

THE CORPORATION OF THE COUNTY OF LAMBTON			
Department:	Homelessness Prevention and Children's Services		
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Subject:	Homelessness Coordinated Access System, Triage & Assessment Policy		
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#### 1 SUBJECT

Homelessness Coordinated Access System, **Triage & Assessment Policy**, in the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS).

### 2 PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish and clearly define the common triage and assessment protocols used in Lambton County. The information will help guide the type of support and housing intervention options that may be the most beneficial to improve long term housing outcomes for individuals who are or at risk of homelessness.

### **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 Triage & Assessment Policy is a critical component of maintaining Lambton County's real-time By-Name List (LCBNL) and a robust Coordinated Access System for households experiencing homelessness or at immediate risk of homelessness.

The standardized triage and assessment/data collection tools described in this policy are part of a Coordinated Access best practice approach to assess the current situation of the household, including level of acuity, needs, vulnerabilities, and referral/matching resource options.

### 4 SCOPE

The outlined procedures will be followed by agencies within the Lambton County Homelessness System of Care (LCHSC) on a regular basis. This applies to all clients accessing services within the LCHSC.

### **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.

# **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 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 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.

#### **5.8 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, <a href="https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/homelessness/hifis.html">https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/homelessness/hifis.html</a>

### **5.9 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.

# **5.10** 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, <u>Canadian Definition Of Homelessness</u>

### **5.11** 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.

### 5.12 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. It 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. This tool is appropriate for trained front-line staff to use when serving homeless individuals and families.

### 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 LCHSC.

The LCHSC is composed of various community organizations who provide 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 Unique Identifier List (also known as a By-Name List or BNL) is a real-time list of all known people experiencing homelessness in our community. It includes a robust set of data points that support coordinated access and prioritization at a household level and an understanding of homeless inflow and outflow at a system level. <a href="https://bfzcanada.ca/by-name-lists/">https://bfzcanada.ca/by-name-lists/</a>

### 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 Community Entity (CE) - County of Lambton

The Community Entity (County of Lambton) is required to document and make available a policy for standardized triage and assessment protocols across the Coordinated Access System. It is the responsibility of the CE to support agencies with the appropriate understanding of how to process common triage and assessment tools in alignment with the implementation of HIFIS and Coordinated Access.

### 7.2 Homelessness Service Provider

The Homelessness Service Provider is accountable to ensure trained workers use the standardized triage and assessment protocols.

### 7.3 Homelessness Front-Line Staff / User

- Be aware of all of the triage/assessment tools and their appropriate application.
- Complete standardized triage and assessment protocols with clients providing consent at defined frequencies.
- Update standardized triage and assessment protocols information in HIFIS on a regular and ongoing basis.

### 7.4 Homelessness System Coordinator – County of Lambton

- Update standardized triage and assessment protocols in HIFIS for both HIFIS and non-HIFIS Service Providers with clients providing consent, as required.
- Monitor accuracy and completeness of the standardized triage/assessment protocols.
- Notify relevant staff or agencies if any information is inaccurate and/or incomplete.
- Extract data quality reports from HIFIS on a regular basis for distribution to Management or Staff, as assigned.

### 7.5 Staff as Assigned - County of Lambton

- Monitor accuracy and completeness of the standardized triage/assessment protocols.
- Notify relevant staff or agencies if any information is inaccurate and/or incomplete.
- Extract data quality reports from HIFIS on a regular basis for distribution to Management or Staff as assigned.

### 8 PROCEDURE for the VI-SPDAT

#### 8.1 VI-SPDAT Overview

The VI-SPDAT has different versions for specific populations. Information collected in the triage assessment tool include categories of:

- Wellness (e.g., mental, physical health/abuse, substance use)
- Risks (e.g., harm to others or themselves, legal involvement)
- Socialization and daily functioning
- Housing history

The appropriate version of the VI-SPDAT is to be used by referral sources based on the individual being assessed, as outlined by below.

The Single Youth VI-SPDAT is a tool designed for youth aged 24 and under. Note: If a youth was assessed using a Single Youth VI-SPDAT but ages to 25 or 25+ before being referred to permanent housing with supports, a Single Adult VI-SPDAT must be completed.

VI-SPDAT Version	Description	Version #	Appendix #
Single Youth	Youth, aged 16 - 24	Youth VI-SPDAT v. 1.0	Appendix <b>A</b>
Single Adult	Single Adults, aged 25+	Single Adult VI-SPDAT v. 2.0	Appendix <b>B</b>
Families	Families (an adult or youth- headed client with dependent children under age 18 or dependent adults)	Family VI-SPDAT v. 2.0	Appendix <b>C</b>

### 8.2 Client Choice

Homelessness staff will offer all available services based on the client's eligibility. Withdrawing or limiting consent, including the completion of the VI-SPDAT, does not make a client ineligible for services and supports. Clients are encouraged to exercise choice about what services and housing they believe will be best suited to meet their needs, and their self-determination will be honoured.

#### 8.3 Reassessment

A VI-SPDAT reassessment may be completed if there has been any significant life change in the client's life since the last VI-SPDAT or if an individual re-enters the homelessness system and it has been more than six (6) months since their VI-SPDAT was originally completed.

# **8.4 Significant Life Change**

Some examples of significant life change events that would require a new VI-SPDAT being done include, but are not limited to, the following:

# • A New Episode of Homelessness after being housed

- New event of homelessness after several months of being housed
- Leaving a jail, hospital, or institution after 90 days

### • Changes in the Family Unit

- The death of a family member or divorce or separation
- > The birth of a child or return of another child
- > Dependent leaving or returning to jail, school, or other institution

### • Significant Changes in Health

- > The brain injury impacting one's ability to live alone
- > An incident causing disability, not a disability status change
- An individual or family member develops an original and severe substance use issue that was not present during first assessment

### 8.5 Timeframe

# **Daily**

- All community organizations within the LCHSC will ensure that client updates in HIFIS are completed daily, within 24 hours of changes. (e.g., Intake, Triage/Assessment)
- Triage/Assessment updates should be entered directly in HIFIS via the VI-SPDAT menus. (e.g., VI-SPDAT Youth, v1)

### **14 Days**

❖ All Community Access Points (CAPs) will use the VI-SPDAT to assess individuals who have been experiencing homelessness for 14 days or more.

This threshold of engagement was determined based on community data and research on homeless intervention best practices. In order to efficiently support people, it is recommended that front-line staff allow individuals or families to conduct a self-directed housing search and self-resolve their homelessness for the first two (2) weeks.

- ❖ If there is an individual or family known to the system, and suspected high acuity, front-line staff may complete the assessment earlier. Front-line staff may also use discretion when administering the VI-SPDAT to supplement responses through conversations and observations with the client. (This flexibility helps to ensure the VI-SPDAT is accurately reflecting a client's circumstance in order to match them with the most appropriate housing or program opportunity.).
  - \* Refer to Appendix D for a list of current Community Access Points.
- ❖ All HIFIS Front-Line Staff/Users will ensure that the triage/assessment tools (e.g., VI-SPDAT) is completed with a client within 14 days of intake.

#### **Monthly**

The Homelessness System Coordinator (HSC), Social Planners, and Program/Data Analysts verify client information and service provider information monthly.

### As Needed

- The HSC, Social Planners, Program/Data Analysts and BNL Leadership connect with HIFIS Front-Line Staff / Users / Service Providers on an as needed basis.
- The HSC, Social Planners, and Program/Data Analysts share the relevant priority lists that qualify for individual programs with Leadership, assigned Case Management teams, and respective Service Providers, as needed.

# **8.6 VI-SPDAT Acuity Scoring Chart**

Single Youth & Single Adults	Low	Mid	High	Very High
	Acuity	Acuity	Acuity	Acuity
VI-SPDAT	0-3	4-7	8-13	14-17

Families	Low	Mid	High	Very High
	Acuity	Acuity	Acuity	Acuity
VI-SPDAT	0-3	4-8	9-15	16-22

While individual programs and services in the LCHSC may hold inclusionary or exclusionary criteria related to acuity score, below describes the level and type of support generally offered to households by acuity score.

# • Low score (0-3)

**No Formal Housing Intervention:** Individuals who do not require intensive supports, but may still benefit from access to affordable housing, housing listings and community level resources to resolve their own homelessness.

# Medium Score (4-7)

Rapid Re-Housing: Individuals or families with moderate health, mental health and/or behavioral health issues, but who are likely to be able to achieve housing stability with short-term to medium access to financial and/or support services.

# • High Score (8-13)

**Permanent Supportive Housing:** Individuals or families who need permanent housing with ongoing access to services and case management to remain stably housed.

# Very High Score (14+)

**Permanent Supportive Housing:** Individuals or families who need permanent housing with ongoing access to services and supports (possibly 24/7) and case management to remain stably housed.

### 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 Triage/Assessment process to focus on key indicators and potential gaps in service.

### 11 ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

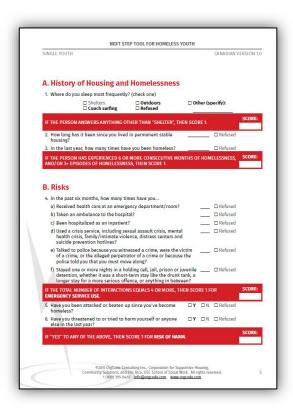
- a) A11.222 Coordinated Access Timely and Accurate Data in HIFIS
- b) A11.223 Coordinated Access Intake Policy
- c) Lambton County's Homelessness Services Coordinated Access System Process Guide
- d) County of Lambton Housing and Homelessness Plan, 2020-2024
- e) Lambton County's Quality By-Name List (BNL)

# 12 POLICY HISTORY

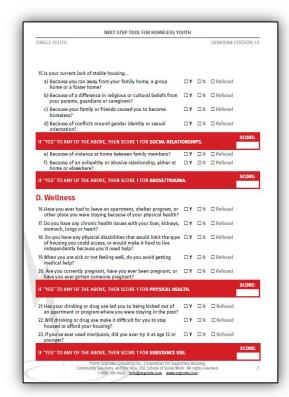
Revised By Date		Prepared By	
Policy created.	• December 20, 2022	Nancy Kalbfleisch	

# Appendix A - VI-SPDAT for Single Youth, v1

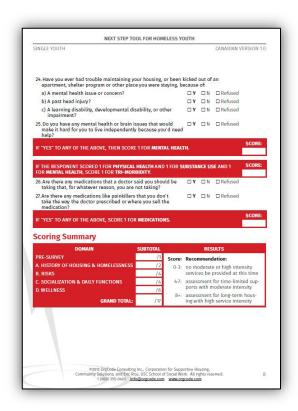


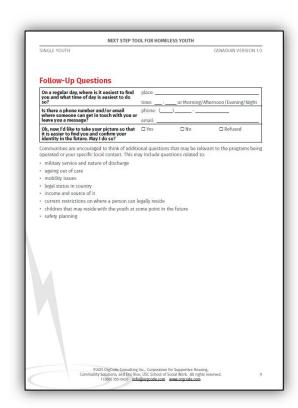






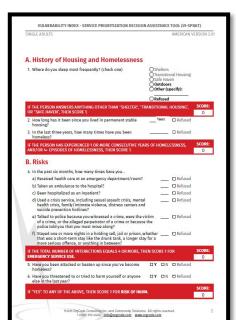
# **Appendix A - VI-SPDAT for Single Youth, v1 - (Continued)**

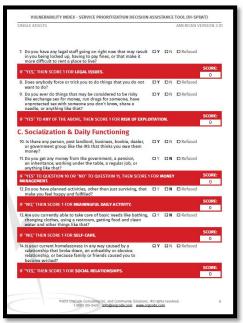


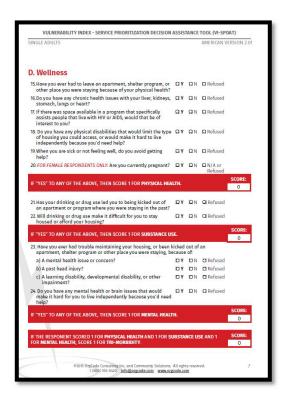


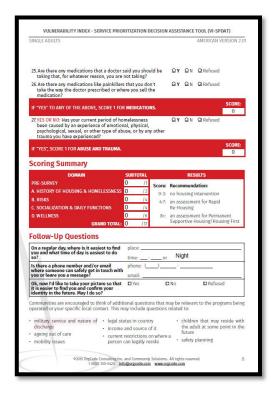
### Appendix B - VI-SPDAT for Single Adult, v2





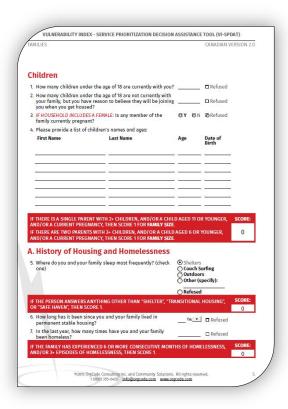


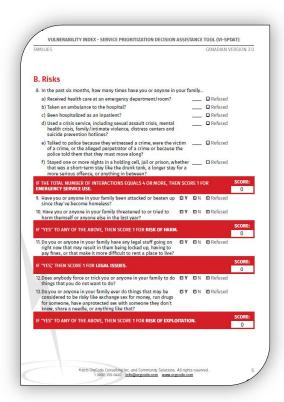


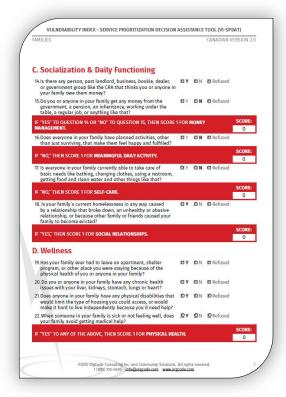


### Appendix C - VI-SPDAT for Families, v2

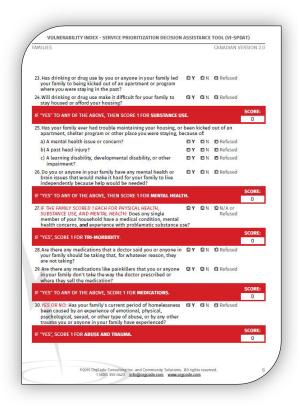


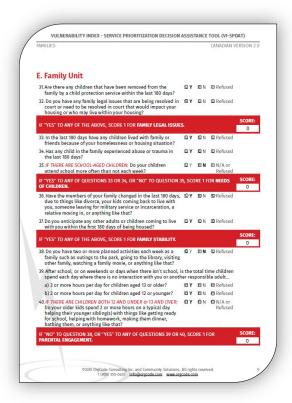


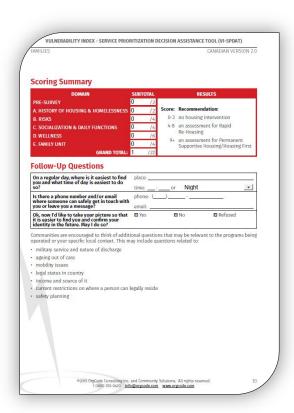




## **Appendix A - VI-SPDAT for Families**, v2 - (Continued)







# **Appendix D** - Community Access Points (CAP) - Identified

Any agency in Lambton County can add an individual or family to the By-Name List by completing the Intake process.

Should a household present as homeless at an agency who is not identified as a Community Access Point, the agency will make a connection to one of the following Lambton County's Community Access Points for Intake:

# **Community Access Points in Lambton County**

- Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)
- ❖ The Corporation of the County of Lambton Social Services Division
- The Inn of the Good Shepherd
  - The Lodge (Adult Shelter)
  - The Haven (Youth Shelter)
- North Lambton Community Health Centre
- Sarnia-Lambton Rebound
- Sarnia-Lambton Native Friendship Centre
- Women's Interval Home
- Temporary Congregate Care Sites