

Homelessness

in the United States of America

Widespread homelessness didn't always exist; however, during the 1980s homelessness increased significantly. Now, on any given night, approximately 750,000 men, women, and children are homeless in the US.¹

A homeless person, as defined in the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence or their primary residence is one of the following:

- A temporary place for people about to be institutionalized;
- Any place not meant for regular sleeping accommodation by humans; or
- A supervised temporary shelter.

This definition also includes those people who are at risk of losing their housing because they are being evicted from their residence or they are being discharged from institutions, such as hospitals or prisons, and have nowhere else to go.

Housing Ends Homelessness!

Major Federal Programs that Address Homelessness

Section 8/ Public Housing. The Federal Government provides housing assistance to low-income families primarily through the Section 8 and public housing programs. The Section 8 program provides rental assistance for tenants who live in privately owned units, while public housing does the same for those living in units owned by the federal government. Tenants of both programs pay 30 percent of their income for housing, with the government making up the difference between that amount and the rent.

HUD Homeless Assistance Grants. Since the passage of the McKinney Homeless Assistance Act in 1987, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds programs specifically targeted to address homelessness. HUD currently provides funds for permanent and supportive housing, shelters, transitional housing, and services.

Health Care for the Homeless. This is the only federally funded program specifically designed to meet the complex health care needs of people without homes. Health Care for the Homeless projects all over the country offer an integrated, community based approach to make sure people without homes receive the health care services they need.

Anybody can be homeless. It does not matter what color a person's skin is, what religion they practice, or how old they are; families with children, single adults, teenagers, and the elderly are all homeless. In fact, about half of the homeless people in the United States are families with children.

People can be homeless for a variety of reasons. Often, multiple reasons contribute to an individual's homelessness:

- In many places it costs a lot to live and there may not be enough affordable housing for everyone (housing is considered affordable when a household spends no more than 30 percent of its income on housing).²

- They could have become sick or injured and lost their job and therefore, the money to pay for their house, and,
- Particularly for families with children, they may not have enough money to pay for everything they need, such as food, clothing, bills, transportation, and rent, so they end up having to give up their house in order to clothe and feed their children.

Community Making Progress: San Francisco

Across the country, communities are making progress in ending homelessness. Between 2002 and 2005, the number of chronically homeless individuals dropped from 8,640 to 6,248 (28%) because of San Francisco's Housing First approach.⁴

Fact Checker: Statistics for Homeless Populations

Over the course of a year, between 2.5 and 3.5 million people will live either on the streets or in an emergency shelter.

Over 5 million low-income households have serious housing problems due to high housing costs, substandard housing conditions, or both.

Within 2-4 years of exiting foster care, 25 percent of foster children experience homelessness.

About 600,000 families and 1.35 million children experience homelessness in the US each year, and about 50 percent of the total homeless population is a part of a family.

Explore the Internet!

The internet is full of information on many topics, including homelessness. Go online and find a new fact about homelessness to share with your classmates.

You can find more information about homelessness on the Alliance's website:

www.endhomelessness.org

It is estimated that between 23 and 40 percent of homeless adults are veterans.

The rate of HIV infection in the homeless population is three times higher than that of the general population.

Homeless children go hungry twice as often as other children.

Only 20 percent of homeless families report they receive help finding housing.

43 percent of children living with homeless parents are under the age of 6.

Ending Homelessness is Possible

While homelessness can seem like a complex problem, there are actually very simple solutions. In 2000, the Alliance announced *A Plan, Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in Ten Years*³ and since that time, over 180 communities have created their own plans to end homelessness that utilize key strategies espoused by the Alliance, including:

- Create more affordable housing so households do not pay more than 30 percent of their income on housing.
- Pay people enough money so they can pay their rent, buy food, and pay their bills.
- Develop homelessness prevention systems in order to prevent evictions.
- Once a homeless person or family is housed, provide them with access to services to assist them in meeting their daily needs.

Want to know more?

Read and talk about one of these books:

No Place to Be: Voices of Homeless Children
by Judith Berck

Changing Places: A Kid's View of Shelter Living
by Judy Wallace, Glen Finland, Margie Chalofsky

Home Is Where We Live: Life at a Shelter Through a Young Girl's Eyes by Jane Hertensten

December by Eve Bunting

Rachel and Her Children: Homeless Families in America (Paperback) by Jonathan Kozol

The Visible Poor: Homelessness in the United States
by Joel Blau

What You Can Do

Help people meet their daily needs. Think about the things that you do everyday and the things you would not be able to live without. Homeless people need many of those same things and you can help them:

- Cook a meal and deliver it to an organization that serves food to people who do not have homes.
- Find out what a homeless program in your community needs most and collect money from your friends, neighbors, and family. Then buy and deliver those items to the program.
- Collect blankets, hats, and gloves for people who are living on the street and deliver these warm items to them.
- Treat homeless people the same way you would treat people who have a home and the same way you would want to be treated.

Teach other people about homelessness, its causes and how to solve it. After reading this fact sheet you are an expert on the ways to end homelessness. Share all of this information with your family and friends.

Write your national, state, and local government representatives who make the laws that affect homeless people. Tell your representatives what you have learned about homelessness and ask them what they plan to do to help these people.

¹ Cunningham, Mary and Meghan Henry. 2007. *Homelessness Counts*. Washington, DC: National Alliance to End Homelessness.

² Cunningham, Mary and Sharon McDonald. 2006. *Promising Strategies to End Family Homelessness*. Washington, DC: National Alliance to End Homelessness.

³ National Alliance to End Homelessness. 2001. *A Plan, Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in Ten Years*. Washington, DC: National Alliance to End Homelessness.

⁴ National Alliance to End Homelessness. 2005. *Community Snapshot: San Francisco*. Washington, DC: National Alliance to End Homelessness.

National Alliance to End Homelessness

The National Alliance to End Homelessness is a non-partisan, mission-driven organization committed to preventing and ending homelessness in the United States.

www.endhomelessness.org