

GUIDE TO IMPLEMENTING COORDINATED ACCESS IN SMALLER COMMUNITIES



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Rural Development Network (RDN) would like to acknowledge that our physical office is located on amiskwacîwâskahikan $\del{alpha} \del{alpha} \del$

Inuit, Métis, and First Nations Peoples are experiencing houselessness at disproportionately high rates compared to non-Indigenous people in Canada. RDN recognizes the ways in which settler relationships to both the land and the Peoples of this land have been broken and misused, causing and contributing to Indigenous Houselessness. We also recognize the ways in which our presence on this land continues to uphold colonialism and reproduce dispossession and violence for Indigenous Peoples, further perpetuating experiences of Indigenous houselessness.

RDN acknowledges we are all treaty peoples with all the responsibilities to the relationships that come along with that. We devote our time to strengthening allyship with Indigenous Peoples through our municipal, provincial and federal projects that help all our relations. We acknowledge the historical oppression of culture, lands, and First Peoples in what we now know as Canada and RDN believes we can contribute to the healing and decolonizing journey for young Indigenous leaders to heal their communities.

We share this acknowledgement to reaffirm our responsibility and commitment to reconciliation. We also recognize that this land acknowledgement is just that, an acknowledgement; it is but one step in our journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We will always be grateful to the Elders of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities who have shared and given their time & wisdom as gifts to this toolkit so it may change lives for the better guided by their knowledge. Their knowledge, wisdom, and stories shared not only impact the toolkit, but our ways of knowing, being, and doing for future projects.

This project is informed by first-hand accounts of those who have experienced homelessness, houselessness, and housing insecurity. The voices of those affected by homelessness sing their stories and experiences throughout the toolkit and inform the changes they want to see.

We acknowledge and express our gratitude to the service providers from around the country who have taken part in and are still participating in the training, focus groups, interviews, document review, and ongoing conversions that have made it possible to have challenging and diverse conversations that have provided invaluable feedback.

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Canada



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PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

We recognize that many urban and designated Reaching Home (RH) communities throughout Canada are currently developing and implementing formal Coordinated Access (CA) systems; however, service providers in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities do not always have the same capacity for CA systems as urban and designated RH service providers.

The intent of this guide is to complement the Government of Canada Reaching Home Coordinated Access Guide, along with the many RH Designated Communities who have developed and continue to implement this much needed streamlined system approach to support responses to homelessness and houselessness.

This guide recognizes the importance of the social determinants of health and acknowledges that many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples in rural, remote and northern communities have limited access to services (Rural and Remote Mental Health in Canada). With this in mind, this adaptable guide will build upon the housing first philosophy while using a place-based approach along with a person-centred and trauma-informed care lens that is based in Reconciliation. The outcome is to build capacity within the homelessness serving sector in rural, remote, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities across Canada that address their unique challenges.

This guide aims to provide a bottom-up, rather than a top-down approach to understanding CA through the voices of those with lived experience and the experience of rural, remote and Indigenous service providers.

CONTENT WARNING

Information contained in this document may be triggering or upsetting to some individuals. Topics include substance use, mental health conditions, gender-based and intimate partner violence, human trafficking, colonialism, and missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

DISCLAIMER

RDN welcomes communities and organizations interested implementing this guide to reach out to us for further information and info@ruraldevelopment.ca. guide This offers suggestions, and approaches that should complement-not replaceprofessional guidance from relevant stakeholders. It is also important to note that the guide does not provide legal advice. We kindly request that communities and organizations utilizing this guide reference it in the format below, along with the methodology developed by RDN, in any reports or documents produced.

While communities and organizations are encouraged to use this guide and methodology in the creation of a CA system, please note that RDN does not endorse or take responsibility for any systems produced unless explicitly agreed upon in writing by an RDN representative. Such endorsement would require a thorough review of the implemented CA system.

HOW TO REFERENCE THIS GUIDE

Rural Development Network. (2024). Guide to Implementing Coordinated Access in Smaller Communities.

BACKGROUND

In response to the growing National Housing and Homelessness Crisis, there is a need and a desire for more strategic and collective action. The first step in developing a strong foundation for action is to have a shared understanding and acknowledgment that housing is a human right.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (<u>UNDRIP</u>) states the following:

Article 21

- 1. Indigenous Peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security.
- 2. States shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of Indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities.

Article 23

Indigenous Peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, Indigenous Peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions.

"INDIGENOUS PEOPLE ARE HOMELESS BECAUSE THEY HAVE BEEN DISCONNECTED FROM THEIR INDIGENEITY"

- JESSE THISTLE

The <u>Canadian National Housing Strategy Act</u> states:

"Whereas housing is essential to the inherent dignity and well-being of the person and to building sustainable and inclusive communities as well as a strong national economy in which the people of Canada can prosper and thrive;"

- "4 (a) It is declared to be the housing policy of the Government of Canada to recognize that the right to adequate housing is a fundamental human right affirmed in international law;"
- **5 (1)** The Minister must develop and maintain a national housing strategy to further the housing policy, taking into account key principles of a human rights-based approach to housing.
 - (2) The National Housing Strategy is to, among other things,
 - (a) set out a long-term vision for housing in Canada that recognizes the importance of housing in achieving social, economic, health and environmental goals;
 - (b) establish national goals relating to housing and homelessness and identify related priorities, initiatives, timelines and desired outcomes;
 - (c) focus on improving housing outcomes for persons in greatest need;
 and
 - (d) provide for participatory processes to ensure the ongoing inclusion and engagement of civil society, stakeholders, vulnerable groups and persons with lived experience of housing need, as well as those with lived experience of homelessness."



The right to adequate housing is a fundamental human right for everyone in Canada. The human right to adequate housing means that all people are equally entitled to live in dignity in a safe and secure home, and that everyone should be able to access housing that meets their needs without discrimination or harassment.

Marie-Josée Houle, Federal Housing Advocate

Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy is a community-driven initiative with the goal of reducing and preventing homelessness across the country. The objectives of Reaching Home align with the <u>National Housing Strategy</u> by providing funding to urban, Indigenous, rural, and remote communities to respond to their communities' unique needs. The goal of RH is to reduce chronic homelessness nationally by 50% by 2027/2028.

Under Reaching Home, as part of the federal government's strategy to prevent and reduce homelessness, all designated communities were required to have a CA system in place by March 31, 2022 (ESDC, 2019). While many rural, remote, and Indigenous communities do not fall under this mandate, the underlying goals and intended outcomes of CA can still be of great benefit to diverse non-Designated Communities across the country and are worth working towards in ways that best serve each individual community.

While the Reaching Home program administers funding to local service agencies and communities across the country, it is important to note that not all rural, remote, First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities responding to homelessness outside of the urban centres are able to access Reaching Home funding.

Understanding that housing security is not only a human right and key social determinant of health, but that it also creates greater community investment can be a key element in community buy-in for developing responses to homelessness and housing insecurity like CA.

Research shows us that responding to housing insecurity:

- Increases residents' discretionary income (<u>Dwyer et al., 2023</u>), resulting in greater local investment (<u>Aizenman, 2019</u>).
- Increases opportunities and job creation for the local workforce (CommonBond Communities, 2020 and Lee Kong, 2023).
- Increases local business revenues and economic productivity (Canadian Housing & Renewal Association [CHRA], 2023).
- Increases municipal revenues through taxes and less money spent on tax arrears and distressed properties (<u>Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity</u>, <u>2020</u>).
- Decreases crime rates, increases housing valuations, and increases public safety (School of Social Ecology, University of California, Irvine, 2022).

Research by the University of British Columbia released in 2023 showed that unhoused individuals who received cash aid spent the money on clothing, transit, food, and rent. Fifty unhoused individuals in Vancouver were each given \$7,500 in cash aid and their expenditures were tracked over the following year. In the year, the recipients were homeless 99 fewer days, grew their savings, and saved society an average of \$777 per person by spending less time in emergency shelters. Also contrary to public belief, they did not spend more money on temptation items, such as drugs and alcohol.

The impact on the workforce is two-fold. Affordable housing developments create jobs during construction and through long-term societal growth. Not only are jobs created during the construction of the buildings but also in building maintenance. When a local economy is healthier and there are more housing choices, more jobs are created.

When individuals are moved out of homelessness into housing and they are provided the needed services, they can now become contributing members of the local workforce, which further reduces the burden on fellow taxpayers. Several Canadian businesses are feeling the pinch of attracting and retaining employees when affordable housing options are not available to meet the income diversity of employees.

CHRA, Housing Partnership Canada, and their sector partners commissioned Deloitte to conduct a **study on the impact of community housing on Canada's economic productivity in 2023**. The <u>report</u>, *The Impact of Community Housing on Productivity*, showed that bringing community housing stock in Canada to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average by 2030 would **boost economic productivity from 5.7% to 9.3%**. Also, the economic benefit would **increase Gross Domestic Product by an estimated \$67 billion to \$136 billion**, without adding to inflation since gains in productivity boost our economy's ability to grow.

As discussed in this November 2020 <u>article</u> by Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity, housing choice and affordable housing typically enhance municipal tax revenues by improving substandard housing. The municipality and taxpayers win when affordable homeowners and renters contribute to the tax base of a community rather than having low or no payment of taxes by distressed or abandoned properties. In the example of Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity homeowners, they contribute millions in property taxes each year to their municipalities. Housing security also encourages families to put down roots in the community and stay, so municipalities benefit in the long-term.

It's essential to recognize and acknowledge these factors as not only do they improve the health and well being of the community, but strengthen its resiliency that will allow for a stronger community foundation to effectively respond to homelessness.



COMMON LANGUAGE

Ensuring that you have a clear understanding of what CA is and what it means, as well as the language used when discussing its various aspects is essential to being able to see and communicate the benefits of CA. It's also a crucial first step in being able to determine which parts of the system will work for your community and how to implement them.

Although language can be subjective and fluid, it is imperative that everyone is on the same page and shares a common understanding in order to effectively communicate and work together. The definitions presented in this toolkit are examples of some of the more common terminology and phrases heard when talking about CA. It is recognized that communities may find and use other language that better reflects their individual community needs. The important thing is that everyone within the same community fully understands the language being used.

The Federal Government provides a more extensive <u>Homelessness Glossary For Communities</u>, however a few foundational concepts, namely housing and homelessness as well as CA itself, deserve a more in-depth examination and will be explained in greater detail in the following sections.

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS: DEFINED

The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (2012) defines **homelessness** as "the situation of an individual, family or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, domestic violence, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination."

Indigenous homelessness both looks and is categorically different from how non-Indigenous people experience homelessness in Canada. Indigenous homelessness considers the traumas imposed on Indigenous Peoples through colonialism. It is defined as a human condition that describes First Nations, Métis, and Inuit individuals, families, or communities lacking stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means, or ability to acquire such housing. Indigenous homelessness is more than lacking a structure of habitation and involves a fuller description and understanding through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews, including a breakdown of relationships, considering the disconnections from healthy relationships through historic displacement, spiritual disconnection, and loss of the land (Thistle, 2017).

This language acknowledges the differences between Indigenous and Western understandings of 'home'. The Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island are traditional stewards of North America. Some Peoples traditionally roamed nomadically on the land and still choose to do so, and Indigenous languages have no known words for 'homeless' as it is believed that as long as you are on the land and connected to the holistic web of "All My Relations" then you are home.

In contrast, **'houseless'** is used to describe the absence of a physical house or address, which can often result from a disconnection from the holistic web of "All My Relations" due to colonialism and intergenerational trauma.

Differentiating between 'homelessness' and 'houselessness' shifts the narrative away from the stigmatization of the term 'homeless' to respect Indigenous concepts of 'home.' It also recognizes that houselessness, and other associated negative impacts to housing security experienced disproportionately by Indigenous Peoples, such as overcrowding and unsuitable or inadequate housing, are problems that have arisen in the last 300 years due to colonial influences. The 12 dimensions of Indigenous Homelessness (Thistle, J. 2017) have been described by Indigenous Peoples across Canada, as published by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (2017). They include:



entrenched social and economic marginalization of

Indigenous Peoples.

Cultural Disintegration and Loss

Homelessness

Homelessness that totally dislocates or alienates Indigenous individuals and communities from their culture and from the relationship web of Indigenous society known as "All My Relations."





Overcrowding

Homelessness

The number of people per dwelling in urban and rural Indigenous households that exceeds the national Canadian household average, thus contributing to and creating unsafe, unhealthy and overcrowded living spaces, in turn causing homelessness.



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Relocation and Mobility

Homelessness

Mobile Indigenous homeless people travelling over geographic distances between urban and rural spaces for access to work, health, education, recreation, legal and childcare services, to attend spiritual events and ceremonies, have access to affordable housing, and to see family, friends and community members.





Going Home Homelessness

An Indigenous individual or family who has grown up or lived outside their home community for a period of time, and on returning "home," are often seen as outsiders, making them unable to secure a physical structure in which to live, due to federal, provincial, territorial or municipal bureaucratic barriers, uncooperative band or community councils, hostile community and kin members, lateral violence and cultural dislocation.

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Nowhere to Go

Homelessness

A complete lack of access to stable shelter, housing, accommodation, shelter services or relationships; literally having nowhere to go









Escaping or Evading Harm

Homelessness

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Indigenous persons fleeing, leaving or vacating unstable, unsafe, unhealthy or overcrowded households or homes to obtain a measure of safety or to survive. Young people, women, and LTGBQ2S people are particularly vulnerable.

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Emergency Crisis

Homelessness

Natural disasters, large-scale environmental manipulation and acts of human mischief and destruction, along with bureaucratic red tape, combining to cause Indigenous people to lose their homes because the system is not ready or willing to cope with an immediate demand for housing.



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Climatic Refugee

Homelessness

Indigenous peoples whose lifestyle, subsistence patterns and food sources, relationship to animals, and connection to land and water have been greatly altered by drastic and cumulative weather shifts due to climate change. These shifts have made individuals and entire Indigenous communities homeless.



Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful, and distressing. The national definition of homelessness also notes that individuals who become homeless can experience a range of physical living situations, including being:

- **Unsheltered**: Absolutely homeless, living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation (e.g., living on sidewalks, squares, parks, vehicles, garages, etc.).
- **Emergency Sheltered**: People who are staying in shelters due to homelessness or family violence.
- Provisionally Accommodated: People with an accommodation that is temporary or that lacks security for tenure (e.g., couch-surfing, living in transitional housing, living in abandoned buildings, living in places unfit for human habitation, people who are housed seasonally, people in domestic violence situations, etc.).
- At Risk of Homelessness: People who are not currently homeless but whose economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards (e.g., people who are one missed rent payment away from eviction, people whose housing may be condemned for health, by-law, or safety violations, etc.) (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2012).

While a number of government agencies and research institutions still use the word 'homeless' when referring to individuals experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity, there is an increasing trend among contemporary advocates and activists to use the words 'unhoused' or 'houseless' to describe individuals without a physical address. In addition to recognizing Indigenous concepts of 'home', more widespread adoption of the terminology 'houselessness' or 'unhoused' differentiates between the situation of lacking what is considered a typical structure of habitat and the social, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of the term 'home' (Lambert, 2022; Slayton, 2021). This language seeks to challenge the stigma that accompanies the term 'homeless' (Lambert, 2022; Slayton, 2021), and emphasizes the lack of accessibility to affordable housing as a root cause of housing insecurity rather than personal shortcomings (Abrams, 2023).

In this toolkit, we will use the term "housing insecure" to encompass the entire spectrum of 'homelessness', including those who are homeless, houseless, unsheltered, emergency sheltered, provisionally accommodated, and those at risk of homelessness. The term 'housing insecure' "most completely describes the varied experiences and challenges of people who are homeless/houseless, as well as those who are at risk of becoming so [... and] emphasizes the factors that contribute to a person's homelessness/houselessness" (Kerman, 2022).

The Housing Continuum model in Figure 1 by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) illustrates the range of housing types available in a community, from homelessness on one end of the continuum to market home ownership on the other end.

THE HOUSING CONTINUUM

HOMELESSNESS EMERGENCY TRANSITIONAL SUPPORTIVE HOUSING HOUSING HOUSING HOUSING

HOUSING CONTINUUM

HOMELESSNESS EMERGENCY TRANSITIONAL HOUSING HOUSING HOUSING

SOURCE: CANADA MORTGAGE & HOUSING CORPORATION

It's important to recognize that for many people, homelessness is a fluid, shifting experience rather than a static state (Gaetz et al., 2012). It is thus important to consider the entire spectrum of homelessness, as individuals often cycle through different experiences of housing insecurity shown in Figure 2 below.

FIGURE 2:



SOURCE: UNITED WAY HALIFAX, 2020

All of the types of homelessness mentioned thus far – from people living absolutely unsheltered, to people who may be low-income and at risk of homelessness – occur in rural and remote areas and Indigenous communities, in addition to urban centres. The key difference in rural and remote and Indigenous homelessness is the hidden nature of homelessness – therefore many people often do not realize that homelessness still occurs frequently.

While rural, remote, and Indigenous communities may have people living absolutely unsheltered – particularly in encampments, abandoned buildings, in vehicles, in wooded areas, as well as on the street – homelessness also falls into the provisionally accommodated category (e.g., couch-surfing, severe overcrowding, living in abandoned or inadequate buildings, etc.). Although people in these situations do not have permanent, stable housing, they are often not identified or recognized as experiencing homelessness because they are not visible. People may also be more likely to try to conceal their lack of stable housing due to shame and stigmatization around their situation, since there can be a greater likelihood of being known and identifiable in a small community as compared to a larger city.

This hiddenness can create the perception that homelessness is primarily an urban issue limited to the downtown cores of larger cities, rather than a systemic issue that can affect any individual, family, or community. As a result, many municipalities and smaller communities can develop the impression that homelessness does not exist in their community. Although historically limited research exists on homelessness in rural and remote areas, more research and evidence has emerged over the last decade on the nature and prevalence of rural homelessness (RDN, 2023; Schiff et al., 2022). However, due to that widespread perception combined with the lack of hard evidence, this frequently results in fewer, if any, resources for those struggling, even though service providers are often well aware of the extent of the problem. Similarly to the misconception of homelessness as a solely urban issue, little attention is given to the role CA can play in smaller communities.

While the underlying philosophy and goals of a more "comprehensive systems-based approach to addressing homelessness" (ESDC, 2019, p. 9) are acknowledged and supported, **special consideration for rural, remote, and Indigenous communities must be considered** as some of the government mandated requirements and standards on the structure and implementation of systems present challenges due to smaller communities' unique needs.

"TO IMPLEMENT PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES THAT WILL MEET THE GEOGRAPHIC, DEMOGRAPHIC, AND CULTURAL NEEDS OF SPECIFIC COMMUNITIES (AS THEY DEFINED THEM), IT IS IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE THAT NO TWO COMMUNITIES ARE THE SAME. WHAT WORKS IN ONE WILL NOT NECESSARILY WORK (OR BE WELCOMED) IN ANOTHER – EVEN IN THE SAME PROVINCE OR TERRITORY. TO BE EFFECTIVE, THERE'S SIMPLY NO "ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL" APPROACH TO DELIVERING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES."

(MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION OF CANADA, 2021)

SECTION 1: ESTABLISHING INITIAL BUY-IN

1.1 Understanding Why Coordinated Access is Important

What Is Coordinated Access?

Coordinated Access (CA) is a housing-first approach that creates a unified system where all stakeholders—service providers, community organizations, and policymakers—work together to support individuals experiencing housing insecurity. The system ensures that accurate data on available resources and individuals' needs is collected, shared, and analyzed to promote equitable resource allocation and consistent service provision.

The Government of Canada defines CA as:

"A process through which individuals and families experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness are provided access to housing and support services, based on a standardized set of procedures for client intake, assessment of need, and matching and referral to housing." (Government of Canada, 2019)

Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) describes CA in the Reaching Home: Coordinated Access Guide as:

"A system that supports an integrated, systems-based approach, where service providers, local communities, and government entities collaborate to achieve shared goals." (ESDC, 2019, p. 8). CA is "a method for communities to bring consistency to how people experiencing or at risk of homelessness access housing and services within a specific geographic area." (ESDC, 2019, p. 18)

Key Components of Coordinated Access:

- Access Individuals first engage with the CA system at designated community access points, where they are assessed for diversion, prevention or emergency supports, or are referred for further assessment.
- Assessment Trained staff evaluate client needs using common tools to determine appropriate housing and support services.
- **Prioritization** Client needs are analyzed in relation to community priorities and desired community-level outcomes.
- Matching & Referral Clients are connected to appropriate and available housing and resources as soon as vacancies arise.

The Role of Wraparound Services

A key principle of CA is the integration of wraparound services, ensuring individuals receive comprehensive support beyond housing. This includes access to:

- Mental and physical health services
- ✓ Substance use supports
- ✓ Skills training and employment resources (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2019; Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, 2018)
- The ultimate goal of CA is to help individuals where they are at to secure and maintain stable housing, while also ensuring holistic support for long-term well-being (CAEH, 2018; ESDC, 2019).

Building a Formal Coordinated Access System

A structured CA system typically includes:

- Clear governance and leadership (e.g., designating a lead organization)
- Designated access points (e.g., service agencies)
- A standardized assessment tool
- A Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) to maintain a By-Name List
- Service mapping to create a comprehensive resource inventory
- Shared policies and procedures for prioritization, referral, and matching

The Federal Government's <u>Reaching Home Coordinated Access Guide</u> and <u>Homelessness Glossary For Communities</u> contains many of these terms, along with more detailed explanations of the key concepts and terms of CA.

While there are many characteristics and specific implementation methods and practices that are encouraged in the Government of Canada's Reaching Home Coordinated Access Guide, it is important to recognize that many smaller communities do not have the capacity or available services to implement a formal approach or system. In certain communities, this may mean establishing a CA mindset or CA philosophy rather than a structured Coordinated Access System, depending on the capability (time, resources, and financing).

Even though the specific implementation of CA may differ from one community to another, the goal is to ensure clarity, consistency, collaboration and agreement across the entire community regarding each aspect of the system and process. This supports an efficient and effective system that best matches families and individuals to housing supports and services that meet their needs and preferences, ensuring improved access to services for all.

CA and the application of the philosophies underlying it can benefit not only those experiencing housing insecurity or accessing services, but also service providers, communities, and funders alike.

- For those experiencing housing insecurity, it creates a consistent, equitable, and more streamlined experience.
- For service providers, it supports a more collaborative and efficient environment.
- For communities, it promotes greater awareness, cohesion, and reduced strain on other services.
- For funders, it enables the most effective allocation of limited resources.

Benefits of Coordinated Access

Consistency

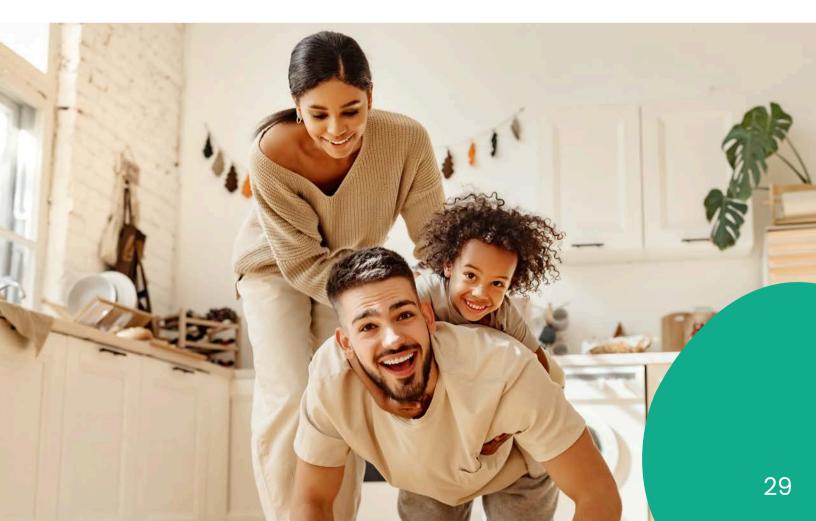
- Consistent intake processes at one or more access points ensure individuals are connected to the appropriate supports, including those they might not have been aware of otherwise.
- Diversion and prevention strategies built into intake and triage can help prevent homelessness and minimize the amount of time those experiencing homelessness spend in homelessness (Bernicki et al., 2022).
- Minimizing re-traumatization Clients do not have to repeatedly share personal information or retell their stories when accessing different services (Bernicki et al., 2022; ESDC, 2019).
- Equitable access Ensures that no one is left behind or falls through the cracks, while also preventing individuals from bypassing waitlists or accessing services through side doors.
- Client-centered approach Access is based on vulnerability, eligibility, and choice, rather than being dependent on where a person first seeks services (GoC, 2023).

Streamlining and Efficiency

- A single, centralized system enhances service coordination and reduces duplication of efforts and inefficiencies (GoC, 2023).
- Timely client-to-service matching leads to improved client outcomes.
- Stronger diversion and prevention practices built into intake and triage can help reduce the strain on crisis-oriented services (ESDC, 2019).

Communication and Knowledge Sharing

- Enhanced collaboration among people with lived experience, service providers, Indigenous organizations, and all levels of government.
- Stronger networks between mainstream services and homelessness-serving agencies.
- Community-wide knowledge sharing can promote capacity building and problem-solving for complex cases.
- Many CA systems integrate community awareness into their mandates, which can increase knowledge of the issues impacting people experiencing housing insecurity and reduce not-in-my-backyard attitudes (NIMBY) (Buchnea et al., 2021; CAEH, 2021g; Gaetz & Dej, 2017; Hurdle, 2021; Stefaniuk & Stenekes, 2022; Bernicki et al., 2022).



Data Collection

- Data-driven insights help communities better understand:
 - The trajectories and needs of individuals experiencing housing insecurity.
 - Effective service delivery strategies.
 - o Gaps and opportunities to increase or improve service provision.
- Formal data-sharing systems can help draw a more accurate picture of housing insecurity and homelessness in a community. For example, having access to client data across service providers can help determine if there are 10 people experiencing housing insecurity accessing services at 10 different agencies, or 100 unique people experiencing housing insecurity in a community.
- Consistent data collection also:
 - Helps agencies align with funder priorities and requirements.
 - o Strengthens funding applications by providing evidence of need.
 - Supports funders in making informed allocation decisions (Bernicki et al., 2022).



Benefits of Coordinated Access

Consistency

Consistent intake processes at one or more access points allow clients to be matched with more appropriate resources that they may not have been aware of or ever been connected with otherwise

Diversion and prevention practices built into intake and triage can help prevent homelessness and minimize the amount of time those experiencing homelessness spend in homelessness (Bernicki et al., 2022)

Clients do not need to share personal information or retell their story multiple times, and can avoid repeatedly reliving trauma (Bernicki et al., 2022; ESDC, 2019)

Supports fairness and equity of access in helping ensure no one slips through the cracks and that people don't bypass wait lists or enter through 'side doors'

This client-centered approach allows for access based on vulnerability, eligibility, and choice as opposed to being largely dependent on where a person first seeks services (GoC, 2023)

Communication and Knowledge Sharina

Communication and relationships between service providers, mainstream services, Indigenous service providers and communities, municipalities and government representatives, people with lived experience, and subject matter experts can be built and improved

Knowledge sharing and working together are promoted and support problem-solving complex cases

Collaboration and shared accountability can increase community-wide momentum and capacity to address housing insecurity and complex and interrelated community needs and issues (ESDC, 2019).

Many Coordinated Access systems integrate community awareness into their mandates, which can increase knowledge of the issues impacting people experiencing homelessness and further the acceptance of affordable housing, overall reducing not-in-my-backyard attitudes (NIMBYism) and furthering homelessness-serving services in non-urban core areas (Buchnea et al., 2021; CAEH, 2021g; Gaetz & Dej, 2017; Hurdle, 2021; Stefaniuk and Stenekes, 2022). (Bernicki et al., 2022)

Coordinated Access benefits:

- · those experiencing housing insecurity
- service providers
- communities
- funders

Streamlining and Efficiency

One system of centralized and shared collections of information on those experiencing housing insecurity, as well as resources available in the community, enables more timely and successful matching of clients to resources, which:

- · Improves client outcomes, and
- Reduces duplication and inefficiencies on the part of service providers (GoC, 2023)

Diversion and prevention practices built into intake and triage can help reduce the strain on crisis-oriented services being used in the absence of access to other more appropriate services and supports (ESDC, 2019).

Data Collection

Data collected can help develop better understandings of:

- the trajectories, experiences, and needs of those experiencing housing insecurity,
- what service providers are doing well and where resource allocation has been more effective, and
- gaps and opportunities to increase or improve service provision

Formal data sharing can also help draw a more accurate picture of housing insecurity and homelessness in a community in general. For example, having client data accessible across service providers can help determine if there are 10 people experiencing housing insecurity accessing services at 10 different agencies or 100 unique people experiencing housing insecurity

Consistency in processes and collection of data can enable:

- agencies to more closely align with funder priorities, criteria, and requirements,
- agencies seeking funding by serving as evidence of need for new applications and projects, and
- funders to better allocate funding by serving as evidence for allocation decisions (Bernicki et al., 2022)

1.2 Strengths of Rural, Remote, And Indigenous Communities in Fostering Collaboration

"[W]hen I hear coordinated access, I think that it will ensure that their human rights, housing and support around housing are being matched regardless of the trauma that they've experienced, the pieces of their personality that may, if we didn't have the system in place, stop people from going out of their way to help them"

-Service Provider

Strengths of Rural Communities in Fostering Collaboration within the context of Coordinated Access:

- Flexibility and custom adaptation to suit community needs and goals
 - Rural, remote and Indigenous communities have the ability to pivot, reframe processes, and update policies more readily based on feedback, evaluations, and emerging needs, often due to reduced bureaucratic barriers or fewer layers of approval.
 - The interconnectedness of smaller communities, where one individual may be connected to multiple agencies, supports adaptation as needed.
 - Rural, remote and Indigenous communities have the opportunity to develop formalized processes tailored specifically to their unique context and community members' needs, while still upholding the core principles of Coordinated Access.

Resource and knowledge sharing

- Rural, remote and Indigenous communities can leverage their specialization, knowledge, resources, and connections.
- There is a strong sense of community and connection in smaller communities that facilitates knowledge and resource sharing.
- As rural service providers are all grappling with limited resources and capacity; they may be more receptive to sharing resources that alleviate the burden on any one agency (RDN, 2021).
- Advocacy efforts can be highly effective when there is strong buy-in from the community and support from influential leaders or organizations.

• Interagency collaboration and partnerships

- Within rural, remote and Indigenous communities, there are opportunities for mutual training across agencies, joint advocacy and funding partnerships.
- There are also opportunities to develop and build trust between service providers, community organizations, and levels of government.
- In smaller communities, a single staff member may wear many hats and be involved in various stages of case management by working across various services or sectors (<u>RDN, 2021</u>). This allows training and education on CA to have greater potential reach and impact.



• Connection, community collaboration, and relationship-building

- Through CA, smaller communities can practise community-based and person-centred systems design, allowing for close relationships with clients and services (Bernicki et al., 2022). In turn, clients feel better supported and can work with familiar faces during their time seeking support and services.
- In smaller communities, people are also strongly connected across multiple generations and spheres of influence. People are generally invested in the community and the well-being of residents and may welcome and adopt community initiatives that benefit the broader community (Youth Collaboratory, 2018).
- Leveraging known and trusted community leaders and organizations that can advocate and educate on the benefits of CA has the potential to be very successful.
 - There are opportunities to use an "ambassador model" where local community leaders can be recruited as ambassadors (Youth Collaboratory, 2018) for CA who can then train more ambassadors. This grassroots advocacy approach can foster community ownership of initiatives and build and strengthen partnerships across Nations, towns and municipalities.

• Experience positive change firsthand: Witnessing impacts and supporting clients' journeys

• Within smaller communities, service providers are often able to more closely witness the positive impacts and success stories of those they serve. They can follow clients' journeys from the initial intake process to securing stable housing and employment. Additionally, through their day-to-day interactions, they may notice broader changes in the community overtime, such as reduced housing insecurity and improved well-being of residents.

1.3 Understanding Community Need

"You can't address what you don't acknowledge."

- Dr. Jody Carrington

Understanding individual community needs is vital in developing responses to housing insecurity and gaining support for collective action. When it comes to housing insecurity and understanding its causes, the urban experience tends to dominate the conversation, mainly due to the "visibility" of individuals experiencing homelessness in urban centres. The issue of homelessness in rural and remote areas is far less understood and acknowledged because of its "hidden" nature. Further, recent data suggests that rural homelessness is prevalent at rates equivalent to or greater than urban per capita rates (Schiff et al., 2022).

Data collection is critical to addressing housing insecurity and creating a CA system. In order to accurately and effectively address housing insecurity and build a functional CA system, it is necessary to develop a thorough understanding of what housing insecurity looks like in a community and what are the specific community needs, as well as the existing and missing services, supports, and housing resources available.

The Point-in-Time Count (PiT) and Population Estimations are the main approaches used for estimating the number of individuals facing housing insecurity in a community. However, it is important to acknowledge that no method can capture 100% of these individuals. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the strengths and limitations of each method when utilizing the collected data to make decisions regarding local service needs and measuring the effectiveness of community homelessness reduction strategies. To address these concerns, one can utilize the data collected from either the PiT Count or the Population Estimation in conjunction with other homelessness data collected in the area. This approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of homelessness within a community.

The Point-in-Time (PiT) count (Donaldson, J., Turner, A., Gaetz, S. 2017) is the Canadian national standard for measuring homelessness in an area. The PiT method is designed to count sheltered and unsheltered people who are experiencing homelessness in a single period (typically 24-48 hours). Volunteers canvas throughout the community and count the number of sheltered and unsheltered individuals by conducting surveys both on the street and in local shelters. This survey provides information on the characteristics of the local homeless population (gender identity, age, ethno-racial background, etc.), which helps the community identify needs, develop strategies and allocate resources.

The <u>Step-By-Step Guide to Estimating Rural Homelessness</u> was first published by the RDN in 2017 and was based on a review of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy's Coordinated PiT Guide in Canada, case studies published on the Homeless Hub, as well as counts and estimations conducted in Cape Breton (Nova Scotia), Leduc County (Alberta), and rural communities in South Carolina (USA). This methodology aims to provide communities with a comprehensive picture of housing insecurity, service gaps and needs. The guide reflects input from a review committee composed of front-line service providers, academics, members of advocacy groups, and government representatives from rural communities, including Indigenous communities, across Canada.

Decolonizing Data Collection - First Nations communities, particularly those on reserves, face challenges with Western and colonial approaches to data collection. These methods are often based on the federal government's definition of homelessness, which does not fully reflect the lived experiences of First Nations and other Indigenous Peoples (Thistle, 2017).

The process of decolonizing data collection when it comes to homelessness is essential as it ensures the experiences and perspectives of First Nations communities are accurately understood and represented. This involves moving away from colonial methods of data gathering, which often impose Western definitions of "home" and "homelessness" that fail to capture Indigenous realities. For many First Nations, "home" is not just a physical structure but a sense of rootedness and connection to family, community, and the land. This understanding contrasts with Western notions, which define homelessness primarily as the absence of a permanent physical address. The colonial lens used in current data collection often overlooks these holistic and relational aspects, leading to incomplete and misleading representations of homelessness in Indigenous contexts (Rural Development Network, 2021).

Historical practices of data collection, such as those linked to residential schools and the Sixties Scoop, have eroded trust in these processes. Decolonized methods emphasize Indigenous control, ownership, and the use of culturally relevant approaches, such as the OCAP® principles (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession). These principles ensure data serves the needs of Indigenous communities and supports their capacity for self-determination.

A decolonized framework also broadens the definition of homelessness to include dimensions like cultural disconnection, overcrowding, and spiritual homelessness. These aspects recognize the impacts of systemic barriers, intergenerational trauma, and colonization on housing insecurity among Indigenous peoples. Rural Development Network's Step-by-Step Guide to Developing An Indigenous Data Collection Tool can provide more information and resources on ways to decolonize data collection through a collaborative and culturally informed approach.

The Importance of Collecting Data

Recognizing and understanding the benefits of estimating housing insecurity will not only help guide you in the next steps and identify which approach is best for your community but it will also help with community support and understanding. Some key benefits of estimating rural homelessness for your community can include:

Key Benefits of Estimating Rural Homelessness

Provides a

comprehensive picture

of housing insecurity

and homelessness,

including demographic

information that helps:

Policies, planning, and

collaboration

Understand who is experiencing homelessness.

Identify where community resources are most needed (e.g. additional supports for veterans, youth, or seniors).

Identify which services are being accessed and which services are missing.

Helps inform municipal, provincial, and federal policies and practices on housing, support services, etc.

Improves organizational planning and program development that address homelessness and housing.

Develops recommendations and next steps for service providers and municipal, provincial, and federal governments.

Enhances collaboration among service agencies.

Tracks progress in reducing and preventing homelessness.

Funding and resource allocation

Helps secure funding to scale up or increase access to resources that can support unhoused, vulnerable, or at-risk populations.

Develops a contextually relevant process for local service providers to engage and collect informed data with those who are at-risk of or currently experiencing homelessness. This resulting data will support service providers in accurately projecting their own needs and allocating resources accordingly.

Elevates and incorporates the voices of people experiencing homelessness in the solutions to end homelessness.

1.4 Service Mapping - Assessing Community Resources and Gaps

Understanding, analyzing, and having a live inventory of what resources and services are in your community allows for all actors – including non-traditional partners to collectively 'get on the same page' and build a more solid foundation for collective action.

The language and level of detail you use will depend on your community's size, audience, mandates, and funding requirements. Community service auditing, service mapping, and system mapping are commonly overlapping used terms, with system mapping being a more formal approach.

THIS PROCESS WILL ALLOW FOR ORGANIZATIONS TO REALLY ASK THEMSELVES:

WHO ARE WE?
WHAT DO WE DO?
HOW CAN WE HELP?
WHO CAN WE HELP?

Additional key outcomes of developing a live inventory includes identifying opportunities for growth, gaps in services, coordination (referrals, funding etc.), and determining what's working, what's not working, and what's next.

Where do we start?

A vital first step is to **thoroughly analyze and document the existing resources within the community**. Many smaller communities already have informal interagency systems to coordinate services, case management practices, and to provide referrals (Ecker et al., 2020; Stefaniuk & Stenekes, 2022). Therefore it is recommended that you begin by leveraging these existing systems and relationships and then address gaps. It's important to not only define what you're doing and why, but to use agreed upon common language, especially when engaging with non-traditional partners. Section 1.5 provides more information on who should be at the table.



SERVICE MAPPING TIP

Taking a holistic approach of understanding services and the connection between them is an essential step in moving towards a Coordinated Access system. Remember, it's crucial to also recognize and identify services that community members need, want or require and make sure their voices are heard.

In conducting service mapping, it is important to **determine if services are** suitable for the targeted population such as being wheelchair accessible, inclusive of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, culturally safe, etc., whether the services are being underutilized or overutilized and clearly identifying gaps in service delivery. The following is key information to include:

- Name and type of service provider: The type of service provider can be broad, for example, public service, private service, community group, faith organization, non-profit, etc.
- Contact information: List the contact information for this service (i.e. phone number and/or email address)
- The location of the service: Note where the physical address of the service is located, if they have a service boundary area, and if services are in person, virtual, or both.

- The operating hours and duration of services: Outline the days and times when the service is open and accepting clients. Indicate if any of the services are offered only for specific times of the year, for example, a temporary MAT program that is only offered in winter months.
- Accessibility information: Provide details if the physical location of this service is physically or wheelchair accessible, and how easy it is to reach. Consider its proximity to housing, whether it is located out of town or in an industrial area, and its accessibility via public transportation. Are there any barriers that might prevent people from accessing this service?
- Type of services offered along with a detailed description of the service: This
 might include: Housing and shelter, case management, health services, basic
 needs services, gender-based violence services, education or income
 services, legal and administrative services, etc. Example: The eviction
 prevention program provides rental arrears, utility arrears, and damage
 deposits.
- The year the service was first offered: This is particularly important for recently offered services, to help give context into when and for how long services have existed.
- The target audience for service use: Detail a list of clients who are allowed to or able to access services. For example, is it a youth-only servicing organization, a women-specific servicing organization, etc.?
- Eligibility criteria in order to access services: For example, in Alberta, you are required to have a referral for an appointment with a PCN social worker; some food bank services require an ID that shows your current address.
- Any costs associated with accessing the service: Detail here if clients will be charged for accessing services and if possible, the range of costs. For example, costs for private health care services like dentist appointments, eye care appointments, or psychology appointments.
- Any documents required to access the service: Highlight any documents
 that might be needed for clients to access services. This could include a
 health card for visiting a doctor's office, property titles or birth certificates for
 legal aid, and/or referral forms.
- Any additional comments: This is where any additional comments, reflections, and insights can be noted. For example, are there opportunities for collaboration between services, is there any historical information that would be beneficial to note, etc.?

SERVICE DIRECTORIES

There are several ways in which to gather this information. Multiple primary and secondary data collection methods should be used to gather this information in order to capture a holistic picture of services in and around the community. One option for gathering some of this information is by **reviewing secondary data from readily available sources** like business listings through the local Chamber of Commerce, community directories, local 211, Help Seeker, or previously collected mapping information. This is often the first recommended means of mapping services as it is a great starting point. From there, rely on existing relationships and partnerships to identify any missing information about services in the community.

Once you are confident that a comprehensive list of services (and their details) has been collected, it is time to **analyze the information you collected**. Consider the following questions in your analysis:

- Are we missing any types of services in the region? (i.e. mental health services, substance use services, emergency shelter services, etc.)
- Are there barriers to accessing some of the services? (e.g., limited hours, lack of wheelchair accessibility, lack of transportation, service eligibility restrictions, etc.)
 Depending on community capacity, consider putting out a short four-question survey to get a better sense of barriers to service use
 - Do you experience any barriers to accessing services? Please tell us more about the barriers you face in accessing services.
 - o Do you think everyone experiences these same barriers? Why or why not?
 - What can we do to reduce these barriers for you?
 - o Do the services offered in the region match client needs?
- Are there opportunities for collaboration that could lead to better service delivery for clients and community members? (e.g., collaborations between transportation services and emergency shelter services, partnerships between rural and urban organizations)
- How can we share this information with the community so that everyone is aware of the services currently available to them?
- How can we address any gaps in service availability moving forward?
- How can we provide services to the community temporarily until a more permanent solution is found?
- Are there opportunities to have a more formalized service delivery model?

Each community has its own unique way of collecting and sharing this information. More often than not, communities develop a service directory as it contributes to the overarching goal of streamlining client referrals and minimizing the need to shuffle clients between different agencies, ensuring timely access to necessary services.

Examples of Service Directories

- Lac La Biche Community Service Directory
- <u>Town of Bridgewater, NS Community Service Directory</u>
- <u>Bathurst, NB Community Directory</u>
- The District Municipality of Muskoka Community Services



Housing Directory

A **Housing Service Directory** is designed to offer comprehensive information on various housing-related services and resources available to individuals and communities. The primary focus is to assist people in locating suitable and affordable housing options while also connecting them to related services such as housing assistance programs, shelters, and supportive housing.

To make a housing directory effective, certain key information is essential.

- Organize the directory based on specific housing-related categories; including affordable housing, emergency shelters, transitional housing, and supportive housing. Develop shared definitions and understandings of the different types of housing.
- **Develop profiles on housing providers and services** with essential information such as contact details, eligibility criteria, application processes, and available amenities.
- List information about affordable housing options, rent subsidies, and available financial assistance programs.
- Provide details on specialized housing programs for persons with disabilities, veterans, seniors, or survivors of domestic violence.
- Note emergency housing options and shelters. Consider options available locally and regionally.

To enhance user experience, the directory should be in an effective and user-friendly format, presenting information in a clear and structured manner. Creating a housing directory ensures a holistic approach to addressing the diverse needs of individuals seeking housing.

Examples of Housing Directory

- Montreal Housing Directory
- Oxford County
- Spruce Grove Regional Housing Guide

Resources for Tenants and Service Providers

• For Service Providers: Housing Law Training

- Program Provider: Canadian Centre for Housing Rights (CCHR)
- o Online or In-Person 1 Hour
- o Cost: \$250 virtual | \$300 in-person

• For Tenants: Know Your Rights

- Program Provider: Canadian Centre for Housing Rights (CCHR)
- Online or In-Person 1 Hour
- Free, depending on availability
- Offered for Ontario Tenants
- RentSmart was a Canadian non-profit that provided tenant education and support for community organizations, educators, and tenants. They provide a solution to housing insecurity and homelessness that's proactive and preventative and reduces the amount of time spent in crisis. Their RentSmart EducatorTM flagship program trained service providers to share and facilitate relevant online, and in-person, tenant education while building the knowledge, life skills, and confidence of tenants to prepare for and maintain their housing.
 - The RentSmart training is now available through different municipalities and organizations that participated in RentSmart EducatorTM.
 - https://northhouse.ca/rentsmart/
 - https://cmha-yr.on.ca/get-support/rent-smart-training/

• More Training Resources

Additional training resources can be found in this spreadsheet: <u>CA</u>
 <u>Training Research Resources</u>

Addressing Service Gaps

All too often, there seems to be systemic and structural racism along with limited communication between service providers that results in major service gaps, duplication of services, and the absence of essential services. CA allows for more effective and efficient approaches to the delivery of services and strengthening the community response while providing strategies for those requiring these services.

"Systemic racism is so embedded in systems that it often is assumed to reflect the natural, inevitable order of things."

(Braveman et al., 2022)

How can we address any gaps in service availability in smaller communities moving forward?

Enhance service coordination

- Strengthen collaboration among service providers to increase access, improve outcomes, and build capacity.
- Explore options for regional service delivery to ensure essential services reach multiple communities. Identify areas close to the community offering services that residents need, but are not available in your community.
- Advocate for funding and policy changes to expand service reach.

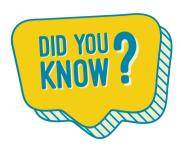
Formalize partnerships and establish clear roles

- Clearly define who provides what, when, and why and work to identify and address system barriers.
- Develop partnership agreements to streamline services with organizations within and outside of your community.
- Use consistent language across service providers to minimize confusion.

Leverage Data for Advocacy

- Conduct housing needs assessments, social needs assessments, community safety plans etc. to uncover service needs and gaps.
- Use enumeration data to highlight statistics, trends and experiences of people who are housing insecure.
- Use data to advocate for funding and policy change.

The response to addressing service gaps will be different for each community across Canada. Once you have a better understanding of the services and resources in your community, take the time to review strengths, gaps and identify clear priorities. As community needs evolve, revisit these findings to determine if service availability and delivery has improved, or if new gaps and priorities have emerged.



- The <u>Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness</u> (CAEH) leads a national movement of individuals, organizations and communities working together to end homelessness in Canada. <u>Built for Zero Canada</u> is a national movement led by CAEH that supports communities in their efforts to end chronic and veteran homelessness, including assisting communities with the development of CA systems.
- The <u>Canadian Centre for Housing Rights</u> is dedicated to promoting the adoption of housing policies that are based on rights, with the aim of providing every individual with a suitable, easily accessible, and affordable home.
- The <u>Canadian Housing and Renewal Association</u> advocates for safe, affordable and appropriate housing for all who live in Canada through Campaigns such as: Blueprint for Housing, Housing on the Hill Day, Urban, Rural and Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy and Vote Housing.
- Nick Falvo, <u>Nick Falvo Consulting</u> is an internationally recognized Canadian researcher and advocate that specializes in affordable housing and homelessness.
- The <u>Federal Housing Advocate in Canada</u> has opened up avenues for people to share their experiences related to systemic housing issues and homelessness.

"Housing conditions that Inult in Nunavut and Nunatsiavut live in are a violation of human rights and a 'staggering failure' by all levels of government to invest in adequate accommodation for Inult," - Canada's federal housing advocate, Marie-Josée Houle.

1.5 Who Should Be At The Table?

When implementing CA, it is important to foster new and existing partnerships across the community with mainstream and non-traditional partners. Understanding gaps and recognizing the need for collaboration will open the door for like-minded partners and strive towards a more collective response.

"WE OFTEN GET MIXED MESSAGING FROM OUR LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS. THEY HAVE VERY DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS ABOUT HOW TO SOLVE THESE ISSUES ESPECIALLY WHO SHOULD TAKE RESPONSIBILITY IN DEVELOPING A RESPONSE"

- COMMUNITY SERVICE PROVIDER

In many rural, remote, and Indigenous communities, there may not be service providers with a mandate dedicated specifically to housing insecurity or homelessness. In these cases, collaboration among diverse partners is critical, including:

- People with lived and living experience
- Diverse service providers and organizations
- First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, leadership & service providers
- All levels of government & various departments
- Housing providers & landlords
- Industry & local businesses
- Law enforcement & emergency responders
- Health systems and mental health & addiction services

The level of involvement of each of these groups in CA will look different depending on the task being undertaken, their mandates, service areas, along with organizational capacity etc.

Engaging Community Leaders

Building relationships with community leaders, elected officials, and key stakeholders from the outset is essential. Their early involvement in planning helps identify gaps, strengthen collaboration, and create a unified approach.

Defining Mainstream Services

The term "mainstream" within the context of CA, and when compared to Indigenous service providers, is best described as services related to healthcare, addictions, mental health, employment, education, and counselling (and more) where programming is designed for a more generalized population without specific consideration given to the unique needs of people experiencing housing insecurity and social, cultural or ethnic backgrounds (Schwan & Gaetz, 2015; A Way Home Canada, n.d.).

While mainstream services are often not homelessness serving organizations, they provide critical services and play an important role in supporting people experiencing housing insecurity.

The Role of Non-Traditional Partners

Having access to various social services and support workers can present a challenge in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities. Compared to urban centres, rural areas can be geographically isolated and lack specialized services, programming capacity, and infrastructure to support these resources. Due to the lack of available partners and resources in rural communities, it is necessary for service providers to network with 'non-traditional partners' to fill gaps in services.

Examples of Non-Traditional Community Partners

In rural and remote communities, non-traditional partners who can help support individuals experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity may include:

- † Libraries and community hubs Safe spaces where people can access resources.
- Canada Post workers
- **Section 2** Gas stations and convenience stores
- = Firefighters and emergency responders
- 🏪 Local businesses

In some cases, women's shelters have "networked" and provided training to local hair salons, as stylists expressed concern about receiving disclosures of violence from women visiting the salons, and the stylists were unsure of how to respond (Mantler, Jackson, & Ford-Gilboe, 2018).

By building connections with diverse partners, communities can expand their support networks, and enhance service accessibility—ultimately leading to stronger, more coordinated local responses to housing insecurity. Make sure to leverage existing collaborative structures in your community or consider creating collaborative groups, including interagency meetings, local taskforce and housing and homelessness coalitions.

The Tamarack Institute speaks to the collaboration spectrum below as a resource to allow for partners to have a shared understanding, build trust, and to create sustainable partnerships. This tool involves identifying where stakeholders are in the engagement process to what is the goal and how will the engagement be achieved. This is a powerful tool to use with identifying partners as it is commonly found that each service provider is at a different level of understanding and expectations. It's important to align with where the stakeholders are to ensure clear communication and mutual expectations alian.

Compete	Co-exist	Communicate	Cooperate	Coordinate	Collaborate	Integrate
Competition for clients, resources, partners, public attention.	No systematic connection between agencies.	Inter-agency information sharing (e.g. networking).	As needed, often informal, interaction, on discrete activities or projects.	Organizations systematically adjust and align work with each other for greater outcomes.	Longer term interaction based on shared mission, goals; shared decision- makers and resources.	Fully integrated programs, planning, funding.

- lave collaborative members individually assess where they think the collaborative is on the spectrum
- Are you all in the same place or in different places? Do you want to move to a new place?
- Have a discussion about this.

clients, resources, partners, public	connection between	information sharing (e.g.	often informal, interaction, on discrete activities or	systematically adjust and align work with each other for greater	interaction based on shared mission, goals; shared decision- makers and	

SOURCE: TAMARACK INSTITUTE

The factors that will determine how power struggles and dynamics are handled, as well as the requirements from each partner and the decisionmaking process, will depend on the governance model and individual roles. Additionally, it is important to consider access points and the inclusion of mainstream services. Transformative change within a small community is effective when there is coordination and collaboration among partners.

Advantages of Community Collaboration

CLIENT CENTERED

- Clients receive wraparound supports
- Clients don't have to repeat their story
- Clients feel safe and supported
- Clients find a place to call home
- Clients are supported in navigating various systems

SHARED WORKLOAD

- Shared access to data
- Increased innovation and problem-solving abilities among different agencies
- Clear and consistent communication amongst agencies

FUNDING

- Access to more funding opportunities
- Demonstrates to funders that communities are committed to project
- Indicates that communities are developing coordinated approach to addressing concerns in community

SUPPORT

- Community partners complement supports available in the community
- Agencies can support one another when working with clients who present with extra challenges

Note: Information gathered from Housing First in Canada: Supporting Communities to End Homelessness by Gaetz, S., Scott, F., & Gulliver, T., 2013. Copyright 2013 by Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

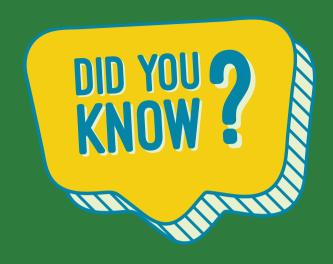
Individual Roles

RH has multiple funding streams and requires the designated communities to develop a governance model in order to provide leadership for the planning, implementation and ongoing management of their CA systems (ESDC, 2019). Each funding stream has Community Entities (CE) and Community Advisory Boards (CABs) or Regional Advisory Boards (RABs).

The CE is "[a]n organization that is accountable to the Government of Canada for the management of RH funds and plays a leadership role in the planning and implementation of Coordinated Access," whereas the CAB is "[t]he local organizing committee responsible for approving the Community Plan and recommending projects for funding to the Community Entity" (ESDC, 2019, p. 18, 17).

As a representative of the community, the CAB may include, but is not limited to, service providers, funders, government staff, and people with lived experience. Communities are required to appoint a lead organization for their governance model, and the model should be inclusive and involve people with lived experience, service providers, including Indigenous and mainstream, government representatives, and subject matter experts (ESDC, 2019).





THERE IS OFTEN A MISCONCEPTION THAT ALL COMMUNITIES RESPONDING TO HOUSING INSECURITY RECEIVE FEDERAL REACHING HOME FUNDING. IN REALITY, RURAL, REMOTE AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY ENTITIES ARE OVERSUBSCRIBED WITH FUNDING REQUESTS. IN ALBERTA, LESS THAN HALF OF COMMUNITIES WHO REQUEST REACHING HOME FUNDING OUTSIDE OF THE MAJOR CITIES ARE ABLE TO RECEIVE REACHING HOME FUNDING TO DEVELOP A RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS.

Selecting a Lead Organization

When choosing a governance model for CA, some communities have opted to form a committee. This allows for different groups, organizations, and leaders to be included. However, this approach can bring challenges in making sure all members are carrying out their assigned responsibilities. It is important to make sure everyone is meeting their commitments to ensure success (CAEH, 2021).

Governance Responsibilities

In any community, how they choose to organize their CA governance is important. Each community's CA governance model should be structured to:

- Plan and implement the CA system
- Develop adaptable policies based on community feedback
- Provide training and support to local organizations
- Monitor and evaluate the CA system

Strong governance is essential to ensuring that CA operates effectively and meets community needs (CAEH, 2021; ESDC, 2019).

"Homelessness is an experience that can't truly be understood unless experienced."

- Al Wiebe, Person with Lived Experience

Key Resources on CA Frameworks & Governance Models

Below are resources that provide deeper insights into CA frameworks and governance models, as well as community-specific approaches:

- Reaching Home Coordinated Access Guide
- <u>Coordinated Access Resources: Tools to Help Communities Implement Reaching Home</u>.
- Webinar: Governance Models
- Built for Zero Canada (CAEH) Coordinated Access Resources
- <u>Webinar: How Communities can Utilize Coordinated Access for Systems</u>
 <u>Planning</u>
- <u>Revisioning Coordinated Access: Fostering Indigenous Best Practices</u>
 <u>Towards a Wholistic Systems Approach to Homelessness Report</u>
- <u>Webinar: Revisioning Coordinated Access: Fostering Indigenous Best Practices Towards a Wholistic Systems Approach to Homelessness</u>
- Alberta
 - Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo: Coordinated Access System
 Guide
 - o <u>Lethbridge: Coordinated Access Round Table</u>
 - o <u>City of Grande Prairie: Integrated Coordinated Access Model</u>
 - Red Deer: Coordinated Access
- Ontario
 - Nipissing: Coordinated Access Nipissing (CAN) Guide
 - o Niagara: Coordinated Access Guide
 - o County of Lambton: Best and Promising Practice Review (pp. 41-43)
- Newfoundland and Labrador
 - o St. John's Homeless-Serving System Coordination Framework
- Winnipeg, Manitoba:
 - <u>Naatamooskakowin: Winnipeg's Coordinated Access System</u>
 <u>Policies and Procedures Guide</u>
- Territories:
 - Yukon: Yukon Coordinated Access Guide
 - Yellowknife: Building a Coordinated Access Model Considerations for the Yellowknife Homeless-Serving System

Inclusion of People With Lived Experience

Inclusion, partnership, and collaboration with people with lived experience (PWLE) are essential for creating meaningful and lasting change in communities. The "Nothing About Us Without Us" model underscores the importance of involving those directly affected by an issue in decision-making, as they are best positioned to identify challenges, gaps, and solutions (Homer, 2019). Including PWLE in decision-making and CA helps to reduce stigma and discrimination, build connections and empathy, and foster a deeper understanding of systemic issues within communities.

Engagement with PWLE exists on a continuum, ranging from:

- Informing PWLE about decisions that impact them
- Seeking feedback on policies and programs
- **Collaborating** with PWLE throughout planning and implementation phases
- **Empowering** PWLE to make final decisions about strategies they develop (Ash & Otiende, 2023)

In the context of housing insecurity, this model highlights the **need to engage PWLE as equal partners at all stages of initiatives that aim to end homelessness**—from planning and delivery to testing and evaluating strategies, programs, policies and services that impact their lives (Homer, 2019; Lived Experience Advisory Council, 2016).

In order to meaningfully engage with PWLE, values of self-determination, trauma-informed approaches, dignity, equity, and inclusion must be integrated throughout the engagement process.

Since homelessness is driven by systemic inequalities, discrimination, and marginalization, addressing homelessness necessitates a fundamental shift in those systems towards a "person-centred" approach. Collaboration between PWLE, governmental agencies, and not-for-profit organizations is crucial to effectively address poverty, including homelessness.

10 practices for effective engagement with PWLE (Homer, 2019):

- 1. Commitment to engaging with people with lived/living experience
- 2. Fostering a culture of inclusion
- 3. Hold accessible meetings
- 4. Create opportunities for engagement
- 5. Eliminate financial barriers
- 6. Provide appropriate financial compensation for time
- 7. Spend time building relationships
- 8. Reduce imbalance of power by promoting an open decision making process
- 9. Providing training and mentorship and capacity-building opportunities
- 10. Diversify representation and deepen engagement



The Lived Experience Advisory Council (2016) outlines **7 major principles for leadership and inclusion of PWLE of homelessness:**

- 1. Bringing perspectives of PWLE to the forefront in awareness and advocacy efforts, while avoiding harmful stereotypes.
- 2.Including PWLE in all aspects of the organization including front-line work, management roles, and government liaisons with the aim of sustainability and advancement within these roles.
- 3. Valuing a PWLE by removing barriers to access, providing fair compensation, and investing in training opportunities, skill development and capacity building for PWLE. Removing barriers to access may involve providing childcare or transportation assistance, or more fundamentally, developing new strategies to incorporate PWLE in a way that works best for them. Fair compensation should entail integrating adequate compensation supports into funding applications rather than a minimal honorarium.
- 4. Challenging stigmas and oppression while prioritizing dignity. This entails critical self-reflection through the identification of unconscious biases and power imbalances, delivering anti-oppression training to all members of the organization, and ensuring policies/practices reinforce the equity and dignity of PWLE.
- 5. Actively engaging PWLE in decision-making by not only listening to their perspectives but giving them a voice in decision-making and taking concrete steps to action their recommendations.
- 6.Committing to equitable representation of PWLE in organizational strategic planning by setting timeline-oriented goals and regularly evaluating progress toward them to ensure accountability.
- 7. Establishing authentic relationships between PWLE and individuals without lived experience that are grounded in equity, true partnership and collaboration. This entails fostering an open and inclusive workplace culture that promotes accessibility, diversity and equity.

A recent toolkit centred on creating <u>Lived Experience Circles (LEC) on homelessness</u> highlights the crucial role of LECs in promoting advocacy, addressing stigmas, systems change work, informed decision-making and improved support services (Rempel et al., 2023). There are several **initial steps** that are required prior to forming an LEC:

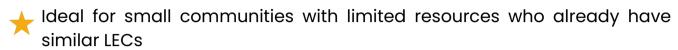
- 1. Gauge community support for an LEC
- 2. Understand community needs in regards to an LEC
- 3. Develop an LEC structure that reflects those needs



Furthermore, the toolkit provides examples of three structures for an LEC:

1. Grassroots/Ad Hoc

• Holds meetings when required and may fall under an existing LEC

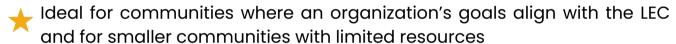


Advantages: Less investment in terms of time and cost and leverages existing relationships

Disadvantages: Limited diversity, potential overlap between LEC members who participate in various groups already, less structure

2. Organization Supported

• LEC is a part of an umbrella organization that addresses community challenges



Advantages: Leverage a "host" organization's resources including funding, staff etc., increased stability and credibility

Disadvantages: Less adaptability and scope of activities must fall within host's organizational mandate

3. Stand-alone/Formalized

• LEC is an independent entity that is responsible for its own operations

Ideal for larger communities with a large LEC membership and access to significant resources; well suited to LECs who are established entities that intend to have a long-term engagement role within the community.

established and holds credibility in the community; can access and distribute funding directly and may receive oversight and support from a board/committee

Disadvantages: Requires significant investment of resources such as time, funding and staff to establish and maintain the LEC

Another important consideration outlined in the toolkit is the three different degrees of engagement with the LEC:

- Consultation: Feedback is sought, minimal collaboration and relationships are short-term in nature
- 2. **Involvement**: Input and reflection is sought, some level of collaboration and several interactions may take place
- 3. **Engagement**: High level of collaboration on outcomes and long-term relationships are developed

Maybe the most critical consideration of all - residents experiencing housing insecurity have the right to be part of the solutions to address housing insecurity. It is critical to continue engaging residents experiencing housing insecurity in conversations and activities geared toward addressing the issue. This means designing activities to allow housing insecure residents the opportunity to participate and intentionally seek out feedback from housing insecure residents throughout the process. Their input will be incredibly valuable in your efforts to address housing insecurity moving forward.





Engaging PWLE in CA Systems

Engaging PWLE in the development of CA systems is critical in moving toward creating effective and equitable responses to homelessness. PWLE's firsthand knowledge and experiences provide invaluable perspectives to addresses real-world issues faced by those experiencing homelessness, including underserved groups (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2024). There are many roles that PWLE hold:

- **Providing Feedback:** PWLE might share thoughts on local policies, act as a consultant, hold positions on boards, or speak publicly about experiences.
- Technical Roles: PWLE may analyze data or develop tools and resources.
- Supportive Roles: PWLE may mentor others with lived experience or even support/work on local homelessness response teams (HUD, 2021).

Ecker et al. (2020) also emphasize the importance of collaborating with local Indigenous knowledge holders, Elders and PWLE:

"There was some concern that federal directives from Reaching Home did not always account for the local Indigenous knowledge and expertise within communities. By bringing in tools and trainings that are not local to the community, it can create a system that is not acknowledging the unique fabric of each community. Engaging with local experts, particularly Elders and individuals with lived experience of homelessness, will ensure that the coordinated access system is grounded in the local community" (p.89).

Engaging PWLE fosters trust between service providers and community members which can encourage participation in support programs and even facilitate smoother transitions into housing (Eckler, 2022). Moreover, involving PWLE in decision-making and leadership roles throughout the development of CA systems empowers them and leverages their expertise to drive meaningful and compassionate service delivery (Moerike, 2024).

Additional Resources:

- <u>Canadian Lived Experience Leadership Network</u>
- <u>Lived Experience as Expertise</u>: Considerations in the <u>Development of Advisory Groups of People with Lived Experience of Homelessness and/or Poverty</u>

"COURAGEOUS ACTS ARE NOT DONE BY PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE IN HUMAN BADNESS. WHY RISK ANYTHING IF WE DON'T BELIEVE IN EACH OTHER? WHY STAND UP FOR ANYONE IF WE DON'T BELIEVE THEY ARE WORTH SAVING? RELY ON HUMAN GOODNESS."

MARGARET WHEATLEY



Engagement With First Nation, Métis and Inuit Peoples

Incorporating principles of Indigenous data sovereignty, notably those highlighted in the OCAP® framework—Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession—is vital in addressing houselessness among Indigenous communities and developing coordinated access systems. OCAP® asserts Indigenous Peoples' rights to control their data, ensuring that data governance aligns with cultural protocols, values, and priorities.

This is particularly significant given the over-representation of Indigenous Peoples in homeless populations across Canada. According to the 2021 census, Indigenous Peoples represent 5% of the general population of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2023), whereas they make up one third of Canadians experiencing homelessness. In some cases First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples comprise up to 97% of the homeless population in a community. In a rural and remote context, housing and service needs estimations completed in rural and remote communities across Alberta found that provincially, 46% of all respondents who were identified as experiencing housing insecurity self-identified as Indigenous (Rural Development Network, 2023).

"Traditionally, in the pre-contact era before the influence of Europeans, no Cree person was ever homeless. All members of the community had a home because our society was based on large extended families in which everyone was cared for and included. The traditional society was egalitarian in the sense that everything was shared. But because of what has happened with colonization, we, as a race of people, have become homeless. This is mainly because our traditional homelands, which are now known as Canada, have all been taken away from us...If you look at it historically, all of us are homeless through colonization and the oppression that came with it."

(Faries, 2012)

The significant differences in these numbers, along with the tendency of mainstream and non-Indigenous services to reproduce colonialism and inadequately meet the needs of Indigenous Peoples (Bernicki et al., 2022) highlight the critical importance of centering First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples in our approach in responding to houselessness.

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities hold valuable knowledge and are the experts on the specific needs and challenges facing their communities, and often have the best understanding of their community's strengths and the best ways to address those needs and challenges.

Collaboration and engagement have often been approached with the expectation that First Nation, Métis, and Inuit partners re-shape and adapt their knowledge, priorities, and ways of being and doing to fit dominant structures, practices, and policies (Ecker et al., 2020; Chung-Tiam-Fook & Naveau, 2022). Rather than requiring First Nation, Métis, and Inuit partners and communities to fit into molds of pre-existing policies and systems, consultation needs to start before implementation of the system and continue throughout all stages of a CA system's life cycle.

Input from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit partners and communities needs to shape how CA systems are designed, implemented, and owned (Ecker et al., 2020). In Ottawa, Ontario, this has resulted in the development of a separate Indigenous CA stream and one for non-Indigenous peoples that integrate Indigenous cultures and values into its overall design (Bernicki et al., 2022).

In order to foster this kind of mutually beneficial co-creation and develop effective CA systems that function for all, "non-Indigenous stakeholders must participate in meaningful engagement, ceremony, and trust-building" with Indigenous partners and communities (Bernicki et al., 2022, p. 108). Relationships must be built around humility, inclusivity, mutual trust, respect, and benefit, a more equitable distribution of power, understanding and meaningful inclusion of Indigenous knowledges, teachings, protocols, methods, and practices (Chung-Tiam-Fook & Naveau, 2022; Bernicki et al., 2022).

Building and maintaining healthy and appropriate relationships and doing things "in a good way" (Flicker et al., 2015) can often take more time and resources, and different resources and approaches than Western standards and mainstream funders and organizations are used to (Flicker et al., 2015). It can often be daunting and difficult for non-Indigenous stakeholders to know how or where to start in building these relationships, engaging meaningfully, and to live up to the "responsibility to [...] become educated and sensitized about Indigenous Peoples' experiences, cultural protocols, dynamics of decolonization, and equitable nation-to-nation relationship-building" (Chung-Tiam-Fook & Naveau, 2022, p. 21).

Many resources exist that can help build capacity and knowledge and give general guidance on following protocol and engaging respectfully and appropriately with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples, and some of these have been collected and shared throughout this guide. This guide also makes an effort to point out important considerations throughout the guide as they apply to specific aspects and components of the design, implementation, and operation of a CA system.

Distasio et al. (2019) emphasize key considerations for non-Indigenous service providers when engaging with Indigenous services providers, leaders and community members:

• Building Relationships and Trust

- Establishing meaningful partnerships requires time and commitment.
- Early efforts should focus on recognizing existing Indigenous leadership, ensuring they guide the approach rather than imposing external models.
- o Trust-building is an ongoing process and must be prioritized before first.

• Indigenous Leadership and Governance

- Indigenous voices must be actively included in decision-making at all levels, from frontline services to strategic planning.
- Hiring Indigenous liaisons can strengthen partnerships and ensure cultural alignment.
- Elders and Indigenous advisors should be meaningfully engaged and compensated for their contributions.

• Culturally Grounded Approaches

- o Programs should be adapted to reflect Indigenous knowledge and needs.
- Understanding local governance structures, community protocols, and historical contexts is essential.
- Non-Indigenous partners should embrace humility, stepping back to allow Indigenous leadership to guide the work.

• Systemic Change and Cross-Sector Collaboration

- o Housing First and similar initiatives require system-wide change.
- Effective collaboration involves breaking down silos and fostering partnerships across different sectors.
- Cultural competency training is necessary to ensure all service providers and decision-makers recognize and respect Indigenous perspectives. There is a lack of safety in current mainstream and non-Indigenous systems (Ecker et al., 2020).

Indigenous Engagement through Coordinated Access

- <u>Cowichan Housing Association: Cowichan's Indigenous-Centered Coordinated Access System</u> The Cowichan Housing Association (CHA) has engaged with Indigenous Peoples in developing an Indigenous-Centered CA system by prioritizing collaboration, cultural sensitivity, and co-creation. Here are the key elements of their approach:
 - Regular Engagement with Indigenous Communities: CHA meets biweekly with Cowichan Tribes to strategize and discuss key aspects of the CA, including developing a guiding framework, peer engagement, community engagement, and data management. Additionally, they are working on a broader Indigenous engagement strategy that includes other Nations within the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) and Indigenous organizations.
 - Co-Creating a Guiding Framework: CHA has worked closely with Cowichan Tribes to develop a guiding framework rooted in Hul'qumi'numspeaking cultures and teachings. This is done in consultation with other Nations whose traditional territories lie within the CVRD boundary, ensuring that Indigenous knowledge and leadership are embedded in the CAS.
 - Centering Indigenous Voices: CHA emphasizes the importance of Indigenous leadership in the development of CA. Given that Indigenous community members are over-represented in the homelessness data (49%), CHA acknowledges that Indigenous homelessness is deeply linked to colonization. They aim to create a safe, equitable, and culturally responsive CA system that supports both Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members.
 - Learning from Other Communities: CHA draws inspiration from other communities, such as Winnipeg, which uses the seven sacred teachings as a guiding framework for its CA system. CHA created a Project Advisory Committee to gather input and feedback, similar to Winnipeg's approach, ensuring that the guiding framework and logic model align with the unique needs of Cowichan's Indigenous communities.

• Naatamooskakowin (Winnipeg's Coordinated Access System)

- The project was led by Indigenous stakeholders from End Homelessness Winnipeg and the Indigenous community in Winnipeg. Hub Solutions, a social enterprise of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, participated as a collaborator on the project.
- "By understanding that large interacting social processes are at work and create an environment that privileges colonial narratives and settlers, while simultaneously working to marginalize Indigenous Peoples, homeless service providers can more effectively understand Indigenous homelessness/houselessness as a social outcome rather than a personal one" (End Homelessness Winnipeg et al., 2022, p. 25)

It is crucial to acknowledge the immense diversity among First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples and avoid oversimplifying their identities. First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities across the country have distinct cultures, protocols, perspectives, priorities, knowledge, traditions, practices, and methods that can differ significantly, even in close geographic proximity. While there are some similarities, and general guides can be helpful, it is integral to learn about each specific community or partner and become familiar with local contexts.

Recognizing the centrality of Indigenous data sovereignty, the OCAP® framework offers a vital lens through which to approach data governance in addressing houselessness among Indigenous communities. OCAP® asserts Indigenous Peoples' rights to control their data, emphasizing Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession. By respecting OCAP® principles, CA systems can ensure that data governance aligns with Indigenous cultural protocols, values, and priorities. Meaningful engagement with Indigenous partners is essential to determine how data will be accessed, used, and protected throughout the CA process. Additionally, recognizing the diversity of Indigenous communities underlines the need for flexibility and sensitivity in applying OCAP® principles, tailoring approaches to respect cultural autonomy and sovereignty while addressing houselessness effectively.

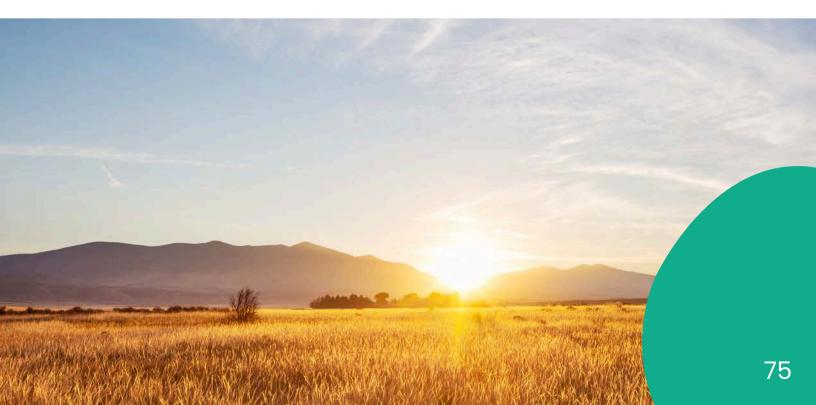
"Indigenous people, whether or not they are in a separate CA stream, need to be at the centre of CA design."

(Bernicki et al., 2022, p. 94)

1.6 Writing Memorandums Of Understanding

Memorandums of Understanding (MoU's) is an agreement between two or more parties that is not legally binding but outlines the details of their partnership. It describes the expectations, responsibilities, and requirements of each party, as well as how they will work together. Essentially, it's a formal document that clarifies the roles and commitments of everyone involved, ensuring all parties are on the same page about how they will collaborate. (Burkholder-Harris et al., 2019; Johnson & Sterthous, 1982).

MoU's can be used in a range of situations between various stakeholders, agencies, and partners involved across a CA system, including between lead agencies, participating service providers, organizations serving as access points, mainstream services, and Indigenous service providers and partners. While there is no set format for MoU's, with some providing detailed delineation of roles and expectations and some merely establishing a more general framework in which collaboration will take place, the following is a list of some elements that are often found in MoU's, as well as some general best practice tips that can be helpful in developing MoU's.



Common Elements:

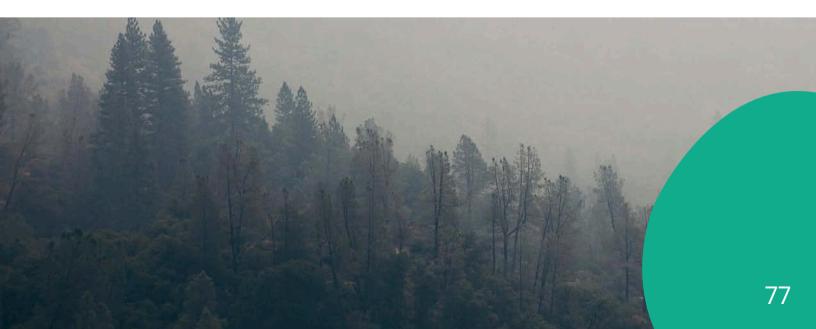
- Dates Include the date the MoU will be initiated, decided upon dates or frequency for review, and whether a date of termination is specified
- Parties in the agreement Name, and in some cases a brief description or mandate of all parties involved
- Preamble Includes:
 - Relevant background information on the issue being addressed by the MoU
 - Common objective or purpose describe the reasons for entering into the MoU, and what the relationship seeks to achieve
- Description of the terms of the relationship/understanding Describe the
 roles and commitments of all parties, including responsibilities, services,
 and actions to be provided and performed, any specific processes or
 procedures to be followed, communication expectations, reporting and
 publicity requirements, etc.
- Amendment/conflict resolution procedures Clearly describe the procedure for resolving any disputes and modifying or updating the MoU
- Data sharing and maintenance agreements and procedures, confidentiality requirements and responsibilities
- **Closing** the closing statement finalizes the agreement, and includes all appropriate, dated signatures

General Tips:

- **Keep things simple and clear** Keep language and goals broad, simple, and clear. Clearly identify key people and parties, and clearly define roles, terms, and service and procedure definitions.
- Set realistic expectations
- Set review dates and specify procedures for amendment, if necessary (Johnson & Sterthous, 1982)

Johnson and Sterthous (1982) mention the **importance of considering the pre-existing relationships and power dynamics between potential signatories, and how this can affect MoU's and the MoU process.** They note that MoU's should not be used as a form of power play, rather MoU's should benefit all parties signing, and state that "[a]n MOU should not be attempted if it will disrupt a good relationship" (p. 6). While this is a valuable consideration to take in any relationship, it is especially significant to think about in forming and maintaining relationships with Indigenous partners.

Formal, written MoU's have been used and found to be beneficial in some cases of partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners (Chung-Tiam-Fook & Naveau, 2022; Ball & Janyst, 2008; Ecker et al., 2020). MoU's are, however, reflective of traditional Western methods to formalize and document agreements in writing, which can be reminiscent of historical oppressive colonialist practices of documentation and relationship formalization that the government enacted upon First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. They are also similar to mainstream Western research and service provision methods for documenting consent. In many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, oral agreements and adherence to proper protocol serve as sufficient formal evidence of understanding and agreement. As a result, written documentation may be viewed as redundant, unnecessary, and even undermining (Baydala et al., 2013).



Examples and Templates

- <u>Handbook on Developing MoU's</u> between communities and public systems, contains example of hospital/homelessness service provider MoU and template
- <u>MoU between the Service Agency participating in the Windsor Essex By-Names</u>

 <u>Prioritized List and The Corporation of the City of Windsor as Service Manager</u>
- <u>Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Between Designated Coordinated Assessment Centers, Designated Assessment Staff Agencies, and the Charlotte/Mecklenburg Continuum of Care (CoC)</u>
- <u>MoU between City of Vancouver, Ministry of Attorney General and Minister Responsible for Housing, and Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation</u> on Support for Unsheltered Vancouver Residents
- Milwaukee Continuum of Care Coordinated Entry System Memorandum of <u>Understanding</u> between United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County (CES Lead Agency), IMPACT, Inc. (centralized access point service provider), and partner agencies involved in the CES
- Greater Richmond Continuum of Care has MoU's between the GRCoC and homeless service providers that get renewed/signed yearly to outline roles and responsibilities of homeless service providers in the continuum of care CES
- <u>City of Abbotsford Coordinated Intake and Referral Pilot</u> MoU between municipality and service providers
- <u>City of Terrace, Province of B.C., RCMP, and three homeless-serving non-profits</u> <u>MOU regarding the Terrace Homelessness Intervention Project</u>
- <u>Staff report to Halifax Regional Council on negotiating a provincial-municipal MOU concerning homelessness</u>
 - Report to Halifax Regional Council describes MoU's in general, goes over some guidelines for negotiation/development, presents findings from a cross-jurisdictional scan of municipal MoU's addressing housing and homelessness challenges (and links directly to some of these documents)

1.7 FOIP and Other Provincial and Territorial Regulations

Developing and running a CA system will require private organizations (including non-profit organizations) as well as public bodies to collect, store, and share the personal information of individuals who choose to access and engage with the CA system. It is important to understand the best practices on data collection, storage, management, and sharing in order to maintain client confidentiality and respect privacy, as breaches can have significant ramifications personally for clients and legally for organizations (Bernicki et al, 2021, p.80).

In this guide, we aim to provide a brief overview of the privacy regulatory landscape in Canada, note some general guidelines and best practices relating to privacy, confidentiality, and data management, and link users to further resources relevant to their individual situations and locations. This section should not be taken as legal advice and should be reviewed in tandem with the applicable privacy policies and legislation of your jurisdiction. For further questions and for more information, we encourage consultation with a lawyer, an organizational privacy officer if available, or the Information and Privacy Commissioner in your province or territory.

is crucial, While adherence to privacy legislation some additional considerations should be noted when addressing privacy and confidentiality in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities. Legislative definitions of personal information differ somewhat between Acts, but is generally considered to be "information that on its own or combined with other pieces of data, can identify you as an individual" (OPCC, 2018) and usually includes information about name, physical characteristics, race, national/ethnic origin, religion, age, status, medical, education or employment history, financial marital information, DNA, or identifying numbers (e.g., SIN, driver's license) (OCPP, 2018).

Due to the small size and closer-knit nature of many rural, remote, and Indigenous communities, information that may typically be considered anonymized can be identified within a community. "For example, if you had a client who was an Indigenous Elder who was also a veteran and had a disability, knowing all that information together may be enough to identify someone in a small community, even if you don't mention the person's name or any other specific information about them" (Bernicki et al, 2021, p.81). These issues should be considered when dealing with and presenting data, especially in any reports or information that will be made public.

Legislation

Legislation surrounding privacy and personal information exists at both federal and provincial/territorial levels. Whether (and which) legislation legally applies depends on the nature of the information, type of organization collecting and handling the information, as well as how and where the information is being used, shared, and stored. Federally, the **two main privacy laws** are the:

- Privacy Act sets out how federal government institutions are to handle personal information
- Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA) –
 governs how private-sector organizations can handle personal information
 in for-profit, commercial activities

Often PIPEDA does not technically apply to non-profit and charity groups, municipalities, universities, schools, and hospitals, except in certain situations such as if the organization is engaged in a commercial activity outside its core mandate. Due to the existence of "substantially similar" provincial legislation, PIPEDA also usually does not apply to organizations operating entirely within Alberta, B.C., and Quebec (OPCC, 2018).

While federal regulation may not legally apply to many of the organizations and activities involved in a CA system, some provinces and territories have their own legislation regulating public, private, or health sector handling of personal information that may be applicable (OPCC, 2019). For a more comprehensive list of the legislation and commissioner or ombudsperson specific to individual provinces and territories, please visit the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada's page on **Provincial and Territorial Privacy Laws and Oversight**.

Regardless of whether your organization and activities technically fall under these legal obligations and requirements, there are **10 principles usually found in personal information legislation that are considered general good practice**:

- 1. Accountability Organizations should handle personal information responsibly and designate an individual(s) to be accountable for adherence to privacy principles
- 2.**Identifying Purposes** Reasons for collecting personal information should be identified at or before the time of collection
- 3. Consent In most cases, knowledge and consent of the individual are required for collection, use, and disclosure of personal information
- 4. Limiting Collection Only necessary information should be collected
- 5. Limiting use, disclosure, and retention Personal information should only be disclosed and stored as necessary for the purposes it was collected for
- 6. **Accuracy** Personal information should be kept accurate, complete, and up-to-date as necessary
- 7. Safeguards Appropriate security measures should be taken to protect information
- 8. Openness Information about privacy policies and practices should be easily accessible to individuals
- 9.Individual Access Individuals should have access to their personal information, details on its existence, use, and disclosure, and the ability to challenge and amend accuracy and completeness of their information
- 10.Recourse There should be procedures for individuals to file complaints or challenges regarding organization compliance with privacy principles (CAEH, 2019; OPCC, 2016)

Related Documents

There are several privacy-related documents that should be considered when developing a CA system. Some are required in certain cases to comply with legislation or organizational policies, or for the use of Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS), but in general, all are good practices.

Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA)

- Determines how a program or service could affect the privacy of an individual
- Promotes transparency and accountability, reduces potential privacy risks
- Can include information about data collection, sharing, access and permissions, and disclosure, as well as information on consent collection and security and protection measures
- Guides and templates exist for federal, provincial/territorial, and local level PIAs, for more information see p. 6 of CAEH's <u>Primer for</u> <u>Homelessness Response Systems on Privacy Legislation and Practice in</u> Canada

• Data Sharing Agreement

 Outlines purposes, practices, and responsibilities and gives authority for sharing client personal information between the Homelessness Management Information Systems (HMIS) host and service providers/agencies involved in the CA system

• Confidentiality and User Agreement (CUA)

 A legal contract formalizing the agreement to not disclose information specified in the agreement, to be signed by HMIS users at an individual staff level

Client Consent Form

- Provides information to individuals participating in the CA system on what and why personal information is being collected, and how it will be used and shared
- Obtains consent from the individual to collect, use, and disclose their personal information for the specified purposes and in the specified ways (CAEH, 2019)

Additional Resources

- Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada <u>Provincial and Territorial</u> <u>Privacy Laws and Oversight</u>
 - Page with links to provincial and territorial privacy legislation and offices of Information and Privacy Commissioners and ombudspersons
- Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness <u>Privacy Legislation and Practice</u> in Canada: A <u>Primer for Homelessness Response Systems</u>
 - Further information and resources on legislation and related documents
- Built for Zero. Canada By Name Lists: Privacy, Consent and Data Sharing
 - o Additional resources and samples of privacy related documents
- Charity Central <u>Privacy Policy Checklist</u>
 - Information, checklist, and resources more specific to charities and non-profits



COORDINATED ACCESS

Establishing Initial Buy-In



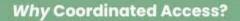
What is Coordinated Access?

Coordinated Access is a housing-first services-wide approach to addressing homelessness.

Creates one services-wide system with a shared overarching inventory of resources and services available in a community.

Provides a consistent, clear process for those experiencing housing insecurity to access the system and be assessed for need, regardless of where they first seek services.

Allows for those seeking services to be better matched to available resources and services.





Coordinated Access and the application of the philosophies underlying it can benefit not only those experiencing housing insecurity or accessing supports/services, but also service providers, communities, and funders alike.

Individuals experiencing housing insecurity – creates consistent, equitable, more streamlined experience.

Service providers – supports a more collaborative and efficient environment.

Communities – promotes greater awareness and cohesion, reduces strain on other services.

Funders – enables most effective allocation of limited resources.



How Do I Start Coordinated Access?

Successful implementation of a Coordinated Access system is built on the foundational work of building a clear understanding of your community – the needs, the existing resources and assets, and the current relationships between the two – and getting all the necessary people and organizations that will be involved in the system together and on board with common understandings, vision, and goals.

Understanding your community can be done through:

- Recognizing and acknowledging systemic racism
- Housing and service needs estimations or a Point in Time Count identifies the extent and nature of housing insecurity within the community, and how individuals are currently accessing (or not accessing) services
- Service mapping identifies services and programs within the community and surrounding areas, links between services, and gaps in services
 - Also useful in development of service and housing directories
- Identifying and addressing service gaps



COORDINATED ACCESS

Establishing Initial Buy-In

How Do I Start Coordinated Access?

Who should be at the table?



People with Lived Experience



Community Leaders and Advocates



All Levels of Government



Service Providers



Housing Authorities and Groups

(Neighbourhood Associations, Emergency Shelters, Tenant Associations, Landlord Groups/Organizations, Housing Coalitions)



Mainstream Services (Hospitals and Clinics, Government Services)



Safety and Security

(Police, RCMP, Peace Officers, By-Law, Community Safety Officers, Child Protection Services, Probation Officers, Correctional Facilities and Institutions)



Other Groups and Organizations that Frequently Interact with Those Experiencing Housing Insecurity

(Libraries, Employment Offices, Youth Groups, Churches, Second-Hand Stores)



Including people with lived experience is fundamental to creating and sustaining change in communities. The people who have been affected by an issue are some of the best experts on the challenges and solutions of that issue, and their involvement can be a critical means of reducing stigma and discrimination.

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples are largely overrepresented in homeless populations in Canada. Mainstream and non-Indigenous services have a tendency to reproduce colonialism and inadequately meet the needs of Indigenous peoples. First Nations, Métis, and Inuit voices and perspectives need to be centered in the ways in which we address homelessness and housing insecurity, including all aspects of Coordinated Access systems and design.





SECTION 2: APPROACHES TO CASE MANAGEMENT

2.1 Intake/Assessment

Access, intake and assessment are important components of a CA system.

Access: Refers to a client's first point of contact with a trained staff member within the CA system, where the initial triage or intake process takes place.

Triage: Usually occurs upon an individual or household's first contact with the CA system. The official Reaching Home Coordinated Access Guide describes triage as "refer[ring] to homelessness prevention and shelter diversion" (ESDC, 2019, p. 28), and intake in the context of CA as "the initial point of entry into the housing and homelessness response system" (ESDC, 2019, p. 26). Homelessness prevention and diversion methods include supporting a client experiencing housing insecurity to stay housed, landlord mediation, providing short term financial assistance to cover rent/utility arrears, connecting them with other services, and/or utilizing informal and natural supports (e.g., connections with friends, family, co-workers, neighbours, etc.) to resolve housing challenges to avoid the use of emergency services or shelter stays.

Intake: Is like an introductory 'meet and greet' between an individual and the services/system; at this stage of case management demographic information on the client is collected, immediate needs that need to be addressed before any others are identified, an initial relationship with the client is established, and whether the client can benefit from the organization or whether further referrals or transfers are necessary is determined (Planstreet, 2020). In some situations intake or triage can naturally flow into a full assessment during the same visit, but in many cases, it may be a better idea to use triage and intake to address more immediate needs right away and come back to a more extensive and formal assessment at a later date.

Essentially, triage and intake both involve gathering information in order to determine the best next steps in assisting an individual. Triage focuses on quickly addressing immediate needs, including basic needs and assessing if emergency crisis supports are required. It also helps determine whether individuals can be redirected to less intensive supports or if they need follow-up and access to more comprehensive services.

Assessment occurs when triage cannot address a client's housing challenges or when it's evident during intake that the client has more complex needs. During the assessment, staff gather detailed information about the client's housing strengths, needs, challenges, and preferences, typically using a standardized or common assessment tool. This information helps guide decisions and match individuals or families with the most appropriate resources within the CA system.

There can be one or many locations or agencies that can perform assessment and serve as access points to a CA system in a community, depending on the needs and capacity of the community and service providers. Access points to the system should be clearly identified, and service providers at these location(s) should apply a consistent assessment process as clients enter into the system.

Why is it important?

Effective triage, diversion, and homelessness prevention can lead to more timely supports and immediate relief for a client, and can also take pressure off of crisis and shelter services and the CA system itself, allowing these resources to be available to those who are in urgent need.

Consistent and well-designed assessment processes allow for the collection of useful, comparable data that enables efficient and accurate matching of clients to resources in alignment with community priorities. In addition, the data collected through client assessments can help give communities a better picture of what housing insecurity looks like in their community, which can be used to strengthen advocacy efforts and expand resources.

Access and assessment are also important in that they are generally a client's first impression of and interaction with the CA system. It is imperative to ensure the safety of clients accessing the system, and this involves making sure that intake and assessment practices are culturally appropriate and sensitive to the trauma many clients may be experiencing.

"Being able to feel safe with other people is probably the single most important aspect of mental health; safe connections are fundamental to meaningful and satisfying lives."

- Bessel Van Der Kolk in The Body Keeps the Score

2.2 Access Points

Virtual Access Points and Service Provision

Having become much more widespread in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, telephone, online, and virtual service provision and access points are another option worth considering, especially for rural, remote, and Indigenous communities. These formats come with their own advantages and challenges, some of which include:

PROS:

- Can help mitigate transportation challenges within a community by allowing clients to access local systems and services without going to a physical location.
- Can help address service gaps and allow for more regionalized approaches in contexts where inter-community transportation is also limited by allowing remote access to services in neighbouring communities that may not be available in their home community.
- Can be a more comfortable and convenient experience for some clients.

ONS:

- Requires access to electronic devices (i.e. phone, computer), connectivity (i.e. broadband internet, adequate upload/download speeds to facilitate video conferencing) and digital literacy.
- Not all services can be delivered virtually.
- Can be viewed as impersonal, disconnected, and lacking the same nuances and warmth of in-person interactions.

Centralized Access Points: A single, designated location or agency serves as the primary entry point for clients.

PROS:

- Ensures a consistent and standardized intake and assessment process.
- Easier to coordinate services and maintain data integrity.
- Reduces duplication of services and referrals.
- Clients know exactly where to go for support.

ONS:

- Can potentially create bottlenecks and long wait times.
- May be inconvenient for clients who live far from the central location.
- Limited accessibility, especially in rural or geographically large communities.

Multiple Access Points: Various agencies and locations serve as entry points into the CA system.

PROS:

- Increases accessibility in geographically spread out communities.
- Clients can connect with a familiar or trusted service provider.
- Reduces congestion at a single location by distributing client intake.

ONS:

- Harder to ensure consistency in assessments and referrals.
- Data collection and coordination may be more challenging.
- Can result in duplication if multiple agencies conduct assessments.

Key Considerations for Rural Access Points

While some urban areas may have centralized access points, such as shelters or designated hubs, smaller communities may prefer a decentralized approach with multiple access points to better reach individuals in need. Examples of access points may include: Homelessness serving organizations, social services, libraries, community centres, food banks, churches, schools, Friendship Centres, health services and mobile outreach teams.

When deciding on access points in smaller communities, it is important to consider:

- Flexibility: Access points should adapt to the unique needs of each community, balancing coordination with service delivery.
- **Collaboration:** Leverage existing networks and organizations to avoid duplication and maximize limited resources.
- **Transportation Challenges:** Address transportation barriers by ensuring services are accessible through multiple ways (e.g., in-person, virtual, mobile).
- Anonymity and Stigma: Create discreet access points to help reduce the stigma that individuals might face in small communities when seeking services.
- Equity and Inclusion: Access points should be inclusive, culturally appropriate, and free of barriers, ensuring that all individuals—including youth, Indigenous Peoples, newcomers, racialized individuals, and people with disabilities—can easily connect with services.
- No Wrong Door Approach: Regardless of where a person enters the system, they should receive the same level of support and be connected to the same network of resources.

2.3 Housing First Philosophy

"Housing First can be adapted to many local contexts, including rural jurisdictions and areas with low vacancy rates."

(Polvere et al., 2014)

Housing First (HF) is a core component of CA systems. The **Housing First Philosophy** is described as a recovery-oriented approach that centers around individuals being housed (Polvere et al., 2014). This approach aims to quickly and effectively address housing insecurity and prioritizes providing individuals and families experiencing housing insecurity with stable and permanent housing as a first and immediate step, without any preconditions or requirements. The Homeless Hub (2021) states that Housing First is: "a rights-based intervention rooted in the philosophy that all people deserve housing and that adequate housing is a precondition for recovery."

Traditionally, individuals experiencing housing insecurity were often required to meet certain criteria, such as completing treatment programs for mental health or substance use issues. The Housing First model challenges this approach by asserting that stable housing is a fundamental human right and is crucial for addressing other challenges faced by individuals experiencing housing insecurity. The goal is to transition individuals from homelessness to self-sufficient, lasting housing, supplemented by additional support and services as required.

There are Five Core Principles of the Housing First Philosophy:

- The right to housing without preconditions
- Providing clients the option to choose their housing
- Separating housing from other services
- Granting tenancy rights and responsibilities
- Integrating housing into the broader community

Why Housing First?

- Improve the quality of life
- Increase housing stability
- Improve health and addiction outcomes
- Reduce involvement with police and justice systems
- Reduce hospitalization and emergency visits (Polvere et al., 2014).

The Housing First Philosophy is **not** a **one-size-fits-all solution** to addressing **housing insecurity**. It will look different in each community. Communities implementing Housing First should consider what principles of the philosophy would work best in the region and use those moving forward.

What are the Challenges of Adopting Housing First in Smaller Communities?

- Lack of Sustainable Funding and Service Gaps: Rural areas often struggle with securing sustainable funding and service availability (wraparound services).
- **Hidden Homelessness and Community Awareness:** Many individuals experiencing homelessness in rural areas remain hidden (e.g., sleeping in cars or in tents in wooded areas). In turn, community leaders and residents may be unaware of or unwilling to acknowledge the issue. Lack of awareness and stigmas hinder efforts to build community support for Housing First initiatives.
- Limited Affordable Housing and Transportation Barriers: Rural communities often face a shortage of safe, stable affordable and supportive housing. Housing can also be located far from essential services and there are often transportation barriers (Waegemakers Schiff & Turner, 2014).
- Geographic and Staffing Challenges: There may be a shortage of trained service providers or high staff turnover. Serving clients across dispersed rural areas requires extensive travel, leading to increased travel time and the need for adjusted staff-to-client ratios. Additionally, limited or no cellular service in some areas poses safety concerns for staff traveling alone, requiring providers to implement clear policies and procedures to ensure staff safety during travel.

 (Homeless and Housing Resource Center, 2024).

Considerations For Adopting Housing First in Smaller Communities

• Increase Housing Options

- **Engage Landlords:** Develop relationships with landlords to secure units for individuals experiencing housing insecurity.
- **Roommate Models:** Explore shared accommodation models when appropriate.
- **Repurpose Existing Buildings** Convert underutilized buildings (e.g., motels, schools, or offices) into affordable housing options.
- Advocate for Affordable Housing: Work with local governments, developers, and funders to build more affordable housing units in rural areas and advocate for policies and funding that incentivize housing development.
- Consider Different Short Term and Long Term Housing Models: Support small-scale housing projects like tiny homes or modular/mobile housing which can be quicker, more flexible and less expensive to develop. Consider using hotels for temporary and bridge housing or partner with community members who may have rooms available for short-term housing.

• Strengthen Support Services

- **Landlord and Tenant Mediation:** Provide support services for tenants and landlords.
- **Prevention and Diversion:** Use Housing First principles to keep people housed by preventing evictions or diverting them from shelters through financial assistance, mediation, or family reunification.
- Housing Set-up: Offer damage deposits and rental subsidies to support individuals in accessing housing.
- Staff Capacity: Provide training and incentives to attract and retain qualified staff. Partner with local post-secondary institutions to create student placements in social work, mental health & addictions, and counselling programs.

• Enhance Regional Collaboration

 Expand Service Areas and Shared Resources: Work with nearby communities to create regional housing and service options.
 Pool funding, services, and expertise with neighboring rural areas to address homelessness more effectively.

• Address Transportation Barriers

- **Support Access to Services:** Provide gas cards, taxi subsidies, or shuttle services for clients to reach services.
- **Mobile Services:** Advocate for mobile case management services and outreach that meet clients where they are at.

• Strengthen Community Buy-In

• **Education and Engagement:** Educate and engage the community on homelessness, Housing First, and its benefits, including how it can reduce long-term costs and improve community well-being.

• Indigenous Led Approaches

- Culturally Appropriate Housing First Models: Work with Indigenous organizations to promote access to land-based healing and culturally relevant supports.
- **On-Reserve Housing Partnerships:** Collaborate with First Nations to develop housing and support services both on and off-reserve.

Two innovative examples of HF implementation in rural communities in the United States may prove to be useful to Canadian CA systems. In Vermont, services were based in one community from which staff would travel to neighbouring communities to deliver services. In Ohio, a regionalized program was implemented where funding and coordination were based in a lead community, while program staff were located onsite in smaller, surrounding communities (Wagemakers-Schiff & Turner, 2014). Both of these community examples demonstrate the leveraging of existing resources and a regionalized approach. These models may be relevant when communities are developing their CA systems across large geographic areas, or enhancing existing Housing First programs to improve accessibility and service delivery.

2.4 Trauma-Informed Care

Trauma refers to an experience that occurs beyond a person's control where the individual feels overwhelmed, fearful and helpless, and unable to cope. Examples of trauma include war/conflict-related violence, natural disasters, childhood abuse and neglect as well as physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. Trauma is a risk factor for physical health conditions, mental health disorders, behavioural challenges, substance use, and further exposure to violence and victimization (National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare, n.d.). Trauma can have long-lasting effects and can erode an individual's sense of safety, confidence, and trust as well as hinder their social, emotional, and cognitive functioning (Hopper et al., 2010).

<u>Trauma-informed care (TIC)</u> is a principle that emphasizes an acknowledgment of trauma and commits to minimizing retraumatization throughout service delivery. It is a holistic approach that promotes a culture of safety, choice, respect, compassion, collaboration, and empowerment in clients while recognizing the pervasive and long-lasting physical, emotional, and psychological impacts of trauma on a survivor's life.

TIC can be incorporated into service provision across a diverse range of sectors including housing, health care, social services, the justice system and legal services. It involves supportive service provision grounded in empathy, trust and collaboration that facilitates healing by allowing a survivor to feel in control of their own life.

"Trauma is not what happens to you. Trauma is what happens inside you, as a result of what happens to you."

- Dr. Gabor Maté

Principles of TIC-based service provision:

- Trauma Awareness: Recognizes the pervasive and debilitating impact of trauma on an individual's life that can persist long after the trauma ends
- **Emphasis on Safety**: Foster emotionally and physically safe environments for individuals
- **Emphasis on Choice and Collaboration**: Empowering individuals through voice and choice
- Strengths-Based and Capacity building: Focus on an individual's strengths rather than weaknesses

In the context of homelessness, housing insecurity in and of itself can be traumatic for individuals and families as they attempt to navigate unsafe environments with feelings of constant fear, stress, and uncertainty. Individuals facing housing insecurity face many compounding vulnerabilities that can exacerbate their trauma including poverty, exposure to violence, social exclusion, and health challenges including mental health disorders.

Moreover, It is vital to understand an individual's experience of housing insecurity in the context of childhood and family violence. Many unhoused individuals often experienced trauma as a child, including abuse, neglect, physical, sexual, and emotional violence, or exposure to domestic violence. Many children who experience trauma are at risk of mental health disorders during adolescence and adulthood, which in turn, is a risk factor for homelessness. Homelessness can also exacerbate existing mental health conditions, increasing the risk of exposure to trauma, and further contributing to poor mental health outcomes.

It is important to note that both the signs and symptoms of trauma appear in different ways for different people and that healing and recovery can be supported in a variety of ways and may look different for different people.

Case management must incorporate a cultural competency lens to account for this.

The following **trauma-informed principles** are key in responding to those experiencing housing insecurity:

- 1. Acknowledgment that trauma is pervasive
- 2. Safety (including emotional)
- 3. Voice, choice and control
- 4. Compassion
- 5. Strengths-based
- 6. Peer support
- 7. Empowerment
- 8. Trust and transparency
- 9. Empathy
- 10. Non-judgmental

(SAMHSA, 2014)

Resources and examples of trauma-informed approaches to support service providers in practice can be found here:

- <u>CA Training Research and Resources</u>
- Government of Canada Trauma and Violence Informed Approaches to Policy and Practice

"Strategies and suggestions for dealing with trauma are only effective if we are regulated first"

- Dr. Jody Carrington

2.5 Harm Reduction

There are numerous interpretations and implementations of harm reduction approaches and methods that minimize risks and negative impacts. At the most basic level, **harm reduction** is a realistic and evidence-based approach that aims to minimize the adverse health and social impacts of behaviours, rather than eliminating the behaviour itself.

When people hear the term "harm reduction," they often think of substance use-related programs like safe injection sites or needle exchange services. However, harm reduction goes beyond this. It includes strategies that prioritize safety, reduce health risks, and address exploitation, particularly within encampment communities. For example, offering First Nations Peoples access to cultural supports, or even small gestures such as a smile, a bottle of water, or a moment of human connection, can reinforce dignity and show that their lives matter. These simple but powerful actions meet people where they are and help build trust—key principles of harm reduction.

Two prevalent factors that harm reduction efforts often address are substance use and experiences of violence. Individuals who have faced violence are at higher risk of also experiencing mental health issues, poverty and homelessness. Furthermore, substance use is both a predictive factor and outcome of homelessness, with at least one third of people experiencing homelessness reporting challenges with addiction upon admission to shelters. Survivors of violence and abuse may often turn to substance abuse to cope with their traumatic experiences.

A fundamental aspect of harm reduction is acknowledging behaviors in a non-judgmental way while developing client-centered programs, services, policies, and procedures. This ensures that individuals using substances can access essential services, engage with peers, and receive support without fear of stigma or exclusion.

The overarching goal of harm reduction strategies is to improve the safety, health, recovery, and rehabilitation of individuals, while prioritizing values of respect, safety, trust, collaboration, and self-determination. Harm reduction must be framed around the principles of a trauma-informed care lens, where the impact of trauma is recognized and individuals are empowered to make their own choices in creating an environment of psychological safety.

Harm reduction also entails **addressing structural factors that contribute to and perpetuate harm.** Poverty and homelessness often lead to addiction, therefore, attaining stable housing must first be a priority in order to adequately address substance use issues (i.e Housing First strategy). Despite their proven value, many shelter providers across Canada lack the capacity to safely implement low-barrier harm-reduction approaches, particularly for multi-marginalized individuals such as gender diverse, newcomer and Indigenous shelter service seekers.





2.6 Cultural Competency

In a diverse multicultural society like Canada, it is essential to be mindful of the cultural, religious, and spiritual backgrounds of program users, as these factors can significantly influence an individual's willingness and ability to access services (Bernicki et al., 2021). Cultural or intercultural competency, as defined by Deardorff (2006), refers to an ability to develop skills, knowledge, and attitudes that lead to visible behaviour and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions.

Cultural competency does not mean becoming an expert in all cultures but rather gaining a foundational understanding that allows for meaningful engagement and interaction in different contexts (Chung-Tiam-Fook & Naveau, 2022). At its core, cultural competence requires self reflection – examining one's own cultural biases, behaviours, and assumptions – while fostering an openness to learning and appreciating different perspectives. This ongoing process builds understanding and compassion, allowing individuals and organizations to navigate cultural differences with respect and sensitivity (Chung-Tiam-Fook & Naveau, 2022).

A deeper level of cultural competency incorporates intersectionality. While "culture" is often equated with race or ethnicity, it encompasses a broader range of identity factors, including language, religion, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and geographic background. The Canadian Race Relations Foundation (2024) defines culture as "the mix of ideas, beliefs, values, behavioral and social norms, knowledge, and traditions held by a group of individuals who share a historical, geographic, religious, racial, linguistic, ethnic, and/or social context." An intersectional approach acknowledges that overlapping aspects of identity can create unique barriers and vulnerabilities, influencing access to and awareness of programs and services (Bernicki et al., 2021).

Resources

- Center for Community Health and Development Building culturally competent organizations.
- <u>Public Health Agency of Canada Indigenous Cultural</u>
 <u>Competency Learning Road Map.</u>
- University of Alberta International Cultural competency.

Five Principles of Cultural Competence

Valuing Diversity

- o Recognizing that cultural differences exist both between and within groups.
- Avoiding assumptions that all members of a racial, linguistic, or religious group share the same culture.
- Understanding how factors like gender, location, and socioeconomic status shape identity.

Conducting Cultural Self-Assessment

- Identifying unconscious biases, cultural norms, and behaviors within an organization.
- Addressing potential cultural miscommunications, such as differences in personal space or body language.
- Using tools like surveys and discussions to continuously evaluate and improve cultural competence.

• Understanding the Dynamics of Difference

- Acknowledging historical discrimination and its lasting effects on trust between cultural groups.
- Recognizing that marginalized communities may mistrust dominant groups due to past injustices.
- Proactively fostering respectful and effective communication and relationship-building to create inclusive environments.

• Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge

- Embedding cultural competence into organizational policies, practices, and decision-making.
- Providing staff with ongoing training on cultural awareness and responsiveness.
- Ensuring programs and materials reflect and respect cultural diversity.

Adapting to Diversity

- Integrating cultural awareness into the organization's core values and operations.
- Promoting respect, inclusion, and adaptability in interactions with diverse populations.
- Developing systems that are flexible and responsive to the needs of different cultural communities.

Training

- St. John Ambulance <u>Cultural Competency in the Workplace</u>
- Nbisiing Consulting <u>Nbisiing Indigenous Cultural Competency</u>
 <u>Training</u>

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples

Indigenous Peoples are disproportionately represented in homelessness statistics across Canada. The legacy of the Indian Act, colonization, and intergenerational trauma have resulted in many challenges for Indigenous communities. Addressing housing insecurity and homelessness requires understanding these challenges through an Indigenous lens. It is essential to consider not only the types of services being provided to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples but also who is leading and delivering these services (Bernicki et al., 2021).





- ROBYN WARD



Based on research and consultations with RH Indigenous Community Entities and Community Advisory Boards, key informants, and the community, Ecker et al. (2020) present the following findings, suggestions, and recommendations for CA systems:

• Indigenous-Led Services & Choice

- Indigenous individuals prefer accessing services through Indigenous agencies and providers.
- If no Indigenous-led agencies exist, prioritize hiring Indigenous staff or, at minimum, ensure all staff receive cultural competency training.

• Building Relationships & Trust

- Service approaches should be conversational, culturally appropriate, trauma-informed, and flexible.
- o In-person contact is critical for trust-building, but alternative methods (phone, video, online) should also be available.

• Rethinking Assessments & Intake Processes

- Western-based assessment tools often fail to capture Indigenous experiences of houselessness.
- A conversational, strengths-based approach is important to understand the unique journeys of individuals.
- Assigning numerical scores based on assessments can be traumatizing, evoking memories of Residential Schools and the Sixties Scoop.

Ethical Data Collection & Consent

- Historically, Indigenous data has been collected, stored, and used without consent, often causing harm.
- Community led and decolonized approaches to data collection must be prioritized.

By centering Indigenous voices, leadership, and culturally safe practices, CA systems can better support Indigenous individuals and families facing housing insecurity.

2.7 Reconciliation And Indigenous Awareness

Inuit, Métis, and First Nations Peoples have endured deep, multi-layered disconnections due to a history of colonialism and assimilatory policies. These disruptions have affected relationships with culture, land, language, family, and ceremony. Western social work practices often focus on addressing symptoms of these disconnections—such as addiction or violence—without fully understanding or addressing the fractured relationships and intergenerational trauma that contribute to these challenges. A stronger emphasis on relationships can help identify not only the barriers individuals and families face but also the strengths, resources, and resilience that exist within Indigenous communities. For example, many Indigenous kinship systems and community networks provide a collective approach to well-being that differs from Western notions of family structure.

Building relationships at all levels—between organizations, communities, households, and individuals—is essential. While there are similarities across Indigenous worldviews, it is important to recognize their diversity, shaped by factors such as Treaty areas, traditional teachings, and local histories. Developing relationships at the local and regional levels helps prevent pan-Indigenization and fosters a deeper understanding of the unique stories, experiences, and needs of the communities being served. At the individual level, not everyone may choose to participate in traditional activities, but it is essential that Traditional Knowledge and cultural supports are available to access. Service providers play a critical role in fostering ethical relationships, offering support, and guiding individuals toward their own paths without imposing solutions (Alberta College of Social Workers, 2019).

In the context of CA, reconciliation and Indigenous awareness require more flexible, relationship-centered approaches. This may involve using conversational and cultural methods for assessments, taking time to understand a person or family's strengths, goals, and preferences, and adapting Western-based assessment tools and questionnaires to be more inclusive and culturally appropriate. By prioritizing Indigenous perspectives and lived experiences, service providers can create more equitable and supportive systems that truly meet the needs of Indigenous individuals and communities.

Ethical Space and Two-Eyed Seeing, Co-existence of Western and Indigenous Views

We talk a lot about the existence of and differences between traditional or Indigenous worldviews and ways of being, knowing, and doing, and Western worldviews, frameworks, and methods. **These separate perspectives can sometimes conflict with each other, making it challenging to reconcile**. Two helpful concepts to look at are those of "Two-Eyed Seeing" and of "Ethical Space".

Two-Eyed Seeing is a principle introduced by Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall, who encourages seeing the world through both Indigenous and Western perspectives: "To see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to see from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together" (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012, p. 335). Similarly, **Ethical Space**, a concept developed by Indigenous scholar Willie Ermine, refers to creating a neutral space where Indigenous and Western worldviews are treated as equally valid. Rather than merging one into the other, Ethical Space allows for meaningful dialogue and collaboration that respects the integrity of each perspective (Ermine, 2007; Alberta College of Social Workers, 2019).

In the context of CA, these principles can be realized through the intentional and meaningful inclusion of Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and traditions in system development (e.g., Indigenous-led decision-making, flexible and culturally appropriate tools and methods, traditional healing practices and building ethical space in service provision). By embracing Two-Eyed Seeing and Ethical Space in CA, service providers can create more inclusive, equitable, and effective systems that truly respect and respond to the needs of Indigenous communities. Rather than viewing Indigenous and Western approaches as opposing forces, these concepts provide a framework for collaboration, where the strengths of both perspectives are braided together to improve outcomes for all.



Data sovereignty, data governance, and OCAP® principles

Differences also exist in the concept and treatment of data among Indigenous and Western traditions. Colonialism and systemic racism have historically and continue to have significant impacts on how First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities view and interact with data. Traditionally before colonialism, for many Indigenous Peoples 'data' was synonymous with oral storytelling and the sharing of knowledge, with no individual or single entity stating ownership of 'data'. Traditional data practices within Indigenous communities included oral histories, kinship networks, and communal decision-making processes, demonstrating a holistic approach to data ownership and usage that aligned with cultural values and traditions (Sparklingeyes et al., 2022).

Collection and usage of data by colonial governments that contributed to forced assimilation and land dispossession (e.g., the enforcement of residential schools and the Sixties Scoop), and exploitative data collection methods, led to significant impacts on Indigenous data practices and a loss of trust between Indigenous communities and external entities. Other issues that arised include:

- Appropriation and misrepresentation Data usage perpetuates negative stereotypes and reinforces Western ideas
- Lack of transparency, reciprocity, and stewardship Data collected and used without consent, not shared with communities and stored in databases that alienate communities
- Data aggregation is pan-Indigenizing, misrepresents First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples as homogenous
- Lack of consent and control in publicly-funded data work where data becomes government property
- Reinforcement of patriarchy Replacement of traditional matriarchal and egalitarian Indigenous governance systems with prevalent Eurocentric systems promoting inequality
- Imposition of Western ideals on Indigenous communities

Data sovereignty is the management of information in ways that are consistent with the laws, practices, and customs of the nation-state in which it is located (Sparklingeyes et al., 2022). It refers to the inherent right of Indigenous Peoples to govern and control the data relating to their communities, cultures, and territories. Data sovereignty gives Indigenous communities the authority to own, manage, and govern data in ways that reflect their cultural values, priorities, and self-determination.

Ecker et al. (2020) note an absence of discussion surrounding data sovereignty in official Reaching Home Coordinated Access documentation. In light of the disproportionate experiences of housing insecurity among First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples and considering the opportunities and necessities for collaboration between Nations and Indigenous communities and other neighboring communities in rural and remote areas, it is crucial to take into account how we use and manage data to ensure our systems and practices are not perpetuating inequalities and harm.

Data sovereignty is realized through data governance. **Data governance** is the system of decision-making rights and responsibilities for information-related processes. Data governance entails identifying and agreeing upon models that outline who can do what with what information, and when, in what situations, and how those actions can be done. Important **considerations in developing a data governance framework** are:

- **Developing and implementing standards** (such as definitions, technical standards, and data models)
- Establishing policies and processes for the monitoring and management, sharing, access, and use of data
- Identifying roles and responsibilities of organizations involved and determining who is accountable for what
- Installing suitable technological infrastructure to work with the data that is collected

(Ecker et al., 2020)

A widely used set of principles that asserts First Nations' rights to their data is the **OCAP® framework** developed by the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC). OCAP® is based on the principles of:

- Ownership First Nations have the right to own and control data related to them, and have the authority to determine how this data is collected, used, and shared.
- **Control** First Nations have the right to control the collection, use, and sharing of data pertaining to them. This protects privacy and confidentiality and helps ensure data is not misused or misrepresented.
- Access First Nations have the right to access data pertaining to themselves, regardless of where/by whom it is held. First Nations also have the right to make decisions about who else has access to this data.
- Possession First Nations have the right to possess and physically control their data, and the ability to safeguard their data and control its use even if it is being stored or managed by external entities.
 (FNIGC, 2019)

Some communities may not have the infrastructure in place to engage in data management and storage practices at the same level as mainstream organizations. This is particularly problematic in the context of CA, where Indigenous data must be handled with care and respect. To address this, data practices in CA must reflect the interests of Indigenous communities, with an emphasis on their self-determination and the diversity of approaches across different Nations. By integrating these principles into CA systems, we can foster more equitable and inclusive data practices that better support Indigenous communities in housing and other service areas.

Newcomers

Newcomers—immigrants, refugees, evacuees, temporary foreign workers, permanent residents, new Canadian citizens, and individuals without status or documentation—are disproportionately affected by homelessness and housing insecurity.

"Coordinated Access is important because of the intersection of needs for those experiencing homelessness."

- Service Provider

Beyond housing, they often face challenges such as language barriers, limited access to essential services (healthcare, education, transportation), cultural adaptation, and social isolation. These factors can significantly impact their ability to access and navigate support systems (Bernicki et al., 2021; AAISA & RDN, 2023a). Additionally, racialized newcomers often experience higher levels of discrimination and violence, making them even more vulnerable to homelessness (Bernicki et al., 2021).



Some important considerations and strategies to keep in mind to effectively interact with newcomer populations and promote the inclusivity of newcomers in a CA system include:

• Language barriers

- Use plain, easy-to-understand language in advertising and client-facing documents.
- Leverage community resources through partnerships, such as volunteers, religious/cultural associations, and settlement services for translation and interpretation support.
- Consider paid options such as Cantalk or Language Bank phone-in translation resources for emergency or crisis situations.

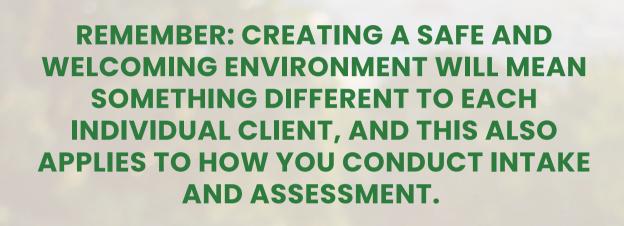
• Immigration status

- Not all newcomers may have Canadian legal papers or immigration status.
- Newcomers should feel safe and that accessing services will not risk their status or residency in Canada.
 (Bernicki et al., 2021)

2.8 Intake Forms And Assessment Tools

Effective intake and assessment policies can reduce the need for clients to repeatedly share their stories, minimizing re-traumatization and creating a more supportive and efficient environment. Standardizing data collection across organizations and systems improves service coordination, ensures accurate information is shared across a system or community, and helps identify trends for better decision-making and resource allocation.

Many organizations use formal intake forms and assessment tools, which can be beneficial, however, they can also be harmful in some situations. It's essential to consider their proper use, ensuring they enhance rather than dictate the intake and assessment process (Bernicki et al., 2022). Additional information beyond those specified by the tools is often valuable to collect. In turn, the structure of the tools, surveys, or questionnaires should allow for flexibility. These tools should supplement, not replace, a conversational, relationship-based approach. Additionally, power dynamics, service provider biases, and structural factors (such as funding requirements) should be considered when designing and administering these tools.





It is also important to consider the power dynamics and possibility of mistrust between those undergoing intake or assessment and those administering intake and assessment, and the possible influence of interpersonal factors such as the experiences and biases of service providers. Structural factors such as funding guidelines or requirements can also affect processes and should be kept in mind when choosing or developing forms, tools, and processes.

Critiques and Challenges of Assessment Tools:

- Rigid, deficit-based tools may result in limited and biased information.
- Some questions may not translate into rural and remote contexts (for example, questions and responses about service access may lead to misleading data in rural and remote communities that more often have limited services and public transportation).
- Tools resulting in numerical scores can be inequitable and stigmatizing, traumatizing and reminiscent of colonial practices, especially for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples.
- Certain questions and topics may also be unsafe, bring up trauma, or be culturally insensitive, and may need to be addressed in a different way, at a later date, or omitted.
- Some commonly used tools have been found to reflect systemic biases and create inequitable outcomes for BIPOC, youth, and diverse genders (Bernicki et al., 2022).

Key Considerations and Recommendations:

- Adopt trauma-informed, culturally competent, strengths-based, and personcentred approaches (Bernicki et al., 2022).
- Practise conversational approaches that do not have rigid structures and promote relationship building and trust (Ecker et al., 2020).
- Ensure Indigenous service providers are available for intake and assessment to support Indigenous clients.
 - If there is no Indigenous service provider within a community, consider hiring Indigenous staff, work to build relationships with surrounding First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, and equip non-Indigenous staff with cultural competency training (Ecker et al., 2020)

Intake Forms

Intake forms serve a key role in collecting information from clients. These forms often vary in their appearance and questions asked but should be designed to meet the specific needs of the clients foremost. The details provided on the intake forms help guide and understand the client's needs and preferences, allowing for services to be tailored and to ensure the best possible supports are able to be provided.

While the specific questions and format of intake forms should be tailored to the local context — considering what information a system seeks to collect and how it will be used, managed, and stored (some case management tools and homeless management information systems, or HMIS, offer customizable information fields) — there are certain types of information that are generally useful and commonly found in intake forms:

- Basic personal information name, address, contact information, age, gender identity and pronouns, veteran status, Indigenous identity, immigration/citizenship status, race and/or ethnicity, household demographics (e.g., spouse/partner, dependents).
- Physical and mental health history
- Substance use and/or addictions
- Socioeconomic status income, assets, supports and programs accessed, education
- Documentation status e.g., ID, Healthcare, insurance information
- Prior service history and other services being accessed
- Current housing situation and housing/homelessness history
- Housing preferences and needs
- Legal history
- Referral method
- Self-care ability and life skills

Many rural, remote, and Indigenous communities do not have the capacity to access and use formal intake forms such as HMIS. Organizations may adopt some questions from more formal intake forms, but often customize their forms to meet the client's individual needs. This guide provides examples of intake forms that can be used to customize your CA intake forms if required.

Some examples of real organization intake forms:

- Yukon Community Outreach Services Unit Application Form
- Working Together to End Youth Homelessness in Canada <u>Youth</u> <u>Homelessness Services Referral Package</u>
- The Access Point Mental Health Supportive Housing Form
- Services and Housing In the Province (SHIP) <u>Supportive Housing and Services Application Form</u>
- Simcoe County Regional Housing First Program Coordinated Intake Referral Form
- Salt Spring and Southern Gulf Islands Community Services Intake Form
- Metis Capital Housing Corporation Reaching Home Program Application Form
- The District Municipality Of Muskoka <u>Transitional Housing Referral Form</u>

"I think coming from an equity and dignity perspective [that] hopefully we'll be moving in a direction sometime soon that looks more at how we can support the person rather than how we can numerically evaluate their vulnerability [or] translate it to something that we can put on a graph."

- Service Provider

Assessment Tools

In comparison to intake or triage, **assessment** is usually understood as a more comprehensive information-gathering process that seeks a deeper understanding of an individual or household's strengths and needs (Bernicki et al., 2022). The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH) describes typical common assessment tools as a "series of questions, conversations and/or observations" that measure, categorize, and/or score "each person's experience, situation, or understanding" (CAEH, 2018b, p. 1). Often, mainstream common assessment tools use a survey or questionnaire-type format to translate an individual's strengths, vulnerabilities, and risks into a numerical score representing acuity or 'need' that can then be compared and evaluated.

Numerous assessment tools exist, and the CAEH recommends communities to use the tool most suited to their local needs and priorities (CAEH, 2018b). The official Reaching Home Guide presents the following as **characteristics of quality assessment tools**:

- Tested, proven, appropriate, and reliable
- Person-centred and strengths-based
- Housing First focused
- Sensitive to lived experience of homelessness, does not cause harm or trauma
- User-friendly for both the assessed (client) and the assessor (service provider)
- Clear about the relationships between the questions of the tool and the potential options for housing resources and supports (EDSC, 2019, p. 61)

Service providers and clients living in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities, often encounter many different types of obstacles when it comes to using formal assessment tools. These challenges can be related to service provider capacity and training, and concerns regarding standardized tools in the depiction of the unique realities of rural communities and individuals' journeys. It is important to understand these barriers in order to find solutions that will help improve access to these tools for everyone. As we continue to explore ways to address these unique and complex issues faced by smaller communities we have provided some examples of formal assessment tools in use across Canada.

• Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT) suite

- The SPDAT was originally developed as an assessment tool for frontline workers in the homelessness sector to determine how to prioritize clients for assistance. It has now evolved as a tool in service planning and provision.
- Requires training from OrgCode (developer of SPDAT) or a certified trainer.
- o Included in Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS).
- Has various versions for specific demographics/situations:
 - Single adults
 - Family SPDAT
 - Next Step Tool/Transition Age Youth (TAY)-SPDAT
 - Prevention and diversion
 - Discharge from corrections
- OrgCode SPDAT Training
- Vulnerability Index Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT)
 - The VI-SPDAT is a more brief survey to quickly determine high, medium, or low acuity level of a client. It is a pre-screen triage tool that can help determine which individuals should be taken through the full SPDAT assessment process.
 - It is a self-reported survey requiring no special training to use.
 - There are versions for families and youth subpopulations.
 - OrgCode began phasing out the VI-SPDAT in 2020 over concerns of deviation from the intended use of the instrument and mixed findings in evaluations of the efficacy and accuracy of the tool (Moses & Oliva, 2022; CAEH, 2018).

Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT)

- VAT is a full assessment tool for individual adults. Rating scales across 10 domains to compare vulnerability relative to other individuals experiencing homelessness.
- It requires training to ensure reliable application of the tool.
- o Included in HIFIS.
- VAT Training Manual for Conducting Assessment Interviews (CAEH, 2018)

• Toronto Service Triage, Assessment, and Referral Support (STARS) tool

- STARS was developed through close work with Indigenous and community partners, People with Lived Experience, and front-line workers.
- Three-part tool including:
 - STARS Intake and Triage
 - STARS Housing Checklist
 - STARS Supports Assessment (under development)
- <u>Training for the first two parts</u> is available under SMIS Training for Improving Housing Outcomes (Built For Zero. Canada, 2024)

Youth Assessment and Prioritization (YAP) Tool

- YAP consists of pre-screen (22 questions) + more complete, strengthbased interview (additional 45 prompted sections).
- Identifies factors that, if not addressed, will lead to a youth being more likely to experience long term homelessness.
- This tool is primarily for initial assessment purposes, but work is being done to develop a version that can be used for ongoing case management (CAEH, 2018).

Matching to Appropriate Placement (MAP)

- MAP assesses the needs and vulnerabilities of people who are experiencing homelessness. The tool was developed in Montana by Dr. Jack Barile with input from Coordinated Entry leaders, homeless services providers, and People with Lived Experience.
- Data is regularly analyzed to identify and address validity, equity, or other issues that emerge.
- Available to communities free of charge.
- Does not require training, but it is available (for a fee).
- o Link to website (Built For Zero. Canada, 2024; PCNI & MISI, n.d.)

Personalized Assistance to Housing (PATH) Process

- PATH is still under development/in pilot stages. This process was developed after extensive community engagement and research, developed by Indigenous, for Indigenous that seeks to replace the assessment piece of CA.
- It is a digitized tool that collects information from service providers and those experiencing housing insecurity.
- The digital tool is meant to be used as part of a conversational process and it identifies challenges and barriers to accessing and retaining housing as opposed to assessing a level of vulnerability.
- Built a customizable decision-making matrix to enable prioritization without assigning numbers/scores.
- Aiming to be able to integrate with HIFIS/existing HMIS, as well as as a standalone software *Currently only integrated with HIFIS/existing HMIS.

It is important that service providers receive the appropriate training to deliver intake and assessment tools in an effective and culturally appropriate way that ultimately results in clients receiving the necessary supports. It is also very important to consider the unique issues that rural, remote, northern and Indigenous communities are experiencing with when it comes to housing and homelessness in Canada. To solve these problems, we need to think creatively and come up with new ideas that are tailored to each community's specific needs. By being flexible and innovative in our approach, we can make sure that everyone has access to safe and affordable housing, no matter where they live. It is crucial that we don't use a one-size-fits-all method but rather consider the individual situations of each community to find the best solutions.

2.9 Client Consent

Client consent and confidentiality are critical areas that need to be addressed in the implementation and operation of a CA system. These issues become especially prominent in rural, remote, and Indigenous community contexts where communities are often smaller, more tightly-knit, and carry increased stigmatization of homelessness and housing insecurity. Personal information that may not be identifying within a larger urban center can be less anonymous in smaller communities, and concerns about confidentiality and privacy can affect the service use of individuals and families in these communities.

Beyond being a requirement under Reaching Home, clear policies on client consent, data sharing, and privacy agreements help build trust and ensure ethical service delivery. Clients must fully understand:

- What information is collected
- · How it will be stored, shared, and used
- Their rights regarding data access, updates, and withdrawal

By making sure clients understand and agree to these terms, we can build trust and maintain a respectful relationship throughout our interactions (CAEH, 2020; Bernicki et al., 2022).

Consent should be separate for receiving support and for data collection, sharing, and usage. Additionally:

- Data-sharing agreements should be signed by participating service providers and the hosting agency.
- Client consent forms should be developed before implementing a Homeless Management Information System (Bernicki et al., 2022).
- Policies should outline how clients can update, restrict, or withdraw consent and limit access to certain service providers if desired.

Special considerations should be made for youth under the age of consent, individuals unable or unwilling to provide informed consent, and clients with substitute decision-makers consenting on their behalf.

2.10 Outreach

"Outreach is especially important for marginalized peoples, particularly Indigenous Peoples and 2SLGBTQIA+ people, who experience violence and discrimination at the hands of social services and in the shelter system" (Bernicki et al., 2022, p.117).

Outreach can be an effective means for a CA system to reach individuals and families experiencing housing insecurity who may not normally reach out for help or who may not feel comfortable accessing conventional homelessness services. Outreach can also be especially important in cases where formal homelessness services are limited and hidden homelessness is more prominent, such as in many rural, remote and Indigenous communities (Bernicki et al., 2022). In addition, outreach can play a large role in increasing inclusion and accessibility for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit populations as many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit People who experience housing insecurity and houselessness feel more comfortable staying with family, community or in encampments than accessing mainstream services, conventional shelter systems, non-Indigenous or organizations (Ecker et al., 2020).

Outreach that targets individuals sleeping rough, encampments, and emergency shelters can in some cases serve as an access point to a CA system by providing on-site assessment and referrals (Bernicki et al., 2022). Other forms of outreach can contribute to prevention efforts. By doing outreach across mainstream service providers and other locations where individuals experiencing housing insecurity are likely to go, this approach can help address gaps and even reach people before they actually become homeless. Examples of this type of outreach include collaborating with paramedics, police, firefighting services, child welfare, schools and educational institutions and programs, hospitals and healthcare services, correctional facilities, and libraries, among others.

"Being homeless is a full time job – an experience that can't truly be understood unless experienced"

"HOMELESSNESS IS A RELATIVELY NEW WORD FOR US. IN THE DAYS OF OUR ANCESTORS, EVERYONE WAS TAKEN CARE OF AND HAD SHELTER AND LOVE FROM THEIR FAMILIES. WHEN COLONIALISM CAME, OUR TRADITIONAL WAYS WERE DEEMED SAVAGE, AND WE WERE TOLD WE HAD TO LIVE LIKE OUR COLONIZERS....THEN AROUSE THINGS LIKE HOMELESSNESS AND HUNGER.

AS A GRANDMOTHER, IT HURTS MY HEART TO SEE INDIVIDUALS LIVING ON THE STREETS AND KNOWING THEY DON'T HAVE A HOME TO GO TO."

-ELDER EILEEN BLACK, SIKSIKA NATION

2.11 Case Management Tools

"Data sharing is one of the key components of CA systems. Using a standardized data management system amongst service providers in a community or region is important to understand homelessness demographics, service capacity, and client needs."

-Service Provider

Case management tools come in various shapes and forms, and can be chosen and tailored to the unique circumstances and needs of each CA system.

- Informal e.g., paper-based forms
- Electronic e.g., Excel spreadsheet
- More complex software/tools e.g., HIFIS

In order to be accessible over time and across a shared system, intake, assessment, and case management information requires some means of storage and management.

Case management tools and Homelessness Management Information Systems (HMIS) are tools for capturing client-level data and managing information collected by service providers over time. Under Reaching Home, the **Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) is promoted as the HMIS of choice for CA systems**. HIFIS was developed by the Government of Canada, and is described in the Reaching Home Coordinated Access guide as a

"Comprehensive data collection, reporting, and case management system that supports the day-to-day operations of housing and homelessness response service providers. HIFIS is designed to support the implementation of Coordinated Access by allowing multiple service providers from the same community to access real-time data and refer clients to the appropriate services at the right time."

(GoC, 2023, p. 24)

HIFIS is a developed software that takes time, effort, and resources to learn and use. Realistically, not every community or service provider may have the necessary capacity, know-how, and resources to implement HIFIS, nor the time, energy, and capacity to develop them. For those communities that feel well equipped or are interested in implementing HIFIS as the HMIS in their CA system, Infrastructure Canada's <u>webpage on HIFIS</u> contains more information, including links to:

- HIFIS Toolkit comprised of an Implementation Guide, Installation Guide, Configuration Guide, and User Guide. *If you are a rural, remote or Indigenous community interested in accessing a license, you can reach out to the HIFIS team directly, or your Reaching Home Community Entity may be able to help connect you.
- HIFIS Demo Site where various features and modules can be explored.

In some communities, they may decide not to use HIFIS for various reasons. However, there are alternative options available. These communities can explore different solutions that may better suit their needs. It is important to consider all available choices before making a decision. Each community has the opportunity to choose what works best for them. Some of the main forms of case management tools that may be options for your community are:

- Paper Data is entered and stored on physical printed documents
 PROS:
 - Easy to learn, does not require technological knowledge or learning new software
 - Does not require access to digital devices or internet/connectivity

CONS:

- Physical security and maintenance of documents must be considered
- More difficult to compile, share or transfer data
- Documents take up more physical space to store
- Additions, updates, and changes must be specifically communicated between holders of the data and manually changed across all copies

• Electronic Spreadsheets/Databases – Data is entered and stored digitally in non-specialized software, for example into spreadsheet software such as Microsoft Excel

PROS:

- Most spreadsheet software is more well-known/easier to use immediately than specialized software
- Files are easier to compile, transfer/share and update than paper methods

CONS:

- Sharing and updates still have to be done manually
- Spreadsheet and database software require some technical knowledge to use software
- Requires access to digital devices and file sharing requires either access to the internet or sharing of physical hard drives
- HMIS Software Specialized data management software
 - PROS:
 - Additions and updates/changes can be applied immediately and across the entire system
 - Sharing/transfer of information is quick and easy
 - Easier to limit/control which users can access which information

ONS:

- Requires access to digital devices and internet connectivity
- Requires technical knowledge or training to use software



2.12 Technology and Communication Challenges In Rural, Remote, And Indigenous Communities

On top of challenges surrounding the existence and capacity of services (or lack thereof) in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities, many of these communities face additional barriers in terms of access to technology and communications connectivity. These barriers become increasingly apparent in a society that is becoming more and more reliant on digital technology.

Beyond challenges mentioned in previous sections of a lack of knowledge and training needed to operate emergent software and technologies, in order for information to be shared across a system, generally, an internet or broadband connection is required. In reference to broadband access at federally mandated minimum speeds, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission notes that "many Canadians, particularly those in rural and remote areas, do not have adequate access to these services" (CRTC, 2023). The data shows that while 91.4% of Canada has access to broadband at the universal service objective level of 50 Mbps download and 10 Mbps upload, only 62% of rural communities do. This underlying issue, prevalent in many rural communities, can have a significant impact on the options available for communities in regards to software like HMIS, case management tools, and data sharing methods.

Another factor that affects technology adoption and possible modes of communication and interaction is device access. Hardware and digital devices such as computers, tablets, or smartphones are required on the part of both service providers and clients to facilitate the use of digital case management tools and system communication, as well as to enable alternate and remote modes of access, intake, and assessment such as through phone, video conferencing, or online platforms. Especially in very remote and northern areas, prohibitively high shipping costs, a lack of stores or suppliers outside of larger centers, and a lack of local repair services can lead to decreased access to digital devices (McMahon et al., 2021).

2.13 Staff Burnout

What is 'Job Burnout'?

"If we are not okay, the people we serve don't stand a chance."

Dr. Jody Carrington

The World Health Organization classifies job burnout as an "occupational phenomenon", a "syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress." Thus, it can be understood as an individual's stress response to systemic or workplace stressors.

Others describe burnout as:

- "A state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by long-term involvement in emotionally demanding situations." Ayala Pines and Elliot Aronson.
- "A state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a cause, way of life, or relationship that failed to produce the expected reward." Herbert J. Freudenberger.

What is the difference between stress and burnout?

Stress and burnout are sometimes terms that are thrown together and used interchangeably. However, there are a few key characteristics that separate the two. For example, **stress** can be short-term and tied directly to specific situations, such as a project deadline or an upcoming presentation. Generally speaking, once the situation changes, the feeling of stress lessens or is no longer present. In the instance of **burnout**, it precedes over an extended period. It can be experienced when one feels a significant disconnect from what they are doing or when your work environment changes for the negative, such as continued workload increase with no plans of mitigation or reallocating resources.

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) describes job burnout as:

- Emotional depletion feeling frustrated, tired of going to work, finding it hard to deal with others at work
- **Detachment or cynicism** being less empathetic with others, detached from work, seeing work or elements of work as a source of frustration
- Low personal achievement experiencing work as unrewarding, feelings of "going through the motions"
- **Depersonalization** thoughts and feelings seem unreal or not belonging to oneself

Factors associated with job burnout include:

- Unreasonable demands
- Lack of control or the ability to influence decisions that affect your job (e.g., scheduling, unfair workload, resources, etc.)
- Unclear job expectations
- Poor work environment (e.g., bullying, harassment, dysfunctional workplace dynamics, etc.)
- Extreme levels of activities (e.g., either very monotonous or very busy with a high caseload)
- A miss-match in values or job fit
- Lack of support, either at work or at home
- Lack of work-life balance



Effects of job burnout:

- Being cynical or critical at work or always having a negative or suspicious response to work conditions
- Struggling to get to work or having trouble being productive when you arrive
- Being irritable or impatient with co-workers, or clients
- Lacking energy or feelings of apathy or hopelessness
- Being tired, forgetful, or lack of attention
- Lack of satisfaction from your achievements or lack of enjoyment in activities outside of work
- Feeling unappreciated for your work contributions
- Disillusionment about your job, feelings of detachment, or being disconnected
- Feeling the need to use food, drugs, or alcohol to feel better or to simply not feel
- Potential change in sleep habits (having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep)
- Maybe your appetite has changed (over or under-eating)
- Being troubled by unexplained headaches, backaches, or other physical complaints
- Productivity can drop
- Less likely to seek new opportunities
- Staff may take more sick days

Burnout is a chronic state - meaning that these feelings may exist for an extended period. However, CCOHS notes that this can also sometimes be due to other health conditions, such as thyroid problems, vitamin deficiencies, or depression. As such, it is always advised that those concerned with burnout from extended periods of stress check with their medical or health professionals to discuss appropriate treatment options.

Ways in which staff and individuals can mitigate job burnout:

"In times of stress we don't need someone to tell us what to do, we need the presence and ability to regulate and hold appropriate space for emotion" - Dr. Jody Carrington

- Make time for self-care
- Ask for help from your supervisor (e.g., asking for clarification on a role or task or discussing ways to reduce workload) or health/medical professionals (e.g., therapist, psychologist, etc.)
- Perform a job analysis
- Work with purpose
- Maintain your social life
- Set boundaries
- Reframe your mindset
- Set positive and healthy habits, such as prioritizing sleep, managing stress, and eating healthy

Additional considerations:

- Assess psychological safety in your workplace and develop a plan to address it.
- Develop policy statements that reflect your organization's commitment to prioritizing workplace mental health. These should demonstrate leadership and commitment.
- Explicitly include mental health and psychological safety in your health and safety mandate.
- When implementing a new process or procedure, consider the psychological impact of the change and if any barriers may arise.
- Provide education and training that ensure supervisors and staff know how
 to recognize hazards such as harassment, bullying, and psychologically
 unhealthy work conditions, including training that provides methods for staff
 to recognize and talk about health issues in general.

Burnout is a significant concern for service providers and frontline workers in the homelessness sector, as their roles often involve high emotional labor, exposure to trauma, and overwhelming caseloads. The unique challenges they face—such as navigating complex client needs, systemic barriers, and resource limitations—can lead to compassion fatigue and mental exhaustion. Unlike other professions, frontline workers in this sector frequently witness the direct impact of homelessness and poverty, making it crucial to address burnout through organizational support, trauma-informed care, and self-care strategies to ensure both worker well-being and effective service delivery.

Resources:

National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health & Safety in the Workplace - guidelines, tools, and resources intended to guide organizations in promoting mental health and preventing psychological harm at work. (https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/national-standard/)

13 Factors: Addressing Mental Health in the Workplace - resources & info sheets https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/13-factors-addressing-mental-health-in-the-workplace/)

Burnout Self-Test via MindTools

(https://www.mindtools.com/auhx7b3/burnout-self-test)

Self-Assessments via Workplace Strategies for Mental Health: Compliments of Canada Life - includes assessment for risk of job burnout, resources on being a mindful employee, and resources for leads.

(https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/resources/atw-assessments)

Training

Trauma-Informed

- <u>Strong Back and Soft Front: Trauma-Informed Leadership and Skills Workshop</u>
 - o Program Provider: Ontario Municipal Social Service Association
 - o Cost:
 - Members: \$695 + HST
 - Non-Members: \$900 + HST
 - Non-Member Education Level 1/2: \$725 + HST
- Trauma Informed Practice Institute 2025 Training
 - o Program Provider: The Trauma Informed Practice Institute, University of British Columbia
 - o Cost: \$129.13
- More Training Resources: <u>CA Training Research Resources</u>

Harm Reduction

- Harm Reduction for the Homelessness Sector
 - o Program Provider: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness
 - Self-paced
 - o Cost: Free
- <u>Understanding & Applying Harm Reduction Approaches Within Gender-Based</u>
 Violence Work
 - o Program Provider: Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OIATH)
 - Self-paced
 - o Cost: Free
- More Training Resources: <u>CA Training Research Resources</u>

Cultural Competency

- <u>Cultural Safety Training</u>
 - o Program Provider: Ladders to Kindness Training
- <u>Stepping into the Circle</u>
 - o Program Provider: Alberta Council of Women's Shelters
 - Self-Paced: 8 modules vary in length (~45 mins-1.5 hrs)
 - o Cost: Free

Approaches to Case Management



What are Access and Assessment?

The first two main components of a formal Coordinated Access system are access and assessment.

Access First point of contact. Generally involves an initial gathering of information to inform next steps of assisting an individual or household through triage and/or intake.

Triage addresses immediate basic needs, diverts from emergency/crisis service use if possible, evaluates the need for follow up/more extensive services

Intake "meet and greet" between the client and the system: collects client demographic information, identifies immediate needs, establishes initial relationship, determines next steps for referrals or transfers Assessment takes place when triage cannot resolve the client's housing challenges or initial information gathered during intake has identified deeper needs. Assessment involves a worker collecting more in-depth information about a client's housing-related strengths, needs, challenges, and preferences. This information can then be used to make decisions and match individuals and families with appropriate resources.

Why Access and Assessment?



Effective triage/intake, diversion and homelessness prevention can offer more immediate resolution of a client's challenges, and can also help alleviate pressure on crisis and emergency services.

Clear, well developed and agreed upon access and assessment methods/tools and processes provide clients the option to access the system from a variety of locations and have a consistent experience. Collecting information once and sharing it across the system reduces the need for clients to re-tell their story across providers, increasing efficiency and reducing the risk of re-traumatization.

Consistent and well-designed assessment processes collect useful, comparable data. This data is valuable in enabling effective and accurate matching of clients to resources in the CA system, and in developing more detailed understandings of what housing insecurity looks like in a community, strengthening advocacy and funding-seeking endeavors.



How Do People Enter the System? Access points are the determined locations or agencies that can perform assessment and serve as entry points to the Coordinated Access system. There can be one or many, depending on the needs and capacity of the community and service providers. It is important that access points are clearly identified and a consistent assessment process is applied across access points.



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How Do People Enter the System? Access points are the determined locations or agencies that can perform assessment and serve as entry points to the Coordinated Access system. There can be one or many, depending on the needs and capacity of the community and service providers. It is important that access points are clearly identified and a consistent assessment process is applied across access points.



Approaches to Case Management

Key Considerations and Approaches in Access and Assessment

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples are significantly over-represented in homelessness statistics nationally, and many aspects of access and assessment processes can be culturally insensitive, (re-)traumatizing, and harmful to Indigenous individuals and communities. Some suggestions to promote a culturally sensitive and appropriate system include:



- Making available First Nations, Métis or Inuit agencies, staff or access to an Elder, Knowledge Keeper or appropriate trained staff
- · Ensuring choice in where clients can access the service
- Emphasizing relationship building and trust during intake and assessment processes through a relational, conversational, trauma-informed, culturally appropriate, and not rushed approach
- Carefully considering how and which intake and assessment tools are used rigid intake and assessment tools and processes and assigning numerical scores can be reminiscent of harmful colonial practices, and are often not appropriate for Indigenous communities
- Ensuring client confidentiality and consent, and providing clear explanations of how data will be collected, used, and stored
- Ensuring staff are trained and follow OCAP® principles



Client consent and confidentiality are critical areas that need to be addressed, especially in smaller rural, remote, and Indigenous contexts. Access and intake processes should clarify collection, use, storage and sharing policies and collect client consent for the collection, use, storage and sharing of their information

Outreach can be an effective way for a Coordinated Access system to reach individuals and households experiencing housing insecurity who may not reach out or feel comfortable accessing conventional homelessness services serve as access points. Outreach can be especially significant in rural and remote areas where formal homelessness services are limited and homelessness is less prominently visible in a community. Outreach can also be an effective way to reach First Nations, Métis, and Inuit individuals and households experiencing housing insecurity that may feel more comfortable staying with family/community or in encampments than accessing conventional shelters, mainstream services, and non-Indigenous organizations.

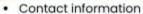




Approaches to Case Management

Many systems use intake forms and common assessment tools to facilitate the collection of client information necessary within a Coordinated Access system. It is critical to remember that while they can be helpful, they can also be harmful, and should be part and not all of intake and assessment.

Intake Forms can vary widely on the degree and type of information gathered, and whether they are client-facing, for staff use only, or a mixture of both. While the questions asked and format of forms depend on local contexts of what information is necessary and how it will be used, managed, stored, and shared within a system, some common information gathered through these types of forms includes:



- Basic personal and household demographic
- Physical and mental health history, substance use and/or addictions
- · Prior service history and other current service access/use
- Socioeconomic and documentation status
- Current housing situation and housing/homelessness history
- · Housing preferences and needs
- Legal history
- Referral method
- Self-care ability/life skills

Assessment Tools are described as a "series of questions, conversations and/or observations" that measure, categorize, and/or score "each person's experience, situation, or understanding" (CAEH, 2018b, p.1). They often appear in a survey or questionnaire format and result in a numerical score representing client need, although alternate, more conversational and flexible formats are being increasingly encouraged and used, and more nuanced ways of representing and comparing the data gathered are emerging. Assessment tools should be chosen based on local contexts and needs, though in general the following characteristics are suggested for a quality tool:

- Culturally appropriate
- · Tested, proven, appropriate, and
- Housing First focused

- · Sensitive to lived experience of homelessness, does not cause harm or trauma
- User-friendly for both the assessed and the assessor
- · Person-centered and strengths-based · Clear about the relationships between the questions of the tool and the potential options for additional housing resources

In order to be accessible over time and across a shared system, intake, assessment, and case management information requires some means of storage and management. Case management tools and Homelessness Management Information Systems (HMIS) facilitate the management, storage, and sharing of information collected by service providers during intake and assessment. These tools, too, come in various forms, and which a community uses is largely dependent on technical, financial, and human resources available to the community. Some options include:

- Paper data is entered and stored on physical printed documents
- Electronic Spreadsheets/Databases Data is entered and stored digitally in non-specialized software (ex. Microsoft Excel)
- HMIS Software Specialized data management software
- Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) – a specialized HMIS software encouraged in Reaching Home Coordinated Access guidelines



SECTION 3: RESOURCE AND SERVICE MANAGEMENT: CONNECTING SUPPORTS TO CLIENTS

3.1 Formal Processes - Lists and Prioritization

In a textbook CA system under Reaching Home guidelines, information gathered during triage and assessment processes places individuals and households experiencing housing insecurity on several interrelated lists. The most general list is usually referred to as the <u>By-Name List</u> (BNL) (CAEH, 2021). It includes identified individuals and households that are "actively experiencing homelessness" (ESDC, 2019, p. 19) and who have consented to be on the list. This list is meant to help clients access appropriate services by containing information that allows for general community referrals, as well as further prioritization and matching to resources in the Coordinated Access Resource Inventory.

A CA By-Name prioritized list is important for making decisions. By having a clear process for prioritization, we can make decisions fairly and efficiently. This ensures that our choices are consistent and lead to the best possible outcomes.

This toolkit recognizes the importance of BNL as it provides the information and accountability required for communities to move from siloed programs to a coordinated system of care. It's important to keep in mind the unique needs of rural, remote and Indigenous communities and how there is some resistance from Coast to Coast to Coast from service providers and clients to implement and consent to a BNL for a variety of reasons. See the section following this as we discuss the *Rural Realities and Culturally Appropriate Considerations when considering a formal BNL*.

"Having the By-Name List has not only allowed us to engage private landlords and house a fair number of individuals, but it has also created opportunity for more collaboration amongst our partners,"

- Neena MacKinnon, Coordinated Access Coordinator at the Safe at Home Society (Yukon)

Why use a By-Name List?

By-Name Lists aim to gather data, with consent of those being entered into the list, to maintain real-time, up-to-date information on every person experiencing homelessness in a community by name (or using unique identifier to protect client confidentiality). These lists also capture each individual or household's housing history, and service and support needs. By-Name Lists collect:

Individual or household level data

 Contact information, housing history, and data on service and support needs play a crucial role in triage and support the Coordinated Access (CA) system by informing prioritization, managing resources and services, and matching clients with appropriate supports.

• Aggregate system level data

- Newly identified individuals and households experiencing homelessness and those returning to the list from an inactive status or from housing to measure inflows to homelessness.
- Individuals and households moved to an inactive status or moved into housing to measure outflows of homelessness.
- Those currently active on the By-Name List to measure levels of active homelessness.

Regularly reviewing inflow, outflow, and active homeless numbers and changes in them can help a community understand what may be causing increases or decreases in homelessness and allow communities to adjust their approaches and interventions.

In Moncton's housing retention plan, they developed important strategies that help people in need, including creating a By-Name List (BNL) to identify and assist those who are most at risk. Next, they focus on each individual's needs to connect them with suitable housing and support services. Additionally, an agency is assigned to manage housing cases, ensuring that clients receive ongoing help and guidance. These efforts work together to improve housing stability and support vulnerable individuals in the community.

The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH, 2021) describes some of the benefits of BNL's, specifically the collection of data as it allows a community to:

- Have a complete picture of who's experiencing homelessness and where to find them
- House people as quickly as possible based on local priorities
- Quantify exactly what housing resources are needed to end homelessness for every person in the community
- Deduplicate your aggregate system-level data
- Operate an effective CA system
- Move from a focus on "my clients" and program level outcomes, to a focus on "our clients" and tracking and reporting system-level outcomes
- Monitor progress relative to the goal of ending homelessness
- Advocate or allocate resources based on real numbers
- Make projections and set meaningful reduction goals
- Have real-time visibility of the community's system functioning to know what is or isn't working and to make improvements

For more information on BNL's and resources and examples to support the development of your community's own BNL, see Built for Zero. Canada's webpage on By-Name Lists:

• Built for Zero. Canada (BFZ). (2024). By-name lists. https://bfzcanada.ca/by-name-lists/CAEH-BNL-QA.pdf (bfzcanada.ca)

The Reaching Home guidelines have **two important groups within the BNL**. The first group is the **Coordinated Access List**, which includes individuals and households who qualify and want Coordinated Access Resource Inventory resources. The second group is the **Priority List**, which is a smaller section of the Coordinated Access List. The Priority List helps to separate and prioritize individuals and households within the CA system (for example, having all required documentation and income verification completed and available). The Priority List informs the matching and referral process of the CA system (ESDC, 2019).

Prioritization plays a crucial role in helping communities decide who gets housing assistance first. By setting specific factors and criteria, communities can determine the priority order for individuals and households needing housing support. It is important to establish criteria that reflect the community's goals and needs. This process ensures that limited housing resources are allocated to those who need them the most. Ultimately, prioritization **helps create a fair and efficient system for distributing housing assistance within a community**. (ESDC, 2019; Bernicki et al., 2022)

Remember: These guidelines should be written into policies and procedures.

Reaching Home guidelines describe three main approaches to prioritization:

• Frequent service use – Households and individuals are ordered based on volume of service use from highest use to lowest use

Benefits:

- Clear prioritization process
- Can help demonstrate cost savings and how access to housing and supports reduces pressure on other systems/resources

Challenges:

- Requires more in-depth and well-developed data management and systems integration/institutional coordination
- **Descending acuity** Households and individuals are ordered based mainly on an acuity score determined through a common assessment process

Benefits:

- Clear prioritization process
- Theoretically addresses the greatest depth of needs first

Challenges:

- Acuity score ranges need to be diverse enough to distinguish prioritization levels
- Assigning scores and conventional assessment tools can be traumatizing/problematic (see section 2)
- Focus on just acuity score can limit addressing other desired community outcomes
- Universal system management Households and individuals are ordered based on a range of factors that could include both frequent service use and/or acuity scores, in addition to other factors deemed significant by the community (for example, number or type of dependents in a household, experiences of genderbased/domestic violence, etc.)

Benefits:

 Considering a range of factors allows for more targeted interventions and wider address of desired community outcomes

Challenges:

- Requires a well-developed data management system and collection of detailed information
- Works better in communities with larger populations of those experiencing housing insecurity and where more extensive resources are available

The Reaching Home Guide also acknowledges that all three approaches to prioritization can suffer unintended impacts of clients trying to increase their scores or access more services to fit more closely with prioritization criteria to rank higher on lists and access housing resources more quickly (ESDC, 2019).

3.2 Rural Realities And Culturally Appropriate Considerations

Understanding the specific circumstances of each client is important, so you may have to change how you prioritize tasks based on the situation. It is essential to be flexible in your approach to handling different client needs. Adapting to the context of each client's situation can help you provide more effective support. Being able to adjust your priorities accordingly will enable you to better meet the needs of your clients.

One of the prominent challenges facing many smaller, rural, remote, First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities is an overall lack of existent or accessible resources within the community. This can include human resources, affordable and supportive housing, emergency shelters, women's shelters, detox centres, transportation, and support services in general. In addition, services that do exist are often at capacity with long waitlists, and high turnover can also impact service quality.

Our research and engagement uncovered some sentiments of CA being a "road to nowhere" for many smaller communities, in that there is no point in developing the system if there is no housing available or there are gaps in resources and services to address clients' needs. While this does create challenges in the later stages of operating the CA system, the initial development of the system that involves collecting information on the services and housing landscape of a community can first of all identify these gaps (Bernicki et al., 2022), as well as give evidence to support advocacy and funding efforts to address these gaps and challenges.

Acknowledging the ongoing systemic racism and colonization experienced by First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples is essential to understanding that traditional methods and formal procedures may not be effective for all communities in the same way. This must be considered when making decisions about CA, as each community has unique needs and challenges that should be addressed appropriately. By recognizing and adapting to these variations, we can better serve and support these communities in a respectful and meaningful manner in order to ensure successful outcomes.

When deciding who gets help first, following a structured process and using set rules can sometimes seem like a competition and can also come across as impersonal and in conflict with the person-centred approaches promoted as best practice. This may also make service providers and people who need housing assistance feel like those who need housing and services are fighting against each other. It's important to be mindful of this when creating policies and procedures for making decisions about housing support. In order to avoid these stigmas and mitigate the potential misconceptions as much as possible, and adopt more inclusive and positive language, this guide proposes to refer to these aspects of the CA system as 'resource and service management' and 'connecting supports to clients' instead of 'prioritization'. By considering everyone's needs and situations fairly, we can ensure that help goes to those who need it the most.

Remember: Regardless of the language or type of prioritization method you choose to use, the goal is to make sure that essential resources go to those who need them the most. It is important to allocate resources accordingly, especially to those in urgent need. By utilizing effective processes, we can all ensure that help reaches those who require it promptly.

Another possible solution to explore to address this issue is wider geographic or regional collaboration. A CA system can allow communities to pool resources and knowledge and align efforts, and can be especially beneficial in reducing the tendency of communities and services to fall into silos when spread across large geographic areas or located in very remote areas. A coordinated service delivery model can link services to offer a more holistic and comprehensive range of services across the region. Additionally, having everyone in the system operate on a shared philosophy, standards, and policies also creates consistency across the region for those accessing services and the system (Bernicki et al., 2022).

While there are many advantages to regional coordination, collaboration across a wider geographic area often raises issues of transportation for clients, as is discussed later in this section of the toolkit. Already a significant barrier within many communities due to limited public transit options, having to commute between communities to access services further exacerbates the problem as public transit is often non-existent and private transportation can be prohibitively expensive.

Beyond the logistical issues of transportation, forced migration to access services can also be detrimental to many individuals and households in that it removes them from their existing social and support networks, and can leave them stranded in unfamiliar situations. Furthermore, widening geographic service areas can potentially lead to conflict over who should be allowed and/or given priority in the system, and issues of equity of access to a system and its resources among pre-existing community members and new or 'outsider' members. These are all factors that need to be understood and carefully weighed with the benefits of regional collaboration in order to develop the most beneficial and feasible solution for a given community or region.

Another important consideration in making the decisions on how to manage resources and services and connecting and supporting clients is who is determining the decision making criteria and procedures. The literature suggests that "so-called universal criteria is not necessarily representative of all households," citing examples of single adults, families, youth, and BIPOC people as subpopulations that all have unique needs (Bernicki et al., 2022, p. 137). Different groups and communities can have different cultures and thus different priorities, desired community outcomes, and ideas of how decisions should be made. This can also be quite apparent between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Ecker et al. note that separate priority lists can be created for Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people and that in communities choosing to keep one single combined list that "Indigenous individuals and families should be prioritized and the Indigenous community must be given authority to determine their own prioritization procedures" (Ecker et al., 2020, p. 22). Reaching Home guidelines also suggest identifying Indigenous Peoples as priority groups in an effort to help address their overrepresentation among those experiencing houselessness and housing insecurity (ESDC, 2019).

Matching Techniques

Generally, there are **two main models presented for determining which clients to connect to which resources and services**, those being case conferencing and a short-list model.

Case Conferencing Model

Case conferencing refers to a practice of regular meetings between CA system organizers and service providers to discuss specific clients, resources, and create connections between the two (Bernicki et al., 2022, p. 141). Some characteristics and considerations of case conferencing models include:

- When there are smaller communities and populations of those experiencing housing insecurity case conferencing can be a great option, as it is more realistic to have more in-depth discussions for each individual case (Bernicki et al., 2022)
- Meeting frequency (Bernicki et al., 2022)
 - Less frequent meetings can help alleviate the burden on administrators and service providers, but can also come at the cost of being less timely than the more instant short-list model, or creating delays between the opening of vacancies and connecting clients to them (ESDC, 2019)
- Can increase collaboration and communication, help identify gaps and solve problems (Bernicki et al., 2022; ESDC, 2019)
- More involvement and people at the table increases the possibility for conflict over decisions/unnecessary challenge to triage and assessment processes (ESDC, 2019)



Short-List Model

In a short-list model, a CA system organizer facilitates the connection of clients and resources by directly referring clients on the BNL to service providers, based on their order on the BNL (Bernicki et al., 2022, p. 141). Some characteristics and considerations of short-list models include:

- They are often more suitable for large communities or wide geographic areas (Bernicki et al., 2022), where larger housing insecure populations would create lengthy discussions and meetings between many widespread organizations are harder to coordinate
- Lists need to be kept up to date consistently (Bernicki et al., 2022; ESDC, 2019)
 - This requires greater administrative capacity, but brings the benefit of realtime data, more timely connections between clients and resources/services, and a more instant system
- Possibility for less suitable matches because service providers and CA coordinators do not discuss whether the service is appropriate for the client (Bernicki et al., 2022)
- Less interagency collaboration (Bernicki et al., 2022)
- Can feel less person-centred (ESDC, 2019)
- Requires well-developed data management systems (ESDC, 2019)

It is also worthwhile to note that choosing a model does not necessarily have to be an either-or decision. Case conferencing and short-listing can be switched between or combined based on current and local circumstances. For example, a short-list model could be used for "imminently house-able", lower acuity clients in the system while case conferencing activities are reserved for cases of higher acuity clients with more complex situations and needs (Bernicki et al, 2022, p. 144).

Regardless of which model(s) is/are used and the specifics of how individuals and households are connected to available resources and services, there are a few situations that, although generally not often, do occasionally happen, and require additional consideration. It can be good to think about these situations in advance and have procedures and policies in place for them. Reaching Home guidelines suggest considering situations in which:

• Vacancies are available but have no good matches

- Resources should stay aligned with the needs and preferences of those experiencing housing insecurity.
- If this is a consistent problem, consider more closely examining resources available, and seeing if things (for example, eligibility criteria) could be changed to better align resources and services with needs and preferences.

• One party declines the match/connection

- This can be a problem, especially in smaller, rural, remote, and Indigenous communities with both fewer service providers and smaller populations.
 Previous relationships and history between providers and clients, as well as lower anonymity and community prejudice or stigma, can factor into refusals on the part of either the provider or the client.
- For service provider declination, there should be a protocol clarifying the circumstances under which the provider can reject a referral to ensure refusals are not based on prejudice or "arcane" reasons, as well as protocol for what happens in that situation (i.e., how it is recorded, what kind of follow up is enacted).
- In the case of decline from the client side, it is heavily suggested that the client should remain on the priority list and not be penalized.
 - A decline may, however, make it a long wait for another offer if the demand for resources in the community is high. The client should be made aware of this fact, but not penalized further or removed or lowered on the list.

Client cannot be located

 Protocol should be developed to give guidance on next steps, minimum requirements for client searches, documentation of the search process, and how long an offer remains 'open' before being offered to the next client (ESDC, 2019).

Warm Referrals

"Also sometimes referred to as "warm transfers", this is where you help a client connect with another service provider and actually ensure that they connect with that service (as opposed to just giving a client an address or number for a service, which they may or may not reach out to)."

(Bernicki et al., 2021)

As with most concepts and practices underlying CA, this method of transfer and referral between services has been called various names. The term 'warm handoff' came from customer service contexts where it was used to describe customer referrals that ensured the customer was adequately connected to someone who could fulfill their needs (AHRQ, n.d.-a). This basic premise has been adopted in healthcare and social service provision settings, where terms such as 'warm handoff', 'warm referral', and 'warm transfer' are used to speak about referral and transfer processes that involve a degree of active participation on the parts of the initial, referring service provider, the receiving or new service provider the client is being referred to, and the client themself.

Some benefits and main reasoning behind warm referrals and transfers are that they can:

- Address clients' feelings of anxiety, apprehension or fear
- Minimize client risk of becoming overwhelmed by complex system demands
- Increase the likelihood of successful engagement and follow-through
- Minimize the potential for traumatic stress by being aware of and navigating potential triggers (PHN-PREP, 2021)
- Create greater engagement and build stronger relationships between service providers and their clients
- Allow those accessing the service to clarify or correct the information exchanged

Warm referrals and transfers can be especially impactful for members of marginalized and vulnerable populations. These individuals have a higher tendency to have had negative and/or traumatic experiences and relationships in accessing services and interacting with service providers, social systems and institutions. They are also more likely to encounter barriers to access and discrimination. Warm referral and transfer approaches can allow the referring service provider to provide support to the client through the potentially stressful transition process, and allow for the referring service provider to advocate for the client (PHN-PREP, 2021; Ecker et al., 2020).

Although the terminology is not universal, the Public Health Nursing Practice, Research & Education Program presents a simple and helpful description of different referral methods and categorization based on the degree of referring provider involvement:

- **Common referral process** Entails providing information to the new provider, service, or program with the expectation that the client is responsible for further contact, information seeking, and arranging appointments or meetings.
- Warm referral The referring provider gives guidance and assistance to the client in the referral process. This can include a shared responsibility in scheduling and ensuring the client can get to an appointment or meeting with the new provider. The referring provider will then follow up after the referral.
- Warm transfer Used to describe situations with a greater degree of referring provider involvement, where a joint meeting(s) takes place at which the referring provider, new provider, and client are all present to introduce and transfer the client to the new provider (PHN-PREP, 2021)

As demonstrated above, a warm referral or transfer process can involve a varying degree of involvement of the referring provider. Literature and resources on the topic emphasize the importance of basing the depth and way in which a provider participates in the referral or transfer process on an individual service user's preferences, situation, and needs, as not everyone will require – or desire – the same level of support and involvement (Ecker et al., 2020; PHN-PREP, 2021).

Some strategies for service providers to help facilitate successful warm referrals and transfers include:

- Becoming familiar with other services, providers, and programs and maintaining relationships with other providers
- Engaging with the client to identify their preferences in levels of support and roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in the process (i.e., who will schedule and attend the appointments, who will 'do the talking', etc.)
 - It is also important to make sure clients understand what to expect during this process and why this process is happening
- Documenting the process and collecting adequate consent for sharing information
- Following up to ensure the client's needs are met, and planning for next steps in transitioning provision of services or exploring alternative options (PHN-PREP, 2021; De Jong, 2018)

Additional Resource:

<u>lain De Jong's OrgCode blog post Making Warm Handoffs Work</u> – contains a more detailed step-by-step breakdown of what a typical warm handoff might look like in the homelessness and housing services sector as well as some general suggestions for practice

Transportation Challenges

"A lack of transportation options for those living in low density areas can restrict their access to health care and social activities and put people at higher risk of physical harm. Those who are low-income, Indigenous, older or young people and those who have disabilities are particularly affected"

(AAC, 2024)

Smaller, lower density, rural, remote, and Indigenous communities often face specific challenges when it comes to transportation. Smaller, dispersed populations create difficulties for public transit, active transportation (i.e., walking, cycling, etc.), and ridesharing strategies to be successful (Transport Canada, 2009). Competition for limited municipal funding can make it difficult to build and maintain necessary infrastructure. In addition, small numbers of passengers traveling over larger distances makes operation of a transit system more expensive, reduces economies of scale and often means potential revenues are lower and user fares are higher. It is evident that common "car-first" culture in smaller communities that assumes general private car ownership and access contribute to a lack of transportation options in many rural, remote, and Indigenous communities (Transport Canada, 2006; Transport Canada, 2009; NADC, 2014).

A recent policy brief from the Institute for Research on Public Policy notes that the "risk of transport poverty, or the lack of adequate transportation options to access essential services and employment, is increasing across Canada's rural and remote communities" (AAC, 2024). Findings from RDN's 2023 Alberta Housing and Services Needs Estimation Project support this assertion, showing that only 36% of survey respondents believed that there was enough public transportation in their community (RDN, 2023).

Many service providers and agencies are aware of these issues and challenges,, however, addressing them can be difficult. Solutions like creating public transit systems, installing and maintaining infrastructure for active transportation, and improving connectivity between transportation routes typically fall under the responsibility of various levels of government.. **Some possible opportunities** to work within the CA system towards addressing transportation issues include:

Advocacy to various levels of government

- Municipally
 - For more direct attention and budget allocation to affordable and accessible transportation
 - NGO's can play important roles as community champions, creating awareness, influencing public opinion, and harnessing community energy (Transport Canada, 2006)
- Provincially/Federally
 - Advocating for national/provincial/territorial transportation plans, strategies, and networks
 - Advocating for the expansion of programs like the Rural Transit Solutions Fund or changes to the Canadian Infrastructure Bank to increase supplementary funding for permanent, reliable, affordable transportation options in rural and remote areas (ACC, 2024)
- Direct supply of transportation services or subsidies
 - Some agencies facilitate transportation for those accessing their services or those they are sending on referrals through paid or volunteer drivers, or providing transit or taxi fare
- Consider options for increased coordination between existing transportation services
 - Many communities have various transportation services and resources available to certain subpopulations (e.g., seniors, people with disabilities, schoolchildren, tourists, certain employers). Opportunities may exist to expand or leverage these services and work together cooperatively to maximize the overall community use and benefit
- Consider offering 'tele-' or 'e-' services through phone or online platforms
 - While this comes with its own possible challenges of requiring access to sufficient broadband connectivity, digital devices, and digital literacy, it can help to alleviate transportation concerns for some individuals and households (Transport Canada, 2006)

Further reading and resources for smaller and rural communities looking to address transportation:

- Rural Transit Solutions Fund Government of Canada webpage
 - o Government of Canada. (2023). Rural transit solutions fund: Overview.
- Improving Travel Options in Small & Rural Communities Transport Canada
 - <u>Transport Canada. (2009). Improving travel options in small & rural</u> communities.
- Towards Coordinated Rural Transportation: A Resource Document The Rural Ontario Institute
 - <u>Rural Ontario Institute. (2014). Towards coordinated rural transportation: A</u> resource document.
- Toolkit for Rural Community Coordinated Transportation Services Federal Transit Administration (US document)
 - <u>Burkhardt, J., Nelson, C., Murray, G., & Koffman, D. (2004). Toolkit for Rural Community Coordinated Transportation Services. Transportation Research Board.</u>

Highlight any successes popping out in the data (e.g., clients and community members indicate their appreciation for the local emergency shelter and its staff) and ensure these successes are celebrated publicly. At the same time, identify any challenges, barriers, and gaps noted in the data (e.g., clients and community members indicate a lack of transportation as the reason they can't secure stable housing). Work with local service providers or your local interagency group/task force to consider opportunities to address each challenge, (e.g., implement a community rideshare program, offer taxi tokens, or pilot a public transportation system).

When identifying and translating challenges, barriers, and gaps into opportunities, remember to consider the scope, feasibility, and impact of each opportunity. How big an undertaking is the opportunity, how feasible is its success, and how big an impact will it have in addressing housing insecurity in the community? These key questions should guide the development of each opportunity and guide the prioritization of opportunities.

Overall, data gathered through CA systems or alternative projects and programs can be incredibly effective in informing internal and external decision-making and community action.



COORDINATED ACCESS

Resource and Service Management



What Do I Do With the Information Gathered?

Now that you are aware of the services and resources available in your community, and have identified those experiencing housing insecurity and understand their housing and service needs and preferences, the next step and ultimate goal of a Coordinated Access system is to most effectively and efficiently connect those experiencing housing insecurity with the most suitable services and resources.

In order to do this, Reaching Home guidelines on Coordinated Access systems recommend organizing data collected on resources and services into a Coordinated Access Resource Inventory, and to develop a By-Name List (BNL) that includes (with consent) individual and household level data such as contact information, housing history, and service and support needs for those experiencing housing insecurity.

By-Name Lists

BNLs can offer aggregate system level data that can indicate inflows, outflows, and current levels of housing insecurity across a community. A BNL can be further divided into a Coordinated Access List that identifies individuals and households on the BNL that are interested and eligible for Coordinated Access Resource Inventory resources, and a Priority List, which differentiates individuals and households that are able to immediately accept an offer of housing resources from the Resource Inventory due to having completed all necessary requirements (e.g. having all required documentation and income verification completed and available).

Rural, Remote, and Indigenous Communities

It is important to understand and acknowledge the intentions and purposes behind conventional descriptions and forms of prioritization and matching or referral components of a CA system, however it also must be acknowledged that they may not always be entirely applicable or appropriate for every situation, especially for smaller, rural, remote, and Indigenous communities.



Many rural, remote and Indigenous communities face additional barriers in terms of access to technology and communications connectivity. Data shows that while 91.4% of Canada on the whole has access to broadband at the universal service objective level of 50 Mbps download and 10 Mbps upload, only 62% of rural communities do. This underlying issue, prevalent in many rural communities, can have a significant impact on the options available for communities in regards to things like HMIS and case management tools and data sharing methods.



COORDINATED ACCESS

Resource and Service Management

How Do I Best Manage Resources and Services and Connect and Support Those Experiencing Housing Insecurity?

In the Reaching Home Coordinated Access guide, the process of matching resources and those accessing the system is called **prioritization**. Regardless of what language is used, this stage of a Coordinated Access system involves determining shared criteria to inform how resources are allocated and matched with those accessing the system. Essentially, this is where those administering the system agree and clearly set out how decisions are to be made prior to making the decisions.

Approaches to Matching

Reaching Home guidelines describe three most common approaches to prioritization or determining matching criteria:

- Frequent Service Use households and individuals are ordered based on volume if service use, with those with highest use at the top of the list
- Descending Acuity households and individuals are ordered based mainly on a score representing acuity or need that is determined through a common assessment process
- Universal System Management households and individuals are ordered based on a range of factors (that can include frequent service use and/or acuity scores and/or other factors deemed significant by the community)

One of the most prominent challenges facing many, rural, remote, and Indigenous communities is an overall lack of existent or accessible services and resources within the community, and challenges with existent services being at capacity with long wait lists and service quality that is negatively affected by high turnover.

Using data gathered in early stages of Coordinated Access system development that identifies these gaps may allow for wider geographic or regional collaboration. Pooling resources and aligning efforts across communities can enable more comprehensive and consistent service delivery and availability across a region.

Clear, shared criteria to base matching decisions on contributes to the consistency, transparency, and fairness of a Coordinated Access system. It is also important to examine who gets to decide what criteria is important and who and how these processes and policies are being put into place.

Who decides what is important?

It's vital that the decision making criteria needs to consider and reflect all those involved in the system. It is important to recognize and acknowledge that different groups and communities including those that are often marginalized, are often left out of the decision making processes and suffer systemic inequalities often resulting in longer wait times and or limited service options.



COORDINATED ACCESS

Resource and Service Management



Matching Techniques and Processes

Two common methods for carrying out determining which individuals and households to connect to which resources and services are:

- Case conferencing model holding regular meetings between CA system organizers and service providers to discuss specific clients and resources, and create connections between the two
- Short-list model a CA system organizer facilitates the connection of clients and resources by directly referring BNL clients to service providers based on their order on the BNL

It is essential for these strategies to consider the various obstacles related to transportation, which is a significant concern in rural, remote, and Indigenous areas. Additionally, there should be awareness of the potential drawbacks of involuntary migration and the fairness of resource distribution among local and non-local service recipients.

Regardless of which model(s) is/are used, there are some specific situations that occasionally arise that it is a good idea to think about in advance and have procedures and policies in place for. These include:



- · Vacancies are available but have no good matches
 - can indicate misalignment between resources and the needs and preferences of those experiencing housing insecurity
- The provider or the client declines the match/connection
 - Protocol should prohibit providers declining matches based systematic racism
 - If a client declines a match they should keep their place on the list and still be in line for the next available resource.
- · Client cannot be located
 - Protocol should specify minimum requirements for client searches, how the search process will be documented, and how long an offer remains 'open' before being offered to the next client

Warm Referrals

Is there protocol for client safety checks? This is a common practice is rural, remote and Indigenous communities.



Warm referrals, transfers, or handoffs are encouraged practices that involve a referral or transfer process with varying degrees of active participation by both the referring service provider, the receiving service provider, and the service user themself as opposed to just providing a service user with a phone number to call or address to visit. Warm referral processes can help increase the likelihood of successful engagement and follow through, minimize service user stress and anxiety, decrease the chances of service users being overwhelmed or retraumatized by complex system demands, and give opportunities for referring service providers to advocate for service users.



SECTION 4: REFLECTING ON AND ADAPTING YOUR COORDINATED ACCESS SYSTEM

4.1 Implementing Coordinated Access

Complementing CA Data

Data is integral to our everyday lives, including our professional ones, and is often the driving force behind critical and strategic decisions, creating new information or knowledge, as well as supporting justification backed by evidence. Data is more than just quantitative information and numbers. It is the story shared by a client on their experience through a system or referral, it is the experience of a staff member who is adapting a new policy, and it is the presentation to the general public that seeks to address myths and misconceptions.

Data is critical to addressing housing insecurity in communities across the country. Municipal, provincial, territorial, and federal governments as well as funders are more often requiring concrete data to develop and implement coordinated solutions to address housing insecurity. Various types of data can complement data emerging from a CA system, while also informing the development and next steps of a community's response to homelessness. It is important to collect more robust and holistic data on housing insecurity as a whole across the community as well as data on service needs, uses, and gaps in the community. This should all be complemented by housing-specific data.

Equally important as collecting data is mobilizing the data to influence change.

Armed with meaningful data, it is important to not only recognize and celebrate community successes, but also identify current challenges, barriers, and gaps and translate them into opportunities moving forward. Data can be used for many purposes including to enhance funding applications, guide advocacy activities, improve policies, practices, and decision-making, and encourage the development of new coordinated solutions to addressing homelessness. In order to get the most out of the data available in your community, it is important to review and reflect on that data with a critical eye.

4.2 Identifying And Reviewing Who Is At The Table

Throughout the process of implementing a CA system and collecting additional and complementary data on housing, homelessness and service needs in the community, consider key questions:

- Who is currently at the table and who is missing?
- Are you actioning Reconciliation?
- Who could help collect key data, identify current barriers, challenges, and gaps, support the development of opportunities moving forward, or encourage participation from community members with lived or living experiences of homelessness?
- Who could help with advocacy activities, funding applications, or coordinating solutions to address homelessness?

Consider these questions when thinking about who is currently at the table and who might need to be brought in moving forward. These are questions that should be considered regularly; active reflection and the ongoing addition of partners are critical to the success of CA and addressing homelessness more broadly.

Whether your community is developing supportive or affordable housing, public transportation, creating a mat program, or looking to improve and/or offer more services, community engagement and consultation are not only necessary: they can be the difference between the success and failure of your program.

You should ensure that community engagement happens as early as possible in the process to address any concerns or potential barriers to moving your community plans forward. However, you also want to ensure that your organization, community, or coalition has a clear purpose and vision for your project so that you have clear answers for why it's necessary.

In some communities, people may rally behind your proposed project and offer broad support for your efforts to help vulnerable populations. However, in other communities – unfortunately, a more common scenario – you may face opposition to your proposed project, not only from community members but also from other service providers, local government officials, and policymakers.

Community resistance, often referred to as "Not In My BackYard" (NIMBY), is frequently driven by myths and misconceptions about housing insecurity, homelessness, and the individuals struggling with homelessness, as well as by fear of the unknown – often due to a lack of community consultation and understanding. This is why establishing a clear mission and vision for your project from the outset is imperative, as it helps maintain focus when facing such barriers. It is important to acknowledge and validate legitimate concerns, while also dispelling myths about homelessness. Concerns can be both valid and discriminatory or based on false assumptions about homelessness, or a mix of both.

While NIMBYism is often seen as a refusal to help people experiencing homelessness (which can sometimes be the case), it's more commonly about community members who support helping people in need – just as long as those services aren't located near their neighbourhoods or places they frequent (hence, "not in my backyard"). It is also important to remember that you do not need to convince everyone. If you do face opposition in the community, it is highly unlikely that you will ever get everyone entirely on board and completely supportive of the project.

Everyone has different views, opinions, and biases, and you're unlikely to change those entirely over the course of your consultation (though it can be possible that the opposition turns into allies through the process). What matters is convincing the decision-makers necessary to move the project forward and addressing the concerns of as many community members as possible to minimize ongoing resistance to the project as much as possible.

YIMBYism or "Yes In My Backyard", is the direct opposite of NIMBYism in that it focuses on meeting the needs of the community, working to foster community resiliency, diversity, and compassion. In essence, YIMBYism is the antithesis of policies, practices, and discourses that seek to deny and restrict community diversity and growth (McNee & Pojani, 2022) and "Accepting our community's collective responsibility to make our shared space welcoming to everyone" (PIVOT, 2015, P. 8). YIMBY campaigns are premised on designing intentional communities that promote housing affordability and localized capacity building. "YIMBYism should also be understood as a discursive concept that can be mobilized to publicly advocate for increased housing, shelters, and other social services."

4.3 Inviting Persons With Lived Experience To The Table

In all of this conversation about data, it is important to remember the people behind the data. This is easier to remember when reviewing qualitative data, but qualitative and quantitative data alike represent the real experiences of community members experiencing housing insecurity. Given this, it is critical to include community members experiencing homelessness in conversations around data collection and around identifying opportunities to address homelessness moving forward. Including community members experiencing homelessness in conversations to address homelessness requires careful consideration as to how to eliminate barriers to participation.

"Living in homelessness is very hard work" - Al Wiebe

4.4 Measuring Success

On top of collecting meaningful data to influence change, it is necessary to evaluate your process and progress in implementing a CA system and addressing homelessness in the community.

According to the Canadian Evaluation Society, "Evaluation is the systematic assessment of the design, implementation or results of an initiative for the purposes of learning or decision-making" (2023). It is the process of testing ideas, hunches, and beliefs about the nature of an initiative and how it might be addressed through the use of data and sense-making (Tamarack Institute, 2017b).

Evaluation helps to:

- Inform decisions related to programming or projects
- Demonstrate impact or success
- Advocate for continued support and resources

There are many considerations to address in developing an evaluation plan, the most important being to **consider who will be responsible for leading the evaluation process**. This can be an individual, a group, or a collaboration between groups, or can be a third-party consultant, depending on the availability and capacity of partners. Equally important is again **ensuring community members experiencing homelessness have the opportunity to participate in evaluation activities**.

The following are a list of evaluative resources to support any evaluation activities related to implementing CA and/or coordinated solution to homelessness:

- <u>Developing an Effective Evaluation Plan: Setting the Course for Effective Program Evaluation (CDC, 2011)</u>
- <u>Developing Evaluations That Are Used (Tamarack Institute, 2017b)</u>
- More Training Resources: <u>Systems & Processes</u>

Key steps in developing an evaluation plan:

- Identify project or program outcomes/objectives -e.g., develop an interagency working group on CA
- Identify the associated indicators that would identify the success of that outcome/objective e.g., # of agencies participating in the working group, # of working group meetings, the development of a work plan to implement CA, etc.).
- Identifying primary methods of evaluation e.g., survey, direct feedback, observation, etc.)
- Identify the frequency in which evaluative feedback will be collected, and
- Identify who will be in charge of collecting and reviewing evaluative feedback

Here are two different template styles for planning out your evaluation; pick which works best for you and follow its structure.



EVALUATION PLANNING TABLES

Evaluation Strategy				
Evaluation Lead:	Primary Methods of Evaluation:			
Evaluation Partners:	 Ex: Survey, direct feedback, observation, etc. 			
Outcomes & Key Indicators for Evaluation (i.e. measures of success) • Ex: # of residents engaged, positive attitude change, improved service offerings, etc. •				
Challenges & Lessons Learned: • • • • • •				
•				
Next Steps: • • • • •				

Initiative Outcomes (i.e. Desired State - these can be community outcomes and process-oriented outcomes)	Indicators (How do we know if we are there?)	Methods (How will we collect information?)	Timing & Frequency (When and how often will this information be collected?)

SECTION 5: BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

This toolkit recognizes and values the contributions of the Federal Government, CAEH along with other organizations and communities in leading the implementation of CA.

We recognize the efforts of smaller cities, rural, remote, and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities in coming together to build capacity to implement a CA system/philosophy that is tailored to their specific needs.

CA systems across the country are at various stages, ranging from building partnerships and understanding what CA looks like, to identifying key roles and responsibilities and implementing more formal and fully integrated systems. No matter the language used or the stage you are at, CA is about creating a sense of no wrong door, implementing strength-based approaches, and allowing those accessing services to feel more connected, all while responding to the growing complexity of those people experiencing houselessness and housing insecurity.

Regardless of our roles, we will engage in important yet challenging work. Prioritizing self care is crucial in order to respond effectively to the growing national housing and houselessness crisis.

Continuous education, growth, and awareness through the lens of reconciliation, and the sharing of Indigenous Peoples' experiences are essential for gaining a deeper understanding of different perspectives, successes, and failures to work towards solutions and effectively address systemic inequalities.

" Who someone is today, is not what they are tomorrow"



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