

Housing Placement Toolkit

Promising Practices, Techniques and Information for Housing First Programs in the Metro Vancouver Region

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Many thanks to the Housing First workers who assisted in the preparation of this Toolkit – your ideas and lived experience have shaped the contents of this document and will hopefully help inform the next generation of Housing First workers in Metro Vancouver.

We plan to update this Toolkit regularly. If you have any suggestions for the next version (additions, corrections, and changes), please contact the Homelessness Partnering Strategy Community Entity for Metro Vancouver at HPSCE-MV@metrovancover.org.

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HOUSING FIRST PHILOSOPHY

Housing First is an approach to addressing homelessness that emerged in the US in the 1990's and has been demonstrated to be a very effective approach to reducing homelessness. One of the most well-known applications of the approach is Pathways to Housing in New York City, founded by Dr. Sam Tsemberis.

Housing First is based on the premise that a person who is chronically or episodically homeless needs to have their basic housing needs met first and foremost. Once they have housing and can access food they can begin to stabilize and address possible issues in their life such as health concerns, addictions, mental health, and finding employment or stable income supports. Accessing support services, as needed, is understood by all to be voluntary. The services are portable, not attached to housing, and can include Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) or Intensive Case Management (ICM) based on the expressed needs and choices of the client.

This approach contrasts with the more standard process of addressing homelessness which focuses on assisting people to become "housing ready" before they receive access to permanent housing. This usually involves moving a person who is street homeless into an emergency shelter, then on to transitional housing and then eventually into independent housing. All the while they are expected to be dealing with their addictions and mental health issues and becoming "housing ready".

How the Housing First model is implemented will vary depending on the client. For those who have experienced chronic homelessness, longer term support and services may be needed, whereas others may only need short-term support to get back on their feet again after a personal or housing crisis. The Federal government's Homeless Partnering Strategy (HPS) outlines 6 core principles for Housing First¹:

1. **Rapid housing with supports:** This involves directly helping clients locate and secure permanent housing as rapidly as possible and assisting them with moving in or re-housing if needed. Housing readiness is not a requirement.
2. **Offering client choice in housing:** Clients must be given choice in terms of housing options as well as the services they wish to access.
3. **Separating housing provision from other services:** Acceptance of any services, including treatment, or sobriety, is not a requirement for accessing or maintaining housing, but clients must be willing to accept regular visits, often weekly. There is also a commitment to rehousing clients as needed.
4. **Providing tenancy rights and responsibilities:** Clients are required to contribute a portion of their income towards rent. The preference is for clients to contribute 30 percent of their

¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/communities/homelessness/housing-first/approach.html>

income, while the rest would be provided via rent subsidies. A landlord-tenant relationship must be established. Clients housed have rights consistent with applicable landlord and tenant acts and regulations. Developing strong relationships with landlords in both the private and public sector is key to the Housing First approach.

5. **Integrating housing into the community:** In order to respond to client choice, minimize stigma and encourage client social integration, more attention should be given to scattered-site housing in the public or private rental markets. Other housing options such as social housing and supportive housing in congregate setting could be offered where such housing stock exists and may be chosen by some clients.
6. **Strength-based and promoting self-sufficiency:** The goal is to ensure clients are ready and able to access regular supports within a reasonable timeframe, allowing for a successful exit from the HF program. The focus is on strengthening and building on the skills and abilities of the client, based on self-determined goals, which could include employment, education, social integration, improvements to health or other goals that will help to stabilize the client's situation and lead to self-sufficiency.

HPS has renewed funding for Housing First until March 31 2019. Housing First is supported by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Canadian Medical Association (2013), and Canadian Housing and Renewal Association.

Online Resources:

The following websites provide more details about the Housing First approach:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/communities/homelessness/housing-first.html>

<http://www.homelesshub.ca/solutions/housing-accommodation-and-supports/housing-first>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Housing_First

<http://www.endhomelessness.org/page/-/files/2016-04-26%20Housing%20First%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>

THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

Metro Vancouver is a large and diverse region, which consists of 21 municipalities. The development patterns across the region are varied; some are intensely urban while others are primarily suburban or even, in a few cases, rural. This variation has an impact on the type and range of housing available for Housing First clients in different Metro Vancouver communities, which can range from Single Room Occupancy Hotels (SROs) and apartments, to basement suites, rooming houses and trailers.

Much of the housing placement in Metro Vancouver is occurring in the purpose built market rental supply and in the secondary rental market (investor-owned rented condominiums, secondary suites, and laneway houses). While growth is occurring regionally in the secondary rental market and is starting up again in purpose built market rental, the demand is not yet being met especially for the most affordable units to serve those with the lowest income.

According to the most recent CMHC Rental Market Report (Nov 2016) rents are climbing and vacancies are decreasing. The vacancy rate across Metro Vancouver is 0.7%, down from 0.8% last year (Nov 2015). What is more, the areas of the region that have typically had higher vacancy rates have seen those rates decrease as well. Last year vacancy rates in Surrey plummeted from 1.9% to 0.4%. Vacancies also fell in Burnaby from 1.2% to 0.8% and in New Westminster from 0.9% to 0.4%.

Supply and demand dynamics have led to an upward pressure on rents throughout the region. The average rent on a bachelor unit is \$1,031 and \$1,159 for a one bedroom and \$1450 for a two bedroom and \$1631 for a three or more bedroom unit, up on average 6.4 % from last year (apartments and townhouses).

Online Resources:

The following websites provide more detailed information about the rental housing market and affordable housing policy in the region.

https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/esub/64467/64467_2016_A01.pdf?fr=1486065820752

<http://www.metrovancouver.org/services/regional-planning/PlanningPublications/RegionalAffordableHousingStrategy2016.pdf>

TOOLKIT INTRODUCTION

This Toolkit has been developed for Housing First program managers, case managers, peer support workers, and housing navigators in Metro Vancouver (collectively referred to as Housing First workers in this document). It is a compilation of techniques, promising practices and information for housing placement in Housing First programs. The techniques and practices are drawn primarily from the experiences of Housing First workers in the Metro Vancouver region but also include some ideas and learnings from across the country and from international programs.

Housing First starts with securing housing, but that is only part of the approach. Throughout the Housing First process the client is ideally supported by wrap around services to help address the circumstances that are affecting their life, such as challenges with their physical and mental health, addictions, involvement in the corrections system, and/or negative experiences with foster care. This Toolkit focuses on housing placement with the recognition that housing stability for a person who has experienced chronic or episodic homelessness is often only possible with a case management component that supports the client at the same time.

This Toolkit is divided into five sections which reflect the typical housing placement process for Housing First:

- Step 1: Getting to know the client
- Step 2: Identifying Housing Options
- Step 3: Working with Landlords
- Step 4: The Emergency Housing Fund, Rent Subsidies and Income Supports
- Step 5: Preparing Clients and Supporting Their Tenancy

This Toolkit is not unique; several Housing First toolkits have already been developed in Canada and internationally. A few are listed below. This Toolkit seeks to provide information that is relevant to the Metro Vancouver context.

Toronto Toolkit - <http://www.housingworkers.ca/rent/toolkit/>

UK Toolkit http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/Private_Rented_Sector/Toolkit/PRS_Toolkit.pdf

Canadian Housing First Toolkit <http://www.housingfirsttoolkit.ca/overview>

The information presented in this Toolkit is focused and limited in scope and detail to ensure that the document does not become too unwieldy, but many links are provided to access additional online information. The Housing First sector is rapidly developing and changing. Much of the information in this toolkit is time sensitive and will require regular updating.

STEP 1: GETTING TO KNOW THE CLIENT

Housing First workers say that when initially meeting with a client it is important to find out as much as possible about a client before looking for housing for them. Clients who are transitioning out of homelessness face multiple barriers including poor credit rating, accumulated debt, eviction histories, no landlord references, spotty rental history, limited literacy, mental health and substance use issues, and/or criminal records. If they are youth they will most likely have additional barriers to finding housing such as no rental history, being too young to sign a lease (17 or younger), or coming out of the Foster Care system. These barriers often mean that people experiencing homelessness cannot pass standard tenant screening criteria, and consequently, are at a competitive disadvantage relative to other low-income tenants, particularly in tight rental markets.

Bobi Jo Evans, US Housing Specialist suggests, “Look at each obstacle separately and address them one at a time if possible. This will help you present and represent your client to a prospective landlord.” Being prepared is the most important factor in overcoming challenges.

Here are some of Bobi Jo Evan’s articles about getting to know clients:

<http://homelesshub.ca/resource/how-connect-your-client>

<http://homelesshub.ca/resource/how-give-helping-hand-toward-housing>

<http://homelesshub.ca/resource/helping-clients-help-themselves-through-housing-process>

It is important to remember to maintain the client’s confidentiality in all communications, especially with landlords. While the Housing First worker may learn a great deal about their clients’ lives as they work with them, this information should only be shared with their permission. Housing First organizations should have established policies and procedures for maintaining client confidentiality.

Homeless persons who are seeking housing often face various forms of discrimination based on race, family composition, housing status, and income source. It is the job of Housing First workers to help clients deal with these challenges. Landlords may be directly or indirectly discriminatory in the questions they ask of clients. The Housing First worker can bring this to the landlord’s attention and find non-confrontational ways to move the discussion forward. Many Housing First workers talked about the ongoing role that they play in educating landlords on tenant rights.

Housing First workers try to find out what type of housing the client is interested in but also try to manage their expectations about what type of housing they can sustain. It is helpful to get to know what a client is feeling about getting housing. They may have some conflicting

feelings. While looking forward to housing the client may have concerns about assuming the responsibilities of renting. They may not feel that they will be able to deal with it or that they deserve it. Due to their personal history they may be anxious about moving inside or they may feel guilty about leaving their friends on the street.

INTAKE AND ASSESSMENT

The intake process involves the collection of relevant information from the client to assist them in connecting to appropriate housing and services. Each Housing First organization has their unique intake process and intake forms. The housing placement process will entail the completion of several forms including an assessment, release of information forms for all of the relevant organizations including the Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation (MSDSI) and BC Housing, rental subsidy applications, and worksheets. Many clients (depending on their age and their history) may be more comfortable working on paper than electronically. Each organization will have a process for organizing this collection of information, in a filing system and/or electronically.

Assessment is a key part of Housing First and assessment tools are typically used in the intake process. The assessment tool helps staff determine client eligibility and understand the history and needs of the people they are working with. It allows Housing First workers to refer them to appropriate housing and services as quickly as possible. It also creates a systematic way to consistently update and track important information about each client. The assessment tool can improve planning and optimize the allocation of resources based on a clearer breakdown of local homeless populations. Assessment is an ongoing process and it should be simple to understand and use.

Two tools are currently being used in the Metro Vancouver area, the Vulnerability Assistance Tool (VAT) and the Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPADAT). BC Housing is now using VAT and providing VAT training (see link below). BC Housing is also encouraging non- profits in BC to use VAT.

HIFIS 4

BC Housing is working with the Homelessness Partnering Strategy to customize the HIFIS 4 database for BC Housing purposes. It will be a web based client centred (by-name) system. It will allow for data sharing between service organizations and is anticipated to be a helpful case management tool. It will become operational between December 2017 and March 2018.

Here are some assessment resources:

- A comparison of the two assessment tools VAT and Vi-SPADAT: <http://www.metrovancouver.org/services/regional-planning/homelessness/HomelessnessPublications/HousingFirst-PrioritizationTool.pdf>
- A video on how to use the VI-SPADAT: <https://vimeo.com/86520820>
- The VI –SPADAT tool for 20,000 Homes: <http://www.20khomes.ca/wp-content/uploads/2-VI-SPDAT-v2.0-Single-CA.pdf>
- BC Housing VAT training <https://www.bchousing.org/partner-services/non-profit-training-resources/VAT-training>
- The Training Manual for the VAT http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/COH_VAT_Manual_Online.pdf
- Additional information about the VAT: <http://homelesshub.ca/blog/launching-canadian-version-vulnerability-assessment-tool-vat-manual> and http://www.caeh.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/RP3_EckerJ.pdf

20,000 Homes Campaign

The 20,000 Homes Campaign is a national movement of Canadian communities to house 20,000 of the most vulnerable people in Canada by July 1, 2018. This movement is based on the Housing First model and uses a by-name registry, which tracks and assesses each person who is homeless. The core philosophy is based on the premise that the most vulnerable, those with the highest acuity are housed first. The process starts with a by-name registry and the VI-SPDAT is used as a triage tool. The by-name registry allows for the tracking of need in real time and VI_SPDAT allows those with the highest need to be served first. Service Providers are able to monitor the flow of homeless and co-ordinate access to housing. It is connected to HIFIS 4.

The 20,000 Homes Campaign in each community tracks data closely to monitor success and seeks to build systems of care. The campaign is currently underway in 37 communities in Canada and has housed 3,602 people. Large Canadian cities that are involved in the campaign are Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Calgary, and Edmonton.

Check out the website: <http://www.20khomes.ca/>

CREDIT CHECKS AND COURT RECORDS

As the Housing First worker gets to know their client, they may hear the client express concern about having a criminal/court record or bad credit history. If possible, these concerns should be verified before applying for housing. Housing First workers recommend that the client should be assisted to review their own court record information and credit ratings. This way they can prepare themselves to discuss the actual records that a potential landlord may have accessed online. In some cases the court records and bad credit rating are not as dire as the client believes they are.

According to rental tenancy law in BC, a landlord is not permitted to assess a potential tenant based on their court or criminal records. Unfortunately Housing First workers report that this does, in fact, happen regularly.

Obtaining a certified criminal record check is a more detailed process, which includes providing fingerprints to the Police/RCMP along with the application form and paying \$25.

- To view Court Record Information:
<https://justice.gov.bc.ca/cso/index.do>
- To access a credit report, see Trans Union online
<https://ocs.transunion.ca/ocs/home.html> or Equifax
http://www.consumer.equifax.ca/home/en_ca . Both have options for free credit reports.
- To view a certified criminal record check see the following RCMP website for more information:
<http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/en/steps-obtain-certified-criminal-record-or-vulnerable-sector-vs-check>

REPLACING LOST IDENTIFICATION

One of the challenges faced by a person experiencing homelessness is the loss of personal identification such as a Care Card, Social Insurance Number, Driver's License and Birth Certificate. This can be a barrier to finding housing. Here are some web sites that will help start the process of ID replacement:

Eligible Project Costs

Many Housing First programs in Metro Vancouver are currently funded through HPS. Housing First workers, especially those new to the job, regularly have questions about what is eligible for funding under HPS. The following HPS directive gives general information about which project activities are eligible. For additional direction speak to a program manager.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/funding/homeless/homeless-directives.html>

- General Information about replacing ID in BC:
<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/government-id/why-you-need-id>
- Replacing a BC Birth Certificate: <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/life-events/births-adoptions/births/birth-certificates> (if the person was born in another province or country they will need to contact that province or country to replace their Birth Certificate)
- Replacing a Driver's License and BC Services Card: <http://www.icbc.com/driver-licensing/getting-licensed/Pages/Replace.aspx>
- Apply for, or request confirmation of, a Social Insurance Number:
<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/sin/before-applying.html>
- Secure Certificate of Indian Status (Status Card)
<http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100032776/1100100032782>

Or go in person to the Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada Office in Vancouver at Suite 600 - 1138 Melville Street to apply or reapply.

WORKING WITH INDIGENOUS CLIENTS

According to the 2017 Homeless Count a significant proportion (34%) of people who are experiencing homelessness in Metro Vancouver identify as Indigenous. Housing First workers need to be prepared to work effectively with clients who identify as Indigenous. This includes developing an understanding of the intergenerational impacts of colonization, knowing how to support cultural safety and learning about Indigenous services and supports which are available in the community. Mainstream organizations which serve Indigenous clients need to examine how they can both embed practices which create cultural safety within the organization and also facilitate access to Indigenous services in the community.

Housing First workers in Metro Vancouver confirmed that they often encounter racism and discrimination when seeking housing for clients who are Indigenous. While it is illegal for landlords to discriminate, Housing First workers say that it does come up in many subtle and not so subtle ways.

A recent Housing First report from Toronto emphasized that Housing First organizations should commit to anti-racism and anti-oppression. To support this commitment they should hire a diverse work force which reflects their clients and create specific procedures for those clients

who might be subject to racism². In addition, training and information sharing can also be helpful.

Resources online and in the community:

- BC Housing runs the Aboriginal Homeless Outreach Program with Aboriginal Outreach workers in Vancouver and Surrey. <https://www.bchousing.org/housing-assistance/homelessness-services/aboriginal-homeless-outreach-program>
- For Housing First workers who are seeking training in this area, the Indigenous Cultural Safety Training for service providers who work with indigenous clients is offered by the Provincial Health Services Authority. The cost is \$250 and a certificate is provided upon successful completion. <http://www.sanyas.ca/home>
- All staff, including nonindigenous staff can learn about how to improve cultural safety for Aboriginal clients. PHSA has developed a webinar series called the National Indigenous Cultural Safety Collaborative Learning Series which is available on line at: <http://www.icscollaborative.com/webinars>
- Cultural Safety from the Canadian Housing First Toolkit
http://www.housingfirsttoolkit.ca/sites/default/files/Cultural_Safety.pdf

ABORIGINAL RESOURCE GUIDE

A Guide to Aboriginal Resources in Greater Vancouver has been developed by Lu'ma Native Housing Society. It is featured on the Lu'ma website at <http://lnhs.ca/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/Guide.pdf>. The Guide is written for an Indigenous person who is thinking about moving to Greater Vancouver. The purpose of the Guide is to provide information and assist the reader to research, navigate, make good decisions, and reach their goals in their transition to Greater Vancouver. Main topic areas include: accessing low cost food and housing, employment, medical services, income assistance, social integration and staying safe. The Guide is presented from an Indigenous perspective but it would also be helpful for people from other cultural groups who are seeking this type of information. It is also helpful for those who are already living in Greater Vancouver.

• ² Toronto Housing First Implementation and Best Practice <http://www.stmichaelshospital.com/crich/wp-content/uploads/HFimplementationsept11FINAL.pdf>

HOUSING CONSIDERATIONS FOR WOMEN FLEEING VIOLENCE

Housing First workers may have to keep additional considerations in mind when they are working with women. The woman they are working with may have children or others such as a parent or friend in their care. In addition, the woman may be fleeing violence. Safety planning and prevention of violence education and training is very helpful for Housing First workers who are assisting women who are fleeing violence. This type of training will help workers keep their clients and themselves safe.

- The BC Society of Transition Houses has a helpful guide book on working with women who are fleeing violence. It is designed for outreach workers who deliver HOP and HPP programming. It is full of tips, ideas and guidelines for safety planning for a woman who is fleeing violence. <https://bcsth.ca/publications/accessing-stable-and-safe-housing-guidebook/>
- Training for working with women who are fleeing violence can be accessed through the BC Society of Transition Houses <https://bcsth.ca/training/>
- Or Battered Women's Support Services <http://www.bwss.org/take-action/workers-activists/training/>
- An interesting post about using a gender lens to understand homelessness <http://homelesshub.ca/blog/homelessness-sexist>

Other Resources for working with clients who are experiencing homelessness and getting to know them:

- Trauma Informed practice presentation from the Canadian Housing First Toolkit [http://www.housingfirsttoolkit.ca/sites/default/files/Trauma Informed Care Homelessness.pdf](http://www.housingfirsttoolkit.ca/sites/default/files/Trauma%20Informed%20Care%20Homelessness.pdf)
- Moments to Milestones Video http://sourcesbc.ca/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=97&Itemid=183

STEP 2: IDENTIFYING HOUSING OPTIONS

Within the Housing First model the ideal housing option varies from client to client and is informed by client choice (at least when possible). Housing First is premised on the fact that most adult clients who are leaving homelessness would like to be able to choose their own apartment in the private market; however, for youth and some adults other options may be more suitable. Clients with complex needs may require a housing option that provides ongoing supports, such as permanent supportive housing. This section provides information and links for a range of housing types:

Online Resources:

- A helpful glossary of housing related terms.
<http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/visions/supported-housing-vol12/glossary>

PRIVATE MARKET RENTALS

When looking for private market rentals, Housing First workers find out where local listings are posted. The following online resources can be helpful (keeping in mind that they are used by many people so the listings disappear quickly):

- Craigslist <https://vancouver.craigslist.ca>
- Kijiji <http://www.kijiji.ca>
- Vancouver Aboriginal Transformative Justice Society publishes a weekly housing list: <http://vatjss.com/>. This list is a compilation of Craigslist housing postings which have phone numbers. It is intended for people who do not have access to a computer. It is usually produced on Mondays.
- John Howard Society Affordable weekly housing list: It is posted on the VATJSS site listed above or it can be sent directly to your e-mail, email reception@jhslmbc.ca or call 604-872-5471 ext. 222. It is usually produced on Mondays.

In addition, to find rental opportunities Housing First workers suggest:

- Driving around the neighbourhood where the client would like to live and look for signs advertising rentals.
- Finding community notice boards in public places that have rental ads posted and check them regularly.
- Getting to know the landlords you are currently working with. Some may have other units that they might be interested in renting to Housing First clients.

- Get to know some of the real estate agents in your community. There may be one who would be able to let you know about rental opportunities.

SROs AND ROOMING HOUSES

CMHC defines a rooming house: *A “rooming house” is a permanent form of housing that consists of a building, or part of a building, where living accommodation is provided in at least four, separate, habitable rooms, each of which may contain limited food preparation facilities or sanitary facilities, but not both.* <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/pdf/65235.pdf>

In this tough rental market Single Room Occupancies hotels (SROs) in downtown Vancouver and rooming houses in lower density neighbourhoods throughout the region are one of the few options in the private rental market that are open to Housing First workers who are seeking affordable housing for their clients. Rooming houses are typically found in older houses that have been converted. They consist of multiple private rooms with a shared kitchen and/or bathroom.

Rooming houses may be licensed or unlicensed. In Metro Vancouver bylaws and regulations vary between municipalities. Housing First workers should talk with a planner or bylaw officer in their municipal planning department to determine any bylaws that pertain to rooming houses.

Single Room Occupancy hotels (SROs) are found in downtown Vancouver. Many are now operated by BC Housing. Some are operated by private landlords and others are independently operated by non-profits. Housing First workers caution that it is important to get to know the SROs before placing a client as building condition and management varies widely in the Downtown Eastside. Additionally, not all SROs are still affordable for a person on income assistance with only the shelter allowance to pay for housing.

Youth Housing

Housing First workers report that it is very challenging to find youth housing in private market rentals. Using an innovative approach Covenant House is partnering with the development community to access private market rentals for youth. Hollyburn Properties, in partnership with Covenant House, is providing 5 rental units for youth for transitional housing (3 in Vancouver and 2 in Toronto).

<http://www.covenanthousetoronto.ca/homeless-youth/New-Partnership-with-Hollyburn-Properties>
<http://homelesshub.ca/toolkit/su-bchapter/hollyburn-properties-partnership-covenant-house-toronto-and-vancouver>

- The Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre Resource Guide provides a wealth of community information about the DTES. It contains a list of the Vancouver SRO hotels and indicates the status of their ownership.

<http://dewc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/DEWC-Resource-Guide-40-Page-Mar-2015.pdf>

SHARED HOUSING

Housing First programs are using shared housing opportunities as a way to offer sustainable housing to clients in terms of affordability. There are various models for doing this, the main ones are:

1. The Housing First worker locates an existing shared housing situation with a vacancy and finds a client who wishes to take it.
2. The Housing First organization rents, leases or purchases a house or building and finds clients who wish to be tenants; they pay rent to the service organization; (this is not a group home; it blends into the neighbourhood so there is some prevention of stigmatization).
3. The Housing First organization locates a house and finds all of the tenants, but the landlord collects the rent directly from the clients. The clients should each have a separate lease negotiated with the landlord or they will be responsible for making sure all of the rent is paid each month even if one tenant misses payment.

There are pros and cons to all of the options. Housing First workers emphasize that it is important to spend the time it takes to find appropriate roommate matches and ensure the tenants have a say. They provide some of the following tips which are combined with more tips from a webinar about shared housing from the US National Alliance to End Homelessness:

- Honour client choice, spend time understanding deal breakers;
- Use roommate agreements;
- Recognize that roommates may need to have a mutual experience with homelessness to understand each other;
- Roommates can become peers and friends;
- The roommate situation could be a step up to living independently as income improves;
- Sometimes partnering a high barrier person in need with a low barrier person as a caregiver can work;
- Clarify upfront the expectations and requirements of roommates and landlords;
- Make sure all housemates understand their roles and responsibilities;

- Seek agreement of landlord on recruitment of new tenants;
- Clarify if one roommate leaves is the other responsible for the rent;
- Agency building ownership or a master lease transfers the vacancy risk to the agency and may help ensure that the quality of the housing is better than an unlicensed rooming house or recovery house.
- When looking at shared accommodation for female clients, if it is something they are willing to consider, pay close attention to the existing gender balance in the house;
- An agency master lease may overcome the landlord's resistance to renting directly to several Housing First clients;
- Consider supplying a mini fridge and TV in each room to reduce friction;
- Identify conflict and mediate to resolve it; and,
- Recognize that shared accommodation is not for everybody.³

Advocates from the Tenant Resource and Advisory Centre (TRAC) emphasize that in a shared accommodation situation it is important that each tenant sign a lease with the landlord in order for the Residential Tenancy Act (RTA) to apply. If the landlord only signs an agreement with a "head tenant" who in turn sublets to other tenants, the RTA will only apply to the head tenant.

Also, if the tenant shares a bathroom or kitchen in their living space with the landlord they are not covered by the RTA.

PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

For Housing First clients whose health and/or mental health needs are acute and chronic, permanent supportive housing may be the best option. To find and access supportive housing in a client's community refer to the BC Housing web site link below. All supportive housing funded by BC Housing is now accessed through the Supportive Housing Registry. Some supportive housing projects, with alternate sources of funding, are still operated independently by non-profit organizations, so it is important to clarify the application process for the supportive housing in your community.

The supportive housing application process includes a vulnerability assessment. Timeliness of access to supportive housing is determined in large part by the level of vulnerability being experienced by the client. BC Housing is using the VAT assessment tool and is encouraging service providers to use this tool as well.

³ National Alliance to End Homelessness; Shared Housing: A solution for single adults experiencing homelessness; July 12, 2016 http://www.endhomelessness.org/page/-/files/FINAL_Shared%20Housing%20Webinar.pdf

Housing First workers can help their clients through the application process. A Housing First worker can apply on behalf of their client as long as their client's consent is on record in the application. They can also provide regular updates for the application and sit in on the assessment interview.

During the process, it is important to make sure that a client's supportive housing application stays active. This is done by providing BC Housing with regular updates (every few weeks) and notification of any changes in the client's status. If BC Housing does not receive any updates in 6 months the application is put on hold. Updates can be provided in person at Orange Hall at 297 East Hastings in Vancouver or by calling 604-648-4270 or BC Housing Head Office at 604 433-1711.

Housing First workers report that wait lists for supportive housing are long and unpredictable so they recommend finding a private market rental for a client while waiting for the supportive housing placement to become available.

- Access to the Supportive Housing Registry

<https://www.bchousing.org/housing-assistance/housing-with-support/supportive-housing>

- An article about BC Housing's Supportive Housing Options

<http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/visions/supported-housing-vol12/supportive-housing-in-british-columbia>

- Recent Research on Housing First and Permanent Supportive Housing: The core components of Housing First in permanent supportive housing are defined by the US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development in:

<https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Housing-First-Permanent-Supportive-Housing-Brief.pdf>

SOCIAL HOUSING

Most social housing is accessed through the BC Housing – Housing Registry. Housing First workers may encourage their clients to apply to the Social Housing Wait List, but they will also continue the process for securing a private market rental. Depending on the client's needs, the wait for a social housing unit can take years.

- The BC Housing Registry can be accessed here: <https://www.bchousing.org/housing-assistance/rental-housing/subsidized-housing> .
- Not all non-profit organizations use the BC Housing Registry for their applicant database, in these cases it is necessary to apply directly to the non-profit organization. [Housing Listings](#)
- Metro Vancouver Housing Listings (housing subsidies accessed through BC Housing Registry): <http://www.metrovancouver.org/services/housing/Pages/default.aspx>

MENTAL HEALTH HOUSING

For youth and adults with diagnosed mental health conditions the best option for them may be some form of mental health housing which is accessed through local health authorities. There are several types of Mental Health Housing including:

- Licensed Community homes
- Group Homes
- Supported Apartment blocks
- Supported Independent Living (SIL) Housing Program and Youth SIL
- Enhanced Supported Apartments

There are four Health Authorities operating in the Metro Vancouver region:

1. Vancouver Coastal Health Authority is responsible for providing health services in Vancouver, Richmond, North Vancouver and West Vancouver. This is a helpful document that presents the scope of mental health and addictions services and housing for Vancouver Coastal Health.
<http://vancouver.ca/docs/policy/framework-for-services.pdf>
2. Fraser Health Authority is responsible for providing health services in Burnaby, Coquitlam, Delta, Langley, Maple Ridge, Mission, New Westminster, Pitt Meadows, Port Coquitlam, Port Moody, Surrey, and White Rock. For information about Fraser Health supported housing options for mental health <http://www.fraserhealth.ca/health-info/mental-health-substance-use/supported-housing-services/>.

3. Provincial Health Services Authority is responsible for providing specialized health services across the province. One of these services is the BC Mental Health and Substance Use services. <http://www.bcmhsus.ca/programs-at-a-glance>
 4. First Nations Health Authority is responsible for providing Indigenous health services and programs across BC. <http://www.fnha.ca/>
- Here is an article about the YSIL program operated by BC Housing in the Fraser region: <http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/visions/supported-housing-vol12/the-youth-supported-independent-living-program>

COMMUNITY LIVING BC

Community Living BC (CLBC) provides services and support for adults over 19 who have been diagnosed with a developmental disability before they turned 18 or have been diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder or Autism Spectrum Disorder. Housing First workers report that it is difficult to reconnect an adult with a developmental disability to CLBC, especially if they have lost their paperwork for their diagnosis. It is also difficult to connect an adult to CLBC if they did not get assessed before they turned 18. The CLBC website has program information: <http://www.communitylivingbc.ca/>

STEP 3: WORKING WITH LANDLORDS

If your goal is to find a private market rental you will need to work with landlords. Housing First workers in Metro Vancouver report that their communication and relationship building with landlords is extremely important to the success of their Housing First programs. Their ideas and suggestions for working with landlords are presented in this section.

PREPARING FOR WORKING WITH LANDLORDS

Here are some of the basics for building knowledge and resources for working with landlords in private market rental:

1. Know the community – what are the housing resources (public and private) and what other organizations operate in the community that provide Housing First/homeless services?
2. Are there existing networks and resources available?
3. What is the relevant local legislation and bylaws (e.g. basement suites and rooming houses)?
4. Develop one page letter templates (support/reference) to use with landlords and other partners.
5. Identify sources of local rental opportunities (Craigslist, agency lists, community boards, street signage, and real estate agents).
6. Be aware of a cultural gap with landlords; if a large number of landlords in the community are from one cultural group it is helpful to have a Housing First worker from that culture, not just to speak the language but also to translate the cultural underpinnings.
7. Get landlord feedback on the program through satisfaction surveys or informal questions.
8. Try to access new landlords through your existing pool of landlords with word of mouth. Housing First workers report that attempts at larger scale landlord engagement through organized recruitment events have not been successful to date in Metro Vancouver.

INITIAL MEETINGS WITH LANDLORDS

The role of the Housing First worker in the landlord relationship will vary depending on the client's needs, but it usually involves some advocacy on behalf of the client. When meeting with the landlord Housing First workers can provide letters of support for the client, with their consent (being careful not to "out" a client or disclose private personal information). Letters of

support can include general information about the wrap around supports available to the client and the guaranteed rent.

While being careful not to disclose too much information about a client, it is important not to “trick” or mislead the landlord when trying to secure a rental agreement. Housing First workers say this usually creates more difficulties and confusion later in the housing process.

It is important to ensure that the landlord knows that they have one clear point of contact with the Housing First organization. Clarify who, in the organization, will respond when there are problems. Emphasize that the Housing First worker will be the first response if any problems with the tenant arise. A prompt response is essential to any requests for help with the tenant.

CLIENT INVOLVEMENT

In Metro Vancouver Housing First organizations there are varying approaches to client involvement in the housing process. Some Housing First workers like to meet the landlord first on their own to feel out the situation and see if it might work for a particular client; this also provides an opportunity to network more with the landlord. Other Housing First workers encourage their clients to actively participate in all aspects of the housing search. They feel this helps build some measure of client choice into the housing placement process.

SKILLS REQUIRED BY HOUSING FIRST WORKERS

Here are some of the skills that Housing First workers say they need to do their job:

- Creative problem solving;
- Ability to build strong relationships with clients and with landlords, two very different groups of people; and also understand their different needs and perspectives;
- Willingness to educate landlords to address discrimination and illegal practices.
- High level of patience and ability to continue working with a client over weeks and months until they are housed regardless of the barriers they face;
- Willingness to find the right fit for the client not just “getting them housed at any cost”; and,
- Ability to take evictions in stride, and not view them as a failure but as a learning opportunity, and try again.

ONGOING RELATIONSHIPS WITH LANDLORDS

When working with landlords Housing First workers suggest being responsive and available to the landlord whenever they want to communicate. It is important to say thank you often, recognizing that the landlords are choosing to do something different and take a risk by participating in the Housing First program. Gratitude can be demonstrated through providing small tokens of appreciation such as a cup of coffee and a muffin or a gift basket.

Housing First workers say that they do their best to try and meet the landlord's needs and requests, if reasonable. One local Housing First worker hand delivers rent cheques to a particular landlord because that is what he has requested. Aside from doing the landlord a favour it also gives her a chance to talk in person, on a monthly basis, with him and catch any issues which may be emerging.

Some Housing First workers become a resource to the landlords that they work with. They offer to meet and work with other tenants in the landlord's building who may need outreach or homeless prevention.

DEALING WITH POTENTIAL EVICTIONS

Housing First workers provide the following suggestions for dealing with a situation where an eviction may happen:

- Identify problems as early as possible. Develop "early warning protocols" for your organization. For example when case managers are observing red flags such as increasing phone calls from the landlord, repeated unit damage, increasing complaints from neighbours and escalating police visits there should be a clear response to help support the client and de-escalate the situation if possible.
- Increase the frequency of visits to those who are at risk of eviction.
- Meet the landlord away from the suite when there is an issue with a tenant so the landlord or the client is not triggered by seeing the problem – it may be easier to discuss the problem this way.
- The Housing First worker needs to support the landlord's right to evict and the tenant's need for new housing.
- Move the client before eviction – this will save costs for the landlord and may save the relationship; it may also be less traumatic for the tenant.

- A planned move gives more time to look for a new place and to work with the landlord to address any issues. Everyone has the chance to learn from the experience.
- Try to develop prevention strategies to avoid evictions, such as ensuring that clients are able to access the services they need especially for mental health and substance use and helping them to integrate in their community and build social connections. Life skills training in household management and budgeting can also be very helpful strategies for maintaining a tenancy.

Online resources for engaging and working with landlords:

There are numerous resources available for learning how to work with landlords in Housing First programs. Some are shared here:

Landlord Information:

- **The Landlord Registry**

The Landlord Registry, operated by LandlordBC is a tool for tenants to see if the landlord they are considering renting from has taken a 2 hour online course called “I Rent It Right” about the Rental Tenancy Agreement. <https://landlordregistry.ca/> .

- **The Friendly Landlord Network**

The Friendly Landlord Network works with a range of partner organizations in Greater Vancouver to provide assistance in finding housing for youth up to age 30 who are “from care” defined as having experienced foster homes, group homes, kith and kin placements, child and youth mental health services, addiction facilities, custody centres, youth agreements, independent living, extended family placements, and/or receiving services through Community Living BC. Tenancy support is provided to facilitate the landlord/tenant relationship and tenants can be financially supported. Participating landlords must register with the program. The Friendly Landlord Network is housed at Aunt Leah’s Place in New Westminister. <https://friendlylandlordnetwork.com/>

Training and Education on Landlord Engagement:

- Training Video developed by Lookout Emergency Aid Society in 2016: [Negotiating with Landlords](#)
- Landlord Engagement Techniques manual developed by the Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy: “Applying lessons on landlord engagement from across the globe to the context of Maple Ridge Homelessness Service provision; Prepared for Alouette Home Start Society by GVSS” <http://www.gvss.ca/PDF-2014/Landlord%20Engagement%20-%20Society%20Resource.pdf>

- Ideas for recruiting and engaging landlords:
<http://www.endhomelessness.org/blog/entry/field-notes-four-things-ssvf-providers-can-do-now-to-recruit-landlords#.VkSwK3arSCg>
<http://homelesshub.ca/blog/what-are-best-ways-engage-landlords>
- MPA Presentation: http://www.caeh.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/HF4_BakerS.pdf
- Privacy Guidelines for Landlords and Tenants <https://www.oipc.bc.ca/guidance-documents/1456>

Research on Landlord Perceptions of Housing First Clients:

- *Research Report: "Perceptions of Private Market Landlords Who Rent to Tenants of a Housing First Program"* Tim Aubry, Rebecca Cherner, John Ecker, Jonathan Jette', Jennifer Rae, Stephanie Yamin, John Sylvestre, Jimmy Bourque, Nancy McWilliams. Published online: 7 April 2015 - Society for Community Research and Action 2015
<http://homelesshub.ca/resource/perceptions-private-market-landlords-who-rent-tenants-housing-first-program?width=500&height=180&inline=true>

Assisting Clients to Maintain their Tenancies

- A resource about "success-based housing" - Holding On! Supporting Successful Tenancies for the Hard to House:
<http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/2014%20Successful%20Tenancies%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

STEP 4: THE EMERGENCY HOUSING FUND, RENT SUBSIDIES, AND INCOME SUPPORTS

Housing First workers support their clients to access a range of financial subsidies and income supports. Some are time-limited subsidies and others are longer term income based or age based supports. These various subsidies and supports are managed federally and provincially. Housing First workers report that they often find these programs complicated and confusing to understand. They struggle to ensure that their clients are getting all of the resources to which they are entitled.

SHORT TERM HOUSING SUBSIDIES

Housing First workers use time limited housing subsidies available through the HPS Emergency Housing Fund (EHF) and BC Housing's Homeless Prevention Program (HPP) and Homeless Outreach Program (HOP) to help get their clients into housing. Mental Health Housing subsidies are also available but referrals from health care professionals are required. The subsidies are meant to be part of a larger program of support for the client not just housing funding. They are all meant to help a client access private market housing not subsidized housing.

The HPS Emergency Housing Fund (EHF) can be used towards a client's rent to a maximum of \$450/ month for up to one year, or longer as necessary. The client is required to contribute 30% of their income towards their rent, or the shelter component if receiving income assistance. Although the EHF is aligned with the BC Housing Homeless Outreach Program; the two funding programs cannot be "stacked" or used for the same portion of rent. The EHF is meant as a bridging measure until clients move to a more permanent source of income to cover that expense. EHF is paid directly to landlords and not to the client.

Typically, the HPS EHF is used first and then the HOP or HPP subsidies are used until longer term income support or employment income is in place.

More information about the EHF: <http://www.metrovancouver.org/services/regional-planning/homelessness/HomelessnessPublications/2016RFPUpdates.pdf>

The following table provides some basic information to compare the three subsidies:

Table 1: A comparison of Emergency Housing Funds (EHF), Homeless Outreach Program (HOP) and Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) Rent Subsidies

	EHF	HOP	HPP
	Federal Government	BC Housing	BC Housing
Maximum value	\$450	\$300	\$450
Maximum duration	Typically limited to 12 months (it can be longer but projects must not spend more than 50% of their HPS allocations on EHF)	12 months	12 months
Purpose	To provide short term funding to cover housing costs until other subsidies or financial supports can be accessed	Rent subsidies and outreach support for people experiencing homelessness	Portable rent subsidies and support services for individuals in at risk groups who are facing homelessness
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chronic or Episodic Homeless Individuals • Must have a plan in place for the end of the subsidy so the person does not become homeless again when EHF ends 	An individual or family without a fixed address	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Youth transitioning out of foster care; 2. Women who have experienced violence or are at risk of violence; 3. Individuals leaving the correctional or hospital systems; 4. Indigenous individuals
Further Info	Move in expenses, apartment setup, damage, ICM team support and weekly check in	Service referral through outreach worker	The subsidy can cover rent, damage deposit, costs that help secure housing (for example, getting identification), transportation to a housing opportunity, storage for belongings, utilities, moving expenses, home start-up items

INCOME AND DISABILITY SUPPORTS

The goal of Housing First programs is for clients to attain housing stability. The role of the Housing First worker is to support the client to develop and work on a plan and to achieve the goals of that plan. The Housing First resources, such as the Emergency Housing Fund and the provision for interim housing are bridging mechanisms to get clients attached to permanent housing and support programs. There are a range of income support programs that may be useful for a Housing First client. In British Columbia, Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation (MSDSI) provides the following income supports.

1. Income Assistance (IA)
2. Benefits for Designated Persons with Disabilities (PWD)
3. Benefits for Persons with Persistent and Multiple Barriers to Employment (PPMB)

The application process is typically initiated online at the My Self-Serve site

<https://myselfserve.gov.bc.ca/> .

Additional information is available: <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/income-assistance/access-services/my-self-serve>

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/policies-for-government/bc-employment-assistance-policy-procedure-manual/additional-resources/howdoiapplyassistance.pdf>

An excellent 2017 guide from Legal Services about applying for Income and Disability Assistance: <http://lss.bc.ca/resources/pdfs/pubs/How-to-Apply-for-Welfare-eng.pdf>

The following checklist identifies the documents that are needed to apply on the My Self-Serve system: <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/policies-for-government/bc-employment-assistance-policy-procedure-manual/additional-resources/documentchecklist.pdf>

To use My Self-Serve an applicant creates an account on My Self-Serve and creates or uses existing BCeID user ID. They generate and complete an application, signing it using a 4 digit PIN. The application is reviewed by the MSDSI and third party checks are completed before making a decision on eligibility.

If the applicant is unable to complete the online application they should contact the MSDSI at (1-866-866-0800) or go to their local office. MSDSI staff will initiate a service request and place it into the *Intake application queue*. Staff will contact the applicant for a phone interview and will enter and submit the information into My Self-Serve on behalf of the applicant. The applicant will have to submit supporting documents in person, by fax or mail. The application is

then reviewed and third party checks are completed. Once all information is obtained eligibility is assessed. The applicant is contacted to communicate the decision. The applicant then goes to their local office to sign the declaration, application, and employment plan (if applicable). If the client does not have a phone they might want to consider signing up for Lower Mainland Community Voicemail (see page 37).

Housing First workers are often dealing with a range of issues for their clients and they may have to communicate regularly with the Ministry regarding Intent to Rent Forms, and getting payment for damage deposits and first month's rent etc. Workers who have established a liaison person in their local Ministry office will have an easier and more time efficient experience accessing information and completing required processes for their clients than those who do not. Housing First workers report that it is worth the effort to build this relationship with the local Ministry office.

Also in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and Surrey the Ministry is setting up dedicated outreach teams that are integrating and delivering services with community partners. These outreach teams can provide direct support to Housing First clients in the community.

ADVOCATE CLIENT ENQUIRIES

When an advocate, such as a Housing First worker, has a query that will be lengthy or involve multiple clients they can request a call back from Advocate Client Enquiries (ACE). Single issue/single client requests can be managed at the point of contact through the My Self-Serve portal, phone or at a local office, unless the Housing First worker specifically requests they be assigned to ACE.

Alternatively Housing First workers with multiple client/lengthy inquiries can contact the Ministry through ACE e-mail, as applicable:

- The e-mail address is SDSI.AdvocateClientEnquiries@gov.bc.ca (indicate your name, organization name, phone # and best time to call; NO CLIENT info)
- A reply email with template will be generated in an auto response allowing the Housing First worker to provide more details.

When Housing First clients are accessing Emergency Housing Funding and other rental subsidies it is important that MSDSI receive documentation (from the funder) indicating how much the client will be receiving. This will help avoid a situation where a client will accidentally trigger an investigation (such as having a rental amount that exceeds existing documented income sources).

INCOME ASSISTANCE

The application form for Income Assistance is accessed through My Self-Serve. The following link provides information from MSDSI about income assistance.

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/income-assistance/apply-for-assistance>

<http://www.clicklaw.bc.ca/question/commonquestion/1127>

ASSISTANCE FOR PERSON WITH DISABILITY DESIGNATION

The designation of “Person with a Disability” (PWD) results in eligibility for programs and services such as financial and health support. The PWD application has three parts:

1. The portion that is filled out by the applicant (potentially with assistance from an advocate);
2. The medical report portion that is filled out by a doctor or nurse practitioner (it is important that they know the applicant so they can fill out their section correctly and completely);
3. The assessor report portion that must be filled out by a prescribed professional such as social worker, doctor or registered nurse. This section can be completed by the doctor or nurse practitioner who filled out the medical report section.

Photocopies of parts 2 and 3 can be filled out in draft by the applicant to assist the professional who is completing them. If the PWD application is denied because part 2 or 3 was completed incorrectly by the professional(s), the decision should be appealed. The application should be reviewed again with the correct information.

For more information on the PWD application visit the MSDSI website:

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/services-for-people-with-disabilities/disability-assistance>

ASSISTANCE FOR PERSONS WITH PERSISTENT AND MULTIPLE BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

The Persons with Persistent and Multiple Barriers (PPMB) category provides assistance to clients who have long term barriers to employment that are not expected to be overcome in the short term. The application process includes an interview with a Ministry (MSDSI) worker to assess employability and a medical report to be completed by your doctor. Addictions of any kind, such as substance use, are not currently defined as a medical condition under this assistance.

Additional information

Disability Alliance BC has developed a series of Help Sheets that may be helpful. Here are links to a few:

- Applying for the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) benefit
<http://www.disabilityalliancebc.org/docs/hs2.pdf>
- Checklist for PWD <http://www.disabilityalliancebc.org/docs/hs3.pdf?LanguageID=EN-US>
- Applying for the Person with Persistent and Multiple Barriers (PPMB) to Employment benefit <http://www.disabilityalliancebc.org/docs/hs6.pdf?LanguageID=EN-US>
- *There are several other useful help sheets available on the Disability Alliance BC website:*
<http://www.disabilityalliancebc.org/money.htm>

Tips for applying for the Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation (MSDSI) Shelter Allowance

- Shelter documents are processed based on priority; if a client is not scheduled to move in for a week they will not be at the front of the queue, even though this may cause the landlord to choose another tenant. Direct liaison relationships can help in this instance because the Housing First worker can speak with the Ministry worker and explain the situation and perhaps move their client's case forward.
- Clearly document all stages of the process and interactions with MSDSI.
- Ensure that the client is clearly and correctly identified on all forms (correct birth date and SIN, relevant information provided, forms filled out legibly).
- Make copies of every document that the client submits.
- Make sure contact information for the landlord is correct; it is not guaranteed that the landlord will be contacted but if they are, and the info is incorrect, it will slow down the process.
- It is expected to take no more than 5 business days to process shelter documentation. If a security deposit is not processed within 5 days it is advisable to escalate the process and ask to speak to a supervisor
- It is very helpful if the client signs a Release of Information with the Ministry that includes their Housing First worker. Later, if a question comes up and the client is not with the Housing First worker, he or she can still answer on behalf of the client. This way there are no gaps in communication and time lags in the processing of information.

Online Resource:

- The Legal Services Society – Your Welfare Rights

<http://www.lss.bc.ca/resources/pdfs/pubs/Your-Welfare-Rights-eng.pdf> - includes a 2014 update

RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (RAP)

This BC Housing Program provides rent subsidies for low income working families. To qualify, families must have a gross annual income of \$35,000 or less, at least one dependent child, and have been employed at some point over the past year. Families will have had to file an income tax return to be eligible. Those who are on PWD or Income Assistance are not eligible for RAP, but those who are on Employment Insurance or who are receiving maternity payments are eligible for RAP. While the eligibility criteria for this program will exclude most Housing First clients, there may be specific instances where this will be helpful and the Emergency Housing Fund will be able to bridge to RAP for a client.

RAP information and application form: <https://www.bchousing.org/housing-assistance/rental-assistance-financial-aid-for-home-modifications/rental-assistance-program>

Table 2: A summary comparison of Income and Disability Assistance Options and the Rental Assistance Program (RAP)

	Income Assistance	PWD	PPMB	RAP
Funder	MSDSI	MSDSI	MSDSI	BC Housing
Maximum value (April 2017)	Up to \$610/month for a single person with no dependents	Up to \$1033/month for a single with no dependents	Up to \$658/month for a single person with no dependents.	Ranges from \$50 – \$765/month (no more than 30% of rent)
Purpose	For people in need of assistance who have no other resources. For employment transition.	For people with severe disabilities that are expected to last more than 2 years.	For people who have long term barriers to employment.	Rent subsidies for low income working families.
Duration	No time limit but eligibility will be reviewed regularly and client must be working on an employment plan.	PWD is not a permanent designation but current MSDSI practice is not to ask people to reapply.	Usually asked to reapply every 2 years, if it is not clear how long the client's condition will last they may have to reapply after 1 year.	Assistance is based on the previous year's income (as reported in the income tax return).
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19 years or older • Have income less 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 18 years • Must complete a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be on Income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For families • Gross annual

	Income Assistance	PWD	PPMB	RAP
	<p>than \$610/month for a single person</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet rules about assets (MSDSI website) • Meet 2 year independence rule • Meet immigration rules 	<p>designation application successfully</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be financially eligible • Must apply for Income Assistance 	<p>Assistance for 12 out of the 15 months before applying</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doctor must provide details about the client’s medical condition which prevents them from working • The doctor must determine that the client’s medical condition has already persisted for at least 1 year and is likely to continue for 2 more years 	<p>income of \$35,000 or less</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less than \$100,00 in assets • At least one dependent child • Must have been employed at some point over the past year • Those on PWD or Income Assistance not eligible • Pay more than 30% of income on rent
Further Info	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must complete a work search; 5 weeks if first application, 3 weeks if returning to Income Assistance; some exceptions apply 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not expected to look for work • Can keep \$9,600/year of earned income • Eligible for a range of health supplements • Easier application process for people who already in a prescribed class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to keep up to \$500/month of earned income • Not expected to look for work • Eligible for certain health supplements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must have filed an income tax return • Must not live in subsidized housing or a co-op • Lived in BC for 12 months

See this BC government website for more information: <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports>

SINGLE PARENT EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVE

This is a training and support program for securing long term employment for people who are single parents receiving Income Assistance or Disability Assistance. The program can include funds for child care costs, training and work experience, transit to school, and health

supplement coverage along with continued Income or Disability Assistance. Information is available on this website:

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/income-assistance/on-assistance/employment-planning/spei>

SPECIFICALLY FOR SENIORS

Provincial Income Assistance will stop automatically when a person turns age 65. If the client is not yet set up on Old Age Security (OAS) and the Canadian Pension Plan (CPP) there is a provision for month to month payment until they begin receiving federal payments. This process is onerous on the client and worth avoiding if possible.

To begin the process of applying for Federal OAS and CPP and related programs a person should receive a package from the federal government when they are 64; however, if they are homeless they may not receive this documentation. If a Housing First worker is working with a client who is 64 they should find out whether the client has started the application process for OAS and CPP. This application process takes approximately 6 months if everything goes smoothly. If documents are lost in the process or there are any mistakes or complications, the process can take much longer.

OLD AGE SECURITY

This is a federal pension program for people aged 60-65 and older. The OAS includes:

- The *Guaranteed Income Supplement* for people who have a low income.
- The *Allowance* for low-income individuals aged 60 to 64 who are the spouse or common-law partner of a Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) recipient.
- The *Allowance for the Survivor* for low-income individuals aged 60 to 64 whose spouse or common law partner has died.

To be eligible the applicant must have lived in Canada for at least 10 years in total since the age of 18. Detailed information is available online:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/publicpensions/cpp/old-age-security.html>

CANADIAN PENSION PLAN

This pension is available to those who have worked (made at least one contribution to the CPP) in Canada and who are 65 years or older. One can receive the CPP at a reduced rate as early as 60 years of age or as late as 70 years with an increase. The amount received depends on how much one paid into the plan while working.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/publicpensions/cpp/cpp-benefit/eligibility.html>

http://positivelivingbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/cpp_retirement_benefits.pdf

SUPPORTING HOMELESS SENIOR'S PROGRAM

This program allows a third party administrator to act on behalf of a vulnerable senior, who is incapable of managing their own affairs, to ensure that they receive their CPP, OAS, and GIS payments to which they are entitled. Qualified individuals (such as a family member, friend, lawyer, or social worker), agencies, non-profit and registered charitable organizations, and municipalities can request to act as third party administrators. To apply for this program a *Certificate of Incapability* must be completed by a medical professional for the vulnerable individual and the individual or agency who will act as the third party administrator must complete an Agreement to Administer Benefits.

Any organization considering this program for a client should review and understand the long term implications of such an action before beginning the process.

See this link for more information:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/publicpensions/cpp/cpp-homeless-seniors-third-party-admin.html>

SHELTER AID FOR ELDERLY RENTERS (SAFER)

This program provides a subsidy to elderly renters (60 years and older) with low to moderate incomes (less than \$2,550 per month for a single) who are currently paying more than 30% of their income on rent. Maximum payments are \$198 for singles and \$175 per couple. Those who are currently receiving PWD or Income Assistance are not eligible for SAFER. Annual reapplication is needed to maintain SAFER subsidies. The HPS Emergency Housing Fund can bridge to SAFER.

- The application and further details can be found on the BC Housing website: <https://www.bchousing.org/housing-assistance/rental-assistance-financial-aid-for-home-modifications/shelter-aid-for-elderly-renters>
- More Information about SAFER: http://positivelivingbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/shelter_aid_for_elder_renters_safer.pdf

STEP 5: PREPARING CLIENTS AND SUPPORTING THEIR TENANCY

This section provides tips and resources about working with your client as they prepare to meet landlords, choose a place to live and get settled. Their role in this process will depend on their capacity and the relationship that they have with their Housing First worker.

Housing First workers emphasize that while finding housing is important, it is not enough on its own. Connecting clients to clinical and community supports, supporting social integration, providing ongoing case management and responding to issues as they arise between the landlord and the tenant are all essential for maintaining housing and supporting the client to stabilize.

MEETING THE LANDLORD

Housing First workers shared some tips for helping prepare clients for meetings with landlords:

- Work with the client to help them make the best possible first impression. Find a place where the client can access a free shower and laundry to clean up before they see a landlord. Some organizations have these resources in-house. If the donations or funds are available, ask the client if they want a set of clothes and shoes before going to a meeting with a potential landlord. A haircut may also be helpful.
- Role play the meeting with the landlord before it happens; encourage clients not to share everything that is going on in their lives - only what is necessary (clients can become accustomed to sharing personal details about their life through interactions with service providers).
- Encourage clients to be mentally ready for housing appointments (sober, well fed and slept);
- If letters of reference from former landlords are not possible because the client was homeless, seek character reference letters from the people who have known the client for a while. This could include staff at shelters, transitional housing, volunteer programs, meal programs, and/or drop-ins.
- Be prepared for some clients who may not arrive on time when meeting the landlord and viewing the unit.
- Also, in some cases a client may not be sober for the landlord meeting. In such cases, rebooking the appointment may be the best option.
- Be aware of tenancy laws and share them if necessary with landlords and tenants.

STAYING CONNECTED

Having access to a phone and a computer can be challenging for a person who is experiencing homelessness, and can be a significant barrier to accessing housing and services. Lu'ma Native Housing has developed an innovative approach to dealing with this challenge.

LOWER MAINLAND COMMUNITY VOICEMAIL

Lu'ma Native Housing has operated Community Voicemail (CMV) since 2010. The organization provides local phone numbers with voicemail to people who are homeless and/or phoneless. The numbers are distributed through local service providers. The phone number and voice mail allows a person to have a constant point of connection even if their lives are unstable for a period of time. It lets them connect to landlords, potential employers, service providers and family and it allows resources such as housing providers, potential employers, mental health and substance use counsellors, and medical services to contact the person. The service also addresses poverty stigma that a person might face if they leave the number of their shelter or transition house as a contact. Finally, even those people who manage to have cell phones may find that, due to poverty, they cannot afford to pay for cellphone plans.

Lu'ma provides 1,700 free phone numbers to 120 – 130 service providers in Metro Vancouver. The service is also available through WorkBC offices in the region. If a service provider would like some phone numbers for their clients, they should contact the CVM program at Lu'ma Native Housing. Features of Community Voicemail include:

- Broadcast messaging – send one message to all Community Voice Mail users in the region about topics such as job fairs, job opportunities, health screenings, available shelter and homeless services
- Instant reply – with one key press, clients can instantly reply to their case managers after hearing a broadcast message that interests them.
- Live tech support – The CMV head office employs a team of technicians to maintain the system and respond to any technical problems.

Connect to CMV through the Lu'ma website: <http://lnhs.ca/community-voice-mail/>

CMV promotional video from Prince George:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pVKM62o8ibs>

TRANSITION

For clients who are homeless, especially over a longer period of time, moving into permanent housing is a big transition. While having a home to call their own is a positive change, Housing First workers report that their clients can be overwhelmed by the process and feel anxious about the responsibilities of renting. For those who have been homeless or incarcerated –

moving inside can feel like a trap. Some workers have reported having clients that do not move into their apartment immediately following the start of their lease, sometimes taking days or weeks to move in. In one case, a Housing First worker shared, his client took two months before he was able to sleep inside his apartment at night-time. Once inside clients may have some basic life skills to learn or relearn such as cooking, shopping, budgeting, paying bills, filing taxes and cleaning. Housing First workers say that this training and general support with life skills is essential and that it will help the client sustain their tenancy.

Moving inside can also be lonely, clients may have left their street network of friends behind. They will need new social opportunities and peer supports. While each person will have their own unique experience during this transition there are some techniques and tools that can help.

Housing First workers shared some ideas for supporting clients through this transition:

- Find video testimonials of people who have moved into their own place from homelessness – it can provide hope for someone who is unsure whether they can do it or if it is even possible. *Try the RainCity Housing video* <http://www.raincityhousing.org/real-stories-real-lives/>
- Once clients are housed respond to their needs promptly. This will help avoid problems snowballing and getting out of hand.
- Talk with clients about guest issues. They may feel guilty about getting housing when their friends do not have housing, especially if the weather is bad. Discuss what a reasonable approach to guests should be. What do they think the landlord will accept and what the RTA says.
- Provide education on clients rights and responsibilities (see below)
- Do a rental unit orientation with the client and support them if they want to meet their neighbours. Here are some helpful videos for learning how to live in an apartment. They are made in Winnipeg but are mostly still relevant for Metro Vancouver. http://www.whrc.ca/whrc_tivideo.cfm

ELDER ABUSE

Housing First workers emphasized that they are working with increasing numbers of seniors who are experiencing homelessness. One of the issues that they are seeing more regularly in those seniors is elder abuse. According to the literature elder abuse varies and can include medical, physical, sexual, financial, neglect, psychological or emotional abuse. It is important that Housing First workers are able to identify the signs of abuse when they arise.

Here are some resources for elder abuse:

- <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/law-crime-and-justice/criminal-justice/victims-of-crime/vs-info-for-professionals/info-resources/elder-abuse.pdf>
- <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/elder-abuse-and-neglect.htm>
- <http://www.albertaelderabuse.ca/>

TENANT AND LANDLORD RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Housing First workers talk about the ongoing work of educating both landlords and tenants about their rights and responsibilities. Some helpful resources and training is available.

- BC Residential Tenancy Branch Information Sheets:
<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/housing-tenancy/residential-tenancies/tools-and-resources/information-sheets>
- See this site for information and the form for condition inspections when moving in and moving out: <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/housing-tenancy/residential-tenancies/starting-a-tenancy/moving-in#inspect>

TENANT RESOURCE AND ADVISORY CENTRE (TRAC) RESOURCES

TRAC provides legal information, education and support to residential tenants in BC. Their online resources are helpful for finding answers to tenancy questions. The Tenant's Survival Guide provides a helpful plain language resource

TRAC's top five survival tips for problem-free renting are:

- Read the [Tenant Survival Guide](#).
- Have a witness with you and take pictures when you move in and out of a place.
- Get everything in writing.
- Think carefully about anything you sign.
- Pay your rent on time and get a receipt if you pay with cash.

TRAC has also developed a **free** online course about renting; finding a place that is suitable and learning about the tenant's rights and responsibilities. It also includes information on how to develop a monthly budget and provides a budgeting worksheet. People who register and pass a final exam are provided with a certificate of completion. LandlordBC endorses Renting It Right and encourages landlords to view the course certificate positively when considering a tenant. <http://www.rentingitright.ca/>

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TRAC provides a range of template letters that can be personalized for communicating with the landlord about a range of issues. TRAC strongly recommends that tenants put all of their communications about their tenancy in writing. Housing First workers report that these template letters help make it easier. <http://tenants.bc.ca/template-letters/>

TRAC offers legal workshops to tenants and advocates. Each TRAC workshop features a plain language PowerPoint presentation, Question and Answer period, and hardcopy publication distribution. Participants are also educated on how to access TRAC's other services, such as the Tenant Infoline (1-800-665-1185), website and online course – Renting It Right (www.rentingitright.ca). The workshop costs \$200.

READY TO RENT

Ready to Rent offers an online course about renting for new tenants. The cost is currently \$45 to take the course and receive a certificate. The course covers tenants' rights and responsibilities, landlord responsibilities and expectations, budgeting, communications with landlords and neighbours, maintenance and crisis management, and more. Ready to Rent also provides professional development courses and train the trainer opportunities.

<http://www.readytorentbc.org/>

VANCOUVER ABORIGINAL TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE SERVICES SOCIETY (VATJSS)

VATJSS offers two Ready to Rent programs. The first is the Rent Smart program which involves a 2 hour session once a week for 6 weeks. The course covers all the basics related to renting. A certificate is provided at the end of the course. This certificate can be used by participants as a reference to support an application to rent. This course is offered up to 4 times a year.

The second option is a 3 hour Rent Ready course which provides the condensed version of the basics of renting. It is designed specifically for youth, newcomers and seniors. It is available upon request.

To find out more information, to sign up, or to get on the waitlist call VATJSS at 604 251-7200. Priority is given to Indigenous applicants.

<http://vatjss.com/>

FINANCIAL LITERACY AND PLANNING

Housing First workers report that one of the key areas to work on with clients to help with their housing stability is financial planning and budgeting. Figuring out how to cover the essentials on a limited budget is a priority as is making sure that bills get paid.

It is also important that clients are aware of the importance of filing their taxes so that they can access any credits they are entitled to such as the Child Benefit and the GST credit. One Housing First worker cautioned that parents can lose their Child Benefit if they forget to file. It can take months to get the benefit reinstated. Taxes can often be done for free at community centres and some service organizations.

MONEY SKILLS

One resource for clients is the Family Services of Greater Vancouver free course on developing financial literacy called Money Skills. The course has been developed for low income and vulnerable populations. The curriculum includes 1) banking; 2) budgeting; 3) consumerism; and, 4) credit and debt. The course is offered on site at service provider locations and is appropriate for 15 – 20 clients. Course content takes approximately 8 hours to cover and ideally it is offered over 4 weeks in 2 hour classes. There is some flexibility in how the course delivery is designed. For more information contact Mark at FSGV at 604 638-3390 ext 3165, or through the website: <http://www.fsgv.ca/find-the-support-you-need/community-connections/financial-literacy/>

- An online money management guide:
http://www.nomoredebts.org/Library/docs/CC_MMB_WEB2.pdf

HOUSING START-UP COSTS

Under the HPS funding provision is made for some housing start-up costs for obtaining household items, furniture, cleaning supplies, pest control, and food and for moving. This allows the Housing First worker to support the client in settling in their new place.

FURNITURE

Most Housing First clients will need assistance to furnish their unit. If possible, it is helpful to pre-furnish suites with the basics so that clients do not feel they need to bring furniture in from the street. Street furniture can lead to bed bugs into the client's unit, which can then spread to their neighbours. HPS provides a base amount for furnishings and there are several options for low cost and free furniture in the region. Here are a few options:

- Free beds and mattresses: <http://wrags.net/index.html>
- Low cost furniture and appliances:
 - <https://www.habitatgv.ca/page.aspx?pagelid=2>
 - <http://homestart.ca/index.htm>
 - <https://www.thriftstore.ca/british-columbia/>
 - <http://www.eversaferranch.ca/>
 - <http://helpingfamiliesinneed.org/>
 - <http://soroptimisttricity.org/what-we-do/local-projects/beas-kloset/>

HOARDING AND BEDBUGS

Hoarding and bedbugs are two issues which Housing First workers say they have to deal with periodically while supporting their clients' tenancies. They are both challenging issues to address, especially if they are left unaddressed for a period of time. There are helpful online resources for identifying the problem and determining the steps to deal with the issue effectively.

HOARDING

Hoarding is the collection and storing of too many items. When it becomes extreme it can lead to eviction. Some sources indicate that it may be more prevalent with seniors and people living in poverty. The following resources provide an introduction to the topic and some practical suggestions for supporting clients who hoard.

See Lookout Emergency Aid Society training video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-rqqA5Qqyg>

Presentation on hoarding and mental health including diagnosis and treatment, harm reduction, and collaborative responses <http://www.mnhomelesscoalition.org/assets/Hoarding-Disorder-Mental-Health-and-Public-Safety.pdf>

BEDBUGS

Bedbugs can become a serious issue for a Housing First client and can impact their ability to remain housed. The following links provide information on identifying and dealing with bedbugs. The manual also provides hand outs and template letters.

<http://www.housinghelpcentre.ca/WoodGreen%20Bed%20Bug%20Manual%202008.pdf>

<http://www.vch.ca/Documents/Guide-to-bed-bug-control.pdf>

<http://tenants.bc.ca/bed-bugs-and-other-infestations/>

APPENDIX 1 - HOUSING FIRST PROGRAMS IN METRO VANCOUVER

The following organizations currently (2016 – 19) receive HPS funding to run a Housing First program in Metro Vancouver. The organizations which participated in the development of this Toolkit through focus groups and interviews are indicated in the right hand column.

Organization	Housing First Project	Toolkit Participation
1. Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre Association	Find and Keep: Housing Support for Women in the Downtown East Side	✓
2. John Howard Society	From Prison to Community – Providing Housing First	✓
3. RainCity Housing and Support Society	Supporting Unique Outcomes for LGBTQ2S Youth	✓
4. Pacific Community Resource Society	Broadway Youth Resource Centre Housing Outreach	✓
5. Stepping Stone Community Services Society	Langley-Outreach-Housing First	✓
6. RainCity Housing and Support Society	RainCity Surrey ICM Team	✓
7. Elizabeth Fry Society (in partnership with Lookout Emergency Aid Society, Sources BC, and Options Community Services)	Surrey Housing First Collaboration – Hitting the Nail on the Head – Reducing Homelessness in Surrey	✓
8. Aunt Leah’s Independent Life Skills Society	The Link Housing First	✓
9. Elizabeth Fry Society	A Key of Her Own: Providing Housing First to Homeless Women and Homeless Women with Children	✓

Organization	Housing First Project	Toolkit Participation
10. Progressive Housing Society (in partnership with Lookout Emergency Aid Society)	Burnaby Housing & Outreach Hub and New Westminster Housing First	✓
11. Hollyburn Family Services Society	North Shore Seniors Housing First Program	✓
12. RainCity Housing and Support Society	Coquitlam Housing First Case Management	
13. Alouette Home Start Society (AHSS)	Housing First ICM Team for Maple Ridge Pitt Meadows, and Katzie First Nation	