
Principles: Homelessness

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BACKGROUND

Homelessness is a complex social problem that has many causes including a shortage of affordable housing; lower wages and loss of jobs that lead to eviction; inadequate general assistance and SSI payments; and local land use decisions that limit where shelters and affordable housing may be placed as a result of Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) and other discrimination.

California has 12 percent of the United States population, but 20 percent of its homeless population. California has the highest percentage of unsheltered homeless in the nation, with 64 percent of homeless Californians not having shelter. California has 24 percent of the nation's homeless veterans population and one-third of the nation's chronically homeless population. California also has the largest population of unaccompanied homeless children and youth, with 28 percent of the national total. Unfortunately, while some improvements are being made, recent data in Los Angeles shows that more people are falling into homelessness for the first time, mostly due to a loss of employment or other financial reasons.

With incomes typically much lower than is needed to comfortably pay average rental costs, millions of people are financially vulnerable to homelessness and housing instability. A reduction in work hours, a lost job, an illness or an unexpected expense can spiral into an inability to pay the

rent, an eviction, reliance on extended family for a place to stay, and, sometimes, entry into a homeless shelter. Income support programs that can assist low-income people, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or unemployment compensation, help many people withstand economic crises. Often, however, people experiencing homelessness find these programs to be inaccessible and the benefits offered may be insufficient to help them achieve stability. Federal and State subsidized rents are insufficient to address the need.

Beginning in the 1980s, homeless systems responded with emergency shelters. Three decades later, we know that there is only one solution proven to reduce homelessness among individuals and families: an affordable home. Coupled with intensive services promoting housing stability, a permanent affordable home is the only evidence-based intervention that allows people experiencing chronic homelessness and other significant barriers to housing stability to exit homelessness.

Thus, homelessness requires comprehensive community-based proactive solutions that addresses chronic homelessness and prioritizing the most vulnerable. But, it also requires solutions that keep individuals and families in their homes. When these solutions are not employed and issues are left unaddressed, there are societal reactions such as increased stigma, criminalization, and discrimination against homeless individuals and families. Those issues then compound the impact of homelessness itself. Affirmative strategies at the earliest points are critical. These principles support those early and ongoing strategies that are both preemptive and responsive. Where appropriate, these principles should be considered along with the Involuntary Mental Health Treatment principles, adopted 12/1/2009 and amended 9/20/2014 (Pub# 1040).

PRINCIPLES

Policies and practices of state and local governments should address homelessness through policy and fiscal solutions that expand the creation and availability of affordable housing for all Californians by:

- a. Adopting continuum of evidence-based approaches proven to work including creating more affordable and supportive housing, funding and implementing promising interventions, and prioritizing permanent affordable housing to allow individuals and families to exit homelessness for good, while targeting resources to the most

vulnerable Californians such as youth, veterans, seniors and individuals with physical and mental disabilities.

- b. Increasing pathways to employment and career preparation and increase wages and other income supports to assist in preventing homelessness.
- c. Providing immediate help to individuals who are homeless including: meaningful outreach and navigator programs to help individuals and families who are homeless identify and access alternatives; coordinated entry process designed to quickly identify, assess, refer and connect people in crisis to housing and assistance and services; immediate assistance to prevent homelessness; and diversion to help individuals quickly identify alternatives.
- d. Ensuring the availability of adequate and appropriate shelter space that meets the needs of diverse clients, allows pets, provides safe storage space for personal possessions and are available in different geographic areas available to individuals who are experiencing homelessness and require accommodations for disabilities.
- e. Adopting and implementing housing first policies, which help, get people living on the street into permanent supportive housing.
- f. Ensuring that a significant percentage of housing meets state and federal access standards so that it is available to individuals with disabilities.
- g. Expanding access to full-service partnerships (FSP) which are designed to provide all of the mental health services and supports a person wants and needs to meet their goals. FSPs are designed to serve at risk individuals who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, frequent users of emergency room services, or involved in the criminal justice system.

Physical and mental health care and addiction treatment are integral components of addressing homelessness and keeping individuals and families safe and healthy in their homes; fiscal and policy decisions should expand:

- a. Peer-mental health services to assist individuals with mental health disabilities who are homeless.
- b. Community-based service models that are holistic and consistent with the philosophy of the Recovery Vision, are flexible and, encompass a continuum of care.
- c. Supportive housing for individuals with mental health disabilities and prioritizing the use of Mental Health Services Act and state housing bond money funding for that purpose.
- d. Access to high quality, voluntary physical and mental health and addiction treatment services in community locations that are accessible to individuals who are homeless and provide transportation to services as needed.
- e. Programs that foster self-determination and recognize the mobility of consumers of the services.
- f. Consistent education for homeless youth.