

CRIMINALIZING HOMELESSNESS IS **NOT** THE SOLUTION



The Homeless Alliance of WNY



The Reality



Homelessness and housing insecurities are on the rise across the United States, affecting our neighbors at an alarming rate. This crisis is a result of decades of insufficient investment in affordable housing, historic inflation, stagnated wages, and more.

The practice of criminalizing homelessness often results in significant costs, including increased expenditures on the legal system, incarceration, and emergency services, all while failing to address the root causes of homelessness. Moreover, it exacerbates the challenges faced by the most vulnerable populations—unsheltered individuals—by compounding their trauma and instability. Instead of receiving the compassionate care and support needed for healing and recovery, they are further marginalized, deepening the cycle of hardship.

Homelessness in WNY



6.5k individuals and families experience homelessness in WNY **every year.**

83% of people experiencing homelessness in WNY **are single adults.**

Most of them are men.

1.7k children throughout WNY are **experiencing homelessness right now.**

70% of families in WNY who experience homelessness **are led by single mothers.**

36% of people who experience homelessness in WNY are **25-44 years old.**

It's Ineffective.



Nearly all **people experiencing homelessness are NOT unsheltered by choice** - but because they lack access to affordable housing, physical and mental health care, or adequate and humane emergency shelter.

Arrests, fines, jail time, and criminal records **make it harder** for those experiencing homelessness to access the affordable housing, health services, and employment necessary to exit homelessness.

Housing Challenges in WNY

The Number of **RENTERS**

USA
33%

NYS
46%

BUFFALO
55%

A quarter are paying 50% or more

The **BURDEN** of Rent

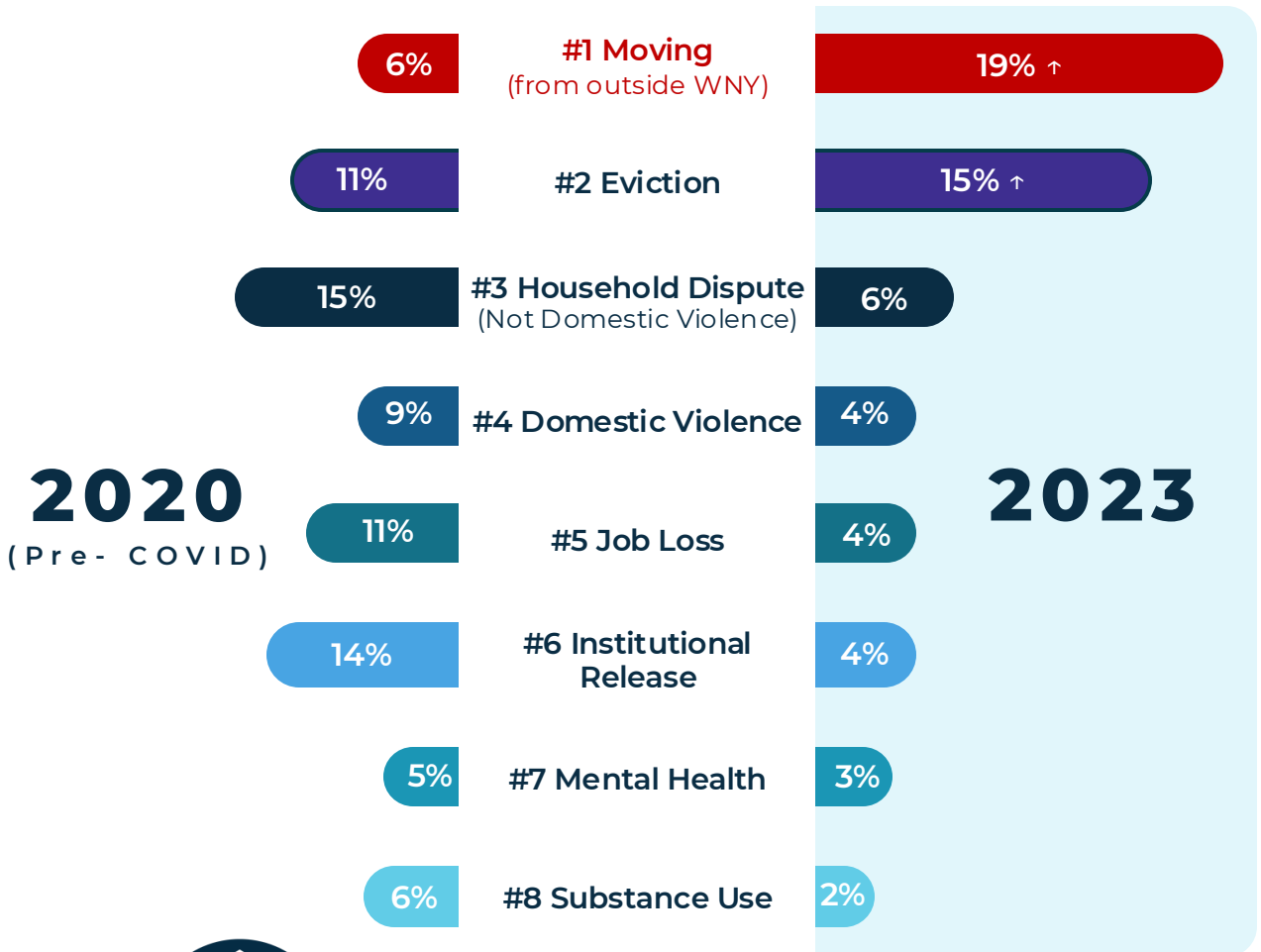
Nearly half of renters in WNY are paying 30% or more of monthly income on rent.

A 1-bedroom rental is
2020 **\$703**

The same unit is
\$992 (41% ↑) **2024**

61% of housing units were built **before 1939.**

Top 8 Drivers of Homelessness in WNY



It's Destructive.



Criminalization will further marginalize communities who are already overly affected by homelessness and mass incarceration.

This unfortunately **often** includes...

- Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color,
- People with mental and physical disabilities,
- LGBTQIA youth and adults

Who is experiencing homelessness in WNY?

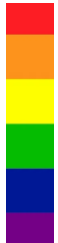


Black, Indigenous, & People of Color

BIPOC

17%
of WNY
Population

51%
of people
experiencing
homelessness



Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Intersex, & Asexual People

LGBTQIA

4%
of WNY
Population

18%
of youth
experiencing
homelessness



People with Disabilities

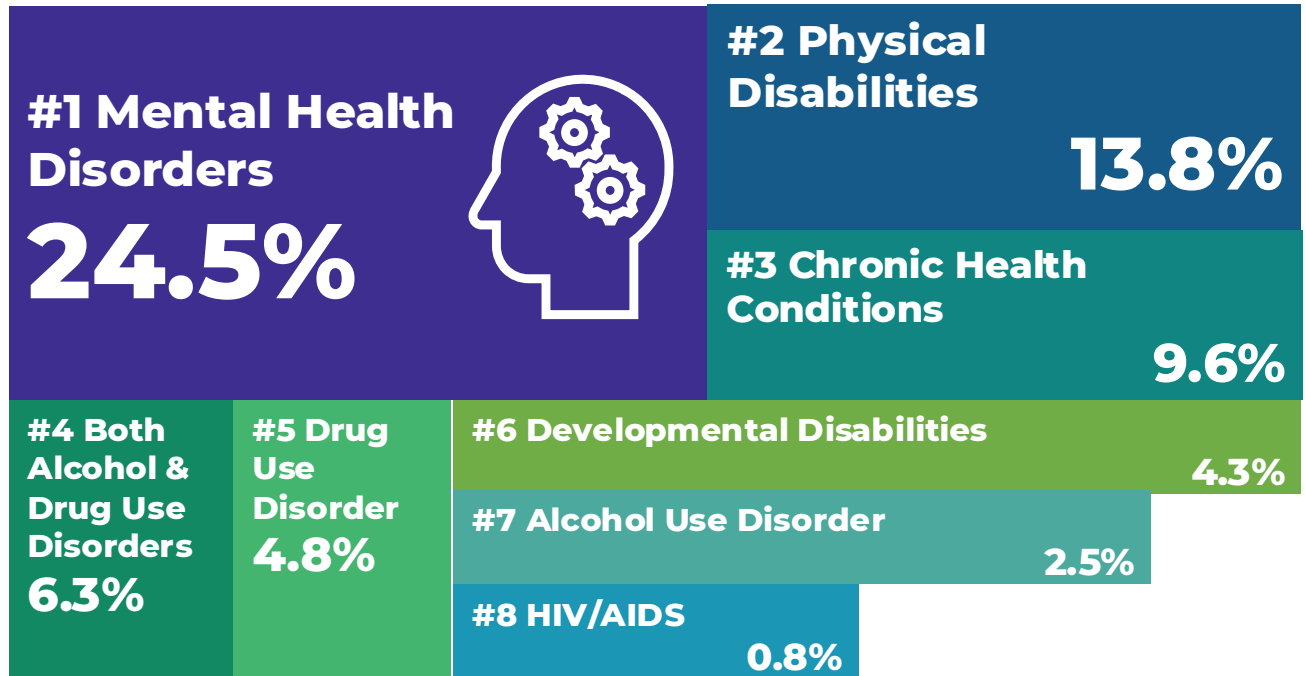
PWD

14%
of WNY
Population

48%
of people
experiencing
homelessness

Experiencing Homelessness with a Disability

48 % of people experiencing homelessness in WNY report having at least one disability.



It's Dehumanizing.



Laws contributing to the involuntary institutionalization of those experiencing homelessness have **regularly been found to violate the civil rights of people with disabilities** and any expansion of those laws would expand the harm they cause.



It's Expensive.

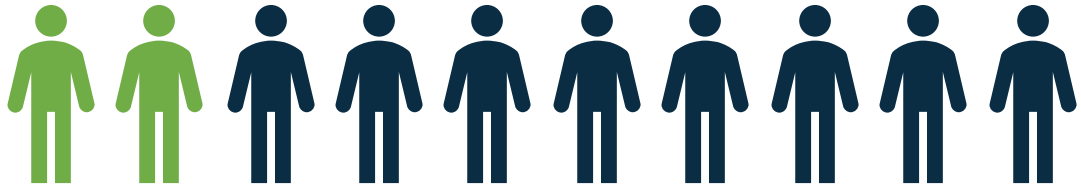


A growing body of research demonstrates that providing affordable housing and voluntary services is more cost-effective than outdated approaches, including criminalization.

A study in Charlotte, NC found that the city saved *\$2.4 million* in the year after creating their Housing First program. **Housing First** prioritizes providing stable, permanent housing to individuals experiencing homelessness as a first step, without preconditions such as sobriety or participation in treatment programs. With limited state and local budgets, elected officials should turn to humane, cost-effective policies.

Limited Housing in WNY

There is still a ways to go to end homelessness in Western New York.



Right now, only **about 20% of people** experiencing homelessness can be housed through our CoC programs.

Fred's Story



Fred is a 61-year-old man who lost his wife and soon after, his home, as his single, fixed income couldn't cover rent without her.

Seeking help, he turned to a local shelter, but the congregative environment left him feeling uneasy. After a week, Fred left the shelter and moved to a local encampment.

In the encampment, Fred connected with an outreach worker who understood the homeless system and took the time to earn his trust. Here the outreach worker would engage regularly and linked Fred to community resources.

This connection became a lifeline for Fred, helping him navigate his situation and begin to rebuild his life.

The Impact of Breaking Up Encampments



BARRIER #1



When the encampment was dismantled, this left him vulnerable, and Fred lost contact with **outreach services**.



BARRIER #2

The loss of Fred's belongings, including his **vital documents**, left him unable to complete housing applications.



BARRIER #3

Accumulating **fines for loitering** makes it harder for him to access housing assistance.



Fred's **length of homelessness will be extended** because his encampment was broken up.

The Solution



To effectively end homelessness in our communities, we must commit to investing in scalable, evidence-based solutions.

Decades of research have shown that providing access to affordable housing and voluntary healthcare services is far more effective in ending homelessness and preventing housing instability than outdated, dehumanizing approaches. By focusing on these proven strategies, we can create sustainable pathways to stability and dignity for all individuals.

Housing First Organizations in WNY

Across Western New York (WNY), many organizations are applying Housing First to end homelessness, including but not limited to:



BestSelf Behavioral Health, Inc.



Cazenovia Recovery Systems, Inc.



Community Missions of Niagara Frontier, Inc.



Compass House



Living Opportunities of DePaul, Inc.



Evergreen Health Services



Gerard Place Housing Development Fund Company, Inc.



Hispanics United of Buffalo, Inc.



Western New York Independent Living, Inc.



Jericho Road Community Health Center



Matt Urban Human Services Center of WNY



Restoration Society, Inc.



Salvation Army of Buffalo



Spectrum Health and Human Services



Transitional Services, Inc.



Western New York Veterans Housing Coalition, Inc.

Join the conversation today!

Get more information!

Join the local planning body!

Become an advocate!

