

research snapshot

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Improved Discharge Planning Will Help Put an End to Prison Revolving Door for the Homeless

What is this research about?

Discharge planning and prisoner re-entry programs exist to ease the transition of prisoners back into society. But there are limited resources for these programs. Those who work in services providing support to homeless populations (shelters and drop ins) have argued that a large number of ex prisoners wind up using their services. The question becomes, what is the relationship between incarceration, discharge planning and homelessness?

What did the researchers do?

The researchers looked at the available literature on discharge planning and prisoner re-entry. They also used questionnaires and interviews to gather information from prisoners and the homeless.

What did the researchers find?

The researchers found that prisoners returning to the community with inadequate discharge planning and transitional supports are at a higher

What you need to know:

The issue of homelessness and prisoner re-entry deserves more political attention. Almost every prisoner will eventually be released back into the community. Therefore, it is important to improve discharge planning and re-entry programs for inmates.

risk of becoming homeless. Prisoners who are sentenced or who are awaiting trial often lose their jobs and housing, and without support, wind up in homeless shelters and drop-ins upon release, where staff do not have the skills to support prisoner reentry.

When prisoners become homeless, their chances of reoffending increase. People who are homeless are more likely to be involved in the justice system because of their poverty, substance use and economic survival strategies not to mention their criminal records. In addition, the police tend to devote more attention to the homeless, often because of community and political pressure. There is thus a reciprocal relationship between homelessness and prison. Many inmates who become homeless, go back to prison.

How can you use this research?

Policymakers, those involved in corrections and community groups must ensure that prisoners – whether convicted criminals or those in prison on remand – must have access to appropriate discharge planning and transitional supports. This will not only better assist inmates who are returning to the community, but will decrease homelessness and lower incarceration rates, stopping the prison/homelessness cycle.

About the Researchers

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