

The Police Response to Homelessness



CRITICAL ISSUES IN POLICING SERIES

The Police Response to Homelessness

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POLICE EXECUTIVE
RESEARCH FORUM

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- NYPD Officer Lawrence DePrimo offers a new pair of boots he purchased for a homeless man. Photo by Jennifer Foster.
- Hillsborough County, FL Sheriff's Deputy Linda Ruggerio shares her lunch with a young homeless man. Photo by Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office.
- Miami Beach, FL police officers deliver mosquito repellent to community members. Photo by Valerie Navarrete.
- Santa Cruz, CA police officers conducting a survey of homeless persons in order to gather information and direct individuals to services. Photo by Santa Cruz Police Dept.
- Pinellas County Sheriff's Office deputies and employees of Safe Harbor, a homeless shelter and jail diversion created by the Sheriff's Office. See pp. 12-13 of this report. Photo by PCSO.

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Acknowledgments

WHEN PERF DECIDED TO HOLD A *CRITICAL ISSUES IN POLICING* MEETING on the police response to homelessness, we weren't sure what to expect. It had been 25 years since PERF last delved into this topic. And while our daily "PERF Clips" news service for our members occasionally includes news stories about homelessness, it wasn't obvious to us that this issue was more than a blip on the profession's radar screen.

So it was something of a revelation to us to learn that for many police departments, the response to homelessness is one of the most important issues they face on a daily basis. The fact that 250 people traveled to Long Beach, CA on January 24, 2018, for our conference indicates how much of a challenge homelessness presents to the law enforcement profession. We traveled to Long Beach for our meeting because California is Ground Zero on the homelessness issue. If you ask a California police chief to name his or her most challenging issue, chances are they will tell you it is homelessness.

I salute all of the police chiefs and sheriffs, other command personnel, supervisors, and front-line officers, along with local government and community partners and researchers, who participated in our meeting. You brought a rich and diverse mix of experiences and perspectives to the table. Your willingness to share new ideas and promising practices made this publication possible.

Any time PERF hosts a meeting outside of our home base in Washington, DC, we rely on local agency support. For this meeting, we could not have asked for a better, more helpful partner than the Long Beach Police Department. Chief Robert Luna and his team helped us with planning and logistics, and offered their assistance every step of the way. Particular thanks go to Peggy Berroa-Morales and Fabiola Smith, who helped with the sign-in process as hundreds of attendees arrived at the meeting.

Twenty years ago PERF started the *Critical Issues in Policing* series. This is our 34th *Critical Issues* project, all made possible by the support of the Motorola Solutions Foundation. Because of the foundation's forward-thinking generosity, PERF is able to research cutting-edge issues such as the police response to homelessness, and we are able to provide timely guidance to the profession through meetings and publications such as this one.

Our thanks go to Greg Brown, Motorola Solutions Chairman and CEO; Jack Molloy, Senior Vice President for Sales, North America; Jim Mears, Senior Vice President; Gino Bonanotte, Executive Vice President and Chief Financial

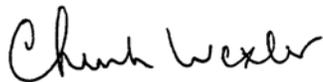
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I am grateful for a talented and hard-working staff, and once again, they planned and carried out another successful project. Our team does a remarkable job conducting background research, getting knowledgeable people to the table, and making sure we ask the right questions and cover the most important topics.

Kevin Morison, PERF's Chief Operations Officer, led the project team and authored several sections of this report. Creation of this report was a true team effort. Research Associates Rachael Arietti, Allison Heider, and Sarah Mostyn, Senior Associate Dan Alioto, and Assistant Communications Director James McGinty all contributed sections of this report, in addition to helping to plan and support the meeting in Long Beach. Research Associate Jason Cheney conducted numerous pre-conference interviews with attendees and assisted with other aspects of project planning. Membership Coordinator Balinda Cockrell assisted with meeting registration and communication with attendees. Communications Director Craig Fischer authored part of the report, edited the entire document, and oversaw production. PERF's graphic designer, Dave Williams, designed and laid out the report. Executive Assistant Soline Simenauer helped to keep the entire project team and me on track. And Andrea Morrozzoff, PERF's Chief Strategy Officer, continues to provide leadership and direction for the *Critical Issues* initiative.

At our meeting, Ken Corney, chief of police in Ventura, CA and past president of the California Police Chiefs Association, summed up the basic challenge that he and his colleagues face in handling issues of homelessness. "Everybody is dealing with the same problems," he said, "and we're all looking for that magic wand approach. But it just doesn't exist, because this is a *community-wide problem* that is often punted to the policing profession to solve."

It is truly amazing to see how many police departments have taken the issue of homelessness to heart. This report provides specific examples of the innovative and humane approaches that departments have taken. I know that police and sheriffs' departments across the country will share this report with their officers so they can learn from these examples. It is gratifying to see the police step up to this challenge.



Chuck Wexler
Executive Director
Police Executive Research Forum
Washington, D.C.

The Police Response to Homelessness: Problem-Solving, Innovation, and Partnerships

By Chuck Wexler

IN MANY WAYS, THE NATURE OF HOMELESSNESS HAS NOT CHANGED much in 25 years. It just seems to have become more severe. What *has* changed is how police and sheriffs' departments see the issue of homelessness, and how they respond to it.

Twenty-five years ago, in 1993, PERF conducted a large, nationally representative survey on policing and homelessness. The survey was sent to chief executives of 650 medium-size or large police agencies, and the response rate was 80 percent. Back then, 69 percent of respondents reported that the homeless individuals in their jurisdiction were viewed “predominantly as a police problem.” Nearly two-thirds said that homeless individuals in their jurisdictions had mental health issues. And the percentages struggling with alcohol abuse (88 percent) and drug abuse (59 percent) were very high.

Those numbers could be even higher today. In January 2018, 72 percent of PERF members who replied to a questionnaire said that homelessness in their communities had increased in recent years; only 13 percent said it had declined. And more than half of the respondents reported increases in mental illness and substance abuse among the homeless population.

The New Police Response to Homelessness: Outreach and Services, Not Arrests

While the nature of homelessness has not changed very much, there has been a sea change in how law enforcement agencies respond to it.

Approximately 250 law enforcement leaders, local government officials, researchers, and other subject matter experts convened in Long Beach, CA on January 24, 2018 for a day-long PERF conference on homelessness. They told us that they have learned that making arrests is not an effective response. Rather, today's police and sheriffs' departments see their role as taking leadership and finding innovative solutions, which often involve multi-faceted activities with social service agencies, other government departments, and other partners.

Today, many law enforcement agencies are implementing direct outreach to homeless individuals, building partnerships with a wide range of service providers, and encouraging their officers and deputies to be resourceful and to show compassion for homeless persons.

So while there may be questions about who “owns” the problem of homelessness, the fact is that police departments across the country are stepping up. (Police and sheriff’s departments tend to be on the leading edge of social problems, because they respond to calls 24 hours every day.) And the focus is on problem-solving and innovation. This report showcases many of the promising practices that were discussed at PERF’s conference in Long Beach.

A National Problem, Centered in California

Each January, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development conducts its national Point in Time (PIT) count of homeless persons. After declining over the last decade, the count rose in 2017, to more than 553,000 homeless people nationwide. Many experts believe the 2018 tally will show another increase.

The PIT numbers paint a detailed, and perhaps surprising, portrait of homelessness in the United States. About 20 percent of the homeless people in the United States are under the age of 18, and another 10 percent are age 18 to 24. Women account for 39 percent of all homeless persons, and nearly 29 percent of the *unsheltered* homeless people are women.

Nowhere is the problem more acute than in California. In 2017, the state had an estimated 134,000 homeless individuals, an increase of almost 14 percent from 2016. Of every 10,000 state residents, 34 were homeless in 2017. *California accounts for one-quarter of all homeless persons in the United States, and nearly half of those who are unsheltered.*

Of course, California is not alone in facing homelessness issues. Four other states—New York, Florida, Texas, and Washington—account for a combined total of 30 percent of the country’s homeless population. There are nuances to the homeless situation depending on location. Some cities in Texas have experienced large numbers of people living in their cars. California has a major problem with encampments in or near dry river beds. Colorado and other states that have legalized marijuana may be seeing an increase in “travelers”—mostly young people who are attracted to locations with legal marijuana but have few if any roots in the community.

Challenges of Homelessness, Mental Illness, and Substance Abuse

Regardless of location, participants at the PERF meeting cited two nearly universal factors that are helping to drive homelessness in their communities: mental illness and substance abuse. Police officials from Eastern cities—Buffalo, NY; Philadelphia; and Louisville, KY, among others—described how the opioid epidemic ravaging their cities is contributing to homelessness. In California and other parts of the West, the persistence of methamphetamine continues to impact homelessness, according to officials there. And police officials

from across the country said that mental illness remains a significant contributor to homelessness in their communities.

Meeting participants discussed other factors that are contributing to homelessness in their communities. These include the prohibitively high cost of housing in many cities, and the expansion of public transportation systems and other services that may attract homeless individuals from nearby communities where services are not as robust.

Who Owns This Problem?

These connections between drug abuse, mental illness, economic factors, and homelessness prompted meeting participants to ask a fundamental question: Who is responsible for responding to the problem of homelessness? The police? Social service agencies? Public housing departments? All of the above?

Being homeless in the United States is not a crime. However, community members frequently complain when they can't use their parks or other public spaces without having to navigate around people who are living there. In these circumstances, residents don't call the health department or social services. They call the police.

As a result, many people think of the police as “owning” the problem of homelessness. This can put police executives and officers in a difficult spot. They feel caught between residents demanding action and homeless individuals who are vulnerable and have few options.

Police Chief James McElvain of Vancouver, WA summed up the dilemma—and the opportunity—facing the police. “Homelessness isn't necessarily a law enforcement problem, but we are the ones who get the calls, and we will respond because that's our responsibility,” he said. “But we don't have the resources to provide more shelter space or services for mental health. We need others to come to the table.”

“Coming to the table”—forming partnerships among police and other agencies and organizations—was a common theme at the *Critical Issues* meeting. Across the country, police chiefs and sheriffs are stepping up and taking the lead in putting together and participating in these collaborative efforts.

New Challenges, New Approaches

PERF's meeting explored many of the underlying principles that have come to guide the police response to homelessness. As police leaders look at specific programs or approaches, it is important to keep in mind these big-picture ideals:

It matters how we think about, and talk about, the problem.

First, there has been a fundamental shift in how we talk about the issue. In the past, people often referred to “the homeless,” a monolithic term that defined a wide swath of the population by a single characteristic. Today, we refer instead to “persons experiencing homelessness,” recognizing that there are many reasons someone may become homeless, and that *homelessness is often a*

“Homelessness is a *community-wide problem* that is often punted to the policing profession to solve.”

— **Ventura Chief Ken Corney**



Ken Corney

temporary condition that, given appropriate intervention by the police and others, can change. This is not a mere question of semantics. It gets to the fundamental principle of police officers treating everyone, including those who don't have a home, with dignity and respect.

Agencies are putting this principle into action, especially through their training programs. For example, the Broward County, FL Sheriff's Office offers a 40-hour "homelessness school" that is a follow-up to the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training that deputies receive. The homelessness training includes classroom instruction, scenario-based exercises, and site visits to shelters and encampments.

Similarly, the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department requires its recruit officers to make contact with at least one homeless person per shift during field training. The purpose is to expose the new officers to issues surrounding homelessness, to ensure that they understand that most homeless persons are not committing crimes, and to help them practice their communications and referral skills.

The late John Timoney, who had a stellar career in the New York City Police Department and later became Police Commissioner in Philadelphia and Chief of Police in Miami, once told me that many police officers don't understand that homeless persons often carry knives or similar weapons for self-protection, not to use against officers. It's not surprising that people who sleep in the open, with no locked door to protect them from intruders or attackers, feel the need for self-protection. Many homeless individuals also carry knives as a tool for everyday tasks.

Some police agencies are revamping their training to help officers understand homeless persons better and avoid potentially deadly encounters. A homeless person being awakened by a police officer may instinctively grab his knife, causing the officer to perceive a deadly threat. That's part of the reason the Riverside, CA Police Department began training its officers in PERF's ICAT curriculum (Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics). Riverside Chief Sergio Diaz said the training has helped officers peacefully defuse a number of situations where deadly force might have been deployed in the past.

Enforcement action alone won't solve the problem of homelessness.

Police leaders increasingly recognize that they cannot make the problem of homelessness go away through enforcement actions alone. When homeless individuals commit serious crimes, they need to be held accountable. At the *Critical Issues* meeting, officials from several jurisdictions described crime problems in their homeless encampments, including gang infiltration, domestic violence, prostitution, and human trafficking. Much of the crime is committed by homeless individuals against other homeless individuals, which can make it especially challenging for investigators to locate and work with victims and witnesses.

But for the vast majority of people experiencing homelessness, arrest and incarceration should be a last resort, not a first option for minor offenses. Providing housing, treatment, counseling, and other services is a far more effective

approach for most people who are homeless. That is why Santa Cruz, CA Police Chief Andy Mills stopped enforcing an “anti-camping” ordinance that had officers citing and arresting the same people over and over again, with no impact on homelessness. Instead, the city set up a controlled and secure encampment on city property, and brought in resources for individuals who need help.

Sheriffs’ offices are making this shift as well. In Pinellas County, FL, Sheriff Robert Gualtieri started Safe Harbor, a 400-bed diversion program that is providing transitional housing and a range of services for persons who might otherwise be homeless or in jail because they were involved in minor criminal activity. Safe Harbor provides these services at a fraction of what it would cost to keep a person in jail.

Partnerships with other agencies are essential.

Police leaders have come to recognize that to be effective in addressing homelessness, they must partner with other agencies and service providers and address the problem in a coordinated and comprehensive manner. Sometimes, law enforcement may take the lead in these efforts, as in Indio, CA, where the police department’s Community Outreach Resource Program (CORP) is anchoring that city’s response to homelessness. In other communities, a different agency may lead. That is the case in Long Beach, CA, which has instituted a comprehensive, data-driven approach to homelessness that is being led by the city’s Health and Human Services Department.

The *Critical Issues* meeting revealed other promising partnerships. In San Francisco, for example, the police department recently established a multi-agency command center within its emergency communications facility. When calls involving homelessness come in, officials immediately triage them to determine which agency is best equipped to respond. Sometimes it is the police, but other times it may be another agency. This approach has the potential to improve the response to these calls, while preserving police resources for matters that require their attention.

In Vacaville, CA, Police Chief John Carli created the Homeless Roundtable, a multi-agency entity that brings together the police, social services, the faith-based community, and other nonprofit organizations to share information, develop strategies, and increase coordination in addressing the city’s homeless problem. Other cities, such as Portland, OR, are using a similar model in which the inter-agency group not only discusses broad strategies, but also develops specific plans for individuals who are chronically homeless.

And in San Diego, a public health emergency—a Hepatitis A outbreak among the homeless population—prompted multiple agencies to work together and invest in short- and long-term solutions. With the assistance of the police, the city cleaned up encampments where the disease was spreading and offered vaccinations to homeless individuals, police officers, and other city workers. Then the city erected three “sprung shelters”—large, industrial tents that include storage facilities for people’s property and have service providers on site.

Police agencies must think and act regionally.

Law enforcement leaders are also recognizing that they don't operate in a vacuum in addressing homelessness. One jurisdiction's actions can impact neighboring jurisdictions, so it is important for communities in a region to come together and work cooperatively on strategies and solutions.

Clearwater, FL Police Chief Dan Slaughter described the challenge: "As we squeezed the balloon in Clearwater, it would create problems elsewhere. Then, St. Petersburg, the city due south of us, would squeeze the balloon, and it would create problems for us. So we really needed a countywide approach."

The *Critical Issues* meeting provided examples of regional cooperation. On the east side of Seattle, for example, the communities of Bellevue, Kirkland, and Redmond got together to coordinate their shelter services. Bellevue created a shelter for men, Kirkland built a shelter for women, and Redmond built one for families. In Riverside County, CA, six communities came together to make their local ordinances regarding homelessness more consistent and to collaborate on services and resources.

Unintended Consequences: Criminal justice reform in California removed incentives to enter drug treatment.

Why is homelessness such a severe problem in California? That was one of the issues explored at the *Critical Issues* conference. The answer may provide guidance to other states and localities.

According to law enforcement officials, homelessness in California is caused by more than just the warm climate and the high cost of housing in many parts of the state (although those are certainly factors). California's surge in homelessness may be, in part, an unintended consequence of recent criminal justice reforms that the state enacted.

A.B. 109, the so-called "realignment" bill, was passed by the California State Legislature in 2011 as a way to reduce crowding in the state's prison population. Under the law, individuals convicted of approximately 500 different felony offenses that are considered "non-serious, non-violent and non-sex related" are now sentenced to county jails instead of state prison. As a result, thousands of sentenced offenders who would have served their time in state prisons are now incarcerated in county jails.

California police leaders say this has created a domino effect that is contributing to homelessness in many of their communities. County jails, many of which were already overcrowded, are being forced to release some inmates back to the community in order to make room for the prisoners being sent to them under the realignment bill. Many of those being released lack permanent housing and struggle with mental illness, substance abuse, or both. Some continue to commit crimes, often to feed their addictions, and others become victims of crime.

In addition to A.B. 109, a measure called Proposition 47 is resulting in more low-level drug offenders on the street, and fewer in treatment. Approved by California voters in November 2014, Proposition 47 downgraded a wide range of theft and drug offenses from felonies to misdemeanors. Many suspects



Clearwater, FL Police Chief
Dan Slaughter

accused of these crimes now receive only a citation and little chance of jail time.

One consequence of Proposition 47 is that without the threat of incarceration, the justice system lost much of the leverage it once had to get people into drug treatment programs.

“Low-level drug offenses became misdemeanors. In California, that’s a citation, no matter how many times you’re caught, so there’s no incentive to stop reoffending,” said Los Angeles County Sheriff Jim McDonnell, whose agency operates the largest jail in the nation and is the second largest police agency in the United States. “Before, people facing jail time would eventually accept treatment, but now that leverage is gone. And the number of people in treatment went down after that.”

And as the number of people in drug treatment declines, the number on the streets grows, thus creating additional challenges for law enforcement.

California’s experience with criminal justice reform offers a cautionary tale to other states that are considering similar reform measures. While the underlying goals of these initiatives may be laudable, California has shown that implementation can worsen homelessness.

Technology and data sharing are important components of the police response.

Participants at the *Critical Issues* conference described how technology is helping them to understand and respond to homelessness. In Vacaville, CA, for example, Community Response Unit officers use a survey loaded on their smartphones to voluntarily collect information about homeless individuals they encounter. The data help officers maintain an up-to-date count of the number of homeless persons in their city, and to plan more effective response strategies. In Seattle, a mobile app is helping the city’s “Navigation Teams” (police officers and mental health clinicians) to keep track of the sites they visit, the people they encounter, and the services they offer.

Jurisdictions such as San Diego County and Colorado Springs are using GIS technology to map homeless encampments. This information supports everyday outreach activities and can be life-saving during severe weather or fire events in which evacuations may be necessary.

Other communities are taking on the challenge of sharing data about homeless individuals across agencies, while adhering to privacy laws such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Long Beach drafted an administrative regulation that deems the entire city a single legal entity for purposes of sharing data on individuals who are homeless and high utilizers of city services. The city created a data warehouse where information can be stored and accessed by two dozen departments that are involved in assisting people who are homeless.

Helping homeless persons can be much less expensive than not helping them.

The types of comprehensive programs that can impact homelessness are expensive in terms of up-front and ongoing operational costs. But making those investments can save money in the long run.

For the past several years, researchers at Portland State University have analyzed Portland's Service Coordination Team, which targets individuals who are homeless and involved in the justice system. *Their most recent study found that every dollar invested in the program resulted in \$13 in savings in crime and justice system costs.*¹

Participants in Long Beach emphasized that jurisdictions need to be creative in how they fund their homelessness programs. Some cities have used federal, state, and private philanthropic grants to fund their initiatives. In other jurisdictions, voters have approved special sales taxes that fund homelessness initiatives. Measure H, passed in 2017 by voters in Los Angeles County, is expected to raise approximately \$355 million per year over 10 years for homelessness programs and services. And in Lakewood, WA, a charity established to help the families of four officers killed in the line of duty in 2009 is now being used to assist homeless persons in the community.

The actions of individual police officers make a difference.

Perhaps most importantly, police agencies have come to learn that the actions of dedicated, compassionate police officers are the foundation of an effective response to homelessness. Officers Brandon Haworth and Jose Ibarra doggedly tracked down the mother of a chronically homeless man in Indio, CA, got the man showered, clothed and fed, and then drove him 77 miles to reunite him with his mother.

Sergeant Dave Kellis and members of the Community Response Unit in Vacaville discovered that a homeless woman had a Section 8 housing voucher that was about to expire, and used their community contacts to locate an apartment—and then paid for some of her move-in expenses out of their own pockets.

Across the country, specially trained “Homeless Outreach Teams” are on the front lines every day, practicing their own brand of community policing. Their focus is not on making arrests, but on making contacts, building relationships, and finding ways to improve the lives of homeless individuals in their communities. In many cities, such as Seattle and Houston, these officers team up with mental health clinicians to help individuals who are chronically homeless and have mental health issues.

Selecting and training the right officers to perform these roles are vitally important. Participants at the *Critical Issues* meeting emphasized that homeless outreach officers must possess a unique combination of skills and attributes:



Vacaville, CA Police Sgt.
David Kellis

1. Study of the Service Coordination Team and its Impact on Chronic Offenders: 2017 Report. Portland State University, Capstone Class UNST 421, Section 572. 2017

compassion, determination, communication skills, an ability to network and problem-solve, and, perhaps above all else, patience.

The work of these officers can be slow and laborious, and situations are seldom resolved right away. Experts at the meeting said that on average, it can take 15 to 20 contacts with a homeless person before he or she accepts an offer of help. And even then, success can be fleeting.

Our *Critical Issues* meeting produced a number of promising initiatives and helpful case studies that agencies can examine and introduce in their own communities.

The conclusion to this report includes 11 steps that police departments and sheriffs' offices—and their community partners—can consider right away as they look for new and more effective ways to combat homelessness.

Lessons from LA's Skid Row – A Half-Century Ago

More than 50 years ago, the sociologist Egon Bittner published a groundbreaking study of policing on Skid Row in Los Angeles.² His findings back then ring true today.

Bittner noted that the general public may turn away from homeless persons, but police officers do not have that option. They must engage with and protect people who are homeless. In doing so, officers come to see homeless persons as individuals with names and stories, and in many cases dreams for a better future. Officers, Bittner noted, “frequently help people to obtain meals, lodging, employment, direct them to welfare and health services, and aid them in various other ways.”

I witnessed this type of compassion first-hand 30 years ago, while walking a beat with Madison, WI Police Chief David Couper. When we passed a homeless man, he looked up. Chief Couper immediately recognized the man, greeted him by name, and asked how he was doing. In that moment, the connection—the gesture of care and compassion—made all the difference.

Acts of kindness and intervention by individual police officers will not solve the problem of homelessness in America. But for many individuals experiencing homelessness, and for communities concerned about the problem, officers' actions can be an important first step. How law enforcement agencies and their partners build on that foundation will go a long way toward determining how successful they will be at reducing homelessness and improving the quality of life in their communities.

2. Bittner, Egon. “The Police on Skid-Row: A Study of Peace Keeping.” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 32, No. 5 (Oct., 1967), 699-715. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2092019?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

Pinellas County Sheriff's Office Opens A \$2.3 Million Facility to Help Homeless Persons

Wexler: Sheriff Gualtieri, you have undertaken a remarkable project in your county. Your Sheriff's Office actually opened a homeless facility, and you run it. Please tell us about it.

Pinellas County Sheriff Robert Gualtieri: Pinellas County is the Tampa Bay area—St. Petersburg, Clearwater. We're a county of a million people, with 24 cities and a very diverse population.

The scenario in 2010 was this: We had about 3,600 inmates in the county jail, and were facing projections of it going toward 3,800. We had about 500 inmates sleeping on the floor.

So we looked at the jail population and saw that a lot of the inmates were there on very minor crimes related to homelessness. In effect, the criminal justice system had become a dumping ground for a social problem. And the cops were doing what cops do, which is solve problems by locking people up, because they had no other resources available to them to deal with the homeless population. We had people who had been arrested 75 times in a two-year period for minor crimes—disorderly conduct for urinating, public trespassing, minor retail theft, all those things. Some were spending hundreds of days in the county jail.

Meanwhile, in the 24 cities in the county, elected leaders were meeting. Mayors, judges, prosecutors, everybody was trying to figure this out, but there was a lot of inaction. Nobody was actually doing anything about the problem. And I was faced with 500 inmates on the floor of the jail, which was unworkable. It was an officer safety issue and an operational issue.

So we opened our Pinellas Safe Harbor³ as a jail diversion program to deal with the chronic homeless. At that point, our peak count was showing about 6,000 homeless people in the county. We opened Pinellas Safe Harbor in January of 2010 with the naïve idea that we would slowly increase the population. Well, right away it went from zero to 400, and our average daily population in Safe Harbor since January 2010 has been 400 a day.

The jail population dramatically went down and now it's about 3,100, which is manageable. The average cost of housing inmates in the county jail is \$126 per person per day. We house them in the Safe Harbor for \$13 a day on average, *and we're getting them services*. Not only shelter and meals, but also medical care, transportation, clothing, laundry facilities, case management services, alcohol treatment, substance abuse treatment, life skills training—all these things to help break the cycle of homelessness.

Since 2010, we have had 86,000 admissions to Safe Harbor. 19,000 unique individuals. And it's solving a problem as it relates to the chronic homeless. We, as the Sheriff's Office, are the largest homeless services provider in the county.

Should we be in the business of running services for homeless persons? I don't know. You can debate that all day long. But we are in that business, and we're making a difference, and it's solving a problem. Ideally, somebody else should be doing it. I've offered it to all of the homeless service providers in the county many times. I ask them, "Do you want to come do it? I'll give it to you." But nobody's taking me up on the offer.



Pinellas County, FL Sheriff
Robert Gualtieri

3. <http://www.safeharborpinellas.org/>

So we continue to do it, and we spend \$2.3 million a year to run the facility. But it's a cost avoidance, because the \$2.3 million that we're spending to house those 400 people a day, if they were in the county jail, would be at about \$4.5 million.

So it's a \$2.2-million cost avoidance. *And it's not a revolving door to nowhere.*

One of the benefits of being an elected sheriff is, I don't report to a board, I don't report to the county commission or an administrator or city manager. And so, I decided to do it and I used our money to do it.

Wexler: This is fascinating. Why does it cost *less* to put people in Safe Harbor, where they get all these services, than to put them in jail?

Sheriff Gualtieri: Because in a county jail, especially when you're an accredited jail like we are, you have to meet all the accreditation standards. Also, Safe Harbor is a safe place, but it's not a secure facility. We have a private contractor we use for security services at Safe Harbor; we don't have sworn deputies. We use a mag for screening; we want to make sure that there's no weapons coming in. We have an "amnesty box," so when people come in, we tell them, "Drop all your dope, drop your guns, drop your knives, whatever weapons you have, drop them in the box. No questions asked." And they come in. We also have what we call "criminal justice specialists," not sworn deputies, to staff positions at Safe Harbor. And we contract different functions out. So we're able to do it at a lower cost than what it requires to run a county jail.

One other important aspect of this is NIMBY—not in my back yard. Nobody wants a facility like this in their back yard. So you need to address the community concerns. We have a community police unit that's assigned to Safe Harbor, not only to deal with what's going on at Safe Harbor, but also everything else that's happening in the neighborhood. At the first community meeting I had when we opened Safe Harbor in 2010, we had about 200 people show up. But within two years, we stopped doing the community meetings because nobody was showing up. Their concerns had been addressed.

Wexler: Last question. You are sheriff. You have to run for office. Is this going to help you or hurt you getting re-elected?

Sheriff Gualtieri: I think overall it helps. It's not going to hurt. The bottom line is that I don't care about the politics, because it was the right thing to do.



Lieutenant Zach Haisch, manager of Pinellas Safe Harbor, describes the services offered to homeless individuals. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyH1Yc4aPxA>.



What We Know About Homelessness

National Data on Homelessness

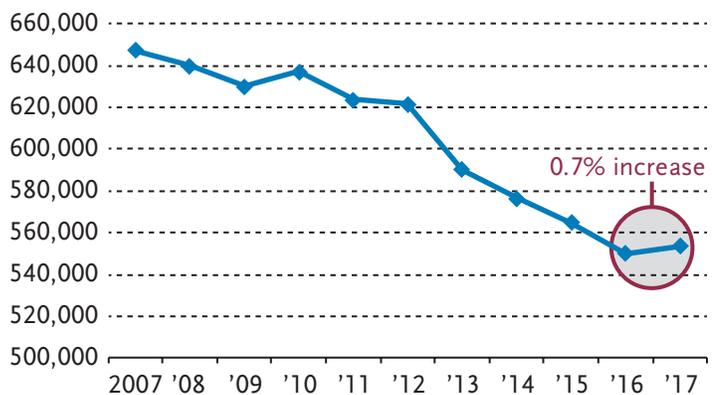
The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires that communities receiving federal funds to reduce homelessness⁴ conduct an annual count of all sheltered homeless individuals, and a count every other year of unsheltered homeless individuals. These counts are called “Point-in-Time” (PIT) counts because they focus on the numbers of homeless persons on a single night in January. The PIT counts are important in helping communities to determine the extent of homelessness, and they provide data for comparison across years.⁵

The PIT count of unsheltered homeless persons has limitations, because counting unsheltered homeless persons is more difficult than counting populations of homeless shelters. The methodology for PIT counts of unsheltered homeless persons varies between different communities and across years.⁶

However, PIT counts are the only national measure that captures both sheltered and unsheltered homeless individuals, and therefore they provide the most reliable estimate available of people experiencing homelessness in the United States.⁷

According to the 2017 PIT estimate, there were 553,742 people experiencing homelessness on a single night in January—360,867 (65 percent) sheltered and 192,875 (35 percent) unsheltered. Approximately 67 percent of homeless people were lone individuals, and 33 percent were members of homeless families with children. Approximately 20 percent of the

PIT Estimates of People Experiencing Homelessness, 2007–2017



Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. *The 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress: Part 1: Point-in-Time Estimates of Homelessness*. By M. Henry, R. Watt, L. Rosenthal, and A. Shivji, Abt Associates. December 2017. <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2017-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

4. HUD’s “Continuum of Care” program provides funding to provide housing to homeless persons and families and promote self-sufficiency. <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/>

5. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. 2018. *HDX Reporting*. <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hdx/hdx-reporting/>

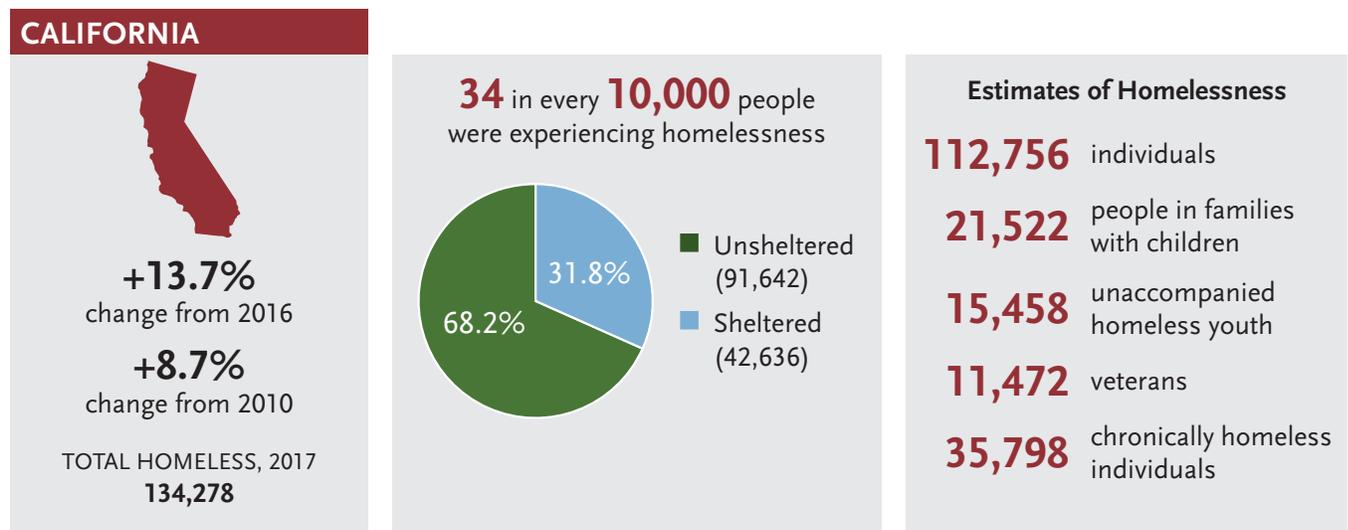
6. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. 2018. *CoC Homeless Populations and Subpopulations Reports*. <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/coc-homeless-populations-and-subpopulations-reports/>

7. National Alliance to End Homelessness. *What is a Point-In-Time Count?* September 7, 2012. <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/what-is-a-point-in-time-count/>

people experiencing homelessness were children under the age of 18; 70 percent were over the age of 24, and 10 percent were between the ages of 18 and 24. Homelessness has generally declined over the last decade, but increased slightly in 2017 (by a little less than 1 percent) for the first time in seven years. This increase was driven mostly by increases in the number of unsheltered homeless individuals in the 50 largest cities.⁸

States Experiencing High Levels of Homelessness

Approximately 55 percent of all people experiencing homelessness in 2017 were concentrated in five states: California (25 percent), New York (16 percent), Florida (6 percent), Texas (4 percent), and Washington (4 percent). Representatives from each of these states participated in PERF's conference in Long Beach on January 24, 2018, and provided perspectives on homelessness in their jurisdictions:



Santa Cruz Police Chief Andy Mills:

Santa Cruz Has Declared a Homeless Shelter Crisis

We have a significant issue with homelessness in Santa Cruz and in California. The population of our city is about 65,000, and our Point-in-Time count indicates that we have about 2,200 homeless people living in our county and 1,200 in the city of Santa Cruz. Last night, our city council declared a homeless emergency shelter crisis, as many cities have done in California. And when we're looking at the data, we have more homeless in our city than many states do.

Our problem is that seriously mentally ill people, drug-addicted persons, and people with co-occurring disorders [substance abuse and mental health disorders] are the predominant number of people we're



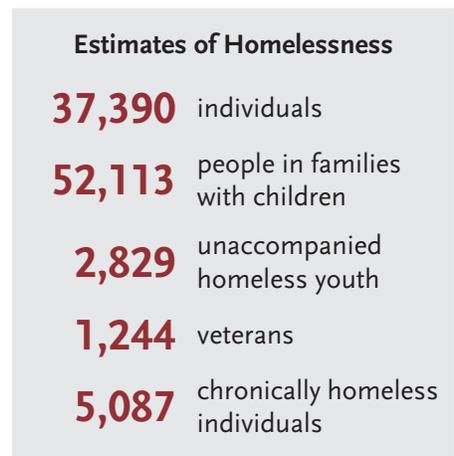
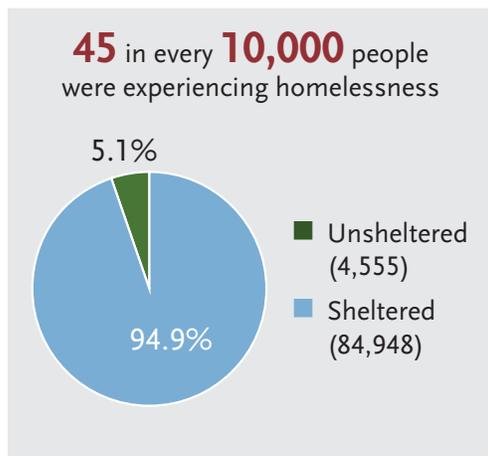
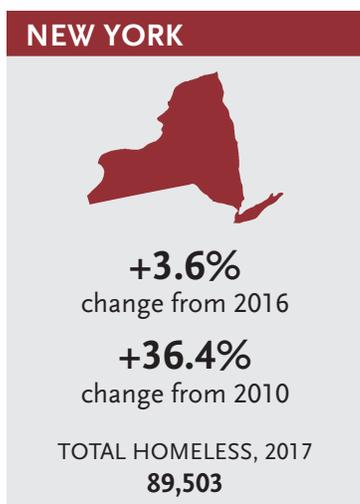
8. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. *The 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress: Part 1: Point-in-Time Estimates of Homelessness*. By M. Henry, R. Watt, L. Rosenthal, and A. Shivji, Abt Associates. December 2017. <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2017-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

seeing, and the resources to help them just are not there. Until we fix that, we're going to continue to either move them from place to place or incarcerate them, which does not seem to be a good solution in anybody's book.

Los Angeles Deputy Chief Bob Arcos:

AB109 and Proposition 47 Have Contributed To Homelessness in California

In California, prison realignment and Proposition 47, the “Reduced Penalties for Some Crimes Initiative,” have contributed to the increase in homeless individuals. The street population is probably the worst I have seen in almost 30 years with the Los Angeles Police Department. The City is amid an unprecedented homelessness crisis, struggling to serve people shattered by mental illness, poverty, poor health and addiction. Today, persons experiencing homelessness are in every part of the City, not just Skid Row.



NYPD Deputy Chief Ed Thompson:

Sheltered and Unsheltered Homeless Persons Are Two Distinct Populations

In New York City, there is a dichotomy between the sheltered and unsheltered homeless population. Most of our street homeless population are experiencing mental health issues; this may be the driving factor causing street homelessness, as well as opioid addiction.

Due to a number of socioeconomic issues, people voluntary seek shelter. For example, the recent loss of a job, shortages of affordable housing, or a sudden traumatic life experience can cause one to voluntarily seek shelter.

Conversely, many street homeless have mental illnesses, and we must try to convince them to seek shelter for their safety. Unfortunately, at times, the street homeless have a negative perception of the shelter system, although many have never been exposed to shelters.



FLORIDA

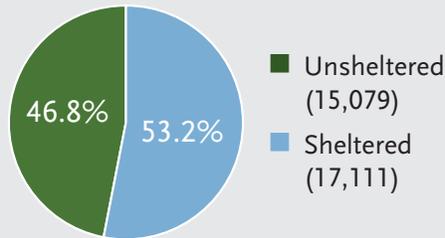


-4.1%
change from 2016

-44.1%
change from 2010

TOTAL HOMELESS, 2017
32,190

16 in every **10,000** people
were experiencing homelessness



Estimates of Homelessness

22,768 individuals
9,422 people in families with children
2,019 unaccompanied homeless youth
2,817 veterans
4,951 chronically homeless individuals

Miami Beach, FL Major Wayne Jones:

Our County Has 3,000 Homeless Residents

In the county of Miami-Dade, which my city is a part of, we think we have roughly 3,000 homeless people. On any given day, about 1,700 of those folks are in shelter, and the rest are on the street. Miami Beach accounts for a small percentage of that; on a given day we have somewhere between 150 and 200 homeless people on our streets.



TEXAS

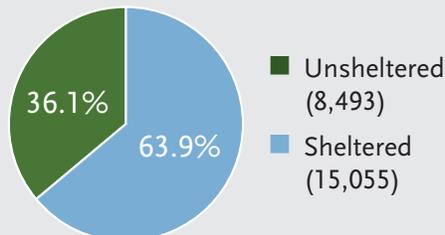


+1.8%
change from 2016

-33.0%
change from 2010

TOTAL HOMELESS, 2017
23,548

9 in every **10,000** people
were experiencing homelessness



Estimates of Homelessness

16,708 individuals
6,840 people in families with children
1,318 unaccompanied homeless youth
2,200 veterans
3,497 chronically homeless individuals

Arlington, TX Police Chief Will Johnson:

Many Homeless Juveniles Are Embarrassed, So They Cover It and Do Not Get Services

Over the last five years, our Point in Time counts have gone up 63 percent. Compared to some of my colleagues, our numbers aren't as high, but the percentage change is really impactful to the community.

We're seeing an increase in the number of homeless juveniles—school-aged kids, high-schoolers. Often, the high school students are embarrassed about being homeless, so they try to cover it and hide it. A lot of times, the services that could be available for these kids aren't rendered as promptly as possible, because they're embarrassed about their family status and the challenges that they're going through.



WASHINGTON STATE

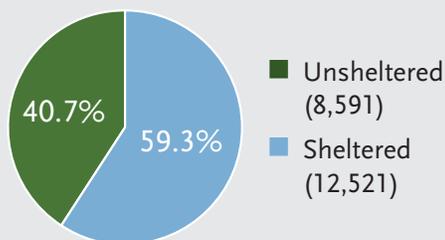


+1.4%
change from 2016

-7.7%
change from 2010

TOTAL HOMELESS, 2017
21,112

29 in every **10,000** people
were experiencing homelessness



Estimates of Homelessness

14,781	individuals
6,331	people in families with children
2,135	unaccompanied homeless youth
2,093	veterans
4,357	chronically homeless individuals

Seattle, WA Acting Chief Carmen Best:

Homelessness Contrasts with Great Wealth in Seattle

Homelessness is a huge issue for us. In Seattle we have major corporate offices like Amazon, Boeing, Microsoft, and Starbucks. There's a lot of wealth in Seattle. About one-fifth of the homes have more than a million dollars in value. We have just under 4,000 people homeless in the city of Seattle, and another 1,000 or so who are living in RVs and campers and cars within the city.

We have devoted significant resources as a department to assisting in this crisis, but at this scale, it requires more than even specialized police units can provide.



Causes of Homelessness

The U.S. Conference of Mayors' Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness conducts a yearly survey of 25 cities to provide information on the magnitude and causes of hunger and homelessness, as well as local responses to these problems. In 2014, mayors of the 25 cities were asked about the top causes of homelessness in their communities.

Respondents reported that the top causes were a lack of affordable housing; unemployment; poverty; mental illness and the lack of needed services; and substance abuse and the lack of treatment services. Many of the cities reported that their shelters had to turn away homeless individuals due to a lack of available beds.⁹ Across the 25 cities over the previous year, officials estimated that 22 percent of the demand for emergency shelter had gone unmet.

9. U.S. States Conference of Mayors. *Hunger and Homelessness Survey: A Status Report on Hunger and Homeless in America's Cities - A 25-City Survey*. December 2014. <https://www2.cortland.edu/dotAsset/655b9350-995e-4aae-acd3-298325093c34.pdf>

Mental Illness and Substance Abuse

People with mental illness and/or substance use disorders can be particularly vulnerable to becoming homeless. According to 2017 PIT estimates, 22 percent of homeless individuals were severely mentally ill, and 16 percent experienced chronic substance abuse.¹⁰ Additionally, an estimated 26 percent of homeless adults living in shelters experience serious mental illness, and an estimated 46 percent live with severe mental illness and/or substance abuse disorders.¹¹ Co-occurring substance abuse and mental health disorders are common among people experiencing homelessness. Mental illness and substance use disorders can create barriers to accessing and maintaining stable and affordable housing.¹²

In addition to being a *consequence* of mental illness and substance abuse, homelessness can also lead to and perpetuate emotional problems and substance abuse.



Denver Deputy Police Chief
Matthew Murray

A Particular Focus of Police: Chronic Homelessness

Persons are said to be *chronically homeless* if they have a disability and have been continuously homeless for one year or more, or have experienced at least four episodes of homelessness in the last three years where the combined

>> *continued on page 21*

Categories of Homeless Persons

Denver Police Department's Homeless Outreach Unit (HOU) identifies four different groups of homeless individuals.

- **Chronically homeless persons.**
- **Situational homelessness:** People who become homeless because of the sudden loss of a job, divorce, or other unexpected event. These people are generally sane and rational, and usually manage to escape homelessness quickly.
- **Economic homelessness:** Similar to "situationally" homeless individuals, these people become homeless because of a sudden turn in their finances. They share many of the same characteristics as situational homeless individuals.
- **"Travelers":** These are typically young people, mostly in their late teens or 20s, who travel from community to community, with few or no ties to those communities. Many don't consider themselves homeless. They are resistant to accepting services, although many receive food assistance.

10. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. *Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs, Homeless Populations and Subpopulations Report*. November, 2017. https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/reportmanagement/published/CoC_PopSub_NatlTerrDC_2017.pdf

11. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development. (2011). *The 2010 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*. <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2010HomelessAssessmentReport.pdf>

12. United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*. Washington, D.C., June 2015. https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/USICH_OpeningDoors_Amendment2015_FINAL.pdf

Legalized Marijuana and Homelessness

As more states legalize the recreational use of marijuana, officials are looking into what impact legalization may have on homelessness and crime. Police leaders from Colorado, Washington state, and California discussed this matter at the *Critical Issues* conference.

While researchers have found no clear correlation between legalized marijuana and homelessness, police officials report that states with legal marijuana may be attracting a different type of person who may technically be homeless, but does not share the same characteristics as many chronic homeless individuals. For example, the new type of homeless persons who use legal marijuana tend not to have mental illness, and then tend not to abuse alcohol, heroin, methamphetamine, or other serious drugs.

Since retail marijuana was legalized in Colorado in 2012, the state's population has grown by more than 400,000 residents (about 8 percent), or roughly 7,000 residents per month, making Colorado one of the fastest-growing states in the country. What percentage, if any, of that increase can be attributed to legalized marijuana is unknown. As in most states, homelessness in Colorado has generally declined over the last decade, although it did increase 3.7 percent between 2016 and 2017, when it reached nearly 11,000 individuals.

According to police officials from Colorado, many of the people attracted to legal marijuana appear to be “travelers” or “couch surfers” who do not have a permanent residence, but instead drift from place to place. In Colorado, especially, some of these “travelers” end up living in the national parks, sometimes for extended periods of time. In general, these individuals are young and not in need of social services. According to officials, they appear to be responsible for some low-level property crimes such as thefts from cars, but have not contributed to an overall uptick in crime.

One subset of this particular group of homeless individuals is known as “trimigrants.” These are individuals who travel to areas where marijuana is grown to secure work trimming the plants at harvest time. Because most of the trimigrants do not have any connection to the communities they travel to, they can contribute, at least temporarily, to the homeless situation in those localities.

In Seattle, Chief Carmen Best said that “marijuana really hasn't had much of an impact on homelessness or on crime generally. But we certainly have an opioid crisis, and there is definitely a nexus there with homelessness. The City has devoted significant sanitation resources to picking up discarded needles, including around outdoor living locations, and our officers are routinely administering naloxone to persons in distress on the streets.”

“In Denver, we get a lot of travelers, mostly young people who are homeless. Think of the ‘flower children’ of the 1960s. They want to travel the country and smoke marijuana. They don't want services, and they don't want anything to do with the police. They're typically not mentally ill, but they are responsible for a lot of low-level crime that feeds their marijuana habit.”

—Deputy Chief Matthew Murray, Denver Police Department

“My concern with marijuana legalization is that we're going to see greater access and acceptance of marijuana use by young people. I think that's tangentially related to homelessness.

“We do have young people—adolescents, some minors, some young adults—who are not necessarily living in the river beds or the shelters, but they're crashing in a different buddy's garage every night. Some of them do encounter homelessness.”

—Chief Sergio Diaz, Riverside (CA) Police Department

“We had a large group of people coming from all over the world to trim marijuana in Humboldt County [when I was police chief in Eureka], and it did cause a problem with homelessness. On a statewide basis maybe there wasn't much of an impact, but in those impacted counties, it was substantial.”

—Chief Andy Mills, Santa Cruz (CA) Police Department

length of time being homeless in those occasions was at least 12 months.¹³ In 2017, almost a quarter (24 percent) of people experiencing homelessness had chronic patterns of homelessness.¹⁴ According to the Office of National Drug Control Policy, 30 percent of people experiencing chronic homelessness have a serious mental illness, and around 66 percent have a primary substance use disorder or other chronic health condition.¹⁵

Participants at PERF's meeting reported that mental illness and substance abuse were major issues affecting homeless individuals in their jurisdictions. Many agencies have established relationships with local service providers, so they can refer homeless individuals with mental illness and substance abuse to appropriate services. However, police officials also said that chronically homeless individuals they interact with can often be service-resistant, especially those who experience both mental illness and substance abuse. These individuals pose unique challenges to law enforcement, and often require multiple contacts before they agree to accept assistance.



Riverside, CA Police Chief
Sergio Diaz

Lack of Affordable Housing

One of the primary drivers of homelessness in America is the lack of affordable housing. As of 2017, 11.4 million renter households living in the U.S. are classified as “Extremely Low Income” (ELI) by HUD. However, there are only 4 million rental homes that are affordable and available to those 11.4 million ELI renters. This adds up to a shortage of 7.4 million affordable and available rental homes.¹⁶ Many participants at PERF's conference said this shortage of affordable housing contributes to homelessness in their communities. This is especially acute in expensive urban areas such as Honolulu, the Boston metro area, and urban centers in California.

Santa Cruz City Manager Martin Bernal:

Santa Cruz Is the 4th Least Affordable City in the World

Santa Cruz is the fourth “least affordable” city in the world. That means that the difference between the price of housing and income levels is one of the greatest in the world, even though we're not the most expensive



13. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. *The 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress: Part 1: Point-in-Time Estimates of Homelessness*. By M. Henry, R. Watt, L. Rosenthal, and A. Shivji, Abt Associates. December 2017. <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2017-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

14. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. *The 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress: Part 1: Point-in-Time Estimates of Homelessness*. By M. Henry, R. Watt, L. Rosenthal, and A. Shivji, Abt Associates. December 2017. <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2017-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

15. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Homelessness and Housing. Accessed February 13, 2018. <https://www.samhsa.gov/homelessness-housing>

16. Andrew Aurant, Dan Emmanuel, Diane Yentel, and Ellen Errico, *The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes*. National Low Income Housing Coalition, March 2017. http://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/Gap-Report_2017_interactive.pdf

place. The median price of a house in Santa Cruz is about \$900,000 for a small 1,200-square-foot, 60-year old house. We're a built-out city, so we don't have a lot of raw land. That means that it's very difficult for people to be able to find housing. It's difficult for families and individuals to be able to just stay in the community.

Honolulu Police Chief Susan Ballard:

Even "Affordable Housing" in Honolulu Is Not Affordable for Most People

In Honolulu, our price of housing is skyrocketing, and it does affect the homeless. We get a lot of immigrants from the Micronesian islands. They're not really aware of the cost of housing or the cost of living in Honolulu, so that's a large population that has become homeless on Oahu. We're seeing an increase in our homeless population because of the lack of affordable housing.

Every time there is housing being built, Honolulu requires a certain amount of more "affordable" housing. But it's sort of an oxymoron, because the so-called affordable housing in Honolulu starts at about a half-million dollars.



Supreme Court Ruling on Free Speech Brings Reversals of Laws on Panhandling

In 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down a ruling in the case of *Reed v. Town of Gilbert, AZ*, a case about the free speech rights of churches to post signs about their religious services. The court held that governmental regulations curtailing speech must be narrowly tailored to serve compelling state interests, and ruled against the Town of Gilbert's restrictions on a church's signage.¹⁷

Unexpectedly, the ruling has had implications for local governments' efforts to restrict the free speech rights of panhandlers, particularly those who hold signs or make verbal requests for donations. Based on the legal precedent set by *Reed v. Gilbert*, ordinances against panhandling have been struck down or repealed in Springfield, IL; Grand Junction, CO; Tampa, FL; Portland, ME; Worcester, MA; Lowell, MA; Akron, OH; Cleveland, OH; and Toledo, OH.¹⁸

Officials at the PERF conference said that the *Gilbert* ruling is affecting their approach to homelessness and panhandling. In Walnut Creek, CA, the police department is considering how the decision will impact its ability to move people who panhandle in the median strips of highways. Lacey, WA reported that its ordinance on panhandling was recently overturned, and that its homeless population has now grown substantially.

In Arlington, TX, Chief of Police Will Johnson cited the lack of enforcement options for panhandling as a primary factor in the growth of homeless populations in the city. Chief Johnson also noted that the visibility of panhandling often prompts concerns among community members who might otherwise be unaware of the extent of the city's homelessness issues.

Officials agreed that as panhandling ordinances continue to be overturned, police departments will need to find new methods of address the public's concerns related to panhandling and homelessness.

17. *Reed et al. v. Town of Gilbert, Arizona et al.* 576 U.S. (2015). https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/14pdf/13-502_9olb.pdf

18. Wogan, J.B. "The Unexpected Reason Panhandling Bans are Being Struck Down Across the Country," *Governing*, July 25, 2017. <http://www.governing.com/topics/health-human-services/gov-panhandling-homeless-supreme-court-reed-gilbert.html>

Does the Availability of Services Attract Homeless Individuals to Particular Communities?

Some participants at PERF's conference said that the availability of services or assistance in their communities has attracted more homeless individuals to their jurisdictions, which increases the pressure on police departments and partner agencies. Participants at the PERF conference agreed that offering services is crucial to addressing the problem of homelessness. But many pointed out that having robust services can result in increased demand for the services, so it can be difficult to stay "ahead of the curve" on the homelessness issue.

Colorado Springs, CO Lieutenant Michael Lux:

Housing Vouchers Don't Mean Anything If No Housing Is Available

Recently our homelessness numbers have increased greatly, from under 1,000 to about 1,400, according to our PIT. Our problem is that we only have housing for about 500 homeless people in Colorado Springs. Therefore, we have about 900 people living on the streets.

People can talk about voucher programs for housing, but our problem is we just don't have the housing available. We have about 800 people with vouchers walking around saying, "I'd love to live in a place if you can give it to me." But we just don't have it available.



Gainesville, FL Lieutenant Whitney Stout:

A Homeless Services Center in Gainesville Attracts Individuals from Neighboring Counties

We're a big city in North Central Florida; we're about 90 miles away from other big cities like Jacksonville, Orlando, and Tampa. We opened a kind of "one-stop homeless center" several years ago, with the intention of providing a place for our local population to get wraparound services. The facility was more "high barrier" than "low barrier," which meant that there were folks who wanted some of the services, but didn't want to have the structure of the rules that came with the homeless center. So the unintended result was that an encampment developed outside of the center. That's a pretty large population for us, with not a lot of rules and not a lot of structure. We're kind of reacting to that now.

We have found that vulnerable populations are being brought to our shelter, and to the resulting homeless camp outside, when their services are terminated in some neighboring county. For example, a hospital may give them a voucher to get a cab when they're released, and they're brought to our homeless center. Most of the Florida prisons are also in close proximity to us, so inmates are released from the Department of Corrections to our location. Even some community mental health care service providers bring homeless people there. So we now have a larger population than we were planning to help or are equipped to help.



Gainesville officers working to provide food and shelter to a community member.

Two PERF Surveys on Homelessness in 1993 and 2018: Many of the Themes Are Similar

In 1993, PERF conducted a nationally representative survey on the police response to homelessness. PERF surveyed 650 police agencies serving populations of 50,000 or more, or with 100 or more sworn officers, and received an 80-percent response rate. Every state except North Dakota was represented in the sample.

Key findings of the 1993 survey included:

- 69 percent of respondents reported that the homeless individuals in their jurisdiction were viewed “predominantly as a police problem.”
- 77 percent reported that their community did not understand the police role in responding to homeless individuals.
- 88 percent reported that homeless individuals in their jurisdiction appeared to experience alcohol abuse.
- 60 percent reported that homeless individuals in their jurisdiction appeared to be involved with drug abuse.
- Almost 65 percent of respondents reported that homeless individuals in their jurisdiction appeared to have a mental illness.

When asked about the three most common reasons police make contact with the homeless, 92 percent reported calls from citizens, 82 percent reported officer observations, and 74 percent reported calls from the business community.

Regarding policies and training, 35 percent of respondents said their agency did not have a policy specifically related to incidents involving homeless persons. About 50 percent of agencies reported that at least some of their officers receive training regarding homelessness; only 17 percent of agencies reported that they had an individual or unit assigned to deal with the specific needs of the homeless.

With regard to partnerships with service providers, 97 percent of respondents indicated that police departments needed some type of referral arrangement with other agencies to effectively respond to homeless individuals. About 65 percent reported that it was difficult to get assistance for homeless people outside of normal business hours, and 55 percent reported that it was difficult for police to get mental health care for homeless individuals in their jurisdiction.¹⁹

2018 PERF Questionnaire

In preparation for the meeting on the Police Response to Homelessness, PERF prepared a brief questionnaire that was distributed to its members via email. (Unlike the 1993 survey, this was not a nationally representative survey, but rather was designed mainly to identify discussion topics for the conference.)

72 percent of the respondents to the 2018 questionnaire said the homeless population in their jurisdiction has increased within the past five years. 53 percent said there has been an increase in the number of homeless individuals in their jurisdiction experiencing mental illness, and 54 percent said there has been an increase in the number of homeless individuals experiencing substance abuse.

With regard to crime, 39 percent of respondents said they have seen an increase in the number of crime victims within the homeless community, and 51 percent said they have seen an increase in the number of homeless offenders.

Forty percent of responding agencies reported that they have a policy specific to interacting with homeless individuals. Sixty-six percent said their agencies provide training on responding to homeless individuals, and 52 percent reported that their agencies have officers or deputies designated to respond to individuals experiencing homelessness.

19. Martha R. Plotkin and Ortwin A. “Tony” Narr, *The Police Response to the Homeless: A Status Report*. November, 1993. Police Executive Research Forum.

What Is the Role of the Police?

ONE OF THE FIRST QUESTIONS ADDRESSED BY PARTICIPANTS AT THE PERF meeting was how to define the role of police and sheriffs' departments in responding to the homelessness problem. Agencies increasingly are viewing the issue as a problem to be solved, rather than an enforcement issue that can be addressed by arresting homeless persons. So the police role is evolving. Because most police and sheriffs' departments are not given funding and resources to take on responsibilities for helping homeless persons, they must develop partnerships with a wide range of social service agencies and other government departments in order to have an impact.

As police agencies take leadership roles in addressing homelessness, the key words that are used most often to describe what's happening are "partnerships" and "innovation." (See "Pinellas County Sheriff's Department Opens A \$2.3 Million Facility to Help Homeless Persons," page 12, for an example of a very innovative program undertaken by a sheriff's department.)

To meet this expanded role, agencies are also developing expertise within their ranks in the form of specially selected and trained officers and units.

Vancouver, WA Chief of Police James McElvain:

*Police Have a Role in Responding to Calls,
But Others Have the Resources for Long-Term Solutions*

Homelessness isn't necessarily a law enforcement problem. We have a role to play, and that's always been our stance in Vancouver: We are members at the table with everybody else. Otherwise, we may find ourselves alone and blamed for not solving the problem.

Going back to 2015, we had a service in the city called the Sharehouse that provides shelter, meals, and social services. And an encampment was developing around this facility. Upwards of about 100 people were camping in this residential neighborhood, and we started having drug use and prostitution and crimes of violence occurring there.

People began to express their concerns about all this to the city, and the question was presented to the police, "What are you going to do



about it?” And that’s when I took the stance that “We will be a partner in this, but this isn’t our problem. The Police Department doesn’t have the resources to provide more shelter space; we don’t have funding to increase mental health treatment. We simply don’t have all that. We need other services to come to the table.”

So with Community Economic Development, along with Code Enforcement, Public Works, and Social Services, we asked, “What are *we* going to do about this?” And we were able to address the encampment and clean it up with zero negative headlines. We started trying to connect the homeless people to services, while letting them know what our city ordinance said about camping and not camping, and we said, “By this date, this is what’s going to occur.” A lot of people moved off the encampment. Others stayed there, and we ended up having to do some enforcement. But we have developed relationships within our community with social service partners and others in the city.

I think it continues to fall on the shoulders of police because we are the ones who get the calls 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and we will continue to respond to the calls because that is a role and a responsibility for us. But others have more tools to address the issues long-term, and I think we have to bring them to the table.

Former San Diego Chief of Police Bill Lansdowne:

*Police Must Take a Big Role,
Because No One Else Responds at 3 a.m.*

Working with the homeless population isn’t for all the officers. Some just don’t have the patience or the skill set to do that. Some officers like to handle traffic. Some officers like to work homicide. And some officers enjoy working with the homeless. They get a lot of satisfaction out of it, and they’re very good at it.

The advantage of having a homeless outreach team or any team specifically assigned to homelessness issues is that they start to build trust within that community. And that means that the community will tell the officers if there’s a violent predator in a homeless encampment, or if there’s a person who is close to dying because they’re not moving, and where they’re hidden.

And that’s what the police do. We provide this service because the ambulance companies won’t go down there into an encampment. The Fire Department won’t go down there for you. No one will go down there until you render it safe. And police are the only ones who can do that. We also are the only ones who can do these things at three o’clock in the morning or on Christmas Eve, because we’re out there all the time.

One thing I recommend is that the police chief or other top people should take some time and go down to the encampments with one of the officers who does the outreach and see what it looks like. Not with a band of 50 officers, but with just one or two of your officers, get a feel for what’s going on, and listen to what these officers tell you. At least in my experience, once the officers believe that you’re concerned about it, they will offer the information you’re looking for about what works best.



These officers have the contacts with the rescue mission and social services. They have the ability to get emergency housing for the kids and families they find out in the riverbeds. And your specialist officers also know whether a homeless person needs to go to jail, or whether they'll do well if you take them to the rescue mission, or whether they're ready for change and they need to get into an AA program. The officers are good at triaging, because they've learned how to work with homeless people.

I don't think this kind of work can be done by all the officers. I think we need to look at specially trained, skilled officers, and we have examples of those kinds of officers here in the room.

Cambridge, MA Police Commissioner Branville Bard, Jr.:

*We See Our Role as Including Social Work,
So We Strongly Believe in Dedicated Outreach*

More than a decade ago, the Cambridge Police Department went through a pronounced shift away from being a traditional enforcement agency to being a social service agency. So a great amount of our resources are geared towards that. Out of that came outreach for all of our vulnerable populations, including youths, the homeless, those who suffer from mental health and substance abuse issues, and our elderly.

When we were making a choice for this dedicated outreach, our department selected officers who were already highly engaged with the homeless population and had already shown that they were compassionate with them. That's what it's about.

Of our 500 or so homeless people, about 200 have chronic mental illness. And we know our homeless people. When a call comes out, you hear an officer picking up the radio and saying, "That sounds like Fred." Our homelessness officers know each individual.

Wexler: That's very interesting. So the homelessness officers know their customers, and understand what may be happening if a homeless person acts out in a certain way, or has some particular behavior. As opposed to regular patrol officers who roll up and don't necessarily know who they're dealing with...

Commissioner Bard: Yes. For example, an officer may be responding to a call for an ambulance because someone is having an episode. And I happen to be nearby, so I'll pull up. And the very first thing the outreach officer shouts at me is, "Commissioner, no sudden movements." The guy's out there behaving strangely, and the officer knows that he had been diagnosed with schizophrenia. And he knows that if I jump out of my car, it may trigger the guy. So the officer tells the guy, "These are my friends. They're here to help me to help you." And the guy says, "Okay, okay."

And so we were able to get him into the ambulance and get him to services without touching him, without having to physically engage him. This is what you can only achieve through that trust-building and that constant contact through dedicated outreach.

We also see our role as being conveners. We are in so many



collaborations with different agencies, that we are able to marshal the resources of the whole city.

Initially, there might have been some uncertainty about this among our line officers, but more than a decade into it, everybody has bought into it because they can see it works.

Hermosa Beach, CA Chief of Police Sharon Papa:

Our Role Includes Getting to Know Homeless Persons, And We Work with Neighboring Towns to Share Resources

Wexler: Sharon, you were homeless outreach coordinator in the Los Angeles Police Department, and now you're chief in Hermosa Beach. What is that like?

Chief Papa: It was a huge change to go from LAPD, with a cast of thousands, to a small beach community. Hermosa Beach is about a mile and a half along the coastline with 20,000 people. We have a downtown area that has a Pier Plaza, and has restaurants, bars, and cafes with people sitting outside. If our homeless people are there, they're very visible, and our tourists are paying a lot of money to be there and don't want to see that.

Our officers know all of our homeless people, because it's a lifestyle choice for the majority of them. Hermosa Beach is their home; that's where they hang out. So we have a book with photographs of each of our homeless people and information about them, which is very helpful. For example, if a homeless person dies, we know who the person was and whom to contact. It's a very different dynamic in a small community. Our officers know who's in our town.

When I was the homeless outreach coordinator at LAPD, back in the late '90s, my personal take on what was happening on Skid Row was that it was a problem, but it wasn't the magnitude that it is now. Now I think we've gotten to the point where it's unmanageable, and somebody mentioned that you need to have the political will to deal with it. I'm not sure the will was there then, but it certainly is now. So, I see two very different scenarios in a small city and a large city.

Wexler: You can get your hands around it in a small city, right?

Chief Papa: Yes.

Wexler: But what I'm hearing is that you still need to have people who know the homeless population, no matter what. That seems to be a common theme. If you don't know this population, that's problematic. But if you know them and know their backgrounds, you can engage with them and you are better off to deal with them.

Chief Papa: Correct. And you have to look at the issue regionally. We have two beach cities on either side of us, and we went for a grant together to get a clinician to ride with our officers. We're small, so the clinician rides with us one day, she rides with the neighboring city one day, she rides with the other city one day. She's covering our areas and getting to know our people, so hopefully we'll be able to help the



homeless people with mental illness. So if you are too small to deal with it yourself, don't be afraid to reach out to your neighbors.

Oakland, CA Chief of Police Anne Kirkpatrick:

We Instruct Our Officers to Enforce Criminal Laws, But Not Rules Against Camping within the City

Homelessness is a very big issue for us in Oakland. Our population is about 420,000, and our most current number on homelessness is 2,716. We have 350 shelter beds. And so it is a major crisis for our community. Oakland is a very activist community, with divided wills within the community as to what to do about homelessness. It's easy to say, "We do not want to criminalize homelessness," but many people in the community want us to enforce laws against criminal behavior.

So it can be a mixed message for the officers. They are instructed, "Do not enforce the laws against camping," and some of them have thought that that means "hands-off entirely." But that is not the message. We need to be very clear in telling the officers that if there is criminal behavior within an encampment or by a homeless individual, they are to take action. But they are not to enforce the laws barring camping within the city. The result is that we have sanctioned encampments in our city.



Oakland, CA police distribute meals to community members, thanks to a donation by a local business leader.

Police Officers' Perspectives

PERF ASKED SEVERAL LINE OFFICERS WHO ATTENDED THE MEETING IN Long Beach to describe the response to homelessness in their cities, as seen from their perspective of working directly with homeless persons.

Vancouver, WA Police Officer Tyler Chavers:

*We've Had an Explosion in Homelessness,
But There Are Success Stories*

Wexler: Officer Chavers, can you give us a success story?

Officer Chavers: Yes I can. First, a little background. The homelessness problem has sort of exploded in Vancouver. Back in 2015 when I started, homelessness ate up maybe five minutes a week of my time. By the end of the year, it was probably 50 percent of my time, and it may be more than that now. And I work in the district that has the most visible homelessness problems.

As the homelessness problem grew, I had no choice but to develop relationships with other agencies, because I knew the Police Department couldn't house, feed, and otherwise help these folks who are in need. So we started learning who the social service providers were, and how to get in touch with them. We also started learning homeless people's names, and finding out that homeless people have a lot of different kinds of problems.

So my success story, I'll call him Steve. He lived under a bridge, was on probation, a drug abuser, homeless on and off for years. One morning, I was having a casual conversation with a service provider, who said, "Oh, by the way, if you see Steve today, he needs to be in my office by 2 o'clock this afternoon or he's out."

I knew what that meant. A treatment bed was open, and Steve had to apply for it, or he'd miss his chance. I also knew what it would mean if he didn't get it: he'd end up with another felony warrant for his arrest.

I knew where Steve hung out, and I kept my eyes open. About 1:40 that afternoon, under the bridge, doing some camp checks, I ran across Steve, who saw me and was quickly getting on his bike and trying to get out of



there. I flagged him down, said, “Hey, you’re not in trouble. No warrants today. But you need to call Jamie right now. You’ve got 20 minutes to be in her office, or you’re going to lose your spot.”

I didn’t see him again for about a year. The next time I saw him, he was clean, sober, and had been for some time. He had made it into the treatment bed, and now he was actually a volunteer with our severe weather program, which is about how to house folks when the temperature drops. So I consider that a success story.

El Segundo, CA Police Officer Marco Lemus:

Our Training Now Teaches Officers to Help Homeless Persons, Not Arrest Them

We have a small homeless population, maybe 10 to 15 people. We’ve had encampments that come and go. Our approach has changed because of the training and classes we’ve gone to.

It used to be, “Kick them out, give them a ride somewhere, give them a citation, get them arrested.”

Now the first questions I ask are, “Are you okay? Can we get you some help?” We try to make sure they know that there are services available to them.



Community Lead Officer John Deer, El Segundo, CA Police Dept.:

Homeless People in Our City Are Transient, So the Issues Are Constantly Changing

About 90 percent of our transient issues are sporadic. It’s like a tornado. They’ll come in, create havoc for a day or two, and then they move on.

We have one right now who says he’s got an alcohol problem. I ended up letting him stay where he is, by the railroad tracks. I told him we’ll try to get him help within a couple weeks. Our approach has shifted from being kind of aggressive and kicking people out of town to getting people assistance.

Wexler: What you’re ultimately doing is you’re problem-solving, trying to understand what this person’s issues are, is that right?

Officer Deer: Yes.

Wexler: But you have to build a relationship with them, because they’re kind of afraid of you. Are you in uniform or plainclothes?

Officer Deer: We’re moving to plainclothes. Right now it’s uniform.

Wexler: Who’s going to help him if you don’t?

Officer Deer: Nobody, because we’re the ones who get called. About 60 percent of our calls every day are about transients and problems that they cause.

Wexler: How long have you been doing this, and do you like it?

Officer Deer: Just a couple of years, and I love it, because it’s different every day. Dealing with different people, different problems.



Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC Police Officer Russ Faulkenberry:

*We Have Had to Work Hard to Build Trust
With Homeless People and with Service Providers*

All of our homeless resource providers are downtown, so that's where all of our encampments of homeless persons are. At our last Point in Time count, we had about 1,400 homeless people, with fewer than 300 unsheltered. Fortunately, we don't experience some of the tough problems I've heard about here today. I'm glad we don't have a riverbed in Mecklenburg County.

Brad Hall and I are community police officers, community coordinators for the downtown area. We are the de facto homeless service guys. We don't have a crisis outreach unit or a homelessness unit. In the past, there was a lot of mistrust between the police and our human service providers. So Brad and I have worked hard to build that trust, so the police are not seen as just the people who arrest the homeless people that these service providers work with. We've had to build relationships with the providers to get them to trust us. We invite them to come out into the field with us.

We also work to build rapport with these homeless individuals, so they will trust us enough to bring in these service providers, so we can get them off the street or at least get them connected with providers.



Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC Police Officer Brad Hall:

*Your Front-Line Officers Are Closest to the Problems,
So Encourage Them to Offer Ideas for Solutions*

With so many command staff personnel in the room today, I'd like to mention that from a patrol perspective, it's important to allow your officers the freedom to implement some of the ideas they have about how to handle homelessness issues. A lot of our colleagues tell us that they don't feel they have that support from the command staff to maybe try something different or new.

Wexler: Excellent point, thank you.



Crime and the Homeless Community

RESEARCH HAS CONSISTENTLY FOUND THAT HOMELESS PERSONS ARE disproportionately victimized by violent crime:

- A 2014 study of approximately 500 homeless individuals across five U.S. cities found that nearly half the people studied had been victims of violent crime.²⁰
- A 2010 study found that 76 percent of homeless youths in Toronto had been victims of violent crime in the previous year.²¹
- For comparison, the Bureau of Justice Statistics' National Crime Victimization Survey found that among the general public, there were just over 2 violent crimes per 100 people in the United States over the age of 12 in 2016.²²

Homeless individuals also commit crimes at a disproportionate rate. A 2012 study of homeless youths in four U.S. cities found that more than 60 percent of those studied had been arrested and more than 40 percent had been arrested for “severe-status activities,” a category that included drug- and violent crime-related arrests.²³ For comparison, fewer than 2 percent of American young adults have been arrested. These findings have echoed earlier studies.^{24, 25}

20. Meinbresse, M. et al. “Exploring the experiences of violence among individuals who are homeless using a consumer-led approach.” <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24672998>

21. Science Daily. “Homeless youths most often victims of crime.” Sept. 28, 2010. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/09/100927105203.htm>

22. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. “Data Collection: National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS).” <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=dcdetail&iid=245>

23. Ferguson, Kristin M. et al. “Exploration of Arrest Activity among Homeless Young Adults in Four U.S. Cities.” *Social Work Research*, Sept. 2012. <https://academic.oup.com/swr/article/36/3/233/1627542>

24. Schwartz, Marci, et al. “Exploring the Relationship Between Homelessness and Delinquency: A Snapshot of a Group of Homeless Youth in San Jose, California.” *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, August 2008. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10560-008-0125-1>

25. Kipki, MD et al. “Homeless youth and their exposure to and involvement in violence while living on the streets.” *The Journal of Adolescent Health*. May 1997. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/9168383>

PERF's 2018 questionnaire indicated that law enforcement agencies have seen a recent increase in violent offenses perpetrated by homeless individuals, as well as an increase in victimization of homeless persons. Thirty-nine percent of respondents said that there had been an increase in victimization among the homeless population over the last five years, and 21 percent said that that number had remained the same. Fifty-one percent of respondents said that there had been an increase in the number of offenders within the homeless population, and 21 percent said that that number had remained the same.

Mental illness exacerbates problems

Homeless persons with mental illness are at increased risk of becoming perpetrators or victims of crime. Persons with a mental illness are more likely to be homeless than the general population, and people who are both homeless and have a mental illness are arrested more frequently and are victims of crimes at a higher rate than people with a mental illness who have stable housing.²⁶

Homelessness also increases the risk that a person will commit crimes later in their lives. Individuals who experience homelessness by age 26 are far more likely to commit property crimes and violent crimes than individuals who do not experience homelessness.²⁷

Participants at the PERF summit in Long Beach discussed some of the specific crime problems that occur within the homeless community.

Homicides

"In one of our patrol areas the majority of the homeless individuals who were issued citations during the month had a criminal history," San Diego Chief Shelley Zimmerman said. "And in 2017 we had substantially more homicides where the victims and/or suspects were homeless than gang-motivated homicides."

Some cities have experienced deliberate and sometimes brutal attacks on individuals experiencing homelessness. And because these types of crimes often have few witnesses or other solid leads, police agencies need to be creative in how they go about investigating these types of crime.

This was the case in Las Vegas in early 2017. Two homeless men were beaten to death near the same downtown Las Vegas intersection within a 30-day period. After the second incident, leaders of the Downtown Area Command implemented a plan dubbed "Operation Charlie McCarthy" (named for the famous ventriloquist dummy used by Edgar Bergen). The plan involved dressing a CPR mannequin as a homeless person, wrapping it in blankets, placing it at the same intersection, and then conducting surveillance.



San Diego Police Chief
Shelley Zimmerman



Chief James Hellmold,
Los Angeles County Sheriff's Dept.

26. Roy, Laurence, et al. "Criminal Behavior and Victimization Among Homeless Individuals With Severe Mental Illness: A Systematic Review." *Psychiatric Services*, June 2014. <https://ps.psychiatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/appi.ps.201200515?code=ps-site>

27. Cronley, Courtney et al. Effects of Homelessness and Child Maltreatment on the Likelihood of Engaging in Property and Violent Crime During Adulthood." *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, Vol. 25, Issue 3, 2015. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10911359.2014.966219?src=recsys>

Approximately three weeks after the second murder, a person attacked the mannequin in the much the same manner as the first two attacks. The suspect pleaded guilty to attempted murder and was sentenced to eight to 20 years in prison.

Domestic violence and human trafficking

Several participants said that domestic violence and human trafficking are particularly challenging aspects of the police response to homelessness.

“There has been an increase in domestic violence among our homeless,” James Hellmold, Chief of the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, said. “Sheriff Jim McDonnell has established a unit dedicated to addressing crimes frequently impacting homeless individuals, such as domestic violence and human trafficking.”

“Larger encampments form their own community dynamics,” said Seattle Police Sergeant Eric Zerr. “They bring a sense of anonymity from the outside world, where violence, drug and sex trafficking, and domestic abuse are shielded from view or investigation. In our experience, the larger, more established encampments gravitate towards these activities.”

Carrying weapons for protection

Many police officials report that homeless persons often carry knives and other weapons to protect themselves and their belongings. This can make working with homeless communities and individuals more difficult for police, because weapons present a risk that officers must consider as they try to communicate with a homeless person.

The limited research on this subject supports police officials’ observations. A 2014 study of homeless youths found that 57 percent of the individuals interviewed across three U.S. cities carried weapons for protection.²⁸

“It’s lawless in the riverbeds in California,” Lompoc, California, Chief Patrick Walsh told attendees at the PERF summit. “It’s the Wild West, and everyone is armed. Most are armed with knives, but we’re also seeing more guns in the last couple years.”

Crime in homeless shelters

Data on crime in homeless shelters is limited, but violence occurs in U.S. shelters on a daily basis and can lead some homeless individuals to avoid shelters in favor of living on the streets. As one example, New York City shelters reported 826 violent critical incidents in 2015, and some homeless individuals in New York City cite safety concerns as a reason they prefer living on the streets to living in shelters.²⁹



Seattle Police Sgt. Eric Zerr



Lompoc, CA Police Chief Patrick Walsh

28. Bender, Kimberly et al. “Risk Detection and Self-Protection Among Homeless Youth.” *Journal of Research on Adolescence*. 25(2). <https://www.du.edu/tssgroup/media/documents/benderetal2015.pdf>

29. “NYC homeless would rather risk the street than hellish shelter system.” *New York Daily News*, March 14, 2016. <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/nyc-homeless-prefer-streets-violent-shelters-article-1.2564370>

Portland's Service Coordination Team Helps Homeless Persons Involved in Low-Level Crime

One of the biggest challenges facing cities is how to approach individuals who are chronically homeless and also have a history of involvement in the criminal justice system. The Portland Police Bureau (PPB) is addressing this challenge through a comprehensive approach called the Service Coordination Team (SCT).

Although shelters and other services are generally funded at the county level in Oregon (and most other states), Portland took the unusual step of creating and funding within the Police Bureau its own full-service homelessness program that includes a housing component. The goals of the SCT program are to break the cycle of addiction and criminality; reduce police contacts; and provide individuals with housing and treatment that can lead to long-term stability.

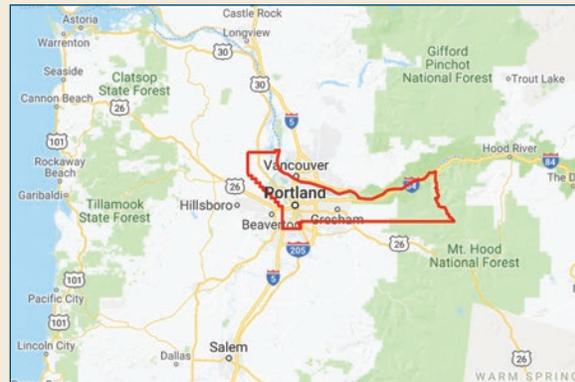
Prior contacts with the police: The program targets a specific, and challenging, population: *homeless individuals who are involved with low-level crimes and have issues with addiction (and often mental illness)*. Not surprisingly, these individuals are overrepresented among Portland residents having contacts with the police.

The SCT was the brainchild of a police officer working in Portland's Chinatown neighborhood in the late 2000s. He found that he was arresting the same people over and over again, with little or no impact on crime in the community. It became apparent that the common denominators in those arrests were homelessness and addiction, which led the officer to ask: Why don't we treat underlying causes—lack of housing and drug treatment—instead of relying on arrests?

Launched in 2009 as a one-time pilot effort, the SCT has grown into a well-established component of the PPB's approach to homelessness. Program costs for outreach, housing, and services are covered in the annual police budget.

One criterion for getting into the program is that an individual has a criminal history that includes at least three crimes or police contacts inside the City of Portland in the previous six months. Individuals must also have lived in the Portland tri-county area for at least five years. Participation in the program is voluntary.

"Low-barrier" housing allows drug users to participate: The SCT program has 60 housing units. They include "low-barrier housing," which means that clients can get housing even if they are still using drugs or alcohol and have legal issues. (See page 44 for a discussion of "wet" vs. "dry" shelters.) A small portion of the housing program was recently opened to people with severe mental health issues. PPB officers are



Portland is the county seat of Multnomah County, Oregon.

Multnomah County population (2016 est.): **799,766**

City of Portland

Population (2016 est.): **639,863**

Area: **133 square miles**

Median household income: **\$58,423**

Percentage of persons in poverty: **16.9 percent**³⁰

Most recent Point in Time homelessness count: **4,177** (2017, includes Portland and Multnomah County)

30. U.S. Census Bureau "QuickFacts." <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/portlandcityoregon,multnomahcountyoregon/PST045216>

empowered to temporarily remove these individuals from the streets and take them to dedicated rooms in a city-sponsored transitional housing facility.

In addition to housing, the SCT program offers a range of wrap-around services, including medical, legal, substance abuse, and mental health programming, as well as 24-hour staff support. Central City Concern, a local nonprofit organization, provides some of the housing, as well as case managers and other staffing.

Individuals can remain in the program for up to 18 months. Clients who show signs of success are moved into drug- and alcohol-free housing, and from there, they can get help in moving into permanent housing. SCT case managers follow up with individual clients for a year after they leave the program to see if they have housing and are sober, employed, and meeting other personal goals. Some SCT “graduates” are hired by the nonprofit organizations that provide services through the program.

In addition to overall program management, the Portland Police Bureau plays a major role in referring individuals to the SCT program. Bicycle officers and other patrol officers refer potential clients to the unit, which also takes referrals from social service agencies, hospitals, probation and parole personnel, and jail employees. Walk-ins are also accepted.

The SCT holds weekly coordination meetings to gather and evaluate new referrals and to discuss next steps on existing cases. The coordination meetings include all of the key stakeholders from the justice system and the service provider community.

Cost-benefit analysis shows tremendous savings: Faculty and students at Portland State University have evaluated the SCT program annually since 2009. The evaluation focuses on crime reduction among the targeted population and a cost-benefit analysis. The most recent evaluation, from Spring 2017, examined the 185 persons who entered the SCT program in 2015. Researchers found a 75 percent reduction in post-program arrests among this group. They also calculated that the reduction in crime and criminal justice system costs far exceeded SCT program costs, yielding a cost-benefit ratio of .076. That means that for every \$1 in SCT program costs, there were savings of more than \$13 in reduced crime and justice system costs related to police, courts, and corrections.³¹

“The first portion of our program is ‘low-barrier,’ or ‘wet’ housing. We do not want to be an additional barrier for someone to enter the program. We don’t expect sobriety right away, but abstinence is the ultimate goal. Within 30 to 60 days, there is responsibility and accountability to engage in the program and in treatment services.

“Once an individual is stable in the low-barrier phase, they are eligible for the Alcohol and Drug Free housing portion of the program. This phase focuses on connecting with the recovery community, continuing treatment services, volunteering in the community, and employment/income. Having both low-barrier and alcohol- and drug-free housing options has been key to meeting our participants’ needs.”

—**Emily Rochon, Service Coordination Team Manager
Portland Police Bureau, Behavioral Health Unit**



Emily Rochon

31. Study of the Service Coordination Team and its Impact on Chronic Offenders: 2017 Report. Portland State University, Capstone Class UNST 421, Section 572. 2017

Homelessness in California: The Unintended Consequences of Criminal Justice Reform

“In California, all drug possessions are now misdemeanors. The maximum for most misdemeanors is six months in jail, and it is common for someone convicted of misdemeanor possession of cocaine or heroin to be sentenced to six months. In Los Angeles County, the policy is to release any person sentenced to 180 days in jail the same day.

“What this means is that the court system no longer has any leverage to get people into rehab. In the past, the choices were, go to jail or go to rehab. Now, it’s get released or go to rehab. Very few people are choosing rehab.”

—City Prosecutor Doug Haubert, Long Beach, CA



City Prosecutor Doug Haubert

Nowhere is the problem of homelessness more acute than in California. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Point in Time count, California had an estimated 134,278 homeless individuals in 2017. That represents a 13.7 percent increase from 2016. California accounts for one-quarter of all homeless persons in the United States, and California has nearly half of the nation’s homeless persons who are unsheltered.

According to California police officials who participated in PERF’s *Critical Issues* meeting, the recent surge in homelessness in California may be an unintended consequence of three criminal justice reforms in the state:

- The California Public Safety Realignment Act (AB 109), passed in 2011, mandated reductions in the state’s prison population. That has been accomplished, in large part, by shifting tens of thousands of offenders from state prisons to county jails to serve their sentences. Many jails, facing overcrowding themselves, have been forced to release inmates back to the community. Many of these individuals are struggling with mental illness and/or substance abuse, and many are homeless.
- Proposition 47, approved by the state’s voters in 2014, downgraded many theft and drug offenses from felonies to misdemeanors. Even if an offender commits multiple offenses covered by the law—for example, theft under \$950 or possession of most illegal drugs—each offense is treated as a misdemeanor. In many counties, especially those facing jail overcrowding, suspects are issued a citation, and there is almost no threat of jail time or other serious consequences upon conviction.
- Proposition 57, approved by voters in 2016, redefined some felony offenses as “nonviolent.” As a result, more prisoners are qualifying for early release back to the community.

“AB 109 shifted people from the state prison to the county jail, which displaced people who were previously in the county jail onto the streets.

“We’ve been dealing with those individuals ever since, as part of our homeless population as well.”

— Sheriff Jim McDonnell, Los Angeles County



Sheriff Jim McDonnell

“We compared the prison population of California, 2006 versus 2016, and found that there are at least 40,000 fewer people in state prisons. It’s down to 115,000 from 155,000.

“Everybody that I have talked to who has worked in state prisons has told me that approximately half of the people there have mental illness.

“So where do we think these people are now, who used to have their lodging, their food and especially their medical care taken care of?”

— **Chief Sergio Diaz, Riverside (CA) Police Department**

“With narcotics offenses now misdemeanors, word travels very rapidly that Los Angeles seems to be a safe haven for people who are experiencing drug abuse, and they make their way into the homeless population.”

— **Deputy Chief Robert Arcos, Los Angeles Police Department**

“Criminal justice reform and reducing incarceration are being discussed not just in California, but across the country.

“For anybody who is considering that as a way forward, you need to look at what’s happening here in California to see what some of these unintended consequences are.”

— **Chief Robert Luna, Long Beach (CA) Police Department**

The justice system has lost its leverage to get offenders into treatment: According to California police leaders at the conference, the impact of these three measures on homelessness goes beyond the increase in persons with mental illness and other conditions living in the community who might otherwise be in custody. As importantly, they said, the justice system in California has lost much of its leverage to get lower-level offenders into drug treatment or other services.

In the past, many of these suspects were offered a choice: go to treatment or go to jail. But because many of the underlying offenses are now misdemeanors, with no threat of jail time even upon conviction, fewer people are accepting the treatment option. According to Sheriff Jim McDonnell, the number of offenders in drug treatment in Los Angeles County declined by 60 percent after Proposition 47 was enacted.

While many of California’s police leaders said they support the broad goals of criminal justice reform, the measures in California have had unintended consequences on homelessness and some of its underlying conditions, such as drug addiction and mental illness. They cautioned other states that are considering similar reforms to analyze and understand the impacts in California.



Chief Robert Luna

A Meta-Analysis of Intervention Programs Reveals Some Evidence of Effectiveness

In 2018, the Campbell Collaboration, a research organization based in Norway, conducted a systematic review to assess the effectiveness of interventions to reduce homelessness and increase residential stability for individuals who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless.³² The authors examined 43 randomized controlled trials (RCTs) of programs targeting homeless individuals that measured the impact on homelessness or housing stability, with follow-up of at least one year.

Of the 43 studies included in the analysis, 37 were from the United States, and all of the studies were conducted prior to January 2016.

The review looked at a range of housing programs and case management interventions, and found that in general, the interventions examined performed better than the “usual services” (i.e., services typically provided outside of the intervention) in reducing homelessness or improving housing stability. However, certainty in the findings varied from very low to moderate.³³

The interventions that were analyzed in the research studies were categorized as:

- **Case management (high- and low-intensity):** In these programs, clients are assigned to case managers who coordinate their access to services. The services can vary in intensity.
- **Abstinence-contingent housing programs:** In these programs, housing is provided to residents who agree to remain sober.
- **Non-abstinence-contingent housing programs:** Housing is provided regardless of whether residents are sober. Housing First is an example of one such program.
- **Housing vouchers with case management:** In these programs, a housing allowance is provided to certain groups of individuals who qualify.
- **Residential treatment with case management:** Housing is provided to individuals who also need treatment for mental illness or substance abuse.

According to the analysis, these interventions seemed to have similar beneficial effects, so it's unclear which of the programs are the most effective for reducing homelessness and increasing housing stability. Specifically, the researchers found moderate-certainty evidence³⁴ for high-intensity case management and Housing First programs, as compared to usual services.

Overall, the findings suggest that case management and housing programs appear to be effective in improving housing stability and reducing homelessness. However, the researchers note the uncertainty in their findings, because many of the studies examined have a risk of bias due to various methodological concerns.

In addition, the researchers identified specific gaps in the research with regard to: 1) case management for specific groups, such as disadvantaged youths; 2) abstinence-contingent housing with case management or day treatment; 3) non-abstinence contingent housing comparing group vs. independent living; 4) Housing First compared to interventions other than usual services; and 5) studies outside of the United States.

32. Heather Menzies Munthe-Kass, Rigmor C. Berg, and Nora Blaasvaer, 2018. *Effectiveness of Interventions to Reduce Homelessness: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis*. Campbell Collaboration. <https://www.campbellcollaboration.org/library/effectiveness-of-interventions-to-reduce-homelessness.html>

33. The authors used The Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development, and Evaluation for effectiveness approach (GRADE) to assess the certainty of the synthesized evidence. GRADE is a method for assessing the certainty of evidence in systematic reviews.

34. “Moderate certainty” indicates that further research is likely to have an impact on the researchers’ confidence in the estimated effect of the program.

Key Challenges and Promising Practices

AT THE CRITICAL ISSUES MEETING IN LONG BEACH, POLICE LEADERS discussed the following aspects of their responses to issues of homelessness:

- *Special units called “Homeless Outreach Teams,”*
- *The challenges in handling homeless encampments,*
- *Court rulings that govern seizures of homeless persons’ property,*
- *“Homeless courts” that are now operating in more than 30 jurisdictions,*
- *The training that police officers receive regarding homelessness,*
- *Innovative uses of technology and data-sharing to improve the police response to homelessness;*
- *Funding of programs that help homeless persons, and*
- *Regional partnerships that agencies have created to share resources.*

This chapter summarizes programs and guidance offered by agencies with experience working with homeless persons.

In PERF’s recent questionnaire of law enforcement agencies, 52 percent of the respondents said their agency has officers or units dedicated to working with homeless persons.

Homeless Outreach Teams

Many law enforcement agencies have created units specifically staffed to respond to individuals experiencing homelessness. Although the names of these units vary, many are called Homeless Outreach Teams (HOT). In PERF’s recent questionnaire of law enforcement agencies, 52 percent of the respondents said their agency has officers or units dedicated to working with homeless persons.

Police officers working directly with mental health providers: In creating a Homeless Outreach Team, many departments use a “co-responder” model, in which patrol officers are paired with or co-located with mental health service providers. In Santa Monica, CA, two members of the city’s Department of

Mental Health are co-located with members of the police department's Homeless Liaison Program (HLP). HLP is a unit of eight officers and a sergeant dedicated to addressing homelessness. One of the mental health representatives is assigned to patrol, while the other is assigned to the HLP team. The mental health workers assist officers and connect homeless persons with services.

In Vacaville, CA, the police department has a Community Response Unit (CRU) that acts as a specialized homeless outreach team. The city, through grant funding, embedded a mental health clinician within the unit. The clinician goes out into the field with CRU officers and conducts follow-up and case management.

As the name indicates, a primary responsibility of Homeless Outreach Teams is conducting outreach to homeless individuals. The Houston Police Department's HOT consists of a sergeant, six officers, and three case managers from a local mental health authority who engage individuals on the streets and connect them to services. In 2017, the team found housing for more than 300 individuals, and it connected more than 4,500 people with services. As a result of the large caseloads that HOT members have in the outreach component of their work, HOT members do not always respond to general calls for service, unless those calls involve homelessness.

Patience is required: Due to the unique responsibilities of working on a Homeless Outreach Team, many departments carefully select unit members. In Vacaville, CA, candidates for the Community Response Unit were evaluated on their practical experience, emotional intelligence, and patience. Working with homeless communities can be challenging and requires perseverance. In Long Beach, CA, the multi-disciplinary team that responds to homelessness noted that it takes, on average, 17 contacts with a homeless individual before they will agree to enter services. Therefore, officers selected to conduct outreach to the homeless must be prepared to experience resistance from people who may have mental illness and substance abuse issues.

Homeless Outreach Teams provide multiple benefits to their communities and their law enforcement agencies. Dedicating officers to the problem of homelessness gives them time to develop relationships with community partners and service providers. In Long Beach, CA, the police department's Quality of Life officers address homelessness and work closely with service providers. The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD) also has improved its relationships with community partners by dedicating officers to the Multi-Agency Outreach Resource Engagement Team (MORE). MORE consists of officers from LVMPD and one provider each from five local nonprofit organizations. Together they conduct outreach and connect homeless individuals with services in the field. By having the designated officers conduct outreach, the officers are able to develop relationships with individuals experiencing homelessness.

Homeless Outreach officers are a resource for patrol: In many departments, Homeless Outreach Team officers act as a resource for other patrol officers. In Santa Monica, the HLP team trains others in the department on how to interact with homeless persons. In Vancouver, WA, Neighborhood Police Officers (NPOs) are designated to respond to livability issues and have taken on

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“Our officers take the case managers, the mental health experts, into the encampments, because otherwise they would be afraid to go in.”

— **Houston Assistant Police Chief Wendy Baimbridge**



Wendy Baimbridge

“Seattle Navigation Team” Combines Officers and Homelessness Caseworkers

In 2015, Seattle faced a dramatically increasing number of homeless individuals living within its city limits, prompting Mayor Ed Murray to declare a state of emergency on the issue. Under the state of emergency, the city began concentrated efforts to clean encampments and conduct outreach to homeless individuals. Despite these actions, the city found that the rate of homeless individuals engaging with services remained low.

In order to improve outreach and increase the number of successful referrals of homeless individuals to services, local officials created the Seattle Navigation Team in January 2017. The Seattle Navigation Team is comprised of caseworkers from REACH, an organization that conducts outreach and provides case management services to the homeless population in Seattle; eight officers, a sergeant, and a lieutenant from the Seattle Police Department; and two individuals from the city’s facilities department to assist with possessions left in encampments.



An excellent 6-minute video that shows the Seattle Navigation Team at work is available at <http://www.seattlechannel.org/videos?videoid=x78447>.

Police and social service workers help each other accomplish goals: Including outreach workers and police on the same team provides multiple benefits. The presence of outreach workers increased the officers’ credibility and perceived legitimacy in the homeless community. If homeless individuals feel uncomfortable speaking with an officer, they can be directed to the outreach worker. Having officers on the team also assures the community that public safety is a priority and that any criminal activity is being addressed.

On a daily basis, the Navigation Team goes out into the community and makes contact with homeless individuals and attempts to connect them with services. In its first year, the Navigation Team made approximately 8,000 contacts with 1,800 individuals, 35 percent of whom accepted case management and 30 percent of whom accepted shelter referrals. This is an improvement on the 3 to 5-percent referral rates prior to the formation of the Navigation Team.

In addition to increased referrals, positive word of mouth about the Navigation Team in the encampments has resulted in more individuals asking the Navigation Team for assistance.

Wanted: Engaging, personable officers with problem-solving skills: To find dedicated officers to work on the Navigation Team, a job position was posted throughout the Police Department, and applicants were interviewed. Before posting the position, police officials carefully considered which qualities they would seek in officers joining the Navigation Team, and decided to look for engaging, personable candidates with problem-solving and team-building skills.

Another important part of the Navigation Team’s success is its relationships with other city departments. In early 2017, Mayor Murray activated a homelessness emergency operation center that brought together the directors of different agencies to meet on a regular basis. The emergency operation center was expected to function for three months but lasted nine months. During that time, various city departments learned to communicate and coordinate their work to clean encampments, create shelters, manage contracts, work with the news media, etc.

Cell phone app helps keep track of homeless individuals: The Navigation Team is also able to track its efforts in working with the homeless community through a cell phone app. With this app, the Navigation Team can track where they have worked, which homeless persons they have contacted, what services they offered, and the outcomes of their visits. The data collected from those interactions helps inform the team’s prioritization of what encampments to visit. Outcomes are also tracked to determine how many individuals are moving into housing and which service providers produce stable outcomes.

Wet Shelters, Dry Shelters, “Housing First,” and Harm Reduction

For homeless persons who are struggling with an addiction to drugs and/or alcohol, finding shelter can be especially difficult if local shelters do not admit individuals who are under the influence of substances. These shelters are known as “dry” shelters, and their counterparts, where individuals are allowed to be intoxicated and, in some cases, consume substances, are referred to as “wet” shelters.

Dry shelters exclude many homeless persons: Chief Brian Allen from the Sparks, NV Police Department explained that dry shelters can be a barrier to services for people with an alcohol addiction. “Individuals who want to get into housing don’t want to follow the necessary rules and requirements of a provider that does not allow the individual to be intoxicated when they go into the shelters. So, dry shelters can be a barrier to getting them off the streets and into a shelter.”

Sergeant Russ Norris from the Concord, CA Police Department believes that wet shelters, while more resource-intensive and costly, are more successful and effective in the long run. “Dry shelters sound great on paper, but we have to get somebody sheltered before we can start providing the resources necessary to get them a permanent roof over their head. Making someone come into a shelter only when they are dry restricts us from access to a huge number of people.”

Cities are beginning to embrace the idea of wet shelters, as research has shown that they can be more effective in getting chronically homeless individuals to drink less³⁵ and to have other positive impacts, including fewer run-ins with police and improved health, social ties, and higher levels of satisfaction with life.³⁶

“Housing First” starts with a stable place to live: Additionally, a wet shelter is a form of “Housing First,” an approach to combat homelessness in which the immediate focus is to get an individual a stable place to live, followed by providing services and treatment. Housing First has been found effective in reducing homelessness, especially in individuals with co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorders.³⁷

Wet shelters are similar to the idea behind needle exchange programs: harm reduction. If individuals are going to drink or abuse drugs, it is better to provide a supervised environment where some of the harm may be mitigated. Contra Costa County, where Concord, CA is located, runs 214 beds in shelters, and all are run as a wet shelter, harm reduction model. Michael Fischer, Program Manager for Contra Costa Health, Housing and Homeless Services, explained how wet shelters promote harm reduction: “We’re reducing the harm to anybody entering our facility. If somebody’s intoxicated and wandering the streets, they could fall, hit their head, and be seriously injured. At our facility, we can take them to their bed and lay them down so they won’t get hurt.”



Sparks, NV Police Chief
Brian Allen

35. “The Wet House: Homeless People with Alcoholism Drink Less When Booze Is Allowed.” *Time Magazine*, January 20, 2012. <http://healthland.time.com/2012/01/20/the-wet-house-homeless-people-with-alcoholism-drink-less-when-booze-is-allowed/>

36. Reed, M. “Wet Shelters: The Benefits and Risks Associated With Alcohol-Administering Homeless Shelters.” *British Columbia, Cross Government Research, Policy and Practice Branch*, November 13, 2008. http://www.jedc.org/forms/wet_shelters_BCstudy.pdf

37. Tsemberis, S. “Housing First: The Pathways Model to End Homelessness for People with Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorders.” *Hazelden Publishing*: MN (2010). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/47669330_Housing_First_The_Pathways_Model_to_End_Homelessness_for_People_with_Mental_Illness_and_Addiction_Manual

greater responsibility in addressing homelessness issues. NPOs have become agency experts on the issue of homelessness and are able to educate and assist their fellow patrol officers. In Seattle, WA, patrol officers can refer homeless individuals to officers on the Navigation Team (made up of police officers and mental health clinicians), which frees patrol officers to respond to other calls.

Homeless Encampments Raise Difficult Questions

Homeless encampments pose a major challenge to law enforcement agencies. Encampments can be unhealthy places for the individuals living in them, and can also be harmful to the environment and the larger surrounding community. Encampments have posed health risks to inhabitants in San Diego and other cities that have experienced outbreaks of Hepatitis A. These sites can also damage the environment, especially when encampments are located along rivers where human waste and hazardous materials are disposed of improperly. Encampments also can foster low-level crime and disorder, which concern community members and business owners who live or work nearby.

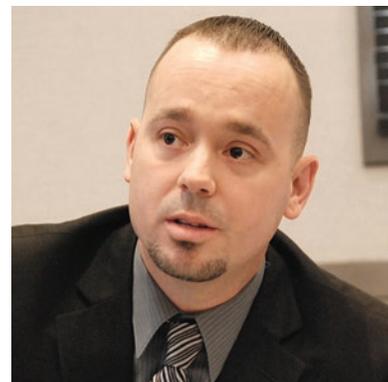
Philosophical issues about homeless persons' rights: Advocates for homeless persons argue that for some persons, homelessness is a choice that should be protected by law. Many people object to strategies that they consider “criminalization” of homelessness. In other cases, advocates say, homeless persons have mental illness or substance abuse issues, and they should be given real assistance, rather than being pushed out of one encampment and into another.³⁸

While many cities and police departments are moving toward programs to address the underlying causes of homelessness, one of the biggest remaining challenges is how to address the issue of encampments.

Closing an unsafe encampment in Anaheim: In Anaheim, CA, a two-mile stretch of the Santa Ana River Trail is home to 500 to 1,000 individuals. Orange County officials and the Orange County Sheriff's Department have been working to clean up the area. Part of this clean-up involves removing the individuals living in the area, as it is not safe for human habitation.³⁹ Lieutenant Frank Hale of the Anaheim Police Department said, “Although a few people might have viewed this is a temporary quick-fix, pedestrians and cyclists who frequently use the trail felt it was becoming increasingly dangerous.”

The Anaheim Police Department and the Orange County Sheriff's Office, along with outreach workers, posted notices and increased their presence in the area to notify individuals that the encampment would be cleared out. The decision to clear the encampment was difficult because there are few alternative places for individuals to go. According to Lieutenant Hale, Anaheim is

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Michael Fischer, Program Manager, Contra Costa, CA Health, Housing, and Homeless Services



Anaheim, CA Police Lieutenant Frank Hale

38. Chamard, S. “Homeless Encampments.” *Center for Problem-Oriented Policing*. (Guide No. 56: 2010). http://www.popcenter.org/problems/homeless_encampments/1

39. “Homeless Encampment near Angel Stadium in Anaheim Coming Down.” *ABC News 7*, January 22, 2018. <http://abc7.com/society/homeless-encampment-near-angel-stadium-coming-down/2977013/>

San Diego County's Response to Hepatitis A

In early 2017 in San Diego County, reports of an increase in Hepatitis A cases began to emerge. The county Health and Human Services Agency reported that 42 cases had been reported between November 2016 and April 2017, roughly four times the typical monthly average. San Diego County Undersheriff Mike Barnett said that the first sign the county might have been experiencing an issue with Hepatitis A was discovered by officials at the jail.

After the sheriff's office reported the issue to San Diego's Health and Human Services Agency, the county began to vaccinate police officers, sheriff's deputies, other first responders, and residents on a volunteer basis. Soon it was learned that the outbreak was spreading through the county's homeless population due to unsanitary conditions. Tens of thousands of vaccinations were administered to individuals on the street, by nurses in partnership with city and county law enforcement agencies.

On September 1, 2017, San Diego County declared a state of emergency due to the Hepatitis A outbreak.⁴⁰ The county Department of Sanitation was brought in to assist with trash removal, and to begin a program to spray bleach on surfaces that were potentially affected by this outbreak.

"As of January 9, 2018, there were more than 577 confirmed HEP A cases, 20 deaths, and 396 hospitalizations," San Diego Undersheriff Michael Barnett said at the PERF conference. However, the crisis quickly abated at that time. In mid-January, the county passed the first week without a new case reported, and on January 23, the county officially ended the state of emergency.⁴¹

Hepatitis Outbreak Prompts El Cajon to Ban Food Distribution in Parks

In October 2017, after San Diego County declared a Hepatitis A emergency, the city of El Cajon banned sharing food in city parks. City officials said that the ban would prevent people from consuming contaminated food that could transmit Hepatitis A. Mayor Bill Wells encouraged churches and other organizations to provide prepared food in their own kitchens and dining facilities, rather than in public parks.

Homeless persons and their advocates argued that the ban was a punitive measure, and formed a group called "Break the Ban." Approximately a dozen people were arrested distributing food in a park. But Mayor Wells said, "This has always been about preventing the spread of hepatitis. Ironically, it's the homeless that are most likely the ones who were most protected by this ban."⁴²

When San Diego County declared the public health emergency was over, El Cajon rescinded its ban.

40. "Local Public Health Emergency for Hepatitis A Outbreak Ratified by Board of Supervisors." *County News Center*, September 6, 2017. <https://www.countynewscenter.com/local-public-health-emergency-for-hepatitis-a-outbreak-ratified-by-board-of-supervisors/>

41. "Hepatitis A Outbreak." San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency. https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/phs/community_epidemiology/dc/Hepatitis_A/outbreak.html

42. "El Cajon ends ban on feeding homeless." *San Diego Union Tribune*, Jan. 23, 2018. <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/communities/east-county/sd-me-eastcounty-20180123-story.html>

the first city in Orange County to have a year-round multi-service homeless shelter. The 100 beds will hardly be enough to house the individuals who were living adjacent to the Santa Ana riverbed, and police have noted that many people are reluctant to accept shelter.

Some encampments allowed in Oakland: Oakland, CA has taken a different approach and sanctioned encampments in certain parts of the city. This means that on certain streets and in parks, the city has designated areas as encampments where people can live. Oakland has approximately 2,700 individuals experiencing homelessness and only 300 shelter beds, so there is a need for additional solutions. Recently, a homeless center opened with 20 “Tuff Sheds”—small structures that can be used for storage or adapted for use as housing. The 20 sheds can provide a temporary housing solution to a total of approximately 40 people.

While Oakland has largely sanctioned encampments, there are instances where an encampment must be closed. These decisions are left to the city council, which gives clear direction to the police department when abatement is needed. “In some of these encampments, we have rat infestation, or we have Hepatitis A beginning to break out,” Police Chief Anne Kirkpatrick said. “We are now vaccinating our officers for Hepatitis A to protect them.”

Encampments crop up in Honolulu: In Honolulu, a sanctioned encampment was attempted approximately 20 years ago. Police Chief Susan Ballard explained that “initially, it was working fine, but then it began to deteriorate. It turned into the Wild West, so we had to make the decision to not sanction encampments.” Even though the city no longer sanctions encampments, they still pop up around the island, Chief Ballard said. The police use “compassionate disruption” to enter the encampments and explain to the individuals living there that they need to dismantle the encampment. The individuals then have 24 hours to leave before the police return and clean up the area. However, encampments sometimes are re-established soon after they are taken down. “It’s an ongoing process, because all we’re really doing is moving people around,” Chief Ballard said.

A Hepatitis outbreak in Santa Cruz: Santa Cruz, CA Chief Andy Mills stressed the importance of collaboration in addressing these issues, especially when deciding what to do with encampments. Santa Cruz was the second city in California to experience a Hepatitis A outbreak in one of its homeless encampments. That encampment was dismantled and the city has been involved in creating a new encampment. However, homeless persons often move to other locations.⁴³ The city also has hired a homelessness coordinator.⁴⁴ “We have been working on a place that would be lawful for people to go and sleep in a controlled environment,” Chief Mills said. “This would be temporary until the city

43. “Camp cleanups shuffle Santa Cruz’s homeless population around city.” *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, Feb. 2, 2018. <http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/article/NE/20180202/NEWS/180209910>

44. “Santa Cruz declares homeless shelter crisis, hires homeless manager.” KSBW8, Feb. 9, 2018. <http://www.ksbw.com/article/santa-cruz-declares-homeless-shelter-crisis-hires-homeless-manager/16944143>

and county could purchase a more permanent solution with wraparound services available on site.”

Finding the best solutions for handling encampments can be a challenge. Police departments must balance the need for safety and health of all residents while also treating individuals experiencing homelessness humanely.

Court Rulings in California Result in Strict Rules Limiting Seizure of Homeless Persons’ Property

Rules for handling a homeless person’s belongings have become a complex issue for law enforcement agencies in California because of a series of court cases holding that homeless persons’ property cannot be seized without limits. Three major cases are involved:

- **Cruel and unusual punishment:** In the 2006 case *Jones et al. v. City of Los Angeles*, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, which has jurisdiction over California and eight other Western states, concluded that criminalizing homelessness was cruel and unusual punishment:

“[J]ust as the Eighth Amendment prohibits the infliction of criminal punishment on an individual for being a drug addict, or for involuntary public drunkenness that is an unavoidable consequence of being a chronic alcoholic without a home, the Eighth Amendment [ban on cruel and unusual punishments] prohibits the City from punishing involuntary sitting, lying, or sleeping on public sidewalks that is an unavoidable consequence of being human and homeless without shelter in the City of Los Angeles.”⁴⁵

As part of the reasoning for its decision, the 9th Circuit added:

“The loss of [homeless persons’] possessions when they are arrested and held in custody is particularly injurious because they have so few resources and may find that everything they own has disappeared by the time they return to the street.”⁴⁶

- **Homeless persons have no choice but to leave possessions unattended:** Six years later, in another case involving issues of homelessness, *Tony Lavan et al. v. City of Los Angeles*,⁴⁷ the Ninth Circuit upheld strict limitations on the authority of police to confiscate and immediately destroy the possessions of homeless persons. The court noted that homeless persons often have no choice but to leave their possessions unattended on public sidewalks while they “attend to necessary tasks such as eating, showering, and using restrooms.”

45. *Jones et al. v. City of Los Angeles*, U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit, 444 F3d 1118 (2006). <http://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-9th-circuit/1490887.html>

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Tony Lavan et al. v. City of Los Angeles*, U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit, No. 11-56253 (2012). <http://cdn.ca9.uscourts.gov/datastore/opinions/2012/09/05/11-56253.pdf>

As a result, the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California had issued an injunction barring the City of Los Angeles from seizing such property “absent an objectively reasonable belief that it is abandoned, presents an immediate threat to public health or safety, or is evidence of a crime, or contraband.” The District Court injunction held that unless there was “an immediate threat to public health or safety,” any such seized property must be maintained in a secure location for at least 90 days, in order to give homeless persons an opportunity to retrieve their belongings.

The City of Los Angeles appealed the ruling, but the Ninth Circuit denied the appeal, saying:

“The City has ... asked us to declare that the unattended property of homeless persons is uniquely beyond the reach of the Constitution, so that the government may seize and destroy with impunity the worldly possessions of a vulnerable group in our society. Because even the most basic reading of our Constitution prohibits such a result, the City’s appeal is denied.”

- **Court provides a detailed list of what Los Angeles cannot do:** In 2016, the Los Angeles City Council approved an ordinance requiring that homeless persons’ tents be taken down between 6 a.m. and 9 p.m., and limiting the amount of property a homeless person can have on the street. A number of homeless persons and advocacy organizations filed suit, alleging that police and other city employees had been cordoning off areas where homeless persons were located and bringing in trash trucks to dispose of tents, blankets, clothing, and other property, and that the city employees were not protecting property such as medications and personal items, making it difficult or impossible for the owners to retrieve their property.

The U.S. District Court for the Central District of California quickly issued an injunction strictly limiting the City of Los Angeles’ ability to confiscate, destroy, or seize and store the property of homeless individuals.⁴⁸

Police have created protocols for adhering to the court rulings: Participants at the PERF conference discussed the policies and procedures they have established to comply with the court rulings, with specific rules for temporary seizure of various types of property and for ensuring that homeless persons can retrieve their property. In the past, items such as tents and blankets often were seized and destroyed with little or no documentation. Today, large quantities of property are stored. Exceptions allow police and other city employees to destroy property if it is infested with vermin or otherwise presents a public health risk. The Hepatitis A outbreak in a number of California communities also has affected some decisions about property.

Homeless Outreach Teams take an active role in guiding homeless persons through the process of retrieving property, explaining why certain pieces of

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48. *Mitchell et al. v. City of Los Angeles et al.* U.S. District Court for the Central District of California. Case No. CV 16-01750 SJO (GJSx). Order Granting Plaintiff’s Application for Preliminary Injunction. April 13, 2016. <https://lafla.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Mitchell-Preliminary-Injunction-Text.pdf>

How Indio (CA) Is Reducing Homelessness and Evaluating Its Progress

Since 2013, Indio, CA has operated the Community Outreach Resource Program (CORP)—a multi-disciplinary, data-driven approach to combating homelessness. When CORP started in 2013, there were 256 unsheltered persons living in Indo. By 2017, that number had dropped to 89, a 65-percent reduction.

The CORP initiative begins with the Indio Police Department and its two Quality of Life officers. They focus on reaching out to and understanding the homeless community in Indio, and identifying individuals who might be good candidates for the treatment and service components of the program. The target population is homeless individuals who have mental illness and/or substance abuse issues, and who have had previous encounters with the police and the justice system.

Each homeless client is assigned a counselor to guide the person through the program: Based on their individual needs, clients voluntarily enroll in an extensive long-term recovery program at one of the CORP service providers. There are currently five

community-based service providers, including the Coachella Valley Rescue Mission, which shelters more than 200 men, women and children in both transitional and emergency housing. Each CORP client is assigned a designated counselor to help guide the individual through the program and to act as a liaison with the Quality of Life officer, who in turn serves as the liaison with the justice system.

A particular focus of CORP is helping people who successfully complete the recovery program to reintegrate into society. The Coachella Valley Rescue Mission also offers an after-care program for individuals who have graduated from the CORP program. This includes substance recovery meetings, as well as continued mental health, substance abuse, medical, housing and employment services. Program graduates can also work on the community's "food box" distribution program.

In addition, the police department works with the district attorney, public defender and the courts to forgive any outstanding fees or fines that program graduates may have. This increases the chances that program graduates can get driver's licenses and locate jobs and housing. To date, 115 CORP clients have had approximately \$300,000 in fines and fees dismissed.

Homeless Persons Express High Levels of Satisfaction After Completing the Program

CORP is undergoing a rigorous process and outcome evaluation led by Dr. Cody Telep of Arizona State University.

Initial findings suggest that after participating in the program, clients have better housing, employment status, and quality of life. And exit interviews indicate that they have a better view of the police department and other components of the justice system after participating in the program (see chart, next page):



Indio, CA

Riverside County (125 east of Los Angeles)

Population (est.): **90,000**

Area: **29 square miles**

Median household income: **\$49,500**

Percentage of persons in poverty: **18.9 percent**

Most recent Point in Time (homelessness) count: **89** (2017, unsheltered only)

Agency Ratings

On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you rate your interactions with the following agencies and groups?

Agency	Entrance Interview Mean (Std. Dev.) n = 48	Exit Interview Mean (Std. Dev.) n = 40
Indio Police Department*	6.32 (3.22)	8.60 (2.36)
Public Defender's Office*	7.51 (2.09)	9.11 (1.53)
Riverside Co. Probation*	7.70 (2.12)	9.27 (1.72)
Service Provider	9.36 (1.22)	9.71 (.70)
CORP Overall	N/A	9.56 (1.09)

*pre-post t-test $p < .05$

Source: Dr. Cody Telep, Arizona State University

CORP Partners

- Indio Police Department
- Riverside County District Attorney's Office
- Riverside County Law Offices of the Public Defender
- Superior Court of California-Larson Justice Center
- Riverside County Indigent Defense Program
- Riverside County Department of Public Social Services
- Riverside University Health System
- Riverside County Probation Department
- Coachella Valley Rescue Mission (CVRM)
- Mama's House
- Martha's Village & Kitchen
- ABC Recovery Center
- Victory Outreach of Indio (faith-based)

“People tend to think of social workers as being compassionate and caring, but that’s not the typical role for the police. When the Coachella Valley Rescue Mission first started doing outreach with the two Indio resource officers, people would see the police and start to run. Now, two years later, I don’t even have to go out and do the engagement, because the officers engage, they build trust, they get people into rehab or detox, they get them to the mental health services—they just bring the people to us.

“We’re collaborating, which is working. We have on-site, 24-7 wraparound services, including medical, mental health, and substance abuse treatment.”

— **Tom Cox, Director of Programs, Coachella Valley Rescue Mission**



Tom Cox

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“I think a key to a program like this is selecting the right officers. They need to have a lot of tenacity—they can’t take ‘no’ for an answer.

“They also need patience. My officers will approach the same person again and again, saying, ‘Let us take you over to the Mission for a meal.’ At some point, that person will finally say, ‘Yes, I want to take advantage of the services you are offering.’

“So persistence really is a key along with strong collaboration across the criminal justice sectors and our community-based organizations like the Coachella Valley Rescue Mission—we just won’t give up on people.”

— **Chief Michael Washburn, Indio Police Department**

“One of the things we focused on in the evaluation is how people who go through the Community Outreach Resource Program view the program and view the criminal justice system.

“So we have them complete a survey at the time they apply to be part of the program, and then another survey at the end.

“We’ve seen improvements in how they view their quality of life, and also improvements in their trust in police and their belief that the police are there to help them.

“Those effects are also for other parts of the justice system.”

— **Dr. Cody Telep, Arizona State University**



Chief Michael Washburn



Dr. Cody Telep

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property are destroyed, and in some cases, helping homeless persons replace lost property.

San Diego rents storage units where homeless persons can store property: San Diego Police Chief Shelley Zimmerman⁴⁹ noted that San Diego was planning an innovative program to help homeless persons manage their property. On March 20, 2018, the City Council voted to approve a storage facility that homeless persons will be able to use to store their property.⁵⁰

Homeless Courts Now Operating In More than 30 Jurisdictions

Jurisdictions across the country have created a number of different “specialty courts” designed to provide assistance to certain categories of low-level and

49. Chief Zimmerman retired on March 1, 2018.

50. “San Diego City Council approves homeless storage facility.” CBS8.com. March 21, 2018. <http://www.cbs8.com/story/37772452/san-diego-city-council-approves-homeless-storage-facility>

first-time offenders. Drug Courts and Veterans Courts are well-known variations of this model. A number of jurisdictions have applied this concept to homeless offenders, because many of these offenses committed by homeless people are misdemeanor nuisance and quality-of-life violations that can be handled more effectively through alternatives to traditional judicial proceedings.

The goal is to break the cycle of repeated arrests: Homeless Courts provide homeless persons with access to treatment services and programs. Ideally, the services help to reduce the chances that a homeless person will repeatedly be arrested and charged with minor offenses. While the rules and requirements for entering Homeless Court differ across jurisdictions, the courts operate under the same basic premises. An individual who meets the qualifications is offered the opportunity to participate in Homeless Court. After a judge hears the case, a plan is outlined that includes programs and services designed to address the underlying issues of the individual's homelessness, such as Alcoholics Anonymous meetings or sessions with a mental health professional. Upon successful completion of the plan, offenders may have their charges expunged from their records.

The first Homeless Court Program was established in San Diego in 1989. Since then, at least 32 other jurisdictions have created similar programs.⁵¹

Concord, CA recently expanded its Community Court program in order to address the needs of homeless persons. The court was established as a voluntary program designed to divert first-time and nuisance offenders from the criminal justice system and to identify alternative dispositions for long-term problems. The Community Court has operated since 2013 and has diverted 420 criminal cases. Participants in Community Court agree to complete community service or attend diversion classes in order to have their cases set aside.

Working with persons who lack a permanent address: Sergeant Russ Norris of the Concord Police Department explained how the city was able to make the Community Court available to homeless persons. "Until recently, the Concord Community Court had not had much success reaching the homeless population, because the program is initiated with an invitation to participate. Because homeless persons do not have fixed addresses, officers had trouble delivering those invitations. However, the recent launch of Contra Costa County's homeless outreach program—Coordinated Outreach, Referral and Engagement Team (CORE)⁵²—has allowed us to correct this problem. As of January 2018, the CORE teams can now deliver Community Court invitations to individuals experiencing homelessness."

To allow direct and easy access to this service, the Concord Police Department has set up a special Community Court session held at the homeless shelter. Individuals who agree to participate in court are directed to engage with services that fit their condition in exchange for the criminal case being set aside. There are no fines with this version of Community Court.

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Concord, CA Police Sgt.
Russ Norris

51. "Homeless Courts." *American Bar Association*. Accessed 2/16/18. https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_services/homelessness_poverty/initiatives/homeless_courts.html

52. CORE "works to engage and stabilize homeless individuals living outside through consistent outreach to facilitate and/or deliver health and basic need services and secure permanent housing." For more information, see: <https://cchealth.org/h3/services.php>

Cambridge, MA Is Tracking Homelessness With a Focus on Services and Relentless Follow-Up

Home to Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA is often thought of as a leafy college town. However, the city of about 110,000 (whose daytime population swells to about 200,000) also attracts a sizable and diverse homeless population. The 2017 Point in Time count registered just over 450 individuals in emergency or transitional housing in Cambridge and another 67 who were unsheltered.

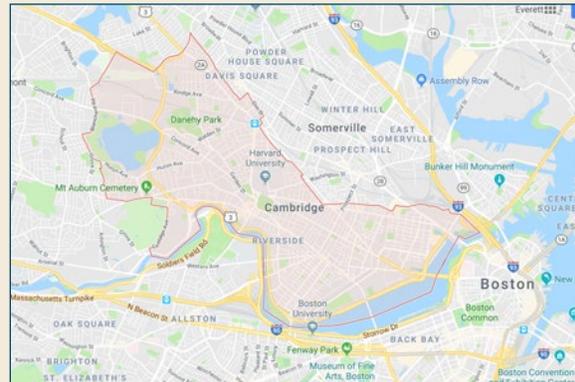
According to city officials, Cambridge's homeless population includes people from the greater Boston area who are attracted to the range of services that Cambridge offers. These include a special "Y2Y shelter"⁵³ for young people between the ages of 18 and 25, as well as one of only two "wet shelters" in Massachusetts, where individuals who are actively using drugs or alcohol can find temporary housing (see page 44 for a discussion of wet vs. dry shelters).

In the spring and summer, Cambridge also attracts many "travelers"—mostly young people who venture from city to city, living on the streets or sleeping on the couches of people they meet.

20% of Cambridge officers focus on special populations: Just over a decade ago, the Cambridge Police Department fundamentally changed its basic approach to individuals experiencing homelessness and other vulnerable populations. Twenty percent of the department's sworn officers now have a specialty assignment that focuses on youth, mental illness, homelessness, or other special populations. The police department established a two-officer Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) in 2005. And while the same two officers have been on the team from the start, their focus has shifted from primarily transporting individuals to hospitals and shelters to a problem-solving, case management approach.

In Cambridge, the Homeless Outreach Team is supported by beat officers, all of whom receive regular in-service and roll-call training on the services and resources available to homeless people and other vulnerable populations. Patrol officers are expected not simply to hand off cases to the HOT team, but to engage with and assist homeless individuals themselves. "Service provision is woven into everything the Cambridge Police Department does," Commissioner Branville Bard said. "Patrol knows what to do when they have a vulnerable person."

Weekly meetings to review cases of homeless persons: This service-driven mindset among officers is supported by a citywide multi-disciplinary group that ensures that a range of agencies—not just the police—are focusing on homelessness in a coordinated, strategic manner. Every Wednesday morning, a team consisting of police, public health and mental health officials, and other stakeholders meets to review individual cases that the HOT team, beat officers, and other agencies are working on. The group focuses on the progress of homeless individuals who are high users of services, as well as those who are low utilizers of services but at high risk for negative outcomes.



Cambridge, MA

Middlesex County (3.5 miles west of Boston)

Population (est.): **110,000**

Area: **7.1 square miles**

Median household income: **\$83,122**

Percentage of persons in poverty: **14.0 percent**

Homeless population: **450 sheltered and 67 unsheltered (2017)**

53. See "Y2Y, Young Adults United to End Homelessness." <https://www.y2yharvardsquare.org/>

After reviewing the cases, the group splits up and heads into the community to make contact with the identified individuals, check on their well-being, and try to get them into appropriate services. Involvement and leadership from the City Manager's Office help to ensure that agencies are coordinating with one another and following through on promises.

“Much the same way that we address crime with relentless follow-up and the CompStat model, we do the same thing with protecting our vulnerable populations, including our homeless community.

“Every Wednesday morning, a multi-disciplinary group is sitting around the table, using a case management approach and focusing on our high utilizers of services and on our high-risk, low-utilizers of services.

“We meet every Wednesday to make sure that each agency did what they said they were going to do on the previous Wednesday.”

— **Commissioner Branville Bard, Cambridge Police Department**

“In the past, the approach to homelessness was to arrest and jail individuals, only to have them back on the street in a short period of time. Now, the Police Department has come to realize we can't arrest our way out of this.

“Some homeless people need to go to jail, but most are better served through services we can offer them.”

— **Superintendent Christine Elow, Cambridge Police Department**

“I'm sensitive to the issue of, if the police step in and take over, does mean that other people step back?

“I would say we're incredibly fortunate in Cambridge that our experience has been otherwise. The police stepping in and taking a very broad view of their role has resulted in excellent partnerships, both with other city departments and all of our community agencies.”

— **Assistant City Manager Ellen Semonoff, City of Cambridge**

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Ventura, CA has involved its homeless community in the city's community intervention courts through its chronic offender program. Individuals who commit five different minor offenses within a year are known as “chronic minor offenders” and are eligible to enter into the community intervention court. One judge hears all of these cases on a dedicated day of the week. The ultimate goal of the community intervention court is to use the justice system to get individuals into treatment.

Training Programs for Police Officers Who Work with Homeless Persons

This section highlights police training of officers to assist homeless persons in four jurisdictions: Los Angeles County; Broward County, FL; Las Vegas; and Miami.

Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department Gives First Responders Thorough Training on Homelessness

The Los Angeles County Homeless Initiative includes training for the Sheriff's Department, in a program known as "Homeless Training for First Responders." Deputies are trained to safely interact with the homeless population in a way that is focused on providing resources and assistance, rather than enforcement.

The training includes the following modules:

- Understanding the Homeless Population,
- Stages of Homelessness,
- Approach and Contact,
- Enforcement and Collaboration,
- Leveraging Available Resources, and
- Legal Considerations and Potential Liabilities.

At training sessions, first responders are educated on the various backgrounds of homeless individuals, including veterans, persons with mental illness, "transitional age youth" (teens and young adults, particularly those who are in transition from state custody or foster care to independent living), LGBT persons, and others. Discussions also focus on the challenges faced by homeless individuals, including hunger, sleep deprivation, domestic violence, assaults, substance abuse, and others. Another topic is various patterns regarding how and why individuals slip into homelessness.

Every encounter with a homeless person can improve the situation—or make it worse: Emphasis is placed on communication, compassion, and understanding that strategies for building rapport and cooperation offer the best chance for achieving results. Deputies are encouraged to understand the importance of how they handle any particular encounter with a homeless person, because any encounter may either build rapport, or create more problems for the homeless person and undermine the efforts of other deputies who may interact with the homeless individual in the future.

Deputies are also encouraged to work with homeless populations and stakeholders on long-term solutions, and to view joint efforts as *including* law enforcement, but not necessarily being *led by* law enforcement.

Award-Winning Training in Broward County, FL Begins with Crisis Intervention

Most training programs to teach officers how to work with homeless persons begin with Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training, which is defined as "bringing together law enforcement, mental health providers, hospital emergency departments, and individuals with mental illness and their families to improve responses to people in crisis."⁵⁴

54. National Alliance on Mental Illness. "What Is CIT?" <https://www.nami.org/Law-Enforcement-and-Mental-Health/What-Is-CIT>

The Broward County Sheriff's Office (BCSO) has taken this approach one step farther by offering a separate 40-hour Homeless Outreach Initiative training that covers the causes of homelessness, prevention, needs assessments, continuity of care, and legal issues. Officers who complete both CIT training and the additional homelessness training are designated as Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) specialists.

The Broward Sheriff's Office is recognized as a leader in homelessness training throughout Florida, and trains other agencies' personnel as well as its own deputies.⁵⁵ The CIT training is conducted once per month, and the HOT training is conducted once per quarter.

Using technology to manage information about homeless individuals and improve services: The HOT training also integrates with the Homeless Management Information System, which gathers data on clients and on the provision of services to homeless persons, homeless families, and persons at risk of homelessness.⁵⁶ Agencies that provide services to homeless persons use HMIS applications to coordinate their work and serve clients more effectively.

"Our training goes into motivational interviewing," Broward Sheriff's Captain Scott Russell said. "Learning how to be good listeners is a big part of the training. We stress that deputies need to stop 'listening to respond.' Instead, they should 'listen to *understand*.'"

Las Vegas Uses Field Training to Teach New Recruits to Work with Homeless Persons

The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department takes a somewhat different approach to training officers in how to work with homeless persons. The department instructs officers in the Field Training Program to contact a member of the homeless community once every shift, even if it is just to introduce themselves. The goal of making these contacts is to acquaint new recruits with homeless persons and help them to understand the causes and nature of homelessness. The officers are taught to use their communications skills, to be familiar with the resources that are available for referring homeless persons to services, and to understand that many homeless people experience mental illness and substance addictions.

Building rapport and sharing resources: "What we've done is spread it out throughout the whole city," said Las Vegas Assistant Sheriff Charles Hank. "We had challenges getting the academy to cover this, so we looked at another approach where the officers are making consensual contacts and interviewing homeless persons. What we expect from them is to go out, contact these people, share the resources that are available, and at the same time they're developing their communication skills."

As in other cities, many homeless persons in Las Vegas are resistant to

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Broward County, FL Sheriff's Capt. Scott Russell



Las Vegas Assistant Sheriff Charles Hank

55. IACP Human Rights and Civil Rights Award 2014 Winners." <http://www.theiacp.org/HCRAwardwinners2014>

56. "Homeless Management Information System." HUD Exchange. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hmis/>

Long Beach, CA Is Using a Multi-Disciplinary, Data-Driven Approach to Combat Homelessness

Like other major cities, Long Beach, CA faces challenges with serious crime. But in community surveys, residents consistently identify homelessness as the top priority they want their local government to address.

20-percent reduction in homelessness in 2 years:

The city of Long Beach is addressing homelessness through a multi-disciplinary, data-driven approach that is showing some positive results. City officials report that the number of people experiencing homelessness has declined more than 20 percent over the last two years, at a time when many surrounding jurisdictions and California as a whole have seen their homeless populations increase.⁵⁷

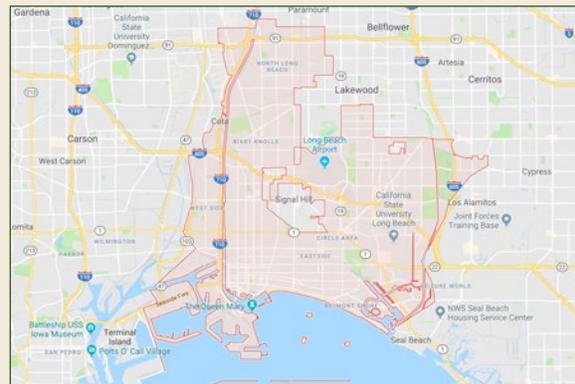
Unlike most cities, Long Beach has its own health department: Two key factors in Long Beach's success are (1) the availability of resources and (2) interagency coordination, led by the city's health department.

Long Beach is one of only three cities in California to have its own health department; most municipalities work with a county health agency. The Department of Health and Human Services is the lead agency on homelessness in Long Beach, and it is tasked with inter-agency coordination among the various departments (including the police) that are involved in addressing the problem.

The health department manages an annual \$8.5 million continuum-of-care grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which funds more than a dozen nonprofit agencies that offer permanent and transitional housing and support services to persons experiencing homelessness. Among the service providers is the Century Villages at Cabrillo, which developed former U.S. Navy housing into units for approximately 1,000 individuals. These residents have access to a multi-agency service center, along with case managers and outreach personnel.

Specialist officers as well as patrol officers work on homelessness: In recent years, Long Beach has focused on identifying individuals most in need of assistance and trying to get them into services. Several agencies, including the police department, play a role here. The department has quality-of-life officers, one of whom was homeless himself at one time. The officers work closely with the homeless community and service providers, and they partner with a mental health clinician from Los Angeles County, who assists with outreach and service provision.

Despite the specialization by experts, Long Beach Police Chief Robert Luna emphasizes that “all of our patrol officers work homelessness—there's no way around it. With as many calls for service as we get, how many contacts we make, everybody is trained to address issues related to homelessness.”



Long Beach, CA

Los Angeles County (20 miles south of Los Angeles)

Population (est.): **475,000**

Area: **51.5 square miles**

Median household income: **\$55,151**

Percentage of persons in poverty: **20.3 percent**

Most recent Point in Time (homelessness)

count: **1,863** (2017)

57. “Long Beach cut 21 percent of its homeless population in 2 years. Here’s how.” 89.3 KPCC/Southern California Public Radio, April 27, 2017. <https://www.scpr.org/news/2017/04/27/71212/long-beach-cut-21-percent-of-its-homeless-populati/>

Long Beach also has a Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) that meets at least monthly (sometimes more often) to examine the top 10 to 15 cases of homeless individuals who are in need of services but are not connecting with them. A case manager is assigned to oversee outreach and service provision for each of the individuals targeted by the MDT.

Fewer than half of homeless “high-frequency arrestees” had accessed services: Long Beach has placed a particular emphasis on individuals who are homeless and are frequently involved in the criminal justice system. The city’s Innovation Team (iTeam), which is funded by a grant from Bloomberg Philanthropies, began analyzing this nexus in 2017.⁵⁸ The iTeam looked at five years’ worth of arrest data, and found that 5 percent of the arrestee population had been booked or cited 11 or more times, with the most common charges being quality-of-life offenses such as possessing an open container or drinking alcohol in public, loitering in parks and beaches, and failure to appear on a warrant. The iTeam also made two other interesting discoveries: approximately half of the high-frequency arrestees did not have permanent addresses, and of those, fewer than half had ever accessed homeless services. The iTeam concluded that connecting these high-frequency offenders with the appropriate services could break the cycle of homelessness and crime.

Next, Long Beach focused on ensuring that all of the partner agencies involved in the response to homelessness were sharing data with one another. The city established a unique data-sharing agreement that provides access to critical information but is compliant with HIPAA and other privacy regulations. The city also created a secure data warehouse to facilitate the collection and sharing of data, and it is using technology to provide police officers and other front-line personnel with ready access to the information they need. (See page 63 for more details on Long Beach’s data sharing and technology innovations.)

Once candidates for services have been identified, city agencies, including the police department, begin the arduous work of reaching out to homeless individuals to try to get them housed and into services and treatment. Long Beach also operates a multi-service center, a coordinated entry point where homeless individuals can walk in and receive immediate services and develop a plan for longer-term assistance. According to Teresa Chandler, manager of human services in the Long Beach Department of Health and Human Services, it takes up to 17 contacts on average to get a person who has been living outside to say they are ready to start the process of being housed.

“The key for us was that the community didn’t look to the police department specifically to handle the problem of homelessness. They wanted the entire city government to handle it.

“In Long Beach, for the last decade or so—Los Angeles County Sheriff Jim McDonnell being my predecessor here as chief—we have really pushed the idea that homelessness is a public health issue and a challenge that we have to take on collectively with our many partners.”

— **Chief Robert Luna, Long Beach (CA) Police Department**

“Ten years ago, people were pointing fingers. Now, there is a citywide team in place that feels like they’re in this together and are working together.”

— **Tracy Colunga, Long Beach Innovation Team Director**



Tracy Colunga

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58. i-team Update to City Council. Long Beach Innovation Team, October 10, 2017. <http://innovatelb.com/assets/city-council-presentation---public-safety.pdf>

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“The Health and Human Services Department has been able to work very closely with our police department, fire department, parks and recreation, public works, City Attorney’s Office, and the libraries to form a true inter-departmental coordination, which really focuses on getting people connected to housing and addressing the issues of homelessness.”

— **Teresa Chandler, Manager of Human Services,
Long Beach (CA)**



Teresa Chandler

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accepting services, but by building rapport with homeless persons, officers eventually succeed in some cases and help homeless persons get help.

Miami Training Is Based on a Landmark Court Case

Training of police officers in Miami on homelessness issues is based largely on the findings of a federal court in a landmark 1992 case, *Pottinger et al. v. City of Miami*. In that case, the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida found that it was unconstitutional for the City of Miami to “criminalize homelessness” by arresting persons for behaviors associated with homelessness, such as sleeping outdoors, because the arrested persons had no alternatives for those behaviors.⁵⁹

There was additional litigation over the Pottinger ruling, and a detailed agreement was reached in 1998 specifying the essential activities of life that may be conducted in public areas of the city. Changes to the agreement were made in 2013, and additional proposed changes provoked controversy in 2015.⁶⁰

Major Wayne Jones of the Miami Beach Police Department said that the agreement has been refined over the years. “For example, in the original agreement, homeless residents were allowed to start small fires and cook outdoors, because cooking is a life-sustaining activity,” Major Jones said. “But under the amendments made to the agreement in 2013, cooking outdoors in a public place is no longer allowed.” The Miami Beach Police Department has voluntarily adopted the guidelines for the City of Miami resulting from the Pottinger case, and ensures that its personnel understand the guidelines.

59. *Pottinger et al. v. City of Miami*. 810 F. Supp. 1551 (1992). U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida. <http://osaka.law.miami.edu/~schnably/pottinger/pottinger.html>

60. “Miami commission defers vote on controversial homeless camping law.” *Miami Herald*, March 12, 2015. <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/article13805360.html>

Innovative Uses of Technology and Data Sharing

As jurisdictions look to implement comprehensive, cross-disciplinary approaches to combating homelessness, they are recognizing the importance of collecting and sharing data. At the *Critical Issues* conference, participants described innovative uses of technology that are helping them to understand and respond to homelessness.

Several jurisdictions, for example, are using mobile applications and mapping systems to collect data on the homeless individuals in their communities, the locations where they are living, and the services they are accessing.

21-question survey in Vacaville: In Vacaville, CA, Community Response Unit officers collect information about homeless individuals they encounter using a 21-question survey loaded on their smartphones. The voluntary questionnaire covers a range of information, including how long the person has been homeless, what factors led the person to become homeless, what brought the person to Vacaville, and past experiences with law enforcement and service providers. This Enhanced Homeless Community Survey provides officials with a more accurate, real-time count of the homeless population, and it helps them plan more effective responses to individual cases. (See pages 64-65 for more information on Vacaville’s approach to homelessness.)

“Clarity Cards” to access services in Las Vegas: In Las Vegas, officials issue “Clarity Cards” to individuals experiencing homelessness. To access services such as meals, housing, clothing, and haircuts from local nonprofit organizations and other providers, individuals must show their card. Clarity Cards are connected with the Homeless Management Information System used in Nevada and other Western states. The system helps officials track the specific services that individuals access, as well as larger service use patterns.

An app for tracking homelessness data in Seattle: The Seattle Police Department worked with the city’s Information Technology department to build an app that is used by the city’s “Navigation Teams,” which consist of police officers and mental health clinicians who focus on offering services in homeless encampments. The app tracks locations that the team visited, individuals they contacted, services offered, and outcomes of the visit. By pulling in data on calls for police service, community complaints and other information, the app also helps the Navigation Teams prioritize which locations they will prioritize for intervention.

GIS mapping apps to monitor far-flung locations of homeless encampments: Police in other jurisdictions—including Colorado Springs, CO and San Diego County, CA—are using GIS mapping applications to capture the locations of homeless encampments. Members of the Colorado Springs Police Department’s Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) use their smartphones to collect information about locations and size of encampments.

Because Colorado Springs spans 200 square miles, with numerous hiking trails and open spaces ideal for setting up camps, the maps provide all team members with a visual representation of camps. This information is used to support everyday outreach by the HOT team, and in the event of major weather



In October 2016, Vacaville police worked to reunify a homeless man with his family in Hawaii, who were able to find him housing and a job. With a grant from a foundation, police arranged an airline flight, and Sergeant David Kellis drove the man to the airport.

events such as blizzards, flash flooding or wildfires, the maps can be shared with others to guide the deployment of emergency resources.

“Covering the large geographic area that we’re responsible for, it’s virtually impossible for our Homeless Outreach Team to be able to get out to all of the encampments in the event of a weather emergency.

“A lot of our patrol officers don’t know the depths of where these camps are, so we send the GIS map out to the different area commands, and they can safely deploy their patrol resources out to the hazardous areas when there is an emergency.”

— **Sgt. Curtis Hasling, Colorado Springs Police Department**

Sharing the burden of calls for service more effectively: In other jurisdictions, police agencies are looking more closely at calls-for-service data in order to determine the most appropriate response to individual calls. They are finding that, in many cases, it may be more appropriate for a health or social service agency to respond to a call for service, and not the police department.

In mid-January, the San Francisco Police Department launched its Healthy Streets Command Center, which it modeled after a similar approach being used in Seattle. At the Healthy Streets Command Center, officials from a variety of city departments—including police, public health, and homelessness—triage calls for service as they come in, and collectively determine which agency, or combination of agencies, is best suited to respond. (See page 66 for more information on the Healthy Streets Command Center initiative.)

HIPAA often limits information-sharing: While information-sharing among different agencies is critical to an effective response to homelessness, participants at the *Critical Issues* meeting noted that laws such as HIPAA (the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) can severely restrict the amount and types of information that can be shared across different agencies. In general, police department data on contacts with individuals who are homeless can be readily shared with partner agencies. However, information collected by others, including health, mental health, and drug treatment entities, cannot always be shared with the police.

This situation can be frustrating for police officers who work closely with homeless persons, because they lack a complete picture of the barriers the individuals are facing and the full range of services they are receiving. Police officials are quick to point out that they are not looking for personal information on specific diagnoses, medications, or treatments. Rather, they are seeking information on contacts with different service providers. That way, if an officer encounters a homeless person in need or in crisis, the officer can coordinate with the appropriate providers to determine the best course of action.

Long Beach addresses HIPAA concerns by “combining” departments: One jurisdiction that is addressing the issue of data-sharing is Long Beach, CA. The city’s multi-agency approach to homelessness is led by the Department of Health and Human Services and is supported by a special “Innovation Team”



Sgt. Curtis Hasling

funded by a grant from Bloomberg Philanthropies. (See pages 58-60 for details on Long Beach's comprehensive, data-driven approach to homelessness.)

As the city began looking at individuals who were high utilizers of city services, they discovered that staff members in some city agencies were hesitant to share basic information with other departments because of concerns over violating HIPAA and other protections. So the program partners brought in the city attorney and drafted an administrative regulation that deems the city of Long Beach a single legal entity for purposes of data-sharing. This arrangement allows 24 city departments to share data on high utilizers of city services—including names, dates of birth, contacts with city agencies, and services rendered. The next step is to create a data warehouse where information from multiple agencies can be stored in a single location and accessed by personnel from various departments when they encounter homeless persons. With access to information about past services, police and other service providers can make more informed decisions about future assistance.

“Long Beach is building a data warehouse. Our different city departments that have distinct data systems will start to load their information into the data warehouse. On the back end, when someone types in ‘John Doe,’ they can see how many contacts John Doe had with fire, police, homeless outreach teams, and the like.

“Now we can triage around these individuals, and provide a more comprehensive system of accountability and wrap-around services.”

— Tracy Colunga, City of Long Beach Innovation Team Director

Making it possible for officers to know about past contacts a homeless person has had with police and service agencies: Long Beach is benefiting from another unique data sharing system called GUIDES (Government User Integrated Diversion Enhancement System). Developed by the Long Beach City Prosecutor's Office, GUIDES is designed to equip police officers with information they need to make informed decisions when interacting with homeless persons.

(The idea for GUIDES grew out of an earlier system developed by the prosecutor's office directed at gang members. That system took information on stay-away orders and other restrictions that courts placed on gang members, and made it available to officers in the field. In three years, Long Beach police increased their arrests for gang court order violations by 760 percent, because officers had ready access to information about what certain gang members were not permitted to do.)

Similarly, GUIDES focuses on court diversion actions, allowing officers to know how many times a homeless person has been diverted from the justice system or connected to services, either through court diversion, pre-filing diversion, or pre-booking diversion. This information helps police officers and other first responders to quickly determine if a homeless individual is already receiving services and what services may be most appropriate moving forward.

>> continued on page 67

Vacaville’s Enhanced Survey Measures The Size and Nature of the Homeless Community

In May 2016, using a grant from the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, the Vacaville, CA Police Department created a three-person Community Response Unit (CRU) to address a variety of quality-of-life issues, including homelessness.

One of the early priorities of the CRU was to assess the nature and extent of the homelessness problem. In the past, different data collection systems—primarily, the annual Point in Time count by the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Education’s count of homeless school children—had produced vastly different estimates of homelessness in Vacaville.

Rather than rely on an annual, single-day count of the homeless population, the CRU decided it needed an ongoing tool to track the unit’s interactions with homeless individuals over time.

The idea was not merely to count how many homeless individuals are in Vacaville. Rather, it was to collect more detailed information about these individuals, so that CRU officers and other partners could match people with appropriate social service programs or make contact with family members.

As a result, the CRU team developed the Enhanced Homeless Community Survey. The instrument is hosted on an off-the-shelf survey tool, and it runs on officers’ smartphones or other mobile devices.

When CRU officers encounter a homeless individual for the first time, they ask the person if he or she would be willing to take the survey. The instrument is completely voluntary. Chief John Carli said that while some individuals may be “a little standoffish on the first contact,” CRU members work hard to build rapport, and most individuals end up providing information.



Chief John Carli

“There’s an established relationship over time between the officers and the community. You have to know them by name.

“What you end up getting is honesty. People will tell you if they’ve been arrested before, or if they’re addicted to drugs, or if there is prior mental illness.

“From that, we can then offer resources and have that connectivity.”

— **Chief John Carli, Vacaville, CA Police Department**

21 survey questions provide profiles of each homeless person: The survey consists of 21 questions designed to provide a window into the person’s life: their family situation, veteran status, possible drug or alcohol dependency, other issues that contributed to their current homeless situation, resources used in the past, and other data. In other words, the tool allows officers to put names and circumstances to the individuals they encounter. Chief Carli said that 21 questions seem to be a good number: the survey provides enough information to help CRU officers and others understand the individual, but it isn’t too intimidating or time-consuming.

The information is not static. When CRU members encounter homeless individuals who have previously completed the survey, they will ask if there have been any changes in the person’s situation and update the survey. Because the survey is electronic, every member of the CRU team has access to the information in the field.

As Vacaville has expanded its homeless outreach and intervention efforts, the information in the survey has become even more important. For example, a social services professional is now embedded with the CRU for two or three days per month. Information collected through the survey helps her to quickly identify what services particular homeless individuals may benefit from. The survey also helps to inform the work of the Homeless Roundtable, a regional forum in which faith-based entities, other

nonprofit organizations, the police, and other government agencies meet monthly to identify service needs and increase coordination among stakeholders.

20-percent reduction in homelessness: Chief Carli reported that Vacaville has achieved a 20 percent reduction in homelessness in recent years. He attributed the decline to the proactive, service-model approach that the city has adopted—an approach that the Enhanced Homeless Community Survey supports.

Questions in the Enhanced Homeless Community Survey

- | | |
|---|---|
| Q1 What is your name? | Q12 What resources have you been offered in the past? |
| Q2 How long have you been homeless? | Q13 What resources do you wish were offered? |
| Q3 What is your relationship status? | Q14 What type of benefits are you eligible for or using? |
| Q4 Do you have minor children? | Q15 Have you ever been diagnosed with a mental health disorder? |
| Q5 Do you have a drug or alcohol dependency? | Q16 If yes, can you tell us what disorders? |
| Q6 What led to you being homeless? | Q17 Are you a veteran? |
| Q7 How long have you been in Vacaville? | Q18 When was the last time you had a steady job? |
| Q8 What made you come to Vacaville? | Q19 Where is your closest living relative? |
| Q9 Where did you live before Vacaville? | Q20 Are you satisfied with your current lifestyle? |
| Q10 How many times have you been arrested? | Q21 Is your lifestyle a matter of choice? |
| Q11 What type of resources have you used in the past? | |

Louisville’s “Living Room” Gives Officers An Alternative to Arrest for Minor Offenses

Recognizing the large role that substance abuse plays in homelessness, the Louisville, KY Metro Police Department has implemented initiatives to connect homeless persons with substance abuse services. One recent initiative known as “the Living Room” is being piloted.⁶¹

The Living Room—located in the basement of a mental health organization named Cornerstone—is a safe place for individuals experiencing mental health or substance abuse crises that do not reach the level of requiring involuntary hospitalization or criminal prosecution. At the Living Room, individuals in crisis can receive peer support and immediate referrals to other services. Additionally, individuals do not have to be detoxed to gain access to the Living Room or its services. If individuals are not violent, the Living Room will accept them. The service acts as an alternative to jail for low-level offenders who, without this service, might otherwise be jailed for offenses such as public intoxication or disturbing the peace.

The Living Room program also benefits patrol officers. Officers can take individuals to the Living Room, where they will receive assistance. In the past, officers often had little choice but to make arrests in many situations, and the officers would be off the street for hours handling the intake process and documentation requirements associated with arresting an individual. By taking someone to the Living Room, an officer can be back on patrol promptly. Living Room caseworkers take responsibility for the persons they accept for services.

61. “Instead of jail, new Louisville program offers ‘living room’ for people with mental illness.” *Louisville Courier Journal*, Dec. 19, 2017. <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/local/2017/12/19/louisville-living-room-program-mentally-ill-drug-users/793010001/>

San Francisco Police, Public Health, Public Works, and Others Work Together

In January 2018, the San Francisco Police Department, in partnership with other city agencies, began an innovative way to work together to address homelessness. Partners include the San Francisco Department of Public Health, Department of Public Works, Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing, the Department of Emergency Management, 311, and other agencies.

Instead of operating separately and relying on the police to respond to calls about homeless persons, the San Francisco partners created a plan to bring together all agencies affected by homelessness to discuss and think through each type of call. The coordination allows the agencies to consolidate resources and coordinate their responses.

This initiative, called the San Francisco Healthy Streets Operations Center (HSOC), is centered within the Department of Emergency Management (DEM) in San Francisco.

Utilizing an Incident Command System structure,⁶² stakeholders are staffed five days a week to triage and respond to the calls for service that come into the DEM involving individuals experiencing homelessness. As calls come in, the individuals in the Healthy Streets Operations Center determine what the immediate need is, if any. If there is no immediate threat to public safety, the team discusses the main issue of the call in order to dispatch the most appropriate resources. For example, if they receive a call about hypodermic needles surrounding an encampment, the team may send a representative from the Department of Public Health to respond, instead of sending police.

By operating in this manner, the team is able to send the correct and most effective resources to each incident. This keeps the police department focused on police matters while utilizing the other valuable resources that exist in the city.

“Every day, we’re learning something new about where the gaps are,” said San Francisco Police Commander David Lazar. “These conversations and coordinating resources won’t happen if we’re working in silos. It has to happen when everybody is in the room, in real-time.”



San Francisco Police Commander David Lazar

62. ICS is a management approach to coordinate an emergency response. It involves a hierarchy in which responders from multiple agencies (multiple law enforcement agencies, fire, EMS, etc.) can be organized and utilized effectively and efficiently. For more information, see <https://www.fema.gov/incident-command-system-resources>

“One of the things I’ve heard over and over is that police officers too often spin their wheels.

“On Monday, one officer deals with a person who is chronically homeless and maybe spends an hour or two with that person trying to connect them to services. Then on Friday, another officer encounters that same person, but doesn’t know what the first officer did.

“Maybe that person has already been connected to services, and now it’s just a matter of reconnecting that person. In Long Beach we are developing software to help us connect and reconnect chronic offenders to services.”

— **Doug Haubert, City Prosecutor, City of Long Beach**

Funding Issues

Providing targeted and sustained outreach to individuals experiencing homelessness is almost always an arduous undertaking. Experts at the *Critical Issues* meeting noted that it usually takes multiple contacts—often 15 to 20 or more—to get an individual to agree to accept services.

The provision of those services—including temporary housing, substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, job readiness training, and others, depending on the needs of the individual—can also be a lengthy process. Many people who enter a treatment program don’t succeed on the first try, and some never succeed.

Costs and Benefits: As a result, addressing homelessness is an expensive proposition, both for police agencies conducting outreach and enforcement operations, and for the support services that are crucial to making a long-term impact on the problem. Combating homelessness requires up-front investments in everything from police homeless outreach teams to housing options and services. It also demands maintenance funding to keep these initiatives operating.

However, experience suggests that making these investments can improve outcomes and reduce criminal justice system costs over the long run. For example, researchers at Portland State University have been evaluating the impact of the Portland, OR Police Bureau’s Service Coordination Team (SCT), in terms of reducing crime among program participants and lowering criminal justice costs. The SCT is a comprehensive homeless reduction initiative that targets the most difficult cases, involving chronically homeless individuals who have also had frequent contacts with the police. The 2017 evaluation found a 75-percent reduction in post-program arrests. Researchers calculated that every dollar spent on the SCT program resulted in a \$13.10 savings in costs related to crime and criminal justice system activities.⁶³ (*More information on Portland’s SCT program can be found on pages 36-37.*)

63. Study of the Service Coordination Team and its Impact on Chronic Offenders: 2017 Report. Portland State University, Capstone Class UNST 421, Section 572. 2017

Similarly, in Pinellas County, Florida, the sheriff's office opened the Safe Harbor facility as an alternative to jail for approximately 400 individuals involved in low-level crimes often related to homelessness (*see page 12 for more information about Safe Harbor*). The facility, which offers both temporary housing and wrap-around support services, costs about \$2.3 million per year to operate. That is about half of what it would cost to house those same 400 individuals in the county jail, where they wouldn't have the access to services they receive in Safe Harbor.

Federal, state and private grants: To cover their start-up costs, some jurisdictions have turned to grant funding from federal and state governments and private foundations. For example:

Indio, CA started its Community Outreach Resource Program (CORP) with local funds, but turned to the state of California for funding as the initiative grew. In 2017, Indio received a \$1.9 million state grant to expand CORP and keep it operating for three years.

In Vacaville, CA, the police department received a \$250,000, three-year grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services to launch its Community Resource Unit.

Long Beach, CA created an Innovation Team that has used sophisticated data analysis to address issues related economic development, public safety, and homelessness. Substantial funding for the iTeam came from a \$3 million grant from Bloomberg Philanthropies.

City vs. county funding: As cities look to develop comprehensive programs to address homelessness, one of the funding challenges they face is coordination with their county governments. In general, municipalities are responsible for policing, code enforcement, and related services, while counties are generally responsible for housing, mental health, substance abuse, and other social services. Participants at the *Critical Issues* meeting said tensions can arise when larger cities, which often have the highest concentration of homeless individuals in need of services, must compete for funding with smaller communities and unincorporated areas.

Some cities, such as Long Beach, CA, have established their own health and human services departments, which gives them control over many social services and more direct access to federal and state grants funds. Other cities, such as Portland, have simply invested in support services themselves.

“Most health and human services are funded by the state and implemented through the county. However, because homeless challenges tend to be more significant in the urban areas, they are not always attuned to the needs of the city, where the homeless problem and service needs are greatest. As a result, services in Santa Cruz—shelters, substance abuse, and mental health services—have not been as robust as they need to be. We always feel like we're playing catch-up.”

— **City Manager Martin Bernal, Santa Cruz, CA**

Special Sales Taxes: Some jurisdictions have turned to special sales taxes as another source of funding for programs and services directed at individuals experiencing homelessness.

In Los Angeles County, voters in March 2017 approved Measure H, a quarter-cent sales tax for homeless services. The tax took effect in October 2017, and is expected to raise approximately \$355 million per year over 10 years. While the bulk of the funding is being directed toward housing for homeless persons, several million dollars each year are expected to be devoted to outreach services.

In November 2017, voters in the City of Los Angeles approved Proposition HHH, a special parcel tax that is expected to raise \$1.2 billion in bonds for the construction of 10,000 units of housing.

In Washington state, the legislature in 2005 approved the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Tax, which allows individual counties to pass a one-tenth of 1 percent sales tax for mental health, substance abuse treatment, and court treatment programs—services that are frequently needed by homeless individuals. To date, 22 of Washington’s 39 counties, covering about 80 percent of the state’s population, have enacted the tax.

Community Support: In the community of Lakewood, WA, residents and the police department turned a tragedy into an opportunity to help individuals experiencing homelessness. On November 29, 2009, four Lakewood Police officers were ambushed and killed as they sat in a coffee shop. The Lakewood Officers’ Charity Fund was created to support family members of the slain officers.

With strong support from the community and the police department, the charity raised several million dollars. After the families’ needs were met, the charity’s board decided that any remaining funds would be devoted to helping the community. The charity continues to raise money through regular fundraisers and voluntary payroll deductions by officers.

According to Lakewood Sergeant Jeff Carroll, money from the charity fund is regularly used to help homeless individuals in the community. In some cases, it provides train or bus fares to reunite a person who is homeless with responsible family members. The fund can also pay for up to three nights of motel rooms for homeless individuals or families who are particularly vulnerable.



Lakewood, CO Police Sergeant
Jeff Carroll

Regional Partnerships and Cooperation

Another theme that emerged from the Critical Issues conference was the importance of regional cooperation in combating homelessness. Here are a few examples of how communities are forming partnerships and working together more closely.

Hermosa Beach, CA Police Chief Sharon Papa:

*Hermosa, Redondo, and Manhattan Beaches
Share a Mental Health Clinician*

We have a mental health clinician that we share with two neighboring cities—Redondo Beach and Manhattan Beach. The clinician rides with our officers one day a week, and with the other agencies on other days. We share that resource, but she’s in our community and is getting to know our people. She helps us with evaluations and trying to determine whether people meet the criteria for “5150” involuntary psychiatric holds.⁶⁴ She has had limited success in trying to establishing long-term relationships, but she does work with repeat individuals to offer resources. This is a relatively new program we have adopted in the last six months, so hopefully with more time there will be measurable positive impacts.

Bay Area Rapid Transit Police Department Engages Homeless Persons in Train Stations

The Bay Area Rapid Transit Police Department (BART PD) serves four counties in the San Francisco Bay Area. BART PD frequently experiences issues with homeless individuals using trains and stations for shelter. In order to engage homeless persons and attempt to connect them to services, BART PD began a partnership with the city of San Francisco to pay for Homeless Outreach Teams (HOT) to work in their stations. These HOT teams provide practical support, information and referrals, and in-depth assessment and case management for the most vulnerable and at-risk individuals.

In addition, BART PD participates in the Alameda County Multi-Disciplinary Forensic Team—a coalition of Alameda County law enforcement agencies, Alameda County Behavioral Health Care, and allied service providers. The team assists individuals who have mental illness, substance abuse issues, and co-occurring disorders who are at high risk for homelessness, involuntary hospitalization, and arrest. The team’s goal is to provide these individuals with treatment and ongoing services, leading toward recovery and reducing recidivism.

Cities in Riverside County, CA Adopt A Program of “Responsible Compassion”

Murrieta, CA, a city of 115,000 southeast of Los Angeles in Riverside County, recently formed a collaboration with nearby Temecula and four other municipalities to address homelessness in a comprehensive way.

“For years, each city handled homelessness in silos, and the neighboring cities created conflicting ordinances and practices. Some focused on enforcement, others accommodated homeless persons

64. California Legislative Information, Welfare and Institutions Code. The Lanterman-Petris-Short Act. http://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=5150&lawCode=WIC

or provided assistance. But we have very little resources and limited experience in the homelessness arena. Our nonprofits aren't able to handle such an increasing problem. So we decided that it's important to take a collaborative approach, with teamwork by city and county agencies and nonprofit organizations, to *solve* homelessness, as opposed to just *managing* it. Our police department is starting to understand that an enforcement-only approach simply squeezes one end of a balloon, moving homeless individuals across an arbitrary city border. But the root causes of homelessness are never addressed and nothing truly gets done.”

— **Brian Ambrose, Assistant to the City Manager in Murrieta**

In November 2017, the city of Temecula hosted a panel on homelessness that included law enforcement officers, city officials, and religious leaders.⁶⁵ Personnel from the Murrieta Police Department and the Riverside County Sheriff's Office (which patrols Temecula) discussed the partnerships they have in place and how the cities are working together. Both cities have homeless outreach teams.

Robin Gilliland, Homeless Outreach Liaison for Temecula, said that the city has adopted a program of “Responsible Compassion,” a policy for working with homeless persons that is designed to help these individuals become self-sufficient. Through the partnership, Temecula, Murrieta, and the four other cities have adopted this philosophy collectively to help ensure that consistent outreach is occurring throughout south Riverside County.⁶⁶

Three Cities in Washington State Join Forces to Create Shelters

Bellevue, WA is a suburb of Seattle with a population of 141,400. Along with its neighboring cities, Redmond and Kirkland, the area is known as East Side Cities, a region that has seen an increase in the number of homeless individuals in the past four to five years.

Rather than addressing the homelessness issue individually, the East Side Cities have taken a regional approach, specifically in the creation of shelters. Bellevue, WA created a shelter for men, Redmond created a shelter for families, and Kirkland created a shelter for women. Taking this approach enables the region to focus specifically on the needs of each population, while offering services in close proximity for all homeless individuals in the region. If an officer in Bellevue encounters a family experiencing homelessness, the officer can take the family to the shelter in Redmond and arrange for services in a timely manner.

65. “Community Forum Looks at Comprehensive Approach to Homelessness.” *Valley News*, November 23, 2017. <http://www.myvalleynews.com/story/2017/11/23/news/community-forum-looks-at-comprehensive-approach-to-homelessness/56110.html>

66. See for example, http://www.murrietaca.gov/getconnected/homeless_resources.asp and <https://temeculaca.gov/1078/Homeless-Outreach>

CONCLUSION

11 Steps Law Enforcement Agencies Can Take To Improve the Response to Homelessness

AS PERF BEGAN RESEARCHING THE POLICE RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS, we were somewhat taken aback at how immense and complex the problem is.

More than half a million people in America today are homeless. Many of them are grappling with mental illness, substance abuse, or both. In many cities, the high price of housing allows few affordable options for many people, including some who have jobs.

Many communities remain divided in what the response to homelessness should be. Many homeless persons are suspicious of government and social service agencies, and are reluctant to accept assistance, even when the assistance might improve their living situation. So it often takes a long time before police and social service workers can convince a homeless person to accept help. In the meantime, the problem continues. And some community members believe that homeless individuals should be left alone, if that is what they wish.

Other community members want the police to clear parks, sidewalks, and other public spaces of homeless individuals—to make the problem “go away,” or at least go somewhere else.

This divergence of opinion puts the police in a challenging position. It is more difficult to deal with a problem when there is no consensus in the community about what the goals are.

When 250 law enforcement personnel and other experts gathered in Long Beach, CA in January 2018 for PERF’s *Critical Issues in Policing* conference on the Police Response to Homelessness, their focus was, in many ways, on how to bridge these gaps and find solutions that most people can agree on. The meeting was a wide-ranging exploration of what police departments and sheriffs’ offices can do to alleviate the problem of homelessness in caring, compassionate, and effective ways that the community can support.

This report documents the range of strategies and programs that agencies in different parts of the country are implementing. Because the problem is different in every community, it is impossible to identify one single or preferred approach. However, the *Critical Issues* meeting and the research that went

into it revealed the following actions or initiatives that every law enforcement agency and its community partners should consider:

1. **Take a problem-solving approach to homelessness.** The police and sheriffs' departments that are most advanced in addressing homelessness issues have adopted problem-solving approaches, in which they analyze their local challenges, and then work with a wide range of other government and private-sector organizations to address the challenges. Arresting homeless persons for minor offenses (that typically result from their homelessness) is no longer considered a viable approach. Rather, police and sheriffs' agencies are adopting a variety of initiatives to directly address the problem, such as specialized training for dedicated officers, homeless courts, regional partnerships that pool resources and spread the work around, and technologies that help to keep track of homeless individuals and the services they are receiving.
2. **Create a dedicated Homeless Outreach Team.** In agencies of all sizes, these units (which go by a variety of names) provide the focus and the expertise to understand the issues surrounding homelessness and the strategies for addressing it. Homeless Outreach Team members are able to get to know members of the homeless community and the service providers who can help them, and they are critical for connecting the two. However, Homeless Outreach Teams, especially in large cities, cannot address the problem on their own. They are most effective when they coordinate closely with uniformed patrol officers, other police personnel, and external agencies that are involved in the response.
3. **Select the right personnel to staff the Homeless Outreach Team.** Serving on a dedicated Homeless Outreach Team takes a distinctive set of skills and a special mindset. In many respects, team members must adopt a social worker-like perspective. They must have compassion, excellent communications skills, and tremendous patience, among other attributes. It is imperative that agencies with Homeless Outreach Teams establish a process for reviewing and selecting officers who have the needed skill set, and not make assignments based on seniority or other factors that don't take skills and mindset into account.
4. **Provide staff with training to work effectively with persons experiencing homelessness.** In addition to Homeless Outreach Team members, all patrol officers need basic instruction on how to safely and humanely interact with homeless persons. Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training and ICAT (Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics) are two examples of training that all officers could benefit from in their interactions with homeless individuals. Officers must also be provided with information on the services available in the community to persons experiencing homelessness and how to refer individuals to those services. Homeless Outreach Team members should receive more specialized and comprehensive training, covering topics such as psychology, the homeless culture, and detailed instruction on connecting individuals with services.

5. **Take a multi-disciplinary approach to the problem.** Police departments and sheriffs' offices cannot "own" the problem of homelessness, and they certainly cannot solve it on their own. The jurisdictions that have had the most success in addressing homelessness are those that have taken an expansive, multi-disciplinary approach to the problem. Law enforcement agencies must be an integral part of these multi-disciplinary, multi-agency efforts, and in some cases they may take the leading role. But it is essential that the approach involve the full range of service providers—health, human services, housing, employment, fire and emergency medical services, and nonprofit and faith-based communities.
6. **Collect, analyze, and share data to better understand the community of homeless individuals and their service needs, and to track progress.** Homeless management information systems, mobile apps, and geographic information systems are among the applications that agencies are using to support homeless outreach and service provision. Agencies involved in the response to homelessness—including the police, public health, fire and EMS, and others—should seek creative ways to share information to support their response, without violating privacy laws and regulations.
7. **Form regional partnerships to address the problem in a coordinated fashion.** Homelessness knows no geographic or governmental boundaries. Actions taken in one community can have a ripple effect on homelessness in adjacent areas. To avoid simply displacing the problem from one community to another, jurisdictions should form partnerships to coordinate resources, programs, and strategies. This coordination can be especially important in areas with a number of small to mid-sized jurisdictions, which often lack the resources to fully manage the problem on their own.
8. **Pursue a variety of funding sources.** Providing an effective and compassionate response to homelessness is expensive. Jurisdictions need to pursue a range of funding sources to meet the needs related to outreach, housing, services, and follow-up. Law enforcement agencies have benefitted from federal, state, and foundation grants, special sales taxes, and charitable organizations that support their efforts in responding to homelessness.
9. **Create or expand homeless courts.** Like drug courts and other specialized courts, homeless courts offer alternatives for homeless persons facing minor criminal charges who are in need of services. These courts provide leverage for getting homeless individuals into housing and services for substance abuse, mental health treatment, job readiness, and other assistance—and keeping them out of jails and prisons. This approach has the potential to be less costly and more effective in addressing the underlying long-term issues facing persons experiencing homelessness.
10. **Work to identify and eliminate unnecessary, counterproductive barriers that prevent homeless persons from improving their lives.** One of the reasons it can take 15 to 20 contacts or more to convince a homeless person to accept services is that there are often barriers in the way. For

example, even after homeless persons complete a program to help them re-enter society, some face fines and fees assessed by the criminal justice system for past offenses. Jurisdictions should look to eliminate these barriers.

- 11. Evaluate what you are doing.** As the *Critical Issues* meeting demonstrated, communities across the country have adopted a number of innovative and creative approaches to homelessness, many of which appear to be producing positive results. However, there are not many formal evaluations of the initiatives taking place. If the law enforcement profession and its partners are to know what really works when it comes to addressing homelessness, they must invest in research.

The Human Factor in the Police Response to Homelessness

Egon Bittner wrote a sociological study of the police response to homelessness in 1967—long before any of the programs cited in this report were created. And yet, some of Bittner’s findings from more than 50 years ago describe the “human factor” that is at the heart of today’s approaches. Police and sheriffs’ departments are getting to know homeless persons as individuals, and are taking leadership roles in marshaling the resources of many different agencies to offer real assistance to community members who need help.

In many ways, the police response to homelessness is similar to the police response to the opioids epidemic that has gripped many parts of the nation in recent years. In both cases, police departments are not the type of social service or public health agency that one would expect to see leading the way to problem-solving and innovative approaches to these issues. But because police respond to calls for service 24 hours of every day, they tend to be among the first to detect social problems like homelessness and an epidemic of drug overdoses.

Furthermore, homelessness and the opioid epidemic are both types of problems that require close collaboration by many different governmental and non-governmental organizations for an effective response, and often these collaborations and partnerships do not naturally occur. Too often, agencies remain in their own “silos,” unaware of other organizations that have similar missions and goals. In these cases, many police and sheriffs’ departments have been stepping into the breach and organizing the multi-agency cooperation that is needed.

What Does Success on Homelessness Look Like?

One of the interesting questions posed at the *Critical Issues* conference was, “When it comes to combating homelessness, what exactly does success look like?”

For the short term, success may be defined as getting more people into temporary or transitional housing and accessing services for mental health issues, substance abuse, and other factors that lead to homelessness. In some jurisdictions that offer a wide and robust range of services, success may actually

cause a temporary *increase* in the number of homeless persons in their communities, because individuals from one jurisdiction sometimes are attracted to a neighboring community that offers more help.

For law enforcement agencies, success may mean placing homeless people with social service agencies so they can obtain the care they need, a reduction in crime involving homeless persons (as victims or perpetrators), and fewer citizen complaints about encampments or other locations where homeless individuals gather.

For the long term, success entails getting more people off the streets and into permanent supportive housing and jobs.

It is unrealistic to expect that these changes will happen overnight, and even the most effective programs will not make the problem of homelessness disappear altogether. However, with concerted and coordinated efforts of police and sheriffs' departments and their partner agencies, communities can experience real success, reducing suffering and distress among individuals who are vulnerable, and increasing community safety and overall quality of life.

About the Police Executive Research Forum

THE POLICE EXECUTIVE RESEARCH FORUM (PERF) IS AN INDEPENDENT research organization that focuses on critical issues in policing. Since its founding in 1976, PERF has identified best practices on fundamental issues such as reducing police use of force; developing community policing and problem-oriented policing; using technologies to deliver police services to the community; and developing and assessing crime reduction strategies.

PERF strives to advance professionalism in policing and to improve the delivery of police services through the exercise of strong national leadership; public debate of police and criminal justice issues; and research and policy development.

The nature of PERF's work can be seen in the titles of a sample of PERF's reports over the last decade. Most PERF reports are available without charge online at <http://www.policeforum.org/free-online-documents>.

- *New National Commitment Required: The Changing Nature of Crime and Criminal Investigations* (2018)
- *The Revolution in Emergency Communications* (2017)
- *The Unprecedented Opioid Epidemic: As Overdoses Become a Leading Cause of Death, Police, Sheriffs, and Health Agencies Must Step Up Their Response* (2017)
- *The "Crime Gun Intelligence Center" Model: Case Studies of the Denver, Milwaukee, and Chicago Approaches to Investigating Gun Crime* (2017)
- *Hiring for the 21st Century Law Enforcement Officer: Challenges, Opportunities, and Strategies for Success* (2017)
- *ICAT: Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics* (2016)
- *Guiding Principles on Use of Force* (2016)
- *Identifying and Preventing Gender Bias in Law Enforcement Response to Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence* (2016)
- *Advice from Police Chiefs and Community Leaders on Building Trust: "Ask for Help, Work Together, and Show Respect"* (2016)
- *Re-Engineering Training on Police Use of Force* (2015)
- *Gun Violence: Regional Problems, Partnerships, and Solutions* (2015)

To learn more about PERF, visit www.policeforum.org.

- *Constitutional Policing as a Cornerstone of Community Policing (2015)*
- *Defining Moments for Police Chiefs (2015)*
- *Implementing a Body-Worn Camera Program: Recommendations and Lessons Learned (2014)*
- *Local Police Perspectives on State Immigration Policies (2014)*
- *New Challenges for Police: A Heroin Epidemic and Changing Attitudes Toward Marijuana (2014)*
- *The Role of Local Law Enforcement Agencies in Preventing and Investigating Cybercrime (2014)*
- *The Police Response to Active Shooter Incidents (2014)*
- *Future Trends in Policing (2014)*
- *Legitimacy and Procedural Justice: A New Element of Police Leadership (2014)*
- *Compstat: Its Origins, Evolution, and Future in Law Enforcement Agencies (2013)*
- *Civil Rights Investigations of Local Police: Lessons Learned (2013)*
- *A National Survey of Eyewitness Identification Procedures in Law Enforcement Agencies (2013)*
- *An Integrated Approach to De-Escalation and Minimizing Use of Force (2012)*
- *Improving the Police Response to Sexual Assault (2012)*
- *2011 Electronic Control Weapon Guidelines (2011)*
- *Managing Major Events: Best Practices from the Field (2011)*
- *It's More Complex than You Think: A Chief's Guide to DNA (2010)*
- *Promoting Effective Homicide Investigations (2007)*
- *"Good to Great" Policing: Application of Business Management Principles in the Public Sector (2007)*
- *Managing a Multi-Jurisdiction Case: Identifying Lessons Learned from the Sniper Investigation (2004)*

In addition to conducting research and publishing reports on our findings, PERF conducts management studies of individual law enforcement agencies; educates hundreds of police officials each year in the Senior Management Institute for Police, a three-week executive development program; and provides executive search services to governments that wish to conduct national searches for their next police chief.

All of PERF's work benefits from PERF's status as a membership organization of police officials, who share information and open their agencies to research and study. PERF members also include academics, federal government leaders, and others with an interest in policing and criminal justice.

All PERF members must have a four-year college degree and must subscribe to a set of founding principles, emphasizing the importance of research and public debate in policing, adherence to the Constitution and the highest standards of ethics and integrity, and accountability to the communities that police agencies serve.

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APPENDIX

Participants at the Critical Issues Meeting: The Police Response to Homelessness

January 24, 2018, Long Beach, CA

Participants' titles and affiliations are those at the time of the meeting.

Sergeant Fareed Ahmad
TORRANCE (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Captain Tim Albright
ELK GROVE (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Sergeant Chris Alkadis
HERMOSA BEACH (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief Brian Allen
SPARKS (NV) POLICE DEPARTMENT

**Assistant to the City Manager
Brian Ambrose**
CITY OF MURRIETA (CA)

Commander Andre Anderson
GLENDALE (AZ) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Milena Andreani
ORANGE COUNTY (CA) HEALTH CARE AGENCY

Deputy Chief Robert Arcos
LOS ANGELES (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

**Assistant Police Chief
Rick Armendariz**
MODESTO (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Lieutenant Michael Austin
GREENVILLE (SC) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Officer Alberto Avelar
FRESNO (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Corporal Mark Bailey
ORANGE (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Assistant Chief Wendy Baimbridge
HOUSTON (TX) POLICE DEPARTMENT

**Community Resources Manager
Riann Balch**
CITY OF CHANDLER (AZ)

Chief Susan Ballard
HONOLULU (HI) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Commissioner Branville Bard, Jr.
CAMBRIDGE (MA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Undersheriff Michael Barnett
SAN DIEGO COUNTY (CA)
SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

Commander Kevin Baysinger
OXNARD (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

**Law Enforcement Manager
John Beck**
ESRI, INC.

Douglas Beckett
DURHAM (NC) POLICE DEPARTMENT

**Senior Program Manager
Alyce Belford**
SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY (CA)
DEPARTMENT OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

City Manager Martin Bernal
CITY OF SANTA CRUZ (CA)

Officer Eric Bernier
TORRANCE (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Acting Chief Carmen Best
SEATTLE (WA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Vanessa Botti
ELGIN (IL) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Lieutenant Harold Brady
SURPRISE (AZ) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Commander Randy Brice
GILBERT (AZ) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Officer Rodney Brinser
MARTINEZ (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief Tammany Brooks
ANTIOCH (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief Allwyn Brown
RICHMOND (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief Randy Burba
CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY (CA)
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

Corporal Leonard Cabrera
FRESNO (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Sergeant Dave Campbell
LACEY (WA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief John Carli
VACAVILLE (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

**Community Relations Manager
Elizabeth Carreno**
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

Sergeant Jeff Carroll
LAKEWOOD (WA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Sergeant Alfonso Castillo
FRESNO (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Captain Donna Cayson
SIERRA MADRE (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Lieutenant Neil Cervenka
TURLOCK (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Tim Chan
BAY AREA RAPID TRANSIT
POLICE DEPARTMENT (CA)

**Manager of Human Services
Teresa Chandler**
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN
SERVICES, CITY OF LONG BEACH (CA)

Chief Thomas Chaplin
WALNUT CREEK (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Officer Tyler Chavers
VANCOUVER (WA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Commander Dominic Choi
LOS ANGELES (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief Jorge Cisneros
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE
POLICE DEPARTMENT

Donna Colombo
TRINITY CENTER (CA)

**Innovation Team Director
Tracy Colunga**
CITY OF LONG BEACH (CA)

Deputy Chief Richard Conant
LONG BEACH (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Lieutenant Sean Conley
WALNUT CREEK (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief Ken Corney
VENTURA (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

**Deputy City Manager
Robert Cortez**
CITY OF SANTA ANA (CA)

**Deputy Superintendent
Winifred Cotter**
BOSTON (MA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Commander Bryan Cox
CHANDLER (AZ) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Director of Programs Tom Cox
COACHELLA VALLEY RESCUE MISSION (CA)

Deputy Sheriff Branden Davault
SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY (CA)
SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

**Community Lead Officer
John Deer**
EL SEGUNDO (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

City Manager Leslie Deese
CITY OF NATIONAL CITY (CA)

Deputy Chief David Delaini
DAVIS (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

**Special Agent in Charge
Kent Delbon**
U.S. FOREST SERVICE, ROCKY MOUNTAIN
REGION

Chief Sergio Diaz
RIVERSIDE (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Lieutenant Osvaldo Dominguez
VISALIA (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Assistant Chief Stephen Donahue
SAN BERNARDINO CITY UNIFIED SCHOOL
DISTRICT (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Deputy Richard Donoho
TEMECULA (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Deputy Chief John Drake
METROPOLITAN NASHVILLE (TN)
POLICE DEPARTMENT

Commander Lisa Drake
PORT OF SEATTLE (WA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

**Director, Human Service &
Community Vitality Seth Dyson**
CITY OF SURPRISE (AZ)

Superintendent Christine Elow
CAMBRIDGE (MA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief Larry Esquivel
TRACY (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Officer Russ Faulkenberry
CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG (NC)
POLICE DEPARTMENT

Assistant Chief Tony Filler
MESA (AZ) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Michael Fischer
CONTRA COSTA HEALTH, HOUSING, AND
HOMELESS SERVICES (CA)

**Chief Strategy Officer
Christopher Fisher**
SEATTLE (WA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief Peter Fisher
FIFE (WA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Superintendent Marcie Flamand
VANCOUVER (BC) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Sergeant Gerald Foreman
VENTURA (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Lieutenant Craig Friesen
ANAHEIM (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Deputy Humberto Garcia-Flores
TEMECULA (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Captain Aaron Gardner
FIFE (WA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Robin Gilliland
CITY OF TEMECULA (CA)

Deputy Robert Glaser
RIVERSIDE COUNTY (CA)
SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

Chief Joseph Gramaglia
BUFFALO (NY) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Commander Terrence Graves
METROPOLITAN NASHVILLE (TN)
POLICE DEPARTMENT

Lieutenant Walter Green
DALLAS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT (TX)
POLICE DEPARTMENT

Dr. Mark Greene
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE

**Deputy Chief for Operations
Jeffrey Greer**
RIVERSIDE (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Deputy Director Andrew Gruchy
SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY (CA)
DEPARTMENT OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Sheriff Robert Gualtieri
PINELLAS COUNTY (FL) SHERIFF'S OFFICE

**Project Coordinator
Geanela Guirao**
CITY NET (CA)

Captain Mike Hagar
METROPOLITAN NASHVILLE (TN)
POLICE DEPARTMENT

Deputy Chief Lance Haight
BAY AREA RAPID TRANSIT
POLICE DEPARTMENT (CA)

Lieutenant Frank Hale
ANAHEIM (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Officer Brad Hall
CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG (NC)
POLICE DEPARTMENT

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POLICE DEPARTMENT

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Officer Ryan Holz
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TEMPE (AZ) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Commander Brett Houser
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Lieutenant Bill Huffor
EL PASO COUNTY (CO) SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Deputy Chief James Huggins
METROPOLITAN NASHVILLE (TN)
POLICE DEPARTMENT

Investigator Kendrick Hunter
DURHAM (NC) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Deputy Christopher Ibrahim
TEMECULA (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief John Incontro
SAN MARINO (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Commander James Jackson
SURPRISE (AZ) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Inspector Jutiki Jackson
MILWAUKEE (WI) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Captain Chris Jacobson
LODI (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief Nina Jamsen
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY,
SAN BERNARDINO

Deputy Chief Brian Johnson
METROPOLITAN NASHVILLE (TN)
POLICE DEPARTMENT

Jennifer Johnson
BRECKENRIDGE (CO) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Deputy Todd Johnson
TEMECULA (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief Will Johnson
ARLINGTON (TX) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Captain George Johnstone
LA HABRA (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Deputy Michael Jones
SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY (CA)
SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

Major Wayne Jones
MIAMI BEACH (FL) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Major Joshua Judah
LOUISVILLE METRO (KY) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Sergeant Ted Kazarian
FRESNO (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Sergeant David Kellis
VACAVILLE (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Corporal Craig Kelly
VENTURA (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Lieutenant Dan Kim
EL SEGUNDO (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Officer Stephen Kim
TORRANCE (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

**Director of Government Marketing
Tracy Kimbo**
MOTOROLA SOLUTIONS

Chief Anne Kirkpatrick
OAKLAND (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Captain Mike Kovaleff
PALM SPRINGS (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Commander Rory Lakind
PACIFIC GROVE (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief (Ret.) William Lansdowne
SAN DIEGO (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

**Human Services Administrator
James Latta**
CITY OF BEVERLY HILLS (CA)

Detective Brandon Lavin
MESA (AZ) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Commander David Lazar
SAN FRANCISCO (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief Deputy Joseph Leko
DAKOTA COUNTY (MN) SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Officer Marco Lemus
EL SEGUNDO (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Deputy Chief Angel Leos Jr.
CASA GRANDE (AZ) POLICE DEPARTMENT

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VANCOUVER (WA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Commander Michael Lewis
LONG BEACH (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Sergeant Bradley Lindblom
SAN PABLO (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief Robert Luna
LONG BEACH (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Lieutenant Michael Lux
COLORADO SPRINGS (CO) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Corporal Greg Marquez
RIALTO (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Ada Martinez
ELGIN (IL) POLICE DEPARTMENT

**Administrative Services Manager
Erika Martinez**
INDIO (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

**Director of Community Housing
Katherine Martinez**
CAMILLUS HOUSE (FL)

Sheriff James McDonnell
LOS ANGELES COUNTY (CA)
SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

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VANCOUVER (WA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

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TRACY (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

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PEACE OFFICERS RESEARCH ASSOCIATION OF
CALIFORNIA (PORAC)

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DENVER (CO) POLICE DEPARTMENT

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Katherine Nammacher
RIDEALONG (CA)

Katie Neal
SPECTRUM NETWORKS (CA)

Rick Neal
GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES ADVISORY GROUP

Captain Alex Neicu
TRACY (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

**Policing Program Director
Rebecca Neusteter**
VERA INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE (NY)

Lieutenant Brian Nevins
SAN DIEGO COUNTY (CA)
SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

Assistant Chief David Nisleit
SAN DIEGO (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Interim Chief Michael Nordine
GRAND JUNCTION (CO) POLICE DEPARTMENT

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Deputy Chief Benny Pina
PEORIA (AZ) POLICE DEPARTMENT

**Supervising Deputy Public
Defender Barbara Plate**
RIVERSIDE COUNTY (CA)
PUBLIC DEFENDER'S OFFICE

**Homeless Service Advocate
Christopher Porter**
CITY OF LITTLE ROCK (AR)

Lieutenant Sean Rafferty
ELGIN (IL) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Detective Aaron Raine
MESA (AZ) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Lieutenant David Ramsey
FRESNO (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Lieutenant Greg Raquer
VANCOUVER (WA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Lieutenant Mark Reid
MURRIETA (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Council Member Ken Remley
CITY OF SURPRISE (AZ)

Chief Bryan Reyes
PALM SPRINGS (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Deputy Chief G. Michael Richey
GREENSBORO (NC) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Officer Luke Riddering
MORRO BAY (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

**Service Coordination Team
Manager Emily Rochon**
PORTLAND (OR) POLICE BUREAU

Captain Kelly Rodriguez
HUNTINGTON BEACH (CA)
POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief Manuel Rodriguez
NATIONAL CITY (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief R. Fred Ross
UTAH TRANSIT AUTHORITY
POLICE DEPARTMENT

Commander Aaron Roth
MARTINEZ (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Captain Scott Russell
BROWARD COUNTY (FL) SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Chief Jason Salazar
VISALIA (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Captain Mark Salazar
FRESNO (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

**CIT Coordinator & Community
Outreach Liaison
Armando Sandoval**
BAY AREA RAPID TRANSIT
POLICE DEPARTMENT (CA)

Chief Manjit Sappal
MARTINEZ (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief Mark Saunders
TORONTO (ON) POLICE SERVICE

Captain Ian Schmutzler
VACAVILLE (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

**Assistant City Manager
Reina Schwartz**
CITY OF SAN PABLO (CA)

**Code Compliance Officer
Randy Scrivner**
CITY OF VANCOUVER (WA)

**Assistant City Manager
Ellen Semonoff**
CITY OF CAMBRIDGE (MA)

Sergeant Dave Shaw
TURLOCK (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Captain Thomas Shawyer
SAN FRANCISCO (CA)
DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

**Community & Economic
Development Program Manager
Peggy Sheehan**
CITY OF VANCOUVER (WA)

Commander Kelli Sheffer

PORTLAND (OR) POLICE BUREAU

Lieutenant Tony Sheneman

TRACY (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Captain Wendell Shirley

SANTA MONICA (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Agent Mike Short

VISALIA (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Elizabeth Siggins

COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS JUSTICE CENTER (CA)

Chief Martin Sissac

FONTANA SCHOOL (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

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Lieutenant Richard Slavin

SCOTTSDALE (AZ) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Constable Alyson Smith

VANCOUVER (BC) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Commander Robert Smith

LONG BEACH (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Lieutenant Robert Smith

RIALTO (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Sergeant Grant Snyder

MINNEAPOLIS (MN) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Special Agent in Charge Jill Snyder

BUREAU OF ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, FIREARMS, AND EXPLOSIVES, SAN FRANCISCO FIELD DIVISION

Lieutenant Joseph Sobrio

LAS VEGAS (NV) METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT

**Director, Strategic Initiatives
H. Spees**

CITY OF FRESNO (CA) MAYOR'S OFFICE

Lieutenant Dean Spivacke

TEMECULA (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Ann Marie Staudenmaier

THE WASHINGTON LEGAL CLINIC FOR THE HOMELESS

Lieutenant Paul Stella

RIALTO (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Lieutenant Whitney Stout

GAINESVILLE (FL) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Deputy Chief Robert Strange

WEST SACRAMENTO (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Park Ranger Timothy Sun

CITY OF LAKE ELSINORE (CA)

Deputy Sheriff Jacob Swalwell

ALAMEDA COUNTY (CA) SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Dr. Cody Telep

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

Chief John Thomas

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

Deputy Chief Edward Thompson

NEW YORK CITY (NY) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Sergeant Candice Torres

SAN MARINO (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Deputy Chief Rod Torres

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY (CA) SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

Deputy Chief Rocky Triplett

SPARKS (NV) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Leah Vail Compton

MERIDIAN BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE (FL)

Acting Chief David Valentin

SANTA ANA (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Sergeant Brian Valles

FRESNO (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

**Director, Access and Engagement
Nathaniel VerGow**

LOS ANGELES (CA) HOMELESS SERVICES AUTHORITY

Lieutenant Jason Verhoff

SEATTLE (WA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Master Officer Val Villarreal Jr.

TUSTIN (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Officer Bernie Vizcarra

FRESNO (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Captain Dennis Vrooman

MURRIETA (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

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FREMONT (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Sergeant Greg Welch

SURPRISE (AZ) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Sergeant Don Weller

MURRIETA (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Officer Mathew Wessels

TORRANCE (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Captain Marty Wilkes

GREENVILLE (SC) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Lieutenant Raymond Winick

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Deputy Chief Bill Wolf

ELGIN (IL) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Lieutenant Greta Woyciehowsky

SPARKS (NV) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief Michael Yankowski

LANSING (MI) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Officer Anthony Yim

NEWPORT BEACH (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief Terry Young

SURPRISE (AZ) POLICE DEPARTMENT

**Director of Program Development
Gigi Zanganeh**

CITY NET (CA)

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POLICE EXECUTIVE
RESEARCH FORUM

Police Executive Research Forum
1120 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 930
Washington, DC 20036
202-466-7820
www.PoliceForum.org

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