



SONOMA COUNTY
CONTINUUM OF CARE

SONOMA COUNTY 2026 HOMELESSNESS POINT-IN-TIME COUNT & REPORT

Prepared by
Applied Survey Research



ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

Applied Survey Research (ASR) is a social research firm dedicated to helping people build better communities by collecting meaningful data, facilitating information-based planning, and developing custom strategies. The firm was founded in 1980 on the principle that community improvement, initiative sustainability, and program success are closely tied to assessment needs, evaluation of community goals, and development of appropriate responses.

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Sonoma County Department of Health

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Reach for Home, Healdsburg	Sonoma Emergency Operations Center, Sonoma
COTS Mary Issak Center, Petaluma	Rohnert Park City Hall, Rohnert Park
HomeFirst Services, Sonoma and Petaluma	

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Sonoma County Family, Youth, and Children Division	

SONOMA COUNTY HOMELESS COALITION BOARD

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Chris Coursey - Board of Supervisors	Jennielynn Holmes - Catholic Charities
Margaret Sluyk - Reach for Home	Karen Nau - City of Petaluma
Martha Cheever - Sonoma County Community Development Commission	Akash Kalia - The Palms Inn
Ron Wellander - City of Sonoma	Ash Culver - Community Member
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INTRODUCTION

In late January, volunteers and guides fanned out across the County of Sonoma as part of an annual effort to understand the needs, number, and circumstances of persons experiencing homelessness. Point-in-Time Counts measure the prevalence of homelessness in each community and collect information on individuals and families residing in emergency shelters and transitional housing, as well as on people sleeping on the streets, in cars, abandoned properties, or other places not meant for human habitation.

The Point-in-Time Count is the only source of nationwide data on sheltered and unsheltered homelessness and is required by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) of all jurisdictions receiving federal funding to provide housing and services for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Currently, The Sonoma County Homeless Coalition (CoC) receives approximately \$4.9 million dollars annually in federal funding, a key source of funding for the county's homeless services.

The Sonoma County Homeless Coalition reports the findings of their local Point-in-Time Count annually to HUD. This information ultimately helps the federal government to better understand the nature and extent of homelessness nationwide. Point-in-Time Census and Survey data also help to inform communities' local strategic planning, capacity building, and advocacy campaigns to prevent and end homelessness.

Sonoma County worked in conjunction with ASR to conduct the 2026 Sonoma County Homeless Point-in-Time Census and Survey. ASR is a social research firm with extensive experience in homeless enumeration and needs assessment that has worked with Sonoma County on their Point-in-Time Counts since 2009.

The Sonoma County Homeless Point-in-Time Count consists of two primary components: (1) a point-in-time enumeration of unsheltered, tents, or vehicles, and (2) a point-in-time enumeration of homeless individuals and families, such as those sleeping outdoors, on the street, or in parks and families residing in temporary shelter, including emergency shelters or transitional housing facilities.

The 2026 Sonoma County Homeless Point-in-Time Count was a comprehensive community effort. With the support of individuals with lived experience of homelessness, community volunteers, staff from various city and county departments, and law enforcement, the entire county was canvassed between the hours of 5:00 AM and 10:00 AM on January 30, 2026.

The count was a peer-informed visual count of unsheltered homeless individuals and families residing on the streets and in vehicles, makeshift shelters, encampments, and other places not meant for human habitation was conducted. Shelters and transitional housing facilities in Sonoma County's annual Housing Inventory Count (HIC) also reported the number of homeless individuals and families who occupied their facilities on the night prior to the day of the count.

A specialized count of unaccompanied children and transition-age youth under the age of 25 was conducted on the same day. This dedicated count was designed to improve the understanding of the prevalence and scope of youth homelessness. Seven trained youth enumerators who currently or recently experienced homelessness conducted the count in specific areas where homeless youth were known to congregate.

In the weeks following the street count, a comprehensive, close-ended survey was administered to 276 unsheltered and sheltered individuals and families. The survey gathered basic demographic details as well as information on service needs and utilization.

This report provides data regarding the number and characteristics of people experiencing homelessness in Sonoma County on a single night in January. Special attention is given to specific subpopulations, including chronically homeless persons, veterans, families, unaccompanied children under the age of 18, and transition-age youth between the ages of 18 and 25.

To better understand the dynamics of homelessness over time, results from previous years, including 2018-2025 are provided where available and applicable.

PROJECT OVERVIEW AND GOALS

ASR held planning meetings in the fall of 2025 to reflect the experience and expertise of the community with local stakeholders. Participants were drawn from City and County departments, community-based service organizations, and other interested stakeholders. They joined the 2026 Project Team (staff from Sonoma County Department of Health Services) in planning for the PIT count. These representatives were instrumental in ensuring the county's 2026 Homeless PIT Count and Survey reflected the needs and concerns of the community.

The 2026 Project Team worked toward several important project goals:

- To measure changes in the numbers and characteristics of the homeless population and to track progress toward ending homelessness.
- To assess the status of specific subpopulations, including veterans, families, unaccompanied children, transition-age youth, and those who are chronically homeless.
- To preserve current federal funding for homeless services and to enhance the ability to raise new funds.
- To improve the ability of policy makers and service providers to plan and implement services that meet the needs of the local homeless population.
- To increase public awareness of overall homeless issues and generate support for constructive solutions.



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

FEDERAL DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS FOR POINT-IN-TIME COUNTS

For the purposes of this report, the HUD definition of homelessness established under Category 1 of the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act is used. Enacted in 2009, the HEARTH Act reauthorized and expanded the federal response to homelessness and established the definitions used for HUD homeless assistance programs and PIT Counts.

Under Category 1 of the HEARTH Act, the definition of homelessness includes individuals and families who are:

- Living in supervised publicly or privately-operated shelters designated to provide a temporary living arrangement; or
- With a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground.



SONOMA COUNTY

2026 POINT-IN-TIME COUNT & SURVEY

Every two years, typically during the last 10 days of January, communities across the country conduct comprehensive counts of the local homeless populations in order to measure the prevalence of homelessness in each local Continuum of Care.

The 2026 Sonoma County Point-in-Time Count was a community-wide effort conducted on January 30, 2026. In the weeks following the street count, a survey was administered to 276 unsheltered and sheltered individuals experiencing homelessness in order to profile their experience and characteristics.



SONOMA COUNTY
CONTINUUM OF CARE



TOTAL PERSONS
EXPERIENCING
HOMELESSNESS

1,951



44%
Sheltered
853



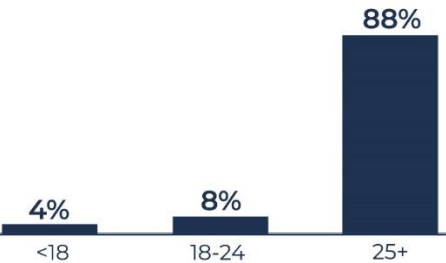
56%
Unsheltered
n=1,098

TOTAL PERSONS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

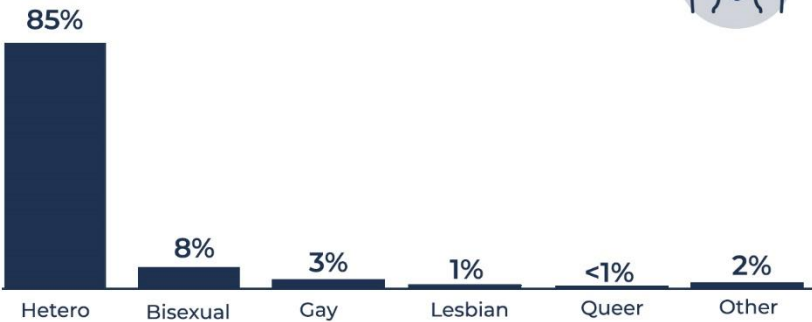


DEMOGRAPHICS

AGE



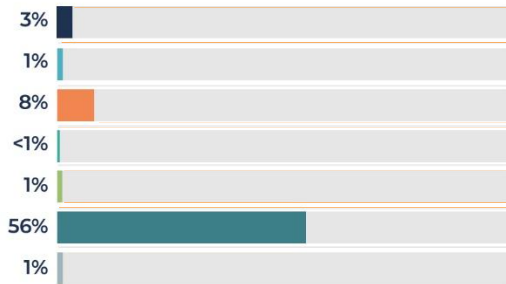
SEXUAL ORIENTATION





RACE/ ETHNICITY

NOT HISPANIC/LATINA/E/O



American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous

Asian or Asian American

Black, African American, or African

Middle Eastern or North African

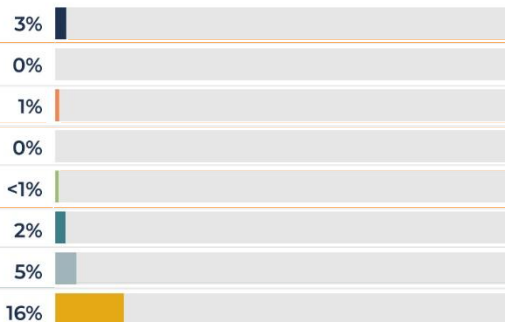
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

White

Multi Racial

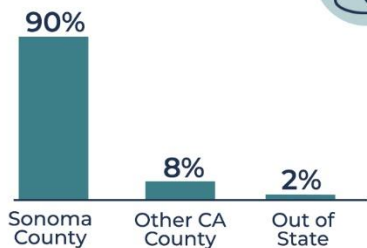
Hispanic/Latina/e/o

HISPANIC/LATINA/E/O



DATA PORTRAITS [▯]

RESIDENCE AT TIME OF HOMELESSNESS



DURATION OF CURRENT HOMELESSNESS



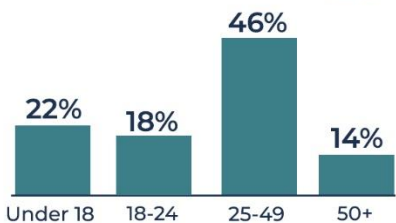
FIRST EPISODE OF HOMELESSNESS



37%

Reported their current episode of homelessness as being their first

AGE AT FIRST EPISODE OF HOMELESSNESS



PRIMARY CONDITION THAT LEAD TO HOMELESSNESS*

(Top 5 Responses)



21%

Lost Job

15%

Argument with Family or Friend

12%

Alcohol/Drug Use

9%

Family/domestic violence

8%

Divorce/separation/break up

WHAT IS KEEPING YOU FROM GETTING PERMANENT HOUSING*

(Top 5 Responses)



49%

No Job/not Enough Income

49%

Can't afford rent

26%

No Housing Available

25%

No Money for Moving Cost

18%

Housing Process too Difficult

EMPLOYMENT STATUS



16%

had some form of employment

AMONG UNEMPLOYED RESPONDENTS



59%

Were looking for work

31%

Were unable to work

10%

Were not looking for work

FOSTER CARE



21%

of survey respondents have been in the foster care system

JUSTICE SYSTEM INVOLVED



31%

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

15%

on probation/parole at the start of their most recent episode of homelessness

SURVEY POPULATION BY SLEEPING ACCOMMODATION



35%



Outdoors/ Streets

28%



Shelter

18%



Vehicle

9%



Tent

8%



Motel/ Hotel

2%



Abandoned Building

SELF-REPORTED HEALTH [□]

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

PSYCHIATRIC
OR EMOTIONAL
CONDITIONS



49%

Report having a psychiatric or emotional condition

PTSD



46%

Report having Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

SUBSTANCE
USE
DISORDER



44%

Report having a substance use disorder

CHRONIC
HEALTH
CONDITION



32%

Report having a chronic health condition

PHYSICAL
DISABILITY



30%

Report having a physical disability

TRAUMATIC
BRAIN
INJURY



20%

Report having had a TBI

HIV/AIDS
RELATED
ILLNESS



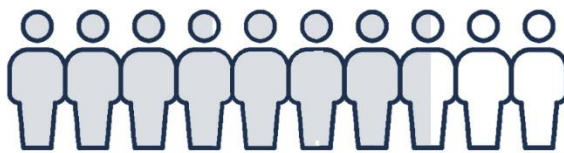
1%

Report having an HIV/AIDS related illness

DISABLING CONDITION

A disabling condition is defined by HUD as a developmental disability, HIV/AIDS, or a long-term physical or mental impairment that impacts a person's ability to live independently but could be improved with stable housing.

75%



of survey respondents report having at least one disabling condition

GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE [□]



91%

Of survey respondents reported receiving government benefits.

SERVICES CURRENTLY ACCESSING* (TOP 5 RESPONSES)

40%



Free Meals

27%



Emergency Shelter

25%



Hygiene Services

24%



Health Services

21%



Bus Passes

REASONS FOR NOT RECEIVING GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE* (TOP 3 RESPONSES)

12%



Applied and waiting for a response

10%



Don't think I'm eligible

7%



Don't know where to go

SPECIAL POPULATIONS

Total Sheltered Unsheltered

CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS



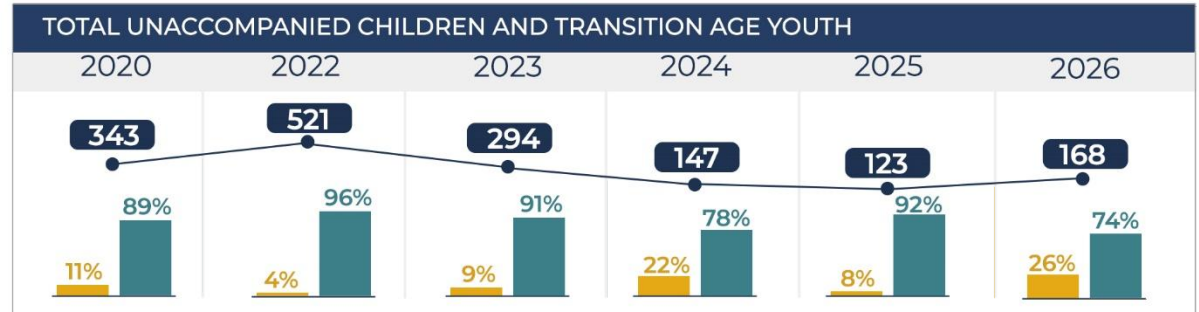
VETERANS



FAMILIES



UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN + TAY



SUBPOPULATION DEFINITIONS

CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS

An individual with one or more disabling conditions, or a family with a head of household with a disabling condition, who:

- Has been continuously homeless for one year or more and/or;
- Has experienced four or more episodes of homelessness within the past three years.

VETERANS

Persons who have served on active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States. This does not include inactive military reserves or the National Guard unless the person was called up to active duty.

FAMILIES

A household with at least one adult member (persons 18 or older) and at least one child member (persons under 18).

UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH YOUNG ADULTS

Youth under the age of 18 and young adults from the ages of 18 to 24 years old (TAY) who are experiencing homelessness and living without a parent or legal guardian.

□ Source: 2026 Sonoma County Homeless Survey, N=276

* Multiple response question, percentages may not add up to 100%

Note: Some percentages have been rounded so total percentage will equal 100%.

POINT-IN-TIME COUNT

The 2026 County of Sonoma Homeless Point-in-Time Census and Survey included a complete enumeration of all unsheltered and publicly or privately sheltered homeless persons. The general street count was conducted on January 30, 2026 from approximately 5:00 AM to 10:00 AM and covered all of Sonoma County. The shelter count was conducted on the previous evening and included all individuals staying in emergency shelters, transitional housing facilities, and domestic violence shelters. The general street count and shelter count methodology were similar to those used in 2025 and previous years.

The methodology used for the 2026 Homeless Point-in-Time Census and Survey is commonly described as a “blitz and survey count” since it is conducted by a large team over a very short period of time. As this method was conducted in Sonoma County, the result was an observation-based count of individuals and families who appeared to be homeless.

The point-in-time occupancy of homeless shelters in Sonoma County was collected for the night of January 29, 2026. All shelter data were gathered either directly from the shelter or from Sonoma County’s Homeless Management Information System. All shelter occupants were listed on the HIC report that the Sonoma County Homeless Coalition submits to HUD.

The count was followed by an in-person representative survey of persons currently experiencing homelessness in Sonoma County, the results of which were used to profile and estimate the condition and characteristics of the local homeless population. Information collected from the survey was used to fulfill HUD reporting requirements and inform local service delivery and strategic planning efforts.

In a continuing effort to improve data on the extent of youth homelessness, Sonoma County also conducted a dedicated youth count similar to the youth counts that have been conducted since 2009. The dedicated youth count methodology was improved in 2017 to better ensure unaccompanied children and transition-age youth were not included in both the general street count and youth count. For more information regarding the dedicated youth count, de-duplication, and project methodology, please see [Appendix A: Methodology](#).



NUMBER AND CHARACTERISTICS OF PERSONS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN SONOMA COUNTY

Figure 1: Total Number of Persons Experiencing Homelessness

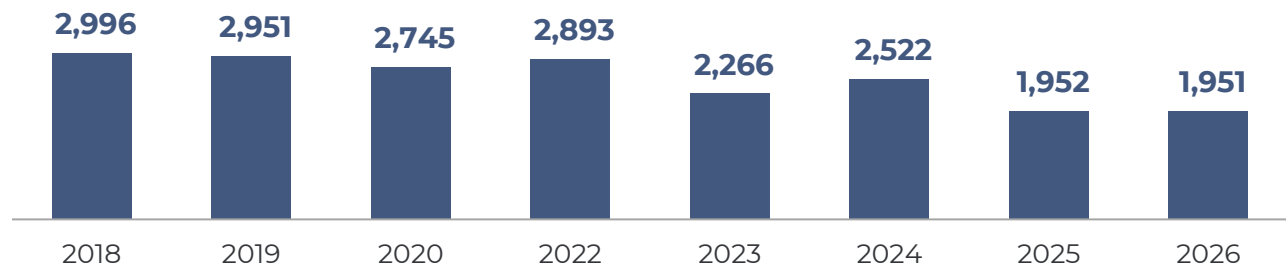
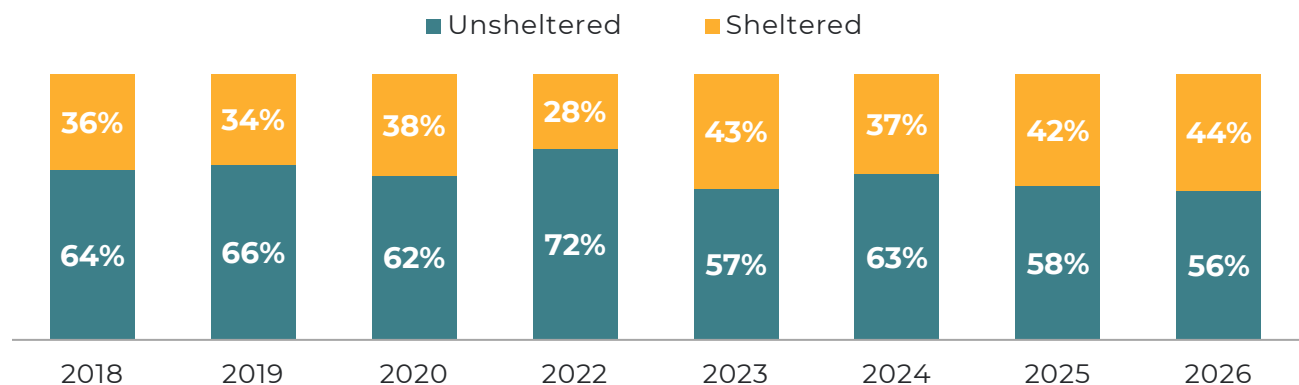


Figure 2: Total Homeless Census Population, by Shelter Status



	2018	2019	2020	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2025-26 % CHANGE
Sheltered	1,067	994	1,043	805	975	945	829	853	3%
Unsheltered	1,929	1,957	1,702	2,088	1,291	1,577	1,123	1,098	-2%
Total	2,996	2,951	2,745	2,893	2,266	2,522	1,952	1,951	-<1%

Figure 3: Total Homeless Census Population by Shelter Status and Jurisdiction

JURISDICTION	UNSHELTERED			SHELTERED			TOTAL		
	2024	2025	2026	2024	2025	2026	2024	2025	2026
North County	141	60	55	16	31	31	152	91	86
Cloverdale	6	7	9	3	4	4	9	11	13
Healdsburg	37	12	17	13	17	27	50	29	44
Town of Windsor	26	23	20	0	10	0	26	33	20
Unincorporated	67	18	9	0	0	0	67	18	9
South County	434	168	238	181	174	165	615	342	403
Cotati	21	0	2	10	6	4	31	6	6
Petaluma	143	88	109	97	103	91	240	191	200
Rohnert Park	205	46	98	74	65	70	279	111	168
Unincorporated	65	34	29	0	0	0	65	34	29
West County	128	137	146	49	44	23	177	181	169
Sebastopol	108	16	47	10	0	0	118	16	47
Unincorporated	20	121	99	39	44	23	59	165	122
Sonoma Valley	74	82	43	12	8	35	86	90	78
Sonoma	13	15	13	0	0	35	13	15	48
Unincorporated	61	67	30	12	8	0	73	75	30
Santa Rosa	805	676	606	664	552	582	1,469	1,228	1,188
Santa Rosa	701	588	492	664	552	582	1,365	1,140	1,074
Unincorporated	104	88	114	0	0	0	104	88	114
Undisclosed Location	0	0	0	23	20	17	23	20	17
Total	1,577	1,123	1,098	945	829	853	2,522	1,952	1,951

Note: Confidential beds have been included in their respective jurisdiction(s) since 2018.

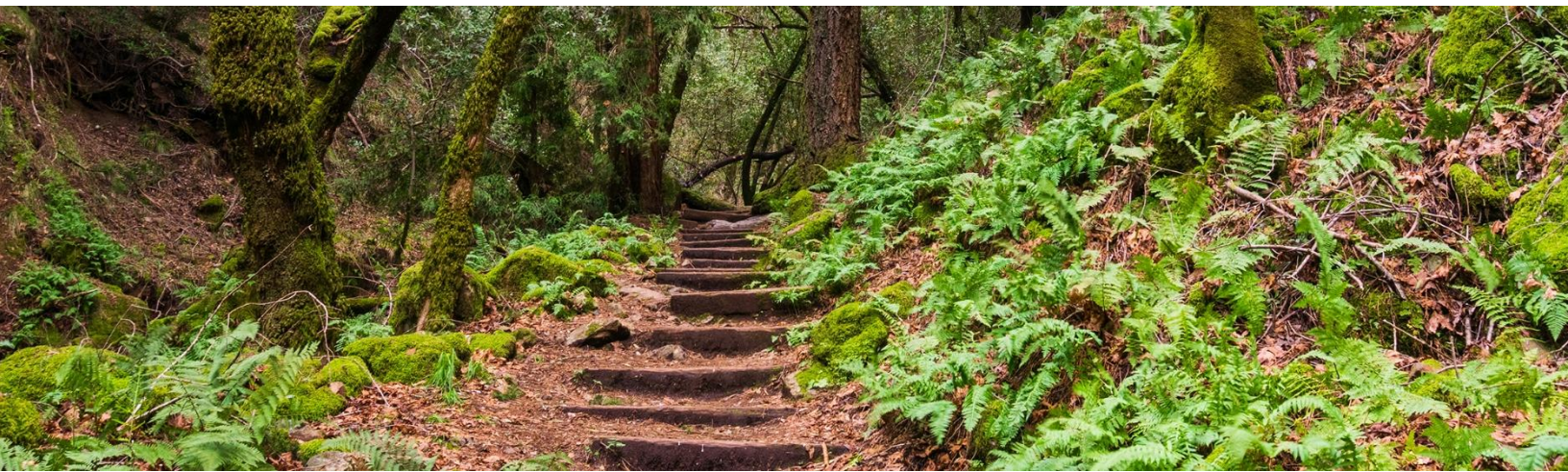
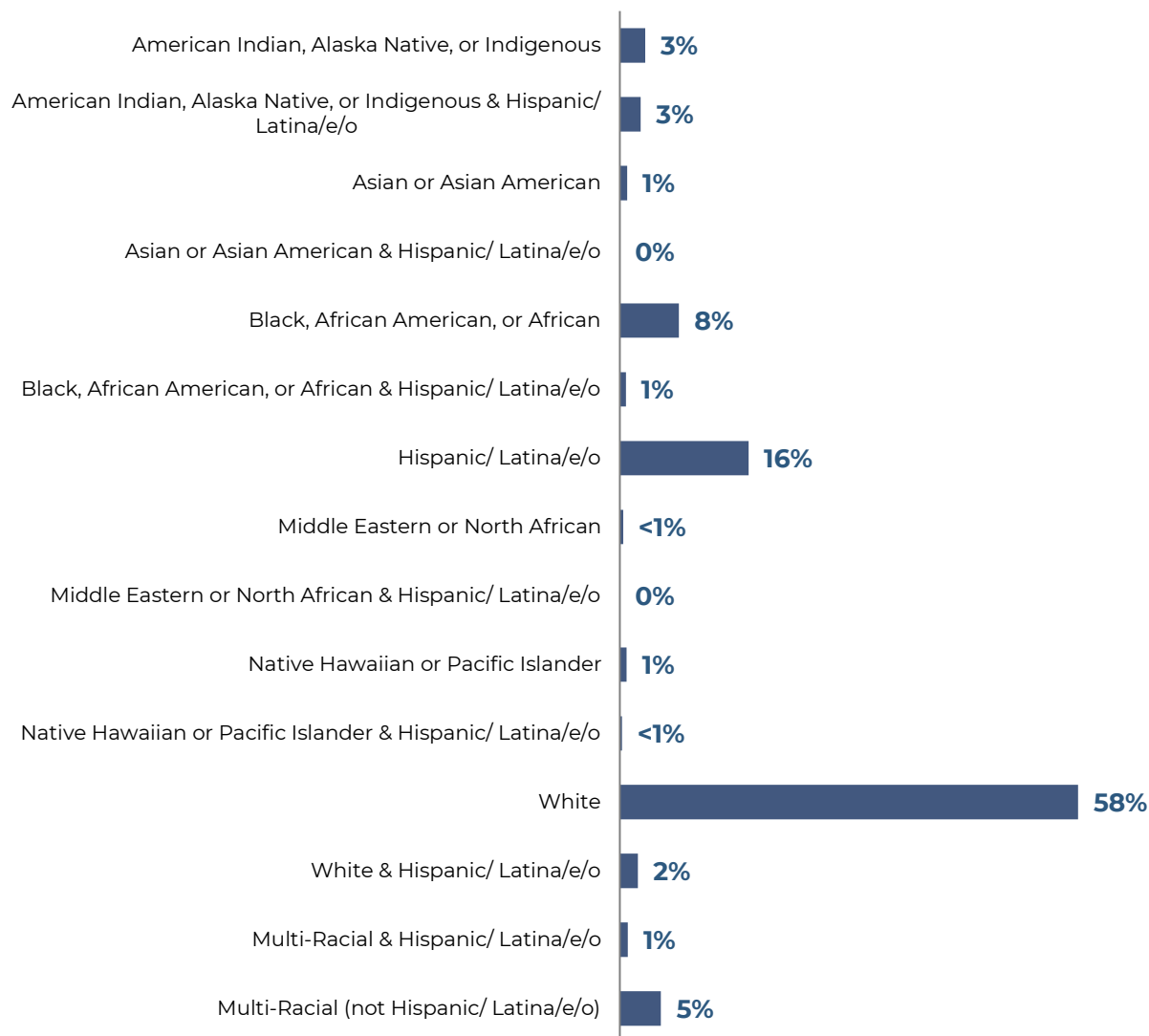


Figure 5: Total Homeless Census Population, by Race



2026 N = 1,951

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



HOMELESS SURVEY FINDINGS

This section provides an overview of the findings generated from the survey component of the 2026 Sonoma County Homeless Point-in-Time Census and Survey. Surveys were administered to a randomized sample of homeless individuals between February 6 and March 27, 2026.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Sonoma County, Respondents were asked basic demographic questions including age, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity.

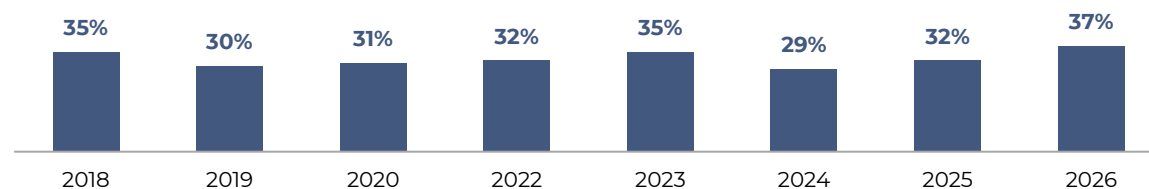
Based on a Point-in-Time Count (PIT) of 1,951 homeless persons, with a randomized survey sampling process, these 276 valid surveys would represent a confidence interval of +/- 5% with a 95% confidence level when generalizing the results of the survey to the entire estimated population of homeless individuals in Sonoma County. In other words, if the survey were conducted again, we can be 95% certain that the results would be within 5 percentage points of the current results.

In order to respect respondent privacy and to ensure the safety and comfort of those who participated, respondents were not required to complete all survey questions though they were asked to be generally responsive to all questions. Missing values were intentionally omitted from the survey results. Therefore, the total number of respondents for each question will not always equal the total number of surveys conducted. For more information regarding the survey methodology, please see [Appendix A: Methodology](#).

DURATION AND RECURRENCE OF HOMELESSNESS

Unstable living conditions, poverty, housing scarcity, and many other issues often lead to individuals falling in and out of homelessness. For many, the experience of homelessness is part of a long and recurring history of housing instability.

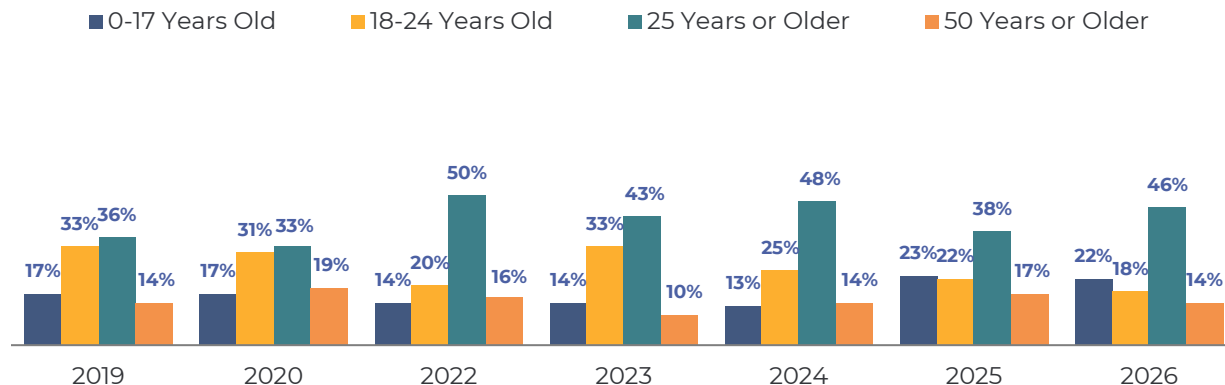
Figure 6: First Time Experiencing Homelessness (Respondents Answering “Yes”)



2018 N = 519; 2019 N = 498; 2020 N = 444; 2022 N = 385; 2023 N = 442; 2024 N = 361; 2025 N = 363; 2026 N = 254

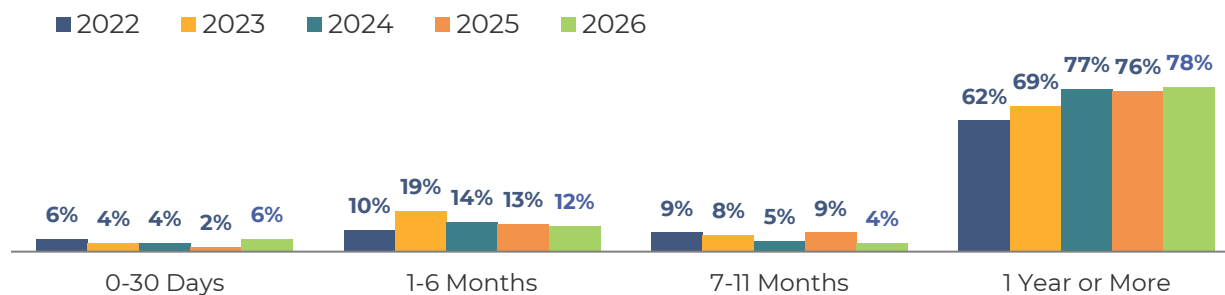
In an effort to better understand the experiences and age distribution of those experiencing homelessness, respondents were asked how old they were the first time they experienced homelessness.

Figure 7: Age at First Experience of Homelessness



2019 N = 511; 2020 N = 435; 2022 N = 413; 2023 N = 440; 2024 N = 354; 2025 N = 361; 2026 N = 265

Figure 8: Length of Current Episode of Homelessness



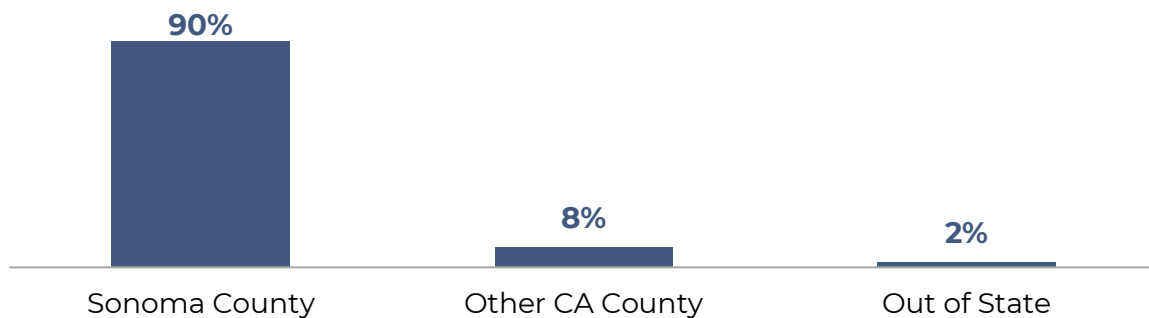
2022 N = 420; 2023 N = 441; 2024 N = 358; 2025 N = 361; 2026 N = 257



LIVING ACCOMMODATIONS

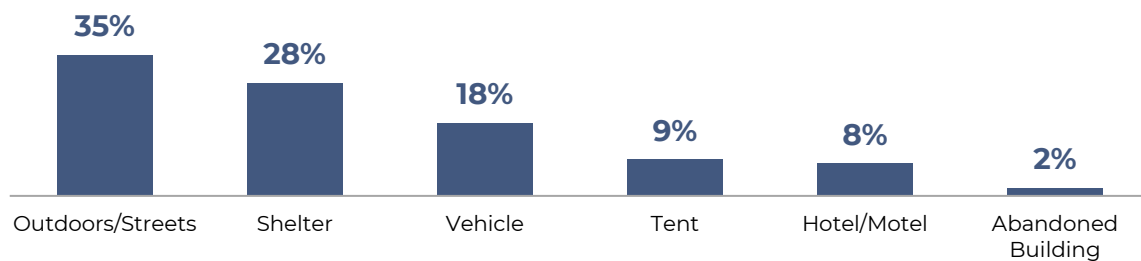
Where individuals lived prior to experiencing homelessness and where they have lived since impacts the way they seek services, as well as their ability to access support from friends or family. Previous circumstances can also point to gaps in the system of care and to opportunities for systemic improvement and homelessness prevention. Survey respondents reported many different living accommodations prior to experiencing homelessness, although most lived in or around Sonoma County with friends, family, or on their own or with a partner in a home or apartment.

Figure 9: Place of Residence at Time of Housing Loss



2026 N = 261

Figure 10: Total Homeless Population Surveyed, by Sleeping Accommodation



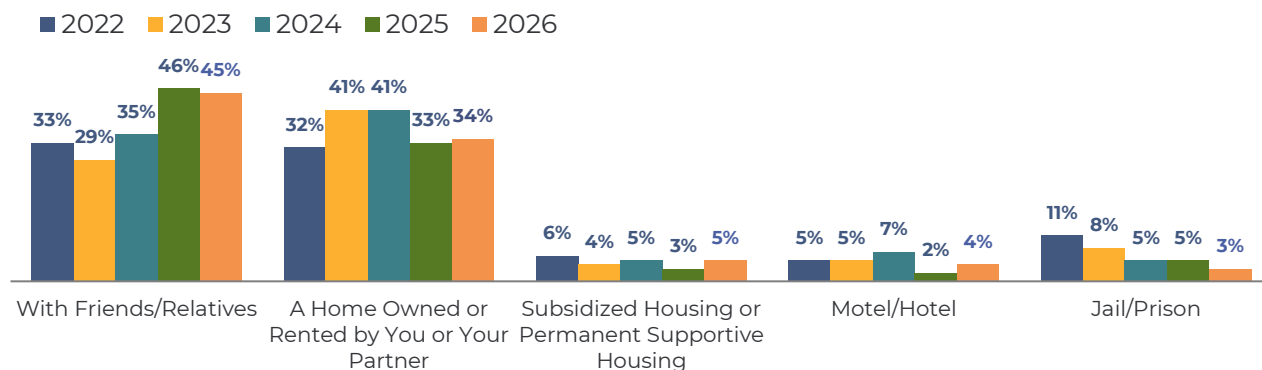
2026 N = 268



PRIOR LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Similar to our respondents' previous place of residence, the type of living arrangements maintained by individuals before experiencing homelessness can influence knowledge of and access to various types of homeless prevention services available to help individuals maintain their housing.

Figure 11: Living Arrangements Immediately Prior to Becoming Homeless This Time (Top Five Responses)

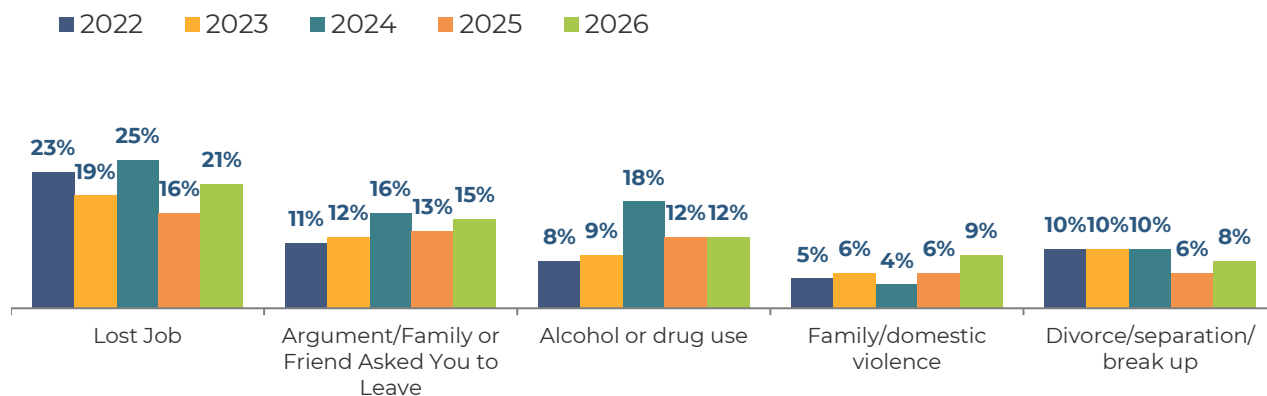


2022 N = 396; 2023 N = 426; 2024 N = 344; 2025 N = 348; 2026 N = 253

PRIMARY CAUSE OF HOMELESSNESS

The primary cause of a person or family's inability to obtain or retain housing is often difficult to pinpoint, as it is often the result of multiple, inter-related causes. An inability to secure adequate housing can also lead to or result in an inability to address other basic needs, such as healthcare and adequate nutrition. In our survey question, respondents were asked to list their self-assessed primary cause of the experience of homelessness.

Figure 12: Primary Cause of Homelessness (Top Five Responses) *

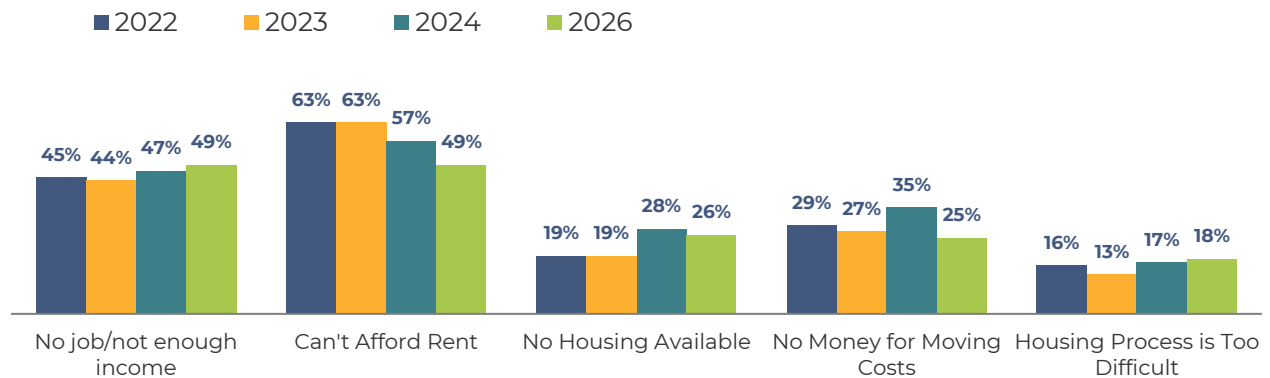


* Note: Beginning in 2025, respondents were asked only to shade one
 2022 N = 397 respondents offering 475 responses; 2023 N = 433 respondents offering 576 responses; 2024 N = 350 respondents offering 548 responses; 2025 N = 325; 2026 N = 229

OBSTACLES TO OBTAINING PERMANENT HOUSING

When asked about the obstacles to permanent housing, nearly half (49%) of respondents selected a lack of job/income or an inability to afford rent. A lack of available housing was the third most common response, with 26% of respondents selecting that response.

Figure 13: Obstacles to Obtaining Permanent Housing (Top Five Responses) *



2022 N = 404 respondents giving 1,145 responses; 2023 N = 428 respondents offering 1,152 responses; 2024 N = 353 respondents offering 1,061 responses; 2026 N = 274 respondents offering 770 responses

*Note: 2025 data are excluded from this chart because the survey used a single-response format that year, whereas the comparison years used a select-all-that-apply format, limiting direct comparability.



HOUSING TYPE DESIRED

Survey respondents overwhelmingly most desired housing without any sort of preconditions, were it to be offered to them.

Figure 14: Survey Respondents by Housing Type Desired



2026 N = 276

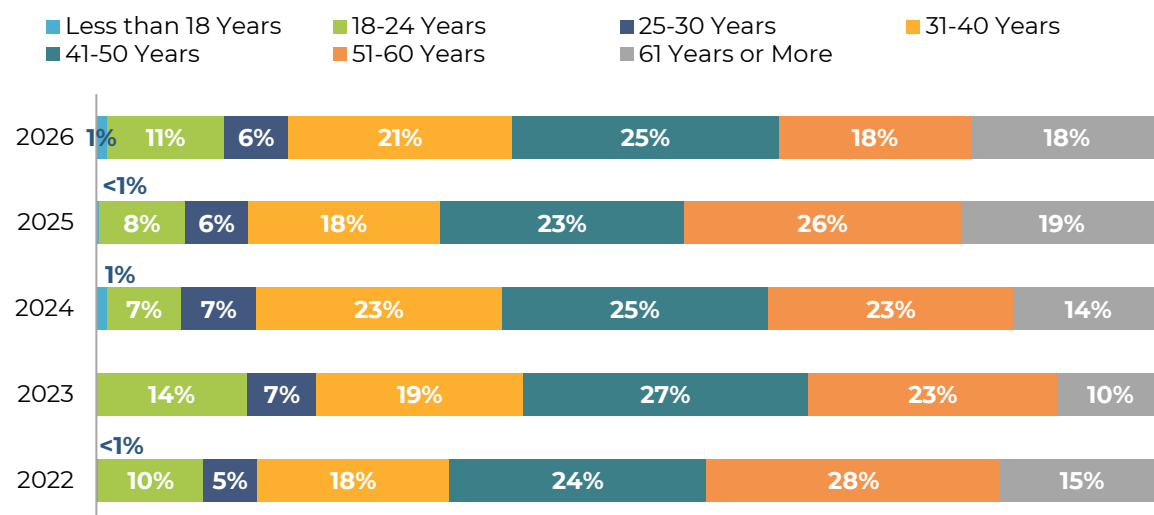
* Note: Beginning in 2025, respondents were asked only to shade one

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

AGE

Over three-fifths of survey respondents were over the age of 41. The age group with the most respondents was 41-50 years old.

Figure 15: Survey Respondents by Age



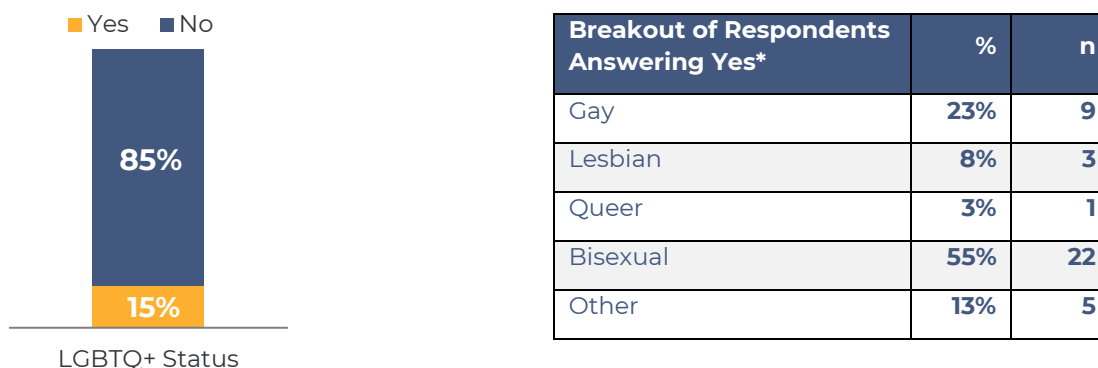
2022 N = 428; 2023 N = 445; 2024 N = 367; 2025 N = 367; 2026 N = 274

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

LGBTQ+ STATUS

Persons identifying as LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, gender non-conforming, transgender, or queer) are overrepresented in the population experiencing homelessness when compared to the general population: as of 2018, 5.6% of the US population Identified as LGBT.¹ According to the 2026 Sonoma Homeless Survey, fifteen percent (15%) of survey respondents identified as LGBTQ, up from 13% in 2025.

Figure 16: Survey Respondents by LGBTQ+ Status



LGBTQ 2026 N = 262

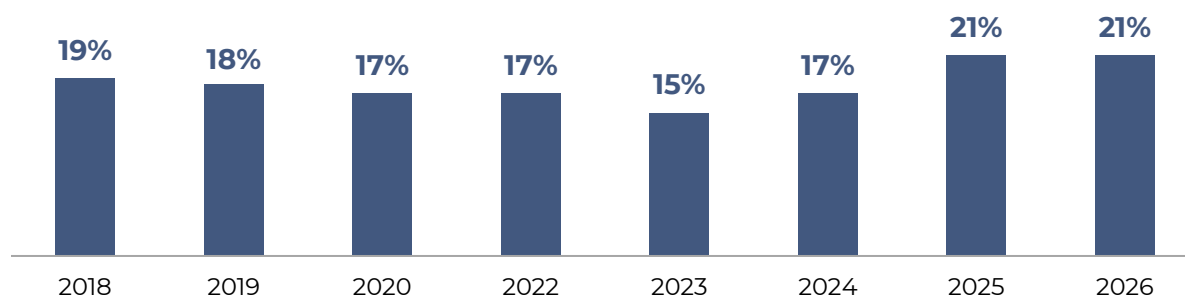
Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.

* Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

FOSTER CARE

In California, it is estimated that 24% of foster youth experience homelessness after exiting care.² In 2026, 21% of survey respondents reported a history of foster care, similar to previous years.

Figure 17: Survey Respondents that Reported a History of Foster Care



2018 N = 510; 2019 N = 504; 2020 N = 423; 2022 N = 408; 2023 N = 425; 2024 N = 338; 2025 N = 368; 2026 N = 265

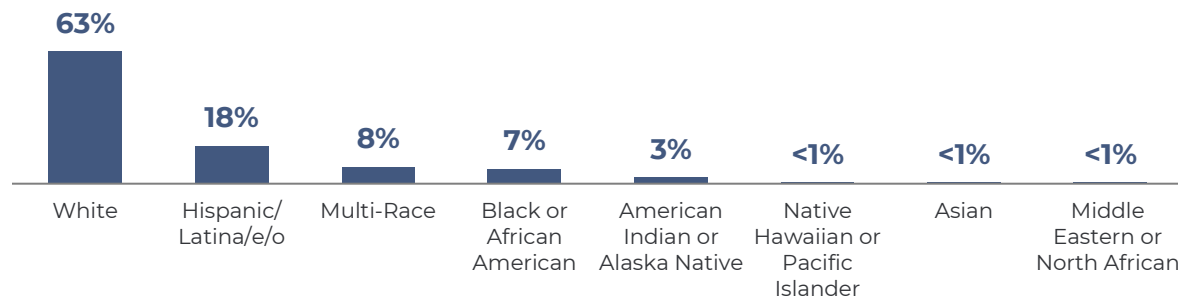
¹ Jones, J. (2021). LGBT Identification Rises to 5.6% in Latest U.S. Estimate. Gallup. Retrieved 2023 from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/329708/lgbt-identification-rises-latest-estimate.aspx>

² Broslawski, A. (2021). Foster Youth and Homelessness. Homeless Policy Research Institute. Retrieved 2023 from https://socialinnovation.usc.edu/homeless_research/foster-youth-and-homelessness/

RACE/ETHNICITY

Nearly two thirds (63%) of surey respondents identified as White in 2026. Latinos were the second most common at 18%, followed by persons identifying as multi-racial (8%).

Figure 18: Survey Respondents by Race/Ethnicity



2026 N = 268

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding



GOVERNMENT SERVICES AND ASSISTANCE

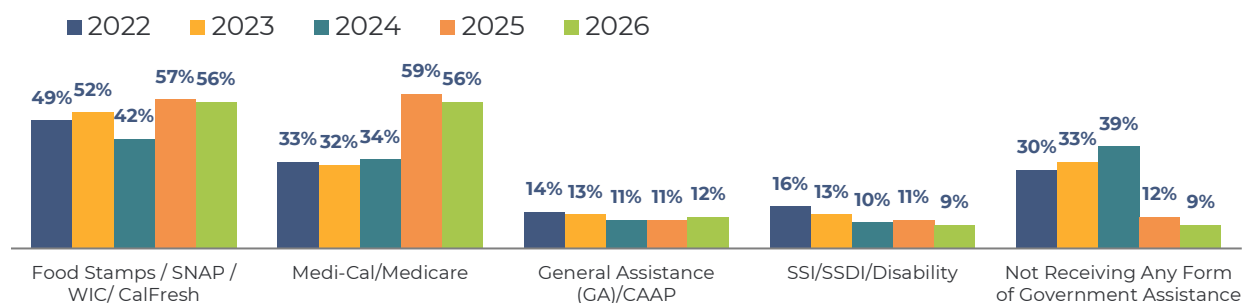
Sonoma County provides services and assistance to those currently experiencing homelessness through federal and local programs. However, many individuals and families do not apply for services, as many are not interested in receiving assistance, or believe that they are ineligible for assistance.

There are various forms of government assistance available to individuals experiencing homelessness, though usage of these supports is impacted by knowledge of services available, understanding of eligibility requirements, and perceived stigma of receiving governmental assistance, amongst others.

Fifty-six percent (56%) of survey respondents were receiving food stamps, SNAP, WIC, and/or CalFresh assistance, nearly the same as in 2025. Nine percent of respondents reported not receiving any form of governmental assistance, continuing a decrease from 39% in 2024.

When asked why they weren't receiving any governmental assistance, 12% of respondents stated that they applied and are waiting on a response, which represents a decrease from 21% in 2025.

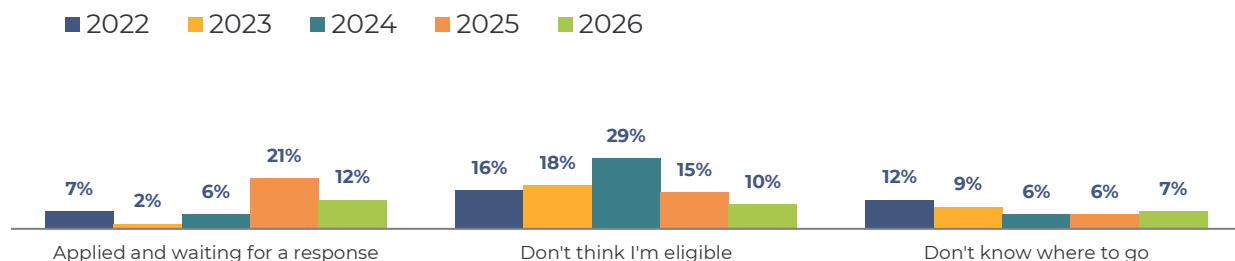
Figure 19: Government Assistance Received (Top Five Responses)



2022 N = 397 respondents offering 631 responses; 2023 N = 445 respondents offering 686 responses; 2024 N = 359 respondents offering 533 responses; 2025 N = 372 respondents offering 615 responses; 2026 N = 320 respondents offering 539 responses

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

Figure 20: Reasons for Not Receiving Government Assistance (Top Three Responses)

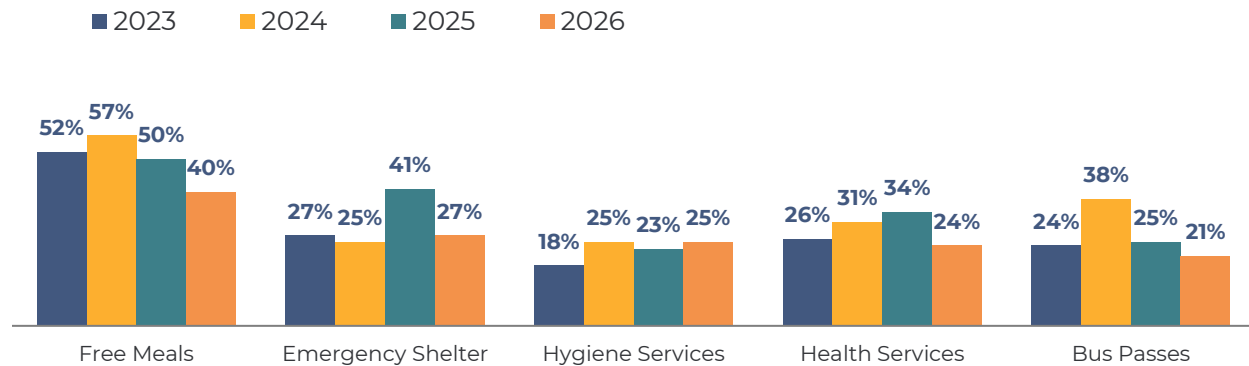


2022 N = 276 respondents offering 422 responses; 2023 N = 128 respondents offering 193 responses; 2024 N = 104 respondents offering 162 responses; 2025 N = 223 respondents offering 290 responses; 2026 N = 324 respondents offering 332 responses

SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

In addition to government assistance, there are numerous community-based services and programs made available to individuals experiencing homelessness. These services range from day shelters and meal programs to job training and healthcare. While free meals were the most commonly used service used, it continued a downward trend from 57% two years ago to 40% this year.

Figure 21: Service Usage (Top Five Responses)



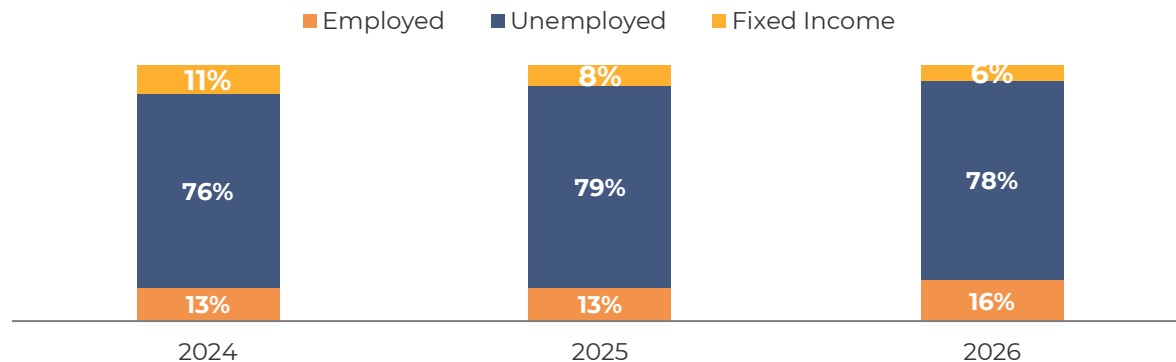
2023 N = 411 respondents offering 956 responses 2024 N = 319 respondents offering 833 responses; 2025 N = 372 respondents offering 950 responses; 2026 N = 324 respondents offering 672 responses
Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.

EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

Just over three-quarters (78%) of survey respondents reported being unemployed. Many were receiving an income, either public or private. Despite this income, data suggest that employment and income were not enough to meet basic needs.

Sixteen percent (16%) of survey respondents reported they were at least somewhat employed. This includes seasonal, part-time, and full-time employment.

Figure 22: Survey Respondents by Employment and Income



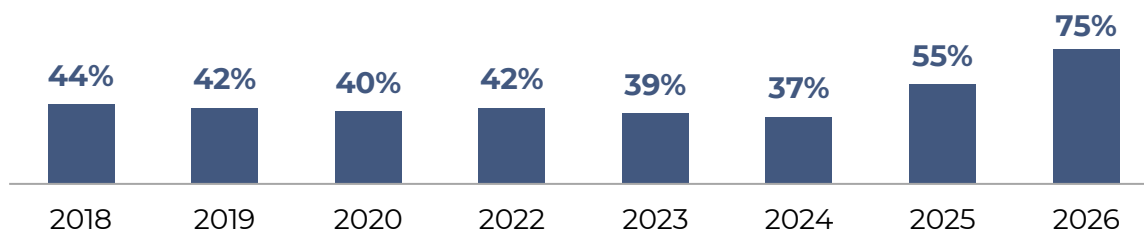
2024 Employment status N = 340; 2025 Employment status N = 354; 2026 Employment status N = 256

HEALTH

There are two main focuses when discussing the health of survey respondents. All survey respondents are asked if they are experiencing a range of health conditions. Those who indicate they are experiencing at least one of those conditions are asked follow-up questions to determine if they meet the level of HUD-disabling conditions, health conditions that prevent them from maintaining housing and/or a job.

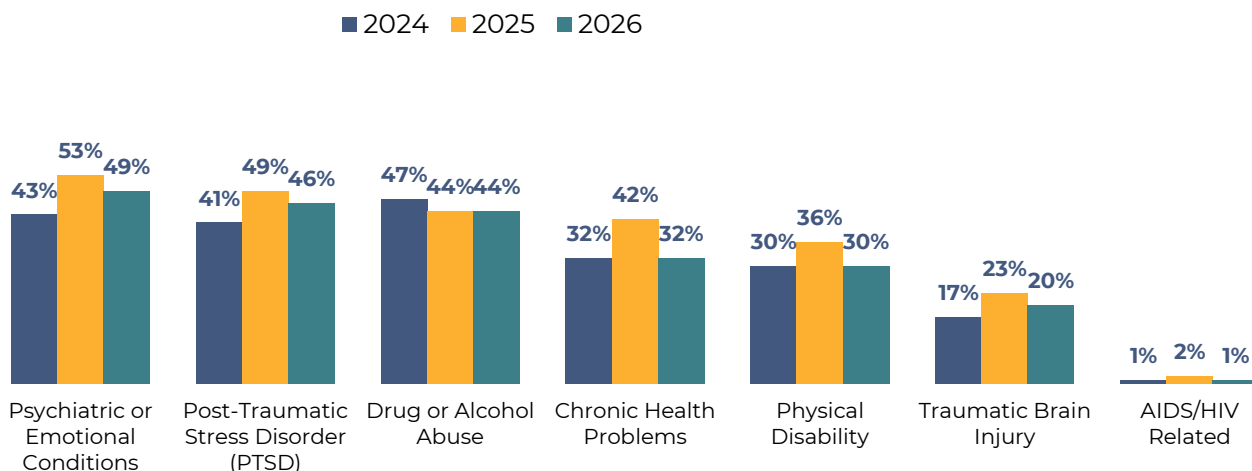
Seventy-five percent (75%) of survey respondents reported suffering from at least one HUD-disabling condition. The most common health conditions experienced by respondents were psychiatric problems (49%) and PTSD (46%), followed by drug or alcohol abuse (44%).

Figure 23: HUD Disabling Conditions



2018 N = 515; 2019 N = 520; 2020 N = 478; 2022 N = 451; 2023 N = 445; 2024 N = 361; 2025 N = 372; 2026 N = 269

Figure 24: Health Conditions



2024 N = 307 – 315; 2025 N = 354 – 361; 2026 N = 249-258

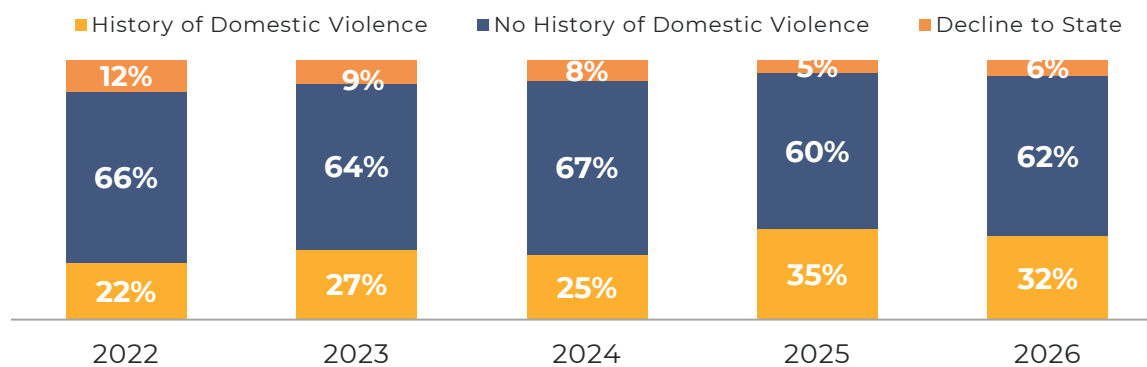
Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.

DOMESTIC PARTNER VIOLENCE OR ABUSE

Histories of domestic violence and partner abuse are prevalent among individuals experiencing homelessness and is often the primary cause of homelessness for many. Survivors often lack the financial resources required for housing.

When asked if they had experienced domestic violence in their past, 32% of respondents reported having such a past. This represents a slight decrease from 2026 (35%). Eight percent of respondents reported that they were currently experiencing domestic violence.

Figure 25: History of Domestic Violence

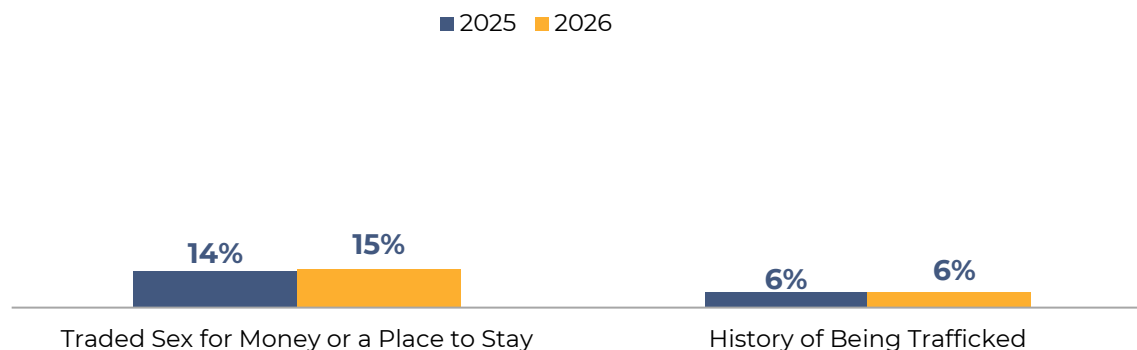


2022 N = 403; 2023 N = 417; 2024 N = 344; 2025 N = 372; 2026 N = 269
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

SEX TRADE INVOLVEMENT

Due to their vulnerable circumstances and precarious access to basic needs, many of those experiencing homelessness have a history of being involved in the sex trade. Fifteen percent of survey respondents reported trading sex for money or a place to stay in the past, and 6% reported being trafficked in the past.

Figure 26: Sex Trade Involvement



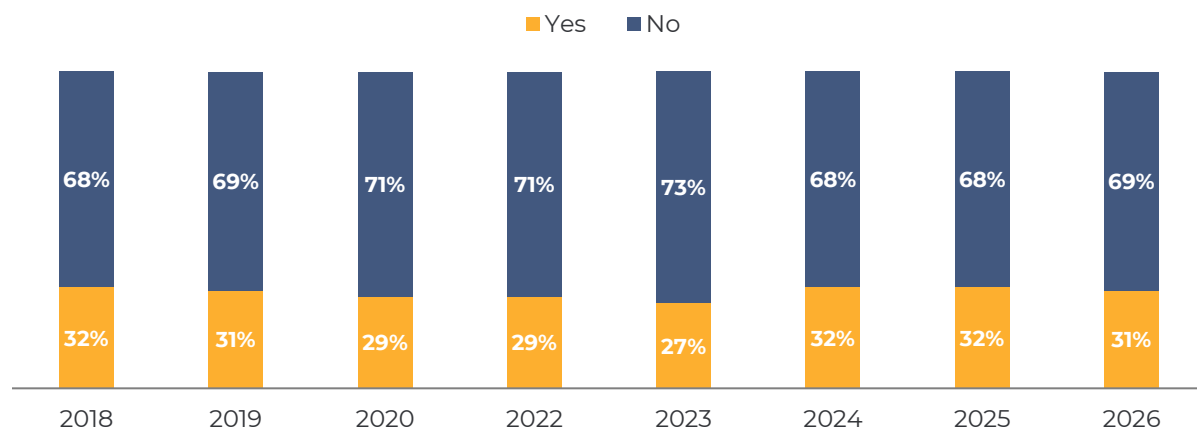
2025 Trading Sex for Money or a Place to Stay N = 360, History of Being Trafficked N = 359
2026 Trading Sex for Money or a Place to Stay N = 238, History of Being Trafficked N = 247

CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Individuals without stable housing are at greater risk of criminal justice system involvement, particularly those with mental health issues, veterans, and youth.

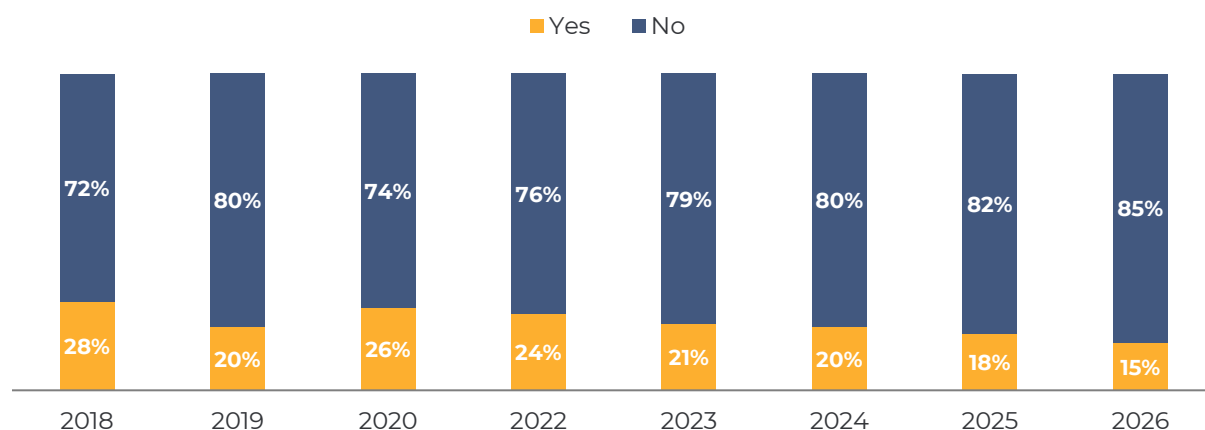
Similar to previous years, 31% of respondents reported spending a night in jail in the 12 months prior to taking the survey. Fifteen percent of respondents reported being on parole or probation at the time of the survey.

Figure 27: Spent a Night in Jail or Prison in the Last 12 Months



2018 N = 500; 2019 N = 505; 2020 N = 427; 2022 N = 391; 2023 N = 409; 2024 N = 330; 2025 N = 364; 2026 N = 258
Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100%

Figure 28: Currently On Probation or Parole



2018 N = 488; 2019 N = 489; 2020 N = 427; 2022 N = 391; 2023 N = 420; 2024 N = 324; 2025 N = 367; 2026 N = 263

HUD DEFINED SPECIAL POPULATIONS

In order to adequately address the diversity within the population experiencing homelessness, the federal government identifies four subpopulations with particular challenges or needs, including:

- Chronic homelessness among people with disabilities;
- Veterans;
- Families with children; and
- Unaccompanied children (<18) and transition-age (18-24) youth.

Consequently, these subpopulations represent important reportable indicators for measuring local progress toward ending homelessness.

The following sections examine each of these four subpopulations, identifying the number and characteristics of individuals included in the 2026 Sonoma County Homeless Point-in-Time Census and Survey.

HOUSEHOLDS EXPERIENCING CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development defines a chronically homeless individual as someone who has experienced homelessness for a year or longer—or who has experienced at least four episodes of homelessness totaling 12 months in the last three years—and also has a disabling condition that prevents them from maintaining work or housing. This definition applies to individuals as well as heads of household who meet the definition.

The chronically homeless population represents one of the most vulnerable populations on the street; the mortality rate for those experiencing homelessness in high income countries is three-to-eleven times higher than that of the general population.³

In 2026, the population of persons experiencing homelessness rose to 818 persons, representing 42% of the overall population experiencing homelessness.



³ Effects of Housing First approaches on health and well-being of adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness: systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. (2019). *J Epidemiol Community Health*. Retrieved 2023 from chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://jech.bmj.com/content/jech/73/5/379.full.pdf

Figure 29: Total Number of Persons Experiencing Chronic Homelessness

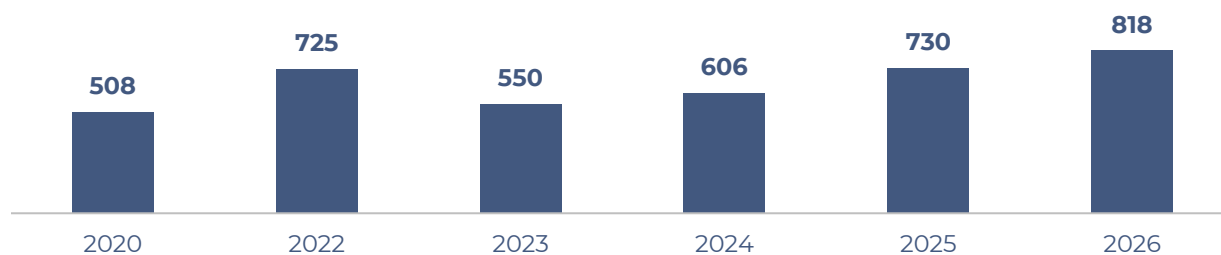


Figure 30: Chronically Homeless Census Population by Shelter Status

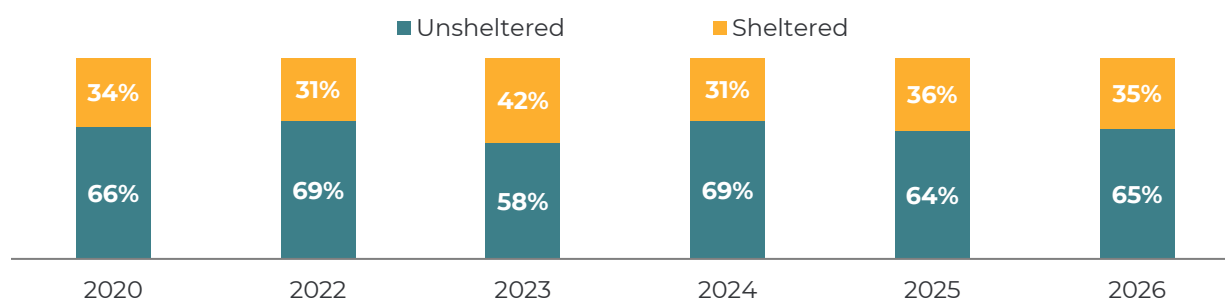
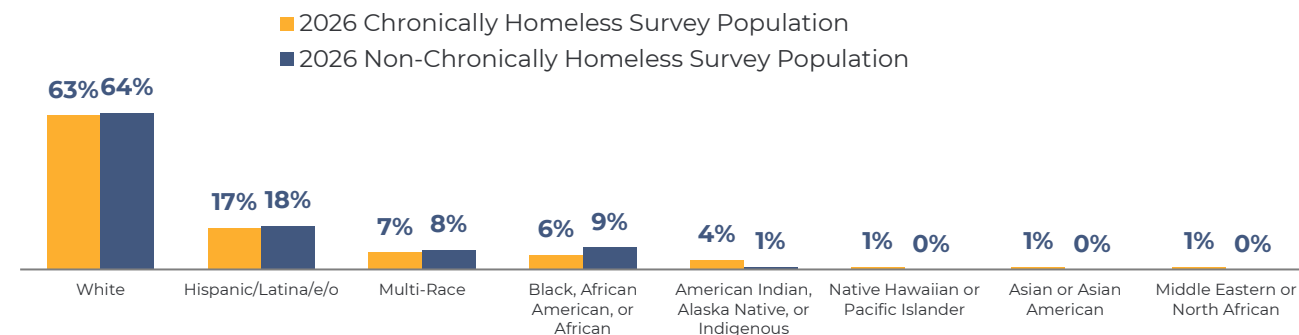


Figure 31: Number of Chronically Homeless Individuals by Shelter Status

	2020	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2025-26 % Change
Sheltered	174	224	231	189	265	290	9%
Unsheltered	334	501	319	417	465	528	14%
Total	508	725	550	606	730	818	12%

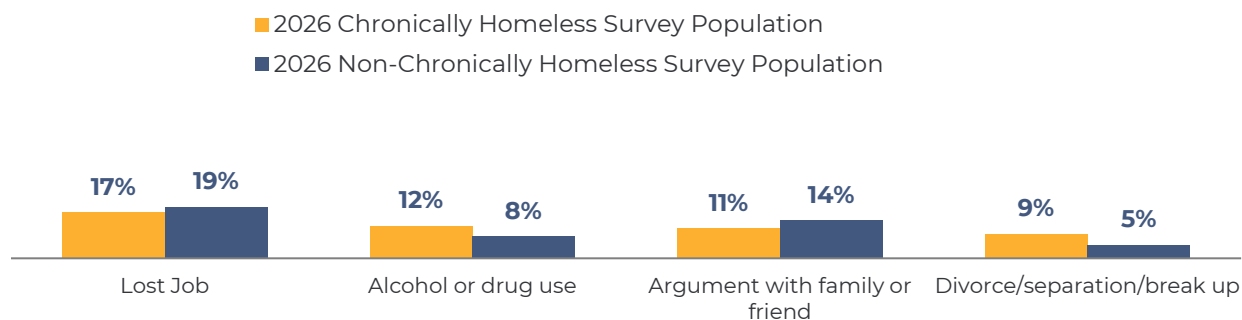
Figure 32: Chronically Homeless Survey Population by Race and Ethnicity



2026 Chronically Homeless Survey Population N = 105; 2026 Non-Chronically Homeless Survey Population N = 151

The most common cause of homelessness amongst those experiencing chronic homelessness was loss of employment (17%), followed by alcohol or drug use (12%).

Figure 33: Primary Cause of Homelessness, Chronic and Non-Chronic Comparison (Top Four Responses)



2026 Chronically Homeless Survey Population N = 111; 2026 Non-Chronically Homeless Survey Population N = 153

* Note: Beginning in 2025, respondents were asked only to shade one

VETERANS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Many U.S. veterans experience conditions that place them at increased risk for homelessness. Veterans experience higher rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), sexual assault, and substance abuse. Veterans experiencing homelessness are more likely to live on the street than in shelters, and often remain on the street for extended periods of time.

The number of veterans experiencing homelessness increased very slightly, moving from 99 to 104 veterans. Sixty three percent were living unsheltered, continuing a downward trend since 2024.

Figure 34: Total Number of Veterans Experiencing Homelessness

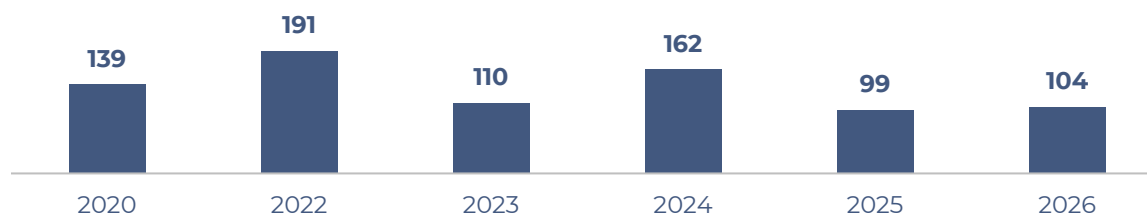


Figure 35: Veterans Experiencing Homelessness by Shelter Status

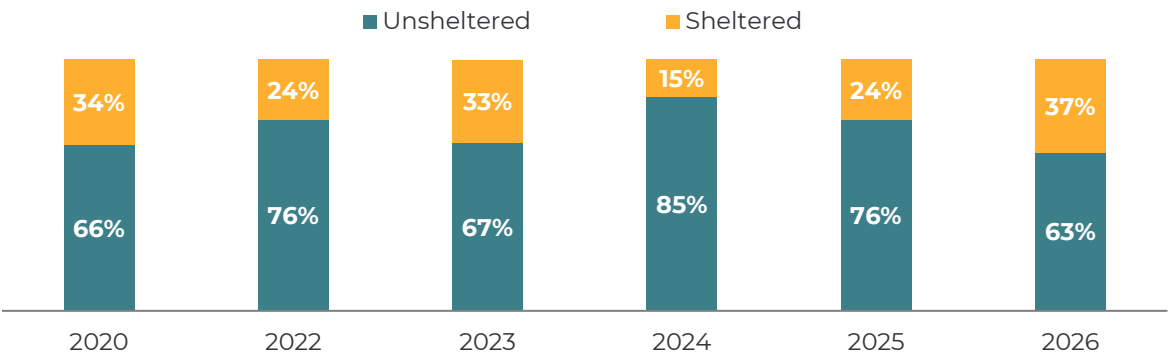
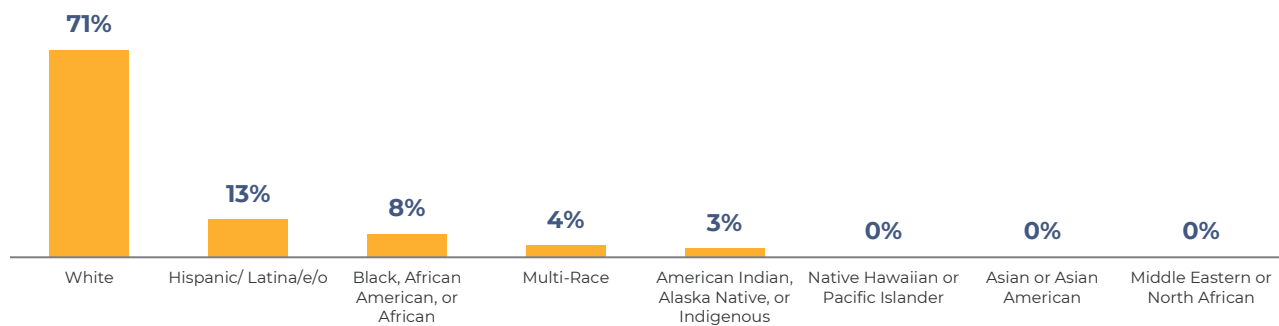


Figure 36: Number of Veterans Experiencing Homelessness by Shelter Status

	2020	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2025-26 % Change
Sheltered	47	45	36	24	24	38	58%
Unsheltered	92	146	74	138	75	66	-12%
Total	139	191	110	162	99	104	5%



Figure 37: Veterans Experiencing Homelessness by Race/Ethnicity



2026 Homeless Veterans Population N =104
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.



FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

National data from 2020 suggest that 30% of all people experiencing homelessness are persons in families.⁴ Very few families experiencing homelessness are unsheltered, as public shelters serve more than 90% of homeless families in the United States; this is a significantly higher proportion of the population compared to other subpopulations, including unaccompanied children and transition-age youth. Data on families experiencing homelessness suggests that their circumstances are not much different from other families in poverty.

Nationally, the majority of homeless families are households headed by single women and families with children under the age of eighteen.⁵ Children in families experiencing homelessness have an increased incidence of illness and are more likely to have emotional and behavioral problems than children with stable living accommodations.⁶

Families experiencing homelessness can be difficult to identify and even harder to survey. Because of the wide array of supports available to them, families experiencing unsheltered homelessness frequently receive the support necessary to enter shelters or other housing options. This can lead to difficulties in surveying large numbers of families experiencing homelessness, resulting in survey data that may fluctuate more than that of other subpopulations. For example, while the local Point-in-Time (PIT) count captures families who meet HUD's definition of literal homelessness, local school districts identified 1,753 children experiencing homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act, which uses a broader definition that includes families living doubled up or in temporary arrangements.⁷ While they're not included in the overall number, they still contribute to the overall understanding of children experiencing homeless in Sonoma County. This contrast underscores the challenges in fully capturing the scope of family homelessness. Please use caution when interpreting these results, as finding families experiencing unsheltered homelessness is difficult for PIT teams, while schools have a much greater understanding of their students and their families. Sonoma County is committed to collaborating with the Sonoma County Office of Education to ensure a more complete and accurate understanding of the prevalence of homelessness and the needs of those, especially families, who experience it.

In 2026, there were 42 families with 135 family members in them experiencing homelessness in Sonoma County, a decrease from 78 families with 209 family members experiencing homelessness in 2025. All families were sheltered.

4 U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2020). The 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. Retrieved 2023 from <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2020-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

5 U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2020). The 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. Retrieved 2023 from <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2020-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

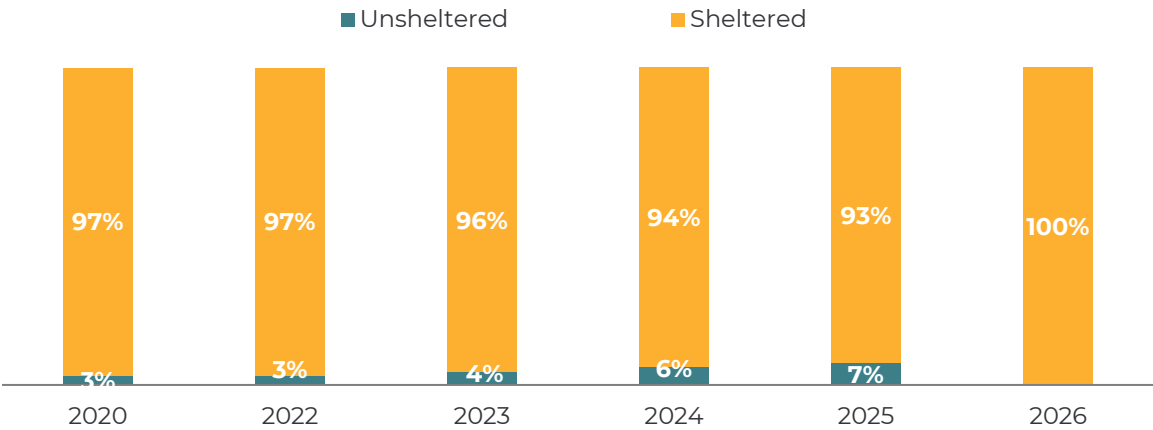
6 U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. (2015). Opening Doors. Retrieved 2015 from <http://www.usich.gov/>

7 Data Quest. California Department of Education (2024). Homeless Student Enrollment by Dwelling Type. Retrieved 2025 from <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest>

Figure 39: Total Families with Children Experiencing Homelessness, Census Population



Figure 40: All Individuals in Families with Children Experiencing Homelessness by Shelter Status



	2020	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2025-26 % Change
Sheltered	77	46	59	53	73	42	-42%
Unsheltered	3	2	3	4	5	0	-
Total	80	48	62	57	78	42	-46%

Note: Percent change is not presented due to the small number of individuals.



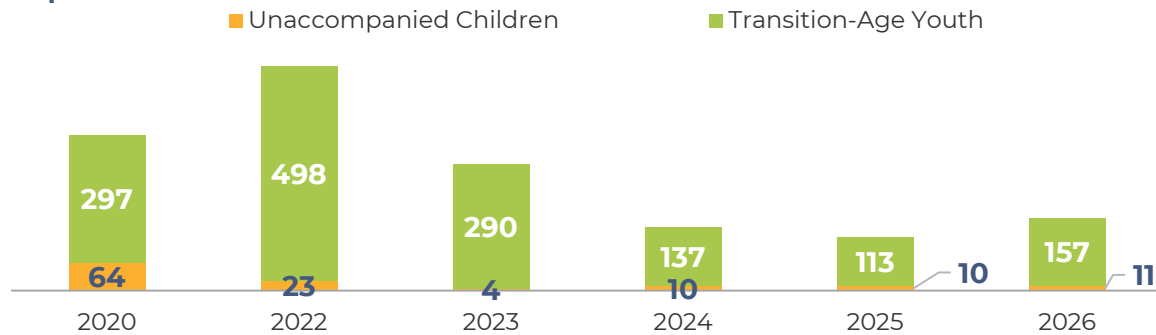
UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN AND TRANSITION-AGE YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Young people experiencing homelessness have a harder time accessing services, including shelter, medical care, and employment. Some reasons include the stigma of their housing situation, lack of knowledge of available resources, and a dearth of services targeted to young people.⁸

Due to the especially challenging outreach and access efforts necessary to profile the nature of youth homelessness, limited data are available on unaccompanied children and transition-age youth experiencing homelessness.

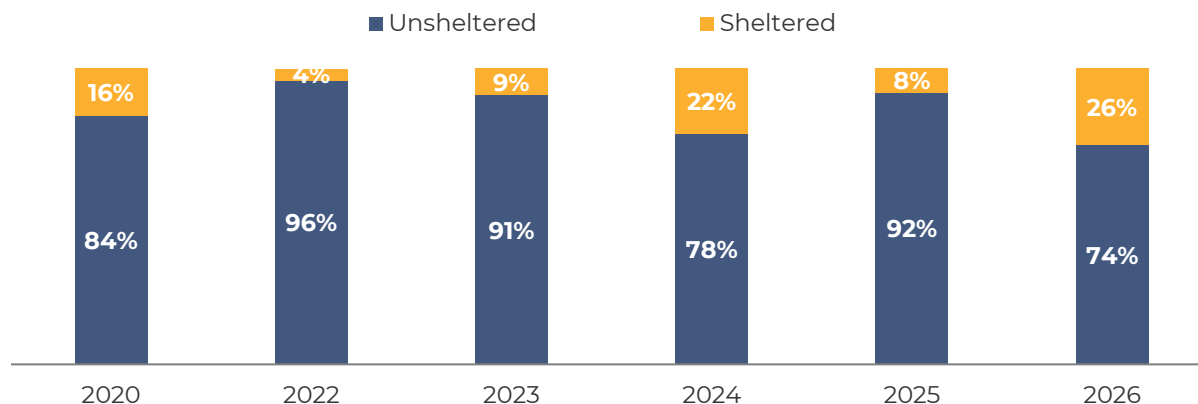
In Sonoma County, the number of children and transition-age youth increased from 2025, up to 168 persons.

Figure 42: Total Unaccompanied Homeless Children and Transition-Age Youth Count Population



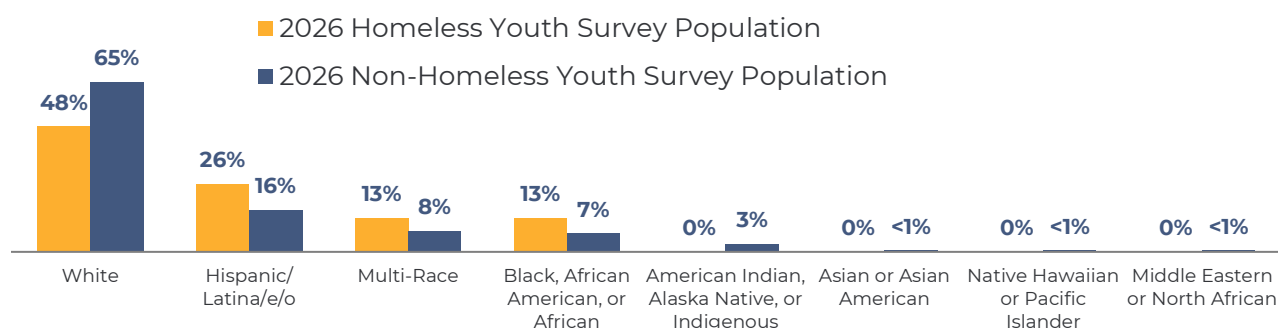
⁸ National Alliance to End Homelessness. (2022). Retrieved 2023
<https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/who-experiences-homelessness/youth/>

Figure 43: Unaccompanied Children and Transition-Age Youth by Shelter Status



	2020	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2025-26 % Change
Sheltered	57	20	26	32	10	44	340%
Unsheltered	304	501	268	115	113	124	10%
Total	361	521	294	147	123	168	37%

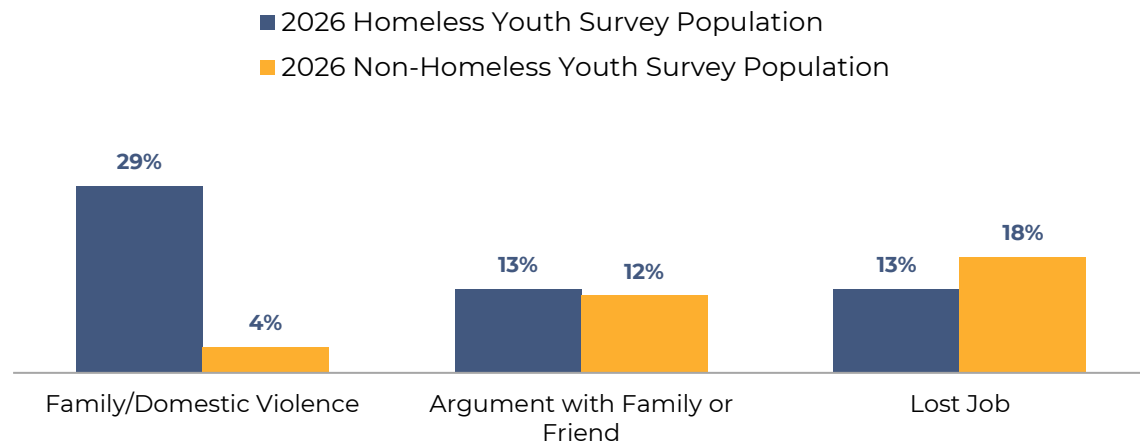
Figure 44: Unaccompanied Children and Transition-Age Youth by Race/Ethnicity



2026 Homeless Youth Survey N = 31; 2026 Non-Homeless Youth Survey N = 232

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

Figure 45: Primary Cause of Homelessness Among Unaccompanied Children and Transition-Age Youth



2026 Homeless Youth Survey Population N = 31; 2026 Non-Homeless Youth Survey Population N = 238
Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.



CONCLUSION

The 2026 Sonoma County Homeless Count and Survey was performed using HUD-recommended practices for counting and surveying the homeless population. The 2026 Point-in-Time Count identified 1,951 persons experiencing homelessness in Sonoma County. This represents a decrease of less than 1% from the count conducted in 2025.

The 2026 Sonoma County Homeless Count and Survey revealed a diverse population with many different trends and needs. There are many valuable insights into the Sonoma County homeless population from the data collected in this report, including:

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

- The sheltered count increased by three percent and the unsheltered count decreased by two percent.
- Ninety percent of those experiencing homelessness entered into homelessness while living in Sonoma County.
- Forty-five percent of survey respondents experienced homelessness for the first time before age 25. Seventeen percent reported experiencing homelessness for the first time at age 50 or older.
- Sixteen percent of survey respondents cited job loss as the primary cause of their homelessness. Eighteen percent cited the complexity of the housing process as a barrier to securing permanent housing, while another fourteen percent pointed to a lack of employment or insufficient income as an obstacle.
- Ninety-seven percent of respondents who were unsheltered or staying in emergency shelter would move into housing if it were available. Sixty-six percent preferred housing without preconditions.

CONCLUSIONS BY SUBPOPULATIONS

Chronically Homeless

- The count of chronically homeless individuals increased 12% from 2025.

Veterans

- The number of veterans experiencing homelessness in Sonoma County rose very slightly from 2025, increasing by 5 persons.

Families with Children

- The number of families experiencing homelessness fell from 78 families in 2025 to 42 in 2026.

Unaccompanied Children and Transition-Age youth

- There were 11 unaccompanied children experiencing homelessness, and 157 transition age youth.

In summary, there are still many challenges to overcome in achieving the goal of eliminating homelessness in Sonoma County and in helping homeless individuals and families access necessary services and support. There are also significant successes, including a decrease in persons in families experiencing homelessness. While there are areas that still need more attention, the successes show a path toward future reductions.

CLOSING

The 2026 Sonoma County Homeless Count and Survey provides valid and useful data that can help create a more comprehensive profile of those experiencing homelessness. The dissemination and evaluation of this effort will help the Sonoma County Homeless Coalition and all Sonoma County stakeholders continue to produce and refine constructive and innovative solutions to end homelessness and make it a rare, brief, and one-time occurrence. Through innovative and effective housing programs and services, Sonoma County remains committed to moving homeless persons into permanent housing.

Data presented in the 2026 Sonoma County Homeless Count and Survey report fulfills the Sonoma County Homeless Coalition's federal reporting requirements for Continuums of Care, and will continue to inform additional outreach, service planning, and policy decision-making by local planning bodies over the next year as Sonoma County continues to address homelessness.

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

OVERVIEW

The 2026 County of Sonoma Homeless Census and Survey was performed using HUD-recommended practices and using HUD's definition of homelessness. The primary purpose was to produce a point-in-time estimate of individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Sonoma County, a region which covers approximately 1,768 square miles. The results of several components were combined to produce the total estimated number of persons experiencing homelessness on a given night. A detailed description of these components follows.

COMPONENTS OF THE HOMELESS CENSUS & SURVEY

The 2026 Point-in-Time Census and Survey had four components:

- **General Street Count:** A morning count of unsheltered homeless individuals and families on January 30, 2026. This occurred from approximately 5:00 AM to 10:00 AM and included those sleeping outdoors on the street; at bus and train stations; in parks, tents, and other makeshift shelters; and in vehicles and abandoned properties. The general street count was designed to take place before shelter occupants were released. In areas with shelters, the immediate area surrounding the shelter was prioritized to eliminate potential double counting of individuals.
- **General Shelter Count:** A nighttime count of individuals and families experiencing homelessness staying at publicly- and privately-operated shelters on the night of January 29, 2026. This included those who occupied emergency shelters, transitional housing, and safe havens. All shelter data were gathered either from Sonoma County's Homeless Management Information System or directly from the shelter.
- **Targeted Street Count of Unaccompanied Children and Young Adults:** An afternoon count of unsheltered youth and young adults on January 30, 2026. This occurred from approximately 3:00 PM to 7:00 PM and was led by special youth teams who canvassed specific areas where youth and young adults were known to congregate. Upon completion, data from this targeted count was carefully reviewed against the results from the general street count to ensure that any possible duplicate counts were removed.
- **Homeless Survey:** An in-person interview with sheltered and unsheltered individuals experiencing homelessness conducted by peer surveyors between January 30 and March 17, 2026. Data from the survey was used to refine the Point-in-Time Census estimates and then used to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the demographics and experiences of homeless individuals.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

To ensure the success and integrity of the count, many county and community agencies collaborated on community outreach, volunteer recruitment, logistical plans, methodological decisions, and interagency coordination efforts. Applied Survey Research (ASR) provided technical assistance for these aspects of the planning process. ASR has over 22 years of experience conducting homeless counts and surveys throughout California and across the nation. Their work is featured as a best practice in the HUD publication, *A Guide to Counting Unsheltered Homeless People*, as well as in the Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago publication, *Conducting a Youth Count: A Toolkit*.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Local homeless and housing service providers and advocates were valued partners in the planning and implementation of this count. Thanks to local efforts, the count included enumerators with a diverse range of knowledge, including expertise regarding areas frequented by homeless individuals, individuals living in vehicles, and persons residing in encampments. Community partners were also key in recruiting individuals with lived experience of homelessness to participate in the street count and survey efforts.

STREET COUNT METHODOLOGY

DEFINITION

For the purposes of this study, the HUD definition of unsheltered homeless persons was used:

- *An individual or family with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train stations, airport, or camping ground.*

METHODOLOGICAL IMPROVEMENTS

The 2026 street count methodology followed an established, HUD approved methodology used in the 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025 counts, with the addition of dedicated youth outreach in each of those years. Local homeless and housing service providers and advocates were valued partners in the planning and implementation of this count.

VOLUNTEER AND GUIDE RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

Outreach and program staff did recruitment of persons with lived experience to act as guides, and in some cases embedded reporters, in order to conduct the count in 2026. Homeless guides were paid \$20 for online training as well as \$20 per hour worked on the days of the count.

In order to participate in the count, all volunteers and guides were requested to view a 20-minute training video before the count. Training covered all aspects of the count including:

- definition of homelessness;
- how to identify homeless individuals;
- how to safely and respectfully conduct the count, how to use the smartphone app and also access the smartphone app training video;
- how to use the route maps to ensure the entirety of the assigned area was covered;
- tips to identify vehicles; and other tips to help ensure an accurate and safe count.

SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

Every effort was made to minimize potentially hazardous situations. Law enforcement agencies were notified of pending street count activity in their jurisdictions. In census tracts with a high concentration of homeless encampments, specialized teams with knowledge of those encampments were identified and assigned to those areas. Enumeration teams were advised to take every safety precaution possible, including bringing flashlights and maintaining a respectful distance from those they were counting.

LOGISTICS OF ENUMERATION

On the morning of the street count, teams of two or more persons deployed to enumerate designated areas of the county for the street count. Each team was composed of any combination of outreach workers, lived-experience guides, program staff and service-experienced community volunteers. Each team had a lead and prior to the count were provided with their assigned census tract maps, smartphone access information and training, field observation tips and guidelines, including vehicle identification criteria. Teams were instructed meet at one of the designated deployment sites to gather materials, ask last minute questions, and receive one more brief training review before their route assignments.

All accessible streets, roads, parks, and highways in the enumerated tracts were traversed by foot or car. The Sonoma County Survey 123 smartphone app was used to record the number of homeless persons observed in addition to basic demographic and location information. Dispatch center volunteers also verified that at least one person on each team had a cell phone available for their use during the count and recorded the number on the volunteer deployment assignment sheet. Teams were asked to cover the entirety of their assigned areas.

To ensure that the privacy of individuals experiencing homelessness was respected and that safety concerns were kept as a priority for enumeration teams, teams were asked to conduct observation-only counts and to not have any contact with individuals experiencing homelessness. When they encountered a structure or vehicle that they believed to be inhabited, they had the option to indicate that it was inhabited but that they didn't know the number or the demographic detail (age and gender) of its residents if this could be determined by the team. In order to determine the number of residents of these dwelling types, ASR uses the survey data from respondents who indicated they stayed in the named dwelling type. Demographic detail for those inhabitants is gathered from count data.

YOUTH STREET COUNT METHODOLOGY

GOAL

The goal of the 2026 dedicated youth count was to improve representation of unaccompanied homeless children and youth under the age of 25 in the Point-in-Time Count. Many homeless children and youth do not use homeless services, are unrecognizable to adult street count volunteers, and may be in unsheltered locations that are difficult to find. Therefore, traditional street count efforts are not as effective in reaching youth.

RESEARCH DESIGN

As in all years, planning for the 2026 supplemental youth count included homeless youth service providers and youth with lived experience of homelessness. Local service providers identified locations where homeless youth were known to congregate and recruited youth currently experiencing homelessness with knowledge of where to locate homeless youth to serve as guides for the count. Late afternoon and early evening enumeration was the ideal time recommended by advocates to conduct the youth count.

The Community Support Network, TLC Child & Family Services, Sonoma County Family, Youth and Children's Services, and the Sonoma County Department of Health Services Homelessness Services Division, IMDT SOUL took the lead in recruiting 7 youth to work as peer enumerators in addition to 6 youth service provider staff members who accompanied and transported the youth around the county. These teams counted homeless youth in the identified areas of Sonoma County on January 30, 2026.

Youth workers were paid \$20 per hour for their time, including time spent in training prior to the count. Youth and youth service provider staff members were trained on where and how to identify homeless youth as well as how to record the data.

DATA COLLECTION

It was determined that homeless youth would be more prominent on the street during daylight hours rather than in the early morning when the general count was conducted. The youth count was conducted from approximately 3:00 PM to 7:00 PM on January 30, 2026. Youth worked in teams of two to four, with teams coordinated by youth service providers.

Both the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness recognize that youth do not commonly come in contact with homeless adults and are not easily identified by non-youth. For this reason, these agencies accept and recommend that communities count youth at times when they can be seen rather than during traditional enumeration times.

STREET COUNT DE-DUPLICATION

Data from the supplemental youth count and general street count were compared and de-duplicated by assessing location, gender, and age.

SHELTER COUNT METHODOLOGY

GOAL

The goal of the shelter and institution count is to gain an accurate count of persons temporarily housed in shelters and other institutions across Sonoma County. These data are vital to gaining an accurate, overall count of the homeless population and understanding where homeless persons receive shelter.

DEFINITION

For the purposes of this study, the HUD definition of sheltered homelessness for Point-in-Time Counts was used. This definition includes individuals and families living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The homeless occupancy of shelters in Sonoma County was collected for the night of January 29, 2026. All shelter data were gathered either directly from the shelter or from Sonoma County's Homeless Management Information System.

CHALLENGES

There are many challenges in any homeless enumeration, especially when implemented in a community as large and diverse as Sonoma County. Point-in-Time Counts are "snapshots" that quantify the size of the homeless population at a given point during the year. Hence, the count may not be representative of fluctuations and compositional changes in the homeless population seasonally or over time.

For a variety of reasons, homeless persons generally do not wish to be seen and make concerted efforts to avoid detection. Regardless of how successful outreach efforts are, an undercount of the homeless population will result, especially of hard-to-reach subpopulations such as families and youth.

The methods employed in a non-intrusive visual homeless enumeration, while academically sound, have inherent biases and shortcomings. Even with the assistance of dedicated homeless service providers, the methodology cannot guarantee 100% accuracy. Many factors may contribute to missed opportunities, for example:

- It is difficult to identify homeless persons who may be sleeping in vans, cars, recreational vehicles, abandoned buildings, or structures unfit for human habitation.
- Homeless families with children often seek opportunities to stay on private property, rather than sleep on the streets, in vehicles, or in makeshift shelters.

Even though the Point-in-Time Count is most likely to be an undercount of the homeless population, the methodology employed—coupled with the homeless survey—is the most comprehensive approach available.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

A survey of individuals experiencing homelessness was conducted between February 6 and March 27, 2026 to yield qualitative data about people experiencing homelessness in Sonoma County. This data is used for the McKinney-Vento Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance funding application and are important for future program development and planning.

The survey elicited information such as gender, family status, military service, duration and recurrence of homelessness, nighttime accommodations, causes of homelessness, and access to services through open-ended, closed-ended, and multiple response questions. The survey data bring greater perspective to current issues of homelessness and to the provision and delivery of services.

Surveys were conducted by shelter providers, outreach teams, and peer survey workers with lived homeless experience. Training sessions were facilitated by Applied Survey Research, Sonoma County staff, and community partners. Potential interviewers were led through a comprehensive orientation that included project background information as well as detailed instruction on respondent eligibility, interviewing protocol, and confidentiality. Peer survey workers were compensated at a rate of \$10 per completed survey.

It was determined that survey data would be more easily obtained if an incentive gift was offered to respondents in appreciation for their time and participation. \$10 gift cards were provided as an incentive for participating in the 2026 homeless survey.

SURVEY SAMPLING

Based on a Point-in-Time Count estimate of 1,951 homeless persons, with a randomized survey sampling process, the 276 valid surveys represented a confidence interval of +/- 5% with a 95% confidence level when generalizing the results of the survey to the estimated population of individuals experiencing homelessness in Sonoma County.

The 2026 survey was administered in shelters, transitional-housing facilities, and on the street. In order to ensure the representation of transitional-housing residents, who can be underrepresented in a street-based survey, survey quotas were created to reach individuals and heads of family households living in these programs.

Strategic attempts were also made to reach individuals in various geographic locations and of various subset groups such as homeless youth, minority ethnic groups, military veterans, domestic violence survivors, and families. One way to increase the participation of these groups was to recruit peer survey workers. Since 2009, the ASR survey methodology has prioritized a peer-to-peer approach to data collection by increasing the number of currently homeless surveyors.

In order to increase randomization of sample respondents, survey workers were trained to employ an “every third encounter” survey approach. Survey workers were instructed to approach every third person they considered to be an eligible survey respondent. If the person declined to take the survey, the survey worker could approach the next eligible

person they encountered. After completing a survey, the randomized approach was resumed.

DATA COLLECTION

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

DATA ANALYSIS

The survey requested respondents' initials and date of birth so that duplication could be avoided without compromising the respondents' anonymity. Upon completion of the survey effort, an extensive verification process was conducted to eliminate duplicates. This process examined respondents' date of birth, initials, gender, ethnicity, length of homelessness, and consistencies in patterns of responses to other survey questions.

SURVEY CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

There may be some variance in the data that individuals experiencing homelessness self-reported. However, using a peer-interviewing methodology is believed to allow the respondents to be more candid with their answers and may help reduce the uneasiness of revealing personal information. Further, service providers and county staff members recommended individuals who would be the best suited to conducting interviews and these individuals received comprehensive training about how to conduct interviews. Service providers and county staff also reviewed the surveys to ensure quality responses. Surveys that were considered incomplete or containing false responses were not accepted.

Last year, we transitioned from using paper surveys to administering surveys electronically. As a result of this shift, we observed changes in response patterns for certain questions. These percentage shifts may be attributed to differences in how respondents interact with electronic surveys compared to paper formats, including variations in accessibility and response behavior. This change in format should be considered when interpreting year-over-year comparisons.

APPENDIX B: DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Chronic homelessness – Defined by HUD as an unaccompanied individual or head of a family household with a disabling condition who has either continuously experienced homelessness for a year or more or has experienced at least four episodes of homelessness totaling 12 months in the past three years.

Disabling condition – Defined by HUD as a physical, mental, or emotional impairment, including an impairment caused by alcohol or drug abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, or brain injury that is expected to be long-term and impacts the individual's ability to live independently; a developmental disability; or HIV/AIDS.

Emergency shelter – Temporary accommodation for people experiencing homelessness, either in a shelter facility or through the use of stabilization rooms. Emergency shelter is short-term, usually for 180 days or fewer. Domestic violence shelters are typically considered a type of emergency shelter, as they provide safe, immediate housing for survivors and their children.

Family – A household with at least one adult and one child under the age of 18.

Homeless – Under the Category 1 definition of homelessness in the HEARTH Act, includes individuals and families living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements, or with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground.

HUD – Abbreviation for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Precariously housed – A person who is staying with the household because they have no other regular or adequate place to stay due to a lack of money or other means of support.

Sheltered homeless individuals – Individuals who are living in emergency shelters or transitional housing programs.

Single individual – An unaccompanied adult over the age of 18.

Transition-age youth (TAY) – Young people between the ages of 18 and 24 years old who are not accompanied by a parent or guardian.

Transitional housing – Housing in which homeless individuals may live up to 24 months and receive supportive services that enable them to live more independently. Supportive services, which help promote residential stability, increased skill level or income, and greater self-determination, may be provided by the organization managing the housing, or coordinated by that organization and provided by other public or private agencies. Transitional housing can be provided in one structure or several structures at one site, or in multiple structures at scattered sites.

Unaccompanied children – Children under the age of 18 who are not accompanied by a parent or guardian and are not a parent presenting with or sleeping in the same place as their own child(ren).

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