

The State of Homelessness

There are an estimated 553,742 people in the United States experiencing homelessness on a given night, according to the most recent national point-in-time estimate ([January 2017](#)). This represents a rate of approximately 17 people experiencing homelessness per every 10,000 people in the general population.

The total number of people experiencing homelessness increased slightly compared with 2016, but the rate per 10,000 people is at its lowest value on record. This is because overall population growth is outpacing the growth of homelessness. Homelessness rates in individual states ranged from highs of 110 and 51 in the District of Columbia (D.C.) and Hawaii, to 5 in Mississippi.

In 2017, the vast majority of the homeless population lived in some form of shelter or in transitional housing (360,867 people) at the time of the point-in-time count. Approximately 34 percent (192,875 people) lived in a place not meant for human habitation, such as the street or an abandoned building. Single individuals comprised 66.7 percent of all people experiencing homelessness (369,081 people), with the remaining 33.3 percent being people in families (184,661 adults and children). Looking further, 7.2 percent were veterans (40,056 veterans), and 7.4 percent were unaccompanied children and young adults (40,799 children and young adults).

From 2016 to 2017, homelessness increased nationally by 0.7 percent. The largest increases were among unaccompanied children and young adults (14.3 percent increase), individuals experiencing chronic homelessness (12.2 percent increase), and people experiencing unsheltered homelessness (9.4 percent increase). The number of people in families experiencing homelessness decreased 5.2 percent.

Between 2007 and 2017, homelessness decreased overall and across every major category of homelessness nationally. Overall homelessness decreased 14.4 percent. The most dramatic decreases in homelessness have been among veterans (34.3 percent), individuals experiencing chronic homelessness (27.4 percent), and people living in unsheltered locations (24.6 percent).

State Trends in Homelessness

From 2016 to 2017:

- 30 states and Washington, D.C. reported decreases in overall homelessness, while 20 states reported increases. Georgia reported the largest decrease of 2,735 people experiencing homelessness, and Massachusetts reported a decrease of 2,043 people. California reported the largest increase by far, with 16,136 additional people experiencing homelessness. New York reported the second largest increase—3,151 people.
- A majority of states followed national declining trends for people in families. 37 states and D.C reported decreases, with the largest decreases reported in Massachusetts (1,876 people) and Georgia (892 people).
- A slight majority of states mirrored national *increases* in unsheltered homelessness (28 states and Washington, D.C.) and chronic homelessness among individuals (28 states). California reported the largest increase in unsheltered homelessness by far (13,252 people) as well as the largest increase in chronically homeless individuals (5,996 people).
- Contrary to national increases, most states reported *decreases* in the number of homeless veterans (36 states and Washington, D.C.) and homeless individuals (28 states and D.C.). The divergence between the aggregate national and state trends was largely driven by increases in California. Georgia reported the largest decrease in homeless veterans

(343 people) as well as the largest decrease in homeless individuals (1,843 people).

Since 2007:

- 36 states reported decreases in overall homelessness since 2007, while 14 states and Washington D.C. reported increases.
- The majority of states followed national trends for every major category of homelessness: unsheltered (34 states reported decreases), individuals (27 states and Washington, D.C. reported decreases), family homelessness (38 states reported decreases), chronically homeless individuals (38 states and Washington, D.C. reported decreases), and veterans (30 states and D.C. reported decreases).

Homeless Assistance in America

Communities across the country respond to homelessness with a variety of housing and services programs, including emergency shelters, transitional housing, rapid re-housing, and permanent supportive housing. Over the last decade, a shift has occurred in homeless assistance, placing a greater emphasis on permanent housing solutions to homelessness—such as permanent supportive housing and rapid re-housing—over transitional housing programs. Permanent housing interventions account for about half of the beds in the U.S. overall (52.8 percent).

Permanent supportive housing is currently the intervention which has the most capacity, representing 41.8 percent of all homeless assistance beds.

Emergency shelter has the next highest capacity level, accounting for 32.8 percent of homeless assistance beds. Rapid re-housing is a relatively newer intervention; capacity data has only been collected since 2013. Nationally, it accounts for more than one in ten beds, but the growth rate has been dramatic—a 372 percent increase from 2013 to 2017.

State Trends in Homeless Assistance

From 2016 to 2017:

- The majority of states (33) increased permanent supportive housing capacity in 2017 relative to 2016. The largest increases were in California (3,420 beds), Colorado (2,052 beds), and Texas (1,651 beds). The largest decrease was in Minnesota (1,379 fewer beds).
- Rapid re-housing inventories also increased in a majority of states (34 states and Washington, D.C.). The largest increases were in California (3,010 beds), New York (2,679 beds), and Massachusetts (2,306 beds). The largest decrease was in Washington (1,570 fewer beds).
- Most states increased emergency shelter capacity (33 states). The largest increases were in New York (4,989 beds) and California (4,559 beds). Pennsylvania had the largest decrease (382 fewer beds).
- Transitional housing decreased in almost all states (44 states and Washington, D.C. reported a decrease). The largest decreases were in California (2,437 fewer beds), New York (1,883 fewer beds), and Florida (1,714 fewer beds). The largest increase was in Minnesota (113 beds).

Since 2007:

- All but one state (Arkansas) report higher permanent supportive housing capacity compared with 2007. The largest increases were in California (33,049 beds), New York (11,331 beds), and Texas (9,488 beds).
- Emergency shelter capacity increased in the majority of states (42 states and Washington, D.C.). The largest increases were mostly in states with jurisdictions guaranteeing a “right to shelter”: New York (36,274 beds), Massachusetts (5,286 beds), and D.C. (2,887 beds). California also increased capacity by 4,618 beds. The largest decrease was in Michigan (606 fewer beds).
- Transitional housing capacity decreased in all but three states (Hawaii, Wyoming, and Alaska). The largest decreases were in California (11,223

fewer beds), New York (7,994 fewer beds), and Oregon (6,459 fewer beds).

Populations at Risk of Homelessness

Many people with low incomes are at risk of homelessness. Ultimately, this is due to a lack of affordable housing.

The number of poor, renter households experiencing a severe housing cost burden (i.e., those paying more than 50 percent of their income toward housing) totaled 6,902,060 in 2016. This is 3.1 percent lower than 2015, but still 20.8 percent greater than 2007.

According to an analysis of the 2016 American Community Survey, an estimated 4,609,826 people in poor households were living “doubled up” with family and friends. This represents one of the most common prior living situations for people who become homeless. The 2016 rate is 5.7 percent lower than 2015, but still 30.0 percent greater than in 2007.

State Trends in At-Risk Populations

From 2015 to 2016:

- The number of poor people living doubled up with friends or family decreased in a majority of states (35). The largest percent decrease was in Montana (56.0 percent or 8,148 people) and the largest percent increase was in North Dakota (180.8 percent or 3,779 people).
- The number of poor, renter households experiencing a severe housing cost burden decreased in the majority of states (35). The largest percent decrease was in Maine (20.7 percent or 5,022 households) and the largest percent increase was in D.C. (37.9 percent or 8,197 households).

Since 2007:

- Only three states (Montana, Colorado, and New Hampshire) saw a decrease in the number of poor people living doubled up, and 47 states and D.C. saw an increase. The largest percent decrease was in Montana (10.6 percent or 758 people) and the largest percent increase was in Nevada (133.5 percent or 24,446 people).
 - The number of poor, renter households experiencing a severe housing cost burden decreased in only 3 states (Maine, Alaska, and North Dakota). The largest percent decrease was in Maine (4.9 percent or 990 households) and the largest percent increase was in Wyoming (154.8 percent or 6,622 households).
-