

# **Overview of Homelessness**

Oakland/Alameda County, California

**2017-2018**



Compiled June-July, 2018

# Understanding the Need

## Defining Homelessness

In order to effectively discuss the impact of homelessness and consider the range of assistance needed, it is necessary to have clear working definitions of terms we often take for granted. Defining homelessness is a complex and continuous task. This document relies primarily on definitions provided by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which are periodically updated.

**Homelessness:** HUD defines a homelessness by considering where the individual normally sleeps – a nighttime residence that is not "fixed, regular, and adequate," such as a place not meant for human habitation or sleeping, a safe haven, an emergency shelter. Even if sleeping in an institutional care facility, the person may be considered homeless if they had previously been sleeping in unfit conditions and have been at the facility fewer than 90 days.

**Subpopulations:** When considering the homeless population, it is helpful to be aware of the usual subpopulations, as trends and needs can vary within subgroups. The 2017 *Everyone Counts! Alameda County Point-in-Time Count and Survey*, conducted by the EveryOne Home homeless advocacy initiative, identifies three such groups:

- **Chronically homeless** – Disabled person who has been homeless for at least 12 consecutive months, or who has experienced homelessness 4 times during the past 3 years, totaling at least 12 months. All periods between episodes of homelessness must include at least 7 nights of inadequate shelter (as defined by HUD). Biennial Survey includes families depending on a head of household with a disabling condition contributing to homelessness (EveryOneHome.org). Alameda County had 1,652 chronically homeless people in 2017. Unsheltered: 85 %.
- **Veterans** – Someone who has served in a branch of the United States Armed forces, active-duty only (EveryOneHome.org). Alameda County had 531 homeless veterans in 2017. Unsheltered: 71 %.
- **Transition-age youth** – 18-24 years old (EveryOneHome.org). Alameda County had 919 transition-age youth in 2017. Unsheltered: 74 %.

**Additional Factors:** Although the *Point-in-Time Count* doesn't identify them as specific subpopulations, it is also helpful to consider the impact of the following:

- Sheltered versus unsheltered
- Household type: individuals, families, unaccompanied children (under 18 and living without parent or legal guardian)

- Formerly incarcerated or institutionalized – Often lack sufficient resources to secure adequate employment and housing.

## **Dramatic 2017 Spike in Area Homeless Population**

EveryOneHome.org conducts the *Everyone Counts! Alameda County Point-in-Time Count and Survey* of the area's homeless population during the last 10 days of January of odd-numbered years. Except where otherwise stated, the following statistics are from this report.

### **Spike suggests alarming trend:**

- 2017 count showed **additional 1,589** homeless since 2015 count
- From 2009 to 2015, the trend had shown a slow but steady decrease (301 total)
- January 2009 – 4,341 homeless
- January 2011 – 4,178 homeless (down 163)
- January 2013 – 4,264 homeless (up 86)
- January 2015 – 4,040 homeless (down 224)
- January 2017 – 5,629 homeless (up 1,589)

### **12,000 homeless over course of 2017:**

- *Point-in-Time Count* only provides snapshot view: Number of homeless at that moment
- Many people experience homelessness for less than a year, and may not be accounted for during *Point-in-Time Count*.
- In 2017, 2,973 people became homeless for the first time. Only 1,459 homeless found permanent housing that same year. That leaves a net of **1,514 still homeless**.
- The number of people who experienced homelessness in 2017 was around 12,000.
- At the current rate, homelessness could **increase at a rate of 1,500 per year**.

## **Other 2017 Statistics**

- 69% of Alameda County's homeless are unsheltered (3,863 people).
- Majority age range: 25-59 (63%)
- Women: 41%
- Black: 49%
- Our neighbors: 82% were already Alameda County residents. Of those, 50% had lived here 10 years or longer.
- Oakland has the highest homeless population in Alameda County: 1,902 unsheltered and 1,766 sheltered. The next is Berkeley, with 972 total.
- In 2017, there were 72 unaccompanied homeless children, 86% of whom were unsheltered.
- There were 270 homeless families.

- There were 4,846 homeless single adults (78% unsheltered).

**Services used by survey participants:**

- Receiving benefits: 73%
- **Free meals: 69 %**
- Emergency shelter: 49 %
- Health services: 30 %
- Drop-in center: 22 %
- Job training/employment services: 12 %
- Interested in independent, affordable rental housing or housing with supportive services: 98 %

**Those who do not use shelter services gave the following reasons:**

- Shelters full: 41 %
- Bugs/germs: 40 %
- Too crowded 29 %
- Concerned about personal safety in shelter environment: 22 %
- Too many rules: 20 %
- Too far away: 18 %

**Homeless Youth in California:**

- 31% of the nation's 1.6 to 2.8 million homeless youth live in California
- Yet, 2/3 of the state's counties lack basic services for them, including housing and accessible health services
- California has the 2nd-highest number of unsheltered youth in the country
- A "disproportionate number" of the nation's runaway/homeless youth are LGBT

**Possible Causes of Homelessness**

**Oakland/Alameda housing crisis:** Since around 2011, a dramatic influx of moneyed professionals into the Bay Area has caused housing prices to rise sharply, pricing many residents out of their homes. Median market rent for available 2BR apartments increased nearly \$600 during the 11-month period between September 2015 and August 2016.

**Inadequate support for formerly incarcerated:** There is a link between homelessness and the criminal justice system, and it goes both ways. People who lack the support they need to reintegrate into society after incarceration, can find themselves on the street. In addition, homelessness itself is often criminalized, creating a no-win situation.

**6 top reasons for homelessness according to survey:**

- Money issues: 57%
- Personal relationships: 16 %

- Mental health issues: 12 %
- Substance abuse: 12 %
- Physical health: 10%
- Incarceration: 6 %

**Health issues affecting employment and/or housing stability according to survey:**

- Psychiatric/emotional conditions: 41%
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: 29%
- Chronic health problems: 36%
- Physical disability: 27%
- Drug/alcohol abuse: 26%
- Traumatic brain injury: 10%
- AIDS/HIV: 5%

**4 top things homeless said could have prevented homelessness:**

- Rent assistance: 42 %
- Employment assistance 36 %
- Benefits/income: 24 %
- Mental health services: 22 %

## **Current Local and State Efforts**

### **SB-918: Homeless Youth Act of 2018**

As amended, outlines a plan to require the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council to assume additional responsibilities that specifically pertain to the state of California's homeless youth (unaccompanied, aged 12-24).

**Main Provisions:**

- **Requires S.M.A.R.T. Goal approach:** "Setting specific, measurable goals aimed at preventing and ending homelessness among youth in the state."
- **Identify gaps:** Identify "funding, policy and practice gaps" across the state, in areas that "serve, or have the potential to serve" homeless youth. Develop and implement a timeline-centered plan to address these gaps, and report back to Legislature.
- **Grant oversight:** Requires Council to oversee certain grant programs that can be applied across the state, supplemental to existing local program funding.
- **Continuum of care:** Requires those seeking grants to provide documentation that their program offers a continuum of services to homeless youth served, including mental/emotional health services, substance abuse services and education. Under the continuum of care model, those served are not evicted from shelters if they refuse care.

## **Oakland Homeless Initiatives**

**Homeless Youth Act:** On May 3, 2018, the Oakland City Council voted to endorse Senate Bill 918.

**Continuum of Care:** Oakland Homeless Youth Housing Collaborative (OHYHC) program provides transitional housing and supportive services to homeless youth aged 18 to 24 for up to 24 months. On April 26, 2018, the Oakland City Council was asked to renew the lease to the city-owned property at 3824 West Street, which they allow the East Oakland Community Project (EOCP) to use for free, in exchange for using the location for the OHYHC. The property houses 11 homeless youth. EOCP also runs the Families in Transition (FIT) program.

**Tuff Shed Program:** On April 13, 2017, Oakland's Human Services Director requested funding for services designed to handle health and safety issues at homeless encampments, such as in-place health and hygiene projects, interim housing projects such as Safe Havens and camping/parking sites, and the development of deeply affordable, rapid-construction units as a permanent housing option. Oakland created its first Tuff Shed site, meant to house "at least a few dozen," in December 2017, later expanding to an additional site that would house around 100.

**Private Sector:** On March 27, 2018, Oakland City Council considered resolution to "encourage and support" private development (including faith-based and nonprofits) of housing options and restroom facilities. These include small homes, shipping container conversion homes, recreational vehicles, unattached trailers.

**Health & Hygiene Stations:** 12 bathroom/hand-washing stations have been installed at various locations around the city, as of April 12, 2018. These stations include garbage carts, serviced by the city sanitation department.

**Coordinated Entry:** Homeless can dial 211 in order to have their situation assessed and gain access to resources.

## **In Conclusion**

Homelessness is a complex social issue that affects an alarming number of people in the United States, California and the Alameda County/Oakland area. The landscape of homelessness and our attempts to combat it is ever-changing, especially now that Oakland has entered a crisis situation in regard to homelessness. This report is an attempt to capture a portion of the vast amount of information concerning its effects on Oakland, which is a very small piece of the puzzle. It contains plenty of numbers, but please remember that those numbers represent people – thousands and thousands of people. This document is about "solving a problem"; it is about the homeless, their stories, and their value as human beings.