

# Coalition on Homelessness, San Francisco

## Fact Sheet on Homelessness

### **Homelessness is not a lifestyle choice—it is the result of extreme poverty.**

- Between 1976 and 2001, the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) department's total budget has dropped by more than \$45 billion per year, with the biggest drop occurring between 1980 and 1983 (*National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2001*). The funding has stayed relatively flat since.
- The average rent in San Francisco for a studio apartment has now reached \$2,200, far exceeding a service sector employee's paycheck (\$10/hour gross or \$1,495 /month net) and more than 3.5 times a monthly public assistance check (\$608 for family of three).
- People who cannot afford market rents turn to subsidized housing for help. In San Francisco, there are 8,000 households on the waitlist for public housing..

### **How many people are homeless and who are they?**

- The January 2015 the San Francisco homeless count found 6,686 homeless people. This is considered an undercount, as families and youth are underrepresented. (*2015 San Francisco Homeless Count and Survey*)
- 30% of survey respondents were experiencing homelessness for the first time. The overwhelming majority became homeless as San Franciscans (71%). (*2015 San Francisco Homeless Count and Survey*).
- More than two-thirds (67%) of all survey respondents said they had a disabling health condition in 2015. (*2015 San Francisco Homeless Count and Survey*).
- In San Francisco, about 40% of the homeless population are members of homeless families (*First Five*). There are currently over 3,300 homeless children living in intact families in SF, this includes 2,352 homeless students enrolled in San Francisco Unified School District, up from 844 in 2005.
- At one San Francisco youth program, they have contact with over 3,000 homeless youth in San Francisco a year. (*Larkin Street Annual Report 2014*)

### **How is Homeless People's Health Affected?**

- Homelessness is an independent risk factor for a number of illnesses, and homeless people themselves are susceptible to increased health problems due to high stress, sleep deprivation, unsanitary surroundings, lack of access to hygiene facilities and a myriad of other symptoms inherent with living without stable housing. Subsequently they are 3 to 4 times more likely to die prematurely than their housed counterparts.
- Sleep deprivation impairs cognitive processes and puts you at risk for heart disease, heart attack, heart failure, irregular heartbeat, high blood pressure, Stroke and Diabetes. Homeless people suffer from sleep deprivation absent a right to rest, they are woken frequently by police and security.
- A recent study by UCSF found that homeless people are fully 25 years older in all areas of health than their calendar age.

## **How does mental illness and/or addiction factor in?**

- In San Francisco, there are typically 500 people on the waitlist for methadone and substance abuse residential treatment
- San Francisco once had a robust mental health system, but realignment, recession era cuts and huge losses to board and care facilities have left our mental health system nowhere near the capacity that is needed to serve the population.
- Individuals suffering from mental illness and addiction disorders are the most visible portion of the population. However, 35% of the homeless people in San Francisco have a mental illness. 37% have a substance abuse problem. (*2015 San Francisco Homeless Count and Survey*).
- Many individuals with mental illnesses self-medicate with drugs and alcohol while experiencing the trauma of being without a home; this leads to addiction disorders.

## **Human rights and homelessness**

- According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, everyone has a right to an adequate standard of living, including housing. While the United States touts human rights to other countries, in the United States, 3.5 million people experience the trauma of homelessness each year.
- Last year, San Francisco cited homeless people for sleeping, lying or resting 11,000 times. Homeless people received more than 27,000 Quality of Life citations, and that number appears to be increasing by 30% by the end of this year. (SFPD data, 2015) Each citation carries a fine of more than \$76. An unpaid or unresolved ticket goes to warrant in 21 days, and the fine doubles. Accumulated warrants can result in incarceration, destroyed credit, and denial of affordable housing.
- According to the Budget Legislative Analyst Office, we are spending \$20.7 million on criminalizing homeless people without any positive outcomes. That money is equivalent to the cost of 1,300 housing subsidies.

## **What about San Francisco's shelter system?**

- There are approximately 1,300 beds in shelters for adults and families – or less than 1 bed for every five homeless people.
- There are more than 700 single adults, and over 200 families waiting for 90 – 120 day shelter beds in SF.

## **How is the Coalition on Homelessness Responding?**

*The Coalition has been busy organizing homeless people to fight for justice for over twenty five years. During that time, we have forced the city to respond to this crisis by creating housing, opening new substance abuse treatment programs, transforming the mental health system and creating jobs for homeless people. We have passed numerous pieces of legislation that ensures the human rights of homeless people are protected, and we have successfully beat back policies that would harm the population. We have established ourselves as a strong force to be reckoned with – a group who does not compromise homeless people's lives, and never gives up fighting for our rights. Check out our website or call us for ways to join the struggle.*