



Analysis of Homelessness and Chronic Homelessness in Texas and Potential Solutions

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Abstract

Home to the second largest state in the United States, Texas currently has a population of 700,000 homeless individuals. The increasing rates of homelessness in Texas, especially chronic homelessness, showcases the inadequacy of conventional, short-term solutions which provide temporary financial aid, such as Pathways Home and the Homeless Housing and Services Program. This rise in the number of chronic homelessness is due to prolonged instability in housing, sometimes aggravated by mental illness, substance misuse, or disability. This increase reveals greater social issues, such as housing affordability, economic disparity, and deteriorating social safety nets as primary structural determinants. Using a case study approach, I investigate and compare the effectiveness of a community-oriented housing initiative in Austin called the Community First! Village with traditional policies. My study of the Community First! Village suggests that community support, integrated healthcare, and permanent housing are effective in assisting the chronic homeless population gain housing stability. This signifies that these holistic approaches in dealing with homeless problems must be prioritized in any future policies. These findings illustrate to policymakers the usefulness in shifting towards human-centered, scalable solutions to address the escalating issue of homelessness.

Introduction

There is little question that homelessness continues to be one of the most pressing and enduring social problems in the state of Texas, as well as throughout the United States. The number of Texans experiencing chronic homelessness increased from 1,949 in 2022 to 2,594 in 2024. Despite the fact that Texas and the U.S. have high rates of homelessness, Texas has a greater rate of individuals who are without shelter. This is partially due to the warmer weather in Texas as well as the limited shelter facilities in specific urban and rural locations. Although the federal and local governments have been working for decades to provide emergency shelters and housing subsidies, the number of people experiencing homelessness continues to increase annually (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development). This upward trend is driven by a mix of structural and socioeconomic reasons, such as a shortage of affordable housing, salaries that have remained flat and have not kept pace with the rising cost of living, and limited access to long-term healthcare.

Chronic homelessness is an increasingly pressing topic among the types of homelessness that are currently being experienced. Chronic homelessness, as opposed to transient homelessness, is characterized by extended periods of time during which a person does not have a secure place to live. This is frequently accompanied by serious health issues, such as substance misuse or mental illness. According to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), an individual is considered to be chronically homeless if they have been homeless for longer than one year, currently reside in locations that are not designed for human habitation, and suffer from a condition that renders them unable to work.

Conventional approaches are insufficient in meeting the specific, multifaceted requirements of this group, which is expected to continue to expand. In response, innovative concepts such as Community First! Village, a permanent housing community developed



exclusively for those who are chronically homeless, have demonstrated promising outcomes in terms of providing dignity and stability. Therefore, chronic homelessness needs more public attention, support, and effective community-based solutions such as Community First! Village must be developed on a national scale to have a long-lasting effect.

The Growing Crisis of Chronic Homelessness in the U.S. and Texas

In recent years, the number of people living without a home in the U.S. has continued to increase, and recent data reveals a particularly worrying rise in chronic homelessness (Zhao, 2023). Data from the federal government (HUD) indicates that the number of people in the U.S. who experienced homelessness reached 771,480 in 2024, an increase of 18% from the previous year. This is the steepest increase in a single year that has been documented in the U.S.. The numbers are also expanding in the state of Texas. In 2023, the number of people without homes increased by more than 12 percent, and by 2024, it had reached an estimated 45,511 people, illustrating the growing difficulty that the state is having in managing the situation (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development). Individuals who are sheltered and those who are not sheltered are included in this category; nonetheless, a sizable proportion of them are chronically homeless and require long-term housing interventions and comprehensive care solutions. Figure 1 shows the percent of people across the U.S. and Texas experiencing different kinds of homelessness.

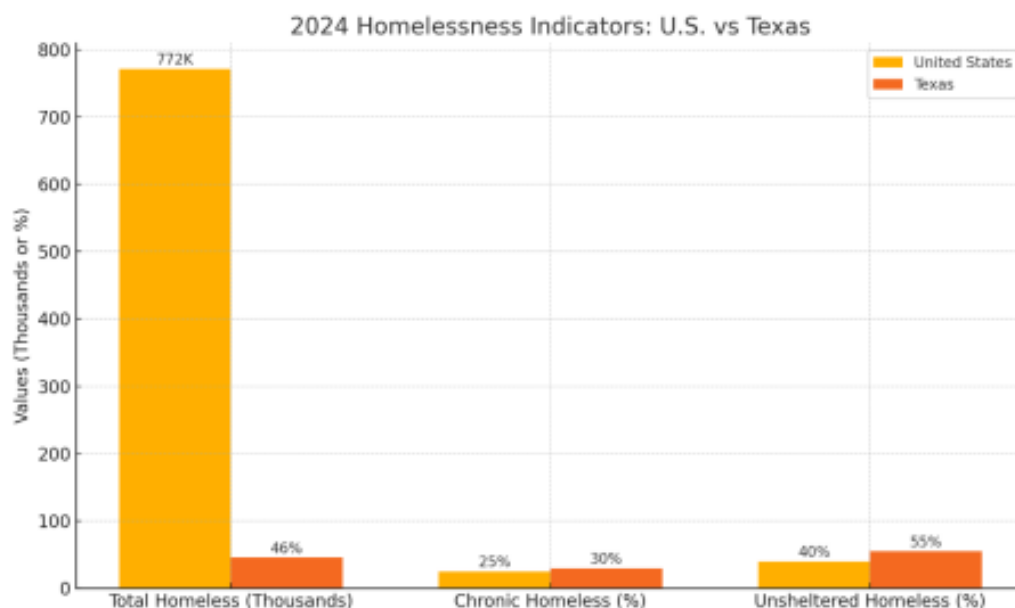


Figure 1: Comparison of key homelessness indicators between the United States and the state of Texas in 2024

- **Total homeless population:** 771,480 in the U.S. vs. 45,511 in Texas
- **Chronic homelessness rate (estimated):** approximately 25% in the U.S. vs. 30% in Texas
- **Unsheltered homelessness rate:** approximately 40% in the U.S. vs. 55% in Texas

Certain demographics also seem more at risk of experiencing chronic homelessness. African Americans make up about 52 percent of the homeless population in the state of Texas,

despite the fact that they make up a far smaller percentage of 11.8 percent of the overall population. The percentage of homeless white people is forty percent, while the percentages of homeless Asians and Indigenous people are each one percent, and the percentage of homeless multiracial persons is four percent. In terms of age, the largest portion of the homeless population in Texas include young people, under the age of 25, and the elderly over 60 years old.

In contrast to chronic homelessness, which is caused by systemic barriers such as mental illness, substance use disorders, or disability that prevent individuals from escaping homelessness without structured, long-term support, general homelessness may be caused by temporary setbacks such as the loss of a job, eviction, or disruptions in the family unit. Chronic homeless groups are far more difficult to serve with solutions that are only short-term, and they require assistance that is in-depth and frequently continues throughout their lives.

Inequality in terms of economic status is a significant contributor to the rising rate of homelessness in the U.S. As the wealth gap continues to widen, it becomes increasingly difficult for individuals who belong to the working class to afford essentials such as rent, healthcare, and other necessities. A complete social safety net system is not present in the U.S., in contrast to other industrialized nations, particularly Scandinavian countries. As a result of universal healthcare, accessible education, affordable housing, and robust government welfare programs, countries such as Sweden, Norway, and Denmark have much lower rates of homelessness (Wright, 2000). However, the U.S. is primarily dependent on local programs that are dispersed and frequently underfunded. Structural imbalance can partially explain the increased rates of homelessness in the U.S. compared to other wealthy nations.

In addition, terminology has a part in molding both the public's understanding and the responses of policymakers. The terms "unsheltered," "unhoused," "chronic homeless," and "veteran homeless" not only reflect the various living situations that people are experiencing, but they also reflect the services that these different groups require. Chronic homelessness, in particular, is frequently underrepresented in public discourse, despite the fact that it is one of the most complex and important types of homelessness to treat. The increasing percentage of homelessness, particularly chronic homelessness, in Texas and throughout the United States as a whole is the result of a number of structural concerns that are both complicated and overlapping. The solution to chronic homelessness involves persistent investment in long-term housing options, medical care, and community assistance, demonstrated by programs such as Community First! Village.

Understanding the Root Causes and Policy Responses to Chronic Homelessness

Homelessness is a social problem that cannot be handled by a single solution since it is complicated and involves a variety of aspects. Previous studies indicate that homelessness is not only the product of individual decisions or isolated incidents; rather, it is the result of structural causes such as housing that is unaffordable, financial instability, health difficulties, and a lack of robust social support networks (Zhao, 2023). This highlights the importance of providing more than just short-term assistance; long-term support in the areas of housing, social services, and emotional well-being is essential in preventing persons from returning to a state of homelessness.

In addition, the deepening of homelessness is intimately connected to the larger economic system. The welfare state has been weakened as a result of the emergence of global capitalism and neoliberal policies, which has led to an increase in the concentration of

resources in the hands of huge multinational firms (Wright, 2000). As a consequence of this, housing is regarded more as a commodity than a fundamental right, which makes it inaccessible to communities that are particularly vulnerable (Comptroller of Texas, 2021). This shift in the global economy has led to an increase in the number of people living on the streets of the U.S., which have a social safety net that is relatively poor (National Alliance to End Homelessness). It is vital to concentrate on the structural cycles that prolong homelessness to gain an understanding of the underlying causes of chronic homelessness. Although there are a number of reasons that contribute to the problem, including substance misuse, domestic violence, and mental illness, the primary problem is still housing instability (HUD Exchange). Many people are living paycheck to paycheck, earning just enough to subsist but not enough to obtain a stable home (Texas State University Libraries). Even when there is financial aid available, it is sometimes insufficient to meet the costs of housing for an extended period of time (Comptroller of Texas, 2021). Furthermore, landlords are generally unwilling to rent to persons who do not have steady incomes or credit histories, which makes it much more difficult for those who are currently experiencing homelessness to re-enter the housing market (Zhao, 2023). Due to these circumstances, a cycle of poverty and housing insecurity is created that cannot be stopped without the intervention of an outside party (Holden, 1986).

In response, the U.S. federal government and the state of Texas have created initiatives with the intention of lowering the number of people who are homeless. Among these, the Homeless Housing and Services Program (HHSP) and Pathways Home stand out as particularly noteworthy instances. Under the HHSP, individuals under the age of 24 who are experiencing homelessness are eligible to receive financial assistance for the building and refurbishment of transitional homes and shelters, as well as help for education, job training, and youth-specific programs (Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs). In 2012, the Texas Interagency Council for the Homeless (TICH) initiated a program called Pathways Home, which placed an emphasis on inter-agency collaboration, data sharing, access to healthcare, and employment help. Additionally, it targeted vulnerable groups such as veterans, those who had aged out of the foster care system, and those who had survived domestic violence. Despite the fact that these initiatives have been somewhat successful in treating homelessness in general, they have been shown to be insufficient in satisfying the long-term and intensive needs of those who are chronically homeless (Texas Homeless Network).

Community First! Village, which was established in 2015 in Austin, Texas by the charitable group Mobile Loaves & Fishes, an NGO group in Texas, is an example of a model that is both more sustainable and innovative than previous solutions that were suggested to combat chronic homelessness. In addition to providing permanent inexpensive housing, this residential community that spans 51 acres is created exclusively for those who are homeless and is available to them for an extended period of time. It also provides an atmosphere that is supportive and self-sustaining. A theater, a farmers market, a dog park, and a chapel are some of the communal amenities that are shared by residents of the town (Mobile Loaves & Fishes). Residents have access to a wide variety of resources, such as career possibilities, medical services, and emotional support, all of which are designed to assist them in making the transition out of homelessness and achieving permanent independence. "Housing First" is the strategy that Community First! Village takes, which means that it places a higher priority on providing secure housing than it does on resolving other concerns such as career or mental health services. The cycle of chronic homelessness can be broken through the implementation of this technique, which has proven to be highly effective in providing both short-

term and long-term stability (PsycNET).

Methods

To understand the impact of community support and focusing on permanent housing, I conducted a case study of Community First! Village. I examined a total of twenty articles and reports, including those published in academic journals, official websites of the federal government (such as those of HUD and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness), and reports that published by non-governmental organizations like Mobile Loaves & Fishes and the National Alliance to End Homelessness. Among the scholarly sources, academic databases such as JSTOR offered access to literature that had been vetted by other academics and focused on topics such as urban development, social policy, and homelessness. The articles "Permanent Supportive Housing and the Pathways to Recovery" and "The Geography of Homelessness in the United States" were helpful in determining long-term trends and assessing the efficiency of housing-first strategies. The analysis did not solely concentrate on Texas and also included data and policy comparisons from other states in the United States in order to effectively compare the chronic homelessness within Texas to the US. I also use examples from foreign countries to provide context to the reasons why chronic homelessness is much more prevalent in the U.S..

Analysis

After reviewing the relevant literature and data, it is evident that chronic homelessness continues to be a pressing problem that is not adequately handled, not just in the state of Texas but throughout the entire U.S.. The number of people who are homeless on a permanent basis continues to rise, despite the efforts of both federal and local governments over the course of several decades. It appears from the statistics that traditional methods, such as emergency shelters and transitional housing programs like HHSP and Pathways Home, are frequently insufficient when it comes to meeting the long-term requirements of those who are chronically homeless, particularly those who suffer from mental health illnesses or substance use disorders.

Additionally, the findings of the research showed that creative community-based programs, such as Community First! Village, have resulted in encouraging outcomes. Not only do these models offer permanent housing that is within a reasonable price range, but they also provide access to mental and physical healthcare, career prospects, and community assistance. By placing an emphasis on "Housing First," which means providing stable housing before asking folks to stay sober, find a job, or undergo treatment, they have been successful in breaking the cycle of homelessness for those who have been without a place to live for extended periods of time.

Discussion

The results indicate that the escalation of general and chronic homelessness is significantly associated with the decreasing affordability of housing. As the cost of living increasingly surpasses salary growth, a growing number of persons struggle to get or retain stable housing. Recent data reveals a significant decrease in the availability of affordable housing, especially in swiftly expanding urban regions. Simultaneously, institutional impediments—such as restricted healthcare access, societal stigma, and discriminatory rental practices—persist in obstructing disadvantaged populations from reintegrating into the housing market.

Although governmental initiatives like HHSP and Pathways Home have made significant



contributions, they frequently lack the continuous, personalized care essential for aiding chronically homeless individuals. This disparity highlights the necessity for comprehensive and sustainable policy solutions that extend beyond immediate assistance. Initiatives such as Community First! Village demonstrate the feasibility of not just providing housing but also reinstating dignity, fostering community, and promoting self-sufficiency.

I believe that the present discourse lacks a national commitment to expanding community-based housing options and including mental health and employment assistance into housing solutions. The enduring nature of chronic homelessness transcends housing concerns; it constitutes a matter of public health and human dignity. The United States should adopt policies that emphasize stability rather than temporality, and favor community-building over confinement.

Conclusion

Inadequate social support networks at the grassroots level, economic inequalities, and poor housing policies all contribute to long-term homelessness, which points to a systemic problem instead of an individual problem. According to this research, chronic homelessness is still an increasing problem in Texas and the US, despite decades of federal and state government interventions. The combination of rising housing costs, stagnating wages, and institutionalized discrimination keeps vulnerable groups at the margins. For many, this is the beginning of an endless cycle that will require consistent aid to break.

Traditional, short-term solutions, like emergency shelters, are inadequate, according to the data provided in the research, because they only offer short-term comfort and do little to remedy the underlying causes of chronic homelessness. Those struggling with mental illness, substance abuse, or physical disability will find this to be particularly true. In contrast, Community First! Village and the "Housing First" philosophy offer a human-centered and hopeful alternative. If people are given priority in obtaining secure housing and a supportive community is formed around them, they can rebuild their life with dignity, acquire access to resources, and strive for their permanent independence.

When it comes to solving the problem of chronic homelessness, a paradigm change is necessary. This shift can be characterized from reactive and piecemeal responses to proactive, coordinated, and community-based solutions. Nationwide implementation of effective models, such as Community First! Village, requires a firm resolve from policymakers. Not only will shelter infrastructure be funded, but so will wraparound services, such as mental healthcare, job programs, and social integration. It is also important for national initiatives to learn from international examples of how to end homelessness through the provision of affordable housing, universal healthcare, and strong welfare systems. One limitation from this study is that only one particular organization was highlighted, but there may be other organizations with a unique model or approach.

A test of society's principles lies in finding a solution to the problem of chronic homelessness, which transcends simple policy considerations. A country is tested for their compassion and democracy by how it handles its most vulnerable citizens. Making investments in long-term, holistic solutions that empower rather than marginalize persons experiencing homelessness will help the U.S. achieve its goals of reducing chronic homelessness and creating a more just and equitable society.



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