



Homelessness

Homelessness is one of the most difficult, complex, and troubling issues facing the region today, and King County is utilizing many tools to effectively and efficiently provide services to help people stabilize their lives and successfully exit homelessness.

BACKGROUND

On a single night in January 2018, 12,112 people were counted experiencing homelessness. Forty-eight percent (5,792) were sheltered (staying in emergency shelters or transitional housing) and 52 percent (6,320) were unsheltered (vehicles, abandoned buildings, tiny houses or living outside). This represents a four percent increase over the number counted in 2017. While that is the smallest increase in four years, it is also the first time the unsheltered number was higher than the sheltered number.

The annual point-in-time count is an important snapshot on homelessness, but it is only one piece of the picture. Data shows that far more people—over 30,000—experienced homelessness in King County last year. Over 20,000 were able to exit homelessness. Homeless providers are succeeding in moving more people to housing, but the severe shortage of affordable housing hampers making greater progress. King County joins with many partners to develop affordable housing, and each building is fully leased before it opens. Two 24-hour shelters for families in formerly vacant County buildings opened in 2017 and they are full every night. Effective interventions like the Best Starts for Kids funded Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Initiative have been successful in preventing or diverting people from homelessness.

To truly get out in front of homelessness, however, the region must do a better job of stopping people from becoming homeless in the first place. Executive Dow Constantine joined with Auburn Mayor Nancy Backus and Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan to focus on the root causes of homelessness and strategize effective and scalable interventions to connect people to shelter, housing, and the supportive services they need to achieve and sustain stability. The five root causes of homelessness include:

1. Lack of affordable housing
2. Inadequate access to behavioral health treatment services
3. Criminal justice system involvement
4. Child welfare system involvement
5. Wages not keeping pace with the cost of housing

PROPOSED INVESTMENTS & ANTICIPATED IMPACTS

In his proposed budget, Executive Constantine calls for funding additional shelters with onsite services to help people transition from homelessness to stable housing. The budget utilizes several fund sources, including the Veterans, Seniors and Human Services Levy (VSHSL), document recording fees, General Fund, Convention Place Station housing mitigation funds, and Mental Illness and Drug Dependency (MIDD) sales tax revenues to fund permanent supportive housing, treatment, and other services, and a variety of shelter models to assist people experiencing homelessness.



King County

2019-2020 Proposed Budget

Priorities in 2019-2020 include:

- **Enhanced shelter.** Improving access to shelter connected with onsite case management services to give people a safe place to stay, combined with the services and tools to exit homelessness.
- **Stronger partnerships.** Expanding and strengthening partnerships between the county, cities, communities, and other entities through an improved governance structure for homeless funding and priority setting.
- **Modular housing pilots.** Piloting modular construction models to determine speed, durability, and cost effectiveness to expedite possible future affordable housing or shelter creation.
- **Linkages to behavioral health services.** Programs and services to address unmet treatment needs for people with mental health challenges and substance use disorder.

The proposed budget includes funding to address root causes of homelessness and respond to the crisis:

Enhanced Shelter

- **Elliott Congregate Modular Shelter** to house 72 persons on County-owned land in Seattle with 24/7 onsite case management services.
- **Harborview Hall renovations** to transform a currently unused building into a 100-bed shelter for vulnerable populations.

Modular Housing Pilot

- **Modular Micro Dwelling Units** to provide housing for 25 persons at a site to be determined with 24/7 onsite case management services.

Linkages to Behavioral Health Treatment

- **Increased access to behavioral healthcare** by adding \$2.5 million to enable providers to make mental health care available where people live versus waiting for people to come to an office.
- **New peer respite facilities** to provide support to people experiencing a mental health crisis.
- **Increased buprenorphine access**, including outreach by service providers to shelters and encampments and expansion of buprenorphine treatment at the Downtown Public Health Center.

Support for Justice-Involved Individuals

- **Medication assisted treatment induction for people in the King County Jail** to continue existing and start new buprenorphine treatment plans for individuals with opioid use disorder.
- **Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) expansion** to three new cities and changes in the prosecution of low-level drug offenses to facilitate treatment and community services instead of jail for people with behavioral health challenges.
- **Jail reentry services** to link more people exiting jail to housing, employment, behavioral health, and other community services to increase the chance for success and reduce returns to jail.

The budget also provides funding for the following:

- Continuation of County-sponsored shelters in the Administration Building, 4th and Jefferson Building, former White Center Public Health building, and a women's winter shelter.
- Support and collaboration with the City of Seattle for the Navigation Center and Navigation Team.
- Support and collaboration with the cities of Redmond and Bellevue for shelter development.
- Prevention of eviction and other inappropriate housing loss.
- Continuation of funding for rental assistance.
- Therapeutic community court (support and access to services as an alternative to the traditional court process).