

**“For me, it’s the drinkin’ and the druggin’, ya know?”
Substance use in the Lives of Homeless Elders**

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Substance abuse is often cited as the single largest cause of homelessness and nearly 55% of homeless older adults struggle with it. My poster will share findings from a qualitative study exploring the experiences of 20 homeless elders. Through secondary data analysis, I was able to explore the role of substance use in participants’ lives, including their perspectives on the interface between substance use and social support. Particular attention was focused upon environmental factors and strategies for enhancing services. This research will allow readers to better understand the role of alcohol and drug use in the lives of homeless older adults, and potential areas for prevention and intervention. Participant narratives referred to the insidious nature of substance abuse and addiction, with older adults taking tremendous personal responsibility for the impact of substance abuse on their housing situation. Participants discussed ways in which substance use either damaged supportive relationships and/or encouraged non-supportive connections. I was able to conclude that age and duration of both use and homelessness seem to influence attitudes toward sobriety and facilitate a change in housing situation. Also, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural factors all play fundamental roles in substance use and sobriety. This research leaves us questioning in what ways can service providers and systems promote individual well-being, supportive social networks, and environments that encourage sobriety?