

A Health of the Heartland Fact Sheet: Housing and Homelessness



What is Housing Insecurity?

Many Midwesterners face housing insecurity. They struggle to pay rent, their home is overcrowded, they move frequently, or they spend most of their household income (50%) on housing.¹ Housing insecurity impacts physical and mental health and makes it harder to access healthcare.² Unsafe, unaffordable and unstable housing impact health and quality of life for an individual or household.²

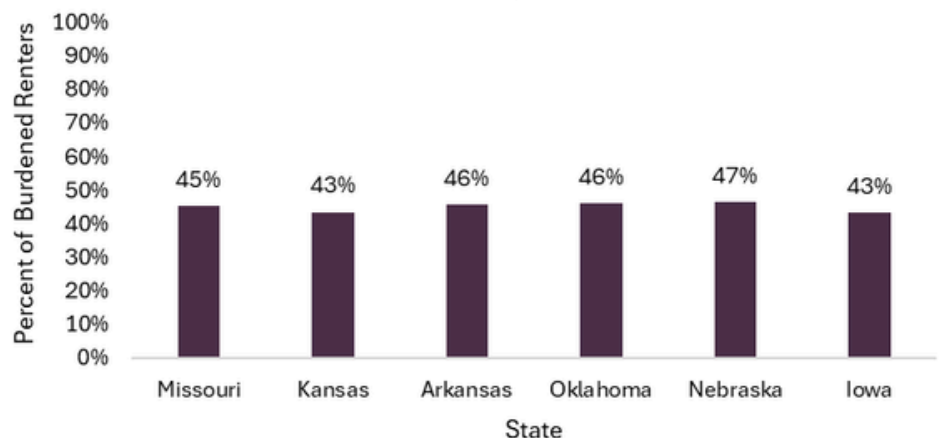
Over 7,300 people in Missouri experienced homelessness in 2024.

- Department of Housing and Urban Development, The 2024 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report

Quality Affordable Housing can Impact Health

Housing is considered unaffordable if a household spends 30% or more of their household income on housing.² When housing is so expensive, families are not able to spend as much on things that are necessary to be healthy, like food or health care.² When there are limited affordable housing options, low-income households may be forced to live in substandard housing that exposes them to health and safety risks, such as pests, mold and poor heating and cooling systems.² Affordable, quality housing is necessary for a healthy community.²

Percent of Renters Who Spend over 30% of Income on Rent, 2019-2023



Source: U.S. Census, ACS 5-year Estimates

Homelessness

Homelessness, generally, means someone lacks a regular place to sleep at night.² People who experience homelessness may live in a motel or doubling up with family or friends because there is nowhere else to stay.² Homelessness can increase risk of early death and chronic illness like diabetes, high blood pressure and depression.² Lack of shelter and transportation can make it hard to manage these conditions.² The Kansas City 2025 Point in Time count found there were **2,654** people (out of a population of 886,622) experiencing homelessness.⁵ The Joplin 2024 Point in Time count found there were **292** people (out of nearly 188,000) experiencing homelessness.⁶

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Public Health Interventions

Coordination between several groups, including healthcare, community based-organizations, governments and public health is necessary to address homelessness. In the Kansas City Region, several Community Health Improvement Plans (CHIPs), including Kansas City, MO and Wyandotte County, KS, have goals focusing on housing like investing in safe and affordable housing and improving housing stock.^{7,8} A Regional Housing Commission is actively working with local partners to address homelessness in and around Joplin.⁶

KCU's Impact

KCU faculty, with student participation, provide care at Care Beyond the Boulevard (CBB), a community health clinic that provides healthcare to people experiencing homelessness in Northeast Kansas City. Additionally, the Center for Population Health and Equity has established a Streetwise Scholar program where KCU student teams work with people experiencing homeless to achieve health goals.

References

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6. Community Development Block Grant And HOME Partnership Investment Program. City of Joplin, Missouri. 2025.
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ABOUT KANSAS CITY UNIVERSITY

Kansas City University was founded in 1916 as one of the nation's five original osteopathic medical schools. Today, KCU is a fully accredited, private, not-for-profit health sciences university strategically located on two campus locations – Kansas City and Joplin, Missouri – to address the growing health needs of both urban and rural populations. KCU's Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine, Biosciences and Dental Medicine offer graduate degree programs in osteopathic medicine, clinical psychology, biomedical sciences, dental medicine as well as multiple dual-degree opportunities.

THE CENTER FOR POPULATION HEALTH AND EQUITY MISSION

The CPHE builds momentum around understanding and addressing the social factors that impact health within and outside of the traditional health care setting, in partnership with local organizations, to better prepare students to practice osteopathic medicine, clinical psychology and dentistry while improving the well-being of the communities we serve.

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