

Homelessness in Nome

When people become homeless, they are losing everything they own as well as connections to friends, family and even community. And, while homeless, it is very hard to do things that many of us take for granted like sleeping, taking a shower,



or brushing teeth, going to the bathroom, or washing clothes. This also makes it extremely difficult to get to work or maintain employment.

Many of Nome’s homeless individuals stay at the NEST shelter when its open starting in November. They are also temporarily living in cars, tents, Conex’s, abandoned buildings, are often seen on Nome’s main streets and sidewalks. Being homeless with others in public spaces, they are more likely to experience violence and other traumatic events and often arrested for it, while some are seen sleeping in public, or loitering amongst Nome’s Front Street business owners.

The Nome Community Center (NCC), a nonprofit organization, provides a variety of services to the community of Nome. NCC has experience in caring for Nome’s homeless individuals through its NEST (Nome Emergency Shelter Team) operations and its permanent supportive housing (PSH) program using the scattered sites model. Through these programs, NCC staff have gained firsthand knowledge that additional permanent supportive housing is needed to address homelessness in Nome.

Through data collection, NCC learned that of the 225 people using NEST services in 2020, 23 individuals had stayed at the shelter for over 100 days, fitting the HUD definition of chronic homelessness. Additionally, NEST staff knew that overcrowding, the “hidden homeless” were often not counted in the annual Point in Time (PIT) count of the homeless in Nome. This data accelerated the growing concern from NCC’s governing board and staff that a more permanent solution is needed for the homeless population of Nome.

Who Are They?

Within Nome’s city limits, every day there are 25-30 homeless individuals seeking shelter, and of those, 23 are considered chronically homeless many of which suffer from physical and mental health needs, substance misuse problems and undiagnosed disabilities, all contributing factors to lack of employment making it extremely hard to afford a place to live even if there was housing available. Nome is also short on housing.

Homeless Characteristics Through Data Collection

Male 17 Female 6
Veterans 2
50 and older 5
Primary residency is Nome 10

Regardless of tribal affiliation or known village or regional corporation, many consider Nome as home like everyone else that lives here for its accommodations such as employment, school and shopping.

VI-SPDAT Scores measuring history of homelessness, risks & wellness		
0 to 3: No housing intervention		0
4-7: few risk factors		1
8+ very high-risk factors		18
did not participate		4
	total	23

Individuals using the NEST shelter are registered and interviewed using the Vulnerability Index Tool to assess level of homelessness. The Vulnerability Index-Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) is a nationally used tool that helps staff to distinguish more objectively the relative vulnerability of all homeless adults, those that come to the NEST shelter, or through outreach and referrals from the community. Once completed and scored, the information is entered into a statewide database, the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Individuals that score high are placed on a waiting list with the Nome Community Center’s permanent supportive housing (PSH) program.

Housing is the Solution to the Homeless Problem

Permanent supportive housing models that use a Housing First approach have been proven to be highly effective for ending homelessness, particularly for people experiencing chronic homelessness. Studies such as HUD's *The Applicability of Housing First Models to Homeless Persons with Serious Mental Illness* have shown that Housing First permanent supportive housing models result in long-term housing stability, improved physical and behavioral health outcomes, and reduced use of crisis services such as the emergency room, hospital, and jail.

By offering housing with onsite supportive services, it is eliminating the burden—and cost—to our public systems.

For example--Forget Me Not Manor (a HF project in Anchorage) showed reduced usage of emergency services after one year in housing (Brocius, UAA SSW, 2019)

- ER visits reduced by 45% (230 fewer visits)
- Contacts with police reduced by 66% (2 fewer contacts per day)
- Sleep off center visits reduced by 99% (fire and rescue services decreased transports by 54% or 2.3 fewer transports per week)

In Nome, service call numbers from the Seawall section of the Nome Nugget newspaper:

Week Ending	Nov 14 / Nov 28	
NPD calls for service	362	421
Alcohol related	122	70
Intoxicated persons	28	12
Ambulance calls	29	11
AMCC protective hold	0	0
Hospital for eval/treat	0	1

Cost realization and effectiveness is being assessed by staff at the City of Nome and Norton Sound Health Corporation and will be shared in the near future.

What is Housing First?

As the name suggests, it is about first getting into housing, HOUSING FIRST. The Housing First practice came from decades of trying to determine who was "housing ready" or the promise of housing was used to reward people for achieving

a pre-determined goal such as drug and alcohol abstinence. These outdated approaches lead to high failure rates and the false notion that homeless people like living on the streets. It doesn't help that homelessness is often labeled with substance use problems and drug addiction---this is only what is most visible. If they were housed, no one would see the addiction.

Why Housing First model?

It is NCC's experience that while stable housing helps some, many of Nome's chronically homeless population have conditions and other struggles that make it difficult to maintain housing, and do not fit in the PSH scattered sites model or traditional housing environment.

Housing First is an

- Evidence based approach
- Effective Use of Government & Local Resources & it
- Reduces length of time someone experiences homelessness.

Nome's Housing First Project

NCC is interested in building a 15-studio apartment complex using a Housing First approach. This is an effective strategy that combines affordable housing with intensive coordinated support services. Housing is the first step in helping Nome's most vulnerable chronically homeless individuals. It not only helps to alleviate the unproductive and costly cycle through emergency services but addresses a part of Nome's housing shortage and is a permanent solution toward ending homelessness.

How much will it cost?

The NCC Housing First project will cost approximately \$10 million to build with an annual operating cost of roughly \$300,000. The project has already been approved for project-based housing vouchers which is rental assistance attached to each room by contract, and the subsidy stays with the unit if the tenant moves.

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