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WELLINGTON GUELPH DRUG STRATEGY HOUSING FIRST RESEARCH

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This short research brief was conducted for the Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy Committee. Housing First is a strategy focusing on providing non-contingent housing to chronically homeless and the traditionally hard-to-house including individuals with mental illness and/or addictions. Programs exist in several cities across Canada and vary in their level of support and types of services. The following report outlines existing Housing First programs across the country, detailing their service delivery, depth and, where applicable, funding sources.



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BACKGROUND

Housing First is a model of housing support that focuses on establishing permanent housing for chronically homeless individuals, particularly those with mental illness and/or substance use issuesⁱ. This strategy differs from the traditional model of low-income housing in its provision of housing without contingencies. Unlike programs which offer step-wise housing from emergency shelter to long-term housing based on following a prescribed treatment plan and contingent upon random drug testing, home inspections and/or service use, Housing First operates on the principle that the people most at risk are capable of making decisions about their housing and treatmentⁱⁱ. Instead of requiring all individuals to follow the same treatment plan, Housing First programs primarily provide community-based support services through coordination with specialist organizations, which can be accessed if the participant so chooses. Based on a Housing First program in New York City called Pathways to Housing, Inc., Streets to Homes was among the first Housing First programs to be established in Canada, in 2005. Since its inception, Streets to Homes has provided housing to many hard-to-house homeless individuals and has served as a basis for several other Canadian initiatives, including the Mental Health Commission's (MHCC) ongoing At Home/Chez Soi research project operating in five Canadian cities, to be evaluated in 2013. Housing First programs differ in their degree of support, type of housing, number of individuals served, and funding sources, and the following rapid response research details the main elements of existing Canadian Housing First initiatives.

METHODS

This “rapid response¹” research consisted of Google searches, drawing information primarily from the websites for existing Housing First programs across Canada. Additional phone interviews were conducted with the Street Outreach Programs Coordinator at the Streets to Homes program in Toronto and the Senior Partnership Consultant at the Prairie and Territory Development Centre of the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (the company that funded the development of the Buffalo, Red Deer). Email correspondence with the Coordination and Campaign Coordinator at Vancouver's Streethome foundation informed further research into the Housing First programs funded in part by this organization. Research is still in progress, and attempts have been made to contact the Mental Health Commission of Canada and the Calgary Homeless Foundation. This report will be updated once this additional information has been obtained.

¹ Rapid response research is research that responds to pressing community questions using a range of “soft” research methods—from Google searching, and informational phone calls—to produce reports and briefs in a timely and responsive manner. In some cases, rapid response research forms the basis of longer-term and more in-depth research.



STREETS TO HOMES, TORONTO ON

Operating since 2005, Streets to Homes is well established in the city of Torontoⁱⁱⁱ. Streets to Homes clients are contacted through on-street outreach from several teams: a mobile outreach team that accesses areas outside of the downtown core, a multi-disciplinary mobile outreach team that operates downtown, a youth team and an Aboriginal team. Once a potential client expresses the wish to be housed, they work one on one with a support worker, with whom they collaboratively create a housing and support plan. The participant chooses the type of housing they desire (ie. private market, social housing), and whether they wish to access support services, which are provided through collaborations with existing community organizations. The support services available are geared toward allowing participants to retain housing, but are holistic and diverse in nature.

A primary aim of the program in terms of its support services delivery is to avoid “too much too soon,” and to allow participants to make changes to their support plans as their priorities change. Housing support is provided for a minimum of one year, with the option to continue. The program provides system navigation, directing clients to such supports as the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health at St. Michael’s Hospital, individual psychiatric and physical health services, including nurses, clinical case managers and concurrent disorder therapy. Currently, over 3000 people are housed through Streets to Homes in housing scattered throughout the city. For private market housing, the landlord-tenant relationship is fostered by program facilitators, who are available at a phone call’s notice. However, clients and landlords alike are encouraged to deal directly with each other if concerns arise.

Funding for the Streets to Homes program stems from municipal, provincial and federal sources. It is managed through the Housing and Homelessness Supports and Initiatives section of the Shelter, Support and Housing Administration Division of the City of Toronto, which is responsible for Toronto’s government-subsidized housing programs. Streets to Homes works in concert with 29 partner agencies to provide its services, which are provided by both volunteers and professionals^{iv}. Encouragingly, 88% of the program’s participants are satisfied with their housing, according to 2007 Post-Occupancy Research^v. Additionally, as of 2011, over 80% of participants housed have retained tenancy^{vi}.

STREETHOME FOUNDATION, VANCOUVER BC

Established in 2008, the Streethome Foundation is not a traditional service-providing agency, but rather a foundation that helps to fund several Housing First initiatives^{vii}. These include the MHCC’s At Home/Chez Soi project, the London Hotel, the Aboriginal Mother Centre and projects through RainCity housing (see below for details on RainCity housing). Types of support provided vary according to the project being funded. If housing development is congregate (ie. many prior homeless individuals living in one building) support is generally provided on site. However, the presiding Housing First model, scatter-



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site housing, warrants more community-oriented support, including programs taking place through existing community support services. The support offered tends to be holistic in nature, including an emphasis on mental health, addictions recovery, budgeting, community kitchens and meal planning, and family reunification. Following the Housing First model, these supports are chosen in collaboration with the client, and may or may not be followed depending on the individual's wishes. Intensiveness of support depends on the program, as well as on individual need and desire.

Streethome does not provide funding for staffing. This is generally provided to housing projects by the Province of BC or the City of Vancouver. BC Housing generally provides operating funding to specific service providers, though some projects actively seek funding through fundraising or their existing mandate. Streethome's role is generally one of providing funding for the necessary capital and infrastructure to develop a project.

RAINCITY HOUSING, VANCOUVER BC

RainCity Housing provides housing in a Housing First model specifically for those dealing with addictions. RainCity runs several programs and services geared toward Housing First. RainCity differs from Streets to Homes in its orientation toward transitional housing, with the ultimate goal of securing housing hard-to-house individuals in longer-term housing with an appropriate level of support according to individual need. RainCity promotes a holistic approach to Housing First, and aims to create a supportive environment for all tenants, allowing them to make their own choices about housing and health. This organization also works with the MHCC on the At Home/Chez Soi project through their Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) model.

Transitional: RainCity's "Housing First" transitional housing provides tenants with 24 hour staff, shared bathrooms and kitchens, and pets are allowed. Rooms are either SRO or subsidized, depending on the project.

The Vivian Transitional Housing Program for Women is designed specifically for women with concurrent mental illness, addiction, and other risk factors, and who are homeless. The housing project operates on harm reduction/health promotion principles to provide housing women who have "slipped through the cracks" of traditional low-income housing situations, mental health and/or addictions programs and services.

Princess Rooms Transitional Housing for both men and women provides tenants access to low-barrier housing for chronically homeless individuals with high risks and needs. Again following the harm-reduction/health promotion philosophy, the Princess Rooms provides 24-hour staff but is accepting of street activities, though it also provides alternatives to these activities and works directly and collaboratively with clients to establish goals for a return to "health, hope and stability" if the client so desires. Support at the Princess is holistic and individualized, offering social activities and help with daily tasks. Assistance is provided both on-site and in the community.



The Lux provides housing for those with health needs and/or difficulty obtaining housing. A focus on reaching solutions to these needs is applied, and clients work with staff to reach realistic goals, with length of stay varying based on an individual's needs. Medication and other support is provided on-site, though rooms are self-contained and individuals are able to live independently. Encouragement is provided for tenants to become more involved in their communities. There is a Community Integration Support Worker who organizes peer-driven activities and events and links clients to other existing community resources^{viii}.

OTHER PROJECTS FUNDED BY STREETOHOME^{ix}:

- ❖ London Hotel: 25 people housed, low-barrier housing for the chronically homeless
 - Funded by Streetohome, building managed by Atira, support services funded by BC Housing
- ❖ 1050 Expo Boulevard: 90 units, holistic support and housing first for homeless individuals including basic skills training (ie. household management, meal preparation, money management) and links to healthcare/employment services in the community
 - Funded by Streetohome, St. James Community Service Society, Province of BC and City of Vancouver
- ❖ 7th and Fir: 62 units, housing and support services (on-site) for mental health treatment, advocacy and crisis prevention
 - Funded by Streetohome, Katherine Sanford Housing Society, Motivation Power and Achievement Society, Province of BC and City of Vancouver
- ❖ 590 Alexander: 139 units, access to housing and on-site basic life skills, community health services, education and training, community kitchens/nutrition/meal preparation, money management, budgeting, shopping and housekeeping, exercise and self-care
 - Funded by Streetohome, Portland Hotel Society, Province of BC, City of Vancouver
- ❖ 1233-1251 Howe Street: 110 units, housing first and support services for homeless individuals with HIV/AIDS, access to health management/wellness programs, life skills programs (nutrition, housekeeping and budgeting), links to community case managers, education, employment programs
 - Funded by Streetohome, McLaren Housing Society, Province of BC, and City of Vancouver
- ❖ 215 West 2nd Ave.: 147 units, half for individuals with mental health/substance abuse issues; housing first and support programming in the community and on-site including community medical/mental health services, recreational activities and skill-building to maintain inter-tenant and tenant-landlord



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relationships; 30 residents in early substance abuse recovery to receive enhanced support from Vancouver Coastal Health as well as connections to community treatment services

- Funded by Streethome, RainCity Housing and Support Society, Katherine Sanford Society, Province of BC and City of Vancouver
- ❖ **Aboriginal Mother Centre:** 16 units, transitional supportive housing for homeless women and children, offering supports and day care on site
- ❖ **606 Powell:** 147 units for women and children, addressing housing as well as mental health/substance abuse issues and family issues, including connections to community services such as child care, support services, medical/mental health services, peer-based programming, community kitchen and family nights, and a Parent Resource Centre
 - Funded by Streethome, RainCity Housing and Support Society, Province of BC and City of Vancouver
- ❖ **675 East Broadway:** 103 units, with 30 units for youth 16-24; clients to access support for mental and physical health, addictions, household management and meal preparation, money management and community living skills in the community
 - Funded by Streethome, Vancouver Native Housing Society, Broadway Youth Resource Centre, Province of BC and City of Vancouver
- ❖ **1134 Burrard:** 141 units, 30 for youth 16-24; clients to access group/individual support, training on household management/meal preparation/money management, community living skills, as well as peer support, counseling support, medical services, education and life skills
 - Funded by Streethome, Kettle Friendship Centre, Family Services of Greater Vancouver, the Province of BC and the City of Vancouver
- ❖ **YWCA “Cause We Care House”:** 20 housing units for single mothers and children, aiming to support marginalized women to help them develop economic independence
 - Funded by Streethome, City of Vancouver and Vancouver Public Library
- ❖ **120 Jackson:** 12 housing units for young women (16-24) who are homeless/at risk of homelessness or in unsafe housing

THE BUFFALO, RED DEER, AB

The Buffalo is a converted hotel in Red Deer, Alberta, that offers Housing First through 40 units for traditionally “hard to house” individuals. The support provided at the Buffalo focuses primarily on securing and maintaining tenancy, but additional services are provided on-site upon client request. These additional services include on-site psychiatrists, addictions counselors, and staff members who



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can help with daily tasks such as laundry and housekeeping. Staff members are available 24 hours a day and interact with clients to develop individualized plans for accessing additional community support if desired, including hobbies, employment and medical services. Tenants may also choose to enroll in a monthly meal plan for a nominal fee, and in 2010 the restaurant also began to operate as a training facility for meal preparation. Rent includes access to free laundry, Internet and local telephone. All services are voluntary, and choice is a fundamental aspect of all Buffalo programming. Potter's Hands, a ministry serving the homeless population of Alberta, owns the Buffalo, and provides funding for its staffing and operation through collaboration with provincial and independent donor sources^x. Start up and development funding for the Buffalo was provided by the Red Deer chapter of the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) and by governmental Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) funding. This funding allowed this formerly derelict hotel to be transformed into a Housing First program. The program's budget is \$960 000, and funds come directly to the City of Red Deer via Alberta's Department of Housing and Urban Affairs^{xixii}.

THE CALGARY HOMELESS FOUNDATION

A part of the province of Alberta's 10 year plan to enhance support for hard-to-house chronically homeless individuals, the Calgary Homeless Foundation works to support 23 agencies, including several programs providing Housing First to residents of Alberta^{xiii}. Particularly relevant to the Housing First approach for housing homeless individuals with mental illness and addictions are the following programs funded by the foundation:

- ❖ The Mustardseed: provides housing and various support programs to help individuals retain long-term tenancy^{xiv}
 - Provincially funded
- ❖ The Alex: Pathways to Housing program provides housing and assertive community treatment in mental and physical health, substance abuse, education and employment for homeless individuals including those in medical need and those involved in the justice system^{xv}
 - Provincially funded

MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION OF CANADA "AT HOME/CHEZ SOI" RESEARCH PROJECT

The Mental Health Commission of Canada launched its "At Home/Chez Soi" project after receiving \$110 million in February 2008 to establish and improve methods of helping homeless individuals with mental illness^{xvi}. A multi-site, randomized, controlled trial, At Home/Chez Soi is taking place in Moncton, Montreal, Vancouver, Toronto and Winnipeg, and will be evaluated in 2013. The program delivers a



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Housing First approach as well as a “care as usual” control condition with an overarching goal to increase understanding of and reducing incidence of homelessness across Canada. All participants are 18 or older and suffering from serious mental illness, as well as being eligible for provincial income assistance or other equivalent forms of financial support. Support is holistic, including assistance with routine tasks such as shopping, appointment-making, education, volunteering and employment. All services are optional, except for the portion of rent paid by the participant, but all participants are encouraged to make use of the services available to them. Each city has a different “Third Arm” intervention aimed to capture the uniqueness of the location.

MONCTON

Through collaboration with local and provincial governments, the Moncton program includes 180 participants, 96 of whom are now housed. Services are provided in both English and French to attempt to bridge the gap left by traditional services in Moncton, which have been unilingual. A sub-project addresses the difference between service access and use for urban and rural homeless individuals^{xvii}.

MONTREAL

The Montreal project’s focus is on whether social housing is an efficient way to offer Housing First programs. In the social support model, support is accessed on-site, whereas private housing staff act more as system navigational aides to connect residents to community-based services. Currently, 404 people are participating in the Montreal program and 163 are housed. Unique methods of research result dissemination are being explored, including the potential to create a documentary film to express the qualitative experience of participants^{xviii}.

VANCOUVER

Vancouver’s focus is on finding and securing housing for individuals with substance abuse and addiction issues, and is taking place in collaboration with the Streethome Foundation and RainCity Housing. Using both scattered site and congregate models, the depth and location of support varies depending on the type of housing provided. A central site model offers on-site, holistic support, whereas private market housing provides connections to community sources of support. High-need participants are housed in scattered site apartments with support provided by Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams, congregate units with on-site support provided, or receive care as usual. Those with moderate needs as housed in scattered site apartments with intensive case management (ICM) or receive care as usual. ACT teams operate on a 10 to 1 ratio, and do 80% of their work in the community, with 24/7 crisis support available^{xix}. 459 people are participating in the Vancouver project, and 220 are now housed^{xx}.

TORONTO



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Toronto's At Home program builds upon existing Housing First services in the city, including the Streets to Homes program. This project focuses on an "anti-oppression" approach to attempt to better meet the needs of people from diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds, including the recently immigrated. The basis of this project is the knowledge that marginalization based on ethnicity may act as a barrier to recovery from mental illness^{xxi}. Holistic, culturally appropriate and linguistically competent support is provided in collaboration with Across Boundaries (an Ethnoracial Mental Health Centre) and various other partners. Active outreach is also provided to Toronto landlords to bolster the tenant-landlord relationship. Similarly to Vancouver's program, high-needs participants have service provision from ACT teams (of 14 members), and those with less-intense mental health concerns are linked to ICM teams (of 6 members). As of October 2011, 580 people are enrolled in the program, and 290 are currently housed^{xxii}.

WINNIPEG

The Winnipeg At Home project focuses on providing services that are appropriate for Aboriginal populations, including "Back to the Land" activities, provided as a part of "Wi Che Win" (walk/come with me), an Aboriginal ICM program. Active outreach to landlords and a mutual system of referrals between community health and social organizations characterizes this Housing First program. Currently, 401 people are program participants, and 119 are housed^{xxiii}. Culturally appropriate, holistic service provision is the cornerstone of the Winnipeg initiative^{xxiv}.

CONCLUSION

The Housing First programs that exist across Canada reflect the diversity of their locations, and each endeavors to provide services that meet the needs of those individuals in each community who are hardest to house. Chronically homeless populations, particularly those with concurrent mental health and/or addiction issues, have traditionally been housed through contingency-based programs, and the Housing First provides an alternative to this approach under the assertion that providing housing first enhances these individuals agency to make decisions about their health and well-being. While Canadian research is still underway, notably through the Mental Health Commission of Canada's At Home/Chez Soi program, the diverse Housing First models that currently exist in this country demonstrate this model of service provision's increasing popularity and utility in housing the chronically homeless.



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- ⁱ See Greenwood, Ronni Michelle Nicole J. Schaefer-McDaniel, Gary Winkel and Sam J. Tsemberis. 2005. "Decreasing Psychiatric Symptoms by Increasing Choice in Services for Adults with Histories of Homelessness." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 36(3/4): 223-238. ; and Tsemberis, Sam, Leyla Gulcur and Nakae Maria. 2004. "Housing First, Consumer Choice, and Harm Reduction for Homeless Individuals With a Dual Diagnosis." *American Journal of Public Health* 94(4): 651-656.
- ⁱⁱ Gulcur, Leyla, Ana Stefanic, Marybeth Shinn, Sam Tsemberis and Sean N. Fischer. 2003. "Housing, Hospitalization, and Cost Outcomes for Homeless Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities Participating in Continuum of Care and Housing." *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* 13: 171-186.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Information about Streets to Homes, see City of Toronto, "Streets to Homes" <http://www.toronto.ca/housing/about-streets-homes.htm>
- ^{iv} Falvo, Nick. 2009. "Homelessness, Program Responses, and an Assessment of Toronto's Streets to Homes Program." *CPRN Research Report* February 2009.
- ^v City of Toronto. 2007. "What Housing First Means for People: Results of Streets to Homes 2007 Post-Occupancy Research." *Shelter, Support & Housing Administration Report*
- ^{vi} Personal communication, Sue Goodfellow, October 31st, 2011
- ^{vii} Personal communication, Lindsay Yuasa, November 3rd, 2011
- ^{viii} Rain City Housing, <http://www.raincityhousing.org/>
- ^{ix} All below information from Streethome's project page: <http://streetohome.org/projects>
- ^x Personal communication, Terrence Hodkins (CMHC)
- ^{xi} DeJong, Iain. 2011. "A Paradigm Shift in Ending Homelessness."
- ^{xii} Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation. "The Buffalo, Red Deer, Alberta" *Project Profile*.
- ^{xiii} Calgary Homeless Foundation, "What We Do: Programs" <http://calgaryhomeless.com/what-we-do/programs/>



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- ^{xiv} The Mustard Seed Calgary <http://www.theseed.ca/The-Mustard-Seed-Calgary.html>
- ^{xv} The Alex Pathways to Housing <http://www.thealex.ca/programs/pathways-to-housing>
- ^{xvi} See Mental Health Commission of Canada, At Home, <http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/Pages/homelessness.aspx>
- ^{xvii} MHCC At Home, Moncton Research <http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/Pages/MonctonResearch.aspx>
- ^{xviii} MHCC At Home, Montreal Research <http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/Pages/MontrealResearch.aspx>
- ^{xix} RainCity Housing's ACT team, <http://www.raincityhousing.org/what-we-do/hfact/>
- ^{xx} MHCC At Home, Vancouver Research <http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/Pages/VancouverResearch.aspx>
- ^{xxi} At Home/Chez Soi. 2009. "Mental Health Commission of Canada Launches National Research Project to Find Sustainable Solutions for People With Mental Health Issues Who Are Homeless: Study will Investigate 'Housing First' Approach" *Mental Health Commission of Canada*
- ^{xxii} Mental Health Commission of Canada "At Home/Chez Soi Research Demonstration Project in Toronto: Project Update October 2009"; <http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/Pages/TorontoResearch.aspx>
- ^{xxiii} At Home Winnipeg Research <http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/Pages/WinnipegResearch.aspx>
- ^{xxiv} Mental Health Commission of Canada "At Home/Chez Soi Winnipeg Update May 2010"