

Applying a Trauma-Informed Spaces of Care Model for Programming Solutions for Homeless Substance Users

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Homeless substance users in Montreal, Canada face exceptional barriers to accessing essential resources for exiting homelessness: many homeless resources refuse individuals who are inebriated or who are dependent on drugs or alcohol, or they fail to stably house them. Addressing this gap in services, this research asks: what are the needs of homeless individuals who use substances to exit homelessness? What are the current limits within homeless resources in Montreal to actualize these needs? How can they change to meet these needs? In the summer of 2023, 30 homeless substance users participated in semi-structured interviews to better understand how to adapt housing and homelessness programming specifically for their needs. Taking full consideration of the traumatogenic circumstances that accompany homelessness, a trauma-informed spaces of care framework was employed. This framework expands on a traditional spaces of care framework by illustrating the interplay between those seeking care (homeless substance users), those giving care (resource staff), and the space (homeless resources), all under a trauma-informed lens. Findings revealed a need for a broader spectrum of harm reduction services, better occupational supports, better psychosocial accompaniment, better division of spaces in homeless resources, and specifically adapted programming for this group. Overarchingly participants highlighted the inadequacy of homelessness resources for meeting their needs while disclosing extensive traumatogenic life experiences before and during experiencing homelessness. Implications from this research suggest that the application of a trauma-informed spaces of care framework offers a valuable opportunity for developing health inequity solutions led by those who need them the most.

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