COH
Canadian Observatory on Homelessness
the homeless hub

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Mental Health Commission of Canada
Commission de la santé mentale du Canada

Housing First Assessment Tools Task Force: Objectives and Methods

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Centre for Research on Educational and Community Services
Centre de recherche sur les services éducatifs et communautaires

Task Force Objective/Rationale

- To develop a brief consensus statement that will identify key assessment tools for potential use by communities that are planning and implementing housing first programs. The field is currently unaware of the wide range of options beyond instruments that are being actively promoted by their developers

Composition of Task Force

- A small group of researchers with extensive experience with measures relevant to those who are mentally ill and homeless will do the initial work of identifying candidate measures
- A process of consultation with a wider group of users and stakeholders will then be completed before the advice is forwarded to the field and government decision makers

Sponsorship and Support of Task Force

- The work of the TF was conducted under the aegis of the ***Canadian Observatory on Homelessness*** (COH) as one of its related research activities. The ***Mental Health Commission of Canada*** (MHCC) was a primary collaborator with At Home/Chez Soi researchers volunteering their time to the effort and MHCC project leadership actively involved in communication with key communities and government partners

Assumptions Underlying Work

Key tasks for communities include:

1. Setting priorities for Housing First programming and support
2) Assessing clients for applicability and supporting the determination of appropriate intervention
3) Planning and outcome monitoring for individual clients receiving case management
4) Program and system monitoring and evaluation

Assumptions Underlying Work (contd.)

- There are a number of varied purposes and related tools that can be employed for planning and evaluation. It is important to match the tool to the purpose
- Whenever possible the use of existing, well standardized and tested assessment tools should be considered
- Methods of scale development should meet academic standards, be well specified and undergo scientific peer review
- Burden upon assessors is a major consideration with brief scales preferred over longer ones

Assumptions Underlying Work (contd.)

- Scales and algorithms are intended as aids to population and individual level planning and evaluation, they are not intended to replace decision making and the judgments of those who are using them
- Effective and low cost approaches to training and technical support in implementing assessment and case management tools need to be considered

Steps Taken by the Task Force

1. Develop conceptual frame that defines the key assessment purposes and levels
2. Do a quick scan and identify most promising candidate tools/scales
3. Establish criteria and rate scales to identify strengths and weaknesses
4. Ascertain whether there is a need for the development of new assessment tool and propose how this might be accomplished
5. Consult with key informants regarding findings and recommendations
6. Communicate consensus statement to target audiences

Qualities of Good Standardized Assessment Tools (HUD, 2014)

1. Valid
2. Reliable
3. Inclusive
4. Person-centered
5. User-friendly
6. Strengths-based
7. Housing First orientation
8. Sensitive to lived experience
9. Transparent

Knowledge Mobilization Strategy

- Engage community members regarding their needs
- Make community members and funders aware of the existence of the resources identified through TF
- Provide community members with easy to access resources and tools
- Provide communities with training and technical support
- Support the building of community capacity to become self sufficient in using tools.

TF Members

- DR. TIM AUBRY (University of Ottawa)
- MEAGHAN BELL (Calgary Homeless Foundation)
- DR. JOHN ECKER (University of Ottawa)
- DR. STEPHEN GAETZ (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, York University)
- DR. PAULA GOERING (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health)
- CATHARINE HUME (Mental Health Commission of Canada)
- STASHA HUNTINGFORD (University of Calgary)
- CAROLINE JOHNSON (Centre for Northern Families)
- ALLYSON MARSOLAIS (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, York University)
- DR. GEOFFREY NELSON (Wilfrid Laurier University)
- BRUCE PEARCE (End Homelessness St. John's)
- LAURAL RAINE (City of Toronto – Streets to Homes)
- DR. SAM TSEMBERIS (Pathways to Housing)
- DR. ALINA TURNER (Turner Research & Strategy)