

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

INNOVATIONS & SOLUTIONS
for Ending Unsheltered Homelessness

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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

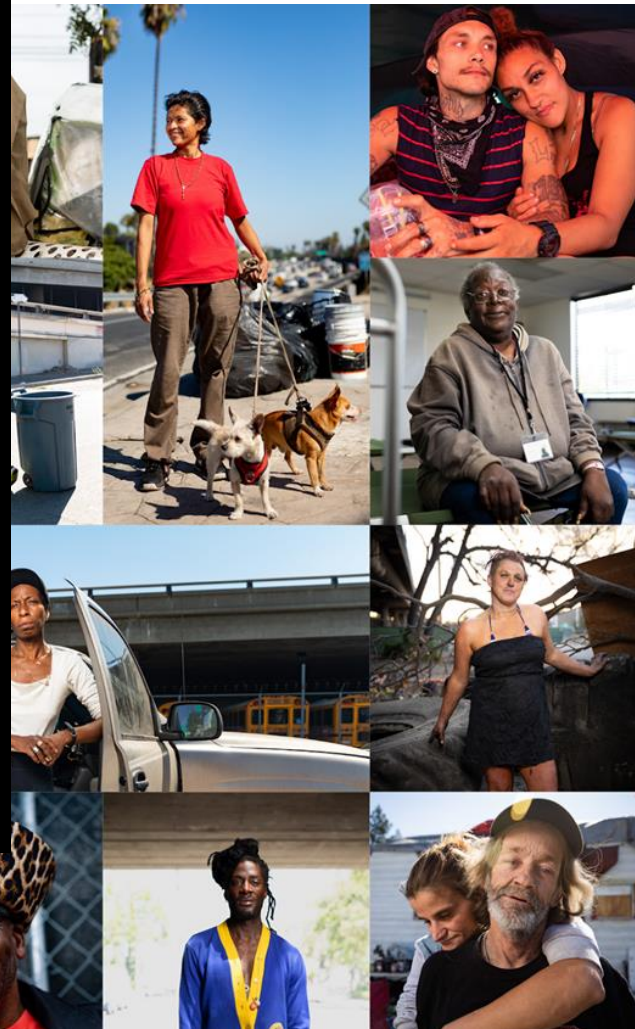


University of California
San Francisco

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

Tiana Moore, PhD

Policy Director, Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative

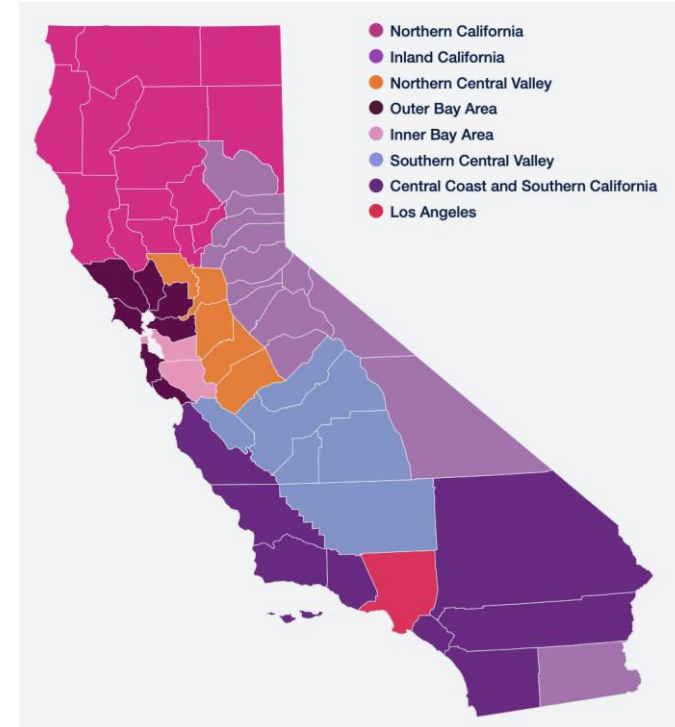


Study Overview

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

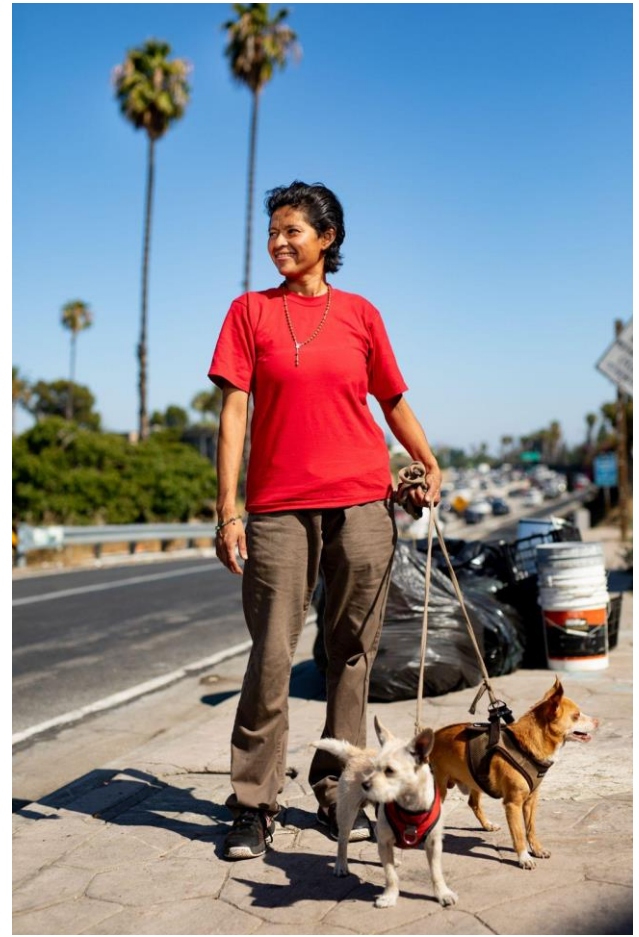
Study Methods

- **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.”*

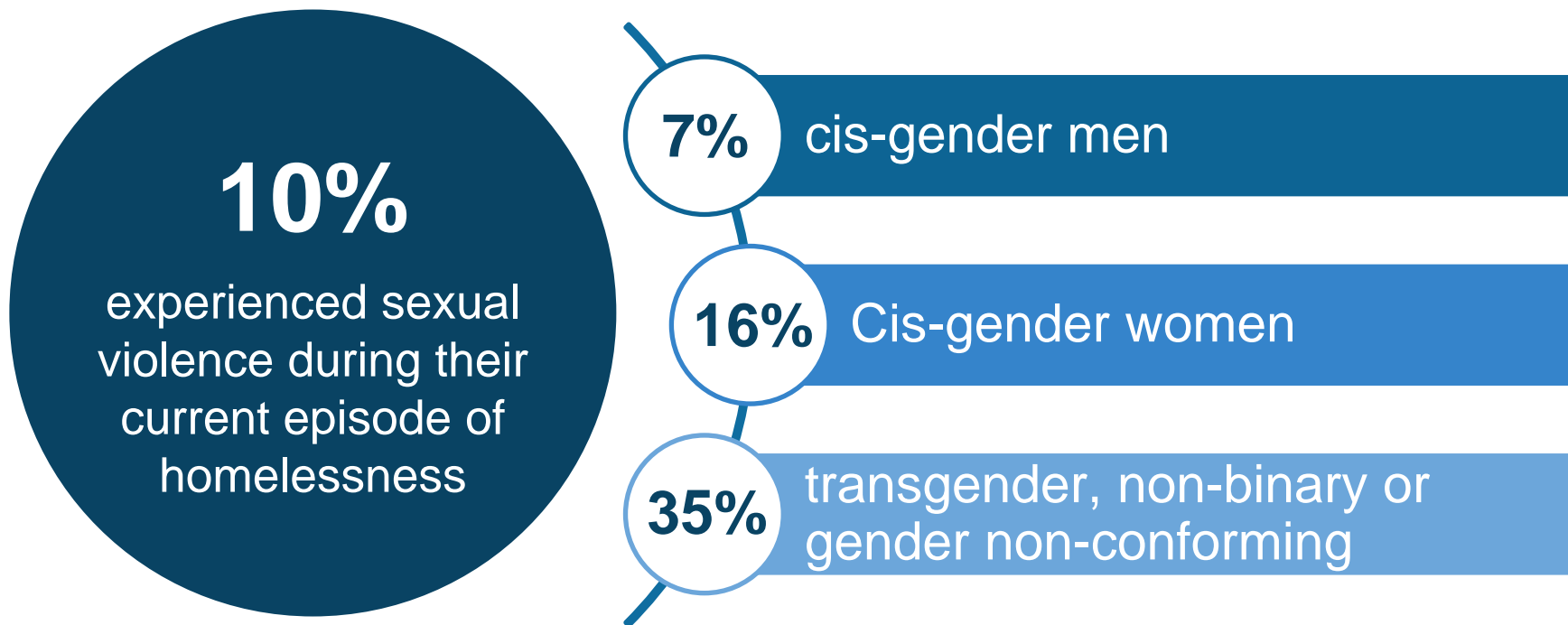
-CASPEH Participant



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

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PROJECT FOR SANITATION JUSTICE

SDSU

School of
Public Affairs

**THINK
DIGNITY**

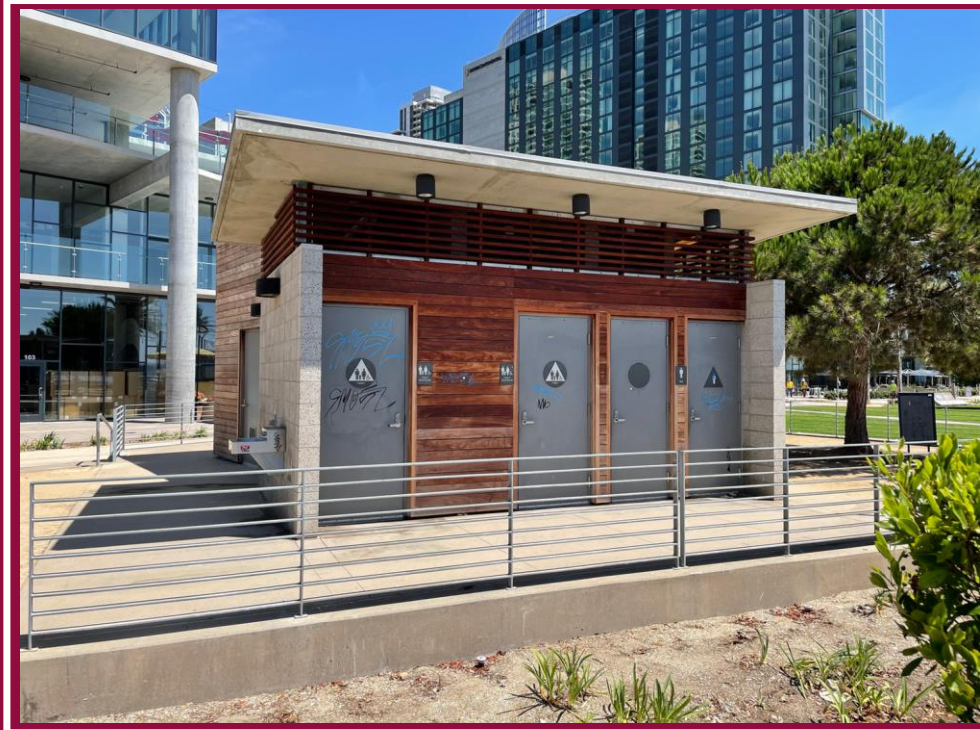
Hands-on Advocacy & Activism with
People Experiencing Homelessness



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

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?



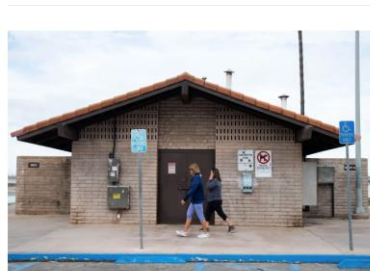
What is Sanitation Justice?

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?

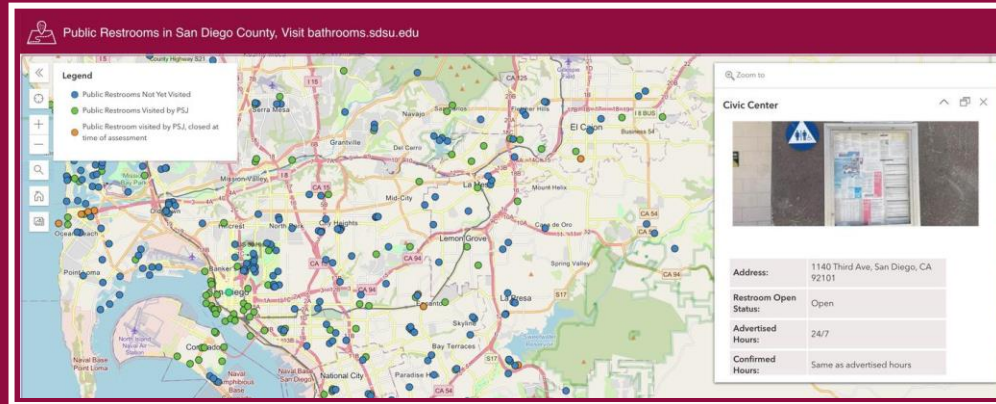
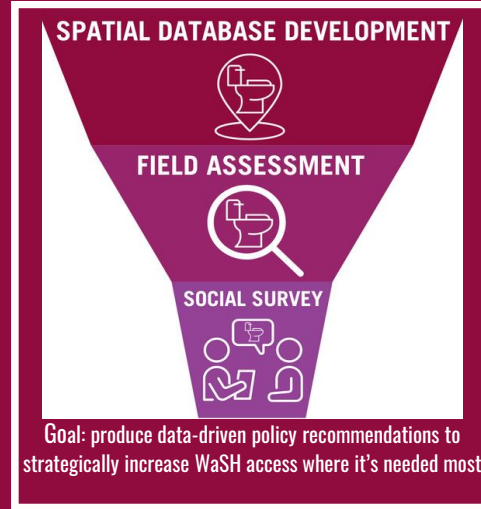
Sanitation justice is the principle that all people and communities must have safe, consistent access to water for drinking, handwashing, and bathing; toilets; menstrual hygiene supplies; and trash collection / disposal.

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





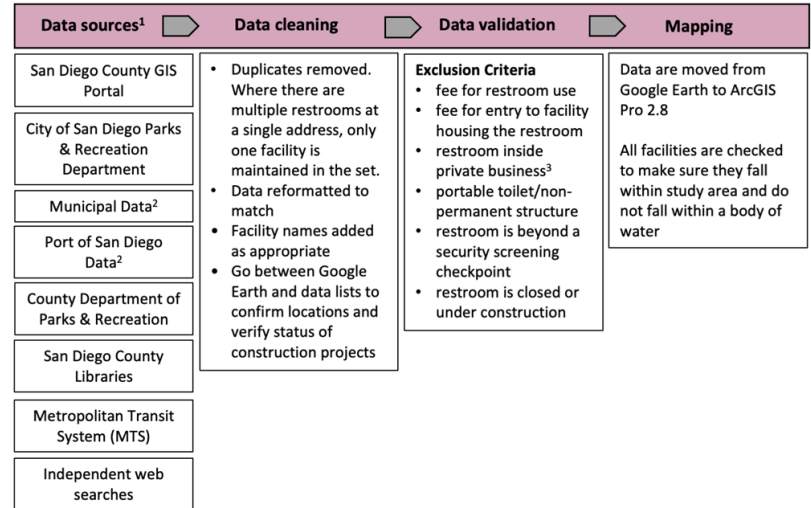
Building a public restrooms spatial database

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



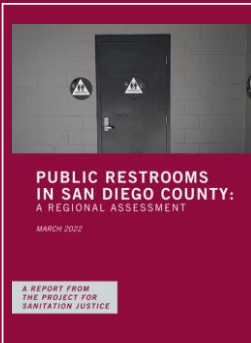
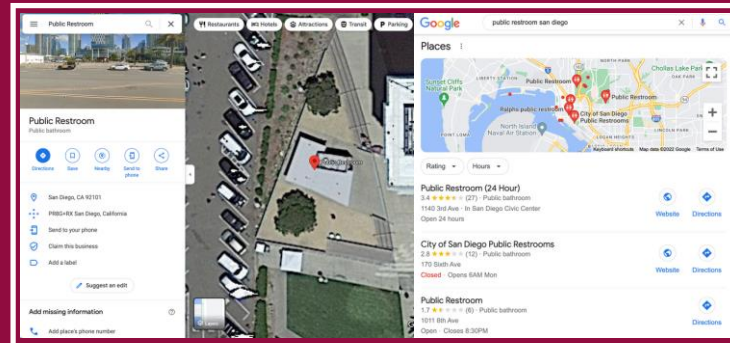
Figure 1. Data Development Process



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/>





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



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



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

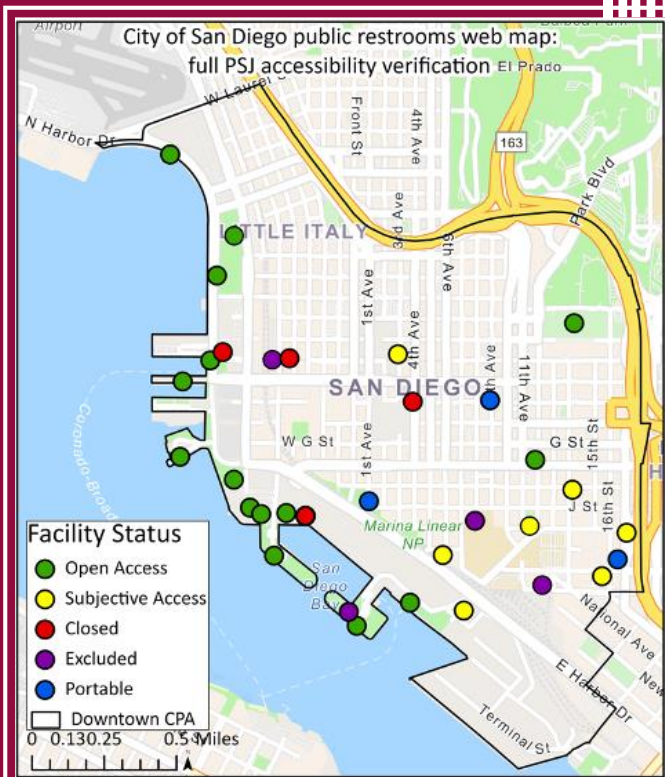


RESTROOM STALLS WITH NO DOORS
RUOCO PARK, AUGUST 2, 2022



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

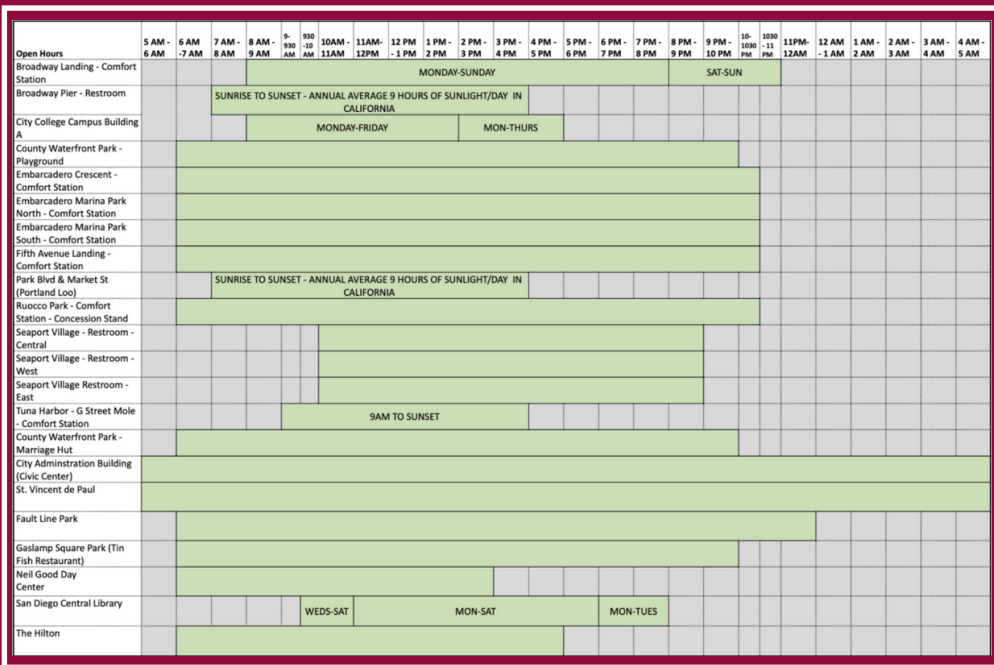
While 4 public restrooms offer menstrual products, there are just 2 locations that provide them for free.

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



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



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



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 diverse people, many wearing face masks and 'THINK DIGNITY' t-shirts, are gathered outdoors. They are holding a large banner that reads 'THINK DIGNITY' and 'Hands-on Advocacy & Activism with the Homeless'. The background shows a chain-link fence and some industrial structures.

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**

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 background image showing two people shaking hands in a professional setting. One person is wearing a dark suit, and the other is wearing a blue and white plaid shirt. They are standing in front of a wooden shelf with various items on it, including a small gold-colored object and a framed picture.

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 and a mustache, wearing a dark suit and a red tie. In the center is a woman with dark hair, smiling. On the right is another man with glasses and a mustache, wearing a grey suit and a dark tie. In the background, a hallway leads away with a sign that says '102'.

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



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*



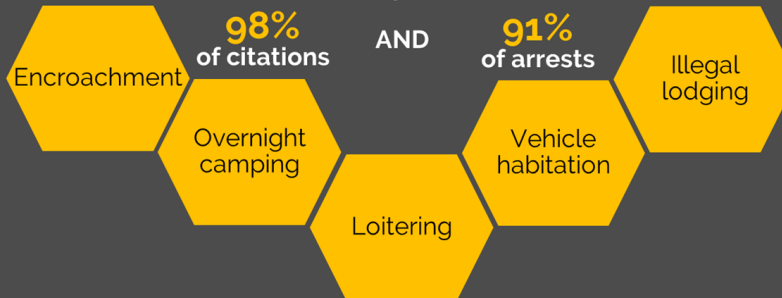
likelihood of being
ticketed for
sleeping, resting,
living in their
vehicles, and
having belongings



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.