



MEMO / NOTE DE SERVICE

To / Destinataire	Chair Deans and Members of Council	File/N° de fichier:
From / Expéditeur	Shelley VanBuskirk, Director, Housing Services	
Subject / Objet	City of Ottawa Housing First	Date: April 25, 2018

PURPOSE

The purpose of this memo is to provide information on the City's Housing First (HF) program as per direction received at the Community and Protective Services Committee meeting of March 22, 2018 in relation to the Progress Update of the 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan.

DEFINITION OF HOUSING FIRST

HF is a service approach that focuses on moving people experiencing chronic/episodic homelessness from the streets or shelters directly into permanent housing with supports. The approach is based on the assumption that the primary need of people experiencing homelessness is to obtain stable, permanent housing, at which time other issues affecting housing stability can be addressed.

BACKGROUND

A key priority of the City's 10 Year Plan is to ensure that as people transition from emergency shelter into permanent housing they receive the supports necessary to achieve housing stability, long term housing retention and improve their quality of life. Key to achieving the Plan's goal of ending chronic homelessness by 2024 are investments in the HF model.

In order to meet the Plan's objectives and to respond to changing federal requirements under the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, Housing Services implemented an intentional 2014 re-design of the homelessness service system through a \$10.8M Request for Offers. New funding contracts were signed April 2015 to reflect a 65% investment in HF services and supports. This ensured that the City has evidence-informed, best practice approaches to working with people experiencing chronic homelessness in our community.

FINANCIAL INVESTMENTS

Funding for the HF program from federal, provincial and municipal governments is as follows:

- \$4.4M from the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS)
- \$4.7M ongoing operating funding from the provincial Home for Good program (HFG) effective April 2018 (\$1.9M 2017-2018), in addition to \$19.2M in capital funding 2017-2019 to support the construction of approximately 150 new units
 - HFG is a supportive housing strategy that has provided new funding to expand the HF program, adding case managers, peer support workers, funding for unit set-up and first/last month's rent, funding for up to 310 new housing subsidies
- \$800K from the municipal Housing and Homelessness Investment Plan for the Families First Program, in addition to \$1.7M in operating for supportive housing projects to complement the HF program

PARTNERS

Housing Services partners with 11 organizations to deliver HF services for adults and youth with 50 case managers supporting upwards of 500 people at any point in time. There is a separate HF stream for families with the Families First Program at Pinecrest-Queenway CHRC that provides up to nine months of support to families who have been recently homeless, are exiting the family shelter system and who may face challenges in maintaining their housing. All agencies enter into service agreements with the City that outline service activities, targets, outcomes and reporting requirements.

THE PROGRAM

People are assessed for entry to the HF program using a common assessment tool that is administered within the emergency shelter system or by street outreach teams. Eligibility is limited to those who are chronically or episodically homeless and have high or moderate needs, such as having multiple barriers to securing/retaining housing including addictions, physical and/or mental health issues. Housing Services prioritizes people for entry into the HF program based on their needs and their length of shelter stay and then matches them to an appropriate agency that has available space. Ongoing supports are provided by a Housing-Based Case Manager (HBCM), who is an employee of the partner agency. They remain the main point of contact for the participant from assessment, housing search, move-in to providing ongoing supports.

The HBCM works with the participant to ensure income supports are in place and to access housing benefits to secure essential furniture and moving expenses. Participants choose from housing options that are within their budgets. Participants may select from available options in private market housing, including rooming houses, by considering housing identified by the Landlord Partnership Program, searching mainstream sources such as Kijiji, and applying for rent geared to income housing through the Social Housing Registry. Participants may also opt to move into supportive housing if their needs dictate that onsite supports are needed to achieve housing stability.

The Landlord Partnership Program or “housing locator service” is operated by the Salvation Army and secures private market landlords to participate in the program. Program participants moving into private market housing are supported with a portable housing allowance paid directly to the landlord to help increase housing affordability.

The HBCM helps the program participant to move in (assists with initial unit set-up, furnishings, neighbourhood orientation, tenant rights/responsibilities etc.). Regular home visits focus on practical assistance in the areas of cooking, cleaning, budgeting and providing information on public transit, grocery shopping, drop-in centres, health services, social services, etc. A client-directed case management plan is established, and participants are brokered to longer-term community supports in the areas of addiction, mental health etc. Participants are supported to achieve their personal goals such as casual, part or full-time work, education, training, volunteering etc.

On average, HF supports last from nine months to a year, although supports can continue past a year depending on individualized needs. In the last three months of service, a written exit plan is created with the participant’s input outlining strategies for success in maintaining housing after

graduation from the program, the actions to be taken should issues arise, and contact information of various sources of support. For six to 12 months following graduation, the HF agency will provide follow-up support, as required. If needed, in consultation with the City, former program participants may return to the caseload.

HOUSING FIRST FIDELITY

Fidelity determines the degree to which the key components of the HF model are being implemented. HF fidelity is measured against a [38-point scale](#), developed by Pathways Housing First, an innovative, evidence-based model of providing permanent housing and services to adults with severe mental illness. Fidelity looks at how well the HF program aligns with the key principles of HF as follows: consumer choice, separation of housing & treatment, service array to match needs, recovery focused practices and program operations. The HF model's objectives are to increase housing stability, increase quality of life, decrease drug/alcohol use and reduce the use of acute care or emergency services by program participants.

The Pathways Housing First model does not consider the role of supportive housing in the fidelity scale. In this regard, the City will never be able to achieve full fidelity to the Pathways HF model. High fidelity is associated with all program participants being housed in scattered site, market rent housing with a deep subsidy so that participants are paying no more than 30% of their income towards their housing costs. Although Ottawa to date has housed 72% of our HF program participants in independent housing (both private market and social housing) the City has also made significant capital and operating investments in new supportive housing. There is a certain percentage of Housing First program participants (can range anywhere from 10-15%) who will not be successful living independently even with ongoing mobile supports and will require a living environment with onsite supports. The City sees a supportive housing placement, where choice and needs dedicate, as a positive outcome and count these housing outcomes in our HF outcome reporting.

The City has not undertaken a fidelity assessment as per the Pathways model, nor is this a requirement of any of our funding streams. However, the City does report annually to Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) on a modified [four-point](#) fidelity scale that is based on the Pathways scale. This scale is used by ESDC to track a community's progress towards having implemented HF programming to align with the key principles of HF. As of May 2017, Ottawa had scored a four on 71% of the questions, three on 14% of the questions, and two on 14% of the questions. The lower scores (two) were due to the length of time it took HF program participants to find housing and the degree of housing affordability that was being achieved. The City is working to improve these scores; however, local rental market realities effect the ability to move people into housing within one month, as well as the affordability of units in Ottawa, both of which translate into a lower score on the rating scale. New funding through the provincial HFG program will allow the City to increase the housing subsidy that is available for participants to achieve a greater depth of affordability and thus improve our rating.

OUTCOMES

From April 1, 2015, 619 homeless single adults/youth have been housed through the HF program as follows:

- 317/619 (51%) moved into private market housing
- 176/619 (28%) moved into supportive housing

- 126/619 (21%) moved into social housing

NEXT STEPS

As part of the mid point review of the 10 Year Plan, an operational review of the HF program will be undertaken, which will include a fidelity assessment by an external provider, to ensure that the program is aligned with best practices in service delivery, identify any needed enhancements and opportunities for program expansion.

cc: Janice Burelle, General Manager, Community & Social Services