

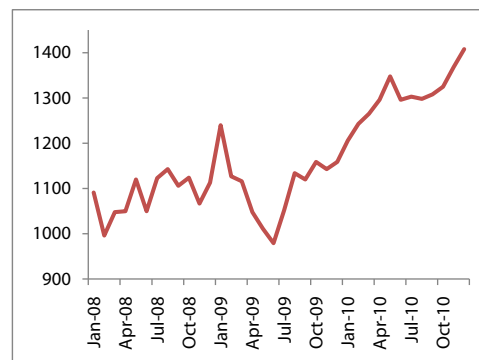
Homeless in Rhode Island

An Overview of the Homeless Crisis and Proposed Solutions

An Unprecedented Homeless Crisis

Rhode Island is currently experiencing the highest levels of homelessness in the state's history. We have experienced a 20% increase in monthly shelter use in just the last two years. Shelters are full; social service agencies are strained; and more and more individuals are forced to sleep outside. Unless action is taken, hundreds will be without a place to sleep this winter. With the recession showing few signs of abating, we expect the homeless crisis to continue to worsen unless we intervene.

Monthly Rise of Homelessness in RI



Who is Homeless?



Those experiencing homelessness in Rhode Island represent the diversity of our state - they include children and elderly, families and individuals. They come from cities and rural communities, from every town and city in RI. In recent years, a growing number of the homeless are young children and families. Of those who experienced homelessness in 2010:

- 51% experienced homelessness for the first time
- 39% were families, 13% were 5 years old or younger
- 41% of the homeless were female
- 12% were employed

Why are People Homeless?

Severe Affordable Housing Shortage

A lack of adequate income and a lack of affordable housing are the top two reasons why people become homeless in Rhode Island. Rhode Island is one of the least affordable places to live in the US. Our state has experienced the second largest increase in the nation for the largest gap between what people earn and the cost to rent a home. In order to afford a two-bedroom apartment in Rhode Island, a minimum wage earner must work 102 hours per week, 52 weeks per year. Housing is simply unaffordable to many Rhode Islanders. In 2008, nearly 25% of renters in Rhode Island were spending more than half of their income on rent.



This shortage of affordable housing makes it more difficult for people to exit homelessness and increases the risk of homelessness for low-income individuals and families.

Slashed Services

As the state and municipalities attempt to balance their budgets, service programs have been cut including health care, childcare, housing subsidies, and food assistance. When families are living paycheck to paycheck, these types of cuts can turn a stable family into a homeless family.

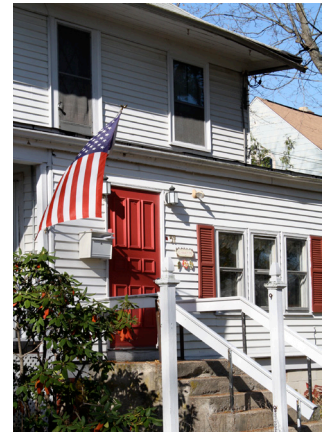
Foreclosure Crisis

The foreclosure crisis of the last two years is affecting communities throughout Rhode Island. We are experiencing the highest rate of foreclosure in New England and experts predict the crisis to continue. Between 2009 and 2012, another 31,192 foreclosures are expected in RI. At the current rate, one in every 10 mortgaged Rhode Islanders could face foreclosure. Over half of these foreclosures will occur in multi-family buildings, causing continued displacement of tenants and, for many, entry into the homeless shelter system.

Solutions

We know what works to prevent and end homelessness. Years of research and evaluation have shown which programs are most effective and which approaches work. We know that a targeted, comprehensive solution is more cost effective and will have better results than temporary fixes. We know we must commit to a continuum of affordable housing and homeless prevention programs. We know that we must shift fundamentally from a focus on providing temporary shelter to a focus on providing stable, affordable housing.

Given the limited resources of our state budget, we need to be sure to strategically invest in the most cost-effective, efficient strategies for dealing with our homelessness crisis.



Homelessness Prevention

Investing in services to keep individuals and families in their homes is far less expensive and has better outcomes than having them enter the homeless emergency shelter system. Four avenues of homelessness prevention that have been proven to work are:

Discharge Planning - Providing vulnerable populations (those exiting prison, mental health centers, and DCYF) with training, housing options and other supportive services can give these individuals the tools they need to live independent, stable lives and prevent them from being discharged into homelessness.

Diversion - Assistance programs can intervene to assist those who are at imminent risk of becoming homeless. This can include financial literacy, connecting with available services, and rental subsidies.

Emergency Assistance - An unexpected illness, the loss of a job, domestic violence, or a temporary disability can push people into homelessness. A one-time small loan or grant can often provide the stability these individuals and families need to stay in their housing.

Foreclosure Prevention and Tenant Protection - Provisions to prevent foreclosure and protect tenants have proven effective. These laws need to be strengthened and made permanent.

Affordable housing is the primary solution to ending episodic homelessness

Providing an adequate, stable supply of affordable housing is the primary solution to ending episodic homelessness. Affordable rentals allow low-income families and individuals to stay in their homes and provide an avenue for the homeless to find housing.

An adequate supply of affordable housing will allow us to transform the homeless service system into a crisis response system that rapidly returns people who experience homelessness to stable housing. Rental housing subsidies *and* new development of affordable rental units are needed.



Permanent supportive housing is the primary solution to ending chronic homelessness

Approximately 18% of the homeless population in Rhode Island is considered chronically homeless - that is, they have been homeless multiple times over a period of years or for years at a time. People who are chronically homeless face unique barriers to finding and keeping housing - many of them live in poverty, suffer from severe mental illness and/or substance abuse, or have physical disabilities. The chronic homeless are often the most visible homeless population and often use the most resources. Nationally, over 50% of service dollars for the homeless are used by the chronic homeless population. There is a more cost-efficient and outcome-effective solution: supportive housing.



Supportive housing is a nationally tested approach to permanently break the cycle of homelessness by providing the chronically homeless with affordable housing and the wrap-around services that will allow them to live independent, stable and productive lives.

A supportive housing pilot program called Housing First was launched in 2006 in Rhode Island. The program found a 90% success rate and a cost savings of \$7,946 per person who is no longer homeless. Supportive housing proved to be effective in moving individuals out of chronic homelessness and saving taxpayers' money.

Chronic Homelessness is a solvable problem in Rhode Island. An estimated 711 chronically homeless individuals accessed shelter in Rhode Island in 2010. This is a solvable problem. In just one year Portland, OR, was able to house 660 chronically homeless individuals. In Worcester, MA, chronic homelessness has decreased by 97%. We could be the first state to end chronic homelessness.

**We know how to end homelessness.
What is missing is the political will and funding to do so.**

Need for a Permanent Funding Stream

Stable, consistent funding is the key component missing in the plan to end homelessness in Rhode Island. Each year, affordable housing funding is cut from the state budget, yet the need for affordable housing continues to grow. We need a permanent funding stream to address this growing problem.

A predictable funding source will allow more strategic and efficient development of affordable housing. Housing development is almost always a multi-year process, therefore developers need reliable funding to make these projects successful. Affordable housing development is being hindered because future funding is unpredictable.

Forty states have established a housing trust fund to provide consistent funding for affordable housing. It is time Rhode Island made the same commitment to ensuring this basic need to its residents.



A home for all Rhode Islanders!



We believe that all Rhode Islanders have the right to safe, affordable housing and that no man, woman, or child should be homeless in our state.

We believe that together, we can make this vision a reality.

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