

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

The Number of Homeless Persons in the Los Angeles Continuum of Care

The 2005 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count, the single largest homeless enumeration effort ever conducted, was performed by using HUD-recommended practices for counting homeless persons. This comprehensive study included a field enumeration, field surveys, telephone surveys, and a sophisticated statistical analysis used to project homelessness in non-enumerated areas.

The overall homeless population of the Los Angeles Continuum of Care (CoC) at a given point in time is estimated to be 82,291 people. Approximately 72,413 were unsheltered, and 9,878 people were living in either emergency shelters or transitional housing programs at the time of the census. For the purposes of this study, the HUD definition of an unsheltered homeless person was used: someone who is either living on the streets, or in a vehicle, encampment, abandoned building, garage, or any other place not normally used or meant for human habitation. An additional 4,360 homeless people were housed in jails, hospitals, and rehabilitation facilities, but do not meet HUD's homeless definition. The CoC includes all of Los Angeles County, excluding the cities of Glendale, Long Beach, and Pasadena, who administer and operate their own respective CoC. If the reported numbers for those cities (6,054 homeless people among the three cities) were totaled with the Los Angeles CoC, the homeless population of Los Angeles County for a point in time in 2005 is estimated to be 88,345 people. The estimate for the Los Angeles CoC is the result of a combination of a physical enumeration and statistical estimations, while the numbers for Glendale, Long Beach, and Pasadena were gathered from each respective city's Continuum of Care application.

Using the above major data components and the results of 3,187 homeless surveys, ASR generated detailed demographic profiles of homeless people in the Los Angeles CoC. Detailed profiles of Los Angeles County's eight Service Planning Areas (SPAs) and the City of Los Angeles are presented in the report, as are population estimates for Los Angeles County Supervisorial Districts, and Los Angeles City Council Districts.

Geographic Breakdowns

The 2005 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count found homelessness was prevalent throughout Los Angeles County's CoC. Not surprisingly Los Angeles, the largest city in the County, has the largest homeless population.

Figure 1: Homeless Estimates by Region

City	Homeless Estimate
Los Angeles	48,103
Other Incorporated Cities*	26,764
Unincorporated Areas	7,424
Los Angeles CoC Total	82,291

*Note: This number excludes the cities of Glendale, Long Beach, and Pasadena.

Figure 2: Homeless Estimates by Service Planning Area

SPA	Homeless Estimate
SPA 1 – Antelope Valley	3,544
SPA 2 – San Fernando Valley	11,275
SPA 3 – San Gabriel Valley	9,254
SPA 4 – Metro Los Angeles	20,023
SPA 5 – West Los Angeles	6,860
SPA 6 – South Los Angeles	16,787
SPA 7 – East Los Angeles	7,178
SPA 8 – South Bay/Harbor	7,369
Los Angeles CoC Total	82,291

Annual Estimate

Survey data regarding the average length of homelessness indicates that the Los Angeles CoC homeless population cycles through homelessness approximately 2.69 times every year. This projects to an annual estimate of 221,363 persons who were homeless some time during the year.

Based on the 2005 population estimates from the State of California

Department of Finance, this annual estimate of homelessness represents approximately 2.4% of Los Angeles County's total population of 9,336,361 people (the Los Angeles County general population estimate does not include the cities of Glendale, Long Beach, and Pasadena).¹

This projects to an annual estimate of 221,363 persons who were homeless some time during the year.

A General Profile of Homelessness

Demographics

Of the 82,291 homeless people identified in the 2005 point-in-time count, 12% were in shelter facilities and 88% were unsheltered. This proportion highlights the importance of street-based versus shelter-centered enumeration efforts.

¹ State of California, Department of Finance, Race/Ethnic Population with Age and Sex Detail, 2000-2050.

In addition to the street and shelter enumerations (which were based on direct observation), we also relied on the survey responses of 3,187 sheltered and unsheltered homeless people to provide us with a profile of the Los Angeles County homeless population. Gender and family status was determined for the unsheltered homeless population using the *unsheltered* survey responses. Similar shelter survey responses were gathered, but gender and family status was directly observed during the shelter census.

Gender

- There were 47,813 homeless males in the Los Angeles CoC on the nights of the census.
 - ⇒ Approximately 89% (42,543) of homeless males were unsheltered, and 11% (5,270) were in emergency shelters or transitional housing.
- On the nights of the census, there were 20,092 homeless women identified.
 - ⇒ Over 87% (17,543) of homeless women counted were unsheltered, and nearly 13% (2,549) were in shelter facilities.
- Approximately 1,088 transgender homeless people were counted on the nights of the census.
 - ⇒ More than 95% (1,039) of transgender homeless people were unsheltered, and approximately 5% (49) were living in emergency or transitional shelters.

Family Status

- On the nights of the census, 19,882 of the homeless persons identified were in families.
 - ⇒ Approximately 87% (17,202) family members were unsheltered, while over 13% (2,680) were living in emergency shelters or transitional housing.

Ethnicity²

Homeless survey respondents were asked which ethnic group they most closely identified themselves with. The responses revealed that homeless people in the Los Angeles CoC come from many ethnic backgrounds:

- Nearly 39% of respondents were African-American.
- Almost 29% identified themselves as Caucasian.
- Over 25% of respondents were Hispanic or Latino.
- Nearly 3% of respondents were American Indian or Alaskan Native.
- Almost 1% identified themselves as Asian or Pacific Islander.
- Approximately 4% of survey respondents indicated they identified with other or multiple ethnic groups.

Age

- The median age of homeless survey respondents was 43 years old.
 - ⇒ The two largest age groups were 31-40 years old (24%) and 41-50 years old (34%).

² The percentages of respondents by ethnicity are slightly different than the percentages used for the CoC population estimates due to survey cleaning and weighting.

Veterans

- Almost 81% of survey respondents indicated they had never served in any branch of the military.
- Over 16% of respondents had served in the regular military, approximately 2% were in the National Guard, and over 1% had been in a reserve unit. These responses were not mutually exclusive.

Chronic Homelessness

A profile of people who are chronically homeless was obtained from the data gathered from the homeless survey. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development defines a chronically homeless person as: “An unaccompanied individual with a disabling condition who has been continually homeless for one year or more, or has experienced four or more episodes of homelessness within the past 3 years.”

For the purposes of this study, a disabling condition was identified as a physical or mental disability, depression, alcohol or drug use, or chronic health problems. These conditions were self-reported by survey respondents. It should be noted that the survey asked about alcohol “use,” and not “abuse.” This is because pilot surveying and experience indicated that respondents experienced difficulty defining “abuse.” This difference may contribute to a possible over-estimation of the chronically homeless population, but our experience in other communities suggests that self-identification of disabilities results in conservative reporting.

Our survey found that approximately 49% of respondents could be considered chronically homeless according to the above criteria. When this percentage is applied to the segment of Los Angeles County’s point-in-time total that could potentially be considered chronically homeless, the chronically homeless population is estimated to be approximately 34,512 people. It should be noted that the HUD definition of chronic homelessness does not include chronically homeless families, and have been excluded from this calculation.

The following charts offer a profile of Los Angeles County’s chronically homeless population. It should be noted that, similar to the overall results for the street and shelter surveys, every chronically homeless respondent may not have answered every question, and the graphs below only represent valid responses.

Figure 3: Chronically Homeless Population by Gender

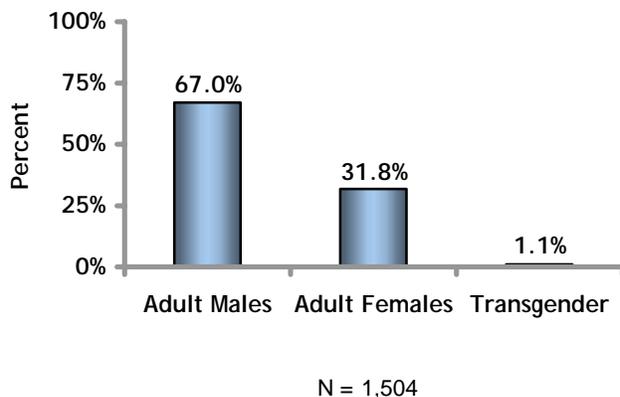
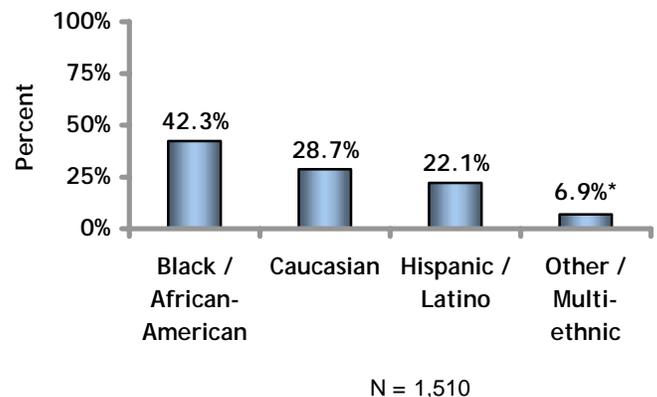


Figure 4: Chronically Homeless Population by Ethnicity



*Note: “Other/Multi-ethnic” includes Asian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaskan Native ethnic groups.

The Daily Condition of Homeless Persons – Survey Results

Frequency of Homelessness

- Just over 67% of homeless survey respondents indicated they had been homeless only once within the past 12 months (this percentage includes people who have been homeless for one year or more).
- Over 12% of homeless survey respondents had been homeless four or more times in the past 12 months.

Length of Homelessness

- Nearly 52% of all respondents have been homeless for one year or more, including the 25% of all respondents who indicated being homeless for three years or longer.
- 37% had been homeless for two years or more (as compared to 30% nationwide).³

Usual Sleeping Arrangements

- Approximately 88% of survey respondents were unsheltered.
 - ⇒ Over 40% of all survey respondents indicated their usual nighttime sleeping arrangement was outdoors, about 14% slept in a hotel or motel room, and over 34% were marginally housed, meaning their usual sleeping arrangements were in a converted garage, backyard storage structure, or a place other than the outdoors that was not meant for use as shelter for human beings.
- Nearly 12% indicated they usually spent the night in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or other types of shelters.

Previous Living Arrangements

- When respondents were asked where they were living *immediately* prior to becoming homeless, over 47% indicated they rented an apartment or home, nearly 19% stated they lived with their family, and 14% indicated they stayed with friends.
- Of the respondents who stated they were renting an apartment or home immediately prior to becoming homeless, over 8% indicated that the apartment was subsidized housing, and approximately 6% stated that the apartment or home was Section 8 housing.

Reasons For Not Living in Permanent Housing

- Nearly 53% of respondents indicated that they were not living in permanent housing because they could not afford the rent, while over 48% stated that not having a job or income was preventing them from living in permanent housing.
- These responses were not mutually exclusive.

³ The Urban Institute, *Homelessness: Programs and the People They Serve, Findings of the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients: Summary Report*, Department of Housing and Urban Development, December 1999.

Shelter Access

- Almost 28% of survey respondents indicated they had tried to access a shelter or transitional housing facility in Los Angeles County in the 30 days prior to the survey, but had been turned away.
- The most common reason for being turned away from a shelter was the lack of available beds (50%).

Residency Before Becoming Homeless

- When respondents were asked where they were living when they became homeless, over 78% indicated they were living in Los Angeles County.
- Approximately 7% stated they were living in Southern California (outside of Los Angeles County), and over 6% indicated they were living in California (outside of Southern California) at the time they became homeless.

Unemployment

- Over 89% of homeless survey respondents were unemployed at the time of the survey (nearly 11% were employed either full- or part-time).
- The two leading causes of unemployment among unemployed survey respondents were the presence of a disability (25%) and not having a permanent address (22%). It should be noted that all causes of unemployment are self-reported and were, by definition, subjective.

Disabling Conditions

- Over 34% of respondents were experiencing mental illness, while 55% of all respondents were experiencing depression.
- Almost 35% indicated they were experiencing a physical disability.
- Approximately 35% reported they were using drugs, while another 40% indicated they were using alcohol. Over 25% of all respondents were experiencing *both* alcohol and drug use at the time of the survey.
- Overall, approximately 79% of survey respondents indicated they were experiencing a disabling condition. For the purposes of this survey, a disabling condition was identified as a physical or mental disability, depression, alcohol or drug use, or chronic health problems. It should be noted that responses to disability questions were not mutually exclusive.

Access to Health Care

- Approximately 32% of homeless survey respondents indicated their primary source of health care is the hospital emergency room (ER), and over 54% of all respondents had been to the ER at least once in the 12 months prior to the survey.
- Over 22% of respondents stated they normally receive health care at a free clinic or community clinic, and almost 18% stated that they go to a public health clinic for medical attention.
- Nearly 25% of all homeless survey respondents indicated that since becoming homeless this last time, they have needed medical attention but have been unable to receive it.

Domestic Violence

- Nearly 12% of respondents indicated they were currently experiencing domestic violence.
- Approximately 24% of female respondents reported experiencing domestic violence.
 - ⇒ Comparatively, approximately 11% of all respondents (and 28% of female respondents) from the 2005 Santa Cruz County Homeless Census and Survey were experiencing domestic violence.⁴
 - ⇒ The 2004 Downtown Women’s Needs Assessment found that 19.4% of respondents had experienced domestic violence within the past year.⁵
- Of respondents who indicated they were experiencing domestic violence, nearly 14% stated that domestic violence was the primary cause of their homelessness.

Conclusion

The 2005 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count provides important data that illustrates the magnitude and complexity of the challenge to end homelessness in Los Angeles County. This information will support the City’s and County’s efforts to craft and implement a plan to end homelessness by providing baseline numbers regarding the distribution of homelessness throughout the County, as well as the prevalence of subpopulations, including youth and veterans, and the wide-ranging nature of their needs. This report affirms the poor health conditions of this population, including a high incidence of mental and physical disability. It also documents the high rate of unemployment and extreme poverty experienced by people who are homeless. Above all, the information in this report should help policy makers and providers alike sharpen their focus on meeting the needs of homeless persons, and bring to the forefront the urgent need to end homelessness for all populations.

⁴ Applied Survey Research, *2005 Santa Cruz County Homeless Census and Survey*, Applied Survey Research, 2005.

⁵ Downtown Women’s Action Coalition, *Many Struggles, Few Options*, January 2005.