



COUNTY OF SONOMA

2023 POINT-IN-TIME COUNT RESULTS

ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

Applied Survey Research (ASR) is a social research firm dedicated to helping people build better communities by collecting meaningful data, facilitating information-based planning, and developing custom strategies. The firm was founded on the principle that community improvement, initiative sustainability, and program success are closely tied to assessment needs, evaluation of community goals, and development of appropriate responses.

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INTRODUCTION

In late January, volunteers and guides fanned out across the County of Sonoma as part of an annual effort to understand the needs, number, and circumstances of persons experiencing homelessness. Point-in-Time (PIT) Counts measure the prevalence of homelessness in each community and collect information on individuals and families residing in emergency shelters and transitional housing, as well as on people sleeping on the streets, in cars, abandoned properties, or other places not meant for human habitation.

The Point-in-Time Count is the only source of nationwide data on sheltered and unsheltered homelessness and is required by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) of all jurisdictions receiving federal funding to provide housing and services for individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

The Sonoma County CoC reports the findings of their local Point-in-Time Count annually to HUD. This information ultimately helps the federal government to better understand the nature and extent of homelessness nationwide. Point-in-Time Census and Survey data also help to inform communities' local strategic planning, capacity building, and advocacy campaigns to prevent and end homelessness.

Sonoma County worked in conjunction with ASR to conduct the 2023 Sonoma County Homeless Point-in-Time Census and Survey. ASR is a social research firm with extensive experience in homeless enumeration and needs assessment that has worked with Sonoma County on their Point-in-Time Counts since 2009.

The Sonoma County Homeless Point-in-Time Count consists of two primary components: (1) a point-in-time enumeration of unsheltered, tents, or vehicles, and (2) a point-in-time enumeration of homeless individuals and families, such as those sleeping outdoors, on the street, or in parks and families residing in temporary shelter, including emergency shelters or transitional-housing facilities.

The 2023 Sonoma County Homeless Point-in-Time Count was a comprehensive community effort. With the support of individuals with lived experience of homelessness, community volunteers, staff from various city and county departments, and law enforcement, the entire county was canvassed between the hours of 5:00 AM and 9:00 AM on January 27, 2023.

The count was a peer-informed, visual count of unsheltered homeless individuals and families residing on the streets and in vehicles, makeshift shelters, encampments, and other places not meant for human habitation. Shelters and transitional-housing facilities in Sonoma County's annual Housing Inventory Chart (HIC) also reported the number of homeless individuals and families who occupied their facilities on the night prior to the day of the count.

A specialized count of unaccompanied children and transition-age youth under the age of 25 was conducted on the same day. This dedicated count was designed to improve the understanding of the prevalence and scope of youth homelessness. Eighteen trained youth enumerators who currently or recently experienced homelessness conducted the count in specific areas where homeless youth were known to congregate.

In the weeks following the street count, a comprehensive, close-ended survey was administered to 445 unsheltered and sheltered individuals and families. The survey gathered basic demographic details as well as information on service needs and utilization.

This report provides data regarding the number and characteristics of people experiencing homelessness in Sonoma County on a single night in January. Special attention is given to specific subpopulations, including chronically homeless persons, veterans, families, unaccompanied children under the age of 18, and transition-age youth between the ages of 18 and 24.

To better understand the dynamics of homelessness over time, results from previous years, including 2011, 2013, 2015-2019, 2020, 2022 are provided where available and applicable.

PROJECT OVERVIEW AND GOALS

In order for the 2023 Sonoma Point-in-Time Count and Survey to best reflect the experience and expertise of the community, ASR held planning meetings with local community members to review current goals and address continuous improvement goals. These community members were drawn from city and county departments, community-based service providers, and other interested stakeholders. These individuals comprised the 2023 Planning Committee and were instrumental to ensuring the 2023 Sonoma County Homeless Point-in-Time Count and Survey reflected the needs and concerns of the community.

The goals of the 2023 Point-in-Time Count:

- To preserve current federal funding for homeless services and to enhance the ability to raise new funds;
- To improve the ability of policy makers and service providers to plan and implement services that meet the needs of the local homeless population;
- To measure changes in the numbers and characteristics of the homeless population since the 2020 Sonoma County Homeless Point-in-Time Count and Survey, and to track progress toward ending homelessness;
- To increase public awareness of overall homeless issues and generate support for constructive solutions; and
- To assess the status of specific subpopulations, including veterans, families, unaccompanied children, transition-age youth, and those who are chronically homeless.

This report is intended to assist service providers, policy makers, funders, and local, state, and federal governments in gaining a better understanding of the population currently experiencing homelessness, measuring the impact of current policies and programming, and planning for the future.

FEDERAL DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS FOR POINT-IN-TIME COUNTS

In this study, the HUD definition of homelessness for the Point-in-Time Count is used. This definition includes individuals and families:

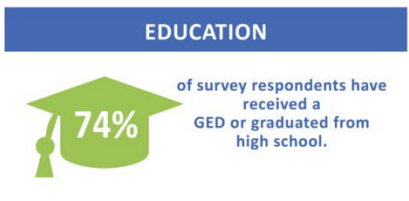
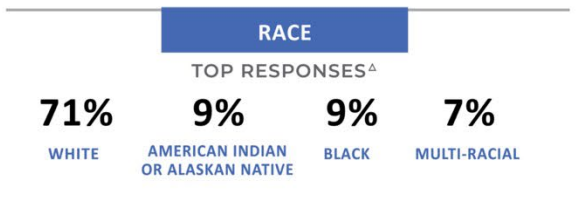
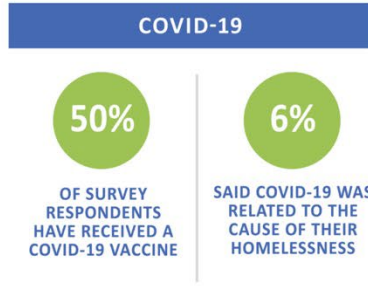
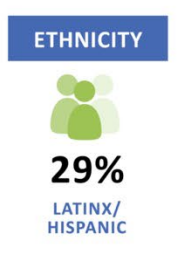
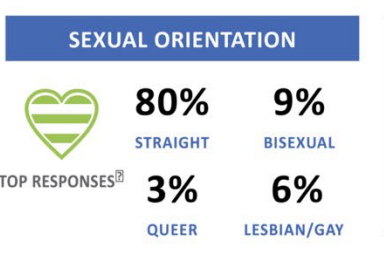
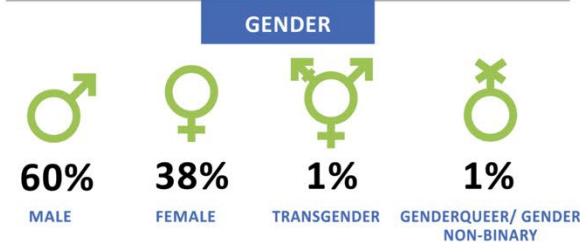
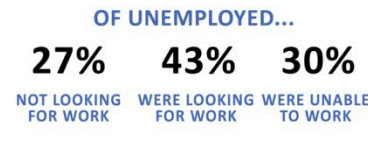
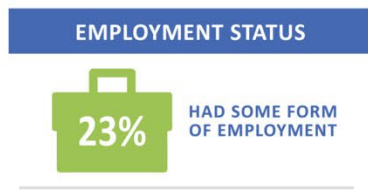
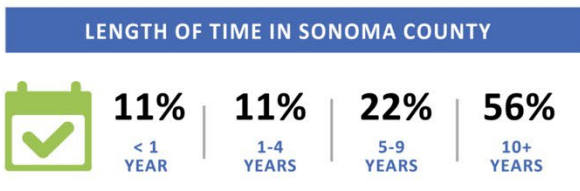
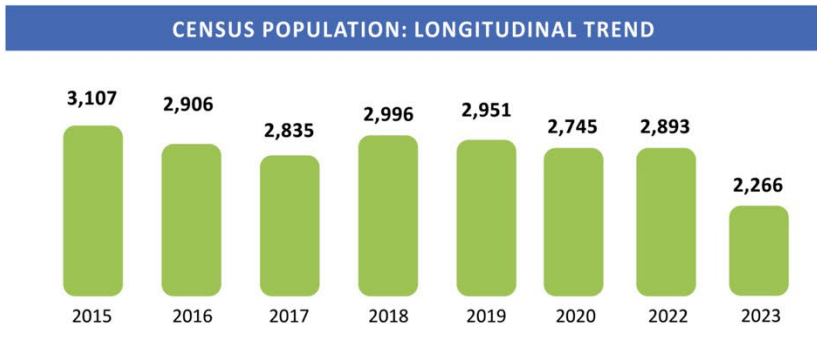
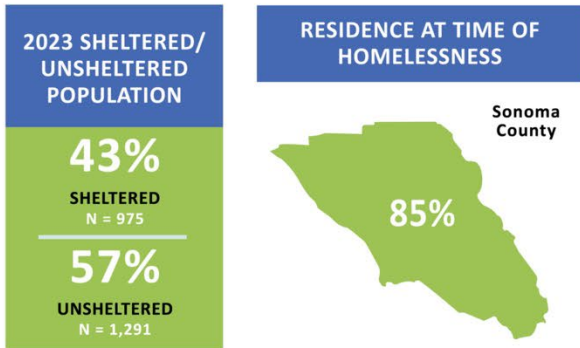
- Living in a supervised publicly- or privately-operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangement; or
- With a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping.

SONOMA COUNTY

2023 HOMELESS POINT-IN-TIME COUNT & SURVEY

Every two years during the last 10 days of January, communities across the country conduct comprehensive counts of the local homeless populations in order to measure the prevalence of homelessness in each local Continuum of Care.

The 2023 Sonoma County Point-in-Time Count was a community-wide effort conducted on January 27th, 2023. In the weeks following the street count, a survey was administered to 445 unsheltered and sheltered individuals experiencing homelessness in order to profile their experience and characteristics.



SEX TRADE INVOLVEMENT

17% traded sex for money or a place to stay

have a history of being trafficked **8%**

HISTORY OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

30% reported they had experienced domestic violence

PRIMARY EVENT OR CONDITION THAT LEAD TO HOMELESSNESS+

TOP 4 RESPONSES^Δ

19% LOST JOB **14%** EVICTION **13%** COST OF LIVING **12%** ARGUMENT WITH FAMILY/ FRIEND

AGE AT FIRST EPISODE OF HOMELESSNESS

 **14%** 0-17 **33%** 18-24 **43%** 25-49 **10%** 50+

OBSTACLES TO OBTAINING PERMANENT HOUSING+

TOP 4 RESPONSES^Δ

63% CAN'T AFFORD RENT **44%** NO JOB/ NOT ENOUGH INCOME **27%** NO MONEY FOR MOVING COSTS **22%** BAD CREDIT

DURATION OF CURRENT EPISODE OF HOMELESSNESS

 **4%** 30 DAYS OR LESS **27%** 1-11 MONTHS **69%** A YEAR OR MORE

SELF REPORTED HEALTH+

Current health conditions that may affect the housing stability or employment of those experiencing homelessness.



DISABLING CONDITIONS



A disabling condition is defined by HUD as a developmental disability, HIV/AIDS, or a long-term physical or mental impairment that impacts a person's ability to live independently but could be improved with stable housing.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES AND ASSISTANCE



67%

Of survey respondents reported receiving government benefits.

REASONS FOR NOT RECEIVING ANY GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE+ Top 6 Responses^Δ

38% DON'T WANT GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE **23%** NEVER APPLIED **22%** DON'T HAVE ID

18% DON'T THINK I'M ELIGIBLE **15%** NO PERMANENT ADDRESS **9%** DON'T KNOW WHERE TO GO

NON-GOVERNMENT SERVICES CURRENTLY ACCESSING+ Top 6 Responses^Δ

52% FREE MEALS **27%** EMERGENCY SHELTER **26%** HEALTH SERVICES

24% BUS PASSES **24%** SHELTER DAY SERVICES **17%** HYGIENE SERVICES

*SUBPOPULATION DEFINITIONS

CHRONICALLY HOMELESS

An individual with one or more disabling conditions or a family with a head of household with a disabling condition who:

- » Has been continuously homeless for one year or more and/or;
- » Has experienced four or more episodes of homelessness within the past three years.

VETERANS

Persons who have served on active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States. This does not include inactive military reserves or the National Guard unless the person was called up to active duty.

FAMILIES

A household with at least one adult member (persons 18 or older) and at least one child member (persons under 18).

UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH & TRANSITION-AGE YOUTH (TAY)

Children under the age of 18 and young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 years old (TAY) who are experiencing homelessness and living without a parent or legal guardian.

+ Multiple response question, results may not add up to 100%.
 Δ Only displaying top responses, all response data will be available in full report.
 Note: Some percentages have been rounded so total percentage will equal 100%.

The complete comprehensive report includes a more detailed profile of the characteristics of those experiencing homelessness in Monterey. It will be available summer 2023.
 Source: Applied Survey Research, 2023, Monterey County Homeless Census & Survey, Watsonville, CA.

POINT-IN-TIME CENSUS

The 2023 County of Sonoma Homeless Point-in-Time Census and Survey included a complete enumeration of all unsheltered and publicly- or privately-sheltered homeless persons. The general street count was conducted on January 27, 2023 from approximately 5:00 AM to 9:00 AM and covered all of Sonoma County. The shelter count was conducted on the previous evening and included all individuals staying in emergency shelters, transitional-housing facilities, and domestic violence shelters. The general street count and shelter count methodology were similar to those used in 2022 and previous years.

The methodology used for the 2023 Homeless Point-in-Time Census and Survey is commonly described as a “blitz and survey count” since it is conducted by a large team over a very short period of time. Outreach coordinators and volunteers traversed the county in order to identify persons experiencing homelessness. We then surveyed 445 individuals experiencing homelessness to gain an understanding about their experiences and characteristics. As this method was conducted in Sonoma County, the result was an observation-based count of individuals and families who appeared to be homeless.

The point-in-time occupancy of homeless shelters in Sonoma County was collected for the night of January 26, 2023. All shelter data were gathered either directly from Sonoma County’s Homeless Management Information System. All shelter occupants were listed on the HIC report that the Sonoma County CoC submits to HUD.

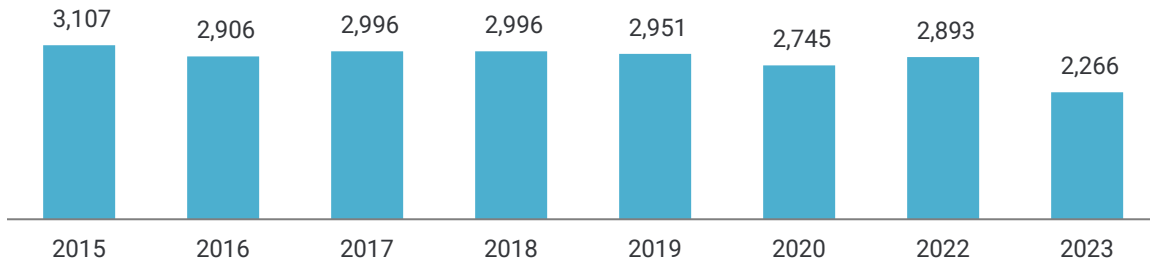
The count was followed by an in-person representative survey of persons currently experiencing homelessness. In Sonoma County, the results of which were used to profile and estimate the condition and characteristics of the local homeless population. Information collected from the survey was used to fulfill HUD reporting requirements and inform local service delivery and strategic planning efforts.

In a continuing effort to improve data on the extent of youth homelessness, Sonoma County also conducted a dedicated youth count similar to the youth counts that have been conducted since 2009. The dedicated youth count methodology was improved in 2017 to better ensure unaccompanied children and transition-age youth were not included in both the general street count and youth count. For more information regarding the dedicated youth count, de-duplication, and project methodology, please see *Appendix A: Methodology*.

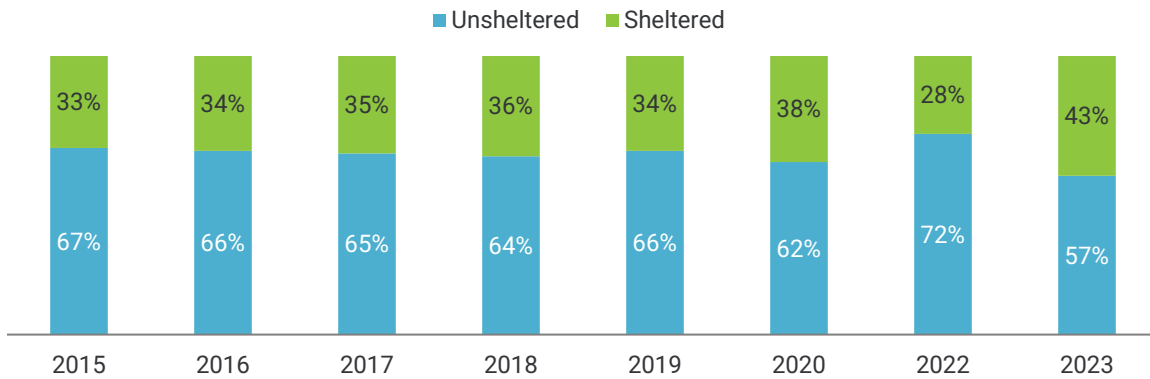
NUMBER AND CHARACTERISTICS OF HOMELESS PERSONS IN SONOMA COUNTY

There were 2,266 persons experiencing homelessness in the County of Sonoma in 2023, representing a decrease of 22% from 2022. Fifty-seven percent of persons experiencing homelessness were living in unsheltered conditions, a decrease from 72% from 2022.

Total Number of Homeless Persons



Total Homeless Census Population by Shelter Status

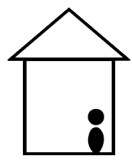


	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2022	2023	2022-23 % CHANGE
Sheltered		1,000	988	1,067	994	1,043	805	975	21%
Unsheltered		1,906	1,847	1,929	1,957	1,702	2,088	1,291	-38%
Total		2,906	2,835	2,996	2,951	2,745	2,893	2,266	-22%

Total Number of Homeless Persons Surveyed, by Location

Sheltered

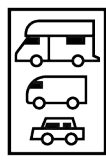
Unsheltered



11%
Shelter



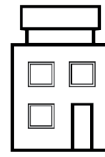
50%
Outdoors



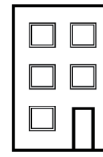
17%
Vehicles



15%
Tents



6%
Motels/
Hotels



1%
Abandoned
Buildings

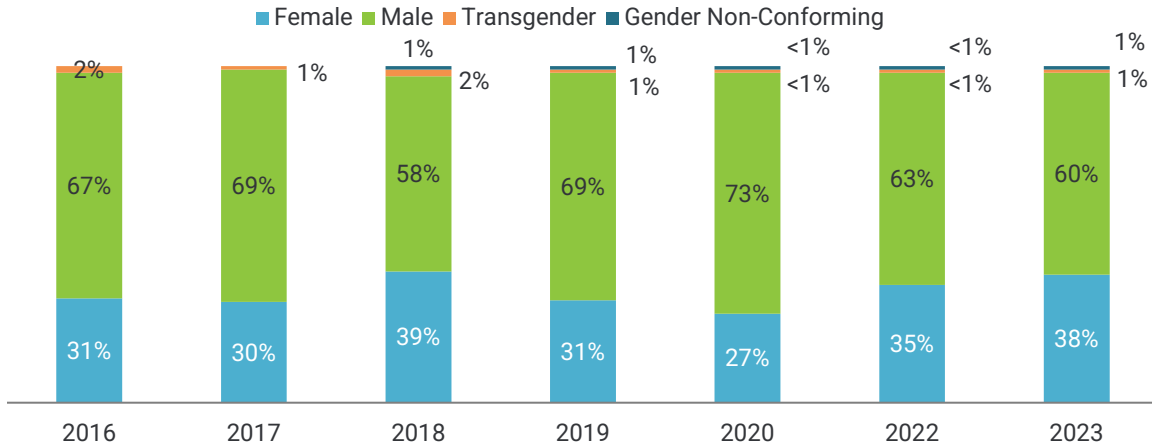
Total Number of Homeless Persons, by Jurisdiction and Shelter Status

JURISDICTION	UNSHELTERED			SHELTERED			TOTAL		
	2020	2022	2023	2020	2022	2023	2020	2022	2023
North County	205	155	103	4	40	15	209	195	118
Cloverdale	29	23	9	4	0	0	33	23	9
Healdsburg	69	97	18	0	0	15	69	97	33
Town of Windsor	38	8	26	0	40	0	38	48	26
Unincorporated	69	27	50	0	0	0	69	27	50
South County	427	679	337	170	89	163	597	768	500
Cotati	37	79	9	0	6	6	37	85	15
Petaluma	133	214	157	163	79	88	296	293	245
Rohnert Park	241	365	141	7	4	69	248	369	210
Unincorporated	16	21	30	0	0	0	16	21	30
West County	290	62	143	37	65	70	327	127	213
Sebastopol	129	40	47	0	38	40	129	78	87
Unincorporated	161	22	96	37	27	30	198	49	126
Sonoma Valley	54	93	109	34	29	20	88	122	129
Sonoma	46	66	40	15	15	0	61	81	40
Unincorporated	8	27	69	19	14	20	27	41	89
Santa Rosa	726	1,099	599	798	582	695	1,524	1,681	1,294
Santa Rosa	719	1,089	465	742	569	695	1,461	1,658	1,160
Unincorporated	7	10	134	56	13	0	63	23	134
Undisclosed Location	0	0	0	0	0	12	0	0	12
Total	1,702	2,088	1,291	1,033	805	975	2,745	2,893	2,266

Note: Confidential beds have been included in their respective jurisdiction(s) since 2018.

Total Number of Homeless Persons, by Gender

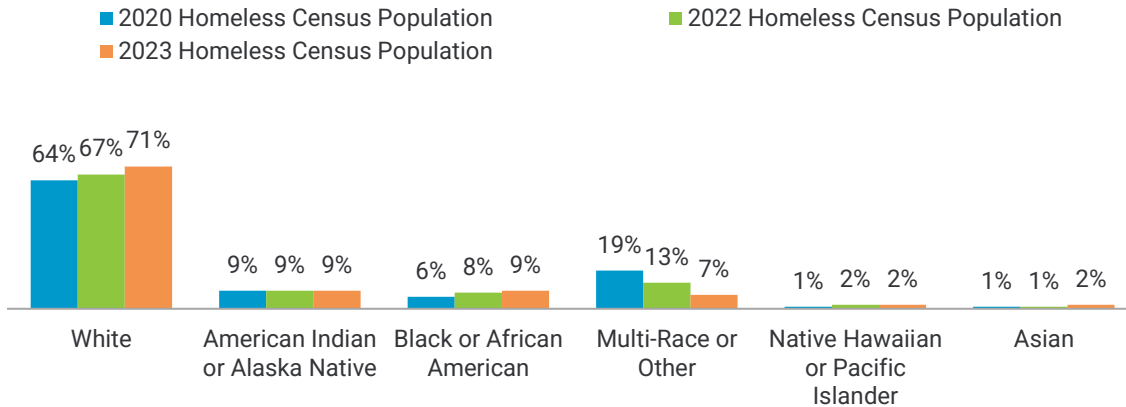
Men made up three-fifths (60%) of the persons identified during the PIT count, a decrease from 63% in 2022. Women were 38% of the persons identified, while transgender and gender non-conforming respondents were 1% each.



2016 N = 2,906; 2017 N = 2,835; 2018 N = 2,996; 2019 N = 2,951; 2020 N = 2,638; 2022 N = 2,893; 2023 N = 2,266

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding. Transgender data were not collected prior to 2016 and Gender Non-Conforming data were not collected prior to 2018.

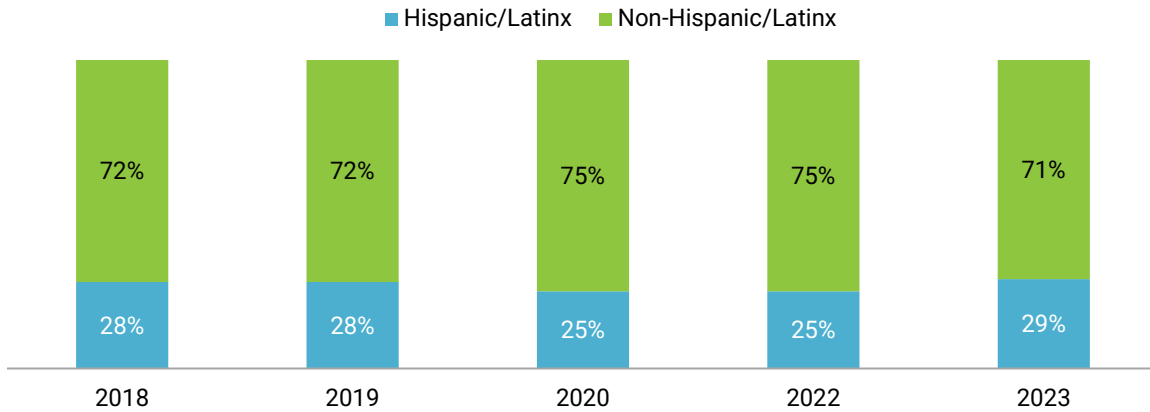
Total Number of Homeless Persons, By Race



2020 N = 2,638; 2022 N = 2,893; 2023 N = 2,266

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Total Number of Homeless Persons, by Ethnicity



2018 N = 2,996; 2019 N = 2,951; 2020 N = 2,638; 2022 N = 2,893; 2023 N = 2,266

Notes: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

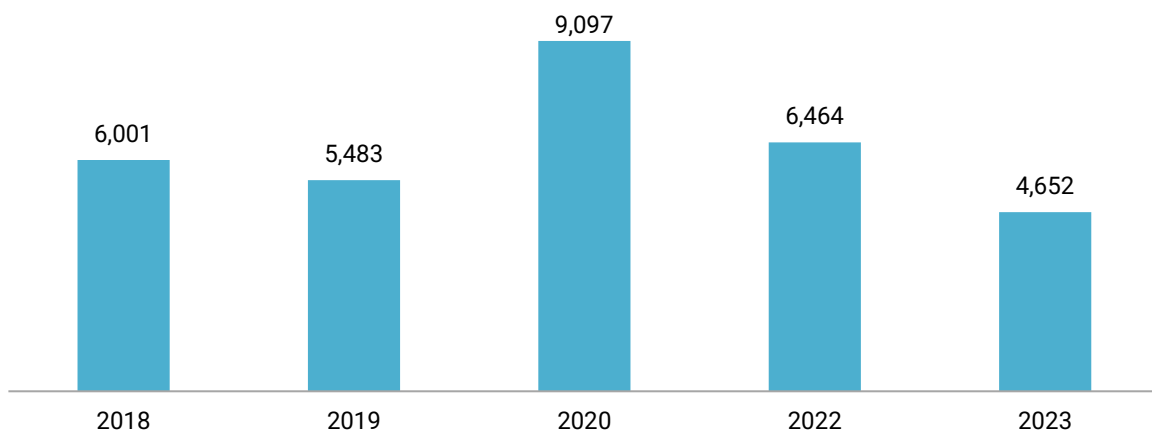
ANNUALIZATION

By definition, the Point-in-Time Count only provides a snapshot of homelessness during a single point in time and therefore may not adequately reflect the number of unique persons experiencing homelessness throughout the year. Consequently, it does not reflect the number of people who are homeless at other times or the total number who access the homeless support system throughout the year.

To address this shortcoming, an annual estimation formula can be used to profile the number of persons who may have experienced homelessness in Sonoma County over the course of a year. While this estimate is valuable and can inform the complexity of enumerating those persons experiencing homelessness, the calculation can also be volatile due to survey sampling and, in particular, the impact of certain variables such as the prevalence of short-term homelessness, specifically when there are many respondents whose homeless experience is seven days or less.

With these caveats laid out, the 2023 Sonoma County annual estimate is 4,652 unique homeless experiences over a year, a large decrease (28%) from 2022, though similar to the overall percentage decrease.

Annualization



HOMELESS SURVEY FINDINGS

This section provides an overview of the findings generated from the *survey* component of the 2023 Sonoma County Homeless Point-in-Time Census and Survey. Surveys were administered to a randomized sample of homeless individuals between January 27 and mid-March, 2023.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Sonoma County, Respondents were asked basic demographic questions including age, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity.

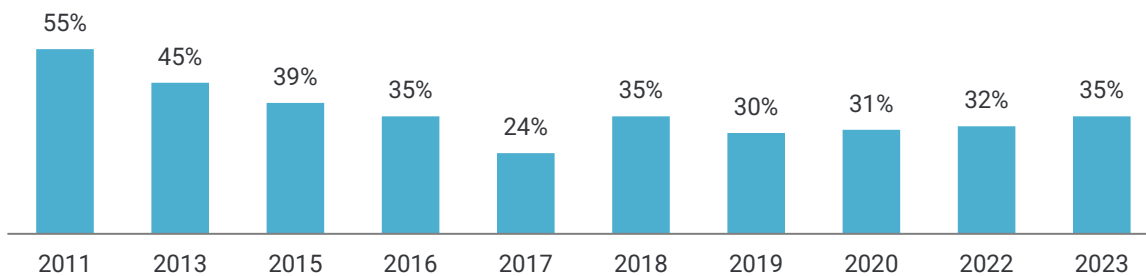
Based on a Point-in-Time Count (PIT) of 2,266 homeless persons, with a randomized survey sampling process, these 445 valid surveys would represent a confidence interval of +/- 4.2% with a 95% confidence level when generalizing the results of the survey to the entire estimated population of homeless individuals in Sonoma County. In other words, if the survey were conducted again, we can be 95% certain that the results would be within 4.2 percentage points of the current results.

In order to respect respondent privacy and to ensure the safety and comfort of those who participated, respondents were not required to complete all survey questions though they were asked to be generally responsive to all questions. Missing values were intentionally omitted from the survey results. Therefore, the total number of respondents for each question will not always equal the total number of surveys conducted. For more information regarding the survey methodology, please see *Appendix A: Methodology*.

DURATION AND RECURENCE OF HOMELESSNESS

Unstable living conditions, poverty, housing scarcity, and many other issues often lead to individuals falling in and out of homelessness. For many, the experience of homelessness is part of a long and recurring history of housing instability.

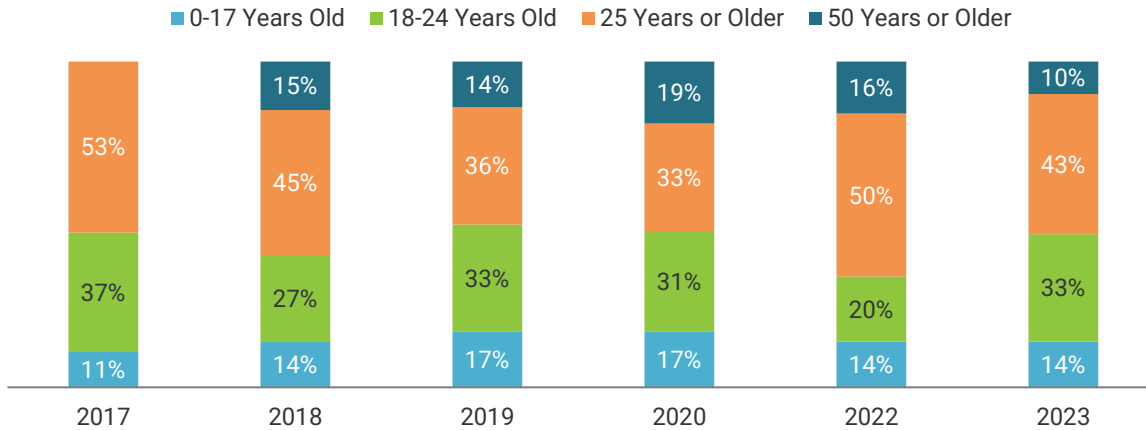
First Time Experiencing Homelessness (Respondents Answering “Yes”)



2011 N = 617; 2013 N = 533; 2015 N = 609; 2016 N = 605; 2017 N = 678; 2018 N = 519; 2019 N = 498; 2020 N = 444; 2022 N = 385; 2023 N = 442

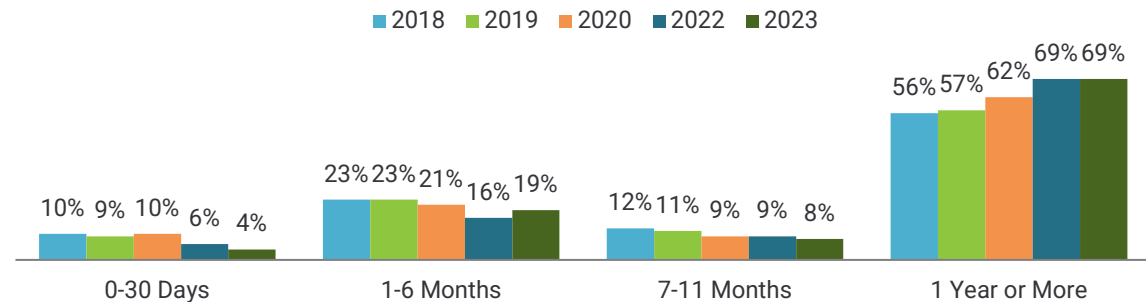
Age at First Experience of Homelessness

In an effort to better understand the experiences and age distribution of those experiencing homelessness, respondents were asked how old they were the first time they experienced homelessness. Since 2018, there is an emerging trend of those experiencing homelessness for the first time at age 50 or older.



2017 N = 675; 2018 N = 513; 2019 N = 511; 2020 N = 435; 2022 N = 413; 2023 N = 440

Length of Current Episode of Homelessness

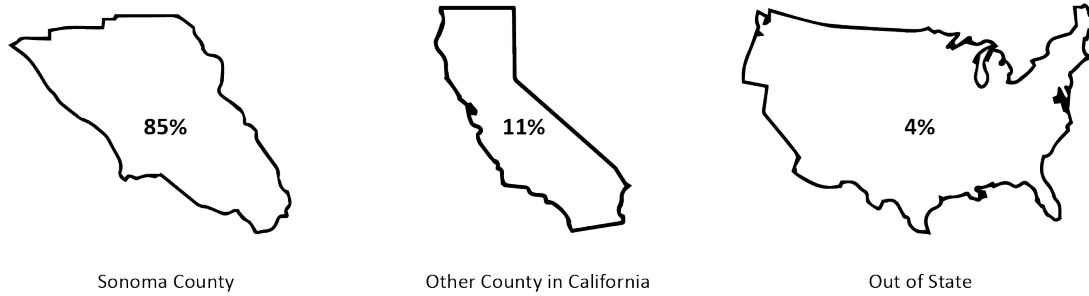


2018 N = 519; 2019 N = 516; 2020 N = 444; 2022 N = 420; 2023 N = 441

LIVING ACCOMMODATIONS

Where individuals lived prior to experiencing homelessness and where they have lived since impacts the way they seek services, as well as their ability to access support from friends or family. Previous circumstances can also point to gaps in the system of care and to opportunities for systemic improvement and homelessness prevention. Survey respondents reported many different living accommodations prior to experiencing homelessness, although most lived in or around Sonoma County with friends, family, or on their own or with a partner in a home or apartment.

Place of Residence at Time of Housing Loss

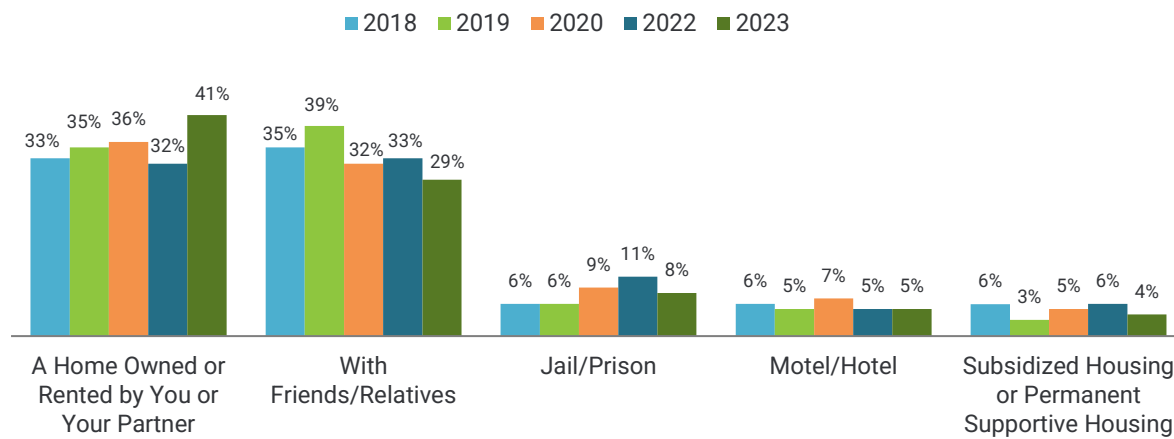


2023 N = 434

PRIOR LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Similar to our respondents' previous place of residence, the type of living arrangements maintained by individuals before experiencing homelessness can influence knowledge of and access to various types of homeless prevention services available to help individuals maintain their housing.

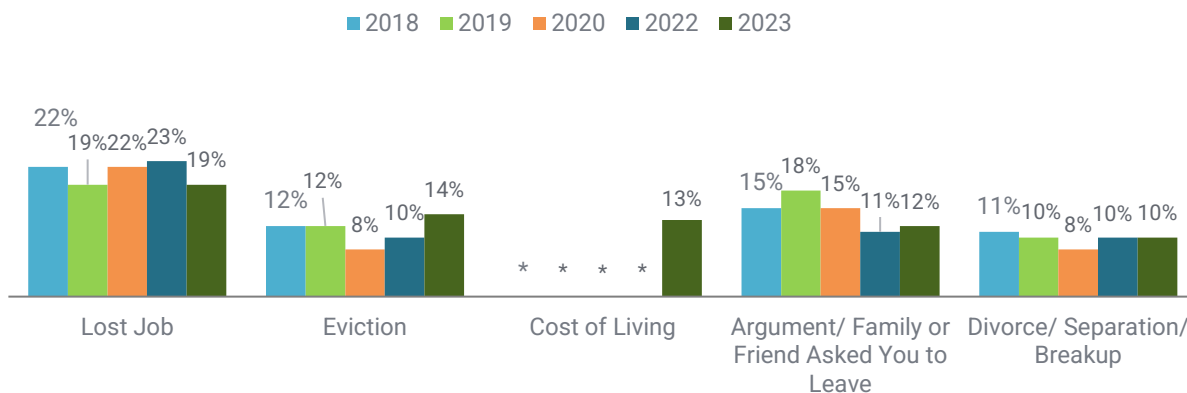
Living Arrangements Immediately Prior to Becoming Homeless This Time (2023 Top 5)



2018 N = 506; 2019 N = 501; 2020 N = 431; 2022 N = 396; 2023 N = 426

Primary Cause of Homelessness

The primary cause of a person or family’s inability to obtain or retain housing is often difficult to pinpoint, as it is often the result of multiple, inter-related causes. An inability to secure adequate housing can also lead to or result in an inability to address other basic needs, such as healthcare and adequate nutrition. In our survey question, respondents were asked to list their self-assessed *primary* cause of the experience of homelessness.



* Note: Cost of living was added as a response in 2023

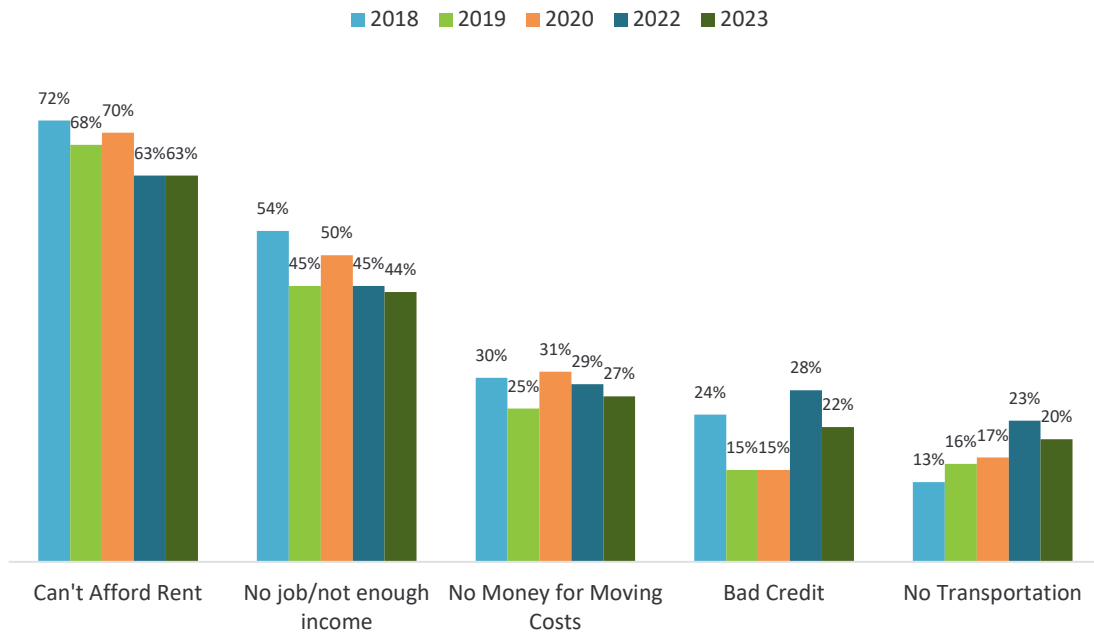
2023 PRIMARY CAUSE OF HOMELESSNESS			
Lost Job	19%	Family/Domestic Violence	6%
Eviction	14%	Illness/Medical Problem	5%
Cost of Living	13%	Probation/Parole Restrictions	2%
Argument with Family or Friend	12%	Hospitalization/Treatment	2%
Divorce/Separation/Break Up	10%	Foreclosure	2%
Alcohol or Drug Use	9%	Aging Out of Foster Care	2%
Mental Health Issues	8%	Fire	2%
Landlord Raised Rent	7%	Other	9%
Incarceration	6%	Don't Know/Decline to State	4%

2018 N = 506 respondents offering 660 responses; 2019 N = 511 respondents offering 635 responses; 2020 N = 438 respondents offering 542 responses; 2022 N = 397 respondents offering 475 responses; 2023 N = 433 respondents offering 576 responses

OBSTACLES TO OBTAINING PERMANENT HOUSING

When asked about the obstacles to permanent housing, the most common response amongst survey respondents was an inability to afford rent, with 63% choosing that option. Lack of job or income was the second most common (44%), followed by difficulties affording moving costs (27%).

Obstacles to Obtaining Permanent Housing (Top 5)

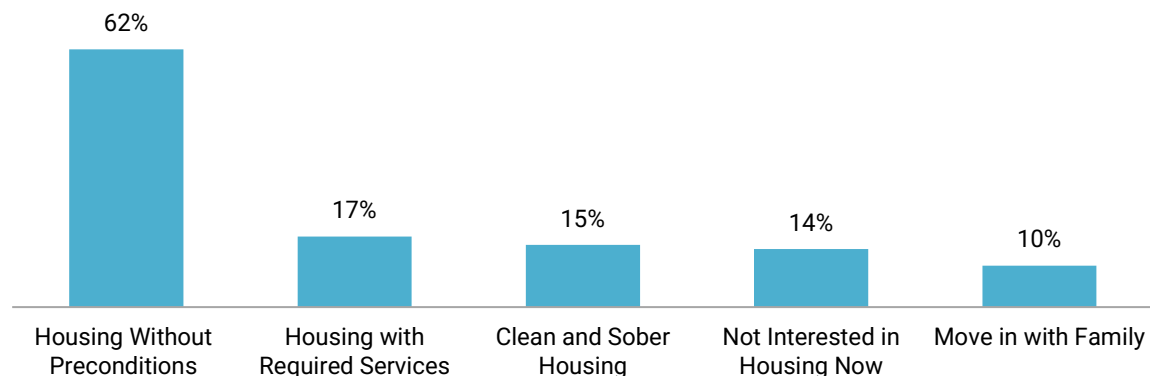


2018 N = 503 respondents giving 1,489 responses; 2019 N = 513 respondents giving 1,331 responses; 2020 N = 436 respondents giving 1,130 responses; 2022 N = respondents 404 giving 1,145 responses; 2023 N = 428 respondents offering 1,152 responses

Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.

Housing Type Desired

Survey respondents most desired housing without any sort of preconditions, were it to be offered to them.



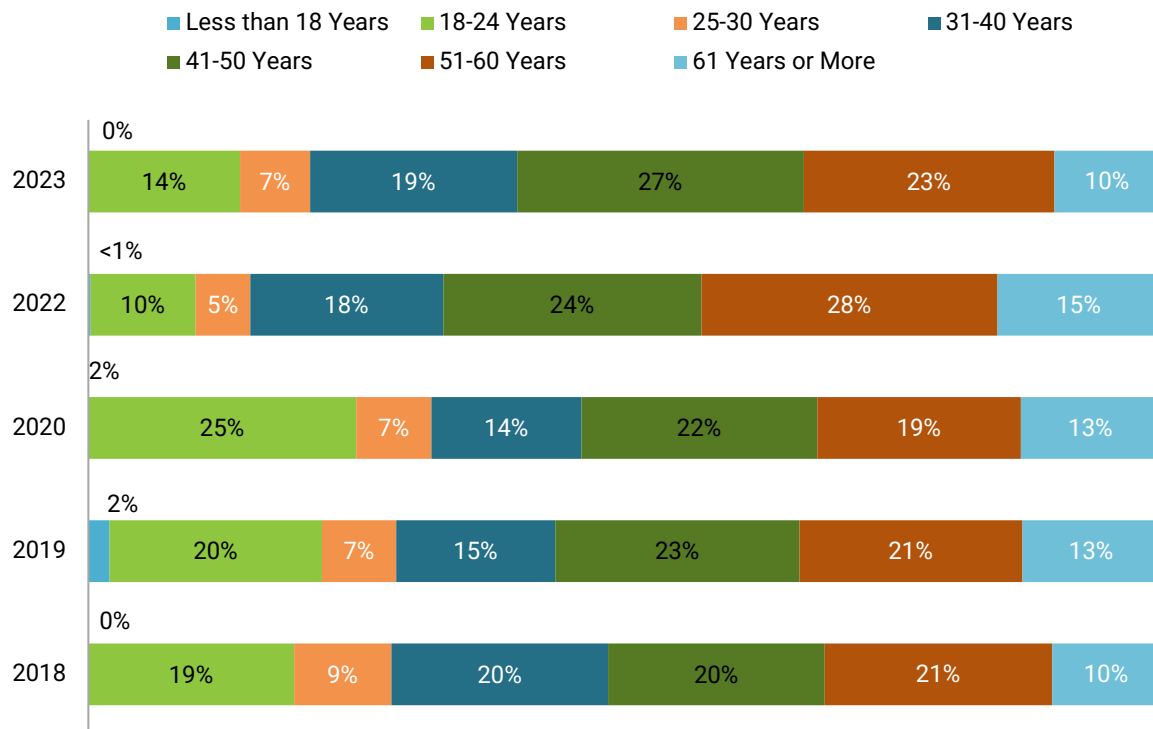
2023 N = 416 respondents offering 546 responses

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

In 2023, 61% of survey participants identified as male, 36% identified as female, 2% identified as transgender, and 1% did not identify as male, female or transgender. Among the female respondents, 4% indicated that they were currently pregnant.

Age

Three-fifths of survey respondents were over the age of 41. The age group with the most respondents was 41-50 years old.

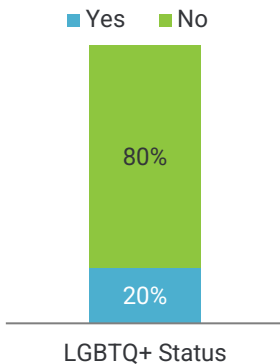


2018 N = 519, 2019 N = 520, 2020 N = 444; 2022 N = 428; 2023 N = 445

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

LGBTQ+ Status

Persons identifying as LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, gender non-conforming, transgender, or queer) are overrepresented in the population experiencing homelessness when compared to the general population: as of 2018, 5.6% of the US population identified as LGBT.¹ According to the 2023 Sonoma Homeless Survey, twenty percent (20%) of survey respondents identified as LGBTQ in 2023, down from 23% in 2022.



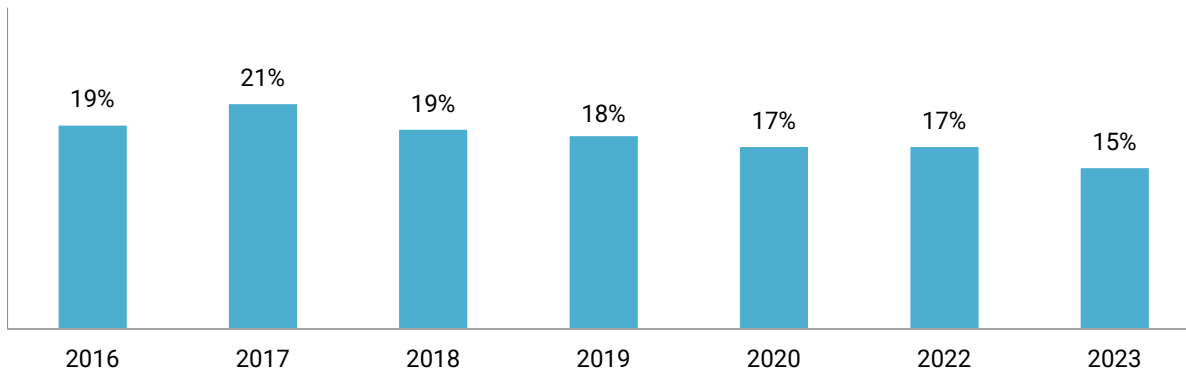
Breakout of Respondents Answering Yes	%	n
Gay	16%	14
Lesbian	12%	11
Queer	13%	12
Bisexual	44%	39
Other	15%	13

LGBTQ 2023 N = 46

Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.

Foster Care

In California, it is estimated that 24% of foster youth experience homelessness after exiting care.² In 2023, 15% of survey respondents reported a history of foster care, similar to previous years.



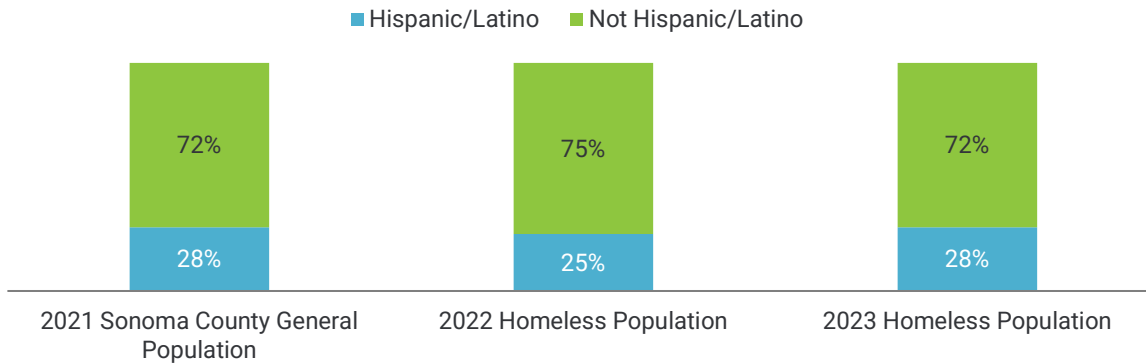
2016 N = 563; 2017 N = 645; 2018 N = 510; 2019 N = 504; 2020 N = 423; 2022 N = 408; 2023 N = 425

¹ Jones, J. (2021). LGBT Identification Rises to 5.6% in Latest U.S. Estimate. Gallup. Retrieved 2023 from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/329708/lgbt-identification-rises-latest-estimate.aspx>

² Broslawski, A. (2021). Foster Youth and Homelessness. Homeless Policy Research Institute. Retrieved 2023 from https://socialinnovation.usc.edu/homeless_research/foster-youth-and-homelessness/

Race/Ethnicity

Twenty-eight percent (28%) of survey respondents identified as having Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, similar to to 2022 and identical to the overall county population.

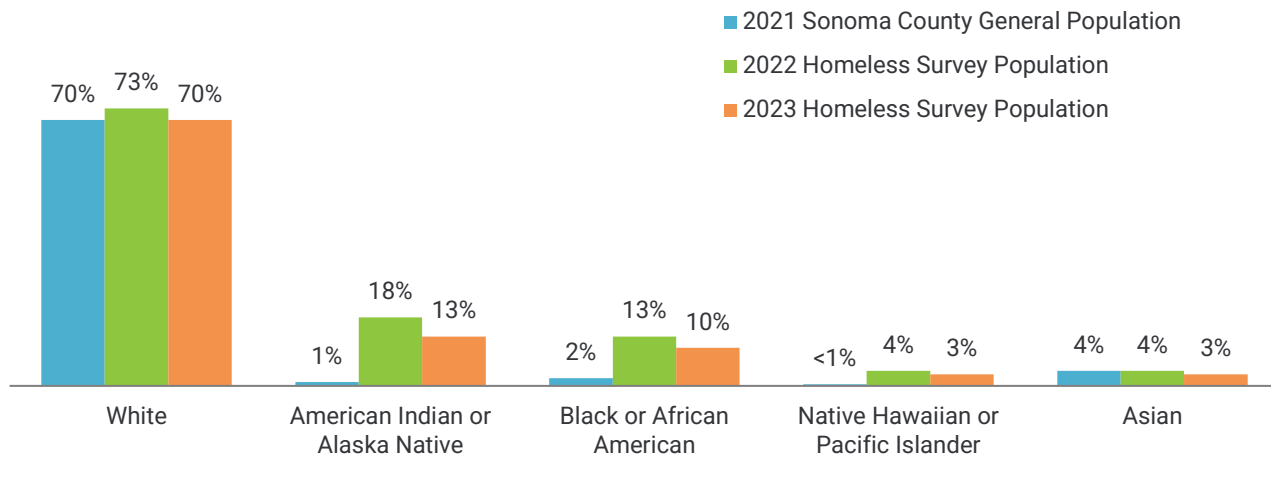


2022 N = 388; 2023 N = 401

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2017-2021). Sonoma County, California, DP05 Demographic and housing characteristics [Data].

2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/>

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.



2022 N = 412; 2023 N = 421

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2017-2021). Sonoma County, California, DP05 Demographic and housing characteristics [Data]. 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/>

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

SERVICES AND ASSISTANCE

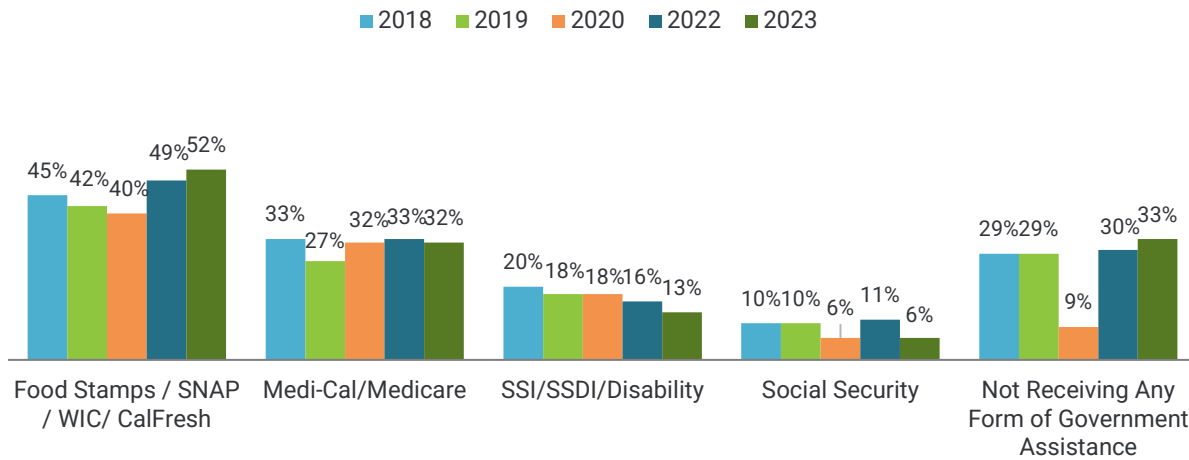
Sonoma County provides services and assistance to those currently experiencing homelessness through federal and local programs. However, many individuals and families do not apply for services, as many are not interested in receiving assistance, or believe that they are ineligible for assistance.

There are various forms of government assistance available to individuals experiencing homelessness, though usage of these supports is impacted by knowledge of services available, understanding of eligibility requirements, and perceived stigma of receiving governmental assistance, amongst others.

Over half (52%) of survey respondents were receiving food stamps, SNAP, WIC, and/or CalFresh assistance, an increase from 49% in 2022. Thirty-three percent of respondents reported not receiving any form of governmental assistance, an increase from 30% in 2022, and similar to past years.

When asked why they weren't receiving any governmental assistance, 38% of respondents replied that they were not interested in doing so, which represents an increase from 24% in 2022.

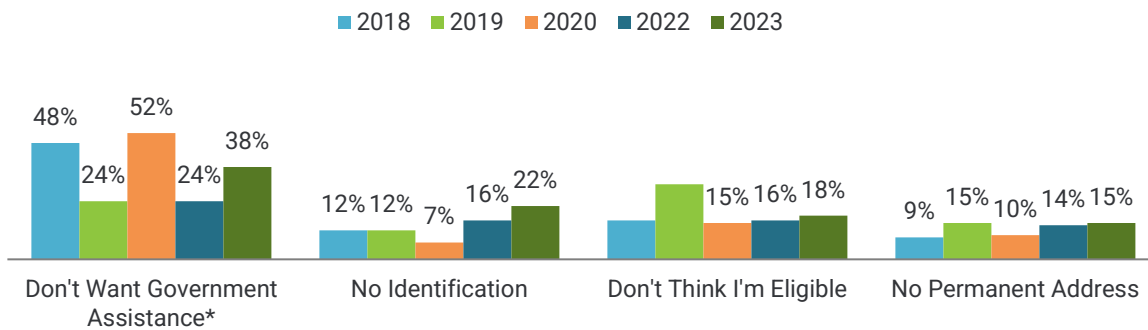
Government Assistance Received



2018 N = 580 respondents offering 855 responses; 2019 N = 315 respondents offering 586 responses; 2020 N = 419 respondents offering 600 responses; 2022 N = 397 respondents offering 631 responses; 2023 N = 445 respondents offering 686 responses

Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.

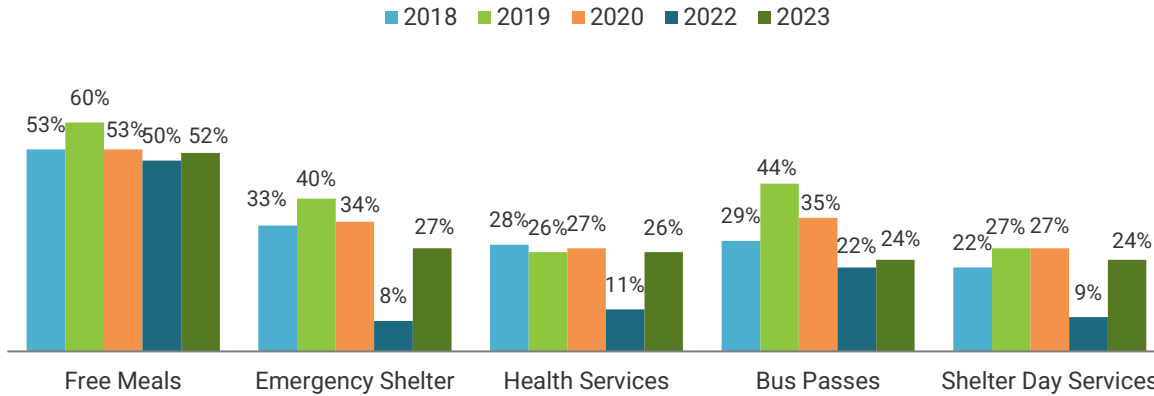
Reasons for Not Receiving Government Assistance



2018 N = 139 respondents offering 184 responses; 2019 N = 292 respondents offering 421 responses; 2020 N = 138 respondents offering 162 responses; 2022 N = 276 respondents offering 422 responses; 2023 N = 128 respondents offering 193 responses

Services and Programs

In addition to government assistance, there are numerous community-based services and programs made available to individuals experiencing homelessness. These services range from day shelters and meal programs to job training and healthcare.



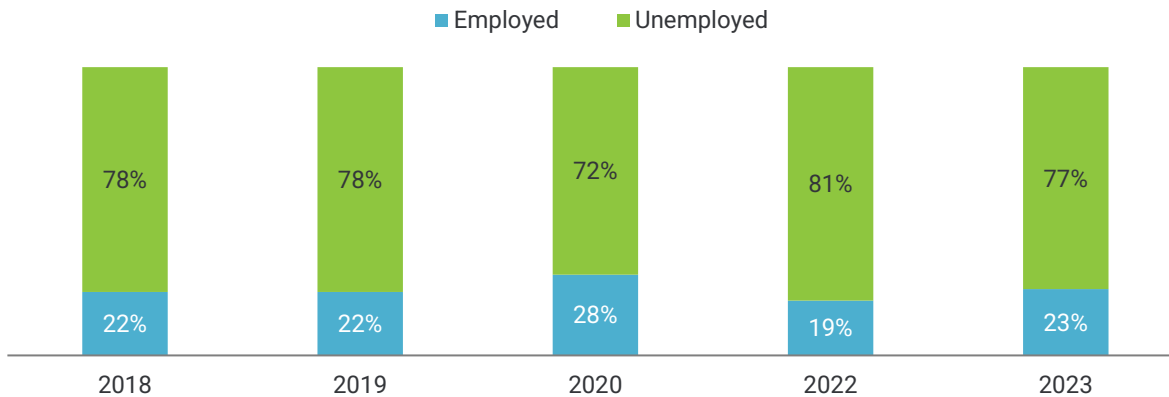
2018 N = 491 respondents offering 1,212 responses; 2019 N = 495 respondents offering 1,328 responses; 2020 N = 429 respondents offering 1,160 responses; 2022 N = 381 respondents offering 613 responses; 2023 N = 411 respondents offering 956 responses

Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.

Employment and Income

While over three-quarters (77%) of survey respondents reported being unemployed, a small percentage reported part-time (4%) or full-time work (3%) and many were receiving an income, either public or private. Despite this income, data suggest that employment and income were not enough to meet basic needs.

Nearly one-quarter (23%) of survey respondents reported they were at least somewhat employed. This includes seasonal, part-time, and full-time employment.



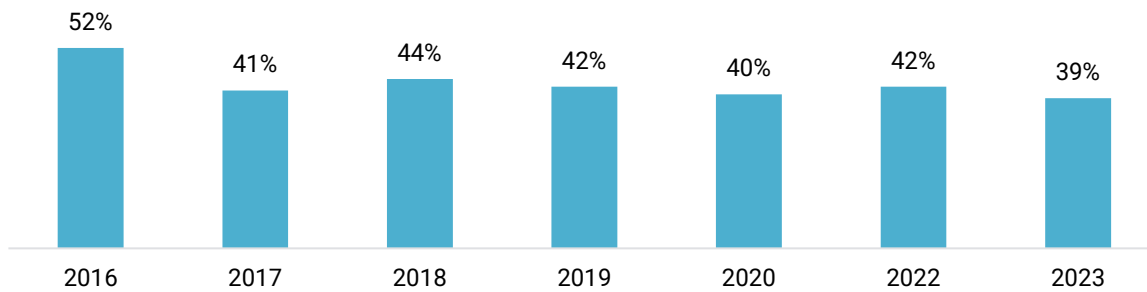
2018 Employment Status N = 500; 2019 Employment Status N = 500; 2020 Employment Status N = 428; 2022 Employment status N = 386; 2023 Employment status N = 385

HEALTH

There are two main focuses when discussing the health of survey respondents. All survey respondents are asked if they are experiencing a range of health conditions. Those who indicate they are experiencing at least one of those conditions are asked follow-up questions to determine if they meet the level of HUD-disabling conditions, health conditions that prevent them from maintaining housing and/or a job.

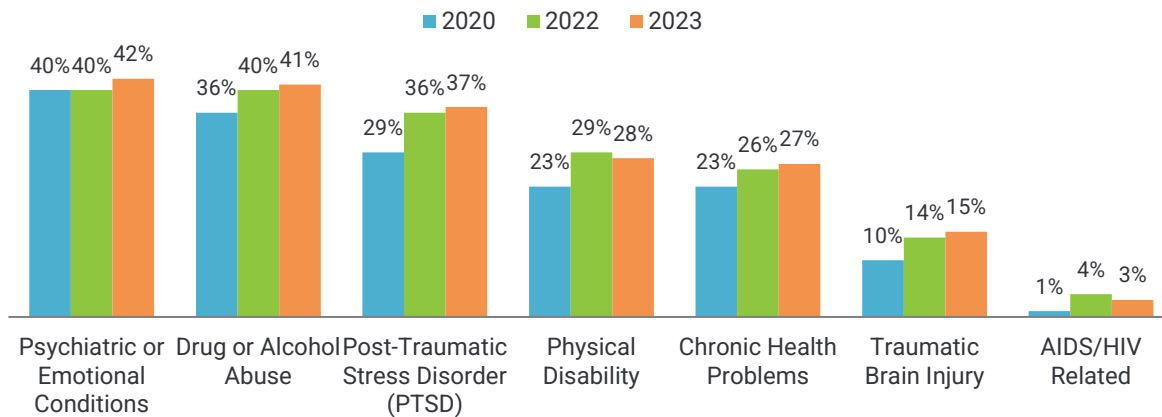
Similar to previous years, 39% of survey respondents reported suffering from at least one HUD-disabling condition. The two most common health conditions experienced by respondents were psychiatric problems (42%) and drug or alcohol abuse (41%), followed by PTSD (37%).

HUD Disabling Conditions



2016 N = 605; 2017 N = 687; 2018 N = 515; 2019 N = 520; 2020 N = 478; 2022 N = 451; 2023 N = 445

Health Conditions



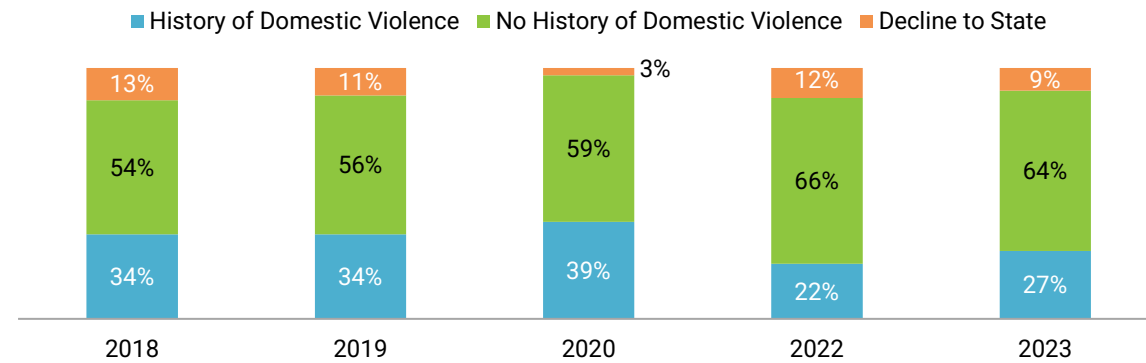
2020 N = 426; 2022 N = 387; 2023 N = 412

Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.

Domestic/Partner Violence or Abuse

Histories of domestic violence and partner abuse are prevalent among individuals experiencing homelessness and is often the primary cause of homelessness for many. Survivors often lack the financial resources required for housing.

When asked if they had experienced domestic violence in their past, 27% of respondents reported having such a past. This represents an increase from 2022, when it was 22%. Eight percent of respondents reported that they were currently experiencing domestic violence.

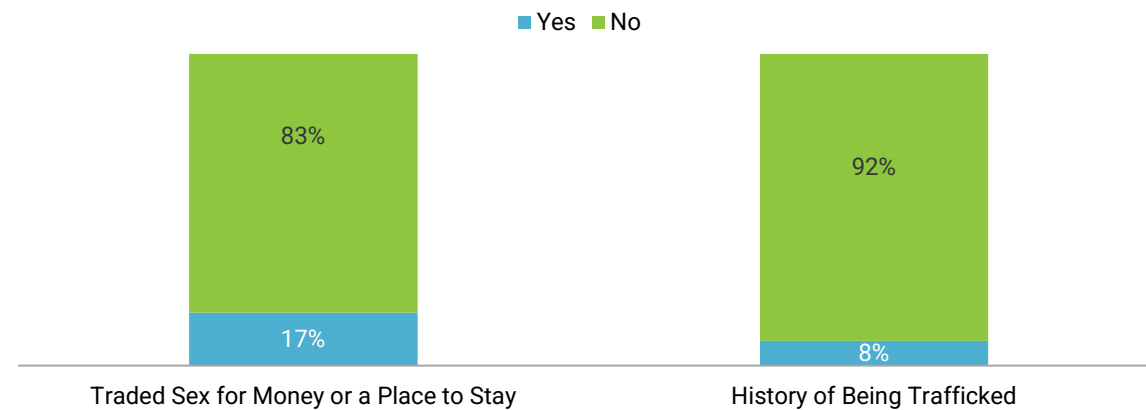


2018 N = 494; 2019 N = 499; 2020 N = 421; 2022 N = 403; 2023 N = 417

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Sex Trade Involvement

Due to their vulnerable circumstances and precarious access to basic needs, many of those experiencing homelessness have a history of being involved in the sex trade. Seventeen percent of survey respondents reported trading sex for money or a place to stay, in the past. And 8% reported being trafficked in the past.



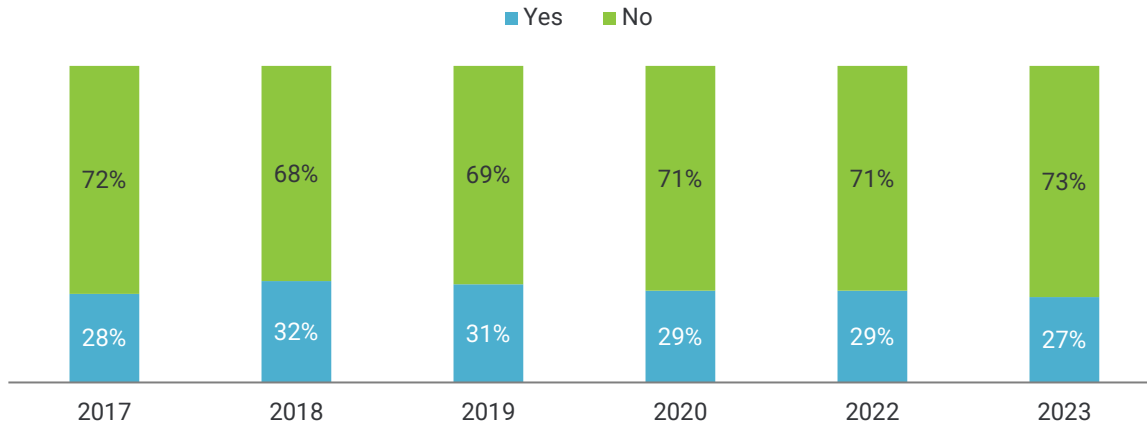
2023 Trading Sex for Money or a Place to Stay N = 414, History of Being Trafficked N = 400

CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Individuals without stable housing are at greater risk of criminal justice system involvement, particularly those with mental health issues, veterans, and youth.

Similar to previous years, 27% of respondents reported spending a night or jail in the 12 months previous to taking the survey. Just under a quarter (21%) of respondents reported being on parole or probation at the time of the survey.

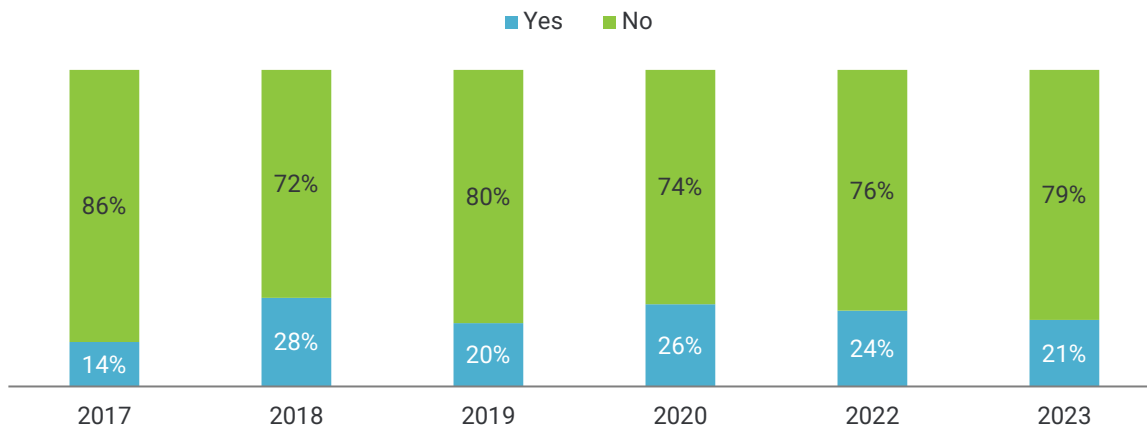
Spent a Night in Jail or Prison in the Last 12 Months



2017 N = 744; 2018 N = 500; 2019 N = 505; 2020 N = 427; 2022 N = 391; 2023 N = 409

Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100%

Currently on Probation or Parole



2017 N = 737; 2018 N = 488; 2019 N = 489; 2020 N = 427; 2022 N = 391; 2023 N = 420

Note: Decline To State was given as an answer option solely in 2013

HUD DEFINED SUBPOPULATIONS

In order to adequately address the diversity within the population experiencing homelessness, the federal government identifies four subpopulations with particular challenges or needs, including:

- Chronic homelessness among people with disabilities;
- Veterans;
- Families with children; and
- Unaccompanied children (<18) and transition-age (18-24) youth.

Consequently, these subpopulations represent important reportable indicators for measuring local progress toward ending homelessness.

The following sections examine each of these four subpopulations, identifying the number and characteristics of individuals included in the 2023 Sonoma County Homeless Point-in-Time Census and Survey.

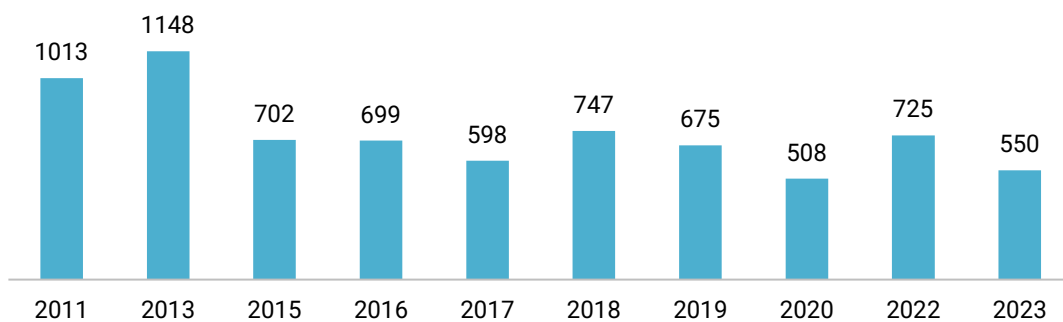
CHRONICALLY HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development defines a chronically homeless individual as someone who has experienced homelessness for a year or longer—or who has experienced at least four episodes of homelessness totaling 12 months in the last three years—and also has a disabling condition that prevents them from maintaining work or housing. This definition applies to individuals as well as heads of household who meet the definition.

The chronically homeless population represents one of the most vulnerable populations on the street; the mortality rate for those experiencing homelessness in high income countries is three-to-eleven times higher than that of the general population.³

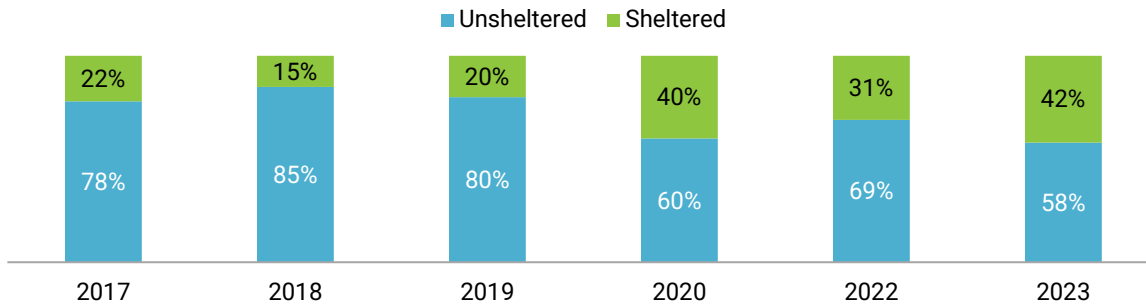
After increasing from 2020 to 2022, the chronically homeless population dropped 24% to 550 in 2023. Just over two-fifths (42%) of the chronically homeless population was sheltered. Sixty-two percent of the population was male, while 34% was female.

Total Chronically Homeless Census Population



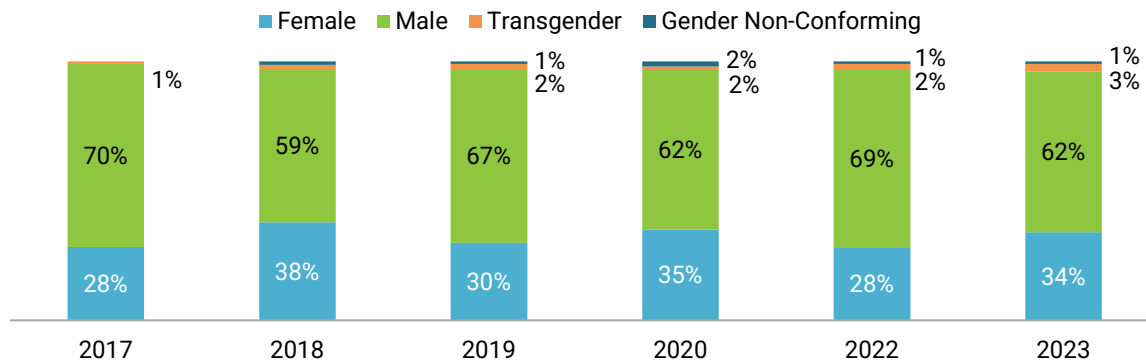
³ Effects of Housing First approaches on health and well-being of adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness: systematic review and meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials. (2019). *J Epidemiol Community Health*. Retrieved 2023 from [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclcfndmkaj/https://jech.bmj.com/content/jech/73/5/379.full.pdf](https://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclcfndmkaj/https://jech.bmj.com/content/jech/73/5/379.full.pdf)

Chronically Homeless Census Population by Shelter Status



	2017	2018	2019	2020	2022	2023	2022-23 % Change
Sheltered	134	115	138	174	224	231	3%
Unsheltered	464	632	537	334	501	319	-36%
Total	598	747	675	508	725	550	-24%

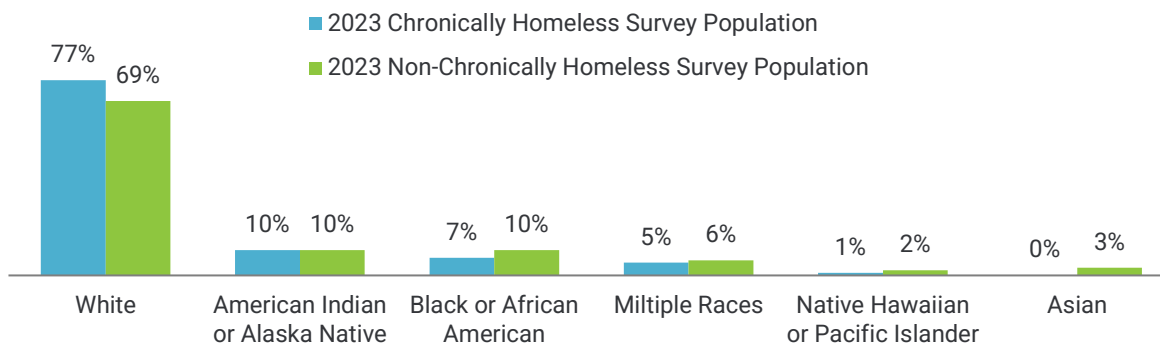
Chronically Homeless Census Population by Gender



2017 Chronically Homeless Population N = 598; 2018 N = 747; 2019 Chronically Homeless Population N = 675; 2020 Chronically Homeless Population N = 562; 2022 Chronically Homeless Population N = 725; 2023 Chronically Homeless Population N = 550

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding. Gender Non-Conforming category was added in 2018.

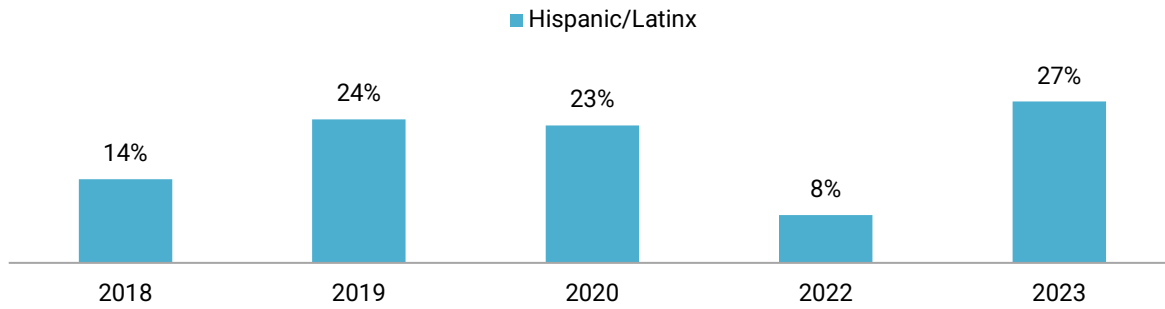
Chronically Homeless Population by Race



2023 Chronically Homeless Survey Population N = 99; 2023 Non-Chronically Homeless Survey Population N = 288

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

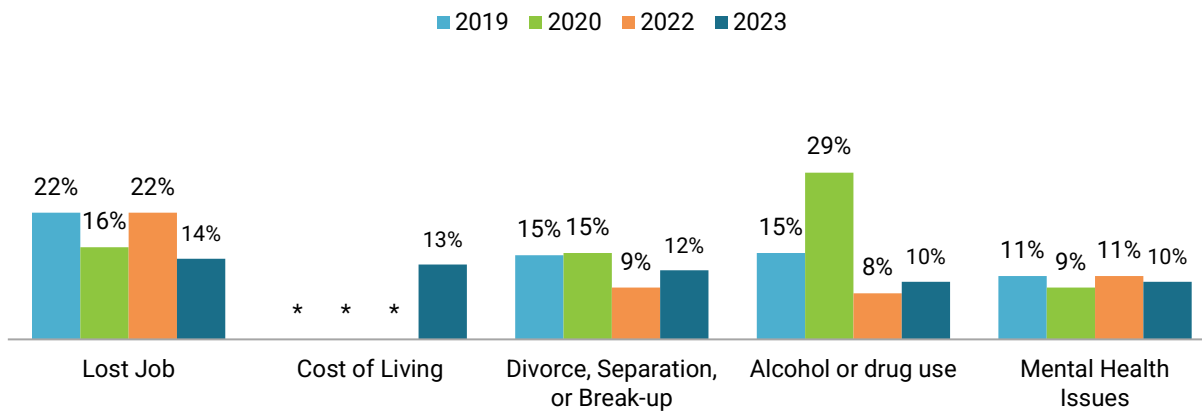
Chronically Homeless Population by Ethnicity



Chronically Homeless Survey Population N = 153; 2019 Chronically Homeless Survey Population N = 123; 2020 Chronically Homeless Survey Population N = 562; 2022 Chronically Homeless Survey Population N = 725; 2023 Chronically Homeless Survey Population N = 103

Primary Cause of Homelessness Among Those Experiencing Chronic Homeless

The most common cause of homelessness amongst those experiencing chronic homelessness was the loss of a job (14%), followed by cost of living (13%).



2019 N = 123; 2020 N = 80; 2022 N = 100; 2023 N = 108

Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.

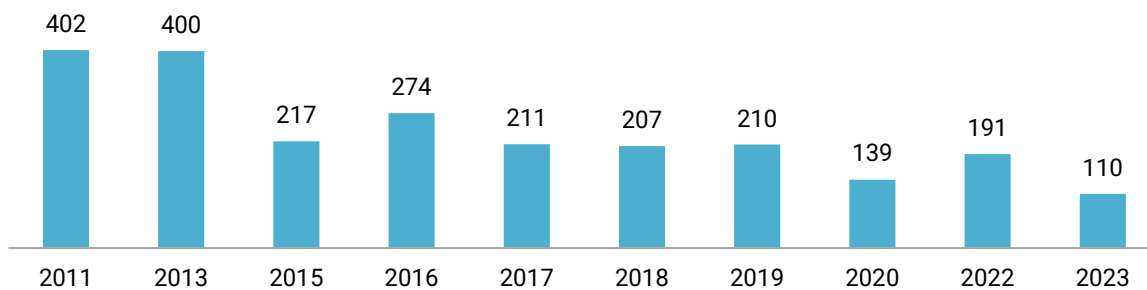
* Note: Cost of living was added as a response in 2023

HOMELESS VETERANS

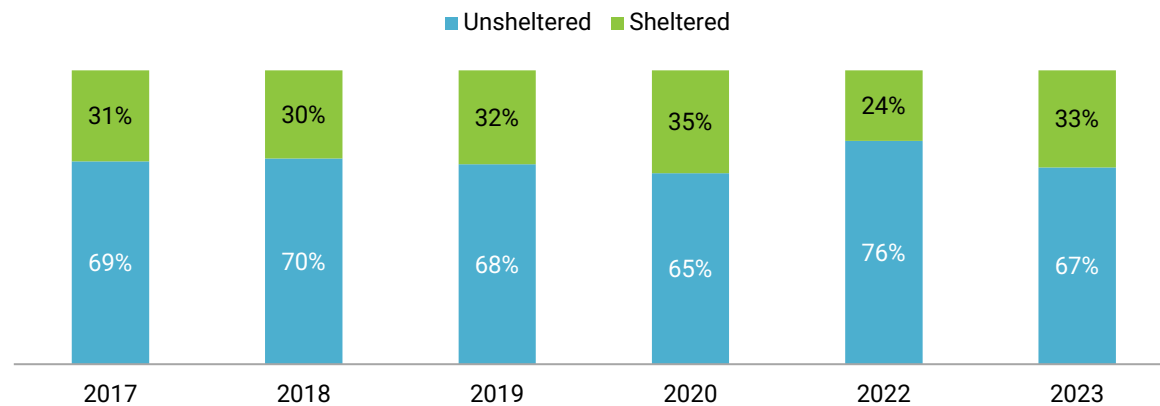
Many U.S. veterans experience conditions that place them at increased risk for homelessness. Veterans experience higher rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), sexual assault, and substance abuse. Veterans experiencing homelessness are more likely to live on the street than in shelters, and often remain on the street for extended periods of time.

After an increase to 191 in 2022, the number of veteran experiencing homelessness in Sonoma County dropped to 110 in 2023, the lowest it's been in the last 10+ years. Sixty-seven percent of veterans were unsheltered, a decrease from 76% in 2022. Fifty-five percent of veteran respondents identified as White, while 32% identified as Hispanic/Latino.

Homeless Veteran Census Population

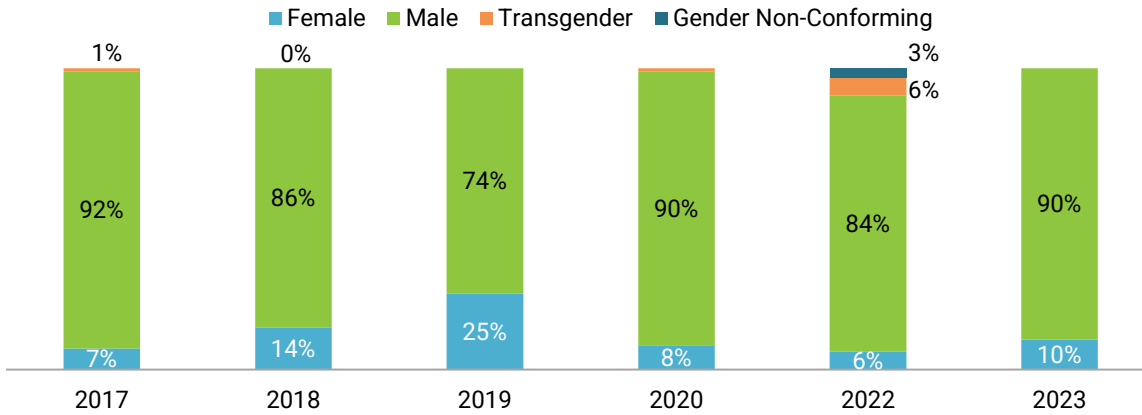


Homeless Veteran Census Population by Shelter Status



	2017	2018	2019	2020	2022	2023	2022-23 % Change
Sheltered	66	63	68	47	45	36	-20%
Unsheltered	145	144	142	92	146	74	-49%
Total	211	207	210	139	191	110	-42%

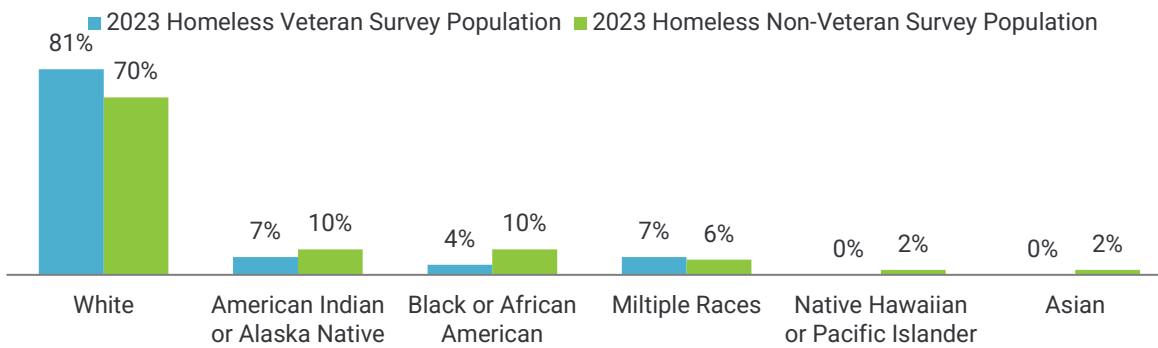
Homeless Veteran Census Population by Gender



2017 N = 211; 2018 N = 207; 2019 N = 210; 2020 N = 134; 2022 N = 191; 2023 N = 110

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding. Gender Non-Conforming category was added in 2018.

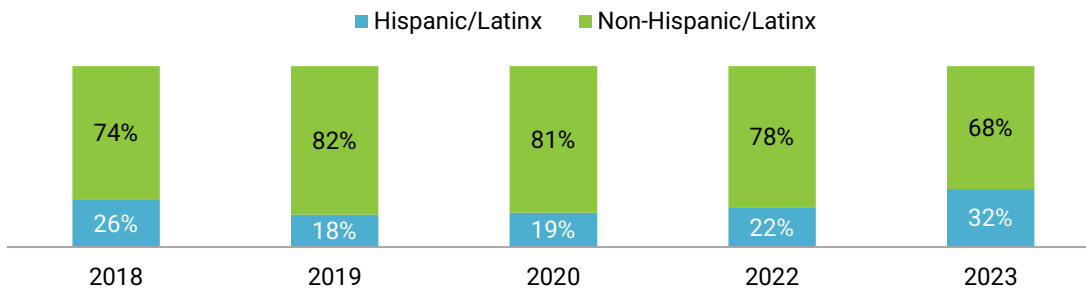
Homeless Veteran Population by Race



2023 Homeless Veterans Survey Population N = 27; 2023 Non-Homeless Veterans Survey Population N = 360

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

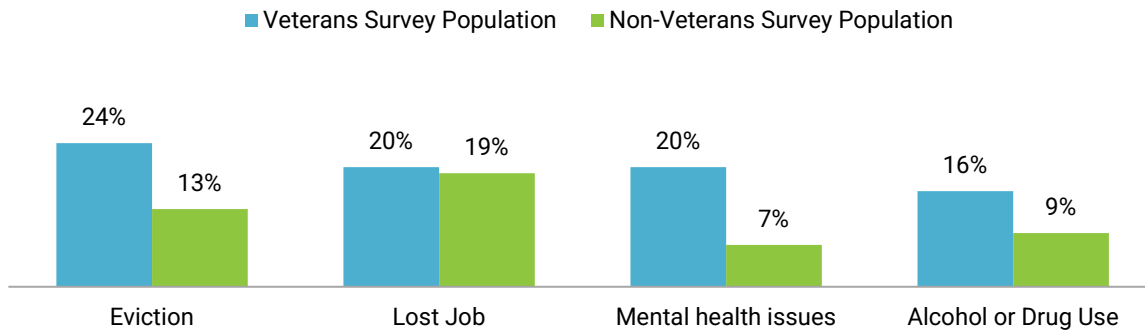
Homeless Veteran Census Population by Ethnicity



2018 Veterans N = 207; 2019 Veterans N = 210; 2020 Veterans N = 134; 2022 Veterans N = 191; 2023 Veterans N = 110

Primary Cause of Homelessness Among Homeless Veterans

Veterans were more likely to cite eviction, mental health issues, alcohol and drug use, and other as the cause of their homelessness when compared to the non-Veteran population.



2023 Homeless Veterans Survey Population N = 25; Homeless Non-Veterans Survey Population N = 408

Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.

HOMELESS FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

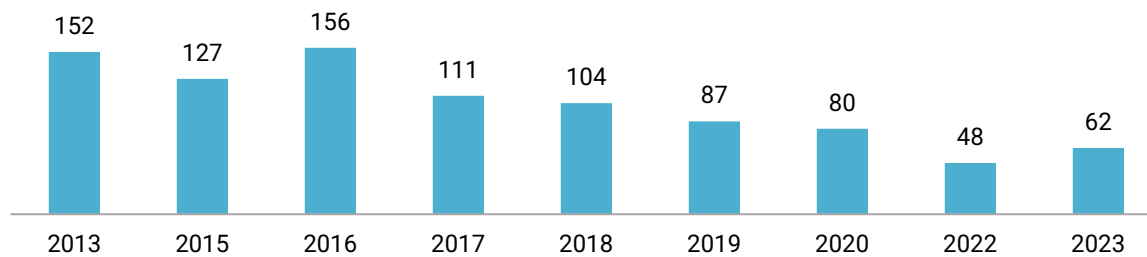
National data from 2020 suggest that 30% of all people experiencing homelessness are persons in families.⁴ Very few families experiencing homelessness are unsheltered, as public shelters serve more than 90% of homeless families in the United States; this is a significantly higher proportion of the population compared to other subpopulations, including unaccompanied children and transition-age youth. Data on families experiencing homelessness suggests that their circumstances are not much different from other families in poverty.

Nationally, the majority of homeless families are households headed by single women and families with children under the age of eighteen.⁵ Children in families experiencing homelessness have an increased incidence of illness and are more likely to have emotional and behavioral problems than children with stable living accommodations.⁶

Families experiencing homelessness can be difficult to identify and even harder to survey. Because of the wide array of supports available to them, families experiencing unsheltered homelessness frequently receive the support necessary to enter shelters or other housing options. This can lead to difficulties in surveying large numbers of families experiencing homelessness, leading to survey results that can be subject to greater fluctuation than other subpopulations. Please use caution when interpreting these results.

In 2023, there were 62 families with 203 family members experiencing homelessness in Sonoma County representing 9% of the total persons experiencing homelessness.

Total Homeless Families with Children, Census Population

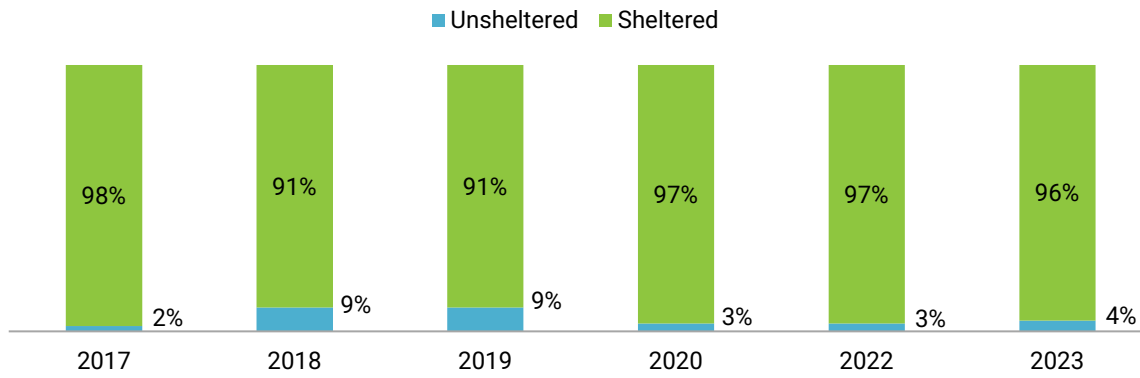


4 U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2020). The 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. Retrieved 2023 from [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2020-AHAR-Part-1.pdf](https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2020-AHAR-Part-1.pdf)

5 U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2020). The 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. Retrieved 2023 from [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2020-AHAR-Part-1.pdf](https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2020-AHAR-Part-1.pdf)

6 U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. (2015). Opening Doors. Retrieved 2015 from <http://www.usich.gov/>

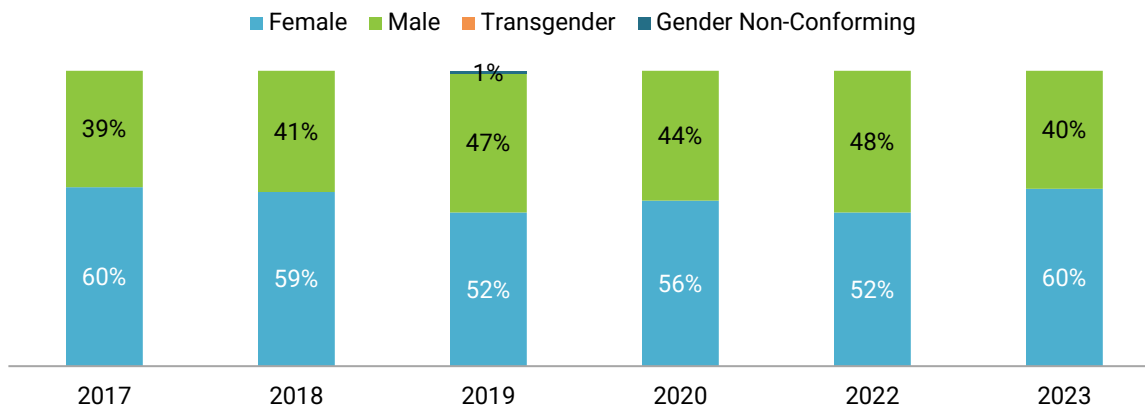
Homeless Families with Children Census Population, All Family Members, by Shelter Status



	2017	2018	2019	2020	2022	2023	2022-23 % Change
Sheltered	319	307	253	227	150	194	29%
Unsheltered	7	32	26	8	5	9	80%
Total	326	339	279	235	155	203	31%

Note: Percent change is not presented due to the small number of individuals.

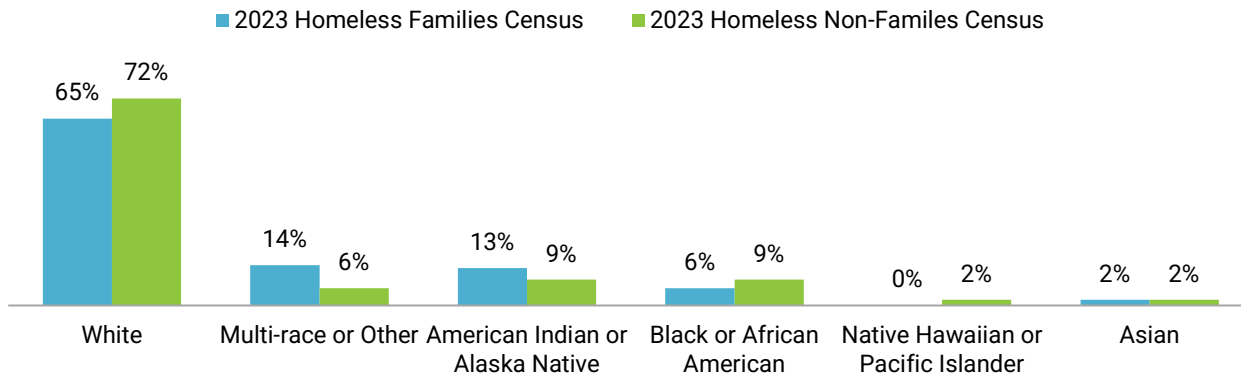
Homeless Families with Children Census Population, All Family Members, by Gender



2017 N = 326; 2018 N = 339; 2019 N = 279; 2020 N = 235; 2022 N = 155; 2023 N = 203

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding. Gender Non-Conforming category was added in 2018.

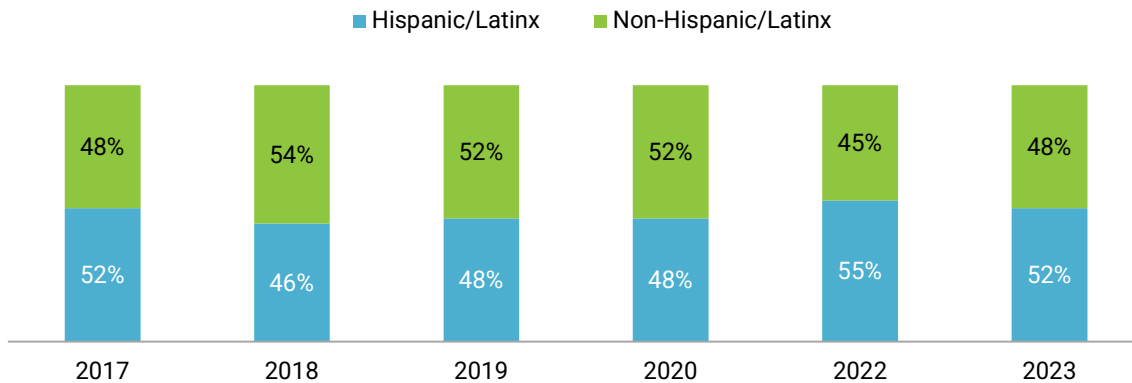
Homeless Families with Children Census Population, All Family Members, by Race



2023 Homeless Families N = 203; 2023 Homeless Non-Families N = 2,063

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Homeless Families with Children Census Population, All Family Members, by Ethnicity



2017 Homeless Families N = 326; 2018 Homeless Families N = 339; 2019 Homeless Families N = 279; 2020 Homeless Families N = 233; 2022 Homeless Families N = 155; 2023 Homeless Families N = 203

Note: HDX data were prioritized for the 2018 and 2019 reports. Previous reports include survey demographic data for family ethnicity.

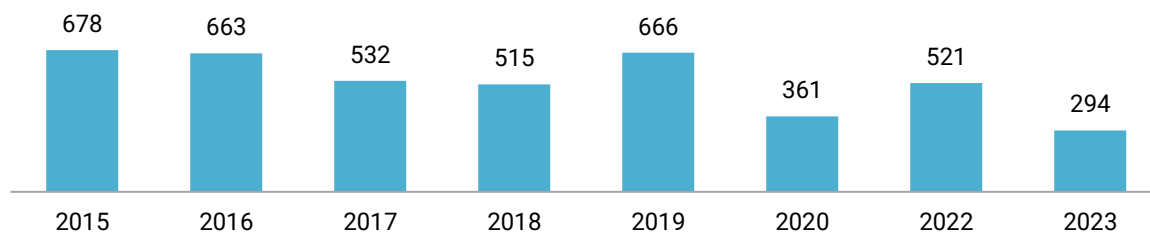
UNACCOMPANIED HOMELESS CHILDREN AND TRANSITION-AGE YOUTH

Although largely considered an undercount, nationwide estimates from 2022 suggest there are at least 30,090 unaccompanied children and transition-age youth on the streets and in public shelters, a decrease of 12% over 2020. Young people experiencing homelessness have a harder time accessing services, including shelter, medical care, and employment. Some reasons include the stigma of their housing situation, lack of knowledge of available resources, and a dearth of services targeted to young people.⁷

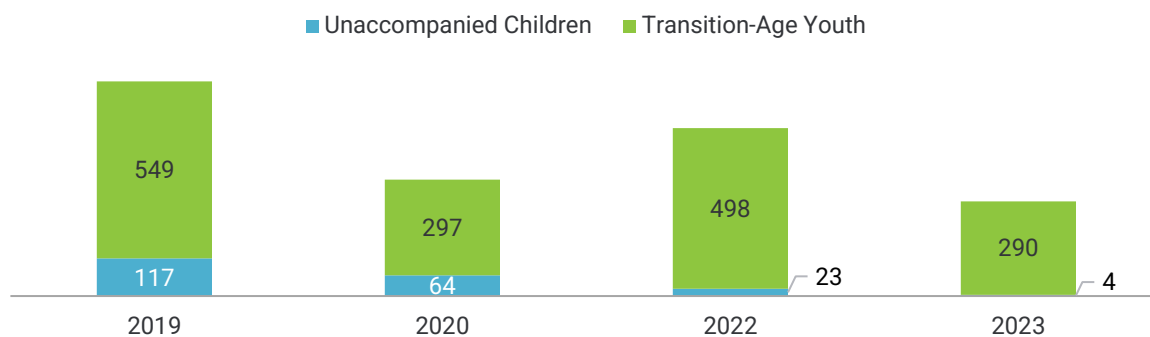
Due to the especially challenging outreach and access efforts necessary to profile the nature of youth homelessness, limited data are available on unaccompanied children and transition-age youth experiencing homelessness.

In Sonoma County, the number of transition-age youth decreased 42% from 498 in 2022 to 290 in 2023. Thirteen (13%) of all those experiencing homelessness in 2023 are unaccompanied youth under 25 years of age.

Total Unaccompanied Homeless Children and Transition-Age Youth Census Population

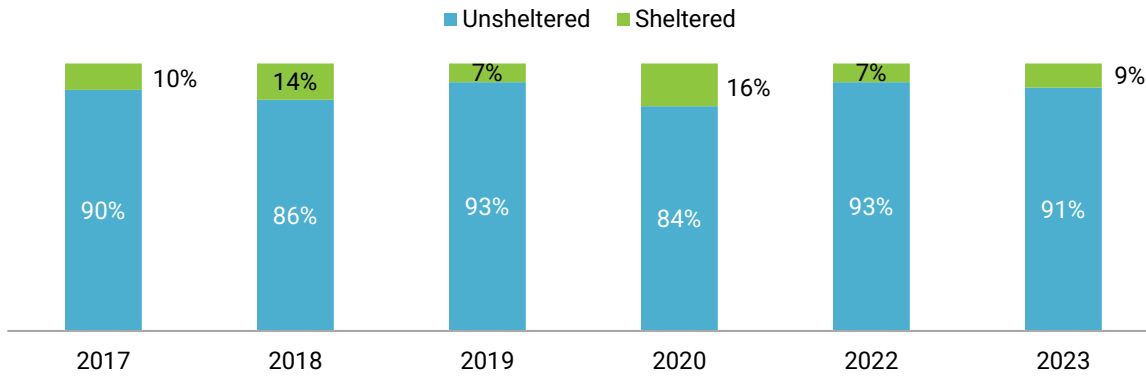


Total Unaccompanied Homeless Children and Transition-Age Youth Count Population



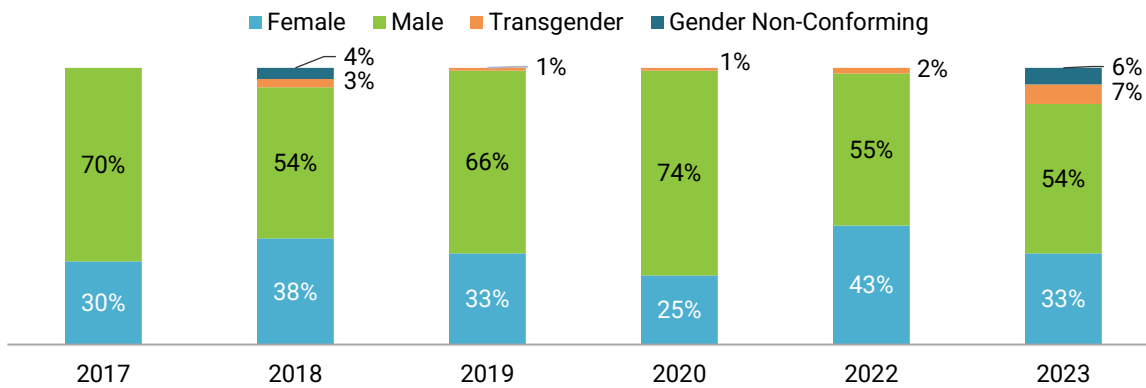
⁷ National Alliance to End Homelessness. (2022). Retrieved 2023 <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/who-experiences-homelessness/youth/>

Unaccompanied Homeless Children and Transition-Age Youth Census Population, by Shelter Status



	2017	2018	2019	2020	2022	2023	2020-22 % Change
Sheltered	52	70	43	57	35	26	-26%
Unsheltered	486	445	623	304	501	268	-47%
Total	538	515	666	361	536	294	-45%

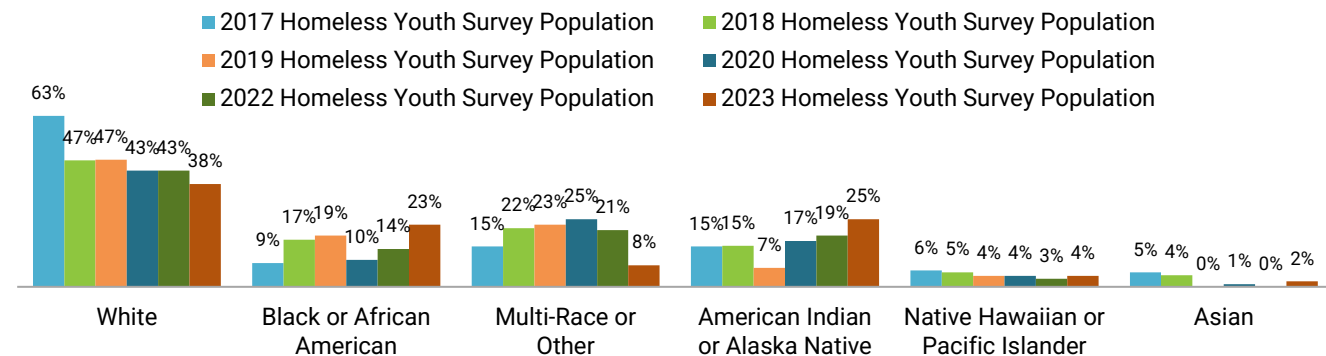
Unaccompanied Homeless Children and Transition-Age Youth Census Population, by Gender



2017 N = 538; 2018 N = 515; 2019 N = 666; 2020 N = 357; 2022 N = 528; 2023 N = 294

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding. Gender Non-Conforming category was added in 2018.

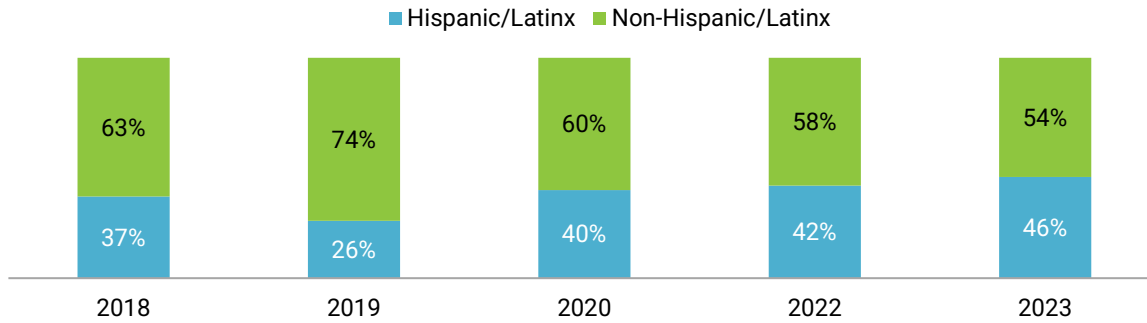
Unaccompanied Homeless Children and Transition-Age Youth Population, by Race



2017 Homeless Youth Survey N = 114 respondents offering 129 responses; 2018 Homeless Youth Survey N = 92 respondents offering 102 responses; 2019 Homeless Youth Survey N = ; 2020 Homeless Youth Survey N = 108; 2022 Homeless Youth Survey N = 37; 2023 Homeless Youth Survey N = 48

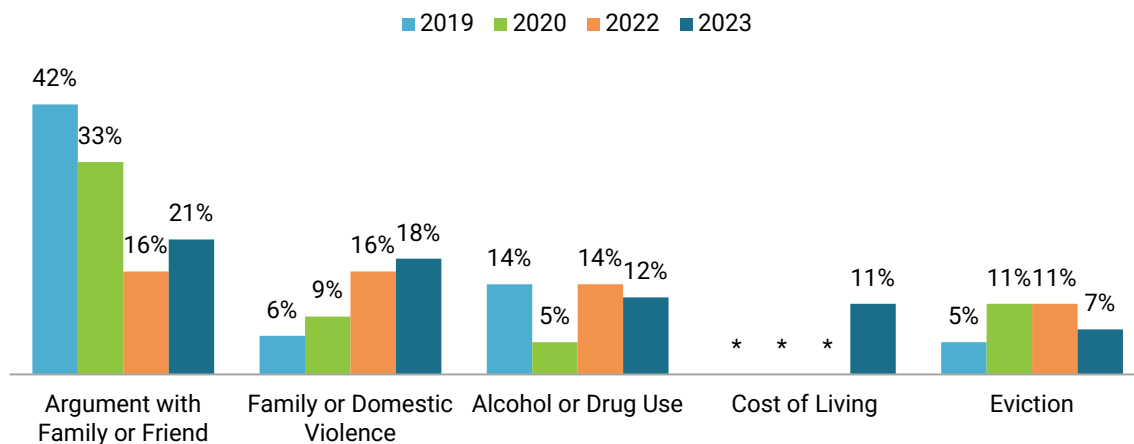
Note: Question changed from a multiple response option to a single response in 2019

Unaccompanied Homeless Children and Transition-Age Youth Census Population, by Ethnicity



2018 N = 515; 2019 N = 666; 2020 N = 347; 2022 N = 528; 2023 N = 294

Primary Cause of Homelessness Among Unaccompanied Children and Transition-Age Youth (2023 Top 5)



2019 Unaccompanied Children and Transition-Age Youth UC/TAY Survey Population N = 111; 2020 UC/TAY Survey Population N = 109; 2022 UC/TAY Survey Population N = 37; 2023 UC/TAY Survey Population N = 57

Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.

* Note: Cost of Living was added as a response in 2023.

CONCLUSION

The 2023 Sonoma County Homeless Count and Survey was performed using HUD-recommended practices for counting and surveying the homeless population. The 2023 Point-in-Time Count identified 2,266 persons experiencing homelessness in Sonoma County. This represents a decrease of 22% from the count conducted in 2022.

There are numerous interpretations for the cause of the reported decrease including the continued focus on prevention and housing retention, the successes of Coordinated Entry, as well as efforts to re-house those who became homeless after natural disasters that have taken place in recent years.

The 2023 Sonoma County Homeless Count and Survey revealed a diverse population with many different trends and needs. There are many valuable insights into the Sonoma County homeless population from the data collected in this report, including:

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

- The sheltered count increased by twenty-one percent and the unsheltered count decreased by thirty-eight percent.
- Seventeen percent of the population was counted in vehicles.
- Eighty-five percent of those experiencing homelessness entered into homelessness while living in Sonoma County.
- Forty-seven percent of survey respondents experienced homelessness for the first time before age 25. Ten percent reported experiencing homelessness for the first time at age 50 or older.
- Almost one-fifth (nineteen percent) of survey respondents cited job loss as the primary cause of their homelessness. Sixty-three percent reported unaffordable rent as an obstacle to securing permanent housing and another forty-four percent cited no job or not enough income as an obstacle.
- Eighty-six percent of respondents who were unsheltered or staying in emergency shelter would move into housing if it were available. Sixty-two percent preferred housing without preconditions.

CONCLUSIONS BY SUBPOPULATIONS

Chronically Homeless

- The count of chronically homeless individuals decreased 24% from 2022.

Veterans

- The number of veterans experiencing homelessness in Sonoma County decreased 42% from 191 individuals in 2022 to 110 in 2023.

Families with Children

- The number of families experiencing homelessness increased from 48 families in 2022 to 62 in 2023.

Unaccompanied Children and Transition-Age youth

- There were four unaccompanied children experiencing homelessness, and 290 transition age youth.

In summary, there are still many challenges to overcome in achieving the goal of eliminating homelessness in Sonoma County and in helping homeless individuals and families access necessary services and support. There are also significant successes, noticeably among subpopulations, including decreases in the numbers of chronically homeless

persons, veterans experiencing homelessness, and youth experiencing homelessness. While there are areas that still need more attention, the successes in reducing numbers in subpopulations show a path toward future reductions.

CLOSING

The 2023 Sonoma County Homeless Count and Survey provides valid and useful data that can help create a more comprehensive profile of those experiencing homelessness. The dissemination and evaluation of this effort will help the Sonoma County CoC and all Sonoma County stakeholders continue to produce and refine constructive and innovative solutions to end homelessness and make it a rare, brief, and one-time occurrence. Through innovative and effective housing programs and services, Sonoma County remains committed to moving homeless persons into permanent housing.

Data presented in the 2023 Sonoma County Homeless Count and Survey report fulfills the Sonoma County CoC's federal reporting requirements for Continuums of Care, and will continue to inform additional outreach, service planning, and policy decision-making by local planning bodies over the next year as Sonoma County continues to address homelessness.

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

OVERVIEW

The 2023 County of Sonoma Homeless Census and Survey was performed using HUD-recommended practices and using HUD's definition of homelessness. The primary purpose was to produce a point-in-time estimate of individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Sonoma County, a region which covers approximately 1,768 square miles. The results of several components were combined to produce the total estimated number of persons experiencing homelessness on a given night. A detailed description of these components follows.

Components of the Homeless Count Method

The methodology used in the 2023 Point-in-Time Census and Survey had four components:

- 1) **General Street Count:** A morning count of unsheltered homeless individuals and families on January 27, 2023. This occurred from approximately 5:00 AM to 9:00 AM and included those sleeping outdoors on the street; at bus and train stations; in parks, tents, and other makeshift shelters; and in vehicles and abandoned properties. The general street count was designed to take place before shelter occupants were released. In areas with shelters, the immediate area surrounding the shelter was prioritized to eliminate potential double counting of individuals.
- 2) **General Shelter Count:** A nighttime count of individuals and families experiencing homelessness staying at publicly- and privately-operated shelters on the night of January 26, 2023. This included those who occupied emergency shelters, transitional housing, and safe havens. All shelter data were gathered either from Sonoma County's Homeless Management Information System or directly from the shelter.
- 3) **Targeted Street Count of Youth and Young Adults:** An afternoon count of unsheltered youth and young adults on January 27, 2023. This occurred from approximately 2:00 PM to 7:00 PM and was led by special youth teams who canvassed specific areas where youth and young adults were known to congregate. Upon completion, data from this targeted count was carefully reviewed against the results from the general street count to ensure that any possible duplicate counts were removed.
- 4) **Homeless Survey:** An in-person interview with sheltered and unsheltered individuals experiencing homelessness conducted by peer surveyors between January 28 and March 31, 2023. Data from the survey was used to refine the Point-in-Time Census estimates and then used to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the demographics and experiences of homeless individuals.

The Planning Process

To ensure the success and integrity of the count, many county and community agencies collaborated on community outreach, volunteer recruitment, logistical plans, methodological decisions, and interagency coordination efforts. Applied Survey Research (ASR) provided technical assistance for these aspects of the planning process. ASR has over 22 years of experience conducting homeless counts and surveys throughout California and across the nation. Their work is featured as a best practice in the HUD publication, *A Guide to Counting Unsheltered Homeless People*, as well as in the *Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago* publication, *Conducting a Youth Count: A Toolkit*.

Community Involvement

Local homeless and housing service providers and advocates were valued partners in the planning and implementation of this count. Thanks to local efforts, the count included enumerators with a diverse range of knowledge, including expertise regarding areas frequented by homeless individuals, individuals living in vehicles, and persons residing in

encampments. Community partners were also key in recruiting individuals with lived experience of homelessness to participate in the street count and survey efforts.

STREET COUNT METHODOLOGY

Definition

For the purposes of this study, the HUD definition of unsheltered homeless persons was used:

- An individual or family with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train stations, airport, or camping ground.

Methodological Improvements

The 2023 street count methodology followed an established, HUD approved methodology used in the 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2022 counts, with the addition of dedicated youth outreach in each of those years. Local homeless and housing service providers and advocates were valued partners in the planning and implementation of this count.

Volunteer and Guide Recruitment and Training

Outreach and program staff did recruitment of persons with lived experience to act as guides, and in some cases embedded reporters, in order to conduct the count in 2023. Homeless guides were paid \$20 for online training as well as \$20 per hour worked on the days of the count.

In order to participate in the count, all volunteers and guides were requested to view a 20-minute training video before the count. Training covered all aspects of the count including:

- definition of homelessness;
 - how to identify homeless individuals;
 - how to safely and respectfully conduct the count, how to use the smartphone app and also access the smartphone app training video;
 - how to use the route maps to ensure the entirety of the assigned area was covered;
 - tips to identify vehicles; and
- other tips to help ensure an accurate and safe count.

Safety Precautions

Every effort was made to minimize potentially hazardous situations. Law enforcement agencies were notified of pending street count activity in their jurisdictions. In census tracts with a high concentration of homeless encampments, specialized teams with knowledge of those encampments were identified and assigned to those areas. Enumeration teams were advised to take every safety precaution possible, including bringing flashlights and maintaining a respectful distance from those they were counting.

Logistics of Enumeration

On the morning of the street count, teams of two or more persons deployed to enumerate designated areas of the county for the street count. Each team was composed of any combination of outreach workers, lived-experience guides, program staff and service-experienced community volunteers. Each team had a lead and prior to the count were provided with their assigned census tract maps, smartphone access information and training, field observation tips and guidelines, including vehicle identification criteria. Teams were instructed meet at one of the designated deployment sites, or to text a central PIT count dispatch center to confirm they were enroute and on task for enumeration of their route assignment.

All accessible streets, roads, parks, and highways in the enumerated tracts were traversed by foot or car. The Sonoma County Survey 123 smartphone app was used to record the number of homeless persons observed in addition to basic demographic and location information. Dispatch center volunteers also verified that at least one person on each team

had a cell phone available for their use during the count and recorded the number on the volunteer deployment assignment sheet. Teams were asked to cover the entirety of their assigned areas.

To ensure that the privacy of individuals experiencing homelessness was respected and that safety concerns were kept as a priority for enumeration teams, teams were asked to conduct observation-only counts and to not have any contact with individuals experiencing homelessness. When they encountered a structure or vehicle that they believed to be inhabited, they had the option to indicate that it was inhabited but that they didn't know the number or the demographic detail (age and gender) of its residents if this could be determined by the team. In order to determine the number of residents of these dwelling types, ASR uses the survey data from respondents who indicated they stayed in the named dwelling type. Demographic detail for those inhabitants is gathered from count data.

YOUTH STREET COUNT METHODOLOGY

Goal

The goal of the 2023 dedicated youth count was to improve representation of unaccompanied homeless children and youth under the age of 25 in the Point-in-Time Count. Many homeless children and youth do not use homeless services, are unrecognizable to adult street count volunteers, and may be in unsheltered locations that are difficult to find. Therefore, traditional street count efforts are not as effective in reaching youth.

Research Design

As in all years, planning for the 2023 supplemental youth count included homeless youth service providers and youth with lived experience of homelessness. Local service providers identified locations where homeless youth were known to congregate and recruited youth currently experiencing homelessness with knowledge of where to locate homeless youth to serve as guides for the count. Late afternoon and early evening enumeration was the ideal time recommended by advocates to conduct the youth count.

Social Advocates for Youth (SAY) took the lead on recruiting 15 youth to work as peer enumerators in addition to 12 youth service provider staff members who accompanied and transported the youth around the county. These teams counted homeless youth in the identified areas of Sonoma County on January 27, 2023.

Youth workers were paid \$20 per hour for their time, including time spent in training prior to the count. Youth and youth service provider staff members were trained on where and how to identify homeless youth as well as how to record the data.

Data Collection

It was determined that homeless youth would be more prominent on the street during daylight hours rather than in the early morning when the general count was conducted. The youth count was conducted from approximately 2:00 PM to 7:00 PM on January 27, 2023. Youth worked in teams of two to four, with teams coordinated by youth street outreach workers.

Both the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness recognize that youth do not commonly congregate with homeless adults and are not easily identified by non-youth. For this reason, these agencies accept and recommend that communities count youth at times when they can be seen rather than during traditional enumeration times.

Street Count De-Duplication

Data from the supplemental youth count and general street count were compared and de-duplicated by assessing location, gender, and age. No duplicates were found.

SHELTER COUNT METHODOLOGY

Goal

The goal of the shelter and institution count is to gain an accurate count of persons temporarily housed in shelters and other institutions across Sonoma County. These data are vital to gaining an accurate, overall count of the homeless population and understanding where homeless persons receive shelter.

Definition

For the purposes of this study, the HUD definition of sheltered homelessness for Point-in-Time Counts was used. This definition includes individuals and families living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements.

Research Design

The homeless occupancy of shelters in Sonoma County was collected for the night of January 26, 2023. All shelter data were gathered either directly from the shelter or from Sonoma County's Homeless Management Information System.

Challenges

There are many challenges in any homeless enumeration, especially when implemented in a community as large and diverse as Sonoma County. Point-in-Time Counts are "snapshots" that quantify the size of the homeless population at a given point during the year. Hence, the count may not be representative of fluctuations and compositional changes in the homeless population seasonally or over time.

For a variety of reasons, homeless persons generally do not wish to be seen and make concerted efforts to avoid detection. Regardless of how successful outreach efforts are, an undercount of the homeless population will result, especially of hard-to-reach subpopulations such as families and youth.

The methods employed in a non-intrusive visual homeless enumeration, while academically sound, have inherent biases and shortcomings. Even with the assistance of dedicated homeless service providers, the methodology cannot guarantee 100% accuracy. Many factors may contribute to missed opportunities, for example:

- It is difficult to identify homeless persons who may be sleeping in vans, cars, recreational vehicles, abandoned buildings, or structures unfit for human habitation.
- Homeless families with children often seek opportunities to stay on private property, rather than sleep on the streets, in vehicles, or in makeshift shelters.

Even though the Point-in-Time Count is most likely to be an undercount of the homeless population, the methodology employed—coupled with the homeless survey—is the most comprehensive approach available.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Planning and Implementation

A survey of individuals experiencing homelessness was conducted between January 28 and March 31, 2023 to yield qualitative data about people experiencing homelessness in Sonoma County. This data is used for the McKinney-Vento Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance funding application and are important for future program development and planning.

The survey elicited information such as gender, family status, military service, duration and recurrence of homelessness, nighttime accommodations, causes of homelessness, and access to services through open-ended, closed-ended, and multiple response questions. The survey data bring greater perspective to current issues of homelessness and to the provision and delivery of services.

Surveys were conducted by peer survey workers with lived homeless experience. Training sessions were facilitated by Applied Survey Research, Sonoma County staff, and community partners. Potential interviewers were led through a comprehensive orientation that included project background information as well as detailed instruction on respondent eligibility, interviewing protocol, and confidentiality. Peer survey workers were compensated at a rate of \$10 per completed survey.

It was determined that survey data would be more easily obtained if an incentive gift was offered to respondents in appreciation for their time and participation. \$10 gift cards were provided as an incentive for participating in the 2023 homeless survey.

Survey Sampling

Based on a Point-in-Time Count estimate of 2,266 homeless persons, with a randomized survey sampling process, the 445 valid surveys represented a confidence interval of +/- 4% with a 95% confidence level when generalizing the results of the survey to the estimated population of individuals experiencing homelessness in Sonoma County.

The 2023 survey was administered in shelters, transitional-housing facilities, and on the street. In order to ensure the representation of transitional-housing residents, who can be underrepresented in a street-based survey, survey quotas were created to reach individuals and heads of family households living in these programs.

Strategic attempts were also made to reach individuals in various geographic locations and of various subset groups such as homeless youth, minority ethnic groups, military veterans, domestic violence survivors, and families. One way to increase the participation of these groups was to recruit peer survey workers. Since 2009, the ASR survey methodology has prioritized a peer-to-peer approach to data collection by increasing the number of currently homeless surveyors.

In order to increase randomization of sample respondents, survey workers were trained to employ an “every third encounter” survey approach. Survey workers were instructed to approach every third person they considered to be an eligible survey respondent. If the person declined to take the survey, the survey worker could approach the next eligible person they encountered. After completing a survey, the randomized approach was resumed.

Data Collection

Care was taken by interviewers to ensure that respondents felt comfortable regardless of the street or shelter location where the survey occurred. During the interviews, respondents were encouraged to be candid in their responses and were informed that these responses would be framed as general findings, would be kept confidential, and would not be traceable to any single individual.

Data Analysis

The survey requested respondents' initials and date of birth so that duplication could be avoided without compromising the respondents' anonymity. Upon completion of the survey effort, an extensive verification process was conducted to eliminate duplicates. This process examined respondents' date of birth, initials, gender, ethnicity, length of homelessness, and consistencies in patterns of responses to other survey questions.

Survey Challenges and Limitations

There may be some variance in the data that individuals experiencing homelessness self-reported. However, using a peer-interviewing methodology is believed to allow the respondents to be more candid with their answers and may help reduce the uneasiness of revealing personal information. Further, service providers and county staff members recommended individuals who would be the best suited to conducting interviews and these individuals received comprehensive training about how to conduct interviews. Service providers and county staff also reviewed the surveys to ensure quality responses. Surveys that were considered incomplete or containing false responses were not accepted.

APPENDIX B: DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Chronic homelessness – Defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as an unaccompanied individual or head of a family household with a disabling condition who has either continuously experienced homelessness for a year or more, or has experienced at least four episodes of homelessness totaling 12 months, in the past three years.

Disabling condition – Defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as a physical, mental, or emotional impairment, including an impairment caused by alcohol or drug abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, or brain injury that is expected to be long-term and impacts the individual’s ability to live independently; a developmental disability; or HIV/AIDS.

Emergency shelter – The provision of a safe alternative to the streets, either in a shelter facility or through the use of stabilization rooms. Emergency shelter is short-term, usually for 180 days or fewer. Domestic violence shelters are typically considered a type of emergency shelter, as they provide safe, immediate housing for survivors and their children.

Family – A household with at least one adult and one child under the age of 18.

Homeless – Under the Category 1 definition of homelessness in the HEARTH Act, includes individuals and families living in a supervised publicly- or privately-operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements, or with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground.

HUD – Abbreviation for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Precariously housed – A person who is staying with the household because they have no other regular or adequate place to stay due to a lack of money or other means of support.

Sheltered homeless individuals – Individuals who are living in emergency shelters or transitional-housing programs.

Single individual – An unaccompanied adult over the age of 18.

Transition-age youth – Young people between the ages of 18 and 24 years old who are not accompanied by a parent or guardian and are not a parent presenting with or sleeping in the same place as their own child(ren).

Transitional housing – Housing in which homeless individuals may live up to 24 months and receive supportive services that enable them to live more independently. Supportive services—which help promote residential stability, increased skill level or income, and greater self-determination—may be provided by the organization managing the housing or coordinated by that organization and provided by other public or private agencies. Transitional housing can be provided in one structure or several structures at one site, or in multiple structures at scattered sites.

Unaccompanied children – Children under the age of 18 who are not accompanied by a parent or guardian and are not a parent presenting with or sleeping in the same place as their own child(ren).

Unsheltered homeless individuals – Individuals who are living on the streets, in abandoned buildings, storage structures, vehicles, encampments, or any other place unfit for human habitation.