

Toronto Housing and Homelessness Service System Planning Forum July 13th, 2022

Date and time: July 13, 2022; 10:00am – 12:00pm

Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89213891956>

1. Land Acknowledgement Savhanna Wilson

2. SSHA Items and Updates

Update on STARS: Supports Assessments, and New Intake and Triage, and Housing Checklist

Stephanie Malcher, SSHA & Alison Kooistra, SSHA

- See slide deck presentation
- **Action:** Alison noted that Supports Assessment Tool can be shared for anyone who would like a copy, encourages folks to check out the City of Toronto's [Coordinated Access webpage](#)
- **Q:** Is the system of coding used by Central Intake operators being changed through the implementation of this tool?
- **A:** No this tool is not related to the coding used by Central Intake.
- **Q:** Are the workers being trained to work on this level? In my homeless experience, the help I got depended greatly on the individual workers commitment to seeing the client as a person, not a stereotype...
- **A:** Doing work to develop training to focus on person-centred approach, embedded tool within existing case management, and would be administered by someone with trusting relationship or currently building that relationship with the client. This way the client's emotional well-being can be put first.
- **Q:** I imagine that it is also client-led. Sometimes all the information might not be given in several conversations. Is there a timeline that caseworkers have to complete the whole tool?
- **A:** Intake is done. We ask caseworkers to ask to go back if information comes back around support needs to go back and refresh. New tool in Shelter Management Information System (SMIS) to download case management support (who has ID, notice of assessment) for caseworkers. Based on Toronto Shelter Standards: if you are at a shelter the caseworker is expected to meet with client in 7 days. We hope for the checklist to be filled out in that time frame, but don't expect the whole thing to be filled out. We want the process to start within 7 days. At respites, it is when the individual is ready. Not an expectation that the supports assessment to be completed all in one setting.
- **Q:** is there a component to encourage client feedback, through worker training in order to iron out the mostly uneven power dynamic?
- **A:** Yes, we are putting together an RFQ for evaluation to gather feedback on this – service user and people with lived experience – how is the roll out and power dynamics. We don't have an ongoing mechanism right now but planning to hire 3rd party to do this engagement/evaluation
- **Q:** Very important tool. Relationship of trust between workers and clients increases the value of the content collected. How do we reconcile this with clients that we don't know?

- **A:** This is on-going, we acknowledge this is a process. We are engaging regularly to do this better. Developing transfer guidelines between referring agency and follow-up supports providers with the individual to ensure that connection is made: and warm transfer is completed. We acknowledge we have more to do here.
- **Q:** Do the Developmental Services Ontario (DSO) case workers have access to this tool?
- **A:** We are starting some work with the DSO around the processes (e.g. consent) that would be required to share this kind of information. Obviously we want to be wary of privacy and consent, but know that it could be very beneficial.
- **Q:** Are Housing Providers required to provide the level of support they provide and on what parameters? e.g. interactions per week.
- **A:** Yes, housing providers are required to share this kind of information to guide the matching process.
- **Q:** Has there been an assessment done around admin (with shelter hotels), are there enough shelter workers or access teams to do this work?
- **A:** Some work has been done to do an assessment of staff/caseworker/client ratio, especially in the hotel programs across the sector. This is why it is only been done with housing opportunity available, because we know it is intensive assessment and capacity is an issue. No firm answer, but something that is being thought about – particularly in terms of capacity
 - **Follow-up:** some of the biggest issues around budgets: Housing access team and supports team with resources and budgets and staff compliments
- **Q:** Housing Help Centres are seeing a higher number of homeless clients. Is there any thought of cross-over so housing help workers can have access to this information/assessments that are being done – we aren't quite sure how to help these folks?
- **A:** We've been thinking about how coordinating access system intersects with housing help centres, but we aren't there yet. Trying to open up information sharing with appropriate consent in place. Certainly something that has come up and we are aware of.
- **Q:** Perhaps I missed it? Is there a roll-up of individual client data to identify system gaps/needs/priorities?
- **A:** We have our Shelter System Flow data which is aggregated data. In time, we will integrate some of the additional demographic data that just started being collected at the end of June (racial identity, veteran status etc). This data is currently used to identify system gaps etc.
- **Q:** Does the tool allow for an immediate outline of the goals for the client, so there are no surprises in questioning and so they can better express their problems and goals? it was the ignorance that was fostered by the workers that helped create such an uneven and intimidating power dynamic... in 5 years of homelessness this was a major obstacle to my achieving my goals and allowed for a lot of superiority and insult
- **A:** Thank you for this question. Yes, the Intake asks the person coming in to share any immediate requests for supports in various areas. This information is foregrounded at the top of the Housing Checklist so that when the caseworker

meets with the person they can see that information right away and ask follow-up questions to guide their work with the person.

- **Q:** If we are talking about a centralized system without any pre-existing relationships, and we are working towards a warm transfer. My concern is for highly complex folks, particularly once they are in housing. They need extra support – need case management or an ACT team in addition to housing staff. Or else they often can't remain in housing (e.g. mental health – they become too aggressive for their neighbours and lose housing). What is built into this, given how hard it is to access ACT to address the points above - is there anything built in beyond the warm transfer?
- **A:** There is nothing built into the tool itself. It is a matching tool. I think this is a bigger conversation point about system processes, which is essential. We can get folks on operations team to speak more to this.
 - **Action:** Mark and others recommends to talk about bringing this piece back for a future discussion/future forum.

3. Housing Secretariat Items and Updates

- a. Housing Secretariat could not attend and sends regrets

4. Accessing Housing Benefits

Panel with:

Kay Hodge, Access to Housing, Housing Secretariat, City of Toronto

Richard Marshall, Housing Secretariat, City of Toronto

Pablo Escobar, Dixon Hall

- a. **Kay Hodge, Access to Housing, City of Toronto** - See presentation deck

- **Q:** Are we aware that many people on the street entering the system are not computer educated? is there ancillary training/classes offered to allow them to work the tools available to them? especially those from smaller hubs or newcomers?
- **Q:** As a housing help centre, we are receiving for example in June 55 + clients seeking direct support with their A2H applications. Clients are informing us that they are not receiving direct support from 176 Elm office. The number of clients accessing our service is outstripping resources available. Can we have an offline conversation?
- **Q:** Rent Cafe questions to better understand the situation: 1. A recent staff report noted an adoption rate of 29% of homeless applicants. Can you elaborate on this figure? Specifically: does this mean 29% of the homeless applicants on the old waitlist have successfully transitioned to the new system?
- **A:** Yes, to date we have moved this up to 33%. Applicants who were now on a previous system have moved over who have completed the registration process.
 - **Clarification to comments RE applicants losing their position on the waitlist if they haven't moved over:** If applicants move over they **don't** lose their position on the wait list, if they haven't already completed the registration process. We know this will take time to adapt to the new system.

- If community staff are looking for support, we have a help desk that is responsive, opposed to going to the application support center – this is for applicants.
 - **Q:** How many homeless people in total are currently registered in the new system...how many of these people are new applicants who were not registered in the old system?
A: I don't have net new numbers, but can contact my team for numbers. Net new are brand new applicants. For those that registered on previous system, they were eligible on the old system and need to transition to new system
 - **Action: Kay to contact Access to Housing team to find out net new #s.**
 - **Q:** What happens to people who have not transitioned to the new system? Data shows 521 applications were cancelled/deemed inactive in Q1 of 2022...how long do people have to transition to the new system before they are deemed inactive?
 - **A:** We haven't put a deadline on the process – we understand the adoption process make a while for people to come over to the new system.
- b. **Richard Marshall, Housing Consultant, Housing Secretariat, City of Toronto):** Canada Ontario Housing Benefit - See presentation deck
- **Q:** Has there been any communication and education with the Landlord community on this benefit to ease the process of securing a rental tenancy?
 - **Q:** Has there been exploration of connecting transitional housing providers to COHB access? This would be to prevent people re-entering shelter environments after a transitional lease
 - **A:** One of the other streams is the Toronto Indigenous Community Advisory Board (TICAB) stream that includes transitional housing providers – another way COHB is being used. An idea that has come up and we would like to give attention to.
 - COHB: Risk and opportunity
 - One risk is that has annual renewal process, if this is not done, the benefit is lost and can't be reinstated. We would have to restart a new application.
 - However, an opportunity for those who have vulnerable tenancies. Once you enrolled in COHB, if you lose rental tenancy, you are still in the program. Your benefit will just go down to zero if you are not paying rent. You can stay in that state for up to 24 months. So if it takes more than a few tries to secure rental tenancy, the benefit stays with them – will be helpful for those who are struggling.
 - **Q:** Did I read the earlier chart right, that the scale of those being processed is about 150 people/month?
 - **A:** Including all streams we are processing about 150 benefit applications per month.
 - **Q:** How much funding is provided through COHB for rent?

- **A:** Average COHB benefit amount is \$875 and ranges as high as \$1,200 per month
- **Q:** Is it possible for people to re-apply to the CWL once they have accepted COHB? I believe the COHB is confirmed through March 2029? Being removed from the CWL is a concern If COHB doesn't get extended/there isn't something similar that replaces it.
- **Q:** Does that 24 month hold re-set in every housing experience? ie: if a person finds housing and loses it again after, say, 3 months, would it be another 24 months?
- **A:** yes COHB recipients can reapply and will receive a new application date.

c. **Pablo Escobar, Dixon Hall**

- Here to talk about technological challenges at-risk populations are facing:
 - This new system is not effective in providing access to affordable housing for at-risk populations: requires users have a baseline of stability, tech knowledge and resources to access these systems independently.
 - Assumes that people have a baseline understanding of technology
 - Many are unable to navigate these systems independently. What does this mean? People require ongoing support from front-line staff, which has led to increased stress for frontline staff – exponentially. We are doing this without any increases in funding for staff.
- **Specific challenges that at-risk and front-line staff:**
 - Many homeless people have navigated from the old system to the new system. If and when they move over will lose their position.
 - **Clarification from Access to Housing staff: If applicants move over they don't lose their position on the wait list**
 - They don't have access to a computer or internet the capacity to address the technology challenges. Tried to implement training to support folks, but the people who access training workshops are more stable. The people who really need this information are not benefitting from these workshops and information, who are more complex and have on-going difficulties.
 - All of this is being downloaded onto community agencies. E.g. many challenges in staff setting up client emails. Staff have challenges to set up client email, because it is the staff who needs to check the emails
 - Access to Housing resource centre is very helpful and great to hear they are doing more hands-on. But workers are saying the wait-time for information is onerous - sometimes on the phone for a couple of hours.

- A lot of information that we are hearing from clients around support from resource centre is how to navigate the system but we need more hands-on support.
- Another technical issue – units cannot be viewed in person. The online system doesn't allow system to make informed choice – lack of equity compared to others who look for housing in the community. Important for people to be able to see the housing unit in person.
 - Given these factors it is not surprising that enrollment for people experiencing homelessness, particularly more vulnerable people, into this system has been slow
 - COHB that now replaces THAP
 - i. Challenges we have spoken about are compounded and impedes access to the private market
 - ii. Application process for COHB requires clients to respond to emails. Could change the demographics of public and private market. Could disproportionately support more stable individuals vs. others.
 - Closing thoughts: Let's be solutions-focused in regards to how we address these challenges. How can the City and community work together work to mitigate these challenges?

Other comments:

- Thanks Pablo for sharing concerns and providing a framing from a solutions-based lens.
- What am I hearing from staff: not enough complexity to the solution. We can help one person here and there, but are we getting at the core group of people who are really struggling which impacts our staff.
- We are taking a greater look at Black and Indigenous folks, who are making up a larger portion of people with HIV – why is this happening. How can we look at specific solutions in relation to how people identify? One size does not fit all. Part of the challenge.
- Let's gather more information, demographic information. ARAO lens: continuing to gather data to understand and address complex issues

Richard:

- We did introduce pandemic related information into the process. This been helpful to give us an understand of which the COHB benefit is working for and which groups are underrepresent and are not able to access it.
- One of our challenges is that COHB is an annual funding allocation – provided on a use it or lose it basis.
- We want to add the learning from each previous years to improve access to all demographic groups
- Important informed consent piece. Under provincial program guidelines, if you accept COHB, you take your name off centralized wait list.

- Benefit levels are set by average market rate that the province rate. Started at 80% and advocated and submitted a business case for it to be raised to 100%. This year business case was not accepted, so currently at 95%. Above this applicants will be using more than 30% of their income. Continuing to advocate for increase benchmarks with the province.
- **Action:** For those interested, you can go to City's webpage to find out [COHB benefits calculator](#) and what the benefit will be for different household types and income scenarios.

Pablo (final framing and question): As time goes on, and adverse populations are still being challenged to access these systems, wondering what power the City would have to implement parallel systems and separate COHB from Rent Café? Have these conversations happened? If this system doesn't work, what is our plan B?

Answer:

- There is a directive from 2019 that is being updated and shared with shelter providers to ensure all clients have the opportunity to be on the centralized waitlist (and disadvantaged code attached to their file) to make sure they are considered for RGI housing. We appreciate this doesn't address all the concerns.
- Richard: We've had three implementation of COHBs and each one has been significantly different and to respond to different priorities
 - Year 1: COHB rolled out as the pandemic hit, challenge to implement on use it or lose it basis. We targeted people on centralized wait list. 75% of people came from centralized wait list. Year 3 is focused on shelter release stream.
 - Interesting opportunities from a choice based system to make COHB available to those who are looking for housing – again informed consent piece.
 - Something that definitely on the table for looking at future year implementation to make this part of the menu of options

5. TAEH Items and Updates

- a. Savhanna Wilson – see attached slide deck
 - No TAEH forum in August, will be reconvening in September
 - Developing municipal election plan, developing a kit, including template letters, social media messaging that can be used by organizations. Will have web-page up RE housing related content
 - **Action:** Savhanna will send out more information about this in August.

6. Emerging Priorities

- a. Watch out for survey coming out in August, to find out what you would like to talk about moving forward
- b. Any interest in supporting the conference please email Savhanna.

7. Other business

Next meeting: September 2022
Zoom: No Zoom link yet.