



HPRI Research Symposium: *What We Learned*

Permanent Supportive Housing: Evaluating the Evidence for Improving Health Outcomes Among People Experiencing Chronic Homelessness

EVENT DETAILS

Date: September 25, 2018

Location: University of Southern California

Researcher: Dr. Suzanne Wenzel, Richard and Ann Thor Professor in Urban Social Development at the USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work

BACKGROUND

HPRI Research Symposia provide an opportunity for researchers to share current and upcoming work with colleagues and policymakers. The goal of these symposia is to inform current policymaking efforts across Los Angeles County, inform future research studies relevant to homelessness in Los Angeles County.

Dr. Suzanne Wenzel presented research findings from the recent National Academy of Sciences report, *Permanent Supportive Housing: Evaluating the Evidence for Improving Health Outcomes Among People Experiencing Chronic Homelessness*. The program included a discussion about policy implications and future research directions as stakeholders work to understand the impact that permanent supportive housing has on the homeless population and their health.



Primary Research Question: To what extent have permanent supportive housing programs improved health outcomes and affected health care costs in people experiencing homelessness?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- PSH is effective in keeping persons stably and safely housed and has great potential for both reducing the number of persons experiencing chronic homelessness and improving their health outcomes.
- Existing research data is too limited to demonstrate definitively that PSH contributes to improved health outcomes.
- There is a need for more well-designed, high quality research studies to more clearly define the impact of PSH on the health outcomes of the homeless population.



ADDITIONAL TAKEAWAYS

Impact of PSH on Health

- In studies where quality of life and satisfaction have been measured over time, PSH has been shown to have a positive impact.
- Among people living with HIV/AIDS in supportive housing, there have been benefits to health outcomes including positive changes to CD4 counts and viral loads.

PSH and Health Related Costs

- While some studies do suggest that PSH may produce cost offsets, primarily due to reduced emergency department and inpatient service use for example, a higher standard would involve calculating a cost-effectiveness ratio to understand net cost per "quality adjusted life year".
- There is a shortage of high quality research that focuses on cost effectiveness as it relates to PSH, most center on cost savings or cost avoidance.

Population Health Factors

- Few mental health conditions are caused by homelessness, but the lack of safe, stable housing can contribute to the worsening of a mental health condition.
- Freedom from police brutality should be considered a component of population health — particularly among the unsheltered homeless population where rates of engagement with law enforcement are high.

Linking Different Systems of Care

- Research should begin to track what kind of health services residents of supportive housing are most likely to consume and address the question of who should be providing those services.
- There needs for better linkages between the housing and healthcare systems to ensure people are getting better health care, substance abuse treatment, and mental health treatment — and that the responsibility of providing these services does not fall to housing providers alone.

Recommendations for Future PSH Research

- Research should explore health conditions that are sensitive to the potential impact of housing, and which the absence of housing would worsen an individual's condition — known as "housing-sensitive conditions".
- There is a need for standardized PSH definitions and clearly defined program characteristics & services to allow for more comprehensive research on health outcomes for individuals living in PSH.
- There is a need for enhanced screening & assessment tools to be able to more accurately identify individuals whose housing or health outcomes are more likely to improve through the PSH model and related service.

*For questions about the Homelessness Policy Research Institute,
please contact Elly Schoen, Data & Project Manager, at ebschoen@price.usc.edu.*