



## LONG WAITING LISTS A BARRIER TO DRUG TREATMENT FOR YOUTH

### BACKGROUND & METHOD

- The health and social risks of chronic use, and particularly injection, of illicit drugs are well known.
- In most places, the demand for such services exceeds availability. There are often further barriers that prevent those who are addicted from obtaining the treatment they seek. So far, most of the research about addiction treatment and barriers has focused on adults.
- Among young people who spend most or all of their time living on the street, drug use is widespread. To design addiction treatment services geared towards youth in the early stages of their drug use, it's important to understand more about the street-involved young people who seek to use these services, and what barriers they encounter when they do try to use them.
- A recent study tried to answer these questions. Between September 2005 and July 2007, more than 500 drug-using, street-involved youth were interviewed.

### FINDINGS

- About a third of these young people had successfully or unsuccessfully sought addiction treatment in the six months prior to being interviewed.
- These youth were more likely than those who had not sought treatment to be Aboriginal, to have completed or be currently enrolled in high school, to have a history of mental illness, to use non-injection crack cocaine, to regularly binge on drugs, and to spend more than \$50 a day on drugs.
- All of the youth who were interviewed indicated they were aware of existing treatment programs. The most common barrier to services was reported to be the excessively long waiting lists.
- Study participants most likely to fail in their attempts to access treatment were those who regularly binged on drugs and those who were homeless.

### QUICK FACT

*THE MOST COMMON BARRIER TO ACCESSING ADDICTION TREATMENT SERVICES REPORTED BY YOUTH WAS THE EXCESSIVELY LONG WAITING LISTS.*

### IMPLICATIONS

- In light of growing evidence that drug use among street youth is associated with risky health-related behaviour, improving access to addiction services for this population should be a public health priority.

Hadland SE, Kerr T, Li K, Montaner JS, Wood E. **Access to drug and alcohol treatment among a cohort of street-involved youth.** *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 2009; 101(1-2): 1-7.

