
CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Breaking down silos: building collaborative partnerships to increase access to health and support services for older adults in social housing

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Introduction

Housing is an important determinant of health, as poor housing conditions are consistently linked to negative health outcomes. Many older adults across Canada are aging in social housing but are more vulnerable than seniors who rent or own their own home due to higher rates of social isolation, disability, and chronic physical and mental health conditions. Furthermore, the lack of integration between housing and health services makes it difficult for older tenants to access needed supports.

Aims Objectives Theory or Methods

We examined barriers and facilitators that health service agencies experience in providing on-site services to older tenants living in a social housing complex in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. First, we conducted a survey of 33 health and community support service providers that work directly with older adults living in the social housing complex to examine their relationship with key housing staff who support tenants. Next, we conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 58 health and community service providers to examine the barriers and facilities they faced in providing on-site services to older tenants.

Highlights or Results or Key Findings

While most service providers (84%) were aware of housing staff who support rent and leasing matters, only 70% were aware of housing staff that help tenants access services to support their physical, mental, and social health. In the interviews, service providers identified challenges to providing services on-site, including: a lack of coordination between partner agencies offering duplicative services in the building, inconsistent 'red tape' for establishing formal agreements with the landlord, high housing staff turn-over, incompatible policies and practices across sections, and difficulties sharing information across sectors. Many also described that pest control and safety issues impacted their ability to safely provide services on-site. Participants reflected on opportunities to make it easier to provide services on-site to tenants, including having access to 'touch down' space to work in, simplified and consistent partnership process across all buildings, and more opportunities to collaborate directly with housing staff to identify who need support.

Conclusions

Seniors living in social housing face a variety of challenges that negatively impact their ability to age-in-place. While services are available in the community to support older tenants, there are several opportunities to enhance access to these services through a stronger and more collaborative relationship between landlords and service providers.

Implications for applicability/transferability sustainability and limitations

Our findings highlight the need for more effective integration of housing and health services. Simplified processes for establishing partnerships with service agencies and more opportunities for communication and collaboration with housing staff would ensure that services are reaching the most vulnerable tenants.