Homelessness in U.S. Rises for First Time Since 2010

Los Angeles, January 3 (RHC)-- The number of homeless people in the United States has increased for the first time since 2010, driven by a surge in the number of people living on the streets in Los Angeles, California, and other West Coast cities, according to a new government study.

Nearly 554,000 people were homeless across America during a one-night count in January of this year, a nearly one percent increase from 2016, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development said in a new report. Of that total, 193,000 people were unsheltered, meaning they had no access to nightly shelter and instead were staying in the streets, tents, vehicles and other places considered uninhabitable.

Increases are higher in several West Coast cities, where the explosion in homelessness has prompted at least 10 city and county governments to declare states of emergency since 2015. Los Angeles and its surrounding suburbs saw their total homeless count top 55,000 people this year, the report found, an increase of more than 13,000 from 2016.

Four out of every five homeless individuals there are considered unsheltered, leaving tens of thousands of people with no place to sleep other than the streets or parks. While the overall homeless population in the states of California, Oregon and Washington grew by 14 percent over the past two years, the part of that population considered unsheltered climbed 23 percent to 108,000.

Many cities on the U.S. West Coast are struggling with acute homelessness amid an unprecedented level of poverty and hardship in the region, a new report suggests. Homeless advocates and local officials say, ironically, that the region's booming economy is the main culprit for the surge in homelessness.

"A vibrant state economy hasn't translated into a quality of life improvement for a lot of Californians," said Sara Kimberlin, a senior analyst at the California Budget and Policy Center. Rents have soared beyond affordability for many low-wage workers who until just a just few years ago could typically find a place to stay. Now, even a temporary setback can be enough to leave lower-wage workers out on the streets.

Observers say that the federal government's response to homelessness is lackluster. Government investment in low-income homes has lagged since it was slashed during the administration of former President Ronald Reagan. A lack of affordable housing, combined with falling wages at the lower end of the U.S. pay scale, has been cited by analysts as a cause for homelessness in the United States.

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