

# *A HOME FOR EVERYONE*

## Whatcom County Coalition to End Homelessness 2019 Annual Report

Part A: Point-in-Time Census of Homeless Residents

Part B: Youth Homeless Count

Part C: Public School Students and their Families

May 2019

**Sponsored by:**

**Whatcom County Health Department**

**City of Bellingham**

**Whatcom County Coalition to End Homelessness**

**Whatcom Homeless Service Center at Opportunity Council**

For more information about Whatcom County's Homeless Point-in-Time Count, this annual report,  
or our community's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness, please contact:

Barbara Johnson-Vinna, Housing Specialist, Whatcom County Health Department  
(360) 778-6046  
BJJohnso@co.whatcom.wa.us

Or

Chris D'Onofrio, Housing Specialist, Whatcom County Health Department  
(360) 778-6049  
CDOnofri@co.whatcom.wa.us

Or

Michael Parker, Director, Whatcom Homeless Service Center  
(360) 255-2091  
michael\_parker@whatcomhsc.org

## Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Acknowledgments.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Part A: Point-in-Time Census of Homeless Residents .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Number of Homeless Individuals and Families in Whatcom County .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Characteristics of Homeless Persons and Families .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Un-sheltered and Sheltered Homeless Persons and Families.....</b>	<b>12</b>
Household Size and Family Status.....	13
Age and Gender .....	18
Disabling Conditions .....	18
Race and Ethnicity.....	20
Geographic Distribution: Location of Previous Residence .....	21
Sources of Shelter .....	22
Reasons for Homelessness.....	23
Sources of Income and Other Benefits.....	24
Community Re-entry.....	25
Chronic Homelessness.....	26
Persistence of Homelessness .....	27
Homeless Veterans .....	28
<b>Part B: Youth Count! 2019 .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>A Special Focus to Develop a Better Understanding of Youth Homelessness .....</b>	<b>30</b>
Types of Youth Count Households.....	31
Characteristics of Minors and Young Adults Who are not Children of Youth Count Households .....	32
LGTBQ Youth and Young Adults.....	31
<b>Part C: Homelessness of Public School Students.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Number of Homeless Students in Washington State and Whatcom County Public Schools .....</b>	<b>35</b>
Homelessness and academic achievement .....	39
<b>Appendix A: Homeless count methodology .....</b>	<b>40</b>
Methods Overview .....	41
Data Assumptions and Limitations .....	41

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

On January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019, volunteers and homeless housing providers counted 700 people as experiencing homelessness in Whatcom County during the annual Point in Time (PIT) Count. Additionally, hundreds more are known to be at risk of losing their homes and becoming homeless in Whatcom County, due to lack of economic opportunity, family break up, mental illness, addiction, and domestic violence. People released from institutional settings, including psychiatric hospitalization, treatment, and incarceration, face extremely challenging community re-entry issues and the combination of high rents and low vacancy rates have led families of all sizes to share housing units with additional families (“doubling up”). This annual report provides historical and current data from the PIT Count, along with other relevant data, which helps guide our work in reducing and ending homelessness, informs our community about the current face of homelessness locally, and provides a year by year comparison on local trends of homelessness.

## The 2019 Homeless Count

This year, 40 volunteers participated in the Whatcom County Point in Time Count, which occurred on January 24<sup>th</sup>. A few observations from this years’ Count include: good location coverage even with fewer volunteers, Homeless Outreach Team again provided great support with surveying unsheltered households and those in camps, and the Lighthouse Mission providing the second highest count of surveys returned. It is important to note that two survey locations were not able to participate in the one day count: Sea Mar and Northwest Youth Services which provided a total of 34 surveys last year. Despite this, the combined efforts of so many other volunteers, tend to provide consistent coverage and even improve our reach year after year. However, as you read this report, please keep in mind that Point in Time Counts generally underestimate the number of those who are homeless because:

- A point-in-time is just a “snapshot” and may not capture all those who are cycling in and out of homelessness over the course of a year.
- It is difficult to find where all of the unsheltered people reside. It is impossible to know all the places that might provide unconventional shelter (i.e. tents, abandoned cars) for one night.
- Participation in the PIT count is voluntary and a small number of households decline to complete the survey. Our volunteers noted people declining to participate at several locations though this is largely consistent with previous years.

## How many are homeless?

This year we counted:

- 700 homeless persons (a *person* may be part of a family household, or an unaccompanied individual)
- 514 homeless households (a *household* may include one or more persons)
- 294 persons reported being unsheltered

## Who are the people experiencing homelessness?

The 2019 homeless population is as diverse as the larger community population with complex barriers and incredible resiliency: They are old and young, diverse in gender identification, unaccompanied individuals, and families with children. Some are residing in sheltered settings, while others are, literally, without a roof over their heads. Of those counted this year:

- 77% of homeless households included only one person

- There were 72 families with children that included 207 persons; the median<sup>1</sup> family size was 2 persons
- 12% of homeless households identify as Native American which is in disparate proportion to comprising 3.1% of Whatcom County residents in the last census

In terms of age and identified gender:

- Ages ranged from less than one year old to 76 years old
- Median age of all homeless persons was 37 years
- Median age of unaccompanied homeless persons was 46 years
- 47% of all homeless persons identified themselves as female

## Homeless Minors and Young Adults

“Every night, thousands of homeless youth in Washington go to sleep without safety, stability, and support of a family or home” (Dept. of Commerce). Homelessness among youth may result from family problems, economic problems, and residential instability. Some youth become homeless with their families; others leave home after years of physical and/or sexual abuse, strained relationships, neglect, addiction of a family member, or their own substance use disorder. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTBQ) youth experience significantly higher rates of homelessness than their non-LGBTBQ peers. The following statistics are for youth we encountered in 2019 who are literally homeless<sup>2</sup>.

- 126 persons under 18 years old were counted, or 18% of all homeless persons
- 13% of all homeless persons were 10 years old or less
- 33 persons counted were 16 to 21 years old
- 64 persons were 16 to 24 years old
- 7 homeless minors (age 13-17) were unaccompanied

This year, we also conducted a special count of homeless youth that included minors and young adults ages 18 to 24 who were either literally homeless or unstably housed (e.g. couch surfing with friends or relatives to prevent becoming literally homeless). This special youth count was conducted at the same time as the larger count. In this special count we encountered:

- 42 youth households
- 7 unaccompanied minors (all staying in emergency shelter)
- 8 young adult families with children
- 17% of young adult households were unsheltered
- 54% of youth had a self-reported mental health disability
- 27% of youth identify as LGBTBQ

## Community Re-Entry from Institutions

Homeless Count survey respondents were asked if they had been discharged from an institution within the last six months. 85 (17%) household respondents said they had been released from jail or prison, inpatient substance use disorder treatment, and or mental health treatment in the last six months.

- 17% of household respondents had been released from jail or prison (n=60)
- 4% had been released from inpatient substance use disorder treatment (n=22)

<sup>1</sup> The median value is, essentially, the midpoint. Specifically, in a group of measurements (e.g. family size, age) arranged from lowest to highest, the median is the middle value if the number of measurements is odd. If the number of measurements is even, the median is the average of the two middle values.

<sup>2</sup> Literally homeless means people who are staying unsheltered, in emergency shelter, or in homeless transitional housing

- 5% had been released from a psychiatric hospital (n=23)

## Shelter

Homeless survey respondent households told us where they had slept the previous night:

- 19% in transitional housing (n=97)
- 36% in emergency shelter<sup>3</sup> (n=183)
- 28% out of doors (n=145)
- 13% in a vehicle (n=67)
- 3% in a RV/boat lacking basic amenities (n=15)
- 1% in an abandoned building (n=7)

## Chronic Homelessness

Based on HUD's definition of chronic homelessness, **165 unaccompanied persons** reported information indicating they were experiencing chronic homelessness. Our Homeless Outreach Team was again invaluable in obtaining this information; however, many survey respondents did not supply enough information to determine whether or not they met all of the HUD chronic homelessness characteristics. Nevertheless, it is a slight increase from our baseline year of 2008 when 158 people experiencing chronic homelessness were counted.<sup>4</sup> To be considered chronically homeless based on HUD's definition, a person must be an unaccompanied individual who has been homeless for 12 months or more OR has had four or more episodes of homelessness in the last three years AND those episodes must total 12 months, AND has been sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation OR in emergency shelter, AND has one of the following disabling conditions (mental disorder, substance use disorder, permanent physical or developmental disability). The longer people live on the streets, the worse their health becomes over time leading to chronic homelessness.

The number (and percent) of 514 counted households with any of the HUD characteristics of chronic homelessness include:

- 394 (77%) unaccompanied, single individuals
- 211 (41%) who had been homeless for 12 months or more
- 154 (30%) who have had four or more episodes of homelessness in the last three years AND those episodes total at least 12 months
- 361 (70%) households including a person with a disabling condition
- 234 (46%) who slept in a place not meant for human habitation or in emergency shelter

## Homeless Housing System

While it is beyond the scope of a Point in Time Count Report to comprehensively cover the robust and coordinated homeless housing system in Whatcom County, the following are important statistics for families who received a housing intervention in 2018 and who would have been otherwise homeless. The following families would have been homeless but for the rental assistance and supportive services our community undertakes with our crisis response housing system operated through coordinated entry:

- 1,304 households received housing assistance through the Whatcom Homeless Service Center and its partners
- 314 households received assistance to prevent an eviction, thus avoiding likely homelessness

<sup>3</sup> Emergency shelter includes 15 households who stayed in a motel using an emergency assistance voucher.

<sup>4</sup> Due to a counting error in 2008, the published report that year reported that only 113 persons were considered to be chronically homeless by HUD's definition; however, only unsheltered persons were included in that calculation. Instead, we should have also included persons in emergency shelter who also meet the other criteria. The correct number of chronically homeless persons in 2008 is actually 158.

- 319 households were sheltered with emergency assistance (e.g. family receiving a motel voucher), frequently as a bridge to a more permanent housing situation. (this does not include those households staying at the Lighthouse Mission or Lummi emergency shelters)
- All told, at least 2,859 individuals were assisted in 2018 with shelter and/or housing

Without the efforts of partner agencies and the resources from our local, state, and federal funders, these households would also face homelessness. Partners include: Bellingham Housing Authority, Catholic Community Services, DVSAS, Interfaith Coalition, Lake Whatcom Treatment Center, Lighthouse Mission Ministries, Lydia Place, Northwest Youth Services, Opportunity Council, Pioneer Human Services, Sun Community Services, and the YWCA.

## Key Findings

Compared to the baseline year of 2008 when our community began implementing the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, the number of people counted in 2019 that were literally homeless<sup>5</sup> decreased by 18%. Our community welcomed the opening of our newest Supportive Housing project late in 2018, 22 North, which created 36 homes for Chronically Homeless youth and adults. Foundational Community Supports, a Medicaid reimbursed service that provides supportive housing and employment case management, was another positive development in 2018 helping house 20 individuals in scattered-site apartments.

However, other findings from this years' data are more troubling. The proportion of individuals 55 or older is now 17% of the total homeless count (or 26% of unaccompanied individuals), highlighting the disparate impact of rising rents on seniors in our community. The number of families with children also increased modestly from 68 to 72, eroding some of the gains made with this group. Since our baseline year of 2008, there has been a 29% reduction in the number of homeless families with children. This is the second year we have highlighted the disparities in who experiences homelessness: Native Americans represent slightly more than 3% of the total population of Whatcom County, but are 12% of the persons counted as homeless.

More than 2,281 individuals were re-housed or received assistance to prevent them from becoming homeless in 2018. The partners of Coordinated Entry, together with Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham, help an amazing amount of people. It is hard to imagine the streets of Whatcom County filled with 2,200 more people experiencing homelessness but without the investments we have made thus far, that would be a likely reality. Assisting 700 more individuals to get into permanent housing is an attainable goal with the necessary additional resources. The need for deeper investments in affordable housing, and the lack of that housing now, directly contributes to homelessness. In fact, the Washington State Department of Commerce has reported that in Washington State, a \$100 increase in rent is associated with a 14% increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness. (Journal of Urban Affairs, New Perspectives on Community-Level Determinants of Homelessness, 2012)

This is the seventh year we can report the proportion of people we encountered who were also encountered in previous homeless counts. Altogether, 22% of the homeless households we encountered in 2019 were also encountered in 2018; 12% were also encountered in 2017, 7% were also encountered in 2016; 5% were also encountered in 2015; 3% were also encountered in 2014, 3% were also encountered in 2013 and 3% were also encountered in 2012. In other words, 7% of homeless households encountered in 2016 have been continuously homeless for at least three years, OR, they have been housed and become homeless again during that time interval (see table on page 28).

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<sup>5</sup> Literally homeless means people who are staying unsheltered, in emergency shelter, or in homeless transitional housing

## Acknowledgments

Counting people who are experiencing homelessness for the annual Point-in-Time Count is not an easy task. Successful PIT Counts in Whatcom County are made possible because of the commitment from the service organizations, community volunteers, and members of the Whatcom County Coalition to End Homelessness.

This year was no exception; a great number of individuals and organizations assisted with the 2019 PIT count.

Thank you to all of you who gave your time and effort.

Finally, we would like to extend a special thank you to the individuals and families who responded to this year's PIT Count survey. We understand that we are asking you some difficult questions and to share a part of your very personal story. Without this information, we would know very little about the complexities of homelessness, or how we, as a community, should respond. Your assistance can help us perform better at our work in ending homelessness in Whatcom County.



**Part A: Point-in-Time Census of Homeless Residents**

## Introduction

At any point in time, at least 700 people in Whatcom County are homeless. Throughout the year, hundreds more face the prospect of losing their homes due to economic hardship, domestic violence and sexual assault, family break up, loss of employment, and mental illness. Hundreds of students in our schools have unstable housing; as a result, their academic performance may suffer and they are likely to have lasting impacts from this adverse childhood experience. People released from psychiatric hospitalization and incarceration face challenging community re-entry issues, such as negative stigma around mental illness and poverty. Furthermore wage growth has been greatly outpaced by rising housing costs increasing the risk of people losing their housing. The extremely slow pace of dedicated affordable housing development, and the low rate of rental vacancies make it increasingly difficult for people who become homeless to return to stable, permanent housing.

**Report format.** This marks the eleventh year of our community's efforts to implement its formal response outlined in the original 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness. The plan is in the process of a major update at the time of this report. This year we are using this reporting opportunity for three purposes, each embodied in a separate section of the report:

**Part A: Point-in-Time Count Homeless Census** contains the results of our annual census of individuals and families who are literally homeless<sup>6</sup>. Part A of this report is consistent and comparable with past years' methods to measure people who are literally homeless at a single point in time (see Part C below for cumulative school data).

**Part B: Youth Homeless Count** describes the results of a focused effort during our regular Point-In-Time count to locate youth and young adults under 25 years old who are either literally homeless or who have unstable housing and are at risk of becoming literally homeless.

**Part C: Homelessness of Public School Students** contains cumulative estimates of public school students who are unaccompanied, or part of families who are either experiencing a housing crisis or are literally homeless, at any time over the course of a complete school year. The data comes from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). Doubled up students and families in addition to literally homeless families are included in this data.

## The Point-in-Time Homeless Count

The Point-in-Time Count is a census of homeless persons. It is conducted over a very short period of time to reduce the chance of counting people twice. The Count is sponsored by the Whatcom County Homeless Coalition, Whatcom County Health Department, and the Whatcom Homeless Service Center and the Opportunity Council. In 2019 more than 30 agencies participated in the Count, which occurred on January 24<sup>th</sup>.

Homeless census data derived from this count is useful for characterizing the homeless population in our community. Knowing approximately how many families with children, unaccompanied youth, and unsheltered veterans – to use just a few subgroup examples – helps Homeless Coalition members and our City and County governments plan for homeless services and measure progress toward goals.

The Count is also required by Washington State and federal laws as a condition of receiving financial assistance to fund homeless services.

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<sup>6</sup> Literally homeless means people who are staying unsheltered, in emergency shelter, or in homeless transitional housing

**Limitations**

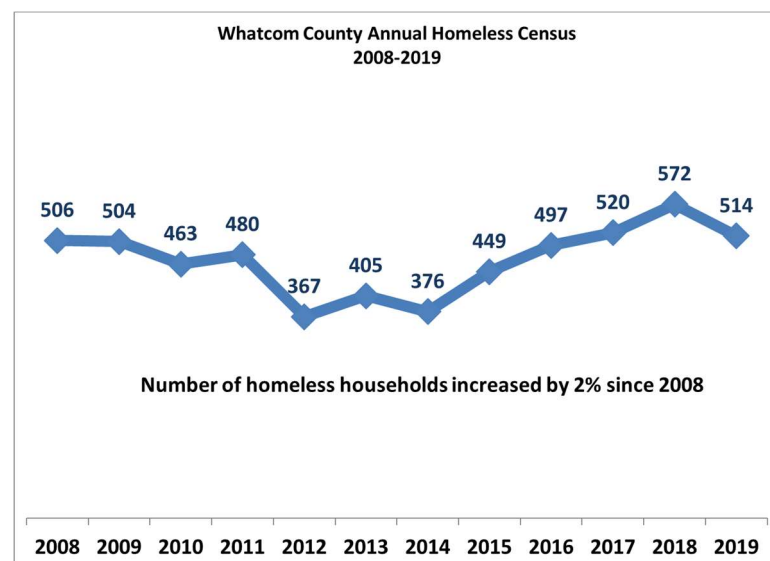
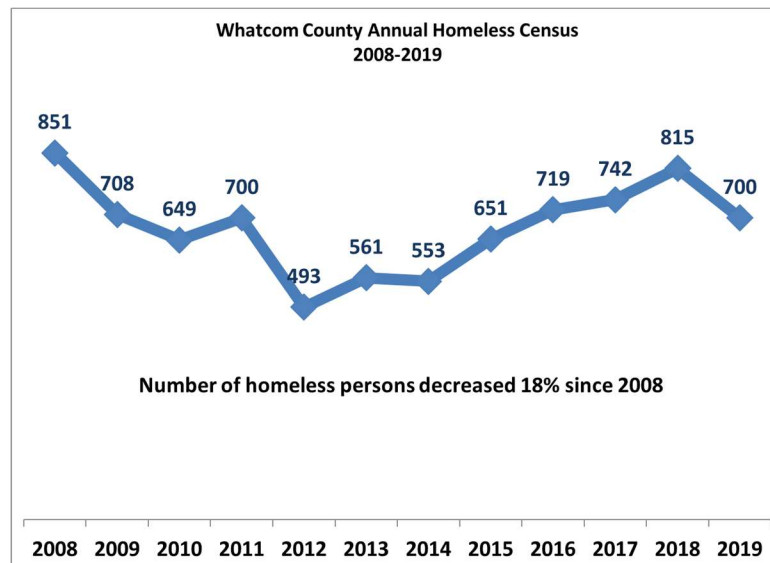
National research indicates that Point-in-Time Counts generally underestimate the number of those who are homeless because:

- Participation is, with good reason, voluntary, and some choose not to be counted. Additionally, immigrants, even those with legal status, may avoid participating out of concerns of reprisal.
- A point-in-time is just a “snapshot” and does not capture all those who are cycling in and out of homelessness over the year. Furthermore, “snapshots” will miss seasonal fluctuations that occur in our communities.
- It is difficult to find where all the unsheltered people reside. It is impossible to know all the places that might provide unconventional shelter (i.e. tents, sheds, abandoned cars).

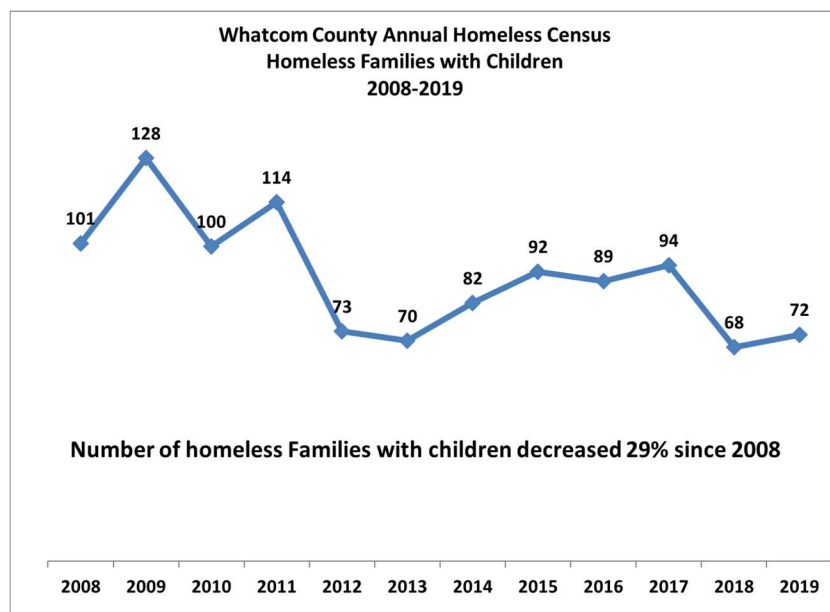
## Number of Homeless Individuals and Families in Whatcom County

At a single point in time in late January 2019, a total of **700 persons** were homeless in Whatcom County. They were members of **514 households**. For the purpose of this homeless count, households were divided into two categories: *sheltered* and *unsheltered* individuals and families. Sheltered homeless persons stayed in emergency shelter or in transitional housing on the night before the Count. Unsheltered persons stayed outdoors, in cars, or other places not meant for habitation on the night before the Count.

Overall, there has been a 18% decrease in the number of homeless persons since 2008 and a 2% increase in homeless households. The year-over-year change between 2018 and 2019 was a 14% decrease in homeless persons counted (from 815 homeless persons in 2018 to 700 in 2019). The year-over-year change in number of homeless households similarly decreased by 10% between 2018-2019 (572 in 2018 to 514 in 2019)



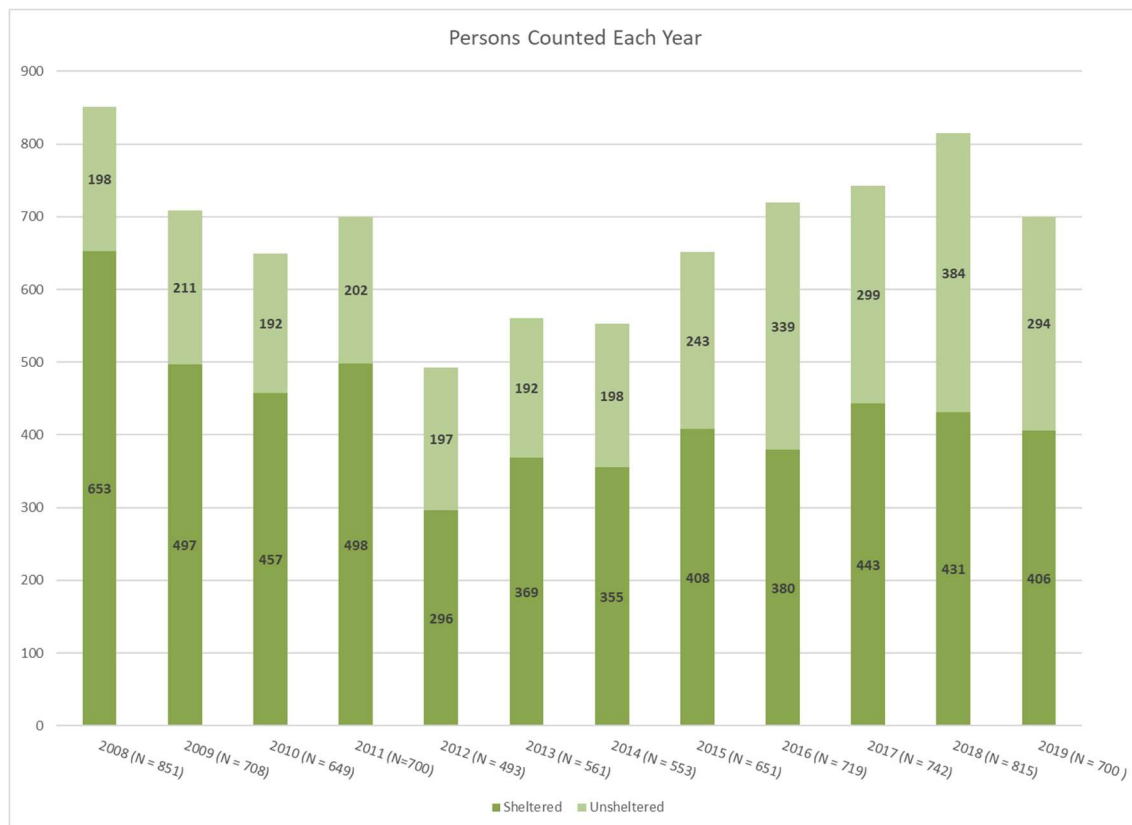
Overall, there was a 29% decrease in the number of homeless families with children since 2008. From 2018 to 2019, the number of homeless families grew from 68 to 72, an increase of four. As stated in this report, this number is based on self-report, and custody status of children is not verified. For comparison, there were approximately 43 families in the Coordinated Entry system waiting for housing with 17 families engaged in diversion case management at the Opportunity Council.



## Characteristics of Homeless Persons and Families

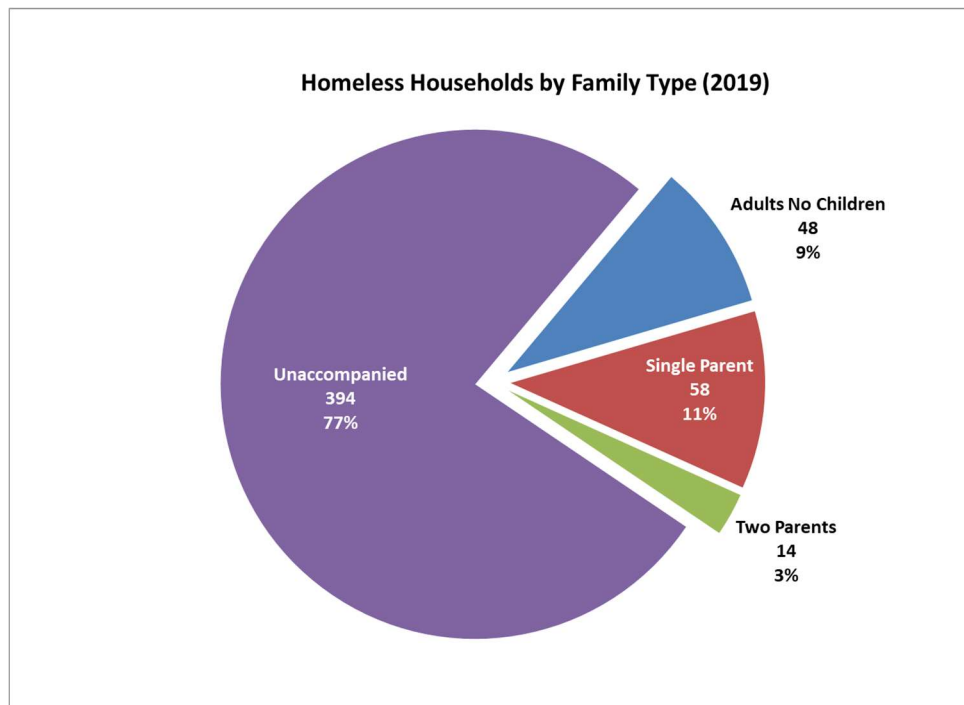
### Un-sheltered and Sheltered Homeless Persons and Families

A key measure in the PIT count is the number of unsheltered individuals. Of the 700 persons counted this year, 294 were unsheltered, which includes those in camps, cars, and places not meant for human habitation. The table below shows this breakdown since Whatcom PIT counts began in 2008. In 2019 there was a significant reduction from 2018 in the number of people who were unsheltered while the number of sheltered individuals saw a modest reduction.

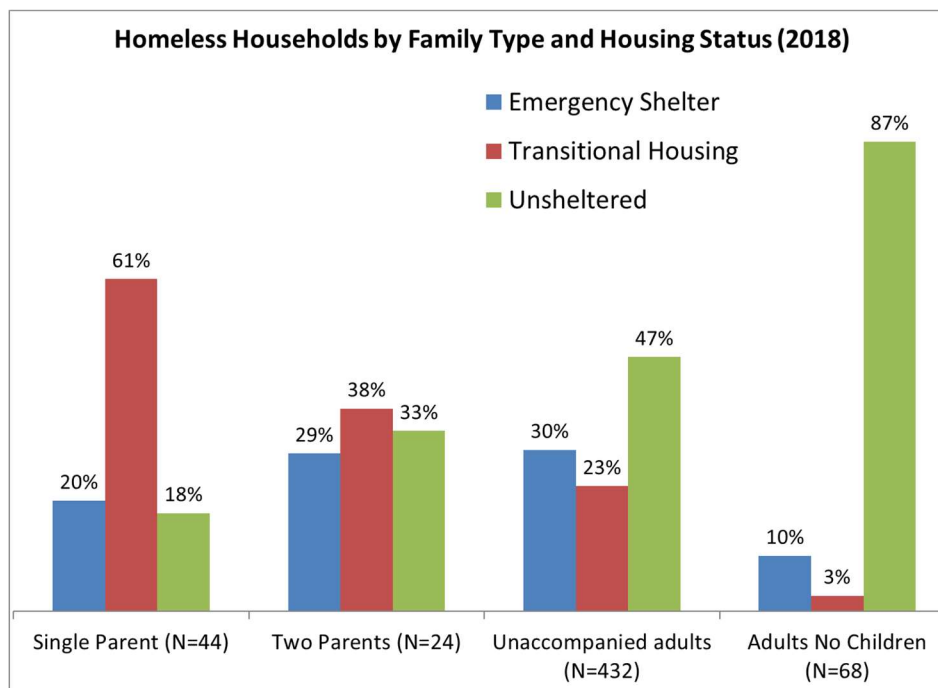
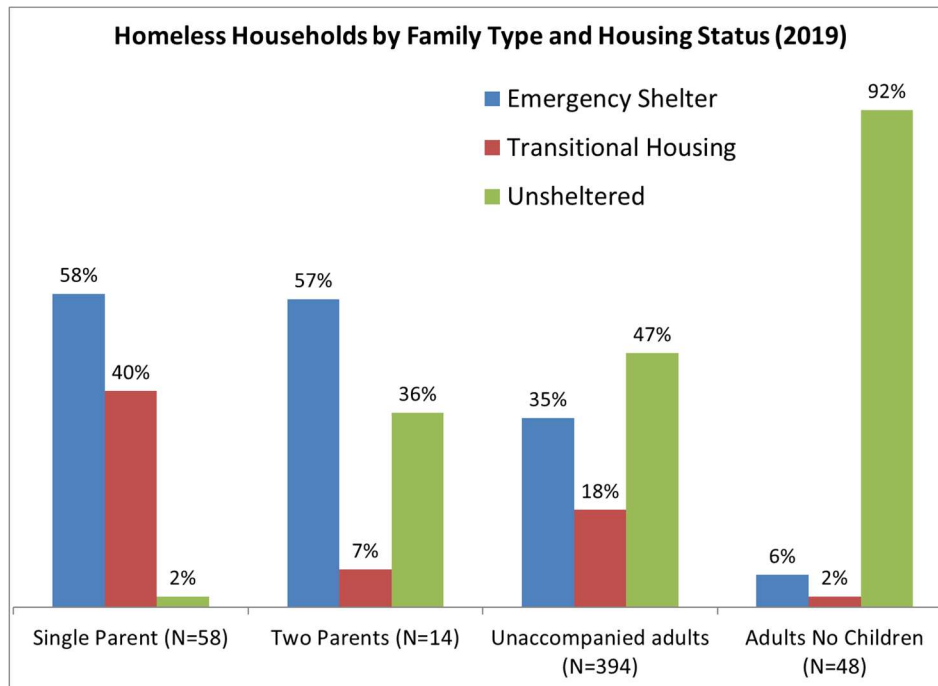


### Household Size and Family Status

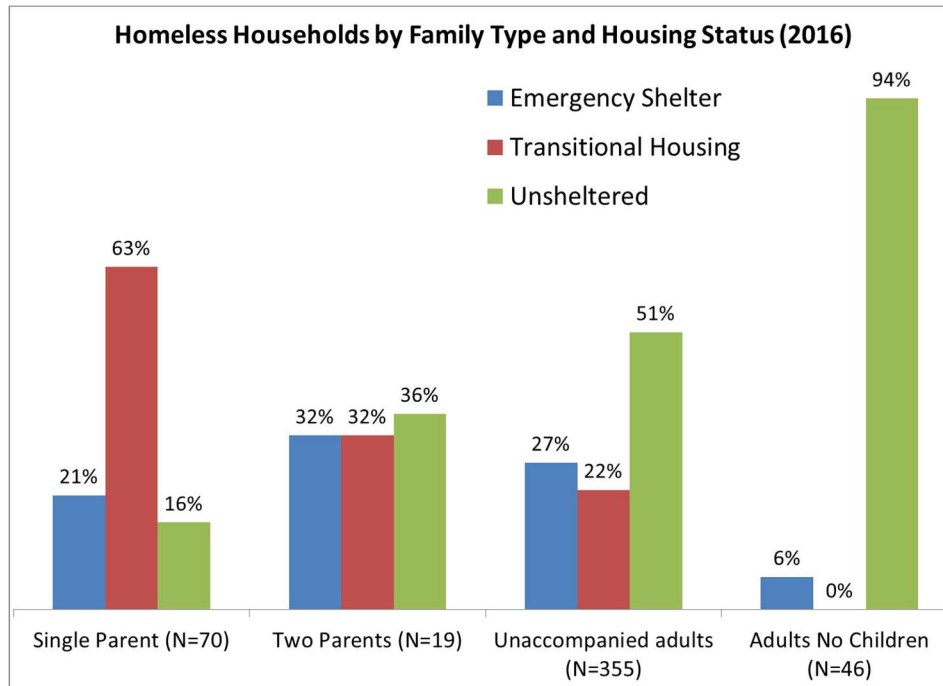
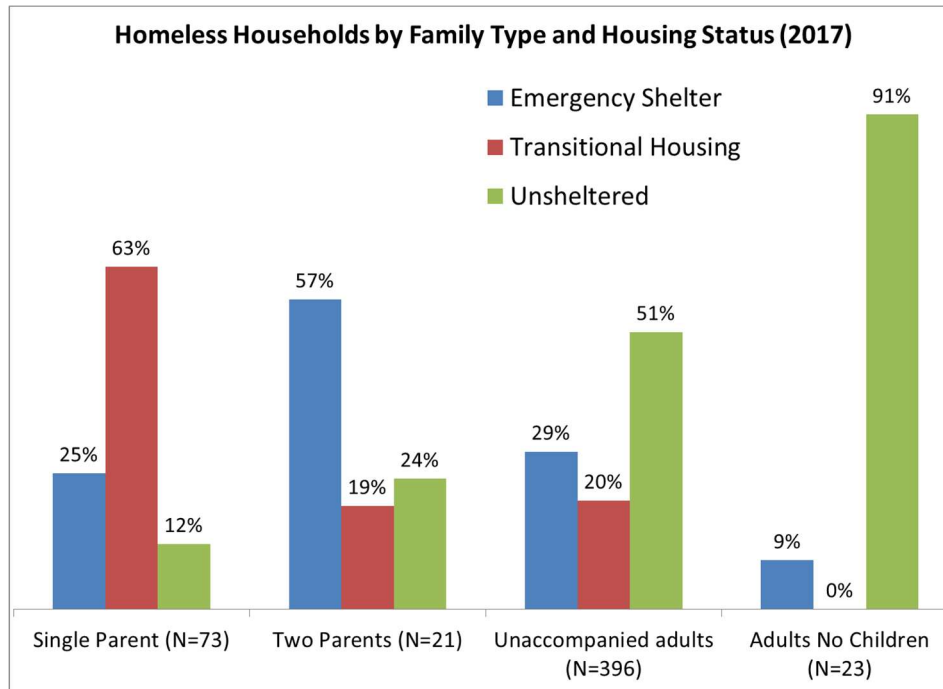
Of the 514 homeless households counted, 394 (77%) were unaccompanied persons. There were 48 (9%) family households with no children. A total of 72 (14%) families with children were counted, most of whom (58) were single-parent families; 14 (3%) families had both parents present. Seven unaccompanied minors were encountered this year. The breakdown by family type are remarkably consistent with 2018 with a modest increase in the number of families with children. The Adults with No Children category in the following graphs includes couples.

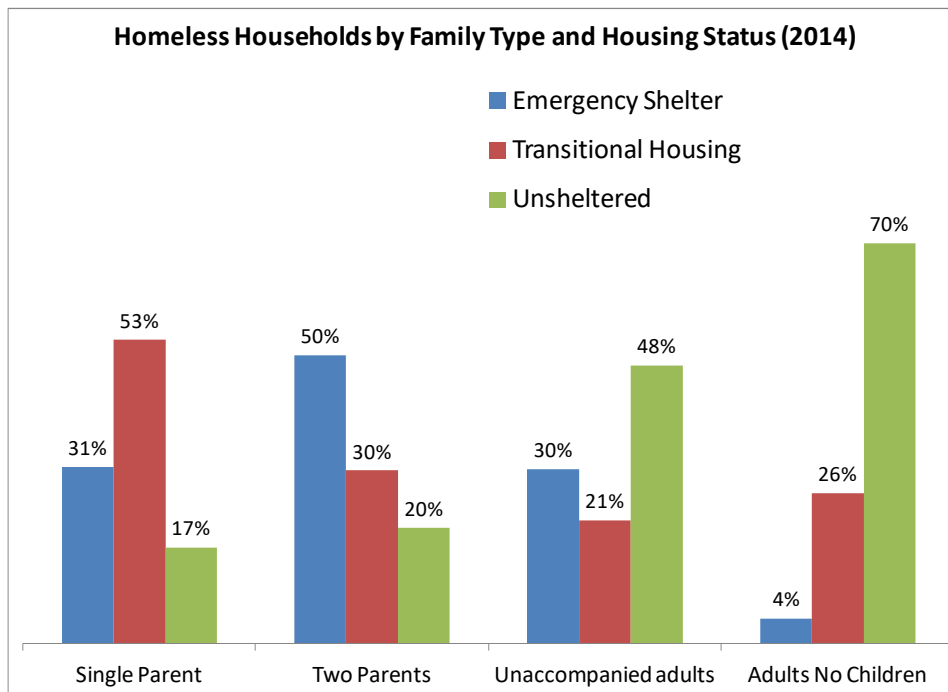
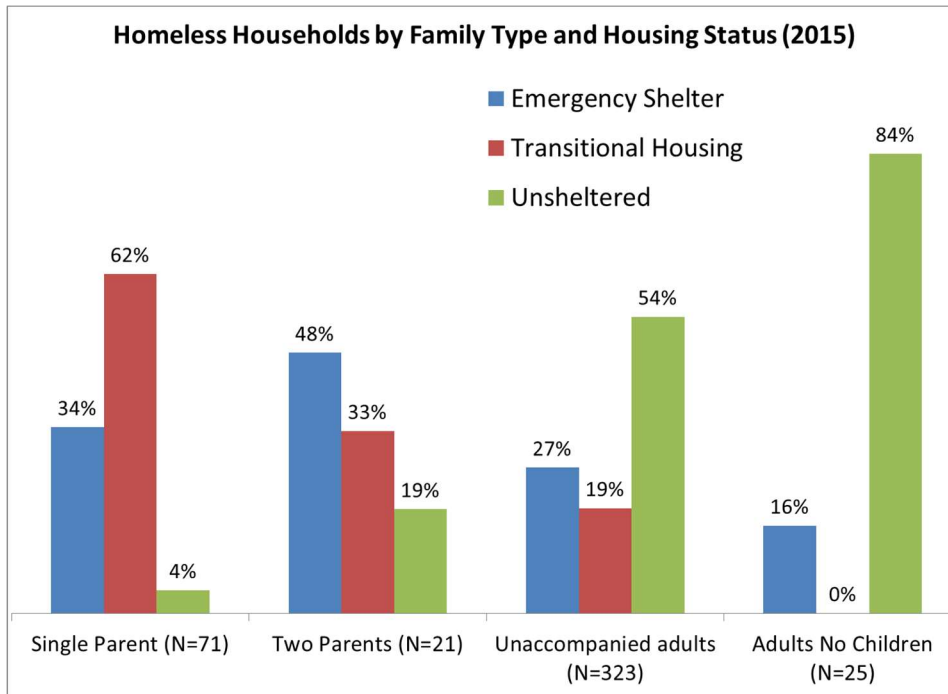


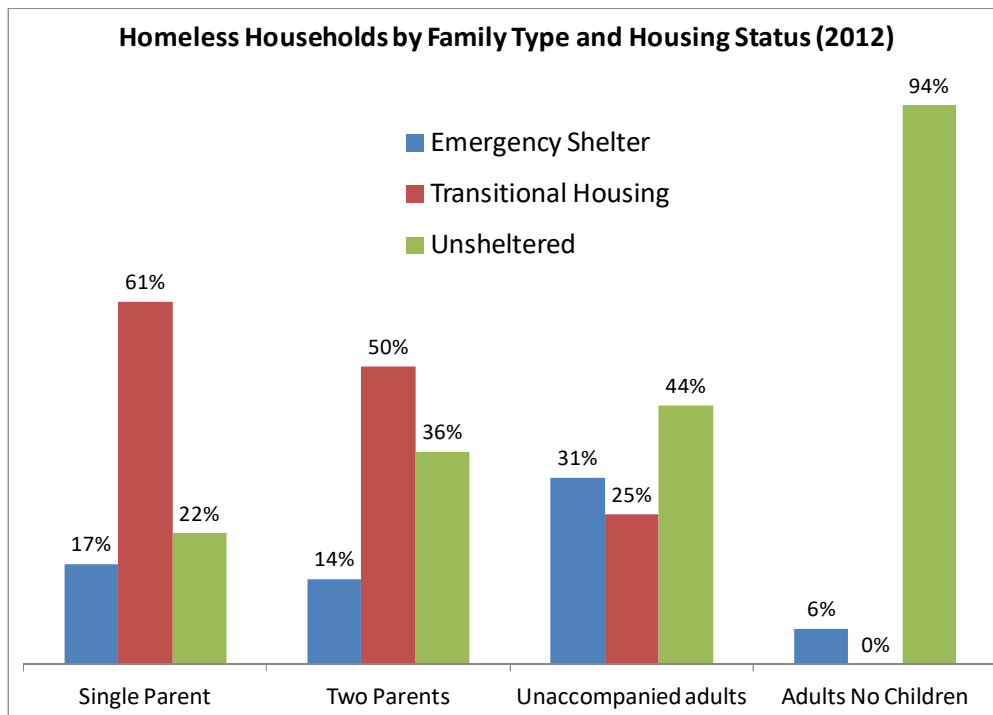
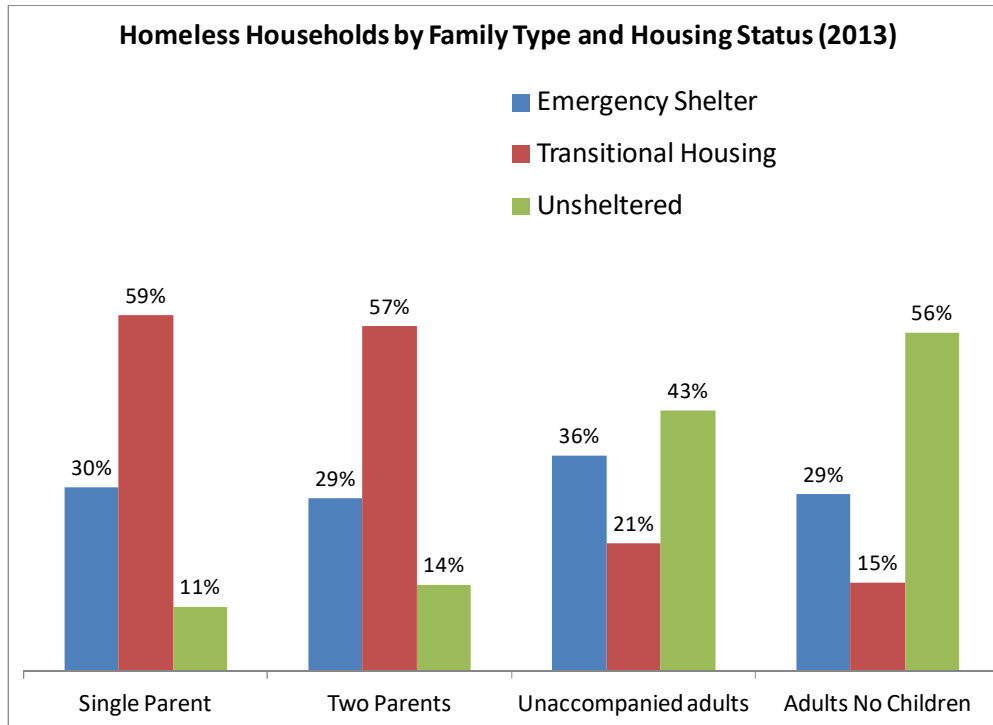
Compared to last year, similar proportions of households without children were unsheltered this year. For example, 47% of unaccompanied adult households were unsheltered which is the same percent as 2018. For families with children, the proportion of unsheltered was slightly higher this year compared to last year for two parent households (36% of two parent households compared to 33% in 2018) but was down for single parent households compared to last year (2% in 2019 were unsheltered and 18% of single parent households were unsheltered in 2018). The tables following show this breakdown in previous years.







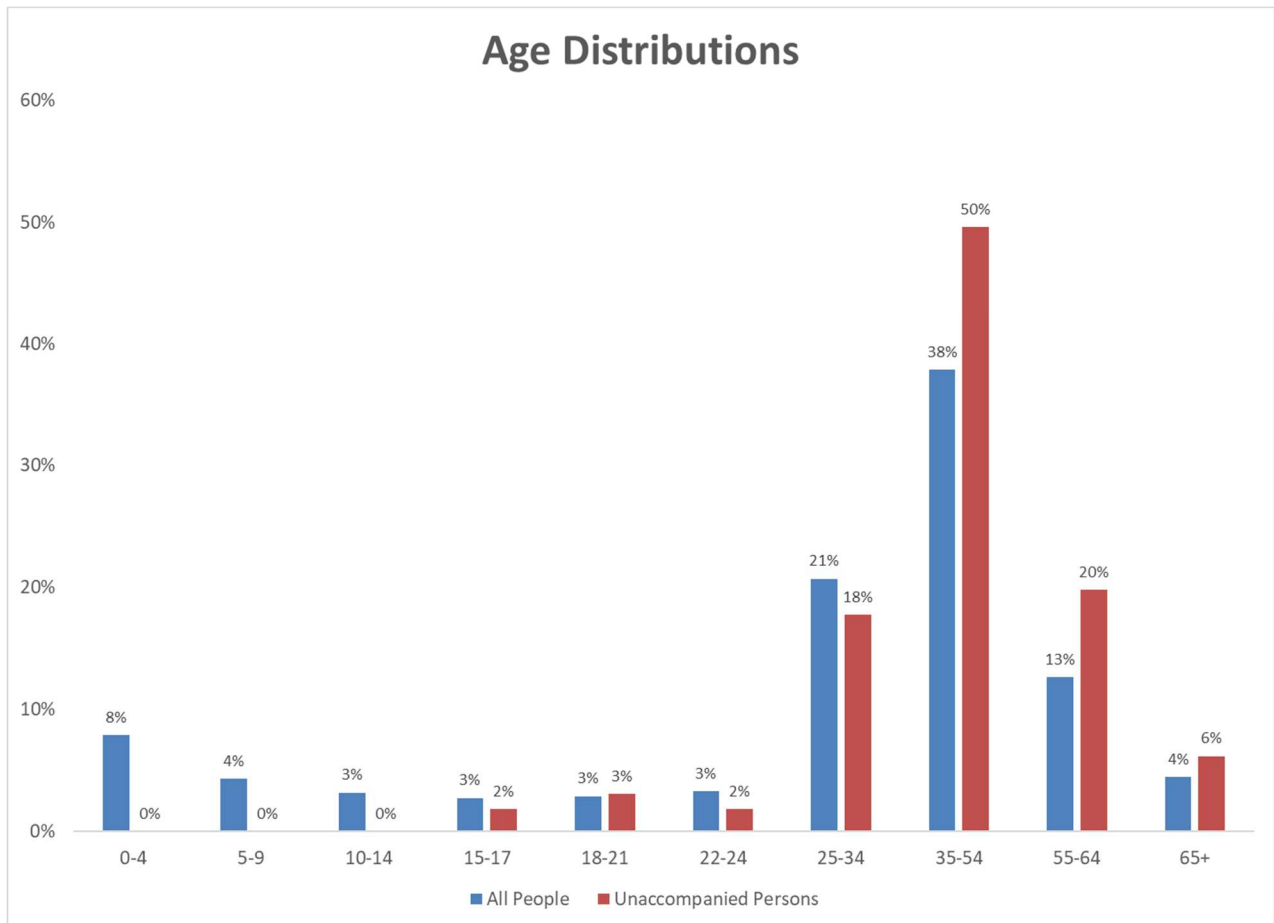




## Age and Gender

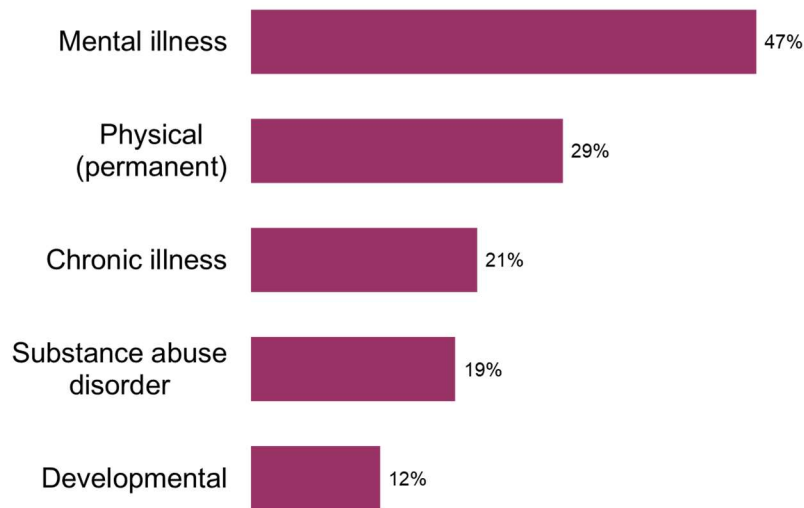
Homeless persons were almost evenly divided between persons who identified as males (51%) and identified as females (47%). Ages ranged from less than one year old to 76 years old. The median age of all homeless persons was 37 years. 13% of all homeless persons this year were children under 10 years old, and 18% were under 18 years old.

The median age of unaccompanied homeless persons was 46 years. Seven unaccompanied minors were encountered during this year's Count. Half (50%) of unaccompanied homeless persons were in the 35-54 years age range.

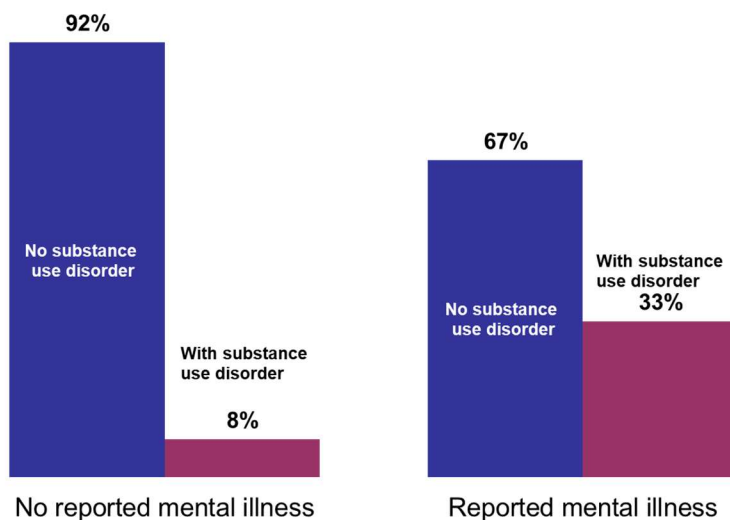


## Disabling Conditions

Homeless count survey respondents were asked to list which of five disabilities applied to each member of their household. The most prevalent disabling conditions were mental illness (47%), permanent physical disabilities (29%), chronic illness (21%), substance use disorders (19%), and developmental disability (12%). It should be emphasized that the data below on prevalence of disabling conditions is based on self-reporting. Due to the stigma of mental illness and substance abuse, these conditions are almost certainly under-reported.

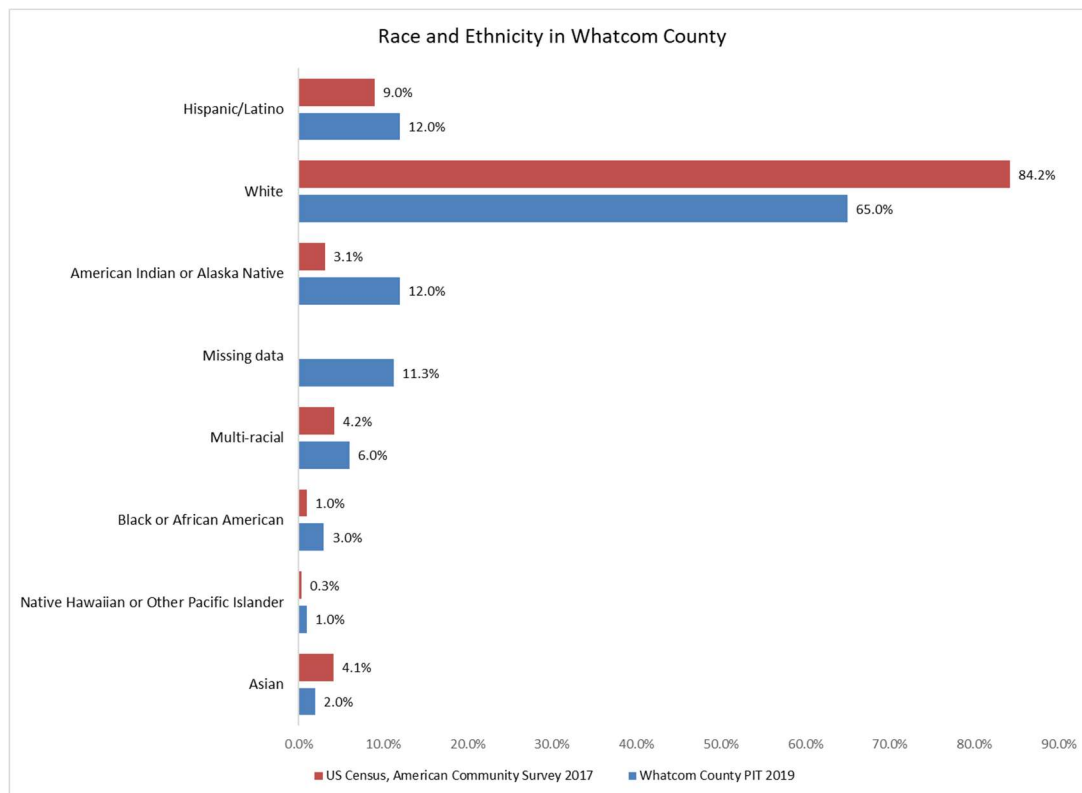
**Homeless Persons With Disabling Conditions (2019)**

Additional analysis shows that a substantial number of homeless persons face the challenges of co-occurring disorders. About 1 in 3 (33%) persons who reported having a mental illness also reported having a substance use disorder. Research estimates from the Journal of the American Medical Association put the number closer to 50% underscoring respondents reluctance to disclose substance use disorders.

**Homeless persons with reported mental illness are highly likely to have a co-occurring substance use disorder (2019)**

## Race and Ethnicity

Homeless count survey respondents were asked to list which race or races they identified with and the results are shown on the below graph. Persons of color experience rates of homelessness in greater numbers than their white neighbors. This is consistent with American Community Survey (census data) which shows households of color in higher rates of poverty than white-identified households. American Indian/Alaska Natives comprise 3.1% of the population of Whatcom County but are 12% of the counted homeless population.

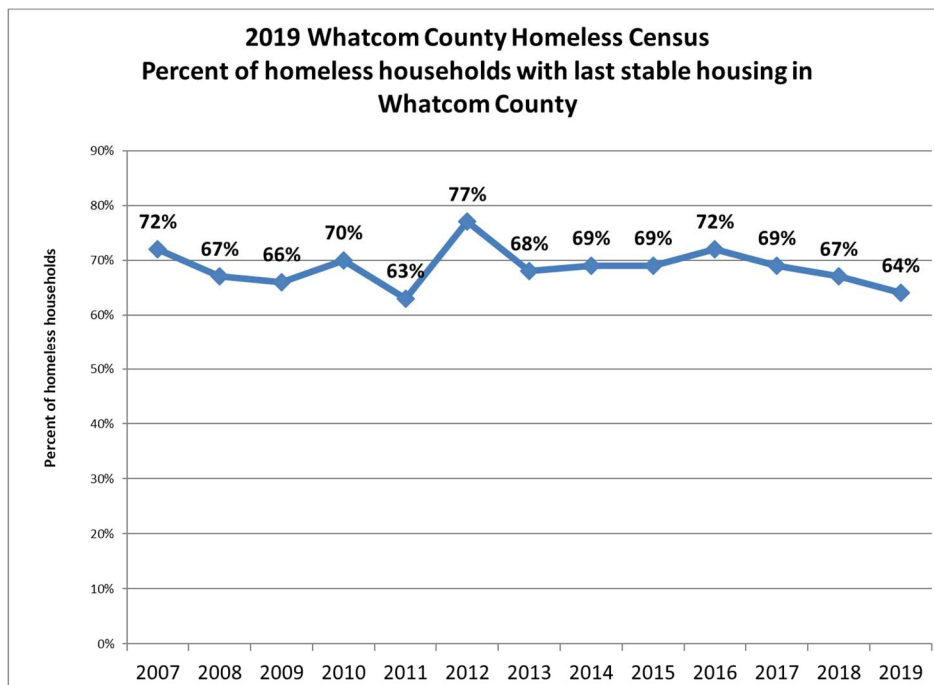


64% of the counted homeless persons had their last episode of stable housing in Whatcom County.

### Geographic Distribution: Location of Previous Residence

About two-thirds of homeless households had their last stable housing in Whatcom County. That statistic has been fairly stable despite new investments toward ending homelessness. This data refutes a common misperception that new services attract new people from elsewhere.

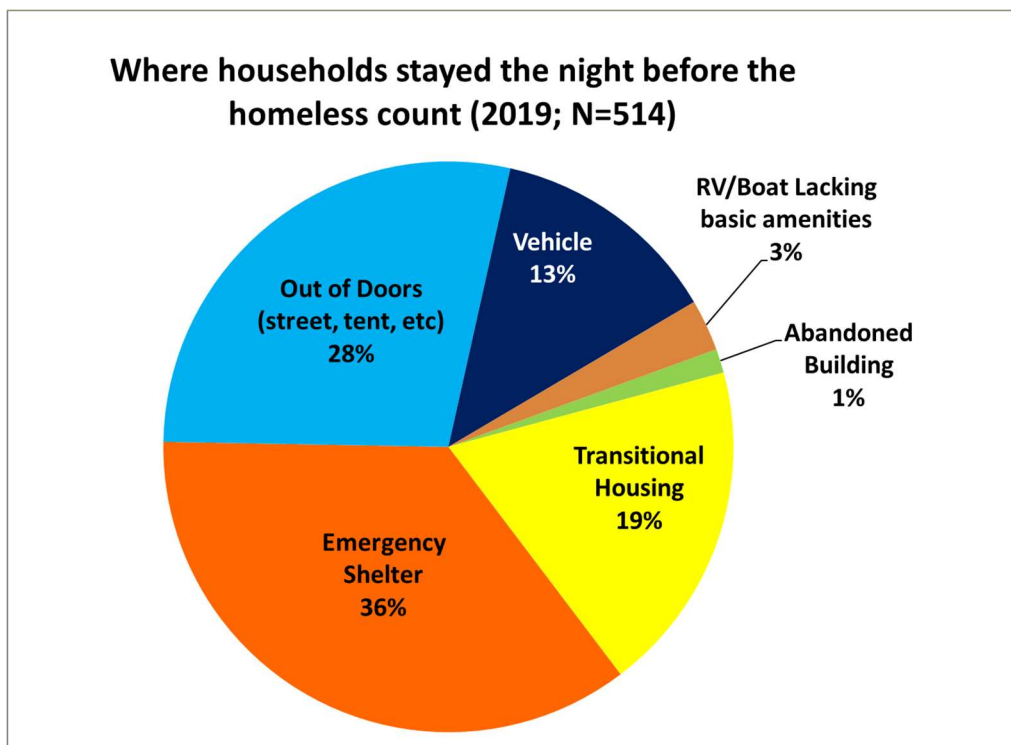
About two thirds of the households (69%) who reported that their last stable housing in Whatcom County said they had previously lived in Bellingham. The next most frequent locations were Ferndale, Lynden, Maple Falls, Blaine, and Custer.



## Sources of Shelter

Compared to 2008, this year's count of unsheltered households was up 62%. Year-over-year compared to 2018, the number of unsheltered households decreased by 11%. It is important to note that the Department of Commerce issued new definitions in 2019 for RVs and mobile homes without water and electricity were to be considered sheltered in contrast with 2018 where they would have been unsheltered.

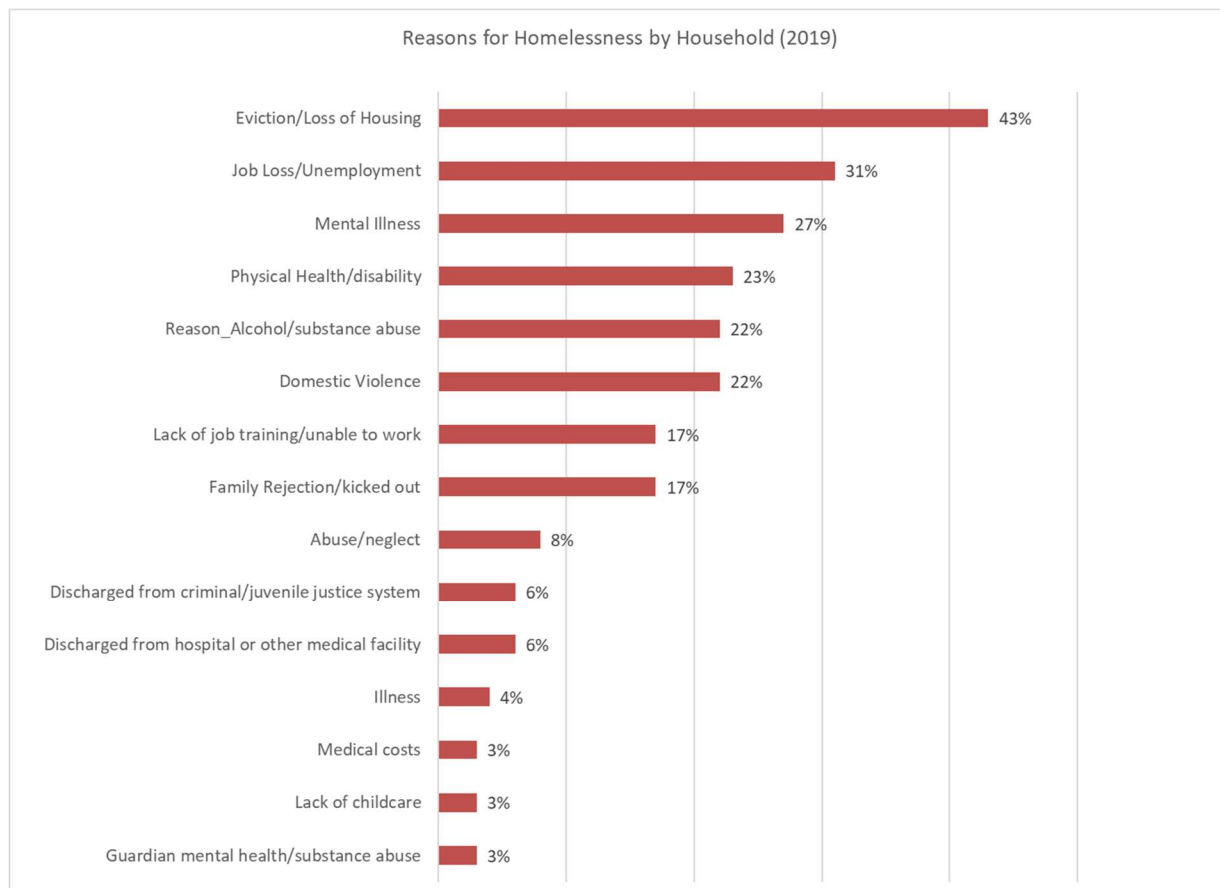
In 2019, 55% of all homeless households were sheltered. Of that 55%, about two thirds were in emergency shelter, which includes motels if they were receiving a "voucher" or financial assistance to stay there, and the other third were in transitional housing. Of the 45% of homeless households who were unsheltered, most (62%) were staying outdoors, about 29% were living in their vehicles, and the remaining 9% were in a RV or boat lacking access amenities such as water or power or an abandoned building.





## Reasons for Homelessness

Homelessness results from a complex set of circumstances that require people to choose between food, shelter and other needs. In fact, 25% of respondents to this year's count reported three or more reasons for their homelessness. The top factors this year were eviction or loss of housing (43%), job loss or unemployment (31%), mental illness (27%), physical health or disability (23%), alcohol or drug use (22%). Eviction and the loss of housing and lack of job training/unable to work remain the top two leading causes.



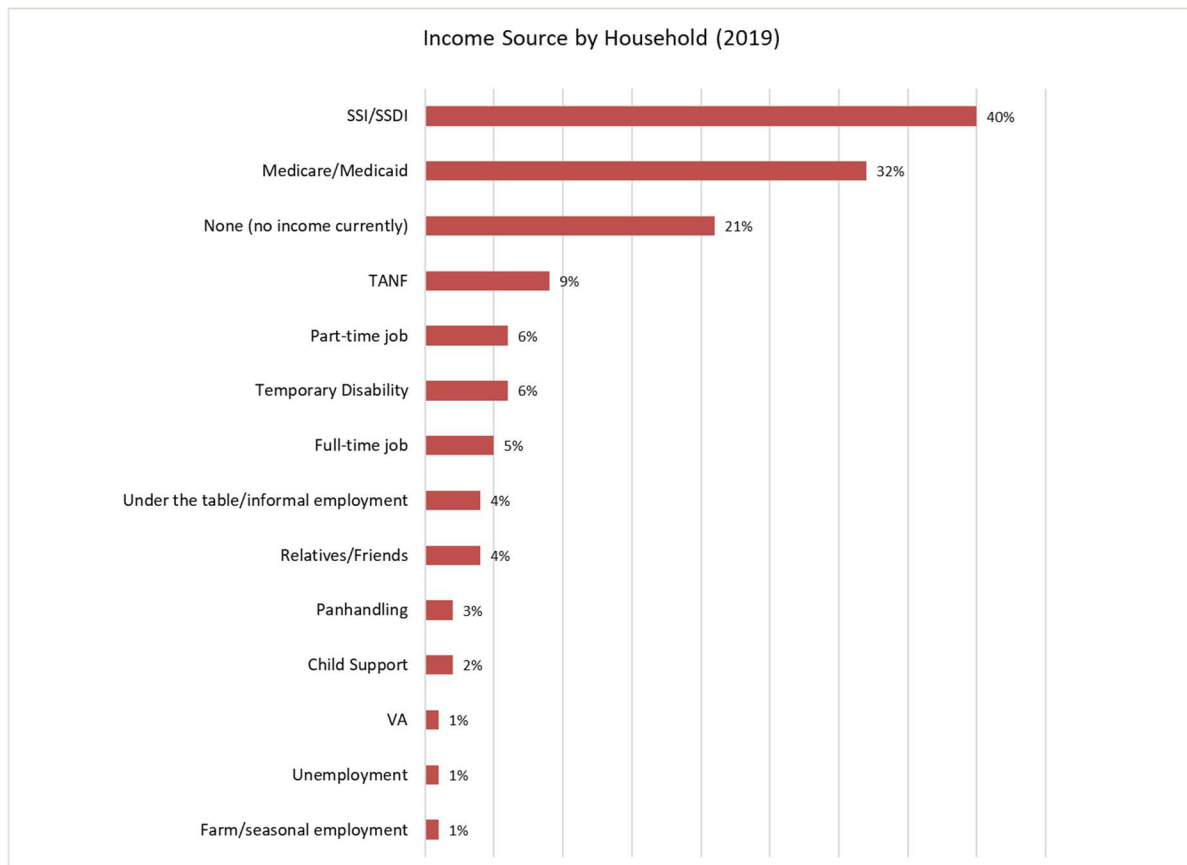
\*Due to an error in reporting the number of households reporting mental health as a reason for homelessness was under-reported in 2017 and 2018. This error was fixed in this report.

*“While there is no single cause of homelessness, poverty, lack of decent and affordable housing, mental illness, substance abuse, physical disability and other life challenges all contribute to the risk for homelessness. Evidence suggests that poverty, coupled with one or more disabilities, creates the highest risk for homelessness. Mental illness, alcoholism, and substance abuse generally do not lead to homelessness for middle- or higher-income persons, as they tend to have access to financial resources and familial support. For impoverished individuals struggling with disabilities, however, the risk of homelessness is significant.”<sup>7</sup>*

<sup>7</sup> From Dutchess County Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness,. Dutchess County, New York. 2010

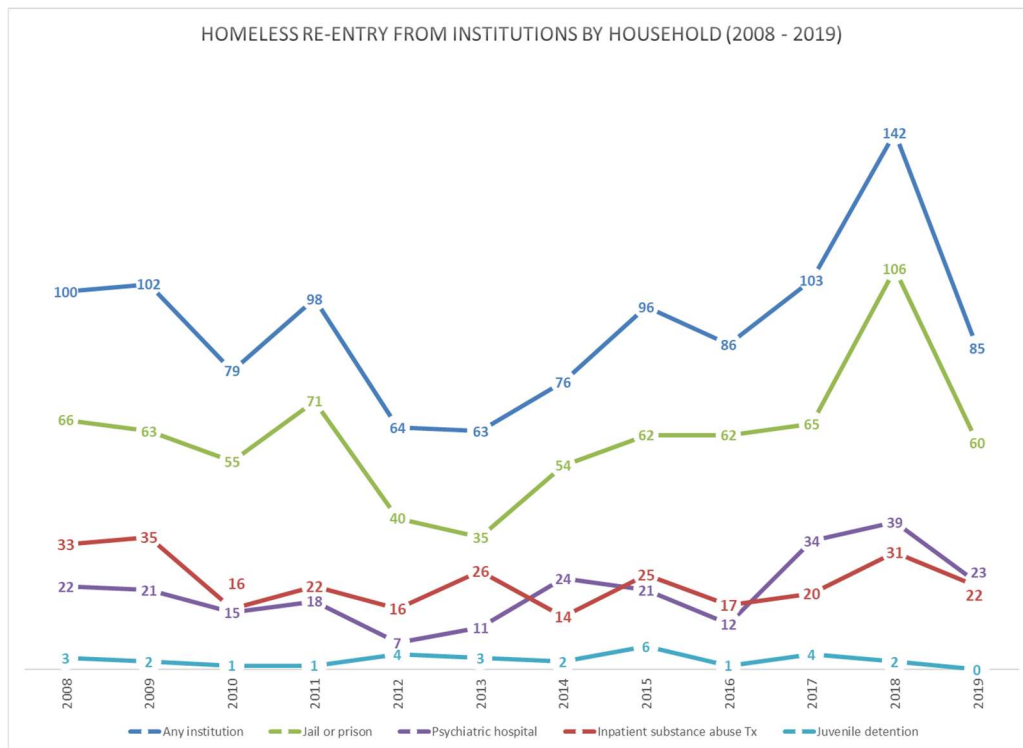
## Sources of Income and Other Benefits

One in five (20%) of homeless households reported having no income whatsoever. The most common income sources reported by homeless households in 2019 were Supplemental Security Income / Social Security Disability Income (SSI/SSDI) and Medicare/Medicaid. SSI benefits for 2019 are \$771 per month. Only 16% of households reported income from any type of employment. Medicare/Medicaid do not provide cash payments for families, but represent a valuable benefit nonetheless. This follows from the top two stated reasons in the previous graph for homelessness are both income related.



## Community Re-entry

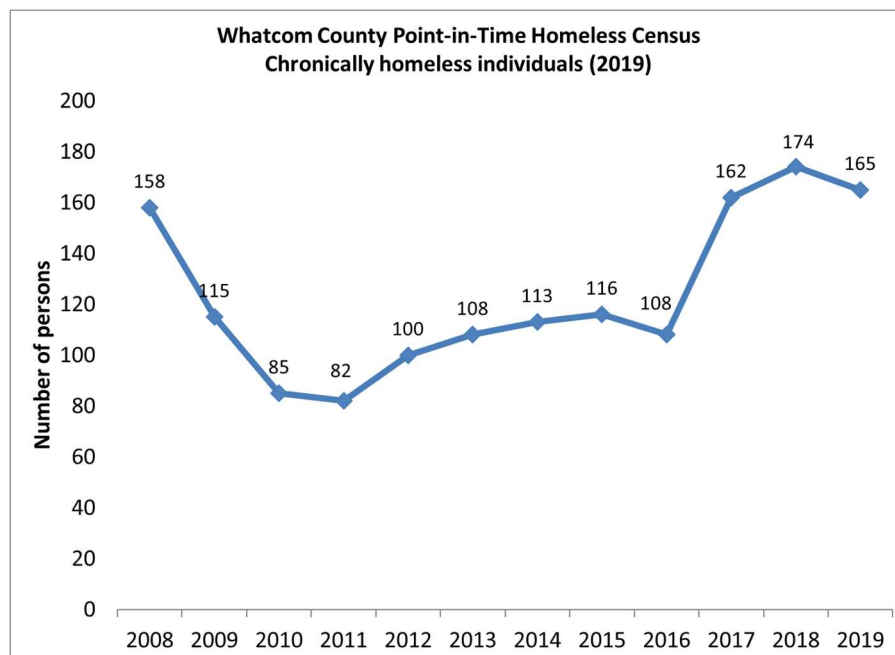
Homeless count survey respondents were asked if they had recently re-entered the community after being discharged from a residential institution within the last six months. Altogether, 85 (or 17% of all homeless households) said someone in their household had recently been released from jail, prison, an inpatient substance abuse treatment program, or psychiatric hospital. Compared to 2008, this is a 15% decrease in homeless re-entry cases. Compared to 2018, homeless re-entry from jail, prison, juvenile detention, an inpatient substance abuse treatment program, and chronic psychiatric hospital, decreased by 40%.



**NOTE:** A few respondents had been released recently from multiple types of institutions, so simply adding up the number of releases for any given year will not accurately count the number of persons represented. For example, in 2019, 85 persons had a total of 105 releases (60+22+22= 105)

## Chronic Homelessness

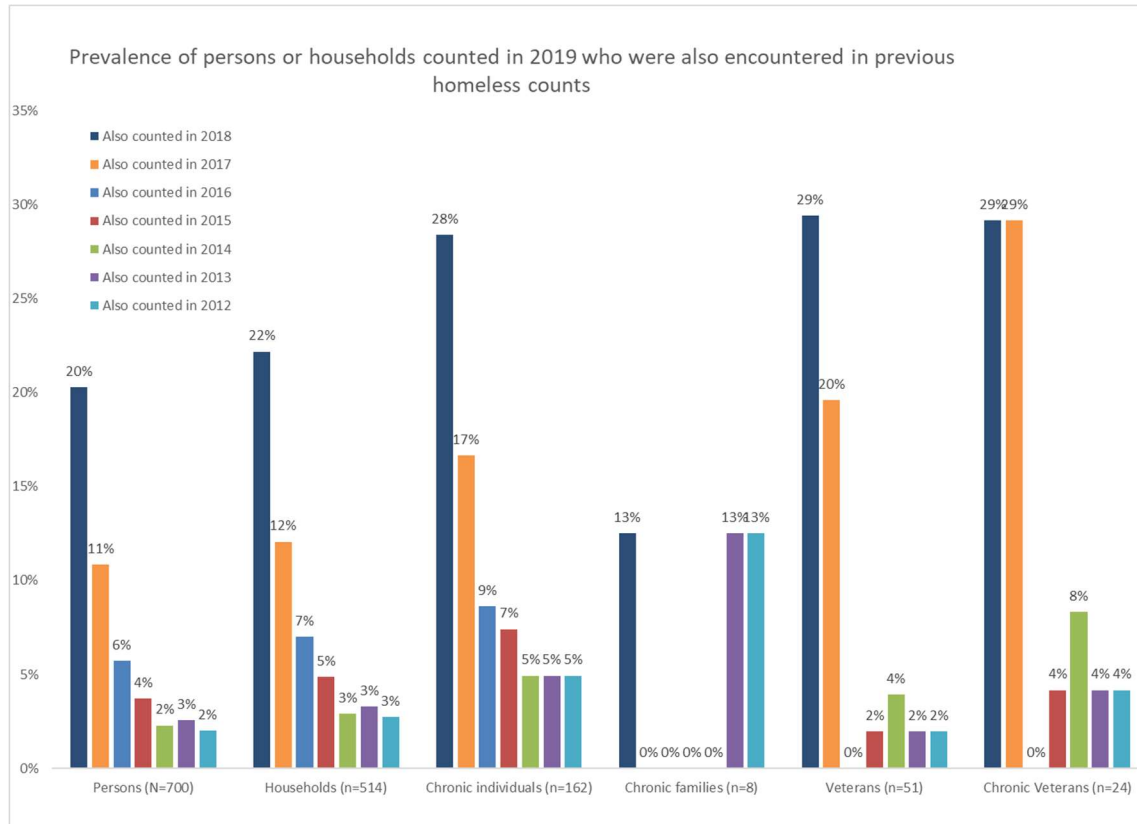
Based on HUD's definition<sup>8</sup>, **165 unaccompanied households, or 32%** of all 514 homeless households, were chronically homeless. This is a 4% increase from 2008 and underscores the ongoing need for additional resources to make progress for this highly vulnerable group. Over the years, we have improved our ability to gather information on disability status; however it is not possible to definitively determine chronic homelessness status from the survey. Skyrocketing rental prices and historically low vacancy rates created an extremely tight rental market that forces many of our community members to wait longer for housing, and has contributed to this increase. The number of chronically homeless households counted was impacted by a new permanent supportive housing facility that opened in late 2018. The 22 North facility, housed 36 chronically homeless individuals who would very likely would have otherwise been added to the number counted. Were it not for these additional beds, the number of chronically homeless individuals counted would almost certainly have been an increase from 2018.



<sup>8</sup> To be considered chronically homeless based on HUD's definition, a person must be an unaccompanied individual who has been homeless for 12 months or more OR has had more than four episodes of homelessness in the last three years AND those episodes must total 12 months AND has been sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation or in emergency shelter, AND has one of the following disabling conditions (mental disorder, substance use disorder, permanent physical, or developmental disability).

## Persistence of Homelessness

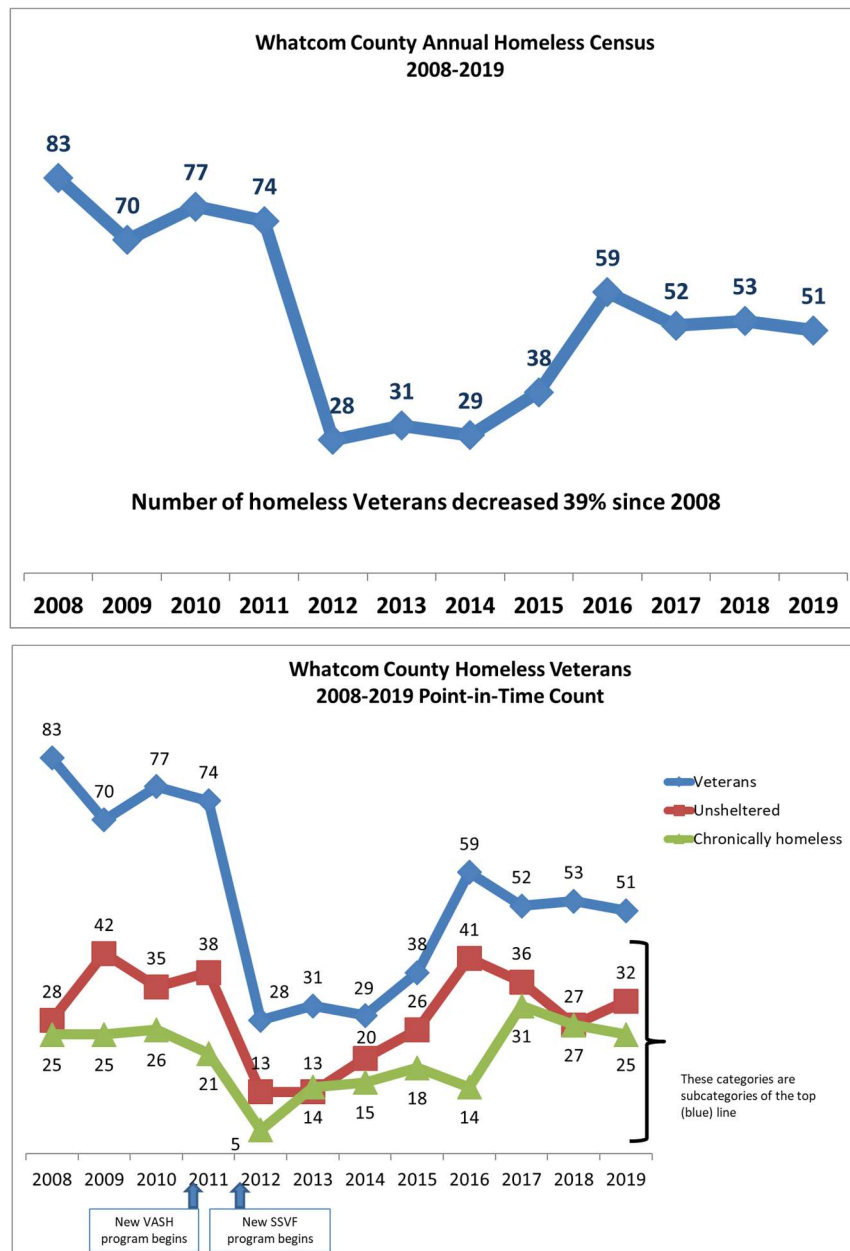
Altogether, 22% of the homeless households we encountered in 2019 were also encountered in 2018; 12% were also encountered in 2017, 7% were also encountered in 2016; 5% were also encountered in 2015; 3% were also encountered in 2014, 3% were also encountered in 2013 and 3% were also encountered in 2012. In other words, 7% of homeless households encountered in 2016 have been continuously homeless for at least three years, OR, they have been housed and become homeless again during that time interval. Unfortunately, as people wait longer for housing, their vulnerability increases and their physical and mental health tend to decline, as observed by worsening scores in vulnerability assessments by our Coordinated Entry System.



## Homeless Veterans

Over the past six years, nonprofit service providers, the Veteran's Administration, and Whatcom County government have devoted an unprecedented effort toward ending homelessness among local Veterans. Yet we still face an uphill battle ending homelessness for our community's Veterans.

Since 2008, the number of chronically homeless Veterans encountered during the annual homeless census has decreased by 4%. This year we encountered 51 homeless Veterans in 50 households (one household included two Veterans); 32 of these Veterans were unsheltered, and 25 were chronically homeless. Additional resources are necessary to provide housing and wrap-around services for our community members who served our country yet cannot afford housing.



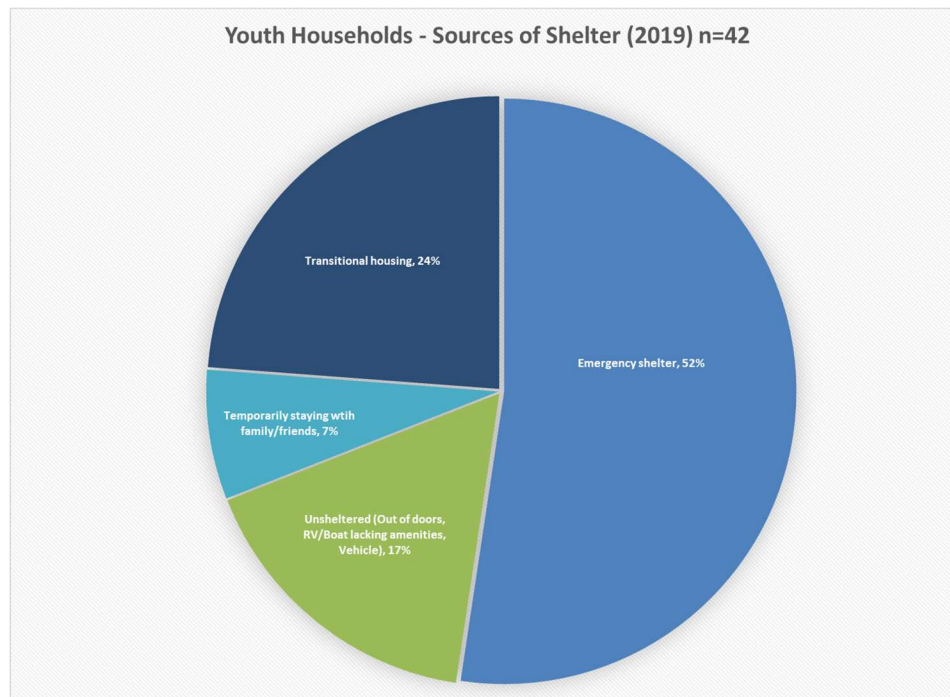
***Part B: Youth Count! 2019***

## A Special Focus to Develop a Better Understanding of Youth Homelessness

The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and the Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education (ED), launched Youth Count!, an interagency initiative to develop promising strategies for counting unaccompanied homeless youth, up to 24-years-old, through innovative implementations of HUD's 2013 Point-in-Time (PIT) count. The Youth Count! Initiative was developed per a recommendation from the national framework for ending youth homelessness. We chose to continue this effort in Whatcom County in 2019 as we continue to learn more about the phenomenon of youth homelessness.

The Youth Count for Whatcom County was similar to the regular Point in Time count in the way volunteers were recruited and how the count training was structured. However, the Youth Count differed in other ways: a specialized youth-focused interview form was used; focused training on LGTBQ and youth homeless was delivered; and outreach was targeted to locations where youth were likely to be camping, often in large camps. Unlike our regular Point-in-Time Count, for the Youth Count we included youth who are in unstable, doubled-up situations to prevent becoming literally homeless<sup>9</sup>. While our primary youth provider was unable to participate in the count this year, we were still able to gather valuable data.

## Sources of Shelter for Youth Households



<sup>9</sup> Literally homeless means people who are staying unsheltered, in emergency shelter, or in homeless transitional housing



## Types of Youth Count Households

All young people aged 14-24 who were not dependents or otherwise associated with another family household were included in the Youth Count. Altogether, we encountered 42 youth households; 7 of them consisted of minors (under 18 years old) with no adults in the household, and 35 had a young adult (aged 18-24) as head of household.

Most of these households (29 of 42) were single, unaccompanied individuals; 8 households were families with children, and 5 youth households consisted of families without children (e.g. couples).

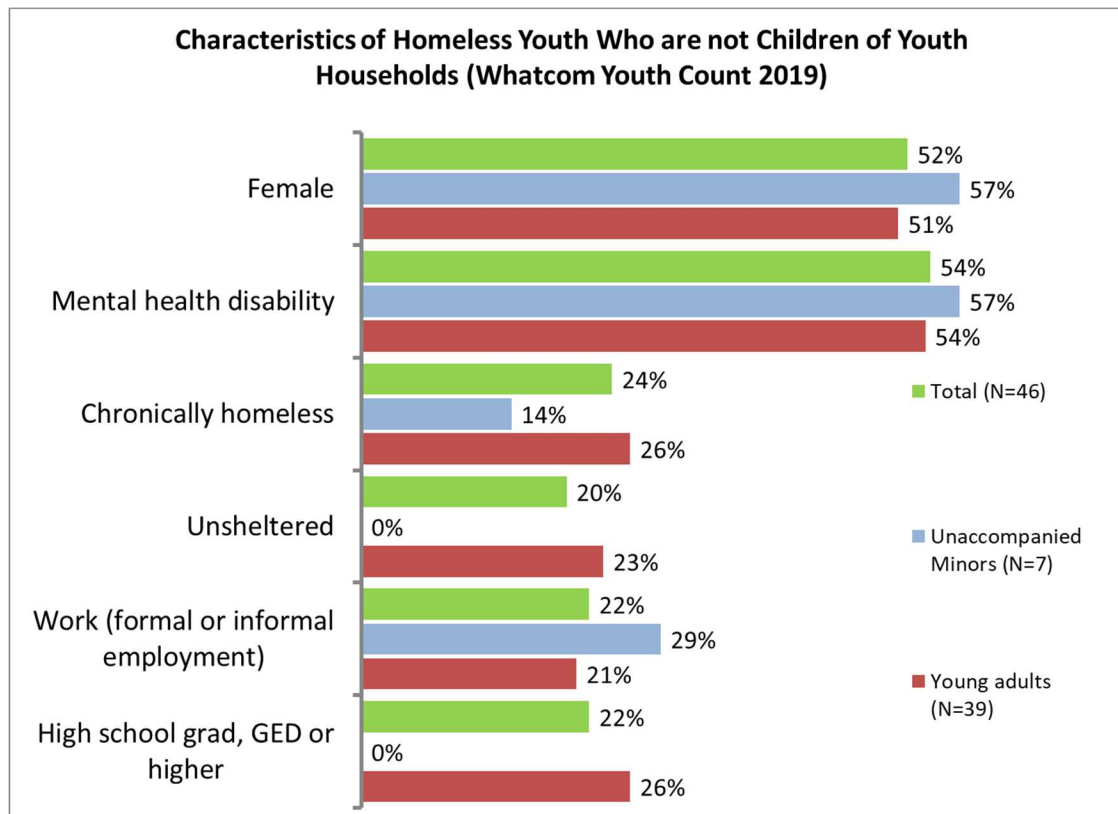
Within these 42 households were 55 persons, almost half of whom (22) were single, unaccompanied individuals. There were 8 young adults (ages 18-24) in families with children; and 9 children who were part of those families.

<b>Total Youth Count of unaccompanied youth households age 13-24</b>	<b>42</b>
Minor heads of household	7
Young adult heads of household	35
<b>Household type</b>	<b>42</b>
Families with children	8
Families without children	5
Single, unaccompanied households	29
<b>Total Youth Count number of persons</b>	<b>55</b>
Young adults in families with children	8
Children in families with children	9
Unaccompanied minors	7
Persons in adults no children households (couples)	9
Singles	22

### Characteristics of Minors and Young Adults Who are not Children of Youth Count Households

There were 46 persons counted in Youth Count households who were not children of parenting households. This section describes the characteristics of those persons.

Most (39) of the 46 persons were young adults ages 18-24; the rest (7) were minors, under 18 years old. There were more self-identified females (51%) counted than self-identified males among young adults; 57% of the minors self-identified as female.

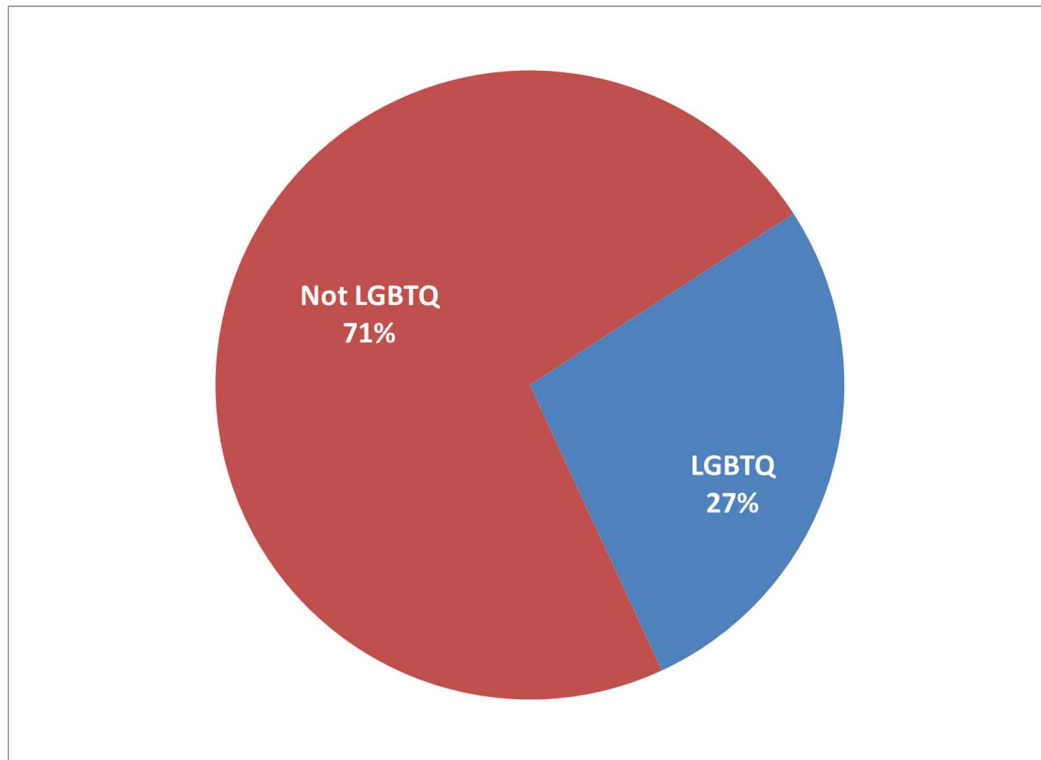


None of the minors were unsheltered (0%), compared to 23% of young adults.

Unaccompanied minors were more likely to be working for income (29%) compared to the young adults we encountered (21%). Twenty-six percent of young adults had completed high school or a GED.

### **LGBTQ Youth and Young Adults**

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) homeless youth make up a disproportionate number of the overall homeless youth population across the nation and that continues to be the case in Whatcom County. Several population-based studies have estimated that three to five percent of youth in the United States are LGBTQ. On the other hand, research suggests that between 20 percent and 40 percent of all homeless youth identify as LGBTQ. The 2019 Whatcom County Youth Count found that 27% of youth who answered the sexual orientation and/or the transgender question identified as LGBTQ.

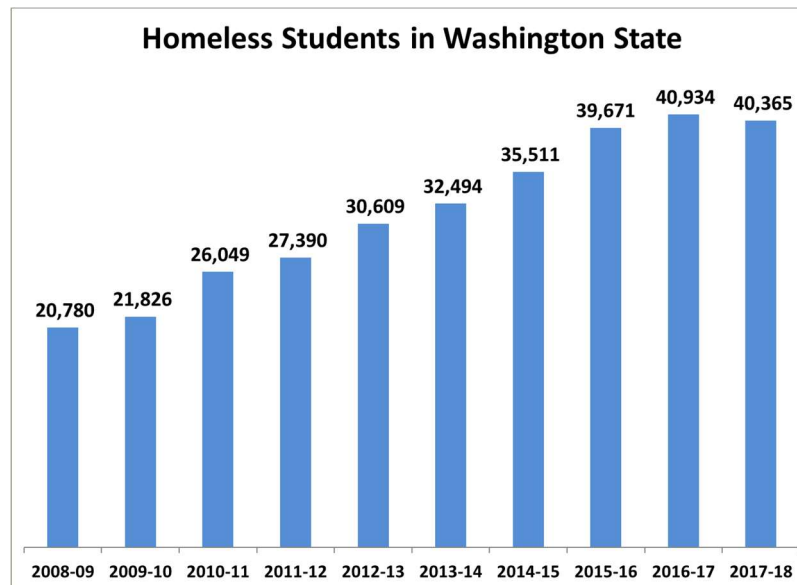


***Part C: Homelessness of Public School Students***

## Number of Homeless Students in Washington State and Whatcom County Public Schools

Beginning in 2004, the U.S. Department of Education required states to report data on homeless children and youth enrolled in all local school districts within their state as part of their Consolidated State Performance Report (CSPR). The following figure shows the increase in the number of homeless students enrolled in Washington State public schools between school years 2008-2009 and 2017-2018.

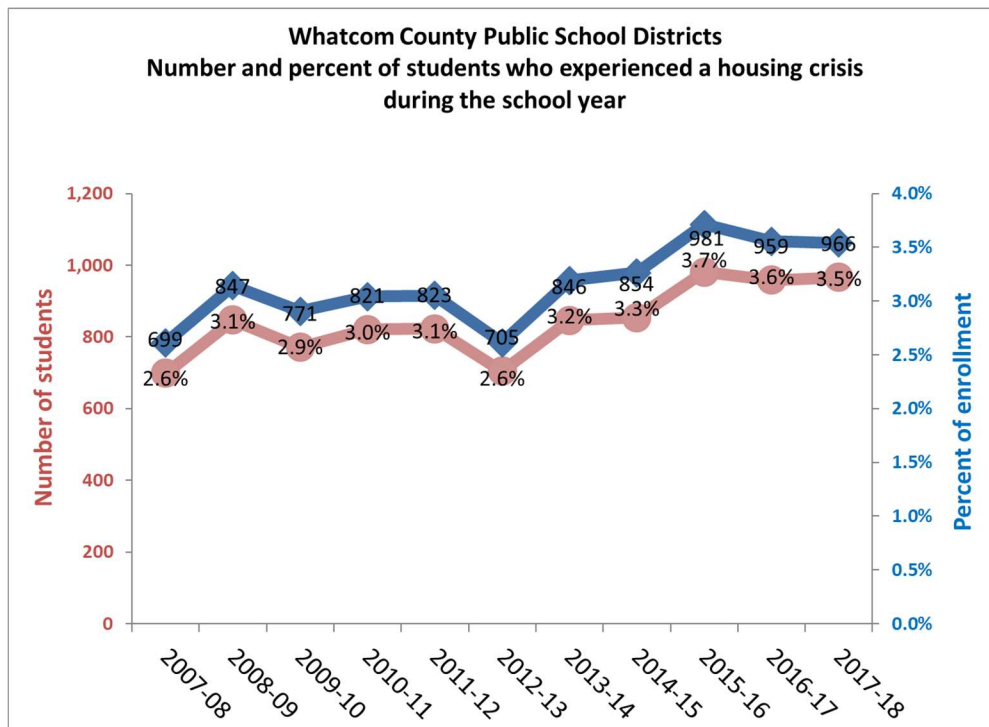
**There was an astounding 94% increase over this period**, notwithstanding the modest decrease in the last reporting school year. (Note that these figures reflect the definition of homeless children included in Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Act<sup>10</sup>, a definition that is different than the one used by the homeless Point-in-Time Count).



**Differences between Homeless Point-in-Time Count and Homeless Students in School data.** School districts and the Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) report data on homelessness that is different than the countywide annual Point-in-Time (PIT) homeless count in two important respects. First, the Point-in-Time homeless count is a snapshot of homelessness on a single day in the community, whereas the data reported by schools are cumulative over the course of a school year. Second, the PIT Count data include only people who are literally homeless, meaning those people who are unsheltered, in emergency shelter, or in homeless transitional housing. In addition to those three categories, school districts also report as homeless those children who are doubled-up with another family to prevent becoming literally homeless, and youth awaiting temporary foster placements.

<sup>10</sup> Individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence including, children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement; children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings; children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and migratory children who qualify as homeless.

**Whatcom County public school homeless students.** The emerging trend in Whatcom County is quite different than that depicted for the state as a whole on the previous page. Here, we observed a significant increase in homelessness among public school students after the 2007-2008 school year. Then, during school year 2012-13 the data suggests a return to pre-recession levels. However, a surge in homelessness is evident between school years 2013-2014 and 2014-2015, and that surge essentially continued into the 2017-2018 school year (the most recent data available at the time of this report). As a percentage of school enrollments, 3.5% of students experienced homelessness during the 2017-2018 school year, representing only a slight reduction from 3.6% last year.



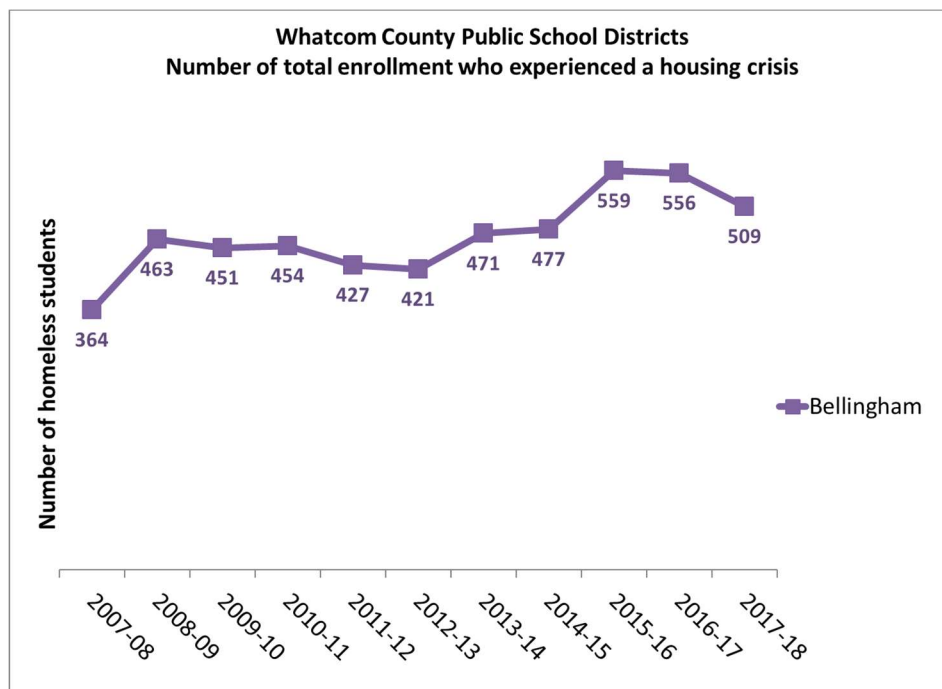
**Public school homeless statistics by district.** The charts below show the number of homeless students counted in each school district from 2007-08 to 2017-18 school years. Blaine and Nooksack saw sharp increases in homelessness between 2007-08 and 2008-09, but then leveled off or declined in subsequent years. Nooksack's number of homeless students has been increasing from 2015-16 and again in 2016-17 but went down slightly from 69 students in 2016-17 to 65 students in the 2017-18 school year. Blaine reported a big increase in the 2016-17 year to 81, very close to the record year of 2008-2009 (82) and has remained around that same level in the 2017-18 school year at 79 students.

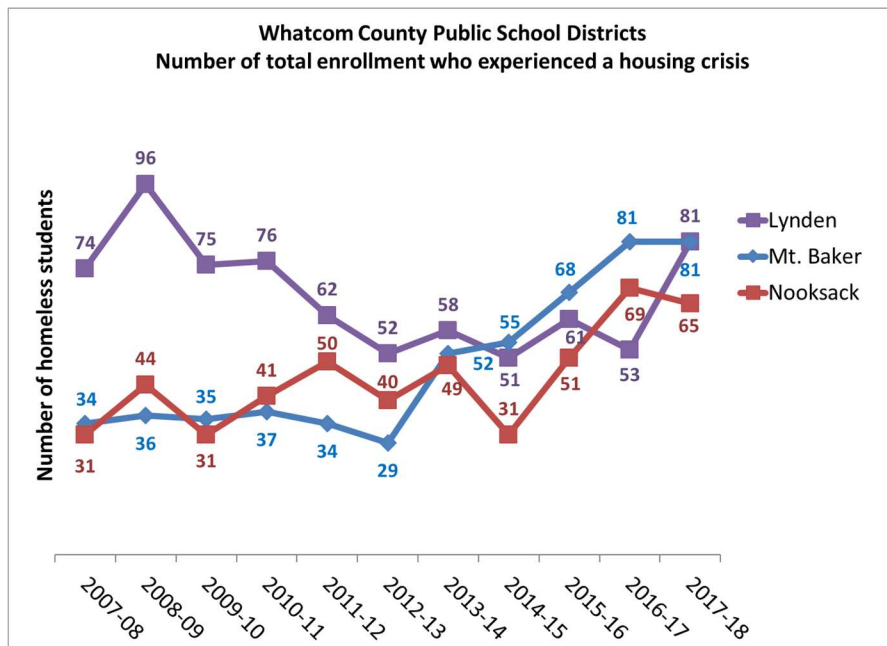
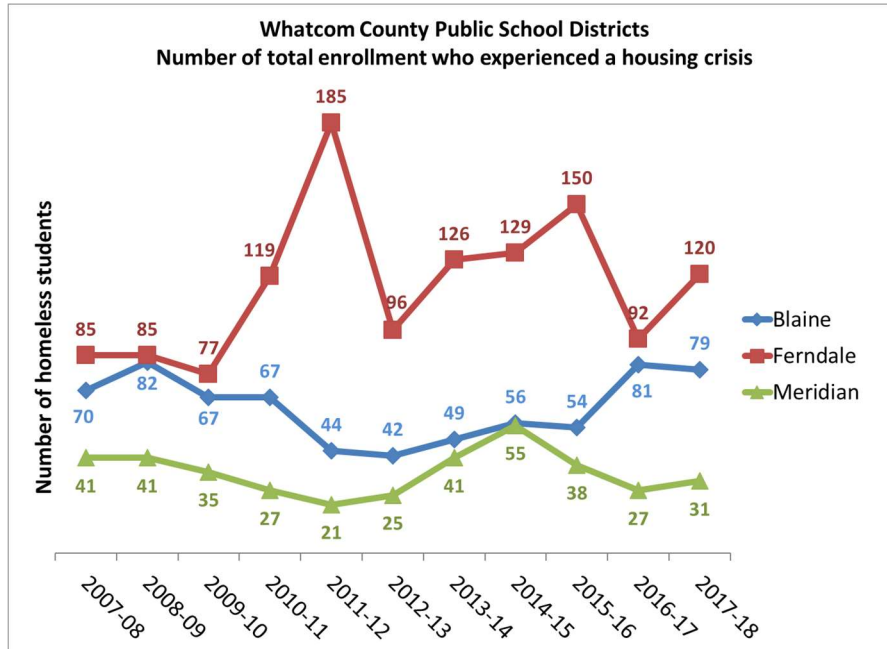
Bellingham followed that same pattern until the most recently reported period between 2012-13 and 2015-16 when homelessness increased 33% from 421 to 559 students. During the 2017-18 school year the number of homeless students decreased by 10% compared to the prior year

Ferndale reported a dramatic increase in homelessness that was not observed in the other districts between the 2009-10 and 2011-12 school years, followed by a significant drop between 2011-12 and 2012-13. This was in turn followed by another sharp increase in 2013-14. The amount of students who experienced homelessness in 2015-16 increased slightly to 150, sharply declined in 2016-17 to 92, and increased again in the 2017-18 school year to 120 students.

Mount Baker also saw a sharp increase between 2012-13 and 2013-14, counting 52 students as homeless. Mount Baker's number of homeless students in 2016-17 increased to 81 compared to the prior year (2015-16; 68) and set a new district record high count of homeless students. The number of homeless students in that district remained at 81 in the 2017-18 school year.

After measuring a steady decline in homeless students from 2008-09 through 2011-12, Meridian School District exceeded its highest measured homeless student population count with 55 students during the 2014-15 school year. In 2015-16, 38 students experienced homelessness marking a substantial decrease. This decrease continued in the 2016-17 school year with 27 homeless students. The 2017-18 school year showed a slight increase from 27 students the year prior to 31 students.







**Homelessness and academic achievement<sup>11</sup>**

Basic tenets of the McKinney-Vento Act require school districts to be proactive in identifying homeless students and ensuring their immediate enrollment, even if they lack documents normally required for enrollment. The definition of homeless includes children and youth who “lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence”. Eligible students have the option of continuing to attend their school of origin (if feasible) with transportation provided by the school district upon request, even if they move outside their school of origin’s residential zone; or students may transfer to the local attendance area school. These same rights, including the right to immediate enrollment, extend to unaccompanied homeless youth, even if they are unable to provide proof of guardianship.

Under the McKinney-Vento Act, states are required to distribute a certain portion of their state’s homeless education allocation to school districts through a competitive subgrant process. Subgrant funds are awarded to facilitate the school enrollment, attendance, and success of homeless children and youth. The level of funding for subgrants is based on the needs of the LEAs [Lead Educational Agency] requesting assistance, as well as the quality of their applications. School districts that apply for and receive McKinney-Vento subgrants may use the funds to provide tutoring and supplemental instruction, early childhood education, transportation, school supplies, professional development on homeless education issues for school and district staff, and other services that otherwise may not be provided by the public school program.

Homeless children not only have the adversity of poverty, they also must cope with the additional burden of homelessness. They are exposed to a plethora of risk factors which, in turn, can make them vulnerable to academic difficulties. Many research studies have found that homeless students, including those living in doubled-up situations, routinely underperform when compared to the general student population.

While homelessness is certainly a risk factor for students, there is a broader constellation of risk factors experienced by homeless students and other students living in poverty that some researchers suggest may have a greater effect on student performance. These risk factors include: economic stressors, parental job loss, and parental financial distress; residential mobility; school mobility; crowding; and hunger and poor nutrition. Researchers also underscore the significance of cumulative risk, pointing out that many of the risk factors listed above often co-occur in the lives of homeless children, making it difficult to isolate the effects of each individual risk factor.

Despite the difficulty in separating the effects of poverty from those of homelessness, and the mixed results of studies comparing homeless and low-income children, it is clear that homeless children are a particularly vulnerable, heterogeneous subgroup of disadvantaged children who face numerous challenges in achieving academic success.

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<sup>11</sup> This section is excerpted from: Bowman, Dukes, and Moore. 2012. *Summary of the State of Research on the Relationship Between Homelessness and Academic Achievement Among School-Aged Children and Youth*. National Center for Homeless Education, Greensboro, NC.

## **Appendix A: Homeless count methodology**

## Methods Overview

The Point-in-Time Count relies on numerous volunteers and voluntary participation by many agencies countywide. Essentially, the methodology of the count includes three components: (1) coordination and training, (2) data collection, and (3) data processing.

*Coordination and training* require that all agencies identified as having a role in the County's Continuum of Care be recruited to participate in the count. Participating agencies then receive instructions for that year's count and are given data collection tools most appropriate for their situation (e.g. paper survey forms or online database access for direct data entry).

*Data collection* activities include (1) having clients fill out the survey questionnaires, (2) having volunteer interviewers assist clients with completion of the survey questionnaires, or (3) having agency staff enter client information directly into the online Point-in-Time Count database. In some cases, agency staff will complete paper questionnaires for their clients. This is the sixth year during which we used the statewide Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to collect data for many homeless individuals who were staying in transitional housing or emergency shelter.

*Data processing* begins when the paper survey questionnaires are delivered to the County's designated data analyst at the Opportunity Council, or when the data is entered by participating agency staff into the online database. Data from paper forms is added to the online database and then the data is "cleaned." Cleaning includes several processes designed to detect data entry errors and identify and remove duplicated survey respondents<sup>12</sup>. The cleaned data is then imported into special software to facilitate statistical analysis.

## Data Assumptions and Limitations

National research indicates that Point-in-Time Counts generally underestimate the number of those who are homeless because:

A point-in-time is just a "snapshot" and may not capture all those who are cycling in and out of homelessness over the course of a specific period of time (e.g. annually). Furthermore, an annual "snapshot" may miss any seasonal fluctuations that may occur in our communities.

It is difficult to find where all the unsheltered people reside. It is impossible to know all the places that might provide unconventional shelter (i.e. tents, abandoned cars) for one night.

Furthermore, due to survey item nonresponse (when a respondent skips one or more of the Point-in-Time Count survey questions), some of the analyses are based on only a subset of all homeless households counted.

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<sup>12</sup> Duplicated survey respondents are identified using automated and non-automated processes that rely on unique identifying data derived by combining fields of data such as gender, date of birth and initials.