

Homelessness is a Solvable Problem

Homelessness impacts every community across the country. Reducing homelessness creates strong, stable communities where everyone has an equitable opportunity to thrive. But communities can't do that without robust investments in housing and homelessness programs from the federal government.

The Problem

As the housing affordability gap rises, more and more employed people are falling into homelessness as wages are unable to keep up with the rising cost of housing. And more people are becoming homeless at a rate that the system can no longer handle.

On any given night, more than 582,000 people across the country experience homelessness, while more than a million people experiencing homelessness over the course of a year.

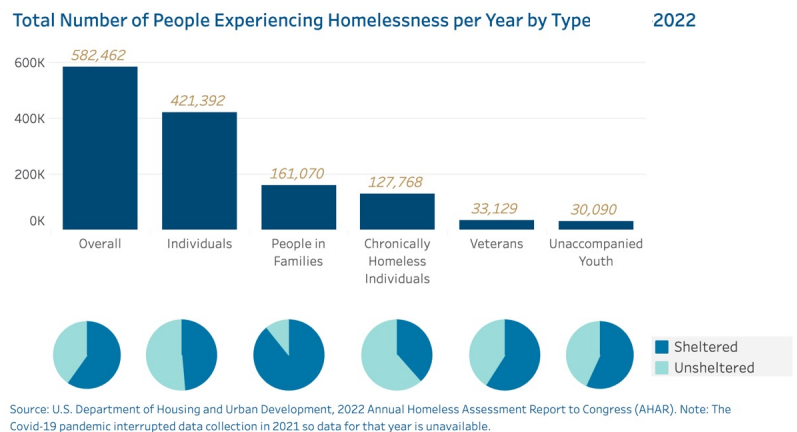
- 60 percent of the homeless population is unsheltered – sleeping in cars, abandoned buildings, outdoors, or in some other place not meant for human habitation.

Add to this the number of households who are living “doubled up” or in overcrowded situations and the number of households who are severely rent-burdened, the number of households experiencing homelessness or housing instability surges even higher.

- Each year between 2017 and 2020, an average of 900,895 people were able to resolve their homelessness as a result of effective homelessness response systems. However, during that same time period, an average of 908,530 people entered into homelessness.

While homelessness impacts people of all ages, races, physical and cognitive abilities, ethnicities, gender identities, and sexual orientations, it disproportionately impacts some groups and populations.

- People of color are overrepresented in the homeless population, with Black Americans especially overrepresented at a rate of 3 to 1 as compared to the general population and American Indians and Alaska Natives overrepresented with a as high as 5 to 1. And Latino homelessness is rising faster than for any other group.



The Impact

Homelessness takes a crippling toll on those who experience it – which includes your constituents.

- It can cause families to separate, and has negative impacts on children's physical and mental health, causing them to miss school, and delaying their development.
- Individuals who are homeless often become isolated from their communities. Their careers are disrupted, and finding or maintaining employment becomes nearly impossible.
- Homelessness is associated with the onset of complex, costly health conditions, including mental health conditions and substance use disorders. Limited access to quality health care combined with severe shortages in qualified professionals exacerbates the impact that these conditions can have on an individual.
- Homeless people frequently engage with hospital emergency rooms, first responders, and the criminal justice system. **Sometimes their cost to these public systems exceeds what it would cost to rehouse them.**

The longer people are homeless, the worse these problems become.

We can end homelessness.

The Solutions

Housing is the fundamental solution to homelessness. The United States suffers from a severe shortage of safe, affordable, and accessible rental housing which both results in more and more people becoming homeless and is a barrier to people exiting homelessness. To address this, we must maximize the use of federal housing assistance while also prioritizing the creation of new affordable housing.

Once a person is housed, they have a platform to address all their needs, no matter how complex. People are most successful when that housing is paired with the right level of voluntary and accessible support based on their expressed and individualized needs and preferences, otherwise known as Housing First.

The solution may be simple, but implementing it is not. Ending homelessness requires a focus on evidence-based practices, data and outcomes, efficiency, and adaptiveness to change.

Looking Ahead

The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) released a new federal strategic plan to prevent and homelessness, All In, which serves as a roadmap for federal action across three foundational pillars (equity, data, and collaboration) and three solution pillars (housing and supports, homelessness response, and prevention). Each pillar includes strategies that, if implemented by USICH and its 19 member agencies, would facilitate increased availability of and access to housing, economic security, health care, and stability for all Americans.

All In builds upon the lessons that were learned over many years of bipartisan-backed comprehensive approaches to ending homelessness. These approaches produced consistent federal investment, evidence-based guidance from federal agencies, and continuous innovation by communities which led to significant reductions in homelessness between 2010-2016.

Congress should invest resources and take legislative action in support of the strategies that are highlighted in All In and should direct all 19 Council Member agencies to execute on the actions included in the plan.

As a first step, the Alliance requests support for \$3.8 billion in overall funding for FY2024 for HUD's homeless assistance grants program.