

Module 4

EVALUATION OF HOUSING FIRST

www.housingfirsttoolkit.ca/evaluate



Mental Health
Commission
of Canada
Commission
la santé ment
du Canada



This product has been made possible through a financial contribution from Health Canada to the Mental Health Commission of Canada. The views expressed herein solely represent the authors.

© 2014 Mental Health Commission of Canada

Contents — Module 4

EVALUATION OF HOUSING FIRST

KEY MESSAGES 139

Key Messages 140

WHY EVALUATE? 141

The Importance of Evaluation & Performance Measurement 142

- Evaluation helps programs ensure participant... 142
- Evaluation also helps ensure that “the program” ... 142
- Further, it can help decision-makers understand ... 143
- Evaluation can also help a program to improve, ... 143
- Finally, evaluation can determine if the program is ... 143

MYTH BUSTING 145

Myth Busting Section 146

EVALUATION TASKS 147

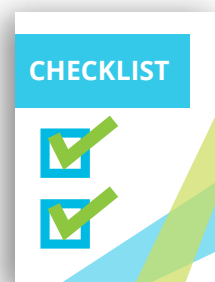
1. Obtain Resources 148
2. Build a Culture of Evaluation 149
[TABLE 1: EVALUATION MODELS](#) 150
3. Identify the Purpose of Evaluation... 150
4. Develop a Program Description... 152
[FIGURE 1.1 AT HOME/CHEZ SOI LOGIC MODEL](#) 153
5. Using Fidelity Indicators 155
[TABLE 2: USING FIDELITY INDICATORS](#) 156
6. Finding Outcome Indicators 158
7. Create an Evaluation Plan and Collect Data 160
8. Analyze the Data 161
9. Develop a Reporting Process 162

CHALLENGES & STRATEGIES 165

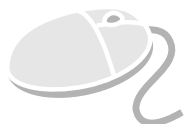
- Challenge: Sorting through the many evaluation options 166
- Challenge: Getting Buy-in From Providers 168
- Challenge: Missing the Big Picture 169
- Challenge: Data Overload 170



SPOTLIGHT SECTION 172
The Alex Calgary



**EVALUATION
CHECKLIST 175**



APPENDICES & RESOURCES 177

KEY MESSAGES

MODULE 4 — EVALUATION OF HOUSING FIRST



Photo: Shane Fester

Key Messages

- Evaluation helps programs ensure that participants are showing improvement in the outcomes expected by the program and that the program is being implemented as intended.
- Evaluation can help decision makers understand how the implementation process is working and can help a program to improve and mature.
- Often, the term evaluation has negative connotations (e.g., that it is a test). It is important to clearly communicate to program staff that evaluations help with performance and training.
- It is important to identify and involve stakeholders who will use the evaluation data and will need to be involved in its collection early on.
- When undertaking an evaluation, it is important to locate resources. Determining whether an evaluation will be conducted by an internal or external team member is an important first step.
- To determine which evaluation components are necessary, it is important to start by identifying the purpose of the evaluation.
- Crucial evaluation components include a theory of change logic model, fidelity indicators, and outcome measurements.
- These evaluation components are well resourced and templates are often available for them; it is important to draw on these tools to avoid replication.
- A good reporting process will ensure that evaluation data ends up in the hands of the proper stakeholders, and that evaluation information is used for program improvement.

WHY EVALUATE?

MODULE 4 — EVALUATION OF HOUSING FIRST



Photo: Shane Fester

Why Evaluate? – The Importance of Evaluation & Performance Measurement

Evaluation helps programs ensure participant improvements in expected program outcomes. Evaluation helps answer questions such as:

- Are participants stably housed?
- Is the quality of life improving for participants?
- Which participants aren't improving and need a different approach?

Evaluation also helps ensure that “the program” is actually in place, answering such questions as:

- Is the target population being reached?
- Are participants receiving supports consistent with the Housing First model?
- Are participants receiving support on a consistent basis?

Further, it can help decision-makers understand how the implementation process is working, and provide insight into questions such as:

- Is the program being implemented as intended?
- Is the program being implemented with a high degree of fidelity to the principles of the Housing First approach?
- Are there adequate financial and human resources to implement the program?
- Are staff receiving appropriate training and support?
- Is the program adapted appropriately to the local context without comprising the basic principles of the Housing First approach?


Evaluation can also help a program to improve, mature, and answer questions like:

- How can the program better serve program participants?
- In what ways can the program be enhanced and lead to greater improvement in outcomes for participants?

Finally, evaluation can determine if the program is being provided in an efficient manner, answering questions such as:

- What are the costs and potential cost savings of the program?
- Are there ways that the same level of outcomes can be achieved at a lower cost?





In summary, evaluation or performance measurement is a tool that helps clinicians do their job better. It's also a tool that helps managers understand their programs' strengths and work with staff to build upon these strengths. Evaluation can be used by program staff for public relations and advocacy – helping them to sell the program to policy-makers and funders. Evaluation also helps all stakeholders to continually improve the program. Finally, evaluation is a way to engage individuals receiving Housing First services. For all of these reasons, assessing program fidelity and outcomes is part of the reporting procedures specified by the Homelessness Partnering Strategy. This module of the toolkit provides you with the information and resources to get started and move in the right direction to implement an evaluation approach for your Housing First program.

MYTH BUSTING

MODULE 4 — EVALUATION OF HOUSING FIRST



Photo: Shane Fester

Myth Busting Section

There are a number of myths surrounding evaluation. Stakeholders may have to address the following misconceptions at an early stage.



MYTH

Evaluations are “a test.”



MYTH BUSTED

The term “evaluation” itself may contribute to this notion. It is important to frame program evaluation as a tool for program improvement. Some programs have avoided the term “evaluation” and have used the term “progress report” instead. The field of program evaluation has evolved to use terms such as “developmental evaluation”. This emphasizes an approach that sees program improvement as evolving. Developmental evaluation ensures that the intervention continually adapts to its environment, rather than seeing evaluation as the “last word” as to whether the program works or not.



MYTH

Evaluations take resources away from clinical work.



MYTH BUSTED

It does take time to complete forms and questionnaires, but when done properly, evaluation is a tool to ensure that clinicians are actually achieving the goals that program participants articulate; evaluations can make use of outcome measures that are also clinically relevant. Program evaluation can also offer clinicians the opportunity to give their opinions on how the program is working. It can also be used to flag systemic issues that are interfering with clinical goals, such as a lack of resources, incomplete implementation of the model, or inefficient teamwork.



MYTH

Evaluations are only of use to external bodies and funding decisions.



MYTH BUSTED

Past experience with accreditation processes may have given stakeholders the impression that evaluation is only about going through a rigorous process in order to receive a “stamp of approval” on a program. Given the realities of insecure or limited funding, evaluation is necessary and valuable, particularly when it is also used as a springboard for developing internal quality improvement capacity.

EVALUATION TASKS

MODULE 4 — EVALUATION OF HOUSING FIRST



Photo: Shane Fester

1

Obtain Resources

Conducting an evaluation involves allocating resources from the project budget for this task, hiring appropriate personnel and budgeting staff time. If the evaluation is going to be conducted by an external evaluator, resources will be required for this individual or team. Additionally, if there is a fidelity component that will be conducted by an external team (e.g., through technical assistance from the Mental Health Commission of Canada) this will need to be arranged early on in the evaluation process.

Another resource to consider is data management. How will data be collected, stored and accessed? This will be an important piece of the evaluation process. There is no “one size fits all” solution, but there are resources upon which you can draw. For instance, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy has developed a Homelessness Information System (HIFIS), which is a management information system. This system is particularly relevant for programs receiving federal Housing First funding, since the system allows them to report on certain outcome indicators that need to be measured. The case study on The Alex, a Calgary Housing First program developed specifically tailored spreadsheets and information systems to make data management and decision-making more efficient. Another issue that should be anticipated are the costs of participating borne by Housing First participants. Honoraria should be set aside for people with lived experience who participate in an evaluation.



For additional info on obtaining resources:

1. [Non Researcher's Guide to Evidence-Based Program Evaluation](#)
2. [Hiring an External Evaluator](#)

2

Build a Culture of Evaluation

Building a culture of evaluation means helping your organization understand the importance of evaluation, and gradually building the capacity to do it well. A significant challenge here is building a commitment amongst staff and program leaders to examine their beliefs about how well the program is working and to create a community centered around learning. Another challenge is to understand that evaluation is about improving the program rather than making judgements about its worth. A key tool is to frame the evaluation as part of a culture of learning and continuous improvement.

Perhaps the most important challenge of building a culture of evaluation is to ensure that all stakeholders feel part of the process. This involves both planning and stakeholder engagement, so that all stakeholders understand the purpose of doing evaluation. Engaging stakeholders early is an important component of building a culture of evaluation. Stakeholder engagement will initially involve identifying stakeholders in your community who are involved in the implementation of your Housing First program.

Stakeholders might be broken into four broad groups:

- managers of implementation teams,
- direct service workers,
- persons with lived experience who participate in Housing First, and
- systems-level actors – these individuals are program sponsors and likely come from municipal or provincial government.

Building a culture of evaluation also requires having some expertise and guidance to set things off in the right direction. Conducting an effective evaluation of a Housing First program will involve developing an evaluation plan and involving evaluators during the planning stage of program development. Having evaluation expertise early in the process will help you to tailor your evaluation approach to the stage of implementation.

In summary, it is important to build a culture of evaluation into your Housing First program to ensure that the evaluation is useful to a broad range of stakeholders who “buy in” to the process.

3

Identify the Purpose of Evaluation and Select Evaluation Components

Table 1: Evaluation Models

Evaluation Purpose	Evaluation Type/Elements	Resources
Understanding processes and their link to outcomes	Theory of Change Evaluation/ Logic Model Construction	Chen, H.-T. (2005). <i>Practical program evaluation: Assessing and improving planning, implementation, and effectiveness</i> . Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
Ensuring critical program ingredients are in place and factors affecting implementation	Fidelity Assessment/ Implementation Evaluation	<i>See appendices for fidelity scales.</i> Macnaughton, E. L., Goering, P. N., & Nelson, G. B. (2012). Exploring the value of mixed methods within the At Home/Chez Soi Housing First Project: A strategy to evaluate the implementation of a complex population health intervention for people with mental illness who have been homeless. <i>Can J Public Health</i> , 103, 57-63.
Understanding how implementation is adapted to context	Developmental Evaluation	1. Gamble, J.A. (2008). <i>A developmental evaluation primer</i> . JW McConnell Family Foundation: Montreal. 2. Patton, M.Q. (2011). <i>Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use</i> . New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
Understanding whether program outcomes have been achieved	Outcome Evaluation	Resource specific to outcome evaluation and measurement.



The table above outlines different types of evaluation, matches them to specific evaluation purposes, and provides some resources.

In evaluating your Housing First program there will be at least three key purposes:

1. To **ensure fidelity to the program model** (making sure your program is adhering to Housing First principles);
2. To **understand how well your implementation strategy is working**, including any barriers to implementation (e.g., like lack of resources or training opportunities); and
3. To **determine outcomes resulting from the program**.

Evaluating outcomes is not about judging, but about tracking performance for continued program improvement, and making sure that the program is

appropriately adapted to the local environment. Different purposes may be emphasized at different stages of program development, but it is possible that these evaluation purposes may be completed simultaneously in the same evaluation process (e.g., you may be interested in both fidelity and outcome evaluation).

Three components that will likely be central to most evaluations of a Housing First program (and that were used in At Home/Chez Soi) are:

1. Developing a program description and logic model;
2. Using fidelity indicators, and
3. Using selecting and using outcome indicators.

4

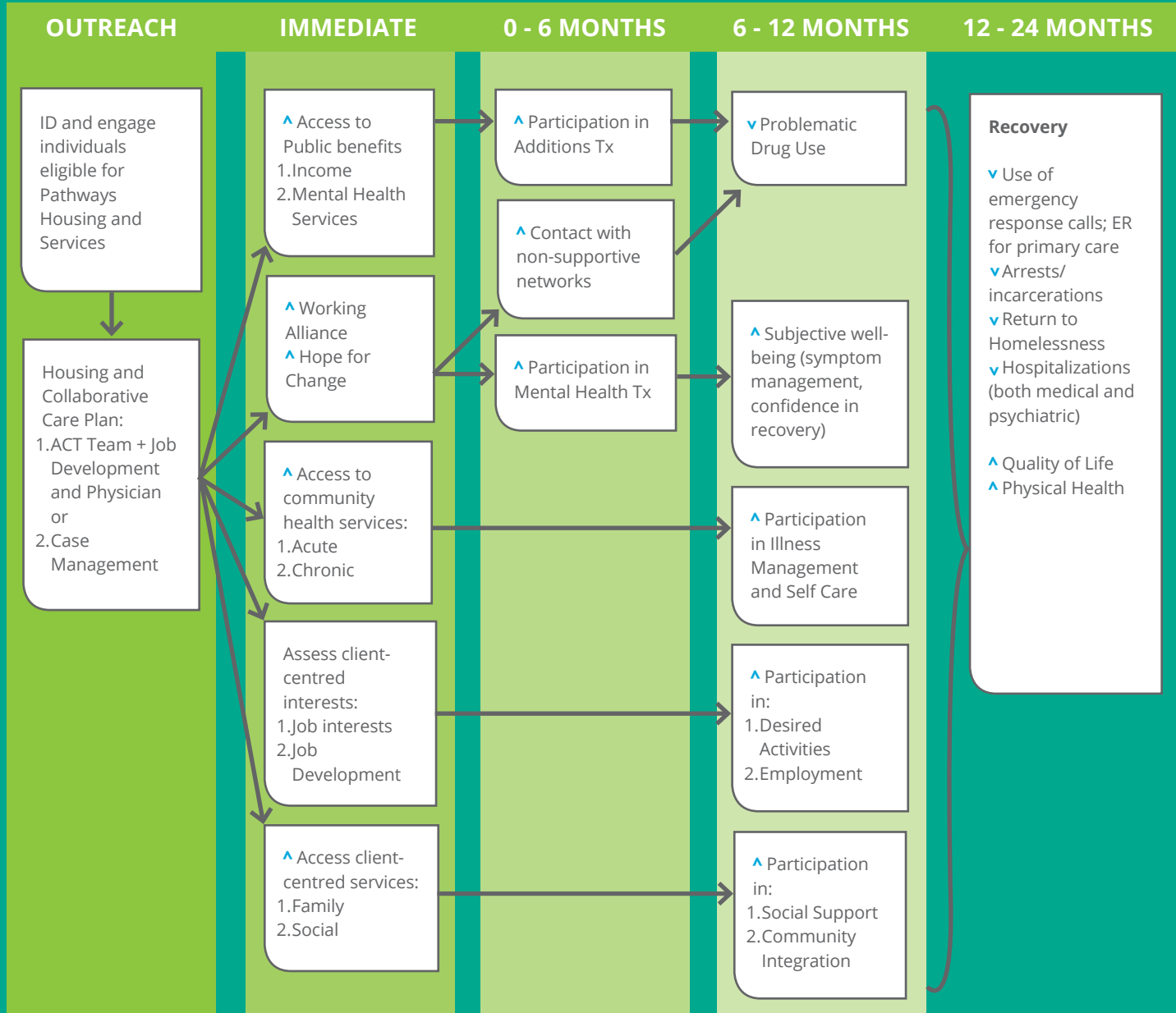
Develop a Program Description and Logic Model

A program description should include a description of the key components of your Housing First program, which should be clearly linked to program outcomes. A logic model is a visual representation of this program description that depicts key program components (including a time component) that are related to outcomes. Program descriptions and logic models are helpful in understanding how key program components lead to outcomes.

This logic model is helpful in understanding the context of program operations and outcomes. This can be particularly helpful in explaining why certain outcomes do not occur as predicted and explaining implementation challenges (e.g., difficulties with housing stability, difficulties rehousing participants).

The graphic representation (next page) of the theory of change of At Home/Chez Soi. The logic model above begins with outreach to identify individuals eligible for Housing First services. All individuals are offered the components listed in the “immediate intervention” column. These immediate interventions are then linked to time specific outcomes that build on one another through specific “pathways”. The crucial component of this model is the concrete and specific linking of program components to outcomes that are specific to particular points in time.

Figure 1.1 At Home/Chez Soi Logic Model based on the Pathways Housing First Model



At Home/Chez Soi Logic Model based on the Pathways Housing First Model

4. Develop a Program Description and Logic Model - cont'd

Following access to housing of participants' choice, a care plan is prepared at intake by an ACT team member or case manager. There are five critical immediate interventions believed to be central to the recovery of chronically homeless participants upon entering the program: (1) immediate assistance in organizing the finances of participant in addition to applying for public assistance in order to meet eligibility requirements for an apartment lease and prepare client for the income management; (2) participants and service coordinators form an immediate working alliance to facilitate participant guided treatment goals; (3) identifying and assistance in accessing community health services for the treatment of critical and chronic health issues; (4) assistance in identifying vocational interests and goals; and (5) assistance in establishing client guided social, family and spiritual connections.

These interventions should help participants engage in mental health and addictions treatment and reduce contact with non-supportive social contacts within the first 6 months of participation. All of these things, in turn, should help participants reduce abuse of alcohol and substances. Helping participants access community health services should help them increase self-care and participation in illness management. Access to vocational support should enable participants to more effectively search for employment and other desired activities. Assistance in establishing client guided social, family and spiritual connections should help participants increase their community integration and social support. Overall, the theory of change predicts recovery is associated with the maintenance of stable housing, increases in physical health and quality of life, and decreases in use of emergency response service calls, use of emergency room for primary care, number of hospitalizations and number of arrests.

5

Using Fidelity Indicators

A fidelity evaluation is a process that quantifies the degree to which implementation corresponds to the Housing First program model. Pathways to Housing in New York has developed a fidelity measure that was used in the At Home/Chez Soi project by an external team

The Pathways fidelity scale measures fidelity across five domains:

1. Housing choice and structure;
2. Separation of housing and services;
3. Service philosophy;
4. Service array; and
5. Program structure.

In At Home/Chez Soi, external teams performed site visits to conduct the fidelity assessments for each of the five project sites. Pathways to Housing has also developed a Housing First Self Assessment Survey for sites that wish to perform an internal fidelity assessment. The same five domains are covered as with the external fidelity measure. It is important to note that qualitative evaluation techniques are important in giving broader context and significance to quantitative fidelity measurements. This is an important consideration in planning this part of the evaluation.

In developing a fidelity assessment process, the first task is to select one of the two measures of the key program domains noted above. While some sites may choose to have fidelity evaluated by external teams — likely through technical assistance provided by the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) — many sites will choose to utilize an internally led fidelity process (or start with an external review, and then develop the capacity to measure this internally).

Two excellent resources for internal fidelity are the HPS fidelity self-assessment tool and the Housing First Self-Assessment Survey developed by Pathways.



For Additional Resources:

1. [*Table: Using Fidelity Indicators*](#)
2. [*HPS fidelity self assessment tool*](#)
3. [*Pathways Housing First Self-Assessment Survey*](#)
4. [*At Home Fidelity Scale*](#)

Table 2: Using Fidelity Indicators

HPS Fidelity Scale	Pathways Fidelity Self Assessment
<p><i>Core Principles</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rapid housing with supports 2. Housing choice 3. Separating housing provision from other services 4. Integrated housing (security of tenure) 5. Tenancy rights and responsibilities (legal title to unit) 6. Reasonable (per cent of income) cost for housing 7. Housing support 	<p><i>Housing Process and Structure</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does program determine type of housing? 2. How does program determine neighbourhood? 3. Furniture assistance 4. Does program have access to affordable housing through subsidies? 5. Percentage of participant paying 30 per cent or less of income to rent 6. Time between enrolment and permanent housing 7. Housing type 8. What per cent of participants share a bedroom? <p><i>How Housing and Services are Related</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Requirements to access permanent housing 2. Requirement to stay in permanent housing 3. Tenancy rights and responsibilities (legal title to unit) 4. Components of lease agreement 5. Housing loss protocol 6. Rehousing protocol



Table 2 (above) continues on the next page.

HPS Fidelity Scale	Pathways Fidelity Self Assessment
<p><i>Service Philosophy</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Service choice 2. Participant-driven program and services 3. Contact with participants 4. Continuous services 5. Directly offers or brokers services 6. Selection of vulnerable populations 	<p><i>Service Philosophy</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Determining the type, sequence, and intensity of services 2. Psychiatric treatment requirements 3. Substance use requirements 4. Approach to substance use 5. How does program promote adherence to treatment plan? 6. Components of treatment plan 7. Which life areas does the program address? <p><i>Service Array</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Services targeting independent living skills 2. Types of psychiatric services offered 3. Types of services available for substance use 4. Services available for paid employment opportunities 5. Services available for educational opportunities 6. Services available for volunteer opportunities 7. Services available for physical health issues 8. Paid peer specialist staff 9. Social integration services 10. Location of program services and opportunities for social integration 11. % of participants experience psychiatric hospitalization in last 6 months.
<p><i>Team Structure/Human Resources</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Low participant/staff ratio 	<p><i>Team Structure/Human Resources</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participant histories 2. Service staff caseload 3. Participant/staff ratio 4. Minimum face-to-face contact/month 5. Actual face-to-face contact/month 6. Frequency of staff plan/review meetings 7. Team meetings 8. Participant feedback opportunities

6

Finding Outcome Indicators

The Homelessness Partnering Strategy has outlined outcome indicators for measuring Housing First at the level of individuals. Outcome measures are broken into three categories:

1. Housing First placement indicators;
2. Self sufficiency indicators; and
3. Prevention indicators.

Table 3: HPS Outcome Measures
<i>Housing First Placement Indicators</i>
Number of individuals placed through an HF intervention
Percentage of HF clients who remained housed at six months
Percentage of HF clients who remained housed at twelve months
Number of days to move HF clients into permanent housing
Percentage of clients who require re-housing
Percentage of HF clients who return to homelessness
Percentage of HF clients who have successfully exited the HF program to a positive housing situation
<i>Self Sufficiency Indicators</i>
Number of people who increased their income or income stability
Number of people who increased their employment stability or started part-time or full-time employment
Number of people who started part-time or full-time education
Number of people who started a job training program
<i>Prevention Indicators</i>
Number of people who remain housed at three months after receiving a Housing Loss Prevention Intervention



The HPS indicators are displayed in Table 3 (HPS Outcome Measures) above.

6. Finding Outcome Indicators - cont'd

Another useful set of outcome measures is the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care's Community Mental Health Common Data Set. A final source of outcome indicators is the At Home/Chez Soi project, which used several outcome indicators that should be of interest to groups wanting to evaluate Housing First programs.

There are two components that use the measures to ascertain change. First, there should be a process of taking baseline measurements. Secondly, there should be a set of outcome measurements that show the impacts of the Housing First program on participants. The CDS was intended for the evaluation of outcomes across mental health programs in Ontario. The CDS is comprised of mandatory elements (p. 10) and optional elements (p. 11). The mandatory elements contain useful administrative, demographic, and clinical categories that capture basic information in each of these areas. The optional elements contain an "outcome" category that should be useful to individuals wanting to evaluate a Housing First program. In particular the outcomes category contains measures of baseline and

current psychiatric hospitalizations, living arrangements, residence types, employment, education, and income. These measures are helpful in tracking life changes across time that are of importance in evaluating Housing First outcomes because they provide information pertinent to community integration and functioning, as opposed to more narrow measures like symptom severity.

The At Home/Chez Soi project included several outcome measures/instruments that received positive feedback from program staff. These measures included the Multnomah Community Ability Scale (MCAS) for community functioning; the Qoli-20 for quality of life; the Global Appraisal of Individual Needs (GAIN SPS); the Colorado Symptom Index (CSI); the EQ-5D for basic health status, and; the Service Satisfaction Scale (SSS-10). It should be noted that organizations can use these scales and compare against data from At Home/Chez Soi, including the treatment as usual group, for tracking.



Click for additional Outcome Measure tools:

- [1. Community Mental Health Common Data Set \(CDS\)](#)
- [2. Core Measures Terms of Use and Training Materials](#)

7

Create an Evaluation Plan and Collect Data

A good strategy for keeping track of all of the evaluation tasks is to create a timeline or protocol that organizes data collection and makes clear which team members are responsible for specific tasks. An excellent worksheet to help guide the development of this protocol is available here:



[*Planning a Program Evaluation*](#)

Additionally, a review document from Australia about outcome data collection and analyzing can be found here:

[*Literature Review: Measurement of Client Outcomes in Homelessness Services*](#)

This document contains some concrete strategies for planning, collecting, and analyzing data.



8

Analyze the Data

Once data collection has been completed, data analysis should begin. There will likely be both qualitative and quantitative data to analyze that involves markedly different skills and might subsequently be assigned to different team members. Quantitative analysis will involve the use of statistical software to ascertain whether outcome measurement shows changes that are statistically significant. Qualitative data will involve some form of “narrative analysis”, which can help understand whether and how any quantitative changes are significant to the participant outcomes. It might be helpful to use quantitative findings as a basis for doing exploratory qualitative analysis, particularly if the results are unclear or unexpected. It will be helpful to use a qualitative guidebook to guide the narrative analysis.



Access additional resources:

1. [Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods](#)
 2. [A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years](#)
- 

9

Develop a Reporting Process

It is important to consider the diverse audiences of evaluation data. Evaluation findings can be helpful in improving performance in clinical practice and might be communicated through staff coaching or training. Evaluation findings might also be useful in keeping community stakeholders current on the progress of the Housing First programs.

There are at least three stakeholder groups to consider that ideally should be involved in evaluation from the outset:

1. Service providers,
2. Program leaders, and
3. Funders.

Providing evaluation feedback to these groups is important for ensuring continual improvement and learning in your program.

Finally, evaluation results are a good way to engage landlords about the progress of the program and to develop relationships. Holding a breakfast or lunch in which results are shared with landlords can be an effective engagement strategy. Ideally, results should be synthesized into a one to three page document for this group.

Some concrete examples from At Home/Chez Soi might be helpful to illustrate the reporting process. One of the challenges of At Home/Chez Soi — as revealed through implementation evaluation — was the separation of housing and clinical service teams, and maintaining effective communication between them. This was an important finding for program leaders who needed to innovate new program structures that facilitated communication between these teams.

The following pages contain infographics that show the value of a successful reporting process in the cities of Calgary and Edmonton, Alberta.



READJUSTED HOMELESS COUNT & GROWTH RATE

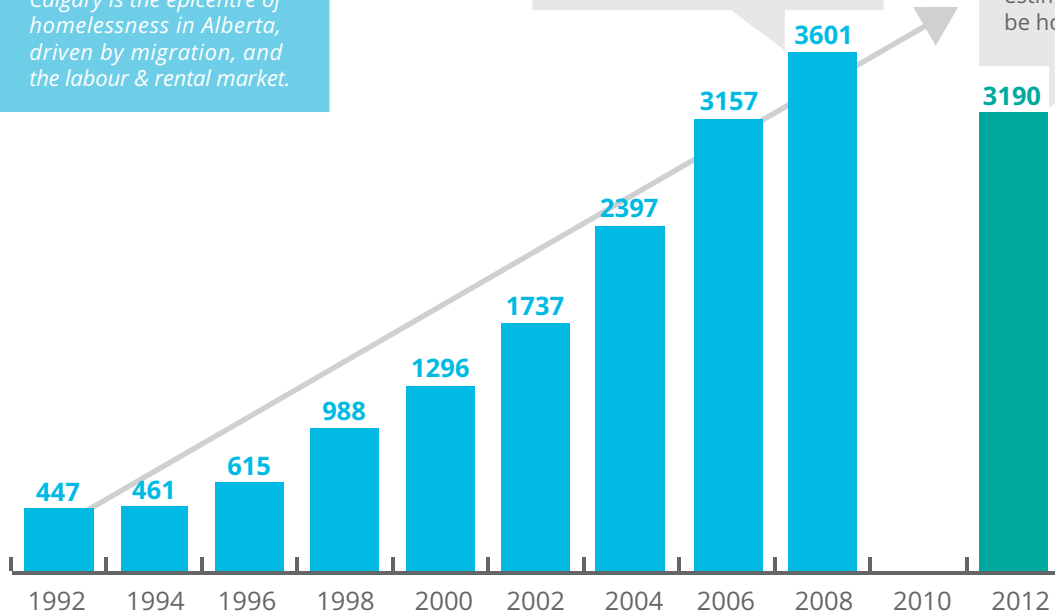
Calgary, 2012

Calgary is the epicentre of homelessness in Alberta, driven by migration, and the labour & rental market.

10 YEAR PLAN was implemented in 2008

Linear forecast trend estimated 4200 would be homeless in 2012

-1010

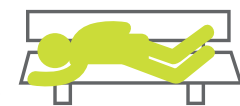


THE VALUE OF EVALUATION:

Without the 10 Year Plan, the homeless count would have continued to increase (as per the linear forecast trend). In 2012, 24% fewer homeless were counted than predicted in business as usual projections.

IN THE CITY OF CALGARY
15,000 TO 17,000
INDIVIDUALS USE THE
SHELTER SYSTEM ANNUALLY

2012 HOMELESS COUNT BREAKDOWN



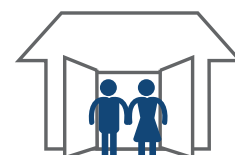
2% Sleeping rough



5% Public systems
(remand, emergency rooms & hospitals)



39% Short-term
supportive
housing



54% Emergency
shelters

* Based on a 24 hour Point in Time (PIT) Count

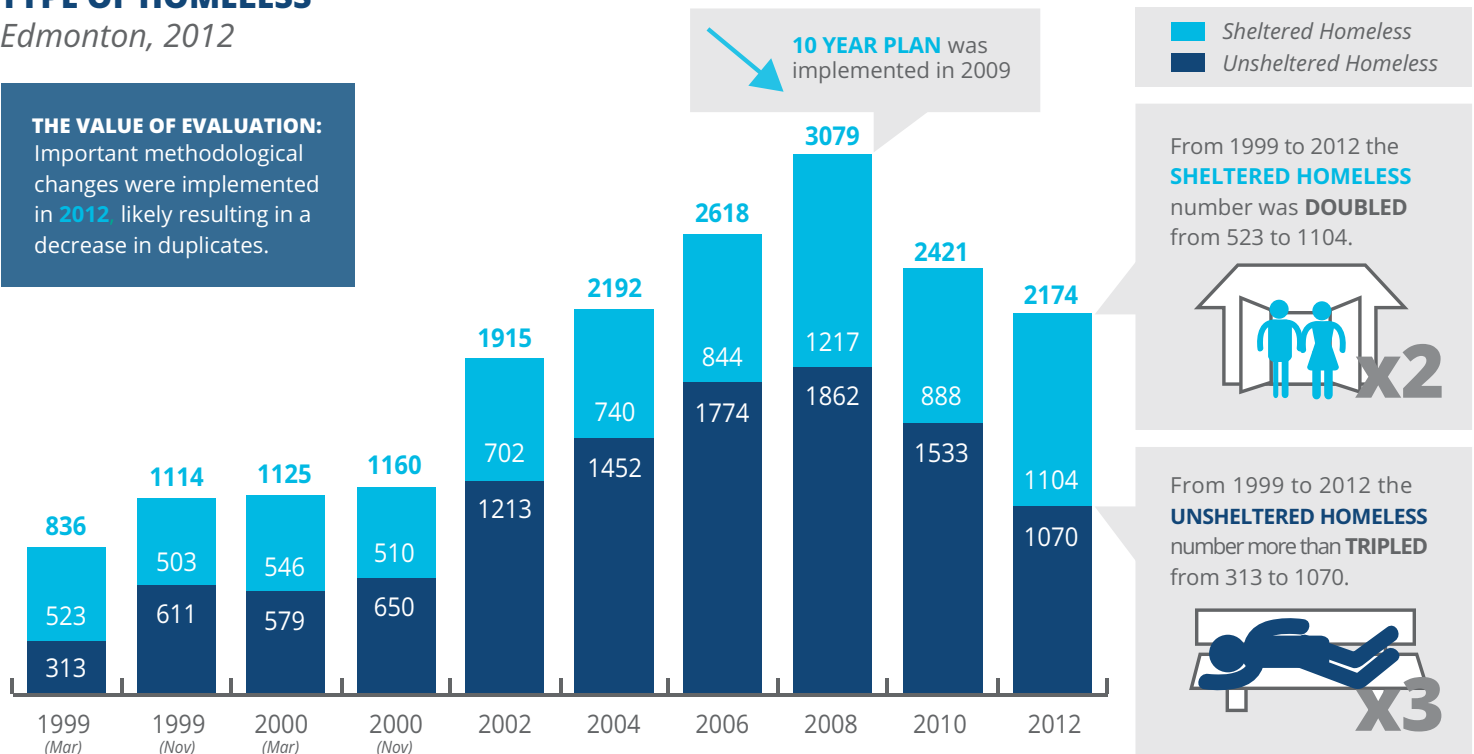
Stats taken from: The State of Homelessness in Calgary 2012,
Calgary Homeless Foundation
Designed by: The Homeless Hub, 2014

TOTAL NUMBER & TYPE OF HOMELESS

Edmonton, 2012

THE VALUE OF EVALUATION:

Important methodological changes were implemented in **2012** likely resulting in a decrease in duplicates.

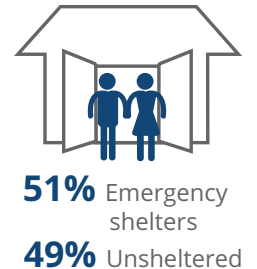
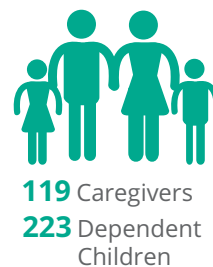
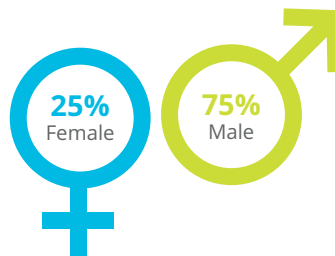


2012 HOMELESS COUNT BREAKDOWN



AGE DISTRIBUTION

0 - 17 : **13%**
 18 - 24 : **9%**
 25 - 30 : **10%**
 31 - 44 : **26%**
 45 - 54 : **25%**
 55 - 64 : **14%**
 65+ : **3%**



* Based on a 24 hour Point in Time (PIT) Count

Stats taken from: 2012 Edmonton Homeless Count,
 Homeward Trust Edmonton
 Designed by: The Homeless Hub, 2014



CHALLENGES & STRATEGIES

MODULE 4 — EVALUATION OF HOUSING FIRST

Photo: Shane Fester



Challenge: Sorting through the many evaluation options

There are many ways to evaluate. To select an appropriate evaluation strategy, keep in mind stakeholder perspectives and match the approach to the stage of program development.

Keep the Perspective of Stakeholders in Mind

Whatever approach you use you should keep in mind the perspectives and expectations of the stakeholders who will be using the results, whether these are funders, program managers, direct service workers, or participants, or researchers. Depending on the audience, the primary purpose could be knowledge development (research), ongoing improvement for the program and its individual participants, or demonstrating positive results to funders. Narrow down the options by consulting key stakeholders and make sure to incorporate the perspectives of program participants.

Matching the Approach to the Stage of Program Evolution

The choice of approach to evaluating program performance should fit the stage of your community's program. In the beginning stages, the focus is generally on implementation and fidelity evaluation—determining whether and to what degree the critical ingredients of the program are actually put in place, whether the community's implementation strategy is working as planned, or whether barriers to implementation need to be addressed.

When the Housing First program is more solidly in the place, the focus can shift to examining outcomes. In an evidence-based program, such as Housing First, there are expected outcomes; thus, the focus can be on outcome evaluation.

In Housing First, an outcome evaluation would look at:

- Housing stability, service usage, quality of life, and community integration;
- Using recognized quantitative measures, as well as qualitative information.

There may also be a need to understand qualitatively more about how the program achieves, or struggles with, certain outcomes, and to understand which components are critical and which need to be adapted. This may be important when Housing First is introduced into a new context (e.g., for youth), or when novel elements (such as supported employment) are introduced. This is known as Theory of Change Evaluation, as it seeks to help understand the reasons underlying why the program processes lead to the expected outcomes.



Click here:

[HPS' Outcome Measures](#)

2

Challenge: Getting Buy-in From Providers

Another evaluation challenge is that case managers and clinicians may see evaluation as getting in the way of their work. For example, they may see the measures as burdensome to administer, and not relevant to helping meet the needs of participants.

Making Measures Clinically Relevant and Feasible to Collect

In order to get buy-in from practitioners, make sure that:

- The measures chosen are clinically relevant;
- The team members receive regular feedback about how their participants are doing with respect to important outcomes (housing stability, quality of life, community integration and other recovery-oriented outcomes)

This will allow the team to understand what is working well, pinpoint common problems, as well as identify specific individuals whose needs aren't being met. This will help clinicians adjust their practice, as well help the team as a whole consider new strategies for addressing challenging systemic issues. From a feasibility standpoint, it may be possible to dovetail evaluation data collection with doing regular clinical progress reporting, so that practitioners to do not have an additional task.

3

Challenge: Missing the Big Picture

Most often, when we talk about evaluation, we refer to the level of the program. Assessing whether a program is working well can sometimes deflect attention from the bigger picture context of how well the program is meeting the needs of the wider community, and how well developed its partnerships are with other agencies in the wider mental health and housing service system.

Consider the System Level

In addition to considering the performance of a program, the system level should also be considered. System-level evaluation looks at issues such as how accessible the program is, whether programs target the right participants, and how well HF programs are coordinated with agencies providing referrals or complementary resources. System evaluation can also look at issues such as adequacy of resources and accountability structures. Some of these system level measures are being developed by the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, and will be included in a toolkit for Community Entities that will help CE's monitor quality at the system level.

4

Challenge: Data Overload

One common problem is that programs become overwhelmed by the sheer amount of data being collected. In their attempt to be rigorous, programs may end up developing a “laundry list” of scales and measures with no clear purpose. As mentioned, this can

feel burdensome to practitioners and affect buy-in. Another problem with data overload is that it can take up a significant amount of administrative costs and time. It can also lead to problems deciding on which data are most relevant.

Use the Logic Model of the Program to Guide Data Collection



Click for further resources related to the Logic Model and guiding data collection:

1. [Logic Model \(in “steps”\)](#)
2. [Alex \(Example of Internal Evaluation\)](#)

While it is important to find rigorous measures, it is also important to develop a manageable list of measures that is relevant. The program’s logic model is the guide that helps direct attention to measuring the outcomes that are valued by stakeholders. It also helps select measures that are achievable, in light of the program’s “theory of action,” and in light of its stage of implementation. The logic model also specifies the critical ingredients of the program, and thus provides a guide to focussing an implementation and fidelity evaluation.

Evaluation can be done internally or by an external evaluator. The choice in part depends on the purpose of the evaluation. When making the case to funders that the program is successful, it makes sense to hire an external evaluator, or someone who is at “arms length” from the program. The Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) asks communities to undergo a self-assessment at baseline, and periodically. It is also advisable to bring in an external party with specific expertise on Housing First fidelity to do an implementation evaluation, both in the beginning stages and later stages of implementation. Over time, the community can gradually develop the capacity to measure program fidelity internally. Housing First programs that are funded by HPS will be asked to develop a performance management database which tracks outcomes at the program and system levels.

The evaluation profession has developed a series of principles that should be followed when doing evaluation or performance assessment. When going through the steps of planning and conducting the process, these principles should be kept in mind. (Link includes all material below)

Utility

The endeavour should be useful to the program and its stakeholders, and aid their decision making about the program, facilitating continuous quality improvement. Utilization-focused evaluation is an approach for ensuring utility, which emphasizes the clear articulation of purpose and ongoing participation, guided by the key stakeholders who will be using the data, including people with lived experience of homelessness. In order to be useful, the findings of the evaluation should be translated into action.

Feasibility

This principle emphasizes that your approach should not disrupt the program, that there are adequate resources to carry it out, and that the organization has the capacity to use the results effectively.

Ethics

This principle emphasizes that the process should be carried out ethically, with respect to respecting participants' rights, and with respect to providing an analysis that accurately reflects the strengths and weaknesses of the intervention. Ethics also involves ensuring that participants are provided access to the results. A helpful document for working with people with lived experience can be found in the appendices.

Learn more:

<http://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/how-do-investigators-conduct-ethical-research-people-who-are-homeless-homeless-hub-research>



How do investigators conduct ethical research with people who are homeless?
(Homeless Hub Research Summary Series)

Accuracy

This principle means that the intervention should be clearly described, that the methods should be transparent and replicable. Quantitative measures should be valid and reliable and relevant to the program. Similarly, qualitative evaluation approaches should uphold appropriate standards of rigour. The findings should be presented adequately and with enough detail so that decision-makers can understand the interpretations, and see that the conclusions are justified.

SPOTLIGHT

MODULE 4 — EVALUATION OF HOUSING FIRST



The Alex in Calgary is a community health centre that has two Housing First programs. One is based on the Pathways to Housing New York Model and utilizes ACT teams, while the other is termed “Home Base” and utilizes ICM teams. The Pathways program was initiated in 2007, while the Home base program was initiated in 2009. The Alex had developed an internal evaluation system to ensure that, “...at the end of the day we...know we are doing our job.”



More about The Alex's program:

- 1. Pathways to Housing: Bringing People Home*
- 2. Homebase: First Steps to Healing*

About The Alex Pathways to Housing



Above is a still image from The Alex Pathways to Housing video. Colleen, a program participant, talks about how Pathways has changed her life.



Click here to watch the full video online:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkJc0XOoyAE>

We spoke with a senior program leader who talked about the importance of an evaluation process for tracking program success and ensuring continued learning and adaptation of the program to implementation challenges. The impetus to begin internal evaluation came from not having a clear picture of the characteristics of program participants and their related challenges. This presented an important opportunity for program improvement, learning and documenting success.

Initially, it was a challenge to sell clinical staff on the importance of evaluation and actually getting clinicians to complete evaluation assessments of program participants. A lesson learned from this process is that it is important to involve clinicians early on and present the possibilities for program improvement so that clinical staff understands the process. Another challenge faced by internal evaluators was the creation of data management tools to keep track of evaluation data. The team has developed a series of excel spreadsheets to this end. An important component of this data tool is that when baseline data are collected on new participants, the tool populates future data collection points and notifies both team leads and members by email about when the next assessments should be completed.



MODULE 4: BONUS

Evaluation Checklist

MODULE 4 — EVALUATION OF HOUSING FIRST

☐ Resources

- ___ Assess your internal capacity to evaluate
- ___ Decide if you will need training or will bring in an external evaluator
- ___ Assess data management capabilities
- ___ Set a budget

☐ Build a culture of evaluation

- ___ Identify stakeholders who will benefit from evaluation data
- ___ Engage stakeholders in evaluation process from the beginning
- ___ Identify leadership

☐ Identify the purpose of evaluation

- ___ Identify the purpose of the evaluation and identify the stakeholders will use it.

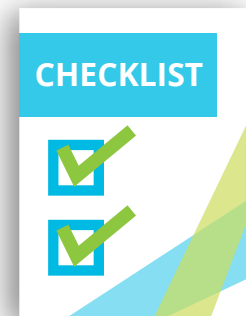
☐ Select Evaluation Type

- ___ Identify the components of evaluation including:
 - ___ Fidelity measures
 - ___ Qualitative component
 - ___ Quantitative outcome measures
 - ___ Developmental components

☐ Develop a program description and logic model

☐ Access fidelity -measures

- ___ Internal or external process
 - ___ Identify a fidelity team and arranging a visit if external
 - ___ Select a self-guided fidelity process if internal



*Download printer friendly version:
[Module 4: Evaluation Checklist](#)*



☐ Find/develop outcome indicators

- ___ Select a set of developmental indicators
 - ___ Homelessness Partnering Strategy outcome indicators
 - ___ Minimum Data Set outcome indicators
 - ___ At Home/Chez Soi outcome indicators
 - ___ Develop your own measures

☐ Select appropriate methods

- ___ Methods should reflect evaluation type (Step 4.) and,
- ___ Methods should be appropriate for the outcomes selected (Step 7.)

☐ Create an evaluation plan

- ___ Develop a protocol with timelines for evaluation tasks and assign responsibilities to evaluation team members.

☐ Collect Data

☐ Analyse Data

- ___ Create an analysis plan
- ___ Identify appropriate quantitative analysis tools
- ___ Identify appropriate qualitative analysis tools

☐ Develop a reporting process

- ___ Identify stakeholder groups who will benefit from evaluation data
- ___ Develop reporting procedures to communicate the results/ of the evaluation

APPENDICES & RESOURCES

MODULE 4 — EVALUATION OF HOUSING FIRST



Photo: Shane Fester

Appendices & Resources



Click any of the listed resources to access the online or downloadable document

- Principles of Evaluation [Canadian Housing First Toolkit](#) | 2014

Housing First Program Adaptation And Fidelity Resources

- Housing & Services Program Self-Assessment Survey
[Gilmer, T., Stefancic, A., Sklar, M., & Tsemberis, S.](#) | 2013

Meaningful Inclusion Of People With Lived Experience Resources

- Vancouver Peer Reference Group Report on Peer Support for Homelessness and Mental Health
[Mental Health Commission of Canada](#) | 2013

Logic Model Information

- Enhancing Program Performance with Logic Models
[University of Wisconsin-Extension](#) | 2003
- Program Evaluation for the Homelessness Sector
[The Homeless Hub](#) | 2014
- At Home/Chez Soi Logic Model based on the Pathways Housing First Model
[Canadian Housing First Toolkit](#) | 2014

Self-Assessments And Fidelity Scales

- Housing First Self-Assessment: Assess and Align Your Program and Community with a Housing First Approach [100,000 Homes](#) | 2014
- Pathways Fidelity Evaluation Tools
[Mental Health Commission of Canada](#) | 2014
- Baseline Fidelity Assessment Protocol- PHSI Project
[PHSI Project](#) | 2013
- Table: Using Fidelity Indicators
[Canadian Housing First Toolkit](#) | 2014

10-Year Plans For Ending Homelessness/State Of Homelessness Reports

- A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years
[Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness | 2013](#)
- The State of Homelessness in Calgary 2012
[Calgary Homeless Foundation | 2012](#)
- The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013
[Gaetz, Stephen; Donaldson, Jesse; Richter, Tim; Gulliver, Tanya | The Homeless Hub | 2013](#)
- 2012 Edmonton Homeless Count
[Homeward Trust Edmonton | 2012](#)

Data Manuals

- Community Mental Health Common Data Set- Mental Health (CDS-MH)
[Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care | 2013](#)

Measures And Indicators

- HPS Project Level Indicators
[Homelessness Partnering Secretariat | 2014](#)
- Core Measures Terms of Use and Training Materials | 2014
- Literature Review: Measurement of Client Outcomes in Homelessness Services
[Planigale, Mark | HomeGround Services | 2011](#)
- Table: Evaluation Models
[Canadian Housing First Toolkit | 2014](#)
- Table: HPS Outcome Measures
[Homelessness Partnering Secretariat | 2014](#)



*For additional
resources on
Housing First:
[Click to visit the
Homeless Hub,](#)*



the homeless hub



*Download the
printer friendly:*

*[Evaluation
Checklist](#)*