

Homelessness, Health and Other Issues

Introduction

There are many different reasons why a person becomes homeless. In many cases, mental and physical health problems play a big part. Once a person becomes homeless, their physical and mental health problems can get worse very quickly. Drug and alcohol use can also play a role - and once a person becomes homeless, their alcohol and drug problems tend to become more serious.

Physical health and homelessness

People who are homeless are likely to suffer from poor physical health including respiratory problems, arthritis, problems with bones and joints, heart disease, tuberculosis, eye and ear complaints, epilepsy, skin problems, headaches and injuries from accidents and assaults.

Mental health and homelessness

There is a clear relationship between homelessness and poor mental health. In some cases mental health issues can be the cause of a person becoming homeless in the first place. However, the actual experience of being homeless can take its toll on people, resulting in high levels of stress, isolation and depression.



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Drug/alcohol use and homelessness

We have already mentioned drug and alcohol use as causes of homelessness. As drug and alcohol use spirals out of control, other areas of a person's life can suffer. For example, they could lose their job or their relationship could break down, and in some cases the end result is homelessness. On the other hand, drug and alcohol use can also be a consequence of being homeless and the stress and uncertainty that being homeless brings with it.

Conclusion

Some people who are homeless have many different needs. Take for example a person living in an emergency shelter who suffers from depression, drinks alcohol on a daily basis and also has a chronic respiratory problem. It can seem unclear which one of these issues should be dealt with first, yet they actually all need to be addressed together.

Responding effectively to homelessness requires that a menu of options is available to meet all of these needs. In some cases these options must be available at the same time. A range of accommodation options must be accompanied by care and social supports where necessary, for as long as necessary.



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