



Mindfulness-informed practices for work-related stressors: Supporting hospice for the homeless providers' wellbeing

To increase equitable access to hospice palliative care (H/P/C), several brick-and-mortar specialized hospices for the homeless (H4Hs)/structurally vulnerable have been established across Canada. The delivery of high-quality H/P/C within H4H organizations depends upon the wellbeing of staff and volunteers. However, H4H providers are at high risk for burnout due to unique work-related stressors such as proximity to death and trauma.

“We must protect the caring capacity of providers and volunteers working in hospice for homeless (H4H) settings if we want to realize more equitable hospice palliative care delivery for all Canadians. I am excited about this CIHR funded planning grant where we H4H teams and academic leaders from across Canada will explore opportunities for mindfulness-informed practices to support proactive, evidence-informed workforce supports—preventing burnout instead of waiting to intervene once it exists.” – Fr. Dr. Matthew M. Durham, Executive Director, Journey Home Hospice



Project Overview

Hospices for the homeless (H4Hs) rely on specially trained staff and volunteers to provide high-quality hospice palliative care (H/P/C) services using trauma-informed, harm reduction, and anti-oppression approaches.^{1,2} These providers experience unique work-related stressors including long work hours, frequent proximity to death and traumatic experiences, and workplace harassment.² If left unaddressed, these stressors can result in burnout leading to feelings of low accomplishment, exhaustion, and poorer professional relationships, which can compromise client care.³⁻⁵ To provide high quality H/P/C in Canada, an exploration into the experiences of H4H providers is required to identify opportunities to attend to work-related stressors and support wellbeing.

As part of SE Health, the **Saint Elizabeth Foundation** is a nationally recognized leader in advocating for equitable access to H/P/C for people experiencing homelessness and structural vulnerability through **Journey Home Hospice**—a brick-and-mortar H4H in Toronto, Ontario and Windsor, Ontario. A chaplain at Journey Home Hospice first approached the SE

Research Centre to explore ways of integrating mindfulness-informed practices to mitigate work-related stressors and support the delivery of high-quality client care.

What are we doing?

Guided by the **Participatory Research to Action (PR2A) Framework**,⁶ we are taking a multi-pronged approach to authentically engage experts-by-experience in a planning project on mindfulness-informed practices in H4H. This includes: 1) a **survey** of H4H provider experiences, 2) an **environmental scan**, and 3) **collaboration** with H4Hs to co-develop a research study.

What have we done?

To examine the unique needs of H4H providers, we conducted a survey. The intent was two-fold: 1) **to explore H4H staff and volunteers' experiences of compassion satisfaction, stress, and supports**, and 2) **better understand opportunities for improvement**. Participants were asked to rate their compassion satisfaction on a validated scale. Participants were also invited to elaborate on their experiences through open-ended narrative-informed questions including

requests for metaphors symbolizing staff and volunteers' experience of stress.

What did we find?

A total of 51 H4H providers at Journey Home Hospice completed the survey in May 2024 (a 50% response rate). Key findings from statistical and thematic analyses include:

1. The workforce is new to H/P/C with over 40% have less than 1-year experience in this area.
2. Providers have a high Compassion Satisfaction indicating satisfaction in their ability to be effective carers (mode score 50/50).
3. Multi-level factors shape workplace stress (e.g., societal, organizational, interpersonal, personal) which were reflected in metaphors.
4. These providers have limited engagement with resources to support well-being. There is a desire by 21 providers for resources that are educational, spiritual/psychological, social, and/or process related.

What are the next steps?

Environmental Scan

We are conducting an environmental scan of mindfulness-informed practices that support workplace well-being. This will provide information on what practices may be adapted to mitigate and/or prevent the unique stressors faced by H4H providers in our future study. Our team intends to complete the environmental scan by mid-2024.

Collaboration with H4Hs

We will come together with leaders, staff, and volunteers from three Canadian H4H organizations (2 in ON, 1 in NS), and clinician academics who have expertise in mindfulness. The primary objective is to co-design a future research study incorporating mindfulness-based practices to advance the wellbeing of H4H staff and volunteers across Canada. Project activities include a 2-day planning meeting with diverse H4H experts-by-experience to explore their experiences and ideas on mindfulness-informed practices. Organizations involved include:

- Journey Home Hospice; Ontario
- The Ottawa Mission; Ontario
- The Overlook; Nova Scotia

The anticipated outcomes of these meetings include:

1) **readiness for developing meaningful protective practices** against work-related stressors in H4H; 2) **clarity on the scope of work** required in a future research study to respond to specific stressors of H4H providers with existing and/or adapted mindfulness-informed practices; and 3) the **building of strategic partnerships** between diverse H4H organizations across Canada, applied researchers, and academics mindfulness expertise.

What will be the impact?

Overall, this project emphasizes the importance of **end-to-end participatory research**, where experts-by-experience identify the most pressing and urgent problems to be addressed, and work in collaboration with researchers to determine readiness for action, and define potential solutions that are relevant, meaningful, and useful. This planning grant will result in a research plan for a future co-design study emphasizing the development, delivery and evaluation of mindfulness-informed practices in H4H settings to support provider wellbeing. The long-term goal for this work is to **promote the sustainability of H4Hs' capacity to provide high-quality H/P/C** across Canada.

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References

