Denmark

The Danish Homelessness Strategy

Denmark has one of the largest Housing First programmes in Europe. The Danish National Strategy, which was adopted in 2008 and ran until 2013, included Housing First services which were targeted at over 1,000 homeless people with high support needs. As in Belgium and France, the Danish strategy is being evaluated to assess the effectiveness of Housing First and other homelessness service models in supporting homeless people who have high support needs. The strategy is led by central government and the Housing First services operating in Denmark all follow the eight core principles of Housing First described in Chapter 2.

The use of Housing First in Denmark has similarities with the At Home/Chez Soi programme in Canada and also with the French Un Chez-Soi d'abord programme. The national strategy focused on 17 municipalities which contained the majority of homelessness recorded in Denmark, including the three largest cities, Copenhagen, Aarhus and Odense. The specific goals were to reduce levels of people living rough, to target rising levels of youth homelessness more effectively, to reduce the time homeless people spent in emergency accommodation and to bring down the rate of homelessness associated with people leaving hospitals and prisons. Housing First was adopted as a key element of the Danish strategy with the goal of systematically testing how well Housing First could work in Denmark. Housing is provided through cooperation with social landlords.

Denmark explored Housing First by looking at models using intensive case management (the ICM model) and multidisciplinary teams (the assertive community treatment model, ACT). There was also an assessment of both scattered housing and single-site congregate/communal services. Different models, such as the ACT team approach, were targeted at specific groups of homeless people.

The bulk of the Danish strategic use of Housing First was ICM services, which supported over 1,000 homeless people with high support needs in 17 municipalities during 2009-2013. One ACT-based service had worked with 92 individuals by 2013.

In an evaluation completed in 2013, the success of the Housing First services was reported as high, particularly in the ACT-based services. There was evidence that the single-site Housing First service was somewhat less successful than the services using scattered housing. There are parallels with Finland in the use of Housing First in Denmark. Like Finland, the extensive social protection (welfare) systems in Denmark combined with social housing, appear to stop most forms of homelessness that are associated with poverty and low support needs. As in Finland, most Danish homelessness is associated with high support needs. This gives Housing First in Denmark a central role in the homelessness strategy, because most of the homelessness is among the groups of people that Housing First is specifically designed to help.

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2 As above.
Following the positive results from the first homeless strategy, the National Board of Social Services decided to implement the Housing First principle, including ACT and ICM approaches, and explore the use of the related Critical Time Intervention (CTI) model in 24 municipalities from August 2014 to May 2016. A special programme for young people (aged 17-24 years) is also being introduced in 11 municipalities from September 2015 to autumn 2017. The programme is designed to prevent youth homelessness and one of the methods used will be the ICM model. A review of the outcomes from both these programmes will be published in the autumn of 2016.

The National Board of Social Services has also been given the task of implementing the Housing First Principle and related floating support models at national level from May 2016 to December 2019. This programme will contain support for all municipalities, private service providers and NGOs to learn about Housing First.