

A HOME FOR EVERYONE

Whatcom County Coalition to End Homelessness 2023 Annual Report

Part A: Point-in-Time Census of Homeless Residents

Part B: Public School Students and their Families



June 2023

Sponsored by:

Whatcom County Health and Community Services

City of Bellingham

Whatcom County Coalition to End Homelessness

Whatcom Homeless Service Center at Opportunity Council

For more information about Whatcom County's Homeless Point-in-Time Count, this annual report, or the Whatcom County Plan to End Homelessness, please contact:

Chris D'Onofrio
Housing & Homeless Services Program Supervisor
Whatcom County Health and Community Services
(360) 778-6049
CDOnofri@co.whatcom.wa.us

Or

Teri Bryant
Director
Whatcom Homeless Service Center
(360) 255-2091
teri_bryant@whatcomhsc.org

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Disclaimer

The COVID-19 pandemic has been enormously disruptive over the last several years and we continue to experience lasting impact to the Point-in-Time (PIT) Count. COVID-19 affects how people experience homelessness and has consequently changed how the count and surveys are completed from year to year, thus reducing our ability to make simple comparisons from one year to the next.

This year's counting effort relied again heavily on the professional services of the Homeless Outreach Team (HOT), Coordinated Entry (CE) system administrators, and other homeless and community service providers to safely collect information about people experiencing homelessness in our community - both in shelters and outdoors. Their commendable efforts greatly improved the value and completeness of this report's information, but almost certainly have resulted in a different data set than would have been created with the traditional input of community volunteers or the conditions experienced during the Omicron surge of early 2022.

Introduction

Purpose of this report

The annual Point-in-Time Count Report provides a deeper understanding of Whatcom County residents experiencing homelessness. Efforts to resolve homelessness for these residents rely on accurate information that provides a basis for an informed community response. The goal of this report is to educate and empower service providers, local policy makers, funding partners, and concerned community members who seek to engage this challenge in meaningful ways. The systematic and routine collection of data about homelessness makes it possible to be more informed about changes over time and to analyze our county's progress against the backdrop of regional and national trends.

Criteria for counting homelessness

The Point-in-Time surveys provide information only about people who were experiencing homelessness in Whatcom County overnight on January 26, 2023 and chose to participate. The surveys reflect only households who met a specific and limited federally-defined description of homelessness, which excludes people who were:

- couch surfing, or otherwise staying informally with friends or family,
- formerly homeless and residing in supportive, subsidized housing, or
- institutionalized, and homeless at their time of entry into prisons, jails, hospitals, or other institutions

The information in this report is inclusive only of participating households who spent the night of January 26, 2023:

- residing in emergency shelters,
- transitional housing programs,
- subsidized motel rooms, or
- unsheltered in unconventional sleeping places, such as tents, sidewalks, vehicles, or other places not intended to be used for human habitation

The surveys capture information only for people who reported that they were homeless, on the specific night of January 26, 2023, and in accordance with the above definitions. These criteria were established by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, and they are applied consistently across jurisdictions to allow for meaningful comparisons.

Limitations for counting homelessness

National research indicates that Point-in-Time Counts underestimate the number of those who are experiencing homelessness because:

- Participation is voluntary, and some choose not to be counted. This is especially true of immigrants, even those with legal status, who fear reprisal as a result of participation.
- A point-in-time is just a “snapshot” and does not capture all those who cycle in and out of homelessness over the year; therefore, “snapshots” will miss seasonal fluctuations.
- It is difficult to find where all unsheltered people reside, and impossible to know all the places that might provide unconventional shelter (i.e. tents, sheds, abandoned vehicles).
- There are many definitions of homelessness. Some households living in substandard housing that lacks basic amenities might not consider themselves to be homeless and may not seek or engage with service providers if residing on private land. Others would be considered homeless based on broader definition of the term, but are excluded by the criteria of this report.

Understanding homelessness data

The data in this report was provided to surveyors by individuals experiencing homelessness in Whatcom County. Individuals responded verbally to questions and, in some cases, on behalf of household members who were not present and/or not adults. It should be understood that the sensitive and personal nature of some questions, as well as different interpretations of terms like *disability*, *domestic violence*, *shelter*, or *length of time homeless* means that answers reflect the views of respondents, and do not necessarily meet precise or standard definitions. Some participants chose to answer only some of the questions. The Point-in-Time Count provides data that can be used for estimates, but it is not a comprehensive study of all people experiencing homelessness.

The Point-in-Time Count is only one of several sources of information about people experiencing homelessness. Other sources include the Washington State Office of the Superintendent for Public Instruction, the local Coordinated Entry database, records of the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, and the Homeless Management Information System.

The homeless housing system in Whatcom County

This report is not an overview of the many efforts underway to prevent and end homelessness for Whatcom County households. Still, many individuals and households are no longer experiencing homelessness after being successfully housed through community programs, and the numbers provided speak to the flow of households into and out of homelessness over a given year. Specifically, there were 1,369 households (2,282 individuals) who received some form of housing support from Whatcom County’s Coordinated Entry housing providers in 2022. Approximately two in five of those households (487) benefited from new program openings in 2022, while the rest received services that continued from prior years. Of the 1,369 households, 206 received assistance to prevent an eviction that likely would have added to the homelessness count. Additionally, between 10/1/21-9/30/22 there were 2,602 households supported with federally-funded emergency rental assistance to avoid eviction in Whatcom County. Those households received rental assistance outside of CE, but could have also received services through CE simultaneously. In addition, 1,930 households (more than 2,000 individuals) benefited from a stay at an emergency shelter, either with a publicly-funded stay at a motel or at one of several emergency shelters for specific vulnerable populations over the year. Information from recently homeless (but newly-housed) individuals and families was not collected for this report.

Without partner agencies and the supportive resources from local, state, and federal funders, many the 1,369 households who received services in 2022 may also have been added to the count in January 2023. Partner agencies that participate in the local coordinated housing system to reduce homelessness include:

- Bellingham/Whatcom County Housing Authority,
- Catholic Community Services,
- Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services of Whatcom County (DVSAS),
- Interfaith Coalition,
- Lake Whatcom Residential and Treatment Center,
- Lydia Place,
- Mercy Housing Northwest,
- Northwest Youth Services,
- Opportunity Council,
- Pioneer Human Services,
- Road2Home/Low Income Housing Alliance,
- Sun Community Services,
- Veteran's Administration (HUD-VASH), and
- YWCA Bellingham

Many households receiving housing assistance did so thanks to organizations who add value to our homeless services system without using the CE system. The effort and commitment of additional independent housing providers further reduces homelessness in Whatcom County and adds much-needed capacity to a system in which the demand for housing services exceeds supply. Agencies and programs like HomesNOW Not Later!, Engedi Refuge, New Way Ministries, Lummi Stepping Stones, Lummi Victims of Crime, Tl'íls Ta'á'altha Victims of Crime (Nooksack Tribe), Nooksack Indian Tribe Homeless Program, some Bellingham Housing Authority programs, Lighthouse Mission Ministries, Samish Indian Nation, several Lake Whatcom Center and Lifeline Connections programs, Sean Humphrey House, and multiple clean and sober homes deserve recognition for their work ending homelessness among the households they serve. We are grateful for their contribution to our common goal.

A more in-depth overview of this system is available in the 2019 *A Home For Everyone: Strategic Plan to End Homelessness in Whatcom County*, which can be found online at <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/44575/Strategic-Plan-to-End-Homelessness-in-Whatcom-County-2019>.

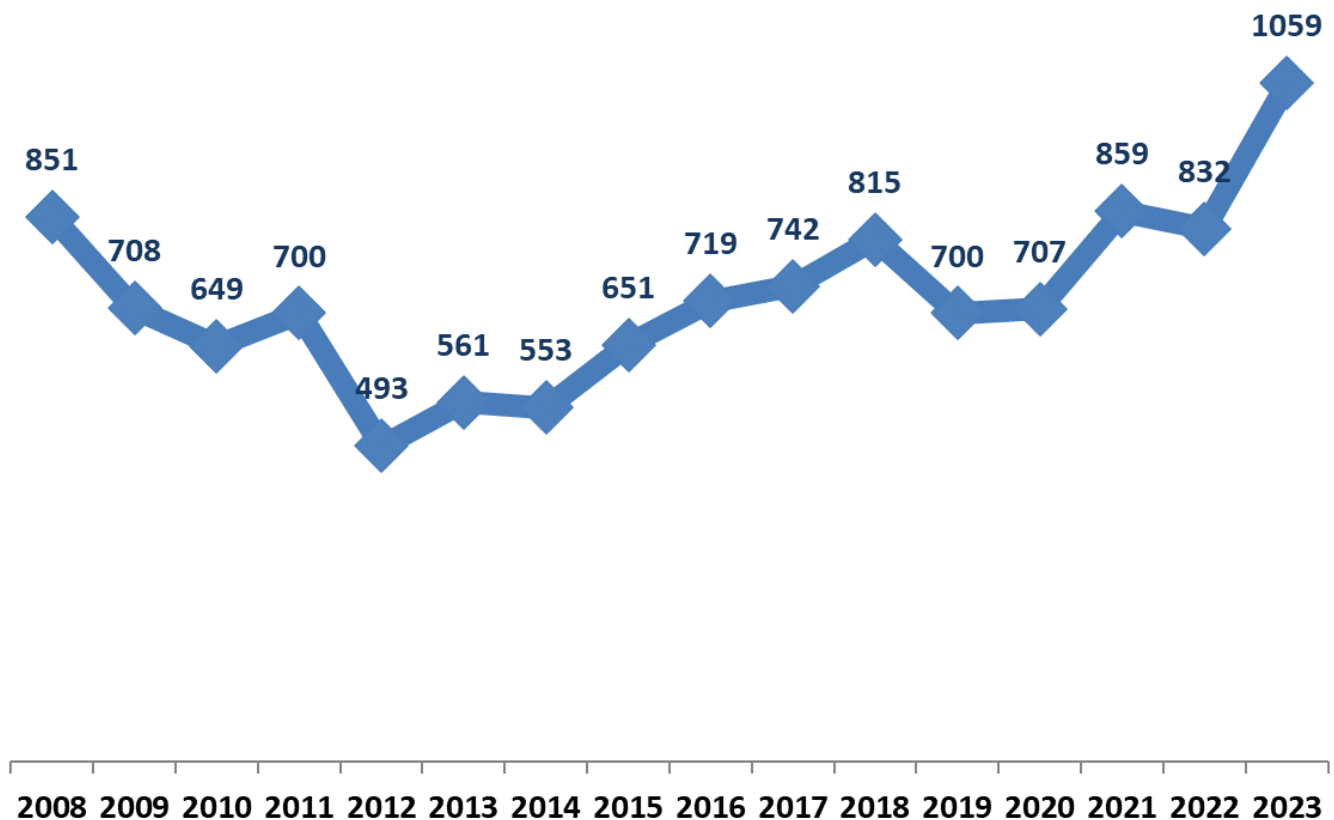
Part A: Point-in-Time Data & Analysis

Individuals and households experiencing homelessness in Whatcom County

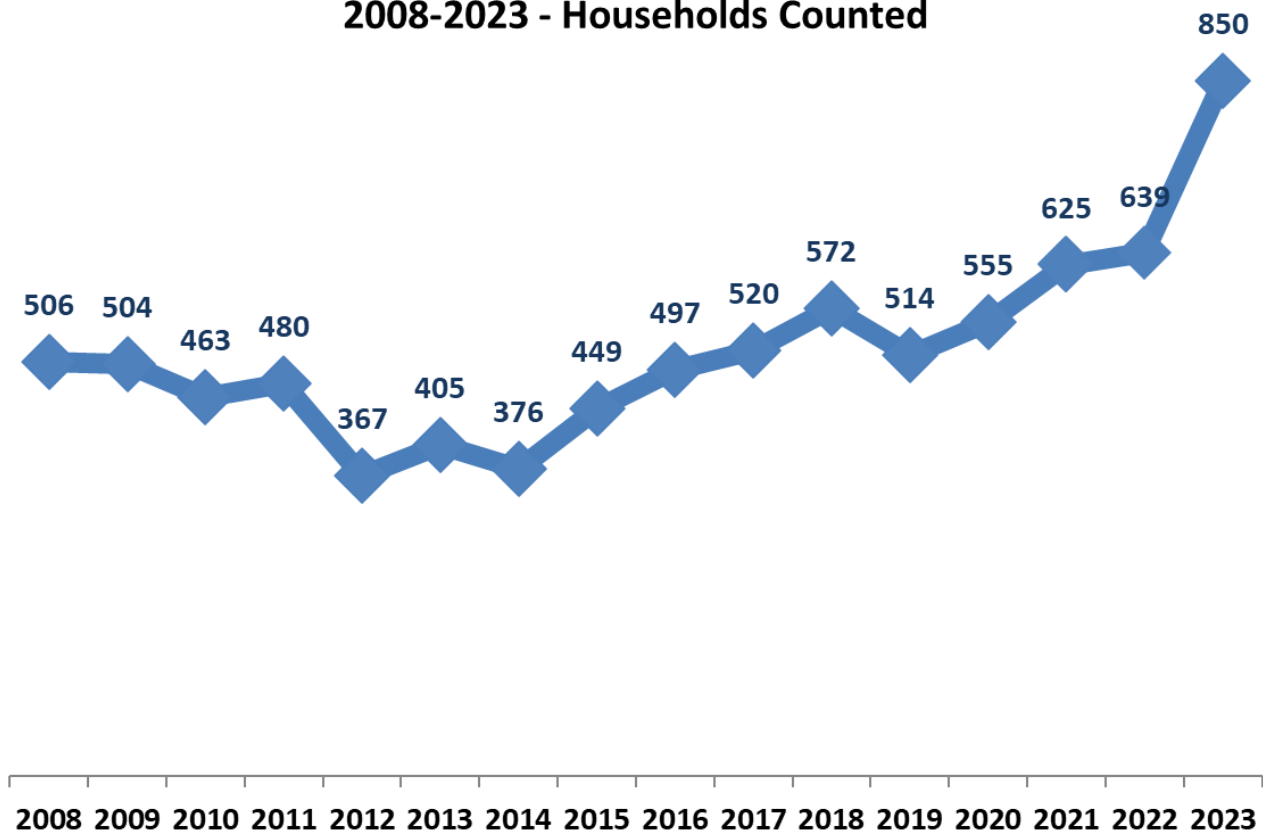
Of those surveyed, a total of **1,059 individuals** from **850 different households** were found to be experiencing homelessness in Whatcom County on January 26, 2023. For the purpose of this report, households were divided into two categories: *sheltered* and *unsheltered*. Either category of households (sheltered or unsheltered) could be single individuals or comprised of multiple people. Sheltered households stayed in an emergency shelter or transitional housing facility on the night of the count. Unsheltered households spent the night of January 26, 2023 outdoors, in vehicles, or other places not meant for habitation.

Between 2022 and 2023 there was a 27% increase in persons experiencing homelessness counted (from 832 persons experiencing homelessness last year to 1,059 this year). The number of households experiencing homelessness increased by 33% between 2022 and 2023 (from 639 households to 850 households). The numbers of both individuals and households counted in 2023 are the highest reported since counting began in 2008.

Whatcom County Annual Homeless Census 2008-2023 - Persons Counted



Whatcom County Annual Homeless Census 2008-2023 - Households Counted



Unsheltered and Sheltered Persons and Households

Of the 1,059 persons counted this year, 711 slept in shelters or transitional housing facilities, and the other 348 were *unsheltered*. The count of sheltered individuals includes people staying in:

- Night-by-night (drop-in) emergency shelters
- Extended stay emergency shelters (including facilities, houses, apartments, and tiny homes that provide locking doors, electricity, heat, windows that open, and access to onsite hygiene and cooking facilities¹)
- Motel rooms paid with subsidies
- Transitional housing programs

In 2023 there was a 9% increase in the number of people counted who were sheltered compared to 2022, and an increase of 8% in the number of households.

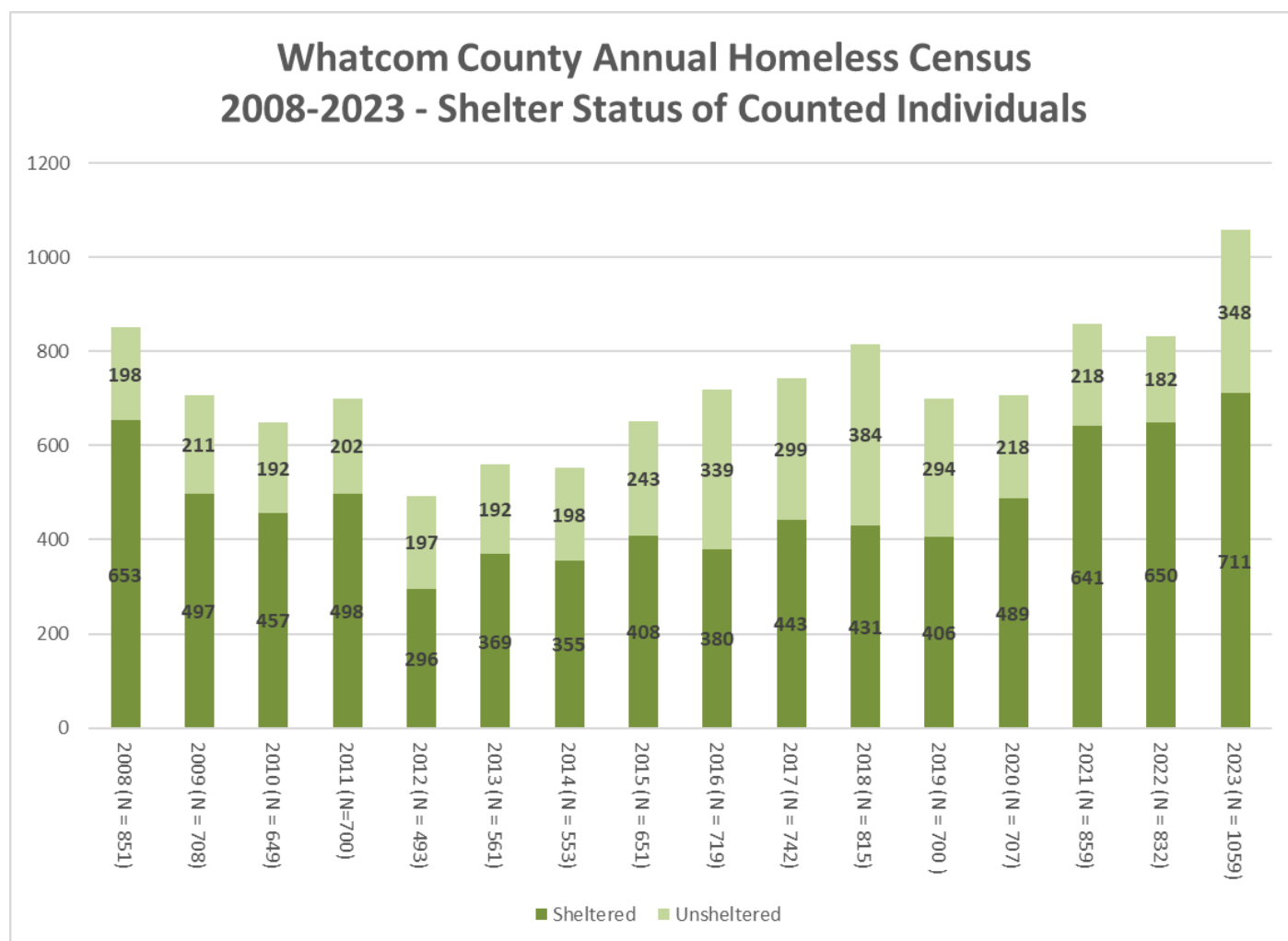
The count of unsheltered individuals includes people who slept in the following types of locations:

- Informal camping locations
- In alleys, under bridges, on sidewalks, or in doorways
- In vehicles (including RVs that do not have functioning hygiene and/or cooking facilities), or
- Other places not meant for human habitation, including abandoned buildings

The number of unsheltered individuals counted increased by 91%, to 348 (compared to 182 in 2022), and the number of unsheltered households increased by 110% from 2022 to 2023.

¹ Note: Any accommodation without locking doors, electricity, a heat source, windows that open, and access to onsite hygiene and cooking facilities is not considered to be shelter for the purposes of this report. A person who lacks access to any of the above amenities is therefore counted as “unsheltered”.

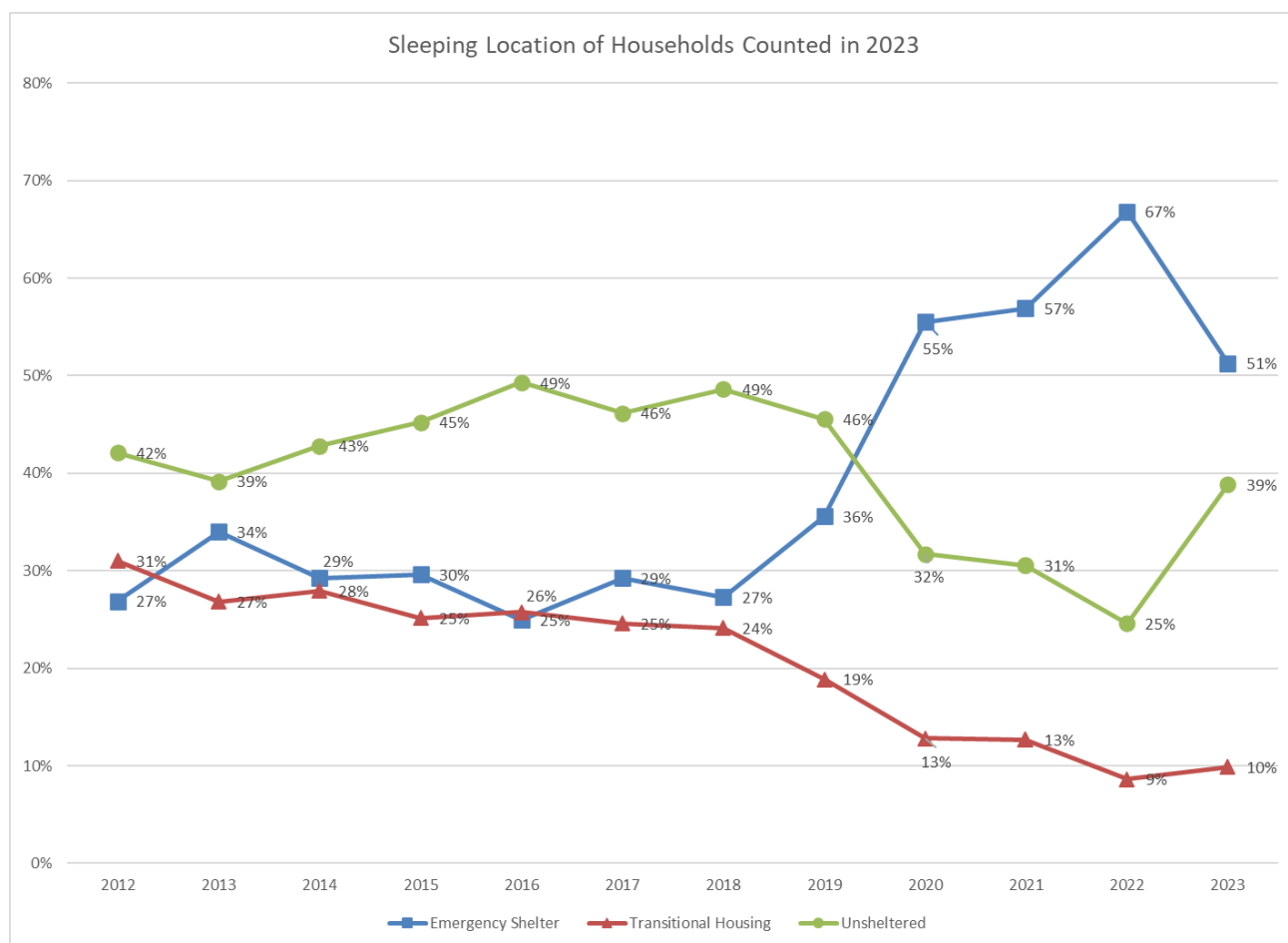
Living Arrangement	Individuals Counted (2023)	Change (Year-Over-Year)	Households Counted (2023)	Change (Year-Over-Year)
Sheltered	711	+9%	520	+8%
Unsheltered	348	+91%	330	+110%
Total	1,059	+27%	850	+33%



An increase in resources to provide motel stays for families with children during the COVID pandemic, along with other increased shelter capacity, likely contributed to the increase in sheltered households. A leading contributor over the last few years has been the increase in hotel use for families from 2019 to 2021 (more detail about family homelessness is provided in following sections).

The relationship between shelter availability and unsheltered homelessness continues to be a complex interaction that reflects the diverse and overlapping needs and desires of the many different people experiencing homelessness. Aligning the types of shelters and the services offered with the community's need is an ongoing challenge. The number of people included in the unsheltered count demonstrates that the needs of the community are not being met by current and available resources for shelter, services, and affordable

housing. This is further evidenced by the number of households who are eligible for services but remain homeless due to system capacity issues. The registry of eligible households who have sought services (the “housing pool”) consistently shows more new households seeking services each month than are connected with program openings. Although shelter capacity increased slightly since 2022, the number of unsheltered individuals increased dramatically indicating that shortage of resources is growing more severe. Outreach professionals concur that the likely reason for the increase in unsheltered individuals is that homelessness is increasing, and available shelters are near or at capacity, or do not offer the services in a way that will meet the individuals’ needs.



Household Size and Composition

Of the 850 households experiencing homelessness counted, 752 (88%) were unaccompanied (single) persons. There were 11 (1%) family households with more than one adult but without children. Families with children accounted for 87 households (10% of total households). Of the households with children, 63 were single-parent families and 24 families had both parents present. In addition, three households comprised of unaccompanied minors were counted in 2023. Compared to last year, there was a 6% increase in households with children and a 37% increase in households without children. It is probable that 87 households with children experiencing homeless is a significant undercount because Housing Pool data indicates many eligible families were waiting for services in January, although they were unreachable when surveys were conducted. The following reasons explain why some families on the Housing Pool were not counted for the purposes of this report:

- CE staff attempted contact, but could not get in touch with the families

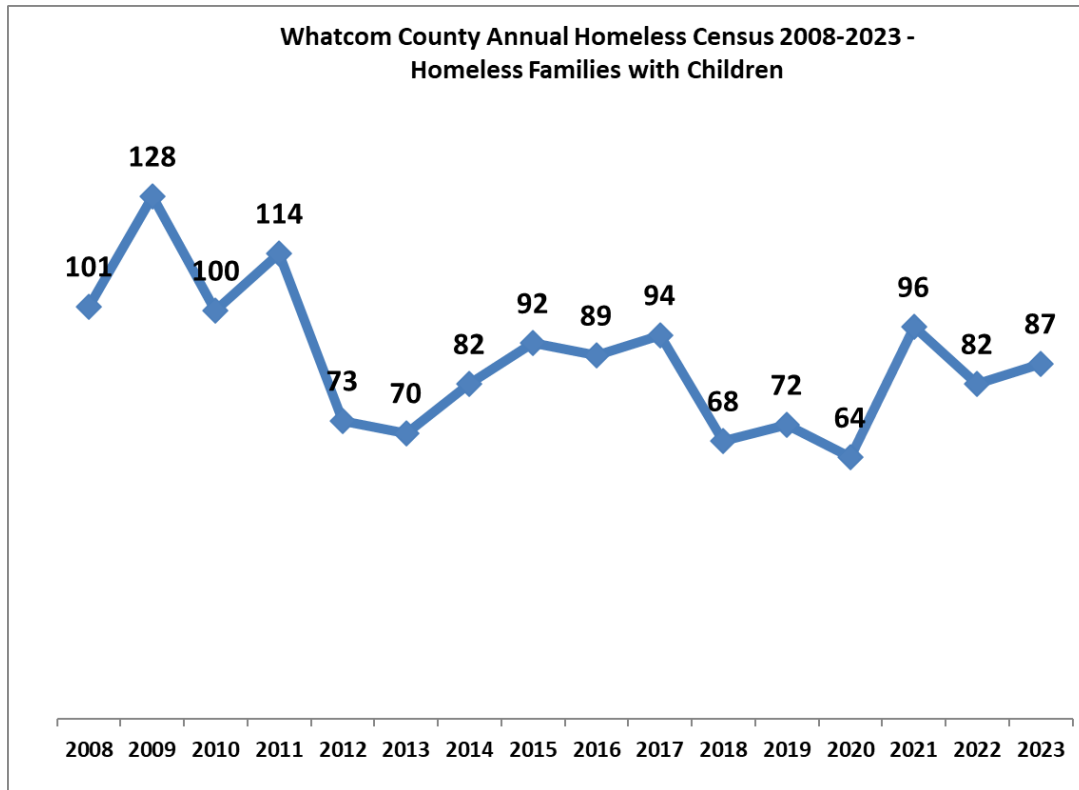
- The household was not considered a family with children on the night of January 26 (child was not unsheltered or head of household was pregnant)
- The family wasn't eligible to be counted (e.g. fleeing domestic violence and staying in a rental or with family/friends)

Household Type	Number of Households	Percent of Households
Households with more than one Adult, no Children	11	1%
Single Parent with Children	63	7%
Two Parents with Children	24	3%
Unaccompanied Individuals	752	88%
Total	850	100%

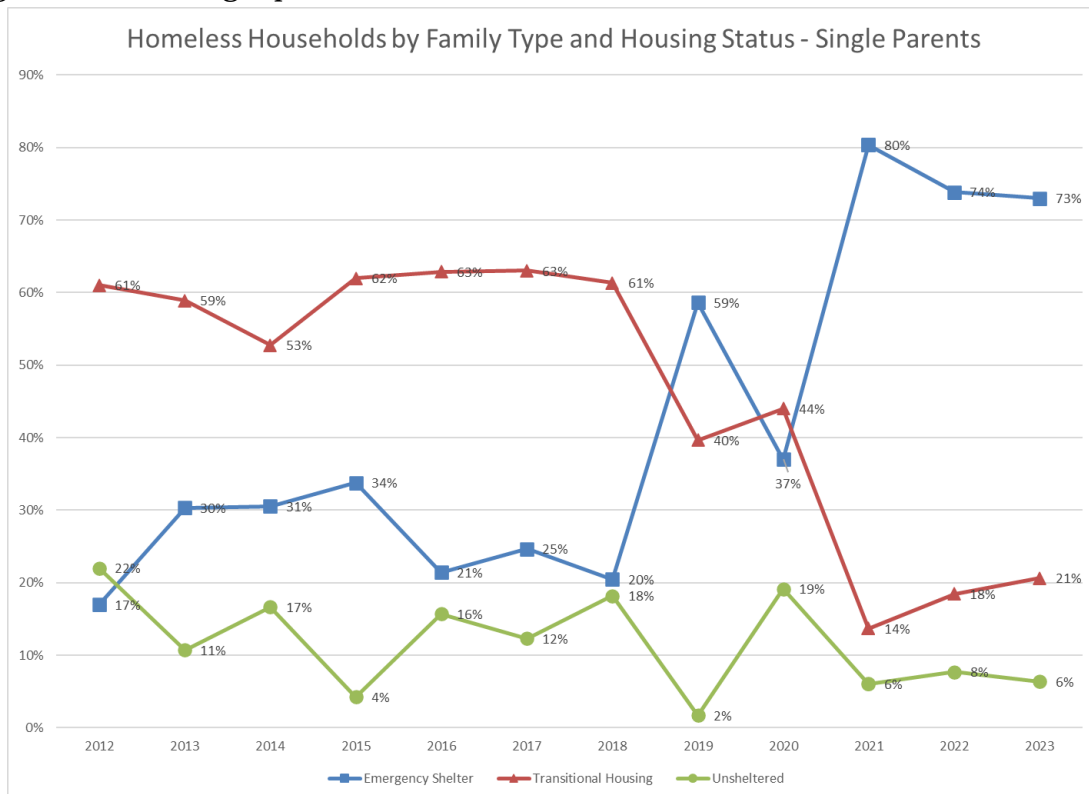
As in years past, the overwhelming majority of households continue to be comprised of single, unaccompanied adults. These one-person households have been shown to be more likely to experience unsheltered and chronic homelessness.

Families with children

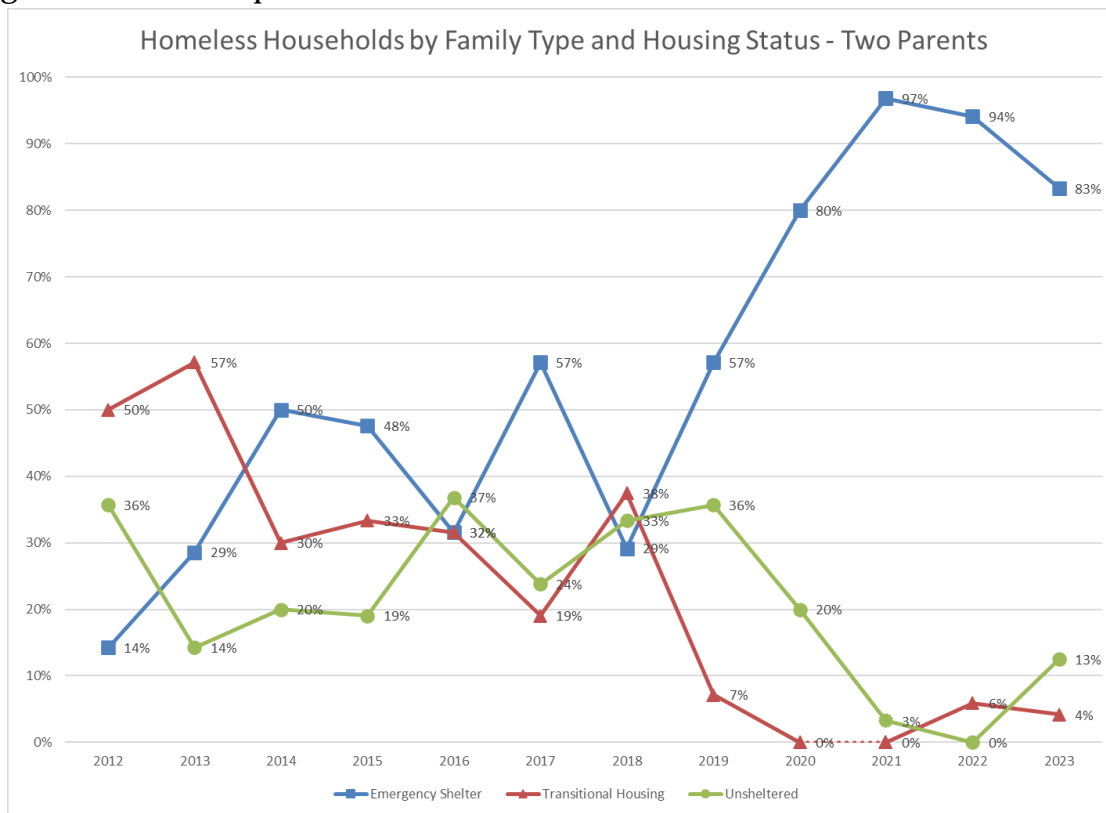
The number of families with children counted in motels increased dramatically in 2021 following an expansion of the motel program, and has remained elevated. Over the last three years the number of homeless families counted has averaged 88 households. In the previous three years (2018-2020) the average was 68. Children experiencing homelessness consistently comprise a significant proportion of people counted year over year. Persons under the age of 18 accounted for 15% of all persons identified in 2023. Since 2019, children have made up between 15-18% of all individuals counted, with the exception of 2021 when 22% of all individuals counted were under 18. As always, family composition is reported through self-report surveys and does not account for complex custody arrangements.



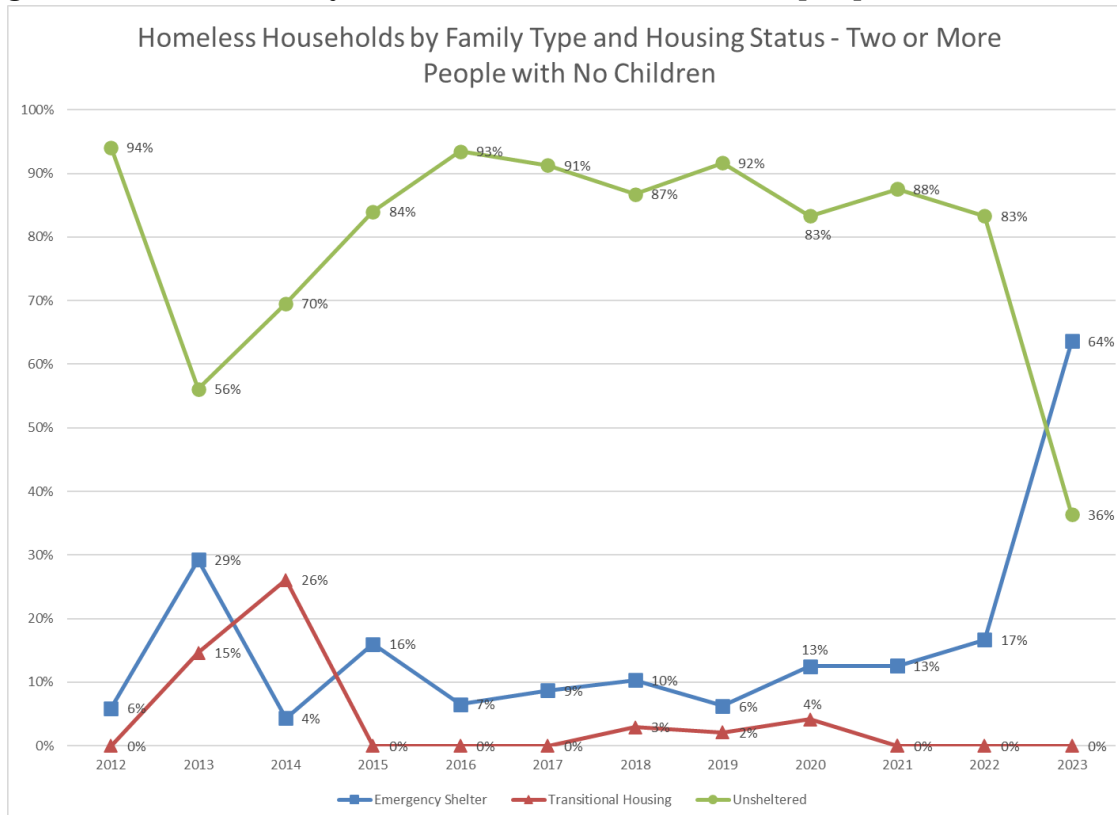
Sleeping location of single parent households



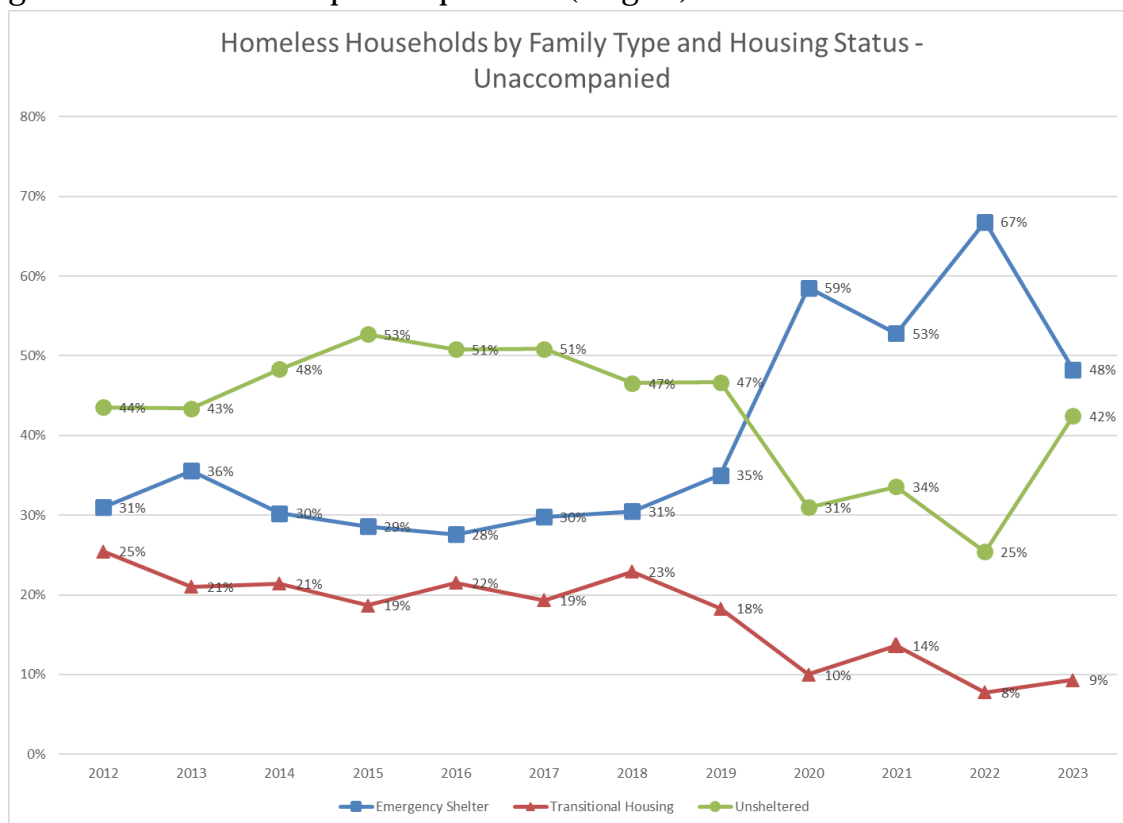
Sleeping location of two parent households



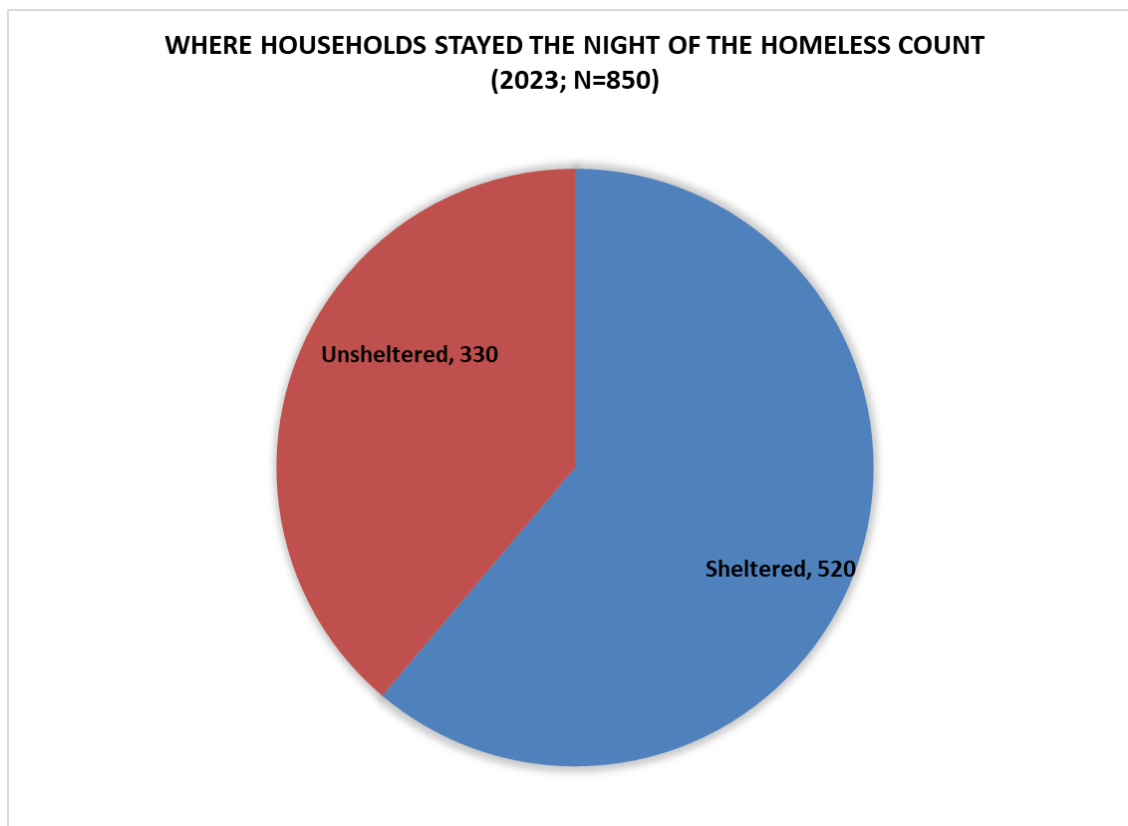
Sleeping location of adult-only households with two or more people



Sleeping location of unaccompanied persons (singles)



Sheltered and unsheltered households



The two broad categories for sleeping locations are either sheltered or unsheltered. Sheltered locations are further divided into transitional housing and emergency shelter programs (sometimes collectively referred to as “interim housing”). Although there are differences among interim housing programs, transitional housing tends to resemble a stable, predictable home for the medium-term, and emergency shelter stays usually are shorter, aiming to host individuals or families for about 90 days. There are many types of emergency shelters, some with drop-in availability, some for specific populations (i.e. minors, survivors of domestic violence, etc.), some that use congregate settings or tiny homes, and others that provide private bedrooms or entire units in more traditional residential settings. By definition, people residing in either emergency shelters or transitional housing facilities are considered to be experiencing homelessness because they do not benefit from the protections of a legally-binding lease for their home.

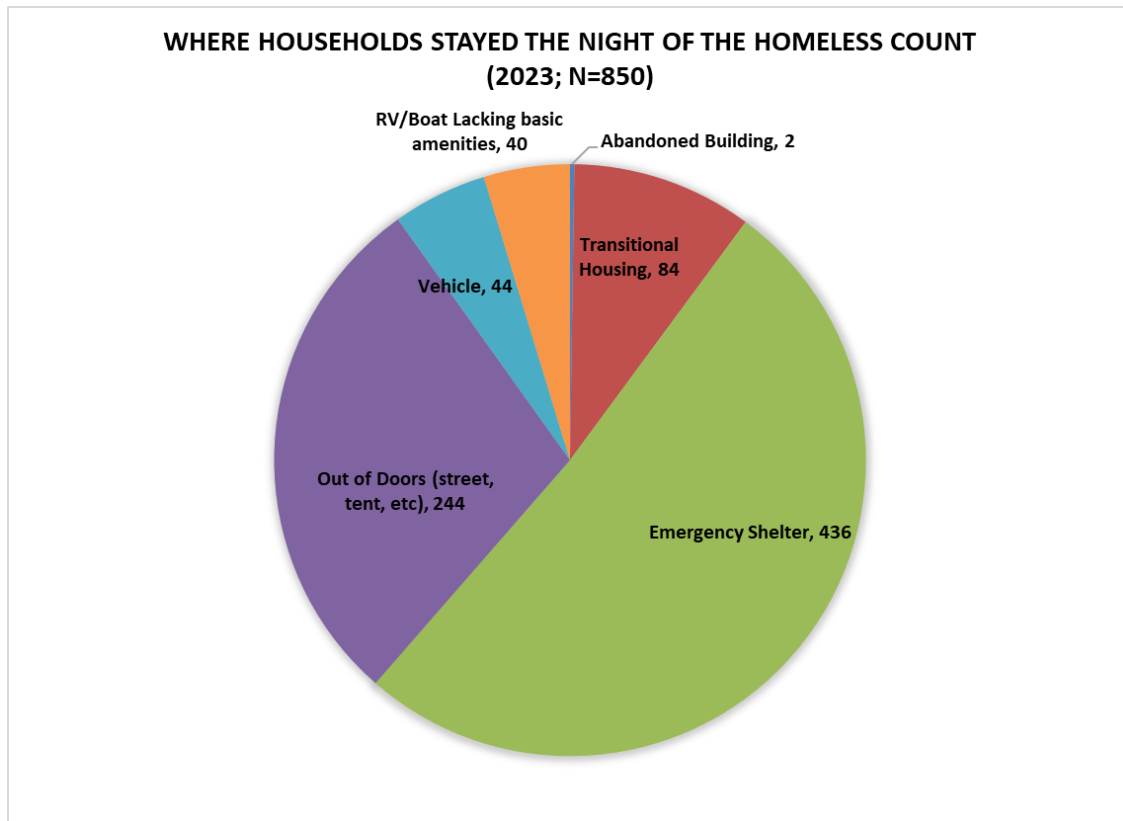
In 2023, 61% of all surveyed households experiencing homelessness had spent the Point-in-Time Count night in a shelter or transitional housing facility and the other 39% spent the night unsheltered.

- Of the 61% in shelters or transitional housing, more than five out of six (84%) were in an emergency shelter, including subsidized motels, and the rest were in transitional housing (16%).
- Of the 39% of households experiencing homelessness who were unsheltered, about three out of four (74%) were staying outdoors, 13% slept in passenger cars or trucks, 12% were in a RV or boat that lacked access to amenities such as water or electricity, and the remaining 1% slept in an abandoned building.

Location	Percent of All Households Counted
Sheltered (Transitional)	10
Sheltered (Emergency Shelter)	51
Sheltered (Subtotal)	61
Unsheltered (Outdoors)	29
Unsheltered (Cars or Trucks)	5
Unsheltered (RV or Boat)	5
Unsheltered (Abandoned Building)	>1
Unsheltered (Subtotal)	39
Any Location	100

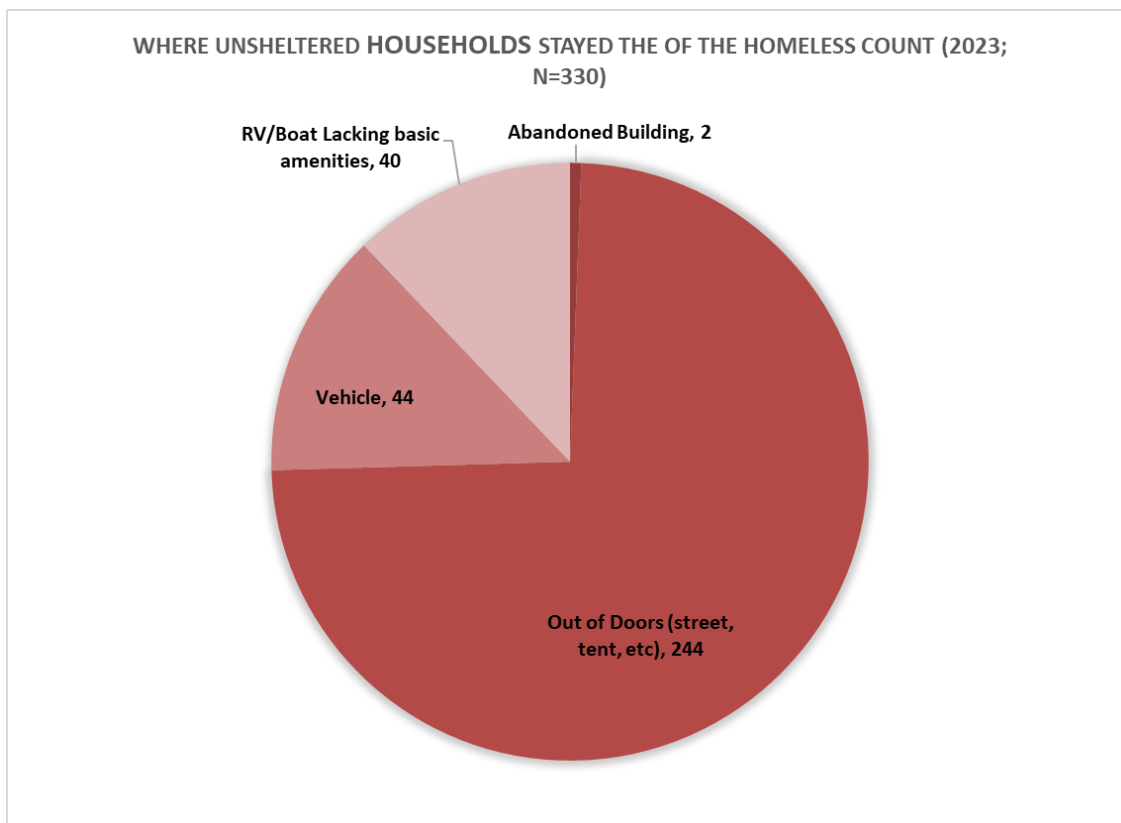
When compared to households that are unsheltered, people sleeping in interim housing facilities (transitional housing or emergency shelters) have better access to opportunities that can lead to long-term health improvement and housing stability. Resources in shelters include hygiene facilities, healthy food and clean drinking water, connections to medical care, and often a place to safely store their belongings. PIT reports in previous years have counted unsheltered homelessness despite shelter availability, which has suggested that shelters do not adequately meet the personal needs of people choosing not to use them. But this year’s surge in the number of unsheltered individuals as well as shelters that were frequently full over the winter clearly demonstrates a problem with capacity. The amount of shelter needed is primarily the product of two factors: the rate of people becoming homeless in the area and the average number of days it takes for them to move on

to different living situations. System data has shown increasingly long lengths of stay in shelters, creating congestion that prevents beds from becoming available.



The above graph shows the number and location for each of the 850 households counted in 2023.

The following graph shows the number type of location of only the *unsheltered* survey participants. It describes where they reported having slept the night of January 26th, 2023.

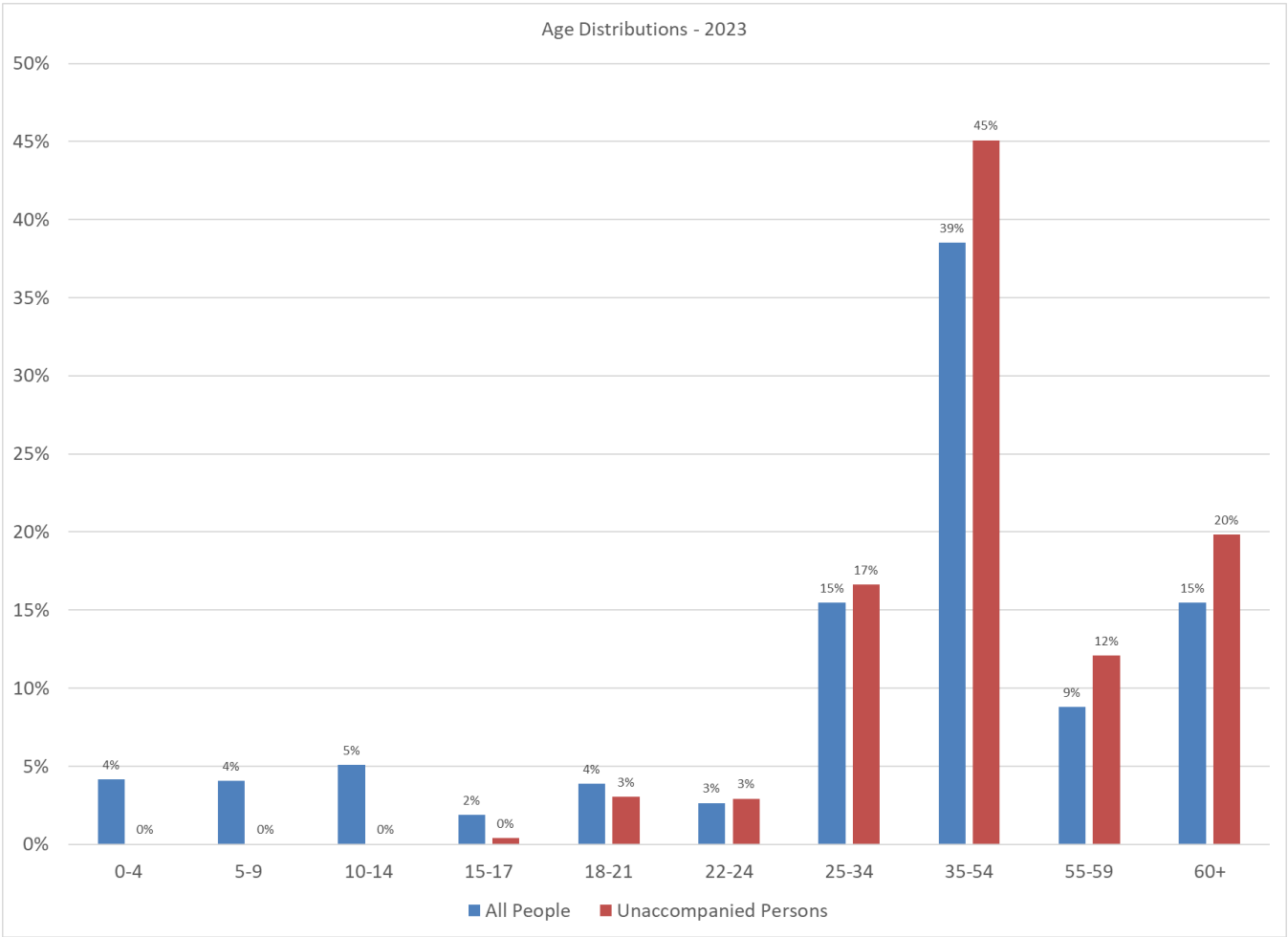


Age and gender

Respondents could select more than one gender option or refuse to answer the question. Of those who were surveyed, persons experiencing homelessness were divided between persons who identified as males (58%), females (41%), gender nonconforming (less than 1%), or more than one gender (e.g., female and transgender, female and a gender other than a singular gender; less than 1%). Another one percent of respondents chose not to disclose or identify a gender.

There was a wide range of ages, spanning from infants less than a year old to seniors as old as 89. The median age of all persons experiencing homelessness, including children, was 41 years. Children under 10 years old accounted for 8% of all identified individuals, and another 7% were between 10 and 17 years old. Together, children under the age of 18 accounted for about one in seven of all individuals counted.

Unaccompanied individuals tend to be older than members of multi-person households. The median age of unaccompanied persons experiencing homelessness was 47 years, and 20% of all unaccompanied persons experiencing homelessness were 60+. Two unaccompanied minors (ages 16 to 17) were staying in an emergency shelter for youth, and one unaccompanied minor was staying unsheltered. Most (62%) unaccompanied persons were 35-54 years of age.

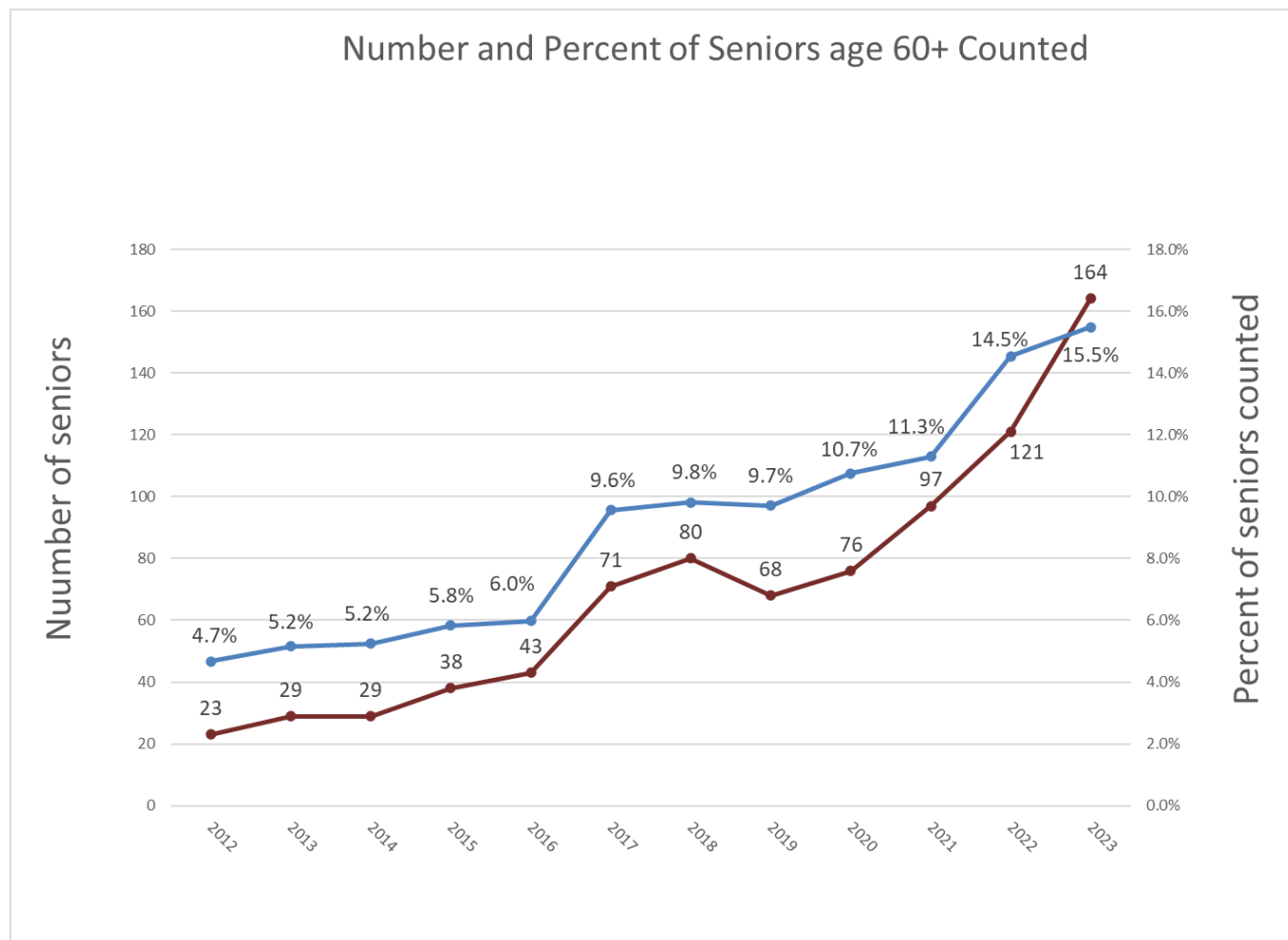


The number of seniors counted has increased steadily over the past five years, and seniors have made up a larger and larger percentage of the homeless population. Since 2019, senior homelessness measured in the Point-in-Time Counts has increased by 141% from 68 in 2019 to 164 in 2023. In that same time frame, the percentage of seniors among those surveyed also increased by about a half, from less than 10% to more than 15%.

Health conditions and complexities for seniors 60+ are being recognized at a national level as well: The National Alliance to End Homelessness reports that homelessness among older adults is expected to nearly triple in 2030². Compounding this issue is that individuals experiencing homelessness and aged 50+ are more frequently experiencing health complications normally found in populations aged 70+³ due to the difficult conditions they endure while unhoused.

² United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. (2022, December). *ALL IN: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*. https://www.usich.gov/All_In.pdf

³ Brown, Hemati, Riley, Lee, Ponath, Tieu, Guzman and Kushel. (2016). Geriatric Conditions in a Population-Based Sample of Older Homeless Adults. *The Gerontologist*, Volume 57 (Issue 4) August 2017, Pages 757–766. <https://academic.oup.com/gerontologist/article/57/4/757/2631974>



Disabling Conditions

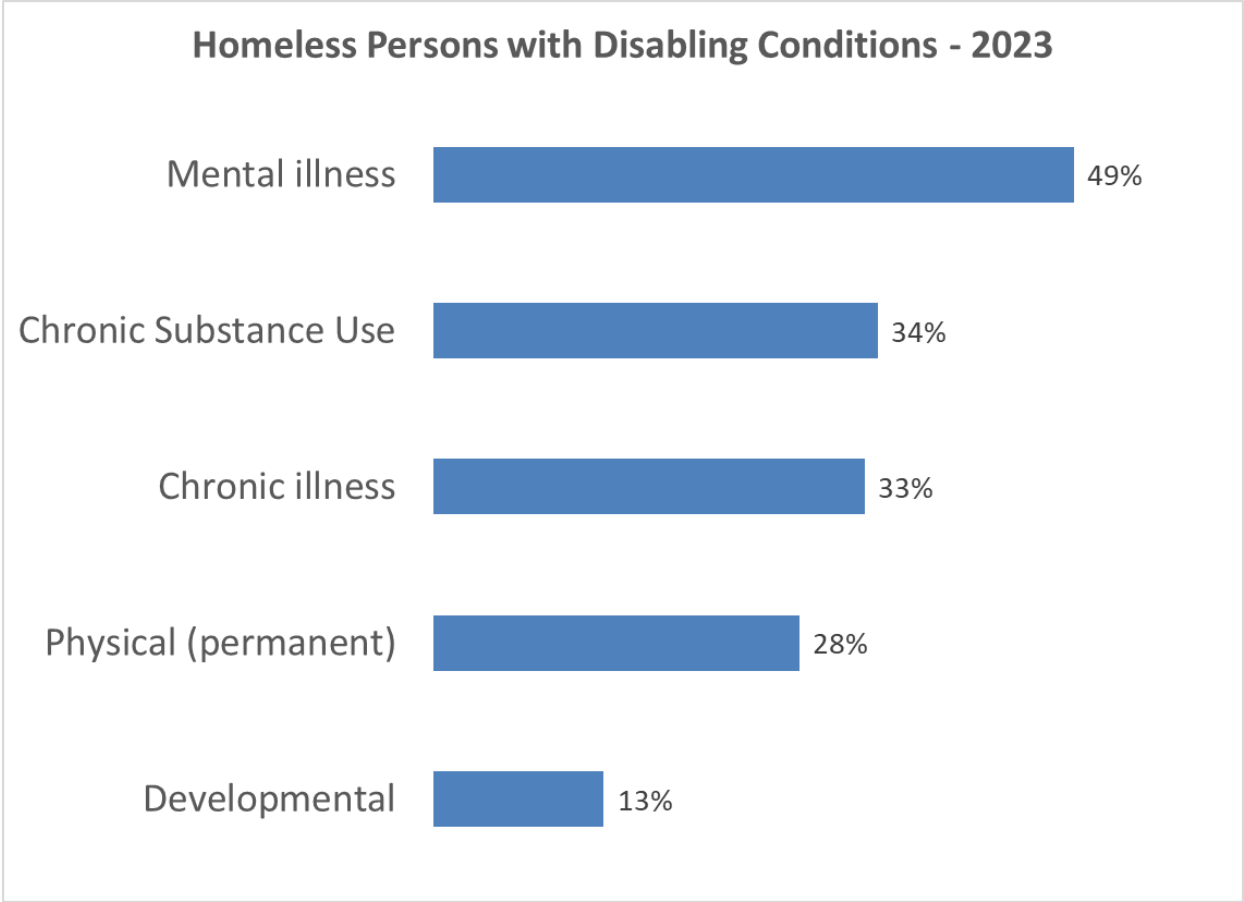
Respondents who were staying in a night-by-night emergency program (e.g., Base Camp) are not required to respond to disability questions when they enter the shelter. As a result, responses for night-by-night shelter participants regarding disabling conditions are not available for this report. All who responded to this question were individuals who stayed unsheltered, in continuous stay emergency shelters, or in transitional housing. They were asked to indicate if they, or members of their household, have any of the following five disabilities⁴:

- Mental Health (Substantial and Long Term)
- Chronic Health Condition (Permanently Disabling)
- Developmental Disability
- Physical Disability (Permanent)
- Chronic Substance Use

The chart below includes only persons who were staying unsheltered, or in continuous stay emergency shelters or transitional housing operated by local providers including Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services (DVSAS), YWCA, Northwest Youth Services, Opportunity Council, Lydia Place, Sun Community Services, Lighthouse Mission Ministries (not including the Base Camp emergency shelter), HomesNOW!, Interfaith Coalition, New Way Ministries, Low Income Housing Institute, Lake Whatcom Center, and Engedi Refuge. Disability information is available for only 836 of the 1059 persons counted this year.

⁴ The five categories of disabilities, as well as the specific wording to describe the categories, were determined by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development.

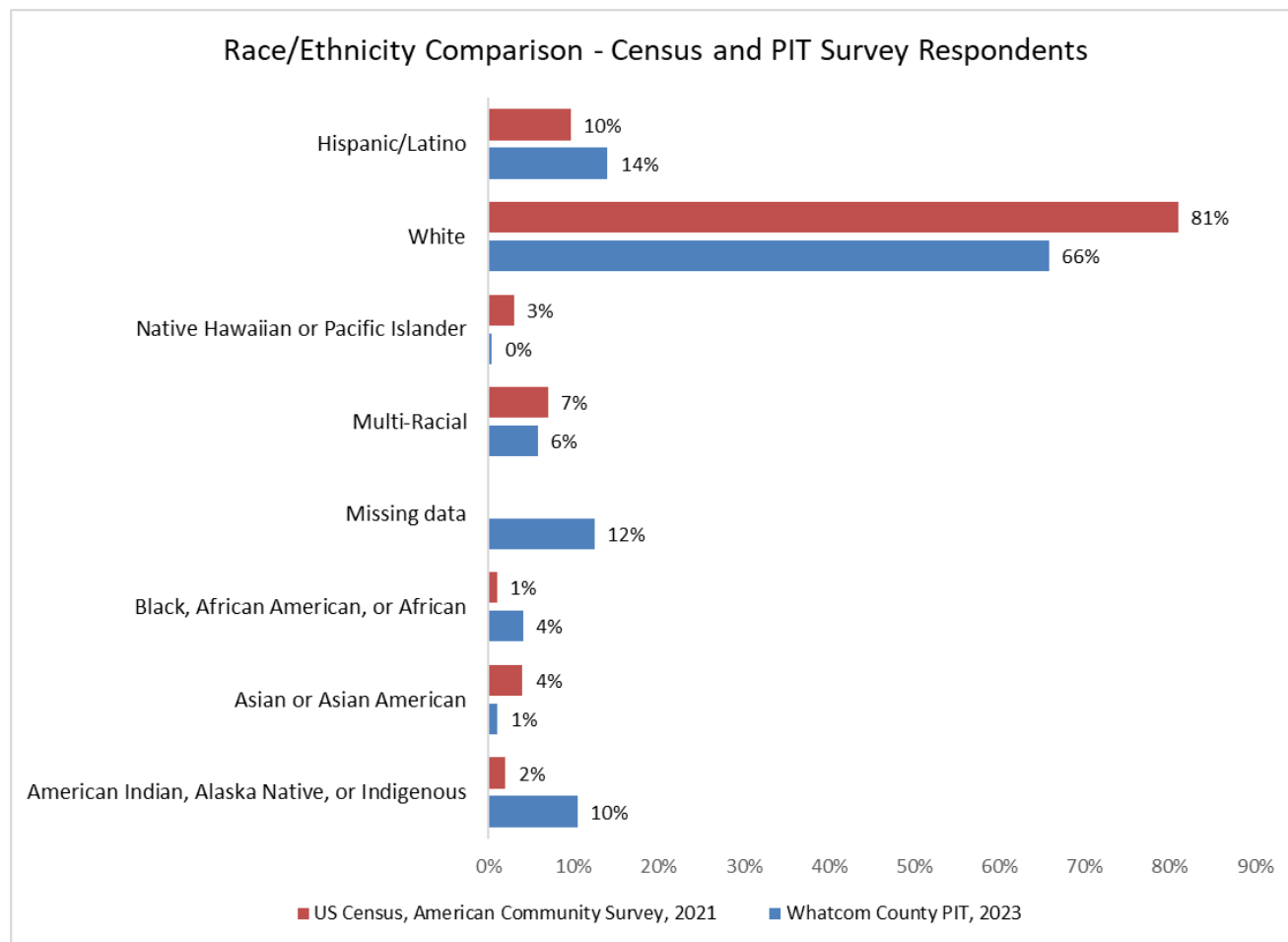
The disabling conditions asked about and reported for the 836 surveyed individuals were mental illness (49%), chronic health conditions (33%), developmental disability (13%), permanent physical disabilities (28%), and chronic substance use (34%). Compared to 2022, all disabling conditions categories increased besides developmental disabilities which decreased by 3%. The number of people experiencing homelessness while also suffering from chronic substance use more than doubled, from 16% in 2022 to 34% in 2023. Two thirds of people who answered disability questions reported having at least one disability (558 of 836). The data on disabling conditions is based on self-report, and it is acknowledged that negative stigma may contribute to under-reporting of personal disabilities.



Disabilities are common among individuals experiencing homelessness, with many experiencing more than one disability that may be contributing to their housing insecurity. The combination of having a disability and experiencing housing insecurity can make it more difficult to obtain an education or maintain employment, thus contributing to financial difficulties related to housing security. People with disabilities are disproportionately likely to experience homelessness because of limitations related to fixed income that increasingly cannot cover the cost of living. They may also have difficulty accessing benefits and services when needed, and/or have unstable employment due to discrimination related to their disability.

Race and Ethnicity

Survey respondents were asked to list which race or races they identify with and results are shown below. Note that 12% of respondents did not answer this question.

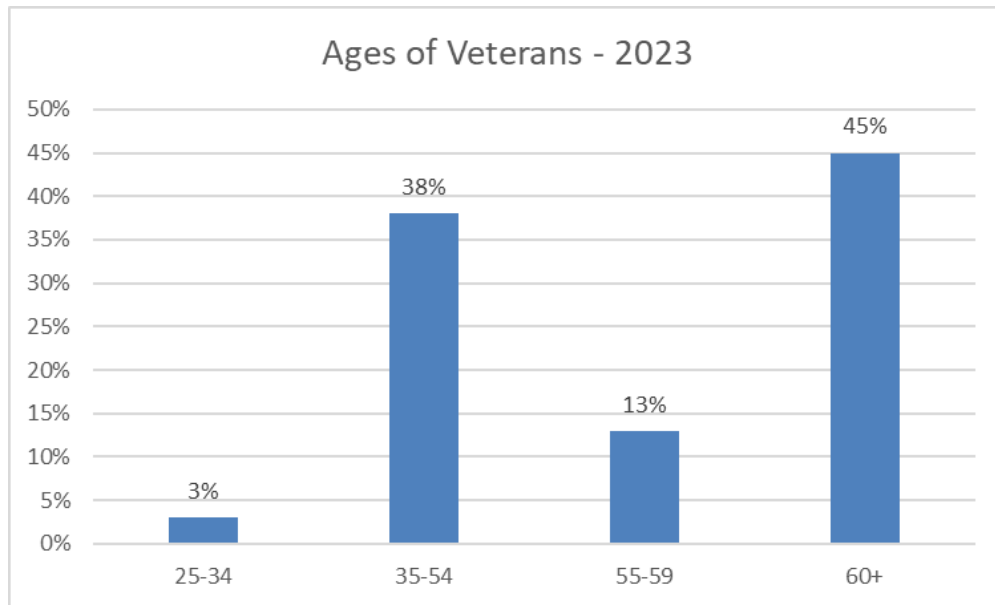


Race and ethnicity continue to correlate with homelessness. The 2023 Point-in-Time Count surveys show that only 66% of the respondents identify as white. This is in contrast to census data that reports 81% of county residents are white, a difference of 15%. Likewise, with ethnicity, we see a greater percent of PIT respondents identifying as Hispanic (14%) than the percent of county residents who are Hispanic (10%) according to the census data. The PIT data is incomplete (12% did not answer this question) and surveys were not conducted by outreach workers across all of Whatcom County, but the survey responses suggest that work is needed to offset current systems that result in a greater portion of people of color experiencing homelessness than their white neighbors. Adding further evidence of overrepresentation among the homeless community, minimal surveys were conducted across Lummi Nation, and surveys were not conducted on site this year with the Nooksack tribe. This suggests that the undercount of non-white individuals may be significantly higher than it would be otherwise, and that exploration of additional factors that are contributing to high rates of homelessness for some communities within Whatcom County is needed.

Veterans

Surveyors counted 60 homeless veteran households in 2023. Fifty-seven of these households were comprised of a single person, one was a household that included children, and two included more than one adult, but no children. Of all the veteran households experiencing homelessness, 25 of them were unsheltered, and 24 of those unsheltered households were experiencing chronic homelessness. Seniors 60 or older accounted for 45% of counted veterans, while the next largest age group comprised of 38% of veterans counted were 35-54 years old. Consistent with the major increase in all individuals experiencing homelessness in 2023 compared to 2022, the number of homeless veterans increased considerably.

Despite significant progress over the last five years in reducing homelessness experienced by veterans, the 2023 count shows an increase in homeless veteran households, indicating that additional resources are necessary to end veteran homelessness for all veterans in Whatcom County. As evidenced by dramatic declines in the number of veterans experiencing homelessness a decade ago, new programs and new resources introduced during the pandemic show promise to be effective in reducing the number of veterans that become, or continue to be, homeless.

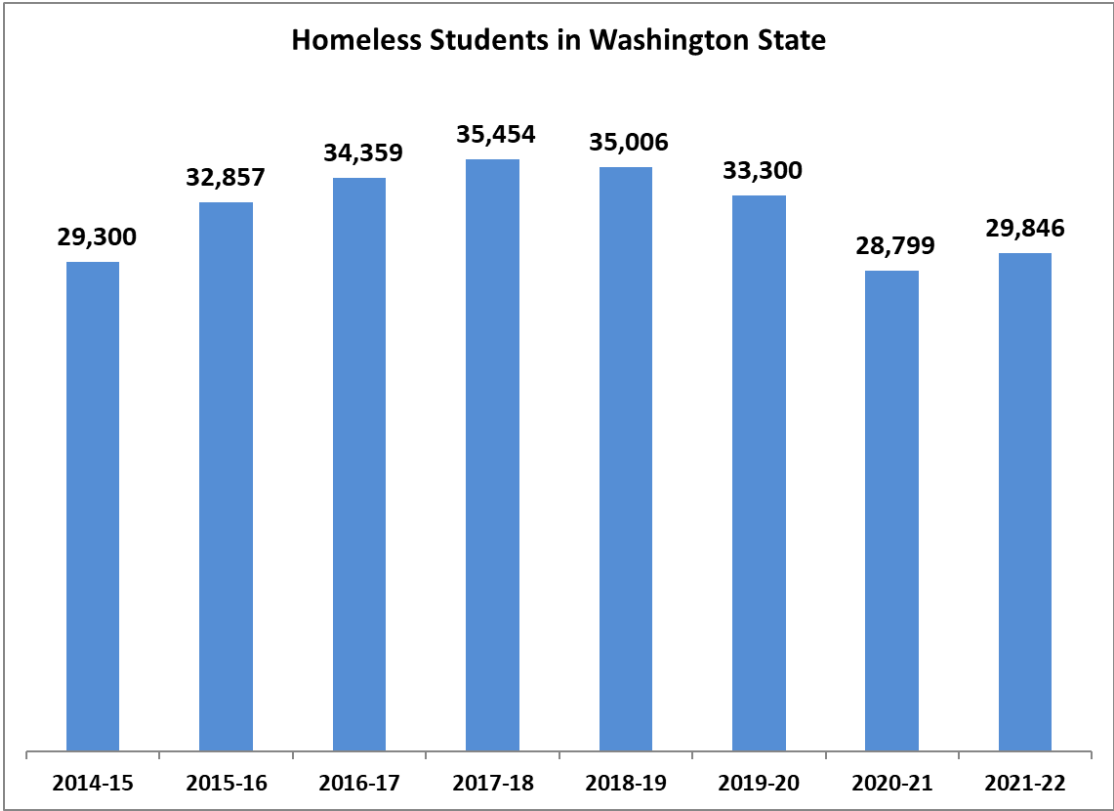


Part B: Homelessness of Public-School Students in Washington State and Whatcom County

In 2004, the U.S. Department of Education began requiring states to report data on homeless students in all local school districts as part of their Consolidated State Performance Report.

Point-in-Time Count reports in Whatcom County before 2022 have included information about homelessness from the Washington State Office of the Superintendent for Public Instruction (OSPI), which was a cumulative count of all students who experienced episodes of homelessness at some point during the school year. The OSPI’s approach to reporting on homelessness changed in the 2020-2021 school year, and their figures now include only the students who were enrolled prior to the first school day of October. As a result, the newly reported numbers are lower, because students that enroll after the beginning October are not included in the report.

The figure below shows the number of homeless students in Washington State public schools over the last seven years. Note that these figures reflect the definition of homeless children included in Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Act⁵, a definition that is different than the one used by HUD and elsewhere in this report, and as noted above, includes only students enrolled in the district prior to October.



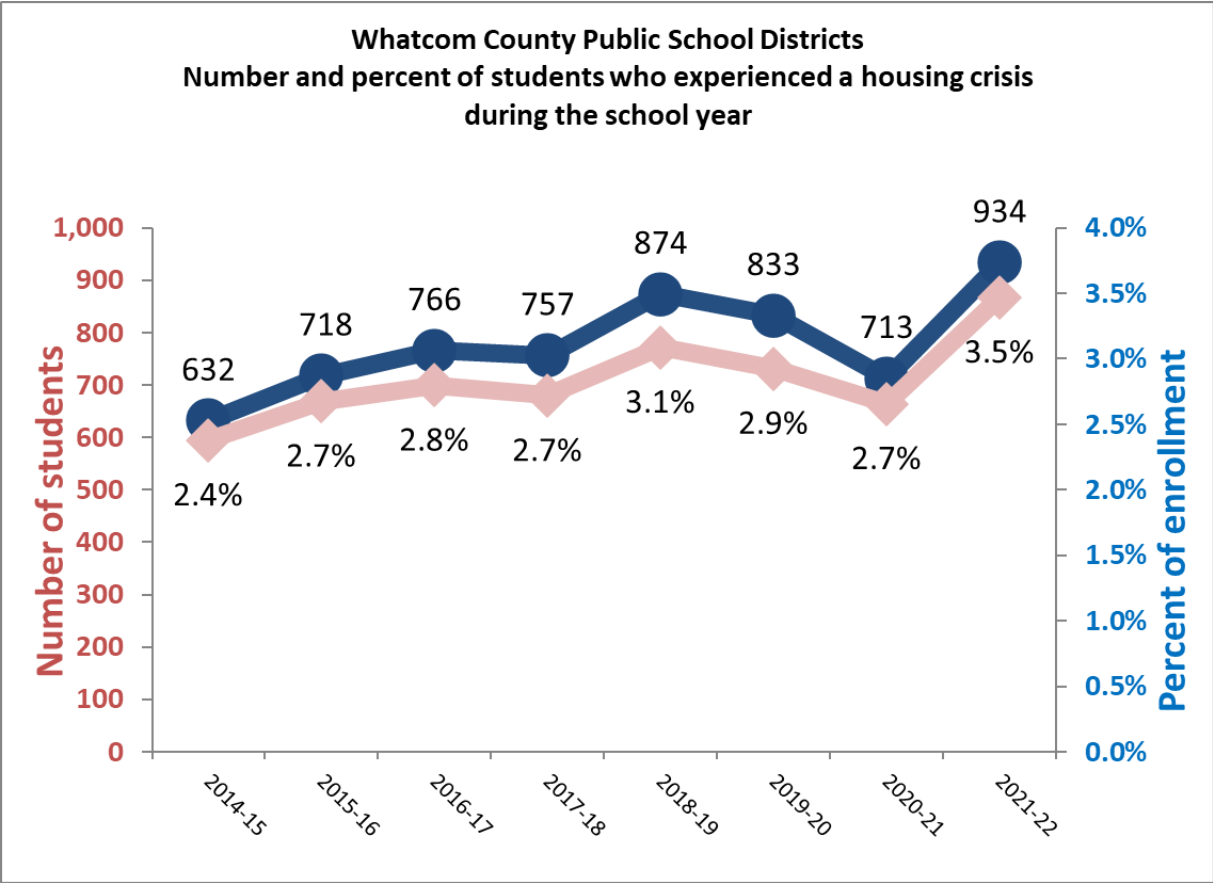
⁵ Individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence including, children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement; children and youths who have 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; children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and migratory children who qualify as homeless.

Differences between Point-in-Time count and school data

School districts and the OSPI report data on homelessness that is different than the countywide annual Point-in-Time Count in two important respects. First, the Point-in-Time Count is a snapshot of homelessness on a single night, whereas the data reported by schools are cumulative over the course of a school year (meaning they add together everyone who is homeless at any point during the school year). Secondly, the PIT Count data includes only people who are “literally” homeless according to HUD, generally meaning people who are unsheltered, in emergency shelter, or in transitional housing. In addition to those three categories, school districts also include children who are doubled-up with another family to prevent becoming literally homeless, and households residing in a hotel or motel that is paid with private funding.

Homelessness among students at public schools in Whatcom County

The emerging trend in Whatcom County is similar to the state as a whole (shown on the previous page). The following graph shows that in Whatcom County there was a significant increase in homelessness among public school students after the 2017-18 school year, followed by a decrease of 9% between the 2019-20 and 2020-21 years and an increase of 31% between the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years (the most recent data available at the time of this report). Since the 2014-2015 school year, the percentage of students who experience homelessness has increased from 2.4% to 3.5%, or stated differently, from 24 out of every 1,000 students to 35 out of every 1,000 students.

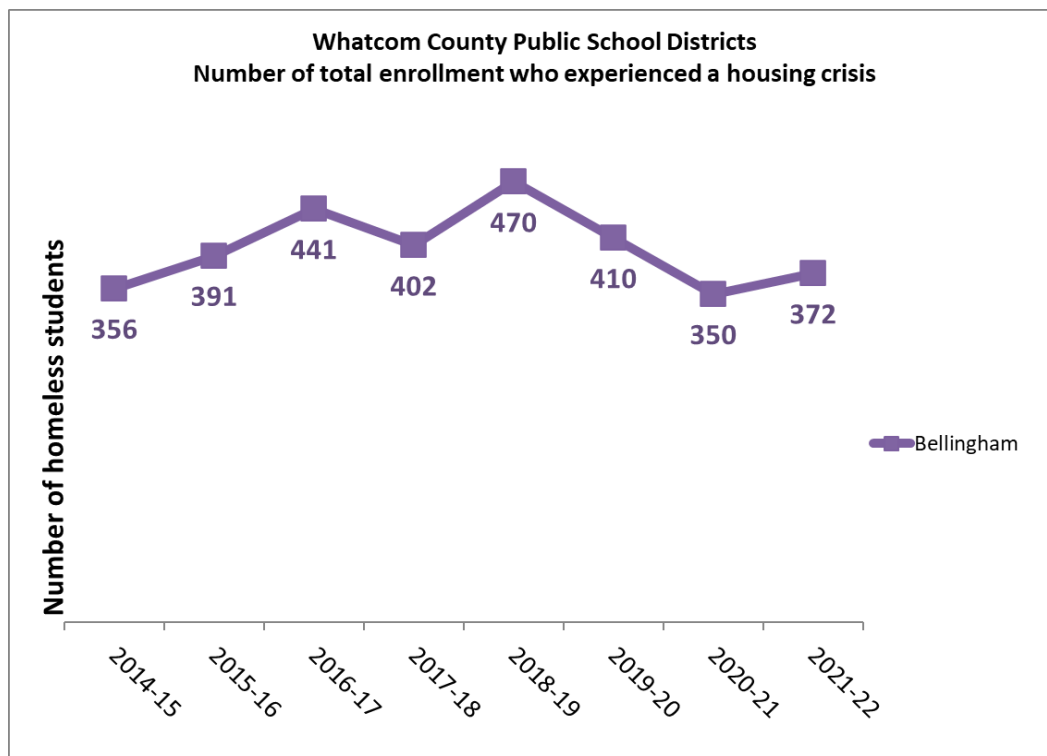


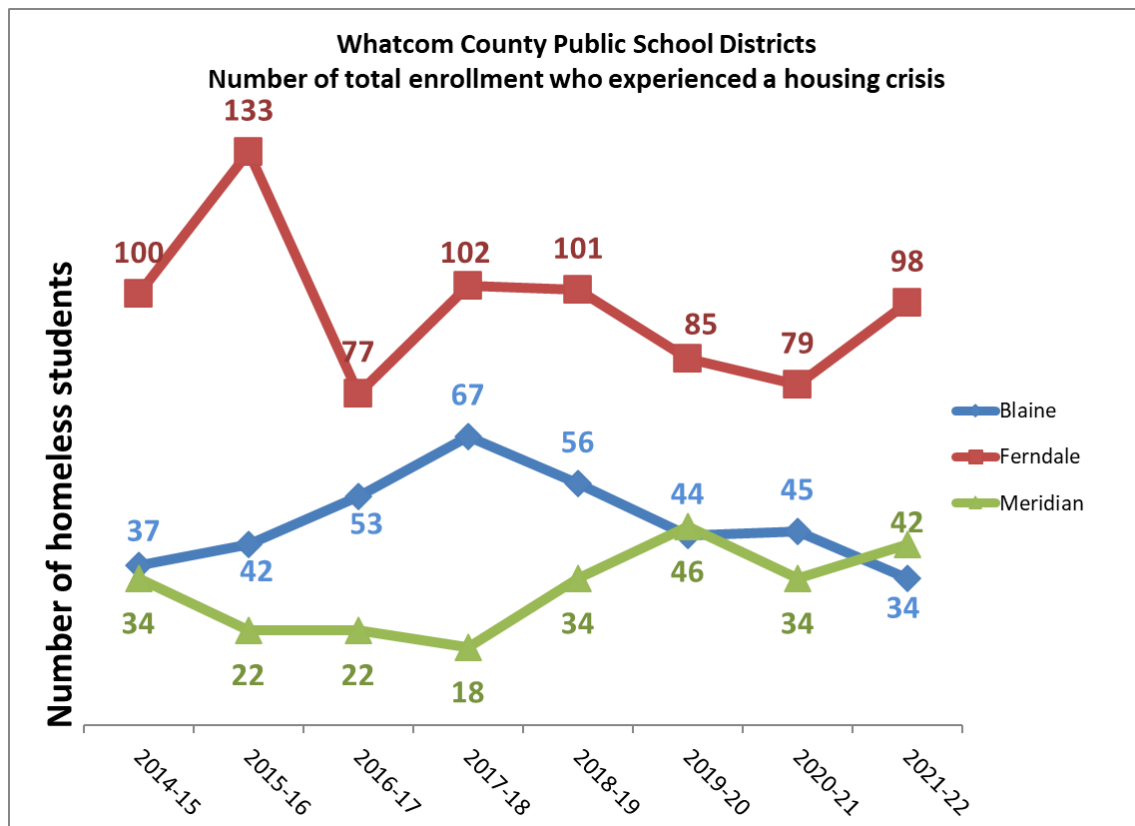
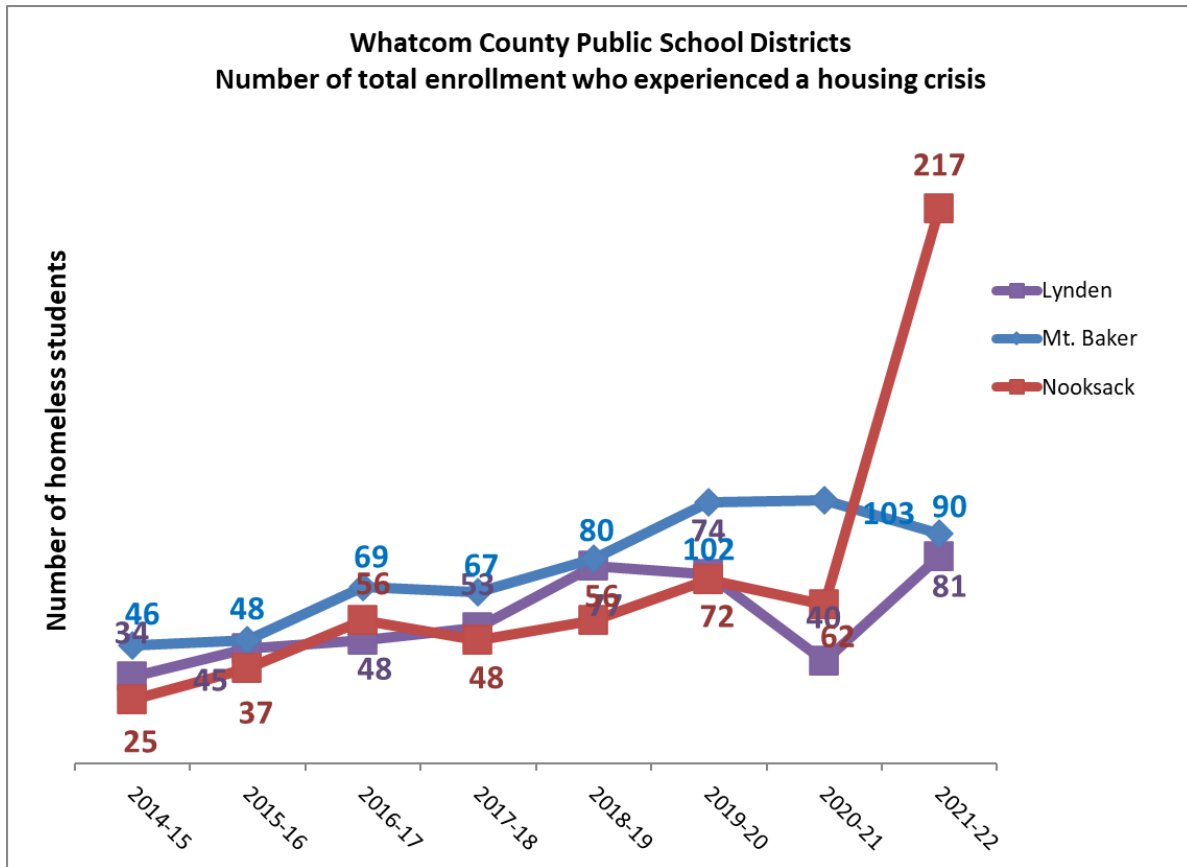
Public school homeless statistics by district

The charts below show the number of homeless students counted in each school district from 2014-15 to 2021-22 school years. These charts are one of the few opportunities to look at homelessness as it relates to geography

within Whatcom County because the standardized approach taken by these public-school districts is consistent from region to region and numbers do not rely on street outreach or other Bellingham-based services.

As noted in the graph above, homelessness among students had been growing in Whatcom County, then went down for two school years, but in the past school year has increased. Disaggregated data, shown below, provides more local insight about how different regions of the county are faring in this respect. For example, in Bellingham School District, the most populous district, homelessness had decreased by 26% between 2018-19 and 2020-21. However, between 2020-21 and 2021-22 homelessness increased by 6%. The Nooksack and Lynden school districts both had a large increase in students experiencing homelessness, from 40 in the 2020-21 school year to 81 in the 2021-22 school year in Lynden (+ 103%), and from 62 in 2020-21 to 217 in 2021-22 in Nooksack (+250%). According to the Nooksack Valley School District Homeless Liaison, the tremendous spike in Nooksack students experiencing homelessness is largely a result of the major Nooksack River flooding event that occurred in the fall of 2021. The school district liaison continues to identify additional students experiencing homelessness due to the flood. Furthermore, while student homelessness went up overall in several areas of the county in the past school year, homelessness among students went down in both the Blaine (-24%) and the Mt. Baker School Districts (-13%). Other districts have seen periods of growth and reduction, indicating a dynamic environment for local families, and one of geographic inconsistency from district to district. These changes may also reflect families relocating from district to district.





Homelessness and academic achievement⁶

The McKinney-Vento Act requires school districts to proactively identify and enroll homeless students, even if they lack the normally required documents for enrollment. The definition of homeless includes children and youth who “lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.” Eligible students may continue attending their school of origin (if feasible) with transportation provided by the school district upon request, even if they move outside their school of origin’s residential zone. Students may also transfer to the local attendance area school. These rights, including the right to immediate enrollment, extend to unaccompanied homeless youth, even if they are unable to provide proof of guardianship.

Under the McKinney-Vento Act, states are required to distribute a certain portion of their state’s homeless education funding to school districts through competitive subgrants. Subgrant funds facilitate the school enrollment, attendance, and success of homeless children and youth. The level of funding for subgrants is based on the needs of the Lead Educational Agency requesting assistance, as well as the quality of their applications. School districts that apply for and receive McKinney-Vento subgrants may use the funds to provide tutoring and supplemental instruction, early childhood education, transportation, school supplies, professional development on homeless education issues for school and district staff, and other services that otherwise may not be provided by the public-school program.

While lack of housing is a direct challenge for students, there are broader difficulties experienced by homeless students and other students living in poverty that researchers suggest may have a greater effect on student performance. These include:

- economic stressors
- parental job loss
- parental financial distress
- residential mobility
- school mobility
- crowding
- hunger and poor nutrition

Researchers also underscore the significance of cumulative risk, pointing out that many of the risk factors listed above often co-occur in the lives of homeless children, making it difficult to isolate the effects of each individual risk factor.

Despite the difficulty in separating the effects of poverty from those of homelessness, and the mixed results of studies comparing homeless and low-income children, homeless children are a particularly vulnerable, diverse subgroup of disadvantaged children. They face substantial challenges in achieving academic success, and the consequences of their struggles can last a lifetime.

⁶ This section is excerpted from: Bowman, Dukes, and Moore. 2012. *Summary of the State of Research on the Relationship Between Homelessness and Academic Achievement Among School-Aged Children and Youth*. National Center for Homeless Education, Greensboro, NC.

Appendix A: Survey Form

2023 Whatcom County Point-in-Time Count Agency or Location: _____

NOTE: Victims of DV: do not enter name, birth month or birth day into HMIS. However, please collect this information so surveys can be de-duplicated prior to data entry. No signature is required.
ONE FORM PER HOUSEHOLD

Location: Where did you stay last night? (choose one - applies to entire household)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Out of Doors (street, tent, etc) City/Town staying in: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Emergency Shelter/Motel Voucher Program (program name: _____)
<input type="checkbox"/> Vehicle (CAR/TRUCK ONLY) City/Town staying in: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Homeless Transitional Housing Program (program name: _____)
<input type="checkbox"/> RV/Boat lacking any of the following amenities: drinking water, restroom, heat, ability to cook/bathe City/Town staying in: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Permanent Supportive Housing Program* *STOP!
<input type="checkbox"/> Abandoned Building City/Town staying in: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> (Currently in Jail) *STOP!
<input type="checkbox"/> (Currently in Hosp/Detox/Other facility)* *STOP!	<input type="checkbox"/> Temp. Living w/ Family or Friends *STOP! <input type="checkbox"/> Paying for a motel *STOP!

*"STOP!" indicates not considered homeless for PIT. Do not proceed with rest of form.

A. *Household Information																
ONLY include CHILDREN and other household members if they are staying in the same location as the Head of Household (Please enter each HH member below. Use additional form if household has more than seven members.) <u>Please check a HH type in the next box.</u>																
Household without Children _____ Household with Adults & Children _____ Households with only Children _____																
Last Known Permanent Location City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____										v. Disabilities						
										Check all that apply to each client						
Individual #	Relation to Head of Household Spousal/Partner/Child/Etc	ii.		iii.			iv. Population Data				NONE APPLY	Chronic Substance Abuse	Physical Disability (Permanent)	Developmental Disability	Mental Health (Substantial & Long-Term)	Chronic Health Condition (Permanently Disabling)
		First Name	Last Name	Birth Date (or if DOB refused; Year of Birth)			Gender ¹ Choose all that apply	Race ² (enter all that apply)	Native / Indigenous tribe	Ethnicity (Hispanic (H) or Non-Hispanic (N))						
				Month	Day	Year										
1	Self															
2																
3																
4																
5																
6																
7																

¹ Male (M), Female (F), Transgender (T), Not singularly male or female (e.g., non-binary, gender fluid; D), Questioning (Q), Refused (R)
² White (W), Black/African-American (B), Asian/Asian American (A), American Indian/Alaska Native/Indigenous (I), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (H), Client refused (R)

- Q1. Has anyone in your household ever served on active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States?
☐ Yes which individual(s)? Use the "Individual #" from table above: _____ ☐ No ☐ Refused
- Q2. Are you currently fleeing or in danger from a domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking situation? (If yes, DO NOT ENTER NAMES IN HMIS) ☐ Yes Use the "Individual #" from table above: _____ ☐ No
- Q3. What month and year did you become homeless? MONTH _____ YEAR _____
- Q4. Has any adult in household or minor head of household been continuously staying in an emergency shelter and/or unsheltered for a year or more?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Refused
- Q5. Has any adult in household or minor head of household been homeless 4 or more times in the last 3 years? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Q6. Do these times without housing, added together, amount to a year or more? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Q7. Does any person who answered yes for Q4, Q5, or Q6 have a disability? ☐ Yes ☐ No