

'Best Prescription' for Homeless Patients



More than providing medical care, a better way to treat chronically homeless patients may be to provide them with a roof over their heads. An Illinois hospital's housing initiative has been successful in reducing the number of emergency visits made by homeless patients. Now a hospital in New York City is about to launch a similar initiative for low-income patients.

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Before the University of Illinois Hospital (UI-Hospital) and Health Sciences System launched its housing programme in 2015, seven of the top 10 users of the organisation's ER were chronically homeless. These "superusers" accessed the UI health system between 30 and 120 times a year. Most of these frequent users didn't always come for medical care. In many cases they just needed a warm place to stay on a cold night.

The organisation decided to invest \$250,000 in a programme to provide furnished apartments and support services for homeless patients. The programme has led to impressive results, with monthly hospital visits dropping by 35 percent and the annual cost of care for these patients falling by more than 40 percent.

In addition to housing, patients are assigned a case manager who coordinates their care and helps them manage money.

"We see funding housing as a way of improving health," explained Avijit Ghosh, MD, CEO of the UI Health Hospital & Clinics. "Actions like this are important to address the problems facing our community. By helping those who rely on UI Health, we're improving the health of both the individuals and our community overall."

Hospitals should view patients who are chronically homeless the same way they consider chronic illnesses, according to Peter Toepfer, associate vice president of housing for the Center for Housing and Health in Chicago, which partners with UI Health. The best prescription, he said, is providing a homeless patient with permanent supportive housing.

SBH Health System, based in New York City's Bronx borough, is working on a similar initiative by partnering with a developer to build housing for low-income patients.

Source: [Fierce Healthcare](#)

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