

### Learning Activity: Icebreaker Discussion – Distinguishing Myth from Fact

Description of Activity:	Students answer and reflect on 3 common conceptions about homelessness. Discussion allows for exploration of the evidence and understanding of intersectionality.		
Keywords:	Over utilization of the ED Mental Illness & Homelessness                      Systemic causes of homelessness		
Type of activity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Didactic <input type="checkbox"/> Simulation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Clinical	Recommendation on when introduced in curriculum?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Early <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mid <input type="checkbox"/> End
Suggested Course:	<input type="checkbox"/> Health Promotion /Assessment/ Fundamentals <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Acute care <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chronic care <input type="checkbox"/> Pharmacology	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Population/ Community health <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership <input type="checkbox"/> Other:	
Competency addressed:	<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Provide respectful, compassionate, person-centered care for people experiencing homelessness (PEH) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2. Evaluate clients for social determinants of health needs, including housing status and related aspects of safety, access to food, social support and other relevant domains <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Collaborate with client and appropriate Interprofessional community members to optimize health in PEH <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Advocate for improved health for PEH		
Assessment	Formative: Completion of questions.	Summative: Group discussion analyzing evidence and statistics to dispel common myths	Assessment Tools: Worksheet with questions and faculty discussion guide
Learning Activity:	Students in a small group (clinical or classroom) answer 3 questions individually. Subsequent discussion allows them to compare and contrast their answers and explore the evidence and statistics regarding root causes of homelessness, mental health conditions, and ED utilization.		
Time Required:	20-30 minutes    Optional deeper dive questions are provided		
Preparation of the student:	<b>No prep is required. Students base their answers on their experiences and societal norms.</b>		
Resources:	Barry, R., Anderson, J., Tran, L., & et al. (2024). Prevalence of mental health disorders among individuals experiencing homelessness: A systematic review and meta-analysis. <i>JAMA Psychiatry</i> , 81(7), 691–699. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2024.0426">https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2024.0426</a>  Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). QuickStats: Rate of emergency department visits, by homeless status — National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey, United States, 2010–2021. <i>MMWR Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report</i> , 72(42), 1153. <a href="https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7242a6">https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7242a6</a>		

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Franco, A., Meldrum, J., & Ngaruiya, C. (2021). Identifying homeless population needs in the Emergency Department using Community-Based Participatory Research. *BMC health services research, 21*(1), 428. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-021-06426-z>

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Heston T. F. (2023). The Cost of Living Index as a Primary Driver of Homelessness in the United States: A Cross-State Analysis. *Cureus, 15*(10), e46975. <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.46975>

National Institute of Mental Health. (n.d.). *Mental illness*. National Institutes of Health. Retrieved March 23, 2025, from <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness>

Reilly, J., Ho, I., & Williamson, A. (2022). A systematic review of the effect of stigma on the health of people experiencing homelessness. *Health and Social Care in the Community, 30*, 2128-2141. <http://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.13884>

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## Nursing and Homelessness

### Icebreaker Activity: Distinguishing Myth from Fact

**Student Instructions:** Are the following statements True? False? Or somewhere in the middle? Write a few sentences to explain how you came to your answer.

1. The primary cause of homelessness is personal choice.
  2. Most people who are experiencing homelessness have mental illnesses and/or substance use disorders.
  3. People experiencing homelessness utilize the Emergency Department more than the general population.
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### Faculty Discussion Guide Icebreaker Activity: Distinguishing Myth from Fact.

1. The primary cause of homelessness is personal choice

**FALSE.** Homelessness is driven by a combination of personal, social, and economic factors. **Economic conditions often play the biggest role** in displacement (Fowler et al., 2019), and housing cost and availability are the **root causes** of homelessness (Heston, 2023).

- Optional further exploration: Search the literature for explanations for the rise of homelessness in the U.S since 2000 and how chronic health conditions contribute to homelessness.

2. Most people who are experiencing homelessness have mental illnesses and/or substance use disorders.

**TRUE.** Living with mental illness and/or substance use disorder elevates the risk of becoming homeless, and the experience of living on the street can also exacerbate or contribute to the development of these conditions. The prevalence of a mental health disorder in this population is 67%, with 25% having a severe mental illness (Barry et al. 2024, Healthcare for the Homeless, 2021). This compares to 23% and 6-11%, respectively, in the general population (National Institute of Mental Health, n.d.) It is important to note the two-way nature of this phenomenon and consider the intersection of medical, mental health, and housing support services.

- Optional further exploration: Search the literature for evidence-based approaches to supporting people who are unhoused in their mental health needs, or you may choose to explore options to prevent homelessness for people with severe mental illness.

3. People who are experiencing homelessness utilize the Emergency Department more than the general population.

**TRUE, and** it's important to understand their other options. People experiencing homelessness are three times as likely to utilize the Emergency Department than people who are housed (CDC, 2023). The graph below illustrates growth in ED utilization among people experiencing homelessness. This is a complex issue involving the skyrocketing of homelessness rates, lack of primary care and other options, social influences on health, and the need for multifaceted approaches to care, as you explored in question #2.

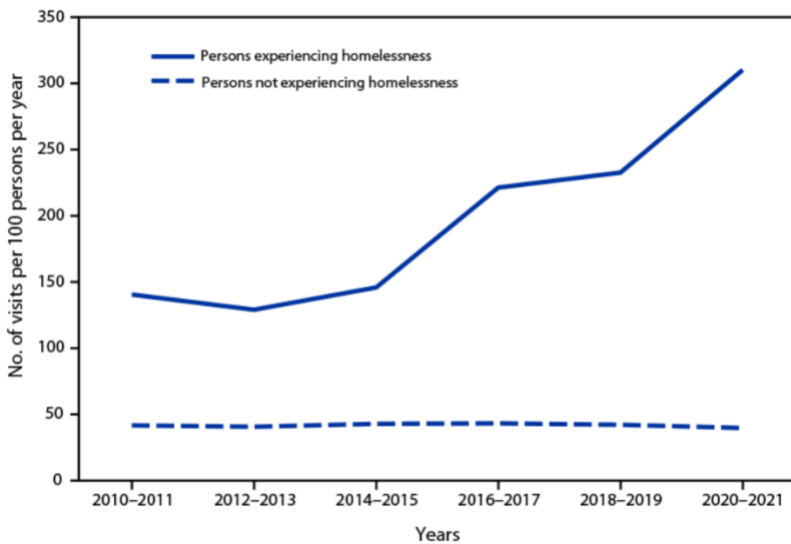


Image source: CDC, 2023

- Optional further exploration: Locate graphs representing the rise in homelessness in the U.S. Compare this with the availability of primary care models that are accessible to a population often lacking phones, transportation, and basic survival needs.

