

**SANTA CRUZ COUNTY 2026
HOMELESSNESS**
POINT-IN-TIME COUNT & REPORT

Photo: Housing for Health

August 2026

Prepared by
Applied Survey Research



ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

Applied Survey Research (ASR) is a social research firm dedicated to helping people build better communities by collecting meaningful data, facilitating information-based planning, and developing custom strategies. The firm was founded in 1980 on the principle that community improvement, initiative sustainability, and program success are closely tied to assessment of needs, evaluation of community goals, and development of appropriate responses.

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ABOUT THE HOUSING FOR HEALTH PARTNERSHIP

Housing for Health Partnership (H4HP) serves as the federally designated Continuum of Care for Santa Cruz County and coordinates resources, programs and services focused on preventing and ending homelessness. H4HP is driven by its mission to ensure all residents within Santa Cruz County have stable, safe and healthy places to live.

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www.housingforhealthpartnership.org

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SUPPORTERS

Abode Services	Nation's Finest
Association of Faith Communities of Santa Cruz	People First of Santa Cruz County
City of Santa Cruz	Santa Cruz County Housing for Health
Community Action Board of Santa Cruz	Housing for Health Partnership Lived Expertise Action Board - LEAB
Encompass Community Services	Housing for Health Partnership Youth Lived Expertise Action Board - YLEAB
Front St. Inc.	Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission
Homeless Garden Project	Santa Cruz Public Libraries
Housing Matters	Stepping Up Santa Cruz
Mental Health Client Action Network	United Way of Santa Cruz County
Monarch Services	University of California, Santa Cruz



INTRODUCTION

The County of Santa Cruz typically conducts a Point-in-Time (PIT) Count of all persons experiencing homelessness annually during the last 10 days of January; this year on January 29, 2026. PIT Counts approximate the number of persons experiencing homelessness in each community on a given day and collect information on persons and families residing in emergency shelters, transitional housing, and unsheltered situations including on the streets, in cars, abandoned properties, or other places not meant for human habitation. The federal government requires communities to conduct a PIT Count every two years; however, the County of Santa Cruz has elected to conduct the count annually.

The PIT Count is the only source of point-in-time data reporting both sheltered and unsheltered homelessness nationwide. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires all jurisdictions receiving federal funding for housing and services for persons experiencing homelessness to conduct a PIT Count. The Housing for Health Partnership (H4HP) receives approximately \$7.8 million annually in HUD Continuum of Care (CoC) funding, a key source of funding for the county's housing and services programs for persons experiencing homelessness.

The CoC reports the findings of its local PIT Count annually to HUD, though the unsheltered count component is required every other year. As part of the PIT Count, a survey is conducted to gather additional information about the demographics, experiences, and needs of people experiencing homelessness. The reported findings help the federal government better understand the nature and extent of homelessness nationwide. Data from the PIT Count and Survey help inform local strategic planning, capacity building, and advocacy campaigns to prevent and end homelessness.

The County of Santa Cruz partnered with Applied Survey Research (ASR) to conduct the 2026 Santa Cruz County Homeless PIT Count and Survey. ASR is a social research firm based in Santa Cruz County with extensive experience in homeless enumeration and needs assessment and has been the principal researcher for Santa Cruz County PIT counts and surveys since 2000.

The Santa Cruz County Homeless PIT Count consists of six primary components:

1. Point-in-time visual enumeration of unsheltered persons and families experiencing homelessness, including those sleeping outdoors, on the street, or in parks, tents, or vehicles.
2. Point-in-time enumeration of persons and families experiencing homelessness in temporary shelter, including emergency shelters or transitional housing facilities.
3. A targeted street count of unaccompanied children and transition-age youth, conducted at locations and times identified by local youth service providers and advocates to improve outreach and increase the likelihood of identifying youth experiencing homelessness who may not be captured through the general count.
4. A targeted County Office of Education street count of students and their families, conducted in partnership with the County Office of Education to identify students and families experiencing homelessness who may be unsheltered or otherwise difficult to reach during the general Point-in-Time Count.
5. A sample-based survey of the characteristics of persons and families experiencing homelessness in both sheltered and unsheltered locations.
6. HMIS data from safe sleeping and safe parking programs were included to account for individuals and households staying in designated safe sleeping sites or safe parking locations on the night of the count.

The 2026 Santa Cruz County Homeless PIT Count was a comprehensive community effort. With the support of over 200 persons, including those experiencing homelessness, community volunteers, staff from the City of Santa Cruz and Santa Cruz County, and community-based organizations, the entire county was canvassed between the hours of 5:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. on January 29, 2026. Specialized outreach teams canvassed more remote areas of the County. This effort yielded a peer-informed visual count of persons and families experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Shelters and transitional housing facilities reported the number of persons and families who occupied their facilities on the night of January 28, 2026. In addition, the 2026 count included data on unsheltered individuals participating in safe parking and safe sleeping programs throughout the County that were not counted in prior PIT counts. This represents a change in practice from prior PIT counts and contributed to an increase in the unsheltered count numbers in 2026.

A supplemental count of unaccompanied children under the age of 18, and transition-age youth (TAY) between the ages of 18 to 24 was conducted in the afternoon of January 29, 2026. This specialized count was designed to improve the understanding of the scope of youth homelessness, as youth are frequently undercounted during the unsheltered morning count effort. Trained youth enumerators, some who currently or have previously experienced homelessness, conducted the count in specific areas where youth experiencing homelessness were known to congregate. The 2026 youth count included more intensive and robust outreach when compared to the 2025 count, likely contributing to an increase in the number of youth counted.

In the weeks following the January 29 PIT count, an in-depth survey was administered to 374 persons experiencing unsheltered and sheltered homelessness. The survey gathered basic demographic details and information on service needs and utilization.

This report provides data on the number and characteristics of persons experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz County on a single night in January 2026. Unstably-housed persons living without assistance in hotel/motels, doubled-up situations (living temporarily with family/friends due to lack of housing), or temporarily in a jail or hospital are not included in the PIT count. The report provides focused analysis on special populations, including chronically homeless persons, veterans, families, unaccompanied children under the age of 18, and TAY aged 18-24. To better understand the dynamics of homelessness over time, results from previous PIT counts are provided where available and applicable.

The data presented in this report have five separate sources which are inter-related but distinct:

1. Observation-only data of unsheltered individuals and families from PIT-day canvassing.
2. PIT-eve shelter and transitional housing occupancy and resident data sourced from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).
3. PIT-eve safe parking, safe sleeping occupancy, and client data sourced from HMIS.
4. In-depth survey data from a representative sample of sheltered and unsheltered individuals.
5. Homeless Data Exchange (HDX) data, cross-referenced with the above sources. The HDX is HUD's secure online reporting system used by Continuums of Care to submit Point-in-Time Count, Housing Inventory Count, and other homelessness data required for federal reporting.

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

2026 POINT-IN-TIME COUNT & SURVEY

Every year, typically during the last 10 days of January, communities across the country conduct comprehensive counts of the local homeless populations to measure the prevalence of homelessness in each local Continuum of Care.

The 2026 Santa Cruz County Point-in-Time Count was a community-wide effort conducted on Thursday, January 29th, 2026. In the weeks following the street count, a survey was administered to 374 unsheltered and sheltered individuals experiencing homelessness in order to profile their experience and characteristics.



TOTAL PERSONS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

1,648



22%
Sheltered
n=358



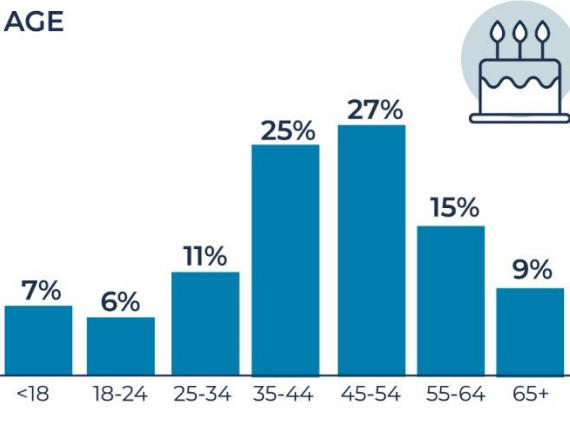
78%
Unsheltered
n=1,290

TOTAL PERSONS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

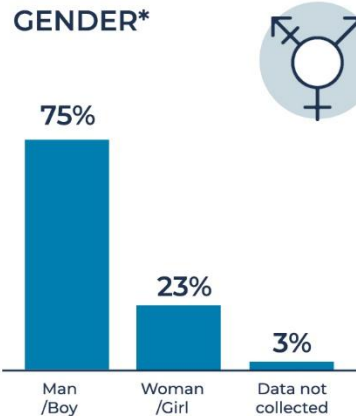


DEMOGRAPHICS

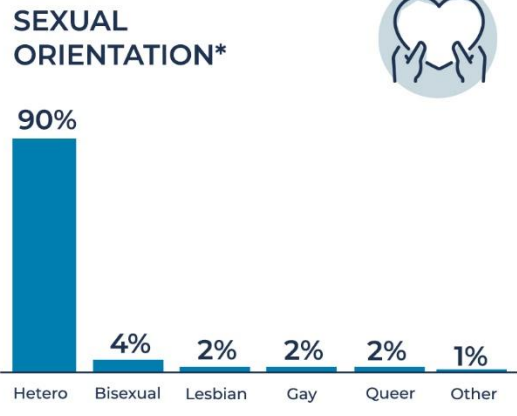
AGE



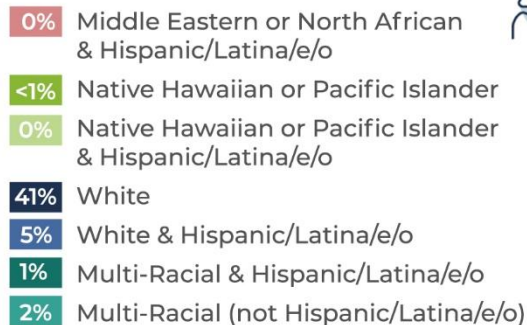
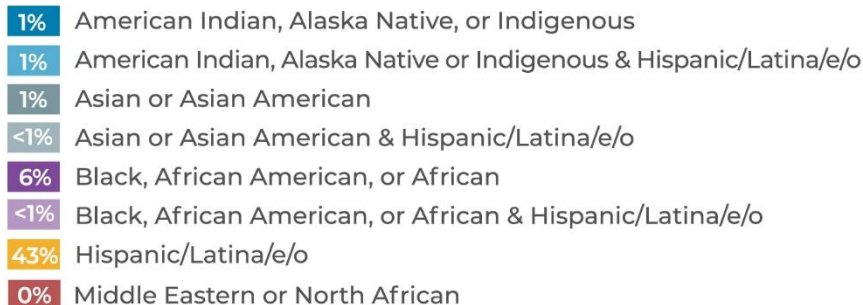
GENDER*



SEXUAL ORIENTATION*

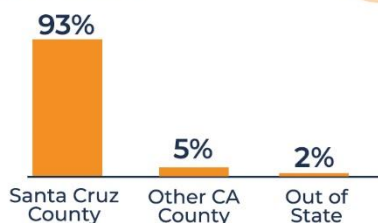


RACE/ ETHNICITY

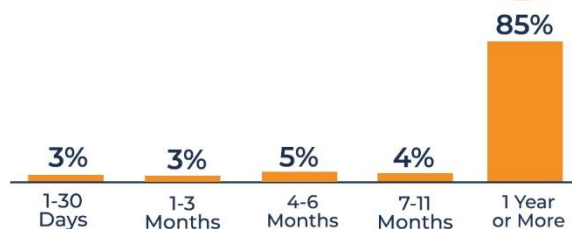


DATA PORTRAITS

RESIDENCE AT THE TIME THEY BECAME HOMELESS



DURATION OF CURRENT EPISODE OF HOMELESSNESS



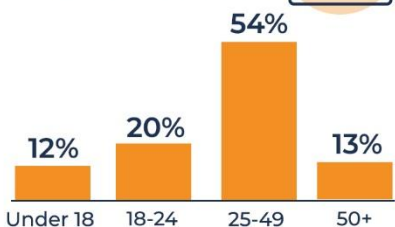
FIRST EPISODE OF HOMELESSNESS



50%

of survey respondents reported their current episode of homelessness as being their first

AGE AT FIRST EPISODE OF HOMELESSNESS



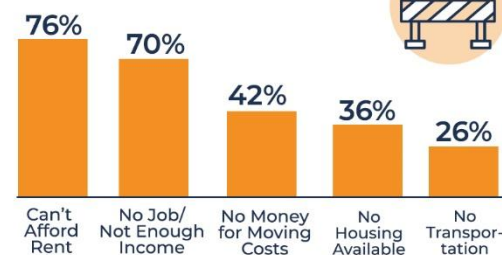
PRIMARY CONDITIONS THAT LEAD TO HOMELESSNESS*

(Top 5 Responses)



BARRIERS TO OBTAINING PERMANENT HOUSING*

(Top 5 Responses)



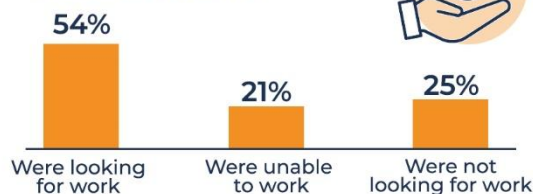
EMPLOYMENT STATUS



12%

of survey respondents had some form of employment

AMONG UNEMPLOYED RESPONDENTS



FOSTER CARE



11%

of survey respondents have foster care involvement

JUSTICE SYSTEM INVOLVED



22%

of survey respondents spent one or more nights in jail/prison/juvenile hall in the past year.

18%

of survey respondents reported being on probation/parole at the start of their most recent episode of homelessness

SURVEY RESPONDENTS BY SLEEPING ACCOMMODATION



SELF-REPORTED HEALTH^a

Current health conditions that may affect the housing stability or employment of those experiencing homelessness.

PSYCHIATRIC
OR EMOTIONAL
CONDITIONS



52%

Report having a psychiatric or emotional condition

SUBSTANCE
USE
DISORDER



45%

Report having a substance use disorder

PTSD



42%

Report having Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

PHYSICAL
DISABILITY



30%

Report having a physical disability

CHRONIC
HEALTH
CONDITION



22%

Report having a chronic health condition

TRAUMATIC
BRAIN
INJURY



17%

Report having had a TBI

HIV/AIDS
RELATED
ILLNESS



1%

Report having an HIV/AIDS related illness

DISABLING CONDITION

A disabling condition is defined by HUD as a developmental disability, HIV/AIDS, or a long-term physical or mental impairment that impacts a person's ability to live independently but could be improved with stable housing.

71%



of survey respondents report having at least one disabling condition

GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE^a



83%

of survey respondents reported receiving government benefits.

SERVICES CURRENTLY ACCESSING* (TOP 6 RESPONSES)

70%



Medi-Cal/
Medicare

55%



Food
Stamps

14%



General
Assistance

7%



Social
Security

6%



SSI/SSDI/
Disability

17%



None

REASONS FOR NOT RECEIVING GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE* (TOP 4 RESPONSES)

21%



Immigration
issues

11%



No permanent
address

11%



Don't have
ID

9%



Don't think
I'm eligible

SPECIAL POPULATIONS

Total ■ Sheltered ■ Unsheltered ■

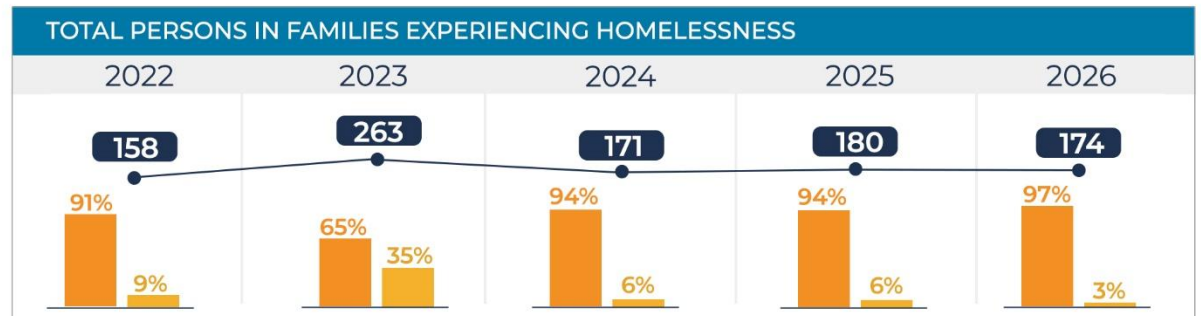
CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS



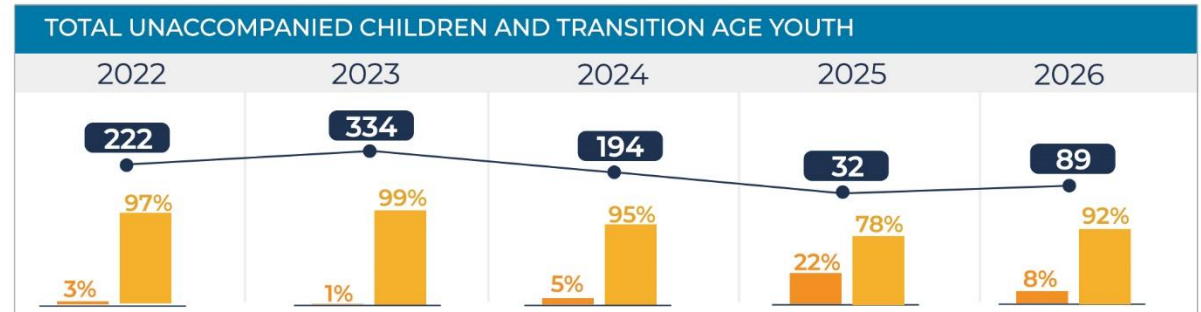
VETERANS



FAMILIES



UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN + TAY



SUBPOPULATION DEFINITIONS

CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS

An individual with one or more disabling conditions, or a family with a head of household with a disabling condition, who:

- Has been continuously homeless for one year or more and/or;
- Has experienced four or more episodes totaling 12 months or more of homelessness within the past three years

VETERANS

Persons who have served on active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States. This does not include inactive military reserves or the National Guard unless the person was called up to active duty.

FAMILIES

A household with at least one adult member (persons 18 or older) and at least one child member (persons under 18).

UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH YOUNG ADULTS

Youth under the age of 18 and young adults from the ages of 18 to 24 years old (TAY) who are experiencing homelessness and living without a parent or legal guardian.

□ Source: 2026 Santa Cruz County Homeless Survey, N=374

* Multiple response question, percentages may not add up to 100%
Source: 2026 Santa Cruz County Point-in-Time Count

Note: Some percentages have been rounded so total percentage will equal 100%.

POINT-IN-TIME COUNT

The 2026 Santa Cruz County Homeless PIT Count and Survey includes data on unsheltered persons, including individuals participating in safe sleeping and safe parking programs, as well as persons in emergency shelters and transitional housing programs. The general street count was conducted on January 29, 2026, from approximately 5:00 AM to 10:00 AM, and covered all of Santa Cruz County. The shelter count, conducted the night of January 28, 2026, included all persons occupying emergency shelters, transitional housing, and domestic violence shelters. The unsheltered count also included data from HMIS on participants in safe sleeping and safe parking programs throughout the County. The 2026 count identified 1,648 people experiencing homelessness, including 1,290 unsheltered persons and 358 sheltered persons.



Photo credits: Housing for Health

NUMBER AND CHARACTERISTICS OF PERSONS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

Figure 1: Total Number of Persons Experiencing Homelessness

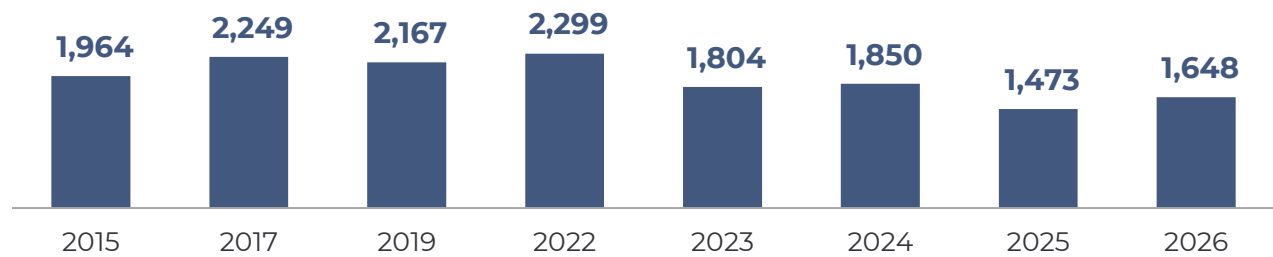
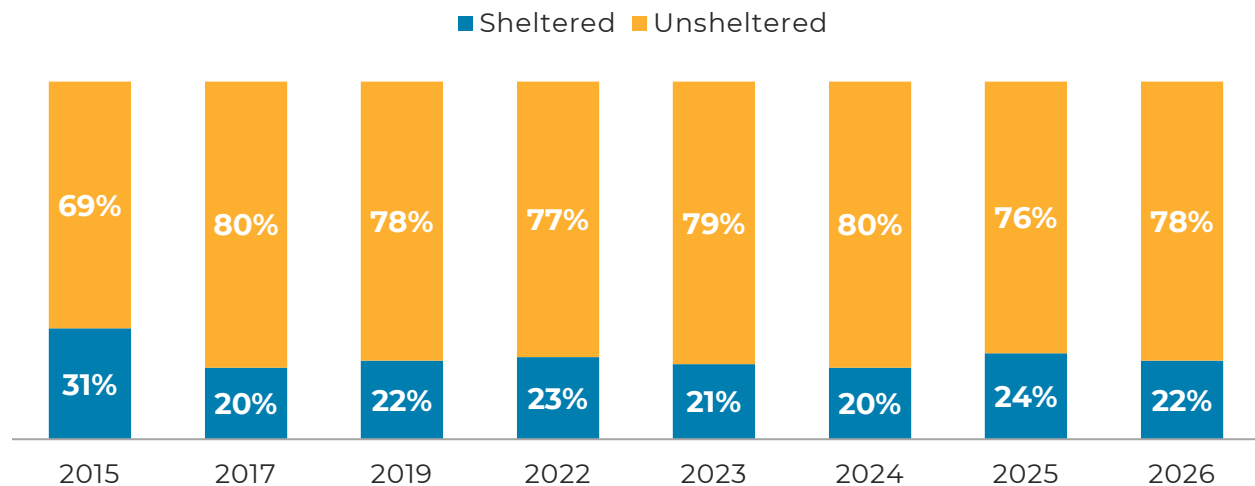


Figure 2: Total Homeless Count Population, by Shelter Status

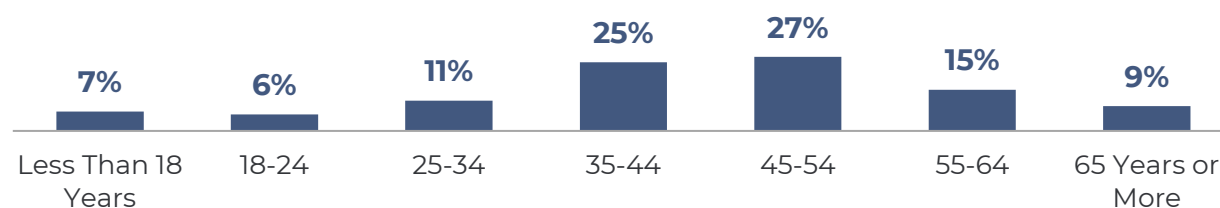


2015 n=1,964; 2017 n=2,249; 2019 n=2,167; 2022 n=2,299; 2023 n=1,804; 2024 n=1,850; 2025 n=1,473; 2026 n=1,648

Note: The county did not conduct a PIT count in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19 related concerns.



Figure 3: Total Homeless Count Population, by Age



2026 n=1,648

Adults ages 35–54 represented the largest share of people counted, with 25% ages 35–44 and 27% ages 45–54.

Figure 4: Total Homeless Population by Shelter Status and Jurisdiction

JURISDICTION	UNSHELTERED*		SHELTERED		TOTAL		
	2025	2026	2025	2026	2025	2026	25-26 NET CHANGE
Total Incorporated	924	1,032	351	358	1,275	1,390	9%
City of Capitola	71	32	0	0	71	32	-55%
City of Santa Cruz*	612	789	250	234	862	1,024	19%
City of Scotts Valley	7	32	0	0	7	32	N/A
City of Watsonville*	234	179	101	124	335	303	-10%
Total Unincorporated/ Confidential Scattered Site**	198	258	0	0	198	258	30%
Total	1,122	1,290	351	358	1,473	1,648	12%

* Inclusion of HMIS safe parking and safe sleeping data in the 2026 unsheltered count contributed to a 124 person increase in the City of Santa Cruz and a 2-person increase in the City of Watsonville. None of the other jurisdiction counts were impacted by this change.

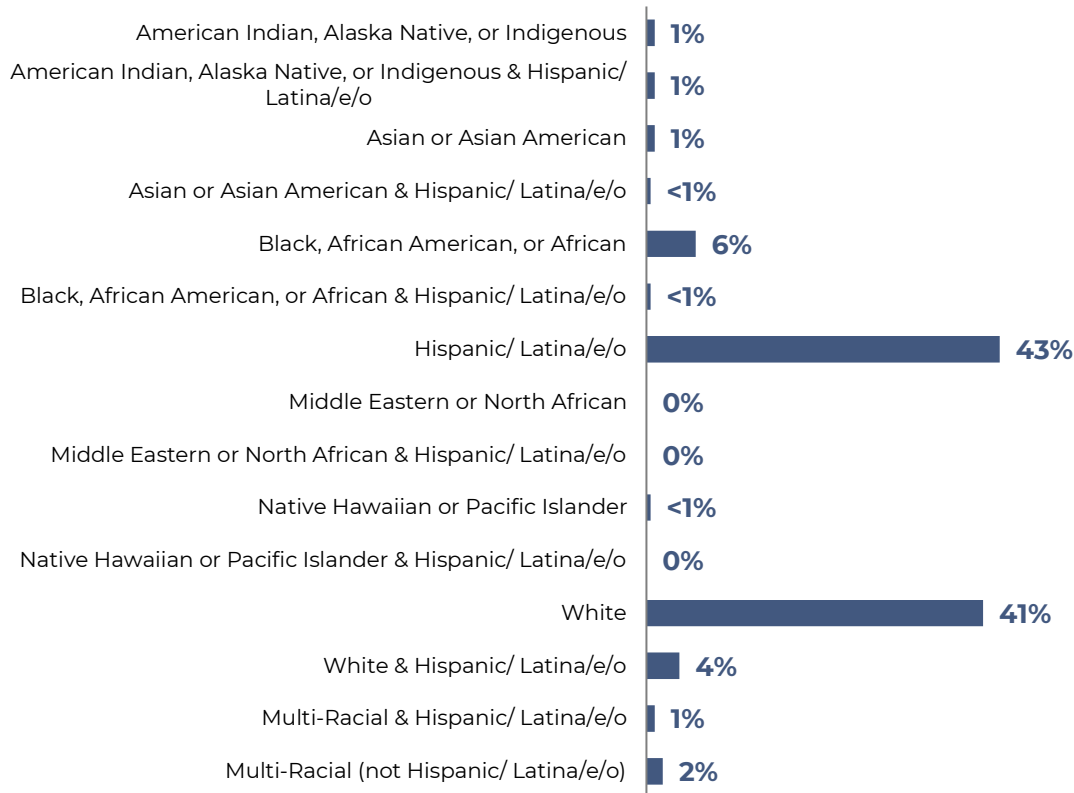
** Confidential/scattered site data are confidential due to privacy considerations.

Note: Percentage change is not calculated for low numerical values because even small numerical differences can produce large percentage changes that may be misleading.



TOTAL HOMELESS POPULATION BY RACE AND ETHNICITY

Figure 5: Total Homeless Census Population, by Race



2026 PIT Count n=1,648

Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Note: In 2024, HUD changed how race and ethnicity are collected in the PIT Count; therefore, comparisons with previous years are not recommended.



Photo credits: Housing for Health

HOMELESS SURVEY FINDINGS

This section provides an overview of the findings generated from the survey component of the 2026 Santa Cruz County Homeless Point-in-Time Count and Survey. Surveys were administered to a randomized sample of people experiencing homelessness between February 5 and March 13, 2026, resulting in 374 valid and complete surveys.

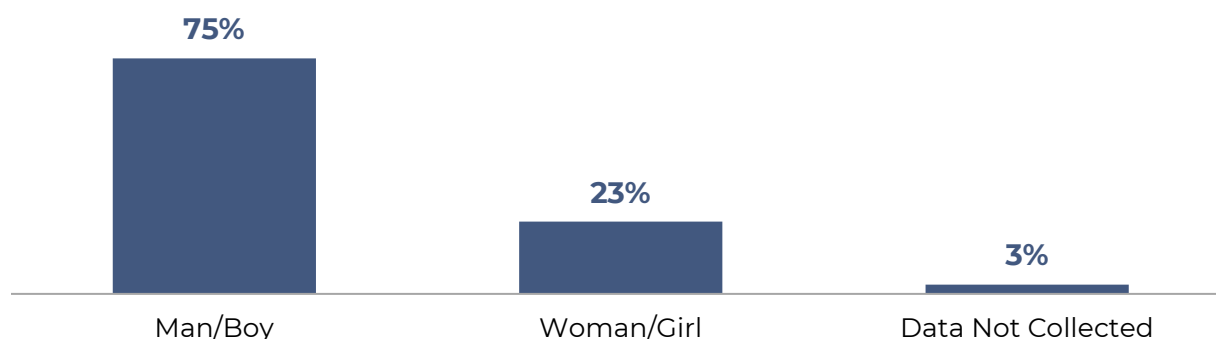
Based on the 1,648-person PIT Count, a randomized survey process produced 374 valid responses. This sample yields a margin of error of $\pm 4\%$ at a 95% confidence level when generalizing to the entire estimated homeless population in Santa Cruz County. In other words, if the survey were conducted again, we can be 95% certain that the results would be within four percentage points of the reported results.

To respect respondent privacy and ensure the safety and comfort of those who participated, survey respondents were not required to complete all survey questions. Missing values were intentionally omitted from the survey results. Therefore, the total number of respondents for each question will not always equal the total number of surveys conducted. For more information regarding the survey methodology, please see [Appendix A: Methodology](#).

GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Seventy-five percent (75%) of survey responses were reported in the Man/Boy category and 23% were reported in the Woman/Girl category. Three percent were reported as Data Not Collected. Approximately 90% of survey respondents identified as heterosexual when asked about their sexual orientation, a decrease from the previous year (92%).

Figure 6: Gender *

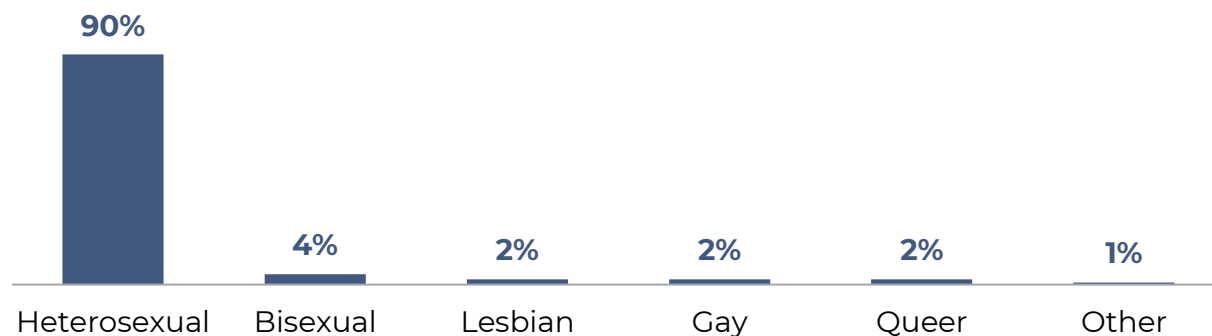


2026 n=374 respondents offering 379 responses

Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.

*Note: Starting in 2026, gender categories are limited to binary man/boy or woman/girl classifications to align with updated U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) reporting requirements.

Figure 7: Sexual Orientation



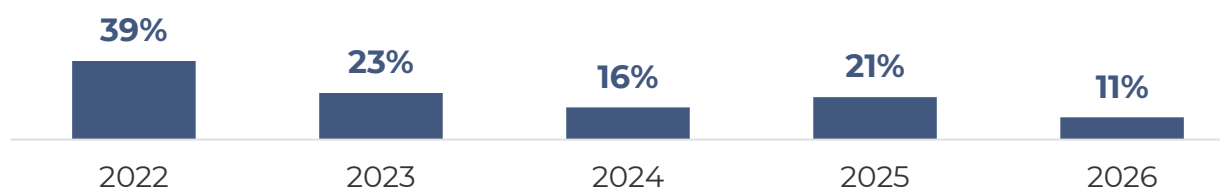
2026 n=374 respondents offering 382 responses

Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.

FOSTER CARE

In 2026, 11% of survey respondents in Santa Cruz County indicated a history of foster care involvement, a decrease from 21% in 2025.

Figure 8: History of Foster Care

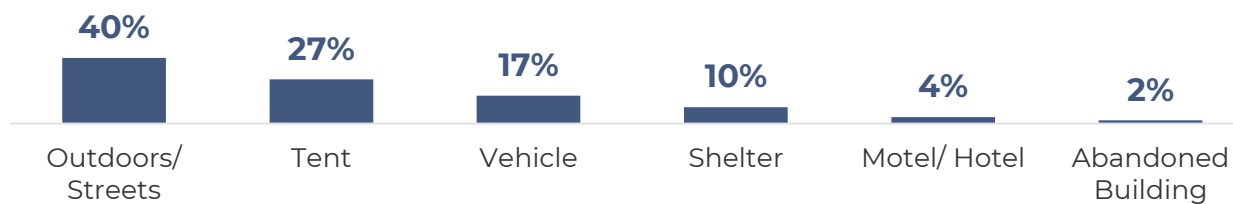


2022 n=314; 2023 n=391; 2024 n=370; 2025 n=425; 2026 n=363

SLEEPING ACCOMMODATIONS

Forty percent (40%) of survey respondents reported sleeping outdoors, 27% reported sleeping in a tent, and 17% reported sleeping in a vehicle.

Figure 9: Survey Respondents by Sleeping Accommodations

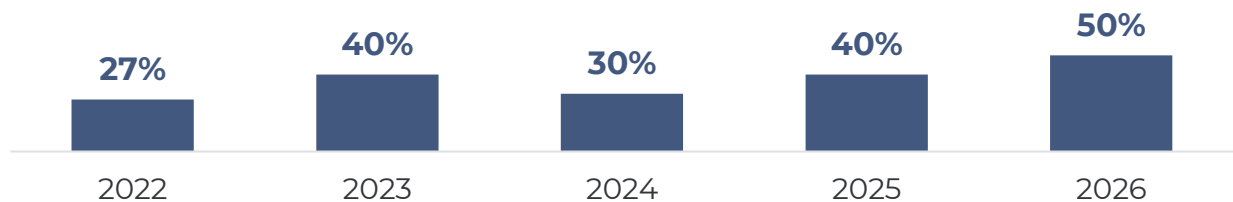


2026 n=371

ONSET, AGE, AND DURATION OF HOMELESSNESS

The percentage of survey respondents who were experiencing their first episode of homelessness increased from 40% in 2025 to 50% in 2026.

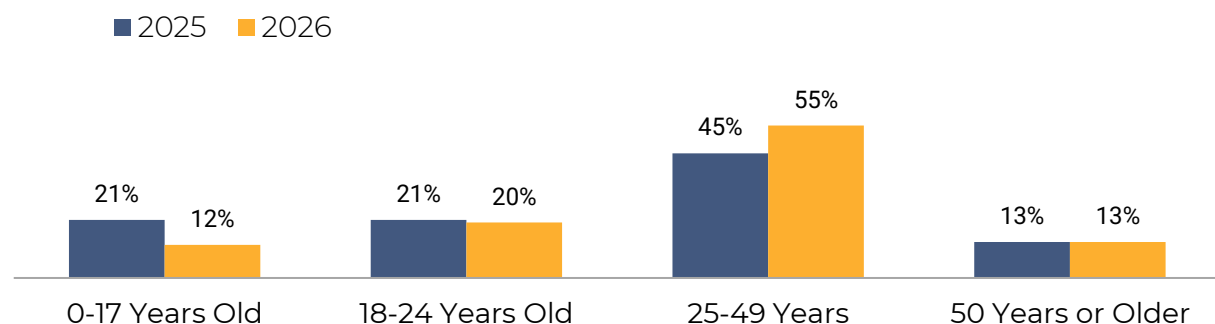
Figure 10: First Time Experiencing Homelessness ("Yes" Respondents)



2022 n=329; 2023 n=410; 2024 n=395; 2025 n=422; 2026 n=365

Sixty-eight percent of survey respondents reported being over the age of 25 when they first experienced homelessness, and twelve percent of respondents were under the age of 18 when they first experienced homelessness. Eighty-five percent of respondents reported that their current stint of homelessness has lasted a year or more.

Figure 11: Age at First Experience of Homelessness

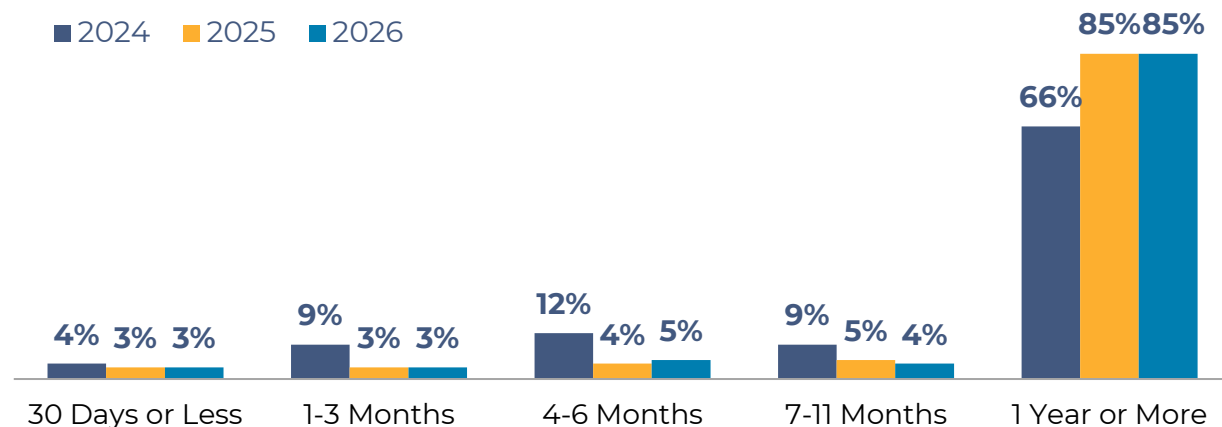


2025 n=423; 2026 n=364

Note: Age groupings were revised in 2025 to reflect input and recommendations from the community.



Figure 12: Duration of Current Episode of Homelessness

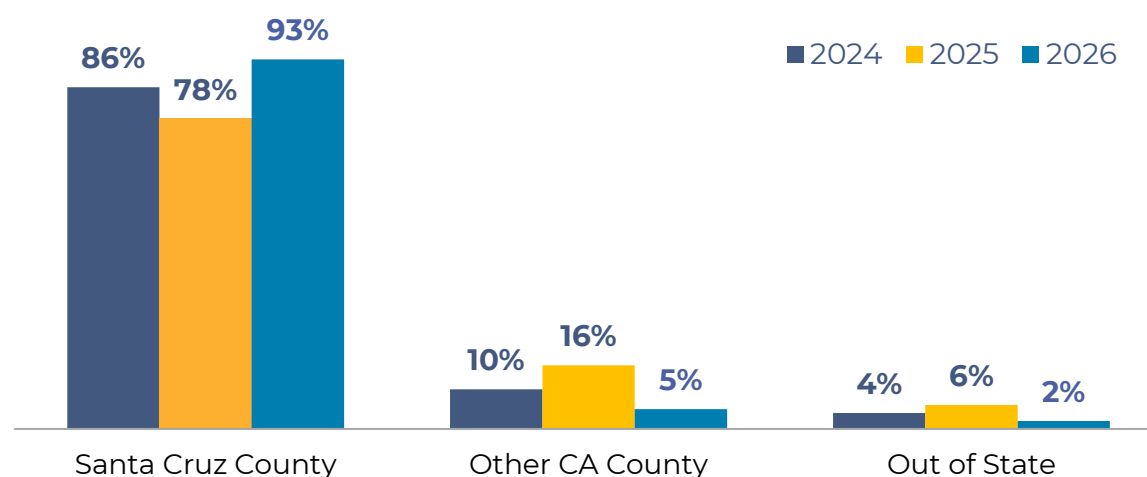


2024 n=393; 2025 n=423; 2026 n=359

PLACE OF RESIDENCE

The percentage of survey respondents who indicated they were living in Santa Cruz County at the time they lost their housing increased from 78% in 2025 to 93% in 2026. Fifty-six percent of respondents indicated they had been living in northern Santa Cruz County at the time they became unhoused, 9% indicated living in the central part of the county, and 28% indicated living in south county prior to becoming homeless.

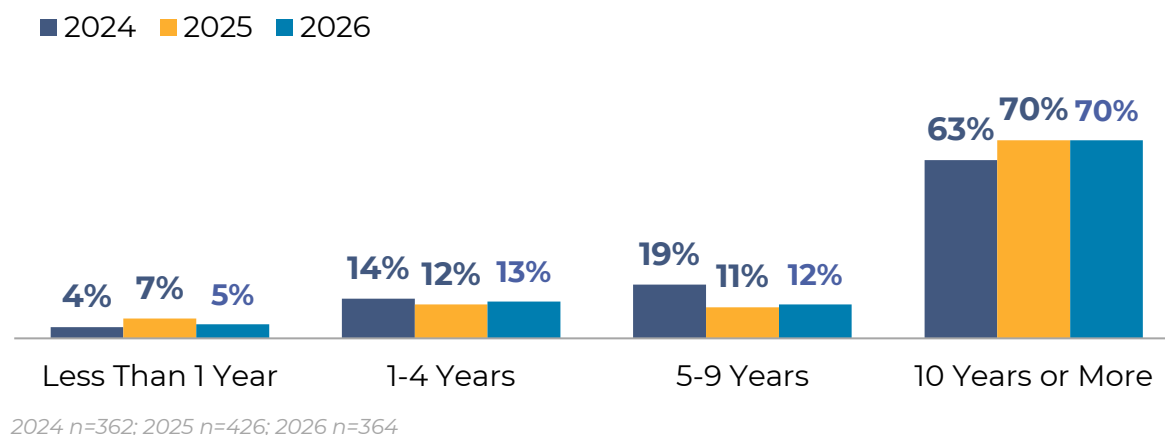
Figure 13: Place of Residence at Time of Housing Loss



2024 n=388; 2025 n=426; 2026 n=368

Seventy percent of respondents indicated living in Santa Cruz County for at least 10 years before their current episode of homelessness, identical to 2025.

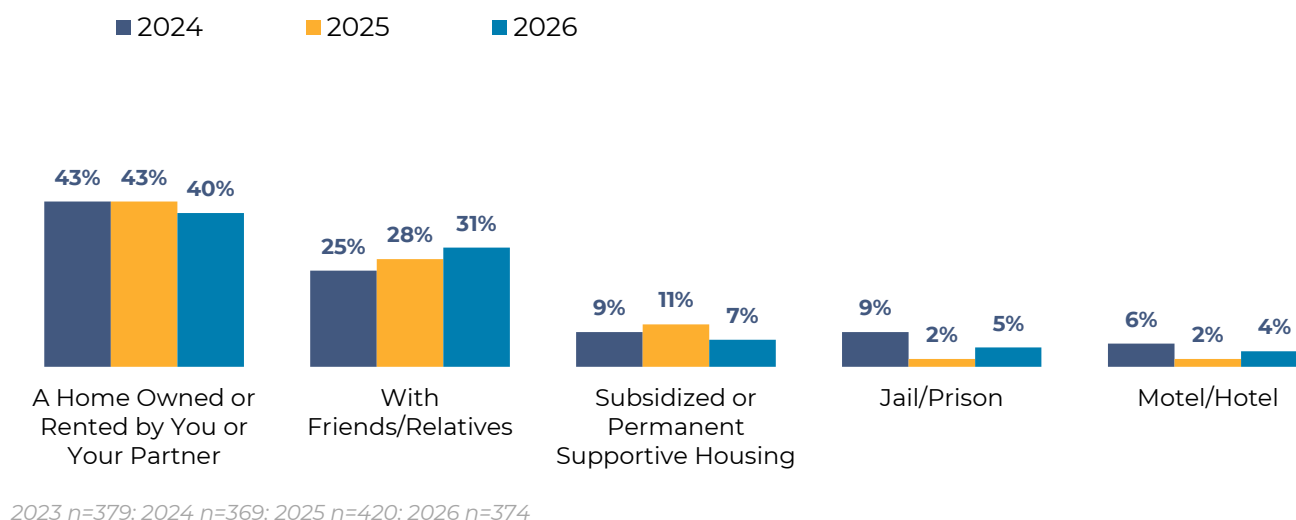
Figure 14: Time Lived in Santa Cruz County Prior to Becoming Homeless



PRIOR LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

In 2026, 40% of respondents reported living in a home rented or owned by themselves or a partner prior to experiencing homelessness, a slight decrease from 2025 (43%). Meanwhile, 31% reported living with friends or relatives, up slightly from 28% in 2025.

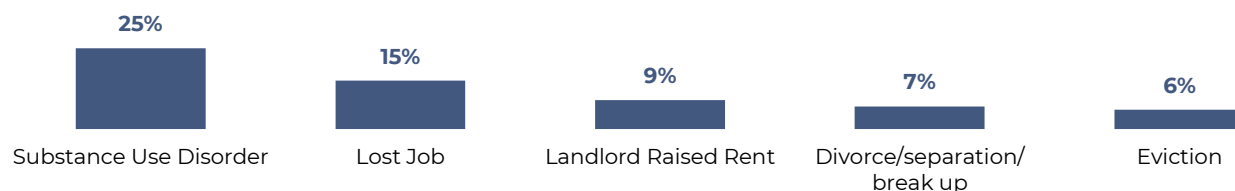
Figure 15: Living Arrangements Prior to Experiencing Homelessness (Top Five Responses)



PRIMARY CAUSE OF HOMELESSNESS

Among survey respondents who answered this question, the most commonly selected primary cause of homelessness was substance use disorder (25%), followed by job loss (15%). Because respondents were asked to select one primary cause, these results should be interpreted as self-reported primary contributors rather than a full accounting of all factors contributing to someone's homelessness.

Figure 16: Primary Cause of Homelessness 2026 (Top Five Responses)



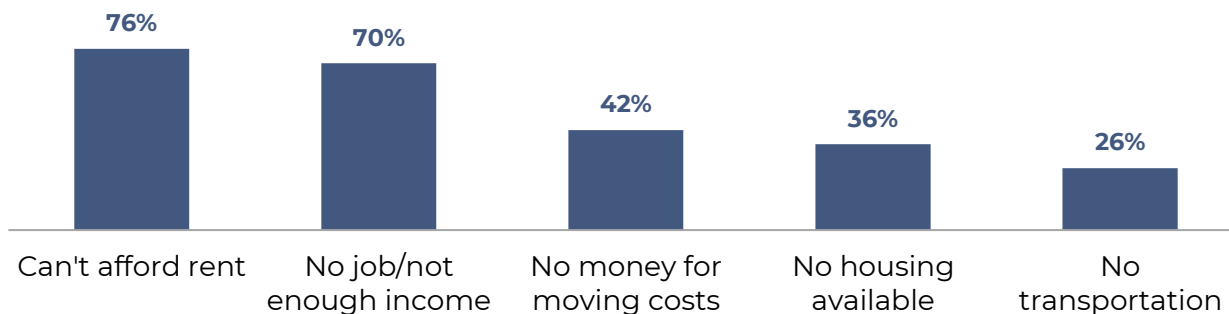
2026 n=358

Note: Beginning in 2025, respondents were asked to select only one response.

SUPPORT NEEDED TO OBTAIN PERMANENT HOUSING

An inability to afford rent (76%) was the most common response when survey respondents were asked what keeps them from obtaining permanent housing. Seventy percent (70%) of respondents reported that a job or an increase in income would support their ability to attain permanent housing, while 42% of respondents reported they needed money for moving costs to obtain permanent housing. Thirty-six percent (36%) cited limited housing availability as a barrier. Thirty-six percent (36%) cited limited housing availability as a barrier.

Figure 17: Constraints to Obtaining Permanent Housing (Top Five Responses)



2026 n=374 respondents offering 1311 responses;

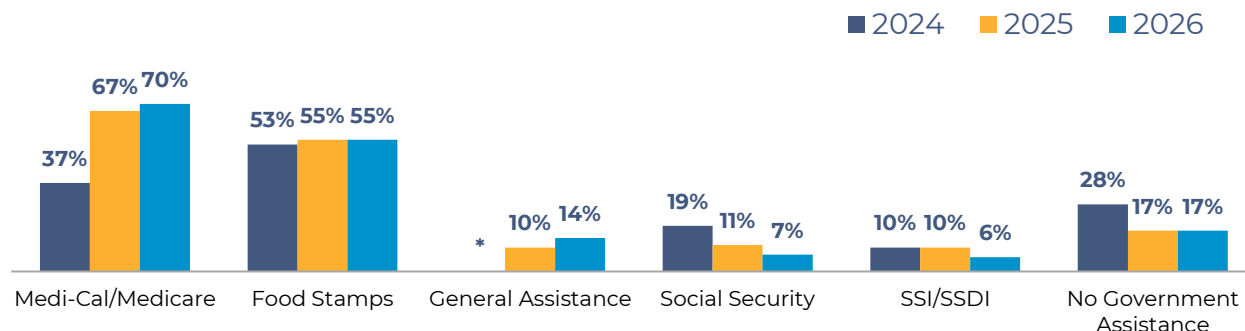
Note: Multiple responses allowed; percentages sum to >100

GOVERNMENT BENEFITS

In 2026, 83% of survey respondents indicated that they received some form of governmental benefit, consistent with 2025 (83%).

The most common benefit was Medi-Cal/Medicare (70%, up from 67% in 2025). Additionally, 55% received food stamps (consistent with 55% in 2025). Seventeen percent (17%) of respondents reported not receiving governmental benefits.

Figure 18: Government Benefits Received (Top Five Responses)



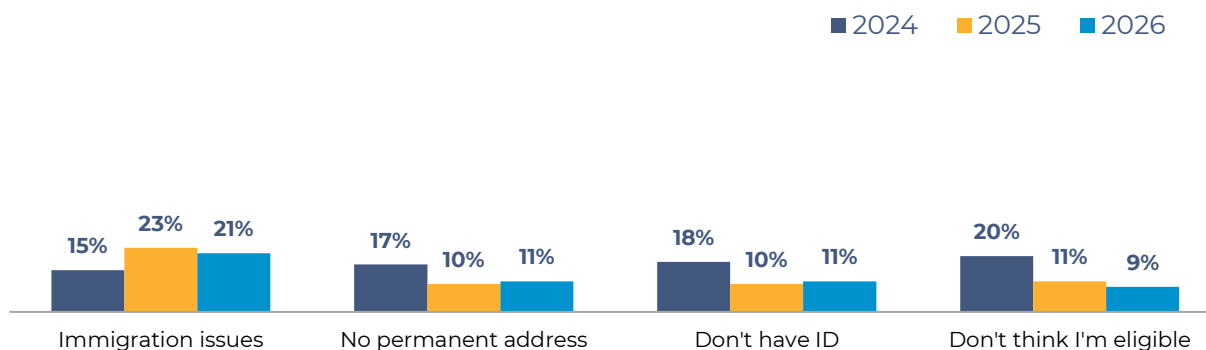
2024 n=395 respondents offering 607 responses; 2025 n=426 respondents offering 736 responses; 2026 n=374 respondents offering 663 responses

Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.

* Note: General Assistance was added as a response option in 2025

Twenty-one percent of survey respondents reported they weren't receiving government benefits because of immigration issues, a slight decrease from 2025 (23%).

Figure 19: Reasons for Not Receiving Government Benefits (Top Four Responses)



2024 n=96 respondents offering 137 responses; 2025 n=124 respondents offering 169 responses; 2026 n=123 respondents offering 156 responses

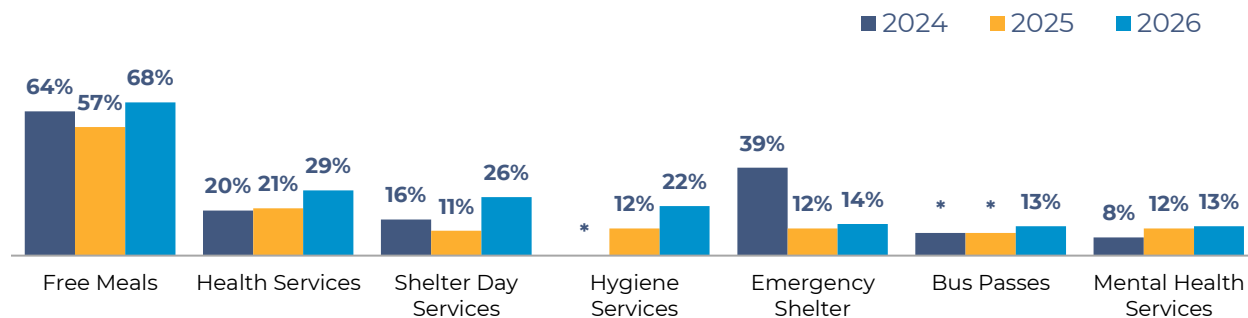
Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.



SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

Use of free meal services was the most common form of assistance received by survey respondents, increasing from 57% in 2025 to 68% in 2026. The second most frequently used form of assistance was health services (29%), followed by shelter day services (26%), hygiene services (22%) and emergency shelter (14%).

Figure 20: Service Usage (Top Seven Responses)



2024 n=364 respondents offering 743 responses; 2025 n=426 respondents offering 817 responses; 2026 n=374 respondents offering 854 responses

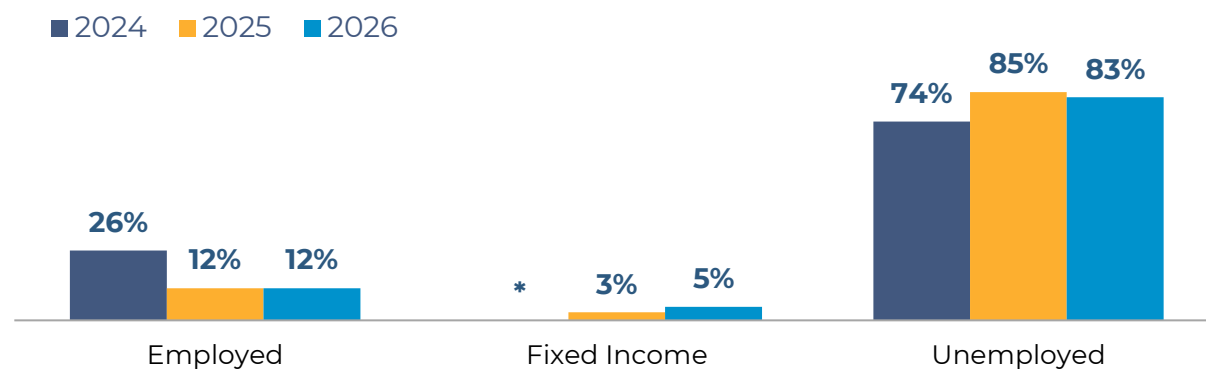
Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.

* Note: Hygiene Services were added as a response option in 2025

EMPLOYMENT

While the majority of survey respondents reported being unemployed (83%), 12% reported seasonal, sporadic, part-time or full-time work, and 5% reported a fixed income. Of those who were unemployed, 54% said they were looking for work, 21% said they were unable to work, and 25% replied they were not looking for work.

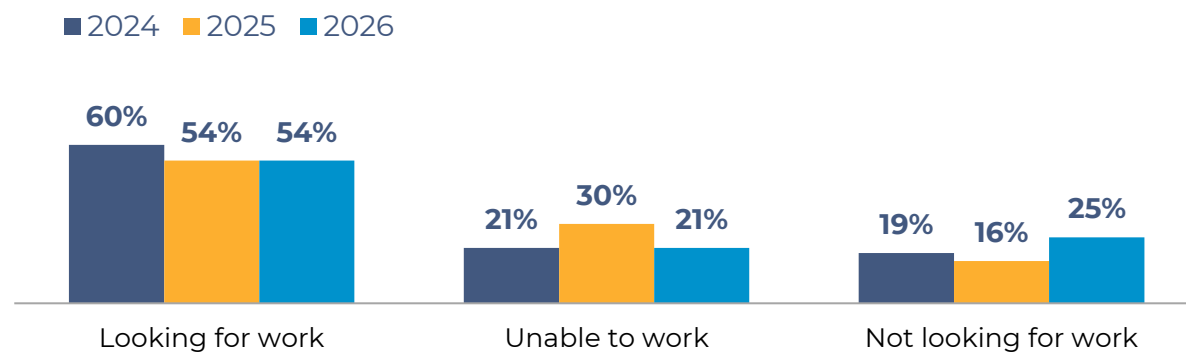
Figure 21: Employment



2024 n=367; 2025 n=419; 2026 n=360

* Note: Fixed Income was added as a response option in 2025. It is defined as a consistent, regular source of income that does not vary significantly over time, such as SSI, SSDI, veterans benefits, etc...

Figure 22: Among Unemployed Respondents

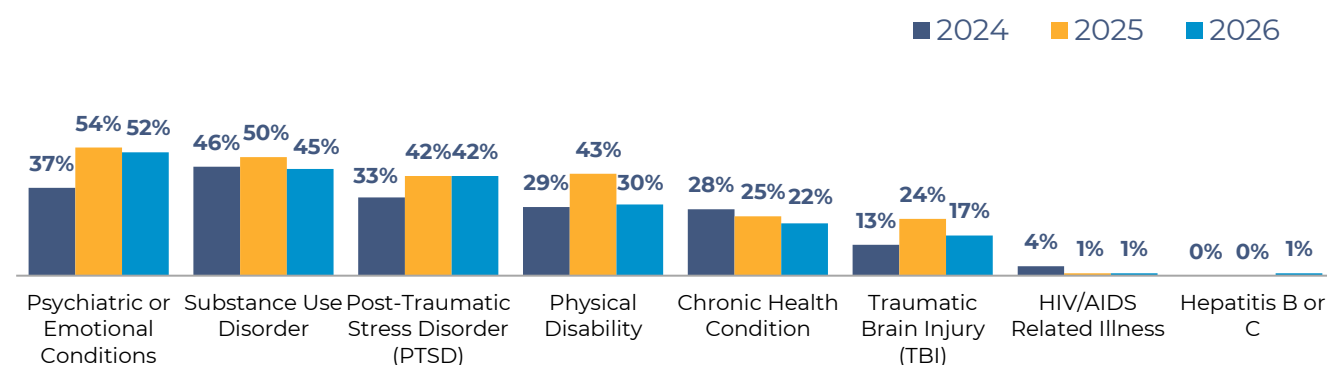


2024 n=207; 2025 n=361; 2026 n=313

HEALTH CONDITIONS

Just under three-quarters (71%) of survey respondents reported at least one disabling condition. The percentage of respondents reporting a psychiatric or emotional condition decreased from 54% in 2025 to 52% in 2026, persons reporting a physical disability decreased from 43% in 2025 to 30% in 2026, and those suffering from a traumatic brain injury decreased from 24% in 2025 to 17% in 2026.

Figure 23: Health Conditions



2024 n=362-373; 2025 n=408-419; 2026 n=357-366

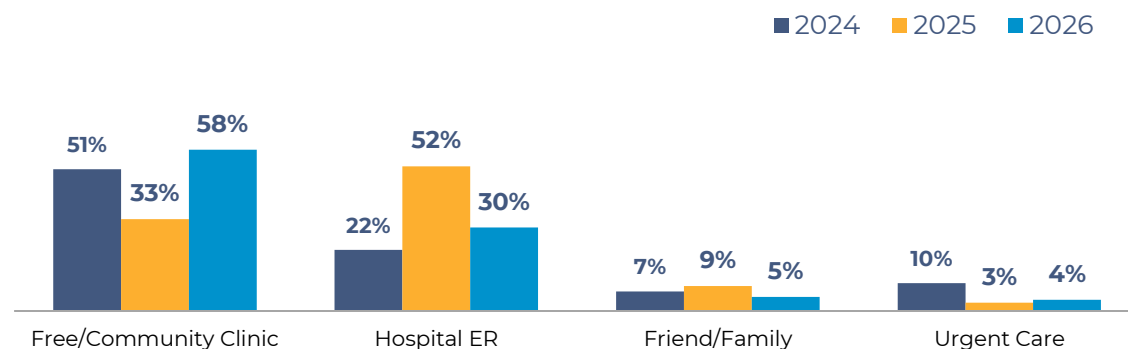
Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100

Note: Substance use disorder (SUD) is defined as a diagnosable mental disorder characterized by a problematic pattern of alcohol or drug use that leads to clinically significant impairment or distress, as evidenced by impaired control, social impairment, risky use, and/or pharmacological criteria such as tolerance or withdrawal.



Over half (58%) of respondents indicated they received care at a free or community clinic, an increase from 2025 (33%). Thirty percent (30%) of respondents received care at a hospital emergency room, a decrease from 2025 (52%).

Figure 24: Location of Health Care (Top Four Responses)

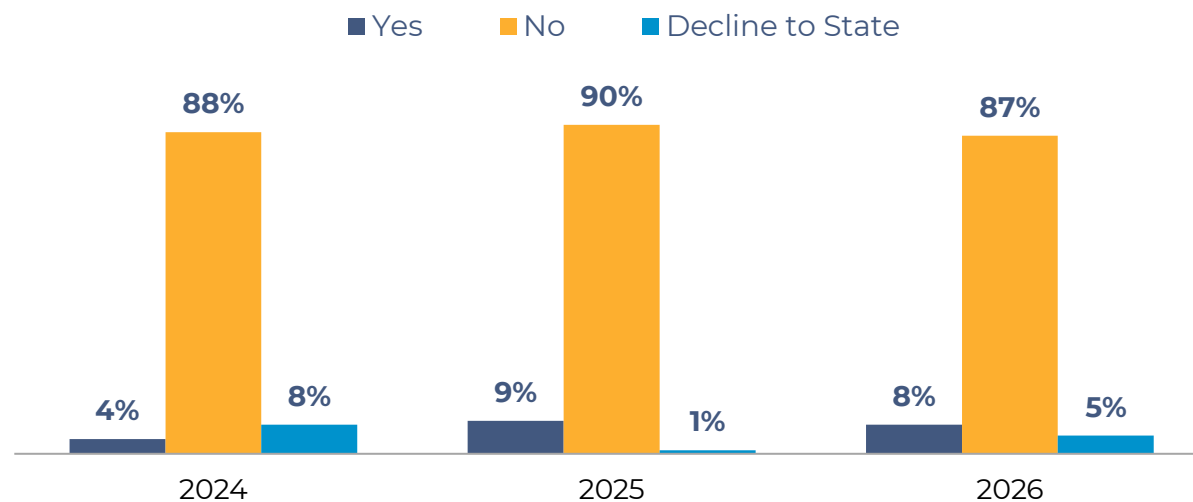


2024 n=368 respondents offering 402 responses; 2025 n=395; 2026 n=341
 Note: Beginning in 2025, respondents were asked to only select one answer.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE, OR ABUSE.

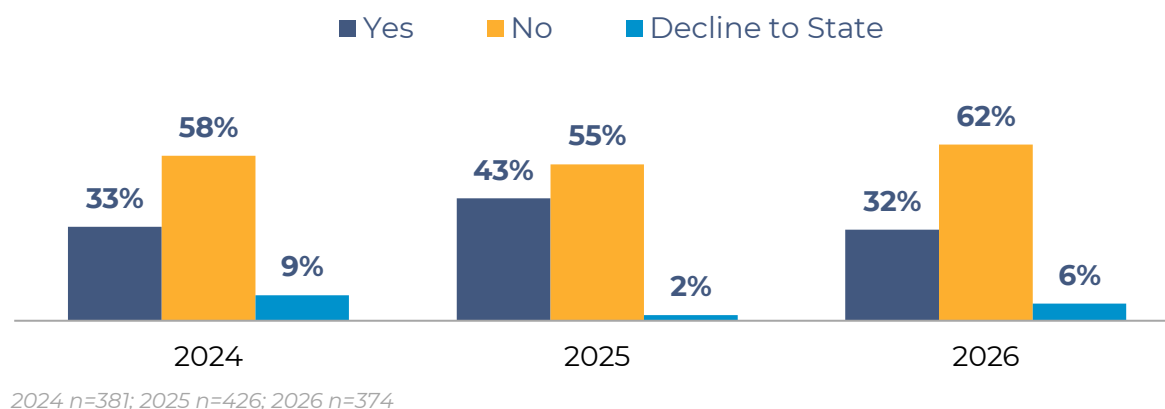
Eight percent (8%) of survey respondents indicated they were currently experiencing domestic/partner violence or abuse at the time of the survey, while 32% of survey respondents indicated they had experienced domestic violence at some point in their life. Three percent of respondents indicated domestic/partner violence or abuse was the cause of their homelessness.

Figure 25: Currently Experiencing Domestic Violence



2024 n=381; 2025 n=426; 2026 n=374

Figure 26: History of Domestic Violence



CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Twenty-two percent (22%) of survey respondents indicated they had spent at least one night in jail or prison over the last 12 months, a decrease from 31% in 2025. Eighteen percent of respondents indicated they were on probation or parole when they most recently became homeless, an increase from 13% in 2025. Criminal justice involvement can both contribute to housing instability and result from the conditions associated with unsheltered homelessness.

Figure 27: Spent a Night in Jail or Prison in the Last 12 Months

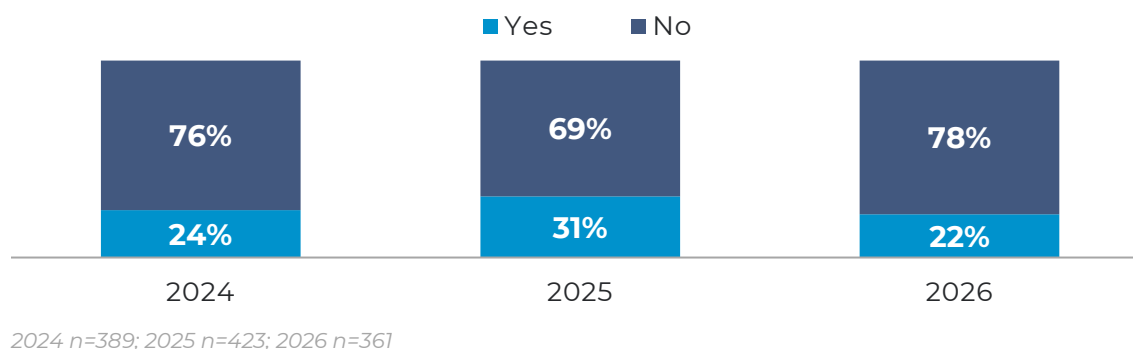
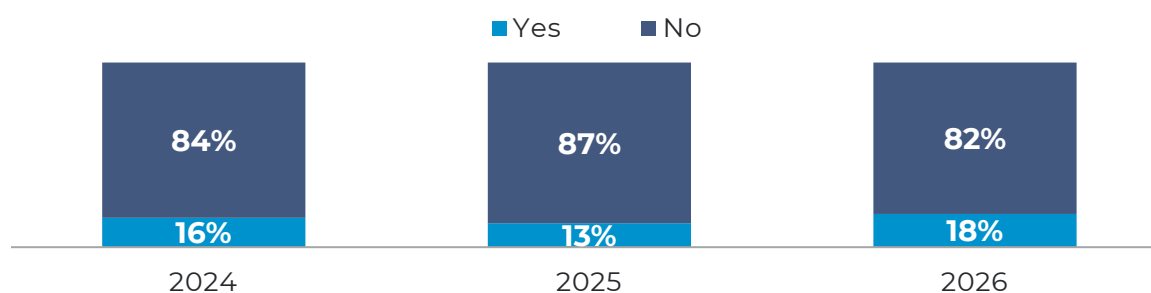


Figure 28: On Probation or Parole When Homelessness Occurred



HUD DEFINED SPECIAL POPULATIONS

All In: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness outlines national objectives and evaluative measures for ending homelessness among all populations in the United States.

To address the diversity within the population experiencing homelessness, the federal government identifies four subpopulations with particular challenges or needs, including:

- Persons experiencing chronic homelessness
- Veterans and their families
- Families with children
- Unaccompanied children and transition-age youth.

The following sections examine each of these four subpopulations as identified in Santa Cruz County during the 2026 Homeless Point-in-Time Count and Survey.

HOUSEHOLDS EXPERIENCING CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS

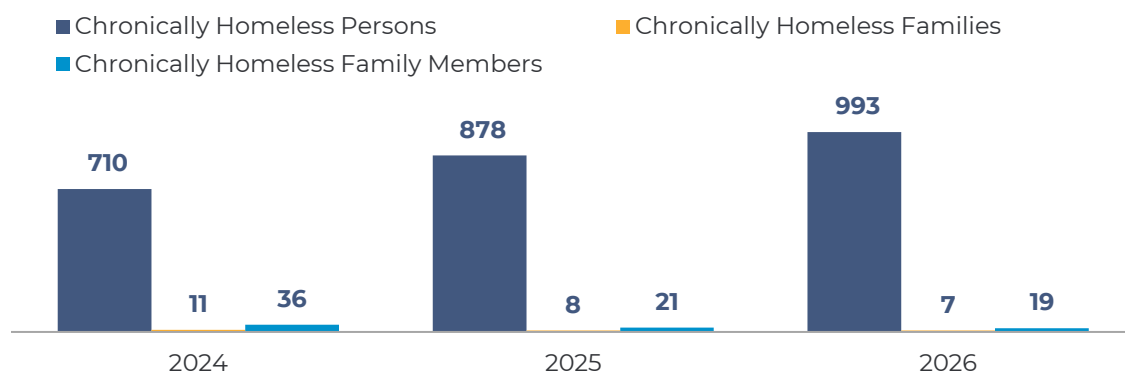
The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines chronic homelessness as an individual with one or more disabling conditions, or a family with a head of household with a disabling condition, who has been continuously homeless for one year or more and/or has experienced four or more episodes totaling 12 months or more of homelessness within the past three years.

Data from communities across the country show significant public costs associated with long-term homelessness among people with disabilities. Significant health care, criminal justice, and human service costs are incurred while persons remain homeless. In 2025, HUD reported that roughly 169,467 people were chronically homeless nationally.¹ In 2026, 993 persons were experiencing chronic homelessness in Santa Cruz County, representing 60% of the total PIT population. This is an increase from 878 persons in 2025, though the share of the total PIT population remained approximately the same at 60%.



¹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2026). The 2025 Annual Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. Retrieved July 2026 from <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2025-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

Figure 29: Total Number of Persons Experiencing Chronic Homelessness



Approximately eighty-six percent (86%) of the chronically homeless population was unsheltered.

Figure 30: Chronically Homeless Population by Shelter Status

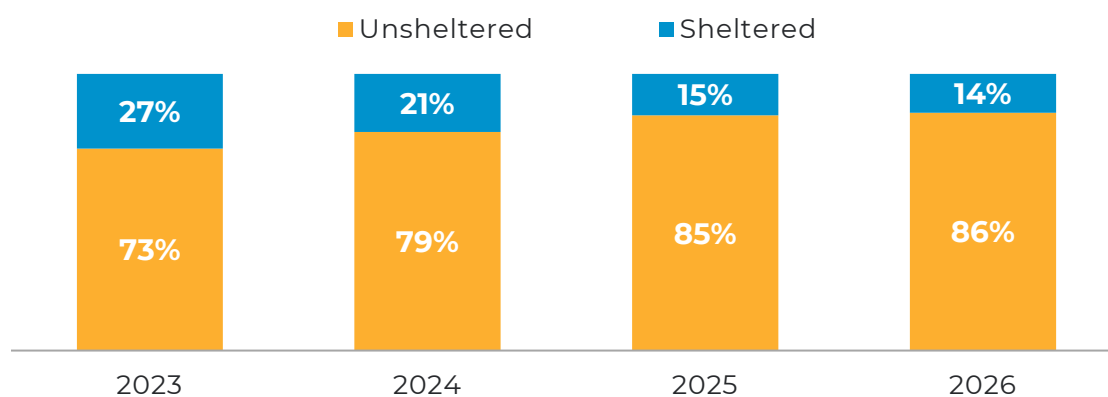


Figure 31: Number of Chronically Homeless Persons by Shelter Status

	2024	2025	2026	2025-2026 % CHANGE
Sheltered	148	134	135	1%
Unsheltered	562	744	858	15%
Total	710	878	993	13%

PRIMARY CAUSE OF HOMELESSNESS AMONG THOSE EXPERIENCING CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS

Substance use disorder (31%) and the loss of a job (14%) were the two most common responses people experiencing chronic homelessness gave as the primary cause of their homelessness.

Figure 32: Primary Cause of Homelessness, Chronic, Non-Chronic, and All Respondent Comparison (Top Five responses) *

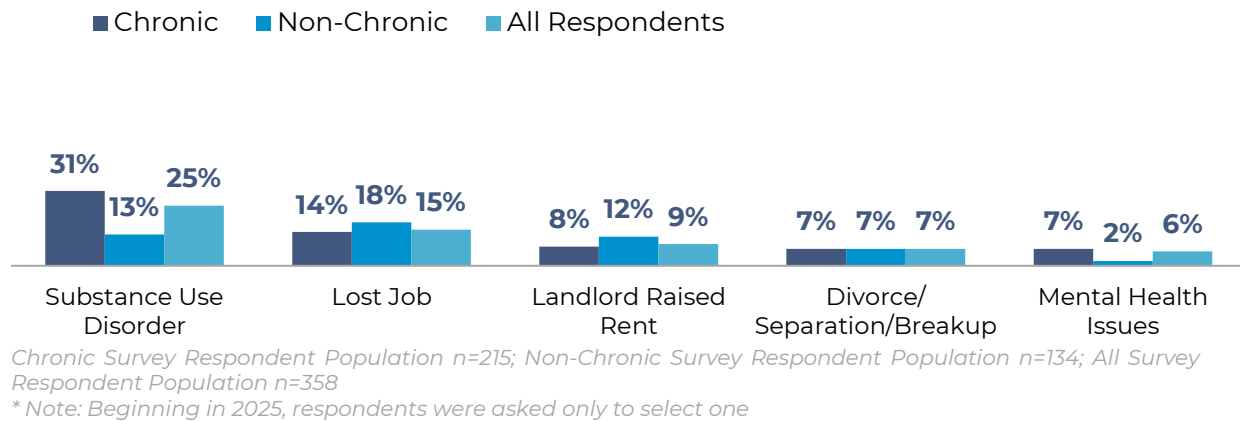


Figure 33: Health Conditions, Chronic, Non-Chronic, and All Respondent Comparison

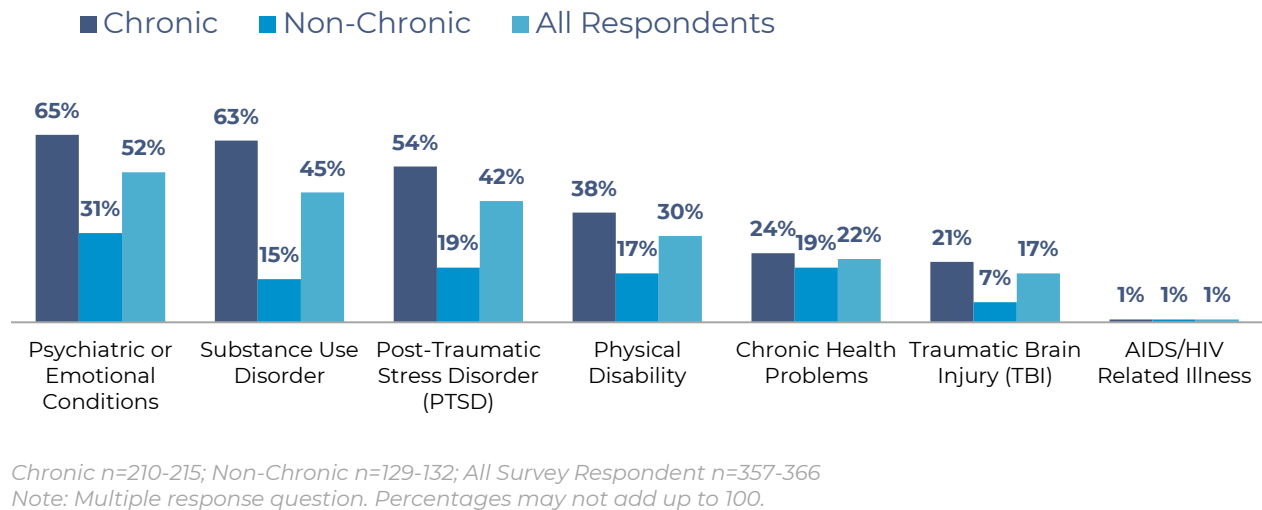
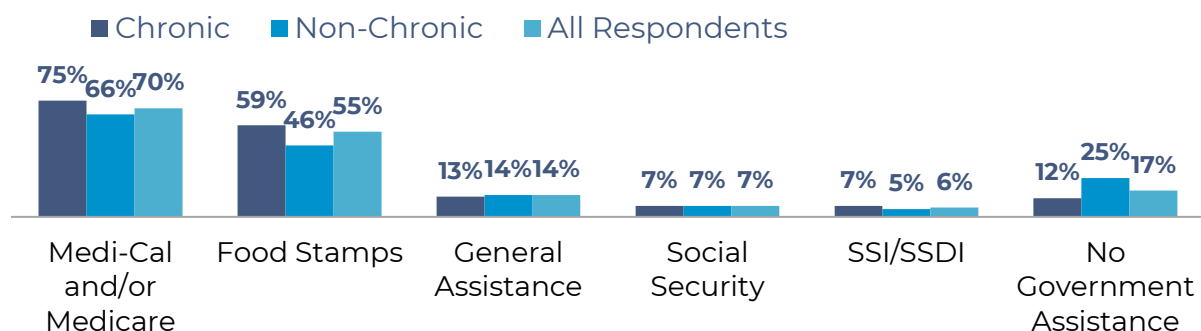


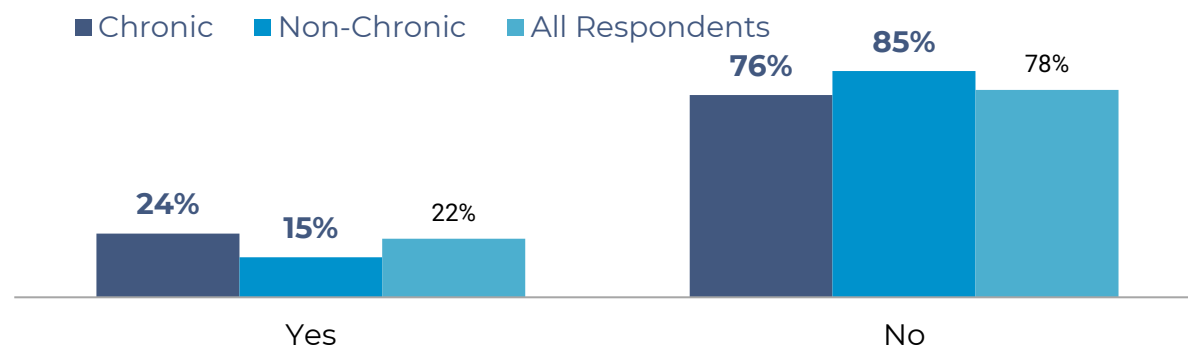
Figure 34: Government Assistance Received, Chronic, Non-Chronic, and All Respondent Comparison (Top Five Responses)



Chronic n=215; Non-Chronic n=134; All Respondents n=374
 Note: Multiple response question. Percentages may not add up to 100.

Twenty-four percent of people experiencing chronic homelessness reported they had spent a night in jail in the past year as compared to 15% of people experiencing non-chronic homelessness.

Figure 35: Spent a Night in Jail in the Past Year, Chronic, Non-Chronic, and All Respondent Comparison



Chronic n=212; Non-Chronic n=131; All Respondents n=361



VETERANS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

U.S. veterans experience conditions that place them at increased risk for homelessness. Veterans often face higher rates of PTSD, TBI, sexual assault, and substance use disorders than non-veterans, increasing their homelessness risk.

The number of veterans experiencing homelessness remained relatively stable, increasing from 71 in 2025 to 75 in 2026. Seventy-seven percent of veterans were unsheltered.

Figure 36: Total Number of Veterans Experiencing Homelessness

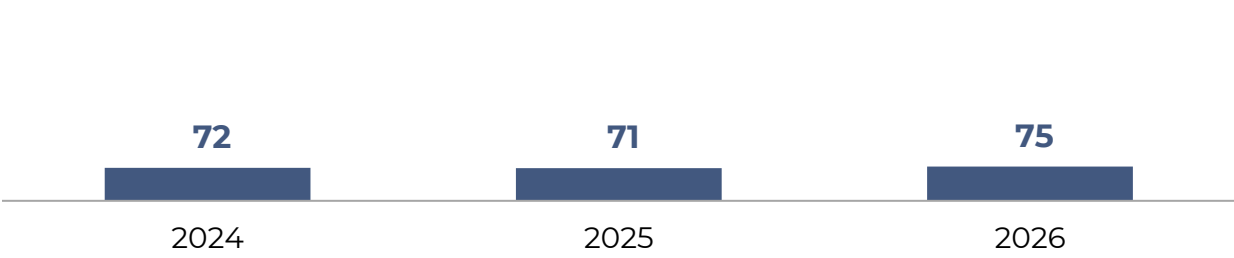
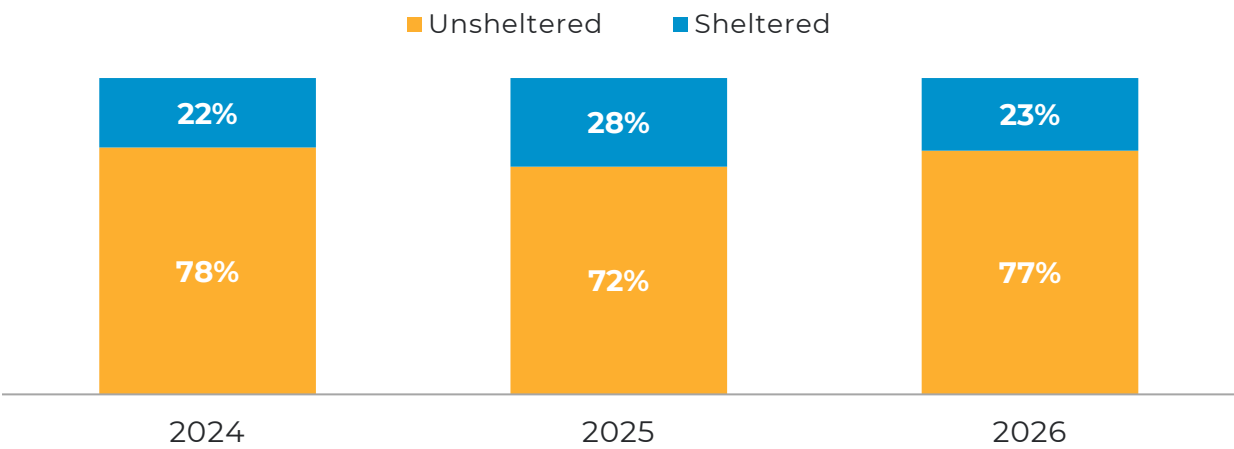


Figure 37: Veterans Experiencing Homelessness by Shelter Status



	2024	2025	2026	2025-2026 % CHANGE
Sheltered	16	20	17	-15%
Unsheltered	56	51	58	14%
Total	72	71	75	6%

2024 n=72; 2025 n=71; 2026 n=75

FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

There was a decrease in families experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz County, from 52 families with 180 persons in 2025 to 49 families with 174 persons in 2026. In 2026, 97% of people in families experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz County were sheltered.

Figure 38: Total Number of Families with Children Experiencing Homelessness

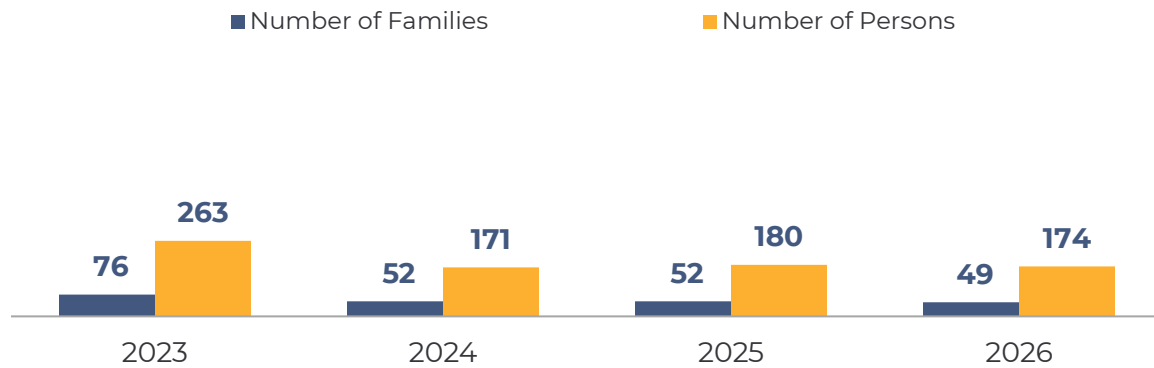
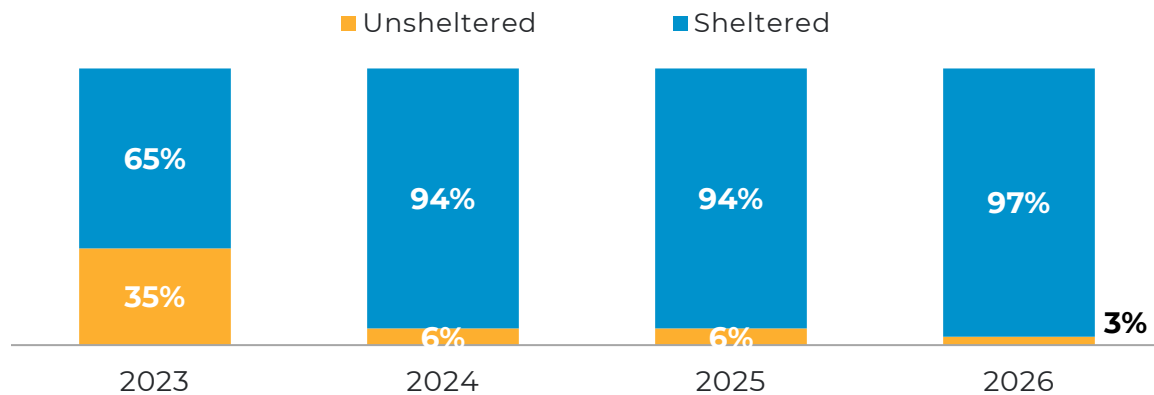


Figure 39: Persons in Families by Shelter Status



	2023	2024	2025	2026	2025-2026 % CHANGE
Sheltered	172	161	169	169	0%
Unsheltered	91	10	11	5	-55%
Total	263	171	180	174	-3%

UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN AND TRANSITION-AGE YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Unaccompanied children are defined as persons under the age of 18 who are not accompanied by a parent or guardian and, if they have children of their own, are not sleeping in the same place as their child(ren).

Transition-age youth (TAY) are defined as persons between the ages of 18 and 24 who are not accompanied by a parent or guardian and, if they have children of their own, are not sleeping in the same place as their child(ren). There were 86 transition-age youth (TAY) experiencing homelessness in 2026, a large increase from 24 TAY in 2025. In 2026 there were three unaccompanied children under 18, a decrease from 8 in 2025. Ninety-two percent (92%) were unsheltered. In 2026, 55% of unaccompanied children and TAY were identified in the City of Santa Cruz (similar to 2025 at 53%), while 20% were identified in Watsonville (35% in 2025). This increase should be interpreted alongside the 2026 youth count methodology, which included more intensive outreach and targeted youth engagement efforts than the prior year.

Figure 40: Total Number of Unaccompanied Children and Transition-Age Youth Experiencing Homelessness

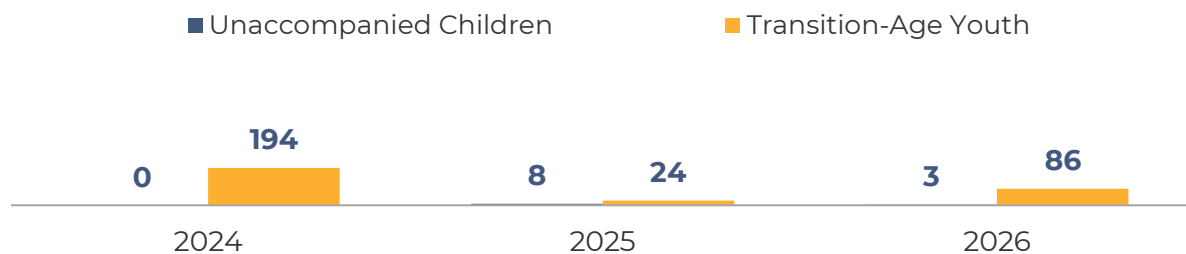
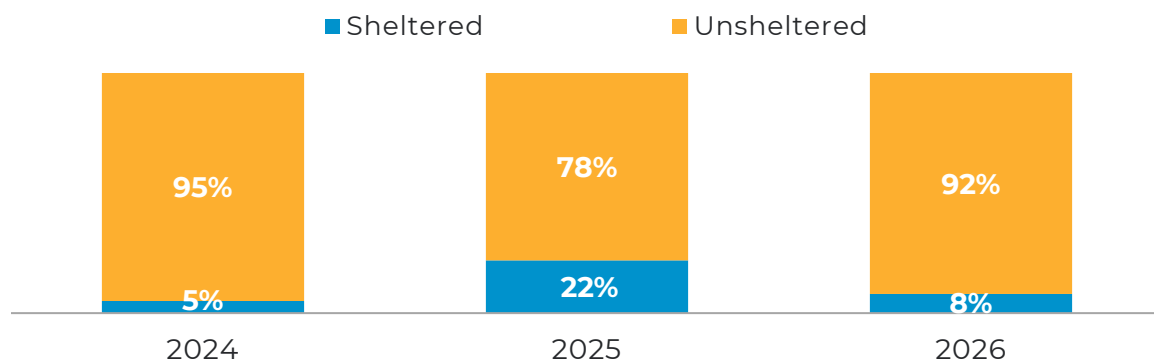


Figure 41: Transition-Age Youth by Shelter Status



2026 Unsheltered Transition-Age Youth n=79; 2026 Sheltered Transition-Age Youth n=7

CONCLUSION

The 2026 Santa Cruz County PIT Count and Survey followed HUD-recommended practices. Outreach staff, volunteers, and persons with lived experience came together on January 29, 2026, to canvass the entire county for the PIT count. Data summarized in this report provide valuable insights into the unique and diverse experiences of homelessness in Santa Cruz County. A few highlights from the report include:

The PIT Count identified a total of 1,648 persons experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz County in 2026, an increase of 12% from the overall count conducted in 2025.

- **Total Count:** 1,648 persons experiencing homelessness (a 12% increase from 2025).
- **Shelter Status:** 78% unsheltered
- **First-Time Homelessness:** 50% of survey respondents, a 10% increase from the previous year.
- **Place of Origin:** 93% were living in Santa Cruz County when they lost their housing (up 15%).
- **Primary Causes:** Substance use disorder (25%), job loss (15%).
- **Assistance Needs:** Rent assistance (76%), job opportunities (70%), moving costs (42%).
- **Health Conditions:** 52% psychiatric/emotional; 45% SUD; 42% PTSD; HIV/AIDS-related illness remained at 1%.
- **Time Lived in Santa Cruz County:** 10 years or more (70%).
- **Special Populations:** 993 chronically homeless (60% of PIT), 75 veterans, 174 persons in families, 89 children and TAY.

The 2026 Santa Cruz County Homeless Count and Survey provides a comprehensive profile of those experiencing homelessness within the county. Data presented in this report fulfill federal reporting requirements for the CoC and will inform outreach, service planning, and policy decisions by local planning bodies.

Santa Cruz County remains committed to preventing homelessness and rapidly moving those experiencing homelessness into permanent housing. Dissemination and evaluation of this report will help the CoC and County stakeholders refine solutions to end homelessness.

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

OVERVIEW

The 2026 Santa Cruz County Homeless Count and Survey was performed using HUD-recommended practices and definitions of homelessness. The primary purpose of the count and survey was to produce a point-in-time estimate of persons and families experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz County.

COMPONENTS OF THE HOMELESS COUNT & SURVEY

The 2026 PIT Count and Survey had six components:

- **General Street Count:** A no-contact, visual observation-only count of unsheltered persons and families experiencing homelessness on January 29, 2026, from approximately 5:00 AM to 10:00 AM. The count included people sleeping in a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus stations, or camping ground. The general street count was designed to take place while shelter occupants were still indoors.
- **General Sheltered Count:** A nighttime count of persons and families staying at publicly and privately-operated shelters and transitional housing programs on the night of January 28, 2026, the night before the general street count. Shelter data were gathered either from Santa Cruz County's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) or directly from the shelter provider.
- **Targeted Street Count of Unaccompanied Children and Transition-Age Youth:** A count of unaccompanied children and transition-age youth on January 29, 2026. This count occurred from approximately 3:00 PM to 8:00 PM and was led by special youth teams who canvassed areas where youth and young adults were known to congregate. Upon completion, data from this targeted count was carefully reviewed against the results from the general street count to ensure duplicate counts were removed.
- **Targeted County Office of Education Street Count of Students and Their Families:** This count included previously identified unsheltered homeless students and their families and was conducted by the Santa Cruz County Office of Education (COE) for the night of January 28, 2026, in conjunction with participating school districts. Demographic and geographic detail from the COE count was compared to the general count data to identify and remove duplicate counts.
- **Survey:** In-person interviews with 374 unique sheltered and unsheltered persons experiencing homelessness were conducted by peer surveyors between February 5 and March 13, 2026. Data from the survey were used to refine the Point-in-Time Count estimates, particularly for special populations, and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the demographics and experiences of homeless persons and families.
- **Safe Sleeping and Safe Parking HMIS Data:** HMIS data from safe sleeping and safe parking programs were included in the 2026 Point-in-Time Count to account for individuals and households staying in designated safe sleeping sites or safe parking locations on the night of the count.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

To ensure the success and integrity of the count, The Housing for Health Partnership led the project with collaborations from other local jurisdictions and community-based organizations on community outreach, volunteer recruitment, logistical plans, methodological decisions, and interagency coordination efforts. ASR provided technical assistance for these aspects of the planning process.

STREET COUNT METHODOLOGY

DEFINITION

For the purposes of this study, the HUD definition of unsheltered homeless persons was used:

- *An individual or family with 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, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train stations, airport, or camping ground.*
- *Individuals participating in safe sleeping and safe parking programs are still considered unsheltered even though they are connected with a supportive services program.*

METHODOLOGICAL IMPROVEMENTS

The 2026 street count methodology followed an established, HUD-approved approach commonly called a blitz method followed by a sample survey. This is the sixth year of using GPS-enabled smartphones in data collection, using an ESRI Survey 123 application (GPS-enabled mobile data collection tool) developed and customized by ASR to conform to HUD data collection requirements. Improvements were made in pre-planning efforts to deploy count teams both remotely and from deployment sites, wherever possible using an online GIS route planning tool integrated into the volunteer sign-up process.

Outreach organizations, Santa Cruz County and City of Santa Cruz staff, along with community members and community-based organizations, selected areas for enumeration from an interactive GIS planning map tool that enabled planning for complete coverage of the county. Regions with known higher concentrations of people experiencing homelessness were prioritized for outreach staff and personnel with direct service experience

VOLUNTEER AND GUIDE RECRUITMENT

In 2026, over 200 outreach workers, community volunteers and homeless guides participated in the general street count.

Special effort was made to recruit and involve individuals with lived experience of homelessness to serve as guides. Guides were paid \$20 to participate in a PIT Count training, as well as \$20 per hour worked on the day of the count.

Volunteers and guides were required to view a 20-minute training video before the count that covered:

- Definition of homelessness,
- Identification of persons experiencing homelessness,
- Guidance on safely and respectfully conducting the count, using the smart phone app, and accessing the smartphone app training video,
- Using route maps to ensure full coverage of assigned areas,
- Tips to identify vehicles in which persons may be residing and other information to facilitate an accurate and safe count.

SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

Every effort was made to minimize potentially hazardous situations. Law enforcement agencies were notified of pending street count activity in their jurisdictions. Specialized teams with knowledge of specific encampments were assigned to census tracts with those encampments. Enumeration teams were advised to take every safety precaution possible, including bringing flashlights and maintaining a respectful distance from those they were counting.

LOGISTICS OF ENUMERATION

On the morning of the street count, teams of two or more persons deployed to enumerate census tracts in the county. Each team was composed of any combination of outreach workers, lived experience guides, program staff, and community volunteers. Each team had a lead and was provided with smart phone access information, and training and field observation tips and guidelines, including vehicle identification criteria at the deployment sites prior to the count. Teams were instructed to meet at one of the deployment sites before and after enumeration to sign in and pick up census tract maps and check receipt of data post count. Dispatch center volunteers verified that at least one person on each team had a cell phone available for their use during the count; the phone number was recorded on the volunteer deployment assignment sheet.

All accessible streets, roads, parks, and highways in the enumerated tracts were traversed by foot or car. The Santa Cruz County Survey 123 smartphone app was used to record the number of homeless persons observed in addition to basic demographic and location information. Teams were asked to cover the entirety of their assigned areas.

To ensure the privacy of persons experiencing homelessness was respected and enumeration teams remained safe, teams were directed to conduct *observation-only* counts and not have any contact with persons experiencing homelessness. When they encountered a structure or vehicle that they believed to be inhabited, teams could indicate that it was inhabited but that the number or the demographic detail (age and gender) of its inhabitants could not be determined. Only actively occupied places were eligible to be included in the count effort. Teams marked such locations as 'occupied-unknown' in the app, and survey data were used to estimate occupant characteristics. ASR uses count data on confirmed cases identified during the PIT to extrapolate data on gender and age to estimate the demographics of persons counted.

COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION COUNT

In the days following the street count, representatives from several school districts called households known to have recently experienced homelessness to ascertain where they stayed on the night of count.

This is a significant effort, as school districts may have hundreds of calls to make to ensure that families counted fit the HUD definition of homelessness and were, in fact, experiencing homelessness on the night of the count. COE data were reviewed against general count data to identify eligible students and families who met the HUD PIT definition and to remove duplicates. Any eligible unduplicated households were incorporated into the final PIT count totals.

UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN AND TRANSITION-AGE YOUTH STREET COUNT METHODOLOGY

GOAL

The goal of the 2026 unaccompanied children and transition-age youth (TAY) count was to accurately represent unaccompanied children and transition-age youth in the Point-in-Time Count. Because many children and TAY experiencing homelessness do not use homeless services, are unrecognizable to adult street count volunteers, and may be in unsheltered locations that are difficult to find, traditional street count efforts are not as effective in reaching youth. In this regard, HUD and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness recommend that communities count youth at times when they can be seen rather than during traditional enumeration times.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Planning for the 2026 unaccompanied children and TAY count included homeless youth service providers and persons between the ages of 18 and 24, with lived experience of homelessness. Local service providers identified locations where unaccompanied children and TAY experiencing homelessness were known to congregate and recruited TAY experiencing or with lived experience of homelessness and knowledge of those areas to serve as guides for the count. Late afternoon and early evening were recommended by advocates as the best time to conduct the youth count. Youth workers were paid \$20 per hour for time spent both in training and the actual count. Youth worked in teams of two to four, with teams coordinated and supervised by street outreach workers.

This year, there were two points of emphasis for youth count teams. First, ensuring that all teams had enough participants to cover their assigned areas, and that those areas were best opportunities to count youth experiencing homelessness. Second, multiple gatherings were held for youth to come and be counted, using past outreach to encourage those youth to allow themselves to be included in the PIT results. These events had incentives such as pizza and giveaways to encourage youth to attend.

STREET COUNT DE-DUPLICATION

Data from the unaccompanied children and TAY count and general street count were compared and de-duplicated by assessing location, gender, and age.

SHELTERED COUNT METHODOLOGY

GOAL

The goal of the sheltered count is to gain an accurate count of persons temporarily staying in shelters and transitional housing programs across Santa Cruz County.

DEFINITION

For the purposes of this study, the following HUD definition of sheltered homelessness for Point-in-Time Counts was used: *persons and families living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter or transitional housing programs designated to provide a temporary living arrangement.* Persons living in publicly-supported managed camps or safe parking programs are not considered sheltered under this definition.

DATA COLLECTION

To collect data on persons staying in shelters and transitional housing programs, ASR worked with BitFocus, the HMIS system administrator for Santa Cruz County, to collect data from all emergency shelters and transitional housing programs operating in the county. Data collected from the shelters and transitional housing programs included participants' household status, age, gender, race and ethnicity, veteran status, duration and recurrence of homelessness, chronic homeless status, and health conditions. Data from shelters that do not participate in HMIS was collected using a web-based reporting system.

HMIS data from safe sleeping and safe parking programs were incorporated into the 2026 Point-in-Time Count methodology to identify individuals and households residing in designated safe sleeping sites and safe parking locations on the night of the count. These data were used to supplement the unsheltered count and provide a more complete representation of people experiencing homelessness in non-traditional shelter settings.

CHALLENGES

Point-in-Time Counts are “snapshots” that quantify the size of the homeless population in a specific area at a given point during the year. Hence, the count is not representative of fluctuations and compositional changes in the homeless population seasonally or over time.

The methods employed in a non-intrusive visual homeless enumeration, while academically sound, have inherent biases and shortcomings. Even with the assistance of dedicated service providers, the methodology cannot guarantee 100% accuracy. It can be difficult to identify persons staying in dense vegetation or in locations that are hard to reach. Persons staying in vehicles take steps to minimize the visibility of their sleeping situation, making it another population that can be hard to identify. As enforcement agencies increase their sweeps, persons experiencing homelessness are forced to find sleeping locations that are increasingly hidden.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

The survey elicited information from respondents including gender, family status, military service, duration and recurrence of homelessness, nighttime accommodations, causes of homelessness, and access to services through open- and closed-ended, and multiple response questions.

Surveys were conducted by peer survey workers with lived experience of homelessness. Survey workers completed training sessions facilitated by ASR. Potential surveyors had a comprehensive orientation that included project background information and detailed instruction on respondent eligibility, interviewing protocol, and confidentiality. Peer survey workers were compensated at a rate of \$10 per completed survey.

It was determined that survey data would be more easily obtained if an incentive was offered to respondents in appreciation for their time and participation. Gift cards were provided as an incentive for participating in the 2026 homeless survey because they are easy to distribute, have wide appeal, and could be provided within the project budget.

SURVEY SAMPLING

Based on a Point-in-Time Count estimate of 1,648 homeless persons, with a randomized survey sampling process, the 374 valid surveys represented a margin of error of +/-4%, with a 95% confidence level when generalizing the results of the survey to the estimated population of persons experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz County.

The 2026 survey was administered in shelters, transitional housing facilities, and outside. Survey quotas were created to ensure appropriate representation of persons and heads of families staying in emergency shelter and transitional housing residents.

Strategic attempts were made to reach persons in a variety of geographic locations and demographic groups such as homeless unaccompanied children and TAY, minority ethnic groups, veterans, domestic violence survivors, and families. Quotas were used for geographic locations, unaccompanied children and transition-age youth, and shelter and transitional housing residents.

To reduce implicit bias, during the recruitment and training of surveyors, every attempt was made to recruit capable persons who represented a broad range of experiences and backgrounds. Since 2009, the ASR survey methodology has prioritized a peer-to-peer approach to data collection by increasing the number of surveyors currently or recently experiencing homelessness. We prioritize surveyors who have experienced homelessness as they can better relate to and understand the population they are surveying.

To increase randomization of respondents, survey workers were trained to employ an “every third encounter” approach. Survey workers were instructed to approach every third person they considered to be an eligible survey respondent. If the person declined to take the survey, the survey worker could approach the next eligible person they encountered. After completing a survey, the “every third encounter” approach was resumed.

DATA COLLECTION

Care was taken by interviewers to ensure respondents felt comfortable regardless of the location where the survey occurred. During the interviews, respondents were encouraged to be candid in their responses and were informed that their responses would be framed as general findings, kept confidential, and not traceable to any single individual. Participants received a \$10 gift card for completing the survey.

DATA ANALYSIS

The survey requested respondents' initials and date of birth to avoid duplication without compromising the respondents' anonymity. Upon completion of the survey effort, an extensive verification process was conducted to eliminate potential duplicates. This process examined respondents' date of birth, initials, gender, ethnicity, length of homelessness, and consistency in patterns of survey question responses. Outlier surveys were examined and eliminated if thought to be inauthentic.

SURVEY DATA AND PIT COUNT DATA

Survey data is used to extrapolate data on race and ethnicity for all persons, and to account for situations where PIT enumeration teams were unable to collect data on age and gender. That data is combined with data from HMIS on shelter and transitional housing participants to provide a complete demographic picture for all persons identified during the PIT count.

SURVEY CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

The 2026 Santa Cruz County Homeless Survey strives to be a representative sample of the homeless experience through geographic and shelter-based quotas. Bias in respondent selection by surveyors is a major training theme and all attempts are made to minimize. The diversity of the homeless experience is significant and our ability to profile this can always be improved. The survey methods, though constantly evolving, are essentially the same over time so longitudinal data has good methodological consistency.

The smaller the subpopulation, the harder it is to ensure it is accurately represented during the survey process. For example, finding families and youth and TAY experiencing homelessness presents a challenge and can lead to underrepresentation in the survey results. Locating and surveying persons who identify as transgender, have a sexual orientation other than heterosexual, are experiencing specific health conditions such as AIDS/HIV related illness and TBI, among others can be challenging and may not be fully represented in the survey process.

There may be some variance in the information that persons experiencing homelessness self-reported. A peer interviewing methodology is believed to allow respondents to be more candid with their answers and help reduce uneasiness of revealing personal information.

Jurisdictional counts should be interpreted with caution. Differences between jurisdictions may reflect variations in route coverage, encampment movement, enforcement activity, and shelter locations, rather than actual shifts in the geographic distribution of people experiencing homelessness.

Two years ago, ASR transitioned from using paper surveys to administering surveys electronically. As a result of this shift, we observed changes in response patterns for certain questions. These percentage shifts may be attributed to differences in how respondents interact with electronic surveys compared to paper formats, including variations in accessibility and response behavior. This change in format should be considered when interpreting year-over-year comparisons. For example, in previous years, a question asking about the primary cause of homelessness was designed as a single response question, but many respondents would choose more than one answer on the paper version of the survey. However, using electronic version of the survey allowed the survey to accept only one answer.

APPENDIX B: DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Chronic homelessness	Defined by HUD as an unaccompanied individual or head of a family household with a disabling condition who has either continuously experienced homelessness for a year or more or has experienced at least four episodes of homelessness totaling 12 months in the past three years.
Continuum of Care (CoC)	A Continuum of Care (CoC) is a regional or local planning body recognized by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that coordinates housing and supportive services for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. The CoC is responsible for assessing local needs, managing a coordinated entry system, overseeing data collection through the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), and applying for federal funding to support homelessness response programs.
Disabling condition	Defined by HUD as a physical, mental, or emotional impairment, including an impairment caused by alcohol or drug abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, or brain injury that is expected to be long-term and impacts the individual's ability to live independently; a developmental disability; or HIV/AIDS.
Emergency shelter	Temporary accommodation for persons experiencing homelessness, either in a shelter facility or through the use of stabilization rooms. Emergency shelter is short-term, usually for 180 days or fewer. Domestic violence shelters are typically considered a type of emergency shelter, as they provide safe, immediate housing for survivors and their children.
Family	A household with at least one adult and one child under the age of 18.
Fixed Income	Regular income received from non-employment sources, including Social Security, SSI, SSDI, veterans' benefits, pensions, and other retirement or disability benefits.
Housing for Health Partnership (H4HP)	The Housing for Health Partnership (H4HP) is the HUD-designated Continuum of Care for Santa Cruz County. It coordinates the regional homelessness response, manages data and housing referrals, and allocates federal and state funding in partnership with local governments, service providers, and community members.
Homeless Data Exchange (HDX)	The Homeless Data Exchange (HDX) is a web-based platform developed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for Continuums of Care (CoCs) to submit data on homelessness. It is used to report critical information such as Point-in-Time (PIT) counts, Housing Inventory Counts (HIC), System Performance Measures, and Longitudinal Systems Analysis (LSA) data. HDX supports national and local efforts to track homelessness trends, evaluate program performance, and inform funding decisions.

HEARTH Act	The HEARTH Act, enacted in 2009, reauthorized and revised the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act to strengthen the federal response to homelessness. Administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the HEARTH Act emphasizes prevention, rapid rehousing, and coordinated community systems. It consolidated funding streams, introduced performance-based measures, and established Continuums of Care (CoCs) as the lead entities responsible for coordinating local homelessness response systems.
HMIS	The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is a federally mandated, secure database used by Continuums of Care (CoCs) to collect and manage data on individuals and families experiencing homelessness. HMIS tracks client interactions with housing and service programs, supports coordinated entry, and generates required reports for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), including Point-in-Time counts, System Performance Measures, and funding applications.
HUD	Abbreviation for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.
Persons Experiencing Homelessness	Under the Category 1 definition of homelessness in the HEARTH Act, includes persons and families living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements, or with 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, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground.
PIT	The Point-in-Time (PIT) Count is an annual survey conducted by Continuums of Care (CoCs) to estimate the number of people experiencing homelessness on a single night in January. Required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the PIT Count includes both sheltered and unsheltered populations and provides critical data for understanding local trends, informing policy, and securing federal funding.
Safe Parking	A program that provides designated parking locations where individuals and families experiencing homelessness can safely reside in their vehicles overnight, often with access to supportive services and resources.
Safe Sleeping	A program that provides designated, supervised locations where individuals and families experiencing homelessness can safely sleep in tents, vehicles, or other approved temporary sleeping arrangements, often with access to services and case management.
Sheltered homeless persons	Persons who are living in emergency shelters or transitional housing programs.
Single individual	An unaccompanied adult over the age of 18.

Substance Use Disorder (SUD)	A diagnosable mental disorder characterized by a problematic pattern of alcohol or drug use that leads to clinically significant impairment or distress, as evidenced by impaired control, social impairment, risky use, and/or pharmacological criteria such as tolerance or withdrawal.
Transition-age youth (TAY)	Young people between the ages of 18 and 24 years old who are not accompanied by a parent or guardian.
Transitional housing	Housing in which homeless Persons may live up to 24 months and receive supportive services that enable them to live more independently. Supportive services, which help promote residential stability, increased skill level or income, and greater self-determination, may be provided by the organization managing the housing, or coordinated by that organization and provided by other public or private agencies. Transitional housing can be provided in one structure or several structures at one site, or in multiple structures at scattered sites.
Unaccompanied children	Children under the age of 18 who are not accompanied by a parent or guardian and are not a parent presenting with or sleeping in the same place as their own child(ren).
Unsheltered homeless persons	Persons who are living on the streets, in abandoned buildings, storage structures, vehicles, encampments, or any other place unfit for human habitation.