



Allentown Commission on Homelessness



2025 Annual Report

Allentown Commission on Homelessness

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In 2025, there were over 80 community members who attended our monthly meetings.

Purpose and Function

The Commission serves as a collaborative body dedicated to working with the community and key stakeholders to promote effective strategies and informed recommendations addressing homelessness and its prevention in the City of Allentown. Additionally, the Commission acts in an advisory capacity to the Mayor of Allentown and Allentown City Council.

Key Functions of the Commission

- Raise public awareness and understanding of homelessness.
- Advocate for policies that support and protect individuals experiencing homelessness.
- Develop and present actionable recommendations to prevent and ultimately end homelessness.
- Foster communication, coordination, and referrals among local organizations and community partners.
- Ensure that the immediate needs of unhoused individuals are met and that their civil rights are upheld.
- Offer evidence-based, forward-thinking solutions to prevent homelessness in the future.

Executive Summary

On behalf of the Allentown Commission on Homelessness, we are proud to present our 2025 Annual Report.

The Commission's mission is to collaborate with community members and key stakeholders to develop effective, compassionate responses to homelessness in Allentown. We serve as an advisory body to the Mayor and Allentown City Council, offering guidance and recommendations on issues affecting those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The past year has been defined by one of the most significant and emotionally taxing challenges in our city's recent history: the closure of the Jordan Creek encampment. This was not merely an administrative action; it was a period of extreme hardship for our unsheltered neighbors who lost their sense of community and stability, and a grueling ordeal for the advocates and providers working on the front lines. Navigating the closure required us to confront the raw reality of the housing crisis in Allentown, forcing us to reconcile the urgent needs of public health and safety with the fundamental human right to shelter and dignity.

While the Jordan Creek closure was born of tragedy, the response to it sparked a historic shift in how we operate. Historically, progress in Lehigh County has been hindered by "siloes" where city departments, county agencies, and service providers worked in parallel but rarely in tandem. The necessity of the Jordan Creek response forced a collapse of these barriers. For the first time, we saw city and county officials prioritizing the most vulnerable individuals, streamlined communication between the silos and a transition from reactive crisis management to a collaborative, proactive framework. By working through the friction of this hardship, we have begun to build the bridges necessary to replace fragmented efforts with a cohesive continuum of care.

As we look toward the coming year, we carry a profound sense of hope forged in the fire of this experience. The lessons learned at Jordan Creek have proven that we are undeniably stronger together than we are apart. We are committed to fostering an environment where partnership is the default, not the exception. Our focus remains steadfast on our unsheltered neighbors, the people we are here to represent. By deepening our collaborations and maintaining this newfound spirit of collective service, we will move beyond temporary fixes toward sustainable, dignified solutions for every resident of Allentown.

Respectfully,

Abigail Goldfarb and Christina DiPierro

Co-Chairs

Allentown Commission on Homelessness

2025 Accomplishments

Created new subcommittees for lived experience, encampment, strategic planning and communication. Strategic planning created priorities for the city to fund through consultation with those with lived experience and local providers. It also served to designate priorities for the upcoming year. The Communication committee worked to make the meetings more accessible for the community at large via social media, advertising events and opportunities to participate. Lived experience is an essential piece of promoting essential strategies. A committee is in the early stages to advise on new and existing initiatives, reduce stigma and empower those who are unhoused. More details of committee work is included below.

Jordan Creek encampment eviction mitigation efforts. The Commission coordinated with the city to organize three separate volunteer clean-ups of the Jordan Creek encampment area and facilitated trash collection cleanups to prevent the need for a sweep of the encampment. However, in August the city announced an eviction date for the 103 unhoused community members who were residing along the creek. The Commission worked to lobby city council and the mayor to fund the early opening of the warming shelter and extend the eviction to coincide with the new open date. The newly formed Encampment Committee also worked alongside Allentown's housing coordinator to set up resource hubs positioned at various dates to help residents relocate and find needed services. As a result, 20 people were housed, including three veterans, four individuals who went to inpatient treatment and two to transitional housing.

Established the Unhoused Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT). The MDT was formed in response to the deaths of 12 unhoused individuals in 2024, to focus on those who are at imminent risk of death. Conceptualized at the Commission and brought to fruition through the dedicated partnership of our colleagues at Lehigh County, the MDT is a collaborative group of professionals from various sectors such as health, social work, housing, and law enforcement, who work together to provide integrated care, outreach, and housing solutions to individuals experiencing homelessness. By integrating these varied perspectives, the team provides comprehensive, trauma-informed, and person-centered solutions tailored to the complex needs of individuals and families experiencing street-level homelessness. This unified approach allows for more coordinated and productive interventions, ultimately improving individual outcomes while collecting vital data to guide future regional efforts and systemic improvements.

Supported the establishment of the Neighborhood House. Operating on Sunday mornings, the Neighborhood House is a collaborative effort to fill the gap when providers such as the warming center at the Allentown YMCA are closed. Allentown Collaborative Ministries and the Allentown Public Library are essential partners in this community web of support.

Supported the Allentown Homelessness Services Alert System. This text-based alert system allows providers to receive weather alerts and changes in services that impact the unsheltered community.

Advocacy Initiatives

Hosted several well-attended community engagement and education events. Throughout 2025, the Education Committee spearheaded a series of high-impact events designed to bridge the gap between public perception and the lived realities of our unsheltered neighbors. These initiatives proved remarkably successful in fostering community engagement and dismantling the stigma surrounding homelessness through informed dialogue. The year's momentum began in February with the Homelessness and The Business Community Town Hall, which successfully engaged local businesses in economic and social solutions. This was followed by the Community Conversations: Homelessness in Allentown event in August, which saw a surge in local participation as residents united to identify solutions. The committee concluded the year with the November session, Community Conversations: Solutions from Beyond the Valley, which brought fresh, external perspectives to our local challenges. Collectively, these events did more than just inform; they built a stronger, more empathetic network of advocates ready to tackle the complex challenges of homelessness in Lehigh County.

Placed an opinion piece in the Morning Call. Titled The problem is homelessness, not homeless people and published in the Morning Call in August, this opinion piece addresses Bill 780 that criminalizes encampments and advocates for humane solutions to homelessness.

Advocated for a homeless support service line item in the city budget. In 2025, the Commission's newly formed Strategic Planning Committee successfully advocated for a landmark \$100,000 homeless support services line item in the city budget, specifically earmarked to fund immediate, dignified solutions for our unsheltered neighbors. This critical funding provides a safety net for those in crisis by securing emergency hotel vouchers when local shelters reach capacity and enhancing public health through the deployment of porta-potties and hydration stations at encampments. Furthermore, the budget supports essential quality-of-life services such as local free laundry initiatives and eliminates barriers to care by funding the Humane Society to board pets, allowing owners to enter shelters or treatment programs without the trauma of abandonment. Crucially, the initiative also prioritizes lived experience by allocating funds for gift card reimbursements, ensuring that individuals who have navigated homelessness are fairly compensated for providing the vital perspectives that shape our city's policies. Every dollar spent on targeted homelessness interventions generates significant savings by lowering expenditures in emergency healthcare, law enforcement, and clean-up operations, while improving community well-being and economic stability.



Community members attending an education event hosted by the Commission on Homelessness

Short-Term Goals and Ongoing Challenges

Weather planning. Planning for extreme weather remains an area that needs work. This winter was brutal with record breaking temperatures and multiple snow storms that taxed the already overburdened provider network. While short-term planning was ultimately successful, significant planning and funding is needed to be prepared for extreme weather.

Prioritizing projects for city funding. Now that projects have been selected and funding is moving into place, the Commission must prioritize those projects and ensure their success.

Encampment Resolution Ordinance. The Ordinance was introduced at City Council with Commission support. Once adopted by the City of Allentown, the Commission will work to ensure this ordinance functions as a logistical, practical protocol for addressing encampments.

Improved integration of City and County initiatives. Lehigh County is planning to declare a homelessness emergency to potentially improve coordination, close service gaps, and create a more robust support system. A broader, regional approach to address homelessness, while also recognizing the urgency, will propel this work forward. The Commission intends to participate as robustly as allowed.



Photo courtesy of the Morning Call

Future Directions and Long-Term Priorities

While the Commission has made important strides, the work ahead remains vast and complex. As we move beyond initial priorities, it is clear that sustained attention must be given to the deeper, structural barriers driving homelessness in Allentown.

Establishing Emergency and Year-Round Shelter Solutions. The need for a permanent, year-round emergency shelter must move from discussion to action. Simultaneously, the City of Allentown with the Commission on Homelessness must champion efforts to create more affordable and entry-level housing across the city. The recent rise in residential fires has displaced dozens of households, creating an already critical shortage of low-cost housing. Emergency resources tailored to respond to such incidents should be explored and prioritized.

Improving housing safety and accessibility. This must include action against absentee landlords and illegal rental operations. Allentown needs a housing ecosystem rooted in safety, dignity, and affordability—this will require a shift in mindset among policymakers, including City Council and key community stakeholders. Short-term initiatives must help lay the groundwork for a long-term commitment to real, actionable change.

Strengthening collaboration with the Allentown Housing Authority is a key priority for the coming year. Their involvement is essential to aligning citywide efforts and expanding access to stable housing for residents experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Comprehensive data collection continues to be a significant challenge due to fragmented and inconsistent practices. Agencies often use different methods and definitions for homelessness, while some are not obligated to share their data, initiatives, or outcomes. This lack of coordination makes it difficult to fully understand the scope of the issue or to identify effective strategies across the City. The data included in this report represents a sample of what robust data collection could look like—a critical priority moving into 2026.

The Commission remains committed to moving this work forward with urgency, compassion, and collaboration. We look ahead with determination—grateful for the ongoing partnership of our elected officials, City Council, the Mayor’s Office, and all those working to make Allentown a place where everyone has a safe place to call home.



Community members attending an education event hosted by the Commission on Homelessness

The State of Homelessness in Allentown

At the end of 2025, 1,497 new households had been enrolled in the Lehigh Valley. The majority of those households were in the 18102 Allentown area code.

Point-in-Time (PIT) Count data includes anyone residing in a shelter, in a place not meant for habitation or transitional housing on January 22, 2025:

- Lehigh County: 401
- Northampton County: 362

The Eastern Pennsylvania Continuum of Care (CoC) manages the Coordinated Entry (CE) system for individuals experiencing or at imminent risk of homelessness in the region. Our CoC comprises 33 counties. The Eastern PA CoC 2025 Gaps Analysis reports the following:

- There were 2,181 CE enrollments in Lehigh Valley in 2024.
- The 18102 zip code in Lehigh County had 873 CE enrollments, which accounts for 40% of the CE enrollments for the Lehigh Valley. It is also the largest number of any zip code in the Eastern Pennsylvania CoC.

Our Housing Inventory in the Lehigh Valley consists of a total of 844 dedicated beds, which only meets 38% of the need of households enrolled in Coordinated Entry. The inventory consists of:

- Emergency Shelter Beds: 278
- Transitional Housing: 141
- Rapid Rehousing: 144
- Permanent Supportive Housing: 214
- Other: 67



Community members attending an education event hosted by the Commission on Homelessness

The State of Homelessness in Allentown: Shelter data

Allentown Rescue Mission recently expanded their bed capacity to serve 150 men. The Emergency Shelter recorded 20,418 nights of shelter for 2024. In 2024, they served a total of 676 unique individuals.

Sixth Street Shelter is comprised of 20 apartments plus 5 units for two-year transitional housing. In 2025, 91 families received services.

The Salvation Army Hospitality House Emergency Shelter provides 50 beds for women and children. In 2025, they served 249 women and children.

YMCA-River Crossing Winter Shelter has bed capacity to serve 100 individuals. So far this 2025-2026 season they have seen 10,456 bed nights with 361 unique individuals (there were 9,154 bed nights and 346 unique individuals last season).

Family Promise of Lehigh Valley has capacity for 9 families. During fiscal year 2024-2025, 69 families were served (86 adults and 145 children).



Volunteers help clean area near the Jordan Creek encampment in 2025.
Photo courtesy of the Morning Call