State of Homelessness in California: Fact Sheet

Author: Claudia Galliani

WHO IS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN CALIFORNIA?

- The people experiencing homelessness in California are locals. **90% of the people experiencing homelessness in California became homeless while living in the state**, 75% currently live in the same county where they fell into homelessness, and 66% were born in California.¹

- Consistent with national trends,² individuals who are Black/African American, Indigenous/Native American, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders are **overrepresented groups** in the population of Californians experiencing homelessness.³

- Latinx Californians are experiencing an alarming increase of homelessness; while homelessness in California rose by 6.2% from 2020 to 2023, homelessness among Latinx Californians increased by 22% over the same period.⁴

- In Los Angeles County, the population of Latinx people experiencing homelessness increased 4.9% from 2022 to 2023 (1,412 person increase) while the American Indian/Alaskan Native population experiencing homelessness increased by 18.5% (113 person increase) during that time period.⁵

- Black people have experienced, and continue experiencing, **systemic racism** in the form of **disproportionate levels of policing, housing segregation, employment discrimination, and the ongoing disinvestment from Black communities**, which have led to their significant overrepresentation in the population experiencing homelessness.⁶

- People who are Black/African American make up only 7.6% of L.A. County’s population, yet account for 31.7% of the people experiencing homelessness in the County.⁷

- Regarding adults ages 18+ experiencing homelessness in California, **69% are cisgender men, 30% are cisgender women, 1% are transgender, nonbinary, or gender non-conforming individuals**.⁸ Among Transition Age Youth (ages 18-24 not living with minor children), the numbers are 64% cisgender men, 30% cisgender women, and 6% transgender, nonbinary, and gender non-conforming individuals.⁹

- California reports the **highest number of unaccompanied youth** in the nation (9,590); this is a third of all unaccompanied youth (32%) and half (52%) of unsheltered unaccompanied youth in the nation.¹⁰

---

¹ UCSF 2023
² National Alliance to End Homelessness 2020
³ UCSF 2023
⁴ California Budget and Policy Center July 2023
⁵ LAHSA 2023
⁶ CSH & CHP 2022
⁷ LAHSA 2023
⁸, ⁹ UCSF 2023
¹⁰ HUD 2023
The homeless population is aging: 44% of people experiencing homelessness are over the age of 50, and 41% of them experienced their first episode of homelessness after the age of 50.\textsuperscript{11}

More than a third (36%) of individuals experiencing homelessness in California are considered chronically homeless, accounting for 45% of all individuals experiencing chronic patterns of homelessness in the country. An individual experiencing chronic homelessness is defined as a person with a disability who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more or has experienced at least four episodes of homelessness in the last three years where the combined length of time unhoused is at least twelve months.\textsuperscript{12}

The median length of time experiencing homelessness is nearly two years (22 months).\textsuperscript{13}

Those at the greatest risk of homelessness are people with a history of trauma, older adults, and people of color.\textsuperscript{14}

\section*{WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT HOMELESSNESS IN CALIFORNIA?}

Home to only 12% of the nation’s population, California encompasses a third (30%) of the nation’s population experiencing homelessness and half (49.4%) of those experiencing unsheltered homelessness in the United States.\textsuperscript{15}

As of 2023, over 171,000 people are experiencing homelessness in California.\textsuperscript{16}

Homelessness in California increased more than 23% from 2007 to 2022.\textsuperscript{17} From 2020 to 2022 alone, the number of people experiencing homelessness in California increased by 6.2%.\textsuperscript{18}

The majority of unhoused Californians live in Los Angeles (49.9%) or in the San Francisco Bay Area (22.2%),\textsuperscript{19} but the rise in homelessness is occurring throughout the state; 30 of 43 (70%) California Continuums of Care (CoC) in California saw increases in homelessness between 2020 and 2022.\textsuperscript{20}

67.3\% of people experiencing homelessness in California are unsheltered, which is the highest proportion of unsheltered homelessness of any state.\textsuperscript{21}

Compared with people staying in shelters, people experiencing unsheltered homelessness are far more likely to face health challenges, disabilities, racial discrimination, violence and trauma, and longer lengths of homelessness.\textsuperscript{22}

People experiencing unsheltered homelessness also encounter disproportionate levels of policing and are more likely to engage with emergency health services than people experiencing sheltered homelessness.\textsuperscript{23}

Violence against unhoused folks is common; 38% of unhoused Californians reported experiencing physical or sexual violence during their current episode of homelessness,\textsuperscript{24} and 47% report being “roughed up” or harassed by police.\textsuperscript{25}

\begin{itemize}
\item The California Homeless Housing Needs Assessment estimates that the state of California needs to commit \textbf{$8.1 \text{ billion each year for 12 years to solve homelessness.}$ Current state and federal governments are projected to allocate an average of $1.2 \text{ billion toward affordable and supportive housing annually, leaving a $6.9 \text{ billion gap equivalent to 2.7\% of the 2022-23 state budget.}$}\textsuperscript{26}
\end{itemize}
HOW DID WE GET HERE?

- Housing in California has long been more expensive than the rest of the country, but as construction slowed significantly from 1970 to 1980, home prices in California increased from 30% above the national average to more than 80% higher.\(^27\)
- Thousands of Californians began falling into homelessness in the 1980’s when widening income inequality prevented wages from keeping up with housing costs.\(^28\)
- The median rent in California has increased by 38% since the year 2000, and 4% in the last year alone, but the median renter household income has only increased by 7% in the same time period, adjusted for inflation.\(^29\)
- Today, renters would need to earn 2.9 times the state minimum wage to afford average rent in California.\(^30\)
- California is experiencing a shortage of 1.2 million affordable homes given the demand for affordable housing.\(^31\)
- In California, there are 24 units of affordable housing for every 100 extremely low-income households.\(^32\)
- California spends twice as much supporting homeowners (e.g. mortgage interest reduction, property tax reduction) than renters (e.g. renter’s credit, low-income housing tax credits), and while 97% of support for homeowners is permanent, meaning ongoing sources of funding, only 17% of renter resources are permanent.\(^33\)
- California’s history of explicitly racist government policies, such as redlining and housing discrimination, has systematically denied Black households entry into middle-class neighborhoods and the wealth-building power of homeownership.\(^34\)
- Across the nation, income inequality is the widest it has been in decades, encompassing an enormous racial wealth gap. In 2019, while the median white family had $184,000 in wealth, the median Latinx family had $38,000 and the median Black family had $23,000.\(^35\)
- Black renter households are 41% more severely cost burdened than white renter households.\(^36\)

WHAT ARE THE EMERGING ISSUES IN LOS ANGELES?

- Homelessness in Los Angeles continues to rise. As of 2023, on any given night, approximately 75,518 people experience homelessness in L.A. County (a 9% increase from 2022), and 46,260 of them live in the City of L.A. (a 10% increase from 2022).\(^37\)
- From 2022 to 2023 alone, the County of Los Angeles saw a 14% increase in the unsheltered homeless population, and the City experienced a 15% increase.\(^38\)
- In Los Angeles County, about 14,844 people are chronically homeless and unsheltered.\(^39\)
- Chronic homelessness increased by 18% in Los Angeles CoC from 2022 to 2023, including a 21% increase in unsheltered chronic homelessness and a 7% increase in sheltered chronic homelessness.\(^40\) This reflects the statewide trend of a steady increase in chronic homelessness over the past decade.\(^41\)

\(^{27}\) LAO 2017  
\(^{28}\) CSH & CHP 2022  
\(^{29}\) California Housing Partnership 2023  
\(^{30}\) California Housing Partnership 2021  
\(^{31}\) UCSF 2023  
\(^{32}\) California Housing Partnership 2023  
\(^{33}\) Rothstein 2017  
\(^{34}\) UCSF 2023  
\(^{35}\) California Housing Partnership 2023  
\(^{36}\) LAHSA 2023  
\(^{37}\) LAHSA 2022  
\(^{38}\) LAHSA 2023  
\(^{39}\) LAHSA 2023 [Video]
REFERENCES:


