



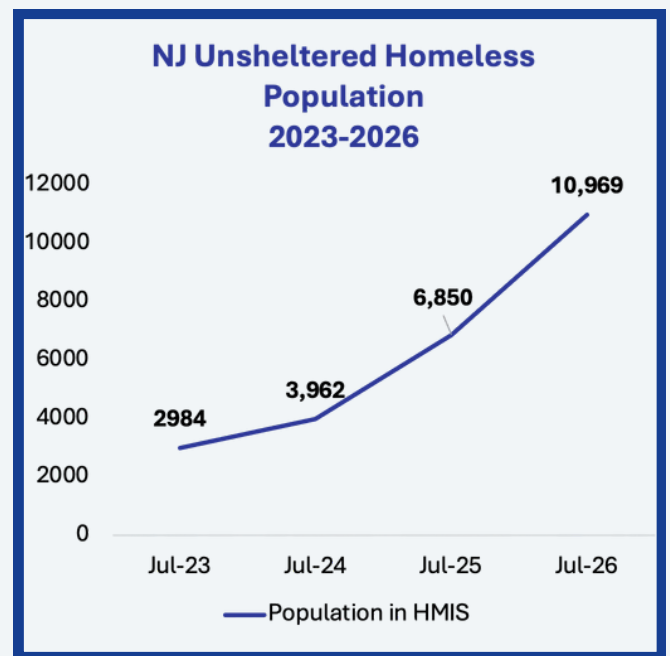
NO PLACE TO GO

The Rise of Unsheltered Homelessness in New Jersey



Cars, streets, bus stations, abandoned buildings, and wooded areas are **not safe places to call home**. Yet thousands of people experiencing homelessness are forced to live in these conditions because they have nowhere else to go. **People staying in places not meant for human habitation are considered unsheltered.** Unsheltered homelessness further **compounds the struggles and risks associated with being unhoused**, especially during adverse weather conditions and in areas with safety hazards

Unsheltered homelessness is a crisis within a crisis.



What the Data Says

- Unsheltered homelessness in New Jersey **increased by 61%** from 2025 to 2026, according to HMIS.
- In July 2026, **77% of unhoused adults age 62 and older** were living unsheltered.
- New Jersey's shelter system is **overburdened**, leaving many people facing long waitlists for a safe place to stay.
- In July 2026, **60% of people experiencing homelessness in New Jersey were unsheltered.**
- A national University of Chicago study found that **40% of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness were employed** during the year they were homeless.
- Criminalization, especially of those living unsheltered, can **push people deeper into homelessness** by repeatedly displacing them and separating them from essential belongings, including identification and medications—**creating new barriers to housing and stability**

The Stories Behind the Numbers

Frank, 67, worked as an engineer for the State of New Jersey for nearly three decades. After a stroke, a broken hip, brain surgery, and most recently leg surgery, his health made it increasingly difficult to keep up with his bills. Unable to afford even the \$1,000 legal fee to file for bankruptcy, Frank eventually lost his housing. After nearly 30 years of public service, he now lives in the woods.



Michelle has a bachelor's degree in business administration and is living with bipolar disorder. For two years, she has been on a waitlist for affordable housing. In the meantime, she lives in a wooded area on public land. Even without a home, Michelle continues to look for work, recently applying for a telephone sales position from the encampment where she lives.

Darren suffered a heart attack last year and ended up living outdoors with his wife and three children. Darren was already injured before his heart attack as a result of being hit by a tanker truck and the surgery following the accident. Even living in the woods, Darren is still working doing odd jobs when he can get them.

Shannon is a 40-year-old college graduate and artist. She suffered a brain aneurysm and is now paralyzed on the right side of her body. Unable to get Emergency Assistance, she ended up seeking refuge in a local encampment.

These stories challenge the **assumptions** we make about unsheltered homelessness. Living in a car, an encampment, or on the street **does not** mean someone stopped trying. Often, it means they **ran out of options**.

No one should be left without a safe place to go.



GET INVOLVED

Learn more about homelessness, support our advocacy, and join the movement to end homelessness in NJ.

