



FACT SHEET

YOUTH & YOUNG ADULTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS AT GREAT RISK AMID CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

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4.2 million young people between the ages of 13 and 25 experience homelessness in America every year. They need connections to caring adults and access to housing, basic life needs, supportive services, access to employment and education support, legal services, health and dental care.

Youth and young adults (YYA) experiencing homelessness are at high-risk of infectious diseases¹, and their mobility places them at a higher risk for both contracting and spreading COVID-19. This population is also not able to self-isolate or self-quarantine in their tenuous, transient, crowded, and unstable situations. YYA experiencing homelessness are facing increased rates of unemployment and face many barriers when trying to access adult-centric programs, including public or tax benefits.

We need to act with urgency as a nation to expand funding and access to the services, housing, cash assistance, and basic needs, such as food and hygiene, that YYA experiencing homelessness need. Together, we can ensure that our young people are not forgotten in our nation and throughout our communities during and after COVID-19.

YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS LACK SHELTER, ACCESS TO BASIC NEEDS & THE ABILITY TO SHELTER-IN-PLACE

- YYA experiencing homelessness are not able to self-isolate or self-quarantine in their tenuous, transient, crowded, and unstable situations. The stress of staying in confined spaces and the stigma associated with homelessness pose additional mental health problems and added trauma.
- Without access to Wi-Fi, electronic devices or an ability to charge devices, they can lack access to the information they need to protect themselves and others.
- YYA experiencing homelessness lack a stable environment, access to hygiene products, and an ability to implement good hygiene practices that would otherwise protect their health in such conditions.
- YYA experiencing homelessness face many of the same adversities as adults experiencing homelessness, but they are still developing physically, cognitively, psychologically, and emotionally, and the trauma they experience has long-lasting effects.
- YYA facing homelessness lack parental or other supportive adults who can help them navigate emergencies or emergency response systems. Their mobility coupled with their distrust and fear of adult-centric systems - and the level of trauma and vulnerability they experience when not faced with a pandemic means that traditional means for delivering all services (homeless assistance, food, counseling, housing, and supplies) do not reach them unless policies explicitly include and target them.
- YYA experiencing homelessness sleep where they are able to - on the streets, on someone's couch, a motel, in cars, in abandoned buildings, by participating in a youth program, or in crowded adult shelters. This mobility has long left youth vulnerable to infectious diseases, like flu and hepatitis and to conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and respiratory illnesses, including asthma and pneumonia, which require regular, uninterrupted treatment. Without health insurance, these problems go unchecked, medication is beyond their reach, and even a minor untreated infection can morph into a major health emergency with long-lasting impact.
- YYA experiencing homelessness also face several key challenges in accessing certain benefits because they often lack a government ID, parental signature, knowledge of their social security number, a bank account, stable address and help with navigating the paperwork and filing requirements of public and tax benefits.

Policies must be explicitly targeted to YYA experiencing homelessness. Otherwise these young people face many barriers in trying to access the help they need.

¹ Rice, E., Stein, J. A., & Milburn, N. (2008). Countervailing social network influences on problem behaviors among homeless youth. *Journal of Adolescence*, 31(5), 625-639. Talks about HIV; Beech, B. M., Myers, L., & Beech, D. J. (2002). Hepatitis B and C infections among homeless adolescents. *Family & Community Health*, 25(2), 28-36. Kulik, D. M., Gaetz, S., Crowe, C., & Ford-Jones, E. (2011). Homeless youth's overwhelming health burden: A review of the literature. *Paediatrics & child health*, 16(6), e43-e47.