

Brief: Shelter and Housing



General Description

Housing is crucial to the ability of families of all incomes to move from poverty to self-sufficiency. A permanent or semi-permanent residence makes it easier for adults to find and keep jobs, and improve their health and education attainment.¹

More than 150 community-based organizations, in every county of Washington State, received Emergency Shelter Assistance Program (ESAP) funds to prevent homelessness and help homeless families and individuals begin to rebuild their lives in safety. These funds provide emergency shelter bed nights for individuals, families, and unaccompanied children.² Not everyone who qualifies or has a need is able to be sheltered under this program, leaving sizeable unfilled shelter requests and families with children turned away due to a lack of room.³

Many national, state, and local agencies work to provide services ranging from emergency sheltering to affordable housing advocacy. There is a wide spectrum of programs affecting not just those in deep poverty with immediate and urgent sheltering needs, but also programs that are working to ensure that sufficient accessible and affordable housing is available and within financial reach for low to moderate earners.

Relationship to Poverty

In Snohomish County, housing prices have continued to outpace income growth, and more and more households are being priced out of housing. This trend extends beyond the just the county, as worsening housing affordability in the larger metro area has broader impacts on transportation, housing prices, and community livability across the region.⁴ Causes of homelessness include job loss, family crisis/breakup, drug or alcohol abuse, mental illness, and eviction.⁵

Access: Lack of housing and shelter bed availability, as well as the limited scale of housing assistance programs, contribute to both the current housing crisis and to homelessness overall. Overcrowding, substandard housing, and supply shortages for housing subsidies means being placed on waitlists or remaining in shelters and inadequate housing longer.⁶

Feasibility: Housing affordability is an important factor to ensure that low-wage earners have access to housing. Renters or homeowners paying more than 30% of income towards housing costs, including utilities, are considered “cost burdened.” Those paying more than 50% are “severely cost burdened.” Snohomish County’s housing wage for a family of four is \$1,123 (the estimated full-time hourly wage necessary to afford a fair market rental unit without being cost burdened) is nearly 3 times the state minimum wage of \$11.00.⁷

Quality of Life: Safe and affordable housing leads to improved health outcomes, reduced emergency room visits and inpatient admissions, and decreases in health care costs. Reductions in the number of arrests and nights in jail also significantly decreased in homeless individuals who were housed. People experiencing homelessness face disproportionately high rates of physical and mental health conditions; often these conditions are chronic. Existing health issues among homeless and unstably housed individuals can often be exacerbated by the chronic stress of not having housing.⁸

Example programs that might fall under this focus area:

- Homelessness
- Emergency Shelters
- Permanent Housing
- Transitional Housing
- Rental Subsidies
- Housing Readiness Programs
- Low-barrier Housing

Snohomish County Stats:

- Population: 746,653
 - Under 18: 174,695
 - 18 to 64: 484,948
 - Over 64: 87,010
- Poverty Rate: 10.2
 - Under 18: 13.6
 - 18 to 64: 9.4
 - Over 64: 7.5

Source: U.S. Census 2015, 5-yr avg.

Effects on Youth

Permanent and stable housing is associated with higher educational attainment among children, a decrease in inter-generational poverty and generally healthier and more satisfied parents.⁹

In 2013, 658 children under 18 years old were in foster care in Snohomish County.¹⁰ They are at high risk for joblessness, teenage pregnancy, incarceration, and homelessness.¹¹ Over the course of a year, roughly 1 in 5 youth aging out leave the state's care and, with no place else to turn, their next stop is a homeless shelter.¹²

68 children under 18 were counted in the 2016 Point in Time count. 22 children between the ages of 12 and 17 were found to be living on their own in a precariously housed situation. 16 children between the ages of 13 and 17 were found to be living on their own, in a sheltered program.¹³

During the 2015-16 school years, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) reported 3,788 homeless students in Snohomish County. This is a 17% increase over the previous reporting year. Everett Public Schools reported the largest number of homeless students (1,101 students), representing nearly 1/3 of all homeless students in Snohomish County.¹⁴

Effects on Adults

In 2016, 1,118 persons in 878 households did not have a permanent place to stay; this is an 18% increase from the 743 households that did not have a permanent place to stay in 2015.¹⁵

The number of households that are unsheltered has grown 35% since 2013. Unsheltered families (households with at least one child and one adult) doubled from 5, in 2015, to 10 in 2016.¹⁶

In 2015, 34.2% (93,970) of households earned \$50,000 or less – below Snohomish County's housing wage threshold of \$56,597.^{17,18}

Insufficient income to cover the housing wage extends well beyond those typically considered to be in poverty.

The Housing Authority of Snohomish County (HASCO) provides Section 8 voucher assistance to 3,335 households. In 2014, 170 vouchers were terminated.¹⁹ Among those affected, the typical household was a single mother with children earning \$1,226 per month. 60% of the households have employment income and the average length of time spent on the program is 11 years. Many of these families were homeless or on the verge of becoming homeless when they originally received their voucher.²⁰

Effects on Seniors

Insecurely housed adults age 50 and over visit the emergency room 4 times as often as the general population. Stable housing is known to reduce chronic stress and improve health outcomes in individuals.²¹

Nationally, 1/3 of adults aged 50 and older pay an excessive proportion of their incomes for housing. With generally lower incomes, older renters are more likely to be cost-burdened, ranging from nearly 50% of renters aged 50-64 to 60% for renters aged 80 or older.²²

Older adults are skimping on other necessities in order to keep themselves housed. Nationally, those with the highest housing cost burdens spend 40% less on food than their counterparts in more affordable housing, making clear the link between hunger and high housing costs among older adults.²³

Homeless older adults are at greater risk of becoming victims of crime. 72% of homeless victims are 40 years of age or older.²⁴ At Project Homeless Connect in 2016, 479 individuals responded that they were 40 and older; the average participant age was 31.²⁵

Other Populations of Interest

LGBT: LGBT youth account for between 30% and 43% of those served by drop-in centers, street outreach programs, and transitional housing programs nationally.²⁶ Specific challenges for this population include social stigma, discrimination, and the stress of family rejection, as well as heightened risk of violence, abuse and exploitation, and suicide.²⁷

Communities of Color: Generally, ethnic minorities and migratory children are represented at higher rates in homeless student populations than in the general student population in Washington State.²⁸ Communities of color (specifically African-Americans and Hispanics) also face discrimination in both housing and lending practices.²⁹

Veterans: Veterans represent 11% of the adult civilian population but 26% of the homeless population.³⁰ The average income for a Snohomish County veteran disabled during active service is just \$12,493, 2.6 times less than the income needed to afford a one-bedroom apartment.³¹

Strategies in Practice

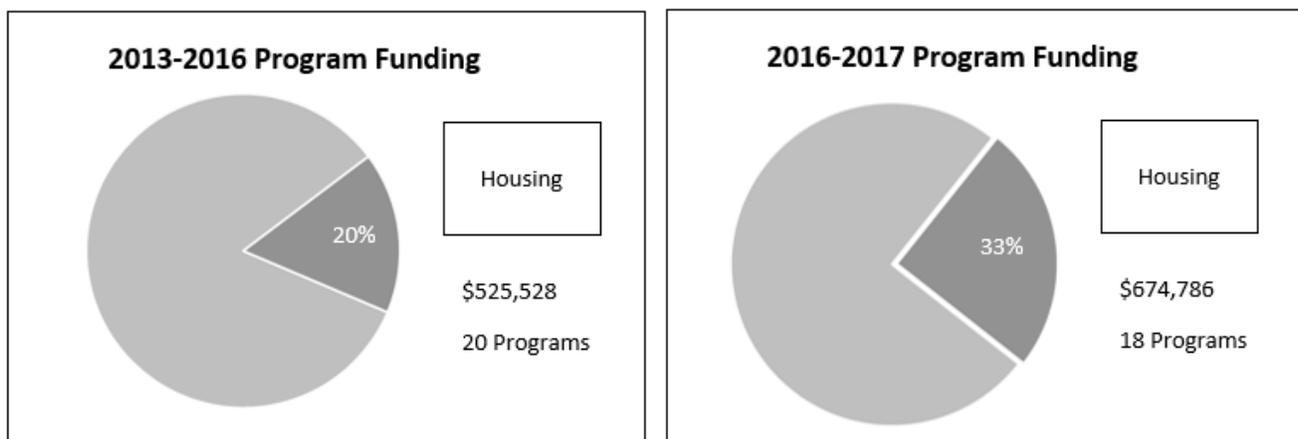
Prevention strategies target those precariously housed and not yet homeless;³² diversion helps those seeking shelter to identify immediate alternate housing arrangements. Whenever possible, both types of strategies connect clients with services and financial assistance to help them retain or return to permanent housing.³³

Rapid Rehousing targets the homeless or those currently in the homeless assistance system³⁴ and is offered without preconditions like employment, income, absence of criminal record, or sobriety. These resources and services provided are typically tailored to the unique needs of the household or individual.³⁵

Transitional and other supportive housing services (which include basic needs and services like case management, child care assistance, and job training) are essential to eventual self-sufficiency.³⁶ Experts agree that the best transitional/supportive housing also includes non-housing services for residents, including GED classes, broadband access, financial literacy counseling, and after school programs.⁷

A number of programs help owners defray the costs of home maintenance, which can be critical to keeping low-income populations housed. These can include weatherization programs to help owners save on energy costs,³⁷ home rehabilitation or accessibility modifications to help older owners age in place,³⁸ or utility assistance programs to prevent families from having to forgo buying food or paying for medical care in exchange for paying the utility bill.³⁹

Past United Way Funding



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⁸ “Bringing Washington Home: 2014 Affordable Housing report,” *Washington Low Income Housing Alliance, Department of Commerce, and Housing Washington State Housing Finance Commission*.

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¹⁶ “2016 Point in Time Summary for Snohomish County,” *Snohomish County Human Services*.

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¹⁹ Staff Calculation. Source: “Section 8 Legislative Dist. Stats,” *Housing Authority of Snohomish County (HASCO)*, accessed January 22, 2016, http://hasco.org/about/why_hasco/section_8_legislative_dist_stats.

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