Youth, HIV & Housing Study

The Department of Research and Evaluation at Fife House is engaged in community-based research and evaluation studies that impact the programs and services for people living with HIV/AIDS.

In January 2017, Fife House received funding from the Ontario HIV Treatment Network (OHTN) for this community-based research study developed by Fife House, in collaboration with Wilfrid Laurier University, AIDS Committee of Toronto, AIDS Committee of Durham Region, The Teresa Group, YMCA Sprott House, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and youth living with HIV/AIDS. The study was further supported by an advisory committee comprising of Egale Canada Human Rights Trust, Peel HIV/AIDS Network, LOFT Community Services, Eva's Initiatives for Homeless Youth, and Toronto Public Health.

Thirty-three (33) participants aged 19-29 years participated in the study, which aimed to: identify housing challenges of young people living with HIV/AIDS, who are unstably housed; identify individual, systemic and structural barriers to social support and health care services; explore issues of stigma and discrimination, and; document the variation of experiences of perinatally infected youth and those infected later in life.

Study findings:

Housing instability continues to be an important issue that destabilizes youth. A majority of participants (58%) had experienced housing instability two or more times in the last three years.

Experiences of discrimination while finding housing were common among youth. 67% of the participants had experienced discrimination while attempting to obtain housing.

"...there have been a number of moments in my life ...where my sexual orientation has defined me and some may find something about gay men to be... offensive to them, which has prevented me from accessing services like shelters when I needed them."

Prevalence of housing instability was higher among those who reported substance use. 69% of unstably housed youth also reported living with mental health conditions.

"...when I didn't have a home, I used that as an escape, right. Because it's just like, I don't have a home, I can use more drugs because I don't have to go back home to that environment, so it created more, I don't know, a self- eating behavior."

Youth were more likely to stay with a partner or friend for the sake of housing, even if it caused them stress.

Unstably housed youth were less likely to access a family physician or HIV specialist. However, average number of visits to the family physician and HIV specialist was higher for those who were unstably housed than those who were stably housed.

While most participants had some form of social support, the majority reported having social support little or only some of the time.

The study's recommendations include:

Increase availability of housing options and housing supports for young people living with HIV.

Discussions should be initiated with key stakeholders regarding restrictions and barriers to accessing housing connections.

More coordinated access to housing services would reduce the fall-out rates of youth seeking housing stability.

Support programs targeted at increasing social support and reducing discrimination can improve housing outcomes for young people living with HIV.