Setting the Stage for a Coordinated Access System in Cowichan

[Reaching Home](#), the Government of Canada's redesigned homelessness strategy, supports communities to address the needs of those experiencing or at-risk of homelessness. This initiative replaced the Homelessness Partnering Strategy and officially launched April 1, 2019. Reaching Home is designed to support the goals of Canada's [National Housing Strategy](#) and positions communities at the forefront of tackling homelessness.

Reaching Home also introduced [Coordinated Access](#) as a program priority. The shift to Coordinated Access (CA) supports an integrated systems-based approach where service providers, local communities, and orders of government work together to achieve common goals.

The goal of Coordinated Access is to help communities ensure equity of access to appropriate resources, prioritize those most in need of assistance, and streamline services.

WHAT IS COORDINATED ACCESS?

Coordinated Access involves a connected system where individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness or at-risk of homelessness are directed to community access points where a shared assessment tool is used by trained staff to evaluate an individual or family's depth of need, prioritize them for housing support services, and help match them to available housing-focused interventions.

WHY IS COORDINATED ACCESS IMPORTANT?

Coordinated Access is the most effective way to serve people with housing challenges. It is not a program; it is an integrated process that streamlines access to available services in a community.

Without a coordinated approach, those in crisis must navigate a complicated web of connected – but uncoordinated – services. They are forced to repeat their story multiple times and place themselves on numerous waiting lists to have their housing issues addressed.

Using a person-centered approach reduces the frequency of a mismatch between peoples' needs and the services they access, poorer housing outcomes, continued diminished quality of life, and inefficient use of limited resources.
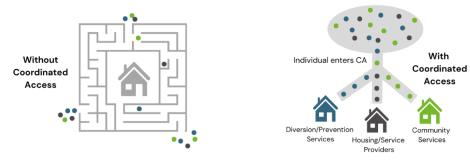

Figure 1. With and without Coordinated Access

DEVELOPING THE SYSTEM

Employment and Social Development Canada's *Reaching Home: Coordinated Access Guide* (2019)[1] outlines in detail all essential aspects of developing a Coordinated Access System (CAS). **Establishing a governance system** and **identifying community-level outcomes** are the first steps:

Establish a Governance System

- Engage stakeholders including service providers (Indigenous and non-Indigenous), people with lived experience, subject matter experts, government representatives, etc.

- Both the Community Entity (United Way BC) and their Community Advisory Board (CAB) are expected to engage in the planning and implementation of CA to support active participation of all service providers.

Identify Community-Level Outcomes

Desired community-level outcomes are established to identify the overarching goals that will measure success over time. These inform how access to housing resources is prioritized and other critical elements of the CA process, including who needs to be part of the governance structure and design of the access points.

Many communities start with a conversation about the core values and principles that will drive the CA system.

According to the parameters set out by Reaching Home, there are a specific selection of outcomes that a community must add to their outcomes list including:

- Reduce chronic homelessness in the community
- Reduce homelessness in the community, and overall for priority populations
- Reduce new inflows into homelessness
- Reduce returns to homelessness

After a community reaches consensus on its desired community-level outcomes, they should be integrated into policies and protocols of Coordinated Access.

Other Essential Aspects of System Development

- Data Collection (HIFIS, or other HMIS)
- Access Points to Service
- Triage and Assessment
- Prioritization
- Vacancy Matching and Referral

Each of these components come together to form the CAS. (*see Appendix 2*)

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[1] Employment and Social Development Canada (2019). Reaching Home: Coordinated Access Guide.

COORDINATED ACCESS IN THE COWICHAN REGION

Cowichan Housing Association (CHA) was selected as the Coordinated Access Lead Agency in February 2022, and we have been formally working on the development and implementation of a CAS in our region since October 2022. Project milestones thus far include:

System Mapping

We have completed a System Map of all essential services in our region that support those who are homeless and/or at imminent risk of becoming homeless.

Data Collection and Management

We are actively participating in the conversations taking place around the provincial roll-out of the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS), which will be the data collection tool for CA in our region. These conversations include BC Housing, Ministry of Housing, Infrastructure Canada, and all community entities in BC who are required to establish a CAS. We are also strongly advocating for the incorporation of OCAP Principles and appropriate Indigenous representation at these conversations.

Indigenous Engagement

We are meeting with Cowichan Tribes bi-weekly to discuss and strategize key aspects of developing and implementing a CAS in our region. This includes developing a guiding framework, peer engagement, community engagement, and data management. We are also in the process of co-creating a broader Indigenous engagement strategy, which includes other Nations within the CVRD boundary and Indigenous organizations.

Integrated Community Development Group

We have established an Integrated Community Development (ICD) Group which represents the first iteration of our CA governance structure. The ICD group consists of key community partners delivering essential services in our region. We meet bi-weekly to discuss and work through all necessary and relevant topics pertaining to CA.

Peer Engagement

We have established a working group tasked with the planning and delivery of peer engagement activities to ensure persons with lived and living expertise's voices are central in the development of our CAS.

Community Engagement

We will be hosting a Community Engagement Session on June 4, 2024 and inviting key service providers to participate in critical conversations around CA development, including access points, prioritization, triage and assessment, diversion, community-level outcomes, and core values.

DEVELOPING A GUIDING FRAMEWORK

In order to establish core values and principles for our CAS, we have asked Cowichan Tribes to work with us to develop a guiding framework rooted in Hul'qumi'num-speaking cultures and teachings. We are working together to consult with all the Nations who's traditional territories are within the CVRD boundary.

A key priority for CHA in the development and implementation of CA is to center Indigenous leadership and voices[2]. Our community homelessness data shows that Indigenous community members are over-represented (49%), and we know that Indigenous homelessness is rooted in colonization.

We want our Indigenous community members to feel safe entering the CAS, and we want the CAS to provide equitable access to essential resources and available housing. We also know that when Indigenous ways of knowing are implemented into our mainstream systems, the systems become richer and everyone benefits, Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members.

Learning from Other Communities: Winnipeg[3]

This community is using the seven sacred teachings as a guiding framework. *(See Appendix 1)*

1. Project Advisory Committee was created.
   - Gathered information on context of Winnipeg, history of CA in Winnipeg, and vision for a fully implemented CAS.
2. From those learnings, lead agency developed program logic model and evaluation framework to guide implementation.
   - Outlined vision, goals, target population, eligibility, inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and guiding principles of a fully operational CAS in Winnipeg.
   - Presented draft to Advisory Committee and refinements were made.
3. Verified logic model with community members who reflected Winnipeg's diversity (five consultations).
4. Evaluation frameworks created based on previous reports and consultations with Advisory Committee and community.
5. Logic models can serve as guiding frameworks to base an emerging coordinated access system on. **living document review annually (components may change over time)

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[2] Thistle, J., & Smylie, J. (2020). Pekiwewin (coming home): Advancing good relations with Indigenous people experiencing homelessness. CMAJ, 192(1), E257-E259

[3] End Homelessness Winnipeg (2022). Sharing the Journey of Coordinated Access in Winnipeg: Logic Model and Evaluation Framework.

Appendix 1 – Winnipeg Logic Model for Coordinated Access

Coordinated Access in Winnipeg – Logic Model – Guided By the 7 Sacred Teachings: Love, Respect, Courage, Honesty, Wisdom, Humility, Truth

Vision of Coordinated Access in Winnipeg: Coordinated Access creates lasting solutions with our community to provide a seamless and rapid exit from the experience of homelessness, through system collaboration and coordination that is person-centered, anti-oppressive, trauma-informed, strengths-based, and grounded in the principles of harm reduction.

Eligibility: Individuals and families experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness in Winnipeg. It is also important to consider the migratory patterns of people travelling from their home community to Winnipeg to access services, connect with friends and family, find employment, escape domestic violence, etc.

INPUTS

A coordinated body to organize, operate, and adapt coordinated access processes

- Includes dedicated staff
- Includes direction from individuals with lived and living experience of homelessness

Local organizations to participate in the coordinated access system

Educational and community engagement materials on the coordinated access system

An assessment process

An inventory of housing and support providers for matching and referrals

A data management system (i.e., HIFIS)

ACTIVITIES

Awareness: Education, outreach, and community engagement activities to ensure the whole community understands the processes.

Collaboration: Collaborating with other systems (e.g., child welfare, justice, Employment and Income Assistance, violence against women) and prevention and diversion (e.g., eviction prevention, shelter diversion) organizations.

Training: Ensure that all staff participating in coordinated access process are sufficiently trained, particularly related to trauma-informed care, harm reduction, and anti-racism/anti-oppression.

Access points: Physical and virtual spaces where people experiencing homelessness can access the system. This includes centralized (i.e., one primary location for in-person access) and decentralized (i.e., multiple secondary locations for in-person access and phone/Internet/apps) options to reduce the number of organizations a person may need to access.

Assessment: A process to understand the person accessing the coordinated access system and to reduce the number of times a person must share their story. The process should be simple, contextualized to the community, and may include an assessment tool.

Prioritization: A community-based consultative process to identify community members with housing and support needs that are best fit to what the coordinated access system can offer.

Matching and Referral: A fair and transparent process to match people to housing and supports based upon their needs and choices. Ensure there are several comprehensive services available and safe housing options.

Follow-Up Supports: Offer follow-up supports to people once they are housed.

Peer Supports: Offer peer supports throughout the system.

Data Management: A system to manage the data that is collected from people who participate in the coordinated access system. Recognizes privacy, confidentiality, and data sovereignty.

Evaluation: Processes to conduct quality checks to ensure the same quality of service is being offered to all people who access the system.

OUTCOMES

Short-Term

- Enhanced awareness of the coordinated access system among community members and service providers
- Improved access to housing and support options for community members
- Increased engagement of community members in developing housing and support plans

Mid-Term

- More appropriate matching to housing and support based on the unique identities of community members
- More equitable access to housing and supports for community members

Long-Term

- Decreases in returns to homelessness
- Achieving housing stability more quickly
- Improved spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional health of community

Guiding Practices for Implementation

The system should provide access to Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Healers, and medicines before, during, and after the steps in the coordinated access system

The system should address the intersecting identities of people: Indigenous communities, young people, older adults, domestic violence survivors, women and gender diverse people, 2SLGBTQ+ communities, people with various accessibility needs, newcomers and refugees, Black community members, racialized community members, sex workers, and people who use alcohol and substances

The system should be guided by a culturally safe, trauma-informed, harm reduction approach and meet people where they are at in their journey. Follow the principles of Thistle and Smylie (2020) when engaging with community members – Identifying and situating oneself, Keeoukaywin (visiting), Hospitality, and Treat people like you would treat your own loved ones or relatives.

Appendix 1 – Winnipeg Logic Model for Coordinated Access

Coordinated Access in Winnipeg – Logic Model – Guided By the 7 Sacred Teachings: Love, Respect, Courage, Honesty, Wisdom, Humility, Truth

What is Coordinated Access? A system to help people rapidly exit from the experience of homelessness by enhancing collaboration and coordination across the system. It means having different ways to access housing and support options, not having to repeatedly share your story, and identifying housing and support options that work for you.

Who is Coordinated Access for? Any individual or family who is experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness in Winnipeg.

WHAT MAKES UP A COORDINATED ACCESS SYSTEM IN WINNIPEG?

Organizer. End Homelessness Winnipeg organizes, operates, and adapts coordinated access processes

Service providers. All local organizations that provide services to people experiencing homelessness in Winnipeg

Community engagement. Educational and community engagement materials on the coordinated access system

An assessment process. A process to understand your journey.

Housing and support options. A list of housing and support providers for matching and referrals

A data management system. A private and confidential system to keep information that you share.

WHAT ARE THE STEPS IN WINNIPEG'S COORDINATED ACCESS SYSTEM?

Being aware of the system: Making sure that the Winnipeg community understands the processes and what is available.

Collaborating across the system: Agencies working together with to prevent people being bounced around the system.

Preventing homelessness: Agencies working together to prevent homelessness, like preventing evictions.

Training staff: Ensuring that all staff treat people with respect, including taking a trauma-informed, harm reduction, and anti-racism/anti-oppression approach.

Accessing the system: Providing in-person and virtual (e.g., online, phone) spaces where people can access the system. This includes having multiple locations for in-person access to reduce the number of organizations a person may need to access.

Understanding your journey: A way for people to share their story to understand their needs and reduce the number of times a person must share their story.

Prioritizing people based on their needs: Based upon community feedback, developing a system to identify community members with housing and support needs that are best fit to what the coordinated access system can offer.

Matching people to housing and support: A fair and transparent process to match people to housing and supports based upon their needs and choices. This includes having several comprehensive services and safe housing options available.

Offering follow-up supports: Offering follow-up supports to people once they are housed to help them with their journey.

Offering peer supports: Offer peer supports, or supports from people who have also experienced homelessness, throughout the system.

Keeping your information private: A system to manage the data that is collected from people who participate in the coordinated access system. This includes the right to privacy, confidentiality, and data sovereignty.

Evaluating how the system is doing: Reviewing the system to make sure that the same quality of service is being offered to all people who access the system.

WHAT IS THE SYSTEM TRYING TO ACHIEVE?

Short-Term

- Enhanced awareness of the coordinated access system among community members and service providers
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Mid-Term

- More appropriate matching to housing and support based on the unique identities of community members
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Long-Term

- Decreases in returns to homelessness
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HOW SHOULD THE SYSTEM BE OPERATED?

The system should provide access to Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Healers, and medicines before, during, and after the steps in the coordinated access system

The system should address the intersecting identities of people: Indigenous communities, young people, older adults, domestic violence survivors, women and gender diverse people, 2SLGBTQ+ communities, people with various accessibility needs, newcomers and refugees, Black community members, racialized community members, sex workers, and people who use alcohol and substances

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Appendix 2 – What is Coordinated Access?