

## 26.6 Percent of People Living on the Street Report Chronic Substance Abuse

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A survey of the U.S. homeless population indicates 26.6 percent of people living on the street report chronic substance abuse, according to *The Washington Post*.

The findings come from a 2013 survey of about 600,000 homeless people. Two-thirds were in shelters or temporary housing, and one-third were living on the street, the article notes.

The survey found 19.3 percent of people living in shelters reported chronic substance abuse.

The 100,000 Homes Campaign, a group that aims to permanently house 100,000 chronically homeless people, conducted interviews among the unsheltered homeless. They found more than 60 percent of homeless men and women living on the street have struggled with some form of substance abuse in their lives.

The group is focused on helping the chronically homeless—people with mental health problems, addiction or other disabilities who have been homeless for more than one year, or who have been homeless at least four times in the past three years. About one-third of the homeless living on the street are considered chronically homeless.

Many programs aimed at helping chronically homeless people with addiction problems first put them in temporary housing. These programs expect homeless people to demonstrate their substance abuse problems are under control before they can move on to living independently, according to the article.

Often, people in the program are not able to comply with the requirement that they be totally abstinent. The requirement scares away many from participating in the first place, the newspaper notes.

A study published in 2012 found heavy drinkers who were formerly homeless, and are provided with housing, cut down on their drinking if they are allowed access to alcohol.

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The study followed participants in a program call Housing First, which was developed by a housing agency in Seattle. The program provides housing to chronically homeless people, and does not require that they stop drinking in order to obtain housing.