

USU UWLP Releases Research on Homelessness Among Utah Women: A 2025 Update

Emmalee Chastain, Julene Reese

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With winter upon us and families preparing for the holidays, it is important to be aware that many Utahns will face the coldest months without stable housing. These months intensify challenges for Utah women and families experiencing homelessness, as shelter capacity, essential services, and financial strain reach seasonal peaks. Homelessness in Utah has risen sharply in recent years, reflecting national trends. National homelessness surpassed 770,000 people in 2024, and Utah's single-night count rose 46.4% between 2021 and 2024. In 2025, 4,584 Utahns experienced homelessness on any given day, an 18% increase from the previous year.

To better understand these patterns, the Utah State University [Utah Women & Leadership Project \(UWLP\)](#) recently published a research brief, "[Homelessness Among Utah Women: A 2025 Update](#)." The report examines national and state trends, the demographic characteristics of Utah women experiencing homelessness, contributing factors, and efforts to reduce homelessness.

Background and National Trends: In 2024, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development reported the highest homelessness levels in U.S. history, with 771,480 people experiencing homelessness on a single night, a 30% increase since 2022 and the most significant one-year jump ever recorded. Nearly all groups saw

record highs, especially families with children and unaccompanied youth, with children experiencing a 33% increase from 2023. Chronic homelessness also reached its highest level, now affecting one in three unhoused individuals. While 64.5% of these individuals were sheltered, unsheltered homelessness continued to rise, and over 7.2 million households remained at high risk due to severe housing cost burdens. The sheltered population grew significantly – up 40% since 2020 – as communities worked to serve more people amid escalating need.

Key Factors for Increase: Record-high homelessness is driven by a worsening affordable housing crisis, low incomes, weak safety nets, and rising inflation. In 2023, half of renter households were cost-burdened, with 12.2 million severely so. Natural disasters, public health crises, and increased immigration have further strained shelters, especially as COVID-era assistance ended. A bright spot is a 13% rise in shelter beds from 2023 to 2024, mostly in emergency shelters, though transitional housing continues to decline.

Demographic Characteristics: Key demographic trends in homelessness reveal essential disparities. In 2024, men comprised 60% of people experiencing homelessness, but women are rising faster, with a 19% increase from 2023 versus 15% for men. First-time homelessness is also growing, up 23% since 2019, outpacing available state and federal resources. Black, Latino, and Indigenous communities remain overrepresented, with Hispanic/Latino individuals seeing the most significant increase from 2019 to 2024. People of color are more likely to rent and face severe housing cost burdens, while gender-expansive individuals experience higher rates of unsheltered homelessness. Veterans are the exception, with homelessness among them declining 8% from 2023 to 2024 and 55% since 2009, likely due to sustained targeted funding.

Utah Data: In 2025, Utah saw an 18% increase in homelessness from 2024, with 4,584 individuals experiencing homelessness on a single night, bringing the state rate to 13 per 10,000, which is still below the national rate of 23 per 10,000 but steadily rising toward it. Between 2015 and 2024, overall homelessness grew 27.9%, unsheltered homelessness surged 346%, chronic homelessness increased 288.8%, and homelessness among individuals rose 61.6%, while homelessness among children, families, and veterans declined.

In 2025, 30,578 Utahns accessed homeless services, and 41.9% were women. Utah Women experiencing homelessness face numerous barriers to stability. The

most commonly reported challenges in 2025 included mental health disorders (22.8%), chronic health conditions (18.4%), physical disabilities (13.9%), developmental disabilities (10.2%), and substance use (7.6%). Domestic violence remains a significant factor as well: more than 1,100 women accessing services in 2025 had experienced domestic violence, and 329 were fleeing abuse at the time they sought help. Racial and ethnic disparities also persist, with women of color disproportionately represented among those experiencing homelessness.

Housing affordability remains a driving force statewide. Utah now ranks ninth nationally in housing costs, with counties such as Washington and Salt Lake classified as “severely unaffordable.” Median rent for a one-bedroom apartment exceeds what many low-income households can sustainably afford, putting thousands at continued risk of instability.

To address these challenges, the Utah legislature allocated \$11.4 million in 2025 for FY 2026, including \$7.5 million for winter response and \$3.9 million for a family non-congregate shelter. Ongoing funding for the homeless system totals \$97.4 million, including \$36 million directed by the Utah Office of Homeless Services to support programs that help Utahns secure stable housing.

What Utahns Can Do: Reducing homelessness in Utah requires prioritizing housing affordability and directing resources to the state’s most vulnerable populations: women, children, seniors, veterans, and racial minorities. Making homelessness brief and non-recurring is essential, with prevention through affordable housing, job training, economic opportunities, and strong social safety nets as the most effective strategy. Both short and long-term housing solutions are needed, especially as the average emergency shelter stay rose 17% (10 days) between 2023 and 2024. Access to mental health care and substance use treatment is also critical. Expanded state and national efforts are necessary to support those experiencing/at risk of homelessness, helping ensure it becomes rare, brief, and non-recurring while strengthening Utah communities.

“We must prioritize long-term solutions that focus on affordability, prevention, and support systems,” said Susan Madsen, UWLP founding director and co-author of the report. “When we strengthen stability for women and families, we strengthen communities across the state.”

Robyn C. Blackburn, UWLP research fellow, co-authored the report.

For more information, visit the [UWLP website](#). The UWLP is affiliated with the [Jon M. Huntsman School of Business](#) and [USU Extension](#).

Contact

Emmalee Chastain
Emmalee.Chastain@usu.edu

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