



## Solving Homelessness Together

### Uniting to Solve Homelessness

Communities across America share an ambitious goal to end homelessness as it exists today. Called *Functional Zero* or *Net Zero*, this goal envisions homelessness as a **rare and brief experience**—in contrast to the shocking and demoralizing situation we see today.

Currently, on a typical night more than 650,000 Americans are homeless.<sup>1</sup> Nearly 2.5 million American children (one in every 30) experience homelessness each year.<sup>2</sup> In January 2023, the federally mandated Point-In-Time Count found 1,611 unhoused individuals in Idaho outside of Ada County<sup>3</sup>, plus 687 in Ada County<sup>4</sup>. Total (estimated) in Idaho: **2,298**. We believe this can and must change.

### Why Do We Have Homelessness?

Myths about homelessness abound, including the idea that people choose to live unhoused. Here are a few facts:

***Homelessness is NOT by Choice:*** While affordable housing is the only permanent solution to homelessness, it can be very hard to find. The National Low-Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) reports<sup>5</sup> that 20% of Idaho renters (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 Fair Market Rent. The *City of Boise Housing Needs Analysis 2021 Report* (page 7)<sup>6</sup> estimates that 2,145 affordable units need to be built **each year** through 2030, *in Boise alone*.

***Homelessness and Work:*** Despite common misconceptions, many of our unhoused neighbors DO have jobs. A 2021 study from the University of Chicago<sup>7</sup> estimated that 53% of people living in homeless shelters and 40% of unsheltered people were employed, either full or part-time, in the year that people were observed homeless between 2011 and 2018.

Many people experiencing homelessness 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. Many of those who have jobs don't earn enough to afford market rent. The University of Chicago study estimated the mean income for workers living in homeless shelters at only \$8,169 in annual pre-tax earnings. Affordable housing—including units that are affordable for people with extremely low incomes—is the way to get these workers out of shelters and into homes.

***Homelessness and Addiction Issues—Homelessness Can Make Them Worse:*** According to The National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH), on a given night in 2022<sup>8</sup>, 16 percent of the homeless population reported having conditions related to chronic substance abuse. But like the old riddle about the chicken and the egg, not all unhoused people who struggle with substance use had this problem before they were homeless. Living on the street, in cars or in homeless shelters can be tremendously stressful. Some people turn to alcohol or drugs to cope with their situations. And those who had a pre-existing addiction find it challenging to address the issue while unhoused, even with treatment.

The National Healthcare for the Homeless Council states<sup>9</sup>, “The best, most coordinated medical services are not very effective if the patient’s health is continually compromised by street and shelter conditions.” They also affirm that **“Housing is health care...stable housing is a key ‘social determinant of health’ that directly impacts health outcomes”**.

***Homelessness and Mental Illness—Homelessness Is Traumatic:*** Any group of people, no matter where they reside, will include people living with mental illness. According to a U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) report<sup>10</sup>, 21% of the homeless population on a given night in January 2022 reported having a serious mental illness. Living

with the stressors and trauma of homelessness can increase symptoms of mental illness. Here again, stable housing is crucial to improving outcomes. It is easier for people to access and adhere to treatment when they are securely housed.

Studies have shown that Permanent Supportive Housing (affordable housing with supportive services) is an effective *and* cost-effective solution for people who need ongoing support due to disabilities. The National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) states<sup>11</sup>, “Housing stability is a key contributor to long-term recovery and reduces relapse for people who are homeless”. But for those who live on disability payments, market rate housing is out of reach. A person living on **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)** income of \$914/month can only afford \$290 in rent<sup>12</sup>.

### **What is the Answer?**

*Our beautiful Treasure Valley should NEVER have anyone living unhoused for extended periods of time. Almost all people who experience homelessness want to return to stable housing, but due to problems and barriers they are facing, they need some help to get there.*

According to the nonprofit Community Solutions (<https://community.solutions>), reaching Functional Zero means “keeping the number of people experiencing homelessness below the community’s proven record of housing at least that many people in a month”. The key is to operate a **system of programs** that prevent homelessness, quickly detect homelessness when it occurs, and permanently and promptly resolve those incidents of homelessness.

Sounds simple, right? But we know that many people (in Idaho and beyond) struggle to access decent, affordable housing. Recent research, reported in a book called *Homelessness is a Housing Problem*, found that a shortage of affordable housing is the greatest single predictor of higher rates of homelessness in a community. And even where available units exist there are many hoops to jump through: credit and background checks, security deposits, application fees, and barriers like income discrimination that keep people with housing vouchers, disability payments, and other non-employment sources of income from renting.

*So, the solution to homelessness is multi-tiered: we need programs to identify and assist people who become or may soon be homeless—but there also must be a supply of housing they can afford that will accept them as tenants, without unsurmountable barriers. And once they are stabilized in housing, some people, including those with disabilities and other health conditions, may need ongoing supportive services to help them stay housed.*

### **What Can You Do?**

The Boise/Ada County Homeless Coalition exists to bring people together to support solutions that will end homelessness and address housing insecurity in our community. All of us must work together to make a difference--including advocating for, and creating an ample supply of affordable housing units, and providing timely assistance for people who become unhoused or are at risk. Learn how *you* can be part of the solution on the Boise/Ada County Homeless Coalition’s Take Action webpage ([www.homelesscoalitionboise.com/take-action/](http://www.homelesscoalitionboise.com/take-action/)).

You can also learn more by visiting the website of Our Path Home ([www.ourpathhome.org](http://www.ourpathhome.org)), the public-private partnership working to end homelessness in Ada County. The nearly 50 partner agencies of Our Path Home work together to provide homelessness prevention services, a rapid response for those households that do fall into homelessness, and supportive housing.

***Thank you for your interest***—we are grateful for every person who takes time to educate themselves and others, advocate, volunteer, donate and participate in our community’s effort to end homelessness.

1 [The 2023 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report \(AHAR to Congress\) Part I: Point-In-Time Estimates of Homelessness, December 2023 \(huduser.gov\)](#)

2 [National Center on Family Homelessness | American Institutes for Research \(air.org\)](#)

3 [2023 PIT FINAL \(idahohousing.com\)](#)

4 [BCAC PIT & HIC Counts Year to Year | Tableau Public](#)

5 [Idaho | National Low Income Housing Coalition \(nlihc.org\)](#)

6 [boisehousinganalysis-2021-report.pdf \(cityofboise.org\)](#)

7 [Working Homeless: More Than Half Of Unhoused People Have Jobs \(invisiblepeople.tv\)](#)

8 [CoC\\_PopSub\\_NatlTerrDC\\_2022.pdf \(hudexchange.info\)](#)

9 [homelessness-and-health.pdf \(nhhc.org\)](#)

10 [CoC\\_PopSub\\_NatlTerrDC\\_2022.pdf \(hudexchange.info\)](#)

11 [Health - National Alliance to End Homelessness](#)

12 [Idaho 2023 OOR.pdf \(nlihc.org\)](#)