

Homelessness: Prevent and End Homelessness, and Improve Conditions for Residents Experiencing Homelessness

By Kate Coventry

Stable housing is out of reach for far too many District residents, many of whom have lived in the District their entire lives and are finding themselves priced out of our rental market. In addition to the 4,700 households that experience literal homelessness on any given night in the District, thousands more are living in doubled up and often unstable (if not unsafe) situations, and over 40,000 are severely cost burdened, paying more than half of their monthly income for housing. For these District residents, any number of catalyzing events—a healthcare crisis, domestic violence, job loss—can land them at the shelter door.

The District’s fiscal year (FY) 2021 budget should make big strides towards reaching DC’s goal of making homelessness rare, brief, and non recurring. This includes housing for individuals, youth, and families experiencing homelessness, resources to help survivors of domestic violence stay safe, street outreach, and homelessness prevention.

Tackle Chronic Homelessness

Many DC residents have been homeless for years and suffer from life-threatening health conditions and/or severe mental illness. It is difficult to manage these conditions while homeless—[residents often die](#) from diseases that could be managed or prevented if they had homes.

\$41.1 million will fund Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) for 1,500 individuals experiencing chronic homelessness. By providing affordable housing coupled with intensive case management services, PSH helps people stay in housing and improve their health, and it saves a substantial amount of money as a result. This investment will ensure almost all of those assessed as needing PSH will receive it.

Maintain Comprehensive Street Outreach Network

Outreach services primarily target hard-to-reach individuals who do not seek shelter or other homeless services. Outreach workers help these individuals to apply for housing and gain necessary documentation. They also help them connect with vital services like mental and physical healthcare. The District partially funded outreach with one-time funds in FY 2020. **To maintain these critical services, an investment of \$2.1 million is needed to replace these one-time funds.**

Prevent Residents from Becoming Homeless and Help Those Who Do Exit Quickly

Project Reconnect is a program that helps individuals who are newly homeless find alternatives to shelter, such as reuniting with friends and families. **DCFPI proposes doubling the program by investing \$1.75**



million in new funding to serve 2,000 additional individuals. This investment represents a program expansion that is significant and able to be implemented.

Invest \$1.65 million so that 150 individuals can exit homelessness quickly. This funding will provide help finding apartments, paying move-on fees, and with time-limited rental assistance. We believe that some people could benefit from short term assistance, such as Rapid Re-housing (RRH), if the program were better targeted and had exit criteria that considered income, affordability and potential for eviction. All new RRH should only be funded with one-time funding.

Invest \$12 million in Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP). ERAP helps residents facing eviction pay for overdue rent and related legal costs. The program also provides security deposits and first month's rent for residents moving into new homes.

Help Survivors of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is one of the leading causes of homelessness and domestic violence service providers frequently must turn survivors away due to lack of capacity. **An investment of \$4 million in crisis shelter will help survivors of domestic violence stay safe.**

Tackle Family Homelessness

Many DC families are struggling with homelessness. **The District should invest \$10.5 million to provide Permanent Supportive Housing to 302 families.** DC also needs to invest substantially more in [affordable housing](#) for families to reduce the number of families experiencing homelessness and housing instability.

Tackle Youth Homelessness

Youth experiencing homelessness on their own are particularly vulnerable. Because of this vulnerability and the need for programming that meets their developmental needs, the District needs to continue to make investments in youth programs.

- **\$1 million will create a mobile behavioral health unit that can meet youth in the locations they are such as drop-in centers, youth shelters, and schools.**
- **An investment of \$345,000 will create 10 adult PSH slots for youth who are currently in youth PSH but will turn 25 and age out this year, meaning they're no longer eligible for youth PSH.** This small investment will allow us to pilot transitioning young people from the youth system to the adult system
- **An additional investment of \$1.79 million in youth Extended Transitional Housing is needed because the current funding level does not cover the actual costs of providing housing and services.** This has led to a shortage of willing providers. This investment will bring the costs per unit from \$34,236 to \$55,000 and allow for 50 fully funded units to be in operation in FY 2021.
- Finally, youth experiencing homelessness have asked for a mentoring program. Access to mentors and supportive adults is critical to long-term success, but homeless youth face unique barriers to cultivating these kinds of connections. **An investment of \$350,000 will fund the creation of a pilot mentoring program for 70 youth.**

In total, the District should invest \$3.48 million to make progress towards ending youth homelessness.