Prevention Assessment Tool

Prevention of homelessness is a huge task and can feel daunting. However, more and more organizations and communities are shifting from crisis to prevention. This Prevention Assessment Tool is designed for organizations and communities to assess current prevention strategies and identify areas for improvement and/or attention.

How you can use this tool:

1. Go through the tools with your team and actions and discuss if the action is applicable to your organization.
2. If applicable, select your current level of participation:
   a. No, and not yet considered
   b. No, but considered
   c. Yes
3. Add any other notes in the notes column.
4. Take action!

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| Is life skills education offered in your community to individuals vulnerable to housing instability? | Being a good tenant is not an innate skill. Instead it is a set of life skills that people can learn. These life skills are known to contribute to housing stability:  
   » Employment skills  
   » Tenant rights and responsibilities  
   » Interpersonal communication  
   » Financial management  
   » Independence skills such as cooking, cleaning, banking  
   Most organizations recognize the need for building life skills and provide some education support including handbooks, building tours, life skills training, and group programming. It is important to assist tenants to develop the skills required to maintain housing if housing stability is the goal.  
   RentSmart is a life skills program that incorporates a combination of the skills above. You can learn more about RentSmart through the Homelessness Prevention Toolkit.  
   **Highlighted Practice:**  
   Other life skills resources can be found by searching:  
   » Prosper Canada  
   » Financial Literacy in Canada |

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<td>There is a community resources guide or portal where people can find support if needed</td>
<td>People need support, whether informal support from friends and family, or access to more professional support services. Key to accessing support is knowing what is out there. Many communities have services directories, online portals and/or a tenant support or legal call-in line. <strong>Highlighted Practice:</strong> United Way 211 is one example of a support directory that is growing across Canada, that local services and supports can be listed within.</td>
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<td>Tenants have access to third party housing information and advice</td>
<td>Even in the best case scenarios, housing may come with challenges. Party housing information and advice, that is easily accessible, can help address problems before they become too big of an issue. Most provinces have tenant and legal aid resources, offered through government residential tenancy offices and non-profit organizations. Non profit credit counselling agencies are also helpful in providing financial advice and assistance if debt and finances are a significant concern. Make sure that tenants know who to call when they need information and advice.</td>
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<td>Tenants set housing and life goals prior to moving into a new place</td>
<td>Setting goals has been demonstrated as a factor in increasing housing stability. By linking successful housing to someone’s broader life goals, it reminds them why this home, at this time is important to THEM. It also puts them in the driver’s seat, encourages them to make choices and exercise control, and provides an empowering document to refer back to if things become tough. Successful Tenancy Action Plan (STAP) can be completed at intake to determine what a new tenant requires in order to access and maintain their housing. Ideally a STAP: » Is individualized » Is in writing » Describes specific triggers (and consequences) » Is solutions oriented » Defines roles and responsibilities of tenant, support and housing provider » Outlines who to contact when there is a problem » Identifies what constitutes “a problem” » Includes timelines for action items » Can be measured (Peters, 2008) <strong>Highlighted Practice:</strong> Curo Group in the UK provides a “Passport to Housing” to help people prepare for a successful tenancy. This service is offered to applicants likely to be rehoused within six to eight months, taking the form of an assessment process as well as household income and expenditure check. This process culminates in a “success plan” that is agreed upon with each applicant. The success plan addresses areas such as debt, income, fuel costs and advice on setting up a home.</td>
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| **We use a pre-move in vulnerability assessment tool to identify areas of risk and where support is needed** | In Canada, Vulnerability Assessment Tools (VATs) tend to be used to assess the needs of people who are currently experiencing homelessness, as part of a screening and matching to supports tool. Examples from the US show VATs being utilized more broadly to identify people who are or may be at risk of housing instability.  
*Highlighted Practice:* Homeward Trust (Edmonton, Alberta) and its partner agencies use the Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT) to assess need and to prioritize service delivery based on client acuity. SPDAT is not a clinical tool, but rather assesses a client’s degree of challenges based on a 15-point web-based assessment.  
The Veterans Health Administration (Montgomery et al., 2013) uses a 2-question screening tool which then prioritized rapid rehousing and supports for veterans at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness. | | | | | |
| **Upon move-in, tenants receive a move-in package, conduct a move-in orientation and have reviewed the tenancy agreement in a way that checks for understanding** | Sometimes new tenants do not know how to work the stove, or how to unblock a plugged toilet. They may not know how to adjust the housing unit’s thermostat, or have appropriate food storage and food safety skills. For all of these situations, appropriate education through handbooks, tours, and one-on-one demonstrations work best.  
It is also important to include an overview of the supports and resources available as well as providing key contact information.  
*Highlighted Practice:* Beyond the Key to the Front Door: A guide to helping tenants keep their homes is a guide produced by Mainstay Housing. The guide identifies five key preventive measures to ensure successful tenancy including a move-in orientation. Access the guide through Mainstay’s website: www.mainstayhousing.ca | | | | | |
| **Tenants are provided with plain language materials on cleaning, conflict resolution, damages, problem solving, codes of conduct, etc.** | As part of orientations and move-in, provide tenants with clear guidelines and information about how live in the unit. Do not assume that people know information already or their literacy level. Check for jargon, technical language and acronyms. Use visual diagrams and flow charts whenever possible. Some housing providers put key information on fridge magnets!  
*Highlighted Practice:* Atira Women’s Resource Society uses a Good Neighbour Agreement that outlines all the things “a tenant can do as opposed to all the things a tenant can’t do” when being a good neighbour.  
Atira describes good agreement rules as ‘consistent, predictable, and transparent’ so tenants and staff know what the rules are, and that they are applied consistently over time. | | | | | |
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| There are low-cost/free furniture and household goods options to help people set up their home | ‘Creature comforts’ refers to the things that contribute to comfort and ease of mind. For lower-income or vulnerable populations, providing access to those creature comforts helps shift ‘housing’ into a ‘home’. What are the resources in your community that help provide low-cost or free housing holds goods and furniture?  
*Highlighted Practice:*  
Furniture Banks of Canada state that ‘4 walls alone don’t make a home... without furniture, it’s just an empty space’. Furniture Banks provide gently used furniture to help set up a home. |  |  |  |  |  |
| We visit our clients/tenants within 48 hours of move-in | Yes, please do this. It helps people feel welcome and supported (and is also an evidence-based practice to boot). |  |  |  |  |  |
| We track any housing complaints in order to understand the issues and identify solutions | Complaints are an incredibly rich resource to understand what is taking place in a housing community. By tracking complaints, providers and landlords can begin to understand what may be individual issues vs system issues. This is also a way to understand effective follow-up and solutions to common issues, and to identify where preventative changes can be made.  
In order to track complaints, there need to be clear pathways for making complaints, a system from triaging responses and common indicators to theme issues and identifying solutions. It is also essential that visual, plain language materials are provided to explain the process to tenants, inclusive of varying literacy levels.  
*Highlighted Practice:*  
Toronto Community Housing has a detailed Complaint Procedure that describes the scope, steps and policies around collecting and addressing complaints. This procedure is grounded in Human Rights, Harassment and Fair Access Policies. |  |  |  |  |  |
| Tenants have a sense of belonging and are encouraged to participate in community building activities. | Helping a new tenant become part of a community is a contributing factor to housing stability. First steps in helping people feel at home in a community includes being able to choose where to live, knowing the neighbourhood and feeling that they belong.  
Some communities actively pay attention to community building activities. |  |  |  |  |  |
| Tenants have access to peer support | Talking to and receiving support from someone who has lived similar experiences is important for anyone, and especially individuals who are marginalized or who have experienced trauma.  
*Highlighted Practice:*  
The Coalition to End Homelessness in Victoria, BC provides one-to-one peer mentorship between people in housing transition with peers who have similar lived experience who have made a successful transition to housing stability. |  |  |  |  |  |
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<td>We have safety and harassment policies in place</td>
<td>Time to double check if you are not sure, and implement if you don’t have this yet. There are many good examples and templates to draw upon.</td>
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<td>We have a clear, detailed eviction prevention policy</td>
<td>Too often, housing and tenant/landlord relations have utilized a punitive approach, with the threat of eviction being used to address behaviours and rent arrears. The fastest way to shift organizational culture and practice towards housing stability is to introduce ‘no eviction’ or ‘eviction as last resort only’ policies. These types of policies require systems and organizations to think upstream and act preventatively. It can be a daunting shift to make, so a first step could be to ask ‘what if we introduced a no eviction policy?’ ‘What would change in how we support tenancies?’</td>
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| We have an eviction prevention team or third party that we engage to prevent evictions | Evictions are linked to homelessness, therefore preventing evictions is critical. Upstream approaches include education and early detection of issues. Eviction prevention supports have a significant role to play. Eviction prevention can include:  
  » Repayment plans for arrears that can allow tenants to pay back over time that is realistic based on financial circumstances of tenants  
  » Mediation services regarding landlords and other conflicts  
  » Landlord liaison services  
One of the challenges is that people who are experiencing circumstances that can lead to eviction are embarrassed or worried that if they say something, they will lose their housing. A third party can provide some distance with a landlord, and help solve the issue while protecting people’s dignity. | | | | | |
| We reward tenants who pay their rent in full and on time | Part of reinforcing the behaviour you want is to recognize and reward that behaviour. Behavioural insights provides a number of strategies to support successful tenancies. First, create a culture where paying rent on time and in full is the norm. Most people want to follow the norm.  
Next, think through strategies to reward behaviours that lead to successful tenancies. Here are some ideas:  
  » Good Neighbour of the Month recognition  
  » Link rent payments to common benefits such as new laundry machine or planting trees  
  » Rent reduction if one-year of rent paid in full and on time  
  » Investment of % of rent into individual savings accounts | | | | | |
| We provide at least 2 options for paying rent, one of them being automatic withdrawal | Payment of rent is the single most important factor in a successful tenancy. Having a reliable system to pay the rent is easier for everyone. For individuals who have been homeless, paying the rent is a learned responsibility; provide supports or systems to make this as easy as possible.  
If tenants are on third party direct payment to landlords systems, double check immediately if rent doesn’t arrive. Sometimes tenants are not aware that their payment status has changed, and may face eviction due to no fault of their own. | | | | | |
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<td>We conduct monthly visits for the first 6 months</td>
<td>The problems that can threaten a tenancy often evolve over weeks or months. Problems need to be identified early and solutions enacted. The first visit to the tenant is recommended within the first week of the tenancy. Further visits should occur regularly depending on the needs of the individual or family.</td>
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<td>Our organization and/or community has an emergency fund to assist people in times of emergency</td>
<td>Housing stability and homelessness prevention funds are usually short-term funding that can help with rent payments, utility payments and/or housing related costs such as pest removal and moving costs. There are a variety of eligibility requirements and ways that such funds are structured including loans and grants. Some organizations hold a certain percentage of operating funds into a ‘flex fund’ that can be drawn upon as a last resort to address needs as they come up such as damages, home cleaning services and planned moves. <strong>Highlighted Practice:</strong> All of Chicago operates 9 different emergency funds. According to Program Manager, Lynette Barnes, Emergency Funds are critical in helping people stay stably housed. For example, one of the funds provides up to $2500 within a 2 year period to help people with loss of employment, medical emergency, loss of benefits, etc. The fund can cover rent arrears, move in assistance, security deposit, help with utilities- prevention and diversion into other programs. Applicants identify their issue and can apply through various points across the city. It is essential that requests are processed very quickly and that the eligibility of requests is broad. Although access is distributed, administration and reporting of the funds are centralized.</td>
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<td>Private landlords are part of the housing conversation in our community</td>
<td>Only a fraction of the people who need stable, affordable housing with supports are housed within the non-profit and public housing sector. Most are dealing with private market rentals and private market landlords and property managers. It is important to build relationships and provide avenues for successful tenancies that create a ‘win-win’ for both tenants and landlords. <strong>Highlighted Practice:</strong> Landlord Engagement Toolkit describes many of the promising and best practices that exist currently. Friendly Landlord Network operates in BC, in the Lower Mainland, engaging landlords to house vulnerable youth.</td>
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<td>If things are not going well in a tenancy, we have a process and options for planned moves</td>
<td>“The use of planned moves (proactive or pre-emptive moves) was a widely used strategy to prevent the eviction of tenants. Proactive moves were used when a tenant had come into conflict with the landlord or other tenants and was on the verge of eviction. Proactive moves were typically to other housing units an agency may have in stock, but sometimes to other accommodation as a temporary measure. In any case, the objective is always to keep the tenant housed rather than sending them back to a shelter or the street, so that they don’t retrench into the streets while at the same time giving relief to landlords, neighbours, tenants, and staff.” (“Holding On: Supporting Successful Tenancies for the Hard to House”) <strong>Highlighted Practices:</strong> Eviction Prevention Toolkit, pg 16 outlines many different strategies to help prevent evictions, including planned moves.</td>
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<td>We provide regular staff training and professional development on housing stability best practices</td>
<td>Support staff to make the shift from crisis thinking and acting to prevention thinking and acting by supporting professional development and staff training. Regular staff training is key in the face of high staff turnover, and is demonstrated to increase staff resilience.</td>
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| Our Board of Directors includes representation from our client group    | ‘Not about us, without us’ is used to communicate the idea that no policy should be decided by any representative without the full and direct participation of members of the group being served or affected by that policy. How is your organization or community sharing the power of decisions with the people most affected?  
  **Highlighted Practices:**  
  Mainstay Housing is the largest non-profit housing provider in Ontario. The Board of Directors is comprised of both tenants and community representatives.  
  Homeward Trust has a requirement that a minimum of 4 of the 9 Directors are of the Indigenous community. ‘Directors are nominated through the Indigenous Nominating Committee and a nominating committee composed of stakeholders from the community and members of government. This governance model ensures that the views and culture of Indigenous peoples are respected and reflected in our work and relationships’. |                        |                   |     |     |       |
| We have discharge and transition plans/supports in place that specifically identify housing for people exiting from publicly funded systems | Government systems such as foster care, health and detox and corrections release people to no fixed address. Many people ‘fall into homelessness upon leaving such systems because they lack other options’. pg 20, A New Direction  
  These systems need to integrate discharge planning and be accountable for their contribution to homelessness. Communities also need to engage these systems and prepare for system-contributing inflows.  
  **Highlighted Practice:**  
  For youth transitioning out of foster care, Raising the Roof identified “very practical solutions that could be implemented, such as allowing youth to stay in care longer (i.e. until age 21); increasing allowances when they are transitioning out of care to ensure they don’t end up living in poverty; and offering more educational supports and life skills coaching to help them prepare for independence”. Pg 19, Youth Homelessness in Canada: The Road to Solutions.  
  Other approaches include introducing legislation or policies that require a ‘Duty to Prevent’ or ‘Duty to Assess’. |                        |                   |     |     |       |
| There is a coordinated access system to help people find services as required | Coordinated access is a whole systems shift that aims to increase the ease of access to a system and coordinate across silos. As coordinated access becomes implemented in Canada, it is important to ensure that coordinated access supports shifts to prevention instead of focusing resources primarily on crisis and acuity. |                        |                   |     |     |       |
There is a community collaboration network active

No one organization can prevent or solve homelessness by themselves. Collaboration is key to developing system and community-wide coordination, practices and approaches. Collaborative roles need to be resourced over the long-term, and exist to serve the system, not deliver programs and services.

Highlighted Practice:
The Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (the Coalition) was formed in 2008 with a mission to end homelessness in the capital region. The Coalition consists of local housing, health and social service providers; non-profit organizations; all levels of government; businesses; the faith community; people with a lived experience of homelessness (past or present); and members of the general public. This diverse membership, referred to as Coalition Stakeholders, come together to collectively address the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness in the capital region.

The Coalition’s activities centre around funding effectiveness, system effectiveness, inclusiveness, evidence-based reporting, and building capacity. As a backbone organization, the Coalition facilitates information sharing, relationship building, and strategic planning to ensure the collective efforts of stakeholders are making the greatest possible difference.

This document was informed by:

» Ready to Rent’s ongoing work with tenants, landlords and community organizations, and our impact measurement

» A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention

» Nudging Your Way to Reduced Rent Arrears

» Beyond the Key to the Front Door

» Eviction Prevention: Toolkit of Promising Practices

» Youth Homelessness in Canada: The Road to Solutions

» “Holding On!: Supporting Successful Tenancies for the Hard to House”