Houston, Pasadena,
Harris, Fort Bend, and Montgomery Counties

2019 Point-In-Time Homeless Count & Survey Independent Analysis

Overview

A Point-In-Time (PIT) Homeless Count & Survey of sheltered (i.e., those in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or safe haven) and unsheltered persons experiencing homelessness in the Houston, Pasadena, Harris County, Fort Bend County, and Montgomery County area was held on the night of 21 January, with the unsheltered portion of the Count conducted over a three-day period from January 22-24, 2019. The purpose of the Count is to determine the number of persons experiencing homelessness [defined by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as those staying in emergency shelter, transitional housing, or safe haven programs with beds dedicated for homeless persons or those persons who are unsheltered (i.e., staying in a place not meant for human habitation)] on a single night. The Count is a federal requirement for all communities receiving McKinney-Vento funding from HUD. The Way Home Continuum of Care (CoC) covers a vast geographic region (3,711 sq. miles, including all of Houston, Pasadena, Harris County, Fort Bend County, and Montgomery County) with a large dispersed unsheltered population. Due to the size of the geographic area covered by the Count, we know that not all unsheltered persons experiencing homelessness can be identified in a short period of time (we are much more confident about counting the number of those experiencing homelessness who are sheltered). However, the Count gives a good assessment of the extent of the problem in the region and can allow for comparisons over time to help understand how well a community is solving the problem of homelessness.

The Count was organized and led by the Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County in consultation with UTHealth School of Public Health. Over one hundred homeless services providers participated in the Count as well as community volunteers, including persons currently and previously experiencing homelessness.

The 2019 Count included individuals staying in a total of 53 programs including emergency shelters (28 different programs), transitional housing units (24 different programs), and safe havens (1 program) on the night of 21 January based on reports received from the programs

and data entered into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness (those sleeping on the streets or in other places not meant for habitation) were counted using direct engagement and interviews when possible, and observation if not. Teams walked under bridges, along the bayous and other areas where encampments of unsheltered individuals experiencing homelessness had been identified. They also investigated abandoned buildings where persons experiencing homelessness have may have been residing.

Changes from 2011 through 2019 in PIT Count Methodology

A major change to the Count in 2017 was the addition of Montgomery County to the geographical area to be canvassed. Montgomery County lies to the north of Harris County with 1,047 square miles[1]. While results from Montgomery County are included in the description of findings from the 2019 Count, only comparisons with the previous two years include these data; the previous six years' results exclude this additional area to allow for a valid assessment.

From 2011-2015, Count was a purely observational one, performed during a single night between the hours of approximately 5 to 11 pm. Beginning in 2016, we undertook to directly engage and interview, when possible[2], every person experiencing homelessness in the jurisdiction using a Coordinated Access approach. This was possible because of the dramatic decrease in the number of those experiencing homelessness in the area since 2011, due to the community's success in housing individuals through permanent housing. There is a danger of counting people twice or mistaking them as unsheltered with this method, as someone on the street during the day may have been in a shelter the night before or approached twice during the three-day period. We guarded against this in three ways:

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[1] http://www.mctx.org/for_visitors/index.php
[2] We were not able to engage and interview those who refused, those who were sleeping, those who were physically impossible to reach (e.g., spotted across a highway), or those whom the interviewer felt it would be dangerous to approach. This was a little over half of those approached or sighted.

- The geographic region to be covered was divided into three areas and each area was canvassed on a specific day of the Count
- Interviewees were asked if they had been questioned previously and, if so, they were not included more than once in the Count
- Interviewees were asked where they slept on the night of 21 January 2019 (the official night of the Count) and were classified as experiencing unsheltered homelessness only if they slept in a place not meant for human habitation, per HUD guidelines. This assured that we did not double count someone who was included in the HMIS shelter count and that we did not include those who appeared as if they were experiencing homelessness but were not, according to HUD guidelines
- When reviewing data from the Count, a search for potential duplicate entries is performed and, if found, one is deleted. This year, two duplicates were found.

An additional change implemented in the 2018 Count was the use of SimTech Solutions software (Cambridge, MA) in place of a different software that was used in 2016 and 2017. The software, Counting Us, is a mobile application that can be readily implemented to help count unsheltered persons experiencing homelessness. Due to this change, some of the questions asked varied in wording from previous years.

Several improvements implemented in previous years were continued. Traditional homeless services providers were involved as partners of The Way Home CoC, along with academia (UTHealth School of Public Health). This included the use of over 200 surveyors recruited from the homeless provider community, outreach teams, VA staff, and community volunteers. The Coalition drew on consumer volunteers (persons who had in the past or were currently experiencing homelessness) to provide expertise and guidance during the Count. Observational counts of people not able to be interviewed were performed.

With approval from HUD, the unsheltered Count took place over three days, January 22-24, 2019, with the night of 21 January designated as the official date for the Count. The geographic area for the Count was divided into three sections for purposes of counting unsheltered individuals. On each day of the Count, at least 60 volunteer teams canvassed the area designated for that day to interview unsheltered persons experiencing homelessness. Four to five Staging Area locations were set up each day of the Count with a total of 15 Staging Area Captains and co-Captains between all days and locations.

The use of a mobile application survey had several advantages. All individuals and families who were identified as experiencing chronic homelessness, young adults (18-24 years), or Veterans were assessed for housing on the spot by one of 31 trained Coordinated Access Assessors. Due to GPS mapping technology included in the mobile application, the Count execution and data could be monitored in real time and location of the interview recorded. Volunteers could be tracked while conducting surveys based on the user IDs assigned.

The enhanced methodology developed in previous years for the sheltered Count was continued. All emergency shelters, transitional housing, and safe havens in the area, whether or not they were officially part of the HMIS, were contacted and inventoried. Shelter providers were trained on entering data and assessments into HMIS and given the opportunity to confirm the data counted on the night of the Count. Shelters that do not use HMIS such as domestic violence shelters were asked to report their numbers on 21 January using the Housing Inventory Count.

Volunteer trainings were conducted on January 6th, 7th, 16th, & 17th. These trainings involved the use of the PIT Counting Us application and creating user IDs & passwords. A test Count site was available so that volunteers could conduct test surveys. Each question on the survey was reviewed. Trainings also included the role of the driver, how to read maps, how to identify homeless hot spots, and proper etiquette to follow when approaching someone who might be experiencing homelessness.

Staging Area Captains were trained on January 17. This included an introduction to the Counting Us application, the distribution of t-shirts, volunteer sign-in sheets, maps, and map interpretation guides.

2019 PIT Count Key Findings

Data collected shows a total of 3,938 sheltered and unsheltered individuals experiencing homelessness (per HUD's definition) in the Houston/Pasadena/Harris County/Fort Bend County/Montgomery County region on the night of the Count (Figure 1). Among the individuals living unsheltered, the average length of homelessness was 3 years, ranging from less than one month to 56 years. Breaking down where those experiencing homelessness were located, we determined that most were in Houston/Harris County with only one out of fifty (2%) counted in Fort Bend County while approximately one out of twelve persons experiencing homelessness in the total CoC area were found in Montgomery County (8%). Both Fort Bend and Montgomery Counties showed increases in the number of persons experiencing homelessness counted in 2019 vs. 2018 (73 vs. 67 and 298 vs. 277 respectively). It is important to note that, for those experiencing unsheltered homelessness on the night of 21 January, geographical assignment was determined by where they were interviewed during the day, which may be near where they seek services but not necessarily where they sleep.

The estimated combined population of Houston, Pasadena, Harris County, Fort Bend County and Montgomery County, according to population estimates on 1 July 2018, was 6,047,402[3]. This puts the percent of individuals experiencing homelessness within these three counties at 0.065% or approximately one out of every 1,541 residents. This is a decrease compared to one out of every 1,446 residents of the three-county area last year. To allow comparisons since

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[3]

(https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/harriscountytexas,montgomerycountytexas,fortbendcountytexas/PST045218 accessed 26 April 2019; 2019 population estimates not available

2011 (when Montgomery County was not included in the Count), we calculated the homelessness rate in Houston/Harris County and Fort Bend County only. The combined population within these two counties on 1 July 2018 was 5,456,477. The number of individuals experiencing homelessness is approximately one out of every 1,500 residents compared to one out of every 450 residents in 2011, a substantial decrease.
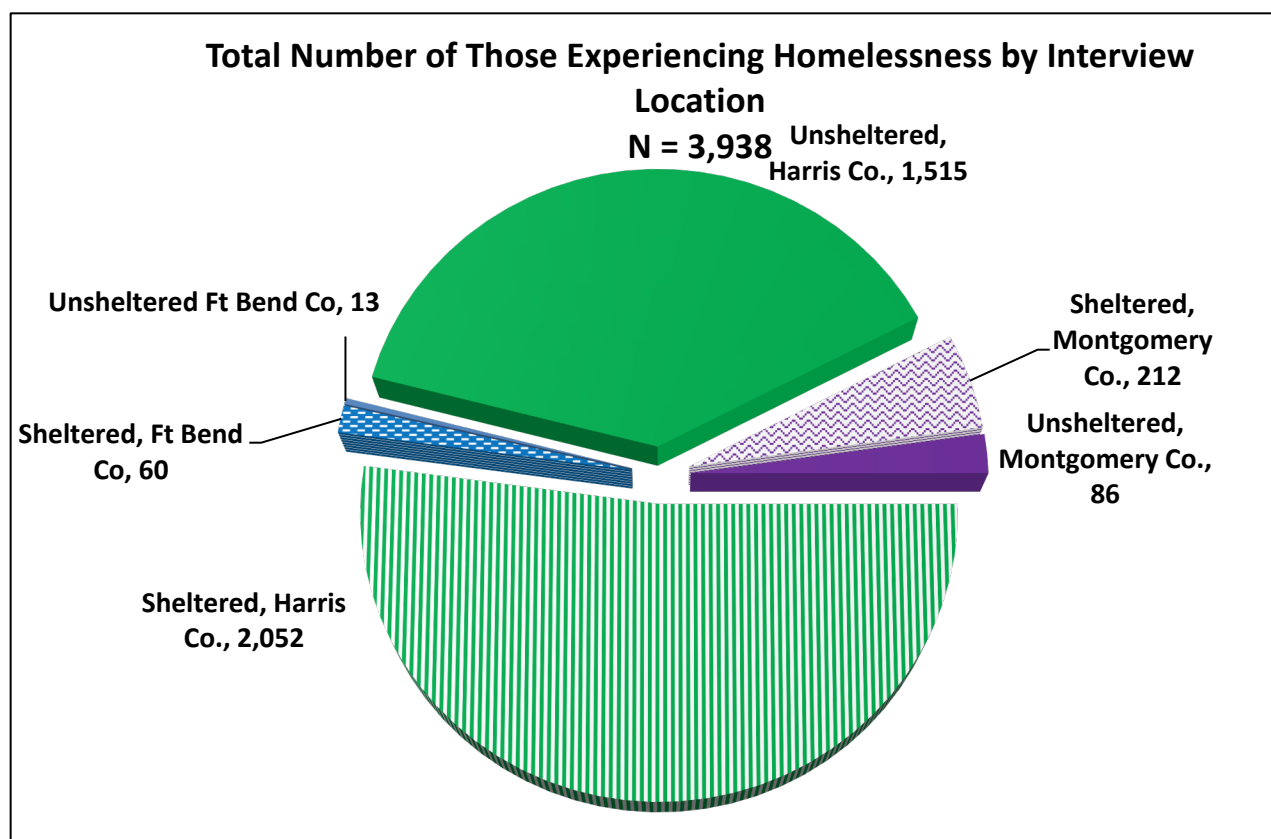
Total Number of Those Experiencing Homelessness by Interview Location

N = 3,938

Unsheltered, Harris Co., 1,515

Unsheltered Ft Bend Co, 13

Sheltered, Montgomery Co., 212

Sheltered, Ft Bend Co, 60

Unsheltered, Montgomery Co., 86
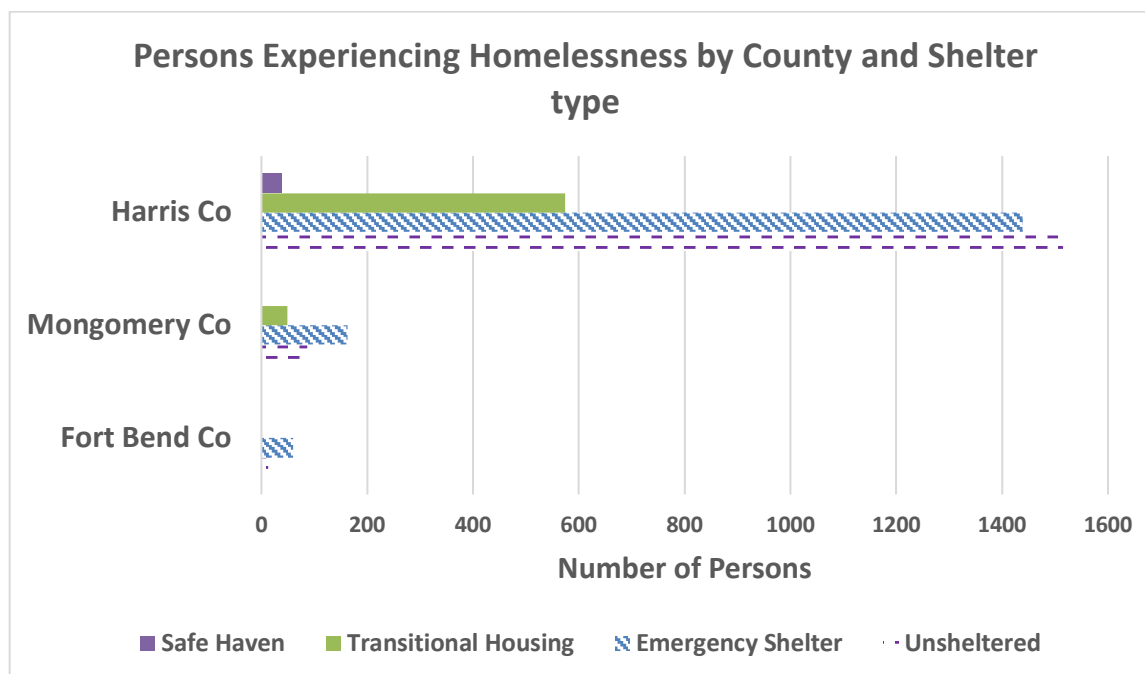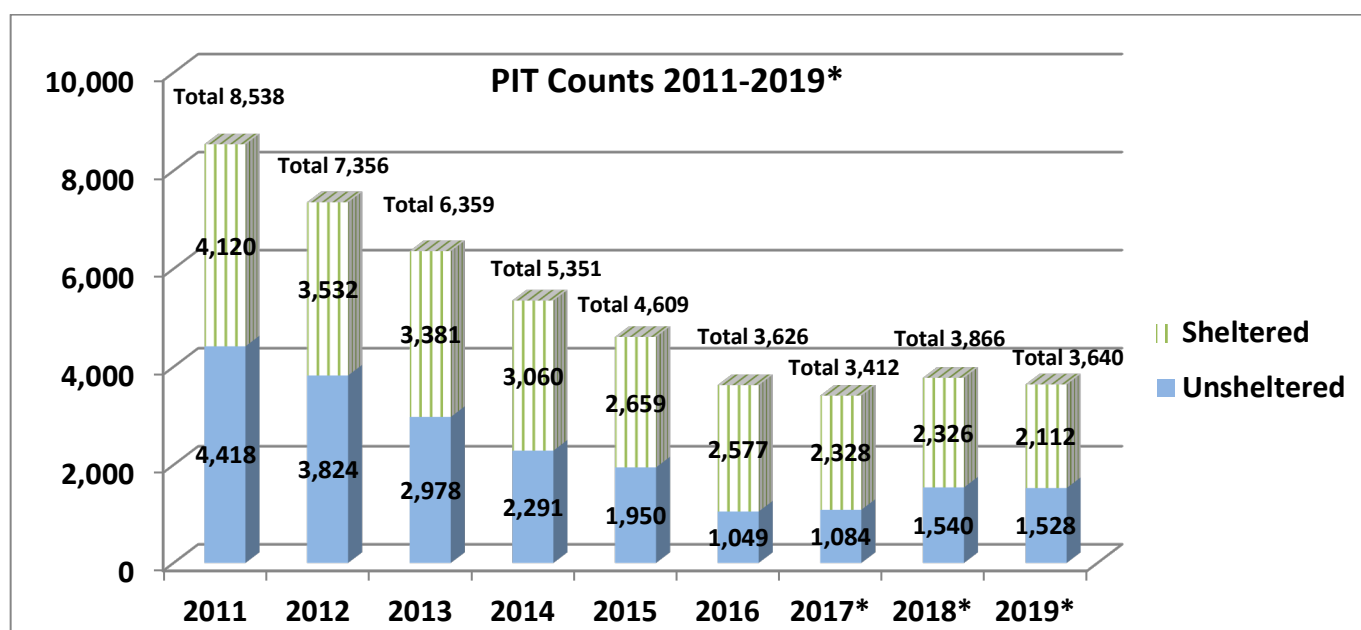
Sheltered, Harris Co., 2,052

Figure 1

Figure 2

Comparison between 2019 and 2011-2018 PIT Counts

Figure 3 shows findings from the last nine years of the Count. (data from Montgomery County are not included in the comparisons in Figure 3 as 2017 was the first year the CoC included that area in the PIT Count). While the Counts during years 2011-2015 used a standardized observational count methodology and so valid comparisons can be made between those years, the methodology changed significantly in 2016 and therefore comparisons with previous years must be made with caution. An observational count over our vast geographic area during a single night (like those Counts conducted from 2011-2015) is likely to miss some people and therefore result in an undercount; however, there is no way to verify that those observed during an observational Count are actually experiencing homelessness per the HUD definition or that they were not counted previously, despite best efforts, which may have led to an over count. In 2016, to obtain a more accurate count, we began directly engaging and interviewing all persons presumed to be experiencing homeless. This method also has limitations. We may not have identified all persons (leading to an undercount) or may count persons twice (leading

to an over count), despite best efforts to avoid this. However, we had the advantage of talking
to approximately half of those presumed to be experiencing homelessness and so could ask
them if they had been interviewed previously and if they qualified as experiencing
homelessness per the HUD definition. Despite best efforts, we were not able to interview all of
those presumed to be experiencing unsheltered homelessness who were sleeping, unable to be
accessed, or refused the interview. We applied the percentage of characteristics for those who
were able to be interviewed (other than age group, gender, ethnicity, and race, data for which
were collected on everyone) to the total group to estimate numbers of persons in each
category.

*includes data from Houston/Harris County/Ft. Bend County only for comparison purposes with previous years
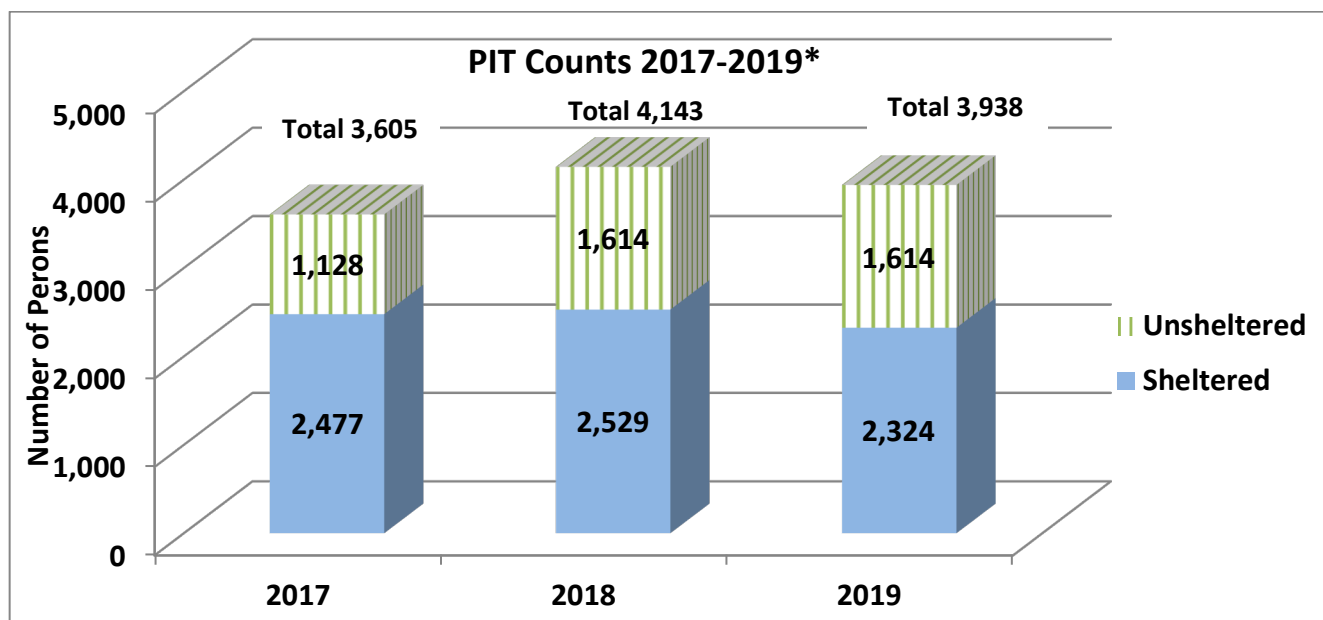
Figure 3

The 2019 Count of 3,640 persons experiencing homelessness in Houston/Harris/Fort Bend
Counties exclusively shows a decrease of 4,898 persons from that found in the area in 2011.
This corresponds to a 57% decrease compared to the 2011 count. Two hundred twenty-six
fewer people were found to be experiencing homelessness this year compared to that found in
2018, a decrease of 6%. However, the 2019 Count is higher than that found in 2017, before

Hurricane Harvey. Lingering effects of Hurricane Harvey may still be felt in the area (see next paragraph). However, the overall decrease over the past eight years is encouraging, particularly given the increase in population of the Houston/Harris County/Fort Bend County area by over 750,000 persons between 2011 and 2018. While the precise magnitude of homelessness cannot be determined, the level and trend of the decrease does provide solid evidence that the number of persons experiencing homelessness in the Houston/Pasadena/Harris County/Fort Bend County area has decreased since 2011.

In 2019, in Houston/Harris County/Ft. Bend County only, of those experiencing homelessness (42% or two of five) were found on the streets or in places not meant for habitation compared to over 52% in 2011 (Figure 2). This is an encouraging overall trend since 2011 and likely reflects successes of the effort to house individuals experiencing chronic homelessness, Veterans experiencing homelessness, and the implementation of Coordinated Access to create a standardized entry process into housing.

Data from the whole area of the Continuum of Care (CoC) are included in Figure 3 for 2017 through 2019 (the only years we surveyed all three counties). A total of 3,938 individuals experiencing homelessness was observed in 2019, a decrease of 5% over the 2018 Count for the total area. This is an encouraging finding after the increase in those experiencing homelessness seen in 2018, possibly due to Hurricane Harvey. Housing was affected in the Houston area tremendously with an estimated 122,000 homes damaged and almost 1,000 homes destroyed in the three-county area.[4]

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[4] http://abc13.com/harvey-destroyed-more-than-15500-homes-in-texas/2454379/

PIT Counts 2017-2019*

	2017	2018	2019
Total	3,605	4,143	3,938
Unsheltered	1,128	1,614	1,614
Sheltered	2,477	2,529	2,324

Chart: Number of Persons (Y-axis from 0 to 5,000), with Unsheltered and Sheltered legend

*includes data from total Continuum of Care geographic area

Figure 3

Homelessness in Houston/Harris County/Fort Bend County/Montgomery County using an Expanded Definition

HUD's rules and regulations dictate the definition of homelessness used for the Count, and those figures are reported to HUD in the Homeless Data Exchange. However, a more complete picture of homelessness in the region can be obtained by widening the definition of homelessness to include individuals in county jails (Harris, Fort Bend, and Montgomery) on the night of the Count who indicated that they were experiencing homelessness before arrest (and therefore likely to experience homelessness after release). When these numbers are added to the 2019 PIT Count (Figure 4), the total number of homeless individuals in the region is 4,297 with over half of those experiencing homelessness located in emergency shelter, transitional housing, or safe haven programs (54%).
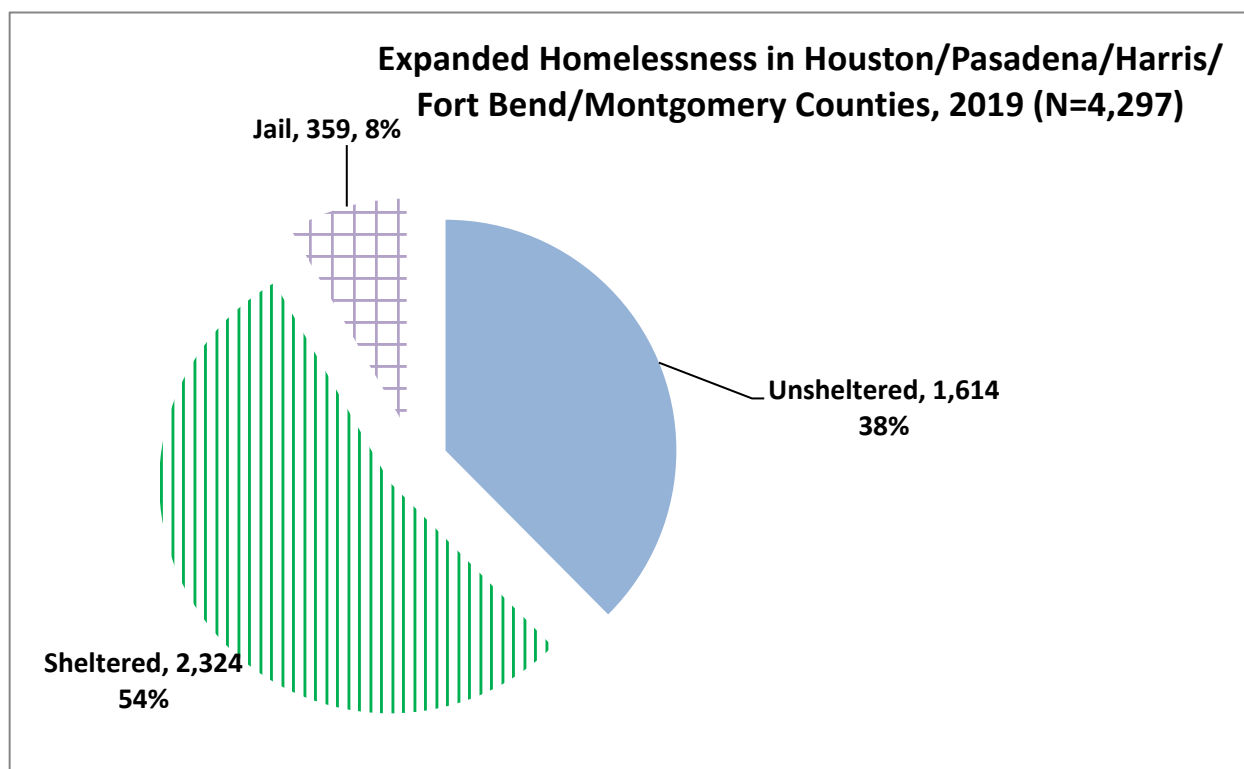
Expanded Homelessness in Houston/Pasadena/Harris/ Fort Bend/Montgomery Counties, 2019 (N=4,297)

Jail, 359, 8%

Unsheltered, 1,614 38%

Sheltered, 2,324 54%

Figure 4

Permanent Housing

At the same time as the observed decrease in the number of persons experiencing homelessness on a single night, there was an increase in the number of persons placed in permanent housing. Permanent housing (PH) consists of Rapid Re-housing (RRH) and Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) programs. From January 1, 2012 to March 25, 2019, 14,076 persons were placed in permanent housing in the CoC. During this time period, another 3,125 Veteran heads of households were housed through the Housing and Urban Development – Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program. Of these, 904 Veterans were housed during the past two years. The total number of persons housed during the past seven years is therefore at least 17,201 (we do not have number of Veteran household members

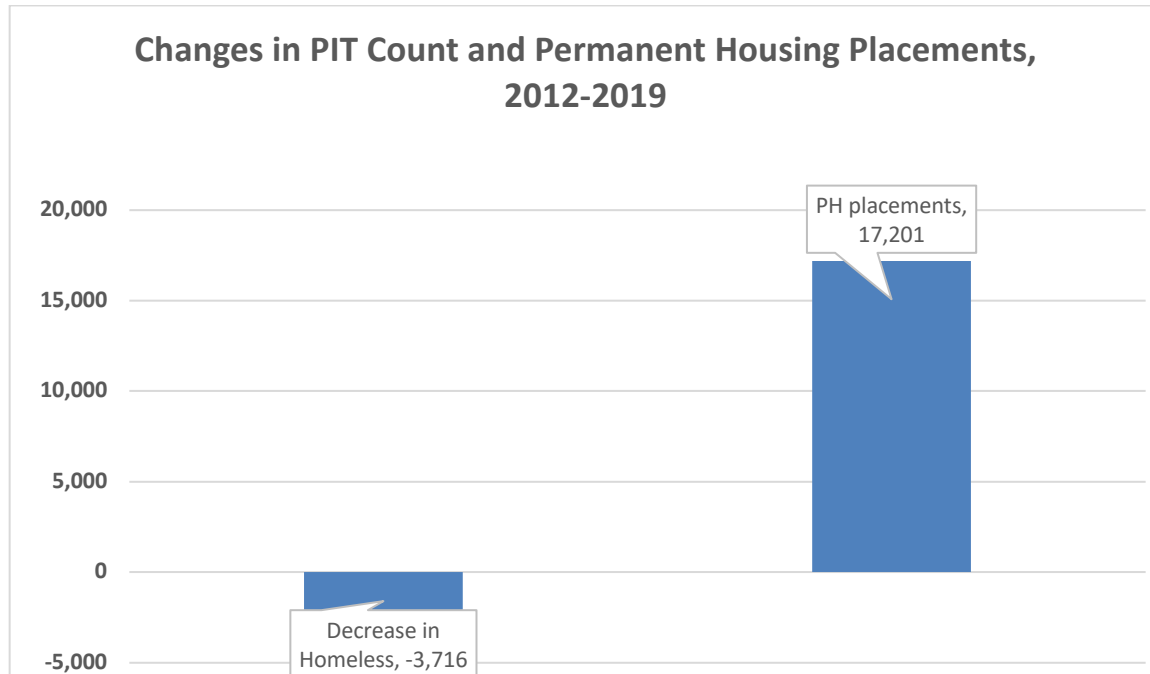housed and so can't include that number) with 3,267 of these placements occurring during the past year (Figure 5).

Changes in PIT Count and Permanent Housing Placements, 2012-2019

Figure 5

<u>**Characteristics of Those Experiencing Homelessness**</u>

Persons experiencing homeless are classified into three household types: persons in households without children (HHWOC), persons in households with children under age 18 years (HHWC), and households with only children (under the age of 18 years). Figure 6 shows the number of people in these household types among the sheltered and unsheltered population (there were no children-only households among the sheltered or unsheltered populations and no households with children among the unsheltered population). Figure 7 shows the breakdown of these groups between emergency shelters and transitional housing for the sheltered group while Figure 8 graphs these data in a way to show among each household type, what number/percent were in emergency shelter and transitional housing.
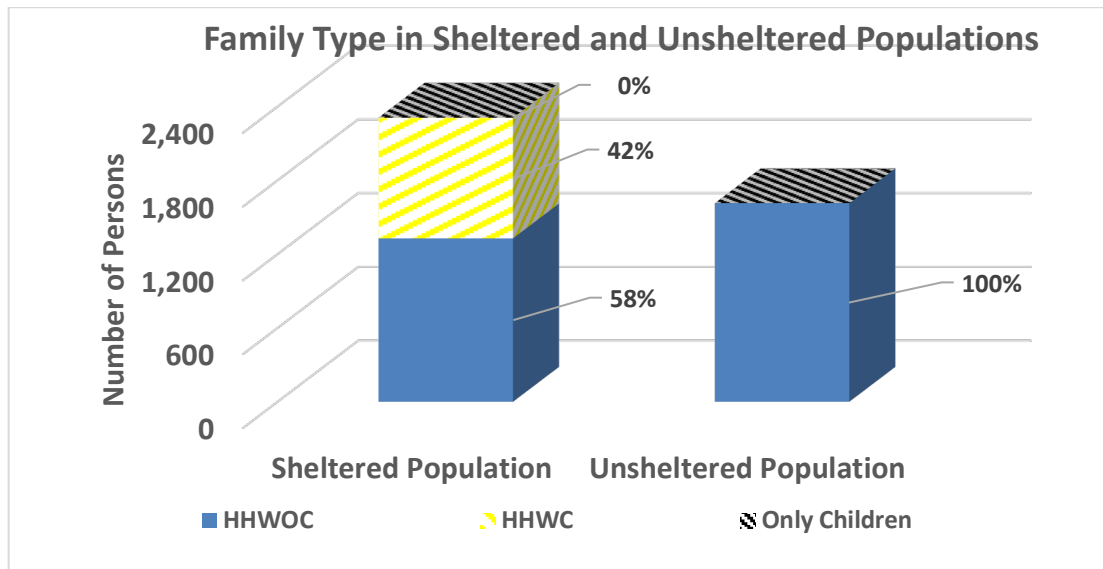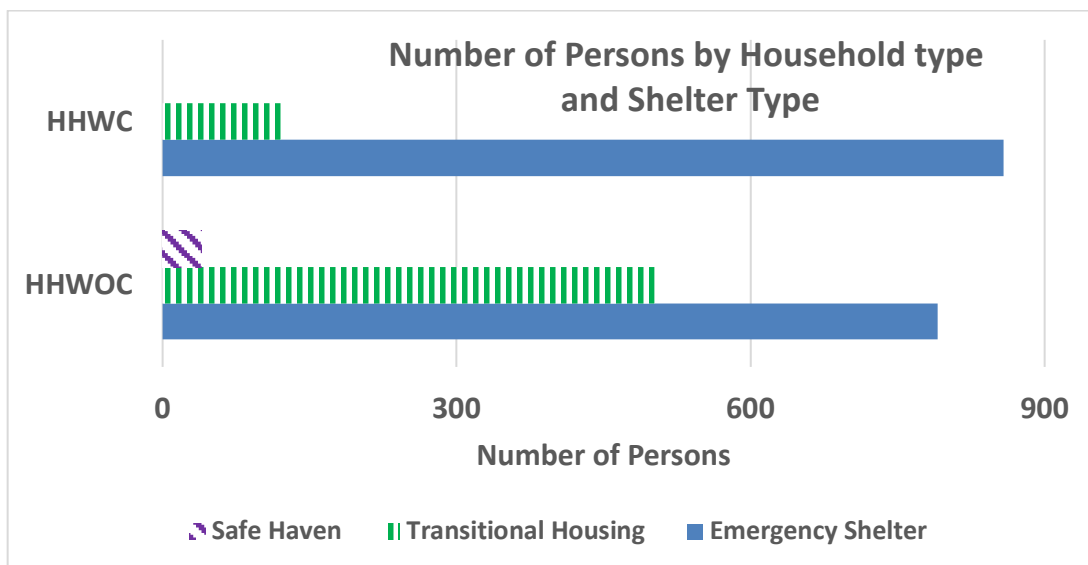
Family Type in Sheltered and Unsheltered Populations

Number of Persons (y-axis): 0, 600, 1,200, 1,800, 2,400

Sheltered Population: 58%, 42%, 0%

Unsheltered Population: 100%

Legend: HHWOC, HHWC, Only Children

Figure 6

Number of Persons by Household type and Shelter Type

Categories: HHWC, HHWOC

Number of Persons (x-axis): 0, 300, 600, 900

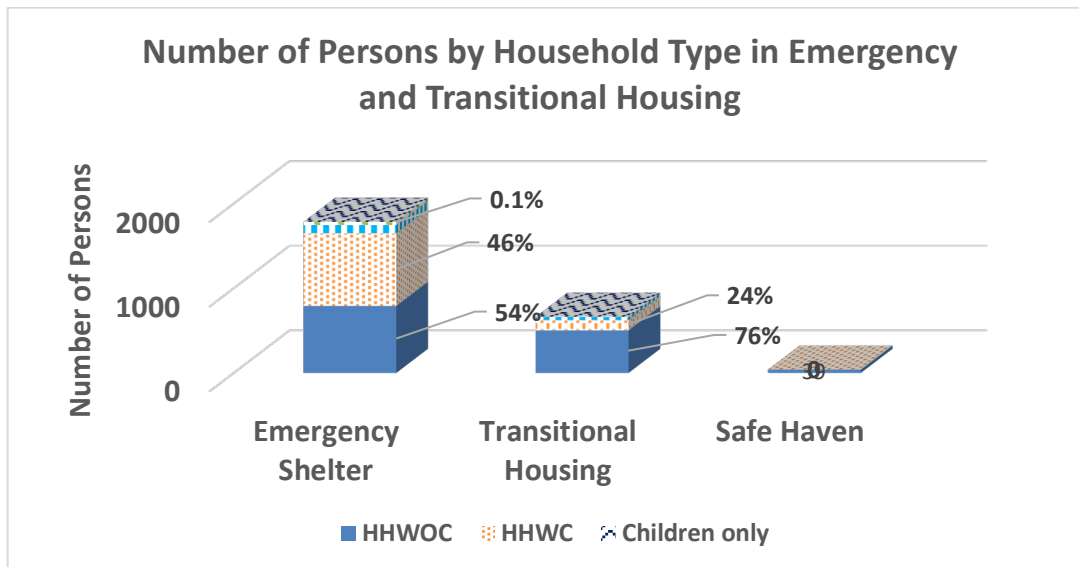Legend: Safe Haven, Transitional Housing, Emergency Shelter

Figure 7

Figure 8

Subpopulations

HUD requires that certain subpopulations of persons experiencing homelessness be enumerated along with the total number of persons experiencing homelessness. These subpopulations include:

- Veterans

- Individuals and families experiencing chronic homelessness[5]

- Survivors of domestic violence

- Persons with HIV/AIDS

- Persons with Serious Mental Illness

- Individuals experiencing chronic substance use disorder (alcohol and/or drugs)

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[5] HUD's definition of chronic homelessness is four or more occasions of homelessness within the past three years for a total of 12 months or longer or one or more current consecutive years of homelessness. In addition, the individual must have a disabling condition which makes daily activities difficult (e.g., medical, psychological, substance abuse) and prevents them from holding a job. A chronically homeless family meets the above definition with at least one child under the age of 18 years living with his/her parent(s). For sheltered individuals, they must be staying in emergency shelter or safe haven, but not in transitional housing.

- Unaccompanied young adults and parenting young adults

This information can be captured by HMIS for those in shelters. It is more difficult to get this information on the unsheltered population as these characteristics cannot be determined by observation. When an interviewer counted a person experiencing homelessness, they either administered the questions or did an observational tally which was captured in the database. This year there were 844 interviews or slightly over half of the total number of persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness counted. The number of persons living unsheltered and exhibiting a particular demographic characteristic (other than location, age range, race, and ethnicity which was captured on everyone) was extrapolated by determining the number answering yes to a question and dividing it by 844 to get a percent positive. This percent was then applied to the whole unsheltered population to estimate how many people in the "observed" tally exhibit that characteristic. However, it is important to note that data was not complete on all 844 persons who were surveyed (many people did not answer every question, and some responded, "don't know" or refused to answer). If data were missing, it was assumed to be negative. This may have the effect of artificially lowering percentages in a characteristic category as some of the persons with missing answers may truly have had that characteristic.

In addition, information collected was based on self-reporting and so may not represent the true proportions in the population experiencing homelessness. There is potential over-reporting in some categories (e.g., Veterans) or underreporting due to fear of stigmatization in others (e.g., HIV/AIDS, mental illness, substance use disorder).

The age range of the total population experiencing homelessness and by sheltered or unsheltered status is shown in Figures 9a-c. In the total population, over three out of four persons experiencing homelessness were over the age of 24. Approximately one out of six were under the age of 18; however, all of those under age 18 were in sheltered situations. The population living unsheltered was older with nineteen out of twenty (94%) being 25 years of

age or older. The sheltered population experiencing homelessness was younger, due to the inclusion of children in that population. Of the 2,324 persons in safe haven, emergency shelter, or transitional housing, one of four (27%) was below the age of 18 years and nearly one out of 12 (8%), ages 18-24 years. Fewer than one out of nine of those under age 18 were in transitional housing, a decrease from last year when it was one out of six.
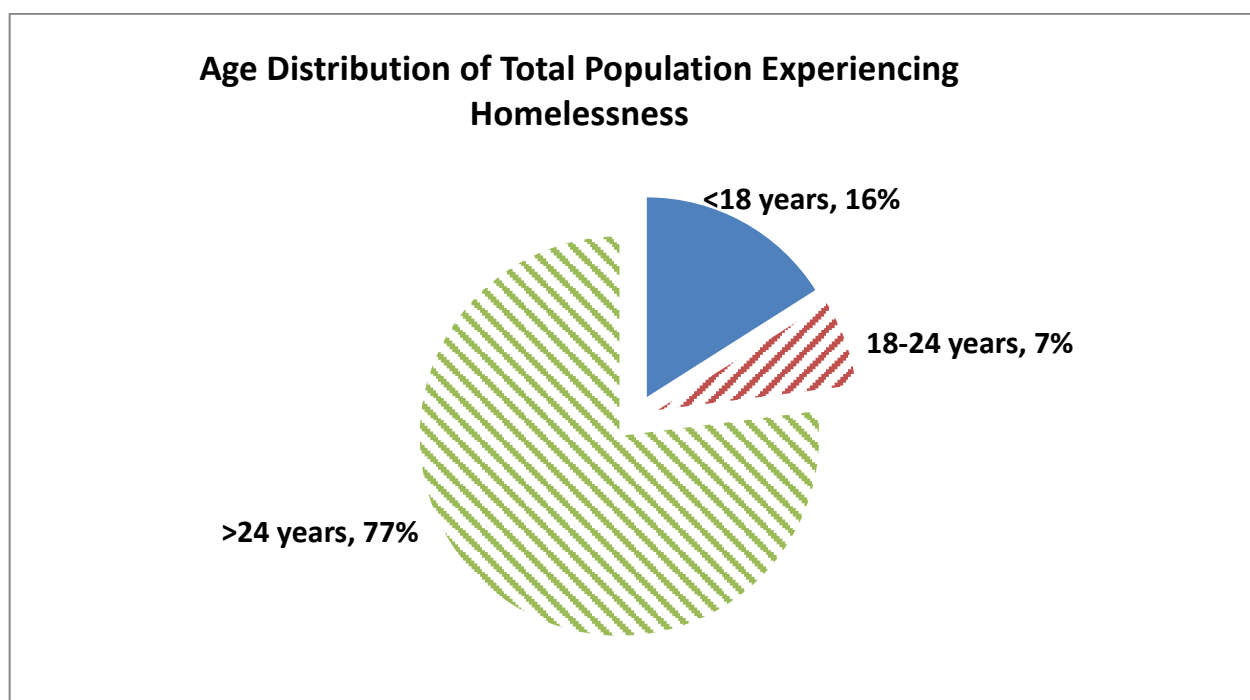
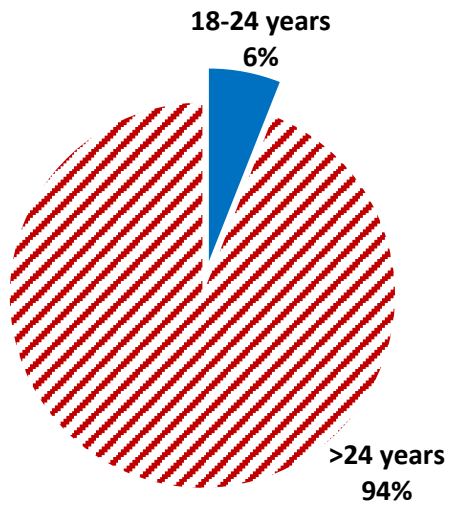**Age Distribution of Total Population Experiencing Homelessness**

<18 years, 16%

18-24 years, 7%

>24 years, 77%

Figure 9a

Age Distribution of Unsheltered Persons Experiencing Homelessness

18-24 years
6%

>24 years
94%

Figure 9b

Age Distribution of Sheltered Persons Experiencing Homelessness

<18 years, 27%
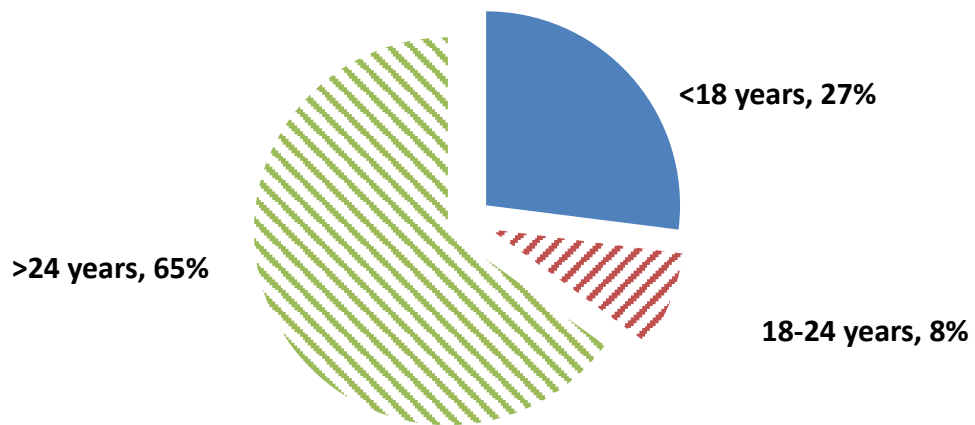
>24 years, 65%

18-24 years, 8%

Figure 9c

Figures 10 and 11 show subpopulations for the total population experiencing homelessness surveyed as well as a breakdown by sheltered and unsheltered status. Not shown in the figures is information only asked of the population living unsheltered. Two out of five of the unsheltered persons experiencing homelessness stated this was their first experience with homelessness and one of nine unsheltered persons said they were homeless due to a natural disaster, primarily Hurricane Harvey. Overall, three out of five persons in the total population experiencing homeless were male with a higher percentage in the unsheltered population (83%). Only 11 persons experiencing homelessness identified as transgender. Approximately one out of eight identified as Hispanic with a slightly higher representation in the sheltered population.

Persons who are experiencing chronic homelessness represent a particularly vulnerable population and are prioritized for permanent housing. We determined that nearly one out of four (24%) of the total population experiencing homelessness met the HUD definition of experiencing chronic homelessness[6]. This is a similar to that found in 2018. Not surprisingly, the percentage of persons experiencing chronic homelessness was higher among the unsheltered versus sheltered population (30% vs. 16%). Of the 102 unaccompanied young adults (18-24 years) who were in emergency shelter, five (5%) were classified as chronically homeless while 15 out of 87 unsheltered unaccompanied young adults were so classified (17%).

Another subpopulation of particular interest are Veterans. This year we found 392 Veterans experiencing homelessness in 2019 compared to 443 found in 2018. Approximately half of the Veterans were in a sheltered condition. Of these 392 Veterans, one out of four (28%) were classified as experiencing chronic homelessness and of these, three of four were unsheltered (78%). Gap analysis and take down targeting have been predicting an annual steady state volume of between 1200 and 1400 homeless Veterans based on opposing actions of successful housing efforts versus returning Veterans and those falling temporarily back into homelessness.

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[6] Persons in transitional housing cannot be considered chronically homeless so the denominator for this percent is 3302.

Our findings this year are still well below that number. We did not ask this year about type of discharge and so we do not know what percent of Veterans experiencing homelessness were not eligible for VA benefits. Regardless, The Way Home Continuum of Care has a housing option for any Veteran, no matter the discharge status.
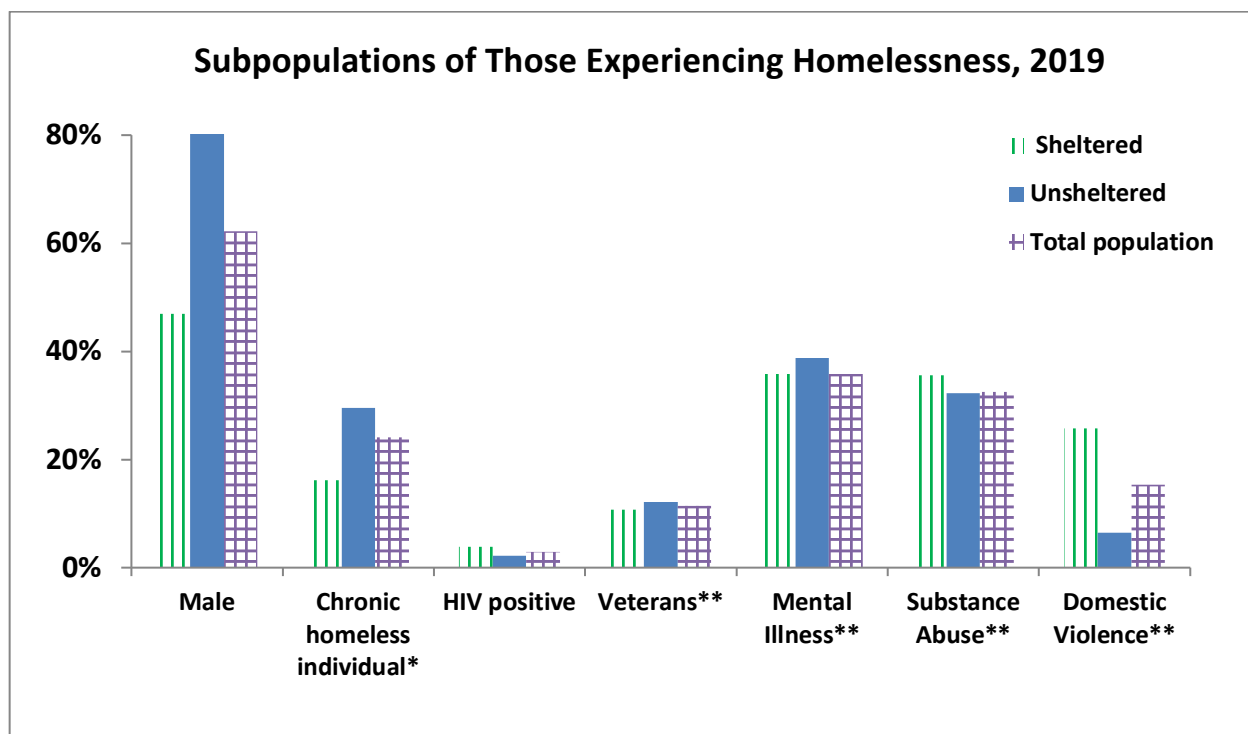
Subpopulations of Those Experiencing Homelessness, 2019

Figure 10

*sheltered individuals experiencing chronic homelessness are only those in emergency shelter
**among adults only

Other subpopulations reported in the total adult population experiencing homelessness include over one of three with self-reported serious mental illness (36%) and/or substance use disorder (33%; alcohol and/or other drugs). Rates were similar in sheltered and unsheltered populations.

Approximately one in thirty-five (2.9%) of the total population experiencing homelessness self-reported as HIV positive although the true percentage may be higher since many may not have been tested and therefore don't know their status. Overall, approximately one in seven of

those experiencing homelessness had experienced domestic violence. This percent was higher in the sheltered population (26% vs 7% among unsheltered), not surprising since there are shelter beds specifically dedicated to survivors of domestic violence.

Figure 11 shows the racial and ethnic self-classification or classification by the observer, if not interviewed (unsheltered population only) of those experiencing homelessness. The clear majority of those experiencing homelessness were White or Black/African-American. A higher percentage of Caucasians were found in the unsheltered population. Persons interviewed were asked if they considered themselves Hispanic and approximately one in eight did. As outlined in Table 1, there are significant disparities between the overall racial/ethnic breakdown of the total Harris County population and those experiencing homelessness with Blacks/African-Americans overrepresented among those experiencing homelessness.
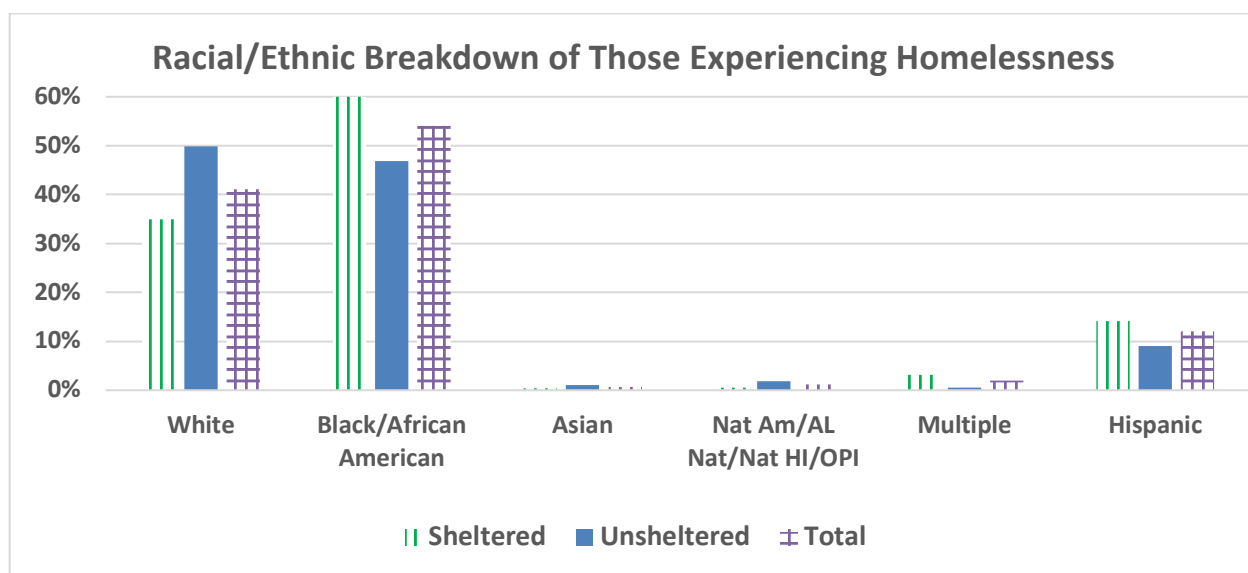

Figure 11

Comparison of racial/ethnic percentages in Harris County total and those experiencing homelessness

Race/Ethnicity[7]	Harris Co Population 7/1/2018	Total experiencing homelessness	Sheltered experiencing homelessness	Unsheltered experiencing homelessness	Young Adults experiencing homelessness
White	69.8%	41%	35%	50%	38%
Black/African American	19.7%	55%	60%	47%	53%
Asian	7.3%	0.9%	0.4%	1%	2%
American Indian/Alaska Native/ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1.2%	0.15%	0.85%	2%	0%
Multiple Races	1.9%	2%	0.1%	0.5%	0%
Hispanic*	43%	12%	14%	9%	28%

Table 1

*asked separately from racial identity

Finally, Figure 12 shows the number of sheltered and unsheltered young adults (ages 18-24 years) experiencing homelessness. These are further divided into unaccompanied young adults and parenting young adults. All parenting young adults were sheltered and there were 46 children under the age of 18 years in these young adult households.
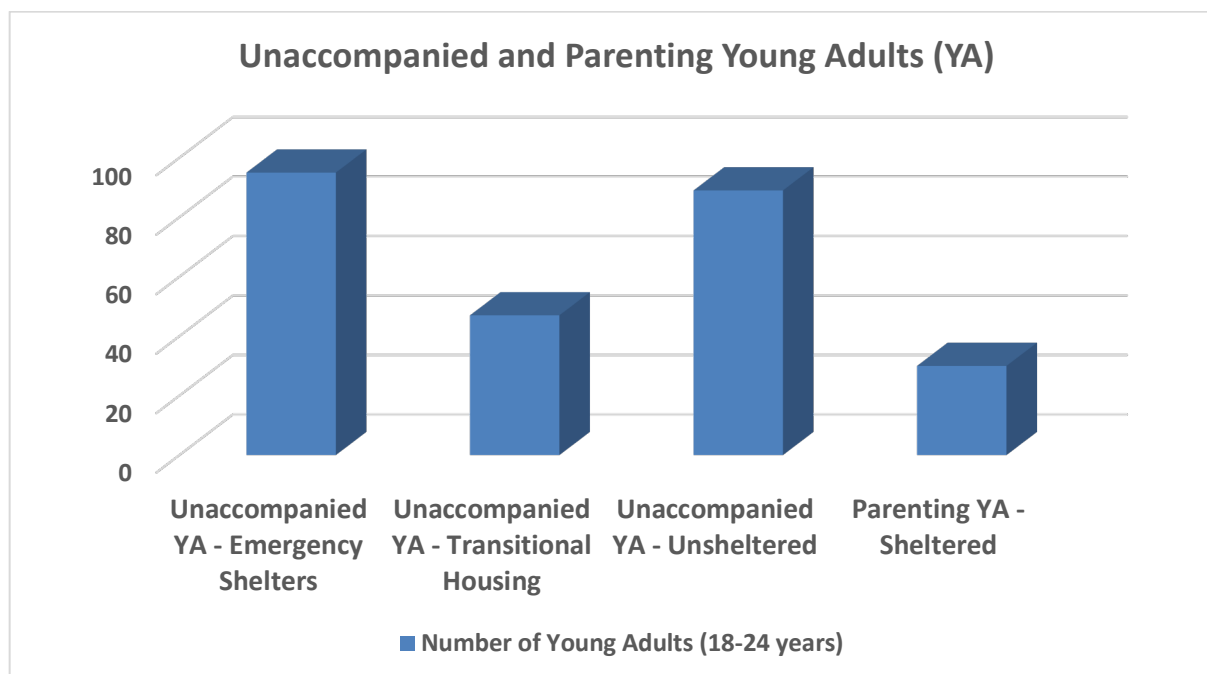
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[7]https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/harriscountytexas,US

Unaccompanied and Parenting Young Adults (YA)

Figure 12

Summary and Conclusions

New methodology designed in 2011 to increase the completeness and accuracy of the Point-In-Time Count of sheltered and unsheltered persons experiencing homelessness in the Houston/Pasadena/Harris County/Fort Bend County region was used until 2015. Beginning in 2016, due to the community's success in decreasing the number of those experiencing homelessness, we implemented a modified approach using direct engagement and interview to count those who were living unsheltered. An important change in 2017 was the addition of Montgomery County to the Count, so data from that region was not included in comparisons with Counts from 2011-2016 which only included Houston/Pasadena/Harris County/Fort Bend County.

The unsheltered Count took place over three days in January and we attempted to interview every person identified who was thought to be experiencing unsheltered homelessness. The

Counting Us mobile application from SimTech Solutions (Cambridge, MA) was downloaded onto mobile devices which were then used by volunteers to enter data. If someone could not be interviewed, observational data was recorded. We were able to interview a little over half of those thought to be experiencing homelessness.

A total of 3,938 persons experiencing homelessness were counted in Houston/Harris County/Fort Bend County/Montgomery County, corresponding to one out of 1,541 residents. Of these, 1,614 (41%) were unsheltered (staying in a place not meant for human habitation) while 2,324 (59%) were staying in emergency shelters or transitional housing the evening of 21 January 2019. A safe haven Veteran shelter opened up since the last Count and 39 people were staying in that shelter on the night of the Count. Most of these individuals were interviewed in Harris County (90%) with much smaller percentages of persons experiencing homelessness located Fort Bend County (2%) and Montgomery County (8%). This year saw a slight increase in the number of persons experiencing homelessness in Fort Bend and Montgomery Counties (The number of individuals interviewed outside of Harris County decreased compared to that found in 2018, corollary to the overall reduction in persons experiencing homelessness). However, it is important to note that the persons living unsheltered were classified as to where they were interviewed or spotted, which may not have been where they slept the night of the Count. Persons move around during the day and may congregate near services.

The 2019 PIT Count represents a 58% decrease in the number of individuals experiencing homelessness counted in Houston, Pasadena, Harris County, and Fort Bend County compared to the number counted in January 2011. This corresponds to over 5,000 fewer people experiencing homelessness over the past eight years in the Houston/Pasadena/Harris County/Fort Bend County area. This is even more impressive given that the population of that area has increased by over 750,000 during that time. At the same time, there has been an increase in those placed in in permanent housing with over 17,200 persons housed since 2012 (Figure 5).

There was a decrease in numbers of persons experiencing homelessness between 2018 and 2019 but numbers are still higher than in 2017. We can't determine the exact cause of this increase but the area experienced unprecedented flooding during Hurricane Harvey in August 2017, causing homelessness for some households, particularly those who were precariously housed before the flooding. The Houston Housing Authority estimates that there were almost 6,000 affordable housing units damaged by the storm, putting additional pressure on the housing market. Additional evidence that the increase in homelessness seen is due to Harvey is reflected in the finding that, among the unsheltered, over two out of five were experiencing their first homelessness episode and one in nine reported they had become homeless due to Harvey, a decrease from the almost one in five found last year.

Nearly one in four of those experiencing homelessness were classified as being chronically homeless using the HUD definition, a stable percent over the past year. The sheltered population was younger, reflecting the fact that all families with children under the age of 18 years were living in shelter. Persons living unsheltered were older and more likely to be in Households Without Children. A total of 189 unaccompanied young adults (18-24 years old) were identified as experiencing homelessness and one of seven was experiencing chronic homelessness. More males than females were counted, especially among those living unsheltered. High rates of substance use disorder and mental illness were found in both populations. Fifty-one fewer Veterans were found to be experiencing homeless this year, a decrease of 11% (vs. 6% decrease in homelessness among the general homeless population). Of the 376 Veterans homeless in the 2019 Count, we do not know how many are not eligible for military benefits (and thus housing assistance) based on discharge type. Regardless, The Way Home Continuum of Care has a housing option for any Veteran, no matter the discharge status.

As seen with many other social determinants of health, there were major racial disparities among those experiencing homelessness. While Blacks/African-Americans represent not quite 20% of the composition of the total population of Harris County, they comprised over half of those experiencing homelessness. Conversely, all other racial groups, along with Hispanics,

were underrepresented among those experiencing homelessness. This represents an issue that needs to be examined and addressed, if homelessness is to be defeated in this area.

The decrease in homelessness in Houston/Harris County/Ft. Bend County/Montgomery County in 2019 is encouraging after the increase seen in 2018. However, the dramatic decreases seen in earlier years have plateaued and our community needs to continue its pledge to address homelessness in our community. Therapeutic services for those experiencing homelessness – particularly mental health and substance abuse treatment services – are needed. A higher availability of affordable housing is key. A sustained commitment, as shown by The Way Home over the past nine years, may not totally eliminate homelessness but will assure that when it does occur, it is rare and brief in duration.