

HOME FOR GOOD PROGRAM

WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

AUGUST 2017

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Home for Good is a provincial funding program for Housing with Supports to be implemented over the next 2 years. Four consultations were recently hosted to inform the City of Toronto's Home for Good program development.

A total of 170 people attended, including City of Toronto staff from Shelter, Support, and Housing Administration, and participants from alternative housing providers, shelters, housing help centres, developmental services, supportive housing and community support providers, and health services.

The first consultation was held in early May, and informed the City of Toronto's application to the provincial Expression of Interest submitted on May 19th 2017. Three additional consultations were hosted in August. The purpose of these sessions was to gather feedback and input on the implementation of provincial Home for Good funding for housing with supports in Toronto.

This document summarizes the feedback we received on three key engagement questions:

- RFP Categories and Processes
- Levels of Funding and Support
- Referral Pathways

Thank you to all those who participated. Your input and ideas will help shape implementation as the program is further developed.

KEY THEMES

- Partnerships and collaboration between agencies and across sectors is essential, particularly with the healthcare sector
- Focus on providing a higher subsidy and more supports to fewer people
- A standardized assessment tool is needed
- Housing Allowances should be flexible and range from \$250 - \$800
- \$30,000 may not be enough to support tenants who have complex needs
- Continuity of care between housing access or shelter workers and follow-up housing supports is important to create housing stability
- Investing in landlord engagement is a valuable approach to increase access to housing
- Creating system flow has benefits, but a client centred approach is required when moving people out of housing with supports
- Homelessness prevention is an important element of any housing program
- The end date to the program is a concern for many providers
- The limited availability of housing may impact the success of the program
- More engagement with Indigenous organizations is needed

WHAT WE HEARD

1. RFP CATEGORIES AND PROCESSES

KEY THEMES

- Overall support for the three phases proposed
- Create opportunities for more flexible RFP processes and encourage innovation and partnerships
- Partnerships are essential to creating successful Housing with Support programs
- Clients need continuity of care when moving from homelessness into housing
- Better engage private landlords to increase the availability of affordable and high quality housing

GENERAL FEEDBACK

Participants encouraged the City to adjust the RFP process to be more open and less rigid. There was general agreement that the RFP process should foster the creation of partnerships between agencies, or sectors of service, rather than encourage competition.

There was strong support for the coordination of housing and health services, with some participants suggesting partnerships with healthcare providers be a requirement of the RFP. This was particularly applicable for those programs serving high-support clients with complex mental and physical health care needs. Participants also suggested that the City facilitate partnerships between RFP applicants and the LHIN's. Many participants referred to the LHIN's Coordinated Care Plans as an example of how care coordination can be successfully implemented.

Some participants suggested that the RFP's should require the adoption of a standardized support model with a minimum level of service delivery.

A key concern of many participants was the lack of provincial commitment to ongoing funding and how agencies would design programs with no funding guarantee after 2 years.

It is clear that further engagement with Indigenous organizations is required to understand how the program can address the needs of Indigenous communities in Toronto.

PHASE 1: ENHANCING COORDINATED ACCESS TO HOUSING SUPPORTS

There was agreement among participants that increasing funding to current programs through the Coordinated Access to Housing Supports pilot process was the right approach considering the time constraints and program success. Though, there were a number of suggestions for how the program could be improved.

A number of participants suggested that eligibility criteria for the Coordinated Access to Housing Supports pilot should be expanded to include other target groups. Participants noted that applications should also be accepted from Housing Help Centres and Drop-In's, and emphasized that those who are chronically homeless aren't always visible in the service system.

Others suggested that the Coordinated Access to Housing Supports pilot should be available to Alternative Housing Providers who have tenants who might wish to transition into private market housing with a housing allowance and supports.

Housing Allowance application process

Participants commented that the current process for accessing a Housing Allowance, involving an agency, the City, and the Province is confusing and complicated, especially when working with private landlords. In particular, the delay in initial payments makes it difficult to secure units. Some suggested that a tool to assist in calculating the value of Housing Allowance their client is eligible for would be helpful, as well as being more clear about who can apply.

Continuity of care

Many participants emphasized the disconnect when transferring clients to follow-up supports and the need for continuity of care as people move into private housing. Participants suggested a range of solutions such as warm transfers between housing and follow-up staff, or imbedding housing workers and follow up workers in the same agency. The Salvation Army brief triage team was referenced as an example of how this is currently being done successfully.

Landlord recruitment

Participants recognized that while the availability of supports is positive, the impact will be limited if there is no additional housing stock. There was strong support for the implementation of programs to incentivize landlords to house formerly homeless tenants. There was a recognition that building and maintaining landlord relationships requires an investment of resources and specialized skills.

Suggestions for this type of program included:

- Guaranteed supports for tenants
- Vacancy loss funding
- Damages funding for damage beyond the value of the security deposit
- Training around landlord and tenants' rights and responsibilities
- A single point of contact for landlords to get support and advice on dealing with tenant issues

Participants suggested that, in return for these services, landlords could commit units to the program for a minimum amount of time.

Housing quality

There was some concern raised about how to monitor the quality of housing available through Home for Good program. Housing quality was identified as a key element of creating housing stability for tenants and the implementation of housing standards was suggested.

PHASE 2: ENHANCING SUPPORTS TO CURRENT PROVIDERS

There was agreement among participants that increasing funding to those already serving the target group/s is a good idea. Participants identified that the current funding levels are not sufficient as providers support more tenants than they are funded for. Additionally, some providers who already house this client group do not currently receive any support-based funding. Some agencies have units available but have previously not had access to funding to operate them as housing with supports.

In contrast, there was a concern that this approach may have a limited impact on creating new housing.

In addition to case management, some participants suggested other supports should be provided, such as cooking, cleaning and employments skills. Participants also asked that other needs of agencies are considered, such as the provision of appropriate security measures in buildings.

TCHC supports

While there was support for leveraging existing assets to create housing with supports, there was some concern about using TCHC units. Some participants raised the issue that many units are not in a state of good repair and are often isolated from community amenities. There was also concern that TCHC buildings may not be suitable for on-site housing with supports as there is not the appropriate communal space available. Some suggested capital work would need to be done to remedy this, or suggested focusing on smaller buildings rather than apartments.

PHASE 3: OPEN CALL FOR IDEAS

Participants were supportive of the proposed Phase 3 of the program. Participants encouraged the City to be open to ideas as much as possible, not to focus on funding one large project, and to fund innovative and new programs where possible. Participants also identified that the call for this RFP needs to be released as soon as possible to ensure agencies have sufficient time to develop and submit proposals.

Some participants identified specific projects they thought would be appropriate, including strong support for transitional housing, programs that would support the redevelopment of Seaton House, and Housing First for Youth projects. Some participants also encouraged the City to consider the needs of clients and tenants outside of downtown.

2. LEVELS OF FUNDING AND SUPPORT

KEY THEMES

- Support for providing a deeper subsidy to fewer people
- Increase the maximum amount of the housing subsidy to secure better quality housing and meet the needs of larger families
- Higher funding level should be available for very high-needs support clients
- Consider processes for flexible levels of supports that adapt to meet changing needs of clients over time

HOUSING SUBSIDIES

Attendees overwhelmingly agreed that it was better to provide a deeper subsidy to fewer people, rather than offering a lower subsidy to more people. This will enable households to secure better quality housing that encourages housing stability.

Suggestions for improving the current housing subsidy included:

- A higher subsidy for families
- Make it permanent and portable
- Ensure the value responds to market forces and inflation

Housing allowance amounts

Participants shared that the current maximum \$600 Housing Allowance is only adequate under certain circumstances and that a maximum \$800 allowance would be more effective. The feedback indicated that increasing the allowance would allow households to secure better quality housing, and would better serve larger households.

Bridging Grant

There was a general consensus that the current Bridging Grant program provides a sufficient amount of money to help clients secure housing in the private rental market. Some suggested that it should be increased, specifically to cover the first two month's and last month's rent, in lieu of the provincial/municipal application process being simplified. The question was also raised about whether this funding could be used to prevent homelessness by paying arrears (similar to Rent Bank).

HOUSING SUPPORTS

Funding levels – on-site

Feedback indicated that the proposed funding levels would be sufficient under some circumstances, but not all. There was a general consensus that the \$30,000/unit/year for high-supports on-site programs would not be enough to meet the needs of very high-support clients, however there was an acknowledgement that the design of the program, efficiencies of scale, and possible stacking with other health-related funding, would influence the financial viability. It was suggested that an additional funding bracket (above \$30,000) should be included to address the needs of high-support tenants.

Funding levels – scattered site

Many participants agreed that the scattered site support funding levels were appropriate, however this depended on the client group an agency was working with. Feedback suggested that some clients groups would need significantly more support than would be available under the proposed funding levels.

There was also support for the option for providing Follow-Up Supports for longer than one year, and the addition of other types of mobile supports who could visit people in their homes.

Case loads

The case loads of medium-support (1:20) and high-support (1:10) were generally accepted by participants, however there remained concern that the funding levels would only be sufficient to cover staffing costs and not additional costs such as damages and unit maintenance. It was also noted that clients do not fit neatly within levels of support and will fluctuate over time. Integrating a step up and step down process to match level of support with client need is one option to consider.

Eligible supports

Participants shared ideas about the types of supports that should be provided, identifying holistic supports, as well as harm reduction, peer support models, security, and damages as being key elements of operating housing with support programs for high-support needs tenants.

Funding for the provision of food is important for a number of participants and it was suggested that the cost of providing meals should be considered when determining funding levels.

3. REFERRAL PATHWAYS

KEY THEMES

- A centralized referral process is preferred, that leverages existing systems as much as possible
- A standardized assessment tool is strongly supported
- Monthly vacancy meetings were seen as an effective process for matching clients to units that would include provider input
- Creating system flow was supported by most participants, however there was an emphasis on ensuring that client choice was paramount in the process
- Matching and referral processes need to be sufficiently resourced, including with the right technology, to work efficiently and effectively
- Measurement tools and evaluations should be integrated into the program

EXISTING REFERRAL TOOLS

Many participants thought the creation of a specific waiting list for Home for Good units was not an appropriate use of resources, and that existing infrastructure could be leveraged and adapted to suit the needs of the program.

Many participants recognized that integrating with the Access Point would be a useful and important referral pathway. Some suggested that Home for Good could help to alleviate pressure on that list, however many also recognized that importance of relieving pressures on the shelter system. Some suggested that having a secondary sub-list on the Access Point waiting list was a possible way to integrate these two goals. Those requiring HIV supports was provided as an example of how this process is already in place in a partnership between the Access Point and Loft.

Using the Coordinated Access to Housing Supports approach to allocating housing subsidies and follow-up supports was generally supported, however there were concerns about access for non-shelter clients. SMIS was also identified as a tool which could be enhanced to assist with the matching process, as well as the Choice Based Rental System.

A number of participants highlighted that chronology of application date should not be used as the sole determinant for who has access to units. Vulnerability and support needs should also be considered.

ASSESSMENT TOOL

A standardized assessment tool was strongly supported among participants. Many suggested that the Housing Support Assessment Tool (HSAT) was useful in assessing client support needs as they move into housing with supports. Some added ongoing assessment were required to track client outcomes and

possible suitability for exiting housing with supports (where appropriate and in line with client preferences).

There was strong support for the idea that assessments need to be individualized and personal, and an acknowledgment that assessment requirements take time and must be properly resourced if they are going to be done properly.

MATCHING CLIENTS TO UNITS

Participants communicated clearly that there needs to be a well-resourced, and well understood, matching and referral process for all housing providers, including social, alternative and supportive housing. Some participants identified that these providers have their own referral processes already in place and that Home for Good should be integrated with these processes, however some also suggested that individual providers (particularly alternative housing providers) should not manage their own waiting lists as they do now. Rather, a centralized referral process should be implemented. Regardless, participants emphasized that providers should be engaged in the matching process to encourage housing stability.

Monthly vacancy meetings were suggested by a number of participants as a strategy for matching eligible clients to vacant units, though this approach would need to be sufficiently resourced to ensure it ran smoothly and was successful. Some thought that small meetings worked most effectively, and that one large group for all Home for Good units would not be a good approach. Some suggested that referral agreements, particularly for sub-populations, between housing providers and referring agencies could work in this setting.

Participants identified that the program required a large database for hosting all the possible units so that housing workers can see what is available and clients can be matched easily. There was also a suggestion from a number of participants that resources would need to be available for data management in order to ensure the referral and reporting processes were streamlined.

TARGET GROUPS

There was a strong emphasis on targeting programs towards supporting high needs and chronically homeless clients with mental health and addictions. Similarly, many participants suggested a focus on seniors, including supporting older people to exit the shelter system, and assisting seniors to age in place. Retrofitting current units was considered a key factor to creating this opportunity.

CREATING SYSTEM FLOW

The notion of creating system flow was supported by most participants, however there was an emphasis on ensuring that client choice was paramount in the process. Participants communicated that clients should never be forced or incentivized to move, however having the opportunity to move was seen as a positive.

Moving people out of housing with supports was seen as extremely challenging, though there were a number of suggestions about how this could be done effectively. A number of participants highlighted that a permanent housing subsidy would be needed for tenants to be confident moving from an RGI unit. It was recognized that a portable housing benefit may assist with this.

Participants further suggested that the subsidy offered (via a PHB or Housing Allowance) would need to be high enough to secure them a unit of at least the same, if not better, quality than their RGI unit.

One of the key challenges of moving people out of housing with on-site supports into the community is recognizing if the tenant is stable because of their easy access to supports and the community they're engaged with in their building. Moving someone into the community could require significant supports initially and then taper off as they stabilize.

Lastly, participants highlighted that this process could result in providers serving a higher proportion of high-support needs tenants in their buildings as low-needs tenants move out and higher needs tenants move in. This consequences of this outcome needs to be considered when designing the referral process and funding levels.

EVALUATION

There was a strong emphasis on ensuring that the data collection and reporting requirements of the Home for Good program is purposeful and contributes to an evidence base which can be used to support future program funding.

Participants agreed that measurement tools and evaluations need to be integrated into the program so we can see what works and ensure agencies are accountable. However, they also identified that these processes need to be suitably resourced at the agency and City level. Participants highlighted that a referral and matching process could help with data collection and reporting, while also alleviating the administrative pressures put on agencies.

Many participants emphasized that outcome measures should consider more than merely the number of people who are housed, but measure housing stability over time as well as quality of life.

NEXT STEPS

FUNDING ANNOUNCEMENT

We hope to hear an announcement of provincial funding levels by the end of August.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Request for proposals will be released through our Housing and Homelessness Services Network (HHSN) over the coming months. Please email ssha@toronto.ca to be added to the HHSN list.

CONTACT

For more information on Home for Good, please contact: ssha@toronto.ca