

## Harm Reduction Facts

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- **Harm reduction within this supportive housing initiative will mean that we use a client centred counseling approach that meets the client where they are at. This means that we do not judge people when they tell us they have relapsed, or continue to use. Instead, we work with them to decrease and/or eliminate their substance use.**
  - It puts the client first (a client-centred approach), provides flexibility, and focuses on the individual needs of each client.
  - It puts emphasis on the strengths and capabilities of the individual and encourages empowerment.
  - It uses counseling and other health-related supports to work with individuals to reduce their harmful behaviours.
  - It actively engages clients in making positive changes to their lives.
  - In a report published by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (September 2005), 13 agencies were interviewed about their innovative housing programs and the use of a harm reduction approach. In many cases, clients had undergone positive changes around housing stabilization, substance use, physical and mental health, and income. (Source: CMHC Report)
  
- **Harm reduction works.**
  - Harm reduction has positive outcomes, including: mental health improvements, service reduction, and housing stabilization.
    - **Mental Health Improvements:**
      - 75% of residents in a Seattle housing provider (Lyon Building) were found to reduce their use of crisis service within six months after moving into the building. (Source: CMHC Report)
      - Residential mental health care was virtually eliminated in the first year of supportive housing, and average utilization dropped to zero within 12 months, from an average of more than 2.5 days per person per year. (Source: Corporation for Supportive Housing)
  
    - **Service Reduction:**
      - Before living in supportive housing, 20.7 annual detox visits. After housing, 2.3 visits per year. (Source: CMHC Report)
      - 58% decrease in emergency room use (Source: Corporation for Supportive Housing)
      - For those who stayed in housing for at least one year, the number of days in the hospital decreased by 57%. (Source: Corporation for Supportive Housing)
  
    - **Housing Stabilization:**
      - 88% of clients remained in their housing, compared to 47% for those who chose another treatment system. (Source: CMHC Report)
      - 66% of clients remained in their housing (Source: CMHC Report)

- Reductions in substance use ranging from 66 to 78% have been reported from similar housing providers that have incorporated the harm reduction approach. Research shows that, as people engage in therapeutic services and have stable housing, their alcohol and drug use decreases. (CMHC Report)
- Abstinence-based programs are not as successful as harm reduction programs in attracting or retaining people who are homeless. (Source: CMHC Report)
  - When Switzerland operated abstinence based treatment programs, similar to what Canada now offers, they attracted no more than 20% of all active drug user. (Source: MoH Report)
  - Since Switzerland implemented a harm reduction approach, they now attract 65% of active drug users to some form of treatment and the remainder are now in contact with harm reduction services. (Source: MoH Report)
  - Studies conducted in the U.S. found that "... 12-step programs, which account for more than 90% of all alcohol and other drug treatment programs in the U.S. had a success rate of between 5 and 39% and that 80% of clients failed to complete traditional treatment." (CMHC Report)
- **The Supportive Housing Initiative, in conjunction with a harm reduction model, can begin to address the very complex issue of homelessness in our city.**
  - Kelowna has over 400 people who are living on the street or in a shelter. These are people who are caught in the cycle of homelessness — people who need help.
  - In the programs profiled in the CMHC report, "safe and secure housing was identified as a key factor that makes it possible for residents/program participants to address their substance use issues and to become abstinent, reduce their substance use, or reduce the negative impacts of their use."
  - Housing provides the safety and security that makes it possible for people to begin to reduce their substance use. It also provides "a base for the residents to form friendships, get to know and respect themselves, develop and establish their own networks, and become connected to the community." (CMHC Report)

**Sources:**

CMHC - [Homelessness, Housing, and Harm Reduction: Stable Housing for Homeless People with Substance Use Issues](#).

Corporation for Supportive Housing. – [Supportive Housing and Its Impact on the Public Health Crisis of Homelessness](#).

MoH – [Harm Reduction, A British Columbia Community Guide](#).