

A Night of Remembrance



Photo Credit: Karen Smul

On December 18, 2019, Care For the Homeless in partnership with Urban Pathways held our annual Homeless Persons' Memorial Day (HPMD) observance. We gathered 160 community members to commemorate the lives of 156 people who passed away in 2019 while unstably housed.

The program kicked off with CFH Executive Director, George Nashak, who said, "We gather each year at this memorial event for two key reasons. First, to bear witness to the lives of people who died while homeless in the past year. We recognize these individuals and acknowledge their lives by reciting their names...and bear(ing) witness to a life that was lost.

Secondly, we participate in this memorial to hold ourselves accountable. It is our belief that none of the people we recognize tonight died because of a personal failure. We believe they died because the system designed to help them failed. Our hope is that each of us will return to our work tomorrow morning and try harder; that we all will start 2020

by re-doubling our efforts to ensure that the list of names we read next year will be shorter than the one we read this evening.”

We were joined by several elected officials, including NY State Assembly Members Richard Gottfried and Andrew Hevesi, City Council Speaker Corey Johnson and City Council Member Ben Kallos. Each spoke to the tragedy of homelessness and the need to create policies that would prevent and end homelessness for those most in need.

We were also joined by Mr. Ben Vereen, who delivered a special eulogy for the four men that lost their lives due to a brutal attack in Chinatown on October 5th. Mr. Vereen said, “One of the purposes of this Memorial is to acknowledge and remember our neighbors and to honor the lives of people like Mr. Manson, Mr. Villegas, Mr. Comano and Mr. Kwok and the others individuals who will be named tonight. We remember them, and many vulnerable people like them, who are victimized by homelessness.”

Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day has been observed on or about the winter solstice – fittingly the longest, darkest night of the year – for almost 30 years in cities across North America, to recognize these lives of our neighbors unnecessarily spoiled by poverty and homelessness.

In this observance we commit to the ideals below:

- Stable housing for the 60,000+ men, women and children who are experiencing homelessness;
- The human right to proper health care for all;
- The provision of basic food security for every family;
- And an end to discrimination, racism and stigmatization that casts a grim shadow over our society and effects our most vulnerable brother and sisters.

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Victory For Housing Advocates!

On December 19th, City Council passed [Intro 1211-a](#). This piece of legislation takes a bold and decisive step in implementing a housing policy that puts us on the path to ending homelessness in New York City. Intro 1211-a requires most city development projects who receive city subsidies to set aside 15% of their units for people experiencing homelessness. It was introduced by Council Member Rafael Salamanca Jr. and has been endorsed by the House Our Future NY Campaign because it creates an additional 1,000 units of housing each year will be created for our neighbors most in need. This is in addition to the current commitment of 15,000 units over 10 years in the Mayor’s affordable housing plan.



We applaud Speaker Johnson, Council Member Salamanca and our allies in the City Council for their leadership in prioritizing the needs of people experiencing homelessness. The negative impacts of homelessness are far reaching and if we are to comprehensively address the needs of this vulnerable population, we must ensure that they have a safe and stable place to live.

As Council Member Salamanca said, "This is hope, we are giving homeless families hope, Intro 1211 sets us on a path

to create what we need most to address the issue at hand: thousands of units of new permanent housing for the thousands of men, women and children who are looking for a place to call home".

After the vote both Council Member Salamanca and Speaker Johnson joined advocates in the rotunda to celebrate this accomplishment. Speaker Johnson said, "I think this will be one of the most important things City Council does in its entire four year session, and I think after he (Salamanca) and I are gone from the Council and we continue to fight homelessness, this is going to be one of the things that eventually one day, when we hopefully end homelessness in NYC, they will say it started with this (Intro 1211). It started with set aside for homeless families to make sure that every person, every development that is getting our tax payers money has to do their part to house homeless people". We are thankful to our allies in the House Our Future Campaign for their relentless advocacy. We are also thankful for our allies in the City Council for taking a critical step in the path to ending homelessness in NYC.

Medicaid Expansion Saves Lives

A study published in the National Bureau of Economic Research shows that the expansion of Medicaid to low-income adults has prevented thousands of deaths each year. States that expanded Medicaid coverage under the Affordable Care Act saved the lives of 19,200 older adults between the ages of 55 and 64 (over a period of four years, 2014-2017). For those states that did not expand, there were 15,600 premature deaths due to lack of coverage.

This Study is consistent with a great deal of research that expanding opportunities for low-income individuals to access comprehensive, quality health care leads to much better health outcomes. Notably, mortality rates for older adults who gain coverage are reduced from 39% – 64%. In plain words, Medicaid expansion saves lives!



Source: rwjf.org

Our goal at Care For the Homeless is to reduce barriers for unstably housed individuals to access primary health care services. We also strive to create a culture of ongoing health care access. This means that individuals who have chronic conditions such as diabetes or heart disease take their medications regularly. They visit their

primary care doctors on a regular basis, and they manage health care concerns as needed. Without appropriate health care, chronic conditions can go unmanaged and can lead to premature death.

This study makes a strong argument for policy recommendations that strive to increase health care access to vulnerable populations, getting us closer to realizing health care as a human right.

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities has an excellent summary of the research that can be found [here](#).

The Busy Advocate's January Calendar

Wed., Jan. 8, 12:00 p.m., NYC City Charter Meeting, City Hall Council Chambers, New York, NY, 10007.

Mon., Jan. 20, Martin Luther King Day, many people observe this with volunteer public service.

Thur., Jan. 23, 1:30 p.m., NYC City Council Meeting, City Hall Council Chambers, New York, NY, 10007.

Wed., Jan. 22, 12:30 p.m. - 2:00 p.m., CFH Consumer Advisory Board Meeting, 30 E. 33rd Street, 5th floor conference room, Manhattan, NY, 10016.