

# The Tools of Housing First: Evaluating a Client Needs Assessment

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# What is the Housing Support Assessment Tool (HSAT)?

- Tool developed by the City of Toronto to assess level and type of support needed to find and keep housing
- Supports common assessment as part of Housing First case management
- Assesses support needs in 12 service components

Housing & Homelessness History	Financial	Communication	Social Networks and Behaviours
Safety	Activities of Daily Living	Organization & Comprehension	Physical Health & Wellness
Mental Health & Wellness	Emergency Service Use	Substance Use	Legal

# Why use a common assessment tool?

- **Client level:** Support consistent, effective Housing First case management to support people to find and keep housing
- **Program level:** understand client needs within and across programs & manage caseloads
- **System level:** Inform service planning, program design and efforts to address priority housing and service needs at a system level

# What the HSAT is and is not:

## HSAT is designed to:

- Support informed client choice within available options
- Assess levels of support needed to find & maintain housing
- Inform Housing First case management & planning

## HSAT is NOT designed to:

- Restrict client choice
- Assess vulnerability or mortality risk, or provide clinical diagnosis
- Identify reasons someone can't be housed
- Replace other complementary tools

# Developing the tool

- Building on what works, customizing for Toronto
  - Review of existing tools
  - Creation of customized tool based on promising models, research, frontline experience & unique context

# Piloting the HSAT

- 1 year pilot program, Housing First program Hostels to Homes (H2H)
- HSAT completed at intake, housing & 3 month intervals

# Evaluating the HSAT

- Partnership with Dr. Stephen Hwang at Centre for Urban Health Solutions, for 3<sup>rd</sup> party evaluation
- Funding from Province of Ontario Local Poverty Reduction Fund



# Data sources

- Administrative program data and HSAT scores from 111 H2H clients
- Focus groups with 17 staff members
- Semi-structured interviews with 42 clients



# Results: Inter-rater reliability

- Good inter-rater reliability overall
- Highest consistency:
  - Substance use
  - Emergency service use
  - Homelessness history
- Lowest consistency:
  - Mental health
  - Social behaviours and networks

# Results: The HSAT in case planning

Staff described the HSAT as straightforward to administer and score

- Most completed in a single meeting over 10 minutes to 1.5 hours
- Multiple meetings with client occasionally necessary
- Most staff and clients thought the tool was helpful for case planning and future program evaluation

**“It was really thorough, and I think each segment was appropriate because they asked about...things that really pertain to looking for housing.”**

**- Client**

# Results: The HSAT in case planning

- Desire to viewing and share changes in scores over time
- Interest in better capturing relationship between personal challenges and broader systemic concerns
- Best administered if:
  - Completed conversationally
  - Had pre-existing trust and rapport

**“It really predicated on the engagement... If it’s there, then it’s an amazing tool.”**

**- Staff member**

# Results: HSAT and housing outcomes

- Initial HSAT of H2H clients who were housed by end of the H2H pilot showed:
  - lower proportions of financial concerns
  - lower proportion of mental health needs
  - higher proportions of emergency service use

...compared to those who were not housed
- The total mean HSAT score was not associated with housing status of clients in the H2H pilot

# Results: Changes in scores over time

- Sample of 34 clients with 2 or more HSATs
- Outside of housing status, not a lot of change in HSAT scores between assessments
- The greatest number of clients experienced a change in scores in:
  - social behaviours and networks (11 improved, 6 worsened)
  - communication (8 worsened, 1 improved)
  - finances (9 changed in either direction)

# Evaluation recommendations

Refine the HSAT questions that were not rated as consistently

Add questions to learn more about client housing experiences

Complete the HSAT in a conversational way

Complete the HSAT once staff and clients have built rapport

Develop a method to easily enter, store, summarize and access data

Use HSAT data to inform programs and policy, not only individual case planning



## Next steps for the HSAT

- Incorporating recommendations into an updated tool that is currently under development
- Transitioning to a three phased tool which builds on information gathered in previous phases



# Phased common assessment tool

Stages and timelines for delivery

## Screening & Triage



**Timing:** Intake – 36 hours

**Purpose:**

1. Gather an indication of which level of in-shelter case management support the client will require.
2. Ensure sufficient understanding of immediate supports needs in the first 7 days of the client's stay

**Administrator:** Worker conducting intake

## Initial Assessment & Prioritization



**Timing:** Within 7 days of intake to service, and updated every 3 months

**Purpose:**

1. Confirm the level of support required in shelter (refer to alternative level if required).
2. Determine level of support required in housing to facilitate appropriate referrals and inform housing search
3. Prioritization for access to various housing opportunities

**Administrator:** Qualified staff who have a minimum level of experience working with vulnerable clients, and have completed the online training.

## Full assessment



**Timing:** Approx 6 months, OR high acuity clients identified through initial assessment

**Purpose:** Full assessment of the client's support needs (aligned with HSAT)

**Administrator:** In-shelter case worker or housing worker.

## Next steps for the tool

- Further validity and reliability testing on updated tool
- Client and staff user testing for continued feedback and improved functionality
- Integrating into our Coordinated Access systems

# Acknowledgements

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