Mental Health & Addictions North COVID-19 Innovations

Thunder Bay Isolation and Illness Shelters: Protecting Those Most Vulnerable

The Challenge
Those experiencing homelessness in Thunder Bay are especially vulnerable in the face of COVID-19. Physical distancing has meant that not as many people can be served in one location as in the past. Individuals who are experiencing homelessness have no means to self-isolate.

The community needed to rapidly increase screening measures and create a safe isolated space for those exposed, probable or confirmed of having COVID-19.

The Solution
- Working from a harm reduction lens to provide the best care and support to individuals to increase adherence to self-isolation requirements.
- Utilizes a two-pronged approach:
  1) Increase surveillance for those with illness
  2) Provide isolation for those with high COVID-19 risk.
- A local space (Urban Abbey) was identified as the illness shelter where those who were experiencing any non-COVID illness could be housed and monitored, with 24-hour support provided by volunteers.
- Funding was provided by the District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) to secure a hotel with designated spaces and entrance/exit, identified as the isolation shelter, as well as funding for Grace Place to provide 24-hour staffing at the isolation shelter. TBDSSAB also provided funding supports for the Urban Abbey illness shelter.
- Leveraged and re-deployed professionals within the community who already had training, experience and trust with individuals experiencing homelessness.
- Mobile nursing team (St. Joseph’s Care Group & Norwest CHC) provides medical care across both shelter spaces.
- Designed a clinical pathway with a strong referral algorithm.
- Strong community partnerships allowed the shelters to be set up within 72 hours.
- Safe transportation is an area of ongoing development.
- For some who had not had success within the existing shelter system, the isolation shelter’s increased privacy and autonomy has been a better fit.

The Process

2. If someone fails screening, staff call 24-hour referral number.
3. Referral algorithm is used to determine the right location.
4. Safe transport to identified shelter (illness or isolation).
5. Community paramedic mobile COVID-19 testing.

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