

Senate and Assembly Committees on Human Services
Joint Informational Hearing

California's Homeless Youth: Averting Long-Term Crisis

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Summary

On a January night in 2016, volunteers fanned out across the United States to count the number of homeless people in this country. What they found – more than a half million people living in shelters, cars, empty warehouses, along river beds, or other places not meant for habitation – was by all accounts validation of a human tragedy. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) had some good news to report in this year's data: chronic homelessness and family homelessness both showed signs of decline, as did overall homelessness. However, another population was growing: Homeless youth.

Nearly one-third of the nation's homeless youth live in California – 11,222 youth, according to the 2016 HUD count. Preliminary data from the 2017 count shows that number increasing to 15,206 homeless youth – an increase of 26 percent in a single year, and 32 percent since 2015. Prior to 2015, the count did not break out this group at all. HUD and local experts say this number is likely a vast undercount.

The federal government defines a homeless youth as a minor younger than 18 or a young adult between 18 and 24 years old who is living individually without shelter. Exact counts vary substantially based on definition and methodology, but reports across various systems show a growing number of homeless unaccompanied youth, a group that often stays hidden from view and may be easily overlooked.

Housing is limited for these youth, with anecdotal reports of wait lists for shelter or more permanent housing of weeks or months. Providers of services and shelter say youth tend to avoid adult homeless shelters because they are often victimized there, instead believing they are safer in youth encampments, living with relatives or strangers, or in other situations until they can access shelter care. Experts say, it is critical to develop and fund youth homeless services that are developmentally appropriate for young, maturing adults. Services that have proven successful for youth include those that are trauma-informed, teach life skills, and offer educational degrees and job training.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning (LGBTQ) youth, those who were in foster care or involved with the juvenile system, and African American youth are disproportionately

represented among the homeless youth population. Family rejection is often cited as the reason for leaving home – including those who flee conflict, and those who have been kicked out of their parents’ homes.

On the street, unaccompanied young people are particularly vulnerable to violence and exploitation. There is a significant overlap between homelessness and commercial sexual exploitation. Studies indicate at least one in five homeless youth have participated in “survival sex” in order to find shelter or food. The likelihood of victimization is even higher for young women and LGBTQ youth. A 2012 report by the California Homeless Youth Project described strategies that youth use to stay as safe as possible on unsheltered nights including staying up all night walking the streets, riding public transportation, napping at a fast food restaurant, finding sexual partners who would provide them with shelter, and “hustling up” enough cash for a room.¹

Youth homelessness has not gone unnoticed: The US Interagency Council on Homelessness in August noted “an unprecedented increase in collaboration among federal agencies and between the government and locally-driven efforts to end homelessness among unaccompanied youth under age 25.”ⁱⁱ In one effort, California and other states are participating in a HUD demonstration project to identify best strategies and practices for addressing youth homelessness. In another, researchers have embarked upon a project to identify better practices in counting homeless youth, and to identify factors that can be used as flags for intervention prior to a youth becoming homeless.

One challenge in California is that policies to combat homelessness are adopted and administered by a variety of entities, including the Department of Housing and Community Development, Office of Emergency Services, Department of Social Services, counties and cities. Until recently, there was no single statewide entity charged with coordinating policy development and state resources to fight homelessness. The Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council was established by SB 1380 (*Mitchell, Chapter 847, Statutes of 2016*) to serve as a statewide facilitator, coordinator, and policy development resource on ending homelessness in California. Its inaugural meeting is being held at in Sacramento at the same time as this hearing.

Half of chronically homeless adults were homeless during the ages of 18 to 24. Researchers, providers and psychologists say that youth homelessness presents an immediate crisis that can lead to victimization and lifelong trauma for youth. But these experts also say that this transitional age provides a window to intervene and help youth become self-sufficient.

Background

There is no single statewide or nationwide definition of a “homeless youth,” with different definitions and age ranges being applied in the various programs that serve this population. This is one of several reasons why data on homeless youth can be somewhat wide-ranging. Other factors that make it difficult to get a true count of homeless populations include evolving data collection methods and the hidden nature of youth homelessness. Advocates report that some youth are unwilling to participate in surveys; others stay out of view for safety.

In California, the term “homeless youth” generally refers to unaccompanied minors ages 12 through 17 who are living apart from their parents or legal guardians, as well as young adults ages 18 through 24 who are economically and/or emotionally detached from their families and are experiencing homelessness or living in unstable or inadequate living situations. Such living situations include sleeping on friends’ couches, staying in shelters, and living under bridges, in abandoned buildings, and on the streets.ⁱⁱⁱ

Estimates of Homelessness

Each year, HUD releases its Annual Homeless Assessment Report, which includes point-in-time estimates of the nation’s homeless population based on the January count. These numbers provide a snapshot of homelessness across the country. In recent years, HUD has expanded the point-in-time data collection to include the number of young adults and children who are experiencing homelessness without a parent or guardian present.

In 2016, there were 549,928 homeless people in the nation, according to the HUD point-in-time count. Of those, 35,686 were unaccompanied youth, or about 6 percent of the total. Of that population, about 11 percent was under age 18 and the remainder was between ages 18 and 24. Slightly more than 45 percent of homeless youth nationwide were unsheltered.

In California, the percentage of homeless youth is much higher. Of a total homeless population in 2016 of 118,142, there were 11,222 unaccompanied youth, or 9.5 percent of the state’s homeless population, and 31 percent of the nation’s homeless youth. About 850 of the counted youth were younger than 18.

Another 862 homeless youth are caring for their own 1,098 children. Taken together, this is slightly more than 11 percent of the state’s homeless population. By comparison, about one-quarter of California’s homeless population is considered chronically homeless.

An emerging homeless population is the community of college students. Nationally, the prevalence of homeless community college students is estimated to be 14 percent. A recent report by the Los Angeles Community College District found 1 in 5 of its 230,000 students is homeless. The California State University system released a study saying that 1 in every 10 of its 460,000 students was homeless, and 1 in 5 had spotty access to food.

Disproportionate representation

Within the population of homeless youth, some distinct groups are disproportionately represented, including those who are LGBTQ, formerly or currently involved with the foster care system, involved with the juvenile justice system and youth of color.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ)

Between 5 and 10 percent of the general youth population identify themselves as being LGBTQ, yet they make up 20 to 40 percent of the homeless youth population.^{iv} Concentrations of homeless youth are higher in communities known to offer specific LGBTQ supports, such as Los

Angeles and San Francisco. Yet the demand for help far exceeds the capacity. A survey of youth in San Francisco found that LGBTQ respondents were more likely to have been homeless for less than a year compared to the non-LGBTQ survey respondents.^v

Current and former foster youth

Youth aging out of foster care are at high risk for becoming homeless. One 2013 study published in the Journal of Public Health found that between 31 percent and 46 percent of former foster youth had been homeless at least once by age 26. The study found that the odds of becoming homeless by age 19 years were higher for those who (1) had run away more than once while in foster care, (2) were placed in a group care setting at baseline, (3) had been physically abused before entering foster care, (4) had engaged in more delinquent behaviors, and (5) did not feel very close to a biological parent or grandparent.^{vi}

Youth who have been involved in the foster care system are more likely to become homeless at an earlier age and remain homeless for a longer period of time. Former foster youth are less likely to have completed high school, have work experience and have the life skills necessary to become independent at 18 than their peers. With the passage of AB 12 in 2010, youth began to have the option to remain in extended foster care and learn additional life skills between the ages of 18 and 21, providing they are pursuing education or school. Experts say this may reduce the number of former foster youth who are facing homelessness.

Juvenile Justice Involved Youth

The overlap between youth homelessness and youth with justice system involvement is similarly significant. A 2017 report, “Addressing the intersections of Juvenile Justice Involvement and Youth Homelessness: Principles for Change,” cites a survey of homeless youth in 11 cities by the US Administration on Children, Youth and Families which found that nearly 78 percent had at least one prior interaction with police. Nearly 62 percent of those surveyed had been arrested at least once and almost 44 percent had been in a juvenile detention center, jail or prison. Seven percent directly attributed their first experience with homelessness to exiting a jail or prison.

Racial and Cultural Minorities

San Francisco’s 2017 point-in-time survey found black or African American, Latino and multi-racial youth are substantially overrepresented among the city’s homeless youth. While the city’s African American population is 6 percent of the total, 26 percent of the counted homeless youth were black or African American. The percentage of youth identifying themselves as Latino was twice as high among homeless youth as the general population, and those identifying themselves as multi-racial were 5 percent of general population but 35 percent of all homeless youth.

Researchers who studied differences in youth homelessness by ethnicity found substantial differences in youths’ experiences by race.^{vii} Though sharing common histories of family dysfunction, the youth differed in their experiences of family, access to housing, street survival strategies, self-presentation, health behaviors and service utilization.

White youth generally identified with the term “homeless,” engaged in survival activities, and accessed the services intended to address the needs of homeless youth. In contrast, researchers said the sample of African American youth generally did not perceive themselves as “homeless,” a stigmatized term, and were thus less likely to utilize, or be engaged by, relevant services. A report published in 2013 by the California Homeless Youth Project suggests that the reluctance of African American youth to identify themselves as homeless means that providers need to employ different strategies to engage them.

Reasons for Becoming Homeless

The reasons leading a person to become homeless are varied and often complicated. Studies have shown that youth often have traumatic childhood experiences prior to becoming homeless. As discussed previously, youth who have been involved in the foster care and juvenile justice systems are significantly more likely to become homeless than those who have not. By definition, involvement in both of these systems is traumatic. Family conflict and family rejection, as well as economic instability, also can cause a young person to become homeless.

Family Conflict / Family Rejection:

Youth who run away from home as minors and become homeless cite problems at home including physical and sexual abuse, mental health disorders within the family, substance abuse or addiction of a family member, pregnancy, parental neglect, and rejection over sexual orientation. In some cases, youth are asked to leave the home because the family is unable or unwilling to continue supporting them.

The US Administration on Children and Families defines a “throwaway youth” to be one who either is asked or told to leave home by a parent or other household adult who does not arrange for adequate alternative care, or is away from home and prevented from returning by a parent or other household adult who does not arrange for adequate alternative care, and the child is out of the house overnight.^{viii} Almost 40 percent of youth surveyed by Larkin Street in San Francisco said that a fight or conflict with a parent or guardian contributed to their becoming homeless.^{ix} When asked why they became homeless for the first time, more than half said it was because they were asked to leave by a parent or caregiver. Seventy percent said they did not have the option to return home.

Between 25 and 40 percent of LGBTQ homeless youth report leaving home due to conflicts with family members around their sexual orientation or gender expression. Often, LGBTQ youth are either forced to leave or they choose to leave home in order to avoid verbal or physical abuse of unsupportive family members.^x One survey of service providers for LGBTQ homeless youth found that nearly half of the youth reported running away because of family rejection of sexual orientation or gender identity,^{xi} and about four in 10 reported being forced out of their home by parents because of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Economic problems

Some youth become homeless because their families cannot find affordable housing or are having difficulty obtaining or maintaining a job. These youth may become homeless with their

families, but be separated from their families and/or living on the streets alone. In other cases, youth report being told to support themselves once they turn 18.

Developmental Impacts Related to Youth Homelessness

Many youth experience homelessness as a result of escaping physical or emotional abuse. In addition to the impacts of these experiences, the conditions of homelessness and the resulting stress can be traumatic, and repeat exposure to trauma can have significant effects on an adolescent's biological and social development.

Prolonged exposure to trauma and stress can also affect a youth's ability to master the developmental tasks of adolescence and the ability to plan and organize for the future. Because a child often learns self-worth from those closest to them, a lack of caring and supportive caregivers can result in feelings of hopelessness and low self-worth. These poor self-images can cause pessimism and negative outlooks on the future, resulting in an inability to focus on tasks, understanding the consequences of actions, an inability to develop and implement a budget, and an inability to complete job applications and develop interview skills.^{xii} Negative experiences at a young age can cause a youth who has experienced trauma to feel powerless to change his or her circumstances, contributing to the sense that planning for the future is futile.

Social effects of complex trauma

Many adolescents who experience homelessness experience complex trauma, which is the combination of exposure to traumatic events and the impact of this exposure on immediate and long-term outcomes. Complex trauma can affect a youth's ability to form attachments, develop forms of self-regulation, and attain competency in developmental tasks of adolescence.

Many unaccompanied youth with a history of complex trauma have significant mental health problems, including depression, anxiety disorders, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, suicidal ideation, attachment issues, and substance abuse disorders. Young people's responses to trauma are shaped — at least in part — by their age, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. When traumatic events occur before youth leave home, many youth are re-traumatized once they arrive on the street. The youth are therefore trying to recover from traumatic events that prompted their homelessness at the same time that they are trying to survive in a hostile street environment.

Youth who have experienced trauma often have difficulty forming positive attachments with other individuals, which can manifest in suspicion of others, defiant or aggressive behavior, needy and demanding behavior, an unawareness of their own emotions and the emotions of others, or loud, attention-seeking behavior. Complex trauma also can result in a youth's inability to connect with peers, desire to avoid contact with others, development of an over-attachment to peers, or — particularly for youth involved in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems — a distrust of authority figures.^{xiii} Many homeless youth create street families in order to ensure safety, but also to compensate for love and support they did not receive from parents and caregivers earlier in life.

Additionally, youth who experience complex trauma may be hypersensitive to physical contact, hyper vigilant, overreact to perceived threats or danger, and experience disturbances in the regulation of bodily functions such as sleeping, eating, and digestion. Many youth who experience complex trauma have difficulty identifying, expressing, and managing emotions and they often internalize or externalize reactions as a result of underlying issues of depression, anxiety, or anger. Emotional responses to various situations, especially situations that trigger memories of trauma, can be unpredictable or explosive, and a youth may have difficulty managing emotional response to upsetting situations, or they may dissociate from situations and appear detached, distant, or out of touch with reality.

Toxic stress

Prolonged and repeated exposure to childhood trauma, including physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, and caregiver substance abuse or mental illness, can result in “toxic stress.”^{xiv} When someone experiences a stressful situation, the body responds by elevating heart rate, blood pressure, and excreting stress hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol. Repeated exposure to stressful experiences results in a prolonged state of the body’s response to stress.

When a child who is surrounded by supportive adults experiences trauma such that the body’s stress response is triggered, the physiological effects of stress are buffered and reduced by those supportive adults, thereby resulting in healthy responses to subsequent stress. However, if stress is extreme and long-lasting and a child lacks the necessary supportive relationships with adults, the physiological effects of stress are not buffered and the child may experience damaged, weakened systems and brain architecture.

Other Impacts of Youth Homelessness

Homelessness may have negative impacts on health and mental health and can create barriers to education, job skills, and resources that lead to financial stability and overall wellbeing.

Poorer health outcomes

The circumstances that led to a young person’s homelessness compounded by the experience of being homeless often lead to a heightened risk of negative health impacts. Youth experiencing homelessness are at high risk for a number of illnesses and for the development of chronic conditions such as influenza, hepatitis, sexually transmitted infections, diabetes, skin diseases, respiratory diseases such as pneumonia and asthma, and dental problems.

Once homeless, youth can face a number of barriers to accessing medical care, including a lack of health insurance, transportation, and knowledge of services. In a 2003 article in the journal *Seminars in Pediatric Infectious Diseases*, researchers noted that, “In addition to the barriers experienced by the adult homeless population, homeless adolescents confront further hurdles stemming from their age and developmental stage. Some of these impediments include a lack of knowledge of clinic sites, fear of not being taken seriously, concerns about confidentiality, and fears of police or social services involvement.”

Mental illness

More than half of homeless youth report mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, psychosis, and post-traumatic stress. The prevalence of psychiatric disorders is almost twice as high as their more stably housed peers. Youth experiencing homelessness may also be at higher risk of suicide. According to a 2012 article in the journal *Child Psychiatry and Human Development*, “While some pre-existing mental and physical health problems associated with abusive and neglectful pre-street backgrounds may contribute to suicidality; these issues are typically intensified by the high risk lifestyle of street living.”

Substance use

Research indicates that alcohol and other drug use are more prevalent among youth experiencing homelessness. Results vary across studies, but a 2012 literature review in the journal *Child Psychiatry and Human Development* found that prevalence of substance use by homeless youth ranges between 70 percent and 90 percent. Other studies, such as one detailed in a 1997 article in the *American Journal of Public Health*, have indicated that, across substances, youth living on the streets were the most likely to use illicit substances, followed by youth living in shelters and youth living in homes who had a recent runaway/homeless experience. Stably housed youth had the lowest prevalence of substance use.

Victimization

Youth experiencing homelessness are at risk of becoming the victims of violence, and report high rates of physical and sexual victimization.

A literature review from the 2007 National Symposium of Homelessness Research highlights studies that indicate that not only are young people who experience homelessness much more likely to be victimized than their more stably housed peers, but many of these youth are victimized repeatedly. Young women experiencing homelessness face particularly high risk of violence and trauma. A 2002 article in the *American Journal of Public Health* indicates that LGBTQ youth living on the streets have been found to face higher rates of victimization than their heterosexual counterparts.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation

There is a significant correlation between the populations of youth experiencing homelessness and commercially sexually exploited children (CSEC): Some 60 percent of 10- to 17-year-olds who are CSEC victims are runaway, throwaway, or homeless youth.

A 2017 study by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania and Loyola University, New Orleans, interviewed 911 homeless youth between ages 17 and 25 about their experiences with sex trafficking – being forced into commercial sex acts by force, fraud, or coercion. The survey, which involved youth in 12 United States and Canadian cities, found that 15 percent of the total population of homeless youth had been trafficked for sex (21.4 percent of young women and 10

percent of young men) and that “an astounding 26.9 percent of LGBTQ youth reported experiences consistent with the U.S. federal definition of sex trafficking.”^{xv}

Ninety-one percent of the homeless youth reported being approached by strangers or acquaintances who offered lucrative work opportunities that turned out to be fraudulent work situations, scams, pandering, or sex trafficking.

Unsafe sexual practices

Homeless youth also have a higher likelihood of engaging in earlier sexual intercourse, having multiple sexual partners, and participating in survival sex – or sex in exchange for food, money, shelter, drugs, or clothing. One study of more than 200 homeless youth ages 15 to 22 found that, of those who reported recent sexual intercourse, one-third of young men and half of young women did not use a barrier contraceptive method with at least one partner. More than one-fifth said they had participated in survival sex. Of the sexually active respondents, 46 percent reported receiving a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) test in the last three months, and 32 percent reported positive STI results.

Additionally, homeless youth have high pregnancy and parenting rates. As many as one-third of unaccompanied young women have been pregnant; and one-half of unaccompanied young men have had a pregnancy experience. Homeless youth are three times as likely as national samples of youth to be pregnant, to have impregnated someone, or to already be a parent.

Arrests

Unaccompanied youth may be arrested or cited for reasons that are solely related to their homelessness. A 2017 report by the Coalition for Juvenile Justice and other organizations provides some examples, and recommendations that local governments focus on ways to avoid criminalizing survival behavior.

For example, youth may be cited for sleeping on a park bench in violation of an ordinance that prohibits sleeping in public spaces. A young person who is sleeping on the couch of a friend who lives far from school may have trouble getting to school each day, leading to a truancy charge. A youth living on the street or elsewhere who is experiencing traumatic stress may be more likely to end up in a fight and face an assault charge.

The report, “Addressing the Intersections of Juvenile Justice Involvement and Youth Homelessness: Principles for Change,” makes a series of recommendations, and provides examples of a youth who has no safe place stealing objects in order to have money for shelter, and facing a theft charge, or breaking into a building and being charged with trespassing.^{xvi}

Barriers to education and employment

Education and employment are cornerstones of financial stability, and provide a means for avoiding or escaping homelessness. Yet youth with unstable housing can face a number of barriers to attending high school or college. Barriers to education can include transportation to

school, being in violation of school attendance policies, residency requirements, policies about releasing records to a minor without a legal guardian, and a need for proper records.

Homeless youth also may have difficulty getting and maintaining a job, as a lack of sufficient education can create barriers to employment. These may include lack of a stable address or means of contact, proper identification, work experience, transportation, and assistance with or knowledge of application materials and processes.

Shelter and Housing

There are a variety of housing models that support youth who are homeless, although the demand for shelter is much greater than available space. Providers of services say that while the youth may be eligible to stay in adult shelters, they typically do not because they are often victimized there. Instead they seek safety in groups in unsheltered locations, or by staying with friends, relatives or strangers. Housing and shelter models used by youth include:

Emergency Shelters

Emergency homeless shelters are temporary accommodations that may have communal living spaces and often serve as the entry point into the system of homeless services. The US Family and Youth Services Bureau provides grants to 24 shelters for runaway and homeless youth in California. Shelters for minors under age 18 are licensed as group homes through the California Department of Social Services. Shelters serving transition age youth up to age 25 function as adult shelters. While emergency shelters can serve as short-term stop-gap measures, when an individual or family is facing a crisis, they are meant to be a temporary solution.

Transitional Housing

Transitional housing generally offers a housing subsidy along with supportive services in a range of residential settings. According to a 2015 Urban Institute report entitled, “Rapid Re-housing: What the Research Says,” participation in the transitional housing program assumes that individuals are not yet ‘housing ready’ and focuses on teaching skills to achieve employment and self-sufficiency so they can become ready to maintain independent housing. Transitional housing programs often require participants to spend time on education or work and participate in support services. Youth may be removed from the program for lapses in conduct or participation.

For current and former foster youth, transitional housing has served as a key element in the progression to independence. The Transitional Housing Program-Plus (THP-Plus) is available to young adults who exited from foster care on or after their 18th birthday who are not yet 24 years of age. It provides affordable housing and comprehensive supportive services for up to 24 months. THP-Plus Foster Care (THP+FC) is a licensed placement for youth, ages 18-21 who are participating in extended foster care. It provides housing and comprehensive supportive services.

Together the foster care transitional housing programs house 3,000 transition age youth in California on any given night, according to a 2017 report by the John Burton Advocates for Youth organization. Another 18 transitional housing programs for non-foster youth are funded through the federal Family and Youth Services Bureau.

Permanent Supportive Housing

Programs that provide individuals and/or families who have documented disabilities with a long-term housing unit of their own are referred to as Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH). Tenants may stay as long as they want if they are able to pay their rent on time each month. The program includes supportive services such as case management, advocacy, substance abuse or mental health counseling, job finding and others, which are voluntary and offered on site.^{xvii} The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness considers Permanent Supportive Housing to be a proven solution for people who have experienced chronic homelessness.

Funding

A variety of funding streams support services and shelter for youth who are homeless. Most significantly, HUD in 2017 granted about \$582 million to California entities to administer programs that meet a large range of housing needs. Other federal sources include the McKinney Vento school-based funding for youth, Chaffee Grants for foster youth, and the Family and Youth Services Bureau at the US Department of Health and Human Services, which funds emergency shelters, and other programs.

California's largest direct funding stream for homeless youth programs comes through the state Office of Emergency Services. Prior to 2015, OES provided approximately \$1 million per year for the Homeless Youth and Exploitation program. The program is divided among projects in urban areas to provide crisis intervention and stabilization to homeless minors and youth, including food, shelter, counseling, and outreach.

However, in 2016, the Legislature provided \$10 million to fund Homeless Youth Emergency Services Pilot projects in four targeted counties. Funds are intended to provide crisis intervention and stabilization services to homeless minors and youth. An additional \$10 million from the 2017 budget will be allocated for four target counties to conduct Homeless Youth Emergency Services and Housing pilot project, which may include Rapid Rehousing; Rental Assistance (to access affordable housing); Transitional Housing; and Supportive Housing.

Other funding for homeless programs comes from the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, which is administered by the Family and Youth Services Bureau, within the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 was the first major federal legislative response to homelessness. Under the Act schools must work to eliminate any barriers, such as transportation, that may prohibit students from attending school, and are required to appoint a liaison to work with homeless students and their families.

Current and former foster youth may receive supports through the Chaffee Foster Care Independence Program, which funds states to support and provide services to youth who are expected to age out of foster care, as well as former foster care youth ages 18 to 21. Funds from the program can be used for housing, educational services and independent living services. Additionally, the Fostering Connections Act of 2008 increased federal funds available to states to extend assistance to foster youth up until age 21 as long as the youth is in school, working or has a medical condition that prevents them from participating in those activities. Services can include housing assistance, vocational and college help, and counseling.

Federal Priorities

In 2010, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness released “Opening Doors: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness,” which identified four distinct populations: veterans, chronically homeless adults, unaccompanied youth less than 25 years of age, and families with children. It articulated a goal of preventing and ending homelessness in each of those populations.

Similarly, HUD has issued priorities for grant funding. Because HUD’s more than \$550 million in grant funding is a substantial part of the state’s overall homeless plan, the department’s priorities have significant impact on the direction of housing policy in California. California’s state-funded investment in youth homelessness services is significantly less robust.

Housing First

Both HUD and the state of California have adopted a Housing First philosophy for funding organizations serving the homeless population. Under Housing First, homeless adults and youth are quickly placed into housing without preconditions such as sobriety or a minimum income threshold, and similarly are not subject to eviction for lack of compliance with a service plan. The underlying theory is that people with barriers to maintaining stable employment will not benefit from the associated services until they have a safe, steady place to sleep each night. Once basic safety, comfort and health needs are met, services are offered. This model rejects the idea of returning someone to homelessness as a punishment for failing to participate in services.

Rapid re-housing is a Housing First model that focuses on moving families quickly into permanent housing by providing housing location services and financial assistance. The federal Homeless Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program offers individuals or families help with move-in expenses such as first and last month’s rent, or rent subsidies.

Transitional housing and service-only projects can be considered Housing First if they operate with low-barriers, work to quickly move people into permanent housing, do not require participation in supportive services and, for transitional housing projects, do not require any preconditions for moving into the transitional housing. However, many transitional housing programs traditionally have made attendance at school or work, or participation in certain services a required condition of getting and remaining in housing. This shift in program philosophy is underway.

Coordinated Entry Systems / Prioritization of beds

All programs receiving HUD funding, must participate in a Continuum of Care system, which includes a coordinated entry system. Under Coordinated Entry, a homeless adult, youth, or family is assessed for history and risk factors at any “door” they enter into the system, as are homeless adults and families. All providers feed assessments into a single priority list for care, and the coordinated entry system assigns the youth to housing that is most suitable.

The coordinated entry system requires that individuals who are chronically homeless be placed in the top tier of priorities “in order to ensure that those persons with the longest histories residing in places not meant for human habitation, in emergency shelters, and in safe havens and with the most severe service needs are given first priority.”^{xviii} Some providers have said that the coordinated entry removes provider discretion to shelter a homeless youth who is facing his or her first night on the street, which may be the most dangerous night.

Legislative Efforts

Various Legislative efforts over the past decade have focused on supporting people who are homeless to find and maintain housing, but focus on these issues has increased in intensity in recent years.

In 2016, the Legislature and Governor enacted the “No Place Like Home” initiative, which provides \$2 billion for the construction and rehabilitation of permanent supportive housing for homeless individuals with mental illness. The initiative also included funding for programs to assist individuals, including homeless individuals, to successfully apply for Supplemental Security Income/State Supplementary Payment (SSI/SSP) program, and to assist families served by the child welfare system with housing to support reunification.

On September 29, 2017, Governor Brown signed 15 bills into law to help increase the supply and affordability of housing in California. The package of legislation provides funding for affordable housing, reduces regulations, boosts construction and strengthens existing housing laws. Among the bills are *SB 2 (Atkins, Chapter 364, Statutes of 2017)*, which establishes a permanent funding source for affordable housing through a \$75 fee on real estate transaction documents. The fees would generate roughly \$250 million a year, which would be split among state and local affordable housing programs. Additionally *SB 3 (Beall, Chapter 365, Statutes of 2017)* authorizes \$4 billion in general obligation bonds for affordable housing programs and a veteran’s home ownership program. It must be approved by voters.

Recent Efforts

In January 2017, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness released goals for ending youth homelessness, including that communities have resources, plans, and system capacity in place to continue to prevent and quickly end future experiences of homelessness among youth. The agency also identified benchmarks that communities should use in assessing their own approaches, including the numbers of unsheltered youth, speed with which homeless youth are housed and duration of time in shelters.

Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program

Recognizing a need to learn more about youth homelessness, HUD recently awarded \$33 million for its Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program which is intended to build systems that will end youth homelessness. The YHDP will support a wide range of housing programs including rapid re-housing, permanent supportive housing, transitional housing, and host homes, in which an adult brings a homeless youth into their own home temporarily, with supportive services. The

demonstration program was developed with youth in mind, relying upon the recommendations provided directly from young people who had experienced homelessness.

Two of the ten communities nationwide receiving YHDP funds are located in California.

- Santa Cruz County received a \$2.2 million grant. Elements of its plan include creating an intensive family finding process for youth, establishing host homes for LGBTQ homeless youth and creating a coordinated entry system specifically for youth.
- San Francisco City received \$2.9 million. Elements of its plan include identifying, assessing and prioritizing the needs of the most vulnerable youth experiencing homelessness, including LGBTQ and CSEC youth, pregnant and parenting youth, justice-involved youth, immigrants at high risk of homelessness, and youth of color.

Each demonstration site will create a plan, and participate in a program evaluation to inform the federal effort to prevent and end youth homelessness. San Francisco and Santa Cruz have already submitted their plans to HUD and are awaiting HUD approval to launch their plans.

Voices of Youth Count

In July 2016, in an effort to obtain more comprehensive data on youth experiences homelessness, HUD awarded a \$2 million grant to Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago to support the Voices of Youth Count (VoYC) project. The VoYC was designed to capture the experiences of runaway, unaccompanied homeless and unstably housed youth, by more clearly defining the size of the population and scope of the issue.

VoYC conducted a point-in-time count in 22 urban, suburban, and rural communities across the country to provide incidence and prevalence estimates of homeless and unstably housed youth within those communities. VoYC also conducted a complementary set of qualitative data collection interviews that will provide a deeper understanding of the characteristics of homeless youth, the conditions that lead to youth homelessness, and the barriers that homeless youth face in accessing needed housing and services. The findings will be released on Nov. 15.

California Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council

The Council is tasked with overseeing the implementation of Housing First guidelines and regulations and to identify resources, benefits, and services that can be accessed to prevent and end homelessness in California. The bill also requires California agencies and departments that provide housing or related services to operate using a Housing First approach. A specific goal for the youth population is to ensure that “time-limited, supportive services programs serving homeless youth, programs should use a positive youth development model and be culturally competent to serve unaccompanied youth under 25 years of age.”

This hearing provides an opportunity to focus directly on the growing population of homeless youth, to understand the risks they face, and to identify opportunities to intervene.

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- ⁱ <http://cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov/docs/pdf/76146-Compare-WA-Brief-Report.pdf>
- ⁱⁱ <https://www.usich.gov/goals/youth>
- ⁱⁱⁱ <http://cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov/docs/pdf/a-quickoverview-of-hy-inca.pdf>
- ^{iv} <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/lgbtq-youth/homelessness>
- ^v <http://hsh.sfgov.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017-SF-Point-in-Time-Count-General-FINAL-6.21.17.pdf>
- ^{vi} Dworsky, Amy, Laura Napolitano, Marc Courtney, "Homelessness During the Transition From Foster Care to Adulthood," American Journal of Public Health, December 2013.
- ^{vii} Hickler, Benjamin, et al. "The worlds of homeless white and African American youth in San Francisco, California: A cultural epidemiological comparison," the journal of Social Science and Medicine, 2008.
- ^{viii} https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/fysb/rhy_report_to_congress_fy1213.pdf, pg. 27
- ^{ix} <http://larkinstreetyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Larkin-Street-Incidence-and-Needs-Report-2014.pdf>
- ^x <http://cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov/docs/pdf/strugglingtosurvivefinal.pdf>
- ^{xi} <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Durso-Gates-LGBT-Homeless-Youth-Survey-July-2012.pdf>
- ^{xii} http://hhyp.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/PPT_No2_TraumaPTSD_Complex_Trauma.pdf
- ^{xiii} http://hhyp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Complex-Trauma-Facts_Homeless-Youth_draft-4.pdf
- ^{xiv} <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/toxic-stress/>
- ^{xv} <https://covenanthousestudy.org/landing/trafficking/docs/Loyola-Research-Results.pdf>
- ^{xvi} <http://juvjustice.org/sites/default/files/ckfinder/files/FINAL%20Principles%20-%20ns%20final.pdf>
- ^{xvii} http://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/MH/Documents/2015_HopeForTheHomeless.pdf
- ^{xviii} <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/FAQs-Notice-CPD-14-012.pdf>