

Housing First Innovation Labs

Fostering Collaboration
in Support of a Housing First
Approach in Metro Vancouver
Communities



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Prepared by the Housing First Innovation Labs Team

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INTRODUCTION

In 2015-16 Lookout Housing and Health Society coordinated and hosted six training courses through a Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) Housing First program initiative called *Skills First*. The goal of this project was to improve the knowledge and skills of housing agency staff responsible for delivering HPS funded Housing First programming to better meet the needs of people experiencing chronic or episodic homelessness in Metro Vancouver. As part of the project, Lookout Society recorded webinars which can now be used for self-directed training or to allow others to lead these types of courses.

During the needs assessments done by Douglas College as a part of the Skills First project, we consistently heard two things: First, there are important services missing or inaccessible in each community and these gaps make it tough to administer and implement Housing First programs; second, Housing First providers want more collaboration, partnership and connection with the other organizations in their community to better support Housing First service delivery.

In response, the Housing First Innovation Labs project was developed to create more opportunities for local stakeholders to network and cultivate inter-agency collaboration in support of a Housing First approach to homelessness in eight unique Metro Vancouver communities. Participant communities included Burnaby, Langley (including the City and Township), Maple Ridge (including Pitt Meadows), New Westminster, the North Shore (including the District and City of North Vancouver and West Vancouver), Richmond, Surrey and Vancouver.

Communities have unique challenges implementing Housing First. This project recognizes that there are unique gaps and barriers in each community in Metro Vancouver and one solution or idea does not necessarily work for all. Using a social innovation lab approach, this project employed systems and design thinking methods to addressing homelessness in each community. This approach was used to generate ideas about new ways to integrate services, address gaps, avoid duplication and encourage collaboration among diverse stakeholders. The labs were co-designed with the community to create open space for innovative problem solving, and convened Housing First providers (HPS and non-HPS funded), non-Housing First organizations, all levels of government, funders, health authorities, community partners and those with lived-experience.

Participants worked together with lab facilitators to review and update research previously conducted in their community, provide feedback in co-developing the overall social innovation lab, and co-design potential solutions and ideas that addressed gaps in the homeless-serving system in their communities. Groups worked through activities, facilitated discussion, and guided action-planning that integrated organizational partners and resources in their communities. The Housing First Innovation Labs Team did not propose to solve these issues for the communities, but rather empower them to begin to find the solutions together.

The Housing First Innovation Labs Team worked with community partners to support the action plans created by lab participants through a series of workshops in each community. **In total, 196 community stakeholders participated in eight full-day sessions, and a further 230 community stakeholders participated in 12 follow-up workshops during the lab process.**

1. METHODS & LAB PROCESS

What is Social Innovation?

Simply put, social innovation is about uncovering promising solutions to complex problems. Once solutions have been thoroughly tested, a solution becomes a true social innovation when it spreads and scales to a systemic level. Complex challenges are messy, conflicting, changing, and full of uncertainty. Social innovation approaches strive to tackle problems at their root, not chase novelty, pay attention to what might already be working, and be open to experimenting with new pathways and possibilities.

What are Social Innovation Labs?¹

If social innovation is the theory, then social innovation labs are the practice. Social innovation labs offer new channels to collaborate constructively and systematically on bottom-up solutions, with the participation of those who will actually benefit. These labs identify needs and problems and create a motivating environment for those who participate. While their methods and tools may vary, all labs provide a structure and expertise to help diverse stakeholders innovate together.

Labs can be²:

- Permanent spaces for tackling issues
- Service design focused innovation labs
- Policy and systems change labs
- Pop-up design jam labs in community
- Collectives of diverse stakeholders tackling complex challenges over many years

All social innovation labs have three main characteristics.³ They are:

- 1. Social:** they bring together diverse participants from a range of backgrounds, not as consultants but as experts, forming a team who act collectively towards defining the problem and achieving their shared societal goals.
- 2. Experimental:** Social innovation labs test and try out different things on an ongoing basis, in order to bring about change.
- 3. Systemic:** Labs focus on addressing the root causes of a systemic challenges at hand, rather than focusing on the symptoms of a problem.

Why Social Innovation Labs?

To aid the move from discussion to action, the social innovation lab approach draws on the strengths, empathy, creativity, and experience of a collective to explore new ways of making progress on a complex challenge – in the case of this project, the challenges of implementing a Housing First approach to homelessness in eight unique Metro Vancouver communities. These labs are guided by convening diverse perspectives on an issue, gaining insight from people with lived experience of the challenge, facilitated ideation, building prototypes of solutions, and testing them to see how they work in the real world outside of the lab setting. A lab creates a safe zone for a collective to explore, challenge assumptions, be bold, be agile enough to adapt as learning emerges, and experiment with solutions.

1 Edmonton Shift Lab Team. The Shift Lab: Learnings from our First Year. (2018)

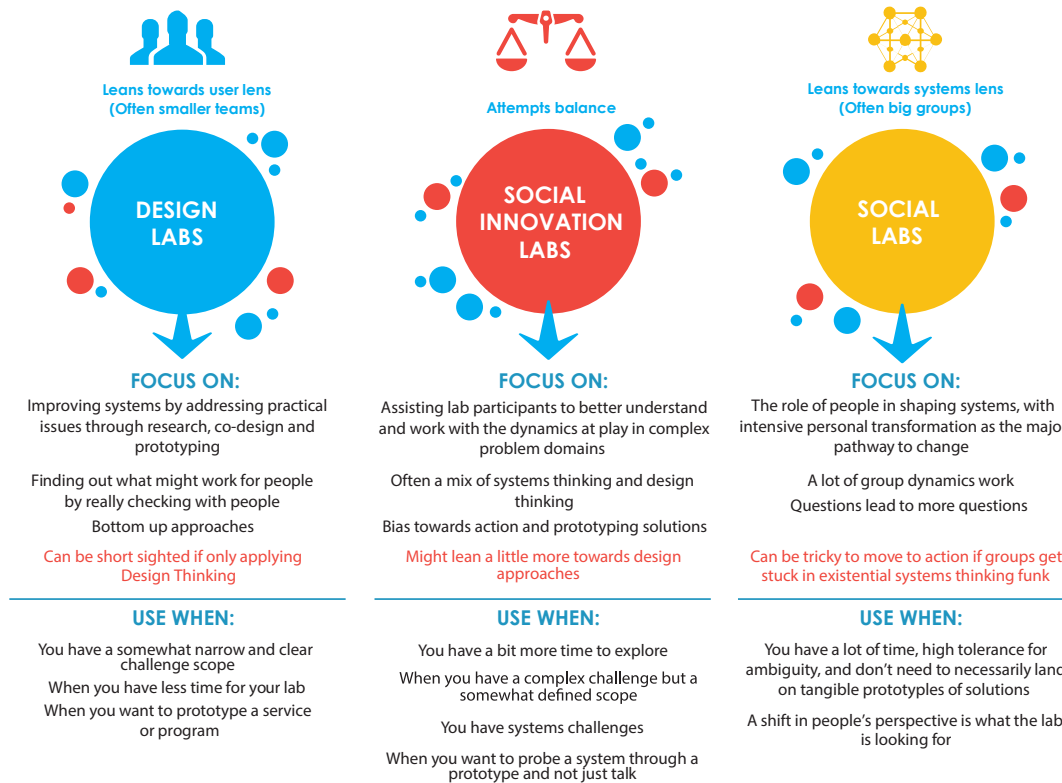
2 Social Innovation Lab Field Guide: Ben Weinlick, MA-&- Aleeya Velji, M.Ed (2016-17). Adapted from Think Jar Collective lab guide and design tools, and the Edmonton Shift Lab field guide.

3 Hassan, Z. (2014). The Social Labs Revolution: A new approach to solving our most complex challenges. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc.

As evidence emerges of what prototyped solutions are working, solutions can be scaled and spread to impact systemic change.⁴

- **The challenges we face keep getting more complex** - Labs help to navigate the complexities
- **The usual approaches to problem solving are not really working anymore** - Labs offer traditional and fresh problem-solving approaches
- **Working in silos doesn't really work to tackle complex challenges** - Applicable solutions often emerge from creative intersections between seemingly disparate ideas and disciplines. Labs help convene multiple perspectives, helping to uncover better pathways forward
- **We need new ways to understand problems and their root causes** - Social innovation labs help to uncover status quo assumptions which can lead to better understanding of root causes of challenges
- **We need experimental space and processes to try new things and make progress** - Labs help build a safe zone for experimentation, trying things, failing, learning from failure, and trying again

There is no one way to design and lead a social innovation lab. Lab design and methodologies are constantly evolving and need to be custom-tailored to the context of the lab. Although many different lab process approaches are possible, there are three that are typically used: **design labs, social innovation labs, and social labs**. Mindful of our desire to be action-oriented to support the development of potential solutions, the Housing First Innovation Lab was mainly a social innovation lab, leaning towards design methodologies as there was a desire for practical prototypes in a short time frame, given the challenges many in the sector have with capacity and resources.



Source: <http://www.edmontonshiftlab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Shift-Lab-Final-Report-1.pdf>

⁴ Social Innovation Lab Field Guide: Weinlick, B & Velji, A. (2016-17). Adapted from Think Jar Collective lab guide and design tools, and the Edmonton Shift Lab field guide.

Why use a Social Innovation Labs approach to address gaps in Housing First Delivery?

Housing First is not only a program model – it is also a systems approach and a philosophy.⁵ As such, developing solutions to the challenges and complexities of adopting and implementing a Housing First approach to homelessness requires the systems-based lens and diversity of input a social innovation lab offers.

Housing First as a program focuses on specific program models targeted at particular homeless populations (e.g., adults with mental illness and co-occurring addictions, families with children, youth) to reduce or eliminate homelessness and promote the well-being of these populations.

A Housing First systems approach focuses on cohesive community planning to develop coordinated, complementary programs and policies to end homelessness which are consistent with Housing First principles and practice. The implementation of Housing First requires a difficult and systematic process, beginning with planning and strategy development that recognizes how every part of the homeless-serving system will co-ordinate around the Housing First philosophy.

Housing First is an overarching philosophy with a core set of principles that have implications for both systems approaches to ending homelessness and for program models. The core principles (e.g., immediate access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirements, consumer choice and self-determination) underlie and guide both systems approaches to ending homelessness and program models.

The Housing First Innovation Lab Approach: Human-Centred Design

The Housing First Innovation Labs Team, comprised of project coordination from Lookout Housing and Health Society and lab design/facilitation from Vantage Point, used a methodology known as *human-centered design* (HCD) over the course of the lab project. HCD is a disciplined creative process that begins with empathy and strives to dig deeper into the needs and motivations of the people who are facing a challenge. Once insights have been generated from people with the context experience of a challenge, there is a process of facilitated ideation which leads to the development of prototypes of solutions. Finally, these prototypes are tested on the ground to see if they truly meet the needs of people. As evidence emerges of what prototyped solutions are working, those solutions can be scaled and spread to create systemic change.⁶

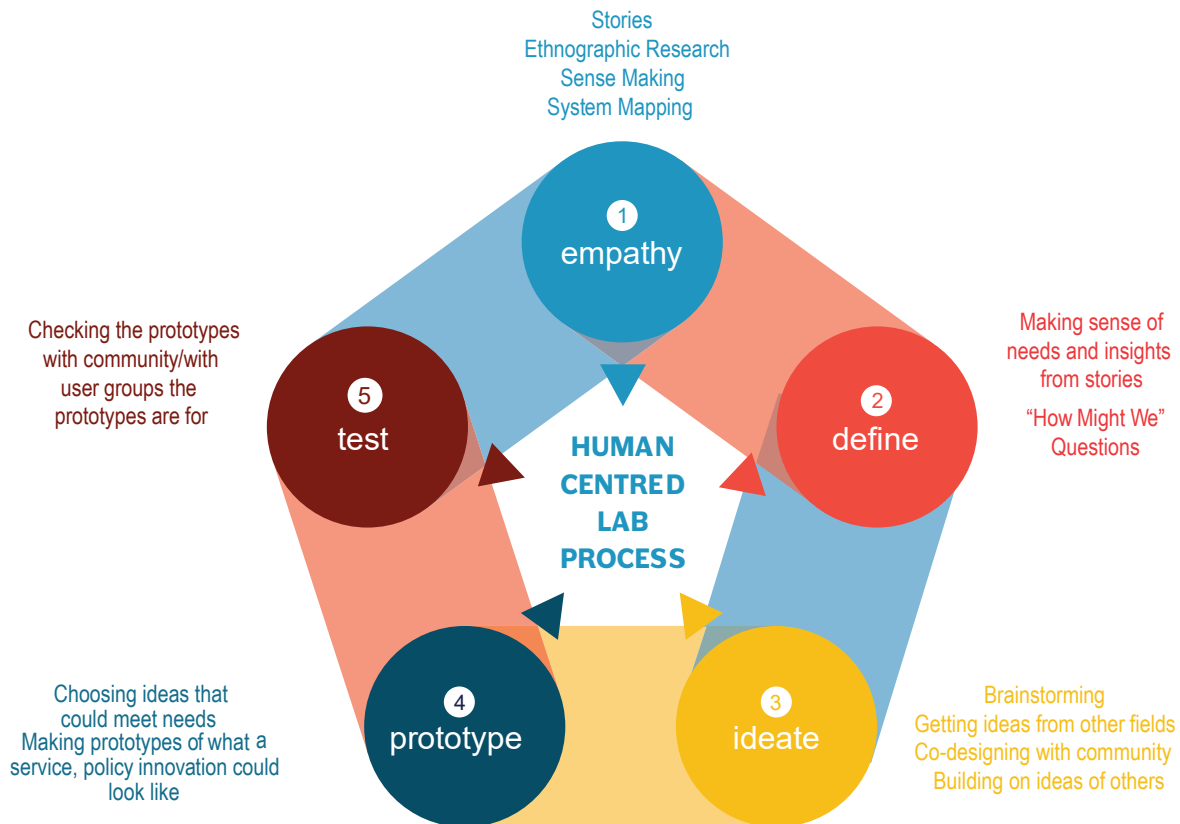
What we liked about applying this social innovation design methodology to Housing First implementation is that HCD is a creative approach to problem solving that starts with the person and ends with an innovative solution to meet people's needs. It supports systems change and service delivery by better understanding what people and communities need and want. It is a way to design solutions with people, not for them – and it allowed the uniqueness of each of the eight participant Metro Vancouver communities to come through in the process.

While it is recognized that sufficient access to support resources is essential for successful Housing First delivery, there is relatively little documentation to describe and understand resource differences between and within communities in Metro Vancouver. Between March and June 2016, Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy (GVSS), now Homelessness Services Association of BC (HSABC), partnered with SFU Gerontology

5 Polvere, L., MacLeod, T., Macnaughton, E., Caplan, R., Piat, M., Nelson, G., Gaetz, S., & Goering, P. (2014). Canadian Housing First toolkit: The At Home/Chez Soi experience. Calgary and Toronto: Mental Health Commission of Canada and the Homeless Hub.

6 Edmonton Shift Lab Team. The Shift Lab: Learnings from our First Year. (2018)

Research Centre and bc211 to conduct 13 community mapping workshops to gain a better understanding of varying levels of access to these types of support services. This report compiled findings from this research to help organizations understand how the service system functions in their specific communities and inform the implementation of a systems approach to delivering Housing First across Metro Vancouver.⁷



Using this research, along with further feedback from those associated with the GVSS Mapping project, our lead researcher then compiled profiles for the eight communities that were identified for participation in the lab process. Community action teams consisting of community leaders and stakeholders were assembled to begin ‘sense-making’ and defining the key questions to be put forward through a lab approach. This community-based participatory approach provided participants an active voice in the research process.

These action teams informed three components to lab design in each community:

- A problem statement: When it comes to housing first, what are the key questions that could inform the ideation in a lab process? What issues or challenges could the lab focus on?
- Who should participate in a survey to further define the question or challenge when it comes to housing first?
- Who should participate in the lab itself?

Surveys were then developed for each community, to further define the key challenges facing each community when it comes to implementing a Housing First approach.

⁷ Canham, S., Battersby, L. & Fang, M.L. (2016). Mapping Metro Vancouver to Support Housing First Implementation: Service Barriers, Gaps, and Recommendations. Simon Fraser University, Gerontology Research Centre.

The survey also asked respondents to identify individuals or organizations who may have some influence to support a Housing First approach to homelessness (survey results discussed in section #2).

Survey results were then reviewed by each community's action team to confirm:

- A problem statement for the lab that captures the challenge the lab is undertaking
- Lab participants
- Lab design

Subsequently, the lead facilitator worked to design an agenda for a full-day session with lab participants.

Full day in-person sessions for each of the eight participating communities were designed to:

Map the system, relationships and barriers. Local stories, information, and experiences of individuals with lived experience were featured to develop empathy and connection with the key challenges relating to Housing First. In some communities this took the form of informal storytelling or conversations with community members, or informal interviews with individuals who had lived experience with homelessness. Participants also mapped out the experience of an individual experiencing homelessness, to understand homelessness at a system level in their community.

Define the challenge. The key components to a housing first approach to homelessness were highlighted. Participants broke into groups, and based on the group of barriers relating to Housing First delivery each team selected, synthesized the problem/area of concern (NOT solutions) in the form of a "How might we" statement. Existing assets and resources related to housing and homelessness in each community were identified, with a specific focus on barriers in the system that had a high potential for intervention.

Ideate. Based on the identified barriers – groups 'ideate' prototypes; develop proposals for action – actions that could be prototyped in the community. In the Ideation stage, the aim is to generate a large quantity of ideas — ideas that potentially inspire newer, better ideas — which the team can then filter and narrow down into the best, most practical, or most innovative ones. Throughout the day, emphasis was placed on ideas that could be 'tested' with existing community resources, assets and people. This message was conveyed using an analogy; the Apollo 13 space mission. During this space mission, and the mechanical difficulties that ensued, it was not valuable for the astronauts to conceive possible solutions that required resources, assets or material that were not immediately available within the shuttle. They had to focus on 'ideating' solutions utilizing existing resources. Participants in the lab were encouraged to adopt the same mindset, and to be willing to propose ideas that required little investment to prototype, whether they had a perceived chance of success or not.

Rapid Prototype. As the full-day session evolved in each community, participants focused in on their most testable ideas, groups started to consider who on their team could help bring their ideas to implementation. Groups completed worksheets which captured the nature of the idea to prototype, possible roles, assign tasks, and immediate next steps to begin testing prototypes (see Table 4 in section 4 for the list of ideas developed in the rapid prototyping phase of the lab).

Prototype and/or Test. After the full-day session, the project coordinator would follow up with 'leads' for each prototype, and assess how to focus the follow-up workshops/meetings that were funded through this project. These follow up meetings took a variety of forms; some served as progress updates, others

served as focused meetings to plan next steps in prototyping or implementing a particular proposed idea/solution. Depending on the community, these follow up sessions could be considered as either planning to continue prototyping, or ‘testing’ to see if each proposed idea should go further.

There is a significant overlap between the Define and Ideation stages of a typical design thinking process. Interpreting information and defining the problem(s) and ideation both drive the generation of problem solutions. One idea typically leads on from another; by considering the thoughts, opinions, and ideas of other lab participants during the full-day session, new insights and perspectives can be achieved, which then inform one’s own ideas for solution building. Thus, participants will continue to build ideas which hopefully become progressively more refined and targeted towards the central issue throughout the lab process.

2. BARRIERS & FACILITATORS TO HOUSING FIRST IN METRO VANCOUVER

In order to gain a preliminary understanding of the gaps and challenges to delivering Housing First services in our Metro Vancouver communities, we undertook a variety of different data gathering activities. Drawing upon previous research, (most notably Mapping Metro Vancouver to Support Housing First Implementation)⁸ and in consultation with various stakeholders, a primer ‘community summary’ document was produced for each community, summarizing service gaps, challenges and strengths in each community as it related to implementing and delivering services within the Housing First framework.

To begin the lab process, prospective participants in each community would be sent a ‘community summary’ and asked to complete an online survey. This gave respondents the opportunity to assess the priority action areas in their community and to provide their unique perspective on the issues facing their community relating to Housing First. This activity was one of several components of the lab co-design process, where efforts were made to tailor the lab to the needs of each community. Survey respondents identified and ranked areas of priority need within their communities; raised emerging concerns not captured in earlier research (i.e. closing of a particular service, or the current opioid crisis); highlighted new housing related projects and planning efforts; and prospective lab participants were identified. From the surveys we coalited the priority action area rankings, summarized the main areas of concern, and produced a problem statement⁹ and summary document to guide the full-day session in each community (see Appendix two).

By collecting stakeholder feedback prior to the full-day session, it helped to orient participant’s focus toward action areas which already had support of the group. The following table summarizes the key results of the survey by each community. This table highlights the number of participants who responded to the survey, the top three ‘action areas’ based on respondent’s ranking thereof, and the challenges related to delivering Housing First.

8 Bell, J. (2016). Mapping Metro Vancouver to Support Housing First Implementation. Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy. & Canham, S., Battersby, L., & Fang, M.L. (2016). Mapping Metro Vancouver to Support Housing First Implementation: Service Barriers, Gaps, and Recommendations. Simon Fraser University, Gerontology Research Centre.

9 For the first two labs (New Westminster & North Shore) we crafted custom problem statements, but it became apparent that all communities were struggling to implement Housing First and do so while trying to integrate the principles that underlie it. To address this we shifted to putting forward a problem statement that also helped to maintain focus on the 5 principles (see Appendix two)

Table 1. Housing First Innovation Labs survey of priority action areas and community challenges related to Housing First implementation.

Community	# of Surveys Completed	Priority Action Areas	Housing First Challenges
Burnaby	29	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access to and availability of affordable housing (66% ranked as #1; 97% ranked within top 3 priorities) 2. Loss of affordable housing (69% ranked within top 3 priorities) 3. Difficult to access or inaccessible services (31% ranked within top 3 priorities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low vacancy rates • Limited low barrier housing options • Lack of basic services • Barriers to income assistance • Access to supportive housing for people with concurrent disorders • Lack of coordination between service providers • Need for better partnerships between developers and affordable housing providers • stigma and discrimination • local government support
Langley (includes City and Township of Langley)	20	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access to and availability of affordable housing (73% ranked as #1; 93% ranked within top 3 priorities) 2. Stigma and discrimination (60% ranked within top 3 priorities) 3. Limited low-barrier services and restrictive eligibility requirements (60% ranked within top 3 priorities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low vacancy rates • Limited low barrier housing options • Barriers to income assistance & rent subsidies • Access to supportive housing for people with concurrent disorders • Need for partnerships between developers and affordable housing providers • Stigma and discrimination • Access to meal programs • Private landlord engagement
Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows	19	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access to and availability of affordable housing (58% ranked as #1; 89% ranked within top 3 priorities) 2. Stigma and discrimination (63% ranked within top 3 priorities) 3. Limited low-barrier services and restrictive eligibility requirements (42% ranked within top 3 priorities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low vacancy rates • Limited low barrier housing options • Barriers to income assistance & rent subsidies • Access to supportive housing for people with concurrent disorders • Need for partnerships between developers and affordable housing providers • Stigma and discrimination • Access to detox services • Private landlord engagement
New Westminster	25	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access to and availability of affordable housing (45% ranked as #1; 82% ranked within top 3 priorities) 2. Access to mental health and addictions services (50% ranked within top 3 priorities) 3. Inter-agency collaboration (50% ranked within top 3 priorities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low vacancy rates • Limited low barrier housing options • Access mental health & substance use services • Barriers to income assistance & rent subsidies • Access to supportive housing for people with concurrent disorders • Need for partnerships between developers and affordable housing providers • Stigma and discrimination • Access to meal programs • Private landlord engagement
North Shore (Includes City of North Vancouver, Districts of North & West Vancouver)	20	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access to and availability of affordable housing (73% ranked as #1; 93% ranked within top 3 priorities) 2. Essential services at capacity or not available on the North Shore (67% ranked within top 3 priorities) 3. Over-capacity caseloads and lack of service coordination (40% ranked within top 3 priorities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low vacancy rates • Limited low barrier, long term housing options • Access mental health & substance use services • Access to supportive housing for people with concurrent disorders • Need for partnerships between developers and affordable housing providers • Stigma and discrimination • Access to supportive services outside of the City of North Vancouver • Private landlord engagement • Loneliness & isolation • Transit access

Table 1. Housing First Innovation Labs survey of priority action areas and community challenges related to Housing First implementation continued.

Community	# of Surveys Completed	Priority Action Areas	Housing First Challenges
Richmond	25	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Affordable housing (61% ranked as #1; 87% ranked within top 3 priorities) Uncoordinated housing placement and service delivery (17% ranked as #1; 65% ranked within top 3 priorities) Landlord engagement (30% ranked as #2; 35% ranked within top 3 priorities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low vacancy rates Limited low barrier housing options Barriers to income assistance Access to supportive housing for people with concurrent disorders Lack of coordination between service providers Need for better partnerships between developers and affordable housing providers stigma and discrimination
Surrey	23	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Access to and availability of affordable housing (76% ranked as #1; 95% ranked within top 3 priorities) Limited low-barrier services and eligibility requirements (57% ranked within top 3 priorities) Landlord engagement (48% ranked within top 3 priorities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low vacancy rates Limited low barrier housing options Access to mental health & substance use services Barriers to income assistance & rent subsidies Access to supportive housing for people with concurrent disorders Need for partnerships between developers and affordable housing providers Stigma and discrimination Access to meal programs Private landlord engagement Loneliness & isolation Transit access
Vancouver	18	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Access to and availability of affordable housing (83% ranked as #1; 94% ranked within top 3 priorities) Limited low-barrier services and eligibility requirements (61% ranked within top 3 priorities) Inter-agency collaboration (39% ranked within top 3 priorities) <p>73% of respondents agreed that having a smaller group of service providers regularly connecting with one another to collaborate on service delivery would be of benefit to our community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low vacancy rates Limited low barrier housing options Access to mental health & substance use services Barriers to income assistance & rent subsidies Access to supportive housing for people with concurrent disorders & other unique subpopulations including seniors and couples Insufficient rent subsidies Stigma and discrimination Collaboration between service providers Private landlord engagement Competition for limited resources Overcapacity caseloads & significant time constraints

Important differences exist between all of the Metro Vancouver communities that were selected for, and participated in these innovation labs. Our survey helped to underscore these differences revealing varying levels of support for some issues that are similar between communities, such as the need for improved **inter-agency collaboration**, and improved **access to mental health services**; and highlighting differences that are unique to certain communities, such as the level of **support from elected officials** or the degree to which **stigma and discrimination** against people experiencing homelessness plays a role in a given community.

Communities where most of the available **services are concentrated in one area**, were identified as making access to such services difficult for anyone not living in the immediate vicinity. This concentration of services often occurs in areas of low-income housing, limiting community integration and the opportunities for people to live in other areas of the community while continuing to access necessary services. **Community integration** is further limited by **fragmented transit access**. Transit was often noted as a barrier to service access in many communities where housing and supports are not close to each other, or where transit service is inadequate to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

Service coordination and community dynamics were highlighted as important barriers or facilitators to successful Housing First implementation. In communities where stakeholders (including service providers, municipal officials, and other community members) regularly meet (i.e. a Community Homelessness Table (CHT) to discuss issues and keep abreast of local concerns related to homelessness, survey respondents ranked the need to **improve service coordination** lower than in communities where a regular table did not exist. Overall survey respondents indicated a strong desire to work together to improve service coordination and increase the efficiency of the system of services. **Overcapacity caseloads** was frequently cited as a challenge to Housing First implementation. Survey respondents suggested options for improving service coordination through improving the options for following clients, **streamlining intake processes**, and **creating service hubs**. Additionally, emergency shelters often act as service hubs, providing important connections to services; however, not all communities had such shelters. While emergency shelters are not part of the Housing First approach, the absence of this type of service was cited as an important missing piece of the service continuum.

Despite unique community dynamics, the one challenge that was consistently identified as **the greatest challenge and top priority for allowing successful implementation of Housing First was access to and availability of affordable housing**. Many individuals face challenges in accessing social housing due to past evictions, long waiting lists, or not meeting the specific eligibility criteria for certain housing projects, making both neighbourhood choice and immediate access to housing challenging. In all communities, there was nearly unanimous agreement that a lack of affordable housing, a loss of such housing due to poor conditions of such housing, ‘renovictions’/‘demovictions’, and rising cost of housing in general has created a situation where the options for those seeking low-cost housing are few, often poor quality and in some communities non-existent. These circumstances have created an especially challenging situation for those trying to implement and deliver Housing First services, as meeting the basic need to secure housing for their clients is a very significant challenge.

3. COLLABORATION & INTEGRATION IN EACH COMMUNITY

Homelessness is a complex social issue. It is multifaceted, takes many forms and affects different populations in various ways. Getting the various sectors involved (health services, social workers, corrections, housing providers, etc.) and working in partnership with a wide range of organizations tackling the issue can be very effective. Bringing together experts and service providers from across the homelessness service spectrum is often one of the most important first steps in helping a community to begin to systematically address homelessness.

Why do we need to partner to address homelessness? In the context of Housing First in Canada, one organization simply cannot provide all the services that support a robust Housing First approach to homelessness. The successful implementation of a Housing First approach in Metro Vancouver requires a range of mobile, flexible and community-based support services to meet the diverse needs of people who are homeless, including youth, families, Aboriginal people, women fleeing abuse, seniors, people with disabilities, and people with criminal histories.

Sectors and agencies with various and complementary expertise have to come together, which includes both HPS and non-HPS funded organizations. When the community comes together to map out what services already exist and who can provide what, gaps in the suite of services needed to keep clients successfully housed are also identified. By working in partnership, communities are in a better position to provide a “one-stop-shop” approach for clients to access and navigate the services they need to remain successfully housed.

Table 2. Identified barriers to collaboration by lab participants.

IN THEIR WORDS: Barriers to Collaboration Identified by Participants in the Lab Process
<i>"Self-imposed barriers around culture and funding. We are all trying to access the same pot of available housing resources for youth on our caseloads."</i>
<i>"Funding scarcity breeds competitiveness and entitlements; lack of accountability to communities they serve (populations and agencies)."</i>
<i>"The scale of the problem. Providers are busy trying to secure funding, attending to the needs of their clients, don't feel as though there is time/space to collaborate."</i>
<i>"There are many great collaborations currently going on in my immediate vicinity, but not as part of the greater community. There is a big focus on the Opioid Crisis at the moment, so other issues are not at the forefront. Time is a major challenge, there are a lot of very committed people that are stretched thin."</i>
<i>"Communication can be a challenge. When you don't have a close rapport with workers from other agencies so it can be difficult to give accurate referrals."</i>
<i>"Time and scheduling conflicts. With such a high case load it can be difficult to prioritize meeting with other service providers."</i>
<i>"A Lack of time to develop these relationships and provide each other opportunities to learn about our roles in supporting individuals experiencing homelessness/housing insecurity."</i>
<i>"A fair amount of collaboration is already taking place but every organization has their own specific funding sources and mandates that can create barriers to collaboration."</i>
<i>"More communication between services is needed. More collaboration between service providers would improve services to marginalized people."</i>
<i>"More collaboration of service providers will happen when you have a centralized location for services."</i>

Recognition of the need for a collaborative approach to homelessness is certainly not new, nor is it exclusive to those who support a Housing First philosophy. Throughout the Housing First Innovation Lab, participant communities unanimously acknowledged that inter-agency collaboration is also essential to achieve success, as access to services must be immediate and responsive, delivering the necessary interventions to prevent a drift into homelessness. However, also unanimously acknowledged by participant communities were numerous examples of collaboration to varying degrees of success, and an acknowledgment that system coordination needs to become more of a priority across a growing region. As one participant emphasized:

“ Service coordination only exists here because the community is still relatively small and people work together by calling up and making referrals as needed. It’s informal and person driven – people get along and are willing to work together so it happens but it is highly dependent on the individuals who are currently invested in it. There is no system of coordination, it is only happening organically. The community is projected to grow and when this happens if there is no formal mechanism in place it will be difficult for service coordination to continue the way it currently happens. ”

Through the systems-lens of our Housing First Innovation Lab design, we witnessed first-hand that the size, shape and scope of partnerships and the suite of services available varied considerably in each of the eight Metro Vancouver communities we worked with. Perhaps even more strikingly, during the co-design phase for each lab, we learned just how different the relationship dynamics are between key stakeholders from community to community, regardless of the current systems of collaboration in place.

Relationships matter; ultimately they are the levers for change. Even if two distinct communities have similarly structured systems for collaboration and capacity building in place, in practice the working relationships may operate with varying levels of effectiveness.

The primary resource needed for a social innovation lab is the commitment of time and collaborative action from individuals and organizations who care about and are authorities on the topic the lab is addressing. It is the participants that make it work. But how do you get buy in from community for a lab? To help with this, we needed to consider who was best to convene and steward the lab. If a social innovation lab convener team comes from outside the community the lab is going to work with, there is – rightfully so – the potential for negative push-back from the stakeholders in a system you’re working with. We intentionally sought out locally situated homeless serving groups that understood the local dynamics and had experience collaborating to address homelessness in their unique communities.

The Role of Community Homelessness Tables

Often referred to as Community Homelessness Tables (CHTs), local task forces work to address homelessness in the sub-regions of Metro Vancouver. They are a forum for homeless-serving agencies, business representatives, municipal governments, provincial government representatives, local citizens and public authorities operating in their communities, facilitating local leadership on homelessness issues. They identify gaps in services and establish priorities, build capacity, and keep their communities informed about the status of homelessness locally and opportunities to support solutions.

As noted earlier, key to the development of a social innovation lab is the collaborative work done in the pre-lab design phase by the Community Review Team (CRT). As a group, the CRT builds collaborative and authentic relationships that model the kind of collaboration lab facilitators seek to instill with each of the participants invited into the full-day lab setting. In many of the eight Metro Vancouver region communities participating in the Housing First Innovation Labs project, the local Community Homelessness Tables effectively became CRT’s, co-designing the labs, identifying lab participants and helping to navigate the local homeless serving systems.

Not surprisingly, participant Metro Vancouver communities that have established local task forces adapted well to our social innovation lab approach and were quickly able to collaborate effectively towards potential prototypes. The Housing First Innovation Lab essentially became another opportunity to build capacity and work together towards a complementary, coordinated system in their community.

Based on geography, some municipalities have identified the need to establish a system of coordination, advocacy and shared identity across municipal boundaries. Impressively, they are able to navigate the numerous challenges that arise (bylaws, zoning, policing, local governments) from having separate mechanisms that at times can run in opposition to realization of shared goals within their homeless serving system.

Table 3. Community Homelessness Tables in the region by participant community.

Location	Community Homelessness Table
Burnaby	Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness/The Society To End Homelessness In Burnaby
Langley (Includes City & Township)	Langley Homelessness Coalition
Maple Ridge/ Pitt Meadows	Ridge-Meadows Katzie Community Network – housing table
New Westminister	New Westminister Homelessness Coalition
North Shore (Includes City of North Vancouver, Districts of North & West Vancouver)	North Shore Homelessness Task Force
Richmond	Richmond Homelessness Coalition
Surrey	Surrey Housing and Homelessness Task Force
Vancouver	None

Surprisingly, however, some long-standing CHTs in the region exist only on paper; friction between particular agencies or individuals, a lack of consistent or regular attendance at meetings or capacity issues to effectively coordinate, collaborate and initiate action on established mandates were noted through the Housing First Innovation Lab process. In some cases, participants struggled with whether or not they should identify themselves as both a member of the local CHT and/or their organization, which made it difficult to assign roles, generate and test ideas within the lab setting:

“ I tried numerous times connecting with the task force (as a member myself) to get more information on the housing sub-committee but have not yet heard back from the representative who said they may have some information. This is something I can keep pursuing, but most likely not within the context/timeline of the lab that we agreed upon as a working group. ”

In some communities, previously established CHTs simply ceased to exist in the long-term, choosing only to convene over a specific issue for a short period of time. One stakeholder noted:

“ We have had working groups, task forces, etc. in the past – they have typically been formed to address a specific issue (e.g., SROs, 2010 Olympics Housing Working Group, HEAT – Homelessness Emergency Action Team which resulted in the opening of temporary winter shelters). There are just so many service/housing/shelter providers, advocates, grassroots coalitions that they typically come together for a period of time to address a certain issue/sub-population. The issue was always who should be invited and what is its purpose and mandate. ”

Continuous communication is key to capacity building; consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation. These CHTs are the established structure that facilitates collaboration between local, regional, provincial and

federal government agencies, housing and shelter providers, and health practitioners to increase the collective capacity to provide services, build consensus on new initiatives, and enhance support across communities. As such, it may be time to thoroughly evaluate how they currently function across Metro Vancouver, given the critical role they play in communities throughout the region. As one service provider lab participant said:

“ The City seems content without a community table despite it being part of one of their strategic plan items. Many local providers are willing to participate but no one has expressed the intent to lead a table. To be fair—it might not be the City nor a particular provider’s role to lead the table, but the table should have the power to influence change and provide a voice that could be used to call into account actions, or the lack of action, within the community. ”

While many CHTs have made considerable progress in developing their tables and increasing capacity within their communities to address homelessness, their funding is limited and unstable in many cases. Some participant Metro Vancouver community CHTs had consistent funding for a coordinator position to manage activities, while others had very little, and some CHTs did not have funding at all. This makes it difficult for CHTs to engage in long-term planning, initiate longer-term projects, and operate as effectively as they might. More importantly, the inconsistency of funding to support collaboration via CHTs throughout the region limits opportunities to develop components of a coordinated approach region-wide. Municipalities are working in isolation from each other where information exchange, data sharing and collaboration across municipal boundaries is limited, yet the needs of vulnerable populations cross municipal boundaries.

The Role of Municipal Government

Solving the challenges of homelessness requires all three levels of government and connected systems working in collaboration. Municipal councils cannot address these pressing social issues alone and yet they face them daily as they show up at the local level within our communities. This is why it is so important to align municipal commitments with provincial and federal strategies. In many cases, we think of commitments in terms of funding, but advocacy and engagement are two key areas where local governments can support those who work locally to combat homelessness.

Over the course of co-designing and convening innovation labs throughout Metro Vancouver we witnessed varying levels of interaction and coordination between local governance and the homeless serving system. Some municipalities were very active and took a lead role in homelessness initiatives, some were merely kept informed, some were noticeably absent, and some were combative to select services and programs operating in their communities. These differing levels of collaborative engagement factor heavily in a community’s ability to integrate services and support a broader systematic approach to homelessness.

Some participant communities reported that the local social and political climates presented challenges in the delivery of Housing First services and supports – or even the most basic attempts to collaboratively work on local solutions to homelessness. In some communities, there were reports that homelessness was an unknown issue, simply ignored, or denied as a problem by both citizens and persons in local government sectors.

The denial was reported to be a result of both purposeful political will and a general lack of awareness:

“ The community and local government doesn’t support this population. No one wants low barrier admission. They are afraid of homeless people and some I would say actually make fun of them and hate them. There is a lot of ‘this is not my mandate’ which means people are losing hope that we can actually solve anything. ”

In communities where the municipal government denied the existence of homelessness, fewer services are provided and parts of the homeless serving system are impeded through local bylaws, thus encouraging people to leave their home community to receive services in other communities.



Municipal governments reach people, quite literally, where they live. They set the plans, policies and by-laws that shape our homes and our neighbourhoods. Councils need to work with community agencies and advocate for the support that is needed to implement programming that supports a robust homeless serving system. Of the eight Metro Vancouver communities who participated in the Housing First Innovation Lab, there was an incredible discrepancy from municipality to municipality of council leadership and support.

4. IDEATION & RAPID PROTOTYPING

Important components of the social innovation lab process are ideation and rapid prototyping. On the full-day session, lab participants worked together to come up with ideas for how they might be able to improve Housing First implementation and delivery in their communities, given their own skills, connections and interests. The intent was for participants to imagine tangible solutions, and discuss how these solutions could be tested with as few resources as possible, by utilizing the assets of the group. The following table lists all of the rapid prototyping ideas put forth, by each community.

Table 4. Rapid prototyping of solutions to improve Housing First implementation in Metro Vancouver communities.

Community	Rapid Prototyping Ideas
<p>Burnaby <i>(21 participants formed 5 groups)</i></p>	<p><u>Group 1. Expand Outreach Centre Services in Burnaby</u> Explore potential of the Salvation Army Metrotown Citadel building as an additional Outreach Resource Centre to serve those who are vulnerable/homeless:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Showers? ● Weekly meal? ● Extreme Weather location? <p><u>Group 2. Expand Wrap-Around Services in Burnaby</u> Expand wrap-around services in Burnaby:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hot breakfast ● Shower ● Clean clothes (clothing donations) ● Food bank <p>Offer other services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Housing connections (Progressive Housing) ● Tenancy advocates ● Coaching/life-skills <p>Maybe a change of venue to expand services? Royal Oak Ministry Centre?</p> <p><u>Group 3. Explore partnerships with developers to build affordable housing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Connect with developers, Board of Trade to build affordable housing within new builds ● Alternative to having developers contribute to the affordable housing fund in Burnaby <p><u>Group 4. Influence policy for the creation of affordable housing for people who are/have experienced homelessness</u> <i>Demonstration Project #1: Work Force Housing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Immediate and mobile housing ● Affordable ● Blends with neighbourhood <p><i>Demonstration Project #2: Modular Housing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● On a site set for redevelopment <p><u>Group 5. Explore temporary housing for those who are homeless on properties slated for demolition and/or rezoning</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Connect with developers about donating buildings for temporary housing while the city processes their applications to rezone and rebuild the properties ● Explore modular housing as a temporary housing solution for housing on empty (demolished) land waiting for permits/rezoning

Table 4. Rapid prototyping of solutions to improve Housing First implementation in Metro Vancouver communities continued.

Community	Rapid Prototyping Ideas
<p>Langley (includes City and Township of Langley)</p> <p>(26 participants formed 4 groups)</p>	<p><u>Group 1. Community Education: Campaign in Langley to reduce stigma and provide education on Supportive Housing</u> To host an information meeting at the Friends Langley Vineyard:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Share personal stories ● Share information on Stepping Stones supportive housing project ● Photo Voice Project ● Use as a public awareness/education campaign <p><u>Group 2. Coordinated support for persons experiencing homelessness</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A visionary team to present to existing tables in the Langleys (HCP, HAT, etc.) to advocate for a coordinating/navigator position through a shared funding model ● The navigator position would identify gaps, advocate for needs, align services & organizations and coordinate intake, service and response. <p><u>Group 3. Develop/map case studies to advocate for changes in criteria and funding for case managers to better support clients</u> Develop and document case studies of previously homeless individuals who are housed now</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Five (ish) case studies ● See what worked and what did not ● Advocate for changes in funding placement and criteria for case managers <p><u>Group 4. Formation of a Grassroots Homelessness Advocacy Group to raise awareness and reduce stigma in Langley</u> Create Grassroots Homelessness Advocacy group to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Change attitudes toward homelessness ● Reduce stigma ● Aid with acceptance of initiatives that support those who are homeless or at risk ● Have a mobilized, strategic/organized voice for supporters
<p>Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows</p> <p>(22 participants formed 4 groups)</p>	<p><u>Group 1. Community Database/Resource Hub</u> Create a website that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lists all homeless-oriented services with a high level of detail ● Allows clients to enter their information to self-refer for services ● Collate this information into a database that will support accountability of all teams ● Have a person/phone number for support and follow-up ● Turn Salvation Army building into an inter-agency resource hub? <p><u>Group 2. To get a Detox Facility in Maple Ridge</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mobile detox – to have some detox beds made available at different sites in Maple Ridge, with the opportunity to move people into treatment <p><u>Group 3. Reduce Stigma</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Join Compassionate Care project at Ridge-Meadows Hospital ● Media campaign around homelessness and poverty – provide information ● Community dinner – medicine wheel teaching; National Aboriginal Day celebration <p><u>Group 4. Open Door Youth Facility with Beds and 24 Hour Access</u> Repurpose and expand the Greg Moore Youth Centre</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● More activities, hours and supports ● Have 24 hour access (safe)

Table 4. Rapid prototyping of solutions to improve Housing First implementation in Metro Vancouver communities continued.

Community	Rapid Prototyping Ideas
<p>New Westminster <i>(20 participants formed 4 groups)</i></p>	<p><u>Group 1. Speak with one voice to influence policy to build affordable units</u> Speak with one Voice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Social networks ● Activism ● Public representation ● Identify intervention points (policy, land, funding) ● Partnerships ► Service provision, Development partnerships Desired Outcome: <i>Build units in New Westminster where rent is geared to income</i></p> <p><u>Group 2. Re-launch Wrap-Around Service Network (former program of the NWHCS)</u> Based on previous project of the New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society: Multiple service providers working in partnership focusing on known homelessness clients and developing a single care plan. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Client is in centre of plan, communication exchanged with client consent ● Depending on need, different agencies would be involved Desired Outcome: <i>An expanded network of support and holistic services to ensure stable housing for individuals experiencing homelessness</i></p> <p><u>Group 3. Establish community showers and laundry</u> Build or establish a community space for showers and laundry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Supported by community stakeholders ● Run by volunteers ● Machines and maintenance donated Desired Outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Reduce social stigma</i> ● <i>Bring services to people who need them</i> ● <i>Help people fit in, reduce isolation through volunteering opportunities</i> ● <i>A place for showers and clean laundry</i> </p> <p><u>Group 4. Connect seniors & empty nesters who need help and have space with potential tenants</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Exchange work maintenance for reduced or no rent in secondary suites of seniors or empty nesters who need help and have space Desired Outcome: <i>Increased access to secondary suites: access private market homeowners to create secondary suites</i></p>
<p>North Shore <i>(Includes City of North Vancouver, Districts of North & West Vancouver)</i> <i>(29 participants formed 6 groups)</i></p>	<p><u>Group 1. Coordinated advocacy to influence affordable housing policy on the North Shore</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “By name” + pit data to coordinate data messaging to highlight the “real” problem on the North Shore ● Use this information to (in a coordinated way) educate/inform all levels of government including Vancouver Coastal Health ● Go back to the North Shore Homelessness Task Force to develop policy SUB COMMITTEE to create North Shore-specific policy pieces ● All 3 municipalities have all relevant policies in place to support affordable housing supply ● Municipalities need to prioritize affordable housing policies </p>

Table 4. Rapid prototyping of solutions to improve Housing First implementation in Metro Vancouver communities continued.

Community	Rapid Prototyping Ideas
<p>North Shore (Includes City of North Vancouver, Districts of North & West Vancouver)</p> <p><i>(29 participants formed 6 groups)</i></p>	<p><u>Group 2. Connect HF participants with secondary suites on the North Shore through engagement with the Faith Community</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Campaign to engage and educate churches about housing first supports ● Use their knowledge with the community/congregations to source basement or secondary suites. Support them with presentations, and also the community at large ● Locate the under-utilized suites and educate the potential landlord on the Housing First program <p><u>Group 3. Host a forum focused on creating a Land Trust on the North Shore</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Forum on land trust (eg. North Shore Congress) - a 'Land Trust 101' ● Figure out best format for North Shore Land Trust (eg. give ownership to land trust) or just for long-term use (eg. governance model) <p><u>Group 4. Create a homelessness awareness campaign to reduce stigma on the North Shore</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Humans of New York-style homelessness awareness campaign ● Goal is to reduce stigma <p><u>Group 5. More immediate access to mental health and addictions services on the North Shore for those who are homeless through mental health outreach</u></p> <p>Goal is to connect mental health services directly to those who are homeless, by seeking them out/going directly to them where they are at on the street</p> <p><u>Group 6. Identify and utilize empty housing stock on the North Shore</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Compile empty house data ● Compile data on single living seniors and other under-utilized residences ● Design pilot project (create business plan, communications plan)
<p>Richmond</p> <p><i>(23 participants formed 4 groups)</i></p>	<p><u>Group 1. Client Action Table</u></p> <p>Client Action Table to meet to discuss specific clients and how to work together to meet all of their needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Find agencies that want to be part of the table ● Clients brought to the table: homeless, or at high risk of homelessness ● Protocol in place for high acuity cases (eg. conference call) <p><u>Group 2. Community Education</u></p> <p>Raise awareness around the complexities that result in homelessness, this includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased self-reflection around individual stigmas of homelessness ● Reduce fear around those who are homeless, have mental health or addictions issues ● Increase awareness and dialogue ● Increase empathy <p><u>Group 3. Housing Partnerships</u></p> <p>Seek housing partnerships with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Those who have vacant homes (developers) ● Landlords that want to work with agencies to house people <p><u>Group 4. System/Agency Coordination (Community Table – Homelessness)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Decision makers or designate ● Share roles and agency strengths ● Leave egos behind and agree to coordinate ● Clear mandate and roles for table ● Ensure/maintain financial stability of partner agencies ● Determine where funding is best used

Table 4. Rapid prototyping of solutions to improve Housing First implementation in Metro Vancouver communities continued.

Community	Rapid Prototyping Ideas
<p>Surrey</p> <p><i>(32 participants formed 5 groups)</i></p>	<p><u>Group 1. Public campaign to raise awareness, educate and reduce stigma towards homelessness</u></p> <p>Public homelessness campaign that :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Educates the masses ● Builds strong content and presents in an innovative way ● Measures impact (funding, “shares/hits”, calls to BC211) ● Reaches influential people ● Is hard hitting and impactful <p>Measurable outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>More funding</i> ● <i>More services</i> ● <i>More accountability</i> <p><u>Group 2. Community Landlord Engagement Team to build inventory of affordable housing stock for Housing First clients</u></p> <p>Creation of a Community Landlord Engagement team that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Seeks landlords to participate in Housing First programming ● Making calls, gain landlords/housing stock for HF ● Use landlords already connected to provide support <p><u>Group 3. Introducing mediation into the Residential Tenancy Board process</u></p> <p>Introduce mediation into the Residential Tenancy Board process – make it absolute – to prevent illegal evictions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bring people together to try and problem solve without the loss of housing ● Maybe a third party ● Make it time-sensitive ● Introduce recourse (compensation) for illegal evictions ● Try to align this with other processes and plans already put in place (homelessness action plans) <p><u>Group 4. Creation of a Surrey I.D. Clinic</u></p> <p>An Identification Clinic in Surrey in a centralized location to apply for and store original copies of identification, such as: BC ID, BC Services Card, Birth Certificate, Status Card, Landed Immigrant Card.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Free/discounted cost to acquire new ID ● Free storage to hold original ID ● Link with Corrections, IRCC, Ministry, Service Canada, ICBC, Department of Motor Vehicles ● Biometrics to identify clients ● Non-profit operated with Notary on staff ● Operate 8 am – 8 pm seven days a week with room for flexibility depending on trial period ● Media campaign to promote the service

Table 4. Rapid prototyping of solutions to improve Housing First implementation in Metro Vancouver communities continued.

Community	Rapid Prototyping Ideas
<p>Vancouver <i>(23 participants formed 3 groups)</i></p>	<p>Group 1. Connecting Housing Providers (Forum) Networking and developing a community of practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Include the possibility of people calling in ● Develop community map of providers and their services and/or community members/those who are homeless ► First meeting in September? <p>Group 2. To establish dedicated MSDSI workers with Housing First knowledge to work with Housing First organizations Liaise with Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation (MSDSI) to streamline access to income assistance related services, to improve people’s access to Housing First housing/programming/related supports. Desired outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Improved access</i> ● <i>Less bureaucracy when accessing MSDSI services</i> <p>Group 3. More personalized community consultations for supportive housing projects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Proposing a model of community engagement to the city of Vancouver, for communities where non-market/social housing is being/has been built ● Diversify/improve who has access to community consultations (such as webinars for those who cannot attend in person) ● Preparing educational materials to arrive alongside information regarding consultations (such as highlighting a person who could benefit)

5. PROTOTYPE DEVELOPMENT, TESTING & OUTPUTS

The purpose of prototypes is to develop tangible expressions of good ideas that can be tested and refined with the people who might benefit from the ideas and/or eventually be involved in their implementation. A prototype could be of a product, a service, a program, a policy, a system, a movement, a role, an interaction.¹⁰

The benefits of developing prototypes to address complex problems include¹¹ :

- It provides a simple way for diverse people to work on something tangible
- It is a fast, inexpensive, and low-risk way to test an idea
- It encourages people to be creative

Once the Lab teams for each community completed their full-day sessions together, which included their own unique ethnographic research and rapid prototyping, each group revisited their completed worksheets which captured possible roles, assigned tasks, and immediate next steps to begin testing and re-evaluating their prototypes.

¹⁰ Social Innovation Lab Field Guide: Ben Weinlick, MA-&- Aleeya Velji, M.Ed (2016-17). Adapted from Think Jar Collective lab guide and design tools, and the Edmonton Shift Lab field guide.

¹¹ Edmonton Shift Lab Team. The Shift Lab: Learnings from our First Year. (2018)

The Housing First Innovation Labs project coordinator continued to follow up with the ‘leads’ for each prototype, including discussions with groups to assess how to focus the follow-up workshops/meetings that were funded through this project. These follow up meetings took a variety of forms; some served as progress updates, others served as focused meetings to plan next steps in prototyping or implementing a particular proposed idea/solution. Depending on the community, these follow up sessions could be considered as either planning to continue prototyping, or ‘testing’ to see if each proposed idea should go further. In some communities, groups had devoted time to revisit their rapid prototypes on their own to decide how to proceed; in other cases, groups could not find the time to convene to discuss where/how they saw their ideas evolving. What follows are some key findings from groups and communities that have been able to move their ideas past the rapid prototyping stages of development.

Burnaby

Group 1. Expand Outreach Centre Services in Burnaby and Group 2. Expand Wrap-Around Services in Burnaby:

- Each group meet to discuss common objectives and goals for their prototypes; participants from each group decided to partner to continue to explore the expansion of outreach services in Burnaby
- Both groups convened in a workshop setting facilitated by Vantage Point to discuss the next steps in their approach, deciding to approach membership of The Society To End Homelessness in Burnaby to gain buy-in to participate
- A four-quadrant approach was decided upon to evaluate what area of Burnaby could support the expansion of Outreach Centre Services
- Consensus determined that a needs assessment would be done; the purpose of the needs assessment was therefore to: (1) determine what needs of people experiencing homelessness are not presently met in Burnaby and in each specific quadrant; (2) to determine where improvements can be made in Burnaby; (3) and if any solutions can be found, with the goal of finding out what resources/services are still needed by those who use different services
- With assistance from a university summer student working with The Society To End Homelessness in Burnaby, a needs assessment report was published and shared with local community stakeholders for feedback/verification, with the majority choosing to focus on North Burnaby for possible expansion of services
- A second workshop facilitated by Vantage Point brought together local services and concerned stakeholders to explore next steps for establishing drop in services for people who are homeless in the northern quadrant of the city of Burnaby
- Resulting from the workshop, a working group was formed to scout potential locations, do more in depth resource mapping and seeking funding opportunities to support their prototype

Group 3. Explore Partnerships with Developers to Build Affordable Housing:

- Group members identified a housing/service provider in Richmond that has partnerships with developers that offer short-term rentals at homes slated for demolition; developers have offered up homes that can be lived in for at least six months, sometimes longer than a year, while the city processes their applications to rezone and build townhomes on the properties
- The Richmond provider was invited to a local task force meeting so group members could learn more about how it has been successfully done in Richmond – and see if it is viable in Burnaby

Langley (includes City & Township)

Group 2. Coordinated support for persons experiencing homelessness:

- Group members created a presentation to outline/map the full spectrum of housing needs and illustrating where the gaps are in Langley, to share with municipal and health authority staff
- Group members reached out to the City of Abbotsford to learn from their experiences as they move towards their own Coordinated Access and Intake System

Group 1. Community Education: Campaign in Langley to reduce stigma and provide education on Supportive Housing and Group 4. Formation of a Grassroots Homelessness Advocacy Group to raise awareness and reduce stigma in Langley:

- Both groups discussed how/if they should unite; group one primarily focused on being sector-driven, while group four viewed itself as more community-driven
- A workshop facilitated by Vantage Point brought in the majority of the original full-day session participants to evolve the discussion; in the short term, both groups mobilized to develop a campaign to educate the public on a supportive housing development proposed for the community that was facing opposition
- A second workshop facilitated by Vantage Point brought together groups one and four to discuss how they could align; both groups worked together to create an official name, logo, vision, mandate and short and long term strategic goals
- Priorities for the newly formed group include: working with bylaws and enforcement, advocating for a continuum of housing and support services, reducing stigma and humanizing the homeless, and enhancing local extreme weather services

Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows

Group 1. Community Database/Resource Hub:

- The group was hoping to secure a summer student to work on this; the group concluded that this is likely too large a project for any of them to work on given their other responsibilities

Group 3. Reduce Stigma:

- Group members reached out to the Ridge-Meadows Overdose Response table to gauge their interest in collaborating to host a public community event to humanize the homeless; both groups decided to work together to develop an idea that would bring a diverse community together
- The group sent out an invite to local stakeholders to participate in a workshop facilitated by Vantage Point to plan an event that shows the documentary film “Us & Them” – composed of striking portraits of four extraordinary homeless individuals as they struggle with addiction
- A diverse attendance for the planning workshop, including provincial and federal officials, discussed a comprehensive event plan, including a lived-experience fair, film screening and panel discussion featuring the film director, local service providers and other special guests
- The group has secured funding and is working on a date, time and appropriate venue to host the event

New Westminster

Group 2. Re-launch Wrap-Around Service Network (former program of the New Westminster Homelessness Coalition Society):

- Members of the group reached out to the Coalition and were able to secure all relevant documents related to the wrap-around service network, which previously was a pilot project
- The majority of full-day session participants reconvened for a workshop facilitated by Vantage Point to review documents and identify local resources that may want to participate in a re-launch of the program
- Challenges for Wrap-Around Service Network: successful when first started, but this was happening off the side of the desk. Not enough time allotted; needed a dedicated staff/employee working on this; need funding; need coordinated intake model; it could be cost effective in the long term to have this, but not with current capacity
- After reviewing the documents and much discussion with the Coalition, it was decided that there was not enough capacity in the community to re-launch the network

Group 1. Speak with one voice to influence policy to build affordable units:

- City of New Westminster staff were invited to a second workshop to discuss their policies and strategies regarding housing stock, which include: a renoviction action plan, tenant rights workshops, calling for an end to fixed term leases and working with tenants through residential tenancy branch to prevent work done without permits
- City of New Westminster is developing an inclusionary housing policy: currently an internal document, but agreed to share with innovation lab participants; could bring in non-profits to do consultation with Housing First Innovation Lab group (via information sessions)
- The group drafted a list with non-profits that are New Westminster based and have services in New Westminster; when a developer comes forward and wants to support a local non-profit, the City can provide that list, with basic information on who the organization supports or serves. (Title, population served, etc.)

North Shore (Includes City of North Vancouver, Districts of North & West Vancouver)

Group 4. Connect seniors & empty nesters who need help and have space with potential tenants:

- During the first workshop facilitated by Vantage Point, a North Shore organization mentioned they had received funding to do some community engagement around a “secondary suite roommate matching” strategy, mainly for seniors, and invited other interested groups to the table to collaborate with them

North Shore (Includes City of North Vancouver, Districts of North & West Vancouver)

Group 3. Host a forum focused on creating a Land Trust on the North Shore:

- Also during the first workshop for this community, participants discussed: public buy in/support; land trusts that can function with and/or without government commitment of land; under-built properties of non-profits, churches, legions, privately donated properties, etc. that could be part of a land trust; legacy donations – from philanthropists and leveraging community equity
- Participants put together a comprehensive list of local stakeholders with knowledge of community land trusts that could participate in a second workshop to gain more insight
- A second workshop facilitated by Vantage Point discussed the roles of a land trust, including: stewardship; as a property developer – developing for mission rather than profit; asset management – leveraging value out of the portfolio of assets; property management – maintaining the building and collecting rent; fostering a sense of community within the land trust properties
- Additional discussion points around: who's support is needed; willing land owners (private and/or public land); development expertise; capital and support services
- By the end of the second workshop a draft form of the North Shore Community Land Trust Plan was created by participants
- Resulting from the second workshop, Vancity planned and hosted a 'Real Estate 101' for interested parties, with invitations going out to all NSHTF members
- The event discussed 'Leveraging Assets and Partnerships for Social Purpose Real Estate Development'
- Participants learned about: models and examples of impactful and creative mixed-use real social purpose estate projects; the real estate development process/roadmap; how to get started, including defining your real estate vision and options; and identifying partnership/funding opportunities

Group 4. Create a homelessness awareness campaign to reduce stigma on the North Shore and Group 3. Host a forum focused on creating a Land Trust on the North Shore:

- The North Shore Homelessness Task Force (NSHTF) has decided to add the topics 'Homelessness Awareness' & 'Community Land Trust' to their task groups. They are also looking into making a 3-5 year strategic plan that will be informed by what came out of the innovation lab in their community

Richmond

Group 2. Community Education:

- Full-day session participants convened with the Richmond Poverty Response Committee to develop a community education campaign to reduce stigma towards those who homeless or at risk of homelessness in Richmond

Richmond

- Facilitated by Vantage Point, the workshop focused on: evaluating the prevailing community view of new/developing housing, shelter & related services for homeless in Richmond; stigma, NIMBYism towards pending modular housing, shelter; how to reduce fear and promote the positives
- Participants discussed the resources that local community homeless services providers have to educate the public and whether they were enough; participants identified opportunities to work with other committees/agencies/organizations to present a consistent and unified front
- A new community group – Richmond United for Supportive Housing (RUSH) was formed, with an immediate focus on mobilizing public support for the city’s first modular housing project
- Group members developed a coordinated campaign/message to educate and inform the public on Richmond services for those who are homeless
- Campaign activities to date include: a name, logo and social media presence; hosting a roundtable dialogue aimed to provide a communication platform for supporters and opponents, which included representatives from B.C. Housing and local non-profit organizations; a student-organized sleepover night outdoors at Richmond City Hall in support of modular housing for the homeless; a short rally and pre-drafted speeches to share at city council in support of modular housing

Surrey

Group 4. Creation of a Surrey I.D. Clinic:

- Group members reached out to contacts in Vancouver to learn about how they operate their ID Bank; based on the findings, one participant organization is now looking at the possibility of developing this as a service in their resource centre

Group 2. Community Landlord Engagement Team to build inventory of affordable housing stock for Housing First clients:

- Participants in this group were primarily comprised of a group of four agencies that provide Housing First programming collaboratively; to start, the group reviewed their separate pool of pre-existing landlords to create a shared database
- From this initial process, group members from each of the four agencies recognized the need to ‘do a deeper-dive’ on their shared programming best practices; each identified a need to shift their collaborative work from ‘silos to a team that works in synergy – being responsive with solutions for client needs’
- Two workshops facilitated by Vantage Point supported the agencies in doing an internal review of their best practices individually and collectively; gaps and needs were identified, local resources for clients were reviewed to ensure each organization offered clients all available local resources in their individual case plans

Surrey

- Through the workshops, the group identified the need to develop their own resource and best practice manual to support new and current Housing First workers across all four agencies; goal is to ensure each client receives consistent program support within the community
- Together each of the four agencies created and reviewed local case scenarios to inform details of the best practice manual; the goal is to continuously add to the manual as programming and services evolve

Vancouver

Group 1. Connecting Housing Providers (Forum):

- Group participants determined that the creation of a homelessness services sector table that commits to meeting monthly seemed too challenging a task to take on with current capacity and workloads; full-day session participants were contacted and invited to join a small, already established community group to see if it could be built upon

Group 2. To establish dedicated MSDSI workers with Housing First knowledge to work with Housing First organizations:

- A local Housing First provider has specific contacts with significant experience with HPS-funded Housing First program knowledge within The Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction; these contacts have been shared with all other local Housing First providers to support their clients

Group 3. More personalized community consultations for supportive housing projects:

- Group members compiled a list of modular housing provider contacts for organizations in the region; goal is to gain more insight/feedback on what works/what needs improvement in the community consultation process

6. HIGHLIGHTS & LEARNINGS FROM THE SOCIAL INNOVATION LAB PROCESS

We recognize that Housing First can be viewed as a program model, systems approach and a philosophy. As such, improving implementation of Housing First in communities requires a systems planning approach, beginning with planning and strategy development that recognizes how every part of the homeless serving system will co-ordinate around the Housing First philosophy. Because of the importance in leveraging additional resources and services from other community organizations to support clients' needs, it's important for providers to collaborate across sectors. While some providers currently engaged in cross-sector collaborations reported these to be a strength in the work they do, providers without connections to other organizations felt that this was a weakness in the Housing First model and indicated a desire to build relationships with other providers.

The Housing First Innovation Labs project applied social innovation lab design methodology to support discussion of systems change and improved service delivery by providing a space for stakeholders to better understand what people and communities need to better support Housing First implementation. The labs generated ideas to integrate services, address gaps, avoid duplication and encourage collaboration among diverse stakeholders in eight very unique Metro Vancouver communities. What follows are some key learnings about the application of social innovation lab design (and capacity building) to the homeless serving sector.

Social innovation labs bring people together. In total, 196 local stakeholders participated in eight full-day sessions, and a further 230 community stakeholders participated in 12 follow-up workshops during the lab process in eight Metro Vancouver communities. For some communities, the lab process was the first real opportunity to take a comprehensive look at *their* system in *their* community. During the full-day sessions numerous participants identified services and supports within their local homeless serving system they had not previously been aware of. For lab participants providing direct services for clients (HPS and non-HPS funded alike) the lab revealed how difficult it can be to navigate the perceived resources available vs. the actual resources available in their home communities.

Social innovation labs strengthen relationships and promote partnerships. Social innovation labs really are people and how they dynamically work together to find solutions that never would be created by individuals working alone in silos. Through the Housing First Innovation Labs, new groups have formed, existing CHTs have adopted some prototypes into their long-term strategic plans and other local tables and committees have re-evaluated how they do their work. In one case, lab participant organizations from neighbouring communities were inspired enough to partner on a proposal to adopt a social innovation lab approach to explore creative housing, social and support program solutions for seniors.

Social innovation labs are safe, diverse spaces. A lab creates a safe zone for a collective to explore, challenge assumptions, be bold, be agile enough to adapt as learning emerges, and experiment with solutions. They are guided by convening diverse perspectives on an issue, including gaining insight from people with lived experience of the challenge. As a tool, Human-centered design puts the person who will gain most at the heart of the innovation process. It supports systems change and service delivery by better understanding what people and communities need and want. Many of the rapid prototypes created in each community recognize a need to address the stigma surrounding those who are homeless – and in particular, the need to give a voice to those who are homeless in their community. The lab environment was the perfect setting for lab participants from a variety of perspectives to hear local voices and their unique individual stories/journeys through homelessness.

Table 5. Participant feedback to the Housing First Innovation Lab process.

PARTICIPANTS		
	What Worked	What Didn't
Innovation Lab Team	Well facilitated, time was well managed throughout the day and were effective at keeping participants on track. Games and team building exercises worked well.	Innovation lab team could have played a bigger role in facilitating the discussions happening during small group activities.
Full-Day Session Attendees	Great diversity of attendees from a variety of stakeholders with different roles in serving the population experiencing homelessness.	Broader representation from certain sectors (i.e. government officials, local business community & people with lived experience) for all communities.
Group Dynamics	Great networking opportunity. Rare opportunity to engage in problem solving with people from many different sectors.	May have been helpful to shuffle the groups more throughout the day to give opportunities for different people to interact with each other.
LAB ACTIVITIES		
	What Worked	What Didn't
Mapping	Interesting approach to mapping which allowed people to be creative and was a helpful exercise to get group members oriented to the issues.	Would have been interesting for different groups to be able to see and engage with the mapping that others in the session did. Some felt that mapping activities are overdone.
Ideation	Great opportunity to explore new, innovative and creative solutions to addressing Housing First challenges. Having diverse table groupings allowed for different ideas to be considered.	Could have used more guidance and/or facilitation during the ideation phase to help keep focus on Housing First within groups, and potentially help people think outside of their respective boxes.
Rapid Prototyping	Built excitement and effectively engaged participants in thinking creatively about how to put ideas into action. Participants enjoyed the focus on actionable solutions and spoke very positively about this activity.	The most common comment was that participants would have benefitted from more time to delve further into their rapid prototyping ideas and be able to develop them more during the full-day session.
LOGISTICS		
	What Worked	What Didn't
Session Format	The interactive nature of the session and the space for people to share their experience, opinions and ideas was a unique and valuable opportunity. Great balance of presentation, discussion, networking, and workshop.	Some felt that too much time was initially spent on mapping activities and background discussion while they would have preferred to have had more time to focus on solutions. More time dedicated to rapid prototyping.
Length of Session	The interactive nature of the session and the space for people to share their experience, opinions and ideas was a unique and valuable opportunity. Great balance of presentation, discussion, networking, and workshop.	Some felt that too much time was initially spent on mapping activities and background discussion while they would have preferred to have had more time to focus on solutions. More time dedicated to rapid prototyping.
Meeting Facilities	Functional and comfortable meeting spaces which allowed for easy interactions with other participants.	No notable complaints about the meeting facilities.

Social innovation labs require time – a lot of time – are somewhat unpredictable and require space to properly develop effective prototypes. Over and over we heard we heard from participants the value of the lab process bringing together key stakeholders to work together and share innovative ideas, but having the time to test prototypes and revisit their ideas until they were satisfied with their progress proved to be challenging. Program/service delivery takes precedent over innovation, as it should. We found that communities with historically strong homeless tables, committees or other systems of coordination were more able to navigate their solution-building than those who do not. A single cycle of research, analysis, playback, idea generation and prototyping can take several months to over a year. That’s too way long in an already busting-at-the-seams homeless serving sector.

The problem does not lie with the method itself, but with the need to conduct it at a pace that is both effective and manageable by organizations in the sector.

Capacity matters for successful collaboration. Social innovation labs throughout the world struggle with the “who, what, and how” when trying to roll out prototypes. Often, those who are best-suited to develop innovative ideas within the system they operate don’t have the capacity to manage each developed prototype, create business models, or go out into community to pitch an intervention to stakeholders or networks who might adopt it.¹² Current capacity building initiatives/available funding streams in the Metro Vancouver region do not adequately support the system navigation and inter-agency collaboration necessary to improve homeless serving systems at a local level. Lab participants in multiple communities commented on the excitement of participating, while simultaneously wondering where they would find the time to contribute in the manner they would like.

The mindset of participants is important. To support deep social innovation to emerge we need networks of people and collectives saying, “yes and” more often than “yeah but”. A mindset where people don’t jump to conclusions too quickly; where people are comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity; where people build on the ideas of others more than shoot ideas down; where people can shift between reflection and action and diversity of perspectives is valued – these traits go a long way to ensure success. However, the idea of failure and risk – an important part of the prototyping process – is a sensitive subject in the not-for-profit world. Participants understood the value of collaboration but not the Innovation Lab process initially; one comment was “You want us to test solutions and not be afraid of failure, but what we do is a matter of life or death, we cannot fail in our line of work.” Homelessness is growing in the Metro Vancouver region and the sector is overwhelmed by a housing crisis and opioid crisis that continues to worsen; burnout is very real and it’s understandable that some in the field may not see the value of this approach given the circumstances.

Creating buy-in is key, but be clear on the process. Usually people want to launch a social innovation lab because business as usual approaches on their own are not working to make progress. There is, however, a danger where participants can get overwhelmed by complexity and do nothing, or simply revert back to business as usual approaches to solution finding. Social innovation labs often carry the hopes of a community that there is a magic formula or process to solve very big and complex challenges in a short amount of time – sadly, this is not true. Being clear about the expectations, time and capacity needed to participate effectively in a lab process goes a long way to ensure that the people you want to be a part of the process can manage the ups and downs and feel like they can make a difference. ‘Human-Centred Design’, ‘Systems Thinking’, ‘Ideation’ – these concepts and terms associated with collaborative processes have meaning, but you have to be able to simplify the jargon and ensure people know what the process entails.

¹² Edmonton Shift Lab Team. The Shift Lab: Learnings from our First Year. (2018)

Make sure all of the key players are involved. Social innovation labs work best when there is representation from a wide swath of stakeholders with multiple perspectives who can impact and are impacted by the complex problem. Does the lab have partnerships with people who have insights and access to the system it wants to change? Groups or organizations in the community working on the issue or who care about it deeply; people and groups connected with the issue from municipal, provincial and federal system perspectives; including those with lived experience of the challenge; inspiring leaders close by and far away doing promising work in the challenge area – this diversity stands the best chance at stimulating solutions that truly make systems change.

Not surprisingly, Metro Vancouver communities that had participation from all three levels of government, health authorities and the key related stakeholders were better able to collaborate on tangible solutions that have the chance to positively change the local homeless serving system. Some communities, however, had provincial and federal government participation but no involvement from local government.

Yes it's collaboration but leaders and champions still need to emerge. The role of local Community Homelessness Tables (CHTs) as facilitators of local leadership on homelessness issues were crucial to the development and co-design phases of the social innovation labs. They identify gaps in services and establish priorities, build capacity, and keep their communities informed about the status of homelessness locally and opportunities to support solutions. Having local CHTs emerge as lab co-designers were vital in ensuring lab momentum continued to push prototypes further along. In a sector where capacity and resources are limited, CHTs remind us that any capacity building or collaborative efforts still need champions to push ideas and solutions forward. Think of a lab process as a capacity building effort similar to a CHT; you need structure and organization to convene and collaborate continuously (and productively) on mutually agreed upon challenges and solutions. In some communities, the co-created ideas and rapid prototypes from the lab groups that emerged during the full-day session began and ended with no champions to carry the momentum forward.

Social innovation labs require autonomy. Ultimately, the Housing First Innovation Lab Team had to be committed to the process and what each community would produce, without knowing what that would be. Using a Human-Centred Design approach we were able to meet each community where it was at (to capture their own unique issues), but we couldn't expect to unilaterally guide or steer it. Success or failure, outputs or outcomes, these things were dependent on each community; they were empowered to take ownership of their own ideas and action plans.

That said, it's naive to imagine that there are never any political considerations when investigating complex problems, but the more distance a lab can have from an agenda other than its own, the better. During the duration of the lab, participant Metro Vancouver communities were mindful of the upcoming municipal elections and how new regimes in local government could change the landscape in the local homeless serving sector. While our team emphasized ideas that could be 'tested' with existing community resources, assets and people during the full-day sessions, many participants felt the need to put a hold on certain ideas in various stages of development during the prototyping/test stages until the elections were over. Not surprisingly, this behavior illustrates how the homeless serving system is influenced by the socio-political challenges (funding, stigma, advocacy and other supports) that disrupt attempts at systems change.

7. CONCLUSION

The Housing First Innovation Labs project was developed to create more opportunities for local stakeholders to network and cultivate inter-agency collaboration in support of a Housing First approach to homelessness in eight unique Metro Vancouver communities. Recognizing that there are unique gaps and barriers in each community, participants reviewed research and provided feedback on the gaps and challenges to delivering services within the Housing First framework. Using a social innovation lab approach, this project employed systems and design thinking methods to addressing homelessness in each community to generate ideas about new ways to integrate services, address gaps, avoid duplication and encourage collaboration among diverse stakeholders. The labs were co-designed with the community to create an open space for innovative problem solving and convened Housing First providers (HPS and non-HPS funded), non-Housing First organizations, multiple levels of government, funders, health authorities, community partners and those with lived-experience.

Through the lab process, participants gained a better understanding of the challenges and complexities of integrating services to better support Housing First programming within their local homeless serving system. In many cases, the lab process was the first opportunity for community stakeholders to convene and collaborate on local systems issues. However, outside of the full-day sessions and workshops made available through this project, many communities struggled with further developing ideas that would integrate services or enact the systems changes that were identified collectively. Not having the dedicated funding, staffing resources, or capacity building structures in place to carry the work forward was noted as the greatest challenge to participants.

Other themes emerged as barriers to improving coordination of services in many communities, including a lack of broader buy-in from other sectors, systems and stakeholders identified in the homeless serving system, a lack of vital services (mental health and low barrier services being the most cited), stigma and discrimination (from elected officials and community members) and most importantly, a lack of affordable housing.

Successful Housing First implementation – successful implementation of any homeless/at-risk serving system – requires appropriate levels of affordable housing. Approximately 5 people become homeless within Metro Vancouver every week.¹³ The housing crisis continues to worsen and outlying Metro Vancouver communities are no longer immune to the affordability issues once thought to be exclusive to the city of Vancouver. While efforts to increase capacity and inter-agency collaboration may help support homeless services, critically low affordable housing stock levels will prevent Housing First from being a viable model in the region.

Applying the lab approach in each of the eight participating Metro Vancouver communities afforded our team to view the challenges to collaboration both locally and region-wide. It is not just organizations within communities working in isolation from one another; municipalities are working in isolation from one another too. Information exchange, data sharing and collaboration is limited – yet the needs of vulnerable populations cross municipal boundaries.

8. CHANGING THE HOUSING FIRST LANDSCAPE: THE REDESIGN OF THE HOMELESSNESS PARTNERING STRATEGY TO REACHING HOME

In June 2018, the Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, announced the Government of Canada will be making bold changes to the federal strategy to prevent and reduce homelessness. Reaching Home will replace the existing Homeless Partnering Strategy (HPS), and

13 Regional Homelessness Task Force. (2017). Addressing Homelessness in Metro Vancouver. Metro Vancouver.

officially launches in April 2019. Reaching Home will support knowledge collection and sharing as well as introduce coordinated access as a program priority. Coordinated Access will help communities shift toward a more coordinated and systems-based approach to addressing homelessness. To support this transformation, federal funding will be provided to Designated Communities to help them implement coordinated access, including adopting the necessary Information Technology infrastructure. The goal of Coordinated Access is to help communities ensure fairness, prioritize people most in need of assistance, and match individuals to appropriate housing and services in a more streamlined and coordinated way.¹⁴

What does this mean? A big shift with Reaching Home is that it pairs system planning with community-led responses. This means that communities are challenged not just to deliver good programs, but to think bigger about how their network of programs and systems in place can respond quickly, and work together. Capacity building that currently does not exist will be needed to help communities create and manage local coordinated access and assessment processes.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Reaching Home will prioritize a more coordinated and systems-based approach to addressing homelessness. However, through the Housing First Innovation Labs, we have found that currently Metro Vancouver communities do not have the necessary support to coordinate, plan and implement systems change locally. Communities will need to convene in unprecedented ways. Getting and helping them to chart a path forward that aligns with federal and provincial priorities, meet their local needs, and utilize assets and opportunities will be essential.

The social innovation labs approach recognizes that systems change needs to happen at the individual, cultural and systems level. Here are some recommendations that will support communities implement systems change:

- Re-evaluate current interagency and homelessness tables at a local level and region-wide to ensure communities have the capacity and resources needed to develop and maintain inter-agency collaboration and review progress and learnings
- Provide incentives/develop more program funding models that encourage partnerships amongst local providers to deliver services and avoid duplication
- Provide a robust, separate funding stream that encourages partnerships between community groups and homelessness service providers throughout the region to regularly host events that increase awareness, address stigma and educate/engage the public on homelessness initiatives
- Ensure that intake processes and access are streamlined and consistent across the region so that vulnerable populations that cross municipal boundaries can effectively navigate the homeless serving system
- Better support community systems plans that address homelessness through a process that provides more coordination and alignment between Indigenous, municipal, provincial, territorial and/or federal systems
- Provide the necessary technology to align data collection, public reporting, intake, assessment and referrals to enable coordinated service delivery
- Provide communities the education and expertise in systems planning they need to effectively implement coordinated and systems-based approach to addressing homelessness

¹⁴ Backgrounder, Reaching Home. (2018). <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2018/06/backgrounder-reaching-home.html>

APPENDIX ONE: *Table of lab participants in each community by organization.*

Community	Participating Organizations	# of Participants	Current HPS HF Funded Program Participation?
Burnaby	Burnaby Community Services, Burnaby Health Services, Burnaby Hospital, Burnaby Outreach Resource Centre, Burnaby RCMP, Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness, City of Burnaby, Community Engagement for Peter Julian MP Burnaby - New Westminster, Fraser Health, Lookout Housing and Health Society, MLA Anne Kang, Progressive Housing Society, Purpose Society, Society to End Homelessness in Burnaby, Vancity, Vancity Community Foundation	21	Yes - Progressive Housing Society: Burnaby Housing and Outreach Hub (in partnership with Lookout Housing and Health Society)
Langley (Includes City and Township)	Acting Mayor - Township of Langley, City of Langley, Community Health Specialist - Fraser Health, Encompass Support Services Society, Environmental Health Officer Fraser Health, Friends Langley Vineyard Church, ICM Team - Fraser Health, Langley Division of Family Practice, Langley Lions Senior Citizens Housing Society, Langley Senior Citizens Action Table, Lookout Housing and Health Society, Lower Fraser Valley Aboriginal Society, Mayor - Township of Langley, Public Health Nurse - Fraser Health, Salvation Army - Gateway of Hope, Stepping Stone Community Services Society, Township of Langley - Planning	26	Yes - Stepping Stone Community Services Society: Langley Outreach Housing First; and Lookout Housing and Health Society: Langley Housing First Project
Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows	Alouette Addictions Services; Alouette Heights, Coast Mental Health, Board of Education School District 42, City of Maple Ridge, Fraser Health, Fraser River All Nations Aboriginal Society, Lookout Housing and Health Society, Overdose Response Task Force, RainCity Housing and Support Society, Ridge Meadows Hospital, Salvation Army Ridge Meadows	22	Yes - RainCity Housing and Support Society: Housing First ICM team for Maple Ridge
New Westminster	Aunt Leah's Place, BCNPHA, City of New Westminster, Fraser Regional Integration Program – MSDSI & FHA, Fraser Works Co-Op/Work BC, GVSS (now HSABC), Lookout Housing and Health Society, Purpose Society, Seniors Services Society, Spirit of the Children Society, Elizabeth Fry Society Of Greater Vancouver, Salvation Army Stevenson House, Union Gospel Mission	20	Yes - Progressive Housing Society: Burnaby Housing and Outreach Hub (in partnership with Lookout Housing and Health Society); Aunt Leah's Place: The Link Housing First; and Elizabeth Fry Society: A Key of Her Own
North Shore (Includes City of North Vancouver, Districts of North & West Vancouver)	BC Green Party, BC Housing, BCNPHA, Canadian Mental Health Association, City of North Vancouver, CMHA North and West Vancouver Branch, Community Housing Action Committee, District of North Vancouver, Dunderave Festival of Lights Society, Harvest Project, Hollyburn Family Services Society, Landlord BC, Lookout Housing and Health Society, Ministry of Social Development, North Shore Homelessness Task Force, NS Crisis Services Society, Salvation Army, Squamish First Nation, Turning Point Recovery Society, Vancity, Vancouver Coastal Health, West Vancouver Community Foundation	29	Yes - Hollyburn Family Services Society: North Shore Housing First for Youth

APPENDIX ONE: *Table of lab participants in each community by organization continued.*

Community	Participating Organizations	# of Participants	Current HPS HF Funded Program Participation?
Richmond	Atira Women's Resource Society, BC Housing, Chimo Community Services, City of Richmond, Coast Mental Health, Ministry of Social Development, RCMP, Richmond Addictions Services, Richmond Centre for Disability, Richmond Poverty Response Committee, Richmond Society for Community Living, St. Alban Anglican Church, S.U.C.C.E.S.S., Salvation Army Richmond, Transit Police, Turning Point Recovery Society, Vancouver Coastal Health	23	N/A
Surrey	Atira Women's Resource Society, City of Surrey, Downtown Surrey BIA, Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver, Friendship Boulevard Foundation, Lookout Housing and Health Society, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ministry of Social Development & Poverty Reduction, Options Community Services, RainCity Housing and Support Society, Surrey North Community Corrections, Realistic Success Recovery Society, Sources BC, Surrey Mental Health outreach, Surrey Homelessness and Housing Task Force, Surrey Homelessness and Housing Society, Surrey Urban Mission, Vancity	32	Yes - Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver: Surrey Housing First Collaborative (includes Options, Sources BC and Lookout Society); and RainCity Housing and Support Society: Surrey ICM Team
Vancouver	Atira Women's Resource Society, Downtown Eastside Women's Centre, Heatley Community Health Centre, Helping Spirit Lodge Society, John Howard Society of Greater Vancouver, Lookout Housing and Health Society, Metro Vancouver, Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House, MPA Society, Pacific Community Resources Society, PHS Community Services Society, PLEA Community Services, St. Paul's Hospital, Streethome Foundation, Vancouver Coastal Health - ACT Team	23	Yes - Downtown Eastside Women's Centre: Find and Keep; John Howard Society: From Prison to Community Providing Housing First; and Pacific Community Resources Society: Broadway Youth Resource Centre Housing Outreach



“How can the community come together to support this key area of concern. – Local Business Member

We need to continue to find ways to build a full continuum of affordable housing” – City Employee

Burnaby: Innovation Lab Problem Statement

Burnaby is comprised four community hubs (Brentwood, Lougheed, Metrotown and Edmonds) each of which is centred around a library, community centre and other services for community members. Burnaby has service providers and the Society to End Homelessness in Burnaby who meet regularly and are committed to inter-agency collaboration to meet the needs of people experiencing poverty and homelessness in the city.



The Challenge

Housing First has emerged as an effective model for moving people experiencing homelessness into long-term independent housing; however, many communities face important barriers to successful implementation – most notably a lack of affordable housing. Through consultations with the Society to End Homelessness in Burnaby, local officials and community members, challenges related to Housing First implementation have been identified. The **Burnaby Housing First Innovation Lab** will address the following:

Challenge: Within our community, how can we implement Housing First in a way that integrates the 5 principles?

- Immediate access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirements
- Consumer choice and self determination
- Individualized and client driven supports
- Recovery orientation
- Social and community integration

What Housing First looks like in Burnaby?

- Two important hallmarks of Housing First are client choice and immediate access to housing; however, a significant barrier to successful Housing First implementation in Burnaby is being priced out of your neighbourhood of choice. Many individuals face challenges in accessing social housing due to past evictions, long waiting lists, or not meeting the specific eligibility criteria for certain housing projects, making both neighbourhood choice and immediate access to housing challenging.
- Local service providers have made efforts to improve service coordination and have seen success in joint funding applications; however, the demand for services exceeds the capacity of many of the services that Housing First clients rely upon. Many people experiencing homelessness in Burnaby must travel to other communities (primarily Vancouver) to have their service needs met – particularly in terms of addiction treatment (i.e. detoxification services, methadone maintenance, etc.).
- Burnaby has effective outreach services; however, navigating the system of services has been noted as a significant barrier. Many services have eligibility requirements (i.e. age, gender, disability), long waitlists and restrictions in terms of program and treatment adherence in order to maintain support.
- Emergency homeless shelters generally operate as an important point of referral to other essential services, so in the absence of such a shelter, this type of service hub does not exist.

Principles of Housing First



Immediate access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirements



Consumer choice and self-determination



Individualized and client-driven supports



Recovery orientation



Social and community integration

What is Burnaby already doing?

Compared to other Metro Vancouver communities, Burnaby benefits from greater availability financial support services, and has effective outreach services for people experiencing homelessness. Burnaby, however, has notably lower levels of service support in the areas of

addictions, health care, food, shelters, basic goods and services, and civic services, and most strikingly the city currently does not have a permanent emergency homeless shelter¹.

- Burnaby service providers and community members are actively engaged in their communities, hosting, contributing to and participating regularly community events.
- The Society to End Homelessness in Burnaby meets regularly and is committed to inter-agency collaboration and service delivery.
- Positive connections have been built between the outreach teams and local RCMP, especially in relation to the Extreme Weather Response Shelter.
- Financial supports are available through employment programs, tax services and financial literacy resources.
- The libraries situated within the four community hubs offer important points of resource access and community connection.

*" With the **lack of subsidized housing stock** available, people living in poverty and/or with addictions, mental health issues and/or physical health issues require a much **longer lasting rent subsidy** that allows them more time to pursue avenues that lead to independence of a rent subsidy. **Ideally, the rent subsidies would be permanent.** Rent subsidies would only expire if the client's income level eventually exceeded agreed upon maximum levels that are based on the current market value and availability of housing in their individual communities. If permanent subsidies cannot be granted at this time, then **allowing rent subsidies to continue indefinitely, provided the client is actively pursuing goals that are reasonable and within the client's individual abilities, upon individualized timelines, that are appropriate for each individual to achieve independence of the rent subsidy.**" — Burnaby Service Provider*



Housing First supports people who are homeless and living with mental illness by combining the immediate provision of permanent housing with wrap-around supports.

¹ Bell, J. (2016). *Mapping Metro Vancouver to Support Housing First Implementation*. Greater Vancouver Shelter Strategy. & Canham, S., Battersby, L., & Fang, M.L. (2016). *Mapping Metro Vancouver to Support Housing First Implementation: Service Barriers, Gaps, and Recommendations*. Simon Fraser University, Gerontology Research Centre.

Source: <http://ontario.cmha.ca/news/national-homechez-soi-project-helps-people-find-keep-home/#.WLDPcBgZOuU>



“The demand exceeds the supply by far and the owners want to make the most money, it's no longer affordable for most people to live in the lower mainland - we need to address this at every level”

– Local Service Provider

Langley: Innovation Lab Problem Statement

Langley (including both the City of Langley and the Township of Langley) is a community that has made important strides to promote efficiency within its system of resources that serve people experiencing homelessness through effective collaboration between service providers. Compared to other Metro Vancouver communities, Langley benefits from greater availability of addiction services, food banks, civic services, community connections services and temporary shelter services. Limitations to the availability of services in Langley include the fact that there are few long-term housing options, and many of the available resources are specialized in their purpose or target population, requiring that many still need to seek supports in other communities.

The Challenge

Housing First has emerged as an effective model for moving people experiencing homelessness into long-term independent housing; however, many communities face important barriers to successful implementation – most notably a lack of affordable housing. The **Langley Housing First Innovation Lab** will address the following:

Challenge: Within our community, how can we implement Housing First in a way that integrates the 5 principles?

- Immediate access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirements
- Consumer choice and self determination
- Individualized and client driven supports
- Recovery orientation
- Social and community integration



What Does Housing First look like in Langley?

- Two important hallmarks of Housing First are client choice and immediate access to housing; however, a significant barrier to successful Housing First implementation in Langley is being priced out of your neighbourhood of choice. Many individuals face challenges in accessing social housing due to past evictions, long waiting lists, or not meeting the specific eligibility criteria for certain housing projects, making both neighbourhood choice and immediate access to housing challenging.
- Local service providers have made important efforts to improve service coordination, reducing duplication and encouraging collaboration; however, the demand for services exceeds the capacity of many of the resources that Housing First clients rely upon. Further, when service needs cannot be met in Langley, clients need to travel to other communities to access necessary services.
- The majority of services and low-income housing are concentrated in the same area, limiting community integration and the opportunities for people to live in other areas of Langley while continuing to access necessary services. Community integration is further limited by fragmented transit access.

Survey Summary

Challenge areas with highest levels of support:

1. Access to and availability of affordable housing (*73% ranked as #1; 93% ranked within top 3 priorities*)
2. Stigma and discrimination (*60% ranked within top 3 priorities*)
3. Limited low-barrier services and restrictive eligibility requirements (*60% ranked within top 3 priorities*)

Summary of challenges related to Housing First

- Low vacancy rates • Limited low barrier housing options • Barriers to income assistance and rent subsidies • Access to supportive housing for people with concurrent disorders • Need for partnerships between developers and affordable housing providers • Stigma and discrimination • Access to meal programs • Private landlord engagement
-

Principles of Housing First



Immediate access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirements



Consumer choice and self-determination



Individualized and client-driven supports



Recovery orientation



Social and community integration

What is Langley already doing?

- Existing organizations have well established collaborative relationships with each other, working together effectively to facilitate client referrals and transitions from outreach to shelters to permanent housing.
- Access to mental health and addiction services is well facilitated.
- Community connections have been built between medical practitioners and the RCMP through a liaison officer.
- Community support can be found through access to libraries, low cost recreation, animal protection and faith groups.
- BC Housing has announced a 49 unit supportive housing project in partnership with Stepping Stone Community Services to be supported by an Intensive Case Management (ICM) team for Spring 2018.



Housing First supports people who are homeless and living with mental illness by combining the immediate provision of permanent housing with wrap-around supports.

Source: <http://ontario.cmha.ca/news/national-homechez-soi-project-helps-people-find-keep-home/#.WLDPcBgZOuU>



"I would like to find creative ways to engage populations who are marginalized and stigmatized in our community."
– Local Service Provider

Maple Ridge: Innovation Lab Problem Statement

Maple Ridge is a community that has shown a commitment to addressing the needs of people experiencing homelessness through collaboration between service providers involved in the Housing Planning Table and through efforts of numerous organizations to provide community meals. Compared to other Metro Vancouver communities, Maple Ridge benefits from greater availability of advocacy, mental health services, basic goods and services, and victim services. Limitations to the availability of services in Maple Ridge include the fact that there are few long-term housing options, and many of the available resources are specialized in their purpose or target population, requiring that many still need to seek supports in other communities. Further, Maple Ridge is unique given the presence of provincial correctional facilities, which represent a greater burden of managing transitions from institutional care through to community living and integration.



The Challenge

Housing First has emerged as an effective model for moving people experiencing homelessness into long-term independent housing; however, many communities face important barriers to successful implementation – most notably a lack of affordable housing. The **Maple Ridge Housing First Innovation Lab** will address the following:

Challenge: Within our community, how can we implement Housing First in a way that integrates the 5 principles?

- Immediate access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirements
- Consumer choice and self determination
- Individualized and client driven supports
- Recovery orientation
- Social and community integration

What Does Housing First look like in Maple Ridge?

- Two important hallmarks of Housing First are client choice and immediate access to housing; however, a significant barrier to successful Housing First implementation in Maple Ridge is being priced out of your neighbourhood of choice. Many individuals face challenges in accessing social housing due to past evictions, long waiting lists, or not meeting the specific eligibility criteria for certain housing projects, making both neighbourhood choice and immediate access to housing challenging.
- Local service providers have made important efforts to improve service coordination; however, the demand for services exceeds the capacity of many of the resources that Housing First clients rely upon. Many services have limited hours of operation with few being accessible during the evening or on weekends. Further when service needs cannot be met in Maple Ridge, clients need to travel to other communities to access necessary services.
- The majority of services and low-income housing are concentrated in the same area, limiting community integration and the opportunities for people to live in other areas of Maple Ridge while continuing to access necessary services. Community integration is further limited by fragmented transit access.

Survey Summary

Challenge areas with highest levels of support:

1. Access to and availability of affordable housing (*58% ranked as #1; 89% ranked within top 3 priorities*)
2. Stigma and discrimination (*63% ranked within top 3 priorities*)
3. Limited low-barrier services and restrictive eligibility requirements (*42% ranked within top 3 priorities*)

Summary of challenges related to Housing First

- Low vacancy rates • Limited low barrier housing options • Barriers to income assistance and rent subsidies • Access to supportive housing for people with concurrent disorders • Need for partnerships between developers and affordable housing providers • Stigma and discrimination • Access detox services • Private landlord engagement • Housing & support options for youth
-

Principles of Housing First



Immediate access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirements



Consumer choice and self-determination



Individualized and client-driven supports



Recovery orientation



Social and community integration

What is Maple Ridge already doing?

- Existing organizations have established collaborative relationships with each other through the Housing Planning Table.
- Several organizations provide multiple services creating localized service hubs where clients can have multiple needs met in a small geographic area.
- Community organizations participate in providing meals and the community has more effective food security programming compared to other Metro Vancouver communities.
- A 40-bed low barrier supportive housing complex and 40 bed emergency shelter to be operated by the Salvation Army are slated for development, funded by the Provincial Government.
- Newcomers to the area can access community resources through an existing service available at www.ridgemeanowsnewcomers.com.



Housing First supports people who are homeless and living with mental illness by combining the immediate provision of permanent housing with wrap-around supports.

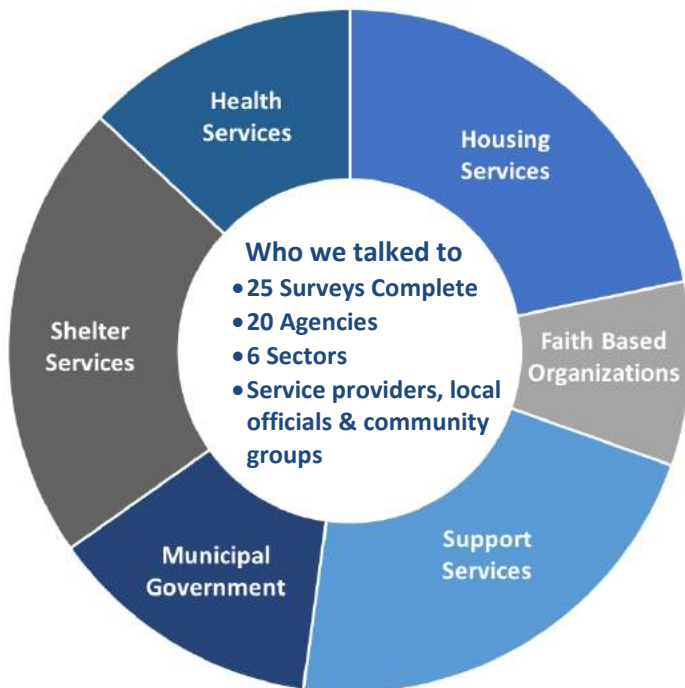
Source: <http://ontario.cmha.ca/news/national-homechez-soi-project-helps-people-find-keep-home/#.WLDPCBgZOuU>



“The community is more tolerant here. It is very progressive, so people don’t necessarily need to conform to one specific way of living.” – New Westminster Service Provider

New Westminster: Innovation Lab Problem Statement

The community of New Westminster is socially aware and responsive to the challenges facing the population of those experiencing homelessness, and service providers have made significant efforts towards improving coordination across services in the area. Despite these efforts, homelessness remains a significant challenge and those experiencing homelessness face a variety of barriers to exiting homelessness in this community. Within the framework of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy’s Housing First initiative, challenges related to the availability of affordable rental housing are especially apparent. The following provides a brief overview of the community context and the specific issue that will be addressed during the New Westminster Innovation Lab.



The Challenge

Housing First has emerged as an effective model for moving people experiencing homelessness into long-term independent housing; however, many communities face important barriers to successful implementation – most notably a lack of affordable housing. Through consultations with New Westminster Housing First service providers, local officials and community members, a priority challenge concerning **Housing First** was identified as follows:

Challenge: Housing Stock/Access to Affordable Housing: There is a shortage of land and/or properties dedicated to affordable (barrier-free) housing in New Westminster.

- Long term: how can we increase the availability of barrier-free housing stock?
- Short term: how can we collaborate to better support current clients?
- How can we find and support landlords willing to provide housing on a ‘Housing First’ basis?

What Housing First looks like in New Westminster?

- New Westminster has higher concentrations of housing and shelter resources compared to some other communities in Metro Vancouver; however, the community also has a higher proportion of renting households impacting the availability and affordability of rental housing.
- Housing First strives to provide client choice in terms of neighbourhood and type of housing; this is a significant challenge in New Westminster. In the absence of dedicated and sufficient rent subsidies, Housing First service providers have limited to no capacity to place clients in housing in New Westminster, requiring that clients move outside of the area (typically Surrey) to find affordable housing.
- Identifying privately owned vacant rental properties is a significant challenge due an increasingly competitive rental market and lack of centralized database to catalogue available housing. Further, prospective Housing First tenants face significant stigma and discrimination from landlords who are concerned about the potential risks of renting their property to someone who has experienced homelessness.



Immediate access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirements



Consumer choice and self-determination



Individualized, recovery-oriented, and client-driven supports



Harm reduction



Social and community integration

*"I'd say one of the resources in the community is a real strong sense of community-mindedness. There is a lot of activity going on in community associations, and engagement. I think the City has been really responsive around social issues. I know that in my previous life... there was a lot of pushback...around social housing and actually the city turned down 22 million dollars in funding for a men's housing project. And **we went to New Westminster to have a lot to look at some of the housing programs and to look at really successful examples of the downtown business, working together with social providers and stuff.**"*

– New Westminster service provider

What is New Westminster already doing?

New Westminster is a uniquely socially aware and responsive community, and this is seen throughout various levels of government and through the engagement of local service providers. Some examples of innovative programming include:

- Creation of the Homeless Coalition
- A commitment to vulnerable populations through the City of New Westminster Affordable Housing Strategy, and affordable housing projects
- The Friendly Landlord Network for homeless youth created by Aunt Leah's Place
- Creation of the Rent Bank
- Ongoing support from local community organizations such as the Business Improvement Association
- Addressing transportation needs through the City's provision of a free shuttle service

*"I think the success in keeping the housing that we've had (we've had one [client housed] for almost a year now), is **having honestly, landlords that understand**. Having them be like, can you help us, this is an opportunity, they are kind of learning. **I am amazed at some of the landlords I have talked to**. But then there are landlords that flatly ask you what's wrong with them and then they close the door if they don't want that stigma, or are adverse to people who have been on the system. **SO, I think its knowledge – teaching landlords that this is someone who is trying to better themselves, who is trying to learn the skills and “step up to the plate” and be a part of society and be part of their community. I've had the luck in sustaining housing, just because I've had some really great landlords.**" - New Westminster Resident*



Housing First supports people who are homeless and living with mental illness by combining the immediate provision of permanent housing with wrap-around supports.

Source: <http://ontario.cmha.ca/news/national-homechez-soi-project-helps-people-find-keep-home/#.WLDPcBgZOuU>



“How can we make it mutually beneficial for everyone; the developer, the municipalities, the support services and the person that needs help? What does everyone involved need to get out of it?”
 – North Shore Homelessness Task Force Member

North Shore: Innovation Lab Problem Statement

The North Shore is comprised of three major municipalities including the City of North Vancouver, the District of North Vancouver and the City of West Vancouver, as well as the Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. Also, included within this grouping are the communities of Lions Bay, Bowen Island and Gambier Island. Across these communities, the North Shore has developed a highly effective Homelessness Task Force that provides up-to-date communication on available services, facilitates coordination and partnerships in funding, and supports community action. Despite these efforts, homelessness remains a significant challenge and those experiencing homelessness face a variety of barriers to exiting homelessness in these communities. Within the framework of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy’s Housing First initiative, challenges related to the availability of affordable rental housing are especially apparent. The following provides a brief overview of the community context and the specific issue that will be addressed during the North Shore Housing First Innovation Lab.

The Challenge

Housing First has emerged as an effective model for moving people experiencing homelessness into long-term independent housing; however, many communities face important barriers to successful implementation – most notably a lack of affordable housing. Through consultations with North Shore Housing First service providers, local officials and community members, a priority challenge concerning **Housing First** was identified as follows:

Challenge: Access to, and availability of non-market affordable housing.

Housing First program staff on the North Shore are challenged with locating suitable and affordable housing:

- **How can diverse stakeholders collaborate to develop non-market housing across distinct communities on the North Shore?**



What Housing First looks like on the North Shore?

- A hallmark of Housing First is client choice; however, a significant barrier to successful Housing First implementation on the North Shore is being priced out of your municipality of choice. Many individuals face challenges in accessing social housing due to past evictions and long waiting lists, and affordable market housing options are rare.
- Local service providers have made efforts to improve service coordination and have seen success in joint funding applications; however, the demand for services exceeds the capacity of many of the services that Housing First clients rely upon. Many people experiencing homelessness on the North Shore must travel to other communities (primarily Vancouver) to have their service needs met – particularly in terms of addictions treatment (i.e. detoxification services, methadone maintenance, etc.)
- Most services are concentrated in the City of North Vancouver, which is effective for service coordination between agencies, but, this can pose a challenge for implementing new services or for clients who are living in areas removed from this main hub of services.

Principles of Housing First



Immediate access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirements



Consumer choice and self-determination



Individualized, recovery-oriented, and client-driven supports



Harm reduction



Social and community integration

*“One of the good things about the North Shore is that **there are three areas that seem to have high concentration of services, but there are three areas...** it isn’t as obvious as the DTES. Which, you can look at as a good thing, because we’re all living together; you can look at it as a bad thing because **there’s a lot of people that don’t recognize that there’s homelessness on the North Shore**” – North Shore Service Provider*

What is The North Shore already doing?

Compared to other Metro Vancouver communities, the North Shore benefits from greater availability of health services, basic goods and services, civic services and community connection services, but has notably less housing and shelter services than other communities. The following provides a brief overview of the strengths, challenges and action areas for this community.

- The Homelessness Task Force meets regularly and has strong attendance across the North Shore communities.
- Service providers have engaged in coordination activities to reduce duplication to meet client needs including coordination around landlord engagement and creating working relationships between staff across different agencies.
- Service providers know the population of individuals experiencing homelessness and are therefore well equipped to maintain relationships and re-connect with those who they have lost contact with more easily.
- Municipal support includes: training in mental health first aid for frontline city staff; and training to check renovation permits to investigate 'renovictions'.
- Strong relationships and partnerships with community addictions, health services (both mental and physical) and policing have increased support for people experiencing homelessness.

*"On the North Shore, it can be very tense, as **many people love their single-family homes and the existing characteristics of their neighbourhood**. When you start talking about height and density, people freak out. Most often though, **a solution to affordable housing issues is height and density**".*

— North Shore Homelessness Task Force Member

Promising Ideas

- Modelling future affordable housing projects after successful examples of housing developed locally and in other areas (i.e. Storeys (Richmond); The Kimpton (North Shore); Lu'ma Native Housing Society (Vancouver); etc.).
- Expanding opportunities for rent supplementation using the Hollyburn Family Services rent supplement program as an example.
- Developing a rent bank to prevent individuals and families from experiencing homelessness and assist low-income individuals and families to get into housing.



Housing First supports people who are homeless and living with mental illness by combining the immediate provision of permanent housing with wrap-around supports.

Source: <http://ontario.cmha.ca/news/national-homechez-soi-project-helps-people-find-keep-home/#.WLDPCBgZOUU>



*“Affordable Housing is more than just the building of units. Improvement is needed to facilitate and support service providers to acquire and operate affordable housing.” –
Local Service Provider*

Richmond: Innovation Lab Problem Statement

The following provides a brief summary of the survey results collected as a precursor to the Richmond Housing First Innovation Lab. Based on the following findings we suggest the **Richmond Housing First Innovation Lab** will address the following:



Challenge: Within our community, how can we implement Housing First in a way that integrates the 5 principles?

- Immediate access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirements
- Consumer choice and self determination
- Individualized and client driven supports
- Recovery orientation
- Social and community integration

What Housing First looks like in Richmond?

- The demand for services exceeds the capacity of many of the services that homeless clients rely upon. Currently, many people experiencing homelessness in Richmond must travel to other communities (primarily Vancouver) to have some of their service needs met – particularly in terms of addictions treatment (i.e. detoxification services, methadone maintenance, etc.), shelter services and housing options.
- Richmond does have crisis focused services to address the immediate and

more urgent needs of people experiencing homelessness; however, many of these services do not have the resources or adequate staffing to provide ongoing supportive services to clients. Navigating the system of services has been noted as a significant barrier whereby a lack of coordination and consistency between existing services often requires that clients must complete new intake assessments with each different service accessed. Many services have eligibility requirements (i.e. age, gender, disability), long waitlists and restrictions in terms of program and treatment adherence in order to maintain support.

Survey Summary

Challenge areas with highest levels of support:

1. Access to and availability of affordable housing (61% ranked as #1; 87% ranked within top 3 priorities)
2. Uncoordinated housing placement and service delivery (17% ranked as #1; 65% ranked within top 3 priorities)
3. Landlord engagement (30% ranked as #2; 35% ranked within top 3 priorities)

Summary of challenges related to Housing First

- Low vacancy rates
 - Limited low barrier housing options
 - Barriers to income assistance
 - Access to supportive housing for people with concurrent disorders
 - Lack of coordination between service providers
 - Need for better partnerships between developers and affordable housing providers
 - stigma and discrimination
-

What is Richmond currently doing?

- Richmond is slated to open an emergency homeless shelter in March of 2018.
- Well established working relationships exist between key community partners including, service providers, the City of Richmond, Vancouver Coastal Health, the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, faith groups and the RCMP.
- In the past, initiatives have been implemented, including affordable housing planning, facilitating landlord engagement events, and making efforts to more accurately estimate the number of people experiencing homelessness in Richmond. Service providers have recognized the need to better coordinate services and supports for people experiencing homelessness through better coordination of outreach activities, and improving engagement of clients using drop-in services.
- Richmond has a strong and experienced volunteer community with support from non-profit organizations.

Principles of Housing First



Immediate access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirements



Consumer choice and self-determination



Individualized and client-driven supports



Recovery orientation



Social and community integration



“How do we manage the acute needs of clients? We end up housing people together when they would be better off housed independently – but due to lack of affordable housing they are forced into shared and substandard accommodation ”
 – Local Service Provider

Surrey: Innovation Lab Problem Statement

Surrey is a large community, which faces a disproportionate burden of meeting the needs of people experiencing and attempting to exit homelessness. Compared to other Metro Vancouver communities, Surrey benefits from greater availability of many necessary support services, including a higher volume of housing, addictions and food services; however, these services are significantly constrained by the fact that Surrey is often the place where service providers from other Metro Vancouver communities seek housing for their clients when local options aren't available. Limitations to the availability of services in Surrey include the fact that the population of Surrey in general is growing, there are few long-term housing options, and many of the available housing options are temporary. Further, while Surrey does have a higher proportion of addictions treatment facilities, the rising challenges of the current opioid crisis and concerns about such facilities being unregulated and low quality, do little to alleviate the burden of addictions in the community.

The Challenge

Housing First has emerged as an effective model for moving people experiencing homelessness into long-term independent housing; however, many communities face important barriers to successful implementation – most notably a lack of affordable housing. The **Surrey Housing First Innovation Lab** will address the following:

Challenge: Within our community, how can we implement Housing First in a way that integrates the 5 principles?

- Immediate access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirements
- Consumer choice and self determination
- Individualized and client driven supports
- Recovery orientation
- Social and community integration



How can we maintain community connections within the Housing First model? “The residents of 135A and the surrounding area are a community. They are connected and they know each other well.” – Local Service Provider

What Does Housing First look like in Surrey?

- Two important hallmarks of Housing First are client choice and immediate access to permanent housing; however, a significant barrier to successful Housing First implementation in Surrey is being priced out of your neighbourhood of choice and few long-term affordable housing options. Many individuals face challenges in accessing social housing due to past evictions, long waiting lists, or not meeting the specific eligibility criteria for certain housing projects, making both neighbourhood choice and immediate access to housing challenging.
- Local service providers have made important efforts to improve service coordination; however, the demand for services, especially when considering the influx of people from adjacent communities, exceeds the capacity of many of the resources that Housing First clients rely upon.
- The burden of addictions among those experiencing homelessness places considerable strain on many services and the lack of regulation among recovery houses adds to the volatility of the current opioid crisis.

Survey Summary

Challenge areas with highest levels of support:

1. Access to and availability of affordable housing (76% ranked as #1; 95% ranked within top 3 priorities)
2. Limited low-barrier services and eligibility requirements (57% ranked within top 3 priorities)
3. Landlord engagement (48% ranked within top 3 priorities)

Summary of challenges related to Housing First

- Low vacancy rates
 - Limited low barrier housing options
 - Access mental health and substance use services
 - Barriers to income assistance and rent subsidies
 - Access to supportive housing for people with concurrent disorders
 - Need for partnerships between developers and affordable housing providers
 - Stigma and discrimination
 - Access to meal programs
 - Private landlord engagement
 - Loneliness & isolation
 - Transit access
-

Principles of Housing First



Immediate access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirements



Consumer choice and self-determination



Individualized and client-driven supports



Recovery orientation



Social and community integration

What is Surrey already doing?

- Existing organizations have established collaborative relationships with each other through the Surrey Homelessness & Housing Society, Healthier Community Partnerships and the Surrey Mobilization and Resiliency Table; as well service providers meet monthly as part of the Homelessness Task Force.
- The City of Surrey maintains an online database of resources to assist people exiting homelessness and there are well established collaborative relationships established between the City of Surrey and housing service providers.
- Local libraries act as information and resource hubs of the community.
- A new purpose-built transitional housing and shelter project for men and women that will provide 50 transitional beds and 50 shelter beds, is scheduled to be completed by April 2020, located at 14150 Green Timbers Way.
- 160 units of supportive temporary modular housing to be completed for early spring 2018 at three Surrey sites, including 10662 King George Blvd and 13550-105 Ave. Additionally, Fraser Health, in partnership with local service providers, will operate a new ICM team out of one of the new modular housing sites (in addition to already existing ICM teams operating in Surrey).



Housing First supports people who are homeless and living with mental illness by combining the immediate provision of permanent housing with wrap-around supports.

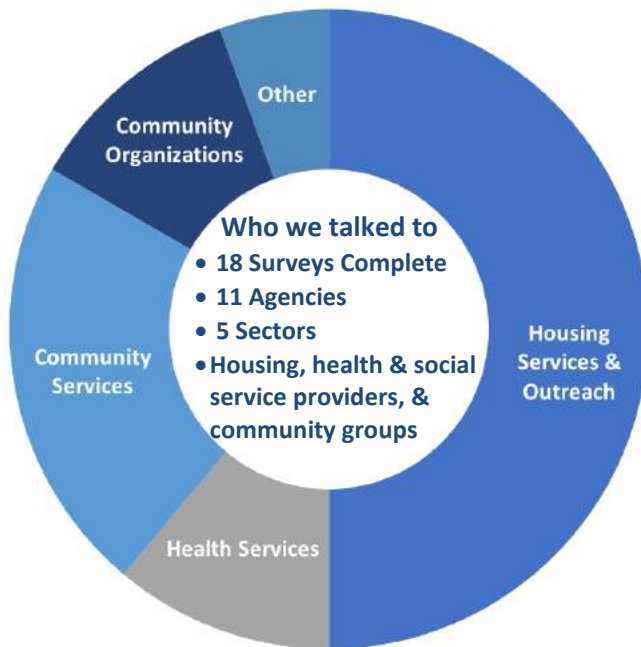
Source: <http://ontario.cmha.ca/news/national-homechez-soi-project-helps-people-find-keep-home/#.WLDPCBgZOuU>



“Affordability and availability of rental stock is the primary issue by far, and it's also the most difficult problem to work around” – Local Service Provider

Vancouver: Innovation Lab Problem Statement

Vancouver is the most populous city within Metro Vancouver, and faces a disproportionate burden of meeting the needs of people experiencing homelessness. Compared to other Metro Vancouver communities, Vancouver benefits from a greater volume of many outreach and support services, including health and shelter services; however, these services are significantly constrained by the larger population of people experiencing homelessness in Vancouver. Limitations to the availability of services in Vancouver include the considerable demand for services by the growing population of people experiencing homelessness and fact that the majority of services are concentrated in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) neighbourhood, with limited options available for those who attempt to leave the neighbourhood to find housing in other parts of the city. Housing costs are prohibitively high and there are few long-term, affordable housing options, and many of the available housing options are temporary or of very low quality. Further, while Vancouver does have better access to health services compared to other communities, the rising challenges associated with the current opioid crisis, do little to alleviate the burden of illness in the community.



The Challenge

Housing First has emerged as an effective model for moving people experiencing homelessness into long-term independent housing; however, many communities face important barriers to successful implementation – most notably a lack of affordable housing. The **Vancouver Housing First Innovation Lab** will address the following:

Challenge: Within our community, how can we implement Housing First in a way that integrates the 5 principles?

- Immediate access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirements
- Consumer choice and self determination
- Individualized and client driven supports
- Recovery orientation
- Social and community integration

What Does Housing First look like in Vancouver?

- Two important hallmarks of Housing First are client choice and immediate access to permanent housing; however, a significant barrier to successful Housing First implementation in Vancouver is being priced out of your neighbourhood of choice and few long-term, affordable, quality housing options. Many individuals face challenges in accessing social housing due to past evictions, long waiting lists, discrimination, or not meeting the specific eligibility criteria for certain housing projects, making both neighbourhood choice and immediate access to housing challenging.
- Loss of affordable housing options due to rising housing costs across Vancouver and low vacancy rates, as well as loss of single room occupancy (SRO) housing due to increased rents and disrepair.
- The prohibitively high cost of housing in Vancouver means that Housing First clients rarely are able to be housed within the City of Vancouver, requiring moves to other neighbouring Metro Vancouver communities (namely Surrey), which complicates access to services based in Vancouver due to residency requirements and/or the high cost of transportation.
- Time limits on rent supplements limit the duration that Housing First clients can be stably housed.
- While efforts have been made to improve service coordination, local service providers report that many services remain siloed and adaptations to the evolving needs of clients are often slow to take shape both within and between service agencies. Further, the demand for services, particularly the type of wrap around services required for Housing First exceed the capacity of existing services.

Survey Summary

Challenge areas with highest levels of support:

1. Access to and availability of affordable housing (83% ranked as #1; 94% ranked within top 3 priorities)
2. Limited low-barrier services and eligibility requirements (61% ranked within top 3 priorities)
3. Interagency collaboration (39% ranked within top 3 priorities)

73% of respondents agreed that having a smaller group of service providers regularly connecting with one another to collaborate on service delivery would be of benefit to the community.

Summary of challenges related to Housing First

- Low vacancy rates
 - Limited low barrier housing options
 - Access mental health and substance use services
 - Barriers to income assistance and rent subsidies
 - Access to supportive housing for people with concurrent disorders and other unique subpopulations including seniors and couples
 - Insufficient rent subsidies
 - Stigma and discrimination
 - Collaboration between service providers
 - Private landlord engagement
 - Competition for limited resources
 - Overcapacity caseloads and significant time constraints
-

Principles of Housing First



Immediate access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirements



Consumer choice and self-determination



Individualized and client-driven supports



Recovery orientation



Social and community integration

What is Vancouver already doing?

- The high volume of services available in Vancouver means that there are many different service options and multiple modes of service delivery available to address the needs of individuals.
- Service providers have made efforts to improve collaboration between services by working towards developing centralized client tracking and intake processes.
- The City of Vancouver is actively involved in developing solutions to address homelessness and create affordable housing.
- Recently, several modular housing projects have been approved or are underway in the City of Vancouver.
- The Vancouver Police department has sought to develop relationships with homelessness service providers and people experiencing homelessness as a means to improve communication and work more collaboratively.

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Housing First

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Housing First supports people who are homeless and living with mental illness by combining the immediate provision of permanent housing with wrap-around supports.

Source: <http://ontario.cmha.ca/news/national-homechez-soi-project-helps-people-find-keep-home/#.WLDPcBgZOuU>