

The logo for the Housing Ohio conference features the word "Housing" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. The letter "o" in "Housing" is partially enclosed by a grey outline of the state of Ohio. To the right of this, the word "Ohio" is written in a larger, bold, blue, sans-serif font. Below "Ohio", the word "conference" is written in a smaller, grey, lowercase, sans-serif font.

Housing Ohio conference

Homelessness 101: Forest Fires and Elephants

Wednesday, May 8th, 2024

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Advocacy

**Youth
Housing
Initiative**

**Race
Equity**



OHIO

Balance of State
Continuum of Care



COHHIO

Training and
Technical Assistance



COHHIO

Coalition on Homelessness
and Housing in Ohio



COHHIO

Homeless Management
Information System

Housing Ohio
conference

**SOAR
Ohio**

**Fair Housing
& Tenant
Information**



Healthy Beginnings
At Home



Forest Fires and Elephants:
An Introduction to Homelessness
Sherri Downing, Senior Consultant
Advocates for Human Potential, Inc.

March 14, 2024



Real World Solutions for Systems Change

ahpnet.com

Advocates for Human Potential, Inc. helps local, state, and federal agencies in their work to improve health and human service systems of care. We offer technical assistance, training, system/program development, resource development/dissemination, research and evaluation.

We'd love to talk about how we can help you!



AIP



Insights from *Sherri Downing*
Homelessness and Housing

Please join my list for an occasional column on homelessness and housing.

By the end of this session,
participants will be able to:

- Name 3 reasons for the homelessness epidemic in America
- Describe at least 4 conditions that put people at risk of homelessness
- Discuss at least 2 ways that each of us can make a difference





Please
stand
up



Introductions

1. Who are you?
Name, Community
2. What is your relationship to homelessness?
3. Are you seeing more homelessness in your community?

Homelessness 101



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Homelessness

Homelessness is a condition of housing – not character. People experiencing homelessness often have multiple vulnerabilities and incredible resilience and strength.

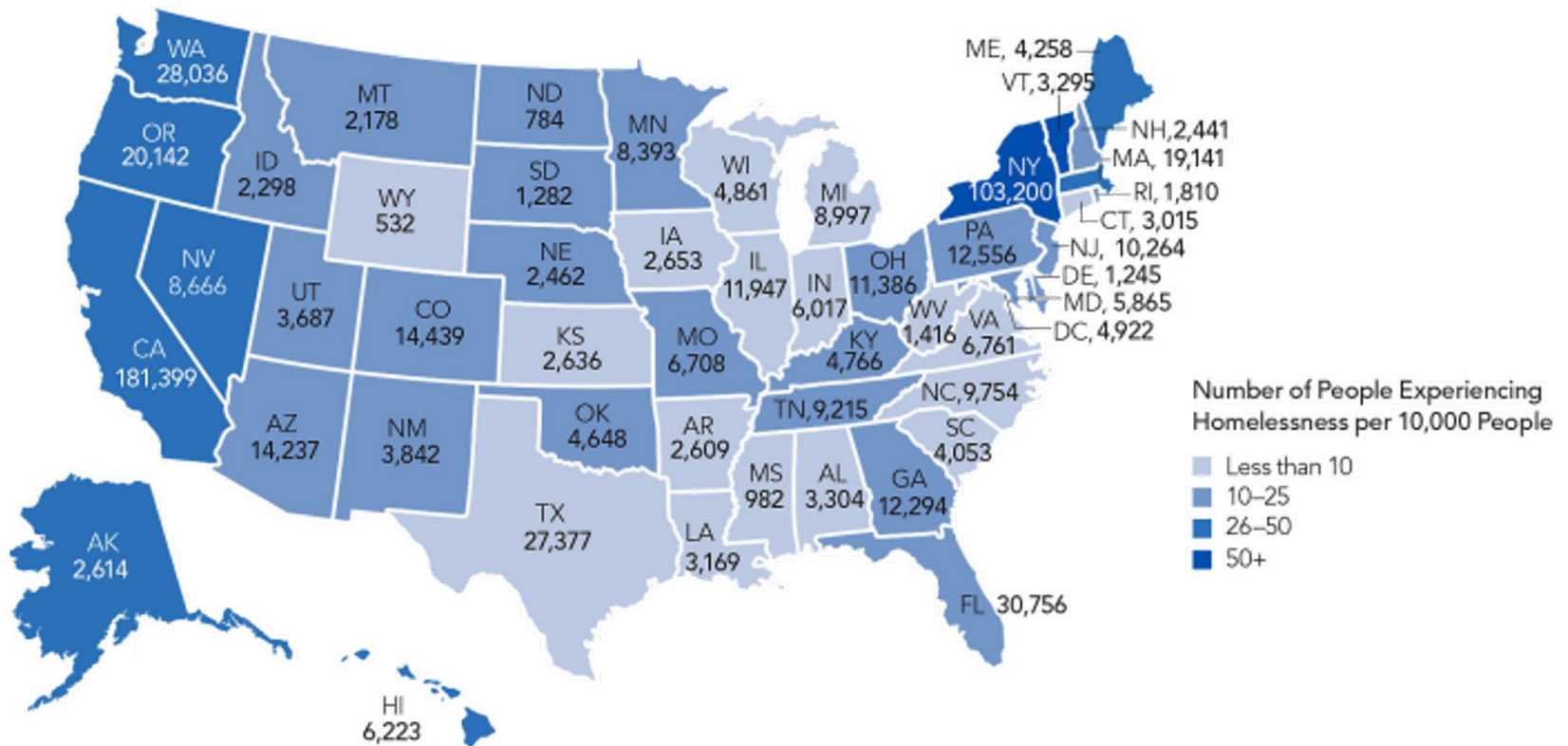


Homelessness

- Lacking safe, stable, and appropriate housing
- People can be categorized as homeless if they are living on the streets, moving between temporary shelters, staying with friends or family, living in deeply substandard housing, or staying in emergency shelter.
- People do not always recognize or admit they are homeless



Homelessness in the U.S.



In January 2023, volunteers in Ohio identified 11,386 people who were experiencing homelessness. This number is not a census.

Who Experiences Homelessness in Ohio?

Populations Monitored During the Point-in-Time Count

People Experiencing Chronic Homelessness: 1,232

Individuals: 8,253

People in Families with Children: 3,133

Unaccompanied Youth: 796

People Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness: 2,403

Veterans: 623

11,386 people were identified as experiencing homelessness in Ohio on one day in January 2023.

The total number is UP 6.8% since 2022.

Sheltered and Unsheltered Homelessness

Sheltered

An individual or family in emergency shelters, safe havens, and transitional housing projects.

Unsheltered

An individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning sleeping in a place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, camping ground, or other place not meant for human habitation.

The Challenge of Homelessness is Getting Worse

KEY FACTS

From the 2023 State of Homelessness Report

Housing affordability is a primary driver of homelessness.

35%

Increase in unsheltered homeless.

The unsheltered population has risen dramatically since 2015, nearly erasing a decade of work.

216,495

Individuals (not living in families with children) were unsheltered in 2022.

This is a record high number.

Every race, ethnicity, gender, and age group (except for children) is affected.

The Challenge of Homelessness: Affordability



Housing Affordability in Ohio

Ohio has a “shortage of rental homes that are affordable and available to extremely low income (ELI) households, whose incomes are at or below the federal poverty guideline or 30% of area median income (AMI).”

- There is a **shortage of 267,382** affordable rental homes for extremely low-income (ELI) renters.
- **70 percent** of ELI renter households have severe cost burden (spending more than half their income on housing).

Homelessness in Ohio

11,386 Ohio residents were identified as experiencing homelessness during the 2023 Point-in-Time Count

- **2,403 persons were unsheltered**
- **1,232 were designated as chronically homeless**
 - Had a disability
 - Lived in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or an emergency shelter
 - Had been homeless for at least 12 months or on 4 separate occasions in the past 3 years, with a combined period of at least 12 months

For more information: [CoC and ESG Homeless Eligibility - Definition of Chronic Homelessness - HUD Exchange](#)

What Puts People at Risk of Homelessness?

- Poverty coupled with lack of affordable housing
- Low incomes that have not kept pace with the cost of living and/or loss of employment
- Lack of social/familial networks
- Lack of job skills/education
- Disabilities and health issues
- Trauma and domestic violence
- Racial disparities and discrimination
- Backgrounds that include justice system involvement, poor credit and rental history, poor work history...



Pathways into Homelessness

- Intricate interplay between structural factors, system failures and individual circumstances
- No two stories are the same and none of them are happy
- Homelessness results from the cumulative impact of many factors, including poverty, trauma, disability

Causes

Neither linear or uniform

Extreme vulnerability

Lacking adequate housing, income and supports

What else?

Causes of Homelessness: Poverty

- Homelessness and poverty are tightly linked.
- People in poverty must make hard choices among many necessities, including housing, food, childcare, healthcare, and education.
- People living on very low incomes are one paycheck away from disaster: one missed day of work, one car repair, one sick child can all be the first domino



Where Do People Without Homes Sleep?

- Vehicles
- Tents and encampments
- Couch surfing, doubled or tripled up
- Emergency shelters
- Living in places not meant for human habitation: abandoned buildings, storage units...
- Hotels/motels
- Old RVs, campers and trailers
- Streets





How did we get here?

*It started like a
wisp of smoke, a
little concerning,
but seemingly
fixable.*

Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987

- Landmark legislation
- First federal funds targeted to meeting the needs of people experiencing homelessness
- Consisted of just 15 programs providing a range of services: emergency shelter, transitional housing, primary health care, education and social services

11 years later, federal agencies held the 1998 Symposium on Homelessness research to ask: *How do we put this fire out?*

Themes emerged

- People were extremely poor but otherwise diverse
- People of color were overrepresented
- Affordable, accessible housing was identified as a significant predictor of stability, but there was a large, unmet need for housing
- Inability to access housing based on earned income alone

What Have We Learned?

Homelessness is a social justice issue

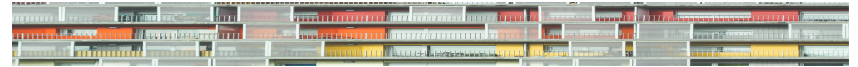
Housing is a key part of the equation, but not the only answer

People can't afford to live in dignity

highly addictive drugs has added fuel to

Homelessness is a Social Justice Issue

- The Housing Act of 1949 increased the number of Public Housing Agencies (PHAs).
- The Fair Housing Act passed in 1968, prohibiting discrimination in housing based on race, religion, national origin or sex.
- Starting with President Richard Nixon's moratorium on housing spending in 1974, there has been a pattern of underfunding and cuts that led to declining housing quality.
- Today, most wait lists are closed.
- Those who succeed in accessing this housing are typically disabled, aged or single head-of-household families.



Housing Is The Answer, But There Isn't Enough Housing

- There is not a single state with an adequate supply of affordable rental housing.
- According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, there is a shortage of 7.3 million rental homes affordable and available to renters with extremely low incomes in the U.S.
- This means incomes at or below either the federal poverty guideline or 30 percent of the area median income, whichever is greater.
- Only 33 affordable and available rental homes exist for every 100 extremely low-income renter households.



People Cannot Afford to Live in Dignity

- In 2024, the federal minimum wage is \$7.25/hour or \$15,080/year.
- The federal poverty level for a one-person household is \$15,060
- This means that someone working full time at minimum wage, makes just \$20/year more than the poverty threshold.
- The National Alliance to End Homelessness states that households find themselves without homes because they do not make enough to pay for housing.
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a disability benefit created to help Americans who are aged, blind, or otherwise disabled.
- The monthly monetary benefit is \$943 for an eligible individual.
- If rent is affordable at 30% of household income, this means that SSI recipients can afford to pay \$282.90 for rent.
- National data says the average monthly rent for a one-bedroom unit is \$1,702

Compare Typical Income and Expenses

Income Source	Monthly	Annually
2024 Ohio Minimum wage (non-tipped employees) Hourly rate: \$10.10	\$1,616	\$21,008
2024 Ohio Minimum wage (tipped employees)	\$808	\$10,504
Supplemental Security Income (\$943/month)	\$943	\$11,316
Expenses		
Fair Market Rent 2- bedroom apartment (Columbus, Ohio)	\$1,302	\$15,624
Food	\$412	\$4,944
Utilities	\$168	\$2,016

*This doesn't include transportation costs, taxes, Social Security contributions, health care, clothing, education, insurance, or personal care. People are in the **red** before they even cover rent, food and utilities. **It doesn't pencil.***



What is the Living Wage in Columbus, Ohio?

One Adult Wage Earner				
	No Children	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children
Living Wage	\$20.96	\$37.32	\$47.74	\$59.67
Poverty Wage	\$7.24	\$9.83	\$12.41	\$15.00
Minimum Wage	\$10.45	\$10.45	\$10.45	\$10.45
Required annual income after taxes	\$37,508	\$68,174	\$87,130	\$107,335
Required annual income before taxes	\$43,593	\$77,622	\$99,290	\$124,111

The living wage shown is the hourly rate that adult must earn to support themselves and/or the household. Wages shown are for a single adult working full-time (2080 hours per year).

The living wage is predicated on the costs of basic needs, including food, childcare, medical, housing, transportation, civic, internet and mobile, and other.

Highly Addictive Drugs Have Fueled The Fire

- According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, in 2021, more than 106,000 people died from drug-involved overdose, up from 70,630 in 2019.¹
 - Across the country, providers are talking about the horrific impact of the opioid epidemic on people experiencing homelessness. These drugs are so dangerous that the people using them rarely reach the gift of desperation, where they are willing to do what it takes to get through and past.
 - Alcohol remains the leading substance of misuse. Nationally, 140,557 Americans die from the effects of alcohol in an average year. On average, 5,739 deaths annual can be attributed to excessive alcohol use.³
- Everyone without housing does NOT have a problem with drugs or alcohol. The research shows that that around 1/3 of people who are homeless have substance use disorders.
 - Since June 27, 2023, about 3,624 Ohioans and 57,380 Americans have died of fentanyl poisoning, according to statistic provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.²

There Is An Appetite For Simple Solutions

- The flood of federal funds during the COVID-19 pandemic illustrated that money alone will not solve homelessness.
- Billions of dollars have been available for housing and services, but states have struggled to spend the funds.
- Housing is a keystone solution, but it is not the only solution.
- Without housing, practical zoning laws, and political will, we find ourselves in an endless loop and the fire continues to rage.
- There ARE NO simple solutions. Housing is not the ONLY solution. People experiencing homelessness are highly vulnerable.
 - Backgrounds of significant trauma
 - Poverty
 - Behavioral health disorders and other disabilities
 - Backgrounds that include poor rental and credit histories, justice involvement...
- People need services, health care, education and more to get on with their lives.

Addressing Homelessness





Picture by Cathi Geisler, used with permission

The key to ending
homelessness is
HOUSING, but it is not
just housing.

Go Upstream

With one-on-one solutions, we pull a drowning man out of a river. Just as he begins to breathe, another person cries for help. Then another. And another.

If we are going to stop people from drowning, we must look upstream and figure out why they are falling into the river in the first place. We need to stop looking at symptoms and start looking at causes.

Even after we pull people out of the river, even when we get them into housing, we still need to figure out how to keep them from falling back in.

These are systems issues, but no one system can fix this problem. We can't fix it with health care OR housing OR treatment OR education OR jobs OR integrated care. Real solutions must take an integrated approach.



It's Failure on the Part of Systems

- People who have lived without homes die nearly 30 years sooner^[1] than their housed peers.
- Nonelderly people who experience homelessness face about 3.5 times the mortality risk when compared to people who have homes.^[2]
- Even after people with significant vulnerabilities are housed, many need ongoing supports and services
- Homelessness is complex. As a society, we need to recognize and address fundamental inequities in our systems: schools, justice, welfare, foster care, healthcare...all are trying to address the impacts of abuse, neglect, trauma, poverty, disease...lack of skills.^[3]



Education...Justice...Housing...Employment...Health care...Behavioral health...Homelessness services...Living wage jobs...Foster care...State...Local...Federal...

Housing First



Housing First was developed as an alternative to housing approaches where people had to “earn” housing by completing a treatment program or meeting other requirements.

What Is Housing First?

Housing First connects “individuals and families experiencing homelessness to permanent housing without preconditions or barriers to entry, such as sobriety, treatment or service participation requirements.”

Supportive services are offered but are not required.

Housing First can be...



- **A philosophy**
- **A systems approach**
- **A program**

(U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.)

What Are the Benefits of Housing First?

Those who are housed via a Housing First Model:

Obtain faster access to housing

Are more likely to remain stably housed

Those who receive supportive services are:

More likely to participate in job training or school

More likely to reduce substance use

More satisfied with their own autonomy, choice, and control

Five Principles of Housing First



Immediate
access to
permanent
housing with no
housing
readiness
requirements



Consumer
choice and self-
determination



Recovery
orientation



Individualized
and client-
driven supports



Social and
community
integration

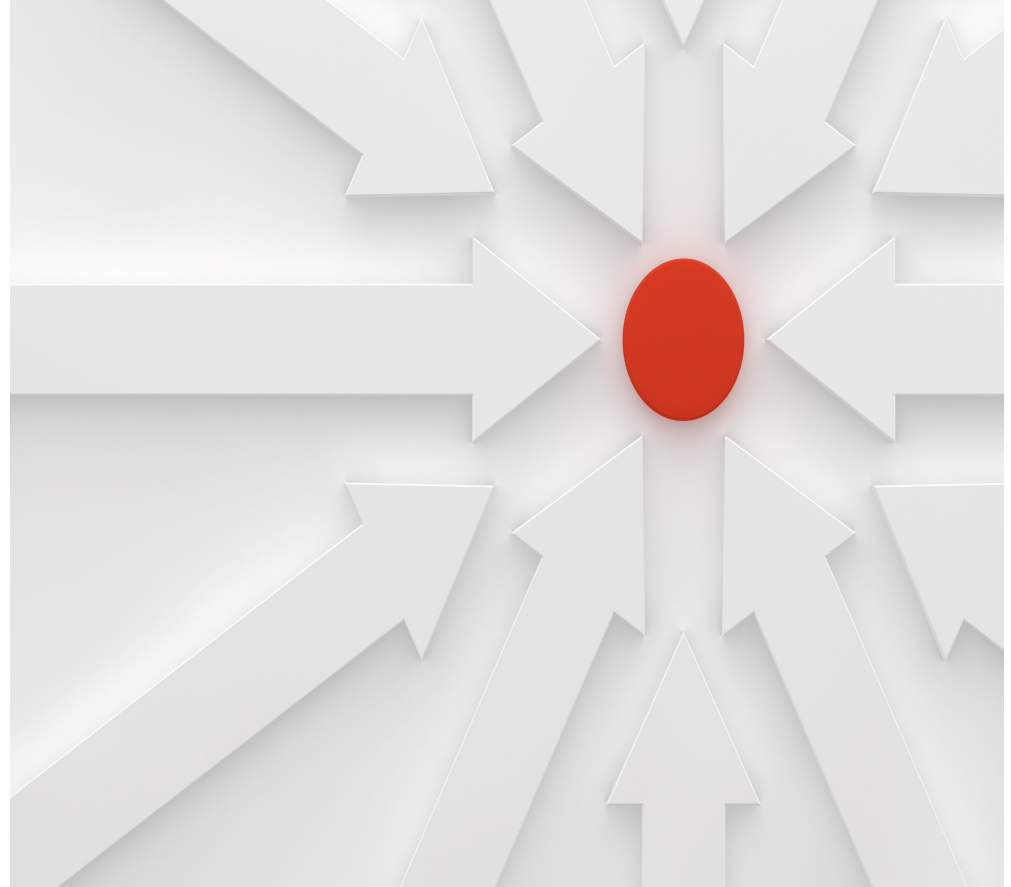
Seek Local Solutions

- Most people without homes in a community have roots in that community.
- Evidence-based practices can – like Housing First – can be effective, but the community needs to buy in and believe the problem can be fixed.
- Monstrously large cities present monstrously large problems.
- Rethink cities into neighborhoods, then empower and support local solutions because homelessness is, at heart, a local issue.
- Training, technical assistance, and capacity building all have their roles. State and federal funds are needed. These are most useful when used as supports to bring local stakeholders together around homelessness as it exists locally.



Understand and Focus

- People want and need the same things: homes, food, safety, education, justice and healthcare.
- People need to be able to earn enough with a full-time job to put a roof over their heads and food on the table, with dignity. Access to education, livable wages, healthcare, and affordable housing are key.
- Focus on prevention: childhood and adult trauma are precursors to homelessness.
- Support additional funding for housing and services.
- Ensure that enough community-based treatment is available.



What Can We Do to Make a Difference?

- **Recognize that there is no easy solution that can be translated into a soundbite.**
- **Understand that housing is not the endpoint.** It's a beginning.
- **Provide continuity of care.** Relationship is key.
- **See people.** People should never be treated as if they are invisible, but many people who experience homelessness are discounted and ignored. People without homes are not other, they are us.
- **Share your gifts.** The dignity of human connection is crucial.
- **Think about solutions logically and creatively.**



How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time

- Homelessness feels intractable, complicated, too big to fix
- We can put the fire out with a mix of old-fashioned ingenuity, hard work, policy, political will, equitable zoning, community building, education, training, and funding.
- It doesn't matter where you start: tiny-home villages; organize a crew to help Habitat for Humanity; establish host homes for youth; support sober living facilities and medical respite centers; provide meals for local shelter residents. The list is practically endless.
- The key is to take the first bite and keep eating.



Homelessness

Homelessness is not a choice, but rather a journey that many find themselves in.

– Asa Don Brown



For More Information

- [Ohio | National Low Income Housing Coalition \(nlihc.org\)](https://nlihc.org)
- [Rough Sleepers: Dr. Jim O'Connell's urgent mission to bring healing to homeless people: Kidder, Tracy: 9781984801432: Amazon.com: Books](https://www.amazon.com/dp/9781984801432)
- [State of Homelessness: 2023 Edition - endhomelessness.org](https://endhomelessness.org)
- [Stories from the Shadows: Reflections of a Street Doctor](#) by James O'Connell, M.D.
- [The 2023 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report \(AHAR to Congress\) Part 1: Point-In-Time Estimates of Homelessness, December 2023 \(huduser.gov\)](https://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/ahar/ahar2023part1.html)

Discussion



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