



Who are the homeless? Employment Challenges

Individuals experiencing homelessness face a number of challenges with finding employment in the formal labor market. The stigma and stereotype associated with individuals who are experiencing homelessness is that they are unemployed, and this is simply not true. In reality, research consistently shows that individuals experiencing homelessness want to work and many diligently pursue employment opportunities or work in some capacity. However, homelessness makes it next to impossible to obtain and maintain formal employment.

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Barriers to employment.

Not having a consistent place to come home to at the end of the day means that individuals experiencing homelessness may not have some of the typical things needed to acquire a job. They may not have access to an address to put on a résumé, a phone number for job call backs, or a safe place to prepare for job interviews. They also may not have an environment where they can recover from a day's work including a place to shower, get a good night of sleep, prepare their own food (including food to take to work), recover from illness or injury, rest, and maintain their health. Individuals experiencing homelessness often share that they feel shame and embarrassment when providing a shelter's address to a potential employer or having to explain why they didn't have an ID or a bank account. Many decide not to disclose their homelessness status in fear of being automatically disqualified as a suitable candidate. Other barriers to employment among those experiencing homelessness include:

- Low educational attainment
- Physical disability
- Mental health and substance use
- Criminal record
- Limited access to transportation
- Lack of experience in the field of interest
- Lack of vocational training
- Lack of computer access in addition to low levels of computer literacy required to perform job searches and fill out online applications.

Often, individuals are forced to find temporary work which has also been identified as a barrier by potential employers.

Even when individuals experiencing homelessness are able to find employment, the quality of their employment opportunities depends on the economy. Many are forced to work in unsafe and unregulated jobs and/or are paid under the table where the pay may be inconsistent and/or lower than average wages. Often individuals are forced to find temporary work, which has also been identified as a barrier by potential employers. Temporary employment hinders relationship building with employers and also interferes with long-term career planning

Often, individuals experiencing homelessness have no other option but to adopt dangerous survival strategies to generate income including panhandling, dealing drugs, stealing and/or sex work. A study conducted on individuals experiencing homelessness found that individuals experiencing homelessness who dropped out of high school were more likely to engage in sex work or panhandling but the overwhelming majority who engage in such work would prefer gaining employment within the formal economy.

Youth experiencing homelessness face a number of additional barriers to employment in comparison to adults experiencing homelessness, including:

- Age discrimination
- Lack of encouragement to plan and pursue career opportunities
- Weak social and human capital (education, friends, families, networks)
- Lack of life skills (budgeting, time management, conflict resolution)
- Lack of recognition and value in hiring youth with barriers
- Lack of support with transition to adulthood

Meaningful and sustainable employment is part of the solution to moving people forward.

The solution.

Meaningful and sustainable employment is part of the solution to moving individuals experiencing homelessness forward to a more sustainable living situation. Unemployment, underemployment, and low wages relative to rent are frequent causes of homelessness and burden millions of families with the risk of becoming homeless. At the same time, individuals experiencing homelessness face obstacles to finding and maintaining employment.

As a result, connecting people experiencing or at-risk of homelessness with job training and placement programs is critical to ensure they have the tools they need for long-term stability and success. Facilitating access to work supports like childcare subsidies and transportation assistance can help increase the likelihood that individuals will be able to retain employment.





Who are the homeless? Housing Challenges

Housing is seen as the fundamental base-solution to the problem of homelessness. Lack of affordable housing and the limited scale of housing assistance programs contributes to the current housing crisis and to homelessness. The deficit of affordable housing has led to high rent burdens, overcrowding, and substandard housing. This has resulted in many individuals experiencing homelessness and has put others at risk of experiencing homelessness.

Affordable housing has not always been a growing issue in the United States. In the 1970's and 1980's, the federal government made significant cuts to affordable housing which led to the current housing crisis the United States is facing. Recently, there has been an increase in focus on creating more permanent supportive housing for individuals who chronically experience homelessness due to disability or health issues. The process of making these improvements is slow moving in most cities, though, because of political foot-dragging, municipal agency delays, and the process of raising money from multiple sources. This perpetuates the cycle of homelessness.

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The risk.

A critical shortage of housing that is affordable, safe, and stable directly contributes to homelessness. The millions of American families and individuals who are paying more than 50% of their income on housing are at serious risk of homelessness, as are families and individuals spending more than 30% of their income on housing. Arguably, the most impactful factor is the lack of affordable housing nationwide; however, discrimination can impede access to employment, housing, justice and helpful services. Racial and sexual minorities are at greater risk of such discrimination.

**The demand for assisted housing
exceeds the supply.**

Affordable housing needs are increasing while the supply is decreasing.

While affordable housing has become an increasing issue, since 2000 the incomes of low-income households have declined as rents continue to rise. However, the demand for assisted housing clearly exceeds the supply. The National Coalition for the Homeless and others are urging Congress to include money for homelessness prevention and rehousing in any legislative response to the foreclosure crisis and are also seeking to pass legislation that would help renters living in foreclosed properties to remain in their homes or transition smoothly to new housing. Yet, the housing crisis continues as the cost of living continues to rise. In Nashville/Davidson County the average cost of a one-bedroom apartment is approximately \$975 per month. The minimum wage in Tennessee is \$7.25 an hour and starting pay with most employers is \$10.00 an hour.