

What is Housing First?

Housing First is a model of ending homelessness that works. It is an internationally recognised intervention to address homelessness for people with interlocking, multiple and serious needs who experience homelessness. Unlike other supported housing models, individuals do not need to prove they are 'ready' for independent housing, or progress through a series of accommodation and treatment services. There are no conditions placed on them, other than a willingness to maintain a tenancy agreement and meet regularly with the Housing First support team. Housing First is designed to provide long-term, open-ended support for people's on-going needs.



Housing First provides rapid access to a stable tenancy in ordinary (social, public or private) rented housing. From this point onwards, people's other support needs are addressed through coordinated and intensive support on an open-ended basis. These needs can include long term street homelessness, mental, psychological or emotional ill-health, drug and/or alcohol dependency, contact with the criminal justice system, experience of trauma, physical ill-health, or experience of domestic violence and abuse.

The support is open ended (i.e. not time limited) and is often addressed through a multi-disciplinary team. The **core principles** of Housing First as described in the Housing First Europe Guide are central to operating high quality and effective Housing First programmes.



Housing First was developed as a service model the US, by Sam Tsemberis (Pathways to Housing) in the early 1990s. Almost simultaneously, in **Finland**, starting in the 1980s, the government, local authorities, NGOs and volunteers began working to reduce homelessness. From the 2000s the Finnish government has funded programmes to reduce and end homelessness, using the principle of Housing First as an operating model, an ideology and a way of thinking.

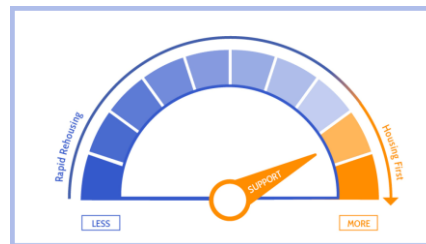
Across **Europe**, an increasing number of governments at national, regional and local level are adopting a Housing First approach to better address and resolve homelessness.

(organisations, governments, cities, housing providers, researchers, etc.) together in a network to support and promote the take up and delivery of Housing First (www.housingfirsteurope.eu).

There is more evidence to show that Housing First works than there is for any other intervention to tackle and end homelessness. When all aspects of the model are operating at high fidelity, it has tenancy sustainment rates at 80 per cent or higher. Studies looking at community capabilities and wellbeing also report positive outcomes in most cases.

A Housing-led approach to ending homelessness A 'housing-led' or 'rapid re-housing' approach to ending homelessness aims to move people into their own homes as quickly as possible and provide them with the support they need to make it work.

This type of approach seeks to prevent homelessness from happening in the first place. In situations where homelessness does occur, housing-led models foresee a minimal amount of time spent in temporary accommodation and very few transitions before someone moves into a settled home. Housing First is one type of housing-led model, and is specifically designed for those with the highest and most complex needs.



Individual programmes delivering Housing First work well for the individuals who participate, but Housing First works best when it functions as part of an integrated, multi-agency homelessness strategy, alongside prevention, and low intensity emergency accommodation services.

Housing First works best when applied as an approach to eliminating homelessness rather than a standalone intervention addressing homelessness for a sub-group of people with high and complex inter-related needs.

Most people who experience homelessness only need a secure, affordable home and short-term support, only a relatively small proportion of people experiencing homelessness need the level of support provided by Housing First. A housing-led approach recognises that the principles underlying the Housing First model can and should benefit all those who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Despite its proven impact, Housing First requires continued support help it become the mainstream or 'go to' approach for responding to homelessness. Common challenges across Europe include difficulties in accessing both housing for Housing First and ongoing, reliable funding for coordination and services.