

The *Coming Home* Project: Helping HIV-positive Ex-offenders from Prison Walls to Permanent Housing

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Learning Objectives

1. To identify the unique needs of homeless HIV-positive ex-prisoners
2. To identify approaches for meeting these needs and helping these individuals find and maintain stable, independent housing in the community
3. To identify specific barriers to successful client outcomes and possible resolutions.

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Presentation Description

Homelessness and history of incarceration are often linked for a complex variety of reasons. For the HIV-positive inmate, homelessness upon release can be a serious barrier to accessing a continuum of health care services and receiving regular medical treatment. In New York City, housing subsidies exist for individuals who meet criteria for AIDS (although there is still unmet need). However, HIV-positive individuals who do not seroconvert are often ineligible for such benefits. HIV-positive ex-prisoners, who face additional discrimination due to their criminal justice involvement, can easily get lost in the cracks of the housing services system.

In this presentation we will describe The Fortune Society's Coming Home Project, a HUD/HOPWA-funded program designed to help homeless HIV-positive ex-prisoners secure permanent housing in their communities. The Fortune Society, founded in 1967, is a NYC-based advocacy and services organization for ex-prisoners. The Coming Home program model recognizes that before individuals can support themselves in independent housing, they may need to learn a host of daily living skills, develop vocational and educational strengths and address substance use and other psychological issues. Thus, the program houses clients in stages (e.g., emergency to transitional to permanent) and surrounds clients with the support, training and treatment required to successfully remain independently housed. We will also present program barriers and resolutions encountered in the first three years of the project. Finally, we will present preliminary analyses of client outcomes related to physical and mental health status, social support systems and the ability to remain stably housed, and we will explore the relationship between stable housing and access to and utilization of health care.

Conclusions

Research and practice consistently support the maxim that housing is health care. The Coming Home Project was conceived to meet a need for more housing opportunities and to provide the necessary continuum of care for HIV-positive ex-prisoners. This pilot project, once evaluated, may be replicated on a national level in order to continue evolving better ways to promote the health and well-being of HIV-positive individuals who are hidden within the criminal justice system and are being served outside of traditional AIDS service organizations.