

Homelessness is a policy choice. So is ending it.

How do I talk about homelessness?

A brief summary of the key shifts in language you can adopt to create effective policies which not only reduce homelessness in our communities but recognize the humanity of those experiencing it.

People first language

People experiencing homelessness are just that—people having an experience.

And while their housing status may be shared, every person living in shelters or outside is an individual with a unique story.

Our language should acknowledge that.



Don't use

"The homeless"
"Homeless people"
"The unhoused"

These terms carry a negative stigma which not only dehumanizes people experiencing homelessness, but erases their individuality.



Do use

"People experiencing homelessness"
"Unhoused people"
"People living outside"

These terms emphasize personhood over housing status and recognize that someone's current experience does not define who they are or limit the potential for their experience to change.

People first policy

Recognizing unhoused Californians as people first in your language is only the first step. From there, you must advance policies that do the same.

What does that look like?

- Prioritizing legislation which gives unhoused people access to deeply affordable and supportive housing
- Outreach strategies that empower unhoused people to decide which housing accommodations and services are best for them
- Letting input from formerly and currently unhoused people inform policy

People first. Always.

Remember: People experiencing homelessness deserve the same rights and dignified supports as those living in stable housing.

By centering unhoused Californians' personhood in your language and policy, you can advance legislation that addresses the housing needs of your unhoused constituents and neighbors.

In short, you can change your community's experience.