

Homelessness

Policy Brief

By Lily Zhou's Campaign Team

Context

In 2007, San Diego county had the 12th largest homeless population in the nation. By 2018, that ranking changed to 4th¹. During a three-hour sweep of San Diego, the 2018 Point in Time study pinned the number of homeless in San Diego at 8,576, and that number is only going to rise². Homelessness continues to be a problem, since after the homeless find homes, 14 percent of them are homeless again after 6 months and 27 percent of them return to the streets after 2 years - some of the highest rates from across the West Coast³.

Problems

Sanitation



Homelessness is not only a humanitarian and moral crisis, but also a threat to public health. Infectious diseases - some that ravaged populations in the Middle Ages - are resurging in California and around the country, and are hitting homeless populations especially hard. Los

¹ "San Diego again has 4th-largest homeless population in nation." 17 Dec. 2018, <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/homelessness/sd-me-homeless-report-20181217-story.html>. Accessed 12 Jan. 2020.

² "San Diego Has Fourth-Highest Homeless Population ... - KPBS." <https://www.kpbs.org/news/2018/dec/17/san-diego-has-fourth-highest-homeless-population/>. Accessed 12 Jan. 2020.

³ "Report: Many San Diegans fall back to homeless months after" 21 Nov. 2019, <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/homelessness/story/2019-11-21/details-on-san-diegos-homeless-revealed-in-report-from-annual-count>. Accessed 12 Jan. 2020.

Angeles recently experienced an outbreak of typhus - a disease spread by infected fleas on rats and other animals - in downtown streets⁴. Hepatitis A, also spread primarily through feces, infected more than 1,000 people in Southern California in the past two years. The homeless in San Diego are a catalyst for these long-lost diseases to spread.

There is also the threat of superbugs and antibiotic resistant bacteria. With poor sanitation across San Diego's homeless population, diseases can become even more potent. Treatments for advanced diseases and superbugs cost enormous amounts of money - something the homeless definitively lack.

Housing

In recent years, the cost of housing in California has led to many people spiraling into housing insecurity and eventually homelessness. In 2017, 57 percent of people were spending at least 30 percent of their income on rent and utilities, and 20 percent of people spent 50 percent or more⁵.



6

⁴ "Typhus and Tuberculosis Are Spreading in Homeless" 8 Mar. 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2019/03/typhus-tuberculosis-medieval-diseases-spreading-homeless/584380/>. Accessed 12 Jan. 2020.

⁵ "Report: Many San Diegans fall back to homeless months after" 21 Nov. 2019, <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/homelessness/story/2019-11-21/details-on-san-diegos-homeless-r-evealed-in-report-from-annual-count>. Accessed 13 Jan. 2020.

⁶ "File:Ten Fifty B construction, 1050 B Street, San Diego, CA.jpg" https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ten_Fifty_B_construction,_1050_B_Street,_San_Diego,_CA.jpg. Accessed 12 Jan. 2020.

As of November of 2019, the average rent for a San Diego apartment was \$1,852 per month: a 2.7 percent increase from 2018⁷. That means that even for someone with a sustainable job making \$13 an hour and working five days a week, they would barely make enough to afford a market rate apartment (earning \$2080 a month), not to mention other expenses on food, fuel, and consumer necessities.

The 2017 U.S. Census found that 57 percent of the country's renters were considered burdened by housing costs, with people spending 30 percent or more of their income on rent and utilities, while 28 percent spent more than half their income on those costs. It's these costs that drive the crisis in the country and especially California⁸.

While San Diego County has added 3,809 new apartments in the last 12 months, it has not been nearly enough to meet demand. As a result, those in lower income brackets struggle to find affordable housing and have to resort to living on the streets.



⁷ "San Diego average rent at \$1,852 a month - The San Diego" 27 Nov. 2019, <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/business/real-estate/story/2019-11-27/rent-prices-still-going-up-san-diego>. Accessed 12 Jan. 2020.

⁸ "Report: Many San Diegans fall back to homeless months after" 21 Nov. 2019, <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/homelessness/story/2019-11-21/details-on-san-diegos-homeless-revealed-in-report-from-annual-count>. Accessed 12 Jan. 2020.

⁹ "California needs to build more apartments - Brookings Institution." 11 Jul. 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2019/07/10/california-needs-to-build-more-apartments/>. Accessed 18 Jan. 2020.

Mental Illness

Though external factors account for many of the issues that the homeless face, there is a lot of evidence to suggest that mental illness largely affects those living on the streets. This isn't speculation; 43 percent of all the homeless in San Diego reported living with a mental illness¹⁰. 10 to 20 percent of the homeless population deals with substance abuse and severe mental illness.

Depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, anxiety disorders, and substance abuse disorders are among the most common types of mental illness in the homeless population¹¹.

Through their illness, many people are more susceptible to the three main factors that can lead to homelessness: poverty, disaffiliation, and personal vulnerability¹². In the long term, these factors can drive a person out of their economic stability and onto the streets.

Because of their illness, it is also very hard for a person to recover from their situation. Mental illness prohibits a person from carrying out daily activities, much less trying to find a way out of homelessness. They are stuck in a downwards spiral, where their situation amplifies the effects of their illness and thus makes it very hard to climb back out.

Although homeless shelters provide programs and group therapy for those struggling, it hasn't proved to be a viable solution for the greater issue at hand. The amount of therapy for these mental illnesses is not sufficient. Increased funding and better understanding of the illnesses is necessary to solve the crisis.

¹⁰ "Column: Can San Diego get its arms around homelessness" 28 Jun. 2019, <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/columnists/story/2019-06-26/column-can-san-diego-get-its-arms-around-homeless-and-mental-health-problems>. Accessed 12 Jan. 2020.

¹¹ "Homelessness and Mental Illness: A Challenge to Our Society" 19 Nov. 2018, <https://www.bbrfoundation.org/blog/homelessness-and-mental-illness-challenge-our-society>. Accessed 12 Jan. 2020.

¹² "Homelessness Questions & Answers | The Homeless Hub." <https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/homelessness-questions-answers>. Accessed 12 Jan. 2020.



13

Financial Responsibility

Most of the homeless do not know how to properly manage their finances. Even if they are provided housing and money, they would not know how to effectively save and utilize it. This just allows the cycle of homelessness to continue. Since they do not know how to properly manage their money, homelessness for many is almost inescapable. Even if they did escape, over a fourth of them would simply return to the streets after 2 years.



14

¹³ "There's a good chance you hallucinated this week ... - Inverse." 11 Oct. 2019, <https://www.inverse.com/article/59958-the-science-behind-hallucinations>. Accessed 12 Jan. 2020.

¹⁴ "4 Ways That Personal Finances Can Affect Your Business" 30 Jul. 2018, <https://www.forafinancial.com/blog/small-business/4-ways-personal-finances-can-affect-business/>. Accessed 12 Jan. 2020.

Law Enforcement Reform

One major reason many people are homeless is because of mass incarceration. In fact, 15 percent of all people who go to jail will be or have been homeless at one point in their life. Thus, solving the relationship between homelessness and jail time and is crucial¹⁵.

Many laws unnecessarily target the homeless. Instead of throwing the homeless in prison - which makes them more likely to be homeless again - they should be given guidance and assistance to return to society.

Solutions

Sanitation

One solution is regular cleanups of homeless-stricken areas to avoid a buildup of bodily waste or trash. San Diego has started washing its downtown streets with bleach in an effort to combat an outbreak of hepatitis A, which killed at least 15 people and infected nearly 400. Hepatitis A has also largely infected homeless people in the coastal California cities, and part of the issue is an apparent shortage of public restrooms in areas where the population congregates.

Another solution is the installation of more public restrooms and homeless shelters, as cities such as New York with a greater density of homeless shelters are more sanitary than places such as San Diego.

Housing

Lily's campaign has a unique and innovative solution to this issue.

In her campaign, she vouches for the construction of communities in which the homeless live on self-sustaining living communes. There, they can grow their own food and manage their own community, with the hope that over time the community can integrate back into society.

The most effective way to create these communities is to hire private contractors and investors. It is up to those living there as to what programs would be implemented, but some may

¹⁵ "Reduce Criminal Justice Involvement | United States ... - USICH." 16 Oct. 2019, <https://www.usich.gov/solutions/criminal-justice/>. Accessed 4 Jan. 2020.

Financial Responsibility

Currently, other cities are implementing reforms to create financial management programs to help the homeless. For example, a non-profit organization called Virginia Supportive Housing creates affordable housing and includes programs to teach their participants how to manage their funds. When people lived in housing provided by the organization, they had programs that encouraged participation through supermarket gift cards.

They found that 90 percent of participants climbed out of poverty because of the class¹⁷. This system could be implemented in San Diego, effectively helping people get off the streets and then stay off of them. A weekly class would allow the homeless to learn how to manage their money and create a long-term solution to San Diego's homelessness problem.



18

Law Enforcement Reforms

One way to break the harmful cycle of incarceration is by sponsoring jail diversion. Jail diversion is a system in which people with a history of substance abuse or mental illness are diverted from jail and sent to community based rehabilitation programs. Jail diversion has proven very successful. In a project known as the Nathaniel Project, 92 percent of the participants were

¹⁷ "Financial Education for Homelessness Transition and" 17 Apr. 2012, <https://www.moneyhabitudes.com/case-studies/financial-education-homelessness-transition-homebuyers/>. Accessed 12 Jan. 2020.

¹⁸ "Free Images : cash, currency, dollar, finance ... - PxHere." <https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1515455>. Accessed 17 Jan. 2020.

homeless. After the project was completed, 72 percent of participants had permanent housing. Along with this, the number of arrested individuals with mental illness dropped by 93 percent¹⁹.

Another way to help stop homeless incarceration is the creation of better coordination between law enforcement and homeless service systems. Often, incarcerating homeless people fails to address the root cause of homelessness, and exacerbates the problem, causing more frustration for the police, thus furthering the cycle of incarceration.

Thus, instead of just arresting homeless people, it is important to help them by coordinating with homeless shelters and social programs. This solution has been proven successful, as in Honolulu, coordination between police and homeless services has decreased average homeless shelter stays by 20 percent, and increased the number of homeless people who move to permanent housing by 48 percent²⁰.

¹⁹ "Practical Advice on Jail Diversion - Pennsylvania Mental"

<http://www.pacenterofexcellence.pitt.edu/documents/PracticalAdviceOnJailDiversion.pdf>. Accessed 4 Jan. 2020.

²⁰ "Strengthening Partnerships Between Law ... - USICH." 14 Jun. 2019,

https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Law-Enforcement-and-Homelessness-Service-Partnership-2019.pdf. Accessed 4 Jan. 2020.