

Housing and justice report

Improving supportive housing for justice-involved
individuals with mental health and addiction issues

ABOUT THE HSJCC NETWORK

The [Human Services and Justice Coordinating Committees \(HSJCCs\)](#) were established in response to a recognized need to co-ordinate resources and services, and plan more effectively for people who are in conflict with the law. Priority consideration is for people with a serious mental illness, developmental disability, acquired brain injury, drug and alcohol addiction, and/or fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. The committees were generated as a co-operative effort between the Ministries of the Attorney General; Children, Community and Social Services; Health; and the Solicitor General. The HSJCC Network is made up of 39 local committees, 14 regional committees and the Provincial HSJCC (P-HSJCC), which serves as a provincial planning body.

BACKGROUND: HOUSING, MENTAL HEALTH AND JUSTICE

For many, each interaction with the criminal justice system brings a unique set of life circumstances. These interactions can lead to housing instability and can exacerbate existing mental health and addictions issues¹, creating a cycle between homelessness and incarceration. The causal relationships between housing, mental health and addictions, and justice issues are complex, as the presence of one can ignite a concern in the other two areas.

Homelessness and mental health are closely connected, where the presence of one increases the likelihood of the other. Individuals who are homeless and have mental health and/or addictions issues are then more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system. The broader social determinants of health also reinforce these issues as poverty and social inequality can create or exacerbate housing and mental health and addictions issues, and the likelihood of criminal justice contact.

Stigma around mental health and addictions issues, homelessness and criminal justice involvement can further affect a person's ability to access necessary services and support. This stigma can often lead to discrimination. For example, landlords may discriminate against these populations for having criminal records, showing past patterns of disruptive behaviour, having multiple complex social and health care needs, and potentially having poor tenancy histories. This creates barriers for individuals in accessing supportive housing², and therefore it is often why the "justice-informed" lens is missing from many housing-related initiatives and funding opportunities.

The costs of homelessness and of correctional services place burdens not only on individuals, but also on society. Providing adequate and affordable housing can reduce the demand for public services including homeless shelters, emergency and non-emergency medical services, and justice sector services. The Office of the Auditor General of Ontario noted in its [2017 annual report](#) that the average cost of providing social housing to one household is about \$613 per month. In comparison, one shelter bed costs \$2,100 per month (more than three times as expensive), one long-term care bed costs an average of \$3,960 per month (more than six times as expensive), one correctional facility bed costs an average of \$4,300 per month (seven times more expensive), and one hospital bed costs an average of \$13,500 per month (22 times more expensive).

\$613
PER MONTH

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BACKGROUND: THE P-HSJCC'S WORK ON HOUSING AND JUSTICE

Issues surrounding access to supportive housing for individuals who become involved in the justice system were first identified by the HSJCC Network as a priority in 2015. In 2015-16, the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario (CMHA Ontario) convened the health, housing & justice community of interest (COI) in partnership with the John Howard Society of Ontario (JHSO), the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), the Wellesley Institute, Addictions & Mental Health Ontario (AMHO) and the P-HSJCC. Their focus was to ensure the needs of this population were kept in view as the government moves forward on supportive housing initiatives.

The COI held their first think tank event in November 2016 to explore the housing crisis impacting individuals involved with the justice system. In 2019, the COI released *Closed Quarters: Challenges and Opportunities in Stabilizing Housing and Mental Health Across the Justice Sector* which highlighted the barriers to housing for people involved with the criminal justice system and made related recommendations. This report became the precursor to the P-HSJCC's continued work to advocate for improved access to housing for justice-involved individuals and subsequently lead to a provincial forum in February 2020. The forum was also influenced and informed by *Promising Practices: 12 Cases in Supportive Housing for People with Mental Health and Addiction Issues*, a resource guide developed by AMHO, CMHA Ontario and the Wellesley Institute.

THE PROVINCIAL HSJCC 2020 HOUSING AND JUSTICE FORUM

On Feb. 26, 2020, the [P-HSJCC](#) hosted a one-day provincial housing and justice forum in Toronto to share and discuss promising practices and ways to improve housing support for individuals with mental health, addictions and other complex needs who are involved with the criminal justice system. The forum convened stakeholders from across the human services, housing and justice sectors including representation from mental health and addictions community organizations, special population agencies, housing service providers, policing and partner ministry representatives. Several persons with lived experience were invited as presenters and guests.³

HOUSING & JUSTICE FORUM STATISTICS

FEBRUARY 26, 2020 | TORONTO ON



50 Participants in person

5 Persons with lived experience were supported to attend the event

50 Participants online



2 Guest speakers

MIKE CREEK, Director of Strategic Initiatives, *Working for Change*

DR. TIM AUBRY, Faculty Research Chair in Community Mental Health and Homelessness, *University of Ottawa*

5 Government ministries were represented by participants

- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of the Attorney General
- Ministry of Children, Community & Social Services
- Ministry of the Solicitor General
- Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Housing



Panel discussions

- Highlighting Key Issues and Recommendations for Supportive Housing and Justice Involved Clients
- Promising Practices in Supportive Housing
- A Discussion with the Ontario Ministry of Health, Mental Health and Addiction Programs Branch

KEY THEMES

In addition to the panel discussions, attendees participated in breakout sessions where they were asked to discuss options to improve supportive housing for justice-involved individuals. Some key themes emerged through these discussions including the following:

AVAILABLE AND ACCESSIBLE CORE SERVICES⁴

The lack of a consistent and co-ordinated set of defined mental health and addictions services combined with the inadequacy of a consistent and seamless service experience leaves a patchwork of services across Ontario. Ontarians need a consistent set of core services regardless of where they live. Elements of core services could address gaps and improve access to supportive housing for justice-involved individuals.

Specifically, participants noted a need for:

- Transitional case management for long-term housing with supports that are available immediately upon release from incarceration.
- Ramping up employment support programs for people with justice involvement; having employment can assist in getting housing.
- Maintaining Ontario Disability Support Program and Ontario Works income support for individuals while in custody, especially for short periods of incarceration, to ensure no loss of income support as a result of short-term incarceration.
- Access to income support while in halfway houses.
- System navigators to help connect people to housing supports.

INCREASED COMMUNICATION, CO-OPERATION AND COLLABORATION

Improving the connectivity between the criminal justice system, the supportive housing system and the broader health care and social services delivery system can be accomplished through increased communication, co-operation and collaboration across sectors. When sectors operate in silos, clients are at increased risk of “falling through the cracks.”

Specifically, participants noted a need for:

- An increase in inter-ministerial mandates and increased communication and co-operation between ministries to break down silos.
- A **client focus** versus a **ministry focus**.
- Clear pathways between systems and roles for service providers in supporting their clients.
- Stronger collaboration between community partners focused on client needs.
- A collaborative model to be developed (as with Ontario Health Teams) so service providers at those tables will be able to bring other partners to that table.

CONTINUITY OF CARE/ CONSISTENT DISCHARGE PLANNING⁵

Close linkages to community-based services and supports has been noted as an effective tool for discharge planning. Unfortunately, there is no consistent approach to discharge planning across correctional facilities in Ontario.

Specifically, participants noted a need for:

- Consistent and immediate discharge planning for individuals upon admission to correctional facilities, especially for remanded populations⁶ who may be there for shorter periods of time.
- Leveraging community-based organizations and services to provide a smoother transition between institutions and the community.
- Ensuring individuals have a source of income when being released from custody, along with their personal belongings such as identification, medications, etc.

INCREASED EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Stigma and discrimination associated with criminal justice involvement is a key barrier to accessing supportive housing. Increased education and training for service providers as well as the broader public was noted as an important piece in breaking down barriers and improving access to supportive housing for justice-involved individuals.

Specifically, participants noted a need for:

- Cultural competency and anti-oppression training for landlords and housing service providers.
- Cross-sector training for case managers.
- Increased knowledge exchange between supportive housing providers and landlords to educate on need for supportive housing for these populations.
- Engaging persons with lived experience of mental health and addictions issues, and racialized and Indigenous populations, as a way of educating the public, health care and housing sectors.

INCREASED ACCESS TO LEGAL SUPPORT SERVICES

Increased access to community-based legal support services can assist with eradicating discrimination, protecting an individual's human rights and ultimately improving access to supportive housing for justice-involved individuals.

Specifically, participants noted a need for:

- More legal support to clear/expunge criminal records that prevent individuals from accessing housing and support services.
- Embedding legal programs in places where there is already access to services.
- Preventative and informal support in dealing with rights and discrimination in accessing social support and non-eviction housing matters.
- Expanding institutional duty counsel program for housing, family law matters and criminal law matters.
- Addressing renovictions and other means used to evict tenants.

LACK OF HOUSING SUPPLY

Across the province, there's a shortage of both public and private housing. Housing prices and rental rates in many large and mid-sized cities have risen faster than incomes, to the point where the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing called the situation in Ontario in 2019 a "housing crisis." Securing appropriate housing is challenging for everyone. Due to stigma and discrimination, the problem is compounded even further for people with complex needs involved in the justice system.

Specifically, participants noted a need for:

- Increased housing supply (*promoting provincial and municipal policies that make it easier to develop affordable housing solutions*).
- Creating more purpose-built and affordable rental accommodation.
- Having an anti-discrimination focus in supportive housing for clients with justice involvement.
- Improving housing accessibility (such as low-barrier housing for justice-involved tenants, applying rent control, funding for rent subsidies for community-based supportive housing providers, etc.).

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The key themes above clearly present immediate opportunities for action to improve access to supportive housing for justice-involved individuals.

At the service delivery level, the following recommendations are proposed:

1.

Develop mandatory anti-oppression and equity-focused training, specifically designed to eradicate stigma and break down barriers for justice-involved individuals, to educate landlords and supportive housing service providers across Ontario.

2.

Increased access to and availability of community legal services to assist justice-involved individuals to attain income security, apply for a record suspension, assert the right to equal treatment in housing and employment, challenge discrimination or harassment, and ultimately improve access to employment and supportive housing opportunities in Ontario.

3.

Increased collaboration and co-operation between community service providers to assist justice-involved individuals in connecting with appropriate supports and services and improve their access to supportive housing.

At the system level, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

4.

The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Ministry of the Solicitor General and Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, make dedicated, long-term investments in supportive housing and case management supports for individuals with mental health and addictions issues involved in the criminal justice system.

5.

The Ministry of the Solicitor General, in collaboration with community-based organizations, develop and implement a provincial strategy to ensure consistent and standardized discharge planning for individuals leaving provincial correctional institutions across Ontario, with a focus on remand populations.

6.

Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services revise the Ontario Disability Support Program and Ontario Works policies to continue benefits for an extended period of time when a recipient is incarcerated, thereby preventing the potential loss of housing and entry into homelessness upon discharge.

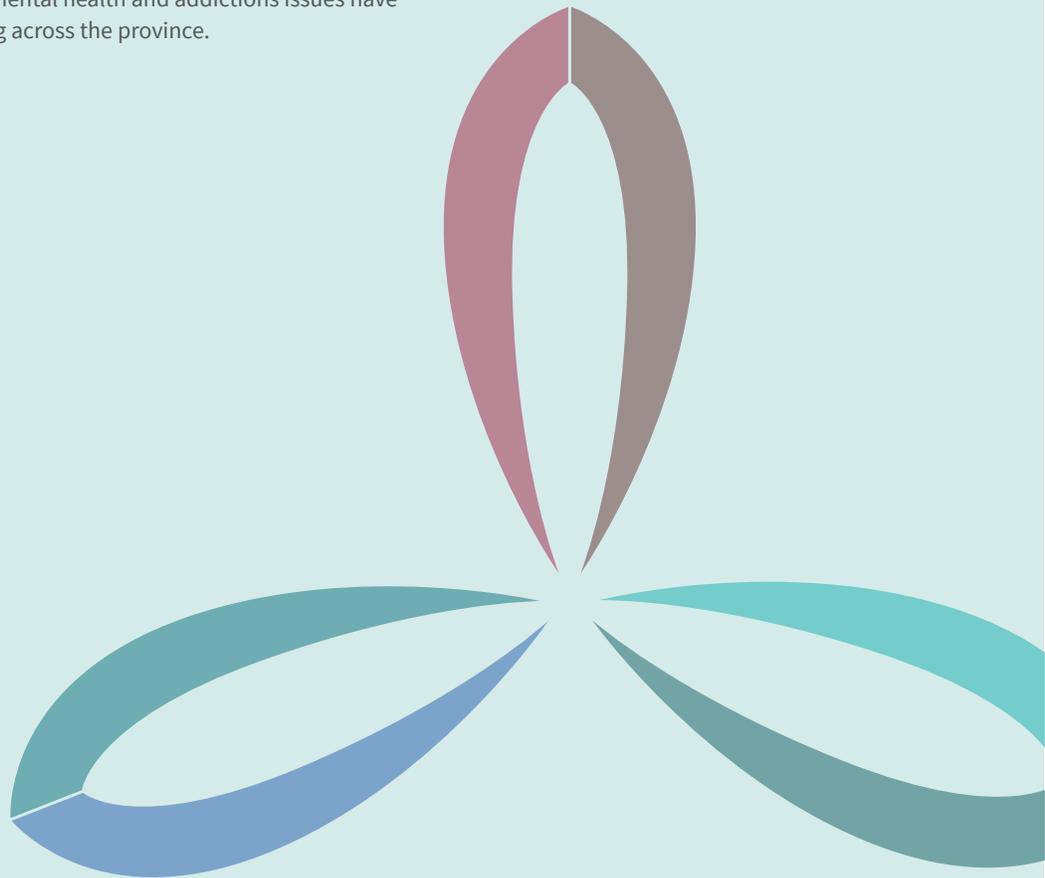
CONCLUSION

A multi-faceted approach is required to improve access to supportive housing for individuals with complex needs involved in the criminal justice system.

At a service delivery level, it requires increased education and training for the housing and social service sectors as well as increased availability of community legal services to break down barriers and eradicate discriminatory practices that continue to prevent justice-involved individuals from accessing safe and affordable housing. It also requires increased communication, collaboration and co-operation between the human services and justice sectors and ministry partners to break down silos and improve the continuity of care for these populations.

At a systems level, long-term solutions are required in both the justice and supportive housing sectors. The lack of investments in supportive housing for justice-involved individuals will continue to overburden the health care and justice systems, place strain on community service providers and will ultimately lead to a continued cycle of criminal justice involvement rates and negative outcomes for these populations. Dedicated investments for supportive housing for justice-involved populations are required to not only improve outcomes for these individuals, but also to reduce the demand for public services across sectors and ultimately, enhance overall public safety.

The Provincial HSJCC urges the Ontario government to take immediate, targeted steps to ensure justice-involved individuals with mental health and addictions issues have access to safe, affordable and stable housing across the province.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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REFERENCES

¹ Although this report focuses on mental health and addictions broadly, neurodevelopmental disabilities, brain injuries and other conditions, and combinations of conditions can increase the likelihood of an individual interacting with the justice system and create additional barriers to housing.

² Ontario Ministry of Health (2020) *Ontario Healthcare Reporting Standards V11.1 Chapter 7 Community Mental Health & Addictions*. Data Standards Unit, Health Data Branch, Capacity Planning and Analytics Division. Ministry of Health and Ministry of Long-Term Care 2020-21. <https://hsim.health.gov.on.ca/hdbportal/> [access by subscription only]

³ Expenses for people with lived experience were covered through honoraria as a token of thanks for their participation.

⁴ Ontario Health (2020) Presentation to CMHA Executive Director's Network meeting, Sept. 11, 2020. Proposed categories of core services for mental health and addictions (under consideration): 1) Highly-specialized intensive [Severe or complex MHA need population]; 2) Intensive and specialized [Moderate to severe MHA need population]; 3) Targeted-to-moderate MHA needs [Moderate MHA need population]; 4) Early intervention and self-management [Low MHA need population]; 5) Population-based health promotion and prevention [general population]. Model adapted from: Rush, B., Tremblay, J. & Fougere, C. (2017). *Development of needs-based planning models for substance use services and supports in Canada. A national project*. <https://www.eenet.ca/project/development-needs-based-planning-models-substance-use-services-and-supports-in-canada#about>

⁵ Discharge planning, release planning, or transition planning is defined as the process of preparing individuals for their eventual release from correctional facilities and reintegration back into the community. The three main components of discharge planning include: assessment, the development of a release plan, and transferring care for the releasee to the community. Definition from John Howard Society of Ontario and the University of Guelph. (2016). *Reintegration in Ontario: Practices, Priorities and Effective Models*. <https://johnhoward.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Reintegration-in-Ontario-Final.pdf>

⁶ Those on remand are individuals who are being held in custody while awaiting a further court appearance. Definition from John Howard Society of Ontario. (2005). *Remand In Ontario: A Background*. <https://johnhoward.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/remand-in-ontario-a-background-september-2005.pdf>