

# Managing Risky Behaviours and Challenges to Prevent Housing Loss in Permanent Supportive Housing

**CAEH23 (November 8, 2023)**

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# Disclosure

- Collaborators: Drs. Vicky Stergiopoulos (CAMH), Sean Kidd (CAMH), John Sylvestre (uOttawa), Tim Aubry (uOttawa), Abe Oudshoorn (Western University), Carrie Anne Marshall (Western University), Christina Mutscheler (uOttawa), Frank Sirotich (CMHA Toronto)
- Research Support: Tim de Pass (CAMH), Joseph Voronov (CAMH)
- Funding: Infrastructure Canada
- Acknowledgments: Community partner organizations that supported data collection and all individuals who participated in the research
- No conflicts of interest to report

# Background

- Permanent supportive housing (PSH) is a best practice intervention for stably housing people experiencing chronic homelessness and mental illness
- Approximately 10-20% of individuals experience difficulties in PSH that can result in eviction, recurrent homelessness, and/or rehospitalization
- Past research examining predictors of housing outcomes in PSH have not been able to accurately identify who would be unsuccessful in 1-2 years
- High-risk behaviours/challenges have been minimally examined in past research as potential contributors to housing loss

# High-Risk Behaviours and Challenges

## Risks to Self:

- Overdose
- Suicidality and suicide attempts
- Non-suicidal self-injury
- Falls and fall-related injuries

## Risks to Others and Building:

- Intentional/unintentional fires
- Hoarding
- Apartment takeovers and unwanted guests
- Trespassing
- Physical and sexual violence
- Property damage
- Drug selling
- Human trafficking

## Histories of Supportive Housing Applicants:

- Suicide attempts: 20.3%
- Physical assaults: 17.7%
- Non-suicidal self-injury: 14.7%
- Fire safety concerns: 8.0%
- Property damage: 7.9%
- Hoarding: 5.9%

Sirocich, F., & Rakhra, K. (2021). Examining the need profile of supportive housing applicants with and without current justice involvement: A cross-sectional study. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal, 44*, 291-298.

# Research Objectives

- The objective of this mixed-methods study is to: [a] identify promising approaches, and barriers to managing risk behaviours in supportive housing and [b] develop resources to augment risk management approaches in supportive housing for the purpose of preventing recurrent homelessness.
- This presentation will:
  - Describe the barriers, facilitators, and approaches to managing high-risk behaviours in supportive housing and Housing First programs
  - Identify innovative person-centred risk management practices

# Study Design

Component	Target Sample	Current Sample	Status
Rapid review	-	-	Complete
Qualitative interviews	30	31	Nearing completion
Online survey	≥200	~115	Ongoing
Final report and resource development	-	-	Spring 2024

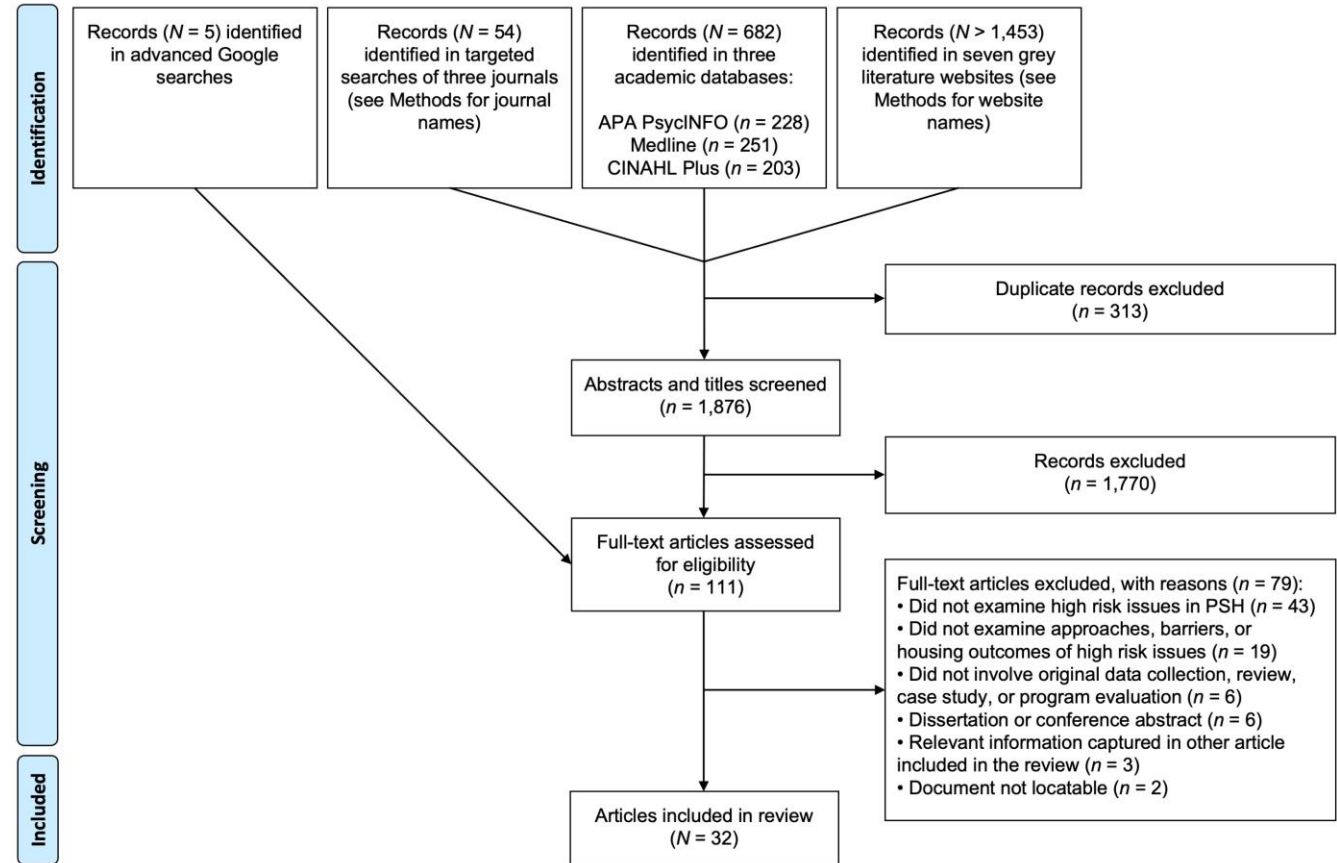


# Rapid Review: Methodology

Research questions:

1. What impacts do high-risk behaviours and challenges have on housing tenancies in PSH/HF?
2. What are the approaches and barriers to managing high-risk behaviours and challenges in PSH/HF programs?

High-risk behaviours and challenges were defined broadly: **any critical events or serious behaviours that are potentially life-threatening and/or may jeopardize a person's housing tenure.**



# Rapid Review: Housing-related Outcomes

- Overdose as a leading cause of death in Housing First programs (two studies)
- Greater hostility > Higher likelihood of leaving a single-site Housing First program (one study)
- Suicide/self-injury > no effect on PSH exits (one study)
- Interpersonal abusiveness > no effect on PSH exits (one study)
- Property damage > no effect on PSH exits (one study)

**Key Message:** Insufficient evidence to conclude how high-risk behaviours and challenges affect housing stability, though overdose is a serious concern in PSH and HF programs that needs to be addressed.



# Rapid Review: Approaches to Managing Risk

## Clinical

- Specialized supports (e.g., hoarding specialists)
- Risk-related screening tools
- Safe onsite drug use spaces

## Relational/Educational

- Advocacy with landlords on damage debts
- Guest management education with residents

## Surveillant

- Security cameras
- Staff check-ins and home visits

## Restrictive

- Exclusion of at-risk individuals
- One guest policies
- Self-isolation to avoid conflict

## Strategic

- Non-use of first floor apartments
- Non-eviction housing transfers

## Design-based

- Stovetop motion sensors
- Women-only programs

## Legal

- Pursuit of charges following offences
- Support to report crimes

## Self-defence

- Weapon possession for safety

# Qualitative Interviews: Barriers in Risk Management

- Organization is landlord; can undermine the relationship-building/support work between case managers and residents
- Landlord tolerance of disruptiveness/behavioural issues (partially mitigated with private market rentals when there is dedicated housing liaison)
- Risk issues used as an 'out' by private market landlords wishing to leave housing partnerships/increase their rents in line with current market value
- Service waitlists lead to developing emergent high risk issues becoming crises before supports are accessible
- Understaffing (insufficient time for prevention and early intervention work) and staff turnover (relationship loss for residents)
- No phones or call buttons in unit
- Rigid and limited information obtained via screening and assessment tools

# Qualitative Interviews: Facilitators in Risk Management

- Community partnerships, such as mental health agencies and fire departments
- Access to multidisciplinary team for consultation and intervention
- Organization is landlord or landlord is nonprofit agency; allows for more comprehensive exploration of non-eviction solutions and sometimes use of loopholes to address problems (e.g., subleases permit programs to directly remove guests in apartment takeovers)
- Prioritization of relationships with landlords
- Small community size (histories of housing applicants are generally more well-known)
- Large organization size (more capacity to take on the financial costs of risk incidents to retain tenancies/access to housing units, and bring in nursing and allied health supports)

# Qualitative Interviews: Promising, Person-Centred Practices

- Reframing risk behaviours as a symptom of trauma and structural violence needed for survival and coping (including with calmer supportive housing environments)
- Use of ethical decision-making frameworks for exploring intervention options
- Relationship building as primary goal with residents to prevent risk issues
- Acknowledgment of the risks of eviction on future housing obtainment and how (and if) eviction aligns with organizational mandates and philosophy
- Recognition that residents may experience moral dilemmas with guest management; provide support with community integration and connect guests to housing supports
- Risk response practice drills for staff
- Mobile managed alcohol program yielded reductions in violence
- Specialist roles on support teams (e.g., hoarding specialist, landlord liaison)

# Key Learnings to Date

- There are generally eight types of approaches to managing risk in supportive housing, with some having the potential to be more controlling and autonomy limiting, and others being more person-centred; the approaches are complex and their effectiveness cannot yet be evaluated
- Although the rapid review found few studies examined how high-risk behaviours and challenges affected housing stability, service providers overwhelmingly identified risks to others/building as being the primary threat for housing loss
- Hoarding and drug selling are the two types of high-risk issues where providers feel their programs' approaches are least effective
- There are concrete, person-centred risk management approaches that programs are using to prevent housing loss throughout the sector; there is a need to further share knowledge on these innovative practices

# RESEARCH STUDY RECRUITMENT

Our national survey of supportive housing  
and Housing First service providers  
examining approaches to managing risk is  
now online:

<https://redcap.link/riskinhousing>

We are seeking to reach service providers  
across Canada.

## Do you work as a service provider in supportive housing?

We want to hear from you for a study on managing  
risk issues and behaviours in supportive housing

### What Is the Objective of the Study?

This study is examining how supportive housing programs prevent and manage risk issues and behaviours encountered with tenants, such as violence and overdose, as well as the challenges encountered in risk management.

### Who Is Leading the Study?

Dr. Nick Kerman (Principal Investigator) of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH).

### What Is Involved in the Study?

- We are inviting service providers who work in supportive housing programs to participate in an online survey as part of the study.
- The survey takes approximately 30 minutes to complete.
- Compensation for study participation will be provided.

### Where Can I Participate in the Survey?

- The survey can be accessed online at: <https://redcap.link/riskinhousing>

### Who Can I Contact to Learn More about the Study?

416-535-8501 x33528

[Timothy.dePass@camh.ca](mailto:Timothy.dePass@camh.ca)

The security of information sent by e-mail cannot be guaranteed. Please do not communicate personal sensitive information by e-mail. Email is not routinely monitored outside of work hours. Please do not use e-mail to communicate emergency or urgent health matters. If it is a medical emergency, call 911.

For information about programs and services at CAMH, please visit [www.camh.ca](http://www.camh.ca) or call 416-535-8501 (or 1-800-463-6273).

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# Thank You

If you would like to be notified about study updates and forthcoming publications and resources, please contact:

[Nick.Kerman@camh.ca](mailto:Nick.Kerman@camh.ca)

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Kerman et al. *Harm Reduction Journal* (2023) 20:140  
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12954-023-00873-z>

Harm Reduction Journal

REVIEW

Open Access



## Managing high-risk behaviours and challenges to prevent housing loss in permanent supportive housing: a rapid review

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### Research Snapshot

Managing high-risk behaviours and challenges to prevent housing loss in permanent supportive housing

#### What you need to know

Permanent supportive housing (PSH) provides an affordable and safe place to live for people experiencing mental health or addiction challenges and/or those who are homeless. However, these individuals can have high-risk behaviours and challenges that can put their housing stability at risk. Research has not looked closely at the relationship between high-risk behaviours and housing stability in people living in supportive housing. This paper presents the findings of an analysis of 32 studies, looking at how high-risk behaviours and challenges impact the housing stability of PSH residents. It also presents strategies that agencies and residents use to prevent high-risk issues from occurring in PSH.