

MEDIA ALERT

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Portland’s Homeless Persons’ Memorial Vigil is Virtual in 2020

Annual commemoration honors those who have died, Mon 12/21 at preblestreet.org/vigil

PORTLAND, ME (December 21, 2020) — A vigil to remember friends from the Greater Portland homeless community who have died will be held virtually this year due to COVID-19. **The memorial can be viewed beginning December 21 at preblestreet.org/vigil.**

For 26 years Portland’s Annual Homeless Persons’ Memorial Vigil has coincided with the winter solstice, the longest night of homelessness all year. It is a time for the community to connect with one another to honor and mourn lives that were cut short, and to reaffirm a commitment to ensuring that everyone who needs a home finds one.

“The health implications of people experiencing chronic and or unsheltered homelessness are devastating. 84% of people who are homeless and unsheltered experience physical health conditions. Worse, the life expectancy of our friends who endure chronic homelessness is 28 years shorter, on average, than that of people who are housed. We lost 64 people this year. As a community, we cannot continue to let our most vulnerable neighbors slip through the cracks,” said Mark Swann, Preble Street Executive Director.

This year’s vigil will include a reading of the names of the people we lost this year, a reflection from Grace Street Ministries, music from people experiencing homelessness, and more.

Number of deaths in Portland homeless population by year	Of those who died in 2020
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2008: 21 • 2009: 20 • 2010: 25 • 2011: 22 • 2012: 30 • 2013: 20 • 2014: 35 • 2015: 43 deaths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Average age = 49 • 2016: 34 deaths • 2017: 40 deaths – 29 men; 11 women <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Average age = 48 • 2018: 36 deaths – 26 men; 10 women <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Average age = 48 • 2019: 43 deaths – 31 men; 12 women <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Average age = 55 • 2020: 64 deaths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The youngest was 22 and the oldest was 80; 75% were younger than 60 • One was a longtime community advocate for people in recovery or suffering from substance use disorder • At least 8 were veterans • Other causes of death are similar to those who aren’t homeless — chronic medical conditions, suicide, liver disease, overdose, heart conditions, and cancer

Preble Street is a nonprofit human services, anti-poverty agency serving the most vulnerable people in Maine since 1975 through innovative, best-practice, client-centered programs that respond to and prevent hunger and homelessness. www.preblestreet.org