

Homelessness Among Women: What Utahns Need to Know

RESEARCH SUMMARY

UTAH WOMEN & LEADERSHIP Project

NO. 45 | JULY 16, 2026

Homelessness remains a growing concern for Utah communities and affects the well-being of individuals, families, and the state as a whole. Although homelessness can impact anyone, women often face unique challenges that increase their risk of housing instability, including poverty, caregiving responsibilities, domestic violence, and physical and mental health concerns. These challenges are frequently interconnected, making it more difficult to secure and maintain safe, stable housing. Understanding the factors that contribute to homelessness and the experiences of those affected is critical to creating effective solutions that strengthen Utah families and communities.

RAPID INCREASE

Homelessness has grown rapidly in Utah during the past several years. On a single night in 2025, 4,584 Utahns were experiencing homelessness, representing a 46.4% increase from 2020 and an 18% increase from 2024. Utah's homelessness rate reached 13 people per 10,000 residents and more than 30,500 individuals accessed homeless services during 2025. While Utah's rate remains lower than the national average, the gap between state and national rates has narrowed considerably, signaling a growing challenge that affects communities throughout the state.

AFFORDABILITY

Housing affordability is a key factor driving homelessness in Utah. In 2024, Utah ranks as the ninth most expensive housing market in the nation, with several counties classified as "seriously" or "severely" unaffordable. While a one-bedroom apartment would need to cost about \$530 per month to be affordable for a low-income worker, the state's median one-bedroom rent is around \$1,200 per month. As housing costs continue to outpace incomes, more Utahns are struggling to secure and maintain stable housing, increasing their risk of homelessness.

WHY THIS MATTERS

"Homelessness affects the entire state of Utah. All the large municipalities and many small ones have community members who, for a wide variety of reasons, find themselves unhoused and at risk. It is almost impossible for an individual or family to thrive when living in such adverse conditions. The personal implications of homelessness are broad and can affect multiple generations."

Utah Homelessness Council

WOMEN & FAMILIES

Women and children represent a significant share of Utahns seeking homeless services. In 2025, 12,823 women accessed homeless services in Utah, accounting for 41.9% of all service users, and 27.3% of these women were under age 18. The growing number of women and children accessing services highlights how homelessness often affects families rather than isolated individuals. Women are also more likely to encounter barriers related to caregiving responsibilities, economic insecurity, and domestic violence, creating unique pathways into homelessness and making recovery more challenging.

HOMELESSNESS IN UTAH:

- is rising rapidly.
- begins with housing instability.
- reflects unique challenges for women and families.
- requires early prevention.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Homelessness rarely occurs in isolation and is often accompanied by health and safety challenges. Among Utah women accessing homeless services in 2025, the most commonly reported barriers to stable housing were mental health disorders (22.8%), chronic health conditions (18.4%), physical disabilities (13.9%), developmental disabilities (10.2%), and substance use concerns (7.6%). Research also shows that poverty and homelessness are linked to higher risks of chronic illness, shorter life expectancy, and adverse developmental outcomes for children. Stable housing provides a foundation for better health and well-being for individuals and families.

For many Utah women, housing instability is also closely tied to personal safety. In 2025, 8.6% of women who accessed homeless services (1,103 women) had experienced domestic violence, including 329 who were actively fleeing abuse. This number has nearly doubled since 2017, highlighting that homelessness is not simply a housing issue but also a safety issue. Effective responses must address both housing needs and the broader challenges affecting women's safety and well-being.



COMPLEX TRENDS

While Utah's overall homelessness rate remains below the national average, several trends point to increasingly complex housing challenges. Between 2015 and 2024, overall homelessness increased by 27.9%, while unsheltered and chronic homelessness rose by 346% and 288.8%, respectively. At the same time, homelessness among children, families, and veterans declined by 22.9%, 22.2%, and 64.1%. Despite this progress, the average length of stay in emergency shelters increased by 17% between 2023 and 2024, highlighting the growing difficulty of securing permanent housing and the need for prevention, affordable housing, and long-term support.

SHARED SOLUTIONS

In 2025, Utah invested \$97.4 million in ongoing funding to support a range of homelessness response efforts, including emergency shelters, outreach and prevention, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing. However, growing demand for services reinforces the need for sustained funding and coordinated solutions that address both housing instability and its underlying causes.

THE PATH FORWARD

Housing stability is essential to individual, family, and community well-being. Rising housing costs continue to place pressure on individuals and families, increasing the risk of housing instability and homelessness. Expanding affordable housing opportunities and supporting cost-burdened renters and homeowners can help more Utahns secure and maintain stable housing.

Preventing homelessness is one of the most effective ways to reduce it. Strengthening economic opportunities, increasing access to resources and support services, and addressing barriers related to health, safety, and housing can help individuals and families avoid homelessness before a crisis occurs. Efforts that make homelessness brief and non-recurring can improve outcomes for Utah's most vulnerable populations.

Every Utahn has a role to play in creating solutions. Community members can learn about the root causes of homelessness, raise awareness of housing challenges, support organizations working in their communities, and engage with leaders and policymakers on issues related to housing stability. Working together to address homelessness can strengthen individuals, families, and communities throughout Utah.

PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS IN UTAH

Addressing homelessness begins with understanding its causes and supporting effective solutions. You can help prevent homelessness in Utah by increasing awareness of housing insecurity, supporting efforts to expand affordable housing and community resources, and advocating for policies that strengthen housing stability for individuals and families. See below for calls to action and resources that can help Utahns promote housing stability, strengthen communities, and prevent homelessness before it occurs.

Data Source: [UWLP Snapshot No. 65](#)

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Learn More:** Explore resources in the UWLP Poverty & Homelessness [Resource Kit](#).
- **Review:** Goals, perceptions, and community partners on the Poverty & Homelessness Spoke [webpage](#).
- **Get Involved:** Connect to grassroots movement happening within [A Bolder Way Forward](#).
- **Take Action:** Help move the needle and discover additional [Calls to Action](#) for groups, organizations and communities.



Learn about the root causes of poverty and homelessness and share this knowledge with others. Understand and use appropriate language when discussing these challenges.



Contact developers and community decision makers to raise awareness of the challenges around housing and ensure more attainable housing is available.



Reach out to community leaders and policymakers about the importance of listening to cost-burdened renters and homeowners so that effective solutions can be developed.

Learn more at www.utwomen.org

Authors: Brie Sparks & Dr. Susan R. Madsen