Housing First in Europe
The Solution to Homelessness?

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Europe

• European Union (28 member states)
• Norway, Switzerland, Balkans
• Germany, UK and France are economies 4,5,6
• The EU is, collectively, the World’s 2nd largest economy
• But a lot of Europe is less prosperous
• Stark inequalities
• Around 508 million in EU (soon to be minus 66 million when UK leaves)
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

- Off the streets (Warehouse)
- Treat, accommodate and rehouse
- Integrated Housing-led approaches, provide independent homes and support
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
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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