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About the Pacific AIDS Network (PAN)

PAN is a pro-active member-based coalition that provides a network to the abilities and efforts of almost 50 member organizations to respond to HIV, HCV and related issues in BC. PAN facilitates communication and the sharing of best practices, and provides professional/workforce development and leadership training to its members and people living with HIV/AIDS throughout BC. PAN acts as a voice for the community-based response to the HIV and HCV epidemics. It provides face-to-face opportunities for networking, mutual support, education, skills development, and capacity building for evaluation. PAN promotes and carries out community-based research (CBR) and undertakes collective action to influence public perceptions and policies affecting persons living with HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C, and those most at risk.

Background

Positive Living, Positive Homes (PLPH) is a qualitative, community-based research (CBR) study led by the Pacific AIDS Network (PAN) in partnership with the University of Victoria. PLPH examines the complex relationship between health and housing of adults living with HIV in three BC communities – Prince George, Kamloops and Greater Vancouver. One of the main goals of PLPH was to document the successes and challenges of various housing-related policies, and identify best practices for HIV and housing programs, services and policies to better meet the needs and promote the health of people living with HIV (PLHIV).

Methods

Between June 2015 and October 2017, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted in-person or via phone with 42 HIV and/or housing service providers and policy makers working in a range of community and government organizations in Greater Vancouver, Kamloops, and Prince George. Interviews explored the work of their organizations, successes and challenges in that work, and perspectives on policies and other influencers of housing provision for PLHIV.

Successful and Innovative Practices

Identified in BC Housing Programs and Policies Applicable to PLHIV

- ★ **Rent determined based on income** (i.e., tenants pay only 30% of their income for rent and provide yearly income verification documents) allows people to allocate sufficient funds to support other areas of life crucial for health (e.g., food)
- ★ **Portable housing subsidies** tied to individuals rather than housing units allow people to choose where they live. Choice in housing based on self-identified needs and preferences is important in finding an appropriate housing to best support one's health
- ★ **Mixed housing**, a combination of social housing and market housing, creates a diverse community
- ★ **Partnerships with municipalities for land and providing incentives for developers** (e.g., make it financially beneficial to build social/rental housing by waiving development fees or shortening the process time for development applications) can increase our social/rental housing stock
- ★ **Free electronic registry and community voicemail** as tools to increase access to housing. A secure registry online that keeps a record of personal documents (e.g., digital scans of IDs) and a secure voicemail that allows one to maintain contact during housing applications can be particularly helpful for people without a fixed address and/or phone (e.g., many waitlists including BC Housing registry require consistent contact and information update)
- ★ **Pets allowed**. Pets play an important role in people's lives and health (emotional, mental and physical). "No pet" policies deter some from being housed (e.g., some prefer to be homeless or precariously housed than to be housed without their pets)
- ★ **Proactive municipal governments, mayors and councils** can push affordable housing as political agendas. Strong partnership with municipalities is key as they govern bylaws that determine zoning, land use, etc.
- ★ **Research and evaluation findings integrated into programs, policies and guideline development** leads to improved, evidence-based systems

Challenges

in housing-related programs and policies for PLHIV in BC

- ★ **Housing access and affordability**: Lack of affordable housing, decreasing rental housing stock and escalating rent/land values disproportionately displace vulnerable populations, such as people living with HIV

"People are being displaced from their home communities, and as a result, displaced from their care providers and service providers that they're familiar with. They're losing connection with pharmacists, or nurses, or whoever it is that's supporting them in disease management."

- ★ **Lack of public awareness, and the ensuing stigma and NIM-BY (Not In My Back Yard)-ism**. Stigma remains as a significant challenge in HIV, partially because the public still lacks knowledge about HIV transmission. As a result, many are resistant to sharing space/environment with social housing and support organizations/facilities for people living with HIV

- ★ **Maintaining and negotiating federal government investment in capital-based social housing**. Federal government operating agreements that have supported mortgages and subsidies of a number of social housing programs are expiring. As a result, many social housing units/developments are in jeopardy. The provincial government isn't stepping up, creating a gap in much needed social housing

- ★ **Non-centralized system**. BC Housing has its registry and is trying to streamline the process. However, many non-profits and health authorities also have their own systems for various reasons (e.g., working with particular populations under specific internal referral systems). This makes it challenging for service providers to access or change housing for clients, and even more difficult for individuals to navigate the system on their own. The process is also more coordinated in Vancouver compared to other regions in BC, including Prince George and Kamloops

Recommendations

from Service Providers and Policy Makers

Note: These recommendations are based on service provider and policy maker interview data and are not final recommendations of PLPH study

- ★ **Apply Housing First approach**. PLPH participants connected housing with harm reduction/prevention of new infections
- ★ **Increase the amount of government assistance** (including persons with disabilities) payments, particularly the rental portions, to reflect inflations and increased cost of living

"If you make people's housing more affordable then you free up resources for them to have better diets, to be able to... you know, afford prescription medication. A lot of people just — they go to the doctor, they get a prescription. They don't fill it because they can't afford it. So... you're dipping into the non-housing portion of your benefit to pay for housing that's not affordable otherwise, right?"

- ★ **Address stigma** related to HIV, mental health and substance use by providing education and training for housing providers so they are able to better support the needs of PLHIV
- ★ **Treat housing as a public health issue** rather than an economic issue or opportunity

"Don't let the provincial government leave it to the market — they need to build new housing and certain rental ranges that we will provide some form of subsidy or tax forgiveness or something."

- ★ **Increase meaningful consultations** with people with lived experience, allies, stakeholder groups, and the public
- ★ **Develop and apply universal design principles** (for disabilities, walkability, multiple needs and barriers)

- ★ **Build partnerships** with landlords, developers and other stakeholders for mutually beneficial incentives and culture

"Attract equity partners who are willing to wait a long period of time for the return on their equity, so the amount of money that you have to borrow in the form of conventional debt doesn't inflate your operating costs to the point that you have to charge market."

- ★ **Engage and advocate** to policy makers and political leaders

"Lobby to have the federal and provincial governments communicate and figure out who is responsible for providing housing subsidies and programming going forward and for a government to continue providing housing subsidies for low income folks."

- ★ **Increase intra- and inter-disciplinary partnerships and reduce silos** (e.g., between sectors – BC Housing and Health authorities; across and within ministries – Health, Education, Children & Family Development, Transportation & Infrastructure, and Municipal Affairs & Housing)

- ★ **Ask municipalities to take leadership** in facilitating the connections between right partners to identify a need and provide incentives and clear policies

- ★ **Increase the availability of housing options** along the housing spectrum (from shelters, transitional, supportive to independent, subsidized)

"We don't have an option in Prince George. For example, most of the shelters - even have policies that if you're an active user or if you're inebriated in any way, or if you're a couple - you can't go in."

Successful Social and Affordable Housing Models to Scale Up

- ★ **Social enterprise** can be used as self-sustaining financial models for non-profit housing. For example, Vancouver Native Housing Society developed a social enterprise – a boutique hotel called Skwachàys Lodge and an adjoining art gallery (Canada's first Indigenous arts hotel). The profits feed into operating its supportive housing project with 24 units for Indigenous artists who were homeless or at risk of homelessness (*Housing Partnership Canada, 2015*)
- ★ **Co-op housing** is a unique housing model that can benefit PLHIV. In a housing co-op, one is a tenant and a landlord at the same time. Each tenant is a voting member who has a stake in, and contributes to, the governance of that particular co-op. Co-op housing reduces sense of isolation (common amongst PLPH PLHIV participants) – the shared ownership and sense of community encourage neighbours to look out for one another. Co-op housing is also often affordable, with rent subsidies and rent-geared-to-income commonly available. HIV-designated co-op housing units exist in Vancouver; this number should be increased across BC with affordability parameters attached and guaranteed (*Co-Operative Housing Federation of British Columbia, n.d.*)

References

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Learn more about Positive Living, Positive Homes at:
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