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Approval Date: April 20, 2022

Triage and Assessment Policy

Policy Statement	This policy details the triage and assessment protocols within Hamilton's homeless serving system.
Purpose	To identify the common triage assessment tool (e.g., a specific tool or set of tools and any additional information) that is used for individuals accessing support through City-funded homeless serving programs. To ensure a best practice approach to right matching of housing services.
Indigenous Clients	Individuals who identify as Indigenous are not required to use mainstream triage and assessment tools in order to receive services. An alternative Indigenous Common Assessment Tool will be offered as an option to Indigenous clients. Indigenous clients' names are not required to appear on the By-Name List (BNL) to be prioritized for service.
Triage & Assessment Tools: VI-SPDAT & SPDAT	<p>SPDAT Series of Tools: VI-SPDAT & SPDAT</p> <p>The <i>Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool</i> (VI-SPDAT) is the current standardized tool for initial screening and triage in Hamilton. It consists of a brief survey that can be conducted to quickly determine whether a client has high, moderate, or low acuity.</p> <p>All Coordinated Entry Points, including: emergency shelter staff, drop-in staff, and outreach teams must complete VI-SPDAT assessments. Staff should complete the VI-SPDAT with clients at or within 14 days of intake. Outreach should aim to complete the VI-SPDAT as soon as possible after receiving client consent. City-funded housing programs must complete the full SPDAT upon client intake and every three months thereafter.</p> <p>A client should only complete the triage tool once. If there are major changes to the person's circumstances, including being housed and becoming homeless again, or if program staff are concerned that the VI-SPDAT failed to accurately capture client need/risk, a full SPDAT is recommended. Research shows the accuracy of the triage tool is lessened each time it is retaken, which may result in discrepancies. Client VI-SPDAT/SPDAT scores can be accessed in HIFIS.</p>

	<p>The <i>Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool</i> (SPDAT) is completed upon intake to City-funded housing programs with prioritized clients. All preconditions must be met before conducting a full SPDAT (e.g. client must be homeless). It is recommended that the SPDAT begin at program intake.</p> <p>The SPDAT can be completed over several visits with the client as opposed to one engagement. Clients that are receiving ongoing supports should have their full SPDAT reassessed at the following intervals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At 30 days • On or about 90 days • On or about 180 days • On or about 270 days • On or about 365 days <p>Review of the SPDATS at regular intervals will monitor client progress in housing stabilization. With increased stabilization and supports, client acuity should consistently go down.</p> <p>Do not attempt to complete a SPDAT when a client is in crisis as the episode may misrepresent the overall acuity score. The SPDAT is not intended to replace clinical expertise or clinical assessment tools, rather it should complement them.</p> <p>Information collected in both assessment tools include categories of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wellness (e.g. mental, physical health/abuse, substance use) • Risks (e.g. harm to others or themselves, legal involvement) • Socialization and daily functioning • Housing history
Applicability	<p>This policy applies to all City funded homelessness programs and all staff members contracted there within to provide related coordinated access services.</p>
Definitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acuity Scale: best practices approach to right matching of services. Case managers can use the scale to assess nature and severity of issues for their clients. Alternatively, the scale can be used by management for balancing the time commitment and caseload of an organization overall. • 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.

- **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.
- **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.
- **Hamilton's homeless serving system:** comprises a range of local or regional service delivery components serving those who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness.
- **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.
- **VI-SPDAT:** Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool is a pre-screening, or triage tool designed to be used by community providers to quickly assess the health and social needs of homeless persons and match them with the most appropriate support and housing interventions available.
- **SPDAT:** Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool is an assessment tool for frontline workers to prioritize which of those clients should receive assistance first and help guide case management. The SPDAT provides an in-depth assessment that relies on the assessor's ability to interpret responses and corroborate those with evidence.

<p>Responsibilities</p>	<p><u>Community Entity (CE)</u></p> <p>The CE is required to document and make available a policy for triage and assessment of clients as well as to ensure the use of common assessment tools (VI-SPDAT/SPDAT) across the system. It is the responsibility of the CE to make resources available, including training, to support agencies with the appropriate understanding of how to apply the assessment tools to triage and prioritize clients in a Coordinated Access system.</p> <p><u>Agency</u></p> <p>It is the agency’s responsibility to use the common assessment tools as outlined above and to identify training needs when they arise to the CE. Common assessment metrics are to be reported through HIFIS in a timely manner. 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 Coordinated Access policies and standards, processes for intake, as well as consistently generating a prioritized BNPL bi-weekly to share with agency partners.</p> <p>Outcomes related to timely referrals of priority populations will be analyzed and reported by the CE to the federal government, City Council and general public and will be regularly reviewed with system partners.</p> <p><u>Agency</u></p> <p>The agency is accountable to ensure every client that seeks homelessness services is provided with coordinated intake supports required to connect them with programs. Furthermore, agencies must record and promptly input that information into the HIFIS database to ensure the system has the most accurate and up-to-date information.</p>
<p>Related Documents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritization Policy • Hamilton’s Coordinated Access Guidelines • Hamilton’s Systems Planning Framework • Coordinated Access Policies

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Revisioning Coordinated Access: <i>Fostering Indigenous Best Practices Towards a Wholistic Systems Approach to Homelessness</i>• Urban Indigenous Strategy• Hamilton's Housing and Homelessness Action Plan |
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