

THE PRIMARY CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS TO HOMELESSNESS



Homelessness is one of our country's most urgent, tragic and solvable crises. In every community across the nation, the affordable housing crisis is putting America's lowest-income seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, veterans, and other individuals at risk of evictions, and in worst cases, homelessness. In the wealthiest nation on earth, more than half a million people experience homelessness on any given night. To end homelessness once and for all, federal, state, and local governments must invest in proven solutions at the scale necessary.

THE CAUSE OF HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness and housing poverty is a crisis in many communities – one that demands urgent action at the federal, state and local level. The main reason people become homeless is because they cannot find housing they can afford. Until we end the affordable housing crisis for America's poorest households, even the best efforts to end homelessness will fall short.

Other factors that contribute to homelessness include chronic health conditions, domestic violence, and systemic inequality.

- At least [568,000 people experience homelessness](#) in America on any given night. Many more are on the cusp – living doubled or tripled up and paying far too much of their income to keep a roof over their heads.
- According to NLIHC's [The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes](#), there is a national shortage of 7 million rental homes affordable and available to America's 11 million lowest-income households. For every 10 of the lowest income renters, there are fewer than 4 affordable homes available to them.
- Overall, 71% of extremely low-income people pay at least half of their limited incomes on rent, leaving few resources to put groceries on the table, cover medical costs, or meet their other basic needs. These households are at a higher risk for evictions and, in worst cases, homelessness, when faced with an unexpected financial shock.
- Homelessness disproportionately impacts people of color. African-American households make up 13% of the country's population, but represent 40% of people experiencing homelessness. Racial justice cannot be meaningfully realized in America without addressing homelessness.
- Despite the clear need, [three in four](#) households eligible for housing assistance are turned away due to the lack of funding.

THE SOLUTION TO HOMELESSNESS

The primary solution to homelessness is affordable and accessible homes, coupled with supportive services to help individuals address other challenges. To end homelessness throughout the country, our nation must significantly expand investments to make homes affordable for people with the lowest incomes.

Specifically, policymakers should:

- **Preserve and build deeply affordable homes.** Ending the affordable housing crisis requires a major investment in developing homes affordable to the lowest-income people through the national Housing Trust Fund. The underlying cause of the affordable housing crisis is the severe lack of affordable rental

homes for America's lowest-income households – the only segment of the population for which there is an absolute shortage of affordable and available homes. Because the private sector cannot on its own build or maintain homes at a price these families can afford, the federal government must play a leading role. Congress should also preserve our nation's existing affordable housing infrastructure, including public housing.

- **Provide rental assistance.** Despite the growing gap between wages and housing costs, only one in four families gets the housing assistance it needs because of chronic underfunding. Policymakers should call for a major expansion of Housing Choice Vouchers and/or the creation of a targeted renters' tax credit to help families keep more of their incomes for other essentials like food, medicine, education, and transportation.
- **Prevent families from facing evictions and homelessness.** The country needs a National Housing Stabilization Fund, a new national program to help prevent evictions and, in worst cases, homelessness. The program could provide temporary financial assistance to help cover rent for households experiencing unexpected economic shocks (e.g., loss of work hours, unreimbursed medical bills, a broken-down car).
- **Protect renters from discrimination and abuse.** Policymakers should support a broad array of renter protections, including federal legislation to ban housing discrimination on the basis of source of income, gender identity, and sexual orientation, and increased enforcement of existing fair housing laws, including state and local obligations to affirmatively further fair housing. Congress should also support a national right to counsel for renters facing eviction.

HARMFUL TRUMP ADMINISTRATION ACTIONS ON HOMELESSNESS

The Trump administration has proven that it fundamentally does not understand the causes or solutions to homelessness and housing poverty. None of the policy changes put forward by the Trump administration would significantly reduce homelessness and many of these proposals would, in fact, make the homelessness crisis worse.

President Trump has proposed to:

- **Dramatically cut or eliminate federal programs that provide affordable, accessible homes to the lowest-income people at the greatest risk of evictions and homelessness.** In his fiscal year [2018](#), [2019](#), and [2020 budget requests](#), President Trump proposed to slash funding for HUD programs by up to 18%.
- **Triple rents for the lowest-income renters and raise rents for all other residents of HUD-subsidized homes.** HUD Secretary Ben Carson released in 2018 [draft legislation](#) with punitive measures that would jeopardize family stability – increasing the financial burdens families face through higher rents and ending supports to help cover the cost of basic utilities, like water and heat.
- **Force mixed-status immigrant families, including 55,000 American children, to separate or face eviction from federally assisted housing.** HUD's [proposed rule](#) would force families of mixed immigration status to break up to receive housing assistance, forego the assistance altogether, or face eviction from their home.
- **Allow shelters to refuse to serve transgender and other LBGTO people experiencing homelessness.** With its proposal to weaken the agency's [Equal Access rule](#), HUD is sanctioning discrimination and abandoning its mission to end homelessness and ensure vulnerable people have safe and decent homes.
- **Discourage immigrants from accessing housing programs.** The administration's [Public Charge](#) will have a chilling effect, impacting hundreds of thousands of hardworking immigrant households that depend on these programs for survival.

- **Incentivize local governments to eliminate restrictive zoning policies.** Reducing zoning and land use restrictions could result in more housing affordable to middle class renters, but it would do little to address homelessness. This is because the private sector is unable to build and maintain housing affordable to America's lowest-income households without federal subsidies. Local zoning and land use regulations is a red herring, used by the Trump administration to justify its proposed cuts to federal housing investments.

For more information, contact Sarah Saadian, NLIHC Vice President of Public Policy at ssaadian@nlihc.org.