

Mortal Systemic Exclusion Yielded Steep Mortality-Rate Increases In People Experiencing Homelessness, 2011–20

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Background



Research shows a relationship between homelessness and increased mortality



Previous studies rely on limited locally-specific data, primarily in coastal cities and counties

Research Question

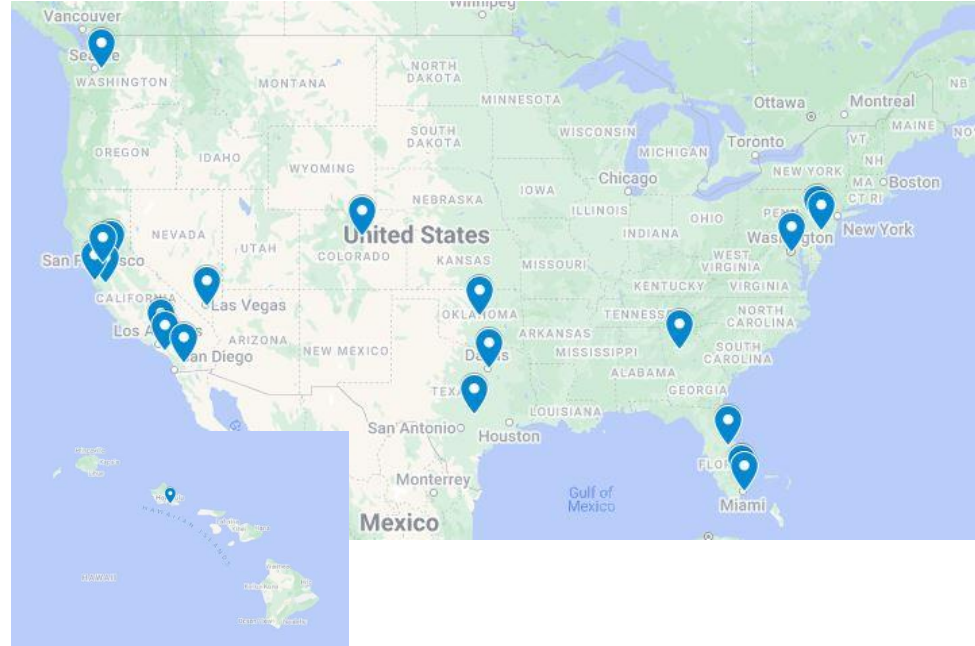


How have all-cause & cause-specific mortality rates changed over time for people experiencing homelessness across the US?

Methods

Data

- Unique dataset that includes **22,143** homeless decedents in **22 localities** from **2011 – 2020**
- Individual-level death records assembled from local medical examiners, coroners, sheriff's offices, and departments of public health



Methods

Analysis

- Manual coding of text descriptions of cause of death according to categories established by ICD-10
- Compressed into 14 causes of death, plus “other” and “unknown”

- Annual point-in-time count data used to calculate crude mortality rate per 100,000 people

Results

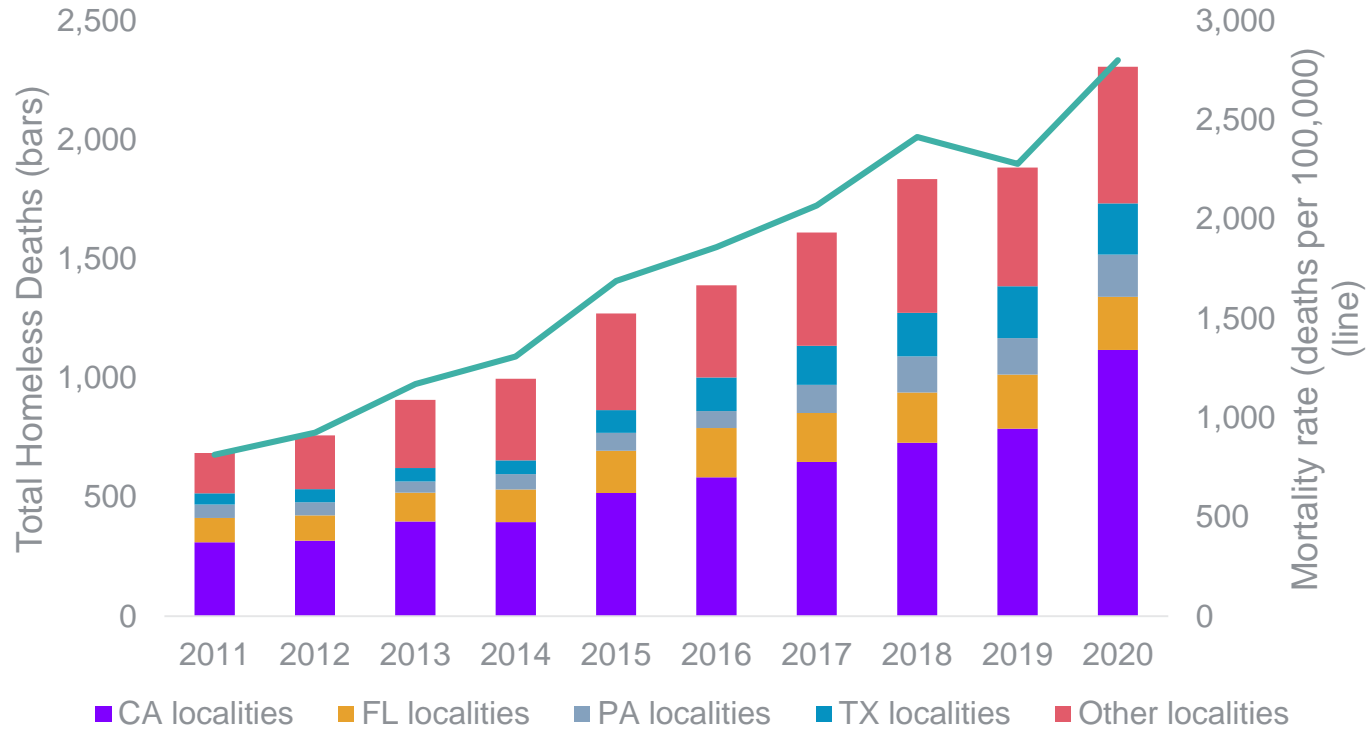
Average age of death: **51**

Demographics

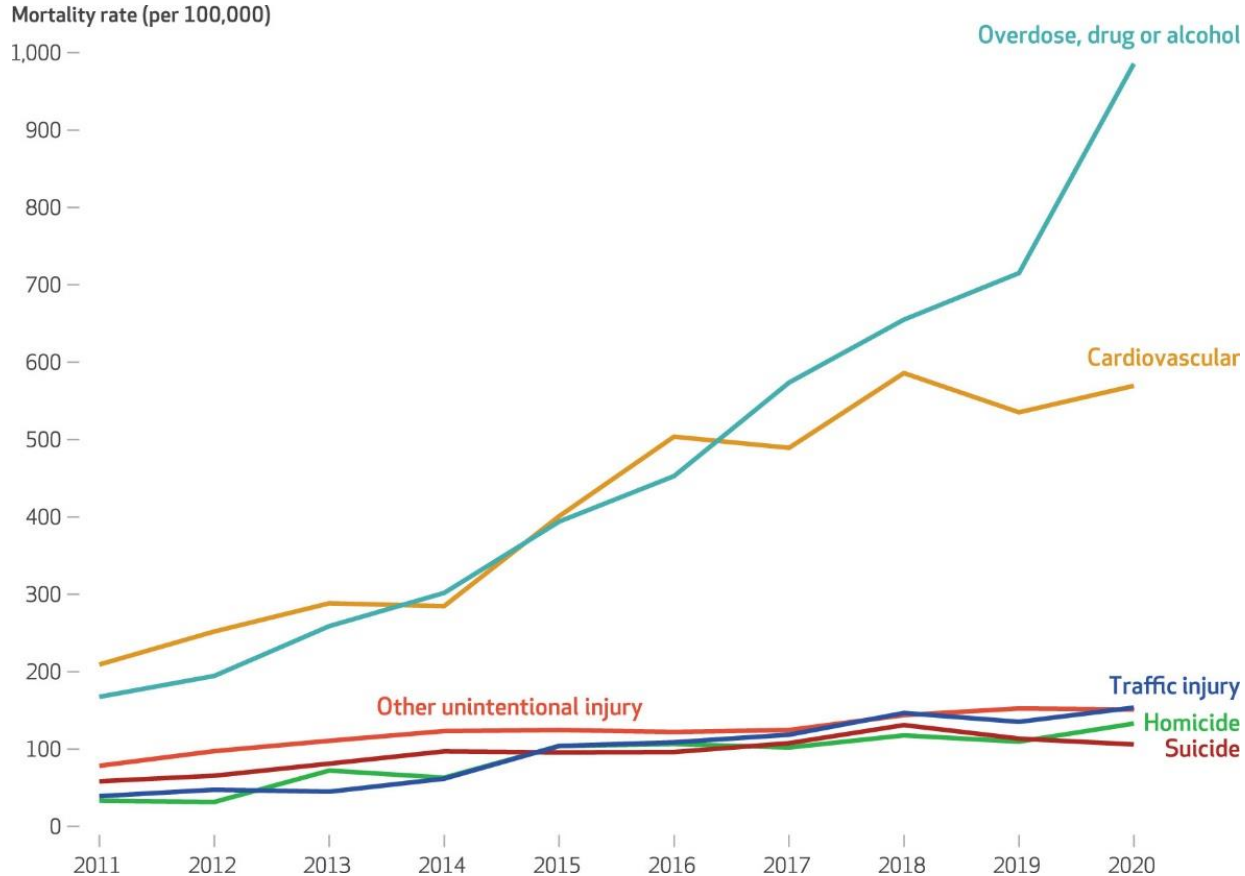
- **82% male**
- **53% White**
- **22% Black**
- **18% Hispanic or Latino**

Causes of death		
Brain	365	1.7
Cancer	242	1.1
Cardiovascular	5,356	24.2
Chronic or other substance use	766	3.5
Diabetes	251	1.1
Digestive or urinary	879	4.0
Hot or cold climate exposure	461	2.1
Homicide	1,146	5.2
Infection	621	2.8
Other unintentional injury	1,529	6.9
Other	88	0.4
Overdose, drug or alcohol	6,373	28.8
Respiratory	710	3.2
Suicide	1,192	5.4
Traffic injury	1,284	5.8
Unknown	880	4.0

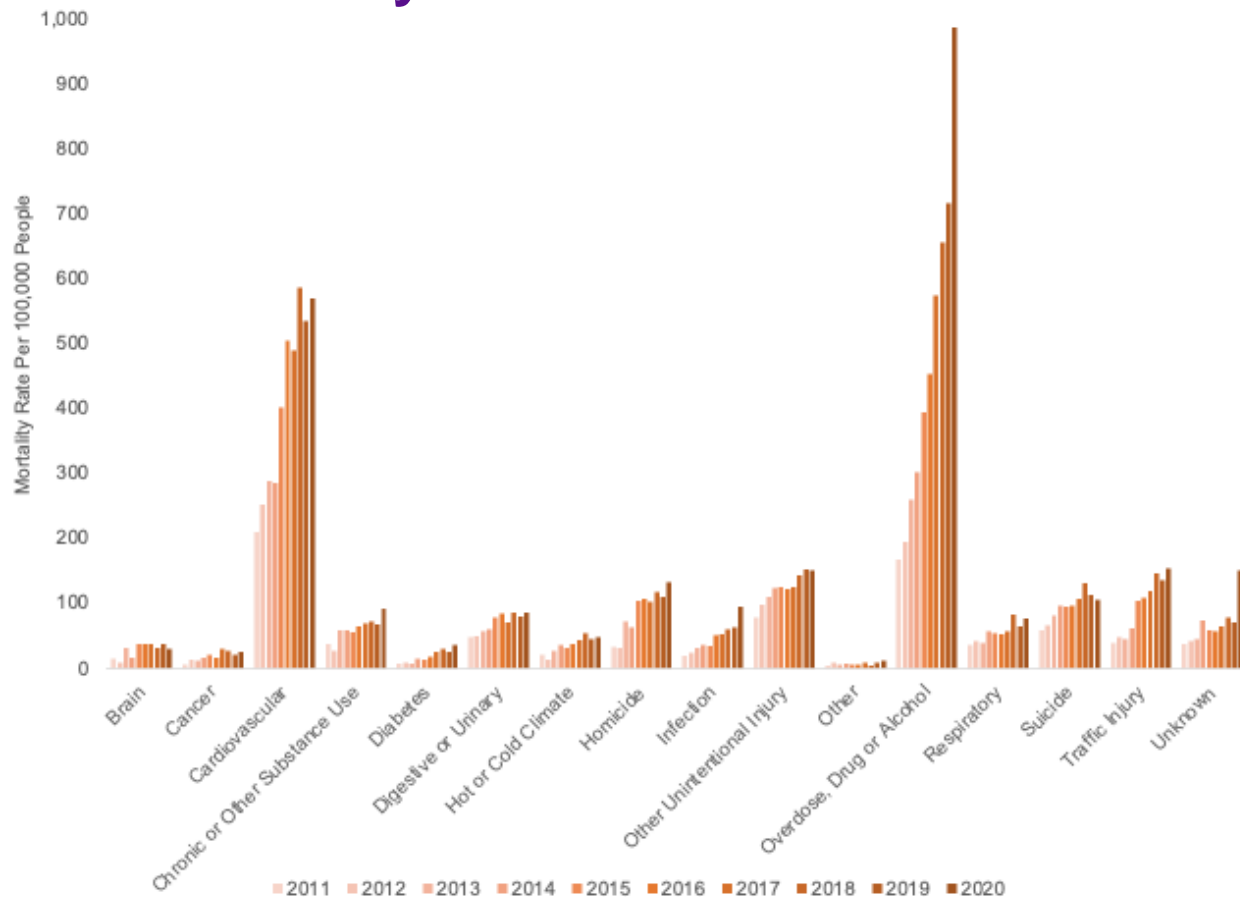
All Cause Mortality Trend



Cause-Specific Mortality Trends



Cause-Specific Mortality Trends



Discussion

- Steep **increases** in **all-cause** & **cause-specific mortality** rate from 2011-2020
- Sharp rise in deaths due to **alcohol or drug overdose**, which was also the leading cause of death overall during the study period
- Notable rise in **violent and/or preventable deaths**, we argue due to **systematic** and **worsening** exclusion from the life-affirming institutions of housing and healthcare



This scale of preventable death represents a form of *mortal systemic exclusion* in which governments have failed to meet the most basic needs of people experiencing homelessness.

Implications

Need for:



Policy on local, state, and federal level



Health-specific interventions



Increase access to evidence-based
substance use treatment & interventions



Collection and standardization of homeless
mortality data

“The most effective form of mortality prevention is preventing the occurrence of homelessness in the first place and rehousing people experiencing homelessness as quickly and stably as possible.”



Life, Death, and the Streets In Between

Oral Histories of People Who Died Without Homes



Staff who were involved in collecting and providing access to mortality data in 22 localities

Co-author Matthew Z. Fowle



**Dedicated to the
thousands of
people who lost
their lives while
experiencing
homelessness.**

Department of Population Health

