

# Housing First in the European Union



**FEANTSA**

**The European Observatory on Homelessness**

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# Housing Led Services

- Access to permanent housing as the primary response to all forms of homelessness
- Prevention of loss of housing
- Provision of adequate mobile support services on the basis of need
- Jury of the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness 2010

# What is Housing First?

- Originates in the United States, an example of 'housing led' services
- It is based on a housing and support model designed originally for psychiatric patients leaving long stay hospital
- First appeared as the Pathways Housing First service in New York in early 1990s
- Aimed at 'chronically homeless' people
  - Repeated and sustained street homelessness, high rates of problematic alcohol and drug consumption, severe mental illness, poor physical health

# Harm reduction approach

- Drug and alcohol services are provided
- Psychiatric services are provided
- But there is no requirement to use these services
- **“Separation” of housing and support**
- ‘Chronically’ homeless people using Housing First services can choose not to use psychiatric services and to keep drinking alcohol and using drugs
- Encouraged and supported to use services to improve well-being but not required to use those services

## Three types of Housing First

- Pathways Housing First
- Communal Housing First
- Housing First 'Light'

# Pathways Housing First

- Housing as a basic human right
- Respect, warmth and compassion
- A commitment to working with people for as long as they need
- Scattered site housing, independent apartments
- Separation of housing and services
- Consumer choice and self-determination
- Recovery orientation
- Harm reduction

# Pathways Housing First

- PHF is the original Housing First model
- Uses private rented housing
  - Usually with the service being the ‘tenant’ and the (formerly) homeless person having a sub-tenancy
  - Scattered throughout a city or region, not all in one block
- Mobile support services
  - Assertive Community Treatment Team (ACT)
  - Intensive Case Management (ICM) team

# Pathways Housing First

- Solid evidence of success in providing housing stability
- In US, staircase services have rate of loss – homeless people *abandoning* services – of some 60-80%
- Successive studies of PHF services suggest 80% plus *still in housing* at 12-18 months. In 2007, PHF New York, claimed that among people regarded as ‘too hard to house’ by other services, they had kept 85% in housing for five years.

# Pathways Housing First



# Pathways Housing First

- While there is evidence that drug and alcohol use stabilise and fall to some extent...
- No evidence that drug and alcohol use stops among majority of PHF service users
- Improvements to well-being from being well housed, but less evidence suggesting widespread improvements in mental health
- Uncertainties about extent of social and economic engagement

# Communal Housing First

- Provides communal accommodation
- Not independent scattered housing
- Support staff are on site or nearby
- Can offer self contained apartments
- Separation of accommodation and support in a harm reduction approach allows drinking/drug use, does not require people to use psychiatric services
- Sometimes only offers rooms or 'semi-private' areas
- CHF widely used in Finland and in USA

# Communal Housing First

- Some strong evidence of success in promoting stable accommodation
- Whether this is regarded as providing stable 'housing' is debatable
- Higher costs than PHF
- Requires dedicated buildings as well as support team
- Some worries about 'negative effects' from presence of heavy drinkers/drug users in one communal site
- Evidence base weaker than for PHF

# Housing First 'Light'

- Provides low intensity mobile support workers to formerly and potentially homeless people living in their own homes
- Some direct support aimed at promoting housing stability, but often low level
- Reliance on case management/service brokering approach to access drug, alcohol, physical and mental health problems
- Might also link up with services/encourage social and economic participation
- Widely used in UK, to a lesser extent elsewhere

# Housing First Light

- Evidence is limited
- There are some data from the USA and UK suggesting that HFL services can be successful at promoting housing stability
- Cost of service delivery is lower
- But HFL services enable access to health, social care and welfare systems for vulnerable homeless people who might not have been using those services before, so total cost may well be higher

# Different Roles For Housing First

- PHF – proven successes in providing housing stability for chronically homeless people.
- CHF – may be better for people who are “highest risk” but is it actually providing housing?
- HFL – might be better for groups of homeless people with lower support needs

# Key Questions

- Do Housing First models address all the needs associated with homelessness?
  - PHF is very effective at promoting housing stability, which in itself improves well-being
  - But are some needs not being met?
- Are there roles that Housing First is not suitable for?
  - Emergency accommodation
  - Migrant homelessness
  - Groups with specific needs (e.g. homeless women at risk of gender based violence)
  - People with **LOW** support needs
- Evidence base on CHF and HFL is limited – these services are *not consistent* in design and operation – makes judgement about effectiveness more difficult

# Key Questions

- American social policy and research often focuses on individual characteristics to 'explain' social problems like homelessness
- Europeans more likely to reject explanations of exclusion that centre on individual characteristics and look for more complex and nuanced explanations in how groups like homeless people interrelate with wider society
- Important that the structural factors, changes to housing and labour markets and welfare systems and how these relate to homelessness is not neglected in policy responses

# Housing First in the US context

- Thinking about the role of Housing First
- Important to bear in mind what USA has done
- Housing First is one of a range of services
- It operates alongside a large scale prevention programme designed to stop homelessness from occurring
- Shelter system remains operational as do staircase services

# Housing First

- Evidence on effectiveness in promoting housing stability for homeless people with high support needs cannot be ignored
- Housing First consistently ends homelessness for a large proportion of people whose well-being is being undermined by homelessness
- But it is not necessarily a complete answer to all forms of homelessness