

## **LC 2: Greater Cincinnati Homeless Coalition**

### **Subgroup 1:**

The Cincinnati Homeless Coalition (CHC) is a non-profit advocacy group in the Cincinnati Metro Area that strives for social justice advocacy for the populations in Cincinnati experiencing housing insecurity. Social determinants of health affecting the homeless population about which CHC raised advocacy included:

- Inequality in access to healthcare
- Housing insecurity
- Poor access to mental health and addiction treatment resources
- Prevalence of sex work as means of survival for the homeless population

The organization seeks to accomplish their mission with political lobbying for municipally funded affordable housing projects in the Cincinnati area as well as providing the homeless population with a means of earning an income by selling *Street Vibes* newspapers, which is a publication by CHC meant to raise awareness for the plight of the populations in Cincinnati. CHC also seeks to advocate for the enactment of legislation that protects low-income residents of Cincinnati from displacement due to raising rent prices due to gentrification of lower income neighborhoods. According to representatives from the Cincinnati Homeless Coalition, the COVID-19 pandemic had an exacerbating effect on the struggles against which the CHC was already fighting on behalf of those experiencing homelessness. Not only did the inability to shelter in place during COVID lockdowns make the members of the community particularly vulnerable to the pandemic, but also, due to an already pre-existing inequality to access to quality healthcare, those infected with COVID requiring medical treatment were further put at a disadvantage. Additionally, due to the economic impact of COVID lockdowns, including massive job loss and dismantling of small employers, many more residents of Cincinnati that were riding the poverty line before the pandemic were shifted into utter destitution and desperation by COVID, further increasing the numbers of those experiencing homelessness in the Cincinnati area. As medical students, our project consisted of advocating for getting the Affordable Housing Trust Fund enacted into public policy by raising awareness on the medical impacts of the social determinants of health experienced by the homeless community. Due to the extreme impact of this trust fund for CHC both now and in the future, continued advocacy by UCCOM LC 2 for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund is a vital project.

### **Subgroup 2:**

There is a profound impact of inflation on the affordability of housing. Inflation causes the cost of living to increase, which makes it more difficult for individuals searching for housing to afford it. In addition, inflation also increases the general cost of living expense which makes less resources available for housing. With wages remaining constant, and the rise of expenses, individuals may have to work longer hours for fewer returns, and still not be able to secure

affordable housing. Post-covid, inflation has increased significantly making this issue worse for individuals facing housing insecurity.

The Covid pandemic was especially difficult for people experiencing homelessness. Throughout the pandemic, homeless shelters, or having limited space, likely became hotspots for disease transmission due to the crowdedness. As these people unfortunately do not have access to private shelters, social distancing is something that became impossible. Consequently, each individual was likely exposed to significantly more infections, thereby increasing their risk of infection. Furthermore, without stable shelter to rest, recovery times for this patient population likely took longer, increasing morbidity and mortality.

The Cincinnati Homeless Coalition advocates for affordable housing to help meet the needs of people in the city that are experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity. With Cincinnati's housing options becoming more and more expensive we need people to advocate for funding and housing options that are accessible to everyone. By advocating for affordable housing the Homeless Coalition helps Cincinnati become a better place for everyone, not just the people in need of housing. By working to decrease the housing insecurity rate in Cincinnati, the health, education, and opportunities will be improved for those benefited by the advocacy done.

Education and health are two aspects that are greatly affected by housing insecurity. By advocating for more equitable and affordable housing, the Homeless Coalition looks to work toward mitigating some of the deleterious impacts. Education is one of the biggest risk factors associated with homelessness and less educated adults report worse general health, more chronic conditions, functional limitations, and emergency room visits. With the aforementioned socioeconomic pressures of inflation, increasing housing costs, and COVID-19 complications, the pressing issues that housing insecurity presents are even more important to be addressed.

### **Subgroup 3:**

In our M1 year, we created a presentation on the impact of affordable housing on health. We also hosted a panel of experts on the topic of homelessness in Cincinnati. This event was recorded and given to several members in the community (see figure 1 for photos from the event). A lot of work went into compiling information about how the experience of homelessness impacts health and well being of the community. We used our backgrounds in research review to simplify studies that have been done, both in Cincinnati and nationally. The goal of this presentation was to provide our community partner with statistics and background that could be used to advocate for citizens to sign a petition to get the Affordable Housing Trust Fund on the ballot. It was an educational event for those that were working to get petitions signed. The Greater Homeless Coalition has since reached their goal and they are shifting to advocating for members of the community to vote for this initiative. We hope to contribute to this by shortening our presentation and making it more focused and digestible for voters to learn about how this issue impacts the health of Cincinnati and why they should vote for it. We can appeal to the Cincinnati city government through requesting their continued

support and endorsement of this important initiative.

## HOUSING INSECURITY IN CINCINNATI: IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH



*Figure 1: Photos from the M1 event that we hosted*

One idea to increase awareness in our community and further expand education of the impact of the lack of affordable housing on health to medical professionals, we plan to strive to make the presentation count for CME credit. Ultimately, this method allows us to reach a more expansive audience, while educating the medical community on the effects of unaffordable housing. In order to make the presentation count for CME credit, we would need assistance navigating the crediting-agencies, like the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACC), and their requirements to make sure that it gets approved.

The Homeless Coalition already has a website created to share information on this topic (see figure 2 for a screenshot of the current website). Another idea to support our community partner is to update the website, making it more up to date, more aesthetically pleasing, and easier to navigate. We found it difficult to access the resources that The Homeless Coalition offers and would put more emphasis on the resources available to the community to both support and advocate for the unhoused population in the Greater Cincinnati area. In order to accomplish this, we would need help getting in contact with someone from The Homeless Coalition who would be willing to work with us throughout the year. Last year as M1s, we had significant communication issues and difficulty getting in touch with our contact person. If we were to move forward with this idea, we would like to avoid this and have the opportunity to build a collaborative relationship with The Homeless Coalition.

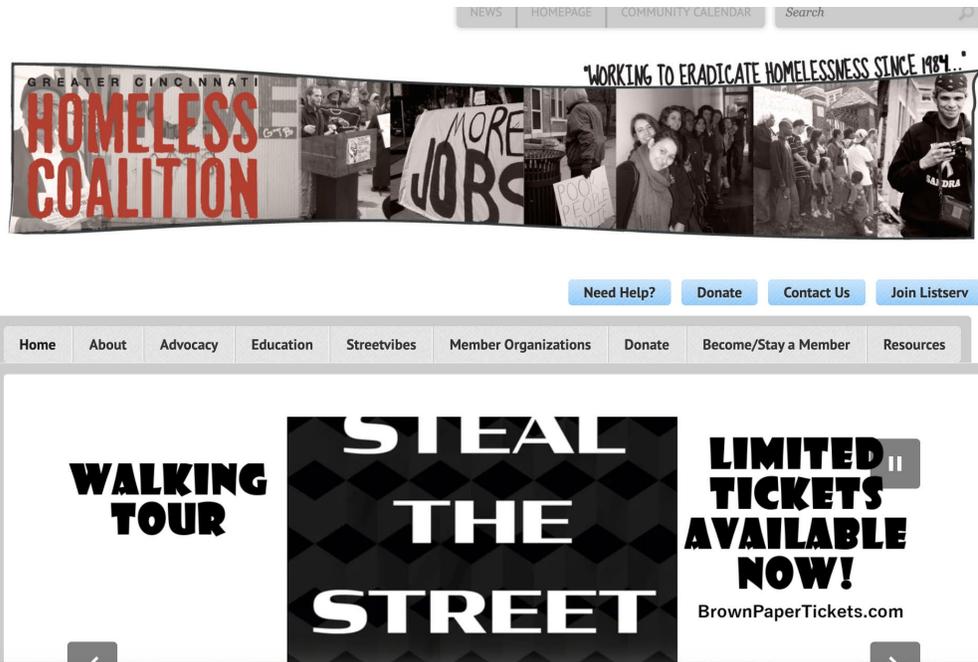


Figure 2: Greater Cincinnati Homeless Coalition Website