



SANTA CRUZ COUNTY
Housing for Health
PARTNERSHIP

1482 FREEDOM
BLDG A

SANTA CRUZ 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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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
INTRODUCTION	5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	8
POINT-IN-TIME COUNT	12
HOMELESS SURVEY FINDINGS	16
CONCLUSION	34
APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY	35
APPENDIX B: DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS	42

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The considerable talents and efforts of many people helped ensure the success of this endeavor. The County of Santa Cruz and ASR would like to thank county and jurisdiction staff, community members, and the many service providers who facilitated the process of homeless outreach and peer enumeration by recruiting and organizing count workers and distributing surveys. Finally, the County of Santa Cruz and ASR would like to thank survey respondents, whose experiences and needs are reflected throughout the findings of this report.

SUPPORTERS

California Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency	County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors
Community Action Board (CAB)	Encompass Community Services
Housing Matters	People First of Santa Cruz County
Homeless Garden Project	City of Santa Cruz
Pajaro Valley Shelter Services	



INTRODUCTION

At least every two years, typically during the last 10 days of January, communities across the country conduct comprehensive Point-in-Time (PIT) Counts of the local population experiencing homelessness. PIT Counts approximate the number of persons experiencing homelessness in each community and collect information on persons and families residing in emergency shelters and transitional housing and unsheltered situations including on the streets, in cars, abandoned properties, or other places not meant for human habitation (the unsheltered).

- The 2021 count did not take place in Santa Cruz County and most other jurisdictions due to safety concerns associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The 2022 Santa Cruz County count took place on February 28, 2022, rather than the end of January due to additional COVID-19 precautions in response to the Omicron variant surge.
- The 2023 Santa Cruz County count took place on February 23rd rather than the end of January due to severe storms that struck the county.
- The 2024 Santa Cruz County count took place on January 25th.

The PIT Count is the only nationwide data on both sheltered and unsheltered homelessness. The U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires all jurisdictions receiving federal funding to provide housing and services for persons and families experiencing homelessness to conduct a PIT Count. The H4HP receives approximately \$6 million dollars annually in HUD CoC funding, a key source of funding for the county's housing and services programs for persons experiencing homelessness.

The CoC reports the findings of its local PIT Count annually to HUD, though the unsheltered count component is required every other year. However, the County of Santa Cruz and the Santa Cruz County Continuum of Care (CoC), known locally as the Housing for Health Partnership (H4HP), intend to continue conducting the full count and survey on an annual basis. The reported findings help the federal government better understand the nature and extent of homelessness nationwide. PIT Count and Survey data also help inform local strategic planning, capacity building, and advocacy campaigns to prevent and end homelessness.

The County of Santa Cruz worked in conjunction with Applied Survey Research (ASR) to conduct the 2024 Santa Cruz County Homeless PIT Count and Survey. ASR is a social research firm based in Santa Cruz County with extensive experience in homeless enumeration and needs assessment and has been the principal researcher for Santa Cruz County PIT counts and surveys since 2000.

The Santa Cruz County Homeless PIT Count consists of three primary components:

1. Point-in-time, visual enumeration of unsheltered persons and families experiencing homelessness, including those sleeping outdoors, on the street, or in parks, tents, or vehicles.
2. Point-in-time enumeration of persons and families experiencing homelessness in temporary shelter, including emergency shelters or transitional housing facilities.
3. A comprehensive sample survey of the characteristics of persons and families experiencing homelessness in both sheltered and unsheltered locations.

The 2024 Santa Cruz County Homeless PIT Count was a comprehensive community effort. With the support of about 100 persons, including those experiencing homelessness, community volunteers, staff from multiple city and county departments, and law enforcement, the entire county was canvassed between the hours of 5:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. on January 25, 2024. This resulted in a peer-informed visual count of unsheltered persons and families experiencing homelessness residing on the streets and in vehicles, makeshift shelters, encampments, and other places not meant for human habitation. Specialized outreach teams canvassed more remote areas of the County including certain rural locations in Aptos, the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC), and Pajaro River levee areas. Shelters and transitional housing facilities reported the number of persons and families who occupied their facilities on the night of January 24, 2024.

A supplemental count of unaccompanied children under the age of 18, and transition-age youth (TAY) between the ages of 18-24, was conducted in the afternoon hours on January 25th, 2024. This specialized count was designed to improve the understanding of the scope of youth homelessness, as youth are frequently undercounted during the unsheltered morning count effort. Trained youth enumerators, who currently or recently experienced homelessness, conducted the count in specific areas where youth experiencing homelessness were known to congregate.

In the weeks following the January 25th street count, an in-depth survey was administered to 395 unsheltered and sheltered persons. The survey gathered basic demographic details and information on service needs and utilization.

This report provides data on the number and characteristics of persons experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz County on a single night in January. Unstably-housed persons living without assistance in hotel/motels, doubled-up situations, or temporarily in a jail or hospital are not included in the PIT count. Extra attention is given in the report to special populations, including chronically homeless persons, veterans, families, unaccompanied children under the age of 18, and TAY aged 18-24. To better understand the dynamics of homelessness over time, results from previous PIT counts are provided where available and applicable.

The data presented in this report has four separate sources which are inter-related but distinct from one another:

1. Observation-only data of unsheltered persons and families from PIT-day canvassing of all census tracts in Santa Cruz County.
2. Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) sourced data of PIT-even shelter and transitional housing occupancy and shelter resident characteristics.
3. Survey data from a representative sample of persons experiencing homelessness in sheltered and unsheltered places.
4. Homeless Data Exchange (HDX) data sourced and cross-referenced from all of the above sources.

PROJECT OVERVIEW AND GOALS

ASR held multiple planning meetings in the fall of 2023 to attain local community members' experience and expertise of the local unhoused community. Meeting participants were drawn from City and County departments, community-based service organizations, and other interested community members. They joined the 2024 Project Team (staff from Santa Cruz County Human Services Department) in planning for the PIT count. These participants 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, TAY, 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, implement and expand the range of housing opportunities to meet the needs of people-at-risk or people who are currently experiencing homelessness
- To increase public awareness of overall housing and homeless issues and generate support for constructive solutions.

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

FEDERAL DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS FOR POINT-IN-TIME COUNTS

The HUD definition of homelessness from Category 1 of the HEARTH Act is used in this report. This definition includes persons and families:

- Living in supervised publicly or privately-operated shelters or transitional housing programs 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.

SANTA CRUZ 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 Santa Cruz County Point-in-Time Count was a community-wide effort conducted on January 25, 2024. In the weeks following the street count, a survey was administered to 395 unsheltered and sheltered individuals experiencing homelessness in order to profile their experience and characteristics.



TOTAL PERSONS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

1,850

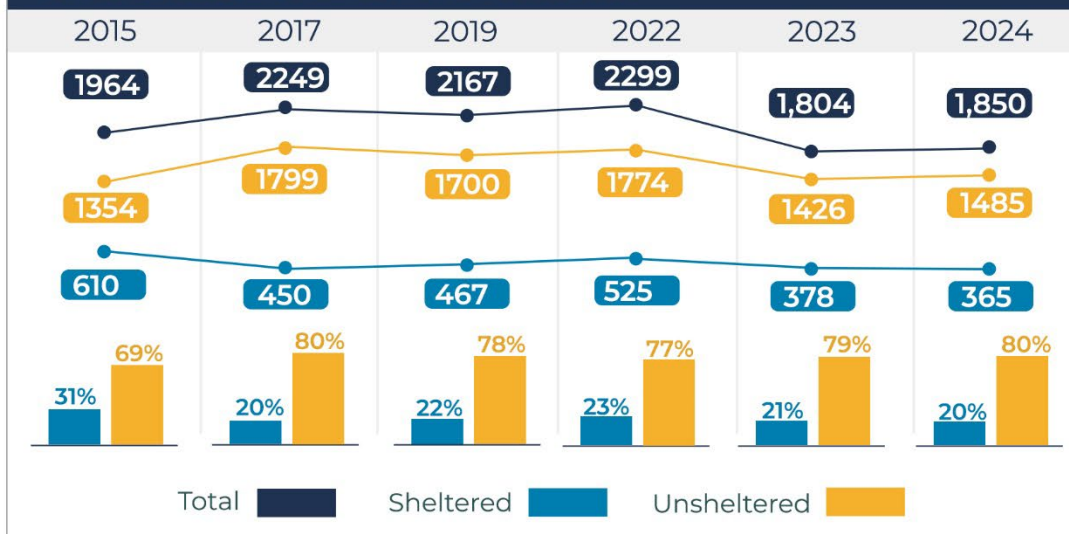


20%
Sheltered
n=365



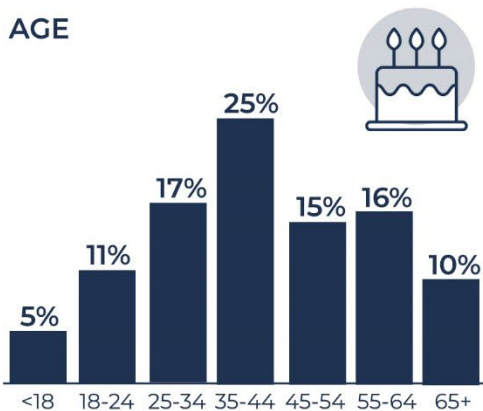
80%
Unsheltered
n=1,485

TOTAL PERSONS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

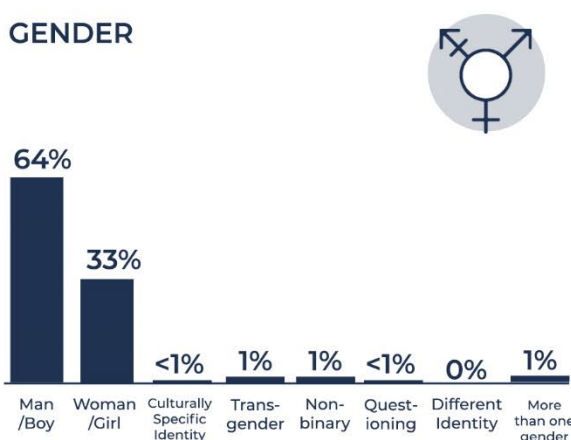


DEMOGRAPHICS

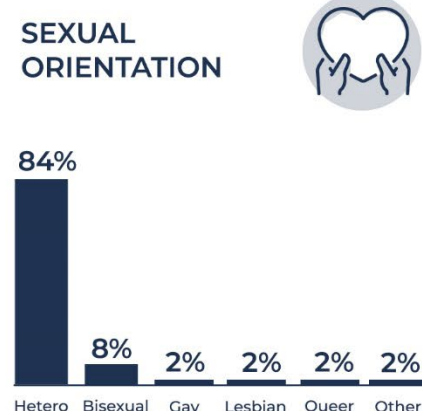
AGE



GENDER



SEXUAL ORIENTATION



RACE/ ETHNICITY

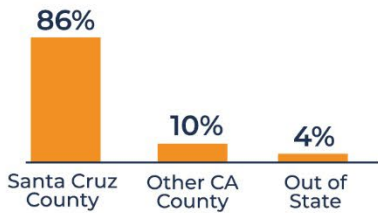


- 2% American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous
- 2% American Indian, Alaska Native or Indigenous & Hispanic/Latina/e/o
- 3% Asian or Asian American
- 0% Asian or Asian American & Hispanic/Latina/e/o
- 5% Black, African American, or African
- <1% Black, African American, or African & Hispanic/Latina/e/o
- 29% Hispanic/Latina/e/o
- <1% Middle Eastern or North African

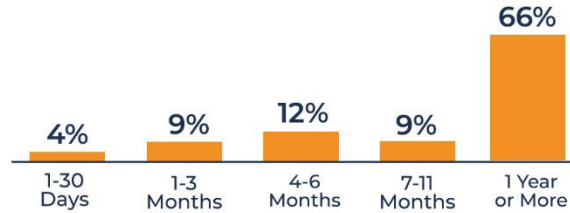
- 0% Middle Eastern or North African & Hispanic/Latina/e/o
- 1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- <1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander & Hispanic/Latina/e/o
- 47% White
- 9% White & Hispanic/Latina/e/o
- 2% Multi-Racial & Hispanic/Latina/e/o
- <1% Multi-Racial (not Hispanic/Latina/e/o)

DATA PORTRAITS ¹

RESIDENCE AT THE TIME THEY BECAME HOMELESS



DURATION OF CURRENT EPISODE OF HOMELESSNESS



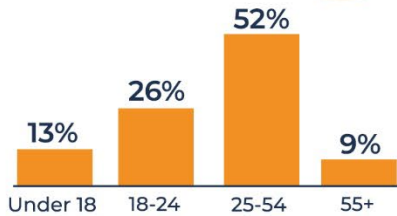
FIRST EPISODE OF HOMELESSNESS



30%

of survey respondents 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)



WAYS TO PREVENT LOSING HOUSING*

(Top 4 Responses)



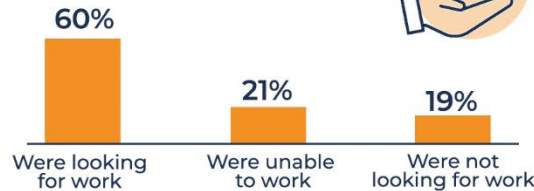
EMPLOYMENT STATUS



26%

of survey respondents had some form of employment

AMONG UNEMPLOYED RESPONDENTS



FOSTER CARE



16%

of survey respondents have foster care involvement

JUSTICE SYSTEM INVOLVED



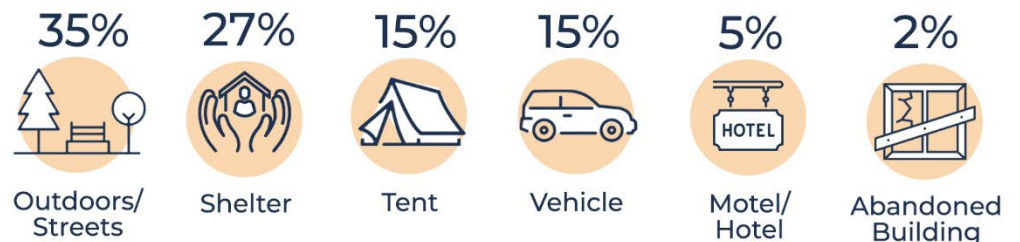
24%

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

16%

of survey respondents reported being on probation/parole at the start of their most recent episode of homelessness

SURVEY RESPONDENTS BY SLEEPING ACCOMMODATION



SELF-REPORTED HEALTH [□]

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

SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER



46%

of survey respondents report having a substance use disorder

PSYCHIATRIC OR EMOTIONAL CONDITIONS



37%

of survey respondents report having a psychiatric or emotional condition

PTSD



33%

of survey respondents report having Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

PHYSICAL DISABILITY



29%

of survey respondents report having a physical disability

CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITION



28%

of survey respondents report having a chronic health condition

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY



13%

of survey respondents report having had a TBI

HIV/AIDS RELATED ILLNESS



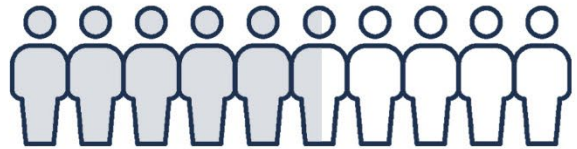
4%

of survey respondents 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.

55%



of survey respondents report having at least one disabling condition

GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE [□]



72%

of survey respondents reported receiving government benefits.

SERVICES CURRENTLY ACCESSING* (TOP 6 RESPONSES)

53%



Food Stamps

37%



Medi-Cal/Medicare

19%



Social Security

10%



Disability

5%



CalWorks

28%



None

REASONS FOR NOT RECEIVING GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE* (TOP 5 RESPONSES)

25%

Don't want government assistance

20%

Don't think I'm eligible

18%



No ID

17%



No Permanent Address

15%



Immigration issues

SPECIAL POPULATIONS

Total ■ Sheltered ■ Unsheltered ■

CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS



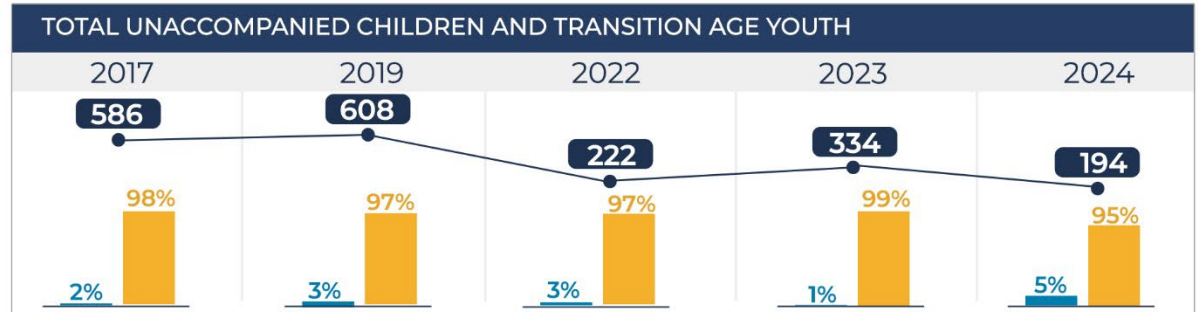
VETERANS



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 totaling 12 months or more 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 Santa Cruz County Homeless Survey, N=395

* 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 Santa Cruz County Homeless PIT Count and Survey includes data on unsheltered persons as well as those in publicly or privately funded shelters or transitional housing programs. The general street count was conducted on January 25, 2024, from approximately 5:00 AM to 9:00 AM and covered all of Santa Cruz County. The shelter count was conducted on the previous evening (persons registered in a shelter the night of January 24) and included all persons staying in emergency shelters, transitional housing facilities, and domestic violence shelters.



NUMBER AND CHARACTERISTICS OF PERSONS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

Figure 1: Total Number of Persons Experiencing Homelessness

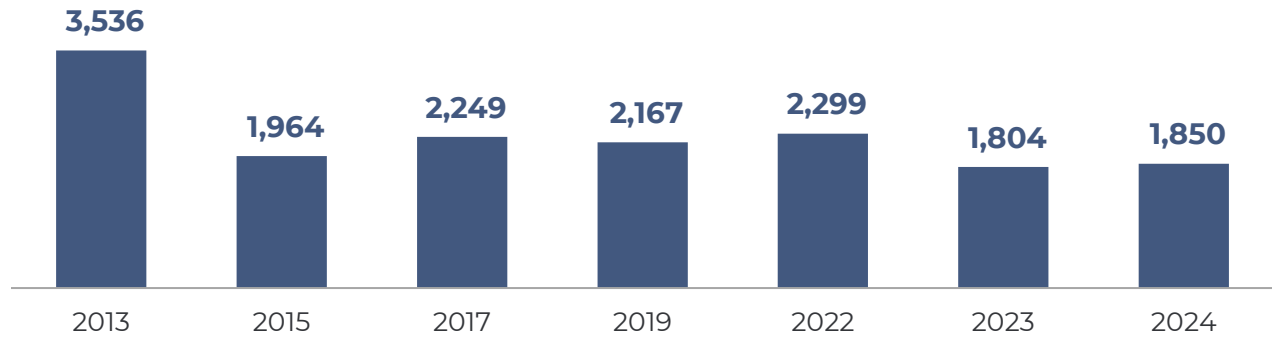
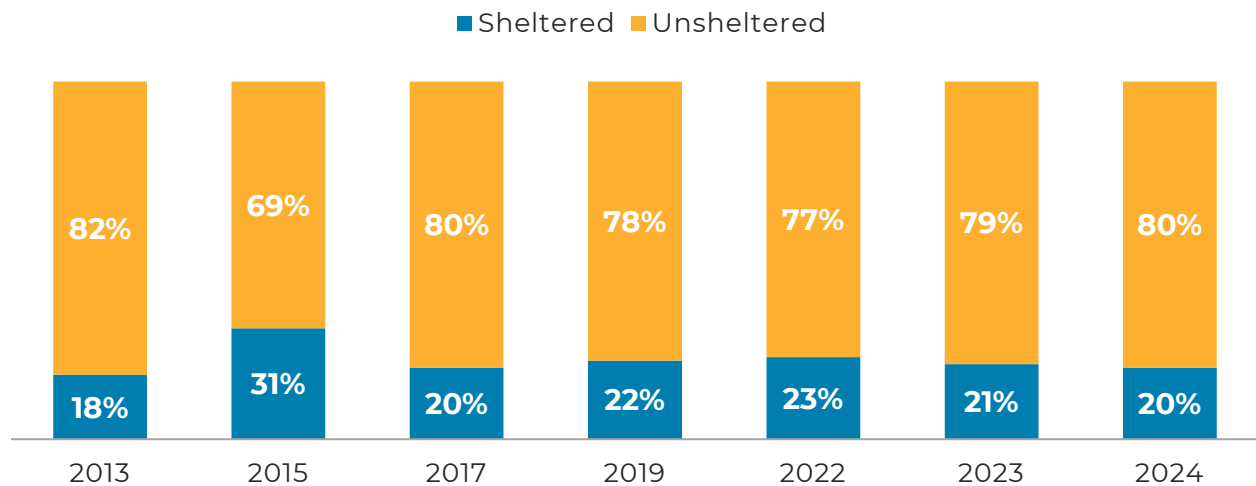


Figure 2: Total Homeless Count Population, by Shelter Status



2013 n=3,536; 2015 n=1,964; 2017 n=2,249; 2019 n=2,167; 2022 n=2,299; 2023 n=1,804; 2024 n=1,850



Figure 3: Total Homeless Population by Shelter Status and Jurisdiction

JURISDICTION	UNSHELTERED		SHELTERED		TOTAL		
	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024	23-24 NET CHANGE
Total Incorporated	1,118	1,061	378	365	1,496	1,426	-5%
City of Capitola	23	50	0	0	23	50	117%
City of Santa Cruz	749	384	279	275	1,028	659	-36%
City of Scotts Valley	24	44	0	0	24	44	83%
City of Watsonville	332	583	99	90	421	673	60%
Total Unincorporated/ Confidential Scattered Site*	249	302	0	0	249	302	21%
Total County Office of Education	59	122	0	0	59	122	107%
Total	1,426	1,485	378	365	1,804	1,850	3%

* Confidential/scattered sites are places that do not release their location due to privacy concerns or an inability to do so.

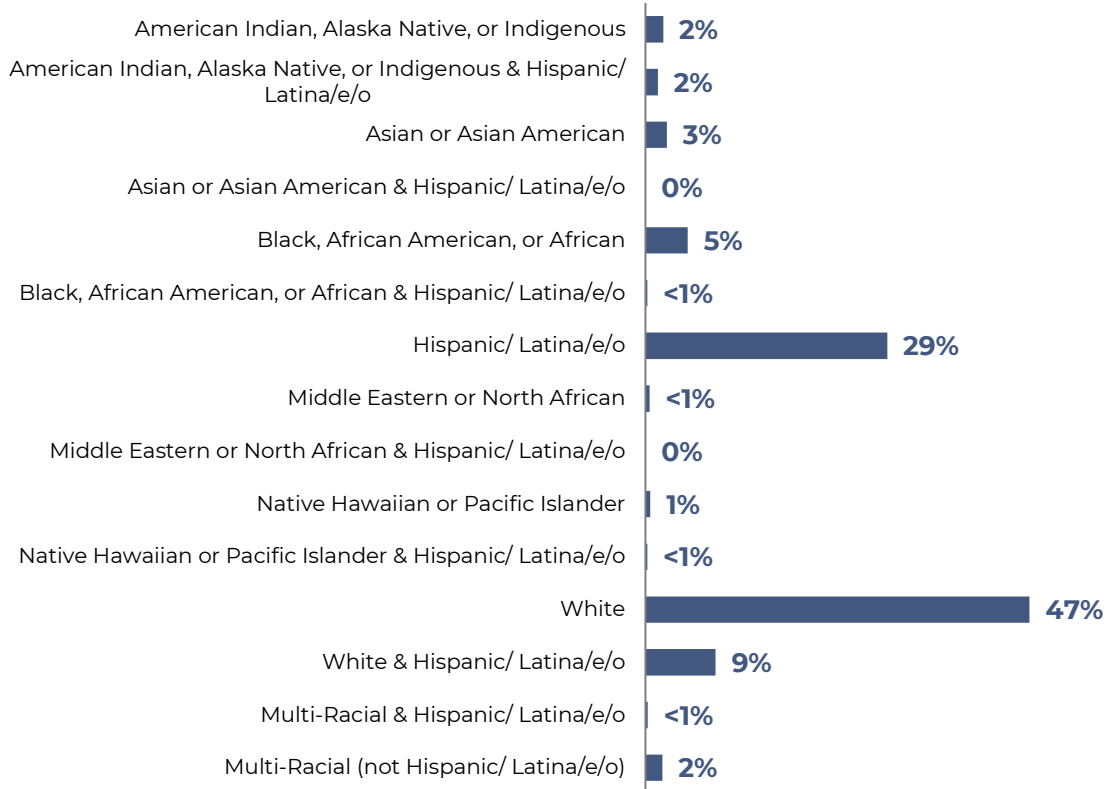
Note: Please see Appendix A for a description about how County Office of Education information is collected



TOTAL HOMELESS POPULATION BY RACE AND ETHNICITY

Persons identified as White made up 47% of the PIT population. Persons identifying as Black or African American dropped to 5% in 2024 from 6% in 2023.

Figure 5: Total Homeless Census Population, by Race



2022 General Population n=264,370; 2023 n=1,804; 2024 n=1,850

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

Note: HUD has changed how race/ethnicity is collected in the PIT Count, and comparison to previous years is not recommended.



HOMELESS SURVEY FINDINGS

This section provides an overview of the findings generated from the survey component of the 2024 Santa Cruz County Homeless Point-in-Time Count and Survey. Surveys were administered to a randomized sample of homeless persons between February 1 and March 8, 2024, resulting in 395 unique surveys.

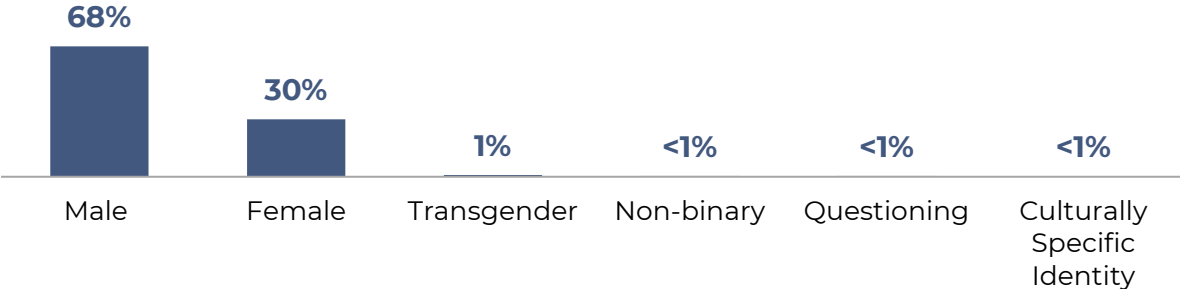
Based on a Point-in-Time Count of 1,850 homeless persons, with a randomized survey sampling process, 395 valid surveys represent a margin of error of +/- 4.4%, with a 95% confidence level when generalizing the results of the survey to the entire estimated population of persons experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz County. In other words, if the survey were conducted again, we can be 95% certain that the results would be within four percentage points of the reported results.

To respect respondent privacy and ensure the safety and comfort of those who participated, survey respondents were not required to complete all survey 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](#).

GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

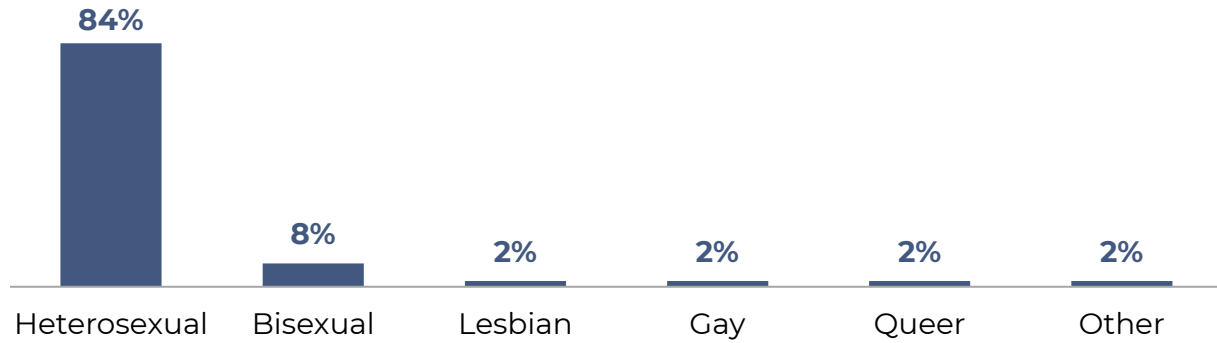
Just over two-thirds (68%) of survey respondents identified as male, 30% identified as female, 1% identified as transgender, and the remainder identified as another gender. Approximately 84% of survey respondents identified as heterosexual when asked about their sexual orientation, similar to previous years.

Figure 6: Gender Identity



2024 n=390
**Includes respondents whose individual gender categories represent <1% of the total, including Questioning, Culturally Specific Identity, Non-binary, Do not identify as male, female, or transgender; and other not listed.*

Figure 7: Sexual Orientation



2024 n=392

FOSTER CARE

In 2024, 16% of survey respondents in Santa Cruz County indicated a history of foster care, a decrease from 2023.

Figure 8: History of Foster Care

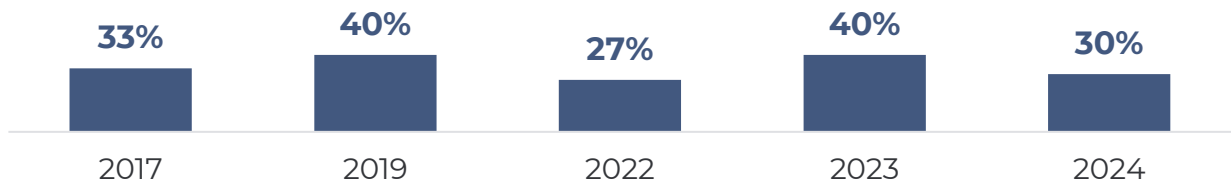


2019 n=377; 2022 n=314; 2023 n=391; 2024 n=370

ONSET, AGE, AND DURATION OF HOMELESSNESS

The percentage of survey respondents who were experiencing their first episode of homelessness decreased from 40% in 2023 to 30% in 2024.

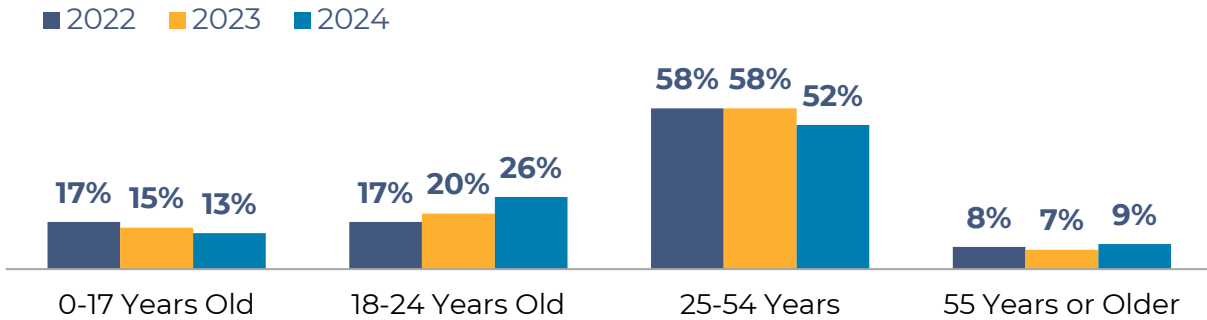
Figure 9: First Time Experiencing Homelessness ("Yes" Respondents)



2017 n=459; 2019 n=386; 2022 n=329; 2023 n=410; 2024 n=395

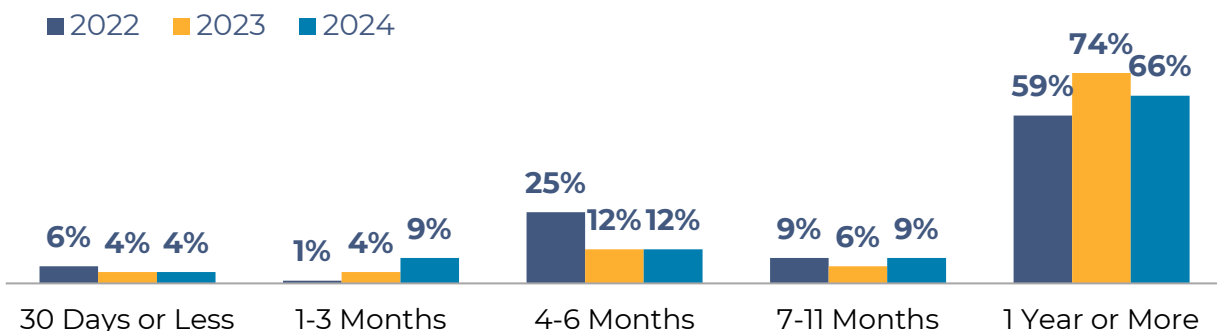
Sixty-one percent of survey respondents reported being over the age of 25 when they first experienced homelessness. Thirteen percent of respondents were under the age of 18 when they first experienced homelessness. Sixty-six percent of respondents reported that their current stint of homelessness has lasted one year or more.

Figure 10: Age at First Experience of Homelessness



2022 n=332; 2023 n=404; 2024 n=394

Figure 11: Duration of Current Episode of Homelessness



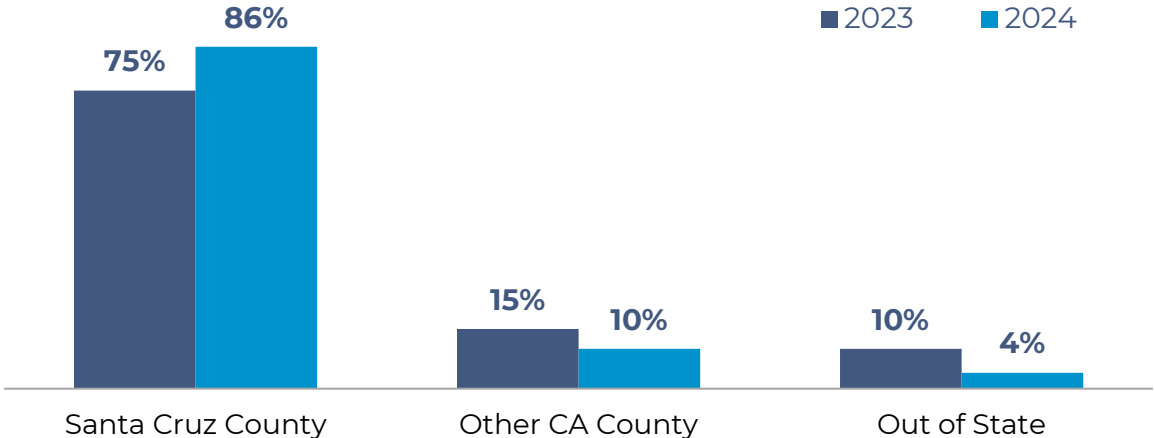
2022 n=331; 2023 n=408; 2024 n=393



PLACE OF RESIDENCE

The percentage of survey respondents who indicated they were living in Santa Cruz County at the time they lost their housing increased from 75% in 2023 to 86% in 2024. Fifty-three percent of respondents indicated they had been living in the northern Santa Cruz County at the time they became unhoused, 7% indicated living in the central part of the county, and 26% indicated living in south county prior to becoming homeless.

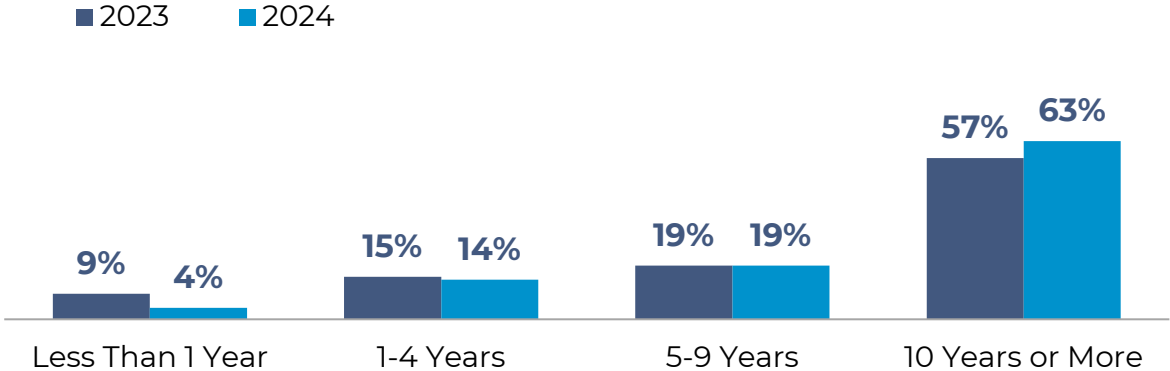
Figure 12: Place of Residence at Time of Housing Loss



2023 n=395; 2024 n=388

Sixty-three percent of respondents indicated living in Santa Cruz County for at least 10 years before their current episode of homelessness, an increase from 57% in 2023.

Figure 13: Time Lived in Santa Cruz County Prior to Becoming Homeless

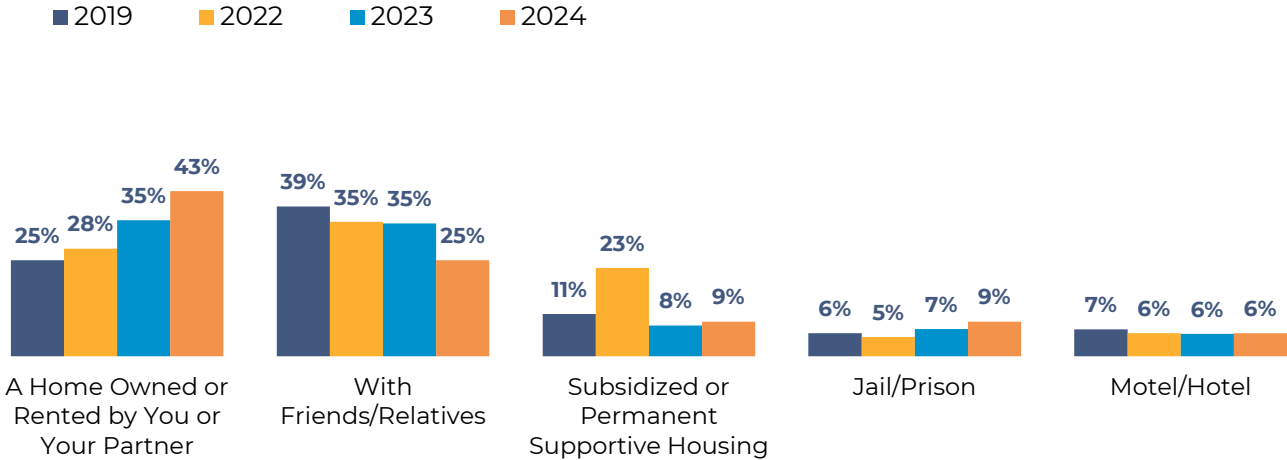


2023 n=382; 2024 n=362

PRIOR LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Just over forty percent of survey respondents (43%) indicated they were staying in a home rented or owned by themselves or their partner prior to becoming homeless, an increase from previous years, while 25% stated they were living with friends or family, a decrease from previous years.

Figure 14: Living Arrangements Prior to Experiencing Homelessness (Top Five Responses)

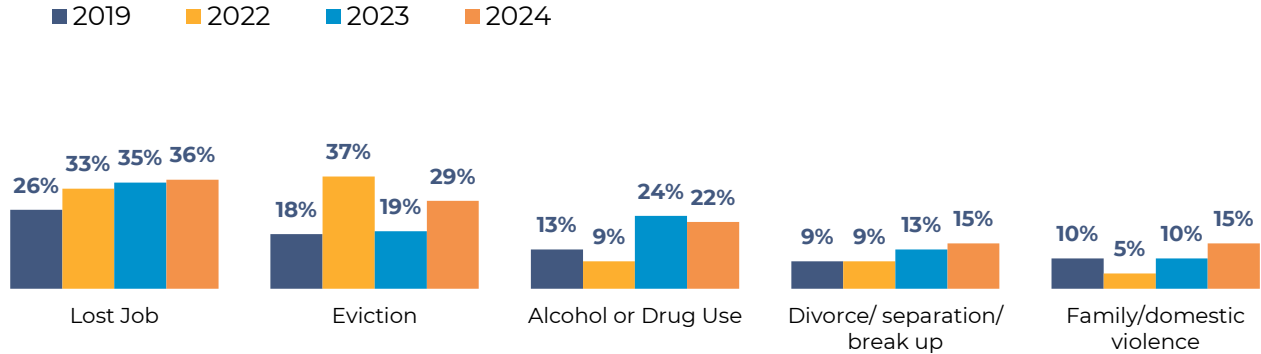


2019 n=370; 2022 n=314; 2023 n=379; 2024 n=369

PRIMARY CAUSE OF HOMELESSNESS

The most common response when survey respondents were asked about the primary cause of their homelessness was the loss of a job (36%). The second most common cause of homelessness amongst survey respondents was eviction (29%).

Figure 15: Primary Cause of Homelessness (Top Five Responses)

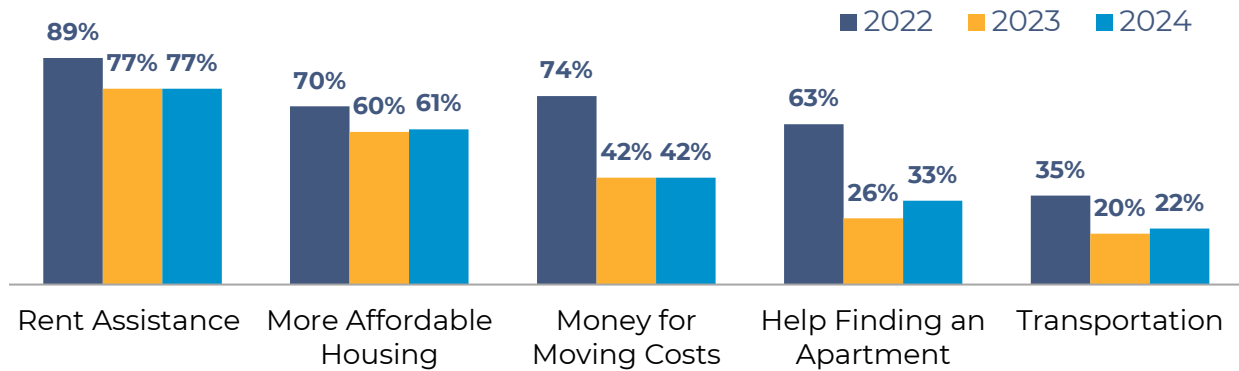


2019 n=385 offering 539 responses; 2022 n=322 respondents offering 426 responses; 2023 n=399 respondents offering 646 responses; 2024 n=390 respondents offering 675 responses

SUPPORT NEEDED TO OBTAIN PERMANENT HOUSING

Rental assistance was the most common (77%) response when survey respondents were asked what kind of support they needed to obtain permanent housing. Over three-fifths of respondents (61%) reported that an increase in the availability of affordable housing would support their ability to attain permanent housing, while 42% of respondents reported that they needed money for moving costs to obtain permanent housing.

Figure 16: Support Needed to Obtain Permanent Housing (Top Five Responses)



2022 n=315 respondents offering 1,718 responses; 2023 n=396 respondents offering 1,374 responses; 2024 n=389 respondents offering 1,367 responses

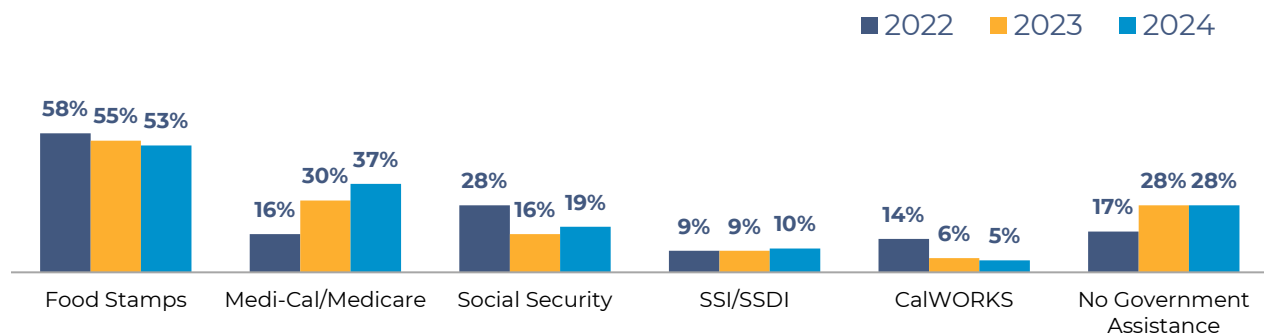
Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.

GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE

In 2024, 72% of survey respondents indicated that they received government benefits.

The most common government benefit survey respondents indicated receiving was food stamps (53%), a decrease from 55% in 2023. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of survey respondents reported receiving Medi-Cal/Medicare, an increase from 30% in 2023. The same percentage of respondents reported not receiving governmental benefits as in 2023 (28%).

Figure 17: Government Assistance Received (Top Five Responses)

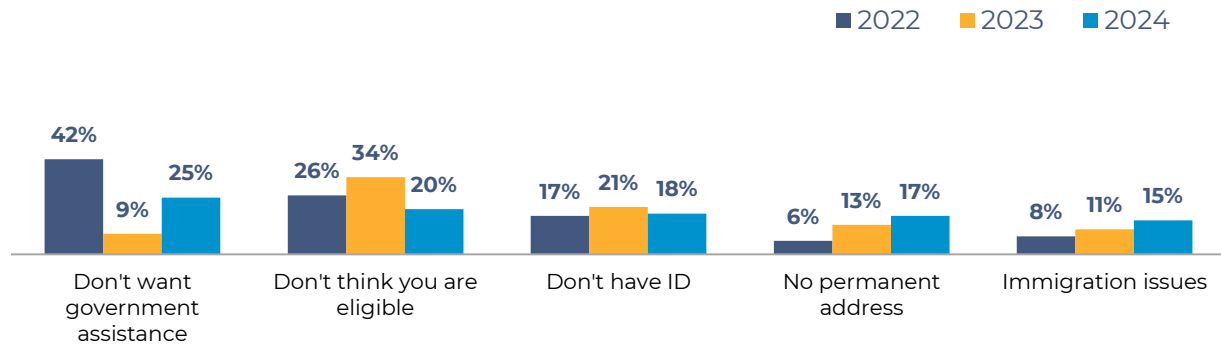


2022 n=316 respondents offering 505 responses; 2023 n=416 respondents offering 617 responses; 2024 n=395 respondents offering 607 responses

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

Twenty-five percent of survey respondents who said they weren't receiving government benefits reported not wanting government assistance, an increase from 2023 (9%).

Figure 18: Reasons for Not Receiving Government Assistance (Top Five Responses)



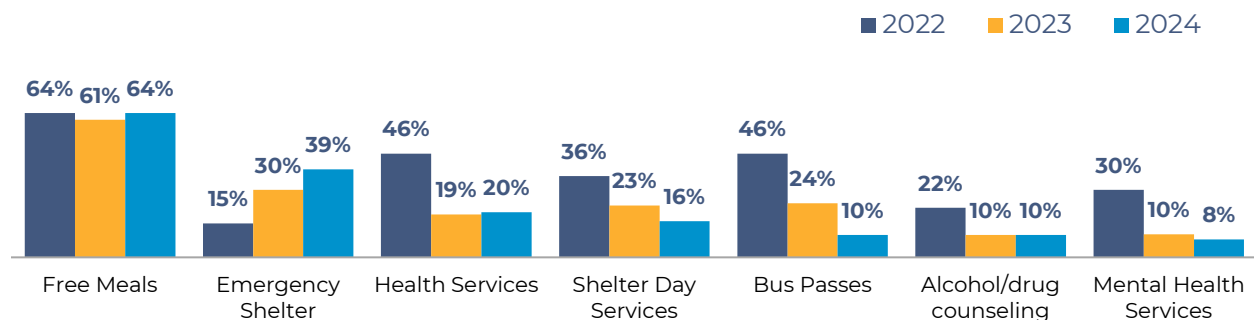
2022 n=53 respondents offering 90 responses; 2023 n=101 respondents offering 146 responses; 2024 n=96 respondents offering 137 responses
 Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.

SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

In Santa Cruz County there are numerous community-based services and programs that serve persons experiencing homelessness. These services range from day shelters and meal programs to job training and health care.

Usage of free meals was the most common form of assistance received by survey respondents, increasing from 61% in 2023 to 64% in 2024. The second most frequently used assistance were emergency shelters (39%), followed by health services (20%), shelter day services (16%) and bus passes (10%).

Figure 19: Service Usage (Top Seven Responses)

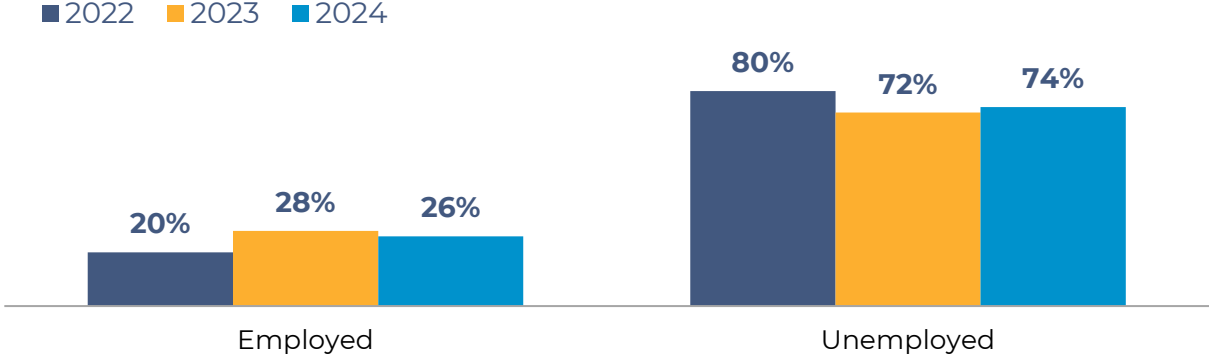


2022 n=314 respondents offering 1,014 responses; 2023 n=381 respondents offering 835 responses; 2024 n=364 respondents offering 743 responses
 Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.

EMPLOYMENT

While the majority of survey respondents reported being unemployed (74%), more than one-quarter (26%) reported seasonal, sporadic, part or full-time work. Of those who were unemployed, 60% said they were looking for work, 21% said they were unable to work, and 19% replied they were not looking for work.

Figure 20: Employment

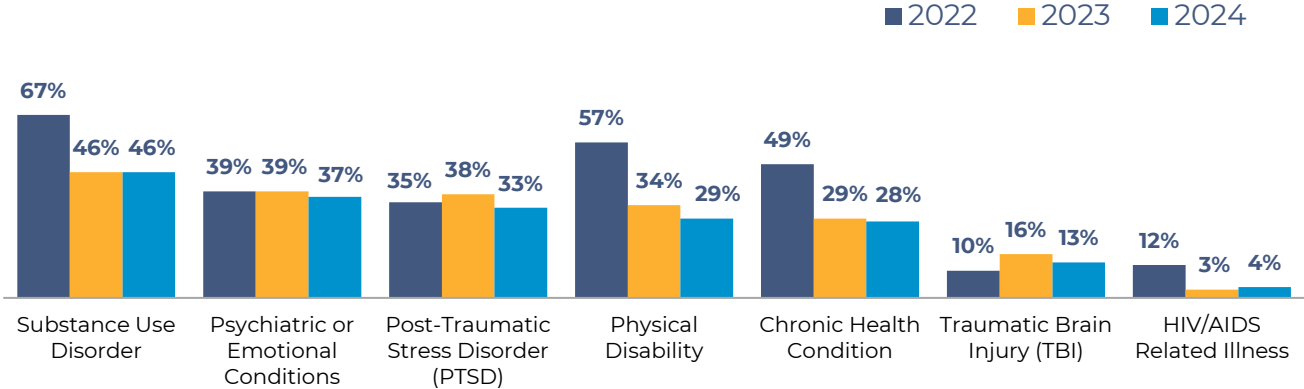


2022 n=310; 2023 n=380; 2024 n=367

HEALTH CONDITIONS

Over half (55%) of survey respondents reported at least one disabling condition. The percentage of respondents (46%) reporting a substance use disorder remained the same as in 2023, persons reporting a physical disability decreased from 34% in 2023 to 29% in 2024, while those suffering from chronic health problems decreased from 29% in 2023 to 28% in 2024.]

Figure 21: Health Conditions



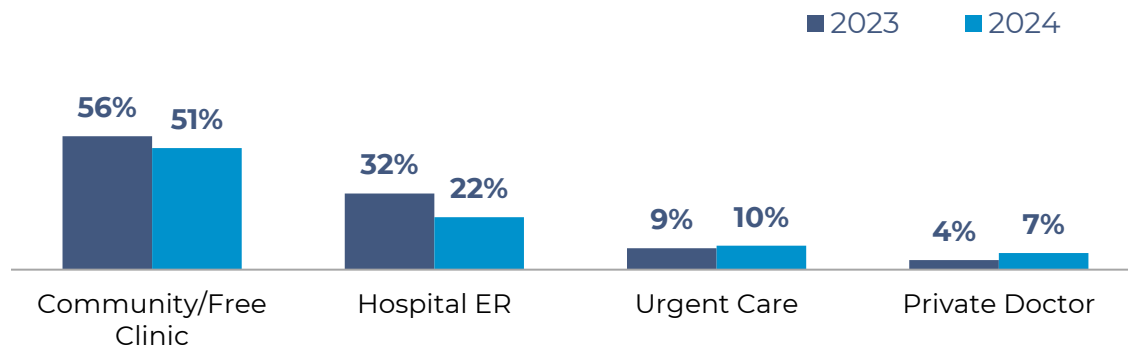
2022 n=297-316; 2023 n=383-402; 2024 n=362-373

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

Note: Substance use disorder is defined as a treatable mental disorder that affects a person's brain and behavior, leading to their inability to control their use of substances like legal or illegal drugs, alcohol, or medications. Symptoms can be moderate to severe, with addiction being the most severe form of SUD.

Over half (51%) of respondents indicated they received care at a community or free clinic; 22% of respondents received care at a hospital emergency room.

Figure 22: Location of Health Care (Top Four Responses)

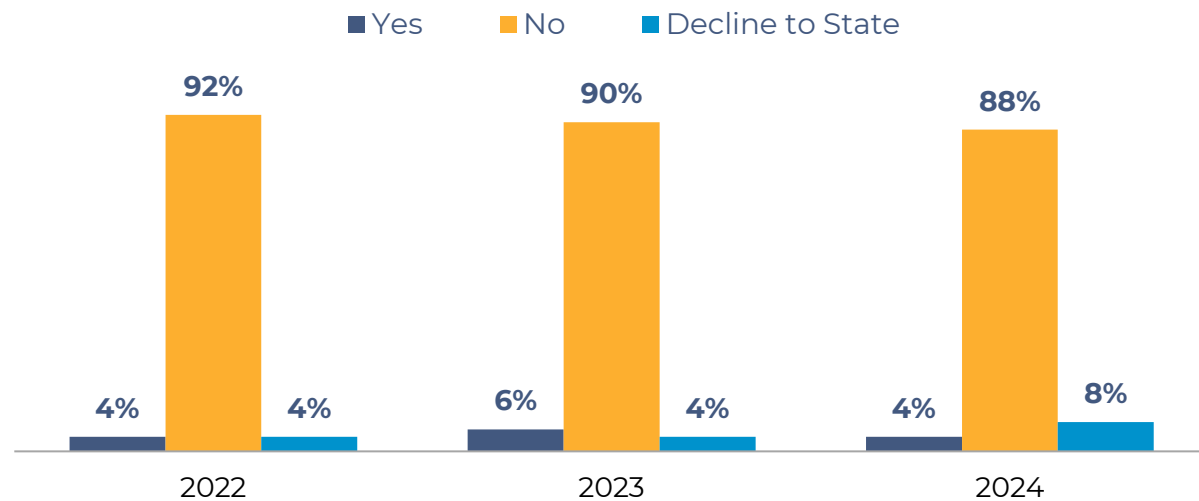


2023 n=383 respondents offering 460 responses; 2024 n=368 respondents offering 402 responses

DOMESTIC PARTNER VIOLENCE OR ABUSE

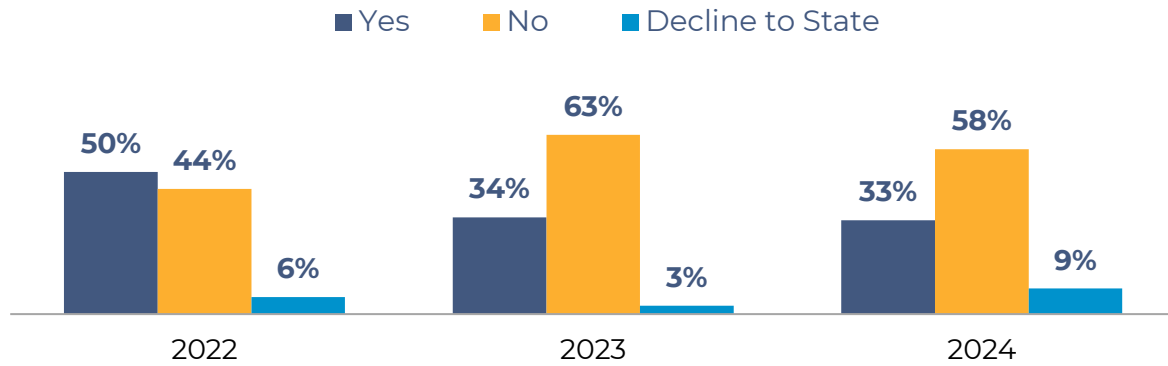
Four percent (4%) of survey respondents indicated they were currently experiencing domestic/partner violence or abuse at the time of the survey, while 33% of survey respondents indicated they had experienced domestic violence at some point in their life. Fifteen percent of respondents indicated domestic/partner violence or abuse was the cause of their homeless situation.

Figure 23: Currently Experiencing Domestic Violence



2022 n=293; 2023 n=390; 2024 n=381

Figure 24: History of Domestic Violence

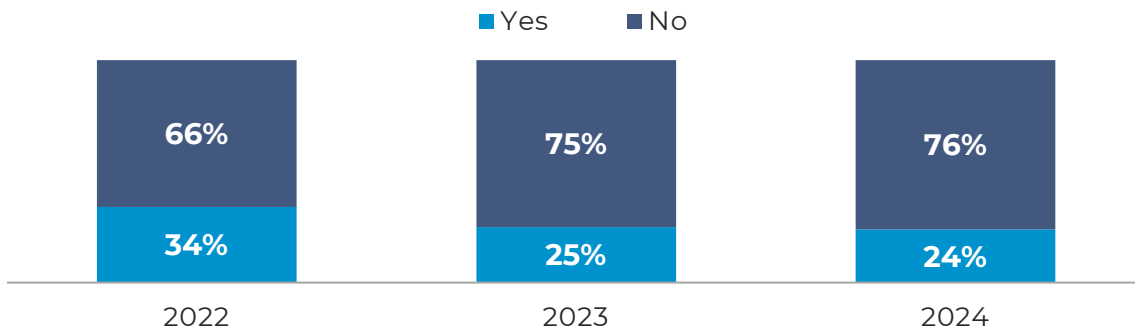


2022 n=306; 2023 n=387; 2024 n=381

CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

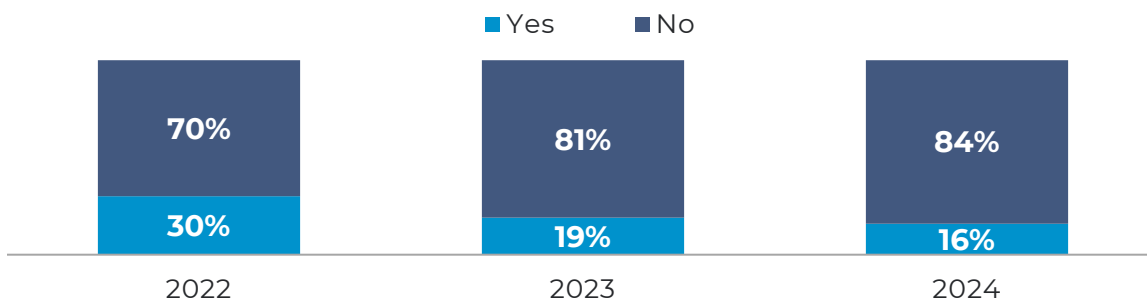
Twenty-four percent (24%) of survey respondents indicated they had spent at least one night in jail or prison over the last 12 months, a decrease from 34% in 2022. Sixteen percent of respondents indicated they were on probation or parole when they most recently became homeless, a decrease from 30% in 2022.

Figure 25: Spent a Night in Jail or Prison in the Last 12 Months



2022 n=290; 2023 n=406; 2024 n=389

Figure 26: On Probation or Parole When Homelessness Occurred



2022 n=284; 2023 n=372; 2024 n=339

HUD DEFINED SPECIAL POPULATIONS

Home, Together: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness outlines national objectives and evaluative measures for ending homelessness among all populations in the United States.

To 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 and their families
- Families with children
- Unaccompanied children and transition-age youth.

The following sections examine each of these four subpopulations as identified in Santa Cruz County during the 2024 Homeless Point-in-Time Count and Survey.

HOUSEHOLDS EXPERIENCING CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS

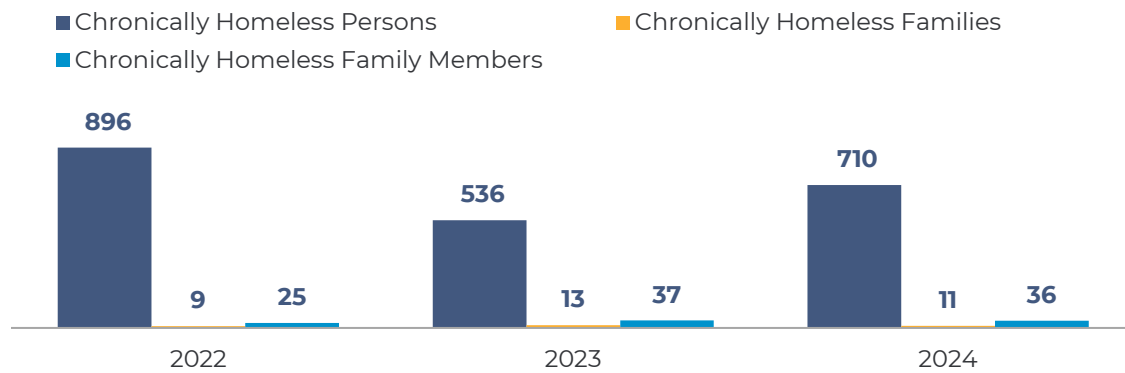
The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines chronic homelessness as an individual with one or more disabling conditions, or a family with a head of household with a disabling condition, who has been continuously homeless for one year or more and/or has experienced four or more episodes totaling 12 months or more of homelessness within the past three years.

Data from communities across the country show significant public costs associated with long-term homelessness among people with disabilities. Significant health care, criminal justice, and human service costs are incurred while persons remain homeless. HUD reported that roughly 22% of the national homeless population of 143,105 persons was chronically homeless in 2023.¹ In 2024, 710 persons were experiencing chronic homelessness in Santa Cruz County, or roughly 38% of the community's PIT homeless population, an increase from 2023 (32%).



¹ Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2023). Annual Assessment Report to Congress. Retrieved 2024 from <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/ahar/2023-ahar-part-1-pit-estimates-of-homelessness-in-the-us.html>

Figure 27: Total Number of Persons Experiencing Chronic Homelessness



Approximately seventy-nine percent (79%) of the chronically homeless population was unsheltered, an increase from 73% in 2023.

Figure 28: Chronically Homeless Census Population by Shelter Status

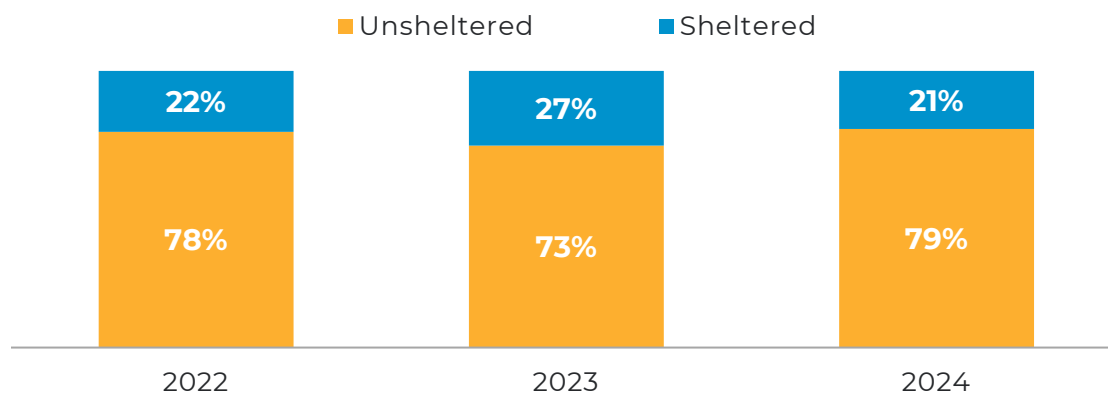


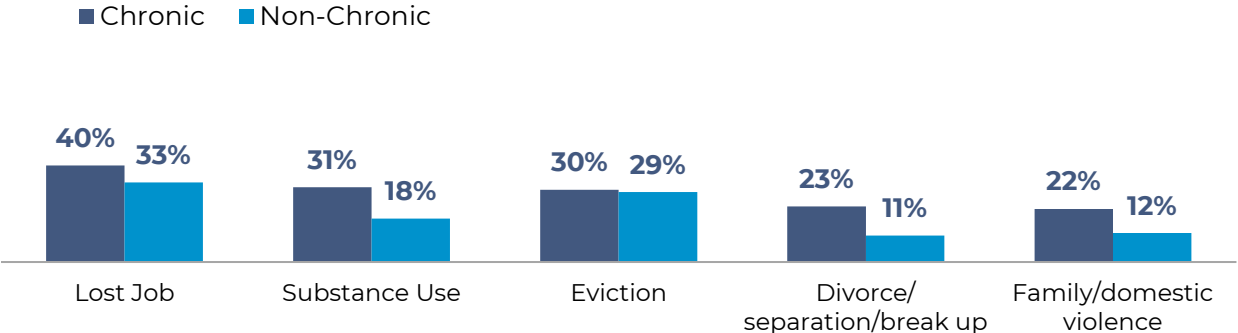
Figure 29: Number of Chronically Homeless Persons by Shelter Status

	2022	2023	2024	2023-2024 % CHANGE
Sheltered	203	153	148	-3%
Unsheltered	718	420	562	34%
Total	921	573	710	24%

PRIMARY CAUSE OF HOMELESSNESS AMONG THOSE EXPERIENCING CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS

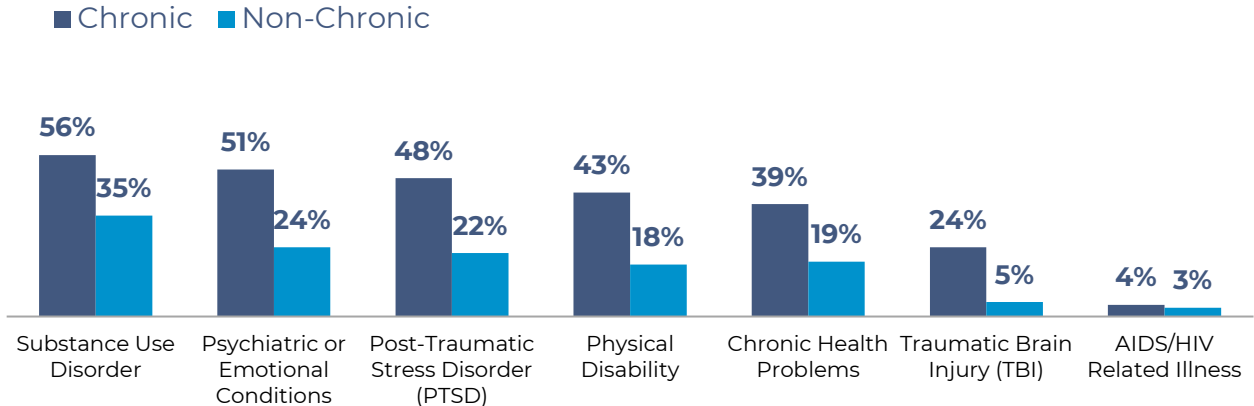
The loss of a job (40%) and substance use (31%) were the two most common responses people experiencing chronic homelessness gave as the primary cause of their homelessness. The chronic homeless population reported higher percentages than the non-chronic population in all of these categories.

Figure 30: Primary Cause of Homelessness, Chronic and Non-Chronic Comparison



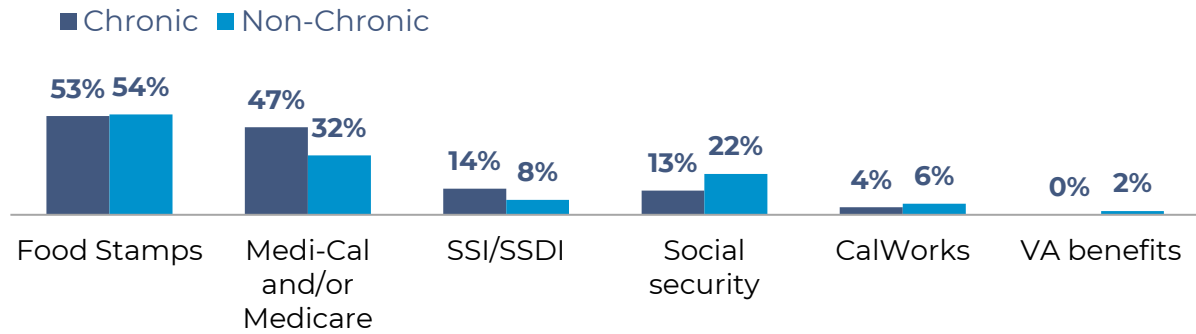
Chronic Survey Population n=136; non-Chronic Survey Population n=254
 Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.

Figure 31: Health Conditions, Chronic and Non-Chronic Comparison



Chronic n=138; non-Chronic n=258

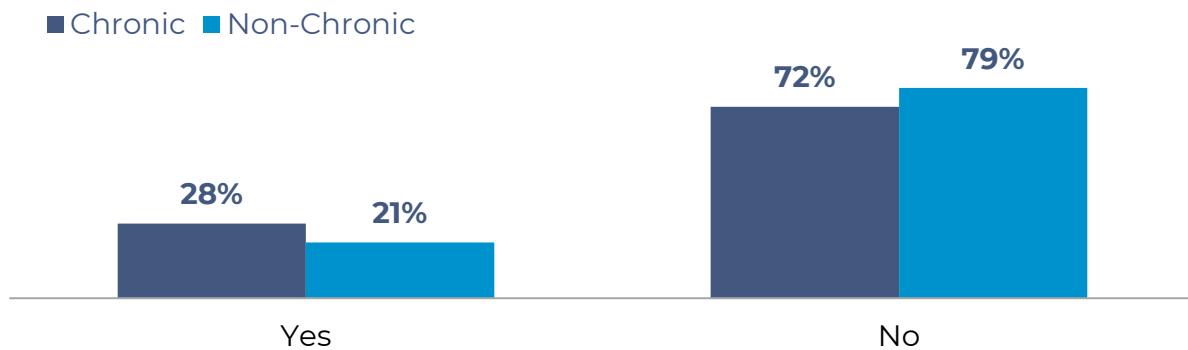
Figure 32: Government Assistance Received, Chronic and Non-Chronic Comparison



Chronic n=138; non-Chronic n=257

Twenty-eight percent of people experiencing chronic homelessness reported they had spent a night in jail in the past year as compared to 21% of people experiencing non-chronic homelessness.

Figure 33: Spent a Night in Jail in the Past Year, Chronic and Non-Chronic Comparison



Chronic n=136; non-Chronic n=253



VETERANS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

U.S. veterans experience conditions that place them at increased risk for homelessness. Veterans frequently experience higher rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), sexual assault, and substance use disorders when compared to the non-veteran population.

The number of veterans experiencing homelessness decreased by 55% in 2024 when compared to 2023. Seventy-eight percent of veterans were unsheltered.

Figure 34: Total Number of Veterans Experiencing Homelessness

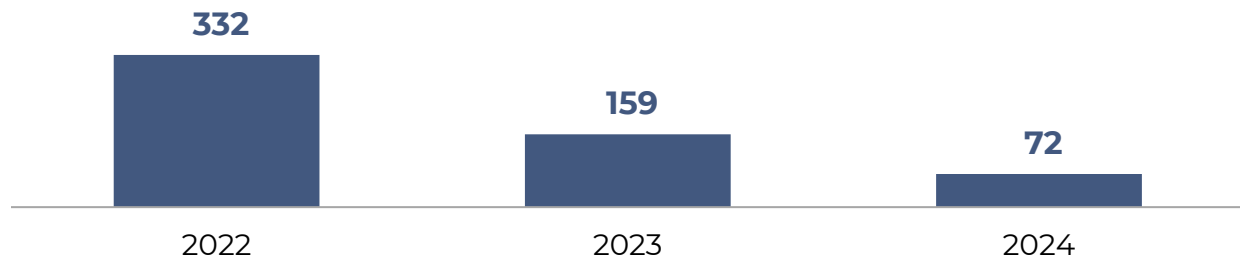
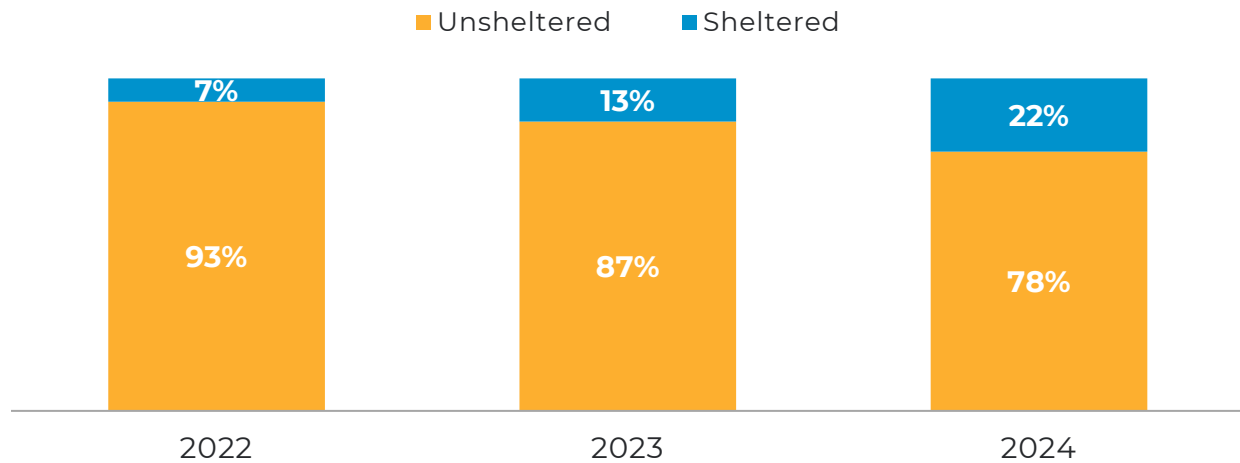


Figure 35: Veterans Experiencing Homelessness by Shelter Status



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

Figure 36: Number of Veterans Experiencing Homelessness by Shelter Status

	2022	2023	2024	2023-2024 % CHANGE
Sheltered	22	20	16	-20%
Unsheltered	310	139	56	-60%
Total	332	159	72	-55%

* Note: Percent change is not calculated when the population is less than or equal to 20.



FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

There was a decrease in families experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz County from 76 families with 263 persons in 2023 to 52 families with 171 persons in 2024. In 2024, 94% of families experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz County were sheltered, compared with 65% in 2023.

Figure 37: Total Number of Families with Children Experiencing Homelessness

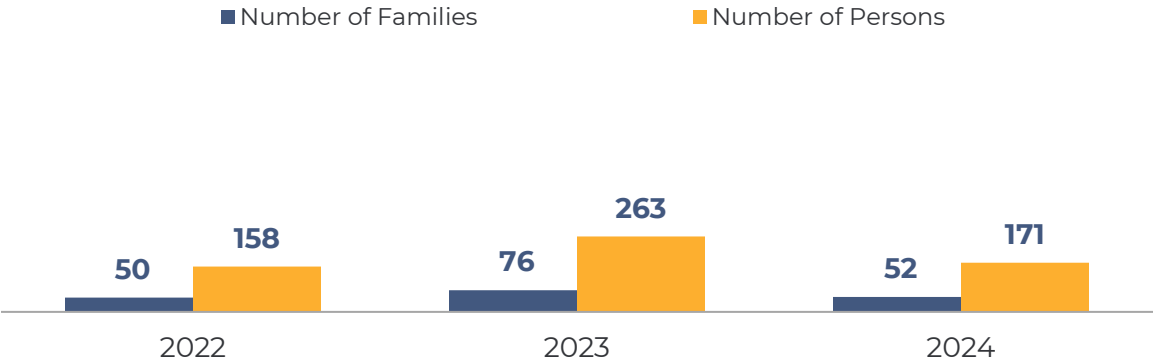
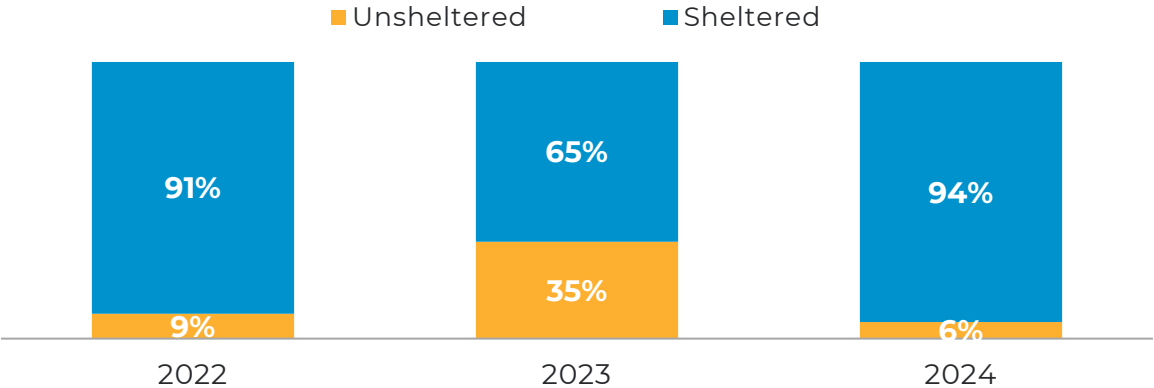


Figure 38: Persons in Families by Shelter Status



UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN AND TRANSITION-AGE YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Unaccompanied children are defined as persons under the age of 18 who are not accompanied by a parent or guardian and, if they have children of their own, are not sleeping in the same place as their child(ren).

Transition-age youth are defined as persons between the ages of 18 and 24 who are not accompanied by a parent or guardian and, if they have children of their own, are not sleeping in the same place as their child(ren). There were 194 transition-age youth (TAY) experiencing homelessness in 2024, a decrease of 38% from 311 TAY in 2023. In 2024 there were no (0) unaccompanied children under 18, a decrease from 23 in 2003. Nearly all TAY (95%) were unsheltered.

Figure 39: Total Number of Unaccompanied Homeless Children and Transition-Age Youth

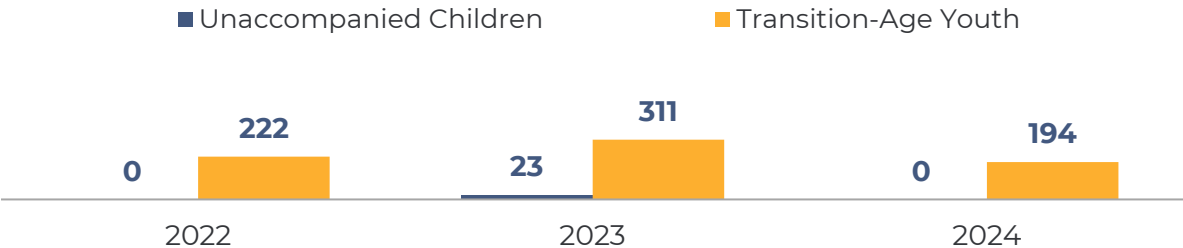
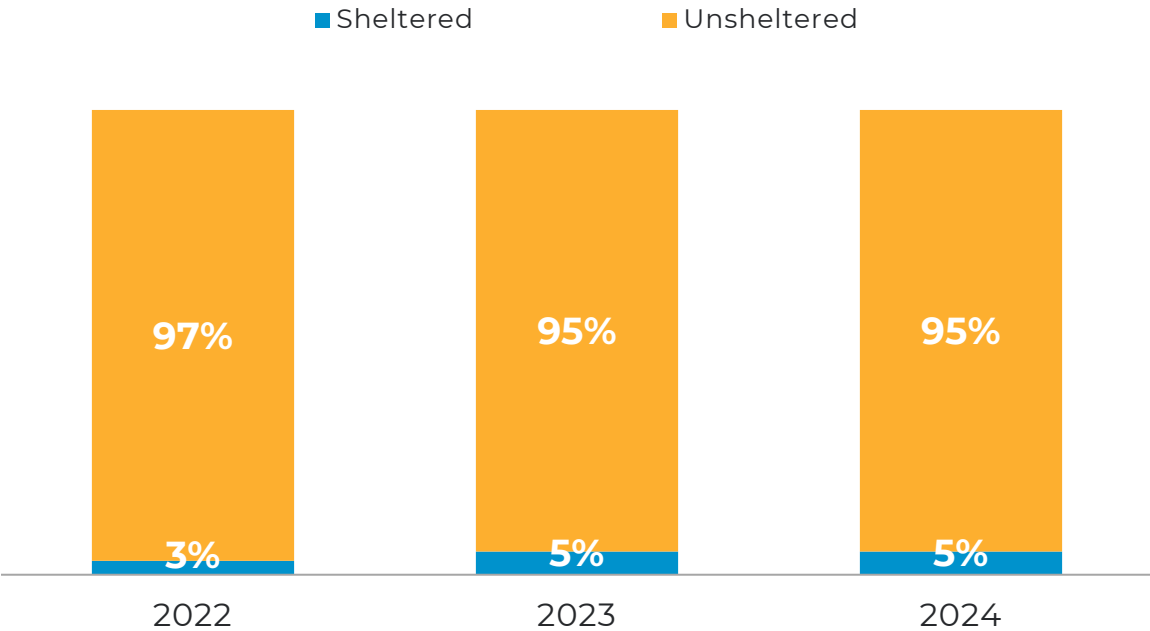


Figure 40: Transition-Age Youth by Shelter Status



CONCLUSION

The 2024 Santa Cruz County Homeless PIT Count and Survey was performed using HUD-recommended practices for counting and surveying the homeless population. Outreach staff, volunteers, and persons with lived experience came together in January 2024 to canvas the entire county for the PIT count. Data summarized in this report provide valuable insights into the unique and diverse experiences of homelessness in Santa Cruz County. A few highlights from the report include:

The PIT Count identified a total of 1,850 persons experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz County in 2024, an increase of 2.5% from the count conducted in 2023.

- Eighty percent (80%) of persons experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz County were unsheltered, living in places not intended for human habitation.
- Thirty percent (30%) of survey respondents indicated they were experiencing homelessness for the first time, a decrease from 40% in 2023.
- Eighty-six percent (86%) of survey respondents indicated they were living in Santa Cruz County at the time they became homeless, an increase from 75% in 2023.
- The most common causes of homelessness were the loss of a job (36%) and eviction (29%).
- When asked what assistance would be most helpful toward securing housing, assistance with rent was chosen by the majority of respondents (77%), followed by more affordable housing (61%), and money for moving costs (42%).
- Survey respondents most frequently reported having the following health conditions: substance use disorder (46%), a psychiatric or emotional condition (37%), and post-traumatic stress disorder (33%). The percentage of respondents who reported having AIDS/HIV related illness increased from 3% in 2023 to 4% in 2024.
- The estimated counts of the four HUD-identified subpopulations in Santa Cruz County were:
 - 710 chronically homeless persons and families with one or more disabling conditions and continuous experience with homelessness for a year or more, or four episodes totaling 12 months within three years
 - 72 homeless veterans
 - 171 members of homeless families with children
 - 194 Unaccompanied children and Transition-Age Youth

The 2024 Santa Cruz County Homeless Count and Survey provides valid and useful data that helps create a comprehensive profile of those experiencing homelessness within the county. Data presented in this report fulfill federal reporting requirements for the CoC, and will inform outreach, service planning, and policy decisions by local planning bodies.

There are many challenges to ending homelessness in Santa Cruz County. The dissemination and evaluation of this report will help the CoC, and all Santa Cruz County members, continue to produce and refine constructive and innovative solutions to end homelessness. Santa Cruz County remains committed to preventing people from becoming homeless and helping those experiencing homelessness to move quickly into permanent housing.

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

OVERVIEW

The 2024 Santa Cruz County Homeless Count and Survey was performed using HUD-recommended practices and definitions of homelessness. The primary purpose of the count and survey was to produce a point-in-time estimate of persons and families experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz County.

COMPONENTS OF THE HOMELESS COUNT & SURVEY

The 2024 PIT Count and Survey had five components:

- **General Street Count:** A morning no contact, visual observation-only count of unsheltered persons and families experiencing homelessness on January 25, 2024, from approximately 5:00 AM to 9:00 AM. The count included people sleeping in 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. The general street count was designed to take place while shelter occupants were still indoors.
- **General Sheltered Count:** A nighttime count of persons and families staying at publicly and privately-operated shelters and transitional housing programs on the night of January 24, 2024, the night before the general street count. Shelter data was gathered either from Santa Cruz County's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) or directly from the shelter provider.
- **Targeted Street Count of Unaccompanied Children and Transition-Age Youth:** An afternoon count of unaccompanied children and transition-age youth on January 25, 2024. This count occurred from approximately 2:00 PM to 7:00 PM and was led by special youth teams who canvassed 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 duplicate counts were removed.
- **Targeted County Office of Education Street Count of Students and Their Families:** This is a count of previously-identified unsheltered homeless students and their families conducted by the Santa Cruz County Office of Education (COE) for the night of January 24, 2024, in conjunction with participating school districts. Demographic and geographic detail from the COE count was compared to the general count data to identify and remove duplicate counts.
- **Homeless Survey:** In-person interviews with 395 unique sheltered and unsheltered persons experiencing homelessness were conducted by peer surveyors between January 25 and mid-March, 2024. Data from the survey were used to refine the Point-in-Time Count estimates, particularly for special populations, and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the demographics and experiences of homeless persons and families.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

To ensure the success and integrity of the count, the county government, other local jurisdictions, and community-based agencies collaborated on community outreach, volunteer recruitment, logistical plans, methodological decisions, and interagency coordination efforts. ASR provided technical assistance for these aspects of the planning process.

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 approach commonly called a blitz method followed by a sample survey. Very significantly, this is the second year of using GPS enabled smartphones in data collection, using an ESRI Survey 123 application developed and customized by ASR to conform to HUD data collection requirements. Improvements were made in pre-planning efforts to deploy count teams both remotely and from deployment sites, wherever possible using an online GIS route planning tool integrated into the volunteer sign-up process.

Outreach organizations, County and city staff, along with community members, selected areas for enumeration from an interactive GIS planning map tool that enabled planning for complete coverage of the county, with prioritization of regions with known high numbers of people experiencing homelessness to outreach staff and personnel with direct service experience..

VOLUNTEER AND GUIDE RECRUITMENT

In 2024, about 100 outreach workers, community volunteers and homeless guides participated in the general street count.

Outreach and program staff increased recruitment and incorporation of persons with lived experience of homelessness this year to act as guides. Guides were paid \$20 to participate in a PIT Count training, as well as \$20 per hour worked on the day of the count.

Volunteers and guides were required to view a 20-minute training video before the count that covered:

- definition of homelessness,
- identification of persons experiencing homelessness,

- guidance on safely and respectfully conducting the count, using the smart phone app, and accessing the smartphone app training video,
- using route maps to ensure full coverage of assigned areas,
- tips to identify vehicles in which persons may be residing and other information to facilitate 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. Specialized teams with knowledge of specific encampments were assigned to census tracts with those encampments. 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 census tracts in the county. Each team was composed of any combination of outreach workers, lived experience guides, program staff, and community volunteers. Each team had a lead and was provided with smart phone access information, and training and field observation tips and guidelines, including vehicle identification criteria at the deployment sites prior to the count. Teams were instructed to meet at one of the deployment sites before and after enumeration to sign in and pick up census tract maps and check receipt of data post count. Dispatch center volunteers verified that at least one person on each team had a cell phone available for their use during the count; the phone number was recorded on the volunteer deployment assignment sheet.

All accessible streets, roads, parks, and highways in the enumerated tracts were traversed by foot or car. The Santa Cruz County Survey 123 smartphone app was used to record the number of homeless persons observed in addition to basic demographic and location information. Teams were asked to cover the entirety of their assigned areas.

To ensure the privacy of persons experiencing homelessness was respected and enumeration teams remained safe, teams were directed to conduct observation-only counts and not have any contact with persons experiencing homelessness. When they encountered a structure or vehicle that they believed to be inhabited, teams could indicate that it was inhabited but that the number or the demographic detail (age and gender) of its inhabitants could not be determined. Only actively occupied places were eligible to be included in the count effort. ASR uses data from survey respondents to estimate the number of inhabitants in dwellings where the number of inhabitants was unknown. ASR uses count data on confirmed cases identified during the PIT to extrapolate data on gender and age to estimate the demographics of persons counted.

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION COUNT

In the days following the street count, representatives from several school districts called households known to have recently experienced homelessness to ascertain where they stayed on the night of count. Participating school districts include Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD), Santa Cruz City Schools (SCCS), Bonny Doon Union Elementary School District, Pacific Elementary School District, and Adult Education. This is a significant effort, as school districts may have hundreds of calls to make to ensure that families counted fit the HUD definition of homelessness and were, in fact, experiencing homelessness on the night of the count. Using demographic and geographic detail, data gathered by the school districts were compared to count data to check for duplication.

UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN AND TRANSITION-AGE YOUTH STREET COUNT METHODOLOGY

GOAL

The goal of the 2024 unaccompanied children and transition-age youth (TAY) count was to accurately represent unaccompanied children and transition-age youth in the Point-in-Time Count. Because many children and TAY experiencing homelessness do not use homeless services, are unrecognizable to adult street count volunteers, and may be in unsheltered locations that are difficult to find, traditional street count efforts are not as effective in reaching youth. **In this regard**, HUD and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness recommend that communities count youth at times when they can be seen rather than during traditional enumeration times.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Planning for the 2024 unaccompanied children and TAY count included homeless youth service providers and persons between the ages of 18 and 24, with lived experience of homelessness. Local service providers identified locations where unaccompanied children and TAY experiencing homelessness were known to congregate and recruited TAY experiencing or with lived experience of homelessness and knowledge of those areas to serve as guides for the count. Late afternoon and early evening were recommended by advocates as the best time to conduct the youth count. Youth workers were paid \$20 per hour for time spent both in training and the actual count. Youth worked in teams of two to four, with teams coordinated and supervised by street outreach workers.

STREET COUNT DE-DUPLICATION

Data from the unaccompanied children and TAY count and general street count were compared and de-duplicated by assessing location, gender, and age.

SHELTERED COUNT METHODOLOGY

GOAL

The goal of the sheltered count is to gain an accurate count of persons temporarily staying in shelters and transitional housing programs across Santa Cruz County.

DEFINITION

For the purposes of this study, the following HUD definition of sheltered homelessness for Point-in-Time Counts was used: *persons and families living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter or transitional housing programs designated to provide a temporary living arrangement.* Persons living in publicly-supported managed camps are not considered sheltered under this definition.

DATA COLLECTION

To collect data on persons staying in shelters and transitional housing programs, ASR worked with BitFocus, the HMIS system administrator for Santa Cruz County, to collect data from all emergency shelters and transitional housing programs operating in the county. Data collected from the shelters and transitional housing programs included participants' household status, age, gender, race and ethnicity, veteran, duration and recurrence of homelessness, chronic status, and health conditions. Data from shelters that do not participate in HMIS was collected using a web-based reporting system.

CHALLENGES

Point-in-Time Counts are “snapshots” that quantify the size of the homeless population in a specific area at a given point during the year. Hence, the count is not representative of fluctuations and compositional changes in the homeless population seasonally or over time.

The methods employed in a non-intrusive visual homeless enumeration, while academically sound, have inherent biases and shortcomings. Even with the assistance of dedicated service providers, the methodology cannot guarantee 100% accuracy.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

The data collected through the survey are used for the Helping Expedite and Advance Responsible Tribal Home Ownership Act (HEARTH Act) funding application and for future program development and planning. The survey elicited information from respondents including gender, family status, military service, duration and recurrence of homelessness, nighttime accommodations, causes of homelessness, and access to services through open- and closed-ended, and multiple response questions.

Surveys were conducted by peer survey workers with lived experience of homelessness. Survey workers completed training sessions facilitated by ASR. Potential surveyors had a comprehensive orientation that included project background information and 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 was offered to respondents in appreciation for their time and participation. Gift cards were provided as an incentive for participating in the 2024 homeless survey because they are easy to distribute, have wide appeal, and could be provided within the project budget.

SURVEY SAMPLING

Based on a Point-in-Time Count estimate of 1,850 homeless persons, with a randomized survey sampling process, the 395 valid surveys represented a margin of error of +/-4.4%, with a 95% confidence level when generalizing the results of the survey to the estimated population of persons experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz County.

The 2024 survey was administered in shelters, transitional housing facilities, and outside. Survey quotas were created to ensure appropriate representation of persons and heads of families staying in emergency shelter and transitional housing residents.

Strategic attempts were made to reach persons in a variety of geographic locations and demographic groups such as homeless unaccompanied children and TAY, minority ethnic groups, military veterans, domestic violence survivors, and families. Quotas were used for geographic locations, unaccompanied children and transition-age youth, and shelter and transitional housing residents.

To reduce implicit bias, during the recruitment and training of surveyors, every attempt was made to recruit capable persons who represented a broad range of experiences and backgrounds. Since 2009, the ASR survey methodology has prioritized a peer-to-peer approach to data collection by increasing the number of surveyors currently or recently experiencing homelessness. We prioritize surveyors who have experienced homelessness as they can better relate to and understand the population they are surveying.

To increase randomization of respondents, survey workers were trained to employ an “every third encounter” 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 “every third encounter” approach was resumed.

DATA COLLECTION

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

DATA ANALYSIS

The survey requested respondents' initials and date of birth to avoid duplication without compromising the respondents' anonymity. Upon completion of the survey effort, an extensive verification process was conducted to eliminate potential duplicates. This process examined respondents' date of birth, initials, gender, ethnicity, length of homelessness, and consistencies in patterns of survey question responses. Outlier surveys were examined and eliminated if thought to be inauthentic.

SURVEY DATA AND PIT COUNT DATA

Survey data is used to extrapolate data on race and ethnicity for all persons, and to account for situations where PIT enumeration teams were unable to collect data on age and gender. That data is combined with data from HMIS on shelter and transitional housing participants to provide a complete demographic picture for all persons identified during the PIT count.

SURVEY CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

The 2024 Santa Cruz County Homeless Survey strives to be a representative sample of the homeless experience through geographic and shelter-based quotas. Bias in respondent selection by surveyors is a major training theme and all attempts are made to minimize. The diversity of the homeless experience is significant and our ability to profile this can always be improved. The survey methods, though constantly evolving, are essentially the same over time so longitudinal data has good methodological consistency.

The smaller the subpopulation, the harder it is to ensure it is accurately represented during the survey process. For example, finding families and youth and TAY experiencing homelessness presents a challenge and can lead to underrepresentation in the survey results. Locating and surveying persons who identify as transgender, have a sexual orientation other than heterosexual, are experiencing specific health conditions such as AIDS/HIV related illness and TBI, among others can be challenging and may not be fully represented in the survey process.

There may be some variance in the information that persons experiencing homelessness self-reported. A peer interviewing methodology is believed to allow respondents to be more candid with their answers and help reduce uneasiness of revealing personal information.

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 persons 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.

Persons Experiencing Homelessness – Under the Category 1 definition of homelessness in the HEARTH Act, includes persons 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.

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