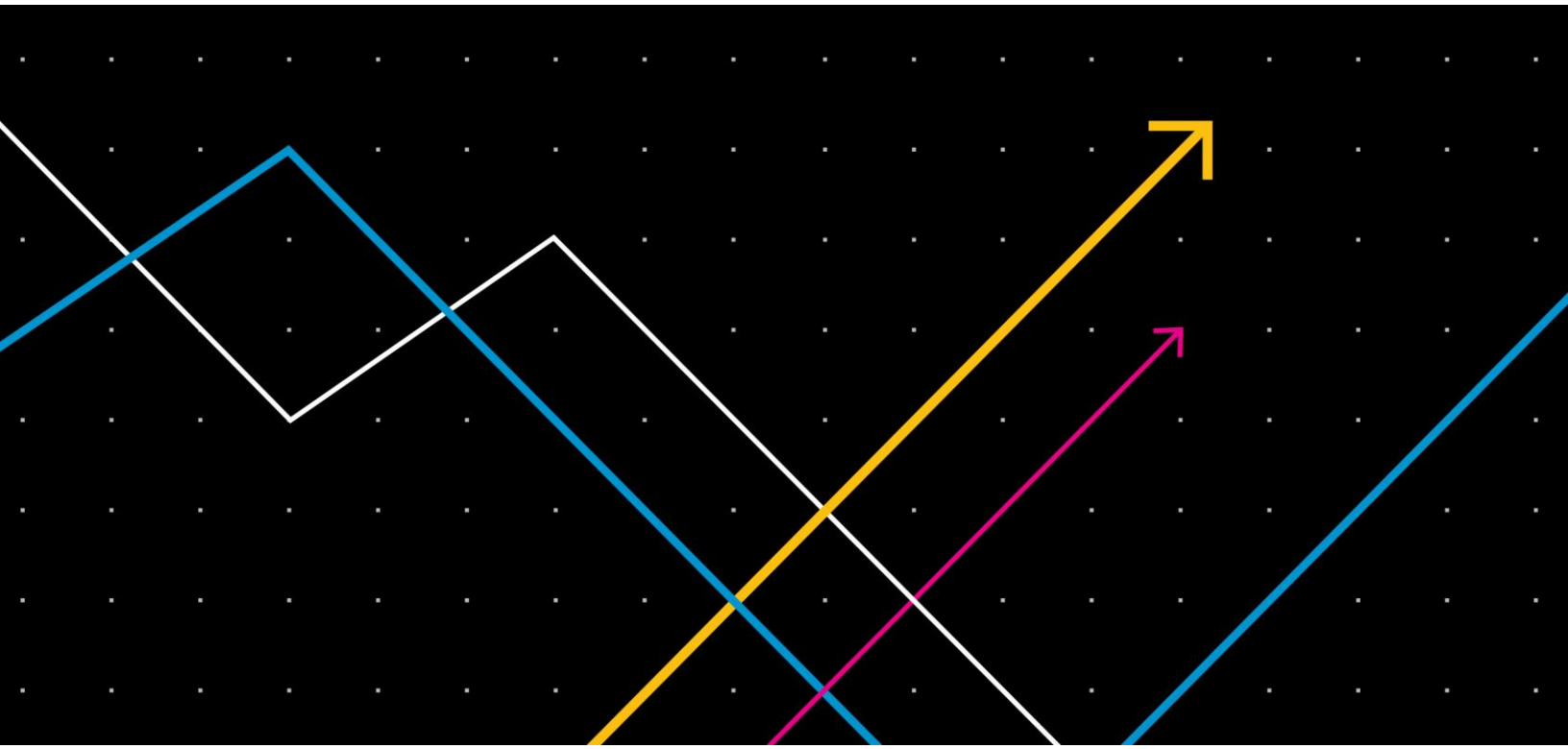

RESEARCH REPORT

Unsheltered Homelessness

Trends, Characteristics, and Homeless Histories

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Executive Summary

After decreasing between 2009 and 2015, the number of people enduring unsheltered homelessness—sleeping outside, in cars, and in other places not meant for human habitation—increased in recent years. This growth is concentrated in a small number of jurisdictions, particularly West Coast cities, and among key populations: individuals not experiencing chronic homelessness, women, and those who identify as Black or Latinx.* Compared with people who are experiencing homelessness in sheltered locations, people enduring unsheltered homelessness are more likely to be disconnected from formal employment; have significant physical, mental, and behavioral health challenges; and have former and ongoing involvement with the criminal legal system. People enduring unsheltered homelessness are also more likely to experience homelessness for longer periods, probably reflecting the challenges they face accessing and affording housing in the private rental market and accessing homeless assistance and other assistance programs. Ultimately, unsheltered homelessness devastates people's lives and costs localities millions of dollars to manage.

Population Trends

On a given night, more than 200,000 people sleep outside, in cars, or in other places not meant for human habitation such as abandoned buildings. These people, who are enduring unsheltered homelessness, are approximately 1 in 3 of the people experiencing homelessness overall. The vast majority of them—93 percent—are individuals, or people who are not members of a household with children, and experience homelessness on their own; only 7 percent of people enduring unsheltered homelessness do so as a member of a family unit.[1] In 2019, individuals experiencing chronic homelessness, unaccompanied young people, and veterans were more likely to be unsheltered than people experiencing homelessness in families with children.

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* We have chosen to use the terms "Black" and "Latinx" throughout this report, even when they differ from terms used in source materials, because they may be more inclusive of the way members of these populations self-identify. We acknowledge this language may not reflect how people describe themselves, and we remain committed to employing respectful and inclusive language.

The number of people experiencing homelessness overall and those enduring unsheltered homelessness declined after 2009; however, unsheltered homelessness increased sharply from 2015 to 2019, erasing some decreases from earlier years. These recent increases were driven predominantly by individuals who were not experiencing chronic homelessness. And there were increases among groups that historically were less likely to be unsheltered, including women and people who identify as Black or Latinx.

Geographic Trends

Rates of unsheltered homelessness are not uniform across the United States but rather are concentrated in urban areas on the West Coast. Increases in the number of people enduring unsheltered homelessness are concentrated in 14 "hot spot" Continuums of Care, the governing bodies responsible for coordinating homeless assistance at the local or regional level. These hot spots accounted for 83 percent of the increase in the number of people enduring unsheltered homelessness between 2015 and 2019. These Continuums of Care also have some of the most expensive and least accessible housing markets, which correlate with both overall and unsheltered homelessness.

Characteristics of People Enduring Unsheltered Homelessness

The average person experiencing unsheltered homelessness is an older, white man. However, Black people are overrepresented among people enduring unsheltered homelessness, and the numbers of women and people who identify as Latinx have increased significantly.

People enduring unsheltered homelessness are more likely than people living in sheltered locations to have various characteristics that reflect how system- and program-level policies and structural and systemic racism may increase their likelihood of being unsheltered. Some of these characteristics may also be the result of living in unsheltered situations for protracted periods of time. These characteristics include lower educational attainment and less connection to formal employment; higher rates of physical, mental, and behavioral health challenges; and greater involvement with the criminal legal system. People enduring unsheltered homelessness are likely to have been homeless for long periods of time and to have had their first experience of homelessness at a young age (younger than 25).

Costs of Unsheltered Homelessness

Unsheltered homelessness is devastating for people enduring it; they are often exposed to violence and other traumatic experiences or resort to participation in risky behaviors as a survival technique. Unsheltered homelessness is also costly to local jurisdictions. People enduring unsheltered homelessness are reliant on public and emergency health systems and frequently interact with police, and local jurisdictions are responsible for sanitation associated with people living outside. Some jurisdictions also take costly steps to make living outside less habitable, such as making sidewalks and benches less comfortable. With the high individual and government costs associated with managing unsheltered homelessness, ending it should be a priority across all levels of government and for the public.

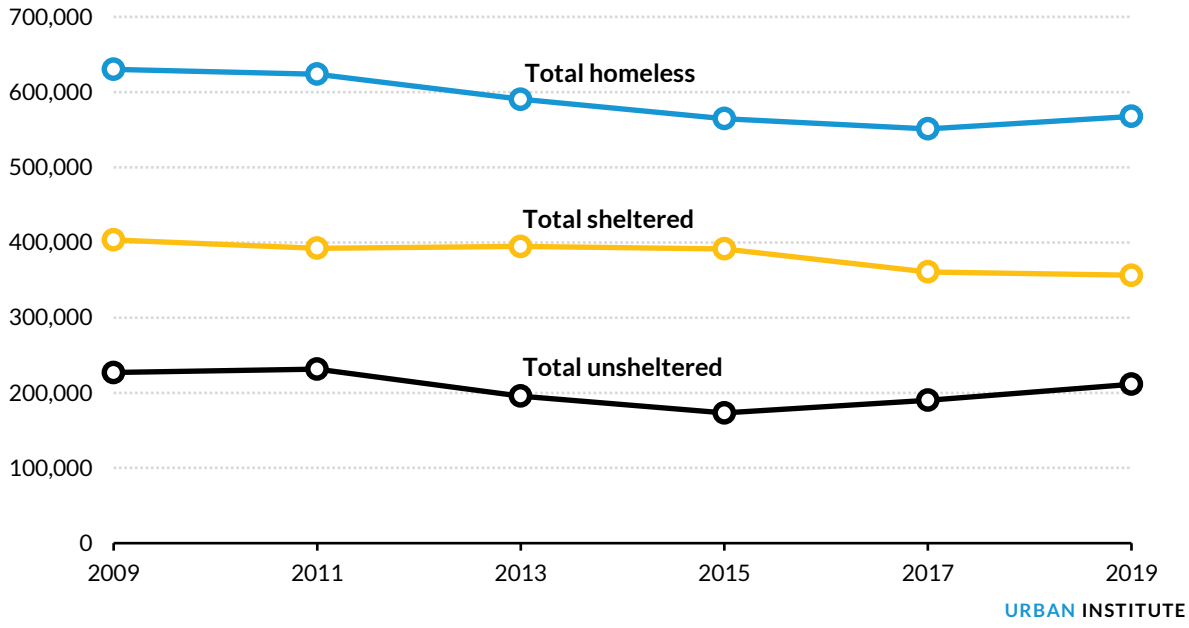
Unsheltered Homelessness: Trends, Characteristics, and Homeless Histories

On a given night in 2019, more than 560,000 people were experiencing homelessness. Approximately 1 in 3 of them (about 211,000 people) were forced to sleep in unsheltered locations: outside, perhaps on a sidewalk or in a park; in a car; or in other places not meant for human habitation, such as an abandoned building (Henry et al. 2020). The others were living in shelters or other temporary accommodations.

About 10 percent fewer people are experiencing homelessness overall now than were a decade ago. Between 2009 and 2015, trends in unsheltered and sheltered homelessness largely mirrored the trend in overall homelessness, with modest declines in most years. However, since 2015, unsheltered homelessness has been steadily growing, while sheltered homelessness has been declining. Between 2015 and 2019, the number of people enduring unsheltered homelessness increased 22 percent. During the same period, the number of people experiencing sheltered homelessness fell 9 percent. This decrease is why the number of people experiencing overall homelessness remained relatively flat from 2015 to 2019 (figure 1).

FIGURE 1

Total, Sheltered, and Unsheltered Homelessness, 2009–19

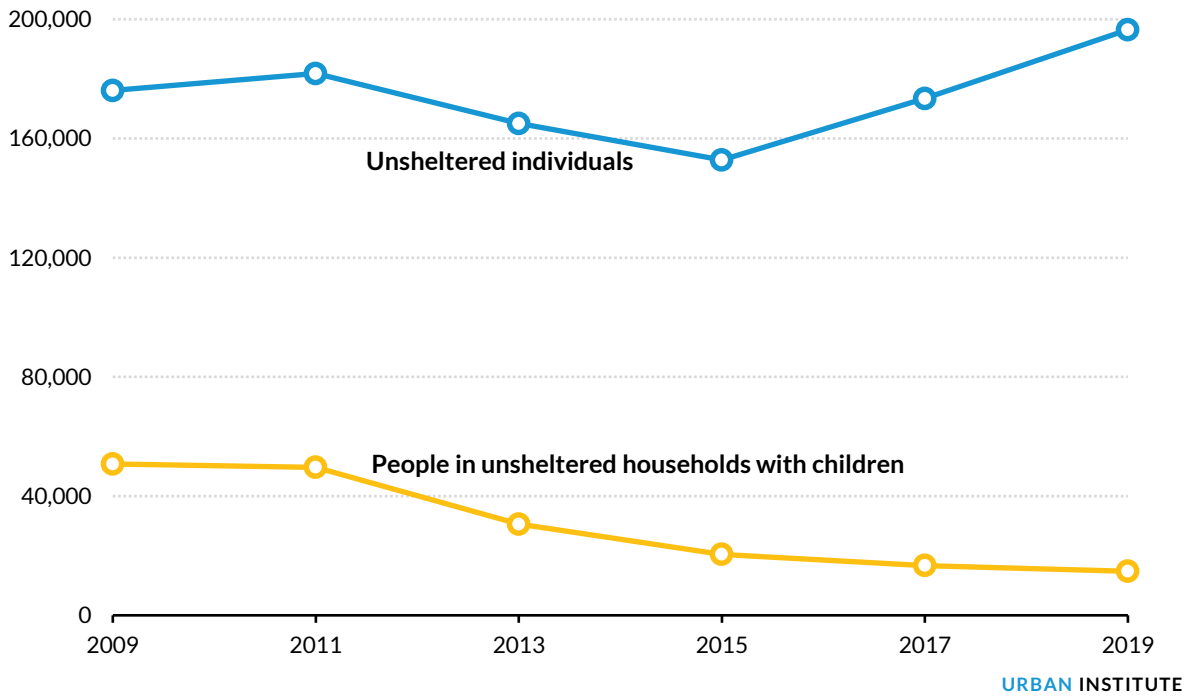


Source: 2019 US Department of Housing and Urban Development point-in-time data, available at https://www.hud.gov/2019-point-in-time-estimates-of-homelessness-in-US.

Historically, most people enduring unsheltered homelessness have been individuals—or people who are experiencing an episode of homelessness and are not members of a household with children[2]—and that share has been growing. In 2009, 78 percent of people enduring unsheltered homelessness were individuals, and 22 percent were people in families with children. In 2019, 93 percent of people enduring unsheltered homelessness were individuals, and 7 percent were people in families with children. This shift was driven by divergent trends: a decrease in the number of people in families in unsheltered locations and an increase in the number of individuals enduring unsheltered homelessness (figure 2). Between 2009 and 2019, the number of people in families with children in unsheltered locations dropped 71 percent (from 50,783 to 14,779), while the number of individuals living in unsheltered locations increased about 12 percent (from 176,136 to 196,514).

FIGURE 2

Unsheltered Homelessness by Individual and Family Populations, 2009–19



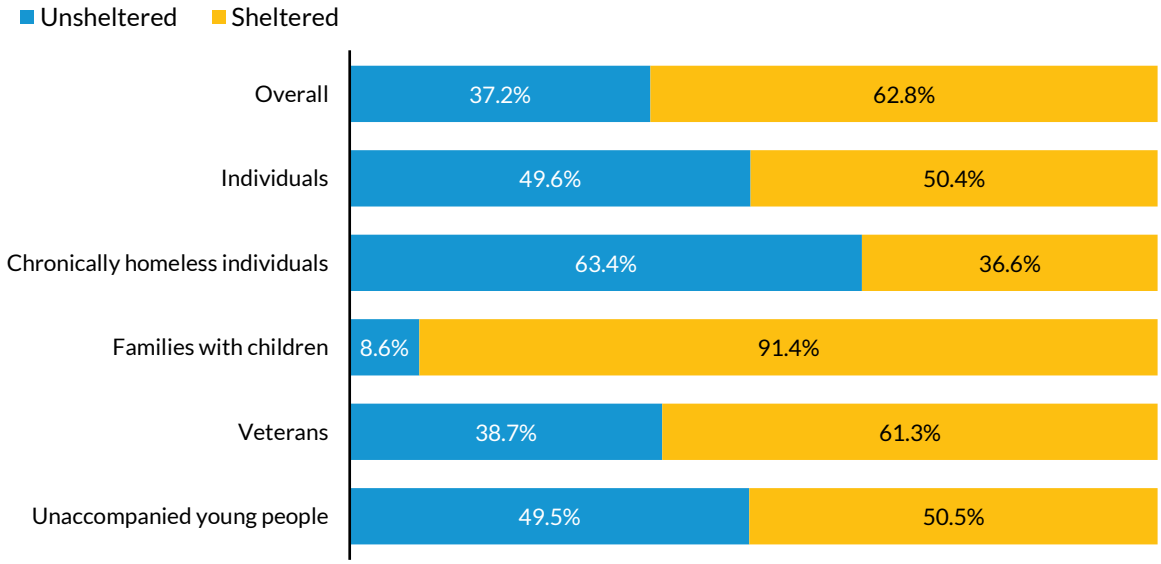
Source: 2019 US Department of Housing and Urban Development point-in-time data, available at https://www.hud.gov/2019-point-in-time-estimates-of-homelessness-in-US.
Note: Individuals are people who are experiencing homelessness and are not members of a household with children.

Population Trends

Over time, the share of people experiencing homelessness who are unsheltered has remained fairly stable. In 2009, people enduring unsheltered homelessness were 36 percent of the overall number of people experiencing homelessness. This number dropped to 31 percent in 2015 only to rise to 37 percent in 2019. Sheltered status, however, varies across populations experiencing homelessness. Individuals (people who are not members of a household with children)—especially those experiencing chronic homelessness[3] (people who have a disability and are experiencing homelessness long term or repeatedly)—and unaccompanied children and young adults (people who are younger than 25 and are experiencing homelessness without a family member) are more likely to experience unsheltered homelessness than other population groups, while families with children are more likely to be sheltered (figure 3).

FIGURE 3

Sheltered Status by Homeless Population, 2019



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Source: 2019 US Department of Housing and Urban Development point-in-time data, available at https://www.hud.gov/2019-point-in-time-estimates-of-homelessness-in-US.

Notes: Individuals are people who are experiencing homelessness and are not members of a household with children. Chronically homeless individuals are people who have a disability and are experiencing homelessness long term or repeatedly. Unaccompanied young people are children and young adults who are younger than 25 and are experiencing homelessness without a family member.

Individuals experiencing chronic homelessness (box 1) are the population most likely to be unsheltered. Between 2009 and 2015, the number of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in unsheltered locations decreased 11 percent. However, between 2015 and 2019, this population increased 11 percent.

BOX 1

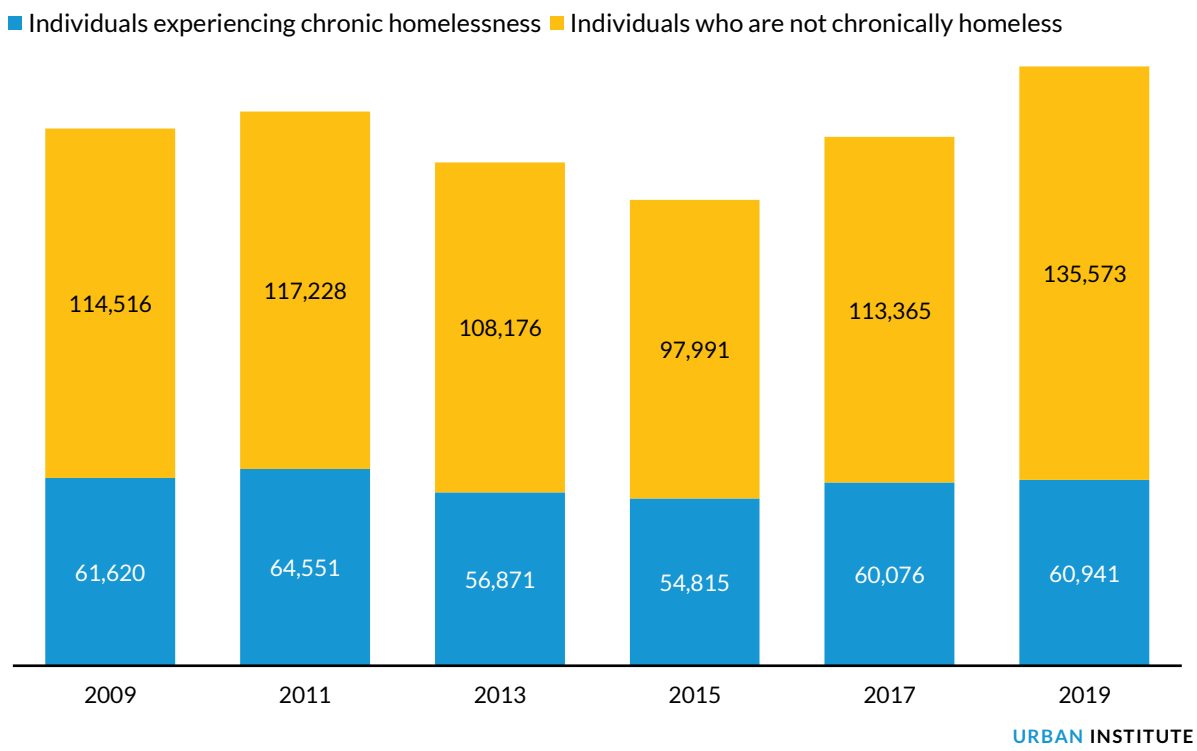
Individuals Experiencing Chronic Homelessness

People experiencing unsheltered and chronic homelessness have longer durations of homelessness and are more likely to have serious health problems than those who are not unsheltered and not chronically homeless (Levitt et al. 2009; Rountree, Hess, and Lyke 2019). People experiencing chronic unsheltered homelessness report higher rates of lifetime illness and lifetime substance use than people who are unsheltered but not chronically homeless. They are also more likely to have one or more of the following: mental health, physical health, or substance use disorders (Levitt et al. 2009). An analysis of individuals (members of a household without children) enduring unsheltered homelessness in Los Angeles County found that compared with individuals enduring unsheltered homelessness for the first time, individuals experiencing chronic homelessness were twice as likely to have a serious mental health disorder or depression and more than twice as likely to have a physical disability or chronic physical illness (Flaming, Burns, and Carlen 2018). The same analysis found that individuals experiencing chronic homelessness were nearly three times as likely to have a substance use disorder and nearly twice as likely to have alcohol use challenges. People experiencing chronic homelessness in unsheltered locations also had higher reported rates of incarceration (jail or prison) than individuals who were not chronically homeless but living in unsheltered locations (Levitt et al. 2009).

Although the number of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in unsheltered locations grew between 2015 and 2019, individuals who were enduring unsheltered homelessness and were not chronically homeless drove the overall increase in unsheltered homelessness. This population rose 38 percent between 2015 and 2019, with an increase of about 15,000 people from 2015 to 2017 and of more than 22,000 from 2017 to 2019 (figure 4).

FIGURE 4

Individuals Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness by Chronic Status, 2009–19



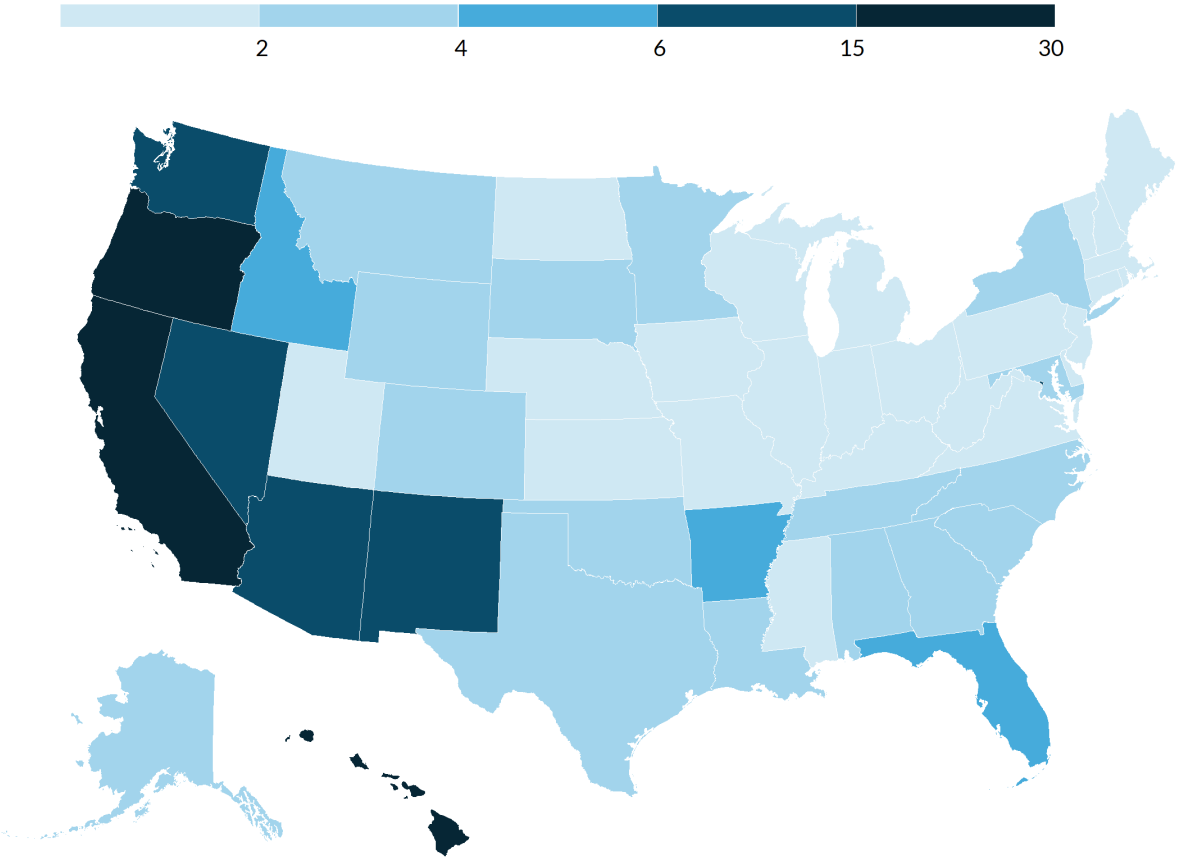
Source: 2019 US Department of Housing and Urban Development point-in-time data, available at https://www.hud.gov/2019-point-in-time-estimates-of-homelessness-in-US.
Note: Individuals are people who are experiencing homelessness and are not members of a household with children.

Geographic Trends

Rates of homelessness vary widely across the US. Overall, unsheltered homelessness is far more prevalent in urban areas on the West Coast. In 2019, the national rate of unsheltered homelessness was 6.3 persons per 10,000 people in the general population, but California, Hawaii, and Oregon had rates of unsheltered homelessness more than 3.5 times the national average (figure 5).

FIGURE 5

Rate of Unsheltered Homelessness per 10,000 People, 2019



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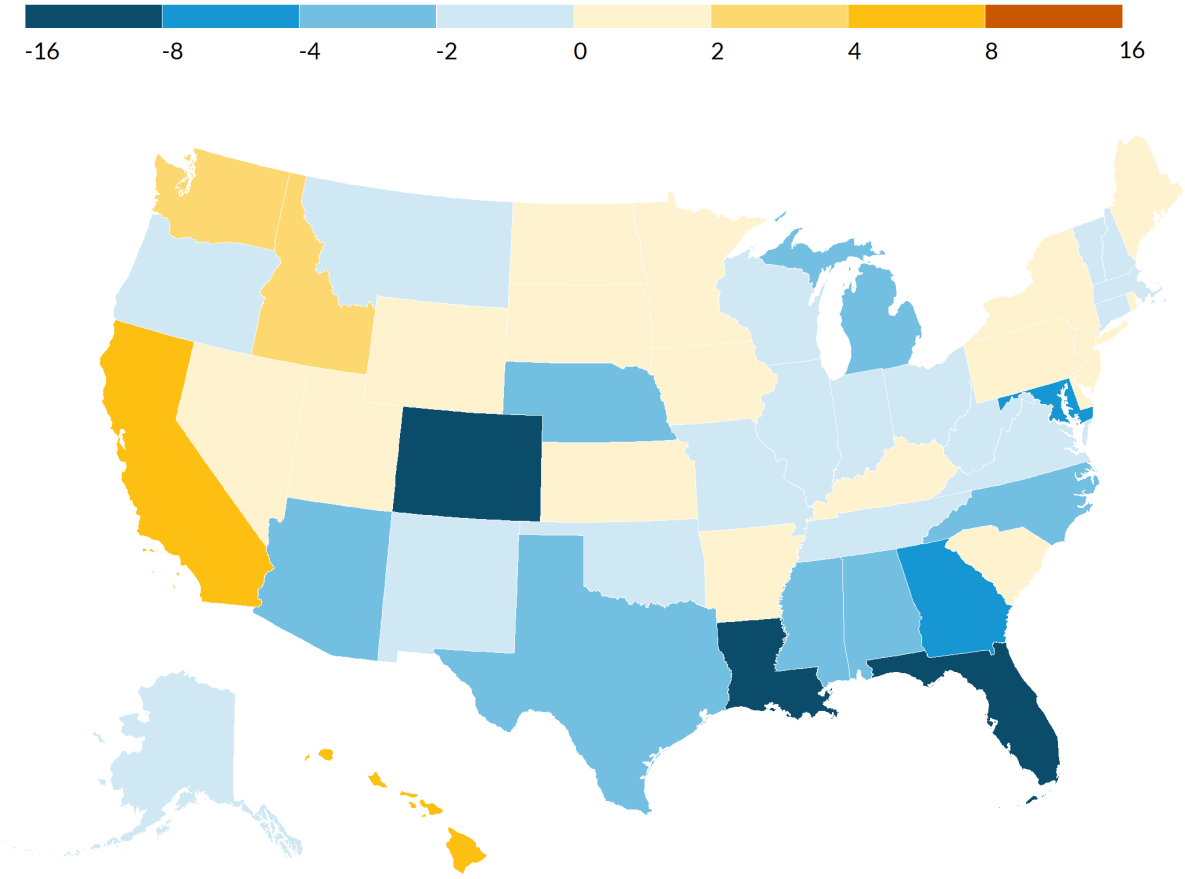
Sources: 2019 US Department of Housing and Urban Development point-in-time data, available at https://www.hud.gov/2019-point-in-time-estimates-of-homelessness-in-US; "State Population Totals and Components of Change: 2010–2019," US Census Bureau, updated December 30, 2019, https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2010s-state-total.html; "State Intercensal Tables: 2000–2010," US Census Bureau, updated November 30, 2016, https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/intercensal-2000-2010-state.html.

In contrast, in 2009, the national unsheltered homelessness rate was 7.3 unsheltered persons per 10,000 people in the general population. (See appendix A for the rates of unsheltered homelessness in each state in 2009 and 2019.)

As figure 6 shows, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, and Maryland experienced large decreases in their rates of unsheltered homelessness between 2009 and 2019. The rate of unsheltered homelessness grew, meanwhile, in California, Hawaii, Idaho, Washington, and other states.

FIGURE 6

Change in Rate of Unsheltered Homelessness, 2009–19



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Sources: 2019 US Department of Housing and Urban Development point-in-time data, available at https://www.hud.gov/2019-point-in-time-estimates-of-homelessness-in-US; "State Population Totals and Components of Change: 2010–2019," US Census Bureau, updated December 30, 2019, https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2010s-state-total.html; "State Intercensal Tables: 2000–2010," US Census Bureau, updated November 30, 2016, https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/intercensal-2000-2010-state.html.
Note: The rate of unsheltered homelessness is the number of unsheltered people per 10,000 people in the general population.

Hot Spots

Unsheltered homelessness is concentrated not only in specific states but also in several urban areas, mostly on the West Coast. In 2019, approximately 44 percent of all people enduring unsheltered homelessness nationwide resided in 14 "hot spot" Continuums of Care (CoCs), the governing bodies responsible for coordinating homeless assistance at the local or regional level.[4] In 2019, these 14 CoCs had a population of either more than 5,000 individuals enduring unsheltered homelessness or more than 2,000 individuals enduring unsheltered homelessness and an increase of 500 individuals at any

point since 2009.[5] People enduring unsheltered homelessness in these 14 local hot spots are predominantly individuals (table 1). In more than half these hot spots—Fresno, Las Vegas, New York, Oakland, Phoenix, Portland, Riverside, and San Francisco—individuals made up 99 percent or more of the people enduring unsheltered homelessness.

TABLE 1

Hot Spot Continuums of Care, 2019

Unsheltered homeless population and the share that are individuals

Continuum of care (CoC)	State	Total unsheltered homeless population	Unsheltered individual share
Los Angeles City and County	CA	42,471	96.2
San Jose/Santa Clara City and County	CA	7,922	96.9
Oakland, Berkeley/Alameda County	CA	6,312	99.6
Seattle/King County	WA	5,228	98.8
San Francisco City	CA	5,180	99.5
Santa Ana, Anaheim/Orange County	CA	3,961	90.0
Sacramento City and County	CA	3,900	85.5
New York City	NY	3,622	100.0
Las Vegas/Clark County	NV	3,317	99.2
Phoenix, Mesa/Maricopa County	AZ	3,188	99.9
Honolulu City and County	HI	2,403	87.9
Fresno City and County/Madera County	CA	2,069	99.2
Riverside City and County	CA	2,045	99.4
Portland, Gresham/Multnomah County	OR	2,037	99.4

Source: 2019 US Department of Housing and Urban Development point-in-time data, available at https://www.hud.gov/2019-point-in-time-estimates-of-homelessness-in-US.

Notes: Individuals are people who are experiencing homelessness and are not members of a household with children. A Continuum of Care is the governing body responsible for coordinating homeless assistance at the local or regional level. In 2019, hot spot CoCs had a population of either more than 5,000 unsheltered individuals or more than 2,000 unsheltered individuals and an increase of 500 unsheltered individuals at any point since 2009.

Because of the high concentration of unsheltered homelessness in these 14 CoCs, the trends in these cities have a large effect on nationwide homeless population trends. Therefore, examining national trends with and without these 14 CoCs is useful.

With the 14 hot spot CoCs included, the number of people enduring unsheltered homelessness decreased 24 percent between 2009 and 2015; excluding the hot spot CoCs, the number of people enduring unsheltered homelessness decreased 36 percent during that time (figure 7).

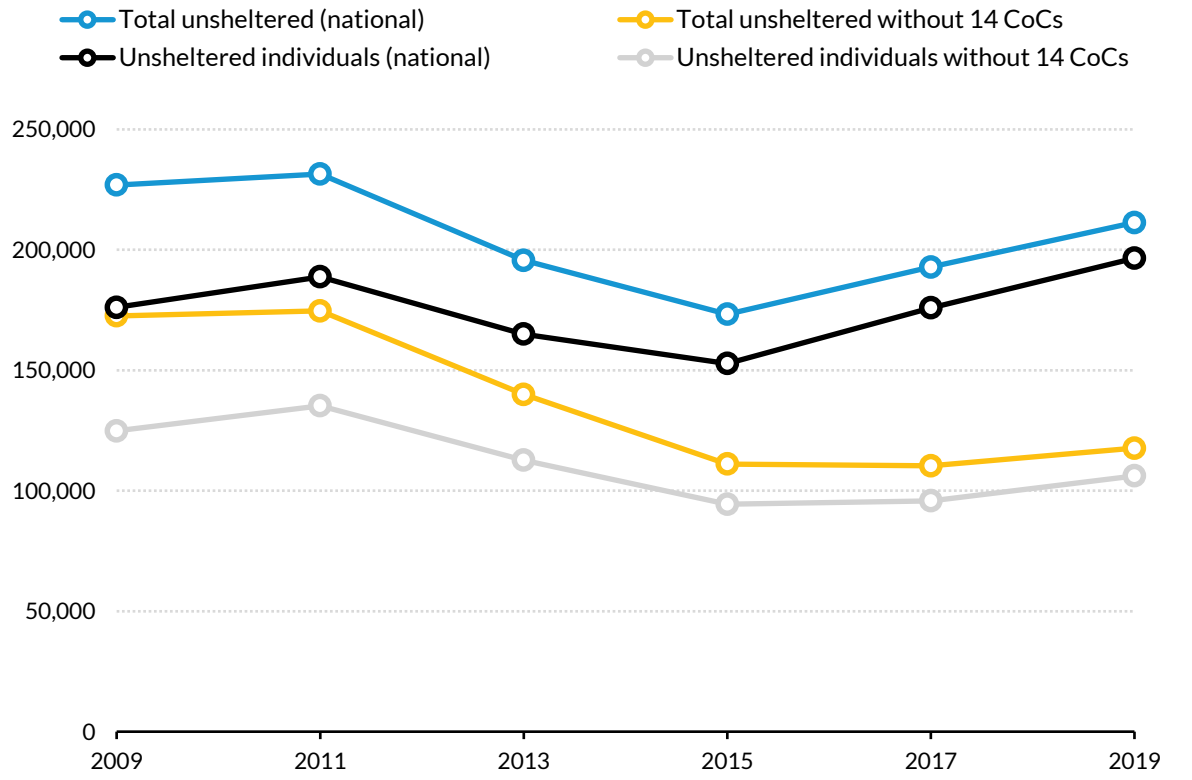
However, between 2015 and 2019, when unsheltered homelessness increased nationwide, hot spot CoCs accounted for 83 percent of that growth. In the hot spot CoCs, 31,488 more people were enduring unsheltered homelessness in 2019 than in 2015, a 51 percent increase. In contrast, the rest of

the country reported an increase of only 6,537 people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, a 6 percent increase.

FIGURE 7

National Trends in Unsheltered Homelessness with and without Hot Spot Continuums of Care

2009–19



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Source: 2019 US Department of Housing and Urban Development point-in-time data, available at https://www.hud.gov/2019-point-in-time-estimates-of-homelessness-in-US.

Notes: Individuals are people who are experiencing homelessness and are not members of a household with children. A Continuum of Care is the governing body responsible for coordinating homeless assistance at the local or regional level. In 2019, hot spot CoCs had a population of either more than 5,000 unsheltered individuals or more than 2,000 unsheltered individuals and an increase of 500 unsheltered individuals at any point since 2009.

As noted previously, the growth in unsheltered homelessness between 2015 and 2019 was solely because of an increase in the number of individuals enduring unsheltered homelessness. Nationally, the number of individuals enduring unsheltered homelessness grew by 43,708 people (29 percent) between 2015 and 2019 (figure 7). Within only hot spot CoCs, the population of individuals enduring unsheltered homelessness grew by 31,971 people (55 percent). In total, 73 percent of the national growth in individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness was attributable to increases in hot spot CoCs. Removing hot spot CoCs, the number of individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness increased nationally only about 12 percent.

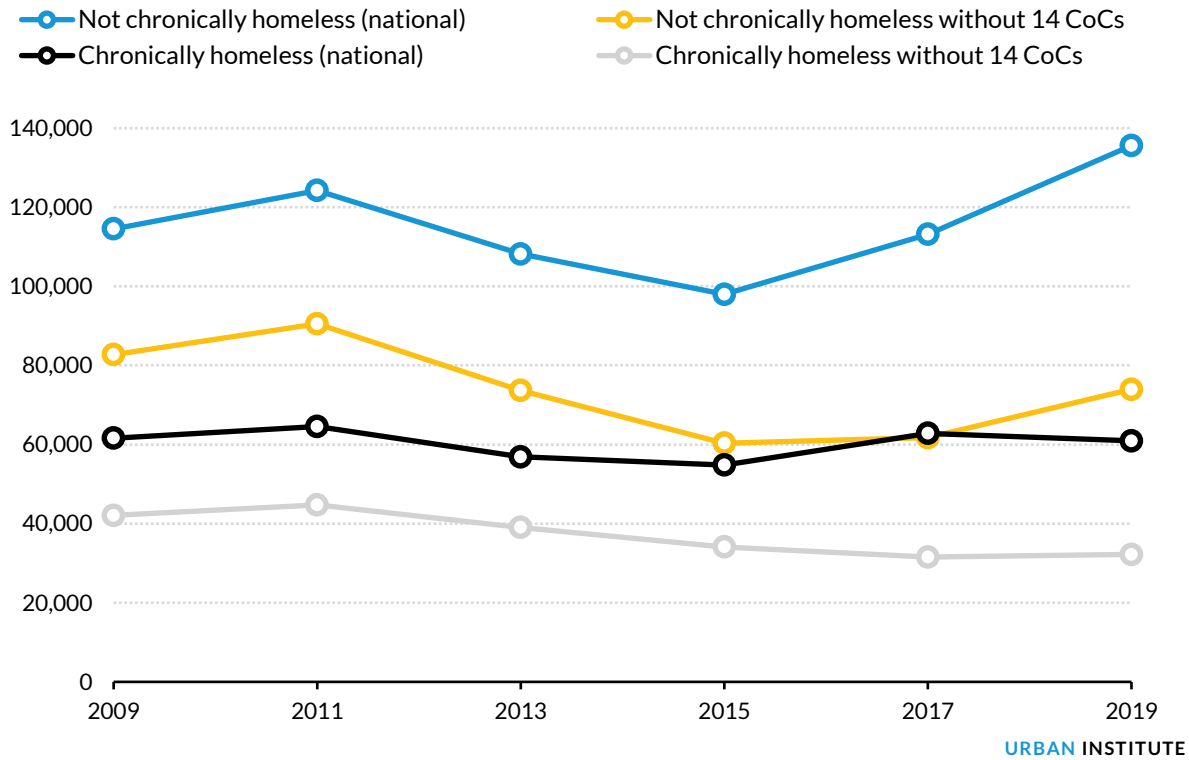
Differences among individuals enduring unsheltered homelessness also emerge when comparing national numbers with and without this subset of CoCs. With hot spot CoCs included, the population of individuals who were enduring unsheltered homelessness but were not chronically homeless increased by 37,582 people (38 percent) between 2015 and 2019 after falling significantly between 2009 and 2015 (figure 8). On their own, hot spot CoCs saw an increase in this group of 23,964 people (64 percent). This means hot spot CoCs accounted for 64 percent of the national increase in the number of individuals who were enduring unsheltered homelessness but were not chronically homeless between 2015 and 2019.

The population of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in unsheltered locations decreased nationally between 2009 and 2015. It then rose in 2017 before decreasing slightly in 2019. Within only the 14 CoCs, the population of unsheltered chronically homeless individuals stayed relatively stable between 2009 and 2015 before spiking in 2017—from 20,710 in 2015 to 31,246 in 2017. It then decreased slightly in 2019, to 28,717 (8 percent). Without the 14 CoCs, the national population of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in unsheltered locations fell between 2009 and 2019, from 42,079 to 32,224. Interestingly, even as the population of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in unsheltered locations dropped 8 percent in the 14 hot spot CoCs between 2017 and 2019, the number of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in unsheltered locations in the rest of the nation *increased* 2 percent.

FIGURE 8

Individuals Enduring Unsheltered Homelessness by Chronic Status, 2009–19

With and without hot spot Continuums of Care



Source: 2019 US Department of Housing and Urban Development point-in-time data, available at https://www.hud.gov/2019-point-in-time-estimates-of-homelessness-in-US.

Notes: Individuals are people who are experiencing homelessness and are not members of a household with children. A Continuum of Care is the governing body responsible for coordinating homeless assistance at the local or regional level. In 2019, hot spot CoCs had a population of either more than 5,000 unsheltered individuals or more than 2,000 unsheltered individuals and an increase of 500 unsheltered individuals at any point since 2009.

Community Factors

For communities, a lack of affordable housing correlates with higher rates of overall homelessness and unsheltered homelessness (Glynn and Fox 2019; National Alliance to End Homelessness 2017). The hot spot CoCs identified earlier have some of the highest-cost rental markets. This aligns with historical data that have found that homelessness correlates with low vacancy rates and high rents (Honig and Filers 1993), as well as the median rent, the ratio of rent to income, and the rent for the least expensive 10 percent of units (Quigley and Raphael 2001; Quigley, Raphael, and Smolensky 2001). For example, the rental vacancy rate fell in 11 of the 14 hot spot CoCs between 2010 and 2018 (table 2).

TABLE 2

Change in Hot Spot Continuum of Care Vacancy Rates between 2010 and 2018

		2010		2018		Difference	
Continuum of care	State	Vacant housing units (%)	Rental vacancy rate (%)	Vacant housing units (%)	Rental vacancy rate (%)	Vacant housing units (% pts)	Rental vacancy rate (% pts)
Fresno City and County/ Madera County	CA	13.6	4.7	11.1	4.1	-2.5	-0.6
Honolulu City and County	HI	9.0	4.8	10.6	5.2	1.6	0.4
Las Vegas/Clark County	NV	14.4	10.8	13.6	8.9	-0.8	-1.9
Los Angeles City and County	CA	6.1	4.1	6.2	3.2	0.1	-0.9
New York City	NY	12.7	3.5	13.3	4.5	0.6	1.0
Oakland, Berkeley/ Alameda County	CA	7.9	5.8	4.8	2.7	-3.1	-3.1
Phoenix, Mesa/ Maricopa County	AZ	13.4	10.9	11.5	6.4	-1.9	-4.5
Portland, Gresham/ Multnomah County	OR	6.6	4.7	6.1	3.7	-0.5	-1.0
Riverside City and County	CA	14.8	7.5	13.8	5.3	-1.0	-2.2
Sacramento City and County	CA	7.9	7.1	5.5	4.1	-2.4	-3.0
San Francisco City	CA	9.8	5.4	8.7	2.9	-1.1	-2.5
San Jose/Santa Clara City and County	CA	4.7	3.4	4.5	5.5	-0.2	2.1
Santa Ana, Anaheim/ Orange County	CA	5.5	4.9	5.4	3.2	-0.1	-1.7
Seattle/King County	WA	6.4	4.6	5.7	3.0	-0.7	-1.6

Sources: 2014–18 and 2006–10 American Community Survey five-year estimates.

Notes: A Continuum of Care is the governing body responsible for coordinating homeless assistance at the local or regional level. In 2019, hot spot CoCs had a population of either more than 5,000 unsheltered individuals or more than 2,000 unsheltered individuals and an increase of 500 unsheltered individuals at any point since 2009.

A correlation also exists between the number of affordable units available per 100 renter households with extremely low incomes (those earning below 30 percent of area median income) and the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness per 10,000 people in the general population (National Alliance to End Homelessness 2017). All 14 hot spot CoCs have less than the national rate of affordable and available units per 100 renter households at or below the extremely low–income threshold (Aurand et al. 2019). Three CoCs—those covering Las Vegas, Los Angeles, and Riverside, California—have less than half the national rate. Additionally, all 14 hot spot CoCs have a higher share of households with both very low incomes (those earning below 50 percent of area median income) and a severe housing cost burden (spending more than 50 percent of their income on housing costs) than does the nation overall. In five CoCs—Las Vegas, Los Angeles, New York, Portland, and Riverside—the share of households with a severe housing cost burden is at least 10 percentage points higher than the share in the nation overall.

Although this lack of affordable housing drives the growth of homelessness, including among people living in unsheltered locations, other factors, including limited emergency shelter and temporary bed capacity, have been associated with higher rates of unsheltered homelessness (Glynn and Fox 2019; National Alliance to End Homelessness 2017). The US does not have enough temporary beds to house all people experiencing homelessness on a single night. Temporary bed capacity for individuals fell between 2007 and 2018; it recovered slightly in 2019, to its 2016 level, but was still lower than in previous years (Henry et al. 2020). Lower numbers of temporary beds available per person are associated with higher rates of unsheltered homelessness among individuals, reflecting a demand for assistance that outpaces supply. Additionally, shelter policies (e.g., limited daytime access, sobriety requirements, and prohibitions against pet and personal belongings) or undesirable shelter conditions (e.g., crowding, lack of privacy, bed begs, violence) may discourage people from accessing available shelters (Cousineau 1997; National Coalition for the Homeless 2010; Smith 2015; Wong, Park, and Nemon 2006), especially when temperatures are conducive to sleeping outside.

TABLE 3

Available Shelter Beds for Individuals in Hot Spot Continuums of Care

	Shelter Beds				Unsheltered Individuals			
Continuum of Care	2009	2019	Change #	Change %	2009	2019	Change #	Change %
Fresno City and County/Madera County	682	282	-400	-58.7	2,265	2,053	-212	-9.4
Honolulu City and County	1,052	1,050	-2	0.2	1,040	2,113	1,073	103.2
Las Vegas/Clark County	5,673	1,593	-4,080	-71.9	2,932	3,292	360	12.3
Los Angeles City and County	10,455	6,980	-3,475	-33.2	18,182	40,844	22,662	124.6
New York City	15,878	32,812	16,934	106.7	2,328	3,622	1,294	55.6
Oakland, Berkeley/ Alameda County	1,065	1,203	138	13.0	1,541	6,285	4,744	307.9
Phoenix, Mesa/ Maricopa County	2,154	1,960	-194	-9.0	2,688	3,185	497	18.5
Portland, Gresham/ Multnomah County	1,407	1,893	486	34.5	1,513	2,025	512	33.8
Riverside City and County	668	448	-220	-32.9	1,345	2,032	687	51.1
Sacramento City and County	1,055	884	-171	-16.2	1,178	3,333	2,155	182.9
San Francisco City	1,958	2,499	541	27.6	2,917	5,154	2,237	76.7
San Jose/Santa Clara City and County	831	1,099	268	32.3	4,917	7,679	2,762	56.2
Santa Ana, Anaheim/ Orange County	807	1,690	883	109.4	5,643	3,565	-2,078	-36.8
Seattle/King County	2,724	3,675	951	34.9	2,827	5,165	2,338	82.7

Sources: 2019 US Department of Housing and Urban Development point-in-time and housing inventory count data, available at https://www.hud.gov/2019-point-in-time-estimates-of-homelessness-in-US.

Notes: Individuals are people who are experiencing homelessness and are not members of a household with children. A Continuum of Care is the governing body responsible for coordinating homeless assistance at the local or regional level. In 2019, hot spot CoCs had a population of either more than 5,000 unsheltered individuals or more than 2,000 unsheltered individuals and an increase of 500 unsheltered individuals at any point since 2009.

Characteristics of People Enduring Unsheltered Homelessness

The average person enduring unsheltered homelessness is a white, non-Latinx man who is older than 25 and lives in an urban area of California (Henry et al. 2020). However, the group of people living in unsheltered locations is not homogenous. Black people are significantly overrepresented among people enduring unsheltered homelessness, and women account for nearly a third of people enduring unsheltered homelessness. Many studies compare the unsheltered and sheltered populations to understand the characteristics and makeup of the group of people enduring unsheltered homelessness.

But who is in these groups is likely determined by the availability of shelter beds and discriminatory shelter policies. One should not infer that the distinctions between the groups are the result of decisions made by people with particular characteristics.

Demographic Characteristics

Clear demographic differences exist between people experiencing homelessness in shelters and other temporary housing and those enduring unsheltered homelessness. The primary difference is that very few families live in unsheltered locations (for statistics on the overall unsheltered population and families experiencing unsheltered homelessness, see appendix B).

Among individuals (people in households without children) experiencing homelessness, significant differences exist between those who are sheltered and those who are unsheltered (table 4). Additionally, some important demographic trends in the 14 hot spot CoCs affect the nationwide trends in unsheltered homelessness, particularly trends around individuals' gender, race, and ethnicity.

TABLE 4

Demographic Characteristics of Individuals Experiencing Homelessness, 2019

	Sheltered Homelessness		Unsheltered Homelessness	
	Total population	Share of population	Total population	Share of population
Total	**199,531**		**196,514**	
Age				
Younger than 18	1,996	1.0	2,105	1.1
18 to 24	17,428	8.7	15,752	8.0
Older than 24	180,107	90.3	178,657	90.9
Gender				
Women	60,847	30.5	54,788	27.9
Men	137,228	68.8	138,679	70.6
Transgender	1,187	0.6	2,001	1.0
Does not identify as a man, a woman, or transgender	269	0.1	1,046	0.5
Ethnicity				
Non-Latinx	169,187	84.8	151,327	77.0
Latinx	30,344	15.2	45,187	23.0
Race				
White	98,194	49.2	112,130	57.1
Black	83,073	41.6	53,318	27.1
Asian	2,366	1.2	3,065	1.6
Native American	5,024	2.5	9,274	4.7
Pacific Islander	1,671	0.8	3,449	1.8
Multiple races	9,203	4.6	15,278	7.8

Source: Meghan Henry, Rian Watt, Anna Mahathey, Jillian Ouellette, and Aubrey Sitler, *The 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. Part 1: Point-In-Time Estimates of Homelessness* (Washington, DC: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2020).

Note: Individuals are people who are experiencing homelessness and are not members of a household with children.

GENDER*

The majority of individuals experiencing sheltered homelessness and of individuals enduring unsheltered homelessness are men, but their majority is slightly larger among those living in unsheltered locations. Older men are more likely to be sheltered than younger men (Montgomery, Szymkowiak, and Culhane 2017). Women make up just under a third of individuals experiencing homelessness and are slightly more likely to be sheltered than men (box 2). Despite being only a small share of the overall number of people experiencing homelessness, individuals who identify as transgender are almost twice as likely to be unsheltered than sheltered.

Between 2015 and 2019, the share of the national population of individuals enduring unsheltered homelessness who identified as women or transgender increased about 3 percentage points. In 2015, 26 percent of unsheltered individuals (39,681 people) identified as women or transgender; in 2019, 29 percent (56,789 people) did. Since the data became available in 2017, the share of individuals who identify as gender nonconforming increased about 0.2 percent. In 2017, 0.3 percent of unsheltered individuals (596 people) did not identify as a man, woman, or transgender; in 2019, that number was 0.5 percent (1,046 people).

The increase in the number of individuals who identified as women or transgender in hot spot CoCs accounted for 28 percent of the overall increase in individuals enduring unsheltered homelessness nationally between 2015 and 2019 (12,324 of 43,708 people). Additionally, about 86 percent of individuals enduring unsheltered homelessness who identified as transgender and about 77 percent of those who identified as gender nonconforming in 2019 were identified in hot spot CoCs. The increases in these 14 areas accounted for almost all of the national increase in the population of individuals who identified as transgender and were enduring unsheltered homelessness between 2015 and 2019, and they accounted for all of the national increase in the population of individuals who identified as gender nonconforming between 2017 and 2019. However, this may be the result of differences in self-reporting or local counting methods.

* Although our data uses "male" and "female," terms representing biological sex, we instead use "man" and "woman," terms representing gender, in this report because they may better reflect how people self-identify. We acknowledge the limitations of these terms, however, and remain committed to employing respectful and inclusive language.

BOX 2

Women

Women enduring unsheltered homelessness are a particularly vulnerable population. They are more likely than men enduring unsheltered homelessness to experience a violent attack (Montgomery, Szymkowiak, and Culhane 2017; Rountree, Hess, and Lyke 2019), and the differences in health for women enduring unsheltered homelessness compared with women experiencing homelessness in a shelter are stark. Women enduring unsheltered homelessness are more likely to have poor mental and physical health than women experiencing homelessness in shelters or other temporary housing. According to a survey of more than 1,000 women experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles, women in unsheltered locations were 12 times as likely to have poor mental health as women in sheltered locations (Nyamathi, Leake, and Gelberg 2000). Women enduring unsheltered homelessness were also 3 times as likely to have fair or poor physical health. Additionally, women enduring unsheltered homelessness were at higher risk for premature death and were more likely to have chronic medical conditions, including substance use challenges, than women in sheltered locations (Montgomery, Szymkowiak, and Culhane 2017).

RACE

Black people are significantly overrepresented in the homeless population overall, as well as among people experiencing sheltered homelessness and those enduring unsheltered homelessness. However, individuals who identify as Black are more likely to be sheltered than unsheltered, whereas individuals who identify as white, Asian, Native American, or Pacific Islander are more likely to be unsheltered than sheltered (table 4).

In 2015 and 2019, the racial composition of individuals enduring unsheltered homelessness nationally was largely the same: about 57 percent were white, and about 27 percent were Black. The racial composition of this population in the 14 hot spot CoCs also remained steady during this period, although it was more diverse: about 48 percent were white, and about 31 percent were Black. Additionally, individuals enduring unsheltered homelessness who identified as Black accounted for about a quarter of the overall increase in individuals enduring unsheltered homelessness nationally between 2015 and 2019 (10,327 of 43,708 people). However, this may be the result of differences in reporting or local counting methods.

ETHNICITY

People who identify as Latinx are also overrepresented among those enduring unsheltered homelessness nationally. And individuals who identify as Latinx are more likely to be unsheltered than sheltered.

Between 2015 and 2019, the share of the national population of individuals enduring unsheltered homelessness who identified as Latinx increased about 3 percentage points. In 2015, 20 percent (30,932 people) of individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness identified as Latinx, and 80 percent (121,874 people) did not. In 2019, 23 percent (45,187 people) identified as Latinx, compared with 77 percent (151,327 people) who did not.

Much of the increase was within the 14 hot spot CoCs. Individuals in the 14 hot spot CoCs who identified as Latinx and were enduring unsheltered homelessness accounted for 31 percent of the overall increase in the number of unsheltered homeless individuals between 2015 and 2019 (13,422 of 43,708 people). However, this may be the result of differences in reporting or local counting methods.

Education and Income

People enduring unsheltered homelessness are less likely to have completed high school and are more likely to have informal sources of income than people who live in sheltered locations. Overall, 70 percent of women and 75 percent of men experiencing homelessness have a high school diploma or less. Self-reported education data showed that for both women and men, those with less than a high school diploma were more likely to live in unsheltered locations than people experiencing homelessness with a high school diploma (Montgomery, Szymkowiak, and Culhane 2017). Also, people enduring unsheltered homelessness were less likely than people experiencing homelessness in a sheltered location to receive income through formal employment or entitlement or benefit programs and were more likely to have informal sources of income, such as recycling or panhandling, or to resort to drug or sex trades for survival.

Among people enduring unsheltered homelessness, the duration of homelessness does not appear to affect the likelihood of reliance on informal income sources. A study in the New York City borough of Manhattan found that a similar share (just over a third) of people living in unsheltered situations both experiencing and not experiencing chronic homelessness relied on informal income (Levitt et al. 2009). Similarly, no significant differences in receipt of public assistance, Supplemental Security Income, veteran benefits, or Social Security Disability Insurance have been shown between veterans who were enduring unsheltered homelessness and were chronically homeless and those who were enduring

unsheltered homelessness but were not chronically homeless (Montgomery et al. 2016a). In Los Angeles County, just over half of individuals enduring unsheltered homelessness reported receiving a public cash benefit, and 17 percent reported receiving noncash public assistance (Flaming, Burns, and Carlen 2018).

BOX 3

Veterans

In 2019, 39 percent of veterans experiencing homelessness were doing so in unsheltered locations—a significantly lower share than the 50 percent of individuals experiencing homelessness who were (Henry et al. 2020). Compared with veterans in shelters, veterans enduring unsheltered homelessness were more likely to be men, white, and older than 50 (Montgomery et al. 2016a). Veterans enduring unsheltered homelessness were also more likely to have lower educational attainment, a history of criminal legal system involvement, and mental health or substance use challenges (Byrne, Montgomery, and Fargo 2016). They were less likely than veterans living in shelters to have income from entitlement programs or disability insurance incurred through military service and to have health insurance (Montgomery et al. 2016a).

Physical, Mental, and Behavioral Health

Individuals enduring unsheltered homelessness, particularly women and people experiencing chronic homelessness, have higher rates of chronic physical conditions and mental health and substance use disorders. Overall, people enduring unsheltered homelessness reported having poorer health and exhibited more symptoms of illness than those living in sheltered locations (Montgomery et al. 2016b). In an analysis of Vulnerability Index-Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) scores[6] from 15 states, the California Policy Lab found that individuals enduring unsheltered homelessness reported higher rates of and more significant health challenges than individuals experiencing homelessness in sheltered locations (Rountree, Hess, and Lyke 2019). People living in unsheltered locations scored, on average, more than twice as high on the VI-SPDAT as individuals in sheltered locations—9.9 compared with 4.7. The study also found that women enduring unsheltered homelessness, on average, scored nearly three times as high as individuals in sheltered locations—12.0 compared with 4.7. Similarly, a small study in Louisiana showed that women living in unsheltered locations were three times as likely to have poor physical health than women living in shelters (Nyamathi, Leake, and Gelberg 2000). A study in New York City also found that people experiencing

chronic homelessness in unsheltered locations were more likely to report a serious medical issue than those living in sheltered locations (Levitt et al. 2009).

People enduring unsheltered homelessness, particularly people experiencing chronic homelessness, report higher rates of mental health challenges. Based on the findings from a survey of 1,000 individuals experiencing homelessness in New York City, people experiencing chronic homelessness in unsheltered locations reported higher rates of lifetime mental health disorders, defined as a history of psychiatric hospitalization or current mental health counseling or treatment (Levitt et al. 2009). The survey also found that approximately half of people experiencing chronic homelessness in unsheltered locations experienced depression, and 44 percent experienced anxiety. A survey in Phoenix found that a third of people experiencing chronic homelessness in unsheltered locations reported mental health challenges (Linton and Shafer 2014).

People enduring unsheltered homelessness—particularly people experiencing chronic homelessness, veterans, and women—were more likely than those in sheltered locations to drink alcohol and use drugs, including intravenous drugs (Levitt et al. 2009; Linton and Shafer 2014; Montgomery et al. 2016b; Nyamathi, Leake, and Gelberg 2000). The role that shelter policies play in this distinction is unclear, but people who were experiencing homelessness and received treatment for alcohol or drug use were more likely to be sheltered, which could reflect preconditions for admission to a shelter or better connections to services for people who are in shelters (Montgomery et al. 2016b).

Systems Involvement

Multiple studies have found a strong correlation between criminal legal system involvement and homelessness. The Prison Policy Initiative found that people who have been incarcerated are 7 times as likely to experience homelessness than a member of the public and that people who have been incarcerated more than once are 13 times as likely (Couloute 2018). A survey of 350 adults experiencing homelessness, including those enduring unsheltered homelessness, in Oakland, California, found that 79 percent of respondents had a history of incarceration at some point before losing stable housing (Lee 2016). An analysis in Los Angeles County found that 58 percent of men and 42 percent of women older than 25 enduring unsheltered homelessness had been incarcerated (Flaming, Burns, and Carlen 2018).

This systems involvement may be both a precursor to unsheltered homelessness and a result of living outside. People who endure unsheltered homelessness have frequent interactions with police. According to the California Policy Lab's analysis of VI-SPDAT responses, people enduring unsheltered

homelessness reported an average of 21 contacts with police in the previous six months, 10 times the number reported by people living in shelters (Rountree, Hess, and Lyke 2019). People enduring unsheltered homelessness were also 9 times as likely as people in shelters to have spent at least one night in jail in the previous six months. In a study in Phoenix, approximately half of a sample of 260 individuals enduring unsheltered and chronic homelessness had spent time in jail (Linton and Shafer 2014).

Although existing research does not directly link foster care and unsheltered homelessness, some common experiences in foster care are similar to risk factors for unsheltered homelessness (Montgomery et al. 2016b).

Enduring Unsheltered Homelessness: Duration, Trauma, and Service Utilization

In addition to having different characteristics, people enduring unsheltered homelessness have different experiences while homeless: longer durations of homelessness, greater likelihood of physical trauma, greater likelihood of living in an encampment, and less likelihood of engagement in services.

Durations of Homelessness

Compared with people experiencing homelessness in sheltered locations, people enduring unsheltered homelessness reported longer durations of homelessness but less frequent episodes. An analysis of 64,000 VI-SPDAT surveys in 15 communities across the country found that the average number of days that people enduring unsheltered homelessness reported since they were last stably housed was more than 6 times that of people experiencing homelessness in sheltered locations—2,632 days (more than seven years) versus 410 days (just over one year) (Rountree, Hess, and Lyke 2019). Women enduring unsheltered homelessness reported an even greater number of days since being stably housed than the overall population of people enduring unsheltered homelessness: an average of 5,855 days (16 years) compared with 2,632 days. Other studies have found similar duration numbers for people enduring unsheltered homelessness:

- In Phoenix, individuals enduring unsheltered homelessness reported experiencing homelessness for 13 percent of their lifetime, on average (Linton and Shafer 2014).

- In New York City, people experiencing chronic homelessness in unsheltered locations reported experiencing homelessness for an average of about 10 years (Levitt et al. 2009).

Overall, the average duration of homelessness reported increased with age, and the longer the duration reported, the more likely a person was to be unsheltered (Montgomery et al. 2016b).

BOX 4

Child and Youth Homelessness as a Precursor to Unsheltered Homelessness

In Los Angeles, a fifth of individuals who were older than 25 and were enduring unsheltered homelessness had their first homeless episode as a child, and a quarter of them had their first episode between ages 18 and 24 (Flaming, Burns, and Carlen 2018). In 2019, approximately 35,000 unaccompanied children and young adults experienced homelessness on a given night. Nearly 90 percent of them were ages 18 to 24 (Henry et al. 2020). Unaccompanied children and young adults had about the same rate of unsheltered homelessness as homeless individuals overall—around 50 percent. In contrast to older individuals enduring unsheltered homelessness, children and young adults have varied sleeping locations: unaccompanied youths younger than 18 were more likely to live in a vehicle or abandoned building, and young adults ages 18 to 24 were more likely to live on streets, sidewalks, or in alleys (Flaming, Burns, and Carlen 2018). The share of women experiencing unsheltered homelessness was slightly higher among children and young adults than among individuals older than 25. This is especially concerning because young women who are disconnected from a stably housed social network are at an increased risk of negative health outcomes (Valente and Auerswald 2013).

Trauma while Enduring Unsheltered Homelessness

As noted previously, people enduring unsheltered homelessness report more significant physical and mental health challenges than people experiencing homelessness in sheltered locations. Some of these challenges are probably the result of violence and other traumatic experiences endured while unsheltered. Thirty-five percent of men and 40 percent of women reported experiencing a violent attack while living in unsheltered locations (Montgomery et al. 2016b). Women enduring unsheltered homelessness were more likely than men to have experienced a violent attack (Montgomery, Szymkowiak, and Culhane 2017; Rountree, Hess, and Lyke 2019). Women enduring unsheltered homelessness were also more likely to report having a history of being physically assaulted and victimized than women in sheltered locations (Nyamathi, Leake, and Gelberg 2000).

Encampments

There is no universally recognized definition of a homeless encampment, and encampment characteristics vary across and within jurisdictions. In one analysis, an encampment was defined as "a group living arrangement in a public location involving semi-permanent shelters and storage of possessions" (Tars 2017, 28). Without a universally recognized definition, cities have defined encampments in ordinances they have passed to regulate them. Table 5 includes examples of these definitions.

TABLE 5

Encampment Definitions, by Locality

Locality	Type of structure	Size	Location
Berkeley, CA	Tents, vehicles, or improvised structures	One or more individuals or households	Public location
Dallas	Existence of free-standing structures, personal belongings, and other valuables	n/a	n/a
Edmonds, WA	Temporary enclosures (tents and other forms of portable shelter)	n/a	Outdoors
San Francisco	Tent, tarp, or other nonpermanent structure	n/a	n/a
Santa Rosa, CA	Makeshift shelter outdoors, such as a tent	One or more people	Public or private space
Seattle	Tent, structure, or assembly of camping equipment	One or more structures	Public property
Washington, DC	Set-up of an abode or place of residence	One or more people	Public property

Sources: Office of the mayor of Berkeley, California, "Proposed Policy on Encampments and Objects on Sidewalks," January 16, 2018; City of Dallas, "Homeless Services and Encampment Protocol," September 6, 2016; City of Edmonds, Washington, "Chapter 17.20: Temporary Homeless Encampment," September 22, 2020; City and County of San Francisco, "Police Code: Process for Removal of Encampments and Transition to Housing"; City of Santa Rosa, California, "Homeless Encampment Cleanup Pilot Program—6th Street"; City of Seattle, "SEPA Environmental Checklist," January 2017; "Encampments," DC.gov.

The reasons that people group together in encampments are not well understood. The limited available research suggests that access to necessities and services may drive congregation: people in encampments have improved access to services, food, and jobs (Herring 2014) and congregate around the locations of homeless service programs (Culhane 2010). Substance use challenges, including the rise in opioid and methamphetamine use, and untreated mental health challenges also may be related to the rise in encampments. Philadelphia, for example, worked to clean up "heroin camps" in the Kensington

District by connecting people with substance use treatment, but housing shortages made serving everyone difficult.[7] Other possible drivers include localities' administrative policies (Herring 2014) and the desires of people living in encampments to find safety and community by creating localized societies—to replace the broader society from which they are excluded (Sparks 2009).

Similarly, little is known about the composition, characteristics, and needs of people living in encampments. Through his ethnographic work in San Francisco, Chris Herring (2014) found a disproportionate number of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness living in encampments. According to a survey of 134 people living in urban encampments in Los Angeles, two-thirds of residents had been homeless for more than a year, and a fifth had been homeless for more than five years (Cousineau 1997). A third of respondents had spent time in a shelter within the previous year, but nearly 60 percent had never lived in a shelter. Respondents cited rules, religious requirements, threats of violence, and crowding at shelters as well as a lack of shelter bed availability and rental costs as reasons that they were not sheltered.

Shelter Use and Service Engagement

People enduring unsheltered homelessness report using shelters, health services, and other services at varying rates. In a survey of older adults experiencing homelessness in Oakland, California, people in unsheltered locations reported that in the previous 180 days, they had spent 154 days unsheltered (Lee 2016). A survey in New York City found that people experiencing chronic unsheltered homelessness—sleeping without shelter for at least 9 of the previous 24 months—were nearly twice as likely as those not experiencing chronic unsheltered homelessness to have spent the previous winter outdoors, in subway areas, or in drop-in centers or shelters (Levitt et al. 2009). This could be explained by barriers to entering shelters, either because of shelter restrictions (e.g., no couples, pets, or substance use) or a lack of space (National Alliance to End Homelessness 2017).

People enduring unsheltered homelessness report mixed experiences in engagement with other services and systems of care. It is unclear whether participation in substance use treatment is a protective factor that increases one's likelihood of being sheltered or an indicator of significant substance use challenges that increase one's likelihood of being unsheltered (Montgomery et al. 2016a; Montgomery et al. 2016b). People enduring unsheltered homelessness report using public hospitals and public health clinics as their primary sources of health care (Cousineau 1997).

When asked what they are looking for from the service system, people experiencing unsheltered homelessness reported that they wanted trustworthy housing options and outreach workers (Jost, Levitt, and Porcu 2011).

Costs of Unsheltered Homelessness

An increase in the number of people enduring unsheltered homelessness can increase costs for municipal governments. Identifying which costs are associated with homeless programs broadly and which are specifically attributable to addressing unsheltered homelessness can be difficult. Municipal governments tend to allocate funding for homeless assistance programs to a limited number of departments, but many more departments engage with people enduring unsheltered homelessness and people living in encampments, making actual expenditures larger than the line-item costs in the budget.

As previously discussed, people enduring unsheltered homelessness have higher reported involvement with costly systems, including the criminal legal, health, and emergency care systems. For example, in 2015, the Los Angeles Police Department estimated that they spent $54 to $87 million on law enforcement responses to homelessness, out of an overall budget of about $100 million (Office of the City Administrative Officer 2015).[8] In 2014, Denver spent about $750,000 enforcing the city's antihomelessness ordinances, including bans on panhandling and camping or sleeping in public spaces (Adcock et al. 2016). Additionally, in 2011, the Denver Crime Prevention and Control Commission calculated that the city spent about $7.3 million in a single year on about 250 individuals experiencing chronic homelessness.[9] This included an average of 56 nights in jail per person each year and their interactions with other systems, such as detox services and emergency room visits.

Cities and states also spend thousands of dollars on "homeless-proofing" parks and other public areas with fences, bars, rocks, spikes, and other architecture that make certain areas less accessible to people enduring unsheltered homelessness (Tars 2017).

In recent years, the increase in the number of people enduring unsheltered homelessness correlated with an increase in the number of reported encampments and an increase in the associated costs to municipal governments.

The direct costs associated with managing encampments vary widely and are dependent on geography and the services provided. Costs are easier to calculate for cities that have sanctioned encampments. In 2016, Seattle spent about $2,310 per person for the city's three permitted encampments; the costs included $755,000 for operations and case management.[10] Oakland's 2017–19

proposed budget dedicated about $1.14 million to cleanup crews and $250,000—with a plan to leverage an additional $1.8 million—to operating the city's indoor and outdoor Safe Haven Navigation Centers.[11]

The costs are more difficult to calculate for unsanctioned encampments, which are far more common. Costs are incurred both at the state and local levels and can be difficult to track, especially because multiple agencies and departments are responsible for engaging with people living in encampments and are not always allocated funds explicitly for working with people enduring unsheltered homelessness. For example, in 2015, the city of Los Angeles dedicated funds for homeless programs to only four agencies, although it estimates that more than 15 departments work with this population.[12] Honolulu reported spending $15,000 per week on encampment sweeps.[13]

Sanitation is a commonly requested service related to unsheltered homelessness but is not typically accounted for as a homelessness-related budget expense. Between 2012 and 2017, the California Department of Transportation spent nearly $30 million on cleanup costs associated with encampments; in 2017 alone, it spent more than $10 million, a 34 percent increase from 2016 (California Department of Transportation 2018). Four California cities—San Francisco, Sacramento, San Jose, and Oakland—conduct additional street cleaning weekly or multiple times a week for encampments.[14] Similarly, between January and July 2017, Seattle spent more than $4.3 million—including labor and overtime, supplies, fencing, equipment, and other operations—to clean 6 million pounds of trash from unsanctioned encampments.[15] In 2014, the Santa Clara Water District in California spent $275,000 removing debris from encampments along creeks and rivers; that cost does not include any associated environmental costs from increased pollution or decreased water quality.[16]

The indirect costs of encampments, like the impacts on public health or the environment, are tougher to quantify. In 2014, when San Jose closed its largest encampment, the cleanup effort took two weeks and removed more than 600 tons of debris and 2,850 gallons of biowaste.[17] However, the city did not try to measure the trash and human waste that had entered nearby waterways. These pollutants can lead to environmental and health concerns for nearby communities (Johnson 2016). Additionally, some businesses say the presence of unsheltered people and encampments hurts their sales and creates economic costs, which affect municipal revenues.

Conclusion

Between 2009 and 2015, the number of people in the US who were enduring unsheltered homelessness dropped. From 2015 to 2019, however, the number increased, fueled by growth in unsheltered homelessness among individuals (people in households without children) in 14 "hot spot" Continuums of Care. Although people enduring unsheltered homelessness are, on average, older, white men who have been homeless for a large part of their lives, concerning trends—including increases in unsheltered homelessness among individuals who identify as women or transgender; individuals who identify as Black or Latinx; and individuals who are not chronically homeless—suggest growth among other, vulnerable groups. Considering the local costs of managing unsheltered homelessness and that trauma and significant physical and mental health challenges are associated with it, ending unsheltered homelessness should be a priority across local, state, and federal governments.

The good news is that solutions exist, although they are not implemented at the necessary scale. Housing provided through a Housing First approach, including permanent supportive housing and rapid re-housing, ends homelessness for people enduring unsheltered homelessness. Housing First is built on the idea that people need safe, secure, affordable, and permanent housing before they can work on other challenges to stability. Permanent supportive housing increases housing stability, reduces time spent in shelters and experiencing homelessness, decreases arrests and jail stays, increases access to health services, and improves people's quality of life (Aubry et al. 2015; Collins, Malone, and Clifasefi 2013; Fontaine et al. 2012; Gabrielian et al. 2016; Tsemberis and Eisenberg 2000). Rapid re-housing is a time-limited intervention intended to stabilize people in private-market housing quickly. Studies have shown the intervention helps people exit homelessness quickly and not return to homelessness (Cunningham and Batko 2018). In 2018, more than 40,000 (nearly half) of the veterans rapidly re-housed through the US Department of Veterans Affairs' Supportive Services for Veteran Families program were enduring unsheltered homelessness before re-housing (US Department of Veterans Affairs 2019). If funded to scale, these solutions offer positive alternatives for both people enduring unsheltered homelessness and communities.

Appendix A. Unsheltered Homelessness in 2009 and 2019, by State

TABLE A.1

Unsheltered Homelessness in 2009 and 2019, by State

State	State population 2009	Total unsheltered 2009	Rate unsheltered 2009	State population 2019	Total unsheltered 2019	Rate unsheltered 2019
Alabama	4,757,938	2,167	4.6	4,903,185	1,191	2.4
Alaska	698,895	327	4.7	731,545	273	3.7
Arizona	6,343,154	6,355	10.0	7,278,717	4,532	6.2
Arkansas	2,896,843	1,122	3.9	3,017,804	1,415	4.7
California	36,961,229	72,901	19.7	39,512,223	108,432	27.4
Colorado	4,972,195	6,237	12.5	5,758,736	2,188	3.8
Connecticut	3,561,807	502	1.4	3,565,287	456	1.3
DC	592,228	321	5.4	705,749	608	8.6
Delaware	891,730	47	0.5	973,764	95	1.0
Florida	18,652,644	33,732	18.1	21,477,737	12,476	5.8
Georgia	9,620,846	10,941	11.4	10,617,423	3,880	3.7
Hawaii	1,346,717	2,514	18.7	1,415,872	3,640	25.7
Idaho	1,554,439	462	3.0	1,787,065	985	5.5
Illinois	12,796,778	2,204	1.7	12,671,821	1,889	1.5
Indiana	6,459,325	1,778	2.8	6,732,219	642	1.0
Iowa	3,032,870	159	0.5	3,155,070	188	0.6
Kansas	2,832,704	196	0.7	2,913,314	475	1.6
Kentucky	4,317,074	700	1.6	4,467,673	779	1.7
Louisiana	4,491,648	8,386	18.7	4,648,794	974	2.1
Maine	1,329,590	38	0.3	1,344,212	95	0.7
Maryland	5,730,388	4,252	7.4	6,045,680	1,348	2.2
Massachusetts	6,517,613	1,006	1.5	6,892,503	829	1.2
Michigan	9,901,591	2,707	2.7	9,986,857	662	0.7
Minnesota	5,281,203	946	1.8	5,639,632	1,653	2.9
Mississippi	2,958,774	1,576	5.3	2,976,149	486	1.6
Missouri	5,961,088	1,490	2.5	6,137,428	976	1.6
Montana	983,982	363	3.7	1,068,778	345	3.2
Nebraska	1,812,683	639	3.5	1,934,408	110	0.6
Nevada	2,684,665	3,297	12.3	3,080,156	3,807	12.4
New Hampshire	1,316,102	239	1.8	1,359,711	149	1.1
New Jersey	8,755,602	1,298	1.5	8,882,190	1,482	1.7
New Mexico	2,036,802	1,367	6.7	2,096,829	1,259	6.0
New York	19,307,066	3,613	1.9	19,453,561	4,047	2.1
North Carolina	9,449,566	4,445	4.7	10,488,084	2,268	2.2
North Dakota	664,968	8	0.12	762,062	12	0.2
Ohio	11,528,896	1,771	1.5	11,689,100	1,507	1.3
Oklahoma	3,717,572	1,531	4.1	3,956,971	1,237	3.1
Oregon	3,808,600	9,867	25.9	4,217,737	10,142	24.0
Pennsylvania	12,666,858	1,277	1.0	12,801,989	1,630	1.3

State	State population 2009	Total unsheltered 2009	Rate unsheltered 2009	State population 2019	Total unsheltered 2019	Rate unsheltered 2019
Rhode Island	1,053,646	51	0.5	1,059,361	71	0.7
South Carolina	4,589,872	1,437	3.1	5,148,714	1,717	3.3
South Dakota	807,067	64	0.8	884,659	234	2.6
Tennessee	6,306,019	3,399	5.4	6,829,174	2,598	3.8
Texas	24,801,761	15,103	6.1	28,995,881	11,222	3.9
Utah	2,723,421	255	0.9	3,205,958	408	1.3
Vermont	624,817	157	2.5	623,989	114	1.8
Virginia	7,925,937	1,568	2.0	8,535,519	859	1.0
Washington	6,667,426	6,545	9.8	7,614,893	9,557	12.6
West Virginia	1,847,775	389	2.1	1,792,147	248	1.4
Wisconsin	5,669,264	1,060	1.9	5,822,434	295	0.5
Wyoming	559,851	64	1.1	578,759	125	2.2

Sources: 2019 US Department of Housing and Urban Development point-in-time and housing inventory count data, available at https://www.hud.gov/2019-point-in-time-estimates-of-homelessness-in-US; "State Population Totals and Components of Change: 2010–2019," US Census Bureau, updated December 30, 2019, https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2010s-state-total.html; "State Intercensal Tables: 2000–2010," US Census Bureau, updated November 30, 2016, https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/intercensal-2000-2010-state.html.
Note: The rate of unsheltered homelessness is the number of unsheltered people per 10,000 people in the general population.

Appendix B. Demographic Characteristics of People Experiencing Homelessness

TABLE B.1

Demographics of Total People Experiencing Homelessness, 2019

	Sheltered Homelessness		Unsheltered Homelessness	
	Total population	Share of population	Total population	Share of population
Total	**356,422**		**211,293**	
Age				
Younger than 18	97,153	27.3	9,916	4.7
18 to 24	28,840	8.1	16,789	7.9
Older than 24	230,429	64.7	184,588	87.4
Gender				
Women	157,211	44.1	62,700	29.7
Men	197,678	55.5	145,509	68.9
Transgender	1,236	0.3	2,019	1.0
Does not identify as a man, a woman, or transgender	297	0.1	1,065	0.5
Ethnicity				
Non-Latinx	279,940	78.5	163,160	77.2
Latinx	76,482	21.5	48,133	22.8
Race				
White	151,120	42.4	119,487	56.6
Black	169,354	47.5	56,381	26.7
Asian	3,743	1.1	3,485	1.6
Native American	7,980	2.2	9,986	4.7
Pacific Islander	4,025	1.1	5,286	2.5
Multiple races	20,200	5.7	16,668	7.9

Source: Meghan Henry, Rian Watt, Anna Mahathey, Jillian Ouellette, and Aubrey Sitler, *The 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. Part 1: Point-In-Time Estimates of Homelessness* (Washington, DC: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2020).

TABLE B.2

Demographics of People in Families with Children Experiencing Homelessness, 2019

	Sheltered Homelessness		Unsheltered Homelessness	
	Total population	Share of population	Total population	Share of population
Total	**156,891**		**14,779**	
Age				
Younger than 18	95,157	60.7	7,811	52.9
18 to 24	11,412	7.3	1,037	7.0
Older than 24	50,322	32.1	5,931	40.1
Gender				
Women	96,364	61.4	7,912	53.5
Men	60,450	38.5	6,830	46.2
Transgender	49	0.0	18	0.1
Does not identify as a man, a woman, or transgender	28	0.0	19	0.1
Ethnicity				
Non-Latinx	110,753	70.6	11,833	80.1
Latinx	46,138	29.4	2,946	19.9
Race				
White	52,926	33.7	7,357	49.8
Black	86,281	55.0	3,063	20.7
Asian	1,377	0.9	420	2.8
Native American	2,956	1.9	712	4.8
Pacific Islander	2,354	1.5	1,837	12.4
Multiple races	10,997	7.0	1,390	9.4

Source: Meghan Henry, Rian Watt, Anna Mahathey, Jillian Ouellette, and Aubrey Sitler, *The 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. Part 1: Point-In-Time Estimates of Homelessness* (Washington, DC: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2020).

TABLE B.3

Demographics of Unaccompanied Children and Young Adults Experiencing Homelessness, 2019

	Sheltered Homelessness		Unsheltered Homelessness	
	Total population	Share of population	Total population	Share of population
Total	**17,708**		**17,330**	
Age				
Younger than 18	1,874	10.6	2,102	12.1
18 to 24	15,834	89.4	15,228	87.9
Gender				
Women	7,338	41.7	5,840	33.7
Men	9,891	55.9	10,828	62.5
Transgender	313	1.8	414	2.4
Does not identify as a man, a woman, or transgender	116	0.7	248	1.4
Ethnicity				
Non-Latinx	14,150	79.9	12,621	72.8
Latinx	3,558	20.1	4,709	27.2
Race				
White	7,728	43.6	9,184	53.0
Black	7,902	44.6	4,603	26.6
Asian	170	1.0	290	1.7
Native American	478	2.7	800	4.6
Pacific Islander	141	0.8	295	1.7
Multiple races	1,289	7.3	2,158	12.5

Source: Meghan Henry, Rian Watt, Anna Mahathey, Jillian Ouellette, and Aubrey Sitler, *The 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. Part 1: Point-In-Time Estimates of Homelessness* (Washington, DC: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2020).

TABLE B.4

Demographics of Veterans Experiencing Homelessness, 2019

	Sheltered Homelessness		Unsheltered Homelessness	
	Total population	Share of population	Total population	Share of population
Total	**22,740**		**14,345**	
Gender				
Women	1,798	7.9	1,494	10.4
Men	20,892	91.9	12,600	87.8
Transgender	44	0.2	176	1.2
Does not identify as a man, a woman, or transgender	6	0.0	75	0.5
Ethnicity				
Non-Latinx	20,894	91.9	11,954	83.3
Latinx	1,846	8.1	2,391	16.7
Race				
White	12,628	55.5	8,362	58.3
Black	8,580	37.7	3,635	25.3
Asian	182	0.8	177	1.2
Native American	448	2.0	787	5.5
Pacific Islander	141	0.6	216	1.5
Multiple races	761	3.3	1,168	8.1

Source: Meghan Henry, Rian Watt, Anna Mahathey, Jillian Ouellette, and Aubrey Sitler, *The 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. Part 1: Point-In-Time Estimates of Homelessness* (Washington, DC: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2020).

Notes

[1] A family is defined as a household that includes minor children.

[2] An individual may be experiencing homelessness as a single adult, as an unaccompanied youth, or as a member of a multiple-adult or multiple-youth household.

[3] The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines a chronically homeless person as "either (1) an unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has been continuously homeless for a year or more, OR (2) an unaccompanied individual with a disabling condition who has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years" (National Alliance to End Homelessness 2007).

[4] Continuums of Care are the geographic classification that HUD uses to allocate resources and the local bodies responsible for governing how key homeless assistance resources are spent.

[5] To measure whether a CoC had an increase in its unsheltered population of at least 500 people, we identified all CoCs with a population of more than 2,000 unsheltered individuals in 2019. We then calculated the change in population between 2019 and 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, and 2017.

[6] The VI-SPDAT is a survey designed to identify the severity of need for individuals and families experiencing homelessness and to assist communities to prioritize housing assistance and services. For more information, see "VI-SPDAT," Connecticut Homeless Management Information System (CT HMIS), accessed April 27, 2020, https://www.cthmis.com/info/detail/vi-spdat/13.

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