

# Brain Injury and Homelessness



**Brain Injury and Homelessness are highly interrelated.  
Brain Injury is both a cause and a consequence of homelessness.**

**51-92%**



**As many as 92% experience their 1st TBI before becoming homeless.**

**50%**



**Over 50% of people who are homeless or in an insecure living situation have a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).**

**25%**



**Of that 50%, 25% were moderate to severe brain injuries. This is 10 TIMES higher than the general population.**



**TBI in people who are homeless is associated with poorer physical and mental health, higher suicidality and suicide risk, memory issues, more health service use and higher criminal justice system involvement. People with cognitive impairment are likely to spend more time unhoused than those without cognitive impairment.**

## BEST PRACTICE

**The Homelessness and Housing System should:**

- **SCREEN** for prior history of Brain Injury
- **ASSESS** Cognitive & Functional Impairment
- **EDUCATE** staff on Brain Injury
- **EDUCATE** the person about their Brain Injury
- **PROVIDE** and **TEACH** Accommodations
- **CONNECT** person served with Community Resources

## COMMON PROBLEMS

**After Brain Injury, we often see problems with:**

- Attention, memory and new learning
- Slowed speed of processing
- Organization, problem solving & impulsivity
- Irritability, frustration & agitation
- Balance, dizziness & headaches
- Poor awareness of deficits & difficulties
- Difficulty being flexible, poor self-monitoring

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

**Homelessness and Housing personnel may see:**

- Looking uninterested because they cannot pay attention
- Forgetting appointments, rent paying & new information
- Slow to understand and respond
- Getting into fights because of irritability, anger and impulsivity
- Falling into things, often getting hurt
- Refusing help because they do not realize they need it
- Gets stuck on an idea or a way of doing something, does not recognize mistakes

**"Many who meet the definition of homelessness do not consider themselves homeless or do not disclose their housing status due to stigma and discrimination." -nhchc.org**

# Common Accommodations for Brain Injury Challenges

Here are some common and simple accommodations:

- Working for shorter periods of time
- Getting rid of distractions around you, like noise or movement
- Taking notes (on paper, in a notebook, on a phone or computer)
- Using a phone to set timers to remember appointments
- Repeating information to the person
- Slowing down when talking; giving them more time to respond
- Giving the person a list of house rules, written directions, or pictures to help them understand and remember
- Coaching the person with the injury to “Stop, think and plan” then act
- Coaching the person to take deep breaths when feeling angry or anxious



Take Note

## Tools for Best Practice

**Brain Links' Strategies & Accommodations Tool:** <https://www.tndisability.org/rehabilitation>

**Symptom Questionnaire:** <https://mindsourcicolorado.org/adult-symptom-questionnaire/>

**Cognitive Strategies Guidebook:** <https://mindsourcicolorado.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Strategies-and-Accommodations-Guidebook-CJ-Professionals-5.6.19.pdf>

**Brain Injury Screening Resources:**

- **OSU TBI Identification Method:** <https://wexnermedical.osu.edu/neurological-institute/neuroscience-research-institute/research-centers/ohio-valley-center-for-brain-injury-prevention-and-rehabilitation/osu-tbi-id>
- **NASHIA's OBISSS:** <https://www.nashia.org/obissprogram>



## Tennessee Resources

**Brain Links' Website** with many resources:  
[tndisability.org/brain](https://www.tndisability.org/brain)

**Brain Links' Toolkits** (for Service Professionals and Survivors): <https://www.tndisability.org/brain-toolkits>

**TN Department of Health TBI Program:**  
<https://tinyurl.com/3v5jrdt3>



**Tennessee Brighter Futures' Resource Pages & Training for Brain Injury:**

<https://www.tndisability.org/tbf-brain-injury>



**Resource Pages & Training for Homelessness:**

<https://www.tndisability.org/tbf-homelessness>

**TN Brighter Futures is organized and facilitated by Brain Links through a contract from the TN Department of Health TBI Program.**

### References:

- *Adapting Your Practice: Recommendations for the Care of Patients Who Are Homeless or Unstably Housed Living With the Effects of Traumatic Brain Injury.* National Health Care for the Homeless Council, Oct. 2018.
- Hwang, SW., Colantonio, A., Chiu, S., et al. (2008). The effect of traumatic brain injury on the health of homeless people. *CMAJ*, 179(8), 779-784.
- Stubbs, JL., Thornton, AE., Sevick, JM., et al (2020). *Traumatic brain injury in homeless and marginally housed individuals: a systemic review and meta-analysis.* *Lancet Public Health*, 5:e19-32.
- Where does homelessness happen? Understanding the definitions of homelessness. 2021. National Health Care for the Homeless Council, Inc. [www.nhchc.org](http://www.nhchc.org)



Homelessness Resources



<https://www.tndisability.org/brain>  
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