Homelessness Prevention: Definitions & Key Concepts

The purpose of this working document is to provide a working definition of homelessness prevention, prevention types, and a corresponding typology of housing insecurity that provides a foundation for the **HSLC Housing Insecurity Screening Tool (v.1, November 2022)**. These working definitions can be adapted locally and shared with local stakeholders to further your community's common understanding of homelessness prevention, while providing a standardized basis to consistently and efficiently identify people relative to their risk for literal homelessness. Common definitions and risk screening in turn supports further standardization and training around the types of responses and referrals to offer people screened as housing insecure, including specific prioritization protocols for accessing targeted prevention resources for highest risk households.

Homelessness Prevention

Homelessness prevention refers to policies, practices, and interventions that reduce the likelihood that someone will experience homelessness. It also means providing those who have been homeless with the necessary resources and supports to stabilize their housing, enhance integration and social inclusion, and ultimately reduce the risk of the recurrence of homelessness. There are three general types of Homelessness Prevention (HP):

- **PRIMARY**: Structural-level initiatives that apply to everyone, in order to reduce the risk of homelessness and build protective factors.

- **SECONDARY**: Intervention strategies aimed at those who are at imminent risk of homelessness (i.e., received an eviction notice) as well as those who have recently become homeless, with the aim of avoiding homelessness or moving out of homelessness as quickly as possible.

- **TERTIARY**: Prevention initiatives that support individuals and families who have previously experienced homelessness to ensure that it doesn't happen again.

  Stephen Gaetz & Erin Dej. (2017). A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

Key Concepts:

EFFICIENCY: Prevention activities that are well targeted, delivering effective activities to people who are very likely to become homeless unless they receive help

EFFECTIVENESS: Prevention activities capable of stopping someone from becoming homeless

"Poor targeting leads to an inefficient strategy and inefficient strategies are rarely effective."

Martha Burt, et al (2005): Strategies for Preventing Homelessness. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research.

Targeted Homelessness Prevention

A form of secondary homelessness prevention that targets assistance to households at greatest risk for literal homelessness within a defined period of time and who lack other safe housing options and resources to avoid literal homelessness "but for" timely and individualized prevention assistance.

- Helps individuals and families avoid imminent literal homelessness by providing timely, flexible assistance to resolve a household's immediate housing crisis and help them stabilize in their current or new housing.

- An integral part of homeless system coordinated entry and diversion efforts.

- Provides a direct and scalable means for reducing avoidable literal homelessness and homeless system inflow.

Coordinated Prevention (Coordinated Prevention Systems)

A community-wide approach that uses common risk screening criteria to identify people who are housing insecure, including those who are at greatest risk for literal homelessness, and then offers immediate, coordinated access to housing problem-solving and prevention-related resources, including prioritized access to assistance for people with more urgent prevention needs.

Built for Zero *Housing Stabilization Learning Cohort (HSLC)*
Core Elements of Coordinated Prevention
Last updated December 2022

HSLC Housing Insecurity Typology: Definitions & Indicators

This is our working Housing Insecurity Typology for HSLC, built in part off McKinney-Vento, SSVF and common ways to identify people most *materially* at risk, and allowing for additional screening to identify other characteristics that indicate higher risk (e.g prior homelessness, youth who aged out of foster care, etc).

Risk Level		Living Situation	Housing Options & Resources
0	**Stably Housed**	· Current housing is safe; AND · Current housing is stable for the foreseeable future (e.g., sufficient income to pay rent and utilities, able to stay with host family/friend indefinitely)	<u>Has</u> housing options, financial resources, and/or support networks to maintain or obtain a safe place to stay for *foreseeable* future.
1	**Unstably Housed**	· Current housing is safe; AND · No material risk of imminent risk of literal homelessness (i.e., not Risk Level 2-4); AND · Is currently experiencing general housing insecurity due to housing cost burden, housing conditions, frequent unplanned moves, and/or other characteristics and barriers indicative of higher risk for future literal homelessness. May be at-risk of housing loss in 3-6 months.	<u>Has</u> housing options, financial resources, and/or support networks to maintain or obtain a safe place to stay for *foreseeable* future.
2	**At-Risk of Literal Homelessness (within 15-90 Days)**	· Current housing is safe; AND · Must leave current housing within <u>15-90 days</u> (e.g., due to court-ordered eviction, landlord-issued eviction, foreclosure, safety or health risk, host family/friend limitation, etc.); OR · Must leave an institution (e.g., hospital, jail, treatment facility) within <u>15-90 days</u>;	<u>Does not have other</u> housing options, financial resources, and/or support networks to maintain or obtain a safe place to stay *after* the <u>next 15-90 days.</u>
3	**Imminent Risk of Literal Homelessness (within 1-14 Days)**	· Current housing is safe; AND · Must leave current housing within <u>14 days</u> (e.g., due to court-ordered eviction, foreclosure, imminent safety or health risk, host family/friend request to leave, family conflict, etc.); OR · Must leave an institution (e.g., hospital, jail, treatment facility) within <u>14 days</u>;	<u>Does not have</u> other housing options, financial resources, and/or support networks to maintain or obtain a safe place to stay after the <u>next 14 days</u>.
4	**Literally Homeless Tonight**	· Is currently literally homeless and continues to have no other safe housing option tonight outside of available emergency shelter, Safe Haven, or transitional housing options; OR · Must leave current housing <u>today</u> (e.g., due to court-ordered eviction, foreclosure, immediate safety or health risk, host family/friend request to leave, etc.); OR · Must leave an institution (e.g., hospital, jail, treatment facility) <u>today</u>.	<u>Does not have</u> other housing options, financial resources, and/or support networks to maintain or obtain a safe place to stay <u>tonight</u>