

# How Ready Are We to Implement the Operating Principles for Emergency Shelters?

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Territorial Social Services Department

The Salvation Army, Canada and Bermuda Territory

## INTRODUCTION

This document presents an overview of what we know to date about how ready The Salvation Army is to implement the Operating Principles in its Canadian emergency shelters. It contains information from the feedback received during the webinars conducted to inform emergency shelter staff about the Operating Principles in April 2015.

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### THE SALVATION ARMY OPERATING PRINCIPLES FOR EMERGENCY SHELTERS

**Principle 1:** We take a person-centred, holistic approach and ensure that people with particular vulnerabilities are supported.

**Principle 2.** We help people experiencing chronic and episodic homelessness to access stable, positive housing and appropriate supports.

**Principle 3.** We use harm reduction principles to guide services to clients and behaviour-based criteria for restricting access to shelter.

**Principle 4.** We ensure people who have high needs receive accompaniment and follow-up services.

**Principle 5.** We aim to make every discharge from shelter an organized departure.

**Principle 6.** We coordinate services and participate in planning with community partners.

**Principle 7.** We track and analyze outcomes to inform planning and policy decisions and continuously improve services.

## WEBINARS & POLLS

Four English webinars and one French webinar were held between April 7 and April 13, 2015, with emergency shelter directors and program leads across Canada. The purpose of the webinar was to share the Operating Principles with staff, provide an opportunity for questions and discussion, and gauge readiness to implement the principles. 46 of the 51 emergency shelters in Canada (90%) participated in the webinars. 76 staff attended and 61 responded to the polls. Polls were conducted throughout the webinars. Following each explanation of an Operating Principle, the facilitator asked respondents to rate **how ready** they felt their emergency shelters were to implement each of the principles on a scale of 1 to 5.

| WEBINAR POLL QUESTIONS – GAUGING READINESS  | RESPONSES<br>(Rate from 1 to 5)                      |
|---|--|
| P1. How ready is your shelter to provide person-centred, holistic care & ensure people with vulnerabilities are supported?      | 5: We already do this – no change needed             |
| P2. How ready is your shelter to help people experiencing chronic & episodic homelessness access housing & supports?            | 4: Some changes will be needed                       |
| P3a. How ready is your shelter to use harm reduction principles to guide services to clients?                                   | 3: Not sure / neutral                                |
| P3b. How ready is your shelter to use behaviour-based criteria for restricting access to shelter?                               | 2: Many changes will be needed                       |
| P4a. How ready is your shelter to ensure clients with high needs receive accompaniment?<br>(Whether from you or another agency) | 1: We do not do this at all – complete change needed |
| P4b. How ready is your shelter to ensure clients with high needs get follow-up services? (Whether from you or another agency)   |  |
| P5. How ready is your shelter to aim to make every discharge an organized departure?  |  |
| P6a. How ready is your shelter to coordinate services with external agencies?   |  |
| P6b. How ready is your shelter to participate in planning with community partners?  |  |
| P7. How ready is your shelter to track and analyze outcomes?  |  |

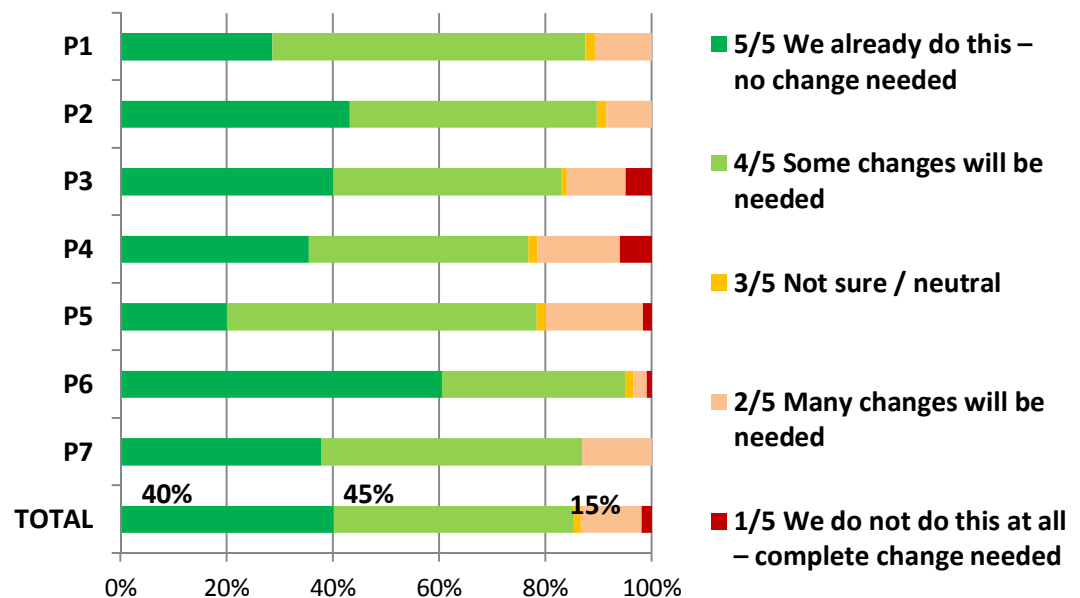
## KEY FINDINGS

**Overall, emergency shelter staff feel confident that they are ready to implement the principles.** 85% of responses to the webinar polls indicated “We already do this – no change needed” (40% of all responses) or “Some changes will be needed” (45% of all responses). 11% of responses indicated “Many changes will be needed” and only 2% of responses indicated “We do not do this at all – complete change needed.” This confidence was reflected in webinar participants’ comments (see Sidebar on the next page).

Staff felt most confident in their ability to implement Principle 6 (service coordination and planning with community partners) and least confident in their ability to implement Principle 4 (ensuring high-needs clients receive accompaniment and follow-up services). For Principle 6, 95% of poll responses indicated either “We already do this – no change needed” or “Some changes needed.” Principle 4 received the lowest score, with 76% of responses indicating “We already do this – no change needed” or “Some changes needed.” (See **Figure 1.**) Lack of resources was identified as the key barrier to implementation.

**Principle 5 (organized departures)** received the fewest “We do this already – no change needed” responses (20%). During the discussions, several people challenged the feasibility of ensuring organized departures for all clients. They pointed out that there will

**Figure 1: Webinar Poll Data by Principle**



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**“We tried to implement many of these principles back in 2003. We had no idea it was called ‘Housing First.’ It just seemed like the Christian thing to do at the time. I’ve been at three different shelters now as an executive director and it’s done differently everywhere. So I’m just really excited that we have something we can look at and say, No, this is what we’re supposed to be aiming for.”** ~ Major Kathie Chiu, Executive Director, Richmond House, BC

**“Philosophically, the principles are perfect. The cost to implement the accompaniment and follow-up will be our challenge.”**  
~ Nancy Powers, Executive Director, London Centre of Hope, ONG

**“The Seven Operating Principles really re-affirm the approach of meeting a client where they are at, including their individual needs that they are struggling to meet. And we do after all exist to meet human needs.”** ~ Trevor Loria, Manager of Men's Residential Services, Calgary Centre of Hope, ANT

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always be a need for sudden client discharges due to threats or violent behaviours, and these discharges will not count as “organized departures.”

Staff felt ready to implement **Principle 3**, both:

- **Using behaviour-based criteria to determine access to the shelter** (34% said “We already do this – no change needed” & 50% said “Some changes needed”)
- **Using harm reduction principles to guide services to clients** (46% said “We already do this – no changes needed” and 36% said “Some changes needed”).

During discussions, this principle was the one staff asked the most questions about and made the most requests for additional supports, such as sample policies and procedures, a list of definitions, strategies for managing risks and liabilities, and further clarification regarding lower and higher barrier versions of behaviour-based criteria. Participants expressed appreciation that Harm Reduction Guidelines supporting Principle 3 are in development.

The discussion of **Principle 7** focused on how this principle might be implemented and the explored the development of standardized definitions. Questions were also raised about which software might be used. Suggestions included versions of SAMIS (The Salvation Army’s internal data collection system), HIFIS (the data management software supported by the federal government), and a new to-be-developed National Data Management System.

**Principles 1, 2, and 6** did not generate discussion.

## NEXT STEPS

A follow-up email requesting feedback on the webinar posed the question, “What types of communications or other supports would be helpful for you in the future?” Below are responses summarized and organized by theme.



### TRAINING & MENTORSHIP

- List of resources
- One-on-one communications between shelter directors and Territorial consultants throughout the implementation process
- Regular email updates
- Regular webinars
- In-person training



### COMMUNICATION MATERIALS FOR SHELTERS TO SHARE

- Standardized PowerPoint materials that may be shared with staff, community advisory councils, funders, and others
- Talking points
- Posters printed with the new Operating Principles on them for display in Salvation Army emergency shelters



### INFORMATION SHARING AMONG MINISTRY UNITS

- Processes for sharing tools, processes, and policies that have been successful in other shelters
- Ways to connect a unit with a question on a particular topic with a unit that has expertise in that topic
- Regular networking and information-sharing opportunities, including teleconferences and regional in-person meetings