

Moving the Needle on Youth Homelessness in California

An estimated 4.2 million youth and young adults up to age 24 experience homelessness each year in the United States, and we as a nation are not doing enough to change it. Youth experiencing homelessness, particularly those who are unaccompanied, face numerous challenges, which can include legal barriers to meeting the basic necessities of life and to accessing assistance.

The State Index on Youth Homelessness (the Index) provides a snapshot of some of the legal, systemic, and environmental barriers and complex challenges youth experiencing homelessness face. The Index also provides states, advocates, grassroots activists, and youth themselves with a tool recommending concrete steps that states can take to protect the safety, development, health, and dignity of youth experiencing homelessness, thereby helping end the cycle of homelessness and increasing youth's prospects for a brighter future.

This scorecard evaluates the state based on 61 metrics assigning points up to 100. The metrics span across state laws and policies, systems, and environments that affect youth experiencing homelessness and influence state policy and program implementation.

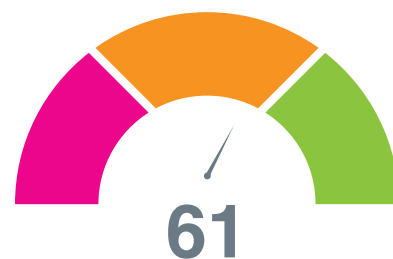
Quick Facts & Stats

State Ranking: 3

Overall Score: 61

Performance Breakdown:

- Law & Policy: 69% of metrics met
 - Laws authorizing comprehensive supports and services for youth experiencing homelessness: 67% of metrics met
 - Preventing youth experiencing homelessness from coming into contact with the criminal and juvenile justice systems: 67% of metrics met
 - Providing unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness the opportunity to seek legal independence and live independently: 63% of metrics met
 - Addressing the educational needs of youth experiencing homelessness: 33% of metrics met
 - Allowing youth experiencing homelessness to access critical supports and services: 89% of metrics met
- Systems: 29% of metrics met
- Environment: 71% of metrics met



State Highlights

Some areas where California has moved the needle relative to other states includes authorizing comprehensive supports and services for youth experiencing homelessness, preventing their contact with the criminal and juvenile justice systems, and promoting safety and inclusion by providing protections for LGBTQ youth within key state programs.



Law & Policy

- State does not criminally punish youth who run away.
- State law provides partial or full contract rights for youth experiencing homelessness.
- State allows unaccompanied youth under 18 to apply for health insurance coverage on their own.
- State has RHY legislation similar to the federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) that provides funding for emergency services and other supports to prevent and end youth homelessness.



Systems

- The State Department of Transportation has systems in place to address proof of residency requirements to receive a state-issued identification card.
- There is a state interagency council on homelessness.



Environment

- The state has banned conversion therapy for minors on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and/or expression.
- The state promotes safe and inclusive environments in child welfare, juvenile justice, and runaway and homeless youth programs by providing protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

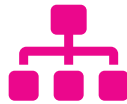
Recommendations for Improvement

There is room for improvement throughout the metrics for the Golden State, with emphasis on the Systems and Environment categories. Addressing the educational needs of youth experiencing homelessness and creating structures like a statewide plan to end homelessness that includes a youth-specific component should be prioritized.



Law & Policy

- Enact state law that allows youth in need of supervision to receive services without court involvement.
- Implement a grievance process for students experiencing homelessness that complies with federal law.



Systems

- Create a comprehensive statewide plan to end homelessness that includes a strategy to prevent and end youth homelessness and LGBTQ youth homelessness.
- Create a state entity - such as an Office of Homeless Youth Services - that focuses solely on designing, implementing, and evaluating youth homelessness programs.



Environment

- Require training about sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, healthy sexual development, or issues specific to LGBTQ youth for staff working in runaway and homeless youth systems.