

A photograph of a homeless man lying on a sidewalk. He is wearing a dark shirt and light-colored pants. His feet are in the foreground, showing signs of dirt and wear. A white plastic bag is visible to the left. The background is a blurred urban setting.

Homelessness in Utah:
Who are They?
What Causes It? What is it Like?
What's Being Done?

English 2010 Report

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It's 28 degrees outside and you've just been forced to leave your apartment that you haven't been able to pay rent for. You've recently been divorced and have a small child to take care of. You have about \$100 left and you've just been laid off. Your connection with friends and family hasn't been good lately and you suffer from depression. You don't have a car and can only carry what your body can handle. What do you take? What do you do and where do you go?

Introduction

The word “homeless” is simply defined as “having no home or permanent place of residence” (Homeless). Anyone could become homeless at any given time for reasons sometimes out of their control, which is why it’s important to be sensitive to this problem. Across the United States many individuals and even entire families become homeless every year for various reasons. Every single day hundreds of men, women and children are doing without the basic necessities of life. The majority of these individuals, whether on the street by the choices they have made or unforeseen circumstances in their lives, are looking for a hand up rather than a hand out. It’s a devastating experience that affects not only the homeless, but the community as well.

Among the homeless more emergency services are utilized, but without the funds to cover the cost, the community ultimately has to pay for these services. Homelessness causes a chain of events that often makes it difficult for the individual to step out of.

The effects on young children are also particularly tragic in that they expose the child to unhealthy environments or situations, strain their schooling, and alter positive peer and mentoring

relationships. This exposure can in turn cause long-term effects that may result in future homelessness, repeating the vicious cycle (Moore, et al. 6).

In Utah, homelessness is reported in all counties except: Rich, Morgan, Daggett, Juab, Millard, Sanpete, Emery, Piute, Beaver, Wayne, and Garfield. Within Utah, the highest concentration of homeless individuals resides in Salt Lake, Weber, and Washington County, followed by Utah and Davis County; see Fig.1 for more details (Day, et al. 10). In comparison to the entire United States, Utah is doing better than many states, but eliminating homelessness completely would be ideal; see Fig. 2.

Fig. 1: Source: Utah Comprehensive Report on Homelessness 2012

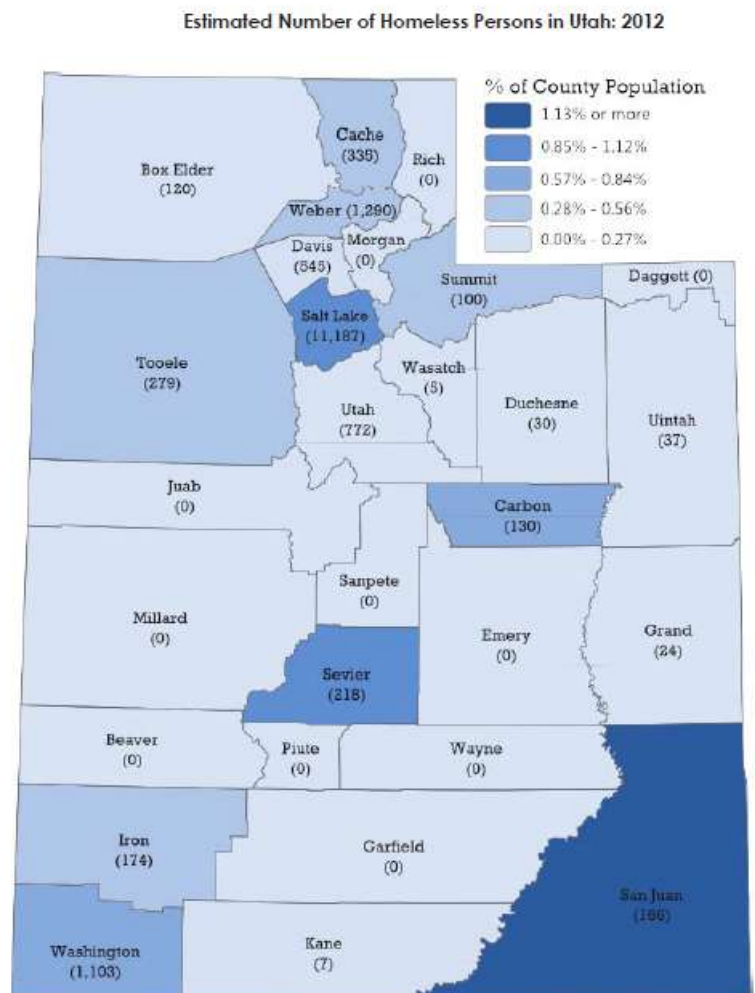
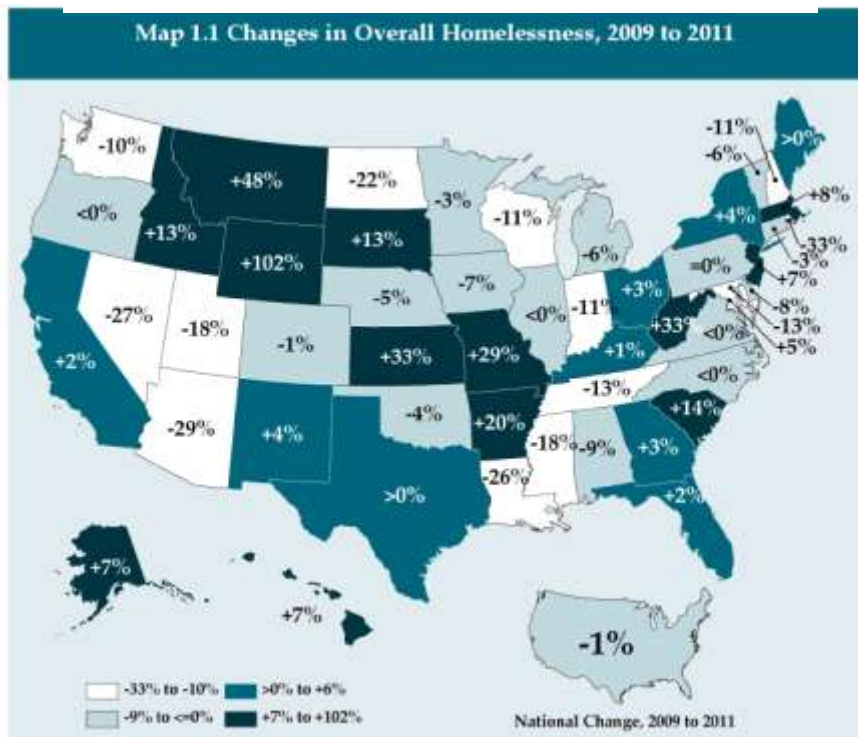


Fig. 2: Source: State of Homelessness in America 2012



- 34% have a diploma or an equivalent
- 28% have more than a high school education

Chronic homelessness

For many, homelessness is a short-term problem, but for others homelessness is pervasive. Chronic homelessness is defined by long-term or repeated homelessness. Although chronic homelessness represents a small portion of the overall homeless population, this population consumes over half of the services.

Many chronically homeless people have mental illnesses and alcohol and substance addiction. According to Volume 1 of the 2012 Annual Homeless Assessment

Report, the chronically homeless population, some 100,000 individuals, accounted for just under 16% of all homeless people in 2012 (endhomelessness.org).

Families and Children

One of the fastest growing segments of the homeless population is families with children. There is a common misconception that homelessness is an issue that only pertains to single men and women, but in reality thousands of families a year will experience homelessness. In fact, 41% of the homeless population is comprised of families (National Alliance to End Homelessness).

Who are the homeless?

The homeless community consists of men, women, and children of all ages, ethnicities, religions, and walks of life. In Utah, the average age of homeless adults is 38 and in children, 7. In the US, 51% are single males, 25% are single females, and 5% are minors unaccompanied by an adult.

Ethnicity

- African American 49%
- Caucasian 25%
- Hispanic 13%
- Native American 2%
- Asian American 1%

Education

- 38% have less than a high school education

“One of the fastest growing segments of the homeless population is families with children.”

HOMELESSNESS AMONG VETERANS

100,000 Homes Campaign volunteers surveyed over 23,000 individuals currently homeless, 3,493 of whom are American veterans

Homelessness is a devastating experience for families. It disrupts virtually every aspect of family life, damaging the physical and emotional health of family members, interfering with children's education and development, and frequently resulting in the separation of family members.

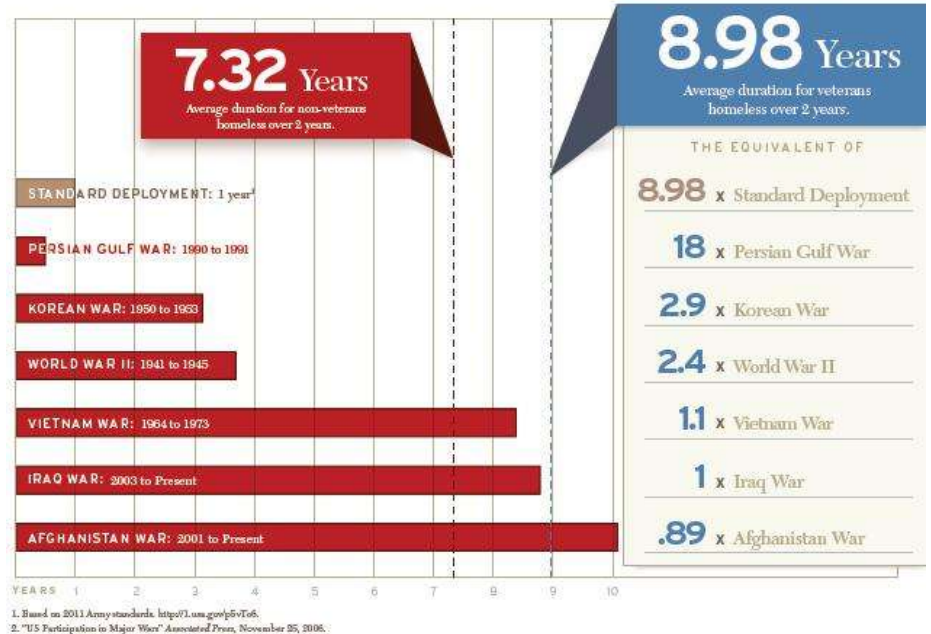
Veterans

In the United States, roughly 15%-20% of people experiencing homelessness are veterans. Among this group of veterans, three fourths experience mental health issues and drug and alcohol addiction. Alcohol may be used by veterans to help cope with the effects of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and/or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (samhsa.gov). Veterans are twice as likely as other Americans to become homeless and the risk for women vets to become homeless is four times greater than that of men.

- 46% age 45 or older
- 3% women
- 76% experience alcohol, drug, or mental health problems
- 89% received Honorable Discharge
- 47% Vietnam Era
- 79% reside in central cities
- 25% have used VA Homeless Services

(nationalhomeless.org)

“The risk for women vets to become homeless is four times greater than that of men.”



Homeless Teens

Homeless youth face many challenges on the streets. Because of their age, homeless youth have few legal means by which they can earn enough money to meet basic needs. Many homeless adolescents find that exchanging sex for food, clothing, and shelter is their only chance of survival on the streets. In turn, homeless youth are at a greater risk of contracting AIDS or HIV-related illnesses. Estimates for percentages of homeless youth infected with HIV are generally around 5%.

Furthermore, homeless youth face difficulties attending school because of legal guardianship requirements, residency requirements, improper records, and lack of transportation. As a result, homeless youth face severe challenges in obtaining an education and supporting themselves emotionally and financially.

Homeless adolescents often suffer from severe anxiety and depression, poor health and nutrition, and low self-esteem.

What causes homelessness?

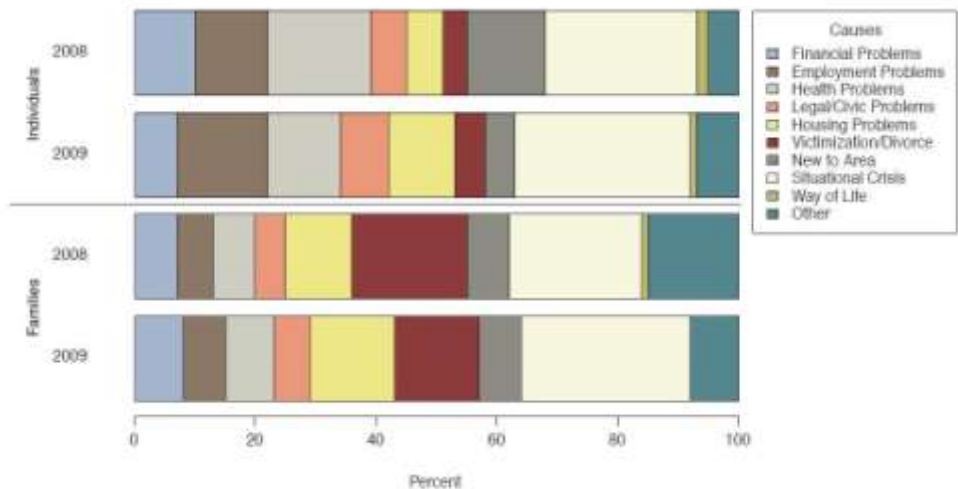
Many factors come into play when distinguishing an exact cause for homelessness. Ultimately though, it is based on the idea that there is “a lack of available, affordable, or adequate housing” (Utah 2012 Comprehensive Report). There are countless personal reasons that affect individuals and lead them to becoming homeless as well, including: divorce, abuse, status of health and wellness, and incarceration. Some contributing social factors that play a role in homelessness can include: the state of the economy and job market, lack of affordable housing, and absence of public assistance. These factors are commonly intertwined, with one cause leading to another. Depending on an individual, some aspects are more likely to cause homelessness than others.

Personal Problems

Divorce

Situations involving divorce particularly affect those within a family with children. Mainly, financial problems leading to homelessness come about after divorce situations because there will be one less income to support the family where there once was two. A statistic provided by the 2011 Utah Comprehensive Report on Homelessness states, “In Utah, 13.5% of low-income children live in a single-parent household where the household head was at one time married.” With the rapidly increasing divorce rates in the country, and more specifically the state, homelessness among families of divorce steadily grows more common.

Source: Utah 2012 Comprehensive Report on Utah



Domestic Violence or Abuse

Individuals that suffer from some form of abuse or domestic violence may feel forced to escape from these current situations, and, with nowhere else to live, must resort to becoming homeless. Victims of violence and abuse that are homeless are mainly women that have escaped such abusive relationships. A survey done in Salt Lake City, Utah found that approximately 22% of homeless adults were homeless due to domestic violence (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2011).

Incarceration

Those who have recently been released from prison or jail are more prone to becoming homeless because they have not had the means of gaining an income during the time they were incarcerated. In addition to that, the 2011 Utah Comprehensive Report on Homelessness writes, “Parole supervision fees and restitution commitments can mean recently discharged individuals have financial commitments beyond conventional expenses of housing, food, and transportation.” Having been incarcerated and having a criminal record, these individuals are much less likely to obtain a job, which could lead to living in

poverty, increasing the likelihood of becoming chronically homeless.

Unemployment

The increased rates of unemployment contribute to the rather extensive numbers of homeless in the state of Utah. Those who are currently homeless or have been homeless have a much more difficult time obtaining a job than those who are not. In order to seek employment, individuals often need a recommendation or experience in order to apply for a job. Those who have been homeless for a prolonged time period tend to lack these certain criteria. Many also lack the resources necessary to aid them in finding a job, as well as the education, skills, and networking (2011 Utah Comprehensive Report on Homelessness 9). If they are not able to get hired in the first place they will not be able to achieve any means of employment and aid, and are more likely to remain homeless for longer.



State of Health & Wellness

“Homelessness is often the consequence of mental illness, physical disability, or substance abuse for those who do not have access to family or institutional supports” (2011 Utah Comprehensive Report on Homelessness). Individuals that may be suffering from some type of illness or disease are not always able to maintain a house and work in addition to caring for themselves. Veterans commonly return

home with drastic physical and mental health problems that make them incapable of supporting themselves or make it extremely difficult to do so. Living with such illnesses without the proper support contributes to the large and growing population of homeless suffering from disabling conditions.

Economic and Social Factors

Insufficient Job Market and Jobs

Depending on the job market and employment rates, some individuals may not be able to obtain a job that provides enough for the minimal cost of living. A decline in the job market and economy may lead some families or individuals into poverty, increasing the likelihood of them becoming homeless.

Public Assistance

The homeless population needs suitable types of support and assistance in order to improve their current situations and regain a form of housing. Such public assistance programs are vitally important in helping people avoid homelessness altogether. According to the Utah Division of Housing and Development though, existing support programs are not always deemed entirely successful and adequate.

Housing

There are not enough affordable housing options that are reasonable for those living on the poverty line. With no other solutions in finding a place to live, people are pressured to settle for homelessness.



What's it like?

There's more to homelessness than worrying about where to stay, when the next meal is, and what to do next. Here's an invitation to explore how homeless people are treated, what the living conditions are like, what they're constantly thinking about, their health status, and other challenges they may have being homeless.

How do others treat the homeless?

Think about how you treat the homeless. Do you pretend that they don't exist or think that they should be doing something more useful? Do you tell homeless people that you don't have any money when you really do? Do you feel threatened by homeless people who come up to you and ask you for money? Do you think that they'll rob or hurt you if you don't hand over some money or other possessions? Do you think that they're going to use your money for food, transportation, or some other necessity? Or do you really think they're going to buy booze, cigarettes, or drugs? These are just some of the negative thoughts that some people may have about homeless people. Such thoughts create false assumptions of these sometimes innocent people who really need help. People don't realize that these assumptions exclude the homeless from society, making them nothing-invisible and hopeless.

Many homeless people feel embarrassed about their state of living. They're aware that others may view them as lowly and worthless. Imagine yourself as the person who quoted this:

There'[re] so many stresses. People assume if you're homeless all you have to worry about is a place to sleep and food but that's not true. You have to worry about clothing. Once you're kicked out you basically only have what's on your back and what you can hold

in a bag. There's no laundry. After a week or two you reek. Trying to walk around or get on a bus, I worry that people move away because I smell. I'm so embarrassed. Eventually you get to the point that you feel so filthy in your own clothing that you want to crawl out of your skin (Winnipeg Street Health Report 16).

“People assume if you're homeless all you have to worry about is a place to sleep and food but that's not true.”

What are living conditions like?

It's important to take into consideration what situation the homeless were in before they became homeless. Some may have been living with family or someone they knew (also called “doubling-up”). According to the State of Homelessness report, “1 in 12 who ‘doubled-up’ experience homelessness” and “Doubled-up people have an elevated risk of experiencing homelessness.” Others may also have been discharged from prison (1 in 13), aged out of foster care (1 in 11), or other reasons giving them no place to go (Witte).

Shelters

Shelters can provide a temporary stay for some who have nowhere to go. In Salt Lake City, The Road Home provides two shelters for those in need of a place to stay any time of the year. They claim that they do not turn anyone away and also provide a winter shelter during the cold seasons (Shelter). Some shelters will also provide meals, items, and/or tokens to trade for

goods such as clothing or a bus ride.

Guests may have different experiences during their stay, including others asking for money or even stealing belongings that are not guarded. Meals are at set times and guests may be expected to be gone throughout the day, ideally looking for a job. Shelters can be packed and people sometimes trade goods or favors to fill their needs. Sleeping peacefully can be difficult if there are disturbances in shared rooms (Johnson). Sometimes there are fights, pest infestations, discrimination, or even negative treatment from staff members (Winnipeg Street Health Report).

Because things don't always go as planned, sometimes guests may have to stay longer than expected and it's possible that as time passes the individual can experience depression and a decline in health (What Is It like to Be Homeless?). Fortunately in Utah, 63% of the homeless population does not remain chronically homeless. Over half of homeless Utahns only remain in shelters for a short amount of time (Fourth Street Clinic). This is good news because according to the Winnipeg Street Health Report, 30% of respondents reported that they did not feel safe in shelters. Shelters do however provide more protection than "rough sleeping" or sleeping outside.

Rough Sleeping

Rough sleeping can be a traumatizing experience because there is no protection from dangers that lurk while the person is asleep. These sleepers can be "attacked, abused, robbed, or moved on." Many also have felt threatened by even the general public and harassment from police who unfairly search and arrest them. Other factors also take a toll on the health of the homeless who sleep on the streets such as

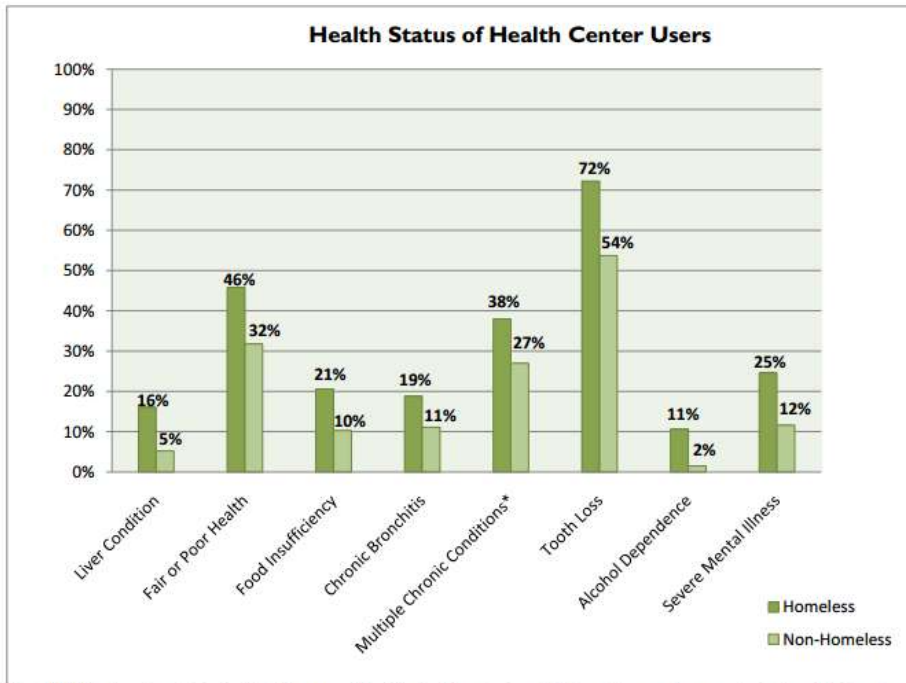
“Rough sleepers are 35 times more likely to commit suicide than the general population.”

disruptive sleep from the weather, hunger, and fear. Rough sleeping also means no showers, washers, or other basic personal care facilities, which adds to poor health. The risk of substance use or abuse is also higher when paired with street living (England Shelter). Lastly, statistics have claimed that rough sleepers are 35 times more likely to commit suicide than the general population (Rough Sleeping).

What is the health status of homeless?

Many homeless people experience stress and disease that result from the effects of homelessness. Mental illnesses are common among the homeless and mental health is a concern. The homeless face anxiety, depression, hallucinations, bouts of suicide, and problems with memory, concentration, and comprehension (Winnipeg Street Health Report). Many are sick and cannot afford to seek medical care so they often ignore the problems, which develop into even worse conditions. Oral health is also poor in most of the homeless population (Winnipeg Street Health Report). The homeless are also a high-risk population for tuberculosis (TB) due to living conditions that increase the contraction of this disease, "including substance abuse, HIV infection, and residence in crowded shelters (Center for Disease Control and Prevention)." Figure 3 compares the health status between the homeless and non-homeless.

Fig. 3: Source: National Health Care for the Homeless Council



*Note: Multiple chronic conditions include (2 or more of the following): hypertension, diabetes, asthma, emphysema, chronic bronchitis, heart problems, stroke, liver condition, weak/failing kidneys, cancer, and HIV/AIDS.

Since 1988, the Fourth Street Clinic has provided health care for the homeless in Salt Lake City. At this specialty clinic, hours are generally reasonable (most days open at eight in the morning and close up to seven at night), a pharmacy is available, and there is even a walk-in clinic for those as young as 13. The downfall seems to be that there is only one location, meaning that lines can be long or receiving care can take more time. The clinic is also closed on certain holidays; however, this clinic offers a wide range of care for their patients. Patients can receive primary care, behavioral health care, medications, and even more specific care for other needs such as dermatology, physical therapy, and others. The Fourth Street Clinic accepts insurance, but does not require it for their services. New patients can simply make a call for an appointment or walk in to screen for eligibility and future appointments (Fourth Street Clinic). It’s important to acknowledge these generous services; however, we are reminded by the National Health Care for the Homeless Council that “no amount of health care can substitute for stable housing”.

Are there other challenges?

Obtaining and keeping a job while homeless is harder than you may think. Many homeless people can’t afford or keep up with the proper attire for their jobs because of cost or lack of resources to care for the clothing. Transportation can be another factor, especially when individuals are staying far from their workplace or have other circumstances that delay traveling time. Disabilities can be a challenge for many reasons. Being pregnant or having children or other family

members to care for also adds to the challenges of trying to get out of homelessness.

What’s being done?

All across America there are programs in place to help the homeless crisis. In 2009, Congress passed the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP) in part with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Nationally, there are large groups and organizations set up to guide and assist cities and states effectively help their residents.

Ten Year Plan

The Ten Year Plan: A Plan Not a Dream was presented in 2000 by the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH). The Department of Housing & Urban Development is an active supporter of this initiative. There are four steps to the Ten Year Plan. These steps give community leaders a map on how to understand and

help their residents in the most effective way.

Four Steps to the Ten Year Plan

- *Plan for Outcomes*

Know your homeless population and demographic. Who are the people that are in need of these services? There is not one set way to help everyone that is homeless. Each group has its own specific needs.

- *Close the Front Door*

Prevent homelessness by avoiding the problems that lead to it. Community leaders are encouraged to create classes that teach how to handle crisis whether it be a financial, personal, or medical.

Hold poverty programs more accountable for the outcome of their clients. It is vital to intervene before severe poverty turns into homelessness. Tracking and monitoring the men, women, and families that come into these programs need follow up support and encouragement.

- *Open the Back Door*

Homelessness occurs in part to a lack of affordable housing. Developing and subsidizing an adequate amount of affordable housing. Houses lost to foreclosure can be purchased at a greatly reduced price, turning these homes into housing that is designated for those in great financial need is just one solution to the affordable housing need.

- *Build the Infrastructure*

Ending homelessness can be a building block to addressing and eliminating the problems that lead to crisis, poverty and eventually homelessness. This is the largest and most encompassing step of the plan. This step pulls community leaders to review the problems in their communities that are the pieces that lead to the crisis, the shortage of affordable housing, incomes that cannot pay for even basic needs and the lack of

services to those who desperately need them.

Several cities around the country have set up programs supporting the Ten Year Plan including:

Denver, CO

Fayetteville & Cumberland County, NC

Harrisburg and Dauphin County, PA

Hudson County, NJ

Kittias County, WA

Laredo, TX

Lee County, FL

Southeast Minnesota

Tulsa, OK

Washington County, OR

Housing First

Housing First is one national program that emphasizes stable permanent housing as its primary strategy. It focuses on getting families and individuals out of shelters and into rental housing as soon as possible. They provide services to promote housing stability and well-being. They offer budget counseling to educate and hopefully prevent future financial crisis that can lead to future homelessness. Housing First offers programs for families that include healthy living nutrition classes and individual and family counseling. They offer assistance with the first month's rent, security deposit, or back rent payments that may be due. They provide services to help families find permanent housing without conditions. With this help, families achieve independence and very few end up needing additional services. Through federally funded programs, Housing First is able to coordinate help and assistance (NAEH 2013).

The National Alliance to End Homelessness and Housing First are just two of the federally supported organizations that help the homeless. There are thousands of programs and organizations that provide

help to the homeless community which include:

- **Chronically Homeless**

Those that are chronically homeless need permanent housing linked to intensive services to achieve stability due to the prolonged periods of being homeless.

- **Families**

Although this group is normally only in the shelter for a short time, these families can quickly recover from homelessness with proper support and rapid re-housing options.

Utah's Workforce Services has partnered with The Road Home to aid families in getting connected with TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families). Together they locate and secure affordable housing, assist with paying rents, and relieving the stress from parents while they search to gain employment. This joint effort between Workforce Services and The Road Home has helped over 1000 families quickly regain homes.

- **Veterans**

US Department of Veterans Affairs and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, General Eric Shinseki, have vowed to end veteran homelessness by 2015. Currently, there are 76,000 homeless veterans. Many of our homeless veterans face similar problems that the chronically homeless suffer from. For example, severe mental illnesses, disabilities and substance abuse are the leading causes of homelessness in veterans. There are benefits available to homeless vets that all veterans are entitled to. VA offers health care, mental health services, housing assistance, employment and job training. There are also supportive services for families of veterans. The SSVF (Supportive Services for Veteran Families) grants technology assistance, grants for education, assistance with health care concerns, and

daily living services for those in need of a care center or other rehabilitation care center.



**It took strength to serve.
It can seem even harder to ask for help.**



If you served in the U.S. military and are now facing tough times or don't have a place to call home, VA can help.
Make the call!

Call VA's toll-free hotline:
1-877-424-3838
(1-877-4AID-VET)

or visit www.va.gov/homeless for help with housing, jobs, health care, education and other Veteran benefits.

VA Home Front
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

WWW.VA.GOV/HOMELESS Working together to eliminate Veteran homelessness.

Conclusion

The facts and statistics on homelessness are overwhelming. Men, women, and children sleep on the streets, in parks, and fill shelters every night. One cannot fully understand what it feels to be homeless unless they have experienced it firsthand. Every person has their own story and personal experiences that we may not ever understand. We cannot assume that all homeless people are the same. Many of us who walk by give a quick glance, never having a

second thought to try and understand what has led these people to shelters and the streets. Making negative assumptions about the homeless is an unfair and uninformed way to view these people in our community. Local churches, such as the Cavalry Chapel and the Rescue Mission, located in Salt Lake City, Utah, offer outreach programs that provide basic necessities and more importantly show love and compassion to a group of people that often feel rejected and neglected (S. Hooper). There are homeless outreach programs that need your help. They need your hands to pass out sandwiches and soup, to distribute warm coats, and to pass out socks and gloves. They need you to offer a smile and an ear to listen. They need you. Donate your money. Donate your time.

A special thanks goes out to those in our community that love and care for the homeless.

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