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**Title:** Challenges faced by people experiencing homelessness and their providers during COVID-19: a qualitative study

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### **Reviewer 1**

General comments (author response in bold)

The focus of this article is very important to the health of underserved populations, and the professionals who care for them in emergency department and shelter situations. The article is timely, unique in its focus, and of great clinical importance.

**We are glad the reviewer finds our study interesting, important and well-written.** (n/a)

If I had one criticism, it is that the word limit of CMAJ prevents more detail about how rigor was maintained in the study, and in terms of the nuts and bolts of the coding and thematic analysis. More detail would have been helpful to demonstrate the depth of this thematic analysis, and steps taken to ensure its quality.

**We appreciate the reviewer's comment – and agree that the word limit prevents us from going into great detail regarding our analytic approach. We have updated the analysis section with some further details, but would also like to note here that we employed a number of techniques to promote analytic rigour, including the use of multiple interviewers and analysts (with a range of perspectives and expertise), discussions on the different interpretations of the coding scheme, data quality review, data sampling modification based on initial analysis, and reflexivity (pertinent references include Green & Thorogood, 2014; Braun & Clarke, 2019; Btaun & Clarke 2021; and Eakin & Gladstone, 2020).** (Methods, Analysis subsection, Pg. 8)

I also think that a single figure that captures the major themes that emerged would be useful as a knowledge translation tool.

**We thank the reviewer for this suggestion. We have added a new figure that summarizes the major themes (Figure 1)** (Figure 1 (new))

Overall, in terms of importance, clarity of the writing and message, appropriateness of the design, and implications for clinical science and society in general ... this is a little gem

**We are delighted that the reviewer enjoyed reading our paper and thank them for these positive comments.** (n/a)

### **Reviewer 2**

General comments (author response in bold)

I think this paper meets all the methodologic requirements that would be expected in qualitative research including use of the COREQ checklist. The insights provided are validating from the perspective of an emergency department provider and leader who dealt at length with issues related to the care of an urban homeless population. The insights related to moral distress among healthcare providers resonate particularly well

and trigger the anxieties that were experienced around this time. The quotations are well-chosen and provide additional richness above and beyond the thematic analysis. **We thank the reviewer for these positive comments!** (n/a)

I do think that there is an overall negative bias to the way that this project was structured and recorded, with more of a focus on challenges and barriers and less input pertaining to any innovations, if any which emerged and allowed the homeless population to receive sage and effective care and shelter.

**Thank you to the reviewer for raising this. Our intention was to focus on the experiences of those we interviewed and much of what was shared was negative. There were some innovations shared by participants but, as outlined under our response to the editor above (regarding actionable items), these were not a theme reported in the results.** (Interpretation, Pg. 17)

The study is focused on understanding the experience of homeless individuals during the pandemic and concludes that this information would be needed to plan for how to proceed with future pandemics. I think that this may be a stretch for what qualitative data can provide and I would have liked to see more literature speaking to the risk of infection and outcomes in this population as well as data on shelter outbreaks.

**We agree both qualitative and quantitative research is needed to inform future pandemics. CMAJ Open has published some excellent quantitative research related to risk of infection, outcomes, and shelter outbreaks (see: <https://www.cmajopen.ca/content/9/1/E302> and <https://www.cmajopen.ca/content/9/1/E1>). However, to our knowledge, there have been no Canadian qualitative studies related to the plight of people who are homeless during the pandemic.** (Interpretation, n/a)