

# Housing First in Europe

## The Solution to Homelessness?

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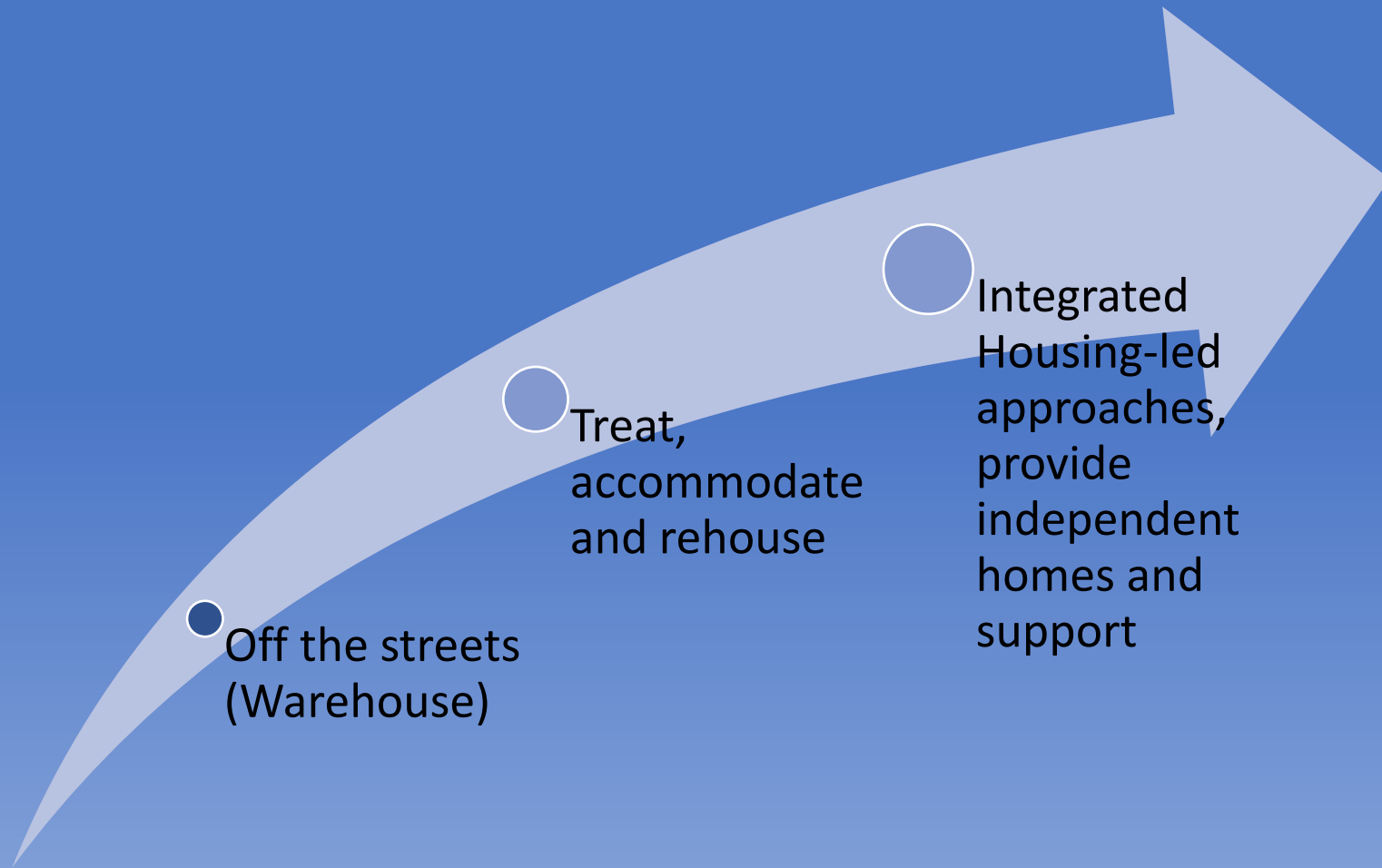
# Homelessness

- No single European definition
- Most countries agree that people living rough and in emergency accommodation are 'homeless'
- ETHOS from FEANTSA physical domain (exclusive space), social domain (private space) and legal domain (some security of tenure)
- Similar to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) definition adequate dwelling, have reasonable security of tenure and space for social relations.

# Homelessness policies in Europe

- Do not have the same target
- Denmark, Finland and the UK target hidden homelessness
- Other countries are targeting street homelessness/rough sleeping and people in shelters

# Different policies



# Different policies

- Not just at the level of individual countries
- There are often elements of warehousing, treatment-led and housing-led policies in the same country
- Coherent, integrated national strategies do exist
  - Denmark, Finland
- But there is also inconsistency and variation
  - Germany, Sweden, UK

# The case for Housing First

- Work of Dennis Culhane and others in the USA
- Showed the presence of a small, high cost, high risk population around 15% of total
- Growing evidence that linear residential treatment/'staircase' services were not effective with *that specific group*
- And were expensive
- Housing First offered a solution that was more cost effective

# The case for Housing First

- Evidence of the same sort of patterns in North Western Europe
- Not the same, less economic homelessness than in the USA
- But still a small high cost, high risk group not being reached
- Denmark, Ireland, UK, Finland, France



# The case for Housing First

- Long-term/recurrent rough sleepers
  - High and complex needs
  - Not engaging with existing services
- Frequent flyers
  - More numerous
  - Long-term and recurrent homeless
  - High and complex needs
  - Stuck in homelessness services
  - And heavy contact with hospitals, mental health, Police...

# The case for Housing First

- Money is being spent
- But the highest need people are not being helped
- The drivers behind the Finnish national strategy exist elsewhere
- And Housing First appears to offer the answer

# European Successes

- Every time Housing First is deployed in Europe it appears to work
- Tiny pilot projects held together with string in the UK, Sweden, Italy
- Full-fat government programmes, Denmark, Finland and the French RCT trial, *Un Chez-Soi d'abord* (2011-2016) and subsequent national programme
- 7-9 people housed @ 1 year

# But

- Not quite so simple
- Ambiguity
- Limits
- Risks

# Ambiguities

# Will the real Housing First please stand up?

- Sam Tsemberis and others argued strongly for fidelity, for near-replication of the original New York model
- Because of what happened in the US
- Federal funding for loosely defined Housing First
- Spartacus/Brian response
- Sometimes little more than changing the sign

# Differences

- Adaptation to Europe
- Welfare state in miniature model does not make a lot of sense in North Western European countries
- Universal welfare systems
- Universal health systems
- Extensive social housing
- So intensive case management (ICM) only models used

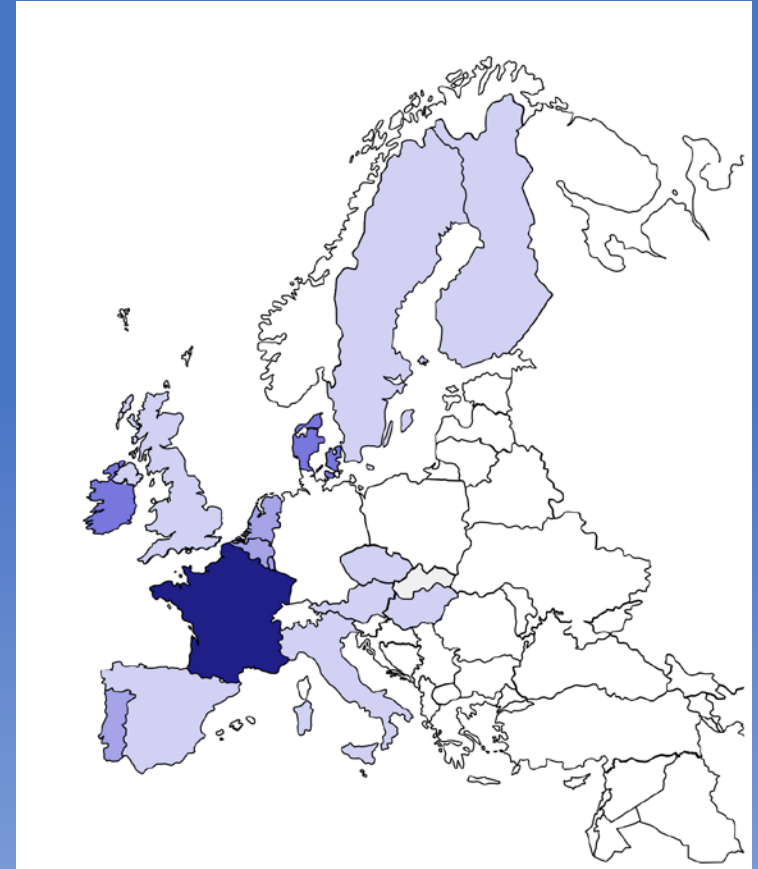
# More differences

- **Full tenancies in social rented housing**
  - Not sub letting/a lease
- **No financial controls**
  - No service making sure bills are paid first
- **Deemphasising behavioural modification**
  - Harm reduction
- **Greater emphasis on choice and control**
  - Not just consumer choice, but co-production
- **Congregate models**
  - Not scattered but clustered
- **Targeting**
  - All long term/repeat homelessness, no chaos indices, no mental health diagnosis



# Never mind the fidelity...

- Very high fidelity in France
- Quite high in Denmark
- But then falling away
- Crucially though, all these services are reported as successful



# Consistency

- Choice and control
- Harm reduction
- Separation of housing and support
- Own, settled home with mobile support
- Housing plus user-led support services
- But **not** on the operational details
- And **not** on the behavioural modification

# Limits

# Evidence base

- Is still largely North American
- Housing First is often being compared with treatment as usual that is not the same as European homelessness services
- Harsher, abstinence based
- Operating in a different context and culture
- Guy Johnson; Sharon Parkinson; Cameron Parsell (2012) *Policy shift or program drift? Implementing Housing First in Australia*

# Evidence base

- Top rehousing rates
- But, while you have to allow time, less certain on
  - Mental and physical health
  - Drugs and alcohol
  - Social integration
- Including the long-term study (5 years) Padgett et al in USA
- And European evidence base

# Key criticisms

- Is it just dispersed warehousing (Americans)
  - Not really sustainable if you look at **qualitative** evidence
- Its not doing anything beyond housing (Americans)
  - Some truth in this, but can you expect a miracle cure from one intervention (Volker Busch Geertsema) or expect it to work very quickly, bearing in mind who it is meant for?
- It is still behavioural modification using flawed North American constructs of homelessness as deviant individual pathology (European sociologists)
  - It is not really fully empowering, still controlling, true coproduction has not been achieved, again, some truth in relation to original model

# Limits

- Housing First is for people with high and complex needs
- France, Ireland, UK, most homelessness is not like that
- Economic causation
- Domestic violence and family homelessness
- Housing First is care and support for high need groups, a lot of people just need a house or help to avoid homelessness
- Crucial US evidence showing that support/treatment needs can develop *after* homelessness, it is better to prevent (and probably cheaper)

# Different environments

- In Denmark and Finland, Housing First is being used to reduce a residual social problem
- Homelessness is a hugely damaging thing to happen
- But the extensive social protection in these countries makes it unusual
- Danish and Finnish homeless people have higher and more complex needs and have fallen through extensive, universal safety nets
- Not so elsewhere, less protection from homelessness being triggered by *poverty*



# Cost effectiveness

- Best American evidence tends towards concluding that Housing First costs about the same
- But achieves better rates of rehousing
- Making it more cost effective
- Limited UK and European evidence suggests a similar pattern
- Cost offsets for other services may sometimes be large
- But Housing First will sometimes cause a spike in other spending
- And someone has to be costing a lot before the financial advantages are really clear

# Risks

# Housing First solves homelessness?

- It can get people with high and complex needs off the street and stop frequent flying
- But it only solves homelessness if you define homelessness in those terms
- And it cannot be 100%, in who it helps or meeting every need
- That is what it was designed to do in the first place and its creator would not claim more than that for it
- If homelessness is families, children and poor people with low or no support needs then no, Housing First does not solve homelessness
- And it is reactive, not preventative in design

# Think carefully about the evidence

- North American
- Basis for comparison is not the same
- Many UK services, for example, are harm-reduction, user-led and housing-led
- Being criticised as ‘obsolete’ and ‘ineffective’ compared to Housing First, based on a comparison made with very different services in another country
- Using one indicator, which is ending physical homelessness among people with high and complex needs
- It is a misrepresentation to simply portray all pre-Housing First models as inherently ineffective

# Using Housing First effectively

- There are long-term and repeatedly homeless people it can reach
- Frequent flyers and those who avoid all but basic services
- But that is not all homelessness
- Need to look beyond individual services or programmes and think about how Housing First is used

# The Finnish example

- Housing First is part of an integrated homelessness strategy
- Prevention
- Building of new social housing
- A mix of lower and higher intensity services, just one of which is Housing First
- It is targeted, it does a specific job
- Housing First is a philosophy, an ethos

# Structures

- There has to be an adequate, affordable housing supply with reasonable security of tenure
- Without that Housing First will not work
- You need housing if you are serious about homelessness prevention and about rapid rehousing

# The best solution

- Broadly speaking the more extensive the welfare and social policy spending that a society has, the more safety nets there are...
- The less homelessness there will be
- A key lesson from Europe is that
- If a society does nothing much about affordable housing supply, allows extremes of poverty to occur and does not look after citizen's health there will be more homelessness



# The best solution

- Housing First can help when people with complex needs fall through existing safety nets and avoid the risk of frequent flyers getting stuck in lower intensity services
- Strong case for Housing First, but look to Finland
- But you also need prevention, rapid rehousing, lower intensity services, high intensity supported housing
- And sufficient homes

Thanks for listening

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European Observatory on Homelessness

Women's Homelessness in Europe Network