



SACRAMENTO
LOAVES & FISHES

2021

Survey of People Experiencing Homelessness in Sacramento



Acknowledgements

Author

Ryan Finnigan, Ph.D. an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Davis, and Senior Research Associate at the Turner Center for Housing Innovation at the University of California, Berkeley.

Acknowledgements

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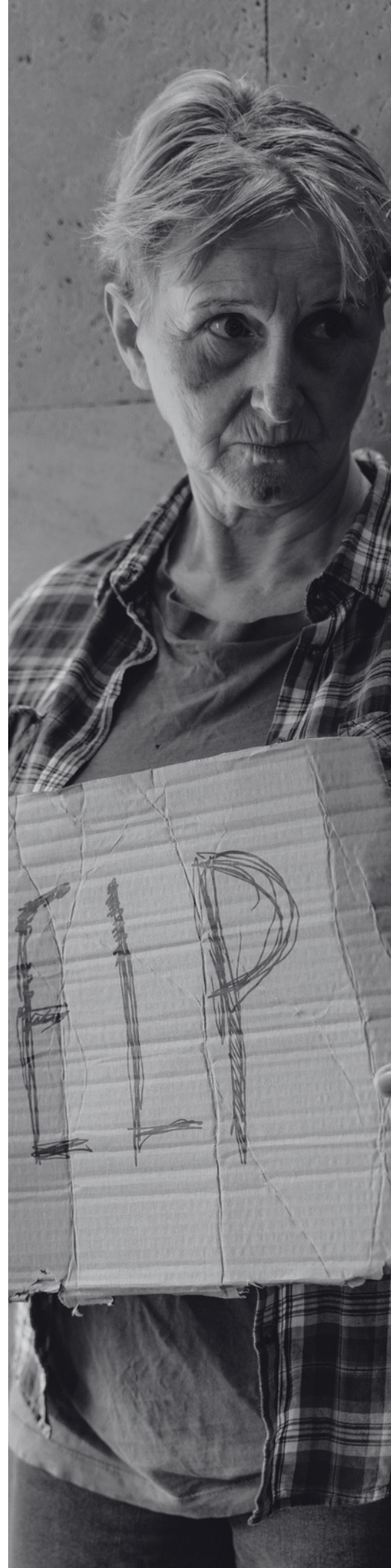
Thanks also to participating staff and volunteers, who were crucial for collecting the survey responses. This survey expanded on a previous survey of Loaves & Fishes' guests in 2020, jointly designed by Ryan Finnigan and Joe Smith.

For the 2021 survey, Joe Smith, John Kraynak, Nick Peterson, and Steve Watters contributed additional questions related to services at their organizations, among other important recommendations. Arturo Baiocchi, Susanna Curry, and Ethan Evans also contributed to the 2021 survey's content and design. Special thanks to the survey participants, who generously shared their time and information. Many people shared personal experiences and perspectives that went far beyond the survey's questions. We hope this report accurately reflects their experiences and informs services to better meet their needs.

This report documents urgent needs for people experiencing homelessness in Sacramento, both generally and specific to the COVID-19 pandemic.



The content of this report does not necessarily reflect the views of Dr. Finnigan's employers, or the participating organizations (Loaves & Fishes, First Step Communities or Midtown Hart)



Introduction

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, hardships for people experiencing homelessness likely became more challenging. In late September and early October, 2021 Sacramento Loaves & Fishes, Midtown HART, and First Step Communities—collaboratively surveyed hundreds of people using their services. This survey was designed to assess people’s experiences with each of the service providers, their general experiences and needs, and how the pandemic has affected them. This report summarizes the results of this survey.

Objectives

1. Inform Organizations’ Services

- Data can help organizations evaluate and plan their services
- Data will show whether current guests see areas for improvement
- Data can show if there are barriers preventing clients from using the organizations’ services

2. Assess Needs and Resources for People Experiencing Homelessness

- Data measured food security, mental and physical health status and healthcare access, public benefits, transportation, income and more
- Data can inform advocacy efforts
- Data can highlight unmet needs and importance of resource and service expansion

3. Background and Demographic Information

- Data can illustrate similarities and differences to overall homeless population in Sacramento
- Data documents life experiences that may affect their current homelessness
- Data can help service providers a deeper understanding of client needs

4. Understand the Impact of COVID

- Data can help estimate COVID-19 vaccination rate among people experiencing homelessness
- Data documents information about job loss during COVID
- Data highlights reason for vaccine hesitancy and avoidance of shelters during COVID

Participating Survey Sites

Survey Site	Organization/Service Description
Loaves & Fishes	Multi-service site, including “to-go” meals, survival supplies, sanitation, hygiene and health services, clothing, rest areas
Midtown HART Respite Centers	Food and drinks, donated clothes and bicycles, quiet rest areas
North A Street Shelter	Overnight shelter, sanitation services, casework
Safe Ground Site	City-sanctioned encampment with sanitation and casework services
Downtown Streets	Surveys of people sitting on downtown streets and the California State Capitol Park

Staff, volunteers and the author collected 320 completed survey responses face-to-face (with masks) in Sep/Oct of 2021. All respondents received a \$10 gift card to Subway Sandwiches which were funded in part by an Academic Senate Faculty Research Small Grant from the University of California, Davis.

Survey Outcomes

Life Experiences

- Almost everyone (97%) in the survey experienced as least one difficult life event
- About 92% reported as least two difficult life events , 80% reported at least three
- Physical disabilities that limit "daily activities or ability to work," serious mental health challenges "like major depression, PTSD, or schizophrenia," and struggles "with alcoholism or substance abuse" were also common

Difficult Life Events	Total	Sheltered	Unsheltered
Incarcerated in prison or jail	66%	66%	66%
Serious mental health challenge	54%	58%	53%
Alcohol or substance abuse	53%	57%	51%
Physical disability	44%	40%	45%
Childhood abuse	35%	40%	34%
Formal eviction	28%	26%	28%
Serious or chronic disease	27%	24%	28%
Foster care	19%	23%	17%
Childhood homelessness	19%	23%	17%

Current research including studies produced by the CDC indicate that;
"Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's), can have a tremendous impact on future violence, victimization and perpetration, and lifelong health and opportunity."

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/index.html>

Note: The rates of physical disabilities and serious mental health challenges are much higher than in the 2019 PIT survey however these areas were measured differently. The increase may be due to larger fraction of older adults and/or chronic homelessness in this survey.



Experiences with Law Enforcement

Experience with Law Enforcement	Total	Sheltered	Unsheltered
Police harassment or violence	40%	31%	43%
Forced to change sleeping location	30%	22%	33%
Possessions confiscated (ID, medication, etc.)	21%	19%	21%
Illegal camping ticket or arrest	5%	1%	6%



Needs & Resources

Food and Physical/Mental health

The survey revealed high needs regarding food and physical/mental health. Food insecurity, poor physical health and stress are common among people experiencing homelessness.

Food Health Stress	Total	Sheltered	Unsheltered
Food Security in Last 7 Days			
Enough of the kinds of food you wanted to eat	27%	31%	25%
Enough, but not always the kinds of food you wanted to eat	38%	42%	36%
Sometimes not enough to eat	18%	17%	18%
General Health			
Excellent	12%	16%	11%
Very good	11%	9%	12%
Good	29%	33%	28%
Fair	34%	30%	35%
Poor	14%	12%	15%
Bothered by Worry in the Last Two Weeks			
Nearly every day	46%	48%	45%
Several Days	20%	17%	21%
More than half the days	7%	6%	7%

Transportation

Main Forms of Transportation	Total	Sheltered	Unsheltered
Walking	59%	52%	62%
Public Transportation	33%	50%	26%
Bike	22%	19%	23%
Own Vehicle	9%	9%	9%

Percentages total more than 100% due to option to select multiple forms of transportation

Other Key Resources

Access to other key resources such as identification (driver's license or birth certificate), health insurance (including MediCal or Medicare), and access to a mailing address, was mixed among participants. However these resources were much more common among sheltered people than unsheltered.

Resource	Total	Sheltered	Unsheltered
Has identification	75%	94%	67%
Has health insurance	85%	92%	82%
Has mailing address	82%	95%	77%

Housing Status

This survey report focuses on data from people currently experiencing homelessness.

To measure homelessness the survey asked respondents about their sleeping situation and categorized responses into three categories.

"What is your usual sleeping situation in the last month?"

Unsheltered homelessness

- "in a tent or other outdoor shelter"
- "outside without a tent or shelter"
- "car"
- "RV, trailer, or bus"

Sheltered homelessness

- "temporary shelter"
- "transitional housing"
- "hotel that you paid for"
- "hotel using a voucher or from government (Project Roomkey or Homekey)"
- "friends or relative's home"
- "jail"

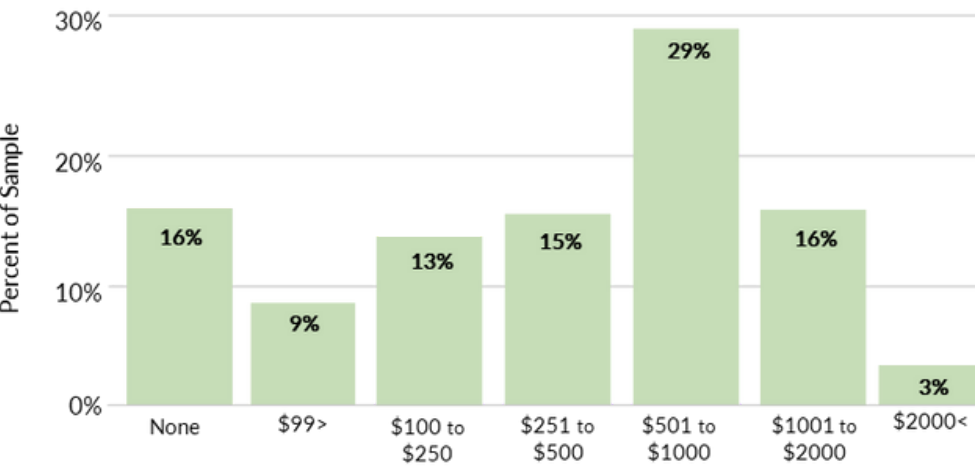
Permanently housed

- "own apartment or house"

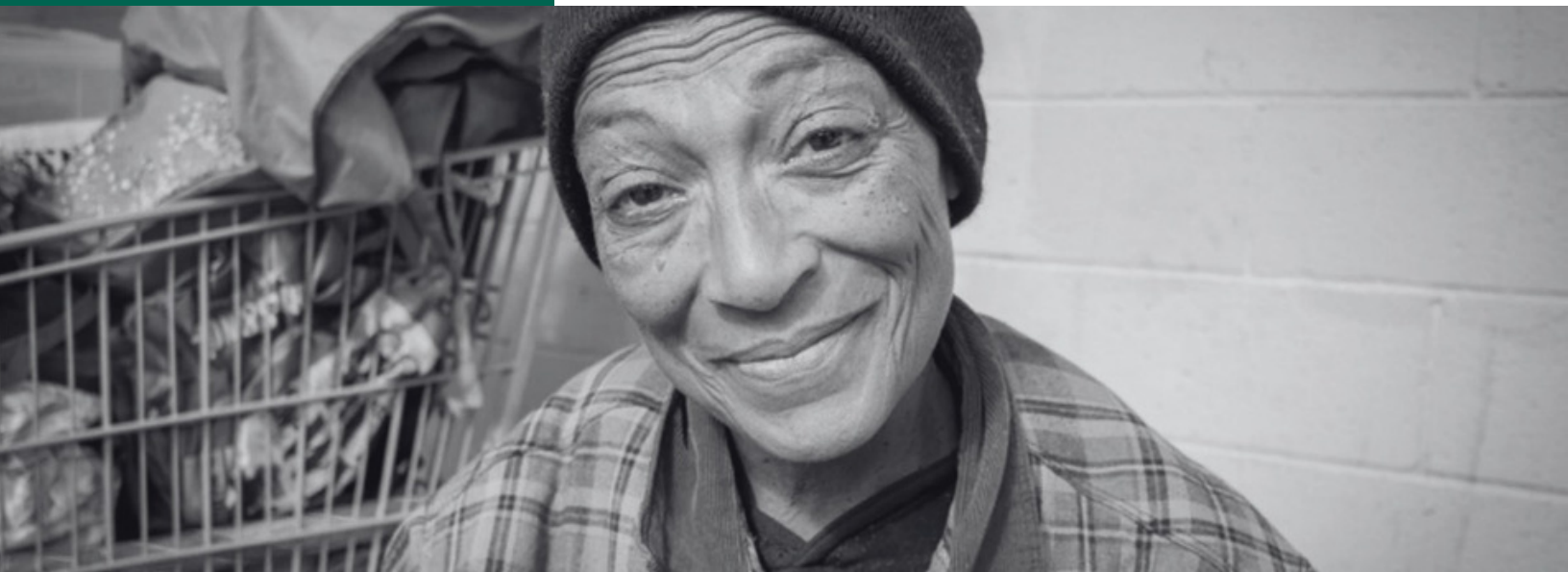
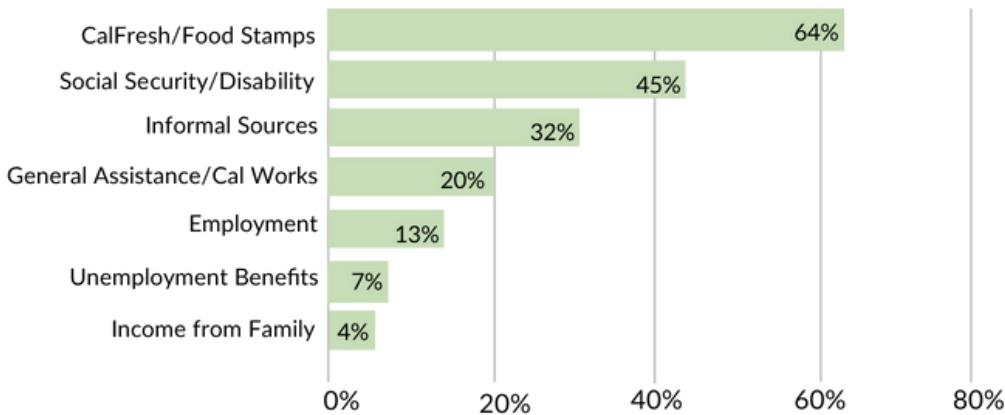
Income and Public Benefit Access

Incomes were very low for most survey participants. Incomes were slightly lower for unsheltered people compared to sheltered people.

- Over 55% of unsheltered people had incomes of \$500 (including CalFresh) or less compared to 45% of sheltered people
- 26% of unsheltered people had incomes of below \$100 compared to 21% of sheltered people.



Public benefits were the most common income sources for survey participants. Two-thirds of the sample received CalFresh, social security, SSI and/or disability assistance. Informal sources such as selling plasma or recycling were common and over half the participants reported at least two incomes.



Demographics

The survey respondents had similar demographics to the population experiencing homelessness in Sacramento County prior to the pandemic. While the demographic composition of the 2021 survey was similar to the 2019 Point-in-Time survey, this survey did not directly include families with children. The absence of children made its average age (50 vs 39) older than the 2019 survey, and a much higher fraction of adults age 45 or older (71% vs 40% in 2019)

Demographic Characteristic	Survey Sample
Age (281 Respondents)	
Average Age	50
Age 45 years or older	71%
Gender (284 Respondents)	
Male	63%
Female	36%
Transgender or Other	1%
Race & Ethnicity (281 Respondents)	
White	42%
Black	27%
Latina/Latino	10%
American Indian & Asian/Pacific Islander	7%
Multi-racial/Other	13%
Family Status (271 Respondents)	
Adults (age 25+) without Children	87%
Families with Children	12%
Unaccompanied Youth (younger than 25)	1%
Sexual Orientation (273 Respondents)	
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Other	10%
Served in Armed Forces (Unknown Number Respondents)	
Served in Active Duty	16%

Experience of Homelessness

Key Facts

- 70% of the survey respondents were experiencing unsheltered homelessness
- 84% had been homeless one year or longer
- 90% lived in Sacramento one year or longer

38% unsheltered respondents said their usual sleeping situation was unsafe

- People that slept in parks or on the streets reported they felt "very unsafe" because they were harassed or attacked while sleeping
- People sleeping in tents felt "unsafe" due to not being able to see outside their tent
- Other safety concerns were theft and extreme weather (extreme temperatures, rain/flooding, etc.)
- People sleeping in overnight shelters reported that fights and theft made them feel "unsafe"



COVID-19 and Homelessness

A major finding from the 2020 Loaves & Fishes survey was that the COVID-19 pandemic added onto pre-existing hardships for many people experiencing homelessness. The 2021 survey shows that many of these challenges persisted.

The true fraction who were ever infected with COVID-19 among Sacramento's homeless population could be higher than indicated. Many people who contracted COVID-19 were isolated in hotels rooms through Project Roomkey. These people may still have been sheltered or have transitioned into permanent housing at the time of the survey.

*Severe infections and death may be more common for people experiencing homelessness, who tend to be older and have more health conditions than the housed population **

*McFarling, U. (2021), March) "The Uncounted: People Who Are Homeless are Invisible Victims of COVID-19." [Stat News](#)

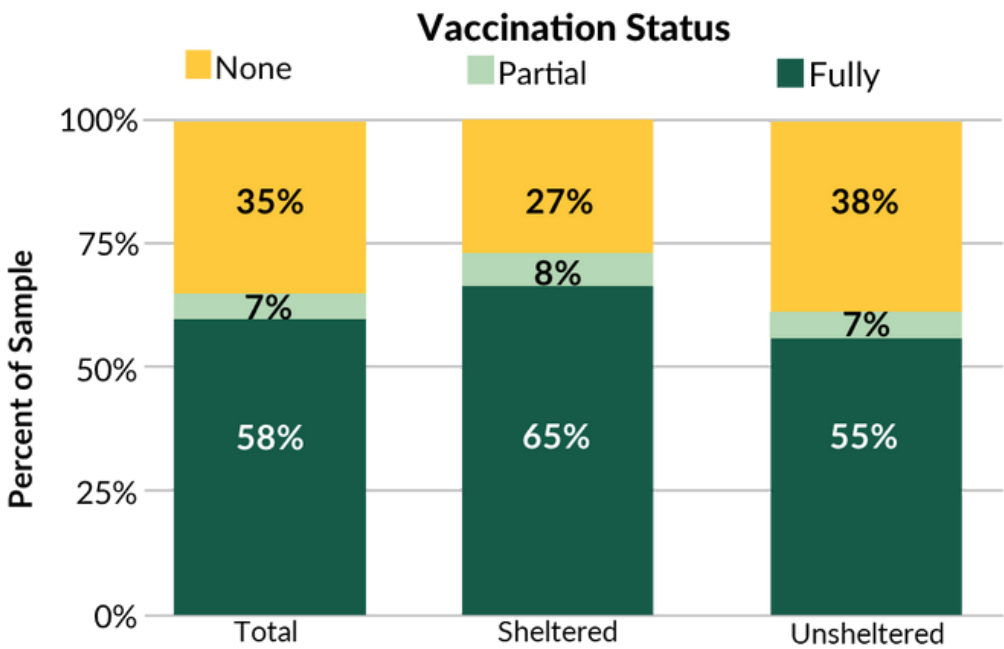
COVID-19 Pandemic

A higher number of sheltered people than unsheltered said they had ever tested positive for COVID-19. It's possible this higher fraction is due to transmission inside congregate shelters - shelter outbreaks were common early in the pandemic.

COVID-19, Shelters, Job Loss

- One-in-six people surveyed said they avoided shelters due to concerns about COVID
- Several people stated that despite their fear of COVID, the safety of a shelter vs staying on the streets or in camps was more important
- 15% said they had lost a job during the pandemic
- Economic support from the federal and state governments' stimulus checks also failed to reach two-in-five survey participants

Job losses and limited access to economic supports like stimulus payments have made it harder to exit homelessness



People experiencing homelessness are confronted by many additional hardships such as food insecurity, health challenges, unmet mental health needs, unsafe sleeping conditions and resource limitations of many kinds.

Respondents in the survey indicated that many of the homelessness service providers were important to them and stated that they did not know how they would meet basic needs such as food, clothing, bathing and more without the organization(s).

Sacramento's increasing housing costs and lack of affordable housing combined with the removal of thousands of jobs due to the pandemic, has made it much harder for people to move out of homelessness, thus increasing long-term homelessness.

What are your most urgent needs right now?

Participants' responses included numerous services relevant to their diverse situations and needs, however the most resounding response was housing! Consistent with decades of advocacy arguing that homelessness is fundamentally a problem of not having housing, research has repeatedly demonstrated that housing scarcity and high costs are the main predictor of homelessness.

In conclusion, we share with you some insight from one of Loaves & Fishes founding members:

"There is no substitute in this country for the opportunity to live in one's home - however humble or small it may be."
- Sister Nora Lowe, August 1992