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**Homelessness is a significant issue in  
both rural and urban areas of the Finger Lakes region**

ROCHESTER, N.Y., Jan. 18, 2023 – Despite being viewed as an urban problem, homelessness is increasing in rural communities of the Finger Lakes region as well, according to a new Common Ground Health issue spotlight.

Homelessness increased by 215% collectively in Ontario, Seneca, Wayne and Yates counties and by 46% collectively in Allegany, Chemung, Livingston, Schuyler and Steuben counties between 2007 and 2021, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development statistics show.

“Just as poverty was revealed to be a region-wide issue in our 2019 Overloaded report, our spotlight shows that homelessness also is a significant issue across the entire Finger Lakes region,” said Wade Norwood, CEO, Common Ground Health. “Homelessness in our region affects people of every race, gender, age and ethnicity in cities and in rural towns.”

Factors contributing to increasing homelessness include the gap between increasing housing costs and stagnant wages, the low availability of affordable housing, disabilities, poor mental or physical health, substance use disorders, trauma, attempts to escape from domestic violence, financial or life crises, and systemic inequalities that perpetuate discrimination and poverty.

Based on an examination of regional data and interviews with community partners, *Unhomed: A Spotlight on Homelessness in the Finger Lakes Region* also highlights the limitations to getting complete data on homelessness and on the issue of “hidden homelessness” in rural and suburban areas.

“The ability to collect complete homelessness data is limited due to such factors as the time of year data are collected and the forms of sheltering used,” said Zoë Mahlum, health planning research analyst, Common Ground Health. “While urban areas tend to heavily utilize shelters, rural and suburban areas see a higher prevalence of people seeking shelter in vehicles, tents, hotels or motels, or doubling or tripling up with relatives. As a result, many homeless individuals and families are difficult to locate, are not included in the data and represent ‘hidden homelessness.’ ”

The COVID-19 pandemic also added to the complexity of the homelessness problem, the issue brief states, as shelters reduced capacities to assist with social distancing practices and service providers were forced to move shelter-based housing to hotels.

In the issue spotlight, Common Ground concludes that while there are strong efforts within the region to improve conditions for the homeless population, greater local and national collaboration is needed to address the social and systemic issues at the root of the problem.

“At this time of year, as the weather grows colder, we know that unhoused families are making difficult choices to try to stay together and stay warm,” said Brenda Spratt, executive director of Family Promise of Ontario County. “Organizations like ours need the support of the entire community to ensure that all families have a place they can call home.”

To view and download the spotlight, go to: [www.commongroundhealth.org/homelessness](http://www.commongroundhealth.org/homelessness).

**About Common Ground Health**

Founded in 1974, Common Ground is the health research and planning organization for the Rochester-Finger Lakes region. We bring together leaders from health care, education, business, government and other sectors to find common ground on health challenges. Learn more at [commongroundhealth.org](http://www.commongroundhealth.org/).

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