

Older Albertans Experiencing Homeless and Addiction: A Systems and Policy Analysis

Category: Poster Presentation (In-Person)

Abstract Body

Context

Older homelessness in Alberta is growing. Many Older people with experiences of homelessness (OPEH) have complex health challenges (physical and mental illness, addiction). They face barriers to care, both individual and structural. Historically, Alberta has developed impactful approaches to supports for marginalized groups. This review was undertaken to study relevant policy and system structures to identify how best to support OPEH with complex needs including addiction.

Method

Identification, selection and analysis was undertaken of 1) government reports, 2) academic and grey literature, and 3) a select list of expert interviews (n=7) to report on the different factors that shape the health and social outcomes of OPEH with complex needs in Alberta.

Results

Four policy pillars shaping the outcomes of OPEH with complex needs in Alberta were identified: 1) the housing and homelessness sector 2) continuing care in Alberta 3) federal and provincial approaches to harm reduction and 4) the operation of Federal Indian policy.

Discussion

Five recommendations to improve the health and social outcomes of OPEH in Alberta were generated: 1) consolidating current approaches to enumerating OPEH in Alberta using the age of 50 as a standard metric; 2) Freezing the age of eligibility for Old Age Security payments at 65; 3) Fully integrating harm reduction services within facility-based networks of continuing care in Alberta; 4) Acknowledging the risks of reliance on home-based continuing care for older people who are unhoused; 5) Grounding emergent strategic frameworks to address OPEH within consideration of federal Indian policy and the unique causes and contours of Indigenous homelessness.

Conclusion

The centralization of health services in Alberta and historic success with supporting younger people experiencing homelessness uniquely position Alberta to be a leader in implementing system change to support the needs of older people with experiences of homelessness and addiction.

Key Words (Max 5)

- Equity, Diversity, Inclusion Issues
- Elderly Populations
- Policy
- Prevention/Harm Reduction
- Substance Use Disorders (general)

Learning Objective #1

To appraise policy and system structures that shape the health and social outcomes of older people with complex needs including experiences of homelessness and addiction

Learning Objective #2

To describe potential policy and system changes to better support the needs of older people with experiences of homelessness and addiction

Reference #1

Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, Improving Quality of Life: Substance Use and Aging, 2018, 27, <https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2022-04/CCSA-Substance-Use-and-Aging-Report-2018-en%20%28ID%2023186%29.pdf>

Reference #2

John Church and Neale Smith, Alberta: A Health System Profile (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022), 15.

Lead Author

Dr. Lara Nixon

Family Physician, Associate Professor | Department of Family Medicine, University of Calgary