

Homeless High Utilizers of the Emergency Department

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Cambridge Health Alliance and the University of Massachusetts Medical School



The Agency:

Cambridge Health Alliance Healthcare for the Homeless program provides medical care, case management, and advocacy for homeless residents of Cambridge and Somerville, Massachusetts

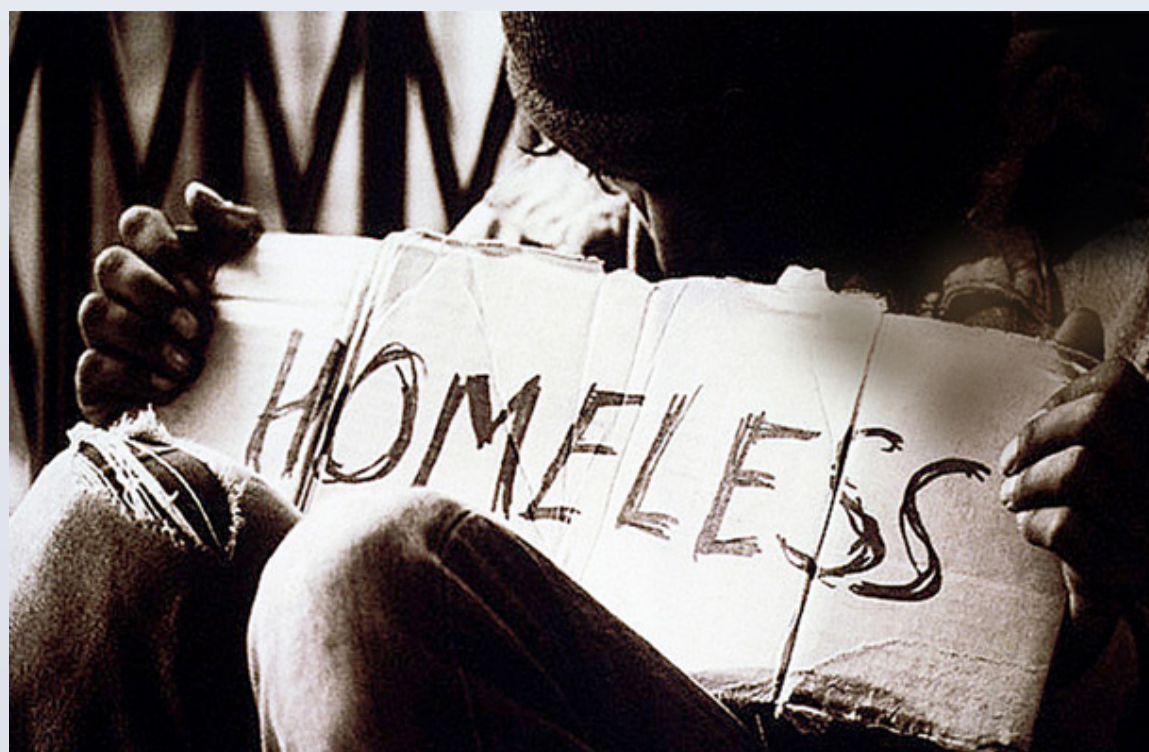
Physicians, Nurse Practitioners, Nurses, and Social Workers provide care for patients in clinics, shelters, soup kitchens, and on the streets

There are 3 outreach clinic sites: Salvation Army in Cambridge, CASPAR Emergency Service Center in Cambridge, and St. Patrick's Women's Shelter in Somerville

Dental screenings are offered twice monthly at the Salvation Army site with same day appointments available at the Windsor Dental Clinic

CHA Healthcare for the Homeless staff also visit hospitalized homeless patients and coordinate treatment and discharge plans

The Issue:



The majority of the highest utilizers of emergency departments are homeless ¹

Increased frequency of visits is not correlated with better outcomes ²

Increased frequency of visits is associated with increased costs ³

The emergency department may not be the appropriate setting for these individuals to receive optimal care for their presenting conditions

Studies have shown that intensive case management through the "Housing First" model reduce frequency of ED visits and improve patient health ⁴

Boston Healthcare for the Homeless (BHCHP), of which CHA's program is a sub-grantee, has initiated an intervention for this target population, the HUES to Home program. (HUES = High Utilizers of Emergency Services)

In partnership with local Boston hospitals, Medicaid and Medicare, the Boston Commission for Public Health, and others, Boston Healthcare for the Homeless has been able to reduce ED visits by homeless high-utilizers by 56%, inpatient stays 33%, and EMS transport by 86% ⁵

CHA is considering a similar intervention for their patients but is interested first in identifying their high utilizer population

What Can Be Done:



Photograph with permission of Rick Friedman, BHCHP

CHA is initiating a study to determine the characteristics of homeless individuals who frequently visit the Emergency Department.

Frequent utilization is defined variably among studies, but will be defined as those who utilize the ED 10 or more times in a 6 month period, in accordance with BHCHP's definition ⁵

Concurrently, a qualitative study is being undertaken at CHA under Dr. Yamini Saravanan, to learn the stories of these patients in their own words.

Once this population and their reasons for presenting to the ED are understood, interventions may be developed to help reduce ED visit frequency and improve patient outcomes

Interventions include the "Housing First" model which enables homeless individuals to obtain permanent housing to provide a foundation for intensive case management

Studies have shown "Housing First" interventions alongside case management to reduce frequency of ED use and improve patient outcomes, in Boston and throughout the country ^{4, 5}

How To Get Involved:

For UMass Medical Students:

Homeless Outreach and Advocacy Project, Worcester MA
Population Health Clerkship, 3rd and 4th Year Electives

For Medical Students, Nursing Students, and Individuals:

Boston Healthcare for the Homeless

See opportunities at <http://www.bhchp.org/volunteeropportunities.htm>



References

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- 3 Ku, BS. *The Urban Homeless: Super-users of the Emergency Department*. Population Health Management, 2014; <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24865472>
- 4 Althaus, F. *Effectiveness of Interventions Targeting Frequent Users of Emergency Departments: A Systematic Review*. Annals of Emergency Medicine, 2011; <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21689565>
- 5 Gaeta, J. "Hot Spotters" at Boston Healthcare for the Homeless. Presentation, March 2013

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