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Addressing Housing Challenges Faced by People with HIV in Ontario

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McMaster HEALTH FORUM

Topic Overview

Addressing Housing Challenges Faced by People with HIV in Ontario

Stakeholder Dialogue
1 June 2010

The McMaster Health Forum convened a stakeholder dialogue on the subject of addressing housing challenges faced by people with HIV. With the support of the Ontario HIV Treatment Network, the dialogue brought together participants – two policymakers, one manager from a health region, five housing providers, two representatives from AIDS service organizations, one representative from a healthcare organization, four researchers/research funders, and two other stakeholders – from across Ontario to examine the problem, options for addressing it, and key implementation considerations.

The stakeholder dialogue and the issue brief that informed it were funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), through a Meetings, Planning and Dissemination grant to the Ontario HIV Treatment Network (OHTN). OHTN receives core operating funding from the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care through the AIDS Bureau. The views expressed in the dialogue summary are the views of the author and should not be taken to represent the views of CIHR, OHTN or the Ministry.

CIHR IRSC Canadian Institutes of Health Research / Instituts de recherche en santé du Canada

OHTN

Deliberation about the problem

Dialogue participants were generally persuaded, either by their own experiences or by the available research evidence, that many Ontarians with HIV struggle to find and maintain appropriate, stable housing. They also agreed that housing challenges affect the health and well-being of people with HIV, as well as their access to healthcare services. Differences of opinion tended to be about the uniqueness of the housing challenges faced by people with HIV compared to, for example, people with hepatitis C, addictions and select other conditions. Some of the potentially unique housing issues confronting people with HIV are: 1) the stigma associated with HIV and its implications for disclosure of HIV status to those who can provide healthcare, housing and other forms of care and support; 2) the access to healthcare and adherence to treatment that can be enabled by stable housing and their implications for living well with HIV; and 3) the realities and uncertainties associated with living with HIV and being treated with powerful medications that cause or could cause significant side-effects, and their implications for fluctuations in the factors that influence housing stability.

Ontario

Want to hear participants' insights and reflections?

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www.youtube.com/mcmasterhealthforum

Participants representing government, housing organizations, and AIDS service organizations, among others, gather during a McMaster Health Forum event on 1 June 2010

Deliberation about options

Dialogue participants tended to like aspects of all three options: 1) build on what's in place now; 2) build new programs, particularly ones that foster integration of programs and services to better meet the needs of clients; and 3) tackle the tough jurisdictional issues. However, many dialogue participants felt that a three-pronged strategy had the potential to yield the greatest impacts:

1) collaboratively identify or develop the guiding principles, promising practices and outcome indicators that would guide how these three options were pursued;
2) push for these principles, practices and indicators to be incorporated into credible accountability agreements, such as funding agreements with Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) and memoranda of understanding between housing providers and AIDS service organizations; and
3) push for a dramatic increase in the affordable housing stock available in Ontario and in the support services available in Ontario (e.g., LHINs).

While most dialogue participants felt that forming alliances with other groups facing similar challenges would be the most fruitful way forward, one dialogue participant wondered whether the uniqueness of the housing challenges faced by people with HIV would mean that these individuals would be better served by 'going it alone' with dedicated housing and support services for people with HIV.

Deliberation about implementation

Dialogue participants drawn from the HIV community agreed that there would be value in the community clarifying the arguments about the unique housing issues confronting people with HIV, identifying other groups confronting similar housing issues, and mobilizing the numbers that back up the stories about these issues. Most dialogue participants saw great value in HIV housing providers and key partners collaboratively identifying or developing the guiding principles, promising practices and outcome indicators that would guide further work in this area, both within the HIV sector and potentially well beyond it. They also agreed that the HIV community and its key allies should consider pushing for corresponding changes to accountability agreements, and for a dramatic increase in the affordable housing stock and support services. Several dialogue participants noted the importance of being attentive to 'windows of opportunity,' such as upcoming municipal, provincial and federal elections, the launch of new strategies (e.g., housing, mental health), and the periodic re-neogiation of service agreements with housing and support service providers.

Dialogue deliverables

To learn more about this topic, consult the issue brief that was presented to participants before the dialogue, the summary of the dialogue, or the video interviews with dialogue participants. For an electronic copy of the evidence brief or dialogue summary, or to view the video interviews, visit our website (http://www.mcmasterhealthforum.com) and click on 'Products' along the sidebar.

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