Homelessness

- a Wicked Problem -

Homelessness is a model example of a wicked problem, I believe it displays with clarity all of the key characteristics used to define a wicked problem in essence which in turn defines the nature of the general definition of a wicked problem by having no definitive long term solution to solve the problem. The six individual characteristics that make up this broad definition are, We can go on to see how these six characteristics help to support this claim at that it has: a vague problem definition, and undefined solution, no clear endpoint, it is irreversible, unique and has a great sense of urgency attached to it.

To begin, we can see how the characteristics of homelessness are marked by its intricate and interconnected nature. Homelessness can be a result of many factors, from poverty to mental health issues, addiction, and even a shortage of affordable housing. This group of factors interweave together to form a tight web of challenges making it difficult to tackle any one issue without having to second-handedly impact others. For example, addressing housing affordability alone may not suffice if mental health and substance abuse issues are not also addressed. Because of these complexities, this wicked problem requires a nuanced approach that acknowledges and navigates all of these factors at once. Knowing this; since there is no single, clear solution to homelessness. Various strategies such as emergency shelters, supportive housing, and prevention programs, have been implemented to try and mitigate the effects of this wicked problem. However, the effectiveness of these approaches often depends on the specific context, the differing needs, and often even just the general scale of the population in question as well. This lack of a one-size-fits-all solution underscores the challenge of developing universally effective interventions.

Homelessness also exhibits another aspect of ambiguity due to its constant evolving nature. The problem shifts over time due to economic changes, political shifts, and societal attitudes. As these conditions change, so too must the strategies to address homelessness. This dynamic aspect requires adaptable and flexible solutions that can respond to these changing circumstances. Moreover, homelessness involves conflicting interests among various stakeholders as well. Many government agencies, non-profits, business owners, and community members often have divergent perspectives and priorities when it comes to addressing homelessness. These conflicts can complicate efforts to develop and implement effective solutions, as compromises and negotiations are required to balance differing viewpoints.

As reflected in the definition of this main conflict, there is no definitive resolution to homelessness. So while a multitude of interventions can help to mitigate different aspects of this problem, they rarely provide a complete solution. The persistence of homelessness highlights the need for ongoing efforts and continual adaptation of strategies to address its evolving facets. Finally, these efforts to combat homelessness can lead to a plethora of rather unintended consequences. For example, increasing affordable housing might not fully address homelessness if other necessary services, such as mental health and substance abuse treatment, are not simultaneously increased. Furthermore, policies designed to alleviate homelessness can sometimes exacerbate other social issues or create new challenges, reimposing the complexity of managing such a wicked problem. With this we can clearly see how homelessness exemplifies the characteristics of a wicked problem through its complexity, lack of a clear solution, evolving nature, stakeholder conflicts, its inability to be fully resolved, and by showing its potential for unintended consequences to arise as a by-product of searching for a sustainable solution. Knowing this we can now deduce that to address this wicked problem, we must address it effectively with comprehensive and adaptable approaches to this problem that considers all of the aforementioned qualities of this conflict and seeks the balance between them and all of the differing interests involved.

So while it may be apparent that homelessness has no one real solution, maybe if we reverse the formula we may be able to find something to suffice. Looking at the root cause of homelessness, our government. We can see today how many blame it on surface level problems when in reality the bottom line is much more lucrative in nature. If you are picking up on my hints so far; I’m sure you could’ve guessed that this along with many other problems in America is always a money issue, wrapped with a lot of greed circulating around a general lack of empathy, we can also see how wicked problems such as this one founded the country riddled with these problems today and how it goes to show just how unstable our the country we live in today truly is. In this YouTube,TEDx Talk video titled, “So you think you understand homelessness,” by Marissa A. Zapata (https://youtu.be/8AMy3UR-77U?si=VaCWw\_d5kxv3SSwl), goes into the details of how this wicked problem is actually, in a way, a by product of pretty wicked morality and lack of empathy. So, in conclusion. This wicked problems solution may be the most multifaceted of them all as it deals with an array of not just socio-economic structures but also structures of the heart which each individual person must come to realize and understand in themselves before they can hope to make a change in the world around them.