

## International

# Homing in on health: Homeless prescribed stable, safe housing

## Being homeless puts more strain on US health, public services

**WASHINGTON:** When Catherine Crosland sees patients in the US capital, her key concern is whether they have somewhere to live. "The biggest social determinant of health is housing status," the doctor told the Thomson Reuters Foundation at a clinic below a Washington DC shelter. Being homeless, she said, "causes risks to your health, lack of access to food and hygiene, the threat of violence, depression and substance abuse".

Crosland is the medical director for homeless outreach services at Unity Health Care, a non-profit focused on low-income communities in the capital. In that role she sees patients in clinics, on sidewalks and at encampments - and the effect a lack of housing has. Last year, she said, one patient with several chronic medical problems lost her apartment in a fire. That forced her to move with her son to a motel housing homeless families.

For a month, Crosland said, the woman was dependent on fast food and soup kitchens - and in that time gained 20 pounds (9kg). She died two days after going to hospital showing signs of heart failure and high blood pressure. "To me, she died because she lost her housing - absolutely, 100 percent," Crosland said. That fits research - most recently data from a 2018 study that found "rough-sleeping" adults in Boston were three times more likely to die than those of the same age living in shelters, and 10 times more likely than the state's general population.

Being homeless puts more strain on health

and other public services: the homeless tend to be readmitted to hospital more than the general population, and they stay longer, according to research published in *Health Affairs*, a journal focused on health policy issues. When Oregon provided stable housing, the research showed, it cut certain medical expenditures on the affected population by 12 percent. Their use of emergency rooms declined 18 percent.

### Longstanding gap

Last year's annual government survey showed about 553,000 people were homeless nationwide. About a third lived outside of shelters. People without homes are three to four times more likely to die prematurely than the

general population, according to the National Health Care for the Homeless Council, a network of over 200 groups nationwide.

Such findings are pushing officials, housing advocates and doctors to embrace the idea that housing must be considered a health issue. "The homelessness crisis isn't a social one. It's a health issue," said the council's Rick Brown. "Homelessness doesn't just hurt - all too often it kills," said Brown, adding that the health system had for decades failed to take into account housing issues. "Thankfully, we're seeing increasing recog-

inition of the importance of the social determinants of health - and that we need broader solutions to this," he said.

Those determinants are a globally agreed list of factors that affect inequalities linked to health - among them, housing. In November, the World Health Organization updated that list to show how improving housing conditions could cut health risks. Valerie Agostino of Mercy Housing recalled one ex-colleague complaining that, while he could write a prescription for a \$100,000 drug, "what his patients needed was a place to live, and he couldn't write a prescription for \$20,000 for a year". "That was incredibly frustrating for him."

A shift to link housing and health means practitioners can tap a larger pool of potential funding, said Agostino, adding that a lack of affordable housing remained a central problem. For Mercy Housing, a non-profit that focuses on housing low-income and other vulnerable communities, a key point came with the 2010 passage of the Affordable Care Act, a signature policy for then-President Barack Obama. Many felt that the incentives and other policies in the law - better known as Obamacare - would help bring health and housing closer, Agostino said.

Five years later, the federal government announced that Medicaid - which provides health insurance for the poor - could be used for housing-related services for the chronically homeless. But under the Trump administration much of the Affordable Care Act has been weakened, removing some of the momentum seen earlier this decade, Agostino said. And yet, at the same time other partnerships between the health and housing communities have taken off, she said. "There's a recognition on the part of healthcare providers that they can be part of the solution."

### 'Direct connection'

Those partnerships include investments by insurers and hospital systems in creating affordable housing, such as a joint \$100-million national affordable housing fund unveiled in January by health insurance provider Kaiser Permanente. "We believe ... both in the direct connection of health and housing, and what effect not having that has on physical, mental health and wellbeing," said chief executive Bernard J Tyson. "Our position is we need to solve (homelessness) in this country - and that it is solvable," Tyson told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Hospitals are also getting involved, said think-tank the Urban Institute, with several working to build low-cost housing. Early results from a survey of nearly 70 cities by the Urban Institute found most hospitals indicated that housing issues were a community or patient need, and about half of them thought the healthcare sector should be involved in housing. — Reuters



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homeless in US

## Indonesia ends mine collapse search as death toll reaches 27

**JAKARTA:** Indonesia ended the search yesterday for victims of last week's mine collapse on the island of Sulawesi as the death toll climbed to 27, an official said, even as dozens are still feared missing. Rescuers were forced to stop using excavators as conditions deteriorated and it was no longer possible to operate heavy machinery on such unstable ground. "Our assessment found it is no longer possible to search for the victims because of the possible landslides, it is getting more and more dangerous for the rescuers," local disaster mitigation agency official Abdul Muin Papatungan said. "We decided to end the search for the mine collapse victims today."

The remains of 27 miners have been found following the disaster on February 26, while 18 were pulled out alive, Papatungan said. Rescuers have been hampered by steep terrain, unstable soil and dangerously narrow mining shafts. It remains unclear how many miners were in the shafts at the time of the accident as survivors had given varying tallies. Rescue agencies said some miners reported it could be as high as 100. "At least five bodies had been buried in a mass grave because no family had claimed them," Papatungan said.



**BOLAANG MONGONDOW:** Photo shows Indonesian rescue workers removing a body of a miner from a collapsed mine in Bolaang Mongondow, North Sulawesi. — AFP

The accident happened in the Bolaang Mongondow region of North Sulawesi, where five miners were killed in December after a similar illegal gold mine accident. Mineral-rich Indonesia has scores of unlicensed mines — many with complete disregard for even the most basic safety procedures. In 2016, 11 miners died after a mudslide engulfed an illegal gold mine in Sumatra's Jambi province. A year earlier, 12 people were killed when a shaft collapsed after they tunneled into a disused gold mine on Java island. — AFP

## Trump lashes out at 'crazy' opponents

**WASHINGTON:** President Donald Trump branded Democratic opponents "crazy" and guilty of overreach Tuesday in a fevered response to a huge new probe of his alleged crimes. In a burst of early morning tweets, the president said the House Judiciary Committee investigation launched Monday was "the greatest overreach in the history of our Country." "The real crime is what the Dems are doing, and have done!" he said. Another tweet labeled Democratic leaders "stone cold CRAZY."

"PRESIDENTIAL HARASSMENT!" said another. Trump's exclamation mark - and capital letter - laden outbursts indicated a rising temperature in a White House under assault from multiple directions. Democrats, who took control of the House of Representatives last November, suspect Trump of a slew of potentially impeachable offenses, including obstruction of justice and abuse of office. The powerful judiciary committee is demanding information from 81 Trump-connected individuals and entities, including his sons.

The new front opened just as Trump braces for the results of an independent probe into his dealings with Russia by special prosecutor Robert Mueller. Rumors that Mueller is close to ending his two-year investigation have set Washington on edge. Debate over whether the prosecutor's findings should be made immediately public is already underway, with Democrats warning that attempts at a cover-up by the White House could lead them to subpoena Mueller to testify. Trump's response to the pressure has been consistent with his longtime playbook: to insult accusers, admit no weakness, and rely on backing from his ultra-loyal political base. Polls show that the president's support among Republican voters remains strong, even if Democratic voters are just as convinced in opposition. However, cracks in Republican support at the top echelons of the party have appeared. — AFP