Homelessness dramatically elevates one's risk of illness, injury and death.

For every age group, homeless persons are three times more likely to die than the general population. Middle-aged homeless men and young homeless women are at particularly increased risk.1

The average age of death of homeless persons is about 50 years, the age at which Americans commonly died in 1900.2 Today, non-homeless Americans can expect to live to age 78.3

Homeless people suffer the same illnesses experienced by people with homes, but at rates three to six times higher.4 This includes potentially lethal communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and influenza, as well as cancer, heart disease, diabetes and hypertension.

Homeless persons die from illnesses that can be treated or prevented. Crowded, poorly-ventilated living conditions, found in many shelters, promote the spread of communicable diseases. Research shows that risk of death on the streets is only moderately affected by substance abuse or mental illness, which must also be understood as health problems. Physical health conditions such as heart problems or cancer are more likely to lead to an early death for homeless persons. The difficulty getting rest, maintaining medications, eating well, staying clean and staying warm prolong and exacerbate illnesses, sometimes to the point where they are life threatening.

2 O’Connell, p. 13.
3 National Center for Health Statistics, at http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/lifexpec.htm
Homeless persons die on the streets from exposure to the cold. In the coldest areas, homeless persons with a history of frostbite, immersion foot, or hypothermia have an eightfold risk of dying when compared to matched non-homeless controls.\(^5\)

Homeless persons die on the streets from unprovoked violence, also known as hate crimes. For the years 1999 through 2005, the National Coalition for the Homeless has documented 472 acts of violence against homeless people by housed people, including 169 murders of homeless people and 303 incidents of non-lethal violence in 165 cities from 42 states and Puerto Rico.

Poor access to quality health care reduces the possibility of recovery from illnesses and injuries. Nationally, 71% of Health Care for the Homeless clients are uninsured,\(^6\) as were 46.6 million other Americans in 2005.\(^7\)

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\(^5\) O’Connell, p. 7.
\(^6\) Health Resources and Services Administration, Bureau of Primary Health Care, Uniform Data System 2004. http://www.bphec.hrsa.gov/hchirc/about/prog_successes.htm