



Photo courtesy of the city of Olympia

Homelessness strategy: bringing people inside

A six-year trend of rising homelessness in Washington was broken this year. Major investments in affordable housing and homelessness programs, combined with greater emphasis on serving unsheltered homeless households, have led to fewer people living outside and more living in homeless shelters.

Even so, Washington experiences the 5th highest per-capita rate of unsheltered homelessness in the nation. On any given night in our state, approximately 10,000 people are living outside or in places unfit for human habitation. In fact, the number of unsheltered homeless individuals now exceeds the number of people who lived without shelter during the Great Recession.

The effects of such arrangements can be devastating. Unsheltered individuals experience profound health and safety challenges compared to their sheltered counterparts. They are more likely to have contact with the police, to spend nights in jail and in emergency rooms, and to die earlier. The impacts are far-reaching, too: As people living outside lack customary facilities such as restrooms and laundry machines, unsheltered homelessness presents environmental impacts along roadways and

in city parks and other locations used by homeless individuals.

Making meaningful steps to bring people inside will require a significant increase in shelter capacity as well as investments in additional housing supports and improvements to assistance programs.

Gov. Inslee's supplemental operating and capital budgets provide funding to dramatically decrease the rate of unsheltered homelessness in Washington. These investments are aimed at bringing thousands of individuals off the streets and into shelter while acknowledging the need for more permanent solutions to homelessness:

- A new grant program that will reduce the point-in-time count of unsheltered individuals by 1,890. (\$66 million)

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- A transitional housing pilot program for nondependent homeless youth. (\$1 million)
- Housing and Essential Needs program improvements to serve an additional 2,300 individuals. (\$26 million)
- Permanent supportive housing assistance for an additional 1,080 individuals. (\$15.4 million)
- Affordable housing benchmarks and robust data collection and reporting on homeless system performance to measure success and ensure accountability developed by the Department of Commerce. (\$884,000)
- Construction of new enhanced shelters — or conversion of basic shelters to enhanced shelters — through facility improvements such as laundries, bathrooms and storage spaces. (\$30 million)
- Improvements to the Aged, Blind or Disabled Assistance Program to help homeless clients and refer them to appropriate resources. (\$2.7 million)

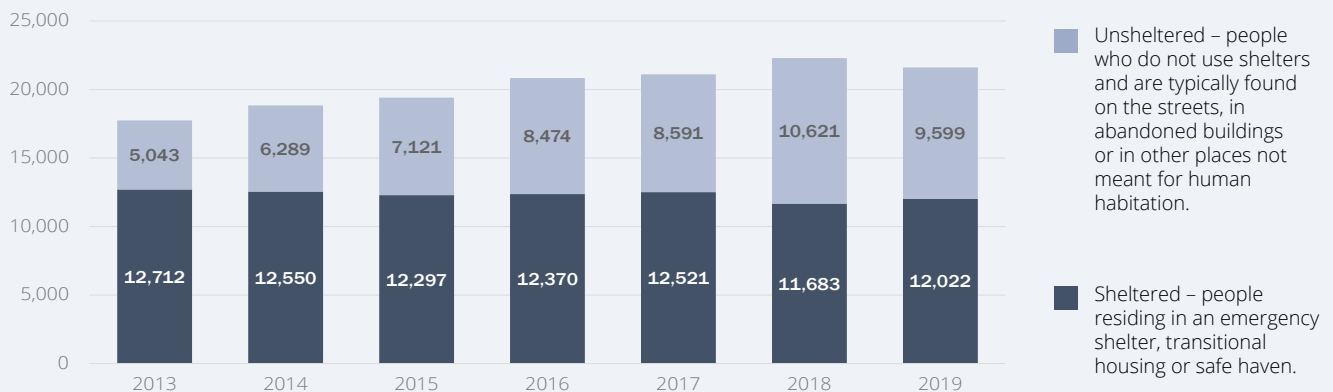
- Grants to local governments for removing waste and contaminated materials associated with vacated homeless encampments. (\$4 million)

These actions will cost \$146 million in the current operating budget and more than \$300 million over the next three years. To cover costs, the governor proposes tapping the state's emergency reserve, which is projected to contain about \$2.5 billion at the end of the next biennium.

The state has made sizable capital budget investments over the past seven years, with more than \$200 million being tabbed in just this biennium. This biennial funding — along with a state sales tax credit for local governments to further invest in affordable housing development — will spark a rise in affordable housing stock throughout the state. Extending these efforts and finding more ways to preserve affordable housing units can help to bring rents in closer alignment with wages of working Washingtonians.

Washington: 5th highest per-capita rate of unsheltered homelessness

Point-in-time count — homeless individuals — 2013–present



Source: Washington State Department of Commerce, June 2019