



I-SPHERE
Institute for Social Policy, Housing and Equalities Research



Housing First Scotland Pathfinder Evaluation

Outcomes Data Collection Guidance

V 2.0 (updated post covid)

Background to the evaluation

The Housing First Scotland Pathfinder programme is being independently evaluated by Heriot-Watt University and ICF. It will: document the outcomes for service users; assess fidelity to the principles of Housing First; determine what factors facilitate or hinder delivery; calculate potential cost-benefits; and draw together operational 'lessons learned'. Evaluation findings will be used to inform the future development of Housing First in Scotland.

The evaluation consists of three main elements: 1) analysis of Housing First user outcomes data; 2) interviews with people using the service, staff, and other key stakeholders; and 3) cost-benefit analysis. This guidance relates to the first of these elements, i.e. the outcomes data. Outcomes data will be collected in two ways: firstly from the perspectives of people using the Housing First service via a questionnaire, and secondly from perspectives of frontline staff via New Directions Team (NDT) assessments.

Whose outcomes data should be collected?

All individuals recruited to the programme after 1 November 2019¹ should be invited to complete a questionnaire (with the help of a support worker or independently – see below) and grant permission for the outcomes data in their case file to be used for the evaluation. For ethical reasons participation in the evaluation is voluntary – so whilst everyone using Housing First should be strongly encouraged to contribute they should not be made to feel obliged to complete the questionnaire or share data with the evaluation team. Please do emphasise the importance of the evaluation and value of their input when inviting service users to contribute, but respect any refusals to do so.

When should it be collected?

Data should initially be collected for individual service users as soon as possible after their recruitment to Housing First, that is, after the point they are signed up as a Housing First 'case' (and no later than six weeks afterwards). It is critical that questions are answered in relation to their **situation at the point of recruitment** even if some time has passed between recruitment and questionnaire completion – otherwise there is a risk that any 'distance travelled' (e.g. recovery progress) thereafter may be under-reported. Please do bear this in mind when helping people fill in or administering the questionnaire.

¹ This outcomes data does not need to be collected for service users who were recruited to Housing First Pathfinder projects before evaluation data collection began, that is, before 1 November 2019.

Importantly, the development/maintenance of relationships and facilitation of levels of engagement with the service should always be given precedence over data collection. Please do exercise your professional discretion in determining when and how to invite an individual to contribute to the evaluation and respect any refusals to do so.

Outcomes data should also be collected every six months following recruitment for two years (i.e. at 6, 12, 18 and 24 months). The timing of data collection will inevitably be different for individuals using the service, so it is important to keep track of when each is due to complete an outcomes questionnaire and associated staff NDT assessments are due. **Please note that HNS can send prompts when an individual's follow-ups are due, but is only able to do this if that person's baseline data has been submitted electronically.**

If an individual's 6- or 12-month follow-up was 'missed' due to the impacts of the covid-19 pandemic, they can be invited to complete a survey at the next (e.g. 12- or 18-month) time-point and 'picked up again' that way. Regrettably, outcomes data cannot be collected retrospectively, so if a service user was not baselined during 2020 due to the pandemic they cannot be included in the outcomes data collection.

Housing First users may refuse to have evaluation outcomes data collected/shared at any or all of these points. The questionnaire for the later time-points (i.e. 6 months and thereafter) is different to the one used at recruitment; the baseline questionnaire is purple/blue in colour, the follow-ups green.

How should it be collected and who by?

Outcomes data will be collected in two ways (see Figure 1 below for a summary):

1) From people using Housing First via a questionnaire

Individuals using the service should be invited to contribute to the evaluation by a Housing First support worker. This will normally be the worker with which the individual has most contact, but if it is thought this might put the support relationship in jeopardy another member of the team can invite and/or assist them to complete the questionnaire (see below).

The worker should talk them through the baseline questionnaire coversheet which describes the purpose of the evaluation and explains how the data will be used. This emphasises that their decision regarding whether or not to contribute will have no effect on their eligibility for or the service provided by Housing First. Please reiterate the importance of the evaluation, emphasise that no identifying information will be included when this data is anonymously transferred to Heriot-Watt University, and assure them they will not be identifiable in reports from the evaluation.

Individuals who agree to participate should be asked to sign the 'outcomes questionnaire information and consent' cover-sheet. This records their consent for the anonymised data from the questionnaire and/or NDT assessment data held in their case files to be used for the evaluation. Signed cover-sheets should be kept securely in their case files.

Please exercise your professional judgement in deciding how the questionnaire might be most effectively administered on a case by case basis. If service users are confident to complete the paper questionnaire themselves, please do encourage them to do so, but check that they have

answered all the questions. Most questions have a 'prefer not to say' option, so please ensure this has been ticked if someone does not want to answer a particular question.

Alternatively, ask the questions verbally and complete the questionnaire on a Housing First user's behalf by recording their answers either on the paper questionnaire or electronically via the (identical) survey form provided by Homeless Network Scotland (HNS).

If recording responses on an individual's behalf, please take care not to influence their responses to the questions about self-perceived health, substance dependency, and financial wellbeing.

In some cases it may even be appropriate to 'pre-populate' parts of the questionnaire (e.g. re gender, nationality, housing status, benefits received) based on existing cases file records, if an individual grants their permission for you to do so. Care should however be taken to ensure that individuals do not feel 'disempowered' by such an action. Please adopt a pragmatic approach based on the nature of your relationship and professional judgement re what is appropriate in each case.

Regardless of who actually records the responses (i.e. staff member or service user), please do help Housing First users choose the appropriate answers when it comes to recording benefits received, engagement with the criminal justice system, and use of health services. Two heads are often better than one when answering these questions, especially given widespread confusion amongst the general public re benefit and health service classifications.

Please do assure everyone completing the survey that there are no 'right' and 'wrong' answers and encourage them to give truthful responses. It's important that they answer as honestly as possible, and don't feel obliged to answer in any way they might think they 'should'. If necessary, reiterate that the answers they give will not affect their eligibility for or the service they receive from Housing First.

Guidance regarding specific questions is provided in the box below.

2) From staff via a New Directions Team (NDT) assessment

If Housing First users consent to anonymised outcomes information from their case file to be shared with the evaluation team (see above), please ensure that an NDT form is completed. This data should be collected as close as possible to the point of recruitment (baseline) and again at 6 months, 12 months, 18 months, and 24 months thereafter. Consent for this to happen will be asked at each of these time-points and Housing First users may opt out of doing so at any or all time-points.

NDT assessments should ideally be completed by the support worker that works most closely/regularly with the individual service user. It is important that the same person conducts the assessment at each time-point (insofar as is practically possible) to maximise comparability.

A new NDT assessment should be done by a Housing First staff member even if it was used as a referral tool, so that it can most effectively measure change over time. These assessments should be conducted as close as possible to the time the service user completes an outcomes questionnaire (see above) but should not be conducted in the presence of the service user.

Figure 1: Outcomes data collection time-point summary

Recruitment (baseline)	6 months	12 months	18 months	24 months
Service user baseline questionnaire	Service user follow-up questionnaire			
+	+	+	+	+
Staff NDT	Staff NDT	Staff NDT	Staff NDT	Staff NDT

What should be done with the completed questionnaires?

Data from the Housing First user questionnaire and staff NDT assessments should be recorded via the online data collection tool provided by HNS. Training in the tool's use will be provided.

Individual service users should be identified by the unique identification number used on the Housing First Pathfinder Tracker System.

The information provided will be sent directly to and stored securely by HNS when the 'submit' button is clicked.

Tracker identification numbers will then be replaced with another unique identifier before data are sent securely to Heriot-Watt University to support the analysis of individual-level outcomes and cost-benefits.

Where can I get further information or advice?

If you would like advice or guidance regarding the logistics of outcomes data collection and submission processes, please do not hesitate to contact housingfirst@homelessnetwork.scot or David Kidd (David@homelessnetwork.scot), ph. 0141 420 7272. If you have any questions about the evaluation in general, please contact Prof Sarah Johnsen, I-SPHERE, Heriot-Watt University, s.johnsen@hw.ac.uk, ph. 0131 451 3642.

Guidance re specific questions within the Housing First user questionnaire

Unique ID: use the same ID for the individual as is used in the Housing First Scotland Pathfinder Tracker.

Housing status and history

- 'Where did you stay for most of the time in the last month...?': please select just one option and ensure that it is in reference to the month immediately before the individual was recruited to the HF programme (i.e. were signed up as a HF case).

- ‘Approximately how much time in total have you been homeless during your lifetime?’: the answer here will often be an estimate; please do encourage or assist individuals to calculate this as accurately they can. The total should include time spent sleeping rough, staying in hostels, B&Bs, other temporary accommodation and/or sofa surfing.

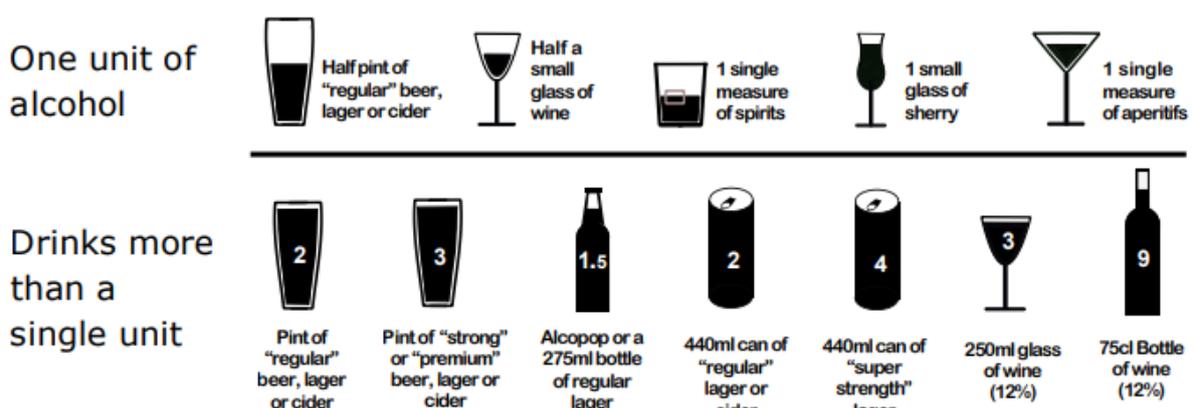
Health and wellbeing

- ‘How is your physical health in general?’: this is a self-perception question, so please do not challenge a service user’s assessment, even if you disagree.
- ‘How would you describe your mental health?’: this is also a self-perception question, so please do not challenge a service user’s assessment, even if you disagree.

Substance misuse

- ‘How often did you have a drink containing alcohol?’: if the answer to this is ‘never’, please skip the next two questions and then ask ‘Do you consider to yourself to be dependent on alcohol?’
- ‘How many units of alcohol did you drink on a typical day...?’: please help to calculate the relevant (approximate) sum using the alcohol unit reference diagram below. Please note that these can all of be of the same type of drink (e.g. beer or cider).
- ‘How often did you have six or more units [of alcohol] if female, or 8 if male in a single occasion...?’: again, please help to calculate the relevant (approximate) sum for that person’s gender (6 if female, 8 if male) using the alcohol unit reference diagram below. Please note that these can all of be of the same type of drink (e.g. beer or cider).
- ‘In the three months before ... did you receive treatment for alcohol misuse?’ or ‘...did you receive treatment for drug misuse?’: ‘yes’ should be ticked if the service user was involved with a community-based programme (e.g. AA/NA etc.), residential programme (e.g. residential detox/rehab), or medication-based treatment (e.g. methadone script).

Alcohol unit reference



Social inclusion

- ‘Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements...’: the questions here refer to any relationships that are considered important to the individual and might include any combination of family, friend or partner relationships. The key thing it tries to ascertain is how satisfied they are with their social relationships ‘in the round’, regardless of whom those are with.

Economic status, financial wellbeing and meaningful activity

- 'What were your sources of income...?': Please select all that apply at the point of recruitment. Tick 'other' if any illegal activity (e.g. theft) is mentioned.
- 'Which if any of the following benefits do you currently receive?': please do help individuals to select all the relevant benefits if they are unsure.
- 'How do you feel about the way you spend your time?': this question aims to get a sense of how satisfied people are with the way(s) they spend their time. They should for example choose a low score if they feel bored a lot of the time, but a higher score if regularly engaged in activities that they enjoy or feel are worthwhile/meaningful.

Crime/anti-social behaviour

- In the past six months ... did any of these things happen to you: these questions aim to get a sense of whether and if so how often people were victims or perpetrators of crime and/or anti-social behaviour. Please do help them to calculate relevant totals based on your knowledge of their recent interactions with enforcement agencies etc. if/where possible. It's likely that some of the figures given will need to be estimates.

Service use

- 'In the past six months ... how many times (if at all) did you...?': Please do help individuals to calculate relevant totals based on your knowledge of their recent interactions with health services. It's likely that some of the figures given will necessarily be estimates.

Goals

- Please record a short description of (up to three) of the individual's main goals re what they want to achieve once living in their own home. Please try to make it clear whether each relates to health, substance misuse, employability, social relationships etc. Insofar as possible, encourage individuals to reflect on their existing skills and aspirations.