

Service provision for older homeless people with memory problems: a mixed-methods study

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Plain English summary

Services for older homeless people with memory problems

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Offering effective support to people with memory problems or dementia and their carers is increasingly important to the NHS and the UK government. However, older people who are homeless appear to have been ignored in these changes. This 24-month study explored the extent of memory problems among older homeless people temporarily living in hostels to find out what support they received and from whom, what their quality of life was and if they had unmet needs. We also wanted to calculate the costs of the services they used. We started by reviewing the existing evidence on this subject. We then recruited eight very different hostels to our study: four in London and four in North England. In these, first we interviewed 62 of their older homeless residents, asking them about their health, lifestyle and memory, and testing their memories. Of these residents, 47 were included in the main study, with 23 in the group with 'memory problems', 17 having 'no memory problems' and 7 who were 'borderline'. We also interviewed 43 hostel staff. We went back 3 months and then 6 months later to ask what residents had done about their memory problems (if anything) and what services they were using. With their permission, we read their medical records and talked to professionals supporting them so we could work out the costs of their services. We concluded that usual memory assessment and diagnosis support services for this group are not suitable. They are not patient- or person-centred enough to meet their needs, and cannot take account of their complicated life histories or other physical and mental health conditions. Hostel residents with memory problems were often being supported by hostel staff, largely on their own. We concluded that there is little evidence that hostel settings can be effective 'dementia communities' that offer relevant, timely support.

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