

About Mental Health and Homelessness

At Community Housing Network, we believe that in order to support people with mental illness who have experienced homelessness, we need to recognize that they have endured challenging health conditions and life circumstances. They have confronted significant disabilities and major adversity. They deserve respect for their resilience—and that starts with dispelling some common misperceptions about mental illness and homelessness.

Mental illness can affect anyone.

People of all ages, races, income

levels, genders, and professions can

have a mental illness. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, an estimated 51.5 million adults in the U.S. experience mental illness: that's 20.6% of the general population.

Mental illness does not reflect the choices or character of the person it affects. Just like physical

illness, mental illnesses can be traced to biological and environmental influences. One family may have a history of diabetes; another of depression. A traumatic head injury may impact one person's ability to walk; and another's ability to manage impulses.

The most widely recognized predictors of mental illness include:

- Biological factors, such as chemical imbalances, physical illness, or injury
- Life experiences, such as trauma or a history of abuse
- Family history of mental health issues

And just like physical illnesses, many mental illnesses respond to interventions, such as:

- Medication
- Counseling and therapy
- Engaged support systems

Mental illness does not correlate to violent behavior.

At CHN, we sometimes encounter the myth that people with mental illness behave violently. In fact, those with severe mental illness are rarely violent, and actually 10 times more likely than the general population to be victims of violent crime.

Anyone who has experienced mental illness, traumatic crisis, abuse, loss, illness, or violence is at risk of becoming homeless.

Imagine a prolonged hospital stay that leads to insurmountably high bills. The onset of a mental illness that derails plans for the future. Falling victim to a crime that results in PTSD.

Any of these issues may create financial and psychological hardship that makes it difficult to earn a living—and, consequently, to pay rent or mortgage.

Any of these issues could lead to homelessness for any of us, at any time.

The experience of being homeless is traumatizing in and of itself. And once a person ends up unsheltered, they are at higher risk of substance abuse, being victimized by sexual assault and other crimes, and worsening mental illness.

People with mental illnesses who have experienced homelessness lead purposeful, productive lives.

With permanent supportive housing and services, many residents enjoy health and optimism. They recover from addiction, learn job skills, raise their income, and attend school. They are better able to sustain their physical and emotional wellness, maintain healthy relationships, and work on their personal goals.

For more information and to donate, please visit: chninc.org

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