



## HOMELESSNESS A BARRIER TO EFFECTIVE TREATMENT AMONG HIV-POSITIVE PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS

### BACKGROUND & METHOD

- People who inject drugs (IDU) often do not experience the full benefits of treatment for HIV/AIDS.
- Previous studies in Vancouver and elsewhere have found that some patient characteristics, including mental health problems and ongoing drug use, can complicate HIV/AIDS treatment.
- In this study, we looked at the effect of homelessness on HIV/AIDS treatment among IDU.
- Between 1996 and 2009 we enrolled HIV-positive IDU from many settings in the Downtown Eastside and other places in Greater Vancouver and, every six months, interviewed them about their housing status.
- We then looked at the impact of homelessness on HIV treatment.

### QUICK FACT

*PEOPLE ON ART SHOULD GET MORE SUPPORT TO TAKE THEIR MEDICATION ON A REGULAR BASIS, INCLUDING ACCESS TO SUPPORTIVE HOUSING.*

### FINDINGS

- 247 participants started antiretroviral therapy (ART) for HIV treatment and were eligible for this study.
- In 140 participants (57%), treatment was successful and the amount of HIV in the bloodstream was undetectable.
- Patients who were homeless were significantly less likely to benefit from treatment because they were less likely to take their ART medication on a regular basis.

### IMPLICATIONS

- Our study shows that poor housing status is an important barrier to HIV/AIDS treatment success among IDU.
- For homeless people, this is probably a result of difficulties in taking their medication on a regular basis.
- To address this problem, people on ART should get more support to take their medication, including access to supportive housing.

Milloy MJ, Kerr T, Bangsberg DR, Buxton J, Parashar S, Guillemi S, Montaner J, Wood E. **Homelessness as a structural barrier to effective antiretroviral therapy among HIV-seropositive illicit drug users in a Canadian setting.** *AIDS Patient Care & STDs*, 2012; 26(1): 60-67.

