

HOMELESSNESS

SUMMARY

- A near-record 19% of Californians surveyed by Inside California Politics/Emerson College cited **homelessness as the Number 1 issue** for the Governor and Legislature to work on in 2021; down 1% from 2020 but still up from 6% in 2019.
- According to the Bureau of State Audits report, “Homelessness in California, the state spent roughly **\$13 billion** from FY 2018-2021 across 9 state agencies who administered 41 programs to address the **151,000 who are homeless**. This figure breaks down to roughly \$4 billion in total funding over the last three years and \$86,000 per homeless person. **But that is not all:** The 2021-22 budget provides **another \$10.7 billion** (\$5 billion General Fund) to 50 housing and homelessness-related programs across 15 state entities.
- Assembly Republicans instead offer innovative reforms and solutions in 2022 to solve this elusive problem.

ISSUE

- **Numbers:** According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development there are 151,000 homeless individuals in California -- the highest number since at least 2007, a nearly 17% uptick since 2018. This means the state’s homeless population represents 27% of the national total even though California has 12% of the nation’s population. If lumped together would be California’s 39th-largest city.
- **Causes:** Lack of affordable housing, eviction, high cost of living, job loss, generous welfare benefits, psychiatric disabilities and deinstitutionalization, drug addictions, failing ex-cons, and youth escaping a violent environment or expelled from their homes.
- **Quality of life:** Then there are the costs to everyone else with increased petty crime, assaults, threats to public health with outbreaks of disease and strewn needles, tent encampments, less business traffic, and property rights lost from invasive squatters.

FAILURE OF “HOUSING FIRST” This law shifts funding from so-called transitional housing to Housing First. In the transitional model, entrants must give up drugs and other destructive behavior as conditions to enter temporary housing, where they are trained to be self-supporting and eventually move out. The Housing First model gives away shelter as a baseline provision while using counseling to fix other problems that cause someone to be homeless. It has become accepted wisdom in the social services industry but Housing First has been a costly failure. While it may house some homeless people, it doesn’t create incentives to help them turn around their lives. All too often, they either die in shelters as addicts or return to the streets.

SOLUTIONS — A decade’s unbridled Democrat control of both legislative chambers and the Governor’s office have failed. Assembly Republicans offer bold and creative solutions to solve the problem:

- **Collaborative Courts and Reentry:** Redirect money to homeless courts, funds for expanded treatment options for criminal defendants in mental health court, and reentry planning for jail inmates. This will promote rehabilitation, housing stability, and provide more tools to law enforcement to reduce crime.
- **Prevention:** Determine which individuals are on the cusp and redirect money to prevent it.
- **Centralize Prevention, Outreach and Support:** Consolidating services and prevention under one department will streamline organization and eliminate duplicative and contradictory regulations.
- **Require an Audit of Homeless Funds:** For example, an audit of Los Angeles’ Measure HHH found that units were costing \$600,000 apiece. A state-level audit would enhance trust or reveal inefficiencies.
- **CEQA Exemptions for Supportive Housing and Emergency Shelters:** A well-intentioned law is being abused by NIMBY activists that delay or outright prevent construction of shelters and housing units.
- **Legal Protection for Places of Worship:** Protecting places of worship that provide shelter and other services from expensive lawsuits will reduce the burden on government services.
- **Involuntary “5150” Holds/Statewide Criteria and Wait Time Standards:** Using findings of a pending state auditor report, develop uniform standards for involuntary holds and limit how long one must wait before being evaluated and treated and hold counties accountable for applying consistent standards.
- **Reform Prop. 47:** Prop. 47 made most theft of \$950 or less and drug possession-related offenses misdemeanors. Applying pre-Prop. 47 penalties for serial thieves and drug abusers with two priors and additional money for drug treatment, such incentives will decrease homelessness and reduce crime.
- **Declare a Homeless State of Emergency:** If the Governor called one, he could suspend statutes to reduce and shorten the building process and block the frivolous use of CEQA to delay construction.

- **Pathway to Employment for Homeless & Foster Youth:** Incentive and training programs give at-risk youth greater opportunity for specialized job training to more easily enter the workforce and escape a life of crime and the cycle of poverty and homelessness so they can contributing members of society.

REFERENCES

SUMMARY:

For details of the poll's report and related graphs and charts, please click here:

<https://www.kron4.com/news/politics/inside-california-politics/exclusive-poll-californians-split-on-newsom-as-recall-election-nears/>

More information on the audit can be found at: <https://www.auditor.ca.gov/reports/2020-112/index.html>

For further information on the 2021-2022 homeless budget, please consult:

<https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/4468>

ISSUE:

For a complete breakdown of California homeless statistics by age, gender, ethnicity and types of shelter please click here: https://files.hudexchange.info/reports/published/CoC_PopSub_State_CA_2019.pdf

Recent data suggests mental illness and addiction are a significant cause of homelessness, especially for those living on the street. About half of the unsheltered nationally report that mental health and/or substance abuse contributed to their loss of housing. [Los Angeles Times investigation](#), which has the highest homeless population in the state found two-thirds of L.A. County's residents living on the streets suffer from a psychological or substance abuse disorder, far more than what's been reported in official statistics that exclude mental disorders that aren't "long-term."

HOUSING FIRST:

A detailed analysis and critique of "Housing First" can be found here:

<https://catalyst.independent.org/2021/11/14/independent-institute-homelessness-report/>

SOLUTIONS:

For a complete Assembly Republican Caucus staff report on recommended policy solutions, please contact William Weber at 916-319-3900 or william.weber@asm.ca.gov.

Exhaustive studies by innumerable think tanks have been commissioned. The Manhattan Institute published one of the best [reports](#) on the law enforcement and quality-of-life dimension.
