



## ***Homelessness and the Health Care System***

- Homeless adults have **high levels of health care use**, most often in emergency departments.
- Homeless people are **admitted to hospital up to 5 times** more often than the general population, and stay in hospital longer than other low-income patients, resulting in significant excess health care costs.
- Homeless people face many **barriers** that impair their access to health care.
- Many homeless people do not possess **proof of coverage** as a result of their identification being lost or stolen.
- Many homeless people **do not fill prescriptions** because they do not have insurance benefits
- Homeless people face other barriers to health care that are **unrelated to insurance** status. Homelessness entails a daily struggle for the essentials of life. These competing priorities may impede homeless adults from using health care services, particularly those perceived as discretionary. Many health recommendations regarding rest or dietary changes may be unattainable.
- The health care system often **fails to provide adequate treatment** for homeless people with mental illness or substance abuse.

***Homelessness affects a significant number of Canadians of all ages and is associated with a high burden of illness, yet the health care system may not adequately meet the needs of homeless people. More research is needed to identify better ways to deliver care to this population. Health interventions alone, however, are unlikely to overcome the adverse effects of homelessness and related social ills. The search for long-term solutions to the problem of homelessness itself must remain a key priority.***