

Moving Policy & Protocol

Approved September 1, 2010

Purpose:

To set out the policies and processes related to furnishings of units for MHCC tenants assigned to services + housing intervention.

Principles:

The key project principles with respect to furnishings include:

- speed – ensuring that furnishings are available and in place at the time that tenants move into their new homes
- tenant as owner – the tenant assumes ownership of the furnishings purchased on their behalf
- sustainability – the housing model is a model that could reasonably be replicated in the future
- stewardship – the project is funded through taxpayer dollars, and therefore, every effort must be made to ensure dollars are used wisely and for the furtherance of the project objectives. Multiple agencies will be involved in decision making and funding approvals, therefore, roles and authorities must be clearly established.
- alignment with other policies and protocols: this policy and protocol must fit within the framework of other Toronto Site policies and protocols which may relate to this policy and protocol.

Related Protocols & Documents:

- Interim Housing (May 14/10 version)
- Access to Housing (May 27/10 version JC)
- Moves (to be finalized; SJ) and related consent forms regarding disposition of furnishings
- MHCC site on Housing Connections Web-site (www.housingconnections.ca/Default.asp) - Furniture Checklist, Tenant Consent for Furniture Deliveries form
- Emergency Furnishings Policy
- Bedbugs prevention and management protocol

Roles:

Service Providers:

The housing model for Toronto is based on the Service Provider (SP) having the lead responsibility for helping their client to find and keep housing, which includes making arrangements for initial furnishings of the tenant's unit.

City & Housing Connections:

- Maintaining budget for furnishings for MHCC Toronto Site

- Purchasing and supplying linen packages to SPs
- Determining standard furniture packages (one-bedroom; two-bedroom); recommended by HWG and approved by SOT
- Accessing furniture providers through competitive process
- In partnership with SP, arranging delivery and set up
- Supporting moves and storage (see Moving protocol)

Background:

This protocol is about the basic furnishings & linen package for a tenant upon first occupancy of their new home. For information about moving of furniture and disposition, see the Moving Protocol.

Furnishings Overview:

The City through HC has lead responsibility for furnishings, including delivery and set up. Service agencies working with the participant are responsible for supporting the participant to receive furnishings, linen package, and other steps to complete the setting up of their new home.

A total of \$1,500 one time per participant is budgeted for furnishings, and should also cover the linen package¹. Delivery and set up are provided for, and are charged to a separate budget so as to maximize the amount of funding put towards buying furniture. These financial arrangements are made through HC, and billed back to the City's MHCC budget through the quarterly reconciliations.

Furniture "packages" have been determined in consultation with the Housing Working Group, and approved by SOT. The furniture packages were purchased through a competitive process. The package contents were determined based on an analysis of outcomes that the furniture must achieve:

- Sleeping – the clients must have furniture that supports quality sleep over the term of the program. Where possible this should be a proper bed. Where unit size and layout does not permit then a quality multi-function furniture piece such as futon or daybed will be considered;
- Sitting – the client must have furniture that supports comfortable sitting in their unit. There should be comfortable seating for the client and at least two guests.
- Eating – the client must have furniture that provides seating and surface for eating meals, playing cards, completing forms, etc.
- Storage – the client must have furniture with sufficient space to store personal effects, clothing, etc. Between the cupboards, closets, vanities, etc. the client should have sufficient space for normal storage.

HC will furnish vacant inventory units. The first occupant of an inventory unit shall take ownership of the furnishings therein.

¹ There may be exceptions – see discussion below.

The SP will be responsible for coordinating the furnishings of unfurnished units for their clients, with assistance from HC. A key role for SPs is to help ensure the unit can be accessed to make deliveries, thereby avoiding additional costs – a consent form for this purpose is available on the HC website, as well as additional information on furnishings.

Key points:

- funding will be for the one time provision of furniture, and paid directly to the furniture provider by HC (to avoid these funds being counted as income and offset from income supports)
- the participant owns the furniture even if they are discharged; in case of loss or damage to furniture, the SP will work with the individual and/or Income Assistance to secure necessary furniture;
- the Moving protocol will include procedures for storage and/or moving of furnishings in the event of a move
- linen packages shall be purchased in bulk from the City MHCC budget, and distributed to service provider offices to use when needed; inventory furnished units shall include the linen package at the unit
- bed bug covers have been purchased separately by TNSS, and are provided to each SP to provide to their clients.
- The participant will purchase other household Items with assistance of the support worker. Assistance includes helping the participant to access community start-up benefits (CSUB) as appropriate.

Emergency Furnishings

The goal is to have furnishings be provided for tenant use when they are ready to occupy the unit. From time to time, there will be delivery problems. Service workers will work directly with HC to resolve problems. In addition, for participants who prefer to take up occupancy in advance of furnishings, and emergency furnishings policy and procedure has been developed and is posted on the HC website, and service agencies have been provided financial assistance from the City's MHCC contract to make these purchases. Emergency furnishings purchases do not count against the \$1,500 per person furniture allowance, and remain the property of the participant. For participants who do not wish to occupy a unit in advance of furnishings, the service worker will assist them in accessing other accommodations until such time as the unit may be occupied. In rare situations, this may include accessing an Interim Unit – refer to the Interim Housing Protocol for more information.

Additional Furnishings Package

There may be situations where it is appropriate to replace all or some of a participant's furnishings and/or linen package – when through no (or little) fault of their own, the furnishings cannot be retrieved. For example, where a unit has been "taken over" and the tenant is having to move to a new home, and neither the tenant nor SP is able to safely retrieve the furnishings.

The circumstances will not be possible to predict, and so a process is required to ensure that a fair, equitable and effective/efficient decision is made. Therefore, on principle – furnishings/linens should be replaced only as a last resort when all other efforts to recover have failed and/or are not feasible. By feasible what is meant is that it would

take too long to retrieve, likely damaged, may negatively impact the participant and/or landlord relationship, etc. Efforts to recover may also include efforts to find other funds to replace the non-retrievable furnishings.

In terms of determining whether it makes sense to abandon the furnishings, HC and the SP will jointly decide on the best approach as they are closest to the situation and best able to respond. If there are conflicts, the conflict resolution approach set out in the MOU shall be followed.

If the furnishings are subsequently retrievable, HC will determine their disposition. If they are in good condition, they shall be donated to the Furniture Bank for use by others in our community who are participating in housing first programs (e.g. Streets to Homes). HC will make these arrangements, including payment of any delivery fee required. If the furnishings are in poor condition, they will be disposed of.

In any situation where additional furnishings/linen are purchased by MHCC funds, HC and the SP shall jointly document the situation, reason for their decision, and results².

Questions & Answers:

Q1. Why is the furnishings package the same for everyone?

A. The basic furnishings package is based on the package developed by MHCC-National for the bulk purchase from the Brick, modified to suit bachelor units. Standard packages have been determined to:

- Maximize savings, thereby maximizing the amount of furniture that can be purchased within the \$1,500 cap
- Minimize ordering time, thereby helping to ensure the furniture is available when the tenant is ready to take occupancy

It is understood that the degree to which a participant can personalize their space can influence their recovery and sense of home. To that end, the intent of the furniture package is to provide quick, basic, good quality and necessary furnishings.

Individualization comes from the SP working with their client to acquire less expensive, more easily transportable, and more personalized items for their home – décor, cutlery, additional furnishings, etc.), largely funded through CSUB. For example, the linen package includes a shower liner rather than a shower curtain:

- lets the client use the shower asap while protecting the washroom from water
- leaves it to the client to decide how they want to decorate the washroom (shower curtains can be quite inexpensive and an easy way to add individual design)

Note, the Toronto Site believes that this approach is in compliance with the Fidelity criteria item 1 to provide participants with “much” choice in furnishings and decorating.

² This documentation is needed by the City to justify the decision to use MHCC funds for this purpose.

Q2. Why doesn't the furnishings package include a TV? Phone?

A. Clearly loneliness will be an issue for many participants, especially the quiet of a private apartment after leaving a noisy street or shelter. Depending upon the individual's lifestyle choices, TVs and phones can help.

The package does not include TVs³ and phones primarily because of the ongoing operating costs to the tenants. TVs and phones have monthly fees that the tenant would need to pay from their income remaining after payment of the shelter component for rent, and the amount is quite high relative to income remaining for food, household costs, transit, etc. A tenant wishing to purchase a phone or TV is certainly able to do so if they so choose, and the capital costs are often quite manageable depending upon what models are chosen. However, this is a decision that the tenant needs to make on their own (with help from the SP) considering their entire budget.

The ongoing operating cost is not within the budget provided for the project by MHCC. Even if it were, and the administrative burden could be managed, there is a risk that amounts paid may be considered as income by income assistance programs, and offset from the tenant's monthly benefit payment⁴. Further, there is a limit on what may be purchased with the \$1,500/client allowance for furnishings, and the Toronto site decided to invest in basic needed furnishings as per the MHCC National approach.

There are options for the SP in assisting their client:

- Where a telephone is needed to permit access to the tenants building per the security process, OW/ODSP will permit these monthly payments to be covered from the shelter component (provided there is room remaining)
- Similarly, where a TV is required, cable payments may be covered
- In some parts of the City and for some types of TVs, "rabbit ears" may work. Newer TVs may not have this option. The SP should ask the landlord if there is good reception in the building before deciding with the participant on this approach.
- The tenant may decide to purchase a TV (often lower cost TVs available on Craigslist, Kijiji, etc.) or \$0 cost cell phone and manage the payments.
- Some may prefer instead to purchase a TV & DVD player to rent shows or borrow from the library

Clients may prefer to purchase a radio.

Additional Research

³ Note – the training provided to ACT team members in September 2009 by Pathways noted that “the typical start up furniture package includes . . . television set”. This information was not included in the training provided to ICM or Housing, although a copy of the document was made available. The inclusion of a TV is not mandatory. In addition, the training for ACT members notes that all participants must have a phone, however this is not mandatory – this information was not provided to ICM or Housing directly and was not noted as a condition of funding or the national furnishings package.

⁴ Further research is being done to determine if there is a way to pay on behalf of clients without negatively impacting their income supports.

Additional research is being undertaken on the potential for provision of phones and cable TV services (installation, monthly operating costs) paid for by MHCC.

Phones: HWG recommended provision of, at a minimum, a basic land line without features (such as long distance calling). The reasoning is that phones can help with participant security, and would make connecting with SPs and Researchers more efficient thereby enhancing delivery of the At Home project. The decision would ultimately be made by SOT, and any changes would be reflected through an amendment to this protocol. Bulk purchasing may save money.

Cable – research is also being done about the potential for bulk purchasing of cable TV for clients. If feasible and supported by SOT, any changes would be reflected through an amendment to this protocol. Bulk purchasing may save money.

Q3. What is being done to mitigate against bedbugs?

The linen package includes a bedbug cover for the pillow and mattress coordinated through TNSS (delivered to 399 Church and distributed from that location). By purchasing new furnishings and opting wherever possible in the basic package to avoid cloth, some risk is managed and clean up may be easier. Quality checks of units prior to approving them for inclusion in the project by HC, and a move in check, may help identify problems existing prior to occupancy. Regular unit checks by the SP after occupancy can also help. In addition, clients are encouraged to wash all belongings before moving into their new home.

Additional information will be provided in the in the bedbug protocol currently being developed.

Q4. Are tenants allowed to personalize their homes through painting, pictures, etc.?

A. Often the tenants' lease will include rules about painting walls, hanging pictures, and other decorating that would have a lasting impact in the unit. SPs and the tenant should refer to the lease prior to undertaking any decorating that may affect the unit (walls, floors, windows, etc.). It is recommended that painting be discussed with the landlord/property management – they may have requirements for colours, and may sometimes pay for the paint. If SPs need advice, contact HC.

Q5. Can the tenant sell their furniture?

A. Yes – it belongs to them. We hope they don't as they then might be without needed furnishings, but it is their decision.

Q6. What happens if the furniture is damaged?

A. Like any other tenant, damaged furniture may be replaced, fixed, or not replaced. The project will not purchase replacement furnishings – the \$1,500 cap is a one time investment for the individual. If there is extensive damage, check with the

tenant insurance program (see link on HC site). CSUB may be available as well – in particular for bedbug infestations (discuss with OW/ODSP worker). There is an exception in rare situations. If the damage may be related to a defect, check with HC to determine if a warranty may apply.

Next Steps:

- Provide this protocol, once approved, to SP's with request that the Protocol be reviewed with their staff.
- Ongoing updates to this Protocol will be done as required by City of Toronto staff, for approval by SOT or its delegate.

Appendix A: Furnishing Items

Using the Principals above the 1 bedroom units have the following items:

Outcome	Solution
Sleeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full size box spring and mattress • Bedframe
Sitting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loveseat • Club chair • Dining Chairs from below
Eating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small dining table • Two chairs
Storage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bedroom bureau • Night side table • 3 piece coffee and end table set

Using the Principals above, the Bachelor units have the following items:

Outcome	Solution
Sleeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single box spring and mattress • Bedframe
Sitting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Club chair • Futon identified above • Dining Chairs from below • Storage cubes and coffee table from below
Eating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small dining table • Two chairs
Storage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nights side table • Large ottoman that has internal storage. Suitable for sitting (2), storage of effects and use as coffee table. • Small storage cube Suitable for sitting (1), storage of effects and use as side. • Bachelor units typically have greater storage space/closets built with shelving for client's close