



Shelter Partnership

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MAJOR STUDY ON HOMELESS OLDER ADULTS UNVEILED
Unique Study Surveys Vulnerable Population for First Time; Offers Specific
Solutions to Address Growing Problem

*Findings by L.A.'s Shelter Partnership Detailed at Special City Council Meeting
At New Image Emergency Shelter*

Los Angeles – With home foreclosures on the rise and fewer public service dollars available, homeless older adults (62+) are among the fastest growing and most vulnerable homeless populations in Los Angeles, a new study has found. The new strategic plan by Shelter Partnership, Inc., along with its key findings and policy recommendations, was released and discussed today at a special meeting of the Los Angeles City Council's Ad Hoc Committee on Homelessness, at New Image Emergency Shelter near downtown, where the field research was conducted.

The Shelter Partnership strategic plan is significant for two reasons: First, it is the first time the homeless older adult population has been ever been studied locally. Secondly, the plan includes a specific set of public policy recommendations for local government to address the unique and persistent problems presented by this population.

“On any given night in LA County, there are between 3,000 and 4,000 older adults who are homeless. Over 60% of them have a disability and one-third to one-half or possibly more are chronically homeless,” said Shelter Partnership's Executive Director Ruth Schwartz. “The solution to their homelessness is the development and greater access to permanent, supportive housing that is affordable,” Schwartz added.

Three key themes emerge in this work: (1) there is a pervasive lack of public focus on homeless older adults; (2) homeless older adults in Los Angeles have unique characteristics and needs; and (3) permanent supportive housing is the housing choice best suited for their needs.

Highlights of the study's key findings include:

- There are between 3,000 and 4,000 homeless aged 62 and above in Los Angeles County
- At least one-third and perhaps as many as one-half or more of homeless older adults are chronically homeless
- Over two-thirds of homeless older adults are male

- Fifty-seven percent of homeless older adults are Black, while Latinos or Hispanics represent between 14 - 15% of the population
- Almost four in ten homeless older adults (62+) have proceeded beyond high school, including 24% reporting some college education
- Twenty-eight percent of homeless older adults (62+) report prior military service, which is twice as high as the general homeless population
- Sixty-two percent of older adults reported a disability of some sort (e.g., mental, physical, or both)
- At least one-half or more of the interviewees suffered from dental problems (60%), eye problems (50%), hypertension (50%), and arthritis (50%). Back problems (40%), pain (40%), diabetes (30%), heart problems (30%), depression (20%), and stroke (20%) were also reported.
- Homeless older adults were likely to have lived most recently on the streets (28%) or in an emergency shelter (25%), and to a lesser extent with family or friends (15%). However, this incidence of living with families or friends is relatively high for the population.
- At New Image Shelter, 24% of homeless older adults aged 62 and up reported receiving no income, as did 27% of those aged 62-64
- Almost two-thirds of the older adults received income from either federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security

"The results of this study are eye-opening, pointing to the fact that more needs to be done to support seniors and older adults who are facing homelessness," said Los Angeles City Councilwoman Jan Perry, who chairs the City Council's Ad Hoc Committee on Homelessness. "Awareness and prevention are imperative to address the growing number of seniors who are now calling the streets of Los Angeles their home," the Councilwoman added.

Among the core recommendations:

- Invest in permanent supportive housing creating a housing development corporation to focus on the development of permanent, supportive housing for fragile homeless older adults such as has been successfully accomplished by Hearth in Boston, the West Side Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing (WSFSSH) in New York City, and Senior Community Centers in San Diego.
- Link homeless service providers with administrators of affordable senior housing, such as HUD Section 202s and Section 8 senior buildings, to overcome application, screening, and wait list barriers including background checks, lack of addresses and birth certificates, and move-in costs.
- Target 250 tenant-based Section 8 vouchers through the various housing authorities (HACLA, HACoLA, and other local cities housing authorities) for at least the next four years for homeless older adults. Identify and fund service providers to assist with housing search and leasing functions.
- Initiate a pilot program targeting homeless older adults aged 62 or older in year-round shelters, using Homeless Prevention Initiative funds. Establish mobile resource teams of gerontologists and other specialists to help seek out and assist homeless older adults. Create interdisciplinary teams that can build trust

including a geriatrician, psychiatric specialists, medical staff, dental staff, income specialist, and housing specialist.

To access a complete copy of the Strategic Plan for Homeless Older Adults, or to learn more about Shelter Partnership, please visit www.shelterpartnership.org.

"This groundbreaking study is crucial to helping us get seniors off the streets and into housing where they can receive the support and services they need," said L.A. City Council President Eric Garcetti.

Council Member Bill Rosendahl, who also serves on the Ad Hoc committee, said, "I appreciate the Shelter Partnership's hard work highlighting the City's most vulnerable population--homeless older adults. I'm confident that Shelter Partnership's strategic plan will move the City in a positive direction as we tackle our homelessness problem."

"Sadly, homelessness among older adults is a growing problem as the population of baby boomers ages," Nan Roman, President of the National Alliance to End Homelessness said. "Few studies have focused on this disadvantaged population, so we are happy to see that the Shelter Partnership has invested in solid research that has pinpointed an effective solution - affordable housing with supportive services - that can be applied not only in L.A., but nationally as well," Roman added.

"Many in our community recognize that the problem of homelessness in Los Angeles is enormous, and seemingly, intractable," said Shelter Partnership Executive Director Schwartz. "To solve older adult homelessness, we must build a consensus that older adult homelessness in Los Angeles can be solved. Working with the public and private sectors, Shelter Partnership is committed to leading the efforts to end their homelessness," she added.

Based in Los Angeles, Shelter Partnership, Inc. is a non-profit organization dedicated to ending homelessness by assisting in the development of short-term and transitional housing programs, permanent housing, and supportive services for the homeless and potentially homeless throughout Los Angeles County. Since 1985, Shelter Partnership has been a leader in the fight against homelessness in L.A.

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