

# Mental Illness and the Chronically Homeless

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When many people see someone, who is homeless they are very quick to judge. So many people view all homeless as drug addicts, or people who are lazy and want to live off the government. Sure, there are some that are homeless because of addiction and substance abuse, but that doesn't mean they deserve to be living in the streets. Many homeless also have various mental illnesses. Together we can work together to shatter the way people look at the homeless through spreading information.

The majority of people living on the streets are there due to mental illness. In 2008 there was a survey done by mayors in 25 cities around the United States. 48% of the cities that were surveyed cited that mental illness was the biggest contributing factor to homelessness in single adults and 12% for families. One of the biggest reasons for homelessness among the mentally ill is a lack of treatment and resources.

Over the past 60 years the beds, or number of patients that can be seen, in psychiatric hospitals has decreased by 91%. As a result many hospitals are smaller and can't treat as many people. Many of them are only able to treat the most severe patients. There is a strong correlation between the decline in beds in psychiatric hospitals and the number of homeless in the United States. Between the years of 1987 and 2007 the homeless population in Roanoke, Virginia rose by 363%. 70% of those homelessness were either currently receiving mental health treatment or had at some point in the past.

According to Dennis Culhane, who is a professor at the University of Philadelphia and homeless researcher, sometimes severely mentally ill people can get help from different agencies to prevent them from becoming homeless. Culhane also states that nearly half of the nation's homeless population has some sort of mental or physical disability, sometimes both. Some of them don't qualify for disability from the federal government, and even if they do qualify they are usually around \$800 per month and aren't enough to cover rent, utilities, and food even with the assistance of SNAP (food stamps) and other assistance programs that states have in place.

In 2013 the mayor of Seattle declared the state of chronic homelessness, many of which have a mental illness, a state of emergency. The city of Seattle outlined a \$5.3 million dollar plan to help, with King County pledging an additional \$2 million. Portland, Oregon, Los Angeles, and Hawaii have also declared states of emergency for their homeless populations.

Seattle Weekly interviewed a man named Ray who says, "Sometimes I go to a shelter, but I'd rather be out here when the weather's good, plus they kicked me out. Said I had a screw loose or something like that." How many of Seattle's -and other cities for that matter- homeless population have been kick out of shelters due to their mental illness. Washington state is ranked 47 out of 50 states in access to psychiatric beds. Vince Matulionis of the United Way of King County states, "By not investing more heavily in mental-health treatment, we are generating more and more chronically homeless people."

Mental illness in general is a huge problem in our country today, and the lack of resources available to the mentally ill is creating a very big problem. More and more are becoming chronically homeless due to the lack of resources available. Hopefully through the spreading of knowledge we can make people aware to these problems and more funding will be put into place to help those that are chronically homeless due to mental illness.

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