CONFRONTING PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGES AMONG THE HOMELESS AND OTHER VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

PUBLIC HEALTH LAW SUMMIT 2017 – WESTERN REGION
MARCH 24, 2017
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA
VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

- Homeless population
- Economically disadvantaged
- The uninsured
- Low-income children
- Elderly
- Racial and ethic minorities
- Those with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)
- Individuals with chronic medical conditions and mental illness

IS HOMELESSNESS A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

HOMELESS

No Family or Support
Health Problems
Could use Some Compassion
Really Need The Help.
QUICK FACTS

• On a single night in January 2016:
  • 549,928 people experienced homelessness in the United States
  • 68% were sheltered, 32% were unsheltered
  • 22% were children under the age of 18
  • 9% were between the ages of 18-24
  • 69% were 25 year or older
  • 7% were veterans

WHAT IS HOMELESSNESS?

• An individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime housing

• An individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground.
HOMELESSNESS AND HEALTH CARE

- Individuals who lack homes often lack health care
- High rates of acute and chronic illness
- Homeless individuals have higher rates of hospitalization any other population
- Frequent use of emergency department services
- Barriers to accessing health services
  - Lack of identification, mailing address, or phone number

Health & Homelessness. Am. Psychological Ass’N.  
Veterans are at a greater risk for experiencing homelessness than any other adult population.

Reasons veteran are at such high risk:
- Combat
- Wartime trauma
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Isolation
- Depression
- Substance abuse
- Broken relationships

INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO HOMELESSNESS

- Hawaii has one of the highest rates of homelessness in the country
- Proposed legislation in Hawaii would treat homelessness like a medical condition
- The legislation allows doctors to prescribe state provided homes as treatment
- State would use data to develop solutions to address homelessness and work with physicians and healthcare plans to increase awareness of homelessness