



How to Support People Who Are Experiencing Homelessness

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Nearly forty years ago, the U.S. government began defunding social support services. Over the last several months, the COVID-19 pandemic put the consequences of these funding decisions at the center of public debate. Following these cuts in the 1980s, rates of homelessness in the United States increased so significantly (800% in places like Chicago) that researchers have since called the change “The New Homelessness.” These stark rates of homelessness have maintained since the budget cuts were made and threaten to worsen as the country attempts to recover from the ongoing pandemic.

When the average person thinks about someone who is experiencing homelessness, they usually envision a dirty, single, addicted, mentally ill, or lazy, adult man. However, research shows that this image does not depict reality. An unprecedented number of women, children, and families experience homelessness every year since the rise of The New Homelessness. Some research attributes the increase of visible homeless populations to the closing of state mental hospitals, but the increase happened at least ten to fifteen years after the exodus from these facilities. Alternately, an abundance of research shows that increasing rates of homelessness can be linked to federal budget cuts made in the 1980s, which defunded food stamps (now Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), Aid to Families with Dependent Children, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development – which experienced an 85% budget reduction.