2020 Homeless Count Results Key Messages

Key Takeaways

- Over the last five years, our homeless services system has vastly increased its performance and effectiveness, housing double the number of people each year than before Measure H.
- In response to Covid-19, we are making even more improvements and moving faster, sheltering 6,010 people in three months, and we are bringing the 15,000 most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness inside.
- Yet, despite our success ending homelessness for tens of thousands each year, the number of people falling into homelessness each year has also grown.
- With the economic fallout of the pandemic, and systemic racism which has led to 4x overrepresentation of Black people among those experiencing homelessness, it is clear that we need big system changes in our housing supply, economy, health care, justice systems and more to advance racial justice and stem the inflow to homelessness.

Key Messages

This year’s point-in-time count shows that the number of people experiencing homelessness at any point in time in LA is still unacceptably high.

- LA County is up 13% to 66,436 people, and the City of LA is up 14%, at 41,290 people.
- This was before the pandemic, which resulted in 599,000 workers in LA County losing their jobs as of May 9.
- This news is discouraging because we’ve done so much to increase the effectiveness of our system, bringing tens of thousands inside.
- But it also is evidence of deeper root causes that must be addressed within larger mainstream/safety net systems to stop people from falling into homelessness.

LA’s inadequate housing supply, systemic racism and income inequality are driving inflows to homelessness.

- Homelessness starts rising when median rents in a region exceed 22% of median income and rises even more sharply at 32%. In LA, the median rent is 46.7%—nearly half—of median income.
- This is largely due to the lack of affordable housing supply—the LA region is 509,000 units short to meet current demand.
- And systemic racism has led to a disproportionate number of Black people becoming homeless. Black people are 8% of the county population and 33.7% of people experiencing homelessness.
- Homelessness is also a regional challenge. In Southern California, only one county’s homeless count decreased - San Diego - while the other five counties increased between 3% and 20%.

Inflow increased in 2020, and shows the dynamic nature of homelessness in our region.

- Across the year, we prevented more than 6,000 people from becoming homelessness.
- An estimated 82,955 people fell into homelessness, and our system placed 22,769 into housing.
- This year’s count was 66,436, which means an estimated 52,686 self-resolved.
- This translates to every day, an average of 207 people exit homelessness, and 227 people become homeless.
A silver lining is we sheltered more people last year. 18,395 people experiencing homelessness in L.A. County were sheltered, up from 14,722 the previous year, a 27% increase.

- The sheltered homeless population in LA County rose 27%, from 14,722 to 18,395, even before Covid.
- This includes a 39% increase in the City of Los Angeles sheltered population, 8,944 to 12,438.
- This indicates the City’s A Bridge Home shelters have successfully moved thousands of people off the street.

And once COVID-19 hit, our new systems allowed us to shelter thousands more.

- We moved 6,010 people into shelter over the past three months (4,056 through Project Roomkey, 1,708 in Rec and Parks shelters, and 246 in trailers).
- It was a shame it took a pandemic, but we’ve shown what we can do with more resources. Now, our Covid-19 Recovery plan is to move the 15,000 most vulnerable people into housing over the next year.
- We just need the local, state and federal resources to do it.

Even in LA’s tight housing market, we placed 22,769 people into housing. Another record year and an annual doubling of 5 years ago.

- With the establishment of Housing Central Command we plan to accelerate placements even further, despite limited supply.
- Using HMIS data, we know that 88% of those placed through our system in 2018 have not returned to homelessness.

Thousands of new PSH units are bringing our most vulnerable inside.

- 732 permanent housing units have opened since July 2019.
- 2,360 permanent housing units will open in the next 12 months.
- Overall, 10,638 total permanent housing units are in the pipeline.

Our systems continue to help significantly more people – even more than last year.

- Prevention: 4,257 people helped (up from 1,346 per year before Measure H)
- Outreach: 38,865 people helped (up from 11,747 before Measure H)
- Interim Housing: 26,032 people (up from 18,979 before Measure H)
- Permanent Housing Placements: 22,769 (up from 11,904 before Measure H)

Insights from the count

Seniors 62+ increased by 20% and make up 9.9% of the homeless population.

- Seniors have been a focus during the COVID-19 crisis, with 1,953 seniors sheltered in Project Roomkey over the past few months.
- The capacity to rapidly shelter people through Project Roomkey means 37% of seniors 62+ are now sheltered, from 1,350 to 2,372.

We saw a 19% increase in Transition-Aged Youth (18-24) homelessness. 7% of the people experiencing homelessness are youth.

0.6% increase, which is essentially flat, in veterans experiencing homelessness demonstrates that more resources to house people are effective.
• This population has been the focus of the most federal, state and local investment over the past decade.

Methodological improvements have set new baselines for family homelessness and chronic homelessness.
• A new, more accurate baseline for unsheltered families reflects a doubling of surveys to unsheltered families
• And better survey methods reveal that chronic homelessness is more widespread than previously understood.
• Because of these changes, year-to-year comparisons in chronic homelessness and unsheltered families are not comparable, and we should consider 2020 a new baseline.

The number of sheltered family members is up 39%, reflecting the increased financial pressures on low-income families.
• The 80% rise in unsheltered families, from 1,600 to 3,000, is largely due to increased surveying; double the number of unsheltered families were surveyed in 2020 (from 80 to 180), through Family Solution Center outreach.

We have a new level of specificity on substance use.
• In 2020, respondents were asked if they had “difficulties with” drug or alcohol use, while in previous years, had been asked if they had “problematic” drug or alcohol use. As a result, the number of people saying yes greatly increased.
• Also, a “permanent/long-term” option was listed separately for every health condition and disability. Previously, there was only one follow-up question.
• This resulted in a doubling of unsheltered who reported substance use in response to the new question wording: 14,284 (32%), up from 6,583, or 16% in the old methodology.
• Notably, there was not an increase in those reporting long-term mental health conditions: 26% of unsheltered, or 11,711 people.
• This should not be interpreted as growth of the population, but better data capture. It’s a new level of specificity, due to two key methodological changes.

Changes to demographic survey give a more accurate picture of vulnerability.
• HUD defines chronic as someone who is homeless more than a year and has a disabling condition.
• Due to the methodological changes, 58% more people in 2020 meet the HUD definition of chronic homelessness, from 13,600 to 21,500.
• Because of these changes, year-to-year comparisons in chronic homelessness are not comparable, but we should consider 2020 a new baseline.

Structural racism causes Black people to be 4x more likely to experience homelessness.
• Without institutional racism, there would be 15,000 fewer people experiencing homelessness, almost all coming from Black & Native American populations.
• We will be addressing institutional and structural racism through systemwide examination aimed at unpacking, naming, and eliminating the racism that has been embedded for centuries.
• This work is guided by the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness.

Two-thirds of unsheltered adults are on their first episode of homelessness.
• 59% of those newly homeless cite economic hardship as the main reason.
• Homelessness starts rising when median rents in a region exceed 22% of median income, and rise even more sharply at 32%. In LA, the median rent is 46.1% of median income. Until we can change that, inflow will likely continue.

*Key Demographics*

• 80% of unsheltered Angelenos have been here more than 5 years.
• Two-thirds of unsheltered Angelenos became homeless here in LA County.
• Two thirds of people experiencing homelessness identify as male
• 33% of people experiencing homelessness have had an experience of domestic violence or intimate partner violence
• Swings between neighborhoods vary widely due to movements in enforcement and cleanups; the SPA level is the most reliable view of geographic changes.

*The Plan Going Forward*

LAHSA’s new model and COVID-19 Recovery Plan are transforming how our homeless services system is managed.

• A new strategic plan & command structure positions LAHSA as the center of gravity for the complex homeless response system--critical in LA where governance is diffuse.
• Real-time awareness of the permanent supportive housing portfolio across government entities for the first time, and will extend to all housing interventions.
• Housing Central Command will use this model to rapidly move our 15,000 most vulnerable inside.
• The model enables real-time awareness of the entire portfolio of permanent supportive housing across government entities for the first time, and will extend to all housing interventions.
• Meanwhile, it’s clear that we also need to go upstream.

*We need a bold, creative vision to reimagine how to dramatically grow LA’s housing supply and fix systems that drive inflow.*

• We need the state, county and city to fund the Homeless COVID-19 Recovery Plan.
• We need to reimagine and expand the supply of affordable and supportive housing with a regional approach that moves toward housing for all.
• We need to target prevention resources to the most vulnerable communities to prevent a wave of evictions.
• We need to scale up anti-racist programs that change how our foster care, health care, criminal justice and other systems work to advance racial justice.

**It will take all of us to reimagine our systems. We need your help.**

• Advocate for system change to dismantle structural racism.
• Advocate for expanded state and federal funding for affordable housing and homeless services.
• Support more interim and supportive housing in your local community; Join the Everyone In Campaign to learn more.
• Donate time, supplies or resources to your local homeless services provider.
Thanks to the investments made by the people of LA County, thousands of people have a home tonight. Our urgent mission continues to help those who don’t.