



What is Housing First?

Housing First is an approach where housing is provided as the first step, in combination with supportive services, to people who are homeless and living with mental health issues. It is based on the idea that the first and most primary need for people is housing, and that any other issues a person is living with can be addressed once a person has housing.

Housing First is recovery oriented and client choice is at the centre. It:

- is an evaluated approach originating in New York City (Pathways to Housing), that provides immediate access to both permanent, independent housing through rent subsidies and mental health supports such as Assertive Community Treatment or Intensive Case Management
- provides an alternative to traditional emergency shelter or transitional housing approaches in that it provides immediate access to permanent housing
- does not have conditions on housing readiness (where people are expected to prove they are 'housing ready' by participating in treatment or by being clean and sober). Tenancy is not tied to engagement in treatment (beyond once a week visits by support team or case manager)
- provides treatment and support services that are voluntary, individualized, culturally appropriate, and portable. A range of services are offered (e.g. in mental health, substance use, physical health, employment, education)
- offers clients a choice of housing (e.g., congregate, scattered site). Housing is in self-contained units, mostly private sector, scattered site across the community to foster a sense of home, self-determination and community integration
- requires clients to pay a portion of their income for housing (less than 30%) directly to the landlord

Does *Housing First* Work?

Housing First is an evidence-based approach that has produced positive results in other studies. It has been shown to:

- increase long-term housing stability
- improve quality of life, recovery and wellness
- reduce costs associated with health care and justice system use e.g. emergency visits and hospitalizations