

Searching for solutions in America's No. 1 state for homelessness

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SANTA ANA, Calif. -- A tent city in the shadow of the Santa Ana city hall is home to about 500 people.

"They want to pretend we don't exist. It makes life a lot easier for them, I think," said Nick Blinderman, 26, a heroin user who lives in the camp.



The Santa Ana homeless camp. CBS News

"I've never in my life seen anything like the drug use around here. It's as common as like drinking a cup of coffee in the morning," he said. "You find feces everywhere, in every trash can, all over the place."

Homelessness is rising in California, in part because housing costs and rents have skyrocketed. Nearly 120,000 people are now homeless in the state. Sixty-six percent of them live on the street, the highest rate of people without shelter in the country.

"You cannot convince me on any day of the week that this is the way that people should have to live," said Mark Ridley-Thomas, a Los Angeles County supervisor.

Tents now line streets all over Los Angeles, so Ridley-Thomas wants Gov. Jerry Brown to declare a state of emergency, using funds for natural disasters, to address homelessness.

Ridley-Thomas said it is "pretty obvious" that homelessness is a disaster like a wildfire or an earthquake. "We have the resources. This is a crisis," he said.

In response to a request for comment to CBS News, Brown's office said that declaring a state of emergency would not be appropriate and that homelessness is better addressed on the local level by city governments.



Tents along a Los Angeles street. CBS News

On Election Day, Los Angeles voters approved a \$1.2 billion plan to build 10,000 units of affordable housing. It's not enough, but it's a start.

Philip Mangano, executive director of the American Roundtable to Abolish Homelessness, said programs often focus on hunger or drug use, not permanent housing.

"Services without housing leaves people still on the street and in shelters," he said.

"There's people that used to teach, there's plumbers, there's roofers, there's construction workers," said Tanisha Trigeros who lives at the Santa Ana tent city.

"There's everything here but nobody's willing to give them that chance because they've already hit rock bottom."

And the view from the bottom is not pretty.

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