Coordinated entry (CE) is a process developed to ensure that all people experiencing a housing crisis have fair and equal access and are quickly identified, assessed for, referred and connected to housing and assistance based on their strengths and needs. Designing a new system provides opportunities to review current practices, policies, procedures and evaluate if community standards and expectations are being met. The CE workgroup decided to create a sub-workgroup to evaluate screening tools and make recommendations.

To assist in making an informed recommendation, the sub-workgroup utilized research from the Homelessness Hub, a project supported by York University. The Homelessness Hub provides information for researchers, policymakers and practitioners on homelessness. The subgroup utilized the “Table of Homelessness-Specific Tools” led by Dr. Eker of York University that reviewed eleven screening tools currently being used in communities in Canada and the United States. Each tool is reviewed in how it is used, strengths, weaknesses and supporting literature involving validity and reliability. Included is an appendix titled “Recommended Qualities of a Good Standardized Assessment Tool”. Universal qualities for a screening tool should include the following: Valid, Reliable, Inclusive, Person-Centered, User-Friendly, Strengths-based, Housing First Orientation, Sensitive to lived experiences and Transparent. For definitions, please see link.

The sub-workgroup reviewed four screening tools: VI-SPDAT v1, VI-SPDAT v2, VAT and Houston Triage Tool. Each screening was reviewed by the research provided by York University and the subgroup reviewed each screening by the additional recommended qualities (table attached). After review, the subcommittee requested the entire committee vote for a final tool.

The information was presented to the CE workgroup included York University’s research, an explanation of the recommended qualities and a review of each of the tools through the lens of the table. In order to gain consensus and shared values each member voted on what qualities were the most important and the following five ranked as priority for a screening tool: Housing First orientation, Valid, Reliable, Inclusive and Transparent.

The committee unanimously voted for the Downtown Emergency Assistance Service Center’s (DESC) Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT) to be the community’s screening tool. This screening appears to best meet the criteria due to research and workgroup agreed upon recommended qualities.
Coordinated Entry


Recommended Qualities

**Housing First orientation**—The tool should use a Housing First frame. The tool should not be used to determine “housing readiness” or screen people out for housing assistance, and therefore should not encompass an in-depth clinical assessment. A more in-depth clinical assessment can be administered once the individual or family has obtained housing to determine and offer an appropriate service package.

**Valid**—Tools should be evidence-informed, criteria-driven, tested to ensure that they are appropriately matching people to the right interventions and levels of assistance, responsive to the needs presented by the individual or family being assessed, and should make meaningful recommendations for housing and services.

**Reliable**—The tool should produce consistent results, even when different staff members conduct the assessment or the assessment is done in different locations.

**Inclusive**—The tool should encompass the full range of housing and services interventions needed to end homelessness, and where possible, facilitate referrals to the existing inventory of housing and services.

**Transparent**—The relationship between particular assessment questions and the recommended options should be easy to discern. The tool should not be a “black box” such that it is unclear why a question is asked and how it relates to the recommendations or options provided.

Vulnerability Assessment Tool

Recommended by the Homelessness Hub as the best brief screening tool available that can assist with prioritization for Housing First Programs.

- Evidence base
- Relatively short
- VI is one item
- Includes chronicity
- Requires training and fewer assessors

Screening tool as 10 domains that are measured on a Likert Scale. Interview allows for screeners to add comments. Items are summed for a total score with no cut-offs. High scores are considered highest risk.

**A man who lives everywhere lives nowhere.** - Marcus Valerius Martial

VAT Next Steps

- Train the Trainer July 1st deadline with identified screeners.
- Method for prioritization of current by-name registry list with new screening tool

Resources

http://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/screening-housing-first

http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/ScreeningforH-F-Table-Nov17.pdf