Where Does Homelessness Happen?

Understanding the definitions of homelessness

Shelter/Mission
Organized shelter for individuals experiencing homelessness

Street/Outside
Abandoned Buildings
or other place where individuals feel unsafe or fit for occupancy

Encampments
Temporary living arrangements sleeping on the ground, under an overhanging structure, storing belongings in the same location for a sustained period

Single Room Occupancy (SRO)/Hotels/Motels
Vehicles

Transitional Housing
Time-limited housing intended to support a transition to permanent housing

Exiting Incarceration
Exiting Treatment
Supportive Housing
Couch-Surfing (Doubled Up)

At-Risk of Homelessness
Such as facing eviction, among other unstable situations

Considered homeless by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) but not “literally” homeless by Housing & Urban Development (HUD)

Duration of homelessness is irrelevant for categorizing shelter status for health care providers. But it has everything to do with eligibility for different HUD services, specifically housing placements.

The HHS and Department of Education definitions of homelessness are broad and health care providers should make full use of this breadth. But it is important to know what other services patients are or are not eligible for. Health care providers have a crucial role in determining “chronic” homelessness and eligibility for other services by diagnosing disability and medical vulnerability.

Many who meet the definition of homelessness do not consider themselves homeless or do not disclose their housing status due to stigma and discrimination.

Key Takeaways

- A recognition of the instability of an individual’s living arrangements is critical to the definition of homelessness.

- Duration of homelessness is irrelevant for categorizing shelter status for health care providers. But it has everything to do with eligibility for different HUD services, specifically housing placements.

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