Houston, Pasadena and Harris, Fort Bend, and Montgomery Counties 2020 Point-In-Time Homeless Count & Survey Independent Analysis

COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

The Way Home

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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 Harris, Fort Bend, and Montgomery counties, Texas was held on the night of 27 January 2020 with the unsheltered portion of the Count conducted over a three-day period from January 28-30, 2020. 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 projects 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 Harris, Fort Bend, and Montgomery counties 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 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 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 100 homeless service providers participated in the Count as well as community volunteers, including persons currently and previously experiencing homelessness.

The 2020 Count included individuals staying in a total of 52 projects comprising emergency shelters (28 different projects), transitional housing units (23 different projects), and safe havens (1 program) on the night of 27 January, based on reports received from the projects 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 human 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 may have been residing. Additionally, data gathered from daily outreach encounters was used to determine "hot spots" or areas where a large number of individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness typically gather.

Changes from 2011 through 2020 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 2020 Count, only comparisons with the previous three years include these data; the previous six years' results exclude this additional area to allow for a valid assessment.

From 2011-2015, the unsheltered Count was a purely observational one, performed during a single night between the hours of approximately 5:00 - 11:00 pm. Beginning in 2016, we adopted a Coordinated Access approach to the Count and directly engaged and interviewed, when possible[2], every unsheltered person experiencing homelessness in the jurisdiction. 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 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 four ways:

- 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 27 January (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), and
- when reviewing data from the Count, a search for potential duplicate entries was performed and, if found, one is deleted (this year, two cases of duplication were found).

An additional change implemented for the 2018 Count was the use of SimTech Solutions software (Cambridge, MA) in place of a different software 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. The use of a mobile application survey has several advantages, including the ability to link to HMIS. 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 25 trained Coordinated Access Housing 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.

Several improvements implemented in previous years were continued. Traditional homeless service providers were involved as partners of The Way Home CoC, along with academia (UTHealth School of Public Health). This included the use of 174 teams, averaging four members each, 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.

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 more than half of those approached or sighted.

With approval from HUD, the unsheltered Count took place over three days, January 28-30, with the night of 27 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, over 50 volunteer teams canvassed the area designated for that day to interview unsheltered persons experiencing homelessness. Four to six 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 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 assessed on the night of the Count. Shelters that do not use HMIS such as domestic violence shelters were asked to report their numbers on 27 January using the Housing Inventory Count.

Volunteer trainings were conducted on January 14, 16, 21, 22, and 29. These trainings involved the use of the Counting Us application and creating user IDs and passwords. A test Count site was available through the application so volunteers could practice entering data into the application with each question reviewed by the trainer and further instruction provided, if necessary. 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 27. This included an introduction to the Counting Us application and the distribution of t-shirts, volunteer sign-in sheets, maps, and map interpretation guides.

2020 PIT Count Key Findings

Data collected show a total of 3,974 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). Breaking down where those experiencing homelessness were located, we determined that most were in Houston and Harris County, with only one out of fifty (2%) counted in Fort Bend County and approximately one out of 28 persons (3.6%) counted in Montgomery County. While Harris and Fort Bend counties showed a plateau in the number of persons experiencing homelessness from 2019 to 2020 (3,567 vs. 3,753 and 73 vs 76, respectively), the number of those experiencing homelessness interviewed in Montgomery County showed a significant decrease in the same time period (298 vs 145). It is important to note that, for those experiencing unsheltered homelessness on the night of 27 January, geographical assignment was determined by where they were interviewed
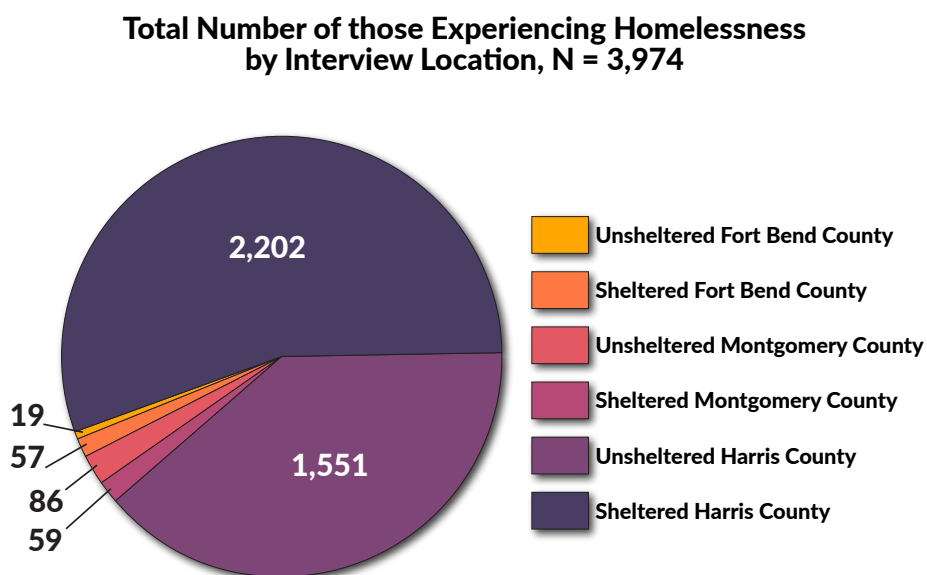

Total Number of those Experiencing Homelessness by Interview Location, N = 3,974

- Unsheltered Fort Bend County
- Sheltered Fort Bend County
- Unsheltered Montgomery County
- Sheltered Montgomery County
- Unsheltered Harris County
- Sheltered Harris County

2,202
1,551
19
57
86
59

Figure 1

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 the population estimates on 1 July 2019 was 6,132,404[3]. This puts the percent of individuals experiencing homelessness within these three counties at 0.06% or approximately one out of every 1,543 residents. This is a slight decrease compared to one out of every 1,449 residents of the three-county area last year as the population has increased. To allow comparisons since 2011 (when Montgomery County was not included in the Count), we calculated the homelessness rate in Houston, Pasadena, Harris County, and Fort Bend County only. The combined estimated population within these two counties on 1 July 2019 was 5,525,013[4]. The number of individuals experiencing homelessness on a single nigh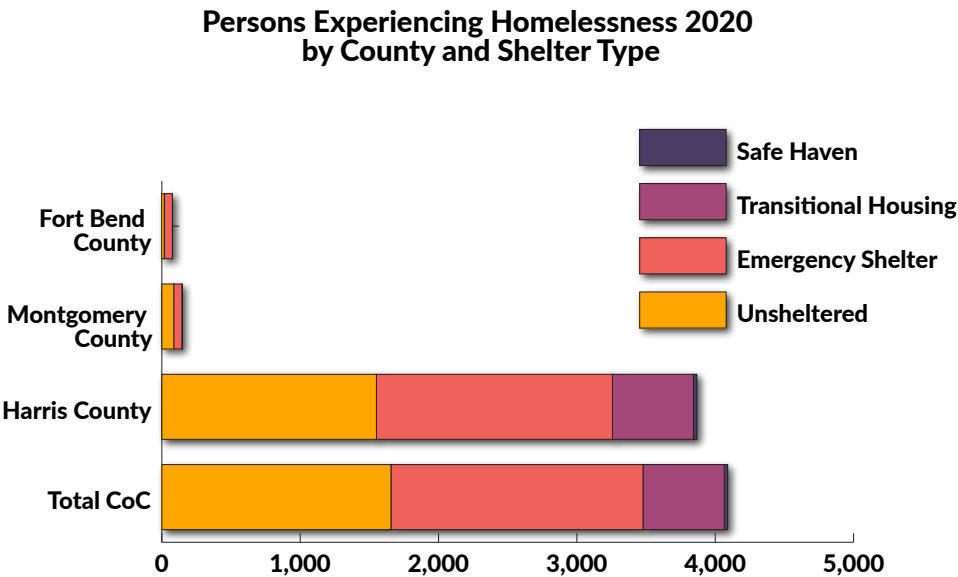t in 2020 in the same geography is approximately one out of every 1,472 residents compared to one out of every 450 residents in 2011, a substantial decrease.

Persons Experiencing Homelessness 2020 by County and Shelter Type

Figure 2

Persons experiencing homelessness can be found in one of four settings: places not meant for human habitation (i.e., unsheltered), emergency shelters, transitional housing, or safe havens. The locations of those experiencing homelessness by county in 2020 are shown in Figure 2. Within the total population, over half (58%) were sheltered on the night of the Count.

Comparison between 2020 and 2011-2019 PIT Counts

Data from the whole area of the CoC are included in Figure 3 for 2017 through 2020 (the only years we surveyed all three counties). A total of 3,974 individuals experiencing homelessness was observed in 2020, a plateau compared to the 2019 count of 3,938 for the total area. This is an encouraging find after the increase in those experiencing homelessness seen in 2018, possibly due to Hurricane Harvey. In fact, the number of individuals experiencing homelessness has remained relatively consistent for the past three years. This may indicate that the community has fully-utilized existing resources and has reached a plateau, unless there is an influx of new resources and programs.
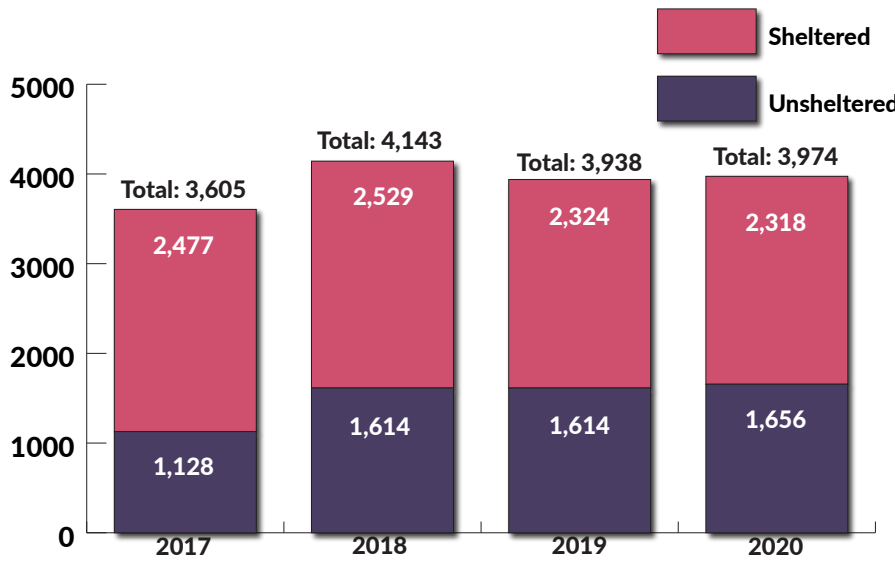
Figure 4 shows findings from the last nine years of the Count (data from Montgomery County are not included in the comparisons in Figure 4 as 2017 was the first year that area was included in this PIT Count). While the Counts during the years 2011-2015 used a standardized observational count methodology and so valid comparisons can be made between those years, the methodology changed significantly in

3   https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/harriscountytexas,montgomerycountytexas,fortbendcountytexas/ PST045218 accessed 24 May 2020
4   https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/harriscountytexas,montgomerycountytexas,fortbendcountytexas/ PST045218 accessed 24 May 2020

PIT Counts 2017-2020*

includes data from total Continuum of Care geographic area

Legend: Sheltered, Unsheltered

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total	3,605	4,143	3,938	3,974
Sheltered	2,477	2,529	2,324	2,318
Unsheltered	1,128	1,614	1,614	1,656

PIT Counts 2011-2020*

includes data from Houston, Pasadena, Harris County, and Fort Bend County only for comparison purposes with previous years

Legend: Sheltered, Unsheltered

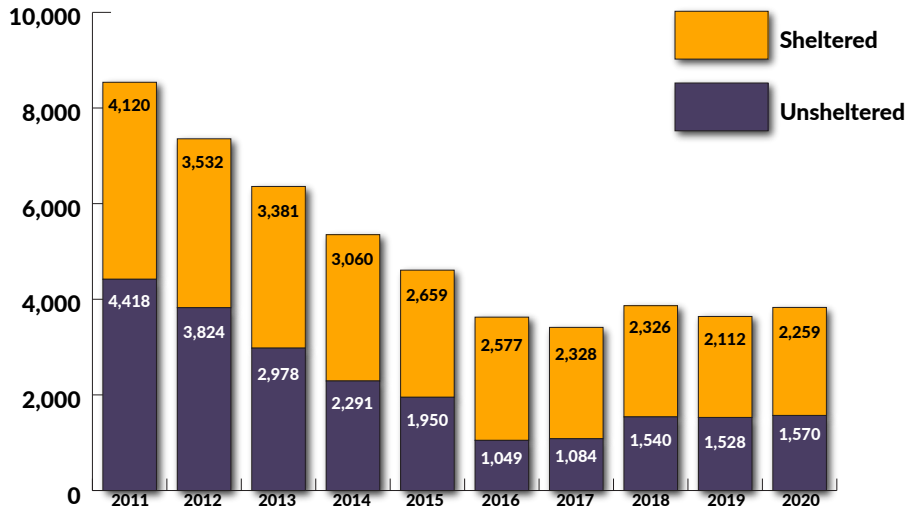|	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Sheltered	4,120	3,532	3,381	3,060	2,659	2,577	2,328	2,326	2,112	2,259
Unsheltered	4,418	3,824	2,978	2,291	1,950	1,049	1,084	1,540	1,528	1,570

Figure 4

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; on the other hand, it is impossible 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 unsheltered persons presumed to be experiencing homelessness. This method also has limitations. We may not have identified all persons (leading to an undercount) or may have counted persons twice (leading to an over count), despite best efforts to avoid this. However, we had the advantage of talking to almost half (45%) 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. Additionally, names were compared to the HMIS to ensure individuals were not counted in the sheltered count. 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.

The 2020 Count of persons experiencing homelessness in Houston, Pasadena, Harris County, and Fort Bend County exclusively shows a decrease of 4,709 persons from the Count in the same area in 2011. This corresponds to a 55% decrease compared to the 2011 Count. The decrease over the past nine years is encouraging, particularly given the increase in population in the same area by approximately 935,000 people between 2011 and 2019[5]. While the precise magnitude of homelessness cannot be determined,

5   https://www.opendatanetwork.com/entity/0500000US48339-0500000US48157-0500000US48201/Montgomery_County_TX-Fort_Bend_County_TX-Harris_County_TX/demographics.population.count?year=2018 accessed 24 May 2020

the level and trend of the decrease does provide solid evidence that the number of persons experiencing homelessness in Houston, Pasadena, Harris County, and Fort Bend County has decreased since 2011.

In 2020, in Houston, Pasadena, Harris County, and Fort Bend County only, of those experiencing homelessness, 40% (or two of five) were found on the streets or in places not meant for habitation compared to over 52% in 2011. 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.

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) projects. From January 1, 2012 to December 31, 2019, 19,716 persons were placed in permanent housing in the CoC (Figure 5).

Characteristics of Those Experiencing Homelessness

Persons experiencing homelessness are classified into three household types: persons in households without children (HHWOC), persons in households with children under the age 18 years (HHWC), and children-only households (under the age of 18 years). Figure 6 shows the breakdown of these groups between the sheltered and unsheltered populations while Figure 7 graphs these

Persons Placed in Permanent Housing

Figure 5

Family Type in Sheltered and Unsheltered Populations

Figure 6

data in a way to show among each household type, what number/percent were in emergency shelter, transitional housing, and safe haven. Approximately one-third of sheltered persons were households with children while, among those living unsheltered, there was only one HHWC consisting of one parent and one child. Three children-only households were in emergency shelter.

We were able to capture length of homelessness for those in the unsheltered population. Results are shown in Figure 8. A plurality of unsheltered persons had been homeless for three or more years. One in
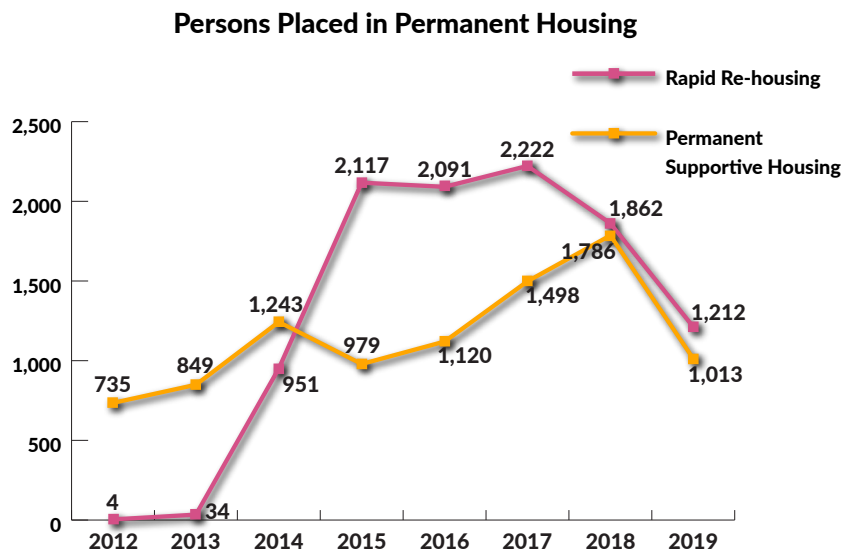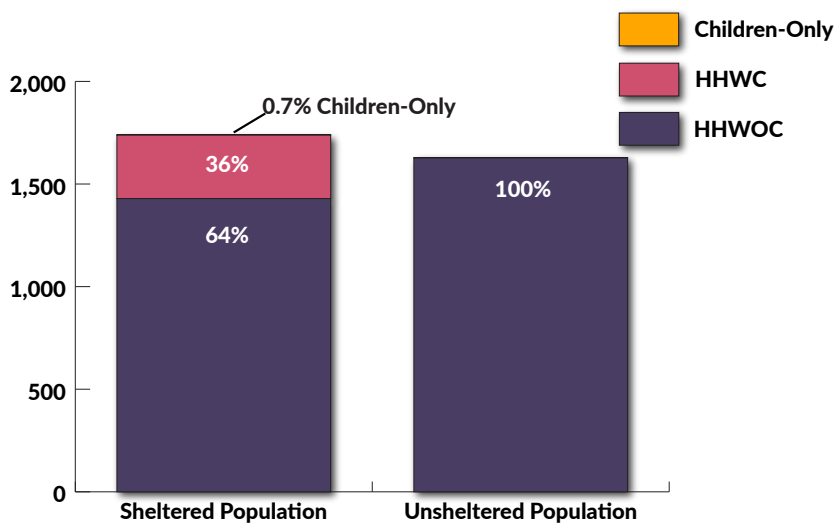
ten of the unsheltered first became homeless in another state (Figure 9) while 85% became homeless in the CoC region.

Subpopulations

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

- Veterans
- Individuals and families experiencing chronic homelessness[6]
- Survivors of domestic violence
- Persons with HIV/AIDS
- Persons with serious mental illness
- Individuals experiencing chronic substance use disorder (alcohol and/or drugs)
- Unaccompanied young adults and parenting young adults

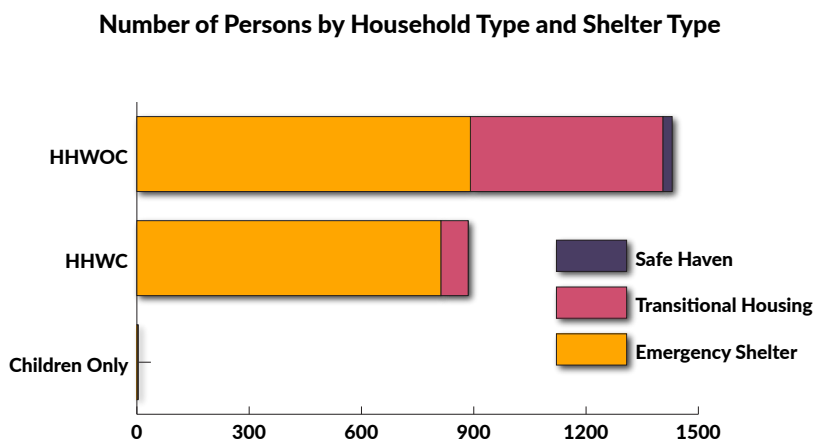**Number of Persons by Household Type and Shelter Type**

Figure 7

This information can be captured by HMIS for those in shelters (although only those answering positively to a question are counted and so we cannot distinguish between negative responses and missing responses). 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.

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

Distribution of Length of Homelessness Among Unsheltered Population

Figure 8

either administered the questions or did an observational tally which was captured in the database. This year there were 750 interviews or slightly less than 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
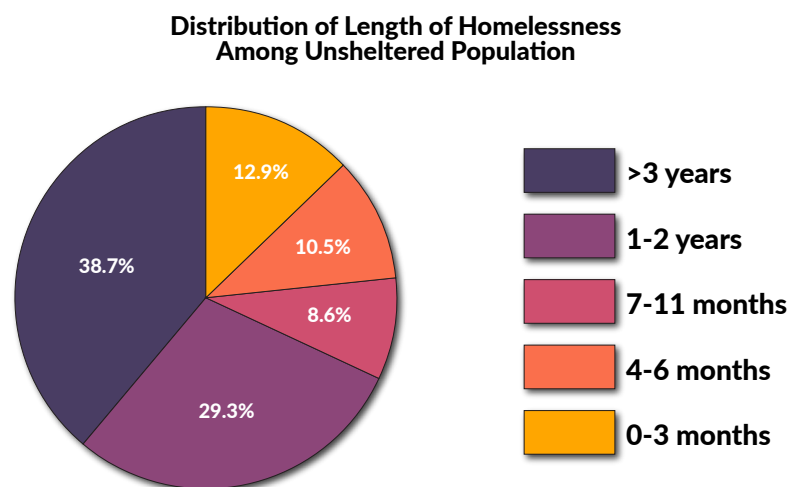
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6   HUD's definition of chronic homelessness is four or more occasions of homelessness within the past three years for a total of 12 months or longer or one or more current consecutive years of homelessness. In addition, the individual must have a 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 of safe haven but not in transitional housing.

the total answering that question 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 the data was not complete on all 750 persons who were surveyed (many people did not answer every question and some responded "don't know" or refused to answer). 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 Figure 10. In the total population, over three out of four persons experiencing homelessness were over the age of 24. Approximately one out of seven were under the age of 18; however, all of those under age 18 except for one child were in sheltered situations on the night of the Count. The population living unsheltered was older with forty-nine out of fifty (98%) 25 years of age or older. The sheltered population experiencing homelessness was younger, due to the inclusion of children in that population. Of the 2,318 persons in emergency shelter, transitional housing, or safe haven, one of four (24%) was below the age of 18 years and one out of eleven (9%) was aged 18-24 years of age. Fewer than one out of thirteen of those under the age of 18 were in transitional housing, a decrease from last year when it was one out of nine.

Place First Experienced Homelessness Among Unsheltered Population

- Out of State
- Texas - Other Area
- CoC Region

Figure 9

Age Distribution of Persons Experiencing Homelessness

- Total
- Sheltered
- Unsheltered

Figure 10

Not shown in the figures is information only asked of the population living unsheltered. Two out of five (435) of the unsheltered persons experiencing homelessness stated this was their first experience with homelessness and one of eleven unsheltered persons said they were experiencing homelessness due to a natural disaster, primarily Hurricane Harvey. Overall, three out of five persons in the total population experiencing homelessness were male with a higher percentage in the unsheltered population (81%). Ten persons experiencing homelessness identified as transgender.

Persons who are experiencing chronic homelessness represent a particularly vulnerable population and are prioritized for permanent housing. We determined that nearly one out of three (30%) of the total population experiencing homelessness met the HUD definition of experiencing chronic homelessness[7].

[7]   Persons in transitional housing cannot be considered chronically homeless so the denominator for this percent is 2,672.
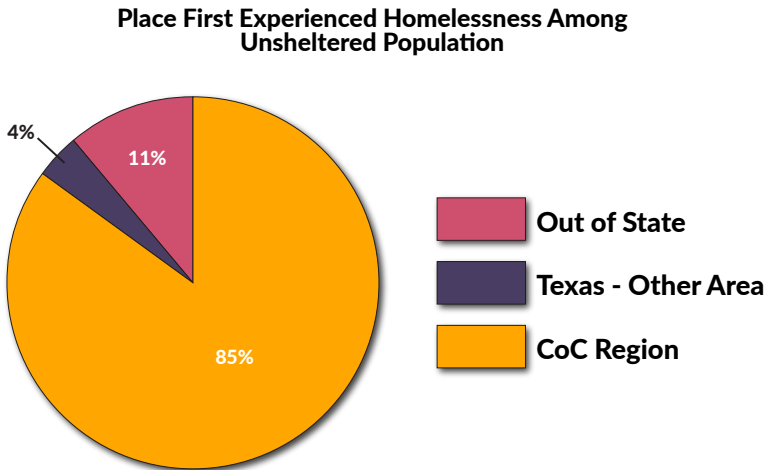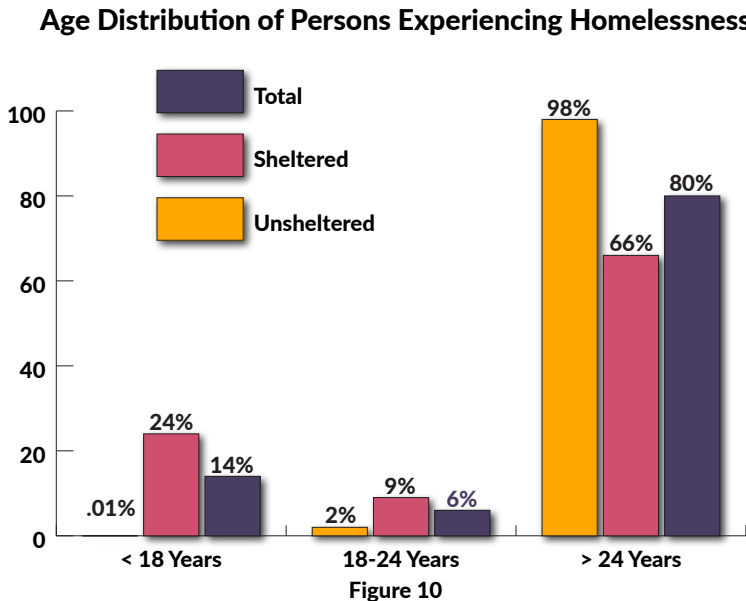
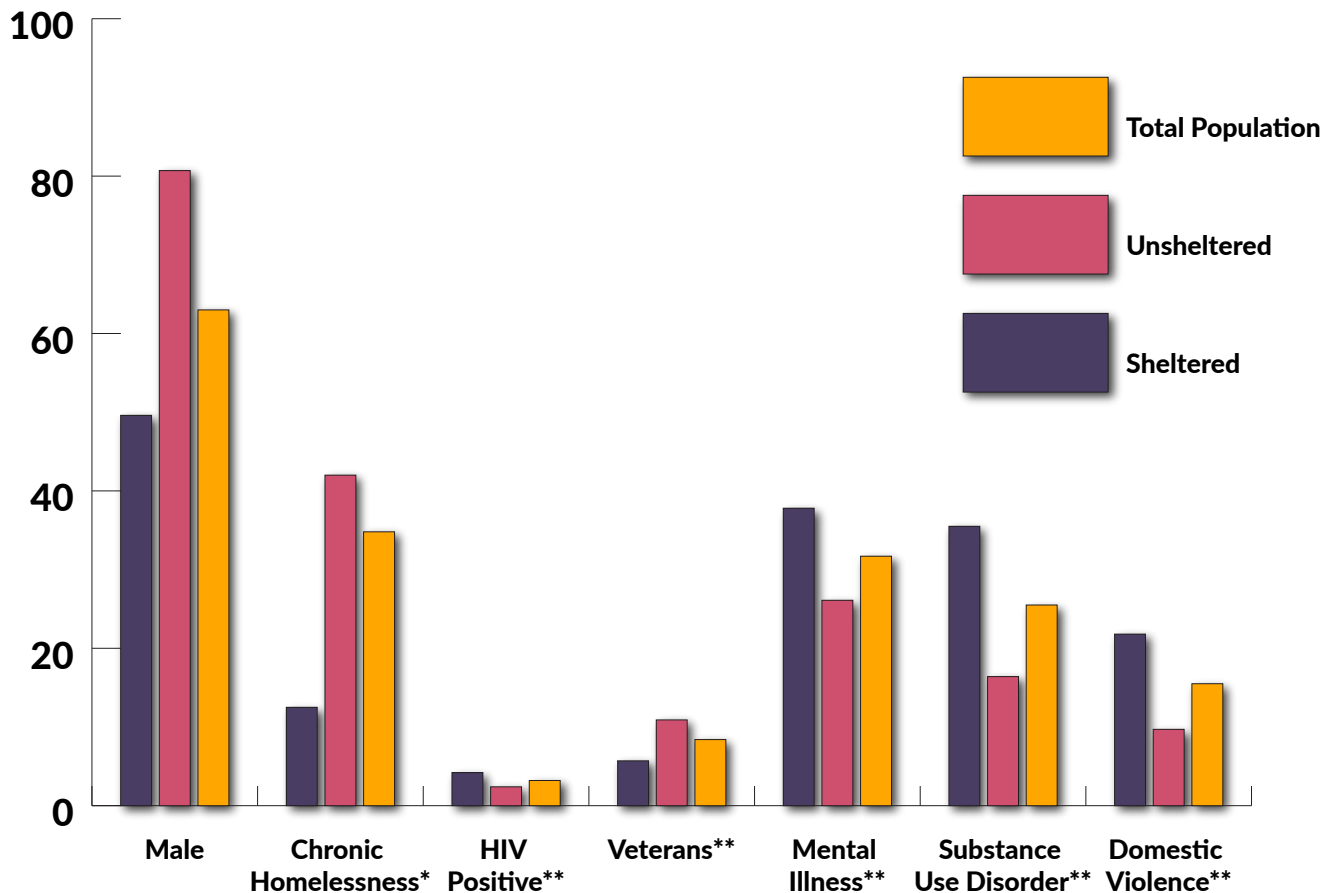## Subpopulations of those Experiencing Homelessness, 2020

Figure 11

* of the sheltered population, only those in emergency shelters can meet the definition of chronic homelessness
** asked for adults only

This is higher than the percent of chronic homelessness found in 2019 though not significantly so (30% in 2020 vs 29% in 2019). Of the 122 unaccompanied young adults (aged 18-24 years) who were in emergency shelter, six (5%) met the definition of chronic homelessness while 7 out of 34 (21%) unsheltered accompanied young adults also met the chronic homelessness definition.

Another subpopulation of particular interest is Veterans. This year we found 267 Veterans experiencing homelessness compared to 376 found in 2019, a significant decrease. Approximately half of the Veterans were in a sheltered condition on the night of the Count. Of the 267 Veterans, approximately one out of three (38%) were classified as experiencing chronic homelessness and of these, nine out of ten were unsheltered (89%). We asked the unsheltered Veterans about their discharge status; only 79 answered that question but of those who did, 92% were eligible for Veterans Affairs benefits.

Gap analysis and take down targeting have been predicting an annual steady state volume of between 1,200 and 1,400 Veterans falling falling temporarily into homelessness in our region each year. Our findings this year are still well below that number. Regardless, The Way Home CoC has a housing option for any Veteran, no matter the discharge status.

Other subpopulations reported in the total adult population experiencing homelessness include almost one of three (32%) with self-reported serious mental illness and/or substance use disorder (26%; alcohol and/or other drugs). These conditions are self-reported, however, and may be artificially low.

Approximately one in thirty (3.2%) 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 do not know their status. Overall, approximately one in six (165) of those experiencing homelessness had experienced domestic violence. This percent was higher in the sheltered population (22% vs 10% among unsheltered), which makes sense given that there are shelter beds specifically dedicated to survivors of domestic violence.

Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of those Experiencing Homelessness

Figure 12

Figure 12 shows the racial and ethnic self-classification. Among the unsheltered population, the observer classified the racial/ethnic group of individuals who could not be interviewed. The clear majority of those experiencing homelessness were White or Black/African American. A slightly higher percentage of White people were found in the unsheltered population.
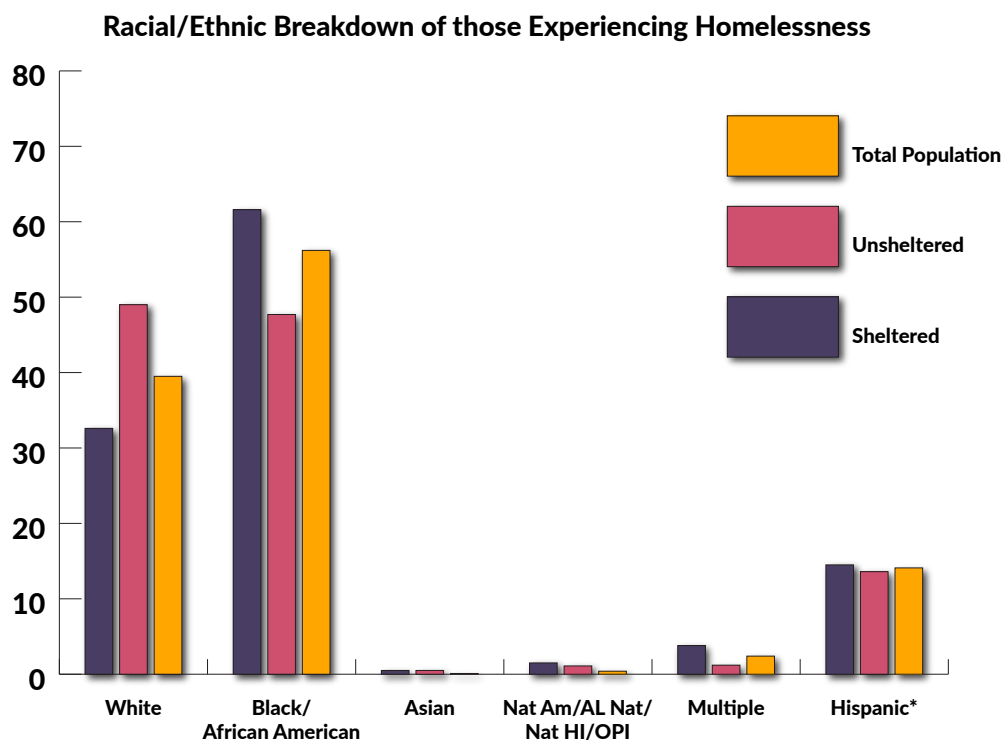
Persons interviewed were asked if they considered themselves Hispanic and approximately one in seven did. As outlined in Table 1, there are significant disparities between the overall racial/ethnic breakdown of the total Harris County population and those experiencing homelessness with persons of color, in particular Black or African Americans, overrepresented among those experiencing homelessness.

Race/Ethnicity[8]	Harris Co population 7/1/2019	Total population experiencing homelessness	Sheltered people experiencing homelessness	Unsheltered people experiencing homelessness	Young Adults experiencing homelessness
White	69.6%	39.7%	32.6%	49.4%	29%
Black/African American	19.9%	55.8%	61.6%	47.7%	65.1%
Asian	7.4%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	1.2%
American Indian/ Alaska Native/ Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	1.2%	1.3%	1.5%	1.2%	0.6%
Multiple Races	1.9%	2.7%	3.8%	1.2%	4.1%
Hispanic*	43.3%	14.1%	14.5%	13.6%	14.5%

Table 1

asked separately from racial identity

8   https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/harriscountytexas,US

Finally, Figures 13a and 13b show 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. There were 46 children under the age of 18 years in these young adult households. Of the unaccompanied young adults, overall, one in sixteen met the definition of chronically homeless but the percent was vastly different between unsheltered and sheltered youth (3% vs 21%, respectively).

Number of Unaccompanied Youth Households

Figure 13a

Number of Parenting Youth Households

Figure 13b

Summary and Conclusions

The original methodology designed by HUD to increase the completeness and accuracy of the Point-In-Time Count of sheltered and unsheltered persons experiencing homelessness was used in the Houston, Pasadena, Harris County, and Fort Bend County region between 2011-2015. Beginning in 2016, due to the community's success in decreasing the number of those experiencing homelessness, we implemented a modified and even more thorough approach by using direct engagement and interviews to count those who were living unsheltered. An important change in 2017 was the addition of Montgomery County to The Way Home CoC and, subsequently, this Homeless Count. As such, data from that region was not included in comparisons with Counts form 2011-2016 which only included Houston, Pasadena, Harris County, and Fort Bend County.
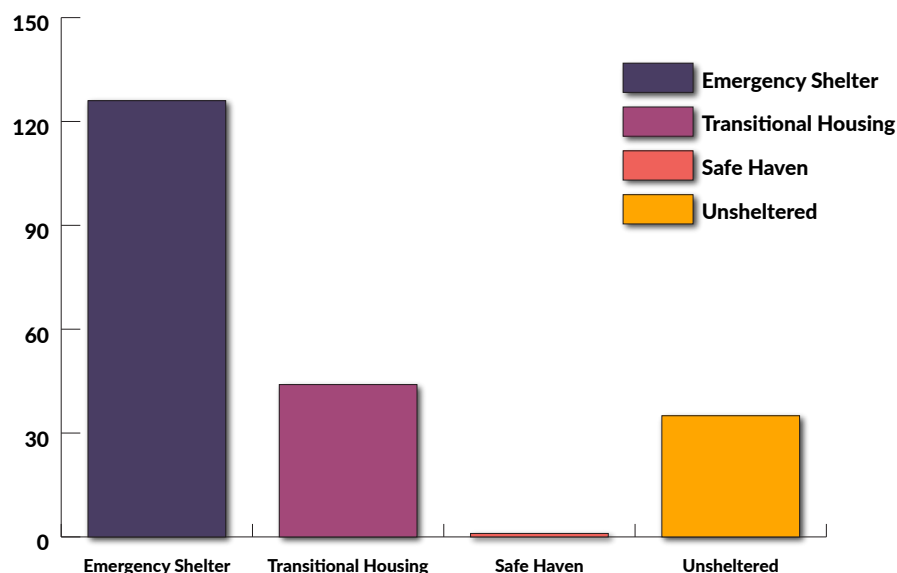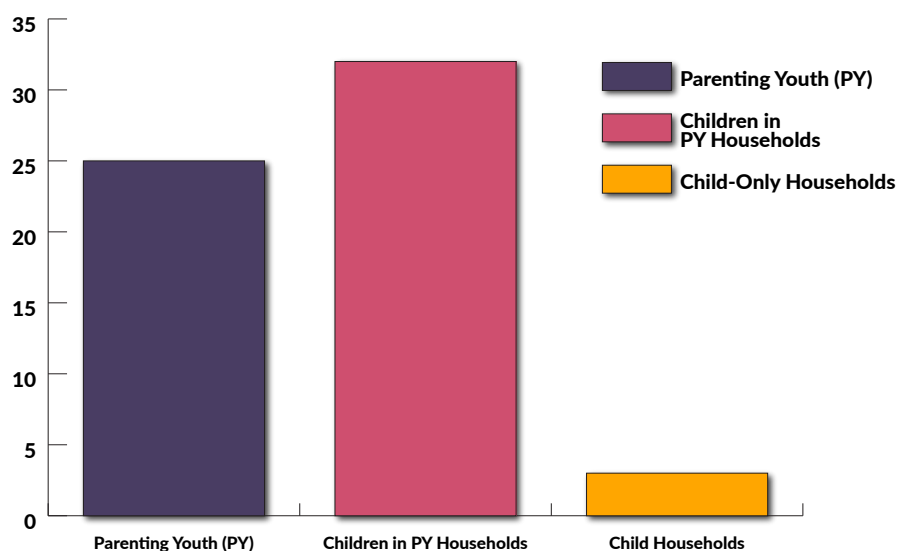
HMIS information or information obtained from shelters not using HMIS on those staying in emergency shelter, transitional housing, or safe haven on the night of 27 January 2020 comprised the sheltered Count. The unsheltered Count took place over three days in January as we attempted to interview every person thought to be experiencing unsheltered homelessness. The Counting Us mobile application from SimTech Solutions 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 not quite half of those thought to be experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

A total of 3,974 persons experiencing homelessness were counted in Houston, Pasadena, Harris County, Fort Bend County, and Montgomery County, corresponding to one out of 1,543 residents. Of these, 1,646 (42%) were unsheltered (staying in a place not meant for human habitation) while 2,318 (58%) were staying in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or safe haven on the evening of 27 January 2020. Most of these individuals were interviewed in Harris County (94%) with much smaller percentages of persons experiencing homelessness located in Fort Bend County (2%) and Montgomery County (3.6%), This year saw a plateau in the number of individuals experiencing homelessness in Harris County and Fort Bend County with a decrease in Montgomery County. 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 on the night of the Count. Persons move around during the day and may congregate near services.

The 2020 PIT Count represents a 55% 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 4,700 fewer people experiencing homelessness over the past nine years in the same region. This is even more impressive given that the population of that area has increased by over 935,000 people during that time. At the same time, there has been an increase in those placed in permanent housing with over 19,000 persons housed since 2012 (Figure 5).

There was no statistically significant change in the number of persons experiencing homelessness on a single night between 2019 and 2020 and numbers are still higher than in 2017. We can't determine the exact cause of this, 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 with one out of ten of the unsheltered persons experiencing homelessness indicating this was due to a natural disaster, with three out of four of these naming Harvey as the precipitating event. The vast majority of those experiencing unsheltered homelessness (85%) entered into that state in the CoC region. Almost seven in ten of those living unsheltered had been homeless for over a year.

Over one in three of those experiencing homelessness were classified as meeting the definition of chronic homelessness per HUD, a stable percent over the past year. Fewer sheltered individuals (13%) met the chronic homelessness definition compared to the unsheltered population (42%). The sheltered population was younger, reflecting the fact that all families with children under the age of 18 years, with one exception, were living in shelter. Persons living unsheltered were older and more likely to be in households without children. A total of 206 (vs 189 in 2019) unaccompanied young adults (18-24 years old) were identified as experiencing homelessness and one of sixteen was experiencing chronic homelessness, a great improvement over last year when one of nine 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 sheltered and unsheltered populations. One hundred nine fewer Veterans (267 vs 376) were found to be experiencing homelessness this year, a decrease of 29% (vs no decrease overall in homelessness among the general homeless population). Of the 267 Veterans

experiencing homelessness in the 2020 Count, we estimate that 92% of the unsheltered Veterans are eligible for military benefit (and thus housing assistance) based on discharge type. Discharge status was not asked of sheltered Veterans. Regardless, The Way Home CoC 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 the population experiencing homelessness. Conversely, all other racial groups and Hispanics were underrepresented among those experiencing homelessness. This represents an issue that needs to be examined and addressed if homelessness is to be conquered in this area.

While we did not see a decrease in homelessness in Houston, Pasadena, Harris County, Fort Bend County, and Montgomery County in 2020, this year's results are still 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. Behavioral, medical, and mental health supportive 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.

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