

Throughout the United States, chronic homelessness persists as a continuing crisis.

The prevalence of individuals enduring homelessness is escalating, with a notable portion forced to reside in cars, parks, and on sidewalks.

Addressing chronic homelessness in our communities is crucial. Everyone deserves safe, stable housing.

This resource supports local shelters, advocating for affordable housing initiatives, and volunteering to assist those in need.

Together, let's create a future where everyone has a place to call home.

HOMELESSNESS IN FOCUS
A Deep Dive into the Southeast





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Having a stable home is not just a matter of convenience; it's fundamental to one's health, well-being, and overall quality of life. Social and environmental factors, along with resulting behaviors, significantly contribute to an individual's health, with studies indicating that these factors determine as much as 80% of health outcomes. However, accessing necessities and maintaining good health becomes a daily struggle for those without a home.

According to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), unsheltered homelessness refers to individuals residing in places not meant for human habitation. In recent years, homelessness has continued to rise, particularly unsheltered homelessness, where individuals find themselves living on the streets, in cars, parks, or abandoned buildings. Every January, HUD conducts a point-in-time count, providing a snapshot of sheltered and unsheltered individuals experiencing homelessness on a single night.

In 2023, the point-in-time count revealed a concerning trend: homelessness, particularly unsheltered homelessness, is on the rise. More than 650,000 people were experiencing homelessness on a single night in January, marking a 12 percent increase from the previous year. Despite efforts such as President Biden's American Rescue Plan aimed at preventing the rise of homelessness, the expiration or reduction of resources has unfortunately contributed to this upward trend.

Despite these challenges, there are organizations dedicated to combating homelessness and providing support to those in need. Good Shepherd of Wilmington, North Carolina, has been at the forefront of this issue for 40 years. Founded in 1983 as an all-volunteer soup kitchen, Good Shepherd has evolved into one of the region's largest providers of homeless services.



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How Many is Too Many?

Through ongoing efforts, there is a collective pursuit to establish a comprehensive and accurate database to better understand the homeless population across the nation. This endeavor aims to delineate various demographic categories such as overall population, unsheltered individuals, chronically homeless individuals, and those with disabilities, among other key subpopulations. While the point-in-time count serves as a starting point, its methodology has limitations. It may not consistently capture an accurate representation due to various factors such as volunteer availability and accessibility to homeless encampments. Despite these challenges, the count remains a commonly used metric, including by national organizations like the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

In addressing misconceptions surrounding homelessness, it is essential to recognize that homelessness trends are not universally increasing. In the local context of Southeastern North Carolina, particularly in the counties of Brunswick, New Hanover, and Pender, there have been periods of success in reducing overall homelessness, particularly in lowering the numbers of chronically homeless individuals. These achievements were facilitated by adopting a housing-focused approach, emphasizing rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing initiatives over traditional shelter-based interventions.

However, the onset of the pandemic has posed significant challenges, leading to a reversal of progress in addressing homelessness. The visible increase in homeless populations, especially in urban areas, has prompted heightened community concerns and calls for action from municipal authorities and other stakeholders. Despite ongoing efforts to rehouse individuals and families, the demand for emergency shelters has surged, highlighting the urgent need for affordable housing solutions. The current landscape presents formidable obstacles in securing long-term housing for vulnerable populations, underscoring the critical importance of advocating for affordable housing initiatives at both local and national levels.

Amidst these challenges, it is crucial to recognize that homelessness's root issue is the lack of affordable housing. Regardless of individual circumstances or demographic characteristics, the common thread among those experiencing homelessness is the financial barrier to accessing and maintaining stable housing in increasingly expensive communities.



Addressing Housing Deficits

In examining the intersection of housing deficits and health outcomes, it's evident that disparities in housing access directly impact individual health, particularly among lower-income populations. Individuals facing housing insecurity are often deprived of regular access to medical care, whether for preventative services or chronic condition management. Unhoused individuals grappling with prolonged exposure to harsh living conditions and limited access to essential medications and treatments especially manifest this disparity.

Their providers' efforts have challenged the conventional understanding of housing as a standalone issue, separate from health considerations. While historically, housing was often viewed in isolation from health concerns, the evolving discourse on social determinants of health has highlighted the integral role of housing in shaping overall well-being. The recognition of housing as a physical and mental health linchpin represents a significant paradigm shift, emphasizing the interconnectedness of housing stability and health outcomes.

Many providers and their housing support initiatives have witnessed firsthand the transformative impact of stable housing on individual health trajectories. The correlation between housing stability and improved health is strikingly evident, whether through facilitating access to private housing or providing supportive housing solutions. While housing alone may not resolve all underlying challenges, the correlation between stable housing and enhanced physical and mental well-being underscores the importance of holistic interventions in addressing homelessness and promoting health equity.

Housing First & Permanent Supportive Housing

Housing First is a new approach to homeless assistance, emphasizing immediate access to permanent housing as a vital step in tackling homelessness and enhancing individuals' lives. This method acknowledges that stable housing is crucial for addressing other challenges, like finding employment or managing health issues. Permanent supportive housing (PSH) is especially effective in alleviating the negative impacts of homelessness as long as individuals maintain housing stability. Unlike traditional methods, Housing First doesn't demand that individuals resolve all their issues or meet service requirements before getting housing.

Instead, it offers voluntary supportive services tailored to individual needs, empowering clients to make choices that enhance their housing stability and overall well-being. Housing First programs and rapid re-housing provide rental assistance and optional services to facilitate swift housing placement and long-term stability. Extensive research demonstrates the effectiveness of Housing First, with high housing retention rates and improved outcomes for participants, including increased autonomy, reduced substance use, and lower reliance on emergency services. Moreover, Housing First has been shown to be cost-efficient, yielding significant savings for communities by reducing reliance on emergency services and improving overall public health outcomes.



Reducing Healthcare Costs

Supportive housing has emerged as a pivotal intervention in addressing homelessness, offering stable accommodation and crucial support services tailored to individuals' unique needs. Compelling research findings underscore the efficacy of supportive housing in promoting health and well-being while mitigating healthcare costs.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, placement in supportive housing is associated with promising health outcomes and substantial reductions in healthcare expenditures. A study revealed a 14.3% decrease in emergency department visits and a 25.2% reduction in associated spending among individuals placed in supportive housing.

Research from the Evaluation of Housing for Health Permanent Supportive Housing Program in Los Angeles, California, highlights the efficacy of PSH among chronically ill individuals experiencing homelessness. Among participants grappling with medical and mental health issues, including substance abuse disorders, program engagement resulted in a substantial decrease in emergency room visits and inpatient hospital stays, yielding a 60% reduction in public service utilization costs.

Further evidence from systematic reviews from the Journal of Public Health Management and Practice on Permanent Supportive Housing with Housing First underscores the profound impact of Housing First programs on homelessness reduction and health improvement. Compared to traditional treatment approaches, Housing First programs demonstrated an 88% decrease in homelessness and a 41% improvement in housing stability. For clients with HIV, Housing First interventions yielded significant reductions in viral load, depression, emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and mortality rates.





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Moreover, research from the National Low Income Housing Coalition emphasizes the economic viability of Housing First initiatives. Systematic reviews reveal that the economic benefits of Housing First programs outweigh intervention costs, resulting in societal cost savings of \$1.44 for every dollar invested. These savings stem from reduced healthcare, emergency housing, judicial, welfare, and disability costs, and increased employment opportunities. Additionally, Housing First interventions lead to notable reductions in hospital visits, admissions, and duration of stays, resulting in substantial decreases in overall public system spending.

Supportive housing, particularly permanent supportive housing with a Housing First approach, represents a transformative solution to homelessness, yielding significant improvements in health outcomes and substantial reductions in healthcare expenditures. By investing in supportive housing initiatives, policymakers and stakeholders can address homelessness, advance public health objectives, and achieve long-term cost savings within healthcare systems.

Permanent supportive housing initiatives, exemplified by programs like Moore Place in Charlotte, North Carolina, and those implemented by Good Shepherd, have demonstrated notable reductions in hospitalizations, emergency room visits, and reliance on public services among chronically homeless individuals with disabilities. While empirical studies may be limited, anecdotal evidence suggests that providing stable housing can significantly alleviate this population's physical and mental health challenges. By offering a sense of stability and security, individuals experience a marked improvement in their well-being, leading to a decrease in emergency calls and a shift away from frequent healthcare utilization.



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What Permanent Supportive Housing Is Not

Permanent supportive housing epitomizes the essence of the “housing first” approach, emphasizing that housing is a fundamental right accompanied by comprehensive support services essential for long-term success and stability. Contrary to misconceptions, it is not a handout but a data-driven, evidence-based practice cultivated globally over decades of research and implementation.

It addresses the needs of individuals facing complex challenges, such as substance use disorders or mental health issues, who may struggle to navigate the conventional housing market independently. By offering tailored support, permanent supportive housing aims to break the cycle of homelessness, incarceration, and reliance on emergency services, ultimately benefiting both individuals and communities. While some may question its cost, it is a wise investment, yielding substantial savings in public expenditures and fostering a more inclusive and prosperous society.



PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

- » Cultural + Community Supports
- » Mobile + On-Site Supports
- » Assertive Engagement
- » In-Reached Health + Social Services
- » Tenant Security
- » Harm Reduction
- » Flexible + Affordable
- » Trauma-Informed Care



The Roles and Responsibilities of a Permanent Supportive Housing Provider

For permanent supportive housing providers, their operational model combines the roles of landlord and service provider, facilitating a comprehensive approach to addressing homelessness. Unlike scattered-site approaches, they undertake housing development themselves, ensuring affordable units are available to individuals in need. This entails offering rental units that are financially accessible, with residents contributing only a portion of their income towards rent and utilities, adjusted to accommodate those with limited or no income initially. In tandem with housing provision, they deliver intensive on-site support, recognizing that success in housing stability often necessitates personalized assistance.

Their approach acknowledges the complexity of transitioning individuals from homelessness to permanent housing, requiring a nuanced understanding of their unique circumstances. They embrace a supportive stance, understanding that individuals may require time and guidance to acclimate to their new living arrangements. This entails navigating unfamiliar routines and responsibilities, such as managing rent payments and household tasks. Through patient guidance and support, individuals are empowered to prioritize housing stability as a foundational step toward rebuilding their lives.

Providers recognize that everyone's journey toward stability is unique, devoid of rigid timelines or benchmarks. Rather than imposing predefined milestones, they adopt a flexible and person-centered approach, acknowledging their clients' diverse needs and capabilities. This flexibility allows them to tailor their support



services to individual circumstances, accommodating variations in health, cognition, and readiness for independent living. Their focus remains on fostering incremental progress and celebrating everyone's achievements, no matter how small.

Their experiences underscore the transformative impact of permanent supportive housing, exemplified by the resilience and progress demonstrated by their residents. While challenges abound, particularly in balancing financial sustainability with providing comprehensive services, the rewards are profound. Witnessing individuals transition from years of homelessness to embracing newfound stability and confidence in their abilities reaffirms the value of their work. Moving forward, providers remain committed to refining their approach, leveraging community resources, and advocating for policies prioritizing housing as a fundamental human right. Through collaborative efforts and unwavering dedication, providers of homeless services endeavor to expand access to permanent supportive housing and transform the lives of those most in need.



In examining the application of the Housing First model, it becomes clear that the approach prioritizes individual autonomy and minimizes imposed requirements. While upholding basic safety standards to ensure community well-being, Housing First avoids prescribing strict mandates such as mandatory weekly meetings with case managers or income-related benchmarks. Instead, the emphasis lies on actively engaging individuals in the

process, respecting their agency, and fostering collaborative decision-making.

At the heart of this approach is a commitment to treating individuals with dignity and compassion, acknowledging their autonomy and right to self-determination. The team at Good Shepherd of Wilmington, North Carolina, exemplifies this ethos through their person-centered approach to supportive housing. By refraining from dictating rigid requirements and instead focusing on building trust and rapport, they create a supportive environment where individuals feel empowered to navigate their paths toward stability.

Furthermore, providers recognize the importance of adopting a harm-reduction approach and promoting mutual respect in tenant interactions. Rather than imposing personal preferences or standards onto residents, they prioritize meeting individuals where they are and supporting their choices. This includes respecting tenants' rights within the landlord-tenant relationship, ensuring fair treatment, and upholding legal protections.

Through this nuanced approach, Good Shepherd of Wilmington acknowledges the humanity of everyone they serve and seeks to address their needs with sensitivity and understanding. By embracing flexibility, empathy, and respect, they strive to create a supportive housing environment where individuals feel valued, heard, and empowered to pursue their goals at their own pace.





Facing the “NIMBY” Mentality

The “Not In My Backyard” (NIMBY) mentality arises when residents oppose new developments or changes in occupancy, such as shelters, affordable housing, or group homes, in their neighborhood. Good Shepherd grapples with navigating and addressing these challenges posed by the NIMBY mentality, recognizing it as an ongoing issue locally and globally. While combating this mindset, Good Shepherd acknowledges its responsibility not only as a provider of permanent supportive housing but also as an advocate for a broader spectrum of affordable housing solutions. This advocacy extends to housing, which the organization may not directly build or operate but serves as a crucial solution for the individuals encountered in their programs.

Rather than viewing NIMBY proponents as distant figures, Good Shepherd recognizes that they often comprise individuals who are otherwise active in the community, serving as donors, board members of nonprofits, and respected business professionals. These individuals may find it easier to attribute housing challenges to personal failings rather than systemic issues. To address this mentality, Good Shepherd engages in dialogues to foster an understanding of the broader community impact of housing instability. By highlighting how the affordable housing crisis affects traffic congestion, education, business operations, and workforce availability, the organization emphasizes the interconnectedness of housing issues and their broader societal ramifications.

In advocating for affordable housing, Good Shepherd seeks to foster a community where all residents recognize their stake in addressing housing challenges and work together toward comprehensive solutions. By reframing the conversation around housing as a shared concern with tangible impacts on all community members, they aim to foster a more inclusive and compassionate approach to housing policy and development.



The Good Work Good Shepherd Does

In the early 1980s, a small-scale effort to address poverty and homelessness emerged in downtown Wilmington, led by a group of concerned neighbors. Initially driven by grassroots volunteers, this effort gradually evolved into a more structured social service organization, expanding its scope to encompass various programs to combat hunger and homelessness.

Good Shepherd of Wilmington maintains its original soup kitchen, which annually serves over a hundred thousand hot meals. While the primary beneficiaries include seniors, individuals with disabilities, and those on fixed incomes, the kitchen extends its services to the broader community. Additionally, the organization operates a “Second Helpings” program, rescuing surplus food from local partners like grocery stores to distribute to smaller community organizations.

This initiative ensures that nutritious food reaches those in need, either through hot meals or groceries provided by partner pantries. Good Shepherd also runs a food box program, delivering prepared food boxes to vulnerable individuals transitioning into housing, particularly seniors and individuals with disabilities who face challenges accessing grocery stores. During the pandemic, the organization introduced a weekly grocery giveaway to provide essential food staples to community members in need, reflecting its commitment to addressing food insecurity.

Beyond food assistance, Good Shepherd’s services focus on homelessness. The organization operates a Day Shelter offering restroom facilities, showers, clothing, mail services, and assistance with identification. Adjacent to the shelter is a medical clinic, in partnership with the county health department, providing comprehensive healthcare services, including chronic condition management and COVID-19 testing and vaccinations. Since its establishment in 2005, Good Shepherd’s Night Shelter can accommodate 118 individuals, including men, women, and families with children.

Case management is integral to the shelter’s operations, with a dedicated team assisting residents in developing and executing plans to transition back into housing. This includes rapid rehousing programs, where intensive case management and financial assistance expedite individuals’ and families’ return to permanent housing.



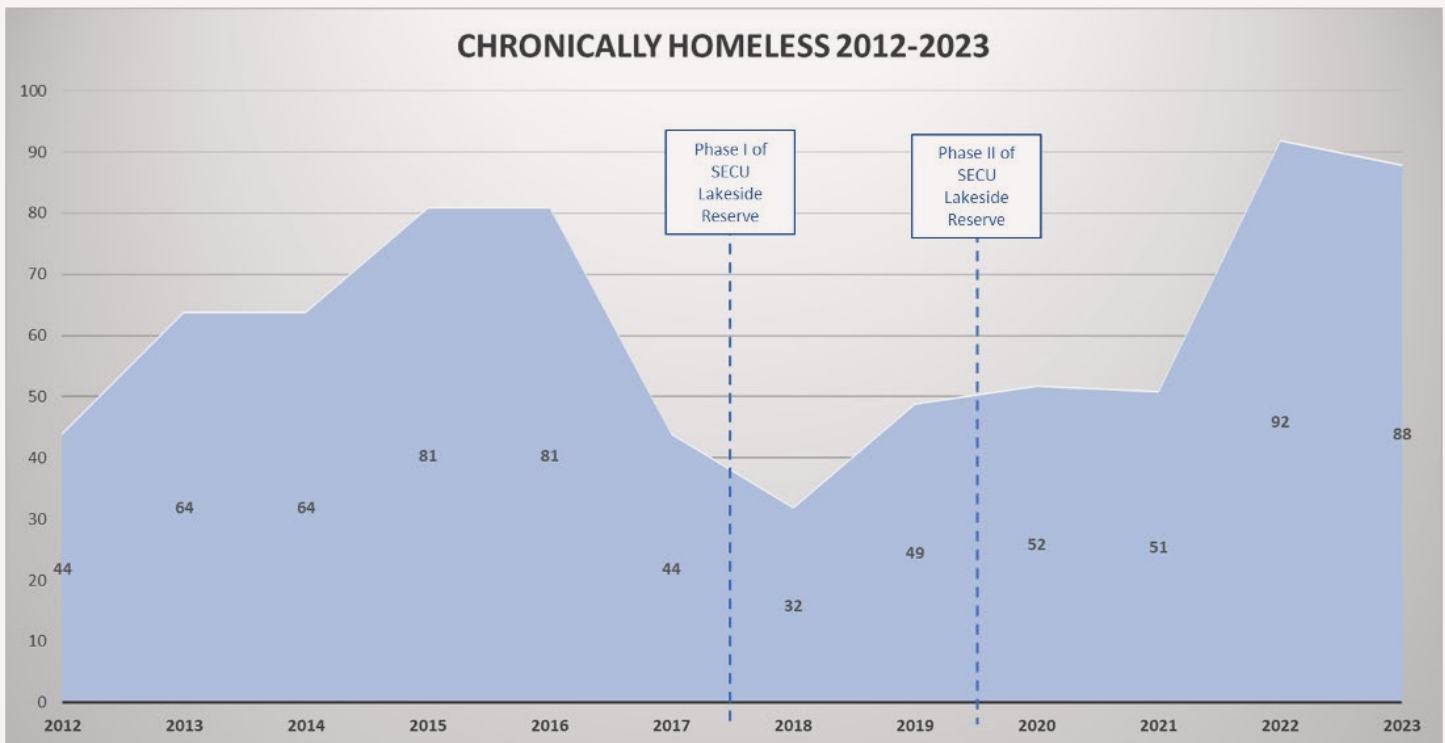
SECU Lake Side Reserve

Good Shepherd manages several housing sites, including the Sergeant Eugene Ashley Center, primarily serving homeless veterans, and the SECU Lakeside Reserve, a 40-unit community designed for chronically homeless individuals with significant disabilities. These housing initiatives provide affordable accommodation and on-site support services to stabilize residents and promote long-term housing stability. The organization is presently engaged in a capital campaign known as “Home for Good,” aimed at expanding its existing campus, which houses the shelter and soup kitchen.

The expansion plan involves acquiring additional space across the street to accommodate more service facilities, an enhanced family shelter, and potentially 24 to 30 apartments catering to the chronically homeless population. Of particular priority is the development of a three-story community similar to the SECU Lakeside Reserve, designed specifically for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and disabilities. This new project, named SECU, The Sparrow, is slated to commence construction within the current year.



Chronic homelessness in New Hanover County has only drastically decreased when adding Permanent Supportive Housing units within the community.



Advocating for Compassion

Good Shepherd undertakes various advocacy and engagement efforts informed by best practices and empirical data to address these challenges and strive for more compassionate and effective solutions.

Recognizing the limitations and counterproductive nature of punitive measures, such as increased law enforcement involvement, Good Shepherd advocates for a more holistic approach to addressing homelessness. This approach emphasizes the importance of understanding the underlying causes of homelessness and providing individuals with the necessary support and resources to secure stable housing.

Good Shepherd emphasizes the fundamental principle that individuals experiencing homelessness are community members deserving of empathy and assistance. Rather than



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stigmatizing or blaming individuals for their circumstances, the organization emphasizes the community's shared responsibility in responding to the needs of all its members.

Central to Good Shepherd's advocacy efforts is promoting solutions-oriented approaches that prioritize housing stability and support services. The organization highlights the success of evidence-based interventions such as permanent supportive housing and rapid rehousing in facilitating positive outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness.

They emphasize investing in these proven strategies rather than imposing additional barriers or punitive measures. By focusing on solutions that address the root causes of homelessness and provide individuals with the support they need, Good Shepherd aims to create lasting pathways out of homelessness and housing insecurity.

Through its advocacy and engagement efforts, Good Shepherd seeks to raise awareness, mobilize resources, and foster collaborative partnerships to effectively address homelessness and work towards building a more inclusive and equitable community for all.



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How the Collective Contribute to Meaningful Change

The discourse often revolves around the absence of a singular solution for homelessness and affordable housing. However, despite the multifaceted nature of these issues, a wealth of knowledge and effective strategies exist for implementation.

Within the community, a reservoir of insight is garnered from extensive research and experiences both locally and globally. This repository illuminates the pathways to rehousing individuals grappling with various forms of crises, whether financial, mental health-related, or physical disability-induced.

Indeed, the blueprint for addressing these challenges is readily accessible, and its efficacy is demonstrable within our community. The key lies in allocating resources and a collective commitment to fostering an environment of inclusivity and equitable access to housing opportunities for all residents.

While some may point to shortcomings in other regions, the reality is that in Wilmington, North Carolina, these best practices are yielding tangible results on a daily basis. Thus, there is a pressing need to amplify awareness, disseminate knowledge, and facilitate access to these proven solutions.

Ultimately, the path forward is characterized by clarity rather than complexity. By championing evidence-based approaches and fostering a culture of empowerment, the community can realize its vision of a more just and housing-secure environment for all its members.

In some ways, it's not complicated at all.





Editor Notes

In the two-part episode of Homelessness in Focus: A Deep Dive into the Southeast, Katrina Knight and Liz Carbone sat down to define what permanent supportive housing is and isn't, and the importance of treating all affected by homelessness with compassion and dignity.

Led by Executive Director Katrina Knight, who has spearheaded the organization's transformational growth over nearly two decades, Good Shepherd has implemented best practices aimed at addressing homelessness comprehensively. Under Knight's leadership, initiatives such as the SECU Lakeside Reserve, which offers 40 permanent supportive housing apartments, have been established, along with the transition to Love Area, a housing-first-oriented day and night shelter.

Working alongside Knight is Liz Carbone, the Director of Community Engagement, who has been instrumental in managing outreach, education, and advocacy efforts related to the organization's mission. With seven years of experience at Good Shepherd, Carbone brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the table, further enhancing the organization's impact on the community.

Homelessness, particularly unsheltered homelessness, remains a pressing issue in the United States. However, through the dedication and tireless efforts of organizations like Good Shepherd of Wilmington, progress is being made in addressing this complex challenge. By implementing comprehensive strategies and leveraging community support, we can work towards ensuring that everyone has access to a safe and stable place to call home, thereby improving overall health and well-being for all individuals.

Reading List

Education about chronic homelessness and the housing problem in the United States isn't a one and done lesson. So, we provided a necessary reading list to help get you started.

[Homelessness is a Housing Problem](#)

Gregg Colburn

[Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Not a Solution to Homelessness](#)

By Michealle Gady, JD of Atrómitos

[The Supreme Court Is on the Verge of Criminalizing Homelessness](#)

Nicolas Slayton of The New Republic

['Criminal for existing': US's unhoused still fear sweeps as supreme court to take on shelter case](#)

Betsy Reed of The Guardian

[A 'Forgotten History' Of How The U.S. Government Segregated America](#)

Terry Gross of NPR



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