

	THE CORPORATION OF THE COUNTY OF LAMBTON			
	Department:	Homelessness Prevention and Children's Services		
	Topic:	<i>Operations' Policy & Procedure</i>	Section A11	Policy # 226
	Subject:	Homelessness Coordinated Access System, Vacancy Matching & Referral Policy		
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1 SUBJECT

Homelessness Coordinated Access System, **Vacancy Matching & Referral Policy**, in Lambton County.

2 PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish and clearly define the vacancy and referral protocols used in the Lambton County Homelessness System of Care (LCHSC). It outlines how vacancies are filled equitably from the Coordinated Access Resource Inventory using agreed upon priorities and best practices. By having vacancy matching and referral protocols in place, transparency occurs between service providers, the community, individuals, and families experiencing homelessness and housing instability.

3 POLICY STATEMENT

The County of Lambton is committed to preventing and ending Homelessness using the principles of "Housing First". As part of this commitment, the Vacancy Matching & Referral Policy details an equitable process for people experiencing homelessness to be:

- Prioritized for housing and support services on the By-Name List (BNL),
- Assessed to determine participant's needs,
- Matched and referred/connected to available as well as appropriate housing/program resources.

4 SCOPE

The outlined procedures will be followed by agencies within the Lambton County Homelessness System of Care (LCHSC) on a regular basis. The protocols apply to all "unsheltered clients" having provided consent for their information to be collected, shared on HIFIS, and have an "Active" (state) on the By-Name List (BNL).

5 DEFINITIONS

5.1 Acuity Scale

An acuity scale is used to determine the appropriate level, intensity, and frequency of case managed supports to sustainably end a person's homelessness. Overall, a higher number represents more complex, co-occurring issues that may impact overall housing stability.

5.2 By-Name List (BNL)

A BNL is a real-time, person-specific list of all people known to be experiencing homelessness in our community. Each household has provided consent to be on Lambton County's BNL. *Note: It is also known as the Unique Identifier List (UIL).*

5.3 By-Name Priority List (BNPL)

The BNPL is a key component to the Coordinated Access System, and it is a subset of the BNL. As part of the matching and referral process, the BNPL is used to prioritize persons and families based on their need level using a standardized process and common assessment tools. Overall, the BNPL helps community partners know every person experiencing homelessness by name, understand their unique needs, and then prioritize them for the most appropriate and available supports and housing.

5.4 Chronic Homelessness

Chronic homelessness refers to individuals who are currently experiencing homelessness AND who meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Have a total of at least 6 months (180 days) of homelessness over the past year;
- Have recurrent experiences of homelessness over the past 3 years, with a cumulative duration of at least 18 months (546 days)

5.5 Client

A client is a consumer of a service provider's resources; this excludes HIFIS users and staff members.

5.6 Community Access Points (CAPs)

CAPs are identified agency locations in Lambton County who have regular contact with those experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Community Access Points ensure that anyone experiencing homelessness in Lambton County has equitable access to available housing and supports that are appropriate to their needs.

5.7 Coordinated Access

A coordinated access system is the process by which individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness or at-risk of homelessness are directed to community-level access points where trained workers use a common assessment tool to evaluate the individual or family's depth of need, prioritize them for housing support services and then help to match them to available housing focused interventions. See, <https://www.infrastructure.gc.ca/homelessness-sans-abri/directives-eng.html#h2.3-h3.4>

5.8 Coordinated Access Community Collaborative Table (CCT)

The Coordinated Access Community Collaborative Table is a community group comprised of community collaborators. The CCT meets on a regular ongoing basis to review the BNPL, assess available supports and services, problem-solve systemic barriers to accessing supports and services and determine when a support and/or service is available for a program match.

5.9 Coordinated Access Resource Inventory

The Coordinated Access Resource Inventory is a list of all participating available housing resources and their eligibility requirements.

5.10 Employee

An "employee" is defined in this policy as someone who is working for or affiliated with the County of Lambton, Homelessness Prevention and Children's Services Department. All employees shall comply with this policy and all applicable privacy legislation as it relates to their particular employment responsibilities.

5.11 HIFIS

The Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) is a comprehensive data collection and case management system designed to better understand what is happening in our community and to work collaboratively. *Note: It is a type of Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS).* See, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/homelessness/hifis.html>

5.12 HMIS

The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is a local information technology system used to collect client-level data and data on the provision of housing and services to homeless individuals, families, and persons at risk of homelessness.

5.13 Homelessness

Homelessness describes the situation of an individual, family or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. See, [Canadian Definition Of Homelessness](#)

5.14 Homelessness Service Provider

Homelessness Service Providers are organizations in the Lambton County Homelessness System of Care that have staff who directly interact with clients to help them address their housing challenges.

5.15 VI-SPDAT

The Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) is a short, self-reported triage/pre-screening tool used to quickly determine a client's acuity. The VI-SPDAT is used to evaluate the individual or family's depth of need (acuity), prioritize their housing and/or support services' needs, and help match them with available housing focused interventions.

6 BACKGROUND

To prevent and end homelessness, Lambton County must know the current scope of challenges and potential gaps in service to resolve. Quality-driven, reliable data enables goal setting with corresponding action since outputs, outcomes, and impacts can be measured using data points.

HIFIS is a comprehensive data collection and case management system designed to better understand what is happening in our community and to enhance collaboration between service providers. In Lambton County, HIFIS is used by agencies within the Lambton County Homelessness System of Care (LCHSC).

The LCHSC is composed of various community organizations providing services to persons who are experiencing homelessness or at-risk of homelessness. The LCHSC includes agencies such as the County of Lambton, emergency shelter providers, transitional housing providers, and street outreach providers.

A Coordinated Access approach allows collaboration and service providers to actively work to prevent and divert households from an experience of homelessness. It involves working together to assess the household's situation, setting priorities and direct-matching housing/supports that best meet the participant's needs.

7 RESPONSIBILITIES

All Employees and Homelessness Service Providers are responsible to comply with this policy and all applicable policies, laws, and regulations regarding the Homelessness Coordinated Access System.

7.1 BNL Leadership

- Ensure the County Homelessness Prevention staff are regularly engaging with clients prioritized on the BNL.

- Review the BNPL for the purpose of 1) identifying the best housing match; 2) identifying clients nearing inactivity (per the Inactivity Policy); and 3) identifying next steps to ensure that clients are housing ready.
- BNL Leadership consists of:
 - Supervisor - Homelessness Prevention & Social Planning
 - Manager, Homelessness Prevention & Children's Services
 - Supervisor, Ontario Works
 - Manager, Ontario Works
 - Additional agencies / staff may be invited to participate (if appropriate)

7.2 Community Entity (CE) - County of Lambton

The Community Entity (CE), County of Lambton, is the lead decision-making body that coordinates efforts to achieve federal, provincial, and local outcomes. The CE is required to create the Coordinated Access policies and standards, processes for monitoring prioritization, matching and referrals, as well as generating a BNPL bi-weekly to share with agency partners. The Community Entity is responsible for receiving disputes and convening resolution efforts.

Outcomes related to timely referrals of priority populations will be analyzed and reported by the CE along with being regularly reviewed with system partners.

7.3 Coordinated Access Community Collaborative Table (CCT)

The CCT assists people experiencing or at risk of homelessness in Lambton County with referrals and warm transfers to programs and supports, including available and appropriate housing opportunities.

7.4 Homelessness Service Provider

Every participating service provider has a duty to protect clients' confidentiality and ensure clients understand how their personal information will be used, and who will have access to it.

Service providers must ensure that client choice and preference is honoured when connecting clients to programs. It is important that clients are engaged in a timely manner once referred to a program and that case managers work with clients to ensure best matching to housing and broader community supports occurs to reduce the likelihood of recidivism.

7.5 Homelessness System Coordinator – County of Lambton

- Extract and review the BNL regularly.
- Monitor accuracy and completeness of the BNL.
- Notify relevant staff or agencies if any information is inaccurate and/or incomplete.
- Filter the BNL to the BNPL sorted by locally defined prioritization criteria.
- Identify the top 5 prioritized clients per the BNL (per the Prioritization Policy).
- Share a list of clients that may become Inactive within 30 days with BNL Leadership.
- Collaborate with BNL Leadership and the CCT to identify a housing/program that is a "Best Match".

7.6 Staff as Assigned - County of Lambton

- Extract and review the BNL regularly.
- Monitor accuracy and completeness of the BNL.
- Notify relevant staff or agencies if any information is inaccurate and/or incomplete.

8 PROCEDURE

8.1 Managing the By-Name Priority List

8.1.1 BNL to BNPL

Overview

To obtain the By-Name Priority List (BNPL), the BNL is filtered and/or sorted by, but not limited to, the following: local priority groups, standardized triage tools (such as the VI-SPDAT), length of time experiencing homelessness, age, gender identity, whether people are currently sheltered or unsheltered and whether people are currently active in the system (accessing services) depending on the eligibility criteria for programs accepting referrals.

Clients with missing information are still added to the By-Name List and prioritized. However, the lack of information may prevent an accurate prioritization. In addition, clients may not be referred to services if they are missing information. Service providers are encouraged to collect as much information as possible to best support the client, including completion of the VI-SPDAT.

Details

- a) The Homelessness System Coordinator extracts the BNL from HIFIS regularly, and updates it to the BNPL by completing the following:
 - Filter the By-Name List by prioritization criteria; and
 - Identify clients that are approaching inactive status within 30 days.
- b) The Homelessness System Coordinator shares the updated BNPL with the BNL Leadership.
- c) BNL Leadership reviews the BNPL, including clients that are nearing inactivity.
- d) BNL Leadership notifies Case Manager(s) of the clients that are prioritized on the BNL.
- e) The most vulnerable clients on the Prioritization and Referral list (BNPL) are then shared with the Coordinated Access Community Collaborative Table (CCT) during the CCT's regular meeting.
- f) The CCT provides case conferencing for the clients that are identified as top priority on the list based on prioritization criteria. The table's goal is to match and refer these clients to available housing options and supports that would best meet their needs.

- g) If the service provider approves of the match and would like to proceed with next steps:
 - i. The service provider's representative contacts the identified household to share the available "best match" to identify which services or supports the client requires, and to identify next steps.
 - ii. The household has two (2) weeks to accept the "best match". If the client does not provide an approving response to the "best match" within this period, the "best match" will be offered to the next client identified as suitable on the list.
 - a. If the client declines the match: The service provider updates the Homelessness System Coordinator.
 - i) The client remains on the BNL.
 - b. If the client approves of the match and would like to proceed with next steps: The service provider updates the Homelessness System Coordinator.

8.2 Vacancy Notification - Coordinated Access Resource Inventory

The Coordinated Access Resource Inventory tracking sheet enables CCT members to keep informed about the resources that are available to prevent and end homelessness, to prioritize which households will be offered each type of intervention in accordance with the prioritization criteria and uniform decision-making criteria described in this policy, and to make referrals only to programs that have available capacity to serve a new household.

To facilitate prompt referrals and to reduce vacancy rates, participating Service Providers must notify the Homelessness System Coordinator of any known and anticipated upcoming vacancies.

- 1) When a resource becomes available, participating agencies will advise the Homelessness System Coordinator of the vacancy within two (2) business days of being aware of such availability.
- 2) The vacancy notification will be provided in writing by emailing the Homelessness System Coordinator.
- 3) The vacancy notification will include following specific details of the vacancy:
 - a) *Program Resource Vacancy*
Service Provider, program name, # of vacant spaces, availability date, and any defined eligibility requirements
 - b) *Housing Resource Vacancy*
Service Provider, unit location, unit size, # of vacant spaces, availability date, and any defined eligibility requirements.
- 4) After receiving the vacancy notification:
 - i. The Homelessness System Coordinator will update the Coordinated Access Resource Inventory tracking sheet.
 - ii. The Homelessness System Coordinator will filter the BNPL to only include those households who are eligible for the applicable resource and will notify the CCT members accordingly.

8.3 Case Conferencing and Program Matching

- 1) At each Coordinated Access Community Collaborative Table (CCT) meeting, the list of clients from the By-Name Priority List (BNPL) will be provided by the Homelessness System Coordinator for discussion. The CCT case conferences with respect to the individual or family. Case conferencing and program matching may include, but is not limited to, discussing a household's:
 - (a) History of homelessness,
 - (b) Engagement with homelessness supports and services,
 - (c) Barriers to finding and keeping housing.
- 2) The CCT will review the list and recommend the appropriate type and intensity of support required for each client pending program space and availability.
- 3) Client situations that are not resolved are discussed at subsequent CCT meetings and a coordinated effort is made to resolve the situation by the members of the CCT.
- 4) A client who cannot be reached remains on the By-Name List and continues to be considered for openings in order of their priority level.

8.4 Referral Process

- 1) Once a program match has been identified, the matched BNPL household will be contacted, ideally by a service provider's representative having an established rapport, so a warm transfer to the agency offering the vacant program space can occur within two (2) business days.

This meeting creates an opportunity to further discuss the program with the household who has been identified to receive an offer, explain what services/supports may be expected, gauge their interest in the program, and determine next steps.

- 2) All attempts the staff person makes to notify the person of their offer will be recorded by the program offering support.
- 3) The number of service provisions a person is offered and receives will also be documented in the BNPL.
- 4) If a person cannot be found within two (2) weeks to offer supports and services, the next person who matches the program will be contacted.
- 5) In order to receive supports and services, the person must agree to complete the intake and adhere to the program requirements of the accepting agency.
- 6) At no time shall a person be screened out of the BNPL due to perceived barriers related to supports and services.
- 7) After referring a client to a service, the lead service provider will provide an update on the outcome at the next CCT meeting. The Homelessness System Coordinator will update the client's status in HIFIS.

8.4.1 Referral - Declined by Client

Clients have the right to decline a referral to any program or offer of housing supports or accommodations without any repercussions to their prioritization status or eligibility for further or alternate supports. In such cases, agencies will continue to work with clients to build trust, support basic needs, and encourage further action towards achieving housing.

If a client declines a referral:

- 1) The lead service provider should ensure the client understands refusing a referral may limit the range of supports available to them.
- 2) The lead service provider will document the decline and advise the Homelessness System Coordinator.
- 3) Clients who decline a referral and later change their mind should understand that they will be reprioritized based on their standing on the Priority List but may not be “next in line” for an available space.

8.5 Dispute Resolution

Disputes may be brought forward by clients to agency staff, whose first response will be to support clients in addressing their concerns as per organizational processes. If an issue cannot be resolved by the organization where the dispute is presented, agency management will engage staff on matters related to Coordinated Access as outlined:

- i. Case Specific disputes could be related to:
 - Accuracy of assessment scores,
 - Prioritization on the By-Name Priority List, or,
 - Selection for housing or program vacancies.
- ii. Systemic Disputes could be related to:
 - Administrative or procedural differences,
 - Differences in service philosophy, principles, or policies,
 - Resource shortages, which may require harmonization of systems.

Systemic disputes will be addressed using the steps below:

- a) Front line staff identifies the nature of the dispute.
- b) Front line staff informs their Supervisor and/or Manager/Director.
- c) Managers/Directors discuss the issue and forward the issue to the Coordinated Access Community Collaborative Table (CCT).
- d) The CCT recommends a strategy for resolution of differences.

9 DOCUMENTATION

Documentation is confidential and all records shall be maintained by the Service Providers and County of Lambton staff.

10 EVALUATION

As part of Quality Improvement, the Homelessness Prevention and Children’s Services Department may conduct regular reviews of the Vacancy Matching & Referral process to focus on key indicators and potential gaps in service.

11 ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

- a) A11.221 Coordinated Access – Inactivity Policy
- b) A11.223 Coordinated Access – Intake Policy
- c) A11.224 Coordinated Access – Triage and Assessment Policy
- d) A11.225 Coordinated Access – Prioritization Policy
- e) Lambton County's - BNPL Prioritization and Referral/Matching Guidelines
- f) Coordinated Access Community Collaborative Table (CCT) - Terms of Reference
- g) Lambton County's - Homelessness Services Coordinated Access System - Process Guide
- h) County of Lambton Housing and Homelessness Plan, 2020-2024
- i) Lambton County's Quality By-Name List (BNL)

12 POLICY HISTORY

<i>Revised By</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Prepared By</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy created. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • December 21, 2022 	Nancy Kalbfleisch
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Per CA CCT. Revision of Section 8.1.1, Item e) to change bi-weekly to regular meeting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 4, 2023 	Nancy Kalbfleisch
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Per CA CCT. Section 8, Addition of new <i>Vacancy Notification - Coordinated Access Resource Inventory</i> procedure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September 19, 2023 	Nancy Kalbfleisch