

# Findings: Prevalence of Homelessness – Example of Alameda County Health Care for the Homeless

## Homeless Prevalence

Accurately determining the number of persons experiencing homelessness is complex and political, with risk of underreporting and differing definitions of homelessness. Methods used to count homeless persons include: **Point-in-time count or PITC**, a count the number of homeless persons in a given point in time; and **Homeless Services Utilization Count**, of which we look at the numbers of persons who received homeless services (health care and housing/support services and school homeless services). Through these data sources we can develop an estimate of the number of people who experience homelessness over a given period of time (**period prevalence count**). Finally, a **Homeless Registry** can be utilized to gather detailed, person-specific data about persons experiencing homelessness that service providers can then use to expedite housing, determine the scope of homelessness, and track changes over time.

## Definitions of Homelessness

There are three federal definitions of homelessness, each depending on funding source:

Entity:	HUD – Department of Housing and Urban Development	HHS/HRSA	Schools/Department of Education
Funding Source applied to:	HUD housing, Supportive Housing Programs, Emergency Solutions Grants, Shelter+Care, HMIS data system	Health Center programs including HCH Program and FQHC Community Health Centers.	Eligibility for school district-based support services for homeless students.
Reference:	24 CFR Parts 91, 582, and 583 <sup>1</sup>	Section 330 of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C., 254b) <sup>2</sup>	McKinney-Vento Act Sec. 725(2); 42 U.S.C. 11435(2) <sup>3</sup>
Definitions including places or place of residence:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Streets or places unfit for human habitation</li> <li>Shelters or transitional programs</li> <li>Fleeing from domestic violence</li> <li>About to be evicted</li> <li><b>Does not</b> include persons who are doubled up in an unstable situation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Streets, shelters, programs, and <b>includes</b> persons who are doubled up in an unstable situation.</li> <li>Also can include children and veterans <i>at risk</i> of homelessness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Streets, shelters, programs, and <b>includes</b> families who are doubled up due to lack of alternative accommodations.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/HEARTH\\_HomelessDefinition\\_FinalRule.pdf](https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/HEARTH_HomelessDefinition_FinalRule.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://bphc.hrsa.gov/policiesregulations/legislation/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> [http://center.serve.org/nche/ibt/sc\\_eligibility.php](http://center.serve.org/nche/ibt/sc_eligibility.php)

### HUD CCC Point In Time Count 2019:

Beginning in 2003, Continuum of Care (CoC) regions have conducted a point-in-time biennial Homeless Point In Time Count (PITC) per HUD mandate. The PITC data and analysis should be available to your jurisdiction (for example Alameda County's <https://everyonehome.org/main/continuum-of-care/everyone-counts/>). In our region, the last PITC was held on January 30, 2019.<sup>4</sup> On that night, surveyors identified 8,022 persons as experiencing homelessness. Of those, 1,710 were sheltered (living in shelters or transitional housing) and 6,312 persons were identified as unsheltered, living on streets, cars or places unfit for human habitation (**Figure 6**). This is often called **Literally Homeless**, or **HUD-defined homeless**, and does not include people that are doubled up or at risk of becoming homeless.

Alameda County's 2019 Point In Time Count uses methodology based on the federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition of homelessness. HUD's

### Sheltered/ Unsheltered Population



definition excludes persons in precarious living situations, in institutions such as jails or hospitals, doubled-up or sleeping on floors or couches of families or others, living day-to-day or week-to-week in motels or SROs, in tenuous overcrowded situations, or trading sex for shelter. Persons in these homeless situations, defined as homeless by HHS/HRSA and Department of Education, are *not* represented in these counts.

The Point In Time Count significantly undercounts the homeless population and does not include in its count unsheltered homeless persons not using support services, not in visible locations during the count, and who cannot be identified to participate. These are the hardest to reach groups. Point-in-time counts overestimate chronic homelessness and underestimate short periods of homelessness such as persons and families whose homelessness is episodic.

**Yearly Count of Literally Homeless:** The Point In Time Count counts those experiencing literal homelessness on a single night. To project how many persons will experience literal homelessness throughout the year, there are two approaches: First, Alameda County CoC uses survey data to find that 2.2% of homeless persons surveyed had been homeless for less than 7 days. This proportion is multiplied by the total homeless<sup>5</sup> to arrive at 9,177 new homeless per year, or to project that 17,199 households will experience literal/HUD homelessness in 2019. Second, at the federal level, HUD has used a method of multiplying the PITC number by 2.58 to produce an estimate of total persons experiencing homelessness as defined by HUD criteria, or 20,697 persons<sup>6</sup>. So we can project some 17,200-21,000 households will experience literal homelessness in 2019.

**Yearly Count Including Doubled-Up Homeless.** It is much more difficult to arrive at an accurate count of those who will experience HHS/HRSA/Department of Education homelessness. According to analysis published by the Urban Institute (2000), multiplying the PITC single night count by a low of 4.15 to a high

<sup>4</sup> 2019 Alameda County Everyone Counts Homeless Point-In-Time Count and Survey <http://everyonehome.org/everyone-counts/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://everyonehome.org/about/the-plan/> methodology page 34.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). (2017). *The 2016 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*. Washington, DC. [HUD's 2016 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress](#), found 549,928 persons homeless in a one-night PITC count in 2016, and reported 1,421,196 persons homeless during the calendar year. This ratio of 2.58, gives us an estimate of 20,697 persons experiencing homelessness as defined by HUD criteria, in Alameda County during 2019.

of 5.18 can give a rough estimate of yearly prevalence of homelessness, under an expanded HRSA definition<sup>7</sup>. **This suggests that some 33,291 persons may experience homelessness (as defined by HHS/HRSA) in Alameda County in 2019.**<sup>8</sup> This constitutes almost 2% of the county population.

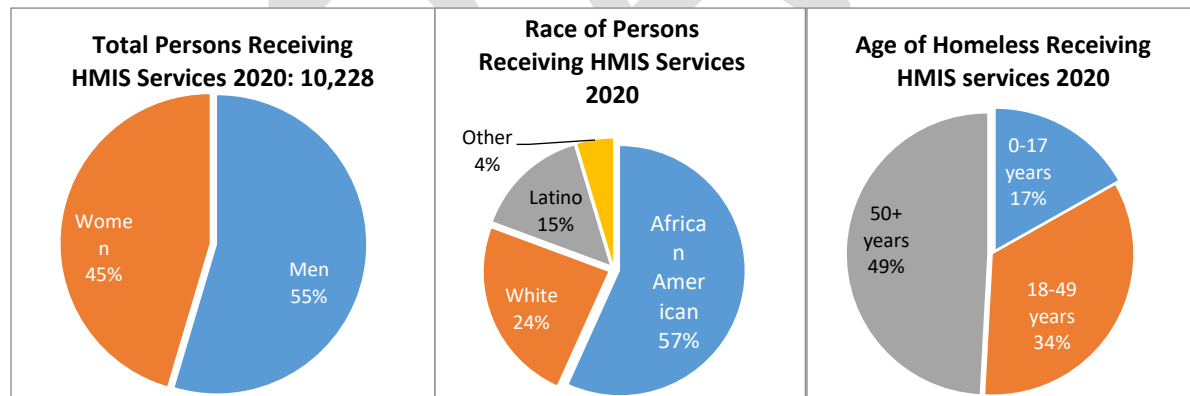
**Homeless Services Utilization Count: Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)**

Utilization of homeless services is another way to estimate the total number of homeless persons. Since 2003, Alameda County CoC has implemented a County-wide Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) as a requirement for recipients of HUD funding. Many, but not all, county homeless shelters, housing and services providers input utilization data into the HMIS. Homelessness is defined using the narrow HUD criteria (not including persons that are doubled up). Alameda County Housing and Community Development counted a total of 10,288 persons utilizing HMIS services for 2020.

In addition to undercounting the doubled-up and hidden homeless, not eligible for many services, this number likely undercounts the number of persons who denied homeless services for other reasons, those who do not seek services, and services providers who do not report data in the HMIS system.

A broad overview of demographics of these 10,228 persons experiencing homelessness who utilized county HMIS homeless services in 2013 is in **Figure 7**<sup>9</sup>. This population is 55% male, disproportionately (57%) African American, over half have medical insurance, a third have zero income, and 15% have employment income, and the average age is just below 50 years old. 18% of the households are families with children, 82% single persons..

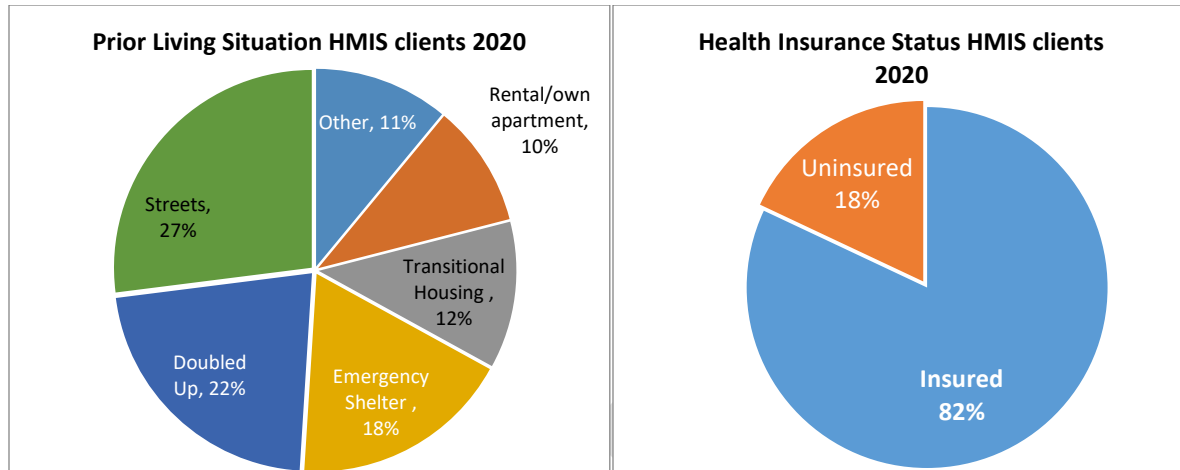
**Figure 7**



<sup>7</sup> A New Look at Homelessness in America, Martha Burt, Urban Institute, 2000, <http://www.urban.org/publications/900302.html#burt>

<sup>8</sup> National Coalition for the Homeless, [http://www.nationalhomeless.org/factsheets/How\\_Many.html](http://www.nationalhomeless.org/factsheets/How_Many.html)

<sup>9</sup> EveryOne Home, Alameda County Housing and Community Development, CY2013 HMIS Utilization Report System Wide without Permanent Supportive Housing and Services to Permanent Supportive Housing.



Source HMIS, 2020

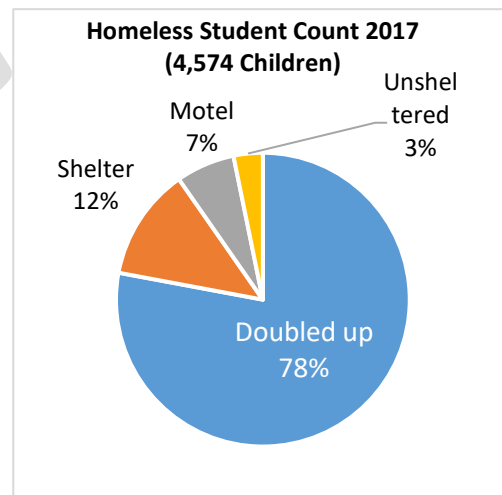
### 2017 Homeless Services Utilization Count: McKinney Vento Homeless School Count

The School Count is a method to include homeless families that normally do not access shelters, are more likely to be doubled up or living in motels, and are not likely to be counted in a Point In Time Count. The McKinney-Vento Act provides support services for homeless children attending public and charter schools in counties nationwide<sup>10 11</sup>.

In Alameda County, the Alameda County Office of Education collects data on homeless students from 19 school districts and charter schools in the County. The total count for 2016-2017 was 4,574 students registered as homeless<sup>12</sup> (See Figure 8). This is an undercount, as it does not include children not enrolled in public preschool programs, and a likely high number of youth and children who are experiencing homelessness who do not identify their status to school officials.

Although all these 4,574 school children were eligible for educational assistance (transportation, supplies), 85% of them are **ineligible** for HUD-funded shelter, short-term or permanent housing programs, as they are living in doubled-up or in a motel, and do not fit strict HUD/HMIS criteria for homelessness.

Figure 8



Source ACOE, 2017

<sup>11</sup> If a child's family is homeless (according to HRSA definitions) they are able -- under the federal McKinney-Vento Act -- to access free transportation and to attend their school of origin regardless of where their family temporarily resides. Schools must register homeless children even if they lack normally required documents, such as immunization records or proof of residence. The state of California creates procedures, including dispute resolution procedures, to ensure that homeless children are able to attend school. Local school districts appoint Local Education Liaisons to ensure that school staff is aware of these rights, to provide public notice to homeless families (at shelters and at school) and to facilitate access to school and transportation services.

<sup>12</sup> California Department of Education, California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) report run 6/14/2018 for academic year 2016-2017. Report provided by Alameda County Office of Education.

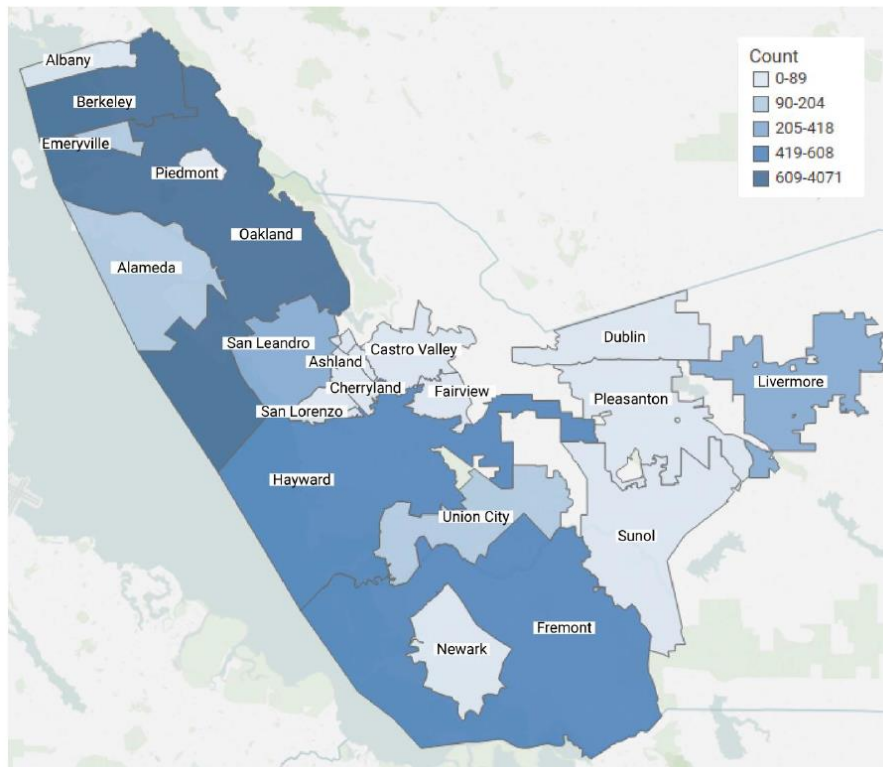
According to HMIS homeless utilization data (shelters, support services), 38% of children in families meeting HUD homeless criteria are under age 5, and not of school age. Thus, the true count of homeless children is higher, or an estimated 7,376 children aged 0-18. Assuming that there is an average of 2 children per family, and an estimated 50% of these families headed by a single parent, there are at least another 5,531 adults living with the homeless children. **Based on the 2016-2017 Homeless School Count, an estimated 12,908 persons living within family units (including parents and children under 18 years) experienced homelessness in Alameda County in 2017.** Again, this number includes only those living in family units, and does not include single persons.

### Finding: Homeless Prevalence in Alameda County 2019

Following the HHS definition of homelessness (including doubled-up persons), and utilizing the methodology used by Urban Institute<sup>13</sup>, ACHCH estimates that **a minimum of 33,000 Alameda County residents experienced at least one episode homelessness as defined by HRSA/HHS** at some point during 2019. This number, likely an undercount, amounts to some 1.95% of the total Alameda County population.

Based on countywide HMIS utilization data capturing city of last residence, we can roughly estimate the total numbers of persons who experienced HUD (sheltered or unsheltered but NOT including doubled-up) homelessness in 2019 by city in Alameda County (Figures 9 and 10):

FIGURE 10. TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS BY JURISDICTION



<sup>13</sup> A New Look at Homelessness in America, Martha Burt, Urban Institute, 2000, <http://www.urban.org/publications/900302.html#burt>

FIGURE 9. TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS BY JURISDICTION AND SHELTER STATUS

Jurisdiction	2017			2019		
	Sheltered	Unsheltered	Total	Sheltered	Unsheltered	Total
Alameda	94	110	204	99	132	231
Albany	0	66	66	0	35	35
Berkeley	308	664	972	295	813	1,108
Dublin	0	21	21	0	8	8
Emeryville	0	29	29	0	178	178
Fremont	197	282	479	123	485	608
Hayward	84	313	397	115	372	487
Livermore	102	141	243	85	179	264
Newark	42	28	70	30	59	89
Oakland	859	1,902	2,761	861	3,210	4,071
Piedmont	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pleasanton	0	18	18	0	70	70
San Leandro	54	55	109	74	344	418
Union City	0	40	40	0	106	106
Unincorporated	26	194	220	28	321	349
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,766</b>	<b>3,863</b>	<b>5,629</b>	<b>1,710</b>	<b>6,312</b>	<b>8,022</b>

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