



Windy City Times

AFC holds meeting about housing study
by Chasse Rehwickel
2009-10-07

AIDS Foundation of Chicago held a special meeting for policymakers and advocacy group leaders at the John Marshall Law School Sept. 30 to explain the results of a recent study on housing for the homeless and also to rally support for its expansion.

The study, which ran from September 2003 to May 2006, focused on rectifying the problem that many homeless adults with chronic medical illnesses frequently use the hospital's emergency services for their medical care.

These emergency-room visits, according to researchers, come at a very high cost to ordinary citizens in the form of higher medical fees and insurance costs.

As one organizer put it, "the price of being in a hospital bed alone can cost around \$3,000 per day, a cost that has become inflated in part because of this constant emergency room use."

The study postulated that if homeless adults with chronic medical illnesses, such as AIDS or diabetes, were offered long-term housing with constant case management care they would be less likely to use the emergency room. After three years of research and five years of work, researchers believe this study's results speak volumes about what can be done to dramatically lower healthcare costs in America.

"We found that those in the study who received housing spent fewer days in the emergency room and fewer days in nursing homes on average," stated principal researcher Dr. Laura Sadowski. "These are important results for anyone worried about rising healthcare costs and the homelessness problem. Going forward I hope the study can be replicated across the country—I think it could have a tremendous impact."

The study was published in a May 2009 edition of the Journal of the American Medical Association and its success has even led to two of the participating hospitals, Mount Sinai and Stroger Cook County Hospital, to continue the program as a service to the community.

With program leaders looking to expand the housing for the homeless plan, a call for help was made to policymakers and advocacy groups at the meeting.

"Currently, the primary funding for this program is coming in the form of a few grants from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development," stated the AIDS Foundation of Chicago's director of government relations, John Peller. "Those grants are stable, but if we were able to receive funding from the government to cover the cost of our case workers then the program could expand dramatically."

According to program organizers the cost of covering the 12 case workers needed would be around \$600,000-\$650,000 annually.

The meeting was attended heavily by healthcare advocacy leaders, including State Sen. Heather Steans, State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz and Cook County Commissioner Bridget Gainer.