

Evaluation of the Palliative Approach to Care (PA2Care) training package for social care workers

The Palliative Approach to Care (PA2Care) curriculum is a 3-part training package for social care workers who support persons who are homeless. This curriculum was evaluated by over 200 social care workers trained in the PA2Care approach at 3 sites across Canada.

Social care workers reported a significant increase in their knowledge, attitudes, and skills. They reported these features increased confidence in their abilities to better support palliative clients with end of life care needs: information on finding locally available resources, strategies to engage with health care workers and people experiencing homelessness and dying. The training package is freely available for others who work with people who are homeless.

Project Overview

Many people who are homeless have chronic or life limiting conditions. However, because of social stigma, people experiencing homelessness are often unable or unwilling to access health care, including palliative care.

Workers who support people who are homeless (“social care workers”) are able to build trusting relationships and therefore have an opportunity to use these relationships to directly improve access to palliative care. However, these social care workers generally know little about palliative care.

The PA2Care curriculum was developed to enable social care workers to better address the palliative care needs of people

experiencing homelessness. Building on the design activities in Phase I (described [here](#)), Phase II evaluated the acceptability and efficacy of the final PA2Care curriculum, which was delivered at 22 workshops across 9 sites in Toronto, Calgary, and Thunder Bay.

What did we do?

Surveys were collected at 3 time points from more than 200 social care workers who participated in the training. The surveys collected self-reported data on knowledge, attitudes, skills, and confidence pre-, post- and 3-months after participating in the training course. Semi-structured interviews were conducted

with course facilitators to obtain feedback on the aspects of the curriculum that worked well and areas for improvement.

What did we find?

Social care workers reported a high level of general knowledge about palliative care prior to participating in the training. However, they reported lacking specific knowledge and practice, including the difference between a palliative approach and what they know as a harm reduction approach in their work. After the training, social care workers reported a significant increase in their knowledge, attitudes, and skills about the palliative approach to care.

The key features of the curriculum participants reported as most helpful were ways to identify available legal and financial resources for the clients as they are dying, and strategies for talking about end of life with their clients. Social care workers reported these strategies helped them to feel better prepared to discuss with clients their wishes and priorities for their end of life care. The participants also found the activity about handling their own grief when their clients die helpful for their personal well-being.

The positive, interactive, and non-judgemental sharing of experiences as part of the training was also well received by

social care workers. The opportunity to learn strategies and hear stories from colleagues was reported as especially valuable in both learning of new techniques and fostering a sense of connection to the wider community. Guest speakers from local palliative outreach programs were also reported as a favourite part of the training, as they provided more information on locally available resources.

Feedback from course facilitators was similarly largely positive. However, they made suggestions for changes to the curriculum's format. Specifically, facilitators wanted flexibility to tailor some activities based on their sense of how participants were responding. For example, some groups preferred discussion over role play, and facilitators wanted the opportunity to accommodate these preferences.

What is the impact?

Based on the feedback from the participants and facilitators, the PA2Care curriculum has now been revised. The training curriculum has been made available online at pa2care.ca. The package and other resources are freely accessible to interested individuals, social care workers, and organizations working with people who are homeless with EOL care needs.

Who were our collaborators?

Partnerships with local organizations included Hospice Toronto, Hospice Northwest and Calgary Allied Mobile Palliative Program (CAMPP) advocates who work closely with people experiencing homelessness and their social care providers.

How was the research funded?

This research is funded by SE Health through the SE Research Centre.

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About the Research Centre

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In the SE Research Centre there are four fields of research and evaluation: Aging in Society; Dying, Death and Grief; Health and Care Experiences; and Models of Care Delivery.

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To see the PA2Care Curriculum in action, visit: pa2care.ca

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