Submission Id: 4403

Title

Is it Feasible to Use a Mobile App to Provide Resources to People who Are Homeless? Let's Ask Them!

Priority 1 (Research Category)

Health Care Disparities

Presenters

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Abstract

Context: Based on data collected from the 2020 Census, an estimated 580,466 individuals are currently experiencing homelessness. This population, many days lacks access to the resources they require to survive let alone lead longer, healthier lives. One approach, mobile apps, have been developed and used across the United States. While they serve as a convenient repository of resources, it also raises the concern of how likely the target population is able to make use of them. The Cincinnati Homeless Resource App lists approximately 200 organizations and includes detailed services and directions.

Objective: To assess the feasibility of using a mobile app as a way of providing resources for persons experiencing homelessness.

Study Design: Cross-sectional survey.

Setting: Primary care clinic waiting room for patients currently experiencing homelessness.

Population: A convenience sample of 20 adults experiencing homelessness who consented to participate and had access to a smartphone. Instrument: Paper survey consisting of multiple choice and open-ended questions.

Outcome Measures: Survey responses.

Results: N=20, 60% Female, 50% African-American/Black, 10% Latinx, Mean age 48 (30 – 64), 45% HS or GED, 40% some college or more, Mean time spent homeless 2 yrs. (3 months – 8 yrs.). All responded with they owned their smartphone, 95% used their smartphone several times a day, all had a data plan, and 75% could use an internet-requiring mobile app whenever they needed to with 25% describing their use as limited to several times per day. When asked about using a mobile app designed specifically for Cincinnati, 90% said that they would, 5% if needed, 5% currently using it and wrote, "yes…very dependable, helpful, and resourceful." When shown the app , it was described as "Useful (n=5), Comprehensive (n=3), Accessible (n=2), Intuitive (n=1), Reliable (n=1)."

Conclusions: Major result despite a small sample size, all the participants had a data plan and having a mobile app requiring internet access was not a significant barrier. For the homeless population in Cincinnati with smartphone access, a mobile app is an effective mode of sharing resources. Moving forward, the maintenance of this platform and keeping resources updated should be a priority. Effective marketing strategies should also be implemented to increase the number of people who know about and can use the app.