



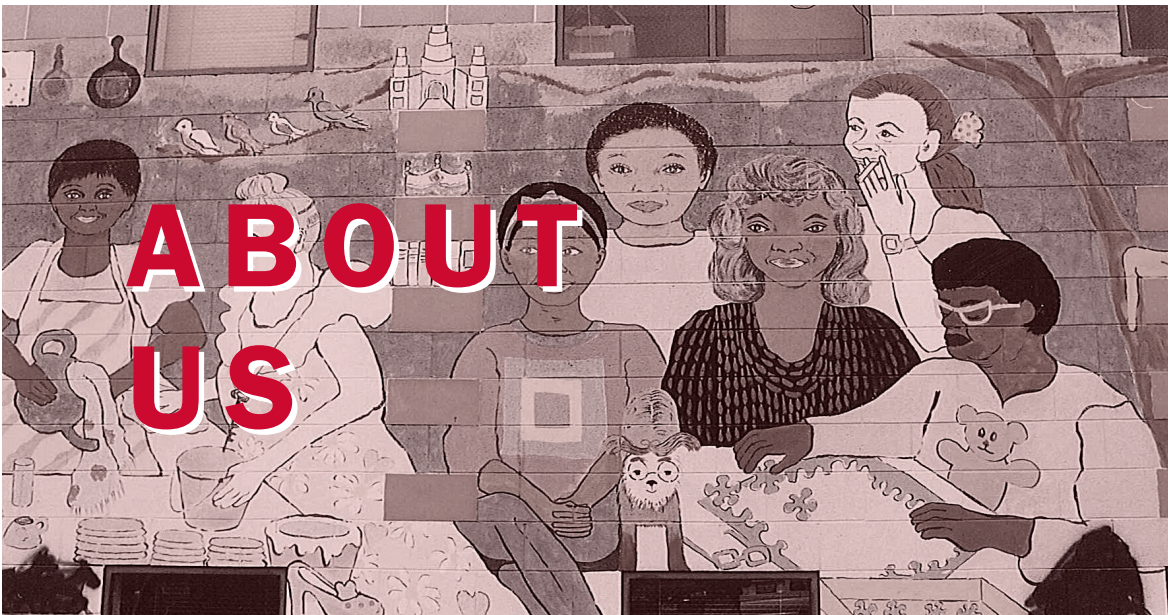
ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

A GUIDE TO ENDING WOMEN'S HOMELESSNESS IN LOS ANGELES

Brought to you by the Downtown Women's Center
Communications & Policy Department

Table of Contents

ABOUT US.....	1
HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT.....	2
SIX THINGS YOU CAN DO EVERY DAY.....	4
DEBUNKING COMMON MYTHS.....	5
CAUSES.....	6
RACE & HOMELESSNESS.....	7
SOLUTIONS.....	9
FUNDING.....	10
BIGGEST AREAS OF NEED.....	11
DWC WORKS.....	13
ADVOCACY ROADMAP.....	16
ADVOCACY IN ACTION.....	19
A GLOSSARY OF WORDS THAT MATTER.....	20
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES.....	21
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	22



The Downtown Women’s Center (DWC) is the only organization in Los Angeles focused exclusively on serving and empowering women experiencing homelessness. DWC envisions a Los Angeles with every woman housed and on a path to personal stability. Its mission is to end homelessness for women in greater Los Angeles through housing, wellness, employment, and advocacy.

At DWC, we believe housing is a human right — and we know that homelessness has solutions. Our 40+ years of experience have taught us that:

- 1. A gender equity lens** is essential to addressing the unique challenges faced by women experiencing homelessness.
- 2. Systemic and institutional racism** is a root cause of homelessness, and programs must directly acknowledge and address racial disparities.
- Housing is inextricably linked to both physical and emotional well-being; **the nexus of housing and health** must be central to policy making.
- Only by advancing **permanent housing solutions** can we truly eradicate homelessness.

We invite you to join us in this conversation and help us build a Los Angeles with every woman housed. We hope you'll use and share this Advocacy Toolkit as a resource to better inform yourself and your community about the causes of women's homelessness, its solutions, and the role we all have to play in ending it.

QUESTIONS? Email us at Comms@DowntownWomensCenter.org.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

Achieving social and policy change is critical to ending women's homelessness, and we can't do it alone. We need committed supporters and people like you to help us spread awareness and change lives.

This Advocacy Toolkit is your reference on the state of women's homelessness in Los Angeles, as well as its causes and solutions. Our hope is that it will empower you to join the conversation and equip you with the tools you need to:

- Submit compelling public comment in support of new affordable housing developments in your community.
- Turn common stereotypes of homelessness into learning opportunities, and combat **NIMBY** ("Not In My Backyard") sentiments when you encounter them.
- Write to and call your elected officials in support of housing and other community investments to ending homelessness.
- Have conversations with friends, family, and coworkers about women's homelessness, its solutions, and DWC.
- Drive awareness by sharing information with your network and/or hosting live conversations about women's homelessness on social media.

advocate

ad·vo·cate | 'ad-və-kæt , -kāt

- noun**
1. one who defends or maintains a cause
 2. one who supports or promotes the interests of a cause or group
- verb**
1. to support or argue for (a cause, policy, etc.)



ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

1. **Increase local development of permanent affordable housing** in order to prevent and quickly end new instances of homelessness.
2. **Increase access** to gender-specific, trauma-informed housing and shelter services.
3. **Expand funding and support** for survivors of domestic and gender-based violence.

Homelessness is a highly politicized and emotional issue that provokes feelings of hope as well as fear. When you advocate for housing solutions, you should be prepared to confront these fears and negative associations, regardless of whether they are grounded in reality or not. One of the most effective ways of doing so is to start from a place of empathy and build a connection based on mutual understanding. This Toolkit is designed to help you navigate these situations and change people's opinions, hearts, and minds along the way.

Here at DWC, we know that homelessness has solutions, and that there are a number of important policy and service changes we can make and advocate for in order to realize them. Our hope is that this Toolkit will show you how.

We start with **a few simple ways** you can support women experiencing homelessness, while debunking the negative myths and stereotypes about them that you'll see in the media, online, and in personal interactions.

Then, we take you through **the main causes of and solutions to women's homelessness** in Los Angeles, to equip you with the kind of nuanced information you'll need to persuade your community members and elected officials that proven, evidence-based solutions *are* within reach — we just have to invest in them. The statistics in this section will also help you combat common NIMBY sentiments, which are frequently driven by fear, not facts.

Information on **the current state of women's homelessness and public funding** in Los Angeles is included, too, in order to round out your knowledge of the state of the field (and where it needs to go).

The biggest areas of need are up next. These include housing, employment, healthcare, and violence and trauma. This section will give you a better understanding of the changes we need to be advocating for and why.

Next you'll find our **advocacy roadmap**, which overviews a number of specific advocacy "asks" that we see as critical to building a Los Angeles with every woman housed. This section should help you assess whether new developments, projects, and legislation in your community have the potential to contribute to long-term housing solutions for women.

We've also included background information on **DWC's programs and interventions** that you can use as evidence to round out your arguments. To further help you speak on the issues, you can refer to our **DWC elevator pitch** and **sample script** for advocacy interactions, as well as our **glossary**, which is your guide to the words that matter and how to use them to avoid contributing to harmful stereotypes.

Finally, we've included **resources** and a **bibliography** at the end of this Toolkit. We hope you'll keep reading and learning about the issues so that, together, we can build a Los Angeles with every woman housed.

Six Things You Can Do Every Day To Help

1. ACKNOWLEDGE

people experiencing homelessness. Have conversations with unhoused neighbors and offer to be a support person if they experience violence from other members of the community. If an unhoused person must call the police, offer to be present to ensure that they are receiving fair treatment.

2. ENGAGE

your neighbors and family members in conversation about the causes of women's homelessness — as well as the existence of proven, evidence-based solutions such as permanent supportive housing. Identify and point out prejudice against homeless individuals, as well as myths and stereotypes, such as the idea that "homeless people want to stay homeless."

3. ATTEND

neighborhood council meetings and push back on anti-homeless language and policies from other community members. Engage community advocates with lived experience of homelessness to discuss services and success stories.

4. ENCOURAGE

supportive conversations with friends and family about mental health and preventive care, healthy relationships, intimate partner violence, and domestic violence, and offer resources as needed.

5. VOLUNTEER

at a homeless service or victims service agency. Learn where local cooling centers and winter shelters are, and spread information about these resources to unhoused individuals in your community.

6. DONATE

financially or give your gently used items to your local homeless service or victim service agency.

Debunking Common Myths of Homelessness



Homelessness is a personal choice. People who are homeless don't want help; they want to stay homeless.



Nobody wants to be homeless. Homelessness is usually the result of economic burden due to unemployment, unexpected medical expenses, etc. Current research in Los Angeles shows that 59% of people report economic burden as the main cause of their homelessness, followed by weakened social networks and disabling health conditions. [1]



People experiencing homelessness are all mentally ill and abuse substances and/or alcohol.



The majority of people experiencing homelessness aren't mentally ill and don't abuse substances. Only 27% of adults experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles report a substance abuse disorder and 25% a serious mental illness, including post-traumatic stress disorder. [2]



Affordable housing developments drive down local property values.



There is no evidence that low-income housing can lead to local property value decline, as noted in a 2007 study of the country's 20 least affordable housing markets prior to the subsequent market collapse. [3]



Unhoused people in Los Angeles are not local; most come from elsewhere because of the nice weather.



The majority (72%) of adults experiencing homelessness have lived in LA for more than 20 years, followed by individuals (11%) who have lived in LA for 10-20 years. [4]

CAUSES

Homelessness has many causes and no woman's path into and out of homelessness is the same. Research shows, however, that economic burdens due in part to extreme housing un-affordability are a primary driver of homelessness across Los Angeles for men and women alike.

Centuries of economic disparities have made women especially vulnerable to housing insecurity and homelessness. Instances of household conflict, experiences of domestic violence, and/or the breakdown of social networks represent other major causes of homelessness for women.

Below you can find recent facts and figures to empower you in debunking the common myths and stereotypes that you'll encounter when speaking publicly about women's homelessness, its causes, and its solutions.



- **Women's homelessness in Los Angeles is increasing at a rate outpacing men's.** In 2019 alone, women's homelessness in Los Angeles increased by 16%. [5]
- **Los Angeles' housing crisis is driving more women into homelessness than ever before:** over a quarter of women surveyed in the [DWC 2019 Los Angeles City Women's Needs Assessment \(WNA\)](#) became newly homeless within the last year. [6]
- **Nearly half of women experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles are age 51 and older,** but research shows that more younger women are becoming newly homeless, too. [7]
- **Women of color — particularly Black women — are disproportionately affected by homelessness.** While Black women make up 9% of LA County's population, they accounted for nearly one-third (28.7%) of women participating in the WNA. [8]

RENT & ECONOMIC BURDEN

Rent Burden

The U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) defines rent burdened individuals as those who spend more than 30% of their monthly income on rent or housing.

- Studies have found that rent burden disproportionately impacts women compared to men. [9] This is due in part to a persistent gender pay gap, with women earning only 88 cents on the dollar in California. [10]
- In Los Angeles, nearly 70% of individual female households were considered rent burdened in 2016. [11] The same study found that nearly half of these households were also considered Extremely Low Income, meaning their income was less than or equal to 30% of the area median income.
- Housing affordability in Los Angeles is at historic lows: LA County needs an additional 509,000 units of affordable housing to meet current demand. [12]
- Renters across LA County would also need to earn \$41.96 per hour — 2.8 times the minimum wage — to afford the average monthly rent of \$2,182. [13]

SOCIAL LINKAGES

- According to a 2017 study of women's homelessness and housing insecurity in Los Angeles, approximately half of unsheltered women cited social circumstances (such as a relationship ending, household conflict, or lack of family and friends) or economic hardship (such as unemployment or eviction) as main drivers of their homelessness. [14]
- Compared to men, higher percentages of women report their current homelessness is in some way caused by a relationship that broke down, an unhealthy or abusive relationship, or because family or friends caused their eviction (60% compared to 49%). [15]

VIOLENCE

- Domestic violence (DV) is a main driver of homelessness for women. In general, it is estimated that more than one-third of DV survivors experience homelessness at some point in their lives. [16]
- According to data from 2017, nearly twice as many women as men experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles had experienced DV or intimate partner violence (IPV) in their lifetime. [17]
- More than one-quarter (25.7%) of women surveyed in WNA had experienced frequent violence within the last year, while more than half (53.2%) had experienced DV or IPV in their lifetime. [18]

RACE & HOMELESSNESS

Centuries of inequitable policies — from slavery to Jim Crow and redlining, to Section 8 and the War on Drugs — contribute to the unique barriers some communities face in accessing services and achieving personal and housing stability today. The disparate rates at which underrepresented groups and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) experience crime, violence, incarceration, non-communicable disease, un/under-employment, housing insecurity, and homelessness should all be understood within the nexus of systemic dispossession and racism.

In Los Angeles, the numbers tell the story. Current research shows that Black and African-American individuals account for a disproportionate 33.7% of the homeless population, compared to their 7.9% share of the County's general population; in general, it is estimated that systemic racism makes Black individuals four times more likely to experience homelessness in Los Angeles. [19] Black women also comprise 28.7% of all women experiencing homelessness across the County and 39.7% of female-identifying residents in Skid Row. [20]

As we'll show later on, unhoused individuals face decreased access to medical treatment and preventative care, and increased risk of personal violence, police brutality, disability, mental and physical illness, unemployment, and even death. Given these interlocking disparities, it is critical that we put the needs and experiences of BIPOC and other individuals with intersectional identities at the forefront of our work to transform systems, services, and lives.

The impact of institutional and structural racism in education, criminal justice, housing, employment, health care, and access to opportunities cannot be denied:

Homelessness is a by-product of racism in America.

— *Report & Recommendations of the LAHSA Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness*

SOLUTIONS

At DWC, we know that homelessness is not inevitable: it is a societal problem that bears especially hard on women. We need committed communities and people like you to help us promote and advance the solutions that are proven to end it.

HOUSING FIRST

“Housing First” is an evidence-based solution to ending homelessness that prioritizes unconditional access to housing for individuals experiencing housing insecurity and/or homelessness. It is based on the belief that people require food, safety, and shelter before they can begin on the path to personal stability, and is proven to be particularly effective at ending homelessness for high-need populations.

- Under a Housing First approach, housing is provided without preconditions and individuals are empowered to engage with supportive services on a voluntary basis.
- Common models include Permanent Supportive Housing.
- Growing evidence shows that individuals housed through a Housing First model are more likely to remain housed permanently.
- In 2016, Former Governor Jerry Brown legally declared California a “Housing First” state.

Permanent Supportive Housing

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) is long-term, service-rich, affordable housing that has been proven to be particularly effective for communities with complex housing needs. It is a key tenet of the Housing First model.

TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

Trauma-informed care (TIC) is a framework for service provision that involves understanding the effects that trauma may have on an individual — physically, mentally, and emotionally.

A simple approach with substantial benefits, TIC improves both emergency and permanent services, reducing costs and leading to stronger short- and long-term outcomes overall. A trauma-informed approach to service provision is particularly effective for individuals with intersectional identities and women experiencing homelessness, given their higher likelihood to have experienced violence, systems involvement, and conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder.



In 2016 and 2017, Los Angeles voters resoundingly approved two important funding sources to combat homelessness in the region, proving their commitment to finding a long-term solution. DWC played a key role in the passage of these historic measures. They include:

PROPOSITION HHH

MEASURE H

OUTCOME

Passed in November 2016 with 76% voter approval

Passed in March 2017 with 69% voter approval

JURISDICTION

City of Los Angeles

County of Los Angeles

WHAT IS IT?

A \$1.2 billion bond to build 10,000 units of permanent supportive housing over 10 years

A quarter-cent sales tax that will invest \$335 million over 10 years into homeless services

WHAT DOES IT FUND?

The development of physical buildings

Supportive services

Although Prop HHH and Measure H provide crucial funding for housing and homeless services across Los Angeles, they will not end homelessness on their own. It is critical that we continue to advocate for the development of affordable housing and permanent supportive housing in every neighborhood.

BIGGEST AREAS OF NEED

Homelessness is not a static issue: unhoused women experience a number of unique vulnerabilities and challenges. Addressing their needs requires us to develop evidence-based, gender-specific, and trauma-informed supportive services and housing solutions that meet women where they are on their path out of homelessness and towards personal stability.

The following facts and figures offer a starting point for understanding how policy changes and interventions that privilege Housing First and trauma-informed solutions can help us better serve the unique needs of women experiencing homelessness.

HOUSING

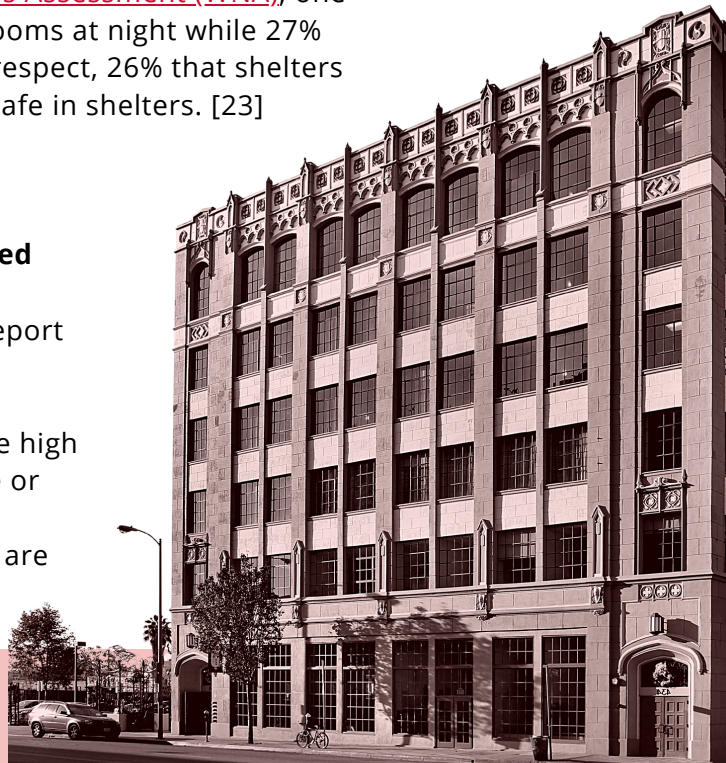
In Los Angeles, the biggest reported barrier to permanent housing for women is the lack of affordable housing:

- Of the emergency shelter beds that were made available in 2017 in LA County, only 17% were reserved for women, [21] a group that now comprises 32.4% of the total homeless population in the County. [22]
- Women also face barriers to accessing overnight shelter. According to the [DWC 2019 Los Angeles City Women's Needs Assessment \(WNA\)](#), one-third of women have difficulty accessing restrooms at night while 27% note that shelter staff do not treat them with respect, 26% that shelters are uncomfortable, and 23% that they feel unsafe in shelters. [23]

EMPLOYMENT

In Los Angeles, 58% of women who are unhoused cite their lack of housing as a barrier to stable employment. At the same time, 21% of women report unemployment itself as a barrier to housing [24]:

- 25% of women in Los Angeles did not complete high school, and only 31% have a bachelor's degree or higher. [25]
- 63% of women living in poverty in Los Angeles are unemployed. [26]



HEALTH & HEALTHCARE

Women experiencing homelessness face challenges accessing necessary medical services and health resources:

- Women identify access to quality food as a main area of need. [27]
- A high percentage of women surveyed in the WNA had a disability and/or experienced mental health issues. For example, 40.7% of those surveyed noted that they have an ambulatory disability, while just over a third (36%) of survey respondents were disabled or on disability. [28]
- Although the vast majority (84.2%) of women surveyed in the WNA possessed some form of health insurance, more than half (63.2%) had also visited the emergency room within the last year, suggesting they were not regularly accessing primary or preventative care. [29]
- Almost 60% of women experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles rate their mental health as poor. [30]
- Unhoused women in Los Angeles live, on average, 35 years less than women in stable housing. [31]

VIOLENCE & TRAUMA

The persistently high rate of violence is one of the most distinguishing differences between men and women's experiences of homelessness:

- Over 50% of women experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles have experienced domestic or interpersonal violence in their lifetime. A majority (60.2%) have also experienced some form of violence within the last year. [32]
- LGBTQIA+ women experiencing homelessness are more likely than average to experience sexual assault or sexual violence. [33]

The immense emotional and physical trauma of homelessness presents a major barrier for women in accessing services and securing sustainable employment and housing.

According to the WNA, 40% of respondents stated that housing services did not understand their trauma, and another 35% reported that street outreach/case management providers did not understand their trauma. More than one-third (37%) of respondents also indicated a preference for accessing services in woman-only environments. [34]



Since 1978, DWC has been spearheading the effort to end women's homelessness in greater Los Angeles. Our 40+ years of experience have taught us that homelessness *does* have solutions — and we have the track record and program outcomes to prove it.

Keep reading for background information on the way DWC has adapted its programs to respond to the biggest areas of need in Los Angeles. You can also use this section as evidence to substantiate your arguments when engaging in advocacy.

HOUSING

- In 1986, DWC became the country's first provider of permanent supportive housing for women. Since then, our housing model has successfully ended homelessness for hundreds of women.
- We currently maintain 119 units of housing in Los Angeles and house hundreds more women every year through Project 100 and our Community-Based Housing and Rapid Re-Housing programs.
- At DWC, we operate under a Housing First model, which means that we do not require women to be employed, enrolled in substance use counseling, or to be receiving any kind of supportive services before they are considered eligible for housing.
- Women experiencing homelessness not only have unique healthcare and job-training needs, but have many unique vulnerabilities, too. By prioritizing housing and empowering women to choose and engage actively in services — two central components of the Housing First model — we can ensure that they are equipped with the tools they need to remain housed in an effective, trauma-informed way.

EMPLOYMENT

- DWC's Workforce Development Program ends the vicious cycle of unemployment and homelessness by pairing case management and housing navigation assistance with employment and education resources and support.
- [MADE by DWC](#) is a purpose-driven social enterprise that allows women to earn an income while gaining job skills and experience at its two brick-and-mortar locations in DTLA, or while handcrafting its shoppable line of all-natural, hand-poured soaps, soy candles, and bath salts.

HEALTH & HEALTHCARE

- DWC's drop-in Day Center provides a safe space for women in the heart of Skid Row. Women who come through its doors have access to three nutritious meals daily, in addition to showers, restrooms, and case management services.
- DWC operates Skid Row's only women's health clinic.

VIOLENCE & TRAUMA

- In 2016, DWC joined forces with Rainbow Services to launch the cross-sector [Domestic Violence & Homeless Services Coalition \(DVHSC\)](#), which aims to create a client-centered system that increases access to safe housing and supportive services for survivors of domestic violence and their families, with an emphasis on integrated, trauma-informed care.
- DWC's Rapid Re-Housing Program helps women in vulnerable situations quickly exit homelessness and connect to a wide range of supportive services to stay housed. Case managers assist survivors of violence with safety planning, advocacy resources, and more.
- DWC provides TIC trainings to all staff as well as service providers and public departments like the Los Angeles Police Department, the Los Angeles Library, and the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks.
- In 2015, DWC launched a [Trauma Recovery Center](#) in partnership with Peace Over Violence where women can attend individual and group therapy, receive psychiatric services and assessments, and obtain referrals to trauma services.

5.4k+

women served annually

99%

housing retention rate

83%

job retention rate

DWC MAKES CHANGE

In September 2020, the LA County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a [historic motion](#) championed by DWC and authored by Supervisor Hilda Solis to designate unaccompanied women as a recognized homeless subpopulation. For the 21,000+ unhoused women across LA at the time, the importance of this victory could not be overstated. Despite significant increases in women's homelessness over the years, individual women unaccompanied by children or dependents have largely remained ineligible for the funding, resources, and research put aside for other groups vulnerable to homelessness, like veterans, families, and youth.

September's designation will help bring enhanced supportive services to the women DWC serves every day, and calls upon relevant County departments to conduct the first-ever countywide needs assessment documenting unaccompanied women's experiences. From there, we'll be able to identify the areas of highest need so that we can begin to address them.

The motion was followed by [a similar designation](#) in November at the city level, making Los Angeles the first city in America to recognize the unique needs of unaccompanied women. Learn more about the issue and our work in [CEO Amy Turk's op-ed in CalMatters!](#)



DWC Elevator Pitch

An elevator pitch is a short, snappy description of an organization or project that seeks to spark the interest of the listener. Below you can find an elevator pitch for DWC to help you build support for ending women's homelessness wherever you go and with whomever you talk to!

"Every woman deserves a safe, stable home. Yet in the midst of Los Angeles' housing and homelessness crisis, more women than ever before are living on the streets and in shelters. What's more, women are frequently left out of efforts to end homelessness.

The Downtown Women's Center is committed to ending women's homelessness for good. They help women regain personal stability through housing, wellness and employment, and they ensure their voices are heard through advocacy. Women's lives depend on the Downtown Women's Center's work, and they depend on their supporters to get every woman housed. Join us."

DOWNTOWN
WOMEN'S
CENTER
333



ADVOCACY ROADMAP

The following pages overview a number of specific policy and service changes that we at DWC believe will move us closer to ending women's homelessness and housing insecurity in Los Angeles.

Ending homelessness requires that women have access to resources that are truly responsive to their unique needs and histories. Through our work at DWC, we have come to understand that comprehensive social security nets; equitable access to affordable housing; universal access to resources and income; combatting intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and trafficking; and trauma-informed communities are all part of a web of solutions.

As you embark on your advocacy journey, you can refer to this roadmap in order to identify organizations, projects, services, and other developments in your community that have the potential to improve the lives of unhoused women.

ADVOCACY PRIORITIES



Increase local development of permanent affordable housing in order to prevent and quickly end new instances of homelessness, with housing affordability in Los Angeles at historic lows.

Increase access to gender-specific, trauma-informed housing and shelter services, in order to better meet women's unique needs.

Expand funding and support for survivors of domestic and gender-based violence, which continue to play a major role in women's experiences of housing insecurity across Los Angeles.

HOUSING

In Los Angeles and across the country, we are experiencing an urgent need for increased access to affordable housing in every neighborhood. Providing more housing will not only offer opportunities for women experiencing homelessness, but also prevent new women from becoming homeless for the first time. Policies and programs to advocate for include those that:

- Develop new permanent supportive housing units, consistent with the Housing First model.
- Ensure proportional allocation of all resources, including interim and permanent housing resources.
- Ensure that adequate units are designated to meet the needs of women with disabilities and women who have experienced chronic homelessness and trauma.
- Provide support to women who are separated from their children, reunifying with their children, and women who have lost their children, including women who have different family compositions (e.g. grandchildren removed from custody and LGBTQIA+ family structures).

HEALTHCARE

Women experiencing homelessness have disproportionately higher gaps in medical and preventive care. Healthcare services must provide comprehensive care with a trauma-informed lens, as well as understand the specific health needs of disabled and mentally ill women. Policies and programs to advocate for and against include those that:

- Mandate follow-up care and discharge from emergency rooms for patients experiencing homelessness, including connection to housing services and clear plans or affordable, accessible medical aftercare.
- Maintain transgender protections in sex discrimination policies.
- Ensure transgender people have access to adequate healthcare and housing.
- Uphold the application of Section 1557, which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, age, and disability in health programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance. [35]



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Women experiencing homelessness are often at greater risk of violence. Many experience intimate partner violence and/or child abuse prior to becoming homeless. Gender-based violence is both a cause of women's homelessness and an increased threat for women who are displaced from their housing. Policies and programs to advocate for include those that:

- Expand funding to implement the Domestic Violence Housing First Model.
- Eliminate "failure to protect" policies and legislation that criminalize women with children for experiencing intimate partner violence.
- Ensure that resources for gender-based violence are inclusive of LGBTQIA+ experiences.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Women experiencing homelessness must have access to basic services on a daily basis, in safe, clean facilities staffed by compassionate, culturally competent advocates. Policies and programs to advocate for include those that:

- Decrease barriers to entry for shelters.
- Ensure that shelters include an adequate number of accessible beds for women and women with disabilities.
- Prohibit publicly funded shelters from accepting rent or public assistance, such as General Relief or Food Stamps, from shelter participants in exchange for their stay.
- Cease sanitation sweeps that destroy tents and possessions of homeless individuals.
- Decriminalize poverty and homelessness by eliminating citations for "quality of life" crimes such as sleeping on the sidewalk.
- Increase "safe sleeping" lots for individuals living in their cars to park overnight.
- Strengthen programs in public libraries to connect homeless individuals with case management.
- Expand citywide cooling centers and winter shelters and create default parameters for when these centers will operate, with temperature minimums and maximums, and any time there is rain.
- Mandate that businesses with restrooms available for customers cannot enforce restrictions on restroom usage.

Domestic Violence Housing First (DVHF) Model

The DVHF Model is a service approach that recognizes violence as a leading cause of homelessness. It focuses on connecting survivors to stable housing as quickly as possible and then providing supportive services to empower them to rebuild their lives and achieve personal stability.

Advocacy In Action

Submitting public comment and calling your elected officials is a great way of making your voice heard on important new legislation and projects at the community, city, state, and federal levels. Regardless of the medium you choose, some helpful tips to keep in mind are:

- **Keep it focused and brief.** Focus on a single issue, with two to three main points.
- **Have talking points ready.** Identify one to two relevant facts and examples to bolster your claim, and keep some notes handy on what you want to say.
- **Keep it local.** Your statements should demonstrate the direct effect that a certain action will have on community members' lives.
- **Clearly state your position.** Listeners should immediately know what you stand for or against. Use words and phrases that urge people to "vote for," "vote against," "provide funding," "make an amendment," etc.

Sample Script

(1) "Hello, my name is [name]. As a local resident, I strongly APPROVE/OPPOSE [description of proposal]. *-or-* Hello, my name is [name]. As a constituent of [representative's title and name]'s district, I strongly urge HIM/HER to vote FOR/AGAINST [name of bill or legislation].

(2-A) As an advocate for people experiencing homelessness, I am HEARTENED/ CONCERNED by the impact it would have on our unhoused community, by [list reasons, e.g., making affordable housing more or less accessible, providing or decreasing funding for supportive services, enhancing or eroding anti-discrimination protections, etc.].

(2-B) Research shows that [statistic or example in support of your argument]. *-or-* [Include personal story or reasons for support/opposition].

(3-OPTIONAL) I would also urge THE CITY COUNCIL/BOARD OF SUPERVISORS/REPRESENTATIVE [NAME] to consider including provisions for [list vulnerable sub-populations as relevant, e.g., survivors of domestic violence, transgender individuals, women with disabilities, etc.], to ensure their unique needs and challenges are being met.

Thank you very much for your time."

A Glossary of Words That Matter

UNHOUSED VS. HOMELESS

- At DWC, we use the term *unhoused* or *women experiencing homelessness* to describe the challenges women face.
- We do not believe in defining a person by their most challenging experiences, which is why we never say *homeless women* or *a homeless woman*.

EMPOWERING LANGUAGE

- When speaking about personal histories of domestic and/or intimate partner violence, we always say *survivor(s)* instead of *victim(s)*.

ABOUT DWC

- DWC is not a shelter. We are an organization that provides immediate services and connections to employment, housing, and healthcare for women experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles.
- DWC and the women it serves are located *in* Skid Row — not *on* Skid Row.

OTHER HELPFUL WORDS & PHRASES

- *Personal stability* (not self-sufficiency)
- *Serve* (not service)
- *Homeless* or *housing insecure* (not indigent or transient)
- *Low-income* or *extremely low-income* (not poor)
- *Mental illness* (not mental problem/issue)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Every three years, DWC surveys the needs, characteristics, and conditions facing unhoused and low-income women in Los Angeles. Read the most recent [DWC 2019 Los Angeles City Women's Needs Assessment](#) and the [City of Los Angeles Women's Housing Gap Analysis](#) for further context.
- Every year, the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) documents the number of people experiencing homelessness in our region via the [Annual Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count](#).
- In 2016, LAHSA organized the Ad Hoc Committee on Women & Homelessness in order to better understand the unique needs of women experiencing homelessness and influence service delivery and the direction of resources to more effectively address these needs. The [Report & Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on Women & Homelessness](#) is the result of their efforts.
- In 2018, LAHSA launched the Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness in order to examine the factors contributing to the overrepresentation of Black people among people experiencing homelessness and identify opportunities to increase racial equity within the homeless service delivery system. The [Report & Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness](#) is the result of their efforts.
- The [Domestic Violence & Homeless Services Coalition \(DVHSC\) Report on Survivor Solutions to Program & Systems Change](#) presents the findings of 12 countywide focus groups conducted with domestic violence survivors in 2017.
- In September 2020, Invisible People surveyed 2,500+ people to understand public attitudes about homelessness, policy preferences, and how the public interprets messages about homelessness. Their report on [What America Believes About Homelessness](#) is the result of this effort.
- DWC also has a number of learning resources available online. Click below to learn more about:
 - [Housing First](#)
 - [Trauma-Informed Care](#)
 - [Violence Against Women](#)
 - [Funding for Women's Homelessness in Los Angeles](#)
- Learn more about Proposition HHH via the Mayor's [Tracking HHH page](#).
- Learn more about Measure J via the [Los Angeles County Homeless Initiative](#) and their [Impact Dashboard](#).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1] <https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=4558-2020-greater-los-angeles-homeless-count-presentation>
- [2] Ibid.
- [3] <https://www.trulia.com/research/low-income-housing/>
- [4] <https://documents.lahsa.org/Planning/homelesscount/2016/factsheet/2016-HC-Results.pdf>
- [5] <https://www.lahsa.org/news?article=726-2020-greater-los-angeles-homeless-count-results>
- [6] <https://fz5.d4b.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/DWC-2019-Los-Angeles-Womens-Needs-Assessment.pdf>
- [7] Ibid.
- [8] Ibid.
- [9] <https://fz5.d4b.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Womens-Housing-Gaps-Analysis.pdf>
- [10] https://www.bls.gov/regions/west/news-release/womensearnings_california.htm#:~:text=In%20California%2C%20the%20women's%20to,was%20the%20highest%20since%202014
- [11] <https://fz5.d4b.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Womens-Housing-Gaps-Analysis.pdf>
- [12] <https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=4558-2020-greater-los-angeles-homeless-count-presentation>
- [13] Ibid.
- [14] <https://fz5.d4b.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Womens-Housing-Gaps-Analysis.pdf>
- [15] Ibid.

- [16] <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/blog/transitional-housing-programs-and-empowering-survivors-domestic-violence>
- [17] <https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=1586-ad-hoc-committee-on-women-and-homelessness-report-and-recommendations.pdf>
- [18] <https://fz5.d4b.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/DWC-2019-Los-Angeles-Womens-Needs-Assessment.pdf>
- [19] <https://www.lahsa.org/news?article=726-2020-greater-los-angeles-homeless-count-results>
- [20] <https://fz5.d4b.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/DWC-2019-Los-Angeles-Womens-Needs-Assessment.pdf>
- [21] <https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=1586-ad-hoc-committee-on-women-and-homelessness-report-and-recommendations.pdf>
- [22] <https://www.lahsa.org/news?article=726-2020-greater-los-angeles-homeless-count-results>
- [23] <https://fz5.d4b.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/DWC-2019-Los-Angeles-Womens-Needs-Assessment.pdf>
- [24] Ibid.
- [25] https://www.lamayor.org/sites/g/files/wph446/f/page/image/LACity_Part4_EducationWorkforceDevelopment.pdf
- [26] Ibid.
- [27] <https://fz5.d4b.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/DWC-2019-Los-Angeles-Womens-Needs-Assessment.pdf>
- [28] Ibid.
- [29] Ibid.
- [30] Ibid.
- [31] <https://khn.org/news/the-homeless-are-dying-in-record-numbers-on-the-streets-of-l-a/>

[32] <https://fz5.d4b.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/DWC-2019-Los-Angeles-Womens-Needs-Assessment.pdf>

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2019/05/24/hhs-proposes-to-revise-aca-section-1557-rule.html>

Copyright © 2020 Downtown Women's Center
Last updated 2021-01-21

Don't forget to tag us in your advocacy posts on social media at
@DWCWeb!



#EveryWomanHoused