

## HOMELESSNESS AND HEALTH:

# 5 ITEMS

For Every Healthcare Professional's To-Do List



Communicable disease among homeless individuals, such as the 2017 outbreak of hepatitis A in San Diego, not only hurts a vulnerable population, but it could also harm the health of the general public.

Nurses and other healthcare professionals can help prevent and control the spread of disease among some of the most fragile individuals in society. Here's how:

## 1 Learn

Make it a point to fully understand the many health issues, from chronic physical conditions and communicable disease to mental health concerns, facing people who are homeless.

The CDC offers a variety of resources for health professionals, including patient teaching materials detailing the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of conditions common among homeless populations, such as hepatitis viruses.

**Go to: [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)**



## 2 Adapt Your Practice

Tailor your engagement, assessment, and care plans to meet the unique needs of people who live without regular shelter. Mental health issues represent a chief contributor to homelessness. For example, it's estimated that 25% of homeless individuals nationwide suffer from a serious mental illness.

As a starting point, download the National Health Care for the Homeless Council's recommended practice adaptations.

**Go to: [NHCHC.org](https://www.nhchc.org)**



## 3 Check Your Attitude

Don't judge people who are homeless. You might be surprised by the scope and causes of homelessness in today's society. For instance, one-quarter of homeless people in the U.S. are children under the age of 18.

The National Coalition for the Homeless offers helpful background information:

**Go to: [NationalHomeless.org](https://www.nationalhomeless.org)**



## 4 Get Involved

Advocacy for individuals who are homeless need not end with a clinic visit or emergency department discharge. Connect with local policymakers and community groups to share the healthcare perspective on homelessness and push for action. For example, you can work with community leaders to improve sanitary conditions at area shelters or install public handwashing stations.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness offers information for would-be advocates:

**Go to: [EndHomelessness.org](https://www.endhomelessness.org)**



## 5 Donate and Volunteer

Small, everyday actions can make a big difference in the life of an individual or family who experiences homelessness. Think of simple donations – an extra pair of socks when it's cold outside, a coffee shop gift card, clean underwear, hand sanitizer liquid, or feminine hygiene products – not as handouts, but as an investment in the continued health of your community. Volunteer your healthcare expertise, such as helping with vaccine administration or conducting a foot care clinic, at churches, community centers, and shelters.

**Go to: [HomelessShelterDirectory.org](https://www.homelessshelterdirectory.org)**

