

research snapshot

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The Health Bus delivers innovative healthcare to the urban poor

What is this research about?

The urban poor in Canada's cities find it difficult to access mainstream healthcare. The Health Bus is a mobile healthcare unit, housed at Sherbourne Community Health Centre, in downtown Toronto. The Health Bus delivers effective and accessible healthcare, such as some basic healthcare supplies and nursing care, to an increasingly diverse population of homeless and working poor.

What did the researchers do?

The York researcher in collaboration with staff asked 58 Health Bus users what they thought of the service. The questions were asked through focus groups and interviews. The users also filled out a questionnaire on their background.

What did the researchers find?

The Health Bus users had an overwhelmingly positive opinion about the program. The three aspects of the Health Bus program that users valued the most were:

- Being cared for with respect and dignity
- Being served by professional competent nurses and staff

What you need to know:

Services like the Health Bus need to be continued and expanded. Bringing healthcare staff into vulnerable communities gives many users a chance to bond with the healthcare staff. This helps break down traditional barriers that the homeless and working poor experience in accessing mainstream healthcare. The Health Bus also attracts members of the community to participate in delivering healthcare. This makes projects like the Health Bus a truly community-based healthcare service.

- Accessing healthcare and services with ease.

The users also made recommendations on how the Health Bus service could be improved.

How can you use this research?

Policymakers and healthcare professionals will find this research helpful in improving health services for the homeless and working poor. The Health Bus demonstrates that caring for the poor requires a

compassionate, non-judgmental attitude from frontline healthcare staff. The Health Bus proves that accessibility is crucial to delivering health services for the poor who find it difficult to reach mainstream healthcare. The Health Bus also aims for the detection and treatment of diseases before they get serious, avoiding long and expensive treatment later on.

About the Researcher

Isolde Daiski is an Assistant Professor with York University's Faculty of Health School of Nursing. This Research Snapshot is from her study, "The Health Bus: Healthcare for Marginalized Populations". It is published in *Policy, Politics & Nursing Practice* 6.1 (2005): 30-38.

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