PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS IN OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

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Class 622: Capstone
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Bay Area’s new homeless epicenter?

Oakland has surpassed San Francisco in per capita homelessness. The city has a multipronged approach to attacking the problem, but advocates say officials aren’t doing enough.

By Sarah Ravani and Joaquin Palomino | Aug. 1, 2019

San Francisco is known for its swelling homeless population, but Oakland has surpassed its neighbor across the bay, and other large cities in California, in a key measure: the concentration of homelessness compared with the number of people living there.
INTRODUCTION

Keep Oakland Housed founded in July 2018.

👍 Prevents renters from losing their apartments
👍 999 households served in first 12 months!

👎 Many unstably housed residents are not renters. They are doubled up, couch surfing or in other temporary housing.

Questions:
Should KOH expand to serve all unstably housed residents?
What can be done to reverse the trajectory of homelessness in Oakland?
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Should Keep Oakland Housed expand to serve unstably housed residents at high risk of homelessness?

👍 Reach people who need help the most.
👎 Run out of money and the program ends.

What can be done to reverse the trajectory of homelessness in Oakland?
OBJECTIVES AND VALUES

1. *Housing is a human right.*
2. To stop the growth of homelessness, we must keep people housed.
3. You can’t solve a problem you don’t understand.
4. *Learn.* Who is homeless? Why?
5. *Listen.* Ask broad questions and avoid leading people to specific answers.
6. Share ideas, but *do not dictate solutions* to the community.
METHODS AND APPROACHES

20 expert interviews

1 focus group with service providers

Analysis of city and county reports

Ongoing dialogue with practitioners
DATA ANALYSIS

Homelessness Growth in 3 Bay Area Counties

Source: Author, using data from annual Point in Time counts
DATA ANALYSIS

Rent, Wages and Homelessness Growth in Oakland, CA

Source: Author, using data from Zillow.com and Oaklandca.gov
DATA ANALYSIS

Key Facts about Homelessness in Oakland and Alameda County

- 79% of Alameda County’s homeless residents are unsheltered.
- 78% of homeless individuals surveyed were Alameda County residents when they became homeless.
- Only 3% of survey respondents said they are not interested in housing.
- In Alameda County, African Americans make up 47% of the county’s homeless population, versus 11% of the general population.
- The disparity is even greater in Oakland, where African Americans make up 68% of Oakland’s homeless residents, despite being just 28% of the city’s population.

Source: Plan to End Homelessness: 2018 Strategic Update, EveryOne Home
DATA ANALYSIS
Drivers of Homelessness in Oakland and Alameda County

- California faces a shortage of 3.4 million homes, including 1 million homes for extremely low-income households.
- More than 3 million Californians find themselves “cost burdened,” meaning that they spend more than 1/3 of their gross income on housing expenses.
- Oakland is now the 5th most expensive rental market in the nation.
- Wages have stagnated while rent has increased.
- Historical discrimination and systemic challenges increase the prevalence of homelessness among key populations, including African Americans, people with mental illness and chronic health conditions, and formerly incarcerated individuals.

Source: Plan to End Homelessness: 2018 Strategic Update, EveryOne Home
PROFILE OF HOMELESSNESS
FROM BAY AREA COMMUNITY SERVICES

- Male
- African American
- 45-54 years old
- On general assistance
- Substance use
- Able-bodied
- Sleeping outdoors
- Generational Poverty/Trauma
- Prior involvement with the criminal justice or homelessness system, or both

Source: Plan to End Homelessness: 2018 Strategic Update, EveryOne Home
## DATA ANALYSIS

### Risk Factors for Homelessness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HUD</th>
<th>Literature Review</th>
<th>Experts</th>
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</table>
| • Below 30% of area median income  
• Do not have sufficient resources or support networks  
• Facing any of the following: frequent moves, doubled up, active eviction, living in a hotel, motel or crowded SRO, or leaving an institution such as a jail or mental health facility | • Education  
• Work history  
• Mental health  
• Minority status,  
• Physical health  
• Substance abuse  
• Trauma or abuse  
• Veteran status  
• Arrest history  
• Foster care involvement  
• Recent mental health hospitalization | • Low or no income  
• Prior experience with homelessness  
• Do not hold a lease  
• Exited homelessness to live with friends or family |
# DATA ANALYSIS
## CAUSES, TRIGGERS AND SOLUTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIVING ARRANGEMENTS</th>
<th>SOLUTIONS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 24-37% in a home owned or rented by you or a partner</td>
<td>• Rent assistance 33%</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 30-39% with friends/relatives</td>
<td>• Employment assistance 23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Other answers included subsidized housing, hotel/motel</td>
<td>• Benefits assistance 30%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Mental health services 21%</td>
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<tr>
<th>TRIGGERS</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Financial challenges - job loss, eviction/foreclosure, rent increase (31%)</td>
<td>• Housing first!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mental health and substance use (22%)</td>
<td>• Eviction prevention or mediation</td>
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<td>• Incarceration (8%)</td>
<td>• Housing problem solving</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Flexible funds</td>
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<td>• Long and short term subsidies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Preservation</td>
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IMPLICATIONS

- We will not end homelessness if 3 people become homeless for every 1 person who exits homelessness.
- The need for prevention is widely understood, but lack of funding means limited examples and evidence.
- Philanthropy is required to demonstrate the effectiveness of prevention, until government resources can be secured.
- African Americans experience a disproportionate share of evictions and homelessness and must play a central role in designing the solutions.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Should KOH expand to serve all unstably housed residents?

Yes. Eviction Prevention + Homelessness Prevention.

What can be done to reverse the trajectory of homelessness in Oakland?

1. Collective impact
2. Coordinated prevention system with an equity framework focused on those at greatest risk
3. Design, fund, test and evaluate new models to prove prevention works and should be adopted by government
REFERENCES


Seron, Frankel, Van Ryzin, and Kovath. (2001). The Impact of Legal Counsel on Outcomes for Poor Tenants in New York City’s Housing Court: Results of a Randomized Experiment. *Law and Society Review.*