



BC Association of Social Workers
#402 – 1755 West Broadway
Vancouver, BC V6J 4S5

E: bcasw@bcasw.org
T: 604.730.9111

May 18, 2021
For immediate release

BC SOCIAL WORKERS CALL ON HEALTH AUTHORITIES TO DO MORE FOR PATIENTS AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS

(Vancouver) BC's professional association for social workers is calling for health authorities to do more for patients discharged from hospital to unsafe or unhealthy living situations.

The BC Association of Social Workers released a report describing the experiences of acute healthcare social workers who discharge vulnerable hospital patients to settings where their follow-up healthcare needs can not be properly met.

"We conducted an on-line survey of social workers working in acute healthcare settings across the province to explore the discrepancies between health system protocols related to discharging vulnerable patients and actual practice" said BCASW's Fiona Lewis, chair of the Health Advocacy Committee.

More than 120 hospital social workers responded to the survey that found a significant problem with the way many vulnerable patients are discharged following acute care.

"Almost all of the social workers who took part in the survey had been involved in discharging homeless patients within the previous three months" said Michael Crawford, President of the BC Association of Social Workers. "Four out of five social workers reported knowing patients discharged to homelessness returning to the hospital within 48 hours of discharge."

The report, "Bus tickets are not enough: Exploring the experiences of British Columbian social workers discharging patients into homelessness" found that patients facing homelessness often had complex social and health conditions that made locating suitable accommodations difficult. Additionally, the general lack of affordable housing, appropriate residential treatment options, and the pressure to discharge patients from acute care quickly, led to many patients being discharged without suitable accommodation.

"Social workers are an integral part of the healthcare team and are often tasked with arranging the discharge of patients" said Lewis. "Not being able to do that job well due to a lack of resources leads to considerable moral distress and hopelessness."

The report's recommendations include calls for more affordable supported housing options particularly for people with mental health and substance use challenges, greater coordination of services between hospitals and community agencies, reframing social needs as determinants of health, and improved access to primary care for people experiencing homelessness.

- 30 -

Fiona Lewis, MSW, RSW | Chair
Health Advocacy Committee
BC Association of Social Workers
E: fclewis1944@gmail.com

Michael Crawford, MSW, RSW | President
BC Association of Social Workers
E: mcrawford@tru.ca

Bus tickets are not enough: Exploring the experiences of British Columbian social workers discharging patients into homelessness – https://www.bcasw.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Bus-Tickets-are-not-Enough_Survey-Report_January-2021.pdf

The British Columbia Association of Social Workers is a voluntary, not-for-profit membership association that supports and promotes the profession of social work and advocates for social justice. - <https://www.bcasw.org/>