

https://www.statehousenews.com/news/healthcare/network-hopes-to-address-hoarding-with-research-training/article_916d054e-5fcb-11ef-98bb-c725cdfba48f.html

Network Hopes To Address Hoarding With Research, Training

Alison Kuznitz
Aug 21, 2024

STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, AUG. 21, 2024.....Backed by new grant funding, the Massachusetts Association for Mental Health intends to officially launch and expand a network dedicated to hoarding resources, as advocates look to introduce more strategies to support stable housing and homelessness prevention efforts.

The Massachusetts Hoarding Resource Network will pursue policy research aimed at strengthening care and advocacy around hoarding conditions, as well as bolstering bilingual training to improve the reach of peer support groups. Members have been meeting informally in recent months, though the two-year grant funding -- which totals just shy of \$100,000 -- will help "formalize" and grow the network, said Jenifer Urff, director of knowledge dissemination and technical assistance at MAMH.

"A key goal for us is the sustainability of this network," Urff told the News Service on Wednesday. "We know that there are a lot of people across Massachusetts who are doing really good work in this area, including peer support intervention. By formalizing and really embedding the Hoarding Resource Network across the commonwealth, we're hoping that will ensure that work can continue and expand."

Unaddressed hoarding can lead to a "significant risk" for housing insecurity, mental health advocates say. Hoarding conditions worsen as people age, and older affected individuals grapple with heightened fall and medical risks, social isolation and housing loss, according to

MAMH.

"A commitment to preventing homelessness and offering robust community support is an investment in the well-being and stability of both individuals and the community at large," MAMH President Danna Mauch said in a statement. "Supporting people to live successfully in the community involves a multifaceted approach that not only focuses on immediate relief but prioritizes long-term prevention and support."

The U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging, in a report released last month, described hoarding disorder as a "chronic and progressive condition that leads people to accumulate more objects than their homes can accommodate." As many as 14 million Americans are affected by the disorder, and experts are worried about an increasing rate of hoarding in the coming decades fueled by the country's aging population, according to the report.

Beyond falls and accidents, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services says hoarding can lead to respiratory problems due to clutter, garbage, animal or human feces, and mold. People can end up becoming homeless if local boards of health order them to leave or condemn the property, and if landlords prove in court the hoarding violated lease agreements, state officials say.

MAMH said the hoarding network is supported by a two-year grant from the Massachusetts Community Health and Healthy Aging Funds, which are awarded to initiatives that address health and racial inequities. The Department of Public Health helps oversee the account, which is comprised partially of funding that hospitals must give to programs to improve health, according to the program website.

The network will also provide training aimed at reducing stigma and promoting intervention tactics for "responders" including elder protective services, home care workers, inspection services and councils on aging.

Through the network, advocates plan to bring together individuals with hoarding experiences and their families, researchers and academics, housing and human services workers, behavioral health professionals, and public safety and code enforcement stakeholders.

"Part of the work of the Hoarding Resource Network is to elevate the importance of the issue," Urff said.

-END-

08/21/2024

Alison Kuznitz