

# New immigrants more likely to be homeless due to economic factors rather than health issues

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New immigrants are more likely to cite economic and housing factors as barriers that keep them homeless compared with native-born individuals, according to a new study on the health of homeless immigrants led by St. Michael's Hospital researcher Dr. Stephen Hwang.

"[Homeless](#) people are in much poorer health than the general population, but immigrants who are homeless tend to be healthier than Canadian-born people who are homeless. This is sometimes referred to as the 'healthy [immigrant](#) effect'," explains Dr. Hwang. "We also found recent immigrants, non-recent immigrants and Canadian-born individuals gave significantly different responses regarding the single most important thing keeping them homeless."

The study team interviewed 1,189 homeless people in Toronto, Canada to examine the association between immigrant status and current health. Participants were asked to identify the single most important thing keeping them from getting out of homelessness. The categories were: insufficient income, lack of suitable/adequate housing, lack of employment, addiction to alcohol and/or drugs, family or domestic instability, mental health condition and all other reasons. The study was published in the [Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health](#).

Key findings of the study include:

- Recent immigrants who are homeless were found to be physically and mentally healthier and less likely to suffer from chronic conditions and substance abuse problems than native-born homeless individuals.
- 22% of Canadian-born individuals said [mental illness](#), domestic instability and addiction were reasons for their homelessness
- 11 % of recent immigrants named the same factors.

The study also found the length of time since immigration is a critical factor, as the health status of homeless individuals who immigrated more than 10 years ago is not significantly different from that of [homeless](#) Canadian-born individuals.

"Previous studies have shown that recent immigrants face an initial disadvantage in the labour market, earning wages well below that of the native-born population," says Hwang. "With economic issues being cited the main factor in recent [immigrant](#) homelessness, strategies that focus on job skills, training and employment for this group of individuals could make a difference."

Source: St. Michael's Hospital

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