



Needs Assessment of the Unsheltered Homeless Population in Phoenix, AZ

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Introduction

According to the Point-in-Time Count, on the night of January 27, 2020, there were 7,419 people experiencing homelessness in Maricopa County. Of these, 3,767 individuals were living in unsheltered situations.¹ These levels of homelessness are significant because homelessness has a negative effect on health-related quality of life.² To understand the needs and health concerns of the unsheltered homeless population in metro Phoenix, a needs assessment was designed.

Street Medicine Phoenix (SMP)

SMP is a student-driven interprofessional health care and social justice team consisting of students and faculty primarily from the UofA, Arizona State University, and Northern Arizona University. Our mission is to meet the unmet needs of Phoenix's homeless population living and sleeping on the streets.

Research Question

Do unsheltered homeless adults ≥ 18 years of age in Phoenix who describe their overall health as fair or poor identify medical care as a top need more so than those who rate their health as good, very good or excellent?

Methods

- Prospective needs assessment of 144 unsheltered homeless individuals in metro Phoenix from April-June 2018
- **Inclusion criteria:**
 - Homeless in metro Phoenix
- **Exclusion criteria:**
 - Living in a shelter or other temporary/transient housing
 - Ages 17 years or younger
 - Inability to speak English
- Received care kit with food, water, clothing, and hygiene items as non-monetary compensation

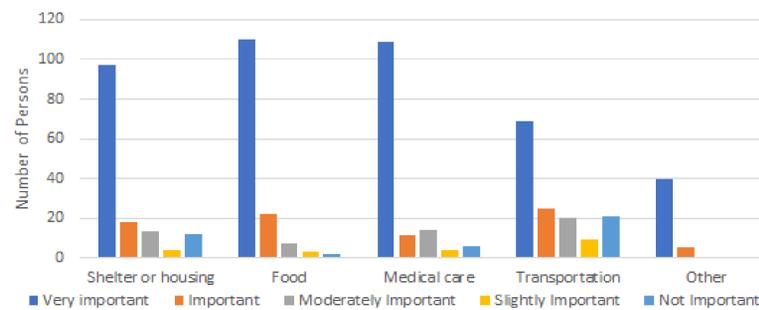


Results

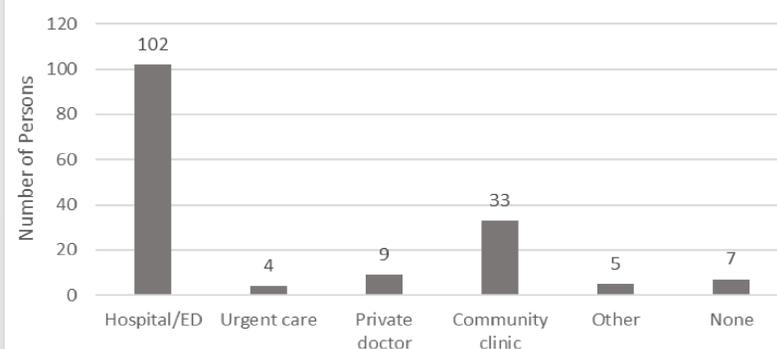
Demographics of Unsheltered Homeless Population in Metro Phoenix (n = 144)

Gender	
Male	71.53% (n = 103)
Female	28.47% (n = 41)
Age	
18-24	8.33% (n = 12)
25-34	13.89% (n = 20)
35-44	22.92% (n = 33)
45-54	31.94% (n = 46)
55-64	20.14% (n = 29)
65+	2.78% (n = 4)
Sexual Orientation	
Heterosexual	96.53% (n = 139)
Homosexual	2.08% (n = 3)
Bisexual	1.39% (n = 2)
Race	
Hispanic	14.58% (n = 21)
White (non-Hispanic)	41.67% (n = 60)
African American	34.72% (n = 50)
Native American	4.17% (n = 6)
Mixed/Multiple	2.08% (n = 3)
Other: Middle Eastern	2.78% (n = 4)
Veteran Status	
Veteran	11.81% (n = 17)
Non-veteran	88.19% (n = 127)

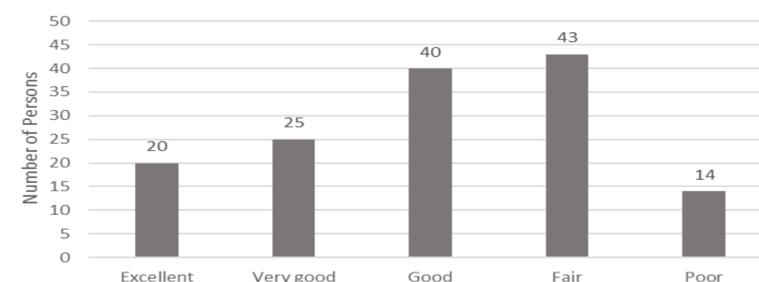
Primary Needs of Unsheltered Homeless Persons (n = 144)



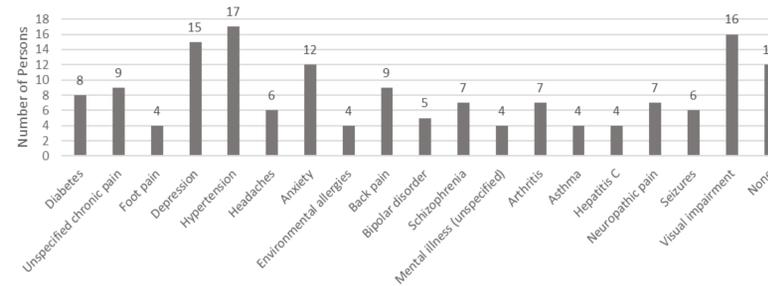
Sources of Medical Care for Unsheltered Homeless Persons (n = 159)



Self-Reported Health of Unsheltered Homeless Persons (n = 144)



Health Concerns of Unsheltered Homeless Persons (n = 144)



Conclusions

The needs assessment revealed that the top need was food, followed by medical care, shelter, and transportation. Most individuals experiencing homelessness utilized emergency departments (EDs) for medical care and almost 40% describe their health as fair or poor. Both medical care (OR 2.47, 95% CI: 0.99-6.14) and transportation (OR 3.03, 95% CI: 1.30-7.07) as top priority needs were strongly associated with suboptimal health, as were health illiteracy (OR 3.68, 95% CI: 0.76-17.9) and obtaining care at an ED (OR 2.05, 95% CI: 0.81-5.25). Individuals who identified medical care as a top priority need were more likely to use an ED for medical care (OR 2.05, 95% CI: 0.81-5.25, $p=0.13$). Interventions aimed at improving accessibility to transportation, high-quality medical care, and health education/literacy classes should be implemented to improve the health of Phoenix's unsheltered homeless population. Such interventions may also decrease care sought in ED settings.

Summary

- Top needs were food and medical care
- The ED was the primary source of medical care and associated with suboptimal subjective health
- Medical care as a top need was associated with suboptimal health and ED utilization

Acknowledgements

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References

1. Maricopa Association of Governments. Point-in-Time Homeless Count Analysis 2020. Azmag.gov. <https://www.azmag.gov/Portals/0/Documents/MagContent/2020-PIT-Handout.pdf?ver=2020-07-20-112218-223>. Accessed December 23, 2020.
2. Sun S, Irestig R, Burstrom B, Beijer U, Burstrom K. Health-related quality of life (EQ-5D) among homeless persons compared to a general population sample in Stockholm County, 2006. Scand J Public Health. 2012 Mar;40(2):115-25.

