



Older Adults Struggle As A Particularly Vulnerable Homeless Group

As the baby boomer population ages, the need to support them in housing, medical care and mental health care greatly increases.

However, the number of the elderly homeless population has increased instead.

According to the [National Coalition for the Homeless](#), there is a clear upward trend in the number of homeless people between the ages of 50 and 64 because this group is not yet old enough to qualify for many of the benefits that senior citizens receive.

When citizens in this age bracket experience poor physical health that is only exacerbated by the poor nutrition and severe living conditions that the homeless population typically endure.

Those aged 65 and over experience homelessness at a relatively lower rate because they fall under the protections of programs such as Medicare, Social Security benefits and subsidized housing. Yet, even with the assistance of benefits, elderly adults often do not receive enough to cover the cost of housing.

Older adults struggling with homelessness are at a disadvantage because they have more difficulty with movement. They are also more likely to distrust the crowds at shelters or clinics, according to [an article](#) from the National Coalition for the Homeless. Often, due to this distrust, the elderly homeless are more likely to sleep on the street.

For those who do not distrust the shelters, they still face inaccessibility. Shelters on upper floors pose a problem for those who cannot walk well and shelters that require their guests to wait in long lines to get a bed are often not an option for elders.

The elderly homeless are also more likely to experience cognitive impairments like depression and dementia which can further their overall health decline.

A study on men over 55 experiencing homelessness in Canada found that 74 percent reported mental illness with schizophrenia and depression among the most reported mental illnesses, according to the [Homelessness Policy Research Institute](#).

Substance abuse, particularly alcohol abuse, is also extremely common among older adults experiencing homelessness. Mortality due to alcohol abuse is far more likely among the elderly homeless population than younger homeless adults.

In order to prevent older citizens from falling through the cracks of social security and other benefit programs, such benefits could be extended to those who are 50 and older rather than the current age which is typically between 62 and 64 years old.

Another solution, according to a [2019 study](#), would be to increase the accessibility of affordable housing for the older population. Yet another solution would be to provide low cost or no cost mental health intervention and prevention services.

It is imperative to support the elderly homeless because they find it harder to survive the grueling life that comes with living off the streets. While all members of the homeless population need support, the elderly homeless are particularly at risk.

Providing care and assistance before an elderly person becomes homeless would prevent the cost of treating an elderly person whose illness has been exacerbated by living on the street. By providing assistance early on, the government could save itself money in health care costs later on.

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