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Lorna Moxham

University of Wollongong, lmoxham@uow.edu.au

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Affordable and appropriate housing: a necessary component of mental health care

Abstract

Although the function of a house is to provide protection from the weather and a safe haven from potential attack, housing does not simply mean the provision of shelter or a roof over one's head; there is clearly more to housing than material provision.

Keywords

appropriate, care, affordable, health, mental, component, necessary, housing

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Affordable and appropriate housing: a necessary component of mental health care

BY **LORNA MOXHAM**

Although the function of a house is to provide protection from the weather and a safe haven from potential attack, housing does not simply mean the provision of shelter or a roof over one's head; there is clearly more to housing than material provision.

Research investigating the complex relationship that exists between health and housing originated in what were the foundations of public health policy, with housing as an agenda being central to public health reform since the mid-19th century.

For someone who is living with a mental health issue, housing is central to staying well, remaining in the community and moving forward in their recovery journey. There is a significant relationship between housing stressors and mental health. There are

a number of conditions, many of which are experienced by people who have a mental illness, all of which are related to higher psychiatric prevalence rates. These include living alone, living in overcrowded accommodation and living in government provided housing.

Lack of affordable housing may result in people with a mental illness living on the streets, using emergency accommodation which is only temporary, higher rates of hospital admissions and readmissions, longer hospital stays and serious impediment on recovery and potential relapse. A seminal Australian report "*the National Inquiry into the Human Rights of People with Mental Illness*", also known as the Burdekin Report, asserted that unsuitable or non-existent accommodation can destroy the benefits of treatment and rehabilitation received in hospital.

Discharge plans should look closely at where the person is being discharged to and mental health nurses need to strongly advocate for suitable housing for their clients.

As Hugh Stretton (1974:45) argued, "we are formed by home and neighbourhood and spend so much of our lives in them; we should really put home and neighbourhood at the heart of urban planning". There is a strong argument that it's not just urban planning where homes are at the centre. Perhaps we also need to put home and neighbourhood at the heart of mental health care if we really are delivering holistic care that isn't solely based on the medical model.

DR LORNA MOXHAM IS PROFESSOR OF MENTAL HEALTH NURSING IN THE SCHOOL OF NURSING MIDWIFERY AND INDIGENOUS HEALTH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG IN NSW.

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