



**COMMUNITY
HEALTH NETWORK**
of Washington™



Local Housing Policy Overview

A Resource for Community Health Centers and Stakeholders

Definitions, Legislative Tracking Tools, and Additional

Community Health Network of Washington (CHNW) represents 21 of the 28 Community Health Clinics (CHCs) in Washington; our clinics are trusted local partners in towns and cities throughout Washington State. Our policy and lobbying efforts are deeply entwined with the needs of the communities and people we represent, meaning we advocate for policy solutions that we are certain will have a positive impact on patients, clinics, and communities.

With housing insecurity and homelessness as one of the most significant social drivers of health (SDOH) affecting people across the state, we recognize the need to support upstream policy changes to promote the availability of affordable housing across the state and support keeping Washington residents housed. Housing has been a key priority for Community Health Plan of Washington's (CHPW's) state legislative advocacy, and we recognize that much of housing policy is grounded in local communities around Washington. To promote and support this work, we have created a series of policy papers to educate, share resources, and promote housing policy advocacy at the local level:

1. Introduction
2. **Definitions, legislative tracking tools, and additional resources**
3. Special populations
4. Zoning laws, tenant protections, and criminalization of homelessness
5. Affordable housing sales taxes, document recording fees, and levies
6. Community engagement, comprehensive plans, and local CHC advice/best practices

Definitions

- **Accessory dwelling unit (ADU):** An attached (AADU) or detached (DADU) dwelling unit located on the same lot as a single-family housing unit, duplex, triplex, townhome, or other housing unit.
- **Affordable housing:** Residential housing that is rented by a person or household whose monthly housing costs, including non-telephone utilities, do not exceed 30% of the household's monthly income; for the purposes of housing intended for owner occupancy, this means housing that is within the means of low or moderate-income households.
- **Area median income:** The household income for the median household in a region
 - For example, Seattle's area median income was \$134,600. Wenatchee's area median income was \$66,143 in 2022.
- **BIPOC:** Black, Indigenous, People of Color; often experience lower rates of homeownership and higher rates of being cost-burdened by higher rents than white populations.
- **Chronic homelessness:** People who have experienced homelessness for at least one year, or repeatedly, while struggling with a disabling condition (serious mental illness, substance use disorder, or physical disability).
- **Coordinated entry:** A streamlined system that provides quick access to individuals and families seeking assistance through a coordinated referral and housing placement process.
- **Cost-burdened:** A household is considered cost-burdened when they spend more than 30% of their income on rent or other housing needs and is considered severely cost-burdened when they spend more than 50%.
- **Excess levy:** Levies that are imposed over and above regular property tax levies that require voter approval by a supermajority (60%).

- **General obligation bonds:** A common type of municipal bond in the United States that is secured by a state or local government's pledge to use legally available resources, including tax revenues, to repay bondholders and are backed by the taxing district's ability to levy tax.
- **Gentrification:** A term in urban politics and planning in which the character of a typically poor urban neighborhood is changed through the influx of more affluent residents and businesses, thus displacing current inhabitants.
- **Homeless person:** There are various definitions of homelessness and those impacted including differences in risk level and impacted population. The most overarching is the HUD definition for "literally homeless", defined as "An individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence". This includes people sleeping outside, in shelters, or in transitional housing.¹
- **Homeless youth (McKinney-Vento definition):** Individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and includes children who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private spaces (cars, parks, other public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, etc.) not designed for or originally used as a regular sleeping accommodation for humans, migratory children who qualify as homeless for the purposes of the McKinney-Vento Act, and children who are:
 - Sharing a house with other people due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason;
 - Living in motels, hotels, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
 - Living in emergency or transitional shelters; or
 - Abandoned in hospitals.
- **Housing levy:** Tax on properties that is used to fund affordable housing projects – construction of new units or renovation of existing units with the intended residents being low, very low, and moderate-income households and individuals.
- **Low-income household:** A single person, family, or unrelated individuals living together whose income is at or below 80% of the area's median income for the county, with adjustments for household size, as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- **Major transit stop:** A stop on a high-capacity transportation system, including commuter rail stops, stops on rail or transitway systems, stops on bus rapid transit routes or those that run on high occupancy vehicle lanes, and stops for a bus or other transit mode providing actual fixed route service at intervals of at least 15 minutes for at least 5 hours during the peak hours of operation on weekdays.
 - HB 1110 incentivized the construction of middle housing units within walking distance of major transit stops, resulting in connecting low-income individuals and households to the larger city and enabling better access to services, work, schools, etc.

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https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/HomelessDefinition_RecordkeepingRequirementsandCriteria.pdf

- **Medical respite:** Acute and post-acute medical care for people experiencing homelessness who are too ill or frail to recover from a physical illness or injury on the streets, but are not ill enough to receive hospital-level care.
 - *Note:* Washington’s Medicaid Demonstration Project (also known as the Section 1115 Waiver) has split “medical respite” into two terms: *recuperative care* and *short-term post-hospitalization housing*.
- **Middle housing:** A range of multi-family or clustered housing types that are compatible in scale with single-family or transitional neighborhoods.
 - Examples: Duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, cottage housing, townhouses, condos, etc.
- **Multiple-family zoning:** Areas in which the construction and development of housing for two or more families on a single parcel of land is allowed.
- **Permanent supportive housing:** Evidence-based housing model that combines affordable housing with voluntary, flexible, and community-based behavioral health and other supportive services with affordable and accessible housing to residents who hold an individual lease and maintain all the rights and obligations of tenancy.
 - Residents are those with extremely low or no income, have chronic disabilities or have a history of chronic homelessness.
- **Property tax:** An ad valorem tax on the value of property levied by the governing authority of the jurisdiction in which the property is located (national or state government, county or other geographical region governing body, or a municipality).
- **RCW (Revised Code of Washington):** Compilation of all laws enacted and effective in Washington.
- **Redlining:** A discriminatory practice in which services – mortgages, insurance loans, and other financial services – are withheld from potential customers who reside in neighborhoods classified as "hazardous" to investment; these neighborhoods have significant numbers of racial and ethnic minorities and low-income residents.
- **Regular levy:** Generally considered levies subject to the statutory limitations described in RCW 84.52.043 and as long as the levy amount remains within rate limits and does not exceed the limitations imposed on levy growth, taxing districts may make budget decisions and determine the size of the levy.
- **Single-family zoning:** A type of planning restriction applied to certain residential zones in order to restrict development to only allow single-family detached homes.
- **Taxing districts:** The state and any county, town, port district, school district, regional transit authority, water-sewer district, or other municipal corporation that has the legal authority to impose burdens upon property within the district on an ad valorem basis for the purpose of obtaining revenue for public purposes, separate from municipal corporations authorized to impose burdens on property in proportion to the increase in benefits received.
- **Very low-income household:** a single person, family, or unrelated individuals living together whose income is at or below 50% of the area’s median income for the county, with adjustments for household size, as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Legislative Tracking and Additional Resources

There are various resources available to members of the public, community stakeholders, and other interested parties to track state housing legislation and local ballot measures. These are great ways to stay informed on the “current conversation” around housing and homelessness amongst political leaders and in your local community.

The Washington Low-Income Housing Alliance maintains a legislative tracker² and the Municipal Research and Services Center³ regularly updates results around local and statewide elections, including the results of ballot initiatives and levies.

Various statewide organizations and associations maintain educational and useful resources on housing and homelessness resources, services, statistics, and other information in cities across the state. These include: the Association of Washington Cities Toolkit⁴, the National Multifamily Coalition’s Housing Affordability Toolkit⁵, and the Washington Low-Income Housing Alliance’s toolkit on advocating against homelessness criminalization⁶.

It can also be helpful and informative to review data and statistical updates for the rates of homelessness and the number of people experiencing homelessness in Washington. The Department of Commerce regularly conducts point-in-time censuses on people experiencing homelessness⁷.

² <https://www.housingconsortium.org/policy/legislative-tracker/>

³ <https://mrsc.org/mrsc/tools/Elections.aspx#results>

⁴ <https://mrsc.org/getmedia/4785af3e-35c7-42ef-8e8e-a44c8d0786c4/Homelessness-And-Housing-Toolkit-For-Cities.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf>

⁵ <https://housingtoolkit.nmhc.org/>

⁶ <https://www.wliha.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/WLIHA%20Toolkit%202020%20online%20version%20w%20handouts%20v3.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/homelessness/annual-point-time-count/>