

Mental Health Advocacy Infographic Population: Unhoused individuals

BACKGROUND

Diversity, equity, and inclusion in mental health care ensure that homeless individuals receive services that can incorporate their unique experiences, trauma, and barriers to access into their care plans. Having access to culturally responsive and equitable care helps reduce the mental health stigma, while building trust. This relationship will then increase the likelihood that unhoused people will then engage in treatment plans. Inclusive practices also improve outcomes by tailoring interventions to meet the social, environmental, and health challenges faced by this vulnerable population. Mental health care and follow up care is going to look different for all vulnerable populations, but especially the unhoused.

Current Challenges

- 67% of people experiencing homelessness have a current mental-health disorder
- 44% have a substance-use disorder



SYSTEM BARRIERS

- Hard-to-navigate and broken health care systems
- Mental health care is often reactionary with little follow through
- Little resources available to coordinate care between a shelter and provider

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

- Lack of stable housing
- Unreliable phone/address
- No transportation
- Clinic hours that conflict with survival needs (panhandling)

COST BARRIERS

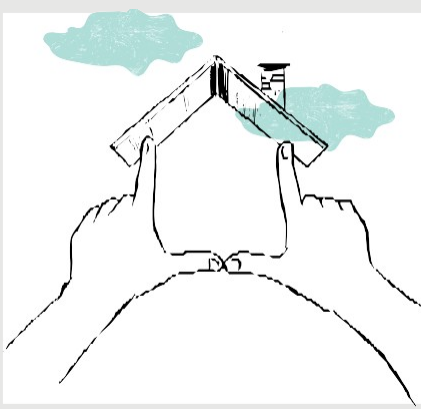
- Coverage and affordability gaps: insurance coverage varies by state
- Medicaid expansion areas show much lower uninsured rates among people experiencing homelessness

Impact of Legislation

- Purposeful legislation can reduce barriers to mental health care for unhoused individuals by making a coordinated effort to dedicate funding and organizational structures.
- The Providing Access to Treatment and Housing (PATH) Act of 2023 was supposed to establish a new office at SAMHSA that work on authorizing grants to expand mental health services, housing support, and case management for the unhoused population
- The Homelessness and Behavioral Health Care Coordination Act would fund more local and community-based organizations that have the intention to bridge the gap between homelessness services and mental health/substance-use treatment. The overall goal being to improve navigation of the healthcare system, a large challenge for this vulnerable population
- These legislative efforts could reduce the gaps in care and expand the access to evidence based treatment
- Removing the holes and barriers in access to care should integrate housing with mental health services, as research has shown it is critical due to housing instability intersecting with psychiatric and substance-use disorders

Benefits of Legislation

- Legislation that expands mental health and housing supports offers major benefits across multiple levels:
 - Unhoused mental health clients:
 - Increases access to coordinated, trauma-informed, and affordable care; improves stability through housing-linked services; reduces crises, ER visits, and untreated illness.
 - For healthcare providers:
 - Provides funding, better care pathways, and better interdisciplinary coordination. This improves follow-ups, reduces burnout, and improves treatment outcomes



Current Proposed Local Legislation

- In Virginia, a key recent legislative proposal is the FY 2025–2026 State Budget Bill directs \$90M in funding toward permanent supportive housing for individuals with serious mental illness
- Tying housing funds specifically along with mental health needs helps stabilize the unhoused by offering long-term housing alongside their mental health being supported
- The hope is the shift in focus to housing will reduce hospitalizations as well as improve continuity of care for mental health; therefore, cutting downstream costs
 - This was in response to the Health and Housing Strategy Report (2024), which outlined how coordinated plans to expand permanent supportive housing in Virginia for people with serious mental illness can bridge housing and clinical care - bridging a major gap in care

Call to

Action

- Support policies that ensure every unhoused individual has access to equitable, culturally responsive mental health
- care Contact your local representatives!
- Share evidence-based information with your local representatives.
- Educate your community
- Advocate in your community to support them to use their voices to push for legislation that expands housing, treatment access, and inclusive services.



Advocacy ➡ Drive meaningful change ➡

Building a most compassionate healthcare System for ALL

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