



Homelessness Myths and Facts



MYTH: Homeless people don't want housing; they choose that lifestyle.

FACT: No one wants to be homeless - it's dangerous, stressful, and humiliating.

Being homeless is not easy or comfortable. This myth allows us to ignore the desperate people living in tents or in cars without water, heat or sanitation. Some people who are homeless choose to sleep outside rather than in shelters because they are fearful of having to leave pets and belongings outside. In addition, many shelters and homeless housing programs have stringent eligibility criteria and rules that 'screen out' the most vulnerable people. (Source: <http://bit.ly/29hRYvQ>)

The "Choice" to remain on the street is a dangerous one. 700 people died in the U.S. from exposure in 2009. Remaining on the streets also puts homeless people at risk of violence, including murder, assault, rape, and theft. Homeless people are often the victims of hate crimes. 1,500 reported attacks occurred nationwide on homeless people in the past 15 years with 375 ending in death. 91 people died while homeless in King County in 2015. (Source: <http://bit.ly/29fPg9R>)

MYTH: Providing services to homeless people only attracts more homeless.

FACT: A recent national study found that 75% of homeless people are still living in the city which they became homeless.

While some people experiencing homelessness move to find jobs and housing, many are unable to move because of physical or behavioral health disabilities, because of financial hardships like foreclosure or job loss that may have led to homelessness, or because they simply do not want to leave a community where they have established meaningful roots. People experiencing homelessness who do move to new areas do so because they are searching for work, have family nearby or for other reasons not always related to services.

Client records from All Home (which coordinates homeless services among King County cities, nonprofits and religious institutions) show that 85–90% of people accessing services in King County became homeless in King County. (Sources: <http://bit.ly/29kmNm1>; <http://bit.ly/29ue7vV>)

Grow and improve jobs in Washington State by championing thriving communities, a prosperous economy, and sustainable infrastructure

Today's investment in our communities, workforce and infrastructure will directly influence the health of Washington State's economy tomorrow. The Department of Commerce builds partners capacity to succeed by helping improve their effectiveness through education, technical assistance and access to data, analysis and funding opportunities. We are strategically clearing pathways for job creation through the development of local communities and a state economic climate that promotes innovation, removes barriers and prepares people for work.

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MYTH: Homeless people just lack ambition.

FACT: Experiencing homelessness is a condition, not a character defect.

Lawyers, doctors, film directors, entrepreneurs, university professors, professional musicians and many others have experienced homelessness. Anyone can become homeless if they have no way to pay for housing and no other resources or support. It's not about lack of ambition or desire for a safe and permanent place to live. Homeless people are often sleep-deprived, cold, wet, and sick. With no transportation and little money, they can spend all day getting to food and maybe an appointment before they need to search for a safe place to sleep, all while trying to keep their personal possessions safe. Additionally many people face the trauma of homelessness with disabling conditions including chronic health conditions and severe mental illness.

MYTH: Homeless people aren't trying hard enough to get a job or find a place to live.

FACT: Getting a job is a challenge for most people these days, and incredibly difficult for a homeless person.

Homeless people do work (some reports estimate as many as 44% nationally) and live in their cars, emergency shelters and even outside. **Surviving on the street takes more work than we realize.** (Source: <http://bit.ly/29ryV5t>) If a homeless person is fortunate to have a job, it is hard to maintain employment when you don't have a place to bathe, prepare meals or electricity to set an alarm. **Even with a job, there is no state in the U.S. where a minimum wage worker working full time can afford a one-bedroom apartment at the fair market rent.** (Sources: <http://bit.ly/29ryV5t>; <http://nbcnews.to/29ldRye>; <http://bit.ly/29ua56l>)

MYTH: Housing for homeless people should have conditions – such as you have to be sober before getting in.

FACT: Housing First, which provides access to housing without preconditions, is a successful approach to ending homelessness.

Research indicates that Housing First and Rapid Rehousing programs, which provide access to housing without requiring participants to use other services such as mental and physical health care, addiction treatment, education and employment options, across the nation have demonstrated success in ending homelessness for even the 'hardest' to reach. When people are housed, they can more easily and effectively work towards resolving issues such as alcoholism, drug addiction and mental illness. (Sources: <http://bit.ly/29hWzOt>; <http://n.pr/29gWNG4>)

MYTH: Homeless people are all drunks and drug users. We're just enabling them!

FACT: Research shows that substance abuse is often a result of homelessness, rather than a cause.

Roughly 32% of individuals experiencing homelessness suffer from addiction to drugs and alcohol—a figure approximately 20% higher than reported abuse of alcohol and illicit drugs by the general population. Homelessness, which is usually accompanied by loss of income, isolation, and loss of self-worth, drives people to substance abuse. It is often mistakenly assumed that alcoholics and drug users lack moral principles or willpower and that they could stop using drugs simply by choosing to change their behavior. Recovering from addiction is difficult for housed people; it is even more difficult for people experiencing the additional trauma of homelessness. (Sources: <http://bit.ly/29g5VP2>; <http://bit.ly/29uiKq0>; <http://bit.ly/29m10t9>)

Myth: People who are homeless are violent, dangerous, and/or are lawbreakers.

FACT: A person who is homeless is no more likely to be a criminal than a housed person, with one legal exception: camping ordinances.

A person who is homeless is no more likely to be a criminal than a housed person, with one legal exception: camping ordinances. People who are homeless break that law merely by being homeless. A person who is homeless is less likely to perpetrate a violent crime than a housed person, and is in fact more likely to be the victim of a violent crime, especially if they are a homeless woman, teen, or child. (Source: <http://bit.ly/29eQVMw>; <http://bit.ly/29ujT0J>)

MYTH: It isn't safe for sex offenders to be in shelters.

FACT: The roughly 82,000 registered sex offenders across the US are more carefully tracked and controlled than any other type of former criminals.

Reporting requirements for registered offenders with no fixed address are particularly stringent compared to most housed offenders. They are obliged to live under terms of release as determined by a court, must report to the local Sheriff every week about where they are staying, and are under threat of more stringent reclassification or re-confinement if they break these terms. If an offender is living at the shelter, that will be the registered address. Access to a shelter is a positive factor associated with offenders meeting the requirements of their release, while banning them from shelter forces them into the more stressful life on the streets associated with a greater likelihood of recidivism. The largest study to date commissioned by the U.S. Department of Justice found a recidivism rate of 5.3%, lower than many other categories of crime. (Source: <http://bit.ly/29hYItT>)