

HOMELESSNESS & HOUSING FIRST

Introduction

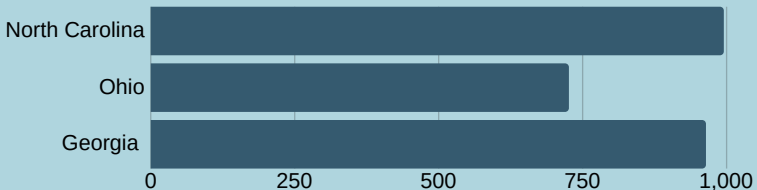
Homelessness refers to the state of people living in places not meant for human habitation, in emergency shelters, in transitional housing or those exiting an institution they previously resided in [1].

Chronically homeless individuals are among the most vulnerable, having been **continuously homeless for more than a year**, and often suffering from addictions or mental illnesses, hence exacerbating their plight [2].

Causes

Since the 1960s, economic restructuring has created **massive unemployment** [3]. Coupled with an **acute shortage of affordably priced housing**, about 80% of families have been unable to afford median priced homes in rural and sub-urban parts of North Carolina [4]. **Federal funding for welfare and housing construction has also decreased**; in 2015, only 7% of poor families in North Carolina received aid, as opposed to 74% in 1996 [5].

North Carolina's Chronic Homelessness Crisis versus Other States [6]



Myth: It is too expensive to help the chronically homeless

Fact: There is substantial empirical proof that suggest significant cost savings as much as \$23,000 per person a year. This is in contrast to temporary alleviation measures such as housing shelters [7].

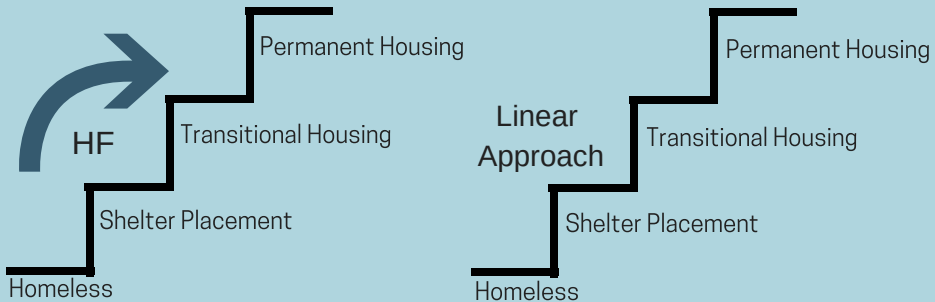
Consequences

As seen above, North Carolina fares poorly in addressing homelessness. The foregone economic potential of homeless individuals has incurred economic costs of \$10.9 billion in public funds [8]. In Asheville, **\$23,000 is incurred per homeless individual annually** [9]. For the individual, cumulative stress arising from poor safety and food security **diminishes well-being** [10]. Homelessness also stunts development of children's cognitive and psycho-social skills [11], thereby perpetuating **inter-generational poverty and homelessness**.

An Introduction to HOUSING FIRST

The Program

Developed by Dr Sam Tsemberis in the 1990s, Housing First (HF) is a **federal endorsed** homeless assistance approach that **prioritizes providing permanent housing to chronically homeless individuals first**, before implementing programs for these individuals to improve their lives [12]. There are two types of HF programs: Rapid Rehousing that caters to homeless individuals and families, and Permanent Supportive Housing that is specific to chronically homeless families and individuals with complex needs [13].



Unlike the traditional linear approach that requires chronically homeless individuals to manage their illnesses and/or addictions before they are permanently housed, HF has the following key tenets [14]:

- Immediate provision of a home for the individual
- Flexible and regular provision of programs to help individuals get better
- No time limit imposed on the individual

In Seattle, Washington

In 1997, 1811 Eastlake opened its doors to house 75 chronically homeless individuals with alcohol problems. Counsellors and specialists were present on-site in the studio apartments. In turn, Seattle saved \$4 million in costs offsets [15].

In Atlanta, Georgia

HF is endorsed by the state government. To this end, there is a plethora of permanent supportive housing such as Phoenix House [16]. In turn, state endorsement to address homelessness has accrued cost savings of as much as \$60 million [17].

HOUSING FIRST SUCCESS STORIES

HF in North Carolina; A Success?

Moore Place, Charlotte [18]

Provides 85 chronically homeless adults with non time-limited housing and support services

Results:

- 81% housing stability rate
- 81% reduction in emergency related hospital services usage
- Cost savings of \$2.4 million

Williams Square, Durham [19]

Houses homeless individuals with varying needs. Support services are hosted at the on-site community center.

- 98% housing stability rate

McCreesh Place, Charlotte [20]

Provides homeless individuals with substance addictions a safe place to live and recover.

- 97% housing stability rate

Not Quite...

There is currently no statewide HF endorsement and implementation. In turn, this has led to:

- Inconsistent homelessness alleviation approaches across the state [21]
- Increasing homelessness rates; an example is Wake County which has seen a 51% increase since 2015 [22]
- Sustenance of the "Not-in-my-Backyard" community attitude [23]; an example is Wilkinson, Charlotte where protests against providing more housing units for the homeless were held [24]

This is in stark contrast to states such as Georgia. Despite facing a similar homelessness crisis, active state endorsement has seen 2316 units being built [25]. *Homelessness rate has since decreased by as much as 61% [26] as opposed to North Carolina's 26.5% [27].*

A Case for North Carolina

Housing First has been endorsed and implemented in other states to resounding success. Moreover, local small-scale applications of HF have proven to achieve high housing stability rates.

With state endorsement, existing service providers will be financially empowered to expand their services [28]. More importantly, state endorsement will send a clear signal to the community about the importance and urgency of alleviating homelessness [29]. Housing North Carolina's homeless results in a drastic reduction of costs from \$23,000 to \$10,000 [30].

A highly successful and cost-efficient approach, endorsing HF is the next step forward.



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