Breaking the Fall

Successful Homeless Interventions in the Covid Pandemic

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Successful Homeless Interventions in the Covid Pandemic

December 2022

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Underwritten by the
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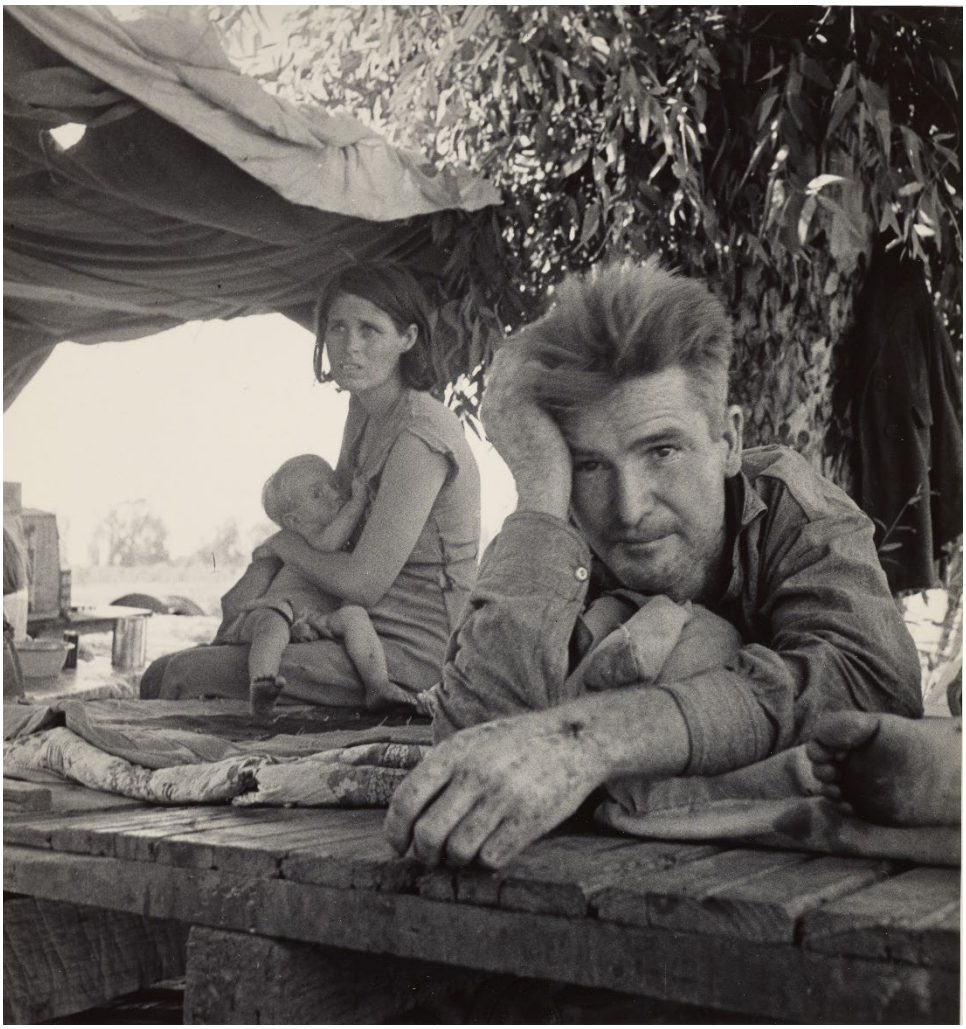

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Drought Refugees Hoping for Cotton Work, Blythe, California, Dorthea Lange, 1936, J. Paul Getty Museum

1. Executive Summary

Breaking the Fall – Covid Interventions Prevented Homelessness

Struggling workers are either everyone's responsibility now or everyone's problem later. When poorly paid workers become jobless at the thin edge of the job market and then unable to pay rent, homeless destitution follows.

In fact, we are equipped with the tools we need to protect workers from the sharper edges of joblessness and to combat homelessness.

Recent government income and housing interventions during the Covid pandemic had demonstrable benefits in reducing the growth of homelessness. Comparisons of projected versus actual growth in Los Angeles County from 2020 to 2022 validate the benefit of these interventions.

In the 2020 report, *Locked Out*, we projected that the Covid recession would cause homelessness to increase 23 percent in Los Angeles, 17 percent in California and 14 percent in the United States from 2020 to 2022. Despite some observable increases in homelessness, increases on this scale did not occur.

This report offers three types of analysis to identify what curtailed homeless growth. *First*, the homeless count is re-analyzed for accuracy. Estimates for both the 2020 and 2022 counts are adjusted, based on sampling and other observed problems with these counts. *Next*, encounters between homeless individuals and government institutions are analyzed to understand the trajectory of homelessness during the pandemic. *Then*, the successful impacts of government interventions are identified.

We conclude by projecting the growth in homelessness if there is a recession in 2023, and recommending steps for curtailing this growth.

Correction of the 2020 and 2022 Homeless Counts

The evidence that the public saw through car windows and that was reported from every metropolitan region in California, except Los Angeles, was that homelessness increased over the two years of the Covid pandemic. However, the 2022 homeless count by Los Angeles' homeless agency (LAHSA) showed a different trend, specifically that that unsheltered homeless declined 0.5 percent from 2020 to 2022. Because this appeared implausible, both the 2020 and 2022 counts were re-analyzed.

The corrected 2020 estimate is that the number of unsheltered homeless residents was 1.3 percent smaller than had been estimated by LAHSA, and the unsheltered population in 2022 was 13 percent larger than in 2020.

When the unsheltered population is combined with the sheltered population, which did not require correction, the new estimate of 70,616

total homeless individuals in LAHSA's continuum of care in 2022 is 11.9 percent larger than the corrected estimate of 63,100 homeless persons in 2020.

Curtailment of Homeless Growth

Overall, it appears that government income and housing interventions during the Covid pandemic *reduced* the forecasted growth of homelessness by 43 percent in Los Angeles County and 41 percent in California. We estimated that the same reduction in homelessness achieved in California was achieved across the United States.

The growth in homelessness that we projected in 2020 was based on the ratio of growth in unemployment to growth in homelessness found in Los Angeles, California and the United States in the 2008 recession. We applied these ratios to the number of workers who became unemployed in the Covid pandemic to make our projections.

These pessimistic but solidly grounded projections did not materialize. This success in curtailing the growth of homelessness is attributable to government interventions.

Under-Employment and Housing Desperation

To solve the employment upheavals that cause homelessness we have to resist the lure of simple thinking. Instead of looking just at people who are homeless now, we must pay attention to those coming down the tracks – precariously housed workers losing jobs and falling into destitution.

We must learn to value the homelessness that we prevent and do not see, rather than responding just to those who we have failed and see before us on the street.

We need to understand the magnitude of unemployment, the attributes of jobless workers, and become capable of identifying those who are most precariously housed and threatened by homelessness.

In the first two months of the Covid pandemic, Los Angeles County lost 17 percent of its jobs, California lost 15 percent and the United States lost 13 percent.

This abrupt decimation of jobs was unlike any other recession. In the Great Recession of 2008, it took Los Angeles 21 months to lose 10 percent of its jobs – a smaller job loss in a time window that was five times longer.

Economic homelessness emerges from jobs lost at the thin edge of the labor market, when jobless workers become destitute and are unable to pay rent. The highest rates of precarious housing were among workers with limited education, single parents, Latinos and African Americans. The rates of

precarious housing among low-income workers in these groups is twice as high as the total population based on ethnicity, three times as high based on household structure, and four times as high based on education.

Cushioning Unemployed Workers from the Sharper Edges of Joblessness

Even when institutions fail to help homeless individuals escape homelessness, the record of those encounters exposes the contours and trajectory of homelessness.

Records during the Covid pandemic are available for hospital care of homeless patients in California and Los Angeles, homeless deaths, arrests, encampment sweeps, and cash aid in Los Angeles. These records shed light on the course of homelessness during the pandemic as well as institutional practices that ameliorated, and in some cases worsened, homelessness.

Hospitals have become a primary institutional touch point for homeless individuals. The number of homeless inpatients reported by hospitals is now 900 times larger than it was 30 years ago. The primary medical diagnosis for inpatients is a psychotic mental disorder. Not surprisingly, these conditions emerge and become more acute over the course of extended homelessness. This is a compelling reason for providing earlier, more effective interventions to identify and help individuals who are likely to become persistently homelessness.

There was a 56 percent increase in deaths among homeless individuals during the first year of the pandemic. This includes a 78 percent increase in deaths from drug overdoses. These are deaths of despair and evidence of the damaging effect of social isolation during the pandemic.

The number of calls from Los Angeles residents asking the city to clean up homeless encampments increased by 60 per month after the onset of Covid. The most likely explanation for the increase is that the number of unsheltered dwellings increased. The long-term ineffectiveness of dispossessing and dislocating unsheltered homeless individuals speaks to the need for both more housing and more sustaining sources of income.

The County of Los Angeles terminated 28,435 individuals from the General Relief caseload at the height of unemployment during the Covid pandemic. This action appears to have been driven by an arbitrary administrative decision rather than lack of eligibility and is likely to have caused greater hardship among homeless residents.

Interventions

Housing and income interventions during the Covid recession and the ensuing wave of unemployment reduced the growth of homelessness by almost half and can provide the same protection in future recessions.

Scaling-up re-employment interventions for high-risk unemployed workers would further reduce homelessness risks.

The moratoriums on eviction provided the greatest protection against homelessness, reducing the number of evictions nationwide by half, and providing even stronger protections in California and Los Angeles.

Cash income from unemployment insurance and stimulus payments provided parallel support for most unemployed, low-income workers until mid-2021. These payments forestalled destitution and reduced the risk of homelessness.

Roughly one-fifth of vulnerable workers benefited from the expanded child tax credit, and a small fraction of the labor force benefited from rent relief and the Paycheck Protection Program.

The homeless housing system provided minimal support, with the exception of a large increase in emergency shelter beds in most California counties, except for Los Angeles, which reported almost no increase.

Re-employment interventions were almost nonexistent, even though unemployment caused the economic crisis. Re-employment of homeless workers calls for rebuilding hope and purpose to open a path for achieving their productive potential.

For example, the Realization Project is demonstrating how interventions that both restore the human spirit and connect high-risk unemployed workers with jobs can be effective.

Breaking the Fall Next Time

We are equipped with the tools we need to combat homelessness. It is up to us to use them. Eviction moratoriums and cash payments kept households and workers intact during the Covid pandemic. These two interventions worked.

The truly obvious and massive problem that causes homelessness in recessions is lack of employment. To solve homelessness, we need a searching, open and good faith dialogue about restorative economic justice and jobs.

The true answer to homelessness is that we must do a better job correcting our nation's structural social and economic inequities.

Re-employment is a third, crucial intervention. This strategy has been under-utilized and should be a primary tool for combatting homelessness among low-income, high risk and unemployed workers.

A mild recession in 2023 appears to be a strong possibility, caused by increases in interest rates by the Federal Reserve Bank.

If there is a recession in 2023, we project that unemployment in the United States will increase from 3.7 percent now to 5.25 percent. This level of unemployment would cause an estimated 7,040 individuals who meet HUD's definition of "sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation" to become homeless in Los Angeles County over the coming four years.

They are projected to be accompanied by a total of 20,560 individuals in California and 61,810 in the United States who also will be sleeping in places not meant for human habitation.

We can apply five important lessons about the 2020 interventions to replicate and improve on our most successful measures for closing the pipeline from unemployment to homelessness.

First, Do Not Rely on the Homeless Services System to Prevent Homelessness

The homeless social services and housing system is largely reactive rather than preventative in addressing homelessness. Furthermore, the system does not have adequate resources to ensure incomes and housing for all unemployed workers at risk of homelessness. It is the responsibility of mainstream public systems to provide income support and protect housing.

Second, Keep People Housed – Prevent Evictions

Eviction moratoriums appear to have been the most effective intervention for preventing housing displacement and homelessness. Tools for keeping vulnerable workers in housing include ordinances that prohibit evictions, legal assistance for households facing eviction, and income supports that enable households to pay rent.

Third, Money – Maintain Incomes

Income is the most essential tool for keeping workers housed. This can be provided in the form of cash aid, rent assistance or earned income.

Fourth, Work – Reconnect Workers with Jobs

The workers who are most vulnerable to homelessness are also likely to have the greatest difficulty becoming re-employed. Paying for housing with earned income meets the essential interests of workers and the public. Reconnecting workers with jobs may require hands-on assistance in finding employment along with restorative justice support for inner healing to overcome trauma.

Fifth, Target Interventions on High-Need Workers – Use Smart Data

Interventions should selectively target unemployed workers who are most vulnerable to becoming homeless. The society-wide interventions during the Covid pandemic were one-time programs in response to a national trauma. Funding will not be available to replicate income and housing interventions on this scale. However, interventions for preventing homelessness were tested and validated during the Covid pandemic and can be more narrowly targeted based on the scale of available federal, state and local funding.

Predictive analytic screening tools such as those used in the Realization Project are in the public domain. They can accurately identify unemployed workers who are likely to become persistently homeless. These tools should be used to target cost-effective interventions that lead to productive re-employment rather than persistent homelessness.

Improve the Accuracy and Reliability of the Homeless Count

We do not know where we are or where we are going without a map. It is the job of the homeless count to provide a map of homelessness, however this effort in Los Angeles County was flawed and unreliable in 2022.

Recommendations for improving the accuracy and reliability of the count, and for understanding and combating homelessness include:

Establish a more independent and reliable count process

1. Establish a peer-review process for the homeless count before it is released to obtain expert and independent assessments of the reliability of the count and recommendations for improving the analysis of data before the final count is released.

2. Give the research organization working with the homeless count a fully independent voice, including independence in releasing data, research findings and recommendations regarding the count.

3. Assess whether the comprehensive information for individuals receiving homeless services and housing provides a more reliable population profile than the demographic survey and should have a role in describing the street population in addition to the sheltered population.

Improve specific count practices

4. Conduct the demographic survey as a uniformly random component of the street count rather than as an activity that is disconnected in time and space.

5. Increase the number of families with children that are reached by the demographic survey to provide samples of at least 100 for subgroups that are used in producing demographic estimates.

6. Make it a primary goal of the count to calibrate year-to-year comparability in population estimates and to identify likely causes for shifts in the number or composition of the homeless population.

7. Improve the reliability of the count by identifying, quantifying and correcting undercounts. This includes conducting surveys at homeless provider locations in the days following the count using a questionnaire designed to determine whether homeless respondents were included in the count.

Use information from the demographic survey to improve homeless outcomes

8. Encourage independent research using information from the demographic survey that is operationally important for combating homelessness, for example, barriers to employment, health conditions, justice system involvement, and needed services.

Photo credit:
Kern County, California,
Dorthea Lange, 1937,
J. Paul Getty Museum

2. Unemployment and the Risk of Homelessness

Destitution is the Seedbed of Homelessness

The tools used to protect against the collective national trauma of the Covid pandemic can be used again in the increasingly likely event of a 2023 recession.

We are equipped with the tools we need to protect workers from the sharper edges of joblessness and to combat homelessness. The tools used to protect against the collective national trauma of the Covid pandemic can be used again in the increasingly likely event of a 2023 recession.

This report maps the homeless landscape during and following the 2020 Covid recession and then estimates the impact of government interventions in reducing the growth of homelessness.

The line between low-earnings employment and homelessness is fragile and permeable. Moreover, the risks that lead from unemployment to homelessness are not stand-alone threats. They include all of the social and economic challenges of a low wage worker's life.

Poverty employment, unemployment, African American or Latino ethnicity, social isolation, personal crises, destitution, and homelessness mutually reinforce each other. Homelessness occurs, not just from lack of housing, but when poorly paid workers become jobless, then destitute, and then unable to pay rent.

The architecture of economic injustice is also the architecture of homelessness.

Based on the link between unemployment and homelessness in the 2008 recession, we estimated in an earlier report, *Locked Out*, that 10.3 percent of recession-caused unemployment in Los Angeles was linked to subsequent homelessness among working-age adults. This definition of homelessness encompasses everyone who does not have a place of their own to sleep, including people who are couch surfing.

There is a direct, but lagged, connection between loss of employment income and loss of shelter. People are likely to fend off homelessness as long as possible by foregoing other expenses, relinquishing assets and going into debt in order to remain housed.

In the 2008 recession, six percent of homelessness caused by unemployment is estimated to have occurred in 2008, 19 percent in 2009, 35 percent in 2010, and 41 percent in 2011.

Overall, the propensity toward both unemployment and homelessness varies by geography. The overall propensity in California is lower than in Los Angeles County, and in the United States it is lower than in California.

Our earlier report projected that the Covid recession would cause the 2022 homeless count to exceed the 2020 count by 23 percent in Los Angeles County, 17 percent in California, and 14 percent in the United States.[1]

The estimate from the 2022 homeless count released by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) showed a 0.5 percent decline in unsheltered homelessness from 2020 to 2022, rather than growth.[2]

To understand what accounted for the discrepancy in estimated vs. actual homeless numbers, this report analyzed apparent data collection and analysis flaws in the 2022 homeless count for the Los Angeles Continuum of Care along with likely impacts of government interventions. We provide a more accurate adjusted 2022 homeless count to support a more realistic estimate of the growth in homelessness since 2020.

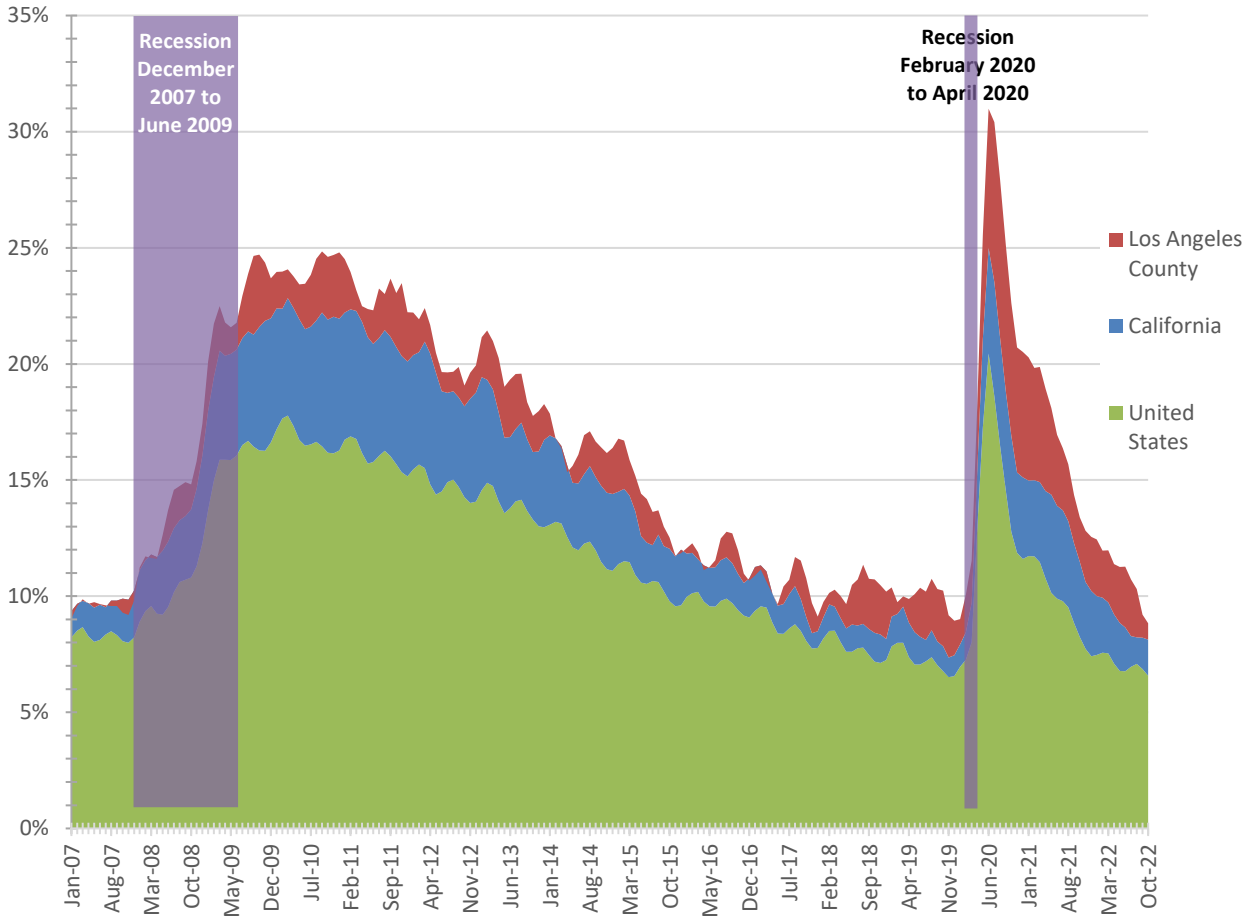
The corrected though still moderate growth in homelessness highlights the benefits of government interventions to buffer impacts from unemployment. The good news is that actual homelessness appears to have grown only about half as much as we projected due to interventions that protected incomes and housing.

Homelessness grew only half as much as we projected due to interventions that protected incomes and housing.

The Los Angeles Homeless Count versus What Our Eyes See

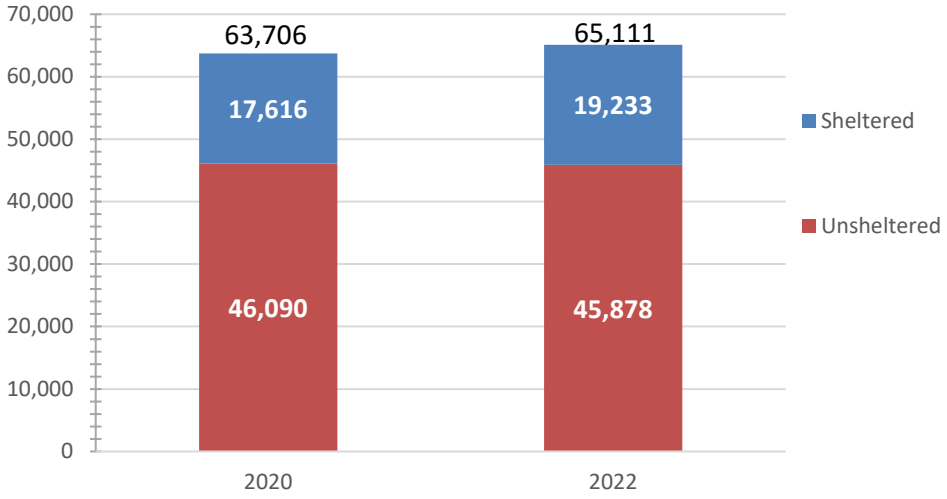
The Covid pandemic and ensuing severe but brief recession tripled the rate of under-employed workers – made up largely of workers who are unemployed and looking for a job and workers who are involuntarily

Figure 1: Monthly Under-Employment Rate in Los Angeles County, California and the United States 2007-2022
The under-employment rate is a three-month moving average of workers who are unemployed and looking for work, involuntarily limited to part-time work, prevented from working by a barrier such as lack of childcare, and discouraged workers who have given up on finding a job.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Basic Monthly Records.

Figure 2: Homeless Population Estimated by LAHSA



Source: Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority.

limited to part-time work (*Figure 1).*[3] Emergency stimulus checks and rental assistance offset some of workers' lost earnings, and federal, state and local eviction moratoriums delayed many evictions for unpaid rent.

Two-thirds of Los Angeles residents reported that the presence of homeless people had increased in over the past 12 months.

For Los Angeles residents, however, the apparent impacts of the pandemic recession included more visible encampments of unsheltered homeless individuals. Two-thirds (65 percent) of Los Angeles residents reported that the presence of homeless people had increased over the past 12 months, in a survey conducted by the Public Policy Institute of California in September 2022.[4]

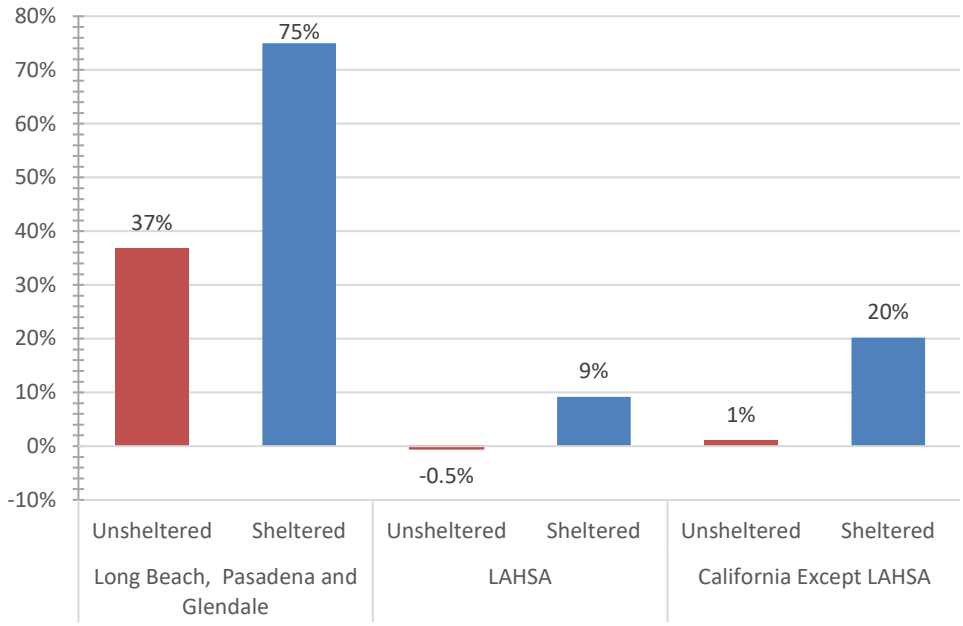
However, the 2022 homeless count released by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) reported that unsheltered homelessness had *declined 0.5 percent* from 2020 to 2022. LAHSA said that the number of unsheltered homeless individuals fell from 46,090 in 2020 to 45,878 in 2022, as shown in *Figure 2*.[5]

Growth, rather than decline, in unsheltered homelessness is reported by the other three homeless administrative jurisdictions in Los Angeles County, and the balance of California, as shown in *Figure 3*. The cities of Long Beach, Glendale and Pasadena make up the other three jurisdictions.[6]

Long Beach is the second largest city in the county and accounted for 82 percent of the 4,033 homeless individuals found in these three cities in 2022. Pasadena accounted for 13 percent and Glendale 6 percent.

The number of unsheltered homeless individuals living on the streets in these three cities increased 37 percent from 2020 to 2022, in contrast to the 0.5 percent decline reported by LAHSA. The growth in unsheltered homelessness reported by the other three jurisdictions occurred despite their expanded number of shelter beds (up 75 percent) to keep people off the streets.

Figure 3: Change in the Reported Homeless Population from 2020 to 2022



Source: Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, Long Beach, Glendale, Pasadena, and Joe Colletti, Policy Insights

The homeless counts for all of the metropolitan regions in the state, except for LAHSA, and the total count for California show that homelessness grew from 2020 to 2022. LAHSA's population estimate was an outlier, different from its neighbors and the rest of California. This is the basis for the review and recomputation of the 2022 homeless count that follows.

The State of California and all of the metropolitan regions in the state, except for LAHSA, had counts showing that homelessness grew.

Shortcomings in LAHSA's 2022 Homeless Population Estimate

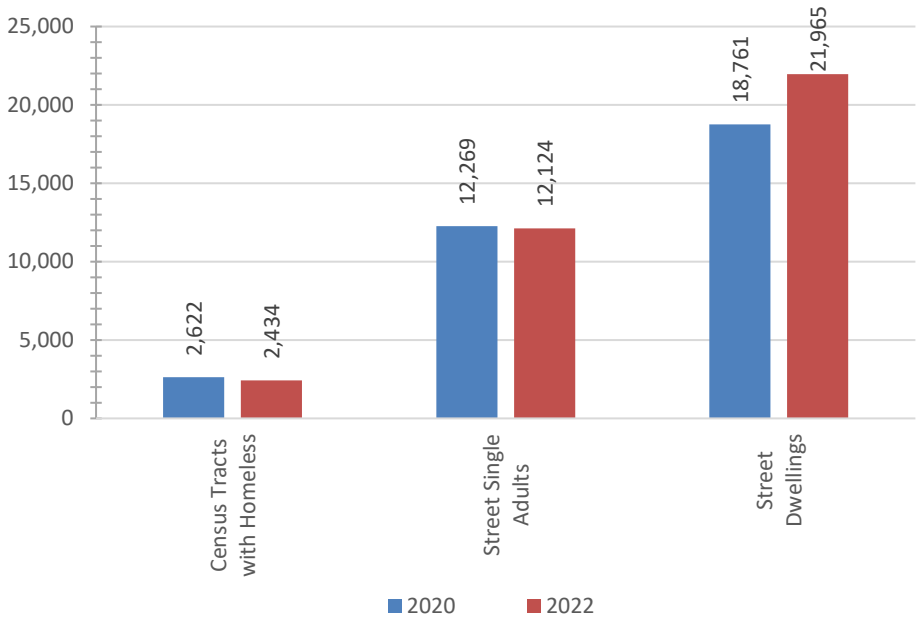
Two problems led to the apparent 2022 undercount. The first was a buggy cell phone app for transmitting street count information. The second was that fewer volunteers carried out the count. Less than two weeks before the count was scheduled to be conducted in January, LAHSA informed volunteers that the count was being postponed for a month because of rising Covid cases.[7] This caused a 40 percent drop in the number of volunteers who signed up for the rescheduled count in February.

As a result, the "conversion factors" used to estimate the number of people sleeping in each tent, encampment or vehicle were based on very sparse data.

Undercount

A specific example illustrates how the underperforming software (the 2022 Aikido cell phone app used by street count volunteers) could cause under-reporting. A homeless count volunteer named Chris LeGras and his team documented the failure of the app to transmit any of their reported

Figure 4: Unsheltered Homelessness Recorded in the 2020 and 2022 Street Counts



Source: Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority.

sightings of homeless individuals and dwellings that his team saw on the Venice Boardwalk. Subsequently, LAHSA staff failed to manually enter this data after they transmitted the screenshots. As a result, LAHSA shows no unsheltered homeless individuals on the Venice Boardwalk in 2022, compared to 509 in the 2020 count.[8]

The street count found more evidence of homelessness in 2022 than in 2020.

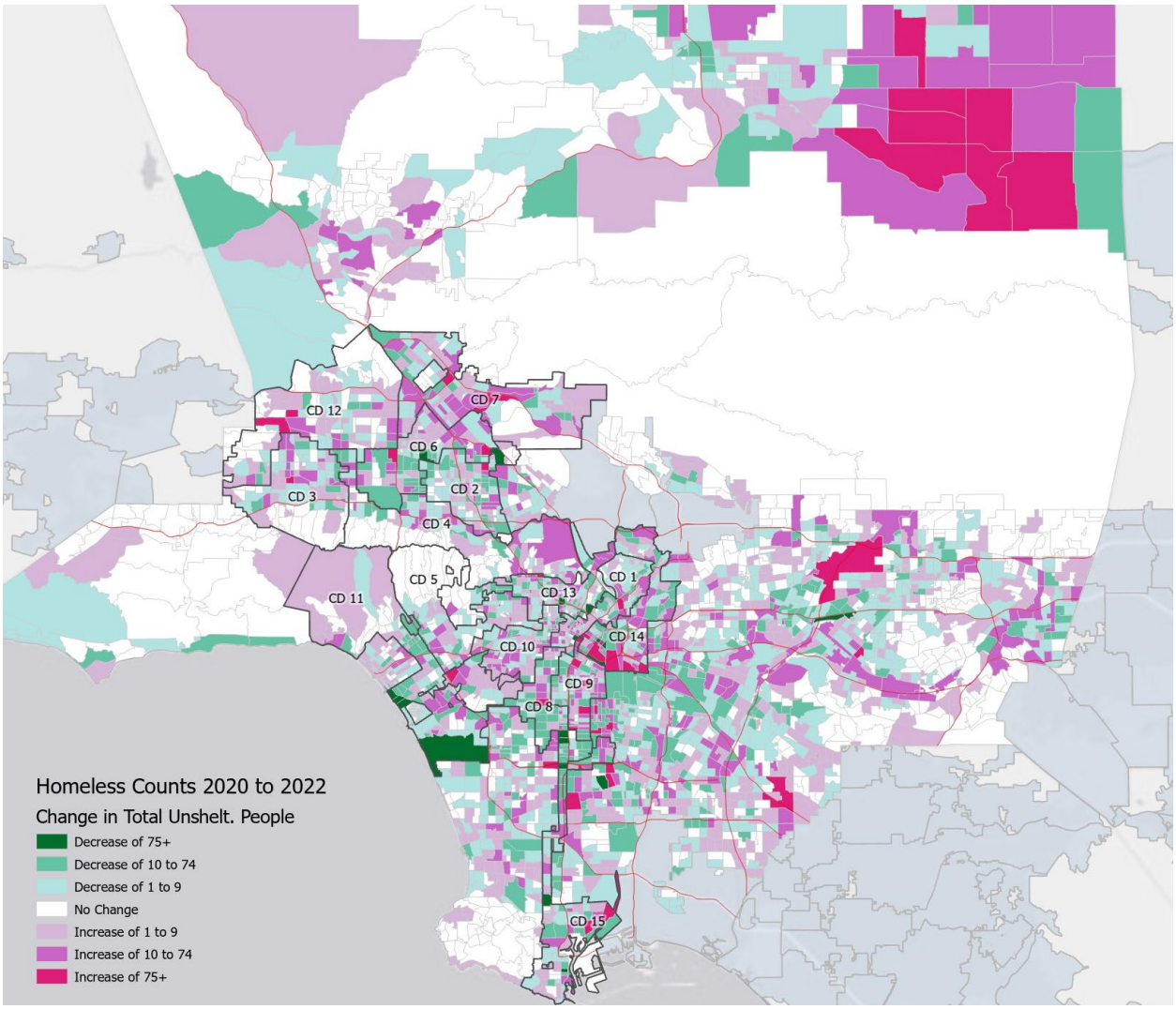
A closer look at the census tracts results illustrates the likely magnitude of the undercount. The street count found more evidence of homelessness in 2022 than in 2020, but in fewer census tracts, as shown in *Figure 4*. Specifically, in 2022, there were 34,089 homeless sightings – people on the street or tents, cars, vans, campers, makeshift shelters, or safe parking sites – compared to 31,030 sightings in 2020.[9]

Increased evidence of homelessness was found in fewer census tracts in 2022 than in 2020 – 2,434 tracts with sightings in 2022 vs 2,622 tracts in 2020. This suggests that if the 2022 count was conducted with the same level of completeness as in 2020, there would have been more homeless sightings and more evidence of homelessness would have been reported.

Altogether, 335 of the census tracts in the 2022 count had a 100 percent decline in homelessness compared to the 2020 count. That is, homeless individuals were reported in 2020 but none were reported in 2022. This may be attributable to the inability of some volunteers to transmit data about their homeless sightings.

A map showing the decrease or increase from 2020 to 2022 in the number of unsheltered individuals in each census tract within LAHSA's continuum of care is provided in *Figure 5*.

Figure 5: Change in the Number of Unsheltered Homeless by Census Tract in from 2020 to 2022



Source: Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority.

Based on LAHSA's population estimates, the number of unsheltered homeless individuals increased in 1,406 census tracts, remained unchanged in 728 tracts, and decreased in 1,603 tracts.

Evidence of increased homelessness is more reliable than evidence of decreased homelessness, because of the apparent under-reporting problems in the street count. The greatest *increase* unsheltered homelessness is shown in:

- Antelope Valley
- Downtown Los Angeles and Skid Row
- Northern and Western San Fernando Valley
- Boyle Heights
- South Los Angeles

The greatest *decrease* in unsheltered homelessness is shown in:

- Venice (where there were problems with the street count app)
- Lancaster
- Westlake
- Pico Union
- Baldwin Park

Estimated Number of People in Street Dwellings

Homeless dwellings are sighted nearly twice as often as individuals on the street in the street count. Consequently, the "conversion factors" used to estimate how many people are in each dwelling have a large impact on the homeless count.

The conversion factors include, *first*, the share of dwellings occupied by *adult* households vs. the share occupied by families and, *second*, the average size of each type of household in each type of dwelling. Family households are estimated to be more than twice as large as adult households.

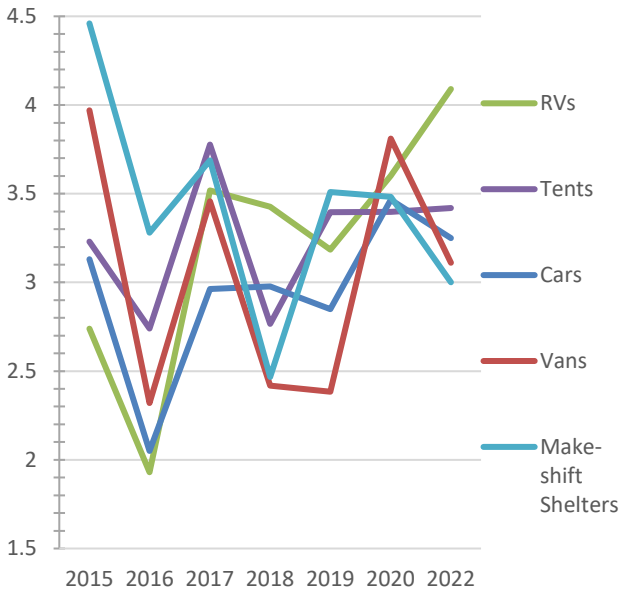
It is not credible that the number of people in street dwellings changes radically from one year to the next.

The conversion factors have fluctuated widely from one year to the next, as shown in *Figures 6* and 7, which show each year's conversion factors for dwellings occupied by families and by adults.

It is not credible that the number of people in street dwellings changes as radically from one year to the next as LAHSA's conversion factors show.

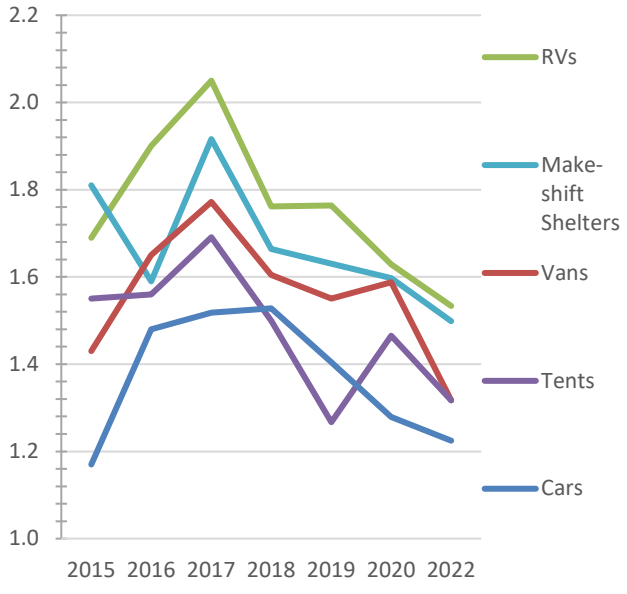
The forces that shape unsheltered homeless households do not fluctuate that dramatically. Many of the same households remain living in the same

Figure 6: Number of Family Members in Dwellings



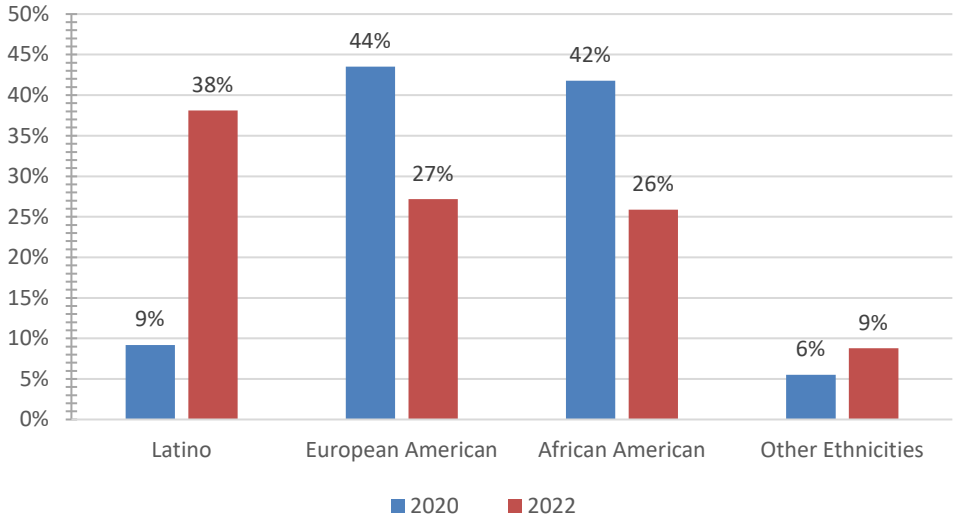
Source: Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority.

Figure 7: Number of Occupants in Adult-Only Dwellings



Source: Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority.

Figure 8: Weighted Ethnic Distribution of Demographic Survey Respondents in 2020 and 2022



Source: LAHSA 2020 and 2022 demographic surveys with sample weights.

locale, struggling with the same poverty challenges, and burdened by the same failures of families, community organizations and public institutions.

Our analysis identified two specific reasons for the discontinuity in LAHSA's conversion factors. Occupancy factors come from an annual demographic survey of roughly one-tenth of the unsheltered population that asks what types of dwellings they have slept in over the past six months and how many people were in each type of dwelling.

The *first* reason why the conversion factors swing widely from one year to the next is that the demographic surveys do not appear to reach a random sample of unsheltered homeless individuals.

For example, there is wide fluctuation from one year to the next in LAHSA's estimate of the ethnic composition of unsheltered homeless individuals, as shown in *Figure 8*. It is not plausible that the ethnic composition of the homeless population was transformed this radically from 2020 to 2022, for example, with the share of Latinos quadrupling.

The *second* reason for the fluctuation is that only a very small number of families were interviewed through the surveys. In 2022, the demographic survey interviewed only 125 families, with only 118 of them reporting the number of occupants in dwellings they slept in.

The sample of families was unusually small because many family agencies were only providing remote services and were unable to arrange survey interviews in 2022. Even though some families slept in more than one type of dwelling, the number of families reporting how many people were in each type of dwelling is shown in *Table 1*.

The demographic surveys do not appear to reach a random sample of unsheltered homeless individuals.

Table 1: Sample Size in 2022 for Estimating the Number of Family Members Occupying Unsheltered Dwellings

Type of Dwelling	*Number of Families*
Makeshift Shelter	4
Van	10
Tent	22
RV/Camper	25
Car	87

Even if this was a random sample of families, these samples are too small to produce reliable information, with the possible exception of families sleeping in cars.

Many statisticians say that the minimum sample size for obtaining meaningful result is 100.[10] When data is scarce, analysts sometimes argue that a sample of 30 is adequate, but this is a tenuous argument.[11]

Results from LAHSA's small sample of families are speculative and fundamentally unreliable.

LAHSA limits itself to information from the current homeless count for producing these estimates, but results from samples of 4 to 25 families are speculative and fundamentally unreliable.

Another consequence of the small sample of families is that families were estimated to occupy only 1.7 percent of street dwellings than in 2022, down from 3.5 percent in 2020. This reduced the overall occupancy factors for unsheltered dwellings.

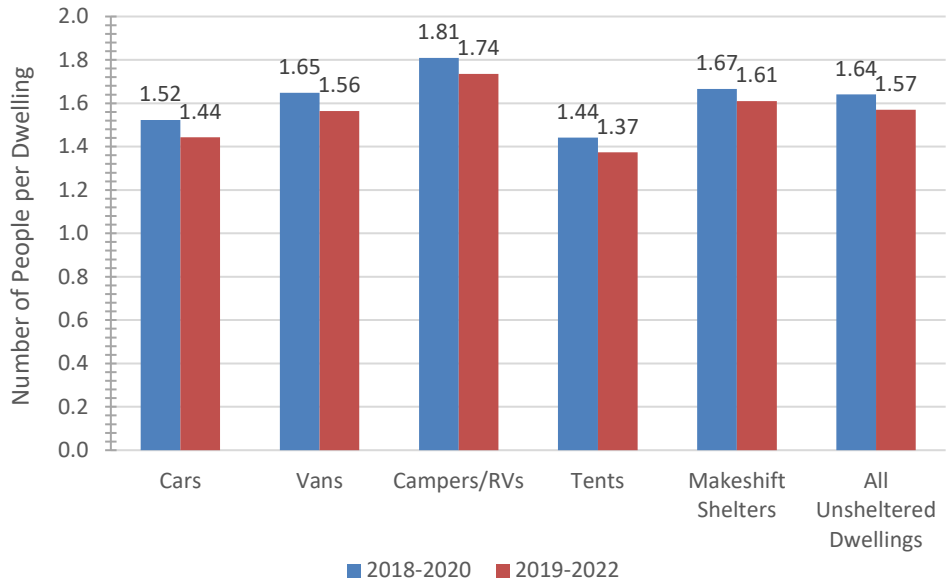
The overall average number of people estimated to be in each unsheltered dwelling fell from 1.65 in 2020 to 1.47 in 2022. This 11 percent reduction in occupancy is largely attributable to sampling deficiencies.

Recalculating the 2022 Homeless Count

To assess the impact of the Covid recession and increased unemployment on homelessness we needed to correct the under-count and sampling deficiencies in the 2022 count to produce population estimates that are comparable to the 2020 count. This does not mean that the counts will be completely accurate, both may well still be undercounts,[12] but they will provide more consistent benchmarks for comparing the two counts and more accurately estimating change in the size of the homeless population.

Only one of the two components to the homeless count needs correction. The sheltered population sleeping in beds provided by homeless agencies offers an accurate, complete count and does not require any corrections. The second component –the unsheltered population -- is enumerated through the street count and subsequent application of occupancy factors to street dwellings and requires corrections.

Figure 9: Three-Year-Average Conversion Factors for Unsheltered Dwellings



Source: Economic Roundtable analysis and averaging of Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority data.

Approach for Correcting the Undercount

The undercount appears to have resulted from information not being recorded in some tracts that were counted, and possibly scant or no counting in other tracts. Our method for correcting this problem is to look at the change in homelessness in the 2,018 tracts where homelessness was sighted in both 2020 and 2022.[13]

These are tracts where there is no ambiguity about whether the street count was carried and whether the results of the count were recorded. They provide consistent benchmarks for identifying the rate and direction of change in unsheltered homelessness from 2020 to 2022.

This approach is conservative because it leaves out tracts in which unsheltered homelessness was recorded in 2022 but not in 2020, possibly indicating expansion of street homelessness.

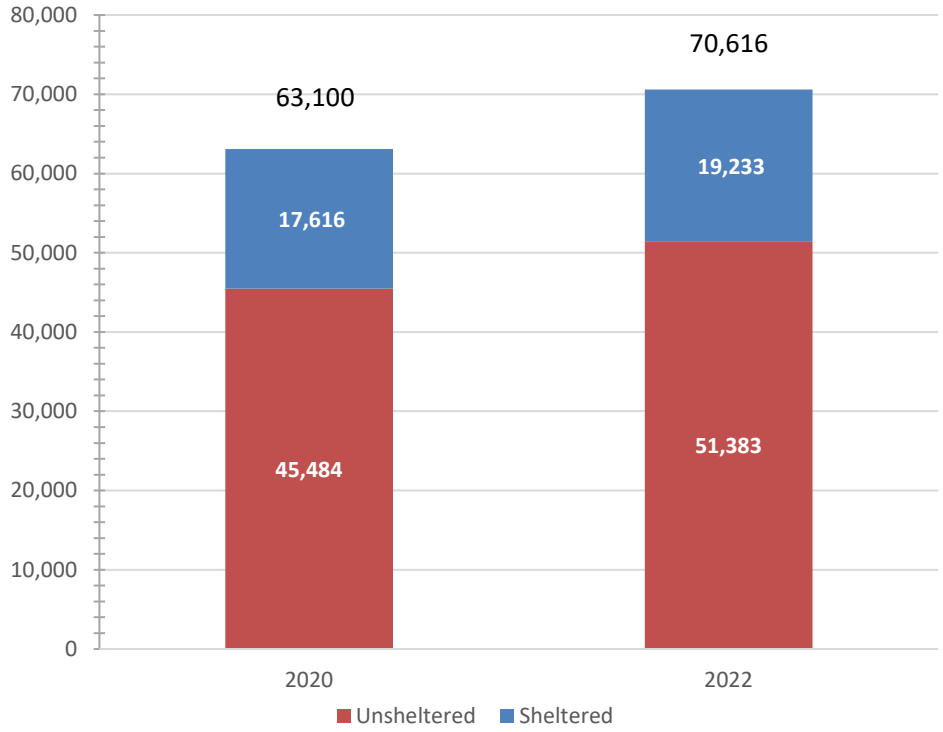
The undercount resulted from information not being recorded in some tracts that were counted, and scant or no counting in other tracts.

Correcting Sampling Fluctuation

Our method for correcting the wide fluctuation in conversion factors for estimating the number of occupants in unsheltered dwellings is to use a three-year moving average of these factors. Occupancy factors for 2022 are still smaller than for 2020, but the gap is reduced (see *Figure 9*).

Conversion factors from 2018 to 2020 were averaged and applied to the 2020 street count, and factors from 2019 to 2022 were averaged and applied to the 2022 street count.

Figure 10: Corrected Estimates of the Point-in-Time Homeless Population in LAHSA's Continuum of Care, 2020 and 2022



Source: Economic Roundtable analysis and recomputation of Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority data.

This approach increases sample size and eliminates much of the year-to-year "noise" creased by small samples and lack of randomness in the samples surveyed.

New Estimate of the Homeless Population

The two steps used here to correct the unsheltered homeless count reduce LAHSA's estimate of unsheltered homelessness for 2020 by 1.3 percent, and produce a corrected unsheltered estimate for 2022 that is 13 percent larger than in 2020. The results are shown in *Figure 10*.

When the unsheltered population is combined with the sheltered population, which did not change, the new estimate of homeless individuals in LAHSA's continuum of care in 2022 is 70,616.

The new corrected estimate of 63,100 homeless individuals in 2020 is 0.95 percent smaller than LAHSA's published estimate of 63,706.

Based on these new estimates, the total number of sheltered and unsheltered homeless residents in LAHSA's continuum of care increased by 11.9 percent from 2020 to 2022.

Impact of Government Interventions

The impact of government income and housing interventions during the Covid pandemic on reducing the growth of homelessness can be estimated by comparing projected versus actual growth in homelessness in Los Angeles County from 2020 to 2022. We do this by looking at data for all four continuums of care in Los Angeles County (LAHSA plus the cities of Glendale, Long Beach and Pasadena) and the State of California.

Our homeless projections for 2020 were focused on working age adults, 18 to 64 years of age, because this is the population that experiences unemployment. Those estimates are shown in *Table 2*.

The homeless count data for 2022 is too recent to have breakouts by age for all four continuums of care in Los Angeles County and California, so we are limited to comparing growth in the total homeless population, which is also shown in *Table 2*. Data for California that is shown in the table was compiled by CalMatters.[14]

We projected that homelessness would increase by 23 percent in Los Angeles County and 17 percent in California. Using our corrected homeless count data for LAHSA, we estimate that homelessness actually grew 13 percent in Los Angeles County and 11 percent in California from 2020 to 2022.

Thus, government economic interventions had a significant beneficial impact. We estimate that *government interventions reduced the growth of homelessness by 43 percent in Los Angeles County and 41 percent in California.*

Government interventions reduced the growth of homelessness by 43 percent in Los Angeles County and 41 percent in California.

Table 2: Projected and Actual Change in the Homeless Counts for Los Angeles County (including all four continuums of care) and California

Geographic Area and Homeless Population	*2020*	*2022*	*% Change*
*Projected Count Results for **adults 18-64 years***			
Los Angeles County Total	56,410	69,564	23%
California Total	142,161	166,942	17%
*Actual Count Results for **all homeless persons***			
Los Angeles County Total	65,830[15]	74,653[16]	13%
California Total	160,942[17]	179,311[18]	11%

We estimated that the same benefits were achieved across the United States. In the *Locked Out* report, we projected that homelessness would increase 14 percent in the United States from 2020 to 2022 because of the Covid recession. Homeless count data for the United States in 2022 is not yet available, but we estimate that the 41 percent reduction in the growth of recession-caused homeless found in California also applies to the United States.

Projections and Recommendations for the Looming 2023 Recession

In the chapters that follow, we describe the workers who were most vulnerable, the scope, timing and impact of government interventions during the Covid pandemic, and the experiences of people living in homelessness based on employment, health, and justice system data. This is followed by projections and recommendations for the possible 2023 recession.

Photo credit:
Cantaloupe Pickers,
Dorthea Lange, 1935,
J. Paul Getty Museum

3. Under-Employment and Housing Desperation

Plummeting Employment

To solve the employment upheavals that cause homelessness we have to resist the lure of the simple thing, looking just at people who are homeless now, and pay attention to the problem coming down the tracks – precariously housed workers losing jobs and falling into destitution.

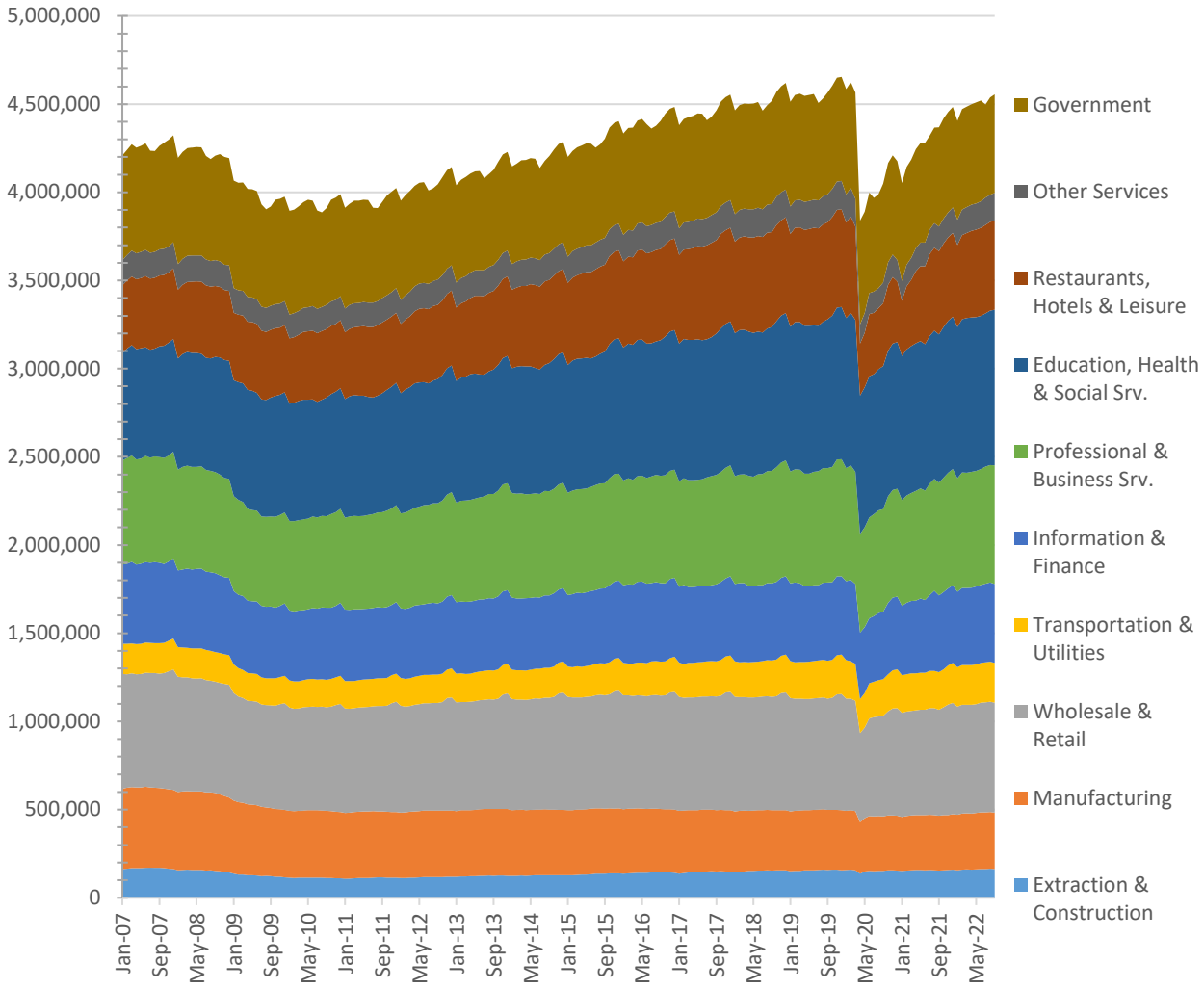
Los Angeles lost 17% of jobs in just two months.

Precariously housed workers are either everyone's responsibility now or everyone's problem later. We need to understand the magnitude of unemployment, the attributes of jobless workers, and who among them is most precariously housed.

The true answer to homelessness is that we must do a better job correcting our nation's structural social and economic inequities.

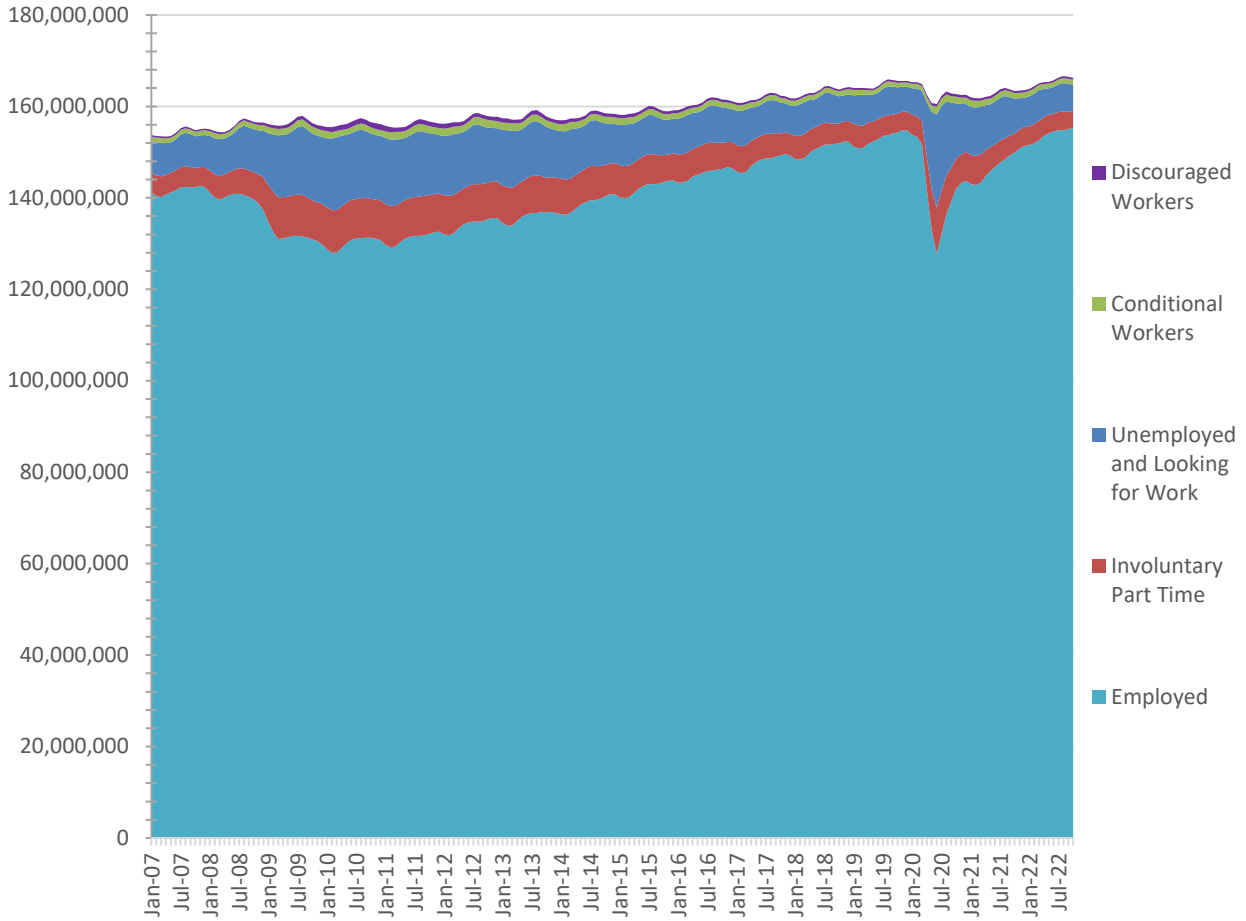
In the first two months of the pandemic, Los Angeles County lost 17 percent of jobs, California lost 15 percent and the U.S. lost 13 percent.

Figure 11: Industry Employment in Los Angeles County, January 2007 to September 2022



Source: California Employment Development Department, Labor Market Information Division. Only wage and salary workers are shown. Self-employed workers and independent contractors are not shown.

Figure 12: Monthly Employment Status of United States Labor Force, 3-month moving average, 2007 to 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Basic Monthly Records. All workers are shown, January 2007 through October 2022.

Job change in Los Angeles County from before the 2008 recession through September 2022 is shown in *Figure 11*. (Corresponding Covid-driven job change in California and the United States is shown in *Endnote 19*.)

This abrupt decimation of jobs was unlike any other recession. In the Great Recession of 2008, it took Los Angeles 21 months to lose 10 percent of its jobs – a smaller loss in a time window that was five times longer than the 2020 Covid recession.

Restaurants, hotels and leisure venues such as sporting events and museums laid off almost half of their workers (47 percent) across the United States.

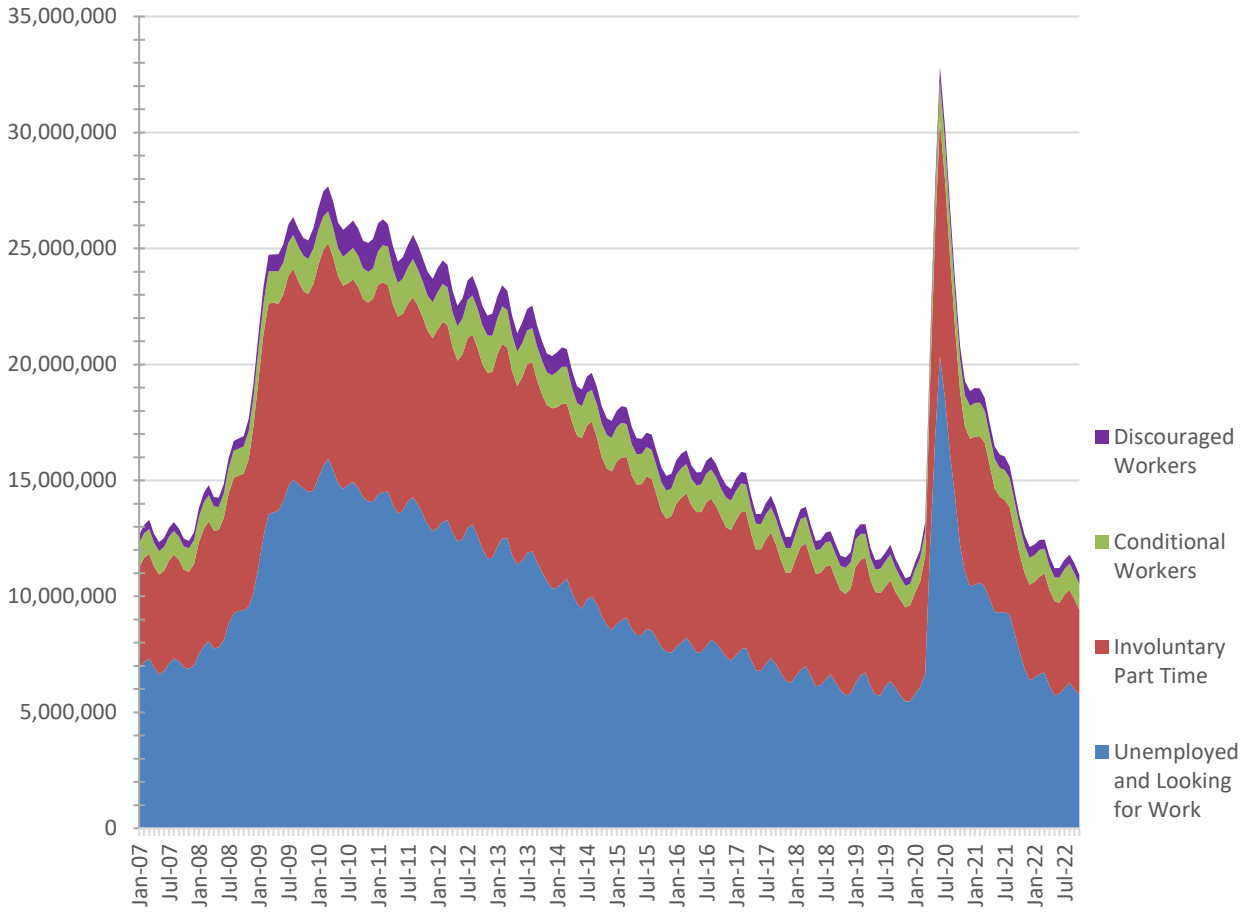
One-third of workers in the sector called Other Services (beauty salons, gyms and churches) were laid off in Los Angeles and California, and 23 percent across the United States.

Wholesale and retail establishments laid off 20 percent of workers in Los Angeles, 17 percent in California and 12 percent across the United States.

The Covid recession and the 2008 Great Recession, arguably, caused comparable harm to workers. More workers lost their jobs in the Covid

The Covid recession is unique because of its extreme severity and short duration.

Figure 13: Monthly Under-Employment in the United States Labor Force, 3-month moving average, 2007 to 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Basic Monthly Records. All workers are shown, January 2007 through October 2022.

recession than in the 2008, but high unemployment did not last as long. However, the official unemployment rate only measures unemployed workers who are actively looking for a job.

The Covid recession caused the U.S. labor force to shrink two percent whereas the labor force continued to grow throughout the 2008 recession.

Under-employed workers have diminished earnings and precarious claims on housing.

The Covid recession differs from past recessions because of its extreme severity but comparatively short duration. Following the 2008 recession, it took 74 months after the trough for Los Angeles to recover the jobs it lost.

It took only 29 months after the trough of this recession for Los Angeles to regain 98 percent of the jobs it lost. Moreover, California and the United States have one percent more jobs than they did in February 2020.

Even though 29 months is a comparatively short recovery period, it is a long time for low-wage workers to be without earnings to pay for rent. The following sections describe the attributes that identified vulnerable unemployed workers who have the greatest risk of losing their housing.

Under-Employed Workers

The status of the United States labor force in both the 2008 and 2020 Covid recessions is shown in *Figure 12*. Los Angeles and California have the same profile, but with proportionally greater under-employment.

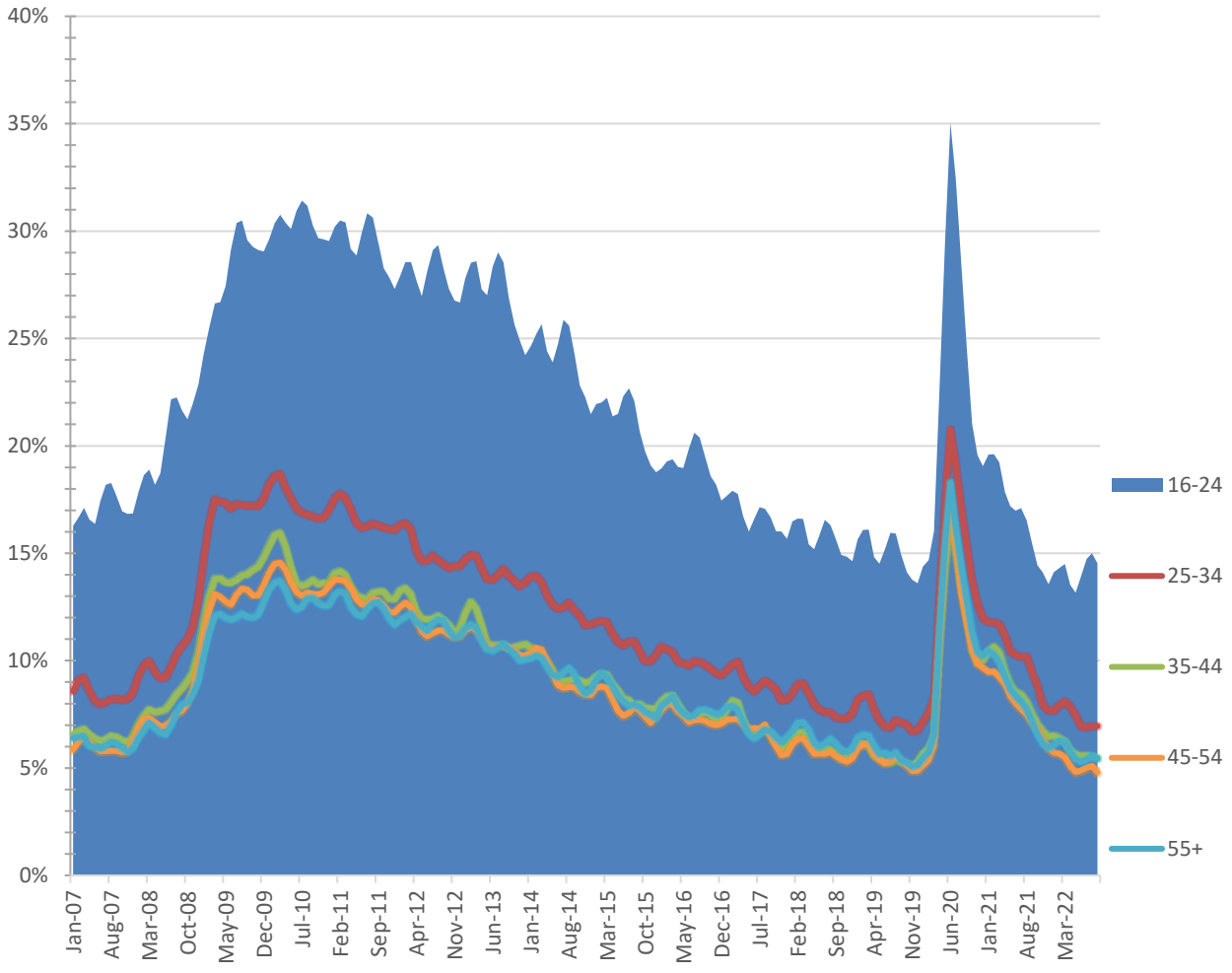
Even in a recession, most workers are employed. However, there are four groups of *under-employed workers* with diminished earnings and precarious claims on housing. These groups are shown in *Figure 13*.

From January 2007 through October 2022, the average under-employment rate in the United States has been 11.4 percent, in California it has been 14.4 percent, and in Los Angeles County, it has been 16.0 percent.

Unemployed workers looking for a job make up roughly half of under-employed workers.

Next are *involuntarily part-time workers* who want a full-time job. They make up roughly one-third of under-employed workers.

Figure 14: United States Monthly Under-Employment Rate by Age, 3-month moving average, 2007-2022



Source: Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Basic Monthly Records. All workers are shown, January 2007 through October 2022.

The most defining characteristics of under-employed workers are that they are young and less educated.

Next are *conditional workers* who have a barrier such as lack of childcare or transportation that prevents them from working. They make up roughly one-tenth of under-employed workers.

The smallest group is *discouraged workers* who have given up on looking for a job. They make up roughly one-twentieth of under-employed workers.

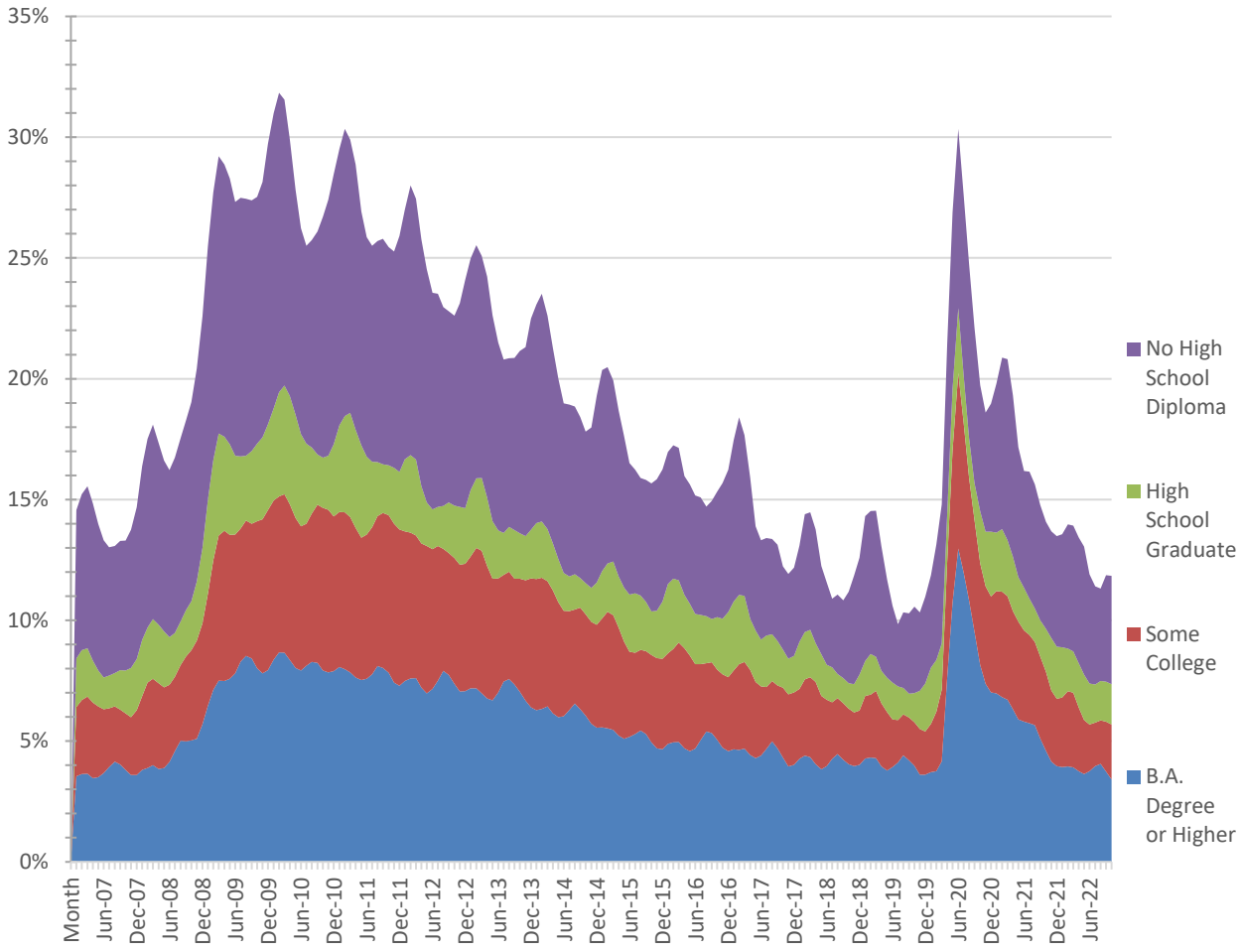
Attributes of Under-Employed Workers

Age

The most defining characteristic of under-employed workers is that they are young, as shown in *Figure 14*. Under-employment is roughly twice as prevalent among workers 16 to 24 years of age as among other age groups.

There is a slightly elevated rate of under-employment among workers 24 to 34 years of age, with almost no differentiation among the rates for workers who are 35 and older.

Figure 15: United States Monthly Under-Employment Rate by Level of Education, 2007-2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Basic Monthly Records, 3-month moving average. All workers, January 2007 through October 2022.

Providing support for young adults who are struggling to find or keep jobs is an important strategy for preventing poverty and homelessness.

Education

Under-employment rates increase as levels of education decrease, as shown in *Figure 15*. Compared to workers with B.A. degrees or higher, the under-employment rate is roughly 60 percent higher for workers with some college or an AA degree, 200 percent higher for workers with just a high school diploma, and more than 300 percent higher for workers without a high school diploma.

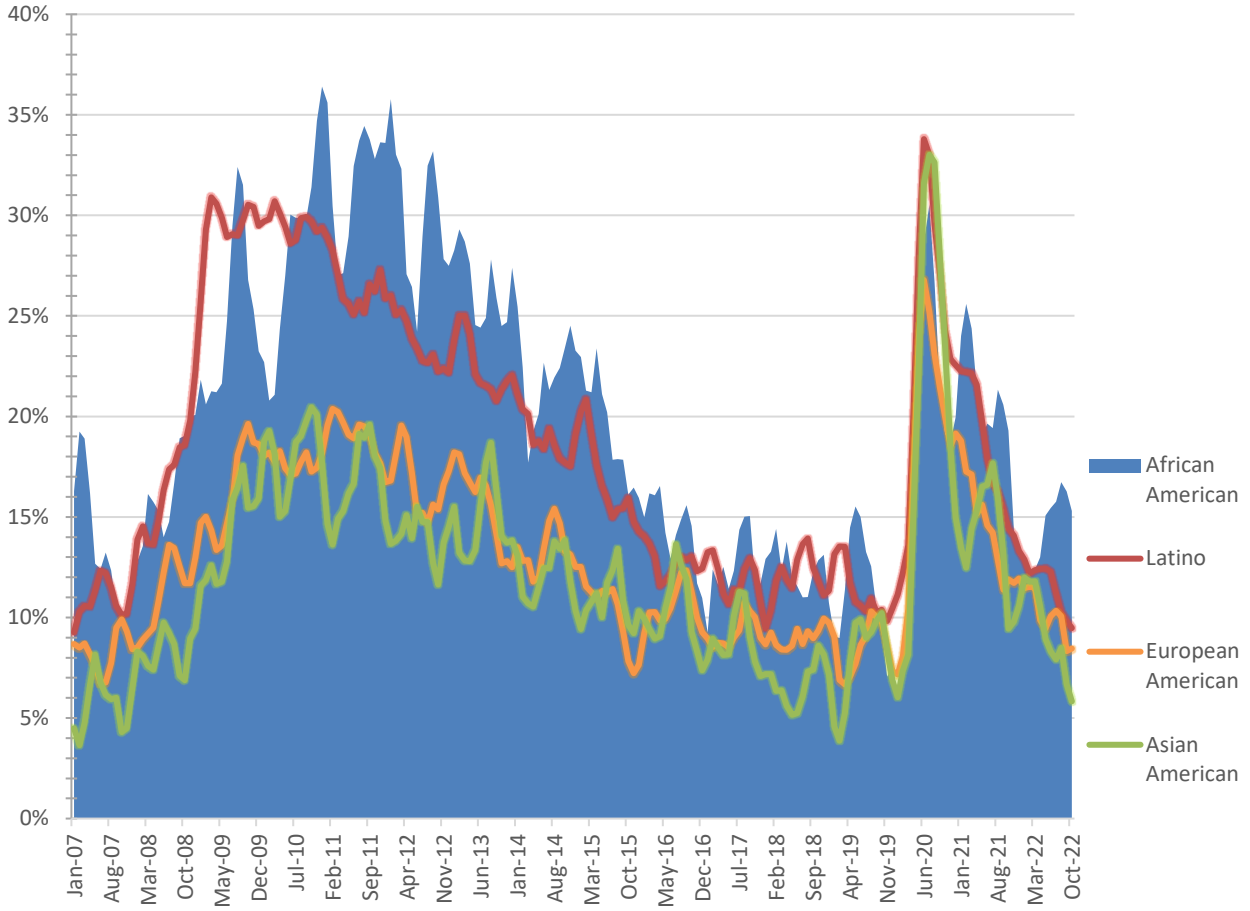
Helping workers attain higher levels of education is an important strategy for preventing poverty and homelessness.

Ethnicity

Higher under-employment rates for African Americans and Latinos appeared during the recovery.

Under-employment rates among Latinos in Los Angeles County during the Covid pandemic reached almost the same level as African Americans, with

Figure 16: Los Angeles County Monthly Under-Employment Rate by Ethnicity, 2007-2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Basic Monthly Records, 3-month moving average. All workers, January 2007-October 2022.

Figure 17: U.S. Adults with No Confidence They Can Pay Housing Costs Next Month

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey.

lower and similar rates among European and Asian Americans, as shown in *Figure 16.*

Overall, the across-the-board layoffs in the pandemic compressed under-employment rates among ethnic groups, but higher rates for African Americans and Latinos have reappeared during the recovery.

Income and Housing Insecurity

Housing insecurity increases as income decreases. United States adults who have no confidence in their ability to pay next month's rent or mortgage are broken out by household income in *Figure 17.*[20] Corresponding levels of "no confidence in California and the Los Angeles MSA are shown in *Endnote 21.*

Changes in housing insecurity are the result of changes in income.

The lowest two income brackets, below $35,000 in annual household income, are particularly vulnerable because they are near or below the poverty threshold, which in 2021 was $27,740 for a family of four.[22]

From 2020 through 2022, an average of 17 percent of U.S. and 19 percent of California and Los Angeles MSA adults in households with incomes under $35,000 have said that they had no confidence that they could pay next month's housing costs. The higher level of uncertainty in California may reflect higher housing costs and higher levels of rent burden.

Rent Debt

The spread that differentiates the rates of housing insecurity reported by different income groups has remained constant from 2020 through 2022. This indicates that changes in the rates of housing insecurity reported by different demographic groups over different time periods *are the result of changes in income*. Most often, income has increased as rates of employment have increased, and housing insecurity has decreased.

The share of United States renters who are in behind in paying their rent increases as income decreases, and accounts for over one-fifth of U.S. renters with household incomes under $35,000, as shown in *Figure 18*. Corresponding levels of renters with rent debt in California and the Los Angeles MSA are shown in *Endnote 23*.

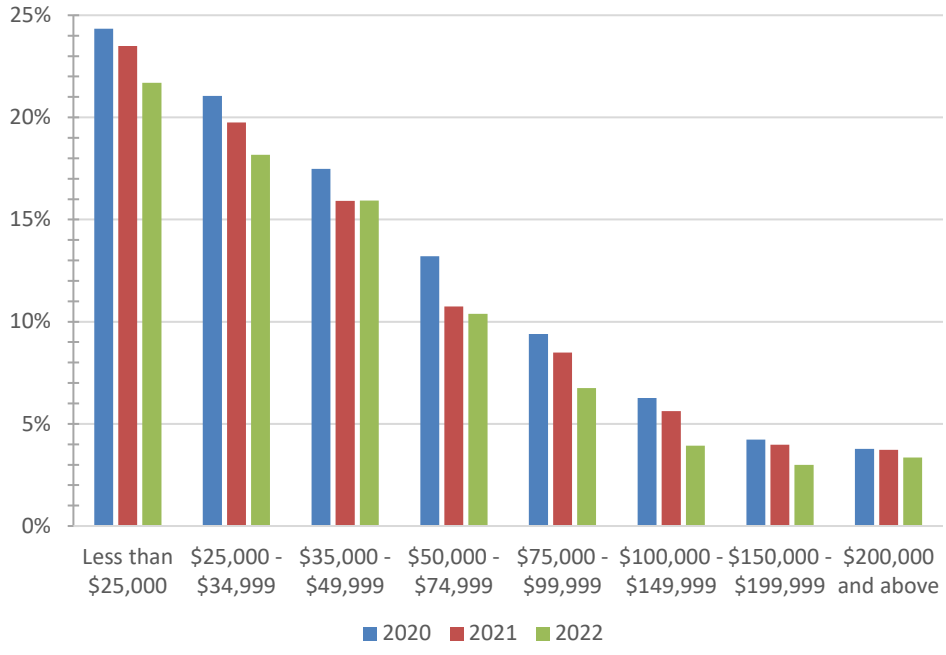
The share of low-income renters who are behind with their rent is similar in the United States and California, but roughly two percentage points higher in the Los Angeles region.

The share of renters who are in behind in paying their rent increases as income decreases.

Eviction

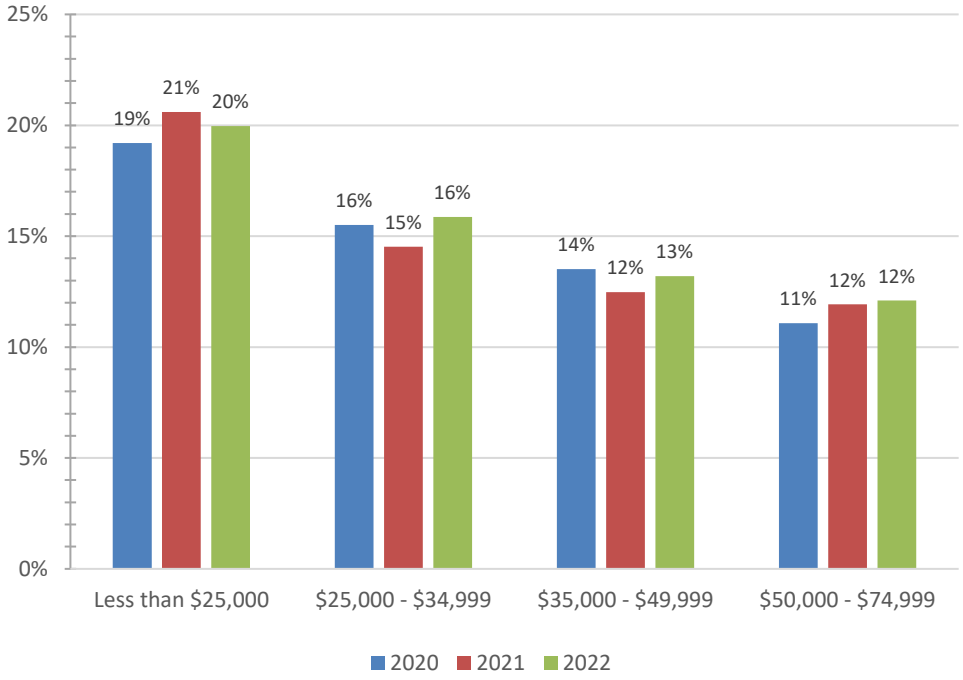
A fifth of United States renters with the lowest household incomes say that they are extremely likely to be evicted in the next two months, as shown in *Figure 19*. Even among households with $50,000 to $75,000 in annual income, 12 percent say they are extremely likely to be evicted. Corresponding shares of renters in California and the Los Angeles MSA who anticipate being evicted are shown in *Endnote 24*

Figure 18: Percent of U.S. Renters Not Caught-Up on Rent, by Household Income



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey.

Figure 19: Percent of United States Renters Who Say They Are Extremely Likely to be Evicted in the Next Two Months



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey.

More renters say they are not caught up on their rent and have no confidence that they can pay next months' rent than say they expect to be evicted. This suggests that some renters anticipate forbearance by their landlords and that *eviction moratoriums have increased housing security*.

Eviction is a threat for many households with rent debt after eviction moratoriums end.

Precariously Housed Adults in Each Demographic Group

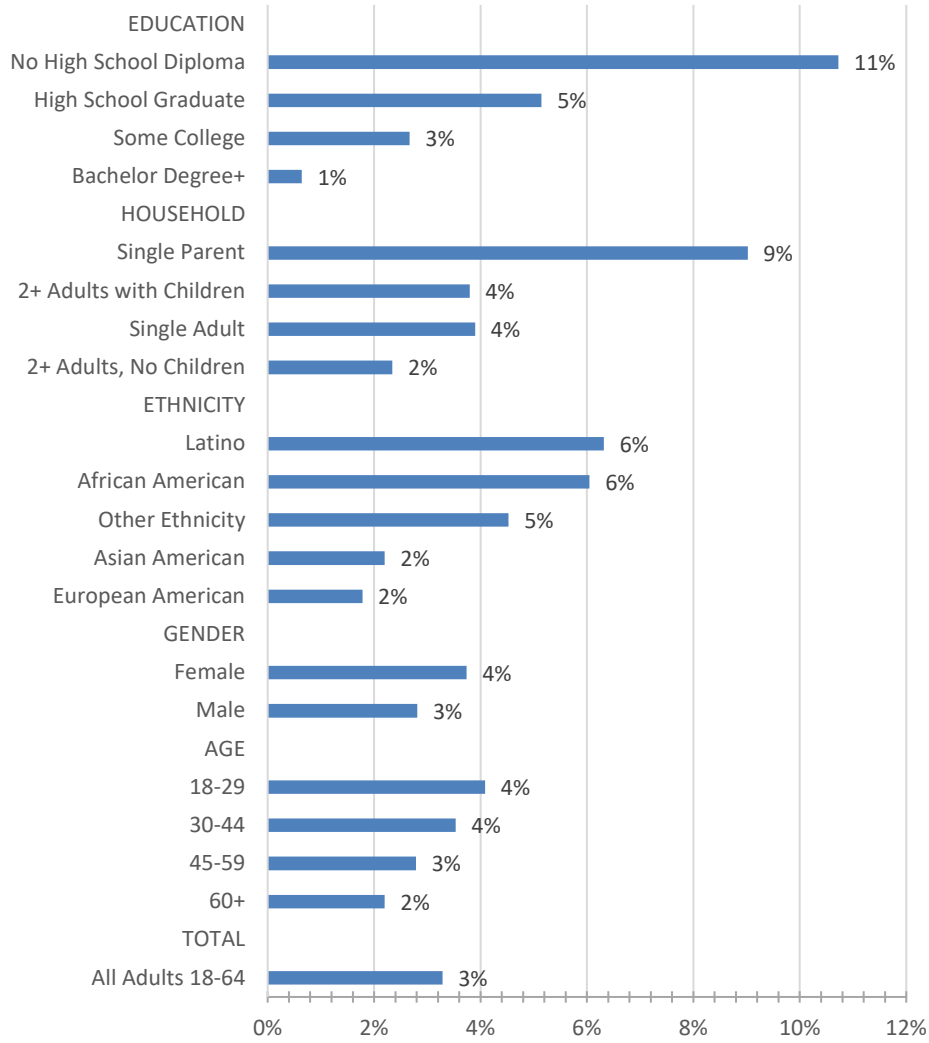
Housing insecurity mirrors disconnection from work.

Adults with low incomes who have not had any paid work in the past week are the most likely to say that they have no confidence that they will be able to pay their rent or mortgage in the coming month. *Housing insecurity mirrors disconnection from work.*

The share of each U.S. demographic group that was in the vulnerable population during the massive wave of unemployment in 2020 is shown in *Figure 20*. These are adults 18 to 64 years of age who had household incomes under $35,000, had not worked in the past seven days and had no confidence that they could pay next month's rent or mortgage. Comparable information for *groups with the highest risks* in California and the Los Angeles region is shown in *Endnote 25*.

The share of the total vulnerable population made up of people from each demographic group highlights the *largest subgroups* in the vulnerable

Figure 20: Percent of United States Adults 18-64 in Each Demographic Group in 2020 with Household Incomes <$35,000, No Work in Past 7 Days, and No Confidence that They Could Pay Next Month's Rent or Mortgage



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, weeks 1-21.

population. This demographic breakout of the entire precariously housed population in the United States, California and the Los Angeles region is shown in *Endnote 26*.

Education

Working age adults *without a high school diploma* had the highest rate of precarious housing during the spike in unemployment in 2020. Conversely, workers with a college degree had the lowest rate.

The rate of disconnection from work for adults without a high school diploma is almost twice as large as for those with a college degree. Less educated workers are facing long-term difficulty in finding jobs.

Workers who did not graduate from high school are facing long-term difficulty in finding jobs.

There are many more individuals with just a *high school diploma* than individuals without a high school diploma, so the larger size of this group combined their above-average rate of housing insecurity makes them the largest precariously housed group based on level of education.

Households with children are more than twice as most likely as those without children to be precariously housed.

Household Structure: Threats to Single Parents

Roughly one-tenth of low-income, unemployed single parents said they had no confidence that they would be able to pay next month's housing costs. Unemployed, working age *single parents* are more than four times as most likely as their counterparts in households with just two adults to report that they have a tenuous claim on shelter.

Two-parent households with children have lower risks of housing insecurity than single parents, but higher risks than households without children. They are a larger household group than single parents, so this makes them the largest precariously housed group based on household structure.

Rates of housing insecurity based on household structure are similar across all geographic areas.

Ethnicity

Among ethnic groups, *Latinos* had the highest rate of precariously housed unemployed adults, followed closely by *African Americans*. The lowest rate of housing insecurity was among Asian Americans and European Americans.

Latinos make up 17 percent of U.S. working age adults. The size of this group combined their elevated rate of housing insecurity makes them the largest precariously housed ethnic group. Latinos make up a much larger share of the population in California and the Los Angeles region, so they make up an even larger share of the precariously housed population in those areas.

Rates of housing insecurity based on ethnicity are similar across different geographic areas.

Gender

Women have had higher rates of disconnection from work than *men* since the onset of Covid.[27] Across all geographic areas, two percent of working age men and three percent of women were in the vulnerable population that was unemployed, had low incomes and had no confidence that they could pay next month's housing cost. Because women make up half of the population and have a higher rate of housing insecurity than men, they are the largest demographic group in the precariously housed population.

Age

Across the United States, *young adults 18 to 29 years of age* were the most likely to be precariously housed. However, there is a different pattern in the Los Angeles region and California, where workers 30 to 44 years of age have the highest rate of precarious housing.

In the United States, the population that is *30 to 44 years of age* is half again as large as the population that is 18 to 29, so even though their risk is lower, their greater size makes them the largest precariously housed age group in the United States.

Conclusions

Precariously housed workers are either everyone's responsibility now or everyone's problem later. Economic homelessness emerges from jobs lost at the thin edge of the labor market, where jobless workers become destitute and are unable to pay rent.

The Covid recession is different from past recessions because of its extreme severity but comparatively short duration. In the Great Recession of 2008, it took Los Angeles 21 months to lose 10 percent of its jobs. This recession eliminated 17 percent of Los Angeles' jobs in just two months. Restaurants, hotels and leisure venues such as sporting events and museums laid off almost half of their workers across the United States.

This surge of joblessness increased the likelihood that many under-employed workers with diminished incomes would lose their precarious claims on housing and become homeless.

The highest rates of precarious housing were among workers with limited education, single parents, Latinos and African Americans. This information is crucial for targeting interventions to prevent homelessness on the most vulnerable workers. Understanding how public interventions protected these groups during Covid defines the precedent for replicating those protections.

The next chapter describes homeless individuals' encounters with public systems and the following chapter looks at public interventions that cushioned many unemployed workers from the sharper edges of joblessness.

Photo credit:
Untitled, Shigemi Izu, 1925, J. Paul Getty Museum

4. Institutional Encounters

Data Mining

Even when institutions fail to help homeless individuals escape homelessness, the record of those encounters exposes the contours and trajectory of homelessness.

Records from before and during the Covid pandemic are available for hospital care for homeless patients in California and Los Angeles, and homeless deaths, arrests, encampment sweeps, and cash aid is available in Los Angeles. These records shed light on the course of homelessness during the pandemic as well as institutional practices that ameliorated, or in other cases worsened, homelessness.

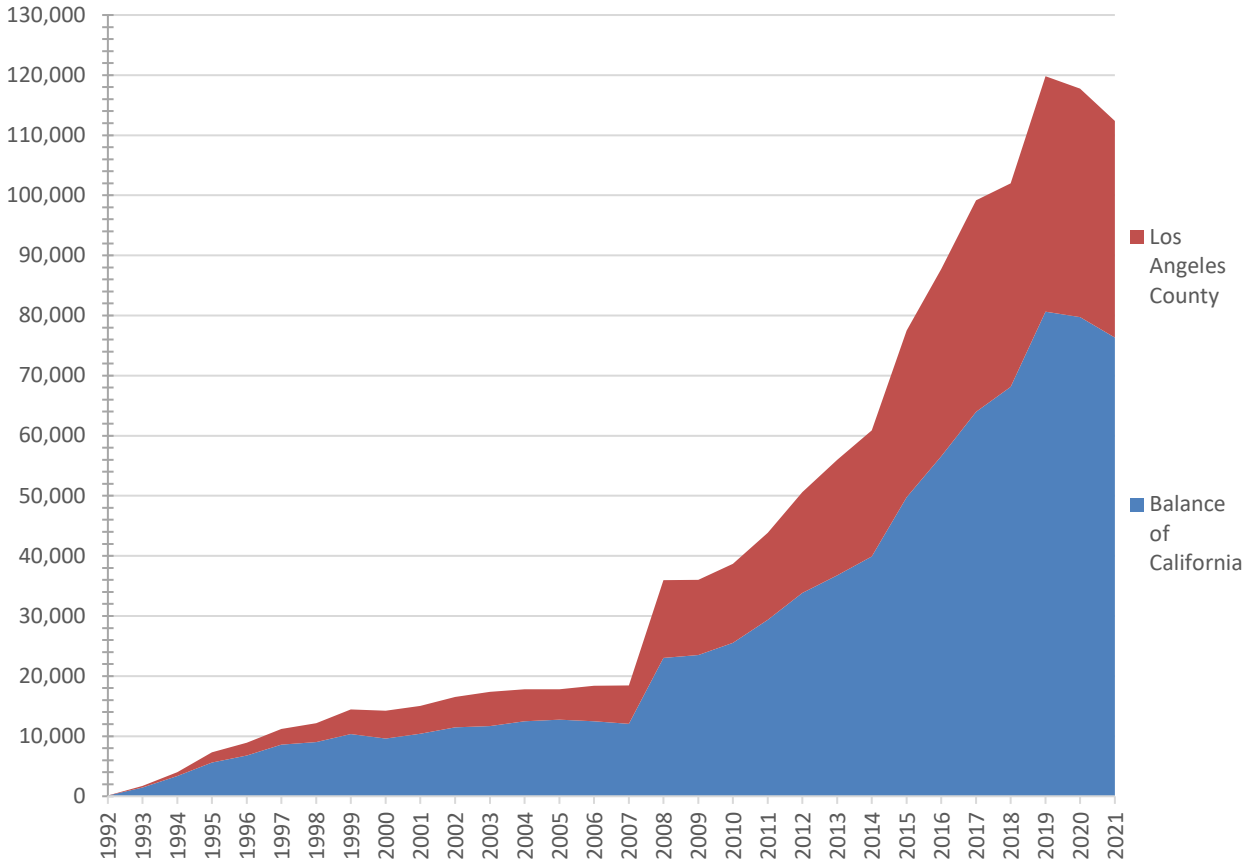
The number of homeless patients reported in California hospitals was 900 times larger in 2021 than in 1992.

Growing Homeless Caseload

The number of homeless patients reported in California hospitals was 900 times larger in 2021 than in 1992, growing from 125 to 112,392, with a third of the patients in Los Angeles County *(Figure 21)*.

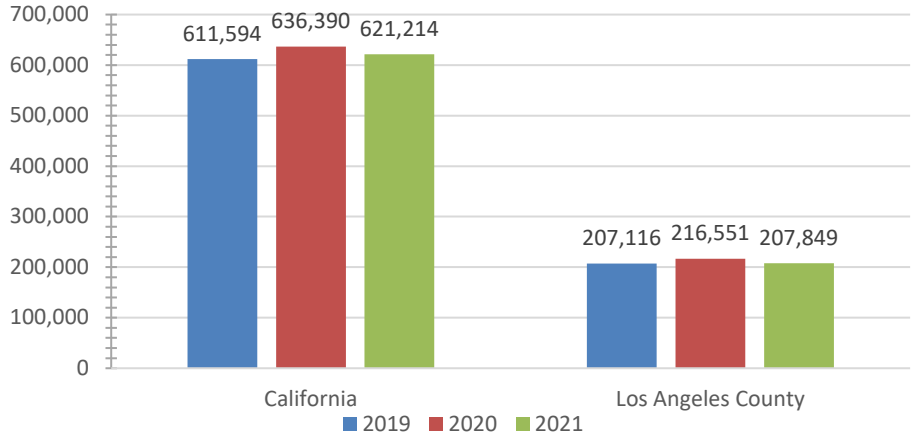
The number of homeless patients admitted to hospitals decreased in 2020 and 2021, but total days spent in the hospital remained virtually unchanged

Figure 21: Homeless Inpatients at Hospitals in Los Angeles County and the Balance of California, 1992 to 2021



Source: California Department of Health Care Access and Information, formerly OSHPD

Figure 242 Annual Inpatient Days for Homeless Hospital Patients



Source: California Department of Health Care Access and Information, formerly OSHPD

from 2019, despite triage protocols during the Covid pandemic that kept all but the sickest patients out of hospitals, as shown in *Figure 22*.[28]

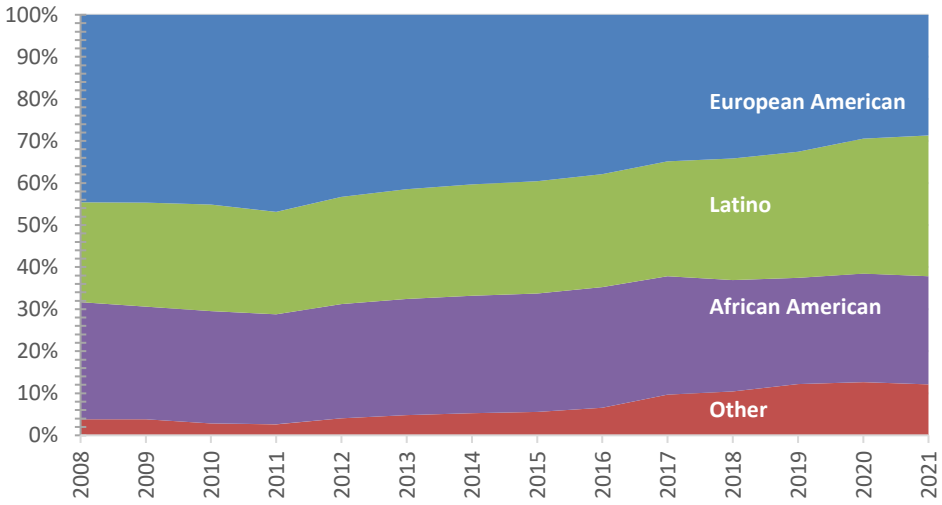
The California Department of Public Health issued guidelines for "triage teams for the allocation of critical care resources."[29] However, the share of hospital resources devoted to homeless inpatients remained undiminished because of the size of this population and their critical health needs.

The extraordinary growth in homeless hospital patients is the result of both growth in homelessness and more complete reporting by hospitals, which in earlier years often did not recognize that patients were homeless, or did not record or report this information.[30]

There has been a slow, steady shift in the ethnic composition of L.A.'s homeless hospital patients, as shown in *Figure 23*. A comparable breakout for California going back to 1998 is shown in *Endnote 31*.

The share of hospital resources devoted to homeless inpatients remained undiminished despite Covid.

Figure 23: Ethnic Distribution of Homeless Hospital Inpatients in Los Angeles County



Source: California Department of Health Care Access and Information

The share of inpatients who are Latinos has grown 0.7 percent a year, accounting for 33 percent of all homeless inpatients in 2021. The share of "Other" ethnicities has grown 0.6 percent a year, accounting for 12 percent in 2021. The share of European Americans has declined 1.3 percent a year, accounting for 29 percent in 2021. The share of African Americans has held steady, accounting for 26 percent of inpatients in 2021.

The one percent annual growth in the share of Latinos among homeless hospital inpatients is a much more moderate rate of growth than the four-fold increase from 2020 to 2022 in the share of Latinos reported by the demographic survey for the homeless count.

Half of the homeless inpatients in LA hospitals, and 40% in California, were admitted to receive care for mental health problems.

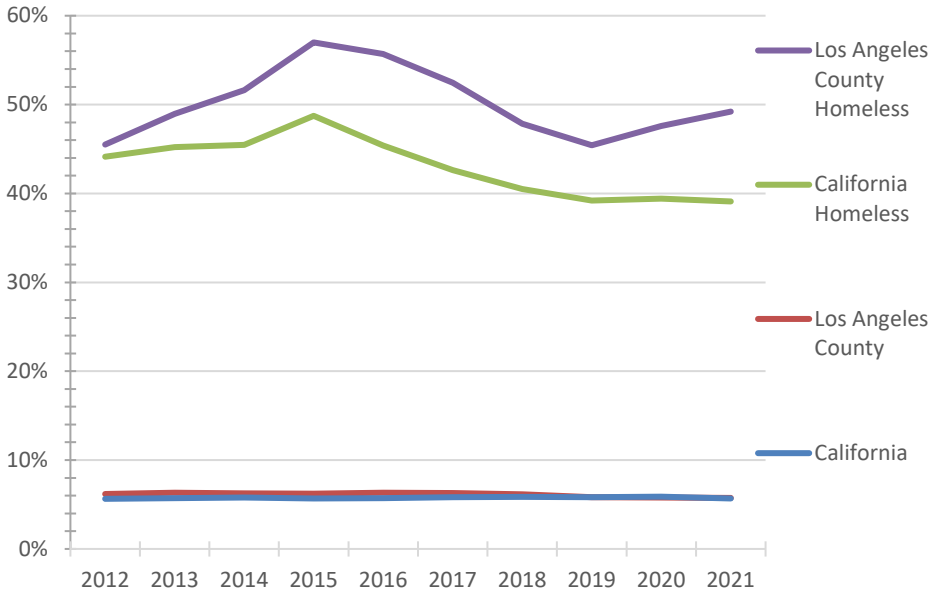
Mental Diseases and Disorders

Half of the homeless inpatients in Los Angeles County hospitals, and 40 percent in California, were admitted to receive care for mental health problems, as shown in *Figure 24*.

Mental health problems that merit a hospital bed for a homeless individual typically (95 percent) entail a psychosis. Forty-five percent of the psychoses are schizophrenic disorders, 35 percent are episodic mood disorders and another 13 percent are unspecified psychoses.[32] In most cases, these individuals were returned to the street after being temporarily stabilized.

In comparative order of frequency, single-digit shares homeless hospital inpatients were admitted to treat conditions of the body rather than the mind. These included injuries, circulatory or heart problems, endocrine disorders such as diabetes, digestive problems, respiratory problems, skin disorders, and other less common medical conditions.[33]

Figure 24: Percent of Patients Hospitalized for Mental Disease or Disorder



Source: California Department of Health Care Access and Information

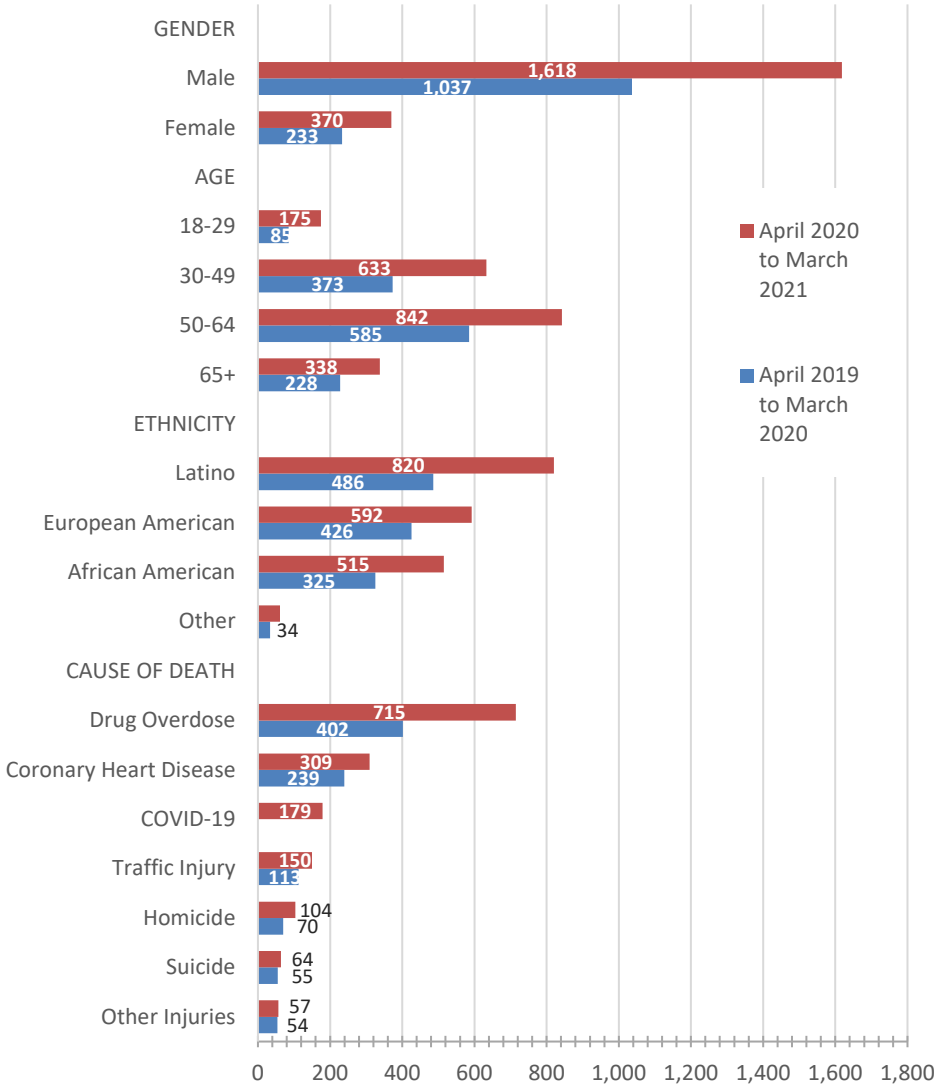
Hospital inpatients are the most severely distressed group of homeless individuals. Their problems have typically developed and become more acute over the course of extended homelessness. Serious health conditions are reported two and a half times more frequently by chronically homeless individuals than by first-time homeless (55 vs. 21 percent for chronic vs. first-time homeless, respectively).[34]

The high rate of acute mental health problems among chronically homeless individuals is a compelling argument for earlier, more effective intervention to identify and help individuals who are likely to become persistently homelessness. The inventory of permanent, affordable housing is sufficient for only a limited number of chronically homeless individuals.

The need for supportive housing was demonstrated in the Economic Roundtable's *10th Decile Project* from 2011 to 2013, which identified high-

The high rate of acute mental health problems is a compelling argument for earlier, more effective intervention.

Figure 25: Deaths of People Experiencing Homelessness in Los Angeles County Before and During the Covid Pandemic



Source: Los Angeles County Department of Public Health.

need, high-cost homeless individuals in hospitals and immediately placed them in permanent supportive housing.[35] This intervention was cost-effective for the public, but many of these individuals died within the first year of being housed. Help came later than it should have. Housing is essential, but it is an ameliorative rather than restorative response to homelessness.

Deaths

Deaths of homeless individuals in Los Angeles County increased 56%.

Deaths of homeless individuals in Los Angeles County increased from 1,271 in the 12 months before the Covid pandemic to 1,988 in the first 12 months of the pandemic. This 56 percent increase is broken out by demographic group in *Figure 25*.[36]

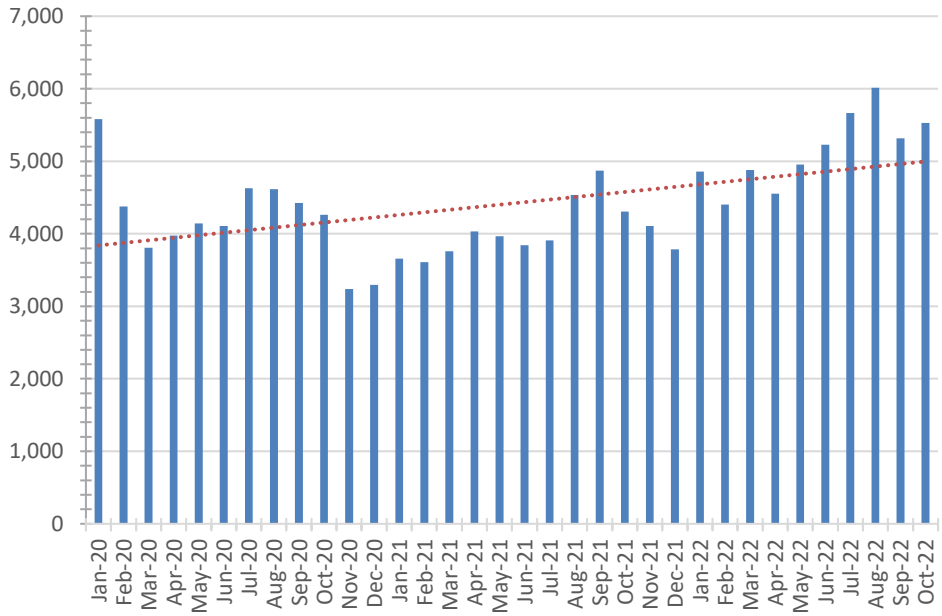
There was a 69 percent increase in deaths among homeless Latinos, with 334 additional deaths. This was the largest increase of any ethnic group.

Drug overdoses were a primary driver of the increase, with 313 additional deaths in the first year of the pandemic, representing a 78 percent increase.

There was an especially high increase in deaths among young adults, driven by drug overdoses. Deaths among individuals 18 to 29 years of age increased 106 percent, with 90 additional deaths. Deaths among individuals 30 to 49 years of age increased 70 percent with 260 additional deaths.

Covid-19 accounted for just 179 of the 717 total additional deaths. The increase in social isolation during the pandemic may help explain the

Figure 26: Number of Monthly Calls about Homeless Encampments in the City of Los Angeles, with Linear Trend Line



Source: City of Los Angeles Information Technology Agency.

increase in drug overdoses and deaths among young adults. These are deaths of desperation. With earlier recognition of their level of risk and effective intervention, many of these homeless young adults might have been empowered to obtain work and earn a wage that would pay for rent.

Encampments

The number of calls to the City of Los Angeles requesting cleanups of homeless encampments increased by an average of 60 a month, from January 2020 through October 2022, as shown in *Figure 26*.[37] Despite month-to-month fluctuation in the number of calls, the upward trend in the number of requests to clean up encampments is most likely explained by an increase in the number of unsheltered dwellings.

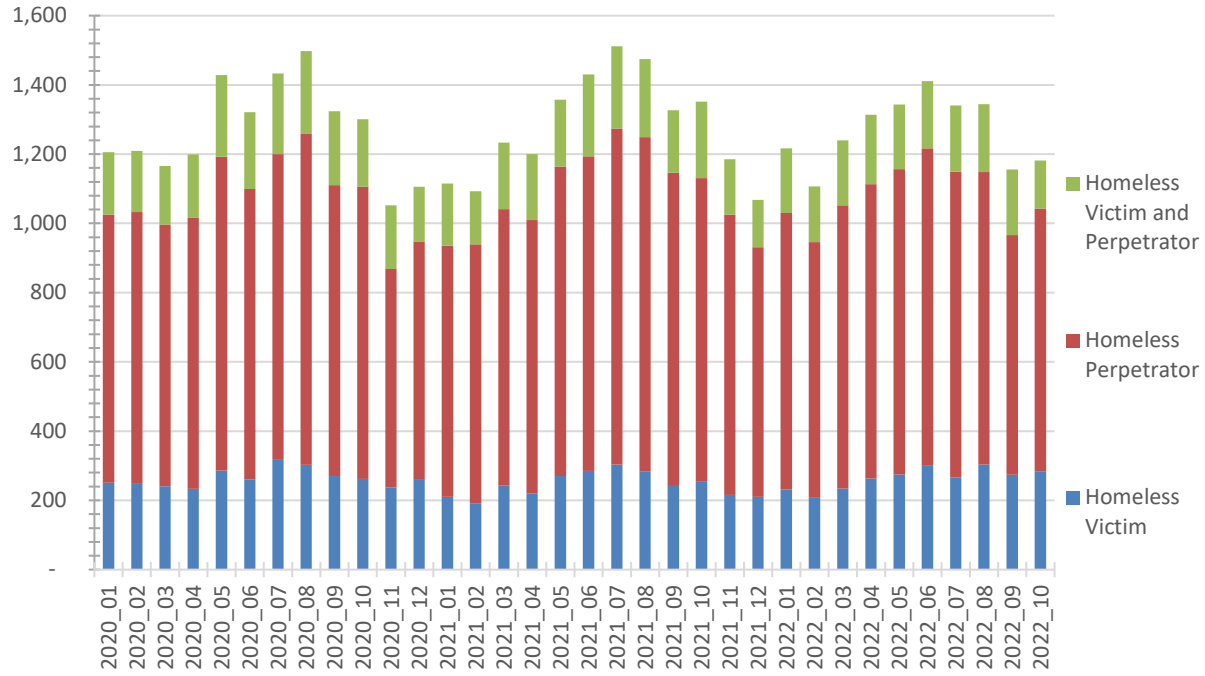
Calls to the City of L.A. requesting cleanups of homeless encampments increased by 60 a month.

Sweeps of homeless encampments by the Bureau of Sanitation provide a temporary response to the concerns of businesses and housed residents, but without permanent housing or a source of income, the result is only temporary. The dwellings needed by homeless individuals will reappear in the same place or another place nearby.[38]

Crime

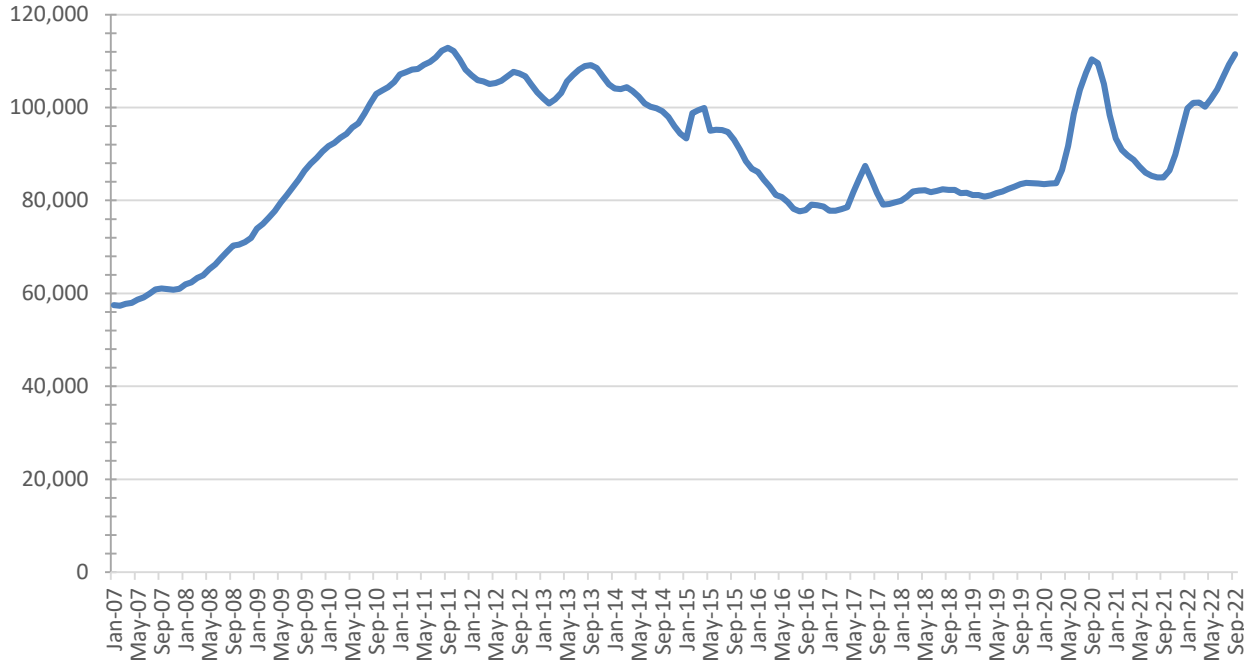
The Los Angeles Police Department reported an average of 1,272 crimes a month involving homeless individuals from January 2020 to October 2022, as shown in *Figure 27*.[39]

Figure 27: Homeless Individuals as Victims of Crime, Suspects or Both



Source: City of Los Angeles Police Department.

Figure 28: General Relief Monthly Caseload 2007-2022, 3-Month Moving Average, January 2007 to September 2022



Source: Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services.

Homeless individuals were victims in 22 percent of the crimes, suspected perpetrators in 63 percent, and both victim and suspected perpetrator in 15 percent of the crimes.

There was month-to-month fluctuation in the number of homeless-related crimes, but no overall increase or decrease in the number of crimes since the onset of Covid.

Cash Aid

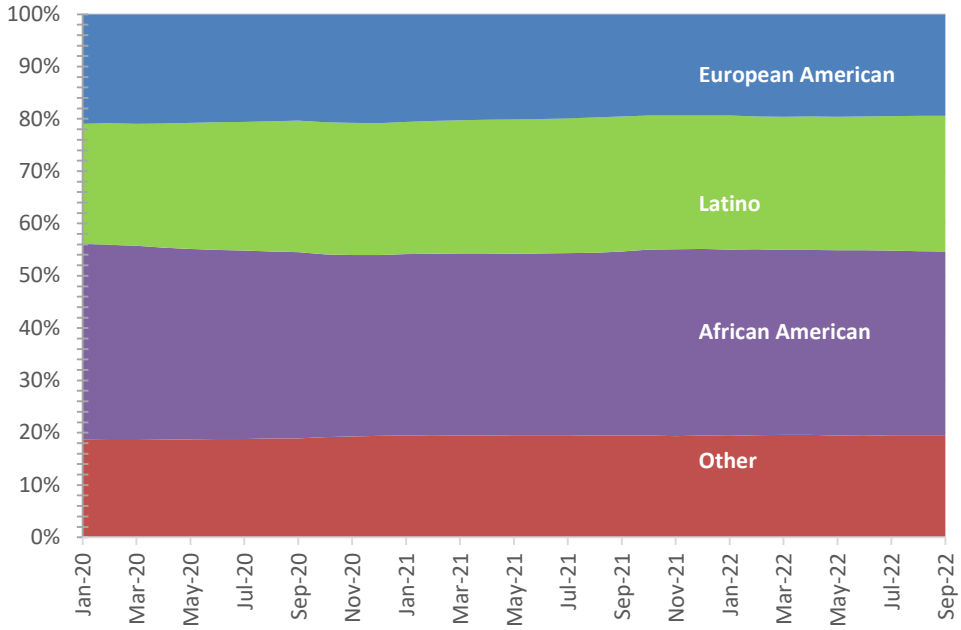
L.A. County dropped 28,435 individuals from the General Relief caseload at the height of pandemic unemployment.

Los Angeles County's General Relief Program does not appear to have provided consistent or reliable income support for destitute and homeless single adults following the onset of Covid. The county's General Relief program is the primary source of aid available to homeless single adults and is a proxy for the homeless population.[40]

From October 2020 through August 2021, the county terminated 28,435 individuals from the General Relief caseload, as shown in *Figure 28*. This was at the height of pandemic-driven underemployment. The discharges occurred when 11.7 percent of the county's labor force was unemployed and 21.2 percent was under-employed.

The Department of Public Social Services explained that the main cause of terminations was that recipients had failed to return the SSP-14 form. Recipients use this form to report whether they are receiving cash aid from the state or federal government.[41]

Figure 29: Distribution of Los Angeles County General Relief Recipients by Ethnicity



Source: Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services Monthly Statistical Reports.

General Relief is financed by the county's discretionary funds rather out of ear-marked funds transferred from the state or federal government. This raises the possibility that purging the General Relief caseload was based on the county's budgetary priorities rather than objective evidence that recipients were ineligible for assistance.

It seems likely that this failure to submit paperwork occurred because recipients were disconnected from public assistance offices, which were closed during the pandemic,[42] rather than because they were double-dipping from another aid program. This assessment is supported by the fact that the General Relief caseload quickly returned to its previous level after the terminations were completed.

In the absence of paperwork, the county acted on the presumption that these indigent and often mentally ill individuals did not need aid. This loss of income support is likely to have created greater hardship among homeless recipients.

L.A. County acted on the presumption that indigent, homeless and often mentally ill individuals did not need aid.

Demography

The General Relief caseload is an indicator of the ethnic distribution among homeless adults *(Figure 29)*. There has been a small pre- to post-Covid increase in the share of Latinos among indigent homeless adults without children. Latinos made up 23 percent of the county's General Relief caseload in January 2020, and this share increased to 26 percent in September 2022.

There was little change in the gender and age composition of the General Relief caseload over the course of the Covid pandemic.

Conclusions

Hospitals have become a primary institutional touch point for homeless individuals. The number of homeless inpatients reported by hospitals is now 900 times larger than it was 30 years ago. The primary medical diagnosis for inpatients is a psychotic mental disorder. These conditions emerge and become more acute over the course of extended homelessness. This is a compelling reason for providing earlier, more effective interventions to identify and help individuals who are likely to become persistently homelessness.

The 78 percent increase in deaths from drug overdoses among young, homeless adults is evidence of the deleterious effect of increased social isolation during the pandemic. These are deaths of despair.

The increasing number of requests to clean up homeless encampments is most likely explained by an increase in the number of unsheltered dwellings. The long-term ineffectiveness of dispossessing and dislocating unsheltered homeless individuals speaks to the need for both more housing and more sustaining sources of income.

There has been slow, steady growth in the share of homeless hospital inpatients and General Relief recipients who are Latino, accompanied by a declining share of European Americans and a largely unchanged share of African Americans. This rate of increase in the share of homeless individuals who are Latino is much more moderate than the four-fold increase from 2020 to 2022 reported by the demographic survey for the homeless count.

The County of Los Angeles terminated 28,435 individuals from the General Relief caseload at the height of unemployment during the Covid pandemic. Apparently, this was an arbitrary administrative decision about a paperwork problem caused by closing county offices rather than ineligibility of these individuals. The closure of county offices left indigent recipients, who often are mentally ill and homeless, with no effective access to county workers. This termination of income benefits is likely to have created greater hardship among homeless recipients.

Photo credit:
Waiting for Work on Edge of the Pea Field, Holtville, Imperial Valley, California, Dorthea Lange, 1937, J. Paul Getty Museum

5. Interventions

Income Support

The United States launched novel and far reaching programs to provide income support that would offset the loss of wages caused by the Covid pandemic, as shown in *Figure 30*. Cash assistance came through three programs.

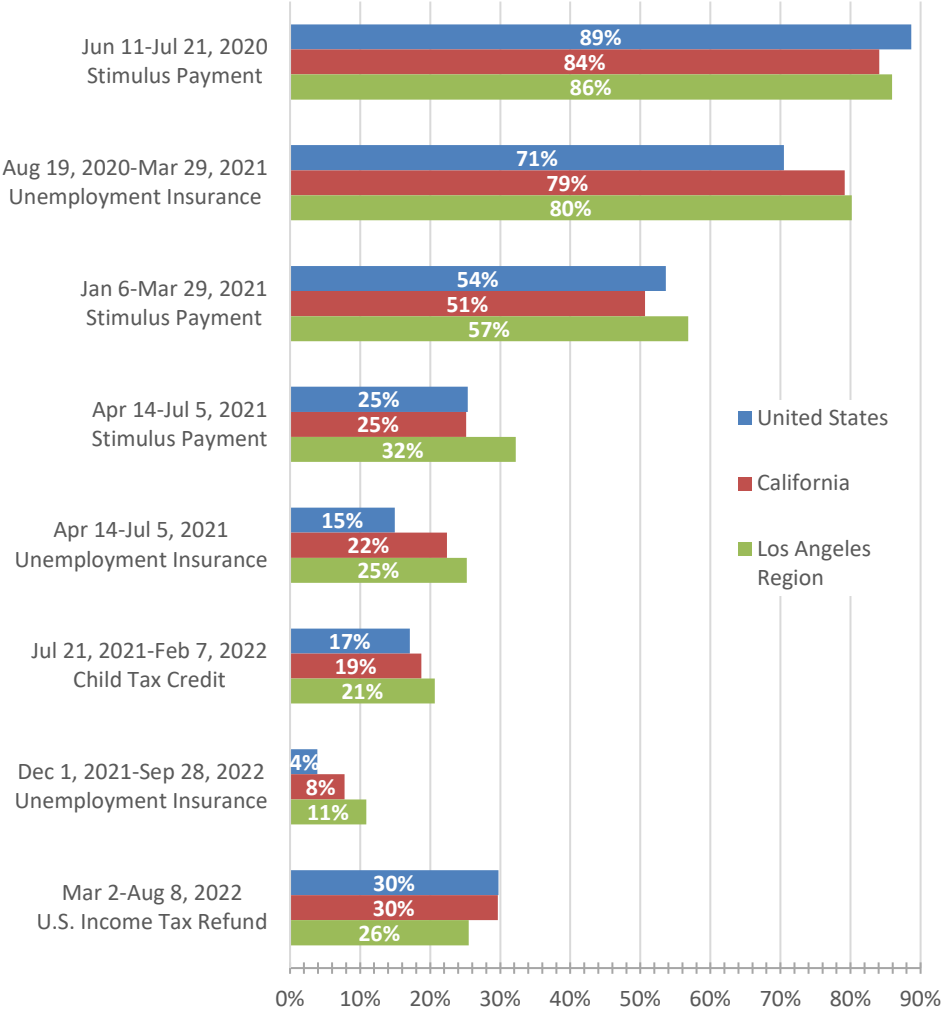
Unemployment Insurance

The extended UI benefit was a generous, broadly inclusive program.

The extended UI benefit was a generous, broadly inclusive program but it stopped providing income support for most low-income adults with long-term unemployment by the middle of 2021.

Extended unemployment insurance (UI) benefits temporarily raised UI benefit amounts, dramatically expanded eligibility, and lengthened the number of weeks that workers could receive support.[43]

Figure 30: Percent of Unemployed Adults with Household Incomes <$25,000 Receiving Income Support, based on the Dates when Questions Were Asked in the Pulse Survey



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey.

Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation under the CARES Act became available in March 2020 and provided up to 53 additional weeks of payments for workers who had used all of the 13 weeks of unemployment benefits that are ordinarily available. This meant that an unemployed worker who began receiving UI benefits in April 2020 would have been able to continue receiving benefits through June 2021.

These extended UI benefits ended in September 2021 in California and most other states.[44] Eighteen states terminated these benefits earlier, citing concerns that unemployed workers were choosing not to return to work because of supplemental UI benefits.

Concern about the moral hazard of income support for unemployed workers proved to be unfounded. Decline in UI recipiency was not followed by a meaningful rise in employment and workers from disadvantaged backgrounds were disproportionately affected by the termination of benefits.[45]

Concern about the moral hazard of income support for unemployed workers proved to be unfounded.

From early in the pandemic through March 2021, roughly four out of five low income, unemployed adults received UI benefits. However, as the onset of the Covid recession receded, the share of low-income, unemployed adults receiving UI dwindled.

By July 2021, less than one-third as many unemployed, low-income adults were receiving UI. Coverage had dropped to 25 percent in the Los Angeles region, 22 percent in California, and only 15 percent nationally.

By September 2022, coverage shrank again by almost two thirds, with 11 percent of unemployed, low-income adults in the Los Angeles region, 8 percent in California and 4 percent nationally receiving UI benefits.

Stimulus Payments

Stimulus payments provided significant financial support for low and moderate income workers, with progressively more restrictive income eligibility criteria. The final payments were made by the middle of 2021, with the exception of California's payout at the end of 2021.

One-time, direct cash payments of $1,200 per person, plus $500 per child, were authorized through the U.S. CARES Act on March 27, 2020. Individuals with incomes up to $75,000 were eligible for the full amount, with the payment amount decreasing five percent for every additional $100 of income up to an income ceiling of $99,000 for a single adult.[46]

A second round of stimulus payments provided direct payments of $600 per person, including for dependents ages 16 and younger. The full payment was available to individuals making up to $75,000 per year, with decreasing amounts up to the income ceiling of $87,000. This was

authorized through the Consolidated Appropriations Act that was signed into law on December 27, 2020.[47]

A third round of stimulus payments provided direct cash payments of up to $1,400 for individuals earning less than $75,000 a year, plus $1,400 per dependent. The full payment was available to individuals making up to $75,000 a year, with decreasing amounts up to the income ceiling of $80,000. This was authorized through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 that was signed into law on March 11, 2021.[48]

California provided two types of supplemental stimulus payments for low and moderate income workers. Golden State Stimulus I (GSS I) provided one-time $600 payment for workers with earnings under $30,000 who received the California Earned Income Tax Credit or who made up to $75,000. Workers who met both criteria received $1,200. This benefit was paid in May 2021.[49]

Golden State Stimulus II (GS II) was California's second stimulus payment. It provided $500 to workers who earned up to $75,000 and qualified for GSS I, $600 if they did not qualify for GSS I, and $1,100 if they did not qualify for GSS I and had one or more dependents. This benefit was paid in November and December of 2021.[50]

The stimulus payments were generous and broadly inclusive programs but they also stopped providing income support for most low-income adults with long-term unemployment by the middle of 2021.

The stimulus payments were generous and broadly inclusive programs.

Expanded Child Tax Credit

Roughly one-fifth of low-income, unemployed adults were in households that received expanded child tax credits, based on information from the Pulse Household Survey shown in *Figure 30*.

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 temporarily expanded the child tax credit for 2021 from $2,000 to $3,600 for each child under age 6, and $3,000 for other children under age 18.[51]

Low-income families with children who did not made enough money to be required to file taxes were also eligible for this benefit. Beginning in July of 2021 through the end of the year, the Internal Revenue Service used information in its records to send automatic monthly payments of up to $300 for each child under age 6 and $250 for each child ages 6 to 17.

Paycheck Protection Program

The objective of the Paycheck Protection Program, to preserve jobs and wages for workers, was important. However, about three-quarters of loan funds went to households in the top income quintile. This regressive flow

of funds compares unfavorably to the enhanced UI benefits and stimulus payments.

The Paycheck Protection Program provided forgivable loans to small businesses with 500 or fewer employees to pay their employees during the Covid crisis. At least 60 percent of a loan had to be spent on payroll for the loan to be forgiven, otherwise the loans were due in two years with one percent interest. The balance could be spent on mortgage interest, rent and utilities. Loans could be for up to two months of average monthly payroll costs during the last year plus an additional 25 percent of that amount.[52]

There were two rounds of loans. The first round began in April 2020 with a $10 million cap on loans and the second in January 2021 with a $2 million cap. The program ended May 31, 2021.

The program saturated its market with 93 percent of small businesses receiving one or more loans. One study estimated that the program preserved between 2 and 3 million job-years of employment over 14 months at a cost of $170,000 to $257,000 per job-year retained. These estimates imply that only 23 to 34 percent of loan dollars went directly to workers who would otherwise have lost jobs; the balance flowed to business owners.[53]

California also supported businesses through the Small Business COVID-19 Relief Grant Program. Businesses with revenue between $100,000 and $1 million were eligible for $15,000 grants. Businesses with $1 million up to $2.5 million in revenue were eligible for $25,000 grants. There were nine rounds of grants.[54] This was the largest state grant program in the country, with $4 billion in funding.

Rental Relief

The Emergency Rental Assistance program provided $21.55 billion to help households facing financial hardship because of Covid that were unable to pay rent or utilities.[55]

In California, households with incomes that were not more than 80 percent of the area median income were eligible. Landlords could get reimbursed for 80 percent of rent that had not been paid since April 2020 if they agree to waive the remaining 20 percent of unpaid rent.[56] More than 340,000 California households received assistance.[57] This represents six percent of California's 5.7 million renter households.

Eviction Moratorium

Eviction moratoriums prevented an estimated 1.36 million eviction cases nationwide in 2021. The pandemic put at least twice as many renters as

Eviction moratoriums prevented an estimated 1.36 million eviction cases nationwide in 2021.

usual at risk of eviction, but expanded federal, state and local legal protections prevented roughly three-quarters of the expected eviction filings. It is especially noteworthy that the most disadvantaged neighborhoods experienced the biggest gains in terms of rental housing stability.[58]

Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac implemented the first eviction moratoriums in March 2020 on mortgages they insured or backed. The same month, the CARES Act became law and temporarily blocked evictions from dwellings with Community Development Block Grant financing.

In August of 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention imposed a halt on evictions of individuals with incomes under $99,000 or couples with incomes under $198,000 in counties experiencing substantial Covid infections. This remained in effect for eight months until a court vacated the order.[59]

Over the first year of the pandemic, 43 states and Washington, D.C. instituted some form of eviction moratorium. The most common protection was to freeze that final stage of the process—law enforcement execution of the eviction. However, many states began to roll back protections—or restrict the original protections that they offered—well before the pandemic was contained. The typical length of a moratorium was 144 days.[60]

California's eviction moratorium continued until the end of June in 2022,[61] and the City of Los Angeles moratorium is scheduled to expire on January 31, 2023.[62]

Evictions are an extremely disruptive displacement, forcing people out of their homes and often upending their lives.

Evictions are an extremely disruptive displacement, forcing people out of their homes and often upending their lives. This includes disrupting children's education, losing jobs, damage physical and mental health, and, making it difficult to find a new home to rent. Short-term and long-term homelessness are all-too-frequent outcomes of eviction.[63]

Low-income tenants are at a severe disadvantage in eviction cases because free legal assistance for tenants is extremely limited across the country. Housing lawyers and tenant groups developed the Tenant Power Toolkit to equip tenants facing an eviction case to respond by filing an "Answer".

The tool asks questions to collect necessary information and enters it into pre-printed court-approved forms that are customized for each county in California. The purpose is to keep people in their homes long enough to be able to fight their eviction case. In counties where it is permissible, the forms are filed electronically for the tenant. Rapid turnaround is essential because tenants have only five business days after their landlord serves them with a Summons and the Complaint-Unlawful Detainer to file their Answer.[64]

Homeless Beds

The increase in homelessness was far greater than the increase in homeless beds during the Covid Pandemic.

California as a whole made a credible showing with a 13 percent increase in the number of emergency shelter beds for homeless individuals during the first year of the Covid pandemic, as shown in *Table 3*.[65]

California accomplished this despite the negligible results in the Los Angeles Continuum of Care, where the number of shelter beds grew by only 0.5 percent. The balance of California, excluding Los Angeles, increased the number of shelter beds by 21 percent.

The overall growth in shelter beds throughout the United States was only slightly better than in Los Angeles, with two percent growth.

Table 3: Number of Emergency Shelter (ES) and Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Beds in 2020 and 2021

	ES 2020	ES 2021	ES Change	PSH 2020	PSH 2021	PSH Change
Los Angeles CoC	14,077	14,144	0.5%	22,683	23,677	4%
California	35,966	40,662	13%	65,872	69,864	6%
United States	301,589	307,720	2%	373,030	376,972	1%

A multi-year effort is required to build permanent supportive housing units, which are usually reserved for chronically homeless individuals with mental or physical disabilities. Construction began several years earlier for the units that became available in 2021. This much needed permanent housing was not a response to Covid and provided only a fraction of the housing needed to meet the growth in homelessness caused by Covid.

The shortfall in emergency shelter beds in Los Angeles and much of the United States meant that many individuals had no alternative but sleeping on sidewalks or in unsheltered dwellings. The hardship and disconnection from services experienced by unsheltered individuals increases the likelihood that they will become persistently homeless and disabled.

The shortfall in emergency shelter beds in Los Angeles and much of the United States meant that many individuals had no alternative but sleeping on sidewalks or in unsheltered dwellings.

Re-Employment

There were society-wide interventions to offset the loss of earnings caused by unemployment, but only negligible efforts directly assist workers in regaining employment. Workers at the margins of the labor market who are less educated or young are the first to lose their jobs and struggle to find a new job. Often they are precariously housed when they are employed, and vulnerable to homelessness when they are unable to pay for rent.

Efforts to reform homeless service systems most often target failures in the housing market, social services and public health systems, overlooking the labor market. Homelessness is a problem of inadequate income as well as of

unaffordable housing. Employment is an important and under-utilized tool for providing income, dignity and housing for homeless individuals.

Employment expands the array of system-change strategies for combating homelessness by highlighting the agency and capacity for self-determination of homeless individuals. It leverages the lived reality that two-thirds of homeless adults are doing something to earn money and one-third are trying to find a job in the formal economy. This is a societal asset that can be used to empower these individuals to shape their own trajectories out of homelessness.

Individuals who experience homelessness typically struggle in the labor market and lose their jobs and earnings before becoming homeless, based on an analysis of shelter and employment records in New York City. After becoming homeless, progress in the labor market proved to be a means to prevent and ameliorate homelessness.[66]

Los Angeles County reports that 2,035 individuals who were homeless or at-risk of homelessness obtained unsubsidized employment in the 2020 to 2021 fiscal year.[67] This is a useful but small response[68] to the need for sustaining employment among the 146,000 individuals[69] in Los Angeles County who experienced homelessness sometime in 2022, and the much larger number on the brink of homelessness.

Early Intervention for High-Risk Workers

Eviction moratoriums prevented an estimated 1.36 million eviction cases nationwide in 2021.

The society-wide income and housing protections that were provided during the Covid pandemic, and that dramatically curtailed the growth of homelessness, are unlikely to be available in future recessions. Therefore, interventions in future recessions will need to target unemployed workers who have a high risk of becoming persistently homeless. This requires predictive analytic screening tools.

The Realization Project is a system-change demonstration project of the Economic Roundtable. It has produced a resource library of public domain screening, personal growth, instructional, and employment tools. The project uses predictive analytic screening tools to identify unemployed workers with a high risk of becoming persistently homeless. The project can quantify future public costs that are likely to be incurred if these individuals remain homeless.

Within the spectrum of need among homeless workers and the range of possible interventions, the project is targeting high-barrier, high potential individuals who are likely to be persistently homeless and have public costs of over $15,000 a year. It is an evidence-based strategy for aligning risks with an intervention that costs less than the problem it solves. Project outcomes are validating the effectiveness of employment in preventing homeless and ensuring an income-based right to housing.

The project addresses chronic homelessness as a problem of racial injustice as well as a problem of inadequate income by providing comprehensive services and skill development for jobs paying wages that cover rent for adults on a path to chronic homelessness.

Poverty and underemployment are often symptoms of deeper trauma that is profoundly damaging, devaluing, and confidence-shattering. The curriculum lays the groundwork for practical discourses on justice and emotional intelligence within the community of participants.

Participants' justice work begins with doing themselves justice through learning and performance.

Participants receive immediate housing and mental health support, and access to the full array of project services. They engage a curriculum focused on professional employability as well as individual psycho-emotional development. Topics, themes, and concepts include resume writing, job searching, home economics, and mock interviews as well as emotional intelligence, self-expression, meditation, and focus.

Restoration of the human spirit and rebuilding hope and purpose are essential for homeless workers to achieve their productive potential. When participants heal core emotional wounds, they can achieve a personal renaissance. The project engages spirituality and cultural imagination to awaken these possibilities.

The predictive analytic screening tools, curriculum and lessons from the Realization Project can be downloaded at: https://economicrt.org/publication/predictive-screening-for-unemployed-workers/

Restoration of the human spirit and rebuilding hope and purpose are essential for homeless workers to achieve their productive potential.

Conclusions

Housing and income interventions during the Covid recession and the ensuing wave of unemployment reduced the growth of homelessness by almost half and can provide the same protection in future recessions. Scaling-up re-employment interventions for high-risk unemployed workers would strengthen this toolkit.

The moratoriums on eviction provided the greatest protection against homelessness, reducing the number of evictions nationwide by half, and providing even stronger protections in California and Los Angeles.

Cash income from unemployment insurance and stimulus payments provided parallel support for most unemployed, low-income workers until mid-2021. This forestalled destitution and reduced the risk of homelessness.

Roughly one-fifth of vulnerable workers benefited from the expanded child tax credit and a small fraction of the labor force benefited from rent relief and the Paycheck Protection Program.

The homeless housing system provided minimal support, with the exception of a large increase in emergency shelter beds in California counties excluding Los Angeles.

Re-employment interventions were almost nonexistent, even though the Covid economic crisis was caused by unemployment.

Public interventions in future recessions are unlikely to be as well funded as they were during the Covid pandemic. To achieve the same outcome in dramatically curtailing the growth of homelessness it will be necessary to target unemployed workers who have a high risk of becoming persistently homeless. This requires predictive analytic screening tools.

The Realization Project is using predictive analytic screening tools and demonstrating that interventions that both restore the human spirit and connect high-risk unemployed workers with jobs are effective.

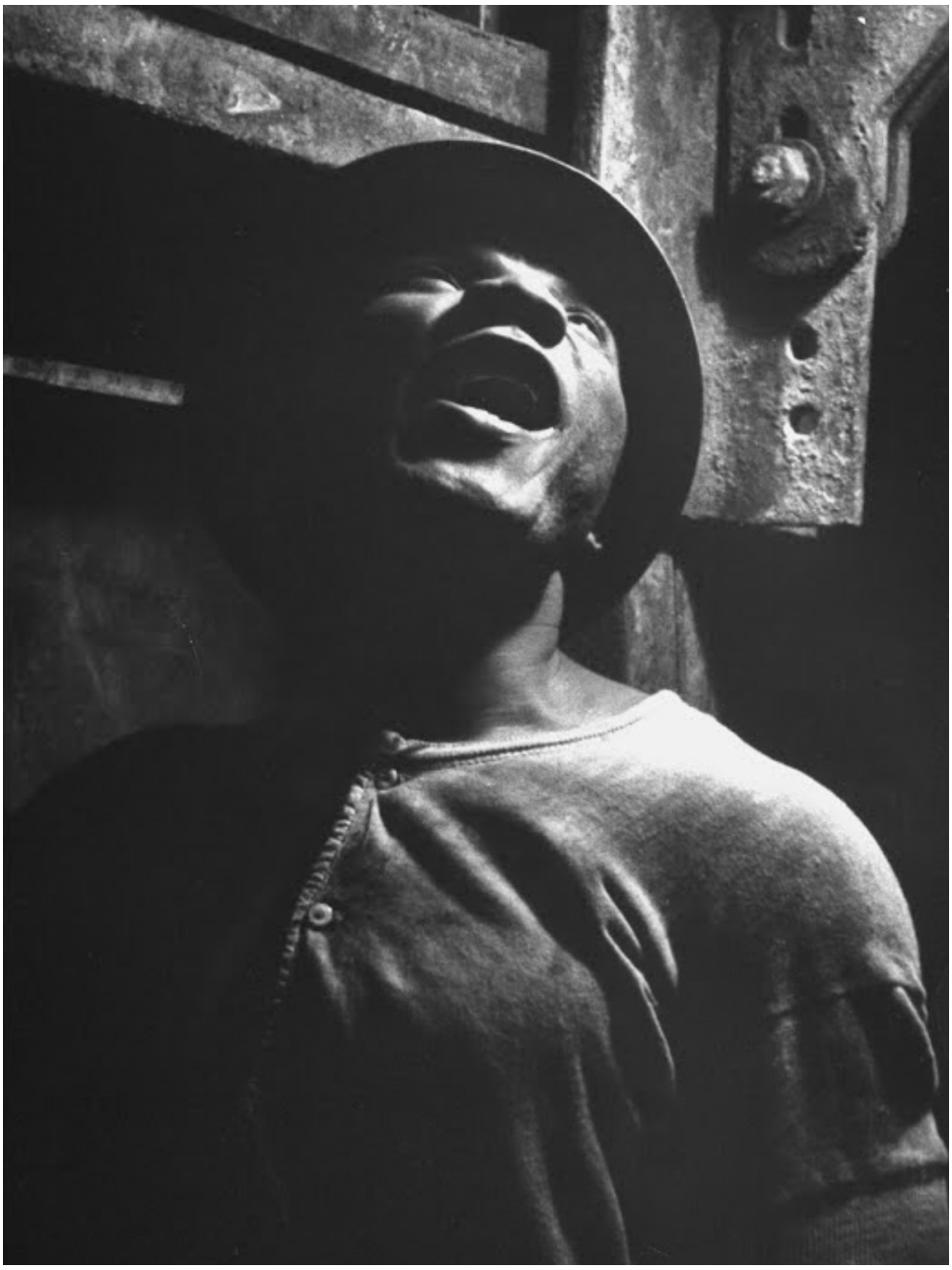


Photo credit:
"*Sandhog," Calling out thrust measurements in Queens, N.Y.C. midtown tunnel, Carl Mydans, 1939, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston*

6. Breaking the Next Fall

Income and Equity

Voters throughout the country have funded extensive homeless programs, but in many metropolitan areas they are seeing homelessness continue to grow. Many voters appear to feel that change is possible, but to be impatient with waiting for change, and to expect to see results quickly.

It is unlikely that any city or county can reverse the trajectory of homelessness in the time frame that voters expect to see results if housing is the only tool they use to combat homelessness.

We cannot house our way out of homelessness without radically shrinking the crowd of people cascading into homelessness.

The goal of immediate housing for everyone who is homeless is the obvious solution. However, it is just a step away from effete sloganeering. In reality, we cannot house our way out of homelessness without radically shrinking the crowd of people cascading into homelessness. Each of them fell out of housing because they could not pay for it. For many this was because they lost their job, had no earnings, and could not pay rent.

The truly obvious and massive problem is lack of employment. To solve homelessness, we need a searching, open and good faith dialogue about restorative economic justice and jobs.

The two primary interventions for keeping households and workers intact during the Covid downturn proved that ensuring that people have incomes and that they will not lose their homes are effective for preventing destitution and homelessness. These two interventions worked.

The third intervention that works is re-employment. This intervention has been under-utilized and should be a primary tool for combatting homelessness among low-income, unemployed workers.

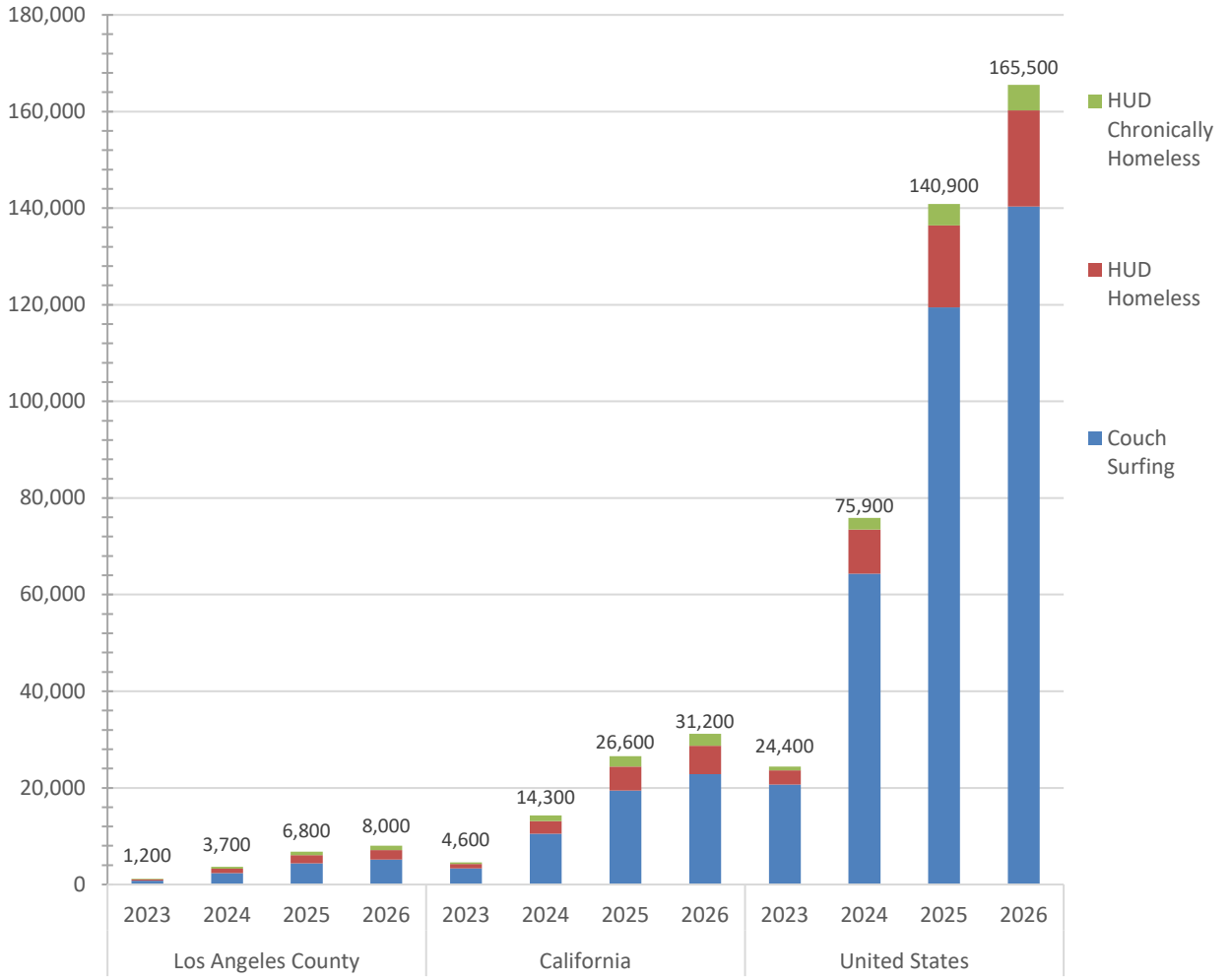
Homelessness if there is a Recession in 2023

There is a strong possibility that increases in interest rates by the Federal Reserve Bank will cause a mild recession in 2023. This pessimistic assessment is shared by the Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae),[70] JPMorgan, Bank of America, and the investment company, Blackrock, Inc., among others.[71]

Former Boston Federal Reserve President Eric Rosengren said than an unemployment rate of 5 to 5.5 percent was likely during a recession in 2023.[72] The average unemployment rate in the United States from January through October 2022 has been 3.7 percent.

We used the midpoint, 5.25 percent, in Mr. Rosengren's estimate to project the resulting growth in homelessness, shown in *Figure 31*, if there is a recession in 2023.[73]

Figure 31: Estimated Additional Unemployed Workers Experiencing Some Type of Homelessness Each Year, if there is a Recession in 2023, Broken out by Type of Homelessness



Sources: Homeless projections are derived from model for Covid recession in 2020 (see Locked Out, Economic Roundtable, 2021), using Current Population Survey basic monthly data, administrative records of Los Angeles County public assistance recipients who became homeless, (see Early Intervention to Prevent Persistent Homelessness: Predictive Models for Identifying Unemployed Workers and Young Adults wo become Persistently Homeless, Economic Roundtable, 2019), and unemployment estimates by Eric Rosengren, former president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston.

An estimated 7,040 individuals who meet HUD's definition of "sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation" are projected to become homeless in Los Angeles County over the coming four years. They are projected to be accompanied by a total of 20,560 individuals in California and 61,810 in the United States who also will be sleeping in places not meant for human habitation.

The projected increase in homelessness if there is a recession in 2023 is roughly a quarter of the increase that was projected to result from the much more severe Covid recession in 2020.[74]

Disbursing unemployment insurance and providing stimulus payments, along with public edicts prohibiting evictions, reduced the growth in homelessness from the 2020 recession by almost half. These interventions can be replicated and improved on if there is a recession in 2023.

An estimated 61,810 individuals are projected to become homeless in the United States over the coming four years.

Intervene to Combat Homelessness

The Covid pandemic recession was an opportunity to assess the benefit of new interventions that were not provided in previous recessions. There are five important lessons to carry forward from interventions during the 2020 recession in order to replicate and improve on the measures that have proven successful for closing the pipeline from unemployment to homelessness.

First, Do Not Rely on the Homeless Services System to Prevent Homelessness

The homeless social services and housing system is largely reactive rather than preventative in addressing homelessness. Furthermore, the system does not have adequate resources to ensure incomes and housing for all unemployed workers at risk of homelessness. It is the responsibility of mainstream public systems to provide income support and protect housing.

Second, Keep People Housed – Prevent Evictions

Eviction moratoriums were the most effective intervention for preventing displacement from housing into homelessness. Tools for keeping vulnerable workers in housing include ordinances that prohibit evictions, legal assistance for households facing eviction, and income supports that enable households to pay rent.

Eviction moratoriums were the most effective intervention for preventing displacement from housing and into homelessness.

Third, Money – Maintain Incomes

Income is the most essential tool for keeping workers housed. This can be provided in the form of cash aid, rent assistance or earned income.

Fourth, Work – Reconnect Workers with Jobs

The workers who are most vulnerable to homelessness are also likely to have the greatest difficulty becoming re-employed. Paying for housing with earned income meets the essential interests of both workers and the public. Reconnecting workers with jobs may require restorative justice in the form of supporting inner healing to overcome trauma as well as hands-on assistance in finding employment

Fifth, Target Interventions on High-Need Workers – Use Smart Data

Interventions should target unemployed workers who are most vulnerable to becoming homeless, because the society-wide interventions during the Covid pandemic were one-time events in response to a national trauma.

Funding will not be available to replicate income support and housing interventions on this scale. However, interventions for preventing homelessness were tested and validated during the Covid pandemic and can be more narrowly targeted to high need individuals based on the scale of available federal, state and local funding.

The predictive analytic tools used in the Realization Project are in the public domain and accurately identify unemployed workers who are likely to become persistently homeless. These or other reliable screening tools should be used to target cost-effective interventions that lead to productive re-employment rather than persistent homelessness.

Improve the Accuracy and Reliability of the Homeless Count

We do not know where we are or where we are going without a map. It is the job of the homeless count to provide a map of homelessness; however, this effort was flawed and unreliable in 2022.

It is the job of the homeless count to provide a map of homelessness; however, this effort was flawed and unreliable in 2022.

The count is a crucial program for counting and describing Los Angeles' homeless residents, but it does not yet reliably identify year-to-year changes in homelessness. The 2022 count produced inconsistent estimates of the number of homeless residents and their attributes.

New procedures for conducting the street count and demographic survey and new statistical methodology are needed to improve the accuracy of the homeless count and strengthen the reliability and year-to-year consistency of the count.

Recommendations for improving the accuracy and reliability of the count for understanding and combating homelessness include:

Establish a more independent and reliable count process

1. Establish a peer-review process for the homeless count before it is released, similar to the procedures followed by peer-reviewed academic journals, to obtain expert and independent assessments of the reliability of the count and recommendations for improving the analysis of data from the count before releasing the final count.

2. Give the research organization working with the homeless count a fully independent role, including an independent public voice in releasing data, research findings and recommendations regarding the count.

3. Assess whether the comprehensive information for individuals receiving homeless services and housing (HMIS data) provides a more reliable population profile than the demographic survey and should have a role in describing the street population in addition to the sheltered population.

Conduct surveys at homeless provider locations in the days following the count using a questionnaire designed to determine whether homeless individuals were counted.

Improve specific count practices

4. Conduct the demographic survey as a uniformly random component of the street count rather than as an activity that is disconnected in time and space.

5. Increase the number of families with children that are reached by the demographic survey to provide samples of at least 100 for subgroups that are used in producing demographic estimates.

6. Make it a primary goal of the count to calibrate year-to-year comparability in population estimates and to identify likely causes for shifts in the number or composition of the homeless population.

7. Improve the reliability of the count by identifying, quantifying and correcting undercounts. This includes conducting surveys at homeless provider locations in the days following the count using a questionnaire designed to determine whether homeless individuals were counted. It might ask, for example, if they spent the night of the count: on the streets, in a bus, walking around, in a park, in a 24-hour store, restaurant or internet café, ATM lobby, or other private establishment, or in an abandoned building, stairwell, lobby, yard, squat, vehicle, tent, or makeshift shelter. This information should be used to adjust the count to make it more accurate, and to identify sources of undercounts and correct them in future counts.

Use information from the demographic survey to improve homeless outcomes

8. Data gets better when it is used. Support and encourage independent research and policy analysis using information from the demographic survey that is operationally important for combating homelessness. This includes barriers to employment, health conditions, justice system involvement, and needed services.

Author Biographies

Daniel Flaming is President of the Economic Roundtable. He specializes in applied policy research addressing homelessness, wage equity, affordable housing, and environmental sustainability. Previously he worked in local government managing delinquency prevention, affordable housing, job training, and research programs.

Seth Pickens is the Director of the Realization Project at the Economic Roundtable. He served for a decade as the Senior Pastor of a congregation in South Los Angeles. Previously he led projects to decrease stigma and promote resources around mental well-being

Patrick Burns is Senior Researcher at the Economic Roundtable. He specializes in labor market dynamics, industry change and urban geography, with experience analyzing outcomes for detailed neighborhoods and groups of workers. He is experienced in data architecture and management.

Endnotes

[1] This projection included people who meet HUDs definition of homelessness in that they are sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation, and excluded people who are couch surfing.

[2] Since 2017, the homeless count has been carried out by LAHSA and a research team from the University of Southern California. The research team made up of Benjamin F. Henwood, Layan Kaileh, Stephanie Kwack, Patricia St. Clair, and Amy Stein at the University of Southern California Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work, and Randall Kuhn at the University of California Los Angeles Fielding School of Public Health, contracted with LAHSA to provide methodology and process direction, design and select all required samples, execute the demographic survey of unsheltered youth and adults, manage the youth count, and produce survey estimates. LAHSA was responsible for all other data collection tasks, which included conducting the PIT and shelter counts, convening an advisory board committee, designing the contents of survey questions, and compiling the estimates for public presentation. https://economicrt.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/2022-usc-homeless-count-methodology-report.pdf

[3] U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Basic Monthly Data, https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/time-series/demo/cps/cps-basic.html.

[4] Mark Baldassare, Dean Bonner, Rachel Lawler, and Deja Thomas, "PPIC Statewide Survey: Californians and Their Government," (September 2022), https://www.ppic.org/publication/ppic-statewide-survey-californians-and-their-government-september-2022/

[5] Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, "2020 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count - Los Angeles Continuum of Care (CoC)," https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=4585-2020-greater-los-angeles-homeless-count-los-angeles-continuum-of-care-coc-, and "2022 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count - Los Angeles Continuum of Care," https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=6505-coc-hc2022-data-summary.

[6] The administrative jurisdictions that receive federal funding for homelessness services and housing, and which are mandated to conduct homeless counts, are called continuums of care by HUD. Sheltered and unsheltered homeless count data for all of the continuums of care in California was compiled by Joe Colletti, Policy Insights, (September 12, 2022), https://homelessstrategy.com/californias-continuums-of-care-2022-homeless-counts-reveal-a-total-homeless-count-increase/

[7] Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, "LAHSA Announces 2022 Homeless Count Postponement," (January 14, 2022), https://www.spa6homeless.org/index.php/pages/february-2022-homeless-count/427-lahsa-announces-2022-homeless-count-postponement

[8] Doug Smith, "Los Angeles homeless count raises doubts about accuracy. Is it time for a new way?" Los Angeles Times, (September 24, 2022),

https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-09-24/doubts-raised-over-the-los-angeles-homeless-count-is-it-time-for-a-new-way

Chris LeGar, "I participated in L.A.'s annual homeless count this week. It was a mess." (February 25, 2022), https://allaspectreport.com/2022/02/25/i-participated-in-l-a-s-annual-homeless-count-this-week-it-was-a-mess/

[9] Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, "Census tract-level data," (September 8, 2022), https://www.lahsa.org/news?article=893-2022-greater-los-angeles-homeless-count-data

[10] Piroska Bisits Bullen, "How to choose a sample size (for the statistically challenged)," About tools4dev, (May 13, 2021), https://tools4dev.org/resources/how-to-choose-a-sample-size/#:~:text=The%20minimum%20sample%20size%20is,to%20survey%20all%20of%20them.

[11] Abhibhav Sharma, "Is n = 30 really enough? A popular inductive fallacy among data analysts," Towards Data Science, (November 22, 2020), https://towardsdatascience.com/is-n-30-really-enough-a-popular-inductive-fallacy-among-data-analysts-95661669dd98

[12] Daniel Flaming and Patrick Burns, *Who Counts: Assessing Accuracy of L.A.'s Homeless Count*, Economic Roundtable, (November 20, 2017), https://economicrt.org/publication/who-counts/

[13] There are a total of 3,737 census tracts in LAHSA's homeless count, some of which are split tracts to make it feasible for volunteers to canvas the entire area. Of these tracts, there were 694 in which no evidence of unsheltered homelessness was reported in either 2020 or 2022, 604 tracts in which homelessness was reported in 2020 but not 2022, and 416 tracts in which homelessness was reported in 2022 but not 2020.

[14] Manuela Tobias, "California homeless population grew by 22,000 over pandemic," CalMatters (October 6, 2022), https://calmatters.org/housing/2022/10/california-homeless-crisis-latinos//.

[15] Economic Roundtable revised estimate of LAHSA's 2020 homeless count (_ rather than the _ reported by LAHSA) plus the homeless counts for the three other continuums of care in Los Angeles County, the cities of Glendale (169), Long Beach (2,034), and Pasadena (527).

[16] Economic Roundtable revised estimate of LAHSA's 2022 homeless count (70,616 rather than the 65,111 reported by LAHSA) plus the homeless counts for the three other continuums of care in Los Angeles County, the cities of Glendale (225), Long Beach (3,296), and Pasadena (512).

[17] U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "2007-2021-PIT-Counts-by-State," HUD Exchange (February 2022), https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/3031/pit-and-hic-data-since-2007/. Note: the total of 161,548 reported by the HUD Exchange was adjusted to incorporate the Economic Roundtable's corrected 2020 homeless estimate for LAHSA's continuum of Care.

[18] Manuela Tobias, *op cit*. Note: the total of 173,806 homeless persons reported by Manuela Tobias was adjusted to incorporate the Economic Roundtable's corrected 2022 homeless estimate for LAHSA's Continuum of Care.

[19] Table of wage and salary employment in Los Angeles County, California and the United States in March and April 2020, and September 2022.

Los Angeles County	February 2020	April 2020	Change	September 2022
Extraction & Construction	159,300	136,000	-15%	162,900
Manufacturing	337,900	292,900	-13%	319,700
Wholesale & Retail	631,400	504,300	-20%	623,200
Transportation & Utilities	212,200	193,800	-9%	226,700
Information & Finance	460,500	375,600	-18%	447,300
Professional & Business Srv.	650,700	559,800	-14%	671,200
Education, Health & Social Srv.	864,300	784,700	-9%	882,800
Leisure & Hospitality	547,600	294,700	-46%	505,800
Other Services	162,600	109,200	-33%	156,300
Government	598,000	588,400	-2%	559,000
TOTAL	**4,624,500**	**3,839,400**	**-17%**	**4,554,900**

California	February 2020	April 20	Change	September 2022
Extraction & Construction	1,267,100	1,121,300	-12%	1,407,700
Manufacturing	1,318,700	1,197,900	-9%	1,323,200
Wholesale & Retail	2,316,300	1,916,300	-17%	2,289,800
Transportation & Utilities	722,000	668,400	-7%	842,700
Information & Finance	1,440,700	1,303,700	-10%	1,440,000
Professional & Business Srv.	2,754,500	2,457,300	-11%	2,856,400
Education, Health & Social Srv.	2,886,300	2,588,700	-10%	2,937,200
Leisure & Hospitality	2,028,300	1,073,600	-47%	1,932,300
Other Services	588,900	395,900	-33%	555,300
Government	2,635,500	2,562,000	-3%	2,514,600
TOTAL	**17,958,300**	**15,285,100**	**-15%**	**18,099,200**

United States	February 2020	April 20	Change	September 2022
Extraction & Construction	7,953,000	7,058,000	-11%	8,514,000
Manufacturing	12,727,000	11,366,000	-11%	12,895,000
Wholesale & Retail	21,212,600	18,604,600	-12%	21,725,600
Transportation & Utilities	6,930,200	6,879,900	-1%	7,023,100
Information & Finance	11,714,000	11,187,000	-4%	12,011,000
Professional & Business Srv.	21,134,000	19,071,000	-10%	22,466,000
Education, Health & Social Srv.	24,668,000	21,891,000	-11%	24,624,000
Leisure & Hospitality	16,292,000	8,601,000	-47%	15,979,000
Other Services	5,882,000	4,502,000	-23%	5,718,000
Government	23,094,000	22,240,000	-4%	22,404,000
TOTAL	**151,606,800**	**131,400,500**	**-13%**	**153,359,700**

Employment data for Los Angeles County and California is from the Employment Development Department, Labor Market Information Division (https://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/). Data for the United States is from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment, Hours, and Earnings from the Current Employment Statistics survey, and does not include farm employment (https://www.bls.gov/ces/data/).

[20] The U.S. Census Bureau has conducted weekly, and now twice monthly surveys, called the Household Pulse Survey, beginning in the week of April 23, 2020. The forty-ninth survey was conducted in the September 14-28, 2022 interval. These surveys ask important questions and provide timely information, however the reliability of the data needs to be monitored. Each survey has received an average of about 75,000 responses. This represents a response rate of about 6.5 percent of the very large sample that Census Bureau seeks to engage. Because of the low response rate, there is noticeable variation in responses to the same questions from one survey to the next, which indicates that there are sampling inconsistencies. In addition, the questions that are asked change periodically, so many questions have not been asked in all 49

surveys. Survey responses can be broken out for major metropolitan areas, such as the Los Angeles MSA, but the smaller sample of responses produces even greater inconsistencies in responses from one survey to the next. For this reason, we have averaged the responses from at least eight, and usually more, surveys in reporting results from the Pulse Survey. These multi-month consolidations of data make the real signal from the survey stand out above the noise. The Census Bureau provides detailed technical documentation about quality control and standard errors in the Household Pulse Survey.

[21] The percent of adults in the United States (US), California (CA) and the Los Angeles MSA (LA) who had no confidence that they could pay next month's rent or mortgage in 2020, 2021 and 2022, broken out by household income, is shown below.

	US '20	CA '20	LA '20	US '21	CA '21	LA '21	US '22	CA '22	LA '22
Less than $25,000	20%	20%	24%	18%	20%	24%	18%	22%	21%
$25,000 - $34,999	16%	19%	19%	14%	15%	15%	14%	16%	12%
$35,000 - $49,999	12%	11%	14%	10%	13%	15%	11%	14%	8%
$50,000 - $74,999	9%	8%	9%	6%	7%	7%	7%	7%	12%
$75,000 - $99,999	6%	6%	8%	5%	5%	4%	4%	4%	4%
$100,000 - $149,999	3%	4%	4%	3%	4%	2%	3%	3%	5%
$150,000 - $199,999	3%	2%	3%	2%	1%	1%	1%	2%	0%
$200,000 and above	2%	3%	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%

[22] U.S. Census Bureau, Poverty Thresholds, https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-thresholds.html.

[23] The percent of renters in the United States (US), California (CA) and the Los Angeles MSA (LA) who were not caught up on their rent in 2020, 2021 and 2022, broken out by household income, is shown below (home owners are excluded).

	US '20	CA '20	LA '20	US '21	CA '21	LA '21	US '22	CA '22	LA '22
Less than $25,000	24%	22%	25%	23%	23%	26%	22%	23%	25%
$25,000 - $34,999	21%	21%	22%	20%	19%	19%	18%	17%	19%
$35,000 - $49,999	17%	15%	17%	16%	15%	18%	16%	19%	20%
$50,000 - $74,999	13%	11%	14%	11%	11%	14%	10%	12%	14%
$75,000 - $99,999	9%	9%	11%	8%	9%	8%	7%	6%	9%
$100,000 - $149,999	6%	7%	6%	6%	6%	7%	4%	4%	3%
$150,000 - $199,999	4%	3%	4%	4%	4%	3%	3%	4%	3%
$200,000 and above	4%	4%	3%	4%	3%	3%	3%	2%	0%

[24] The percent of renters in the United States (US), California (CA) and the Los Angeles MSA (LA) who said that it was extremely likely that they would be evicted in 2020, 2021 and 2022, broken out by household income, is shown below.

	US '20	CA '20	LA '20	US '21	CA '21	LA '21	US '22	CA '22	LA '22
Less than $25,000	19%	15%	18%	21%	15%	16%	20%	25%	28%
$25,000 - $34,999	16%	7%	9%	15%	14%	9%	16%	20%	13%
$35,000 - $49,999	14%	7%	8%	12%	11%	9%	13%	19%	9%
$50,000 - $74,999	11%	9%	8%	12%	12%	10%	12%	8%	7%

[25] The share of adults 18 to 64 years of age in each demographic group in 2020 who had household incomes under $35,000, had not worked in the past seven days and had no confidence that they could pay next month's rent or mortgage is shown in this table.

Demographic Group	United States	California	Los Angeles MSA
Male	3%	3%	4%
Female	4%	4%	5%
18-29	4%	3%	4%
30-44	4%	5%	5%

45-59	3%	3%	4%
60+	2%	3%	2%
European American	2%	1%	1%
African American	6%	4%	4%
Asian American	2%	2%	3%
Other Ethnicity	5%	4%	3%
Latino	6%	6%	7%
Single Adult	4%	4%	5%
Single Parent	9%	10%	8%
2+ Adults, No Children	2%	3%	3%
2+ Adults With Children	4%	5%	6%
No high school diploma	11%	11%	13%
High school graduate	5%	5%	7%
Some college	3%	3%	2%
Bachelor degree+	1%	1%	1%
All Adults	3%	4%	4%

[26] The demographic composition of adults 18-64, surveyed in 2020, with household incomes under $35,000 who had not worked in the past seven days and had no confidence that they could pay next month's rent or mortgage is shown in this table.

Demographic Group	United States	California	Los Angeles MSA
Male	39%	37%	42%
Female	61%	63%	58%
18-29	27%	22%	16%
30-44	42%	45%	44%
45-59	26%	29%	34%
60+	6%	4%	6%
European American	32%	16%	11%
African American	24%	6%	7%
Asian American	4%	10%	10%
Other Ethnicity	6%	6%	4%
Latino	34%	62%	68%
Single Adult	9%	7%	8%
Single Parent	10%	10%	6%
2+ Adults, No Children	33%	33%	33%
2+ Adults With Children	49%	51%	54%
No high school diploma	26%	36%	45%
High school graduate	43%	30%	26%
Some college	25%	26%	18%
Bachelor degree+	6%	8%	11%

[27] The Household Pulse Survey introduced non-binary gender identity categories in July 2021. However, the binary gender categories used at the beginning of the survey restrict data for 2020 to binary categories.

[28] California Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development Hospital Discharge Summary Reports, 2021 California Patient Discharge Data (2022), https://hcai.ca.gov/data-and-reports/healthcare-utilization/inpatient/

Average Length of Inpatient Stay – Days

	2019	2020	2021
Los Angeles County	5.3	5.7	5.8
California	5.1	5.4	5.5

[29] California Department of Public Health, "California Crisis Care Continuum Guidelines: Implementing During the Surge of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Cases," (December 28, 2020), https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CHCQ/LCP/Pages/AFL-20-91.aspx

[30] Hospitals began identifying homeless patients using ZZZZZ as the zip code for patients who did not have an address. The number of homeless patients identified in hospital records jumped in 2008 with the introduction of medical diagnostic code V600, enabling medical staff to identify "lack of housing" as a medical problem. The recorded number of homeless patients jumped again in 2019 when California's Department of Health Care Access and Information emphasized the need for hospitals to report this information.

[31] **Ethnic distribution of homeless hospital inpatients in California.**

Year	Other	African American	Latino	European American
1998	2%	27%	10%	61%
1999	3%	28%	9%	61%
2000	2%	24%	9%	65%
2001	3%	24%	10%	64%
2002	3%	24%	9%	64%
2003	2%	21%	9%	67%
2004	2%	21%	10%	66%
2005	3%	22%	12%	64%
2006	4%	24%	14%	58%
2007	4%	23%	14%	59%
2008	3%	20%	16%	61%
2009	3%	18%	16%	62%
2010	3%	18%	16%	63%
2011	3%	17%	17%	63%
2012	4%	19%	19%	58%
2013	5%	20%	20%	55%
2014	6%	20%	21%	53%
2015	6%	20%	21%	52%
2016	7%	21%	22%	51%
2017	8%	21%	22%	49%
2018	8%	21%	23%	48%
2019	10%	20%	24%	47%
2020	11%	19%	26%	44%
2021	11%	20%	27%	43%

[32] This breakout of medical diagnoses for homeless inpatients in California hospitals is from anonymized person-level records released by California's Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development (OSHPD) in 2014. This is the most recent year in which person-level patient discharge records were released.

[33] This list of medical conditions is based on the principal diagnosis identified in California OSHPD discharge records for homeless patients in 2014.

[34] Daniel Flaming, Patrick Burns and Jane Carlen, Economic Roundtable, *Escape Routes: Meta-Analysis of Homeless in Los Angeles County,* (2018), p. 39, https://economicrt.org/publication/escape-routes/

[35] Daniel Flaming, Patrick Burns, Gerald Sumner, Manuel Moreno, and Halil Toros, Economic Roundtable, *Crisis Indicator: Triage Tool for Identifying Homeless Adults in Crisis*, (2011), https://economicrt.org/publication/crisis-indicator/
Daniel Flaming, Patrick Burns, Gerald Sumner, and Susan Lee, Economic Roundtable, *Getting Home: Outcomes from Housing High Cost Homeless Hospital Patients*, (2013), https://economicrt.org/publication/getting-home/

[36] Will Nicholas, Lisa Greenwell, Cristina Edwards, and Laura Stroud, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Center for Health Impact Evaluation, *Mortality Among People Experiencing Homelessness in Los Angeles County One Year Before and After the COIVD-19 Pandemic,* (April 2022), http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/chie/reports/Homeless_Mortality_Report_2022.pdf

[37] City of Los Angeles Information Technology Agency, https://data.lacity.org/City-Infrastructure-Service-Requests/311-Homeless-Encampments-Requests/az43-p47q

[38] Emily Alpert Reyes, Benjamin Oreskes and Doug Smith, "L.A. is swamped with 311 complaints over homeless camps. But are the cleanups pointless?" Los Angeles Times, (June 7, 2019), https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-homeless-cleanups-accelerate-20190607-htmlstory.html

[39] City of Los Angeles Police Department, Crime Data, https://data.lacity.org/browse?q=crime&sortBy=relevance

[40] The eligibility requirements for General Relief are that individuals can have not have a monthly income that is greater than $221 and their personal property cannot be valued at more than $2,000 (https://dpss.lacounty.gov/en/cash/gr.html). Eligible individuals receive an average of $210 in cash benefits each month as well as access to CalFresh food subsidies and Medi-Cal health insurance. Given these scant benefits, eligible individuals are likely to be homeless and remain homeless unless a solution is found from another source.

[41] On July 14, 2022, when questioned about the reduction in the General Relief caseload, representatives of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services provided this explanation verbally at a meeting with community agencies.

[42] The Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services closed its offices on March 16, 2020 in an effort to slow the spread of Covid-19. https://covid19.lacounty.gov/covid19-2-2/closures/

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	Los Angeles County	California	United States
Current and projected unemployment rate			
2022	5.0%	4.2%	3.7%
2023	7.0%	6.2%	5.3%
2024	6.4%	5.6%	4.8%
2025	5.3%	4.9%	4.4%
Projected annual growth in unemployment			
2023	100,318	397,349	2,576,412
2024	73,400	280,036	1,916,612
2025	16,573	133,757	1,244,816
Percent of unemployed workers experiencing any type of point-in-time homelessness			
	10.3%	9.4%	7.1%
Projected type of homelessness			
Couch surfing	64.2%	73.2%	84.8%
HUD homelessness, including chronic	35.8%	26.8%	15.2%
HUD chronic homelessness	11.0%	8.1%	3.2%
Projected annual new entrants into homelessness of all types			
2023	1,181	4,600	24,386
2024	3,675	14,316	75,887
2025	6,822	26,575	140,869
2026	8,015	31,224	165,511

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