

Authors:

Forchuk, C., Turner, K., Joplin, L., Martin, J., Parsons, W., Perry, S., Vos, S., Wiktorowicz, M.

Tackling Complex Policy Issues with Innovative Strategies

Background: A vast number of policies impact individuals with mental illness struggling to find and maintain affordable, safe housing. A comprehensive understanding of the issues related to mental health and housing is imperative, in order to determine which political actions might best serve the identified population. This Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) initiated an analysis of a multitude of relevant policies to identify gaps and barriers.

Innovative strategies were developed to address the complexities of policy analysis. An initial grid was developed to organize different types of policies (ie. housing, health, mental health, and income support) across three levels of government and various ministries/departments. Using this chart as a guide, further input and direction was sought from policy committee members, community focus groups, key informant interviews, and through review of written policy documents and reports. This process evolved, and led to the development of policy “cheat” sheets to simplify interpretation of the various policies, and to educate others about the interplay of policies influencing housing for psychiatric consumer/survivors.

Outcome: Sharing of policy information between community groups and researchers has resulted in formal and informal coalitions. This CURA has been able to piggyback onto other group events, providing simplified information directly to key decision makers, which has proved beneficial and constructive. This strategy has allowed this CURA to collect data that validated policy barriers, and has enabled a quick response to opportunities to influence policy and effect positive change.