A Critical Review of Research and Policy in Youth-Focussed Housing First

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Abstract

The Housing First approach is a social policy directive for addressing homelessness, but there is a lack of clear evidence of its effectiveness with youth experiencing homelessness. At the community level, service providers are implementing "youth-focussed Housing First" without the research support to evaluate the efficacy of this approach in providing stable housing that promotes a positive transition to adulthood. This comprehensive literature review includes ten of the most widely used social services databases, confirming a deficit of diverse perspectives and research evidence such as evaluative studies and peer reviewed articles validating the Housing First approach with youth. A comprehensive review of grey literature was also completed to determine what is known about youth-focussed Housing First and the most significant gaps in research. This article sets out directions for future research and produces social policy recommendations for all levels of Canadian government that will support Housing First programs that meet the unique developmental needs of youth. At the grassroots level, communities are adapting the Housing First approach to youth; this needs to be recognized and supported by research that evaluates the impact these programs are having in the lives of young people in order to inform scalability efforts to work towards eradicating youth homelessness. The hope is that youth-focussed Housing First develops a robust discussion in academic research.

*Keywords***:** Youth; housing first; housing first for youth; literature review

Résumé

L'approche Logement d'abord est une directive de politique sociale visant à lutter contre l'itinérance, cependant, son efficacité n'est pas clairement démontrée auprès des jeunes en situation d'itinérance. Au niveau communautaire, les fournisseurs de services mettent en œuvre un programme « Logement d'abord » pour les jeunes malgré le manque d'études pour évaluer l'efficacité de cette approche afin de fournir aux jeunes un logement stable qui favorise une transition positive vers l'âge adulte. Cet article de revue détaillé inclut dix des bases de données de services sociaux les plus utilisées, ce qui aide à confirmer le manque de perspectives variées et de données de recherche telles que des études d'évaluation et des articles examinés par des pairs afin de valider l'approche « Logement d'abord » pour les jeunes. Une analyse détaillée de la documentation parallèle a également été réalisée afin de déterminer ce que l'on sait des programmes Logement d'abord pour les jeunes et les principales lacunes de la recherche. Cet article conçoit les orientations des futures études et présente des recommandations de politique sociale à tous les niveaux du gouvernement canadien, qui soutiendront les programmes Logement d'abord afin de répondre aux besoins développementaux uniques des jeunes. Au niveau local, les communautés adaptent l'approche Logement d'abord aux jeunes. Cela doit être reconnu et soutenu par des études qui évaluent l'impact de ces programmes sur la vie des jeunes afin de guider les efforts d'extensibilité visant à éradiquer l'itinérance des jeunes. Le but est de susciter une discussion animée en matière de la recherche universitaire quant au programme Logement d'abord pour les jeunes

Mots clés : Jeunes; logement d'abord; logement d'abord pour les jeunes; article de revue

Introduction

In 2013 the Homeless Partnering Strategy (HPS), a "community-based program aimed at preventing and reducing homelessness by providing direct support and funding to… communities and organizations that address Aboriginal homelessness across Canada," (Government of Canada, 2018), made Housing First a key policy and strategy for addressing homelessness affecting a variety of populations across the country. This was done on the basis that that "a federally funded research demonstration project, along with results from several other organizations and communities across Canada that have adopted a Housing First approach, have shown that Housing First is an effective way to reduce homelessness" (Government of Canada, 2019, para 1). A single research project and reports from communities that focussed primarily on housing for those with severe mental illness and co-occurring addictions is limited information on which to posit a national housing strategy that is aimed at diverse groups with multiple complex characteristics. Without the consensus usually provided by best practice protocols that include a wide array of research findings, a blanket approach based on limited findings was directed to serve housing needs for all vulnerable people.

The Housing First movement found its initial roots in New York City where it was demonstrated as effective in keeping people experiencing mental illness and addictions from leaving housing to return to the streets and tunnels. It was not intended as a blanket initiative that could address the housing needs of all vulnerable people. Certainly, it was not envisioned as a socially and developmentally-acceptable program for vulnerable youth. While the original Housing First program has been found effective, we will discuss how this demonstration is lacking in initiatives targeted to serve youth and young adults.

In 2000, Psychiatric Services medical journal published the results of a five-year research project that provided "support[ive] housing for street-dwelling homeless individuals with psychiatric disabilities" (Tsemberis, 2000), a program that successfully housed these individuals at significantly higher rates than those housed in the usual array of half-way houses available in New York City. In a follow-up article in 2004, Tsemberis, Gulcur, and Nakae (2004) described this initiative as "Housing First." Thus the term was born and rapidly became accepted by American mental health housing organizations, spurred on to a great extent by the endorsement of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) when it was designated as a best practice by the Housing and Urban Development branch of the U.S. Government (despite research results limited to one specific program, Pathways (Waegemakers Schiff, 2014). Subsequently it became widely replicated both domestically and internationally. The program was specific but eventually became prescriptive in its standards of organization and operation (Tsemberis, 2010).

In Canada, soon thereafter, the Mental Health Commission of Canada, newly formed 2007 and intent on making a considerable impact across the country, strategically merged the issues of homelessness and delivery of services to those with persistent mental illness by launching a national replication of the original Pathways Housing First (PHF) program study in five Canadian cities. Termed "At Home/Chez Soi" (AHCS) the project became the official

vehicle for dissemination of a Housing First program across the country. Specific components of the PHF program were delineated: (1) no requirements to demonstrate "housing readiness," (2) no requirements for treatment compliance (e.g. taking psychotropic medication and seeing a therapist), (3) no requirements for sobriety (clients could be actively using alcohol and drugs), (4) housing in independent scatter-site apartments which avoided community stigma of mental health housing, (5) housing in choice of location (to the extent affordability allowed), (6) regular connection with an Assertive Community Treatment team (ACT) for support, and (7) assignment of income benefits to permit the program to pay rent on the client's behalf (Tsemberis, 2010). While the requirements for scatter-site housing, use of an ACT team, and assignment of benefits were modified for the AHCS study, the essential program components were kept intact.

Although results published in 2014 (Goering et al., 2014) demonstrated modest housing retention with 62% of participants housed all of the time after 6 months in the study, the widespread proclamation of success by the AHCS research team, along with effective lobbying, led the Homeless Partnering Strategy (HPS) to adopt the Housing First approach for national homeless housing policy. This occurred despite the fact that its modest efficacy had only been demonstrated in one cohort: housing adults with a major mental illness and co-occurring substance-use disorders. Meanwhile, the adoption of the Housing First approach by HPS was muddled by a lack of clear delineation between the PHF program model and an overall Housing First philosophy which advocates for placing the right to, and need for, safe housing as a priority over treatment and rehabilitative concerns (Waegemakers Schiff, 2014). This confusion, between a program-specific adaptation and an overall housing mandate, spread across the country, as housing providers struggled to re-align their housing practices with new mandates tied to federal funding.

Relying on studies that demonstrated the effectiveness of Housing First programs with a very specific cohort, HPS sought to expand the Housing First approach across all acknowledged special populations – families, primary substance abusers with no major mental health diagnoses, Indigenous peoples, women fleeing domestic violence, seniors, and youth – by mandating its implementation. Most studies that examine the effectiveness of this approach have looked at adult populations, primarily adults with co-occurring major mental health problems and substance abuse (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2017; Waegemakers Schiff & Schiff, 2014).

Despite its adoption by HPS, the Housing First approach had not established clear evidence of its effectiveness or its desirability with other targeted groups. Especially problematic is the original dictum of Housing First: that people needed to be housed in units scattered across communities rather than in specifically designated buildings, as this inter-weaving would reduce community stigma (Tsemberis, Gulcur, & Nakae, 2004). This pronouncement created a conundrum for some groups that preferred more communal housing such as Indigenous women fleeing domestic violence and coping with substance abuse (Schiff & Waegemakers Schiff, 2010). Equally problematic was the use of ACT teams, as the scarcity of community-based psychiatrists in many Canadian communities made this team composition impossible.

Outside of those with such pre-existing conditions, the acceptability, desirability, and effectiveness of Housing First approaches have not been explored in youth populations. The need for stable housing for disadvantaged youth has been documented in studies of those ageing out of the child welfare system (Choca, Minoff, Angene, & Byrnes, 2004). More recently, Gaetz and colleagues emphasized the importance of stable housing for youth in proposing Housing First for youth as a rights-based approach that adapts the Housing First philosophy to meet the developmental needs of youth. It provides youth "with immediate access to housing that is safe, affordable, and appropriate, and the necessary and age-appropriate supports… to facilitate a healthy transition to adulthood" (Gaetz, 2017, p.7).

Many homeless young people have experiences of trauma that require a housing approach that is adapted to individualized needs and a trauma-informed approach (Gaetz, Dej, Richter, & Redman, 2016a; Coates & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010). These needs include a balance of desire for independence, and need for structure, and the importance of a safe place to live. They also include considerations of sexual identity and orientation which frequently causes young people to leave home (Abramovich, 2012). While family discord may at times be a cause for leaving, equally frequently young people are fleeing trauma and abuse perpetrated by parents but experience more victimization on the streets. As such, trauma is both a cause and effect of youth homelessness (Coates & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010). Studies report that over 50% of homeless youth have experienced abuse or multiple forms of violence (Ferguson, 2009; Gaetz, O'Grady, Kidd, & Schwan, 2016b). Additionally, a national study of 1,103 homeless youth in or exiting the foster care system reported that these youth have increased experiences of homelessness (Gaetz, O'Grady, Kidd, & Schwan, 2016b). This study reported that 60% had been involved with child protection and 38% identified "aging out" as the cause of their homelessness. This calls for the implementation of both a prevention lens to eliminating this risk, and a systems approach to rapidly house homeless youth, as they are 193 times more likely to have been involved with the foster care system (Nichols & et al., 2017).

Young peoples' experiences of trauma are compounded by further victimization on the streets. A Vancouver study identified that 69% of female youth engaging in "survival sex" were experiencing absolute homelessness (Miller & et al., 2011), and a Maritime study identified that homeless youth were victims of trauma both before entering homelessness and while on the streets (Coates, & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010). The understanding of the complex trauma and layering of oppression that homeless youth are experiencing requires service providers to have a rapid response before further victimization occurs and youth embark on life-long dysfunctional lifestyles. In order to better document effective and promising approaches, including Housing First options, we conducted a vigorous review of the literature relevant to Housing First for youth, explore the interplay between youth homelessness and Housing First program models, and identify policy recommendations for future implementation.

What is the evidence for youth-focussed Housing First?

Throughout this manuscript the phrase "youth-focussed Housing First" is used to describe and explore the necessary adaptations to the Housing First program model (Tsemberis,

2010) for application to youth populations experiencing homelessness. In addition, there is also the term and program model Housing First for Youth (HF4Y), an adaptation of the original Pathways program, developed by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. For clarity, in this discussion, we are using the term youth-focussed Housing First to distinguish from the HF4Y program model.

A rigorous and systematic review of academic and grey literature indicates that there are limited peer-reviewed studies that deal specifically with youth-focussed Housing First programs and approaches. While the topic of youth homelessness and related housing approaches has a considerable body of literature, the scope of this review included only articles that specifically addressed youth homelessness in, or in contrast to, Housing First models, or articles that identified recommendations for youth-focussed Housing First implementation in Canada. For the scan of academic databases, we utilized ten of the most widely used social science databases: SocINDEX, Social Services Abstracts, PsychInfo, PubMed, Google Scholar, CINAHL Plus, Family and Society Studies Worldwide, Family Studies Abstracts, and Tests in Print. Search terms included "youth" and "housing first;" "youth," "housing," and "approaches;" "youth homelessness," and "approaches;" and "housing first for youth". These searches resulted in only two peer-reviewed studies that could by marginally considered for inclusion, highlighting the significant lack of research in this area (Gilmer, 2016; Anderson, 2013). Notably, these two reports focus on youth who have a diagnosis of a major mental illness and not on those who have lost housing for other reasons.

The AHCS study (Goering et al., 2014) was a multi-year, adult focussed, Housing First program for those with chronic major mental illnesses and co-occurring substance abuse, that as a secondary analysis examined the need for a distinct youth adapted Housing First model. This subsequent analysis extrapolated the data of 156 participants, ranging in age from 18 to 24 years old (Kozloff et al., 2016a). However, the intent of the original project was aimed at demonstrating the effectiveness of the Housing First model primarily in adult populations, without any modifications salient to youth, and thus secondary analysis can only provide limited insight as to what adaptations may be appropriate and effective. Forchuk et al. (2013) report on housing preferences for youth with mental illness and compare their preferences for a Housing First approach, receiving treatment and support services in a residential program, or a combination of the two. Preliminary results indicate that there is a range of housing and support preferences among the 122 youth who participated and thus no unitary approach that will be acceptable and appropriate for everyone (Forchuk, et al., 2013). While mental health problems are only one group of issues that lead to youth homelessness (these include, for example, family discord, leaving Child Welfare Services, and lack of acceptance of diverse sexual orientations), there is no research that focuses on any, or all, of these cohorts. Specifically, we found no reports that more broadly examine which models, programs, and support services may be acceptable and effective for youth who do not have a major mental illness.

The grey literature proved to be a far greater resource on the topic of youth-focussed Housing First. Documents were only considered if they directly addressed the issue of youth

homelessness and Housing First and not if they referred only to generic, non-specific housing approaches. These reports indicate that youth-focussed Housing First is a relatively recent phenomenon, having followed a path started with the Housing First movement and prompted by HPS directives. The literature on youth-focussed Housing First, which consists primarily of program descriptions and some limited evaluations, but does not cover any systematic research studies, began in Canada in 2009 with the Infinity Project sponsored by the Boys and Girls Club of Cochrane Alberta (Canadian Homelessness Research Network, 2013). The project provided housing of choice, with supports, for 58 youth (16-24) from 2009 to 2012. Project staff tracked participant outcomes and identified 44 out of 48 youth who had been in the program for a year and remained housed, 100% of youth engaged in community supports, and 50% accessed mental health supports (Canadian Homelessness Research Network, 2013).

Research by the Homeless HUB has concentrated on youth and has led to the development of a HF4Y Framework and program model (Gaetz, 2014a; Gaetz, 2017). HF4Y is an adaptation of the Housing First model developed in partnership with A Way Home Canada, the Hamilton Street Youth Planning Collaborative, and the National Learning Community (Gaetz Dej, Richter, & Redman, 2016a). Empirical testing of its efficacy is currently underway, but no results are available, albeit the use of promising approaches to address homelessness are implemented at times before status of evidence-formed practices are established. A concern with the model, implemented as a randomized control trail in Ottawa and Toronto, is that it uses the same language and implementation strategy as the AHCS study: either randomization into HF4Y or into "services as usual." This is despite the fact that HF4Y programs are founded on the understanding that there are no alternative services except local shelters, which are not an acceptable option. Effectively, in these demonstration projects, youth are consigned either to a rich array of supports or too few, if any, supports. This is the same randomization process used in the AHCS study and clearly pits a rich array of supports (experimental group) against no readily available supports (control group). There will be positive results based on the bias alone. Furthermore, as was evidenced by the AHCS study where results were far less robust that in the initial Pathways to Housing program (Tsemberis et al., 2004), without a reasonable period for development of program maturity, outcomes of housing stability for participants will likely fall short of those projected. These considerations will impact both results and their applicability across other regions.

Beyond these efforts there is limited references to youth-focussed Housing First in the popular press, which notes that cities such as Edmonton (AB), Hamilton (ON), St. John's (NL), Kamloops (BC), and Ottawa (ON) have initiated programs, but neither evaluation or outcomes areas yet available. Internationally, youth-focussed Housing First programs have begun to be piloted and evaluated in Europe, such as Ireland's Limerick Youth Housing Program, based on the HF4Y framework (Lawlor & Bowen, 2017), but the application has not spread extensively in the European Union.

Throughout the literature one of the most significant issues is the distinct split between the philosophy of Housing First versus an operational youth-focussed Housing First program

model. This follows a similar trend of differentiating principles from overarching philosophy in the Housing First literature on adult housing (Waegemakers Schiff, & Schiff, 2014). Fundamental to a youth approach is the right to housing. One of the core components of an adult Housing First philosophy, "housing readiness," is of little relevance in a youth context. Rather, a cornerstone for approaches with youth should recognize housing as a right and youth should be housed regardless of the perceptions of readiness (Kozloff et al., 2016a; Gaetz, 2017). Scott & Harrison (2013) emphasize this philosophy by commenting that "youth don't earn their home" (p.3). An additional example of the primacy of a safe domicile in youth-focussed Housing First is evident in the Rain City Project's philosophy of removing obstacles to housing, citing the important recognition that one cannot change until they are safely housed (Munro, Reynolds, & Townsend, 2017). Although the philosophical orientation of youth-focussed Housing First is similar to the adult philosophy, the program model needs to be adapted with recognition of the distinctiveness of youth homelessness and the developmental stage of transitioning to adulthood (Gaetz, 2014b).

When we examined specific programs, the literature identified several potential components of a comprehensive youth-focussed Housing First program that differ from adult models, with one of the most significant themes being the need for a range of housing types for homeless youth. In an adult Housing First program, scattered site housing is the format primarily utilized for potential clients (Tsemberis, 2010), although some recent adaptations include some use of congregate facilities (Goering et al., 2014). A youth program, on the other hand, would need both scattered sites and single-site options to meet the differing developmental stages and needs of homeless youth (Munson, Stanhope, Small, & Atterbury, 2017). One example of this in the literature is the communal house and independent rental options for youth in the Rain City Project (Munro et al., 2017). This adaptation of youth-focussed Housing First builds off the Foyer model, which identifies a range of choice within accommodations for youth including transition housing, enhanced accommodations, and independent living (Gaetz & Scott, 2012). A pivotal moment in the development of youth-focussed Housing First was the recognition that Housing First could be integrated with transitional housing supports for chronically homeless youth (Gaetz, 2014c). Gaetz (2017) identified the need for options of accommodations to include respite housing, returning a youth home through family reconnection, permanent supportive housing, transition housing, and scattered site housing. The key idea is that youth should have choice in what models of accommodations meet both their developmental needs and preferences while emphasizing that "independent living is a desired outcome for all young people and a preferred option" (Gaetz, 2017, p.19). One quasi-experiment noted the efficacy of this approach as youth in higher fidelity Housing First programs which emphasized choice of housing options (independent models) had a decline in hospital admissions and an increase in accessing out-patient services (Gilmer, 2016).

Though much of the literature supported a Housing First approach, one study identified youth may alternatively prefer treatment in a residential program as a primary option. The Forchuk et al. (2013) study, longitudinal data and qualitative evidence from a large sample of

187 youth who had both a mental health problems and substance abuse issues, reported that 40% preferred Housing First, while 31% preferred treatment first. The youth who preferred treatment first were representative of those struggling with substance use and felt "that housing would be an enabling environment for addiction and mental health problems" (Forchuk et al., 2013, p.103). This study concluded that adaptations to a Housing First approach for youth must include the option to access housing or treatment first, as this would allow youth to meet their independent developmental needs and preferences. It thus reminds planners and policy makers of a key component of youth-focussed Housing First – choice. However, not all youth in this study were guaranteed the option of the housing or treatment they chose, affecting its overall results. Furthermore, it appears the Housing First option offered was not a specific program model adapted for youth which could have incorporated increased developmentally-appropriate supports. This factor is similar to the limitations of the Kozloff et al. (2016) study that extrapolates the data of youth 18-24 in the AHCS adult Housing First project. As these studies are focussed on the adult model rather than distinct youth-focussed Housing First programs, the conclusions are limited.

A number of articles identified a wide range of themes that focus on developmentally-appropriate supports for inclusion in a youth-focussed Housing First program model. Key support elements had the overall aim of embodying positive youth development by providing individualized support that promotes community and social inclusion (Gaetz, 2017). A study that identified "family, connection, community, and preparedness" (Holtschneider, 2016, p. 214) as key themes to be integrated in to a youth-focussed Housing First program, was supported by several reports (Eberle Planning & Research et al., 2007; Noble, 2015). However, given the additional requirements of a youth-focussed Housing First program structure, it is important for these aspects to be clearly defined and articulated to ensure youth do not feel overly burdened or forced into some semblance of treatment by these additional components. An illustrative example of this is evident in a discussion of transition housing for youth which identified how young adults felt both overly restricted and supported, balancing between feeling like an adult and child in a hybrid model of Housing First and supported living (Munson, Stanhope, Small, and Atterbury, 2016).

Youth-focussed Housing First programs also need to be responsive to the unique issues of specific youth populations. The AHCS project, which focussed on housing stability as the primary program aim, has been identified as improving housing stability for youth struggling with mental illness (Kozloff & et al., 2016b). The roots of youth-focussed Housing First from the Infinity Project highlight that the model was developed as a response to new demographics of youth such as teen parents and youth families needing access to permanent housing (Scott & Harrison, 2013). Another example of this came to light in the Rain City Project which identified the need for youth-focussed Housing First to be adapted to LGBTQ2S+ populations, given trans and queer youth have specific challenges and additional risks while homeless (Munro et al., 2017). These examples demonstrate the flexibility and individualized supports that can be incorporated into youth-focussed Housing First.

Gaps in the Literature

While the youth-focussed Housing First research and knowledge base is growing in the field of grey literature, there continues to be a lack of academic, peer reviewed work necessary to conduct a robust literature review of the results of this adaptation of the adult model. There was limited evidence of youth-specific pilot programs and several of the peer-reviewed articles involved extrapolating youth data out of the adult AHCS project (Kozloff et al., 2016a; Kozloff et al, 2016b). These reports identified limitations of the study as interventions and tools were not created specifically for use with youth populations. Some organizations are currently addressing this gap through social innovation labs that are piloting youth-focussed Housing First, such as the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. This will provide further evidence in future years as there should be a broader base of demonstrated projects to provide evidence for the implementation of youth-focussed Housing First programs.

One significant gap in both the academic and grey literature is evident in the limitations of the existing research, such as a lack of evaluative studies and diverse perspectives of youth-focussed Housing First. In the available work there is one predominant investigator, Stephen Gaetz, who is the co-lead of the Making the Shift initiative which includes three demonstration projects on HF4Y currently underway, involving detailed program evaluation at all phases as well as two locations using a randomized control trail model. However, outcomes are not yet available. While the work that Gaetz and colleagues have completed is important for identifying gaps and potential avenues to advance the field, without research by other investigators to replicate findings, there is no substantive way to independently assess all aspects of this approach. Currently, the only alternative perspective is that provided by Forchuk & et al. (2013), which promotes a philosophy of appropriate alternatives, as "readiness first" is applicable to some youth with substance use issues who preferred treatment prior to housing. Like the AHCS study, this investigation was limited to those with a diagnosed major mental illness. To increase the evidence base on youth-focussed Housing First other academics need to both validate and challenge Gaetz's perspective as well as evaluate the effectiveness of this model.

Based on the available research there appears to be a lack of understanding in what parameters should be used to evaluate youth-focussed Housing First programs. Examples from extant studies are scarce. World-wide there are only a handful of programs that are identified as examples of youth-focussed Housing First, few have any formal evaluation, and none are found in academic literature. Reports omit program logic models, program protocols, and specific components of program delivery, which limits the evaluation of both implementation and outcomes. The Infinity Project is the only Canadian initiative which published a case study in an overview of youth-focussed Housing First approaches (Scott & Harrison, 2013). However, it consists primarily of a program description without either qualitative or quantitative supporting data.

Another issue is that most research out of this limited literature uses qualitative methodology which may detail specific programmatic aspects unique to an organization or

geographic locale but provides no substantive evidence of efficacy or effectiveness. Another aspect of limitations in evaluation arises from the importance of articulating the impact of holistic supports beyond housing sustainability. Although the need for holistic supports is repeatedly identified in the research, there is little evidence of the impact of such program components on youth well-being. The exception is the evaluative report for the Limerick Youth Housing program, which included measures of life satisfaction and quality of life (Lawlor & Bownen, 2017). Further evaluation limitations in the literature are evident in the lack of longitudinal data to provide evidence of whether youth-focussed Housing First impacts better transitions to adulthood for youth experiencing homelessness. The only youth-focussed Housing First longitudinal studies include Forchuk & et al.'s (2013) study, and the AHCS project focussed on adults (Kozloff et al., 2016a; Kozloff et al., 2016b). Longitudinal studies are needed to address concerns that youth-focussed Housing First could push youth towards adulthood too quickly and have negative impacts on education and long-term outcomes (Gaetz & Scott, 2012).

Another significant gap within the literature is a lack of evidence adapting youth-focussed Housing First to sub-populations. Although LGBTQ2S+ youth are overrepresented in the homeless population (Abramovich & Shelton, 2017) there was only one study, Rain City Project, that used the intervention with queer and trans youth (Munro et al., 2017). Other limitations include a lack of model adaptation for youth in varying life stages such as young (adolescent) parents, youth under 19 years of age, and those with higher levels of needs because of co-existing medical, developmental, and emotional conditions. Finally, the model has not been adapted to youth living in rural communities who may not have access to affordable housing stock or appropriate supports.

Indigenous peoples are over-represented among Canadian homeless persons and there are only a couple of examples in Canada which apply this model to the needs of urban Indigenous youth. Wabano, an Aboriginal Access Health Centre in Ottawa, is dedicated to providing supports and housing opportunities to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis persons who are episodically homeless. It offers case management and other supports tailored for youth ages 18-25 within a culturally-appropriate context, but there are no reported program evaluations or outcomes for this initiative. Thus, there is no documented evidence on how youth-focussed Housing First can be culturally-appropriate for Indigenous young people who live on reserve or in rural areas (Wabano's program serves only urban youth). This is of specific cultural importance as the emphasis on independent living contradicts cultural values that emphasize family and community closeness, the importance of traditional teachings and ceremony, and connection to the land. Presently, as a sister program to the Infinity Project, Home Fire, is operating as an Indigenous youth-focussed Housing First program that includes congregate and scattered-site housing (Gaetz, 2017). Although no data has yet been published from the Home Fire project, the role of culture needs to be a key focus area of study as youth-focussed Housing First program models are developed.

Policy Recommendations

Based on this literature review, we make many recommendations for the development of social policy in relation to the implementation of youth-focussed Housing First – at national, provincial/territorial, and municipal levels. Our first key recommendation is that social policy needs to invest in further research to both identify how to best adapt the youth-focussed Housing First program model to meet the distinct needs of youth, as well as to identify the factors required for providing housing stability and success. While research on housing initiatives has been propelled at the federal level, provincial jurisdictions should step in with studies that explore regional and local adaptations. The potential of applying Housing First programs to youth populations has begun to receive attention in the last several years, but a significant amount of further research is needed to identify how to best adapt the program model. Additionally, service providers are caught between needing to provide stable housing and establishing the factors required for housing stability and success.

Future research should pilot a multi-stage youth-focussed Housing First program that provides choice between models of accommodations that include integrated holistic supports based on the local context, and are coordinated through community planning. The pilot should incorporate supports that are provided to youth throughout their housing journey and may involve different models of accommodations as they mature. While there are many potential options for holistic supports, core components of future youth-focussed Housing First research should implement a variety of developmental and social-emotional supports for youth. Developmental supports could include education, life skill development, and employment skills, to name a few, while social-emotional supports could include counselling, substance misuse support, family reconnection, cultural support, healthy activities programming, and peer and adult mentorship supports. Further research would need to determine the most effective and critical program support elements to promote both housing stability and a successful transition out of homelessness into adulthood, and demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of this approach. Research should also identify how adaption of youth-focussed Housing First to sub-populations such as teen parents, LGBTQ2S+ youth, and/or Indigenous youth promotes successful outcomes.

It is important for this research to have strong objectives with built-in measures to provide both quantitative and qualitative data throughout the project and to demonstrate longitudinal outcomes. Quantitatively, measures of success should be completed incrementally to measure different benchmarks of housing sustainability at six months, one year, and two years to provide evidence of housing success. Additional quantitative data collection should be completed throughout the program, tracking numbers of youth successfully housed, length of time housed, types of accommodations, and supports utilized by participants. Specific program outcomes such as employment or education attainment, reduction in hospitalizations, reduced interactions with the justice system could also be identified to measure quantitative success. Qualitative data should also be collected to identify perceptions and satisfaction of the additional support services, housing accommodations, helpful interventions, and reports of unsuccessful services. Youth could share their experiences in the program and their perceptions of the program's

impact on quality of life; this would produce youth-driven recommendations for future programming. As a significant gap in the literature was the lack of longitudinal data, it is important for future research to have the capacity to track participants after completion of the program to measure housing sustainability and other developmental life tasks such as securing employment or educational attainment. This would capture the long-term outcomes of youth-focussed Housing First, such as a successful transition to adulthood and preventing chronic/long term homelessness for the youth later in life.

Our second key policy recommendation is for provincial and federal government to invest in policy and resources to support on-the-ground program implementation for communities to successfully provide youth-focussed Housing First programing. This includes training, funding, and policies that promote the coordination of services and incentivize community planning processes, such as collaboration requirements for funding. Many community plans to address youth homelessness have emphasized youth-focussed Housing First as key to its plans, which may demonstrate a national interest in this program model or may merely be an accommodation to the priority place of this approach by the HPS. Despite significant size differences in many of the communities, youth-focussed Housing First has been prioritized in large urban centers with examples of its applicability to different contexts being Wellington County, Kamloops, and Edmonton (Taylor Newberry Consulting, 2015; City of Kamloops, 2013; Homeward Trust Edmonton, 2016). Despite the lack of academic evidence, youth-focussed Housing First is being actionized by grassroots organizations as community planning encompasses this philosophy and program model. Turner (2016) identifies youth-focussed Housing First as a key element of community planning and an example of tertiary prevention. The philosophy of youth-focussed Housing First both prevents and reduces youth homelessness with outcomes that the Infinity Project has proven to be a cost-effective solution for municipalities (Canadian Homelessness Research Network, 2013).

Our third key social policy recommendation is to incorporate the philosophy of housing as a right for youth within legislation (Canada Without Poverty, 2016). In Wales, this right has included a duty to assist, which is a governmental responsibility to secure accommodations for youth at risk of homelessness by providing housing for six months (Barnardo's, 2016). A duty to assist in a Canadian context would allow the federal government to incentivize the provinces to prevent homelessness by ensuring young people were not discharged into homelessness out of systems such as foster care, corrections, or hospitals.

Our fourth social policy recommendation is to create vehicles that promote coordination between federal and provincial resources in a combined effort to actualize young people's right to housing through a youth-focussed Housing First approach. Youth homelessness is a complex policy matrix that results in fragmented systems, which could be addressed through an inter-ministerial table. French, Gaetz, & Redman (2017) recommend a federal-provincial-territorial planning table to promote coordination between mandates. Alberta is an excellent model of this inter-ministry coordination as the only province that has developed a provincial youth homelessness plan. Surprisingly, the Government of Alberta's (2015) provincial youth plan does

not specifically prioritize youth-focussed Housing First, but the provincial leadership has supported local community plans such as Edmonton's and Calgary's, who have a strong framework to implement youth-focussed Housing First. By coordinating systems at a provincial level, communities are able to actionize youth-focussed Housing First and provide developmentally-appropriate supports.

Our final social policy recommendation is to promote federal leadership and investments through the HPS, which has been re-designed as "Reaching Home" to be launched in March 2019. These federal funds can be administered at the municipal level and used to specifically fund youth-focussed Housing First initiatives. To increase evidence of the effectiveness of youth-focussed Housing First, there should also be funding for research, innovations, and scalability projects that adapt youth-focussed Housing First to sub-populations. By increasing the evidence base of youth-focussed Housing First, there may be a similar effect of Federal investments that prioritize Housing First as is the case with the AHCS project.

In 2012 there was resistance to HPS directives such as 65% of funding designated to Housing First activities that prioritize the chronic homeless (Schiff & Waegemakers Schiff, 2016). Unfortunately, to date the funding criteria promotes a scattered site, permanent housing model that is not always appropriate for young people who may require access to other accommodation options, such as transitional housing and congregate housing, to meet their developmental needs. Youth-focussed Housing First may not meet the HPS Housing First program directives, which requires an adaption of the funding requirements and possibly a distinct youth funding stream.

Prior to HPS, the National Homelessness Initiative had a distinct funding strategy for youth, which Chau & Gawliuk (2009) identify as a limitation of HPS. These funds could be used by local communities to fund youth housing pilot projects and improve the evidence base that youth-focussed Housing First works. Investments should also support municipalities to implement youth-focussed Housing First by funding training and knowledge mobilization tools that help communities adapt the model to their local context. This model is demonstrated to be a cost-effective intervention and a strategic investment by governments (Gilmer, 2016; Kozloff & et al, 2016a; Scott & Harrison, 2013). Clearly, the intersections between national, provincial, and local policies highlight the need for governments to prioritize the advancement of youth-focussed Housing First to ensure communities have the financial and human resources for implementation.

Conclusion

As an emerging practice in the field of youth homelessness, youth-focussed Housing First has rapidly become a topic of interest to both researchers and community planners. Despite the lack of research on this topic, at the time of this review, ten Canadian communities had plans that referenced the inclusion of youth-focussed Housing First. This highlights the need and appetite for further knowledge development so communities have the resources needed to implement successful youth-focussed Housing First programs in their local context. As young people will continue to age out of the foster care system with a need for distinct housing that meets their developmental stage, and there continues to be a surge of young persons who leave unacceptable

home environments, there is a strong need to further the knowledge base of youth-focussed Housing First. By investing in young people with the aim of preventing homelessness and further trauma, we will see an increase in positive outcomes for youth experiencing homelessness. Given this interest, it is an exciting and dynamic time with anticipated opportunities for involvement in research that improves the evidence base that Housing First works for youth. This presents unique opportunities to influence policy and program development that could have a significant influence on the knowledge creation of youth-focussed Housing First. There is hope that youth-focussed Housing First will no longer be missing in the literature in future years.

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