Key takeaways

Los Angeles’s homeless services system is preventing and ending homelessness for more people than ever before, but the housing crisis and economic disparities are pushing more people into homelessness. Since last year’s Point-in-Time Count, LA County saw a rise in homelessness of 12% to 58,936. The City of Los Angeles saw a 16% rise to 36,300.

Ventura County, Orange County, and Kern County saw respective rises of more than double, triple, and quadruple the percentage rise in LA County. The investment voters have made to address homelessness prevented a greater rise in LA.

Last year our system housed 21,631 people, equivalent to 40% of last year’s Count—and 92% of the people we placed into permanent housing in 2016 and 2017 stayed housed through 2018. At every level—housing, services, and outreach—this system has doubled or tripled its capacity.

Although the Count number is higher, the same people have not remained on the street all year. We see a dynamic of inflow and outflow. The system has helped thousands exit homelessness—while economic pressures have pushed thousands more into homelessness.

The homeless services system is the safety net of last resort. People enter it when systems such as foster care, criminal justice, mental health, and the housing market break down.

In order to catch up to the problem of new inflow into homelessness and reverse it, the challenge to our system is to scale up the solutions that are working to meet the size of the problem, move upstream and invest more in prevention, and build on services and connections to those exiting foster care, the criminal justice system, and hospitals.

Looking outside our system, the most important change we need to make is to overcome resistance to siting and building new housing and shelters. We need strong state and local policies that preserve affordable housing, prevent evictions and source-of-income discrimination, control rising rents, and facilitate faster construction of new housing.

Our system is working harder than ever

Outreach, services, and housing: Two years into a ten-year effort from Measure H, LA’s homeless services system doubled the number of people we move into housing each year. We worked with 75,843 people over the course of the year, 80% of whom were new to our system. We prevented homelessness for 5,643 people—triple the number as before Measure H. Outreach workers engaged 34,110 people—triple the number as before Measure H.
Permanent supportive housing construction: HHH Funds are committed to build 5,303 units—53% of our target of 10,000 units. HHH, county, and state funds will support opening 1,397 units in fiscal year 2019-20 (820 currently under construction) and 2,758 units in fiscal year 2020-21 (714 currently under construction).

Scale, move upstream, and build connections: We’ve hired hundreds of street-based outreach workers, putting multi-disciplinary teams on the street, and set up LA-HOP so the public can find resources for their homeless neighbors. We’ve improved care coordination and connections to the foster system, hospitals, and jails to prevent homelessness and connect people to services and housing. More than 40 of the 88 cities in LA County have developed their own city-specific plans to address and prevent homelessness based on our priority strategies. Employment programs connect clients to jobs and help them clear their criminal records. Mental health urgent care centers and specialized outreach teams help people with mental illness stabilize and eventually reach housing. Safe Parking sites and mobile showers support people experiencing homelessness with security and dignity.

The gap remains: We’re moving people into available housing faster than ever, but we need more shelters and rental units. 31,596 people are in our system, have been assessed by case managers and said yes to housing, and there just aren’t enough units available for them.

What are we up against?

Our housing and economic crisis pushes people into homelessness faster than our system can help them out. LA County has a tremendous shortage of affordable housing units, and rents are rising faster for low-income renters and far faster than wages—median household income decreased 3% between 2000 and 2017. A renter would need to earn $47.52 per hour to afford the median monthly asking rent. More than 555,000 county households pay more than 50% of their monthly income on housing.

A legacy of racial discrimination. Black people continue to be overrepresented at 33% of the homeless population in LA County, but only 9% of the general population. A report issued earlier this year recommends policy efforts to provide fair access to housing and employment, expand re-entry support, and close the racial housing gap to address this inequity.

What else is happening and what can we do?

The $460 million Measure H budget for FY 2019-20 ($58M higher) will help scale up all of these efforts. Governor Newsom’s May budget revision adds $650 million in one-time funding.

We need legislation to preserve affordable housing, prevent evictions, and allow faster construction of new housing. We need more cities to allow motels to be converted to housing.

Everyone can help by saying yes to more housing in their neighborhoods. Join United Way’s Everyone In campaign at everyoneinla.org. Landlords can participate in rapid rehousing, become Section 8 providers, and be a part of the solution through the Lease up program.
Subpopulations
The following list shares insights about individual subpopulations. Detailed figures in Fast Facts, below.

Veterans decreased slightly and we housed 2/3 the number counted last year. A large federal investment for homeless veterans helped keep this population from increasing. Expanded cooperation between the VA and LAHSA will improve services.

Chronically homeless went up +17%. Non-chronic single adults are the least-resourced population, and many timed into chronic status, meaning they have now been homeless for more than a year. New resources for housing construction, mental health services and case management will help this population.

Seniors 62 and over rose 8%, less than the overall rise. New senior shelter beds, focused outreach and strategic partnerships (senior centers, Adult Protective Services), and targeted temporary rental subsidies are helping seniors.

Families went up 6.4%. Expanded rapid rehousing and interim housing have made a difference. Expanded prevention funding and crisis resources will keep more families housed.

Youth homelessness rose 24%, in part because we are getting better at counting this population. Rapid re-housing saw 2/3 of exits to permanent housing. Programs for Transition-Aged Youth grew. Partnerships with LACCD, Probation, DCFS are all helping.

People in tents and makeshift shelters rose +17% and people in vehicles rose 5%. These often indicate first-time homelessness. We’ve increased outreach staff, including experts, as well as more intensive field-based services for those with serious mental illness. An increased interim housing inventory and an expanded Safe Parking program will help here.