



People Experiencing Homelessness—Facts and Challenges

The Very Real Problem of Homelessness – On a typical night, more than 580,000 Americans are homeless.¹ Nearly 2.5 million American children (one in every 30) experience homelessness each year.² In January 2023, the federally mandated Point-In-Time count found 1,611 unhoused individuals in Idaho outside of Ada County³, plus 687 in Ada County⁴ (total for Idaho: 2,298). Our Path Home, a one-stop shop to help people experiencing a housing crisis in Ada County, has an average of 832 households (1,473 people), on their waiting list.⁵

Homelessness is NOT by Choice - While affordable housing is the only permanent solution to homelessness, it is nearly impossible to find. The National Low-Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) reports that 20% of Idaho renters, or 39,722 households, have extremely low incomes (<30% Area Median Income)—and that Idaho has a **current** shortage of 24,710 rental homes these families can afford. An Idaho renter needs to earn \$44,782 annually (\$21.53/hour) to afford a two-bedroom unit at HUD’s Fair Market Rent.⁶ The [City of Boise Housing Needs Analysis 2021 Report](#) (page 7) estimates that 2,145 *affordable* units need to be built **each year** through 2030, *in Boise alone*.

Homelessness and Work - The National Coalition for the Homeless estimated that 44% of people experiencing homelessness nationwide are employed.⁷ Unfortunately, people experiencing homelessness often struggle to find work. Common barriers include lack of access to the Internet, transportation, childcare, showering and laundry facilities; low levels of education, job skills or experience; disabilities, health or mental health problems, bad credit and criminal histories.

Homelessness and Addiction Issues: Homelessness Can Make Them Worse - It is estimated that 20 to 40% of people experiencing homelessness have a substance abuse issue. However, substance abuse is rarely the sole cause of homelessness and more often is a response; living on the street creates tremendous stress and can place people in more frequent contact with users and dealers.⁸

Homelessness and Mental Illness: Homelessness Is Traumatic - Any group of people, no matter where they live, will include people living with mental illness such as mood disorder. A January 2021 report from Optum Idaho’s Dr. Dennis Woody says an estimated 45% of Idaho’s homeless population is dealing with mental health problems ranging from schizophrenia to anxiety, with 20 to 25% having serious and persistent mental illness. Living with the stressors and trauma of homelessness can increase symptoms of mental illness, particularly if there is no treatment.⁹

Homelessness is Solvable – To date, 14 communities in America have reached the goal of “Functional Zero” for homeless Veterans, chronically homeless individuals, or both; and 44 communities have achieved a measurable reduction in homelessness.¹⁰ Functional Zero (also called Net Zero) means that although people may still experience homelessness, the instance is rare, brief, and one-time. ***Can Boise achieve this?***

YES! Our Path Home operates Boise/Ada County’s coordinated entry system, the access point to homelessness interventions available from 30+ providers. Our Path Home serves approximately 1,100 households per year, working toward the goal of Net Zero for our community. To learn about Our Path Home and the five-year Supportive Housing Plan, visit www.ourpathhome.org.

¹ <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/state-of-homelessness-2021/>

² www.air.org/centers/national-center-family-homelessness

³ [2023 PIT FINAL \(idahohousing.com\)](https://www.idahohousing.com/2023-PIT-FINAL)

⁴ [BCAC PIT & HIC Counts Year to Year | Tableau Public](https://bcac.org/BCAC-PIT-HIC-Counts-Year-to-Year-Tableau-Public)

⁵ www.ourpathhome.org/learn-more/frequently-asked-questions/

⁶ <https://nlihc.org/housing-needs-by-state/idaho>

⁷ www.nationalhomeless.org/factsheets/employment.html

⁸ <https://www.nyu.edu/about/news-publications/news/2019/september/HomelessQandA.html>

⁹ [Hello Idaho: Homelessness a risk for those dealing with mental illness | ktvb.com](https://www.ktvb.com/news/Hello-Idaho-Homelessness-a-risk-for-those-dealing-with-mental-illness)

¹⁰ [The Movement - Community Solutions](https://www.themovement.org/community-solutions)