



**YOUR HOME SHOULD BE  
YOUR SAFE PLACE.**

**HOME TAKEOVERS  
GUIDEBOOK**

CRIME  
PREVENTION  
OTTAWA




PRÉVENTION  
DU CRIME  
OTTAWA



OCAPDD / AOCPTD  
Open Hands

# WHAT ARE “HOME TAKEOVERS”?



A “home takeover” is defined as “a situation in which a legitimate tenant or home owner finds themselves unsafe, physically, financially or psychologically, because of the presence of people in their home that they may or may not be able to remove”.<sup>1</sup> Ottawa-based research suggests that takeovers are experienced by a range of people with multiple vulnerabilities.

<sup>1</sup> Crime Prevention Ottawa. (2013). *Home Takeovers of Vulnerable Tenants: Perspectives from Ottawa*. Ottawa, ON: Butera, J. A. This research report is helpful for understanding how home takeovers are experienced in Ottawa. It overviews both prevention and intervention measures and is fundamental for highlighting the necessity for a home takeovers guidebook. The full research can be found on Crime Prevention Ottawa’s website at: [www.crimepreventionottawa.ca](http://www.crimepreventionottawa.ca).

## Four broad forms have been identified:

- 1** Drug related takeovers, whether gang or individually perpetrated
- 2** Takeovers of the formerly homeless
- 3** Takeovers of elderly adults
- 4** Takeovers of people with vulnerabilities (who do not fall within categories 2 or 3)

There are many variations within each broad category of takeover. The takeover of an elderly adult may be family member perpetrated, or it may be that a senior has invited an acquaintance or stranger into the home to relieve isolation and loneliness. Further, these categories are not mutually exclusive. For example, there are a number of instances where a formerly homeless individual has found himself taken over by drug associated acquaintances.

# BACKGROUND TO HOME TAKEOVERS

Research into home takeovers began in 2013 with a literature review entitled, *Cuckooing: Home Takeovers of Vulnerable Tenants*<sup>2</sup>. Service-provider responses to this research indicated the desire for a more localized study to explore the issue, which precipitated the 2013 report, *Home Takeovers of Vulnerable Tenants: Perspectives from Ottawa*. A Home Takeovers Advisory Committee consisting of police, resource centres, housing organizations, mental health services, youth services, city services and other community organizations was formed to address the complex issue.

Since the establishment of the committee, there have been a number of strides made. For example, identifying and defining these dangerous situations as “home takeovers” has triggered conversation amongst service providers and residents. The committee has also collaborated to create resources for residents that are designed to educate about home takeovers, provide practical safety tips and encourage individuals to seek help for themselves, neighbours or friends (see Appendix B). These accomplishments have successfully begun the process of bringing education and awareness around home takeovers to the forefront of local discussions on safety.

# WHAT IS THE “HOME TAKEOVERS GUIDEBOOK”?

This guidebook is designed to assist front-line workers in managing incidences of home takeovers by outlining steps and considerations. Given the variety of ways that home takeovers can present, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. The complexities associated with home takeovers necessitate that front-line staff exercise good judgement in deciding an appropriate course of action to take in each unique circumstance. Recognizing that methods of addressing home takeovers are influenced by the mandates of the client-serving agencies practicing them, an additional intent of this guidebook is to encourage those agencies to develop a home takeovers policy that harmonizes with their vision and values.

Suggested prevention, identification, intervention and after-care mechanisms cited in this document are a result of consultation with various front-line service providers, victims, and the Home Takeovers Committee, who have been instrumental in guiding the content of this document.

# PREVENTION

Preventing home takeovers involves a number of interconnected mechanisms and should be personalized based on the needs of the client. However, there are many possible methods to consider no matter the circumstances. Takeovers are best prevented when:

- There is a good relationship between the client and the worker. This is fundamental to understanding both the client's service needs and in supporting the client to disclose information relevant to a home takeover situation. Similarly, fostering a positive relationship between the worker, local police, landlord (if applicable) and the client may not necessarily prevent home takeovers, but may be crucial for resolving a takeover quickly.
  - Clients are connected to supports and services that address their unique vulnerabilities and will assist them in maintaining a safe and positive environment.
  - Clients are aware of the risks of home takeovers and are educated about how to keep their spaces safe. This can take the form of:
    - » *A discussion with the client prior to unit rental about what home takeovers are, what they look like and how to avoid them.*
    - » *Resistance training, namely, how to say "no" to someone who wants to come in.*
- » *Discussing and planning around what the client wants for their home and how to achieve that.*
  - » *If the client has addictions, educating on how to use substances safely in their home.*
  - » *Ensuring that the landlord has thoroughly explained the consequences to the tenant's housing in the case of a home takeover.*
- There is an agreement that service providers can share information about the client. In some cases, landlords have asked the new tenant at time of rental if they can share information with their worker in case something happens.
- Isolation is reduced by ensuring that the individual feels part of a larger community. Community can mean many things:
  - » *Connectedness between buildings and between tenants of neighbouring units.*
  - » *Ethnic communities or communities of culture.*
  - » *Communities based on common interests.*

# IDENTIFICATION

Front-line workers should be aware of the following, as they may be indicators that a home takeover situation is occurring with the client:

- The individual becomes reluctant to allow the worker into the unit or requests that meetings occur outside of the unit.
- The client has not checked in with his or her worker in some time and is noticeably absent from the unit. Some home takeover victims turn up in shelters despite being legitimate tenants of a rented unit because they have been forced out.
- There is an increase in complaints lobbied against the unit, particularly those involving noise and an excess of visitors.
- There is a noticeable change in the client's financial situation, including an uncharacteristic inability to pay rent, bills or buy groceries.
- The client's physical appearance has deteriorated.
- There is an increase in reports that the individual has become more isolated from friends, family and/or social groups.
- If given access to the unit, contents within suggest that there are more individuals staying in the unit than those that reside there, or in some cases, the takeover perpetrator are there.

Reports from neighbours, friends and family members are often crucial for identifying home takeovers. Unfortunately, these bystanders may be apprehensive to report for fear of identification by the perpetrator or because of a belief that nothing will be done in response. In order to encourage bystander cooperation in home takeover situations, those who report should be notified of the process following their statement and assured that all information provided is valuable.

The most obvious way to identify a home takeover is through client disclosure. However, victims of home takeovers often choose not to report the takeover for a number of reasons as highlighted in the research. If you suspect that a problem may be occurring in the unit, consider contacting the landlord and other providers serving the client to share relevant information.

# INTERVENTION

In Ottawa, home takeovers have been resolved by a number of complimentary interventions depending on the circumstances. Importantly, solutions to home takeover situations are not the result of single-handed efforts; the amount of differing services that may be needed in a particular instance necessitate intervention from multiple individuals with varying levels and subjects of expertise. Further, while police are often a good resource to consider, not all clients will want to explore that route. Nonetheless, it is important for the worker to inform the police should the client be in danger of imminent harm.

Intervention strategies often revolve around making the environment uncomfortable for the perpetrator. Methods include:

- Visiting the client more frequently and at non-scheduled times, including during the evening when more activity takes place. This can also take the form of responding to false noise complaints and other related calls.
- Affixing postings outside the tenant's door notifying that the unit is being watched.
- Working with police and/or building security to implement increased security measures including:
  - » *Increased surveillance on the unit and/or surrounding community*
  - » *Installation of cameras on the floor and in other areas of the building with high traffic*
  - » *Safety audits and crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) type improvements (i.e., increased lighting, removal of shrubs that conceal sight-lines)*
- If you are aware of who the perpetrator is, instituting a trespass order on him or her, if possible.
- In apartment buildings, working with the landlord to do home takeovers flyer-drops and safety door knocks on the affected floor.



If the client is engaged in the intervention, working collaboratively with that individual to create a plan unique to their circumstance has proven to be successful. Methods that could be part of this strategy include:

- Motivating the client to resolve the takeover by highlighting how something he cares about is being affected.
- Playing the “bad guy” by prompting the victim to tell the perpetrator that they are facing eviction because of the takeover. However, if the eviction notice does not persuade the perpetrator to leave the unit, the landlord must make a decision whether to follow through on the notice. Choosing not to could produce a more damaging situation whereby the perpetrator feels increasingly empowered by the lack of consequences.
- If possible, relocating the client. In critical takeover situations, leveraging partnerships may help to facilitate a quicker transfer.
- Changing the locks to the unit when the perpetrator is absent.
- Calling 9-1-1 to have the perpetrator removed from the property. This may not be feasible in all situations, but should certainly be done when the client is in immediate danger.

In some cases, those victimized in a home takeover situation don't recognize it as such or if they do, are tolerant of it due to the benefits associated with housing the perpetrator. This can make developing a home takeovers solution increasingly problematic.

Consider the following suggestions:

- Where the perpetrator is a family member, consider approaching other available family members to assist in developing a personalized strategy.
- Discuss what benefits the individual is receiving by housing the perpetrator. How can these benefits be supplemented in a safe way? For example, if the individual is receiving “friendship”, consider suggesting programs or groups that play into their interests. In doing so, the client can build associations with pro-social peers and develop an understanding of how a friend should act.

Whether a victim is seeking help or not, it is important to affirm with the individual the right to feel safe in one's own home and the worker's obligation to ensure that happens.

# AFTER CARE

Once a home takeover has been dealt with, steps must be taken to mitigate the possibility of a takeover reoccurring and any potential retaliation against the victim from the perpetrator or his associates. Concern is particularly high in situations where the takeover involved gangs and/or drug debts. Measures to support an individual following a takeover may include:

- Changing the locks to the unit.
- Transferring the client to a separate unit in a different area of town. In cases where the individual is fearful of his life should he remain in the City, consider setting up housing options outside of Ottawa.
- Frequent worker check-ins following the incident to ensure that the client is not being victimized further.
- Discussing with the individual what kind of supports they need to re-establish a positive environment. This may include tasks as simple as assisting in cleaning and repairing the unit or could mean developing a more involved recovery plan.

- If possible, consider reaching out to the perpetrator. These individuals often have needs that are not being met through legitimate means and therefore rely on victimization in order to fulfil those needs. Attempting to connect the perpetrator with appropriate services can act as a means of mitigating the appeal of committing a future takeover.
- Cycle into the preventative methods listed on page 5 to avoid future takeovers.

In some instances, the takeover has not necessarily been successfully resolved, but has ended because the victim has either given up their housing or been evicted. In such cases, support may include:

- Working with the individual to find new housing.
- Attempting to diminish the financial burden placed on the client as a result of the takeover, including resolving overdue rent payments and costs associated with damages to the unit.

# HOME TAKEOVERS AND THE PROBLEM ADDRESS FRAMEWORK

In July of 2014, a number of service agencies signed the “Multi-Stakeholder Approach to Problem Addresses in Ottawa” (MSAPA). Problem addresses are defined as:

*The site of ongoing disorderly, dangerous and/or threatening activities such as a drug house, a gang hang out, or the location of ongoing public disturbance due to disorderly conduct, noise, excessive or dangerous litter (needles, used condoms, etc.), other property standards or property maintenance concerns, repeated out of control parties or excessive numbers of guests, that have a significant negative impact on the safety, well-being and peaceful enjoyment of the neighbours.<sup>3</sup>*

The framework is an approach designed to collaboratively respond to problem addresses when all other avenues for intervention have been exhausted.

In many cases, home takeovers and problem addresses overlap. While this often means that the takeover has been occurring for an extended period of time, there are benefits to this dual identification. Describing an address as problematic typically means that a number of organizations are aware of the issues

in the unit and are actively working toward a solution. Although service providers may have different pieces of the information puzzle, a coordinated approach to resolving a takeover is made much easier when partners are already invested. Further, the capacity to use the MSAPA framework in a home takeover situation is an additional level of support when a front-line worker has unsuccessfully tried multiple interventions.

What differentiates home takeovers from many non-takeover related problem addresses is the idea that there is both a victim and perpetrator in the unit. Therefore, when using the MSAPA approach, it is important to consider the needs of the victim during intervention. The MSAPA approach should also be furthered to assist and support the individual following the takeover resolution.

Whether the home takeover is a problem address or not, the MSAPA provides a useful list of resources that a worker may connect with in sharing information and developing an action plan for managing the situation.

<sup>3</sup> A Multi-Stakeholder Approach to Problem Addresses in Ottawa. (2014). Ottawa, ON.

## CASE STUDY 1

**ALISON**

One client named Alison became less willing to let her outreach worker come to her apartment unit. After about a month of insisting that her worker not visit her at home Alison stated that whenever her ODSP check comes in, that Friday a woman named Jen comes to her apartment and persistently asks to borrow money. So persistently that Alison would go with Jen to the bank and withdraw 300 dollars and give it to her. After a few one-to-one conversations with Alison her worker met with other service providers to prepare her to say that her worker was holding her money and that she was no longer able to make withdrawals.

When Jen was informed of this she managed to convince Alison to allow her to stay overnight and consequently stayed for the entire weekend. The following Monday Alison said everything was fine and it wasn't until several weeks later that she disclosed that Jen had been staying with her since she could no longer access money. Alison was a public housing tenant, as a result her worker had her contact the security office in her building and they provided a direct line to contact should Jen arrive at her door. When Jen did knock on Alison's door Alison stated that "her home is not a hotel" and refused to open the door. Jen has not been back to Alison's unit; however, if Alison had opened the door her apartment's security was prepared to remove Jen and issue a no trespass notice.

## WHAT MADE THE INTERVENTION **SUCCESSFUL?**



- | The worker had a good enough relationship with Alison that she was willing to divulge the details of her situation.
- | The support worker identified partners to engage with and developed a collaborative plan of action.
- | Security agreed to heighten their response to the unit.
- | Instituting a trespass order was a viable back-up option, but Alison was first given the opportunity to resolve the takeover in a self-empowering way.
- | The worker helped Alison assert herself using a few key words. Not only did this serve to end the existing takeover, but hopefully gives her the confidence to prevent falling victim to a home takeover in the future.

## CASE STUDY 2

# ALEX

A client named Alex struggled with addictions and before he knew it there were groups of people in his unit at all times taking intravenous drugs and staying for extended periods of time despite his vocal requests that these people leave. Alex had a grandson that he very much wanted to see but was unable to because of the condition of his unit and at the time his struggle with addictions. Alex's mental health worker helped him find another unit and referred him to an outpatient addictions service. When Alex moved into the new unit a photo of his old unit and his grandson were placed on the inside of the door. This was done so that every time Alex went to open his door he was reminded of what his old life looked like, his loved ones, and why he would no longer open his door for people who would take advantage of him.

## WHAT MADE THE INTERVENTION **SUCCESSFUL?**



| A variety of partners collaborated to deal with Alex's case.

| The worker identified the vulnerability that ultimately led to the takeover and was able to connect Alex to an appropriate service.

| Alex was given the opportunity to transfer units.

| Alex's passion for reconnecting with his family was used as a motivation to prevent future takeovers. In particular, a creative solution was developed to empower Alex to manage his space safely.

### CASE STUDY 3

## WILFRED

An elderly man named Wilfred invited his granddaughter, Sara to stay with him after losing her job. Claiming that she wanted to take care of him, Sara would frequently ask her grandfather for money and his bank card so that she could run his errands, do his grocery shopping, and pick up his medications. Instead, she would take the money to buy alcohol, drugs, and other things for herself. She would convince him that he was losing his memory and that he had never given her money or his bank card. She refused to let him see his friends or have them over for visits, leave the house or use his phone, telling him that she was worried people would take advantage of him because of his memory loss.

Pamela, a friend and neighbour of Wilfred's who was used to seeing him often noticed that he was no longer appearing at social gatherings and wasn't answering phone calls. Worried that the arrival of his granddaughter was having a negative effect on him, she visited Wilfred while Sara was out. Pamela noticed that Wilfred had lost weight and the only thing in his fridge was beer. Wilfred shared what was happening and Pamela helped Wilfred understand that he was being abused and his home taken over. With Pamela's support, Wilfred connected with an elder abuse worker who coached Wilfred on how to voice his concerns to Sara and tell her to leave. With Wilfred's permission, the worker was at the house and prepared to call the police if Sara refused.



## WHAT MADE THE INTERVENTION **SUCCESSFUL?**



- Wilfred's neighbours knew him well enough to detect that something was wrong. Pamela was concerned enough to check-up on him when she could gain access to his home and support him in resolving the takeover.
- Wilfred was able to see for himself how problematic the situation was and was open to getting help from a service provider. In senior takeovers, the hardest part can be helping the victim to recognize that their family member is taking advantage of them.
- Wilfred was empowered to manage of the takeover himself. Giving him the opportunity to stand-up to an abusive family member may have instilled the confidence to ensure that it doesn't happen again.
- The worker had a back-up plan. If Wilfred's attempts to get Sara out had failed, Wilfred's situation could have become more dangerous.

POSTERS

Your home should be your safe place.

**DON'T LET OTHERS COME IN AND  
TAKE OVER YOUR HOME.**

Beware of home takeovers. If you have guests or visitors who won't leave,

**GET HELP**

**CALL**

Someone you trust

Your support worker

Your landlord

Ottawa Police Service  
613-236-1222 x7300



Votre domicile devrait être un lieu sûr.

# NE LAISSEZ PERSONNE S'EMPARER DE VOTRE DOMICILE.

Méfiez-vous de la prise de possession de domicile.  
Si vous avez des invités ou des visiteurs qui refusent de quitter votre domicile,

**DEMANDEZ DE L'AIDE.**

**APPELEZ :**

Quelqu'un en qui vous  
avez confiance

Votre préposé aux services  
de soutien à la personne

Le propriétaire de  
votre logement

Le service de police d'Ottawa,  
au 613.236.1222, poste 7300



**PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT YOU DON'T:**

- Ask for your keys
- Eat all your food
- Take your phone
- Use your shower without permission
- Threaten or hurt you
- Sell drugs or do other illegal stuff
- Steal your things
- Sexually assault you
- Force you out of your home

**STAY SAFE:**

- Don't let others deal drugs in your home.
- Don't let too many people into your place at once.
- Never give your phone or keys to someone else.

If you feel that your neighbour or someone you know is in danger, take action and get help. Don't let someone take over their home, or yours.

**GET HELP**  
DON'T LET OTHERS COME IN AND TAKE

**HOW TO TAKE ACTION:**

- Don't
- Get c
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- » You
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- If you

**YOUR HOME SHOULD BE YOUR SAFE PLACE.**

Do you feel threatened in your home?  
Can't get rid of unwanted guests?  
You have every right to take back your place.



**WHAT IS A HOME TAKEOVER?**

A takeover is when a friend, relative or someone you know takes over your home. They may use it to crash, sell drugs, do illegal activities or steal from you. As the tenant, you are responsible for what happens in your home.

A home takeover could happen to you, your neighbour or someone you care about. You need to get help. It's important to know the warning signs and what you can do about them.

**HOW THEY HOOK YOU:**

- Ask to crash on the couch
- Give free dope or clear your debt
- Offer women for sexual favours
- Offer protection

## LES PERSONNES QUI SE SOUCIENT DE VOUS NE VONT PAS :

- Vous demander vos clés;
- Manger toute votre nourriture;
- Prendre votre téléphone;
- Vous menacer ou vous faire du mal;
- Prendre de douches chez vous sans votre permission;
- Vendre de la drogue ou d'autres marchandises illégales chez vous;
- Vous voler des biens;
- Vous agresser sexuellement;
- Vous forcer à quitter votre domicile.

## RESTEZ EN SÉCURITÉ

- Ne laissez pas des personnes faire du trafic de drogue chez vous;
- N'accueillez pas un trop grand nombre de personnes chez vous à la fois;
- Ne donnez jamais votre téléphone ni vos clés à qui que ce soit.

Si vous pensez qu'un voisin ou qu'une personne que vous connaissez est en danger, demandez de l'aide. Ne laissez personne s'emparer de leur domicile ni du vôtre.

**DEMANDEZ DE L'AIDE.**  
NE LAISSEZ PAS D'AUTRES PERSONNES PRENDRE POS

## MESURES À PRENDRE

- Ne co
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**VOTRE DOMICILE DEVRIT ÊTRE UN LIEU SÛR.**

Vous vous sentez menacé dans votre propre foyer?

Vous êtes incapable de vous débarrasser d'invités indésirables?

Vous avez le droit de reprendre possession de votre domicile.



## QU'EST-CE QU'UNE PRISE DE POSSESSION DE DOMICILE?

Il y a une prise de possession de votre domicile si un ami, un membre de votre famille ou quelqu'un d'autre que vous connaissez s'empare de votre lieu de résidence. Cette personne peut se servir de votre domicile pour y dormir, pour vendre de la drogue ou pour mener d'autres activités illégales, et elle peut vous voler des biens. Comme locataire, vous êtes responsable de ce qui se passe chez vous.

N'importe qui peut être victime d'une prise de possession de domicile : vous même, un voisin ou une personne que vous aimez. Demandez de l'aide au besoin. Il est important de reconnaître les signes de prise de possession de domicile et de savoir ce qu'on peut faire à ce sujet.

## LES PERSONNES QUI CHERCHENT À S'EMPARER D'UN DOMICILE VONT :

- Demander à coucher sur la sofa;
- Donner de la drogue ou effacer vos dettes;
- Offrir des faveurs sexuelles;
- Offrir une protection.

Posters and information cards may be downloaded on the Crime Prevention Ottawa website:

[www.crimepreventionottawa.ca](http://www.crimepreventionottawa.ca)

Arabic and Somali cards are also available.

Copies of the poster and information card may be ordered by email or telephone:

[cpo@ottawa.ca](mailto:cpo@ottawa.ca)

**(613) 580-2424 ext. 25393**

## VIDEO

An educational video about home takeovers will be available in early July 2015. The video will present different takeover scenarios and include information about how they may be identified and approached. This resource will be accessible on both the Ottawa-Carleton Association for Persons with Developmental Disabilities and the Crime Prevention Ottawa websites:

[www.ocapdd.on.ca](http://www.ocapdd.on.ca)

[www.crimepreventionottawa.ca](http://www.crimepreventionottawa.ca)

# GET HELP

**DON'T LET OTHERS COME IN AND TAKE OVER YOUR HOME.**



OCAPDD / AOCPDI  
Open Hands

CRIME  
PREVENTION  
OTTAWA



PRÉVENTION  
DU CRIME  
OTTAWA

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