VI-SPDAT FAQs AUSTRALIA

1. **What is the VI-SPDAT? And where does this come from?**

    The VI-SPDAT is a triage tool used with people who are homeless to gather a snapshot of current vulnerabilities as well as risks to housing stability.

    The VI-SPDAT was created by OrgCode Consulting, Inc., a Canadian consulting firm specializing in homelessness and housing. The initial versions of the VI-SPDAT blended the Vulnerability Index made popular through the 100K Homes Campaign led by Community Solutions in the United States, with the SPDAT pre-screen tool.

2. **Has much research or testing that gone into the development of the VI-SPDAT?**

    Every question asked within the VI-SPDAT has a body of research and evidence that supports it being asked. To see a sample of the summary of information and research behind each question, take a look at this which was prepared for the section on Meaningful Daily Activities.

    The tool itself goes through considerable testing as well. With research and evidence in hand, almost all questions are written by people experiencing homelessness and tested with others experiencing homelessness as well as frontline staff. We are looking to make sure questions are understood and that the order of questions does not result in survey fatigue.

    Outsourcing of the tool also occurs to get a professional opinion from policy experts, academics, and experts in trauma, domestic violence, and anti-oppression. These independent reviews are intended to ensure the tool stays true to a body of evidence, that it is in keeping with an overall policy direction in reducing and ending homelessness, and to ensure there are few if any phrases or elements of the tool that would place any particular group at a disadvantage or which would be retraumatizing to someone.

    Independent testing has also been completed. The University of Southern California and Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago concluded, amongst other things, that, "Risk assessment scores successfully predict likelihood of continued housing instability." The US Department of Housing and Urban Development, in 2014, indicated that the VI-SPDAT and SPDAT meets all the criteria for a universal assessment tool. Other independent researchers like Dr. Helene Wrzba has also provided the tool a positive outcome and summative evaluation. Preliminary findings by the California Policy Lab at UCLA are also quite positive with regards to the tool and housing outcomes.

3. **When would you complete a VI-SPDAT?**

    While the VI-SPDAT can be completed at a first meeting, it is sometimes more advantageous to have two or three meetings with a person prior to completing the VI-SPDAT.

4. How should you introduce the VI-SPDAT to a participant?

For inter-rater reliability it is really important that the tool be introduced the same way regardless of who is administering the survey. To that end, every community should have a common explanatory script. While the script can be customized for any location, generally it should outline who is completing the survey, why the survey is being completed, how to answer questions - including skipping any question they do not want to answer, how the information is stored, how the information is used, and a request that the person answer as honestly as they feel comfortable doing.

5. There are 5 domains in the VI-SPDAT, why is this?

There are four domains for the VI-SPDAT (Wellness, Risks, Socialization and Daily Functions, History of Homelessness) and five for the Family VI-SPDAT (the same four plus the family unit). The domains are simply major thematic areas that are explored in the tool.

6. Do many participants agree to complete a VI-SPDAT?

Rates of people refusing to participate are exceptionally low. Data assembled from approximately 70,000 VI-SPDAT records across the United States and Canada show refusal rates to participate as less than 1%.

7. What do you do about participants that are reluctant to complete a VI-SPDAT?

Participants are less likely to complete the VI-SPDAT when it is transparent why it is being completed and how the information is used. In those rare instances where someone refuses to participate, the community should have a parallel process for still considering a person or family for housing.

8. The VI-SPDAT requires a participant to self-report, is this accurate enough?

Self-report is a common way to capture preliminary information about a presenting issue, whether that be triage at a hospital or engaging with people who are homeless about their vulnerability and risks to housing stability. More accurate information is self-reported when the opening script requests people's honestly. Testing has also showed that the "order of magnitude" of recall is accurate enough for planning and service purposes. For example, a person may have had 18 encounters with police but only recalls 14 encounters – while off by four encounters, both demonstrate a considerable amount of police engagement within a six month period.

9. Some of the questions feel a bit intrusive, will these not re-traumatise the participant?

While the questions are tested with people who are homeless, there is also the possibility that some people will not want to answer certain questions. This is entirely okay. People should be instructed that they can skip a question they do not want to answer.

It is also acknowledged that some of the questions are intrusive. Local contexts and cultures vary. Rewording a question to be less intrusive can also be possible if there is a suggested rewording that may be less traumatizing.

Rest assured, the feedback by experts on trauma who have reviewed the tool has also been incorporated. Even the question about the experience of abuse and trauma was written by people who are experts on trauma.

10. **What if we cannot complete the whole VI-SPDAT in one sitting?**

    While it is ideal to complete the VI-SPDAT in one sitting, there will be exceptional circumstances when this is not possible. In those rare times, completing it over multiple sittings is acceptable.

11. **How can a VI-SPDAT inform our support plan?**

    There are various ways the VI-SPDAT can inform a support plan. The main way is to start by looking at the ways in which the person has strengths – the areas where they do not have acuity. Then there is the opportunity to segue to areas where more attention may be advantageous. Using the domains and sub-themes throughout the VI-SPDAT, the practitioner and program participant can more easily identify and navigate where to put time and attention in the support process.

12. **How can the data collected from VI-SPDATs influence the homelessness sector?**

    The VI-SPDAT provides data that the homelessness sector simply does not have through any other means. This can help an individual service provider reflect on practice and training needs, or help an entire community better plan and support people with higher acuity who are not well served through other approaches. The data makes us more intelligent in the work that is done, when the data is mined and analyzed.

13. **How can the data collected from VI-SPDATs influence governments?**

    There are two main ways the VI-SPDAT data has influenced government: policy development; and, funding. Where policy development is concerned, the aggregate data is unrivaled at painting a coherent, data-driven picture of housing needs for people that are homeless. This has resulted in program tweaks and improvements to prioritization and matching processes to vacancies. Where funding is concerned, there are several communities that have used the VI-SPDAT to create a business case for why further investment is needed in particular types of housing and support interventions.

14. **Why has the VI-SPDAT been introduced to Australia? Are there other countries, other than the USA or Canada that use it too?**

    The VI-SPDAT is the most widely used triage tool used in homeless services. In addition to Canada and the United States, the VI-SPDAT has been used in countries (or parts of countries)

like Czech Republic, Malaysia, Chile, Ireland, and New Zealand. Micah Projects introduced the VI-SPDAT to Australia.