Fact Sheet on Homelessness and Housing Instability in DC

District of Inequality

- DC is experiencing an economic boom: in June 2018 the DC Council finalized the $14.5 billion FY2019 budget.¹
- DC's population surpassed 700,000 in 2018 - the US Census Bureau states that 19% of the population lives in poverty.²
- As of 2016, Washington DC had 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.³
- DC's homeless population increased by 34% between 2009 and 2016.⁴ According to the 2018 Point in Time count, it decreased slightly, by 7.6%, from 2017 to 2018.⁵

The Numbers: DC 2019 Point-in-Time Count

- The Point-in-Time (PIT) count is conducted each January, yet although it is the official government count of persons experiencing homelessness, it undercounts homeless families because it doesn’t include those who are not in the shelter system, including those doubled up with other households or staying in their cars.
- The 2019 PIT only showed 1,606 homeless children, but at least 5,593 D.C. school children were experiencing homelessness when they started the 2018-2019 academic year.⁶
- Based on the PIT count, as of January 2019, 6,521 persons in the District were homeless, comprised of 3,862 single adults, 13 unaccompanied minors, and 815 families totaling 2,646 family members.⁷
- On the night of the 2019 PIT, at least 608 people were unsheltered on the street.⁸
- 44% of single adults and 13% of adults in families counted in the 2019 PIT are chronically homeless.⁹
- 41% of homeless single adults have been formerly institutionalized – many people become homeless for the first time upon being discharged from an institution, such as a hospital or a jail.¹⁰
- 32% of adults in homeless families, and 20% of single adults, report a history of domestic violence.¹¹
- 22% of single homeless adults, but only 3% of adults in families, have a history of chronic substance abuse.¹²
- 31% of single adults and 19% of adults in families suffer from severe mental illness.¹³
- 21% of single adults are living with chronic health problems, and 16% have a physical disability.¹⁴
- African American DC residents, despite making up 47% of the District’s population on the whole, comprise 87% of adults experiencing homelessness.¹⁵
- Median age of adults in families experiencing homelessness: 28 years old.¹⁶
- Median age of single adults experiencing homelessness: 51 years old.¹⁷
Income Inequality in the Nation’s Capital

• **19% of DC residents live below** the US federal poverty guidelines, which for a family of four is only $25,750 per year.\(^\text{18}\)

• 2016 data shows **31,000 DC children (26 percent)** live in poverty.\(^\text{19}\)

• In the DC metro area, **Median Family Income for fiscal year 2019 is $121,300**\(^\text{20}\) annually. Many “affordable” housing units are available to people whose incomes are 80% of this Median Family Income, which puts them out of reach for many working class and low-income households. People experiencing deep poverty, especially those who need family-sized units, are often left out of the equation.

• Employment is the primary source of income for **34%** of single homeless adults in DC and **26%** of adults in homeless families.\(^\text{21}\) Even with D.C.’s minimum wage of **$13.25/hour** this is not enough to afford any housing.\(^\text{22}\)

• Social Security or VA Disability benefits are the primary source of income for **32.9%** of homeless single adults.\(^\text{23}\) In 2019, the monthly SSI amount is **$771**.\(^\text{24}\) The only source of income available to disabled adults waiting to be approved for SSI is Interim Disability Assistance (IDA), which is only **$370/month**.

• TANF benefits are the primary source of income for **57.4%** of homeless families in D.C.\(^\text{25}\) The maximum benefit for a family of three is **$576** per month.\(^\text{26}\)

• The maximum monthly benefit for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Food Stamps) is **$192** for one person but only for people with no other income.\(^\text{27}\)

• Despite having an overall unemployment rate of **5.6** ,\(^\text{28}\) the unemployment rate for African Americans in DC is **12.9%** - the highest African American unemployment rate in the country.\(^\text{29} \ 30\) The Latinx unemployment rate in DC is **3.1%**.\(^\text{31}\)

DC’s Emergency Shelter System

• In DC, there is a right to shelter only during hypothermic (below 32 degrees Fahrenheit) or hyperthermic (above 95 degrees Fahrenheit) conditions. Although no legal right exists to shelter outside of those weather conditions, the DC Department of Human Services does make some year-round family shelter placements. Massachusetts and New York City are the only other jurisdictions in the United States with right-to-shelter laws.

• From November 1, 2017 to March 31, 2018, **1,599 families applied for family emergency shelter** – a **3% increase** from the 2017 Hypothermia season.\(^\text{32}\) Only **924** families were in the shelter system when the Point-in-Time was done, indicating that many families were denied emergency shelter.

• As of May 2018, DC had **809** emergency shelter units for families – a number that includes government contracted motel rooms for overflow capacity. With DC General family shelter closed in November 2018 capacity has dropped significantly.\(^\text{33}\)
• DC has approximately 890 year-round emergency shelter beds for single adult men, who make up 72% of DC’s 3,761 single homeless adults. Additional beds are only made available during hypothermia season.  

• For homeless women, DC has only approximately 218 year-round emergency shelter beds, who make up 26% of DC’s 3,761 single homeless adults (978 women). As a result, women were turned away from shelter on a regular basis during the last year because there is not enough capacity. Additional beds are made available during hypothermia season.  

• There are no shelter spaces for adult couples without children.

**DC’s Affordable Housing Crisis**

• DC was the city with the highest percentage of gentrifying neighborhoods from 2000-2013.  

• 20,000 Black residents were displaced from Washington, DC between 2000-2013.  

• Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a two-bedroom apartment in DC is $1,793, although apartments in DC are routinely listed for much, much higher.  

• National Low Income Housing Coalition calculates that in order to afford FMR, renters must earn $34.48 per hour (minimum wage is $13.25/hour), working fulltime for 52 weeks per year. As compared to all 50 states, DC has the 2nd highest housing wage in the nation, second only to Hawaii.  

• To afford that same FMR 2-bedroom apartment, a minimum wage earner must work 104 hours per week.  

• Between 2000 and 2012, the number of low-cost rental units in DC fell by half, and the number of lower-value homes fell by nearly three quarters. Low-cost units that remain are likely to be subsidized by either federal or local programs.  

• DC’s public housing stock, which is operated by the DC Housing Authority--the main provider of affordable housing in D.C.--has decreased by 4,000 units since the 1990s, to only 8,000 total.  

• The waiting list for housing resources through DCHA closed in 2013 and has not reopened. There are still 26,000 applicants waiting for public housing, and 40,000 waiting for Housing Choice Vouchers.  

• The lowest-income 40 percent of DC households did not see statistically significant change in income between 2000 and 2010, making it impossible to keep up with the sharp rise in housing costs in DC that occurred since the early 2000s.  

• As of 2018, 57,656 renter households are considered extremely low income, and there is a shortage of 31,666 rental homes affordable and available for that population.  

• As of 2017, DC’s multi-family housing market had only between a 2.7% and 3.6% rental vacancy rate.
• Between 2002 and 2012, the number of low-cost rental units in D.C. dropped by more than 50%, while the number of more expensive units rose by more than 155%. 47

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4 Id.
8 Id.
9 Id.
10 Id.
11 Id.
12 Id.
13 Id.
14 Id.
15 Id.
16 Id.
17 Id.
19 Id., at 56.
30 Id.
31 Id.
34 Id., p. 15
35 Id., p. 16
37 Id.
39 Id.
40 Id.
43 Id.
47 DC Fiscal Policy Institute, Disappearing Act: Affordable Housing in DC Vanishing Amid Sharply Rising Housing Costs, May 7, 2012