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The At Home/ Chez Soi Project: Moving Evidence into Policy

The Story of the At Home/Chez Soi Initiative's Impact on Federal Homelessness Policy in Canada

Eric Macnaughton Geoffrey Nelson Paula Goering Myra Piat

Mental Health Commission of Canada National Qualitative Research Team
for the At Home/Chez Soi Project

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The opinions reflected in this report are based on aggregate themes derived from interviews with community, project and participant stakeholders. The opinions, findings and any quotes expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the opinions or positions of the organizations/agencies mentioned.

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KEY MESSAGES

This study examines the sustainability of the At Home/Chez Soi (AHCS) initiative beyond the demonstration project period. Part of a larger study about the sustainability of the services and their long-term impacts, the current report examines AHCS's wider impact on homelessness policy in Canada.

Using a qualitative case study approach based on key informant interviews and other data (e.g. policy documents), this project examines the federal-level strategies of the project leaders to ensure a “safe landing” for the project beyond the official end of the project. Also, how these efforts brought about the project's longer-term impact on national homelessness policy is considered.

In general, the strategy was based on the integrated knowledge translation approach, which engaged key decision-makers at all stages of the research as a way of gaining “buy in” of the findings. Using the interim findings as a basis, the leadership team, together with the Mental Health Commission of Canada's (MHCC) Government Relations staff mounted a “full court press” meeting with numerous political and policy decision-makers at various levels, in an attempt to persuade them to sustain the project. Eventually, they achieved success in securing transitional funding from both the federal and provincial governments. This occurred during a window of time when the federal government was considering the direction of its homelessness policy. The evidence from AHCS presented during the efforts to secure transitional funding played a significant role during these policy deliberations. Because of this and other factors, the federal government changed the policy of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) towards a Housing First (HF) approach.

Regarding the successful strategy, key informants emphasized four themes, which were:

1. The **importance of evidence that the HF approach worked**, that was both rigorous and contextually relevant.
2. The **framing of that evidence** that was contextually relevant to decision-makers (i.e. in terms of the cost-effectiveness of the HF approach).
3. The **importance of the relationships** between researchers, decision-makers and their intermediaries.
4. The **importance of timing**, as the evidence came forward during a period when federal policy makers were considering policy options for HPS.

The practical implications for demonstration projects are:

- the importance of a **collaborative approach** to lobbying;
- the value of having **interim findings** to use as a knowledge translation tool in advance of the end of the project's formal demonstration period;
- the importance of **framing the findings** (and "ask") in terms of a broader policy agenda; and
- if possible, the **importance of planning** for (and securing funding) for a transitional period after the end of the formal demonstration program.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The current research examines the policy impacts of the AHCS project beyond the demonstration project period. Part of a larger study about the sustainability of the services and their long-term impacts, the current report examines AHCS's wider impact on homelessness policy in Canada. The study describes how efforts to achieve sustainability in a limited sense – that is, to attain transitional funding and secure a “safe landing” for the project beyond the official end of the project – were integrally related to the project's longer-term impact on national homelessness policy and resource allocation. It highlights the importance of the evidence presented by AHCS leaders and its timing, given that it occurred during a time when the federal government was reconsidering the direction of HPS. It also highlights the importance of the strong relationships between the research team and the policy-makers and the ability of the researchers to present interim findings in a way that is most relevant to the decision-making context.

This research builds on previous research on the conception (Macnaughton, Nelson, & Goering, 2013), planning (Nelson et al., 2013; Nelson et al., 2015) and implementation (Macnaughton et al., 2015; Nelson et al., 2014) of AHSC. This report, together with a companion report on sustainability of programs at each of the sites (Nelson et al., 2016) offers systematic evidence about knowledge translation and provides both practical and theoretical insights as to how research makes its way into policy.

The overall purpose of this research is to tell the story behind this large-scale RCT (Nelson, Macnaughton, & Goering, 2015). The two main research questions are:

1. What is the story of the AHCS's national-level efforts to sustain the project for a transitional period and impact social policy?
2. What are the key themes on how the study's research findings were translated into ongoing federal policy?

Given the complexity of the knowledge exchange process related to moving evidence into policy, we adopted a case study approach, which has been recommended as the best way to understand this complexity (Greenhalgh & Fahy, 2015). The approach relies primarily on data from 15 semi-structured key informant interviews with individuals from the political and policy spheres who were involved in the project, as well as AHCS project leaders at both the national and provincial levels.

The findings were analyzed to produce a chronology of the key events leading to sustainability, as well as the common themes underlying the process. By sustainability, we refer both to the efforts to secure transitional funding using the research findings and wider policy impacts of that research.

Key events in the chronology included:

- Deciding to use an integrated knowledge translation approach;
- Creating a Sustainability Task Force which brought together AHCS project leaders and key MHCC staff (including Government Relations);
- Confirming that the federal government would not sustain the project beyond its commitment for the demonstration project;
- Developing a federal-provincial “ask” for transitional funding based on the success of the interim findings from AHCS;
- The upcoming deadline for consideration of renewal of the HPS program;
- Meeting with key federal government insiders to gain advice about how to frame the evidence;
- Based on the interim findings, using a “full court press” to present the findings to numerous political and bureaucratic decision-makers and to “create a buzz” about the findings;
- Drawing on key policy entrepreneurs to bring the urgency of the issue to the attention of senior political leaders;
- Negotiating a provincial/federal agreement to secure transitional funding for the AHCS teams; and
- Learning in advance of the March, 2013 budget that the HF approach would guide future federal homelessness policy.

Regarding the successful strategy, key informants emphasized **four themes**, which were:

1. the importance of the evidence, that was both rigorous and contextually relevant, that the HF approach worked;
2. the framing of that evidence in terms of the cost-effectiveness of the HF approach;
3. the importance to policy uptake of having built strong previous relationships between researchers, decision-makers and their intermediaries; and
4. the importance of timing, as the evidence came forward during a period when federal policy-makers were considering whether to continue HPS.

In terms of theoretical implications, the findings are consistent with policy streams theory, which holds that policy change occurs when the three streams of problems, politics and policy ideas converge. In this case, the threat of AHCS participants losing their housing created a problem. Regarding the politics of the situation, the success of the project's findings and their framing resonated with key decision-makers, expressed in terms congruent with the current government's political agenda (more efficient government). At the same time, policy entrepreneurs both internal to government and outside, were able to use an opening window of opportunity (i.e. the government's review of the HPS program) to advance the successful policy idea (using the AHCS project's findings to inform the renewal of the HPS program). Thus, there was not one key "driver" for the change. Rather, it was the convergence of a number of factors that led to the policy change (and the securing of transitional funding): concern for the participants, the window of the HPS renewal and the strong policy idea backed by rigorous evidence, expressed in a way that was relevant to policy-makers.

In terms of its practical implications for demonstration projects, the study showed:

- the importance of a collaborative approach to lobbying (avoid "shaming");
- the value of having interim findings to use as a knowledge translation tool in advance of the end of the project's formal demonstration period;
- the importance of framing the findings (and "ask") in terms of a broader policy agenda; and
- if possible, the importance of planning for (and securing funding) for a transitional period after the end of the formal demonstration program.

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INTRODUCTION

The At Home/Chez Soi (AHCS) project was the largest mental health services trial ever mounted in Canada. Funded by Health Canada, and carried out by the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC), the project used a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design, following more than 2200 previously homeless individuals in five cities (Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal and Moncton) for two years (Goering, et al., 2011). Participants with mental illness who had experienced chronic homelessness were randomly assigned to Housing First (HF) vs. Treatment as Usual (TAU). Nested within each of these two experimental conditions were two groups of participants: those with high needs, who received support from Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams in the HF condition, and those with moderate needs, who received support from Intensive Case Management (ICM) programs in the HF Condition. Additionally, sites had the option of developing a “third arm,” or an intervention condition that was tailor-made to local conditions and needs, and most sites developed a third arm. HF is an innovative, evidence-based and principle-based (e.g. consumer choice, recovery, community integration) approach to ending chronic homelessness that utilizes rent supplements to access scattered-site market housing (usually private apartments) and recovery-oriented, clinical services that are separate from participants’ housing (Aubry, Nelson, & Tsemberis, 2015).

The AHCS research found that the programs demonstrated a high level of fidelity to the HF model, both initially (Nelson et al., 2014) and after one year of operation (Macnaughton et al., 2015). Moreover, fidelity was significantly and directly associated with positive outcomes, including housing stability, quality of life and community functioning (Goering et al., 2016). After one and two years, HF participants showed significantly more positive outcomes than TAU participants on measures of housing stability, quality of life and community functioning (Aubry et al., 2015; Aubry et al., 2016; Stergiopoulos et al., 2015).

The current research examines the policy impacts of the project beyond the demonstration project period. Part of a larger study about the sustainability of the services and their long-term impacts, the current report examines AHCS’s wider impact on homelessness policy in Canada. As will be described, efforts to secure a “safe landing” for the project beyond the official end of the project were integrally related to project’s longer-term impact on national homelessness policy, given that the evidence about AHCS was presented during a period when the federal government was reconsidering its Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS).

This research builds on previous research on the conception (Macnaughton, Nelson, & Goering, 2013), planning (Nelson et al., 2013; Nelson et al., 2015) and implementation (Macnaughton et al., 2015;

Nelson et al., 2014) of AHSC. Seldom are data about the various phases of a demonstration project, including its policy impacts, systematically collected. The significance of this study rests with its ability to shed light on the nature and impact of the AHCS's national-level sustainability strategy, which involved an integrated knowledge translation approach. This report, together with a companion report on sustainability of programs at each of the sites (Nelson et al., 2016), offers a chance to build systematic evidence about knowledge translation and provide both practical and theoretical insight as to how research makes its way into policy. The companion report looks at the sustainability of the demonstration project teams (funding, staffing, fidelity to the model, as well as influence of HF on the local system of care).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Unfortunately, many effective demonstration projects in health and human services are not sustained, much less expanded into practice in community settings beyond the demonstration sites. Wandersman et al. (2008) have termed this problem the “research-practice” gap. This gap has led to the development of knowledge translation (KT) approaches. Traditional approaches to KT have emphasized top-down, expert-driven, “push” processes that pay little attention to the community context that surrounds and inevitably impacts the implementation of evidence-based programs (Jacobson, 2007; Wandersman et al., 2008). The limitations of “push” approaches to KT have prompted researchers to better understand the context of knowledge users and the importance of the relationship between researchers and knowledge users (Jacobson, Butterill, & Goering, 2003). This recognition of the importance of user context has led to the development of more interactive, relationship-based approaches that have become known as integrated knowledge translation (IKT) (Bullock, Watson, & Goering, 2010).

Central to IKT is the relationship between researchers and knowledge users. The knowledge users in IKT can include policy-makers, planners, and practitioners. With regard to policy-makers, Bogenschneider and Corbett (2010), in their book *Evidence-based Policymaking*, emphasize the importance of the relationship between researchers and policy-makers. They state that it is important to break through stereotypes that researchers and policy-makers may hold of one another. Potential stereotypes are well captured in the following story.

A man in a hot air balloon realized he was lost. He reduced altitude and spotted a woman below. He descended a bit more and shouted, “Excuse me, can you help me? I promised a friend I would meet him an hour ago, but I don’t know where I am.” The woman below replied, “You are in a hot air balloon hovering approximately 30 feet above the ground. You are between 40 and 41 degrees north latitude and between 59 and 60 degrees west longitude.” “You must be a researcher,” said the balloonist. “I am,” replied the woman, “how did you know?” “Well,” answered the balloonist, “everything you told me is technically correct, but I have no idea what to make of your information, and the fact is I am still lost. Frankly, you’ve not been much help so far.” The woman below responded, “You must be a policymaker.” “I am,” replied the balloonist, “but how did you know?” “Well,” said the woman, “you don’t know where you are or where you are going. You have risen to where you are due to a large quantity of hot air. You made a promise that you have no idea how to keep. You expect someone else to solve your problem. And the fact is you are in exactly the same position you were in before we met, but now, somehow, it’s my fault.”¹

¹ Thanks to Ray DeV. Peters of Queen’s University for sharing this story.

Bogenschneider and Corbett (2010) assert that researchers need to have a better understanding of the policy-making process and context and the needs of policy-makers for research. They also underscore the importance of having an ongoing relationship with policy-makers and a long-term commitment to making policy change. Furthermore, they argue for an educational approach over an advocacy approach in working in with policy-makers, observing that policy-makers appreciate having trusted researchers who they can call upon for evidence and advice.

In IKT in the policy arena, the role of the researcher goes beyond providing research evidence and technical expertise to one of consulting about policy alternatives and solutions to problems (Goering & Wasylenki, 1993; Jacobson, Butterill, & Goering, 2005). In essence, researchers become what has been called policy “operatives” (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988) or policy “entrepreneurs” (Kingdon, 2005; Mintrom & Norman, 2009). A policy operative or entrepreneur is well-positioned to advance policy solutions in an environment in which multiple problems compete for policy attention (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988). Kingdon (2005) has argued that policy entrepreneurs recognize and are able to take advantage of windows of opportunity for change, when three different “streams” converge – problems, politics and policy options. An important dimension of making change is how problems and solutions are “framed” (Benford & Snow, 2000; Fischer, 2003; Humphreys & Rappaport, 1993). Policy entrepreneurs are able to frame problems and solutions in way that aligns multiple political stakeholders – government insiders and community members and organizations that have a stake in the issue – on a policy option. Policy entrepreneurs recognize that while research evidence is important, it is only one component of the policy change process. Discursive policy analysis (Fischer, 2003) that uses the metaphor of a drama (Greenhalgh & Russell, 2005; Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988) provides a contextualized view of how evidence can be translated into policy.

In the policy arena, IKT can be used towards different ends. One goal of IKT is to promote the sustainability or continuance of evidence-based programs beyond a research demonstration period (Savaya & Spiro, 2012; Scheirer & Dearing, 2011; Schell et al., 2013; Stirman et al., 2012). Another goal of IKT is to scale out or scale up an evidence-based program to other settings (Westley, Antadze, Riddell, Robinson, & Geobey, 2014). Scaling out refers to expanding a program to other settings, while scaling up is concerned with broader systems change. In the case of HF, scaling out involves the creation of new HF programs, while scaling up refers to policy change that transforms housing and services to a HF approach (Goering & Tsemberis, 2014; Nelson, 2013).

With regard to housing and mental health, there has been little research on the impacts of IKT on program sustainability or policy change. In the context of HF in the United States, Stanhope and Dunn’s (2011) case study suggests that evidence alone is insufficient to explain the G.W. Bush administration’s

adoption of HF as a policy to address chronic homelessness. They noted the limitations of evidence-based policy analysis and argued that the discursive approach to policy described above provides a more robust theoretical approach for understanding policy change. Steadman et al. (2003) examined the sustainability of the Access to Community Care and Effective Services and Supports (ACCESS) five-year U.S. demonstration program. While the 17 of the 18 ACCESS demonstration sites continued after federal funding ended, there were significant changes in the way services were provided. These changes included staff reductions, higher client-staff ratios, changes in eligibility criteria, and fewer clients served. Several sites were either successful in obtaining federal, state, or local funding or were in the process of applying for funding.

The most frequently mentioned factors that enabled sites to obtain funding were:

- the **research evidence** gathered during the demonstration phase, including interim findings;
- a **favourable political environment**; and
- having ACCESS “**champions**” who supported the program.

Thus, both evidence and contextual factors impacted the sustainability of the ACCESS program.

In summary, IKT has been used to bridge the “research-practice” gap and has promise as a strategy for moving research into policy. Researchers who are skilled navigators in the policy arena are not only able to marshal evidence for policy options, but they are able to take advantage of windows for policy change through problem and solution framing and creating a coalition of insiders and outsiders who can promote policy change.

PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The overall purpose of this research is to tell the story behind this large-scale RCT (Nelson, Macnaughton, & Goering, 2015). The two main research questions are:

1. What is the story of the AHCS's national-level efforts to sustain the project for a transitional period and impact social policy?
2. What are the key themes related to how the study's research findings influenced ongoing federal policy?

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

Given the complexity of the knowledge exchange process related to moving evidence into policy, we adopted a case study approach, which has been recommended as the best way to understand this complexity (Greenhalgh & Fahy, 2015). The approach relies primarily on data from 15 semi-structured key informant interviews with individuals from the political and policy spheres who were involved in the project, as well as AHCS project leaders at both the national and provincial levels. Participants were identified and contacted by members of the research team (see Appendix A) and were provided with an information letter and consent form (see Appendix B). Only two of 17 potential participants did not consent to participate in the research, because of availability. Eleven interviews were conducted by phone and four were conducted in person. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The interviews were conducted between January 2015 and July 2015, using a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix C). The interviews were complemented by supplementary archival research from the period in question, including media articles, correspondence, meeting notes and policy documents.

Data Analysis

The main objectives of the analysis were to:

- synthesize the various key informant interviews and secondary data to produce a narrative account of the national-level sustainability story in the AHCS site, including a description of the change, as well as the key events or turning points leading up to the change;
- identify themes related to the sensitizing concepts (topics) in the interview guide, including the nature of the strategy, key players, the role of various organizations and limitations of the change; and
- identify cross-cutting themes or processes that thread their way through or go beyond the themes identified in the earlier stages of the analysis.

The approach involved constant comparative analysis as practiced in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2002) and other analytic approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and entails:

- **open or initial coding**, which involves identifying and giving provisional labels (codes) to apparently similar portions of data that re-occur and/or which appear to be emerging as significant issues or themes;
- **focused (or thematic) coding**, which involves developing more firm categories and may involve going back to re-code data, grouping them according to the emerging themes; if relevant, grouping themes according to stakeholder group; and possibly,
- **theoretical coding**, which may involve identifying how various themes inter-relate or may involve identifying a larger process that goes beyond the individual themes.

In addition to this coding process, summaries were produced for each of the interviews and were shared among the team of four researchers. These summaries were discussed and overall impressions of the summaries were shared. These discussions helped to frame the data analysis and interpretation.

The steps for ensuring the quality of the data and the rigour of the analysis included:

- double-checking transcriptions;
- memo-writing to reflect on individual coding decisions and hunches;
- use of a team approach to making and validating coding decisions;
- member-checking (returning early data analysis to ensure trustworthiness of the analysis); and
- documenting the experiences of the researchers that might impact on analysis decisions.

FINDINGS

Below we present findings related to the story of the initiative’s sustainability from the national perspective. This describes how the presentation of the evidence from AHCS was associated with the “ask” to sustain the project itself (or to create transitional funding) and to influence federal homelessness policy. The first section provides the policy impact story through a chronology of events, while the second section recounts the findings from a thematic perspective.

After the Demonstration Project: The Story of Sustainability and Policy Impact

Background

From the outset of the project, there had always been a concern about what would happen at the end and how to keep the clinical and housing teams going should the approach prove successful. Sustainability referred to more than just keeping the teams going, as there was motivation to see the approach become integrated into policy, both provincially and federally. For the past 10 years, the federal government’s relatively small but still significant role in homelessness policy was carried out through HPS, which provides direct funding to 61 urban Canadian communities, as well as Aboriginal and rural/remote communities across Canada to help them address their local homelessness needs.

At the time of the AHCS initiative, the HPS program was under review, as the program requires periodic renewal. Formed in the 1999 when homelessness was emerging as a national concern, the federal government created a “grants and contributions” program, known originally as the National Homelessness Initiative. During the consideration process around the program’s potential renewal date (which was coming up in April 2014), concerns had been expressed about the program’s ability to demonstrate its effectiveness. In part, this related to the challenges of “moving the needle” on homelessness in a context where multiple sectors and levels of government are involved, where no one level controls the key levers and where movement requires multi-level partnerships that take time to establish.

At the same time, the existing HPS policy framework alluded to the HF approach and there was interest within the federal government in advancing this approach. On the other hand, much of the existing evidence in support of the approach came largely from the United States and it was unclear whether the model could be implemented in various Canadian contexts. Additionally, it was understood that the Conservative government of the day was focused on reducing the “footprint” of government and predisposed to devolving responsibilities perceived to belong to other levels of government. Despite

the federal government's long involvement in housing, this issue is technically under provincial jurisdiction.

As mentioned, the AHCS project's leaders had always been aware of the need to think strategically about sustainability and in the beginning phases of the initiative had always emphasized the need to "think about sustainability from Day 1." An integral part of the strategy was to adopt an IKT approach, which entailed engaging policy decision-makers in the research process, including setting up a National Working Group and Site Advisory Groups at the local level. The working assumption was that engagement would increase the relevance of the research to decision-maker concerns and thereby increase the chances that they would eventually "buy in" to the results. It was unclear, however, what level of government would ultimately be responsible for taking up the results.

Given the complexities of implementation and the need to focus on the research, it was difficult to maintain an active focus on sustainability and on the bigger picture of what sustainability could mean, including expansion of the approach more broadly and its impact on policy. Around the time the interim results of the project were compiled (2011), however, the concern about sustainability did come back to the "front burner" and the project leaders thought more explicitly and strategically about sustainability. Given the complex homelessness policy arena, which involved federal, provincial and local players, it was evident that the "ask" had to be directed to all these levels.

Later in the summer of 2011, there was a deeper sense of urgency when it became clear that the federal government would not reconsider the agreement made at the project's outset, that they would not be funding the teams beyond the end of the pilot project in March 2013. While the "ask" had once been considered in broad terms, with the impending end of the project, the project leaders focused on the more immediate concern, which was to secure funding for a transitional period beyond the project's formal end date, so that the final results could be analyzed and so people could maintain their housing throughout and beyond this period.

As described in the next section, with a growing awareness of the urgency of the need, the project leaders recognized the need to influence senior political leaders at various levels of government. The strategy that emerged thus blended IKT with a "full court press" effort to engage decision-makers from the bureaucratic and political spheres. Based on the interim findings, the project leaders and the MHCC Government Relations team conducted an effort described by one individual as a "relentless effort." Developing an oral presentation with slides, they conducted a series of meetings, "briefing up and down," with federal and provincial decision-makers. The next section describes the full story of the sustainability strategy that was developed and how the key players (i.e. researchers, knowledge brokers and decision-makers) reached an agreement to achieve a "safe landing" for the project and its

participants, which at the same time helped influence the direction of federal homelessness policy. As mentioned earlier, this was under review at the time of the efforts to sustain the AHCS teams.

Chronology: Key events and turning points

In early 2011, the AHCS leaders sharpened their focus on the question of how to ensure that study participants would be able to maintain their housing after the initiative's completion. They also sought to ensure the program's continuation and possible expansion, including to individuals in the study's TAU condition who had not received housing or clinical supports through the initiative. They also hoped that the knowledge gained from the study would influence policy and practice more broadly and had committed to creating knowledge products that could be useful beyond the duration of the project.

While this notion of sustainability was built into the original conception of the project, it was difficult to maintain a focus on it. As one key informant commented, "It would be a pretty sophisticated organization to be able to simultaneously [have] that forethought while at the same time try to launch [a project] at a very compressed period of time with a huge budget and multiple stakeholders." Around the mid-point of the project, after the interim findings had been compiled, various project members began to become concerned about the need to focus more closely on sustainability. Thus, in January 2011, the leadership established a Sustainability Task Force and began an initial series of meetings with government decision-makers.

Said one member of the AHCS leadership team's efforts at the time, "we had no idea where sustainability was going to come from; whether it was going to come federally or provincially, individually, we just were trying to rattle any trees that we could rattle ... we were trying to create a policy window in government thinking at that time." The timing was favourable for these meetings, given that the interim findings were being developed. As one individual put it:

"I think the research created the basis for the conversation. So it provided us with a level of credibility to go in, particularly given the randomized controlled trial. You know, it was a very strong set of findings using a really rigorous methodology."

According to one key informant from the MHCC, speaking about knowledge gained from a government source, a significant event on the federal side during this period of initial meetings was a briefing of Minister Diane Finley in the spring of 2011. At that point it was understood within government that

Minister Finley was interested in advancing innovation and sought to strengthen the performance of the HPS program. According to the government source, subsequent to this meeting it became evident she was impressed by the evidence from the AHCS project as an effective and innovative approach, concerned for its participants and was interested in moving towards HF approach for the HPS. Even though there was interest from Finley's department, at that time known as Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, all options were being considered. As one government informant explained:

“...there was [still] a concern that government could have chosen a different approach and could have devolved responsibility to provinces and territories because quite frankly...from a general policy perspective, this government has very much focused on decentralization and making clear roles and responsibilities between provincial and territorial responsibility.”

Later in the summer of 2011, the AHCS leadership team confirmed that the federal government through Health Canada would not be funding the continuation of the AHCS initiative, despite hopes that they would reconsider the agreement made at the beginning of the project. One key informant described the meeting where this became widely known within the MHCC leadership as what mobilized them into action and eventually resulted in the MHCC dedicating the resources and staff of its Government Relations department to develop a more concerted sustainability strategy. At the same time, the discussion internal to the MHCC shifted to the objective of securing funding for a transitional period that would help ensure a “safe landing” for the initiative: ensuring that participants' housing wasn't jeopardized, that funding for support could continue and that attention could be directed towards compiling the final study results.

So, in December 2011, the MHCC Government Relations department became increasingly involved and coordinated a second series of meetings between AHCS leaders, researchers and government decision-makers at both provincial and federal levels.

As the MHCC Government Relations Director explained, this new strategy involved expanding its integrated knowledge translation approach to include a political component:

“[The AHCS team] had a pretty good network with the bureaucrats involved at the department and had been really had a lot of touch points there in terms of reporting and all those things, but the political class, while they had been appraised of the project, hadn’t necessarily been presented a case for investment and really that was what we were looking at doing was trying to take the research outcomes and package them in a way that they would be understood and would maybe motivate the political half of government to see a really strong case for investment.”

Thus the meetings included political staff, politicians (both Ministers and backbenchers) and civil servants.

According to the MHCC Government Relations informant, one key piece of advice came from a briefing with a Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) social policy advisor, held late in the winter of 2012. As this informant explained, when asked for advice about how they could best make their case to others, the individual advised them:

“...don’t give me a project that’s going to require additional investment in homelessness; give me a project that reforms government spending in an inefficient existing program.”

The individual also advised them about the importance of getting the “rank and file” political members apprised of the project, advising them that “with (this) government you can’t get a (cabinet) minister to advocate for an issue like this unless they know there’s going to be a sufficient amount of support in caucus.”

Despite some discouraging meetings, the MHCC became aware that there was a sense of support, goodwill and “ownership” towards the project within government, including within the network of decision-makers who had been included as part of the project advisory committees. This included individuals from the Department of Health, the project funder, as well as from HRSDC, the funder of the HPS program. As one MHCC informant said, “There was always a sense that they really liked the research and what we were doing...and were proud of it... [but] the bottom line was that they couldn’t just sell it.” The National Working Group included individuals from Health Canada, the project funder, as well as from ESDC, the funder of the HPS program. One key informant identified the significance of bringing the latter individual onto the MHCC Working Group as enabling the links to be made between the AHCS findings and the larger policy question surrounding the HPS renewal decision. At the time,

however, AHCS leaders were focused on the demonstration project itself and unaware of the deliberations surrounding the HPS program.

Subsequent meetings around the draft interim findings provided an opportunity for AHCS to receive detailed advice from government staff about how best to present the results, including the credibility of certain spokespeople. Initially, the MHCC brought forward early findings that were primarily qualitative in nature, but they were advised to refine their message. As one key informant, internal to government, explained:

“Initially, we did not feel that the early draft of the study answered the questions that needed to be answered. So we pressed very much on the quantitative side. We pressed very hard to say that you really got to try and quantify this.”

Subsequently, some quantitative interim findings became available in draft form, which spoke to positive participant outcomes, as well as cost-efficiencies associated with the HF model.

While some progress had been made behind the scenes, there was an increasing sense of urgency from the AHCS project leaders, as the meetings continued for several months without any decision. Though the meetings had begun in winter 2012, summer was approaching and there was less than a year to go before the formal end of the project in March 2013. As one person put it:

“I thought that we would be getting a commitment about a new transition plan in place [by then] so that we could reassure people and they know what is going on and it just dragged on and on and on.”

Given that there was more than one level of government involved, uncertainty remained about who would assume responsibility. There was also the reality that processes involving negotiation between multiple levels of government are often protracted. As a key informant explained:

“It was such vintage federalism, right? The provinces weren’t willing to invest unless the feds were willing to invest. The feds weren’t willing to invest unless the provinces were going to invest.”

Because of these difficulties and the growing tension about the need to get a decision around the transitional funding, AHCS project leaders encouraged Senator Kirby, who by this time was no longer MHCC Chair, to increase his involvement in the project. Said one internal AHCS informant about the reason for him taking this increased role, “He was connected in a way and he was politically astute in a way that nobody else ...was.” Thus Kirby became increasingly involved in discussions with federal and provincial decision-makers, including provincial Deputy Ministers of Health, who because of the MHCC structure, were also ex-officio Directors of the MHCC. One key meeting took place in June 2012, when Mike Kirby and Catharine Hume of MHCC briefed Graham Whitmarsh, British Columbia’s Deputy Minister of Health, about the positive interim findings. As an internal AHCS key informant explained about Whitmarsh’s role, “[It was] a pivotal piece ...[as he] took on a bit of a convening exercise with his counterparts in the other provinces with the exception of Quebec.”

A month after the meeting, Mr. Whitmarsh wrote a letter to the relevant federal Deputy Ministers, calling for dialogue on the transition funding issue. A month later, on August 15, 2012, Mr. Whitmarsh, this time on behalf of three other provinces, wrote a follow-up letter, again calling for dialogue and expressing commitment from the provincial side to fund health-related supports for a transitional period, if the federal government would assure that the housing continued. On the same day, August 15, 2012, Mr. Kirby contacted a very senior official within the PMO. This discussion was one of a series of interactions between the two senior figures, which resulted in an agreement by the PMO to take the issue forward to other relevant Departments, including the Privy Council Office, Finance and HSRDC.

According to the PMO informant, the initial letters from the province were “not persuasive” in and of themselves. Also, some officials in the relevant federal departments were not initially predisposed to respond to the provincial government representatives. There was a concern that the provinces may be taking the worry about the AHCS participants losing their housing and “using it as a lever” to obtain federal funding for an issue that was of provincial jurisdiction. Despite the initial resistance, one key staff person within the PMO found the evidence of the draft interim findings very credible. As our informant said:

“[This staff person, who had a doctoral degree in health research] knew that this was... actually effective public policy in terms of getting a results output for dollars and cents – relative to different options.”

At the same time, they became aware that there was support for the initiative and more broadly for HF, as a policy direction within HRSDC.

In October, 2012, a senior MHCC/AHCS staffer, and key informant to this study, “learned confidentially” that the federal government would make a commitment to the transition funding for the AHCS project and an agreement became public in the following month. Starting in November, this individual, along with the Director General of HPS, then held a series of meetings with their provincial counterparts, aimed at reaching a series of bilateral agreements to secure funding agreements at each of the sites, except Quebec.

Despite the apparent significance of a January 2013 meeting with Minister Flaherty to the HPS continuation and policy shift (where Minister Flaherty communicated his strong support to MHCC Chair Dr. David Goldbloom), the decision to fund HPS was actually made before the transitional funding for AHCS was secured, according to a federal key informant who was close to the matter. According to this individual, the broader policy decision was made first and then, in part “because of a concern for the participants,” the transitional funding decision was made. This individual also stated that the transitional funding decision was made because of a desire to ensure a sound roll out of the broader policy decision, which would have been negatively impacted had the housing of AHCS participants been jeopardized.

While the importance to sustainability of the January meeting with Minister Flaherty may have been overstated, a number of key informants mentioned the crucial significance of Minister Flaherty’s support. A few mentioned his initial support of the AHCS project, as well as his ongoing interest. Two also mentioned a favourable meeting held in later summer of 2012 with an Ontario Member of Provincial Parliament, Christine Elliot, another politician known to be concerned with mental health issues, who also happened to be Flaherty’s wife. Taking place in August 2012, this meeting also included Mississauga federal MP Brad Butt.

Finally, in March 2013 a few days before the federal budget became public, Louise Bradley, CEO of MHCC, received a phone call informing her that there would be support for a five-year extension of the HPS program, which would be repurposed and focused on HF. A total of \$600 million was allocated to HPS from 2014-2019. The Big 10 Canadian communities, which received 80% of the community funding from HPS, were required to invest a minimum of 65% of their funding in HF starting April 1, 2015. All other funded communities with allocations of greater than \$200K, including Aboriginal communities, were required to allocate a minimum of 40% of their funding to HF starting April 1, 2016. Moreover, the target population for HPS funding was mandated to be people who are chronically or episodically homeless.

Other key informants shared their perspective about why the change in policy happened. Said one, “there was good evidence at the right time that allowed the government to say or to feel that there was an important federal leadership role to continue in homelessness based on evidence,” explaining that the timing was right given that a decision had to be made about the HPS program’s continuation. The evidence presented in support of transitional funding (i.e. the AHCS interim findings) occurred at the time the consideration of the wider policy decision was happening. Prior to the push for transitional funding, earlier project results had also informed thinking within HRSDC in a gradual iterative process where “all the right people” were involved. As one individual said, “All the stars aligned.”

Key Themes in How Evidence Was Translated into Policy

In this section, we discuss underlying themes relating to how the evidence from AHCS influenced policy. We discuss these themes in relation to strategy, stakeholders and relationships; we also discuss limitations of the policy.

The Strategy

Regarding strategy, key informants repeatedly emphasized three themes, which were:

1. the importance of the evidence;
2. the framing of that evidence; and
3. the importance of the relationships between researchers, decision-makers and their intermediaries.

A subsidiary theme common throughout the main themes was the importance of timing.

The evidence

Many participants emphasized the importance of the results themselves. Said one key informant, “the thing you’ve got to remember in all of this, is that it only worked because the research was so good.” This individual was careful to point out that evidence alone was not sufficient, emphasizing that is not “...always true that great research gets implemented.” He emphasized though, that in this case that the results would not have been taken up so quickly had the research not been extremely impressive:

“What is absolutely true that you will never get a short a time frame between research results and implementation as you did in this case. I’ve never seen it so fast [which wouldn’t have happened] if the research hadn’t been absolutely spectacular.”

Other stakeholders emphasized that it was not only the evidence’s rigour, but also its relevance to the Canadian context. Said one government stakeholder:

“I think At Home was really able to solidify in many people’s minds, particularly in the political sense, how Housing First could work in communities big and small with different populations, Aboriginal, [and non-Aboriginal], ...[that] it could work across the country with different models. So I think demonstrating success [in that sense] was really important.”

Additionally, key informants noted that the study was part of a larger body of evidence that was accumulating elsewhere in Canada as well as internationally. They also emphasized that the evidence was part of a movement. As one key informant said, “we in Alberta began doing Housing First because we started hearing about it from the States. We started seeing it, we were reading about Philip Mangano [the U.S. “Housing Czar”] and he came up to Alberta and was preaching the gospel of ending homelessness. And we heard about Sam Tsemberis and Housing First. So what’s happening in Canada is also happening in a context.”

Framing the evidence

Many of the key informants emphasized that it wasn't just the evidence, but the way it was framed and communicated to decision-makers. Asked about this, one key informant said, "you know the way in which it was presented it was as critical as the findings themselves. And, so that was really important." One issue in particular here was the significance of the economic findings in the particular political context. Said one of the lead researchers:

"It was the, it was that \$20 savings for a \$10 investment that people wanted to hear and repeatedly used for their conversations. We saw it in the press. We saw in the news release. We saw it everywhere."

As another key informant internal to government said, "it's a simpler argument for someone to make than them trying to explain why choice is important or why harm reduction is part of the model. So if you're from a political perspective it was just an easier sell I would say." As mentioned earlier, it was also important that the request to government was framed not as a request for more money, but in terms of an "opportunity to reform the efficiency of an existing government program."

Despite this messaging, another government key informant explained that the caveats or "nuances" placed on the economic findings were also important to the credibility of the findings. Other key informants emphasized that the idea was oversold, that economic findings themselves made the all the difference. This AHCS leader asserted that "we were able to create a message or send some messages that resonated I think pretty across the spectrum politically...It resonated well in terms of engagement with private market landlords, ending versus maintaining [homelessness]. You know there was a bunch of pieces that resonated well and people within the bureaucracy saw as being able to resonate well." Equally important, she said, was the hopefulness behind the approach, "It provided a piece of a solution to what was going to possibly be a program that was going to end."

The importance of researcher/decision-maker/intermediary relationships

Many key informants placed importance on the value of ongoing engagement between researchers and decision-makers. One thing that was emphasized was the extent of that engagement, which was described as “relentless” and a “full court press” and which led to a critical mass of individuals becoming engaged, including the “rank and file” as well as “very senior” political decision-makers. As one key informant stated, “we did a pretty broad and deep set of briefings with political staff, with senior bureaucrats and elected officials not only federally but also provincially. I think, you know, they talked to each other. I think there was a bit of a groundswell...”

Another factor mentioned was the quality of the researcher/decision maker relationships and how trusting relationships enabled the project to stay on track. As one government official said of this dialogue:

“I think that’s absolutely critical...It was critical for the conversations in the middle [of the project] to make sure that everyone aligned and stayed aligned, and maybe in some cases realigned to produce what I think people on the government side felt was needed to understand and, you know, have it affect policy...That’s where I mean again, we’re coming back to that same thing of having the research team and the decision makers kind of arm in arm earlier on and understanding and good communication between the two. I think that’s how you get it solved.”

Finally, as mentioned earlier, having strong researcher/decision-maker relationships enabled AHCS to gain crucial advice about how to frame their findings. A number of key individuals within government played key intermediary roles in this regard, helping the MHCC understand the importance of framing the ask in terms of cost-effectiveness and in terms of reforming an existing government program.

Key stakeholders and their roles

In terms of stakeholders who contributed to sustainability, key informants spoke about the role of the MHCC, other aligned advocacy organizations and about key intermediaries within these organizations or within government.

Mental Health Commission of Canada

First of all, key informants mentioned the role of MHCC in convening the research, and in carrying out a project in a way that government itself could not have accomplished. They also mentioned the unique positioning of the organization, which enabled its results to be effectively disseminated. One key informant, who because of the MHCC structure was a senior government official and also a MHCC board member at the time, noted that the organization offered “a receptor site, but you know, it brought a mechanism for making people aware of findings that much research naturally wouldn’t have had.” As another stakeholder explained, the MHCC was positioned outside of government and strategically within the federal/provincial context. “By creating a national Mental Health Commission, at arm’s length from the federal government, this unique and unprecedented body was able to dance outside the constitutional framework of health ... (and) wasn’t log-jammed the way the federal government would be if it tried to establish clinical services and housing interventions in five provinces where health care is very much under provincial jurisdiction.” Finally, key informants mentioned the resources brought to bear to the project that enabled the findings to be “amplified,” as well as the Government Relations and leadership advice that allowed the results to be framed effectively.

Aligned organizations

Key informants also mentioned the supportive role of Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH) and other organizations (such as the Homeless Hub) in helping convey a consistent message about the value of HF. As one key informant said, “I mean the AHCS project obviously I would say is the key thing. I think also the Canadian Alliance was something important in that. I think that coalesced with some leading national voices saying this is the direction to go in.” CAEH in particular was mentioned as an organization with unique access to the government of the time. A key informant also noted that CAEH was able to support the message coming out of AHCS, but also provide some “political translation that helped [the government] get comfortable with it.” For example, the CAEH was able to bring to bear the successful experience of HF in Alberta and of the approaches implemented under conservative administrations in the United States.

Key intermediaries

Within all of these organizations and also within government, key informants pointed to certain individuals who were able to help move things forward. For instance, one individual, who on separate occasions was both a key HRSDC political staffer and a PMO adviser, provided the MHCC key advice about how they could frame the message in a way that resonated with decision-makers. Another individual, Senator Kirby, was able to play a key role in bringing the provincial and federal stakeholders to an agreement.

Limitations of the policy

Regarding the federal policy, key informants pointed to some limitations. One issue identified by one stakeholder was the need to adapt the model to be delivered with relatively fewer resources than in the AHCS initiative. Said this key informant, there was perception that AHCS was a “Cadillac” model. Given this, he said that the government leaned more on the Toronto Streets to Home model when devising its policy. A related concern was with maintaining fidelity to the model and implementing it in ways that would achieve results. More specifically, one issue that at the time of writing had yet to be fully sorted out was how the housing subsidy would be offered and who would cover the costs of this. Other concerns related to the need for training and technical assistance to be carried out on an ongoing basis and the need for a “boundary spanner” locally, who could bring the various stakeholders together and establish a common direction.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Implications

Policy streams theory (Kingdon, 2005), which is a form of discursive policy analysis (Fischer, 2003), understands policy change as the convergence of problems, politics and policy ideas. It posits a key role for timing and the ability of individuals or organizations to take advantage of policy windows that arise to bring together a convergence of the three elements. In the present case, the “problem” was what to do about the AHCS participants with the impending end of the project, given that no assurances had been made about continued funding. As it turned out, the government had its own challenge, which was what to do about the impending “sunset” of the HPS program and whether to cut or devolve it in the face of favourable evidence that their own study was producing.

Because of the efforts of multiple partners, the policy idea or proposal that came to the fore was to not only provide the AHCS study with transitional funding, but to repurpose the HPS program with a focus on HF. In order for this policy idea to go forward, the timing had to be right. As the HPS review happened, the evidence in support of the transitional funding was presented while the broader policy direction was already being considered. Also, the political context had to be favourable. In the present case, this meant that key allies had to be brought on side, such as the Minister of Finance and senior decision-makers within the PMO. This depended on the ability to access these individuals. It also depended on being able to frame the policy idea in a way that resonated within the current political context. Hence, there was a focus on the cost-effectiveness of AHCS and using this evidence to improve the efficiency of an existing program, rather than “expand the footprint of government,” which as one key informant emphasized, was anathema to the then current Conservative ruling party.

In sum, the need to make a decision about the future of HPS provided a window of opportunity. The impending crisis about whether vulnerable people would lose their housing provided the motivation to move forward a solution that ended up addressing both issues. The broader policy decision was made first; the transitional funding decision followed and was made in support of the larger one. None of this would have happened, however, without a sound policy idea backed with “spectacular” evidence that was framed in a way that would make it an acceptable policy idea in its current political context. In order for that framing to be achieved, close and ongoing relationships needed to be developed between researchers and decision-makers and key intermediaries played a role in making sure that the message about the policy idea was translated into terms that were persuasive to senior decision-makers.

Practical Implications

There were certain practical implications and lessons that were learned in the course of this research demonstration project. Below, we talk about things that worked well, what worked less well and what lessons were learned.

What worked well

In terms of what worked well, most key informants pointed to the importance of having early findings to be able to share with decision-makers. They believed that it was also important that these findings be communicated honestly and with “nuance” so that the limitations as well as strengths were clear. Doing so actually heightened the credibility of the results. The importance of a collaborative, coalition-building approach also became evident. Having strong research-decision-maker relationships allowed both parties to align expectations around sustainability when challenges or misunderstandings arose about defining who was responsible for what. One key informant mentioned how the “generosity of spirit” of the project leaders, as opposed to possessiveness, created a climate that allowed other community-based organizations to align with AHCS and which enabled a consistent message to come forward to government. Another key informant mentioned the importance of leaders having the skills to “hold a space,” so that individuals from different perspectives could work together rather than pursue separate directions.

What worked less well

While project leaders talked about prioritizing sustainability from the project’s beginning, they acknowledged the difficulty of keeping the issue on the “front-burner” and defining clear expectations up front, as well as underestimating the resources and time that the sustainability strategy would ultimately entail. While the project was fortunate in drawing on organizational expertise of the MHCC, it took time to develop a cohesive message and the sheer scope of the communication campaign was well beyond the initial expectations of any of the project leaders. A number of key informants also pointed to an intrinsic difficulty of mounting demonstration projects in producing evidence to convince decision-makers, given that those decision-makers often require information more quickly than researchers are accustomed to providing. In this case, the researchers had to overcome their trepidation about presenting findings that had not undergone peer review. One key informant noted that this demonstration project and others should anticipate the need for funding a transitional period beyond the formal end of the project, so that time for findings to be analyzed was created. She noted this was a “design flaw” of the project. Others, however, noted the sheer speed and complexity of the initiative from its outset and the difficulty of proactively planning years in advance.

LESSONS LEARNED

Subsequent demonstration projects could benefit from the “hard won” lesson of this project and, if possible, add transitional funding to their budgets. Other practical lessons learned included framing any “ask” in terms of a broader policy agenda, the value of having interim findings to use as a knowledge exchange tool and the importance of trying to maintain a “trusted advisor,” rather than an advocacy position, towards government. At the same time, the AHCS project leaders learned the importance of being sensitive to the context of the “knowledge users,” from the perspective of both elected officials and decision-makers within bureaucracy.

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APPENDIX A

National Key Informant Recruitment Script for Participants

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study on the sustainability phase of the Mental Health Commission of Canada's (MHCC) At Home/Chez Soi Demonstration Project. The purpose of this research is to understand the story of the sustainability of the MHCC At Home/Chez Soi programs. The term "sustainability" refers to continued funding for the rent supplements and ACT/ICM teams, maintenance of local-level partnerships, expansion/dissemination of Housing First (including changes in policy), staff retention and ongoing training, continued high levels of program fidelity and local adaptations of the Housing First model.

The findings of this research will be used to inform other jurisdictions that are interested in planning and sustaining similar initiatives. The principal researchers for this project are Dr. Geoffrey Nelson, of the Psychology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University; Dr. Paula Goering, of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and Department of Psychiatry, University of Toronto; and Dr. Myra Piat, of the Department of Psychiatry at McGill University. Approximately 10 people who were key to the sustainability of this project will be interviewed for this research. Dr. Paula Goering of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto, who is the Principal Investigator of this project, suggested that you would be a key person to invite to participate in this research. Please see the attached Information Letter for further details about the study.

APPENDIX B

National Key Informant Information Letter

for Mental Health Commission of Canada Homelessness and Mental Health Demonstration Project – Sustainability Research

Dr. Geoffrey Nelson, Wilfrid Laurier University

Dr. Paula Goering, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and University of Toronto

Dr. Myra Piat, Douglas Hospital and McGill University

You are invited to participate in a research study, *Mental Health Commission of Canada Homelessness and Mental Health Demonstration Project – Sustainability Research*. The term “sustainability” refers to continued funding for the rent supplements and ACT/ICM teams, maintenance of local-level partnerships, expansion/dissemination of Housing First (including changes in policy), staff retention and ongoing training, continued high levels of program fidelity and local adaptations of the Housing First model.

The purpose of this research is to understand the story of the sustainability of the MHCC At Home/Chez Soi project, as you see it. The findings of this research will be used to inform other jurisdictions that are interested in planning similar initiatives. The principal researchers for this project are Dr. Geoffrey Nelson, of the Psychology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University; Dr. Paula Goering, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and Department of Psychiatry, University of Toronto; and Dr. Myra Piat, of the Department of Psychiatry at McGill University. Approximately 10 people who were key to the sustainability of At Home/Chez Soi will be interviewed for this research. Dr. Paula Goering of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto, who is the Principal Investigator of this project, suggested that you would be a key person to invite to participate in this research.

Information

This research is part of the Mental Health Commission of Canada Research Demonstration Projects in Mental Health and Homelessness, in which you played a key role in sustaining. This aspect of the research involves participation in an individual interview. The interview will be conducted by a member of the project's National Research Team, either Dr. Geoff Nelson, Dr. Myra Piat or Dr. Eric Macnaughton. The interview will be arranged at a time and place that is convenient for you and may be conducted via telephone.

During the interview, the researcher will ask you a number of questions about the sustainability of the MHCC Homelessness and Mental Health Project, in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal and Moncton. We will give you the questions in advance so you have a chance to think about them. You are free not to answer any question or to pass on any question that is asked. The interview will last for approximately one hour. With your consent, the researcher will audio record the interview. We will not be able to interview you if you do not consent to the audio recording. There is no deception involved in the research.

Risks

We do not believe that you will experience any significant risks to your well-being by participating in this interview. It is possible that if involvement in the conception phase of the project was a challenging or emotionally intense experience for you, you may find yourself recalling such challenges and emotions.

Benefits

We do envision significant benefits to your participation in this study. You may benefit from the opportunity to reflect on your participation in the sustainability of the MHCC At Home/Chez Soi project. Your perspectives on the sustainability of the project may be beneficial to other jurisdictions that are interested in planning and sustaining similar initiatives. Finally, the results of this study will make a contribution to the research literature on the ways in which Housing First programs have been sustained in different community contexts.

Confidentiality

Your responses to the interview questions will be held confidential. That is, your name will not be associated with anything you say during the interview. We will keep everything you say confidential and private and your name will not be associated in any way with your responses. However, due to the small number of individuals being interviewed for this research and the fact that your role in the sustainability of the MHCC project may have been a unique one, it may not be possible to present your quotations in such a way as to preserve your anonymity from people who are familiar with the project or the groups and individuals involved. We will not associate your name with any quotes from the interviews, unless you consent to having your name associated with your quotes. While you can choose not to have quotes associated with your name, we will not be able to use your interview if you do not consent to allowing us to quote you anonymously.

All audio files of digitally recorded interviews will be stored on a secure (password protected) server at Wilfrid Laurier University, which is accessible only to Dr. Geoffrey Nelson and individuals who will be transcribing the interviews, Ms. Jessica Noble and Ms. Lindsay Shaw. Transcriptions of the interviews will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the research office of Dr. Geoffrey Nelson. All audio files will be deleted and paper transcripts destroyed by December 31, 2020.

Compensation

No compensation will be provided for your participation in the interview.

Contact

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures or if you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, you may contact Dr. Geoffrey Nelson of Wilfrid Laurier University at (519) 884-0710, extension 3314, Dr. Paula Goering of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health at (416) 979-6844, extension 4747, or Dr. Myra Piat of McGill University at (514) 761-6131, extension 2521. This project has been reviewed and approved by the Wilfrid Laurier University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Bob Basso, Chair, rbasso@wlu.ca, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-0710, extension 5225.

Participation

Your participation in this study is purely voluntary and you have the right to decide that you do not want to take part in the research. Your decision to take part or to not take part will in no way affect your relationship to the MHCC Research Demonstration Projects in Mental Health and Homelessness. If you withdraw from the study, we will not transcribe any of your responses to the interview. You have the right to omit or withdraw your response to any question or procedure without penalty.

Feedback and Publication

Information from this research will be used to inform the reports on the planning and proposal development process at each of the five demonstration sites, as well as a cross-site report developed by the national research team. Study results will be disseminated by the MHCC via a written report to participants by December, 2016. Additionally, we plan to present the results of the research at professional and scientific conferences and to publish the findings in professional and scientific journals.

Where can I get additional help or resources if I need them?

If you have any questions concerning the collection of this information, please contact:

Dr. Bob Basso, Chair, Research Ethics Board
Wilfrid Laurier University
Waterloo, ON N2L 3C5
T:519-884-0710, ext. 5225
Email: rbasso@wlu.ca

Dr. Paula Goering
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
33 Russell St., 4th Floor Tower, T427
Toronto, ON M5S 2S1
T: 416-979-6844
Email: Paula.Goering@camh.ca

Dr. Geoffrey Nelson
Department of Psychology
Wilfrid Laurier University
Waterloo, ON N2L 3C5
T: 519-884-0710, ext. 3314
Email: gnelson@wlu.ca

Dr. Myra Piat
Department of Psychiatry
McGill University
Verdun, QC
T: 514-761-6131 ext. 2521
Email: myra.piat@douglas.mcgill.ca

National Key Informant Consent Form

Mental Health Commission of Canada Research Demonstration Projects in Mental Health and Homelessness – Sustainability Research

I have received a copy of the **Information Letter**. I have read it or had it read to me and understand it. It describes my involvement in the research and the information to be collected from me.

I agree to participate in the individual interview for this research. Yes _____ No _____

I agree to have the interview audio-recorded. Yes _____ No _____

I understand and agree that my quotations may appear in published reports. Yes _____ No _____

I agree to have my name associated with quotations from my interview. Yes _____ No _____

Participant's signature _____

Date _____

Researcher's signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX C

National Key Informant Interview Guide for Sustainability Research for At Home/Chez Soi

Thank you for participating in this interview. As you know, the purpose of this interview is for you to share your knowledge about the sustainability of the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) At Home/Chez Soi programs.

For the purposes of this research, the term “sustainability” refers to continued funding for the rent supplements and ACT/ICM teams, maintenance of local-level partnerships, expansion/dissemination of Housing First (including changes in policy), staff retention and ongoing training, continued high levels of program fidelity and local adaptations of the Housing First model. Also, the questions that we will ask pertain to the time period between January-May 2012 (the time of the follow-up implementation and fidelity evaluation) and March 2015.

We believe that it is very important to understand program sustainability and how it is achieved or not achieved. The interview will take less than one hour.

Before we get started let’s review the consent form. Then you can decide if you want to participate in the interview. [Interviewer reviews the information letter and consent form with the participant.]

What questions do you have before we begin? [After questions have been asked and answered, the participant is asked to complete the consent form and give it to the interviewer.] I am now going to start the audio-recorder.

The purpose of today’s interview is to focus on what has changed in the MHCC At Home/Chez Soi programs at each project site since the end of the demonstration phase.

Changes in Federal Policy and Funding

1. Please tell me about recent changes in federal policy and funding for homelessness programs in Canada. (Probe re:)

What has changed? When did this change come about?

What do you think led to these changes in policy and funding?

Who were the key players in bringing about change?

What strategies were effective in bringing about change?

What role did the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness play in creating change?

What role did the Mental Health Commission play in creating change?
 What role did the findings of the At Home/Chez Soi research play in creating change?
 What else was important in the story about changes in federal policy and funding for homelessness programs in Canada?
 What were the limitations of change and what is needed for the future?

Provincial Policy – Sustainability Story of the At Home/Chez Soi program at the Five Sites

(Note this section will not be relevant to or used with some participants.)

1. Please tell me the sustainability story for At Home/Chez Soi as you see it. (Probe re:)

What has been sustained? What hasn't been sustained?
 What has changed?
 What strategies were used by the sites and MHCC to promote sustainability?
 Who were the main actors in the sustainability story?
 How did the community context influence sustainability?
 How did the policy and funding context influence sustainability?
 What worked to promote sustainability? What didn't work?
 Why were the programs continued in their original form, changed to a new form or discontinued?
 How has At Home/Chez Soi changed provincial policy?

1. For each of the programs at the sites, please describe funding of the programs since the end of the demonstration phase.

- a. Please describe funding for housing subsidies/rent supplements. (Probe re: amount of funding, source of funding.)
- b. Please describe funding for the ACT and ICM teams. (Probe re: amount of funding, source of funding.)

2. Please describe any changes that have occurred in partnerships at the sites since the end of the demonstration phase. (Probe re: government, mental health partners, people with lived experience, housing partners, landlords, other partners, etc.)

3. Describe the extent to which the Housing First programs have become a normal part of the service system at the sites for homeless persons with mental health problems or illnesses. (Probe re: the organizations that sponsor Housing First; re: the positive and/or negative impacts of becoming integrated.)

4. Have there been efforts at the sites to expand or further disseminate the Housing First approach? If so, please describe.
5. To what extent has there been staff turnover in the local teams that have impacted program sustainability? Describe ongoing training for programs that provide the Housing First approach.
6. In your opinion, how well have the existing or remaining Housing First programs maintained fidelity to the Housing First model? (Probe re: Housing Choice and Structure, Separation of Housing and Services, Service Philosophy, Service Array, Program Structure – note the interviewer will have to familiarize himself or herself with these domains of the Housing First fidelity scale.)
7. What factors influenced sustainability at the five project sites? (Probe re:)

What strategies, actions, steps were taken to promote the sustainability of Housing First programs at the sites?

What stakeholders were involved from the sites and MHCC regarding these strategies, actions and steps? Who spearheaded sustainability efforts at each of the five sites?

What organizations supported sustainability efforts? What was the target or focus of sustainability strategies, actions, steps?

Please describe the community context at each site and how it facilitated or inhibited sustainability.

Please describe the policy and funding context at each site and how it facilitated or inhibited sustainability.

What role did the research findings play in sustainability efforts? What was done to influence policy?

Ending the Interview

Are there any other observations about the sustainability of At Home/Chez Soi that you haven't had a chance to mention that you would like to add before we finish?

As I bring this interview to a close I would like to know about your experiences (how you feel, what you are thinking) about having participated in this interview today/tonight.

Is there anything we could do to improve the interview? I am now shutting off the audio-recorder. What questions do you have of me?

CONTACT

CENTRE FOR RESEARCH ON INNER CITY HEALTH

St. Michael's Hospital
30 Bond Street
Toronto, Ontario M5B 1W8
T:416-360-4000



Mental Health
Commission
of Canada

Commission de
la santé mentale
du Canada



Mental Health Commission of Canada

Suite 1210, 350 Albert Street
Ottawa, ON K1R 1A4

Tel: 613.683.3755

Fax: 613.798.2989

info@mentalhealthcommission.ca

www.mentalhealthcommission.ca

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