

→ Street Outreach

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Agenda

- Street Outreach Overview
- Practices in Street Outreach
- Streets to Shelter
- Streets to Housing
- Considerations for Rural Areas
- Considerations for Tribal Nations
- Q&A



Street Outreach Overview



What is **unsheltered** **homelessness?**



Unsheltered Homelessness Within Category 1 (Literally Homeless)

“[An] individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning [...] a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not meant for human habitation”

Examples: Qualifying Unsheltered Living Situations for Category 1 (Literally Homeless)

In a more visible public place such as a sidewalk, a bench, or beside or beneath a bridge or overpass

In a less visible public place such as a park or other green space, including indoor facilities like lavatories

In a vehicle not meant for human habitation such as a car, truck, recreational vehicle, or mobile home without a 'tie down'

On the private property of a business not meant for human habitation such as a grocery store, including indoor spaces

In an encampment, alone or in a group, even if the encampment has temporary accommodations like tents or other ad hoc infrastructure

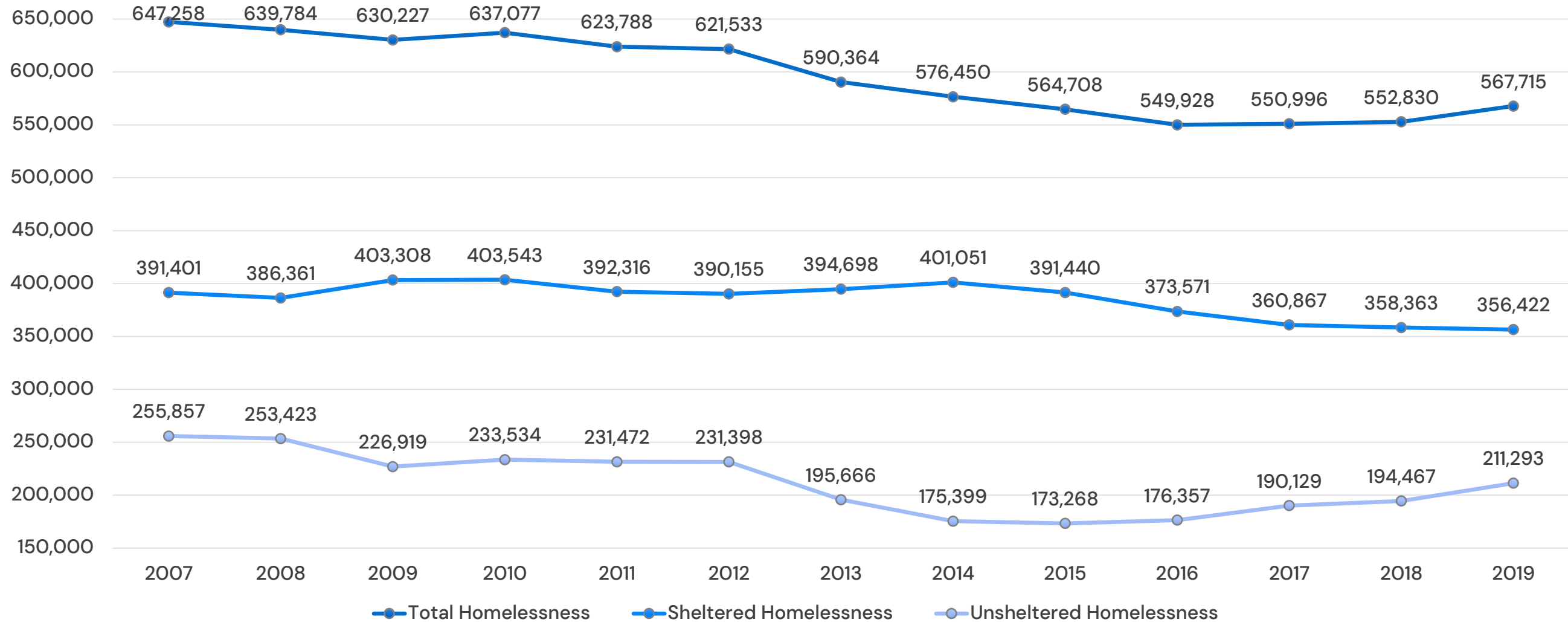
In a camp site or other outdoor recreation area, even if the local authority has explicitly designated it as living space for people experiencing homelessness



Unsheltered
homelessness: **what
the data tells us**

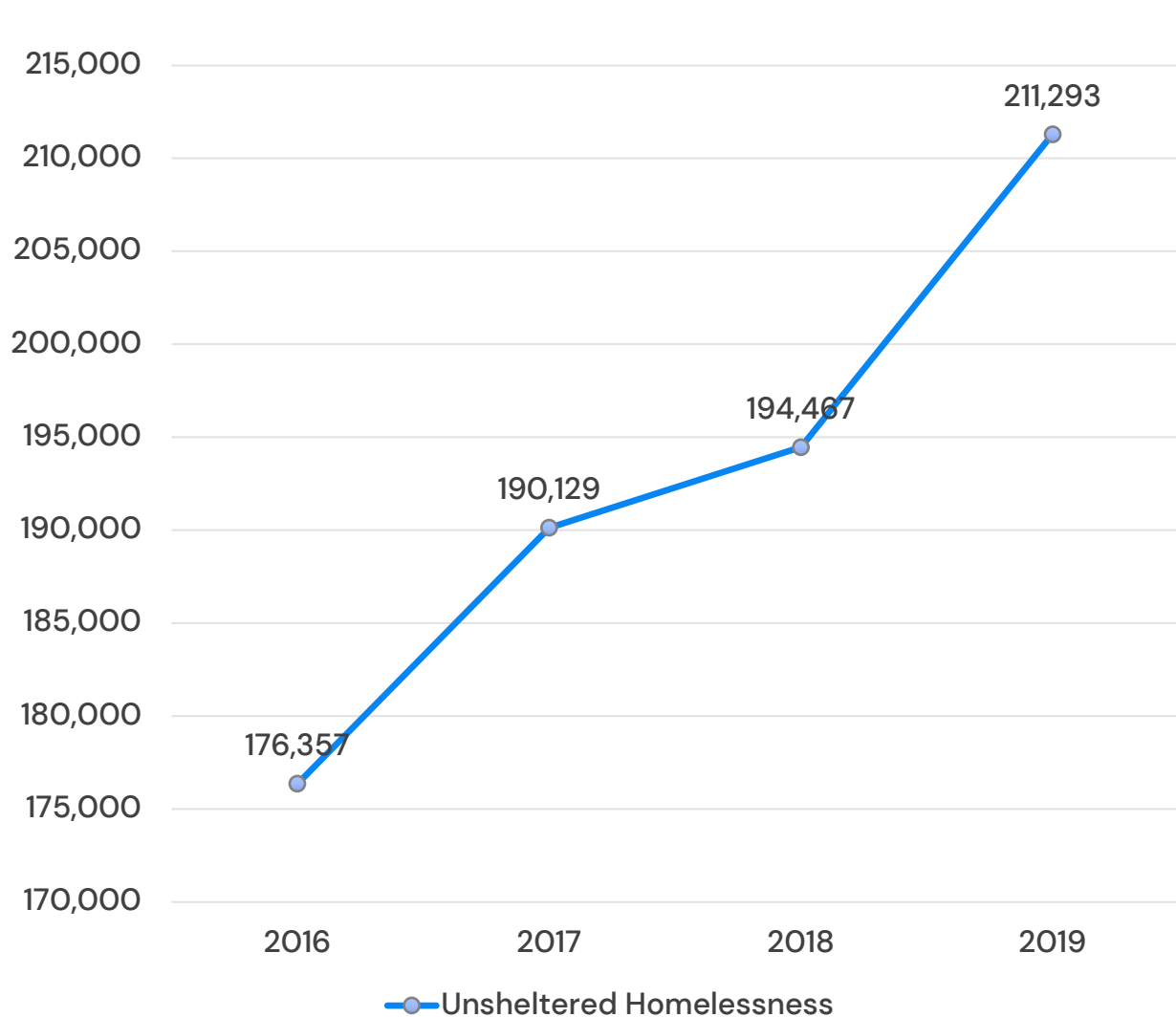
Spotlight: Homelessness in the United States, 2007–2019

Between 2007 and 2019, homelessness in the United States declined ~13%. This decline was driven primarily by a decrease in unsheltered homelessness 2012–2014 (~17%) and a smaller decrease in sheltered homelessness (~8%). Notably, sheltered homelessness decreased only slightly (5%) while unsheltered homelessness rates declined sharply (31%). However, that decline was not durable—see the next slide for more details.



Spotlight: Unsheltered Homelessness in the United States, 2016–2019

Although unsheltered homelessness has decreased since 2007, rates of unsheltered homelessness significantly increased between 2016 and 2019. In 2019, there were 211,293 people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in the United States—a sharp increase from 2014–2016, which represented the lowest levels of unsheltered homelessness since 2009 (~175,000).

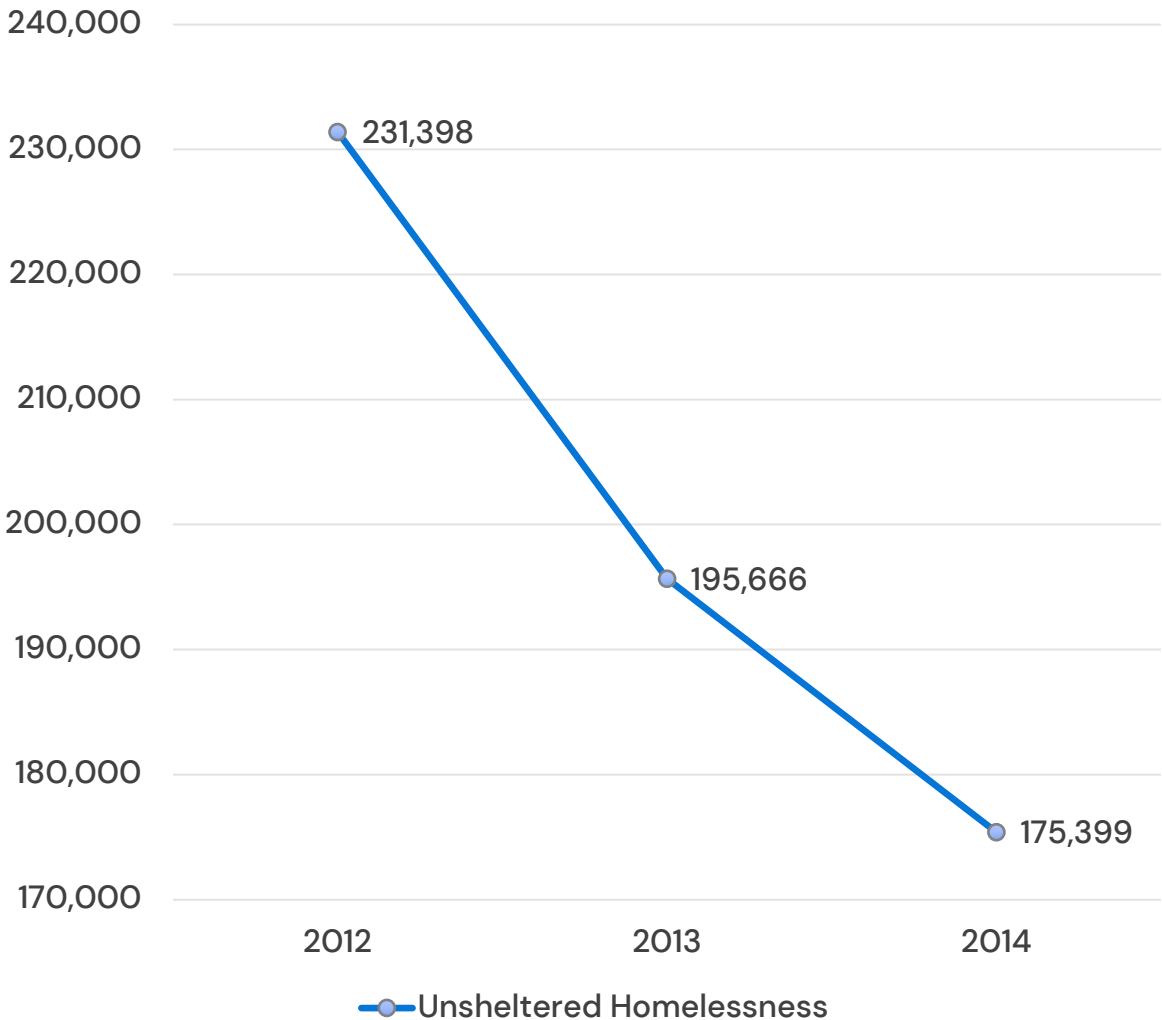


Rates of unsheltered homelessness in **2019** rose back to the rates last seen in **2009**

Unsheltered homelessness increased **19.8%** between 2016 and 2019

Spotlight: Unsheltered Homelessness in the United States, 2012–2014

Between 2012 and 2014, rates of unsheltered homelessness significantly decreased (24%). During the preceding five years, rates of unsheltered homelessness remained almost unchanged. What happened between 2012 and 2014? One possible explanation: the creation of the Emergency Solutions Grant Program and the accompanying focuses on Housing First, housing-focused interventions, and Rapid Re-Housing.



Unsheltered homelessness decreased **24.2%** between 2012 and 2014

Possible explanations include new and newly emphasized interventions with an increased focus on **housing** including the Emergency Solutions Grant Program, the Housing First model, and Rapid Re-Housing

Limitations on Interpreting Unsheltered Data

Unsheltered data is more volatile than sheltered data

Point-in-Time (PIT) Count data is great for longitudinal analysis but must be supplemented by more frequent and local data

PIT Count data is limited by local factors including methodology and capacity

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the number of people experiencing homelessness are not yet well understood

Spotlight: Census Count Extrapolation

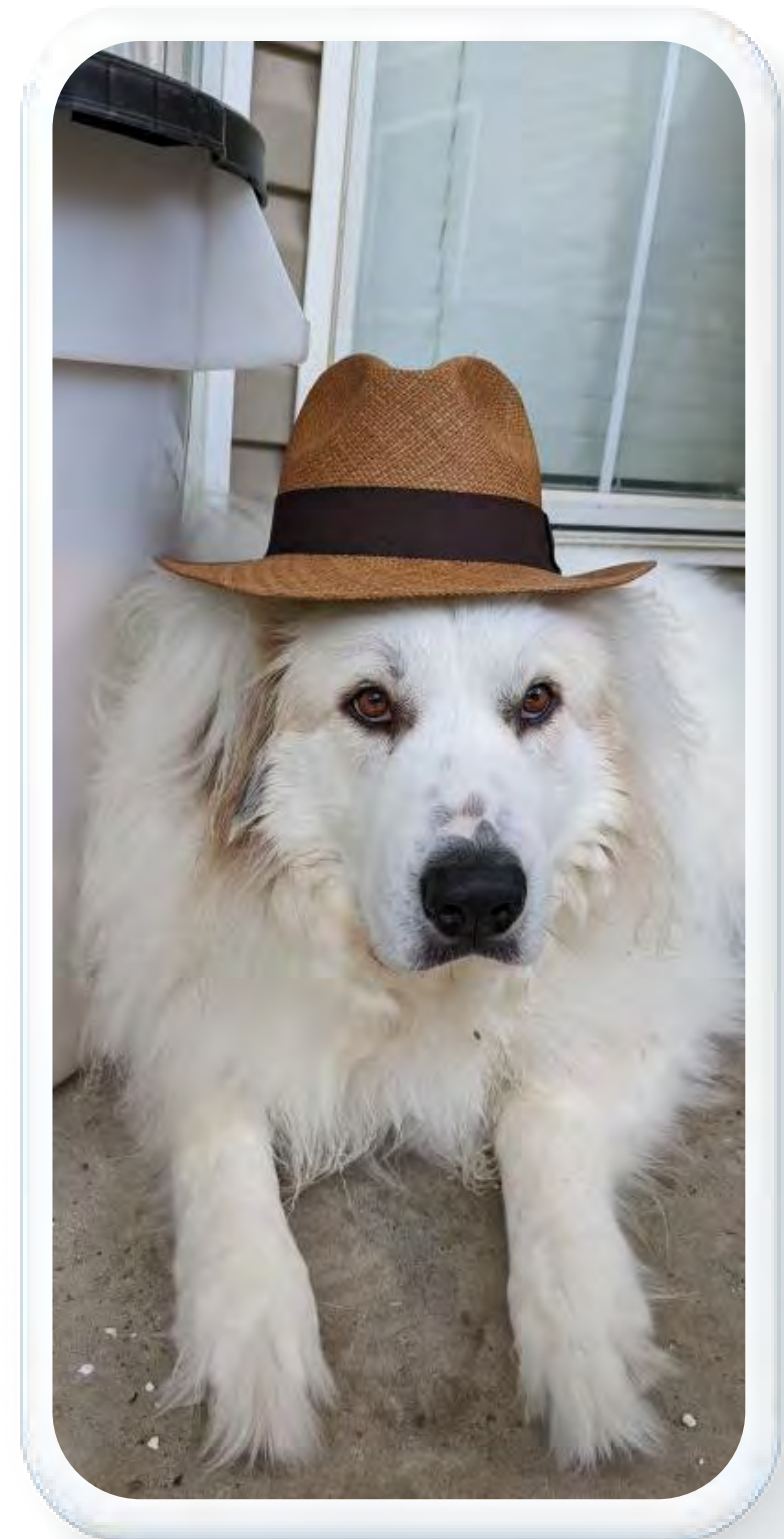
CoCs may use data sampling and extrapolation as part of their Point-in-Time (PIT) Count methodologies

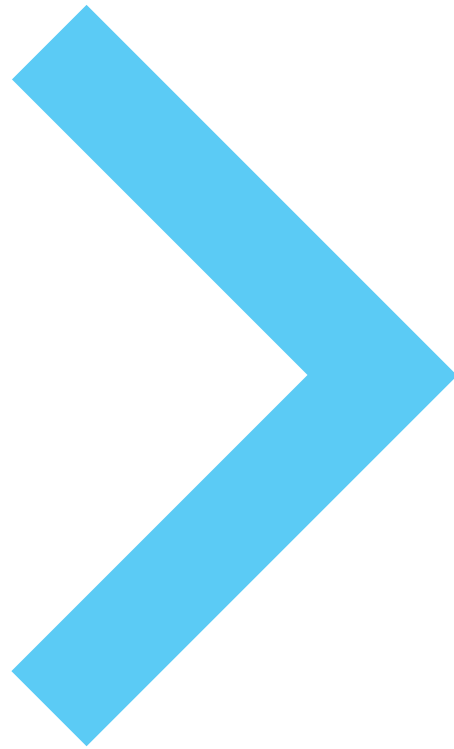
These can be powerful tools, especially in rural areas where census counts are more challenging, but they have their limitations:

- Accurate extrapolation requires a **sufficiently large data sample** to extrapolate from
- Extrapolation magnifies its assumptions and can make **data errors and anomalies look like trends**
- Data samples must be **frequently refreshed** to ensure they reflect current realities

CoCs should carefully review the pros and cons of data sampling and extrapolation in context of their system and census capacities before implementing them as part of the PIT Count

[Click here to review the Point-in-Time Count Methodology Guide, which provides more guidance about data sampling and extrapolation.](#)





Communities must also **think beyond project eligibility** to genuinely understand and engage with their unsheltered and unstably housed populations

Beyond the Category 1 (Literally Homeless) Definition

Housing Instability

People experiencing homelessness often cycle through episodes of unsheltered homelessness and staying with friends/family ('couch surfing'), in self-paid hotels/motels, or shelters; ongoing data collection is critical to identifying people who frequently move between homelessness and temporary housing

Children and Youth

Unsheltered homelessness has a different pattern for children and youth, including high rates of 'couch surfing' and actively avoiding general access points; connecting with these populations usually requires dedicated child/youth outreach and coordination with school districts

Domestic Violence

People fleeing domestic violence are frequently not visible to the homeless services system unless they request housing or shelter; this can be especially true in rural areas, where victim services providers are often the only service providers and might lack strong ties to the general homeless services system

These are not the only complications when discussing what unsheltered homelessness is and isn't; they are prominent examples intended to underscore that [unsheltered homelessness is complex](#).

Additional examples of that complexity—e.g. people who are transgender experience disproportionately high rates of unsheltered homelessness and domestic violence—can be found in other webinars in this series.



Spotlight:
encampments

Spotlight: Encampments

- Encampments are controversial, but **controversy should not drive policy**
- Encampments exist because they **meet a need**
- Breaking up encampments **often causes harm without solving problems**

Encampments can be disruptive, especially when they are highly visible

However, encampments **exist for a reason**; often, they provide safety and comfort in community, shelter from the elements, and access to social resources

When encampments are broken up, residents **rarely return to housing**; instead, they move to/create other encampments,

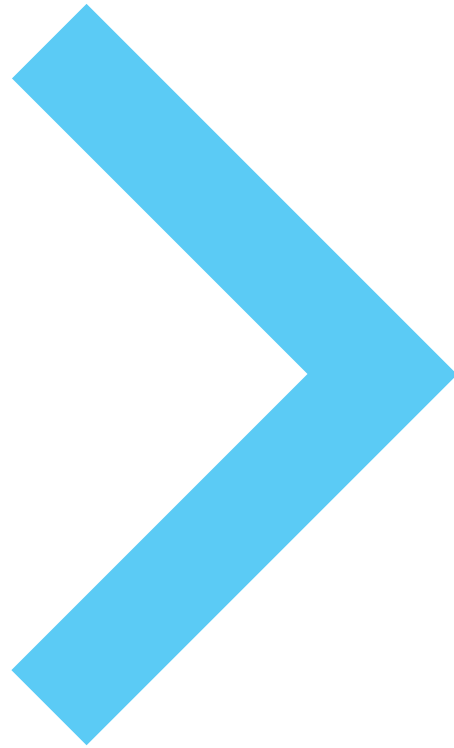
request emergency department services, or end up incarcerated

Before breaking up an encampment, communities should **consult law enforcement and homeless services providers** as experts to determine:

- Is the encampment a danger to residents or others?
- Where will residents live after?
- Can the encampment instead be safely and gradually depopulated?



Practices in Street Outreach



Street outreach is an activity to **identify and engage** people experiencing unsheltered homelessness

Spotlight: Street Outreach Funding (Federal)

Street outreach can be funded by many different programs; most street outreach networks are funded by many sources with different priorities and requirements

Ongoing Programs

- Continuum of Care (CoC)
- Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG)
- Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF)
- Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH)
- Runaway and Homeless Youth – Street Outreach Program (SOP)
- Family Violence Prevention and Services Program (FVPSA)

One-Time Allocations

- CARES Act-funded ESG, SSVF, etc. (ESG-CV, SSVF-CV, etc.)
- American Rescue Plan-funded HOME (HOME-ARP)
- Emergency Housing Voucher (EHV) service fees—*limited scope*

Spotlight: Street Outreach Funding (State and Local)

State General Purpose Revenue

Many states use general purpose revenue to create or supplement homeless services funding; an especially effective strategy is creating a 100% match for ESG, which can help ensure ESG is equitably available even to smaller organizations and rural areas

Local General Purpose Revenue

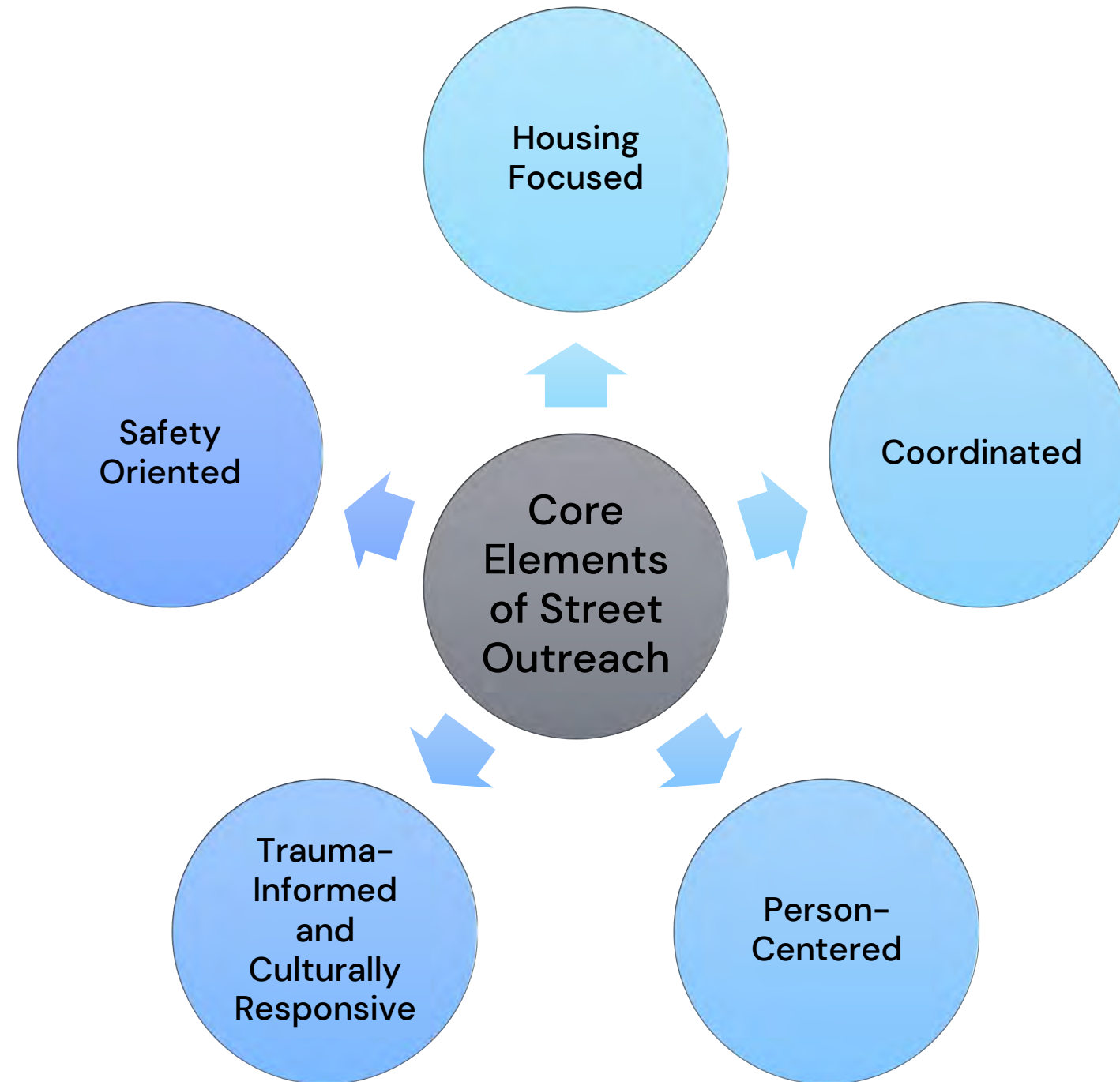
Localities also use general purpose revenue to fund homeless services, but their focus is usually at the project rather than the program level; localities can have a large impact on street outreach activities by providing direct, stable funding for outreach projects

Private Fundraising

Private dollars from entities as diverse as individual donors, private foundations, and corporations often have the fewest restrictions, making them a perfect fit for all outreach activities but especially network-level activities, which can be more challenging to fund

Typically, no single Federal program (or all Federal programs together) is enough to meet all of a community's street outreach needs; as a result, street outreach networks are usually distributed across funding sources, organizations, and projects, and supplemented with state and local dollars. Each stakeholder will have different goals, priorities, and eligible activities and populations. This is especially true in rural homeless services systems that receive comparatively fewer Federal dollars to cover much larger geographies.

Street Outreach: Core Elements

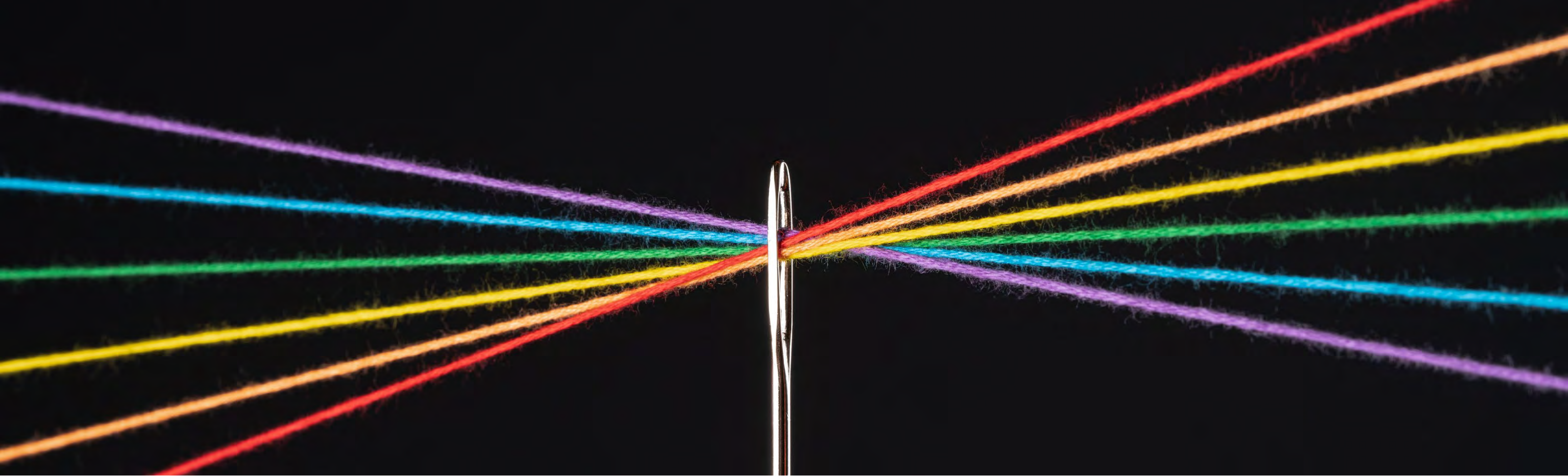




→ Housing Focused



The goal of street outreach is to return people to [safe, stable permanent housing](#). Emergency shelter can be a powerful tool, but only if it addresses a specific need or barrier. Street outreach should [adopt a Housing First approach](#) and never impose preconditions such as sobriety or project participation. Creating, working from, and frequently updating a [housing plan](#) can be a great way to operationalize housing focused street outreach.



→ Coordinated



Street outreach should be a **community-level activity** conducted in partnership between multiple entities. Genuine community-wide collaboration involves **entities other than homeless services providers** such as law enforcement and other first responders, healthcare and behavioral health providers, and youth system agencies, all of which have insight into and engagement with populations that homeless services providers might not.

[Click here for more information about working with and effectively equipping law enforcement to respond to people experiencing homelessness from the Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance.](#)



→ Person-Centered



Street outreach should use a [person-centered approach](#) that seeks to identify and work from each person's strengths, resources, and support networks. To be consistently successful, street outreach must empower participants to [explore many routes to housing](#) to discover what works best for them, including housing subsidies outside Coordinated Entry and routes to housing via existing support networks.

[Click here for more information on the HUD Exchange about housing-problem solving techniques.](#)



→ Trauma-Informed & Culturally Responsive

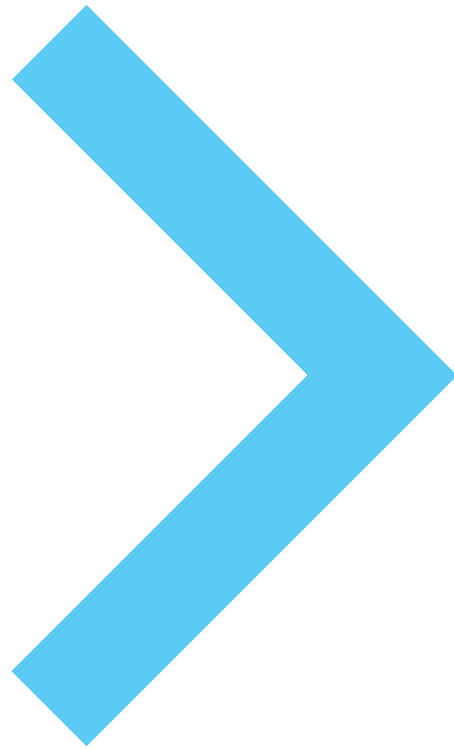
Street outreach must be **culturally responsive** and deploy evidence-based practices including **trauma-informed care**. Homelessness is traumatic, and outreach workers must recognize and be responsive to the reality that people experiencing homelessness are at **elevated risk for physical, mental, and emotional harm**. Street outreach networks must **provide clear avenues for referral** when participants need specialized services, such as creating and maintaining mechanisms to connect participants with domestic violence services, veteran-specific supports, or gender-affirming care.



→ Safety Oriented



Street outreach networks and providers should have [established protocols](#) to ensure the safety of all people seeking assistance. Outreach workers should practice [harm reduction principles](#), including non-judgmental, non-coercive provision of services. Street outreach workers should [provide critical, life-saving resources](#) such as food, water, clothing, blankets, and other necessities as acts of humanity and compassion and as a technique for establishing and earning trust and rapport.



Working to improve street outreach can be uncomfortable because it requires genuine engagement with the **trauma of unsheltered homelessness...**



**...but no one is entitled
to a life without
discomfort if it comes
at the expense of
people they could
otherwise help**

Core Elements of Street Outreach: Further Reading

Much of the content from this section was drawn from or informed by “Core Elements of Effective Street Outreach to People Experiencing Homelessness,” published in June 2019 by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness and developed in collaboration with the U.S. Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Veterans Affairs (VA), Health and Human Services (HHS), and the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH).

[Click here to review the full text of the document.](#)



Core Elements of Effective Street Outreach to People Experiencing Homelessness

Coordinated street outreach that identifies and engages people living in unsheltered locations, such as in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, encampments, and on the streets, plays critical roles within systems for ending homelessness. Effective street outreach reaches people who might not otherwise seek assistance or come to the attention of the homelessness service system and ensures that people’s basic needs are met while supporting them along pathways toward housing stability.

Most street outreach in communities is currently funded through a patchwork of government programs and private resources, with varying mandates, requirements, and performance measures. It is also not funded at levels that would allow for implementation of the full range of activities and approaches described here in most communities. Communities should, however, be striving to strengthen the roles their street outreach programs play within effective systems for helping people who are living unsheltered return to stable community living in safe and affordable housing.

This document, which was developed collaboratively with our partners at Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH), is not intended to replace the mandates or metrics of individual programs. Rather, it is intended to identify **core elements of effective street outreach** that can be implemented under various funding streams, and which are broadly applicable to a variety of communities,



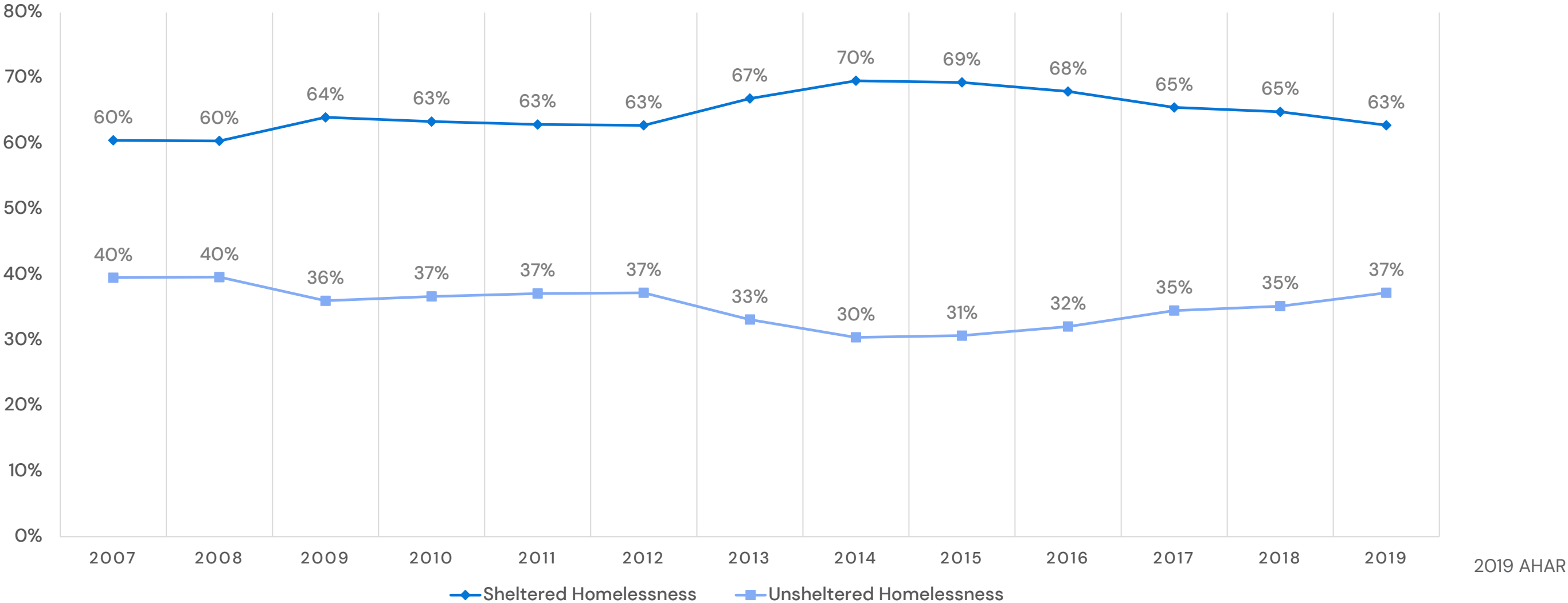
Streets to Shelter



Emergency shelter is an **emergency response** providing access to safe sleeping space and basic services, not an 'interim step' to housing; shelter should always be a participant choice, **never a housing prerequisite**

Spotlight: Sheltered Homelessness (2007-2019)

Between 2007 and 2019, every Point-in-Time (PIT) Count reported that more than half of all people experiencing homelessness in the United States live in emergency shelter, transitional housing, or safe havens. This suggests that emergency housing options are and will continue to be a critical resource for people experiencing homelessness.



Spotlight: Emergency Shelter Bed Inventory (2020)

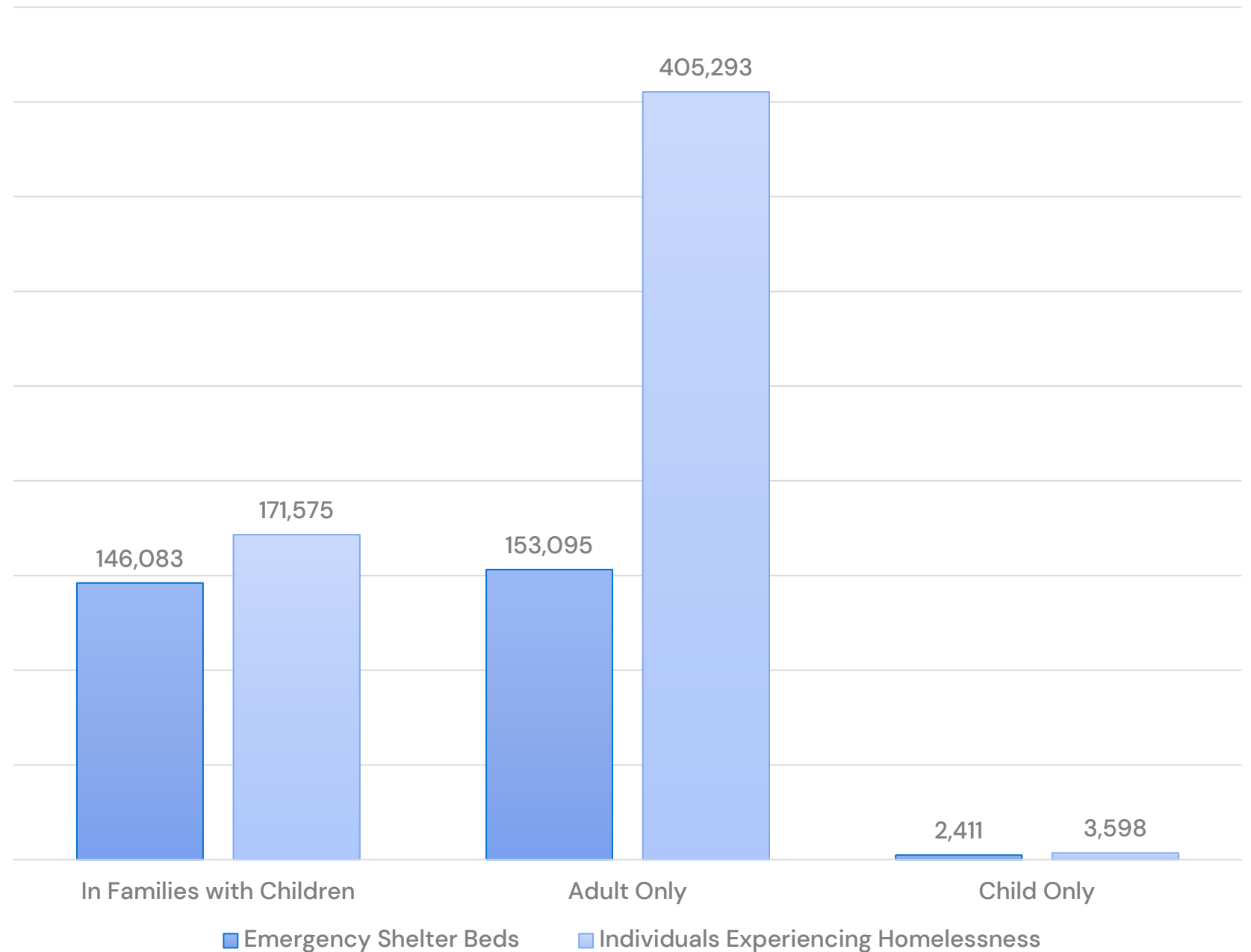
For all household types, the number of people experiencing homelessness exceeds the number of emergency shelter beds

The disparity in emergency shelter beds is greatest for adult only households

This chart does not account for variables that could affect bed availability, such as dedication to specific populations (e.g., veterans, domestic violence)

Bed shortages may be more acute in some places and less acute in others

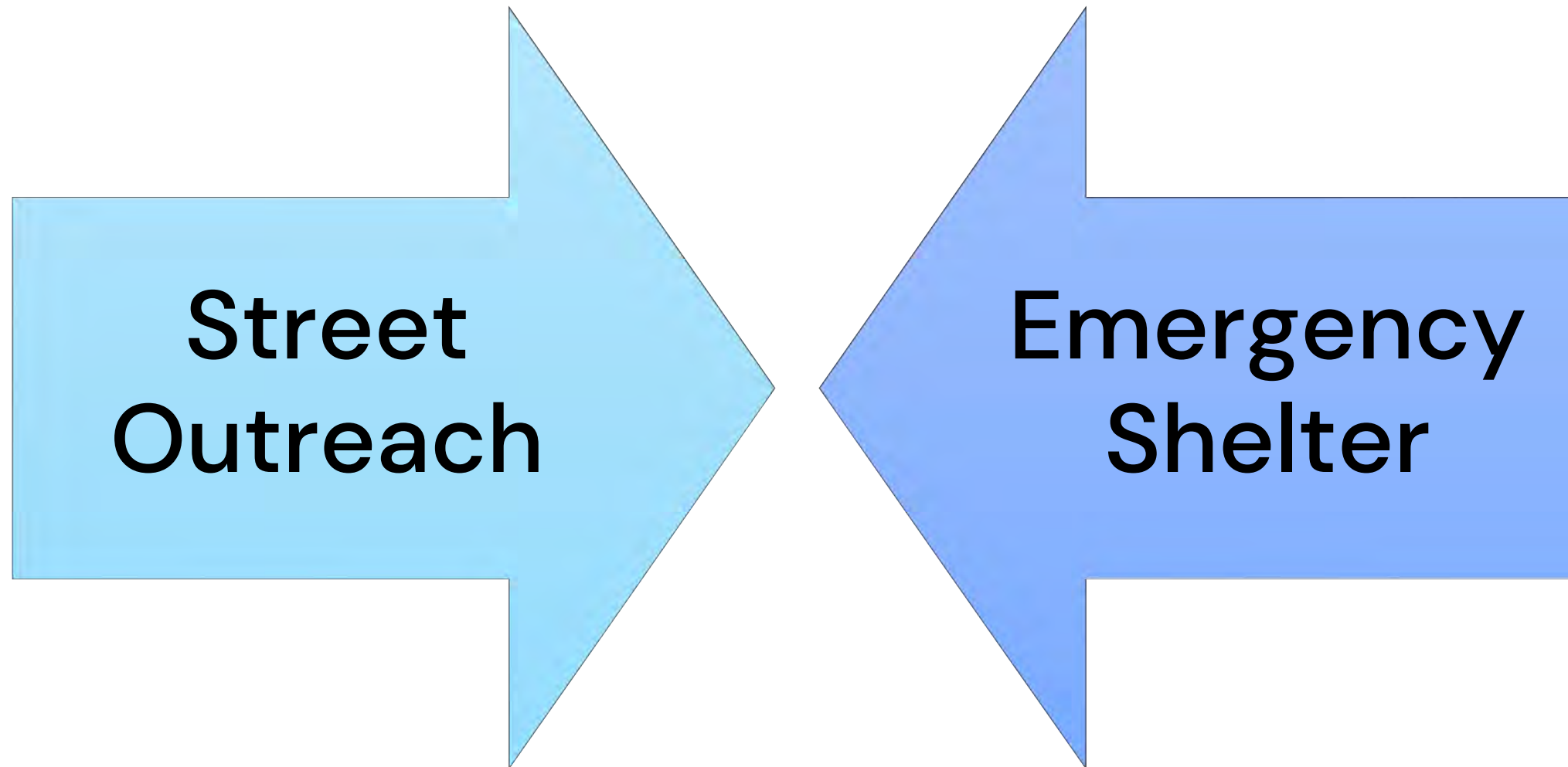
Efficient use of emergency shelter to secure permanent housing placement and maintain system flow is critical



Data Sources: 2020 Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Housing Inventory Count; and Populations and Subpopulations Report, HUD

Streets to Shelter: Population Overlap

There is significant overlap between street outreach and emergency shelter populations, as people move between sheltered and unsheltered homelessness and as each population interacts; this underscores the **importance of collaboration** between street outreach networks and emergency shelters



Streets to Shelter: (Just) One Possible Pathway to Housing

Street Outreach

Emergency Shelter

Permanent Housing

All of these can and should be participants in a well-functioning coordinated entry system

Streets to Shelter: Benefits of Shelter Placement

Safety

Emergency shelters address the immediate need for a safe place to sleep and store belongings, which can eliminate a point of crisis and begin the process of reducing the trauma associated with homelessness

Assessment

While street outreach teams can and do successfully perform coordinated entry assessments in the field, many communities use emergency shelters as their primary assessment sites due to the safety and confidentiality they offer

Access to Resources

Emergency shelters are often resource hubs that directly provide an array of resources beyond the emergency responses and items that outreach teams typically offer

Physical and Behavioral Health

Emergency shelters can promote health both directly (by providing physical and behavioral health services and configuring their space to limit the spread of infectious disease) and indirectly (by connecting participants to healthcare providers and offering space for providers to deliver services)

Streamlined Services

Emergency shelters are frequently connection hubs; shelter and outreach staff can collaboratively design and implement service plans that leverage those connections in context of the space and safety that shelters offer

Advancing Equity

Shelters can advance equity by providing culturally responsive services that are informed by and meet the needs of specific subpopulations in the community; these services may be more effectively provided in a shelter setting for some subpopulations

Streets to Shelter: Role of HMIS



HMIS is an **important tool for street outreach and emergency shelters**; it can house shared documentation that prevents people experiencing homelessness from the need to share their stories and information multiple times

The coordinated entry process, including assessments, is **often integrated into the HMIS**

Data collected through street outreach and engagement can be used to **document critical information** for participants, including homeless and chronic homeless status, housing barriers, and other information important to assessment, referral, and successful housing entry

Effective use of HMIS allows CoCs to map system flow, design strategic plans to address unsheltered homelessness, and allocate resources effectively

Streets to Shelter: Key Considerations

- **Street outreach must focus on safety and client choice**
- **A harm reduction approach will guide activities when offering shelter to those who do not initially want it**

Street outreach must accept that some people may not initially accept offers of emergency shelter or other emergency housing options; they should **continue offering shelter** as a safe option to access services while focusing on permanent housing placement

Service offers, including shelter, as with all services, must be non-judgmental, non-coercive, and **promote and honor participant choice**

When multiple shelter options are available, **ensure that clients are well informed** about what each choice offers, including connection to victim service providers for those fleeing domestic violence

Building rapport and providing life-saving resources can help **create a path to shelter** for participants who are reluctant to access it

Streets to Shelter: Tips for Success



Emergency shelters can be the **foundation for equity advancement**, as in many communities, they serve as the front door to homeless services

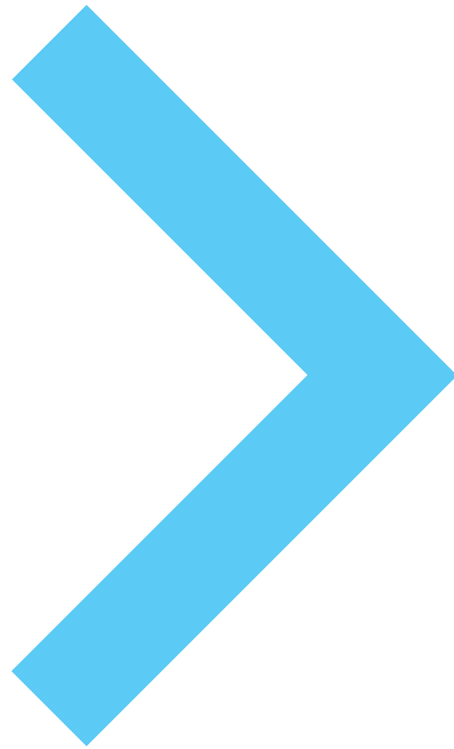
Outreach staff should build strong collaborations with shelter staff to **develop a mutual understanding of their shared participant populations**, including local preferences, cultural competencies, and accessibility needs and barriers

Outreach staff should work with shelters to **eliminate barriers and accommodate specific participant needs** such as storage space, translation services, disability accommodations, etc.

Pet accommodations are critical to a strong unsheltered homelessness response; their absence is a major shelter barrier for many people experiencing homelessness, and outreach staff can help shelters quantify the scope of need and implement solutions to scale



Streets to Housing



The ultimate goal of street outreach is **safe, stable permanent housing**; successful street outreach explores **all available routes to housing**

Streets to Housing: Another Potential Path

Initial Street Outreach Contact



Subsequent Coordinated Entry Activities



Prioritized for Coordinated Entry Referral...



...But Public Housing/HCV Arrives First!



Subsidized Housing via Public Housing/HCV

Streets to Housing: The Most Familiar Path

Initial Street Outreach Contact



Subsequent Coordinated Entry Activities



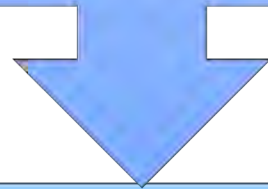
Coordinated Entry PSH/RRH Referral



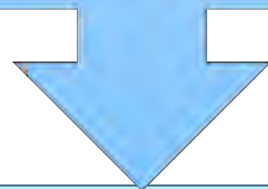
Housing via PSH/RRH

Streets to Housing: Housing Without a Subsidy—Immediate Housing—Problem Solving Conversations

Initial Street Outreach Contact



Immediate Housing Problem-Solving Conversation



Housed Via Support Networks

Streets to Housing: Housing Without a Subsidy—Ongoing Housing-Problem Solving Conversations

Initial Street Outreach Contact



Immediate Housing Problem-Solving Conversation



Ongoing Housing Problem-Solving Conversations



Housed Via Support Networks

Streets to Housing: An Even More Complex Route to Housing

Initial Street Outreach Contact

Immediate Housing Problem-Solving Conversation

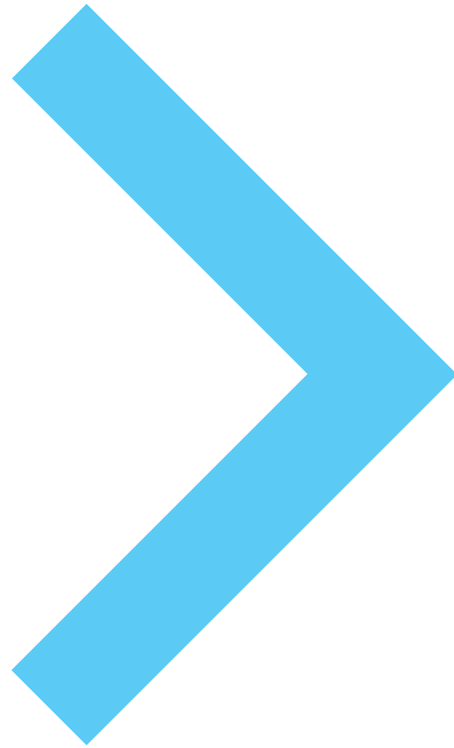
Ongoing Housing Problem-Solving Conversations

(time passes)

Prioritized for PSH/RRH

...But Participant Returns to Housing via Housing Problem-Solving Before a Referral Becomes Available!

Housed Via Support Networks



These scenarios are
real and realistic, but
the most complex
scenarios are the most
common

Streets to Housing: Thinking Beyond Subsidies

- Paths to housing are **diverse** and **non-linear**
- Housing subsidies should not be **limited to coordinated entry**
- Housing problem-solving often requires **multiple attempts**

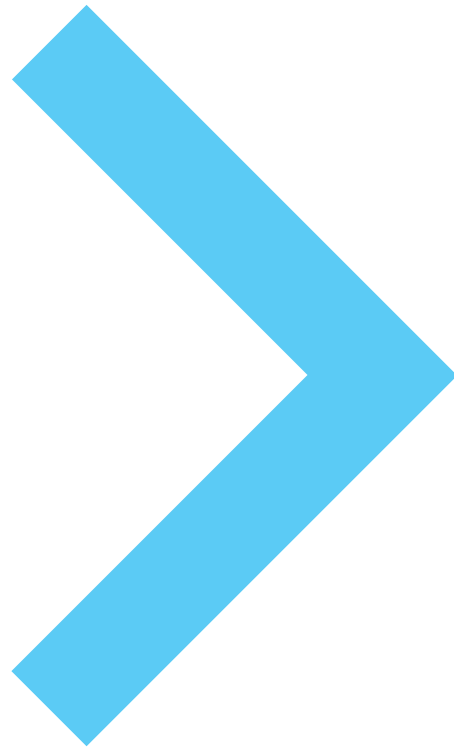
There are **many routes to housing**, and most of them are not coordinated entry referrals—or even housing subsidies

Be honest with participants: most communities do not have sufficient affordable housing or housing subsidies for every person experiencing homelessness, so the most common route back to housing—and the one most directly under a participant's control—is through **personal resources and support networks**

Housing problem-solving can take time to work; even so, it frequently offers **faster returns to housing than a subsidy** and can provide **significant system relief** in communities with very limited affordable housing and low subsidy availability



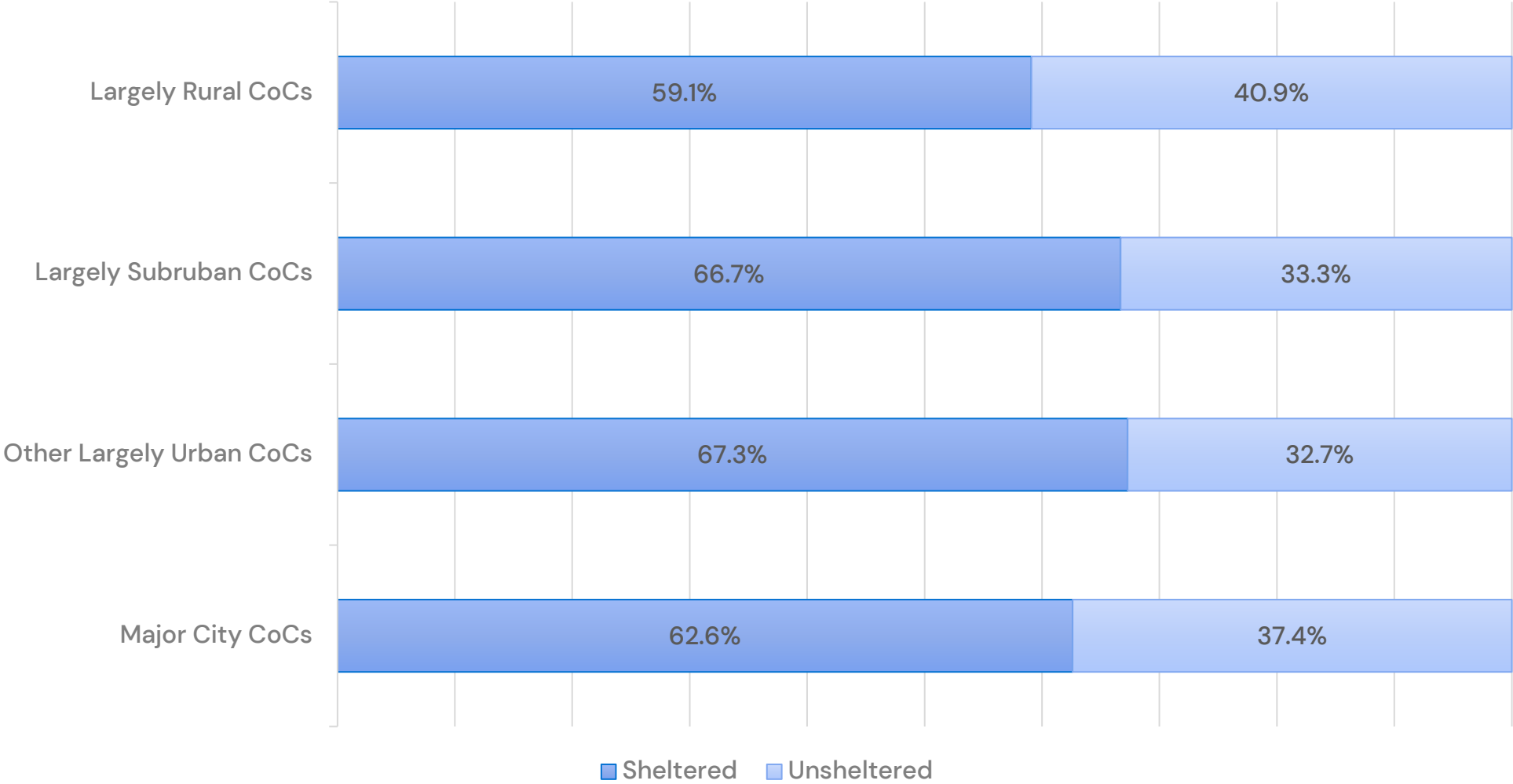
Considerations for Rural Areas



Unsheltered
homelessness often
**presents differently in
rural areas;** street
outreach in rural areas
must be responsive to
these differences

2019 Percentage Unsheltered by Geography Type

In the 2019 AHAR, rural CoCs identified proportionally more people experiencing unsheltered homelessness than either urban or suburban CoCs. Unsheltered homelessness may be less visible in rural areas, but it is more prevalent. Contributing factors may include a comparative lack of shelter beds and, paradoxically, the relatively straightforward nature of unsheltered Point-in-Time (PIT) Count activities in small rural communities.



Data sources: 2019 AHAR

Rural Outreach: Challenges and Ideas

Challenges	Ideas
Outreach is not currently involved in coordinated entry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use coordinated entry planning tools from HUD • Include outreach teams in process design • Strategize how to approach mainstream system providers with the opportunity for them to serve as access points
Outreach is not consistent across the entire geography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create CoC outreach templates that can be used across regions • Clarify the role and importance our outreach through training • Provide maps to local regions and track outreach coverage throughout each year
Perceived safety concerns or lack of knowledge regarding target population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dispel myths associated with people experiencing homelessness while educating outreach workers • Educate local system partners and community members who may come across people experiencing homelessness • Post informational flyers in relevant locations
Lack of trained outreach workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deploy staff by geography, not funding source • If possible, use staff to perform outreach and certain case management activities to reduce transportation costs and time
Local policies criminalize homelessness and make those who are unsheltered more likely to hide their circumstances and locations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate local law enforcement on homelessness and available resources through outreach and other sources • Advocate for changes to policies that have disparate impact on those experiencing homelessness

Rural Outreach: Best Practices

Non-traditional Partners

Unsheltered homelessness is less visible in rural areas; consider partnering with stakeholders such as medical providers, postal workers, faith-based organizations, park rangers, and local businesses who might encounter people experiencing homelessness

Employee Resources

Provide outreach workers with all the resources necessary to do their jobs well while working independently; provide cell phones and other electronics and facilitate appropriate training such as motivational interviewing, personal safety, and use of rescue medications like NARCAN

Regional Coverage

Break larger areas down into a manageable size. If you have regional CoC structures, utilize them. Deploy outreach resources strategically across regions based on need and reassess this resource allocation regularly.

Maintain Safety

Rural outreach has different safety challenges than urban outreach; in addition to cross-cutting safety protocols, make sure that staff are trained to dress and use equipment properly when performing outreach on difficult terrain

Employee Satisfaction

Outreach workers in rural areas can be more prone to burnout due to the high level of effort required to operate independently and maintain constant community presence; to compensate, offer appropriate salaries, benefits, professional development, and flexible hours

Consider Timing

To maximize connections, learn when people experiencing homelessness are present at known sites, heighten urgency when extreme weather is possible, and consider early morning or late evening outreach to reach people before/after jobs begin or people move indoors for climate control



Considerations for Tribal Nations



Street outreach is essential to identifying, connecting with, and serving American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian people experiencing homelessness in **every community** both within and outside Indian Country

Tribal Nations: Considerations

- **Housing conditions** in Indian Country has a direct impact on housing instability
- Homelessness is frequently **less conspicuous** in Indian Country than in other areas

The number of people living in Indian Country has grown since 1998, but **funding has not kept pace with population growth**

Partnering with neighboring CoCs can be a powerful tool for addressing that disparity

Serving American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian populations via street outreach requires **collaborative, culturally responsive partnerships**

Tribal Nations: Outreach Practices to Consider

Know Your Population

Use both qualitative and quantitative data to understand demographics of the local homeless population

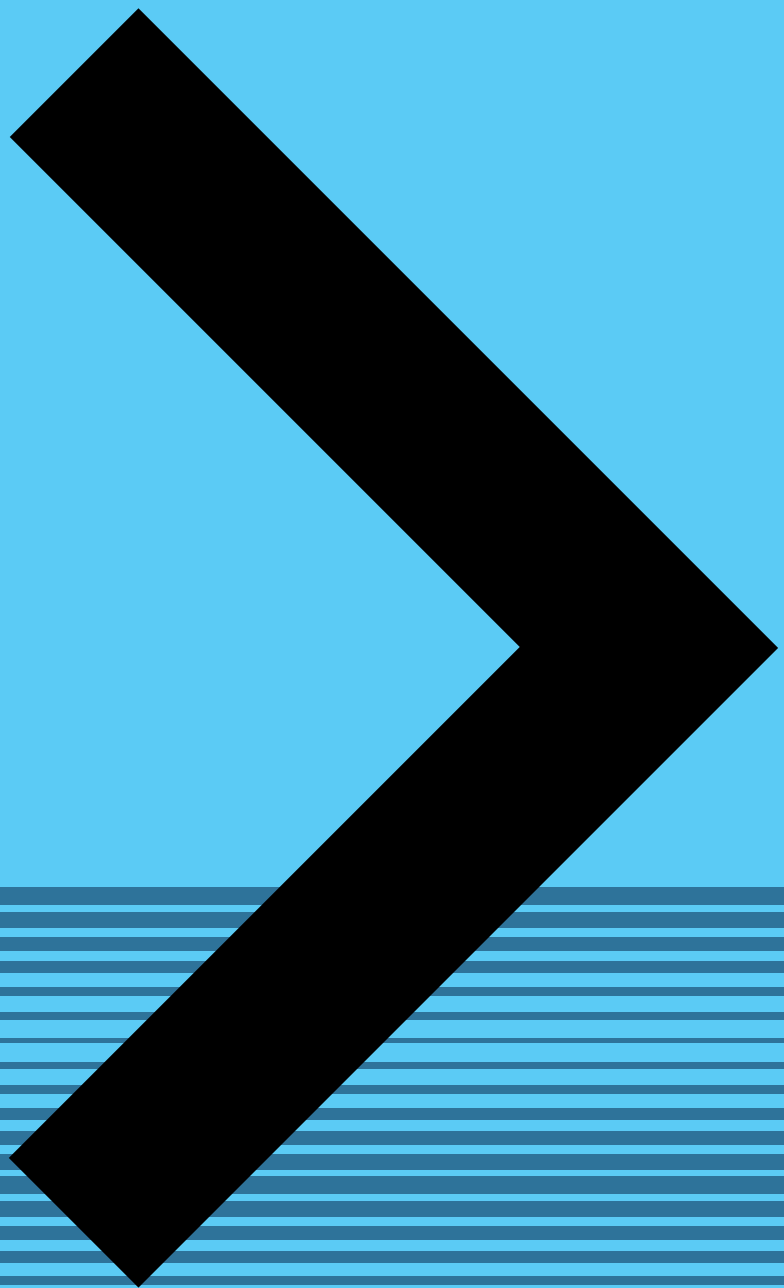
Cultural Responsiveness

Working with members of tribal nations requires a culturally responsive approach

Hire From the Community

The most effective street outreach is often conducted and always informed by members of the populations served

American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian populations are present both within and outside Indian Country, with households who are increasingly moving to metropolitan areas. Advancing equity requires CoCs in every part of the country to assess and accurately understand the demographics of their local homeless populations.



Q&A

Works Cited (1/1)

- ["The 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report \(AHAR\) to Congress," HUD](#)
- ["HUD 2020 Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Housing Inventory Count Report," HUD](#)
- ["Core Elements of Effective Street Outreach to People Experiencing Homelessness," USICH](#)
- ["Point-in-Time Count Methodology Guide," HUD](#)
- ["Homelessness Prevention, Diversion, and Rapid Exit," USICH](#)
- ["COVID-19 Homeless System Response: Housing Problem-Solving," HUD](#)
- ["Housing Problem-Solving: Unscripted," HUD](#)