

The Future of Homelessness for Seniors in Southern California

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Policy Brief

Introduction

What do you think of when you think of older adults; perhaps traveling comes to mind, spending time with grandkids or pursuing new hobbies and enjoying the comforts of retirement. Unfortunately this is not the reality for many elderly Americans; some elderly people don't experience this joy when getting older. In fact some older adults experience quite the opposite; some older adults don't have time to enjoy their golden years as they are too worried about if they will eat every day because they don't have money for food or where they will sleep at night because they don't even have a place to live. The fact is that there is a large number of homeless older adults living on America's streets and this number is increasing every day. Studies conducted across the country concluded that there is an upward trend in the proportion of people aged 50-64 among the homeless population. In fact recent estimates suggest that about one in three homeless individuals are aged fifty years or above, (Bailey,Hartshorn, Hinderlie, McMahon,Press, Tempel, 2011). According to the Sixth Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, the sheltered homeless population age 51 to 61 had grown from 18.9% of total sheltered people in 2007 to 22.3% in 2010,(Bailey,Hartshorn, Hinderlie, McMahon,Press, Tempel, 2011). In a recent study it was found that there was a significant rise in elderly homelessness in years 2011 and 2013, when compared with prior years, (Bailey,Hartshorn,

Hinderlie, McMahon, Press, Tempel, 2011).

As of 2016, the homeless population in Los Angeles, California was approximately 26,000, which is an alarming 11% increase since 2015, (Walcott, 2016). Contributing factors to this problem include an undersupply of affordable housing, low vacancy rates, and high rents, (Walcott, 2016). Other significant factors that could contribute to homelessness of older adults include disabilities such as mental illness as well as substance abuse; studies suggest that 85% of all homeless adults suffer from substance abuse and mental illness, (Baum & Burnes, 1993). Homelessness does not only affect those experiencing it, it is a problem for everyone and affects all segments of society. Homelessness is a public health and safety concern, (Walcott, 2016). Many would agree that the fact that there are so many homeless Americans is discouraging to say the least, what does that say about America and the future of its citizens? What can be done to change this social issue?

Policy Landscape

Throughout Los Angeles county, policies are being proposed in an effort to reduce the elderly homeless population. Measure HHH, (Homelessness Reduction and Prevention, Housing and Facilities Bond), was adopted by the City Council in June 2016, (Wolcott, 2016). This measure aims to provide clean affordable housing for the homeless and for the people in danger of becoming homeless such as seniors, disabled individuals, veterans, women and their children and foster youth. Measure HHH would allow the allocation of \$1.2 billion in bonds to fund housing for homeless people and people at risk for becoming homeless. These funds would also provide funding to facilities that provide mental health care, addiction treatment and other

services to this vulnerable population. The City and County of Los Angeles, in partnership with key stakeholders, determined that approximately 13,000 housing units are needed, (ballotpedia.org, 2016). Revenue sources are required to finance this housing.

“The City will issue up to \$1,200,000,000 in general obligation bonds to buy, build, or remodel facilities to provide supportive housing for homeless individuals and families where services such as health care, mental health and substance abuse treatment, education, and job training may be provided; temporary shelters and facilities, such as storage and showers; affordable housing (up to 20% of bond funds), including veterans housing for individuals and families with low incomes; and related infrastructure. Citizens Oversight and Administrative Oversight Committees would monitor bond expenditures. A financial audit shall be conducted annually. The bonds will be paid from an increase in property taxes. District officials estimated the total debt service cost for the loan—including principal and interest—at \$1,893,000,000. District officials also estimated the average property tax rate required to repay these bonds to be \$9.64 per \$100,000 in assessed property value”, (Walcott, 2016).

Many people are in support of Measure HHH, as it was approved in November of 2016 with the support of 77.14% of voters, (ballotpedia.org, 2016).

Among these supporters were:

- Elise Buik, President & CEO, United Way of Greater Los Angeles
 - Gary Toebben, President & CEO, Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce
 - Michael Albidrez, CEO Director, Skid Row Housing Trust
 - Dr. Mitchell Katz, MD, Director, Los Angeles County Department of Health Services
- Just to name a few, (ballotpedia.org,2016).

People who opposed Measure HHH include:

-G. Rick Marshall, Chief Financial Officer, California Taxpayers Action Network

-Denny Schneider, Community Activist

-Jack Humpreville, Neighborhood Council Budget Advocate;

-Mark Ryavec, Former Chief Deputy Assessor, Los Angeles County Assessor's Office,

(ballotpedia.org,2016).

Policy Implementation



Rushmore Cervantes, General Manager of the Los Angeles Housing and Community Investment Department (HCID), shared implementation information, regarding Measure HHH, during the Homelessness Policy Committee Meeting at the Central City

Association of Los Angeles (“CCA Delivers”, 2016). According to Cervantes, approximately \$1,200,000,000 will be used to construct permanent supportive housing (PSH) and up to \$200,000,000 can be used for the construction of homeless facilities (e.g., temporary shelter and storage). Building 1,000 units of PSH annually to house the chronically homeless is the goal for Measure HHH. The City issues two funding requests every year for developers to respond to with affordable housing projects, which includes PSH. Given the new bond financing availability from Measure HHH, the City anticipates four more annual funding requests, which presents a new challenge in identifying additional sources of funding to fully leverage available resources.

This also exemplifies the paradoxes that underlie even the most well-intentioned policies.

Future of Policy

Measure S is a proposed reform coming up in the March 7th election, which appears to threaten recent voter approved-affordable housing measures, namely Measure HHH. In November, Los Angeles voted 76 percent for Measure HHH, which demonstrates that ending homelessness is a top priority to local voters. Measure S, would create a new barrier to achieving this goal. There is much debate over Measure S (Stewart & Bauman, 2017) because it will halt all construction for the next two years in the City of Los Angeles until a solution can be found for the root of the homelessness problem, which has been argued to be city council corruption



(e.g., breaking zoning laws, backroom deals with international developers, etc.). Many are opposed to Measure S because they believe that the alleged nefarious activities of City Councilmembers requires another strategy, particularly campaign finance reform; however, banning the building of affordable housing is not viewed as a problem solve. Other opponents of Measure S (LA

Federation of Labor, 2017) believe voters have already demonstrated the pertinent need for affordable housing and agreed to tax themselves to protect growing numbers of women and children, veterans, seniors, foster youth, and the disabled in the area from homelessness. Measure S would roll back Measure HHH's progress before it can have a chance at implementation, which would be detrimental because housing is a leading cause of economic insecurity; housing cost burden is also a large risk, particularly seniors. According to Steven Wallace, Ph.D.

Professor at UCLA’s School of Public Health and Associate Director at UCLA’s Center for Health Policy Research, as people age, they pay the largest percentage of their income on housing followed by healthcare (Figure 1).

Other household expenditures also increase over the lifecycle, such as food (Guerra, 2017), further illustrating the need to safeguard seniors in particular. Many seniors live below the federal poverty line, on fixed incomes and strict budgets; which indicates many are forced to morally

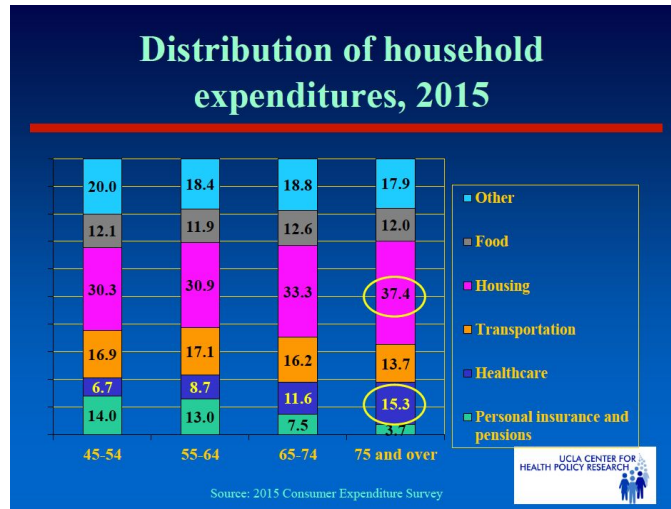


Figure 1

outrageous compromises between paying for mortgages, medicine or meals.

Policy Recommendations & Implications

<u>Recommendations</u>	<u>Implications</u>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Over 2/3 of Los Angeles voters approved Measure HHH; Address issue now. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. No on Prop S 2. Measure HHH is a critical step but will not help enough people; it only focuses on building and in the City of Los Angeles; more work is needed. 3. There is no funding for services to keep vulnerable people housed - Measure HHH is only for “bricks and mortar” -- it is not for the operations and services needed to address intersectional issues. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. County Measure H addresses this in the March election. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Further erosion of communal trust if homeless issue is not addressed soon <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. No plan; City may collect Prop HHH \$ even if Prop S passes 2. "[HHH] won’t clear the streets of homeless people within a few months or a couple of years. But without these housing projects, the problem cannot be solved. Let’s stop pretending we don’t see it." - Los Angeles Times editorial board (Barragan, 2016) 3. Ongoing advocacy is needed to ensure that developments are built but also that coordinated countywide efforts are made to prevent and combat homelessness.

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