



Lisbon, Portugal

CRESCER^e

✓	Needle and syringe programme
✓	Safer smoking equipment
✓	Housing First
✓	Hepatitis C testing and treatment
✓	Safe space
✓	Basic needs: Clothes, showers and snacks
✓	Recreation: Library, computers and TV
✓	Condoms and lubricants
✓	Prescription delivery

✓	Health consultations
✓	Psychosocial, psychological and psychiatric consultations
✓	Employment programmes
✓	Linkage to opioid agonist therapy
✓	Linkage to health services
✓	Linkage to social services
✓	Linkage to legal services

Background

CRESCER is a non-governmental organisation in Lisbon, Portugal. Founded in 2001, they provide harm reduction and other services for approximately 2,000 people annually, including people who use drugs and people experiencing homelessness. In 2002, they began an outreach project, É UMA RUA ('It's a street'), and in 2013 they established a drop-in centre, Espaço Âncora ('Anchor Space'), and a housing first programme, É UMA CASA, Lisboa Housing First ('It's a home'). Each of CRESCER's 15 projects have their own funding, with support primarily coming from public bodies including local and national government bodies and the European Union. Paid peer workers have been included among CRESCER's staff since 2002, and account for around a quarter of employees.

Integrated services

Each of CRESCER's projects operate independently, but with strong pathways of referral and access between them according to their clients' needs. According to staff at CRESCER, the focus on integrated services reflects a holistic approach to their clients. Services are focused on the person as a whole and

their priorities, rather than identifying individual 'problems'. This produces effective responses that are grounded in the lived experience of individuals. Co-ordination between clients, teams, projects and organisations means that clients have easy access to all the services they need and they can cultivate warm, trusting and respectful relationships.

É UMA RUA is CRESCER's outreach programme for people who use drugs and people experiencing homelessness. They deliver harm reduction commodities, including sterile injecting equipment and safer smoking equipment, naloxone (when available), information on harm reduction and health promotion, and sexual and menstrual health products. In 2020, they delivered almost 40,000 injecting kits. The multidisciplinary outreach teams include peer educators, nurses, social workers, psychologists and a psychiatric doctor (once a week), and can also carry out mental and physical health consultations and deliver prescription medication on their daily routes. Since 2018, É UMA RUA has been accompanied by the REACH-U project, targeting micro-elimination of hepatitis C in the community. **Through this project, clients can access the entire continuum of hepatitis C care without ever needing to attend a hospital or clinic.**

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É UMA CASA, Lisboa Housing First was launched in 2013, and now has 120 apartments scattered across Lisbon. The project provides immediate access to permanent, independent and individual housing, in apartments that are rented by CRESCER from the private rental market. CRESCER's outreach teams, as well as other non-governmental organisations working with people experiencing homelessness, are essential to identifying people who would benefit from É UMA CASA, Lisboa Housing First. **Tenants are generally chronically homeless, use drugs in a way that causes them health or social problems, have comorbidities (such as HIV or hepatitis C), and are otherwise extremely vulnerable due to factors like social isolation and a lack of trust in health and social services. There is no requirement that they abstain from drug or alcohol use or that they are Portuguese nationals (or even have documented migrant status), and they can bring pets with them.**

Each tenant has 24-hour individual support, for long term issues and acute crises. CRESCER provide tenants with harm reduction materials and information, and can refer and accompany them to other harm reduction, health and social services. Apartments come fully furnished, and CRESCER also support tenants with redecoration and maintenance to create a home. Case managers can also assist tenants to manage their finances in accordance with the clients' ambitions and if they request assistance. If people want to move out of CRESCER's apartments, they can be supported to search for new accommodation in the private market, if necessary.

All clients in contact with É UMA RUA and É UMA CASA, Lisboa Housing First can also make use of Espaço Âncora (Anchor Space), CRESCER's drop-in centre. The range of services and activities available is broad, including access to safe injecting and smoking equipment, clothes, a library, computers, showers, televisions and snacks. They also put on guided activities to promote social skills, new interests and

friendships, including workshops, theatre groups and painting studios. Above all, the emphasis at Espaço Âncora is on trust. **This makes it a place of unconditional support, care and learning, where clients can take advantage of services and activities as they wish and based on their personal needs and objectives.**

Links to other organisations and services

CRESCER maintains close links to other organisations and services, ensuring strong referral pathways for their clients. **The frameworks established after the 2001 decriminalisation of drugs in Portugal are particularly focused on health.** For example, the *equipas de tratamento* ('treatment teams') enable referral to low threshold OAT services or drug treatment where appropriate to the objectives of the client. The outreach teams refer clients to infectious disease testing, treatment and counselling where this cannot be delivered by CRESCER. In 2020, the team made more than 800 such referrals.

Alongside this, CRESCER also links to social services. They can refer people to shelters or employment services. They also have connections with the *Santa Casa da Misericórdia*, an organisation with an important role in the provision of social security in Portugal. In 2020, the outreach team recorded more than 260 referrals to social services. Each time a new tenant joins É UMA CASA, Lisboa Housing First, one of the first things the team does is to register the person at the parish council, so that they can benefit from potential support and services, and at the health centre in their area of residence.

CRESCER ensures that clients and tenants have access to legal services where necessary. This means supporting them to obtain identification documents

or normalise their migration status, including engagement with embassies. CRESCER partner with Pro Bono, a network of lawyers who work for free for third sector organisations; clients in need of legal support can be referred to this network.

Key lessons

- Even complex services, like blood tests and consultations, can be delivered in a way that places minimal burdens on clients' time and resources.
- Service integration is about making services accessible and empowering people to use them, without pressure or obligation.
- Enabling political and legal environments support greater integration and accessibility.