

Health and Housing

Cross-Sector Collaboration Best Practice Feature

“Having a home is like having a force field to protect you” says a client of Cathy Crowe, established Toronto Street Nurse and Homeless Advocate¹. The impacts of unstable housing and/or homelessness on health and recovery are serious and varied. It is becoming clear how homelessness can exacerbate health issues, and health issues can contribute to homelessness. It is also being reported that people who are vulnerably housed are facing the same kinds and severity of health problems as people who are homeless, while stabilizing housing decreases the use of emergency and treatment services, as well as improving recovery. The need for addressing these issues across the sectors is important.

Investing in affordable, adequate and stable housing is investing in health

While there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to navigating both sectors, there are ways to improve communication and collaboration to achieve better health and stable housing.

6 Best Practices for Working across the Health and Housing Sectors:

Build strong partnerships

Partnerships between health and housing organizations support mutual clients because working together expands the knowledge of both sectors, reduces the need for clients to repeat themselves, and allows workers to focus on their area of expertise. Strong partnerships meet regularly and have clear roles to coordinate support services and care.

Coordinate client care and support

Coordinating case management and transitional plans creates more comprehensive follow-up and/or wrap around services. Involving workers from each sector early on means that supports can be identified ahead of time, and difficult transitions are made easier for mutual clients. This can include having housing professionals meet with clients before they are discharged from hospitals, and introducing a client to the other worker personally. Important in this is developing strategies for ensuring privacy and confidentiality across sectors.

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Communicate and share information

Documenting and sharing best practices about your work and/or partnerships improves service access. Sharing what services are available and what works means clients and workers can quickly and effectively address needs, which means more time spent stabilizing health and housing and less time spent searching.

Create cross-training and networking opportunities

Training and networking opportunities between the sectors are essential to providing comprehensive client support and sharing best practices. Cross-training is important because health care professionals can often be the first point of access and housing professionals in some cases see clients more regularly. Networking opportunities between the sectors will facilitate problem solving, planning, as well as sharing resources and knowledge.

Provide client centred support that addresses barriers

Client centred support includes addressing discrimination that creates barriers in accessing services. Working together across sectors to create safer spaces means addressing the ways that discrimination influences poverty, health, homelessness. Sharing how workers and agencies break barriers promotes learning and better access to services system wide.

“So Remember...”

- **Supporting clients together improves access to services**
- **Sharing what works best for you promotes best practices for everyone**
- **Networking and training across sectors means faster problem solving and referrals**
- **Addressing discrimination and barriers to services promotes system wide learning**
- **Planning and evaluating system wide practices increases the possibility of effective, long term solution**

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Think big together

Cross-sectoral strategizing creates creative solutions to complex needs. Some examples are, including a stable, affordable housing in your organization's definition of health, increasing your understanding of the Housing First Model, implementing coordinated policies such as, no discharging into homelessness and starting discharge planning at intake that includes involving a housing professional.

References

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