

HOMELESSNESS AND POVERTY WASHINGTON, DC

Who is Homeless?

- Washington DC has the **highest per capita rate of homelessness in the country**, with more than 15,000 people experiencing homelessness over the course of a typical year.¹ DC's homeless population increased by 34% between 2009 and 2016.² On a single night in January 2017, **7,473** persons in the city were counted as homeless, at least 897 of whom were *unsheltered* and living on the streets.³
- **The number of homeless families in DC has increased by 103% since 2009.**⁴ As of January, 2017, there were 1,166 homeless families containing 3,890 people who were in the D.C. emergency shelter system.⁵
- The median age for unaccompanied homeless individuals in D.C. is 52 years old; whereas the median age for adults in homeless families is 27 years old.⁶
- There are almost 697 homeless youth (ages 18-24) in Washington, DC, far exceeding the approximately 339 shelter beds reserved for this population.⁷
- Among single homeless persons in DC, 28.9% suffer from chronic substance abuse, 34.7% have severe mental illness, 14% are dually diagnosed; 19.6% suffer from chronic health problems, and 20% are physically disabled, all of which are exacerbated by homelessness. In homeless families, by contrast, only 3.5% of adults have a substance abuse problem, and 13.3% suffer from mental illness.⁸
- 60% of single homeless adults and 31% in homeless families in DC receive **no income of any kind.**⁹
- Approximately 15.1% of single homeless adults in DC are employed, and 9.0% are Limited English Proficient.¹⁰ Only 9.4% of homeless individuals in DC are military veterans. 25.7% of adults in homeless families here have been victims of domestic violence.¹¹

Why are so many homeless?

- **30%** of DC children live below the poverty line, which is \$24,600¹² for a family of four, with 14,000 of those children living in “deep poverty”, in households earning less than \$12,000/year.¹³ The poverty rate for **all** DC residents as of 2014 remained at 18%, but **the number of DC residents living in poverty increased by 18,000 between 2007 and 2014.**¹⁴
- In the District, with an estimated population of 672,228¹⁵, a worker earning the Minimum Wage (\$11.50 per hour¹⁶, or \$1,993/month for fulltime work¹⁷) must work approximately **107 hours** per week, 52 weeks a year, **or** earn more than \$33.58/hour at 40 hours a week, to afford a 2-bedroom apartment at **Fair Market Rent**, which is **\$1,746** per month.¹⁸
- As of March, 2017 the unemployment rate in Washington DC was **5.8%**¹⁹, much higher than the rate for the surrounding metropolitan area.²⁰ Homeless individuals with no phone or permanent address stand a slim chance competing for jobs in an already tight job market.
- DC's TANF (welfare) benefits are inadequate to meet the needs of District families, and have only increased a few times since the 1980s, with a family of three receiving \$508/month in 2017.²¹ DC *cuts benefits each year* for families that have received assistance for 60 months or longer.²² In DC, more than 18,000 families, including **72% of homeless families**, receive TANF as their primary source of income.²³
- The maximum Food Stamps available in Washington, DC is \$194/month for 1 person; \$357 for 2 people; and \$511 for 3 persons, and is much less for those who get TANF or SSI. 18²⁴% of DC's total population and 35% of its children rely on Food Stamps as their only source of nutrition, an increase of **56%** since 2006.²⁵

- Social Security Disability (SSI) benefits, the sole source of income for more than 15,000 disabled DC residents, is \$735/month, which constitutes only 17% of area median income and is equivalent to \$4.36/hour in wages.²⁶ It takes an average of 3 years after applying to obtain these benefits, yet the only DC benefits available for disabled adults is Interim Disability Assistance (IDA) of \$320/month, which has a wait list.

Is there enough shelter?

- Year round, the city only has approximately 1,200 year-round emergency shelter beds for unaccompanied single adults in DC, and 332 emergency shelter “units” for **families**.²⁷
- During the 2016-17 Hypothermia Season (Nov. to March), 1,556 families sought emergency shelter on at least 1,879 occasions (because many had to apply more than once before getting in), and many of these families were never sheltered. Due to lack of shelter placements, more than 600 families were placed in motels during the Winter of 2016-2017.²⁸
- 15% of unaccompanied homeless respondents in an April 2009 survey were forced to sleep on the streets due to shelters being full, and 40% refused to enter shelters due to overcrowding. On average, homeless individuals were turned away from emergency shelter 25 times each night.²⁹

Is there enough housing?

- Washington, DC is the second least affordable housing jurisdiction in the country compared to other “states.”³⁰ DC’s rental market has only a 4.3% vacancy rate, the third lowest in the country, and market rents are unaffordable even for middle class workers such as police officers and teachers.³¹
- **80% of extremely low income residents of DC (earning less than 30% of area median income), and more than half of all DC households, pay more than 30% of their income for rent**, which by definition is unaffordable.³² 62%³³ of *extremely* low income households, and 20% of **all** DC households, spend more than **50%** of their income on rent, an increase of more than 15,000 households since 2000. The typical low income household in DC spends almost **70% of income** on housing,³⁴ with the *median* rent in DC being **\$3,060/month** for a 2-bedroom apartment³⁵.
- There are currently **41,000 households on the wait list** for the **DC Housing Authority’s** Public Housing and Housing Choice Voucher Programs, and the wait list has been closed since 2013. Yet, DC’s public housing stock has *decreased* by 4,000 units since the 1990’s, to only 8,000 total, and DCHA’s 12,800 Housing Choice Vouchers rarely turn over, making the average wait for a voucher 20 years.³⁶ Those lucky enough to get a Voucher have great difficulty finding LLs to rent to them—45% of Voucher holders in DC face discrimination from LLs unwilling to rent to them.³⁷
- Since 2002, the **number of low-cost rental units in D.C. has dropped by more than 50%**, while the number of more expensive housing units rose more than **155%**.³⁸ In fact, rents in DC grew more during the recession of 2007-2010 than in the preceding 7 years.³⁹
- Washington DC has a **deficit of 30,636 affordable and available housing units** for people who are extremely low income, meaning **65%** of extremely low income households here have severe housing cost burdens if they are lucky enough to have housing.⁴⁰

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- ¹United States Conference of Mayors, [Hunger and Homelessness Survey](#), Dec. 2016; The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness, Annual Homeless Assessment for FY2013, May 13, 2014.
- ²*Id.*
- ³Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, [Homelessness in Metropolitan Washington: Results and Analysis from the 2017 Point-in-Time Count of Persons Experiencing Homelessness](#) at 7 (<https://www.mwcog.org/documents/2017/05/10/homelessness-in-metropolitan-washington-results-and-analysis-from-the-annual-point-in-time-pit-count-of-homeless-persons-homelessness/>)
- ⁴US Conference of Mayors, *Supra*, Note 1
- ⁵Homelessness in Metropolitan Washington: Results and Analysis from the 2017 Point-in-Time Count of Persons Experiencing Homelessness. *Supra* at 13.
- ⁶*District of Columbia 2017 Point-in-Time Enumeration*, The Community Partnership, May 2017.
- ⁷DC Interagency Council on Homelessness, [District of Columbia FY2017 Winter Plan](#), September 6, 2016 (Last visited June 8, 2017) (https://ich.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ich/page_content/attachments/FY2017%20Winter%20Plan_09-13-20.pdf) At 32.
- ⁸*Homelessness in Metropolitan Washington: Results and Analysis from the 2017 Point-in-Time Count of Persons Experiencing Homelessness*. *Supra* at 79.
- ⁹[Homelessness in Metropolitan Washington: Results and Analysis from the 2017 Point-in-Time Count of Persons Experiencing Homelessness](#) *supra* at 81
- ¹⁰*Id.* at 79-81
- ¹¹*Id.*
- ¹²U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Poverty Guidelines 2017*, (Last visited June 2, 2017) (<https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines>)
- ¹³DC Fiscal Policy Institute, [While DC Continues to Recover from Recession Communities of Color Face Challenges](#), (analysis of 2014 Census Bureau Data), Sept. 18, 2015.
- ¹⁴*Id.*
- ¹⁵United States Census Bureau (2015, July/August). Retrieved May 18, 2016 from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/11001,00>
- ¹⁶United States Department of Labor, [Minimum Wage Laws in the States](#).
- ¹⁷Retrieved May 18, 2016 from <http://dcwagelaw.com/dc-minimum-wage-to-increase-to-1150-by-2016>
- ¹⁸National Low Income Housing Coalition, [Out of Reach 2017: The High Cost of Housing](#), at 51, June, 2017, (http://nlhdc.org/sites/default/files/oor/OOR_2017.pdf)
- ¹⁹U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Local Area Unemployment Statistics*, (Last visited June 2, 2017), (https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LASST110000000000003?amp%253bdata_tool=XGtable&output_view=data&include_graphs=true)
- ²⁰US Bureau of Labor Statistics, www.bls.gov/eag/dc.htm (March 23, 2016).
- ²¹Dept of Human Services, [Notice of Proposed Rulemaking](#), TANF Standards of Assistance and Payment Levels, Oct 1, 2016.
- ²²*Id.*
- ²³DC Fiscal Policy Institute, June 19, 2013.
- ²⁴*Share of Population Participating in SNAP*, Food Research and Action Center, (May 5, 2017) (<http://www.frac.org/wp-content/uploads/snapdata2017-feb.pdf>); Calculated using the February 2017 SNAP participation in D.C. divided by the estimated population from the latest census bureau data.
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- ²⁶Technical Assistance Collaborative, [Priced Out in 2010: The Housing Crisis for People with Disabilities](#), (2010), available at <http://www.tacinc.org>. Social Security Administration, <http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/11015.html>; Social Security Administration, Number of recipients by state or other area, eligibility category, age, and receipt of OASDI benefits, http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/ssi_sc/2010/table01.pdf
- ²⁷*Homelessness in Metropolitan Washington*, *supra* at 74.
- ²⁸*Hypothermia Debrief Families 2016-17*. (May 2017).
- ²⁹Homeless Emergency Response Workgroup, [Unmet Shelter Needs Assessment](#), June 17, 2009.
- ³⁰NLIHC [Out of Reach](#) Report, *supra*, page 12.
- ³¹*Multi-Family Snapshot*, Cushman & Wakefield, 2016.
- ³²DC Fiscal Policy Institute, [Nowhere to Go](#), Feb. 5, 2010.
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The Legal Clinic envisions a just and inclusive community for all residents of the District of Columbia, where housing is a human right and where every individual and family has equal access to the resources they need to thrive. Combining community lawyering and advocacy to achieve our clients' goals, our expert staff and network of volunteer attorneys provide low barrier, comprehensive legal services at intake sites throughout the District of Columbia, helping our clients to access housing, shelter, and life-saving services. Rooted in the experiences of this client work, we effectively blend system reform efforts, policy advocacy, community education and client engagement to advocate for long term improvements in local and federal programs that serve the low- and no-income community.