



A Homeless Prevention System *for* London Ontario

A Three Year Implementation Plan

A coordinated and integrated individual and family centred housing stability approach that is outcome focussed and designed to address, reduce and prevent homelessness in London.



Neighbourhood, Children and Fire Services
May 2013

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Background

Homelessness begins in a home, in a neighbourhood, in our communities. The lasting or permanent solution to preventing and ending homelessness is housing with support. The City of London is introducing its Homeless Prevention System aimed at the reduction and prevention of homelessness for individuals and families through strong systems and services and based on our vision that the solution to homelessness is housing with support.

The primary goal for the Homeless Prevention System, agencies, programs and funding is to assist individuals and families experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness to achieve housing stability. This transformation to a housing stability approach builds on the research and evaluation undertaken by many countries, communities and non government organizations. This evidence demonstrates that by quickly stabilizing individuals and families in a housing crisis, outcomes are improved in long term health and housing stability. By examining the efforts of other communities we know that this shift in practice reduces the pressures on emergency shelters, decreases or eliminates lengthy shelter stays and offers comprehensive supports focussed on the individual or family. Making housing stability the centre of the homeless prevention system, other sectors such as justice and health, and service providers and funders, can together focus on integrating the responsibility of preventing homelessness.

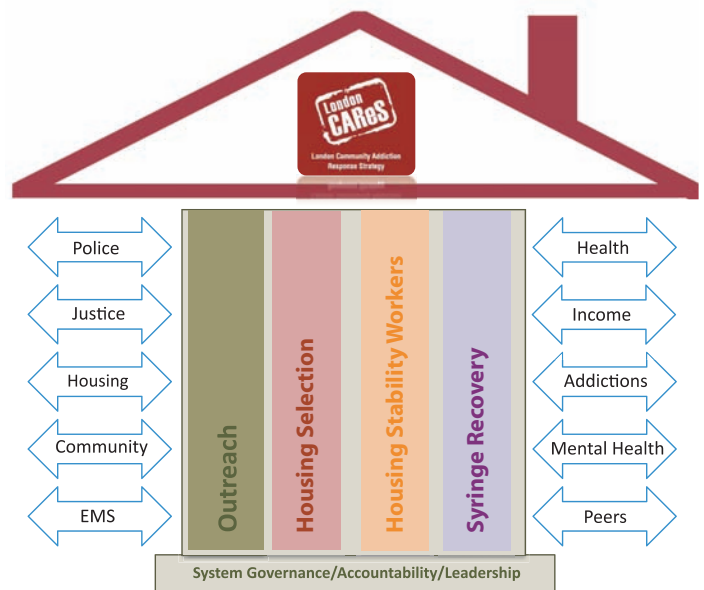
It has been the historical and often current practice, that individuals and families experiencing homelessness were expected to address the issues that led to their homelessness such as addiction, trauma, and mental illness before they were housed. A "Housing First" approach shifts the priority to move individuals and families quickly into housing with support, and then begin to work on the issues that contributed to their homelessness from the stability and safety of their own home. A "Housing First" approach assists individuals and families by seeking out and supporting the right housing,

at the right time, in the right place, with the right level of support to develop lasting housing stability. Housing with support approaches are rooted in the concept that a homeless individual or families' first and primary need is to obtain stable housing, and that other issues that may affect the household can and should be addressed once housing is obtained.

Like many other communities London operates largely within a fragmented system in its response to homelessness. How someone receives service depends on where the individual or family enters the service system, what programs are accessed, and the eligibility criteria of different programs. This can lead to an uneven and inefficient response because individuals and families are not necessarily directed to the appropriate

programs or services. Interventions within a homeless prevention system can be based on assessing risk and prioritizing responses. Individuals and families with a low risk of homelessness may receive less intensive interventions while those at higher risk may receive higher focus. This is the premise behind the revised implementation strategy of London CAREs.

Homelessness begins in a home, in a neighbourhood, in our communities.



In 2010, efforts shifted to providing housing and housing with support to individuals experiencing persistent and chronic homelessness in London. Results indicate that when there is a coordinated response, there is a decrease in police involvement and other emergency responses including emergency shelters, ambulance and hospital emergency departments with improved overall health and housing outcomes.

London's Homeless Prevention System focuses on delivering actionable and measurable solutions in

purposeful and strategic ways with community-level results, consistent service delivery and information management. There are four primary areas of focus: Securing Housing; Housing with Support; Housing Stability; and Emergency Shelter Diversion. Transformation to London's Homeless Prevention System will be achieved through a combination of strategy, increasing capacity and competency in a phased-in approach. We expect the phased-in transition plan will result in positive outcomes as a relatively fragmented system moves to a prevention approach.

London Community Housing Strategy and the Community Plan on Homelessness



The London Community Housing Strategy and the Community Plan on Homelessness were approved by City Council in 2010 and are both based in a Housing First Approach. The plans are rooted in the philosophy that the solution to homelessness is housing with support. London's Homeless Prevention System combines the directions of the Community Plan on Homelessness and the principles of the Provincial Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative into a three year implementation plan.

The London Community Housing Strategy outlines five linked and interdependent themes:

- Strong system design
- Integrated responses to homelessness
- Responsive governments
- Measurable and targeted deliverables
- Strong and responsive administration

The London Community Plan on Homelessness is an action oriented plan with six themes:

- Integration between housing and homeless programs and services
- The opportunities and future role of shelters
- Alignment of services and interventions to focus on housing and solutions to homelessness
- Supportive housing and housing with supports
- Improving discharge planning and prevention services
- Understanding who is served and their needs

Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative

Effective January 1, 2013, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing introduced the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative. Consolidating housing and homelessness related programs is a key part of Ontario's Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy and is aimed at transforming the housing system through a Housing and People First Approach.

The Province consolidated the following housing and homelessness related programs:

- Consolidated Homelessness Prevention Program
- Emergency Energy Fund
- Emergency Hostel Services
- Domiciliary Hostel Program
- Provincial Rent Bank

In addition, the Community Start Up and Maintenance Benefit available to households receiving Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program was eliminated December 31, 2012 and a portion of the funds was added to the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative to assist low income Londoners.

Under the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative, the City of London has increased flexibility to use the consolidated funding in any of the following service categories:

- Emergency Shelter Solutions (e.g. emergency shelter)
- Housing and Related Supports (e.g. permanent housing, rental allowance)
- Services and Supports (e.g. street and housing outreach, housing search)
- Homelessness Prevention (e.g. rent support/eviction prevention)

A Housing First or Housing with Support approach assists individuals and families by seeking out and supporting the right housing, at the right time, in the right place, with the right level of support to develop lasting housing stability.

The Development of London's Homeless Prevention System and Implementation Plan

Throughout 2010, over 215 participants were involved in key informant interviews, consultation sessions, a community roundtable, a focus group with youth and a review session on emerging directions. These consultations were instrumental in the development of the London Community Housing Strategy and the Community Plan on Homelessness both of which have been endorsed by the London Homeless Coalition and City Council. The implementation of a Homeless Prevention System builds on the efforts and areas of focus that these plans have provided over the past several years.

Between November 2012 and January 2013, five community forums were held to develop the areas of focus for the Homeless Prevention System. Forums welcomed agencies, individuals with lived experience and community members.

Homelessness starts in a neighbourhood and requires a neighbourhood response to achieve lasting and positive outcomes.

In addition to the community forums, tasks included:

- A Community Advisory Group met monthly to comment on emerging directions
- Regular meetings commenced with Emergency Shelter Operators in September 2012 and are continuing in 2013
- Reviewing Housing First trends and practices in Canada/United States
- Identifying gaps and challenges in moving to a housing stability approach
- Meeting with a number of groups, coalitions, and funders to discuss and test emerging directions
- Developing the areas of focus and the three year implementation plan
- Submitting the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative Implementation Plan February 15, 2013 to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
- Providing monthly reports and updates to the London Homeless Coalition and regular updates to other groups such as the OW/ODSP Advocacy Group

London's Homeless Prevention System and Implementation Plan

The issue of homelessness in London is chronic and, over time, has resisted our best intentions to reduce and prevent homelessness. The Homeless Prevention System for London focuses our efforts on achieving housing stability and motivates our diverse community to work together to optimize the whole system instead of working within only one part of it.

Outlined below is the framework of how our actions will be guided. Vision, Principles and Outcomes along with four primary areas of focus anchor our efforts and the actions define the programs that serve as the building blocks of the system in a model active in continuous performance monitoring, priority setting and improvements.

Many factors such as unexamined values, models and even self interest affect our process of change. Our context or environments have been based on some of the following:

- Focusing on temporary shelters has appeared to be the right thing to do
- Investing in more shelters has helped us cope with homelessness versus reducing or preventing it
- Despite shared goals, little integration between agencies, funders and stakeholders challenges alignment of efforts
- Stakeholders aim to augment their piece of the system without appreciating the possible negative ramifications on the bigger system
- Short-range action can weaken strategic efforts to solve the problem
- Change is difficult to bring about when faced with such a multi-faceted and long-standing issue
- Generic based approaches limit response to the needs of gender, different populations, cultures and unique interests

The system response applied in London:

- Motivates our diverse community to work together to optimize the whole system instead of striving to optimize only one part of it
- Clarifies leverage points to focus limited resources for sustainable improvement

- Defines the key programs that serve as the basic building blocks of the systems
- Ensures programs have clear, consistent and transparent eligibility to serve the right population with the right service(s)
- Uses common tools to assess the needs of the participants and enables sharing of information across services to allow comparison across programs, make appropriate referrals and tracks their unique progress
- Engages stakeholders in continuous performance monitoring, priority setting and improvements
- Anticipates unintended consequences of proposed solutions

The City of London's Homeless Prevention System is a coordinated and integrated individual and family centred housing stability approach that is outcome focussed and designed to address, reduce and prevent homelessness in London.

The Vision to Address, Reduce and Prevent Homelessness in London

London's Homeless Prevention System is a coordinated and integrated individual and family centred housing stability approach that is outcome focussed and designed to address, reduce and prevent homelessness in London.

Principles of London's Homeless Prevention System

The following principles inform the actions to be undertaken:

- Housing with support
- Homelessness is a solvable problem
- Individual and family centred
- Partnership based
- London driven
- Neighbourhood based
- Harm reduction approach
- Inclusive
- Fiscally responsible
- Outcome focussed

Outcomes

Two primary outcomes guide the efforts and form the basis for the indicators of success:

- Individuals and families experiencing homelessness obtain and retain housing
- Individuals and families at risk of homelessness remain housed

Indicators of Success

The following indicators of success for individuals and families, the system and services will help us to determine our success.

Individuals and families will:

- Reside in stable housing
- Experience improvements in their health, nutrition, levels of stress, sleep, quality of life, personal safety and/or mental health/addiction recovery
- Have fewer hospital emergency department visits, psychiatric and emergency shelter admissions, police involvement and/or less time spent in custody and in emergency shelters
- Develop sustainable positive relationships within the community

The System will:

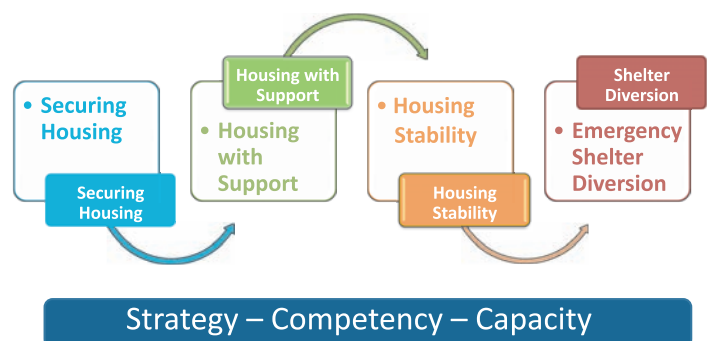
- Increase and develop efficient, attainable, scattered and diverse housing stock
- Integrate early, readily available housing with social and health care supports
- Reduce the number of individuals and families becoming homeless
- Improve the economic costs of resolving homelessness
- Reduce pressures on emergency shelter use
- Decrease use of homeless related services within the City of London

Services will:

- Experience an increase in the capacity of staff to respond to participant needs through training and professional development
- Experience improved coordination of chronic or episodically homeless individuals/families each year
- Experience improved efficiencies with coordinated and optimized resources

Homeless Prevention System – Areas of Focus

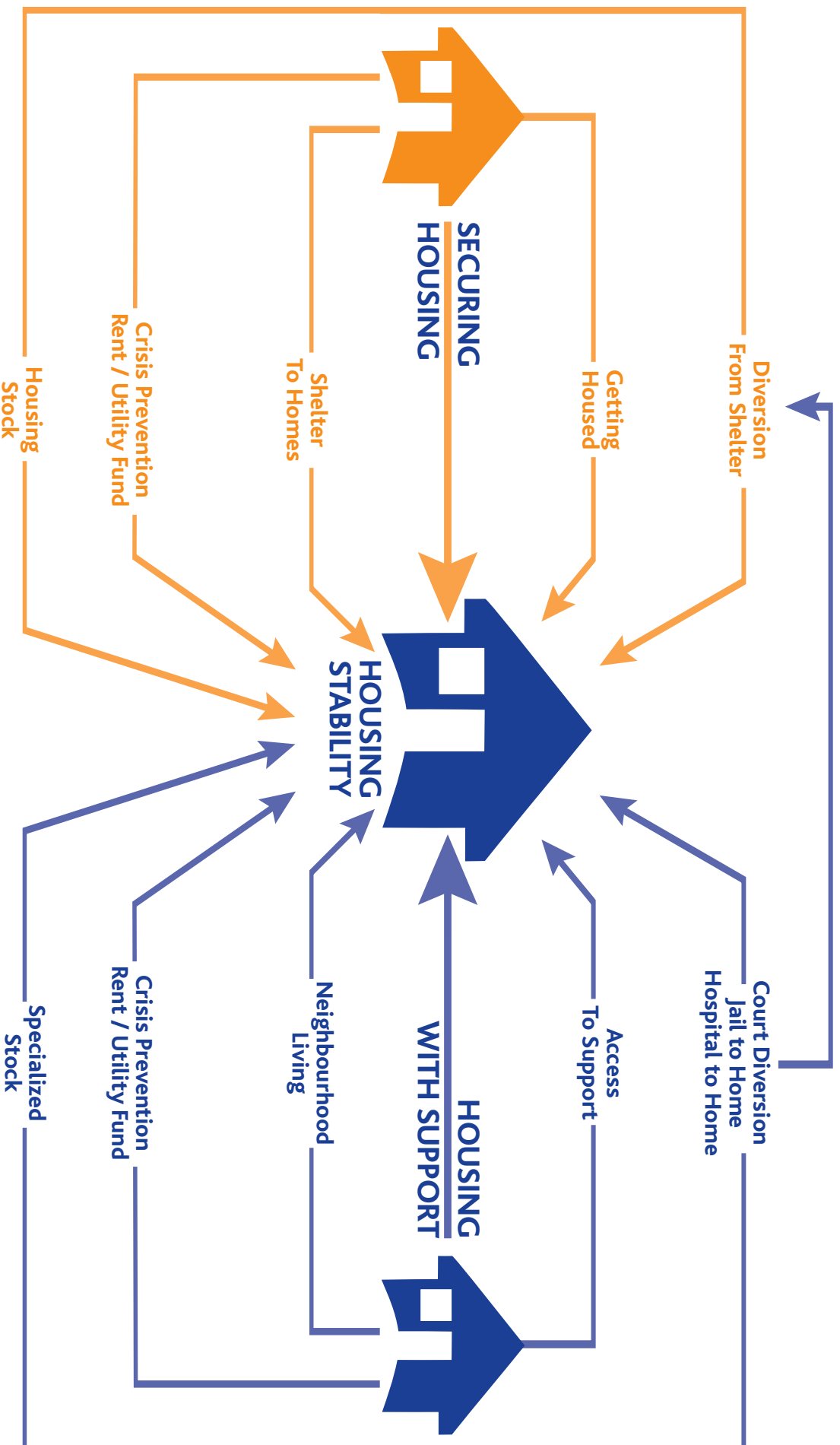
The actions within London's Homeless Prevention System are organized into four areas of focus: Securing Housing; Housing with Support; Housing Stability; and Shelter Diversion. To support a shared approach to ending homelessness a fifth area of focus: Strategy, Competency and Capacity will strengthen community ties and achieve the actions of the Implementation Plan.



The Themes and Directions by Areas of Focus for 2013 to 2016

| Area of Focus | Actions | Time Frame Year 1, 2 and/or 3 |
|--|---|----------------------------------|
| Securing Housing | Introduce Neighbourhood Housing Support Centres as hubs of service | Year 1 to 2 |
| | Initiate a "Jail to Home" and Court Diversion program through a collaborative response with courts, EMDC, police and services | Year 1 - planning and pilot |
| | Initiate a "Hospital to Home" program through a collaborative response with local hospitals and London funded agencies | Year 1 - planning |
| | Establish a last month's rent program by enhancing the rent bank | Year 1 - underway |
| | Establish a moving service | Year 1 - underway |
| | Establish a "new" furniture bank | Year 1 - planning |
| | Strengthen outreach efforts to focus on Housing First with street involved individuals | Year 2 |
| Housing with Support | Introduce an integrated homeless information and case management system | Year 1 - emergency shelters |
| | Strengthen housing with support programs through collaboration | Year 1 - pilot |
| | Strengthen crisis response once housed | Year 2 |
| Housing Stability | Link the emergency utility program and rent bank program to Neighbourhood Housing Support Centres | Year 2 |
| | Introduce peer support and mentoring programs | Year 2, 3 |
| | Introduce collaborative leisure and recreation programs | Year 2 |
| Shelter Diversion | Focus on reducing pressures on emergency shelter use | Year 1 |
| | Establish a coordinated intake for individuals and families | Year 2 |
| | Explore shelter specialization in London | Year 1, 2 |
| Strategy, Capacity and Competency | Establish an Implementation Team | Year 1 |
| | Anchor a consistent Housing First response (philosophy and intervention) | Year 1, 2, 3 |
| | Enhance system capacity through training, case management, program monitoring and clinical expertise | Year 1, 2, 3 |
| | Undertake a community plan on youth, London Aboriginal individuals/families, and street involved sex workers | Year 1 |
| | Introduce standards of service and measures | Year 2, 3 |
| | Work with other funders to align strategies, leverage opportunities, performance monitoring and reporting | Year 1, 2, 3 |
| | Strengthen the response to persistent and chronic homelessness | Year 2 |

The Homeless Prevention System for London



How the Homeless Prevention System Interconnects

The Homeless Prevention System focuses efforts on achieving housing stability for individuals and families at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness. The chart above provides a visual description of how the areas of focus and actions identified in the Implementation Plan all link to achieving housing stability.

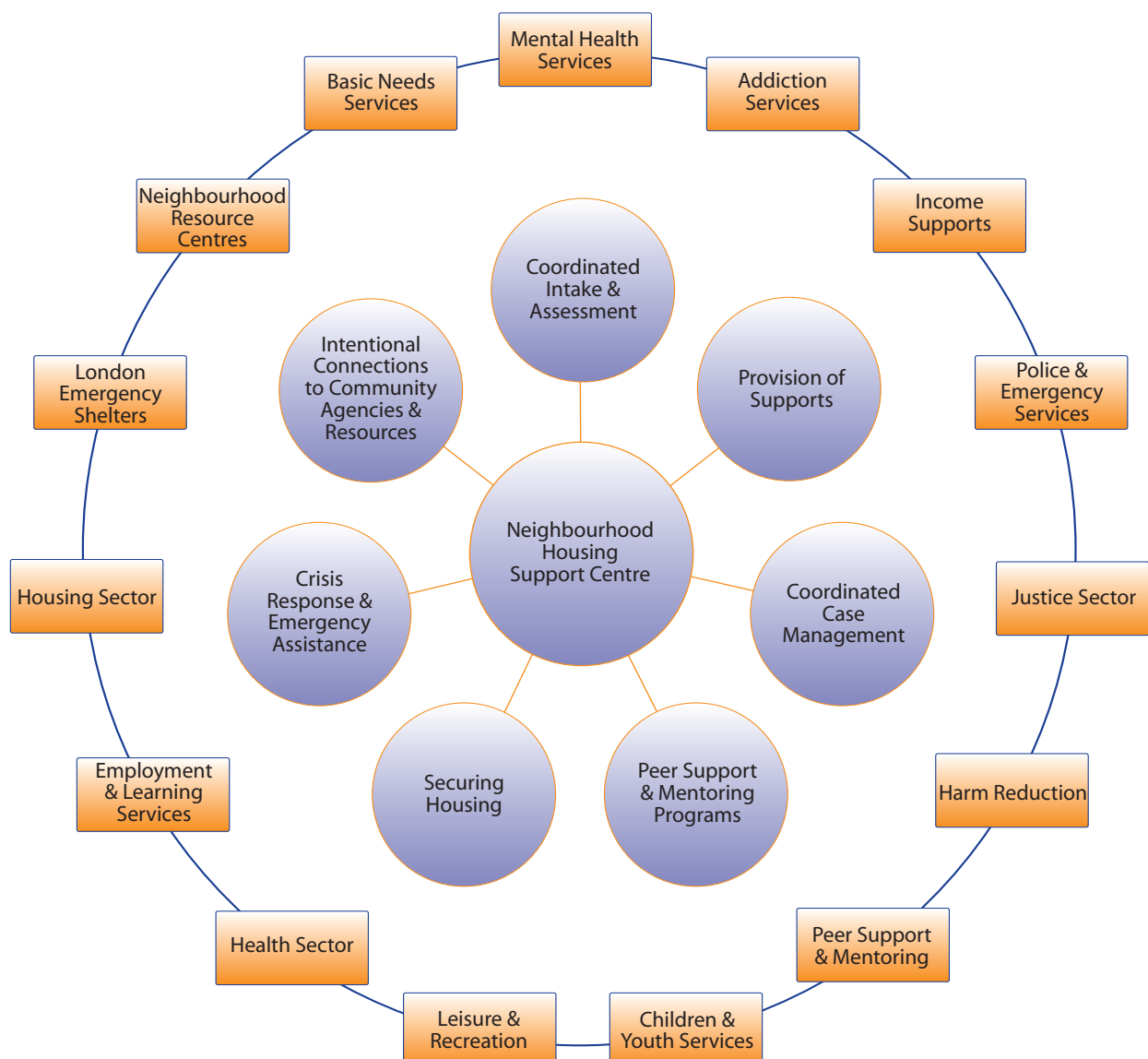
Neighbourhood Housing Support Centre

Homelessness starts in a neighbourhood and requires a neighbourhood response to achieve lasting and positive outcomes. The Neighbourhood Housing Support Centre is the focal point of London's Homeless Prevention System focusing on housing stability in designated communities in London. This model is dependent on strong collaboration and cooperation between the Neighbourhood Housing Support Centre staff, community service providers, City of London and other stakeholders.

The Neighbourhood Housing Support Centre will function as a physical and virtual hub for individuals and families experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, and other stakeholders, providing services and proactively connecting participants to the services they need, when

they need them. Formalized integration strategies between the Neighbourhood Housing Support Centre and service systems will be used, such as planning and working groups, accountability agreements, common assessment, an integrated information system, case management and service practices, communication protocols and collaborative governance. An inventory of available housing will be maintained in partnership with private landlords and the public sector.

The Neighbourhood Housing Support Centre will operate a centralized emergency shelter intake service to assist individuals and families in obtaining immediate alternate housing arrangements when applicable and to provide a warm transfer to a shelter when needed.



The Housing Stability Fund

The Housing Stability Fund

Between January 1 to March 31, 2013 the Housing First Temporary Support Fund provided an immediate alternative to households receiving Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). The Housing First Temporary Support Fund was a temporary bridge fund to assist recipients of OW/ODSP in establishing a new residence, or to prevent eviction or the discontinuation of utilities or heating in an existing residence.

On April 1, 2013 the Housing Stability Fund was introduced. The Housing Stability Fund offers financial assistance to low income Londoners to obtain and retain their housing and for those at risk of homelessness to remain housed.

The Housing Stability Fund offers grant and loan programs to low income Londoners to assist with rental arrears, last month's rent, emergency utility assistance and moving expenses. Eligible applicants will:

- Meet the income criteria such as: be employed, receiving Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program, Employment Insurance, Canada Pension Plan or other regular sources of income
- Live in London and are moving within the City of London
- Have not used the Housing Stability Fund in the past 12 months and/or repaid an existing Housing Stability Fund loan
- Attend an assessment appointment

Rental Assistance

Applicants who are behind in their rent and facing eviction, or are moving to a new home in London, may be eligible for this interest free loan/grant program to help pay past due rent or last month's rent if moving. The criteria includes:

- Applicants must be pending eviction or establishing a new principal residence

- Up to two month's rent is available for rental arrears, based on CMHC Average Market Rent Schedule and unit size
- Up to one month's rent is available for last month's rent based on CMHC Average Market Rent Schedule and unit size
- Applicants are encouraged to set up a direct ongoing payment to their landlord

Emergency Utility Assistance

If the utility service is pending disconnection or has been disconnected applicants may be eligible for this grant program. The criteria includes:

- Applicants must be the person named on the bill and have made a minimum total \$50 payment in the previous four months
- Assistance up to a maximum of \$500 per utility or \$600 for electrically heated homes
- Applicants may be required to set up a direct ongoing payment to the utility company

Moving Assistance

Applicants may be eligible for a grant to assist with hiring a moving company to assist with a move to a new home in London. The criteria includes:

- Applicants must be establishing a new principal residence in London
- Applicants must provide an estimate for moving costs
- Assistance up to a maximum of \$350 for single or couples, with a two stop maximum; and \$550 for a family with dependent children, with a three stop maximum

Reduced Pressure on Emergency Shelter Use

Emergency shelters play a vital role in the continuum of services available to homeless individuals and families. Residing in an emergency shelter is intended to provide immediate and overnight accommodation and basic needs for individuals and families who have no permanent address. The Canadian definition of Homelessness (2012) defines emergency shelters as facilities designed to meet the immediate needs of people who are homeless: "shelters typically have minimal eligibility criteria, often shared sleeping facilities and amenities, and often expect clients to leave in the morning. These facilities may or may not offer food, clothing or other services."² Despite our common understanding of this, over time London shelters have assumed a primary role in responding to homelessness and are often considered the homeless serving system.

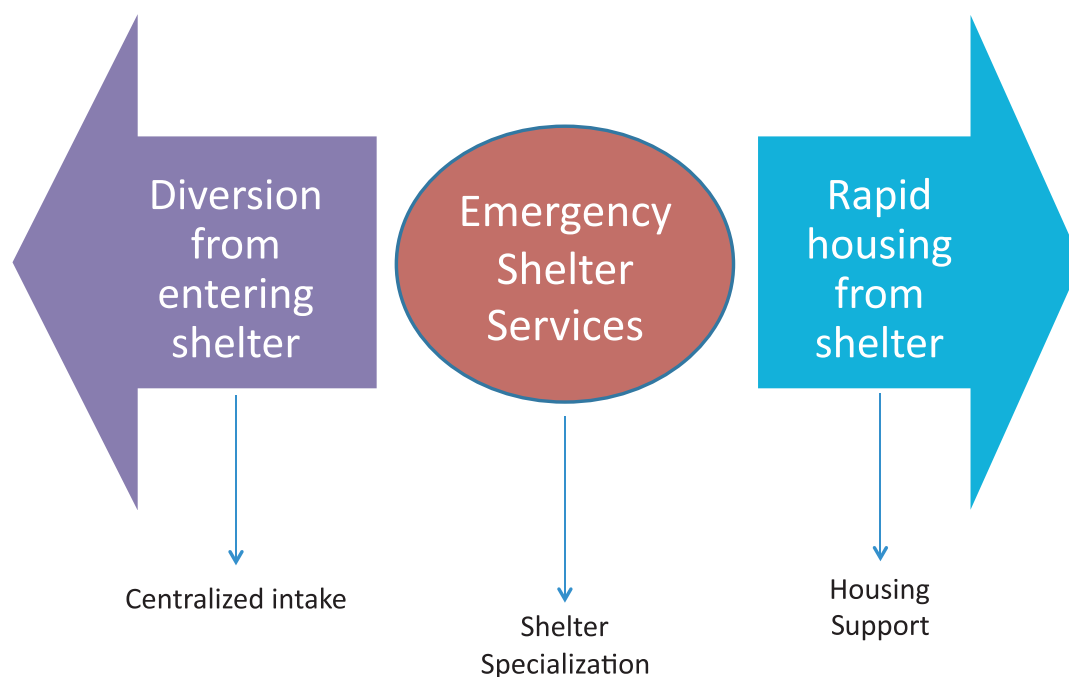
In London, our emergency shelters provide, at a minimum, emergency room and board to individuals and/or families who are experiencing homelessness and are aimed at meeting immediate, short term needs. Mission Services of London, The Salvation Army Centre of Hope and the Unity Project for the Relief of Homelessness in London receive funding through the City of London to operate emergency shelter beds. Two violence against women emergency shelters, Women's Community House and Zhaawanong

Shelter, provide emergency shelter and support to abused women and their children.

Throughout the community conversations, commentary was provided on some of the gaps and challenges within our sheltering services including:

- Lack of centralized intake
- Individuals moving from service to service without a consistent support approach
- Limited diversion to support individuals to more appropriate services upon discharge
- Limited shelter specialization
- No integrated information system
- Limited rapid housing options
- Limited support options once housed
- Shelters serving as the "catch all" for homeless services

In London, the role of emergency shelters is being reframed to work within London's Homeless Prevention System. At the core of the redesign is ensuring that all service delivery has a housing stability focus. The primary objective is to reduce pressures on emergency shelter use through diversion from entering shelter and rapid housing from shelter.



² Canadian Homelessness Research Network (2012) Canadian definition of homelessness. Retrieved from www.homelesshub.ca.

Diversion from entering shelter is a strategy that assists in preventing homelessness for individuals/families seeking shelter by helping them identify immediate alternative housing arrangements and connecting them with services and/or financial assistance to help them return to permanent housing. Support for diversion can reduce the number of individuals/families becoming homeless and the demand for emergency shelter beds. Diversion can improve the ability of homeless serving supports to target emergency shelter resources effectively and help individuals/families avoid traumatic and stressful homeless episodes. The main difference between diversion and other permanent housing interventions is at the point at which intervention occurs. Diversion focussed services include:

- Short-term case management
- Conflict mediation
- Connection to mainstream (*services outside of the homeless service sector*)
- Provision of financial, utility, and/or rental assistance
- Housing selection

Under London's Homeless Prevention System, emergency shelters will contribute to securing and maintaining housing in a system of prevention, diversion, rapid housing and permanent housing. The focus will be on moving out of shelter, reducing the number of individuals relying on emergency shelters and implementing a centralized intake practice. Through these efforts and the integration of the other elements of London's Homeless Prevention System we anticipate that this will lead to the reduction in the length of emergency shelter stays and the reduction of the year-over-year emergency shelter use.

Transforming London's Homeless Services to a Homeless Prevention System

Achieving the transformation to the Homeless Prevention System requires a phased-in approach to shift from focusing on homelessness to focusing on housing stability. The chart on page 13 identifies the stages of the phased-in approach.

Commencing in early 2013 an Implementation Team will be formed. The Implementation Team will consist of individuals representing diverse interests. Their focus will be to assist in putting into practice the Implementation Plan. As shown on page 13, the Implementation Team will review and advise on the draft materials and plans that have been developed by internal and external working groups.

Conclusion

Continuous monitoring and evaluation, priority setting, and improvements will determine how London is shifting towards achieving the vision of reducing and preventing homelessness through a housing stability approach. The continuous evaluation will assist in our understanding of what has been accomplished and what efforts are underway by monitoring the progress of the Implementation Plan. The primary focus will be monitoring the difference the directions and actions are making on individuals and families and the systems and supports that serve them.

Transforming London's Homeless Services to a Homeless Prevention System

