

# SOCIAL SKILLS AND --- HOMELESSNESS

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VA PSYCHOSOCIAL  
REHABILITATION TRAINING  
PROGRAM

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# AGENDA AND OUTLINE

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## Objectives:

- To attain a brief background of homelessness, SST, and serious mental illness in the VA
  - Describe a process for creating, modifying, and adapting social skills that support housing attainment and retention among homeless persons with serious mental illness
  - Discuss what is working and challenges when providing SST in programs aimed at reducing homelessness for Veterans with SMI
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- I would like this to be an interactive discussion with time at the end to brainstorm.
  - **Special Guest:** Sonya Gabrielian, M.D., M.P.H., from the Center of Innovation, Health Development Service, VA Greater Los Angeles will tell us about the work going on in this area in Los Angeles.

## TABLE 6.6 SUMMARY OF STEPS INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING A NEW CURRICULUM

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- Step 1: Define the need that is not being addressed.
- Step 2: Identify a skill that would address the need.
- Step 3: Develop a rationale for the skill.
- Step 4: Decide how best to break down the skill into clear and concise steps.
- Step 5: Devise role-play scenes to practice the skill.
- Step 6: Pilot the skill in the group.
- Step 7: Revise the skill as necessary.
- Step 8: Make a record of the new skill, using the same format used for the other skills, and add it to the existing curriculum.

# DEFINING THE NEED THAT IS NOT BEING ADDRESSED: HOUSING IS A CRITICAL DETERMINANT OF HEALTH

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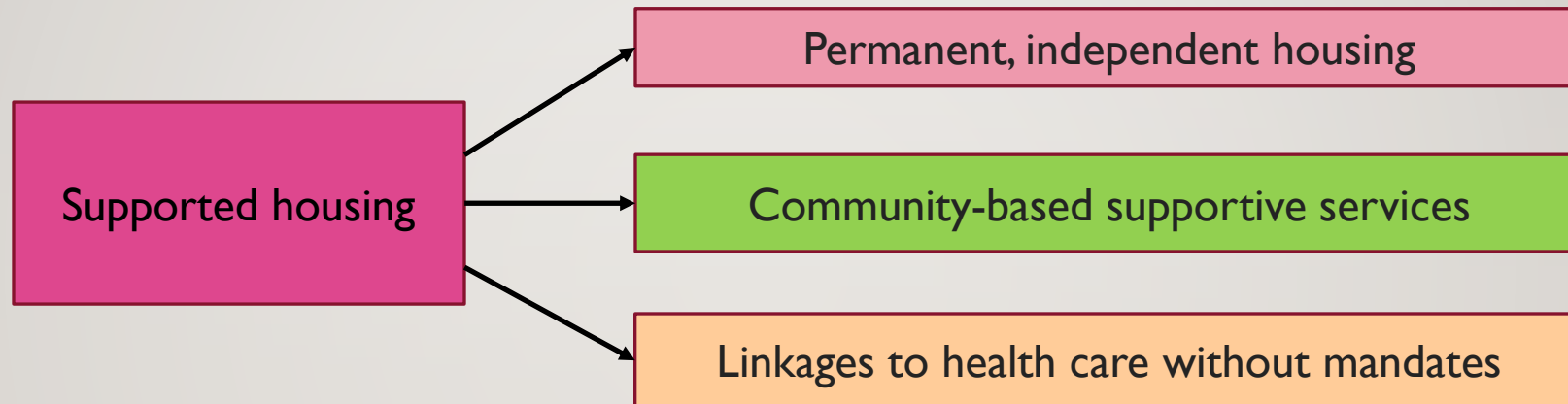
- Persons experiencing homelessness have high rates of medical illness, psychiatric problems, and substance use disorders
- Substandard housing is associated with fragmented health service utilization
- Homeless persons' needs are compounded by poor social support and priorities that compete with medical care



Gelberg et al, 1997

# SUPPORTED HOUSING EFFECTIVELY ADDRESSES HOMELESSNESS

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In partnership with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), VA's Supported Housing (VASH) program is the center of its plan to end Veteran homelessness

- Served >85,000 homeless Veterans to date

# SST AND HUD/VASH

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- 25% of participants in VA's Supported Housing program prematurely exit the program each year
- Social skills (which facilitate social interactions and instrumental tasks, like money management) are an important but underappreciated determinant of exits from supported housing
- Social skills training effectively improves participants' social skills and functioning, but is **essentially absent from supported housing services**

Kopelowicz et al, 2006

# QUOTATIONS:

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- Serious Mental Illness (SMI), defined here as a psychotic disorder, bipolar disorder, major depressive disorder, or posttraumatic stress disorder, is one of the strongest risk factors for experiencing homelessness (Susser et al, 1993).
- Even when engaged in permanent supportive housing (PSH) programs which provide permanent, community-based housing and field-based supportive services, the social and cognitive impairments of people with SMI can hinder housing acquisition and maintenance (Gabrielian et al, 2015).
- Although the literature describes social skills that improve community functioning among persons with SMI, it generally reflects persons who do not live independently (Bellack et al, 2004).

# QUOTATIONS (CONT'D) & SUMMARY:

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- For persons with serious mental illness, there are strong relationships between social skills and functional outcomes, like vocational activities. Social skills training strengthens interpersonal skills through behavioral instruction, that is, role modeling, practice, feedback, and guidance to apply learned skills in everyday life (Kopelowicz et al, 2006; Kurtz et al, 2008).
- Although serious mental illness conveys significant risk of homelessness and despite evidence that social skills are associated with housing outcomes in this group, few social skills are designed to address skills that are relevant in the context of PSH (e.g., interactions with landlords or neighbors) (Gabrielian et al, 2019).
- **SUMMARY STATEMENT:** There is a need for providing social skills that will support housing attainment and retention among homeless persons with serious mental illness.



# SPECIAL GUEST

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- Pleased to introduce Dr. Gabrielian.
- She is with us today to tell us about the work they have been doing in Los Angeles.

# DISCUSSION

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- Anyone currently working in supported housing?
- What is working well when providing SST in supported housing programs?
- What are the challenges you have faced when providing SST in programs providing services to homeless-experienced persons with SMI?
- Questions?
- Reminder about completing evaluation survey in TMS to obtain CEs.

# THANK YOU!

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## Contact information:

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