

# MEMORANDUM



Bellevue Parks &  
Community Services

DATE: September 19, 2023  
TO: Human Services Commission Members  
FROM: Nicolas Quijano, Homelessness Outreach Program Manager  
City Manager's Office  
  
SUBJECT: Root Causes of Homelessness

The Commission will receive an informational overview on the root causes of homelessness.

## **Background**

### Homelessness Outreach Program

The City Manager's Office has a team of three Homelessness Outreach staff, overseen by Homelessness Outreach Coordinator Nicolas Quijano. The team conducts outreach to individuals experiencing homelessness and attempts to help them find housing and otherwise obtain stability. Additionally, the team works with other City departments, including Human Services staff, on policy and practice regarding assisting and interacting with those experiencing homelessness.

### Factors Contributing to Homelessness

This presentation examines factors that contribute to individuals' experiencing or being at risk of experiencing homelessness, including poverty, unemployment, mental health, drug use, demographics, the weather, the number of homelessness resources in the area, and housing availability.

### *Homelessness Is a Housing Problem*

Much of the material covered in this presentation draws on the recently published *Homelessness is a Housing Problem: How Structural Factors Explain U.S. Patterns* by Greg

Colburn and Clayton Page Aldern. The book conducts a statistical analysis of factors that may contribute to homelessness, ultimately finding that housing market conditions offer the best explanation for homelessness rates.

A key distinction the authors make is that many of the above-named factors can contribute to an individual person's vulnerability to experiencing homelessness (for example, someone dealing with addiction or serious mental health difficulties may be more at risk of becoming homeless than someone without those challenges), but does not explain why there are more people experiencing homelessness in one area than another (for example, two cities with the same general rates of addiction or mental health difficulties can have vastly different homelessness rates).

In analyzing statistical data, the authors find that the factors that *do* most accurately predict homelessness rates are the cost of rent and the vacancy rate.

### How Communities Respond

This presentation will conclude with a summary of how communities, including ours, respond to homelessness by investing in short term interventions and long term efforts to expand the availability of housing.