

Our community work was conducted at Jimmy Heath House in the Over-The-Rhine community in Cincinnati. Jimmy Heath House provides housing for homeless individuals before providing additional medical and social support services, embracing the notion of “housing first”. Safe shelter/housing is a social determinant of health, and housing is a basic need that must be addressed before treating chronic conditions like substance abuse disorders.

For our project, our team of medical students conducted a series of interviews with residents of the Jimmy Heath House, asking questions regarding their views on healthcare and perceived barriers to accessing care. Our data indicated that the number one intrinsic barrier reported by residents in receiving healthcare is stigma. Further, 70 percent of residents expressed that there is often a lack of continuity in healthcare and emergency rooms tend to be overcrowded/unclean.

In terms of extrinsic barriers and other social determinants of health, most residents that our team interviewed reported concerns with transportation as well as financial confusion. Obtaining healthcare and managing health takes a significant amount of time, money and resources that often make it difficult for some individuals to receive healthcare.

Further, less than 20 percent of residents at the Jimmy Heath House reported that they experienced compassion during their previous healthcare experiences. Further, less than half of residents reported that there was continuity in their previous healthcare experiences and meaningful relationships formed. This is certainly an area for improvement as ideally, every single patient should experience compassion with every healthcare experience.

Our proposed policy is to evaluate Cincinnati Emergency Room policies and procedures with a concerted effort to decrease stigma, decrease wait times, increase continuity of care and ensure patients feel compassion from their healthcare team. Hospital and emergency room policies often do not get updated as regularly as they should. Further, informing staff that there are patients in the community who do feel stigma when seeking healthcare is essential. Holding a workshop with nurses and staff regarding people-first language and compassionate language terms to use would be helpful in ensuring those with substance use disorders feel respected in the healthcare setting.

Further, our team supports the notion of “housing first” as safe shelter is a basic right that all humans should have and is necessary before treating more difficult conditions such as

substance abuse. As such, we will continue to support Over the Rhine community housing and Jimmy Heath House in their initiatives and work with others in the community with a similar vision.