

Cold Weather Fills Boston's Homeless Shelters beyond Capacity

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BOSTON - This January's record-setting cold snap required Pine Street Inn, which provides shelter for homeless adults in Boston, to expand its outreach hours and set out temporary beds, said Barbara Trevisan, the nonprofit's director of communications.

The icy temperatures were caused by a mass of Arctic air traveling south and sweeping across the United States. Yahoo News [attributed the unseasonable cold to possible effects of climate change](#), but many other publications did not agree. Although several celebrities, including Donald Trump, have seen the freezing weather as an opportunity to question whether the climate is warming, [reporters have been quick to correct them](#).

According to USA Today, [the Arctic air mass caused over 20 deaths in the United States this month](#). Some of the people who lost their lives were homeless.

People without access to heated homes are at risk when temperatures drop. During subzero weather, Trevisan said, it can be dangerous for people to spend even 15 minutes outdoors without adequate protective clothing.

Although no one has died of exposure in Boston due to homelessness this winter, Trevisan said, Pine Street Inn's outreach team has seen people who were suffering from the beginning stages of hypothermia.

Pine Street Inn's outreach staff give out hot drinks and blankets and encourage people to come in out of the cold. Some homeless people seek shelter by sitting in public buildings. Others come to Pine Street Inn to escape the chill.

"They do find places where they can get in out of the worst of the elements," Trevisan said. Sometimes, homeless Bostonians seek shelter with friends or relatives during cold weather.

"We don't turn anyone out on the cold nights," Trevisan said. Even though the shelter has been full, staff make arrangements to ensure no one needs to spend the night outside. They also encourage people to stay indoors during the daytime whenever possible.

In Boston, Trevisan said, many homeless people are handling challenging health conditions such as diabetes, heart problems or alcoholism. All of these problems can make spending time outside during the winter dangerous.

On rare occasions, people will decide not to come indoors for shelter. Trevisan estimated that around 25 people are spending the night on the streets of Boston now each day, during the middle of the winter.

A local shortage of affordable housing is one reason Bostonians sometimes end up losing their homes, Trevisan said. Although she said homelessness has declined in Boston in recent years, [statistics from the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless](#) say it is on the rise statewide.

"Boston tends to be a city that really does pay a lot of attention to homeless individuals and really does dedicate resources," Trevisan said. However, the shortage of beds in homeless shelters for adults during the winter suggests more resources are needed.