

Housing is a Human Right: End Homelessness in America

Homelessness is a national crisis. To end it, we must ensure housing for all homeless people. Because housing is a basic human right— not a privilege.

By the Numbers

- In 2017, [over 1.4 million people](#) stayed in shelters at some point that year—and this doesn't even include those in domestic violence shelters.
- According to the [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development](#), which admits this is an [undercount](#), *on a single night* in 2018:
 - Over 553,000 people were sleeping in shelters, transitional housing, or public places;
 - Only 286,000 emergency shelter beds were available;
 - 35% of people experiencing homelessness unsheltered.
- According to the U.S. Department of Education, almost [1.4 million school children were homeless](#) during the 2016-2017 school year. In 2018, people in families with children were [one-third \(33%\) of the total homeless population](#).
- [Over 4.4 million poor people were doubled up](#) in 2017, sleeping on the floors or couches of family or friends because they could not afford their own housing--25% higher than before the 2007 recession.
- Due to America's long history of [systemic race discrimination](#), racial minorities experience homelessness at disproportionate rates: African Americans make up [13% of the U.S. population](#), [21% of the poverty population](#), and [40% of the homeless population](#).

Lack of affordable housing and insufficient income are the leading causes of homelessness.

- Between 1990 and 2016, the [national median rent rose 20 percent faster](#) than overall inflation; the median home price rose 41 percent faster as well.
- Nationally, [close to half of renters households are cost-burdened](#) (paying more than 30% of their income on housing); as are one-quarter of homeowners.
- In 2016, [45 percent of African-American-led renter households were cost-burdened](#), compared with 27 percent of white households.
- Close to [90% of new apartment construction](#) in 2017 and 2018 was luxury units.
- In 2017, the U.S. had a [shortage of 7.4 million affordable rental homes](#) for extremely-low income renter households; only 37 affordable units were available for every 100 in need.
- [More than nine million ELI renters](#) in 2017 spent more than half their income on housing and utilities, leaving little for food, medicine, transportation, or childcare.



Ask the candidates,

***“Do you believe housing is a human right?
What are your plans to end homelessness
and create affordable housing in America?”***

More people are living in public places—and many cities are responding by criminalizing homeless people instead of offering housing and support.

- [Reports of homeless encampments grew](#) 1,342% between 2007 and 2017.
- Ordinances [criminalizing](#) camping increased by 69%, sleeping in public by 31%, sitting and lying in public by 52%, and living in vehicles by 143% between 2006 and 2016.
- These harms are even more pronounced for African-Americans, who are [disproportionately affected](#) at every stage in the criminal justice system.

We can end homelessness in America by recognizing housing as a human right.

- Recent polling indicates that [over 80% of the public](#) believes that ensuring everyone has a safe, decent, affordable place to live should be a top national priority and [three-quarters believe that housing is a human right](#).
- Investing in housing saves money: [studies](#) show it is less expensive than criminalization and even shelter.
- [Treating housing as a right](#) does not mean a single-family home for every American, it means adopting policies that ensure adequate, affordable for all, such as:

Increasing Access to Affordable Housing

- Fund housing assistance so that all who need it receive it through decent public housing, vouchers, and renters' tax credits.
- Raise the federal minimum wage to a living wage, or "housing wage," so working people can afford housing, including indexing it locally to actual housing costs.
- Index Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance payments to local housing costs so that those unable to work can afford housing.

- Ensure a sufficient supply of affordable housing by funding the National Housing Trust Fund and Low-Income Housing Tax Credits.
- Strengthen Title V of the McKinney-Vento Act to make more vacant federal properties available to homeless service providers at no cost.
- Ensure mixed-status immigrant families can maintain access to rental assistance for U.S. citizen household members.

Shortening Homelessness by Ending its Criminalization

- Federal funding to local governments should require or incentivize local governments to stop enacting and enforcing laws that criminalize homelessness, and instead adopt constructive, housing-based approaches.
- Federal infrastructure funding should ensure persons living in encampments displaced by infrastructure projects are provided with adequate housing alternatives.

Preventing Homelessness by Strengthening Housing Rights

- Prohibit discrimination in housing based on source of income, housing status, or status as a victim of domestic violence, and on criminal, eviction, or credit history unrelated to an individual's ability to abide by reasonable terms of tenancy.
- Ensure a right to counsel for poor tenants facing eviction and prohibit evictions of poor tenants without just cause.
- Ensure domestic violence survivors are not forced to choose between homelessness and abuse by strengthening and reauthorizing the housing provisions of the Violence Against Women Act.
- Ensure persons in institutions or systems of care, including youth aging out of foster care, are discharged into housing, not homelessness.
- Protect homeless children and youth by ensuring their rights to public education as guaranteed by Title VII of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.