

IMPERIAL COUNTY

# 2018 Homeless Point-in-Time Count and Survey



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IMPERIAL COUNTY

# 2018 Homeless Point-in-Time Count and Survey

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# Summary Introduction

## I. Summary Introduction

The following report presents a detailed picture of homelessness in Imperial County, with notes on the overall number of people experiencing homelessness at a single point in time and features of the homeless population, including demographics and household composition, communities where the homeless reside, special needs of individuals and families experiencing homelessness, and implications for policy and program implementation. The key findings of the report include:



Total estimated county-wide homelessness increased from 1,154 in January 2017 to 1,493 in January 2018, an increase of 29.4%.



There were fewer "chronically homeless" people in 2018 than 2017.



There were more homeless veterans, seniors, youth, and survivors of domestic violence in 2018 than 2017.



The number of homeless people counted in Slab City increased by 26% from 2017 to 2018.



The number of people in emergency shelters and transitional housing programs grew from 128 to 160, but the number of unsheltered people increased more in both absolute and relative terms than the increase in shelter capacity.

A photograph of a person's bare feet, with the right foot slightly behind the left, resting on a dark, rough, and textured surface. The lighting is warm and focused on the feet, creating a somber and intimate mood. The image is partially overlaid by a black text box on the left side.

# About the Point-in-Time Count



## II. About the Point-in-Time Count

The Homeless Point-in-Time Count (PITC) is conducted annually throughout the country by cities and counties as required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The PITC occurs in the last 10 days of January each year, allowing volunteers and staff from local agencies to count and interview people sleeping in unsheltered locations during the winter months. The PITC does not and cannot account for all people in any community who will experience homelessness at some time throughout the year, but it provides an annual snapshot that allows for year-to-year comparisons of the number of people experiencing homelessness in each regional Continuum of Care (CoC). The count also includes homeless persons in shelters and transitional housing as well as those who are unable or unwilling to access such programs.

The data from the PITC is compiled and reported to HUD by uploading it to the Homeless Data Exchange (HDX), a national database that sorts and stores information from all CoCs. With the PITC occurring in the winter, shelters nationwide are at their fullest and the remaining unsheltered population living on the streets, in makeshift habitats or other circumstances, is presumed to be the most vulnerable and hard to reach subset of the overall homeless population. PITC data serves as HUD's basis for its annual funding of CoC nationwide, which is allocated through an annual competition to nonprofit providers and state and local governments to achieve three key outcomes:

1



2



3

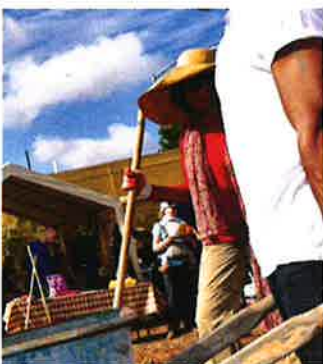




# Three Key Recommendations



**Quickly rehouse homeless individuals and families**



**Promote access to mainstream programs by homeless individuals and families**




**Improve self-sufficiency among individuals and families experiencing homelessness**

This year's Imperial County PITC was conducted on January 26 and 27. The results of the count include an increase in total homelessness countywide, with increases among certain subpopulations and significant decreases in other subpopulations. The count points to areas of concern and notable improvements, which are described in this report. This is the second year that the PITC has been conducted with its current methodology and scope and, as such, its data procedures and results offer only brief longitudinal comparisons. Volunteers administer surveys that form one major component of the report's data, which entails some risk to the data's validity from possible bias in data collection. However, the PITC follows nationwide practices and represents the best available data on the homeless population to date. Furthermore, survey data relies on the self-report of individuals experiencing homelessness and represents a statistically appropriate sample size relative to the counted population of total homeless individuals, though not a fully surveyed population, leaving some margin of error in the PITC's statistical reporting.

In 2017, Imperial County CoC (CA-613) applied for just over \$225,000 for two rapid rehousing programs, one transitional housing program, one coordinated assessment project and one CoC planning grant. Of that request, \$178,875 was awarded out of HUD's determined regional eligibility of \$602,886, inclusive of a base annual renewal amount, preliminary pro rata need, planning and information management, and potential bonus funds for permanent housing projects. Thus, the region received just 29.7% of its potential HUD funding for homeless projects, missing out on \$424,011. The reasons for this disparity are discussed in subsequent sections, along with similar shortfalls in potential California Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) funding and other implications for the county's ability to secure state and federal resources.

This report is intended in part to address Imperial County's status quo response to homelessness and as one small component of structural and systematic changes already underway to help close the gap between potential and actual federal funding for homeless projects. The report is also intended to inform Imperial County Continuum of Care (IVCCC) member organizations and county and municipal governments on the state of homelessness throughout the county, emerging trends, successes, and areas of urgent need.



**This report is intended in part to address Imperial County's status quo response to homelessness and as one small component of structural and systematic changes already underway to help close the gap between potential and actual federal funding for homeless projects.**





# Total Homeless Population

### **III. Total Homeless Population**

For the PITC, homeless people were counted according to HUD's definition of homelessness, which includes only individuals and households who met one of the two following criteria at the time of the count:

**An unsheltered homeless person/household resides in:**

**A place not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings, or on the street**

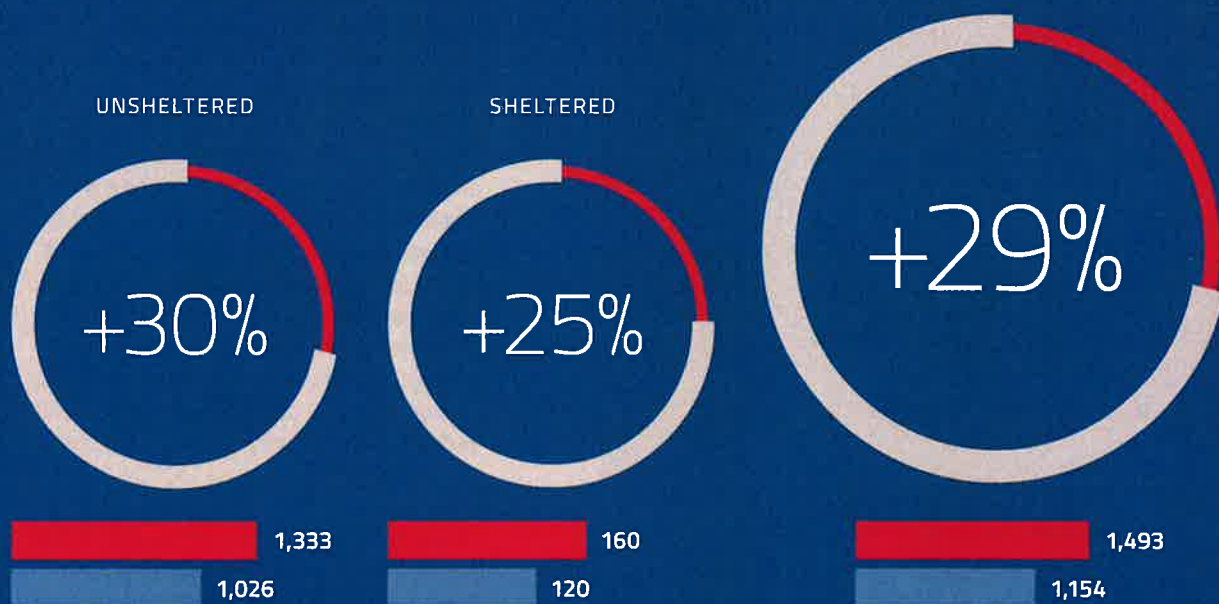
**A sheltered homeless person/household resides in:**

**A supervised publicly or privately-operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local government programs)**



Using HUD's definition, the total population of unsheltered and sheltered homeless people counted in Imperial County on January 26, 2018, was 1,493. Totals are the sum of 566 individuals included in 294 surveys of homeless households and 927 individuals observed in the community but not surveyed. The table below shows the total number of unsheltered and sheltered individuals in the 2018 count, the figures from 2017 and a percentage change from year to year.

# Total Homeless Population





Although local shelter operators had a sheltered population 25% higher in 2018 than 2017, the unsheltered population grew even faster than increased shelter capacity could keep pace with. There is more than one contributing factor to the observed and reported increase in county homelessness. The first factor is that counts prior to 2018 might have under-reported the extent of the problem. In 2017, the PITC followed a new methodology that deployed more volunteers to difficult-to-reach areas of the county, penetrating into hidden pockets of homelessness. Along with a better organized system of calculating findings and a new model for counting homelessness in slab city, the new methodology established a total population in 2017 that was 69% higher than that reported in 2016. Further refinement of the new method and approach no doubt identified homeless encampments in 2018 that were overlooked in 2017. As just one example, the inclusion of Bombay Beach in this year's count documented 136 homeless individuals in a community that was not counted last year.

However, refinements to the system do not account entirely for the nearly one-third growth in overall county homelessness. Providers of services and shelter operators also report a real and observed increase in need, some of which is attributable to in-migration of homeless people from adjacent counties.

Other key insights from this year's PITC are discussed in the following sections.

# IV



## Significant Changes from Prior Year's Count



# Chronic Homelessness

## IV. Significant Changes from Prior Year's Count

Within the PITC's total count are subpopulations, communities, and variables affecting the county as a whole that contribute to the increase from last year. In the first instance, the count includes a 300% increase in the number of youth and young adults ages (18 to 24), more than a 150% increase in the number of seriously mentally ill people and survivors of domestic violence, and an increase in excess of 500% in the number of homeless veterans. With those negative trends come a few positive trends, including dramatic reductions in overall homelessness in a few communities and a reduction of more than 40% in the number of "chronically homeless" persons county-wide. Chronic homelessness by federal definition refers to either of the following:

**An unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition**

**who has been continuously homeless for a year or more.**

**An unaccompanied individual with a disabling condition**

**who has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.**

Reducing chronic homelessness in all CoCs has been a focus of HUD policy for many years and Imperial County's progress in that regard is noteworthy.

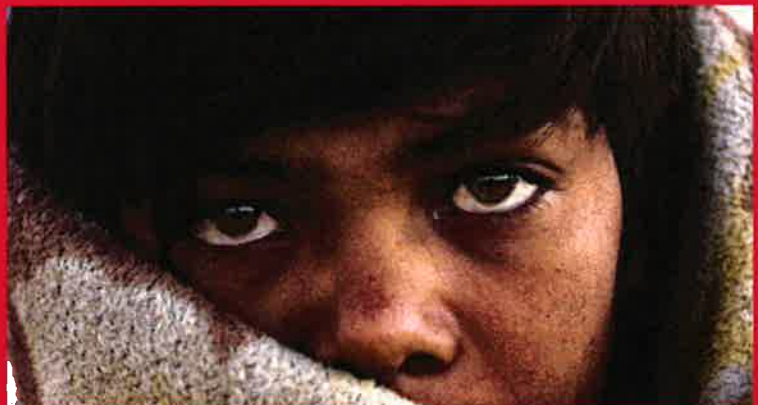
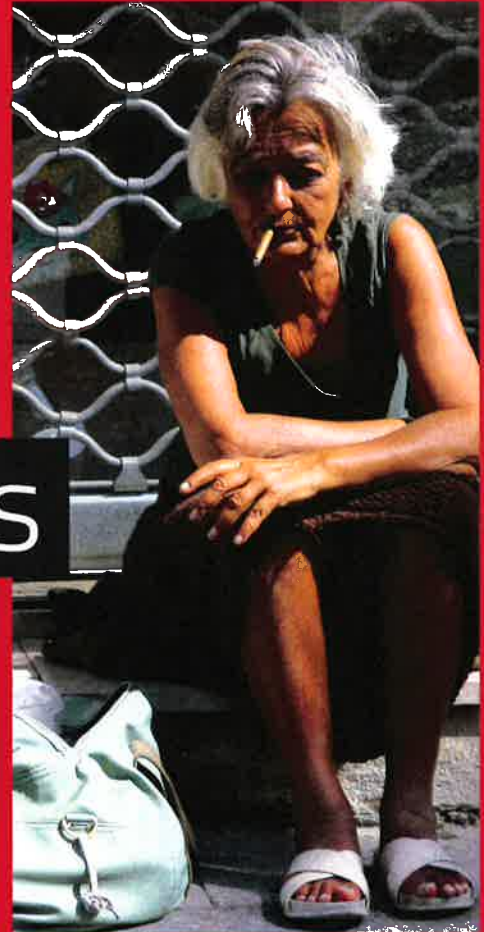
Along with general demographics of the homeless population, the following section includes detailed information on the increase in homelessness among special needs groups, the decrease in chronic homelessness, and other trends among sensitive sub-populations.



Photo courtesy of Imperial Valley Press

V

# Homeless Subpopulations

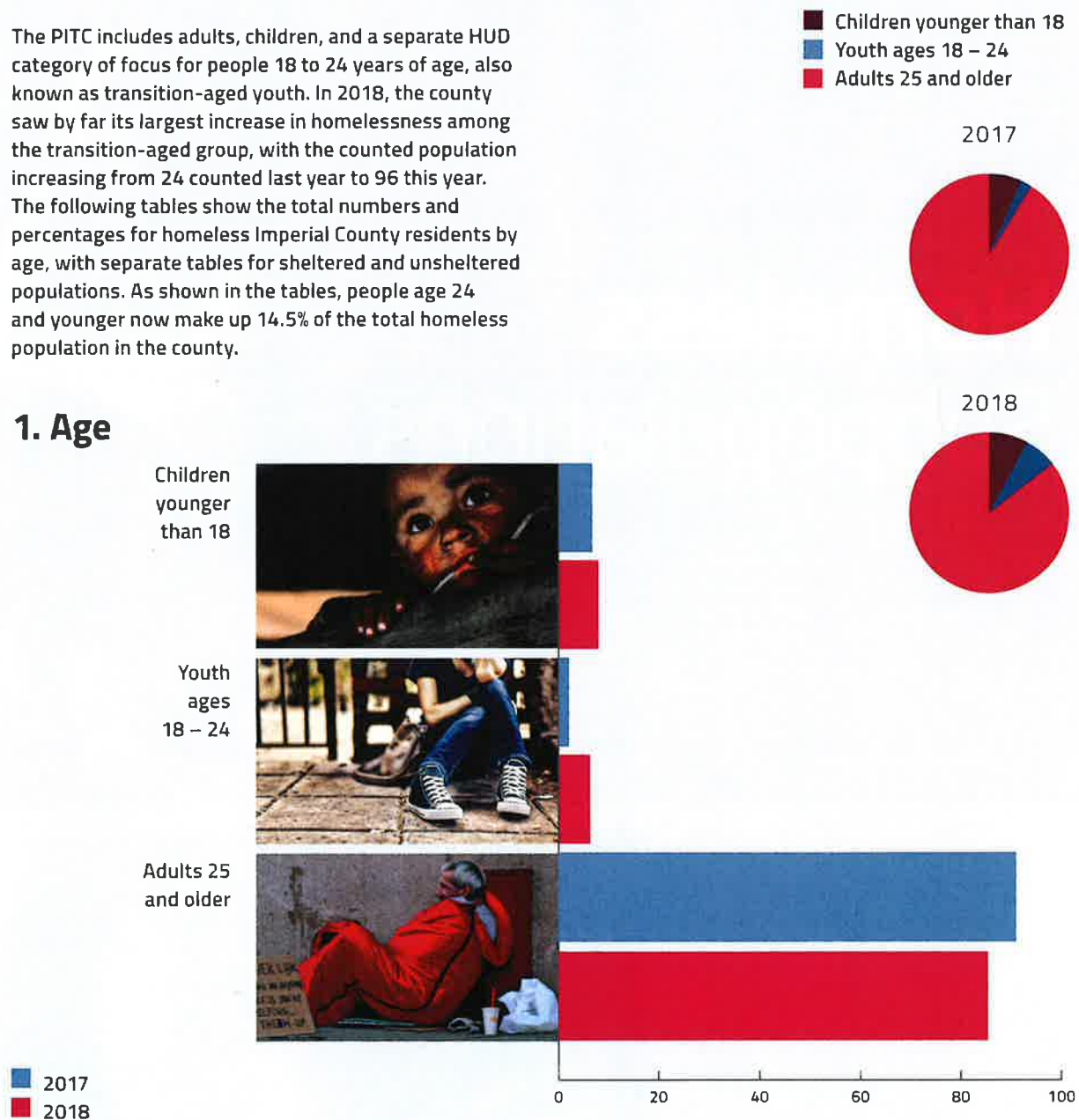


## V. Homeless Subpopulations

### A. Age, Gender, Race and Ethnicity

The PITC includes adults, children, and a separate HUD category of focus for people 18 to 24 years of age, also known as transition-aged youth. In 2018, the county saw by far its largest increase in homelessness among the transition-aged group, with the counted population increasing from 24 counted last year to 96 this year. The following tables show the total numbers and percentages for homeless Imperial County residents by age, with separate tables for sheltered and unsheltered populations. As shown in the tables, people age 24 and younger now make up 14.5% of the total homeless population in the county.

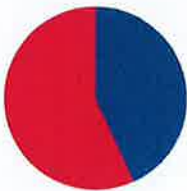
#### 1. Age



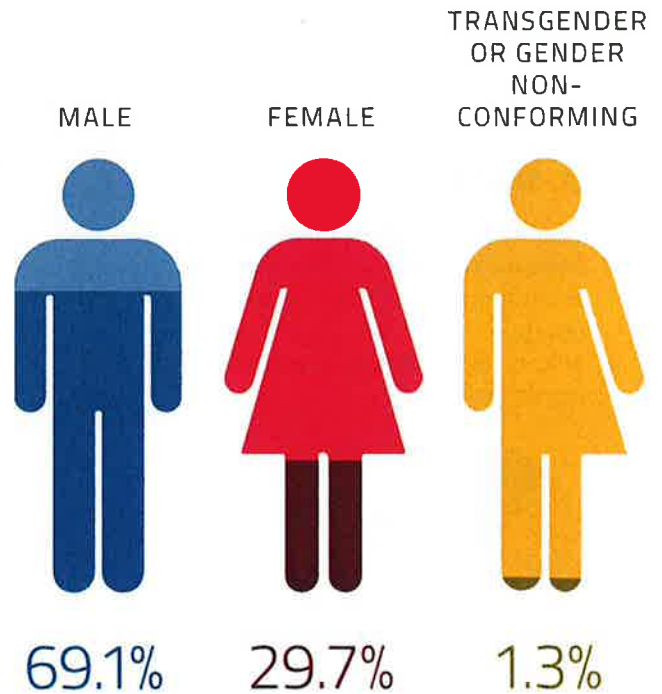
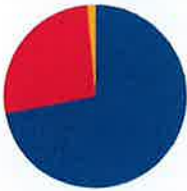
## 2. Genders

As in 2017, by far the majority of homeless people county-wide are men. However, the majority of sheltered homeless people are women. The following table presents the number of homeless individuals by gender county-wide, followed by a table showing the gender division between sheltered and unsheltered populations.

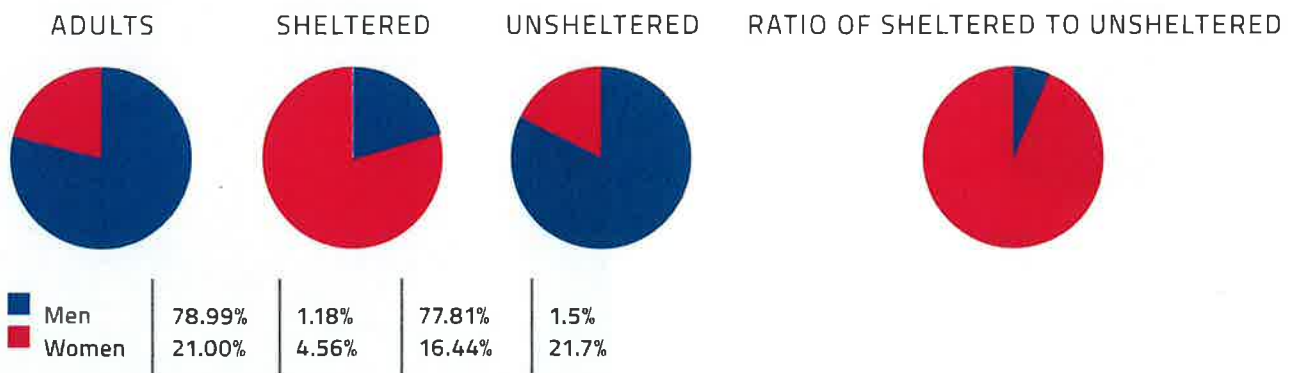
SHELTERED



UNSHELTERED



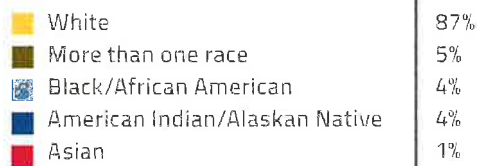
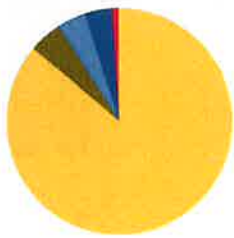
Excluding children from the above numbers, adult men and women make up nearly 85% of the overall homeless population. Of all homeless adults, 267 (21%) are women and 1,004 (79%) are men. Men living alone or in households without children are by far the largest single subset of the total homeless population. However, single men make up less than 10% of the total sheltered population, with just 15 shelter beds occupied by single men at the county's only men's shelter, Our Lady of Guadalupe, in Calexico.





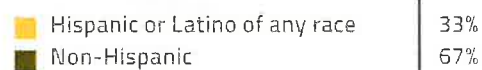
### 3. Race

The racial composition of Imperial County's homeless population is reflective of the county as a whole, with the vast majority of homeless people (87%) identifying as White, and all other races accounting for only single-digit percentages.



### 4. Ethnicity

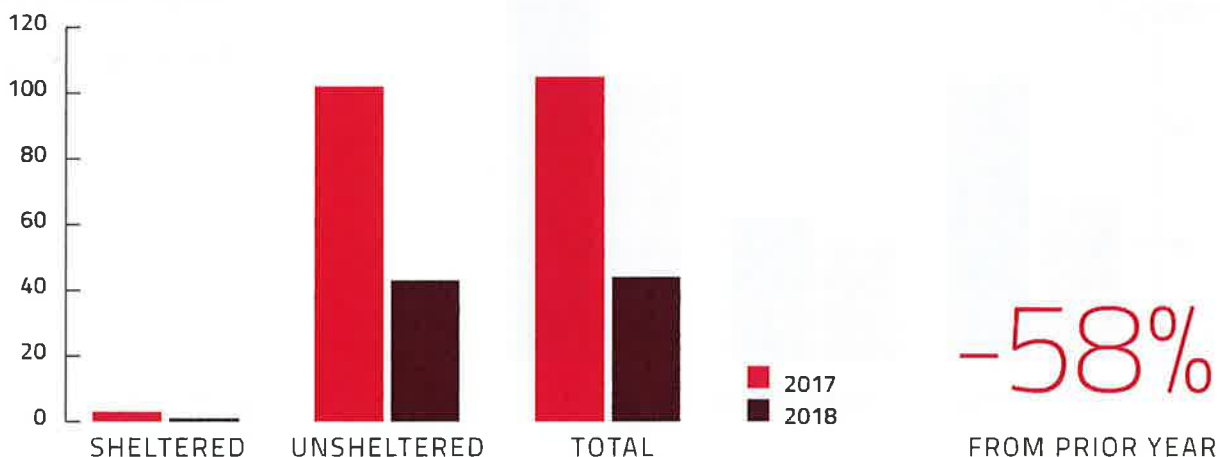
The 2010 U.S. Census reports that in that year the population of Imperial County as a whole was 80.4% Hispanic/Latino. The homeless population in the county in 2018 was, by contrast, 33% Hispanic/Latino and 67% other ethnicities.





## B. Chronically Homeless People

The PITC found significantly fewer people meeting the federal definition of chronic homelessness in 2018 than in 2017. The chronically homeless have been a point of emphasis for HUD and the Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH) since 2002, with an intensified focus following the 2009 passage of the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act in 2009. All CoCs nationwide are measured in terms of their reduction in chronic homelessness consistent with ICH's adoption of Opening Doors, a nationwide strategic plan to end homelessness, in 2009. Imperial County's progress toward eliminating chronic homelessness is an encouraging trend and points the way to ongoing fulfillment of federal priorities and increased competitiveness for federal and state funding for housing and homeless service dollars. The table below shows chronically homeless people counted in 2017 and 2018, including both sheltered and unsheltered individuals.



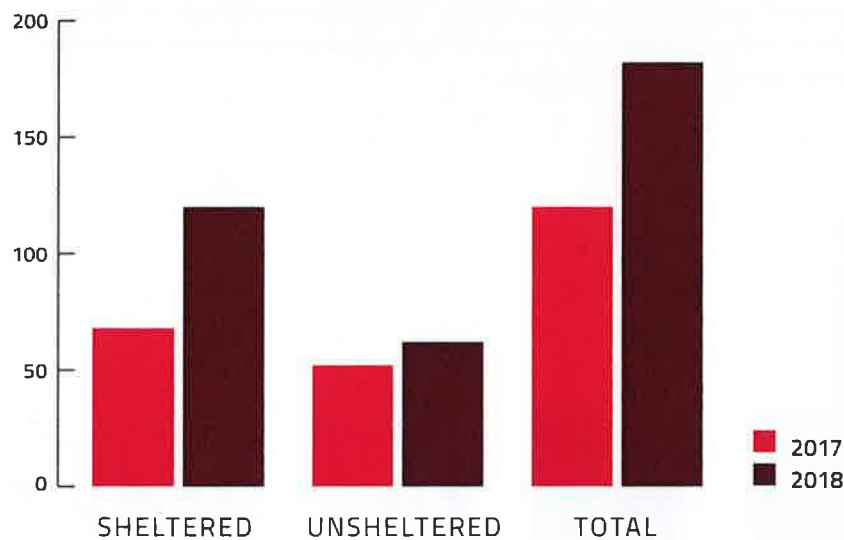
## C. Homeless Veterans

In 2017, the PITC included 21 homeless veterans county-wide, a number that grew by 505% to 127 in the 2018 count. All 127 homeless veterans in 2018 were unsheltered at the time of the count. Three out of four homeless veterans were men and the vast majority were residing in Slab City, some in hand-built structures, others in vehicles. The average age of all homeless veterans in Slab City was 55 and more than half were 60 or older.



## D. Homeless Families with Children

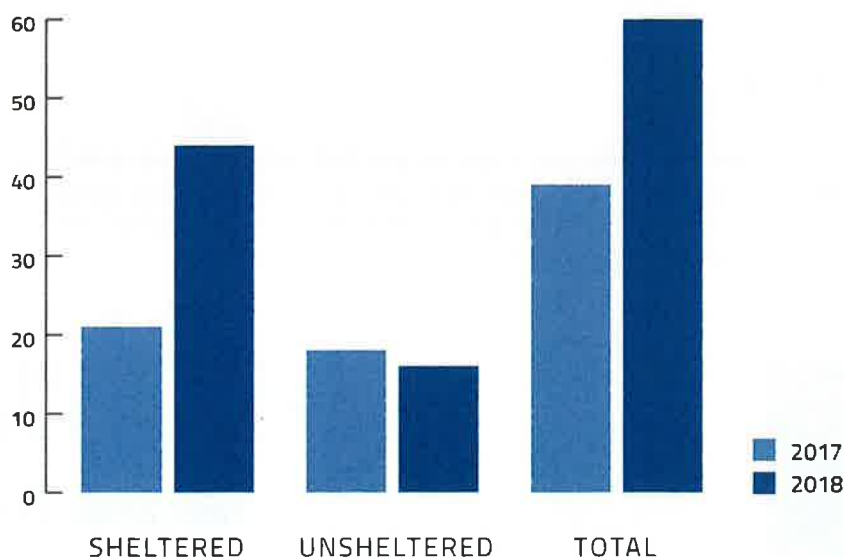
Of the total homeless population in 2018, 182 individuals lived in families with children. Those individuals lived in 60 households that included 75 adults and 107 children under the age of 18, and average household size of 1.25 adults and 1.78 children per household. Of all 60 households with children, 44 were sheltered and 16 were unsheltered. By comparison with 2017, although the total number of homeless individuals in families with children increased (from 120 to 182), the number of unsheltered households decreased slightly from 18 to 16.



**Individuals in  
families with  
children**

**+52%**

FROM PRIOR YEAR



**Number of  
families with  
children**

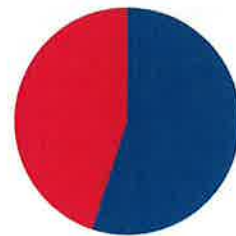
**+54%**

FROM PRIOR YEAR

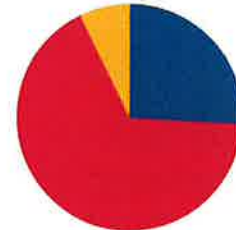


## E. Homeless Youth

Homeless youth, defined as adults ages 18 to 24, totaled 89 individuals in 2018, up from just 20 in 2017. That number includes 60 young women, an increase of 567% from 2017's count of just nine.



2017



2018

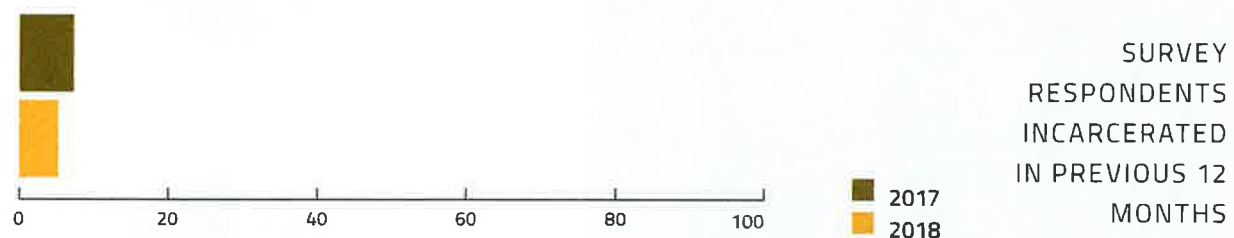
■ Men	55%	45%
■ Women	26%	67%
■ Gender non-conforming	0%	7%



## F. Other Unique Groups

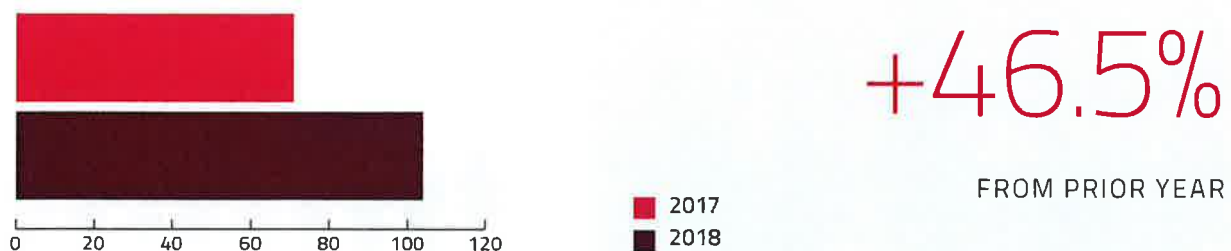
### 1. Returning Offenders

The PITC shows a marked reduction in the percentage of homeless people who reported having been in state or local custody in the 12 months prior to the count. The sample of recently-returned offenders includes only those persons who participated in a voluntary survey. Extrapolation of those numbers to the entire population indicates the county has done a proficient job in responding to the issue of returning offenders through the allocation and coordination of housing and other resources. This is an especially noteworthy achievement given the impact of prison realignment since the adoption of Proposition 47 mandates and corresponding statewide policy shifts, as well as the presence of Calipatria State Prison and Centinela State Prison, with a combined inmate population of almost 7,000, equal to nearly 4% of the entire county population.



### 2. Survivors of Domestic Violence

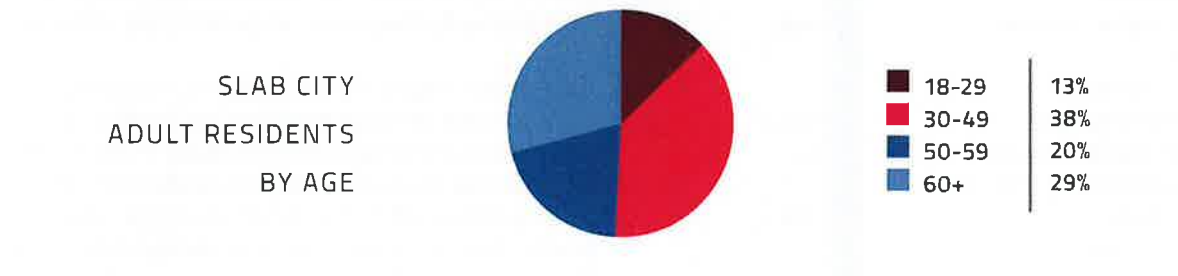
In 2017, 31.2% of survey respondents indicated they had experienced domestic violence as a factor contributing to their homelessness. In 2018, that figure increased to 35.3%, a statistically significant increase above and beyond the overall increase in homelessness. Survey respondents included all persons sheltered at the time of the PITC, 145 of whom were women with children, the majority of whom were sheltered in one of two transitional housing programs for female domestic violence survivors and their children. Thus, the sample is not representative of the county's homeless population as a whole, but as a relative share of the population, the increased need for domestic violence shelter and intervention is noteworthy, with an increase from 71 to 104 respondents year-to-year.





### 3. Seniors and Retirees

From 2017 to 2018, the number of surveyed individuals who reported receiving Social Security retirement benefits increased by more than 300% (from 12 to 39). As one example of the increase in seniors experiencing homelessness across the county, 44 surveyed individuals in Slab City were 60 or older, 16 of whom were between 65 and 69, and 15 of whom were 70 or older.

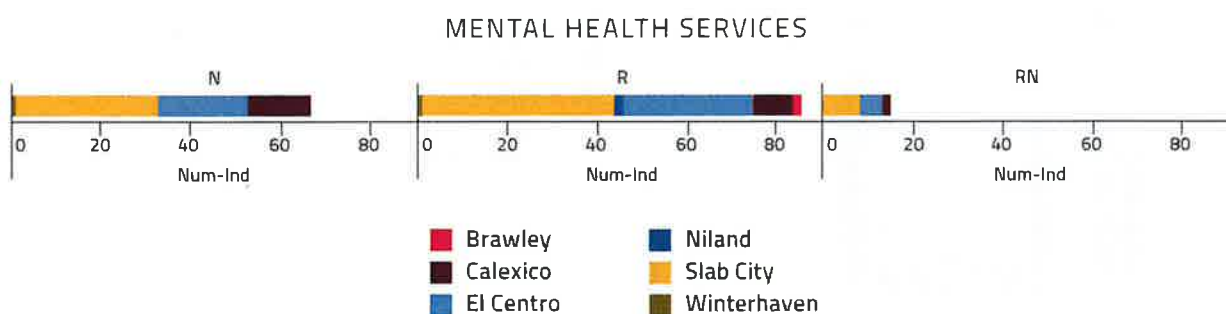


### 4. Additional Trends and Sub-Populations

The following tables identify users of mental health services, causes of homelessness, sources of supplemental income for homeless persons, household compositions, and homeless populations by age in different communities, representing average rates of response for 511 individuals extended to a total population of 1,493. Given the nascent nature of this data for Imperial County, 2017 and 2018 PITC numbers were combined to provide a baseline of information from which larger trends can be extrapolated. The intent of this section is to better inform those providing homeless services and to direct the need for future service providers. The figures below have a margin of error rate of less than 5%.

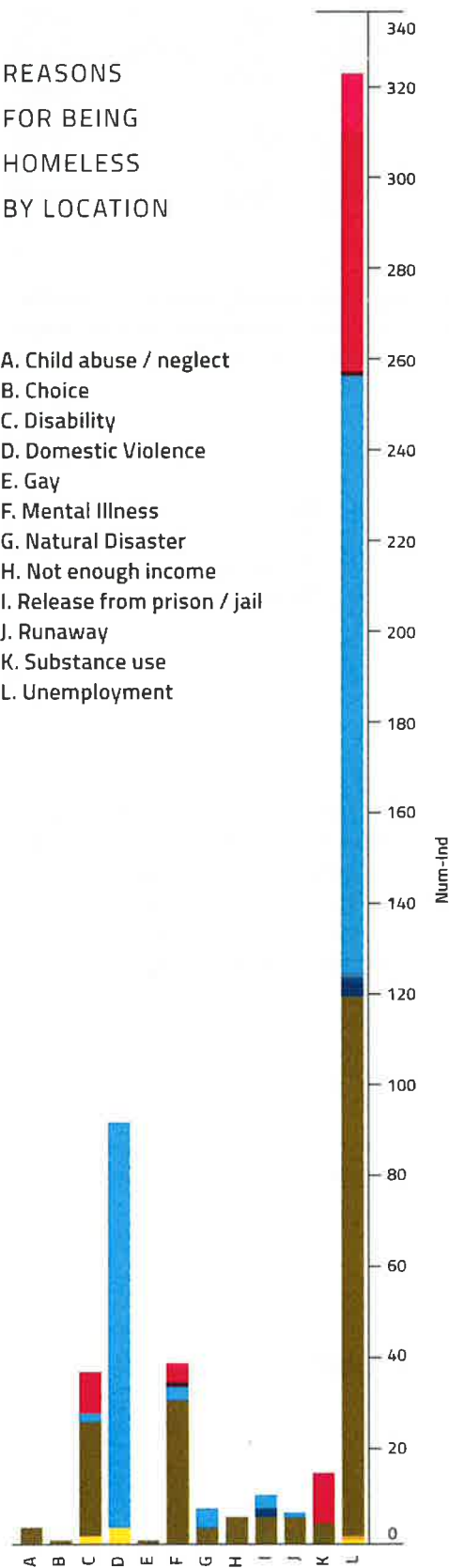
#### a) Users of Mental Health Services by Community

Survey respondents indicating they had either received mental health services recently (R) or were receiving services currently (RN) are shown below, with Slab City representing the largest share of both recent and current mental health service recipients.



# REASONS FOR BEING HOMELESS BY LOCATION

- A. Child abuse / neglect
- B. Choice
- C. Disability
- D. Domestic Violence
- E. Gay
- F. Mental Illness
- G. Natural Disaster
- H. Not enough income
- I. Release from prison / jail
- J. Runaway
- K. Substance use
- L. Unemployment



## b) Causes of Homelessness by Community

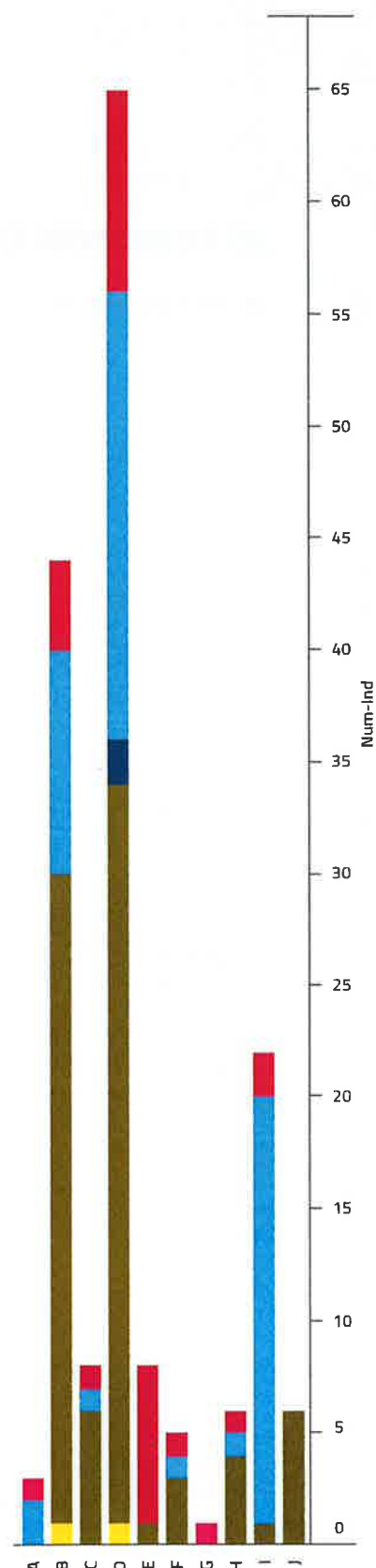
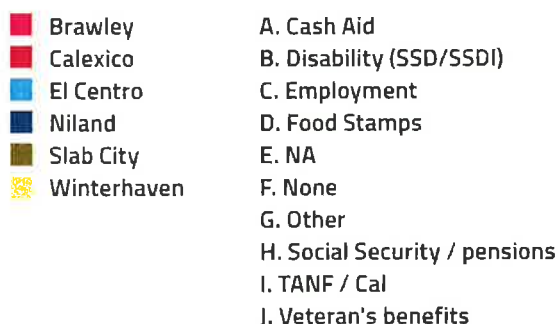
Survey respondents overwhelmingly identified unemployment as the cause of their homelessness in all areas of the county. Domestic violence was the second most frequently cited cause, followed by mental illness.

Note that self-report in all communities conducting PITCs generally gives unemployment as the leading cause of homelessness, which it no doubt is. Poverty is the proximate cause of virtually all homelessness and lack of employment income entails poverty for most people. However, respondents will typically under-report the deeper cause of their unemployment or under-employment, causes which include mental and behavioral health issues, substance use disorders, lack of job skills, preparation and training, involvement with the criminal justice system and much more. Many of these issues are inter-generational and they are, in general, the issues of greatest importance to service providers.

### c) Sources of Supplemental Income by Community

Of all communities in the county, Slab City has the most homeless residents receiving Social Security, Veterans Assistance, Food Stamps, and Disability incomes. El Centro's homeless population cites Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Food Stamps, and cash aid as their primary sources of supplemental income.

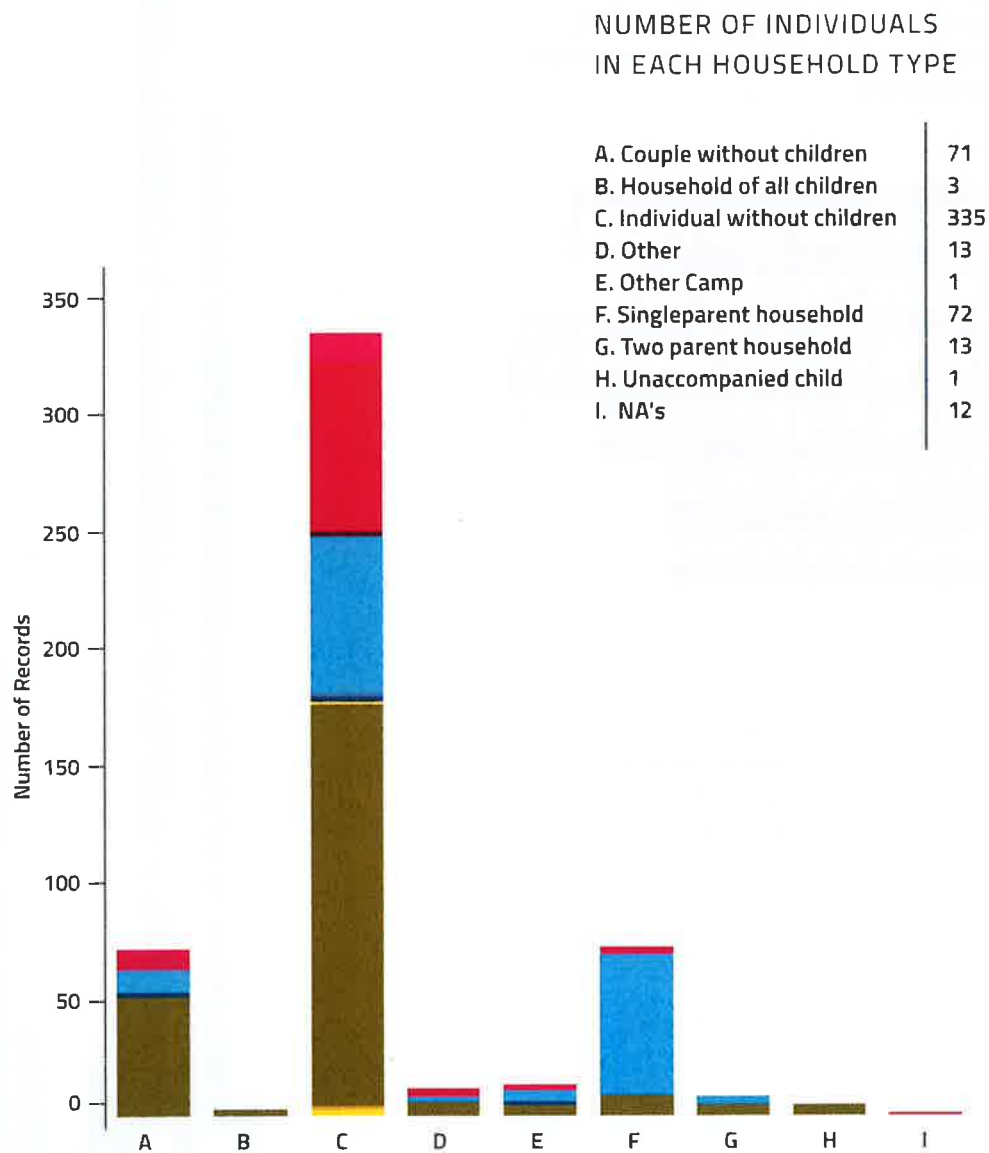
**Slab City has the most homeless residents receiving Social Security, Veterans Assistance, Food Stamps, and Disability incomes**





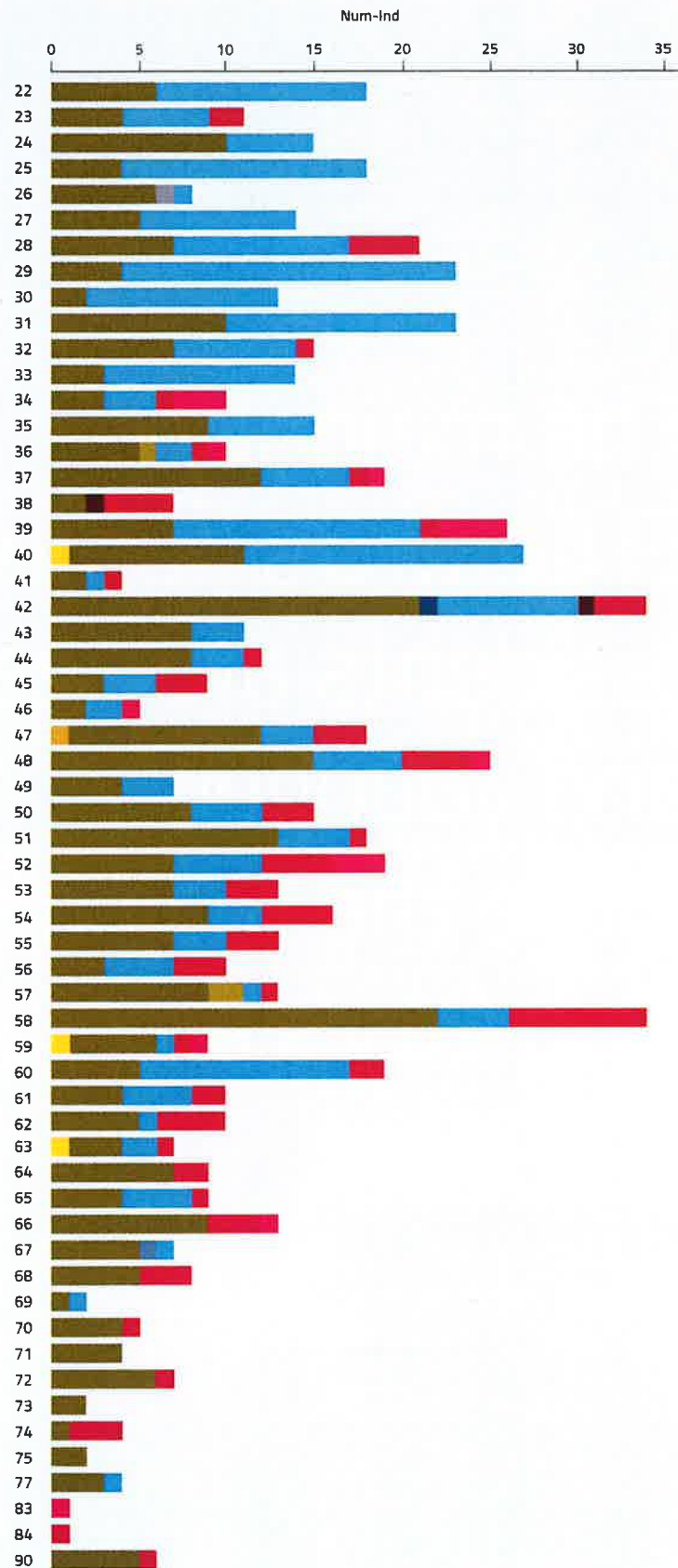
## d) Household Composition by Community

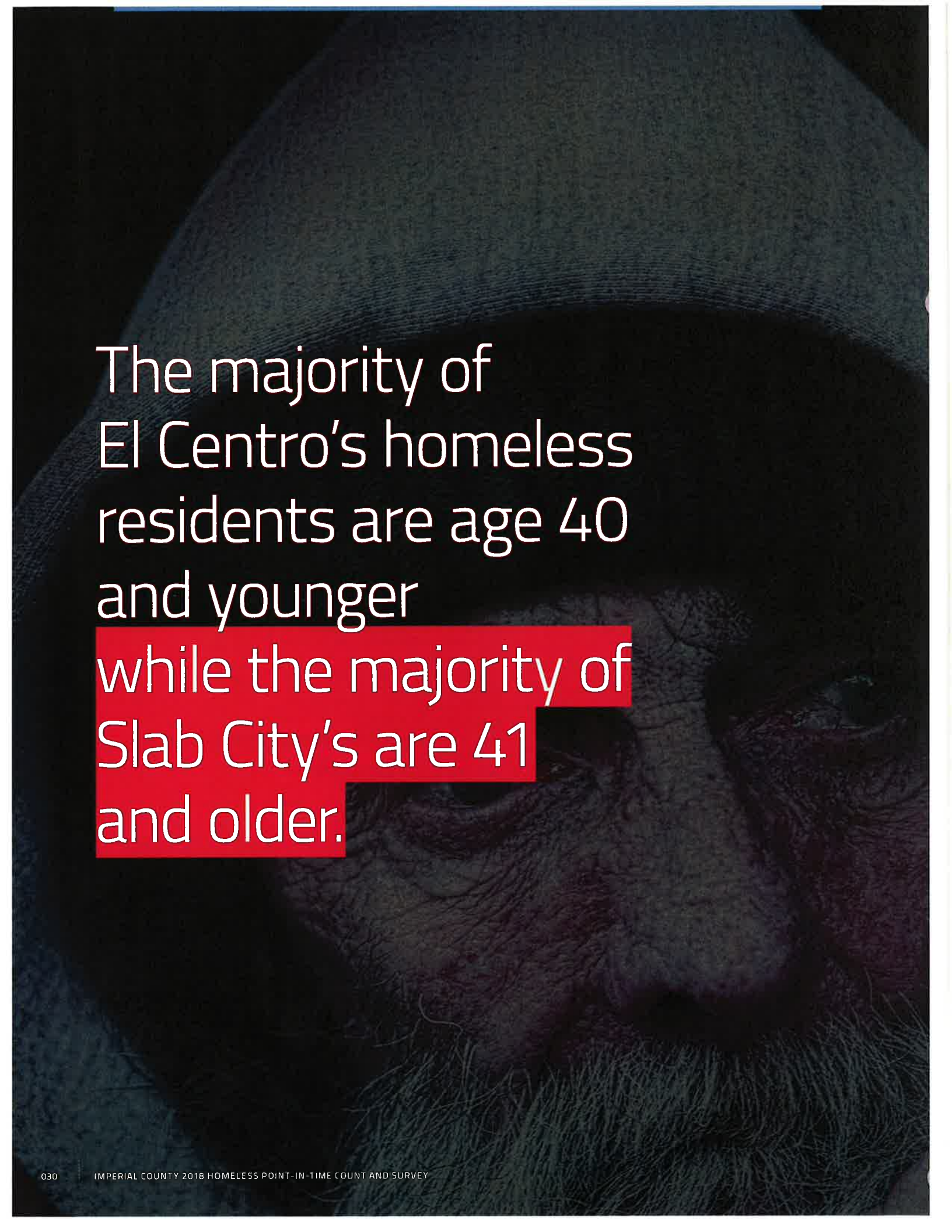
El Centro has by far the highest concentration of homeless families with children in the county.



## e) Number of Homeless Individuals by Age and Community

The majority of El Centro's homeless residents are age 40 and younger while the majority of Slab City's are 41 and older.





The majority of  
El Centro's homeless  
residents are age 40  
and younger  
while the majority of  
Slab City's are 41  
and older.



VI



# Homelessness By Community

# Imperial County

## V. Homelessness by Community

The 2018 PITC shows that homelessness affects virtually all communities in Imperial County, while shelter programs are available in just two cities – Calexico, with 15 shelter beds for men, and El Centro, with 145 transitional housing beds for women and children. County-wide, 91% of all combined shelter and transitional housing beds are located within a radius of just a few miles, leaving the vast majority of the county and its growing homeless population well outside the primary service region of shelter operators.

Not included in the following list of communities are Holtville, Imperial, and Niland, which saw their combined homeless populations drop from 74 individuals to just one (in Imperial) from 2017 to 2018.



**Homelessness affects  
virtually all communities  
in Imperial County**



# Imperial County

■ 2017  
■ 2018



## A. Bombay Beach

The area of Bombay Beach was not included in the 2017 PITC, but the 2018 count noted 136 unsheltered homeless people in the community. Homeless persons in Bombay Beach almost all occupy vehicles or hand-built structures, some of which are makeshift adaptations of abandoned buildings at the Salton Sea shore.



## B. Brawley

The City of Brawley experienced one of the county's most significant increases in homelessness in the past year, with total homeless persons included in the PITC increasing from just eight to 106. All individuals were unsheltered at the time of the count.

### UNSHELTERED



## C. Calexico

Calexico experienced a decrease in sheltered, unsheltered, and total homelessness from 2017 to 2018, with the total number of individuals included in the PITC dropping from 173 to 89.

### SHELTERED



### UNSHELTERED



## D. Calipatria

The City of Calipatria experienced no change in its total homelessness from 2017 to 2018, with six unsheltered individuals included in the PITC in both years.

### UNSHELTERED





# Imperial County



## E. Desert Shores

In the 2017 PITC, no homeless persons were noted in the community of Desert Shores. In 2018, six unsheltered adults were observed in the community, all of them inhabiting either vehicles or hand-built structures.



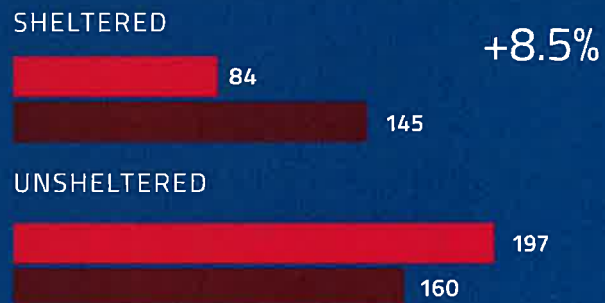
## F. El Centro

The City of El Centro has the largest total homeless population in the county and that population increased from 281 to 305 between 2017 and 2018. The total includes a growth in the sheltered population of 61 individuals and a decrease in the unsheltered population of 37, for a net increase of 8.5%. Although many homeless persons in El Centro live in vehicles and/or hand-built structures, unlike most other communities included in the PITC, El Centro's homeless population includes a majority of unsheltered individuals with no makeshift accommodation of any kind.



## G. Ocotillo

There were no homeless persons in the community of Ocotillo at the time of the 2017 count. In 2018, eight unsheltered individuals were counted, all of whom were living in vehicles.



**El Centro has the largest homeless population anywhere in the county outside of Slab City.**

# Imperial County



## H. Salton City

In percentage terms, Salton City saw one of the county's largest increases in total homelessness from 2017 to 2018, going from just 10 unsheltered individuals to 62.

UNSHELTERED



+570%



## J. Westmorland

As in the case of Seeley, the City of Westmorland had no observed homelessness in 2017 and three unsheltered individuals in 2018.



## I. Seeley

The community of Seeley had three unsheltered individuals in 2018, with no homeless persons reported in 2017.



## K. Winterhaven

The community of Winterhaven had no observed homelessness in the 2017 PITC and eight unsheltered individuals in 2018, all of whom were adults, three of whom were occupying vehicles.



# Imperial County



## L. Slab City

By far the largest share of the county's total homeless population (51%) were counted in Slab City in 2018. The total homeless population of Slab City increased to 760 this year from 602 last year. Homeless persons in Slab City include families with children, single adults, transition-age youth, veterans, seniors, individuals with substance use and mental health disorders, and all other subsets and demographics. Virtually all homeless persons in Slab City occupy vehicles, hand-built structures or other makeshift accommodations, including tents and portable buildings.

Homelessness in Slab City is unlike the type of homelessness most prevalent nationwide in urban and rural communities insofar as residents of the area are a more-or-less settled population, living in some cases for years on claimed lots with semi-permanent installations. The issue of how to count and report on Slab City homelessness is therefore problematic, insofar as at least a subset of Slab City residents denies being homeless, preferring instead to be defined as "living off the grid" or some other alternative to the term "homeless."

The poverty in Slab City is real and extreme, as are issues associated with lack of public sanitation and other services, absence of routine law enforcement, sale and use of controlled substances, and numerous health and safety issues. All these factors directly affect support systems, merchants, community facilities, and services in nearby Niland and all exacerbate the county's challenges to showing significant progress toward HUD's objectives for homeless reduction. Section VIII below includes a more detailed discussion of hand-built structures, tents and other accommodations that is intended to partially elucidate the unique problems and considerations related to Slab City, the nature of its homelessness and its place in IVCCC strategy and priorities.

UNSHELTERED

+26%





VII



# Significant Changes from Prior Year's Count

**Imperial County reported a total inventory of 246 units of combined shelter, transitional and permanent housing units for persons experiencing homelessness.**

IMPERIAL COUNTY COC APPLICATION

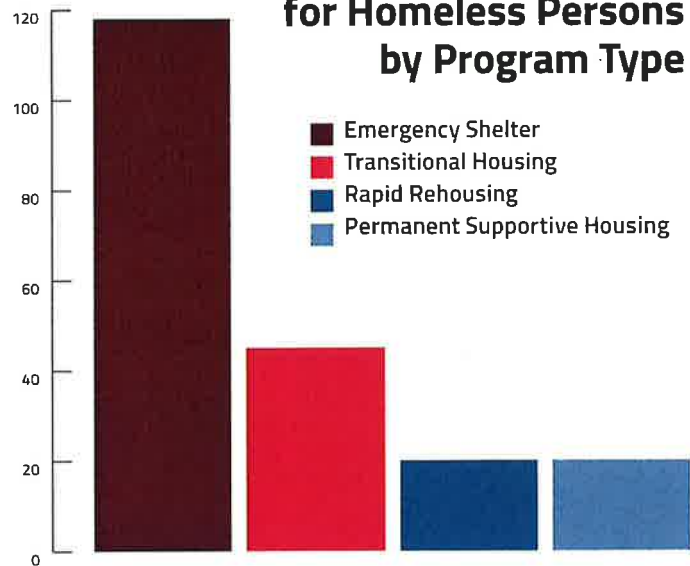


## **VII. Total Shelter Inventory by Community and Program Type**

In its most recent CoC application, Imperial County reported a total inventory of 246 units of combined shelter, transitional, and permanent housing units for persons experiencing homelessness. That total included 15 emergency shelter beds for men in Calexico, 167 emergency and transitional beds for women and children in El Centro, plus 32 units of permanent supportive housing and an additional 32 units of rapid rehousing county-wide. The number of emergency shelter and transitional housing units included in the application differs slightly from the total number of such units available at the time of the 2018 PITC. The total number of permanent housing units differs from the current inventory due to the recent launch of a rapid rehousing program in the county by Veterans Community Services, a much-needed addition to the housing inventory for homeless veterans. The chart below shows the distribution of homeless shelter and housing units by program type.




## Housing Inventory for Homeless Persons by Program Type

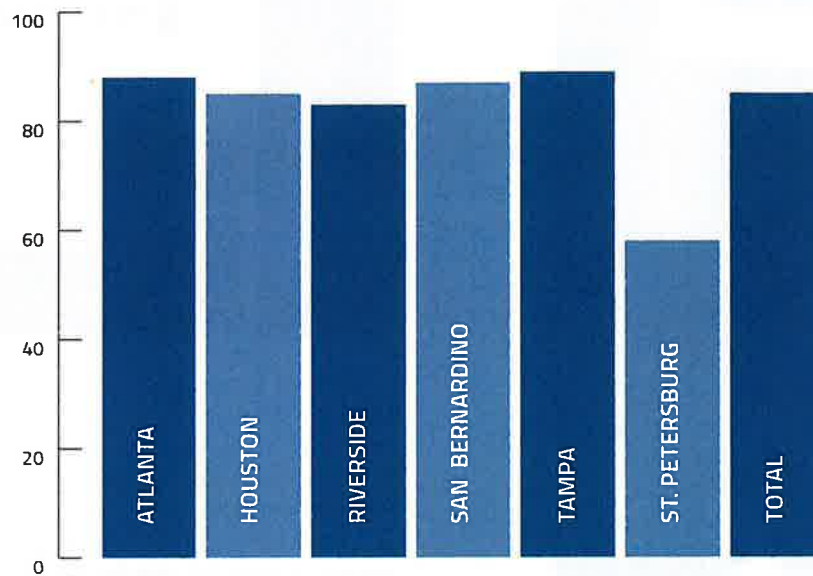


In terms of HUD's current emphasis, philosophy, and funding priorities, the above chart is backward. For more than a decade, HUD has stressed the importance of prioritizing permanent housing (the third and fourth columns in the chart above) in all CoCs as a lasting solution to homelessness for individuals and families with all types and degrees of special needs. The distribution of housing programs by type is represented in the IVCCC's 2017 HUD CoC application, which sought funding for three transitional housing programs, constituting the majority of its request.

In contrast to the above chart and numbers, it is instructive to consider the cases of other CoCs that have shown significant reductions in overall homelessness in the past decade and have, as a result, enjoyed increasingly large HUD CoC awards. Out of the country's 50 largest metropolitan statistical areas, the top four performing regions in terms of homelessness reduction over the past decade have been Tampa-St. Petersburg, Riverside-San Bernardino, Houston, and Atlanta, which have reduced their overall homelessness by 59%, 55%, 52% and 40%, respectively. In those regions (represented by six CoCs) HUD CoC funding is allocated almost exclusively to permanent housing projects, including rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing. The following chart shows each CoCs expenditure of HUD CoC funding on permanent housing as a percent of its of its total award in 2016.



**Permanent housing  
must come through  
growth in overall funding**



**Percentage of HUD CoC Funds Allocated  
to Permanent Housing: 2016**

It is important for Imperial County to preserve its existing emergency shelter and transitional housing bed inventory. Achieving parity with other CoCs in the allocation of funding for permanent housing must come through growth in overall funding, not a reduction in the already small number of beds available to meet the needs of a growing homeless population. Increasing the number of permanent housing units available for homeless individuals and families can be achieved by more fully utilizing already available resources, including the following: HUD grant sources, California Emergency Solutions Grant funding, funding for veterans' programs through the Department of Veterans Affairs, and additional federal and state resources, all of which require a strong and well-coordinated continuum of care. The County's leadership of the IVCCC will help reach the required level of coordination and implementation of policy and practice to achieve this goal (see Section X below).



# VIII



## VII. Hand-Built Structures, Tents and Other Makeshift Accommodations

Using HUD's definition of homelessness, a homeless person resides in "a place not meant for human habitation." That definition explicitly includes cars and abandoned buildings (among other places), but in the case of unconventional structures, the definition leaves room for interpretation. Taking the case of numerous "homes" in Slab City (and to a limited extent elsewhere in Imperial County), it should be emphasized that some of the most elaborate hand-built structures, tents, and other accommodations are not meant for human habitation insofar as the people who constructed them meant to live in them. Some such structures in Slab City include thousands of dollars' worth of materials, in a few cases tens of thousands. Many Slab City residents have access to solar power, satellite internet connections, and other communications. Many have composting toilets. Those residents live in structures not built to code on land for which they have no ownership or tenant rights, no access to public sanitation, no water and power resources, no trash removal, no postal service, and no other basic amenities of modern life. But while it would be accurate to say they are "under-housed," to say they are unhoused creates a dilemma for the County and reveals a quandary in federal definitions.

Using a criterion that would identify all long-term squatters in Slab City as homeless would open the door to defining all residents of the county in unconventional, sub-standard housing as such. Countless county residents live in over-crowded housing. Countless more are "couch surfers." An untold number live in unfinished building additions, garages, sheds, and other structures that don't conform to county code. None of those individuals or households appear in the PITC.





# Slab City:

A haven for  
the homeless  
gentrifies

**Air B&B rental  
in Slab City**

AIRBNB.COM, JUNE 5, 2018

MAKESHIFT ACCOMMODATIONS

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Having established by the PITC's methodology and application that more than 700 Slab City residents are included in the current count, the IVCCC has nevertheless left out of the count short-term visitors and "snowbirds" who move temporarily to the relative warmth of Imperial County during the winter. Where to draw the line is a challenge. Clearly, a retired Canadian couple in a \$200,000 motor home should not be counted. But what about a year-round resident living in a 10-foot trailer? At the time of this report, there are eight different "properties" in Slab City listed on AirBnB.com. None of those are actual homes, none have access to any public amenities or services, none conform to building code, and none are located on space to which the operator has legal right of ownership or occupancy. All are highly sought-after by visitors and are included in an area that, for all intents and purposes, functions like a small town, albeit without public services or a consistent and reliable system for administering law and order.

The county might have the authority to conduct sweeping code enforcement in Slab City, which occupies state-owned land. However, even if the county were to take the most draconian approach toward emptying the site of its current occupants, the resulting impact on other communities would overwhelm current services by creating more than 700 cases of actual homelessness. The result of radical enforcement measures in Slab City would be displacement and destabilization of what is now a somewhat stable community in non-standard housing. In fact, the origins of Slab City as a large-scale settlement date to 1965, when Riverside County emptied the Painted Canyon camping area near Mecca, some 48 miles north, just beyond the north shore of the Salton Sea. Pushing a population of poor and marginalized residents from one area will, predictably, result in their resettlement elsewhere in the county.

Knowing whether residents are said to have opted for or resorted to the substandard "housing" stock of Slab City is not critical for a needs assessment. The facts of life for residents in hand-built structures, vehicles, abandoned structures, and other makeshift accommodations are harsh. For this reason, more than one IVCCC member has suggested that addressing those residents' needs might best be done in the short-term by establishing a multi-service day center, one that addresses the gaps in basic services (restrooms and shower facilities, for example) and includes outreach and engagement staff from nonprofit organizations and public-sector agencies. Providing case management, child welfare, mental health counseling, substance abuse interventions, mail services, and other resources near Slab City would immediately improve residents' quality of life and create a link to longer-term participation in programs and services that could reintegrate residents with mainstream housing and community life. Housing navigation backed by long-term rapport with trusted care providers would address the county's largest share of unmet need among homeless residents and utilize potentially available funding to serve a population that does not easily fit into any established service or housing approach.





# Key Recommendations from Report Findings

# Partnerships Are Key

## IX. Key Recommendations from Report Findings

Given all the preceding information and the picture of homelessness that emerges from the 2018 PITC, a few concrete goals can be recommended for the IVCCC, and additional recommendations can be made for use of a standard, county-wide homeless management information system, development and implementation of a coordinated entry system, and an ongoing focus on the creation and expansion of permanent housing options for people experiencing homelessness.

### A. Goals for 2018/19

In April of this year, the IVCCC formally adopted its current charter and the following month the County Board of Supervisors approved the Department of Social Services assumption of the role of lead agency and collaborative applicant for the CoC. With those steps taken, the IVCCC is positioned to progress rapidly toward adopting policies and practices that meet HUD's objectives and requirements. Under the county's leadership, the IVCCC will be able to set standards for attendance and participation in its regular meetings and functions, codify and refine its performance expectations for funded programs, and mandate integration of existing shelter and service projects in a coordinated approach and a comprehensive plan that includes each of the elements listed below.

**Codify and refine the IVCCC performance expectations for funded programs, and mandate integration of existing shelter and service projects in a coordinated approach and a comprehensive plan**







## B. Use of the Homeless Management Information System

At present, only half of Imperial County's shelter and transitional housing capacity is included in the current Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). A functioning HMIS that tracks all program performance and individual service utilization by homeless persons is a required element of all CoCs receiving HUD, ESG, and other funds. When used and shared by all providers in a given region, the HMIS can produce an unduplicated count of homeless persons, understand patterns of service use, and measure the effectiveness of homeless programs. HUD's direction regarding the use of a local HMIS is unambiguous.

*The HEARTH Act, enacted into law on May 20, 2009, requires that all communities have an HMIS with the capacity to collect unduplicated counts of individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Through their HMIS, a community should be able to collect information from projects serving homeless families and individuals to use as part of their needs analyses and to establish funding priorities. The Act also codifies into law certain data collection requirements integral to HMIS. With enactment of the HEARTH Act, HMIS participation became a statutory requirement for recipients and subrecipients of CoC Program and Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) funds.*



## C. Building a Coordinated Entry System

Another of HUD's mandates that remains unmet in Imperial County is the requirement that CoCs have a process of coordinated entry. This means, at a minimum, a system for assessing the needs of and prioritizing services for homeless persons, and which connects housing and service partners in a seamless network to rapidly place homeless persons on a pathway to housing. As HUD stated in a January 23, 2017 notice:

*HUD requires each CoC to establish and operate a "centralized or coordinated assessment system" (referred to as "coordinated entry" or "coordinated entry process") with the goal of increasing the efficiency of local crisis response systems and improving fairness and ease of access to resources, including mainstream resources. Both the CoC and ESG Program interim rules require use of the CoC's coordinated entry process, provided that it meets HUD requirements. Coordinated entry processes are intended to help communities prioritize people who are most in need of assistance. They also provide information to CoCs and other stakeholders about service needs and gaps to help communities strategically allocate their current resources and identify the need for additional resources.*

Implementing and maintaining a process that meets HUD's requirement will require that the IVCCC and its member agencies identify and use a common assessment battery to determine participant needs, establish a referral and housing navigation process that places people in housing based upon assessed priority, and agree to a method for system-wide analysis and reporting that demonstrates coordination in housing prioritization, placement, and follow-up. In its fullest development, a coordinated entry system entails much more than these minimal elements, but for 2018, a realistic goal will be to bring all IVCCC members into an agreement that achieves at least the first steps toward universal use and acceptance of assessment and placement processes.

## D. Focusing on Permanent Housing

As touched on in Section VII above, the IVCCC should use 2018 to strategize around the creation of new permanent housing projects, including potential new construction and rental assistance programs, permanent supportive housing for people with the highest level of need, rapid rehousing assistance for those capable of quickly resuming independence, and all other feasible housing models. An increased inventory of permanent housing will allow existing transitional housing programs to direct current occupants into permanent supportive housing, increasing available bed space to direct homeless people away from the streets and into transitional housing. This will contribute to reducing the overall homelessness in the county while directly addressing federal priorities.

**New construction and rental assistance programs, permanent supportive housing for people with the highest level of need, rapid rehousing assistance for those capable of quickly resuming independence, and all other feasible housing models**

A photograph of a dry, sandy landscape under a clear blue sky, with a body of water visible in the distance. The image is partially obscured by a black text box.

# Notes on Transfer of Leadership to the County

## **X. Notes on Transfer of Leadership to the County**

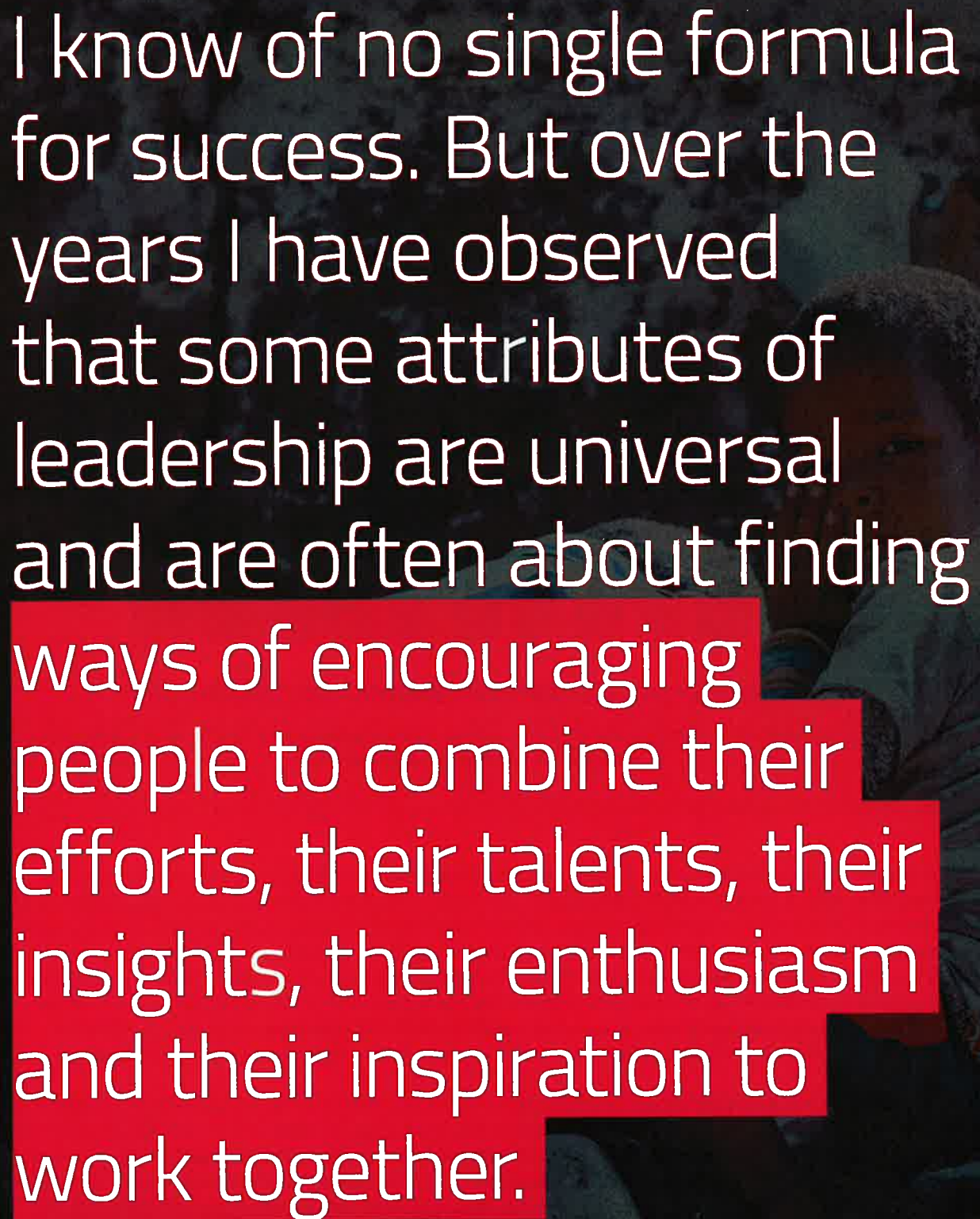
As noted in Section IX.A above, the County Department of Social Services (DSS) now heads the IVCCC as lead agency and collaborative applicant, giving the department considerable leverage and positioning it to use its influence, resources, and authority to effectively steer the region's continuum of care. With localized measures of reductions in homelessness and improved outcomes, DSS can direct its assets – influence, resources, and authority – to effectively create innovative and responsive programs and services.

**With localized measures of reductions in homelessness and improved outcomes, the County Department of Social Services can direct its assets – influence, resources, and authority – to effectively create innovative and responsive programs and services.**

Using its influence with county policy makers and other departments, DSS can guide the coordination of inter-departmental, multi-agency strategies and responses to homelessness. Success in the long run will entail inputs from and participation of the Imperial Valley Housing Authority, the County Probation Department, all local law enforcement agencies, the Department of Behavioral Health Services, County Planning and Development Services, the Department of Public Health, and other public agencies. At its ideal level of coordination, the IVCCC will also have seamless connections to employment development, public school districts, adult education and training programs, federal social security and disability offices, and other mainstream resources with which DSS regularly connects.

DSS's resources, such as its pool of talented and highly trained personnel, information management system, facilities, and other material assets, will also improve IVCCC's outputs by refining IVCCC's standards, policies, and procedures. The department's leadership of and contribution to the IVCCC's required reporting and recurrent collaborative application will strengthen the county's competitiveness with much larger, vastly better funded CoCs.

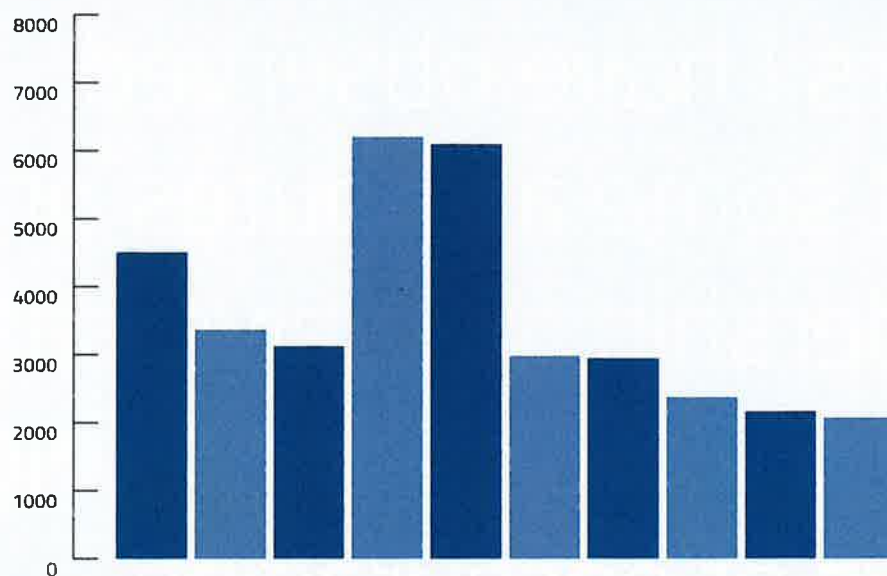




I know of no single formula for success. But over the years I have observed that some attributes of leadership are universal and are often about finding ways of encouraging people to combine their efforts, their talents, their insights, their enthusiasm and their inspiration to work together.

QUEEN ELIZABETH II

# Riverside County's publicly led CoC reduced total homelessness in its PITC by 66% in six years



## Riverside County Total Homelessness: 2008-2017

As shown above, Riverside County's publicly led CoC reduced total homelessness in its PITC by 66% in six years. Such progress is possible in Imperial County.

To ensure uniformity and adherence to a strategy and common process, DSS wields more influence and authority than any of the IVCCC's private member organizations. Consensus is important in uniting member organizations and enlisting their commitment to common processes, common standards and common measurements. Progress can be more easily achieved if organizations accept HUD's mandates as an essential condition of their success. However, the IVCCC's progress towards meeting those mandates has encountered roadblocks due to reluctance and resistance to some aspects of coordinated assessment, coordinated entry, and full utilization of the HMIS. DSS can help resolve these issues and is in the best position to ensure that compliance with HUD's guidance is coordinated with local priorities as determined by the Board of Supervisors and leadership of other county departments and agencies.

Many CoCs across the country have opted for public agency leadership, some of which have placed a county agency in the role now assumed by DSS. The closest example is Riverside County (CoC CA-608), where the Department of Public Social Services assumed the role of lead agency and collaborative action as directed by the Board of Supervisors at a time when homelessness in the region had reached levels of crisis. Public leadership of the Riverside CoC has helped to facilitate and coordinate outreach, assessment, intake, entry, and permanent housing placement processes that have led directly to results that are among the nation's best in the past decade. The chart below shows the change in total homelessness in Riverside County from 2008 to 2017 as reflected in PITCs and records in HUD's data exchange.

XI

A photograph of a hand pointing at a laptop screen. The image is dark and moody, with a bright light source creating a strong glare on the screen. The text 'PITC Methodology' is overlaid in white on a black rectangular background.

# PITC Methodology

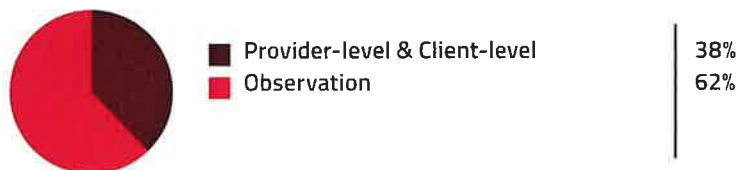


# Data Sources

## XI. PITC Methodology

The following is a summary of the 2018 PITC methodology as reported to HUD.

- **Data sources used to estimate sheltered population**



- **Method of collecting data on sheltered individuals**

Random sample and extrapolation

- **Method to avoid duplication of sheltered count**

Comparison of personally identifying information, simultaneous count of all shelters, and inclusion of screening questions in survey instruments

- **Data sources used to produce sheltered population demographics**

Client-level surveys

- **Selection of sheltered sub-set surveyed**

Sheltered survey participants were not selected randomly but were chosen to represent all people in emergency shelters and transitional housing.

- **Reason for changes in sheltered count from 2017 to 2018**

Change in participation of programs serving the general homeless population, including singles and families (Neighborhood House, with 44 beds of transitional housing, did not participate in the 2017 count.)

- **Approach used to count total unsheltered population**

Night-of-the-count complete census and known locations

- **Selection of counted areas**

Areas were selected based on local knowledge of homeless concentration

- **Inclusion of unsheltered individuals**

All people encountered or observed were included in the count

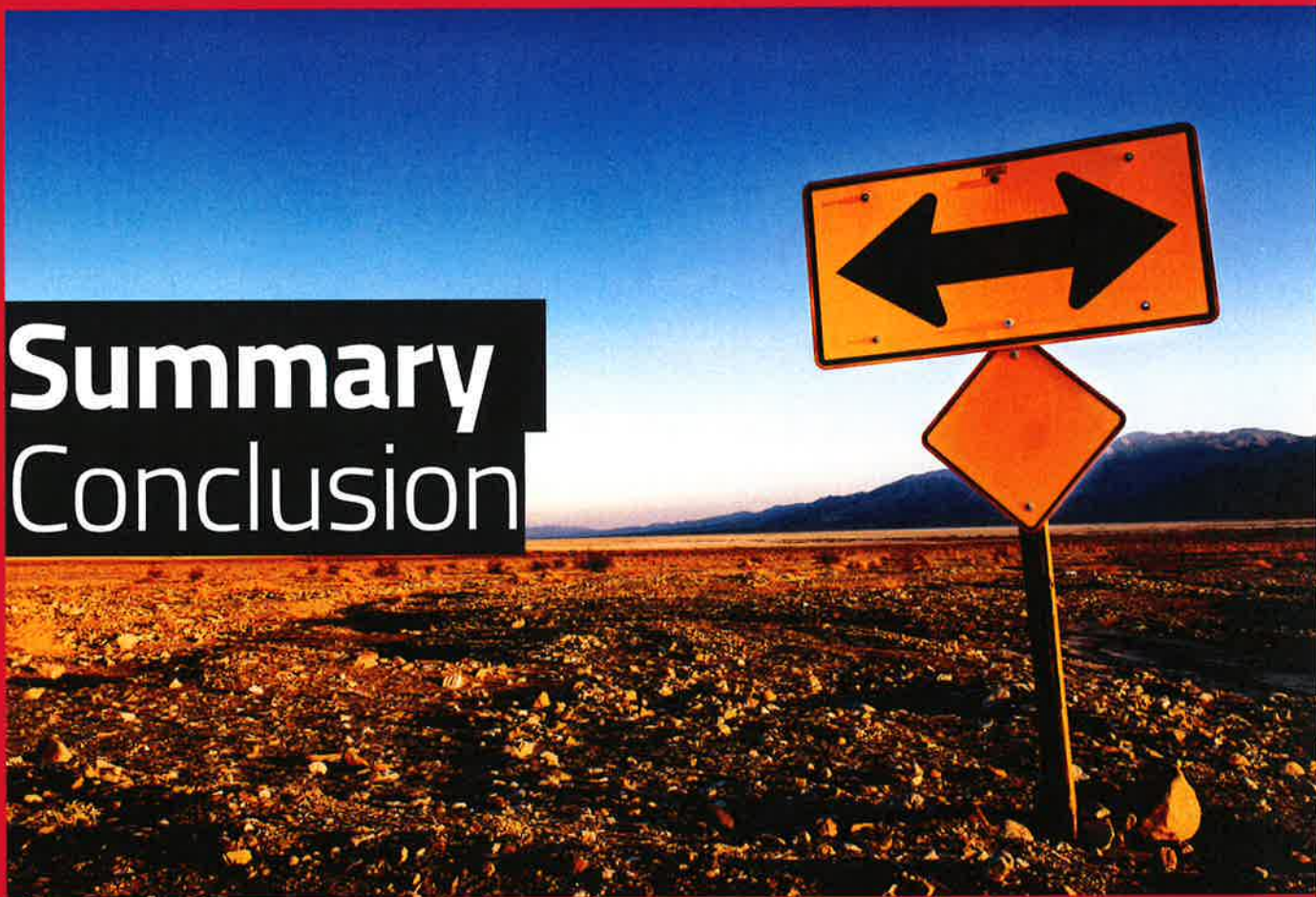
- **Information and methods to avoid duplicate counts of unsheltered people**

Comparison of personally identifying information, simultaneous count of different areas of the county, and inclusion of screening questions in survey instruments

- **Identifying demographic and subpopulation data for unsheltered people**

Surveys and extrapolation from surveyed subset to whole population

# Summary Conclusion



## XII. Summary Conclusion

In summary, the 2018 Imperial County Homeless PITC notes the following:



**A majority of the county's homeless adults live in Slab City, with the second largest subset in El Centro**



An overall increase in homelessness



An increase in the percentage of homeless people who are veterans, youth and/or people living in families with children



A decrease in the number of chronically homeless people and in the number of people recently released from custody



New cases of observed homelessness in communities with no observed homelessness in 2017



An unequal distribution of shelter and transitional housing programs across the county



A shortage of permanent housing options for people experiencing homelessness



A need to engage all providers of shelter and services to the homeless in a homeless management information system



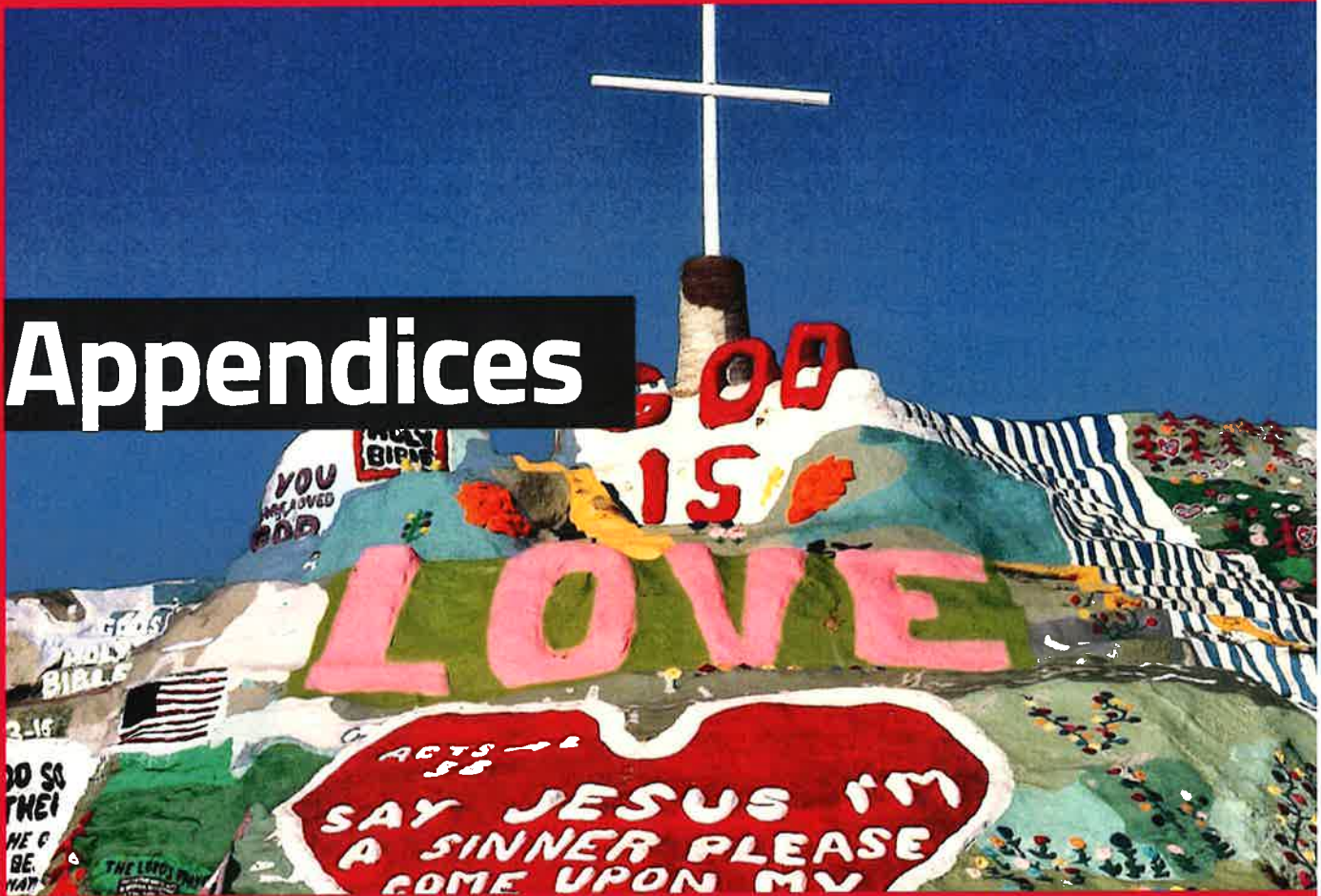
A need to take steps toward full implementation of a process of coordinated assessment and entry



Multiple strengths and resources of the County Department of Social Services as the lead agency and collaborative applicant for the Imperial Valley Continuum of Care Council



# Appendices



## XIII. Appendices

Please see the following appendices, which include an overview of the IVCCC, a copy of the 2018 PITC survey, a summary of salient responses to surveys collected, and a description of the Housing First philosophy.

### A. About the Imperial Valley Continuum of Care Council

The mission of the IVCCC is to engage individuals and organizations of Imperial Valley in a community-based process that works to eradicate homelessness in the region, addresses the underlying causes of homelessness, and lessens the negative impact of homelessness on individuals, families and the community. The IVCCC's goal is to end homelessness by developing systems that will effectively direct homeless individuals and families to needed resources. To support that goal, the IVCCC addresses the concerns of the community dealing with homelessness while improving the conditions that suffocate community growth. The IVCCC takes its direction and initiative from representatives of law enforcement, hospitals, city, county, and state government agencies, fire departments, educational institutions, shelters, nonprofit organizations, faith-based groups, and concerned individuals.

IVCCC member organizations include:

- 2-1-1 Imperial
- Brown Bag Coalition
- Brawley Police Department
- Calexico Neighborhood House
- Calexico Fire Department
- Calexico Library Veteran Committee
- Calipatria School District/Niland Family Resource Center
- Catholic Charities
- City of El Centro
- Campesinos Unidos
- Don Gorham, Addiction and Recovery Specialist
- El Centro Medical Center
- El Centro Police Department
- Employment Development Department
- FACT Center - El Centro Elementary School District
- First United Methodist Church El Centro
- Gateway Church of Brawley
- Imperial County Administration
- Imperial County Area Agency on Aging
- Imperial County Behavioral Health Services, Smart Recovery
- Imperial County Behavior Health Services
- Imperial County Department of Social Services
- Imperial County Housing Authority
- Imperial County Office of Education
- Imperial County Probation Department
- Imperial County Public Health
- Imperial County Sheriff's Office
- Imperial County Work Training Center
- Imperial Valley College Military and Success Center
- Imperial Valley College Extended Opportunity Program & Services
- Imperial Valley College Student Equity Department
- Imperial Valley LGBT Resource Center
- Imperial Valley Regional Occupational Program
- Justserve.org
- Les Smith, Desert Trails RV Park & Golf Resort
- Niland Fire District
- Northern Arizona University
- Molina Healthcare
- Office of Senator Ben Hueso
- Pioneers Memorial Hospital
- Sage Initiative
- Saving Lives
- Sister Evelyn Mourey Center
- Spread the Love Charity
- The Salvation Army
- United Way of Imperial County
- Veterans Community Services
- Womanhaven



# IVCCC

## Executive Board



**LES SMITH**  
**CHAIR**

General Manager,  
Desert Trails RV & Golf Resort



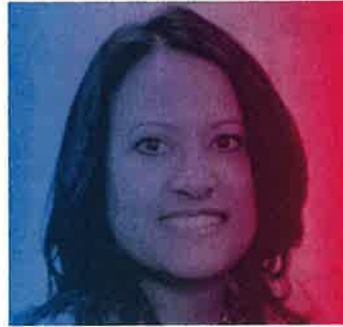
**VICTOR ESTRADA**  
**VICE CHAIR**

Director of Worship & Local  
Missions, Gateway Church



**DEBORAH OWEN**  
**SECRETARY**

Assistant Imperial County  
District Attorney



**PEGGY PRICE**  
**TREASURER**

Director, Imperial County  
Department of Social Services



**ROSIE BLANKENSHIP**

Chief Human Resources  
Officer, Pioneers Memorial  
Hospital



**ROBERT M. BROWN**

Chief Human Resources  
Officer, Pioneers Memorial  
Hospital



**BRETT HOUSER**

Commander, Brawley Police  
Department



**BRIAN JOHNSON**

Chief, El Centro Police  
Department

To learn more about the IVCCC and get involved in its work to end homelessness in Imperial County, visit:  
[www.COCIV.org](http://www.COCIV.org)



## B. Homeless Point-in-Time Survey

Following this page is a copy of the survey administered by volunteers in completing this year's PITC.



### Imperial Valley Continuum of Care Council

Location of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_ County: Imperial Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Homeless individual provided input for survey ☐ Survey completed w/o input (through observation)  
 # Of: Adults \_\_\_\_\_ Children \_\_\_\_\_  
 Number of: Individuals (●) \_\_\_\_\_ Car/RV/Truck/Van (▲) \_\_\_\_\_ Hand-built Structures (✱) \_\_\_\_\_

#### HOMELESS DEMOGRAPHIC & NEEDS SURVEY

IVCCC Point-In-Time Count – January 26, 2018/January 27, 2018

Complete one survey for each homeless adult or unaccompanied child. For families with minor children, record the information about the children on the same form with the head of household's response.

First two letters of Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Transgender
3. Race ☐ African-American ☐ Caucasian/White ☐ Asian ☐ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander  
☐ American Indian/Alaska Native ☐ Multiple ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Ethnicity ☐ Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino ☐ Hispanic/Latino
5. Household Members  
☐ Head of Household (adult or unaccompanied child)  
 Are there any minor children residing with the head of household? ☐ Yes ☐ No  
 1. Age \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: M F  
 2. Age \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: M F Are children age 5-17 enrolled in school? ☐ Yes ☐ No  
 3. Age \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: M F Name of school: \_\_\_\_\_  
 4. Age \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: M F  
☐ Other Adult – not head of household
6. Household Type  
☐ Individual, without children ☐ Single-parent household ☐ unaccompanied child  
☐ Couple, without children ☐ Two-parent household ☐ Household of all children  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Are you a Veteran? ☐ Yes ☐ No  
 a. Have you ever served in any branch of the Armed Forces (Military)? ☐ Yes: \_\_\_\_\_ ☐ No
8. Are you a survivor of domestic violence? ☐ Yes ☐ No

9. Have you been diagnosed with any of the following conditions?

- ☐ Mental illness ☐ Substance use disorder ☐ HIV/AIDS ☐ Physical disability  
☐ Chronic physical illness ☐ Developmental disability ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ None

10. Where did you sleep last night?

- ☐ On the streets (sidewalk, park, tent, abandoned building, car, etc.)  
☐ Slab City  
☐ Emergency shelter (Name: \_\_\_\_\_)  
☐ Transitional housing (Name: \_\_\_\_\_)  
☐ Hotel/Motel → Did you pay for the stay in the hotel? ☐ Yes ☐ No  
☐ Hospital  
☐ Treatment facility or other facility/institution (substance abuse, mental health, jail/prison)  
     • Were you homeless immediately before entering this facility? ☐ Yes ☐ No  
☐ Rapid re-housing program (Name: \_\_\_\_\_)  
☐ Permanent supportive housing program (Name: \_\_\_\_\_)  
☐ Private dwelling that I rent or own (room, apartment, house)  
☐ With a friend/family in their private dwelling

11. How long have you been homeless this time? \_\_\_\_\_ Years \_\_\_\_\_ months \_\_\_\_\_ days

- ☐ I am not homeless now but I will be evicted, discharged, or forced to leave my current housing situation within 14 days AND I lack the resources to obtain new housing.

12. How many times have you lived on the streets or in an emergency shelter in the past 3 years, if any? \_\_\_\_\_

13. What is the main reason you are homeless/unstably housed? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Unemployment ☐ Substance use ☐ Child abuse/neglect ☐ Disability  
☐ Mental illness ☐ Runaway ☐ Domestic violence ☐ Natural Disaster  
☐ Release from prison/jail ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ None

14. Were you released from prison or jail during the past 90 days? ☐ Yes ☐ No

14a. If yes to #14, were you released on probation or parole? (circle one)

15. If no to #14, were you released from prison or jail during the past 12 months? ☐ Yes ☐ No

15a. If yes to #15, were you released on probation or parole? (circle one)

16. Have you received any of the following services in the past 12 months OR do you need these services?

Substance abuse/addiction treatment	<input type="checkbox"/> Received	<input type="checkbox"/> Needed
Mental health services	<input type="checkbox"/> Received	<input type="checkbox"/> Needed
Health Insurance	<input type="checkbox"/> Received	<input type="checkbox"/> Needed
Disability services	<input type="checkbox"/> Received	<input type="checkbox"/> Needed
Housing assistance	<input type="checkbox"/> Received	<input type="checkbox"/> Needed
Food assistance	<input type="checkbox"/> Received	<input type="checkbox"/> Needed
Job training/employment services	<input type="checkbox"/> Received	<input type="checkbox"/> Needed

Legal services	<input type="checkbox"/> Received	<input type="checkbox"/> Needed
Identification/ID card assistance	<input type="checkbox"/> Received	<input type="checkbox"/> Needed
Child care	<input type="checkbox"/> Received	<input type="checkbox"/> Needed

17. Where was the last place you were housed for 90 days or more?

- ☐ This County/Community ☐ Another state: \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Another town/county in CA: \_\_\_\_\_ ☐ Another country: \_\_\_\_\_

18. Were you displaced by a natural disaster? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, name of natural disaster: \_\_\_\_\_

19. Are you currently employed?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No (date of last employment: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_)

20. Do you receive income from any of the following sources?

- ☐ Employment ☐ Social Security/pensions ☐ Friends and family  
☐ Disability (SSI/SSDI) ☐ TANF/Cal ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Veteran's benefits ☐ Food stamps ☐ None  
☐ Cash Aid ☐ Child support

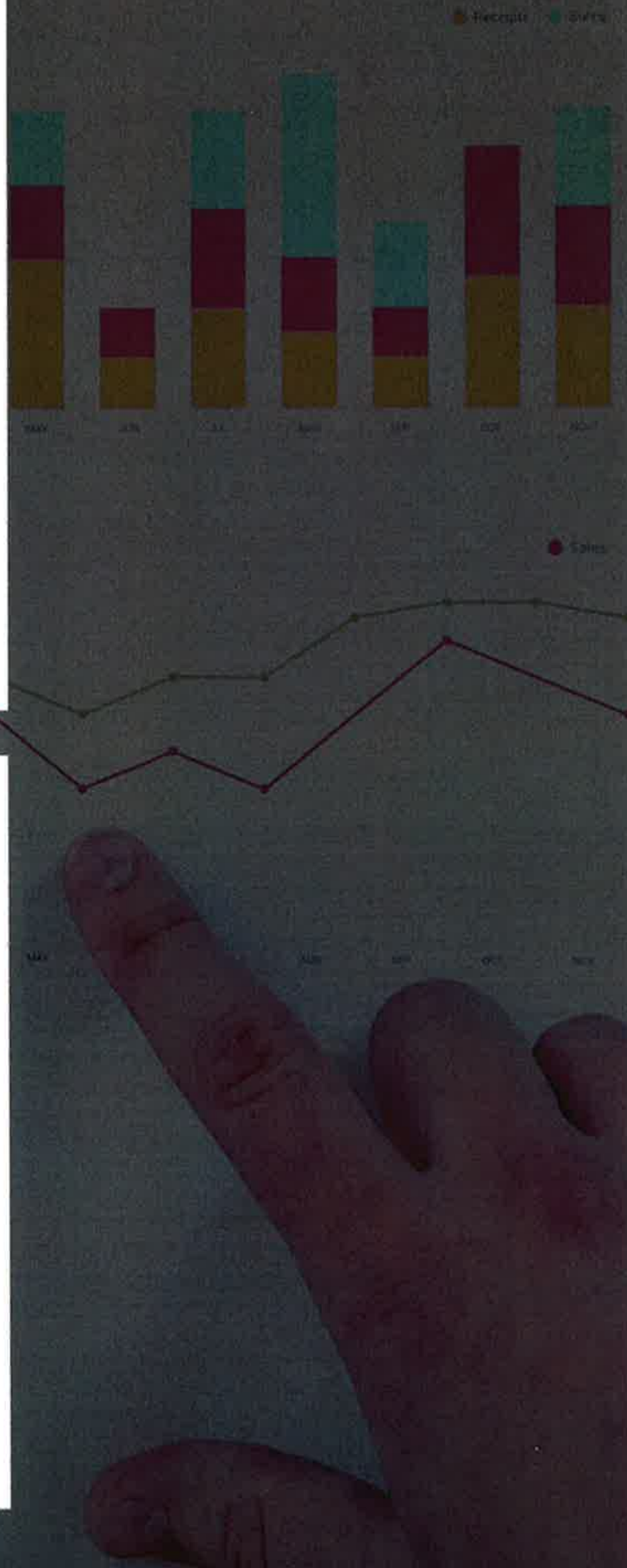
21. What is the total monthly income for your household? \$ \_\_\_\_\_

22. How much school did you complete?

- ☐ Less than high school ☐ Some college or vocational training  
☐ Some high school, no diploma ☐ College or vocational degree  
☐ High school diploma or GED ☐ Graduate degree

23. Anything else you would like me/us to know? ☐ No

☐ Yes: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_



## C. Summary of Survey Responses

The most-needed services identified by homeless persons completing surveys in the 2018 PITC were:

- Running water
- Safe, sanitary restroom and shower facilities
- Trash pick-up services
- Access to primary and mental healthcare
- Mobile food distribution
- Drug treatment services
- Public benefits advocacy and assistance
- Transportation services
- Rental assistance
- Education and job training programs

## D. HUD's Housing First Philosophy

*The following description of Housing First is adapted from HUD's publications.*

The concept of "Housing First" as embodied in federal homelessness policy is an initiative to quickly and successfully connect individuals and families experiencing homelessness to permanent housing without the preconditions and barriers to entry, such as sobriety, treatment, or service participation requirements that characterize other housing support programs. Under the Housing First philosophy, supportive services are offered to maximize housing stability and prevent returns to homelessness, as opposed to addressing predetermined treatment goals prior to permanent housing entry. Housing First emerged as an alternative to the traditional approach in which people experiencing homelessness were required to first participate in and graduate from short-term residential and treatment programs before obtaining permanent housing. In the traditional approach, permanent housing was offered only after a person experiencing homelessness could demonstrate that they were "ready" for housing. By contrast, Housing First is premised on the following principles:

- Homelessness is first and foremost a housing crisis and can be ameliorated through the provision of safe and affordable housing.
- All people experiencing homelessness, regardless of their housing history and duration of homelessness, can achieve housing stability in permanent housing. Some may need very little support for a brief period of time, while others may need more intensive and long-term supports.
- Everyone is "housing ready." Sobriety, compliance with treatment, or even a clean criminal record is not necessary to succeed in housing. Rather, homelessness programs and housing providers must be "consumer ready."
- Many people experience improvements in quality of life, physical and mental health, substance use, and employment, as a result of achieving housing.
- People experiencing homelessness have the right to self-determination and should be treated with dignity and respect.
- The exact configuration of housing and services depends upon the needs and preferences of the population.



**To meet the goals of its Housing First philosophy, HUD has encouraged (and to some extent required) CoCs to do the following:**

## **Adopt Client-Centered Service Methods**

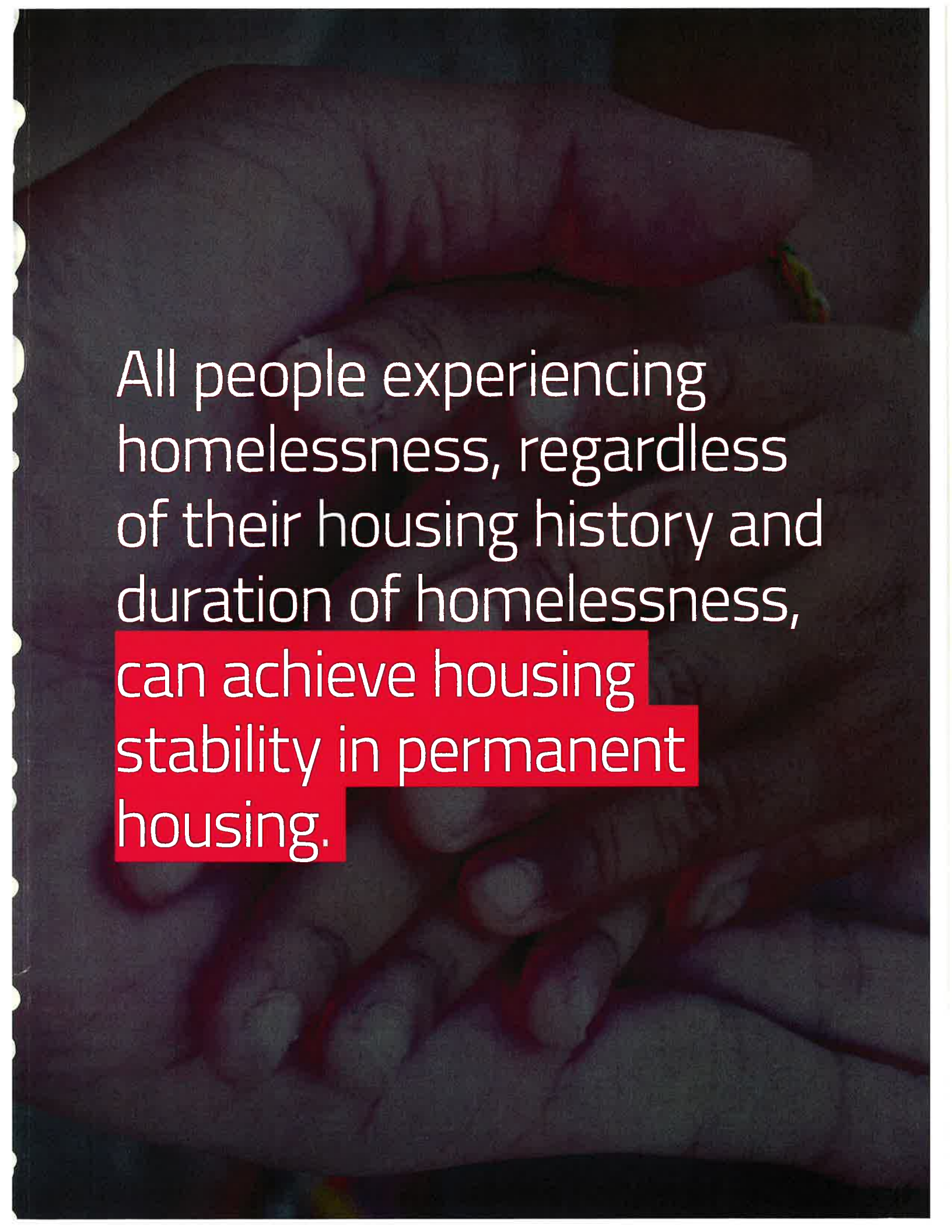
At its core, a Housing First approach should address each participant's current situation and should provide individuals and families with housing choices and access to voluntary supportive services. The services offered should be determined through a collaborative process with the program participant and tailored to meet the unique needs and goals of each individual or family. Because of this, the supportive services offered will likely change over time as the preferences and goals of the program participant change; however, program participants should not be required to participate in services and cannot be required to participate in disability-related services.

## **Remove Barriers to Entry**

Systems and projects following a Housing First model should have minimal barriers to entry. CoCs should review project-level eligibility criteria for all projects within the CoC and work with the recipients to remove any barriers to accessing housing and services. For example, persons experiencing homelessness should not be screened out of or discouraged from participating in programs because they have poor credit history or lack income or employment. Additionally, people with addictions to alcohol or substances should not be required to cease active use before accessing housing and services.

The Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs (SNAPS) released a Policy Brief in 2015 reporting on the Family Options Study—a long-term, multi-site, experimental study which demonstrated that requiring additional eligibility criteria beyond the statutory or regulatory requirements does not increase the success of programs. The study highlighted that permanent housing like Public Housing, vouchers, and Rapid Re-housing (RRH) have lower barriers to entry, whereas transitional housing programs often place additional barriers to receiving housing and services, and these additional eligibility criteria did not result in fewer returns to homelessness or better family well-being outcomes.

In a recent In Focus message, [HUD] also discussed recovery housing programs and how some programs have successfully implemented Housing First principles. The key elements include ensuring that entry into the program is not predicated on a set amount of clean time, strict income requirements, background checks, or other barriers, and ensuring that drug or alcohol relapse does not necessarily mean eviction from the program. Relapse management takes into account the realities of addiction and ensures that clients



All people experiencing homelessness, regardless of their housing history and duration of homelessness, can achieve housing stability in permanent housing.

AHF | Alliance Healthcare Foundation  
[ahf.health](http://ahf.health)

Catholic Charities Diocese of San Diego

IVCCC | Imperial Valley Continuum of Care Council Board and Member Agencies  
[cociv.org](http://cociv.org)

Kouros Phillips Development  
[kourosphillips.org](http://kourosphillips.org)

LiveGoode Programs & Analytics  
[livegoode.com](http://livegoode.com)

