

## **Executive Summary:**

### **Positive Housing and Support Movement**

The 2016 Point in Time Count revealed that there were at least 1,387 people who were homeless in Greater Victoria, and at least 83 were homeless on Salt Spring Island. The Capital Regional District is responding to this situation with a Housing First approach – an evidence-based, effective approach to address homelessness by providing individuals with permanent housing of their choosing, and support services as desired, without preconditions of readiness. The Housing First approach sees housing as a right, as well as a crucial foundation to recovery.

This report examines one particular aspect of the housing system: the client-driven movement from one model of supportive housing to more 'independent' housing. Supporting this is integral to ensuring system effectiveness and adherence to the principles of Housing First.

The primary question is -how:

- a) What barriers currently exist that may be limiting that movement?
- b) What supports could ease this movement, for those who desire it?

Front-line staff and tenants in existing supportive housing provided their insights and perspectives.

Recommendations include:

- Transitional housing must have a transitional program with dedicated staff, intake, goal setting.
- Increase supply of housing availability to ensure there are options to move into when tenants are ready and would like to move to independent housing.
- Provide stable and adequate rent subsidies to ensure no tenant transitioning to more independent housing is required to pay more than 30% of their income on shelter costs (rent and utilities).
- Increase supply of available, affordable, adequate, and suitable housing.
- Institute municipal and provincial policy measures to provide for housing affordability, especially with regard to rental housing.
- Municipal policies to prevent or mitigate the impacts of 'renovictions'.
- Ensure all tenants have tenancy rights in line with the RTA.

# Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)



Report prepared by the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria  
For the Coalition to End Homelessness and the Capital Regional District

Lead researcher: Stefanie Hardman

Spring 2017



# Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

## Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Key considerations and insights when thinking about supporting client-driven movement from one model of supportive housing to more 'independent' housing: .....	5
Context.....	7
Housing First in the Capital Region.....	7
Housing First Principles .....	7
Housing First in the Capital Region: Regional Housing First Program.....	8
This project: Positive Housing and Support Movement (Flow) .....	10
Objectives and Goals of this Project .....	10
Methodology.....	10
Supportive Housing in the Capital Region .....	12
Definitions.....	13
"Flow" in supportive housing .....	15
Flow: Considering the move out of supportive housing to more independent housing.....	17
Summary of themes from conversations tenants and staff.....	17
Tenants experiences of supportive housing.....	20
Access to supportive housing .....	20
Barriers to moving to more independent housing.....	21
Challenges to a system-wide understanding of flow.....	21
The system sets people up to let them down.....	22
Economic barriers .....	24
Lack of options to move into .....	25
Waitlists .....	27
Lack of information .....	28
Population service gaps and priority.....	29
Stigma and discrimination.....	30
Fear & isolation.....	31
Feelings of hopelessness.....	32

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

Supporting self-determination, autonomy, and well-being in supportive housing.....	33
Supports to develop .....	35
Resource limitations .....	35
Supports to develop or expand .....	35
What tenants feel could be helpful in transition – before the transition .....	37
What tenants feel could be helpful in transition – during/after .....	37
What tenants want in housing .....	38
Concluding Considerations .....	41
Reference List .....	45
Appendix .....	46
Participating organizations .....	46

## Acknowledgements

This project was funded in part by the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy. The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada or of the Capital Regional District of Victoria, BC.

The authors of, and contributors to, this report acknowledge we are on the unceded traditional territory of the Lekwungen (Songhees), Wyomilth (Esquimalt), and WSÁNEĆ (Saanich) peoples of the Coast Salish Nation.

The Community Social Planning Council would like to extend gratitude to all stakeholders who participated in this project: service provider staff at the management level and front line, and especially to the more than 50 supportive housing tenants and people with lived experience of homelessness. Thank you for sharing your valuable time, insights, experience, and stories with us.

## Introduction

Homelessness and housing instability is a significant and ongoing issue in the capital region. The 2016 point-in-time counts identified the number of individuals who were homeless in the region, which refers to those who are unsheltered, emergency sheltered, or provisionally accommodated.<sup>1</sup> On the night of February 10, 2016 there were at least 1,387 people who were homeless in Greater Victoria,<sup>2</sup> and at least 83 were homeless on Salt Spring Island.<sup>3</sup>

The Capital Regional District is responding to this situation with a Housing First approach – an evidence-based, effective approach to address homelessness by providing individuals with permanent housing of their choosing, and support services as desired, without preconditions of readiness.<sup>4</sup> The Housing First approach sees housing as a right, as well as a crucial foundation to recovery.<sup>5</sup>

Supportive housing – housing facilities with dedicated support services embedded on site – plays an integral role in the housing and support system in the capital region. The role of supportive housing in the region, however, is not singular and uniform, nor is the path into (and out of, if desired) supportive housing straightforward and linear.

There are a variety of types of supportive housing (from transitional to permanent; clinically-oriented to socially-oriented; etc.) and each person living in supportive housing has their own unique story of how they arrived at living in that form of housing, what their needs are, what would be their preferred housing situation of best fit, and what supports could most successfully contribute to their housing stability.

This project examines one particular aspect of the housing system: the client-driven movement from one model of supportive housing to more ‘independent’ housing – housing that does not have built-in, dedicated services available on site – whether that housing is affordable non-market (social housing) or market housing. Supporting this client-driven movement is integral to ensuring system effectiveness and adherence to the principles of Housing First.

---

<sup>1</sup> Definition used by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness.

<sup>2</sup> More Than a Number: 2016 Greater Victoria Point in Time Count Summary Report.

<sup>3</sup> Salt Spring Island Community Services (2016). Point-in-Time Homelessness Count Report.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Gaetz, Fiona Scott & Tanya Gulliver (Eds.) (2013): Housing First in Canada: Supporting Research Network Communities to End Homelessness. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Gaetz, Fiona Scott & Tanya Gulliver (Eds.) (2013): Housing First in Canada: Supporting Research Network Communities to End Homelessness. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

The primary question is, then, how to support client-driven, strengths-based, positive movements (also called “flow”) into different housing forms for those current tenants of existing supportive housing who may wish to make that move. What barriers currently exist that may be limiting that movement? What supports could ease this movement, for those who desire it?

### **Key considerations and insights when thinking about supporting client-driven movement from one model of supportive housing to more ‘independent’ housing:**

- Supportive housing takes different forms and roles, and it must be considered in relation to how it can support Housing First principles.
- Increased well-being and reduced homelessness are the ultimate goals of the system, and system efficiency is a way to most effectively address those goals rather than an end in itself.
- Individuals’ movement along the housing and support system may not be linear, and may not involve moving towards one particular ideal end goal.
- Every individual is different and unique -- and the housing and support system should be tenant-centred and responsive to individual needs.
- “Independence” may not be the most resonant goal for individuals.
- There are challenges to a systems-wide understanding of “flow.”
- Low turnover rates, or “flow,” may indicate a strength or success of the housing system, rather than simply an issue/problem to resolve.
- Choice is key in a Housing First approach, yet it is constrained in a system with little housing availability and therefore few options.
- The system sets people up to let them down – which counteracts health, well-being, and self-determination.
- Regardless of the housing situation, individuals want basic principles respected: tenant rights and transparency of rules; self-determination and autonomy; safety and security; privacy.
- Greater systems integration, including better coordination and communication of existing services and resources, would improve the effectiveness of the system in supporting movement from supportive housing to more independent housing options.
- There are opportunities for expansion of existing, and development of new, services to support the client-driven movement from supportive housing to more independent housing options.
- Embedding the principles of Housing First in the policies, program development, and organization structures of housing and service provision is just as important as developing additional or increased support services when it comes to supporting self-determination and client-driven movement to more independent living situations.

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)







## Context

### Housing First in the Capital Region

#### Housing First Principles

Housing First is an approach to addressing homelessness – offering individuals access to permanent, affordable housing as quickly as possible and options of community-based support services – that has been implemented and adapted in communities across Canada with evidence-based effectiveness.<sup>6</sup>

There are six mandatory principles under the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) Housing First (HF) approach:

- 1. Rapid housing with supports:** This involves directly helping clients locate and secure permanent housing as rapidly as possible and assisting them with moving in or re-housing if needed. Housing readiness is not a requirement.
- 2. Offering clients choice in housing:** Clients must be given choice in terms of housing options as well as the services they wish to access.
- 3. Separating housing provision from other services:** Acceptance of any services, including treatment, or sobriety, is not a requirement for accessing or maintaining housing, but clients must be willing to accept regular visits, often weekly. There is also a commitment to rehousing clients as needed.
- 4. Providing tenancy rights and responsibilities:** Clients are required to contribute a portion of their income towards rent. The preference is for clients to contribute 30 percent of their income, while the rest would be provided via rent subsidies. A landlord-tenant relationship must be established. Clients housed have rights consistent with applicable landlord and tenant acts and regulations. Developing strong relationships with landlords in both the private and public sector is key to the HF approach.

---

<sup>6</sup> Mental Health Commission of Canada (2014). National At Home / Chez Soi Final Report.



## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

5. **Integrating housing into the community:** In order to respond to client choice, minimize stigma and encourage client social integration, more attention should be given to scattered-site housing in the public or private rental markets. Other housing options such as social housing and supportive housing in congregate setting could be offered where such housing stock exists and may be chosen by some clients.
6. **Strength-based and promoting self-sufficiency:** The goal is to ensure clients are ready and able to access regular supports within a reasonable timeframe, allowing for a successful exit from the HF program. The focus is on strengthening and building on the skills and abilities of the client, based on self-determined goals, which could include employment, education, social integration, improvements to health or other goals that will help to stabilize the client's situation and lead to self-sufficiency.<sup>7</sup>

### Housing First in the Capital Region: Regional Housing First Program

Homelessness and housing instability is a significant and ongoing issue in the capital region. The 2016 point-in-time counts identified the number of individuals who were homeless in the region – which refers to those who are unsheltered, emergency sheltered, or provisionally accommodated.<sup>8</sup> On the night of February 10, 2016 there were at least 1,387 people who were homeless in Greater Victoria,<sup>9</sup> and at least 83 were homeless on Salt Spring Island.<sup>10</sup>

The Capital Regional District is responding to this situation with a Housing First approach – an evidence-based, effective approach to address homelessness by providing individuals with permanent housing of their choosing, and support services as desired, without preconditions of readiness.<sup>11</sup> The Housing First approach sees housing as a right, as well as a crucial foundation to recovery.<sup>12</sup>

The CRD's Housing First approach involves both supply-side interventions, in response to the known undersupply of affordable non-market (social housing) and market housing in the region,<sup>13</sup> as well as a policy and program framework that will support the Regional Housing First Program (RHFP). This framework, in partnership with BC Housing, involves collaboration of stakeholders across the health, residential and housing spectrum of care, including Island

---

<sup>7</sup> Government of Canada, Homeless Partnering Strategy.

<sup>8</sup> Definition used by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness.

<sup>9</sup> More Than a Number: 2016 Greater Victoria Point in Time Count Summary Report.

<sup>10</sup> Salt Spring Island Community Services (2016). Point-in-Time Homelessness Count Report.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Gaetz, Fiona Scott & Tanya Gulliver (Eds.) (2013): Housing First in Canada: Supporting Research Network Communities to End Homelessness. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Gaetz, Fiona Scott & Tanya Gulliver (Eds.) (2013): Housing First in Canada: Supporting Research Network Communities to End Homelessness. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

<sup>13</sup> Community Social Planning Council (2015). Capital Region Housing Data Book and Gap Analysis.

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

Health, Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness and other social service agencies and local, provincial and federal authorities.<sup>14</sup> Both the CRD and the Province are each contributing \$30 million to the initiative, totaling \$60 to support the development of affordable and supportive housing projects.<sup>15</sup>

Once the funding agreements were in place, the CRD, the Coalition to End Homelessness, and other stakeholders identified the need to fully understand how the current housing system worked in order to then make improvements to successfully implement Housing First principles.

The Capital Regional District, in partnership with the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness, BC Housing, the Federal Homeless Partnering Strategy and Island Health, undertook a Process Mapping Project in the summer of 2016 in order to identify barriers, bottlenecks, inefficiencies, and gaps within the housing, health, and social support system in the Capital Region. The Process Mapping Project identified four critical areas for intervention:

- Intake and Access;
- Data Collection and Management;
- System Efficiency and Effectiveness;
- System/Organizational Culture.<sup>16</sup>

### Coalition's Community Plan

In August 2016, the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (the Coalition) drafted a Community Plan, designed to merge the *Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) Community Plan* and the *Creating Homes, Enhancing Communities (CHEC) Plan* into one comprehensive document.

Phase 1 (2016/2017), focused on "Rapid, Visible and Meaningful Change," features recommendations based on the outcomes of two critical initiatives: The *Process Mapping Project*, created through a partnership between the Coalition, BC Housing, HPS and Island Health; and, the Coalition's *Priority One Task Force: Better Housing and Support Services for Individuals Experiencing Chronic Homelessness with Additional or Other Needs*. This project, Positive Housing and Support Movement (Flow), is a part of the first phase of Coalition's Community Plan.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Capital Regional District (n.d.). <http://www.crd.bc.ca/project/regional-housing-first-program>

<sup>15</sup> Capital Regional District (n.d.). <http://www.crd.bc.ca/project/regional-housing-first-program>

<sup>16</sup> CitySpaces Consulting (2016). Process Mapping Supplemental Report.

<sup>17</sup> Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (2016). Community Plan – Phase 1, 2016/17.

# Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)



## **This project: Positive Housing and Support Movement (Flow)**

### **Objectives and Goals of this Project**

This project, Positive Housing and Support Movement (Flow), is part of a coordinated approach to systems change to support the implementation of the Regional Housing First Program in the Capital Regional District.

The Flow project aims to provide insight into opportunities for supporting strength-based, positive movements driven by client choice, by asking the following questions:

1. How many individuals in existing supportive housing would like to move to more independent forms of housing with or without community-based support services?
2. What type of housing and community-based support options would best support these individuals?
3. What are the specific barriers facing these individuals in achieving more independent housing options?
4. If individuals do wish to move on, what kind of 'transitional' support services would they like?
5. What kind of time-frame would be appropriate for the transition process?
6. What kind of 'safety nets' would there need to be should they find they are not comfortable in the new housing and community-based support situation?

### **Methodology**

This project employs a qualitative research methodology, as this approach provides strengths in accessing and parsing depth, complexity, and nuance. It is able to offer an understanding of "how things work in particular contexts,"<sup>18</sup> which is especially useful when situating the concept of flow in the larger, complex housing and support system.

This research is conducted with a strengths-based and client-centred approach, emphasizing the strengths and assets of individuals in supportive housing – and valuing their expertise on the

---

<sup>18</sup> Mason, Jennifer (2002). *Qualitative Researching*, Second Edition. London: Sage Publications.

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

issue – while inquiring into their needs when it comes to movement from supportive housing to more independent housing options.

We built a systems-level understanding through conversations with housing and service provider staff, at both the level of management and at the front line.

The research activities and tools included:

- **A literature review** to investigate promising practices in other jurisdictions with regard to the flow of tenants from supportive housing to other forms of housing;
- **Consultation** with the both Social Inclusion Advisory Committee and the System Improvement Working Group of the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness about the project's activities and approach.
- **Key informant stakeholder interviews**, with management-level staff at supportive housing providers as well as other relevant housing and support system stakeholders. These interviews allowed us to gain a grounded and informed understanding of the local context, including local efforts and considerations in relation to the client-driven movement of tenants from one model of supporting housing to more independent housing options;
- **An engagement session** with front-line staff of housing and support service providers to collect their unique perspective on the housing and support system;
- **Focus groups with tenants**, who are experts of their own experiences, needs, and the housing and support system. We spoke with 50 tenants of supportive housing (both transitional and permanent), at six different housing locations throughout Greater Victoria;
- **Report back with stakeholders**, sharing preliminary findings and soliciting feedback to be incorporated into the final report.
  - We presented to the System Improvement Working Group and Regional Housing First Design Team, and collected feedback through an online survey.
  - We produced a large graphic poster (page 19) illustrating the main themes across the six tenant focus groups, and posted it in the housing buildings where focus groups took place, along with a brief paper survey.

### Limitations of the research

This project does not ultimately provide a quantifiable response to the very first question it was tasked with: "How many individuals in existing supportive housing would like to move to more independent forms of housing with or without community-based support services?" The project team was concerned that attempting to address this question with limited time and resources could compromise both (a) appropriate and respectful engagement and (b) rigorous and

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

effective research. The project team consulted with CRD and Coalition staff to express this concern and it was agreed that this project would not be able to answer this question.

Indigenous people are over-represented in the population of people who are experiencing homelessness or are at-risk of homelessness, due to the ongoing impacts of colonization.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the housing and support system approach these issues from a decolonizing perspective with attention to cultural safety. It is important to recognize that this project was limited in the ability to adequately provide insight to the ways in which colonization and the housing and support system are intertwined. While some participants in the research may be indigenous, the project has not provided much-needed recommendations and insight on how indigenous people can best be supported in the transition from supportive housing to more independent housing options. It is recommended that this be explored in a future project.

A perspective also missing from the research is that of clients in Island Health facilities. Due to the rigorous requirements of the Island Health Research Ethics application, and the limited time frame of this project, we were unable to secure ethics approval in time to conduct conversations with Island Health clients. We did, however, speak with Island Health staff.



### Supportive Housing in the Capital Region

This section clarifies the definition of supportive housing in the region, recognizes the variety roles and models of supportive housing in the broader housing system, identifies that these different models have different orientations towards “flow” as well as tenancy rights, and suggest that there are challenges in coming to a systems understanding of “flow” across a variety of housing providers.

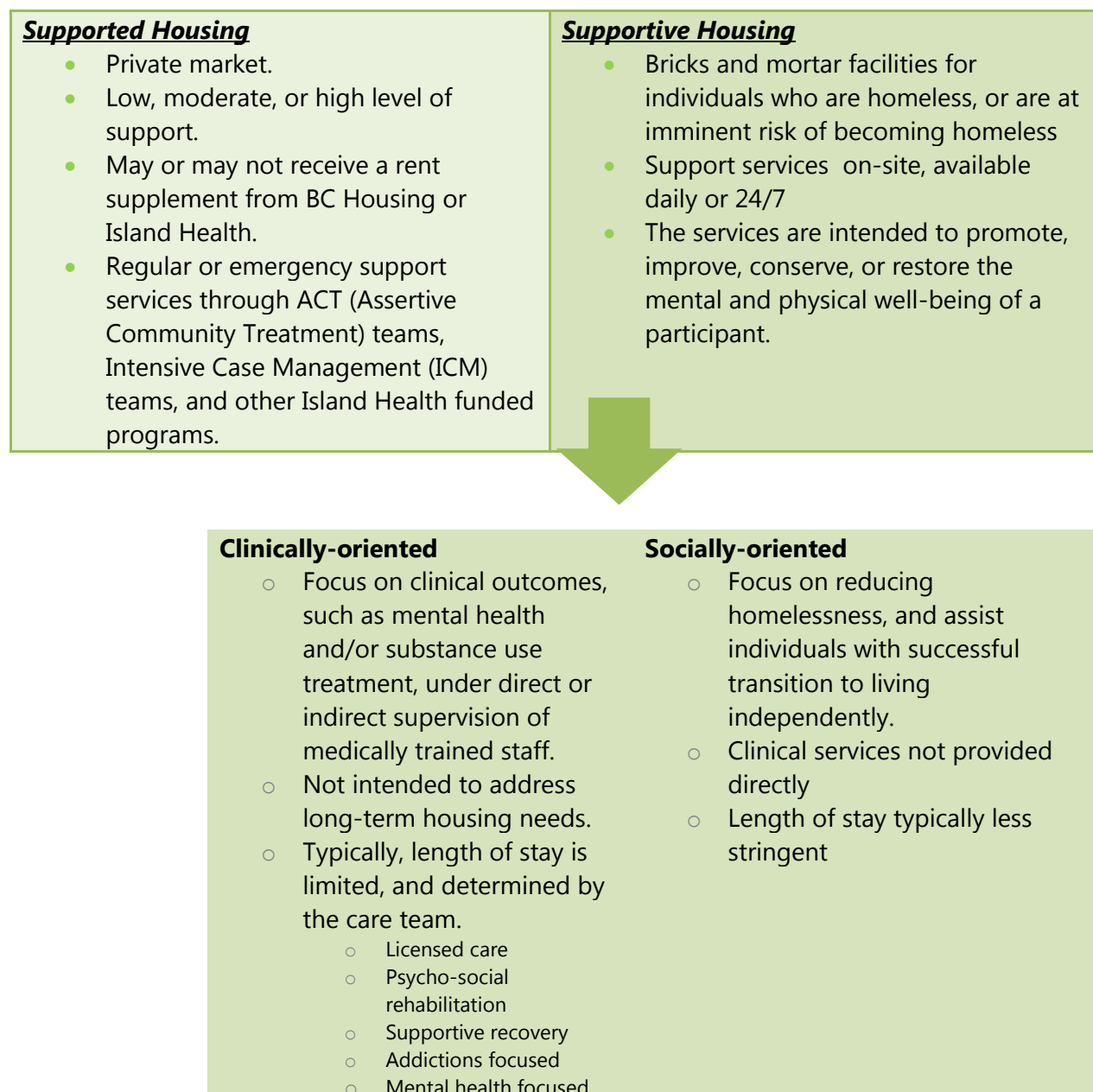
---

<sup>19</sup> More Than a Number: 2016 Greater Victoria Point in Time Count Summary Report.

# Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

## Definitions

The definition of supportive housing – and particularly the differentiation between supportive housing and supported housing – is not standardized and clear between housing and service providers within the region. The terms are often used interchangeably, or used in different ways. In order to provide consistency across the multiple projects and efforts currently undertaken to improve the housing and support system, this project used the definitions outlined in the Process Mapping project:<sup>20</sup>



<sup>20</sup> CitySpaces Consulting (2016). Process Mapping Supplemental Report.

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

Supportive housing plays an important role in supporting recovery, stability, well-being and self-determination of individuals.<sup>21</sup> Supportive housing varies across the housing system in terms of tenant eligibility, barriers to entry, level and types of support services, and housing arrangement (shared amenities, access to kitchen, private or shared washrooms, etc).

While there is a *Health, Residential, and Housing Spectrum of Care* that illustrates a range of housing and support systems on a linear spectrum, individuals' movement within the housing and support system is not necessarily linear, nor does it move towards one particular housing type as an end goal. Our research revealed that not all people who currently live in supportive housing are on the path to more independent housing or another type of housing; some are already home in their existing supportive housing.

### Tenancy rights and supportive housing

In addition to the lack of clarity of definitions, there is also ambiguity when it comes to tenancy rights and supportive housing. This is particularly significant when approaching the issue from a Housing First perspective, as any person housed is entitled to tenancy rights and responsibilities, according to Housing First principles.

The BC Residential Tenancy Act (RTA) is not currently applicable in many supportive housing buildings. If it is, there are often addendums with additional conditions that contribute to lending a sense of ambiguity when it comes to tenant rights.<sup>22</sup>

Particularly in more medicalized and/or transition-based models of supportive housing, a Tenancy Agreement is replaced by a Program Agreement, wherein participation in outlined programming is a condition of being housed.<sup>23</sup>

### Medicalized model and tenancy-based supportive housing

The medicalized and transitional models of supportive housing are distinct from tenancy-based, permanent supportive housing in a number of ways. The following table (Figure 1) outlines the different type of terminology commonly used within each type of model.

---

<sup>21</sup> Wellesley Institute (2009). Critical Characteristics of Supported Housing.

<sup>22</sup> Conversations with and documentation provided by local housing providers.

<sup>23</sup> Conversations with and documentation provided by local housing providers.



## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

Figure 1: Common language distinctions in different models of supportive housing<sup>24</sup>

Medical model	Tenancy-based supportive housing
Patient / Client	Tenant / Client
Flow-through	Security of Tenure
Discharge	Tenant-directed moves
Facilities	Buildings
Beds	Homes
Health Service Provider	Housing Provider / Landlord / Support Provider

These differences in service-delivery, focus, and approach to housing offered, as reflected in the terminology commonly used, are significant as the differences have implications for how supportive fits in the larger housing and support system, and how they support Housing First principles within the larger system.

Different models and approaches are integral to an effective housing and support system, according to Gaetz et al in their study of Housing First in Canada. While they emphasize the importance of Housing First, they also acknowledge it is not the only response, and that this approach ideally “plays an important role alongside other interventions, including prevention, emergency services, and other models of accommodation and support (including effective transitional and support housing models that lead to permanent and adequate housing.”<sup>25</sup>

### “Flow” in supportive housing

The concept of “flow” in supportive housing has differing relevance and meanings depending on the needs of the individual accessing supportive housing, the variation of approaches across service providers, and jurisdictional contexts. In general, it refers to the movement of individuals from one model of supportive housing to other housing options.

The Process Mapping project found that there has been little turnover in many supportive housing units in the region in recent years. This has reduced the accessibility of supportive housing options for individuals who require or would greatly benefit from living in a supportive housing environment.<sup>26</sup>

Meanwhile, there may be individuals living in supportive housing who no longer require or desire that particular housing arrangement, and could potentially be supported to move to a different housing option of their choosing if there was an appropriate alternative with the

<sup>24</sup> Adapted from Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association’s (2013) “focusON: LHINs and the housing system.”

<sup>25</sup> Stephen Gaetz, Fiona Scott & Tanya Gulliver (Eds.) (2013): Housing First in Canada: Supporting Research Network Communities to End Homelessness. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

<sup>26</sup> Process Mapping Supplemental Report (2016).

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

option of community-based support services.<sup>27</sup> This movement, or “flow,” has the potential to free up space for another individual who wishes to live in supportive housing.

The aim of this project is to find ways to increase the opportunity for individuals to be matched with a housing and support situation of their choosing and of ‘best fit’. A secondary beneficial outcome of increasing the opportunities for this “flow” where desired by individuals is a housing and support system that is more efficient and more responsive to individual needs and situations.

While low turnover numbers in supportive housing may raise concern about the limitations that creates to others accessing that housing, it also may indicate that individuals are stably housed. Housing stability is a key indicator of the success of a housing and support system.<sup>28</sup>

### Challenges to a systems-wide understanding of “flow”

This project is focused at the systems-level, aims to improve the housing and support system effectiveness when it comes to flow. Given the different types and roles of supportive housing that can vary from site to site or between housing providers, and the variation in approaches to flow, there are challenges to a systems-wide, integrated understanding of “flow” that works across different housing and service providers.

- For more medicalized and transitional models, tenants/clients moving from supportive housing to other housing upon stabilization is a built-in and explicit expectation of the program.
- For more tenancy-based and permanent supportive housing, there is no expectation of moving, and in fact, there is concern that encouraging an individual to move upon successful stabilization is counterproductive.

These are significant differences in approach, and worthy of consideration when working to establish systems-wide improvements to best support the client-driven movement from supportive housing to more independent housing options. Gaetz et al remind that there is no one-size-fits all approach to the housing and support responses – neither for individuals, nor for the system as a whole.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (2016). Community Plan – Phase 1, 2016/17.

<sup>28</sup> Institute of Urban Studies (2014). Holding On!: Supporting Successful Tenancies for the Hard to House.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen Gaetz, Fiona Scott & Tanya Gulliver (Eds.) (2013): Housing First in Canada: Supporting Research Network Communities to End Homelessness. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.



### **Flow: Considering the move out of supportive housing to more independent housing**

The project team met with front-line staff and tenants in existing supportive housing about their insights and perspectives on the move from supportive housing to more independent housing options, in market or non-market housing. The team explored two main areas of questions with staff and tenants:

#### **1. Current challenges:**

- What are the barriers to moving from supportive housing to more independent housing options?

#### **2. Opportunities for improvement:**

- What support services would be useful in supporting this sort of move?
- What time frame would be appropriate?
- What kind of safety nets need to be in place?

### **Summary of themes from conversations tenants and staff**

One of the most central findings that came up continually throughout our research is that every individual is different, with unique strengths and needs, and therefore flexibility and choice in the housing and support system is of primary importance. Ensuring that the housing and support system can be responsive to individuals' unique needs is more important than establishing a standardized approach when it comes to supporting the client-driven movement from supportive housing to more independent housing options.

With that in mind, there were also some key themes that emerged from our conversations with tenants of supportive housing, and with staff in the housing and support system.

Overall, the main themes when discussing the movement from supportive housing to more independent options were as follows:

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

- There are challenges to a systems understanding of “flow”;
- The system sets people up to let them down;
- Economic barriers are a major roadblock to housing;
- There is an overwhelming lack of available, affordable housing;
- Waitlists limit access to housing;
- There is a lack of information about existing services;
- There are service gaps for certain populations – especially based on age and acuity;
- Stigma and discrimination serve as barriers to tenants securing independent housing;
- Tenants experience fear around the potential isolation of “independent” living;
- These barriers to movement provoke feelings of hopelessness in tenants;
- Supporting self-determination is crucial to well-being.

Tenants and staff also identified opportunities for the development or expansion of services – housing, clinical, complementary supports – that could support the movement from supportive housing to more independent housing options. However, it is important to note that the barriers to moving from supportive housing are not simply service gaps. We found that integrating the values and principles of Housing First into policies, practice, and organizational structure and culture would be beneficial to supporting self-determination and autonomy that is crucial for movement from supportive housing to more independent housing options.

While focus group discussions were focused on these two main questions, other themes emerged through the discussions including tenants experiences about how they got to their current situation in supportive housing, about what they would like in their housing situation, and about what home means to them.

**“Everybody’s case is different. There isn’t one general path for everyone.”**  
– Tenant in supportive housing

The follow graphic (page 19) illustrates the main themes we heard from tenants when it comes to considering their current supportive housing situation and the possibility of moving to more independent housing in non-market or market housing.





## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

### Tenants experiences of supportive housing

#### Access to supportive housing

Tenants shared a variety of stories and experiences about how they got into their current supportive housing arrangement. For some, it required perseverance and tenacity, while for some lucky others, they may have encountered the right staff person at the right time who could assist with their path into a situation of decent fit.

Tenants shared with us their experiences of persistence in their attempts to access housing:

**“Keeping your nose to the grindstone and being good working with your case workers.”**

– Tenant in supportive housing

**“I was with the CSWs, bugging them every day. I worked at anything”**

– Tenant in supportive housing

While centralized access to housing was emphasized as important, few tenants shared with us stories of success with the CASH system in providing access to their current housing, but they may not have explicitly named CASH as instrumental to their housing placement or did not know that it was.

In terms of whether the current housing arrangement suites their needs and feels like the housing and support situation of 'best fit', tenants were mixed in their assessment.

- Some tenants began living in supportive housing simply because there were no other housing options available.
- Several tenants felt that their basic needs were met within the housing arrangement, and this was the most important factor for them at the moment – and while there were drawbacks or limitations, they felt the balance fell in favour of remaining in that housing arrangement.
- Quite a few tenants expressed that their supportive housing arrangement felt that it was counteracting their own recovery and well-being goals – that the housing situation was disempowering and did not support their dignity and self-determination very well.

Some tenants spoke of well of their current living situation and did not wish to leave it, while others would like to move.

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

"I got my own place, my own world, I get fed. **What am I going to get anywhere else? Not much different. So what do I even care?"**  
– Tenant in supportive housing

"There **needs to be more** supportive housing places like this. **I really like this place.**"  
– Tenant in supportive housing

"I did not want to be here – but **it is a roof over your head**. There are people who could take my spot. I think it is unfair that I am here and there are **people out there that need it more than me**. I am happy that they considered me and I have a roof over my head. **I am really looking forward to having my own place.**" – Tenant in supportive housing



### Barriers to moving to more independent housing

While the concerns of this project are to come to an understanding of the barriers to client-driven movement from supportive housing to more independent housing options, with the hope of understanding what types of community-based support services could assist this move, it should be noted that many of the barriers to this movement are not simply service gaps. Our findings suggest there is also a need to consider how policies, program development, and approaches to service delivery may support tenant self-determination or potentially counteract it.

### Challenges to a system-wide understanding of flow

Understandings of the role of "flow" varies within supportive housing – from site to site, and across housing providers -- with different expectations around moving from supportive housing.



## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

Transitional housing, with an explicit (even if flexible) time-limitation to housing and expectations of movement, differs greatly from permanent supportive housing.

We heard from service provider staff and management, as well as from tenants, that there could be better integration, coordination, and communication across existing resources.

- For example, the two main housing waitlists for the region (CASH and BC Housing Registry) are not integrated. This often makes it challenging to know where someone is on the waitlist and that being communicated in a timely way.
- Housing providers attempting to support tenants moving on to other forms of housing are currently in competition with one another for existing, available units in social or market-based housing.
- Staff do not feel fully informed of the existing services that are currently available which can present challenges to supporting individuals with the services they might desire and benefit from.
- Turnover numbers have a different significant to different housing providers.

### Recommendation:

- Increase system integration across housing and service providers, with a focus on integrating housing waitlists
- Establish common understanding of distinct roles of different service providers in the housing and support system, particularly with regard to flow.

### The system sets people up to let them down

When speaking with tenants, we visited both permanent and transitional supportive housing buildings. The transitional supportive housing situations often featured an explicit, even if flexible, time limit to the transitional program and an expectation of movement to another, long-term housing situation once the tenant was ready. **This explicit expectation of a transition to a long-term housing situation of best fit seemed to feel misleading to many tenants and presented a great deal of frustration. Tenants expressed that systemic failures within the housing and support system can be made to feel like an individual shortcoming or failure of the tenant.** The tenants spoke of the system leading them to feel at fault if they have been unable to make this transition to long-term housing. There are, however, many systemic reasons for the difficulty in and barriers to making this transition, which will be explored in the following.

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

If there is an expectation set up within transition programs of being able to achieve independent, long-term housing, the system needs to ensure this is possible for those who desire working towards that goal.

As it stands, there is a pervasive feeling among tenants that there is **no reward for being good** and that the system sets up false hope promises. This can feel frustrating, destabilizing, and disillusioning for tenants.

**"They move the goal posts on us all the time."**

– Tenant in supportive housing

**"I am going to be 4 years clean. It is hard. I have been on drugs my whole life. I changed around my life. And I still can't find a place."**

**There should be a reward."**  
– Tenant in supportive housing

Some tenants spoke to feelings of false hope and of being misled:

**"Don't believe what you read downstairs, that there is room to rent. It sounds good, but then there is a bunch of criminals there. Why should I go for that stuff and take a chance; it's gonna be a coin toss. At least it's guaranteed here you are gonna be fed and stuff."**

– Tenant in supportive housing

**"It's a false hope. It looks really good on paper, but when you ask them about it you ain't getting anywhere near those places [long-term housing]"**

– Tenant in supportive housing

Tenants also spoke to feeling personally blamed for the failures of the housing and support system :

**"They have a system that costs a lot of money and does not work. And politicians point fingers at the homeless as the source of the cost when it is the system. That is the big problem. We have no input on the system but we carry the blame for it. And we are discriminated against because of it."**

– Tenant in supportive housing

**"What did we do to deserve this? Become homeless."**

– Tenant in supportive housing

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

### Recommendations:

- Transitional housing must have a transitional program with dedicated staff, intake, goal setting
- Increase supply of housing availability to ensure there are options to move into when tenants are ready and would like to move to independent housing.

### Economic barriers

Economic factors are among the largest and most fundamental barriers to accessing more independent housing, according to both tenants of supportive housing, as well as housing and support staff.

Social assistance rates are extremely low, while is a particularly substantial burden in a region such as Greater Victoria, with a high cost of living.

- Income assistance rates have been frozen for a decade – at \$610 a month for an individual, with a \$375 shelter allowance, which is severely inadequate to cover rents in the private market.<sup>30</sup>
- Disability rates recently saw a meagre raise of \$50 per month in 2017, with simultaneous clawbacks.<sup>31</sup>
- Minimum wage is a poverty wage, and is inadequate compared to the cost of living.<sup>32</sup>
- The Living Wage for Greater Victoria is \$20.01 for 2017.<sup>33</sup>

There is little incentive for a tenant of supportive housing to move to a situation where they are paying more, when they do not have access to the economic resources to cover that increase. Rental subsidies are inadequate and unreliable, according to tenants and staff.

---

<sup>30</sup> Government of British Columbia. Income Assistance Rate Table.

<sup>31</sup> The Tyee (2017). BC Gov't Hikes Disability Rates by \$50, Maintains Freeze on Welfare. <https://thetyee.ca/News/2017/02/21/BC-Budget-Disability-Rates-Welfare/>

<sup>32</sup> Community Social Planning Council (2017). Living Wage Report.

<sup>33</sup> Community Social Planning Council (2017). Living Wage Report.

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

“The really scary thing though is that the fundamental problem is that the **economic situation is not being addressed**. So if I am going to have an affordable house with the income I have, I have to rely on the government – and there is this awful word called **government clawbacks**, where the political party changes or climate changes and all the people who have relied on this solution or trusted this solution [are left without it]....it **creates an uncertainty** and it’s the greatest enemy for people in our situation is that **we don’t know what’s coming down the road.**”

– Tenant in supportive housing

“The economic situation in the city, **housing is out of control**, which I think is criminal. Nobody to stop these real estate scammers constantly raising the price. There are going to be **more and more people who will land on the street because they don’t have the income to live.**”

– Tenant in supportive housing

“We need **available housing** and **money to pay for it**. The allowances we get are so far from the **market rates**. It just doesn’t work and won’t until **they match.**”

– Tenant in supportive housing

### Recommendations:

- Provide stable and adequate rent subsidies to ensure no tenant transitioning to more independent housing is required to pay more than 30% of their income on shelter costs (rent and utilities).

### Lack of options to move into

Housing First prioritizes choice as a key value, however, choice is constrained in a system with few housing options.

- The capital region is facing a **housing affordability crisis**. There is an extreme

“Where’s the housing we need? The **vacancy rate** is running 0.5%. Where is the housing? We are **stuck here**. We don’t have any **options.**”

– Tenant in supportive housing

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

undersupply of affordable housing stock in the region.<sup>34</sup> The rental market features high and rising rents, coupled with an extremely low vacancy rate of 0.5%,<sup>35</sup> meaning there is little availability and affordability. Almost half, 47%, of renter households in the region are paying more than 30% of their income on rent and utilities, which is a standard measure of affordability in housing.<sup>36</sup>

- Additionally, there are long waitlists for subsidized housing, both BC Housing and supportive housing.

Of the few options that do exist, the more affordable housing in the market may be undesirable. It may be of low quality. It may not be in a desirable geographic area, with access to amenities and services, such as public transit. Tenants spoke of not wanting to move into housing situations where there is illicit activity going on and where they feel unsafe.

**“There is no sense in myself going out and looking for an apartment or room because there are buildings that are being shut down and evicted for renovation purposes. That is huge.”–**

Tenant in supportive housing

**“The real problem not being confronted is galloping inflation being sealed by the real estate industry.”**

– Tenant in supportive housing

Tenants told several stories that demonstrate an experiential understanding to how in-demand real estate market can contribute to displacement and even to experiences of homelessness. They spoke of *renovictions* and *demovictions*, where landlords evict tenants to renovate or rebuild in order to accumulate more value from their property. Tenants also spoke of an awareness of the tight competition in the rental market when it comes to seeking rental housing, and feeling that they would be taking away housing from someone who might need it more.

<sup>34</sup> Community Social Planning Council (2015). Capital Region Housing Data Book and Gap Analysis.

<sup>35</sup> CMHC Rental Market Report (Fall 2016).

<sup>36</sup> Canadian Rental Housing Index, <http://www.rentalhousingindex.ca/>

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

“They say that those people can return [after a **renoviction**], but they **can’t afford it**. So I have a roof over my head right now, so **I’m not going to steal a home from somebody who has been evicted** and has absolutely no where to go who will end up in the street.” –

Tenant in supportive housing

“I **cannot** in my full conscience go out there and **compete** with somebody who is going to be out on the street versus have a house to live in. I have a place to live, I am pretty secure. I mean there are times where I don’t feel very secure when I go into the main population, but **still I have a home.**”

– Tenant in supportive housing

Tenants also spoke of the power imbalance between landlord and tenant:

“Well if you’re going to move into a place that you know nothing about, with one empty room and you don’t know if the **landlord** is honest or not, it’s like **a lamb to the wolf.**”

– Tenant in supportive housing

“**Landlords** can afford lawyers and they check off the boxes. They try to **fight it** [tenant rights]. They try to **figure out where they can go with it.**” –

Tenant in supportive housing

### Recommendations:

- Increase supply of available, affordable, adequate, and suitable housing.
- Institute municipal and provincial policy measures to provide for housing affordability, especially with regard to rental housing.
- Municipal policies to prevent or mitigate the impacts of *renovictions*.
- Ensure all tenants have tenancy rights in line with the RTA.

### Waitlists

Non-market housing options – whether supportive or more independent social housing – have extremely long waitlists. Both BC Housing and CASH have many more people on the waitlist

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

than either system is able to house. There were 1,239 households on the BC Housing waitlist in 2015.<sup>37</sup>

Tenants spoke of feelings of exclusion that result from waiting on a waiting list for years, commenting that they are made to feel unwelcome to live in the region:

"I'm getting to old age, I been **waiting for seven years** on the waitlist for any supportive house with a meal program. I am forced to go now [from transitional housing] because **my two years are up, but where do I go now?**"

– Tenant in supportive housing

"The waiting list may be five years, but that it has to be five years is completely false. It's **just another way to close the door**. You come to Victoria, it's an **expensive place to live – it really means we don't want you to live here**. Or the waiting list is five years means you have to have a certain amount of income or I'm sorry you have a service dog. You see what I mean, there is this sort of **exclusionary viewpoint.**"

– Tenant in supportive housing

### Lack of information

Both tenants as well as staff identified lack of information as a significant barrier to supporting an individual to move from supportive housing to more independent housing options.

Need for information sharing about existing services across housing and support system.

"It feels like they try to **hide all the resources** – they don't want us to **know.**"

– Tenant in supportive housing

"Give information to us. **I don't know what's out there.**"

– Tenant in supportive housing

The system is "**hard to figure out** when you're busy trying to get your **life back on track.**"

– Tenant in supportive housing

<sup>37</sup> Community Social Planning Council (2015). Capital Region Housing Data Book and Gap Analysis.



## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

Tenants noted that they were not often asked what they needed or told what is available – they needed to be proactive and pursue options themselves.

**“We don’t even know what to ask for.”**

– Tenant in supportive housing

**“Unless you know what’s there and ask for it you will never see it.”**

– Tenant in supportive housing

Additionally, some tenants and even housing and service provider staff expressed a **lack of clarity about eligibility and availability** of certain programs.

**“I applied a few months ago to get out of transitional housing into BC housing. I got a letter back saying I was disqualified, it didn’t say exactly why but it listed 3 possible reasons. It said I hadn’t been in transition long enough, they didn’t know if I was in good standing. I said, ‘what the hell does that mean?!’”**

– Tenant in supportive housing

Service providers identified that there may be **difficulty anticipating needs** when thinking about moving from supportive housing to more independent options. If someone has been living in supportive housing for a while, they may not be able to identify the particular supports they need or make use of – it is just their normal, everyday life.

### Population service gaps and priority

There are gaps in service to serve some populations, gaps left by how the existing systems determine priority. The systems of assessing need and vulnerability result in some individuals remaining underserved for long periods of time. Two areas of gaps that were continually raised were with regard to acuity and age.

#### Acuity

There is a pervasive feeling among tenants that there is a higher priority for mental health over physical health or other needs, which leaves many to be continually deferred and deprioritized.

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

"We [people with low/moderate needs] are the **last people to get any help**. I have been told that the waiting list for housing is at least 5 years. **That's crazy!**"

– Tenant in supportive housing

"That's what [CSW] said to me - go out and **get a shrink to say that I am crazy**. I'm not crazy, so what am I going to do, go blow stuff up? I am happy here so I don't care."

– Tenant in supportive housing

"Addiction problems **get more help** than people with a medical disability."

– Tenant in supportive housing

### Age

Many tenants we spoke with are in, what one tenant called, the "grey zone" – usually over 50 years of age, perhaps not only enough to qualify for seniors buildings, or not in need of seniors facilities.

"If they had something where people with **disabilities** or barriers in our age group **[50+]** that would help us."

"I am almost too old for anything else they got, so I am in this **grey zone**."

"They want to put me in a home that is a **care facility**. I **don't need that yet**. I am 63 years old but I do not feel it. I do not need that and I got mad. I have been trying to find a place on my own. And **they're trying to put me in a place I do not want**

While we did not speak specifically with youth, front-line staff highlighted that there is a lack of **youth-centred housing**.

### Stigma and discrimination

Many tenants spoke of their deep awareness of the stigma they carry for living in or having lived in supportive housing. Tenants spoke of stigma and discrimination they face in many aspects of their daily life, but in particular, they spoke of facing intense stigma and discrimination when seeking housing in the private market. This dynamic is furthered, according to tenant anecdotes, in a housing market with extremely low vacancy rates, where landlords have the power to pick

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

and choose preferred tenants; those currently living in supportive housing usually don't make the list of preferred tenancy candidates.

"Landlords do not want 'welfare cases' in their building. It is **not fair**. We need a better system to deal with that."

– Tenant in supportive housing

"They [landlords] have all these people to choose from. You look good but **not going to be first on the list**. It's going to be people with kids or professional jobs. I gave up."

– Tenant in supportive housing

"If you're in Rock Bay Landing, there is a **stigma** that you got mental health issues, a drug addict, a criminal, an alcoholic."

– Tenant in supportive housing

"The **stigma** has got to change. Just because we are in a homeless shelter doesn't mean I am an addict."

– Tenant in supportive housing

"You walk in the door here and the police are interested, you have to prove that you are an ok person. **It's not something you want on your resume** [that you had to stay in a shelter]."

– Tenant in supportive housing

"A lot of people **assume** because of the situation we are in – they assume and lump us in the same **stereotype**."

– Tenant in supportive housing

### Fear & isolation

Moving from supportive to individual living is a big and potentially daunting transition, especially for individuals who may have just recently become stable in their housing and in their health, perhaps for the first time in their lives. Many tenants of supportive housing that we spoke to have come to rely on community, whether it is their street community or community within their supportive housing building. The idea of moving to "independent" housing can seem undesirable for many reasons, and it can bring up fear.

"You have your **community** and your support system and then after two years, it's 'well, **you're on your own** -- out you go.'"

– Tenant in supportive housing

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

Many tenants we spoke to equated independent housing with isolation, and with a potential decline in health and well-being. Tenants often shared stories of people they knew who had moved from supportive housing into independent housing, and it had negative repercussions – in some cases, leading to death.

“You hear about people who **tried and failed** that [moving out independently] – a few weeks later, oh, they are **dead**. Once you go out there, that **safety** line is no longer there anymore.”

– Tenant in supportive housing

“We don’t want to be **secluded**. Really we end up being **dropped out of society**. If we die, nobody is going to notice.”

– Tenant in supportive housing

“I am **afraid** to move out. Where am I going to sleep, where is my social network going to be, who is going to be my support, how much of the CSW is going to be in my life in independent housing? **You move into independent housing, then what do you got?** I know three people that have gone from here and into independent housing that have **died**.”

– Tenant in supportive housing

### Feelings of hopelessness

As a result of many of these barriers, there are feelings of hopelessness about the possibility of finding long-term housing, or finding a way out of the shelter and transitional system:

“Some people got **carried out in a body bag** because they got nowhere else to go, and at one point I was so pessimistic and **I thought that was the only way to get out of Rock Bay Landing**.”

– Tenant in supportive housing

“There’s a person I know of who found a place and left the transitional program, but **the other place was terrible**. Now she is down on the mats [in the shelter at RBL] because she **can’t get back into the transition program** because she had her shot. It’s like you **got one shot** to make it go right and if it doesn’t go right **you’re right back on the mats**.”

– Tenant in supportive housing

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

**"We have to live here.**

**Where are our  
options?"**

– Tenant in supportive

**"I have no place to  
go, I have no  
future."**

– Tenant in supportive

### Supporting self-determination, autonomy, and well-being in supportive housing

Many tenants identified that their supportive housing situations did not always best support their self-determination and autonomy – which were more relevant and resonant concepts than "independence" for many tenants. Tenants spoke of their desire to have input in to their housing situation and to have their concerns listened to and respected. The lack of privacy in supportive housing felt invasive to many tenants, and made their tenancy feel tenuous rather than stable.

**"We have no input. We  
have no input on how this  
place is run."**

– Tenant in supportive housing

**"We do not need babysitters. They are  
trying to paint us as being incapable  
of looking after ourselves."**

– Tenant in supportive housing

**"They [staff] walked in and  
out of your room whenever  
they felt like it, told you  
how you can have your  
room and who you could  
have in your room."**

– Tenant in supportive housing

**"This is supposed to be supportive housing  
but they [staff] are the first ones to call the  
police to create more problems for people  
here who are already up against things like  
this. This does not help them better their life  
by getting them in more trouble with the  
police and getting more charges."**

– Tenant in supportive housing

Even though tenants do not necessarily feel like they are well supported by the building and staff, when there is a community among the tenants they are able to accomplish some of their goals and fill some of their needs:

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

"The only way we get things done here is by **doing it**. The only reason we get things is because **we take it**."

– Tenant in supportive housing

"Supportive housing is a misnomer. This is **soft incarceration**. No question about it. We are told. We can't even ask. If we ask politely it falls on deaf ears. We have to take. They don't want to listen to us or work with us. They push around. If we **don't toe the line they push us out**."

– Tenant in supportive housing

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)



### Supports to develop

#### Resource limitations

Existing services and supports are currently overburdened, according to front-line staff. Many front-line staff expressed feeling like they are unable to support individuals to the best of their ability due to overburdened workload and resource limitations. There are resource limitations both within individual organizations and within the system at large, according to housing and service provider staff.

Specific to the consideration of moving from supportive housing to more independent housing options, staff noted that case loads would need to be smaller to meet clients at different locations rather than being able to meet with clients within one building

On the whole, when it comes to the housing and support system, front-line staff expressed concerns that non-profits are scrambling and attempting to scrape together what they can, in order to fill the gaps left by decreasing government funding in housing and social services.

#### Supports to develop or expand

When considering what could be helpful in supporting a move from supportive housing to more independent housing, many tenants spoke highly of the importance of a transitional program, with intake, identifying strengths and needs, goal-setting, connecting to resources, and having an actual objective of existing available housing to move into – rather than setting individuals up for transition to let them down when there is no housing available. This program would be best served by dedicated staff who can focus only on these tasks, rather than attempting to balance these duties with many others.

One tenant shares their experience of how the transition program has been helpful:



## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

“When I came here I had **no idea** how I was going to live my life. To be honest it was an evolving thing where I had contact with [the staff / client support worker] and I **was able to work out for myself the road out of this place**. When you have no resources or no idea, your life is completely screwed up, so **how are you going to do it in 2 years?** The thing that was most helpful was that [the staff] were always there and I could talk to them and I find something that is **workable, for myself.**”

– Tenant in supportive housing

Tenants provided their input about the importance of transitional program and what would allow it to be most helpful to tenants. One tenant spoke of the desire to see a deeper assessment – like a personality profile with strengths and barriers, in order to assist with finding the right housing match.

“I would like if the transitional program was more of an **actual program**. Where you go into the program there is an assessment done of what your physical illnesses or disabilities are because that is a **barrier to getting your own housing.**”

– Tenant in supportive housing

“[Existing transitional program] is not badly manned, they are trying so much to **rehabilitate our self-determinism** which is absolutely vital, but there needs to be a half-way point and an **objective at the end.**”

– Tenant in supportive housing

“Not having an **objective at the end** is the problem. I don’t have an objective at the end, **I am at the end**. I’m graduating with flying colors as far they are concerned. **But now what?**”

– Tenant in supportive housing

“Brainstorming and trying to find ways to meet the goals, instead of **the clock ticking away** [of the time-limit to the transitional housing]. I know the CSWs are **overwhelmed by their work.**”

– Tenant in supportive housing

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

### What tenants feel could be helpful in transition – before the transition

Tenants provided their perspective on what services could be helpful supportive individuals to get to a place where they feel more comfortable and prepared to move to independent housing. The following summarizes what they shared.

- Service information database / referral service -- e.g. info line like 211
  - To find out about and access existing services.
  - Both tenants as well as staff identified that this would be helpful.
- Counselling
- Life skills training
  - Cleaning training
  - Meal prep training
- Personal budgeting training
  - For example: how to set up and pay bills
- Employment support & training
- Tenancy support training
  - Rights and responsibilities of tenancy
  - Communication
  - Payment of rent, utilities, etc
- Leisure, recreation, and personal development
  - Art therapy, bicycle maintenance, woodshop, yoga

**"I actually want to have independent living and to do that I need a job, but I am 51 so looking for a job is [challenging]. They don't consider experience over a qualification. Ageism is a reality, it's just another barrier."**  
– Tenant in supportive housing

In direct preparation for a move:

- Inventory of housing supplies – to know what they need and how much it costs
- Storage space to accumulate houseware
  - While some service providers may have houseware and furniture they can provide tenants upon moving out, some tenants have expressed wanting to accumulate items they have chosen.

### What tenants feel could be helpful in transition – during/after

Once a tenant has identified that they would like to move to more independent housing, tenants suggested the following would be helpful in immediate preparation for the move, and in the transition period following:

- Help finding and securing an apartment
  - May have never had to look for housing before, especially in the private market

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

- Finding available apartments, setting up and getting to apartment visits, filling out rental applications
- Landlord liaison
  - Tenancy may be new, so it would be helpful to have support to communicate with landlord
- Moving assistance – with the costs & physical aspect of moving
- Move-in starter kit – dish soap, toilet paper, etc
- Follow up / wellness checks
- Transportation assistance
- Peer support & social support
- Meal services – like meals on wheels
- Cleaning services
- Ongoing connection with supportive housing community

**“There were people who moved away from Rock Bay [Landing] but they still come back because that link with their CSW is so vital to their survival, and they visit.”**

– Tenant in supportive housing

Service providers also identified some key areas of supports, not mentioned by tenants. Service providers noted that in the following areas, there were needs to increase coordination between service providers to deliver these effectively:

- Med monitoring
- Home care for people with complex needs (addictions, mental health)
- Case management

### What tenants want in housing

- Permanent and stable housing
  - Most tenants wanted to ultimately find themselves in a long-term and stable housing situation
- To be heard and respected
- Transparency and consistency of rules and rights
- Tenancy rights
- Responsiveness to housing concerns
- Safety and security
- Privacy
- Community and neighbourhood relationships
- A place to personalize and make their own
- To have friends and family visit
- Pet-friendly home

**“Find a place and be stable, completely stable.”**

– Tenant in supportive housing

**“Have a place that we can close the door and say ‘this is my little sanctuary’. I can decorate the way I want to, I can make it personal.”**

– Tenant in supportive housing

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

Rather than “independent” housing, many tenants spoke of a desire to live long-term in a **community-oriented living situation**. This presents an opportunity when developing new housing in the region. Innovative models of new housing could incorporate more community-based living styles, including co-caring models.<sup>38</sup>

“Until the **government** authorities can get their act together and **provide low-income housing**, there should be more large homes with many bedrooms that can be designated for people that are ready to transition out of the shelter system and be **independent but still have staff there to say ‘is this going okay for you?’**”

– Tenant in supportive housing

I love **cooking for people**. It fosters a sense of belonging.”

– Tenant in supportive housing

“They have ‘half-way’ houses, but why can’t we have ‘**full-way**’ **houses**, you know? Same thing, but a place to live [long term].”

– Tenant in supportive housing

“There needs to be a place where it’s an extra step from here. Let’s say they are buying all these building – find a smaller one that has like 8 bedrooms and have a staff member there. You are still paying your own bills, getting your own groceries, taking care of yourself but there is a **staff member there to talk to and rely on**. You’re not going to get kicked out.”

– Tenant in supportive housing

---

<sup>38</sup> See the Community Social Planning Council (2016) report “Innovations in Senior Housing” for more information about co-caring in housing.

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

"I think **families** need to stay together. They are separated so much these days. I want my children with me all the time – they want to be with me all the time. My grandchildren want to be with me. We are very family oriented. We **could not find housing**." – Tenant in supportive housing

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)



### Concluding Considerations

Supportive housing takes different forms and roles, and it must be considered in relation to how it can support Housing First principles.

- The housing and support system's priority is to support individual well-being and quality of life.
- According to Housing First principles, choice and flexibility are key in both housing and support provision.

Increased well-being and reduced homelessness are the ultimate goals of the system, and system efficiency is a way to most effectively address those goals rather than an end in itself.

- There is a tension between the high-level systems approach to efficiency and ensuring that each individual who enters the housing and support system is addressed as a unique individual with their own story, strengths, and needs.
- Indicators of the success of the system should be based on housing stability, not simply turnover rates and flow through.
- In fact, low turnover rates may signify the success of the housing system as it may mean individuals are experiencing housing stability, rather than signifying an issue.

Individuals' movement along the housing and support system may not be linear, and may not involve moving towards one particular ideal end goal.

- While there is a housing and support continuum, it is not to suggest that movement be linear and "progressive" in one particular direction, towards an ideal outcome or end goal (aside from achieving housing stability, even if it means moving to be better supported to achieve housing stability).
- Some are already home, currently living in their long-term housing situation of best fit and of their choosing.

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

Every individual is different and unique -- and the housing and support system should be tenant-centred and responsive to individual needs.

- Homelessness is a situation that people find themselves in, and not a characteristic of a person.
- While people may share the experience of homelessness, and there may be some common experiences and patterns, there is no singular unified experience of homelessness and no singular response.
- There needs to be choice and flexibility with regard to housing and support options, in order to practice Housing First principles and best support individual well-being.
- Both tenants and staff emphasized that the support services needed and the timelines will vary from individual to individual.

"Independence" may not be the most resonant goal for individuals.

- While this project asks tenants about their desire to move on to more "independent" housing, independence may not be the primary motivating goal.
- Self-determination and autonomy may be more relevant and resonant than independence.
- Independence sometimes carries the connotations of being alone, and sometimes isolated.
- Tenants also expressed an appreciation for community.

Low turnover rates, or "flow," may indicate a strength or success of the housing system, rather than simply an issue/problem to resolve.

- Housing stability is a key indicator of housing success.<sup>39</sup>
- There are challenges to a systems-wide understanding of "flow."
- Different models of supportive housing, from permanent supportive housing to transitional housing, approach the concept of "flow" differently.
- Additionally, there is a tension between "flow" and tenancy rights.
- Tenancy rights are an important component of Housing First principles, but the concept of flow – with expectations of increasing turnover and encouraging moving on – introduces tension about individual rights, including their right to remain in a housing situation.

---

<sup>39</sup> Institute of Urban Studies (2014). Holding On!: Supporting Successful Tenancies for the Hard to House.



## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

- According to one housing service provider, “It’s not home if the clock is ticking.”

Choice is key in a Housing First approach, yet it is constrained in a system with little housing availability and therefore few options.

- The availability of adequate and affordable housing is significant and insurmountable gap for moving from supportive housing to more independent options.
- The region features a challenging rental market (high rents, low vacancy rates) coupled with an undersupply of affordable housing for low- to moderate- income households.
- Low income also presents a difficult challenge, with frozen social assistance rates, low disability rates, and very low minimum wage compared with the cost of living.

Regardless of the housing situation, individuals want basic principles respected: tenant rights and transparency of rules; self-determination and autonomy; safety and security; privacy.

- Many tenants expressed that these basic principles are challenged or compromised with their current housing situation.
- Embedding the principles of Housing First in the policies, program development, and organization structures of housing and service provision is just as important as developing additional and increased support services when it comes to supporting self-determination and client-driven movements to more independent living situations.
- The system sets people up to let them down – which counteracts health, well-being, and self-determination.
  - The system makes it feel like it is people’s fault that they are unable to find housing of best fit.
  - Tenants feel as if good behavior – respecting the rules and the process of the system – does not provide them with the outcomes they desire and are sometimes promised.
  - This can lead to frustration, feeling stuck, hopelessness and sometimes can bring the individual further from where they would like to be personally.

Greater systems integration, including better coordination and communication of existing services and resources, would improve the effectiveness of the system in supporting movement from supportive housing to more independent housing options.

## Positive Housing & Support Movement (Flow)

- Housing First principles are well served by a coordinated “system of care” with an emphasis on integration across various housing and service providers.<sup>40</sup>
- Internally, a coordinated intake and assessment system would be helpful to ensuring individuals can be matched with a housing and support situation of best fit. The integration of existing housing waitlists (BC Housing Registry and CASH) would greatly contribute to increasing coordination. This would also make it easier to communicate to clients and potential tenants where they are on the waitlist in a timely way.
- Externally, there is a need for an easily accessible, frequently updated service directory

There are opportunities for expansion of existing, and development of new, support services.

- Including Housing Supports, Clinical Supports, Complementary Supports
- Develop increased peer-led programming within supportive housing, and in community-based services to support transition to more independent housing.

Embedding the principles of Housing First in the policies, program development, and organization structures of housing and service provision is just as important as developing additional or increased support services when it comes to supporting self-determination and client-driven movement to more independent living situations.

- Future planning, development, and implementation of housing and support service policies, programs, and housing should involve the ongoing and meaningful input of those most directly impacted by it.
- It is worthwhile to consider how the housing and support system fosters community connectedness, meaningful inclusion, and self-determination rather than simply an individualized sense of “independence.”

---

<sup>40</sup> Gaetz et al, Fiona Scott & Tanya Gulliver (Eds.) (2013): Housing First in Canada: Supporting Research Network Communities to End Homelessness.

## Reference List

- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2016). Rental Market Report, Fall 2016.
- Canadian Rental Housing Index: <http://www.rentalhousingindex.ca/>
- Capital Region Housing Data Book and Gap Analysis (2015).
- Capital Regional District (n.d.). <http://www.crd.bc.ca/project/regional-housing-first-program>
- Capital Regional District (n.d.). <http://www.crd.bc.ca/project/regional-housing-first-program>
- CitySpaces Consulting (2016). Process Mapping Supplemental Report.
- Community Social Planning Council (2015). Capital Region Housing Data Book and Gap Analysis.
- Community Social Planning Council (2017). Living Wage Report.
- Gaetz et al, Fiona Scott & Tanya Gulliver (Eds.) (2013): Housing First in Canada: Supporting Research Network Communities to End Homelessness. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.
- Government of British Columbia. Income Assistance Rate Table.
- Government of Canada, Homeless Partnering Strategy.
- Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (2016). Community Plan – Phase 1, 2016/17.
- Institute of Urban Studies (2014). Holding On!: Supporting Successful Tenancies for the Hard to House.
- Mason, Jennifer (2002). Qualitative Researching, Second Edition. London: Sage Publications.
- More Than a Number: 2016 Greater Victoria Point in Time Count Summary Report.
- Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association's (2013) "focusON: LHINs and the housing system."
- Salt Spring Island Community Services (2016). Point-in-Time Homelessness Count Report.
- The Tyee (2017). BC Gov't Hikes Disability Rates by \$50, Maintains Freeze on Welfare.  
<https://thetyee.ca/News/2017/02/21/BC-Budget-Disability-Rates-Welfare/>
- Wellesley Institute (2009). Critical Characteristics of Supported Housing.

## Appendix

### Participating organizations

#### Interviews

##### Housing providers:

- Island Heath
- Pacifica
- Cool Aid
- Our Place

##### Programs:

- Lasting Homes
- Streets to Homes
- CASH

##### Other organizations:

- Together Against Poverty Society (TAPS)

#### Front-line engagement session

- Anawim
- Beacon Community Services
- Burnside Gorge Community Association
- Capital Region Housing Corporation
- CASH
- CRD
- Greater Victoria Housing Society
- Island Health - ACT Team
- Lasting Homes Program
- Our Place
- Pacifica Housing
- PHS Community Services Society
- Ready to Rent BC
- Salvation Army - ARC
- St Vincent de Paul
- Threshold Housing Society
- Together Against Poverty Society (TAPS)
- Victoria Native Friendship Centre
- Victoria Youth Empowerment Society
- YMCA-YWCA of Greater Victoria

#### Tenant focus groups

- Pacifica Housing (x 2)
- Cool Aid (x 2)
- Our Place
- PHS Community Services Society