**RENTAL COSTS ON THE RISE**

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Many Americans today have chosen to rent housing vs. buying. Some of their choices are no maintenance costs to cover, no real estate taxes to pay, access to complimentary amenities, or even more flexibility if the renter decides to relocate. Rental properties were forced to lock in on current rental rates during the pandemic. However, now that Americans are returning to normalcy, rental rates have risen.

Typically, the highest rent increase was about 3% in the past. However, America is seeing at least an 11% increase from a year earlier, with some of the larger cities showing 30-40% increases. Unfortunately, the average renter’s income is not increasing at these same rates, causing renters to become homeless. Even though many homeless people might be employed, they just cannot afford housing.

An increase in homelessness can bring on more challenges than trying to correct the affordable housing issue. Firstly, homeless people are exposed to more outside elements – hot, cold, rain, snow, hurricanes, tornados, which increase the likelihood of getting sickness, injury or disease can spread.

Secondly, a strong correlation between homelessness and increased crime has been reported. Not that the homeless are the person(s) causing the crime necessarily. But due to harsh living conditions and lack of defending themselves, they are vulnerable to hate crime (Bridges, 2022).

Finally, the homeless community often use resources provided from vendors at no cost to the public but buy nothing from the vendor in return. One such person could be referred to as a temporary squatter. For example, the nearby Starbucks or mall with free WIFI has a seat taken for a period because the homeless needs WIFI access to continue working or look for employment. With a free resource being used but no income from a sale, the vendor may be forced to increase prices, affecting all individuals.

Datasets that may have useful information showing how homelessness and rent are on the rise with any contributing factors are:

National Alliance to End Homelessness

Kaggle.com

HUD

National Association of Realtors

National Coalition for the Homelessness

Whaley RB, Abbott J. How Safe Is Life on the Road? Criminal Victimization Among a Sample of U.S. Nomads and the #VanLife Community. Crime & Delinquency. April 2022. doi:10.1177/00111287221087957