

Homelessness in Seattle/King County



Homelessness Study Committee

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<sup>1</sup>Relevant positions of LWV of Seattle-King County as revised and adopted 5/18/2017

## ECONOMY

### Economic Development

- **Support legislation that links the granting and continuation of corporate subsidies, tax preferences, and incentives to specific criteria which ensure transparency and accountability.**

**2007**

- A. Criteria should include clear and measurable goals that serve an essential public purpose and:
  1. Offer clear cost/benefit value to the public.
  2. Provide living wage jobs.
  3. Protect the environment.
  4. Sustain affordable housing.

## HUMAN RESOURCES/SOCIAL POLICY

### Human Services

- **Support measures to provide basic food, shelter, and health care for those unable to provide for themselves and to provide training and opportunity for employment.**

**1982, 1984**

- A. Human services should be delivered by federal, state and local governments according to which levels can provide services most effectively and efficiently.
- B. The federal government should tax for human services to provide a minimum base of revenue in order to ensure quality and equity among states and citizens. States and local governments can then tax according to their ability and

desire to provide additional services.

- C. Federal, state, and local governments should regulate the delivery of human services, with minimum standards set by the federal government to ensure equality among states and citizens.
- D. The role of volunteers is important in the delivery of human services, but should be considered supplemental to governmental provision of basic services.
- E. The siting of community-based residential facilities for individuals needing social services should include careful screening of clients, sufficient staff, agency accountability, early and continuous community/neighborhood involvement and adequate funding to meet these criteria. 1990
- F. The role of local government in providing human services should include a process for assessing needs and planning for those needs. Human services should be integrated in city budgets as part of the whole since they are as important as other city services. LWE 2004

- **Support funding for community mental health services that addresses factors such as the number of individuals needing services, complexity of client needs, and local factors such as housing and labor markets that affect the cost of providing services. 2004**

## Housing

- **Support programs that promote individual choice of housing by enhancing the availability and affordability of alternatives throughout the region. Programs should: 1992, 2000**
  - A. Allow flexibility in single family zones to provide for accessory units, duplexes, cluster housing and row houses.
  - B. Encourage the production of accessory dwelling units by simplifying the process and providing workshops and demonstrations which assist and inform.
  - C. Encourage multi-unit buildings that are designed to accommodate families and that provide for health and safety and play areas.
  - D. Encourage housing arrangements and zoning that support the needs of changing family patterns and aging population.
  - E. Allow manufactured housing which meets local standards. LWE 2004
  - F. Support zoning variances for the establishment of mobile home courts. LWE 2004
- **Support low-income housing programs which meet the needs of**

**low-income persons, are well located with respect to schools, jobs, medical care, shopping and transportation, and contribute to the diversity of the neighborhood. 1978, 1982, 1994, 1995, 2000**

- A. Physical considerations
  1. Subsidized low-income housing should be designed and maintained to blend well with the neighborhood.
  2. Subsidized housing should not be identifiable as such.
  3. The housing should be well-constructed and designed for low maintenance.
- B. Locational considerations
  1. Concentration of subsidized units must be avoided.
  2. Regional considerations should be a factor.
  3. The impact of housing patterns on the diversity of the neighborhood should be given serious consideration.
  4. Informed community participation in the planning process is essential to increase neighborhood acceptance.
- **Support programs to aid homeless families and single adults and to prevent homelessness. 1995**

**Programs should:**

  - A. Ensure accessibility of services for homeless people by providing and publicizing a central clearinghouse for referral to such services.
  - B. Increase outreach and engagement programs that serve homeless individuals with mental illness, chemical

addictions or dual diagnoses.  
1995, 2004

- C. Provide resources and support services to prevent homelessness.
- **Support the efforts of government at all levels to increase the supply of affordable housing through a variety of programs. 2000**
- **Support policies which increase the density and the supply of affordable housing and include: 2000**
  - A. Informed community participation in the planning process.
  - B. Support for tenant responsibility and participation in planning, management, and maintenance.
  - C. Projects which are small in scale, diverse in population, well-managed, and in keeping with the character of the neighborhood.
  - D. Neighborhood amenities including parks and open space, schools, a good transportation plan, and access to services.

### Women

- **Support local government policies that enable women to make economic and personal decisions for themselves and their families, and that: 1981, 1993, 1994**
  - A. Encourage availability and quality of child care programs by government and the private sector.
  - E. Ensure protection from domestic violence. 1994
    - 2. Support public funding of programs:

- a. To reach out to victims of domestic violence.
- b. To provide protection and assistance.
- c. To assure access to the courts.
- d. For rehabilitation.

### Teens

- **Support prevention and intervention programs to overcome problems of violence, suicide, homelessness, and family dysfunction. 1995**
  - D. Criteria for support of public funding for teen programs should include:
    - 1. Promotion of equality of opportunity and diversity
    - 2. Serving a prevention and/or intervention purpose.
    - 3. Evaluating for effectiveness.
    - 4. Reflecting the needs of the neighborhood and/or specific special populations.
  - E. There should be cooperation and collaboration between public and private agencies to provide services for teens. Government agencies should be encouraged to contract with private agencies to provide services for teens.
  - F. Criteria for contracting with private agencies should include:
    - 1. Oversight and periodic evaluation by the appropriate government agency.
    - 2. Non-discrimination policies consistent with those required of government agencies.

## Children

- **Support measures to assure that children have adequate food, clothing, education, and medical care, and a safe home environment free from abuse and neglect. While primary responsibility rests with the family, the community must provide the support if the family does not. 1985, 2003**

## Drug Abuse and the Community

- **Support measures to expand and fund drug abuse prevention education and drug abuse treatment programs, as a means to reduce the demand for drugs. Measures should include: 1992**
  - C. Provision of integrated services as appropriate, including long-term treatment, counseling and mental health services, to all drug abusers and to meet the needs of individuals with co-occurring disorders. 1992, 2004

5. Create desirable high density areas.
  6. Ensure adequate infrastructure.
  7. Preserve open spaces in both urban and rural areas.
  8. Ensure neighborhood and community participation in the planning and design process.
- B. Support the following concepts: 1994
1. Urban Villages.
  2. Sustainability.

## LAND USE

### Neighborhoods

- **Support density that is well planned, respects neighborhoods, facilitates public transportation, is environmentally sensitive and complies with growth management open space goals. 1992, 1994**
  - A. Suggested guidelines for density:
    1. Preserve, maintain, and enhance the character of urban areas.
    2. Protect environmentally critical areas and other types of open space.
    3. Support transportation goals.
    4. Provide access to jobs.

In 2007, League of Women Voters of Seattle-King County (LWV-SKC) published a study on homelessness titled “Ending Homelessness in King County.” The report gave an overview of the issue and detailed various strategies including the Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness in King County. The 2007 study did not result in the adoption of any new public policy positions by the LWV-SKC but did inspire a letter to the Director of the Committee to End Homelessness in King County in support of the Ten-Year Plan, which was set into motion in 2005.<sup>2</sup> Fifteen years later, homelessness is still one of the most pressing issues facing Seattle and King County as a whole. The following is an update on the statistics associated with homelessness in King County, an in-depth look at risk factors, an explanation of the organizations and processes involved, and recommendations for moving forward.

## Relevant Statistics

The Point-in-Time (PIT) Count is an annual requirement set forth by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that is conducted by All Home, Seattle/King County’s Continuum of Care (CoC)<sup>3</sup>.

The general street count takes place between 2:00 am and 6:00 am. The unaccompanied youth and young adult count and survey takes place on the day prior to the general street count, and the sheltered count takes place on the evening prior to the general street count. The general street count is then followed-up with a survey in the weeks after. The counts are generally considered to be an underestimate. Also, it is important to note that the count does not capture the total

number of individuals who experience homelessness in a given calendar year, which is thought to be two-to-three times higher than the number provided by the PIT Count<sup>3</sup>. Because of this, comparisons of data from years prior as though they display a trend using continuous data should be scrutinized, due to the discrete nature of the available data.

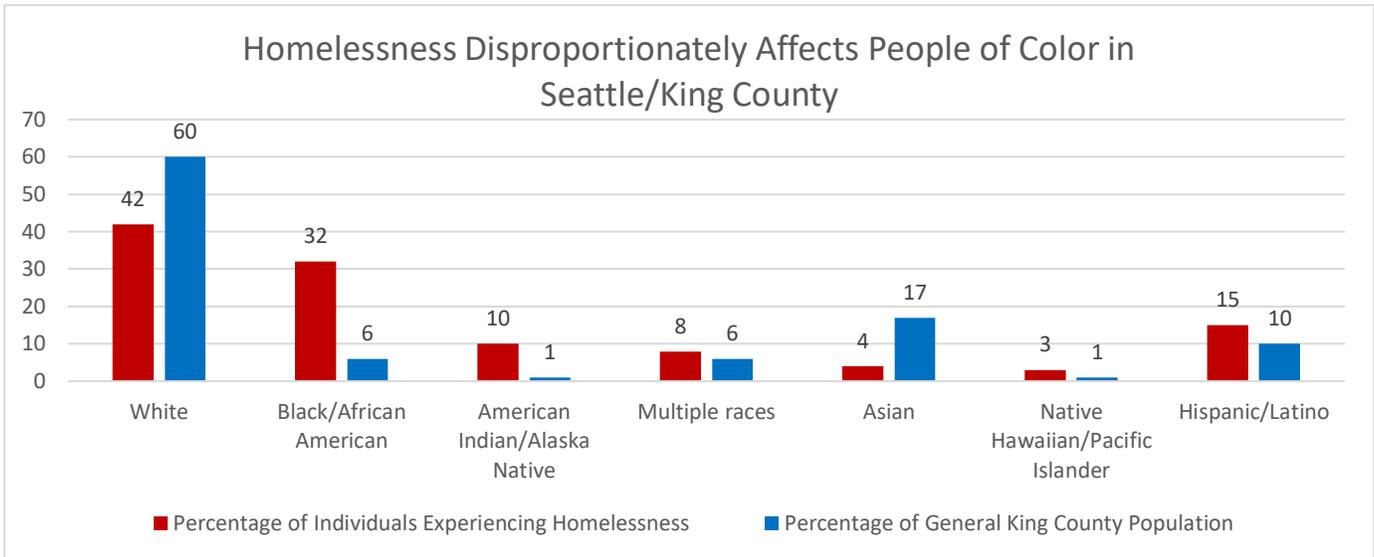
## The Count

According to the 2019 general street count, 11,199 people were experiencing homelessness on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Approximately 47% of these individuals were unsheltered, meaning that they were “sleeping on the streets, on public transit, in abandoned buildings, public facilities, storage structures, vehicles, encampments, or any other place unfit for human habitation.”<sup>3</sup>

Of the unsheltered population, 68% were residing in Seattle, and 21% were residing in the Southwest region. A detailed breakdown of the proportion of unsheltered individuals in each region can be found in Table 1<sup>3</sup>.

Region	Proportion of unsheltered pop.
Seattle	68%
Southwest	21%
East County	6%
North County	2%
Northeast County	2%
Southeast County	1%

**Table 1.** Proportions of unsheltered individuals experiencing homelessness by geographical region<sup>3</sup>.



**Figure 1.** Homelessness disproportionately affects people of color in Seattle/King County<sup>3</sup>.

Of those experiencing homelessness, approximately 78% were single adults or members of adult households with no children. Approximately 21% were part of a family that included at least one adult and one child. Less than 1% were unaccompanied minors<sup>3</sup>.

Most of the individuals experiencing homelessness were people of color. Comparisons between the proportions of each race or ethnicity in the population of individuals experiencing homelessness, as compared to the corresponding proportion of individuals in the general King County population are illustrated in Figure 1<sup>3</sup>.

## The Survey

The PIT follow-up survey sampled 1,171 individuals in the weeks following the general street count. Of those surveyed, 81% were adults over the age of 24. 18% were young adults between the ages of 18

and 24, and 1% were children under the age of 18. 53% identified as male and 38% as female, while 3% identified as transgender, and 5% identified with another gender<sup>3</sup>.

Approximately 4.8% of the general population living in the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue region identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, according to a 2015 Gallup U.S. Daily survey. However, 34% of the unaccompanied youth and young adults under 25 and 20% of all others surveyed in 2019 identified as LGBTQ+<sup>3</sup>.

Of those surveyed, 43% identified as White, 24% identified as Black or African American, 15% identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, 4% identified as Asian, 4% identified as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 9% identified with more than one race. 15% identified as Hispanic or Latino<sup>3</sup>.

Many individuals experiencing homelessness who were surveyed also identified as living with at least one health condition (64%). A detailed breakdown of reported health conditions can be found in Table 2<sup>3</sup>.

Health Condition	Percentage
Psychiatric or emotional conditions	36%
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	35%
Drug or alcohol abuse	32%
Chronic health problems	27%
Physical disability	23%
Intellectual disability or memory impairment	13%
Traumatic Brain Injury	12%
AIDS/HIV-related condition	4%

**Table 2.** Percentages of reported health conditions among those who reported at least one health condition<sup>3</sup>.

Additionally, 37% reported that they were living with a health condition that was disabling, meaning that it may prevent them from holding employment or taking care of themselves. Only 6.4% of the King County population under 65 years of age is estimated to be living with a disability, which means that people with disabilities are disproportionately represented among people experiencing homelessness<sup>3</sup>.

Of those surveyed, 70% reported having experienced homelessness at least one other time before the current period of homelessness, and 61% reported that the duration of their current period of homelessness was at least one year<sup>3</sup>.

Of those surveyed, 24% reported job loss as the primary reason for their current period of homelessness. Other top primary reasons can be found in Table 3<sup>3</sup>.

Primary reason	Percentage
Job loss	24%
Alcohol or drug use	16%
Eviction	15%
Divorce/separation/break-up	9%
Could not afford rent increase	8%
Argument with friend/family member which led to that person asking them to leave	7%
Incarceration	6%
Mental health issues	6%
Family/domestic violence	6%

**Table 3.** Top reported primary reasons for homelessness<sup>3</sup>.

Three-quarters of those surveyed reported that rental assistance and an increase in affordable housing would help allow them to secure permanent housing. Other top responses included employment or increased income, money for moving costs, case management, and help clearing credit<sup>3</sup>.

Most individuals surveyed reported that they are able to make use of the local services available to them (90%). However, most respondents also indicated barriers to accessing these services (76%). The most used services can be found in Table 4, and the most frequently reported barriers to accessing services can be found in Table 5<sup>3</sup>.

Services Used	Percentage
Free meals	57%
Bus passes	42%
Emergency shelter	39%
Hygiene services	36%
Day shelter services	33%
Health services	31%
Mental health services	19%

**Table 4.** Top reported services used<sup>3</sup>.

Barrier	Percentage
Lack of transportation	28%
Not knowing where to go for help	28%
Not having identification/documents	27%
Not qualifying for the service they wanted	20%
Never hearing back after having applied for services	17%
Not following through or returning for services	17%

**Table 5.** Top reported barriers to accessing services<sup>3</sup>.

Surveyed individuals who indicated that they do not use any type of shelter services most frequently cited safety (44%), bugs (41%), and germs (39%) as their reason for not making use of these services<sup>3</sup>.

## Subpopulations

In “Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness,” the federal government outlined four key subpopulations within the population of individuals experiencing homelessness. The subpopulations are: 1) individuals experiencing chronic homelessness, 2) veterans, 3) families with children, and 4) unaccompanied youth and young adults. Statistics associated with these subpopulations are estimates with confidence intervals that range from 6.01% to 12.15%, depending on the group<sup>3</sup>.

### Chronic Homelessness

An individual who is experiencing chronic homelessness is defined as a person who has a disabling condition *and* either 1) has been experiencing homelessness continuously for at least one year or 2) has experienced homelessness for a total of one year over the course of at least four separate periods within three years<sup>3</sup>.

Approximately 2,213 individuals were experiencing chronic homelessness at the time of the 2019 count, and approximately 41% of these individuals were unsheltered<sup>3</sup>.

Approximately 55% identified as male, 40% as female, 2% as transgender, and 3% as gender non-conforming<sup>3</sup>.

Approximately 49% identified as White, 16% as American Indian or Alaska Native, 12% as Black or African American, 8% as multiple races, 2% as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 1% as Asian. Additionally, 11% identified their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino<sup>3</sup>.

Approximately 92% of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness were in adult-only households, and 8% were in families with children. Less than 1% of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness were unaccompanied minors<sup>3</sup>.

### ***Veterans***

Approximately 830 veterans were experiencing homelessness on the night of the 2019 count. Of these, approximately 56% were unsheltered<sup>3</sup>.

Approximately 74% identified as male, 18% as female, 6% as transgender, and 2% with another gender<sup>3</sup>.

Approximately 48% identified as White, 23% as Black or African American, 11% as multiple races, 10% as American Indian or Alaska Native, 5% as Asian, and 3% as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. Additionally, 22% identified their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino<sup>3</sup>.

Approximately 98% were in households without children, and 19% were experiencing chronic homelessness<sup>3</sup>.

### ***Families with Children***

Approximately 2,451 individuals experiencing homelessness on the night of the 2019 count were members of families with children. These individuals comprised approximately 763 families. Of these, approximately 97% were sheltered<sup>3</sup>.

Approximately 62% identified as female and 38% as male<sup>3</sup>.

Approximately 55% identified as Black or African American, 22% as White, 13% as

multiple races, 5% as Asian, 3% as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 2% as American Indian or Alaska Native. Additionally, 15% identified their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino<sup>3</sup>.

Approximately 5% were experiencing chronic homelessness<sup>3</sup>.

### ***Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults***

Approximately 1,089 individuals experiencing homelessness at the time of the 2019 count were youth under the age of 18 or young adults between the ages of 18 and 24. Of these, 68% were unsheltered<sup>3</sup>.

Approximately 60% identified as male, 31% as female, 3% as transgender, and 6% another gender<sup>3</sup>.

Approximately 38% identified as White, 34% as Black or African American, 12% as multiple races, 10% as American Indian or Alaska Native, 3% as Asian, and 3% as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. Additionally, 20% identified their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino<sup>3</sup>.

Approximately 4% were experiencing chronic homelessness<sup>3</sup>.

## Risk Factors for Homelessness

There are several factors at play that have been demonstrated to be associated with an increased risk of experiencing homelessness. A few of these risk factors were covered above such as the disparities that exist for people of color and members of the LGBTQ+ community and the disproportionate representation in the population of those experiencing homelessness of individuals living with physical or mental disabilities<sup>3</sup>. Other challenges that have been identified as potentially increasing the likelihood of homelessness include housing affordability, cost of childcare, wages, tax policy, zoning laws, eviction, domestic violence, and incarceration.

## Cost of Living

According to the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), a single adult in King County needs to make approximately \$43,573 annually, or \$20.95 per hour while working full time, in order to afford their basic living expenses. An adult with one child needs to make approximately \$71,591 annually, or \$34.42 per hour while working full time<sup>4</sup>. However, the minimum wage in King County in 2020 is considerably less than this.

## Childcare

The U.S. government defines “affordable” childcare as costing no more than 7% of a household’s income. However, many families often pay much more than this. Nationally, families below the federal poverty level (FPL) contribute closer to 30% of their income to childcare<sup>5-6</sup>.

The statewide median monthly cost of childcare through a childcare center in 2018 for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers was \$1135, \$966, and \$867, respectively. The cost of childcare has been steadily increasing, but the rate at which the government reimburses childcare centers that accept families who use subsidized childcare has not kept pace. Because of this, low-income families may find it difficult to find a childcare center that will allow them to use assistance at all. In fact, approximately only 1 of every 6 children who are eligible for assistance actually receives it<sup>5-6</sup>.

## Tax Policy

Because Washington has no personal income tax, the state relies on levies and property taxes to raise revenue. More than 60% of Washington’s tax base comes from sales and excise taxes, which means that the tax burden inherently falls more heavily on households that bring in less income. The lowest 20% of income earners, those who make less than \$24,000 annually, contribute approximately 17.8% of their income to state and local taxes, while the top 20% of income earners, those who make at least \$116,300 annually, contribute between 7.1% and 3.0% of their income. Households in the top 1% of income earners, those who make more than \$545,900 annually, are at the low end of the aforementioned range, contributing 3% of their income to state and local taxes<sup>7</sup>.

Property taxes present another issue in that individuals who own a home and have a fixed income may be priced out of their home if the property taxes increase beyond their ability to pay. The increase in property tax also gets passed on to renters, as

landlords must increase the cost of rent to afford the increase in property tax. Some people may be eligible for property tax exemptions which allow them to freeze the taxable value of their property at the time of their application. Some property owners may also be eligible for a reduction in the taxable value of their property, in addition to the freeze<sup>8</sup>.

## Zoning Laws

In Seattle, approximately 75% of all land that can be used for residential purposes is currently zoned for single family housing. As the population has grown, the demand for rental properties has increased the pressure to develop more housing. Most of this growth has taken place in a small proportion of Seattle. Between 2006 and 2017, 80% of the housing growth was taken on by “urban villages and centers,” while single family housing zones took on only approximately 6%. A small proportion of single family housing (20%) is rented, which means that most Seattle renters look for their housing in apartment buildings. Real estate developers are now required to set aside a certain proportion of each new commercial or multi-family residential building to be “affordable housing” but may instead choose to pay a fine to the city. This rule change went into effect in phases during 2019, and the specific requirements depend on the location and type of residence. The options available to renters are limited, and the market favors the developers<sup>9-11</sup>.

## Domestic Violence

Domestic violence has a strong association with homelessness. The 2019 PIT count notes that 7% of their survey respondents

reported that they were *currently* experiencing domestic violence. Additionally, surveyed individuals who were experiencing chronic homelessness were more than twice as likely than those experiencing non-chronic homelessness to report currently experiencing domestic violence. Families with children also reported higher rates of domestic violence than those without children (13% vs 6%) and were also more likely to report the domestic violence as the reason for their current period of homelessness (13% vs 5%)<sup>3</sup>.

New Beginnings, a local organization whose purpose is domestic violence survivor outreach, community education, & activism, reports that domestic violence is actually the leading cause of homelessness among women and children, noting that more than 80% of mothers with children who are experiencing homelessness are survivors of domestic violence. They also estimate that 63% of all women experiencing homelessness are survivors of domestic violence and that 16% of all individuals experiencing homelessness are survivors of domestic violence<sup>12</sup>.

## Eviction

According to a 2018 report by the Seattle Women’s Commission and the Housing Justice Project (HJP) of the King County Bar Association that studied 1,218 unlawful detainer cases (eviction proceedings) that took place in 2017, 86.5% of the filings were for nonpayment of rent and 52.3% of those nonpayment cases were for no more than one month of unpaid rent. Most of the time, tenants were required to pay attorney’s fees and court costs, and most

did not remain housed after the proceedings<sup>13</sup>.

Most of the evicted survey respondents reported that they went on to experience homelessness. Some (25%) reported being able to stay with family or friends, but 37.5% became unsheltered. 25% began living in a shelter or in transitional housing. Only 12.5% were able to find another apartment or home<sup>13</sup>.

## **Incarceration and Re-Entry**

Incarceration and homelessness are strongly associated. Individuals experiencing homelessness are approximately eleven times more likely to be incarcerated than the general population, and individuals who have previously been incarcerated are approximately four times more likely than the general population to experience homelessness. The primary offenses for which individuals experiencing homelessness are cited and arrested include sleeping in public, sitting and/or lying down, and loitering. The subsequent inability to pay for fines or legal fees or to appear in court can also lead to arrest and incarceration. This system is actually more costly to the taxpayer; research out of Portland State University found \$13 in savings in criminal justice system costs for every dollar invested for the purpose of helping those who are experiencing homelessness and are involved in the criminal justice system<sup>14</sup>.

Individuals who are experiencing homelessness at the time of their arrest are also significantly more likely to be living with a mental illness or a substance use disorder. According to the National Alliance

on Mental Illness (NAMI), two million individuals with a mental illness are jailed annually. In a survey of incarcerated individuals who had been experiencing homelessness at the time of their arrest, 40% reported that they had been taking a medication for their mental illness or had otherwise been using mental health services at that time<sup>14</sup>. Notably, this statistic does not account for individuals with undiagnosed and/or untreated mental illnesses.

Incarceration can make it even more difficult to obtain housing, even if the offense was minor and/or nonviolent. Housing authorities can reject an applicant's request for subsidized housing on the basis of their criminal history if they believe the person would "have a negative effect on others."<sup>14-15</sup> Additionally, a criminal history can also make it more difficult to obtain employment after incarceration<sup>14</sup>. According to the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), approximately 50,000 people exit the prison system and go directly to a homeless shelter each year<sup>14,16</sup>.

## **Mental Health**

According to the 2019 PIT count data, approximately 36% of survey respondents reported living with a psychiatric or emotional condition. Thirty-five percent reported living with PTSD, and 32% reported drug or alcohol abuse. These proportions were notably increased among survey respondents who were experiencing chronic homelessness: 64% reported drug or alcohol abuse, 61% reported a psychiatric or emotional condition, and 58% reported PTSD. However, it is crucial to note that this increase is at least partially

due to the requirement for an individual to have a disabling condition (which includes psychiatric conditions) in order to qualify as experiencing *chronic* homelessness<sup>3</sup>.

## The Response System

The response system is a decentralized collaboration between government agencies and non-profit organizations that includes services like subsidized housing, transitional housing, rapid re-housing, and shelters, among many others.

### Shelters

There are a number of different types of shelters included in the response system. Some shelters cater specifically to women, men, youth, families, or older adults. The shelters vary in the accommodations available, with some offering mats on the floor and others offering beds and allowing pets. Some shelters offer case management services in order to help with housing and other needs. Space is limited at each shelter<sup>17</sup>.

An interview with Sylvia Fuerstenberg, Executive Director of the now closed Peace for the Streets by Kids from the Streets (PSKS), revealed that contrary to reports that there has been a recent drop in youth homelessness, shelters are full every night, and there is no real way to obtain an accurate count. She noted that PSKS was a city-funded program that received 50-60% of its budget through the city and had to fundraise the rest on its own. Fuerstenberg also stressed that housing that young people can afford in Seattle is almost impossible to find<sup>18</sup>.

Individuals who identify as transgender may face unique challenges while interacting with the homelessness response system and are also significantly more likely to experience homelessness than the rest of the population. The National Transgender Discrimination Survey reported that one fifth of those surveyed reported having experienced homelessness. Transgender individuals may be denied entry into shelters based on their gender identity. The same survey found that 55% of those surveyed had experienced harassment while trying to access a shelter and that 22% had been sexually assaulted by another shelter resident or a staff member<sup>19</sup>.

### Housing

#### The Housing First philosophy

The USICH refers to the Housing First philosophy as a “proven method of ending all types of homelessness” and the “most effective approach to ending chronic homelessness.” The philosophy prioritizes getting individuals and families experiencing homelessness into housing first, regardless of their current income, sobriety, or criminal history. When paired with support services, this strategy leads to lower rates of return to homelessness, lower use of crisis services, and higher housing retention rates<sup>20</sup>. The idea is that once a person has a stable place to live, they have a much better chance of successfully dealing with any of the other factors that led to the loss of their housing.

#### Tiny House Villages

Tiny House Villages offer a unique solution for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. The Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI) is one of the largest

providers of the villages, in partnership with the City of Seattle, faith communities, and building trade organizations. Each house has electricity, heat, and a door that locks, and each village has restroom and kitchen facilities, along with onsite laundry and counseling services. Exit rates to permanent supportive housing are considerably higher for the Tiny House Villages (37%) than for basic shelters (4%) or enhanced shelters (23%). However, it can often be difficult to find land and funding for Tiny House Villages, and some neighborhoods have voiced opposition to the presence of the villages in their community<sup>21-22</sup>.

### **Transitional housing**

Transitional housing is a type of temporary housing that is intended to provide individuals and families with the services they need to move into permanent housing. Exit rates to permanent housing are considerably higher for transitional housing (73%) than for basic shelters (4%) or enhanced shelters (23%)<sup>17,22</sup>.

### **Rapid re-housing**

Rapid re-housing (RRH) ties into the Housing First philosophy by placing individuals and families in housing, with no requirement that they first attain employment or sobriety. Financial assistance and case management are also part of this strategy. According to the HUD, RRH costs less than both shelters and transitional housing and leads to shorter periods of homelessness than with shelters and transitional housing. RRH has the best exit rate to permanent housing of any strategy (aside from prevention) at 81%<sup>22-25</sup>.

### **Affordable housing**

Affordable housing is considered to be housing that costs no more than 30% of a household's income. If a household must spend more than 30% of their income on their housing, they are considered "cost burdened." Households that make less than 80% of the area median income (AMI) are eligible for subsidized housing in King County, and households that bring in less than 30% of the AMI are prioritized. However, the King County Housing Authority (KCHA) also mandates that in order to qualify, the applicant must either have children under the age of 18, be at least 55 years old, or be disabled<sup>26</sup>.

### **Permanent supportive housing**

Permanent supportive housing (PSH) is affordable housing with rental assistance and other services. Placement into PSH is an overall goal of the response system<sup>17</sup>.

### **King County Regional Homelessness Authority**

The Regional Homelessness Authority is an upcoming change to the system which was conceived in order to address what has been identified as "well-documented fragmentation." The organization will be a collaborative effort between the City and the County in order to better respond to the crisis. Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan and King County Executive Dow Constantine submitted their proposal for the new collaborative response system to the City Council and County Council in September 2019. The idea was later formally accepted in December 2019. The purpose of the Regional Homelessness Authority is to unify what has been largely characterized as a decentralized response system with

fragmented funding. The Authority is planned to have an Implementation Board and a Governance Board, both of which are required to have three members with lived experiences of homelessness. They intend to devise a Five Year Plan and to have the existing Continuum of Care Board serve as an Advisory Committee<sup>27-29</sup>.

## **Moving Forward**

Homelessness is a complex, multifaceted issue, and the best strategy for facing it is to listen to the voices of those who have experienced it firsthand. The factors that lead to someone losing their housing may be entirely different from one person to the next, which means that strategies are the

most efficient when they prioritize the needs of the individual rather than providing one-size-fits-all solutions.

Several of the “risk factors” identified above are woven into the fabric of current policies and systems, and those who propose prevention strategies must be willing to consider that several large-scale systems may have to be overhauled in order to legitimately address the root causes of the crisis at hand. A solution that provides more housing but does not address what leads to the inability to afford housing is not a solution.

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