

# Debunking the Myths of Homelessness

## Separating Fact from Fiction

**Myth:** The cause of homelessness is drug and alcohol abuse.

**False.** Only 20% of people report drugs and alcohol as the cause of their homelessness. Drug and alcohol abuse are often the result of homelessness, not the cause.

**Myth:** Homelessness is a choice. Most homeless people choose to live on the streets.

**False.** According to the Homeless Census in Santa Clara County, 93% of homeless respondents want affordable housing.

The biggest barrier to housing is affordable rent.

- 68% couldn't afford rent
- 50% had no work or income
- 38% reported no available housing
- 20% had criminal records that prevented their access to housing

**Myth:** Homeless people don't need cell phones. Cell phones are a luxury.

**False.** Cell phones are a lifeline for people experiencing homelessness and are sometimes their only connection to family, services, housing and employment. [Learn more about our partners at Sparrow bringing smartphones to the homeless community.](#)

**Myth:** Homeless people move to the Bay Area because of the weather.

**False.** 84% of homeless individuals in Santa Clara County are native to this County. [Read the full report here.](#)

## Common Questions:

**“Homeless people are lazy. Why don't they just get a job?”**

Homeless people spend every moment struggling to find their next meal, shower and shelter. Most homeless people experience overwhelming barriers to employment. Common barriers include criminal backgrounds, lack of internet access to reply to job opportunities, a lack of transportation to interviews and job fairs and not having access to a shower and clean clothing.

## **“Should I give homeless panhandlers money?”**

The basis of our model sprouted from this very problem: how do we decrease panhandling? Giving panhandlers money is a personal choice, and also a temporary fix. We suggest handing them an address to a shelter, a pair of socks, or another resource. Our staff members keep general cards in their cars and pass them out to people standing on the streets. The best thing you can do is [donate](#) or [volunteer](#) your time to an organization that helps solve homelessness.

## **“Why do they sleep on the streets, buses and in cars?”**

Sleeping in a shelter seems like an obvious solution to being on the street. Unfortunately, it's not that simple. Shelters can be quite difficult to get into; usually they require lots of paperwork and all parties must comply with the program, which doesn't always fit their needs or beliefs.

Another common barrier for homeless individuals is having a companion animal. Pets are generally not allowed in temporary housing or shelters. We can't blame someone for turning down a shelter if their best friend, and possibly only family, isn't allowed to come with them.

Other reasons include:

- There are not enough beds
- There are more men's shelters than women's
- They don't always know where to find the closest shelter
- They have to think about whether they have the energy or the means to make the trek to the closest shelter. Choosing between spending money on bus fare versus eating is a hard, daily choice.

People who are homeless are constantly in survival mode and thinking of two things:

1. Their health
2. Their safety

Buses are warm during cold seasons and cool during hot seasons. Getting sick while being homeless is bad news, especially if adequate medical coverage is not available (this is the case for many homeless people). Buses are also safe, and a person may manage to get a good hour or two of sleep on a long bus line. Sleep is a necessity that's difficult to come by when safety is top priority. Often, sleeping on the streets makes a person vulnerable to theft and abuse. Naturally, people try to stay awake at night to protect themselves and the few personal items they have. These circumstances can also extend to shelters.

From Streetstream

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