

## APA Official Actions

# Position Statement on Housing, Homelessness, and Mental Health

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“Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees. . . These are . . . position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects. . .” – *APA Operations Manual*

### Issue:

Housing is a key social determinant of mental health and a universal human right, as defined by the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. Access to housing improves health outcomes and decreases healthcare costs.

Studies have shown that the majority of homelessness triggers are not related to mental health disorders but are economic, such as the loss of a job and debt. Additionally, although individuals with mental illness are at increased risk for homelessness, multiple studies have also shown that the majority of individuals who are unhoused have neither mental illness nor substance use disorders.

Conflation of mental health disorders with poverty and homelessness worsens the stigma toward people with mental illness and toward people who are unhoused. Such conflation may also inadvertently lead to inappropriate substitution of mental health treatment in place of interventions that address the root causes of homelessness, namely the lack of safe, stable, and accessible housing.

Large-scale trials demonstrate improved health outcomes and cost savings from scalable interventions such as permanent supportive housing. This includes state and federal housing initiatives based on the principles of the Housing First approach, which combines permanent housing with rehabilitation and recovery services for people with disabilities. Looking at this issue through the lens of Housing First emphasizes choice and housing as a universal human right.

### APA Positions:

- While a minority of individuals who are unhoused have mental disorders, homelessness and mental disorders are not synonymous and should not be referred to interchangeably.
- Involuntary short-term psychiatric hospitalization is not a solution to homelessness for those with mental disorders.
- Safe, stable, and affordable housing is critical to improving mental health outcomes.
- Housing should not be contingent on mandatory mental health or substance use treatment.

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Caucus on the Social Determinants of Mental Health