Homelessness among people who inject drugs in Los Angeles

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People who inject drugs (PWID) and homelessness

- Recent drug injection prevalence among homeless populations is unknown in Los Angeles
  - As low as 3% among men (Wenzel et al., 2017) and men and women (Gelberg et al., 2012)
  - As high as 13% among homeless youth (Al-Tayyib et al., 2014)
  - 20% lifetime drug injection (Gelberg et al., 2012)

- Drug injection can precede and follow homelessness

- Some drug use appears to be related to homelessness:
  - Stimulant use to stay awake at night, manage hunger, or in preparation for violence
  - Opiate use to manage pain
Homelessness among PWID in Los Angeles

- Qualitative (n=90) and quantitative (n=1,669) survey data from PWID in neighborhoods throughout Los Angeles County

- Study 1 (2001-03): CDC funded study on legal status of syringe exchange programs in California (n=321)

- Study 2 (2003-05): NIDA funded study best practices for syringe exchange programs (n=485)

- Study 3 (2011-13): NIDA funded mixed method study on injection initiation (n=397)

- Study 4 (2016-): NIDA funded randomized controlled trial on injection initiation prevention (n=466)
## Homelessness trends among PWID in LA by area and year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>2001-03</th>
<th>2003-05</th>
<th>2011-13</th>
<th>2016-17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skid Row</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East LA</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollywood</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td></td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South LA</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td></td>
<td>68%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Fernando</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td></td>
<td>41%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Distinguishing demographic and drug use characteristics of homeless PWID by area, 2011-13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Drug use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>San Fernando Valley</td>
<td>Youngest Plurality White</td>
<td>Heroin and meth injection Meth snorting and smoking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtown/Hollywood</td>
<td>Highest GLB Racial/ethnically diverse</td>
<td>Heroin and meth injection Some crack smoking Some meth snorting/smoking Shortest injection years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Los Angeles</td>
<td>Mostly African American</td>
<td>Heroin injection Crack smoking Over 1/4 in methadone TX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Los Angeles</td>
<td>Mostly Latinx</td>
<td>Heroin 1/3 in methadone TX</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall health and well-being characteristics of homeless PWID, 2011-13

- High HCV rates (50% to 72%), but low HIV rate (4%)
- Acute and chronic health problems range from 25% to 33%
- Depression from 33% to 50%
- Food insecurity is common 50% to 75% by area
- Violent victimization ranges from 28% to 51%
- Victim of theft ranged from 47% to 70%
- Arrest and jail time ranged from 25% to 50%
Key Points

- Homelessness has grown among PWID in Los Angeles over the last 18 years

- The drug use and health needs of homelessness PWID vary by area

- The rigors of daily drug injection require significant changes in service delivery to achieve housing and health improvements

- Material deprivation and negative contacts with community institutions create complex barriers to obtaining housing and improving health
Recommendations

- Enhanced engagement with homeless PWID to ensure that services are provided
  - PWID are often unaware of improvements in substance use treatment medication and HCV treatments

- Development of routine and consistent mobile health services for substance use treatment, health screening, and HCV treatment - CHPLA

- For fixed site service: Expediated appointments and presumptive prescribing and treating for substance use disorders, HCV treatment, and skin and soft tissue infections among others - Harm reduction center by HHCLA

- Drug use tolerant housing that maintains social supports
Acknowledgements

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- Study participants

- Community collaborators

- Investigators: Alex H. Kral, Ph.D., Neil Flynn, MD, Rachel Anderson, Karina Gonzalez Dominguez

- Staff and student volunteers