

Flipping the Script Seminar Series Event Summary

A Teach-In for Healthcare Workers on Homelessness and Substance Use

October 1st, 2025

Introduction: Evelyn Graham-Nyaasi, Health x Housing Lab Speakers Bureau and Peer Network Member

Moderator: Kelly Doran, MD, MHS, Co-Director of the Health x Housing Lab

Speakers: Derrick Blocker, Joseph “Yuseff” Wilson, Jed Albano

Event Overview:

Flipping the Script events fill a gap in medical education on housing and homelessness and re- envision how that education is provided. At these events, people with lived experience of homelessness teach healthcare students, trainees, and practitioners about how homelessness and housing insecurity affect health, and how better care can be provided.

At this panel, individuals with lived experience of homelessness and substance use shared their perspectives on navigating healthcare and treatment services.

This event was hosted by the Health x Housing Lab and The Health & Housing Consortium.

Event Highlights + Quotes

Misperceptions about Homelessness & Substance Use

Speakers highlighted **harmful misperceptions about the relationship between homelessness and substance use**. These assumptions include:

- Substance use is a primary cause of homelessness
- Abstinence is the only method of recovery
- False narratives about the needs of people who use drugs or alcohol
- “The biggest misconception is that substance misuse causes homelessness; that’s a misconception; [with] the stresses of life and homelessness, using [substances] became a solution to dealing with those stresses.”
- “People [are] in survival mode experiencing homelessness, especially in NYC. You are trying to worry about where you are going to sleep without being abused, where your next meal will come from.”

Positive Impacts of Peer Workers

Speakers – who all worked as peer workers in healthcare settings – shared their perspectives about **peer workers**. They noted that peers were initially undervalued, but now clinicians depend on them. Peers improve the experience of providing/receiving healthcare for everyone involved by bridging the gap between healthcare providers and patients.

- “[Peers are] not only clinical but humanistic.”
- “Now, we are counted on.”
- “Peers are the voice of the patient in these situations.”

Stigma

Speakers shared their lived experience of **encountering stigma while accessing healthcare**. Panelists shared that healthcare professionals who meet the patient with humility and respect were the most effective.

- “If I’m high and I take time away from using to go to the hospital, there is something wrong; there is an issue that needs attention.”
- “Don’t assume what you see with the patient today is the same as what happened 6 months ago.”
- “It’s not the first swing of the axe that brings the tree down, it’s the last one. If someone has tried and failed, don’t give up; every attempt [by a provider to engage a patient] matters, and you’ll never know which one will be the turning point.”

The Role of Government

Speakers reflected on **the role of government and the need for stable housing**, noting that housing and basic resources are fundamental to health and that the relationship between stable housing and recovery is significant.

- “It’s not the person that needs to be mandated, but the agencies that need to be mandated.”
- “I have sustained my recovery because I have food, clothing, and shelter today.”