

# Service Restrictions from Homeless Shelters

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**camh**

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# Acknowledgments

## Study 1

- At Home/Chez Soi researchers: Tim Aubry, Jino Distasio, Stephen Hwang, Eric Latimer, Julian Somers, Vicky Stergiopoulos
- Without A Home researchers: Stephen Gaetz, Sean Kidd, Bill O'Grady, Kaitlin Schwan
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## Study 2

- Researchers: Stephen Hwang, Sean Kidd, Nicole Kozloff, Carrie Anne Marshall, Amanda Noble, Alexia Polillo, Vicky Stergiopoulos
- Funding: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council; City of Toronto; Canadian Institutes of Health Research

# AGENDA

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- 1 Overview on Service Restrictions**
- 2 Factors Associated with Service Restriction**
- 3 Service Providers' Perceptions of Service Restrictions**
- 4 Effects of Service Restrictions**
- 5 Emergent Needs and Promising Practices**

# Research Methods

## Study 1

Quantitative data analysis from two large Canadian studies

1. At Home/Chez Soi: multisite RCT of Housing First

2. Without A Home: 2019 cross-sectional national youth homelessness survey

Research question: What are the predictors of service bans from homeless shelters?

## Study 2

(Ongoing)

Mixed-methods study examining safety in the homeless shelter

Two Ontario cities

Qualitative interviews with shelter staff, restricted service users, and other key informants

Online survey of 150 shelter staff

Future studies activities: analysis of administrative systems data, promising practices scan

# Overview on Service Restrictions

- Service restrictions refer to **permanent or temporary disallowances** from an organization or program, such as homeless shelters
- Also known as bans, bars, cards, and discharges
- Service restrictions **may be guided by regional standards/municipal policies** on how and when these can be administered
- Some shelter organizations **may use templates for service restrictions, such as drug possession = 30 days or property damage = 60 days**, whereas others address incidents on a case-by-case basis
- Administration of service restrictions varies between agencies, though many have a designated position that are the decision-makers (e.g., shift supervisor)

## Overview on Service Restrictions

- No study has examined the prevalence of service restrictions from homeless shelters, so **estimates are preliminary and vulnerable to methodological error**
- At Home/Chez Soi: **17.6% of homeless adults with mental illness had  $\geq 1$  service restrictions** from a shelter over a two-year period
- Without A Home: **8.2% of homeless youth stated that a service restriction was a reason for their not accessing a shelter** in the past year (caution needed with this estimate due to methodological concerns)

# Factors Associated with Service Restriction

Predictor	At Home/ Chez Soi	Without A Home
Age	—	—
Male gender	—	—
Racialized/non-white ethnicity	—	—
Earlier age of homelessness	^	^
More physical health conditions	^	
Impulse control difficulties	^	
Substance use disorders/substance use-related hospitalizations	—	—
<b>Recent involvement with the criminal justice system</b>	^	^
Engagement in survival sex behaviours		^
Experience of physical violence victimization		^

^ = significantly more likely to be restricted      — = not a significant predictor

# Factors Associated with Service Restriction

Qualitative interviews with homeless shelter staff and key informants from ongoing research highlight perceived groups at greater risk of service restrictions:

- People with serious mental illness and cognitive impairment
- People who use drugs
- Racialized people (excluding newcomers to Canada)

Other perceived contributing factors:

- Ineffective verbal de-escalation techniques by staff
- Staff beliefs and attitudes toward service restrictions
- City/region (significant predictor in At Home/Chez Soi analysis)



# Service Providers' Perceptions of Service Restrictions

- Over 150 staff were surveyed from 5 homeless shelters to understand their perceptions of service restrictions

“Overall, how supportive are you of shelter ban/restriction policies?”				
Very Unsupportive	Unsupportive	Neither Un/supportive	Supportive	Very Supportive
5.7%	3.8%	15.3%	47.8%	21.7%

- Greater support for service restrictions was significantly associated with:
  - Higher job satisfaction
  - Greater sense of safety at work
  - More positive perceptions of organizations' violence prevention practices
- No significant differences by work role (direct service vs. shift leader vs. management)

# Service Providers' Perceptions of Service Restrictions

On why homeless shelter staff feel this way about service restrictions:

- There are no alternative options
- Right to feel safe at work
- Responsibility to keep other people staying at the shelter safe
- Accountability to program rules/social norms (e.g., people cannot make threats in banks or restaurants, so you the same should apply in shelters)
- Consensus that restrictions are needed for physical and sexual violence; more uncertainty about how to handle verbal abuse and aggression, including oppressive language
- Restrictions are needed but there is a lack of consistency in application

# Service Providers' Perceptions of Service Restrictions

On responsibility to keep other people safe:

“It’s never good to be kicking somebody out of the shelter. If you call it a service restriction or a discharge, but to a client, they’ve lost their bed. So, that’s not working well ... however, we also are responsible for the people who stay here to feel safe. So, obviously interrupting behaviour that is dangerous is essential and we have to do that.”

On inconsistency in shelter restrictions:

“The inconsistency is an issue. Some [staff] are very rigid, ‘No, I’m done, finished.’ Whereas others use their relationship to support the process a bit differently, or better ... We call ourselves trauma-informed. We’re not. We’re on a journey to become trauma-informed.”

# Effects of Service Restrictions

- Immediate “pressure relief valve” for potentially volatile situations
- Anger among restricted individuals that increases risk of post-restriction violence elsewhere in shelter system
- Risk of post-restriction victimization from unsheltered homelessness
- Not perceived to yield behavioural change (i.e., does not prevent future behavioural problems or same-cause restrictions)
- Lost connections to health service providers
- Lost progress on housing applications and related case management work
- Conflict among staff based on service restriction disagreement
- “Bouncing around” the institutional circuit

# Effects of Service Restrictions

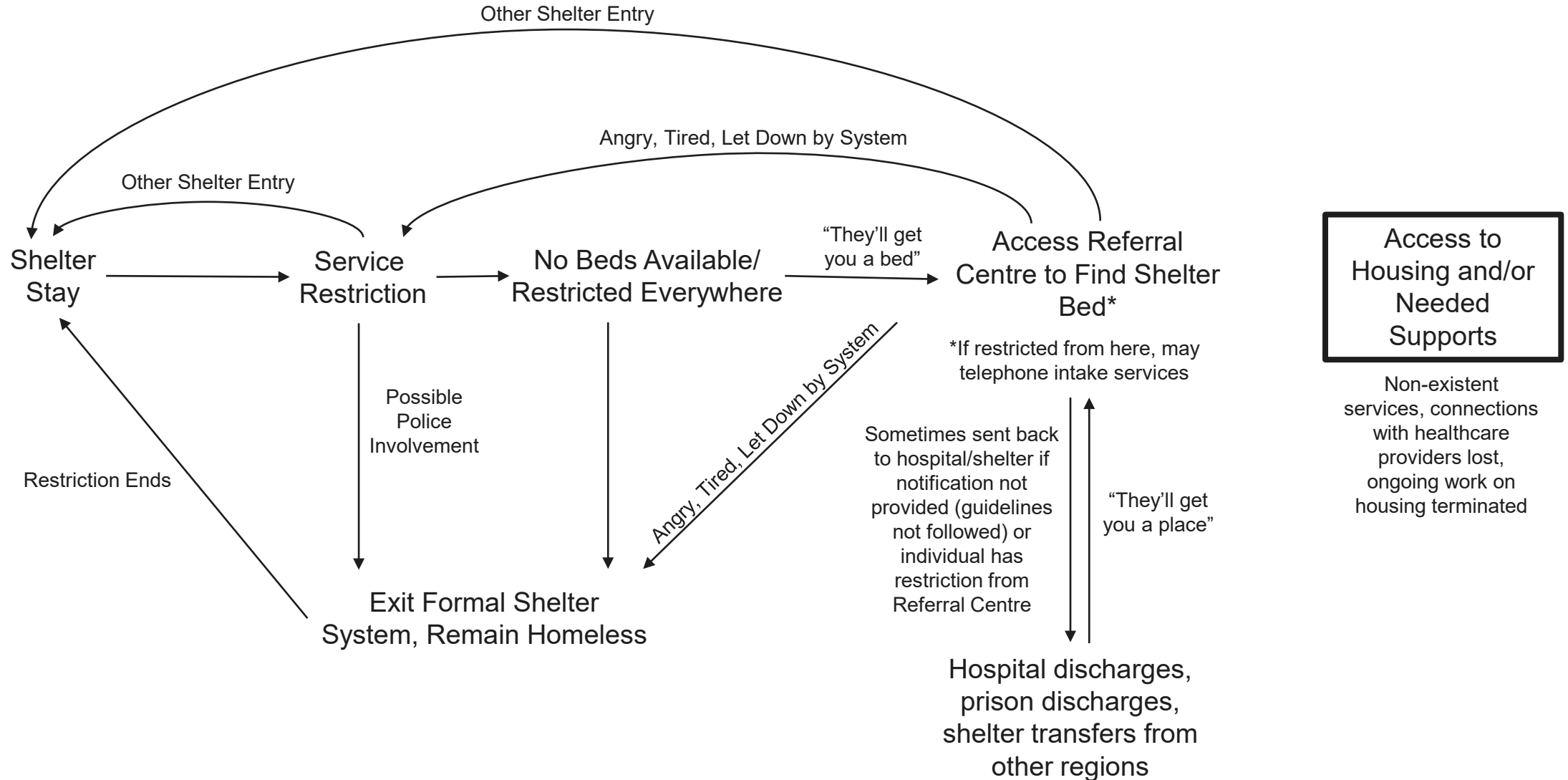
On conflicts between staff about service restriction decisions:

“Some believe [service restrictions are] the right [thing to do], some believe that this is not how we’re supposed to work. I think looking at the vision and mission of [the shelter], this is not supposed to be the way. But there’s clashes between what’s right, what’s wrong, what’s moral, what’s immoral. And, we have a lot of discussion about that within teams as well.”

On risk of post-restriction victimization:

“They can’t go nowhere and like what’s the alternative for them now, right? So, they’re in the streets, it’s cold – people die in the streets, bad things happen, people are victimized, assaulted, robbed. Many bad things ... having nowhere to go gives you little hope and promise.”

# Effects of Service Restrictions: The Institutional Circuit



# Emergent Needs and Promising Practices

- Need for a specialized program/supports for people with many service restrictions
- Need for more specialized crisis-based mental health supports in the shelter system
- Need for more consistency in service restriction decisions within and beyond organizations
- Restorative justice/reparative interventions following completion of service restrictions (some shelters have discussed this but not yet implemented)
- Organizational ombudsman whom people can contact to appeal a restriction (with accessible written information/business card)


# Thank You

If you would like to be notified about  
study updates and forthcoming  
publications, please contact:

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## Shelter Bans Among People Experiencing Homelessness: an Exploratory Study of Predictors in Two Large Canadian Datasets

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**Abstract** Emergency shelters are a core component of homeless service systems that address immediate basic needs. Service bans, which refer to temporary or permanent disallowances from a program or organization, are an underresearched phenomenon that can leave people experiencing homelessness without needed supports. This exploratory study examined the factors associated with shelter bans among people experiencing homelessness using secondary

data from two Canadian studies: (1) a multisite randomized controlled trial of Housing First (At Home/ Chez Soi Demonstration Project) and (2) a cross-sectional survey of youth experiencing homelessness across Canada (2019 Without a Home–National Youth Homelessness Survey). The two datasets were analyzed separately using logistic regression models with similar predictors to maximize the comparability of the results. Participants who experienced