

Advocacy Weekly Wrap

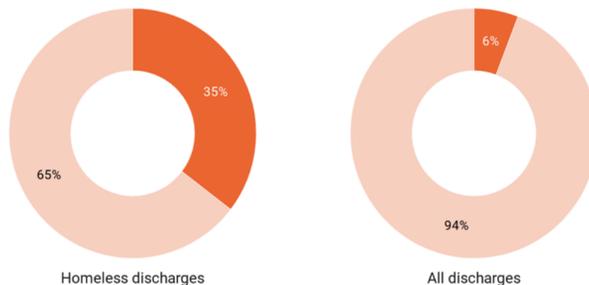
ISSUE 5: January 21, 2021

ISSUE SPOTLIGHT: Mental Health & Homelessness

- **Mental illness disproportionately affects homeless populations.** In 2015, the [US Department of Housing](#) found that, of the 564,708 people that were homeless on a given night in the US, at *minimum* 25% were seriously mentally ill and 45% had any mental illness. In comparison, only 4.2% of adults in the US have been diagnosed with mental illness.

2017 Hospital Discharges By Major Diagnostic Category

■ Mental diseases
■ All other diagnoses

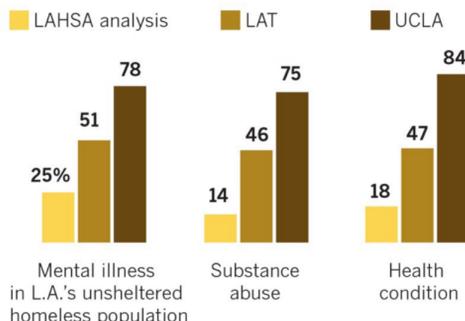


Note: Some patients may be admitted and discharged more than once in a single year.
Credit: Phillip Reese for California Healthline
Source: California's Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development

According to [California Healthline](#), the proportion of homeless people discharged from hospitals in California with diagnoses of mental illness is much higher than that of the general population.

- **Most common mental illnesses among homeless populations:**
 - Affective disorders (depression and bipolar disorder)
 - Schizophrenia
 - Anxiety disorders
 - Substance abuse disorders
- **Mental illness can increase one's chances of being homelessness.** It can make one susceptible to the [3 main factors](#) that lead to homelessness:
 - **Poverty** - mental illness may lead to cognitive and behavioral problems that make it difficult to sustain employment
 - **Disaffiliation** - delusional thinking can lead to withdrawal from friends and family that can provide coping resources in times of crisis
 - **Personal vulnerability** - mental illness can cloud thinking and impair judgement
- **Homelessness can also exacerbate preexisting mental illness.** Experiencing homelessness can be a traumatic event that can lead to high levels of stress. This stress may encourage anxiety, fear, depression, sleeplessness, and substance use.
- **Homeless individuals often lack access to proper health care.** There are many barriers to finding necessary health care, which include financial factors, psychological stability, transportation, among others. [Fryling et al.](#) found that even when healthcare programs (under the Affordable Care Act) are available to those experiencing homelessness, they may not even be aware of these programs' existence.
- **Structural changes within the healthcare system and supportive services can be solutions to this problem.** Programs that provide long-term housing for people with mental illness can help to improve mental health outcomes. In addition, [services that provide cognitive and social skill training](#) are also useful in helping people with mental illness regain housing. [Structural changes](#) in the health system's delivery of service may also be helpful as it has been found that homeless individuals are more likely to use hospitals than regular outpatient care, which can be expensive and provide fragmented service.

A UCLA study found even higher rates than The Times



A [study](#) done by the California Policy Lab at UCLA found extremely high rates of mental illness and other health issues among LA's homeless population, even in comparison to other similar studies.

LEARN MORE

Study: "[Criminal Behavior and Victimization Among Homeless Individuals With Severe Mental Illness: A Systematic Review](#)" is an exploration of the prevalence of criminal behavior, contacts with the criminal justice system, and victimization among homeless adults with severe mental illness. (Laurence et al.)

Podcast: "[Episode 6: The Battle For Mental Health](#)" examines how individuals dealing with homelessness deal with mental health challenges. Includes interviews with formerly unhoused individuals that have first-hand experiences with this. (We The Unhoused)

Article: "[The Never-Ending Loop: Homelessness, Psychiatric Disorder, and Mortality](#)" This article sheds light on the obstacles that homeless individuals encounter in accessing mental health care. (Psychiatric Times)

ACTION ITEMS:

- **Donate to [Homeless Health Care Los Angeles](#) and/or ask friends and family to donate (0.5 hour):**
 - Donate any sum of money to this Los Angeles organization that works to provide both physical and mental health care to individuals experiencing homelessness. They also provide safe spaces for those on Skid Row and connect people to permanent housing and supportive services. Here is the [donation link](#).
 - Even if you have no money to donate yourself, you can ask family members and friends to donate or even post a blurb about the organization on a social media story and ask people to Venmo donations!
- **Listen to a podcast on homelessness & mental health (2 hours):**
 - Listen to [We The Unhoused's podcast](#) on how mental health challenges can affect those experiencing homelessness. Then, reflect on the accounts given by unhoused residents and write a blurb (1-2 paragraphs) about what you gained from listening to their experiences. You can turn in this reflection under the task description question of the services hours form!

Thank you so much for reading! If you found this informative, please share! If you would like to subscribe, [click here](#).

HP Members: If you have completed action items and would like to report them for hours, please complete [this form](#) (also available on the "Members" page of the Hunger Project Website).

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