

# Client Prioritization

## Purpose

This resource was developed in response to the recognition of the need to assist service providers in directing services to those who need it most, as is valued under a Housing First approach.

If seeking to deliver improved client/service prioritization:

- Review the tools provided using the available links
- Consider the costs and benefits of using each tool as outlined
- Determine which tool will best serve your organization

Communities may benefit from developing a consistent method of using these prioritization tools to provide consistent service to clients and assist in communication throughout the community.

At this time, neither tool provides the capability of distinguishing between recommending service under Intensive Case Management or Assertive Community Treatment, the typical client support approaches found within Housing First programming.

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## Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT)

Tool and Background:

[http://www.desc.org/documents/09.11.2012.DESC.Intro to Vulnerability Assessment Tool.in cl%20VAT%20&%201-page%20validity.pdf](http://www.desc.org/documents/09.11.2012.DESC.Intro%20to%20Vulnerability%20Assessment%20Tool.in%20cl%20VAT%20&%201-page%20validity.pdf)

The VAT was developed by the Downtown Emergency Service Center (DESC) in Seattle Washington as “a structured way of measuring a homeless person’s vulnerability to continued instability”.<sup>1</sup> It provides 10 different items measured on unique scales to assess the relative vulnerability of clients completing the tool. These elements include:

- survival skills,
- ability to meet basic needs,
- indicated mortality risks,
- medical risks,
- personal organizational capacity,
- mental health status,
- substance use,
- ability to communicate,
- social behaviours,
- length of time homeless

The VAT is intended to allow services providers to identify those at highest vulnerability or those who are the highest services users and prioritize service to them.

## Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT)

Tool: <http://www.orgcode.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/VI-SPDAT-Manual-2014-v1.pdf>

Manual: <http://www.orgcode.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/VI-SPDAT-Manual-2014-v1.pdf>

The VI-SPDAT resulted from the combination of two tools, the Vulnerability Index developed by Community Solutions and the Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tools developed by OrgCode.

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<sup>1</sup> DESC, *Vulnerability Assessment Tool: for determining eligibility and allocating services and housing for homeless adults.*



The VI-SPDAT covers five domains:

- General Information
- Historing of Housing and Homelessness
- Risks
- Socialization and Daily Functions
- Wellness

The VI-SPAT recommends partnering its use with the Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT) which provides a more in depth analysis of a client’s current situation.

## Comparisons

|                                 | VAT   | VI-SPDAT  |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Time to complete</b>         | Can easily be completed in one session                                | May take multiple sessions to complete  |
| <b>Level of intrusiveness</b>   | Limited levels of intrusiveness                                       | May be considered intrusive by some   |
| <b>Training requirements</b>    | Required to receive training by DESC                                  | Available manuals are sufficient for training                                       |
| <b>Data sharing obligations</b> | Provide feedback and/or de-identified data                            | Not required  |
| <b>Prioritization focus</b>     | Prioritizes highest vulnerability or service use but not service type | Assists in matching clients with most appropriate support and housing interventions |
| <b>Support by HIFIS</b>         | Can be programmed but no reporting capability                         | Full data entry and reporting expected to be available from current beta            |

## Considerations for Selection

Both tools have intellectual property claims by their developers and as such cannot be altered for use. Therefore, the issue at hand is selecting an appropriate tool, rather than seeking to amend a tool for use. Selection of use is about finding a tool that best meets the needs of the community.



## Priority: Service Level Identification

Tool to use: VI-SPDAT

Considerations:

- Service providers need to be prepared to manage assessments that are either lengthy (potentially more than one day if needed by the client) and could be draining
- If assessments span multiple days, it may impact the amount of time required to place an individual in housing, i.e. if it takes three days to determine that a client should be receiving Housing First services, this will increase the amount of time required to find housing
- If assessments do take a greater span of time then a specific plan must be established to appropriate accommodate clients while they are being assessed, with the recognition that interim housing may be more helpful for individuals than shelter accommodation
- While the VI-SPDAT categorizes clients as recommended for Housing First Assessment, it does not distinguish between clients recommended for Assertive Community Treatment and Intensive Case Management. This is particularly important for providers delivering HPS Housing First services as they will only be funded to deliver ICM services.
- If the VI-SPDAT is used across the community, effort should be made to analyze scores and determine whether assessment scores can be differentiated to recommended ACT or ICM treatment. This would likely require consultation with the creators of the VI-SPDAT.

## Priority: Speedy Assessment

Tool to use: VAT

Considerations:

- As training is required to use this assessment, it would benefit the community if Metro Vancouver trainers could be trained to trainer assessors in many organizations
- Alternative recording methods may need to be developed but this could be completed with relative ease through the use of an Excel spreadsheet
- It is understood that BC Housing is currently using this tool in some of their sites and the above steps may already have been completed in some capacity
- If the VAT is used, plans should be made to collectively share data with DESC
- The VAT makes no recommendations for service delivery type and if it is to used, additional work would be required to determine how to recommend this



## Recommendations

- If one tool is to be selected, then a determination needs to be made on the available community investment in supporting the tool. If no funds are available to support training, development of spreadsheets and data sharing then the VI-SPDAT is likely the only option. If support is available, then determination rests with what best suits community need.
- If recommendation of service delivery type is key for the community then VI-SPDAT should be used.
- A potentially study that could assist in final selection of an assessment tool would assess the relative construct validity of each test in how well the tests assessed the needs of the clients served, including capacity to recommend treatment by ACT or ICM teams. Secondly the study could test the convergent validity of each of the tests. If it was demonstrated that the VAT has similar convergent validity to the VI-SPDAT then the community would likely benefit from a shorter assessment tool and could employ the VAT.
- It is also noted that neither tool has been tested for effective assessment for homeless youth. Alternate assessment means may be necessary for this population.

