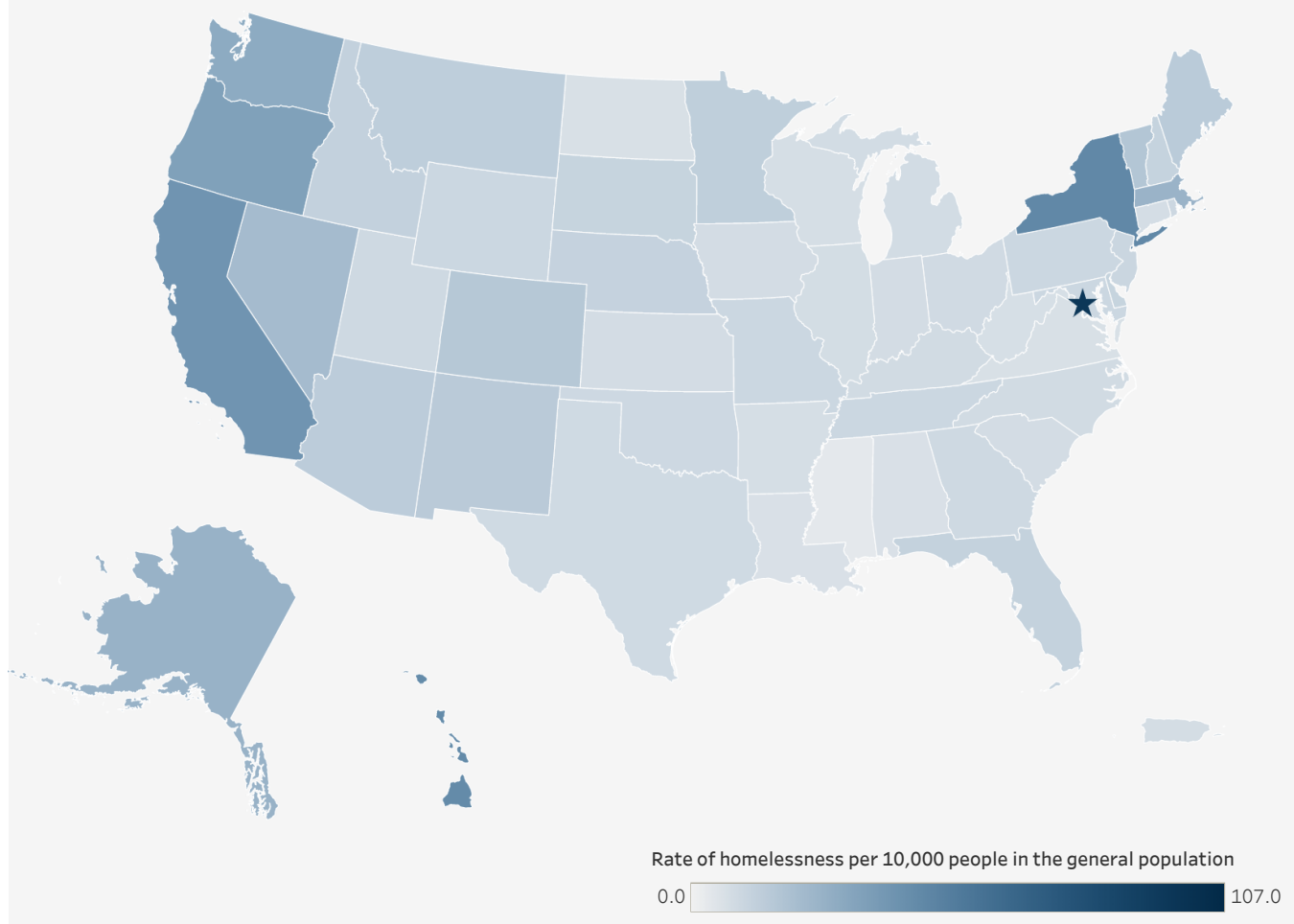


State of Homelessness: 2021 Edition

The current report draws from the nationwide Point-in-Time Count that occurred in January of 2020, just a few weeks before COVID-19 was declared a national emergency. Thus, the data does not reflect any of the changes brought about by the crisis. Instead, the current report reflects the State of Homelessness in America just before a once-in-a-lifetime event interrupted the status quo.

Click on your state to view detailed information on homeless statistics, bed inventory, and system capacity



[Download Printable Infographics \(PDF\)](#)

[Download Social Media Graphics \(JPEG/ZIP\)](#)

[Read Blog by Joy Moses \(Published 8/4/21\)](#)

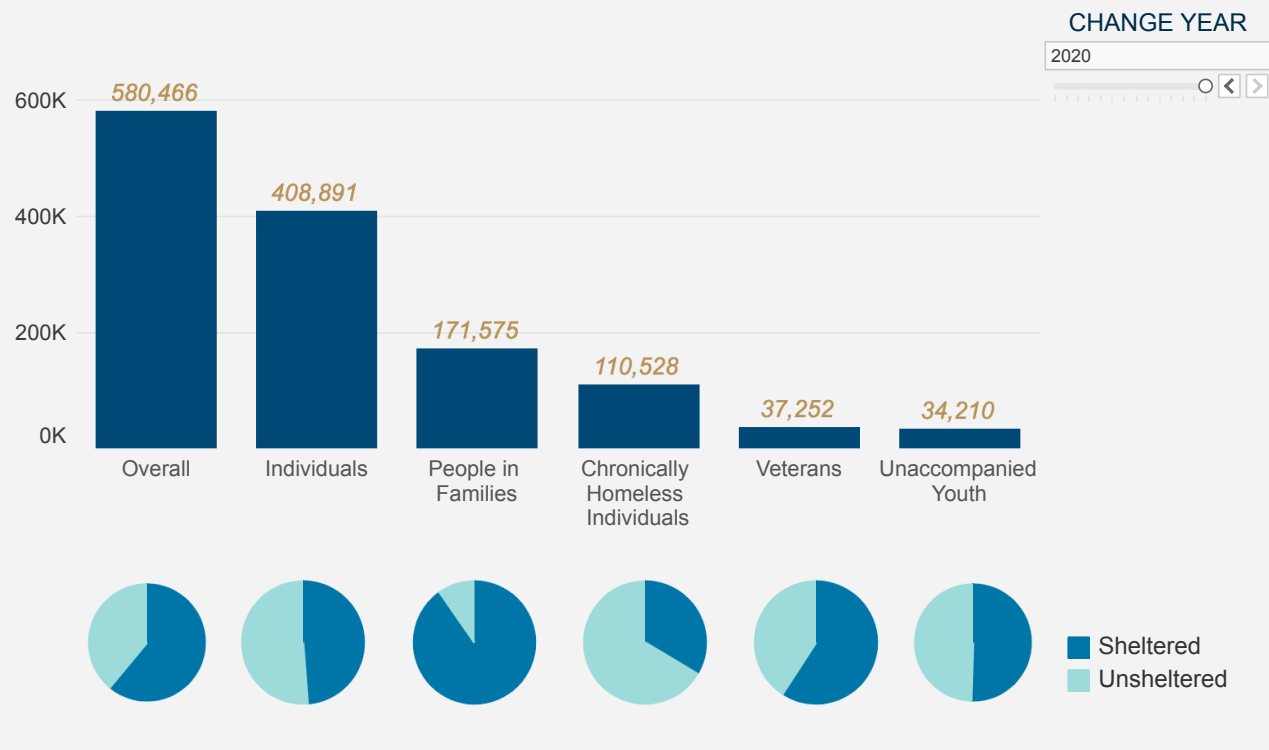
The Basics

In January 2020, there were 580,466 people experiencing homelessness in America. Most were individuals (70 percent), and the rest were people living in families with children. They lived in every state and territory, and they reflected the diversity of our country.

Special Populations. Historically, policymakers and practitioners at every level of government have focused special attention on specific subpopulations.

Decision-makers are often concerned about children and young people due to their vulnerability. People in families with children make up 30 percent of the homeless population. Unaccompanied youth (under age 25) account for six percent of the larger group.

Total Number of People Experiencing Homelessness per Year by Type, 2007–2020



People experiencing “chronic homelessness” belong to another group that often singled out for attention. These individuals have disabilities and have also: 1) been continuously homeless for at least a year; or 2) experienced homelessness at least four times in the last three years for a combined length of time of at least a year. Chronically homeless individuals are currently 19 percent of the homeless population.

Finally, due to their service to our country, veterans are often analyzed separately from the larger group. They represent only six percent of people experiencing homelessness.

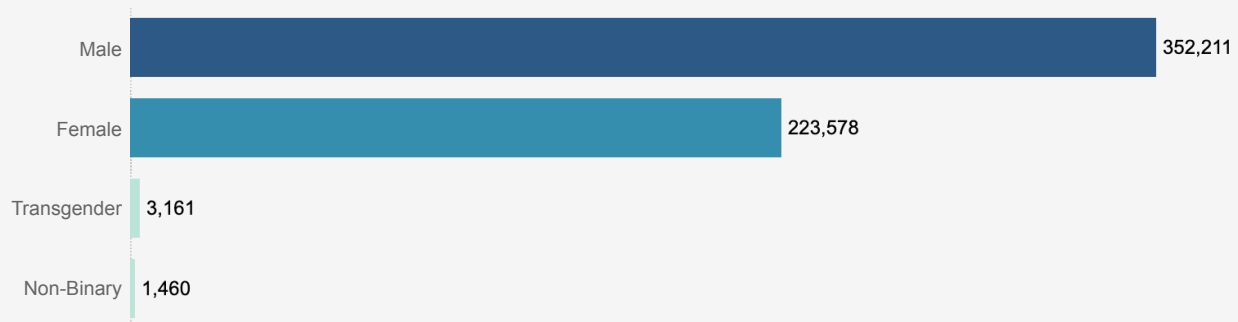
Populations Most at Risk. Although the homeless population is diverse, some subgroups are more likely to find themselves without a place to call home. Risk is significantly tied to gender, race, and ethnicity.

Males are far more likely to experience homelessness than their female counterparts. Out of every 10,000 males, 22 are homeless. For women and girls, that number is 13. Gender disparities are even more evident when the focus is solely on individual adults (the most significant subgroup within homelessness). The overwhelming majority (70 percent) are men.

Counts and Rates by Gender, 2020

Total or Rate

Total Homelessness



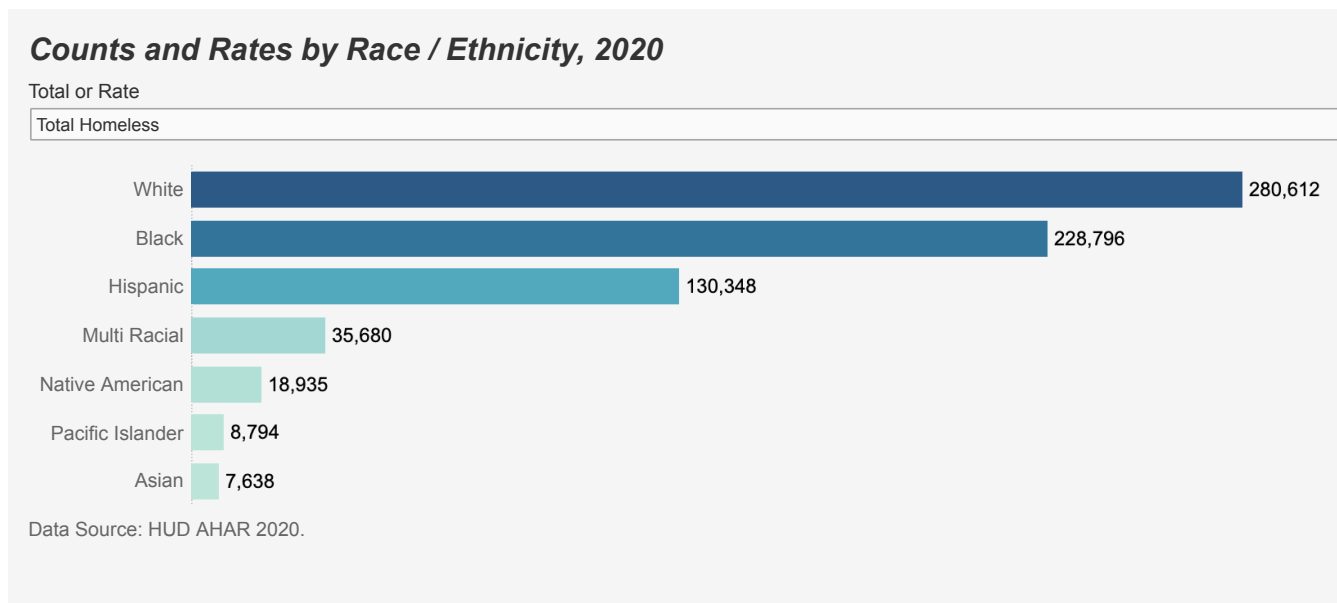
*Rate information is unavailable for Gender Non-Conforming and Transgender people.

Data Source: HUD AHAR 2020.

Race is another significant predictor. As with so many other areas of American life, historically marginalized groups are more likely to be disadvantaged within housing and homelessness spheres. Higher unemployment rates, lower incomes, less access to healthcare, and higher incarceration rates are some of the factors likely contributing to higher rates of homelessness among people of color.

Numerically, white people are the largest racial group within homelessness, accounting for more than a quarter-million people. However, historically marginalized racial groups are far more likely to experience homelessness as a result of segregation and discrimination in employment and housing, among other things.

Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders have the highest rate of homelessness (109 out of every 10,000 people).¹ Groups such as Native Americans (45 out of every 10,000) and Black or African Americans (52 out of every 10,000) also experience elevated rates. Importantly, these rates are much higher than the nation's overall rate of homelessness (18 out of every 10,000).



Unsheltered Homelessness. The nation has a system of temporary shelters that reaches many people in need. However, some still sleep in locations not ordinarily designated for that purpose (for example, sidewalks, subway trains, vehicles, or parks). These unsheltered people are considered particularly vulnerable due to their exposure to the elements and lack of safety, among other things.

Homeless programs and systems provide shelter for most people experiencing homelessness (61 percent). However, significant variation exists among subgroups. For example, children are often a priority for homeless services systems. As a result, families with children are least likely to be unsheltered (only ten percent of unsheltered people are living in families with children). However, young people not living with their families do not enjoy the same access to services—50 percent of unaccompanied homeless youth are unsheltered.

Individuals experiencing homelessness on their own are particularly vulnerable. Most (51 percent) live in places not meant for human habitation. Those who are chronically homeless are most likely to be in these circumstances—66 percent are without any shelter at all.

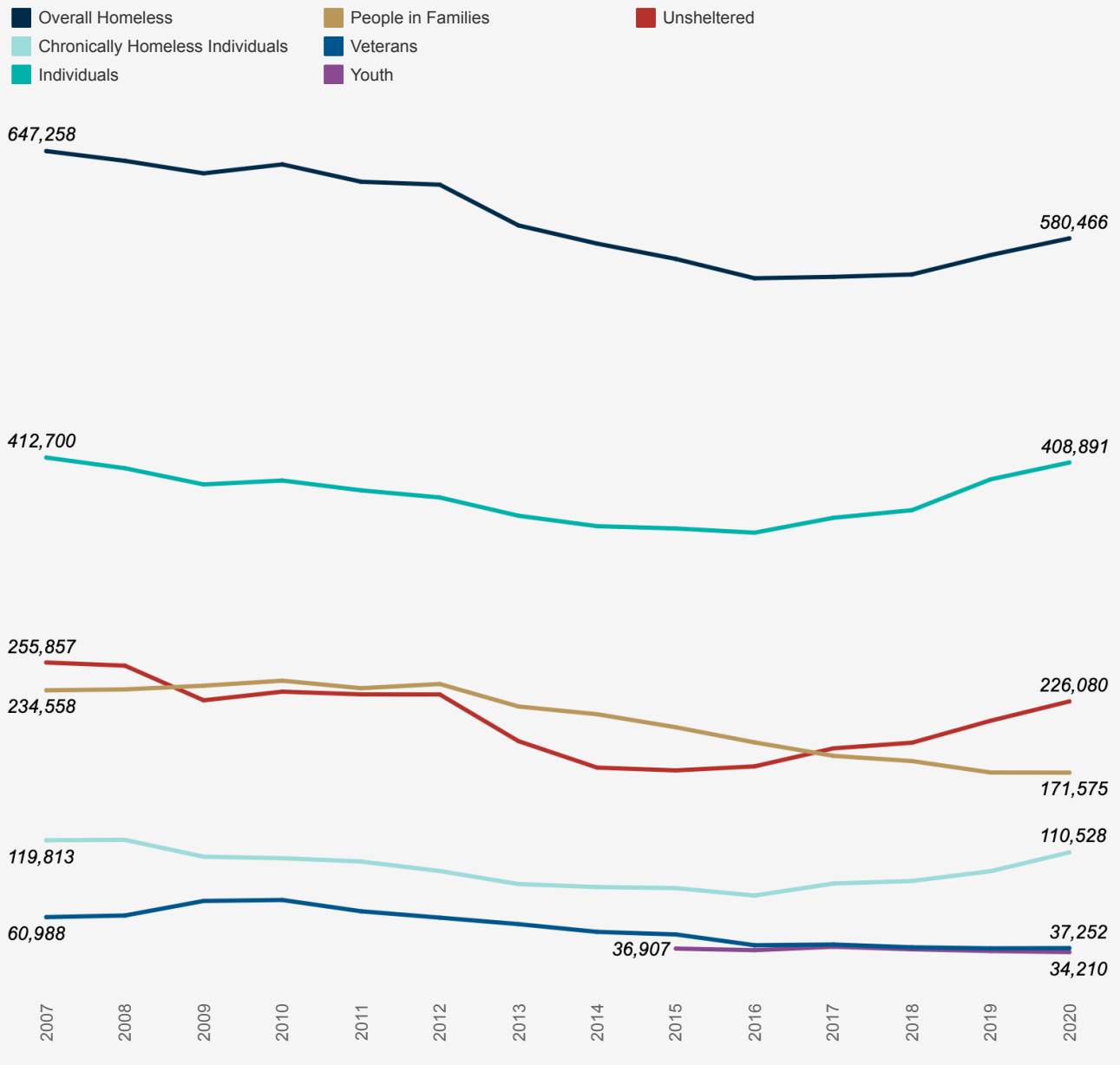
COVID-19 Impacts. Comprehensive national-level data on homelessness was last collected in January 2020, which was before COVID-19 was declared a national emergency. **Thus, this report does not reflect shifts in homelessness that may have occurred because of steps taken to address COVID or elevated unemployment rates tied to the pandemic or the recession.** Similarly, data on services available to people experiencing homelessness was collected just before the crisis began. This information does, however, provide a sense of how prepared homeless systems were to serve a potential influx of new people into homelessness prior to the pandemic.

Unfortunately, COVID-19-related health concerns disrupted counts of unsheltered people in 2021. Thus, data on this group will not be fully updated until late 2022 or early 2023, leaving a significant hole in available knowledge on homelessness.

Trends in Homelessness

Between 2019 and 2020, nationwide homelessness increased by two percent. This change marks the fourth straight year of incremental population growth. Previously, homelessness had primarily been on the decline, decreasing in eight of the nine years before the current trend began.

National Trends by Subpopulation, 2007-2020



Progress has been modest. In 2020, the number of unhoused people was only 10 percent lower than in 2007 (the first year of nationwide data collection). Unfortunately, COVID-19 and the current recession may be making matters worse. COVID-19, elevated unemployment rates and widespread evictions could diminish or completely wipe out previous gains made by those working to end homelessness.

Uneven Progress. While overall progress on ending homelessness has been modest, there is significant variation among subgroups. Some have experienced striking reductions in their counts.

Veterans are a good example of these reductions. Currently, 82 communities and 3 states have announced that they ended veterans' homelessness (meaning that systems can ensure that homelessness is rare, brief, and one-time). Nationally, veteran homelessness has decreased 39 percent since 2007. Homeless families with children are another group that has decreased in size — 27 percent since 2007. And, before a trend reversal in recent years, chronic individual homelessness had dropped by 35 percent.

Multiple causes could explain why veterans, people with families, and chronically homeless individuals have had periods in which they have greater reductions in size than the overall group experiencing homelessness. Some subpopulations have been prioritized by (national-, state-, and local-level) stakeholders, benefiting from greater attention and/or resources. However, factors external to homeless services systems also contribute to outcomes. At bottom, these subgroups illustrate that significant reductions in homelessness are possible and have occurred.

While real progress has occurred for populations such as veterans, others have been left behind— primarily individual adults. The number of individuals experiencing homelessness has remained static over time, decreasing by a mere 1 percent between 2007 and 2020.

Total Number of People Experiencing Homelessness per Year by Type, 2007–2020

SELECT POPULATION

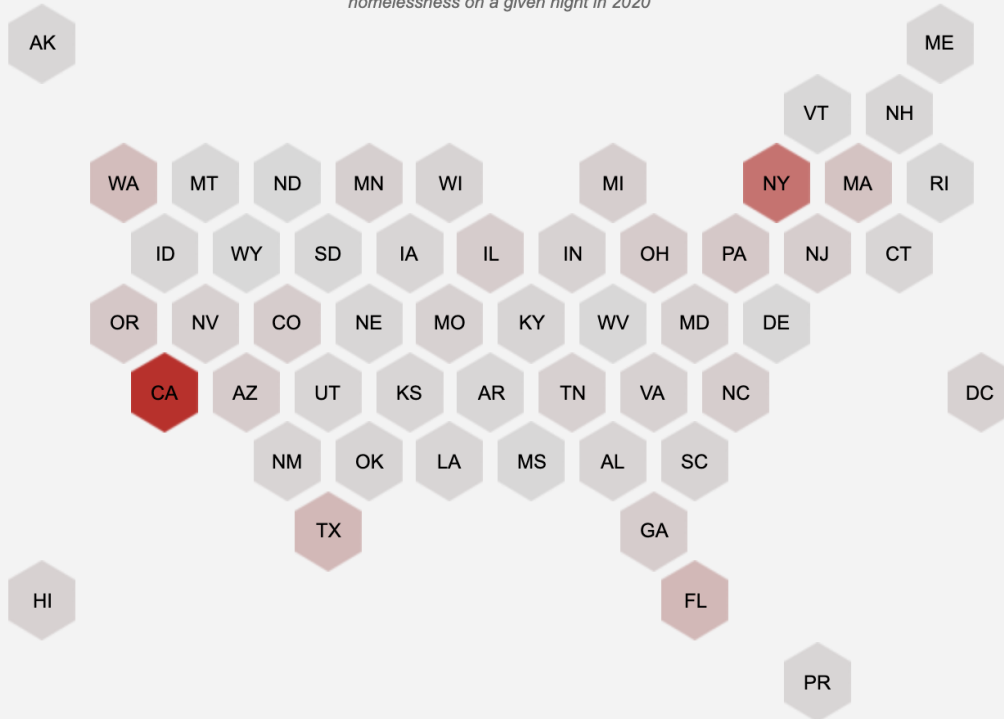
Total Homeless

SELECT COUNT OR % CHANGE

Count, 2020

0 161,548

Number of people experiencing homelessness on a given night in 2020



Although most veterans and chronically homeless people fall under the umbrella category of “individuals,” the majority of individuals do not belong to one of these subgroups. Individual homeless adults who are not veterans or chronically homeless have typically not been the focus of special attention or resources.

Even more troubling, in recent years, previous and significant gains made by chronically homeless individuals have been quickly eroding. As noted above, the size of this group had decreased significantly in the period before 2016. However, since that year, their numbers have surged by 43 percent.

Unsheltered Homelessness on the Rise. Since data on homelessness has been collected, unsheltered homelessness has largely trended downward. By 2015, it had dropped by nearly a third.

However, over the last five years, there has been a reversal of that trend. The unsheltered population has surged by 30 percent, almost wiping out nearly a decade of previous gains. The number of people currently living unsheltered is virtually as high as it was in 2007.

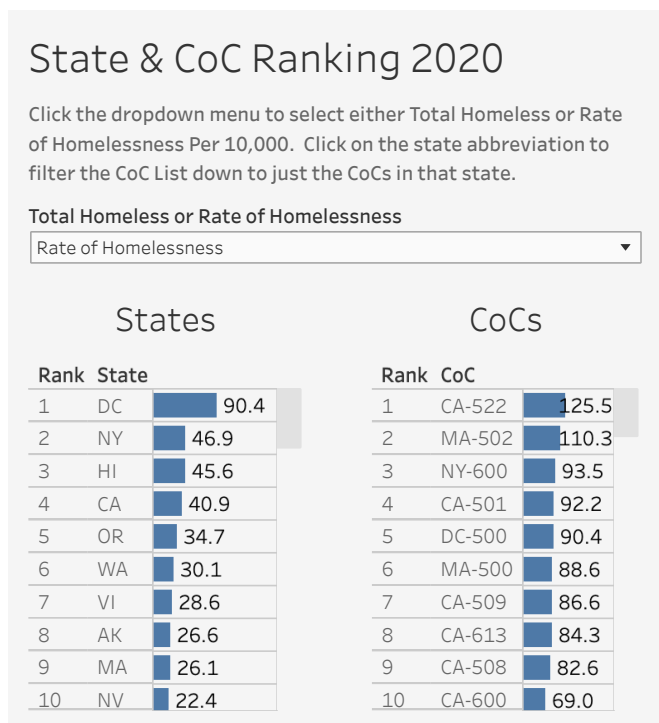
The trend of escalating numbers of people living unsheltered impacts nearly every major subgroup—including people of every race, ethnicity, gender, and most age groups. Only children (people under 18) have realized an overall decrease in unsheltered homelessness during the current surge.

Locating Homelessness

Ending homeless is an ongoing challenge throughout America. However, the severity of the challenge varies by state and community. Locating the areas experiencing the most significant challenges, and directing additional attention and possibly new resources towards them, could result in meaningful reductions in homelessness. There are two ways to evaluate geographic variations—counts and rates.

Counts. Examining the jurisdictions with the largest homeless populations is informative. Many also have the highest populations, overall. For example, California is the most populous state in the union and also has the largest number of people experiencing homelessness. Similarly, the [Continuums of Care](#) (CoC) with the largest homeless populations include highly populous major cities (e.g., New York City, Los Angeles, and Seattle) and Balance of State CoCs encompassing numerous towns and cities.

Fifty-seven percent of people experiencing homelessness are in five states (California, New York, Florida, Texas, and Washington). Half are in the twenty-five CoCs. Thus, a significant share of this national challenge is in a small number of places with large homeless counts. Meanwhile, most communities have relatively small homeless populations to serve. This should impact how the problem is addressed.



Rates. Homeless counts are just one approach to understanding the nature of homelessness. Putting them into context adds nuance to the story. For example, suppose 100,000 people were to experience homelessness in California (a state with more than 39 million people), those would be far less challenging circumstances than 100,000 people being homeless in Wyoming (a state with roughly 575,000 people). Thus, it is helpful to consider the homeless population in relation to the general population.

Rates of homelessness vary widely across the country. For example, the northeast Oklahoma CoC has the lowest rate in the country, reporting 1 person experiencing homelessness out of every 10,000 people. Meanwhile, the Humboldt County CoC in California has the highest rate of 126 people being homeless out of every 10,000.

Many of the states and CoCs with the highest rates of homelessness have the highest housing costs. For example, San Francisco has the fourth highest rate of homelessness in the country; and it has the nation's highest housing wage (necessary earning to afford to rent an apartment). Low-income people in such jurisdictions find it difficult to secure and keep housing they can afford, [impacting homelessness](#).

Other jurisdictions with high rates of homelessness have high [rates of poverty](#). For example, CoCs like Humboldt and Imperial City in California top the above ranking list, being among those ten CoCs with the highest rates of homelessness in the country. They also have high poverty rates, exceeding 20 percent of their overall populations. Such jurisdictions have relatively low housing costs but have a lot of people experiencing economic hardships, some resulting in homelessness.

Understanding Homelessness within a Jurisdiction. Jurisdictions that compare their data to that of other jurisdictions can gain new insights into the severity of their challenges. For instance, the jurisdictions with the highest rates of homelessness (people homeless as a percentage of the general population) will know that they are, in fact, experiencing more challenges than other parts of the country.

Comparisons can also help to identify best practices worthy of replication. Consider the example of CoC A which decides to compare itself to CoC B (a jurisdiction with similar characteristics). When CoC A learns that it has a significantly higher rate of homelessness, it will likely seek out explanations for the differences. CoC A may learn that CoC B has particularly effective approach to securing housing placements. Implementing the best practices of CoC B can help CoC A realize similar progress.

The dashboard at the top of this page and the above rankings chart are helpful in making in-depth comparisons among states and CoCs.

Homeless Assistance in America

The nation's homeless services systems do not have enough resources to fully meet the needs of everyone experiencing homelessness. Thus, it is helpful to examine the difficult decisions they must make, including how much of their limited funds should be spent on temporary versus permanent housing.

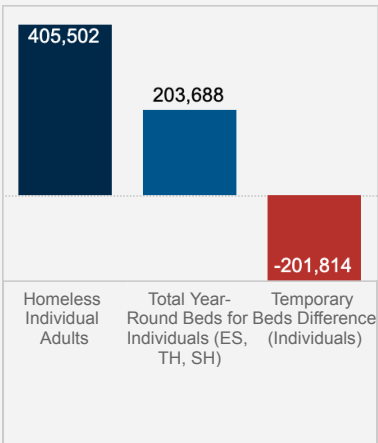
Temporary Housing. For the first time in five years, CoCs increased their overall number of year-round temporary housing beds (Emergency Shelter, Safe Haven, and Transitional Housing). In January 2020, there were 2 percent more of these beds than in the previous year. And the total year-round bed count was 11 percent lower than the all-time high, which occurred in 2013.

Total People Experiencing Homelessness Compared to Temporary Beds Available, 2020

State

Total US

Difference in Bed Capacities-Individuals*



Difference in Bed Capacities-People in Families



Difference in Bed Capacities-Youth Under 18



Seasonal Beds



*Within the AHAR, "Individuals" includes unaccompanied youth under 18 years of age. However, this group is not targeted by adult shelters. Thus, this group has been subtracted from the individuals population and are the subjects of a separate examination.

A national-level snapshot of the reach of homeless services systems is informative. Individual community circumstances vary. However, in the aggregate, systems were able to offer a year-round bed to only 50 percent of individuals, but to 100 percent of families (with a surplus of nearly 18,000 beds).

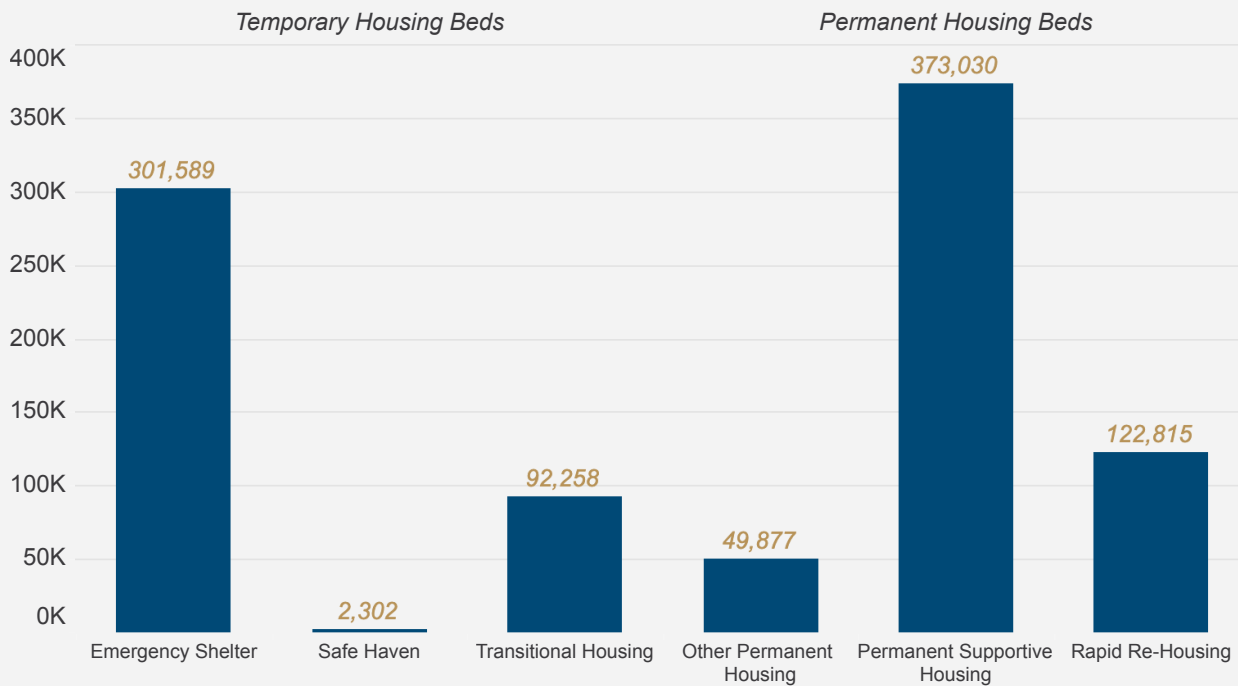
During the winter months, some communities temporarily supplement these year-round beds with seasonal ones. Thus, they may be able to serve more people during that time of the year. But, unfortunately, many people are unsheltered, sleeping on sidewalks, in abandoned buildings, or in other locations not meant for human habitation. Being unsheltered is typically a challenge for individual adults, but some families with children are also in these situations.

Current data reflects circumstances in January 2020. The pandemic interrupted access to temporary housing services. The CDC's social distancing recommendations often translated into more space between beds and, therefore, fewer beds being available in existing facilities. New beds were created in non-congregate locations, largely motels/hotels, that allowed people to isolate themselves from others. The year's net bed gains and losses are currently unknown, as are the pandemic's impacts on offerings in 2021 and beyond.

Homeless Assistance Bed Inventory Trends, 2007-2020

CHANGE YEAR

2020



Permanent Housing. CoCs have had years in which temporary housing offerings were on the decline. However, they consistently increase investments in permanent housing beds (Permanent Supportive Housing, Rapid Re-Housing, and Other). Over the last five years, these types of beds grew by 20 percent.

These numbers reflect a shift in policy priorities. In recent years, there has been a renewed emphasis on housing people as quickly as possible rather than allowing them to linger indefinitely in shelters and unsheltered locations.

Forty-six states and the District of Columbia have contributed to this trend over the last five years, growing their number of permanent housing beds. Currently, 58 percent of all homeless system beds are designated for permanent housing.

Through the CARES Act of 2020 and the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Congress invested billions of new dollars in programs that should impact the number of people and families in permanent housing. Most notably, they appropriated \$4 billion for the Emergency Solutions Grant program, \$5 billion for Emergency Housing Vouchers, and \$5 billion for the HOME program (rental assistance, affordable housing development, and other services). Thus, permanent housing placements should be continuing on an upward trajectory in 2020, 2021, and possibly beyond.

Common Forms of Assistance. Nationally, the most common forms of homeless assistance are permanent supportive housing (40 percent of system beds) and emergency shelter (32 percent of system beds).

State-by-State Trends in Homeless Assistance, 2007-2020

Category

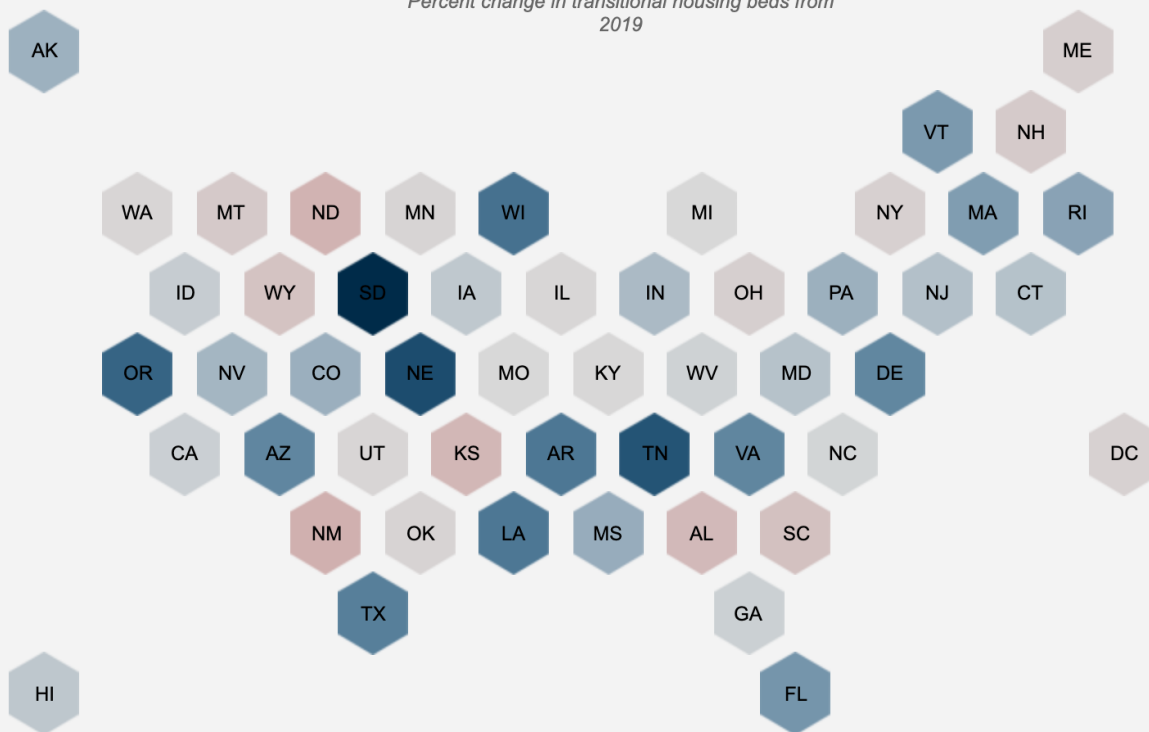
Transitional Housing

SELECT COUNT OR % CHANGE

Percent Change from 2019

-32 133

Percent change in transitional housing beds from 2019



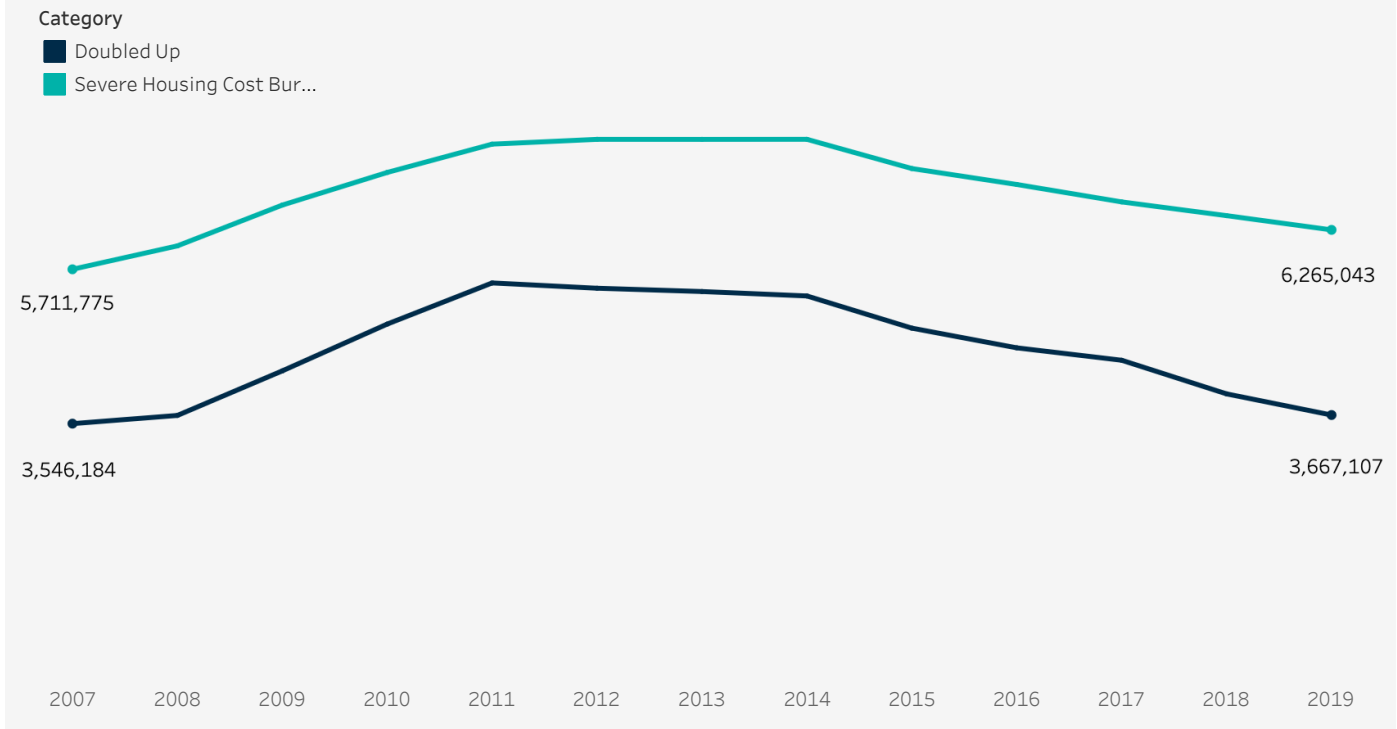
Over the last five years, the fastest growing forms of assistance have been Rapid Re-Housing and “Other Permanent Housing” (permanent housing other than Rapid Re-Housing or Permanent Supportive Housing). During that time period, the former expanded by 104 percent and the latter by 105 percent.

Only one type of intervention has been on the decline—transitional housing. There are 56 percent fewer beds in this category than there were in 2007. This shift is responsible for decreases in the overall availability of temporary housing in recent years. It further reflects the policy goal of moving more people into permanent housing as quickly as possible.

Indicators of Risk

Many Americans [live in poverty](#), amounting to nearly 34 million people or 10.5 percent of the U.S. population. As a result, they struggle to afford necessities such as housing.

Populations at Risk of Homelessness over Time, 2007 - 2019

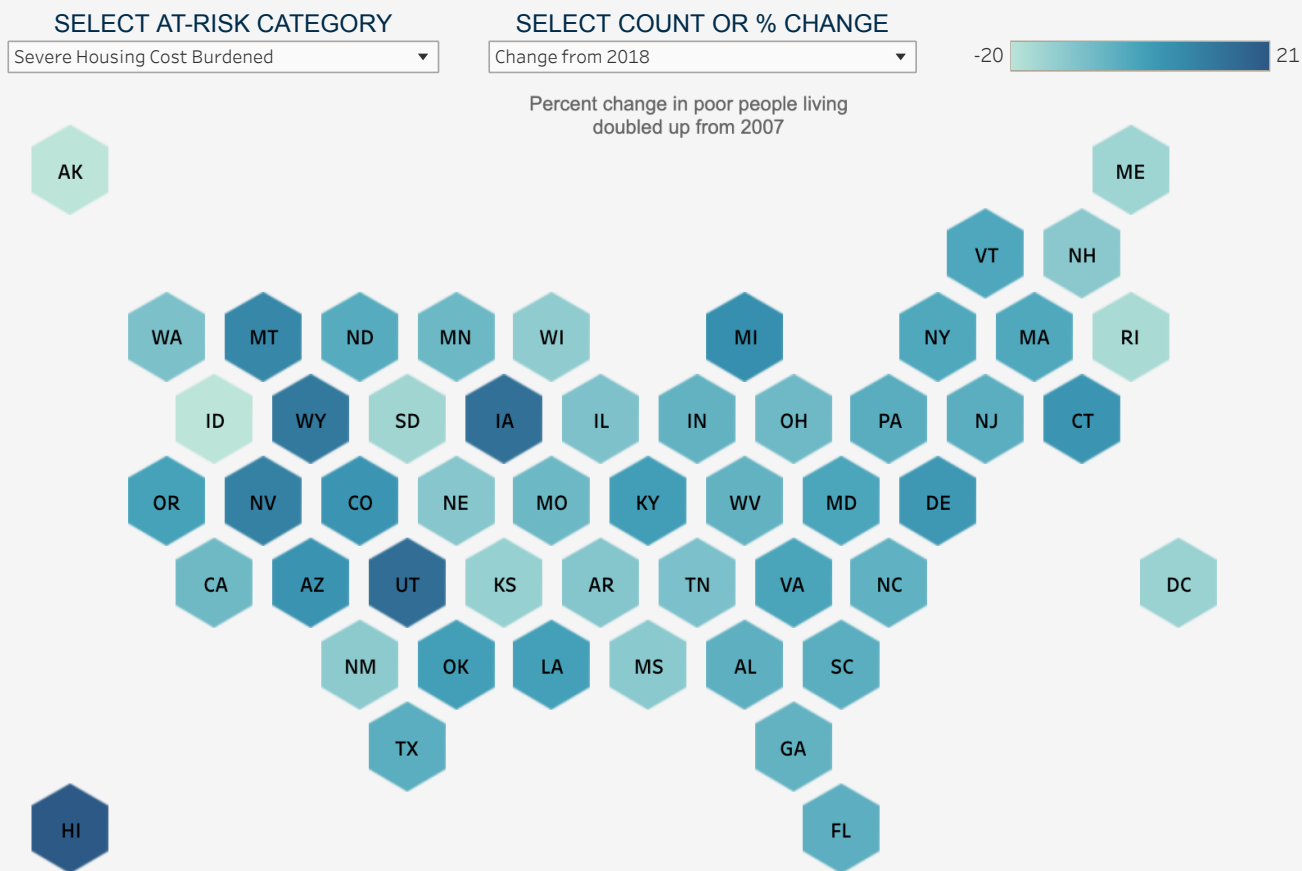


In 2019, 6.3 million Americans households experienced severe housing cost burden, which means they spent more than 50 percent of their income on housing. This marked the fifth straight year of decreases in the size of this group. However, the number of severely cost-burdened American households is still 10 percent higher than it was in 2007, the year the nation began monitoring homelessness data.

“Doubling up” (or sharing the housing of others for economic reasons) is another measure of housing hardship. In 2019, an estimated 3.7 million people were in these situations. Some doubled-up people and families have fragile relationships with their hosts or face other challenges in the home, putting them at risk of homelessness. Over the last six years, the number of doubled-up people has been trending downward but is 3 percent higher than in 2007.

Over a period lasting more than a decade, the nation has not made any real progress in reducing the number of Americans at risk of homelessness. In fact, these challenges are slightly worse. The trends lines in the above chart point to severe house cost and doubled-up numbers that are higher in 2019 than they were in 2007. Even more troubling is that available data predates the COVID-19 health and economic crisis. Reduced work hours and elevated unemployment during the recession may be increasing housing cost burdens and driving more people into doubled-up situations.

State-by-State Trends in Populations At-Risk of Homelessness, 2007-2019



Even before the pandemic, there was significant variation among the states in their data on people at risk of homelessness. National-level data, which has been discouraging, can mask even more dire challenges in specific areas of the country. For example, since 2007, severe-housing-cost burdened households grew by 35 percent in Hawaii and 36 percent in Connecticut (numbers that are even higher than national-level growths in these areas). Similarly, over that same time period, the number of people doubled up expanded by 102 percent in Idaho and 65 percent in Florida.

Complicating matters further, the impacts of the current recession and responsive policies have varied across the country. As a result, regional differences in at-risk housing factors could be shifting and changing.

Sources and Methodology

Data on *homelessness* are based on annual point-in-time (PIT) counts conducted by [Continuums of Care](#) (CoCs) to estimate the number of people experiencing homelessness on a given night. The latest counts are from January 2020. Point-in-time data from 2007 to 2020 are available on [HUD Exchange](#).

Rates of homelessness compare point-in-time counts to state, county, and city population data from the Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program (Population and Housing Unit Estimates data tables, 2019 version). Rates for racial, ethnic, and gender demographic groups are drawn from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey 5-year Data (2019 version).

Data on *homeless assistance*, or bed capacity of homeless services programs on a given night, are reported annually by CoCs along with point-in-time counts. These data are compiled in the Housing Inventory Count (HIC), which is also available on [HUD Exchange](#) for 2007 through 2020.

Data on *at-risk populations* are from analyses by the National Alliance to End Homelessness of the Census Bureau's 2019 American Community Survey 1-year Estimates. Poor renter households with a severe housing cost burden are households whose total income falls under the applicable poverty threshold and who are paying 50 percent or more of total household income to housing rent. For people living doubled up, poverty is based on the composition and income of the entire household as compared to the poverty thresholds. A person is considered living doubled up based on his or her relationship to the head of household and includes: an adult child (18 years old or older) who is not in school, is married, and/or has children; a sibling; a parent or parent-in-law; an adult grandchild who is not in school; a grandchild who is a member of a subfamily; a son- or daughter-in-law; another relative; or any non-relative.

¹The Pacific Islander and Native American groups are relatively small when compared to populations such as whites and Hispanics/Latinxs. This is one of the factors that makes them more difficult for homeless services systems and the Census to count them. There is a need to ensure that data collection efforts focused on these groups becomes more precise. However, available data suggests significant disparities and causes of concern that are worthy of discussion. See USICH, [Expert Panel on Homelessness among American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians](#) (2012) and *Oversight Hearing on Reaching Hard-to-Count Communities in the 2020 Census, 116th Congress (2020)*([testimony of Kevin J. Allis](#)).
