

Designing Healthy, Secure, and Sanitary Environments with and for People Living Outdoors

INNOVATIONS & SOLUTIONS
for Ending Unsheltered Homelessness

March 4–6, 2024

San Francisco, CA

#NAEH2024

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Meeting people's basic needs and promoting community health and safety requires meeting people where they are at: on the streets, in encampments, and in vehicles. Come learn about innovative community-led practices which save lives and promote dignity during peoples' experiences of unsheltered homelessness.

Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative

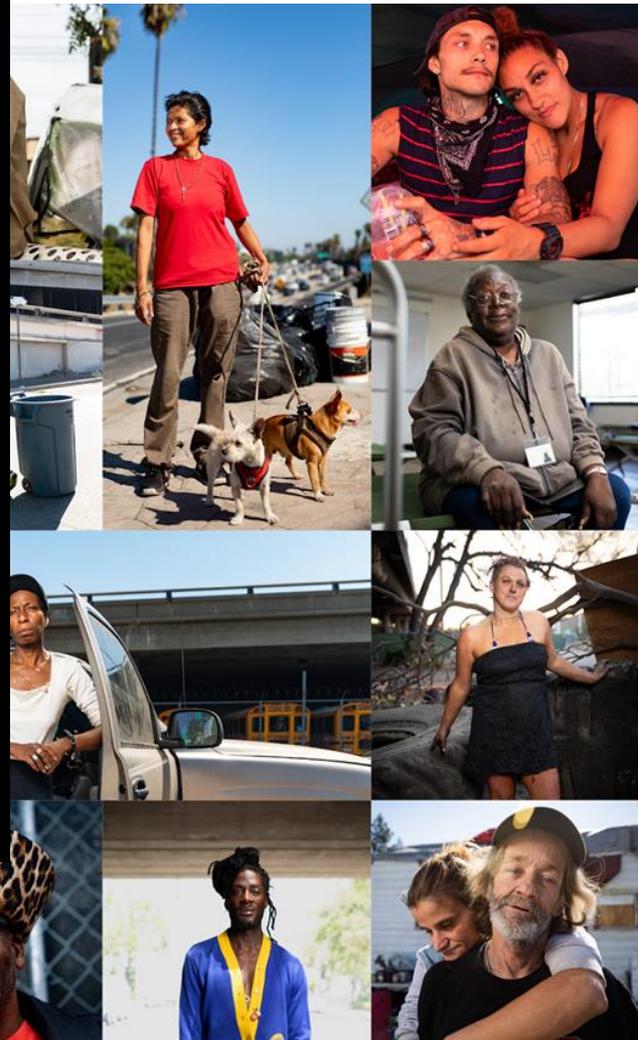


University of California
San Francisco

Experiences During Homelessness: Findings from the California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness

Tiana Moore, PhD

Policy Director, Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative

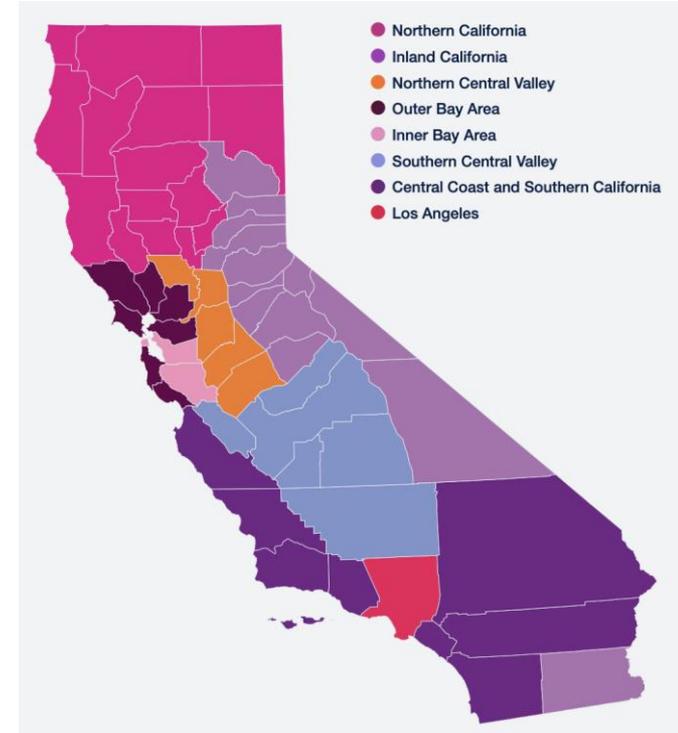


Study Overview

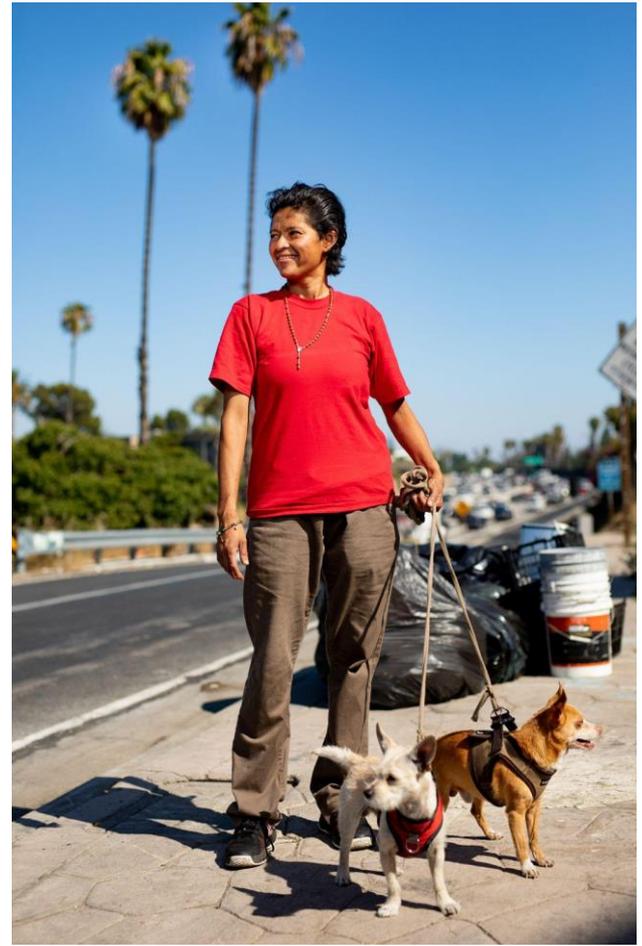
- Largest representative study of homelessness in US since 1990s
- Conducted at the request of CA Health and Human Services Agency

Study Methods

- **8 counties** representing 8 regions (exact counties confidential)
- Target population: **Adults 18+** experiencing homelessness
- Mixed Methods
 - **3,200 questionnaires**
 - **365 paired in-depth interviews**
- English and Spanish (and interpreters)
- Community engaged practices (3 community advisory boards)



Who Experiences Adult Homelessness in California



© Sam Comen



© Sam Comen

- **26%** reported a Black racial identity (vs. 7% statewide)
- **12%** reported Native American, Alaskan Native or Indigenous identity (vs. 3% statewide)
- **35%** reported a Latina/o/x identity

Episode Length and Chronic Homelessness

- **22 months** median length of current episode of homelessness
- **36%** met federal criteria for chronic homelessness

Median Age: 47

(range 18-89)

48% of single adults
were 50+

41% of this group
first became homeless
at 50 or older



Income and Housing Costs Prior to Homelessness

- All:
 - Median monthly household income: **\$960**
- Non-leaseholders:
 - Median monthly household income: **\$950**
 - 43% of non-leaseholders did not pay rent
 - Median monthly housing costs (among those who paid rent): **\$450**
- Leaseholders:
 - Median monthly household income: **\$1400**
 - Median monthly housing costs: **\$700**



*“We were going to get an apartment together, but he died last month. So, now I'm up to paying full rent, which is \$700.00, \$800.00 to start with. I can't pay that. **I can't pay that much.** It's a lot to pay PG&E and get groceries, too. It's just not possible.”*

- CASPEH Participant

Places slept most in past 6 months:

78% Unsheltered

- 21% Vehicle
- 57% Non-vehicle

22% Sheltered



- **41%** indicated there was a time they wanted shelter, but unable to access it during current episode
- Some unsheltered participants expressed concerns about congregate shelter:
 - COVID-19 and health-related risks
 - Burdensome rules
 - Inadequate support to find permanent housing



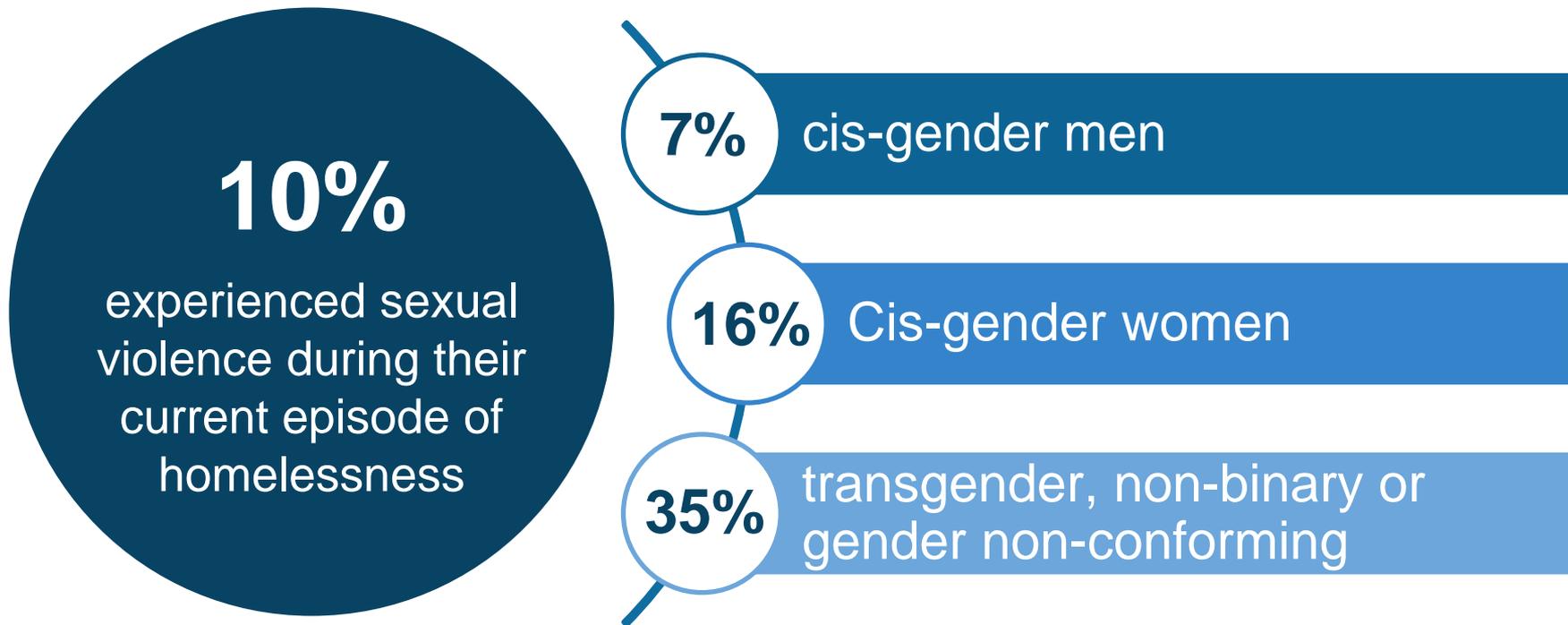
*“Most of the time we're ...running around, **trying to figure out where we're going to sleep at night** ... We're not worried about going to the doctors or going to see somebody or going to get help with our mental state.”*

-CASPEH Participant

36%

experienced physical
violence during their
current episode of
homelessness

- Of participants who experienced this, **49%** said the perpetrator was a stranger



- Of participants who experienced this, **54%** said the perpetrator was a stranger



*“And I pray every day that it comes to an end because I’m tired, you know? Not only do you have to deal with break-ins regularly, you have to deal with a male who might want to **physically violate you**, violently at that. There’s **robberies galore**. There’s always breaking and entering.”*

- CASPEH Participant

- **30%** went to jail during their current episode of homelessness
- **2 days** median length of stay in jail

- **36%** had their belongings confiscated by authorities at least once in the past 6 months
- Resulted in:
 - Losing critical materials and supplies (medications, cell phones, etc.)
 - Loss of documents needed to apply for housing and other services

- **46%** received formal assistance finding housing during current episode of homelessness
 - **26%** received help finding housing monthly or more frequently in past six months
 - Unsheltered Californians less likely to receive help in past six months than those who were sheltered



*“There’s just **not enough resources** out there for people who want to get out of being unhoused... You kind of just seem like you’re stuck there. Even if you’re trying to get a job, like you have to have an address. And, **if you don’t have an address, you can’t get a job. If you can’t get a job, you can’t stop being unhoused.**”*

- CASPEH Participant



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Benioff Homelessness
and Housing Initiative



University of California
San Francisco

homelessness.ucsf.edu/CASPEH





PROJECT FOR SANITATION JUSTICE

SDSU

School of
Public Affairs

**THINK
DIGNITY**

Hands-on Advocacy & Activism with
People Experiencing Homelessness



Planned Parenthood of the
Pacific Southwest, Inc.

SDSU

College of Health
and Human Services
School of
Public Health



Please visit our website:
[BATHROOMS.SDSU.ED](https://bathrooms.sdsu.edu)

With a friend, answer the following questions:



On a typical day, where do you...

- Obtain drinking water?
- Take a shower or bath?
- Obtain menstrual hygiene products, if applicable?
- Dispose of your trash?
- Use a toilet?
- Wash your hands?
- What would you do if your usual resources were unavailable for each of the above?



What is Sanitation Justice?

Months of Emails, Then a Mad Scramble: How the Hepatitis A Crisis Unfolded Behind the Scenes

Shigella outbreak reported among San Diego homeless

San Diego Still Can't Solve Its Public Restroom Problem

by Bella Ross November 23, 2021



A public restroom in Mission Bay on Nov. 1, 2021. / Photo by Adriana Heldiz



The Mayor's Full Take on Public Restrooms: There's No Problem

The San Diego Union-Tribune

Mystery illness impacting residents, workers at Balboa Park homeless camping site



City leaders and San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria unveiled the city's newest Safe Sleeping site at a parking lot in Balboa Park in late October. (Nehin C. Cepeda/The San Diego Union-Tribune)

An abdominal sickness affecting dozens of people at the O Lot safe sleeping site is being investigated by the San Diego County health department

One day before the January storms, residents and staff at the Safe Sleeping Site become ill.



A City of San Diego Safe Sleeping Site is under water, Monday Jan 22, 2024.

What is Sanitation Justice?

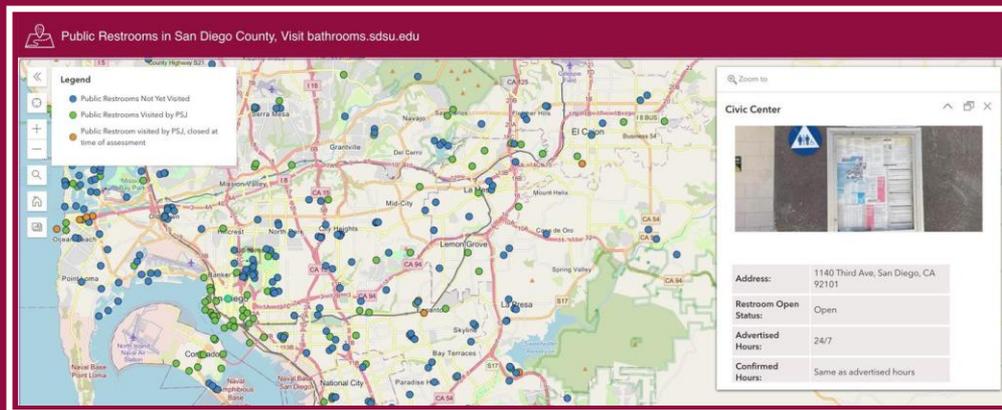
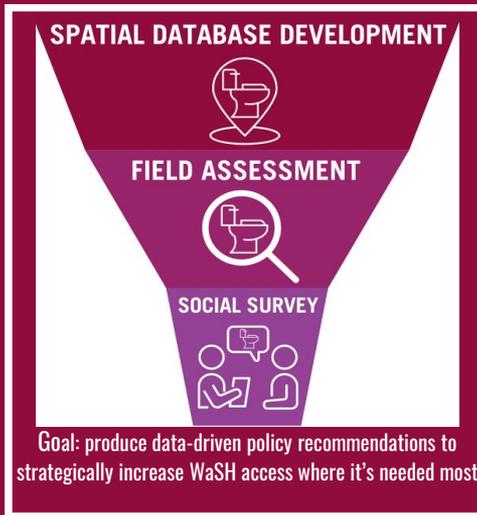
Sanitation justice is the principle that all people and communities must have safe, consistent access to water for drinking, handwashing, and bathing; toilets; menstrual hygiene supplies; and trash collection / disposal.

The **Project for Sanitation Justice** at SDSU is an academic-community partnership among San Diego State University faculty and student researchers, and Think Dignity, a grassroots San Diego organization that advances basic dignity for people experiencing homelessness through advocacy and innovation.



PSJ alum Giovanna Zampa interviews a Think Dignity Fresh Start Showers guest – Summer 2022

SDSU Project for Sanitation Justice activities to-date



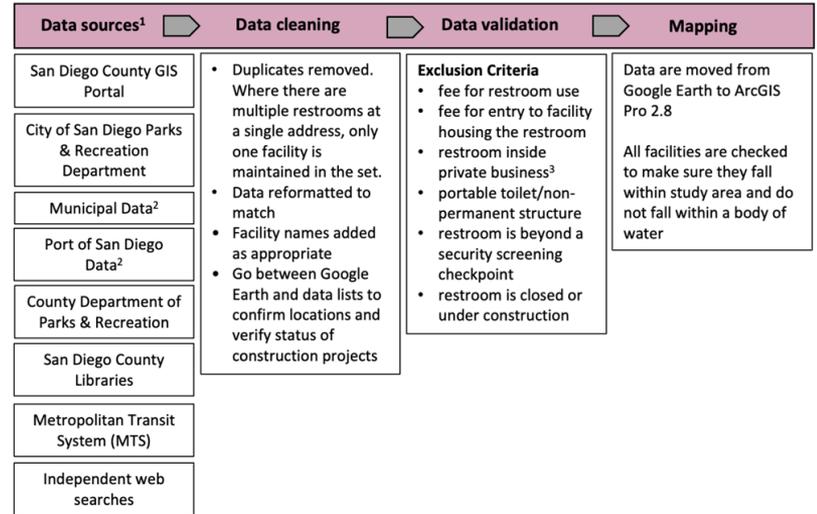


Building a public restrooms spatial database

Utilized multiple sources to determine whether each facility met inclusion criteria:

- Public records requests
- Administrative information
- Google Earth satellite imagery – search terms:
 - "restroom," "public restroom," "bathroom," and "toilet"
- Google Street View
- Online reviews of restrooms and other independent websites/user blogs
- In-person verification when possible

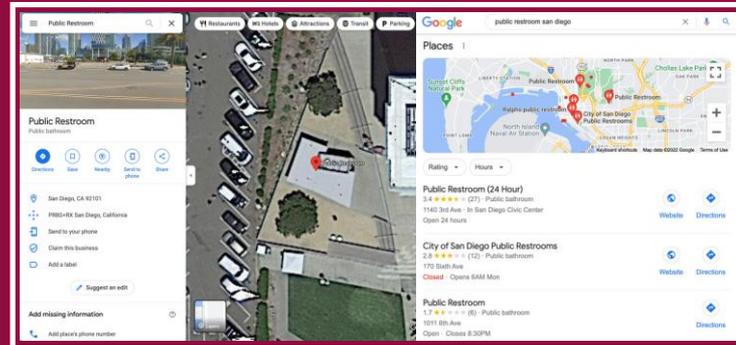
Figure 1. Data Development Process



¹Public data sources are linked in Appendix 1

²See Appendix 1 for further information

There are two private businesses included in our dataset because they are members of the City of Coronado Orange Avenue Commercial Public Restroom Program; see: <https://coronadovisitorcenter.com/public-restrooms/>



PUBLIC RESTROOMS IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY:
A REGIONAL ASSESSMENT

MARCH 2022

A REPORT FROM THE PROJECT FOR SANITATION JUSTICE





Public restroom infrastructure assessment ("toilet audit")

ArcGIS Field Maps App ("short form"):

- Mobile phone app to quickly capture data, specify point locations, and share information
 - Are facilities open or closed?
 - What are the hours of operation?
 - Are facilities ADA-accessible?
 - Do facilities have basic features, such as baby-changing stations and menstrual products?

Qualtrics survey ("long form"):

- Detailed information about health, hygiene, and safety features

FUTURE GOAL: Make this information public + allow community to update data in real time



FUNCTIONING TOILET WITH TOILET PAPER
NEIL GOOD DAY CENTER, AUGUST 30, 2022



FULL SOAP DISPENSERS
ST. VINCENT DE PAUL, AUGUST 30, 2022



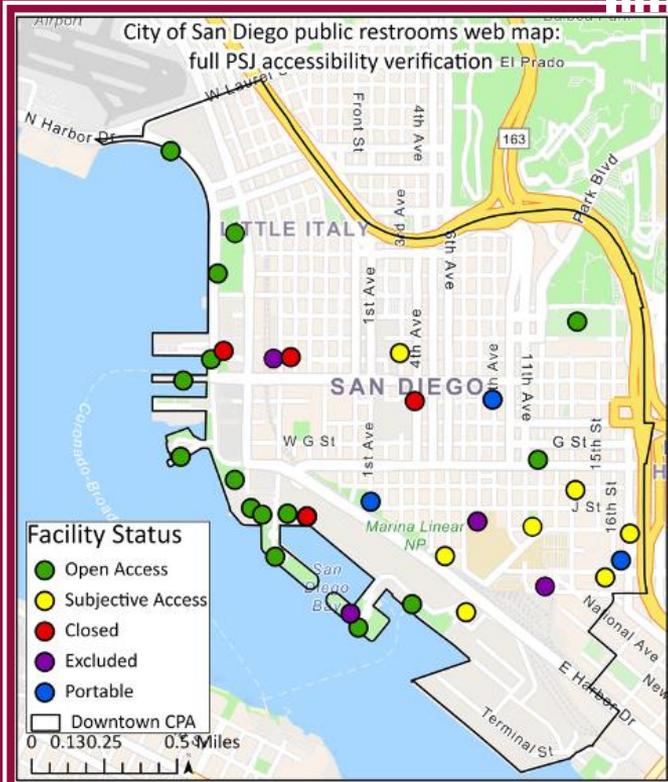
RESTROOM STALLS WITH NO DOORS
RUOCCO PARK, AUGUST 2, 2022



TOILET PAPER OUTSIDE OF STALLS
BAYFRONT PARK, JULY 29, 2022

Public restroom access in Downtown San Diego:

Infrastructure assessment



Downtown San Diego public restroom facilities visited, verified, assessed, and categorized by the Project for Sanitation Justice, December 2022.

31%

Of the 32 permanent public restrooms initially identified, 10 (31%) were closed or did not meet PSJ inclusion criteria.

22%

7 (22%) locations are “subjective access” (barrier to entry) (e.g., security, time limits, or rules on what can be brought in).

47%

Fewer than half (15, 47%) of the permanent restrooms in Downtown San Diego are truly “open access.”

Public restroom access in Downtown San Diego: Infrastructure assessment

Restroom Feature	Percent	Count
Menstrual products available*	18%	4
Baby changing station present	32%	7
Gender-neutral facility available	41%	9
Water fountain or bottle refill station nearby	64%	14
Faucets offer hot water	5%	1
Doors on toilet stalls	77%	17
Showers	9%	2
ADA-accessible	100%	22
Open 24/7**	9%	2
Open access facilities	68%	15
Subjective access facilities	32%	7

PSJ has identified a total of 22 permanent public restroom facilities.
 * Menstrual products are available at four public restroom locations – two are free and two cost money
 ** Two permanent restroom facilities (a total of 9 toilets) are available 24/7 in downtown San Diego

Health, safety, and accessibility features of Downtown San Diego's public restroom facilities.

1

Of the 22 permanent public restrooms in Downtown San Diego, only 1 location had faucets that offer hot water.

2

While 4 public restrooms offer menstrual products, there are just 2 locations that provide them for free.

7

Less than a third of the public restroom locations (7, 32%) have a baby changing station available.

Public restroom access in Downtown San Diego: Infrastructure assessment

Open Hours	5 AM - 6 AM	6 AM - 7 AM	7 AM - 8 AM	8 AM - 9 AM	9 - 9:30 AM	9:30 - 10 AM	10AM - 11AM	11AM - 12 PM	12 PM - 1 PM	1 PM - 2 PM	2 PM - 3 PM	3 PM - 4 PM	4 PM - 5 PM	5 PM - 6 PM	6 PM - 7 PM	7 PM - 8 PM	8 PM - 9 PM	9 PM - 10 PM	10 - 10:30 PM	10:30 - 11 PM	11PM - 12AM	12 AM - 1 AM	1 AM - 2 AM	2 AM - 3 AM	3 AM - 4 AM	4 AM - 5 AM
Broadway Landing - Comfort Station	MONDAY-SUNDAY																									
Broadway Pier - Restroom	SAT-SUN																									
City College Campus Building A	SUNRISE TO SUNSET - ANNUAL AVERAGE 9 HOURS OF SUNLIGHT/DAY IN CALIFORNIA																									
County Waterfront Park - Playground	MONDAY-FRIDAY												MON-THURS													
Embarcadero Crescent - Comfort Station	9AM TO SUNSET																									
Embarcadero Marina Park North - Comfort Station	9AM TO SUNSET																									
Embarcadero Marina Park South - Comfort Station	9AM TO SUNSET																									
Fifth Avenue Landing - Comfort Station	9AM TO SUNSET																									
Park Blvd & Market St (Portland Loo)	SUNRISE TO SUNSET - ANNUAL AVERAGE 9 HOURS OF SUNLIGHT/DAY IN CALIFORNIA																									
Ruocco Park - Comfort Station - Concession Stand	9AM TO SUNSET																									
Seaport Village - Restroom - Central	9AM TO SUNSET																									
Seaport Village - Restroom - West	9AM TO SUNSET																									
Seaport Village Restroom - East	9AM TO SUNSET																									
Tuna Harbor - G Street Mole - Comfort Station	9AM TO SUNSET																									
County Waterfront Park - Marriage Hut	9AM TO SUNSET																									
City Administration Building (Civic Center)	9AM TO SUNSET																									
St. Vincent de Paul	9AM TO SUNSET																									
Fault Line Park	9AM TO SUNSET																									
Gaslamp Square Park (Tin Fish Restaurant)	9AM TO SUNSET																									
Neil Good Day Center	9AM TO SUNSET																									
San Diego Central Library	WEDS-SAT				MON-SAT								MON-TUES													
The Hilton	9AM TO SUNSET																									

Hours of operation for all permanent public restroom facilities in the Downtown San Diego Community Planning Area (CPA).

2

Only 2 permanent public restroom facilities are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

1:215

The overnight ratio is approximately 1 permanent toilet to every 215 unsheltered people.

30

These 2 facilities are located 1.5 miles apart, or approximately a 30-minute walk.

Public restroom access in Downtown San Diego:

Impacts on people and health

70%

Of the 54 homeless San Diegans* we surveyed, 70% indicated using public restrooms on a typical day.

44%

On a typical day, 44.4% stated that they practice open defecation, a preventable behavior that increases the risk of transmitting infectious diseases like Hepatitis A & Shigella.

74%

Nearly three-quarters (74%) identify “no bathroom nearby / too far away” as a reason why they practice open defecation.

*self-identified homeless San Diegans who stay in the Downtown area and receive services from Think Dignity (Welsh Carroll et al., 2022)

Restricted access + lack of information

"Tethered to my restroom"

Approximately 1 permanent toilet to every 215 unhoused people in the Downtown neighborhood

Poor quality

"Cleanliness is a thing that worries me the most"

High population pressures on existing facilities=degradation in quality, maintenance can't keep up

Discrimination & other barriers

"People assume I'm not a customer. But I am."

"They look at me like I'm suspicious."

"Guards in library will check on me, I get it, I know why they do it."



Eliminating dignity, perpetuating stigma

"had to go, couldn't hold it"

"couldn't get there fast enough"

"UTIs are directly related to bathroom inaccess"

Threat of criminalization

"Hidden, so I don't get registered as a sex offender, city doesn't have enough restrooms"

"They think insulin is drugs and you get arrested"



Forced self-regulation

"Limit water intake due to limited restroom access. Less access to water to take medication"

"Kidneys cause more damage as I have to hold it more"

Data-driven examples of sanitation deprivation
Project for Sanitation Justice, San Diego, CA, USA

Sanitation Justice: How can you get involved?

For starters...

- Get connected! Follow @bathrooms.sdsu and @thinkdignity on social media + local orgs in your area that provide WaSH services. Donate to these orgs if you can!
- It's budget season! Consider showing up to a budget hearing in your city/county and speaking about the need to fund services you care about.

Public impact

- We partner with prominent homelessness advocacy and reproductive justice partners to ensure our research has an impact from start to finish
- We seek diverse ways to disseminate our research to public and policymaker audiences – our work is centrally cited in May 2023 San Diego County Grand Jury report on Public Restrooms
- We are designing future projects to maximize community involvement and inform policy

"With the folks that we interview on a regular basis, permanent housing is a distant dream. They're trying to make it through the day and survive the night."

MEGAN WELSH CARROLL
PROJECT FOR SANITATION JUSTICE



EPISODE 249:
UNHOUSED AND UNDERSERVED

scholars.org/podcast

Los Angeles Times

LOG IN

OPINION

Opinion: California cities don't have enough public bathrooms. Here's one solution



People queue up to use a public restroom in downtown San Diego in 2019. (John Gibbins / San Diego Union-Tribune)

BY MEGAN WELSH CARROLL

MAY 8, 2023 3:01 AM PT



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: 2023 ADVOCACY HIGHLIGHTS. PSJ DIRECTOR SPEAKS ABOUT SANITATION JUSTICE AND HOMELESSNESS ON THE NATIONAL SCHOLARS STRATEGY NETWORK PODCAST; PSJ PUBLISHES AN OP-ED IN THE LA TIMES; PSJ DIRECTOR SPEAKS AT A SAN DIEGO CITY COUNCIL BUDGET HEARING

Student outcomes

- We have an established track record of hiring, training, retaining, and mentoring first-generation college students into graduate degree programs.
- We mentor students in the research publication process as well as advanced analytic skills in a range of fields.
- Students gain experience in action research and policy advocacy



PSJ SOCIAL SURVEY LEAD RESEARCHER REBEKAH O'DONNELL GRADUATED FROM SDSU AND IS NOW STARTING HER MSW AT VCU



PSJ SOCIAL MEDIA DIRECTOR & SDSU MCJC ALUM NICOLAS GUTIERREZ III STARTED HIS DOCTORATE IN SOCIOLOGY AT USC FALL 2023

Spatial Thinking Student Competition 2023

Adriana Rios

Congratulations to Adriana Rios, an exceptional lead student mapper for Project for Sanitation Justice (PSJ), who recently won the prestigious 2023 Award in Communication in the Spatial Thinking Student Competition from Esri and the International Statistics Institute. Her dedication and advanced mapping skills shed light on limited access to safe and dignified public restrooms in San Diego County. Adriana's award-winning storymap examines restroom access along San Diego transit lines, showcasing her innovative approach and commitment to making a difference in her home region.



PSJ MAPPING WHIZ ADRIANA RIOS GRADUATED WITH HONORS FROM SDSU AND IS NOW IN THE SECOND YEAR OF HER MASTERS IN PSYCHOLOGY

THANK YOU!

Please visit our website:



[BATHROOMS.SDSU.EDU](https://bathrooms.sdsu.edu)



SDSU

School of
Public Affairs

SDSU

College of Health
and Human Services
School of
Public Health

**THINK
DIGNITY**

Hands-on Advocacy & Activism with
People Experiencing Homelessness



Planned Parenthood of the
Pacific Southwest, Inc.

A group of approximately 20 diverse individuals, including men and women of various ethnicities, are gathered outdoors. They are all wearing face masks. In the foreground, several people are holding a dark-colored banner that features the text 'THINK DIGNITY' in large, bold, light-colored letters, with the subtitle 'Hands-on Advocacy & Activism with the Homeless' below it. The background shows a chain-link fence, a large white tent-like structure, and some parked cars under a clear sky. The overall scene suggests a community event or protest.

THINK DIGNITY

Our mission is to advance basic dignity for people experiencing homelessness through advocacy and innovation.

THINK
DIGNITY

Hands-on Advocacy &
Activism with the Homeless

FOCUS AREAS



**SOCIAL
SERVICES**

**LEGAL
SERVICES**

**GRASSROOTS
ADVOCACY**

UNITY
Advocacy &
the Homeless

TRANSITIONAL STORAGE CENTER

400 lockers and bins for people to safeguard their belongings for an unlimited period of time

\$1

What it costs per day to maintain one storage locker

Clients who found a job or permanent housing

500+

FRESH START SHOWERS

Two-unit trailer that offers **access to showers, hygiene kits, and resources**



**4,500+ showers and
7,300+ resources**
provided since 2016

STREET BOUTIQUE

Distributes menstrual products and new undergarments



**1,100+ undergarments
and 13,000+ menstrual
products
given since 2017**

STREET CAFE

Offers **healthier and nutritious meal options** for unsheltered individuals



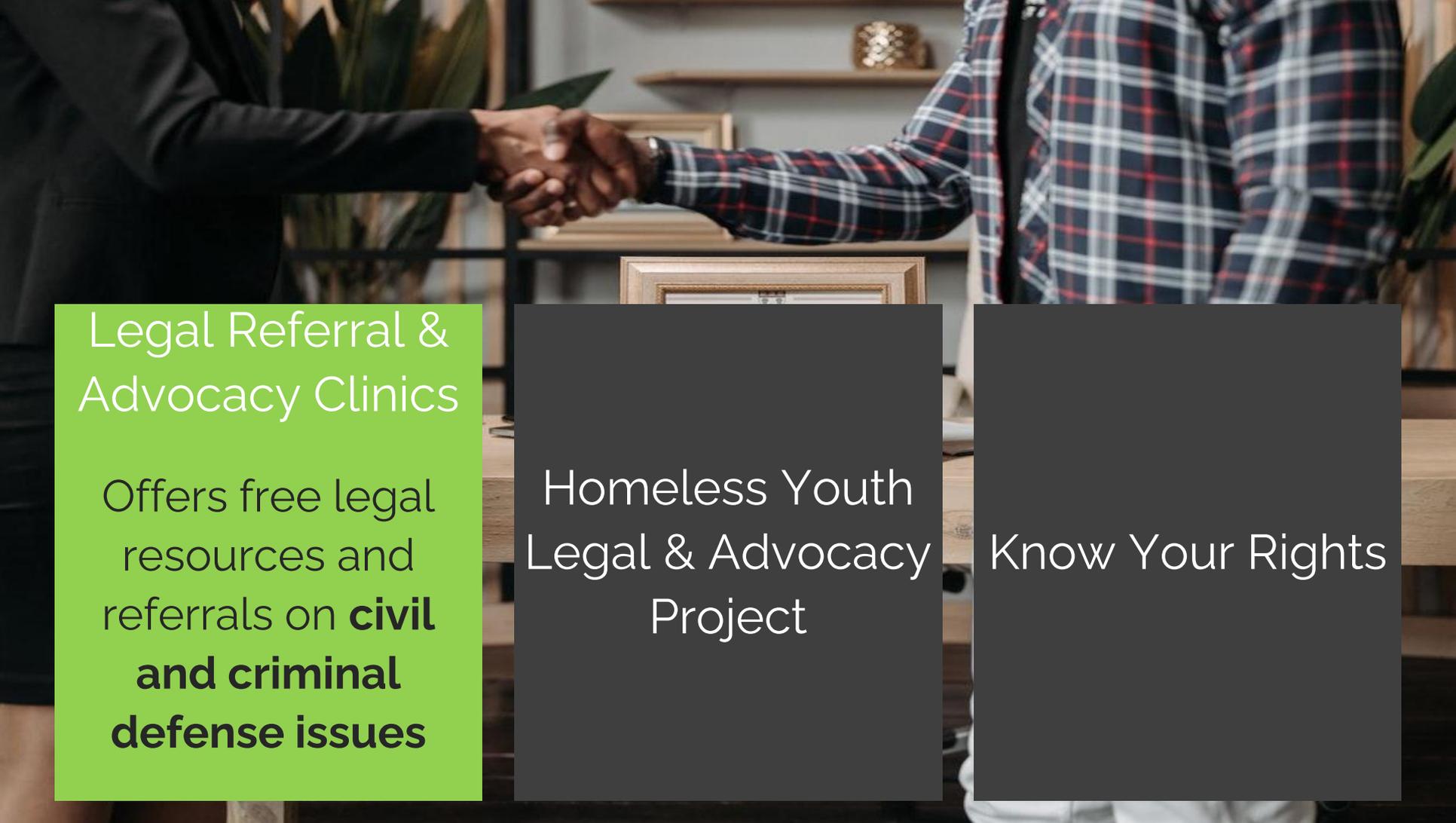
7,900+ meals
served since 2018

LEGAL SERVICES

Legal Referral &
Advocacy Clinics

Homeless Youth
Legal & Advocacy
Project

Know Your Rights

A photograph of two individuals shaking hands in a professional setting. The person on the left is wearing a dark suit jacket, and the person on the right is wearing a blue and white plaid shirt. They are standing in front of a wooden shelf with a framed picture and a small decorative object. The background is slightly blurred, showing a plant and a window.

Legal Referral & Advocacy Clinics

Offers free legal resources and referrals on **civil and criminal defense issues**

Homeless Youth
Legal & Advocacy
Project

Know Your Rights

A photograph of three people in a hallway. On the left is a man with glasses in a dark suit and red tie. In the center is a woman with dark hair smiling. On the right is a man with glasses in a grey suit and dark tie. The hallway has a sign for room 102 and a person in the background.

Legal Referral &
Advocacy Clinics

Homeless Youth
Legal & Advocacy
Project

Pairs youth with an
attorney & advocate
for legal
representation and
basic needs
support

Know Your Rights

A hand is shown holding a fan of colorful cards. The cards are white with the word "RIGHTS" printed in bold black letters. The cards are fanned out, showing various colors like green, yellow, red, and blue. The background is a plain, light-colored surface.

Legal Referral &
Advocacy Clinics

Homeless Youth
Legal & Advocacy
Project

Know Your Rights

Pocket-sized
weather-proof
cards that explain
7 areas of law that
affects unhoused
individuals

ADVOCACY

 **HOUSING** IS A HUMAN RIGHT

ADVOCACY



**DECRIMINALIZATION OF
HOMELESSNESS**



HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT

ADVOCACY



RIGHT TO **SANITATION**



DECRIMINALIZATION OF
HOMELESSNESS



HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT

POLICING & HOMELESSNESS IN THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

FROM JANUARY 2010 TO APRIL 2021

5,861

citations were issued to San
Diegans experiencing
homelessness for
life-sustaining activities



Black San Diegans are about
**four times more likely to be
ticketed or arrested** while
experiencing homelessness



Transitional age youth (TAY) are
more likely to be cited for **overnight
camping** than any other age group
**This is often used as a form of the illegal lodging
citation*



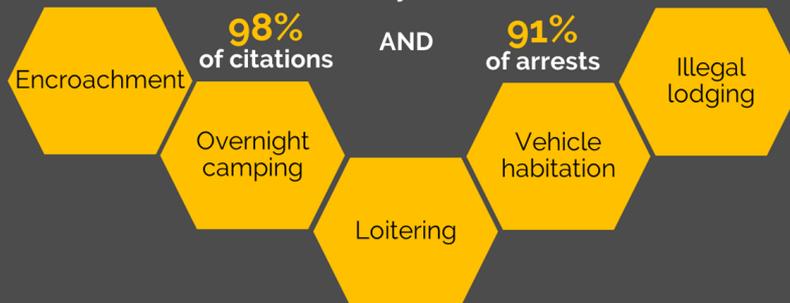
likelihood of being
ticketed for
sleeping, resting,
living in their
vehicles, and
having belongings



Adults between the ages of 41-54
are the most impacted by
**encroachment citations and
arrests**

Out of 11 municipal codes frequently used to criminalize
homelessness, **these are the top 5:**

In total, they account for





I missed out on housing and job opportunities to sit near a porta potty and wait until my period stops because I didn't have anything to make a tampon.

I want to clean myself but I get in trouble every time I try.

I've been mugged, beaten, harassed just for being homeless and no one thinks that my safety is important.

I feel like it's not worth it being alive.