

# EPIC

## PILOT PROGRAM EVALUATION

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

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This report presents the findings from the evaluation of the Eviction Prevention in the Community (EPIC) Pilot program. The EPIC program provides wrap around eviction prevention services to tenants facing an imminent risk of eviction within the City of Toronto. The program was launched in March 2017.

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.

## PROGRAM SERVICES

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

## Purpose of Evaluation

As the EPIC program is a new service model within SSHA, an evaluation focused on both process and outcomes was commissioned. The purpose of the 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.

4

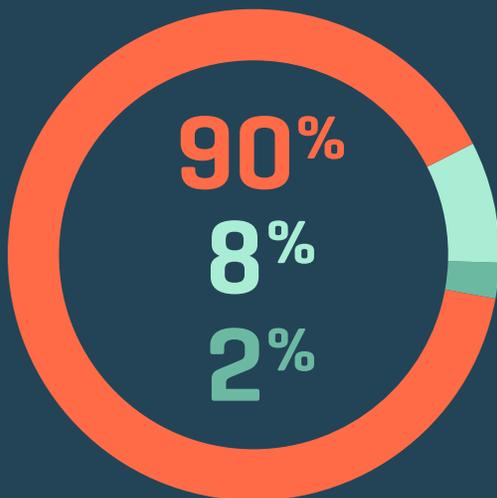
Investigate service gaps that are not easily addressed through the pilot model.

## Evaluation Methodology

- 1 Refined the program logic model
- 2 Developed a program fidelity tool
- 3 Conducted key informant interviews and a focus group with managers and staff of the EPIC program
- 4 Conducted qualitative interviews with clients currently enrolled in the program
- 5 Conducted surveys with clients who exited the program
- 6 Conducted surveys and qualitative interviews with landlords who have participated in the program
- 7 Conducted surveys with referral sources of the program
- 8 Conducted quantitative analyses on the administrative data of the program

## Key Findings

### EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INTERVENTION



Results demonstrated that the program was particularly effective in preventing evictions and stabilizing clients in their current housing. Of the 97 clients discharged from the program, 90% were stabilized in their housing, 8% were rehoused, and 2% exited into homelessness.

EPIC clients were very satisfied with their experience in the program, rating the program an average of 9.5 out of 10 (with 10 being extremely satisfied). Landlords and referral agents were also very satisfied with their experience in the program.

The program's success was often attributed to the strong program model and its implementation. The EPIC program is grounded in many of the key factors associated with successful eviction prevention programming (e.g., case management, financial supports, landlord mediation), indicating that the EPIC program is following best practices.



Coupled with the strong program model was the effective implementation of the model by senior management and program staff. Program staff were described as knowledgeable, dedicated, and passionate about their work. The availability of financial supports was another key component of program implementation. Since the average rate of arrears was over \$4,000 among clients enrolled in the program, the availability of financial supports was vital to housing stabilizations. Staff played a crucial role in acquiring these financial resources, as the systems involved to access these supports were often described as complicated.

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.

## CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO EVICTIONS & CLIENT PROFILES

Formally, eviction notices were largely the result of arrears. At point of entry into the program, EPIC clients had largely received an N4 notice and in some cases, a L1 application. Landlords and referral sources often noted arrears as the primary, if not sole cause of evictions. The amount of arrears owed by clients ranged from \$144 to over \$40,000. This range in arrears reflects the stages of eviction clients are in (e.g., eviction notice, eviction order). Smaller amounts of arrears were found among clients early in the eviction process and larger amounts of arrears were found among clients later in the eviction process.



**EPIC clients spent over 70% of their income on rent.**



Although arrears were often the primary 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 rarely 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 discussed the challenges of navigating multiple public systems and transitioning between different forms of income support.

Challenges faced by EPIC clients were varied. Clients spoke of the impacts of living in poverty and the stress that arose from receiving an eviction notice. Key informants and staff members also commented on the complex mental health issues that some clients were facing. This 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.

EPIC clients generally did not feel prepared should they have 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. Several of the clients were very forthcoming that they would not enter the shelter system, with several of the clients having previous shelter experiences.

## LANDLORDS

The EPIC program worked with many partners, with private market landlords often being defined as the most important of these partnerships. Landlords were often seen as secondary clients by EPIC staff. The program made a concerted effort to develop partnerships with new landlords and worked to foster relationships with landlords who were currently engaged with the program. This engagement served two purposes: 1) Identify individuals at risk of an eviction earlier rather than later in the eviction process; and 2) Identify landlords willing to offer vacant units to EPIC clients who require rehousing. The landlords who worked with EPIC were very satisfied with the program.



## SERVICE GAPS



The service gaps identified by EPIC clients and staff largely centered on issues related to funding and the availability of follow-up supports. There was a finite amount of resources available to the program, particularly as it related to available rental supports. As rental supports became scarce, it was more challenging to assist EPIC clients.

Some EPIC clients felt that more supports could have been offered by the program, particularly follow-up supports. As the program was a time-limited intervention (~three months), some clients felt like they required further supports upon discharge from the program.

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.

# Recommendations

These recommendations focused on program-level and systems-level recommendations.

## PROGRAM-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

**1** It is strongly recommended that the EPIC program is sustained and the capacity of the program is expanded.

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

### **REFERRALS**

- 2** Review how referrals are filtered into the program to maximize efficiencies.
- 3** Develop educational materials for new and existing referral sources to ensure clarity on the objectives and standards of the program.

### **PROGRAM DESIGN**

- 4** Develop formalized, but flexible, standards for caseload sizes.
- 5** EPIC should review its intended length of stay in the program and/or program eligibility requirements.

### **RESOURCES & 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.

### **DATA, RESEARCH, & EVALUATION**

- 7** Assess whether the program is reaching key demographics, such as marginalized populations, through a review of program data.

## SYSTEMS-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

- 17** Access to rental subsidies should be improved.
- 18** In order to effectively prevent evictions, income supports need to be raised and affordable housing needs to be developed.
- 19** Given the demonstrated efficacy of EPIC in stabilizing housing for individuals at-risk of an eviction, the Shelter, Support and Housing

- 8** Continue to monitor EPIC clients' satisfaction with their housing, neighbourhood, and quality of life.
- 9** Develop a follow-up system to monitor the outcomes of discharged clients.
- 10** Develop data quality standards and conduct regular data quality audits to maximize the potential of administrative data.
- 11** Monitor the implementation of the program through the program fidelity tool.
- 12** Conduct further research and evaluation on the EPIC program.

### **RELATIONSHIPS & PUBLIC AWARENESS**

- 13** Continue to develop relationships with private market landlords and engage them in early intervention strategies.
- 14** Increase awareness of the program within other systems and among the general public through the development of promotional materials and targeted outreach.

### **STAFF**

- 15** Given the intensity and nature of the work, staff wellbeing should be fostered.
- 16** Staff training opportunities should be formalized.

Administration (SSHA) should consider expanding other prevention efforts within their suite of services.

- 20** Develop a homelessness prevention network that includes representation from across various systems.