

# Coalition on Homelessness, San Francisco

## Fact Sheet on Homelessness

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

- There have been two episodes of mass homelessness in the United States. The first after the great depression was solved by guaranteeing and investing in housing affordable to our poorest people. That investment has since been gutted, leading to the modern period of mass homelessness.
- 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 of an over 80% reduction occurring between 1980 and 1983 (*National Low- Income Housing Coalition, 2001*).
- HUD funding stayed flat from 2001 until 2017, when President Trump enacted a budget cut of approximately 13.2% for the next fiscal year (*Office of Management and Budget, 2019*). Funding has continued to decrease since, with a notable drop of 18.3% between the enacted 2019 budget and the proposed 2020 budget (*Office of Management and Budget, 2019*).
- The average rent in San Francisco for a 1 bedroom apartment has now reached \$2,900, exceeding a service sector employee 's paycheck and more than 3 times a monthly public assistance check. (Zumper 3/22)
- In San Francisco, there are 8,000 homeless households on the waitlist for public housing.

### **Intersections of Oppression: How many people are homeless and who are they?**

- The February 2022 San Francisco Point-In-Time count found 7,754 homeless people. The city estimates that over the course of the year over 20,000 people experience homelessness. (*2022 San Francisco Homeless Count and Survey*).
- 23% of survey respondents were experiencing homelessness for the first time. The overwhelming majority became homeless as San Franciscans (71%) with 35% having lived in San Francisco for 10 or more years (*2022 San Francisco Homeless Count and Survey*).
- Sixty percent (60%) of respondents reported living with one or more health conditions. (*2022 San Francisco Homeless Count and Survey*).
- 40% of children living below the poverty line in San Francisco are homeless. There were approximately 2,944 homeless children living in intact families in SF over the course of 2021, this includes 2,061 homeless students enrolled in San Francisco Unified School District. (*2022 San Francisco Homeless Count and Survey, 2021 SFUSD, extrapolation for 30% 0-5 aged children*)
- The majority of the homeless population are people of color, African American make up (35%), while making up 6% of the city population. In 2022, there was a 55% increase in Latinos experiencing homelessness compared to 2019. (*2022 San Francisco Homeless Count and Survey*).
- 28% of the homeless population identify as LGBTQ while 46% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ+ (*2022 San Francisco Homeless Count and Survey*).

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

- A recent study by UCSF found that homeless people are a full 25 years older than their calendar age in all areas of health and regularly experience geriatric symptoms at anomalously early ages (*Brown et al. 2016*).
- 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 to living without stable housing. Sleep deprivation impairs cognitive processes and puts one at risk for heart disease, heart attack, heart failure, irregular heartbeat, high blood pressure, strokes and diabetes.

*The Coalition on Homelessness is committed to ending homelessness through organizing homeless people, front line service providers and allies while protecting the human rights of those forced to remain on the streets.*

415-346-3740 • 280 Turk Street, SF, CA 94102 • [www.cohsf.org](http://www.cohsf.org)

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

- Individuals suffering from mental illness and addiction disorders are the most visible portion of the population. However, these individuals typically make up a minority of the population entering into homelessness. Only 12% stated alcohol or drug use was a primary cause of homelessness, and only 7% stated mental health issues were a primary cause of homelessness. (*2022 San Francisco Homeless Count and Survey*).
- Homelessness leads to and exacerbates substance use problems, not the other way around. Many individuals living with mental illness self-medicate with drugs and alcohol as a result of the trauma of being without a home. : In the last Point in Time count, 36% of individuals experiencing homelessness in San Francisco reported having a psychiatric or emotional condition, much higher than reported in causes of homelessness.
- Substance use issues increased dramatically during the despair of the pandemic with the number reporting a substance use issue increasing from 42% in 2019 to 52% in 2022. (*2022 San Francisco Homeless Count and Survey*) In addition fatal overdoses skyrocketed from 259 in 2018 to 641 in 2021 and homeless deaths doubling. (*SF Chronicle 8/9/22*)
- 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.

### **Human rights and homelessness**

- The city's response to homelessness is often to shuffle and forcibly displace unhoused people from block to block without any opportunity to get off the streets or to have anywhere to go. According to a recent survey by Latino Task Force, 64% of survey respondents had been displaced without an offer of anywhere to go, 75% had their property taken and destroyed by the city.
- 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 Can We Do to Address Homelessness in San Francisco?**

- The city was spending less than 3% of its budget on homelessness, but we brought a measure in 2018 called Our City, Our Home to the ballot and won, doubling the investment to now be about 6% of the city budget. This will house about four thousand households and prevent homelessness for thousands more. However, it was held up in court, and the money is being rolled out now.
- While Prop C has led to 25% more shelter beds and housing units so far, an estimated 4 households become homeless for every homeless household housed. About 23 housing units turnover each week.
- The Coalition on Homelessness is calling on the city, state and federal government to halt the human rights abuses of those forced to remain on the streets, while expanding dignified options for unhoused communities to leave homelessness behind.
  - This requires permanent and robust investments in prevention, such as rental assistance to stop people from losing their homes when they lose work, fall behind on rent or become ill. This also requires investing in jobs programs that ensure access to living wage jobs for the mostly black and brown impoverished members of our community.
  - This also requires a very deep investment in housing – housing for extremely low income people, for folks who need support services in their housing and housing for people who have a much higher level of need such as someone to provide meals.
  - Shelters are important and available on demand, but stays should be brief and lead to housing.
  - If an individual needs substance abuse and/or mental health treatment, it should be available on demand.

[Sign up for our Action Alerts](#) on our website to find out how to work to end homelessness in SF!