

# A Review of Coordinated Access with Community-level Experts

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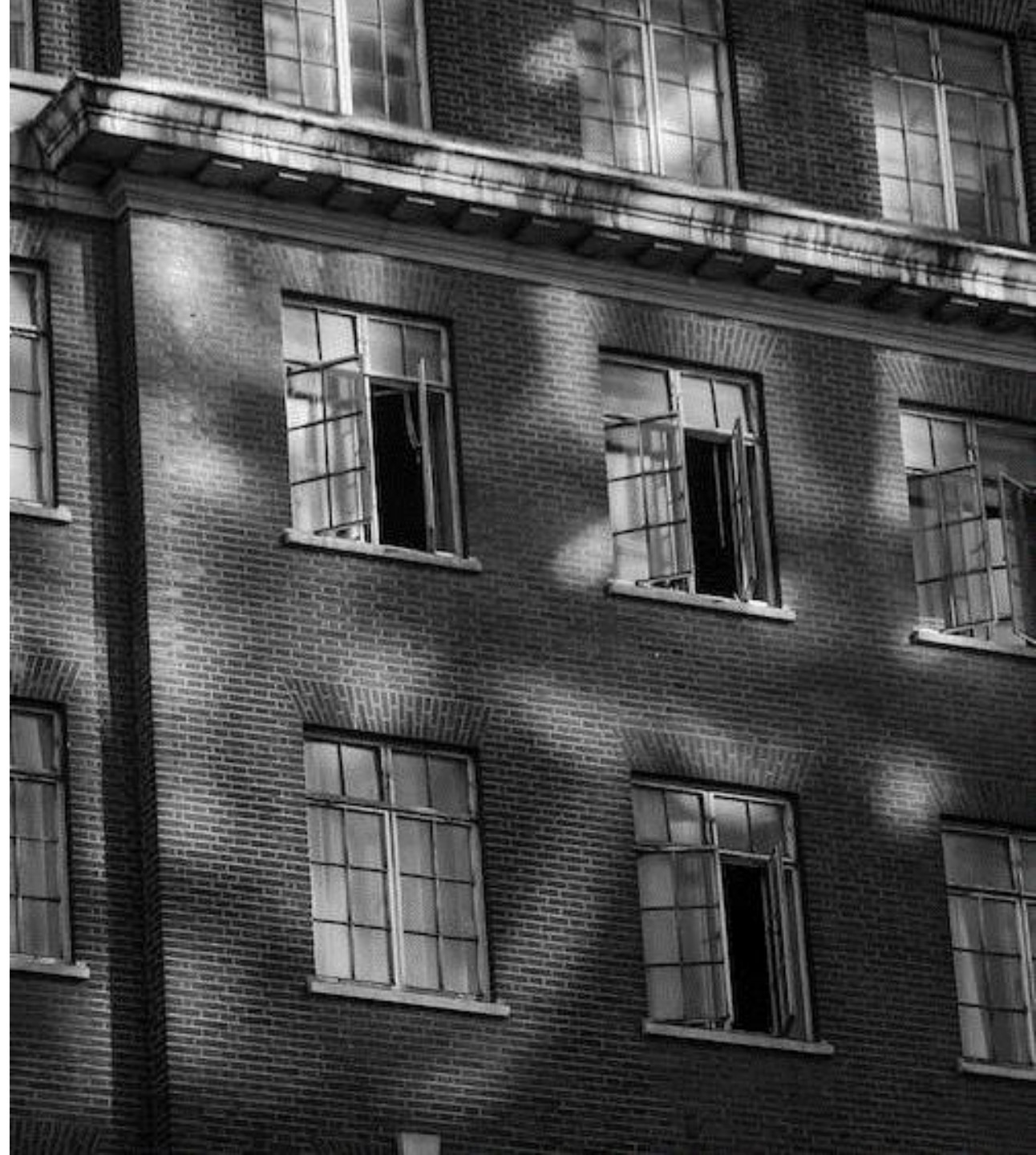
Mary Anne Martin (Sam Blondeau, Naomi Nichols)

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# The Introduction of Coordinated Access

- National Housing Strategies Act
- National Housing Strategy
- Reaching Home
- Coordinated Access:
  - Access
  - Assessment
  - Prioritization
  - Matching and Referral



# **The Need for Research: What was our team noticing?**

- concerns about process
  - lack of collaboration
  - confusion about how the system works
  - the duration, visibility, and gravity of homelessness
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“Despite their ambitious objectives and widespread implementation, the evidence base for coordinated systems is limited” (Ecker et al., 2022, p. 2)

# Our Research Response

## Phase 1 (for transparency and navigability)

To map the official process for getting housing in Peterborough



## Phase 2 (a listening exercise)

To assess whether this process was functioning as designed

- interviews: 48 service users, 42 service providers
- online survey with service providers
- reviewed available local By-Name list data

# Access

- many without housing not using local shelters
- access points not accessible to everyone in housing need
- may not make the system easier to understand/navigate
- many did not understand how CA worked nor the importance of the By-Name List

# Assessment

- assessment key to prioritization, matching and referral
- inconsistency from: staff turnover; variation in its administration
- problematic assumptions of objective and timeless assessments



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“Like we put so much stock in the SPDAT or the VAT or whatever assessment tool you're using, whether it be mental health or substance use or whatever it is. And they are decision assistance tools, right? If you and I did a SPDAT right now or did some mental health screener, based on our frame of mind right now, we would score in a certain way. If something stressful happened tomorrow morning and I redid the test, I would score in a different way. Right? That's the whole idea of an assessment is that it's a point in time. And it also is really reliant on the skill of the assessor and the relationship that the person has with the assessor.”

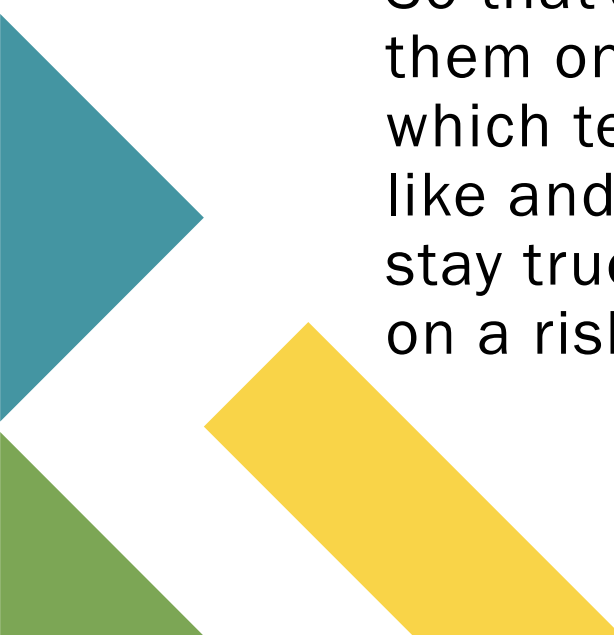
(Kate, Service provider, emphasis added)



# Assessment

- intended to reduce subjectivity/bias- but what about professional knowledge & judgement?
- frames the problem as lack of structured decision making and coordination of services
- diverts attention from the primary drivers of homelessness
- standardized tool as causing distress





“I think it creates many barriers. I think putting people through the By-Name List and the process of the SPDAT is disgusting, de-humanizing. Being a person with 20 years of lived experience in substance use, mental health and homelessness, I think it's a horrific programme that I have no choice but to utilise ... To sit down with an individual who is currently living in crisis and survival mode, asking them about sex work, substance use, mental health, family issues, as a person who maybe doesn't know them that well. In fact, I for sure don't know them that well, because it's a part of our intake process ... So that's problematic in itself. And then to tell them that we've scored them on a scale of 1 of 28, or whatever the number is, depending on which test it is. Then they ask what that means and what that looks like and I have to give them an honest answer, because that's how I stay true to myself today. I have to let them know that I've put them on a risk scale.”

(Amy, service provider)

# Prioritization

- undermined by:
  - unreliability of vulnerability assessment results
  - lack of suitable housing options
- a complex political, economic, social, and psychological undertaking – not simply a technical one



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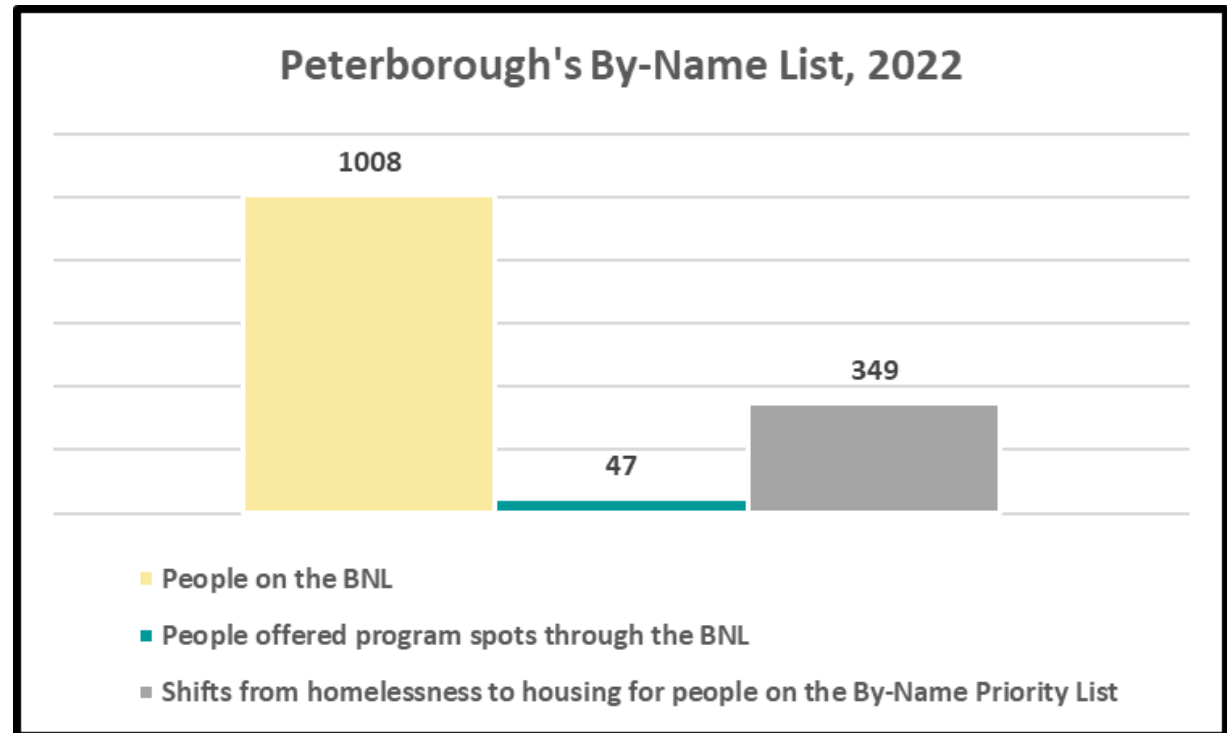
"We're not being offered any places... We do our SPDAT every 3 months [at the Overflow Shelter] ... I'm thinking, what if maybe they're not even entering [our updated scores] ... They don't tell you what number you are [on the list]."  
(Tiffany, service user and provider)

# Matching and Referral

- people in need far outweigh the housing resources they need
- resource scarcity undermines matching and referral & impedes effective use of local prioritization matrix
- **The process set up to advance the right to housing by fostering fairness in the face of resource scarcity is still not housing the people determined to need it most.**
- street- and shelter-living erodes mental and physical health, adding to vulnerability to homelessness, its effects, and the likelihood of being assessed as high-acuity.



The local HIFIS revealed that fewer than 5% of the 1008 people on Peterborough's By-Name List were offered housing through Coordinated Access in 2022.



# Final Thoughts

## The Human Touch:

- human-centred, relational aspects of social service work are necessary
- housing/housing access is a social and political issue (vs a technical one)
- assessment, matching, and referral are not simply a technical process

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## Housing as a human right:

- requires adequate, suitable, affordable housing stock
- is impeded by prioritization of private property ownership (vs continued investments in publicly owned housing stock)
- sees land and shelter as collective resources we all require (vs private commodities)

# Recommendations

- Doing the research to check the pulse of the community
- Working in community
- Forums





THANK  
YOU

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Mary Anne Martin  
Post-Doctoral Researcher  
Research for Social Change Lab  
Trent University  
[marymartin@trentu.ca](mailto:marymartin@trentu.ca)

