Priority Public Health Interventions for People Experiencing Homelessness

April 23, 2025

Dalla Lana School of Public Health

Agenda

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Strengthening the Health Workforce for System Transformation

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

CIHR Team Grant

14 teams across Canada funded for 3 years to research interventions that strengthen the health workforce.

Aim

Scaling and spreading existing workforce solutions that address system level challenges.

Objectives

[1] Produce evidence, [2] Build capacity, [3] Spark collaborations, and [4] Foster knowledge mobilization.

Priority Research Areas

Indigenous health, rural and remote communities, systemically disadvantaged populations, aging populations, public health, and the aging workforce.

Research Team



Aaron Orkin, Principal Investigator

Alexandra Kubica, Project Coordinator

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Collaborators

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Community Partners

Homeless Connect Toronto

Access Alliance Multicultural Health Community Services

The Neighbourhood Group Community Services

Project Summary

- **Codesign**

  a program that reflects the priority public health needs of people at risk of experiencing homelessness in Toronto.

- **Elevate**

  the work of peer programs to deliver public health services, promote linkages to care, and share resources with people experiencing homelessness.

- **Evaluate**

  the effectiveness of peer workers to impact the Quintuple Aim for healthcare improvement:

  1. improved population health,
  2. enhanced care experiences,
  3. reduced costs,
  4. positive provider experiences, and
  5. improved health equity.

Candidate Service Areas



Immunization



Severe weather outreach



Naloxone distribution and training



STBBI Testing



Smoking cessation

Project Aims and Measurement

Aim	Measurement	Data source
Improve population health among people experiencing homelessness in Toronto.	Number and type of interventions administered.	Peer worker documentation and program operational records.
Improve preventive care experiences among people experiencing homelessness.	Participants' satisfaction scores with peer workers and qualitative feedback.	Participant post-intervention surveys.
Deliver services at a scalable reasonable cost.	Unit and marginal cost estimation of services relative to Canadian benchmarks for similar programming.	Operational and program financial records.
Improve staff and peer experiences.	Decreased burnout, increased work satisfaction, affirming qualitative feedback.	Staff and peer surveys.
Improve health equity.	Socio-demographics of program participants including Black, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQ+, people without OHIP coverage, and people who use drugs.	Participant post-intervention surveys.

Access Alliance

Multicultural Health and Community Services

About

Community organization offering primary care, language, and settlement services to newcomers in Toronto.

Current Peer Programming

Peer Outreach Program supports families in under-served and hard-to-reach communities.

Training for Peers

Women from high-need communities participate in a multi-year Peer Outreach Worker Training Program as paid employees.

Current Support Offered by Peers

Peers reach out to immigrant and refugee families, link families to services providing information and referrals, facilitate health promotion workshops, and accompany clients to medical and social appointments.

homeless connect toronto

About

Offer “one-stop-shop” events to bring together essential resources on housing, employment, and health care for people at-risk or experiencing homelessness in Toronto.

Current Peer Programming

PeerConnectTO: project in partnership with Mentor/Mentee Canada and WoodGreen Community Housing to improve community connections in housing safety, autonomy and sustainability.

Training for Peers

Peer Support Workers complete a 10-week training program for individuals with lived experience of homelessness.

Current Support Offered by Peers

Accompany individuals to appointments, provide resources, and support in the domains of mental health and addiction, tenancy, budgeting, employment, and advocacy.

TNG
Community Services

About

Provides services to address poverty, homelessness, mental health, unemployment, social isolation, substance use, conflict resolution, violence, youth alienation, and the settlement of newcomers across 30 locations in Toronto.

Training for Peers

Through the Peer Leadership Centre, peers receive 20 sessions focusing on empathy, harm reduction, boundaries, conflict resolution and advocacy.

Training includes completing a paid work placement as well as participating in weekly peer group debriefing, personal goal development and regular check-ins with staff.

Current Support Offered by Peers

Peer Outreach Teams provide people experiencing homelessness with food, warm clothes, harm reduction supplies, and referrals to community services and shelters.

Phase 1: Current Progress

- Protocolize Grant Proposal ☑
- Onboard Community Partners ☑
- Research Ethics Board Submission ☑
- Finalize Research Agreements ☑
- Establish Steering Committee ←
- Staff and Client Interviews
- Interview Data Analysis

Phase 2: Informed by Interviews

- Design Expanded Peer-Led Delivery for Each Site
- Research Ethics Board Submission
- Collect Baseline Measures
- Implement Expanded Peer-Led Program
- Survey Staff Quarterly
- Monitor Measures and Report Quarterly
- Adjust Intervention Accordingly

Delegation of Controlled Acts

Under Ontario law, certain acts, referred to as “controlled acts,” may only be performed by authorized regulated health professionals.

Controlled acts include:

“Prescribing, dispensing, selling or compounding a drug as defined in the Drug and Pharmacies Regulation Act, or supervising the part of a pharmacy where such drugs are kept.”

“Administering a substance by injection or inhalation.”

Physicians may delegate these acts to others under appropriate circumstances.

Applicable Controlled Acts

Acts Not Controlled

Sexually transmitted and blood borne infection testing, severe weather outreach, and naloxone distribution are not considered controlled acts.

Smoking Cessation

Most nicotine replacement distribution models operate using delegation. However, nicotine replacement therapies containing <= 4 mg of nicotine per dose are available over the counter.

Peers could be trained to assess eligibility and distribute <= 4 mg of nicotine

Immunization

Vaccines must be administered by a regulated health professional or by a trained individual under the delegation of a physician.

Peers could support vaccine clinics on-site.

Naloxone Distribution

Naloxone can be distributed under the Ontario Naloxone Program by community-based organizations to individuals or the friends or family members of individuals at risk of experiencing opioid overdose.

How to Become a Distributor

If community partners are not already approved to be a distributor, they should contact Toronto Public Health to apply.

Necessary Training

Organization or program staff are responsible for training eligible individuals how to recognize and respond to an opioid overdose and how to administer naloxone.

Next Steps

Feedback

Any feedback on what has been proposed is welcome and encouraged.

Steering Committee Members Needed

If you are interested or if you would like to recommend someone for the steering committee, please contact the research team.

- Steering committee will meet virtually once every three months for a maximum of 1.5 hours
- Compensation is available for peers and community members

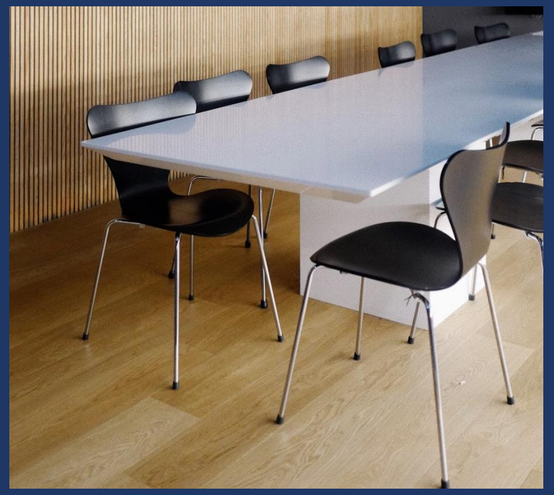
Interview Participants Needed

If you are interested in taking part in an interview to discuss facilitators and barriers to peer-led programming, or would like to recommend a community member, decision maker, or staff, please reach out.

- Interviews will be conducted virtually and will be 1 hour in length
- Compensation is available for peers and community members

Communication







Monthly Update Emails

Look out for our monthly update emails outlining progress and opportunities for collaboration.

Quarterly Steering Committee Meetings

Opportunity to provide more in-depth updates and receive feedback from community members.

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Questions?