

Homelessness to Housing Stability Strategy Summary Series Language Guide

Homelessness to Housing Stability Strategy

This information sheet is part of a series that summarizes key findings from **All Roads Lead to Home: The Homelessness to Housing Stability Strategy for Waterloo Region.**

The Strategy and other background reports are available on the **Region of Waterloo** website at: www.socialservices.regionofwaterloo.ca

Other summary sheets in this series include:

- Introduction to the Strategy
 - Focus on Aboriginal Populations
 - Focus on Economic Homelessness
- Focus on LGBTQ Populations
 - Focus on Mental Health
- Focus on Newcomers to Canada
 - Focus on Older Adults
 - Focus on Persistent Homelessness
- Focus on People with Disabilities
 - Focus on Rural Populations
 - Focus on Substance Use
 - Focus on Youth

For more information about housing stability, please visit:

Homelessness & Housing Umbrella Group:
www.hhug.ca

Homeless Hub:
www.homelesshub.ca

Key Terms Related to Housing Stability

People may move between three possible degrees of stability in housing:

Housing Stability (1st Degree): Housing stability refers to *ideal living circumstances* where people with a fixed address are able to retain adequate housing over the long term. To have housing stability, people must have the following three key resources:

- 1) **Adequate housing** provides security of tenure and is desirable, affordable, safe, adequately maintained, accessible and a suitable size.
- 2) **Adequate income** provides enough financial resources to meet and sustain minimum standards for housing (rent or mortgage expenses and utilities) and other basic needs (e.g., food, clothing, child care, transportation, personal hygiene, health/medical expenses, recreation, communication and education).
- 3) **Adequate support** (informal and/or formal) provides enough personal support for living as independently and connecting with others as desired.

At-Risk of Housing Loss (2nd Degree): People with a fixed address are at-risk of housing loss when they are unable to access adequate housing, income and/or support.

Homelessness (3rd Degree): People who do not have a fixed address are experiencing homelessness and may rest, sleep or stay in a variety of spaces:

- **Unsheltered:** Indoor or outdoor spaces not intended for living (e.g., parks, sidewalks, stairwells, under bridges, abandoned buildings, cars, doorways).
- **Sheltered through Informal or Private Resources:** Shelter accessed on a short term basis through informal connections or the private market/businesses (e.g., staying with family, friends or acquaintances; staying at motels or campground sites).
- **Sheltered by a Housing Stability Program:** An *Emergency Shelter* or *Time-Limited Residence* program, where the primary purpose is housing stability (i.e., at least 50% of the activities are related to housing stability). Housing stability activities include supporting people to find, establish and/or retain adequate housing and/or increasing opportunities for people to fully participate in community life.
- **Sheltered by a Program Indirectly Related to Housing Stability:** A time-limited residential program where the primary purpose of the program is not housing stability (e.g., hospital, post-incarceration, problematic substance use treatment).

How To Talk About Housing Stability

When talking about housing stability it is important to be aware of language. Language plays an important role in shaping how we think about things. In turn, how people think about things changes what they believe should be done about them.

Some phrases or words that were used to talk about homelessness in the past are now considered outdated, even offensive. Many of these older phrases or words served to perpetuate stigmas and misconceptions. To help shift toward more supportive and respectful use of language, consider following these principles:

Principle	Old Language	Recommended Language	Rationale
Focus on the <i>solution</i> rather than the <i>problem</i> .	homelessness	housing stability	Emphasizes the vision for the future. For example, the health care system is not the “illness and disease system” and the justice system is not the “crime system”.
	homelessness system	housing stability system	
Use “people first” language.	homeless person, street person	person <i>experiencing</i> homelessness	Prioritize the <i>person</i> over any affiliated condition or circumstance. Avoid using terms that associate a person’s condition or circumstance with his or her primary identity. For example, homelessness is a temporary circumstance, not a permanent identity or state.
	addict or substance abuser	person with problematic substance use	
	the mentally ill	person with a mental health issue	
	disabled person	person with a disability	
	high-risk person	person in a high-risk situation	
Use respectful language.	client, consumer	use the word person where possible – alternatives include tenant, resident or program participant	Regardless of life circumstances, people are <i>people</i> and should be referred to as such whenever possible. For example, people are not “cases”. Also, people are not “users” – people <i>access</i> resources for which they are <i>eligible</i> , through programs that are <i>designed</i> for them.
	case management, case worker, case plan	support coordination, support worker, support plan	
	program user	person accessing a program	
	difficult person	person whose behaviours we find challenging	
Avoid terms that pass judgment.	unmotivated	differently motivated	People are motivated for different reasons and make decisions that make sense to them at the time.
	labeling a decision as good or bad	accepting a person’s decision without judgement	
	people sabotage their opportunities		
Avoid terms that “rank” people.	workers move “down” to their clients’ “level”	workers meet people “where they are at”	People are not on different “levels”.
Avoid using aggressive language.	work with	walk with	Reflects an aggressive or militaristic view of the world, which can give the impression that people are somehow “at war” either with one another and/or against a social issue like poverty.
	front-line worker	direct support worker	
	target, aim	shorter term goal or purpose	
	banned	service restriction with a planned intake	
Avoid terms that don’t recognize context.	hard to house, non-compliant, service resistant, person is a threat to the community	The services provided are not currently working for the person.	The community may not have the right range of housing and/or support options to meet people’s unique needs. People may require additional person-centred support.