Acquired brain injury describes damage to the brain that occurs after birth as a result of a traumatic or non-traumatic injury. One type of acquired brain injury, traumatic brain injury (TBI), is caused by external physical force, such as a blow to the head, and may involve brain tissue being torn, stretched, bruised, or swollen.

A TBI is classified as mild (e.g., concussion), moderate or severe. Severity is based on the person’s level of consciousness at the time of injury, amnesia after the injury (i.e., posttraumatic amnesia), and findings from brain imaging. Even if consciousness is not lost and brain imaging appears normal, a TBI may have occurred. However, not all jolts to the head will cause a TBI.

TBI is associated with changes in cognitive functioning (e.g., memory problems), emotion regulation and mood, and behaviour (e.g., impulsivity). Symptoms vary depending on the severity of the injury, how long ago it occurred, and the location of injury in the brain. Most people who experience a mild TBI recover within a few weeks, though some people will have symptoms that persist. Moderate and severe injuries often have more long-lasting effects.

WHAT ARE SOME ACUTE SYMPTOMS OF TBI?

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WHAT IS A BRAIN INJURY?

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WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT TBI AND HOMELESSNESS?

TBI is common among people who experience homelessness and is associated with poorer physical and mental health (including suicidality), memory concerns, and increased involvement with health services and the justice system.

"TBI MAY BE BOTH A CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE OF HOMELESSNESS.”

(TYoung & Hughes, 2020, p. e4)²

TBI AMONG HOMELESS PEOPLE IS UP TO 4x HIGHER THAN THE GENERAL POPULATION³

ASSAULT IS THE LEADING CAUSE OF TBI AMONG HOMELESS PEOPLE³
Eighty-one percent of frontline workers (e.g., housing workers, case managers) report they have worked with one or more homeless clients who have been diagnosed with a TBI.\textsuperscript{8} However, in many cases, a formal diagnosis of TBI is not available, especially if healthcare was not sought at the time of injury. TBI symptoms may be misattributed to mental illness, a learning disability, or other difficulties (e.g., substance use), which may lead to provision of inappropriate or ineffective support. Learning about TBI, including evidence-based support strategies, will enable workers to provide more effective support and referrals.

If you are concerned that a client is affected by a history of TBI, consider contacting one of the national brain injury organisations or the National Disability Insurance Scheme to seek consultation regarding resources in your area. If you are concerned that a client has suffered a TBI in recent days and may require medical care, evaluation at an emergency department or by a general practitioner may be necessary.

TBI is a risk factor for homelessness. More than half of people experience their first TBI before becoming homeless.\textsuperscript{6} After becoming homeless, unsafe living situations and risky behaviour (e.g., substance use) may increase risk of later injuries and complicate the task of exiting homelessness.

TBI may prolong homelessness.
- TBI is often a “hidden disability” and service providers may underestimate a survivor’s need for additional supports.
- Physical, cognitive, and emotional changes after TBI may make it difficult for a person to take the necessary steps to exit homelessness, such as applying for housing, budgeting, paying rent, and maintaining property.
- TBI survivors may struggle “remembering to remember” (e.g., have difficulty recalling appointments or turn up on the wrong day, forget to take medication).
- It may be difficult for TBI survivors to communicate their needs or they may be unaware of the extent of their difficulties, which may lead them to not seek services or to decline services.
- Emotional and behavioural symptoms of TBI (e.g., mood swings, temper outbursts) may be mistaken for deliberate disruptive behaviour by service providers, landlords, and others, which may affect an individual’s eligibility to participate in programs.

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW AS A SERVICE PROVIDER?

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NATIONAL RESOURCES

Synapse
https://synapse.org.au

Brain Injury Australia
https://braininjuryaustralia.org.au

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