NEW JERSEY COALITION TO END HOMELESSNESS
we can. we must. we will.

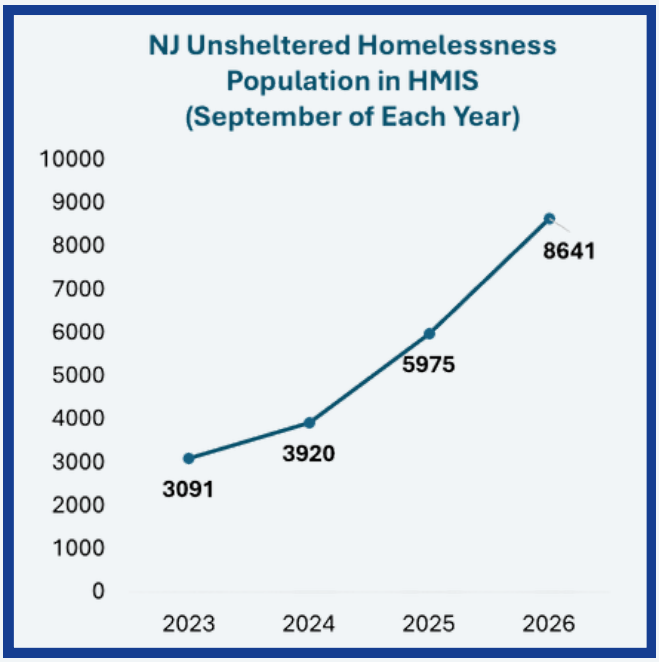
NO PLACE TO GO

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 45%** from 2025 to 2026, according to HMIS.
- In September 2026, **75% 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 September 2026, **53% 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 a leg surgery, his health made it increasingly difficult to keep up with 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.

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GET INVOLVED

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