

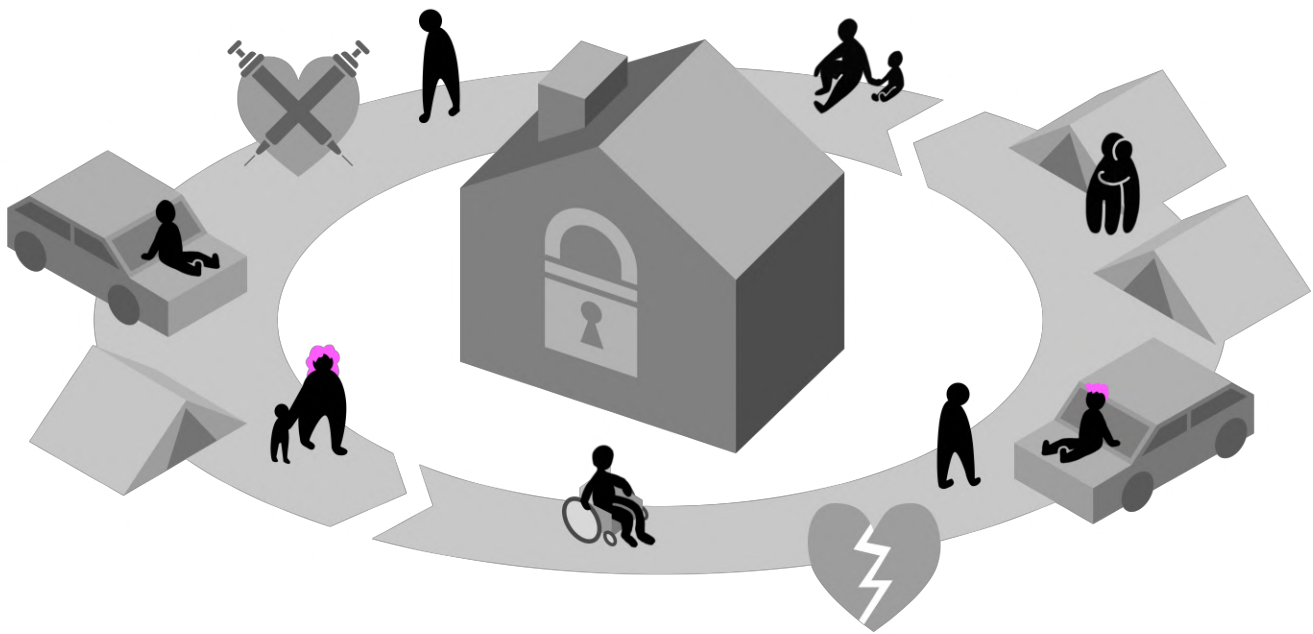
THE

CRISIS

OF

TRANSGENDER

HOMELESSNESS



Transgender Housing and
Services Needs Assessment

Thank you to our *Peer Researchers*,
who were trained to proctor and
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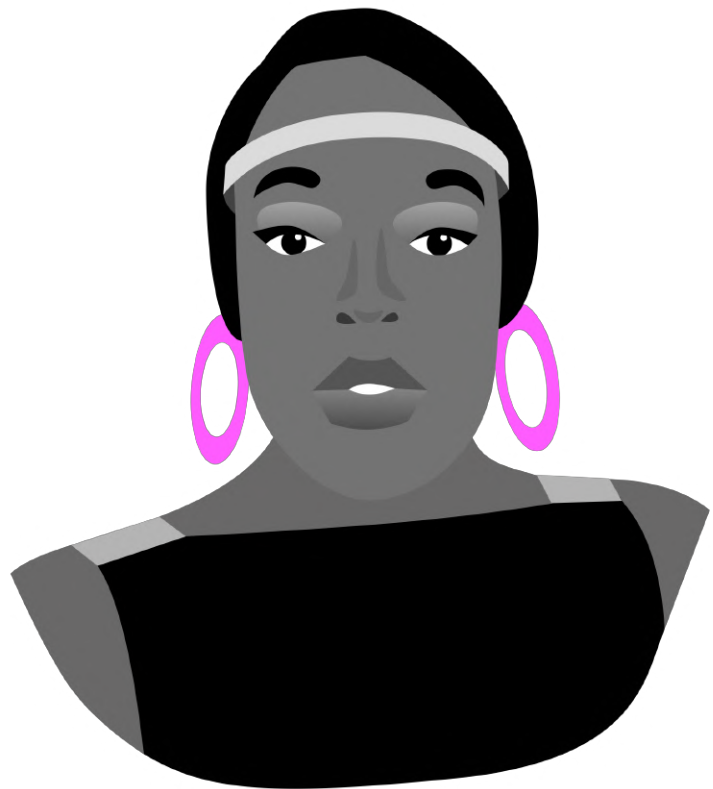
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INTRODUCTION

Trans people experience rates of unemployment and homelessness that are disproportionately high compared with those of cisgender people. Yet when trans people seek support services, they often encounter the same dynamics of exclusion that contributed to job loss or housing deprivation in the first place. In San Francisco and nationwide, trans people need comprehensive support and safe housing. In response to years of advocacy by transgender communities, San Francisco has taken promising first steps toward ending the crisis of transgender homelessness. Our Trans Home SF has successfully advocated for rental subsidies, housing navigators, and other crucial changes, but gaps in the city's homeless service system still disproportionately harm trans people, and dire unmet need remains.¹

This needs assessment centers the voices of transgender women of color and immigrants. Trans women of color are deprived of housing at higher rates than cisgender people—one in every two trans people has been homeless—yet trans experiences and needs are routinely marginalized or excluded from discussions of homelessness policy, and trans-led organizations are rarely consulted about issues related to housing. Too often, transgender experiences are subsumed into the category “LGBTQ” without meaningful representation. Many homeless service and advocacy organizations have no trans women of color in leadership positions or even as staff. In response to this shortcoming in homelessness research and policy, the Coalition on Homelessness partnered with organizations led by transgender women of color to help design and implement a Needs Assessment that centers trans people's experiences and needs. Our decision to include this chapter is a timely one: As federal laws and policies of the Trump administration and Ben Carson's Department of Housing and Urban Development endanger trans and immigrant communities in particular, this report details evidence-based recommendations for local policy to ensure human rights for multiply-marginalized groups.

“Access and education are a big deal to my community. There are lots of people who just don't have access to services, housing, or jobs because of their skin color, gender identity, criminal history, or housing status. Prop C is a way to rectify the systematic exclusion of people who daily face these oppressions.”



—Ms EARL
Peer Researcher
& Focus Group Facilitator)

¹ See <http://www.ourtranshomesf.org> to learn more.

Throughout the COH's larger report, we describe some of the specific ways that San Francisco can build more effective and robust housing and homeless services. In this section, we show how the specific needs of trans people must be centered in undertaking these broader steps. Key findings are summarized below, followed by detailed recommendations for how policies related to homelessness prevention, homeless shelter, mental healthcare, and substance use treatment can best be implemented to meet the needs of trans communities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Binary gender classification and anti-trans discrimination made many transgender people feel unwelcome and unsafe in the city's shelters.

Most transgender participants reported experiencing transphobic harassment in shelters.

The primary reason for transgender study participants' departure from shelters was to escape mistreatment (39%). In addition, 36% left because they timed out, and 16% were kicked out.

Transgender people stated a need for gender-affirming mental health and substance use care.

The criminalization of sex work along with "Quality of Life" law enforcement created unsafe working and living conditions for many transgender women, making them vulnerable to violence and trauma. As in shelters, binary gender classification and anti-trans discrimination made some study participants feel unsafe and unwelcome in treatment facilities or made access more challenging.

Criminalization threatened mental health and physical safety.

Due to racialized gender profiling and disproportionate criminalization of survival and earning strategies, transgender participants' daily lives were often shaped by law enforcement. Forty-five percent of respondents in the survey of currently homeless transgender participants reported having experienced violence perpetrated by police officers and 33% (13/40) of TransLatinx participants experienced police violence, including in their countries of origin. For many, mental health challenges stemmed from past and ongoing exposure to violence. Eighty-five percent of TransLatinx participants had applied for asylum in the U.S., and had overlapping and unmet legal and mental healthcare needs, including gender-affirming and linguistically competent therapists who could help with asylum cases.

Overlapping mental health and substance use care needs resulted from gender-specific trauma.

For transgender participants, mental health issues were often rooted in ongoing exposure to gendered and sexual violence resulting from housing deprivation and labor market exclusion.

BACKGROUND

Nationwide and in San Francisco, transgender people are more likely than cisgender people to experience homelessness, yet there are few services tailored to meet trans people's housing and service needs.² Nationally, a majority of transgender women of color are deprived of safe, stable housing at some point in their lives and 70% of transgender people using shelters report discrimination or violence by shelter staff.³ Recent studies demonstrate that transgender people are particularly vulnerable to harassment and violence in San Francisco's homeless shelters.⁴ Although they are the most affected by housing deprivation, the needs of transgender people, and especially trans women of color, are frequently marginalized in housing and homelessness policy.

Trans Research Methods

In order to develop evidence-based recommendations to help end the crisis of transgender homelessness, we conducted a mixed-methods study with 132 currently and recently homeless transgender people in San Francisco. To understand housing and service needs, we gathered in-depth survey, focus group, and interview data from currently and recently unhoused transgender people. We surveyed 72 currently and recently homeless transgender people as a subpopulation within the Coalition on Homelessness's broader survey-based study, and conducted focus groups with 15 currently and recently unhoused transgender people (seven of whom also completed surveys). Given the lack of empirical data on these issues specific to trans people, our team conducted one-on-one interviews with an additional 12 English-speaking participants at organizations serving low-income trans people, including many formerly incarcerated participants, and 40 Spanish-speaking participants at organizations that work specifically with the TransLatinx community. Because all trans participants were recruited from organizations, the sizable population of trans people who are completely disconnected from services is not represented in this study. All data collection instruments were designed in collaboration with service providers and transgender community leaders. Community input guided us to use stratified sampling for interviews and focus groups among two groups that are disproportionately affected by housing deprivation: TransLatinx immigrants and formerly incarcerated trans people. All interviews and focus groups were conducted by transgender and nonbinary staff and peer researchers, COH staff, or trained cisgender peer researchers who had personally experienced homelessness. All interviewers and focus group facilitators received training and support from the authors.

Community-Informed Action Steps

To identify community concerns and priority areas for advocacy, peer researchers conducted two town hall meetings, one with 30 English-speaking transgender participants and one with nine Spanish-speaking transgender participants. Based on the responses of this diverse group of participants, as well as our review of national data, academic researchers worked with partners at participating organizations (El/La Para Trans Latinas, Mujeres Latinas en Acción, the St. James Infirmary, the Transgender Gender-variant and Intersex Justice Project and the San Francisco Coalition on Homelessness) to develop evidence-based policy recommendations. We discuss these following the findings below.

² Beltran, T, Allen A, Lin J, Turner C, Ozer E, & Wilson E. (2019). Intersectional Discrimination is Associated With Housing Instability among Trans Women Living in the San Francisco Bay Area. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 16: 4521. P. 1-11.

³ James, SE, Herman, JL, Rankin, S, Keisling, M, Mottet, L, & Anafi, M. (2016). *The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey*. Washington, DC: National Center for Transgender Equality, p. 176.

⁴ Yarbrough, D. (2016). "Outlaw Poverty Not Prostitutes:" *Sex Workers' Responses to Poverty Management in San Francisco*. Proquest Dissertation Publishing: University of California, San Diego; Greene, J. (2018) "Categorical Exclusions: How Racialized Gender Regulation Reproduces Reentry Hardship." *Social Problems*, 66(4), 548-563.

FINDINGS

Causes of Homelessness Among Transgender People

Like respondents to the general survey, most trans survey respondents (46%) lost their housing due to an inability to afford rent. Trans people also experienced high rates of housing loss related to gender-based violence. For example, 26% of currently homeless transgender survey participants lost housing due to domestic violence compared with 8% in the general sample, and 22% lost housing related to a family dispute compared with 17% in the general sample. An additional 10% of currently homeless transgender survey participants lost their housing due to family members not accepting their gender identity, and 8% lost housing because they were incarcerated.

Why do we see these higher rates of housing loss among trans respondents? Among trans people, it is particularly common to be kicked out of a family member's house at a young age. One in 10 currently homeless trans respondents initially lost their housing due to family members not accepting their gender identity. More than 45% of currently homeless transgender survey respondents were homeless at or before the age of 18. This reflects a disproportionately high percentage compared with the frequency of homelessness at or before age 18 in the broader homeless population our team surveyed. This finding is consistent with findings of other studies showing that transgender youth are more likely than cisgender youth to experience homelessness.⁵

Economic Barriers & Discrimination

Trans participants described anti-trans discrimination as having an effect on both their ability to find work and their ability to secure housing. Sometimes, anti-trans discrimination was direct and explicit, while other times it was indirect — but in both cases, participants were clear that it is a major barrier to securing housing. For example, one TransLatina interview participant said:

"I thought San Francisco was more open to transgender people, but my experience shows that it is not. When I apply for a room, it depends on how the landlord thinks I look. I applied for a room and my application was approved. When he saw me, the landlord revoked my approval because he said I looked like a man." (translated from Spanish)

Among TransLatinas, additional factors also led to housing deprivation, including language and legal barriers that increased the difficulty of obtaining housing as an immigrant. Nine TransLatinas who participated in this study also experienced particular housing challenges following incarceration, including immigration detention. These overlapped with language and legal barriers to make this group particularly vulnerable to housing deprivation.

⁵ Applied Survey Research (2019). San Francisco Youth Homeless Count and Survey Comprehensive Report. <http://hsh.sfgov.org/wp-content/uploads/FINAL-Youth-Report-2019-San-Francisco-1.pdf>

Legal Barriers to Housing Stability

Even when trans people are able to obtain housing, they frequently find themselves in unstable situations. Sometimes their lack of legal immigration status compromises their ability to contest illegal actions on the part of landlords. Several participants mentioned this insecurity:

"If someone doesn't have documents, they can tell you in any moment, leave ... Not having documents means not having a voice. When you have documents, you can follow up on your legal rights." —TransLatina (translated from Spanish)

Like legal barriers that leave many non-citizens in precarious informal housing situations, criminal records can block access to many housing options. Of currently homeless trans survey respondents who reported having been incarcerated in San Francisco, half (16/31) were living outside or in vehicles compared with 40% (16/39) of those who had not been incarcerated in San Francisco. Of those reporting criminal records affecting access to housing, 75% (12/16) who said their criminal records affected their housing were living outside or in vehicles compared to 47% (15/32) who didn't think their records affected their housing access.

Costly and highly competitive rental markets, multiple forms of discrimination, and administrative barriers can make housing nearly impossible to obtain. The instability produced by this lack of access to stable housing is compounded by lack of access to safe employment and government benefits.

Lack of Access to Safe Employment

Many trans people have limited or no access to formal labor markets or regular income. Among trans people who participated in the survey, only 4% (3/72) had full-time jobs. Twice that number had part-time jobs. More than 1 in 4 (19/72) earned money within informal economies.

TransLatinx respondents relied on a variety of income sources, but most frequently earned money in the underground economy, (9/40) or as day laborers (9/40), often in combination with additional support from public services or other jobs. Both of these positions are often unsafe and unpredictable, but can be a source of income when anti-trans discrimination and legal barriers limit work opportunities.

"...Most jobs ask for an original social security number and this is very complicated for an immigrant. It would be excellent if there were organizations that could support us with work." (translated from Spanish)

For some, this lack of access to formal employment can result in a dire instability and need to seek other means of survival. Many trans participants reported that limited job access-- combined with unsafe shelters and housing market discrimination--have led them to trade sex for a place to sleep at night, sometimes under dangerous conditions.

"I have had to trade sex for a place to stay. I think this is because of widespread apathy [about our safety and well-being] on the part of the people who make the decisions that affect our community." (Translated from Spanish)

While many study participants describe sex work as a reliable way to earn money, they also want other types of work to be available. The lack of other options for many transgender women can leave those who decide not to work in the informal economy without housing or income.

The lack of access to safe, consistent, and reasonably compensated work is exacerbated by anti-trans discrimination, as well as by immigration status or prior incarceration. This comprises a major barrier to trans people securing and maintaining stable housing.

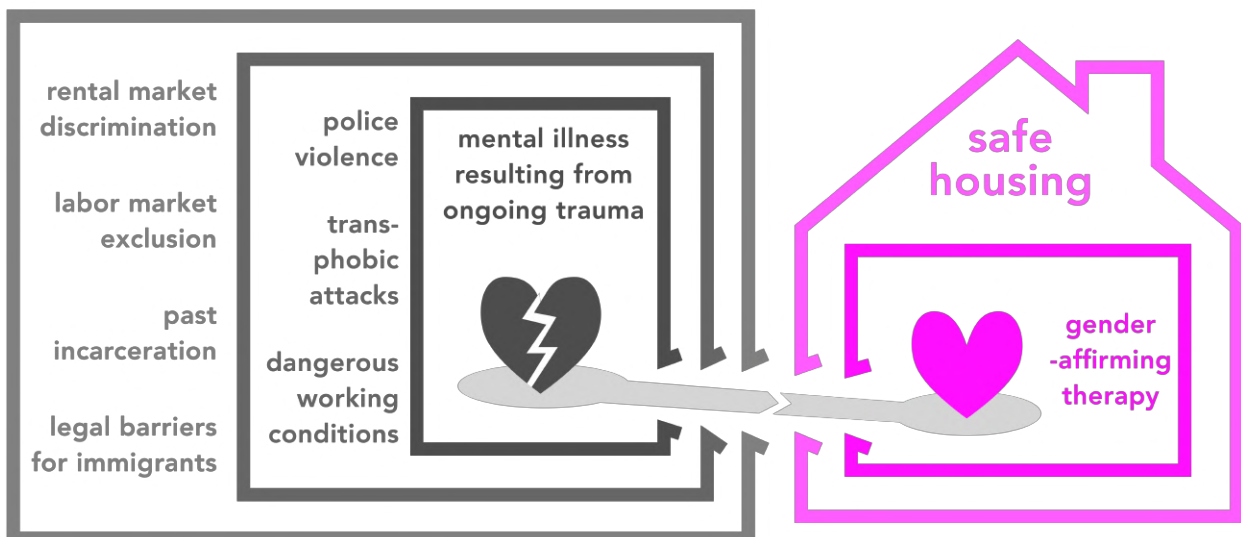
"I've been offered the opportunity to do sex work, but it isn't for me: I prefer to sleep in the street, to go without the things I need. It isn't right that we don't have other options." (Translated from Spanish)

Lack of Support Services

Compounding the problem of anti-trans discrimination among employers, undocumented immigrants and formerly incarcerated people are often excluded from municipal, state, and federal support programs. Even some immigrants who were eligible for support expressed fear of accessing services that might help prevent loss of housing or stability.

"I applied for food stamps and CalFresh. I also applied for a disabled clipper card and they helped me. I now have my asylum approved. Now I'm very worried that because I'm using these government aid programs, they will deny my application for residency. This is one of Donald Trump's laws which says that for asylum applicants who are using government aid, residency will be denied." (Translated from Spanish)

Some municipal, federal, and state support programs were off-limits to many immigrants and people who have been formerly incarcerated, but even if they were technically accessible, the tangible fear of denial related to legal status precluded some respondents from seeking them. San Francisco should focus on protecting immigrants and trans people who are particularly vulnerable to federal regimes of criminalization and withdrawal of survival resources.



Shelter Experiences of Transgender Participants

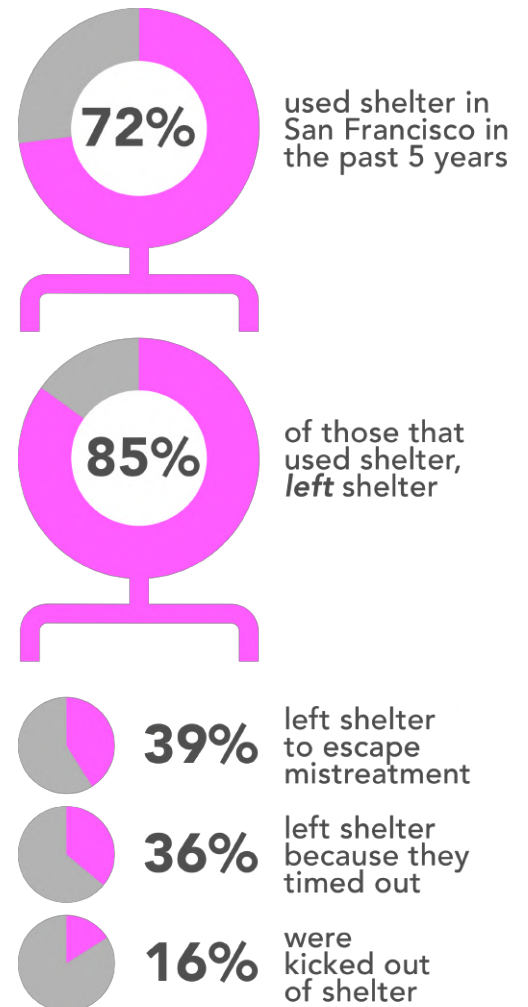
Enforcement of binary gender norms in San Francisco shelters makes transgender women particularly vulnerable to experiencing gender-based violence in and eviction from homeless services.⁶ Qualitative studies have shown how gender policing by shelter and transitional housing program staff puts transgender women at risk of carceral system involvement, as staff call the police to respond to transgressions of gender norms.⁷ Most (52 out of 72) people surveyed had used shelters in San Francisco within the last five years. Forty-four of these shelter users left shelters for a variety of reasons. The primary reason for departure from shelters was to escape mistreatment (39%), compared with 30% of the overall population; 36% left because they timed out, and 16% were kicked out, sometimes following conflicts related to gender identity or sexuality. Fifty-two percent (52%) of transgender shelter users had been asked to leave or forced to leave shelter. This indicates a need for improved policies for conflict resolution and institutionalization of support for diverse gender identity and expression.⁸

Transgender people are uniquely vulnerable both on the street and in shelter. 56% percent (30/54) of trans people felt safer staying in shelter than on the street, 19% (10/54) felt less safe in shelter than on the street, and 26% said there was no difference in how safe they felt staying in shelters vs. on the streets. On the street, transgender people face physical and sexual violence, the risk of which is heightened by policing. In shelters, transgender participants face frequent harassment by other shelter residents and sometimes also staff. Regarding mistreatment from other residents, an interview participant said:

"In my experience in shelters, many people want to victimize me, for example harassing me in the bathroom. They tell me I have to go to the men's bathroom and not the women's. This is hate-based violence." —TransLatina (translated from Spanish)

trans shelter exits

(figure 1, n = 72)



⁶ Yarbrough, D. (2016). "Outlaw Poverty Not Prostitutes:" Sex Workers' Responses to Poverty Management in San Francisco. Proquest Dissertation Publishing: University of California, San Diego; Greene, J. (2018) "Categorical Exclusions: How Racialized Gender Regulation Reproduces Reentry Hardship." *Social Problems*,66(4), 548-563.

⁷ Yarbrough, D. (2016). "Outlaw Poverty Not Prostitutes:" Sex Workers' Responses to Poverty Management in San Francisco. Proquest Dissertation Publishing: University of California, San Diego; Yarbrough, D. (forthcoming). "The Carceral Production of Transgender Poverty: Theorizing Intersectional Vulnerability."

⁸ Because trans survey participants were not recruited from streets or camps, this study may under-represent the extent to which transgender people experience gender-related mistreatment in shelters. A survey of transgender people who have moved from shelters to camps or streets would reveal a fuller spectrum of experiences with the shelter system.

Many trans participants reported avoiding shelters all together, either because of bad experiences in the past or the reputation of San Francisco's shelters as hostile to transgender people. One of the participants in a TGIJP-facilitated focus group at a homeless shelter spoke to the poor treatment of trans residents by staff members:

"Without staff that's dedicated, it's a dangerous place inside. I know people who sleep outside because they can't take abuse from staff members."

Many interview and focus group participants spoke to the importance of "dedicated shelters," or shelters that are available specifically and uniquely to trans residents. Trans study participants frequently experienced discrimination and gender-based violence from cisgender providers, and emphasized that organizations led by and for transgender people were key to their survival and well-being. Jazzie's Place has been one such dedicated shelter space. Although very limited in its capacity, it has been an important resource that was originally intended to serve queer and trans people whose safety is threatened in the general shelter system. However, according to staff at TGIJP, Jazzie's Place has recently experienced an influx of cisgender and heterosexual residents, and as a result is considered less of a safe shelter space than in prior years. This underscores the need for more shelter for all, and dedicated safe spaces for vulnerable queer and trans shelter users.

Peer Researcher **Treasure L'Oreal Earle** had this to say about dedicated space:



"My experience of being a Peer Researcher tells me that there is a population that is unserved. There is a population that has been relegated to substandard living conditions. There are individuals who have to live in dire circumstances, who don't have a place to go. There are a whole lot of individuals that do not have a specific place that is built for them. For example, there was Jazzie's Place, it was transformational but the mission of the place has been watered down and the target audience it was meant to serve has been left out of its current place. Well Jazzie's was for Black trans folks and now it's for anyone — the mission has broadened so there is no specific space for transgender women. There is no specific space. There's men's shelters, women's, youth, and trans can go to these places, but now there's no specific place for trans folk, who were promised a place specifically for them."

Safe Shelter and Housing for Transgender People

Interview and focus group participants also emphasized the need to address safety in deep rather than superficial ways. One transgender focus group participant said of her shelter experience:

"I felt I had to change the way I dress and present, including in places that are supposed to be safe, [where there were] things up on the walls about inclusion. You can have as many signs up as you want to, you're still gonna treat me different. Places aren't safe for everybody."

"Staff should be trans, or people who are capable of understanding what we want and need. Many people who work in these housing offices have no idea, and no ability to even imagine, what trans people go through; no understanding of our struggles and what we need."

—TransLatina participant (translated from Spanish)

Participants discussed how dedicated shelter spaces could build capacity to support trans people by ensuring trans leadership, competency, and safety across the board. One of the primary suggestions was to hire trans staff in shelters and housing offices, and to prioritize permanent housing support.

"Because we are migrants, our first language is different. In order to adapt to this country, we need more support focused on our specific needs." (translated from Spanish)

TransLatinx participants also emphasize the need for linguistic competency across homeless services, including in shelters. Staff inability to communicate with monolingual Spanish-speakers is a serious barrier for TransLatinx people who are seeking housing and services.

Need for Transgender and Undocumented Housing

Indeed, more than just shelter, trans people need safe, stable housing. This is particularly true for people who are leaving incarceration or ICE detention, yet these experiences can create additional legal obstacles to people's ability to obtain stable housing.

incarceration of TransLatinx participants

(figure 2, n = 40)



10% incarcerated in San Francisco



23% incarcerated elsewhere

incarceration of currently homeless Trans participants in survey

(figure 3, n = 72)



42% incarcerated in San Francisco



44% incarcerated elsewhere

Housing deprivation related to past incarceration particularly affects trans people of color. Of trans survey respondents formerly incarcerated in San Francisco, 85% identified as people of color. Of trans respondents formerly incarcerated elsewhere, 52% identified as people of color. The groups most affected by incarceration were Black and Latinx. Most respondents left incarceration with unaddressed legal and housing needs. For some participants who were able to find housing after incarceration, transphobia made it hard to maintain. One formerly incarcerated participant said:

The groups most affected by incarceration were Black and Latinx.

“They sent me to a re-entry facility and I’m the first transgender they’ve ever had. [I wish] that we would be put in a safe environment upon release until we can get physically able to be on our feet and not have to worry about homelessness or being raped or beat up.”

Organized camps with basic amenities have been proposed as short-term solutions to housing scarcity, and could be particularly helpful to transgender people who are vulnerable in shelters as well as on the streets. Like many cisgender respondents to the general survey, 58% of trans survey respondents said they would prefer a camp with basic amenities over shelter. However, there was also a higher rate of trans respondents who said that they would not prefer camps (28%, of trans survey participants, compared with 10% of the general survey participants).



“We need immediate safe structures for trans people coming out of jails, prisons, and locked facilities.”

—JANETTA JOHNSON,
Executive Director of the Transgender
Gender-variant and Intersex Justice Project

Physical Well-Being, Mental Health and Substance Use

Many respondents in our study described how lack of housing affects physical and mental health. This is a particular concern among trans people, since health outcomes among trans people in general are already significantly compromised by experience or fear of discrimination leading to delay or avoidance in seeking care.⁹ Respondents described the many connections between physical health and safety, violence, and mental health as they negotiated living without housing.

⁹ Seelman, KL, Colón-Díaz MJP, LeCroix RH, Zavier-Brier M, & Kattari L (2017). “Transgender Noninclusive Healthcare and Delaying Care Because of Fear: Connections to General Health and Mental Health Among Transgender Adults.” *Transgender Health*. 2(1): 17–28.

For many trans participants, chronic conditions combine with housing deprivation to create serious health risks. Transgender people more often reported that they were living with HIV than cisgender people: 25% of respondents in a general survey of currently and recently homeless trans people in San Francisco and 30% of respondents in a targeted sample of TransLatinas reported that they were living with HIV. This is consistent with data from San Francisco’s Department of Public Health showing that transgender women have been diagnosed with HIV at higher rates than other groups.¹⁰ Of trans participants living with HIV, 12/18 were currently staying in shelters and 5/18 were currently staying on the street.

Conditions of discrimination and instability can also lead trans people who are unhoused or in unstable housing situations to encounter violence. For some, this means enduring violence or mistreatment at the hands of intimate partners or sex work clients to secure temporary housing. One TransLatina participant described the danger of doing sex work while precariously housed or unhoused:

“Because of my need for a place to sleep at night, I have had to put up with violence. To submit to things I don’t want to do for a place to stay. This is what it means not to have a stable place to live.” (translated from Spanish)

Repeated exposure to gender-based and sexual violence on the streets and in shelters can result in continual retraumatization that undermines the effectiveness of traditional mental healthcare for many transgender women. A housing-centered approach to mental healthcare can interrupt the cycle of violence and trauma.

“San Francisco needs to prioritize safe housing for trans women because we are the most vulnerable to physical and sexual assault on the street. The best mental healthcare for the trans community is preventing violence and trauma by providing safe housing.”



—JANETTA JOHNSON,
Executive Director of the Transgender
Gender-variant and Intersex Justice Project

¹⁰ San Francisco Department of Public Health Population Health Division. (2018). HIV Epidemiology Annual Report. San Francisco Department of Public Health.

Overlapping Mental Health and Legal Needs for Transgender Immigrants

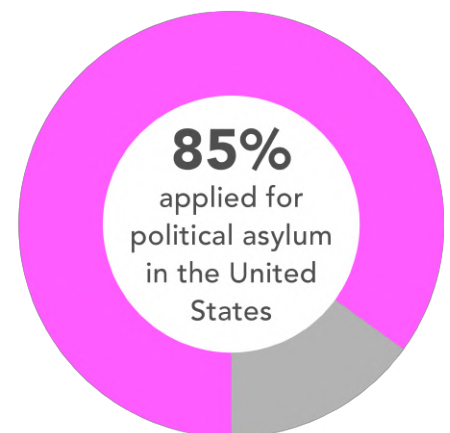
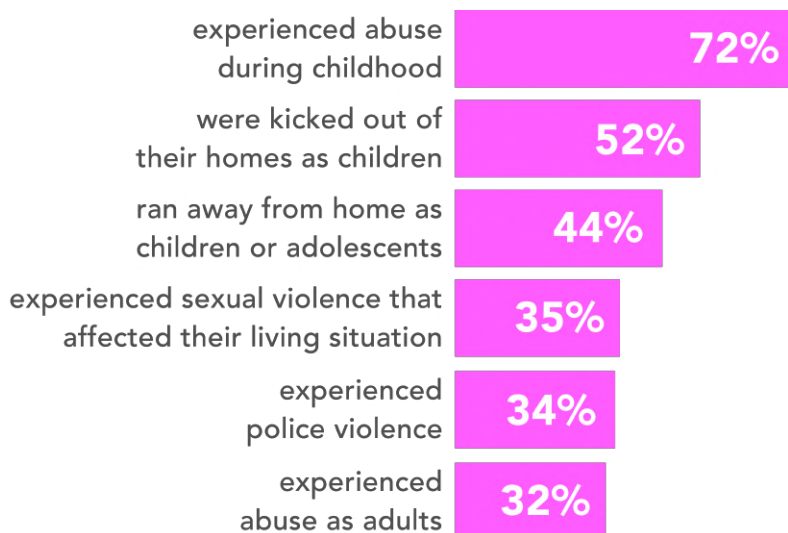
Transgender immigrants have complex legal needs. A majority— 34 out of 40 — of TransLatinx interview participants had applied for political asylum in the United States. Of these participants, 14 reported that they received a visa, and 11 were still waiting or in process. Immigration status affects the ability to access survival resources like housing, cash aid, medical care, and food benefits. Barriers to HUD-funded housing may be particularly onerous for trans people who are not citizens or permanent residents, or who have a criminal record. San Francisco needs to prioritize local resources for these particularly vulnerable populations. Participants reported difficulty finding affordable mental health providers who could speak Spanish and had the expertise to support asylum applications and provide gender-affirming care.

“Many girls need mental health support. I include myself in this list. Sometimes we can’t get mental healthcare because we can’t pay. Sometimes therapists charge a lot and we can’t pay this. Right now, I’m looking for a therapist who won’t charge too much to help me get my asylum.” — TransLatina participant (translated from Spanish)

Applicants for political asylum were often fleeing severe violence in their home countries. In addition to hate-based violence by strangers, asylum applicants reported high rates of family and intimate partner violence. Of transgender asylum applicants, 35% experienced sexual violence that affected their living situation, 72% experienced abuse during childhood, 52% had been kicked out of their homes as children, and 32% experienced abuse as adults. 44% percent said they ran away from home as children or adolescents, and 34% had experienced police violence, often in their countries of origin and sometimes also in the United States.

experiences of TransLatinx participants

(figure 4, n = 40)



Mental Health & Substance Use Care that Addresses Ongoing Trauma

Mental healthcare providers often focus on helping clients cope with past trauma, but have a limited ability to help clients avoid traumatic situations that come with being unhoused or precariously housed. This report makes clear that past experiences are not the main issue: violence and trauma are ongoing in the lives of most trans study participants. From physical attacks on transgender women in public space to depression and anxiety caused by housing and labor market exclusion, study participants confront daily threats to their mental health. Outpatient mental healthcare visits can help individuals survive, but are not equipped to address the structural and institutional sources of ongoing threats to mental health. Many trans people will leave a mental health provider's office and return to conditions of poverty, discrimination, and violence that continuously threaten their well-being. Traditional mental healthcare alone cannot prevent traumatic events from happening—in many cases, repeatedly. One interview participant described how continual exposure to violence in her underground economy work precipitated a mental health crisis:

“Unfortunately I have not had many opportunities for dignified paid work. The resources from programs that the city provides have never come to me. And this makes me feel unstable. I am often on the brink of harming myself. Four years ago I [attempted suicide] because I felt unsafe, because I had to put up with any type of violence that was done to me.”
— TransLatina participant (translated from Spanish)

Exclusion from housing and employment pushed many transgender participants into underground economies, exposing them to criminalization and violence. In addition to high rates of interpersonal violence, trans respondents also reported more frequent experiences of police violence than cisgender study participants: 49% of currently homeless trans survey respondents had been harassed by police, 45% experienced violence perpetrated by police officers, 67% had been incarcerated.

TransLatina study participants emphasized the need for specific policy responses to overlapping forms of marginalization for immigrants, transgender people and sex workers:

The most effective mental healthcare is accompanied by wraparound services, including safe housing and employment options. Many transgender study participants said that their depression and hopelessness resulted from labor market exclusion and concomitant exposure to violence in more dangerous informal economy jobs like street-based sex work. Participants reported that violence made them lose interest in work and other projects like school, and that depressive symptoms made it difficult to earn enough money to maintain housing.

“As TransLatinas, our human right to have a dignified life, to have basic services to be able to live and feel physically safe and psychologically stable, is constantly violated. Many programs have disqualified me for being trans, for being an immigrant, or because of the language barrier. There are many obstacles that create vulnerability for the TransLatina community. We have to trade sex for a place to sleep, to do things we don't want to do with landlords because of necessity, because otherwise they'll throw us out on the streets. This is not social justice. There are many forms of violence that target our community, and we often have to stay quiet about this because there are no other options for us.” (translated from Spanish)

While gender-affirming therapy and peer counseling are crucial resources in helping people to survive adverse conditions, it is San Francisco's responsibility to address the root causes of violence and material deprivation experienced by transgender residents, not only the attendant feelings of depression, hopelessness, or suicidality. Post-traumatic stress is a normal (and sometimes even adaptive) response to violence and the most effective intervention is removal of the sources of danger from the environment.¹¹ Transgender people interviewed about their needs after surviving violence overwhelmingly stated that they needed housing and a safe place to go, in addition to counseling and psychological support.

Effective Housing & Care for Transgender Drug Users & People Living with Mental Illness

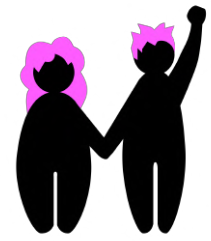
People who do not have access to affordable and gender-affirming mental health and psychiatric care sometimes use illicit drugs to cope with acute post-traumatic stress and mental illness symptoms. Many transgender drug users in this study relied on harm reduction supplies and services as well as peer-based counseling to help them reduce drug use. Trans people who accessed residential substance use treatment programs identified interlocking barriers to maintaining sobriety upon exit. One TransLatina respondent described successfully completing a four-month-long residential drug treatment program and applying unsuccessfully for transitional housing.

*"No transitional living programs wanted to give me a space. They always decide based on their personal prejudices and they didn't see me as a person or acknowledge the progress I'd already made. There was no one who gave me an opening to take the next step."
(translated from Spanish)*

Suddenly without housing and support, she tried to maintain her sobriety, but was unable to do so. Lack of coordination between programs hits transgender people particularly hard, since discrimination can block access to many housing options. San Francisco's shortage of residential treatment and lack of housing for drug users means that the many drug users and people living with mental illness cycle between the city's single adult shelters and the streets. Being deprived of shelter can precipitate or exacerbate mental illness, especially for trans people who become more vulnerable to physical and sexual violence while unhoused. At the same time, people under the influence of drugs or alcohol or who are in mental health crisis might exhibit behavior that is frightening or harmful to other shelter users. Shelters are often ill-equipped to deal with mental health crises, particularly among trans shelter users. The city must expand housing-centered voluntary mental health and substance use care resources for transgender people.

¹¹ Brown, LS. (2017). Contributions of feminist and critical psychologies to trauma psychology. In S. N. Gold (Ed.), *APA handbook of trauma psychology: Foundations in knowledge* (p. 501–526). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000019-025>; Schwarz, R. (2013). *Tools for Transforming Trauma*. Routledge; Street, A., & Dardis, C. (2018). Using a social construction of gender lens to understand gender differences in posttraumatic stress disorder. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 66, 97-105.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



Recommendations to Prevent Homelessness and Provide Gender-Affirming Shelter and Care for Transgender People

Experiences of homelessness are different for different people. Some might wonder why we would include recommendations about one specific group. This section does not intend to say that only trans people need policy attention. Instead, it highlights experiences of interlocking marginalization, as guided by intersectional feminism. Focusing on and addressing interlocking barriers can make more visible the ways that these converge to make navigating systems difficult for everyone, even though some people are more severely affected by these than others. From this vantage point, recommendations that improve living conditions for trans people will improve conditions for everyone — and will also prevent policy changes that benefit some people but leave trans people, particularly trans women of color, behind. Many times, homeless services policy relies on race and gender neutral recommendations that can leave the most marginalized groups behind. Instead, we need to take concrete steps to make sure that homeless services — which are often organized using binary gender segregation and run by cisgender people — are safe and welcoming for trans people.

Like everyone, trans people will benefit most from truly permanent housing, investment in public housing, prevention of housing loss, and effective and well-resourced shelter and treatment programs. At the same time, certain provisions are necessary to ensure that these work for trans people — which means they will work better for everyone.

RECRUIT AND HIRE TRANS PEOPLE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED HOMELESSNESS

Ensure Gender-Affirming Care in Staffing and Hiring.

Binary gender segregation in housing and treatment facilities can exclude trans, nonbinary, and queer people and expose them to harassment. Dedicated programming can help, but all programs should employ staff capable of providing gender-affirming care and addressing transphobia. Homeless service programs must recruit and prioritize hiring of transgender applicants who have experienced homelessness. Homeless service programs should hire trans people with lived experience of homelessness to train existing staff. Incidents involving transgender shelter and transitional living programs (TLP) residents should be reported to the Transgender Gender-Variant & Intersex Justice Project (TGIJP) and the Coalition on Homelessness (COH) for review of related shelter and TLP policies and practices.

Invest in Housing and Shelter Provided Exclusively by and for Transgender People.

Many interview participants reported feeling safest and most welcome in service organizations with dedicated programs run by and for transgender people. We recommend hiring and paid professional development of transgender staff who have demonstrated skill in creating safety for transgender residents to staff trans-specific city-funded shelters. Candidates for homeless services jobs should be interviewed by transgender and nonbinary staff and residents.

Reinstate community referral placement for Jazzie’s Place to ensure the population there is trans, as intended.

Jazzie’s Place was originally designed to be a trans friendly shelter, with thoughtfulness about physical design and allowance for fluidity of gender inside the space. The access process was carefully designed to ensure that the space would serve the intended population, with referral and placement outside of typical shelter sign up time at Mission Neighborhood Resource Center. That process was changed so that the way into Jazzie’s Place is no different from any other shelter — when beds open up there they are offered to the entire homeless population on the waitlist. This has resulted in moving from its original mission. A similar process as to what was originally designed should be put in place with placement authority from providers who serve this community.

ENSURE TRANS ACCESS TO EXISTING PROGRAMS

Create Physical Structures to Promote Safety and Gender-Affirming Care in Congregate Living Environments.

Bathroom and shower facilities in many congregate living environments are sites of harassment. The city should create gender-neutral and more private bathroom and shower options, dedicated safe spaces for transgender residents, and other changes to physical structure. In the meantime, trans residents should be able to shower at different times as requested, and staff should be trained to address privacy and safety needs.

Long Term Housing and Support for Transgender People in Residential Substance Use Treatment Programs.

A lack of available housing forces residential substance use treatment programs to release most people who complete the program back into homelessness, which does not support sustained sobriety or health. The City and County of San Francisco must increase the availability of long-term and permanent housing to improve outcomes for drug users, making sure trans people are fully included. Existing transitional housing programs for drug users can be unsafe and unwelcoming to transgender people. The City should collaborate with transgender run organizations to create housing transition plans for trans people’s direct placement in safe housing.

Flexible Rental Subsidies for Transgender People.

Income documentation for subsidies can present a barrier to members of the transgender community, particularly formerly incarcerated people and undocumented immigrants, who disproportionately work in the informal economy. Some housing programs inadvertently discriminate against transgender people and block educational attainment through income requirements. It is counterproductive to force transgender subsidy recipients to seek work in a low-wage labor market where discrimination renders most jobs unavailable and unwelcoming. Flexible rental subsidies for transgender people can help them to pursue diverse self-identified goals. Rental subsidies should be available for whatever locations individual transgender applicants identify as safe for them, including locations inside and outside of San Francisco, if requested by the subsidy-seeker: The city should not force trans people out of San Francisco simply because it is unaffordable.

Improve Data Collection and Evaluation of Outcomes for Trans People in Shelters, Subsidized Housing and Transitional Living Programs.

Track all evictions and voluntary departures from supportive and subsidized housing by gender identity. Programs that disproportionately evict trans people must work with trans-led organizations to make a plan for reform.

ENSURE SERVICES ARE PROVIDED BY AND FOR TRANS PEOPLE

Develop Dedicated Programs for Transgender People.

While all programs should be safe and welcoming for transgender people, many feel safest and most welcome in dedicated programs run by and for transgender people. The City should ensure that these resources are available as programs simultaneously strengthen their ability to provide gender-affirming care and services.

Harm Reduction-Based Residential Programs for Transgender Drug Users.

While many participants ultimately wanted to stop using drugs, they expressed a wish for transgender-run housing resources that would provide health and safety resources to active drug users. Harm reduction services worked well for many participants, and they wanted safe housing that they would not lose if they used drugs or relapsed. Creation of harm reduction-based residential programs, in addition to changes to existing abstinence-based programs to make them safer for trans people, will allow transgender drug users to choose the model that works best for them.

Gender-Affirming and Linguistically Competent Therapy and Peer Counseling.

There are few therapists who are affordable, have experience with transgender clients, and speak Spanish. One way to expand resources would be to train Spanish-speaking transgender people as paid peer counselors. Paid peer counselor training programs as an employment pathway could enhance mental health resources as well as job security for Trans people, particularly Latinx immigrants.

Trans-Only Floors of Single Room Occupancy Hotels for Dorm-Style Communal Living.

Many transgender women rely on Single Room Occupancy hotel rooms as a safer alternative to the city's shelter system. However, binary gender segregation of single-sex bathrooms and showers still present a challenge for many trans residents. Designating safe floors reserved for trans residents and managed by a trans-serving organization would streamline service provision and increase levels of comfort and safety. Crucially, trans residents should have equal opportunity to stay in any SRO (not just trans-only SROs or floors); the reserved floor should not allow managers to deny access to other floors or spaces.

*"Staff should be trans, or people who are capable of understanding what we want and need. Many people who work in these housing offices have no idea, and no ability to even imagine, what trans people go through; no understanding of our struggles and what we need."
—TransLatina participant (translated from Spanish)*

END RELIANCE ON POLICE IN EMERGENCY HOUSING AND SERVICES

Decrease Police Involvement and Invest in Mental Health Crisis Intervention and Restorative Practices in Shelters and other homeless Programs.

Staff in San Francisco shelters and behavioral health programs sometimes rely on police to enforce rules and gender-related conflict. It would prevent trauma and arrest to have more non-law enforcement mental health and crisis intervention resources available. San Francisco can take several specific steps to end service providers' reliance on police, including: ensuring adequate numbers of

staff trained in mental health crisis and de-escalation; hiring non-transphobic staff who are equipped to address transphobic behavior among cisgender shelter users; and training shelter staff and users in Restorative Practices in smaller shelters. Investing in smaller shelters with higher staff to client ratios will support these changes, and will benefit all shelter users. In the short term, the city should prioritize emergency housing provided by and for transgender people who are particularly underserved by San Francisco's existing resources. Until shelters can eradicate anti-trans harassment and violence, the City should prioritize LGBTQ and trans-specific emergency housing that can keep trans and nonbinary people safe.

Transformation of Shelter and Transitional Living Program Training and Policy to Respond More Effectively to Mental Health Crisis.

Effective responses require the intervention of trained mental health professionals, not arrest or incarceration. While participants and service providers want support for crisis resolution, they worried that emergency services could be traumatic and/or result in arrest. Gender-affirming mental healthcare, including crisis response resources, is crucial for trans people living with mental illness.

PREVENT TRANS EXCLUSION AND BUILD ON COMMUNITY STRENGTH

Preventing Transgender Homelessness.

Prevention of trans homelessness requires addressing labor market exclusion, criminalization, anti-trans discrimination, and legal barriers to housing, including immigration status for many trans asylum seekers and a criminal record for many formerly incarcerated transgender people. Transgender homelessness results in large part from a cycle of criminalization and labor market exclusion. To prevent transgender homelessness, San Francisco City and County must combine decriminalization of trans people's earning and survival activities with investment in creation of safe living-wage jobs for transgender people.

Decriminalization of Consensual Adult Sex Work, Drug Use and other "Quality of Life" Crimes; Legal Advocacy and Safety Liaisons for Victims of Violence

Transgender women, particularly women who did street-based sex work, were frequently victims of violence; not only from clients, but also from police, partners, and passersby. Study participants wanted police protection from violence and freedom from police harassment and profiling. Recent statewide legislation (SB233) protecting sex workers from arrest when they report violent crimes is a good start. Repeal of anti-homeless laws, as well as laws criminalizing prostitution, drug use, and drug possession for personal consumption would help the city move from punishing the most vulnerable transgender people to protecting them.

Paid Career Training and City-Subsidized Pathways to Safe, Living-Wage Employment.

Discrimination, legal barriers related to past incarceration and immigration status, and lack of formal education disproportionately push transgender women into dangerous informal economy work. Addressing housing means creating safe work opportunities for transgender people. Because the problem of transgender unemployment is in large part due to discrimination and legal barriers to formal economy work, traditional "job readiness" training approaches are inadequate. Instead, the city should create government jobs for underemployed transgender people, and incentivize private-sector employers to hire and retain previously unemployed transgender people in living-wage jobs. The city can look to Transgender Gender-Variant and Intersex Justice Project and El/La Para TransLatinas as models of peer-based workplace models led by transgender women of color who are also immigrants (at El/La) or formerly incarcerated (at TGIJP).

Develop Local Programs to Circumvent Federal Exclusion of Formerly Incarcerated Trans People and Immigrants From Housing Access.

As federal policies make housing support increasingly difficult to access for transgender people, especially immigrants and formerly incarcerated people, San Francisco should expand local housing subsidy programs to immediately house trans people coming out of jails, prisons and immigration detention. This could serve as an alternative to federal funding sources to ensure survival for transgender people who are ineligible for federal aid.

San Francisco's Housing Policy Must Center Concerns Related to Immigration Status and Language Among Trans People.

Among people without legal immigration status, the combined effects of discrimination, language barriers, and legal documentation contributed strongly to housing deprivation. TransLatinas struggled to secure work and housing, even despite San Francisco's status as a sanctuary city. The threat or reality of immigration detention or deportation also affected job and housing security, limiting the degree to which people were able to access assistance with basic survival needs. As one interview respondent said, "TransLatinas are invisible to policymakers."

A Community-Based Approach to Mental Health.

Supportive spaces for recreation and community-building are a crucial source of strength and stability for unhoused transgender people, even when other needs might seem more pressing. Trans participants said that spending time doing recreational activities, attending cultural events, and engaging in artistic practice with other trans people strengthened collective ability to confront transphobia, discrimination and violence.



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