

Housing Stability for Transition Age Youth in Foster Care



Background

Over the last decade, California has taken important steps to address the persistent housing instability and homelessness faced by youth currently and formerly in foster care—challenges that compound trauma, negatively impact well-being, and hinder the transition to adulthood. Youth experiencing homelessness often face worse physical and mental health, higher rates of substance use disorders, increased exposure to crime, and greater barriers to education and employment compared with their peers who have not been homeless.ⁱ

To begin addressing the poor outcomes and high rates of homelessness that youth often faced when aging out of foster care at 18, California enacted legislation in 2010 extending foster care eligibility to age 21. Despite this change, many youth continue to face homelessness and deep poverty, even while participating in extended foster care. A recent study found that over half of youth in foster care experienced couch-surfing or homelessness between ages 17 and 21.ⁱⁱ Barriers such as long transitional housing program waitlists, difficulties entering or remaining in housing programs, and unaffordable housing options continue to contribute to this problem.

Over the past several years, advocates, providers, counties, and policymakers have implemented additional measures to improve housing access and stability. For example, in 2019, the Legislature established housing navigators to help youth in foster care and other young adults ages 18 to 21 access needed housing. That same year, the state expanded transitional housing programs for youth in foster care and made other targeted investments to address housing instability and homelessness among youth more broadly, including allocating at least 8% of Homeless Housing, Assistance, and Prevention Program (HHAP) funds to serve homeless youth, extending the Homeless Youth Emergency Services and Housing Program, and providing support for college students facing housing insecurity.

In 2020, the Legislature passed AB 1979 (Friedman), which built on these efforts by requiring evaluations of communities' abilities to meet the emergency housing needs of youth in extended foster care; developing capacity to meet the immediate housing needs of young people re-entering foster care or between placements; streamlining the Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP) approval process; and promoting placement stability by clarifying that counties may "hold" placements for up to 14 days under certain circumstances. That year, policymakers also included a \$4 million augmentation to the Transitional Housing Program – Non-Minor Dependent (THP-NMD) rate in the 2020–21 state budget, providing a housing supplement to support programming for parenting youth in extended foster care and better reflect regional variations in housing costs.

The 2021–22 state budget established an 8% set-aside over two years in the Homekey Program for projects serving youth experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, including youth currently and formerly in foster care through age 25. From 2021-2025, continued funding for HHAP now with at least 10% dedicated to youth and authorization to create new interim housing solutions for youth.

Next Steps

Significant work remains to ensure that young people currently and formerly in foster care have access to safe, stable, and affordable housing as they transition to adulthood. While California has made progress in addressing homelessness, too many youth, particularly those with experience in the foster care system, still face housing instability. It is critical to ensure that state-wide housing programs meet the needs of youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness, prioritize young people in housing policy, and expand youth-friendly housing options and supportive services. Future efforts should secure dedicated funding and expand opportunities for public agencies and community-based organizations with youth expertise to develop housing and youth-centered projects that support current and former foster youth, as well as youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

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ⁱ Morton, et al. "Prevalence and Correlates of Youth Homelessness in the United States," *Journal of Adolescent Health* (2018), 62(1):14-21, available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29153445>; U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Higher Education: Actions Needed to Improve Access to Federal Financial Assistance for Homeless and Foster Youth* (2016), available at <https://www.gao.gov/assets/680/677325.pdf>

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