Module 2

PLANNING A HOUSING FIRST PROGRAM

www.housingfirsttoolkit.ca/overview-plan

Mental Health Commission of Canada

Commission la santé mentale du Canada

the homeless hub

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Contents — Module 2

PLANNING A HOUSING FIRST PROGRAM

OVERVIEW 37

Overview 38

KEY MESSAGES 39

Key Messages 40

PLANNING TASKS 41

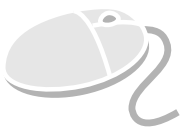
What are the Key Tasks involved in planning a Housing First program? 42

1. Convening a Stakeholder Coalition and Setting up a Planning Group 42
2. Mobilizing Readiness through Social Marketing: Framing your Message 45
3. Developing a Program Model 46
4. Choosing Host Agencies 47
5. Securing Funding 48
6. Developing Housing Protocols 49
7. Hiring Staff 49
8. Involving People with Lived Experience 50
9. Connecting with Landlords 52
10. Developing an Evaluation Plan 54

PLANNING CHECKLIST 56

CHALLENGES & STRATEGIES 59

1. Challenge: Confusion, resistance, & concerns about Housing First 60
2. Challenge: Developing an effective decision-making process 66
3. Challenge: Planning a Housing First program adapted to the specific needs of the community 70
4. Challenge: Securing funding for a Housing First program 72



APPENDICIES & RESOURCES 73

OVERVIEW

MODULE 2 — PLANNING A HOUSING FIRST PROGRAM

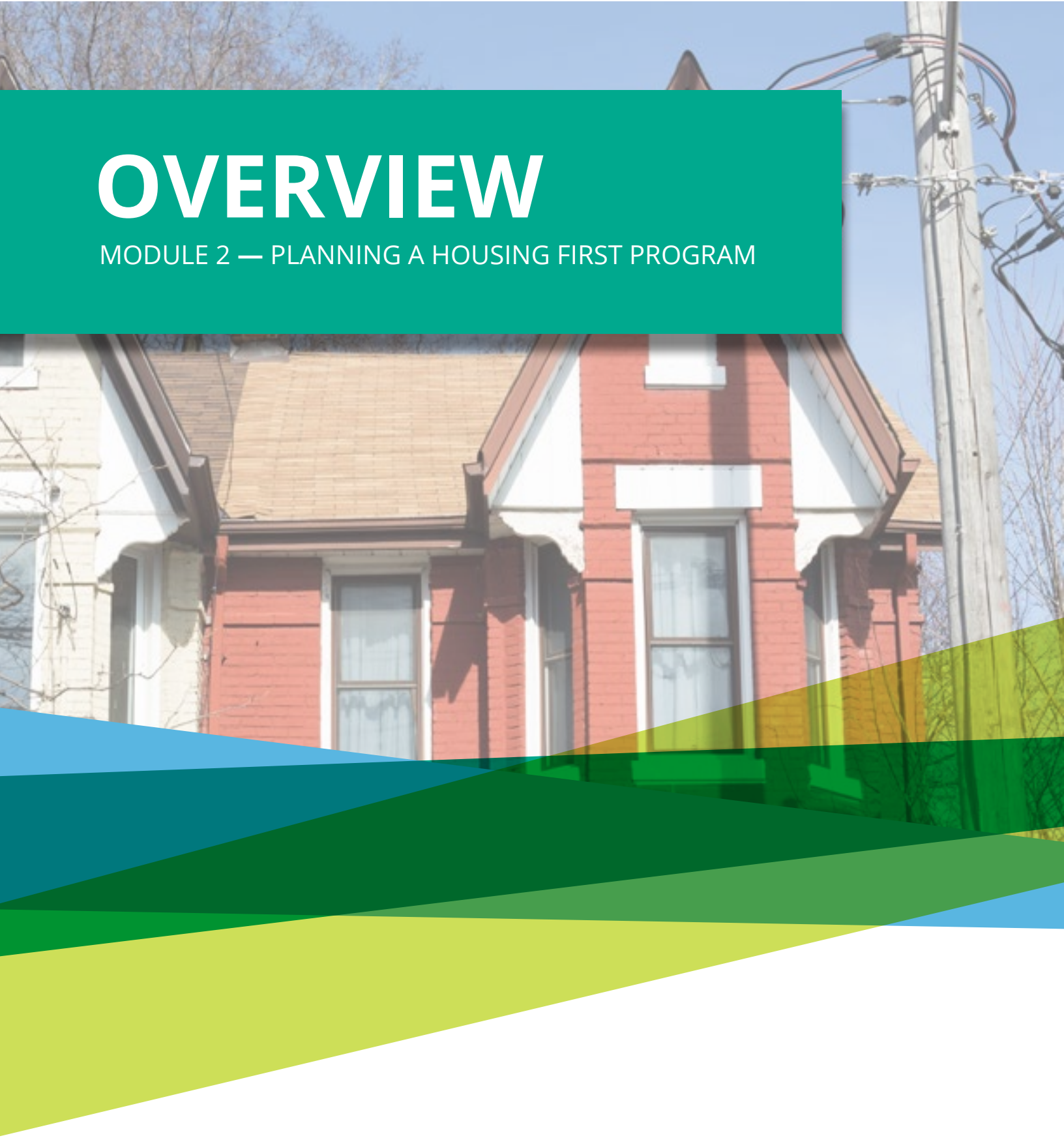


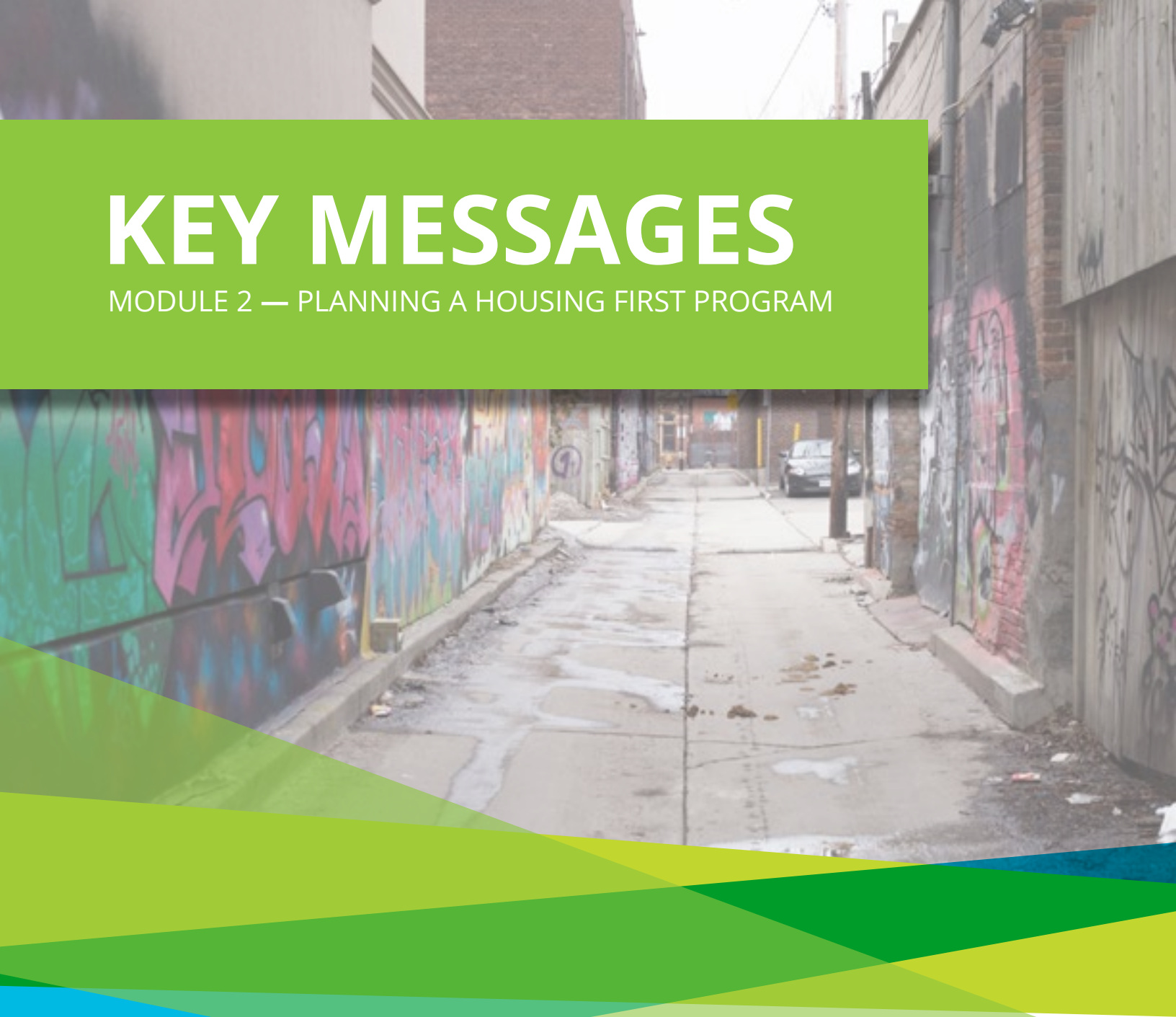
Photo: Shane Fester

Overview

The objective of this Module is to provide an overview of key issues involved in planning a Housing First program. The planning process entails developing a program model, engaging and collaborating with key stakeholders, deciding who does what, where, and when, and developing a preliminary evaluation plan. After reading this Module, you should be knowledgeable about:

- Key Housing First planning tasks and issues;
- Common challenges in planning a Housing First program;
- Strategies for overcoming planning challenges.

The information in this Module was informed by research findings from the At Home/Chez Soi project and consultations with stakeholder groups with experience planning a Housing First program. This interactive Module consists of a **Key Messages** section, which provides a concise summary of the information presented. The **Planning Tasks** section outlines central steps in planning a Housing First program, from considering gaps in the existing system to developing an evaluation plan for your program. The **Challenges and Strategies** section describes several challenges that groups may encounter during the planning process, as well as experience-based strategies for addressing these challenges. This Module also includes helpful **Appendices** related to planning a Housing First program. The Appendices include a Planning Checklist, reports and articles on planning a Housing First program, resources written by people with lived experience, resources on recruiting landlords, and documents describing policies and protocols related to planning, based on the At Home/Chez Soi project sites. Several features are integrated throughout the Module, including pertinent videos.



KEY MESSAGES

MODULE 2 — PLANNING A HOUSING FIRST PROGRAM

Photo: Shane Fester

Key Messages

- **Planning a Housing First program** entails choosing a program model, engaging and collaborating with key stakeholders, deciding who does what, where, and when, and developing a preliminary evaluation plan.
- Common **challenges** encountered during the planning process include confusion, resistance and concerns about Housing First, challenges in developing an effective decision making process, issues surrounding how to adapt the program to meet the specific needs of the community while maintaining fidelity to the HF model, and securing funding.
- **Strategies for addressing confusion, resistance, and concerns about**
- **Housing First** include addressing misconceptions about Housing First right away; framing Housing First as a way to add innovative services; establishing the right team at an early stage; engaging local, provincial, and national champions of Housing First; gaining community support; describing potential economic benefits; communicating about Housing First through staff training; and challenging negative staff perceptions of the participant population.
- **Strategies for developing an effective decision-making process** include using a cross-sectorial approach; establishing a culture of problem solving and learning; providing clarity about staff roles and responsibilities; and engaging the voices of people with lived experience.
- **Strategies for adapting Housing First to meet specific community needs** include anticipating challenges unique to the program context early; creating relationships with landlords; and developing an evaluation process.
- **Strategies for securing funding for a Housing First program** include understanding various funding streams relevant to housing and services in the given context; reaching out to funded Housing First programs in other areas to share experiences; and considering funding from multiple sources.

PLANNING TASKS

MODULE 2 — PLANNING A HOUSING FIRST PROGRAM

Photo: Shane Fester

What are the Key Tasks involved in planning a Housing First program?

1 Convening a Stakeholder Coalition and Setting up a Planning Group

In order to develop an effective and sustainable program, it is essential to work with key stakeholders across sectors to develop a program that can best meet community needs. In jurisdictions where housing/homelessness and mental health/support services are separated, it is essential to bring stakeholders from both housing and mental health groups together.

Stakeholder coalitions will vary by context, and may differ if groups are developing a program from existing resources or creating a new program. While the goal is to develop as comprehensive a stakeholder coalition as possible, groups can include as many contributors as is feasible, based on their community context.

In addition to the groups mentioned above, several other stakeholders that planners may wish to include are:

- Local **leaders and advocates**
- **Health authorities** with a focus on policy/planning regarding mental health, or issues relevant to the target population
- **ACT or ICM teams** that will provide mental health services and/or other support services
- **Consumer organizations** and **People with Lived Experience**
- **Police** and **criminal justice** stakeholders
- **Education and employment sector** stakeholders
- **Potential funders**, including municipal, regional, and provincial governments, community entities, Community Advisory Boards (CABS) for the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS), and private foundations
- **Income assistance** stakeholders
- **Business community members**
- Members of **resident neighborhood associations**

Community members from the target population (for instance, members of Aboriginal and ethno-cultural communities, youth, domestic violence survivors, etc.).

Importantly, people with lived experience of homelessness (and mental illness, depending on the target population) can help groups to ensure that the planned program is person-centred and that it responds to the key challenges faced by the target population. Also, people with lived experience can speak to key challenges faced by the community. Additionally, consider contacting and bringing in groups experienced in planning and implementing a Housing First program for support.

At this stage, it is also important to communicate and connect with the community to develop support for the program and its participants, including the business community and landlord and residential associations. Try to gain the support of these groups early, and communicate how Housing First is part of the solution. By identifying Housing First "champions" in your community, including political figures or other individuals with experience and credibility, programs can begin to establish positive relationships with community members.

Watch videos about convening a stakeholder coalition and setting up a planning group:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YpytU989uY0
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0yfT8G6KHg

When preparing for implementation, it is advisable to set up a **planning group** to help drive the exploration and implementation process. Before developing specific solutions, the planning group can increase awareness about the problem, and mobilize interest amongst potential stakeholders about Housing First as a solution.

2 Mobilizing Readiness through Social Marketing: Framing your Message

Creating readiness for change requires a social marketing strategy for gaining support of a critical mass of key stakeholders, and for addressing the concerns of potential skeptics.

The key to social marketing is to consider the perspectives of the various audiences, and to develop some key messages that frame Housing First in a way that brings them on side as part of the community coalition. For instance, bringing funders and business people into the coalition means being able to make the case for Housing First on the basis of economic or cost-effectiveness. Bringing members of the housing advocacy community into the coalition means emphasizing that Housing First is to be considered in the context of broader concerns about housing affordability and the right to housing. Bringing existing supportive housing and homelessness agencies (e.g., shelters) into the coalition means being able to articulate a role for them in the context of an overall homelessness-serving system of care guided by Housing First principles. Finally, bringing the local community into the coalition means being able to emphasize how the underlying principles of the model can be modified to address the needs of a particular context.

Bringing these groups and the wider community together also means being able to anticipate and address specific misconceptions. Common misconceptions about Housing First are that it ignores the needs of women and families (the model can be modified for various subpopulations), that it involves "free housing for drug users" (housing first is not "housing only", and requires participating in home visits and carrying out the responsibilities of "being a good tenant"), and that it is inappropriate for people or groups that might prefer supportive or congregate housing. Housing First is not necessarily "scattered-site", but is focused on the choices of individuals. While the majority of homeless people tend to choose their own apartment, Housing First still meets the needs of others who choose other options.

3 Developing a Program Model

When developing the program model, start by considering and evaluating existing problems or gaps in the current housing and service system for individuals experiencing homelessness, and for your target population specifically. Consider existing programs in relation to the key components and guiding philosophy of the Housing First model. Key components of the Housing First model include:

1. **The provision of consumer chosen housing, which is provided through housing subsidies;**
2. **The provision of clinical supports, such as ICM and ACT, which are separate from housing;**
3. **Support services, including supports to foster community integration, vocational assistance, and independent living skills;**
4. **The participation of people with lived experience.**

It is important to meet with a diverse group of stakeholders across different sectors to identify key issues. It is particularly important to engage stakeholders who might be resistant to Housing First to understand their perspectives and to address their concerns. One concern in particular is that Housing First will replace rather than build on existing services. By identifying existing gaps, groups can think about how a Housing First program can be complementary to existing services, in the context of an overall system of care for addressing homelessness. Another concern is that the Housing First model may not be appropriate to the local context, and the needs of particular sectors of the community. By communicating the key components of the Housing First model as principles that are adaptable to local need, this concern can be addressed. For instance, the clinical aspects of the model can and should be delivered in a way that is adapted to ethno-racial populations and to specific mental health needs of Aboriginal people.

For an overview of program components eligible for HPS funding

Click here:

http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/communities/homelessness/housing_first/acitivities.shtml

4 Choosing Host Agencies

A key step in the planning process is identifying host agencies for the program that will provide clinical/support and housing services. It is important to consider pros and cons of a particular host agency at an early stage. Depending on the community, some groups may choose a single host agency, while others may decide to use a multi-agency model. Criteria to consider include familiarity with the recovery philosophy, experience with the Housing First model, the flexibility of the agency to innovate and make changes, and willingness to use creative approaches that are not currently being employed. Another criterion is familiarity and comfort supporting people with complex needs, including complex mental health, addictions and other health conditions. Housing and mental health agencies sometimes have competing perspectives and worldviews. It is important for the host agency to be seen as a trusted ally by all partners. Additionally, the housing component should be considered in terms of the capability of a host agency to engage the landlord community, particularly in locations with low vacancy rates. Some existing housing placement agencies may have other clientele (e.g., seniors, people with disabilities) and because of a need to preserve landlord relationships may be resistant to taking a risk placing Housing First clients in decent housing.

Still from: 'Pathways Philadelphia & Integrated Healthcare'

Watch this video to learn more about Pathways Philadelphia and its innovative collaboration with Thomas Jefferson University Hospital:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VNZGEpuKBY

5 Securing Funding

A central planning task is securing funding for a Housing First program. Funding mechanisms vary widely by context and province. Potential funders include:

- Municipal, regional, and provincial governments;
- Community entities for the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS);
- *Community Advisory Boards* (CABS) for (HPS) (which play an advisory role helping community entities to make decisions on HPS funds); and
- Private foundations

Stakeholders can start by understanding how funding operates in their particular context, including all the various streams of funding relevant to housing and services related to the components of the Housing First model. In certain jurisdictions (e.g., Ontario), the city or municipality plays a key funder role in the housing sphere, while in most others the primary responsibility for housing is at the provincial level, and the city primarily plays a planning and regulatory role. Funding from the services side of the equation will generally come from health ministries (or regional authorities) as well as ministries that address income assistance, vocational training and post-secondary education. Consider reaching out to funded Housing First programs in other areas to learn about how funding was secured, including any strategies that may apply to your context. In all cases, potential funding (and human resources) should be considered from multiple sources from the health, housing and social development spheres, which will need to be brought together and coordinated.

Additional Resources:

1. Collective Impact (pdf)

2. Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work (pdf)

3. Embracing Emergency: How Collective Impact Addresses Complexity (pdf)

4. Understanding the Value of Backbone Organizations in Collective Impact (pdf)

6 Hiring Staff

For Sample Job descriptions from Pathways to Housing:

Downlaod the PDF files

Next, a key task is setting up a housing team and a support services team. It is important to hire staff committed to the values and vision of Housing First, particularly regarding the notion of housing as a human right, commitment to a recovery philosophy, and support for consumer choice and the involvement of people with lived experience. In the planning stage and before hiring, it is important to develop a profile of the skills and values that staff should possess, either initially or through training. The profiles should be specific to the various roles within the clinical team, as well as to housing staff. Thus, carefully consider fit when hiring staff, and plan to train staff in Housing First principles and recovery-oriented services at an early stage, keeping in mind that recovery-oriented values are difficult to train for and should be sought as part of recruitment and hiring.

It is also important to develop a protocol for housing and service teams to work cohesively, as well as an accountability structure.

7 Developing Housing Protocols

There is a lot to think through logistically about the housing process. The development of protocols is important for creating clear and action-oriented guidelines in the procurement of housing, interim housing, moving and storage, unit transfers, and evictions. Protocols should assign responsibility to specific staff members and help to ensure accountability to the Housing First model.

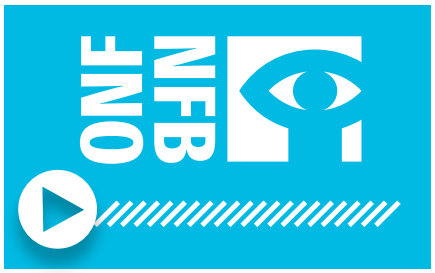
Downloadable content.

Read the housing protocols from the Toronto At Home site.

8 Involving People with Lived Experience

Doug is one of the 127 service providers working with the "At Home" project. He coordinates work for the 100 residents of a community housing initiative. (NFB)

1. Waiting for Jon



2. Seen and Heard

Watch the videos:

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=qwVUEsyx_Ic

2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=M5uM12C3TEA

It is crucial to engage the voices of multiple people with lived experience of homelessness at an early stage of the program planning process. People with lived experience should participate in all stages of planning in an ongoing and meaningful way. Some programs develop plans for employing people with lived experience in the program, such as on clinical service teams, which can be very helpful in terms of engaging participants. For example, there must be a peer support worker on an ACT team. Additionally, programs should develop plans for engaging people with lived experience in quality assurance and evaluation processes. When employing people with lived experience, job descriptions should have clearly defined tasks and roles to avoid tokenism. Stakeholders also suggest having a supervisor (in some cases, another peer) for peer support workers, who can assist them in navigating the role.

In addition to employing people with lived experience in the program, several stakeholders suggested creating new communities of consumers. Stakeholders suggested developing opportunities for participants to connect with and support one another. For example, a group of peer support workers developed an advisory group, which was organized, led, and sustained by Housing First participants. It was initiated as a vehicle to help participants bring forth and discuss issues and resolutions. Another idea from stakeholders was to create a peer ombudsperson.This ombudsperson is available to participants if they have any concerns about the services being provided.

Other stakeholders suggested conducting focus groups with participants during the planning stages to solicit feedback about the direction of the planning process. In the Vancouver site, for example, focus groups with

people with lived experience resulted in the development of a consumer reference group, along with other subcommittees and expanded roles for people with lived experience in the program. As a person with lived experience in Toronto explained, "We speak from lived experience, we attend subcommittees, so I am always giving personal examples of what it was like when I was living it so that I can give recommendations of the services that need to be provided for people that are now receiving housing ." Programs interested in a focus group approach should provide honoraria so that participants are paid for their work.

Within the Toronto site, a governance structure was established for people with lived experience - the People with Lived Experience Caucus. Within the People with Lived Experience Caucus, a full time peer organizer was hired to moderate the caucus, provide leadership, and offer support. Members received an honorarium and participated in a number of reference groups that addressed key issues of interest to the group.

When developing a Caucus or reference groups for people with lived experience, several stakeholders emphasized the importance of training. Participants should receive guidance "in how to participate in committees and how the [program] is structured... [to foster] more comfort and confidence so they feel free to speak and share their knowledge[1]." It is also helpful to hold a training workshop to educate team members on peer involvement, to help to facilitate the transition of peers onto the team and to reflect on the need for sensitivity regarding power imbalances. Involvement of people with lived experience should be frequent and ongoing. People with lived experience have suggested that it is helpful to include peers as part of the planning team and as contributors to all planning meetings from the beginning, and to ensure that peers and service teams are in constant contact with one another, as this will make peer involvement more meaningful. Peers provide important insight on current resources for the target population, including the challenges of accessing these resources, and other challenges to address during the planning process. Click here to access a document about stigma, discrimination, and planning for peer involvement written by people with lived experience.

[1] Nelson, G., Macnaughton, E., Curwood, S.E., Egalite, N., Piat, M. & Goering, P. (2011). Planning and proposal development for the Mental Health Commission of Canada's At Home/Chez Soi Project: Cross-site report. Mental Health Commission of Canada.

Download document:

People with Lived Experience caucus document. (pdf)

9 Connecting with Landlords

It is critical to develop relationships with landlords at an early stage of the process. There are two strategies to consider for this task:

1. Finding the right housing agency is important.

A housing agency with existing relationships with landlords in the community will be in a good position to engage landlords in Housing First.

2. If this capacity does not exist or needs to expand engaging landlords and property managers is crucial.

An important framing to landlords and property management companies is that participation in a Housing First program gives them guaranteed rent accompanied by clinical services for participants. To this end it is important to target building owners or managers at property companies as opposed to site staff. These individuals are more likely to be swayed by the economic argument. Additionally, experience has shown that this individuals at times display altruistic attitudes and a desire to "give back" to their communities.

Potential landlords are likely to be unfamiliar with Housing First. Consider developing a user-friendly brochure that describes Housing First, and your program in particular. Another strategy is to engage a pool of landlords at a community meeting where agency-staff give a presentation on Housing First. Municipal landlord associations might be good access points for this strategy. Some communities have brought in individuals who can articulate the business model aspect of the program.

When speaking with landlords, it is important to emphasize that a skilled and responsive team will be connected with program participants. Explain that team members will meet with the participant on a weekly basis and respond to any issues that might arise. As relationships are established with potential landlords, work collaboratively to develop strategies for eviction prevention. Additionally, consider planning special events (e.g., monthly or bimonthly lunches) specifically for landlords to promote communication and knowledge exchange, and to continue strengthening relationships. Finally, information sharing with landlords is an important planning task. The creation of a monthly newsletter is a great way to share information with landlords in addition to regular informal "stop ins" by members of the housing team.

For Further Reading:

Landlord and property owner/ manager's newsletter (Moncton Example.)

1. Landlords Like That

2. Mother to 400

The NFB videos above show the importance of forming relationships with landlords.

Watch the videos online:

1. http://athome.nfb.ca/#/athome/video/18
2. http://athome.nfb.ca/#/athome/video/13

10 Developing an Evaluation Plan

It is important to evaluate your Housing First program for several reasons. First, this information is important to funders and may be a critical component of sustaining your program. Second, evaluation data are useful to the program itself, as it allows stakeholders to identify what is working well and what is working less well. Additionally, evaluation provides a way for programs to assess fidelity to the Housing First Model.

When developing an evaluation plan, start by deciding on whether to use an internal team (within the program) or external evaluation team (outside consultants). During the planning stage, the evaluation team should work collaboratively with stakeholders to develop a logic model, determine what to track and measure and at what intervals, and discuss a system for data collection, including the development of a database.

The above infographic illustrates the ten Housing First Planning Tasks in action.

MODULE 2: BONUS

Planning Checklist

MODULE 2 — PLANNING A HOUSING FIRST PROGRAM

1 Convening A Stakeholder Coalition & Setting Up A Planning Group

___ Establish a cross sectorial working group
____ Enlist the expertise of people with lived experience
____ Consult with groups with Housing First experience
____ Communicate with the community about Housing First
____ Liaise with Housing First champions in your community
____ Develop a Planning Group

Download printer friendly PDF:

Module 2: Planning Checklist
http://housingfirsttoolkit.ca/sites/default/files/PlanningChecklist-EN.pdf

2 Mobilizing Readiness By Developing A Social Marketing Strategy

____Understand the perspectives of stakeholders on Housing First
____Develop key messages to fram Housing First to each audience

3 Developing A Program Model

____ Evaluate gaps in existing services
____ Determine how Housing First can complement existing services
____ Communicate the core principles of the Housing First model and address community concerns
____ Consider adaptions of the model for your community

4 Choosing A Host Agency

____ Consider pros and cons of potential host agencies
____ Consider pros and cons of a lead agency vs. multi-agency model
____ Select a host agency/agencies

5 Securing Funding

____ Gather information about potential funding streams relevant to housing/services
____ Explore and consider multiple funding sources, based on your context/province
____ Reach out to funded Housing First programs to share experiences

6 Hiring Staff

____ Develop job descriptions of housing and service team members
____ Develop a profile of the skills/values required of staff
____ Plan staff training in the Housing First model and principles
____ Clearly define the roles/responsibilities of each staff member and team

7 Developing Housing Protocols

____ Create protocol for housing procurement
____ Create protocol for interim housing and moving/storage
____ Create protocol for unit transfers and evictions

8 Involving People With Lived Experience

____ Conduct focus groups with people with lived experience to solicit feedback about the direction of the planning process
____ Create full time paid positions for people with lived experience
____ Create job descriptions for people with lived experience with clearly defined tasks and roles
____ Develop a plan for involving people with lived experience in quality assurance and evaluation processes

9 Connecting With Landlords

____ Contact existing housing organizations for leads on potential landlords
____ Develop/distribute a brochure on Housing First to potential landlords
____ Host an information session for potential landlords

10 Developing An Evaluation Plan

____ Decide on using an internal or external evaluation team
____ Develop a Housing First program logic model
____ Work collaboratively to determine what to track and measure
____ Develop a data base or system for collecting data
____ Determine intervals of data collection and persons responsible

CHALLENGES & STRATEGIES

MODULE 2 — PLANNING A HOUSING FIRST PROGRAM

Photo by Shane Fester

Planning a Housing First Program: Challenges & Strategies

What are some key challenges to anticipate during the planning process?

Our consultations with stakeholders experienced in planning a Housing First

program revealed several challenges. We organize these challenges into four sections:

1. Confusion, resistance, and concerns about Housing First;
2. Developing an effective decision making process;
3. Planning a Housing First program adapted to the specific needs of the community; and
4. Securing funding for a Housing First program. Each section describes several experience-based strategies from stakeholders with Housing First planning experience, as well as planning knowledge gained from the At Home/Chez Soi project.

1 Challenge: Confusion, resistance, & concerns about Housing First

It is often difficult to communicate what Housing First is, as well as how it works. After the community learns about scattered-site housing and some of the challenges faced by Housing First participants, resistance and concern is not uncommon. Misconceptions about the Housing First model can contribute to resistance from communities. For instance, a common misconception of individuals unfamiliar with Housing First is the belief that the program will "dump" vulnerable individuals into housing without providing support. Additionally, stakeholders currently involved in ongoing community-based housing programs are often concerned about what will happen to existing services. Stakeholders may perceive competition between Housing First and current supportive housing models.

What are some strategies for overcoming confusion, resistance, and concerns about Housing First?

1. Address misconceptions about Housing First right away.

Address common misconceptions of Housing First by engaging the public in a discussion of the model and its key components. Members of the housing and clinical teams of the At Home/Chez Soi program and other key stakeholders noted that to combat the misconception that individuals are housed and forgotten, it is important to explain that Housing First participants are connected with a dedicated and responsive service team. It is particularly important to communicate this message to potential landlords, community members, and the public.

2. Frame your Housing First program as a way to add innovative services

Service providers from other programs may express understandable resistance to Housing First if they perceive it as a threat to their organization and services. Within the At Home/Chez Soi project sites, stakeholders described initial tensions between individuals and organizations, due to previous experiences, competition around roles, differing priorities, and lack of familiarity with one another's work[1]. These tensions were often rooted in concerns related to organizational survival. Housing First should be understood as a new and innovative approach to providing services, and a way for existing service-providers to expand service-delivery options, as opposed to a replacement for current services and staff. Help organizations to think of the possibilities of the Housing First model in the context of shifting resources and ways of working with participants. For instance, shelters can be encouraged to shift back towards providing emergency short-term housing, and become part of a common, system-wide referral pathway towards permanent Housing First. When suggesting a reorientation of services, some individuals will be more open and enthusiastic than others. It is important to engage enthusiastic individuals at an early stage of the planning process to facilitate "buy-in" from the larger organization. It is also important to engage stakeholders who express resistance at an early stage, and to directly address and discuss their concerns.

To successfully reorient service-providers toward Housing First, stakeholders indicated the importance of developing a common vision- for instance, stakeholders can articulate a common vision of developing recovery-oriented services, within an overall system of care with a common referral pathway guided by Housing First principles. Service providers, people with lived experience, and other key stakeholders should share this common vision. Within the At Home/Chez Soi project, many sites came to a shared vision around the notion that housing is a right rather than something to be earned. Sites also found that the Housing First program model itself, when communicated consistently and clearly, provided an effective basis for a common vision. Having a clear, common vision of Housing First, including both what it is, and what it is not, can help address another common barrier, which is the sentiment that "we do this already". To counter this, it is helpful to review the items in a Housing First fidelity self-assessment tool, which can be a helpful way of convening an initial dialogue about what is or isn't Housing First.

Additionally, think about how the Housing First program will work in conjunction with existing services, and make use of existing resources within your community, including programs that are already doing similar work. You may find that existing resources and networks can help with the planning process. For example, stakeholders in Winnipeg described how capacity-building was an important focus as they collaborated with other stakeholders to deliver ICM and to develop ACT teams.

It is particularly important to bring together partners from the housing sector, who will provide housing services, and the mental health/services sector, who will provide ACT, ICM and other services. Additionally, it is important to go beyond these to sectors to form partnerships with local business people, landlords, housing agencies, universities, and government representatives at municipal and provincial levels.

[1] Nelson, G., Macnaughton, E., Curwood, S.E., Egalite, N., Piat, M. & Goering, P. (2011). Planning and proposal development for the Mental Health Commission of Canada's At Home/Chez Soi Project: Cross-site report. Mental Health Commission of Canada.

3. Establish the "right team" at an early stage.

Many stakeholders described the “right team” as a group of individuals who share values and a vision for the Housing First program and its transformative potential. As one stakeholder explained, “When you start planning leadership and the team, give yourself the chance to pick the right people - it might not necessarily be the ones with the most seniority.” At an early stage, the team should include individuals with grassroots perspectives, particularly service providers in the field and people with lived experience. Individuals providing leadership over the program should fully understand and believe in Housing First values and principles.

When hiring staff, carefully consider fit. To assess fit, it is helpful to identify the specific skill set that is necessary for each position. For example, stakeholders suggest hiring empathetic and forward-thinking staff with regard to mental health and the other challenges experienced by a community’s target population. It is also helpful to think proactively about potential gaps, particularly for smaller programs. If it is not possible to employ staff to meet all needs of the program, consider partnering with community organizations that can provide support, and solicit the help of volunteers in the community. You may also consider coordinating and consulting with other local, provincial, or national Housing First sites to share experiences, resources, and ideas.

For more info:

1. Planning Task 6: Hiring Staff

2. Job Descriptions

4. Engage local, provincial, and national champions of Housing First.

To gain community support for Housing First, several stakeholders described the importance of engaging Housing First “champions”- individuals knowledgeable about Housing First who can support the initiative with passion and knowledge. The help of Housing First champions at the local, provincial or national levels has been an effective strategy for mobilizing new Housing First programs.

Further reading:

Planning Task 1

5. Gain community support for Housing First by emphasizing the role of responsive clinical terms.

Several stakeholders described significant community resistance to the idea of housing participants in the community, which made it difficult to recruit landlords. For instance, stakeholders from the Moncton site described a common community perception that Housing First provides free housing to people who use drugs, and emphasized that is important to "counter that myth right at the beginning." Additionally, stakeholders expressed that it is important to "sell" the program to the community by emphasizing that participants will be supported by a highly responsive team. The stakeholders described how community resistance was eased when they explained how the team will meet with the participant weekly and respond to any issues that might arise.

It is important to foster a sense of security through responsiveness and good communication with landlords and community members. To maintain community support, stakeholders emphasized the need for staff to be available to promptly respond to crisis situations, particularly if police are called. In addition, bring leaders from the community into the program from the beginning, as they can engage the rest of the community. Community leaders can also provide insight about the specific needs of the target population, in order to provide effective services.

Watch video online:

Jim is one of the "At Home" project's 15 housing agents. It's his job to convince landlords to take a chance on the project participants (NFB)

6. Be prepared to make a case for the potential economic benefits of Housing First.

According to several stakeholders, a strategy for garnering support for Housing First is to describe the potential economic benefits. To do so, it is important to develop strategies for collecting data on the cost of services currently in place in the community. Additionally, programs can build a cost analysis into their overall plans for evaluation.

To read more:

To Economic Results From At Home

7. Communicate what Housing First is and what it means to staff through training.

Stakeholders explained the need to plan trainings for staff in order to introduce them to Housing First or to foster a reorientation toward the Housing First approach. As staff become oriented to the Housing First approach, training may address recovery, harm reduction, early adjustment issues, motivational interviewing and strengths-based approaches, the impact of trauma/trauma-informed care, and other topics pertinent to the target population.

During the planning stage, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of Housing First and to manage staff expectations. For instance, eviction/rehousing is to be expected. Also, some participants will experience early adjustment difficulties, as well as fear and resistance. Many participants have had negative experiences within a system that has failed them. Implementing Housing First means engaging people with lived experience in peer support roles, and this should be an important component of training.

8. Challenging negative staff perceptions of the participant population.

Service-providers may have developed a belief that this population (particularly individuals with mental illness and histories of chronic homelessness) are incapable of recovery - it can be challenging to change this perception. Stakeholders suggested sharing research and evaluation findings that report success with similar populations. Also, consider connecting the staff with successful Housing First teams that can describe experience-based successes with participants. Identifying ways for staff to hear directly from people for whom HF has been effective is a powerful way to challenge negative perceptions.

2 Challenge: Developing an effective decision-making process

When planning services for less complex problems, it is common for planning to be driven by single agencies. When dealing with homelessness, however, it is necessary to adopt a multi-sectorial or "whole of society" approach to planning and decision-making. Also, as groups begin the planning process, tensions can arise in the decision-making process, particularly between "top down" approaches, where decision-making is driven by leaders of an organization, and collaborative approaches, through which there is more inclusive participation from diverse stakeholdersinvolved in program planning[2]. There is also a tension between using acollaborative approach and the inevitable deadlines and realities of the planning and service delivery environment.

[2] Nelson, G., Macnaughton, E., Goering, P., Dudley, M., O'Campo, P., Patterson, M., Piat M., Prevost, N., et al. (2013). Planning a multi-site, complex intervention for homeless people with mental illness: The relationship between the National Team and Local Sites in Canada's At Home/Chez Soi Project. American Journal of Community Psychology, 51, 3-4, 347-358.

What are some strategies for developing an effective decision-making process regarding planning?

1. Use a cross-sectorial approach.

A cross-sectorial approach is crucial to success at the planning stage. Collaborating across sectors is a way to ease doubt and uncertainty and to facilitate community "buy-in." In order to build strong relationships across sectors, stakeholders emphasized the importance of consensus-building, open dialogues, and mutual respect. When planning a Housing First program, think broadly about engaging potential stakeholders - include the perspectives of stakeholders beyond the housing and mental health/service sectors, including individuals from the justice sector, individuals experienced with income assistance, landlords and people with lived experience of homelessness, mental health issues, and other issues experienced by the target population.

By using a cross-sectorial approach, communities can benefit from the experiences and perspectives of a broad cross section of stakeholders to better understand the needs of the target population. For instance, the coalition can collaboratively explore community-specific issues, such as the specific needs and challenges of the target population, the extent to which current services are meeting these needs, gaps in services, and vacancy rates/the current housing market.

When using a cross-sectorial approach, it is important to build bridges between sectors, and also "between the worldviews of different communities". In the Winnipeg site, for example, stakeholders were proactive by providing a forum for sharing and discussion during the planning process. "Two days were set aside for teaching and sharing, [making] sure there was time and opportunity for people to come together and find out about each others' work"[3]. Within the At Home/Chez Soi program, the Site Coordinator position was often instrumental in helping the various partners voice areas of disagreement, and develop a common vision for proceeding. This site coordinator was often someone experienced and trusted with the multiple sectors of the project: someone who had worn "multiple hats" and was skilled in navigating a complex terrain of interests and perspectives. The value of finding "neutral space" also became apparent, as a way of helping the various players to begin the dialogue that was necessary for moving forward.

2. Establish a culture of problem-solving and learning

Findings from At Home/Chez Soi and consultations with stakeholders suggest that it is important to establish a collaborative approach. Establish a culture of "learning as we go" that is not punitive to staff or participants for making mistakes. The process of working through problems collaboratively is an important team building experience that is facilitated by a culture of problem solving and learning. Additionally, to establish a learning culture around Housing First, stakeholders suggested developing a "Community of Practice", which is a diverse group of individuals with shared interest and diverse experiences regarding Housing First. Within the Community of Practice, stakeholders can share effective strategies and lessons learned regarding program planning.

Nelson, G., Macnaughton, E., Curwood, S.E., Egalite, N., Piat, M. & Goering, P. (2011). Planning and proposal development for the Mental Health Commission of Canada's At Home/Chez Soi Project: Cross-site report. Mental Health Commission of Canada.

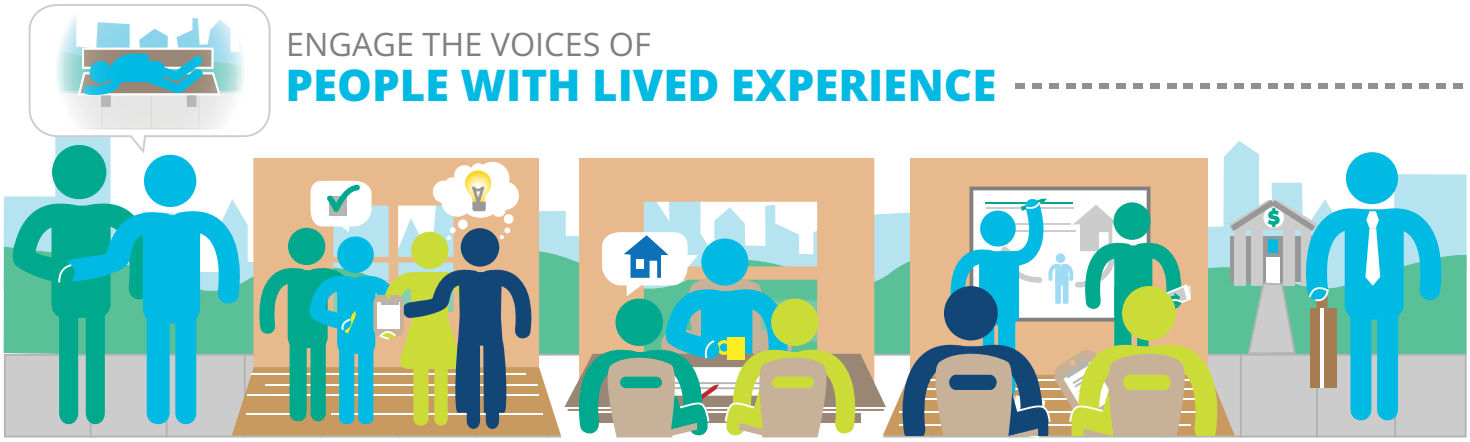
3. Provide clarity regarding staff roles and responsibilities during the planning process.

It is critical to establish roles and responsibilities early, particularly between housing and clinical teams. Stakeholders suggest developing clear protocols about decision-making and accountability for both housing and clinical teams from the onset. Additionally, it is important to distinguish (for Housing First stakeholders and professionals from other programs) between which services are provided through the mainstream system versus those provided through Housing First teams.

For examples:
Appendices & Resources section on At Home Protocols documents

4. Engage the voices of people with lived experience in the planning process.

Involving people with lived experience at an early stage is crucial to effective engagement and the development of meaningful and inclusive roles. It is important for people with lived experience to be present at planning meetings, and to ensure that people with lived experience are given opportunities to voice their perspectives with regard to planning tasks. It is essential to think through potential roles for people with lived experience to ensure that they are able to provide meaningful feedback, communicate concerns regarding implementation, and appropriately engage with program participants. In order to integrate peers meaningfully onto teams, it is important to plan training opportunities for clinical staff who may have limited experience engaging with co-workers with lived experience. In acknowledging the importance of roles for people with lived experience, it is important to provide honoraria for participation, and to create full-time, paid positions for these individuals.



Two important roles are:

1. *Peer support workers - It is important to create peer-support roles within the framework of clinical service teams. Peer support workers are included as part of an ACT team.*

2. *A peer ombudsmen – A peer ombudsmen is a person with lived experience who can consult with program participants and take complaints regarding their experiences with the Housing First program. The ombudsmen should have knowledge of homelessness and services and the community and be housed in an agency not associated with the program (e.g. consumer or peer support centre).*

By including people with lived experience during the planning stage, stakeholders can learn about the specific needs and perspectives of the target population, as it relates to adopting the Housing First model. For instance, if the target population includes survivors of domestic violence, these individuals can provide input about housing options that will best meet their needs and cultivate a sense of safety. Similarly, if the target population includes Aboriginal participants, it is important to understand cultural perspectives on the type of housing options that are most preferred.

For more info about peer support roles:

Click here to access documents about engaging people with lived experience.

3 Challenge: Planning a Housing First program adapted to the specific needs of the community

Another challenge to anticipate during the planning process is ensuring that the program will meet the needs of the target population and community context. Specifically, it can be challenging to adapt the program to address community needs while maintaining fidelity to the Housing First model.

What are some experience-based strategies for developing a Housing First program that meets the needs of your community context?

1. Anticipate challenges unique to your program context and plan potential local adaptations, while maintaining fidelity to Housing First principles.

It is important to consider what is unique about your context and population, and to plan for meaningful adaptations to enhance the success of your program. As one stakeholder explained, "you need to be able to mold the program to meet the needs of your community." Housing First has been implemented in rural and urban areas, with First Nations and ethnoracial populations, and with groups with a high prevalence of addictions. Thus, it is critical to understand the population characteristics well. One important way to understand the needs of your population is to engage the participation of people with lived experience of homelessness and mental health challenges and/or other challenges experienced by the target population. These individuals can articulate the specific challenges faced by their communities.

Delivering culturally competent services is an important aspect of meeting community needs. At the Toronto site, for instance, a crucial component of the program was planning culturally appropriate services for ethnoracial communities. In the process of developing culturally competent services, stakeholders in Toronto were able to benefit from particular areas of expertise provided by different local

agencies[4]. Likewise, in Winnipeg, stakeholders developed the Aboriginal Cultural Lens Committee during the planning process. This committee was formed to ensure that Aboriginal perspectives were meaningfully included in the development of services. The Committee provided feedback on how consistent services were to Aboriginal values through the seven sacred teachings.

[4] Nelson, G., Macnaughton, E., Curwood, S.E., Egalite, N., Piat, M. & Goering, P. (2011). Planning and proposal development for the Mental Health Commission of Canada's At Home/Chez Soi Project: Cross-site report. Mental Health Commission of Canada.

2. Create relationships with landlords well before the program begins.

At an early stage, it is helpful to brainstorm about ways to connect with potential landlords. Engaging existing housing organizations may be one approach, as these groups can draw on their connections with landlords in the community. To develop an approach for engaging landlords, it is important to understand the overall housing environment. Also, think about strategies for eviction prevention and understand the common stumbling blocks and adjustment difficulties specific to your participant demographic.

To address the concerns of potential landlords regarding renting an apartment to participants with complex issues, stakeholders from the At Home/Chez Soi sites noted that it is important to emphasize that participants are connected with a responsive support team. Additionally, they advised program staff to explain that risky tenancies are typically rare, and to note that many participants go on to have successful tenancies, even with complex issues.

Some stakeholders suggested "going high up the ladder" to building owners or executives to secure apartments in urban areas, as these individuals are likely to find the regular payments associated with the rent subsidy motivating. When recruiting landlords, it is also helpful to have recruiting information that clearly describes the program.

3. Develop a process to evaluate the program and to measure success at an early stage.

During the planning stage, it is important to develop outcomes measures and an evaluation plan. Also, develop a process to measure and report the successes of your program and a reporting strategy. Some stakeholders suggested the need for software or a digitized system/template early in the planning process to keep track of tenancies, including rent payments, housing history, participant characteristics, and challenges. This information is helpful for tracking participants and for information sharing and reporting. Additionally, evaluation is a useful tool for managing Housing First programs and a tool for quality assurance. Evaluation can be a valuable tool in ensuring that staff members are providing services consistent with the model and identifying areas for growth and improvement.

For additional info:

Recruiting Landlords In Moncton

4 Challenge: Securing funding for a Housing First program

It can be challenging to secure funding for a Housing First program. The potential streams of funding vary widely by context, and it can be difficult to navigate various funding streams relevant to housing and services.

What are some experience-based strategies for securing funding for a Housing First Program?

1. Consider multiple funding streams and sources relevant to your context.

While funding mechanisms vary widely by context and province, stakeholders engaged in the program planning process can consider a number of potential funders, including municipal, regional, and provincial governments, community entities for the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS), and private foundations.

2. Consider reaching out to funded Housing First programs in other areas to learn about how funding was secured.

Stakeholders from other funded Housing First programs can provide valuable information and strategies for obtaining funding. By fostering connections with other funded programs, stakeholders can educate themselves on potential funding sources, as well as experience-based strategies for navigating the funding environment.

APPENDICES & RESOURCES

MODULE 2 — PLANNING A HOUSING FIRST PROGRAM

Photo by Shane Fester

Planning a Housing First Program: Appendicies & Resources

Click any of the listed resources to access the downloadable (.pdf) document

At Home Protocols

- Access to Housing Protocol
- Caucus Protocol
- Complaints Protocol
- COTA Health Peer Support Interview Template
- Discharge Protocol
- Eviction Prevention Protocol
- Furnishings Protocol
- Household Management Protocol
- Housing Stock Protocol
- Interim Housing Protocol
- Moving and Storage Protocol
- Peer Specialty Protocol
- Rental Payments Protocol

Sample Job Descriptions (from Pathways to Housing)

- Assistant Team Leader
- Medical Nurse Practitioner
- Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner
- Registered Nurse
- Service Coordinator
- Service Coordinator — Housing Specialist
- Service Coordinator — Peer Specialist
- Service Coordinator — Substance Abuse Specialist
- Service Coordinator — Vocational Specialist
- Team Leader

Peer Training/Lived Experience Resources

- Basset, T., Faulkner, A., Repper, J., & Stamou, E. (2010). *Lived experience leading the way: Peer support in mental health.* www.together-uk.org
- Building equitable partnerships: *Tools and lessons learned: A resource for individuals and organizations.* (2011). Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.
- Building on Evidence: *13 things to include in Ontario's municipal homelessness reduction strategies: A resource from the Centre for Research on Inner City Health.* CRICH, October 2013. www.crich.ca
- *Stigma, discrimination, and PWLE knowledge: Discussion report.*(2011). National Consumer Panel, At Home/Chez Soi Project, Mental Health Commission of Canada. www.mentalhealthcommission.ca

Collective Impact Resources

- Hanleybrown, F., Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2012). *Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work.* Stanford Social Innovation Review.
- Kania, J. & Kramer, M. (2011). *Collective Impact.* Leland Stanford Jr. University.
- Kania, J. & Kramer, M. (2013). E*mbracing Emergency: How Collective Impact Addresses Complexity.* Leland Stanford Jr. University.
- Turner, S., Merchant, K., Kania, J., & Martin, E. (2012). *Understanding the Value of Backbone Organizations in Collective Impact.* Stanford Social Innovation Review.

Landlord Resources

- Landlord and property owner/manager's newsletter - Dec 2012
- Landlord and property owner/manager's newsletter - Oct 2012

Suggested Resources

- Liste de vérification en matière de planification
- Planning Checklist - English