



Snohomish County

Dave Somers
County Executive

Statement on
Homelessness in Snohomish County
Snohomish County Executive

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- As a new county executive, I want to do everything in my power to help as many people as possible. That's why I got into public service in the first place. While we are serving ever more people who are homeless, the numbers continue to grow. As a community, we must do more.
 - For the past year, we've been partnering with cities and community agencies from across Snohomish County to pilot best practices learned from around the nation. We are now nearing completion of a single, countywide high performing system to address the issue and begin to see it diminish. It is my commitment to strengthen and expand these efforts to the best of our ability.
 - Last week we conducted a Point-In-Time or PIT count, and the preliminary numbers are worrying. [And just to note: these numbers do not include those who are living in shelters or other temporary homes].
- (1) As anticipated, there is a significant upswing in unsheltered people in Snohomish County (that is, people who are sleeping in places not meant for human habitation). We have identified 481 individuals this year in comparison to 312 individuals last year, **an increase of 54%**.
 - (2) The vast majority of this increase has been in households without children which have increased to 439 from 295 last year, **an increase of 49%**.
 - (3) The number of unsheltered families with children has increased 16 to 35, **an increase of more than 100% which is substantial**. Thankfully, the numbers are still relatively small, however.
 - (4) The number of chronically homeless individuals under the old definition is 127; 123 under the new definition. [The old definition is that the individual was disabled and homeless continuously for one year or more or has four distinct episodes in three years. The new

definition adds that the four distinct episodes in three years must add up to at least one year of homelessness during that timeframe.]

- We can and must do something to help people get back into housing and turn themselves from receivers of assistance to contributors.
- What can we do?
- **First, our approach must be based on partnerships.** Snohomish County Councilmember Ken Klein has worked hard to forge alliances across the county and region to find coordinated solutions. My other friends on the council, Terry Ryan, Brian Sullivan, and Stephanie Wright, all have worked to make sure Snohomish County is leading the way when it comes to finding solutions to homelessness. We can't think that pushing our problem to Bellingham or Seattle is a solution, even were it possible. By building partnerships with cities, other counties, the state, and federal government, we can ensure that we are attacking the core issue: How to make housing and support services available to those living without a home. We can't solve homelessness without cooperation across geographic and political boundaries, much like we would for any crisis.
- **Second, we need to incorporate best practices.** Snohomish County must learn from other cities and counties throughout the nation what innovative solutions are working and which aren't. Mayor Ray Stephanson of Everett has been tireless in his pursuit of answers and he has come up with some great solutions that have been implemented and more that we hope to see implemented. If we aren't learning from each other, then we aren't using resources wisely. The engagement of embedded social workers in both the Everett Police Department and the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office, as well as use of rental assistance to address immediate low-barrier housing needs in the short term, are two successful examples of our learning from other jurisdictions and each other.
- **Third, we need to use resources wisely.** Obviously, when we are spending precious dollars on programs to help community members experiencing homelessness, we can't afford to waste even a nickel. We must target resources effectively and ensure that any dollar spent is actually solving a problem. If it were just a question of enough money, then the problem would have gotten better in the last thirty years. But it hasn't.
- I look forward to working in partnership with all of you to alleviate suffering and give our most vulnerable neighbors the opportunity to live in dignity and peace.

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