

Homelessness In America

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ALTON - Homelessness is a growing issue in the United States. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were more than 580,000 people experiencing homelessness in the U.S. Since the pandemic began, many businesses have had to close their doors, causing one of the largest waves of unemployment and home evictions. According to the Census Bureau, 1.3 million people reported that they were very likely to be leaving their homes in the next two months due to eviction.

Those that are facing homelessness are risking their safety every day. Some of the biggest threats to their safety are extreme temperatures, inclement weather, theft, legal issues, and more recently, the spread of COVID-19. Homelessness can often contribute to increased mental health challenges, many of which often go unaddressed. Examples of mental health challenges that homeless populations might frequently experience include PTSD, substance use disorder, depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and others. These affective disorders can make daily life challenging, especially when it comes to

maintaining personal relationships, finding or maintaining employment, managing finances, and living in stable housing.

Homelessness is not an issue one can battle alone. Here are just a few ways you can help your community:

- **Research.** Staying involved with what your community is doing to support your homeless community members is really important. “You can incite change by staying informed about local politics, and emailing your representatives,” says Stephanie Cooper, Keys to Recovery Project Manager. Knowing the resources your community offers will be more beneficial in getting more people involved.
- **Volunteer.** Ending homelessness is a community effort. Find local shelters and offer your services to help do your part. “Strengthening communities and doing your part to help is by offering housing and jobs to those who are struggling. Advocate on behalf of your community members for landlords to accept vouchers and for employers to allow them work,” says Phyllis Viltz, Director of Special Projects.
- **Spread Awareness.** “Talk to media about your community’s efforts and resources they provide to the homeless population,” says Cooper. Spreading the word will likely go further than just your local community and invite others to participate in volunteer programs. “Awareness is what we need. Sharing what services are provided is great way to call for attention,” says Viltz.

Centerstone offers a variety of different services and grant programs in support of our homeless populations, including:

- **Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF)** is for veterans and veteran families who are homeless or facing imminent eviction. Services include housing assistance, including short-term rent assistance for those who qualify. The program also offers legal consultation, financial counseling, health care navigation, employment assistance, landlord advocacy, and linkage to mental health and substance use treatment/support, as well as other critical resources in the community.
- Centerstone also offers an array of different housing services for many different situations. Recently, a new facility opened in Bloomington, Indiana called Kinser Flats. Kinser Flats are for individuals and families experiencing homelessness who also suffer from substance use disorders or co-occurring substance use and mental health disorders. Kinser Flats features 50 individual housing units with on-site services related to recovery from opioid and substance use disorders.
- **Keys to Recovery** is a program that Centerstone offers to help those who suffer from homelessness with mental illness and co-occurring substance use disorders. The Keys to Recovery program uses case management and a treatment component

to help clients find permanent housing for recovery needs. Keys to Recovery offers training and employment assistance, trauma-informed substance use disorder treatment, physical and mental health care resources, connections to transportation services, daycare, and education.

If you or someone you know is struggling to maintain stable housing or is facing homelessness, Centerstone can help. Call us at 1-877-HOPE123 or visit our website at centerstone.org.

John Markley serves as Regional CEO in Illinois, serving residents in eastern and southern Illinois through more than 30 locations that provide treatment, support, and educational programs and services to individuals who have mental health and addiction disorders and specialized services for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Centerstone employs more than 525 staff in Illinois and serves more than 17,000 individuals annually.

About Centerstone

Centerstone is a not-for-profit health system providing mental health and substance use disorder treatments. Services are available nationally through the operation of outpatient clinics, residential programs, the use of telehealth, and an inpatient hospital. Centerstone also features specialized programs for the military community, therapeutic foster care, children's services, and employee assistance programs. Centerstone's Research Institute provides guidance through research and technology, leveraging the best practices for use in all our communities. Centerstone's Foundation secures philanthropic resources to support the work and mission of delivering care that changes people's lives.