

## 'AT HOME'/'CHEZ SOI' RESEARCH DEMONSTRATION PROJECT IN TORONTO

Project Update • October 2009

*This document is an update on our activities to establish the 'At Home'/'Chez Soi' project in Toronto. The first two pages describe the national 'At Home'/'Chez Soi' project. The rest of the document focuses on what's happening in Toronto.*



### WHAT IS 'AT HOME'/'CHEZ SOI'?

'At Home'/'Chez Soi' is a national housing and health care project for people who are homeless and who experience mental health issues.

'At Home'/'Chez Soi' is funded and coordinated by the Mental Health Commission of Canada. The Commission's goal is to produce evidence about what works to improve housing stability and health for people with mental health issues.

'At Home'/'Chez Soi' is being implemented in 5 cities: Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montréal, and Moncton. Across Canada, over 2,225 homeless people living with mental illness will take part as research participants, advisors, and peer support workers.

'At Home'/'Chez Soi' is unique and the largest study of its kind underway in the world right now.

'At Home'/'Chez Soi' is a research study to compare usual services for homeless people with mental health issues and an approach called '**Housing First**.' Housing First has been very effective in other countries but it has never been formally evaluated in Canada.

### WHAT IS 'HOUSING FIRST'?

The number of people who need housing and mental health supports is not shrinking. Different approaches are needed to help people recover.

'At Home'/'Chez Soi' will look at a different kind of approach. It is called, 'Housing First.' It means that a person who is experiencing homelessness and mental health problems is provided with good, quality housing as the first step to recovery. This approach is guided by two important beliefs:

1. Housing is a basic right for all people. Housing should be an issue that is separate from treatment.
2. People should make their own choices about their lives.

Many social service programs in Canada take a 'treatment first' approach when they try to meet the needs of homeless people who have mental health issues. This approach starts with the view that mental illness and substance use are the main problems that prevent people from staying housed.

Because of this view, the programs usually require a person to go into treatment for addictions and/or mental illness before he/she can be helped to get housing.

Often these programs have very rigid rules. People who "break the rules," (for example, by relapsing or by refusing treatment) can be turned away or can have their services and housing taken away.

## HOW DOES 'HOUSING FIRST' WORK?

One of the first 'Housing First' programs was set up in 1992 in New York City. It is called 'Pathways to Housing'. We will test a similar approach in 'At Home'/'Chez Soi'.

It is for people who experience chronic homelessness and who have high or moderate mental health needs.

It starts by providing the person with access to an independent apartment of his or her own. In Toronto, the apartments are not in a supervised building. The apartments are in well-maintained buildings, in many different locations in the city. A rent supplement is paid directly to the landlord to ensure that the person can afford to live in the apartment. The person has to pay some of the rent and will be visited every week for individualized support, tailored to his or her choice.

The person does not need to start (or finish) addictions treatment or mental health treatment, or take medications, in order to get an apartment. The choice about treatment is up to the individual. If the person relapses while living in the apartment, he/she will not be evicted or moved to a more supervised setting. The only causes for eviction would be the regular ones that every tenant faces (e.g. not paying rent, or committing other violations of a standard lease).

Along with the apartment, the person is provided intensive, individualized help with his or her emotional, psychiatric, medical, and basic needs.

**'AT HOME'/'CHEZ SOI'** is a **'multi-site randomized controlled trial'**. This means:

- It has multiple sites (5 cities).
- Participants will be randomly assigned to either the new program or to usual services, which is an objective way of conducting this type of research.
- It uses a 'control arm', which means it compares the difference between usual services ('control arm') and the new program ('intervention arm'). It does not simply look at the new program all by itself.
- It is a trial (it is testing out something new). Note: in Toronto, the 'Streets to Homes' program follows the 'Housing First' model.

For people with high mental health needs, this help is provided by community-based teams of professionals. These teams are called Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams. ACT teams will provide services whenever a person needs them, and they will provide supports for as long as the person wants. No one has to leave the program unless he or she chooses to leave.

For people with less intense mental health needs, there will be supports through a program called Intensive Case Management (ICM). The 'Streets to Homes' program in Toronto (<http://www.toronto.ca/housing/about-streets-homes.htm>) follows this model.

For more information on **'AT HOME'/'CHEZ SOI'** go to: [www.mentalhealthcommission.ca](http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca)

## 'AT HOME'/'CHEZ SOI' IN TORONTO

### RECENT MILESTONES:

October 2008:	Project announced by MHCC
November – December 2008:	Public Town Halls to receive input on Proposal Development
January 2009:	Toronto Proposal submitted by City of Toronto & Centre for Research on Inner City Health
February 2009:	Service providers selected
March – May 2009:	Focus groups with people with lived experience
April 2009:	Agreements finalized with Mental Health Commission of Canada and Toronto Project Team, applications for membership on Local Advisory Committee reviewed by MHCC
April 2009:	First meeting of the Toronto Site Operations Team
May 2009:	First meeting of the Local Advisory Committee
June 2009:	People with Lived Experience Caucus launched
July 2009:	First meetings of project work groups
August 2009:	Project submitted for ethical review at St. Michael's Hospital

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### ABOUT THE SUPPORT SERVICES

In March 2009, the community-based agencies who will deliver support services were selected, through a widely released Call for Proposals. A Service Work Group has been created to assist the providers to develop the best possible services. Staff training has been provided to increase awareness and understanding of the recovery process, as well as other important concepts of the 'At Home'/'Chez Soi' project.

### ACT SERVICES

The COTA Health Recovery ACT team will provide support to 100 high-needs participants. The Recovery ACT team is committed to being flexible and responsive to the unique needs and choices of each participant.

The ACT team will have 14 members. There will be 3 case managers, 3 nurses, 2 peer support specialists, 1 vocational rehabilitation specialist to help with employment issues, 1 specialist to help with concurrent mental health and substance use issues, 2 part-time psychiatrists, 1 program manager and 1 receptionist.

Supports offered will include:

- Assessing participants' health, psychiatric, and social needs
- Individualized recovery/goal plans for participants (collaborative)
- Peer support and individual activities

### IMPORTANT UPCOMING DATES:

#### OCTOBER 19, 2009, 2-4 PM:

#### 'At Home'/'Chez Soi' in Toronto Town Hall

*An opportunity to learn more about the project first-hand, and to discuss the project with Caucus members, service providers, and researchers.*

**St. Lawrence Hall, 157 King St. East, Toronto**

RSVP by October 16: [mhccproject@toronto.ca](mailto:mhccproject@toronto.ca)

#### NOVEMBER 23, 2009:

**National Launch Date**

### ICM SERVICES

The Toronto North Support Services/Community Resource Connections of Toronto ICM team will provide Intensive Case Management to 100 clients.

Individual support with a recovery focus will be provided to participants, and after hours support will be arranged through crisis services in Toronto. A half-time manager and 5 case managers will provide services to participants.

### ETHNORACIAL ICM SERVICES

Across Boundaries: An Ethnoracial Mental Health Centre will provide specialized supports from a holistic, anti-oppression framework. Support will be provided to 100 moderate-needs participants from racialized groups. This team will have 1 manager, 6 case managers, and 1 nurse.

## HOUSING

The City of Toronto's Shelter, Support and Housing Administration Division will administer the rent allowances and provide housing support to the service teams.

Outreach to landlords has been a big priority, to ensure that participants have the greatest range of housing choices. The City of Toronto is working with Housing Connections on an outreach strategy to recruit up to 300 private market apartments across the city for the project.

A Housing Working Group meets to provide advice on this strategy. The Working Group includes non-profit housing providers, Toronto Employment and Social Services, Ontario Disability Support Program, private market landlords, and people with lived experience.

## RESEARCH

Researchers at the Centre for Research on Inner City Health have been working with the national research team to develop the core research questions that will be asked of participants in all 5 cities. Local research questions are also being developed based on some of the feedback that the project team received during the public consultations for this project last winter and through discussions with the project's service providers and research work group.

Interviewers are being hired and research training is underway. The St. Michael's Hospital Research Ethics Board is reviewing the project.

## TORONTO PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE CAUCUS

People with lived experience need to be involved in all aspects of 'At Home'/'Chez Soi' so that the project meets their needs and so their viewpoints are reflected in the research. People with lived experience have set up a Caucus to share information, promote inclusion, and coordinate participation in 'At Home'/'Chez Soi'. Toronto is the first 'At Home'/'Chez Soi' site in Canada to establish a People with Lived Experience Caucus.

The Caucus meets monthly and Caucus members sit

as representatives on each of the Work Groups, on the Site Operations Team, and on the Local Advisory Committee. Next steps include finding a home base for the Caucus at a community-based agency.

## LOCAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Local Advisory Committee was set up in May after a public Call for Applications. The Committee will help identify ways to continue successful aspects of 'At Home'/'Chez Soi' and to promote the results of the project. Individuals with extensive knowledge of homelessness and mental health issues are involved, including people with lived experience, family members, government leaders, and service and advocacy groups.

## SITE COORDINATOR

In June, the Mental Health Commission of Canada hired a Site Coordinator for the Toronto project, Faye More. Each of the 5 cities in 'At Home'/'Chez Soi' has a Site Coordinator. The role of the Site Coordinator is to work with all of the partners and stakeholders to help facilitate the successful implementation of the project on behalf of the Mental Health Commission of Canada.

## PROJECT OFFICE

A project office on Church Street, near Carlton, will be shared by the ACT team from COTA Health, the Toronto North Support Services/Community Resources Connections of Toronto ICM team, researchers, and the Site Coordinator. The office space has been leased and renovations will soon be underway, with a move-in expected later this fall. Renovations will include interview rooms and a large group activity room for peer-facilitated groups.

The Ethnoracial ICM team will be based at the Across Boundaries office near Eglinton and Caledonia.

## LAUNCH CELEBRATION

The national/local launch of 'At Home'/'Chez Soi' is scheduled for November 23, 2009, in Toronto. The other 4 sites will conduct local launches on the same day.

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