



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

The DC Fiscal Policy Institute blog
www.dcfpi.org

June 2, 2016

Chronic Homelessness Is Down, But the District Is Falling Behind on Its Goal

By Kate Coventry

A key piece of good news in the District's efforts to address homelessness is that the number of chronically homeless individuals actually went *down* last year, from 1,593 to 1,501. This was the result of large recent investments in housing, as well as the creation of a new "coordinated entry" system that prioritizes the most vulnerable residents for available housing and improves coordination among homeless services providers.

The just-adopted FY 2017 budget will help 566 more homeless individuals move into housing. While this is great progress, it is not enough to end chronic homelessness by 2017, the goal set by the District's Interagency Council on Homelessness. More than 900 chronically homeless residents will remain without housing next year. Given that these are among our most vulnerable residents, the District should do all that it can to set a realistic implementation plan and budget to end chronic homelessness by the end of 2018.

HOMELESS SERVICES



Chronically homeless adults are residents who have been homeless for a long time and struggle with severe, chronic issues like mental health issues and substance abuse. People who don't know where they're going to spend the night struggle to receive medical treatment or counseling. And often they must stay in places that make their illnesses worse, or do not keep them safe from violence. This leads to a life cut short. Chronically homeless individuals have an average life expectancy of 62.

On the flip side, we know that helping people who are chronically homeless improves their stability and health – and leads to tremendous savings. A Seattle study found that permanent supportive housing saved the city almost \$30,000 per person, per year.¹

The recent important progress shows that the District has the tools to eliminate chronic homelessness, and just needs more resources. Although the DC budget for 2017 was just adopted, DC's leaders should start planning now for the 2018 budget, to ensure that it devotes enough funding to help all chronically homeless adults move into their own homes.

¹ <http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/fact-sheet-chronic-homelessness>

Last week's blog on family homelessness has been updated with more recent data, showing that the District has made more progress on reducing the number of families entering shelter. Read the updated blog [here](#).

Kate Coventry is a DCFPI Policy Analyst and voting member of the District Interagency Council on Homelessness.