Homelessness and housing access among people who use drugs in Oregon in 2023: a survey of 8 counties

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Background

- Substance use is disproportionately high among people who are unstably housed.\(^1\) People who use drugs are at an increased risk of housing instability.\(^2\)

- People who use drugs have an especially difficult time accessing and maintaining stable housing due to stigma, barriers to care, and restrictive housing policies.\(^3\)

- In Summer 2022, the majority of Measure 110 (M110) funding was allocated, which included increased access to supportive housing for people who use drugs.

- We sought to describe housing access among people who use drugs in Oregon two years after M110 was enacted.

Methods

- Quantitative survey of 468 people who use drugs across 8 counties in Oregon.

- Participants were recruited in collaboration with partner agencies that provide supportive services to people who use drugs or through direct outreach.

- Eligibility criteria: any use of drugs impacted by M110

- Data collection: March – November 2023
  - Two years after M110 was enacted and 6 months after the majority of funding was allocated to community providers

- Qualitative interviews were conducted with participants (n=32)
Results: Sample characteristics

Median age: 40 years

63% cis-men

Median length of time living in Oregon: 24 years

88% earned less than $1200/month

Results: Sample characteristics

Race-ethnicity distribution (n=451)

- 66% White
- 18% Multiracial
- 6% Hispanic/Latine
- 5% American Indian/Alaskan Native
- 4% Black
- 1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- <1% Asian

Results: Drug use characteristics

Over half of our sample have been using drugs for more than 21 years.

* Drugs included fentanyl, heroin, methamphetamine, powder cocaine, and crack cocaine

Results: Drug use characteristics

Over half of our sample have been using drugs for more than 21 years.

Over 80% have been using drugs for more than 10 years.

Number of years using drugs* (n=467)

- 57%: 21+ years
- 26%: 11-20 years
- 15%: 3-10 years
- 2%: 0-2 years

* Drugs included fentanyl, heroin, methamphetamine, powder cocaine, and crack cocaine

Results: Drug use characteristics

Number of years using drugs* (n=467)

- 57% 26%
- 15%
- 1.5%

* Drugs included fentanyl, heroin, methamphetamine, powder cocaine, and crack cocaine

Over half of our sample have been using drugs for more than 21 years.

Over 80% have been using drugs for more than 10 years.

Only 7 people (1.5%) started using drugs since M110 was enacted.

Results: Drug use characteristics

Stimulant use in the past 30 days (n=467)

Stimulants included methamphetamine, powder cocaine, crack cocaine, fentanyl mixed with stimulants, and heroin mixed with stimulants.

Results: Drug use characteristics

Stimulants included methamphetamine, powder cocaine, crack cocaine, fentanyl mixed with stimulants, and heroin mixed with stimulants.

Opioids included fentanyl, heroin, opioid pills, fentanyl mixed with stimulants, and heroin mixed with stimulants.

Results: Housing characteristics

398 participants (85%) self-identified as homeless or unstably housed.

“I do believe that’s why people use drugs out here—that’s why I used drugs—because they’re homeless. You take away a person’s home and they have nowhere to go, they’re going to use drugs. I think I was out there for two months without using it. It was miserable, so I started using drugs again.”

Results: Housing characteristics

Among those who self-identified as homeless or unstably housed,

- 93% said they wanted to get housing
- 30% said were currently on a waitlist for housing
- Average length of time on waitlist was 17 months

“I’ve tried before, but their wait lists have always been really long, or it’s like Section 8 where you have to enter a drawing or whatever they do. I’ve entered before, but my name didn’t get picked. Now I’ve had an assessment, so I’m on a waiting list. It seems like it’s better.”

Results: Housing access among unstably housed

71% sought housing
25% obtained housing

Results: Housing access among unstably housed

“I haven’t tried myself, but as far as I’ve heard, it’s like a job. It’s like having a full-time job.”

“Oh, you’ve got to be in at 9 o’clock.’ … Or, ‘You can’t spend more than two nights away from here, and they can’t be back-to-back.’ Are we dealing with kids or are we dealing with adults? Because you guys are making us seem like I’m nobody.”

Results: Housing access by race-ethnicity

Source: RTI International, 2024, Oregon Measure 110 Drug Decriminalization Evaluation
Summary & Implications

- We found that most people who use drugs have been living in Oregon for over two decades.

- We found very few people started using drugs after M110 was enacted.

- Two years since M110 was enacted, there is still a large unmet need for housing among people who drugs.

- Concerted efforts are needed to ensure equitable access to housing for Black and Latine populations.

- M110 has provided funding for expanded and new housing services across Oregon. The impacts of this funding on housing access and substance use outcomes are under study and require time for evaluation.
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Supplemental Slides
References


Results: Sample characteristics

- Average age: 41 years
- 63% male
- 88% made less than $1200/month
- Median length of time living in Oregon: 24 years
Results: Sample characteristics

PWUD Sample (n=451)

- 66%
- 18%
- 5%
- 4%
- 5%
- 1%
- <1%

Oregon Census (2023)

- 74%
- 14%
- 4%
- 2%
- 1%
- 2%
- 5%
- 5%

Results: Drug use characteristics

* Drugs included fentanyl, heroin, methamphetamine, powder cocaine, and crack cocaine

Only 7 people (1.5%) of our sample started using drugs after M110
Results: Housing access by stimulant use

Stimulant use in the past 30 days

Sought housing
- None (0 days) (n=7) 43%
- Low (1-20 days) (n=83) 73%
- High (21+ days) (n=247) 70%

Obtained housing
- None (0 days) (n=7) 67%
- Low (1-20 days) (n=83) 38%
- High (21+ days) (n=247) 20%

Results: Housing access by opioid use

Opioid use in the past 30 days

- Sought housing:
  - None (0 days) (n=67): 81%
  - Low (0-20 days) (n=68): 79%
  - High (21+ days) (n=150): 64%

- Obtained housing:
  - None (0 days) (n=67): 26%
  - Low (0-20 days) (n=68): 42%
  - High (21+ days) (n=150): 19%

**Conclusion**

- Two years since M110 was enacted, there is still a large unmet need for housing among people who drugs.

- Concerted efforts are needed to ensure equitable access to housing for Black and Latine populations.

- Housing First models have demonstrated higher therapeutic trust and reduced high-risk substance use among chronically homeless individuals.

“You can’t spend more than two nights away from here, and they can’t be back-to-back.” Are we dealing with kids or are we dealing with adults? **Because you guys are making us seem like I’m nobody.**”