

ADDRESSING THE HOMELESSNESS CRISIS

The January 2015 Point-in-Time count found that homelessness in California increased 1.6% from 2014 to 2015, making it one of only 17 states to see an increase in the number of men, women and children experiencing homelessness. Statewide, 115,738 Californians were counted as homeless. This marks a disturbing reversal of the trend seen in 2007-2015, when California experienced a 16.7% drop in the state's homeless population. Of those counted, 73,699 people were unsheltered – by far the largest figure population in the nation.

The situation is particularly dire in Los Angeles. The metropolitan area witnessed a one-year increase of 11%, bringing its homeless population to 41,174 people -- 7% of the nation's homeless population. Los Angeles is not alone, however. Of the nation's major cities with the largest homeless populations, three others are also located in California: San Diego (8,742), San Francisco (6,775) and San Jose (6,556). Many smaller cities in the state are also wrestling with how to address this humanitarian crisis.

The following priority issues are critically important to cities working to bring a functional end to homelessness, a goal proven viable by the great success many cities have achieved in ending homelessness for veterans:

- **Increase funding for critical housing development programs:** California's cities are committed to addressing homelessness. In February, for instance, the Los Angeles City Council adopted a 10-year, \$1.87-billion plan, while partner Los Angeles County has committed \$100 million, including \$42 million over the first 12 months. At the federal level, however, funding for key affordable housing programs has fallen dramatically from pre-recession levels. From 2005 to 2015, federal investments in several critical housing development programs declined significantly. These include: a 77% reduction in USDA's Section 515 program, a 55% reduction in HUD's Section 202 program, a 62% reduction in HOME, and a 50% reduction in CDBG. Coordinated intake, rapid rehousing and housing-first programs are showing promising results in California cities, but they need additional funding in order to scale up and meet the full scope of this emergency. Programs or policies that incentivize the acceptance of vouchers by landlords in communities with high market rents are also needed, as some cities report having to return vouchers because no landlords will accept them. Studies show these kinds of housing investments can yield substantial savings to taxpayers: A six-year look at the homeless population of Santa Clara County, California, including San Jose, found that the most expensive 10 percent of the homeless population cost an average of \$67,000 per year – compared to \$19,000 annually when housed.

- **Invest in other programs that prevent and end homelessness:** California's cities call on Congress to adopt the President's proposal to increase by \$6 billion targeted homelessness assistance across federal agencies, which is consistent with "Opening Doors", the federal strategic plan to address homelessness. It is critically important that the federal government attempt to help address the wide range of issues that contribute to, or aggravate, homelessness, including mental illness and addiction. Funding is also needed to provide additional training for first-responders, who along with social workers are routinely placed on the front line of this crisis.
- **Support additional funding to end family homelessness:** California's cities support the President's call for investing \$11 billion over 10 years with the goal of ending family homelessness by 2020. The 2015 Point-in-Time count found 22,582 Californians in families were homeless. Another 892 unaccompanied children were found homeless during the count -- 260 of whom were unsheltered. Studies have shown that children experiencing homelessness have higher rates of illness, including respiratory infections and asthma, to show delayed development and learning disabilities. Research has also shown that homeless children are also far more likely to be homeless as adults.
- **Increase flexibility in existing programs:** While there is growing agreement on best practices in addressing homelessness, regional and local challenges require both collaboration and flexibility. Well-intentioned changes in the HOME program, for example, have resulted in difficulties at the local level. Cities recognize that the timeliness of expenditures is important. However, the time it takes to assemble the needed funding to build affordable housing can result in an inability to meet federal deadlines.