

HOUSING FIRST: A SOLUTION TO HOMELESSNESS



Is homelessness a problem in New Mexico?

Homelessness affects a wide range of people in our communities, including veterans, youth, domestic violence victims, people with disabilities, people with addictions, and even people with full-time jobs. Homelessness also impacts our families - in Albuquerque alone, over 3,000 children experienced homelessness over the course of the 2005-2006 academic school year.

**In New Mexico,
about 17,000 people
experience
homelessness over
the course of a year.**

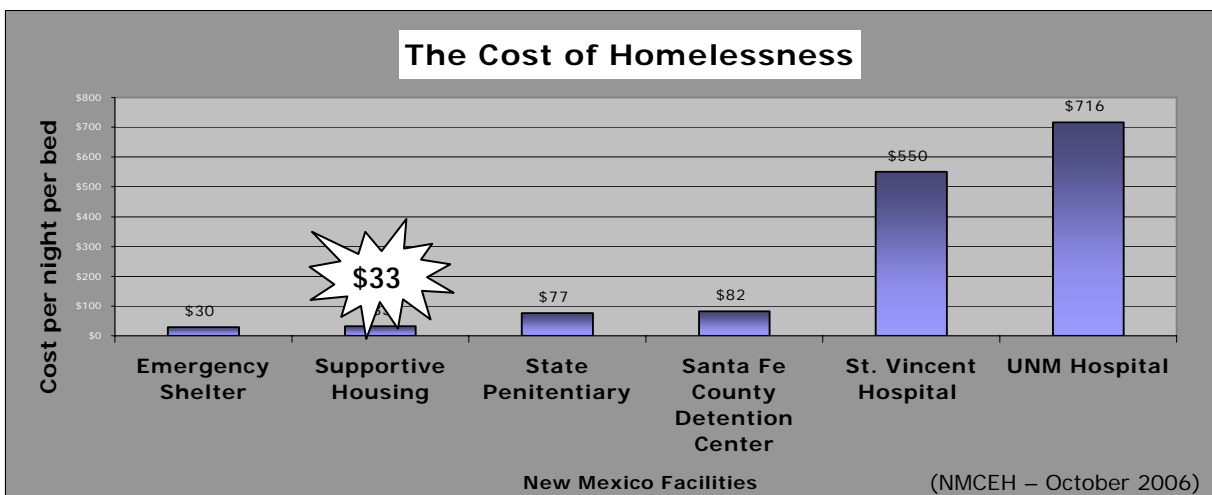
What does our current system look like?

Our current response to homelessness is largely an emergency-based response that is costly and that does not provide long-term solutions. Many people leave prison/jail, hospitals or psychiatric facilities with no place to live. While emergency shelters provide a safe place to sleep, they cannot offer the stability that most people need to exit homelessness. Long-term solutions must help people experiencing homelessness with their primary need – accessing safe, affordable housing.

Studies have shown that when we combine housing and services, 80% of tenants stay for a year or longer and that at least 50% of tenants stay for at least 5 years.¹

How much does homelessness cost the state of New Mexico?

A person who experiences homelessness is more likely to use inpatient hospitals, emergency rooms, psychiatric facilities, detoxification services and spend time in jail or prison than a housed person. Treating the symptoms of homelessness via emergency response systems is an inefficient and expensive use of resources. **Providing housing in combination with services, however, costs just \$33/night.**



What is Housing First?

With a Housing First approach, the primary focus is on helping homeless individuals and families quickly access and sustain permanent housing. In addition to housing, supportive services are offered according to the individual or family's needs and can include mental health counseling, financial management skills training, job training, childcare, job search assistance, parenting skills classes or substance abuse treatment.

Is Housing First effective?

Studies from across the country found that when we combine affordable housing with services, people stayed housed, even when they had a long history of homelessness. Housing First tenants are more likely to experience decreased symptoms of mental illness, reduce dependence on alcohol and other drugs, work or go to school, increase their income from work, permanently leave their abusers, and successfully manage their budgets.ⁱⁱⁱ This results in a significant cost savings for communities. A Denver study found that a Housing First approach saved the community over \$30,000 per person.^{iv}

In a recent survey of people experiencing homelessness, 46% reported that an affordable place to live would most help them exit homelessness.

How can we implement a Housing First approach in New Mexico?

A Housing First Taskforce is the first step in the right direction to address homelessness in New Mexico. The Taskforce will be comprised of key state agencies, housing development organizations, advocacy organizations and service providers.

What will the Taskforce do?

- ▶ Coordinate and target already existing resources and strategies for implementing a Housing First approach
- ▶ Develop a Housing First Plan that provides a strategic guide on how we can effectively use our existing resources to address homelessness
- ▶ Tackle current fragmentation among different housing systems and services
- ▶ Focus on long-term solutions rather than emergency responses
- ▶ Create strategies, goals, and recommendations to house people with disabilities, people with addictions, people being discharged from prison/jail, youth, and low-income working families.



HOUSING FIRST - A PRACTICAL STEP TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS IN OUR COMMUNITIES AND MAKE NEW MEXICO SAFER

ⁱ Pathways to Housing, <http://www.pathwaystohousing.org/Articles/Research.html>

ⁱⁱ The Housing First Program for Homeless Families: Empirical Evidence of Long-term Efficacy to End and Prevent Family Homelessness. Susan Einbinder and Tanya Tull. Institute for Research, Training and Technical Assistance and Beyond Shelter. Los Angeles, CA. June 2005. [http://www.beyondshelter.org/aaa_the_institute/Seaver%](http://www.beyondshelter.org/aaa_the_institute/Seaver%20)

ⁱⁱⁱ The Corporation for Supportive Housing, <http://documents.csh.org/documents/policy/FAQs/CostEffectivenessFAQFINAL.pdf>

^{iv} Denver Coalition for the Homeless. Denver Housing First Collaborative: Cost Benefit Analysis and Program Outcome Report. December 2006 <http://www.shnny.org/documents/FinalDHFCCostStudy.pdf>