



Homelessness is one of the most difficult experiences people have in our community, resulting in 4,897 people in Erie County experiencing the traumatic instability that results from losing housing. Efforts in the community to reduce homelessness among particular subpopulations, such as the chronically homeless or veterans, have been successful due to data-driven, targeted efforts to ensure there are sufficient housing resources available that meet these population's needs. The same tactics can be applied to the broader community through efforts to secure more affordable, sustainable housing. The common denominator for everyone lost their housing is that they lived circumstances where they could not afford it.

The number of people experiencing homelessness has continued to decrease in Erie County, this time by 6.61% in the last year. There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic had some impact on this significant decrease. In March, emergency shelters reduced capacities to ensure social distancing and a new night-by-night shelter similar to Code Blue was opened to make up for it; in the six months they were operating during this reporting period, they served 22% of the HMIS clients in Erie county. However, we believe that there was still hesitation to be surrounded by others during this time and this, as well as the eviction moratorium, played a major role in the decreased number of clients seeking shelter, especially for families. In fact, the number of families served between 2019 and 2020 decreased 30%, a significant change compared to the 3% increase from the years before. Otherwise, many of the data trends we've identified in the past have gone unchanged. The black community continues to be overrepresented, single adult males remain the largest group, and people with disabilities still outnumber those without.

The data in this report, unless otherwise stated, comes from the Homeless Management Information System, which uses self-reported client-level information that is recorded on intake by homelessness alleviation providers. All data in this report is aligned with federal fiscal years. FFY2020 is October 1, 2019 – September 30, 2020. Data about community demographics comes from the American Community Survey, 2015-2019 Five Year Estimates.

Key Findings

Annual Counts of People Experiencing Homelessness

	2019 HMIS	2019 Estimated Total Count	2020 HMIS	2020 Estimated Total Count	% Change
NY-508	5344	6963	4872	6375	-8.44%
Erie County	4271	5244	3830	4897	-6.61%

Table 1: Overall homelessness in Erie County

Demographics of Homelessness

Household Type and Homelessness

Household Type	Count of Households	% of Households	Count of Clients	% of Clients
Single Adult	2887	90.2%	2887	75.4%
Families	313	9.8%	943	24.6%
Couple with No Children	16	0.6%	32	0.9%
Female Single Parent	247	10.9%	735	25.2%
Male Single Parent	13	0.6%	40	1.3%
Other Relative	3	0.0%	7	0.1%
Two Parent Family	34	0.8%	129	2.8%
Grand Total	3200		3830	

Table 2: Family type distribution of the households experiencing homelessness (1 single adult = 1 household)

Household Type	Female	Male	Gender Non-Conforming	Trans Female (MTF, Male to Female)	Trans Male (FTM, Female to Male)
Single Adult	31.26%	68.33%	0.15%	0.22%	0.04%
Families	82.96%	17.04%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Couple with No Children	46.88%	53.13%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Female Single Parent	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Male Single Parent	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other Relative	66.67%	33.33%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Two Parent Family	52.38%	47.62%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 3: Gender breakdown of household types based on all heads of households and their spouses/partners experiencing homelessness (3830 clients)

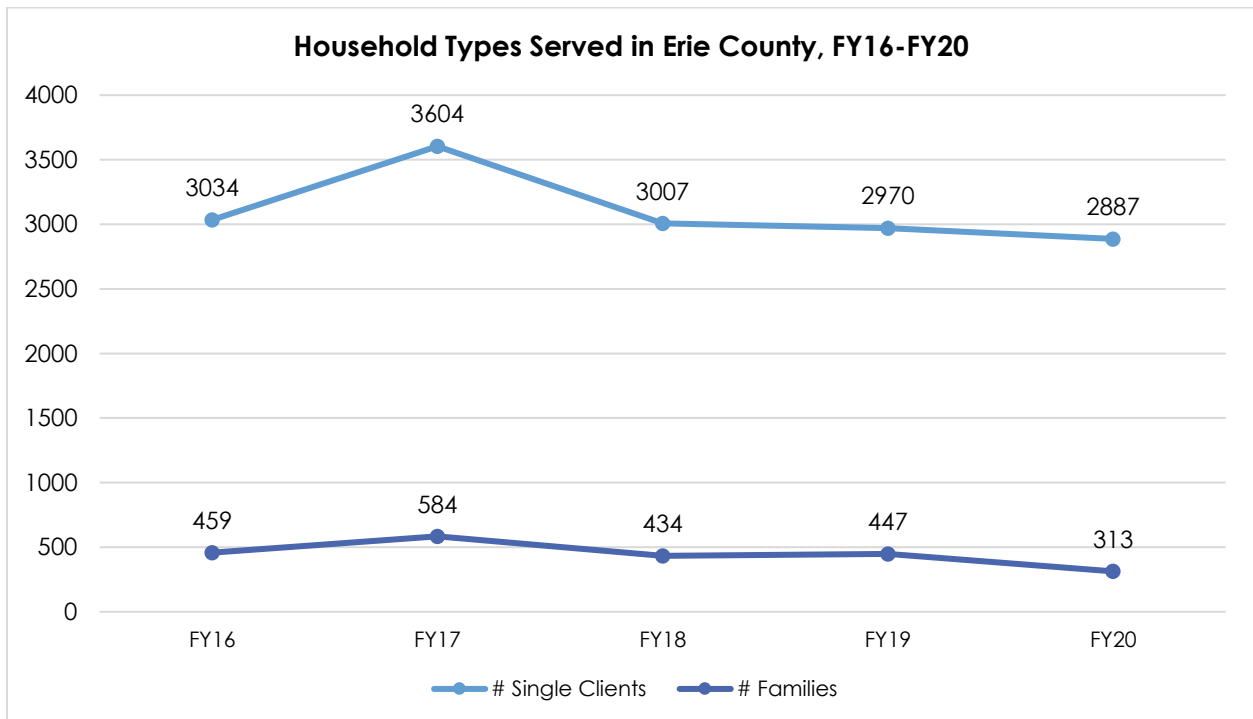


Figure 1: A look at the changes in the number of single clients and total families entering the homeless system over time.

Race, Ethnicity, and Homelessness

Race	% of People Experiencing Homelessness	% of All City of Buffalo Residents	% of All Erie County Residents
Asian	0.8%	5.9%	3.6%
Black	54.3%	36.5%	13.5%
Native American	1.7%	0.5%	0.5%
Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%
White	37.4%	47.1%	77.8%
Multiracial	5.2%	4.0%	2.4%

Table 4: Racial demographics of people experiencing homelessness who reported their race (3407 clients), residents of the city of Buffalo, and residents of Erie County¹

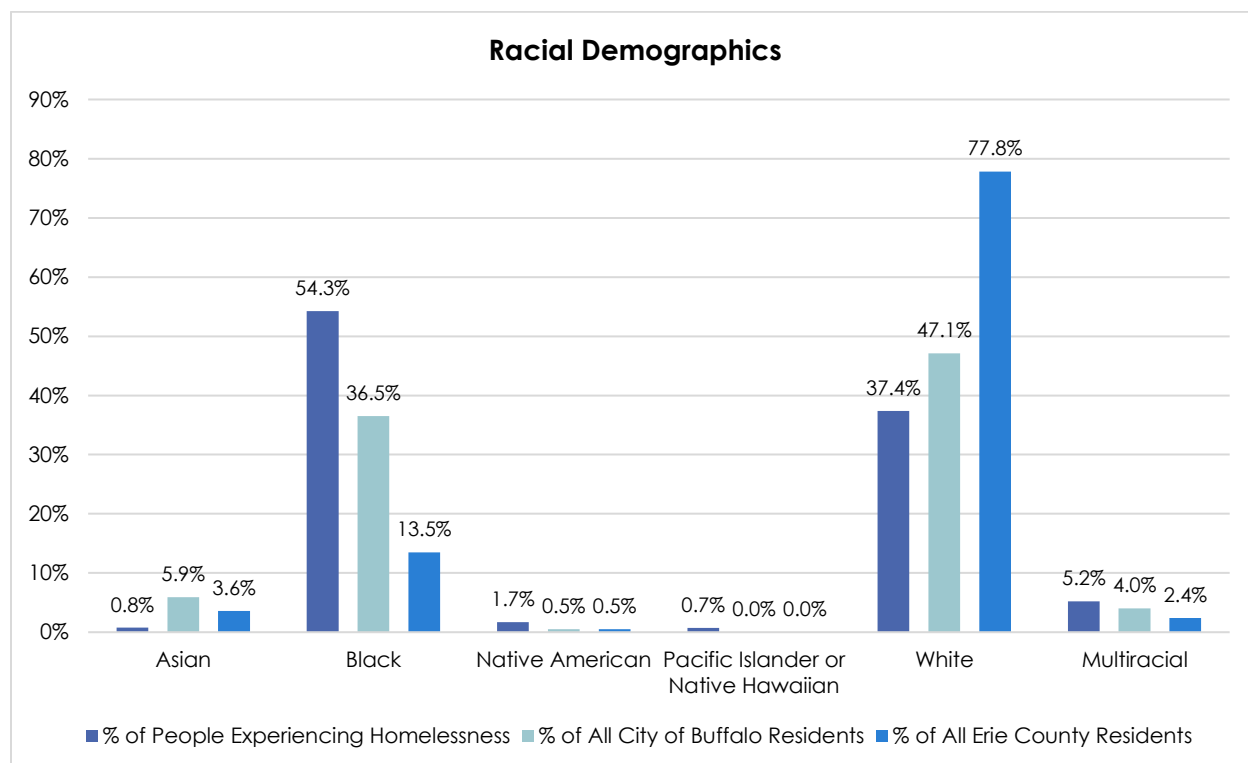


Figure 2: Percent of population in each racial category

Ethnicity	% of People Experiencing Homelessness	% of All City of Buffalo Residents	% of All Erie County Residents
Hispanic or Latino	14.6%	12.3%	5.5%
Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino	85.4%	87.7%	94.5%

Table 5: Ethnicity demographics of people experiencing homelessness who reported their ethnicity (3413 clients), residents of the city of Buffalo, and residents of Erie County²

¹ 2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles (data.census.gov)

² 2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles (data.census.gov)

Age, Gender, and Homelessness

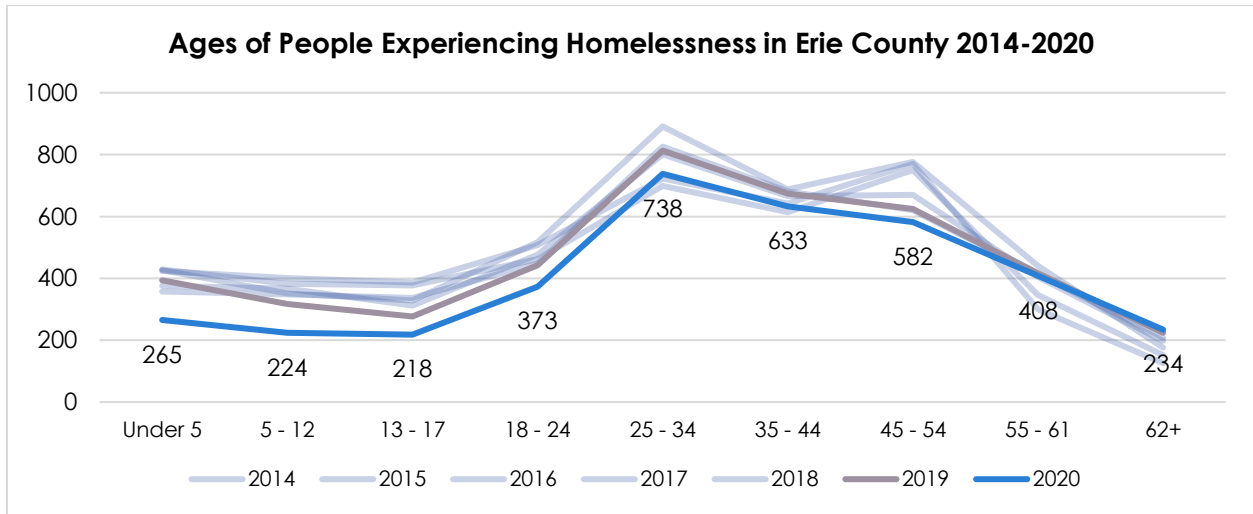


Figure 3: Age distribution of people experiencing homelessness

	Youth	Age 5 & Under	Age 5-12	Age 13-17	Adults	Age 18-24	Age 25-34	Age 35-44	Age 45-54	Age 55-61	Age 62+
Count	707	265	224	218	2968	373	738	633	582	408	234
Percent	19.2%	7.2%	6.1%	5.9%	80.8%	10.1%	20.1%	17.2%	15.8%	11.1%	6.4%

Table 6: Total adults/children experiencing homelessness who provided a date of birth (3675 clients)

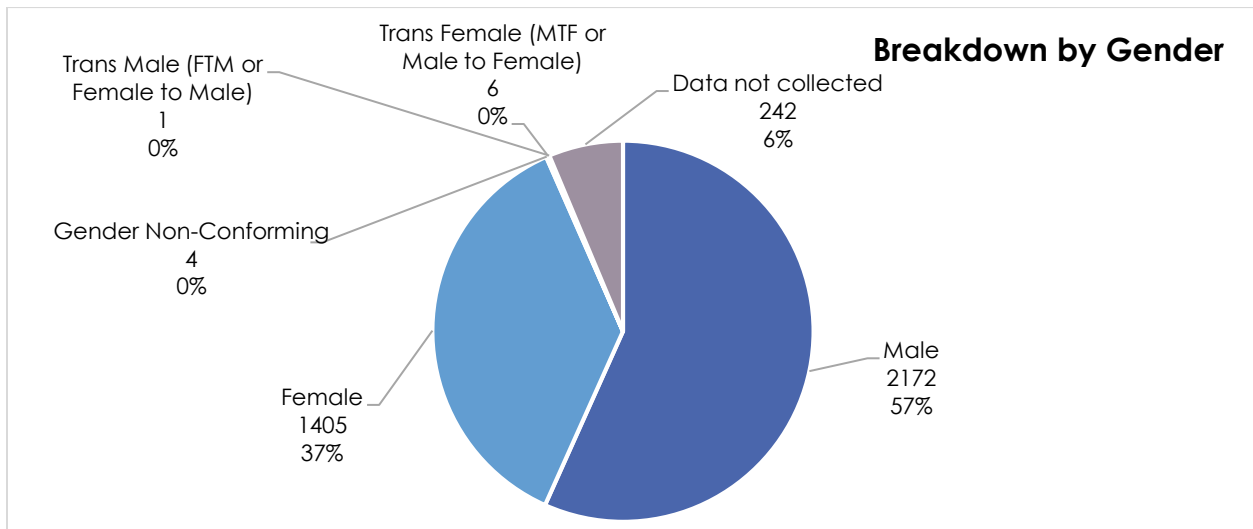


Figure 4: Gender distribution of all people experiencing homelessness (3830 clients)

Gender	Client Count	Percent
Male	2172	56.71%
Female	1405	36.68%
Gender Non-Conforming	4	0.10%
Trans Female (MTF or Male to Female)	6	0.16%
Trans Male (FTM or Female to Male)	1	0.03%
Data not collected	242	6.32%

Table 7: Gender of those experiencing homelessness (3830 clients)

Disability Data

Over half (56.8%) of the 3,830 clients who provided their disability status report having at least one disability. Included in this rate is 3.8% of clients who reported having a disability but did not specify the type; as a result, we cannot determine how many disabilities they have. When only adults (ages 18+) are considered, this rate increases to 70%. People with disabilities are over-represented in the homelessness system. This is made clear by the discrepancies in the rates of people with disabilities in the city of Buffalo and general Erie county (16.3%, 13.2% respectively) compared to the rates of people with disability experiencing homelessness in Erie county.³

	No Disability	1 Disability	2 Disabilities	3+ Disabilities	Number Unknown
% of Disabilities Reported	43.2%	18.4%	14.0%	20.5%	3.8%

Table 8: The disability status of those experiencing homelessness who reported their disability status (3830 clients); if reporting yes to having a disability, the number of disabilities is indicated when data was provided

Disability Type	Count of Clients	% of All Clients with a Disability	% of All Clients
Alcohol Abuse	647	29.8%	16.9%
Chronic Health Condition	514	23.6%	13.4%
Developmental	257	11.8%	6.7%
Drug Abuse	821	37.8%	21.4%
Dual Diagnosis	2	0.1%	0.1%
Hearing Impaired	3	0.1%	0.1%
HIV/AIDS	41	1.9%	1.1%
Mental Health Problem	1628	74.9%	42.5%
Other	8	0.4%	0.2%
Physical	723	33.3%	18.9%
Vision Impaired	3	0.1%	0.1%
Data Not Collected	144	6.6%	3.8%

Table 9: Breakdown of the types of disabilities experienced by both clients with disabilities (2174) and all clients (3830)

³ 2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles (data.census.gov)

Before and After Homelessness

The situations that lead to homelessness, where people resided prior to entering a program, and where they go to after exiting

Primary Reason for Homelessness	Client Count	Percent
Household Disputes (not DV)	330	16.8%
Loss of Job/Income (includes public benefits)	227	11.5%
Eviction by primary tenant	222	11.3%
Domestic Violence	197	10.0%
Release From Institution	194	9.9%
Ask to leave by landlord	136	6.9%
Relocation from out of the NY-508 CoC Area	127	6.5%
Substance Abuse	114	5.8%
Mental Health	107	5.4%
Court eviction by landlord	105	5.3%

Table 10: The top ten reasons cited for homelessness by heads of households, not including those who did not provide a response and not including those in temporary shelters where this information is not collected (1966 clients)

Residence Prior to Project Entry	Client Count	Percent
Emergency shelter, hotel/motel paid w/ voucher, or RHY Host Home shelter	780	27.9%
Place not meant for habitation	491	17.5%
Staying or living in a family member's room, apartment or house	425	15.2%
Staying or living in a friend's room, apartment or house	338	12.1%
Rental by client, no ongoing housing subsidy	171	6.1%
Jail, prison or juvenile detention facility	169	6.0%
Hospital or other residential non-psychiatric medical facility	95	3.4%
Hotel or motel paid for without emergency shelter voucher	67	2.4%
Substance abuse treatment facility or detox center	60	2.1%
Psychiatric hospital or other psychiatric facility	49	1.8%

Table 11: The top ten locations clients were residing at before entering the homelessness system according to heads of households, not including those who did not provide a response (2798 clients)

Exit Destination Data

Exit Destinations	Count	%
Permanent	707	23.4%
Owned by client, no ongoing housing subsidy	7	0.2%
Owned by client, with ongoing housing subsidy	17	0.6%
Permanent housing (other than RRH) for formerly homeless persons	46	1.5%
Rental by client in a public housing unit	13	0.4%
Rental by client, no ongoing housing subsidy	145	4.8%
Rental by client, with GPD TIP housing subsidy	1	0.0%
Rental by client, with HCV voucher (tenant or project based)	4	0.1%
Rental by client, with other ongoing housing subsidy	150	5.0%
Rental by client, with RRH or equivalent subsidy	72	2.4%
Rental by client, with VASH housing subsidy	14	0.5%
Staying or living with family, permanent tenure	185	6.1%
Staying or living with friends, permanent tenure	53	1.8%
Temporary	568	18.8%
Emergency shelter, hotel/motel paid w/ voucher, or RHY Host Home shelter	216	7.2%
Host Home (non-crisis)	1	0.0%
Hotel or motel paid for without emergency shelter voucher	6	0.2%
Residential project or halfway house with no homeless criteria	6	0.2%
Safe Haven	4	0.1%
Staying or living with family, temporary tenure	162	5.4%
Staying or living with friends, temporary tenure	151	5.0%
Transitional housing for homeless persons (including homeless youth)	22	0.7%
Institution	85	2.8%
Foster care home or foster care group home	6	0.2%
Hospital or other residential non-psychiatric medical facility	21	0.7%
Jail, prison or juvenile detention facility	16	0.5%
Long-term care facility or nursing home	8	0.3%
Psychiatric hospital or other psychiatric facility	15	0.5%
Substance abuse treatment facility or detox center	19	0.6%
Unstable	1220	40.4%
Place not meant for habitation	1220	40.4%
No Data Available	439	14.5%
Client doesn't know	4	0.1%
Client refused	10	0.3%
Data not collected	48	1.6%
Deceased	6	0.2%
No exit interview completed	345	11.4%
Other	26	0.9%
Grand Total	3019	

Table 12: Exit destinations provided by the heads of household at their latest exit in fiscal year 2020

Locations of Homelessness and Housing Costs

Zip Code of Last Permanent Address	Percent	Zip Code of Last Permanent Address	Percent
14215	12.6%	14214	3.6%
14211	8.9%	14208	3.3%
14207	5.0%	14206	3.0%
14213	4.9%	14201	2.9%
14212	4.3%	14204	2.6%

Table 13: Top ten zip codes of the last permanent address provided by heads of households (2459 clients)

Percent of Income Towards Rent	City of Buffalo	Erie County - All	Erie County Excluding Buffalo
Less than 15.0 percent	15.8%	16.4%	16.9%
15.0 to 19.9 percent	11.6%	12.6%	13.5%
20.0 to 24.9 percent	10.0%	11.6%	13.0%
25.0 to 29.9 percent	9.6%	10.0%	10.4%
30.0 to 34.9 percent	7.6%	7.8%	8.0%
35.0 percent or more	45.5%	41.6%	38.2%

Table 14: Percent of people paying a certain percent of their income on their housing in the city of Buffalo, Erie county, and Erie county excluding the city of Buffalo⁴

The number of people experiencing homelessness in the city of Buffalo is not entirely surprising when you see that over half of renters (53.1%) pay more of their income towards rent than is considered affordable (30%). Efforts to ensure that residents of the city of Buffalo can maintain their rent should explore housing affordability initiatives, which include subsidies paid to renters.

ESG CV COVID-19 Shelter

When the COVID-19 pandemic forced emergency shelters to reduce their capacities in March 2020, the Restoration Society ESG CV COVID-19 Shelter opened facilities to serve clients while maintaining safe social distancing. Between the end of March and July, they were operating it in two sites with capacity to serve about 120 clients. After July, they changed one of the site and operating in 70 beds per night capacity. Starting on March 29, 2020, the shelter served an average of 52 clients every night through the fiscal year's end (9/30/20). A total of 839 unique clients were served during this time. While just under half of the clients (47.0%) stayed 3 nights or less, a handful utilized this shelter for upwards of 90+ days. On average, most clients stayed 11 nights over the course of the six months it was open during FY2020.

Demographics		# Clients
Gender	Male	584
	Female	159
	Other Gender (Transgender, Gender Non-Conforming)	3
Race	White	282
	Black	351
	Other Race	50
Ethnicity	Hispanic/Latino	76

Table 15: Demographics as reported by the clients served by the ESG CV COVID-19 Shelter

⁴ 2018: ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles (data.census.gov)

Conclusion: Policy Recommendations

The solutions to homelessness is a home. Some people may need more support to remain housed but the basic solution is still finding people safe, affordable and decent housing. The biggest problem is there are not enough affordable housing units available for those at the lowest income levels.

While New York State's laudable initiative to create 100,000 affordable housing units and 6,000 supportive housing units is a good start, these projects often don't reach those at the lowest income levels. A soon-to-be released study by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) is going to verify and quantify the deficit of housing options for those at the lowest income levels. Until we address this deficit, homelessness and people living in substandard housing will continue to be an issue.

Even with the additional Section 8 vouchers provided by the federal government, homelessness will still be an issue because there are not enough available housing units. Some people are losing their allocated vouchers because they can't find housing.

National, State and local elected officials will proclaim they are doing the best they can to address this issue, and there is no doubt of their sincerity, it simply isn't enough. We all have to do better.

The Homeless Alliance of WNY recommends:

1. There are three ways to provide housing to those most in need:
 - a. Subsidize renters with more Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8)
 - b. Further subsidize the developers with HOME funds and project based Section 8 vouchers.
 - c. Invest in public housing through rehabilitation of existing units and the creations of new public housing units.
2. The housing marketing study conducted by LISC cannot be allowed to collect dust on a shelf. Once it is released, all levels of government, nonprofits and the private sector must embrace and commit to building more affordable housing for those at the lowest income levels.
3. Housing is an undisputed Social Determinant of health. The medical community must be more involved in providing housing and end questionable releases of patients into homelessness and unstable housing.
4. There needs to be better discharge planning between correctional facilities and homelessness providers. Too often, people cycle between homelessness and corrections. It's been proven that stable housing reduces recidivism.

In conclusion, the solution to homelessness is housing, housing and housing. It isn't rocket science. There are no magic bullets. The solution is very easy and very complex at the same time. The question is do we have the collective will to finally end homelessness?