

Delivering services to older persons experiencing homelessness:

Providers' perspectives of what does and does not work

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Homelessness in later life

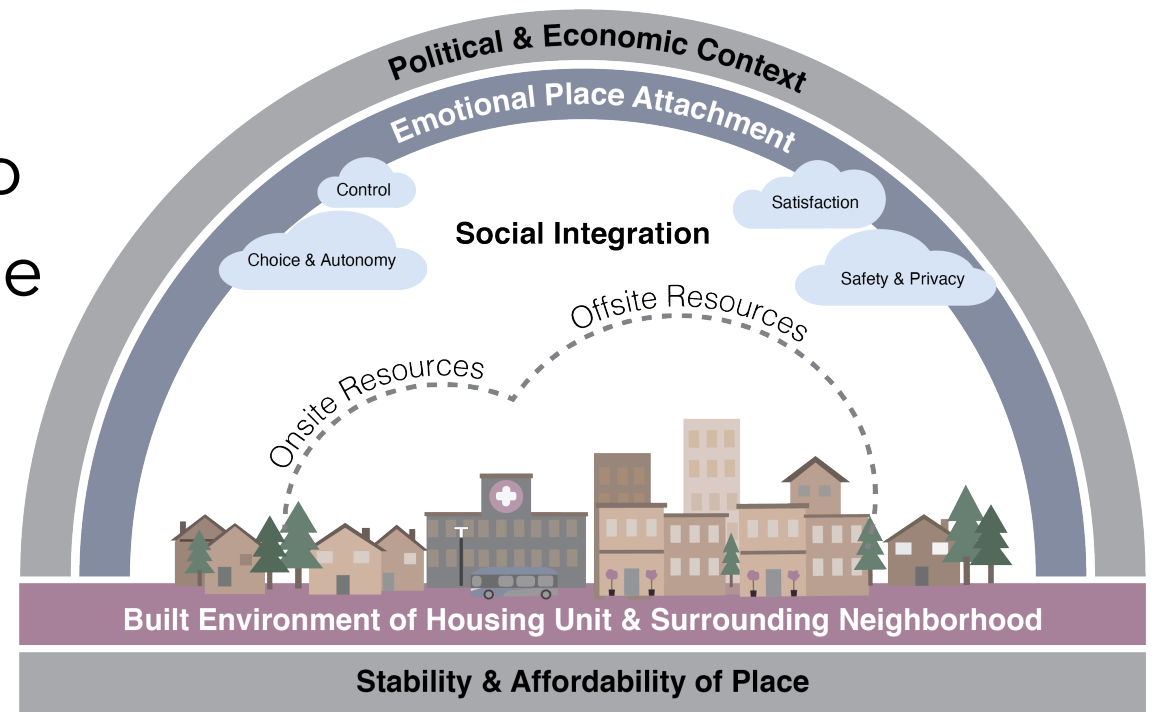
- Older persons with experiences of homelessness (OPEH) often experience greater health, social, and psychological challenges than securely housed older persons¹
- Additional challenges can include accelerated aging, compounding ageism & homeism^{1,2}
- Shelters and housing supports for those experiencing homelessness & housing insecurity are often ill-equipped to support OPEH



Aging in the Right Place (AIRP)

Recent literature has begun to promote the value of aging in the right place (AIRP) — aging in a place that supports individual needs, values, lifestyles, and vulnerabilities

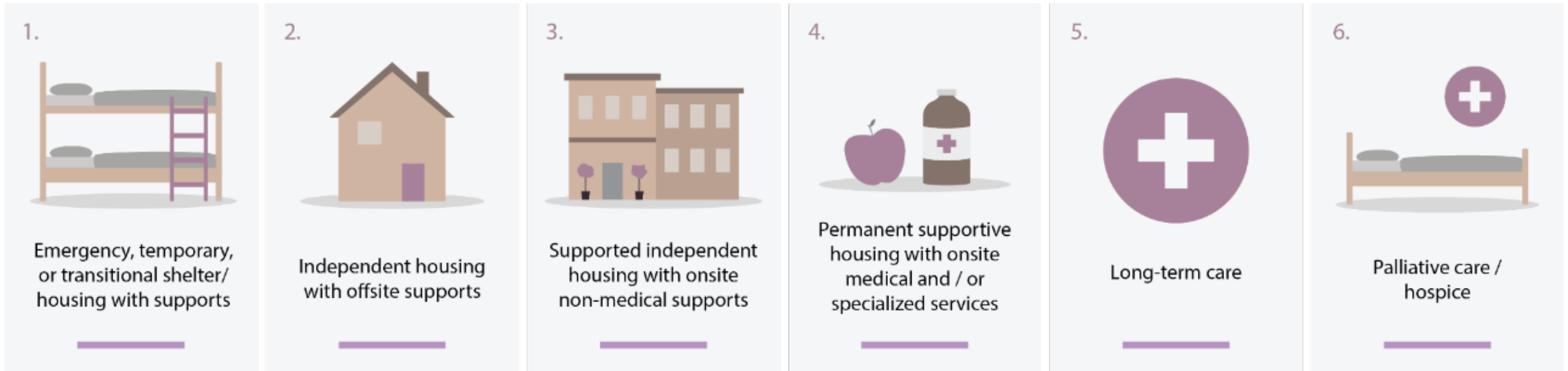
Emerging research has begun to consider how OPEH may be able to age in the right place across a range of shelter and housing types^{5,6,7,8}



Indicators of Aging in the Right Place for OPEH

Promising Practices

- Innovative programs with the potential to support AIRP for OPEH
- In need of rigorous evaluation to be elevated to the level of 'best practice'^{2,3}
- Can include:



Objective

To investigate the aspects of housing and shelter that both promote and impede AIRP for OPEH by examining the delivery of services in three promising practices



Methods



- Recruitment at three promising practice organizations
- In-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews over Zoom
 - 11 in English, 4 in French
- Transcripts coded and analyzed using a six-step thematic analysis approach^{9,10}

Research Context

Three promising practice organizations:

Montreal

- Semi-permanent housing for formerly homeless adults aged 50+

Vancouver

- Temporary housing for adults aged 60+ who were either formerly homeless or at risk of homelessness

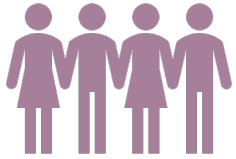
Calgary

- Emergency housing for adults aged 55+ at risk of homelessness and fleeing abuse

Participants

- 15 service providers (5 from each site)
 - 13 female, 2 male
 - Age range: 21 to 59 years
 - Time working at the promising practice: 6 months to 15+ years
- Providers included: frontline staff, case managers, outreach workers, program directors, and other management

Findings



Barriers to providing individualized support

- Time-limited program participation
- Client non-engagement
- Staff burnout and turnover
- Supporting some OPEH by excluding others



Shifting contexts and structures

- Shifts in the housing market
- The changing face of housing need
- The COVID-19 context



Mechanisms of success

- Individualized support
- Partnering and linking
- Facilitating smooth transitions

Barriers to providing individualized support



“

There are about, 25% of people that refuse to look for housing during temporary housing, or they turn down [possible housing options], and I have to reiterate to them, “We understand this is a temporary housing that you signed, and your goal is permanent housing. You can’t stay here . . **if you’re over-staying and not following the program guidelines, you will be removed from the program”.**

”



Shifting contexts and structures

“ When I joined this agency ... I was able to find a one-bedroom apartment for less than \$1000, sometimes \$850, \$900 in our community. That was still doable with senior's income – say somebody's making \$1500-\$1600 [per month]. It's tight but still was doable then. And now, the one-bedroom apartment if you want to find it in our neighborhood, it's going to be \$1300-\$1400, so **it does not leave seniors with very much to live off of**. Yes, definitely the housing market and rising rent has a huge impact on [transitioning] folks with fixed income. ”

Mechanisms of success



“

We do try to really tailor [our support] to each client and make sure that their needs are met during their stay as well as when they move out. It's really nice when we can introduce those supports while they're at the shelter and try to keep them accountable to getting into those habits and routines, **so that when they leave the shelter, they're not trying to figure out all this stuff that we've set up for them.** They've already experienced it.

”





Future Directions in Policy & Practice

- Expanded harm reduction & trauma-informed approach
- Investment in age-friendly programs within housing/homelessness sector
- Improved wages & occupational supports for service providers
- Service refinement based on lived experience of OPEH and providers

Further reading:

Weldrick, R., Canham, S. L., Sussman, T., Walsh, C. A., Cormier, E., & Mahmood, A. (2022). Delivering services to older persons experiencing homelessness: Providers' perspectives of what does and does not work. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01634372.2022.2087128>





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
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