



C² Reflections

Critical Conversations that Lie at the Heart of Health Justice

By C² Host Emily Rose O'Neil

Season 2 Homelessness Series

Episodes 1 and 2: What We Learned

Our first two episodes of the new season focused on the various implications of homelessness for the health of women, mothers, and children. We had the privilege of hosting two guests, Lianne O'Reilly and Dr. Aura Obando, who are engaged in innovative, strategic, and crucial solutions to this public health issue.

Episode 1 explored the significance of advocacy and activism for individuals currently in homeless shelters, while episode 2 followed the career path of one physician who is dedicated to serving the complex medical needs of the homeless community.

Where Advocacy Meets Clinical Care

Defining Homelessness: While the episodes assumed slightly different lenses through which to assess the current reality, there were many common threads. The first recurring item was the definition of homelessness used by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Both Ms. O'Reilly and Dr. Obando cited this definition as limiting, excluding homeless individuals from receiving government housing or assistance. They both noted that this definition excludes a phenomenon that occurs predominately in adolescents known as "couch-surfing," in which an individual's primary place of shelter is a friend or family member's couch. Rewriting the definition could increase access for many homeless individuals.

Accessibility of Caregivers:

Both Ms. O'Reilly and Dr. Obando attested to the importance of caregiver accessibility. Because homeless individuals don't always have consistent routines or travel capabilities, continuity of care is especially challenging. Both guests talked about ways their respective organizations met their patients and clients halfway to ensure proper accessibility. Boston Healthcare for the Homeless, the organization Dr. Obando works for, has been working with new ways to reach their patients, like social media outreach for younger patients or van-administered care services at a similar city location.

"Parent health and child health are inexplicably linked."

What Resonated

My conversation with both guests revealed a key reality that I will absolutely carry with me into future conversations on this podcast. The biggest takeaway from both episodes: ***parent health and child health are inexplicably linked.*** The health of parent and child can be thought of as a complex: a parent's ability to achieve and maintain health predetermines a child's ability to do the same, and vice versa. This framework will be helpful for contextualizing future conversations.