

Prevention & Diversion during COVID-19

Guidance & thoughts on the rapid resolution of housing crises

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Why are Prevention & Diversion Activities Important COVID-19 Responses?

- It is acknowledged that the global pandemic and the resulting economic crisis will likely increase housing crises and potential homelessness;
- With a strategic lens to inform the investment of available P & D resources, the more we can articulate and resource a vision where homelessness is rare, and if it does occur, is brief;
- An expansion of the emergency shelter and isolation capacity doesn't mean that communities should just fill those spaces.



History has Taught Us...

- Expect there to be political pressure to help a particular person, couple or family who advocates well or captures the attention of the news media.
- Incidents of housing crises and homelessness will likely increase in communities long after the world has entered “COVID-19 Recovery” and no longer views homelessness as a public health crisis.
- Better that you prepare your processes, strategies and key messages now instead scrambling to respond as community pressures increase in the coming months.



Our Work Defined...

Prevention activities occur before an individual/family has legally lost their ability to reside at an address. The goal is sustaining an existing safe, appropriate tenancy.

Diversion activities occur once an individual/family has legally lost their housing, but prior to shelter entry. Explore safe, appropriate options in community.

Rapid Resolution activities occur within the first two weeks of a shelter stay when an individual/family cannot be diverted



Hmmm...

- Why do most people - even those that are economically poor with problematic rental histories and a number of life issues - never become homeless?
- What can we learn from people that do not become homeless to apply to those that are about to become or have just become homeless?



System of Care

HIFIS/HMIS

CAB/CE/Service Manager

Progressive Engagement



Progressive Engagement Involves Equity

Equality



The assumption is that everyone benefits from the same supports. This is equal treatment.

Equity



Everyone gets the supports they need (this is the concept of "affirmative action"), thus producing equity.



PRINCIPLES THAT INFORM PREVENTION & DIVERSION



Fundamental Beliefs

- Before a community can embark upon prevention and diversion as a system, it needs to embrace core beliefs about what it aims to achieve.
 - Do you believe people are generally resilient?
 - Do you believe that homeless services should be used by people that have no safe and appropriate alternatives?
 - Do you believe in consistent application of evidence informed processes like prevention & diversion?
 - Who do you want to prioritize for finite shelter space?



Core Principles to Any Prevention & Diversion Effort

- Making people become homeless in order to receive services is a bad idea.
- People are generally resilient. They should be empowered to maximize their resilience.
- Progressive engagement is a good idea and is trauma informed.
- Safe and appropriate tenancies take many forms.
- Mediation is a worthwhile endeavour when solving a housing crisis.
- Flexible resources (financial and supports) increase the potential for success.



Prevention



The Usual Struggles with Prevention

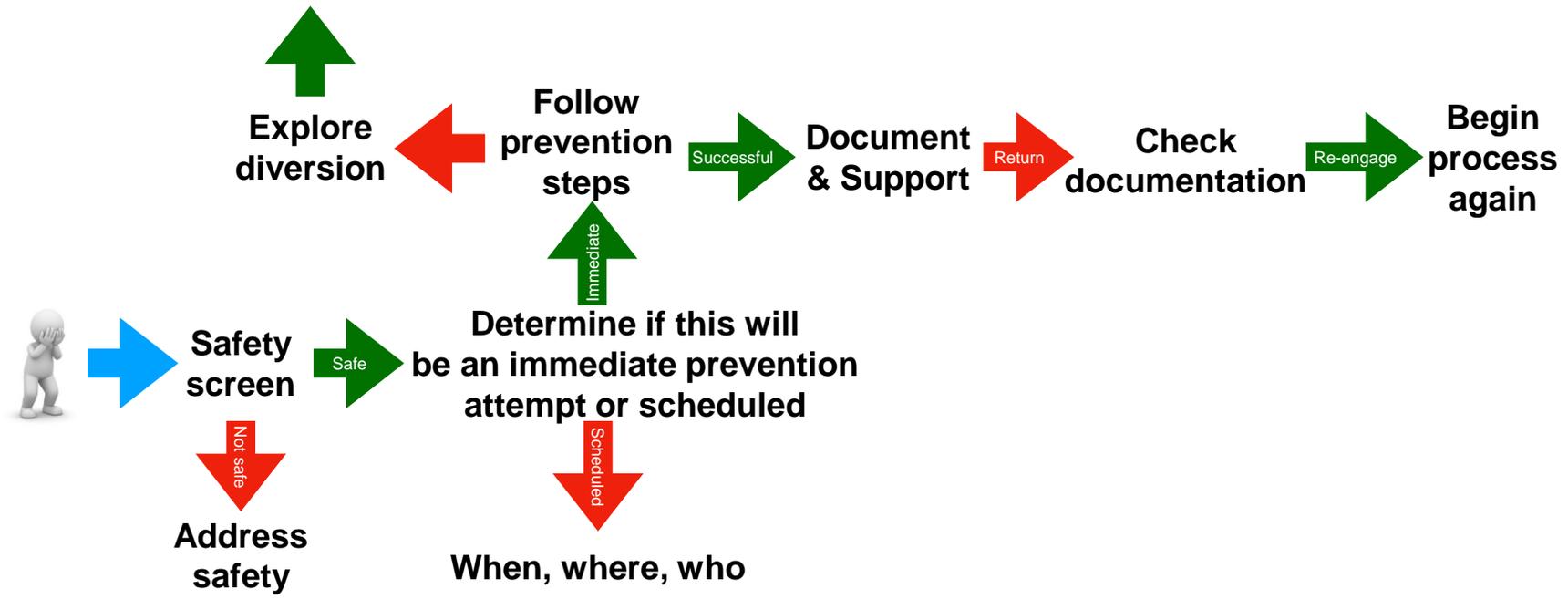
- Administrators of prevention and even funders **see cause and effect where there is not any.**
- Service providers **think they can predict** how a household will do in the future.
- Households deemed to be **too high risk** are most often screened out.
- Homelessness prevention money was incorrectly viewed as a poverty reduction initiative.
 - Analysis of service use often shows repeat users of the service as soon as eligible.



Prevention

- Research demonstrates that historically 80% of homelessness prevention investments went to households that would not have become homeless;
- Prevention efforts must also **target households** that most closely resembles the risk and vulnerability of our chronic homeless households – opportunity to double-down on investment prior to entry/return to homelessness
- Recognize that **prediction is impossible** ...objectivity is essential in the decision-making process





Prevention Workflow...



Homelessness Prevention Activities

- Explore the tenancy agreement/housing scenario
- Investigate the obstacles to staying in current unit
- Access landlord-tenant &/or legal services
- Identify legitimate and legal avenues to intervene in evictions, including mediation & dispute resolution
- Identify if other life areas create vulnerabilities for longer term housing retention if current dispute can be resolved
- Explore financial and potential support options for eviction prevention
- Create action plan with household
- Follow-up on housing stability and provide supports for emerging needs



COVID-19 Specific Considerations for Prevention...

- Economic downturn resulting in increased # of housing crises...how do we prioritize for finite resources?
- Local eviction moratorium may be viewed as a rent hiatus. Are we monitoring supported clients?
- Some types of shared housing can make it more difficult to stay safe at home and shelter may be seen as a “safer alternative”. Are prevention resources flexible enough to increase safety at home?
- With the reported increase in domestic and intimate partner violence at this time, safety screening will be essential + connection to VAW/DV type resources where appropriate



Prevention Investments?

- What proportion of prevention \$\$ allocated for households that have financial crisis as the cause of their housing crisis versus households that were precariously housed and demonstrating higher acuity prior to COVID?
- To prevent homelessness for people experiencing imminent homelessness? first time entry to the system?
- As an insurance policy used along with homelessness proofing efforts for people in supportive housing?
- In examining your homelessness prevention efforts, who is being served and who is not?
- Are policies and procedures promoting equity, not just equality?



- Strategies for ongoing landlord engagement, mediation and support?
- For people hospitalized as a result of COVID19... early detection efforts and rent bridging program via prevention?
- Historically, some communities have linked prevention efforts to employment access efforts. In today's economy, sustainability may need to focus on what is possible through government subsidy rather than personal income from employment.
- Rent bank options? Be aware...these rarely have pay-back rates that make them self-sustaining and often descend into grants programs or forgivable loans programs.



Prevention Considerations – Financial and Support Services

- The amount of funding should be **dictated by the level of need, starting with the *least* amount** of funding to help the household stabilize, and the amount would be customized to the specific circumstance of the household.
- Prevention resources should be **flexible** to adjust to changing needs of household.
- **Flexible support services** may be required to maintain tenancy and increase housing stability.
- Ensure evidence informed tools and approaches are incorporated into the process.



PR-VI-SPDAT

- Currently available for Families & Single Adults
- Measures of Vulnerability and Risk Indicators remain the same + Current Housing Sustainability investigation



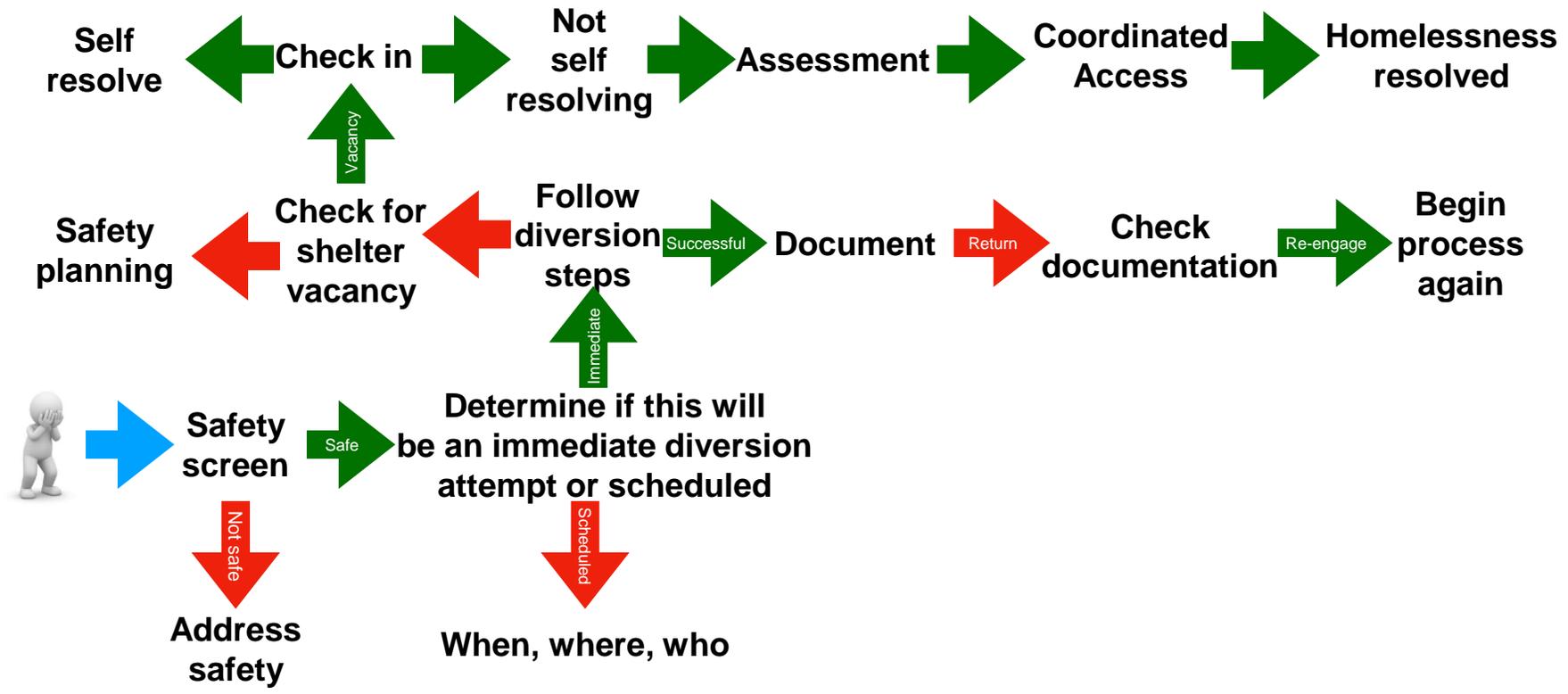
Diversion: A High Level Overview



When to Practice Diversion

- Household does not have a legal and safe tenancy to return to...prevention not a possibility.
- At time of first seeking shelter services...or as soon thereafter as possible.
- Not always practical to attempt diversion at some hours of the day.
- Some people are not ready for the diversion conversation...but the opportunity to prevent literal homelessness is worth the effort.
- For people that have experienced lengthy periods of sheltered and unsheltered homelessness, diversion does not make sense.





Diversion Workflow



COVID-19 Specific Issues for Diversion...

- Screening for symptoms or screening for diversion – which goes first?
- Shelter may be viewed as the “safer alternative” than staying with family, friends, other natural supports;
- Staying outside may be viewed as the “safer alternative” than staying in shelter;
- COVID-19 reality or “rent hiatus” has resulted in a return to homelessness;
- Physical distancing and self-isolation or quarantine can make it difficult to have people engage with family and friends;
- Exploring safe, appropriate housing options – current contact with family/friends? PPE to reduce risk of infection? 2-week self isolation for the unit when new person moves in?



Diversion is...

- **Strength-based** by having households *leverage their knowledge, skills and resources*
- **Progressively engaging** by having households *demonstrate problem-solving skills* prior to more intensive intervention
- **Person-centred** by facilitating a *unique journey out of homelessness based upon the households' circumstances, strengths and resiliencies*
- **Trauma-informed** by *doing "with" rather than "for or to"*, having a clear objective, using empathy and accountability, exercising transparency, and empowering of decision-making
- **Harm reducing** by *focusing on natural supports when safe and appropriate*, encouraging autonomy, and focusing on housing first without focusing on compliance or treatment first



Diversion Step One

- Screen for safety.
- Have the conversation about what diversion is.
- Should be same everywhere.
- **SAMPLE:** *“Our goal is to learn more about your specific housing situation right now and what you need so that together we can identify the best possible way to get you a place to stay tonight and to find safe, permanent housing as quickly as possible. That might mean staying in emergency accommodation tonight, but we want to avoid that if at all possible. We will work with you to find a more stable alternative if we can.”*
- What do you want your script to be?



Diversion Step Two

QUESTION	LOOK FOR:	BECAUSE...
Why are you seeking service today?	Reason(s) and context.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can result in other questions being answered without being asked. 2. Inappropriate reasons for seeking service can be resolved without going further.
What else have you tried to do before seeking service?	Attempts made, likely with friends, family or other community resources, especially mainstream resources.	People should be empowered wherever possible to resolve their own issues, when it is safe to do so.
What else have you thought about trying, but haven't tried yet?	Ideas that have been considered but not acted upon.	It may be appropriate to encourage the person to try these things before admitting to a service.

- Possible Actions:*
1. Proceed to Step Three.
 2. Divert away to attempt other activities.
 3. Divert away because inappropriate for service.



Diversions Step Three

<i>Where did you stay last night?</i>		
ANSWER	LOOK FOR:	BECAUSE...
Outdoors/ any place not fit for human habitation.	Anything other than one's own apartment or that of a friend/family member.	You can skip to Step Six.
Own apartment/ home.	Main/primary reason for leaving.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If fleeing violence, would be suitable for VAW/DV resources. 2. If facing eviction/voluntarily vacated, intervention may be possible. 3. If has been evicted, other courses of action may be considered.
Friends/family	<p>Main/primary reason for leaving. Then ask:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. If staying with someone else, what is the relationship between them and you? b. How long have you been staying there? c. Where did you stay before that? d. Would it be safe for you to stay there again for the next 3-7 days? e. (If a couple and/or household with children under 18) Would your whole household be able to return and stay there safely for the next 3-7 days? f. If indicate that the place where they stayed is unsafe, ask why it is unsafe. g. If cannot stay there safely, or if were staying in a place unfit for human habitation, move to Step Six. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If fleeing violence, would be suitable for VAW/DV resources. 2. If there is a history of them staying there, it may be possible to extend the stay if it is safe to do so. 3. Brief interventions may extend stay. 4. With a bit more time (e.g., 3-7 days) it moves things out of immediate crisis mode.



Diversion Step Four

- Are there additional reasons why you can't stay there any longer?
- Is there anything I haven't asked you about that would be important for me to be aware of as we try to figure out the best situation for you moving forward?



Diversion Step Five

- Do you think that you/you and your family could stay there again temporarily if we provide you with some help or referrals to find permanent housing or connect with other services?
- If no, why not? What would it take to be able to stay there temporarily?



Diversion Step Six

- If no, is there somewhere else where you/you and your family could stay temporarily if we provide you with some help or referrals to find permanent housing and access other supports? For example, what about other family members? Friends? Co-workers?
- What would it take for you to be able to stay there temporarily?



Diversion Step Seven

What is making it hard for you to find permanent housing for you/you and your family - or connect to other resources that could help you do that?

- a. For example, do you or does anyone in your family have special needs or a medical condition? How does this affect your housing situation?
- b. Do you owe money for rent or utilities?
- c. Are you new to the area?
- d. Are you in an unsafe or unstable relationship?



Diversion Step Eight

What resources do you have right now that could help you and your family find a place to stay temporarily or find permanent housing?

- a. For example, are you getting any help from other family members or friends?
- b. Do you have income?
 - i. What are the sources?
- c. Are you involved with any other services right now?



Diversion Step Nine

If admitted to service there is still an expectation that you will be attempting to secure permanent housing for you (and your family). What is your plan at this point for securing housing if you are admitted to a service?



Considerations for Diversion

- We always want to examine what is the **most appropriate and safest** option. That can look different at screening and initial engagement with diversion and prevention amidst COVID-19.
- Ensure screening for COVID-19 for all involved (household & host)
- Gather **guidance from health partners** on reducing infection and transmission when exploring diversion options (self isolation, PPE, etc.).
- The more you can **customize a support structure**, including financial supports, rather than only offering a blanket amount (of financial or support services) for diversion efforts, the better.



Rapid Resolution



Rapid Resolution during COVID-19

- Expansion of rapid re-housing resources both in Canada and the United States should make it possible to rapidly re-house many who cannot be diverted from shelter but can be prevented from having long bouts of homelessness.
- The rental market in some communities may soften allowing for more rehousing as a solution to avoiding/rapidly resolving homelessness.
- Communities may need a financial and low support re-housing track just for households with economic issues but no other substantial support needs.
- These lower acuity households should not be competing with higher acuity households for access to specialized and intensive re-housing resources normally provided by the homelessness response system.



Focus on Rapid Resolution

– Optimize Active and Passive Resources

- Cue up Housing Location and Landlord Liaison Activities
- First 2 weeks of homelessness – greatest opportunity for rapid exit
- Action-oriented housing plan
- Prepare housing-focused passive resources
- Activate income supports, if required
- All documentation ready, including identification
- Listings of places for rent
- Friends/family
- Filling out applications
- Examine roommate/shared housing options



Monitor & Evaluate Impact



Monitor Your Efforts & Impacts via DATA

- Who gets diversion and prevention and why (demographic data of who was accepted and who was denied; who was successful and who was unsuccessful)
- When they get diversion or prevention (how long it takes)
- What assistance people get
- What difference any of this made (impacts, outcomes, recidivism, etc.)
- How this compares to the data of people who did enter into homelessness for the first time during this period
- How this compares to the data of people who returned to homelessness during this period, after having a period of being housed



STAY WELL...

THANKS !!

