

6. CLOSING

Chronic homelessness is a very visible issue facing communities across Washington, and brings with it a complex set of challenges: complex health conditions are often exacerbated by a lack of access to preventative care, prolonged time living on the street with exposure to weather and dangerous situations, and spending time in and out of institutional settings like jails, psychiatric centers, and detox facilities. Mental and physical disabilities are often central factors in causing chronic homelessness and are often exasperated or complicated with new conditions caused by exposure and lack of access to housing and health services.

Responding to a systemic condition by criminalizing the behaviors of individuals is not only an ineffective solution to curbing homelessness, it is harmful—negatively impacting physical and mental health outcomes, perpetuating existing disparities in homelessness and incarceration among people of color,

LGBTQ people, veterans, people with disabilities, and others, and increasing the likelihood that an individual will remain trapped in the cycle of chronic homelessness. We must look at the broader systems at play, especially the policies and laws that specifically affect homeless and low-income people in a given community or across the state.

Everyone has a role to play in the movement to end homelessness in Washington. Regardless of your specific experience, you can help educate decision makers about homelessness. Decision makers greatly benefit from hearing from people from all walks of life, including service providers who work directly with those experiencing homelessness, caring community members, and people who are experiencing homelessness themselves. Many resources are available in the Appendix, and the Housing Alliance is available to support your advocacy efforts.