



Unhoused Individuals & Chicago Libraries

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Smith, C. (n.d.) [Photograph of the Winter Garden at Chicago Public Library's Harold Washington Center]. Retrieved November 5, 2023, from <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2017/06/01/by-the-numbers-chicago/>

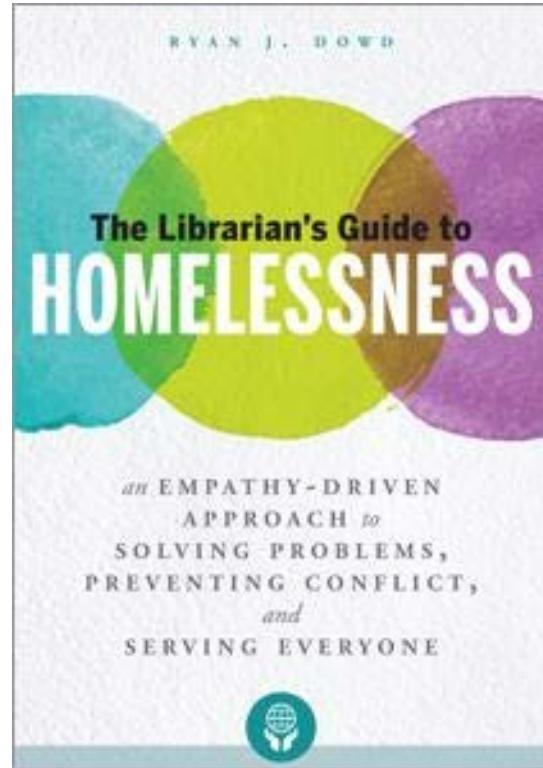
Overview

Causes of homelessness (National Alliance to End Homelessness)

- Housing costs v. income
- Health problems (physical and mental)
- Domestic abuse and violent backgrounds that force a person into homelessness
- Systemic racial discrimination
- Overcriminalization

Why is the library seen as a refuge?

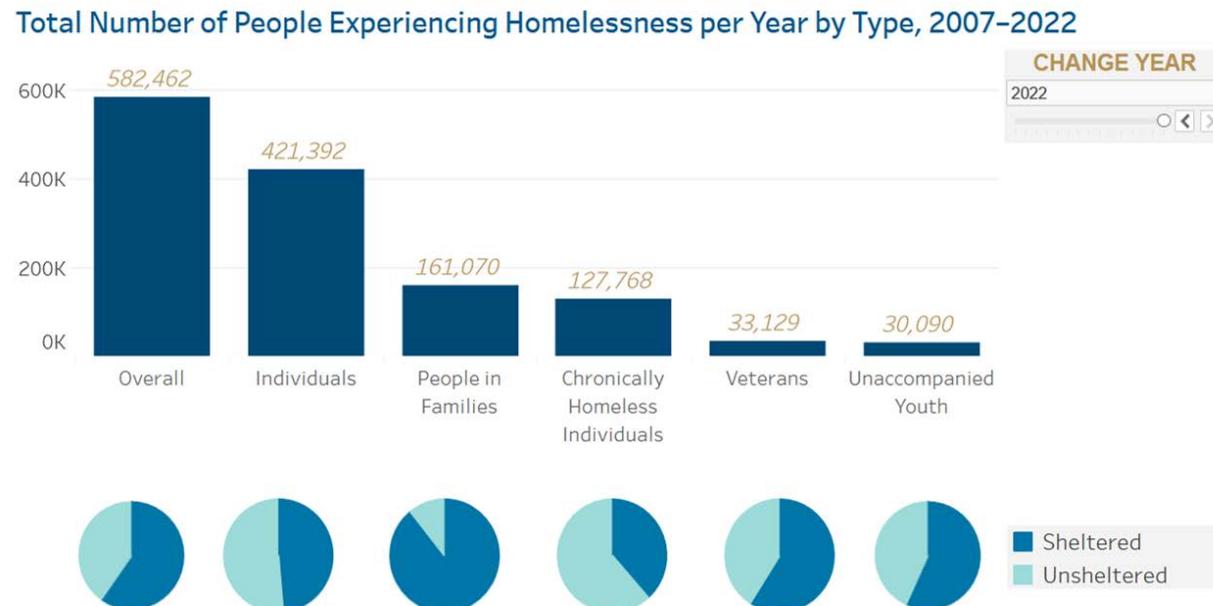
- Warm
- Generally safe from police intervention
- Public facilities
- Internet access



[Cover of Ryan Dowd's *The Librarian's Guide to Homelessness*]. Retrieved November 5, 2023, from <https://www.alastore.ala.org/content/librarians-guide-homelessness-empathy-driven-approach-solving-problems-preventing-conflict>

Numbers in the United States

Approximately 18 out of every 10,000 people experiences homelessness



Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2022 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress (AHAR). Note: The Covid-19 pandemic interrupted data collection in 2021 so data for that year is unavailable.

US Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2022). *Total Number of People Experiencing Homelessness per Year by Type, 2007-2022* [Chart]. National Alliance to End Homelessness. <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/state-of-homelessness/>



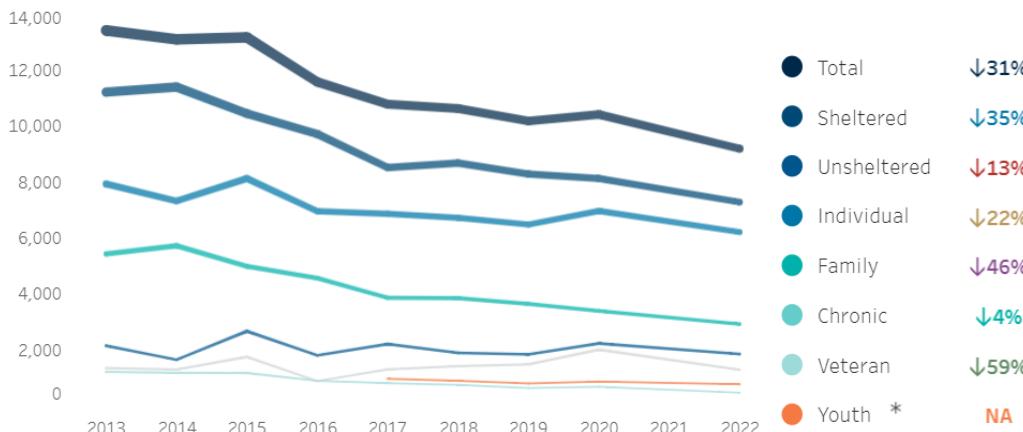
History of Unhoused Populations: Illinois

ALA Statement:

“There are many barriers that can potentially inhibit library service and disallow poor and homeless people from full access to library services.”

State Homelessness by Population

Between 2013 and 2022, Illinois's **Total** homeless population changed by $\downarrow 31\%$, the **Sheltered** population changed by $\downarrow 35\%$, and the **Unsheltered** population changed by $\downarrow 13\%$. See list for statistics on other populations.



US Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2022). *State Homelessness by Population* [Chart]. National Alliance to End Homelessness. <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/state-of-homelessness-dashboards/?State=Illinois>



Unhoused Populations in Chicago



Jin, K. (2019). [Daniel Palmer visits Harold Washington to utilize library facilities]. *Medill Reports Chicago*.

<https://news.medill.northwestern.edu/chicago/chicago-area-public-libraries-offer-staff-social-workers-to-link-patrons-to-resources/>

2023 Snapshot - Chicago

“Chicago and area suburbs are leading the way in a growing trend where public libraries respond to the needs of the homeless by including social workers on staff to offer professional assistance.” (*Medill Reports Chicago*, 2019)

Information Infrastructure for the Unhoused

- Lifeline program gives access to smartphones to those experiencing homelessness
- Internet access continues to be important, while libraries continue to be major providers of this resource, library policy can present barriers
- Collecting data on larger trends in the information infrastructure can be challenging because because without a fixed address, typical information gathering is difficult
- Information that is collected on homeless populations is skewed towards “higher functioning” individuals (Kelleher, 2012, pg. 27)
- More information and information gathering on this population is needed as studies lack a significant sample size

Discussion/Pop Quiz

Why is the library seen as a refuge?

What challenges do unhoused individuals face when trying to access information?

What challenges do libraries face when addressing the needs of unhoused individuals?

How does your own library address the needs of unhoused individuals?

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State of Homelessness: 2023 Edition. (n.d.). National Alliance to End Homelessness. Retrieved October 31, 2023, from <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/state-of-homelessness/>