

Screening for infectious diseases in at-risk populations: preliminary data from an Emergency Shelter in Lisbon for homeless people with addictions

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Introduction

- The COVID-19 pandemic increased the challenge for vulnerable populations. The Municipality of Lisbon implemented a number of Emergency Shelters to answer the increase of homeless people. The Emergency Shelter -CAEM Sta Bárbara- started operating in September 2021 and performed mainly as a housing structure to the homeless with active drug and alcohol abuse -that would not be suited for other available shelters - under the scope of a harm reduction intervention.
- Ares do Pinhal and VITAE co-manage the shelter, sponsored by the Municipality of Lisbon. Present work reports on a 5-months of infectious diseases (ID) screening.

Methods

- All the users provided written signed informed consent forms, authorizing access to epidemiological data and substance use records.
- Screening for ID as part of the routine practice at the CAEM. Therefore, this was an observational study.

Results



From September 2021 to January 2022, 200 homeless were housed in CAEM



117 screened for ID, of these, 79% were male (n=92) and 21% were female (n=25), 74% were Portuguese (n= 86), averaging 44 years old

HIV – 11 reactive test results referred for treatment

HCV – 41 reactive tests referred for treatment; 15 tested → 6 positive results under treatment at local healthcare services

26 that did not perform RNA testing, → 10 were lost to follow-up and 16 left the shelter

Conclusions

- Current results show the importance of the harm-reduction approach at the CAEM, since most homeless have active drug and alcohol use.
- The low-threshold approach enables the housing of homeless people that would not fit other services.
- The CAEM will continue screening and diagnosis efforts, providing referrals to public healthcare facilities for patients with an active disease requiring treatment.

Disclosure of Interest Statement

The authors report no conflict of interests related to the work depicted here.

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