



# Homelessness 101

*An 'All About Homelessness' e-guide*



# DEFINITIONS

**Homeless** – A person is considered homeless when he/she resides in places not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, and abandoned buildings; or in an emergency shelter; or in transitional housing.

**Housing First** – Used to describe an approach that prioritizes placing a person into permanent housing over addressing the underlying causes of their homelessness. The idea is that a person can better deal with the underlying causes when they are securely housed.

**Sheltered** – living in emergency shelter or transitional housing

**Unsheltered** – living outdoors or in a place not meant for human habitation (cars, abandoned buildings, park shelter, etc.)

**Chronically homeless** - is defined as someone with a disabling condition who has been continuously homeless for either a year or more or has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years. (US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development)

**Doubled up** – staying with friends or family

**Precariously housed** – staying in a motel, hospital, detox center, jail without permanent residence

**Low-barrier shelter** – very limited entry requirements

**No-barrier shelter** – no entry requirements and no commitment to change

**High-barrier** – requirements – such as being clean and sober – must be met to check in

## NATIONALLY

**552,830** people were experiencing homelessness on a single night in January 2018 (17 out of every 10,000 people).\*

**49%** were white; **40%** were black

**67%** were individuals; **33%** were people in families with children

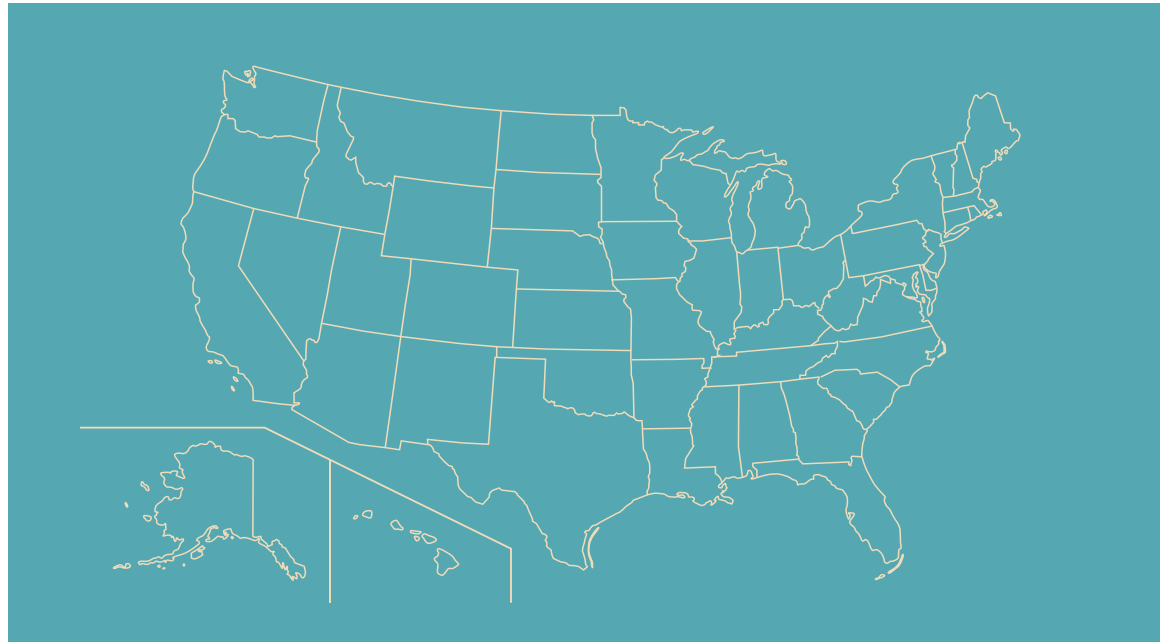
Of the individuals – **70%** were male.

**7%** youth under 25 without parents

**7%** veterans

**18%** chronically homeless

*According to the 2018 Annual Homeless Assessment Report, nearly half of the individuals counted during the Point-in-Time Count were unsheltered, living outdoors or in places not meant for human habitation.*



Washington ranks  
within the  
» **TOP 10 STATES**  
for total number  
of individuals  
experiencing  
homelessness.

**22,304**

people experiencing  
homelessness *(30 people in 10,000. For  
comparison: California has 33 people in 10,000. Oregon  
has 35. New York has 46. Texas has 9.)*





## SPOKANE COUNTY

**1,245** in Spokane County (The 2019 PIT Count total was 1,309.)

**139** homeless families with children

**3,068** the number of homeless students during the 2017-18 school year (2,404 were doubled-up; 351 were living in shelters; 139 were living in motels; and 174 were unsheltered.)

Over the last decade, Spokane County has seen a **46%** increase in homelessness among single adults.

**Nearly one-third** of single adults experience unsheltered homelessness, compared to only 6% of families and 5% of youth.

**>> 30%** of those surveyed were experiencing homelessness for the first time.

**37** people in Spokane's 2019 **PIT Count** said a lack of affordable housing was the primary reason for their homelessness.

CONTINUE



## SPOKANE COUNTY CONTINUED

**74** said a lack of income was the primary reason.

**125** people reported being survivors of domestic violence.  
*(35 said it was the primary reason for their homelessness.)*

**159** adults reported having a substance abuse condition.  
*(63 said it was the primary reason for their homelessness.)*

**318** people reported experiencing serious mental illness.  
*(25 said it was a primary factor in their homelessness.)*

**77** people reported that family conflict was the #1 reason for their homelessness.

*\*The Point-in-Time Count is the primary means of data collection on homelessness in the United States. The Count seeks to count every person experiencing homelessness on a single day in January. The Count is voluntary (a person can decline to be counted) and depends upon self-reporting (i.e., a person is asked for the primary reason for his/her homelessness and that answer is recorded). Funding and policy decisions are made based on this data.*






# CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Any discussion of homelessness has to acknowledge at the outset that the problem is complex. There is not one cause but many and those causes overlap and interlink in endless combinations. Still, there are definitely clearly recurring themes.





# LACK OF **AFFORDABLE** HOUSING

For every 100 extremely low-income (ELI – categorized as those earning below the poverty line or 30 percent of the area median wage) renters nationally, there were only 34 affordable units in 2013. (Joint Center for Housing Rights)

37 people in Spokane's 2019 PIT Count said a lack of affordable housing was the primary reason for their homelessness.



A photograph of a woman with long red hair and two young children sitting on a sidewalk. The woman is wearing a grey jacket and black pants, and is smiling. The child on the left is a girl with long red hair wearing a pink jacket and blue jeans. The child on the right is a boy with dark hair wearing a black jacket and grey pants. In the background, there is a sign for 'LAWRENCE MISSION' with a cross on top, and some trees and a house are visible.

# POVERTY

The 2019 population of Spokane was estimated at 217,000, and the poverty rate was 19.37% overall, translating into roughly 43,400 people living at or below the poverty level.

According to the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty: “After paying their rent and utilities, 75% of ELI households end up with less than half of their income left to pay for necessities such as food, medicine, transportation, or childcare.” These people are on the verge of homelessness.

74 people interviewed in Spokane’s PIT Count said a lack of income was the primary reason for their homelessness.





# SUBSTANCE ABUSE

“The relationship between addiction and homelessness is complex and controversial. While rates of alcohol and drug abuse are disproportionately high among the homeless population, the increase in homelessness over the past two decades cannot be explained by addiction alone. Many people who are addicted to alcohol and drugs never become homeless, but people who are poor and addicted are clearly at increased risk of homelessness. Addiction does increase the risk of displacement for the precariously housed; in the absence of appropriate treatment, it may doom one’s chances of getting housing once on the streets. Homeless people often face insurmountable barriers to obtaining health care, including addictive disorder treatment services and recovery supports.”

*(National Coalition for the Homeless)*

*159 adults in Spokane’s 2109 Count reported having a substance abuse condition. (63 said it was the primary reason for their homelessness.)*



# MENTAL HEALTH

The National Coalition for the Homeless estimates that 22 percent of the adult homeless population suffer from a severe and persistent mental illness. Locally, 318 adults reported experiencing serious mental illness in the 2019 PIT Count. (25 said it was a primary factor in their homelessness.)







# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

In Spokane's PIT Count, 125 people reported being survivors of domestic violence. (35 said it was the primary reason for their homelessness.) For UGM specifically, a much higher percentage of the women coming into our shelters self-report as being victims of domestic violence, close to 40%.

In a 2014 survey of 25 US cities, 15% of all homeless adults were identified as survivors of domestic violence. (National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty)





# FAMILY BREAKDOWN

Most single-parent families are female-headed (71%). Single-parent families are among the poorest in the nation and as such, are extremely vulnerable to homelessness. 84% of families experiencing homelessness are female-headed. 53% of homeless mothers do not have a high school diploma. 42% of children in homeless families are under age six.

77 people interviewed in Spokane's PIT Count reported that family conflict was the #1 reason for their homelessness.





# A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING

It is important to note that the available statistics on homelessness and its causes are slippery, i.e., difficult to gather and difficult to trust. They can be manipulated to support different agendas, and so, while we've drawn some conclusions in the blog posts below, we recommend that you look at multiple sources. Additional references are provided at the end.





# DEFINING THE PROBLEM

In America, we have defined the problem of homelessness as being without a home, and we have therefore seen the solution as one of shelter, food and clothing. No doubt, the word itself is part of the problem, seeming to provide its own definition. But we want to suggest to you that homelessness is a symptom of much more complicated issues, and by ignoring those deeper issues, we are actually making the problem worse. Additionally, we want to point out that the word “homeless” has become a catch-all for people in very different situations.

[» Read more](#)



# HOMELESS ENCAMPMENTS

The author rode along with Spokane Police Officer Jake Willard as he visited various homeless camps in the Spokane area in connection with the Department of Code Enforcement. This blog post will give you a picture of this new pilot program.

[» Read more](#)







# Homelessness: A CASE STUDY

This article highlights a number of themes common among people experiencing homelessness: Adverse Childhood Experiences, criminal records, health problems, lack of affordable housing, mental health issues and substance abuse. There's seldom just one cause.

[>> Read more](#)



# CHRISTIANITY & HOMELESSNESS

Christians have a strong contribution to make in the discussion about homelessness. We believe in some radically counter-culture ideas, and make no mistake, those ideas and the Person behind them have power. The challenge is to hold to God's truth – all of it – to saturate ourselves in it, look at its implications and allow our outlook and behavior to be changed by it. That takes daily diligence.

[>> Read more](#)



# WHAT IS THE LOVING RESPONSE TO A HOMELESS PERSON?

There is no need for me to stop and ask myself if the panhandler on the street corner or the addict under the bridge deserves my love. He does. She does. Every human being is worthy of our love because every single one is created in the image of God.

In 33 years of ministry to the poor and homeless of our city, however, I've discovered a question that does need to be asked before I take action toward another: What is loving?

[>> Read more](#)





# REFERENCES

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration:**

[https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs\\_campaigns/homelessness\\_programs\\_resources/hrc-fact-sheet-current-statistics-prevalence-characteristics-homelessness.pdf](https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/homelessness_programs_resources/hrc-fact-sheet-current-statistics-prevalence-characteristics-homelessness.pdf)

**2019 PIT Count for Spokane County:**

<https://www.static.spokanecity.org/documents/ending-homelessness/everybody-counts/2019-everybody-counts-campaign-presentation-2019-04-18.pdf>

**National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty:**

[https://www.nlchp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Homeless\\_Stats\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](https://www.nlchp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Homeless_Stats_Fact_Sheet.pdf)

**National Coalition for the Homeless**

<https://www.nationalhomeless.org/>

**HUD and Homelessness**

[https://www.hud.gov/press/press\\_releases\\_media\\_advisories/HUD\\_No\\_18\\_147](https://www.hud.gov/press/press_releases_media_advisories/HUD_No_18_147)

**National Institute of Health on Affordable Housing Shortage**

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6051532/>





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