

MY HOUSING IMPACTS MY LIFE

Housing and HIV Assessment Project

*"A lot of folks
line on hotdogs,
hamburgers and
Kraft Dinner"*

*"I stay awake at
night worrying about
the bed bugs coming
to bite me"*

BACKGROUND

Nine Circles Community Health Centre is a community-based, non-profit health centre that specializes in HIV/STI prevention and care. Nine Circles provides coordinated medical and social supports for those living with HIV; promotes sexual and personal health including harm reduction to those at risk; supports HIV and STI prevention through testing, education, and treatment

PURPOSE

This community-based needs assessment was conducted to understand the issues that people with HIV face with regard to housing, in order to:

- Increase awareness of needs
- Identify existing gaps
- Make recommendation for change

The goal was to determine the factors and themes that could enable the development of housing projects or programs to improve the quality of life and health of people with HIV.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach in two phases

- Individual Interviews
- Feedback Session

PARTICIPANTS

All 30 participants had received HIV positive tests, and all lived in Winnipeg but one.

- 18 men and 12 women
- Average age 44 years old (31-63)
- 21 Aboriginal participants
- Years since diagnosis (1-23 years)
- 21 participants on social assistance
- Average grade completed: 10



FINDINGS

Finding **appropriate housing was the number one concern** of the participants, followed by issues around not being able to afford housing, having problems with landlords, **living in unsanitary conditions**, having to deal with **bed bugs or other insects** and being evicted from their homes.

Stress

When dealing with housing issues, participants claimed that their **stress levels were extremely high** and they often have gone without sleep. Mental health was reported as being **more drastically affected than physical health**. Feeling depressed, helpless, frustrated and angry were common emotions associated with housing issues.

Physical health

Participants stated that their physical health is impacted by the environments in which they live. Some reported more skin and lung infections because of living in unsanitary conditions. Others reported **lack of sleep due to noise** and the temperature of their rooms. Bed bugs, insects and rodents were also identified as a major contributing factor poor physical health.

Food security

Most participants noted that despite challenges around accessing food, finding decent housing is a significantly bigger problem. **Nutrition and diet were affected** - participants reported having to give up fresh and perishable food in order to pay their rent. Participants stated that **they often feel worried, stressed, isolated, defeated and fatigued** as a result of not being able to access a proper diet.

Access to services

Biggest issues identified were: not having a phone, lack of transportation, limited crisis or emergency assistance, no assistance with finding housing and poor food delivery services.



WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Key Recommendations

- changes to current social assistance rates for housing and regulations regarding quality of housing services
- increased collaboration between housing and health services
- housing initiatives that are linked to other supportive services
- outreach workers that are able to link clients with services
- collaborative training among service providers to reduce compartmentalization

CONCLUSION

One of the greatest challenges faced by people living with HIV is retaining an affordable, stable place to live. Housing status is also one of the most important factors in determining an individual's access to healthcare and consequential success in living with their HIV infection.

"My sleep is being affected, can't sleep at night and can't rest."

"I mean I'm scraping by the best way I can - because the good quality stuff costs more."

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