

Examining Sober-Living, Supportive Housing: Reducing Stigma and Promoting Long-Term Recovery

Benefits, Strategies, and Key Insights

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Providence House Overview

- Recovery-Oriented Living Program; Place-based; 24/7 on-site support
- 23 single-bachelor units available to house clients at any one time
- Part of Alpha House's Housing Services
- For individuals experiencing homelessness and addiction with a limited term; residents expected to transition out of the program within 24 months
- Transitioned from a harm reduction program model to a sobriety-based program model in April 2024

Why Providence House Was Created


- Providence House was developed in response to a critical service gap in Calgary's recovery and housing system.
- Many individuals exiting detox or treatment programs face a lack of safe, stable, and recovery-oriented housing, leaving them vulnerable to relapse and homelessness.
- Existing options were either harm reduction-based or too rigid, discharging clients upon relapse or requiring prior treatment completion—barriers that excluded those with complex needs.
- Providence House offers a tolerant, structured, and stigma-free sober-living environment that supports recovery without prerequisites like treatment completion. The program bridges the gap between Alpha House's harm reduction-based PSH and the needs of clients ready to try living sober, but who require more support and flexibility to succeed. Founded in April 2024, it reflects a commitment to meeting people where they are, providing the time, support, and space needed for long-term recovery.

Providence House Overview cont.

- The staffing model consists of a multidisciplinary team including Transitional Case Workers, a Peer Support Worker, a Recovery Coach, and a Program Manager.
- Available in-house services include
 - Subsidized housing
 - Help accessing income support
 - Physical and mental health referrals
 - Help accessing day/residential treatment
 - On-site recovery-focused groups
 - Life-skills based programming: cooking, budgeting, resume building etc.
- Additional amenities:
 - Fully furnished units
 - Subsidized rent (\$430–\$605) includes utilities and one daily meal (dinner)



Program Intake

- Providence House serves medium- to high-acuity clients whose life circumstances often include co-occurring mental health concerns, trauma, and substance use. These complexities require 24/7 on-site wraparound support, which we provide through a dedicated team including two Transitions Caseworkers and a Recovery Coach.
- Through the Coordinated Access Assessment (CAA) system
 - Program Type: PBSH - Sobriety
- Range of participants
 - New to Recovery  In recovery, Needing further stabilization
- Clients required to attend Detox 5-10 days prior to program entry
 - Establishes baseline of sobriety
- Residents are expected to
 - Maintain their sobriety
 - Participate in daily recovery-oriented programming
 - Work with case workers to achieve individual goals

Clients at Time of Intake

Table 3 Clients' physical, mental health, and substance use status at intake

	# ¹	%
Mental health condition		
Yes, treated	11	44
Yes, both treated and untreated	6	24
Yes, untreated	3	12
No	5	20
Physical health condition		
Yes, treated	7	29.2
Yes, both treated and untreated	5	20.8
Yes, untreated	5	20.8
No	7	29.2
Substance use issue		
Yes, treated	12	52.2
Yes, both treated and untreated	7	30.4
Yes, untreated	3	13
No	1	4.4
Tri morbidity ²		
Yes	11	40.7

Notes

¹Column sub-totals may not be equivalent due to missing data

Approach to Sober Living

- Continued support as long as the participant shows:
 1. Open-mindedness
 - The willingness to consider new perspectives and approaches to recovery, even when it's uncomfortable.
 2. Willingness
 - The drive to show up, to participate in their own healing, and to take suggestions from staff and peers.
 3. Honesty
 - Being truthful with themselves, with staff, and with others in the house, especially when facing setbacks.
- Relapse does NOT equal discharge
 - Treated as a part of the recovery journey, not as a failure.

In-House Programming

- Daily morning Meetings (except Sundays)
 - Led by Recovery Coach Mon-Fri
 - Saturdays Client-run
- Wellbriety
 - Indigenous-led program blending traditional healing with recovery principles
- In-House AA (Monday Nights)
 - Resident-only AA meeting for peer support in a safe space
- Programming is flexible and inclusive, supporting diverse recovery paths while emphasizing empowerment, dignity, and personal choice.

Enrichment activities (Optional Programming)

- External recovery groups
 - 12-Step, Dharma Recovery, and SMART Recovery
- Cultural and wellness activities
 - Sweat Lodge, Acupuncture (in-house Mondays and Wednesdays)
 - Mindfulness practices and opportunities for giving back to support spiritual growth
- Social events
 - Community cleanups, art projects, BBQs, and games
- In-House Recovery Coach
 - Routine-building, life skills development, and community engagement

Community Partners

- The Calgary Homeless Foundation
 - Primary funder; provides essential leadership as well as financial support
- Street Sisters
 - Outreach and frontline support through community gardening, cookouts, cleanups, and resume-building workshops
- RockPointe Church
 - Donor enabling funding for enrichment activities such as holiday celebrations, cooking supplies, seasonal décor, and art and music therapy resources
- CUPS and The Alex
 - Providing integrated health and community-based social services to support well-being and recovery

Our work is deeply centered on building strong community connections — nurturing partnerships that enhance support, encourage participation, and create inclusive spaces where everyone belongs.

Reducing Stigma at Providence House

- **Core Focus:** creating a supportive, non-judgmental recovery environment
- Respectful, compassionate staff trained to validate and support without judgment
- Peer support networks encourage sharing, reduce isolation, and normalize the recovery journey
- Personal accountability and growth as a staple

Relapse Protocol – Situational Response

1. Relapse Prevention Plan

- Created in collaboration with the participant
 - Address identified triggers and high-risk situations
 - Outline achievable strategies for maintaining sobriety
 - Include clear, realistic goals that promote accountability

2. Expectation Review

Revisit program expectations with the participant to ensure clarity around community standards, responsibilities, and support structure

3. Treatment Encouragement

Where appropriate, staff may encourage the participant to attend additional treatment

Relapse Protocol – Requirements Post-Relapse

1. Detox

The participant must attend a detox program for up to 10 days before returning to the program. Staff will assist in facilitating access and support coordination as needed

2. Return Protocol – Intensive Support Period

- Participant must remain in the building for up to seven (7) days;
- Exceptions are allowed only when:
 - Accompanied by staff for a professional appointment; or
 - Accompanied by a senior program participant for a recovery-related meeting.
- Daily check-ins with staff are required to assess progress and provide consistent support during reintegration.

Developmental Evaluation of Providence

- Qualitative interviews were conducted with 20 participants involved in or associated with the program
 - 2 participants from program management
 - 4 front-line staff members
 - 9 clients
 - 2 program partners (i.e., external agencies)
 - 3 housing strategists who have previously referred prospective clients to the program
- Interview transcripts and field notes were analyzed using thematic analysis
- Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data

Client Demographics Data Since April 2024

- Total Clients Served: 27
- Average Age: 46
- Gender Distribution:
 - Men: 48%
 - Women: 52%
- Income:
 - 70% reported some form of income at intake
 - Average income: \$1,296/month (primarily from Alberta Works/AISH)
- Ethnicity:
 - Caucasian: 59%
 - Indigenous: 22%
 - African: 7.4%
 - Other Racialized Groups: 11.1%

Participant Response to Relapse Protocol

Positive Responses:

- Reduces stigma around relapse.
- Encourages long-term recovery by motivating individuals to stay in the program.
- Compassionate approach that creates a safety net for participants.

Concerns:

- Seen as too lenient, potentially undermining motivation
- Housing units may be occupied by those not fully committed to sobriety
- Risk of a contagion or group morale effect when a relapse occurs within the community

Outcomes at Providence House

Social Participation After Intake:

- Engaged in Volunteer Work: 2 clients (7.4%) *higher when 12-step volunteer work included
- Engaged in Recreation or Cultural Programs/Services: 6 clients (22.2%)
- Experienced Positive Changes in Social Participation: 10 clients (37%)

Program Outcomes (limited data due to program's recent launch):

- Transitioned to Independent Housing: 6 clients
- Completed Treatment Programs: 17 clients
- Sustained Sobriety without Relapse: 10 clients

Program Exploration

Detox Requirement:

- Current: Detox required before entry;
- Improvement: Consider Treatment options to ensure readiness and develop skills to succeed.

In-House Programming:

- Current: 12-Step and Wellbriety;
- Improvement: Expand existing programming by adding more options that encourage empowerment and personal choice, fostering greater engagement and supporting diverse paths to recovery and well-being.

Program Exploration Cont.

Relapse Prevention & Tolerance:

- Stricter Policies: Stricter rules promote accountability but may reduce engagement.
- Balance: Find the right balance between tolerance and accountability to support long-term recovery

Experience in Staff:

- Current: Some staff have lived experience; others are trained and knowledgeable about self-help and recovery models.
- Improvement:
 - Increase peer support by adding more staff with lived experience;
 - Provide additional training for staff without lived experience to enhance program delivery and effectiveness.

John's Journey – From Struggle to Stability

- Came to Providence House after years of homelessness and addiction
- Motivated by the need for housing and serious health issues (lost all toes due to frostbite)
- Relapsed 3 times in his first month
- Weekly toxicology screens, consistent support, and staff encouragement led him to treatment
- Providence offered more than shelter—it offered second chances and accountability

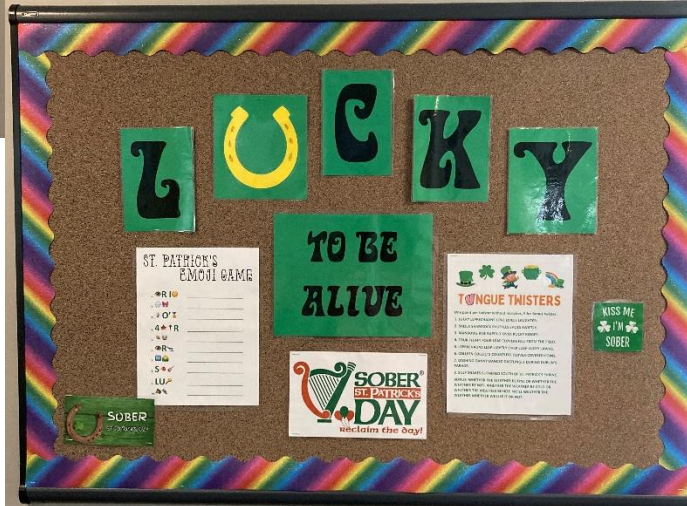
John's Journey – 11 Months Sober – A Life Rebuilt

- Now focused on health, stability, and planning for the future
- Receives AISH support, eats healthier, and is no longer in survival mode
- Maintains sobriety through 12-Step meetings, sponsor check-ins, and peer support
- Advice: “Keep coming back. Trust the process. Find something that gives you purpose.”

Conclusion

- Providence is an example of supporting recovery through stable housing and community
- Finding the balance between reducing shame and stigma with clear expectations and accountability practice
- John's success story: A powerful example of the impact of stable housing and support
- Recovery-oriented, transitional programs are an important part of the spectrum of supportive housing programs needed
- Compassionate, peer-driven environments like Providence House can greatly improve recovery outcomes and lives

Question Period



Date: Thursday, October 24, 2024		
Staff Cinthia + Connie		
Manager: Tom		
Programming Morning meeting @ 09:00		
Supper:		
Garnet 1611 Centre St. NW	Central Recovery 131 7 Ave SW	Regal Group 66 7 St. NE
10:00 am 1.49 kms	12:00 pm 1.26 kms	8:00 pm 0.58 kms

"Your success and happiness lies in you. Resolve to keep happy, and your joy and you shall form an invincible host against difficulties."
- Helen Keller

"For every reason it's not possible, there are hundreds of people who have faced the same circumstances and succeeded."
- Jack Canfield

