

Exploring a Hospital's Role in Addressing Homelessness: a Qualitative Program Evaluation of a Hospital-Housing Partnership for Seniors and Disabled Patients

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Background

Unstable housing is associated with adverse health outcomes, including increased rates of hospitalization, and death.

Project Description

- In December 2023, Denver Health— a safety net hospital serving the Denver metro region—launched a transitional housing program through a partnership with the Denver Housing Authority.
- Located on main hospital campus, it provides safe, temporary housing to elderly or disabled patients experiencing homelessness as they transition from the hospital.
- Participants benefit from on-site support from a social worker and a housing navigator to address barriers to health and housing stability.

Objective

To conduct a program evaluation to understand the 655 Broadway Transitional Housing Program's acceptability and impact on participants' health and access to essential resources and identify areas for improvement.

Methodology

- 16 in-depth interviews were conducted with a convenience sample of program participants who had been in the program at least 45 days.
- A semi-structured interview guide was used to explore participants' perceptions and experiences with the program, and its impact on their health and access to resources.
- Interviews were transcribed and analyzed with themes identified through codes identified a priori and inductively through coding.

Results

Three overarching themes emerged from participant interviews, illustrating the multidimensional impact of the program.



A "last chance": health impact of the program- Participants reported significant improvements in physical and mental health, including better chronic disease management, reduced substance use, and decreased reliance on emergency care. Access to on-site nursing, proximity to healthcare providers, and consistent medication routines led to greater health stability and fewer hospitalizations.



"It feels good to be human again": emotional transformation and identity evolution- Permanent housing allowed residents to recover from illness or injury safely, move beyond immediate needs like food or water, and work towards larger goals with a restored sense of self and of purpose.



"Instrumental in recovery": structural and relational support- Participants emphasized the importance of stable housing, autonomy, and trust-based relationships with staff. Staff helped residents navigate healthcare, relearn life skills, and feel safe. Community among residents also supported transition, though some reported challenges adjusting to rules and shared space.

"No one recovering should be sleeping outside, okay? You should be in a place where you can recover comfortably, fairly comfortably... And this place made me feel like a human being again."

- 655 Broadway Resident

"I haven't been to the doctor ever since I lived here [in Denver] and I was going in and out of the hospital, like, pretty often and I'd be there in the hospital for months and months and I haven't been in the hospital once since I've been here [in the program]...I feel a lot better health wise...and I think that it's [the program] helped me out big time my health."

- 655 Broadway Resident

"This is probably recognition of people's last chance... a lot of us are on our last leg and this is a lifesaver."

- 655 Broadway Resident

"Hope inspires people. I was getting to the point where I didn't even think about suicide. I thought this is suicide. I'm just continuing to do what I do every day. It's suicide."

- 655 Broadway Resident

"Anything that I needed, I've been able to go to either the Housing people... or Human Services...I've never had a situation where if I need something or I want something, boom, I say something and there it is, that still blows my mind."

- 655 Broadway Resident

Conclusion

- The 655 Broadway program is positively regarded by participants.
- This evaluation highlights the importance of transitional housing and case management in supporting health stabilization and addressing barriers to housing stability, and the unique role that hospitals can play in addressing homelessness.

Future Plans

- Moving forward, plans include analyzing interviews with key staff, to better understand barriers to implementation.
- Ongoing evaluations will also assess the program's impact on healthcare utilization and costs, and longer-term impacts on housing stability.



"When I came here, all my goals were just dreams, but now they're starting to be reality now."

- 655 Broadway Resident

