

Racial Equity and Homelessness

Published by the National Coalition for the Homeless
August 2020

Structural Racism and Homelessness

The compounded history of redlining, disinvestment, and other forms of discrimination have created the current system of institutional racism which disproportionately impacts communities of color in the United States. While racism can be practiced through individual prejudice, negative thoughts or stereotypes about a particular racial group, it is also widely practiced within larger institutions and structures of social life. This practice, structural or institutional racism plays a significant role in creating and maintaining the disparate outcomes that characterize the landscape of racial inequality.

It is necessary to advocate for Racial Equity in Homeless Service Provision, organizational management, and advocacy, in order to help people of color out of homelessness. In addition to mitigating long-term effects of structural racism, the solutions recognized as critical in combating homelessness – job training, affordable housing, services, among others – would no longer be confronted with the additional barriers of structural racism.

Advocating on Behalf of Racial Equity

The 2018 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) communicates that Black people continue to be overrepresented amongst the homeless. It is imperative that steps are taken in order to undo the structural forces that continue to lead to these results.

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has started awarding points for addressing racial disparities in the most recent Continuum of Care (CoC) funding application. In order to continue the plight for racial justice in homelessness, HUD should increase Bonus points in NOFA for Racial Equity and mandate Racial Equity training in order to qualify for CoC funds. Furthermore, a non-biased, science based prioritization tool needs to be implemented in order to assess vulnerability needs. Finally, the state can create a pathway to homeownership for people of color via the Housing Choice Voucher Program.

Stats on Racial Inequity of Homelessness

1. The 2018 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR): African Americans represent 13% of the general population but account for 40% of people experiencing homelessness
2. The 2016, Center for Social Innovation SPARC (Supporting Partnerships for Anti- Racist Communities): Approximately 2/3 of people experiencing homelessness in SPARC communities were Black (64.7%), In total, 78.3% of people experiencing homelessness were people of color
3. Black people were the most overrepresented among individuals ages 18-24 experiencing homelessness, accounting for 78.0% of this group.