



SONOMA COUNTY  
CONTINUUM OF CARE

# SONOMA COUNTY 2024 HOMELESSNESS POINT-IN-TIME COUNT & REPORT

Prepared by  
Applied Survey Research



# 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 in 1980 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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City of Cloverdale	City of Santa Rosa
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City of Healdsburg	City of Sonoma
City of Petaluma	Town of Windsor

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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 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. Currently, The Sonoma County Homeless Coalition (CoC) receives approximately \$4.3 million dollars annually in federal funding, a key source of funding for the county's homeless services.

The Sonoma County Homeless Coalition 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 2024 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 2024 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 6:00 AM and 10:00 AM on January 26, 2024.

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 was conducted. Shelters and transitional housing facilities in Sonoma County's annual Housing Inventory Count (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. Sixteen 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 361 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 25.

To better understand the dynamics of homelessness over time, results from previous years, including 2011, 2013, 2015-2023 are provided where available and applicable.

## **PROJECT OVERVIEW AND GOALS**

ASR held planning meetings in the fall of 2023 to reflect the experience and expertise of the community with local stakeholders. Participants were drawn from City and County departments, community-based service organizations, and other interested stakeholders. They joined the 2024 Project Team (staff from Sonoma County Department of Health Services) in planning for the PIT count. These representatives were instrumental in ensuring the county's 2024 Homeless PIT Count and Survey reflected the needs and concerns of the community.

The 2024 Project Team worked toward several important project goals:

- To measure changes in the numbers and characteristics of the homeless population and to track progress toward ending homelessness.
- To assess the status of specific subpopulations, including veterans, families, unaccompanied children, transition-age youth, and those who are chronically homeless.
- 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 increase public awareness of overall homeless issues and generate support for constructive solutions.





This report is intended to assist service providers, policy makers, funders, and local, state, and federal governments in gaining a better understanding of persons currently experiencing homelessness.

## **FEDERAL DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS FOR POINT-IN-TIME COUNTS**

For the purposes of this report, the HUD definition of homelessness from Category 1 of the Hearth Act is used. This definition includes individuals and families:

- Living in a supervised publicly or privately-operated shelters designated to provide a 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 ground.





# SONOMA COUNTY

## 2024 POINT-IN-TIME COUNT & SURVEY

Every two years, typically 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 2024 Sonoma County Point-in-Time Count was a community-wide effort conducted on January 26, 2024. In the weeks following the street count, a survey was administered to 361 unsheltered and sheltered individuals experiencing homelessness in order to profile their experience and characteristics.



SONOMA COUNTY  
CONTINUUM OF CARE



TOTAL PERSONS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

**2,522**



**37%**  
Sheltered  
n=945



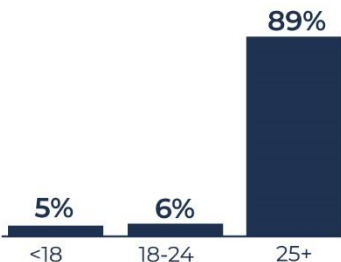
**63%**  
Unsheltered  
n=1,577

### TOTAL PERSONS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

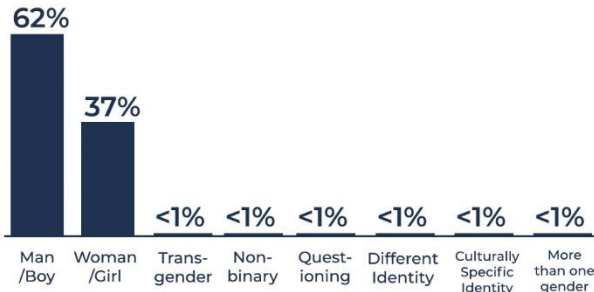


## DEMOGRAPHICS

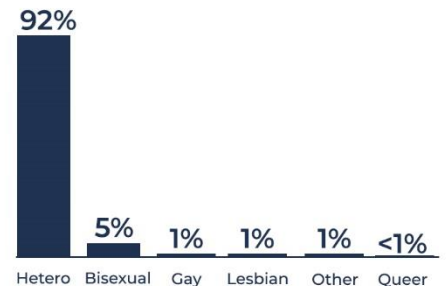
### AGE



### GENDER



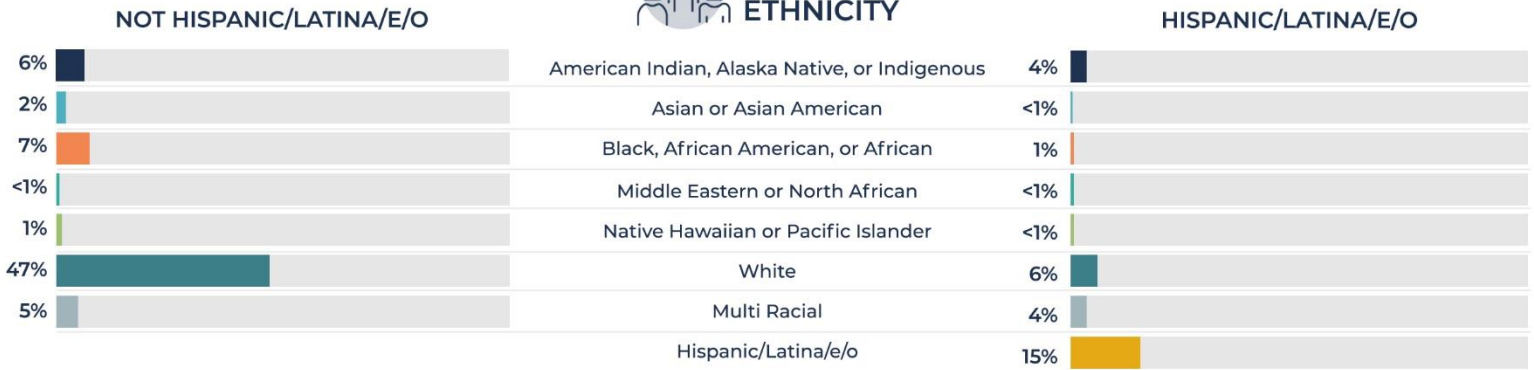
### SEXUAL ORIENTATION





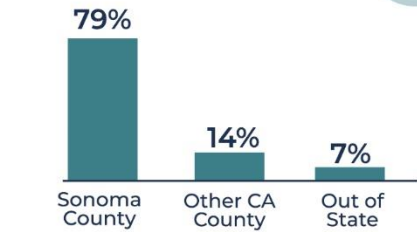


# RACE/ ETHNICITY



## DATA PORTRAITS <sup>□</sup>

### RESIDENCE AT TIME OF HOMELESSNESS



### DURATION OF CURRENT HOMELESSNESS



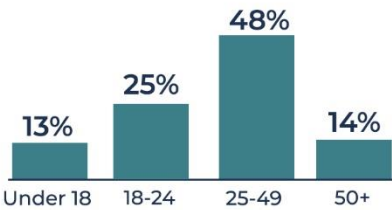
### FIRST EPISODE OF HOMELESSNESS



# 29%

Reported their current episode of homelessness as being their first

### AGE AT FIRST EPISODE OF HOMELESSNESS



### PRIMARY CONDITION THAT LEAD TO HOMELESSNESS\*

(Top 5 Responses)



### WHAT IS KEEPING YOU FROM GETTING PERMANENT HOUSING\*

(Top 5 Responses)



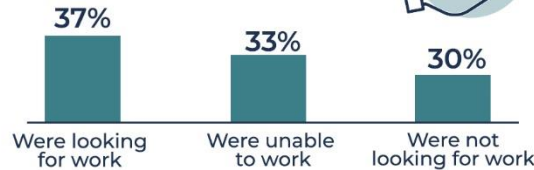
### EMPLOYMENT STATUS



# 13%

had some form of employment

### AMONG UNEMPLOYED RESPONDENTS



### FOSTER CARE



# 17%

of survey respondents have been in the foster care system

### JUSTICE SYSTEM INVOLVED



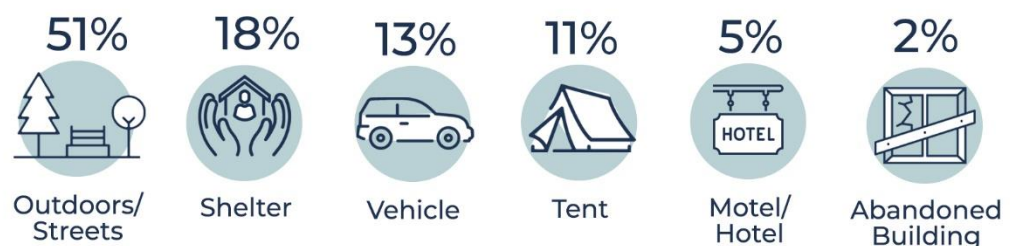
# 32%

of survey respondents spent one or more nights in jail/prison/juvenile hall in the past year.

# 17%

on probation/parole at the start of their most recent episode of homelessness

### UNSHELTERED POPULATION BY SLEEPING ACCOMMODATION



# SELF-REPORTED HEALTH <sup>□</sup>

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

**SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER**



**47%**

Report having a substance use disorder

**PSYCHIATRIC OR EMOTIONAL CONDITIONS**



**43%**

Report having a psychiatric or emotional condition

**PTSD**



**41%**

Report having Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

**CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITION**



**32%**

Report having a chronic health condition

**PHYSICAL DISABILITY**



**30%**

Report having a physical disability

**TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY**



**17%**

Report having had a TBI

**HIV/AIDS RELATED ILLNESS**



**1%**

Report having an HIV/AIDS related illness

## DISABLING CONDITION

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.

**37%**



of survey respondents report having at least one disabling condition

## GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE <sup>□</sup>



**61%**

Of survey respondents reported receiving government benefits.

### SERVICES CURRENTLY ACCESSING\* (TOP 5 RESPONSES)

**57%**



Free Meals

**38%**



Bus Passes

**31%**



Health Services

**25%**



Hygiene Services

**25%**



Emergency Shelter

### REASONS FOR NOT RECEIVING GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE\* (TOP 4 RESPONSES)

**29%**



Don't think I'm eligible

**27%**



Don't want government assistance

**21%**



Don't Have ID

**21%**



No Permanent Address



# SPECIAL POPULATIONS

Total Sheltered Unsheltered

## CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS



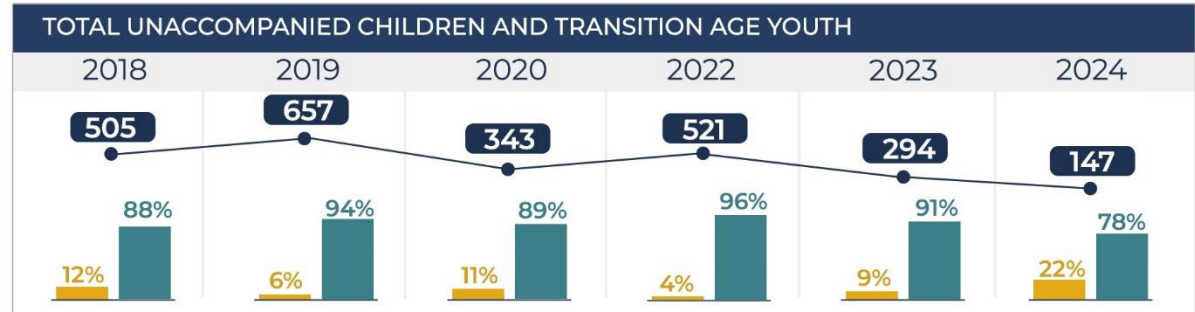
## VETERANS



## FAMILIES



## UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN + TAY



## SUBPOPULATION DEFINITIONS

### CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS

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 YOUNG ADULTS

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

□ Source: 2024 Sonoma County Homeless Survey, N=361  
 \* Multiple response question, percentages may not add up to 100%

**Note:** Some percentages have been rounded so total percentage will equal 100%.

# POINT-IN-TIME COUNT

The 2024 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 26, 2024 from approximately 6:00 AM to 10:00 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 2023 and previous years.

The methodology used for the 2024 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. 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 25, 2024. All shelter data were gathered either directly from the shelter or from Sonoma County’s Homeless Management Information System. All shelter occupants were listed on the HIC report that the Sonoma County Homeless Coalition 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.

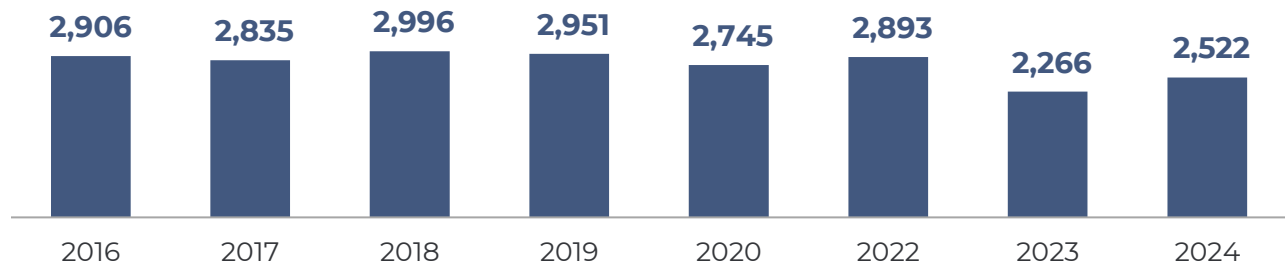
In a continuing effort to improve data on the extent of youth homelessness, Sonoma County also conducted a dedicated youth count similar to the youth counts that have been conducted since 2009. The dedicated youth count methodology was improved in 2017 to better ensure unaccompanied children and transition-age 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](#).



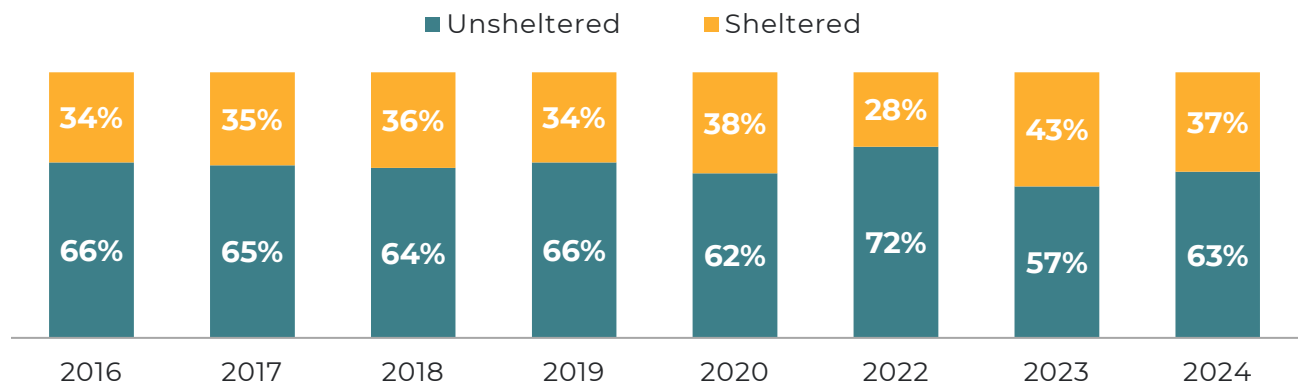


# NUMBER AND CHARACTERISTICS OF PERSONS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN SONOMA COUNTY

**Figure 1: Total Number of Persons Experiencing Homelessness**



**Figure 2: Total Homeless Census Population, by Shelter Status**



	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2022	2023	2024	2023-24 % CHANGE
Sheltered	1,000	988	1,067	994	1,043	805	975	945	-3%
Unsheltered	1,906	1,847	1,929	1,957	1,702	2,088	1,291	1,577	22%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,906</b>	<b>2,835</b>	<b>2,996</b>	<b>2,951</b>	<b>2,745</b>	<b>2,893</b>	<b>2,266</b>	<b>2,522</b>	<b>11%</b>

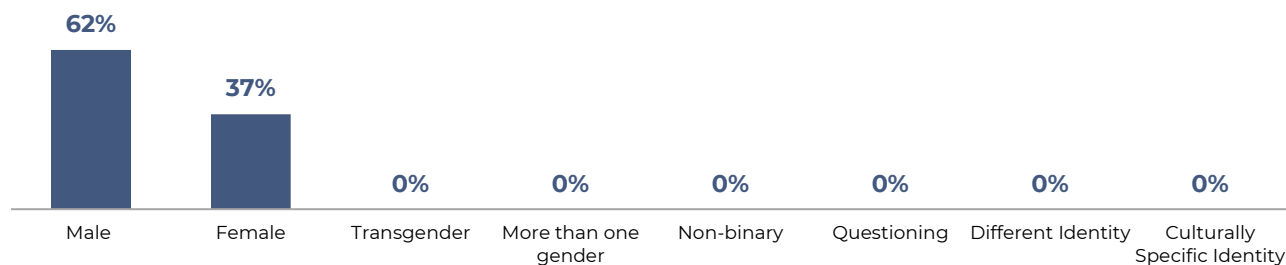
**Figure 3: Total Homeless Census Population by Shelter Status and Jurisdiction**

JURISDICTION	UNSHELTERED			SHELTERED			TOTAL		
	2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024
<b>North County</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>152</b>
Cloverdale	23	9	6	0	0	3	23	9	9
Healdsburg	97	18	37	0	15	13	97	33	50
Town of Windsor	8	26	26	40	0	0	48	26	26
Unincorporated	27	50	67	0	0	0	27	50	67
<b>South County</b>	<b>679</b>	<b>337</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>768</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>615</b>
Cotati	79	9	21	6	6	10	85	15	31
Petaluma	214	157	143	79	88	97	293	245	240
Rohnert Park	241	141	205	4	69	74	369	210	279
Unincorporated	21	30	65	0	0	0	21	30	65
<b>West County</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>177</b>
Sebastopol	40	47	108	38	40	10	78	87	118
Unincorporated	22	96	20	27	30	39	49	126	59
<b>Sonoma Valley</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>86</b>
Sonoma	66	40	13	15	0	0	81	40	13
Unincorporated	27	69	61	14	20	12	41	89	73
<b>Santa Rosa</b>	<b>1,099</b>	<b>599</b>	<b>805</b>	<b>582</b>	<b>695</b>	<b>664</b>	<b>1,681</b>	<b>1,294</b>	<b>1,469</b>
Santa Rosa	1,089	465	701	569	695	664	1,658	1,160	1,365
Unincorporated	10	134	104	13	0	0	23	134	104
<b>Undisclosed Location</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,088</b>	<b>1,291</b>	<b>1,577</b>	<b>805</b>	<b>975</b>	<b>945</b>	<b>2,893</b>	<b>2,266</b>	<b>2,522</b>

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

**Figure 4: Total Homeless Census Population by Gender**

Men made up three-fifths (62%) of the persons identified during the PIT count, similar to 2023. Women were 37% of the persons identified, while transgender and gender non-conforming respondents were less than 1% each.

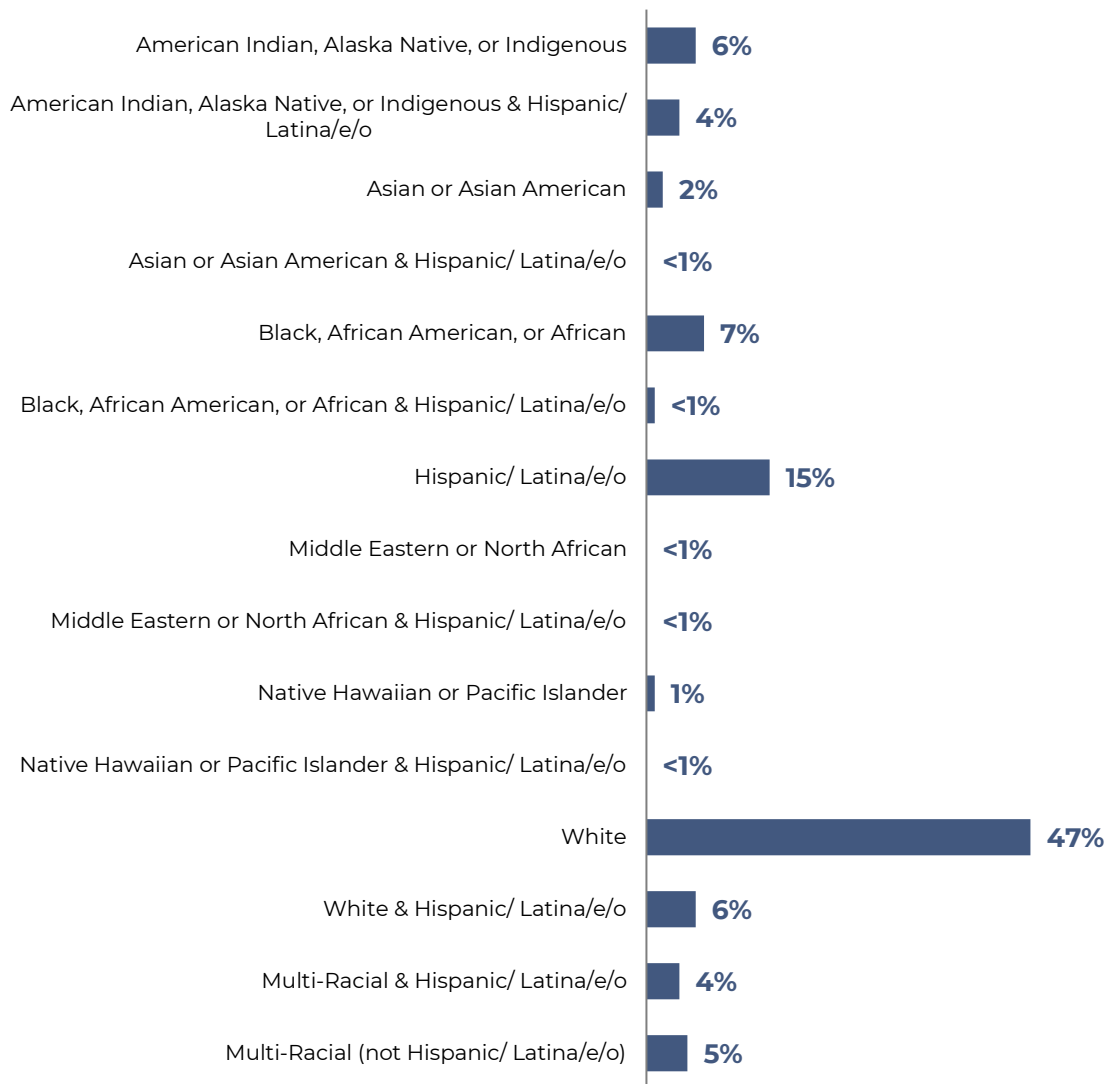


2024 N = 2,522

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.

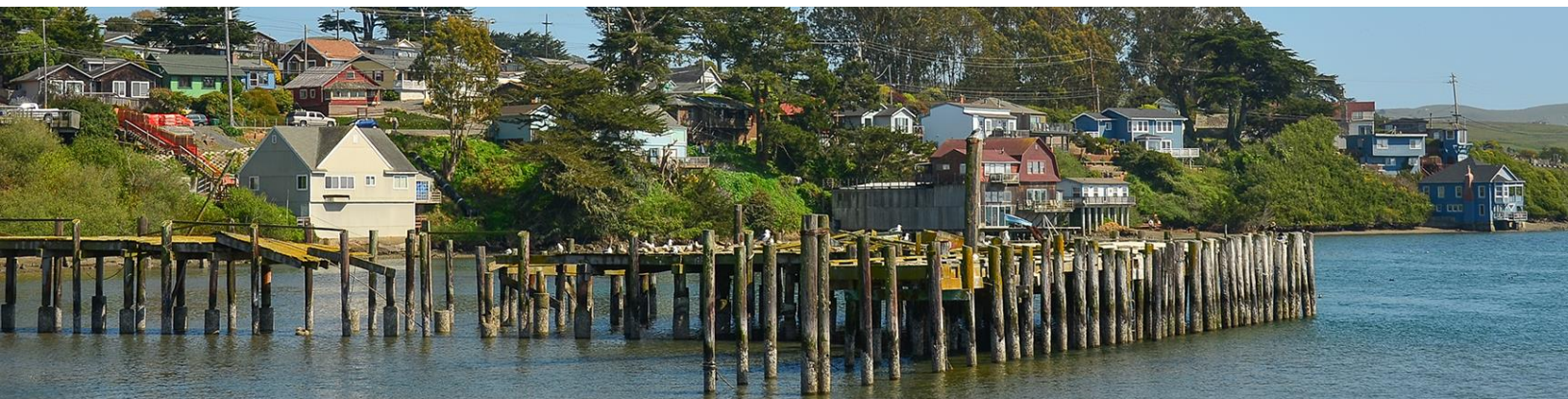


**Figure 5: Total Homeless Census Population, by Race**



2024 N = 2,522

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



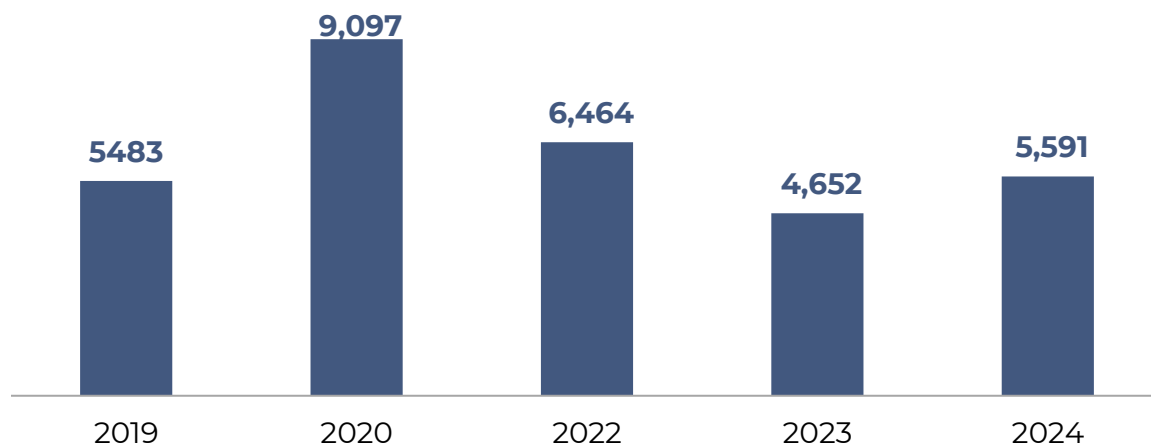
# ANNUALIZATION

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 2024 Sonoma County annual estimate is 5,591 unique homeless experiences over a year, an increase (20%) from 2023, though similar to the overall percentage decrease.

**Figure 6: Annualization**



# HOMELESS SURVEY FINDINGS

This section provides an overview of the findings generated from the survey component of the 2024 Sonoma County Homeless Point-in-Time Census and Survey. Surveys were administered to a randomized sample of homeless individuals between January 26 and February 29, 2024.

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.

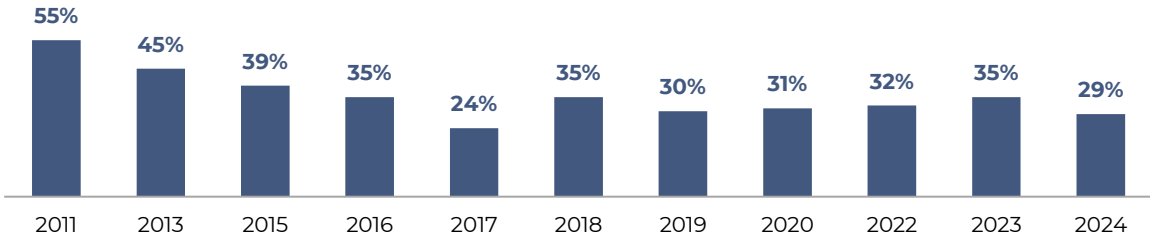
Based on a Point-in-Time Count (PIT) of 2,522 homeless persons, with a randomized survey sampling process, these 361 valid surveys would represent a confidence interval of +/- 4% with a 95% confidence level when generalizing the results of the survey to the entire estimated population of homeless individuals in Sonoma County. In other words, if the survey were conducted again, we can be 95% certain that the results would be within 4 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 RECURRENCE 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.

**Figure 7: First Time Experiencing Homelessness (Respondents Answering “Yes”)**

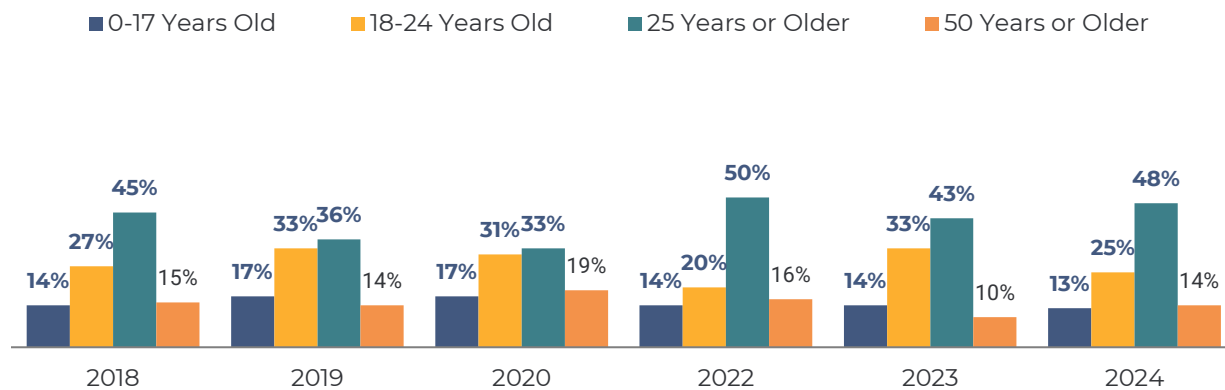


2011 N = 617; 2013 N = 533; 2015 N = 609; 2016 N = 605; 2017 N = 678; 2018 N = 519; 2019 N = 498; 2020 N = 444; 2022 N = 385; 2023 N = 442; 2024 N = 361



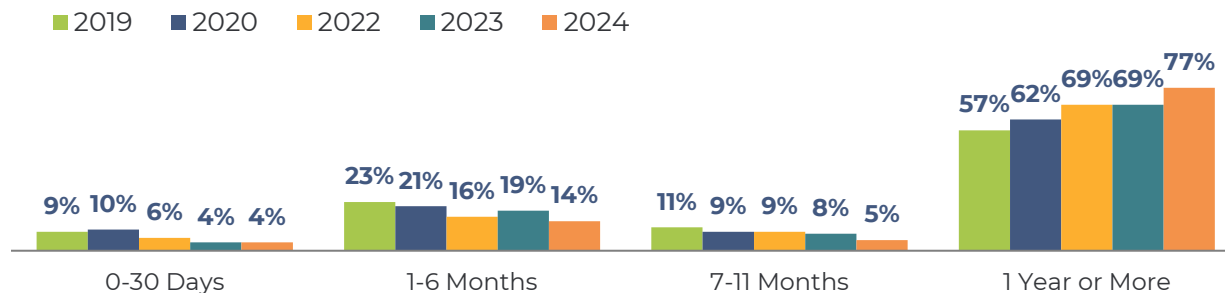
In an effort to better understand the experiences and age distribution of those experiencing homelessness, respondents were asked how old they were the first time they experienced homelessness. Since 2018, there is an emerging trend of those experiencing homelessness for the first time at age 50 or older.

**Figure 8: Age at First Experience of Homelessness**



2018 N = 513; 2019 N = 511; 2020 N = 435; 2022 N = 413; 2023 N = 440; 2024 N = 354

**Figure 9: Length of Current Episode of Homelessness**



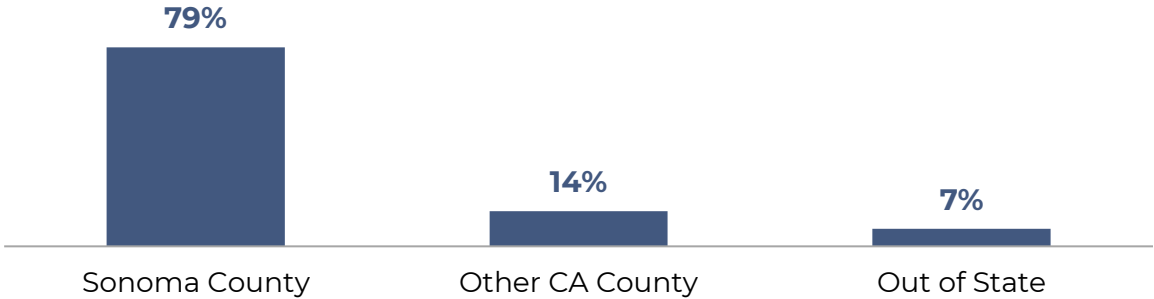
2019 N = 516; 2020 N = 444; 2022 N = 420; 2023 N = 441



# LIVING ACCOMMODATIONS

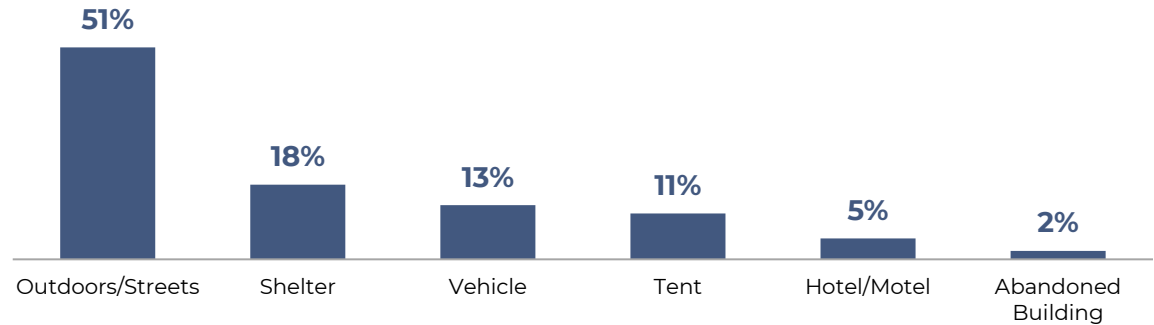
Where individuals lived prior to experiencing homelessness and where they have lived since impacts the way they seek services, as well as their ability to access support from friends or family. Previous circumstances can also point to gaps in the system of care and to opportunities for systemic improvement 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.

**Figure 10: Place of Residence at Time of Housing Loss**



2024 N = 350

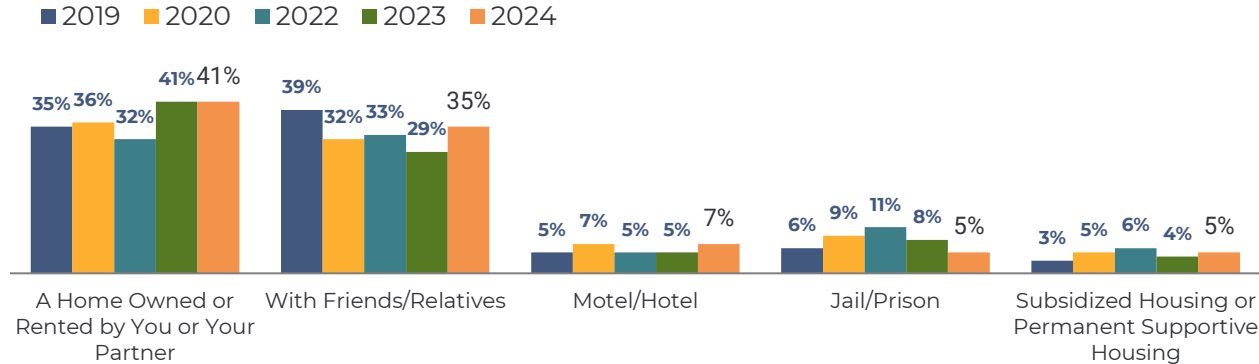
**Figure 11: Total Homeless Population Surveyed, by Sleeping Accommodation**



# 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.

**Figure 12: Living Arrangements Immediately Prior to Becoming Homeless This Time (Top 5 Responses)**

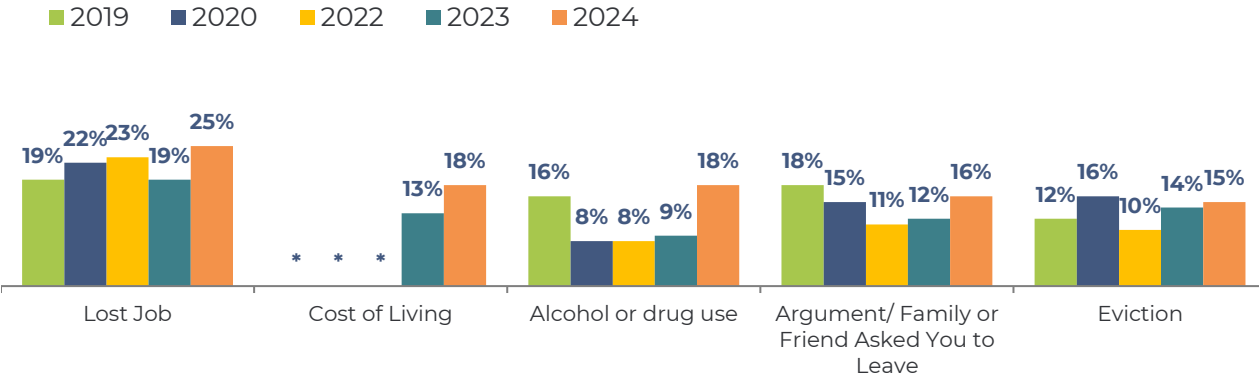


2018 N = 506; 2019 N = 501; 2020 N = 431; 2022 N = 396; 2023 N = 426; 2024 N = 344

# 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.

**Figure 13: Primary Cause of Homelessness (Top Five Responses)**



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



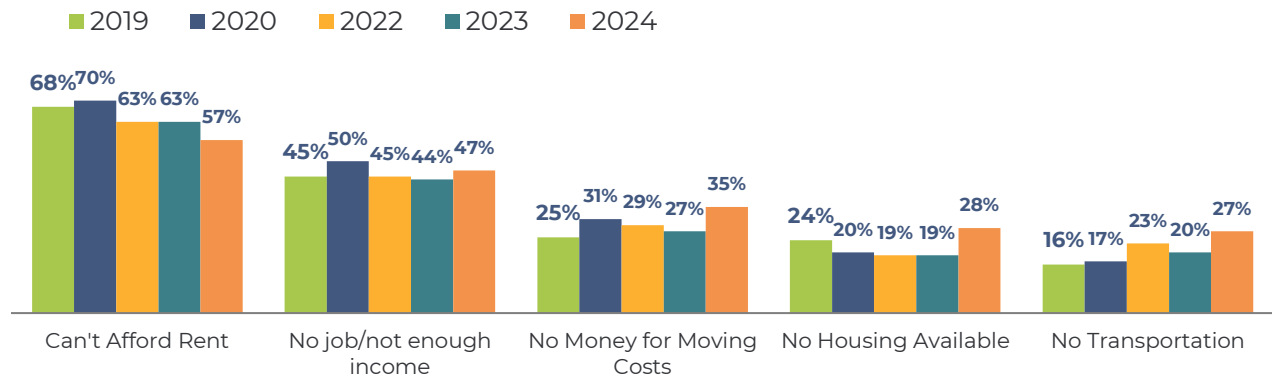
2024 PRIMARY CAUSE OF HOMELESSNESS			
Lost Job	25%	Family/Domestic Violence	4%
Cost of living	18%	Illness/Medical Problem	4%
Alcohol or drug use	18%	Housefire	3%
Argument with Family or Friend	16%	Foreclosure	3%
Eviction	15%	Probation/parole restrictions	1%
Landlord Raised Rent	13%	Hospitalization/treatment	1%
Divorce/separation/break up	10%	Aging out of foster care	1%
Mental health issues	7%	Other	7%
Incarceration	7%	Don't Know/Decline to State	4%

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; 2024 N = 350 respondents offering 548 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 57% choosing that option. Lack of job or income was the second most common (47%), followed by difficulties affording moving costs (35%).

**Figure 14: Obstacles to Obtaining Permanent Housing (Top Five Responses)**



2019 N = 513 respondents giving 1,331 responses; 2020 N = 436 respondents giving 1,130 responses; 2022 N = 404 respondents giving 1,145 responses; 2023 N = 428 respondents offering 1,152 responses; 2024 N = 353 respondents offering 1,061 responses

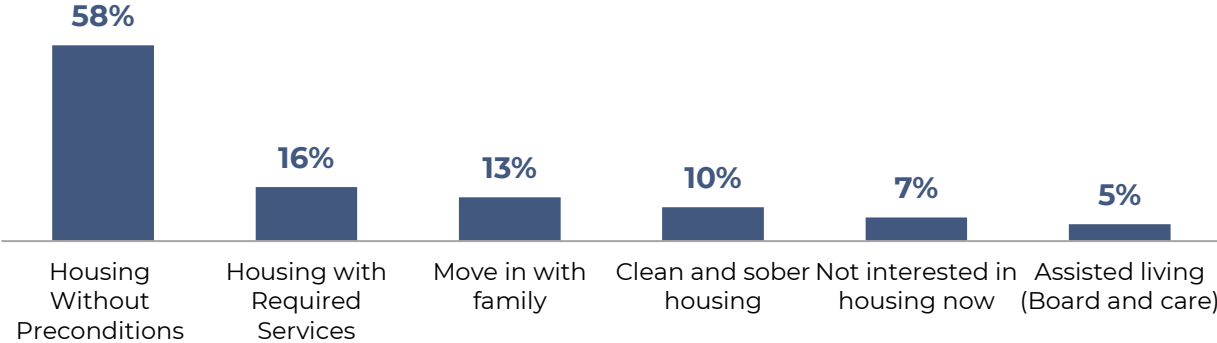
Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.



# HOUSING TYPE DESIRED

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

**Figure 15: Survey Respondents by Housing Type Desired**



2024 N = 341 respondents giving 404 responses

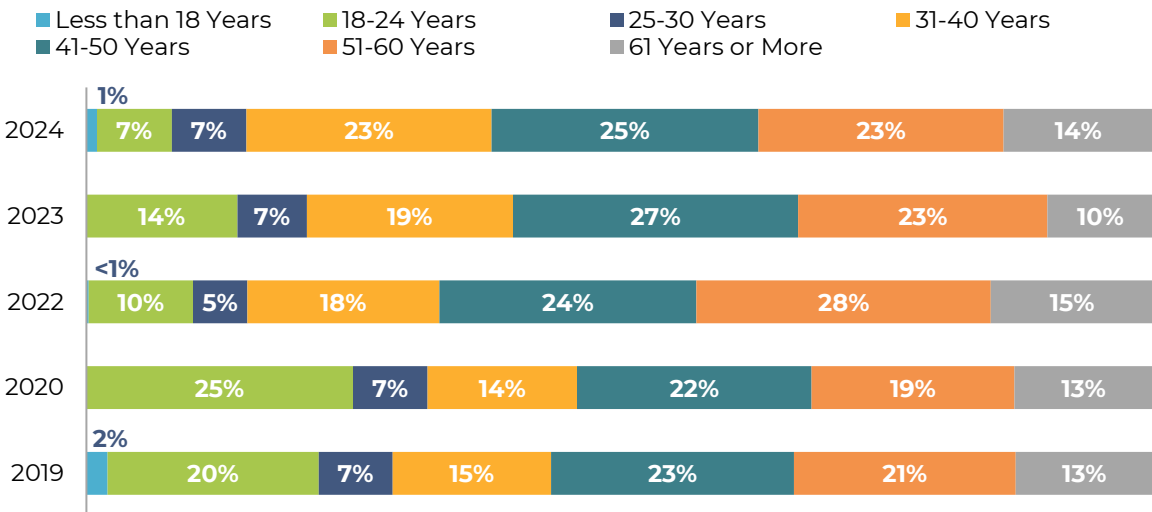
# DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

In 2024, 66% of survey participants identified as male, 32% identified as female, and 2% identified as another gender. Among the female respondents, less than 1% indicated that they were currently pregnant.

## AGE

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

**Figure 16: Survey Respondents by Age**

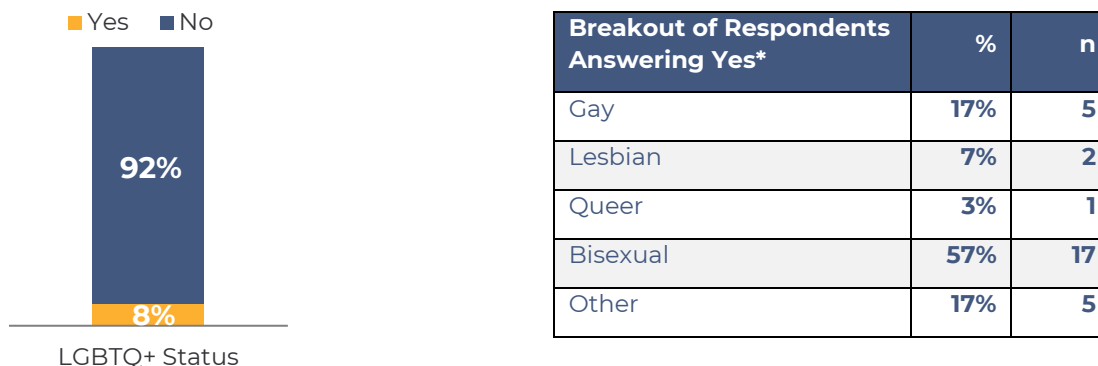


2019 N = 520, 2020 N = 444; 2022 N = 428; 2023 N = 445; 2024 N = 361  
 Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

## 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.<sup>1</sup> According to the 2024 Sonoma Homeless Survey, eight percent (8%) of survey respondents identified as LGBTQ, down from 20% in 2023.

**Figure 17: Survey Respondents by LGBTQ+ Status**



LGBTQ 2024 N = 30

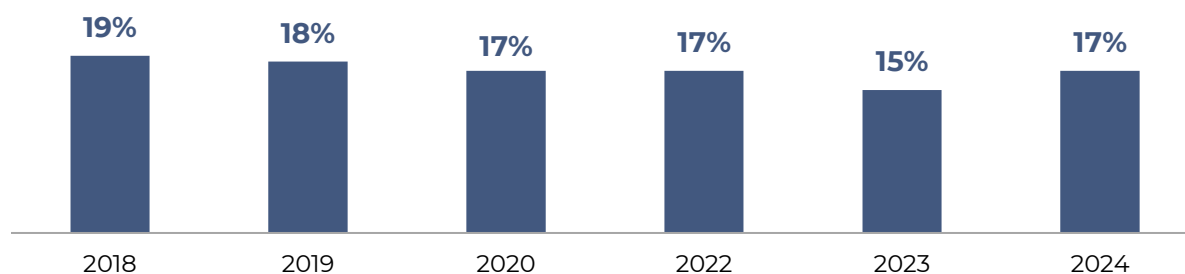
Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.

\* Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

## FOSTER CARE

In California, it is estimated that 24% of foster youth experience homelessness after exiting care.<sup>2</sup> In 2024, 17% of survey respondents reported a history of foster care, similar to previous years.

**Figure 18: Survey Respondents that Reported a History of Foster Care**



2017 N = 645; 2018 N = 510; 2019 N = 504; 2020 N = 423; 2022 N = 408; 2023 N = 425; 2024 N = 338

<sup>1</sup> 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>

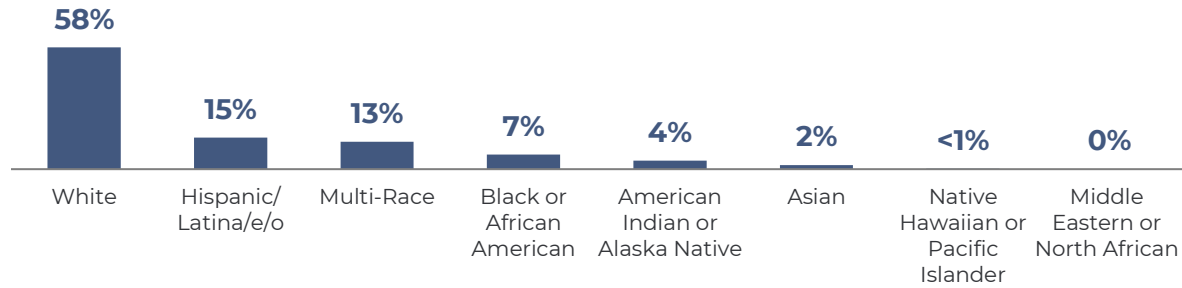
<sup>2</sup> Broslawski, A. (2021). Foster Youth and Homelessness. Homeless Policy Research Institute. Retrieved 2023 from [https://socialinnovation.usc.edu/homeless\\_research/foster-youth-and-homelessness/](https://socialinnovation.usc.edu/homeless_research/foster-youth-and-homelessness/)



## RACE/ETHNICITY

Over half of surey respondents identified as White in 2024. Latinos were second at 15%, followed by persons identifying as multi-race.

**Figure 19: Survey Respondents by Race/Ethnicity**



2024 N = 349

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



# GOVERNMENT SERVICES AND ASSISTANCE

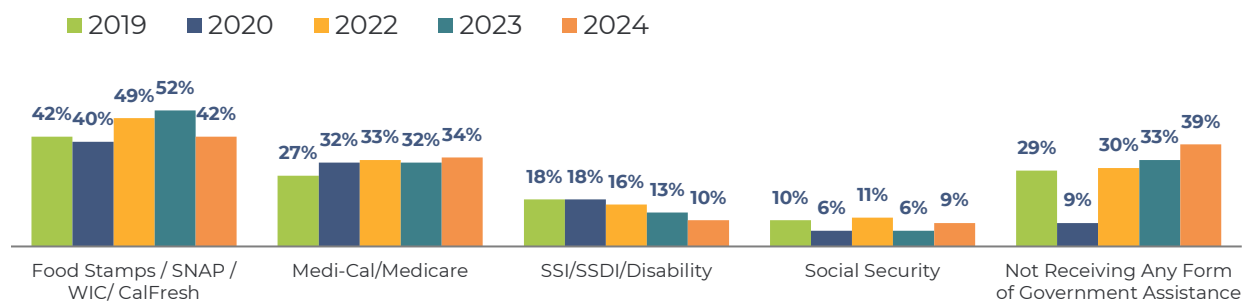
Sonoma County provides services and assistance to those currently experiencing homelessness through federal and local programs. However, many individuals and families do not apply for services, as many are not interested in receiving assistance, or believe that they are ineligible for assistance.

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.

Forty-two percent (42%) of survey respondents were receiving food stamps, SNAP, WIC, and/or CalFresh assistance, a decrease from 52% in 2023. Thirty-nine percent of respondents reported not receiving any form of governmental assistance, an increase from 33% in 2023.

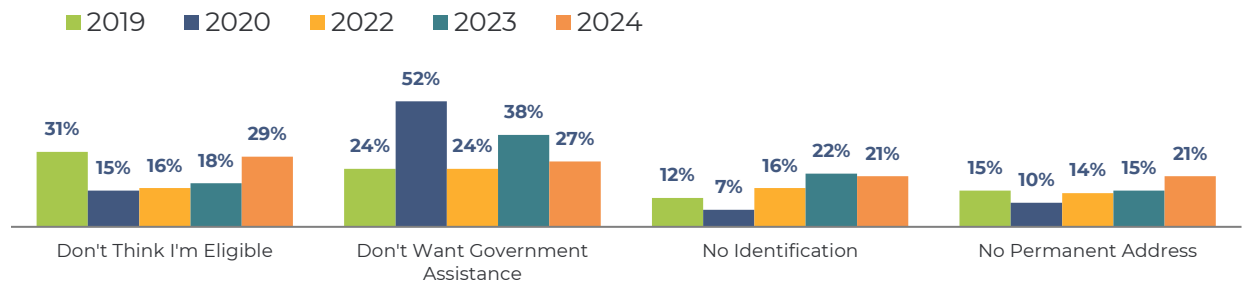
When asked why they weren't receiving any governmental assistance, 27% of respondents replied that they were not interested in doing so, which represents a decrease from 38% in 2023.

**Figure 20: Government Assistance Received (Top Five Responses)**



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; 2024 N = 359 respondents offering 533 responses  
 Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.

**Figure 21: Reasons for Not Receiving Government Assistance (Top Five Responses)**

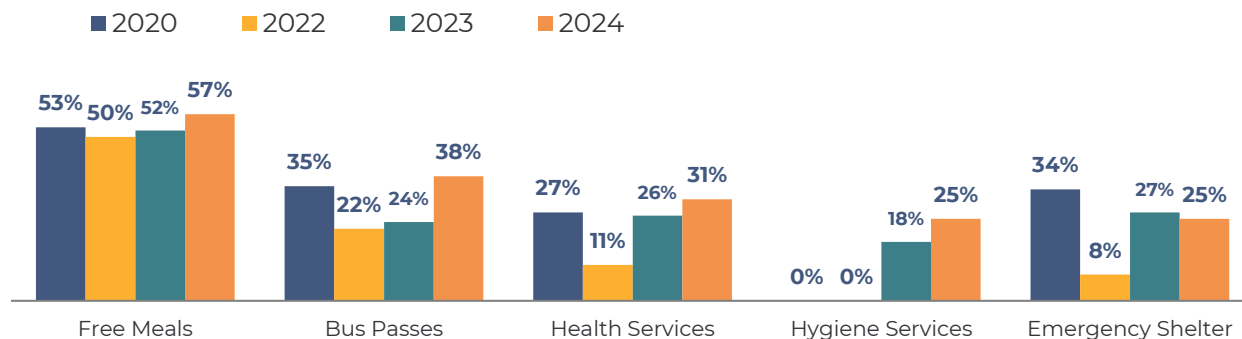


2018 N = 139 respondents offering 184 responses; 2019 N = 292 respondents offering 421 responses; 2020 N = 138 respondents offering 162 responses; 2022 N = 276 respondents offering 422 responses; 2023 N = 128 respondents offering 193 responses; 2024 N = 104 respondents offering 162 responses

## 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.

**Figure 22: Service Usage (Top Five Responses)**



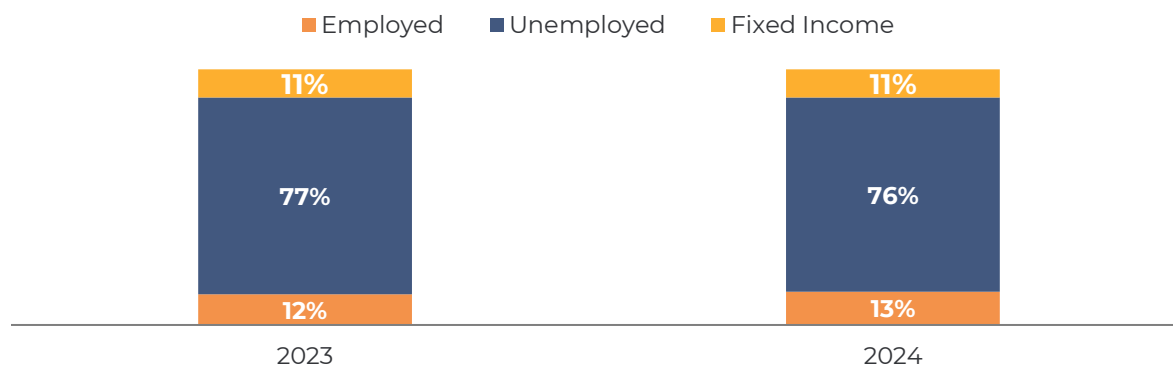
2018 N = 491 respondents offering 1,212 responses; 2019 N = 495 respondents offering 1,328 responses; 2020 N = 429 respondents offering 1,160 responses; 2022 N = 381 respondents offering 613 responses; 2023 N = 411 respondents offering 956 responses 2024 N = 319 respondents offering 833 responses  
 Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.  
 \* Note: Hygiene services was not a response option in 2020 or 2022

## EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

While over three-quarters (76%) of survey respondents reported being unemployed, a small percentage reported part-time (4%) or full-time work (5%) 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.

Eleven percent (11%) of survey respondents reported they were at least somewhat employed. This includes seasonal, part-time, and full-time employment.

**Figure 23: Survey Respondents by Employment and Income**



2023 Employment status N = 385; 2024 Employment status N = 340

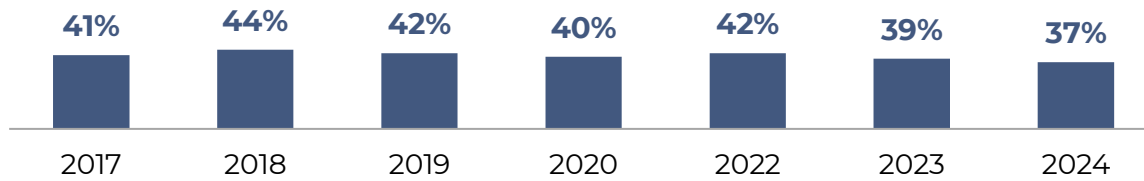


# HEALTH

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.

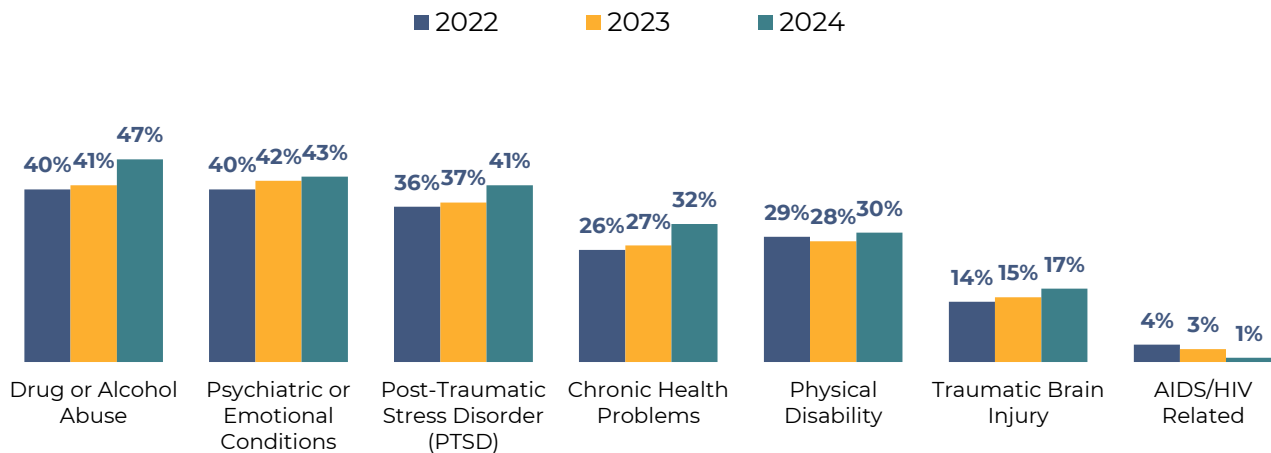
Similar to previous years, 37% of survey respondents reported suffering from at least one HUD-disabling condition. The two most common health conditions experienced by respondents were drug or alcohol abuse (47%) and psychiatric problems (43%), followed by PTSD (41%).

**Figure 24: HUD Disabling Conditions**



2017 N = 687; 2018 N = 515; 2019 N = 520; 2020 N = 478; 2022 N = 451; 2023 N = 445; 2024 N = 361

**Figure 25: Health Conditions**



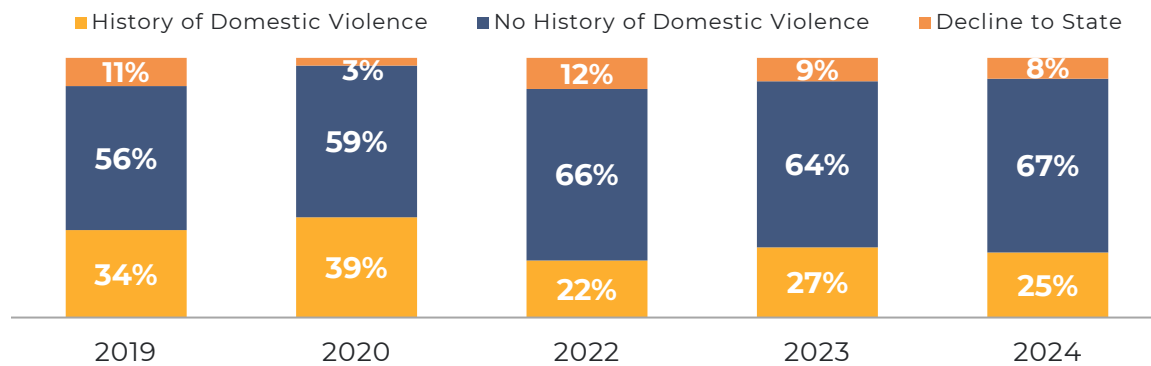
2022 N = 371 - 387; 2023 N = 393 - 413 2024 N = 307 - 315  
 Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.

# 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, 25% of respondents reported having such a past. This represents a decrease from 2023 (27%). Eight percent of respondents reported that they were currently experiencing domestic violence.

**Figure 26: History of Domestic Violence**

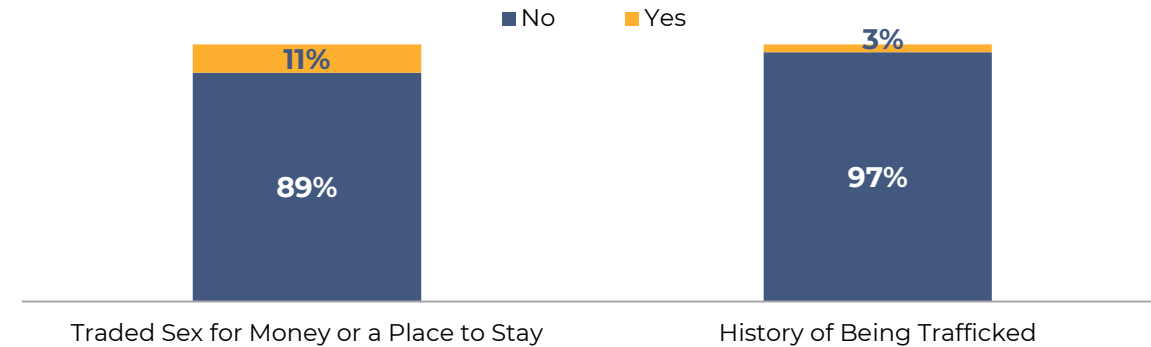


2019 N = 499; 2020 N = 421; 2022 N = 403; 2023 N = 417; 2024 N = 344  
 Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

# 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. Eleven percent of survey respondents reported trading sex for money or a place to stay, in the past. And 3% reported being trafficked in the past.

**Figure 27: Sex Trade Involvement**



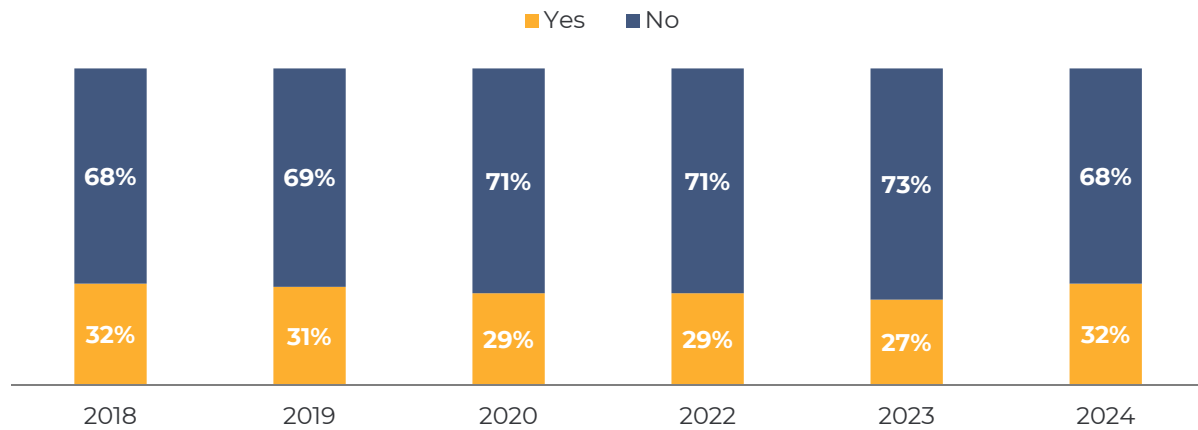
2024 Trading Sex for Money or a Place to Stay N = 344, History of Being Trafficked N = 336

# 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.

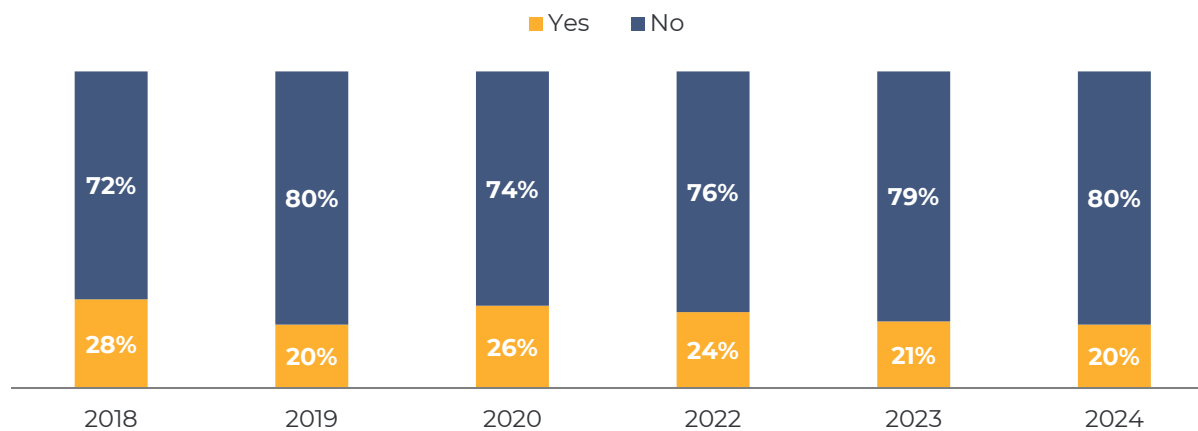
Similar to previous years, 27% of respondents reported spending a night or jail in the 12 months previous to taking the survey. Just under a quarter (21%) of respondents reported being on parole or probation at the time of the survey.

**Figure 28: Spent a Night in Jail or Prison in the Last 12 Months**



2018 N = 500; 2019 N = 505; 2020 N = 427; 2022 N = 391; 2023 N = 409; 2024 N = 330  
Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100%

**Figure 29: Currently On Probation or Parole**



2018 N = 488; 2019 N = 489; 2020 N = 427; 2022 N = 391; 2023 N = 420; 2024 N = 324



# HUD DEFINED SPECIAL POPULATIONS

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 2024 Sonoma County Homeless Point-in-Time Census and Survey.

## HOUSEHOLDS EXPERIENCING CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS

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.<sup>3</sup>

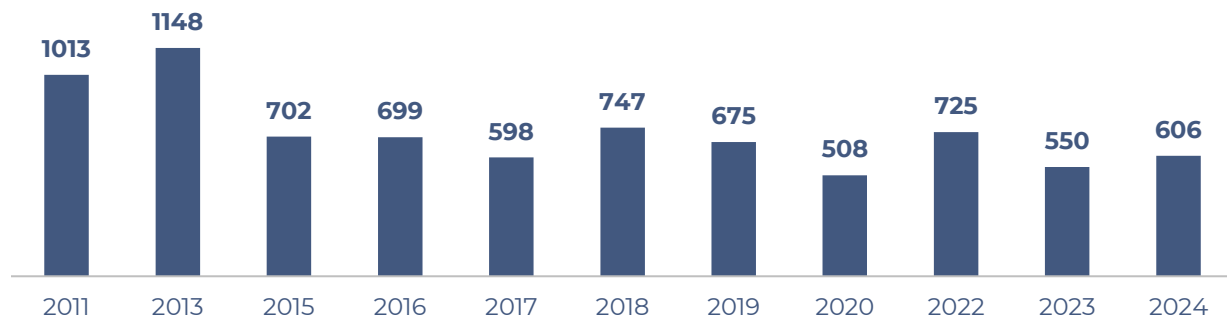
After decreasing from 2022 to 2023, the chronically homeless population increased 10% to 606 in 2024. Just under one-third (31%) of the chronically homeless population was sheltered. Seventy percent of the population was male, while 29% was female.



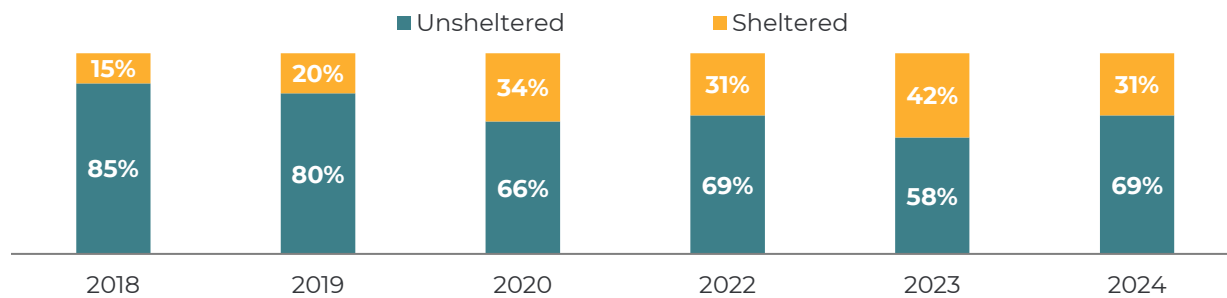
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<sup>3</sup> Effects of Housing First approaches on health and well-being of adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness: systematic review and meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials. (2019). *J Epidemiol Community Health*. Retrieved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

**Figure 30: Total Number of Persons Experiencing Chronic Homelessness**



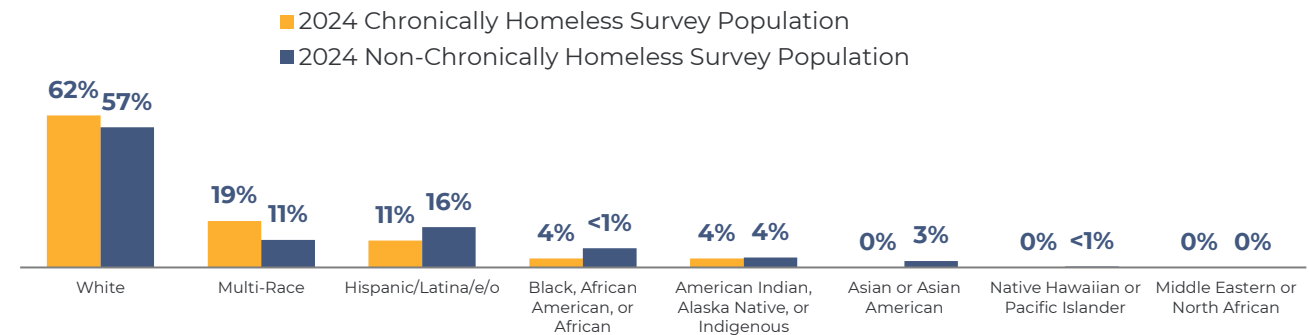
**Figure 31: Chronically Homeless Census Population by Shelter Status**



**Figure 32: Number of Chronically Homeless Individuals by Shelter Status**

	2018	2019	2020	2022	2023	2024	2023-24 % Change
Sheltered	115	138	174	224	231	189	-22%
Unsheltered	632	537	334	501	319	417	31%
Total	747	675	508	725	550	606	10%

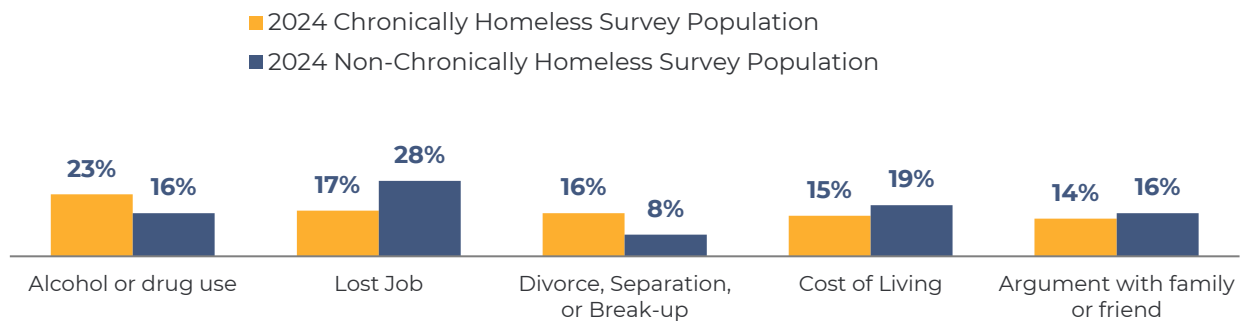
**Figure 33: Chronically Homeless Survey Population by Race and Ethnicity**



2024 Chronically Homeless Survey Population N = 82; 2024 Non-Chronically Homeless Survey Population N = 267  
 Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

The most common cause of homelessness amongst those experiencing chronic homelessness was alcohol or drug use (23%), followed by the loss of a job (17%).

**Figure 34: Primary Cause of Homelessness, Chronic and Non-Chronic Comparison (Top 5 Responses)**



2024 Chronically Homeless Survey Population N = 88 respondents offering 131 responses; 2024 Non-Chronically Homeless Survey Population N = 262 respondents offering 417 responses

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

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

## VETERANS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

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.

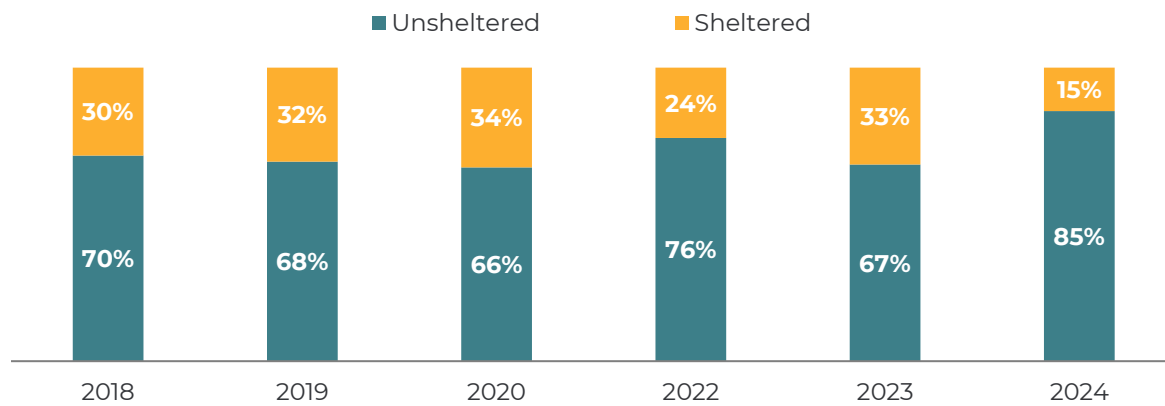
After a decrease in 2023, the number of veteran experiencing homelessness in Sonoma County rose to 162 in 2024. Eighty-five percent of veterans were unsheltered.

**Figure 35: Total Number of Veterans Experiencing Homelessness**





**Figure 36: Veterans Experiencing Homelessness by Shelter Status**

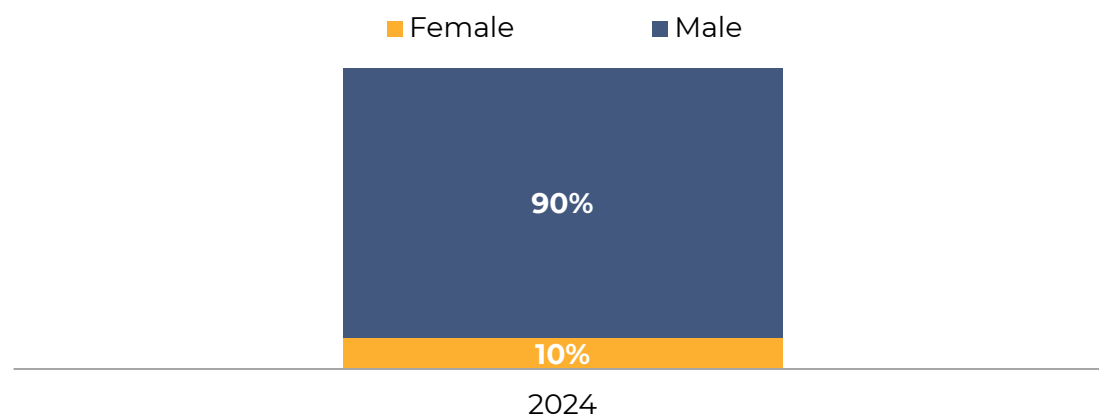


2022 n=332; 2023 n=159; 2024 n=72

**Figure 37: Number of Veterans Experiencing Homelessness by Shelter Status**

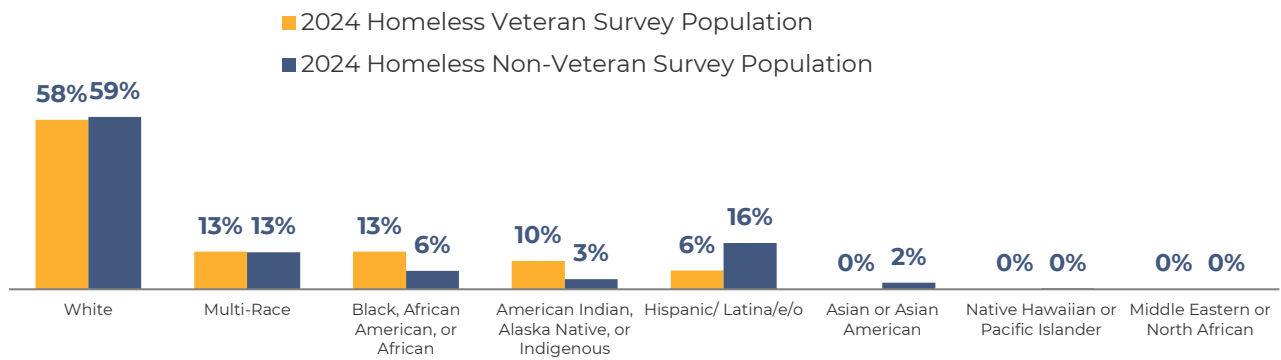
	2018	2019	2020	2022	2023	2024	2023-24 % Change
Sheltered	63	68	47	45	36	24	-33%
Unsheltered	144	142	92	146	74	138	86%
Total	207	210	139	191	110	162	47%

**Figure 38: Veterans Experiencing Homelessness by Gender**



2024 N = 162

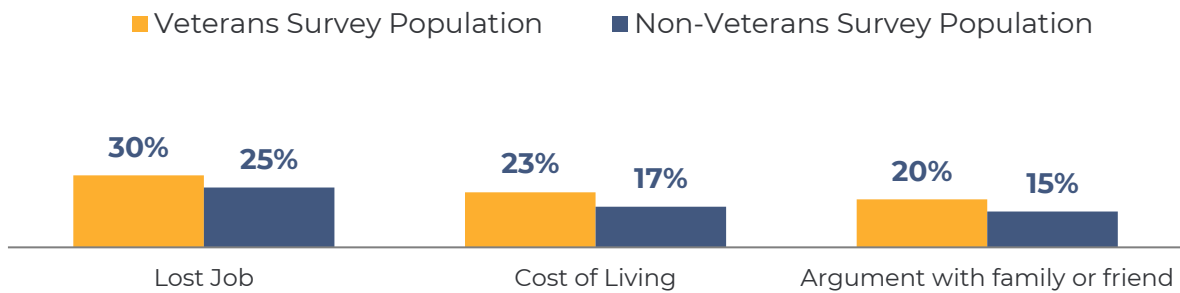
**Figure 39: Veterans Experiencing Homelessness by Race/Ethnicity**



2024 Homeless Veterans Survey Population N = 31; 2024 Non-Homeless Veterans Survey Population N = 315  
 Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Veterans were more likely to cite loss of a job, cost of living, and argument with family or a friend as the cause of their homelessness when compared to the non-Veteran population.

**Figure 40: Primary Cause of Homelessness Among Veterans (top 3 Responses)**



2024 Homeless Veterans Survey Population N = 30 respondents offering 49 responses; 2024 Homeless Non-Veterans Survey Population N = 317 respondents offering 494 responses  
 Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.



# FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

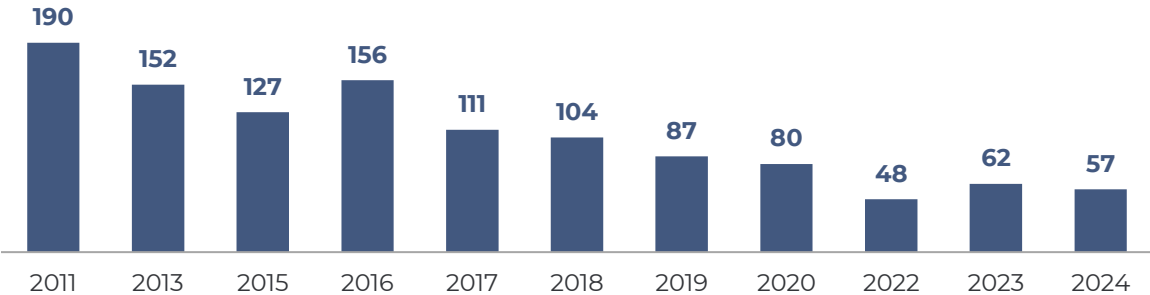
National data from 2020 suggest that 30% of all people experiencing homelessness are persons in families.<sup>4</sup> Very few families experiencing homelessness are unsheltered, as public shelters serve more than 90% of homeless families in the United States; this is a significantly higher proportion 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>

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 2024, there were 57 families with 198 family members experiencing homelessness in Sonoma County.

**Figure 41: Total Families with Children Experiencing Homelessness, Census Population**



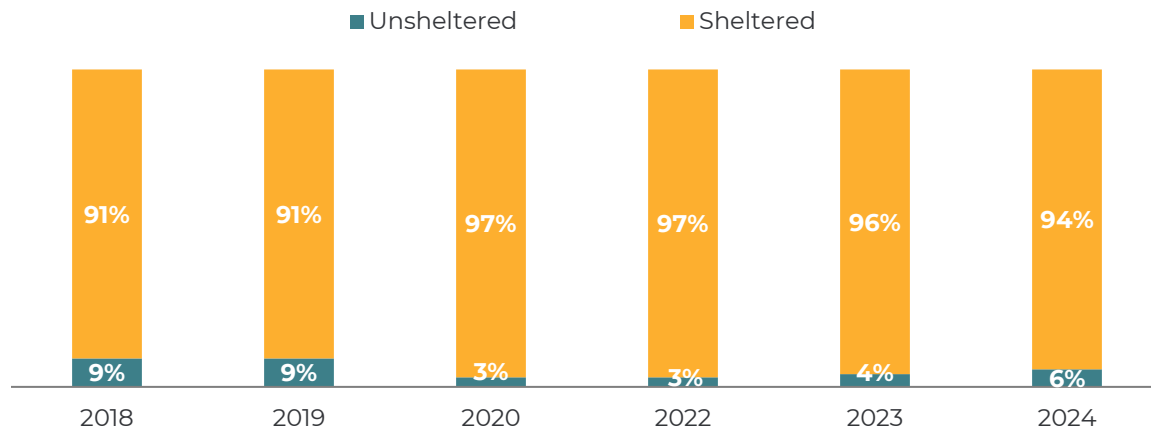
4 U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2020). The 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. Retrieved 2023 from [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2020-AHAR-Part-1.pdf](https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2020-AHAR-Part-1.pdf)

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/>



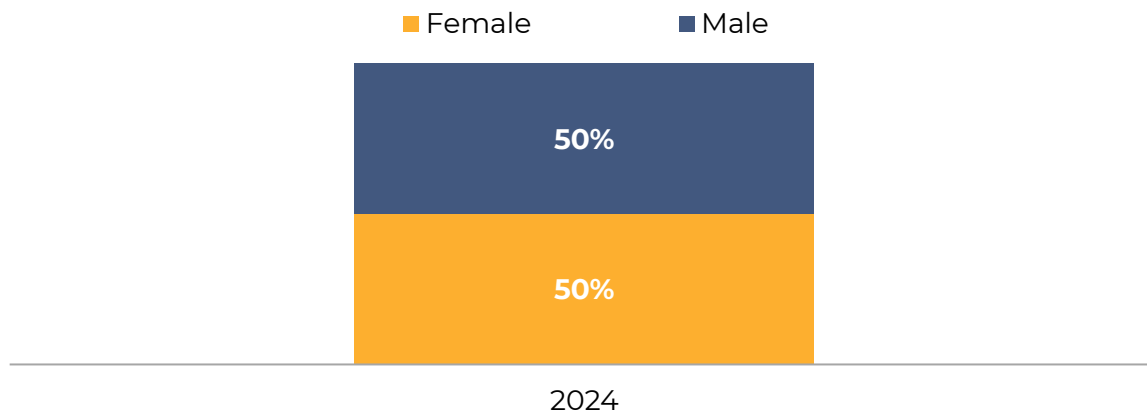
**Figure 42: All Individuals in Families with Children Experiencing Homelessness by Shelter Status**



	2018	2019	2020	2022	2023	2024	2023-24 % Change
Sheltered	307	253	227	150	194	187	-3%
Unsheltered	32	26	8	5	9	11	22%
Total	339	279	235	155	203	198	-2%

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

**Figure 43: All Individuals in Families with Children Experiencing Homelessness by Gender**



2018 N = 339; 2019 N = 279; 2020 N = 235; 2022 N = 155; 2023 N = 203; 2024 N = 198  
 Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

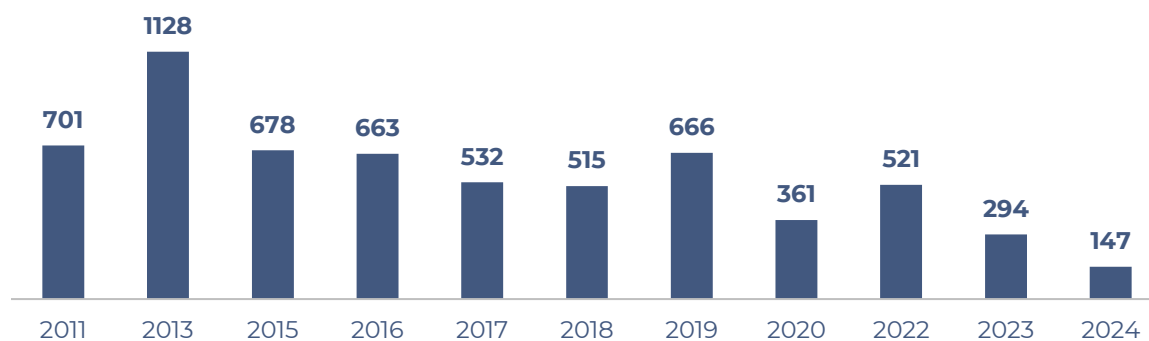
## UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN AND TRANSITION-AGE YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

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.<sup>7</sup>

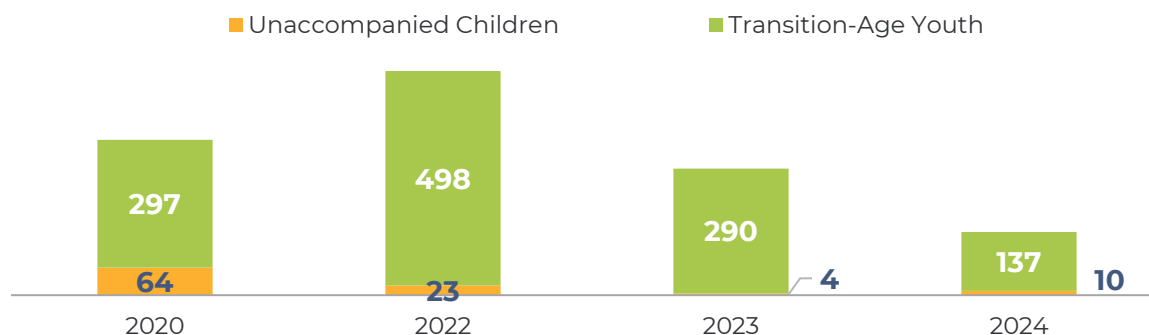
Due to the especially challenging outreach and access efforts necessary to profile the nature of youth homelessness, limited data are available on unaccompanied children and transition-age youth experiencing homelessness.

In Sonoma County, the number of children and transition-age youth continued a decrease from 2022, falling to 147 persons.

**Figure 44: Total Number of Unaccompanied Homeless Children and Transition-Age Youth**

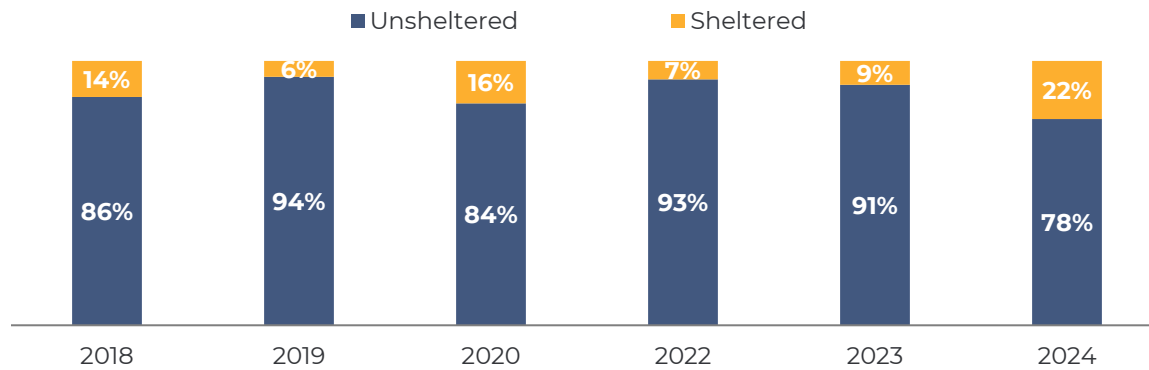


**Figure 45: Total Unaccompanied Homeless Children and Transition-Age Youth Count Population**



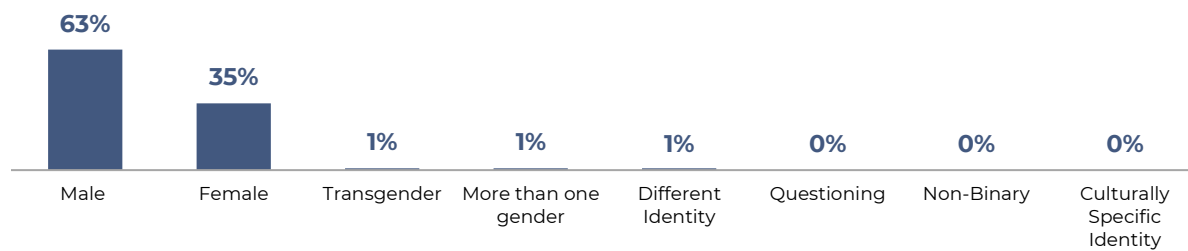
<sup>7</sup> National Alliance to End Homelessness. (2022). Retrieved 2023 <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/who-experiences-homelessness/youth/>

**Figure 46: Unaccompanied Children and Transition-Age Youth by Shelter Status**



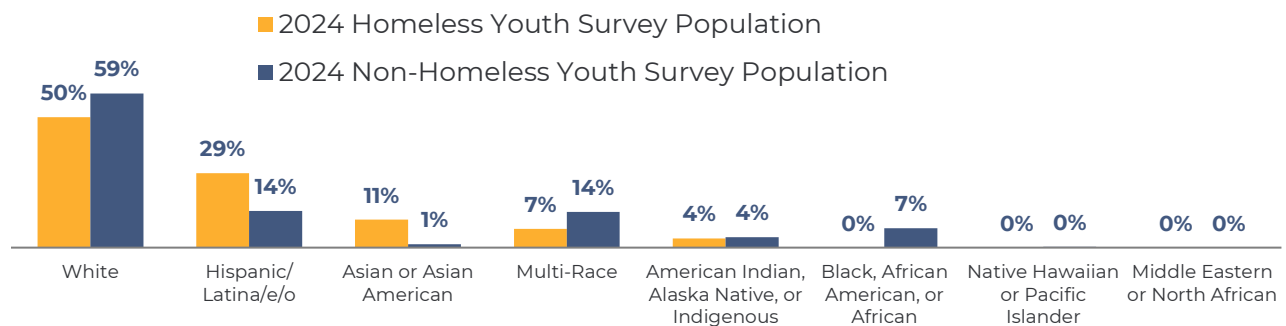
	2018	2019	2020	2022	2023	2024	2023-24 % Change
Sheltered	70	43	57	35	26	32	23%
Unsheltered	445	623	304	501	268	115	-58%
Total	515	666	361	536	294	147	-50%

**Figure 47: Unaccompanied Children and Transition-Age Youth by Gender**



N = 279; 2020 N = 235; 2022 N = 155; 2023 N = 203; 2024 N = 198  
 Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

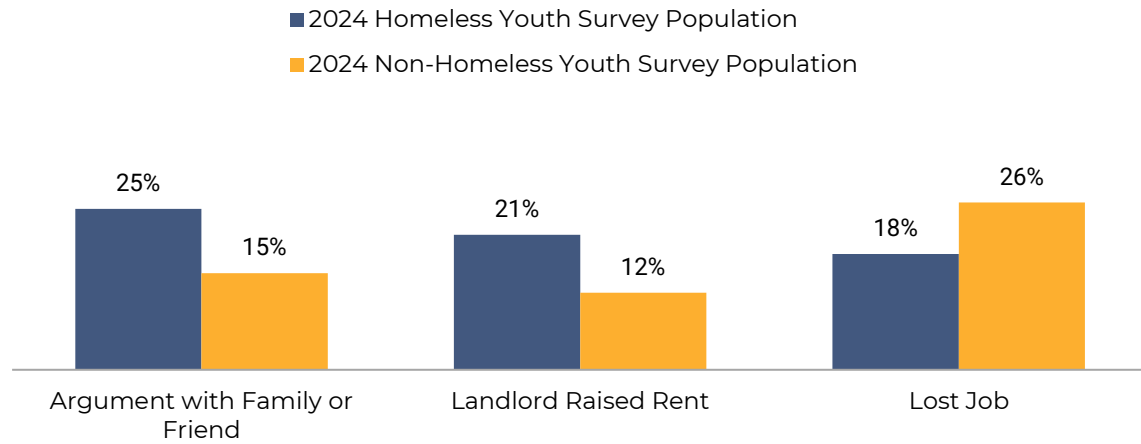
**Figure 48: Unaccompanied Children and Transition-Age Youth by Race/Ethnicity**



2024 Homeless Youth Survey N = 28; 2024 Non-Homeless Youth Survey N = 321  
 Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.



**Figure 49: Primary Cause of Homelessness Among Unaccompanied Children and Transition-Age Youth**



*2024 Homeless Youth Survey Population N = 28 respondents offering 36 responses; 2024 Non-Homeless Youth Survey Population N = 322 respondents offering 512 responses  
Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.*



# CONCLUSION

The 2024 Sonoma County Homeless Count and Survey was performed using HUD-recommended practices for counting and surveying the homeless population. The 2024 Point-in-Time Count identified 2,522 persons experiencing homelessness in Sonoma County. This represents an increase of 11% from the count conducted in 2023.

The 2024 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 decreased by three percent and the unsheltered count increased by twenty-two percent.
- Seventy-nine percent of those experiencing homelessness entered into homelessness while living in Sonoma County.
- Thirty-eight percent of survey respondents experienced homelessness for the first time before age 25. Fourteen percent reported experiencing homelessness for the first time at age 50 or older.
- One-quarter (twenty-five percent) of survey respondents cited job loss as the primary cause of their homelessness. Fifty-seven percent reported unaffordable rent as an obstacle to securing permanent housing and another forty-seven percent cited no job or not enough income as an obstacle.
- Ninety-three percent of respondents who were unsheltered or staying in emergency shelter would move into housing if it were available. Fifty-eight percent preferred housing without preconditions.

## CONCLUSIONS BY SUBPOPULATIONS

### Chronically Homeless

- The count of chronically homeless individuals increased 10% from 2023.

### Veterans

- The number of veterans experiencing homelessness in Sonoma County increased 47% from 110 individuals in 2023 to 162 in 2024.

### Families with Children

- The number of families experiencing homelessness decreased from 62 families in 2023 to 57 in 2024.

### Unaccompanied Children and Transition-Age youth

- There were ten unaccompanied children experiencing homelessness, and 137 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 families experiencing homelessness and youth experiencing homelessness. While there are areas that still need more attention, the successes in reducing numbers in certain subpopulations show a path toward future reductions.

## CLOSING

The 2024 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 Homeless Coalition 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 2024 Sonoma County Homeless Count and Survey report fulfills the Sonoma County Homeless Coalition'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 2024 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 CENSUS & SURVEY

The 2024 Point-in-Time Census and Survey had four components:

- **General Street Count:** A morning count of unsheltered homeless individuals and families on January 26, 2024. This occurred from approximately 6:00 AM to 10:00 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.
- **General Shelter Count:** A nighttime count of individuals and families experiencing homelessness staying at publicly- and privately-operated shelters on the night of January 25, 2024. 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.
- **Targeted Street Count of Unaccompanied Children and Young Adults:** An afternoon count of unsheltered youth and young adults on January 26, 2024. 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.
- **Homeless Survey:** An in-person interview with sheltered and unsheltered individuals experiencing homelessness conducted by peer surveyors between January 26 and February 29, 2024. 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 2024 street count methodology followed an established, HUD approved methodology used in the 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2022, and 2023 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 2024. 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 to gather materials, ask last minute questions, and receive one more brief training review before their route assignments.

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 2024 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 2024 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 16 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 26, 2024.

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 26, 2024. 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.



# 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 25, 2024. 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 26 and February 29, 2024 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 2024 homeless survey.

## SURVEY SAMPLING

Based on a Point-in-Time Count estimate of 2,522 homeless persons, with a randomized survey sampling process, the 361 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 2024 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 HUD 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 HUD 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** – Temporary accommodation for people experiencing homelessness, 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 (TAY)** – Young people between the ages of 18 and 24 years old who are not accompanied by a parent or guardian.

**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.