

OVERVIEW:

This study will measure health care utilization in a sample of 1,200 homeless people in Toronto.

This will be the first accurate assessment of how much health care homeless people in Ontario use.

The evidence we produce will:

- Provide the basis for developing strategies to deliver better health care for homeless people
- Help reduce the need for high-cost hospitalization
- Help determine whether the provision of health insurance and primary care to homeless individuals decreases the likelihood of subsequent emergency department visits and hospitalizations

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

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END DATE: TBD

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RESEARCH PARTNERS:

- Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences
- St. Michael's Hospital
- Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre
- University of Toronto

HEALTH CARE UTILIZATION AMONG HOMELESS PEOPLE

BACKGROUND:

Homelessness is a growing problem in Canada. Homeless people suffer from high rates of illness. Despite their higher need for health care, little is known about their health care use, the barriers to obtaining care, or the effectiveness of specific models of primary care for homeless people.

About 32-54% of homeless people report that they have received care in an emergency department in the last year, which is more than three times the rate of use in the general population. It is plausible that if homeless patients were provided with better access to primary care services, they would be less likely to seek care in emergency departments, however, this hypothesis remains unproven. This question has important implications for the organization and philosophy of health care delivery for the homeless.

STUDY GOALS:

- To identify predictors of health care utilization among homeless single men, single women, and families (e.g. duration of homelessness, self-identified ethnic background, type of health condition).
- To compare health care utilization among homeless people to that of the general population.
- To identify factors associated with self-reported inability to obtain needed health care (e.g. not knowing where to go, unwelcoming environment for homeless patients, small number of available health care providers).
- To determine whether the use of ambulatory care services by homeless people will reduce the likelihood of emergency department utilization.

METHODS:

This study recruited 1,200 homeless people at shelters and meal programs in Toronto. All participants conducted face-to-face interviews.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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