



# Brief Overview of the Homeless in America

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- Why the increase in homelessness?
  - Underlying factors that contribute to homelessness
  - The Revolving Door
  - Conclusions
  - Q&A



*“You can find Calcutta all over the world, if you have eyes to see. Everywhere you go you find people unwanted, unloved, uncared, thus rejected by the society, completely forgotten, completely left alone. That is the greatest poverty of the rich countries.” –Mother Teresa*



## Fact:

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There is an estimated **700,000 to 2 million** people who are homeless in the U.S. on any given night...



Fact:

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...**14,000** are Houstonians.



## Fact:

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30 percent report being on the streets for **more than 2 years** (chronically homeless)



## Fact:

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There has been a marked rise in homelessness in the past 20-25 years in the United States.



# Why the increase in homelessness?

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# Decline in Affordable Housing

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- Between 1973 and 1993, 22 million low-rent units vanished from the housing market
- Between 1991 and 1995, median rental costs paid by low-income renters rose 21%
- 1995=shortage of 4.4 million affordable housing units



# Employment Trends

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- Stagnant or falling incomes
  - Real value of minimum wage in 2004=26% less than in 1979\*
  - In all 50 states, more than minimum wage is required to afford a 1- of 2-bedroom apartment
- Less job security
- Decrease in benefits, including health insurance



# Employment Trends

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- Surveys conducted over the past few years have estimated as much as 26% of homeless individuals to be employed
- Work does not guarantee escape from poverty



# Decline in Public Assistance

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- Reduction in the value and availability of public assistance starting in the 1990's with the Welfare Reform Law
- Recent policy changes reduced or eliminated assistance for single impoverished people



# Poverty

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- Limited resources cover only some of life's necessities...which do you chose?
- Housing often absorbs a large portion of income
- "Being poor means being an illness, an accident, or a paycheck away from living on the streets."



# Underlying factors that contribute to homelessness

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# Domestic Violence and Homelessness

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- Battered women who live in poverty are often forced to choose between abuse and homelessness
- Half of homeless women and children are fleeing domestic violence
- 50% of cities surveyed by US Conference of Mayors listed domestic violence as the #1 cause of homelessness



# Lack of Affordable Healthcare

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- 45.8 million Americans without health insurance in 2004 (~16%)
- 26.3% uninsured in Texas
- 31% of Harris County residents are without any insurance (highest rate of uninsured in the nation)
- Census indicates that only 32% of Houstonians have adequate health insurance





# How does healthcare (or lack there of) affect homelessness?

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Serious illness or disability can quickly spiral into homelessness



# Serious Illness or Disability

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“For families struggling to pay rent, a serious illness or disability can start a downward spiral into homelessness, beginning with job loss, depletion of savings to pay for care, and eventual eviction.”



# Addiction Disorders and Homelessness

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- Rates of drug/alcohol abuse are disproportionately high in homeless population compared to general population
- Most people with addiction *do not* become homelessness → **The combination of poverty and addiction** increase risk of homelessness



# Addiction Disorders and Homelessness

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- Lack of access to healthcare, including addictive disorder treatment and recovery supports, perpetuates the inability to receive and maintain housing=chronic homelessness



# Mental Illness and Homelessness

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- Disproportionate number of severely mentally ill among homeless population
  - Between 1/4 and 1/3 suffer from **severe and persistent** mental illness that prevents them from carrying out essential daily activities
  - Sixty-six percent of homeless individuals suffer from **addiction and/or mental illness**



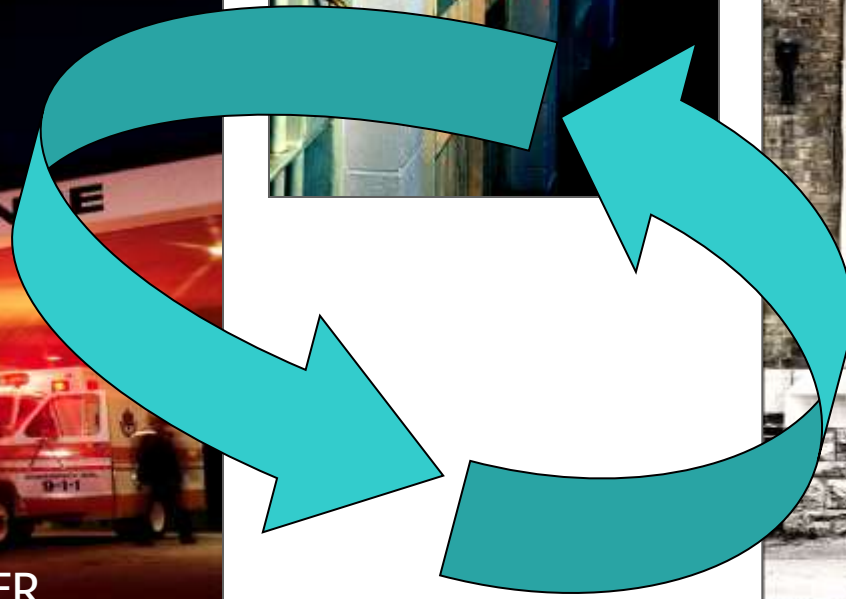
# Mental Illness and Homelessness


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- Most homeless people who suffer from mental illness do not need to be institutionalized.
- Appropriate supportive housing and treatment options help individuals lead productive lives within the community.

# The Revolving Door Phenomenon

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“At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.”

- *Albert Schweitzer*





# Questions?

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*Thank you!*



# References

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