

VITALSIGNS

UNDERSTANDING SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

HOMELESSNESS IN SLO COUNTY



A TREND REPORT BY

Action
FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

ACTION for Healthy Communities (ACTION) is a consortium of public, private, and non-profit organizations that collaborate to assess the quality of life in San Luis Obispo County. The goals of the project are to raise public awareness, provide accurate and reliable data, improve decision-making, establish community goals, and develop collaborative action plans to achieve those community goals.

ACTION began collecting key datasets about quality of life issues in the county in 1999, with updates completed in 2001, 2003, 2006, 2010 and 2013. The 2013 project includes a telephone survey of a representative sample of 1,102 San Luis Obispo County residents. The term “residents” will be used to describe data from those telephone survey respondents. The overall study also includes a face-to-face survey with homeless individuals and Spanish-speaking parents. These primary data pieces have been combined with data from a wide range of federal, state and local sources to bring you a picture of life in San Luis Obispo County.

The full report may be found at <http://ActionSLO.org>.

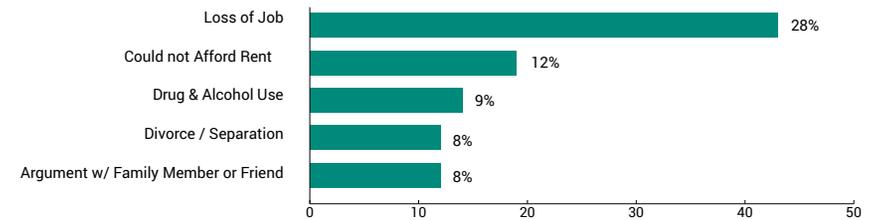
INTRODUCTION

Homelessness in San Luis Obispo County (SLO) is a community issue that is complex and complicated. This folio presents the current picture and facts regarding homelessness in SLO.

HOW DOES ONE BECOME HOMELESS?

Persons most vulnerable to homelessness earn little or no income, especially those on a fixed income and/or who are disabled by mental illness¹. For those without adequate resources, a major “life event” can create financial crisis, leading to eviction and damaged credit ratings. Unemployment, domestic violence, the breakup of the family, or illness are the most common causes. In high cost housing markets, such as SLO, the risk of homelessness is increased.

Primary Causes of Current Episode of Homelessness (Top 5 Responses)

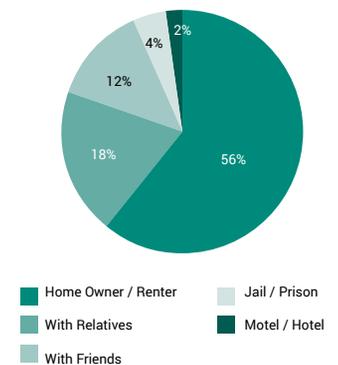


WHO AMONG US ARE HOMELESS?

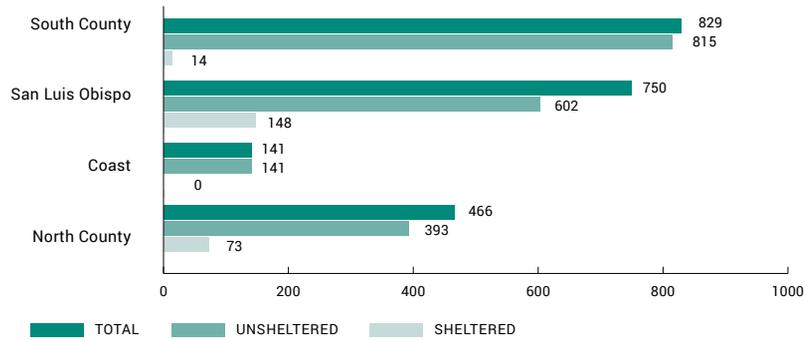
In San Luis Obispo County, approximately 3,500 persons were homeless at some point in 2013²; nearly 90% were unsheltered. Of those surveyed in 2013 who were homeless in San Luis Obispo County³:

- 50% reported this was not their first time being homeless.
- 47% reported they had been homeless for a year or more during this current episode.
- Their mean age is 42.
- 69% are White/Caucasian, with 14% Hispanic/Latino.
- 6% identified themselves as bisexual, gay or lesbian.
- 67% are males and 33% are females.
- 33% had some college education or college degree.
- 71% were living in SLO Co. before becoming homeless.
- 12% reported being a veteran.
- 49% reported having a mental illness (including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, or other).
- 12% were experiencing chronic substance abuse.
- 48% were parents with children; however 84% of these parents were not living with their children.

Living Accomodations Immediately Prior to Becoming Homeless (Top 5 Responses)



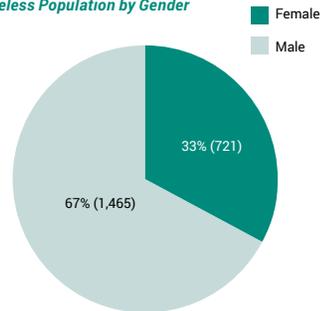
Total Point-In-Time Population by Region



Many have experienced family violence; 18% of those receiving services locally in 2012 had experienced domestic violence.

Many more are at risk of homelessness. In the 2013-14 school year, county school districts identified 1,866 children who were living doubled up with other households. Living doubled up is the single most common living situation for families on the night before they become homeless.⁴

San Luis Obispo County Homeless Population by Gender



MAKING ENDS MEET WHEN HOUSING COSTS ARE TOO HIGH

While the unemployment rate for the overall population in San Luis Obispo County was 8% in January 2013, the rate among the homeless population was 75%.

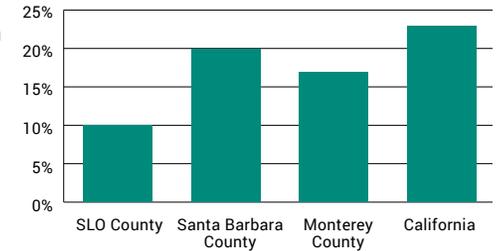
Low paying jobs, underemployment, and unemployment contribute to local families' difficulty in paying for housing. The Department of Housing and Urban Development considers housing costs to be a "burden" if renters spend more than 30% of income on rent and utilities. In San Luis Obispo County, 51% of renters spent 35% or more for rent and utilities. This was higher than in San Francisco (37%), New York City (44%), and Los Angeles County (50%).⁵

THE CHALLENGES OF HOUSING

Lack of affordable housing is a primary cause of homelessness in SLO County. Those with lower incomes have higher housing cost burdens in high rent areas. The scarcity of rental housing – especially multi-family housing⁶ increases local rents. In 2013, it was reported that SLO County had the lowest multi-family vacancy rate in the nation at 1.9%.⁷

In 2014, the Fair Market Rent (FMR) in San Luis Obispo County for a two-bedroom apartment was \$1,215.⁸ In order to afford rent and utilities without spending more than 30% of income, a household needed to earn \$50,600, equivalent to 2.9 minimum wage earners working year-round for at least 40 hours per week. In reality, the relatively low income of local renters makes it difficult for them to keep a roof over their head. The result is that SLO County has one of the highest rates of homelessness in the nation.⁹

Multi-family Units As a Percentage Of Total Housing Stock



RENTAL COSTS FOR SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY RESIDENTS

APT. SIZE	2013 ACTUAL SLO COUNTY AVERAGE RENT	FULL-TIME HOURLY WAGE NEEDED TO PAY AVERAGE RENT	MONTHLY INCOME
0 Bedroom	\$814	\$15.65	\$2,712
1 Bedroom	\$941	\$18.10	\$3,137
2 Bedroom	\$1,215	\$23.36	\$4,049
3 Bedroom	\$1,790	\$34.42	\$5,928
4 Bedroom	\$1,867	\$35.90	\$6,222

PERSONAL & COMMUNITY COSTS OF HOMELESSNESS

Personal Health and Safety – Poor health is closely associated with homelessness. Homeless people are much more likely to become ill. Health issues often cause homelessness. Additionally, homelessness exacerbates existing illnesses.¹⁰

Community Impact and Costs – Homelessness impacts communities economically, socially, and politically. Across the country public opinion has been split as local communities struggle to address these challenges. According to a new report by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty there has been a startling rise in laws criminalizing homelessness. The report contends that criminalization is the most expensive and least effective way of addressing homelessness and argues that providing housing to homeless people is the most affordable option.¹¹

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING – A MODEL FOR CHANGE

The "Housing First" model is a proven means to save precious resources, whereby homeless people are housed first and then provided the necessary services and support to regain stability.

COST FOR PUBLIC SERVICE SAVINGS COMPARISON

LOS ANGELES Study of 10,000+ homeless single adults compared to those in supportive housing		COST FOR PUBLIC SERVICE		MONTHLY COST SAVINGS	PERCENT MONTHLY SAVINGS
		Homeless	Supportive Housing		
All supportive housing residents		\$2,897	\$605	-\$2,291	79%
Gender	Female	\$2,831	\$539	-\$2,292	81%
	Male	\$2,936	\$635	-\$2,301	78%
Age	30-45 Years	\$2,800	\$565	-\$2,235	80%
	46-65 Years	\$3,286	\$634	-\$2,652	81%
Recent Work History	No work in past 3 yrs	\$3,062	\$656	-\$2,407	79%
	Worked in past 3 yrs	\$1,467	\$437	-\$1,030	70%
Mental Health	Mental Illness	\$3,104	\$582	-\$2,522	81%
	Mental Illness w/SA Problem	\$3,462	\$639	-\$2,823	82%
Substance Abuse(SA)	No SA Problem	\$2,182	\$442	-\$1,740	80%
	SA Problem	\$3,084	\$664	-\$2,420	78%
HIV/AIDS	No Documentation of HIV/AIDS	\$2,571	\$597	-\$1,974	77%
	HIV/AIDS Documented	\$3,851	\$726	-\$3,125	81%

Table taken from "Where We Sleep: Costs when Homeless and Housed in Los Angeles", 2009

The Housing First approach depends on access to sufficient permanent housing and supportive services—utilizing a flexible, responsive staffing structure to help clients maintain their housing. To ensure housing and services are available, adequate funding must be secured. It is strikingly evident that when a homeless individual is housed, significant resource savings are realized. The real challenge in SLO County is getting them housed, due to a lack of available and affordable housing.

Locally a collaborative program with the Housing Authority of San Luis Obispo (HASLO), the county and Transitions – Mental Health Association is set to begin. The County is funding this program, called "50 Now", which will identify, house, and provide supportive services to 50 of the county's most vulnerable and chronic homeless individuals.

PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS IN THE FIRST PLACE

Opening Doors, the Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, acknowledges that prevention is critical to ending homelessness. We urge you to join in local efforts addressing five key prevention strategies. For more information of how you can become involved visit: www.slohomeless.com.

1. INCREASED LEADERSHIP, COLLABORATION, AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Bringing the public and private sectors together through planning and resource allocation, leads to a better understanding of the causes and consequences of homelessness and effective interventions. As a result of the creation of the county's Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness and the development of a countywide Homeless Services Oversight Council (HSOC), our community has seen increased leadership, collaboration, and civic engagement. Since its formation in 2009, HSOC members have worked together to achieve tangible results including:

- A commitment by HASLO to set aside 50 housing assistance vouchers for the county's most vulnerable, chronically homeless individuals who will receive intensive case management and healthcare services to ensure stability.
- An allocation of 150 housing assistance vouchers from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development specifically for homeless veterans.

2. INCREASED ACCESS TO STABLE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Affordable housing continues to be a major barrier. Needs far outweigh supply; however, there have been recent successes including:

- Affordable housing projects in Morro Bay, Paso Robles, and San Luis Obispo, with a total of 131 units, recently received allocations of tax credits.
- Obtaining a three-year, federal grant to provide short term housing assistance and supportive services to homeless veterans and their families.

3. INCREASED ECONOMIC SECURITY

Various agencies are helping those at risk for homelessness to access work support programs and income support services to which they are entitled. Recent successes include:

- Funding to increase support for homeless individuals, including unaccompanied youth, at local employment one-stop centers and Cuesta College.

4. IMPROVED HEALTH AND STABILITY

Ensuring access to health care can prevent homelessness and/or keep health crises from escalating. Recent successes include:

- Increased access to dental, mental health, and alcohol/drug services through the Affordable Care Act.
- Increased sober-living facilities with funding support from the Public Safety Realignment Act (AB109).

5. TRANSFORMED HOMELESS CRISIS RESPONSE SYSTEM

- The development of "Homeless Outreach Teams" to identify and engage homeless individuals with severe mental illnesses.

1. Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness: 2010 February 20, 2013 at <http://llenrock.com/blog/top-10-u-s-multifamily-markets-by-vacancy-rate>
2. 2013 S.L.O. Homeless Point in Time Census and Survey - HUD estimation formula
3. 2013 S.L.O. Homeless Point in Time Census and Survey
4. HUD's 2012 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, Volume 2: Estimates of Homelessness in U.S.
5. 2008-2012 American Community Survey - 5-Year Estimates, <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/>
6. Five and more units
7. Information from ReisReports and reported in the Llenrock Blog by Eric Hawthorn. "Top 10 U.S. Multifamily Markets by Vacancy Rate,"
8. Housing and Urban Development, FY 2013 Fair Market Rents, San Luis Obispo County, www.huduser.org
9. In one 24-hour period in 2013, 2,186 people in our county (.87% of our population) were homeless. This was a higher rate of homelessness than in San Francisco (.85%), NYC (.77%) and LA County (.58%).
10. Premature Mortality in Homeless Populations <http://santabarbarastreetmedicine.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/PrematureMortalityFinal.pdf>
11. http://nlchp.org/documents/No_Safe_Place

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