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COMMON MYTHS ABOUT HOMELESSNESS

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AGENDA

- 1 About HRAC
- 2 Definitions & Estimates
- 3 Causes & Conditions
- 4 Myths & Stereotypes





ABOUT HRAC

The Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative's goal is to help reduce homelessness and its negative impact on individuals, families, and communities, with an emphasis on communities of color, through research and evidence-based best practices

HRAC brings together expertise and skills from across PSU's colleges and also partners with people experiencing homelessness, advocates, service providers, policymakers, and other stakeholders.





EXAMPLE PROJECTS

- Released the first [regional estimate](#) of homelessness and housing insecurity, including the cost of solutions
- Helped design and evaluate [Portland Street Response](#)
- Led design, build, and research efforts on [“tiny home villages,”](#) including in Forest Grove
- Estimated homelessness and [cost of evictions](#) statewide after the eviction moratorium expired
- Studied the needs and desires of [people living unsheltered](#)
- Analyzed housing insecurity among [renters of color](#)
- Developed best practice guides for airports and public transit agencies on behalf of federal government
- Conducting regional Point-In-Time Count of people experiencing homelessness, including in Washington Co.





DEFINITIONS & ESTIMATES

Homelessness is defined as:

“Lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence;” for example, living in a shelter, car, or tent. - Department of Housing and Urban Development

Same as above or sharing housing by necessity rather than choice—“doubled-up.”

- Department of Education





ESTIMATING HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness is estimated several ways:

- The Point-In-Time Count, a one-night survey of people living unsheltered that is combined with shelter records for that day (HUD);
- Annual shelter and service records (HUD);
- Counts from teachers and school staff (DoE).

No single estimate is comprehensive or fully accurate.





More than 2,000 K-12 students in Washington County experienced homelessness in the 2021-22 school year.



At least 800 people experienced homelessness in Washington County in 2022. 28% were unsheltered (lower than state average and a reduction from 2021).





CAUSES & CONDITIONS

- Homelessness disproportionately affects communities of color, especially Black and Indigenous people, due to systemic racism.
- People typically enter homelessness because they can't afford housing.
- “Housing First” (free and affordable housing, with services when needed) is most effective at ending homelessness.

Tsemberis et al., Goering et al.





HOUSINGCRISIS

- There are only 26 available and affordable homes in Oregon for every 100 verylow-income rental households. - “The Gap,” NLIHC
- 150,000 households in the metro region pay more than half their income for housing and receive no assistance. - Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
- Before the pandemic, Oregon only provided rent assistance to ¼ of eligible households at risk of homelessness. - “Homelessness in Oregon,” EcoNorthwest.





MYTHS & STEREOTYPES

Three common myths:

1. “People come here for the services”
2. “They just need a job”
3. “Everyone experiencing homelessness is addicted or mentally ill”





“THEY COME HERE FOR SERVICES”

Typically, fewer than 20% of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in a West Coast city came there for services. Most of them came for a job, to stay with family, or grew up there.





‘THEY JUST NEED TO GET A JOB’

- National studies show that about 53% of people living in a shelter are employed and about 40% of people living unsheltered are employed. Rent is simply unaffordable for them. - University of Chicago
- Every \$100 increase in rent is associated with a 9% increase in homelessness. - US GAO
- One-bedroom rent increased about \$250 in Hillsboro from 2019-22. - Zumper.com





“THEY'RE ALL ADDICTED OR MENTALLY ILL”

In Portland, about 36% of people experiencing homelessness report a serious mental illness and 35% report a substance use disorder. This is similar to numbers in other cities. - “Point-In-Time Count,” JOHS

Oregon has the fifth-highest unmet need for mental health services in the country and a huge shortage of mental health workers. - “Oregon mental health services to get over \$500M spending boost this year,” OPB



THANK YOU

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