



FOCUSING ON SOLUTIONS: Homelessness and Domestic Violence

Author: Zack Olmstead, Housing California
Editor: Karen C. Naungayan, Housing California



In our society, the tragedy of domestic violence continues long after the abuse takes place. In fact, for those with the courage to attempt to escape abusive situations at home, the hardship is often just the beginning. Too many persons (mostly women) trade one terrible situation (domestic violence) for another, when they are forced into homelessness simply for leaving their abuser. Homeless counts in California show that about 10 to 15% of our homeless populations are persons who have experienced domestic violence.¹

Budget decisions over the past few years have systematically reduced California's safety-net programs, removing the very support that persons fleeing domestic violence rely upon. Without this support, those escaping domestic violence are hit with a perverse "double whammy" that makes leaving their abusers seem like a less attractive option than remaining in their violent situation. California's public policy should be making it easier, not harder, for domestic violence victims to make better lives for themselves and their children.

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Cutting safety-net supports sends the signal from policymakers that domestic violence situations are tolerable. Without supports, domestic violence victims become homeless. Once homeless, parents and children are often forced to be separated, continuing the family breakdown. Separation of families is a lose-lose situation for the families involved, the systems trying to assist them, and for the taxpayer's bottom line. Once children become part of our child welfare systems, we spend far more trying to care for them (without getting good results) than we would by trying to prevent the separation in the first place. Children without a safe, stable place to live suffer academically and even physically as a result. Policies and budgetary decisions should provide incentives, not disincentives, for families to remain together.

¹ http://www.housingca.org/resources/report_summary_homeless-count_2009_FINAL

What California Can Do About It:

1. Establish a permanent funding source for California's housing trust fund.²
2. Increase domestic violence shelter funding.³
3. Restore funding for the Emergency Housing and Assistance Program (EHAP).⁴
4. Establish a state interagency council on homelessness.⁵

For a list of Top 10 Solutions to Reduce Homelessness in 2010, more-detailed homeless solutions for specific sub-populations (including families, people living in rural areas, California's youth, veterans, and persons with mental illness), and California's 2009 Homeless Count Summary, visit www.housingca.org/nr/resource/reports.

² California's housing trust fund is the primary vehicle the state uses to incentivize the private market to build affordable places to live. For the past decade, funding for the trust has come from bond proceeds. Moving from bond financing to permanent funding for existing state housing programs would reduce boom-and-bust cycles of affordable-home production, reduce the debt-repayment burden on the state's general fund, and create well-paying construction jobs for Californians. It would incentivize the private market to build more of the affordable rental homes that many families need.

³ Even though funding for domestic violence shelters was partially restored after being cut in 2009, by that time, many shelters had already made cuts to personnel. Funds need to be increased, not eliminated. California could accomplish this by passing [SB 662 \(Yee\)](#), which would increase the portion of marriage license fees used to fund domestic violence shelters.

⁴ The declining economy has created a growing demand for emergency shelters in an already overburdened shelter system. Some shelters have closed and are listed for sale because there are no operating funds available to run the shelters. Despite these realities, the state has not invested in emergency shelter operations since 2008, when the funds were cut all together. In 2010, it has been proposed that the remaining \$4.2 million for emergency shelter operations be transferred to the state's general fund; however, this remaining funding must be retained for desperately needed shelter operations. For more information: <http://www.hcd.ca.gov/fa/ehap/>.

⁵ Despite having the largest homeless population in the United States, California is one of the few states not to have an interagency council on homelessness. Establishing an interagency council is the vital first step in identifying and applying for more federal resources (in order to qualify for these funds, states are usually required to have a coordinating statewide body). California can establish an interagency council via governor Executive Order or through legislation, such as [AB 1177 \(Fong\)](#).

