Reviewer’s report

Title: Evaluation of the Housing First Program in patients with severe mental disorders in France: a randomized controlled trial

Version: 1 Date: 31 May 2013

Reviewer: Stephen Hwang

Reviewer’s report:

Comment for Authors:

This is an important and timely study evaluating Housing First in a European setting. Given the growing popularity of this model, it will be interesting to consider the efficacy and policy implication of this intervention within context of the French system of national health and social care. The authors have set out a rigorous and comprehensive evaluation protocol. However, several major and minor revisions are required to the manuscript before this study is ready for publication.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Page 2, Paragraph 2: The authors should clearly state in the abstract how they define “costly health services” (e.g., from page 7: number of hospital admissions, days in hospital, and emergency department visits).

2. Page 2: The authors should state in the abstract the anticipated total number of participants to be enrolled in the study.

3. Page 4, Paragraph 2: The authors describe housing first as model offering stable housing with no treatment, follow up or abstinence conditions. The phrasing of this sentence may confuse readers. Readers should be clear that appropriately matched services are an important part of the housing first approach.

4. Page 4, Paragraph 2: Choice (the idea that individuals can exercise some degree of choice regarding the location and type of housing they receive) is a key principle of housing first, and should be included in authors’ description of the model.

5. Page 4/5, Background: Please include the following in the backgrounds section:
   a) A clear description of what constitutes TAU in the current context.
   b) Details about the funding/funders and partners for the current project.
   c) A description of the makeup and function of the ACT and ICM teams (e.g., staffing ratios)
Much of this information is left to the discussion and should be moved to the background section.

6. Page 6/7, Study Design: The authors should clearly state that they are using both quantitative and qualitative methods. In the first sentence on page 7, when the authors begin describing the qualitative methods, it is unclear whether they are describing a specific component of the data collection or characterizing the entire study.

7. Page 7, paragraph 1: The first two sentences describing the qualitative methods should be reviewed. The authors should clarify the following in this description:
   a. What constitutes a “generalizable study design”?
   b. How will qualitative data be collected and at what intervals will these methods be administered?
   c. Will information regarding a participant’s culture be collected for demographic reasons or will qualitative interviews explore issues relating to the participants culture?

8. Page 7: The authors define costly health services as: number of hospital admissions, number of days in hospital, and number of emergency department visits. The authors should clarify if they will treat these as separate outcomes or how they plan to model them together? Hospital admissions and length of stay are highly correlated. The authors should explain their rationale for specifying both of these outcomes.

9. Page 10: The authors should provide expected values or rates at baseline for primary outcomes (e.g., how many hospitalizations or emergency visits) in order to establish reference points for the 20% differences they hope to detect.

Minor Essential Revisions

10. This submission will require careful editing for readability, grammar and syntax issues. For example:
   o Page 4: Tense in sentence 1, paragraph 1.
   o Page 4: Sentence 6, paragraph 1 is a run on sentence
   o Page 7: sentence 3, paragraph 1: “direct observational” should be “direct observation”.

11. Page 6, paragraph 2: The term “evaluations” is incorrectly applied here. The sentence should be revised to state that quantitative data will be collected by trained research assistants during face-to-face interviews.

12. Page 4: The authors should clarify what percentage of people who are homeless in France suffer from severe and persistent mental illness.

13. Page 9: The reference to Table 1. Assessment Schedule should be moved into the section detailing the study design.
14. Page 9: The authors should clarify membership of steering committee.

Discretionary Revisions:

1. We recommend adding mental illness and evaluation as key words.

2. Do the authors anticipate different rates of attrition between control and treatment participants? Have they considered the possibility of using different incentives for TAU participants as these individual should be expected to have greater rates of attrition.

3. Page 6: How will researchers assess a person’s intent to stay within the same city for the follow up period? How will researchers follow participants if/when participants move to another jurisdiction?

4. Page 12: The authors highlight 2007 legislation introducing a theoretically enforceable right to housing for all citizens. How has this affected France’s homeless population and what are the implications for assessing the impact of the Housing first model.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.