

# The Causes of Homelessness

## What causes homelessness?

The Bay Area is home to some of the wealthiest and most expensive places to live in the world. In the shadow of this great wealth, thousands of people are homeless and many thousands more live below the poverty line on the verge of homelessness.

We know from talking with our Team Members and hearing their stories that there are many reasons people can become homeless: a traumatic event, loss of a job, the inability to pay for needed health-care, or a criminal background got in the way of finding a job.

## How do people become homeless?

Top reasons people become homeless:

- 31% job loss
- 20% drugs or alcohol use
- 15% divorce or separation,
- 13% an argument with a family member who asked them to leave
- 7% domestic violence.
- 10% eviction
- 7% mental health
- 7% physical health or medical condition.
- 12% incarceration
- 1% housing restrictions due to probation or parole

## What could prevent homelessness?

When asked what would have prevented their homelessness, respondents reported:

- 34% employment assistance
- 31% rental assistance
- 28% drug or alcohol counseling
- 19% mental health services

## How is homelessness defined?

Any person living in a temporary location, such as a shelter or a place not fit for human habitation (encampment, car, abandoned building, etc.), is considered homeless, according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development. [For the official federal definition click here.](#)

([These statistics are drawn from](#) the Department of Housing and Urban Development's [Point-in-Time count 2016](#).)

### **Homelessness By the Numbers**

Homelessness affects our communities on a national, regional and local level. The extent of the challenge is mind-boggling. Take a look at the numbers from the [Home Not Found: The Cost of Homelessness in Silicon Valley](#) report.

United States:

- In January 2014, there were 578,424 people experiencing homelessness on any given night in the United States
- Of that number, 216,197 are people in families, and 362,163 are individuals
- About 15% of the homeless population (84,291) are considered “[chronically homeless](#)” individuals
- About 9% of homeless people (49,933) are [veterans](#)

California:

- California hosts a total of 113,952 homeless individuals
  - This represents 20% of all homeless people in the United States
- There are approximately 15,179 homeless veterans

Santa Clara County, California:

- In 2013, there were 7,631 homeless individuals in Santa Clara County
- By contrast, in 2015 there were only 6,556, representing a **14% reduction in homelessness in Santa Clara County**.
  - 4,654 of them were unsheltered
- There are approximately 683 homeless veterans

Did you know that homelessness costs on average cost of \$62,473 per chronically homeless person? Other [consequences of homelessness](#).

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