Why Are People Homeless?
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Two trends are largely responsible for the rise in homelessness over the past 20-25 years:
-A growing shortage of affordable rental housing and a simultaneous increase in poverty.

Below is an overview of current poverty and housing statistics, as well as additional factors contributing to homelessness.

FORECLOSURE

The National Low Income Housing Coalition estimates that 40 percent of families facing eviction due to foreclosure are renters and 7 million households living on very low incomes (31 - 50 percent of Area Median Income) are at risk of foreclosure.

POVERTY

Homelessness and poverty are inextricably linked. Poor people are frequently unable to pay for housing, food, childcare, health care, and education. Difficult choices must be made when limited resources cover only some of these necessities. Often it is housing, which absorbs a high proportion of income that must be dropped. If you are poor, you are essentially an illness, an accident, or a paycheck away from living on the streets.

Two factors help account for increasing poverty: eroding employment opportunities for large segments of the workforce and the declining value and availability of public assistance.

ERODING WORK OPPORTUNITIES

Reasons why homelessness persists include stagnant or falling incomes and less secure jobs which offer fewer benefits.

Americans, more than 50% of their salaries go towards renting or housing costs, resulting in sacrifices in other essential areas like health care and savings.

With unemployment rates remaining high, jobs are hard to find in the current economy. Even if people can find work, this does not automatically provide an escape from poverty.

HOUSING

A lack of affordable housing and the limited scale of housing assistance programs have contributed to the current housing crisis and to homelessness.
OTHER FACTORS

Particularly within the context of poverty and the lack of affordable housing, certain additional factors may push people into homelessness.

**Lack of Affordable Health Care:** For families and individuals struggling to pay the rent, a serious illness or disability can start a downward spiral into homelessness, beginning with a lost job, depletion of savings to pay for care, and eventual eviction. One in three Americans, or 86.7 million people, is uninsured.

**Mental Illness:** Approximately 16% of the single adult homeless population suffers from some form of severe and persistent mental illness (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2005). Many mentally ill homeless people are unable to obtain access to supportive housing and/or other treatment services. The mental health support services most needed include case management, housing, and treatment.

**Addiction Disorders:** The relationship between addiction and homelessness is complex and controversial. While rates of alcohol and drug abuse are disproportionately high among the homeless population, the increase in homelessness over the past two decades cannot be explained by addiction alone. Many people who are addicted to alcohol and drugs never become homeless, but people who are poor and addicted are clearly at increased risk of homelessness. Addiction does increase the risk of displacement for the precariously housed; in the absence of appropriate treatment, it may doom one's chances of getting housing once on the streets. Homeless people often face insurmountable barriers to obtaining health care, including addictive disorder treatment services and recovery supports.

CONCLUSION

Homelessness results from a complex set of circumstances that require people to choose between food, shelter, and other basic needs. Only a concerted effort to ensure jobs that pay a living wage, adequate support for those who cannot work, affordable housing, and access to health care will bring an end to homelessness.