**Homelessness and end of life care**

Several hundred thousand to several million people in the United States are homeless on a given night; about 7.5% of the US population will be homeless at some point in their lifetime.

The number of homeless individuals in Minnesota in 2009 was estimated by the Wilder Research Foundation to be 9,452 youth and adults (46% of the homeless adults had a chronic health illness).

Homeless persons suffer from greater morbidity than any other impoverished population, face great barriers to health care and die at 3–10 times the rate of the general population.

Advocacy for end-of-life care may be beneficial to homeless and other impoverished populations characterized by poor health and poor personal and health care relationships.

Many little is known and few interventions have focused on improving end of life care for underserved populations.

Advances directives or living wills are documents written by individuals that specify what actions should be taken for their health in the event they are no longer capable to make decisions for themselves.

Literature concerning the family relationships of single homeless adults is scarce (making the belief that homeless individuals are estranged from family a widely exploited assumption).

**Family matters: advance care planning for people experiencing homelessness**

Data extraction: Data about interaction with family and family relationships (family cares and trusts family to make decisions) came from the baseline survey; data about advance directive completion and relationship to health care proxy came from the advance directives.

Results:

- 91 percent of individuals (N = 62) named a family member as a surrogate to make decisions concerning them in case of serious illness or death.
- 60.3 percent of individuals (N = 41) saw their family frequently.
- 60.3 percent of individuals (N = 41) named a family member whom they would like to make decisions for them in the case of serious illness or death.
- 50.5 percent of individuals (N = 44) reported that they believed their family cared about them.
- 37.9 percent of individuals (N = 53) reported that they would trust their family to make decisions for them in the case that they could not make decisions for themselves.
- 25 percent of individuals (N = 17) named a family member whom they would like to make decisions for them in the case of serious illness or death.
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Conclusions:

These data negate the widely held assumption that homeless individuals are estranged from family and lack strong personal relationships.

**References regarding family appeared in ever question in the advance directive in six major themes**

1. **Theme: Evidence of strong family values and relationships (N = 73 responses):**
   - "Love my family and friends."
   - "Worries are not barriers & relationships are strong."
   - "That my family has finally lifted themselves up by their bootstraps, from economic poverty."
   - "My kids & my parents. I’m proud of my family & proud to be in the family I was born in."
   - "My family needs to do what they have for the selves – Don’t worry about me!"

2. **Theme: After death family concerns (N = 58 responses):**
   - "I just want my family to carry on my wishes when I’m gone."
   - "I do what you know I would expect you: Help my beautiful daughter become the young, lovely ladies I know they can be."
   - "Believe my wishes, continue you respect me and show my kids that there is a better way."
   - "My children stay together, keep the family brother and sister well help each other."

3. **Theme: Evidence of strained or nonexistent family relationships (N = 25 responses):**
   - "My family not understanding my LD problems."
   - "My sister she is still on the streets."
   - "They’ll just forget about me. Please don’t stress my kids out."
   - "Things with my family are not as good as I want them to be."
   - "My family needs to do what they have for their selves – Don’t worry about me!"

4. **Theme: Do not want to burden or stress family (N = 21 responses):**
   - "No one will do no who I am. Tragic circumstances that would obligate my family into run (Financial consequences of medical costs, funeral/burial – who will pay for this?)"
   - "Relate to be a burden to family, friends or others."
   - "My kids, I worry if they will be ok. My mom, and my siblings because we had so much loss recently."

5. **Theme: Want family to make decisions in case of serious illness or death (N = 67 responses):**
   - "My parents know what to do."
   - "I would want it be told to my mother, and allow her to make any decisions concerning me."
   - "Family and best friends visitations. Make sure my girls are okay, and help them in helping me, and them. My mother, and oldest daughter make any serious, life-threatening decisions, and if re-married, my spouse."
   - "The family to decide."

6. **Theme: Want family to be there/be notified in case of serious illness or death (N = 19 responses):**
   - "Get of hold of my family and explain to them my situation on what is going on."
   - "My mother to be notified."
   - "My family knows about my health conditions. I don’t want my family with no surprise. I want to know everything."