Homelessness
in Yakima County

Homeless Network of Yakima County
Working for the Homeless. Because we Care.
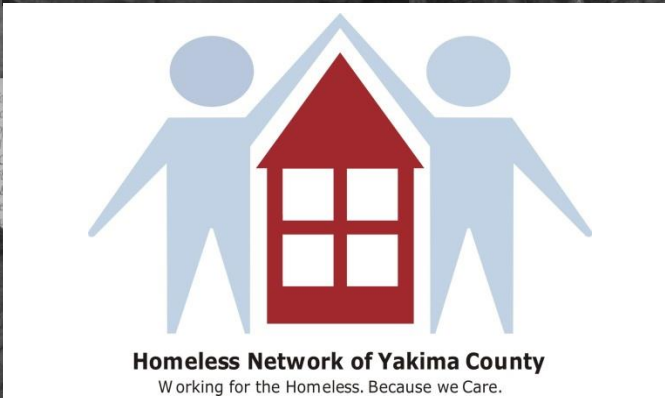
2015 Point in Time
Stakeholder Report

Introduction

The Point in Time count, also referred to as 'PIT' or simply 'the count', is conducted annually throughout Yakima County to estimate the number of people experiencing homelessness on a single night in our communities. The local PIT count is part of a nationwide data collection effort required by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Data collection for the count comes from two sources: a Sheltered Count covering the homeless population staying in housing of various types that is dedicated to serving the homeless and an Outreach Count that attempts to reach the homeless or at risk wherever they may be located within the community.

The Sheltered Count is conducted with the assistance of area service providers who house and serve homeless populations. A two page survey is completed by each household engaged in housing services by specially trained data collectors. Whenever possible, case managers with existing relationships with their homeless clients are trained to complete data collection. Virtually all local housing providers participate in this count on some level, allowing reliable data collection for the homeless population that is engaged with a housing provider, and cooperation during deduplication and analysis allows for a full population count of those sheltered in participating programs. The Sheltered Count is generally composed of homeless persons staying in emergency shelters (ES), transitional housing (TH), and permanent supportive housing (PSH).

The Outreach Count data collection survey is identical to the sheltered data collection tool, but does not have a defined population to count and targets the homeless who are unsheltered or otherwise scattered across our communities. Data is gathered by volunteer and professional outreach teams, either in the field, at other partner social service or mainstream agencies such as the Department of Social and Health Services, or on site at concurrent service fairs known as Project Homeless Connect events. Each field team is lead and trained by professional outreach workers and homeless or formerly homeless advocates. Field teams target known locations where the homeless congregate based on input from service providers, outreach workers, current and formerly homeless advocates, and past survey results.

It is important to understand that the Outreach Count represents only a subset of the homeless not engaged by housing providers, and as a result is not directly comparable to the shelter count in many respects. The total number of homeless individuals in our county on the night of the count is certainly higher than captured by the Outreach Count, and some subpopulations are likely notably undercounted due to an avoidance of known locations, mistrust or hesitance regarding service providers, unwillingness to respond, and many other factors. Because of this the generalizability of the Outreach Count to the larger unsheltered and couch surfing population is imperfect. Descriptions of the Outreach Count participants can still provide insight into the characteristics of the unsheltered populations and how it may reflect or contrast with the priorities of the housing services system, but comparisons do involve a level of uncertainty that may not be easily quantifiable.

Overview

The total number of those identified as homeless during the 2015 PIT Count can be summarized by the number of unduplicated individuals and households. *Chart 1.1* shows the number of homeless individuals counted since 2010, grouped by the type of housing in which they were counted.

2015 data shows the first year-over-year increase in unsheltered and couch surfing individuals since 2010. The unsheltered count is particularly notable, and is discussed in detail as part of the Outreach Count. Full data regarding homeless individuals may be referenced in *Table 1.1* below.

A total of 526 homeless households were identified during the 2015 Point in Time count. This represents a decrease of roughly 29% since 2010. Data prior to 2013 is only available as an aggregated total, a problematic measure due to the differences in the outreach and shelter counts.
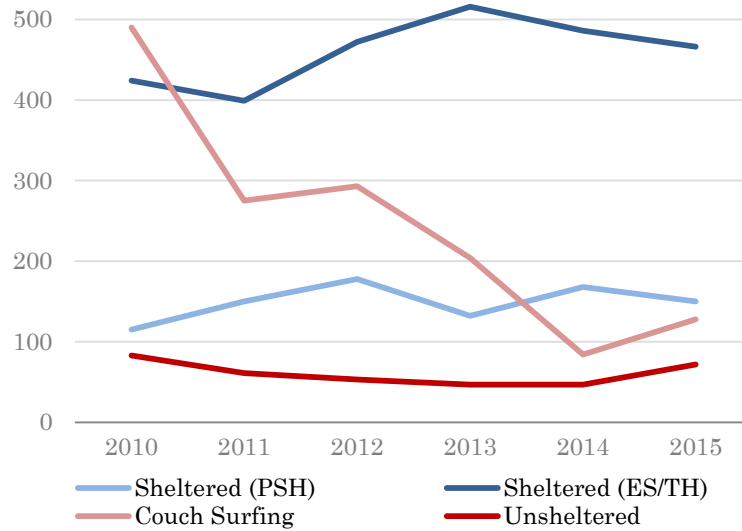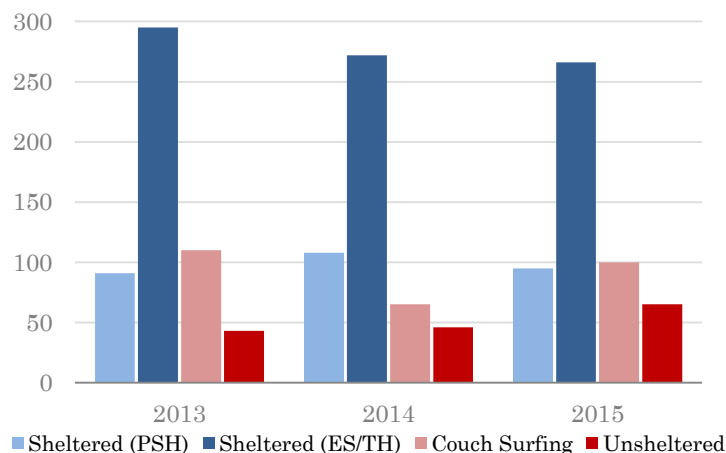
Chart 1.1 2015 Homeless Individuals

Table 1.1 Homeless Individuals

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Sheltered (PSH)	115	150	178	132	168	150
Sheltered (ES/TH)	424	399	472	516	486	466
Couch Surfing	490	275	293	204	84	128
Unsheltered	83	61	53	47	47	72
Total	*1112*	*885*	*996*	*899*	*785*	*816*

Available data broken down appropriately by housing type since 2013 is included below in *Chart 2.1*. As is generally the case, changes in the count of individuals are largely consistent at the household level.

For reference, colored selections generally denote a majority of responses for charts in this report.

*Chart 1.2 2015 Homeless Households*

Sheltered Count

The homeless in Yakima County may find housing assistance through a variety of programs and housing models. Typically, we discuss three categories of shelter provided to the homeless. Emergency shelter (ES) is intended as a short term intervention; clients are typically not expected or allowed to stay for periods longer than 90 days, generally target around a month long stay per client, and may or may not allow clients to return during a subsequent time period.

Transitional housing (TH) models provide housing to the homeless for a longer period and are intended to enable those served to address the root causes of their homelessness. Housing in transitional housing models is generally available for 12-24 months, and most homeless families served in transitional housing also receive in depth housing case management and referral to other mainstream services.

Finally, permanent supportive housing (PSH) projects provide housing indefinitely to those with the most serious barriers to stable housing. Typically this housing is utilized for clients with an extensive history of homelessness and serious physical or mental health disabilities who would be projected to remain homelessness indefinitely without integrated housing and supportive services. Clients served in these programs are not considered homeless by most jurisdictions or funders, but as a critical response to the hardest to serve homeless populations it has historically been included in local data.

Chart 2.1 – Sheltered Count Age Distribution
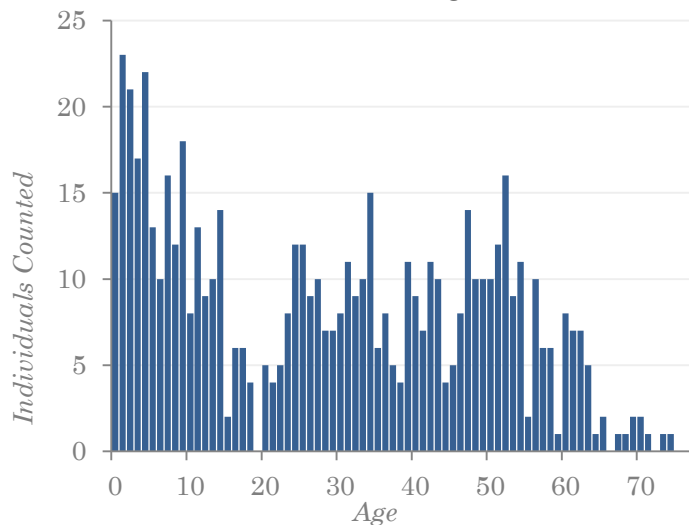
Total Shelter Count individuals and households are available as part of the Overview data. Demographic data on the shelter count population is provided below, beginning with the age distribution in *Chart 2.1*.

Of note in the age distribution is the prominence of children, who make up 38% of the total shelter count population. All of the 5 most frequently reported ages are children, with 4 of the top 5 being under the age of 5. This seems to indicate that families with children are being targeted for housing interventions, particularly households with young children. Counts of households served by family type shows that approximately a third of shelter count households and nearly 60% of total shelter count individuals were part of a family with children.

Chart 2.2 on the following page details the reported race of individuals counted in the 2015 Sheltered Count. Because individuals may consider themselves to be of more than one race, this is not equal to the unduplicated number of individuals counted.

Chart 2.2 – Sheltered Count Individuals by Racial Identification
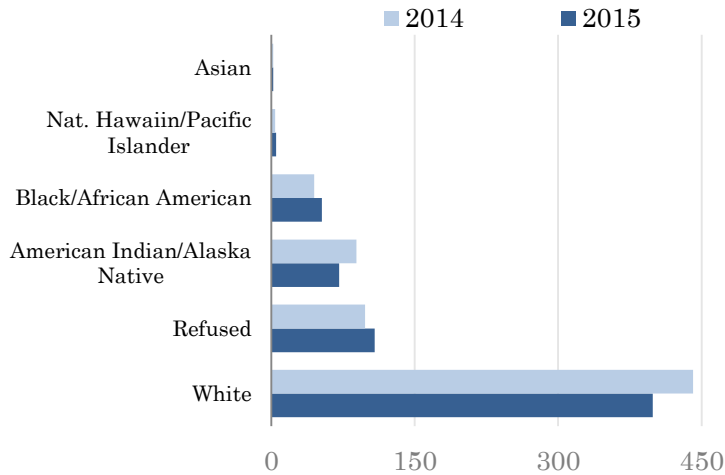
2014 data is also included for comparison of year-over-year changes, which show small shifts but little variation of the overall pattern, with the largest segment continuing to identify as white by a substantial margin. Note that clients who identified with none of the available racial options were recorded as 'Refused'; of the 108 refused cases, 103 identified as being of Hispanic ethnicity. Full data regarding reported ethnicity since 2013 is available below in *Table 2.1*.

Gender data shows that 300 individuals identified as female, 315 as male, and one individual identified as transgender, male to female. Proportionally this is virtually unchanged from 2014.
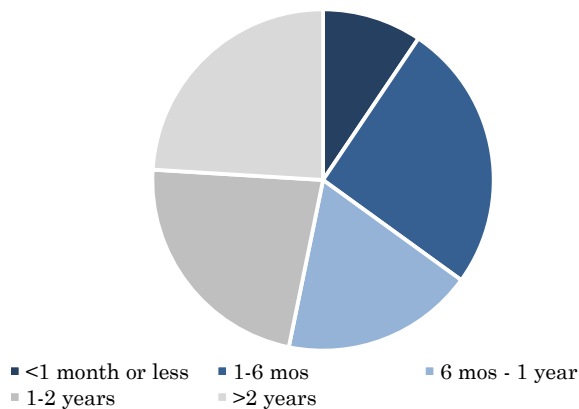
In addition to demographic markers, data is also collected on geographic location, frequency and duration of homeless episodes, and background information such as reported causes of homeless, service needs, and income resources.

Table 2.1 – Ethnicity of Sheltered Count Individuals

	2013	2014	2015
Not Hispanic	393	385	379
Hispanic	245	255	234
Refused	10	14	3
TOTAL	*648*	*654*	*616*

Table 2.2 illustrates the location of shelter count participants on the night of the count. This shows the vast majority of individuals, over 85%, staying within the city of Yakima on the night of the count. This is largely determined by the allocation of housing services, and as would be expected changed very little from 2014 (when 83% of participants were counted within the city of Yakima).

Chart 2.3 – Sheltered Count Individuals by Duration of Homelessness

- ■ <1 month or less ■ 1-6 mos ■ 6 mos - 1 year
- ■ 1-2 years ■ >2 years

Table 2.2 – Sheltered Count Individuals by Location

City	2015	
Yakima	528	*86%*
Sunnyside	25	*4%*
Wapato	25	*4%*
Toppenish	17	*3%*
Grandview	10	*2%*
Granger	7	*1%*
Zillah	4	*1%*

Chart 2.3 illustrates the duration of current homeless episode for shelter count individuals counted in transitional housing and emergency shelter; permanent supportive housing has been omitted, since it is intended to be of indefinite duration by design.

It is important to note that duration of homelessness includes not just the time spent in a housing program, but also the (sometimes substantial) length of time spent homeless and unsheltered or couch surfing prior to entry into a housing service. In spite of this factor, more than a third of the emergency shelter and transitional housing population has been homeless for less than 6 months (35%), and more than half has been homeless for less than a year.

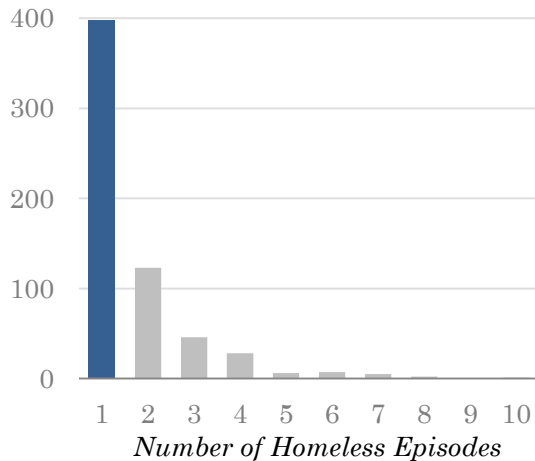*Chart 2.4 – Shelter Count Individuals By Number of Homeless Episodes*

Number of Homeless Episodes

Chart 2.4 summarizes participants in the shelter count by the number of homeless episodes they reported within the past 3 years; those continuously homeless over that period recorded only a single episode.

Nearly two thirds of those surveyed (65%) had experienced only a single episode of homelessness during the relevant period. While this does include all those who reported a duration of homelessness in excess of 3 years, that represents only 10% of the shelter count population. 85% of the sheltered count population had experience two or fewer episodes of homelessness within the past three years.

Participants were also asked about the top needs of their household, aside from housing, and directed to select up to 5 responses. The top ten most frequently selected additional service needs are summarized in *Chart 2.5*. Comparisons from 2014 Point in Time data have been included for reference. The most frequently selected household needs have remained similar over time, with a notable exception in the area of health and dental care needs.

Taken in combination, requests for these healthcare services were down by 49% year over year, and by 45% since 2013. While it is not possible to prove a causal link for this reduction, providers feel it highly likely this is tied to the expansion of health coverage availability through the expansion of available homeless health care services and as a result of the Affordable Care Act.
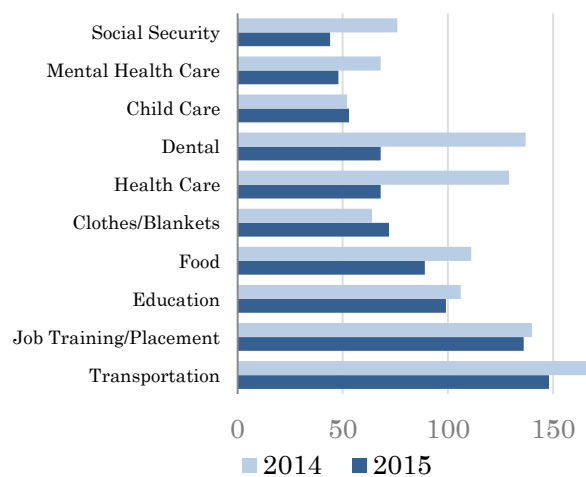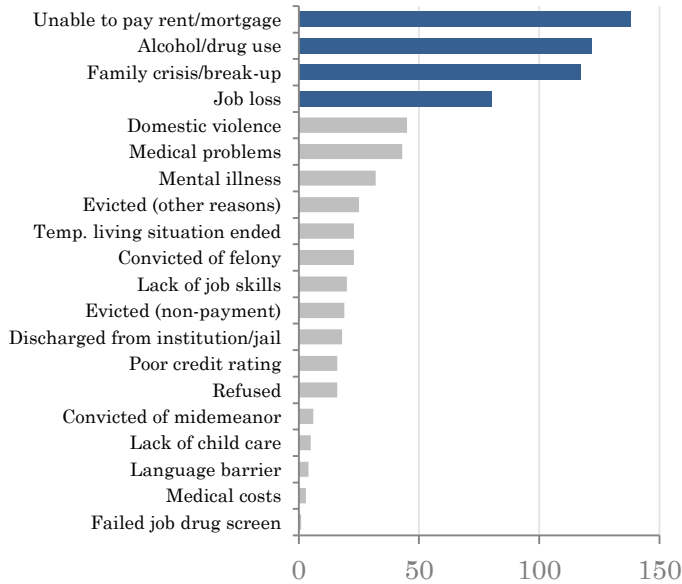
Chart 2.6 on the following page describes the number of sheltered count households indicating various causes of their homelessness. Again, households were allowed to provide multiple responses but were limited to the five selections they felt were most relevant to causing their

Chart 2.5 – Shelter Count Households Top 10 Reported Needs
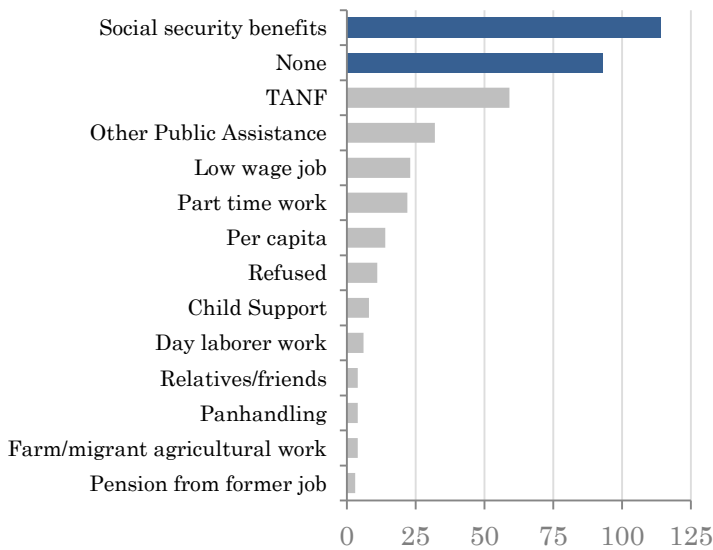

2014   2015

homelessness. While a large number of options were available, the majority of responses fell into just four categories, as illustrated in the chart.

Chart 2.6 – Shelter Count Households Reported Causes of Homelessness

Cause	Value
Unable to pay rent/mortgage	
Alcohol/drug use	
Family crisis/break-up	
Job loss	
Domestic violence	
Medical problems	
Mental illness	
Evicted (other reasons)	
Temp. living situation ended	
Convicted of felony	
Lack of job skills	
Evicted (non-payment)	
Discharged from institution/jail	
Poor credit rating	
Refused	
Convicted of midemeanor	
Lack of child care	
Language barrier	
Medical costs	
Failed job drug screen	

(x-axis: 0, 50, 100, 150)

These four primary causes account for 60% of all responses, with the most common simply being unable to support the cost of housing. Two of the top four causes, accounting for more than a quarter of all reported causes, relate solely to economic conditions of the household. This is clearly reflected in the data on household income sources (summarized in *Chart 2.7*) which show the majority of participating households indicating either no income whatsoever, or relatively low income from social security benefits. Combined, these account for 52% of all reported income sources.

Chart 2.7 – Shelter Count Households Reported Sources of Income

| Source	Value
Social security benefits	
None	
TANF	
Other Public Assistance	
Low wage job	
Part time work	
Per capita	
Refused	
Child Support	
Day laborer work	
Relatives/friends	
Panhandling	
Farm/migrant agricultural work	
Pension from former job	

(x-axis: 0, 25, 50, 75, 100, 125)

Outreach Count

The Outreach Count is conducted by community volunteers, professional outreach workers and case managers, homeless and formerly homeless advocates, and local homeless and mainstream service providers. In addition to those literally homeless (sleeping outside, in vehicles, or in other places not suitable for human habitation) the Outreach Count also attempts to estimate the number of households who are temporarily staying with family or friends due to housing need. This segment of the population is often referred to as 'couch surfing'. Data is collected via survey; this restricts the sample to those who can be located by surveyors, are able to consent to participate (which means minors cannot complete the survey for their household), and are willing to respond.

When reviewing the resulting data, it is important to understand that unlike the Shelter Count, the Outreach Count cannot reach its full target population. The numbers reported here represent some subset of the unsheltered literally homeless population and those couch surfing due to homelessness. The Department of Housing and Urban Development typically estimates that for each homeless person counted two are missed, and the disparity is likely to be larger for some subsets of the homeless population. Specifically, homeless families and unaccompanied youth who typically avoid known locations where the adult homeless population congregates are likely to be even further undercounted.

Note that because the Sheltered Count captures a picture of a full homeless population (those sheltered in housing programs) while the Outreach Count captures a non-random subset of the homeless population *not* receiving housing support, the two counts are not directly comparable, and the generalizability of the Outreach Count to the larger unsheltered and couch surfing population is imperfect. Descriptions of the Outreach Count participants can still provide insight into the characteristics of the unsheltered populations and how it may reflect or contrast with the priorities of the housing services system, but comparisons do involve a level of uncertainty that may not be easily quantifiable.

Chart 3.1 – Outreach Count Age Distribution
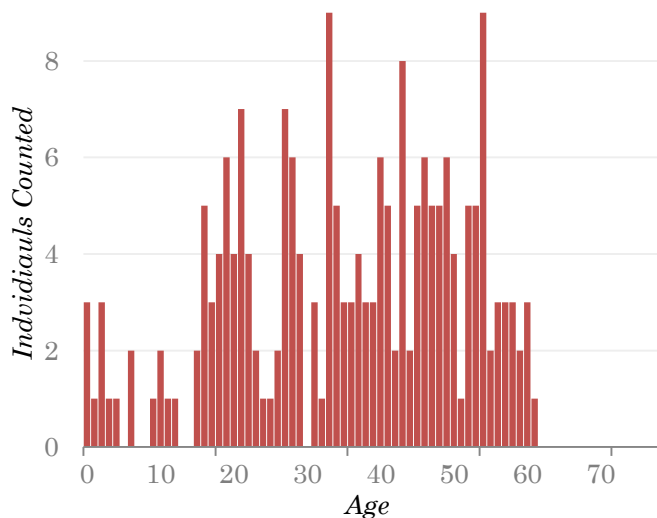
Review of the 2015 data begins with a demographic overview, specifically the age distribution presented in *Chart 3.1*. Notice that in contrast to the Sheltered Count, children do not make up a large portion of participants; children make up only 13% of those counted, and none of the top ten most frequently observed ages are under 18. This could point to an over prioritization of families with children within the housing service system, but is also almost certainly influenced by the systemic undercount of homeless families mentioned above.

Chart 2.2 presents the reported race of individuals counted as part of the 2015 Count. As a reminder, participants can identify as members of more than one racial group, and responded with 'Refused' if they identified with none of the available options (of the 44 who selected Refused, 38 identified as being of Hispanic ethnicity). Full ethnicity data is available in *Table 3.1* below.

Unlike the relatively minor changes observed in the Sheltered Count, 2015 saw a major shift in the racial makeup of participants. Identification as Native American increased by 190% over 2014, and was the most common racial identification in the 2015 Outreach Count.

Chart 3.2 – Outreach Count Individuals by Racial Identification
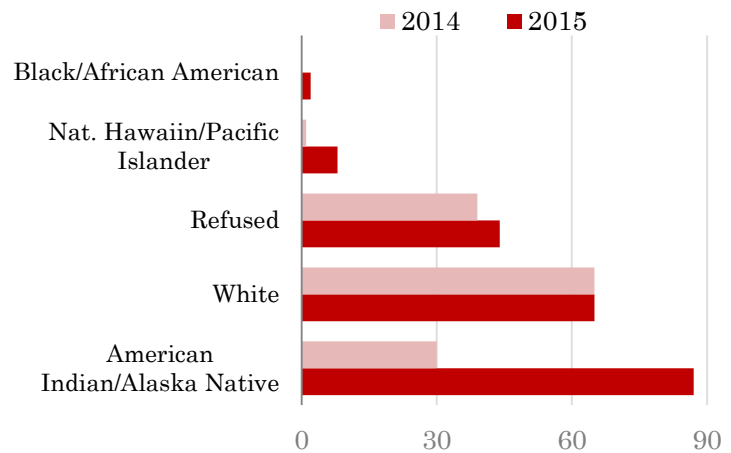
Table 3.1 – Ethnicity of Outreach Count Individuals

	2013	2014	2015
Not Hispanic	126	65	129
Hispanic	114	65	61
Refused	11	1	10
TOTAL	*251*	*131*	*200*

Significantly, this was the first year that the Project Homeless Connect event located on the Yakama Nation Reservation incorporated a site lead by Yakama Nation tribal members and other Native American leaders, and targeted specifically at homeless tribal members and other Native American identified homeless persons staying within the reservation. It is unlikely that the actual racial makeup of the homeless population has shifted so drastically over the past year; the support and active ownership of the count on the part of a key body connected to an undercounted homeless population allowed the Count to better capture the reality of homelessness.

This also illustrates the importance of understanding the limitations of the Outreach Count. In some significant ways, the methodology for conducting the Count did not change: it still consisted of local service fairs for the homeless, with small outreach teams around the small population centers, but the results in engaging this specific subset of the population substantively affected and improved the count.

Table 3.2 presents the Outreach Count participant gender rates since 2013. One transgender individual was recorded in 2015. The overall gender distribution was very similar in 2013 and 2015, with 2014 showing an elevated proportion identifying as male.

Table 3.2 – Gender of Outreach Count Individuals

	2013	2014	2015
F	121	52	95
M	130	79	104
T (F-M)	0	0	1
TOTAL	*251*	*131*	*200*

Table 3.3 details the location of the participants counted. As mentioned in the discussion regarding the racial distribution, the increased effectiveness in capturing Native American populations has significantly changed the picture in this measure. The two largest population centers on the reservation, Wapato and Toppenish, now combine to exceed the

Table 3.3 – Outreach Count
Individuals by Location

City	2015	
Yakima	76	38%
Wapato	42	21%
Toppenish	35	18%
Sunnyside	21	11%
Grandview	8	4%
White Swan	5	3%
Union Gap	4	2%
Zillah	4	2%
Granger	2	1%
Mabton	2	1%
Harrah	1	1%

number of participants counted within the city of Yakima. While this is not necessarily an exact reflection of the overall geographic distribution of the larger homeless population, it does contrast starkly with the Sheltered Count geographic distribution. That is tied largely to the allocation of housing services, and resulted in 86% of the sheltered homeless being counted within the city of Yakima.

Chart 3.3 shows the duration of homelessness for outreach count participants. Unlike the shelter count, the majority of individuals surveyed as part of the outreach count were homeless for a year or more. The outreach count also shows a significantly higher proportion remaining homeless for extended periods of time (over 5 years), although as mentioned these comparisons only hold for the survey groups and may not necessarily be reflective if concerned with the larger unsheltered and couch surfing population.

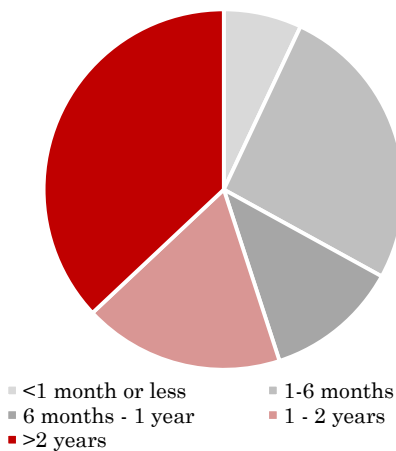*Chart 3.3 – Outreach Count Individuals by Duration of Homelessness*

- <1 month or less
- 1-6 months
- 6 months - 1 year
- 1 - 2 years
- >2 years

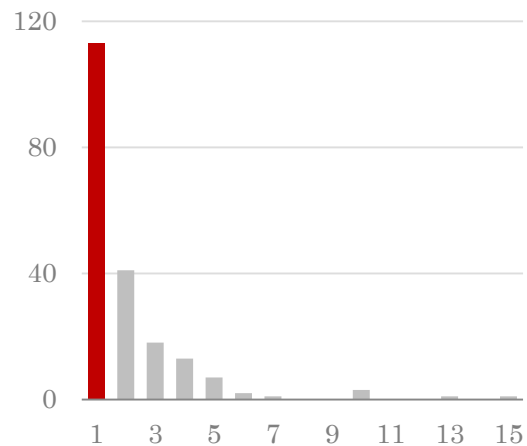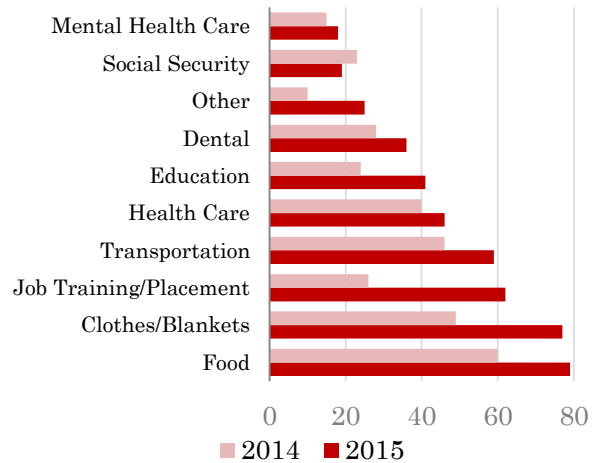*Chart 3.4 – Outreach Count Individuals by Number of Homeless Episodes*

Chart 3.4 shows the number of reported instances of homelessness within the past three years for outreach count individuals. Single instances of homelessness constitute a majority or responses, and have accounted for the majority of responses every year since 2013 to varying degrees, although in 2015 this does include a significant portion that has been continuously homeless for the full three year period; 20% of participants indicated a length of homelessness in excess of three years.

Chart 3.5 compares the top ten reported needs of households participating in the outreach count. Many of the most common responses dealt with meeting basic needs such as food, clothing, and transportation. Of particular interest may be the relatively steady demand for health care and dental services. While the proportion of outreach count households requesting health services has decreased incrementally over the past year (from 36% to 28% for health care and from 25% to 21% for dental care respectively), it does not seem like the effect is as dramatic as that observed with shelter count clients. While the comparison

is not necessarily generalizable to the larger homeless population, it does seem that at least among households participating in the count connection to housing service providers encourages better engagement with health care services.

Chart 3.6 presents the causes of homelessness reported by households participating in the outreach count. The top four selections represent nearly 60% of all responses, and are the same categories that make up the majority of responses in the sheltered count.

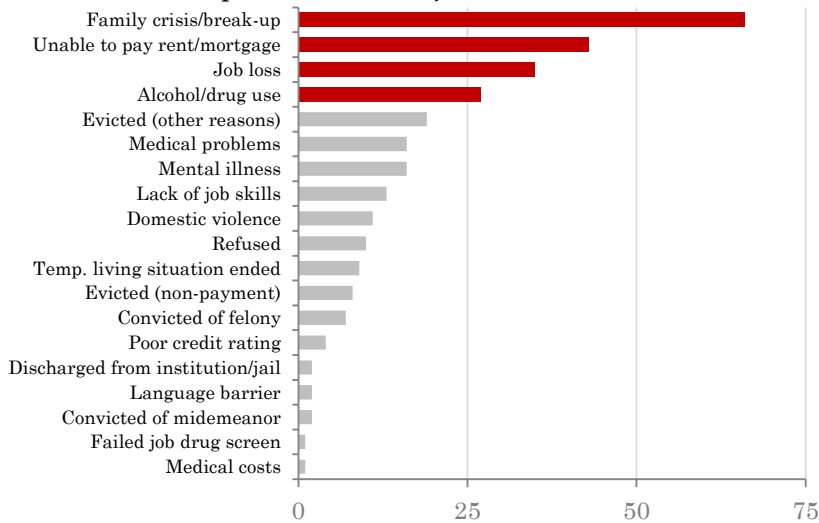*Chart 3.5 – Outreach Count Households Top 10 Reported Needs*

Chart 3.7 illustrates reported income sources. As a reminder, households could select all applicable responses. This measure also shows the effect of increased participation on the part of the Yakama Nation; per capita income available to members of various Native American tribes represents the single most commonly selected income source. Together with no income and social security benefits this represents nearly two thirds of all reported sources of income.

Chart 3.6 – Outreach Count Households Reported Causes of Homelessness

Chart 3.7 – Outreach Count Households Reported Income Sources
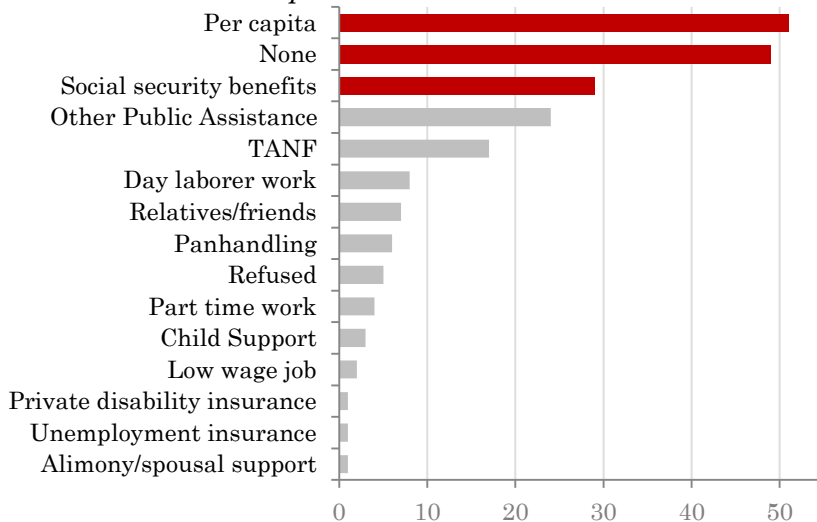
Homeless Sub-Populations & Addenda

In addition to the overall totals reflecting the Outreach and Sheltered counts, data on specific sub groups may be useful in decision making. This portion of the report will provide some summary of the various subgroups across both the sheltered and outreach counts. Note that this is not necessarily representative or generalizable to the entire homeless population or larger relevant subgroups than the data set itself, because the combination of the sheltered and outreach counts is almost certainly not a representative sample of the overall homeless population.

Chronically Homeless

HUD defines a Chronically Homeless Individual as a homeless adult who meets all of the following criteria:

1) Is currently staying in an emergency shelter or an unsheltered state (outside, in a vehicle, or other locations not intended for habitation).
2) Has been homeless continuously for at least one year *OR* has experienced at least four homeless episodes within the past three years
3) Has a qualifying permanent disability that substantially impacts their ability to gain and maintain stable housing.

Households of more than one person who include at least one chronically homeless adult are referred to as 'Chronically homeless families'; for the purposes of this report, Chronically Homeless Individuals and individuals who are part of Chronically Homeless Families are considered together unless otherwise noted.

*Table CH1 – All Individuals by Chronic Homelessness Status*

	2013	2014	2015	
Not Chronically Homeless	828	699	727	*89%*
Chronically Homeless Individual	69	80	74	*9%*
Individual in Chronically Homeless Family	2	6	15	*2%*
TOTAL	*899*	*785*	*816*	

In 2015 a total of 89 such individuals were identified representing 11% of those counted, unchanged from the proportion in 2014. A breakdown of individuals by chronic homelessness status is available in *Table CH1*.

Chart CH1 shows the number of Chronically Homeless Individuals reported at Point In Time annually since 2008. Note that individuals in chronically homeless families are not included to maintain consistency with chronic homeless definitions in effect in earlier periods; numbers are included as reported annually in previous annual reports, which may differ slightly from numbers generated using current definitions.

Chart CH2 shows the location of last permanent residence of those counted as chronically homeless, including individuals in chronically homeless families. This is used as a proxy for a point of origin, and corresponds to

Chart CH1 – Chronically Homeless Individuals by Year
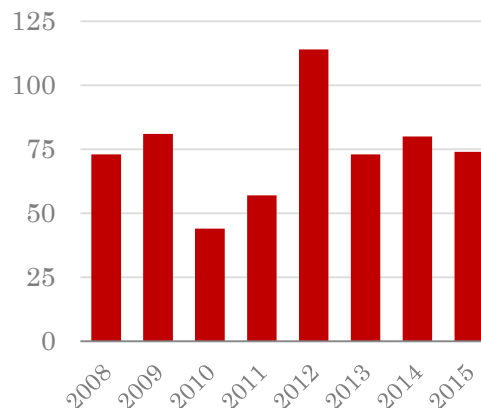
the last location the responding household lived when they were NOT homeless. This is an imperfect method, but does provide an estimate regarding origin. In 2015 83% of the chronically homeless indicated that their last permanent address was within Yakima County. This is very similar to historic numbers; all recorded rates fall between 83 and 86%.

2015 also shows children as part of the chronically homeless population, a result of households with children recorded as homeless families. *Chart CH3* illustrates the distribution of the chronically homeless by age relative to the larger population of all individuals counted. Age is shown as the proportion of each group falling into each age range.

The chronically homeless population is generally older than the general homeless population counted as part of the 2015 Point in Time survey, with only 5% being children and an additional 4% as youth under the age of 25. In the larger count, this segment makes up more than a third of the total. Conversely, a quarter of the chronically homeless count is made up of individuals over the age of 55 – more than double the comparative rate in the larger count.

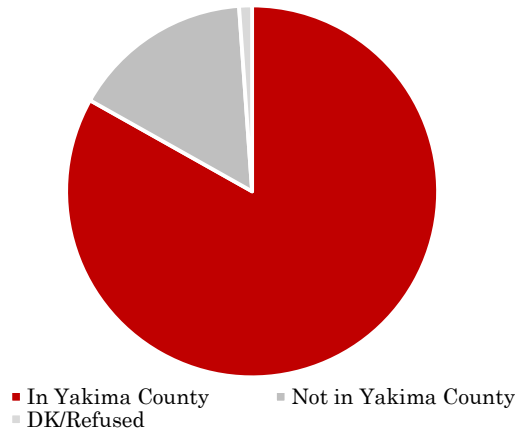*Chart CH2 –Chronically Homeless by Location of Last Permanent Housing*

■ In Yakima County   ■ Not in Yakima County
■ DK/Refused

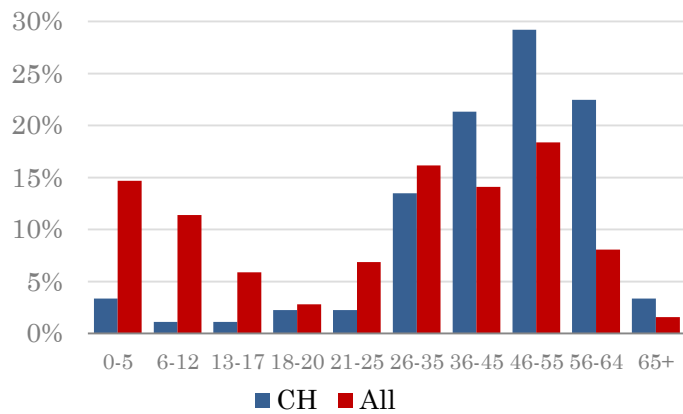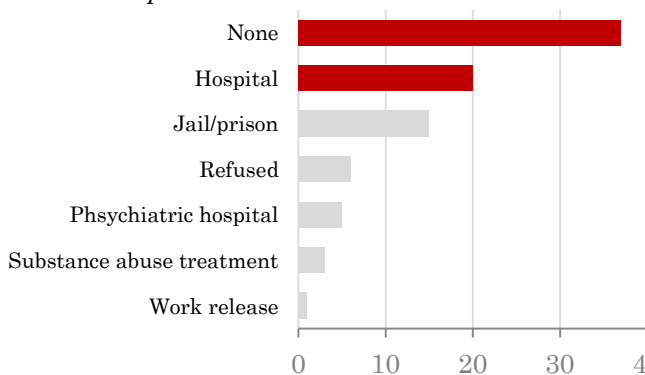*Chart CH3 –Age Distribution*

■ CH   ■ All

Chart CH4 shows the institutional releases reported by each chronically homeless household. Households could select multiple release types, unless they specified 'None' or refused to respond. 71% of the responses were 'None' or included a medical hospital. 37 households, representing 46% of all chronically homeless households, reported no institutional releases at all.

While 19% of chronically homeless households reported a release from jail or prison within the past year, only a single response in this category belonged to a household with a point of origin outside of Yakima County.

Chart CH4 –Chronically Homeless Households Reported Institutional Releases

Veterans

Homeless veterans are often a focal point for communities, and have been targeted recently by several HUD and VA initiatives meant to end unsheltered homelessness among veterans. 40 participants self-identified as veterans during the 2015 count across both the sheltered and outreach surveys. This made up 7.2% of the count of homeless adults for the year, down from 8.5% in 2014. Total for adults by veteran status since 2013 are available in *Table V1*.

Table V1 – Homeless Adults
by Veteran Status

	2013	**2014**	**2015**
Not a Veteran	519	484	503
Veteran	41	45	40
Refused	4	0	12
TOTAL	*564*	*529*	*555*

Chart V1 – Homeless Veterans
by Housing Type

Chart V1 shows veterans by the type of housing veterans were staying in at the time of the count. The number of unsheltered veterans decreased over the 2014 numbers, as did the total in emergency shelters and transitional housing.
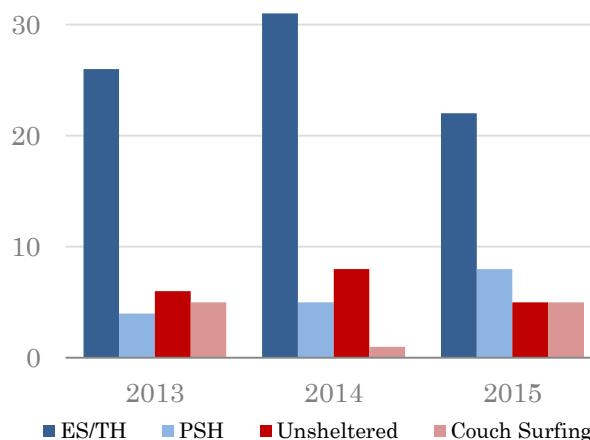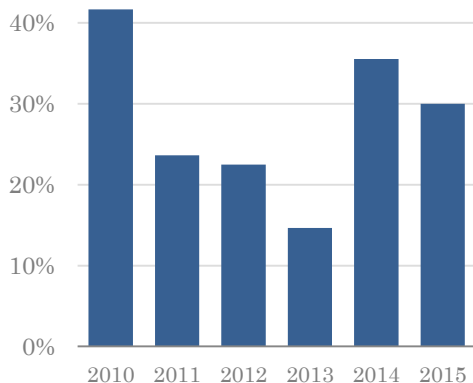
Chart V2 – Homeless Veterans
Veteran Benefit Rates

Many services available to veterans are accessed through veteran specific providers rather than traditional housing providers. As a result, this report has typically tracked the engagement with these veteran specific resources by asking homeless veterans if they receive any veteran's benefits. *Chart V2* shows the rate at which veterans have been receiving benefits since 2010; data from before 2013 is taken from the 2012 report.

Access to benefits dropped sharply after 2010, when 42% of veteran counted were receiving some kind of veteran benefit, and continued to decrease steadily through 2013. Although this did improve in 2014, it seems once again to be on the decrease.

Table V2 – Veteran by Gender

	2013	**2014**	**2015**
Female	1	4	3
Male	40	41	37
TOTAL	*41*	*45*	*40*

Gender data is included in *Table V2*; as has historically been the case, veteran gender distribution skews starkly towards males.

Point of Origin

One of the common questions from decision makers regards the location of origin of the local homeless population. This is not directly asked on the standard survey data collection tool, but in recent reporting cycles the point of origin has been estimated using the location of last permanent housing as a proxy. This is not a perfect analog; a lifelong resident of the area who moved away for employment or another reason might very reasonably return to the area to connect with informal support networks such as family if falling upon hard times. However, these exceptions are in some sense edge cases, and the location of last permanent housing will provide the best estimates available regarding the location of origin for the survey group until any changes to the survey can be incorporated in the next cycle.

Chart O1 – Homeless Individuals
Point of Origin

- In Yakima County
- Not in Yakima County
- DK/Refused
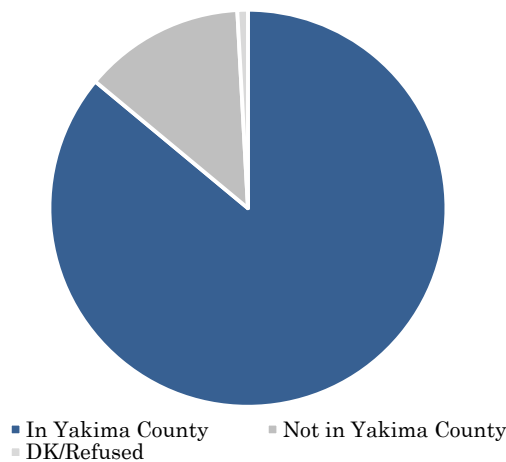
For the 2015 year, over 85% of the participants in the count reported a last permanent address that was within Yakima County (*Chart O1*). This is not unusual when looking at the historical data. Since 2013, more than 85% of those surveyed have listed an origin within the county every year (see *Chart*

Chart O2 – Homeless Individuals
Local Origin, 2013-2015
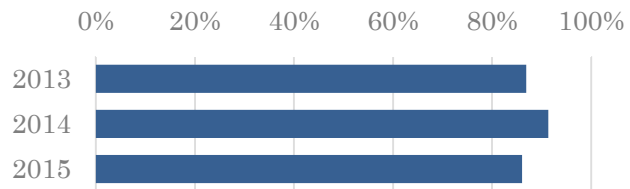
O2).

Discussion about a hypothetical out of area origin for the homeless population often involves a parallel discussion about what would attract homeless individuals to the area. This often takes the form of postulating that perhaps local homelessness is driven by out of area homeless individuals being released locally from institutions (notably prisons and treatment facilities) into the community. However, half of the households counted that did show an out of area origin reported no exits from institutional facilities. See *Chart O3* for a full breakdown.

Chart O3 – Out of Area Households
*Institutional Releases*
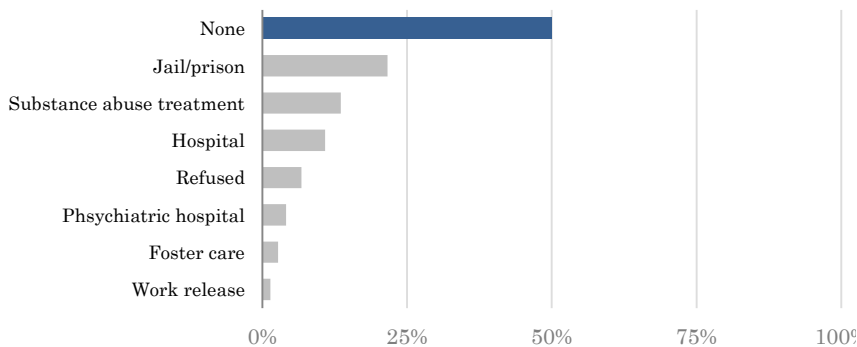
Although institutional releases are slightly higher proportionally from jails and prisons for these households than the general homeless population (22% vs 17%), the difference is marginal. Accessing these services does not seem to be in any way causing the presence of the population of households with a last permanent address outside the area observed as

part of the count.

Available data is even less supportive of the idea that attracting homeless outside the area with these services is any significant factor in driving the overall homeless population. As *Chart 01* and *Chart 02* show, the homeless with an origin outside Yakima County is a small subset of the larger count regardless. Comparisons between reported institutional exits for households with a local origin and those from out of the area show that (as the larger distribution would suggest) the vast majority of the demand for services by the homeless at these institutions is generated by households with a local origin (see *Chart 04*), and in fact the majority of homeless households in general do not report any exits at all – 63% fall into this category regardless or origin.

Chart O4 – Total Institutional Releases (Households)

Out of Area Households   Other Households
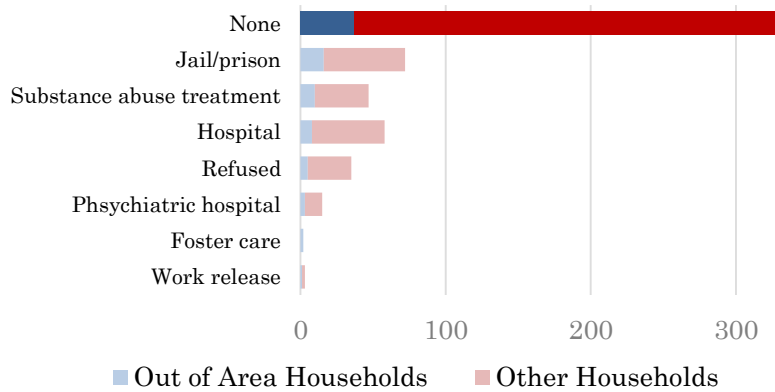
Substance Abuse

The prevalence of substance abuse issues among homeless populations is frequently a topic of discussion, often a discussion based around stereotype. As shown earlier in this report, substance abuse is generally among the most commonly cited causes of homeless episodes by households who participate in the survey, but this can be somewhat misleading. Historically, although it is indeed one of the most commonly cited causes, substance abuse is still cited as a primary cause of homeless by a minority of the households involved in the count. In the current data, only 28% of households identified drug or alcohol abuse as a primary cause of their homelessness, and since 2013 the value has not exceeded 34%.

Chart SA1 – Proportion of Homeless Adults Reporting a Substance Abuse Disabling Condition

■ Individuals with Substance Abuse Disability
■ Individuals with no Substance Abuse Disability
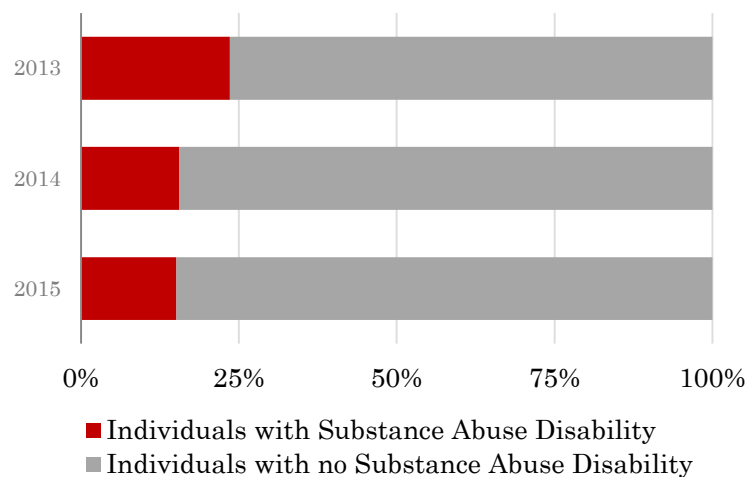
Data collection surveys also ask all individuals about their disability status, including an option for reporting a disabling drug or alcohol abuse condition. Reports of substance abuse by this measure also represent a minority of participating homeless adults (see *Chart SA1)*. While this data does not include minors, over the course of data collection since 2013 a single individual under the age of 18 did identify as having a disabling substance abuse condition.

The data also does not seem to show a consistent type of housing in which substance abuse is more prevalent. Although there is occasionally speculation that substance users are excluded from, or alternatively exclusively make up the population of, a given type of homeless housing depending on the audience who cares to opine on the issue, the proportion of homeless individuals reporting a substance abuse disability does not seem to be consistent by housing type. Some years, notably 2013, show a particularly wide variance in the incidence of substance abuse disabilities (with the highest recorded rate being four times the lowest), while in 2014 the rate is relatively similar across all housing types.
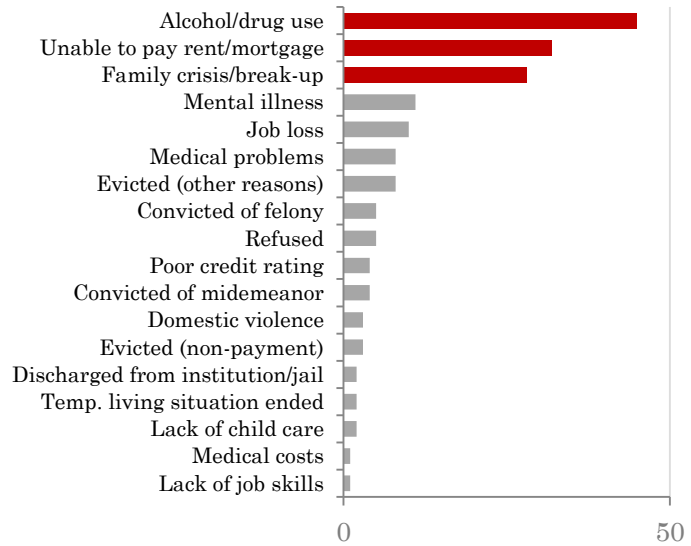
Chart SA2 – Proportion of Homeless Individuals Reporting a Substance Abuse Disability, by Housing Type

■ Sheltered (PSH)   ■ Sheltered (ES/TH)
■ Couch Surfing   ■ Unsheltered
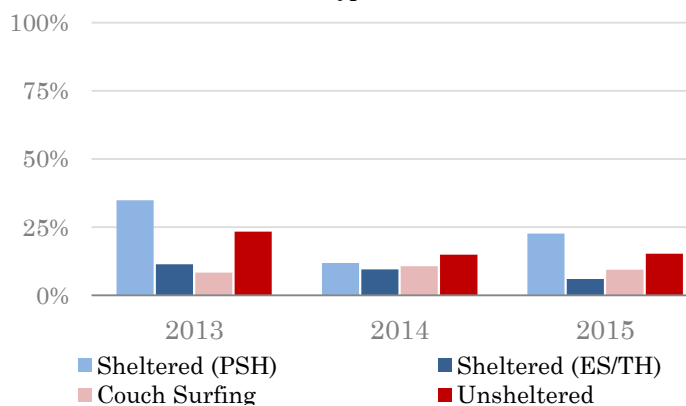
This would seem to indicate that type of housing is not predictive of substance abuse status. Also of note, substance abuse disabilities remain a minority in all types of housing.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, alcohol and drug abuse is the leading reported cause of homelessness for individuals with a substance abuse disability. As has been commonly observed throughout this report, the majority of the reported causes fall into essentially the same small number of categories. *Chart SA3* details the reported needs for individuals with substance abuse disabilities.

As comparison of the totals might indicate, however, alcohol or drug use is not universally cited as a primary cause of homelessness by individuals who consider themselves to be disabled by substance abuse related conditions. *Chart SA4* shows this in greater details. Note that the reported rate has remained stable for the general population, but decreased each year for the group of individuals reporting a disabling substance abuse disorder. This is of particular interest because the reported cause is necessarily a prior event to current state at the time of data collection, potentially supporting the idea that for at least a subset of homeless substance abusers their substance abuse is symptomatic of their homelessness rather than a causal factor.

Chart SA3 – Reported Causes for Individuals with a Substance Abuse Disability

Chart SA4 – Rate of Substance Abuse Cause of Homelessness
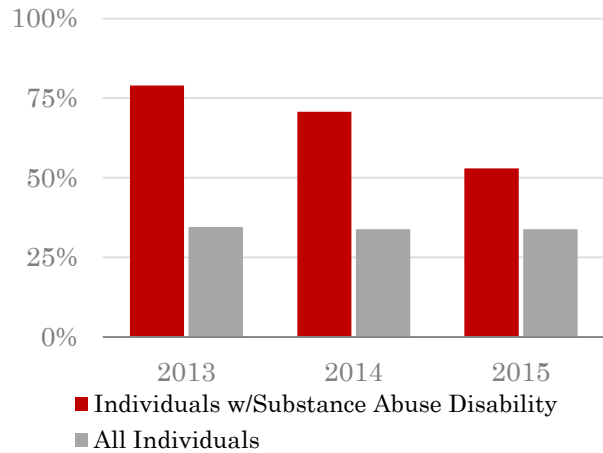
Individuals who identified as having a substance abuse disability were also far more likely to report a mental health disability than other participating homeless individuals. *Chart SA5* on page 18 shows the relative rate of mental health disability between the two groups. Individuals with a substance abuse disability are shown on the outer ring, and are four times as likely to have a mental health disability as other homeless individuals surveyed.

Chart SA5 – Mental Health Disability Rates

Other Individuals

Individuals w/Substance Abuse Disability

■ MH Disability   ■ Refused   ■ No MH Disability
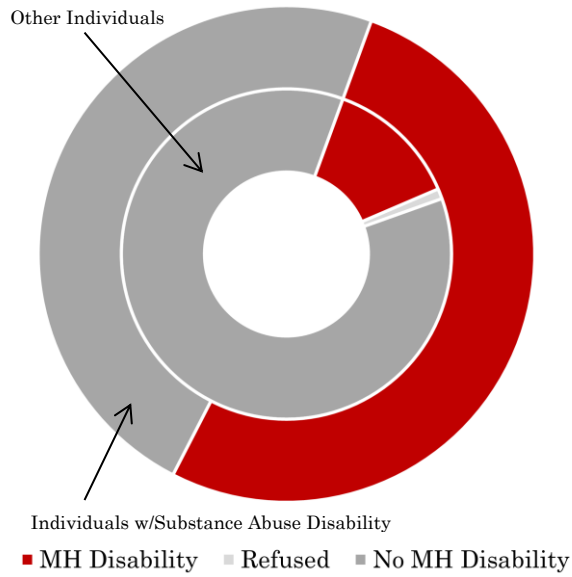
While this does not directly support the idea that homeless substance abusers are self-medicating untreated mental health issues, it is certainly the case that mental health issues are more prevalent among substance abusers among those surveyed.

Appendix Data Tables

Overview Tables

Homeless Individuals

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Sheltered (PSH)	115	150	178	132	168	150
Sheltered (ES/TH)	424	399	472	516	486	466
Couch Surfing	490	275	293	204	84	128
Unsheltered	83	61	53	47	47	72
Total	*1112*	*885*	*996*	*899*	*785*	*816*

Homeless Households

	2013	2014	2015
Sheltered (PSH)	91	108	95
Sheltered (ES/TH)	295	272	266
Couch Surfing	110	65	100
Unsheltered	43	46	65
Total	*539*	*491*	*526*

Shelter Count Tables

Shelter Count Individuals by Age

Age	2015	Age	2015	Age	2015
0	15	26	9	52	16
1	23	27	10	53	9
2	21	28	7	54	11
3	17	29	7	55	2
4	22	30	8	56	10
5	13	31	11	57	6
6	10	32	9	58	6
7	16	33	10	59	1
8	12	34	15	60	8
9	18	35	6	61	7
10	8	36	8	62	7
11	13	37	5	63	5
12	9	38	4	64	1
13	10	39	11	65	2
14	14	40	9	66	0
15	2	41	7	67	1
16	6	42	11	68	1
17	6	43	10	69	2
18	4	44	4	70	2
19	0	45	5	71	1
20	5	46	8	72	0
21	4	47	14	73	1
22	5	48	10	74	1
23	8	49	10	75	0
24	12	50	10	76	0
25	12	51	12	77	1

Shelter Count Individuals by Race

	2013	2014	2015
White	501	441	399
Refused	11	98	108
American Indian/Alaska Native	87	89	71
Black/African American	50	45	53
Nat. Hawaiin/Pacific Islander	5	4	5
Asian	1	2	2

Shelter Count Individuals by Instances 2015

1	398
2	123
3	46
4	28
5	6
6	7
7	5
8	2
9	0
10	1

Shelter Count Individuals (ES/TH) by Duration

	2013	2014	2015
1 month or less	50	45	44
1-6 mos	163	129	119
6 mos - 1 year	71	104	85
1-2 years	89	110	106
>2 years	143	98	112

Shelter Count
Households by Reported Needs

	2013	2014	2015
Transportation	185	169	148
Job Training/Placement	170	140	136
Education	89	106	99
Food	102	111	89
Clothes/Blankets	71	64	72
Health Care	144	129	68
Dental	106	137	68
Child Care	54	52	53
Mental Health Care	79	68	48
Social Security	76	76	44
Counseling	68	64	37
None	29	18	35
Legal Assistance	45	56	35
Church/Spirituality	65	41	33
Other		17	32
Substance Abuse Treatment	57	67	29
Domestic Violence Services	17	8	20
Credit Counseling	33	33	20
Refused	10	13	13
Socialization	30	19	11
Veteran's Services	5	9	8

Shelter Count
Households by Reported Causes

	2013	2014	2015
Aged out of foster care	3	0	0
Failed job drug screen	4	7	1
Medical costs	16	34	3
Language barrier	11	6	4
Lack of child care	6	3	5
Convicted of misdemeanor	4	7	6
Refused	14	22	16
Poor credit rating	14	13	16
Discharged from institution/jail	18	17	18
Evicted (non-payment)	23	31	19
Lack of job skills	49	48	20
Convicted of felony	25	13	23
Temp. living situation ended	53	35	23
Evicted (other reasons)	28	24	25
Mental illness	24	33	32
Medical problems	35	0	43
Domestic violence	44	48	45
Job loss	104	93	80
Family crisis/break-up	95	91	117
Alcohol/drug use	143	138	122
Unable to pay rent/mortgage	116	132	138

Shelter Count
Households by Income Sources

	2013	2014	2015
Blood/plasma donation	0	1	0
Unemployment insurance	6	1	0
Private disability insurance	0	1	0
L&I/Workman's Comp	1	0	0
Pension from former job	2	1	3
Farm/migrant agricultural work	3	3	4
Panhandling	3	3	4
Relatives/friends	2	1	4
Day laborer work	4	5	6
Child Support	12	4	8
Refused	5	15	11
Per capita	13	8	14
Part time work	18	24	22
Low wage job	23	20	23
Other Public Assistance	31	44	32
TANF	67	80	59
None	114	79	93
Social security benefits	107	117	114

Outreach Count Tables

Outreach Count
Individuals by Age

Age	2015	Age	2015	Age	2015
0	3	26	2	53	5
1	1	27	7	54	9
2	3	28	6	55	2
3	1	29	4	56	3
4	1	30	0	57	3
5	0	31	3	58	3
6	2	32	1	59	2
7	0	33	9	60	3
8	0	34	5	61	1
9	1	35	3	62	0
10	2	36	3	63	0
11	1	37	4	64	0
12	1	38	3	65	0
13	0	39	3	66	0
14	0	40	6	67	0
15	2	41	5	68	0
16	5	42	2	69	0
17	3	43	8	70	0
18	4	44	2	71	0
19	6	45	5	72	0
20	4	46	6	73	0
21	7	47	5	74	0
22	4	48	5	75	0
23	2	49	6	76	0
24	1	50	4	77	0
25	1	51	1	78	0
		52	5	79	1

Shelter Count
Households by Reported Needs

	2013	2014	2015
Food	64	60	79
Clothes/Blankets	60	49	77
Job Training/Placement	76	26	62
Transportation	67	46	59
Health Care	55	40	46
Education	33	24	41
Dental	44	28	36
Other	0	10	25
Social Security	15	23	19
Mental Health Care	21	15	18
Legal Assistance	15	6	12
Child Care	13	5	11
Counseling	21	9	10
Substance Abuse Treatment	15	11	10
Socialization	5	2	7
Refused	6	9	7
None	3	2	6
Church/Spirituality	18	11	6
Domestic Violence Services	6	3	5
Credit Counseling	7	1	3
Veteran's Services	5	2	2

Outreach Count
Individuals
by Instances

	2015
1	113
2	41
3	18
4	13
5	7
6	2
7	1
8	0
9	0
10	3
11	0
12	0
13	1
14	0
15	1

Outreach Count Individuals by Race

	2013	2014	2015
American Indian/Alaska Native	61	30	87
White	172	65	65
Refused	11	39	44
Nat. Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2	1	8
Black/African American	3	0	2
Asian	2	0	0

Outreach Count Individuals
by Duration

	2013	2014	2015
1 month or less	7	12	14
1-6 months	89	31	52
6 months - 1 year	32	19	24
1 - 2 years	43	21	36
>2 years	80	48	74

Outreach Count
Households by Reported Causes

	2013	2014	2015
Aged out of foster care	2	1	0
Lack of child care	7	0	0
Medical costs	12	14	1
Failed job drug screen	4	2	1
Convicted of misdemeanor	5	3	2
Language barrier	6	0	2
Discharged from institution/jail	7	1	2
Poor credit rating	14	5	4
Convicted of felony	12	2	7
Evicted (non-payment)	11	6	8
Temp. living situation ended	16	9	9
Refused	10	12	10
Domestic violence	17	9	11
Lack of job skills	19	9	13
Mental illness	14	12	16
Medical problems	11	0	16
Evicted (other reasons)	12	11	19
Alcohol/drug use	41	17	27
Job loss	42	27	35
Unable to pay rent/mortgage	52	33	43
Family crisis/break-up	46	22	66

Outreach Count
Households by Reported Income Sources

	2013	2014	2015
Farm/migrant agricultural work	2	3	0
Pension from former job	1	0	0
L&I/Workman's Comp	0	1	0
Alimony/spousal support	1	0	1
Unemployment insurance	2	0	1
Private disability insurance	0	0	1
Low wage job	2	10	2
Child Support	2	0	3
Part time work	7	1	4
Refused	8	11	5
Panhandling	0	5	6
Relatives/friends	2	8	7
Day laborer work	0	1	8
TANF	16	4	17
Other Public Assistance	9	16	24
Social security benefits	18	20	29
None	71	39	49
Per capita	20	9	51

For more information on this report contact:

Avery Zoglman
Yakima Valley Conference of Governments
311 North 4th Street, Suite 204
Yakima, WA 98901
Office: 509-574-1550
avery.zoglman@yvcog.org