

Homelessness in the United States is a public health crisis which impacts every community across the country.

The most significant drivers of homelessness include:

- disinvestment in affordable housing and failure to upkeep public housing stock,
- wages that have not kept up with rising housing costs,
- inadequate safety net programs (e.g., SNAP), and
- systemic racism and discriminatory practices that result in inequitable access to quality housing, health care, education, and economic opportunity.

Homelessness means lacking a regular nighttime residence, sleeping in an emergency shelter, or living in a place not meant for human habitation, such as a vehicle or outdoors.

The word, emergency, can denote urgency and duration. Yet, many people experiencing homelessness are not able to receive an immediate solution to their need: affordable housing. **Emergency shelter is NOT housing** (temporary or permanent). Homelessness can also mean:

- Earning a wage that is insufficient to meet housing costs.
- Aging out of foster care and not having a permanent place to live.
- Fleeing an abuser as you seek a safe place to live.
- Living in a constant state of survival mode.
- Being arrested for sleeping in a public location, despite having nowhere else to go.

HOMELESSNESS AND THE HOUSING AFFORDABILITY GAP

Homeowners and renters are feeling financially squeezed as housing costs continue to rise and the availability of affordable housing continues to decrease.

- A significant **rise in property taxes** can lead to long-term homeowners finding themselves disadvantaged, exacerbating social inequalities.
- Twenty-two million renters spend **more than 30 percent** of their income on rent and utilities, according to a report by Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies.
- Many landlords are requiring at least two months' rent for security deposits and application **fees have increased**.
- According to the National Low-Income Housing Coalition, the U.S. has a shortage of more than **7.3 million** rental housing units, affordable and available to extremely low-income households, and no state has an adequate supply of affordable rental housing.
- Approximately **400,000 units** in the USDA Section 515 Rural Rental Housing Program's portfolio and the mortgages for 83% of them are on track to mature by 2050, resulting in a significant loss of affordable housing.
- As the housing affordability gap rises, **more Americans are experiencing housing instability and homelessness**.

THE IMPACT

Without sufficient funding for homelessness, housing, and safety net programs, the results are dire.

- The U.S. has seen a **twelve percent increase** in the rate of homelessness. On one night in January 2023, **653,104 people** across the country were experiencing homelessness. **Seventeen percent** were children and **twenty-one percent** were over the age of 55.
- The lack of access to affordable housing **disproportionately impacts** people with disabilities, communities of color, LGBTQIA people, and people with low incomes.
- Unhoused people face a **higher risk of premature death** when compared to housed people due to exposure to harsh weather conditions, violence, and lack of access to healthcare.
- Every time a child moves due to homelessness, **three to six months of their education is lost**.
- Lack of sufficient funding **endangers survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault** as demand for services skyrockets.

CONGRESS, WE NEED YOU!

Ending the affordable housing crisis and homelessness requires Congress to make sufficient investments in safety net, housing, and homelessness programs. It means investing in new ways to accelerate housing production and preserve existing affordable housing units and incentivizing flexible financing structures and zoning policies. Congress must address systemic racial inequities, enforce fair rental practices, and end cycles of poverty in support of upward mobility. Congress must support evidence-based approaches and the homeless workforce. Most importantly, Congress must include the perspectives of people with lived experience of homelessness as they design a path forward.