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Verbal Consent Policy

Policy Statement	This policy details guidelines for program staff working with individuals who are referred remotely (e.g. by phone) to homeless-serving supports to ensure informed consent for sharing personal information through the Coordinated Access System.
Purpose	To ensure those at-risk of, or currently experiencing, homelessness can access support services and/or resources quickly, equitably, and effectively. This policy ensures that individuals referred to, and accessing, the homeless-serving system are given the information needed to provide informed consent. Client provision of informed Coordinated Access & Explicit Consent is essential to enable the collection and sharing of their personal information through HIFIS as laid out in the <i>Consent to Share Personal and Health Information with Hamilton's Homeless Serving System</i> . This policy enables the acceptance of a client's verbal consent until such time that a signed consent can be secured.
Indigenous Clients	Indigenous identifying clients are not required, but may choose, to consent to their information being stored in HIFIS and on the By-Name List (BNL). Progressive engagement to obtain consent should be conducted according to agency practice in a way that is culturally considerate and respects individual autonomy. Consent must be provided to receive services and store any and all personal information.
Provision of Consent	Individuals must be asked for their explicit consent to have their personal information stored in the Homelessness Management Information System (HIFIS 4.0 and the BNL). All new clients are required to review and sign the <i>Consent to Share Personal and Health Information with Hamilton's Homeless Serving System</i> . Clients who do not consent to collection and sharing of their personal information may still access emergency sheltering services and staff will attempt to progressively engage to obtain consent. Staff will explain how, why, and with whom personal information will be shared in order to support the client through Coordinated Access. At the time consent is received, staff will record in HIFIS that the client has provided Coordinated Access & Explicit Consent. The

	<p>individual or family will be engaged to complete common assessment and be included on the By-Name List for prioritization and right matching to available community resources that best meet their needs and preferences.</p> <p>People must consent to the services provided by the agency where they present; however, it must be communicated that they are clients of the whole homeless-serving system in Hamilton. This means their information may be shared within the system to connect them with the most suitable supports.</p> <p>In cases where clients do not provide consent upon entry and the agency agrees to provide service, staff will continue to engage with individuals on the topic of consent. Clients who do not provide consent cannot be added to HIFIS 4.0 or the BNL.</p>
<p>Verbal Consent</p>	<p>In cases where new clients are being referred or booked into shelters or hotel overflow over the phone, staff are required to inform the client of the full <i>Hamilton’s Homeless-Serving System Consent for the Collection and Sharing of Personal Information</i>.</p> <p>Verbal consent will be accepted until such time that staff are able to follow up with the client in-person to complete a signed consent. It is important to flag in HIFIS that a signed consent is still required to alert staff working with the client to have this completed as soon as possible.</p> <p>Once client has provided verbal consent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go to Add Client in HIFIS. • Select Explicit and Coordinated Access Consent with the date of conversation as the Consent Start Date, do not select a Consent Expiration Date. • Fill in the rest of client details, save, and complete book in • Next, Under Client Information, click on <i>Various Factors</i>, then click on the third tab, <i>Watch Concerns</i>. • Click to +Add Watch Concern. In the dropdown, select “Written Consent Required”. Enter the date of conversation for the Start Date. Do not select an End Date. • This will create a prompt in the client’s file, represented by an eye icon to alert staff that the client has an active watch concern. In this case the watch concern is used as flag for staff that signed consent is still required. <p>When staff are working with a client who has an active watch concern denoting that Written Consent is Required, they will see</p>

	<p>an eye icon come up under Action in the client list when they search the client's name.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In this case, staff are required to review the written consent form with the client and have them sign their informed consent. • Staff then must expire the Watch Concern. • To access and edit the watch concern, staff can either click on the eye icon to access the watch concern or can access it Under Client Information, by clicking on <i>Various Factors</i>, then clicking on the third tab, <i>Watch Concerns</i>. Next, click on the pen icon to edit the watch concern, select the end date in line with the date that the consent was signed. Click save. • Next, confirm the client's consent status in HIFIS. Under the Client Information menu, click Consent. Confirm that the client has both Coordinated Access Consent and Explicit Consent indicated without an expiration date. If an expiration date is indicated, please remove the expiration date.
<p>Withdrawn Consent</p>	<p>A client may withdraw consent at any time. In the event that a client withdraws consent for their information to be collected and shared, agency staff will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain the client's signature on a new consent form with "For Withdrawing Consent" selected as the consent option. • City staff will expire the client's previous consent form on HIFIS with an expiration date of the withdrawal date. This will lock the client's HIFIS file to prevent access. • Report the withdrawal of consent to the City through the hifis@hamilton.ca e-mail account.
<p>Applicability</p>	<p><u>Agency</u></p> <p>This policy applies to all City-funded agencies in Hamilton's homeless-serving system.</p>
<p>Definitions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entry Points: the engagement points for persons experiencing a housing crisis (i.e. drop-ins, emergency shelters, outreach, etc.) • By-Name List: Includes the names of individuals and families who are known to be actively experiencing homelessness and have provided consent to appear on the list.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By-Name Priority List: a subset of the By-Name List that identifies those with the highest priority for matching to an available housing resource based on community developed criteria. • Common Assessment Tool: refers to a standardized tool in the community that has been endorsed by the Community Entity and which agencies have been trained to use across the system. • Community Entity (CE): lead decision-making body that coordinates efforts to achieve federal, provincial, and local housing outcomes. The City, as Designated Community Entity, prioritizes collaborative work with the Indigenous CE in all areas of Coordinated Access planning, strategy, and service delivery to develop connections to housing and supports that are culturally appropriate and rooted in the spirit and actions of reconciliation that recognize the values of autonomy and self-determination. • Community Entity (Indigenous Funding Stream): The Coalition of Hamilton Indigenous Leadership (CHIL) is the lead decision-making body for the Indigenous funding stream that coordinates efforts to achieve Indigenous self-determined housing outcomes locally. • Consent: explicit permission for something to happen or an agreement to do something. • Coordinated Intake: a standardized approach to assessing a person’s current situation, the acuity of their needs, and the services they currently receive and may require in the future. It considers the background factors that contribute to risk and resilience, changes in acuity, and the role of friends, family, caregivers, community, and environmental factors. • HIFIS: Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) is a web-enabled Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) that allows multiple service providers to implement coordinated access using real-time information about people experiencing homelessness and the resources they need to find and keep a home. • Homeless Serving Sector: comprises a range of local or regional service delivery components serving those who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness.
<p>Responsibilities</p>	<p><u>Community Entity (CE)</u></p> <p>The CE is required to document and make available a policy for standardized intake and consent as well as to ensure the use of a common assessment tool across the system. It is the</p>

	<p>responsibility of the CE to make resources available to support agencies with the appropriate understanding of how to apply common intake, consent, and assessment in alignment with implementation of HIFIS and Coordinated Access.</p> <p><u>Agency</u></p> <p>It is the agency’s responsibility to conduct the common intake and consent practices outlined above with every client and report that data through HIFIS. Furthermore, the agency must follow client privacy protocols for their respective organizations to ensure personal information is secured.</p>
<p>Accountability</p>	<p><u>Community Entity (City of Hamilton)</u></p> <p>The CE is accountable for the creation of policies, standards, and processes for intake, consent, and assessment as well as generating a BNPL bi-weekly to share with agency partners.</p> <p><u>Agency</u></p> <p>The agency is accountable to ensure every client that seeks homelessness services is provided with the initial intake supports required to connect them with resources. Furthermore, agencies must record and input that information into the HIFIS database promptly to ensure the system has the most accurate and up-to-date information. Each agency is responsible for maintaining the security of hard copy consent forms.</p>
<p>Related Documents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Hamilton’s Homeless-Serving System Consent for the Collection and Sharing of Personal Information</i> • Hamilton’s Coordinated Access Guidelines • Hamilton’s Systems Planning Framework • Coordinated Access Policies • <i>Revisioning Coordinated Access: Fostering Indigenous Best Practices Towards a Wholistic Systems Approach to Homelessness</i> • Urban Indigenous Strategy • Hamilton’s Housing and Homelessness Action Plan