



## **RESEARCH PROJECT SUMMARY**

### **Prairie Research Centre**

#### **Name of Project:**

**The Indigenization of Housing First: A Culturally Responsive Approach to Understanding and Addressing Homelessness in Winnipeg's Urban Aboriginal Community**

#### **Research Start-up Summary and Abstract:**

This research examines urban Aboriginal homelessness and its effect on the overall wellbeing and social cohesiveness of peoples living in Winnipeg. Using a community-centered approach, we seek to document and analyze how Winnipeg adapted the mainstream Housing First model to reflect the local Indigenous context. Housing First, briefly defined, emerged as a response to end chronic homelessness in the United States, Canada, and other parts of the Western world, by providing permanent housing with supports to those experiencing homelessness and mental health challenges. In 2009, the Federal Government funded the 6-year, \$150 million dollar At Home/Chez Soi (AHCS) research demonstration project to deliver housing and support programs (Goering et al. 2011). One of the hallmarks of the Winnipeg Site was the adaptation of the Housing First model to the local context, centering on Indigenous leadership, perspectives, and beliefs through all aspects of the project. The primary objective of this proposal is to reflect on the early design and implementation of the Indigenous components of the Winnipeg Site of the AHCS project. We intend to explore the processes of the early relationship building and development phase as well as the governance structure necessary to localize and adapt the project.

#### **This project aims to address the following questions:**

1. What processes defined the relationship building phase among a range of stakeholders, including local members of the community, government, the homeless service sector, and specifically the Indigenous community, at the Winnipeg Site who came together to launch the AHCS project?
2. How did this relationship-building process influence the subsequent development of a unique governance and program structure that localized a culturally

responsive adaptation of the Housing First model in Winnipeg?

3. At the Winnipeg Site, the approach to governance was underpinned by a shared, community- driven, Indigenous-centered understanding of Housing First. How did this approach contribute to broader capacity building, which in turn contributed to the successful implementation of the demonstration project, and did this impact ongoing sustainability?
4. What Winnipeg experiences can inform broader adaptation of the housing first in Canada and within Indigenous communities and are there distinct policy implications?

### **Engagement objectives:**

An in-depth examination and analysis of the processes of relationship building leading to distinct governance structures will allow us to identify and describe systematic approaches and promising practices for Indigenizing Housing First. While the adaptation of HF at the Winnipeg Site required an Indigenous understanding, the processes used could inform localized adaptations in other communities. Working with our community partners, the proposed research project will contribute to a more comprehensive and shared understanding of how community-based, Indigenous-focused approaches can inform interventions that reduce urban Aboriginal homelessness.

The proposed research offers an opportunity to tell Winnipeg's story of how a community came together to inform and adapt the mainstream Housing First model to holistically reflect the needs and concerns of the urban Aboriginal community in Winnipeg. There remains a need for research that focuses on "good practices and success stories" (Patrick, 2014). In response to this call, this project presents an opportunity to extend our research and community relationships in an ongoing dialogue; one that extends beyond the scope of the initial federally funded project, thereby honouring our relationships, and forwarding best practices, with Winnipeg's urban Aboriginal community.

### **Methodology:**

This community-driven project is committed to privileging Indigenous knowledge (Bartlett et al., 2007) in shared dialogue and action that offers fresh perspectives (Pyrch & Castillo, 2001) by combining traditional wisdom with contemporary urban needs. Prior to drafting this proposal, the Principal Investigator (Jino Distasio who was also the PI for the Winnipeg AHCS project) reconnected with key Aboriginal leaders from the initial AHCS project, to seek support and to ask and reflect upon the most beneficial approach to telling the Winnipeg Housing First story. Our plan is to undertake the following:

- Launch the project with a feast drawing in the three teams, members of the Aboriginal Lens Committee, the Lived Experience Circle and other community/government leaders who were close to the original project to workshop and provide guidance and support for the methodology;
- Engage in a review of the literature/materials relevant to the proposal development and initial stages of the AHCS project. The synthesis of this information will inform the development of an interview schedule for the

stakeholder discussion phase and set the foundation for the report.

- Conduct stakeholder interviews to understand the process by which the AHCS developed a community-based, Indigenous-focused approach to implementing the project. The interview process will shed light on the culturally responsive approaches to adapting and implementing Housing First (this phase will also include an internal document review of AHCS materials).
- Return to the broad stakeholder group to review the findings and seek support and direction for the final report to be released to the community at a wrap up feast and celebration.

Our main objective is to document the strengths and challenges of applying a localized, Indigenous lens to Housing First, as well as offering recommendations for moving forward with Housing First in Canada. We will conduct 15-20 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a cross-section of stakeholders involved in the early development of the At Home/Chez Soi Winnipeg Site. These would include project leaders at the local and national level, program team leaders, members of the Aboriginal Lens Committee and the Lived Experience Circle (that was comprised of staff and participants in the study). We have selected a purposive sampling strategy based on its ability to provide information rich, in-depth understandings of the key research issues and themes. Interview findings will help develop a framework from which to describe the establishment of a localized model of housing first.

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