

Homelessness

Someone who lives on the street, or in an abandoned building, or in any place not meant for human habitation – or someone who has no regular place to live – is often called homeless.

How many people are homeless in the U.S.?



Due to the circumstances of homelessness, it is very difficult to come up with a reliable number of people who experience homelessness. The most recent national count was conducted in 1996. Based on this count, it was estimated that between 2.3 and 3.5 million people experienced homelessness over the course of that year (days to months). Data collected by various local jurisdictions since that time indicates that the number has risen and is continuing to rise each year.

How big is the problem?

- Over the course of a year, families with children make up about half of the homeless population
- National, a typical family without a home consists of a young unmarried mother with 2 or 3 small children. Many of these young women are fleeing domestic violence and most lack the work skills needed to secure jobs to support their families. Most families do not stay homeless for very long. About 80% of people exit the homeless service system quickly.
- Nationally, there are about 150,000 chronically homeless people.
- It is estimated that many of the people who live on the streets are homeless for years, as opposed to days or months. Many of these people require medical and mental health services in addition to help finding a home.
- Most people who lose their homes temporarily stay in shelters, motels and cars. Many others are overcrowded living with family or friends.
- The main thing that all homeless people need is a home. It is important to find appropriate, safe and permanent places to live for everyone.

Why are people homeless?

Systemic or underlying factors & causes:

- **There is not enough affordable housing – The federal definition of “affordable housing” is paying no more than 30% of a household’s income for housing costs.**
 - There are about 5.4 million families who pay more than half of their incomes for rent.
 - In 1995, the number of low-income renters exceeded the number of low-cost housing units by 4.4 million – a trend that continues today.
 - Consequently, fewer people can afford a place to live and homelessness has emerged as a major problem.
- **Many people’s incomes are too low to pay for basic living expenses.**
 - Work is one of the chief sources of income for people without homes.
 - Increases in work wages and public benefits have not kept pace with increases in living expense of the last several decades. Therefore, it is increasingly difficult for low-income people to afford housing.
 - Many people work every day of the week and still do not make enough money to pay for rent and bills, let alone food, healthcare, work clothes, etc. In Washington, DC, a minimum wage worker would have to work 92 hours each week to afford a 1-bedroom apartment at 30% of his/her income. A fulltime worker would need to earn \$14 an hour in order to afford that apartment.
- **It is difficult for people to access the services that would allow them to live independently.**
 - People with lower incomes often rely on overburdened public systems to get the services they need. Some people just need help earning money to pay rent, but others may require treatment for mental illnesses or substance abuse illnesses.
 - Many people need childcare so they can work or search for a job, or legal assistance to help them escape from domestic violence.
 - A lot of people would also benefit from free adult education or job training programs.

Sources:

- <http://www.naeh.org/pub/factsheets/Ushigh.pdf>
- *A Plan, Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in Ten Years*, National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2000.
- *Out of Reach: The Gap Between Housing Costs and Income of Poor People in the United States*, National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2000.

For more information ...

National:

- National Alliance to End Homelessness www.endhomelessness.org
- National Coalition for the Homeless <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/>
- International Homeless Discussion Lists <http://csf.colorado.edu/homeless/>
- National Coalition for Homeless Veterans <http://www.nchv.org/>
- Hope for Homeless <http://www.homesforthehomeless.com/>
- National Resource Center on Homelessness and Mental Illness <http://www.nrchmi.com/facts/default.asp>

In Raleigh, North Carolina:

- News From Our Shoes <http://www.newsfromourshoes.com/>
- Raleigh Rescue Mission <http://www.raleigh-rescue.org/>
- Pan Lutheran Ministries of Wake County <http://www.rtpnet.org/plmweb/services/>
- Wrenn House (Teens) <http://www.havenhousenc.org/wrenn.html>
- Helen Wright Center for Women <http://www.urbanmin.org/ark.html>
- Harrington Place (Men) <http://www.urbanmin.org/harrington.html>
- Epiphany House (Women) http://www.wcwc.org/epiphany_house.htm
- Salvation Army (Women & Children Shelter) 834-6733