

# HOMELESS OUTREACH PROGRAM

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## PROGRAM FRAMEWORK

July 2014

4th Edition



## INTRODUCTION

BC Housing’s Homeless Outreach Program (HOP) connects people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to housing, income assistance and community-based support services. Outreach services, provided by non-profit organizations in communities across the province, directly engage and assess clients, assist them with personal goals, and connect individuals and families with housing and community based support services.

For many clients, HOP is often the first point of contact with the provincial system of housing and support services, and provides the opportunity to find long-term or more stable housing options, as well as referrals to appropriate services.

As of 2014, in some communities, HOP includes additional preventive measures to help individuals and families who are at immediate risk of homelessness due to crisis or transition. This enhancement, the *Homeless Prevention Program (HPP)*, includes additional rental supplements and supports that specifically target people leaving the corrections and hospital systems, women who have experienced violence or are at risk of violence, youth (including those leaving the care system), and people of Aboriginal descent.



This framework outlines the key elements, standards and guidelines of the Homeless Outreach Program and defines the roles and responsibilities of BC Housing and its partners in program delivery and management.

## PRINCIPLES

The following principles guide service delivery:

### **Program services are accessible and focus on client strengths as well as needs**

- Services are accessible to anyone<sup>1</sup> who is homeless or at risk of homelessness, regardless of ethno-cultural background, religious beliefs, physical ability, mental health status, gender identity or sexual orientation.
- Service providers will be informed about the diversity of sexual orientation and gender identities. Service providers will ensure access to outreach services for clients of all sexual orientations and gender identities, and create an atmosphere of dignity, safety and respect.
- A range of service approaches may be required to assure access to a diverse target population (e.g., approaches ranging from abstinence to harm reduction).
- Providing rapid access to housing and support services is fundamental to service delivery. Housing readiness is not a requirement. Acceptance of any services is not a requirement for accessing or maintaining housing.
- Service engagement is based on the willingness of clients to accept help in achieving housing stability, wellness and self-reliance. Clients must be given choice in terms of housing options as well as the services they wish to access.
- Clients are required to contribute a portion of their income towards rent.

### **Operations are transparent and accountable**

- Service providers maintain reliable records, policies and procedures that are attuned to the special needs of clients, and fulfill regular reporting obligations
- BC Housing conducts regular reviews and assessments to confirm that services delivered are effective in meeting the program's objectives and that an adequate quality of service is provided to clients
- BC Housing regularly reports to the provincial government and the public on the effectiveness of the program

### **The service environment is safe, secure and welcoming**

- The health and safety of staff and clients is of the highest importance. Service providers are not expected to deliver services to individuals in circumstances where the safety or security of the provider or any other individual may be threatened.
- Service providers should have a safety protocol in place that provides clear guidance for staff safety, as well as procedures to help ensure safety while engaged in outreach work. Safety protocols should be geared specifically to the context of the local community and reviewed periodically with all management and staff.

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<sup>2</sup> Reporting is based on new clients created during the last 12 months in the HSS database

## GOALS, OUTCOMES AND REQUIREMENTS

### Goals

1. To provide people who are homeless or at immediate risk of homelessness with access to housing and support services in order to reduce the likelihood of continued homelessness
2. To provide services that are focused on the particular circumstances of each client and that promote long term housing stability

### Objectives

1. Connect people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness with:
  - a. Secure, stable accommodation
  - b. Income assistance, where appropriate
2. Where clients have been placed as tenants, help them maintain their housing and their ability to live independently:
  - a. Provide direct support and tenancy skill training to maintain their housing
  - b. Liaise with community based service providers to maintain appropriate services to clients
  - c. Liaise with landlords and provide support to landlords where appropriate

Outcome	Reporting/Tracking	Performance Ranges
1. Increased number of clients obtain or maintain stable accommodation	a. Number and percentage of clients who move to stable accommodation	0% – 24% Does not meet 25% - 39% Meets 40% or greater Exceeds
	b. Number and percentage of clients who are housed and remain housed at six months	0% – 59% Does not meet 60% - 74% Meets 75% or greater Exceeds
2. Clients develop case plans and personal goals for housing, employment / income, health & well being	Percentage of adult clients offered a case plan <sup>2</sup>	0% – 49% Does not meet 50% - 69% Meets 70% or greater Exceeds
3. Increased number of clients who are referred to support services	Percentage of adult clients offered a referral to support services <sup>3</sup>	0% – 49% Does not meet 50% - 69% Meets 70% or greater Exceeds

For clients served in the *Homeless Prevention Program* enhancement, BC Housing will also monitor:

- Number of referrals to support services per client
- Percentage of clients offered a case plan and referrals

<sup>2</sup> Reporting is based on new clients created during the last 12 months in the HSS database

<sup>3</sup> As above

## TARGET POPULATIONS AND ELIGIBILITY

People who are homeless or at immediate risk of homelessness are the primary target population.

Where applicable, the *Homeless Prevention Program* enhancement targets individuals and families who are homeless or at immediate risk of homelessness due to crisis or transition:

- People leaving the corrections and hospital systems
- Women who have experienced violence or are at risk of violence
- Youth (including those leaving the care system)
- People of Aboriginal descent

The program is available to individuals and their dependent children (under age 19), regardless of ethno-cultural background, religious beliefs, physical ability, mental health status, gender identity or sexual orientation. See Glossary.

Unaccompanied children under age 19 can receive service if they are referred to the service provider by a social worker acting under the Child, Family and Community Service Act. They should be referred to child and youth serving agencies and/or the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD).

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### BC Housing:

- Funds service providers and establishes service agreements for the provision of program services
- Monitors and evaluates services
- Approves and reviews annual operating budgets and expenditures
- Works with and supports service providers by:
  - Assigning someone to act as a liaison
  - Providing guidelines and expectations for the provision of outreach services
  - Providing information, resources and assistance where appropriate
  - Promoting partnership development, the dissemination of practices, and service integration
  - Providing access to a Business Support Manager for database support
  - Identifying gaps in service provision and working with service providers to respond to gaps
  - Ensuring the program is transparent, accountable and responsive to local needs
- Provides rent supplements, where applicable

### Outreach Service Providers:

- Deliver program services
- Manage outreach staff
- Submit required program financial and performance measure data
- Notify BC Housing of any issues that may materially affect their ability to fulfill the terms of the service agreement
- Prepare and provide staff for regular program monitoring
- Maintain a clear service mandate that outlines how the program will meet the needs of clients
- Develop partnerships and liaise with other service providers to enhance service delivery

- Build and maintain relationships with landlords and provide supports when appropriate
- Enter service delivery data into the BC Housing sponsored database(s)

## OPERATING FUNDING AND AGREEMENTS

Service providers approved for program funding are required to enter into a Support Services Agreement with BC Housing. BC Housing funds eligible program costs, which may include:

- Staffing
- Program administration
- Rental Supplements (where available)

## PROGRAM SERVICES

**Among people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, service providers:**

- Directly engage clients where they are situated:
  - visibly homeless people
  - those at immediate risk of homelessness
  - hidden homeless
- Complete an intake, consent form<sup>4</sup> and assessment of each client
- Develop a Case Plan for all clients<sup>5</sup>
- Refer clients to appropriate housing options
- Refer clients to income assistance, using the Fast Track Protocol where available<sup>6</sup>
- Refer clients to support services
- Accompany clients to appointments, where appropriate

**Where clients have been placed as tenants, service providers help them maintain their housing and their ability to live independently:**

- Provide clients with rental supplements<sup>7</sup> where appropriate
- Provide tenancy support and skills training
- Provide follow up and ongoing support to tenants as appropriate
- Where appropriate, engage landlords in the process of supporting and maintaining client tenancies

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<sup>4</sup> Consent forms for the collection of personal information are provided by BC Housing. Clients who do not consent are still eligible for outreach services: they should be reported as an anonymous client. However, a release of client information is required in order to activate a rental supplement.

<sup>5</sup> Service providers funded by BC Housing are required to offer case planning services to all clients. BC Housing recognizes that under certain conditions, it may not be possible to provide this service on a regular basis, and some clients may choose not to engage in case planning.

<sup>6</sup> In communities where there is a Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation (MSDI) office.

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix C: HOP Rental Supplement Guidelines

### Service providers ensure optimal service delivery to clients by promoting linkages and partnerships with other service providers:

- Participate in local/regional initiatives to improve the quality and comprehensiveness of service to clients.
- **Fast Track Protocol:** The Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation (MSDSI) directly supports HOP clients by facilitating Income Assistance. In communities where there is an MSDSI office, clients who are accompanied by a HOP Outreach Worker are ‘fast tracked’ in the MSDSI application process. Additionally, employment plans can be geared to help clients meet their personal goals.

## REPORTING AND MONITORING

Regular monitoring helps service providers and BC Housing measure progress, work together to better match services to client needs, improve service delivery, and demonstrate the effectiveness of the program. The cornerstones of monitoring are risk mitigation, quality assurance and quality improvement. Key risks include client and staff safety, and the spread of infectious diseases. Regular monitoring that engages providers and clients allows both to work with BC Housing to identify successes and challenges with program delivery. Accordingly, the monitoring tools are designed to open dialogue with service providers to help identify and share practices that are working well, as well as elicit feedback from outreach clients.

Service providers are required to report on outputs and outcomes that directly relate to activities and services provided to clients. Consent forms for the collection of personal information are provided by BC Housing. The purpose of collecting relevant data is to monitor the success of the program, and for future program planning.

### Homelessness Services System Database

Service providers are required to enter data into the province-wide HSS database no later than the fifth business day of the month. It is the responsibility of the service provider to obtain written consent for information collection from clients to allow personal information to be entered into the HSS database.

Some data fields are mandatory: a client record cannot be created without entering information in the following fields:

- First Name, Last Name, and Date of Birth (or Age Estimate)
- Aboriginal Identity<sup>8</sup>
- Homeless Status (Absolute Homeless, Hidden Homeless or At Risk of Homelessness)

The following fields are required for program performance measurement:

- External referrals to support services
- Housing records created
- Six-month follow-ups

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<sup>8</sup> BC Housing follows the Aboriginal Administrative Data Standard, a document developed by the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation. The Data Standard ensures that information collected is complete, comparable and useful for planning and reporting purposes. Because of these reporting requirements, it is necessary for BC Housing to track Aboriginal identity as accurately as possible. Clients’ self-identified Aboriginal identity is assessed by using “yes”, “no” or “unknown”. “Unknown” captures those who choose not to disclose if they are of Aboriginal descent. This ensures that mandatory tracking will not act as a barrier to service.

- Rental supplements usage
- Case plans accepted or declined

### Operational Review

Every three years (or more frequently as required) the review is completed by BC Housing staff. The review is a springboard for structured discussion of program successes and challenges. The review includes interviews with the service provider's management and outreach workers, a review of service policies and procedures, and other relevant documents as requested. The review may also include an interview with landlords and community organizations to understand their experience with the program.

### Client Survey (Optional)

Service providers may administer an optional client survey at their discretion. The client survey solicits regular feedback directly from program beneficiaries. BC Housing can provide the client survey to service providers who in turn distribute it to their clients. Clients can then return the survey directly to BC Housing via mail. Survey questions focus on client satisfaction with: the outreach worker's accessibility; access to services; and the outreach worker-client relationship.

## SIGNATURES

The Program Framework requires final sign off by the BC Housing Vice Presidents of Operations and Corporate Services.



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Vice President, Operations



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Vice President, Corporate Services



## APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY

**Aboriginal:** Descendants of the original inhabitants of North America. The Canadian Constitution recognizes three groups of Aboriginal people - Indians, Métis people and Inuit. These are three separate peoples with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs.

**Absolute Homeless:** Individuals and families who are living in public spaces without legal claim (e.g., on the streets, in abandoned buildings or in tent cities); a homeless shelter; a public facility or service (e.g., hospital, care facility, rehabilitation or treatment centre or correctional facility) and cannot return to a stable residence; or individuals and families who are financially, sexually, physically or emotionally exploited to maintain their shelter.

**At Risk of Homelessness:** Individuals and families who are living in: temporary accommodation where they do not have control over the length and conditions of tenure (e.g., couch surfing or name not on lease) and do not have adequate personal space; time-limited housing designed to help them transition from being homeless to living in a permanent form of housing, e.g., transitional housing or second-stage housing; or accommodation where tenancy will be terminated within three months of application, (e.g., given notice by landlord or pending release from prison).

**At Risk of Violence:** Refers to situations where a woman indicates that she and/or her children are at risk of experiencing violence.

**Case Planning:** A method of providing service that involves assessing a client's complex needs and designing an individualized package of services and actions to address their situation. The purpose of case planning is to help the client reintegrate into the community. Case planning is a collaborative process between the individual and the service provider that includes (i) Assessing an individual's current situation, strengths, needs and goals; (ii) Exploring available options and developing a strategy to support the client to achieve desired goals; (iii) Identifying the benefits, alternatives and consequences of planned services; and (iv) Documenting the strategy in the form of an individualized personal service plan or case plan.

**Clients:** Individuals who access or attempt to access any of the services provided as part of the Homeless Outreach Program.

**Culturally appropriate services:** Include a broad range of community based programs, services and supports that are available to Aboriginal people who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness, in support of their personal objectives. Culturally appropriate services differ from support services in that they are delivered in a way which links an individual with an aspect of their Aboriginal culture and/or are culturally significant for that individual.

**Drop-in Centre:** A facility that provides access to meals and amenities that address immediate needs such as showers, laundry, telephone, among others. They often offer a safe gathering place with access to information resources and other support services. Drop-in Centres do not provide sleeping accommodations.

**Emergency Shelter:** A facility that provides core services that include a) essential services such as temporary overnight shelter accommodation, food and other services to meet the basic nutritional and hygiene needs of people who are homeless, and b) gateway services in the form of stable housing and key support services.

**Emergency Shelter Program:** Provides funding to homeless shelters and drop-in centres in British Columbia. Management of the program was transferred to BC Housing from the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance (MEIA) in October 2005.

**Hidden Homeless:** Individuals and families living in temporary accommodation who do not have control over the length and conditions of tenure but have adequate personal space.

**Homeless due to crisis:** Individuals and families who are homeless because their previous residence became uninhabitable due to a human caused or natural disaster (e.g., fire or earthquake).

**Housing Income Limits:** Represent the income required to pay the average market rent for an appropriate sized unit in the private market. Average rents are derived from CMHC's annual Rental Market Survey, done in the fall and released in the spring. The size of unit required by a household is governed by federal/provincial occupancy standards. See:  
(<http://www.bchousing.org/publications/2017-Housing-Income-Limits-HILs.pdf>)

**HSS Database:** The Homelessness Services System (HSS) is a computer application developed by BC Housing to meet the operational and information needs of the Homeless Outreach, Aboriginal Homeless Outreach and Emergency Shelter Programs and to allow BC Housing to report on our strategic goals regarding breaking the cycle of homelessness.

**Landlord support:** Landlord support includes any activities that will promote housing stability for tenants housed through the Homeless Outreach Program. Examples of support include, but are not limited to, providing outreach worker's phone number, providing community resources information to landlord, etc.

### **LGBT2S - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Two Spirited**

**Lesbian** - Women attracted to members of the same sex

**Gay** - Men attracted to members of the same sex

**Bisexual** - A sexual orientation involving physical and/or romantic attraction to both males and females.

**Transgendered** - Of, relating to, or designating a person whose identity does not conform unambiguously to conventional notions of male or female gender roles, but combines or moves between these.

People assigned a sex, usually at birth and based on their genitals, but who feel that this is a false or incomplete description of them. Non-identification with, or non-presentation as, the sex (and assumed gender) one was assigned at birth.

**Transsexual** - One who has changed or is in the process of changing his/her physical sex by undergoing medical treatment such as hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and/or sex reassignment surgery (SRS).

**Two spirited** - A direct translation of the Ojibwe term, *Niizh manidoowag*, "two-spirited" or "two spirit" is usually used to indicate a person whose body simultaneously houses a masculine spirit and a feminine spirit.

**Outreach Services:** Outreach services are provided for people who are homeless or at the risk of homelessness. These services are usually provided for people who are sleeping outdoors, couch-surfing or at immediate risk of absolute homelessness. Outreach services include but are not limited to referrals to social and health services, housing and income assistance.

**Referred:** To direct clients to a particular source for either assistance or information. This could include one or more of the following:

- Providing the contact information of a particular agency (name, phone number or address)
- With client consent, contacting an agency on a client's behalf
- Accompaniment

**Stable Accommodation:** For the purposes of this program, *stable accommodation* is defined as allowing for tenancy of more than 30 days, under conditions in which the individual/family has adequate personal space. This range includes supported, transitional housing to independent social or private market housing.<sup>9</sup> As such, the HOP definition of 'being housed' does not include emergency shelters or transition houses. Although camp-sites are not included in the definition of stable accommodation, it is recognized that in some communities they represent the only viable option in some situations.

**Support Services:** Support services include a broad range of community based programs, services and supports that are available to persons either experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness, in support of their personal objectives. Such services are external to the supports provided by the service provider.

**Transition House:** A Transition House provides safe, temporary shelter typically for 30 days to women and children who are at risk of violence. Transition Houses are staffed 24/7 and provide supports such as emotional support, crisis intervention and assistance and referrals to housing, financial, medical and legal resources.

**Transitional Housing:** Transitional housing is intended to offer a supportive living environment with tools and opportunities for social and skill development. While transitional housing has limits on the length of stay, it is an intermediate step beyond emergency shelters (maximum 30 day stay) along the housing continuum.

**Violence:** Refers to violence against women and/or their children including physical, emotional, economic, financial, sexual and/or spiritual abuse or violence.

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<sup>9</sup> Transitional may include second-stage housing, recovery houses, and treatment and rehabilitative settings.

## APPENDIX B: NATIONAL OCCUPANCY STANDARD

The National Occupancy Standard (NOS) can be used as ideal guidelines for ESP and HOP service providers housing clients in stable accommodation. However, it is recognized that NOS is not always achievable given the available affordable housing options in a community as well as the fact that adequate personal space is perceived differently from person to person.

The NOS has been developed by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) to help determine the number of bedrooms a dwelling should have to provide freedom from crowding. The NOS determines the number of bedrooms a household requires given its size and composition.

According to NOS requirements, suitable housing has enough bedrooms for the size and make-up of resident households. Enough bedrooms based on NOS requirements means one bedroom for:

- each cohabiting adult couple;
- unattached household member 18 years of age and over;
- same-sex pair of children under age 18;
- and additional boy or girl in the family, unless there are two opposite sex children under 5 years of age, in which case they are expected to share a bedroom.

A household of one individual can occupy a bachelor unit (i.e., a unit with no bedroom).

NOS definition taken from the CMHC website

[http://cmhc.beyond2020.com/HiCDefinitions\\_EN.html#\\_Suitable\\_dwellings](http://cmhc.beyond2020.com/HiCDefinitions_EN.html#_Suitable_dwellings)

## APPENDIX C: RENTAL SUPPLEMENT GUIDELINES

In conjunction with supports and services, rental supplements, where applicable, provide immediate housing assistance to help break the cycle of homelessness, and allow for rapid re-housing of individuals and families facing homelessness. Rental supplements are deployed in communities with limited public housing stock, and are administered by service providers to help eligible clients secure stable housing in the private market<sup>10</sup>.

A client may only receive one type of rental supplement at any time. Clients receiving other government subsidies such as SAFER or RAP or who live in social housing are not eligible for rental supplements under this program.

Service providers are responsible for ensuring that outreach staff has a clear understanding of the guidelines for rental supplement use, disbursement and monitoring. The following guidelines have been developed to maintain flexibility while ensuring clear administration processes and financial controls.

### Use

While rental supplements are primarily intended to supplement an individual's rental payments in circumstances where they are not able to make the complete payment, in some cases other uses may be appropriate to address the individual's immediate housing concerns, provided a clear link exists between the rental supplement payment and a client securing and/or maintaining housing.

Rental supplements may be used to pay for:

- a) a portion of a client's rent
- b) a damage deposit for a client
- c) storage of a client's belongings if they are in the process of obtaining stable accommodation
- d) an expense that will remove a barrier to housing a client (e.g.; personal hygiene, haircut, nutrition, identification, acceptable medical expenses etc.)
- e) a client's utilities in order to ensure they remain housed
- f) transportation of a client to a housing opportunity
- g) a client's moving expenses
- h) start-up costs and household supplies (i.e.; food, dishes, pots, pans etc.)
- i) other expenses reasonably related to the immediate safety and security of women fleeing violence or at risk of violence

Rental supplements cannot be used to pay for:

- a) direct income support
- b) an expense unrelated to housing the client
- c) an expense for any service provider's employees or management
- d) storage of a client's belongings if the client is not intending to obtain housing
- e) clinical health and treatment services
- f) medical / clinical staff
- g) daycare
- h) on-reserve accommodation or expenses

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<sup>10</sup> Private market housing does not include units that are in receipt of any form of government subsidy.

- i) an expense for an individual who is not a Homeless Outreach Program client. This is applicable where a service provider is also funded for other programs targeting individuals experiencing homelessness (such as the Emergency Shelter Program). Individuals must be referred to a HOP outreach worker and entered in the HSS database uniquely as a HOP client before receiving a rental supplement.

### Disbursement

- a) Service providers should establish policies identifying how eligible clients will receive rental supplements in an open, fair, consistent and non-discriminatory way.
- b) Eligibility is for clients whose incomes are at or below the Housing Income Limits<sup>11</sup> for their area.
- c) A Release of client information is required in order to activate rental supplements.
- d) Except under exceptional circumstances, monthly rental supplement payments for an individual client (including any dependents) should not exceed:
  - i. \$300 (if receiving regular HOP rental supplements); or
  - ii. \$450 (if receiving HPP enhancement rental supplements)

The service provider is required to record a justification for any exceptions in the client's file.

- e) For any rental supplement extending beyond a 12 month period, the service provider is required to record a justification in the client's file. Where clients have other stable income, some of which could be applied to accommodation, the service provider is required to record a justification for the amount and duration of the rental supplement in the client's file.
- f) Rental supplement payments should be issued directly to the landlord, not the client. An exception can be made if the service provider determines that it is in the best interest of the client to receive the payment directly. In this case, the service provider should have a mechanism in place for verifying that the rental supplement was used for its intended purpose.
- g) Rental supplements may be disbursed as a one-time payment (not to exceed the maximum monthly rental supplement amount) or on an ongoing basis, depending on the client's situation.
- h) Where appropriate, rental supplement payments can be used as an opportunity to check-in with or build the relationship between the service provider, client and landlords.
- i) If the rental supplement is used to pay rent, the service provider should, to the best of their ability, ensure that the landlord maintains the unit and building in a reasonable state.
- j) Service providers must include surplus rental supplement funding from the previous year in their HOP budget for the upcoming year. BC Housing monitors budgets annually.

### Exceptions

Where an outreach worker is unsure whether a certain expense is appropriate for rental supplement usage, or they seek approval to apply a rental supplement to an item normally considered ineligible, the following procedure should be followed before making the payment:

- a) The outreach worker should contact their supervisor and explain the situation.

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<sup>11</sup> Housing Income Limits represent the income required to pay the average market rent for an appropriate sized unit in the private market. Average rents are derived from CMHC's annual Rental Market Survey, done in the fall and released in the spring. The size of unit required by a household is governed by federal/provincial occupancy standards (<http://www.bchousing.org/publications/2017-Housing-Income-Limits-HILs.pdf>)

- b) If their supervisor is unsure whether a proposed rental supplement payment fits within these guidelines or an exception is appropriate, they should contact their BC Housing Non-Profit Portfolio Manager to consult with them on the issue and gain approval before authorizing the payment.

### Monitoring

Service providers are required to enter data on rental supplement payments into the Homelessness Services System (HSS) database in accordance with the following guidelines:

- a) Report any tenancy changes, as outlined in Schedule C, Monitoring and Reporting of the Support Service Agreement.
- b) Rental supplement payments should be logged into the HSS database as they are issued, and absolutely by the fifth (5th) business day of the month following their issue.

The HSS database generates a monthly report for each service provider's portfolio and identifies rental supplement payments as well as the use of each rental supplement. Where rental supplement payments consistently exceed the thresholds described above or include an ineligible item, BC Housing may contact the service provider to discuss.