FINAL REPORT OF THE VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT TOOL EVALUATION

NARRATIVE SUMMARY OF QUANTITATIVE RESULTS AND QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Centre de recherche sur les services éducatifs et communautaires

Centre for Research on Educational and Community Services

Prepared for BC Housing, by Pathways PtH Housing First, Inc. &
The Centre for Research on Educational and Community Services, University of Ottawa

January, 2017

PATHWAYS PTH HOUSING FIRST INC.

Pathways PtH Housing First Inc. trains direct service organizations, conducts research projects, and influences policy related to Housing First and homelessness. Through its founder and CEO it is currently participating in national studies of homelessness, mental illness, and addiction, and contributed numerous articles and book chapters on these topics, including the Housing First Manual. Pathways has been instrumental in training, technical assistance, and evaluation for HF in Canada, as a consultant for the Mental Health Commission of Canada's (MHCC) At Home/Chez Soi research demonstration project, and its current HF Training and Technical Assistance initiative. With Dr. Tsemberis, Pathways is continuously engaging with communities and agencies considering Pathways' model nationally and around the world.

Research Team: Dr. Sam Tsemberis, Dr. Eric Macnaughton, Whitney Howard, M.S.W.

Centre for Research on Educational and Community Services, University of Ottawa

The Centre for Research on Educational and Community Services (CRECS) at the University of Ottawa collaborates in research, evaluation, and training with organizations in the educational, social service, and health sectors to improve social programs and policies for citizens, especially those facing social exclusion.

Research Team: Dr. Tim Aubry, Dr. John Ecker

For enquires about this publication, contact BC Housing.

Designed by: Dylan Ostetto,
Canadian Observatory on Homelessness

Canadian Observatory on Homelessness
homelesshub.ca

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

This report is prepared for BC Housing as part of the evaluation of the Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT). The VAT was created by the Downtown Emergency Service Centre in Seattle, Washington, to objectively determine the vulnerability of their clients to continued housing instability. The VAT involves a structured interview to assess an individual experiencing homelessness or marginal housing on 10 domains: survival skills, basic needs, indicated mortality risks, medical risks, organization/orientation, mental health, substance use, communication, social behaviours, and homelessness.

METHODOLOGY

BC Housing and non-profit housing societies in Vancouver have been using the VAT since 2014 to assist in the placement of clients into supportive housing units. BC Housing initiated this evaluation to determine to what extent the VAT has been achieving its objectives, identify lessons learned, and inform whether stakeholder should continue to use the VAT. Although the VAT has been tested on its psychometric properties, there have been no published reports on its use within service agencies and its use with clients. Therefore, this evaluation serves an important function in understanding the functionality of the VAT.

The methodology for this evaluation involved a mixed methods design. Quantitative data was collected from administrative records provided by BC Housing for seven housing facilities and analyzed in order to demonstrate trends. Qualitative data was collected from building managers of the seven housing facilities, assistant managers, tenants and VAT assessors.

KEY FINDINGS

The following are key findings of the quantitative and qualitative results. In reviewing these findings, it should be noted that they reflect the process used at a particular point in time for seven congregate model supportive housing buildings and to fill more than 500 units in new buildings. The influx of housing placements was not typical of the current situation of using the VAT to fill housing vacancies as they come up. This context should be considered in the interpretation of these findings. A further review of the VAT process should be considered which takes into account its current application.

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

- Clients were generally scoring on the low- to mid-range of the VAT, which indicated that clients were assessed as having low to medium vulnerability.

- There were no significant differences in total VAT scores based upon age and gender. However, older clients displayed greater vulnerability in terms of medical and mortality risks compared to younger clients, and females had greater vulnerability than males in terms of survival skills and mental health.

- Non-Aboriginal clients were assessed as having a slightly greater vulnerability than Aboriginal clients. This finding was surprising and requires further study. Possible explanations could be the circumstances of tenanting more than 500 new units of supportive housing within a short time period, or perhaps the assessments are not capturing the unique experience of Aboriginal clients. BC Housing recognizes there is an over representation of the Aboriginal community in the homeless population and is committed to working with its government and community partners in the development of culturally appropriate services.

- The VAT is being used properly to assign clients to an appropriate support level.

- Homeless and SRO clients had similar VAT scores, which indicates they are displaying similar levels of vulnerability. Both groups had higher scores than clients at risk of homelessness.

- Clients who were not allocated housing had higher VAT scores than those allocated housing. This may be due to the limited number of high-support spaces available across the seven buildings and limited capacity to provide an appropriate intensity of support for high-need (i.e., level 3 support) clients, and the objective to ensure a workable tenant mix. This does not imply that clients with higher VAT scores were not housed elsewhere. Clients not allocated housing in one of the seven buildings were likely eventually housed by BC Housing in another development.

- The VAT has some ability to predict who will be successful in housing as clients with higher VAT scores had shorter tenancies. The data also indicated a high degree of tenant stability as the average length of stay was 18.9 months (out of a total maximum of two years available for the study period), 100 out of 129 tenants remained in their housing at the time of the evaluation, and another 15 had moves considered to be beneficial.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

The qualitative results provide an in-depth analysis of the administration of the VAT and its application with housing clients in relation to the objectives identified below.

Fairness/transparency

- The VAT has significantly improved fairness and transparency of the tenant placement process by establishing a “common language” and systematic process for tenant selection that most housing providers have “bought into. This is a significant achievement in an environment where there are many buildings, administered by housing providers with varying approaches and philosophies.

Efficiency/burden/experience

- The process was regarded by stakeholders as definitely worth the time spent, and as eliciting rich information and allowing a reasonably accurate picture of the tenant to emerge in a relatively short time.

- The VAT interview itself was viewed as a positive experience by most of the tenants, and was experienced as safe and understandable, though there were some concerns about the consequences of providing forthright answers, and about certain questions eliciting some discomfort.

Consistency

- For the most part, interviews were being carried out consistently, though there was some variability with respect to how some assessors were using the questionnaire, and possibly with respect to ratings. With the expanding base of assessors, it will be important to bring an increased focus to quality assurance and ongoing training.

Support planning

- The VAT can be used effectively to match housing and support levels for individual clients and is able to determine the proportion of clients considered low, moderate and high vulnerability. While the tool is a good resource for opening up a conversation about support planning, the VAT itself is not a clinical tool and it assumes additional case management planning will be done with tenants once they are housed.

Impact

- Stakeholders, including tenants, viewed the VAT process as having a generally positive impact on creating stable tenancies and a workable tenant mix. The tool/process (including the addendum interview) is seen as valuable for matching prospective tenants with a building that is a good fit and has an appropriate level of support.Tenants viewed the process as enabling them to be placed in settings where they were generally satisfied with their housing and which contributed to their recovery. Concerns were expressed by some tenants about the mix of tenants (e.g. tenants with unmanaged mental illness or addictions) and about disruptive behavior in or around the buildings, (drug dealing, vandalism, sex work, etc.).

Challenges

- One of the main challenges identified in the evaluation is the ability to house people who have higher and more complex support needs. It should be noted, however, that buildings were targeted to include 10% of clients at the level 3 support level (high level of supports being required) and in fact 12% of the units were allocated to these clients. Additionally the seven buildings selected are operated by a range of non-profit housing providers with a diverse range of experience and expertise in housing a homeless population with complex needs.

- The complexity of the support needs, especially for people with mental health and addiction challenges, highlights the importance of establishing partnerships with health authorities to ensure that the appropriate level of clinical services is provided.

- In terms of the interviewing process, respondents mention that there is an informal pre-screening happening, based on experiential knowledge of which individuals may be a good fit. While overall, the VAT process has significantly improved consistency, there is a need to improve transparency about certain aspects of the process (e.g. pre-screening, and the waitlist process for individuals who have a VAT interview but who are not housed).

LESSONS (WHAT WORKED WELL AND LESS WELL)

WHAT'S WORKED WELL

- The new system has significantly improved the fairness and transparency of the tenancy placement process by creating a common language and understanding of the process and an objective picture of vulnerability

- The tool is seen as eliciting rich, relevant information in a relatively short period of time

- There is a high degree of consensus in the community about the value of the tool and the process

- The tool/process (including the addendum interview) is seen as valuable for matching prospective tenants with a building which is a good fit, and has an appropriate level of support

- The process is seen as valuable in terms of creating a workable tenant mix at the buildings that use it

- The skill and sensitivity of the assessors themselves is seen as a significant strength of the system

WHAT'S WORKED LESS WELL

- There are still some issues with transparency of how the system works (e.g. pre-screening for a VAT interview, what happens to people's place on the waitlist if they don't get access to housing)

- Some questions in particular (e.g., about family relationships) are seen as triggering discomfort, which may be exacerbated when prospective tenants are not clear about the purpose of the questions, or when there is no opportunity to debrief

- The VAT write-up "narrative" seems to be inconsistently delivered and/or used, which may constitute a "missed opportunity", given that the information is seen by many as a valuable opportunity to "open up a conversation" about support planning; the VAT itself is not a clinical tool, however, and the process assumes additional case management planning will be done with tenants once they are housed

- The emphasis on tenant mix (and diminishing supply of high-support spaces, and concomitant lack of appropriate intensity of clinical support in certain buildings) has meant that there is a barrier to housing people with high VAT scores

- While the pool of trained assessors is growing, there is a need to develop a more systematic approach to training and quality control amongst VAT assessors

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the results of this evaluation, we recommend the continued use of the VAT in BC Housing funded supportive housing.

The remainder of the recommendations are broken down into two categories: 1) Improving the administration and interpretation of the VAT and 2) System planning/design.

ADMINISTRATION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE VAT

1. Develop the capacity to link VAT data to tenant data to be able to rigorously examine the relationship between VAT scores and tenant outcomes (e.g. housing stability).

2. Assess the use of the VAT and how it applies to vulnerable populations, including Aboriginal clients, women and youth to determine if the VAT is adequately capturing the vulnerability of these groups.

3. Work with the Ministry of Health and relevant health authorities to develop a process for assessing the ongoing vulnerability and functioning of tenants after they are housed.

4. Create a Quality Assurance process for VAT assessors.
   a) Establish a system for periodic audits
   b) Establish a system of supplemental training
   c) Periodically survey new tenants regarding their experience with the VAT
   d) Establish a community of practice so that more experienced assessors can support newer assessors

5. Increase understanding of the purpose and intent of the VAT both for prospective tenants and service providers.

6. Continue the practice of having more interviews at a neutral location (e.g. Orange Hall) rather than at the housing site. This includes conducting the VAT assessment outside of the MOU buildings and holding the supplementary building addendum interview at a later time for candidates who are assessed as potentially eligible for housing based on the VAT interview.

SYSTEM PLANNING/DESIGN

1. Use VAT data for planning and/or broadening the range of housing and support service options for supportive housing applicants, including:
   a) Aligning support services strategically within housing to address the levels of need among supportive housing applicants
   b) Developing a range of supportive housing building options which includes purpose-built smaller units, congregate living spaces and scattered site housing with mobile clinical and non clinical services, including ACT and ICM teams

BACKGROUND

CONTEXT OF EVALUATION

In March 2016, BC Housing selected Pathways to Housing Canada (Pathways) and the Centre for Research on Educational and Community Services (CRECS) to perform an evaluation on BC Housing's use of the VAT for supportive housing applicants. The evaluation team consisted of Sam Tsemberis, Tim Aubry, Eric Macnaughton, Whitney Howard, and John Ecker. The purpose of the evaluation was to determine to what extent the VAT achieved its objectives, identify lessons learned in using the VAT, and inform whether stakeholders should continue to use the VAT to allocate housing priority to rent-up new supportive housing buildings and on an on-going basis to fill vacancies upon turnover.

SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Screening and assessment tools can help guide service systems with housing individuals who experience homelessness and marginal housing. Specifically, they serve as a way to supplement the clinical judgment of service providers and can facilitate engagement with individuals. Once an assessment has been completed, the result can help service providers determine an individual's level of need so that appropriate housing placements occur.

A review of assessment tools was conducted in 2015 (Aubry, Bell, Ecker, & Goering, 2015). This review identified 17 tools that were currently being used or were once used in the homeless service sector. These tools were vetted against criteria developed by the Department of Housing and Urban Development in the United States, which outlined universal qualities of standardized assessment tools. After consultations with researchers, service providers, and program managers, the most promising tools were identified. The outcome of this process identified the Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT) as the best tool available to assist with the prioritization of individuals for housing programs.

The VAT was selected for a variety of reasons, including its ease of use, length, person-centered focus, and previous external reviews. Further, psychometric testing was conducted on the tool and demonstrated that the tool was both reliable and valid. These types of analyses are important as they demonstrate the tool provides consistent results and measures what it is intended to measure. Although these psychometric tests are crucial, there have been no formal investigations regarding the implementation of the tool from the perspective of service providers and clients and whether the tool is achieving its objectives. Therefore, the opportunity to evaluate BC Housing's use of the VAT for supportive housing applicants is timely and much needed.

THE VAT

Seattle-based homeless service provider, Downtown Emergency Service Center (DESC), developed the VAT in 2003 as a means to establish an objective sense of vulnerability to continued housing instability and to compare vulnerability within the homeless community. Utilizing this information, individuals were prioritized for housing based on the most vulnerable, or highest VAT score.

The VAT involves a structured interview to assess an individual experiencing homelessness or marginal housing on 10 domains: survival skills, basic needs, indicated mortality risks, medical risks, organization/orientation, mental health, substance use, communication, social behaviours, and homelessness. Each domain is rated on a five-point scale, with the exception of the homelessness domain which is rated on a three-point scale. The scores from each domain are summed and the total score can range from 10 to 48. There are no scoring cut-offs, instead higher scores indicate a greater vulnerability to continued housing instability.

The 10 domains are described in detail below. The descriptions are taken directly from the VAT manual:

1. **Survival skills** – assesses whether clients are able to avoid being preyed upon or frequently exploited. Clients who score highly in this domain are often preyed upon by other people on the street and/or may possess little regard for their own safety. Clients who score low are capable of findings safe places to be (if available) and can serve as competent self-advocates.

2. **Basic needs** – measures a client's ability to provide for their own basic needs, such as food, clothing, and hygiene. Clients who score highly in this domain struggle to find food, wear soiled clothes, and are often resistant to offers of help. Clients who score low are aware of the food, clothing, and hygiene resources in the area and utilize them on a regular basis.

3. **Indicated mortality risks** – measures a client's vulnerability by the number of indicated mortality risk factors.

4. **Medical risks** – assesses the overall health concerns of the client and their ability to follow-up with prescribed care. The more the client neglects serious medical concerns, the higher the score.

5. **Organization/orientation** – assesses the cognitive functioning related to thinking, memory, and overall awareness of situations. Clients who score highly have impaired thinking processes and are often confused or disorganized. Clients who score low have the ability to track their situation mentally, make appointments regularly and without assistance, and have an attention span adequate for their situation.

6. **Mental health** – assesses the client's own awareness of mental health concerns, if any, and their ability to follow-up with needed care. Clients who score highly have no insight into their mental health problems and the impact those problems have on their functioning. Clients who score low may report some problems with mental health symptoms but possess the ability to get help when necessary.

7. **Substance use** – assesses a client's reported use of substances and how use impairs functioning. Clients who score highly use substance regularly, do not have interest in treatment, and have obvious deterioration in functioning. Clients who score low may use substances at times, but use does not affect level of functioning and clients meet their basic needs most of the time.

8. **Communication** – assesses a client's ability to convey needs and information to others through language. Clients who score highly may refuse to talk to others or may have other barriers that prevent them from being able to communicate. Clients who score low possess adequate abilities for communication and articulate their needs to staff clearly.

9. **Social behaviours** – assesses a client's ability to tolerate people, social situations, and advocate for self. Clients who score highly may have difficulty engaging positively with others, including providers. In addition, clients who score high may have limited ability to cope with social stressors, may provoke others, and have no obvious social network. Clients who score low may display predatory behavior towards more vulnerably clients, utilize intimidation to get their needs met, and can perform competent self advocacy.

10. **Homelessness** – determines client's length of homelessness. Includes criteria to establish whether or not clients meet the definition of being chronically homeless. Based upon a three-point scale.

BC HOUSING AND THE VAT

BC Housing adopted the VAT in 2014, with slight adjustments in its use to reach the following objectives:

1. Assess eligibility of applicants for housing at supportive housing sites opening in Vancouver
2. Assess the needs of applicants in supportive housing
3. Inform decisions around housing placements to ensure applicants are placed in housing with appropriate supports
4. Inform decisions around housing placements to ensure a workable tenant mix is created at supportive housing sites relative to the supports available at those sites
5. Provide consistency among service providers and non-profits with a common assessment tool
6. Create a fair and transparent process around who gets housed in supportive housing

BC Housing, the City of Vancouver and housing providers for 14 Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) sites agreed to use the VAT to help fill new supporting housing units. At the time of the evaluation, the VAT had been used at seven of these MOU buildings. At four of these buildings, the VAT was used to rent-up more than 500 new units of housing. In these buildings, all units were filled by applicants who were assessed using the VAT. This included applicants who were homeless, were moving from Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotels, or were at risk of homelessness and leaving the correctional and hospital systems.

The VAT was also used as a means to define the level of support a client required. The support level of clients was categorized into three levels, with support level 1 demonstrating a low level of need, support level 2 demonstrating a moderate level of need, and support level 3 demonstrating a high level of need.

The buildings were targeted to serve a mix of clients with varying support levels and points of entry into the program. The goal was to have 50% of clients entering from homeless shelters or the street, 30% coming from SROs and 20% being at risk of homelessness form the correctional or hospital systems. The mix of support levels was set at 50% support level 1, 40% support level 2, and 10% support level 3.

Data was available from the following seven MOU sites. Each of these buildings is described below.

1. **The Alexander Street Community** provides 100 units of low-barrier permanent housing and 39 units of supported transitional housing for individuals living with physical and mental health issues and substance use dependencies that often occur concurrently.
2. **The Budzey** is a ten story building unique to both the Downtown Eastside and to RainCity Housing with 147 housing units; 106 units for women (transgender and cisgender), and 41 units for women led families. It provides opportunities for the women and families living there to make connections with a comprehensive range of services and navigate the change from previous housing situations or homelessness into stable, supported, permanent housing.
3. **Kettle on Burrard** has 140 units. The building is geared towards people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness and who have mental health challenges. The goal is to provide tenants with a stable and safe home environment in which they can thrive.
4. **Kwayatsut** has 99 units and involves a partnership between Vancouver Native Housing Society, which provides property management and 24/7 support services and Pacific Community Resource Society, which provides additional support services to the 30 youth residents. Tenant support programming offers an Aboriginal perspective that has elements of Aboriginal culture to address life skills and social programming designed to foster a sense of purpose and community.
5. **Coast Dunbar** has 51 units. They offer safe, affordable permanent housing with professional mental health support, and employment and income assistance to tenants. Coast staff also provide links to addiction services, health care and clinical mental health care services as well as other community services.
6. **Marguerite Ford Apartments** has 147 units. The units provide people with their own self-contained independent living space and a variety of amenity spaces. Support workers are available to provide assistance to tenants as required and a meal program and other social activities are available.
7. **The Lux** has 92 units. In 25 of the units, Vancouver Coastal Health provides support for tenants with histories of homelessness, substance use, and complex physical and mental health concerns.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation assessed the impacts resulting from the use of the VAT at seven MOU sites in Vancouver. The evaluation assessed the impacts of the VAT in terms of housing people who are homeless, creating a workable tenant mix at housing sites, working towards housing stability and stable tenancies, achieving tenant satisfaction with housing and supports, producing improved tenant outcomes, and creating a fair and transparent process around who is selected for supportive housing.

The methodology incorporated a mixed methods design, namely a design that includes both quantitative and qualitative components. This type of design was fitting for the evaluation, as quantitative and qualitative data was needed to answer the main evaluation questions. A detailed description of the proposed methodology (i.e., method and source of data) is presented in the evaluation matrix that follows.

EVALUATION QUESTION	METHOD	SOURCE
1. What is the program logic model?	▪ Consultation ▪ Review of program documents	▪ Advisory Group ▪ Program documents
2. To what extent has the VAT achieved its objectives?	▪ Administrative VAT data ▪ Key informant interviews ▪ Focus groups	▪ BC Housing ▪ Advisory Group, BC Housing staff, supportive housing managers ▪ Supportive housing staff & tenants
3. What are the lessons learned in using the VAT?	▪ Key informant interviews ▪ Focus groups	▪ Advisory Group, BC Housing staff, supportive housing managers ▪ Supportive housing staff & tenants
4. Should stakeholders continue to use the VAT to allocate housing priority to rent-up new supportive housing buildings and on an on-going basis to fill vacancies upon turnover?	▪ Administrative VAT data ▪ Key informant interviews ▪ Focus groups	▪ BC Housing ▪ Advisory Group, BC Housing staff, Supportive Housing managers ▪ Supportive housing staff & tenants

Table 1. Evaluation Matrix

LOGIC MODEL

The first objective of the evaluation was to create a program logic model. A program logic model represents a systematic, visual means of describing the rationale, service activities, outputs, and outcomes of a given program (Fielden et al., 2007[1]; McLaughlin & Jordan, 1999[2]). Within the current evaluation, the structure and content of the logic model was determined through a review of program documentation and was verified in consultation with the Advisory Group. The logic model is presented in a way that describes the goals of using the VAT, the inputs (resources) required, the associated service activities, the outputs (products), and the intended outcomes (benefits).

QUANTITATIVE DATA: ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

Administrative quantitative data was provided by BC Housing. This data included the demographic characteristics (e.g., sex, age, Aboriginal identity, pre-housing status) of clients assessed on the VAT, total VAT scores and individual domain VAT scores, and the support level of clients. The largest amount of data was provided for four buildings (The Alexander, Budzey, Kettle on Burrard, and Kwayatsut). Data on the clients' length of stay in housing was provided for the Kettle on Burrard building.

Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were calculated on clients of all of the buildings regarding demographic characteristics, total VAT scores and individual domain scores, and housing history (homeless, SRO, or at risk). Descriptive statistics on the length of stay of clients in Kettle on Burrard were also calculated.

Correlational analyses were conducted to determine the strength of the relationship between VAT scores and support level across all of the buildings. VAT scores were correlated with length of stay for clients at Kettle on Burrard.

In order to determine group differences among the three tenant groups based on their living situation at housing entry (i.e., homeless, SROs, at risk of homelessness) and their support level (level 1, level 2, level 3), an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted for continuous outcome variables [VAT scores, support needs, length of stay (only at Kettle on Burrard)] and Chi-square test were conducted for dichotomous or categorical variables (demographic characteristics). The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software program was used to analyze all of the data.

[1] Fielden, S.J., Rusch, M.L., Masina, M.T., Sands, J., Frankish, J., & Envoy, B. (2007). Key considerations for logic model development in research partnerships: A Canadian case study. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 30* (2), 115-124.

[2] McLaughlin, J.A., & Jordan, G.B. (1999). Logic models: A tool for tell your program's performance story. *Evaluation and Planning, 22,* 65-72.

QUALITATIVE DATA: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

Qualitative data was collected from the different stakeholder groups, including non-profit supportive housing providers who used the VAT and staff who provide housing supports to tenants selected using the VAT, BC Housing staff, and City of Vancouver staff through key informant interviews and focus groups. The content of the interviews followed the evaluation questions and centered on targeting, efficiency, effectiveness, consistency, and impacts. Interviews were also conducted with a sample of tenants who have been assessed with the VAT. These interviews focused on their experiences of being assessed with the VAT. The interview protocols were semi-structured to allow for exploration of new topics and themes that may have arisen. A total of 30 key informant interviews and two focus groups were conducted. The majority of the key informant interviews were conducted over the phone. Interviews with the tenants and focus groups were conducted in-person. All interviews were audio recorded with consent from participants.

During the interviews data was captured using semi-verbatim field notes, with any gaps reconstructed immediately following the interview session using the tape recording. As soon as possible following the data collection session, the research team created an interview summary, which identified interview high points, memos of potentially emerging themes, and questions for follow-up. Upon completion of data collection, using the interview summaries and memos as a guide, all of the reconstructed field notes were analyzed using a thematic coding approach to identify emergent themes in relation to the evaluation questions.

LIMITATIONS

This evaluation is subject to several limitations. Although data from over 700 clients was analyzed, it is taken from only seven buildings. These buildings may not necessarily reflect the context of the other buildings not included in this analysis. The housing data was limited to one building, as this was the only building that could link clients' VAT scores and their housing outcomes. Once again, the results from this building may not be reflective of the other buildings. As well, this housing data represented a limited period of time, making it difficult to establish a baseline.

RESULTS

LOGIC MODEL

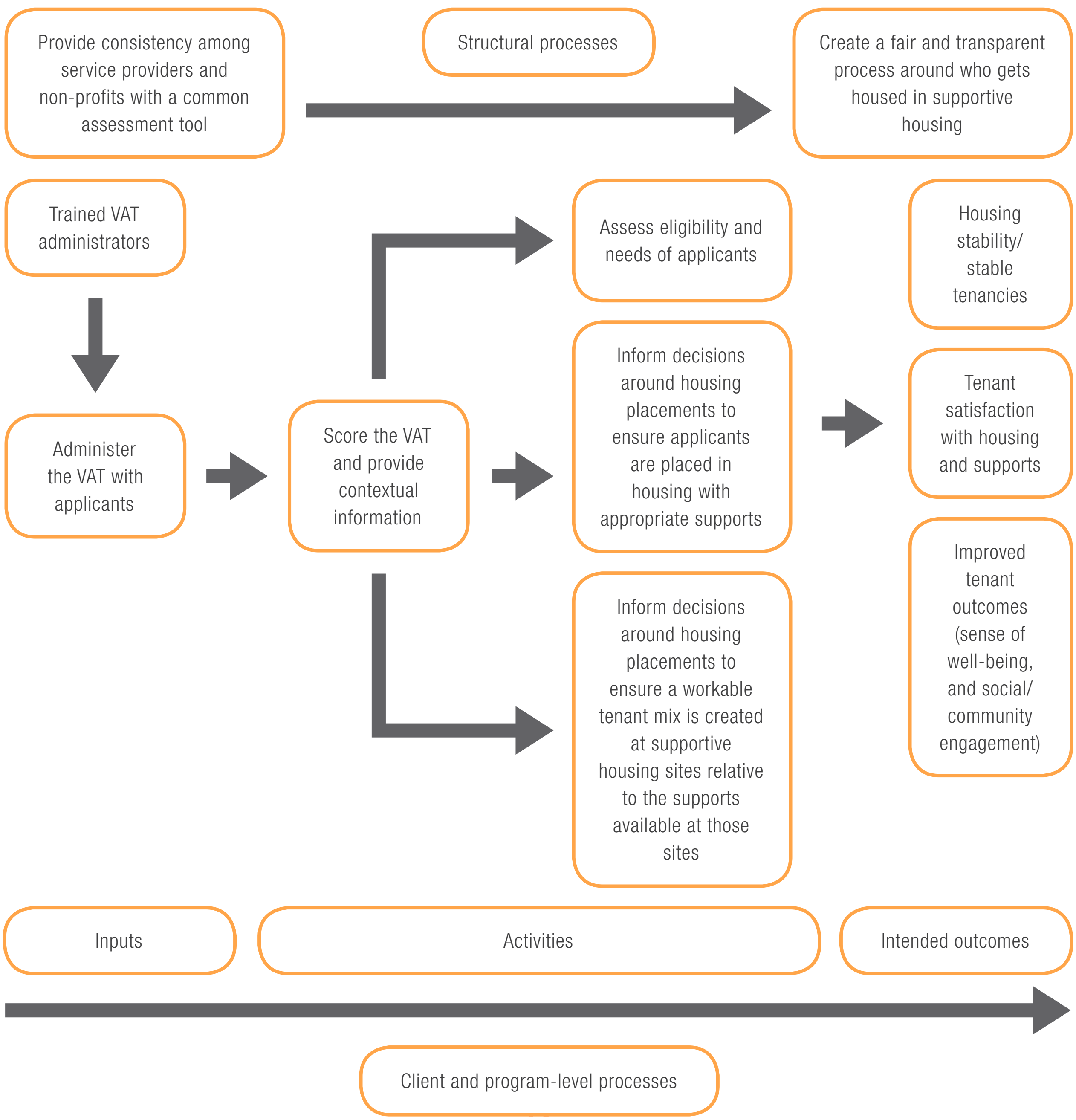
The logic model was developed through a review of program documentation and the VAT manual. The model is presented in a way that describes the goals of using the VAT, the inputs (resources) required, the associated service activities, the outputs (products) and the intended outcomes (benefits).

NEEDS THAT PROGRAM INTENDS TO ADDRESS	INTENDED INPUTS	INTENDED ACTIVITIES	INTENDED OUTPUTS	INTENDED OUTCOMES
▪ Determining in a systematic way a homeless person's vulnerability to continued instability in order to provide tailored housing placements.	▪ Trained VAT assessors ▪ Program materials (VAT tool) ▪ VAT data maintenance/ analysis	▪ VAT assessment ▪ VAT data entry ▪ Assess eligibility and needs of applicants ▪ Inform decisions around housing placements to ensure applicants are placed in housing with appropriate supports ▪ Inform decisions around housing placements to ensure a workable tenant mix is created at supportive housing sites relative to the supports available at those sites	▪ Number of VAT assessments ▪ Number of housing placements	▪ Housing stability/ stable tenancies ▪ Improved tenant outcomes (sense of well-being, and social/ community engagement) ▪ Tenant satisfaction with housing and supports ▪ Provide consistency among service providers and non-profits with a common assessment tool ▪ Create a fair and transparent process around who gets housed in supportive housing

The quantitative analyses in the evaluation were guided by the logic model. By correlating the VAT scores with support needs and housing stability, the goal was to determine if tenants are being appropriately placed in housing which in turn will impact stable tenancies and other outcomes. These analyses were completed on the sample as a whole, as well as with specific tenant subgroups (formerly homeless, moving from SROs, and at risk of homelessness) to account for any potential group differences.

DIAGRAM OF THE APPLICATION OF THE VAT

The diagram presents a visual representation of the application of the VAT to the seven MOU sites in Vancouver that received BC Housing funding. It includes structural processes and client- and program-level processes.



QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

KEY QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Total VAT Score

The average total VAT score for all clients was 20.34. Therefore, clients were scoring on the low to mid level of the VAT.

VAT Domains

The average of the domain items of the VAT all fell below 2.5. The highest scores focused on mental health, substance use, and medical risk.

Demographic Differences

There was no differences in total VAT scores based upon age and gender. Non-Aboriginal clients scored slightly higher on the VAT than Aboriginal clients.

VAT and Support Level

As clients' total VAT scores increased, so too did their designated support level. Clients in support level 3 had the highest total VAT scores.

VAT and Previous Housing

Clients who were homeless and who where living in a SRO had higher total VAT scores than those at risk of homelessness.

Clients who were homeless had similar total VAT scores to those who were living in a SRO.

Housing Outcomes

As VAT scores increased, clients' length of stay decreased. As support level increased, length of stay decreased.

Length of stay did not differ based upon previous housing

Older clients, males, and non-Aboriginal clients had longer lengths of stay.

NARRATIVE SUMMARY OF THE QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

WHAT DID WE DO?

We ran a series of analyses to examine trends within the VAT data. Specifically, the analyses provided an understanding of the demographic profile of clients who were assessed on the VAT, the distribution of VAT results, a correlation between VAT scores and support needs, length of stay for clients at Kettle on Burrard, and a correlation between VAT scores and length of stay at Kettle on Burrard. We also compared the VAT scores, length of stay, demographic profiles, and support needs among clients who were previously homeless, who were moving from SROs, and who were at risk of homelessness and leaving the correctional and hospital systems. Figure 1 presents a summary of the results.

WHAT DID WE FIND?

Total VAT score

We found that clients were generally scoring on the low- to mid-range of the VAT (average total VAT score was 20.34), which indicated that clients were assessed as having low to medium vulnerability. The scores ranged from 10 (the lowest score possible) to 45 (48 is the highest score possible). In terms of the distribution of the scores, 25% of scores were lower than 16, 50% of the scores were lower than 19 (the median), and 75% of the scores were lower than 24.

When applying the guidelines of score distributions outlined in the new Canadianized version of the VAT, total scores of 29 and above (high vulnerability) accounted for less than 10% of the total sample, scores of 23-28 (moderate vulnerability) accounted for 22% of the total sample, and scores of 22 and under (low vulnerability) made up close to 70% of the total sample.

How do VAT scores relate to the age of clients?

We looked at the VAT scores based upon different age groups. The results are found below:

AGE GROUP	AVERAGE TOTAL VAT SCORE & STANDARD DEVIATION	MEDIAN	LOWEST SCORE	HIGHEST SCORE
18-24 (n = 111)	19.74 (5.31)	19	10	38
25-35 (n = 155)	20.95 (5.60)	21	11	40
36-45 (n = 148)	21.33 (5.86)	20	11	41
46-55 (n = 211)	19.98 (5.45)	19	10	37
56-65 (n = 134)	19.60 (5.81)	18	11	38
66+ (n = 27)	21.11 (6.58)	20	11	45

When we ran our analyses, we did not find any significant differences in the total VAT scores when comparing age groups. However, when we looked at the individual items of the VAT some statistically significant differences did emerge. Older clients displayed greater vulnerability in terms of medical and mortality risks and lower vulnerability in terms of survival skills, mental health, substance use, social behaviours, and homelessness. These trends are evident in the results presented in the tables below.

AVERAGE INDIVIDUAL ITEM SCORES AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

Age Group	Survival Skills	Basic Needs	Mortality Risk	Medical Risk	Organization
18-24 (n = 111)	2.14 (.88)	1.88 (.87)	1.39 (.79)	1.68 (.90)	1.82 (.90)
25-35 (n = 155)	2.25 (1.00)	1.98 (.89)	1.34 (.65)	2.13 (.99)	1.94 (.90)
36-45 (n = 148)	2.20 (1.00)	1.86 (.92)	1.62 (.92)	2.43 (.96)	1.99 (1.01)
46-55 (n = 211)	1.96 (.90)	1.79 (.84)	1.62 (.86)	2.61 (.91)	1.78 (.87)
56-65 (n = 134)	1.82 (.94)	1.67 (.91)	2.10 (1.07)	2.76 (.87)	1.77 (.90)
66+ (n = 27)	2.22 (.93)	2.11 (1.05)	2.63 (1.15)	2.78 (.80)	2.07 (1.11)

AVERAGE INDIVIDUAL ITEM SCORES AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

Age Group	Mental Health	Substance Use	Communication	Social Behaviour	Homelessness
18-24 (n = 111)	2.47 (1.07)	2.50 (1.16)	1.67 (.89)	2.05 (.98)	2.06 (.83)
25-35 (n = 155)	2.65 (1.05)	2.65 (1.26)	1.87 (.94)	2.18 (.92)	1.92 (.84)
36-45 (n = 148)	2.64 (1.00)	2.68 (1.23)	1.84 (.89)	2.16 (.84)	1.89 (.84)
46-55 (n = 211)	2.39 (1.01)	2.40 (1.13)	1.62 (.81)	1.98 (.86)	1.84 (.88)
56-65 (n = 134)	2.21 (1.05)	2.08 (1.17)	1.60 (.79)	1.84 (.88)	1.73 (.88)
66+ (n = 27)	2.00 (1.24)	2.00 (1.07)	1.81 (1.00)	1.78 (.97)	1.74 (.86)

How do VAT scores relate to the gender of clients?

We also looked at how the VAT scores related to the gender of the clients. The total VAT scores for females, males, and transgender clients is found below:

GENDER	AVERAGE TOTAL VAT SCORE AND STANDARD DEVIATION	MEDIAN	LOWEST SCORE	HIGHEST SCORE
Female (n = 423)	20.25 (5.64)	19	10	41
Male (n = 349)	20.45 (5.76)	19	10	45
Transgender (n = 20)	20.65 (5.77)	21	13	29

As with age, we did not find any differences in the VAT scores in terms of gender. Looking at the individual items of the VAT did show some statistically significant differences. Female clients had greater vulnerability in terms of survival skills and mental health compared to males. Males had greater vulnerability in terms of their basic needs and mortality risk. Transgender clients were not included in the analyses due to their small numbers, but it should be noted that transgender clients had high scores for survival skills, basic needs, and mental health.

	FEMALE	MALE	TRANSGENDER
Survival Skill	2.19 (1.01)	1.89 (.87)	2.30 (.92)
Basic Needs	1.78 (.85)	1.91 (.95)	2.10 (.79)
Indicated Mortality Risk	1.54 (.86)	1.79 (1.00)	1.55 (.89)
Medical Risk	2.37 (.98)	2.39 (1.00)	2.15 (.99)
Organization/Orientation	1.84 (.91)	1.92 (.94)	1.45 (.69)
Mental Health	2.50 (1.01)	2.38 (1.10)	2.80 (1.01)
Substance Use	2.41 (1.21)	2.49 (1.20)	2.40 (1.10)
Communication	1.70 (.84)	1.74 (.89)	1.70 (1.17)
Social Behaviours	2.00 (.88)	2.06 (.93)	2.00 (.73)
Homelessness	1.84 (.85)	1.90 (.88)	2.20 (.77)

How do VAT scores relate to the Aboriginal identity of clients?
The total VAT scores for clients who identified as Aboriginal and those who did not is presented below:

ABORIGINAL IDENTITY	AVERAGE TOTAL VAT SCORE AND STANDARD DEVIATION	MEDIAN	LOWEST SCORE	HIGHEST SCORE
Aboriginal (n = 364)	19.84 (5.56)	19	10	41
Non-Aboriginal (n = 423)	20.78 (5.74)	20	11	45

We did find a statistically significant difference when examining Aboriginal identity. Surprisingly, we found that non-Aboriginal clients were being assessed as having a slightly greater vulnerability than Aboriginal clients. Individual item analyses showed that non-Aboriginal clients had greater vulnerability in terms mortality risk, mental health, and communication.

	ABORIGINAL	NON-ABORIGINAL
Survival Skill	2.00 (.94)	2.11 (.98)
Basic Needs	1.78 (.86)	1.90 (.92)
Indicated Mortality Risk	1.56 (.86)	1.72 (.98)
Medical Risk	2.33 (.99)	2.42 (.98)
Organization/Orientation	1.80 (.91)	1.91 (.94)
Mental Health	2.32 (1.08)	2.56 (1.02)
Substance Use	2.51 (1.18)	2.39 (1.22)
Communication	1.65 (.85)	1.78 (.88)
Social Behaviours	2.02 (.89)	2.03 (.91)
Homelessness	1.84 (.85)	1.90 (.87)

How do VAT scores relate to support needs?
The majority of clients were in the support level 2 category (44.2%), followed by support level 1 (36.5%), and support level 3 (19.2%). When considering only those who were allocated housing, the numbers slightly changed with 47.4% of clients being grouped into support level 2, 40.6% of clients being grouped into support level 1, and 12.0% of clients being categorized as support level 3.

SUPPORT LEVEL	AVERAGE TOTAL VAT SCORE AND STANDARD DEVIATION	MEDIAN	LOWEST SCORE	HIGHEST SCORE
Support level 1 (n = 289)	16.42 (3.45)	16	10	31
Support level 2 (n = 346)	21.02 (4.51)	20	11	34
Support level 3 (n = 150)	26.28 (5.65)	26	15	45

We found that clients in the highest support level had the highest VAT scores. In terms of the correlation between VAT scores and support needs, we found a significant result. VAT scores were positively correlated with support level assignment, so that individuals with higher VAT scores were also being assigned to the highest support level. This indicates that the VAT was being properly used to assign clients to a support level.

	1	2	3
Survival Skill	1.60 (.75)	2.11 (.83)	2.83 (1.06)
Basic Needs	1.38 (.61)	1.92 (.80)	2.55 (1.02)
Indicated Mortality Risk	1.45 (.77)	1.65 (.90)	2.03 (1.13)
Medical Risk	2.17 (.91)	2.44 (.97)	2.62 (1.10)
Organization/Orientation	1.35 (.60)	1.92 (.83)	2.68 (1.00)
Mental Health	1.96 (.90)	2.58 (.99)	3.09 (1.03)
Substance Use	1.86 (1.00)	2.61 (1.13)	3.17 (1.19)
Communication	1.27 (.55)	1.80 (.83)	2.37 (.99)
Social Behaviours	1.51 (.61)	2.11 (.79)	2.82 (.95)
Homelessness	1.81 (.86)	1.88 (.86)	1.98 (.86)

How do VAT scores relate to previous housing status?

We also examined if the VAT scores differed among the groups based upon their previous housing status. We found that the homeless group and SRO group had higher scores than the at-risk group. Interestingly, the homeless group and the SRO did not differ in their VAT scores. This indicates that the homeless group and the SRO group are displaying similar levels of vulnerability.

PREVIOUS HOUSING	AVERAGE TOTAL VAT SCORE AND STANDARD DEVIATION	MEDIAN	LOWEST SCORE	HIGHEST SCORE
Homeless (n = 341)	20.77 (5.68)	19	11	41
SRO (n = 244)	20.57 (5.32)	20	10	38
At-risk (n = 195)	19.36 (5.97)	18	10	45

When focusing on the individual items, the homeless group actually had lower vulnerability in terms of their mortality risk in comparison to the other two groups. We also found that the SRO group had a greater vulnerability in terms of their medical risk compared to the other two groups. This provides further evidence that individuals who previously lived in SROs are displaying vulnerabilities in line with or greater than homeless individuals.

	50 (HOMELESS)	30 (SRO)	20 (AT-RISK)
Survival Skill	2.17 (.99)	2.03 (.94)	1.93 (.93)
Basic Needs	1.86 (.88)	1.85 (.90)	1.81 (.90)
Indicated Mortality Risk	1.54 (.83)	1.73 (.97)	1.73 (1.01)
Medical Risk	2.27 (.99)	2.56 (.97)	2.34 (.98)
Organization/Orientation	1.82 (.92)	1.94 (.88)	1.83 (.99)
Mental Health	2.40 (1.05)	2.53 (1.05)	2.45 (1.05)
Substance Use	2.49 (1.23)	2.61 (1.17)	2.17 (1.14)
Communication	1.64 (.87)	1.81 (.84)	1.74 (.90)
Social Behaviours	2.00 (.91)	2.07 (.85)	2.02 (.94)
Homelessness	2.54 (.67)	1.40 (.63)	1.34 (.58)

How are homeless clients scoring on the Homelessness item?

We also looked specifically at the homelessness item to see where the homeless clients fell on the three-point spectrum. The greatest number of clients were assessed as being a “3”, or chronically homeless, on the scale (65%). Clients assessed as having a moderate history of homelessness, or a “2” on the scale, comprised 25% of the sample. Lastly, 10% of clients were newly homeless, or a “1” on the scale.

How do VAT scores relate to housing allocation?

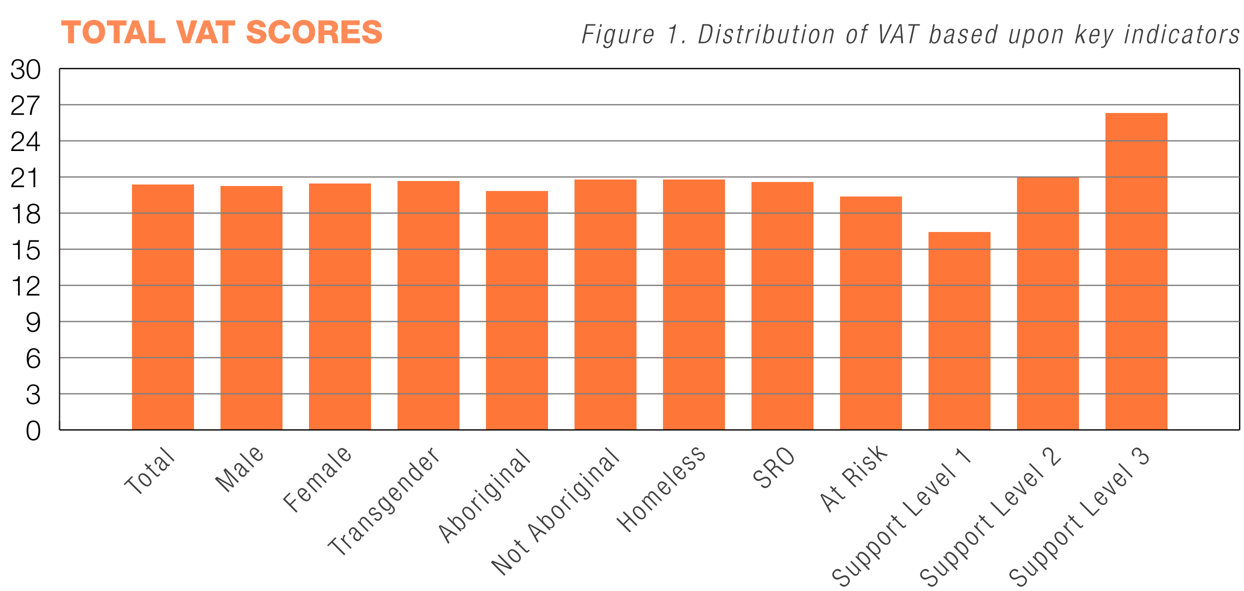
There were also differences in VAT scores in terms of whether clients were allocated housing or not. We found that clients who were not allocated housing had higher VAT scores than those who were allocated housing and those who withdrew. It should be noted that this does not imply that prospective tenants with higher scores were not housed. Clients who were not allocated housing were likely eventually housed by BC Housing in another housing development outside of the seven buildings examined.

How do the VAT scores relate to people who were allocated housing?

We then ran analyses on the client group who was allocated housing. The results we found were generally similar to the results on all of the clients who were assessed on the VAT. This included VAT scores being positively correlated with support level assignment, no effect of gender, and non-Aboriginal clients continued to be assessed as having a greater vulnerability than Aboriginal clients. The individual-item analyses also displayed similar trends.

There were some interesting differences that emerged. There were fewer clients assigned to support level 3 among clients that were allocated housing compared to all of the clients who were assessed on the VAT. This corroborates the evidence that individuals with higher VAT scores were more likely to not be allocated housing. There were no differences among homeless, SRO, and at-risk clients on their VAT scores. This indicates that all three client groups were being assessed as having similar vulnerabilities and is in contrast to previous findings that showed the homeless and SRO groups having greater vulnerability than the at-risk group. This finding could be related to clients with greater vulnerabilities not being allocated housing, as once people with higher vulnerabilities are removed the homeless, SRO, and at-risk groups become more homogeneous. Lastly, age became significant, as older clients had lower VAT scores.

Figure 1. Distribution of VAT based upon key indicators



HOUSING OUTCOMES

The analyses focused on the housing outcomes of clients at Kettle on Burrard demonstrated some interesting trends. Of the 129 clients with complete data who were allocated housing, 100 participants remained in their housing, 14 clients had forced moves (evictions, abandoned apartment) and 15 clients had beneficial moves (client acquiring own housing, moving in with friends or family, or seeking assistance from a detox or treatment facility).

What was the average length of stay?

The average length of stay for clients was 18.9 months (out of a total maximum of two years available for the study period). Coupled with the fact that 100 clients remained in their housing at Kettle on Burrard, and another 15 had beneficial moves, this indicates that 89% of the clients were having successful tenancies.

What was the relationship between VAT scores and length of stay?

A significant relationship emerged between VAT scores and length of stay. As a client's VAT score increased, their length of stay decreased. This indicates that clients with greater vulnerability, as assessed by the VAT, had shorter stays in housing.

Several individual items of the VAT also had significant relationships with length of stay. As client scores on survival skills, basic needs, substance use, and social behaviours increased, their length of stay decreased. This indicates that clients with greater vulnerability in these areas had shorter stays in housing. The remaining items had no significant relationships.

What was the relationship between support level and length of stay?

A similar relationship occurred when considering support level and length of stay. As the clients' support level increased, their length of stay decreased. Providing a more detailed analysis, clients in support level 1 (19.67 months) had longer stays than clients in level 3 (16.38 months). There were no differences between level 1 clients and level 2 clients (18.45 months) and between level 2 clients and level 3 clients.

What was the relationship between demographic characteristics and length of stay?

When considering demographic characteristics, there was an effect of gender, age, and Aboriginal identity. Male clients had significantly longer stays than female clients. Older clients had longer length of stays and Non-Aboriginal clients had longer stays than Aboriginal clients. Once again, the result regarding Aboriginal clients is surprising. Despite having a lower vulnerability than Non-Aboriginal clients, Aboriginal clients had shorter lengths of stay in housing.

What was the relationship between previous housing status and length of stay?
Length of stay for clients in the “50” (18.88 months), “30” (19.08 months), and “20” (19.56 months) groups was not significantly different.

Were there differences among clients who moved and those who did not?
We also looked at clients who have moved versus those who had not moved. The total VAT score was not significantly related to length of stay for clients who did move, regardless of if the move was a “good” move or an eviction. For evicted clients, two of the individual items of the VAT had a significant relationship with length of stay. As client scores on basic needs and social behaviours increased, their length of stay decreased. There were no significant relationships among the individual VAT items and length of stay for clients who had a “good” move. Length of stay for clients in the “50”, “30”, and “20” groups was not significantly different for all clients who moved.

The total VAT score was not significantly related to length of stay for clients who did not move. One individual item of the VAT had a significant relationship with length of stay. As client scores on Organization/Orientation increased, their length of stay decreased. Length of stay for clients in the “50”, “30”, and “20” groups was not significantly different.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS: NARRATIVE SUMMARY

Brief Methodology

Qualitative research methods included convening an Advisory Group of key stakeholders, developing an interview script, and conducting individual interviews with building managers of the seven housing facilities, assistant managers, and tenants. VAT assessors were interviewed in two separate focus groups. Findings are based on analysis of interviews with 30 individuals in total.

Through the interviews, the research team looked at various aspects of the process of interviewing and matching potential tenants related to the objectives of the VAT process, including its ability to target appropriate clients and contribute to a workable tenant mix in the buildings. We also looked at the fairness, effectiveness, efficiency and consistency of the process, and finally its impact on tenant satisfaction, and housing stability.

FINDINGS

Description of Process

The first question asked was how the process works in practice. Key informants identified the steps as follows: conducting the VAT interview and building addendum, scoring and support-level assignment, doing the narrative write-up, making the decision (based on score, support level, and fit), and communicating the decision and write up to the parties. In some cases, the assessment is done at Orange Hall. In other cases (e.g. if a person was identified through an informal pre-screening process as a potential fit for a new vacancy), the assessment is done at the MOU building (in conjunction with the addendum), and with the assessor, the building manager (and in some cases a support person) all present. In the situations when a vacancy opens up, more than one person may be informally pre-screened for an interview. The individual assessed to be the best fit would be offered the unit, while the other(s) would have their names returned to the waiting list. The assessment is done by BC Housing, non-profit and health authority staff (for mental health supportive housing buildings), and outreach workers in shelters, who have been trained by BC Housing on how to administer the VAT. BC Housing has been using the process in Vancouver for approximately two years, and is training others across the province.

The Process Prior to the Interview (selection, and choice of interview venue)

Key informants mentioned some questions arising in relation to aspects of the process happening before the actual interview, including decisions about who will be interviewed, and where the interview should take place. First was the use of pre-screening, and selecting of individuals based on previous knowledge, in order to provide an initial sense of fit. While this may help to avoid individuals going through the interview only to be turned down by the building, it may pre-judge individuals (for example as possibly having a higher VAT score than could be supported for maintaining a viable tenant mix in a given building where the vacancy had opened up.) Another issue arising was some variability in practice and opinion as to where the interview should take place, and whether it was best done at Orange Hall, or at the MOU building itself. A consideration in favour of the former approach was that it was consistent with the move towards the practice of "VATing" all new applications and done as part of a centralized, coordinated access system of entry. The perceived drawback is that objectives of using the VAT are to determine eligibility and fit, and a workable building mix. With that in mind, there are some advantages in efficiency of doing the VAT along with the supplementary interview conducted by the building managers for the latter purpose as vacancies open up.

After the Process

Two notable issues were raised about the steps taken after the VAT interview was conducted. First, assessors affirmed the importance of conducting the scoring immediately after the interview, and the importance of doing the narrative write-up within hours of the interview. The other issue was that the write-ups were not always taken advantage of. In some cases, it appeared that building managers or support staff did not appreciate its usefulness. For instance they may have misunderstood it as intended to be a support planning tool, and viewed it as limited in this respect (rather than as "something to open up a conversation" and as a basis for further planning, which a number of key informants valued). In other cases, the narrative write-up might not have been received. The key informants' responses suggest that BC Housing work towards more consistency around the protocol for the narrative write up and its communication to MOU buildings. They should also take steps to increase awareness of the purpose of the narrative write-up and its potential value as one aspect of support planning.

EXPERIENCE OF PROCESS

Overall Experience and Emotional Safety

For the most part, the VAT was reported to be a positive, emotionally safe experience for tenants, according to the perspectives of assessors and building managers/support workers, and to the experience of tenants themselves. Eight of the tenants described the overall experience as positive, one person had a mixed (but mostly positive) experience, and two individuals described the process as mostly negative. One individual whose experience was negative "didn't understand why all these (personal) questions about drug issues or records were being asked for a housing interview." The other felt "judged on first appearance as a drug addict," which she felt led to her being placed in a building where she could not retain custody of her daughter, and which felt like "a mental health institution." The individual whose experience was mixed was dissatisfied with a question that he felt identified him as a hoarder, rather than "a binner" which he was. The item in question asks, "how many belongings do you currently have?" A quotation exemplifying the typically positive experience of tenants was: "I thought it was well done and covered all the bases and it was a comfort to know that what they'd asked and told you was straight up, and I knew that I'd got in contact with a good building to move into."

A minority of all respondents identified some problems with the VAT interview eliciting discomfort; for example, assessors identified the questions about criminal history, and relationships in particular as causing discomfort, particularly for individuals who experienced abusive relationships. There was also a question "how often do you shower?" that may be offensive. While the most recent version of the VAT script has removed this language, this revised script may still not yet be in wide usage. Tenants themselves acknowledged the experience may have been emotional not because of the questions but because of their situation. As one person said "the questions didn't bother me. I was emotional because I was begging the universe for a chance to get a place." In general, tenants mentioned the skill of the assessors, and its importance in "helping (them) feel safe and comfortable." It should be noted, however, that interviews were done with people who had received housing. We did not interview those who had not been offered a unit, whose view of the process, in retrospect, may have been different.

Understandability

For the most part, BC Housing appears to be doing a good job preparing people for the interview questions and helping them understand their purpose. Tenants reported that they were comfortable answering questions that may have otherwise been emotionally difficult to answer, because they understood that they were to help the assessors understand their housing needs. One issue spoken about by two tenants was their concern about disclosing information that may be "used against them." One building manager also mentioned this drawback. On the other hand, other tenants emphasized that they understood the purpose of the questions was to enable BC Housing to provide support for them. One person talked about being nervous, but "I understand why they asked the questions they asked." One key informant mentioned that there were still misunderstandings about the purpose of the VAT process, i.e. that the VAT score itself determines access to housing, rather than it being one part of a determination that is also based on the fit of the potential tenant with the building in question.

FAIRNESS/TRANSPARENCY

Key informants felt that the new system, though having some drawbacks, was much fairer than the previous approach, which was based on advocacy and where service providers could get their clients in to housing based on previous relationships with housing managers. As one tenant said, "before it was about who you know; now it is a lot fairer." In contrast to the old one, the new process was felt to be based on an objective system, which created a "common language" and a shared understanding about vulnerability and support level, which led to better decisions about prioritizing scarce resources, and about which housing was a good fit for a given individual. Moving towards consistency in an environment with numerous buildings run by a diverse set of non-profit organizations was viewed as a considerable accomplishment.

Despite this, some key informants acknowledged that housing decisions could still be influenced by public and political pressure, for instance in the event of housing encampments. Another challenge was that, despite doing outreach within the shelter system, the system is still to some extent based on "being at the right place at the right time", and not having a fixed address or a phone will put one at a disadvantage with respect to learning about placement decisions. One tenant suggested that because of this, applicants should be allowed to list a service provider with whom they are in close touch as a contact person. Another challenge was the possibility that once assessed, an individual's VAT score could "stick to them", even though it might change over time. For this reason, it was suggested that applicants and tenants receive VAT scores regularly over time.

It was also suggested that the VAT process could be more transparent, including (as noted above) being clearer about the basis for pre-screening, the status of individuals who are "VATed" but are not offered a unit, and whether they have priority status for vacancies that open up. As also noted above, there is a need to be clearer about the role of the VAT in making housing placement decisions (i.e. that it is not determinative).

Groups with Barriers

We asked whether there were any groups of people for whom the process may be less fair. One key informant identified marginalized groups such as women and LGBTQ individuals as being vulnerable and less able to have their housing needs understood. The use of the interview to ascertain a full picture for families (most particularly women with children) was also questioned. Some key informants also wondered whether there may be potential limitations of the interview when used with Indigenous people. Another key informant identified middle-aged or older Indigenous males experiencing trauma and who have alcohol or drug issues as typically less likely to have their needs acknowledged, and as vulnerable to exclusion. Another issue that was raised was whether the interview had some limitations in pinpointing the vulnerability of people currently living in SROs.

In general, assessors and building managers identified individuals with complex needs as less likely to access housing based on a VAT interview. For example, people who "score high on mental health and social behaviours" and have "burnt bridges"; young people with concurrent mental health and addictions problems not engaged in treatment and in "party mode" may also fit in this category. One key informant emphasized that these same types of individuals, once engaged in care and connected to some form of support, often see their VAT scores lower significantly. Said one building manager: "I'm concerned that the VAT could be a way to exclude people (with complex needs), rather than a way to build support around people." On the other hand, he suggested that the VAT actually helps provide a picture that buildings can use to problem solve situations for people previously thought of as "difficult to house."

EFFICIENCY/BURDEN OF PROCESS

Both assessors and building managers affirmed that the process, though time-intensive, is definitely worth the effort, and felt that on the whole the process elicits an accurate picture of a person and "where they're at" in a relatively short period of time. Most tenants affirmed that the questions allowed them to communicate their housing and support needs well, in a way that wasn't overly burdensome. While some key informants were concerned about respondents withholding information, or lacking insight into the issues that the questions asked about, most key informants felt that the questions helped respondents articulate these issues in a way that they may not otherwise have been able to do. Given the time spent doing interviews, assessors could find it a challenge to preserve time for doing the write-ups. A suggestion was made that assessors could be more planful about scheduling time for doing the write-ups, (e.g. have one day for interviews, and then the next day for write-ups).

MATCHING/FIT/TENANT MIX

There was a high degree of agreement that the VAT process together with the supplementary interview was very helpful for creating a workable tenant mix of individuals with various support levels. There was also a high degree of agreement that the process is valuable for ascertaining a good fit between the prospective tenant and the building (and to some extent the neighbourhood) in question. For instance, when considering the needs of a tenant, there is a sense of which housing provider may be a good fit, (e.g., that someone with high needs and challenging behavior may benefit from the more flexible environment of the Alexander, given the PHS service culture, compared to another building which may be a better fit for someone who is currently motivated to address their addictions). Another example was a tenant with complex health needs who appreciated that Kettle On Burrard was close to Three Bridges Health Clinic and St. Paul's Hospital, where he went for his health needs.

Regarding fit, one challenge was a theme expressed in a minority of tenants who identified some discomfort with the permissive environment of the building, and the negative environment of the surrounding neighbourhood in the DTES. "It's like living in a volcano down here. For someone trying to stay clean, it's very triggering" was the comment of one respondent. Said another "the environment (of the building) can bring you down and influence you in a negative way. Rather than striving to hang with happy successful people, you gravitate towards that." This same individual suggested that if the building support staff helped him become more aware of volunteer or employment opportunities, that would motivate him to “go into the world and interact.” There were also some tenants who were not comfortable with the mix of tenants in the building (for instance people with overt drug use, or unmanaged mental health issues). Said one person, “I would have still moved in, but I would have appreciated knowing about this in advance.” While the minority of tenants expressed concern about a permissive, somewhat chaotic environment of their building, in contrast, there was one person in particular who was concerned that his building was like a “mini institution”.

A final challenge mentioned by key informants was the limited number of spots remaining for people with higher needs, now that the buildings have been fully tenanted, and vacancies for high needs individuals open up less frequently. Key informants recognized that buildings are not always staffed in a way that would allow such individuals to be supported, but emphasized there is a still a need to widen the scope of options.

USEFULNESS FOR SUPPORT PLANNING

Key informants generally felt that the information elicited by the VAT process was useful for support planning. In particular, they felt that the interview, together with the written narrative and the support level rating, can provide a basis for relationship development and a further conversation about support needs once the person is settled in. As noted, there was variable interest shown by building managers and support workers in actually using the written narrative, and in some cases, building staff received the scoring but not the write-up. Some people suggested that missing collateral information needs to be gathered, for example information about mental health needs and “what has worked for the person in the past.” As another key informant emphasized, however, “the (VAT process) opens up the conversation” but is not the support planning process itself.

Tenants themselves were generally satisfied that the amount of support available in the building matched their needs, and that the needs elicited in the VAT interview were now being addressed. For example, one person talked about how they were initially reluctant to accept support but was now thankful that “they connected me with a psychiatrist and a mental health team”, once they were in the building. Another person talked about how he was initially not motivated to address his health needs but said that once these were elicited by the interview, he became more aware of them and is now getting support for them in his current housing situation. A number of comments suggested that buildings could be more proactive about providing support. For instance, one tenant talked about being aware of potentially helpful support in the building, but not yet seeking it out. Another talked about wanting employment related support, but not being aware of whether it existed. One non-tenant key informant suggested that most of the focus was on actually getting people into housing, and that there should be more attention paid to providing support once the person becomes settled. Some tenants themselves mentioned that what they wanted most was the housing, and that the support was less important. Finally, one individual talked about the importance of “housing first” in the sense that once he had the housing he could start to address his addiction issues.

IMPACT

Key informants (in particular those who had experienced MOU buildings pre-VAT), indicated there had been a significant positive impact both on building environment and achieving an optimal tenant mix. One individual said it was “night and day”. However, two tenants who had moved in recently, still noticed the presence of drug dealing. As one said, “the first day I moved in the first thing was someone asking me ‘want to buy some Special K. Right at the elevator.” While the same individual acknowledged that having the housing and support has made him “100% better,” about the drug dealing he said: “I don’t need this.”

Regarding the impact on satisfaction with tenancy, most tenants believed that the VAT had allowed them to express their needs, and that these had clearly been met. In particular, tenants talked about their satisfaction with having a self-contained unit, with its own kitchen and bathroom, in a clean building with valued amenities, like shared outdoor patios and exercise rooms. Tenants were also generally satisfied by the climate in their buildings, though a few talked about things in the building environment that concerned them (e.g. high-needs people, overly permissive environment) and which they had not been aware of before they moved in. One tenant, for instance, talked about some “disconcerting interactions with other tenants in the interview”, with the other tenant “screaming and scaring his dog.”

We also asked about the impact of the VAT on creating stable tenancies. In general, people felt the building and its support was what was primarily responsible for stability, but acknowledged that by facilitating a sound placement decision, the VAT process itself could impact tenant stability. One key informant said that “anecdotally” placing people with higher vulnerability leads to lower tenant stability, given the lack of on-site, 24-7 worker availability. Another, however, a building manager, talked about how, drawing on the data from the VAT, they could broker the necessary resources for people who required support that wasn’t available on site. On the whole, the VAT process was thought to contribute to tenant stability by facilitating appropriate placements. Similarly, in doing so, the VAT process was felt to contribute to recovery. Said one tenant, who because of her expressed wishes was placed in a harm-reduction setting, “Harm reduction has saved my life. My use has gone down 60%. …Since I’ve had what I’d call a home now – all those (SRO’s) where I stayed before were just places, a mattress, and I lived like (the movie) Trainspoting, like a hardcore junkie, but when I came here something happened. I had a place that I wasn’t embarrassed to be at, where my children could visit, and that boosted my morale.”

CONSISTENCY/QUALITY ASSURANCE

Most key informants acknowledged the skill and experience of the assessors, and indicated that for the most part the interview was being consistently carried out, regardless of which assessor was present. However, because of the focus on implementing the system, there has been less time to consider quality control, which has been “hit and miss.” Attempts are being made to double check scores that appear anomalous. It was also suggested that newer VAT interviewers, once trained, would benefit from ongoing coaching and feedback on their interviewing technique and from regular check-in meetings. Other possibilities for quality control include reviewing a random sample of assessments, including the narrative write-ups. One specific issue mentioned by an experienced assessor is that some interviewers may not stick to the script, and the order of themes laid out, and instead may follow up on themes raised by the interviewee.

Time and resources have been put to training a wider base of assessors, in a number of agencies. Expanding the base, however, requires greater attention to maintaining consistency of practice across agencies. In this regard, there has been some thought given to establishing a network of assessors, so that the more experienced ones could do “check ins” with newer ones. General issues that require attention include ensuring all assessors have access to the most up to date training manual and date script. It was suggested that the roll-out of the new Canada-specific VAT is a good opportunity to pay increased attention to training and quality control.

CHALLENGES

In terms of the main challenges that are emerging, a common theme is the challenge in housing people who have higher (and more complex) support needs. This relates to the emphasis on establishing a workable tenant mix and the diminishing availability of high-support (i.e., level 3 support) spots. Some respondents also mentioned that certain buildings may be less amenable to including such individuals, and that instead of using the VAT information to build appropriate support, the score may be having the effect of screening a person out, and that certain individuals (e.g. young people with mental health and addictions) if effectively engaged in care, could subsequently score lower. In terms of the interviewing process, respondents mention that there is an informal pre-screening happening, based on experiential knowledge of which individuals may be a good fit. While overall, the VAT process has significantly improved consistency, there is a need to improve transparency about certain aspects of the process (e.g. pre-screening, and the waitlist process for individuals who have a VAT interview but who are not housed.

LESSONS (WHAT WORKED WELL AND LESS WELL)

What's Worked Well

- The use of the VAT has significantly improved the fairness and transparency of the tenancy placement process by creating a common language and understanding of the process and an objective picture of vulnerability

- The tool is seen as eliciting rich, relevant information in a relatively short period of time

- There is a high degree of consensus in the community about the value of the tool and the process

- The tool/process (including the addendum interview) is seen as valuable for matching prospective tenants with a building which is a good fit, and has an appropriate level of support

- The process is seen as valuable in terms of creating a workable tenant mix at the building that use it

- The skill and sensitivity of the assessors themselves is seen as a significant strength of the system

What's Worked Less Well

- There are still some issues with transparency of how the system works (e.g. pre-screening for a VAT interview, what happens to people's place on the waitlist if they don't get access to housing)

- Some questions in particular (e.g., about family relationships) are seen as triggering discomfort, which may be exacerbated when prospective tenants are not clear about the purpose of the questions, or when there is no opportunity to debrief

- The VAT write-up "narrative" seems to be inconsistently delivered and/or used, which may constitute a "missed opportunity", given that the information is seen by many as a valuable opportunity to "open up a conversation" about support planning; the VAT itself is not a clinical tool, however, and the process assumes additional case management planning will be done with tenants once they are housed

- The emphasis on tenant mix (and diminishing supply of high-support spaces, and concomitant lack of appropriate intensity of clinical support in certain buildings) has meant that there is a barrier to housing people with high VAT scores

- While the pool of trained assessors is growing, there is a need to develop a more systematic approach to training and quality control amongst VAT assessors

INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS

The quantitative results demonstrated areas of strength of the VAT and areas for improvement. The VAT is doing its job in terms of assigning support levels. Support levels were significantly correlated with the total VAT scores and differences in the total VAT score were significant across the three support level groups. This indicates that the VAT is a useful tool when determining the support level of clients.

The homeless group and the SRO group had similar total VAT scores and they both had higher scores than the at risk group. It was expected that the homeless group would score higher than the SRO group. This finding could be the result of several contextual factors. There was an overwhelming demand for units within the MOU sites, with some buildings having over 1400 clients apply. Due to this demand, the clients who were being assessed on the VAT may not have accurately reflected the general trends usually found within the homeless and SRO populations. This result could also be a reflection of the structural and social conditions of many SROs in Vancouver. We know that poor quality SROs can lead to negative impacts or no improvements for the clients which may have resulted in VAT scores comparable to those of clients experiencing homelessness.

The lack of differences regarding the total VAT score and age and gender illustrates that the tool is reliable and unbiased when it comes to these markers; however, the lack of differences could also indicate that the tool may not be sensitive to the specific needs of clients, particularly women or that there are no differences associated with gender or age. Upon examination of the differences on the individual items of the VAT, interesting findings emerged. In terms of age, older clients experiencing greater medical and mortality risks is understandable. It also makes sense that older clients were rated as having less vulnerability in the domains of survival skills, mental health, substance use, social behaviours, and homelessness. In terms of gender, it may have been expected that females would be assessed as more vulnerable than males, but this was not the case – except for the domains of survival skills and mental health. This raises the question whether the VAT is adequately capturing the unique experience of female homelessness.

The data on Aboriginal identity displayed an unexpected result. Non-Aboriginal clients scored slightly higher than Aboriginal clients and this result was statistically significant. We found this result to be surprising given what we know about the vulnerabilities of the Aboriginal homeless population in Canada. We are unsure of how to interpret this finding, but it could be the result of several issues. Due to the history of Aboriginal peoples in

Canada, Aboriginal clients may be untrusting of the system in general and be unwilling to share personal information with VAT assessors or underplay the severity of their difficulties. It may also result from the VAT lacking cultural sensitivity or Aboriginal clients having alternative interpretations of the questions asked during the VAT assessment. Focusing less on deficits, it could be that the Aboriginal clients assessed on the VAT have a strong sense of resiliency. Due to this ambiguity, further work is required on determining the relevancy of the VAT with the Aboriginal community.

We found that individuals with higher VAT scores were less likely to be allocated housing than those with lower VAT scores. This was an unanticipated finding and one that has several potential explanations. Due to the intended mix of clients based upon their support level (i.e., 50% level 1, 40% level 2, and 10% level 3), there may not have been enough housing units to support the number of level 3 clients, which makes sense given the overwhelming demand for units. This may have led to clients with more complex needs being screened out and being directed to housing models with more intensive supports. It should be noted, however, that buildings were targeted to include 10% of clients at the level 3 support level and in fact 12% of the units were allocated to these clients. It also should be noted that this finding does not mean that people with higher VAT were never housed at all. It is likely that they were eventually housed by BC housing in a development outside the seven buildings examined.

We also found that the VAT has some ability to predict who will be successful in housing. We found that higher total VAT scores were related to decreased time in housing and that clients with a higher support level had decreased time in housing. This indicates that clients with greater vulnerability had shorter tenancies. To our knowledge, this is the first documentation of the predictive validity of the VAT. It should be noted that this result was for only one building and may not be reflective of the clients in other buildings.

The qualitative results show that the new system has significantly improved the fairness and transparency of the tenancy placement process by creating a common language and understanding of the process and an objective picture of vulnerability. The tool is seen as eliciting rich, relevant information in a relatively short period of time. There is a high degree of consensus in the community about the value of the tool and the process. The tool/process (including the addendum interview) is seen as valuable for matching prospective tenants with a building which is a good fit, and has an appropriate level of support. The process is seen as valuable in terms of creating a workable tenant mix at the buildings that use it. The skill and sensitivity of the assessors themselves is seen as a significant strength of the system

There are still some issues with transparency of how the process unfolds (e.g. pre-screening for a VAT interview, what happens to people's place on the waitlist if they don't get access to housing). Some questions in particular (e.g., about family relationships) are seen as triggering discomfort, which may be exacerbated when prospective tenants are not clear about the purpose of the questions, or when there is no opportunity to debrief. The VAT write-up "narrative" seems to be inconsistently delivered and/or used, which may constitute a "missed opportunity", given that the information is seen by many as a valuable opportunity to "open up a conversation" about support planning. The VAT itself, however, is not a clinical tool and the process assumes that additional case management planning will be done once tenants are housed. The emphasis on tenant mix (and diminishing supply of high-support spaces, and concomitant lack of appropriate intensity of support in certain buildings) has meant that there is a barrier to people with high VAT scores. While the pool of trained assessors is growing, there is a need to develop a more systematic approach to training and quality control amongst VAT assessors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the results of this evaluation, we recommend the continued use of the VAT in BC Housing funded supportive housing.

The remainder of the recommendations are broken down into two categories: 1) Improving the administration and interpretation of the VAT and 2) Lessons learned beyond the VAT – system planning/design

Administration and interpretation of the VAT

1. **Link VAT data to housing outcomes.** Existing data links VAT scores with tenancy outcomes for one MOU building (Kettle on Burrard). In order to more rigorously examine the relationship between VAT scores and housing outcomes, and to determine if the predictive validity of the VAT remains, it will be important to develop the capacity to link the VAT data with tenant data in more buildings.

2. **Assess the use of the VAT and how it applies to vulnerable populations, including Aboriginal clients, women and youth to determine if the VAT is adequately capturing the vulnerability of these groups.** Non-Aboriginal clients were assessed as having a slightly greater vulnerability than Aboriginal clients based on the VAT. This may be due to a number of possibilities, including cultural norms around expressing need and the cultural safety/competence of the process. In light of these possibilities, the VAT process should be reviewed to determine if it is adequately capturing the unique needs of the Aboriginal community. Alternatives for exploring and addressing this issue may include the use of Aboriginal-specific addendum questions, surveying Aboriginal clients who have been assessed on the VAT, and the inclusion of Aboriginal VAT assessors. It is also recommended that as a future direction, BC Housing should examine whether the VAT process is adequately capturing the vulnerability of women and young people.

3. **Work with the Ministry of Health and relevant health authorities to develop a process for assessing the ongoing vulnerability and functioning of tenants after they are housed.** Currently, clients are assessed only once on the VAT. A concern is that this may reinforce a fixed view of a given individual's ongoing vulnerability and functioning. Having a way to assess community functioning periodically would enable BC Housing and other funders (including health) to better understand how existing supports (either within buildings or brokered) are working in order to facilitate recovery.

4. **Create a Quality Assurance process for VAT assessors.** The skills of the assessors were a definite strength of using the VAT. However, some variations in practice (i.e., order of the questions, length of interview, and version of VAT being used) were identified in the qualitative interviews. As BC Housing expands use of the VAT, new assessors will come on board. In order to maintain the strength of the process as the system expands, and minimize variations, we recommend, in conjunction with the release of the new Canadian VAT:

   a) Establishing a system for periodic audits, reviewing a random selection of VATs for consistency and accuracy – looking at scoring and write-ups, and identifying anomalies.
   b) Establishing a system of supplemental training, e.g. annual conference and periodic webinars, based on audit results.
   c) Periodically surveying new tenants regarding their experience being assessed on the VAT and sharing the results of this survey to all of the VAT assessors.
   d) Establishing a community of practice so that more experienced assessors could support newer assessors, or to offer in the moment support in the event of assessment questions.

5. **Increase awareness and transparency of the VAT process**
   a) **to tenants:** by adding context in the VAT script to prospective tenants, explaining that the VAT is an interview to assess vulnerability and support needs, and with other information helps determine housing placement, rather being than a "housing interview" which in and of itself determines housing placement.
   b) **to service providers and assessors:** by communicating more clearly about the value of the VAT process, including the narrative write-up, as a tool to "open up a conversation" about support planning that providers can build on; and about the need for assessors to consistently send the narrative-write up to building managers.

6. **Continue the practice of having more interviews at a neutral location (e.g. Orange Hall) rather than at the housing sites.** The current system often has building managers to sit in on interviews with individuals who are pre-screened, which allows a sense of whether a person is a "good fit" within the building, and the two interviews (VAT and building addendum) to be combined. To remedy the bias that pre-screening may create, and the anxiety this can create in tenants, we recommend:

   a) Conducting the VAT assessment at a neutral location outside of the housing sites such as Orange Hall or a place of the prospective tenant's choice; and

   b) Holding the building addendum interview at a later time for candidates who are assessed as potentially eligible for housing based on the VAT interview.

7. **System planning/design**
   Use VAT data for planning and/or broadening the range of housing and support service options for supportive housing applicants, including:

   a) Aligning support services strategically within housing to address the levels of need among supportive housing applicants

   b) Developing a range of supportive housing building options which includes purpose-built smaller units, congregate living spaces and scattered site housing with mobile clinical and non clinical services, including ACT and ICM teams

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Section 1): Demographic Information

Respondent Category

Check one:

_____ Tenant

_____ Building Manager

_____ VAT assessor

_____ Front Line worker

_____ Decision-maker (including Advisory Group member)

If tenant:

Approximately when was VAT administered

if known: ________________________ (month/year)

or, if not known:

________ within the last 6 months

________ within the last year

________ within the last two years

________ within the last three years

Was the tenant housed when the VAT was administered?

________ (Yes/No)

Length of time respondent works/lives in current situation

_____ months

_____ years

Preamble to Main Interview – Sections 2 and 3: Over the next forty-five minutes or so we will be asking you some questions about the VAT, including what's been working well, and what needs to be improved.

For tenants: Just as a reminder, here is a copy of the questionnaire. Before we start, I'll read out as many questions as it takes to help you think back and remember what the experience was like.

Section 2): Experience with, Strengths and Needed Improvements in relation to:

- **Targeting** (ask all questions to advisory group, funders, building managers, and staff; ask question 3 to tenants)

1. Is the VAT doing its job in helping ensure people who are most in need are being housed? (describe); (probe: re helping determine the most vulnerable, including typically underserved populations? Re helping select people who are chronically homeless (note: give definition)?)
2. What barriers (if any) does the VAT process create for people seeking supportive housing (probe: can you describe whether any specific sub-populations or groups of people experience particular barriers?)
3. Is the VAT doing its job in helping ensure selection of people who are a good fit for a particular building? (describe); (probe: re helpfulness in determining appropriate tenant mix; helpfulness in matching potential tenants with a building that can provide appropriate supports)

Plain language version of question 3 for tenants:

When you had your VAT interview, what kind of housing did you want or feel you needed?

Did the interview ask you the kind of questions that allowed you to explain your needs?

Do you feel that where you live now is a good fit for you?

Are the staff and programs the building offers meeting your needs? (do you think you have needs not being met?) (describe)

4. Describe how effective the VAT process is in terms of allowing for incorporation of other relevant information that would help the targeting process, in relation to eligibility and fit. (Probe: re other eligibility information; use of addendum questions for assessing fit)
5. Based on your experience, when it comes to targeting the right people, what would you say are the main lessons about what's been working well, and what could be working better?

- **Consistency** (for assessors)

1. How consistently is the VAT interview applied?
2. What's the process for ensuring that the interview is applied consistently?

- **Efficiency/burden** of process (ask all questions to steering committee, funders, building managers, and providers; ask questions 2 & 4 to tenant)

1. Describe whether the people administering the VAT interview find it efficient to use (probe: quality of the interview questions; time spent doing the interview; experience of the participants)
2. (for tenants): Describe whether the VAT interview was a positive or negative experience for you.

(If necessary, ask these follow-up questions to tenants:)

2a) How did you find the length of the interview?

2b) How easy to understand did you find the interview (or the questions)?

2c) Did you find the interview (or any of the questions) emotionally difficult to go through?

3. Describe the efficiency of the overall VAT process (probe re: data collection, data entry, reporting, sharing of the write-up with direct-line staff)
4. Based on your experience, what works well with the interview, and what needs to be improved?

- **Effectiveness** (ask to all stakeholders, except tenants):

1. (if answer not already provided by Targeting, question 1): Is the VAT effective in assessing eligibility of applicants for supportive housing? (describe)
2. (if answer not already provided by Targeting, question 3): Is the VAT providing useful information for making decisions about tenant placement? (describe);(probe: re appropriate tenant/building fit; re overall tenant mix within buildings)
3. How helpful is the building-specific addendum with respect to facilitating tenant placement decisions?
4. How helpful is the information provided by the VAT with respect to helping plan for tenants' support needs?
5. Based on your experience and perspective regarding effectiveness (for assessing eligibility and for facilitating good choices about tenant/building fit), what are the main lessons learned with respect to what's working well, what could be improved?

- **Impact and Overall Lessons Learned** (ask questions to all stakeholders, except questions 2, 3, 7 and 8, which are not asked to tenants)

What are the impacts of the VAT (and by impacts we mean positive and negative changes either intended or unintended) in terms of:

1. (if question hasn't already been answered above): creating a system that is fair and transparent for housing people who are homeless (or at risk)?
2. (if question hasn't already been answered above): creating a workable tenant mix at housing sites?
3. For buildings where VAT was instituted mid-stream (e.g. Marguerite Ford): What difference (if any) has the VAT made to the tenant mix and overall environment of the building?
4. Achieving tenant satisfaction with housing and supports? (to tenant: are you happy with where you are living? And with the support the building provides? Are there other things you'd wish staff could help you with?)
5. Improving tenant outcomes (e.g. with respect to sense of well-being, health, income and social/community engagement)? (to tenant: compared to how you wee efore you moved in, how would you say you are doing now?
6. Overall, what are the lessons learned with respect to use of the VAT? (strengths, needed improvements)
7. On balance, compared to the previous system for determining eligibility, do you prefer the VAT? (describe)
8. What could be improved regarding the VAT training?
9. Do you have any other comments or suggestions to make?

Section 2: Contextual Information about Building-Specific Support (asked to building managers and front-line providers)

- In general, what kind of support does the building provide? (this could also be ascertained through program documents, service agreements, etc.)
- What is the support philosophy guiding the process of providing support? (probe: re consistency with Housing First principles)
- What kind of support is provided from outside sources (e.g. clinical support from Health Authority or elsewhere)?
- When it comes to individual tenants, what is the process for understanding the support needs (and how is the information gathered by the VAT incorporated within this process?)
- How does the support for individual tenants change over time?
- Are there ever mismatches between the kinds of support the building provides and individual tenant needs (describe)?

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

PATHWAYS TO HOUSING CANADA RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

The Research Study: Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT) process

In this research study we will be studying:

- How the Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT) process is working, and whether it needs to be improved.
- The value of the VAT as a common assessment tool for helping inform decisions about eligibility for supportive housing, about tenant placement, and for providing information that helps front-line providers provide effective support to individual residents.
- Whether and how the VAT helps to improve residential stability and other tenant outcomes.

Your role in this research will be:

- To let us know about your experiences and perspectives on the VAT tool.
- Depending on your experiences, you may be asked questions about:
    - the tool's fairness, effectiveness, efficiency, as well as its impacts on helping create stable tenancies and other tenant outcomes
- We will be also asking all stakeholders about lessons learned, with respect to the tool's strengths and needed improvements.

IS PARTICIPATION MANDATORY?

Your participation in the study is **completely voluntary**. If you choose to participate, please remember that you are not obligated to answer all the questions. If there are any questions that you can't or don't wish to answer, the interviewer will go on to the next question. You can stop the interview at any time without any effect on the care or services that you receive. If you decide to stop participating in the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible. If you choose not to participate, you will continue to have access to any services that you have now.

All information from you will be **confidential** and your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Notes will be taken during the interview, and with your consent audio recordings will be made. The audio recordings will be safely stored on an encrypted hard drive within Pathways Canada Vancouver office. The notes will be kept on a numbered form that does not have your name or other identifying information. Your name and other identifying information will be stored on a separate numbered form. Both forms will be kept in a locked filing cabinet within a secure research office and only authorized research staff will have access to the information. After the study your information, not including your name, will be kept for a maximum of one year before being destroyed (permanently deleted). Your information will not be used for any purpose other than the current research, including future research, without your consent.

Confidentiality will be respected and no information that discloses your identity will be released or published without your consent unless required by law and/or to disclose abuse or acute risk of harm to yourself or others.

WHAT ARE THE PROS AND CONS OF PARTICIPATING?

Your participation would help us understand the strengths of the VAT tool as well as any needed improvements in the process. While all of your information will be kept confidential, and presented in a format where names will be removed, there is a very small risk that someone who knows you might be able to identify participating individuals. If you are a tenant, and your experience of the VAT was negative, there is also a risk that your participation in this interview could bring up negative emotions associated with that experience.

WILL THERE BE AN HONORARIUM?

There will be an honorarium for tenants of $20. If you decide to stop before finishing the interview, you will still receive the $20.

Any personal information you provide is collected in accordance with section 26(c) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act for the purpose of evaluating the Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT). If you have questions or concerns regarding the research in general, about your role in the study, or about the consultant team, please feel free to contact Sam Tsemberis. You can contact him either by telephone at 778 893 4996 or by e-mail at stsemberis@pathwaystohousing.org.

For questions or concerns regarding the research purpose or uses please contact Deborah Kraus Research Manager at BC Housing: dkraus@bchousing.org or 604-439-4781.

CONSENT

I ____________________, consent to participate in the Research Study outlined above. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent to participate in the research.

Date ______________________________

Signature ______________________________

Participants please initial to indicate receipt of the $20 honorarium ___________________

Name and signature of interviewer ____