

# Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT) —Frequently Asked Questions



## 1. What is the SPDAT?

The Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT) uses the best available evidence to examine the components of a person or family's life that are most likely to result in housing instability. The SPDAT helps you understand the depth of these issues; which household is most likely to benefit from which type of housing support intervention; which household should be prioritized above others based upon their acuity; and, informs the case management process so that you are spending your time working on those things that are most likely going to result in the person/family becoming homeless again.

## 2. Is the SPDAT reliable?

Yes. The tool has been extensively tested independently. In 2012/13 the most rigorous testing was completed to determine if the tool has Interclass Correlation. Four (4) raters involving 469 different subjects were investigated. The model involved same-paired raters for subjects using a two-way model, examining consistency. The interclass correlation for single measures was 0.8748 and the average measure was 0.9673. The confidence interval for single measures was 0.9551, and the average measures confidence interval was 0.9901.

## 3. How else has the SPDAT been independently reviewed?

In 2012, an academic researcher completed an outcome and evaluative evaluation of the SPDAT. Her results show:

- the SPDAT provides baseline information that can be used to set reasonable indicators for years to come;
- the findings are reliable baseline data needed for Social Return on Investment Forecast and Analysis;
- the SPDAT appropriately guides frontline workers and team leaders for an intensive case management approach to service delivery;
- the SPDAT prioritizes which clients should receive which services and reliably tracks the needs and service response to clients over time.

## 4. How do I know that the information collected for the SPDAT is accurate? Couldn't someone just lie their way to a higher score to get supports and housing?

Information for the SPDAT is collected through four means: what is heard; what is seen; through a review of available documentation; and, with consent, what other professionals have to contribute.

In 2011, team leaders in four communities each compared the information collected through the SPDAT process with other health, corrections, police and agency data for a total of 63 households. The information collected through the SPDAT was 94.6% accurate when compared to the other records.

## 5. But does the SPDAT increase housing retention?

Indeed it does. Over a three year period, 86% of households where the SPDAT was used remain housed compared to 62% of non-SPDAT households.

## 6. Any other factoids on the SPDAT performance?

Yes. A detailed examination of 12 SPDAT using communities (6 rural, 6 urban) shows:

- average increase in positive housing destinations from homelessness of 21%;
- average decrease in recidivism of 5.7%;
- average increase in realizing case management goals of 150%.

## 7. How is the SPDAT different from other tools?

It depends what you mean by "tools". Many communities make up their own tools. Almost always these are based upon hunches of what people think would be important to look at. They tend not to be grounded in research or evidence. They tend not to be tested against other tools, nor are they tested against using no tool at all. While well-intentioned, this approach is highly unlikely to produce the best possible results.

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There are only two other tools that have a strong evidence basis. One is the Vulnerability Assessment Tool created by DESC in Seattle. The other is the Vulnerability Index, commonly used in the 100K Homes Campaign. We are really proud of our partnership with the 100K Homes Campaign and the Community Solutions folks to integrate the VI with the SPDAT into a prescreen survey that combines the best elements of both tools.

Unlike the VI and the VAT, the SPDAT helps determine not only the most vulnerable people, it also identifies which households would be the best candidates for Rapid Re-Housing or even no supports at all! Plus, the SPDAT is designed to help inform case management and measure acuity throughout the household's length of time in the support program.

### 8. Can SPDAT be used for coordinated access and common assessment?

Absolutely. While it can be used by a organization or even program within an organization independent of any others using the tool, the original design and intent of the SPDAT was to allow for coordinated access and common assessment.

### 9. How long did it take to create the SPDAT?

Overall there is more than a decade of research and testing that went into the SPDAT. We like to think of it as a labor of love.

### 10. Does the SPDAT work just in urban settings?

No. It has been tested in urban, rural and even remote settings. And it is being used in all types of settings today.

### 11. Is the SPDAT just for homeless people with really complex needs?

No. While it will identify which households have higher acuity, the tool also identifies which households have moderate acuity. And, it will identify those households that do not need your precious resources to get out of homelessness.

### 12. We serve youth. It seems this tool is designed just for adults. Is that true?

False. In 2011 and 2012 there was extensive testing to determine how the SPDAT performs across various populations (youth, adults, newcomers, persons with severe and persistent mental illness, aboriginal persons, gender analysis, etc.). So long as youth are compared only to other youth the tool remains reliable and valid. If youth are compared to adults then they are slightly disadvantaged when it comes to considerations of length of homelessness.

### 13. What is the general structure of the SPDAT?

The SPDAT for singles is divided into four domains (Wellness, Risks, Socialization & Daily Functions, and, History of Housing); the SPDAT for families is divided into five (same as the single's SPDAT, as well as Family Unit).

Each domain is divided into components that relate to that thematic area. In total there are 15 components in the SPDAT for singles and 20 for the Family SPDAT (the same ones as singles, plus five more directly related to family matters).

### 14. How does the SPDAT improve case management?

The SPDAT identifies the areas where the individual or family is experiencing lower acuity as well as higher acuity. The lower acuity areas become strengths that can be used to reinforce positive change in areas where the household demonstrates higher acuity. Matters of higher acuity are more likely to be areas that present the risk of housing instability.

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## 15. How often does the SPDAT have to be done?

It is our recommendation that SPDAT be completed at time of initial assessment, on or about the day of move-in, at the 30 day mark of being housed, at the three month mark and every three months thereafter that they are actively receiving supports.

## 16. How does the SPDAT relate to the Vulnerability Index (VI)?

They are complimentary tools. In fact, there is even a combined VI-SPDAT for those that want to use the best of both in screening those that are most likely to benefit from the supports that you have to offer.

## 17. How much does the SPDAT cost?

The tool itself is free. Like free free. Though you do have to be trained in order to use it properly.

## 18. Okay – so how much is training?

\$1,500 plus disbursements and expenses when offered in person. It is less to do it via webinar depending on which content you want for your training.

## 19. What do we get with training?

A knowledgeable, practitioner-focused, person-centered trainer that knows how to combine the reality of work on the frontline with strong evidence and theory. Sometimes this comes with a free side order of wit, sarcasm and humor.

The full-day in-person training provides you the opportunity to bring together as many people as you want to be trained for the same fee of \$1,500. The webinar training allows for a maximum of 15 different computers to be logged into the training at one time.

The training gives you the manual, case studies, application to current practice, a review of each component of the tool, conversation guidance with prospective clients – and more! The depth of content depends on whether it is in-person or via the web.

In-person training also comes with a copy of the narrated presentation that your community can keep and use forever. That way if you bring on more service providers or if there is staff turnover or whatever you can just show them the presentation.

## 20. If I am trained on the SPDAT, can I train others in my community?

No. But we do offer a “Train the Trainer” workshop that would make you able to train others in the future. Only those who have completed the Train the Trainer workshop do we feel confident can teach others the content.

## 21. Can we start using the SPDAT without the training?

No. If you use the tool incorrectly you won't get the benefits of the tool, and could end up doing more harm than good.

## 22. Is there an annual licensing fee?

No.

## 23. If the SPDAT is updated in the future, does that mean we have to pay for the tool and training again?

No. Though some communities that have had large staff turnover or a large number of agencies turnover have opted to do this.

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## 24. So, all of this seems pretty cheap. What's up with that?

While we have invested almost \$200,000 in staff time and research in creating and testing the SPDAT, we didn't create it in order to get rich. We created it to make a difference in serving homeless people and improving case management supports and assessments.

## 25. Can SPDAT be used with HMIS?

Yes. Some HMIS providers have already put it in their system or local communities have amended their HMIS to put it in. Some other HMIS vendors are considering it. (Feel free to ask your HMIS provider to put it in.)

## 26. How long does it take to complete the SPDAT?

The prescreen survey works out to be just over 7 minutes on average. The full assessment really depends. More experienced assessors seem to have no problem completing a very accurate assessment in about 30 minutes time.

## 27. How does the SPDAT work for families?

There is the Family SPDAT – known most frequently as the F-SPDAT. It adjusts the components from the SPDAT for families, and adds five components that are particularly impactful on the acuity of families: Parental Engagement; Size of the Family; Involvement in Child Protection/Family Court; Stability and Resiliency of the Family Unit; and, the Needs of Children.

## 28. What other training do you offer related to the SPDAT?

We currently offer:

- Improving Case Management Through the SPDAT;
- SPDAT for Supervisors;
- Train the Trainer;
- Creating the Service Narrative in Your Community Using the SPDAT.

Because we offer loads of other training as a firm, we tend to weave the SPDAT into other types of training we do as well.

## 29. How is the SPDAT updated?

Very carefully and thoroughly. We have an extensive review and analysis process that involves end users of services, frontline staff, team leaders/supervisors, and our independent expert advisory panel. We are very proud to say, however, that every community that uses the SPDAT (and/or F-SPDAT) gets a say in how they want to improve the tool in the future. The tool is about you - it isn't about us.

## 30. Who created the SPDAT?

OrgCode Consulting, Inc. created the SPDAT, and Iain De Jong with OrgCode is the main dude that researched, designed and conducted all of the development testing of the tool.

## 31. What do service users have to say about the SPDAT?

In our Version 3 review of the SPDAT, service users preferred the SPDAT on a 3:1 margin over other tools. Their favorite part of the tool is the visual graphing of results that is possible, allowing them to see the changes in their life. They also really appreciated the structure and language from the SPDAT that was then used to provide a framework to case management supports.

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## 32. Who owns the intellectual property of the SPDAT?

OrgCode Consulting, Inc. owns all intellectual property related to the SPDAT.

## 33. Can we use some parts of the SPDAT and not others or change the language of the SPDAT?

No.

## 34. How else is the SPDAT being used?

We are constantly amazed at where and how the SPDAT and F-SPDAT are being used. In almost all of these instances we have also been able to create a research or evaluation component to make sure the tool still works the way it is supposed to work. The four ways it has been used that we are most proud (other than it's original purpose):

- Discharge planning from hospital: we helped create a hospital-specific screening tool for the SPDAT to improve the interface between hospital social work and community housing programs. The result? A massive reduction in people being discharged into homelessness.
- Access to benefits, entitlements and income supports: while still wrapping up the pilot program phase, imagine if you will being granted access to welfare based on a SPDAT score without having other hoops to jump through.
- Permanent Supportive Housing: we have seen a huge increase in PSH providers that have incorporated the SPDAT for residents already in their buildings to improve the support structure. The result has been much higher retention amongst those that have higher acuity, as well as more strategic moving-on amongst some residents that realize that they do not need as many supports as they thought.
- Supporting people with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders: the SPDAT has been increasingly used in programs that support people with FASD. Research and evaluation conducted specifically in the use of SPDAT with this population has demonstrated very favorable results in using SPDAT.

## 35. I still have questions. What do I do?

You can send a note to [info@orgcode.com](mailto:info@orgcode.com) and we will respond to you within a 3-5 business days.