

Should the government guarantee housing for people who are homeless?

Madeline Mcfernan

SWK355/555 Social Welfare Policy and Services

Dr. Marcia Herrera, LMSW

In the US, the homeless population is rapidly increasing; it has gotten to the point where it is beginning to become a public health issue, with thousands upon thousands of people being displaced and not having adequate and fair housing. As discouraging as it may seem, there simply is not enough sustainable housing for families and people suffering hardship. There are many different circumstances that can cause a person or family to lose housing; domestic violence, natural disasters and mental health issues among the many. In New York city alone, the homeless population reached around 50,000, with more than half of that amount being adults with families and children. That number is projected to increase in this current fiscal year, with over 14,000 of those people being children (NYC.gov) The lack of affordable housing, mental health services as well as poor economic conditions all contribute to the growing homeless population. But with government policies and laws being issued that reduce the amount of funding given to organizations that are trying to combat homelessness, it has been an uphill battle. The US government has been assigned the duty to ensure safety and fairness is distributed to all; housing should be a guarantee.

Since housing is such a large social issue, there are certain standards that I believe should be met in order to receive guaranteed housing. As with any social programs that are made to help the needy, there is always the possibility of it being abused by people who don't really need the help or see it out of comfortability and not actual need. There are a few populations that I believe should be provided guaranteed housing by the government; one of these are veterans. According to an article written by a group of doctors from *Psychiatric Services*, there is a strong correlation between veterans who experience homelessness and suicidal ideation and attempts of suicide. Although the US Department of Veteran Affairs works hard to make sure that those who have served in our country's military are taken care of, many veterans who have been dishonorably

discharged or do not have a severe enough disability are disqualified from receiving ongoing services. Many of these veterans in turn look to other ways to cope with the effects of serving in the military. Lack of enough support networks and overcrowded programs also contribute to the fact that there a large number of veterans are left to fend for themselves and live on the streets after the sacrifices made for our country. Although it is not always the case, many veterans also suffer from mental health issues such as PTSD which prevent them from obtaining employment once they are released from the military. Additional funds should be allocated for veterans to obtain stable and livable housing.

People who have disabilities should also be guaranteed housing funded by the government. Whether it be a physical or intellectual disability, there could be a point where employment and housing is not attainable. This is to no fault of their own; not everyone has the ability to rely on trusted loved ones and family. There is a disparity between obtaining affordable housing and having a disability because everyone does not have the same access to SSI funds to supplement their needs if employment is found. According to *NACCHO*, many shelters are not easily accessible to persons who have disabilities which causes them to put themselves in dangerous situations in order to find shelter. Persons who have disabilities and mental health issues are treated poorly and not given the chance to build a sustainable life. An example of this would be the policy set in place just recently by Mayor Eric Adams in New York City. This was amid city budget cuts to non-profit organizations providing unhoused people shelter and mental health services. Homeless people are often the victims of crimes but Mayor Adams has mislabeled homeless people and those with mental health issues as violent (NPR). Although there was backlash and discord that came from this decision, the policy was still executed. Having a disability, particularly one that affects mental health, is a detriment to housing.

Victims of domestic violence who experience homelessness should also be a part of the population that receive guaranteed housing provided by government funding. According to *Comptroller*, more than 40 percent of the family population entered the Department of Homeless Services of NYC in 2018 due to domestic violence, which was the largest cause of homelessness for the people entering the system. This accounted for over 12,000 people entering homeless shelters, with over half of the total being women and children. This increase in need of affordable and safe housing has stretched an already overwhelmed system thin. Because most of these shelters are supplemented with non-profit organizations, more funding should be made available to accommodate the growing number of families in need. Although victims of domestic violence are given top priority, housing continues to be scarce due to the growing number of people experiencing homelessness. Priority should be given to those experiencing homelessness due to domestic violence because more often than not, the children are also experiencing displacement. This can lead to physical and mental health issues as well as substance abuse for those who are not able to cope with the stress of being displaced.

I also believe that people who have experienced natural disasters should also be guaranteed housing. Natural disasters can hit at any moment, many times there is not enough time to get to safety, let alone gather important belongings and information. Oftentimes it may take weeks or even months for these victims to obtain stable shelter and get themselves situated enough to begin to rebuild. Organizations and agencies that are set up to help those in need are also greatly affected by natural disasters, which is why more often than not the US government must deploy emergency services to help affected areas. Mental health is greatly affected while suffering a loss due to natural disaster; food and shelter are suddenly scarce and it can be a very frustrating and difficult situation, especially for families who have small children.

Homelessness will always be a crisis, especially for people in the US. There have been many successes but they do not overshadow the fact that this will always be an ongoing issue. Although homelessness has many causes, it is not something that can be overlooked. As long as funds continue to be cut and redistributed, we won't even begin to put a dent in the homeless population. The US government is responsible for budgeting the economy, and until more importance is placed on the housing crisis in the US, we will continue to see homelessness rise and Americans will continue to suffer.

References

Heyward, G. (2022, November 30). *NYC Mayor Adams faces backlash for move to involuntarily hospitalize homeless people*. Retrieved February 8, 2023, from <https://www.npr.org/2022/11/30/1139968573/nyc-mayor-adams-faces-backlash-for-move-to-involuntarily-hospitalize-homeless-pe>

Homelessness Among Individuals with Disabilities: Influential Factors and Scalable Solutions. (2019, June). Naccho.org. Retrieved February 8, 2023, from <https://www.naccho.org/blog/articles/homelessness-among-individuals-with-disabilities-influential-factors-and-scalable-solutions#:~:text=People%20with%20disabilities%20experience%20housing,to%20meet%20their%20basic%20needs>.

How New York City Can Increase Housing Stability for Survivors of Domestic Violence. (2019, October 21). <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/>. Retrieved February 8, 2023, from <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/housing-survivors/>

Stats and reports. (n.d.). Nyc.org. Retrieved February 8, 2023, from <https://www.nyc.gov/site/dhs/about/stats-and-reports.page>

Tsai, J., & Huang, M. (n.d.). Addressing veteran homelessness to prevent veteran suicides. *Psychiatric Services*.

<https://ps.psychiatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/appi.ps.20170048>