

Policy Statement: Homelessness

Seattle and King County have increasingly become unaffordable for many of our neighbors. The cost of living, a lack of affordable housing options and an inability to provide sufficient health and social services have led to unprecedented numbers of individuals and families living unsheltered. We recognize that homelessness is a complex issue with diverse causes and manifestations, and we seek to understand its roots, advocate for physical and policy solutions and serve our neighbors experiencing its consequences.

Impact on Architects and the Built Environment

Architects are problem solvers and have technical skills that can impact solutions related to shelter and housing. Our involvement in architectural projects across the region has given us a unique understanding of the scarcity and high cost of housing, lack of buildable land, high cost of development and the funding issues related to affordable housing. Architects also have the opportunity to recognize how our work can contribute to displacement, one of the core causes of homelessness, and to consider how these adverse impacts might be mitigated through programming, project design and client education.

Key Messages

- ⇒ We believe that everyone has a fundamental human right to housing.
- ⇒ Architects can help to drive solutions by advocating for livable cities, increased density, enhanced mobility, alternative affordable forms of housing and funding for affordable and subsidized housing of all types.
- ⇒ Architects can also impact the broader societal issues that impact homelessness, including support for: increased funding for essential services like healthcare, addiction and mental illness treatment; ways to mitigate the high cost of living in our region; and fewer barriers to the development of affordable housing and shelters.

AIA Seattle Action

Advocacy Goals

Advocate for policies that will increase the availability of all types of housing.

- ⇒ Support increased funding for low-income and affordable housing through both public and market mechanisms.

- ⇒ Advocate for a wide range of emergency, long-term and permanent housing options for the homeless, including new and existing structures.
- ⇒ Support local and regional policies that encourage low-income and affordable housing development and promote the smart utilization of land to maximize housing resources.
 - Support Seattle’s HALA agenda, including goals related to Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA).
 - Promote efforts in Seattle and elsewhere to increase the number of ADU/DADUs.
 - Support efforts to increase density in urban areas and disincentivize the underutilization of scarce land resources.
 - Promote local land use policies that encourage access to housing and social services for low-income individuals.
 - Support a comprehensive framework for determining how surplus public land is used—one that prioritizes affordable housing among a range of uses.
- ⇒ Support “housing first” approaches in which people experiencing homelessness are offered permanent housing with minimum preconditions, behavioral contingencies or barriers. This approach is based on overwhelming evidence that all people experiencing homelessness can better address other issues once they achieve housing stability and appropriate levels of services.

Support partner organizations in their advocacy for policies that prevent individuals and families from falling into homelessness.

Educate architects about the problem and ways they can impact it.

- ⇒ Invite discussion about complex issues related to design and development, housing affordability, displacement and homelessness.
- ⇒ Provide opportunities for interested members to take direct action, including service opportunities, pathways to advocacy and opportunities to provide outreach to community members.

Proposed Actions

- ⇒ Facilitate member and community education and awareness on homelessness issues. Engage in fact finding, research and coalition-building on a wide range of issues related to the increased prevalence of homelessness in our communities.
 - Offer member education through conferences and short programs; include issues related to homelessness as topics for upcoming forums; sponsor other

presentations at the Center for Architecture & Design; and collect and disseminate data.

- Offer resources digitally for AIA members and others to pursue advocacy goals, including posting on social media and other internal and external digital communication.
- Invite discussion about issues related to design and development, housing affordability, displacement and homelessness.

⇒ Provide opportunities for interested members to take direct action through service and other ways to directly engage with individuals experiencing homelessness.

⇒ Encourage AIA members to engage in direct advocacy action on issues related to homelessness.

- Develop mechanisms to assist members in communicating with policymakers, including sample text and issue background information.
- Work to evaluate local government budgets, policies, elected official actions and candidates for public office based upon the advocacy goals of this committee.

⇒ Support member engagement in new ideas for constructed solutions at the building and urban scales.

⇒ Work with AIA Seattle's Housing Task Force, other AIA committees and AIA Washington Council to align AIA Seattle's advocacy priorities with policies that will increase housing options in Seattle and the region.

⇒ Join advocacy coalitions that align with AIA's advocacy goals: Real Change, Low Income Housing Institute, Washington Low Income Housing Alliance, Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness.