

Housing-Focused Case Management Policy – Shelters

Purpose

To document and share best practices and expectations for a consistent community approach to shelter-based case management within the homeless-serving sector in Hamilton.

Responsibilities and Accountability

Community Entity (CE) – City of Hamilton

The CE is accountable for the creation of policies, standards, and processes for intake, consent, and assessment as well as supporting vacancy matching and referral using By-Name Data.

It is the responsibility of the CE to make resources available to support agencies with the appropriate understanding of how to apply common intake, consent, assessment, and integrated service delivery in alignment with Housing First best practices through implementation of HIFIS and Coordinated Access.

Agency

It is the agency's responsibility to provide shelter services and conduct case management activities with every client. If a client signs explicit consent to have their information stored in HIFIS, it is the agency's responsibility to report service interactions through HIFIS. Agency staff must follow client privacy protocols for their respective organizations to ensure personal information is secured, including for Indigenous clients and other clients who do not consent and are not required to have their information stored in HIFIS.

Agencies will provide staff with further guidance for operationalizing housing-focused shelter policies via an internal program manual and/or policies and training.

Shelter staff are accountable to:

- Inputting accurate and timely HIFIS data themselves for privacy and accountability purposes as per the guidance provided in the HIFIS User Manual
- Participation in Coordinated Access processes according to the [City of Hamilton's Coordinated Access Process Guidelines and Policies](#).
- Providing culturally and linguistically appropriate services as they are able.

Guiding Principles

Emergency shelters are part of a larger network of agencies that make up Hamilton's homeless-serving system. Hamilton's homeless-serving system is grounded in recognition of Indigenous homelessness as a colonial legacy. Agencies are collectively

accountable to respond to Indigenous homelessness in ways that respect the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, reflect their unique experiences and needs, and advance the spirit and intent of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.

Emergency shelters are expected to operate considering a trauma-informed, gender and equity lens; recognizing the systemic barriers faced by women, trans, gender-diverse or non-binary people, and experiencing intersecting oppressions including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, substance use, mental health, disability, gender identity, religion, and sexual orientation.

Programs operating within Hamilton's Coordinated Access system will follow Housing First principles recognizing that stable housing is the primary need shared by all people experiencing homelessness.

1. No housing readiness requirements
2. Self-determination and choice
3. Housing stabilization orientation
4. Individualized service planning
5. Community and social integration

Housing First is not Housing-only. Housing stability is supported by fostering self-sufficiency and connection to community resources and supports as needed, aligning housing goals to client choice. Along with support in obtaining stable and sustainable housing, case managers broker connection to complementary supports as needed in areas such as: physical and mental health, education, employment, substance abuse, and community services.

Shelter staff will apply a person-centred, trauma-informed approach to supportive conversations and service delivery.

Indigenous Clients

Regular, ongoing Indigenous cultural training will be required for all shelter staff, volunteers, students, leadership, and Board of Directors.

With the benefit of Indigenous cultural capacity training, staff may be better able to ask at intake whether a person identifies as having Indigenous ancestry and will support clients in connecting to Indigenous organizations in accordance with the person's needs and choice.

Shelter staff will inform Indigenous clients that they are not required to use mainstream triage and assessment tools in order to receive services or be prioritized for housing supports through the Coordinated Access system.

Indigenous clients' names are not required to appear on the Matching and Referral list generated from HIFIS By-Name data to be prioritized for service.

Service Delivery Model

Clients do not need to demonstrate any preconditions (for instance, housing readiness) to take part in case management or housing support programs in the homeless-serving system. All clients accessing emergency shelters must be offered shelter-based case management supports.

Shelter-based case management supports are targeted to people experiencing homelessness who are staying at an emergency shelter. Individuals can access case management supports throughout the duration of their stay.

Shelter-based case management practices will adhere to guidance outlined in the Emergency Shelter Standards, Hamilton's Triage and Assessment Policy, and Hamilton's Coordinated Access Process Guidelines.

Housing-Focused Case Management Processes

Intake:

- Housing-focused sheltering begins at intake and is available to all clients of emergency shelters.
- Shelter staff will use progressive engagement to build client trust and interest in engaging with housing supports.
- Shelter staff will inform clients about Hamilton's Coordinated Access system and how participation facilitates connections to appropriate housing supports. The Coordinated Access Homeless Sector consent form should be signed once client agrees to participate if not already signed upon entry to shelter.
- Designated shelter-based case managers should be assigned to a client as soon as possible.
- Case managers will complete a VI-SPDAT in accordance with [Hamilton's Triage and Assessment Policy](#), typically at 14 days into a shelter stay. Indigenous peoples are not required to complete a VI-SPDAT.
- Within 14 days of admission to shelter or once triaged, case managers will work with clients to review housing expectations and develop a housing plan to help clients identify and pursue actions to achieve housing goals.

Service Coordination:

- Informed by clients, shelter staff will identify appropriate supports according to needs and provide clients with support in connecting to available supports, such as identification, securing an income source, accessing financial supports, filing taxes, and/or an Access to Housing application.
- With the appropriate Indigenous cultural capacity training, shelter staff will ask whether a person has Indigenous ancestry and if so, will inform client of the option for a warm referral to an Indigenous organization. Indigenous peoples will be informed that they are welcome to but not required to complete a VI-SPDAT triage assessment or to have their personal information recorded in HIFIS.
- Designated shelter staff will participate in case conferencing to help with connecting clients to further supports as needed and locating clients whose names come up on the Matching and Referral list generated from HIFIS By-Name data in line with Hamilton's [Prioritization Policy & Protocol](#).

- On an ongoing basis, case managers will contribute to ensuring the client's online documentation is up to date.
- Shelter staff will make referrals, warm connections, and coordinate services with other service providers, as needed, to address barriers to stabilizing housing.
- Shelter staff will coordinate with Intensive Case Management (ICM) and Rapid Rehousing (RRH) case managers to facilitate warm transfers and ongoing client engagement with those programs for the duration that clients stay in shelter.
- If multiple case managers are working with a client (for example, in shelter and in an Intensive Case Management program), all staff supporting the client should work together and coordinate supports. The ICM/RRH case manager will be the primary case manager responsible for connecting with other service providers to coordinate supports.

Discharge:

- Support typically ends when a client books out of a shelter.
- Shelter staff are to close cases when they are no longer working with a client or have not connected with the client in more than 90 days.
- Planned exits from shelter into stable suitable housing will be initiated at intake and supported through case management.

Documentation

All shelters must maintain records of all case management supports. If a client signs explicit consent to have their information stored in the Homelessness Individuals and Families Information System, these must be documented in the current Homelessness Management Information System (e.g. Homeless Individuals and Families Information System 4.0) with the exception of records for Indigenous clients and other clients who do not consent to be included in HIFIS. As per the [Consent Policy](#), progressive engagement to obtain consent should be conducted according to agency practice in a way that is culturally considerate and respects individual autonomy. Documentation requirements are as follows:

- Housing-focused case management supports should be documented by the staff providing the support or their direct supervisor/manager.
- Housing-focused case management documentation should be completed in accordance with this policy and HIFIS user documentation and training and at a minimum include:
 - 1) Client information, inclusive of whether client identifies as Indigenous
 - 2) Date housing case management supports started
 - 3) The date(s) any housing case management activity or interaction took place with the client or on behalf of the client (e.g., service coordination or referrals made in between meetings with clients), the primary activity that

took place during the interaction, and next steps for both the case manager and client

- 4) The outcome when housing case management supports have ended (e.g., goal met, not met, etc.)
 - 5) If the client is not working with an ICM/RRH case manager and is being discharged from shelter and moving into housing, information about the housing (e.g., type, move in date, etc.).
- If multiple case managers are working with a client within the same shelter, the client should only have one case open and all activities documented in the same case.
 - If multiple case managers from different locations (shelters) are working with a client, each location should have a case open for the client.
 - If a client is also being supported by a housing program case manager, the ICM/RRH case manager is considered to be the primary case manager responsible for documentation.
 - All cases should be closed when there is no activity for 90 days. This is in alignment with the inactivity policy.

Definitions

By Name Data: real-time data, maintained by the City of Hamilton, of everyone known to be homeless in the community who has provided consent in Hamilton's Homeless-serving System; a prioritization list is generated from By-Name data to support matching and referral to housing support programs based on criteria outlined by the homeless serving sector.

Common Assessment Tool: refers to a standardized tool in the community that has been endorsed by the Community Entity and which agencies have been trained to use across the system.

Community Entity (CE): lead decision-making body that coordinates efforts to achieve federal, provincial, and local housing outcomes. The City, as Designated Community Entity, prioritizes collaborative work with the Indigenous CE in all areas of Coordinated Access planning, strategy, and service delivery to develop connections to housing and supports that are culturally appropriate and rooted in the spirit and actions of reconciliation that recognize the values of autonomy and self-determination.

Community Entity (Indigenous Funding Stream): The Coalition of Hamilton Indigenous Leadership (CHIL) is the lead decision-making body for the Indigenous funding stream that coordinates efforts to achieve Indigenous self-determined housing outcomes locally.

Consent: explicit permission for something to happen or an agreement to do something.

Coordinated Access: a City of Hamilton process whereby service providers in the Hamilton community work together to streamline the way people experiencing homelessness access housing support services needed to permanently end their homelessness.

Coordinated Access System: the network of service providers in the homeless-serving sector in the city of Hamilton that participate in Coordinated Access. The Coordinated Access system allows service providers in the homeless-serving sector in the City of Hamilton to:

- Quickly identify and engage people at risk of and experiencing homelessness
- Intervene to prevent the loss of housing and divert people from entering the housing crisis response system
- When homelessness does occur, provide immediate access to shelter and crisis services while permanent stable housing and appropriate supports are secured
- Quickly connect people to housing assistance and services – tailored to their unique needs and strengths to help them achieve and maintain stable housing.

Coordinated Intake: a standardized approach to assessing a person's current situation, the acuity of their needs, and the services they currently receive and may require in the future. It considers the background factors that contribute to risk and resilience, changes in acuity, and the role of friends, family, caregivers, community, and environmental factors.

Entry Points: the engagement points for persons experiencing a housing crisis (e.g., drop-ins, emergency shelters, outreach, etc.)

HMIS: Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS): A System whereby data pertaining to people experiencing homelessness are recorded, stored, retrieved, and processed to improve service coordination and decision-making.

HIFIS: Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) is a Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) that supports the day-to-day operational activities of local agencies in the homeless-serving sector. It enables multiple service providers to access, collect, and share information to ensure individuals and families are referred to the services they need, at the right time.

Homeless Serving Sector: comprises a range of local or regional service delivery components serving those who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness.

Housing First: A service approach that focuses on moving people experiencing homelessness into permanent housing without preconditions and then connecting them to supports and services as needed in order to stabilize their housing.

Housing-Focused Shelter: A housing-focused shelter is unrelenting in its pursuit to make homelessness as brief as possible while returning people to permanent accommodation. From the moment an individual or family pursues shelter, there are efforts to ensure a safe and appropriate exit from shelter. Housing focused shelter does

not operate other programming that can interfere with ensuring stays are short-term with a return to housing rapidly.¹

Indigenous Ancestry: A person who has ancestry associated with First Nations, Métis, and/or Inuit, regardless of residency or membership status.

Indigenous Identity: A person who self-identifies as being First Nations, Métis, Inuit, status or non-status person, regardless of residency or membership status.

Related Documents

- *Hamilton's Homeless-Serving System Consent for the Collection and Sharing of Personal Information*
- Hamilton's Coordinated Access Guidelines
- Hamilton's Emergency Shelter Standards
- Coming Together to End Homelessness: Hamilton's Systems Planning Framework
- Coordinated Access Policies
- Revisioning Coordinated Access: *Fostering Indigenous Best Practices Towards a Wholistic Systems Approach to Homelessness*
- Urban Indigenous Strategy
- Hamilton's Housing and Homelessness Action Plan

¹ Housing Focused Shelter, OrgCode Consulting Inc. in partnership with the Canadian Shelter Transformation Network and Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, March 2019.