

## Transgender Homelessness: Causes and Actions Needed

### Keywords:

- Transgender
- Homeless
- Discrimination
- Social welfare

### 1-2 sentence description

Transgender individuals in the U.S. face many forms of discrimination that lead them to unstable housing situations or homelessness. Although some governmental social programs such as programs under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act help address transgender homelessness, more social service programs are necessary to sufficiently resolve this critical problem.

### Key points

1. The number of youth coming out at younger ages as transgender (i.e., disclosing that they identify as transgender) is increasing.
2. Transgender individuals face discrimination at home, at work, in housing, and even when seeking admission to a shelter, all of which contribute to their high rates of homelessness.
3. Social welfare programs are available to transgender homeless people to help them secure housing.
4. The existing social welfare programs have not been able to keep up with the demand for housing needed for transgender homeless people.
5. Further actions need to be taken to help transgender people secure safe housing, including appropriating additional government funds for existing programs, implementing new programs, and passing the Equality Act.

**Brief**

Transgender individuals refer to people whose gender identity and/or gender expression is different from the sex that they were assigned at birth and the expected gender role of that sex (Gender Minority & Homelessness: Transgender Population, 1). Currently only about 0.3% (that we know of) of the United States population identify as transgender, although the number of those self-disclosing as transgender at younger ages is increasing. These individuals are often discriminated against and suffer from abuses due to their identity, causing housing difficulties and ultimately homelessness (1). In fact, 320,000 to 400,000 gay and transgender youth face homelessness each year, and about one in five transgender persons have unstable housing or are at risk or in need of shelter services (Gender Minority & Homelessness: Transgender Population). Although social welfare programs including the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) work to help transgender homelessness, societal discrimination of transgender people, and the continued difficulties that they face while homeless or seeking refuge in a shelter, illustrate that the U.S. needs more social welfare programs addressing the housing problems of our transgender youth and adult population.

Transgender Americans face discrimination leading to homelessness because of many reasons, including family rejection, running away from or “aging out of” foster care, violence, and institutional discrimination. The most common cause of homelessness amongst transgender youth is family rejection (Gender Minority & Homelessness: Transgender Population, 2). In a web-based survey of 381 homeless LGBT youth in the U.S. conducted from October 2011 to March 2012 by The Palette Fund, True Colors Fund, and the Williams Institute, 46% of LGBT youth named “running away due to family rejection” as their primary reason for homelessness, 43% chose “being forced out or expelled from the home by their parents,” and 17% reported “aging out of the foster care system” (2; Durso & Gates). Although some transgender youth who

are rejected by their families join the foster care system, family rejection is more than twice as likely to be an issue for homeless transgender youth than heterosexual youth (Gay and Transgender Youth Homelessness by the Numbers).

Running away from or aging out of the foster care system (also mentioned above) is another cause of homelessness for transgender youth. Although some foster care systems help transgender youth, the foster care system can consist of other children or adults who discriminate against or abuse them. For example, 78% of gay and transgender youth who were removed from or ran away from their New York foster care placements did so because of conflict related to their sexual orientation or gender identity (Gay and Transgender Youth Homelessness by the Numbers).

Violence is another cause of transgender homelessness for youth and adults. In a National Transgender Discrimination Survey (NTDS) involving 6,450 transgender and gender non-conforming adults, 48% of those who experienced domestic violence also had a history of homelessness (Gender Minority & Homelessness: Transgender Population, 2). This study illustrates how transgender individuals can suffer from physical and/or sexual abuse, leading them to seek shelters or become homeless as an alternative to continuing to live in an abusive environment (2).

Lastly, institutional discrimination in the workplace and in housing contributes to transgender homelessness. For example, 47% of transgender adults experience adverse employment outcomes, and 90% face some form of mistreatment or harassment on the job, all of which lead to income problems that affect their ability to pay for housing (3). Meanwhile, 19% of transgender adults are reportedly denied and 11% evicted from housing because they are transgender (Gay and Transgender Youth Homelessness by the Numbers).

While many issues contribute to transgender homelessness, some social welfare programs help eradicate this issue, including the RHYA which helps homeless youth regardless of their sexual identity through education, providing shelter, counseling and more (Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA)). Through RHYA programs in 2008, 44,483 youths were given a bed in a shelter (although 766,800 homeless youth were identified in these programs) (Gay and Transgender Youth Homelessness by the Numbers). In February 2015, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development issued guidance – that access to all shelters should be based on a person’s self-identified gender – to ensure that transgendered people have equal access to homeless shelters.

However, the existing federal social welfare programs are not adequately addressing the transgender homeless problem and additional action is needed. First, more money needs to be appropriated under existing programs, as currently less than one percent of the \$44 billion federal budget for housing programs is allocated for homeless youth (made up largely of LGBT) (Rooney, Durso, & Gruberg; Gay and Transgender Youth Homelessness by the Numbers). Second, the Equality Act needs to be passed without further delay. Introduced in Congress in 2015, the Equality Act would prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, gender identity and sexual orientation including in housing matters. Finally, additional public and private programs are needed to supplement these actions, given the size of the problem.

Thus, transgender individuals face many forms of discrimination leading to high rates of homelessness, and they continue to face discrimination while seeking homes including in shelters and on the streets. Although some social welfare programs are in place such as the RHYA to help transgender homelessness, not enough is being done to resolve this problem. The above-described actions are needed to help transgender homeless youth and adults access stable and affordable housing.

**Images**



(New Group Looks to Help Homeless & At-Risk Youth in Laclede County)

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**■ - These states lack explicit protections against housing and employment discrimination on the basis of both sexual orientation and gender identity.**

*via @HRC*

**EQUALITY ACT**

**#EqualityForward**

(Equality NC Endorses Federal Equality Act)

## Relevant Websites

1. [http://www.nhchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/in-focus\\_transgender\\_sep2014\\_final.pdf](http://www.nhchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/in-focus_transgender_sep2014_final.pdf)

This is the Quarterly Research Review of the National HCH Council: Vol. 3, Issue 1 September. 2014.

2. <http://homeless.samhsa.gov/Search.aspx?tagId=42144&search=transgender+youth>

This is a homelessness resource center.

3. <http://www.transequality.org/issues/housing-homelessness>

This describes different governmental policies regarding fair housing laws and discrimination based on sexual orientation.

4. [http://salsa4.salsalabs.com/o/51171/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action\\_KEY=15558](http://salsa4.salsalabs.com/o/51171/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=15558)

This is the cite to a petition to sign the Equal Act, which is the current act trying to get passed to help in forming better equal housing laws.

5. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbt/news/2010/06/21/7980/gay-and-transgender-youth-homelessness-by-the-numbers/>

This website provides a lot of statistics about the difficulties facing transgender homeless people.

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