



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.

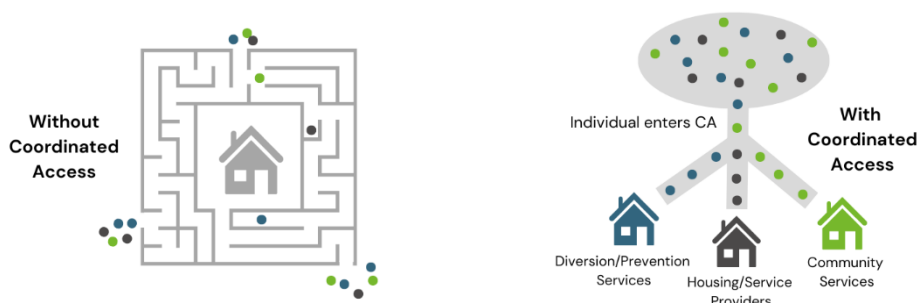


Figure 1. With and without Coordinated Access

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.

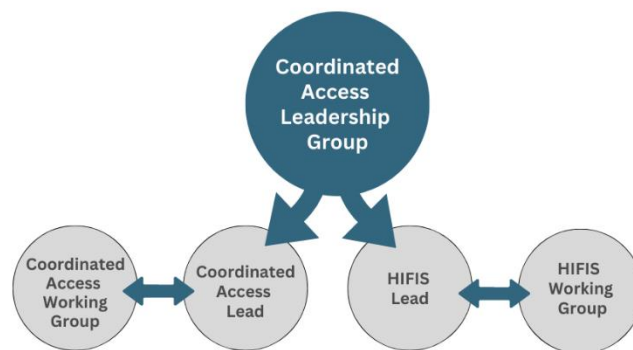


Figure 2. An example of how different governance groups could fit together

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

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

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 Coordinated Access System.

COORDINATED ACCESS IN THE COWICHAN REGION NOW

HelpSeeker

Through 2020-2021, United Way BC contracted HelpSeeker to engage with community members in the Cowichan region to learn more about the opportunities and requirements for improving equitable access to housing and homelessness support. A Coordinated Access Working Group was established and gave advice on practical and technical requirements to incorporate into a CAS. The *HelpSeeker Summary Report*² outlines the key findings that emerged from the Working Group sessions and makes the following recommendations for next steps:

1. Select a backbone agency to lead Coordinated Access.
2. Develop a data collection and usage strategy to prepare for Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) implementation.
 - a) Identify the data collection requirements for the system from an equity perspective
 - b) Align any HMIS decisions and design to that strategy
3. Ensure integration and representation in the community plan.

in February 2022, United Way BC called for Expressions of Interest on developing Coordinated Access in the Cowichan Valley. Through that process, Cowichan Housing Association (CHA) was selected to act as the backbone agency (aka Coordinated Access Lead) for the Region.

BC Housing

BC Housing has also been developing a Coordinated Access and Assessment (CAA) system in Cowichan. They're currently chairing two different tables pertaining to this:

1. a community partners meeting (open to the public), and
2. a placement table, where tenanting decisions are made (invite only).

Both groups have been meeting for approximately one year. BC Housing is aware of Reaching Home's CA program priority and will be a key stakeholder in developing the overall regional CAS in collaboration with CHA and others.

² HelpSeeker (2021). Coordinated Access Working Group: Summary of Findings and Recommendations. Contact melaina@cowichanhousing.com to obtain a copy of this report.

NEXT STEPS FOR COWICHAN

The next steps are to recruit a CA Planning Group and to initiate a visioning session to develop a guiding framework. Important “next step” components include:

- Centering Indigenous leadership and voices³
- Develop a guiding framework
- Establish a governance system
- Identify community-level outcomes
- Update/finalize our Resources Directory
 - What services exist in our region?
 - What infrastructure exists in our region that we can build upon for CA?
 - What are the gaps in services?
- Determine all essential aspects of developing the system (as listed above) for Cowichan
- Possible CA training for our community (CAEH)

The CA Planning Group will build upon what is already in place and work towards creating an effective CAS for the Cowichan region.

LEARNING FROM OTHER COMMUNITIES

Winnipeg⁴

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)

³ Thistle, J., & Smylie, J. (2020). [Pekiwewin \(coming home\): Advancing good relations with Indigenous people experiencing homelessness](#). CMAJ, 192(1), E257-E259

⁴ 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
- 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 members

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

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, Keewaukaywin (visiting), Hospitality, and Treat people like you would treat your own loved ones or relatives.

