



FAMILY & HUMAN SERVICES STUDY TEAM 2017

Issues of homelessness in our region

People can heal when they get the right service and support to regain their lives.

—Liora Berry, Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare

What Causes and Continues Homelessness?

Leading causes of homelessness are poverty, lack of affordable housing, good paying jobs, untreated mental illness, and substance abuse. Other contributing factors are domestic violence, inadequate resources for transitioning youth out of foster care, the formerly incarcerated, and families.

Statistics in Oregon reflect these national trends:

- Poverty: In 2015, 15.4% of Oregonians had incomes below the poverty line.
- Affordable housing: In 2016 Portland had the highest rent increases in the US.
- Living wage: More than half of Portland tenants spend 30% or more of their income on rent, and two-thirds of the area's lowest income residents pay over half of their income in rent.
- Affordable housing: In 2016, Multnomah County lacked 25,000 affordable housing units.
- Mental illness: One in three homeless persons suffers from serious untreated mental illness.
- Substance abuse: 38% of homeless persons have substance abuse issues.

Homeless is NOT going away:

- Oregon has the 5th highest rate of per capita homeless families with children.
- There was a 41% increase in unsheltered women in Oregon from 2011 to 2015.
- In Oregon there was a 48% increase of unsheltered African Americans from 2013 to 2015.

Strategies to Reduce Homelessness in Our Region

A Home for Everyone (AHFE), is a community-wide effort here to house the homeless by investing in housing, income and benefits, emergency services, health, access to services, and systems coordination.

Key partners include Multnomah County, the City of Portland, the City of Gresham, Home Forward, local nonprofits and members of the public. This consortium of government, citizens, and organizations dedicated to resolving the problems of homelessness has developed strategies to address the issue, and service providers throughout the four county area implement these and other efforts to help our homeless.

General strategies

- Housing first. Place people back into housing as quickly as possible through providing temporary housing and rent assistance and resolving credit issues and effects of criminal history.
- Support people. Once housed provide a case manager to give support so that people can remain housed. Assist with everything from budgeting to finding employment.
- Attain income. Help individuals attain income through employment or benefits.
- Health care access. Provide easy access to health care and recovery services.

- Support priority populations. These include families with children, women fleeing domestic violence, unaccompanied youth, adults with disabilities, women in general, and veterans.
- Promote racial and ethnic justice. Homeless affects people of color disproportionately.

Crisis management strategies

- Shelter. Provide overnight and day shelters for children and couples. Provide shelters which serve unstable individuals (i.e. mentally ill or those with substance abuse problems).
- Storage. Provide storage facilities for possessions.

Short-term strategies

- Prevention. Prevent homelessness before it happens through protection from no-cause eviction, support for landlords to avoid eviction, and access to affordable housing.
- Services. Provide home-based services for those who are housed.
- Housing. Provide short term housing including transitional housing and micro housing.

Strategies for homeless with issues of mental illness and addiction

- Flexibility. In service delivery does not require clients to be substance free or to have psychological symptoms completely controlled to receive service.
- Drop-in service for medication with 24/7 prescribing.
- In-patient treatment for addiction with recovery support after discharge.
- Recovery housing after inpatient treatment and hospitalizations.

Strategies specific to homeless youth and those transitioning from foster care

- Life skills development. Provide life coaches who offer a consistent presence for clients
- Education, job training, and placement
- Pregnancy prevention
- Youth parenting programs and quality affordable child care

The Role of Philanthropy in Helping Our Community Reduce Homelessness

A national coalition of funders, including Meyer Memorial Trust of Oregon, has come together to address homelessness through collaboration and focus on system issues. Funders Together to End Homelessness offers guiding principles for funding efforts to eliminate homelessness.

- Move people into permanent housing
- Philanthropy must work in partnership with public resources to leverage funds
- Systems change is required to effect lasting change
- Funders should engage in advocacy efforts at national and local levels
- Philanthropy must partner with others to address structural inequalities resulting in racial and other inequities
- Adopt a grantee-centered approach, embedding lived experience and integrating the voices of people with lived experiences in all aspects of work to prevent and end homelessness