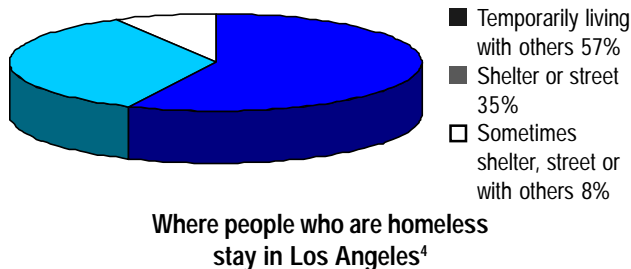


## WHO IS HOMELESS IN LOS ANGELES?

### WHAT DOES HOMELESS MEAN?

A *homeless person* is defined by the *Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987* as an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence or a person who resides in a shelter, welfare hotel, transitional program or place not ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodations, such as streets, cars, movie theatres, abandoned buildings, etc.<sup>1</sup> In addition, individuals who are staying in their own or someone else's home but will be asked to leave within the next month are considered homeless.<sup>2</sup> People in jail are not homeless.<sup>3</sup>



### HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE HOMELESS?

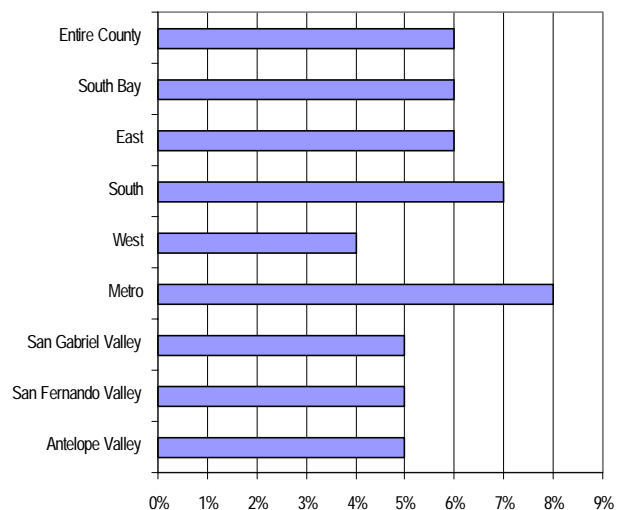
#### HOW ARE PEOPLE COUNTED?

The principal methodologies used to count homeless people are direct and indirect counts. Direct counts include street counts, shelter counts and service utilization counts. Indirect methods, such as telephone surveys and interviews, draw from statistically proportionate, representative samples to approximate the actual population.

Homeless counts tally the number of people at either one point-in-time (e.g., one day) or over a period of time (e.g., one year).

### LOS ANGELES

**Up to 236,400 men, women and children were homeless over the course of a year and up to 84,000 people were homeless each night in Los Angeles County,** according to a 1995 mixed methodology analysis conducted by Shelter Partnership, Inc. and cited by the City and County of Los Angeles. Approximately 46-49% were within the City of L.A.<sup>5</sup>



Percentage of Adults Who Were Homeless Within the Past Five Years, by Region, 1997<sup>6</sup>

**In Los Angeles County 375,000 adults have experienced homelessness in the past five years,** based on a 1997 large sample telephone survey conducted by the County of Los Angeles, Department of Health Services.<sup>7</sup>

According to a 1999 direct count commissioned by the City of Santa Monica and conducted by the Economic Roundtable, 1,037 people were homeless each day in Santa Monica, a city with a population of approximately 90,000. This figure does not include people temporarily staying with family or friends.<sup>8</sup>

**UNITED STATES**

A national estimate-over-time study indicates that roughly 7,000,000 people (3% of the population) were homeless between 1985 and 1990. In 1994, an estimated 600,000 people were homeless each night.<sup>9</sup>

**PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS...**

**FAMILIES AND CHILDREN**

*Families*, defined as a parent(s) with one or more children, represent 34-37% of the national homeless population.<sup>10</sup> The typical family has 2.2 minor children and is headed by the mother (84%).<sup>11</sup> Un-accompanied minors account for an estimated 3-7%.<sup>12</sup>

**SINGLE ADULT MEN AND WOMEN**

*Single individuals*, defined as married or unmarried adults not accompanied by children, constitute 66% of the entire homeless population. 77% of these single individuals are men and 23% are women.<sup>13</sup>

**AGE**<sup>15</sup>

Age (U.S.)	Single Adults	Parents
17-24	10%	26%
25-54	81%	74%
55 and older	9%	<1%

**ETHNICITY**

Los Angeles	Total Pop. <sup>16</sup>	Poor <sup>17</sup>	Homeless <sup>18</sup>
Latino	45%	68%	43%
White	35%	12%	35%
Asian Pacific Is.	11%	10%	5%
African American	8%	9%	17%
Native American	<1%	1%	<1%

**EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME**

In Los Angeles County in 1990, 76% of adults who were homeless had been employed for some or all of the two years prior to becoming homeless.<sup>19</sup> Nationally, the Interagency Council on Homelessness reports that 49% of homeless adults worked within the last 30 days and the U.S. Conference of Mayors cites a 21% employment rate.<sup>20</sup> Nationally, 37% receive food stamps; 28% receive means tested government benefits (welfare); 21%

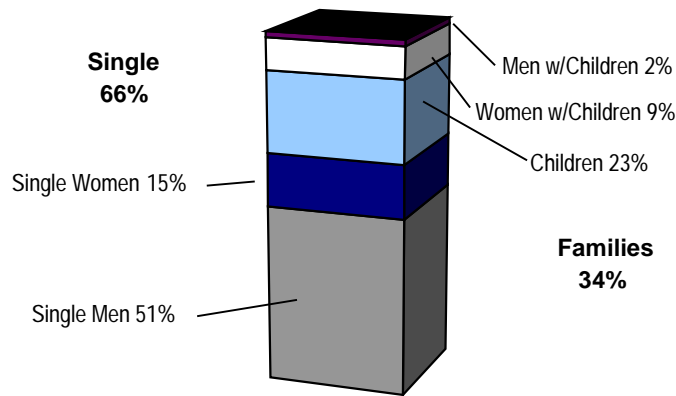
receive help from family, friends or child support; and 27% receive income from one or more of the following: panhandling, selling blood, illegal activities and other sources.<sup>21</sup>

**EDUCATION**

In Los Angeles, 17% of homeless adults have graduated from college; 32% have attended college and 51% have a high school education or less. Nationally, 2% of homeless adults have a college degree; 22% have completed some college; 38% have a high school diploma/GED/Vocational Training Certificate; and 39% did not finish high school.<sup>22</sup>

**VETERANS**

23% of homeless adults are veterans compared to 13% of all American adults.<sup>23</sup>



Family Status of Homeless People <sup>14</sup>

**MENTAL HEALTH**

Nationally, an estimated 19-45% of the homeless adult population have mental health problems, compared with 22.9% of the general population.<sup>24</sup> The City of Los Angeles Community Development Dept. estimates that 33-50% of the homeless population are mentally ill.<sup>25</sup>

The likelihood of mental health problems among single individuals or adults in families is about the same. However, the hospitalization rate for emotional or mental problems is 1.6 times higher for single individuals.<sup>26</sup>

**CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE**

According to the Interagency Council on the Homeless:<sup>27</sup>

- ➔ 27% of homeless adults lived in foster care, group home or other institutional settings as a child.
- ➔ 25% reported childhood physical or sexual abuse.
- ➔ 33% reported running away from home.
- ➔ 22% reported that they were forced to leave home as a child.

## SUBSTANCE ABUSE

National and local estimates of substance abuse (alcohol and/or drugs) among homeless adults range from 31% to 50%. The Interagency Council on the Homeless indicates 23% reported alcohol problems only, 12% drug problems only and 15% alcohol and drug problems.<sup>28</sup>

Single homeless individuals were more than twice as likely to have had alcohol problems in the past month than homeless parents and 1.35 times more likely to have had drug problems in the past month.<sup>29</sup>

In the U.S. general population 15.7% reported binge and/or heavy use of alcohol in the past month and 6.1% reported use of illicit drugs in the past month. Drug use was slightly higher for Californians: 7.2%.<sup>30</sup>

## HEALTH

Nationally, 46% of homeless adults reported one or more chronic health conditions, such as arthritis or high blood pressure; 26% reported an acute infectious condition, principally chest infections, colds, cough or bronchitis. 1% reported having AIDS and 3% reported testing HIV positive.<sup>31</sup>

## DURATION & EPISODES OF HOMELESSNESS

Length of Time Homeless (U.S.) <sup>32</sup>	Families	Single
< 1 week	12%	4%
1 week to 1mo.	10%	7%
1-3 months	27%	12%
4-6 months	11%	11%
7-12 months	16%	15%
13-24 months	11%	17%
25-60 months	5%	11%
5 or more years	8%	23%

Length of Time Homeless (L.A.) <sup>33</sup>	Families
Less than 2 months	42%
2-3 months	22%
4-6 months	15%
7-12 months	9%
Over 1 year	11%

Length of Time Homeless (L.A.) <sup>34</sup>	Single
Less than 1 month	31%
1-6 months	32%
6-12 months	11%
Over 1 year	32%

Forty-nine percent (49%) of individuals and families are homeless for the first time. Single individuals are more likely than families to be homeless three or more times (37% vs. 23%).<sup>35</sup>

## CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

The U.S. Conference of Mayors and/or the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development cite the following causes:<sup>36</sup>

- *Poverty*
- *Lack of affordable housing*
- *Substance abuse, mental illness and the lack of needed services*
- *Change in the labor market*
- *Low paying jobs*
- *Domestic violence*
- *Changes and cuts in public assistance programs*
- *Changes in family structure*
- *Chronic health problems and lack of access to affordable health care*

## SHELTERS

In Los Angeles County, 153 agencies operate 331 homeless shelters, providing 13,632 beds. This figure includes 8,602 beds in the City of Los Angeles. The number of beds in Los Angeles County cumulatively increased by 26% from 1997 to 2000.<sup>37</sup>

The U.S. Conference of Mayors reported a 9.1% annual increase in demand for emergency shelter in America's cities from 1994 to 1999.<sup>38</sup>

## THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF HOMELESSNESS AND POVERTY

The Institute, a project of the Weingart Center Association, is a non-profit, non-partisan, research and policy organization. The Institute serves as a bridge between academia and community-based organizations, government, the media, philanthropic organizations, policymakers and the public-at-large, providing accurate and reliable information, research and networking services.

## ENDNOTES

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**THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF  
HOMELESSNESS AND POVERTY**

*at the Weingart Center*  
**566 S. San Pedro Street  
Los Angeles, California 90013  
Phone: 213/627-8068 ext. 41  
Fax: 213/627-4031  
E-mail: [institute@weingart.org](mailto:institute@weingart.org)**

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