

LOOKING BACK TO MOVE FORWARD:

An assessment of progress on the 2014-2019
St. John's Community Plan to End Homelessness

Released December 2019







Acknowledgements

Nick Falvo Consulting would like to thank Doug Pawson and Jennifer Tipple, who were extremely helpful at all stages of the drafting of this assessment. They were generous with both their time and input. Sherwin Flight schooled Nick on landlord-tenant legislation. Matt George did the document's layout.

This assessment could also not have been written without the 33 people who agreed to interviews, both in person and by telephone. Forty-one people took the time to answer the online survey; their time and input is appreciated. Several people also answered random questions via email. Members of the newly-formed Community Advisory Board provided very helpful feedback during this process. Nick also wishes to thank John Burrett, James McGregor, Steve Pomeroy, Greg Suttor and one anonymous source for further assistance. Susan Falvo provided excellent proofreading. Angela, Bob and Sylvia Regnier covered for Nick at home while he was out of town. Any errors in this assessment are Nick's.

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Matt George
Erik McLean
Francis Nie
Henry Perks
Mec Rawlings
Jeff Smith

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Executive Summary

In 2014, End Homelessness St. John's (EHSJ) unveiled the St. John's Community Plan to End Homelessness 2014-2019. EHSJ is considered the system planning organization for the city's homeless-serving sector. In that capacity, EHSJ plays a central coordinating role and funds important initiatives pertaining to the Plan.

The Plan estimated its total cost of implementation at \$7.7 million, with federal funding (via the Homelessness Partnering Strategy – HPS) accounting for \$3.5 million and matching funding at \$4.2 million. The actual cost of implementation was \$7.8 million, with HPS funding accounting for \$4.5 million and matching funding accounting for \$3.3 million.

As there are external factors not within EHSJ's control, this assessment recognizes the context of the last five years and how external factors have impacted the Plan's implementation, including policies at the federal, provincial and municipal government levels. The macroeconomic and demographic landscape has also influenced the Plan's implementation, particularly factors such as high unemployment in the local region, high vacancy levels, and the costs of rent and utilities.

Through the Plan, a range of housing and supports were implemented. These include:

- An Intensive Case Management (ICM) program, called Front Step, which was launched in January 2016 through partners Choices for Youth, Iris Kirby House and Stella's Circle.
- The Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Rehousing (HPRR) program, which was launched in October 2017 through partners Choices for Youth and Stella's Circle.
- Three Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) projects, which were entered into with Cochrane Community Outreach and Performance Centre (CCOPC), John Howard Society of NL, and Salvation Army, for a total of 40 units (including 7 reserved for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness).

Stakeholders clearly stated there is a need for more sustainable housing situations (particularly more supportive housing), more low-barrier shelter capacity, and more harm reduction services.

The need to secure the necessary leadership and resources to end homelessness was identified as a priority area in 2014-2019 Community Plan. Specifically, the Plan called for the need to develop the infrastructure necessary to implement the Plan, coordinate funding to maximize impact, and champion an end to homelessness.

As a result of inherent conflicts of interest in EHSJ's structure, a governance review process took place in 2018. This has led to EHSJ's transition from the City of St. John's into its own non-profit, to take place in 2019-20. The new EHSJ will be led by a new Executive Director position (hired in March 2019), governed by an independent board of directors, and advised by the community through its new Community Advisory Board (CAB). Stakeholders expressed appreciation for the governance changes. However, there are still concerns about funding allocated through EHSJ, suggesting that only a small group of service providers receive the lion's share of funding. EHSJ staff retention challenges were also raised as an issue.

EHSJ's ability to reach the goals and targets set out in the Plan is dependent on its ability to collect data and measure outcomes. This area is still very much in progress, and is hampered by the fact that robust, community-wide homelessness management software is still under development.

The six outcomes specified in the Plan are as follows:

1. End chronic and episodic homelessness
2. Rehouse and support 460 homeless persons (of these, a minimum of 160 will be chronically and/or episodically homeless)
3. Reduce average length of stay in emergency shelters to 7 days
4. Develop a coordinated homeless-serving system
5. Enhance the integration of public systems to reduce discharging into homelessness
6. Align resources and funding across diverse sectors to support the St. John's Plan to End Homelessness

Some of these outcomes are not well defined and cannot easily be measured. Where they can be measured, they are unclear in terms of what exactly is to be measured and they lack a baseline. With that said, as of March 31, 2019, EHSJ staff estimate 309 individuals have been supported since the Plan's outset, and at least 165 of these had been experiencing chronic and/or episodic homelessness at the time they were accepted. Of the 309, an estimated 244 individuals have been housed since the Plan's outset (of these approximately 156 had a history of chronic and/or episodic homelessness). In sum, it would appear that St. John's is just over halfway to its goal of housing a total of 460 individuals. In terms of total number of people supported since the Plan's inception, St. John's appears to be approximately two-thirds of the way there. However, a very impressive number of those who have been housed and supported have a history of chronic and/or episodic homelessness.

EHSJ has also made strides toward achieving the other outcomes, in particular the development of a coordinated homeless-serving system given the implementation of Coordinated Access in November 2017. However, the present assessment highlights the need for greater integration of provincial public systems, including funding, programs, and services. Within EHSJ's role as a system planning organization, opportunities for greater collaboration could include wider performance management of the province's homeless-serving funding and strengthening Coordinated Access to include a greater number of non-profit and public agencies.

It is clear that the new Community Plan should, in consultation with the community, actively work towards integrating specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-sensitive (SMART) goals as desired outcomes and objectives are identified. This is one example of how, moving forward, there are many opportunities to integrate the learnings of the past Community Plan and the findings of this assessment into the 2019-2024 St. John's Community Plan to End Homelessness.

Introduction

In 2014, End Homelessness St. John's (EHSJ) unveiled the 2014-2019 St. John's Community Plan to End Homelessness. This followed extensive community consultation, including 35 sessions with stakeholders and more than 150 participants from "public systems at all levels of government, faith and business communities, and a diversity of service providers..." (EHSJ, 2014, p. 4). Focus groups were also held with 80 people with lived experience of homelessness. In addition, a public event was held in May 2014, "where 80 cross-sectoral participants discussed the Plan's priorities, strategies and areas of focus" (EHSJ, 2014, p. 4).

In general terms, the Plan sought:

- Increased coordination and supports for persons experiencing homelessness.
- Improved integration of public systems (e.g., health, justice, child welfare) to reduce the practice of discharging people into homelessness.
- The improved alignment of resources and funding across diverse sectors.
- The end of chronic and episodic homelessness.
- Housing and support for people currently experiencing homelessness in St. John's.
- The reduction in length of stay in emergency shelters.
- A decrease in rough sleeping.

The Plan estimated its total cost of implementation at \$7.7 million, with federal funding (via the Homelessness Partnering Strategy) accounting for \$3.5 million. The Plan acknowledged that the sources of the remaining \$4.2 million were not known. Of the \$7.7 million figure, \$1.5 million was allocated for capital in order to develop 7 to 10 new units of supportive housing, and the remaining \$6.2 million for operations (EHSJ, 2014).

The present assessment seeks to review the past five years against the backdrop of this Plan. It will first discuss contextual factors that have affected the Plan's implementation. This will include macroeconomic factors, as well as both legislative and budgetary changes at the federal, provincial and municipal levels.

It will then discuss: the management of local resources over the past five years; the development of a range of housing and support options for households experiencing homelessness; shelter diversion, Coordinated Access and the Vulnerability Assessment Tool; discharge planning from public systems; the evolving role of EHSJ; and progress against the Plan's desired outcomes.

Important Contextual Developments since 2014

End Homelessness St. John's (EHSJ) is considered the system planning organization for the city's homeless-serving sector. In that capacity, EHSJ plays a central coordinating role and funds important initiatives pertaining to the Plan. The present section of the assessment reviews developments that have taken place over the past five years that are believed to have impacted progress against the Plan, but that would generally be regarded as beyond the direct control of EHSJ.

Macroeconomic and demographic changes

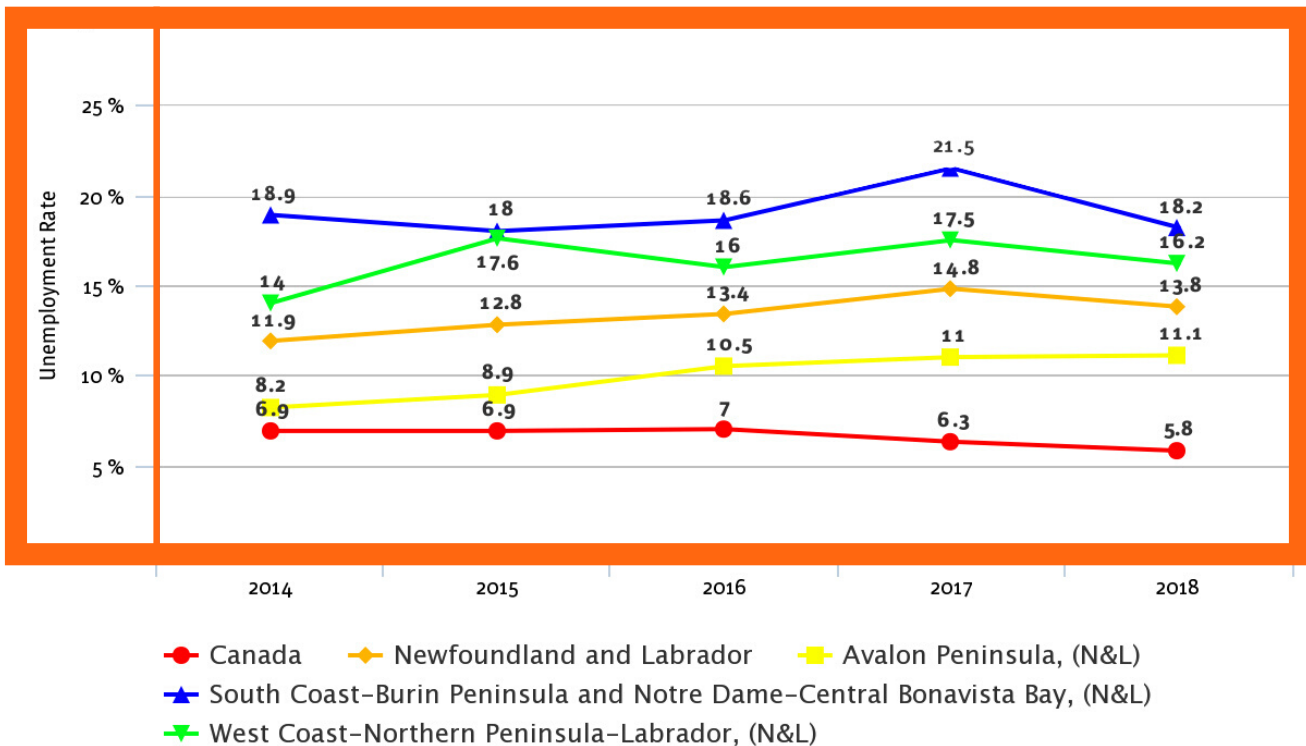
This subsection will review macroeconomic and demographic factors, briefly assessing how they have impacted homelessness and the homeless-serving sector in St. John's. Specifically, this section reviews: high unemployment in the local region; high vacancy levels for rental housing units; rent levels; energy costs; and the aging population. High unemployment, high rent and high energy costs all have the effect of increasing homelessness. High rental vacancy rates are 'good news' for the homelessness sector, while an aging population helps us understand future needs.

High unemployment

St. John's is considered Newfoundland and Labrador's primary centre of economic growth. In fact, per capita household income is above the average for Canada as a whole (May, 2019). However, the province as a whole has the highest unemployment rate of any Canadian province, and by a considerable margin, a figure which is considered bad news for homelessness (Echenberg & Jensen, 2009). As of July 2019, the provincial unemployment rate was 12.8%, more than double the national average of 5.7% (Statistics Canada, 2019, August 13). And since 2014, all regions of the province have suffered from persistently high unemployment, as can be seen in *Figure 1*. The unemployment rate in St. John's rose from 6.0% in 2014 to 8.4% in 2018.

FIGURE 1

ANNUAL UNEMPLOYMENT RATE, NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR VS. CANADA 2014-2018



Source: Statistics Canada (2019, July 31).

High rental vacancy rates

When it comes to the local housing market, the 'good news' for the homeless-serving sector is that rental vacancy rates are relatively high. A 'healthy' rental vacancy rate is generally considered to be in the 3-4% range, and the rate for St. John's has been either within or above that range for the duration of the Plan. Figure 2 shows the average rental vacancy rate for a two-bedroom unit since 2014.¹ Relatively high rental vacancy rates make it easier, in theory, to find housing units in the private market. In principle, it helps create a renter's market where landlords are more eager to rent. However, securing units in such a market also requires that the tenant be able to afford the rent, which bring us to the next point.

[1] Since 2014, the lowest vacancy rate for St. John's units has always been for one-bedroom units. That figure has never dropped below 3%; as of October 2018, it stood at 4.8%.

FIGURE 2
RENTAL VACANCY RATE, ST. JOHN'S

2014	4.6%
2015	4.7%
2016	7.9%

Source: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

Notes: This is the October figure for each year.

It applies to privately initiated rental apartment structures of three units and over located in St. John's Census Metropolitan Area. For vacancy rate data, data quality for two-bedroom units is considered the highest.

Rent levels

For the duration of the Plan, private market rent levels remained high in St. John's (see Figure 3). In most Canadian cities, the cost of private market rental housing is out of reach for a large segment of low-income households. In St. John's, a full-time minimum-wage worker would need to work 55 hours to afford an average one-bedroom apartment (Macdonald, 2019). In October 2018, the average cost of rent for a bachelor unit in St. John's was \$712; yet, a single person considered employable and receiving social assistance in the province receives a monthly income of approximately \$948 (Tweddle & Aldridge, 2018).² The discrepancy between the cost of private rental housing and what a low-income tenant can actually afford underlines the need for financial assistance in the form of rent supplements housing allowances. Such assistance can prevent people from becoming homeless; in cases where a person is already homeless, such assistance can help them move into housing much more quickly.

Energy costs

Rent levels only tell part of the housing affordability story. One-on-one interviews done for this assessment found it is not uncommon for a low-income tenant to pay \$200 per month for heat and light in a one-bedroom unit in the city. Indeed, many low-income tenants in St. John's appear to live in units with very low levels of energy efficiency. In addition to the day-to-day strain this puts on low-income households, a growing number of low-income households in St. John's are in utility arrears, a phenomenon that puts their housing at risk. Both EHSJ and some non-profit agencies in the city's homeless-serving sector pay considerable amounts of money towards utility arrears.

FIGURE 3
AVERAGE RENT, TWO-BEDROOM APARTMENT, ST. JOHN'S

2014	\$888
2015	\$923
2016	\$958
2017	\$941
2018	\$961

Data Source: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

Notes: This is the October figure for each year. It applies to privately initiated rental apartment structures of three units and over located in St. John's Census Metropolitan Area. Please note that dollar figures are nominal (i.e., not adjusted for inflation).

[2] These figures include federal and provincial tax credits.

Federal initiatives

This section of the assessment seeks to identify major changes brought about by Canada's federal government that have had the potential to impact homelessness in St. John's. At a macro level, there were significant policy decisions that supported lower-income workers and families with children. The implementation of the Canada Workers' Benefit, according to the 2018 federal budget, means that "a low-income worker earning \$15,000 a year could receive up to nearly \$500 more from the program in 2019 than she received in 2018" (Finance Canada, 2018, p. 33). Another important tax lever used included the enhancement of the Canada Child Benefit (CCB). With the CCB, Canadian households can receive up to \$6,400/year for each child under the age of six, and \$5,400/year for each child between the ages of six and 17 (those maximum benefit levels apply to households earning less than \$30,000 annually). As of July 2018, the federal government indexed the CCB to inflation. More detailed information on all of these initiatives is available in Appendix 3.

Despite these policy changes, targeted policies for the many individuals who live on the fringes of homelessness, primarily those receiving income support for singles, remained absent.

Federal funding for affordable housing

Canada's federal government has shown a renewed interest in affordable housing in recent years. The 2016-17 federal budget announced \$1.3 billion in new funding for housing for 2016-17, and \$956 million for 2017-18. That is an average of just over \$1 billion in new federal funding per year over a two-year period. The 2017-18 federal budget then announced \$11.2 billion over 11 years for housing. In November 2017, the federal government released its much-anticipated National Housing Strategy, aiming—among other things—to reduce chronic homelessness across Canada by 50% over 10 years.³ However, in light of the fact that other funding streams are either declining or terminating, recent analysis by Canada's Parliamentary Budget Officer projects future federal housing spending on the whole to actually decrease over the next decade, relative to Gross Domestic Product (Parliamentary Budget Officer, 2019).

Federal homelessness funding

For the duration of the Plan, the main federal funding program for homelessness was called the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS). HPS directives stipulated that minimum percentages of Designated Communities' allocations needed to be spent on Housing First. The federal government defines Housing First as follows: "Housing First involves moving people experiencing homelessness—particularly people experiencing chronic homelessness—rapidly from the street or emergency shelters into stable and long-term housing, with supports" (Government of Canada, 2019, April 25). In principle, HPS' main focus was on persons experiencing chronic and episodic homelessness (ESDC, 2018). "Chronic homelessness is defined as when those who are currently homeless have been homeless for six months or more in the past year, while episodic homelessness is defined as

[3] Interestingly, just 5% of new funding under the National Housing Strategy has been earmarked towards the goal of reducing chronic homelessness by half (Pomeroy, undated).

when individuals who are currently homeless have experienced three or more episodes of homelessness in the previous year” (ESDC, 2018, p. iv).

According to a recent evaluation of HPS:

The adoption of the Housing First approach represented a major shift in the direction of the program. To give communities time to implement Housing First, fiscal year 2014 to 2015 was considered a transition year to allow communities to complete projects from the previous funding cycle and to prepare for a Housing First approach. Beginning in fiscal year 2015 to 2016...Mid-sized Designated Communities [such as St. John’s] were required to allocate a minimum of 40% of their funding towards Housing First starting in fiscal year 2016 to 2017 (ESDC, 2018, p. 17).

However, Housing First stipulations (i.e., percentages) did not go as smoothly as some had hoped. According to the same evaluation:

Findings from key informant interviews with ESDC policy and service delivery representatives indicated that the target was viewed by a few communities as prescriptive, and that it was an ambitious target within a relatively short time frame, particularly for those communities who had not previously implemented a Housing First approach on a community-wide level. Communities with no Housing First experience reported facing challenges in adapting their community programming to fit the criteria, and found the learning curve and required levels of organizational changes and coordination of services challenging (ESDC, 2018, p. 19).

According to the same evaluation, “the program’s client eligibility requirements for Housing First services are seen as restrictive.” For example, specific vulnerable populations that have complex needs like youth leaving care and women fleeing violence often do not qualify for Housing First interventions” (ESDC, 2018, p. viii).

Interviews conducted for the present assessment found that, in St. John’s, the minimum Housing First thresholds did not pose a major problem.

Also under HPS, the reporting system (i.e., the Homelessness Electronic Reporting and Information Network) has been onerous and difficult to use. Canada’s federal government has since acknowledged “that the level of monitoring and reporting of the program is high and contributes to administrative burden...there is a clear need to streamline reporting processes and report content, particularly in recognition that the Government of Canada is but one funder of homelessness supports and services” (ESDC, 2018, p. x). Interviews conducted for this assessment found that this was a challenge for EHSJ as well, requiring more staff time than it ought to have, while not adding value to the Community Plan process.

With the commitment of the federal government, the budgets for 2016 and 2017 led to Canada-wide increases to HPS funding levels. This translated into an additional \$1,046,138 for St. John’s homeless-serving sector over a three-period period, as illustrated in Figure 4. Put differently, for the five-year period of the Plan, St. John’s received 30% more federal homelessness funding than anticipated in the Plan.

FIGURE 4

FEDERAL FUNDING FOR HOMELESSNESS, ST. JOHN'S

YEAR	ORIGINAL ALLOCATION	ENHANCEMENT	TOTAL
2014-15	\$697,425	-	\$697,425
2015-16	\$697,425	-	\$697,425
2016-17	\$697,425	\$348,713	\$1,046,138
2017-18	\$697,425	\$348,713	\$1,046,138
2018-19	\$697,425	\$348,712	\$1,046,137
TOTAL	\$3,487,125	\$1,046,138	\$4,533,263

Source: End Homelessness St. John's.

Note: This table indicates when funding was scheduled to be received. Some funding was reprofiled into later years.

In sum

The current federal government has undertaken important initiatives pertaining to income assistance for low-income households. These will likely have the effect of preventing homelessness, as well as assisting households to exit from homelessness. However, single adults without dependents remain a blind spot for governments across Canada when it comes to income assistance for low-income households. The federal government's re-engagement in long-term affordable housing planning across the country is an important step forward, and the enhancement of federal homelessness funding has been very meaningful.

Provincial initiatives

Across Canada, provincial and territorial governments play important roles with respect to homelessness. They fund income assistance, housing, supports for persons experiencing homelessness and other programs that play a crucial role in both preventing and reducing homelessness. This section of the assessment will discuss important initiatives undertaken by Newfoundland and Labrador's provincial government in this respect over the past five years.

Bilateral housing agreement with federal government

In April 2019, Newfoundland and Labrador's provincial government signed a bilateral cost-shared agreement with the federal government, spanning the 2019-2028 period. Its main purpose is to enable funding to flow from the National Housing Strategy. The agreement commits to a 15% expansion of social housing units across the province.

While the bilateral agreement does not discuss supportive housing for persons with complex needs in any great detail, it does state that up to 20% of cost-matching by the provincial government can go towards "housing support services intended to ensure housing retention, greater self reliance for individuals, and social inclusion" (CMHC — Newfoundland and Labrador, 2019, p. F-6). In other words, there appears to be considerable opportunity for the provincial government to create supportive housing units through the National Housing Strategy. Since the present assessment discusses the need for more supportive housing in the local homeless-serving sector, the supportive housing provisions in the bilateral agreement represent an important opportunity to fill gaps.

Changes to landlord-tenant legislation

On January 1, 2019, important amendments were made to the province's Residential Tenancies Act—these were the first major changes to this legislation in nearly 20 years. On the whole, these changes have been welcomed by advocates and officials. Key changes include the following (for a more complete list, refer to Appendix 4):

- Legislation was expanded to include living accommodations provided by non-profit, religious and charitable organizations, as well as boarding houses.
- Tenants experiencing family violence can now terminate rental agreements without penalty by providing 30 days' notice.
- Acceptable forms of documentation can now include electronic formats, such as email and texting.

Provincial shift in responsibility for oversight of emergency shelters

As of June 2018, provincial responsibility for oversight of emergency shelters shifted from the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour (AESL) to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation (NL Housing). This involved oversight of emergency shelters, as well the telephone line that people need to call in order to access most emergency shelters.

Research done for the present assessment uncovered a rather important ‘administrative hiccup’ that occurred during this transition. Citing privacy, AESL staff did not hand over a client database that they had used when providing telephone assistance to persons experiencing homelessness; that database contained important client information (e.g., client needs, services and benefits previously provided). NL Housing was therefore tasked to take phone calls from clients in need, but without documentation as to the client’s needs and past service use.

Prior to the transition, NL Housing staff were not aware that they would have to start from scratch in collecting client information. This has made it more challenging for NL Housing staff to serve clients by telephone.

The move toward deposits for income assistance

Several stakeholders interviewed for this assessment noted that, when homelessness was under the umbrella of AESL, persons experiencing homelessness were frequently moved rather quickly into housing.

However, that process occurs more slowly now. However, one well-placed provincial official noted that this stems from a decision of the provincial finance department to stop allowing provincial officials to issue cheques for landlords; rather, the provincial department required that such rental payments be made via direct deposits. Some landlords do not like this, and this has slowed down the ‘move out’ process from shelters into housing. The well-placed senior official in question stated that this has nothing to do with the move from AESL to NL Housing, but did acknowledge that it certainly has slowed down people’s transition out of shelters.

New Children, Youth and Families Act

In June 2019, new legislation took effect in Newfoundland and Labrador resulting in important updates to child welfare legislation (to be further discussed later in the assessment). According to the provincial government backgrounder, “all youth under a Youth Services Agreement can [now] receive services until they reach the age of 21” (Newfoundland and Labrador, 2019). This appears to represent an important step forward for the province’s homeless-serving sector.

In both the 2016 and 2018 Point-in-Time Counts of homelessness in St. John's, large numbers of youth indicated involvement with child protection or foster care. In 2018, 50% of respondents reported having been involved with child protection as youth, and 40% reported foster care involvement as youth. "Of the youth living in care, half had become homeless within a year after leaving care, and all respondents felt child protection was not helpful in transitioning them out of care" (Memarpour, 2018, p. 10).

Provincial poverty-reduction initiatives

For the first two fiscal years following the implementation of the St. John's Community Plan to End Homelessness 2014-2019, no large-scale provincial poverty reduction initiatives occurred. But for the ensuing years, several were brought into being, many of which have impacted those at risk of, or who are experiencing, homelessness. Those large-scale initiatives are outlined in Figure 5.

FIGURE 5

MAJOR PROVINCIAL POVERTY-REDUCTION INITIATIVES WITH RELEVANCE TO HOMELESSNESS

YEAR	INITIATIVE
2014-15	No new poverty reduction initiatives worth more than \$5 million
2015-16	No new poverty reduction initiatives worth more than \$5 million
2016-17	Funding for the Supportive Living Program to support community-based initiatives that enable individuals with complex needs to overcome homelessness Implementation of Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement Increases to the Low Income Seniors' Benefit Implementation of Full Day Kindergarten
2017-18	Child Care Services Subsidy to help low-income families with the costs of regulated child care Increase in Low Income Tax Reduction thresholds to reduce or eliminate the payment of provincial income tax for households with low income Expansion of NL Housing's Rent Supplement Program to subsidize additional units for eligible low-income households
2018-19	Funding for the Operating Grant Program - Family and Child Care Centres to reduce or eliminate surcharges to parents

Source: Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development website.

Note: Year denotes fiscal year the initiative in question was introduced.

Many of these initiatives have likely been effective in preventing homelessness for some, while others have likely accelerated the transition out of homelessness for other households. NL Housing's Rent Supplement Program has been especially relevant to the day-to-day work of EHSJ and its partners, helping bridge the gap between what a low-income household is deemed able to afford, on the one hand, and market rent, on the other. This program has received a number of increases over the years, including a \$319,000 increase announced in the 2017-18 provincial budget (an increase that has remained in place). These increases have allowed more households to receive this subsidy. Across the province, approximately 1,800 clients are now served annually through this program. As of August 2019, 140 Rent Supplement commitments were earmarked for clients with complex needs—these are delivered in partnership between Stella's Circle and CMHA-NL.

In sum

There have been many important changes across the provincial government. Many of these changes have been already helpful, while others are still in development. A persistent message by stakeholders in the present assessment highlighted the need for greater integration of provincial public systems, including funding, programs, and services. EHSJ staff have also given considerable attention to what greater integration might look like. Within EHSJ's role as a system planning organization, opportunities for greater collaboration could include consistent and relevant performance management of the Province's homeless-serving funding, and strengthening Coordinated Access to include a greater number of agencies, as permitted under Reaching Home.

City of St. John's initiatives

The City of St. John's and EHSJ enjoy a very positive working relationship; the City provides EHSJ with considerable in-kind support, both administratively and operationally. This includes free office space, human resources support, legal support, support with purchasing and procurement, and financial/administrative support. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that the City provides EHSJ with annual in-kind support worth \$250,000, in addition to an annual cash contribution of \$100,000. Going forward, the City has committed to cash contributions in 2019 for \$100,000 and in 2020 for \$100,000.

The City of St. John's plays a very active role in affordable housing. Its role here includes the ownership and operation of a 474-unit housing portfolio. While the City's role is that of a landlord, many tenants with complex needs in these units receive staff support from non-profits in St. John's homeless-serving sector. In 2016, the City of St. John's made three of its housing units available for use by Intensive Case Management (ICM) clients. Each unit was fully furnished at a cost of \$5,000 per unit.

The City has also helped to support many housing and homelessness capital projects by waiving property taxes and development charges, allowing for parking exemptions, providing planning support, and donating land. For example, when Garrison Place was developed by the John Howard Society of Newfoundland and Labrador, the requirement of one parking spot per person was waived by the City in 2017-18. And in general, municipal development fees are waived in St. John's for new affordable housing developed by registered charities; they are also waived for private developers building units with confirmed investment from another order of government.

Through a recent partnership with NL Housing, the City provides assistance with inspections and enforcement of the province's Emergency Shelter Program. On a pilot basis, the City of St. John's will inspect all buildings used for private emergency shelters every six months and all buildings used for non-profit emergency shelters annually. This initiative began in January 2019.

The City has offered Housing Catalyst grants since 2016, an initiative that allows the City to be a catalyst for practical and collaborative projects that produce housing or homelessness solutions. This initiative has a \$50,000 annual budget, with each grant worth \$10,000. One has been used by Canadian Home Builders' Association to produce a Yes-In-My-Backyard video pertaining to affordable housing. Another was used by a for-profit landlord to make a housing unit accessible.

Finally, it should be noted that City of St. John's officials engage in ongoing advocacy in favour of low-income tenants. This includes the creation of information guides/toolkits, the convening of events, as well as advocacy to community, government and landlords.



Management of Local Resources

This section assesses EHSJ's ability to work towards the prescribed targets outlined in the 2014-2019 Community Plan based on available resources. It is worth noting that as the previous Community Plan was developed, the targets were not necessarily attached to specific desired outcomes. More critically, this section addresses three main questions:

1. To what extent did anticipated funding materialize since the Plan's inception?
2. To what extent are outcomes being identified, tracked and measured by EHSJ?
3. What key performance indicators were used to track the Plan's progress?

Five-year funding projection vs. realization

The St. John's Community Plan to End Homelessness 2014-2019 projected the need for a total of \$7.7 million over five years. The good news is that, when one includes in-kind staff support and the above-mentioned enhanced federal funding, this global funding target was realized. However, the funding did not flow as quickly as some would have desired. Governance challenges prevented EHSJ from hiring sufficient staff early on to provide the necessary staff infrastructure to implement key initiatives and manage new funding streams. Matching funding was therefore delayed, resulting in delays in program delivery. In retrospect, the timeline for the rollout of this was ambitious, as in-house staff are required to project manage, disburse and monitor funding. It also takes 9 to 12 months for a new staff to fully learn their roles. In short, the funding was in place, but the EHSJ staffing infrastructure was not. What follows is a detailed breakdown of each of the Plan's funding targets.

Housing First System Coordination

The Plan projected \$1,099,123.75 in HPS dollars for this stream, asking for matching funding worth \$1,099,123.75 (for a total of \$2,198,247.50). The total amount ultimately delivered was approximately \$2.4 million. More HPS funding was forthcoming than anticipated, which offset lower than expected matched funding. In the end, approximately \$1.5 million in HPS funding was delivered for this, while matching funding of approximately \$850,000 was delivered (this included other federal funding of \$140,000; \$440,000 from the provincial government's Supported Living Program; other provincial funding worth \$30,000; and City of St. John's funding worth \$60,000). EHSJ used the funding in this stream for core activities required of a system-planning organization—i.e., system coordination. Specifically, the funding went towards staff salaries, project costs, Coordinated Access (CA), homelessness management software, research, communications, training, the Lived Experience Council, the Point-in-Time (PIT) Count and quality assurance.

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Capital

The Plan asked for \$700,000 in HPS funding and \$800,000 in matching funding, for a total of \$1.5 million dollars for PSH capital funding. All of this funding was delivered, with the matching funding being cost-shared 50:50 between CMHC and NL Housing via the Investment in Affordable Housing fund. This funding paid for various capital-related initiatives, including initial concept and architectural design, as well as furniture. Those three buildings were the Cochrane Centre (Cochrane Community Outreach and Performance Centre Inc.), Garrison Place (John Howard Society NL), and the Centre of Hope (Salvation Army). In total, 40 new PSH housing units were or will be created during this process, with seven units reserved for individuals experiencing chronic and episodic homelessness.

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Operations

The Plan asked for a total of \$600,000 for this initiative (although no funding was requested of HPS). However, operational funding requirements were not made clear in the Request for Proposal process. It is also unclear as to whether these funds were meant for operational costs of the building (i.e. maintenance, cleaning) or operational costs of the programs. It is therefore hard to ascertain whether this funding was ever delivered.

Intensive Case Management (ICM)

The Plan projected \$1,097,765 in HPS dollars, as well as the need for \$1,097,765 in matching dollars, for a total of \$2,195,530 for ICM. The project funding was disbursed to Stella's Circle, Iris Kirby House and Choices for Youth. The project went considerably over budget. The Plan called for a decline in funding for later years once the target of providing housing and supports for 154 clients had been reached and clients were successfully graduated, yet this target was not reached – as of March 31, 2019, 141 clients had been served and 65 remained on the caseload. As of March 31, 2019, this was a \$2.8 million initiative.

The HPS contribution ended up being approximately \$1.78 million, with matching funding of approximately \$1.1 million coming from: AESL (\$150,000); Eastern Health (\$540,000); NL Housing's Supportive Living Program (\$117,000); and \$250,000 in-kind support from service providers (Choices for Youth – \$90,000; Iris Kirby House – \$30,000; Stella's Circle – \$130,000).

[4] Centre of Hope's anticipated completion date is 2020. The others are already completed.

Rapid Rehousing/Prevention

The Plan projected \$592,811.25 in HPS dollars, as well as the need for \$592,811.25 in matching dollars, for a total of \$1,185,622.50 for rapid rehousing/prevention. This was largely delivered, for a total of approximately \$1.1 million in federal funding (HPS, \$500,000) and matching funding of \$600,000. The matching funding breakdown is as follows: AESL, \$18,000; Supported Living Program, \$175,000; and in-kind support worth a total of \$408,000 (\$198,000 from Stella’s Circle, and \$210,000 from Choices for Youth).

In sum

HPS enhancements discussed earlier in the assessment increased funding, making it much easier to successfully meet the Plan’s global targets. However, the funding arrived somewhat later than expected, resulting in a compressed timeline for completion of scheduled activities and projects. There were no philanthropic donations, with the exception of \$10,000 provided by the United Way NL for the 2016 and 2018 PiT Counts. It should be borne in mind that EHSJ, under the City’s umbrella, is not legally authorized to accept private philanthropic donations. Figure 6 provides a rough overview of the Plan’s funding targets and results.

FIGURE 6

FIVE-YEAR FUNDING PROJECTION VS. REALIZATION, 2014-2019 PLAN

ITEM	ANTICIPATED			ACTUAL		
	HPS \$	MATCHING \$	TOTAL	HPS \$	MATCHING \$	TOTAL
HF System Coordination	\$1.1M	\$1.1M	\$2.2M	\$1.5M	\$850K	\$2.4M
PSH Capital	\$700K	\$800K	\$1.5M	\$700K	\$800K	\$1.5M
PSH Operations	None	\$600K	\$600K	None	Unclear	Unclear
ICM	\$1.1M	\$1.1M	\$2.2M	\$1.8M	\$1.1M	\$2.8M
Rapid Rehousing/Prevention	\$590K	\$590K	\$1.2M	\$500K	\$600K	\$1.1M
TOTAL	\$3.5M	\$4.2M	\$7.7M	\$4.5M	\$3.3M	\$7.8M

Source: EHSJ, 2018; Stakeholder interviews.

Note: For ease of presentation, figures in this visual have been rounded. Figures under the “Actual” column include in-kind donations.

Outcomes analysis

The identification, tracking and measurement of outcomes in the St. John's homeless-serving sector is very much in development. This area is further hampered by the fact that a robust, community-wide homelessness management software program (known as a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)) is still under development.

The Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) initiative

The Government of Canada created and now supports the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) software, a type of HMIS. HIFIS has had several versions, with the latest being HIFIS 4. Newfoundland and Labrador is the second province to undertake pan-provincial HIFIS 4 implementation, after British Columbia. In 2017, NL Housing began writing mandatory use of HIFIS into its agreements with provincial service providers in a concerted effort to promote a coordinated provincial homeless-serving system informed by real-time data. During the 2018-19 period, the federal government provided \$332,603 in funding for HIFIS 4 implementation. Many community agencies in St. John's are using HIFIS 3.8, but some are still transitioning from other systems, including paper index cards. It has recently come to light that the federal government has reduced its support for HIFIS 3.8 in order to focus on HIFIS 4. This came as a surprise not only to EHSJ officials, but also to some federal officials with responsibility for homelessness. It is estimated that it will be at least another year before HIFIS 4 is available to service providers province-wide. Given the timeline and importance of a supportive transitional period, lack of federal technical support for HIFIS 3.8 is creating challenges.

Once HIFIS 4 is implemented, it will be much easier to generate performance reports. The ICM program Front Step uses HIFIS 4 (they are the only agency in the province that does, as they are piloting it on behalf of the province) but does not have provisions in their consent forms to share by-name data with EHSJ. What is more, policies and procedures throughout the local system are not yet in place to properly use HIFIS 4. EHSJ has, however, created a spreadsheet and asked each funded program to fill it in for each client. This spreadsheet tracks client information, such as: date of birth; gender identify; housing information over the previous year; move-in date; date the person was housed; type of funds they accessed. For Front Step, these data have to be entered manually twice, once in HIFIS and then again in the EHSJ spreadsheet. Once EHSJ has received data via the completed spreadsheet, it then generates its own outcome reporting (including positive exits and negative exits).

Performance management

Key performance indicators (KPIs) used by EHSJ are outlined in Figure 7. Every EHSJ-funded program gets assessed against some variation of these, in part because some of them have been developed by the federal government and are stipulated in HPS contracts; yet others were developed at the community level. Each funded program's progress against federally developed KPIs is reported to the federal government. KPIs developed at the community level are monitored and have potential to be used for future planning, refinement to program models, and funding decisions. At present, KPIs used by EHSJ are still being refined and could benefit from further development. Moving forward, all of these KPIs have the potential to inform the next Plan. It should be emphasized, however, that these KPIs were never developed with the explicit purpose of tracking progress against the Plan's six desired outcomes.

FIGURE 7
KPIs USED BY EHSJ IN 2014-2019

KPI	TARGET	RESULTS TO DATE	NOTES
Number of new individuals placed in housing through a HF intervention	Varies per program (total 460)	244	This figure can be confusing, as it cannot be used interchangeably with the number of clients who have been accepted into a program (which can create the false appearance that the program is not meeting their target). This KPI does not include clients who are not yet housed, or those who exit the program before they are housed.
Percentage of HF clients who remained housed at 6 months	As per HPS (typically minimum 80-85%)	64-73%, depending on program	This KPI is considered effective in that it is useful in measuring both a program's ability to house clients, as well as promote the ongoing housing stability of clients.
Percentage of HF clients who remained housed at 12 months	As per HPS (typically minimum 80%)	24-50%, depending on program	Same as above. It is worth noting that this KPI is more useful when a program has time to mature (for example, at the end of this Plan, HPRR had been in operation for 17 months).
Number of days to move HF clients into permanent housing	As per HPS (generally 10 to 14 days)	Average 18-57 days, depending on program	Baseline figure is very unrealistic and should be much higher, based on experience. This KPI is also taken to mean the number of days once a client is accepted to a program, while in fact the client may be experiencing homelessness from a broader system perspective for much longer.

FIGURE 7 CONTINUED
KPIS USED BY EHSJ IN 2014-2019

KPI	TARGET	RESULTS TO DATE	NOTES
Percentage of HF clients who require rehousing	Maximum 30%	16-49%, depending on program	This is an arbitrary measure that can be informative but should not be used as a target or threshold. There is nothing inherently wrong with rehousing a tenant. Also, sometimes there are planned rehusings.
Percentage of HF clients who return to homelessness	Maximum 15%	Estimated 5-13%, depending on program	A decent KPI in that it seeks to minimize clients who return to homelessness; however, this is difficult to measure. It is not usually known whether clients who disengage from the program have returned to homelessness.
Percentage of clients who exit program to positive destinations	Minimum 90%	33-41%, depending on program	A decent KPI that could benefit from clearer wording. For example, what is a "positive destination?" Generally, EHSJ interprets this as a client successfully completing the requirements for program graduation. Note that this KPI is more useful when the program has time to mature, as more clients have time to fulfill program requirements.
Minimum occupancy rate at any one time	Minimum 95%	63-93%, depending on program, based on occupancy as of March 31, 2019	Very important KPI in that it is one potential measure of the effectiveness of a program model. Note that turnover in staff can impact occupancy rate, as programs are generally unable to accept new clients until positions are filled.
Percentage of clients who have an increase in income after six months in program from employment and/or benefits, or who maintain a stable source of income, if they are unable to increase income	Minimum 95%	33-100%	This KPI can be difficult to measure, depending on the goals of the program and the individual clients. It can also be misleading, depending on the profile of clients in the program. Historically, HPS has targeted people experiencing chronic homelessness. Clients of more intensive programs are unlikely to gain strong labour market attachment.

Source: End Homelessness St. John's.

In sum

While the KPIs currently used provide interesting information on which to reflect, funding should not always be reliant on these particular metrics. In consultation with community, EHSJ hopes to develop better KPIs for the upcoming Plan.

Development of a range of housing and supports

One of four priority areas in the 2014-2019 Plan was the development of a range of housing and supports choices to meet diverse client needs. Specifically, the Plan called for: support measures to increase housing affordability and reduce homelessness risk; the introduction and enhancement of a range of Housing First programs; supports to meet the needs of diverse groups; and support for the enhancement of service quality and impact.

The City's first Intensive Case Management (ICM) program, called Front Step, was launched in January 2016 through partners Choices for Youth, Iris Kirby House and Stella's Circle (Iris Kirby House's contract expired in 2016-17). The Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Rehousing (HPRR) program was launched in October 2017 through partners Choices for Youth and Stella's Circle. In addition, three Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) projects were entered into with Cochrane Community Outreach and Performance Centre (CCOPC), John Howard Society of NL, and Salvation Army.

It was very common for stakeholders interviewed for this assessment to state that improvements have been made on this front in the past five years, but that more work remains. One online survey respondent stated:

With the introduction of Front Step, HPRR and Coordinated Access process, services to people experiencing homelessness have increased. There has also been some new supportive housing in the last 5 years (Cochrane Centre, Garrison) but I don't think there has been enough of that type of supportive housing to meet the need.

Indeed, from both in-person interviews and the online survey, there was a very clear message: local stakeholders believe that, notwithstanding important improvements, there is a need for more supportive housing. Stakeholders were particularly clear in articulating the need for 24-hour support for tenants with high need, as articulated by the following survey response:

The range has increased slightly (i.e. 20 units) with the addition of "supported" housing – new builds with minimal supports attached (i.e. daytime hours and not case management) but we are still lacking true "supportive" housing – permanent housing with 24/7 case management support for those who need it.

Several interviewees also noted the need for more ‘light touch’ supportive housing, noting that there are currently tenants receiving staff support who are likely ready for less support, but not no support at all. Put differently, some tenants may be over-supported.

Emergency shelters

Stakeholders interviewed consistently said that St. John’s needs more low-barrier shelter capacity. They reported that some clients are barred from all emergency shelters in the city, and that the city needs a shelter with fewer restrictions. Further, some stakeholders noted that it is common for all emergency shelter beds in the city to be full. According to one online survey respondent: “There are shelters that get away with turning people away without finding them other shelter.” Some interviewees say it is not unheard of for some people to be barred from a shelter for up to 15 years.

For-profit shelters

Several stakeholders interviewed expressed concern about the reliance on for-profit shelters in St. John’s. According to the City of St. John’s Housing Needs Assessment, nearly 40% of homeless shelter beds in the city are run by for-profit providers (City of St. John’s, 2019), paid for by NL Housing. That represents a sizeable percentage of the city’s homeless shelter beds, and at a considerable cost.⁵

Community members expressed concern about the quality of some of these short-term arrangements. Some for-profit emergency housing options, for example, have no overnight staffing despite the fact that they often house high-need clients. This raises an important question: if such individuals can maintain shelter with a for-profit emergency housing provider (i.e., with few if any social supports), why can’t they be housed elsewhere with the appropriate supports? This question will be posed to the community as part of the planning process for the next Community Plan.

Expansion of homeless shelter for the 55+ population

An important step in reducing shelter stays amongst a wide-ranging population of shelter users is the integration of Housing First shelters specifically designed for emerging demographics. One positive development over the past five years in the local homeless-serving sector has been the expansion of a homeless shelter for persons aged 55 and older. This shelter is operated by Connections for Seniors. In February 2018, it began as a 4-bed shelter; it then became a 10-bed shelter in April 2019. In light of both the lack of shelter beds in the city and the aging population, this appears to be welcome news.

[5] According to a March 2019 CBC News article: “In the 2016-2017 fiscal year, [one for-profit landlord] was paid \$720,000 in taxpayer money to house people on an emergency basis...They could be barred from other shelters due to issues around hygiene or violent tendencies, or they could simply be coming to him because other shelters are full” (Cooke, 2019).

Lack of harm reduction

Several interviewees expressed need for more harm reduction services, including both a Managed Alcohol Program and supervised consumption services. While harm reduction appears to be a growing concern in St. John's, research for the present assessment did not uncover any formal needs analysis of harm reduction as it relates to the city's homeless-serving sector. This may be a topic for future discussion as part of the planning process for the next Community Plan.⁶

Shelter diversion, Coordinated Access, and the Vulnerability Assessment Tool

One of the 2014-19 Plan's priority areas is the development of a coordinated approach to housing and supports following the Housing First philosophy. The present section will discuss system coordination with a focus on shelter diversion, Coordinated Access, and the Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT).

Shelter diversion

There is a rather formal approval process for being admitted into any St. John's emergency shelter funded by NL Housing, with great emphasis placed on diversion. According to several interviews done for this assessment, there appears to be inconsistencies in how determinations are made for individuals to gain entry into a shelter. For example, frontline staff working for various programs have to engage in intense advocacy with NL Housing in order to gain shelter admission for a client (with most shelters). Sometimes it can take up to a week for a client to gain admission. When people are denied admission, they sometimes sleep outside in the meantime, which has important implications for use of police resources.

In theory, the NL Housing approval/vetting process does allow for consistency across the system; also, it can mean less pressure on shelter staff to make a difficult decision.

However, an important drawback of the current system is that the NL Housing official in question makes the decision over the telephone and cannot physically see the person. Also, one interview subject stated that diversion with shelters varies according to which client is making the phone call and which NL Housing official is receiving the call, noting that there can be considerable discretion.

Once a client has been admitted into an NL Housing-funded shelter, NL Housing is quite flexible on the client's length of stay. Each time a client is admitted, they are guaranteed at least 30 days of stay.

Since it is not ideal for people to remain in emergency shelter for extended periods, the homeless-serving sector in St. John's endeavours to move people into more sustainable housing situations. That is the focus of this assessment's next subsection.

[6] For a general overview of homelessness and harm reduction, see Falvo, 2019.

Coordinated Access

Coordinated Access (CA) began in St. John's in November 2017, designed as an entry point into both: 1) all EHSJ-funded programs; and 2) other programs voluntarily participating. It was not intended to be an entry point into other, more mainstream public and community resources. EHSJ currently works with 15 partner agencies on this initiative. The CA Intake Table is intended to meet weekly. At these meetings, a program match is made for the prospective participant.

This triage process, which is graphically illustrated in Figure 8, involves the following steps:

- Pre-screening, where a front-line worker recommends a participant to CA and an EHSJ staff person reviews the referral for suitability for CA.
- If the EHSJ staff person agrees with the recommendation, an appointment is made for the participant be assessed with the Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT), with the VAT Assessor making a recommendation for a program match.⁷
- The participant's VAT is presented for discussion at the Intake Table for discussion and program match.
- The participant's information is passed along to the program for immediate follow-up.

Program match options include: i) Intensive Case Management (ICM); ii) Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Rehousing (HPRR); iii) Supported Referrals (flexible financial supports provided by EHSJ through partner agencies); iv) various housing program options with a range of supports; or v) diversion (i.e., participant is referred back to community and mainstream supports, family, friends, etc.).

The housing program units to which the participant can be referred include housing units of non-profits (in some cases, the non-profit organization voluntarily agrees to have their units available through Coordinated Access). While all of these housing units at the Intake Table are subsidized by government in some way, most subsidized housing program units in St. John's are not 'up for grabs' at the Intake Table.

Prioritization criteria for St. John's Coordinated Access system are outlined in Figure 9.

[7] The VAT will be further discussed on page 37.

FIGURE 8:

ST. JOHN'S COORDINATED ACCESS PROCESS

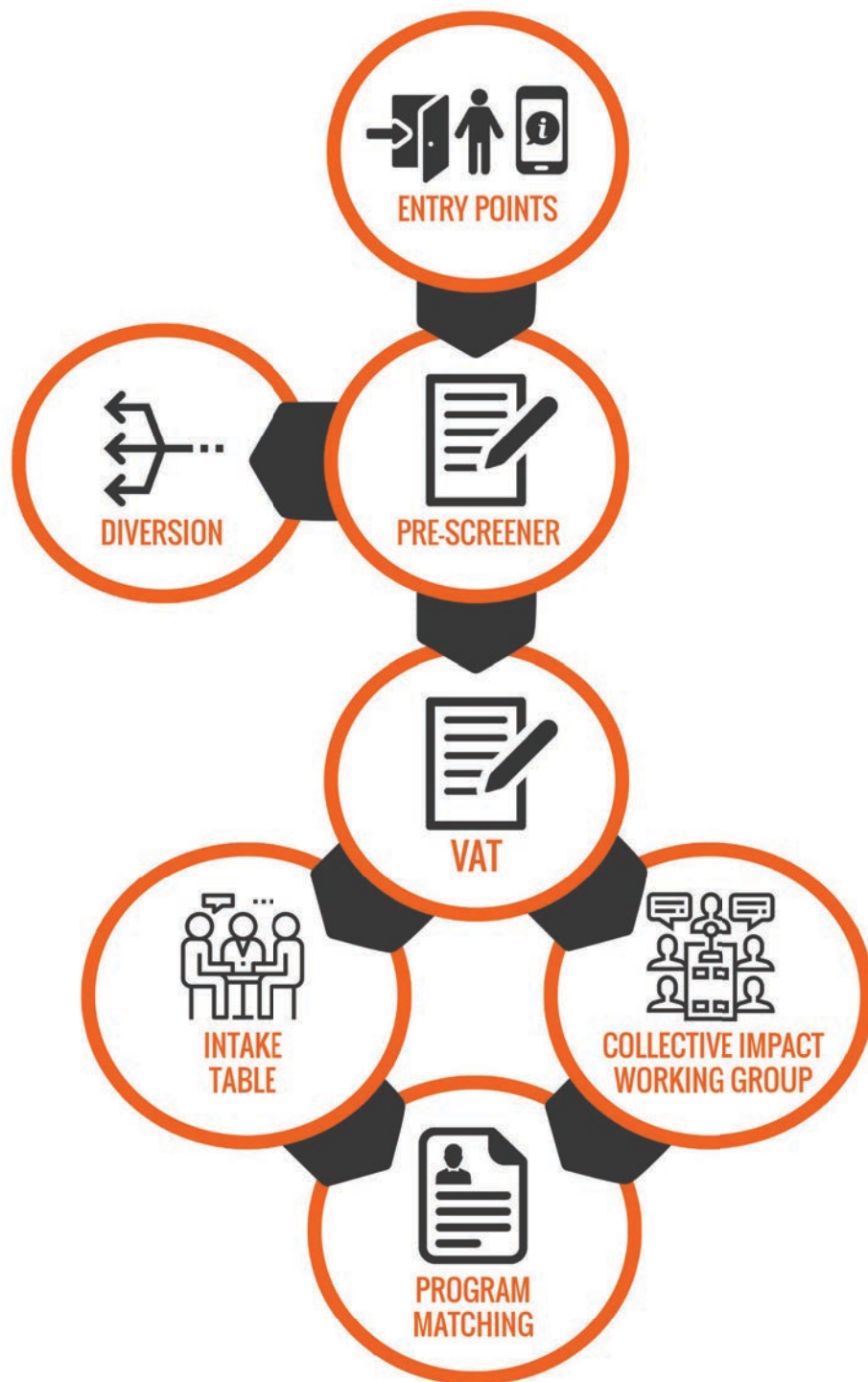


FIGURE 9

PRIORITIZATION CRITERIA, ST. JOHN'S COORDINATED ACCESS

CATEGORY	EXPLANATION
VAT score	People with higher VAT scores prioritized for higher support.
Homelessness history (chronic/episodic)	Individuals with a chronic history tend to be funnelled into higher-support programs. Episodic and transitional would be lower support.
Current location (sleeping rough, shelter, etc.)	The more a person is seen to be in danger (e.g., rough sleeping, survival sex), the higher priority they get.
Participant preference	Participant might refuse a recommendation, with no penalty.
Agency final decision	At the end of the day, the agency has the right to say 'no,' provided they have a legitimate reason.
System capacity report	An updated account of occupancy levels and waitlists from community agencies helps determine where there is space. EHSJ receives this list every week so they can support the CA Table with up-to-date information.

Community views on the efficacy of Coordinated Access appear to be mixed. On the positive side, one online respondent stated the following:

*I think Coordinated Access has had a good introduction; it has definitely *illuminated* many gaps that exist in systems, in lack of case management programs, in funding concerns, and in how to have programs creatively work together to meet an individual's needs.*

Another online respondent noted:

I think this process has given the community a much better understanding of the needs of our community, for example with the by name list. I think that this has also built on the capacity of the community through training of VAT assessors and bringing together multiple stakeholders.

However, some stakeholders consulted expressed concern about CA. One online survey respondent noted:

There are organizations at the table who refer into the system and are in fact funded by EHSJ to run their housing first programs, but who do not offer their own housing and rent supplements through the coordinated access process. This is extremely problematic and an oversight by EHSJ who could have that as part of MOUs with those organizations or even as part of the funding contracts re: the housing first programs.

Some interviewees noted that the two largest nonprofit landlords in St. John's do not have any of their housing units available for direct referral from the CA Intake Table. They are NL Housing and the City of St. John's housing. Together, they own more than 3,000 units of income-based affordable housing (City of St. John's, 2019). (However, it must be noted that CA does not currently have the capacity to accept referrals for all public housing units, nor would all public housing tenants be appropriate candidates for CA.) Further, some interviewees noted that many units owned by Stella's Circle and Choices for Youth are not available for referral from the CA Intake Table either.

The following online response is also instructive:

We have a coordinated access system with dedicated community partners, but we are missing some of the elements of housing first, i.e. there are still barriers that keep people out of our housing first programs. Instead of trying everyone to see if they are a fit, people are sometimes refused at the table and named as too complex for our housing first program. I do believe that some individuals may require a level of support that exceeds our housing first model, but I believe the principles of housing first say that they should be given a chance within those programs and not blocked from entry.

There were mixed views on how many housing units should, in principle, be eligible for CA referrals. Some people expressed hope that EHSJ's new Executive Director could bring the larger providers to the table. However, one interviewee felt it should only be EHSJ-funded housing units and program spaces up for grabs at the CA Intake Table.

There appears to be an opportunity for EHSJ moving forward to work with both NL Housing and the City of St. John's to coordinate on available units that may be appropriate for individuals moving through Coordinated Access. A more comprehensive approach may also include working with the Province, which funds additional housing options across the homeless-serving sector, to find new ways to incentivize their participation with Coordinated Access and encourage their capacity of housing stock to be made available.

Concern was also expressed about the narrow criteria used to determine which cases can be heard at the CA Table. Several online respondents noted that CA is for only a small percentage of people experiencing homelessness, with one noting: “CA has had an impact on a small % of the population at greatest risk for homelessness.”

According to another online survey respondent:

Coordinated Access was designed as a “no wrong door” for entry, and I think this has fallen by the wayside - the pre-screener process has become onerous, it has become increasingly difficult to complete a VAT with individuals and get them engaged in the moment they are available for this, and I think having a Collective Impact table is excellent in theory, but has faltered in practice as it alone can't address the issue of what services are lacking in the community to meet the needs of folks who have very significant needs.

Yet another online survey respondent stated: “For anyone that is not meeting the restrictive criteria... they do not receive services such as rapid rehousing or eviction prevention. The criteria is too strict to receive supports.”

Several online respondents indicated that communication pertaining to CA has been less than optimal. In the words of one online respondent:

On a scale of 1-10, I believe Coordinated access implementation would fall about 5. There is not good communication about it, there are many agencies (including the one I work for) who are not part of CA. In our case, it is mainly because it is not well understood or trusted.

One interview respondent stated that the CA table is currently “a very power-influenced table,” noting that it is a mix of senior managers, directors, and frontline workers. According to the interviewee, the more senior people (in status) tend to dominate discussions, while some front line staff are intimidated. According to the interviewee, frontline staff at the table sometimes experience stress and guilt, especially when they are not successful in advocating for their client.

One online survey respondent raised concern about the ability of service providers at the CA Table to deny referrals to their own agency:

I think this part of EHSJ has worked well...The issue I have is what happens after the VAT is scored. In other locations, people are scored [and] based on that, they are directed to a specific organization that can meet their needs. Here we have organizations being able to say no to these people if they do not feel they will be a good fit.

[9] It is useful to distinguish the CA Intake Table from CA's Implementation Committee. The former involves program coordinators and frontline workers only, while the latter involves senior managers and directors.

In the words of another online survey respondent, “[the] CA table can take too long to get service – the very complex people sometimes sit at that table for a long time.” Another noted: “Some referrals to Coordinated Access have not been completed/addressed in a timely enough manner.”

Several stakeholders raised concern with the number of meetings cancelled. One noted:

When waiting for CA referrals in the past, we've had units sit empty for weeks. One reason for this is that CA table meetings often get cancelled. The CA table is supposed to meet weekly, but there were 10 cancelled CA meetings in first six months of 2019. One reason they've been cancelled is that there've been no VATs to present. It's simply more efficient for us to take someone in one of our own programs. We can arrange move-in immediately.

Another noted:

Since implementing coordinated access it seems as though it takes longer for individuals to get the support needed (as they need to coordinate with many different people in order to get a VAT and then individuals need to be discussed at the coordinated access table). Many clients we serve are unable to make scheduled appointments. These folks are typically the ones that need the most support, however it is difficult for them to get through the coordinated access process.

FIGURE 10
FLOW THROUGH COORDINATED ACCESS

MONTH	DAYS FROM PRE-SCREENER TO VAT	DAYS FROM VAT TO INTAKE TABLE
Nov '17	3.3	4.9
Dec '17	2.9	4.0
Jan '18	5.1	4.2
Feb '18	3.1	5.2
Mar '18	7.8	3.7
Apr '18	3.0	4.3
May '18	7.0	4.8
Jun '18	3.8	9.7
Jul '18	5.7	9.2
Aug '18	8.9	10.8
Sep '18	18.4	8.6
Oct '18	3.5	3.5
Nov '18	8.7	13.0
Dec '18	19.5	4.6
Jan '19	16.6	8.5
Feb '19	8.1	7.1
Mar '19	14.5	6.3

Source: End Homelessness St. John's

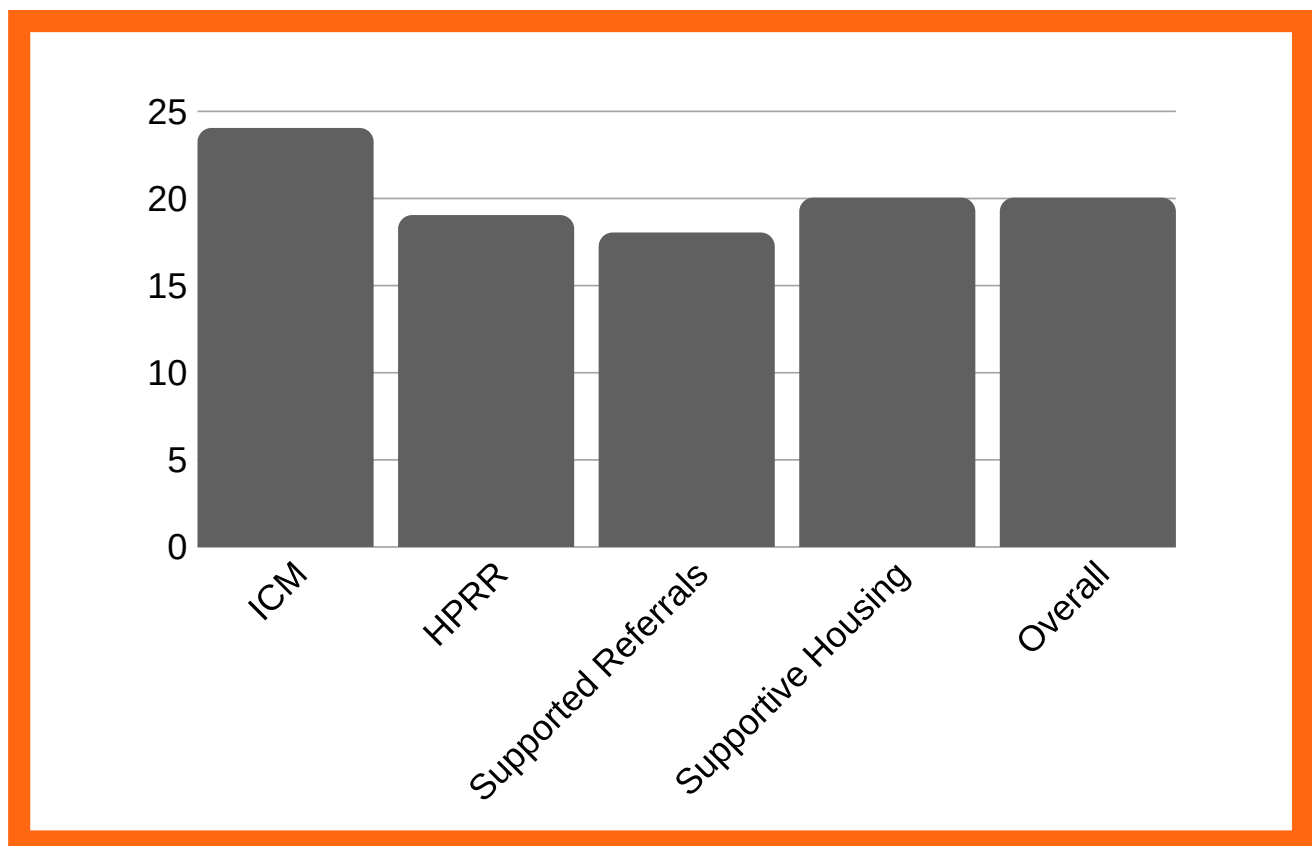
The Vulnerability Assessment Tool

Key to the St. John's CA process has been the use of the Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT), a questionnaire on 10 areas outlined in Figure 9. The VAT was chosen as the community's assessment tool in the consultation process for the St. John's Homeless-Serving System Coordination Framework (2016). A person can receive a VAT score of between 10 and 48. For information on the VAT domains, refer to Appendix 5.

Like the CA process itself, the VAT has been used in St. John's homeless-serving sector since November 2017.

Since referrals by the CA Table try to match clients with the right program fit, it should not come as a surprise that referrals to higher-intensity (i.e., more staff support) programs tend to have higher VAT scores. This is illustrated in Figure 11.

FIGURE 11
AVERAGE VAT SCORE PER PROGRAM



Research done on the VAT in other jurisdictions has uncovered the following three themes: 1) staff who use the VAT tend to find it helpful; 2) the VAT compares well with other, similar tools; and 3) some VAT questions can be triggering (Aubry, Bell, Ecker, & Goering, 2015; Tsemberis et al., 2017). Consultation done for the present assessment found similar experiences in St. John's.

Indeed, interviews done for the present assessment suggest that there are mixed views on the VAT's implementation. One common theme in interviews was that there is currently a lack of inter-rater reliability—i.e., different VAT assessors assess differently, and would likely score the same person differently. Interviewees also feel there is a lack of oversight of this challenge, and no mechanism in place to correct for such inter-rater reliability challenges. Some people interviewed further stated that there is no appeal system for questionable scores.

EHSJ plans to lead a VAT review process at some point in the near future.



Discharge Planning

The St. John's Community Plan to End Homelessness 2014-2019 makes frequent mention of the importance of reducing discharges from public systems into homelessness. This section of the assessment will provide brief overviews of what this currently looks like with respect to the child welfare, hospitals and corrections sectors respectively.

Child welfare

In Newfoundland and Labrador, youth under the age of 16 who are in the child welfare system are typically in a group home (a smaller number are in foster families). But as early as age 16, they are permitted to leave the group home. In order to do this, they must first reach out to the provincial Youth Services Team,¹⁰ where they are assessed by an intake worker. If the youth is deemed by the intake worker to be eligible for services with Youth Services, they are then assigned a case manager. That case manager encourages the youth to engage in education, helps foster life skills (including financial literacy) and helps the youth secure housing. In such cases, income assistance available to the youth is provided by the provincial Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development (CSSD).

Once a youth has left the child welfare system, they can be quite vulnerable to exploitation and homelessness. Housing secured by such youth is often shared; the youth might rent a room in a house with complete strangers. They might struggle in their dealings with housemates and a landlord. St. John's has some supportive housing available for youth operated by Choices for Youth, but these options are in short supply relative to need. As of March 31, 2019, 38% of Coordinated Access participants were under the age of 30. Depending on their housing history and past experience maintaining housing independently, many of these require housing options that are designed for youth.

Prior to June 2019, youth in the provincial child welfare system could remain in the group home or under the care of a Youth Services case manager until age 18, but with the legislative changes discussed earlier in this assessment, they are now allowed to remain in the child welfare system until 21. Local officials who work in the youth homelessness sector have welcomed these changes and believe they have the potential to reduce youth homelessness.

[10] This team falls under the umbrella of the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development (CSSD).

Hospitals

All St. John's hospitals have social workers who, during business hours,¹¹ can provide some assistance to patients without housing. Sometimes this takes the form of the social worker finding the patient emergency housing—either an emergency shelter or some other type of short-term accommodation. Sometimes it takes the form of the social worker encouraging the patient to phone the emergency shelter telephone line operated by NL Housing.

Eastern Health often arranges health care supports to a person who is discharged from hospital into emergency housing. For example, nurses might engage in acute care community management (e.g., catheter care, changing bandages, etc.).

Hospital social workers sometimes refer seniors (aged 65 and older) directly into more stable housing situations (i.e., permanent housing). For example, some seniors are referred directly from St. John's hospitals into personal care homes, which offer group living (board, lodging and minimal personal care is provided). However, some seniors do go directly from hospital into emergency shelters.

Despite the interventions provided for vulnerable individuals, it can also happen that a patient on the verge of being discharged into homelessness is never connected to a social worker and must fend for their own emergency housing needs upon release from hospital (this would be more likely to happen in cases where the person has a very short-term stay in hospital). In terms of what is needed going forward, stakeholders consulted on this matter agreed that a more round-the-clock presence of hospital social workers would help reduce the discharge of people from hospitals into homelessness.

Corrections

Many inmates in St. John's are discharged into homelessness. Newfoundland and Labrador correctional facilities have Classification Officers, most of whom are social workers. They assist with discharge planning, including with income assistance applications. However, once an inmate leaves a correctional facility, the Classification Officer is no longer responsible. It is very difficult for a discharged inmate to go directly into housing, in part because landlords want to meet with the tenant before agreeing to sign a rental agreement.

[11] Eastern Health does have on-call social work support outside of business hours, offered via telephone. So in theory, there is an after-hours social work response.

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) NL's Justice Program does work to have inmates discharged into homeless shelters. CMHA NL staff also help recently-released inmates with housing searches and housing-subsidy applications. CMHA NL staff only work with people with a serious mental health diagnosis, and CMHA NL currently lacks the capacity to take all eligible clients.

In sum

Online survey participants typically expressed that they either had no idea what progress had been made on this front over the course of the past five years, or that they knew and were not impressed. One online respondent stated: "This work has not happened, it is a huge barrier in the work of EHSJ."

In fairness, progress on this front does appear to vary by population sub-groups. For example, recent changes to child welfare legislation appear to represent an important step forward. Moving forward it would appear that EHSJ and its community partners have an opportunity to continue to engage in discussions that are both strategic and policy oriented, but also with frontline staff in public systems who may not recognize the vulnerability and symptoms of those at risk of, or those who are experiencing, homelessness.



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EHSJ's Role as System Planning Organization

The need to secure the necessary leadership and resources to support the 2014-2019 Community Plan to End Homelessness was identified as a priority area. Specifically, the Plan called for the need to: develop the infrastructure necessary to implement the Plan; coordinate funding to maximize impact; and champion an end to homelessness.

Governance changes

St. John's is Newfoundland and Labrador's only Designated Community through Reaching Home. The Community Entity (CE) status has been held by the City of St. John's since 2012.

The 2014-2019 Community Plan announced that St. John's Community Advisory Committee on Homelessness (one of 61 HPS Community Advisory Boards, or CABs, across Canada) would be "redesigned" in order to better meet the Plan's objectives (EHSJ, 2014, p. 3). As such, this Committee was renamed End Homelessness St. John's. The original CAB included 36 members, which was then reduced to 12 members.

The need for EHSJ to transition to its own nonprofit entity was precipitated by several events that saw many community groups placed in inherent conflict of interest given the former structure of the Community Advisory Board (CAB). As a result, a governance review process was ordered and completed in 2018, which has led to EHSJ's transition from the City of St. John's into its own nonprofit, to take place in 2019-20. As a community, St. John's will seek to transition its CE status from the City of St. John's to this new nonprofit. The new EHSJ will be led by a new Executive Director position (hired in March 2019), governed by an independent board of directors, and advised by the community through its new CAB. This is the first time in Canada that a CE will transition from a municipality to a nonprofit.

Interviewees for the present assessment consistently expressed that they are happy with the new governance changes and the planned transition away from City. Interviewees also consistently expressed appreciation and relief regarding the fact that: a) EHSJ now has an Executive Director; and b) that this new person is from out of province. One online survey respondent noted: "The move to incorporation, a new board and hiring an ED are certainly positive to reduce the inherent conflicts of interest that were present prior to." Another stakeholder expressed hope that the new Executive Director will be able to encourage more housing providers to offer their units at the CA table.

When asked about the role of EHSJ, online survey respondents were quite positive. According to one respondent:

The homeless-serving system is less fragmented and thanks to the work of EHSJ is easier to navigate. Agencies appear to be working together to triage and there is consistency in the use of EHSJ assessment tools. The staff of EHSJ are passionate about their work and dedicated to surmounting barriers they face implementing the community plan.

Another online survey respondent noted:

They are doing well at bringing together the community and sometimes governmental partners for shared conversations about the case management/collaboration re: individuals who have been cycling through our systems and been chronically underserved.

One online survey respondent commended EHSJ for bringing more people “into the tent,” adding that, “historically there has always been a sense that there were only a few organizations whose work was valued, although this seems to be shifting.”

Another online responded noted:

I know it's a huge role that EHSJ has taken on, and I think that not only EHSJ but that all service providers must be open to criticism and to constantly be self-reflexive in their work. We are privileged to do the work we do and we need to be accountable to the individuals our programs are designed to serve... and more importantly we as a community need to be accountable to the individuals that fall through the cracks of those programs. I think that EHSJ is moving us as a community in the right direction to collectively developing safety nets for those individuals.

However, a great many online interview respondents noted that it is still early to assess the impact of these changes. One online respondent offered the following cautionary words: “I know the city contributes a lot of in-kind resources so this is an area of concern of what resources will be lost.” One person interviewed suggested that ongoing communication does not happen as much or with as large a group as previously, and that some stakeholders have less influence than previously. The same participant noted: “Previously, a lot of us were used to being consulted on an ongoing basis. But that seems to have stopped. It’s very quiet, yet there seems to be a lot going on.”

Role as funder

A key theme identified via consultations undertaken by Turner Strategies was “[t]he need for transparency with funding decisions, as there [was] a perceived conflict of interest” with the previous governance structure (Turner Strategies, 2018, p. 4). Specifically, it was noted that: “However well intended, the agencies receiving funding should not also have the responsibility for the selection process” (Turner Strategies, 2018, p. 9). The consultation also found community asking for membership revision to allow for more diversity and “new perspectives” (Turner Strategies, 2018, p. 4). One online respondent suggested there is room for improvement, stating “the funding was allocated among board member agencies with limited supporting data and no rigorous evaluation metrics.”

Stakeholders consulted for the present assessment were somewhat mixed as to their views on the effectiveness of EHSJ as a funder. Several were rather positive; however, it was common for stakeholders (both in person and online) to suggest that only a small group of service providers receive the lion’s share of funding. One online respondent noted:

I would say that the fact that both Housing First and HPRR have been awarded to the same two organizations is problematic. I would suggest that diversity in the location of program delivery would be advantageous for the community partners and the individuals we serve.

One respondent suggested that more funding streams need to be funnelled through EHSJ, noting: “The provincial and municipal funds are still managed elsewhere so the funding is piecemeal at best.” One thing remains clear: EHSJ has an opportunity to connect with provincial departments to ensure funding is allocated appropriately and that the management of those programs are measured consistently and effectively.

With EHSJ’s pending departure from the City of St. John’s, it will be important for the staff, board and CAB to reflect on EHSJ’s role as a funder to determine, what, if any role, EHSJ should play in this domain.

Landlord recruitment and advocacy

Interview respondents noted that many of the sector's frontline staff are reaching out to the same landlords, unintentionally competing with each other. One interviewee estimated that approximately eight frontline staff in St. John's doing Housing First (with high acuity clients) recruit and advocate with the same landlords. Several expressed interest in seeing EHSJ play a leadership role in streamlining and centralizing landlord recruitment. Stakeholders suggested the need to have just one housing specialist serving that function. That person would conduct advocacy with landlords, housing searches and landlord relations in general. According to one online survey respondent: "Further investing in landlord engagement is needed and further progress in developing the centralized landlord listing."

EHSJ has hired a Landlord Engagement Consultant for this very reason. It may be that greater communication is in order between EHSJ and community about this new role.

The need to streamline and centralize was also the rationale behind EHSJ implementing a housing inventory on their new website (a development that has been delayed).

Staff retention

EHSJ staff retention challenges were brought up by several stakeholders. According to one:

"EHSJ need to do something to retain staff. There's been a turn-over in staff which makes it harder to communicate and reach people about issues. More money for staff would help."

One online survey respondent was very blunt:

"I was going to apply for a position there but then I saw it was only \$45000 a year. I can't pay my mortgage or student loan payment with that."

EHSJ is in the process of revising its organizational structure to better reflect the job classifications, descriptions and salaries with the rest of St. John's community sector.

EHSJ staff, board and community stakeholders will need to provide critical insights into the role of EHSJ moving forward. With funding commitments from the City of St. John's and Government of Canada, EHSJ will need to reflect on the types of programs, services and investments it makes if it also wishes to bolster its capacity as a system planning entity to support initiatives such as Coordinated Access, Supported Referrals and performance management.

Progress on Plan's Desired Outcomes

The present section discusses St. John's success on the Plan's six desired outcomes. While several appear to have been met, others cannot be easily measured, and still others were not clearly articulated in the first place.

1. End chronic and episodic homelessness

The Plan set as its first desired outcome the end to chronic and episodic homelessness.

Using federal government definitions, the Plan appears to suggest that chronic homelessness refers to chronic shelter use, which is defined as "a user who has stayed at shelters for more than 180 days in the past year" (EHSJ, 2014, p. 11). The Plan estimated that there were 40 such individuals in St. John's at the time that the Plan was written.

Also using federal government definitions, the Plan suggested that episodic homelessness refers to episodic shelter use, which is defined as follows:

An episodic shelter user is a user who has three or more episodes of homelessness in the past year. A single stay or stays within 30 days of each other are considered an episode. A new episode is counted when a user stays at a shelter after 30 days since their last stay at a shelter" (EHSJ, 2014, p.11).

The Plan estimated that there were approximately 80 episodic shelter users in St. John's at the time that the Plan was written.

Today, nobody with strong knowledge of the local homelessness situation would claim that either chronic or episodic shelter use has been ended in St. John's. In order for a community to state that it has ended chronic/episodic homelessness, it would have to choose and define an indicator that would measure this, which has not yet been done in St. John's. As well, in the absence of HIFIS 4, EHSJ is limited in its ability to gauge how close the local community has come to this particular desired outcome. As discussed earlier in the assessment, if community agencies throughout St. John's homeless-serving sector had HIFIS 4 software capability, EHSJ staff would be able to calculate the current number of chronic and episodic homeless people at the click of a button. With HIFIS 3.8, however, EHSJ is not able to access shelter data directly.

The most recent aggregated figures available with respect to chronic homelessness are from 2017. These figures were calculated prior to the implementation of Coordinated Access and was done so in the following manner: St. John's homeless shelters sent their respective shelter data directly to the Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency (NL Stats); staff at NL Stats then cleaned and aggregated this data, and sent it to ESDC in Ottawa. ESDC staff then produced the Community Progress Indicator (CPI) report which was then shared back with EHSJ. According to the most

recently CPI report, there were 55 chronic shelter users in St. John's as of March 31, 2017. Figure 12 illustrates how this number fluctuated between 2014 and 2017.

FIGURE 12
NUMBER OF CHRONIC SHELTER USERS,
ST. JOHN'S, 2014-2017

2014	59
2015	64
2016	58
2017	55

Source: Employment and Social Development Canada, 2017.

It is not known if a recent system-wide calculation has been made as to the total number or episodic shelter users in St. John's or how this number has fluctuated since the Plan's outset (such information is not available in the CPI report). It is important to note that some communities, including St. John's, found the federal definitions of chronic and episodic to be quite restrictive for Housing First programs, i.e. individuals were not "homeless enough" to qualify for programs.

Once EHSJ was able to demonstrate to ESDC that a certain threshold of individuals under the federal definitions had been served, it was able to expand these definitions. This change took place in fall 2017.¹²

It is worth reflecting on the size of the private shelter system in St. John's. Many individuals experiencing chronic and episodic homelessness may have only availed of the private shelters in St. John's, and there may be others who do not avail of the shelter system at all. Given that these shelters comprise 40% of available shelter beds, EHSJ, the provincial government and the community partners will need to reflect on ways to engage with the private shelter system in order to ensure system-wide integration of services.

2. Rehouse and support 460 homeless persons (of these, a minimum of 160 will be chronically and/or episodically homeless).

The Plan set as its second desired outcome the rehousing and supporting of 460 homeless persons, at least 160 of whom would be chronically or episodically homeless. It is important to note that the word "rehouse" has been interpreted to mean "house" – typically, the word "rehouse" is used to refer to when a supported individual loses housing and must be rehoused. It is also important to note that not all supported individuals will be housed, as some individuals will exit the program before it is possible to house them (i.e. disengage from services).

[12] The revised definitions were based on the definitions used in Alberta, as follows:

Chronic homelessness – Continually homeless for a year or more OR 4+ episodes of homelessness in the past 3 years, due to complex and persistent barriers related to health, mental health, and substance use

Episodic homelessness – Homeless for less than a year AND <4 episodes of homelessness in the past 3 years, due to complex issues such as addictions or family violence

If St. John's had HIFIS 4 software in place throughout its system of care, these figures could be accurately calculated by EHSJ staff. But as things currently stand, the figure has to be manually calculated by an EHSJ staff person. And with that manual counting, there is always some risk of double-counting, as individuals sometimes do not engage with programs in a linear manner.

With that said, as of March 31, 2019, EHSJ staff estimate that 244 individuals have been housed since the Plan's outset—of these, approximately 156 had a history of chronic and/or episodic homelessness.¹³ EHSJ staff further estimate that 309 individuals have been supported since the Plan's outset—of these, at least 165 individuals had been experiencing chronic or episodic homelessness at the time that they were accepted to the program in question (i.e. supported).

In sum, it would appear that St. John's is just over halfway to its goal of housing a total of 460 individuals. And in terms of total number of people supported since the Plan's inception, St. John's appears to be approximately two-thirds of the way there. However, a very impressive number of those who have been housed and supported have a history of chronic and/or episodic homelessness.

3. Reduce average length of stay in emergency shelters to 7 days.

The Plan set as its third desired outcome the reduction in average length of stay in St. John's emergency shelters to seven days. When the Plan was released in 2014, the average length of stay was 24 days.

The most recent data available on this measure are from the aforementioned CPI report containing data up to and including 2017. According to that report, the average length of stay in 2017 was 22 days (however, it is worth noting that the median length of stay in 2017 was just 12 days). Figure 13 illustrates how this figure has fluctuated since the Plan began.

FIGURE 13
AVERAGE LENGTH OF STAY IN HOMELESS SHELTERS, ST. JOHN'S, 2014-2017

2014	24
2015	24
2016	26
2017	22

Source: Employment and Social Development Canada, 2017.

While this figure has not been reported since Coordinated Access began in 2017, its pattern of fluctuation from 2014 until 2017 would appear to suggest that a seven-day average is quite far away.

Presumably, the purpose of tracking this outcome is also to streamline the system's response to individuals experiencing homelessness in order to house people more efficiently. However, this outcome does not

[13] Approximately 21 of these 244 individuals were at imminent risk of homelessness when they entered the program in question, and were able to retain their existing housing as a result of homelessness prevention supports. Put differently, their homelessness was prevented,

take into account the individuals that do not access the shelter system. A more comprehensive outcome would include the experience of all individuals experiencing homelessness, with a target geared at lowering the total number of days spent homeless, in the shelter system and otherwise.

4. Develop a coordinated homeless-serving system.

The Plan's fourth desired outcome was the development of a coordinated homeless-serving system. Admittedly, this outcome was not well defined and cannot easily be measured. The Plan did not stipulate how exactly to gauge whether a coordinated homeless-serving system is in place. However, it is reasonable to suggest that this likely pertained to CA, which has been discussed at length in this assessment. Given that this outcome is more qualitative than quantitative, it would have been useful to include a checklist of items that reflect the development of a coordinated homeless-serving system, such as a quality By Name List. CA was implemented in November 2017, with continuous improvement taking place along the way. A By Name List was started at the same time. In light of the challenges raised in the present assessment about CA, it is sensible to suggest that there are further opportunities for improvement that can be earmarked for attention in the next Community Plan.

5. Enhance the integration of public systems to reduce discharging into homelessness.

The Plan set as its fifth desired outcome the integration of public systems to reduce discharging into homelessness. Again, this outcome was not well defined and cannot be easily measured. For example, there have been recent policy changes including changes to child welfare legislation as well as a province-wide mental health strategy. To quantify this outcome, it would have been helpful to show baseline data of what public system discharge into homelessness looked like when the Plan was developed. This outcome also links with the fourth outcome to create a coordinated homeless-serving system across both non profit agencies and public systems. EHSJ undoubtedly can play a role moving forward to inform public policy, but it should clearly state the objectives as part of its desired outcomes.

6. Align resources and funding across diverse sectors to support the St. John's Plan to End Homelessness.

The Plan set as its sixth and final desired outcome the alignment of resources and funding across diverse sectors to support the Plan. Yet again, this outcome was not well defined and cannot be easily measured. The Plan did not stipulate how to assess what constitutes success in this respect. It is likely that this desired outcome pertained to the need for matching funding from non-HPS sources.

It is also possible that it refers to the proper alignment of funding within the sector. As discussed earlier in this assessment, matching funding did materialize if one counts in-kind support. However, as is also discussed in this assessment, there remain important funding gaps in the St. John's homeless-serving sector.

Rather than speculate as to how the sixth outcome should be perceived, it is clear that moving forward, the new Community Plan should, in consultation with the community, actively work towards integrating specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-sensitive (SMART) goals as desired outcomes and objectives are identified.

Conclusion

High unemployment and a lack of affordable housing, despite high vacancy rates, have presented challenges to St. John's homeless-serving sector over the past five years. Although policy changes at the federal and provincial government levels have shown promise, there remains much to do for EHSJ in its goal of ending homelessness in St. John's. Fortunately, EHSJ has the support and collective will from its community partners and stakeholders in working towards their shared goal.

At the provincial level, important changes to both child welfare and landlord-tenant legislation have been positive developments. Likewise, increased funding for NL Housing's Rent Supplement Program has improved housing affordability for some tenants. That said, several stakeholders interviewed for this assessment believe that the provincial government could help expedite the transition of persons from emergency shelters to housing. This remains an important consideration for EHSJ and the community moving into the development of the new Community Plan.

The role of EHSJ is also important to consider. Given the significant changes underway to the governance model of EHSJ, it is worth reflecting that staff and advocates in the local homeless-serving sector appear to be cautiously optimistic about these changes. EHSJ must determine how best to proceed in both increasing, or at least coordinating, existing funding while also bolstering its capacity to enhance Coordinated Access.

Stakeholders consulted for the present assessment express strong support for the need for more supportive housing options—both high- and low-intensity—as well as a low-barrier homeless shelter. Strong sentiment was also expressed for the need for improvements to the local triage system (i.e., Coordinated Access) and the shelter diversion telephone service run by the provincial government.

The 2014-2019 Plan committed to six formal outcomes. While several appear to have been met, others cannot be easily measured, and still others were not clearly articulated in the first place. As St. John's prepares to embark on its next Plan, it is important that clearly articulated and easily measured outcomes be set in order to ensure accountability.



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Appendix 1: Methods

Document review. A considerable amount of publicly-available material was drawn on to write the present report. This includes both academic and grey literature. All documents used to prepare this assessment are listed in the Reference List.

Key informant interviews. In June 2019, key stakeholders were invited to an in-person interview during the June 25-28 period. Nick Falvo was in St. John's during that week and met with each individual for between 45 and 60 minutes (on one occasion, he met with three staff at the same time). All of these discussions allowed for free-flowing conversations that serve to complement the online survey. At the beginning of each interview, he asked each interviewee what main factors they felt needed to be discussed and highlighted in the present assessment. He typically asked a variation of the question: "For people to properly understand progress under the Plan, what major topics need to be discussed and explained?" He probed throughout the discussion, asking such questions as "what do you mean by that point?" and "could you elaborate on that point?" He took notes with a notepad and then typed them within 24 hours of the interview. All told, 33 individuals have been interviewed either in person or by telephone. Persons with lived experience were not directly involved in the drafting of this assessment. When the assessment began, EHSJ had just lost the capacity of two staff persons, including the one running the Lived Experience Council.

Online survey. In July 2019, Nick invited key stakeholders—including all key informants who were interviewed in person—to participate in a confidential online survey. He distributed the link on July 2 and closed the survey on July 14. This survey featured very detailed questions, which are listed in Appendix 2. Forty-one individuals completed the survey. Twenty-two of the respondents reported being frontline service providers, nine reported being in a management position with a service provider, three from the public sector, three were board members, and four reported being 'other.' When asked which populations are primarily served (multiple answers allowed), the answers were as follows: vulnerable populations (33); mental health and/or addictions (30); adults (29); youth (20); seniors (18); corrections (15); general population (6); primary health care (6); and other (6). Some quotes from these online surveys are provided in the present report. The goal was to include quotes that articulately convey common themes gathered both from in-person interviews and surveys.

Ongoing communication with EHSJ staff. Throughout the writing of the assessment, Nick was in regular contact with EHSJ staff. This involved in-person meetings, telephone calls, email correspondence and the review of internal documents.

Feedback. A very rough outline with some very preliminary findings was circulated to EHSJ staff in early July, in order to verify that the report was being written in a manner consistent with the client's expectations. Then, a complete draft was circulated to EHSJ staff in early August, after which point EHSJ provided further feedback.

Research integrity. At no point did EHSJ attempt to have inconvenient (i.e., embarrassing) points removed from the report. The client was clear during all phases of this process that it was essential to tell a full, candid story of the past five years.

Appendix 2: Online survey questions

1. Please state the group with which you identify the most (in your current role).

Please pick just one:

- Frontline service provider
- Management of a service provider
- Public sector/government
- Board member
- Other (please specify)

2. Which population does your organization primarily serve? Select all that apply.

- General population
- Youth
- Adults
- Seniors
- Mental health and/or addictions
- Corrections
- Primary health care
- Vulnerable populations
- Other (please specify)

3. Compared to five years ago, to what extent does a range of housing and supports now exist in St. John's to meet the needs of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness?

4. Compared to five years ago, to what extent does St. John's now have a well-coordinated approach to housing and supports following the Housing First philosophy?

5. On the whole, what would you say EHSJ is doing well? Please be as specific as possible.

6. In terms of EHSJ, where would you say there's room for improvement? Please be as specific as possible.

7. In 2018, EHSJ completed a governance review. As a result, it has adopted an independent board of directors, hired an Executive Director and is transitioning to a nonprofit organization independent of the City of St. John's. How do you feel these recent changes have impacted its ability to deliver?

8. How effectively has Coordinated Access been implemented?

9. How well has EHSJ developed discharge/transition planning measures? This question pertains to public systems and services, including justice, child, youth and family services, education, health, income support and poverty reduction.

10. How effective would you say EHSJ has been at disbursing funding to community service providers?

11. To what extent are there still funding gaps in the homeless-serving system in St. John's?

12. Do you have anything else you'd like to share?

Appendix 3: Supplementary information on federal initiatives

Creation of Canada Workers' Benefit

Canada's 2018 federal budget announced the expansion and rebranding of the Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB). This is a wage supplement for workers who have a fragile toehold in the labour force. The federal government had previously provided a \$250 million enhancement to the program in 2016 (to take effect in 2019) in an effort to offset CPP expansion. In the 2017 Fall Economic Statement, the Trudeau government further announced the enhancement of WITB by an additional \$500 million annually. The benefit, more generous than the WITB, is now known as the Canada Workers Benefit (CWB). For some workers, this will mean up to an additional \$500 annually. According to the 2018 federal budget, "a low-income worker earning \$15,000 a year could receive up to nearly \$500 more from the program in 2019 than she received in 2018" (Finance Canada, 2018, p. 33). The 2018 federal budget also announced that all eligible CWB recipients would be made eligible automatically upon the filing of their tax returns, a move which has likely led to increased take-up of the benefit. The budget estimated that "[a]n estimated 300,000 additional low-income workers will receive the new CWB for the 2019 tax year as a result of these changes" (Finance Canada, 2018, p. 34).

Enhancement of federal child benefits

The 2016 federal budget contained important provisions for child benefits. In creating the Canada Child Benefit (CCB), the federal government increased federal spending on child benefits, making them more generous for low- and middle-income households, and less generous for higher-income households.¹⁴ With the CCB, Canadian households can receive up to \$6,400 per year for each child under the age of six, and \$5,400 per year for each child between the ages of six and 17 (those maximum benefit levels apply to households earning less than \$30,000 annually). The benefit levels decrease with rising income (Finance Canada, 2016).¹⁵ In the 2017 Fall Economic Statement, Canada's federal government announced it will index the Canada Child Benefit to inflation, beginning in July 2018 (Finance Canada, 2017).

[14] As a result of these changes, Canadian households earning more than \$200,000 annually do not receive any benefit at all now.

[15] The 2016 federal budget also eliminated the Universal Child Care Benefit, the Canada Child Tax Benefit, the National Child Benefit and the Children's Fitness Tax Credit and Children's Arts Tax Credits (Finance Canada, 2016).

Lack of enhancement of income support for singles

Single adults without dependents ('singles') experience higher rates of poverty than other household groups. One reason for this pertains to a lack of market income—with just one person to rely on for income in the event of job loss or injury, singles have no additional source of potential income to rely on as a 'shock absorber.' Another important reason is that income assistance programs tend to direct more financial resources towards households with children. Figure 14 illustrates that, when it comes to households in receipt of social assistance in St. John's, the gap between what a single receives as income and Canada's official poverty line is considerably higher than for other household groups.¹⁶ Figure 14 also illustrates that, between 2014 and 2017, the gap for households with children narrowed considerably, likely as a result of the introduction of the federal government's aforementioned child benefit enhancements. Meanwhile, there has been virtually no change in the gap for singles.

FIGURE 14
POVERTY GAP FOR SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RECIPIENTS

	Single person considered employable	Single person with a disability*	Single parent, one child	Couple, two children
Basic social assistance	\$9,048	\$9,048	\$13,644	\$14,220
Additional SA benefits	\$1,800	\$1,800	\$1,800	\$1,800
Federal child benefits	-	-	\$6,448	\$10,881
Provincial child benefits	-	-	\$392	\$808
GST credit	\$315	\$315	\$712	\$860
Provincial tax credits/benefits	\$220	\$420	\$440	\$727
Total 2018 income	\$11,383	\$11,583	\$23,436	\$29,296

Source. All data taken from Maytree website: <https://maytree.com/>

Note. Total welfare income includes social assistance benefits, provincial tax credits and federal tax credits.

[16] The Market Basket Measure is based on the cost of a basket of goods and services sufficient for a standard of living "between the poles of subsistence and social inclusion" [Shillington, R. (2013, October). Statistics and public policy course. Ottawa].

Appendix 4: Changes to the Residential Tenancies Act (2019)

FIGURE 15

KEY CHANGES TO RESIDENTIAL TENANCIES ACT, EFFECTIVE JANUARY 1, 2019

CHANGE	IMPLICATION
Legislation now applies to living accommodations provided by non-profit, charitable and religious organizations, along with boarding houses.	A larger spectrum of low-income tenants now have legal tenant protection.
Landlords must now give tenants information as contained in regulations. These regulations will contain required information to be contained in a standard rental agreement as well as the documentation of an oral or implied agreement.	Previously, verbal rental agreements were permitted. This made it very challenging to sort out disagreements. It should now be easier to resolve disputes.
It is now clear that the tenant must pay the rent owing, in the event of a landlord's failure to provide a copy of the rental agreement.	Lack of clear wording in previous legislation caused confusion. Now, there is less room for misinterpretation.
Landlord can now keep a security deposit for a maximum of 10 days after tenant leaves, as opposed to the previous 15 days.	Delays have been a major source of complaint by tenants. This change may reduce complaints. Even after the 10-day period elapses, a legal process is still required before the money is actually returned (possibly an additional 4 to 6 weeks).
Under the previous legislation, tenant could file a claim to get security deposit back. Landlord could then file a counter claim. Even without a counter claim by landlord, there had to be a hearing (this took several weeks). Under the new legislation, if landlord does not file counter claim, an automatic order is issued by Service NL for a return of the security deposit (without requiring a hearing).	It is now easier get a security deposit returned to the tenant.
Notice period for rent increases has changed from three to six months.	This was done in place of bringing about stricter rent regulation (in terms of limits of rent increase).

CHANGE	IMPLICATION
Landlords must now provide a receipt of rent (or other money) paid, if requested by tenant.	Previously, landlord had to provide receipt only for the security deposit. Since some tenants pay their rent with cash, it should now be easier to resolve disputes.
Tenants experiencing family violence can now terminate rental agreements without penalty by providing 30 days' notice.	Previously, there have been cases where victims of family violence had considerable difficulty escaping violent situations. Now, the victim can request a form from Service NL, which must be signed by a professional. The professional must issue a statement that they have reason to believe that a situation of family violence exists. The tenant then takes that to Service NL, which issues the tenant a certificate for the landlord allowing them to terminate the rental agreement.
Landlords must now store abandoned personal property for a maximum of 30 days, down from 60 days. Landlords also have more flexibility now in terms of where belongings are stored.	Previously, the 60-day period caused landlords considerable frustration, in part because landlords had to have belongings stored in a storage locker. Now, belongings can be stored at a building in a secure area.
Previously, where legislation said that a document had to be provided in writing, this was interpreted as meaning that it had to be on paper. Now, electronic communication also suffices.	This is quite sensible for all parties, especially given the prevalence of emailing and texting.

Source: Service NL. For the full list of changes, see: https://www.servicentl.gov.nl.ca/landlord/Table_of_Changes_to_RTA.pdf.

Appendix 5: The Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT)

FIGURE 16

VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT TOOL

DOMAIN	DESCRIPTION
Survival Skills	Whether clients are capable of finding safe places and can serve as competent self-advocates. A high score can indicate being preyed upon by others and/or possessing little regard for their own safety.
Basic Needs	Whether clients are able to provide for their own basic needs, such as food, clothing and hygiene. A high score can indicate struggling to find food, wearing soiled clothes, and resisting to offers of help.
Indicated Mortality Risks	Whether clients are vulnerable to a number of indicated mortality risk factors. A high score can indicate an age over 60, frequent hospital use and/or conditions such as diabetes or heart disease.
Medical Risks	Whether clients have overall health concerns and are able to follow up with prescribed care. A high score can indicate poorly managed or untreated medical conditions and/or not taking medications as prescribed.
Organization / Orientation	Whether clients possess cognitive functioning related to thinking, memory, and overall awareness of situations. A high score can indicate impaired thinking, confusion, and/or disorganization.
Mental Health	Whether clients have awareness of mental health concerns, if any, and the ability to follow up with needed care. A high score can indicate no insight into such concerns and the impact on their functioning.
Substance Abuse	Whether clients report use of substances and how use impairs functioning. A high score can indicate regular substance use, no interest in treatment, and/or obvious deterioration in functioning.
Communication	Whether clients are able to convey needs and information to others through language. A high score can indicate refusal to talk to others and/or barriers to communication.
Social Behaviours	Whether clients are able to tolerate social situations and advocate for themselves. A high score can indicate difficulty engaging positively with others, limited ability to cope with social stressors, and/or no obviously social networks.
Homelessness	Whether clients have a history of homelessness. A high score can indicate a history of chronic homelessness, living in shelter or places not fit for human habitation, and/or few prospects for housing.

Source: Tsemberis, Macnaughton, Howard, Aubry, & Ecker (2017).

Note: All VAT domains are rated 1-5, except for Homelessness, which is rated 1-3. Hence 48 is the highest possible VAT score.



