

Executive Summary

The Children & Social Services Division receives funding from the Provincial and Federal governments for programming to support social service needs in the community.

As part of the Division's 2020 Work Plan, staff committed to incorporating program evaluations into each program that it supports/offers. Staff worked with a consultant to develop an evaluation framework. As a pilot evaluation to test the effectiveness of the framework, staff evaluated the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative Program (CHPI).

This report summarizes the steps taken to date, the results of the pilot evaluation and next steps.

Background

In order to achieve the goal of building an evaluation culture, a selection of staff received program evaluation training in December 2019 from a leading expert in the industry and a Fellow of the Canadian Evaluation Society. This training was done with two goals in mind:

- (1) develop and implement program evaluation plans for all programs within the Division; and
- (2) create an evaluation culture in which evaluation becomes a part of program management.

A program evaluation working group was formed to explore steps to build internal evaluation capacity and to develop program evaluation guidelines. The framework will be brought forward and presented for adoption across the Division using a train-the-trainer model when implementing and monitoring programs.

The intent and goal of the project is to develop and implement evaluation frameworks/tools that serve the informational needs of the Division, with a view towards creating a culture in which evaluation becomes part of the management of all programs to foster continuous improvements in human services.

Pilot Evaluation - Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative Program

Outline

The local Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) Program is a homelessness prevention program funded by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and administered by the Social Services Section. This Program provides approximately \$1.2 million annually to social assistance recipients (administered through the Ontario Works office) and to individuals who have low-income (administered through Centre de santé Communautaire du Grand Sudbury) and who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The program funding is provided to assist individuals and families with obtaining housing, or remaining housed, by providing a last month's rent deposit, rental arrears, utility deposit, utility arrears, or other miscellaneous items. Singles and couples are eligible for up to \$900 over a 24 month period and families are eligible for up to \$1,600.

Between April 1, 2019 and March 31, 2020, there were 1395 applications approved for assistance through the CHPI program. Of these, 522 households were experiencing homelessness and 873 were at risk of homelessness. During this time period \$1,249,146 in funding was provided through the CHPI program.

The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the program's effectiveness by determining whether clients who participated in the program remained housed long-term at 6 or 12 months, and if the delivery of the program was accessible to meet the needs of the program recipients.

Evaluation Methods

Methods for this evaluation included a literature review of effective homelessness prevention programs, a program record analysis to determine program utilization statistics, a client survey with CHPI funding recipients who had received funding either six or 12 months prior to the survey being conducted, and a survey with Social Services staff.

Results

Literature Review: Permanent rent subsidies and eviction prevention programs including one time funding, legal counsel, or landlord mediation, were proven to be effective in supporting housing stability. Research also suggests that improving data-sharing between homeless service providers can improve targeted prevention strategies.

Program Record Analysis: Most CHPI recipients have requested funding for last month's rent and household items, which has remained consistent across the two fiscal years. The most commonly reported housing outcomes for both fiscal years are moving from unsheltered/provisionally housed to long-term housing and housing loss prevention. Across both years, more than 60% of CHPI recipients have been in receipt of Ontario Works.

Client Survey: A total of 79 people participated in the client survey. Client survey results showed that 94.9% of respondents had remained housed at 6 and 12 months following participation in the program. In addition, 87.3% of respondents said the program was helpful for them to stay housed and 79% of participants said the program was easy to apply for. Clients suggested the following program improvements:

- implement an electronic application process;
- improved relationships with their caseworkers;
- faster approval of applications;
- ability to apply through ODSP caseworkers;
- changes to funding policies;
- mandatory pay direct for social assistance recipients;
- create a housing services resource;
- create accessible landlord mediation resources; and
- create more awareness of the program and how to apply.

Staff Survey: A total of 38 Social Services staff participated in the staff survey, a majority of which were Ontario Works Caseworkers. Staff survey results showed that 79% of staff felt the program was easy for clients to access, and 68% percent felt that the program was either extremely helpful or very helpful for clients to obtain or maintain their housing. Staff suggested the following program improvements:

- remove the signature requirement from the application form;
- implement a streamlined approval process internally;
- implement an electronic application process which includes submitting the signed application form and required documents online, or removing these requirements entirely;
- changes to funding policies;
- implement a referral pathway for individuals ineligible for social assistance;
- form more supportive relationships between caseworkers and clients; and
- reduce stigma of social assistance.

Conclusion

Overall, the evaluation showed that the program is meeting its end goal, with a majority of CHPI participants housed long-term. In response to the evaluation question, the results of the evaluation show that the program did contribute to CHPI recipients obtaining and retaining housing and the program was accessible. Both client and staff provided similar recommendations regarding improving the application process; many of which have already been adopted. The next steps for this evaluation are to implement additional recommendations.

Next Steps

A program evaluation is currently underway for the Early Development School Readiness (EDSR) Program that is facilitated through Children Services. Upon completion, staff will provide an update to the Community Services Committee.