

HOMELESSNESS IN LOS ANGELES

WHAT DOES *HOMELESS* MEAN?

The most commonly cited definition of a *homeless person* is from Section 11302 of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. That Act defines a homeless person as an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence or a person who resides in a shelter, welfare hotel, transitional program or place not ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodations, such as streets, cars, movie theatres, abandoned buildings, etc. People in jail are not homeless.¹

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development's definition of *homeless* includes a person who has no place to go, no resources to obtain housing, and is either being evicted within a week, discharged within a week from an institution, such as a hospital, or is fleeing domestic violence.²

The U.S. Department of Education uses a more expansive definition that includes children and youths "who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason" or are living in "motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations..."³

HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE HOMELESS?

ANNUAL COUNT

Over the course of one year, an estimated 254,000 men, women and children experience homelessness in Los Angeles County.⁴

NIGHTLY COUNT

Approximately 80,000 people are homeless each night in Los Angeles County. Estimates of the number of people who are homeless vary due in part to methodological variables such as differing definitions of homelessness and count time frames,

as well as the difficulty of locating homeless people. Los Angeles has a higher rate of homelessness than most other U.S. cities and counties.⁶

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

Homeless families and individuals can be found throughout the County with concentrations in particular areas. South Los Angeles and Metro Los Angeles have the greatest number of homeless people, with diminishing but significant percentages in San Gabriel Valley, South Bay, San Fernando Valley, Antelope Valley, East Los Angeles and the West Side. There is a higher percentage of homeless families in South Los Angeles and South Bay, single individuals in the Metro and South Los Angeles regions, and youth in Hollywood.⁷

Regional Homeless Counts and Rates⁵

Region	Year	Time Period	Homeless Count	% of pop. homeless
Los Angeles County	2003	Day	82,096	0.9%
Long Beach	2003	Day	5,845	1.3%
East San Gabriel Valley	2003	Day	2,703	0.3%
Glendale	2003	Day	472	0.2%
Pomona, La Verne, Claremont	2002	15 Days	1,410	0.7%
Los Angeles County	2002	Month	1,389	0.6%
Pasadena	2000	Day	78,600	0.8%
		Year	253,918	2.7%
Santa Monica	1999	Day	879	0.7%
		Month	1,832	1.4%
San Bernardino County	2002	Day	1,037	1.1%
Orange County	2001	Day	5,270-8,351	0.3%-0.5%
Monterey County	2002	Day	19,740	0.7%
California	1999	Day	3,071	0.8%
United States	1996	Year	361,000	1.1%
			2.3-3.5 million	0.9%-1.3%

PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY...

FAMILIES

Families, typically headed by single mothers, represent a growing percentage of the overall homeless population, with nightly estimates ranging from 20% to 43%. In Los Angeles, the average homeless family has 2 children.⁸

YOUTH

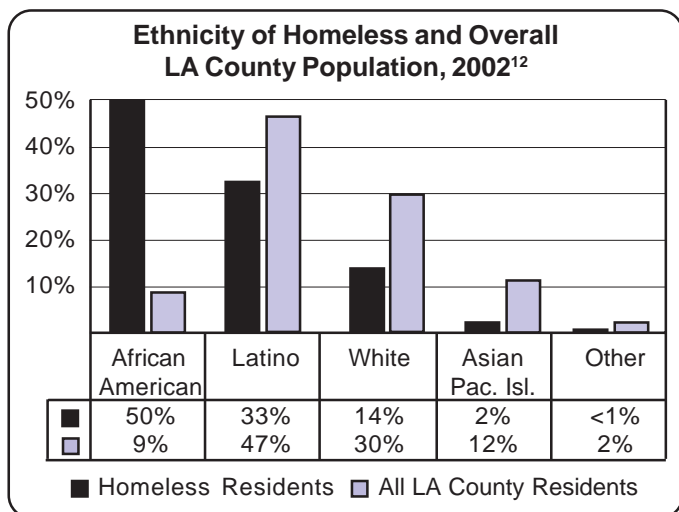
Unaccompanied youth, many clustering in the Hollywood area, represent a small but important group, with annual estimates hovering between 4,800 and 10,000.⁹

GENDER

One-third to one-half of homeless people are women and girls. Men represent about three-quarters of the single population. Among families, the overwhelming majority of adults are women.¹⁰

RACE/ETHNICITY

African Americans are disproportionately represented among the homeless population in Los Angeles County, while Latinos, Whites and Asians are underrepresented.¹¹



AGE

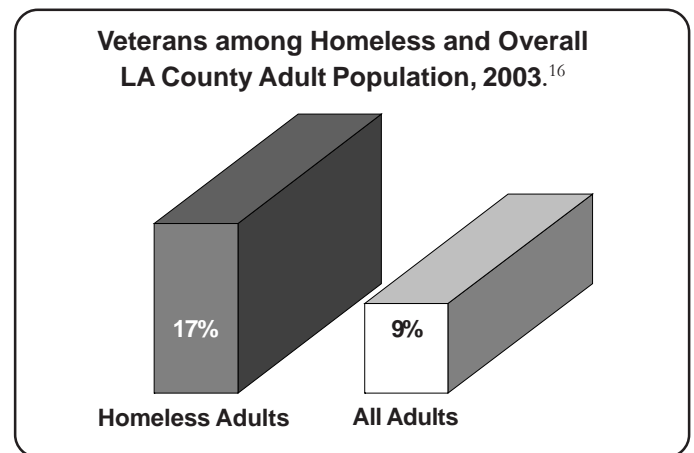
The average age of homeless adults is around 40 years old. Women tend to be younger than men.¹³

RESIDENCY AND CITIZENSHIP

Most homeless people in Los Angeles are from Los Angeles and were housed in or near the community where they are homeless. Estimates of US citizenship rates for the Los Angeles County homeless adult population range from 82% to 86%, compared to 71% for all adults in the County.¹⁴

VETERANS

Veterans represent approximately 14% to 20% of the homeless population, compared with 9% of the overall Los Angeles County population. Vietnam veterans make up the largest block of homeless veterans.¹⁵



PHYSICAL HEALTH AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The physical health of homeless people is worse than the general population. An estimated one-quarter of homeless adults are physically disabled and roughly 20% are victims of domestic violence. The likelihood of having been physically assaulted is higher for homeless people than for others.¹⁷

CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

Nationally, an estimated 27% of homeless adults lived in foster care, group homes or other institutional settings as a child, and 25% reported childhood physical or sexual abuse.¹⁸

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Estimates of substance abuse by single homeless individuals in Los Angeles County range from one-third to two-thirds of the population. Substance abuse is higher among unaccompanied homeless youth and single individuals, and lower among families.¹⁹

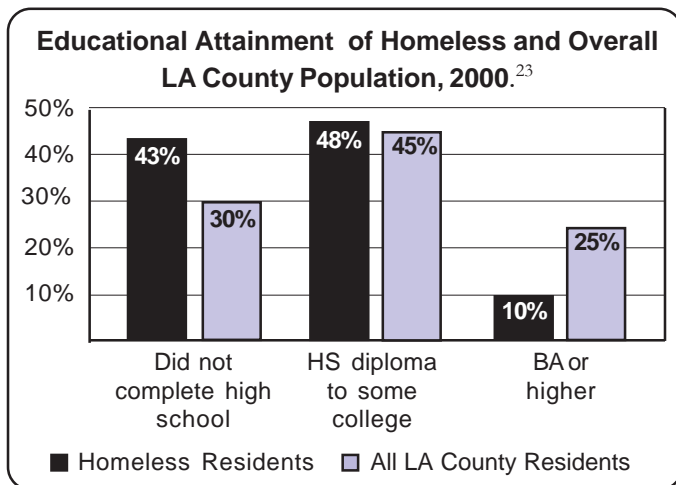
MENTAL HEALTH

The incidence of mental illness varies based upon sub-population, location and other factors. Studies suggest that the overall rate of mental illness among homeless adults in Los Angeles is around 25%.²⁰

Chronically homeless single individuals have a higher incidence of mental illness than families. One study found a 16% dual diagnosis rate among homeless individuals and a 0.6% rate among homeless families.²¹

EDUCATION

About half of homeless adults in Los Angeles have graduated from high school. Los Angeles appears to have a greater percentage of homeless adults with a college education (10%) than nationally (2%).²²



EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

Income for homeless persons, even those working full-time, is in almost all cases below the poverty level. Prior to becoming homeless, 75% - 90% were poor.²⁴

Approximately 16% to 20% of homeless adults are currently employed, and 41% show employment within the last year.²⁵

PUBLIC BENEFITS

Public benefits are underutilized or have been cut for many homeless individuals and families. About 42% to 77% of homeless people do not receive the public benefits to which they are entitled.²⁶

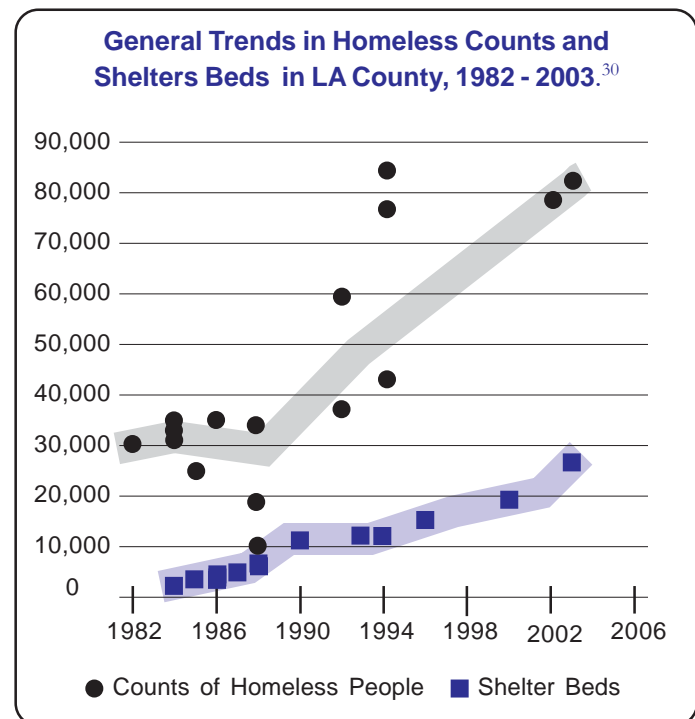
DURATION & EPISODES OF HOMELESSNESS

Researchers disagree regarding the extent of “chronic” or long-term homelessness. In 2003, point-in-time estimates of “chronic” homelessness ranged from 10% to 25%.²⁷

Families are homeless for shorter periods than single individuals and unaccompanied youth. A number of studies indicate that one-third to two-thirds of single individuals have been homeless for more than one year. Roughly half of families and single individuals experience repeated incidences of homelessness.²⁸

SHELTERS

Roughly 20% to 35% of homeless people are in shelters located throughout the county. The number of shelter beds in Los Angeles grew from 2,452 in 1984 to 18,529 in 2003.²⁹



CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

Causes of homelessness commonly cited by researchers, government agencies and advocates include: lack of affordable housing; poverty; low-paying jobs and labor market changes; unemployment; mental illness; substance abuse; changes and cuts in public assistance; domestic violence; changes in family structure; prison release; chronic health problems; and lack of access to affordable health care.

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FOOTNOTES

- 1 a. 15 kk; f; n; aa; p.
16 See footnote 15.
- 2 ccc. 17 t; f; n; kk; p; aa; w; fff; eee.
- 3 b. 18 ff.
- 4 f. 19 f; aa; bbb; kk; u; p; hh.
- 5 ll; m; ee; l; aa; f; dd; z; d; mm; c; 20 f; bbb; ll; n; kk; jj; ii; hhh; w; ss.
- vv; i; zz. 21 kk.
- 6 See footnote 5. 22 f; s; p; gg.
- 7 f; g; hh. 23 f; aaa.
- 8 f; ll; q; n; bbb; m; l; ee; e. 24 f; aa; p; y; hh.
- 9 hh; kk; rr. 25 f; bbb; aa.
- 10 f; bbb; ss; m; aa; ee; ff; p. 26 u; f; nn; aa; p.
- 11 f; bbb; ee; m; p; aa; dd; ss; z; s; 27 ll; f; p.
- hh; u; hhh; k. 28 f; rr; u; ff; h; j; aa; w.
- 12 f; zz. 29 s; x.
- 13 f; aa; ss; hhh; k; p. 30 uu; o; yy; oo; v; tt; qq; pp; x; ww;
- 14 f; r; p; ee; aa; k; hhh. ddd; xx; bb; cc; ggg; rr; f.

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