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Advocates Credit Housing, Rapid Intervention Strategies With Decline In Homelessness

The number of people experiencing homelessness in Ohio on a single night early this year found the number down 3% compared to 2016. The change was part of a broader decrease that advocates attributed to improved strategies to address the problem.

While those strategies, such as permanent supportive housing, are working to combat long-term homelessness, economic trends such as rising rents and stagnant incomes are making housing less affordable.

The **count**, released this week by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, found 10,095 people homeless in Ohio in the annual one-day, point-in-time count, down 19.7% from 2010. The HUD report identified 8,786 were in emergency shelters or transitional housing programs while 1,309 were unsheltered.

The number of unsheltered people was up 13.1% from the previous year, but down 16.2% from 2010.

"All individuals deserve to have a safe and decent place to call home," HUD Deputy Regional Administrator James Cunningham said in a statement. "While we have made significant strides in reducing the number of individuals experiencing homelessness, we must remain committed to implementing strategies that make it a rare, brief and non-recurring event."

The biggest recent overall decline has come among the chronically homeless, said Marcus Roth, spokesman for the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio. That's due to local strategies that have worked, such as permanent supportive housing to stabilize people.

"We've been dealing with a homelessness crisis for so long that we've learned what interventions work and which ones don't," he said in an interview. "There's been a real emphasis on 'let's use the strategies that work now,' and we have the data to figure out what's been effective."

Other strategies that have worked, he said, include rapid rehousing intervention, in which people who lose housing are more quickly connected to services.

"By doing a rapid rehousing intervention that helps them before they get to that point, there's a much better chance that they will become stabilized and back to getting a job and having permanent housing of their own," he said.

Chronic homelessness and other issues have decreased due to better communication and collaboration between state, local and federal agencies, Mr. Roth said. Increased federal funding to combat homelessness among veterans has also helped in reducing that category.

"The bad news is even though the providers, the agencies out there doing this work are doing a better job, there's pressure coming from the other side where rents are rising, incomes are stagnant and there's a growing housing affordability crisis," he said.

The **data** found homelessness in the count dropped by 27.8% from 2012 to 2017, with declines all over the state except for Columbus and Youngstown. While the Youngstown decline was a small sample size - it rose from 224 in 2012 to 262 in 2017, the Columbus increase was more significant, an increase of 257.

Mr. Roth said Columbus, unlike most other metro areas in the state, is seeing rent and the overall cost of living increase quickly.

Potential changes to the federal tax code could hinder efforts to build affordable housing, he said. A series of tax credits and investment programs that encourage the construction of affordable housing, he said, could be eliminated in a tax bill currently in a congressional conference committee.

The possible reduction or elimination of low-income housing tax credits and historic tax credits, as well as the cutting of the corporate tax rate, could reduce incentives to build affordable housing, Mr. Roth said.

"Especially alarming is the fact that right now the debate in Congress over what to do with the federal tax bill has the potential to make the housing affordable crisis a whole lot worse," he said. "The federal tax code is the only way any affordable housing gets produced and preserved at all."

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