

A Cost Effective Best-Practice Model of Harm Reduction through Permanent Supportive Housing for the Chronically Publicly Inebriated

A 2006 article in *The New Yorker* documented the case of a homeless man dubbed "Million Dollar Murray", who over the course of 10 years cost the city of Las Vegas a million dollars.^[1] Chronically Publicly Intoxicated (CPI) individuals like Murray are the heaviest users of publicly-funded crisis services, consuming extraordinary amounts of public funds in their use of emergency transportation, hospital, detoxification, court, jail, and legal services. In King County, the annual cost of care for one chronic public inebriate exceeds \$40,000—compared to approximately \$13,000 per person for housing-based supportive services.^[2]

In 2005 the City of Seattle pioneered the country's first "Wet House"—a new model in the harm-reduction approach to caring for individuals whose alcoholism has placed an excessive burden on the general public. The project, entitled "1811 Eastlake", was the subject of a 3-year, \$400,000 study conducted by experts from the Addictive Behaviors Research Center of the University of Washington, and published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.^[2] Ron Sims, Deputy Secretary of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, described the program as extraordinarily successful—"Our return on investment has exceeded any expectation". With a low-barrier approach to permanent supportive housing (PSH), the 1811 Eastlake project saved King County over four million dollars in the first year alone; medical expenses, jail bookings, and shelter stays decreased significantly.^[2,3]

Unprecedented savings aren't the only documented benefit of the 1811 Eastlake model—residents also began to drink less. Contrary to the "enabling hypothesis"—that allowing homeless, alcohol-dependent individuals to drink in their rooms will cause their drinking to spiral out of control—residents at 1811 Eastlake, who averaged 20 drinks per day upon entry to the program, experienced a steady 2% per month reduction in alcohol consumption, resulting in a full 1/3 reduction by the end of the first year alone.^[2,4] These results have established wet housing across the country as a cost effective, best-practice model of harm-reduction through Permanent Supportive Housing for the Chronically Publicly Inebriated.

[1] Malcolm Gladwell, *Dept. of Social Services*, "Million-Dollar Murray," *The New Yorker*, February 13, 2006, p. 96

[2] *Journal of the American Medical Association* JAMA. 2009;301(13):1349-1357.doi:10.1001/jama.2009.414

[3] *US Interagency Council on Homelessness* http://www.usich.gov/solutions/1811_eastlake/

[4] Bill Hobson, *Downtown Emergency Service Center*, "1811 Eastlake", <http://www.apainc.org/html/1811%20Guide.pdf>