

EPIC

PILOT PROGRAM EVALUATION

SUMMARY
REPORT

Prepared for Shelter, Support, and Housing Administration (SSHA), City of Toronto.

Prepared by Dr. John Ecker, Sarah Holden, and Dr. Kaitlin Schwan,
Canadian Observatory on Homelessness



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About Hub Solutions

Hub Solutions is a social enterprise embedded within the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH). Income generated from Hub Solutions fee-for-service work, is reinvested into the COH to support research, innovation, policy recommendations and knowledge mobilization.



This document provides the key learnings of the evaluation of the Eviction Prevention in the Community (EPIC) Pilot program. It begins with a description of the EPIC program and a literature review on eviction prevention. The methodology and results from the evaluation are then presented. The report concludes with a series of recommendations. A more detailed technical report is also available.

Context of the EPIC Program

The EPIC program was launched in March 2017 by the Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA), a Division of the City of Toronto. EPIC is a one-year pilot project that provides wrap around eviction prevention services in order to help tenants facing imminent risk of eviction.

EPIC uses a blended model of direct and contracted community agency service delivery. The EPIC team lead assigns clients to the community agencies based upon geography and the current caseload capacity at each agency. All of the agencies employ at least two EPIC workers who provide rapid short-term case management. All of the agencies employ at least two EPIC workers who provide rapid short-term case management.

The program offers the following services:

- Wrap around case management supports
- Mediation with landlords to stabilize housing
- Referrals to community legal supports
- Navigation/accompaniment to the Landlord Tenant Board
- Assistance securing income supports, trusteeship, or money management programs
- System navigation and referral to other services and supports
- Rehousing supports and shelter diversion where the existing tenancy cannot be sustained

Financial supports available to EPIC clients can be grouped into community-based and internal (SSHA) supports. The community supports include the Housing Stabilization Fund and the Rent Bank. Internal (SSHA) income supports include the Housing Allowance, the Bridging Grant, and the Homelessness Prevention Fund.

Clients are directed into the program in the following pathway:

- 1 The referral source pre-screen clients based on the eligibility criteria;
- 2 The referral source makes a service request. The EPIC service request referral form is submitted to the EPIC pilot lead;
- 3 The EPIC program lead verifies eligibility within one business day;
- 4 If accepted into the EPIC program, the client is assigned to one of the EPIC teams based on the client's geographic location.

Context of the Evaluation

In March 2017, the City of Toronto selected the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) to evaluate the Eviction Prevention in the Community (EPIC) pilot program.

The evaluation project included eight main components:

- 1 The refinement of a program logic model
- 2 The development of a program fidelity tool
- 3 Key informant interviews and a focus group with managers and staff of the EPIC program
- 4 Qualitative interviews with participants currently enrolled in the program
- 5 Surveys with participants who have exited the program
- 6 Surveys and qualitative interviews with landlords who have participated in the program
- 7 Surveys with referral sources of the program
- 8 Quantitative analyses conducted on the administrative data of the program

The purpose of this evaluation was to:

- 1 Determine the effectiveness of the intervention in preventing evictions and improving housing outcomes for clients;
- 2 Assess the contributing factors to evictions;
- 3 Examine the client profile of households at imminent risk of eviction; and
- 4 Investigate service gaps that are not easily addressed through the pilot model.

In order to meet these objectives, a mixed methods evaluation was conducted. This method was selected as it incorporates both qualitative and quantitative components. We examined trends in the administrative data through the quantitative analysis and gained a deeper understanding of the program through the qualitative interviews with key stakeholders, program staff, landlords, and clients of the program.

Literature Review

WHAT ARE THE RATES OF EVICTIONS IN TORONTO?

Up-to-date information on eviction applications is difficult to acquire. In 2006, there were 23,310 applications to evict in the city of Toronto (Acacia Consulting & Research, 2006b). Of these applications, 58% received an eviction order, and 38% were default orders (i.e., order issued without a dispute or hearing) (Acacia Consulting & Research, 2006b). 29% of the applications to evict had tenants file a dispute, and 44% of the applications went to a hearing (Acacia Consulting & Research, 2006b). Of the 10,205 cases that went to hearing, 58% received an eviction order after the hearing; however the number of evictions is unknown (Acacia Consulting & Research, 2006b).

WHO IS AT RISK OF AN EVICTION?

Individuals at-risk of evictions can be categorized into two groups (Acacia Consulting and Research, 2006b). The first are those “at risk of housing instability,” where households are at risk of facing an eviction due to low-income and other factors such as race/ethnicity, family size, and precarious employment. This category of households is often living in less acceptable housing standards, such as in smaller units and in less desirable neighbourhoods. The second category is “in need of multiple supports to achieve housing stability”, referring to households that are at risk of eviction due to housing instability and additional needs. Households in this category can have a history of homelessness or repeated evictions, and also require health and mental health supports in order to maintain their current housing.

Both categories are vulnerable to an eviction due to the impact of structural factors and system failures. For example, the lack of an adequate supply of affordable rental housing, rising rental costs and declining or stagnant income rates places people at risk of an eviction (Acacia Consulting & Research, 2006b).

Other research has focused on the individual-level factors associated with being at risk of an eviction. These include:

- A lower education level; being unemployed; a lower income level (Vasquez-Vera, Palencia, Magna, Mena, Neira, & Borrell, 2017)
- Female-headed lone families (Acacia Consulting & Research, 2006b; City of Toronto, 2016)
- Identifying as a racial or ethnic minority (Acacia Consulting & Research, 2006b; Vasques-Vera et al., 2017)
- Identifying as Indigenous (Acacia Consulting & Research, 2006b; City of Toronto, 2016)
- Having mental health challenges (Acacia Consulting & Research, 2006b; City of Toronto, 2016; Newcastle City Council, 2013)
- Living alone (Acacia Consulting & Research, 2006b; City of Toronto, 2016)
- A previous experience of homelessness (Crane & Warnes, 2000; Newcastle City Council, 2013)
- A history of late rent payments (Desmond & Gerhenson, 2017; Newcastle City Council, 2013)
- A greater number of children in one’s family (Desmond & Gerhenson, 2017)

WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS OF EVICTION?

Evictions can have profound effects on individuals and families. At the individual level, the stress of insecure housing can lead to difficulty in maintaining employment [Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), 2005] and poor mental and physical health outcomes (Vasquez-Vera et al., 2017). For example, after being evicted, some tenants have reported losing their job and having to rely more on social assistance, which impacted their mental and/or physical health (CMHC, 2005). With respect to mental health, individuals who are evicted, or are at-risk of eviction, have an increased likelihood of experiencing psychological distress, depression, and anxiety (Vasquez-Vera et al., 2017). These effects are strongest amongst those from marginalized groups (e.g., people of colour, Indigenous individuals) (Vasquez-Vera et al., 2017). In terms of physical health impacts, individuals who have experienced, or are at-risk of experiencing an eviction, self-reported poor health, high blood pressure, and even child maltreatment (Vasquez-Vera, et al., 2017).



WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF EVICTIONS?

The cost of an eviction can be difficult to measure; however, available research indicates that there are four main groups who bear the expenses of an eviction: tenants, landlords, programs, and society (Distasio, McCullough, Havens, & St. Aubin, 2014). For the tenants experiencing an eviction, the financial costs include loss of belongings, loss of damage/security deposit, and moving expenses (transportation, replacing lost belongings, and setting up a new house) (CMHC, 2005). In one study, the average cost for tenants who were being evicted was over \$2,000 (CMHC, 2005), however, this may be an underestimation given that this research is

over ten years old. The costs to landlords were even higher. The average cost for a landlord evicting one tenant in social housing is \$3,000, and \$6,600 for a landlord in private housing (CMHC, 2005). These costs are the result of rental arrears, repairs to the unit, and legal costs (CMHC, 2005).

Programs designed to assist those who have lost their housing also face costs when an individual or family is evicted. Rehousing someone who has been evicted from social housing is costly. The average cost to rehouse an individual into their own social housing unit with onsite supports is \$5,000 (CMHC, 2005). For tenants who require more supports, such as substance use treatment services, costs average between \$2,000 to \$10,000, depending on the

level of supports required (CMHC, 2005). A housing program supporting one household being evicted can experience costs somewhere between \$3,000 and \$6,000 (Distasio et al., 2014). For evicted tenants who enter into homelessness, the cost to access an emergency shelter can be up to \$2,500 per month (CMHC, 2005).

At the societal level, the costs of evictions are difficult to measure given that the percentage of those who experience an eviction and also receive publicly-funded services is unknown (CMHC, 2005). However, research does indicate that investing in a reactive response to housing precarity is expensive (e.g., homeless shelters and services cost Canadian taxpayers \$159 million annually) (Shapcott, 2007). Shapcott's research (2007) further suggests that it costs taxpayers ten times more to have a person remain in a homeless shelter than it does to provide cost-effective, good quality social housing. These costs are in addition to the increased spending on social services, health care, policing, and other related programs often needed to support people experiencing housing precarity or homelessness (Gaetz, 2012).

In contrast, emerging research has shown that prevention initiatives are far less expensive (CMHC, 2005; Distasio et al., 2014). For example, a 2016 cost-benefit study in the United Kingdom indicated that early prevention supports would reduce the public spending on homelessness from the equivalent of \$56,000 CDN to \$14,924 CDN, per person each year (Pleace & Culhane, 2016). The study argued that if 40,000 people were prevented from becoming homeless in one year, the savings could be close to \$600 million CDN. Such findings suggest that focusing attention on identifying those at-risk of eviction, resolving problems before they happen, and providing additional supports to a tenant before going through the eviction process may be a far less expensive approach to addressing these issues (Distasio et al., 2014). In addition to these cost savings, research also suggests that investing in affordable housing will improve personal health and neighbourhoods, as well as create new jobs and a valuable social infrastructure (Shapcott, 2007).

WHAT SUPPORTS AND STRATEGIES ARE AVAILABLE TO PREVENT EVICTIONS?

There are various types of interventions and supports available to prevent evictions. Such interventions include mental health supports, income supports to address arrears, or mitigating conflicts between landlords and tenants (Holl, van den Dries, & Wolf, 2016). However, those facing eviction often face barriers to accessing these services, resulting in eviction prevention programs not being used by those who are at most risk and most in need of the services, or the services being offered at less optimal points in the eviction process (Acacia Consulting & Research, 2006a). As such, it is important to detect early signs of an impending eviction with supports targeted to the individual and their situation and needs (van Laere, de Wit, & Klazinga, 2009).

Research has indicated that there are a range of supports can be effective in preventing evictions. These include:

- Financial and legal supports (Acacia Consulting & Research, 2006b; Holl, van den Dries, & Wolf, 2016)
- Communication support between landlord and tenant (Acacia Consulting & Research, 2006b; CMHC, 2005; LaPointe, 2004),
- Case management support (Holl et al., 2016),
- Home visits and direct outreach (CMHC, 2005; van Laere et al., 2008),
- Early detection and intervention for those at-risk of an eviction, offering various and multiple support services (CMHC, 2005; van Laere et al., 2009), and
- Education and information (Acacia Consulting & Research, 2006b).

For tenants who want to stabilize their housing, assistance in communicating with their current landlord was helpful (CMHC, 2005). Communication with the landlord may include arrangements to pay arrears or attending to the circumstances prompting the eviction notice.

Tenants have shown higher success in avoiding eviction in programs that conduct home visits when compared to those that do not (van Laere et al., 2009). In fact, one study found that eviction prevention programs that conducted home visits reported half as many evictions as the programs that did not offer home visits or contact with the tenants (van Laere et al., 2008). As such, the role of the housing workers in providing housing related supports is critical, as is the involvement of health care providers and social workers in eviction prevention services (Gaetz & Dej, 2017).



Evaluation Methodology

A broad overview of each method is described below. Following this description we provide the overarching evaluation matrix that guided the evaluation. The matrix includes the main evaluation questions and the sources of data to answer these questions.

LOGIC MODEL REFINEMENT

We began the project by establishing the program theory through the refinement of EPIC's program logic model. A logic model represents a systematic, visual means of describing the rationale, service activities, outputs, and outcomes of a given program (McLaughlin & Jordan, 1999). Since the program already had an established program logic model, the evaluation team decided it was best to review the logic model to ensure that it was reflective of the program's current operations. This was completed through the review of program documentation, followed by a verification session with key program stakeholders.

PROGRAM FIDELITY TOOL

As there was interest in developing program monitoring tools, we created a program fidelity tool for the EPIC program to monitor its implementation. Fidelity is the extent to which the implementation of your program matches your program's original design (Mowbray, Holter, Teague, & Bybee, 2003).

There are three main steps to establish fidelity criteria (McGrew et al., 1994; Teague, Bond, & Drake, 1998):

- 1 The identification of possible indicators or critical components of a model. This can involve consulting experts with knowledge of the program model or working from existing models. Once the indicators have been chosen, then there needs to be an investigation of how to measure the indicator and how to operationalize it so it can be measured.
- 2 The collection of data to measure the indicators.
- 3 Examine the indicators based upon their reliability and validity.

The evaluation team focused on step one of the criteria and identified a number of possible indicators. This process began with reviewing the program logic model and relevant program documentation. Our selected indicators were then reviewed by key program stakeholders and a series of modifications occurred. Given that the EPIC program was still in its early stages of implementation, we framed the program fidelity tool as one that will require further refinement. The tool can be found in the full technical report.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

To gain an understanding of the program's operations and intended outcomes, we conducted key informant interviews with individuals who were integral in the development of the EPIC program. We conducted five individual interviews in total. Participants included representatives from SSHA and the manager of EPIC (n=5). Three of the interviews were conducted in-person and two interviews were conducted over the telephone. The interviews were based upon a semi-structured interview protocol. This means that the interview protocol included specific questions, but also allowed for new questions to be asked based upon the topics that emerged during the interview.

We also conducted a focus group with EPIC's front-line staff. Six individuals participated, with representation from each of the agencies (Agincourt Community Service Agency, Albion Neighbourhood Services, City of Toronto, and St. Stephen's). The focus group was conducted in-person and also followed a semi-structured format.

CLIENT INTERVIEWS AND SURVEYS

We spoke with clients of the program to develop a sense of what it was like to enter the program, the types of services received, and if an eviction was prevented or a rehousing occurred. We collected two separate data sources: 1) qualitative interviews with clients currently in the program; and 2) surveys with clients who had exited the program.

CLIENT INTERVIEWS

EPIC staff members provided the contact information of 18 clients who were eligible to participate in the interviews (e.g., currently in the program) to the evaluation team.

Most clients were contacted via telephone by the evaluation team, at which point the nature of the evaluation and participation details were explained. If contact was not made during the initial attempt, a total two other attempts were made to contact the clients. This resulted in at least three attempts to contact each client.

We conducted ten individual interviews in total. Participants included representatives from each of the four agencies. Three interviews were conducted in-person and the remaining seven interviews were conducted over the telephone. As with the key informant interviews, these interviews were based upon a semi-structured interview protocol. Each participant received \$20.



SURVEYS

Similar to the interview recruitment process, EPIC staff members provided the contact information of 28 clients who were eligible to participate in the surveys (e.g., discharged from the program). Most of the clients were contacted via telephone by the evaluation team, at which point the nature of the evaluation and participation details were explained. If contact was not made during the initial attempt, a total two other attempts were made to contact the clients. This resulted in at least three attempts to contact each client.

We conducted twenty surveys in total. Participants included representatives from each of the four agencies. Five of the surveys were conducted in-person and the remaining 15 surveys were conducted over the phone. The survey was co-developed by the evaluation team and senior management from EPIC. Each participant received a \$10 Loblaws gift card.

LANDLORD INTERVIEWS AND SURVEYS

The contact information of 12 landlords who had worked with the EPIC program was provided to the evaluation team. All of the landlords were contacted via telephone by the evaluation team, at which point the nature of the evaluation and participation details were explained. If contact was not made during the initial attempt, a total two other attempts were made to contact the landlords. This resulted in at least three attempts to contact each landlord.

Originally, landlords were invited to participate in a 30-minute phone interview. Almost all of the landlords stated that this was not feasible given their schedules. EPIC senior management suggested that as an alternative to the interview, a short survey could be created. The survey was created in collaboration with EPIC senior management and addressed similar questions as the interview protocol.

In the end, one landlord agreed to an interview and five landlords participated in the survey. Thus, six of twelve landlords participated in the evaluation.

REFERRAL SURVEYS

A short survey was administered by the EPIC program to its referral sources. This included Central Intake and the Landlord Tenant Board. The survey asked respondents to provide some context on the number of eviction cases they receive and their impressions of the EPIC program. Seven individuals responded to the survey.

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

Administrative data was provided to the evaluation team. This data included information on referrals made to the program, monthly reporting statistics for clients enrolled in the program, and information from SMIS (Shelter Management Information System).

DATA ANALYSIS

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

The qualitative data was analyzed using an iterative, thematic approach. To ensure reliability of the coding process, the evaluation team independently coded the same segment of data from one transcript. After independently coding the data, the team met to compare and contrast their codes. During this process, codes were examined for

conformity and divergence. When divergence occurred, the evaluation team discussed the nature of the development of the code until consensus was reached. Once the evaluation team had confidence in their coding, each team member was then assigned an evaluation question to answer.

The transcripts were read line-by-line and the data was coded using the participants’ own language as much as possible (in vivo coding). The coded data was then analyzed for similarities and differences across the transcripts and themes were developed. Matrices were created to allow for ease of comparison of themes across the transcripts.

QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

The quantitative data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics provide summaries of the data. This includes frequencies (e.g., the number of records), averages, and the range of scores. Inferential statistics are used to examine group differences.

Evaluation Matrix

EVALUATION QUESTION	METHOD	SOURCE OF DATA
1. What is the program logic model?	Document review	Program documentation
	Consultations	EPIC senior staff
2. Is the intervention effective in preventing evictions and improving housing outcomes?	Analysis of administrative data	Administrative data
	Interviews	Key informants Clients Landlords
	Focus group	Program staff
	Surveys	Clients Landlords Referral sources
3. What are the training needs and quality assurance measures of the pilot sites?	Fidelity assessment tool	Program documentation
	Interviews	Key informants Clients
	Focus group	Program staff

4. What is the client profile of households at imminent risk of eviction?	Analysis of administrative data	Administrative data
	Interviews	Key informants Clients Landlords
	Focus group	Program staff
	Surveys	Clients Landlords Referral sources
5. Is the intervention effective at improving access to services?	Analysis of administrative data	Administrative data
	Interviews	Key informants Clients Landlords
	Focus group	Program staff
	Surveys	Clients Landlords Referral sources
6. What are the service gaps that are not easily addressed through the program?	Analysis of administrative data	Administrative data
	Interviews	Key informants Clients Landlords
	Focus group	Program staff
	Surveys	Clients Landlords Referral sources

PROGRAM LOGIC MODEL

The program logic model was developed in consultation with EPIC's senior management. The program had an existing logic model, so the purpose of the current work was to verify its contents. This was important, since the logic model was created prior to the delivery of the program. Therefore, the evaluation team worked with EPIC senior management to re-examine its contents and ensure that it accurately reflected current program operations.

The logic model is presented on the following page.



GOALS

Primary: To reduce the number of people becoming homeless due to eviction and stabilize housing quickly.

Secondary: Build alliances within existing service systems to avoid duplication of what is already in place.

TARGET POPULATIONS

Primary: Households who are at-risk of eviction due to inability to pay rent, damage to the unit, behavioural challenges, and other unique circumstances.

Secondary: Landlords and system partners

PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

Household must be housed in an address located within City of Toronto boundaries, currently have an eviction notice, have an income below the Household Income Limits, and motivated to maintain the tenancy.

INPUTS

Funding

- personnel and supplies

Staff

- Manager
- Program Lead (SOPO)
- Counsellors

Training

Space

- service space for client sessions
- outreach

Teams

- *External*
Agincourt Community Services Association; Albion Neighbourhood Services; St. Stephen's Community House;
- *Internal*
City of Toronto

Hours of operation

Caseload

ACTIVITIES

Screening and Referrals

- Identify households/screening for risk of homeless due to eviction
- Central referral point
- Triage and assessment

Interventions

- Case management
- Interventions on an as needed basis
- Mediation between tenants and landlords

Financial Assistance

- Referrals to financial assistance programs
- Assistance securing income supports, trusteeship or money management programs

Rehousing

- Rehousing

Aftercare

- Short-term follow-up supports
- Referral pathways to appropriate services

OUTPUTS

Screening and Referrals

- # of clients pre-screened
- # of clients referred to program
- # of intake/assessments

Interventions

- # of clients engaged in program
- Type of support received (housing allowance, bridging grant, prevention fund, follow up supports, furniture bank, voluntary trusteeship)
- # of worker contacts with landlord
- # of landlord mediation
- # of referrals to community legal services
- # of clients accompanied to LTB hearings
- # of clients referred to trusteeship programs
- # of clients assisted with extreme clean, hoarding or pests/infestations

Financial Assistance

- # of arrears repayment plans
- # of clients with rent paid direct
- # of clients accessing financial assistance support for arrears

Aftercare

- # of referrals to follow-up supports program
- # of clients assisted with physical/mental health supports
- # of clients assisted with addiction/harm reduction supports

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

- Engagement with intervention
- Maintain housing
- Rehousing

Indicators

- # evictions avoided
- # diversions
- Average time of time from assessment to housing stabilization

MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES

- Maintain stable housing
- Effective resource use

Indicators

- # evictions avoided
- # diversions
- # people maintaining housing at least 1 year

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

- Decrease homelessness
- Decrease emergency shelter pressure
- Increase system effectiveness
- Improved quality of life for participants
- Improved sense of community

EXTERNAL FACTORS

Rental costs; Vacancy rates; Stigma/discrimination; Poverty/Income

Key Findings of the Evaluation

Below we provide a brief description of the evaluation results. The results are separated by the program themes that were investigated.

CAUSES OF EVICTIONS AND CLIENT GROUP TRENDS

Formally, eviction notices were largely the result of arrears. At point of entry into the program, EPIC clients had often received an N4 notice and in some cases, an L1 application. Landlords and referral sources often noted arrears as the primary, if not sole cause of evictions.

EVICTIION TYPE	NUMBER OF CLIENTS (N;%)
N4 (Non-payment of rent)	66 (49%)
L1 (Application to evict – arrears)	44 (33%)
N5 (Interfering with others, damage, over-crowding)	7 (5%)
Other	7 (5%)
N12 (Landlord’s own use)	4 (3%)
L2 (Application to evict – other)	2 (2%)
N6 (Illegal acts)	1 (1%)
N7 (Causing serious problems)	1 (1%)

The average amount of arrears among the clients was over \$4,000, with a range of \$144 to over \$40,000. This range in arrears may reflect the stage of eviction clients are in. Smaller amounts of arrears were often found among clients early in the eviction process and larger amounts of arrears were often found among clients later in the eviction process.

Although arrears were the cause of being at risk of an eviction, EPIC clients, program staff, and key informants all shared nuanced stories of the driving factors behind these arrears. Poverty and the lack of affordable housing were the primary structural factors leading to arrears. EPIC clients’ income was not enough to keep up with the rising rental costs in Toronto. This was clearly demonstrated by EPIC clients spending over 70% of their incomes on rent. Clients also mentioned the challenges of navigating several systems, such as transferring from one government financial support system to another. For example, one client stated:



“So I was working in 2016 and then I had to go on EI, so employment insurance. And then just because my son dealing with stuff at his school, so he’s ADHD; it’s ADHD and OCD he was diagnosed with, and I had to take time off just because he has a whole bunch of appointments that he has to go to.

And then my EI ran out, and then I went to apply for social assistance and they told me that I needed to wait one month. So just the one month in waiting for my EI payment and Ontario Works I just got behind in my rent.”

EPIC clients stated they would not have felt prepared had they been evicted from their housing, as many of the clients stated that they did not know where they would have gone. Upon further thought, many of the EPIC clients stated that they would have stayed with family or friends, while others stated that they may have accessed an emergency shelter. Several of the clients were very forthcoming that they would not enter the shelter system, as several of the clients had previously stayed at a shelter and did not like the experience. An older client shared that, *“I don’t like to go back again [to a shelter]. I mean, [there] is no other place for the people in my stage now. I want to be nice and clean and have a shower and everything every day, you know?”*

Clients also spoke of the impacts of living in poverty and the stress that arose from receiving an eviction notice. For example, one client shared:

“So if I’m at work and I don’t have enough to cover daycare, and I don’t have enough to pay back rent, then I barely have enough for groceries, it’s kind of hard to kind of catch up.”

Key informants and staff members noted the impacts of poverty among EPIC clients, but added that some clients were also facing complex mental health issues. These mental health challenges largely centered on hoarding behaviours.

The administrative data pointed to a few common features of clients, including a larger proportion of females, an equal number of single and family households, and clients being of middle age. With regards to age, the oldest client in the program was 80 years old. Close to 30% of EPIC clients self-reported having experienced homelessness in the past. A detailed description of the program clients can be found in the table below.

	MEAN (SD) OR %	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM
Age	45 (14.04)	17	80
Gender			
Female	68.9%		
Male	31.1%		
Family status			
Single	48.9%		
Family with dependents	48.2%		
Number of dependents			
0	49.0%		
1	24.8%		
2-4	22.9%		
5 or more	3.2%		
Source of Income			
Government assistance (OW, ODSP)	63.9%		
Employment (Part- or Full-time)	19.1%		
Other (EI, CPP, OAS)	17.0%		

Household monthly income	\$1716.48 (\$780.91)	\$250.68	\$4014.00
Current rent	\$1042.31 (\$327.36)	\$128.00	\$1970.00
Utilities included (yes)	69.3%		
Amount of income spent on rent	72.3%		
Previous emergency shelter stay (as pulled from SMIS)	34 (23.1%)		
Past homelessness (lifetime experience; self-report from monthly reporting)	37 (29.6%)		
Unit size			
Bachelor	10 (7.2%)		
1 Bedroom	48 (34.5%)		
2 Bedroom	57 (41.0%)		
3+ Bedroom	20 (14.4%)		
Amount of arrears owed	\$4065.85 (\$6428.70)	\$144.00	\$46,277.00

The neighbourhood location of the clients' current housing was varied, but many households were close to the locations of the four service agencies. In particular, many of the clients were residing in Scarborough. The breakdown of the neighbourhoods is found in the table below.

NEIGHBOURHOOD	N	%
Etobicoke	25	24%
North York	19	18%
Toronto – East York	24	23%
Scarborough	35	34%

LANDLORD TRENDS

Landlords were described as an integral part of EPIC. They are essential in the prevention of evictions, the stabilization of housing, and the opportunity for rehousing. Landlords were largely driven by financial motives, but some were also described as altruistic, particularly when working with family households. Contextual factors impacted some of the relationships with landlords, including landlords reclaiming rental units for their own use, the type of building (e.g., large rental properties compared to smaller properties), and the complexity of a tenant's behaviour.

EPIC clients generally had a good or non-existent relationship with their landlord. A client's ability to pay their rent on time dictated this relationship. Clients with strained relationships with their landlords stated it was the result of poor communication and the poor quality of their housing.

PROGRAM SUPPORTS

The program provided a wide array of services and supports to its clients. In particular, the financial supports offered by the program were instrumental in stabilizing clients' housing. This included paying off arrears, connecting clients to appropriate financial systems (e.g., Ontario Works), and attaining some form of rental supports (i.e., Housing Stabilization Fund, Housing Allowance).

The second most common type of support involved engaging with landlords. Many of the clients discussed how staff members effectively liaised with their landlord to solve conflicts and set up payment plans. Although falling short of landlord mediation, where all parties are present, the staff engagement with landlords was vital to stabilizing clients' housing.

System navigation was another crucial support offered by the program. As clients were currently engaging with several systems, particularly Ontario Works, they appreciated the support EPIC staff members provided them in both navigating the system and acting as

an advocate. This advocacy was also important for clients when they were attending LTB hearings.

Case management supports were also thought to be helpful in preventing evictions; however, as demonstrated by the administrative data, there was less uptake of these services in certain domains, particularly in regards to mental health. This could indicate that clients did not require mental health supports, that their mental health concerns were unaddressed, or that they were accessing mental health supports through a different source.

The level of contact with clients was relatively uniform. For clients who were in the program for three months or less, the program made approximately three direct contacts and four indirect contacts with clients. For clients with stays longer than three months, the average number of direct and indirect contacts slightly increased. Similar trends followed with contacting landlords.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

The program was very successful in stabilizing clients in their housing. As of January 2018, 90% of discharged clients stabilized their housing and 8% of clients were rehoused.

The quality of life ratings among clients demonstrated some differences. Clients who were currently enrolled in the program rated their overall quality of life as a 7 out of 10, while clients who were discharged from the program rated their overall quality of life as 5.9 out of 10. This slight difference could be the result of clients discharged from the program not receiving the same level of support they were receiving while enrolled in the program.

SATISFACTION WITH PROGRAM

All survey participants and interviewees were very satisfied with the program. The clients rated the program as a 9.5 out of 10, with some clients stating that the program changed their life. For example, one client stated:



“I guess EPIC was my lottery at this point, because, like, [EPIC staff] took over and really fixed me up. She made sure that I’m okay and I could focus, and now I can steady my mind and say, ‘I’m going to pursue what I actually want to pursue, and trust that it’s going to get through’, you know.”

As evident in this quote, program satisfaction was largely attributed to the knowledgeable and friendly staff of EPIC. Landlords and referral sources were also very satisfied with the program and stated that they would work with the program again in the future.

COST-EFFECTIVENESS

Although an economic analysis was not conducted, the program appears to be cost effective. For example, clients who stabilized their housing had average arrears of \$4,182. Comparing this to the average cost of the average length of stay in an emergency shelter (~\$9000 for single adults and ~\$27,000 for a family of three), there is a significant cost saving in keeping individuals stabilized in their housing. Key informants, focus group participants, clients, landlords, and referral sources were asked to describe the strengths and weaknesses of the EPIC program.

Strengths of EPIC

THE WORK OF PROGRAM STAFF

STAFF SKILLS AND EXPERTISE

Key informants described the program staff as having vast knowledge and experience in housing and eviction prevention. For example, when asked about the strengths of the program, one key informant responded:

The EPIC staff members entered into the program with a strong understanding of housing and homelessness. For example, a staff member shared they had previous experience in *“issues for social services, disabilities, immigration, children services, like the gambit of that and then we have both been housing and outreach workers for many years, and that’s already, we’ve done a lot of prevention in that”*. Their robust knowledge of the sector was a vital strength of the program.

The EPIC staff was also able to work effectively with their clients. Key informants felt that the staff were able to develop a rapport with many of the clients and expressed genuine care towards the clients. A key informant shared that the staff were passionate about their work and expressed discontent when they were unable to help clients avoid an eviction. The key informant stated, *“I’ve seen them be very ... you know, disappointed in themselves ... And that truly shows you the – the buy-in into this pilot [program].”*

“Having teams that have knowledge, or having workers that have knowledge of prevention is a huge – if you had to teach that it would take you forever. There’s so many complex parts to prevention. It’s understanding legislation, understanding the legal rights of tenants, you know, tenant rights, landlord rights.”

All of the clients thought that the program staff were the major strength of the program. Staff were described as responsive, supportive, friendly, nice, knowledgeable, informative, problem-solving, advocates, engaging, clear, warm, welcoming, hardworking, patient, persistent, and dedicated. It is important to provide this expansive list of staff attributes, as it demonstrates the many hats that staff members wear when working with their clients. The versatility of the program and staff is best summed up in the following quote:

“Some programs can only do one thing, you know, ‘We help you with this and that’s it,’ but that’s not what happens with this program. It actually has versatility to be able to handle all the various aspects of what this particular issue requires, which I think is a tremendous strength.”

Other clients shared that staff members were able to get to the root problem of their eviction notice and focus on preventing future evictions. This point is illustrated in the following quote:

“She’s a problem-solver, you know, and being able to have somebody on your team who knows the roots of the problems and the ins and outs of the actual, you know, the institutions you have to deal with, it makes it very easy, you know, because she was able to go in and out of the red tape.”

TEAMWORK

The EPIC staff from across the four teams appeared to work in a collaborative fashion, often facilitated by the monthly or bi-monthly team meetings. In particular, staff described their monthly team meetings as an opportunity to share their experiences and learn from each other. A staff member described the importance of these meetings in the following quote:

“And so when [we have] like monthly or bi-monthly meetings and people usually share some of their case management and their stories so far, I think a lot of that is around sort of sharing their expertise and their best practices and good practices and what they’ve done, as a resource for each other.”

ADVOCACY

A further strength of the program was the ability of staff to advocate for clients. Staff noted that they were able to advocate for their clients in challenging situations, such as encounters with landlords and at Tenant Duty Counsel. Without the program, the clients may have had to handle these encounters on their own, something which could have been very stressful and may have led to a less successful eviction prevention rate.

STEERING COMMITTEE

The senior management Steering Committee was described as an important component of the program. The Steering Committee functioned as a way to “troubleshoot” challenging cases that the EPIC program was encountering. The strength of the Steering Committee was in the diversity of experience of each member. For example, a key informant stated, *“we all have a different lens and we all bring something different to the table and we all have different strengths. And I think that is a key piece.”*

Program Components

FINANCIAL SUPPORTS

The financial resources available to EPIC clients were frequently referenced by EPIC staff as an integral and effective component of the program. Without this funding, many of the clients would not have been able to maintain their housing or access new housing. EPIC staff discussed that quick access to internal funding sources has been imperative, as the work they do is time sensitive.

“But because of the assistance [name of worker] gave me with the rent allowance, I believe that’s going to help me to make sure I don’t have that issue with the gap, so then I can – you know, it might be a little bit tight again, but only for maybe a month or two, and then I can actually start rising to the occasion and excelling in life as I want to, and as I’ve been waiting to get to that point.”

Many of the EPIC clients said that the financial support they were able to attain through the support of the program was one of its main strengths. This included paying off arrears, acquiring subsidies, setting up automatic rental payments, and assistance with utilities. This financial support offered hope to some participants, as one participant expressed:

FLEXIBLE AND PORTABLE SUPPORTS

The ability of program staff to meet clients out in the community was an important aspect of the program. Staff visit their clients in a variety of locales, including the client's home or out in the community (e.g., attending court hearings, meetings with landlords). As the program serves clients throughout the Greater Toronto Area, it is essential that staff are able to be mobile and meet clients across the city. As put by a key informant, the program's main strength is this:

“The main strength of our program is our flexibility. Is our responsiveness. Is our – really those are the key elements of this program. We would not be able to do the things we do if it took us you know, three, four, five business days to respond to a referral...Within five business days we already have a plan and we're working towards saving it...The main reason that our responsiveness is such a key factor for this program right now is that we're getting them later on in the cycle.”

STABILITY

Clients also appreciated the sense of stability that emerged in their lives upon enrolment into EPIC. Given how stressful the eviction process can be, clients appreciated the stability that the EPIC program provided them. This stability led to future planning and feelings of hope. Several quotes demonstrate this sentiment:

“... it's amazing that EPIC came into place and I just praise God that [name of worker] came to my aid and, like, God blessed me to have her represent me and help me get over this, because now I can see the light at the end – I can see the light at the end of the tunnel ... I'm going to try, because I don't want to give up.”

PARTNERSHIP

Considerable time and energy was spent on building and strengthening relationships with external agencies, such as Tenant Duty Counsel and Ontario Works. By developing these relationships, program staff noted that they could speak directly with staff at agencies where access was historically limited. For example, a staff member stated:

“I also think it's about relationships ... how do we build or strengthen those relationships? ... For example, like, you know, making those relationships with OW to how to figure out when those policies change, if you can't change the policy at least knowing the policy changed. And making those relationships with the Tenant Duty Councillor or whatever, that we can be like, 'Hey, I've got a question, or maybe this falls outside of this, but could you answer that question?' ... And who we are tag-teaming with to build those relationships, I think, is also important.”

Further, a staff member stated, *“the saving grace for a good majority of clients that I was working with at one point was the fact that I somehow formed a good relationship with the HSF [Housing Stabilization Fund] supervisor at the office.”*

LANDLORDS

Landlords were essential to the program’s efficacy. Although the relationship could often be tenuous, for those landlords willing to work with the EPIC program, the benefits were instrumental to the success of the program. A key informant noted the importance of this relationship in the following quote:

“I think a lot of it comes down to: is the landlord amenable to working with the client? And so ones who are willing to have repayment plans and such, I think then the worker, EPIC worker, has a strong chance or really helping that person to be re-housed.”

Developing positive relationships with landlords often led to more proactive eviction prevention. For example, staff shared that some landlords contacted them directly when they had a tenant who was at-risk of an eviction. A landlord’s willingness to work with the client and the EPIC program was often seen as personality-based and values-based (e.g., are landlords “amenable to social good”). It was clear that these landlords were not only concerned with the repayment of arrears, but also the wellbeing of their tenants.

Challenges and Areas for Improvement

FUNDING

Staff indicated that the program faced pressure due to the high demand for internal financial supports and the finite supply of these resources. All of the clients were described as requiring financial supports, but the extent of the financial support required was not necessarily anticipated. For example, one staff member said, *“I think we might have underestimated the amount of money it would need to pay off arrears.”* As a result, a staff member stated:

“So now we’re relying more on the Bridging Grant to pay the arrears and it could get to a point where we’re not able to pay 100 percent of the arrears, which will mean that it will require the landlord to be willing to negotiate with use for only partial payment of the arrears.”

EPIC tapped into several funding sources, including those external to the program (e.g., Housing Stabilization Fund, Rent Bank) and internal to the program (e.g., Bridging Grant), but some of these sources had rigid regulations (e.g., a one-time only payment). In subsequent meetings, EPIC staff shared that they could no longer access the Bridging Grant as it reached its funding capacity.

These results demonstrate that the amount of internal funding available to the program has its limits, which is putting pressure not only on the clients, but also the staff and program as a whole. As stated by a staff member:

“It kind of almost puts more pressure on the pilot because the housing allowances are such a scarce commodity. Whereas if there was some other way to access those or they were more widely available, then you could almost do more of a pure pilot of just the support intervention itself.”

STAGE OF EVICTION

Key informants and program staff noted that it was challenging to help clients who were too far along in the eviction process. At the later stages of the eviction process, there was less time to focus on stabilization. Although staff helped some clients attain a stay on their eviction, other clients were not as successful. Thus, the program had to shift its mandate when working with clients in the later stages of the eviction process to one that focused on rehousing opposed to stabilization. This challenge is summed up in the following quote:

“I think the other big challenge is getting the referrals at the right time, so how do we get referrals from people who are further back in the eviction process, and not just be getting these last minute kind of crisis referrals that’s not really the intention of the program.”

CLIENTS WITH COMPLEX NEEDS

Clients with complex issues, such as serious mental illness, hoarding behaviours, and concurrent disorders, were challenging for the program to work with. Understandably, these cases often took up a lot of time and resources, leaving some key informants to question whether there is a more appropriate program or method to serve these clients. It was thought that a three-month intervention may not be long enough for a client with complex needs. However, when clients presenting with ‘complex’ cases and situations are accepted into EPIC, referral sources are often pleased with the results and requesting to send a case with additional complexities:



“You know, the ones that we really are able to respond faster and resolve the tenant’s issue, we find the referral sources saying, ‘oh, you did a great job with that one. Can I send you a more complex one?’ Each time they send a new one it gets more and more complex.”

WORKING WITH REFERRAL SOURCES

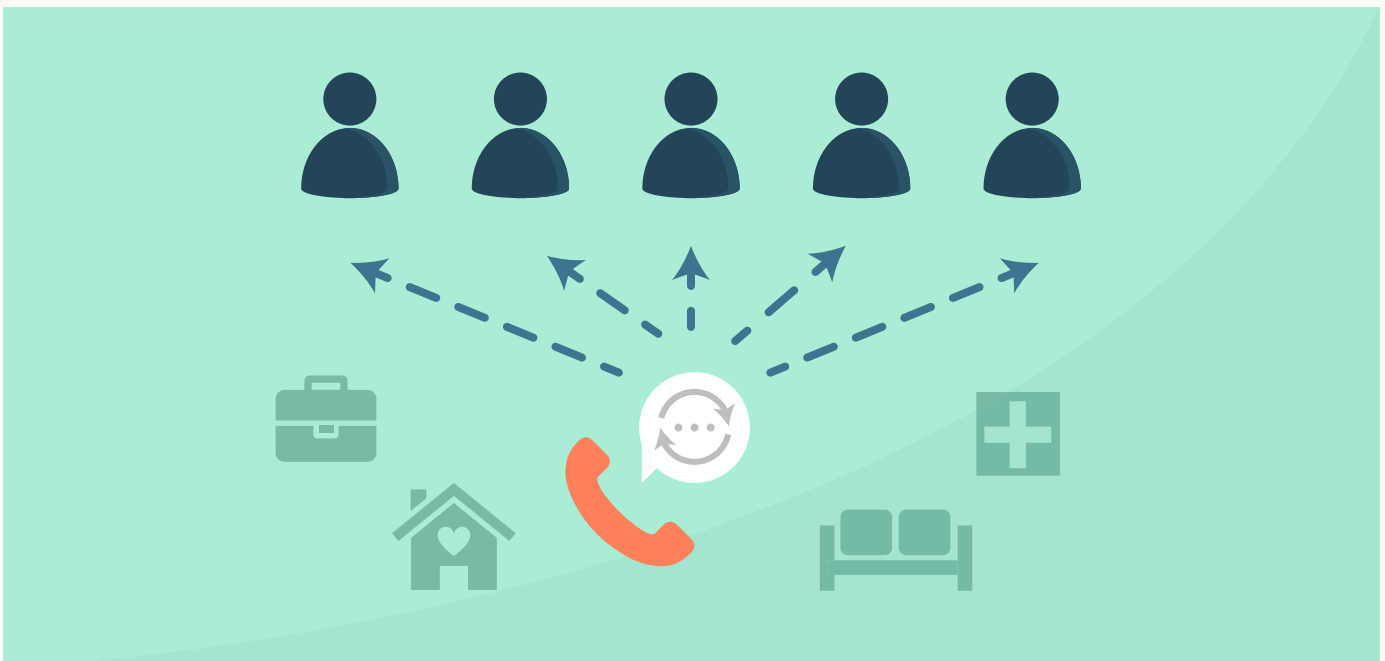
Staff also discussed issues they had with the intake process, specifically with clients calling in through Central Intake to seek help in avoiding an eviction. Workers discussed this issue explaining that *“My clients did, they mentioned it by name, they even mentioned my name. And apparently the person goes, ‘well, that doesn’t matter, you’re not a fit for the program’”*. Another worker indicated a similar issues with confusion from other social service workers referring clients to EPIC:

“...and usually every three days I’ll get a phone call from someone who got my direct information from like an OW worker saying, ‘here you go, talk to eviction and prevention’, and then having to re-explain to them the qualifications and the actual intake process. That takes up time.”

FOLLOW-UP SUPPORTS

When asked if they required follow-up supports from the program, clients shared mixed responses. Three clients felt that follow-up supports were not necessary and two clients were unsure if they would need supports. Those clients who said that they were unsure of follow-up supports felt that their current situations were stable, but felt comfortable contacting the program should problems arise in the future.

Other clients shared particular supports that they required. These included access to the furniture, employment supports, mental health supports, and landlord communication supports. In terms of mental health, one client shared that the level of support required may extend beyond the scope of the program.



Interpretation of the Findings

The findings from across the various sources of data clearly demonstrate that the EPIC program is effective in preventing evictions and stabilizing individuals in their housing. Of the 97 participants discharged from the program during the course of the evaluation, 90% stabilized their housing situation and 2% entered into homelessness.

The small number of clients who entered into homelessness is important from both an economic and social perspective. Many of the EPIC clients stated that they did not know where they would have ended up had they been evicted from their housing. It can be assumed that some of these individuals would have accessed one of Toronto's emergency shelters. Since we know the staggering costs of placing individuals in emergency shelters (~\$75 per day in Toronto), the EPIC program is likely providing the City of Toronto with significant cost savings.

What cannot be calculated are the substantial life changes that resulted among the clients who were able to stabilize their housing. During the interviews and surveys, many clients told us of the significance of being part of the EPIC program. This significance is perhaps best summed up in the following quote from an EPIC client:

“It’s an epic recovery to an epic comeback, you know, at this point, because now I can – all the goals I set, everything I planned to do, I’m not always wondering ... you know. I can actually plan and budget and focus on doing better, because there’s actually an opportunity.”

The effectiveness of the program was largely the result of the program model and its implementation. As demonstrated by the literature review, EPIC's program model reflects best practices. This includes providing financial supports (Acacia Consulting & Research, 2006b; Holl, van den Dries, & Wolf, 2016), communication with landlords (Acacia Consulting & Research, 2006b; CMHC, 2005; LaPointe, 2004), case management (Holl et al., 2016), home visits (CMHC, 2005; van Laere et al., 2008), and education and information on tenant rights (Acacia Consulting & Research, 2006b). EPIC clients reported receiving many of these supports while in the program, with financial supports and assistance in communicating with landlords being particularly vital.

Coupled with the strong program model was the strong staff implementation of the model. Program staff were praised by the key informants, EPIC clients and landlords, as being responsive, knowledgeable, and dedicated. The Steering Committee, and particularly EPIC's program manager, were also vital to the strong implementation of the model. With this managerial support, it was clear that staff were able to effectively implement the program model. It will be important for the program to maintain this strong program implementation, as we know that

fidelity to program models leads to better outcomes (Goering et al., 2016). One way to do so is to pilot the program fidelity tool that was developed as part of this evaluation. Another way is to continue to assess the satisfaction ratings of clients in the program. As illustrated by the results in the current evaluation, participants were extremely satisfied with the implementation of the program.

The program also worked hard to foster relationships with key players, particularly private market landlords. As stated throughout the evaluation, landlords are essential in stabilizing clients' housing. The bottom-line for many landlords is ensuring that arrears are paid and that rental payments are delivered on time. Given that the program provides financial supports to the majority of its clients, EPIC is well situated to develop good relationships with landlords. This will not only help clients to stabilize their housing, but will also open up opportunities to access units for clients requiring rehousing and perhaps lead to the early identification of at risk of an eviction. It is also important to hold landlords accountable to practices that are not supportive of clients, such as poor communication practices or threatening clients with eviction notices for unsatisfactory reasons. There are several resources that the program could use to enhance their engagement with landlords, particularly the recently released Landlord Engagement Toolkit (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2018). The toolkit not only outlines engagement strategies, but also mechanisms to support landlords throughout the housing process.

The drivers of evictions outlined in this evaluation largely centered on structural and systemic factors. The majority of EPIC clients described the impacts of living in poverty and the stresses of maintaining

housing in such a volatile market. Coupled with this were the confusing systems that many clients had to navigate to acquire necessary financial supports (e.g., Housing Stabilization Fund). Although these structural and system factors are largely outside of EPIC's control, it is important to acknowledge that structural and system factors are the root cause of evictions so as not to victim-blame those individuals at risk of an eviction. It is also important to note the systemic barriers encountered by EPIC clients when accessing rental and financial supports. For system optimization to occur, the pathways to financial support must be challenged and addressed.

Although the program was very successful, there are opportunities for improvement. Key informants and program staff noted that it is crucial to identify individuals at-risk of an eviction at the earliest point possible in order to have an effective eviction prevention program. Clients who were in the later stages of the eviction process fell through the cracks and were often difficult to assist. By identifying individuals at-risk of an eviction earlier in the process, then the work will become less reactive and more proactive. As previously stated, landlord engagement will be a crucial factor to this early intervention process.

It will also be important for the program, and the various internal rental assistance programs (e.g., Housing Allowances, The Bridging Grant) to be adequately funded, as it was clearly demonstrated that these financial supports are crucial to avoiding an eviction. The importance of rental supplements is well substantiated in the literature as they are one of the main facilitators of attaining housing stability among individuals who have experienced homelessness (Aubry, Duhoux, Klodawsky, Ecker, & Hay, 2016).

Recommendations

Below we present a series of recommendations for the growth of the EPIC program. They are grouped as program-level recommendations and systems-level recommendations.

Program-Level Recommendations

- 1 The results clearly demonstrate that EPIC is an effective program to prevent evictions, stabilize individuals in their housing, and prevent potential entries into homelessness. **Thus, it is strongly recommended that the EPIC program is sustained and the capacity of the program is expanded.** This expansion should involve a significant and sustained financial investment from the City of Toronto to ensure that the program is adequately staffed and resourced. If properly resourced, expanding eviction prevention efforts may contribute to a reduction in homelessness within the City of Toronto.

In expanding the program, EPIC should consider the following domains:

REFERRALS

- 2 **Review how referrals are filtered into the program to maximize efficiencies.** As it currently stands, the program manager handles all of the referrals and then filters appropriate referrals to program staff to conduct an intake assessment. This is an onerous process for the program manager and something that could be streamlined. The program should consider having at least two staff members assist in the filtering of referrals.
- 3 **Develop educational materials for new and existing referral sources to ensure clarity on the objectives and standards of the program.** Program staff sometimes reported that referral sources were unaware of the EPIC program, particularly its eligibility criteria and mandate. As EPIC expands, it will be important for the program to ensure that referral sources are kept up-to-date on EPIC's mandate and eligibility criteria. Targeted educational campaigns with all referral sources should be conducted in order to ensure that frontline staff know when and how to refer to EPIC. This campaign could include materials such as poster and pamphlets for referral agents.

PROGRAM DESIGN

- 4 **Develop formalized, but flexible, standards for caseload sizes.** EPIC staff were described as providing intensive and time-sensitive supports. As the program expands, the ability to provide quick services will be tested. Thus, it will be important for the EPIC program to develop a case manager-to-client ratio that maintains the high level of supports that are offered to clients. In determining this caseload size, several contextual factors must be taken into consideration, including the stage of eviction a client is at and the level of complexity of the client.

- 5 As some clients were described as having complex needs, **EPIC should review its intended length of stay in the program and/or program eligibility requirements.** Program staff and key informants described that some clients with complex mental health needs required assistance for longer than the usual three-month length of stay in the program. Further, a small number of clients who had been discharged from the program were readmitted to program due to receiving another notice of eviction. Thus, EPIC should consider whether the length of stay in the program should be formally extended for clients with complex needs or if the program should target households with low-to-moderate needs.
- a Should the program decide to target households with low-to-moderate needs, a mechanism will need to be developed to ensure that individuals with complex needs do not fall through the cracks and are immediately connected with appropriate supports.

RESOURCES AND INVESTMENT

- 6 **Ensure the consistency and constancy of financial supports for EPIC clients by advocating for more rental supports to be made available to the program.** Program staff, clients, and landlords all shared that evictions were often the result of financial challenges. Due to the finite internal financial resources available to the program, it will be important for the program to advocate for an increase in the number of rental supports (e.g., Housing Allowance, Prevention Fund) that the program can access. Having a consistent and constant amount of rental supports will potentially alleviate the financial strains experienced by the program. These rental supports should address both one-time arrears payments, but also sustained and portable rental supplements for eligible clients. As the program currently assists clients to attain financial supports that are both external (e.g., Housing Stabilization Fund) and internal (e.g., Housing Allowance, Prevention Fund) to the program, it will be best to develop a tiered and targeted approach as to what source of funding is best suited for a client's needs. For example, if a client is receiving social assistance, an external source of funding (e.g., Housing Stabilization Fund) may be the most appropriate financial resource to access prior to accessing internal supports.

DATA, RESEARCH, AND EVALUATION

- 7 **Assess whether the program is reaching key demographics, such as marginalized populations, through a review of program data.** As highlighted in the literature review, Indigenous Peoples, people of colour, and female-headed households may be at particular risk of experiencing an eviction. We also know that certain groups may be at particular risk of homelessness, such as LGBTQ2S+ individuals and young people. Therefore, EPIC should monitor key demographic data when reviewing program outcomes and develop targeted approaches to meet the needs of these groups. It is acknowledged that the program currently works with an Indigenous housing agency. This good work should be enhanced and expanded.
- 8 **Continue to monitor EPIC clients' satisfaction with their housing, neighbourhood, and quality of life.** It is important to recognize that housing options for individuals living in poverty are often of poor quality

and located in neighbourhoods where safety is a concern. Further, we know that there is an established link between good quality housing and wellbeing. Therefore, it will be important for the program to monitor outcomes that extend beyond housing stability and rehousing, but also the quality and impact of EPIC clients' housing and neighbourhoods.

- 9 Develop a follow-up system to monitor the outcomes of discharged clients.** Given its time-limited nature, it will be important to monitor the sustained impact of the program. Discharged clients should be contacted at regular intervals (e.g., every three to six months) for up to three years to examine whether they have remained stably housed. By conducting this longitudinal analysis, the program will be able to determine if evictions are being deferred or if the program is able to support individuals in sustaining their housing.

- 10 Develop data quality standards and conduct regular data quality audits to maximize the potential of administrative data.** Upon reviewing the data, it became clear that data quality issues sometimes became a barrier to reporting on key participant trends. Data issues included:
 - missing data
 - data duplication
 - lack of coordination across various data systems (e.g., referral database, monthly reporting database, SMIS)
 - the rigidity of SMIS
 - some key variables not being collected (e.g., number of extended family members currently residing in the household)

Therefore, data quality standards should be developed and regular data quality audits should occur.

- 11 Monitor the implementation of the program through the program fidelity tool.** As previously stated, programs that meet high fidelity standards often report better client outcomes. As such, the program should monitor its implementation through a fidelity review at least once a year.

- 12 Conduct further research and evaluation on the EPIC program.** As the EPIC program continues to grow, it will be important to include funding for more research and evaluation activities. Tracking EPIC client outcomes over time, developing service plans based upon client profiles, examining the cost benefits of the program, and monitoring the timeliness of early intervention strategies are tangible next steps for future research and evaluation activities.

RELATIONSHIPS AND PUBLIC AWARENESS

- 13 Continue to develop relationships with private market landlords and engage them in early intervention strategies.** EPIC made a concerted effort to expand their network of private market landlords. As outlined throughout this report, landlords are key to preventing evictions and should be engaged with at the earliest stages possible. Therefore, the program should continue to work collaboratively with landlords in order to develop new rental opportunities and identify households at-risk of an eviction earlier in the process. To do so, the program should consider:
- a** Working with other organizations and agencies that are frequently in contact with landlords (e.g., John Howard Society). These partners could help to identify potential landlords who might be open to housing EPIC clients.
 - b** Developing formalized agreements with landlords to identify at-risk households and explore pathways through which landlords could connect with EPIC for assistance if they are considering evicting a tenant.
- 14 Increase awareness of the program within other systems and among the general public through the development of promotional materials and targeted outreach.** Some EPIC clients noted that they were previously unaware of the EPIC program. Therefore, it is imperative that the EPIC program is promoted to a greater degree. This includes promotion within other systems that EPIC clients may touch (e.g., the healthcare system, the legal system, the homelessness system, the social assistance system) and among the general public. This outreach to the general public is important since some individuals at risk of an eviction may be reluctant to touch these other public systems.

STAFF

- 15 Given the intensity and nature of the work, staff wellbeing should be fostered.** Program staff shared that they were working under stressful situations, as sometimes newly referred EPIC clients were scheduled to be evicted from their unit in a matter of days. Given that much of the success of the program is based upon the good work of the staff, staff wellbeing should be assessed and efforts made to promote wellbeing.
- 16 Staff training opportunities should be formalized.** EPIC staff members sometimes felt that they were learning about key concepts “on the fly.” This particularly related to changes to provincial and municipal housing policies. Thus, the EPIC program should seek out regular training opportunities with representatives from the Landlord and Tenant Board, landlord associations, and tenants’ rights organizations. To streamline the process, EPIC should consider implementing a mechanism that allows program staff and management to receive updates on changes to relevant policies and practices as they relate to housing and eviction-related legislation.

Systems-Level Recommendations

- 17 Access to rental subsidies should be improved.** Clients and program staff both discussed the challenges encountered in accessing external rental supports (e.g., Housing Stabilization Fund). Although the difficulty in access was often outside of the program's control, it is important to recognize that these system barriers hinder the program's ability to provide adequate financial supports to clients. These barriers should be reported to the appropriate source (e.g., Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program), so that collaborative solutions can be developed.
- 18 In order to effectively prevent evictions, income supports need to be raised and affordable housing needs to be developed.** Although outside of the program's control, it is important to recognize that evictions are being driven by inadequate incomes and a lack of affordable housing options. Therefore, it should be acknowledged that governmental policy shifts are required to truly address the root causes of evictions. For example:
- a** The provincial government needs to raise income assistance levels to match rising rental costs
 - b** Provincial and municipal governments need to develop more affordable housing options.
 - c** Coupled with this expansion of affordable housing options, supportive housing and housing for individuals with complex needs should be developed to ensure that mental health status is not a barrier to obtaining and maintaining housing.
- 19 Given the demonstrated efficacy of EPIC in stabilizing housing for individuals at-risk of an eviction, the Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) should consider expanding other prevention efforts within their suite of services.** The EPIC program represents a shift in thinking from crisis-driven responses to more preventative actions. This shift in thinking should be applied across SSHA, particularly as it relates to a focus on early interventions to prevent homelessness and increase housing instability. This could include developing the aforementioned promotional materials on eviction, as well as doing targeted promotional outreach to members of the community. Outreach could take the form of presenting at relevant conferences, community forums, and to housing providers.
- 20 Develop a homelessness prevention network that includes representation from across various systems.** As demonstrated throughout the evaluation, evictions are the result of several structural and systemic barriers. In order to effectively address these barriers, it will be important to bring the relevant system players together in a meaningful way. One potential avenue to bring people together is to develop a homelessness prevention table. This table would be composed of relevant players (e.g., EPIC, Landlord Tenant Board, Landlord associations, Legal representatives, Ministry of Community and Social Services, Ministry of Housing, etc.) and convened to develop policies and best practices for preventative measures. The table could meet on a regular basis and would require administrative support.

Appendix I: Reference List

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