



Homelessness and the Lack of Public Restrooms

For most Americans, public restrooms are a matter of convenience. They provide relief when someone is on the go and needs to use the bathroom before arriving home. To homeless people, however, public restrooms are a matter of necessity. Before, many homeless people would use restrooms located in parks and other public places. Due to the spread of COVID-19, however, many of these restrooms have closed. This is extremely problematic to homeless people, who typically meet their daily needs at these locations.

Of the public restrooms that have remained open, most are located in stores, restaurants, and other consumer areas. Many of these bathrooms require a code to enter. These codes are typically exclusively given to customers and people who have spent money at that certain establishment. This can be confining to homeless people, who would be forced to spend money that they may not have or want to spend solely to use the restroom.

The lack of public restrooms is also extremely harmful when it comes to preventing the spread of disease. Without toilets available, unhoused people have nowhere to appease their daily needs in a private and hygienic manner. This is already a concern, but the risk runs deeper than that. One of the main ways to prevent the spread of diseases, including that of COVID-19, is to wash your hands with soap and water. Without access to public restrooms and, therefore, sinks and soap dispensers, homeless people also lose access to one of the major preventative measures

of disease. COVID-19, and other illnesses, are a public issue. Everyone, no matter their housing situation, should be given a free means to protect themselves and, thus, protect their communities.

This issue demonstrates that our public spaces are not built and maintained with the needs of homeless people in mind. Of course, it is pivotal to control public spaces during times of disease. It maintains, however, that there is still no solution for homeless people. A temporary closure that results in a simple inconvenience for the majority of the American population is the same closure that fully strips away the homeless population's ability to fulfill their needs and to protect their health.

There needs to be a change. Closing public restrooms may appear to be beneficial to the general public, but people affected by homelessness are also the general public. There need to be public restrooms and sanitation areas that remain open for those who require them. These public spaces should not be seen as luxuries. They are a necessity.

By Nicole Alesso