

Exploring paths forward: transitions from residential treatment among young people who use drugs.

Category: Oral Presentation

Abstract Body

Improving residential treatment and community-based recovery programs so that they better align with the needs, priorities, and desires of young people who use drugs (YPWUD) remains an urgent national health priority in Canada, particularly in the context of an unprecedented overdose crisis. Existing quantitative and qualitative research has predominantly focused on facilitators and barriers to program engagement among YPWUD. However, a growing body of research has shifted attention to longer-term treatment and recovery trajectories that include multiple periods of engagement and disengagement with care. It has been noted that many unanswered questions remain about what happens next for young people who are pursuing recovery, broadly defined, following residential treatment. Objective: To examine young people's understandings, perceptions, and experiences of life after residential treatment for substance use disorder, including diverse conceptions of "recovery".

Methods: In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted between 2018 and 2020 with 40 young people between the ages of 14-24 recruited at in-patient residential treatment facilities in Vancouver, Canada. Longitudinal interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically. All activities were undertaken in collaboration with a Youth Health Advisory Council.

Findings: When reflecting on questions of "what's next" following residential treatment, many young people described simultaneous senses of desire and frustration. A number articulated how cycling through treatment, unstable living arrangements, and tumultuous relationships complicated understandings and imaginings of "what's next." Others expressed significant uncertainty about dominant conceptions of "recovery" as largely defined by maintaining abstinence following treatment. Finally, young people described the need to re-imagine familiar rhythms and routines to include the kinds of affective experiences (e.g., senses of fun, thrill) that substance use had previously engendered.

Conclusion: Findings suggest that in addition to supporting young people along a continuum ranging from harm

reduction to abstinence, substance use treatment and recovery must also encompass and prioritize supporting young people with securing safe and stable housing, income, and re-engaging with leisure, culture, spirituality, and relationships across expanded timelines (e.g., > 1 year).

Key Words

- Adolescent/Young Adult Populations
- Recovery
- Substance Use Disorder (general)
- Treatment Models/Programs

Learning Objective # 1

Describe contextual factors shaping the lives of young people navigating life after residential treatment

Learning Objective # 2

Identify policy and programmatic changes needed to advance post-treatment care and recovery supports for young people who use drugs

Reference # 1

Schoenberger, S.F., Park, T.W., dellaBitta, V. et al. “My Life Isn’t Defined by Substance Use”: Recovery Perspectives Among Young Adults with Substance Use Disorder. *J GEN INTERN MED* 37, 816–822 (2022)

Reference # 2

Monico LB, Ludwig A, Lertch E, Schwartz RP, Fishman M, Mitchell SG. Post-residential treatment outpatient care preferences: Perspectives of youth with opioid use disorder. *J Subst Abuse Treat.* 2022;137:108692.

Lead Author

Mr. Cameron Eekhoudt
PhD Student | BC Centre on Substance Use

Co-Author

Dr. Danya Fast
Assistant Professor | University of British Columbia