

Housing Vulnerability Assessment Review Process Guide

IRIS – Institute for Research and Development on Inclusion and Society

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I. Introduction

The *Promoting Inclusive Housing for Marginalized People with Intellectual Disabilities* set out to address the numerous barriers that marginalized people with intellectual disabilities experience when they attempt to secure and retain safe, affordable, and accessible housing. By marginalized groups we are referring specifically to Indigenous, Black, migrant and the 2SLGBTQI+ communities.

A core objective of this initiative was for local mainstream and community agencies serving marginalized populations, more specifically, Inuit and other Indigenous nations, marginalized people fleeing gender-based violence, refugees with a focus on seniors and youth from these populations, to have resources and strategies to effectively identify and respond to the homelessness and housing vulnerability experienced by people with intellectual disabilities.

IRIS has been establishing what we call, Local Safety and Inclusion Solidarity Networks (LSISN) in cities across the country including, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Iqaluit. LSISNs are rooted in a local geographic community made up of grassroots, frontline service providers and community members from the marginalized communities listed above. For this initiative it was critical to establish these local networks to ensure that people with intellectual disabilities are not isolated and vulnerable in their communities even if they have access to affordable housing units.

The Housing Vulnerability Assessment (HVA) tool seeks to bring an intersectional intellectual disability lens to assessing housing providers' practices, with the goal of contributing to more inclusive data collection processes on the experiences of being unhoused in Canada. The HVA tool outlines a process for examining mainstream and disability services' institutional programs and services in terms of location, the built environment, policies, procedures, and processes for communication and outreach.

The HVA review process is for mainstream, community agencies and outreach teams who work to address homelessness and housing precarity. For people with intellectual disabilities, their housing situation may include living on the streets, homeless shelters, rooming houses, living at home with aging parents, foster care, long-term care facilities, congregate housing or group homes, other institutionalized settings, i.e. hospitals, correctional facilities, etc.

This approach aims to systematically review the activities and practices of mainstream agencies, to improve access for people with intellectual disabilities from marginalized communities.

This review process focuses on how the systems that are in place, rather than the individuals working within those systems – can be improved in ways that can meet the needs of all those they are trying to serve. By conducting a comprehensive examination of

how policies and practices operate within a service system, we begin to see where certain groups of people's needs can and do get lost or are not recognized.

This process understands that an agency acts in accordance with its rules, procedures, and protocols, and therefore cannot "do" certain things unless authorized. With the review process, we can identify what practices, policies or procedures are holding organizations back from not doing what they could be doing to better serve systemically marginalized peoples.

The review process can also help workers see themselves as part of a bigger system. This is informed by how the organization is set up and operates, and what has been done in the past. We see this assessment process as a collaborative effort between the project team and your organization, as we learn and grow together!

Objectives

The audit process adheres to the following objectives:

- ✓ To evaluate the functioning or results of current practices or policies.
- ✓ To determine the need for improvements and to develop new programs and policies.
- ✓ To connect organizations with new partners and ongoing work with a cross-sectoral local steering committee; and
- ✓ To contribute to the development of a community-based response.

II. Overview of the Review Process

We want information in the following three areas:

1. The **gap** between what marginalized people with intellectual disabilities experience and what service the organization is attempting to provide.
2. **How the gap is produced** to locate how a problem is produced.
3. **How to solve the problem** once you locate how a problem is produced.

Questions pursuing these three information themes will be divided in four areas.

1. **Background Questions** – to explore the issue of homelessness and housing precarity as experienced by marginalized people with intellectual disabilities and how the community is set up to respond to the issue.
2. **Organizational Practices and Policy Questions** – to seek basic descriptive information on how the organization operates.
3. **The Organization and the Issue** – these questions are specific to the issue of homelessness and housing precarity as experienced by marginalized people with intellectual disabilities and organizational practice; and
4. **Physical Access** – to assess the physical accessibility of the organization.

A Local HVA Researcher would visit the organization to apply the on-site questionnaire.

Who should be interviewed?

This should include representatives from management and direct service housing support staff. You will need to speak to someone who can answer questions on procedures and policies in such areas as; administration, rules, resources, training etc., (please see the questionnaire for the specific questions) as well as someone who can speak about any work that the organization might have done and/or is doing with people with intellectual disabilities and/or marginalized populations.

The physical access section of the questionnaire can be completed by the Local HVA Researcher themselves, by walking through the facility.

When setting up the interviews:

1. Send this document to the participating organizations ahead of time
2. Ask permission to interview them and do the walk around for the Physical Access section after or before the interview

Analysis and Reporting – Offering Recommendations

The final step is to organize and make sense of all the information that has been collected. The Local HVA Researcher would then work closely with the sponsoring organization's staff to organize and analyze the findings of each organizational review. A report should be developed for each organization offering practical recommendations on how to improve access to their housing supports for marginalized people with intellectual disabilities. Participating organizations can decide whether they would like the information to be kept internally or if they would like to share the findings with the Local Safety & Inclusion Solidarity Network to increase community wide impact.

The diagram on the next page outlines how the HVA researcher would document the information that has been collected and the subsequent analysis process that they would engage in.

STEPS IN ANALYZING INFORMATION

1) Assessment Questions - document the answers to all questions.

2) Describe what you heard, saw, & read

- Additional observations
- Text - organizational documents that you reviewed.

3) Write Problem Statements by asking and answering:

- How is what we've learned, a problem? For whom?
- As a housing problem?
- As an accountability problem?

4) What is our evidence? From ...

- Interviews
- Observations
- Text
- Do we need more information?



Source/s of the problem

1. Administrative Practices
2. Rules & Regulations
3. Linkages
4. Resources
5. Education & Training
6. Concepts & Theories
7. Mission Purpose and Function
8. Accountability
9. Other Areas

5) How is the problem produced?

6) How do we solve this problem?

- What needs to be redesigned and how?
- Who needs to be at the table?

7) Final Steps

- Write a draft report
- Get feedback from the organization

III. The HVA Questionnaire

1. The Issue and the Community

These questions are to be answered by your Local Safety & Inclusion Solidarity Network.

1. How do Indigenous, racialized, refugee, people with intellectual disabilities and their families define the problem?
2. What housing support services are available to this target group in the community?
3. What advocacy groups are involved with this issue?
4. What other community-specific groups, i.e., Indigenous, immigrant, Black, etc., could be involved?

2. Background: Practices and Policies

Before we begin can you tell me who the key players and policy makers are in your organization?

In this section it would be useful to be able to have hard copies of relevant documentation and forms that you are comfortable sharing, related to:

1. Administrative Practices - Can you describe intake processes, forms that are used, formal procedures, protocols and any documentation that must be developed when interacting with clients?
2. Rules & Regulations – Can you describe any orders that housing workers, service users, and volunteers have to follow, such as policies, and law?
3. Linkages – Can you describe any past, present, or future links your organization has with other services or organizations involved with homelessness and housing support work?
4. Resources - Can you describe any key resources used in your organization, i.e. related to standards, technology, staffing, services, etc.
5. Education & Training – Does your management and direct service staff engage in any professional, informal, and internal training?

6. Concepts & Theories – How would you describe the philosophical framework or values of your organization? Are there human rights policies?
7. Mission and Function – Can you describe; 1) the overall mission of your organization, 2) Can you describe the roles and function of key positions in your organization? e.g. a housing support worker.
8. Purpose - Can you describe the main processes involved in delivering your service? Can you explain the purpose of these processes, e.g. why certain criteria determine a person's eligibility for a program.
9. Accountability – How are you accountable to your service users?
10. Other Areas – Is there anything else that we might have missed within your organization in relation to how your work is organized?

3. The Organization and the Issue

1. What has your organization already done to address the issue of homelessness and housing precarity?

It is important to attain a sound sense of what has been done already in this area. By developing an understanding of the history of addressing this problem, you are better equipped to expand and build on this work.

2. How do you think the community is set up to respond to the issue of homelessness and housing instability?
3. In your organization, who is the most interested in being involved with this issue and why? Who is the least interested in being involved and why?
4. Who has the power to make or limit change in your organization?
5. How are people with intellectual disabilities, their families and/or Indigenous, Black migrant and 2SLGBTQI+ peoples represented in the decision making and planning processes in your organization?
6. What specific services are available to each of these groups in your organization? What specific programs or services that you are aware of, are available to these populations in your community?
7. What specialized housing projects have been implemented in your community? Are they still in operation? Were they or are they still successful?

Your Experiences with the Target Populations

8. What are some of the challenges that you have come across when working with the following communities, people with intellectual disabilities, Indigenous, Black migrant and 2SLGBTQI+ people?
9. How did you deal with these challenges?
10. What are some ways you might be able to improve your services to better meet the needs of these groups?
11. What are some of the successes that you have encountered when working with people from these groups?

Advertising & Promotion of your Service

12. How do you promote your services?
13. Do you send out or leave promotional materials at specific locations? If so, please describe.
14. Are any of your promotional materials geared to specific populations of people, i.e. people with disabilities? immigrants and refugees? Indigenous peoples? If so, can you describe?
15. Do you think that these materials are in formats that would be accessible to all people? If so, why? For example, are online materials in both official languages, other languages, plain language, culturally appropriate, use of descriptive video, etc.

FEEDBACK

How did you find this interview?

Is there anything you think I could have done differently in gathering this information?

4. Physical Access

For the next section, ideally the Local HVA Researcher could conduct a walk-through and gather the information themselves. It is advisable to bring a measuring tape and a notebook!

Outside your building and entrances

1. Are there parking spaces with the International Symbol of Access for people with disabilities?
 - Yes
 - No

2. Is there an accessible passenger drop-off and pick up area?
 - Yes
 - No

3. Is the pathway to the entrance wheelchair accessible?
 - Yes
 - No

4. Is the entryway clearly marked and well-lit?
 - Yes
 - No

5. Is the pathway to the entrance a flat surface, stairs, or a ramp?
 - Yes
 - No

6. If there are stairs, how many steps are there?
 - Yes
 - No

7. If there are ramps or stairs, do they have a textured strip or a colour change? A textured strip or a colour change on ramps or on the edges of steps are helpful because it can help a person with a visual disability identify a change in the structure such as stairs, doorways, ramps etc.
 - Yes
 - No

8. Is the entrance wide enough for a wheelchair or mobility device to enter?
- Yes
 - No
9. Is the door too heavy for a person with a mobility impairment to open?
- Yes
 - No
10. What kind of handle is on the door?
- Round doorknob
 - Lever
 - Thumb activated
 - Other, describe _____
11. Can the door be opened automatically?
- Yes
 - No
12. Does your facility have an elevator?
- Yes
 - No
13. If yes, does the elevator have a call button/phone?
- Yes
 - No
14. Does the elevator have Braille or raised buttons?
- Yes
 - No
15. Does the elevator have a voice synthesis system that announces floor stops?
- Yes
 - No
16. Is the reception area spacious?
- Yes
 - No

17. Is there enough space for a person in a wheelchair to enter, turn, and move about freely? The average wheelchair is about 650 mm (0.65 m or about 2 ft) wide and 1100 mm (1.1 m or about 3.5ft) long and requires about 1500 mm (1.5 m or about 5 ft) by 1500 mm (1.5 m or about 5 ft) for easy turning.
- Yes
 - No
18. Are hallways and corridors wide enough for a person using a wheelchair or mobility device to circulate freely down them?
- Yes
 - No
19. Are hallways and corridors barrier-free?
- Yes
 - No
20. Are internal direction signs in the facility clearly indicated?
- Yes
 - No
21. Are any of the internal direction signs tactile? Tactile signs are signs that have raised print and/or raised pictorial images to indicate stairwells, bathrooms, etc.
- Yes
 - No
22. Are there signs on all room doors that indicate what the room is used for, such as examinations, etc.?
- Yes
 - No
23. If you answered "Yes" to question number 22, do any of the signs include Braille, large print or contrasting colours for people who live with visual disabilities? Please check all that apply.
- Braille/Braille
 - Large Print
 - Contrasting Colours
 - Raised Print
 - Raised Pictograms

Using the Services in the Facility

24. Is the entrance to a client room wide enough for a person using a wheelchair or mobility device to enter and move around freely?
- Yes
 - No
25. Is there a chair in the room available for a person with limited mobility to sit down?
- Yes
 - No
26. Do you have accessible washrooms?
- Yes
 - No
27. If the bathrooms are shared, does the accessible bathroom stall have the International Symbol of Accessibility on the washroom door?
- Yes
 - No
28. What kind of handle is on the bathroom door?
- Round doorknob
 - Lever
 - Thumb activated
 - Other, describe
29. Is there adequate space, at least 900 mm (0.9 m or about 3 ft) by the side of the toilet to allow a person in a wheelchair to transfer onto the toilet from the side of the wheelchair?
- Yes
 - No
30. Do your washrooms have grab bars to assist a person in transferring from the toilet and to the wheelchair or a standing position?
- Yes
 - No
31. Are all light switches, handles and controls at a lowered height so that they are accessible to a person in a wheelchair or mobility device?
- Yes
 - No