How Social Science Can Influence Homelessness Policy: Experiences from Europe, Canada, and the United States – Part II: Politics and Policy Change

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> **Abstract_** *The purpose of this paper is to understand the roles social scientists can play to influence homelessness policy. Experiences in Europe, Canada, and the United States are used to generate lessons learned about how research can inform policy. Social scientists can have influence through different policy streams (Kingdon, 1995). In the policy stream, knowledge transfer and mechanisms to ensure fidelity to the original research model are important; in the political stream, individual leaders are important for policy change and it is important to recognise that government is not a monolith; and regarding policy windows, timing, crises, and persistence matter. We illustrate these lessons with relevant examples in which social scientists have attempted to influence homelessness policy. While policy change is a messy business, social scientists can play multiple roles and have many tools that they can use to help policy become more evidence-based in the quest to end and prevent homelessness.*

Introduction

In a companion paper, we introduced Kingdon's (1995) policy streams framework to understand how social scientists can influence homelessness policy (Nelson et al., 2021). We examined the problem component and one aspect of the policy component – the development of solutions to the problem through research. In this second paper, we examine the political context of policy-making and strategies for implementing evidence-based solutions on a more wide-scale basis through policy change (see Figure 1). We draw from our experiences and that of others in Europe, Canada, and the United States (US) in striving to change homelessness policy. Within the policy and politics dimensions of Kingdon's framework, we identify lessons learned, borrowing from and expanding on Shinn's (2007) paper on influencing homelessness policy. Furthermore, we describe roles for social scientists (Lavoie and Brunson, 2010) that can be used to influence homelessness policy.

Figure 1: A Framework for Public Policy Change
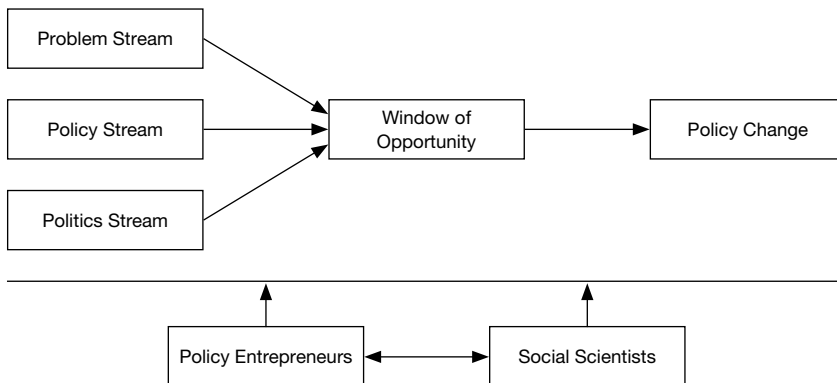
The Policy Stream – Scaling Out and Scaling Up: Can Evidence-Based Solutions to Homelessness Be Implemented on a More Wide-Scale Basis?

In the companion paper, we demonstrated the necessary first steps of problem framing and developing evidence-based strategies to address the problem of homelessness, particularly for people with psychiatric disorders, through a range of research designs and data sources. Once effective solutions are discovered and shown to be effective in different contexts, as we noted in the case of housing-based rather than shelter-based responses to homelessness in the previous paper, social scientists then face the thorny problem of how to influence policy so that these evidence-based solutions are implemented on a wider basis. Sarason (1978) observed that when striving to change policy, social scientists enter the political arena in which research evidence often takes a 'back seat' to issues of power and persuasion. Given the strong evidence that Housing First (HF) provides rapid exits from homelessness and superior rates of housing stability than treatment as usual (Tsai, 2020), we focus in particular on attempts to influence policy makers to introduce HF in North America and Europe.

Scaling Up and Scaling Out

A distinction has been made in implementation science between scaling up and scaling out evidence-based solutions to social problems. *Scaling up* refers to an expansion of evidence-based solutions to the same population and within similar settings under which an intervention has been shown to be effective. On the other hand, *scaling out* refers to adapting practices of policy for new populations and/or in new settings or systems (Aarons et al., 2017). Both scaling up and scaling out are important aspects of policy change.

In the case of homelessness, examples of scaling up would be the creation of more HF programmes for people experiencing homelessness, mental illness, and addictions following closely the Pathways HF model. Examples of scaling out would be adapting such housing based responses for youth graduating from the child welfare system before they experience homelessness (Gaetz, 2014, 2019) or delivering housing-led responses to homelessness in diverse jurisdictions such as Ireland (Tsemberis, 2020), Slovakia (Pongrácz et al., 2021), or Australia (Johnson et al., 2012) which have different housing and health policies in comparison to the US and Canada, where, for example, HF was originally shown to be effective.

Lessons Learned and Roles for Social Scientists

Knowledge transfer matters

Social scientists can assume the role of *knowledge translator* in order to move evidence into policy and practice, and several different knowledge transfer (KT) methods can be used to influence policy. For example, there were a series of peer-reviews of homelessness policies in EU Member States promoted by the European Commission *via* what was known as the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC). Commencing in the late 2000s, member states voluntarily submitted their homelessness policies to a detailed academic peer review (social scientists were the peer reviewers in all cases), followed by a range of inputs from statutory and non-statutory bodies from a small number of other member states in each case (Gosme, 2013).

In the case of the Danish peer review in 2010, a background paper was produced by Lars Benjaminsen from the Danish National Centre for Social Research and Rune Kamstrup from the Ministry of Social Affairs. Secondly what was termed a discussion paper, in effect an analysis or peer review of national policies, was produced by an external expert, in this case, Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick from Heriot-Watt University in Scotland. Finally, written submissions from a number of other member states, culminating in a two day seminar in Copenhagen in early November 2010 where the lessons that could be drawn from the Danish experience for other member states were intensively discussed.

Thus, this series of peer reviews of homelessness policies in a number of member states contributed to a heightened understanding of what was, and what was not, working in responding to homelessness and HF. Both the Pathways HF model and the Finnish approach to scaling out HF were increasingly cited as responses that worked successfully to end homelessness. In this case, social scientists played the roles of *conceptualizer-innovator* and *researcher-evaluator.*

HF projects developed largely independent of each other across different cities of EU Member States from the 2000s onwards, and Housing First Europe, a project funded by the European Commission (Busch-Geertsema, 2013), evaluated the implementation of HF in 10 cities in Europe, bringing together for the first time the accumulated lessons learned. All cities broadly adopted the principles of Pathways HF, and although there was some variation in practices, the results were largely positive with the report concluding that "the Housing First approach is a highly successful way of ending homelessness" (Busch-Geertsema, 2013, p.24). These positive findings were published in a final report and presented at a conference held in Amsterdam, giving significant momentum both to introducing HF in member states where it was not yet established and to expanding the scale of HF in member states where it was established, albeit in most cases, on a tentative basis and

usually very small in scale. To maintain the momentum on scaling up and scaling out HF in Europe, the Housing First Europe Hub was conceived in 2016 to promote and provide training for HF programmes in Europe. This Hub has developed a toolkit (Pleace, 2016), which is available in 10 languages, offers webinars, maintains a catalogue of HF programmes in European nations, and operates a Train the Trainer programme in HF.

Although trans-Atlantic in membership, the first, second, and third International Housing First Conferences, convened bi-annually, took place in Portugal (2013), Ireland (2016), and Italy (2018) respectively, providing opportunities for the knowledge exchange of research findings on HF, particularly the dissemination of the results from the Canadian At Home Chez Soi study. In addition, both the HOME-EU project funded by the European Commission on the implementation of HF in eight member states (Petit et al., 2018), and the International HF Fidelity study which included case studies in seven EU Member States (Aubry et al., 2018) have resulted in greater understanding of programme implementation in Europe.

Furthermore, a number of North American social scientists provided important contributions to the KT process by presenting research findings on the efficacy of HF at national events organised in EU Member States, and increasingly at the annual research conference of the European Observatory on Homelessness. For example, Tim Aubry from Canada was the keynote speaker at the 13th Annual Research Conference in 2018 in Budapest, with his address on *Housing First as an Evidence-Based Practice for Ending Chronic Homelessness: The Current State of Knowledge and Future Directions for Research,* and Deborah Padgett from the US was the keynote speaker at the 11th Annual Research Conference with an address on *Consumer Choice Meets Street Level Bureaucracy: Social Work in the Housing First Era.*

In some countries, for example Italy, KT is very much filtered through the NGO sector (Lancione et al., 2018); in Ireland a municipal authority first piloted HF in Dublin (Greenwood, 2015); and in Finland it was a national state-led project, but a model of HF that developed organically and is increasingly influential across Europe and the Antipodes (Allen et al., 2020). Only in Finland and France is HF operating at scale in Europe. For example, Ireland launched a national HF implementation plan in 2018 (Government of Ireland, 2018) that aims to provide 663 tenancies by the end of 2021. It is likely that this target will be achieved, with 539 adults in HF tenancies across the country at the end of March 2021; however, there were a further nearly 5 900 adults in temporary and emergency accommodation, demonstrating the limited scaling up of HF in Ireland. In a review of HF in Europe, Pleace et al. (2019, p.6) concluded that HF was "a relatively new development in much of

Europe, is sometimes operating on a small scale, is present in some areas but not others, and differs in how it is used alongside other homelessness services, with variation both within and between different countries."

France provides a powerful example of how a research demonstration project can influence homelessness policy and be scaled up across a nation. The beginning of a paradigm shift from relying on emergency or temporary accommodations based on a continuum of care leading to independent living appeared initially in public policies in 2009. Specifically, the Minister for Housing, Benoist Apparu, attempted to overhaul the system serving people who were experiencing homelessness in response to a citizen protest and the occupation of the Saint Martin canal in Paris by the Don Quixote and Médecins du Monde non-governmental associations who distributed tents to those experiencing literal homelessness. The shift in policy, from shelter-led to housing-led policies, combined with plans to reduce funding for emergency accommodation, was not well received by the managers of emergency shelters, and while the shift failed to produce results, it did lead to the creation of the DIHAL (Délégation Interministérielle pour l'Hébergement et l'accès au Logement – an inter-ministerial body intended to address the issue of homelessness on behalf of the National Government in 2010).

DIHAL led to the development of a HF demonstration project in 2011. At the time of the 2017 Presidential elections, DIHAL, having already designed a scaling up plan of 'logement d'abord', presented it to the new Government, which adopted the plan as a central part of its five-year strategy from 2018 to 2022 to combat homelessness. The main elements presented in the plan were developed by DIHAL based on the key principles of the provision of immediate access to affordable housing, flexible and individualised support, separation of housing and support, and challenging the notion of a lack of 'capacity to be able to live independently' for this population.

The French Government commissioned and funded the "Un chez soi d'abord" project that we described in the previous companion paper. Once the positive outcomes, that included cost offsets that exceeded the costs of the HF programmes, were communicated by the research team to the Government in a preliminary report, the Government decided to not only sustain Un chez soi d'abord programmes in the original four sites, but also to create and fund four new sites per year over the five-year period from 2019 to 2022, resulting in HF programmes in 20 new cities.

The work of DIHAL illustrates the important role that social scientists can play in policy implementation as *partnership-makers.* Evidence of this collaboration is the summary of the qualitative report (Gesmond et al., 2016) produced under the joint direction of the National Coordinator of DIHAL and the National Coordinator of Qualitative Research for the project Un chez soi d'abord. However, even with the goal to scale up HF in communities, its actual operationalisation is difficult to achieve.

In brief, there was no single model of knowledge transfer or singular means of transmission, but rather a heterogeneous series of events and interactions between social scientists (North American and European), policy makers, and practitioners that contributed to KT about HF to different cities and countries of the EU.

In Canada, social scientists also played the roles of *knowledge translator*, *training and technical assistance consultant*, and *advocate* to scale out and scale up HF. First, the leaders of At Home / Chez Soi kept in regular contact with senior staff and politicians in the Federal Government who provided funding to update them on the project and its findings (Macnaughton et al., 2017). The relationships between the social scientists from the At Home / Chez Soi project and policy-makers in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) were important for policy change at the end of the project, which we discuss later in the paper.

Second, training and technical assistance were used following the end of the At Home / Chez Soi project to scale up and scale out HF in communities across Canada. The Federal Government provided funding to the Mental Health Commission of Canada to provide a three-year training and technical assistance programme to 20 new Canadian communities. This programme consisted of education of relevant stakeholders in the HF approach, training the staff of HF in relevant practice skills, consultations related to planning and implementation, and fidelity assessment to ensure that new HF programmes adhered to HF principles. A study of six of the 20 sites showed that 14 new HF programmes were created and nine existing programmes shifted to more fully adopt the HF approach (Macnaughton et al., 2018).

Third, HF communities of interest, including provincial networks in Alberta and Ontario, were formed to use a networking approach to the expansion of HF (Worton et al., 2019). Rather than relying exclusively on experts in HF, networking uses a peer learning and mutual aid approach (Worton, 2020). Both the Alberta and Ontario networks hold annual conferences and provide training as the European Hub does.

Fourth, knowledge synthesis tools, like the Canadian National Film Board (Here at Home, 2012) and the HF toolkit (Polvere et al., 2014), were developed and used to scale up and scale out HF. The Ontario Housing First Regional Network Community of Interest has also developed policy briefs, evidence syntheses, and research snapshots, and the networks also used the media, and in particular social media, to communicate with various stakeholders. For example, the Ontario network leaders write opinion pieces for newspapers, provide interviews for television and newspapers, and use Twitter and Facebook to communicate about HF and homelessness.

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In the US, the Pathways Housing First Institute plays a similar role, with biannual conferences and a website that summarises research on the HF approach and offers on-line courses and webinars to provide guidance to service providers and communities. The National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) also uses conferences and a website to promote additional efforts to address homelessness for different populations who may need less support than the group targeted by Pathways to Housing. NAEH tries to work with Congress and the Administration to promote policies and set a research agenda. Its work is similar to the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) in Europe, or the Homeless Hub in Canada. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) also offers technical assistance to local continuums of care on such topics as creating coordinated entry systems and high-quality homelessness management information systems to make homeless services more effective.

Mechanisms to promote adherence to the principles and practices of evidence-based programme

When an evidence-based programme is scaled out and adapted to new settings, a central problem in implementation is 'drift' from principles and practices of the model (Greenwood et al., 2013). However, there remains a lively debate on how "the tension between programme fidelity and adaptations to local conditions be best managed to ensure that programme outcomes remain high?" (Johnson et al., 2012, p.14). HF researchers have developed tools to assess the fidelity of a programme to HF principles and practices (Gilmer et al., 2013; Stefancic et al., 2013), as previous research has shown that the greater the fidelity of a HF programme, the better the outcomes that are achieved for participants (Davidson et al., 2014; Gilmer et al., 2014; Goering et al., 2016). Social scientists can play the role of *training and technical assistance consultant* to help programmes maintain model fidelity.

A multi-country study of fidelity of HF programmes located in nine countries, namely Belgium, Canada, France, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Spain, and the US was completed in 2018 (Aubry et al., 2018). In the study, HF programmes followed a common research protocol that included a self-assessment of fidelity followed by focus groups and interviews with programme staff identifying facilitators and obstacles to achieving high levels of fidelity. Overall, the programmes in the multi-country study reported moderate to high levels of fidelity in their self-assessment of their programmes. In fact, the average item score across all the programmes was 3.5 out of 4, which is the cut-point between moderate and high levels of fidelity (i.e., 3.5 and higher). Programmes in five of the countries had average fidelity scores 3.5 or higher. The highest levels of fidelity across the programmes were in the domains of *Separation of Housing and Services, Service Philosophy,* and *Housing Process and Structure.* Average scores across all of the

programmes on these domains fell in the high level of fidelity range. The average scores on the other two domains, Service Array and Programme Structure and Operations reflected a moderate level of fidelity (Greenwood et al., 2018).

The most common systemic facilitator of achieving high fidelity across the programmes was the availability of partnerships with community-based services that could be accessed by programme participants. Other common systemic facilitators for HF programmes in the study were having a positive reputation in the community and landlords' cooperation with the programme and support of programme tenants. At the organisational level, the commitment to HF values by the organisation delivering the HF programme and by programme staff, and training and technical assistance contributing to strong programme teams were considered key facilitators (Greenwood et al., 2018).

The biggest systemic barrier experienced by almost all of the programmes was inadequate access to affordable housing. As well, poor links to community-based services in key areas such as employment, education, vocational training, income support, and health care were a systemic barrier to achieving a high level of fidelity. A lack of funding from government proved to be both a perceived systemic and organisational barrier affecting staffing levels and supervision and thereby lowering programme fidelity standards in relation to service array and programme structure and human resources (Greenwood et al., 2018).

Fidelity assessments of the Canadian At Home / Chez Soi HF programmes were conducted three times, once early in implementation (between nine and 13 months after the programme had started), once in later implementation (24 to 29 months after the programme had started), and once later yet after the end of the demonstration phase (five to seven years after the programme had started). The results of these assessments showed a high level of fidelity to the HF model and improvement over time (Macnaughton et al., 2015; Nelson et al., 2017). Importantly, the results of this research show that the fidelity of the original At Home / Chez Soi HF programmes was sustainable. In the study of scaling out HF programmes across Canada, Macnaughton et al. (2018) found high levels of fidelity for 10 new or revised HF programmes that were comparable to the fidelity levels of the original HF programmes in At Home / Chez Soi.

In the US, Kertesz et al. (2017) conducted a study of eight VA medical centres that offered HUD-VASH programmes in which they assessed fidelity twice, once early in implementation and again one year later. All programme participants had a housing voucher and the programmes achieved high levels of fidelity on the two housing domains of fidelity: no preconditions and rapidly obtaining permanent housing. Lower levels of fidelity were obtained on service domains of fidelity: sufficient supportive services and adoption of a modern recovery philosophy.

The Political Stream

The political context of homelessness

Politics is the third stream of Kingdon's (1995) framework. The political climate, national values, and public opinion are key components of this stream. Understanding and working within changing political contexts is important for social scientists seeking to influence homelessness policy. As we noted in the conclusion of the companion paper, the political context of homelessness policy has become more challenging since the original formulation of the policy streams framework in the 1980s. Growing economic inequality and a shortage of affordable housing has led to increases in homelessness in many countries, particularly in Canada and the US. Thus, it becomes more imperative for social scientists to partner with advocates to address the economic and housing roots and solutions to homelessness (Shinn and Khadduri, 2020a).

Lessons Learned and Roles for Social Scientists

Individual leaders can matter

Shinn (2007) pointed out that there are politicians and policy-makers who have a particular commitment to a social issue. In such cases, social scientists can play the role of *policy advisor*, serving as a consultant to policy-makers. Bogenschneider and Corbett (2010) underscore the importance of the relationship between social scientists and policy-makers for evidence-based policymaking.

In Canada, Senator Michael Kirby and Dr. Paula Goering were instrumental in the integration of HF into homelessness policy at all levels of government and its imple-mentation across Canada. Senator Kirby launched and co-chaired a special study on mental health and mental illness for the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology between 2002 and 2005 (Kirby and Keon, 2006). The study led to the creation of the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) in 2007, a national organisation dedicated to the development and dissemination of innovative mental health programmes and strategies. Senator Kirby served as the first Chair of the MHCC and negotiated with the Federal Government to commit $110 million dollars for the At Home / Chez Soi Demonstration Project. He designated Dr. Paula Goering to lead the project (Goering et al., 2011; Goering et al., 2014).

Goering was a mental health services researcher whose work had helped develop community mental health services across Canada in the context of the closure of psychiatric hospitals. As a result, she was well known in the mental health sector and her reputation gave credibility to the launching of a complex pragmatic randomised controlled trial requiring the creation of 13 new HF programmes in five

Canadian cities and the development and implementation of research on them. With the participation of over 50 researchers located at 11 different universities, the project has produced over 100 articles in peer-reviewed journals. This research productivity advancing HF in Canada and internationally, along with the impact of the trial on policy discussed previously in this article, is a testament to the effectiveness of Goering's leadership. As a policy influencer, Goering possessed a wide repertoire of skills that enabled her to play many roles: *conceptualizer-innovator, researcher-evaluator, partnership-maker, policy advisor, knowledge translator, training and technical assistant consultant,* and *advocate*.

While it is helpful when the values and assumptions of social science advisors align with those of politicians, sometimes there are surprising connections between unlikely allies. Macnaughton et al. (2017) described how federal homelessness policy in Canada changed to emphasise HF during the conservative administration of Prime Minister Harper (2006-2015). Government insiders reported that there was a dissatisfaction with policy that seemed to have little to no impact on rates of homelessness across Canada, and leaders were encouraged by the positive impacts of the At Home / Chez Soi project in reducing homelessness and the cost offsets created by reductions in hospitalisation associated with the HF programme.

A similar story in the US concerns the agenda of the US Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) under the leadership of Phillip Mangano during the President George W. Bush administration. Mangano was a government insider but also what Kingdon (1995) calls a policy entrepreneur who sought to change homelessness policy from a crisis response to a focus on ending homelessness through HF. While federal funding for the new approach lagged behind the idea, states and cities across the US developed 10-year plans using HF to end homelessness.

Mangano (2017) emphasised the primacy of research leading to this policy change. Stanhope and Dunn (2011) described this policy shift as a 'curious case', because an approach based on progressive values was adopted by a conservative political administration. The approach was successful, they argue, because of the work of Dennis Culhane whom they describe as "a researcher with close ties to policy makers and an unusual adeptness at translating research findings to policy imperatives" (Stanhope and Dunn, 2011, p.280), and the charisma of Mangano and Sam Tsemberis, the founder of Pathways HF.

They also assert that the policy shift was possible because it was able to appeal to conservatives (emphasising cost offsets, the engagement of the private rental market, and the values of choice and self-determination), liberals (emphasising social justice, evidence-based models, and housing), and the general public who were becoming increasingly concerned about more visible homelessness (empha-

sising ending and not managing homelessness), thus creating a broad coalition of support for policy change. However, the administration did not support Mangano's policy proposals with funding and the 10-year plans had, at best, a modest impact.

Shinn (2007) also points out that over time decision-makers change, which can either create new opportunities for change or can constrain progress on homelessness policy. The changing foci of US homeless policy with different administrations are an example. In particular, the most successful effort to end homelessness using HF was implemented for veterans experiencing homelessness promoted by Eric Shinseki, Secretary of Veterans' Affairs, and Shaun Donovan at HUD during the Obama administration, they succeeded in cutting homelessness among veterans nearly in half from 2009 to 2016 (Henry et al., 2021). Crucially, this was supported by research on veterans experiencing homelessness *via* the National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans spearheaded by the aforementioned Dennis Culhane of the University of Pennsylvania and Centre Director Vince Kane. However, this singular focus was not enthusiastically supported by the next administration that proposed a return to the use of large shelters and housing readiness, and not surprisingly progress slowed until the recent arrival of the pandemic which immediately rendered the proposal of a return to congregate shelters obsolete.

In Europe, the role of the European Observatory on Homelessness (EOH) is an example of how social scientists can play the role of *policy advisor*, serving as a consultant to policy-makers at the national and trans-national level. Following a seminar on homelessness in the EU held in Ireland in 1985, the participants recommended that:

> The European Commission fund an association of organisations working with homeless people in the member states so that they may consult regularly on issues affecting homeless people, on methods that will secure improvements in the conditions of homeless people and advise the Commission on policy that will improve the conditions of homeless people. (National Campaign for the Homeless, 1986, p.2)

The recommendation was accepted by the Commission and led to the establishment of the Federation Europeenne d'Associations Nationales Travaillant avec les Sans Abris (FEANTSA) in 1989, and in 1991 the *European Observatory on Homelessness* with core funding coming from the Commission. Comprised of social scientists from different members states, the EOH over the past 30 years has published a range of monographs and reports on aspects of homelessness, including reviewing statistics on homelessness in Europe. In 2007 the EOH launched the *European Journal of Homelessness* which is now in its 15th Volume and

published two to three times a year. Thus, the publication and dissemination of the body of research, analysis, and commentary has contributed to shaping how policy makers and services conceptualise and respond to homelessness in Europe.

At a country level, taking as examples the experience of Ireland and Finland, where in the case of Ireland the number of households experiencing homelessness has grown very significantly over the past six to seven years (O'Sullivan et al., 2021). In contrast, in Finland the numbers have declined just as significantly (Shinn and Khadduri, 2020b), and consistency in policy, allied to stability, and longevity in terms of key personnel seem crucial to embedding evidence-based responses to homelessness (Allen et al., 2020). In the case of Finland, two individuals, one in the Housing Ministry and one in the Y-Foundation, worked collaboratively with their respective organisations over a 30-year period to advance a common agenda to end homelessness, based on a vision of providing housing for people experiencing homelessness and a determination to close congregate shelters (Fredriksson, 2018; Y-Foundation, 2017).

The continuity of key personnel, and the institutional embeddedness of both in a shared political vision and policy principles in Finland, resulted in significant reduction in homelessness, allowing for the majority of congregate facilities to close, with only one emergency shelter remaining open in Helsinki with a bed capacity of 52 in 2020 (Allen et al., 2020). The politics of homelessness in Finland are largely settled, with the focus instead on implementing and refining the policies and practices to achieve an ending of homelessness by 2027 – an absolute zero rather than a functional zero, following a review of their policies by domestic and international social scientists (Pleace et al., 2015).

In Ireland, key personnel in the Housing Ministry with responsibility for homelessness rarely had a tenure of more than two years, approaches to ending homelessness were politicised and fragmented in a way never experienced in Finland, and regular changes in the Minister with responsibility for Housing and Homelessness were not conducive to consistent policy. Alongside the incrementally expanded HF programme noted above, there was also a massive expansion of the congregate shelter system for adult only households, and the development of new congregate facilities for families introduced in 2016, known as Family Hubs (O'Sullivan, 2017), with 29 such hubs now operating across the country. The politics of homelessness in Ireland are fractious, and though considerable success is evident in securing housing for the majority of those who enter emergency accommodation and preventing households entering emergency accommodation in the first instance (O'Sullivan, 2021), the lack of policy coherence, and a specific target to end homelessness, suggests a lack of ambition and political leadership. In the Irish case, social scientists had some influence on shaping a *Homelessness Policy Statement*

in 2013 (Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, 2013) that aimed to end homelessness via a housing led-approach, but this influence had waned substantially by the second half of the 2010s, as demonstrated by the introduction of non-evidence based interventions such as the introduction and expansion of congregate facilities for families experiencing homelessness (O'Sullivan, 2017).

In the case of France, the role of the aforementioned DIHAL was important in providing *training and technical assistance* and creating a community of practice through the creation of training tools and other common tools. It also facilitated the involvement of professionals across sites, supported the exchange of practices, and created a network of mutual support (Laval and Estecahandy, 2019). In addition, DIHAL was in a position to take advantage of every legislative and political 'window of opportunity' available to embed HF in legislation on a long-term basis. For example, it is in the context of the launch of the 'prevention and fight against poverty' strategy (2018-2022) that DIHAL proposed to implement HF for youth (Gaetz, 2014). The proposal was adopted because it was a concrete solution of 'placing a key in one's hand'. In the case of Europe, leadership matters, perhaps less so in terms of 'big personalities' as in the case of North America, but rather individuals in public and civil society organisations embedded often in corporatist type structures that have driven HF.

Government is not monolithic

In fact, there are several levels of government and several different government departments that may have different missions and approaches. Sometimes these levels of government or agencies work at cross purposes. For example, the US Interagency Council on Homelessness attempts to coordinate policy across federal departments, but most resources are distributed by HUD to local communities, which set priorities for the use of funds. A large portion of homeless services are delivered by religious organisations and other NGOs with different value systems, so local administrators are often beholden to these groups.

HUD offers *training and technical assistance* to communities who apply for it, and tries to influence communities by changing incremental funding on the basis of their adherence to priorities HUD sets. The resulting patchwork of jurisdictions has led to far less coherent policy than in France. In many communities, 'Housing First' means little more than removing barriers to entry, and HUD uses the term to describe short-term rental subsidies as well as supportive housing programmes with low fidelity to the original model. The Department of Veteran's Affairs (VA) is a notable exception, where leadership and funding from the top nearly halved homelessness among military veterans, as described above.

Playing the role of *partnership-maker,* social scientists can work to align policy from different levels, sectors, and agencies. In the training and technical assistance programme to expand HF following At Home / Chez Soi, Tsemberis typically began the programme by educating the whole community about HF. Following this, he convened a smaller group to plan a HF programme. While the types of partners varied from community to community, there were typically partners from multiple sectors, including housing, mental health, non-profit service providers, philanthropic organisations, and advocates, among others. In addition to facilitating the creation of new HF programmes, this initiative also had systems level impacts on policy and led to increased coordination and collaboration among partners from different sectors (Nelson et al., 2019).

Policy Windows and Policy Entrepreneurs

When the stars align

When the identified problem, policy, and optimal political conditions converge, there are windows of opportunity for change, a fourth dimension of the framework. Key lessons here are that timing matters; crises present opportunities for policy change; and that persistence is important.

Lessons Learned and Roles for Social Scientists

Timing matters

The At Home / Chez Soi project underscores the importance of timing for creating change. On the front end of the project, Michael Kirby, the first Chair of the brand new Mental Health Commission of Canada, received a phone call in 2008 from a senior member of the Federal Government about what could be done about homelessness. The concern was the visibility of homelessness in the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood of Vancouver that would be on display for the world to see during the upcoming 2010 Winter Olympics. As a policy entrepreneur, Kirby proposed and was able to secure $110 million in funding for the At Home/Chez Soi multi-site project. Playing the role of *conceptualizer-innovator,* Paula Goering worked with Kirby to frame the project as an evaluation of the HF approach for people experiencing homelessness with mental illness (Macnaughton et al., 2013).

Timing was also important on the tail end of the project. The Federal Government's Homeless Partnering Strategy (HPS) that provided funding to communities across Canada to address homelessness was up for renewal in 2014. The renewal date coincided with the end of At Home / Chez Soi, and the positive impacts of the HF

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programmes led to a repurposing of HPS (Macnaughton et al., 2017). Going forward, HPS was to devote the majority of its funding to HF programmes – a major shift in policy. The multiple roles of *researcher-evaluator*, *knowledge translator*, and *policy advisor* were all important for influencing this shift.

Crises present an opportunity for change

The COVID-19 pandemic poses high risks to people experiencing homelessness, particularly for those individuals staying in shelters. The congregate nature of shelters with their shared living space, crowding, unsanitary conditions, and high turnover contribute to making it an environment that is conducive for the spreading of the virus (Perri et al., 2020). In addition, people experiencing long-term or entrenched homelessness are at higher risk of experiencing severe symptoms, being hospitalised, and dying because of the high prevalence of chronic health conditions in the population that include heart disease, respiratory conditions, liver disease, and high rates of smoking (Alridge et al., 2018).

Research conducted to date on testing shelter residents for COVID-19 infections has shown variable rates depending on the shelter. Mosites et al. (2020) conducted universal testing in shelters in five American cities and found the rate of infection to vary from a low of 4% for residents in two shelters in Atlanta to a high of 66% for a shelter in San Francisco. A consequence of the pandemic has been the creation of encampments across the US and Canada as people who are homeless attempt to avoid staying in shelters because of the fear of being infected (Stueck, 2020).

In the context of the pandemic, researchers and advocates are calling for governments to move from temporary solutions of reducing crowding in shelters, creating isolation centres, and housing individuals in hotels to addressing homelessness on a more permanent basis by scaling up HF programmes and moving individuals into permanent housing (Latimer et al., 2020; Nelson and Aubry, 2020). Recognising the opportunity for governments needing to address homelessness in the midst of the pandemic crisis, the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness launched an advocacy campaign called 'Recovery for All' a set of policy initiatives to address homelessness (Pomeroy, 2020). These range from creating more and larger rent supplements, expanding the supply of affordable housing, and strengthening homeless prevention.

In response to the highly visible vulnerabilities of the homeless population in the context of the pandemic and the calls for injecting resources toward more permanent solutions to homelessness, the Canadian Federal Government launched the Rapid Housing Initiative entailing an immediate investment of $1 billion intended to create 3 000 new permanent affordable housing units in cities across the country

(Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2020). This new initiative represents a front loading of resources committed in Canada's National Housing Strategy (Canada Mortage and Housing, 2017).

In the case of the UK, there was some optimism in the homelessness sector that the crisis could result in "making a decisive break away from communal and inappropriate forms of homelessness provision" (Fitzpatrick et al., 2020, p.17), and in the case of Australia it has been argued that "COVID-19 has shown that governments can act to address homelessness, even if only temporarily, and to do so requires a framing of the problem that locates its source in housing and social policy failure, and not in the individuals to whom society fails to provide access to adequate affordable housing" (Parsell et al., 2020, pp.10-11).

Across Europe, Pleace et al. (2021) have shown that COVID-19 has had a devastating effect on some people experiencing homelessness, but has also seen some European countries put a new level of resources and political will into preventing new homelessness and attempts to end street-based homelessness.

Persistence is important

While it is important for policy change agents to recognise and take advantage of windows, timing and crises are not the only factors that are important for change. It is equally important to have a long-term vision, have prolonged engagement in the issue, and be persistent in pushing for change. The At Home / Chez Soi project and its impacts on policy and practice occurred over a 10-year period (Nelson et al., 2020). It is important to have not just a goal but a plan and a timeline to reach that goal, and for communities/municipalities/states that aspire to end homelessness, there must also be identified resources and key individuals that can be accountable for the outcomes of the plan. Social scientists can play the role of *advocate* for evidence-based policy and *partnership-maker* to engage advocates, various stakeholders, and people with lived experience in the quest to influence policy to end homelessness.

In 1987, which was the 'International Year of the Homeless', the Finnish Government announced its first plans to end homelessness in Finland. At that point, it was estimated that Finland had some 20 000 people experiencing homelessness and one of the most crucial policy decisions taken was to start enumerating and estimating that population via an annual survey on the extent of homelessness first conducted in 1987 (Karkkainen, 1996). Although these data have some limitations (Benjaminsen et al., 2020), they nonetheless have provided a consistent measurement of homelessness for over 30 years. The data show a constant reduction in the numbers experiencing homelessness over this period, and as noted above, the aim is to have 'absolute zero' people experiencing homelessness by 2027, 40 years after

the initial plan was launched. Crucial to reducing homelessness in Finland was the establishment of the Y Foundation in 1985, and what was, in effect, the creation of a dedicated supply of social housing targeted towards adult-only households experiencing homelessness. The example of Finland shows conclusively that ending homelessness is possible, but even with clear ambition, stability of key personnel, and a dedicated stream of housing, it takes time.

Policy Change

Finally, we consider some other examples of policy changes that have been realised in Europe, Canada, and the US. In the case of Norway, the numbers experiencing homelessness declined significantly between 2012 and 2016, from 6 259 individuals to 3 909 and is attributed to a 'long-term investment in social housing policy' (Dyb, 2017). Significantly this resulted from policy makers re-conceptualisation of home-lessness as a housing issue rather than as a moral or medical issue (Dyb, 2020). The reconceptualisation of homelessness as a housing issue coincided with the critique of the Swedish staircase model by the sociologist Ingrid Sahlin (2007) and this critique was drawn on by the Norwegians when formulating their strategy. This development of a Housing-led approach to homelessness was facilitated by surveying those experiencing homelessness, commencing in 1996 and every four years thereafter. The survey was initially borrowed from the Swedish survey of those experiencing homelessness, but now has broadened from 13 to 31 items, covering emerging topics such as women's experience of homelessness.

As we noted earlier, the relationships that were formed between the social scientists from At Home / Chez Soi and policy-makers in the PMO in Canada were important for policy change at the end of the project. Following the successful demonstration of the programme's effectiveness in ending homelessness and resulting cost-savings for acute care services, national government policy was changed and mandated that as of 2015, 65% of federal funding allocated to homeless programmes in Canada's largest 10 cities must be invested to develop HF programmes (Macnaughton et al., 2017). Thus, the Federal Government explicitly adopted HF as its approach to homelessness.

This has been a shift in federal policy in recent years. Prior to 2015, communities were given considerable discretion in how they used federal homelessness funding. Local community entities and community advisory boards decided annually how to use federal funding. The result was a patchwork of services that included shelters, transitional housing, and other initiatives, but rarely evidence-based programmes like HF. The Harper Government reported dissatisfaction with the federal HPS programme that seemed to do little to reduce homelessness in Canada.

The results of the At Home / Chez Soi project, Alberta's success in reducing home-lessness using HF as its centrepiece, and the adoption of HF under the Bush administration in the US catalysed this shift in policy.

As was noted earlier, the Federal Government also provided the Mental Health Commission of Canada three years of funding for *training and technical assistance* in HF to 20 new communities that led to the creation of more HF programmes across Canada. Continued funding was provided after the initial three years to reach even more communities, as the training and technical assistance programme shifted from MHCC to CAEH.

The HUD-VASH programme for veterans experiencing homelessness is the largest HF initiative and the best example of scaling out in the US. It began in 2008, during the Obama administration, when a troubling report from the annual national Point in Time (PIT) count estimated that there were approximately 75 000 veterans in the US experiencing homelessness. This resulted in an unprecedented interdepart-mental collaboration and resource allocation for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and HUD with the aim of ending homelessness among veterans by 2015.

This initiative, called HUD/VASH (the SH stands for supportive housing) provided ongoing rental assistance through Section 8 or Housing Choice vouchers that hold rental expenses to 30% of income, and support services through the VA. In its first two years, some 30 000 vouchers were issued and funding for support services was made available. Yet, in the following year the annual PIT count did not show a decrease in homelessness among veterans. In 2010, the National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans decided to implement the Pathways HF approach for HUD-VASH.

At the outset, the National Center selected 14 cities with the largest number of veterans experiencing homelessness. The VA Medical Centers in each city imple-mented the HUD-VASH programmes and were responsible for identifying veterans who had long histories of homelessness and had complex needs. Results of the 14-city HF initiative showed improved outreach to veterans with long histories of homelessness, housing retention rates between 84% and 92%, and reduced use of costly inpatient hospitalisations. By 2013, the PIT count showed an 8% decline from 2012, and a 24% decline from 2010. By 2014, there were reports of cities reaching zero for homeless veterans (Padgett et al., 2016).

Building on these successes, the VA announced in 2014 that HF, as developed by Pathways, was the official policy and programme approach for all HUD/VASH programmes. Given this directive for large-scale system change, the VA expanded its partnership with Pathways to help train VA staff to implement and effectively operate the model in an additional 25 cities and eventually across all 135 VA Medical

Centers (VAMC). A VA report on cost savings related to HUD-VASH showed that veterans in the programme had substantially reduced their use of medical and behavioural health services and the decline in inpatient care was "especially steep" (Byrne et al., 2014, p.5).

The VA also instituted short-term rental subsidies for households deemed not to need ongoing supportive services, and a prevention programme, whereby every veteran who came to the VA for medical services was screened for housing instability and referred to services. In 2014, the Interagency Council on Homelessness called on cities to participate in a 'mayor's challenge' to end homelessness among veterans. These combined efforts reduced the PIT count of veterans experiencing homelessness by 47% from 2010 to 2016 at the end of the Obama administration, and another 3% thereafter (Henry et al., 2020). The campaign has ended homelessness for veterans in 73 cities across the US.

Conclusion

In brief, we argue that social scientists can play multiple roles in bringing evidence to bear on policy responses to homelessness. Kingdon's (1995) policy streams framework provides a useful lens for understanding entry points for social scientists into the policy process. In the policy stream, social scientists can play the roles of knowledge translator and provide training and technical assistance to translate research into policy and to help ensure that programmes maintain fidelity to the original research model.

In the political stream, social scientists can provide leadership and can be partnership-makers with policy and practice stakeholders who are motivated to base policy on evidence. Regarding policy windows, both timing and persistence matter. Social scientists can act as advocates and educators to take advantage of openings for change, as well working with partners over the long-term. While policy change is a messy business, social scientists can play multiple roles and use the many tools that they possess to help policy become more evidence-based in the quest to end and prevent homelessness.

Our two papers show how Kingdon's (1995) policy stream approach is relevant to homelessness policy. The problem stream focuses on how homelessness is framed; the policy stream addresses evidence-based solutions to homelessness; and the political stream draws attention to the complex context in which policy is formulated and enacted. Our review suggests that social scientists are most influential in defining the problem and contributing evidence-based interventions in the

policy streams. However, these impactful contributions to the problem and policy streams have not been fully embraced in the political stream in incorporating evidence into policy.

Challenges in the political stream present stubborn obstacles to achieving trans-formative policy change. Some jurisdictions that use a top-down approach to policy, such as France, or adopt a steadfast commitment to ending homelessness, like Finland or the US HUD-VASH programme, have been successful in effectively influencing the political stream. However, in other contexts, the changing political context and a regression to old policies that have been shown to be ineffective have been an impediment to change. After Obama's success with HUD-VASH, Trump returned homelessness policy to a punitive approach that blames the victim and emphasises "treatment first". Canada made some progress with the Harper Federal Government in repurposing the Homelessness Partnering programme to emphasise HF (Macnaughton et al., 2017), but the Trudeau successor government abandoned the language of HF and proposed only a 50% reduction in long-term homelessness over 10 years. The momentum and focus on evidence-based solutions that had been gained with the At Home / Chez Soi research seems to have dissipated over the last few years.

Perhaps a factor in the lack of success in leveraging the political stream is due to social scientists' narrow focus on ideas and evidence and a reluctance to engage in knowledge mobilisation and advocacy. The need to inform and collaborate with political advocates becomes even more important in a context of rising poverty and economic inequality.

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