



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT HOMELESSNESS ~SPOTLIGHT ON TRANSIT STATIONS~

## UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

### How many people are homeless in Philadelphia?

About 6,200 are considered to be homeless in the city, which includes about 900 people who are unsheltered.

### Why do so many people experience homelessness?

Homelessness is caused by poverty, lack of money to afford a place to live and food to eat. Sometimes mental illness contributes. The Opioid crisis has caused many new people to become homeless. Homelessness in Center City is more visible now due to construction and fewer public spaces for people to live unnoticed. Kensington is another area with a high concentration of homelessness, but homelessness is a city-wide issue.

### What is the City doing about homelessness?

Together with our many nonprofit partners, the City has developed an extensive system of emergency, temporary and permanent housing. In fact, the permanent housing programs have an 85-97% success rate in preventing a

return to homelessness. Even with these efforts, our supply of affordable housing is not able to keep pace with the demand. Last year we were able to help over 1,200 families and individuals move “from-homeless-to-housed.” This year we established the Shared Public Spaces Workgroup—a public-private effort to bring business, civic and hospitality leaders to the table to help address the problem.

### Why are people walking around with suitcases and bags full of stuff?

The City’s emergency housing programs provide storage for people’s belongings. In all likelihood the individual is not in one of our programs or they are more comfortable being surrounded by their possessions. Hoarding can be an indicator of mental illness, but part of the tragedy of homelessness is that people lose everything so they may naturally hold onto whatever little they have.

## EFFORTS TO COMBAT HOMELESSNESS

### What is the City doing to specifically address the situation in the Concourse?

- Doubled outreach for the winter
- Streamlined intake to give people quicker access to shelter and respite beds
- Opened additional daytime services
- Provide mental health and drug treatment screenings and referrals
- Added specialized youth outreach
- Engaged Philly Police Department around narcotics enforcement
- Added Homeless Services staff to assist during peak travel hours

### What’s the Hub of Hope?

The Hub is run each winter by Project HOME and provides a range of physical and behavioral health services to people who are experiencing homelessness. It is very effective at connecting people with services and housing.

### What does Homeless Outreach do?

Outreach engages street homeless individuals on a daily basis to offer hope, resources and opportunities, such as emergency shelter, treatment options for mental health

and substance use disorders, medical services, etc. It focuses on developing trusting relationships with individuals on the street, through ongoing rapport and consistency, that assist individuals in addressing barriers to coming inside.

### Outreach can:

- Offer housing options for those who are interested
- Transport those who are interested to housing, medical, psychiatric, or other resources
- Call in a 302 (involuntary psychiatric hospitalization) in situations that warrant such action
- Never give up on an individual and continue to engage them until they are ready and willing to get off the street and connected to necessary supports and services

### Outreach cannot:

- Physically move people
- Move people’s belongings or clean up any trash they may have left behind
- Address illegal behavior (this is a matter for the police)

**The Homeless Outreach Hotline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Call 215- 232-1984.**



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### MORE ABOUT HOMELESSNESS

#### **Why don't you just move people?**

It is not a crime to be homeless or to have a mental illness. We do not arrest people for being homeless. An arrest decreases their opportunities to become housed and raises the costs for the public sector. People who are homeless need a place to live and a helping hand. We are working to find a way to work with individuals experiencing homelessness, while protecting the rights of residents, businesses, and visitors.

#### **Who's in charge?**

SEPTA, the City's Office of Homeless Services and the Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disabilities and the Philadelphia Police Department work together to coordinate homeless outreach, services, and enforcement.

### HOW YOU CAN HELP

#### **What should I do if I see someone in immediate danger to themselves or others?**

Call 911 and ask for the Crisis Intervention Team (C.I.T.) Officer.

#### **What about if I see a drug deal happening? Who should I call?**

Call 911.

#### **What if someone seems to be mentally ill, like not being dressed for the weather, talking to him or herself?**

You should feel free to talk with people who are experiencing homelessness. They appreciate human contact and connection. We suggest "Where to Turn" <https://projecthome.org/wheretoturn> if you want to connect someone to help. If you don't feel comfortable doing that, please call Outreach at 215 232 1984.

#### **What if I see people smoking crack or pot or K2? What should I do?**

Move away quickly and call 911.

#### **What should I do if I see someone urinating or defecating in public?**

This is illegal. If on SEPTA property, in stations and Concourses, call 215.580.8111. Anywhere else, dial City Police at 911.

#### **What if someone is smoking a cigarette?**

SEPTA enforces the smoking ban. Please call 215.580.8111

#### **What should I do if someone asks me for money?**

Panhandling is not illegal. It is considered free speech, so the police do not arrest people for panhandling.

#### **Is there anything my religious institution or I can do to help?**

Certainly. Churches, synagogues, mosques and other organizations can sponsor fundraising to assist the front line agencies that are always in need of resources to assist others experiencing homelessness. Assistance of this type is best coordinated through the Office of Homeless Services.

The desire to give money to someone in need is kind and generous, but it can also be counterproductive.

Panhandling is often linked to addiction. If you want to help, we recommend buying *One Step Away*, or making a donation to your favorite nonprofit.

#### **What should I do if I feel unsafe?**

Trust your gut. Move away and call 911 or get someone to escort you where you need to go.

For more information, please contact the  
Office of Homeless Services

Liz Hersh, Director

<http://www.phila.gov/homelesservices>

[ohs-generalinfo@phila.gov](mailto:ohs-generalinfo@phila.gov)

215-686-7175