

THE INSTITUTE FOR INNOVATION & IMPLEMENTATION

Integrating Systems • Improving Outcomes

Addressing Housing & Homelessness

Tips on Family Gatherings & Holiday Seasons

When we think about the holidays we are often filled with happy, warm, and joyful memories of spending time with family, eating delicious food, and giving and receiving gifts both tangible and not. Unfortunately, **for many youth and families this is not the case**, especially for those experiencing homelessness or housing instability.

Why do families experience homelessness? Many families experiencing homelessness have complex challenges, including underemployment or unemployment. This may occur because of access to safe, affordable, and reliable transportation and childcare; gaps in education or training; physical and behavioral health challenges; and more. (1) Additionally, there is a severe shortage of safe, affordable housing: no state in the U.S. has an adequate supply of affordable rental housing for the lowest income renters. In 2021, a full-time worker needs to earn \$24.90/hour, 40 hours/week to be able to afford a two-bedroom apartment without spending more than 30% of their income on rent. (2)

Why don't youth experiencing homelessness just go home? Youth experience homelessness and housing instability for a variety of reasons, including being forced to leave home or choosing to leave due to family conflict; substance use or abuse (youth or parental); parental incarceration; and, other reasons. Youth ages 18-24 face similar barriers to housing as others, including a lack of safe and affordable housing, low wages, transportation and child care barriers, and more. (3) Often, youth experiencing homelessness have been involved with the foster care and/or juvenile justice systems and may be pregnant and/or parenting. Youth who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color and youth who identify as LGBTQ are over-represented among youth experiencing homelessness and may face additional challenges to securing safe and affordable housing. (4,5,6)

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Sometimes it feels like there is nothing we can do about homelessness, but ending homelessness takes all of us! There is so much we can each do to help end homelessness and provide support and comfort to those experiencing homelessness every day of the year as well as during the holiday season. There is so much we can do, both big and small, that can help.

- 1. Educate Yourself:** Find accurate information on youth and family homelessness and share with others. Here are some resources:
 - a. Youth homelessness: National Network for Youth
 - b. Family homelessness: National Alliance to End Homelessness
 - c. Affordable housing needs: National Low Income Housing Coalition
- 2. Be Kind:** Kindness is a rare commodity for those who are unhoused. Unspeakable acts of violence and disrespect occur to people who are unhoused daily and often the act of kindness one shows, is the only sharing of humanity experienced throughout the day. (7)
- 3. Advocate:** Homelessness is a complex challenge rooted in many social injustices. To effectively reduce homelessness, we must advocate for person-centered, trauma-informed supports that meet people where they are in life. Organizations across the country have information about policies and supports that can make a difference in ending homelessness:
 - Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
 - National Homelessness Law Center
 - National Center for Housing & Child Welfare
 - National Health Care for the Homeless Council
 - Point Source Youth
 - SchoolHouse Connection

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Donate Time and Money: Volunteerism is vital to the sustainability of existing resources and new resources. Contact your local youth or adult homelessness service provider and ask them what they need—volunteers to serve meals? Hygiene kits assembled? Volunteers to assist with transportation or obtaining documents? In-kind services? Many organizations that are serving those experiencing homelessness rely heavily on donations. **Reach out to your local youth and adult homelessness service providers and ask what donations are needed.** They may be in need of clothes, hygiene supplies, bedding, food, toys, or other items, or perhaps they would prefer a cash donation. Make sure you ask what is most needed, without making assumptions!

Visit www.youthreachmd.org to learn more about how The Institute is partnering with the State of Maryland and local communities to end homelessness for youth and young adults.

(1) National Alliance to End Homelessness. (2020). *What Causes Homelessness?* Available from the National Alliance to End Homelessness: <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/what-causes-homelessness/>

(2) National Low Income Housing Coalition. (2021). *Out of Reach Facts Overview.* Available from <https://reports.nlihc.org/oor/report-graphics>

(3) Miller, A., Unick, J., Hoey, E., & Harburger, D.S. (2019). *Maryland Youth Count 2018: A Report on the Findings from Youth REACH MD's Third Survey of Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults Experiencing Homelessness.* Available from <https://www.youthreachmd.com/publications/>.

(4) Keuroghlian, A. S., Shtasel, D., & Bassuk, E. L. (2014). Out on the street: a public health and policy agenda for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth who are homeless. *The American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 84(1), 66–72. doi: 10.1037/h0098852

(5) Narendorf, S.C., Santa Maria, D.M., Ha, Y. et al. (2016). Counting and Surveying Homeless Youth: Recommendations from YouthCount 2.0!, a Community–Academic Partnership. *Journal of Community Health* 41. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10900-016-0210-x>

(6) Research, Education, and Advocacy Co-Lab for Youth Stability and Thriving (REALYST). (2018). *Homeless youth risk and resilience survey.* Available from realyst.org

(7) Council for the Homeless. *Myths & Facts about Homelessness.* Available from the Council for the Homeless: <https://www.councilforthehomeless.org/myths-facts-about-homelessness/>