

Fact Sheet

Ending Homelessness: Why We Haven't, How We Can

About the book: *Ending Homelessness: Why We Haven't, How We Can*, edited by Dr. Donald Burnes of the Burnes Institute on Poverty of Homelessness, explores the complicated and often dysfunctional relationship between efforts to address homelessness and the realities on the street. The book tackles a range of practical, cultural and economic issues and brings into sharp focus sensible, much needed, and even controversial approaches.



Key facts

- Americans support what is, effectively, culturally endorsed neglect of the most vulnerable citizens.
 - **14 percent** of the U.S. population will experience homelessness at some point in their lives.
 - The wealth gap has been a defining feature of U.S. capitalism - **worsening income inequality** had been a normal phenomenon.
 - A recent poll reveals that almost **half** of respondents knew a friend or family member who had experienced homelessness at some point in their life.
- A major barrier to ending homelessness is our failure to create an adequate supply of low-income units.
 - Very-low-income renters and homeowner families spend **85-90 percent of their total annual income** on housing.
 - Across the country, **7.5 million low-income housing units are needed** to meet present housing demands for persons experiencing homelessness and those at substantial risk of becoming homelessness.
 - Assuming there were no new people becoming homeless over the next ten years, **every state would have to produce 150,000 units of low-income housing** during that same period in order to meet the demand.
- On the legal front, homelessness is rapidly becoming the next civil rights frontier.
 - In Detroit, poor people are **suing** the city for turning off their access to water due to their inability to pay their utility bills.
 - An Illinois bill adopted in 2013 states that “a person experiencing homelessness has the right **not to face discrimination** due to a lack of a permanent mailing address, the address being that of a shelter or service provider.”
 - As U.S. society seems poised to make health care universal, one may ponder if **housing stability can one day become a civil right**, just as did access to educational opportunity over 50 years ago.

Why it matters: The civil rights movement changed how we felt about race. The disability movement altered how we perceive those with physical and cognitive challenges. Cultural

forces have revolutionized attitudes toward gay marriage. Now, we need a similar transformation when it comes to homelessness.