

# Building Knowledge: Research Highlights

## Defining Success for Supportive Housing Projects in British Columbia

### Introduction

As part of *Housing Matters BC*, the provincial government is providing capital and operating funding to develop new supportive housing for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. For example, the Province of B.C. has signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with municipalities to build supportive housing sites on city-owned land in Vancouver, Victoria, Kelowna, Surrey, Abbotsford, Maple Ridge, Campbell River, and Nanaimo. The province has committed more than \$520 million to create 23 new supportive housing sites with more than 2,000 units through these partnerships. In addition, more than 4,000 supportive housing units have been created through other provincial funding programs, including the Provincial Homelessness Initiative.

The purpose of this report is to explore what success looks like for supportive housing in B.C. and how success can be measured. BC Housing values a collaborative approach to determining this. In addition to the outcome reporting requirements from program funders, it is important to consult housing providers who are operating supportive housing sites to determine how they define the success of these sites — which indicators they think are most important for measuring success, and what data they have available to track these.

BC Housing met with housing providers who have supportive housing sites funded through MOUs between the province and municipalities.<sup>1</sup> Focus groups were conducted to inform case studies with Lookout Emergency Aid Society (First Place - Vancouver), John Howard Society of the South Central Okanagan (New Gate Apartments and Cardington Apartments - Kelowna), MPA Society (Sanford Apartments - Vancouver), and Coast Foundation Society (Pacific Coast Apartments - Vancouver). The purpose of these case studies was to learn how the housing providers define success for their supportive housing sites and how they plan to demonstrate these successes. This report summarizes the findings of those case studies.



<sup>1</sup> CitySpaces conducted the focus group and prepared the report for First Place (Lookout Emergency Aid Society).



## Importance of Defining and Measuring Success of Supportive Housing

Defining and measuring success of supportive housing is important for the following reasons:

- Outcome data helps government agencies and housing providers measure the success of their programs.
- Collecting data for outcome indicators helps create a body of evidence-based research to demonstrate the need for supportive housing.
- Measuring outcomes helps demonstrate accountability to funders and other stakeholders.
- Tracking outcomes can improve planning and help government and housing providers see the impact of any changes they make to supportive housing programs.

In order to understand the impacts of their funding, funders of supportive housing in B.C. want to know the following:

- If tenants are achieving housing stability.
- If tenants are connected to support services to maintain housing.
- If tenants are satisfied with MOU supportive housing sites and supports provided.
- How tenants are moving along the housing continuum.

## Defining Success of Supportive Housing

Many common themes emerged among the four housing providers consulted in terms of how they define success. They identified the following characteristics of success for their tenants and for their housing projects:

### SUPPORTIVE HOUSING TENANTS

- Tenants are maintaining housing
- Health outcomes for tenants are improving
- Tenants with addictions are using less or not at all (depending where they are at)
- Tenants are engaging in their communities in a meaningful way (e.g. volunteering, employment, taking a class, going for walks, etc.)
- Tenants are developing their social networks
- Tenants are setting and working towards achieving goals
- Tenants are solving problems more independently
- Tenants feel safe in their homes (units, building, neighbourhood)
- Tenants are developing life skills
- Tenants are making use of on-site supports as needed
- Tenants are connected to the community support services they need
- Tenants feel a sense of pride in their homes

### SUPPORTIVE HOUSING PROJECTS

- Sense of community develops among tenants and with staff (e.g. tenants look out for each other, strong participation in recreational/social activities available onsite, etc.)
- Stability of the building/calm atmosphere
- Strong partnerships and communication with community agencies that provide support services to tenants
- Strong communication and commitment from housing project partners
- Limited complaints from site neighbours
- Supports are client-centred and provided through a collaborative approach/tenants are invested in their goals
- Trusting relationships between tenants and staff develop



## Measuring Success

The housing providers were asked to identify what outcome indicators they felt would help measure whether they are achieving their respective visions of success. Some of the common indicators that supportive housing providers were interested and able to report were:

- Housing stability (blue)
- Incidents (e.g. conflicts on-site, complaints from neighbours, critical incidents) (green)
- Housing continuum indicators (e.g. where tenants go when they leave) (pink)
- Indicators around quality of life and connection to services – onsite and offsite (black)

LOOKOUT	JHSCSO		MPA	COAST FOUNDATION SOCIETY
First Place	New Gate Apartments	Cardington Apartments	Sanford Apartments	Pacific Coast Apartments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % turnover</li> <li>• Where tenants lived before moving in</li> <li>• % of tenants satisfied with housing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of tenants who have remained housed for at least one year</li> <li>• # of conflicts onsite</li> <li>• # of neighbour complaints</li> <li>• Where tenants go when they leave</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of tenants who have remained housed for at least one year</li> <li>• # of critical incidents</li> <li>• % of tenants who feel safe</li> <li>• % of tenants who achieved a goal on Wellness Plans</li> <li>• % of tenants who are satisfied with their living arrangements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of tenants who remained housed at least one year</li> <li>• % turnover</li> <li>• # of neighbour complaints</li> <li>• Where tenants go when they leave</li> <li>• # of referrals to supports</li> <li>• # of onsite activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # of police incidents at site</li> <li>• % of managed transitions vs evictions</li> <li>• % of tenants in compliance with meds</li> <li>• % of tenants with improved physical fitness</li> <li>• % of tenants engaged in one daily activity</li> </ul>

The clear consensus around how to define and measure success among the four housing providers consulted demonstrates that non-profit housing providers see the value in reporting outcomes and that common ground around which indicators to report on can be achieved.



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## Challenges with Data Collection for Evaluating Outcomes

There are challenges around collecting data to evaluate outcomes of supportive housing. Challenges include:

- Much of the data collected by housing providers is for case planning and not easily quantifiable for reporting.
- There is limited time for data collection and reporting, as staff are busy providing supports to tenants.
- Many tenant goals are achieved with the support of external service providers and housing providers may not have access to this information.
- There are concerns about confidentiality and privacy when sharing information.
- Not all housing providers require tenants to provide certain information (i.e. some housing providers prefer to collect information over time as trusting relationships develop between staff and tenants).
- Results of certain indicators can be difficult to interpret (e.g. reduced referrals could indicate that tenants are becoming more independent, but it could also mean perhaps tenants do not feel comfortable coming to staff for assistance).
- Tenants' goals and progress towards their goals are based on their individual needs, so tracking progress can be difficult.
- Not all sites conduct tenant satisfaction surveys (and survey questions and timing would not be consistent across sites).

## Initiatives Underway to Support Housing Providers with Collecting Outcome Data

In order to measure the success of supportive housing programs in B.C. as a whole, comparable data must be consistently collected from housing providers. BC Housing is currently working with supportive housing providers across the province to enter tenancy data into a common database. Having this centralized database of consistently collected tenancy information will allow BC Housing and the housing providers to report on tenant outcomes, including housing stability and housing-continuum-related indicators, to help measure the success of both supportive housing programs overall, as well as supportive housing sites specifically.