

Tri-Cities Chronic Homelessness Assessment Results Report

Presented by

The Center for Housing and Homelessness Research

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- Café 180
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- Wellspring Church

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The contents of this document are solely the responsibility of the Center for Housing and Homelessness Research and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Tri-Cities Homelessness Policy Group.

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DRAFT

As the cost of living increases in the Tri-Cities region (and across the Denver Metro area), the number of individuals and families entering homelessness continues to rise. This rise in homelessness has been witnessed by citizens and stakeholders in the Tri-Cities of Englewood, Littleton and Sheridan. Witnessing this rise in visible homelessness, Tri-Cities stakeholder groups commissioned this assessment to understand the causes of chronic homelessness, the barriers to exiting an experience of chronic homelessness, and the services that assist people experiencing chronic homelessness and the services that are missing for people experiencing chronic homelessness. This assessment provides a directed, local view into chronic homelessness in the Tri-Cities of Englewood, Littleton and Sheridan. Results from this assessment can be used by a wide range of stakeholders and can be particularly useful as a guide to supplement a discussion on the appropriate policies, programs, and services that can be delivered in the Tri-Cities to address chronic homelessness. The specific assessment questions addressed in this report are:

1. What led individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in the Tri-Cities region to their experience of homelessness?
2. What prevents individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in the Tri-Cities region from exiting out of their experience of homelessness?
3. What services do, or do not, exist for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in the Tri-Cities region?

Staff and volunteers at the Center for Housing and Homelessness Research (CHHR) interviewed 121 people experiencing chronic homelessness from January 2020 to September 2020. Interviews took place with the support of local service providers, often on their property. Interviewers read a semi-structured interview protocol to participants and then took notes on participant responses. Interview data provided both quantitative and qualitative information that was then analyzed and is reported in detail in the results section of this report.

Results show that people experiencing chronic homelessness interviewed for this assessment mostly identify as white (74%) and male (69%). **One hundred of the 121 individuals who participated in this assessment reported sleeping on the streets at some point over the last two years.** Over the last two years, 72 reported sleeping in a hotel/motel, 69 reported sleeping in a car, 63 reported sleeping in a tent, and 59 reported sleeping in an emergency shelter.

Participants reported a wide and overlapping range of causes of their experience of chronic homelessness. The most commonly cited cause for an experience of homelessness was loss of a job (51%). Reviewing participant interviews, what became clear was that participants often experienced a series of events or factors that together led to their experience of homelessness. Themes from participant interviews show that evictions, health challenges, relationship issues, accidents, and other crisis together led to an experience of homelessness.

Furthermore, participant interviews revealed that the burden of the multiple and overlapping causes of homelessness often “stuck” and were also identified as barriers to exiting homelessness. Participants described evictions, criminal justice histories, relationship struggles, and challenges securing work, among other factors, as barriers too challenging to overcome without housing. Most clearly, participants described the cost of housing as the top barrier for exiting their experience of chronic homelessness.

The results of this assessment show that people experiencing chronic homelessness face a series of interconnected and challenging issues that prevent them from securing housing. Solutions to address chronic



homelessness need to consider the complexity of the situations that lead to someone's homelessness in the first place. Solutions that are holistic, flexible, and provide a secure and stable place to live may help to address chronic homelessness in the Tri-Cities.

It is our hope at CHHR that the results from this assessment can be used by stakeholders in the Tri-Cities to develop actionable policy, program, and service approaches that support individuals facing chronic homelessness in finding a long-term home.

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The number of individuals and families experiencing homelessness continues to increase across the United States (US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2020). As the experience of homelessness increases, so does the need for effective approaches to affordable, permanent housing. Homelessness is complex and difficult to study and understand. People experiencing homelessness are sometimes transient and sometimes work hard not to be seen. This assessment provides a directed, local view into chronic homelessness in the Tri-Cities of Englewood, Littleton and Sheridan. Results from this assessment can be used by a wide range of stakeholders but can be particularly useful to guide a discussion on the appropriate policies, programs, and services that can be delivered in the Tri-Cities to address chronic homelessness.

Homelessness in the Tri-Cities

As the cost of living increases in the Tri-Cities region (and across the Denver Metro area), the number of individuals and families entering homelessness continues to rise. CHHR staff utilized homelessness definitions from the Department of Education McKinney-Vento (MKV) program (Metro Denver Homelessness Initiative, 2020). For this assessment, the following circumstances were used to define homelessness in the Tri-cities region:

- “Individuals 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;” as well as
- “Those with no fixed, regular, and adequate place to stay. [Those that do] not have the resources to stay where they are for longer than 14 days and who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence or reside with others temporarily” (Metro Denver Homeless Initiative, 2019).

Data from the Piton Foundation’s Shift Research Lab (2020) show the percentage of families living in poverty in Englewood increased from 5.32% in 2000 to 11.98% in 2017. Littleton has also seen higher percentages of families living in poverty, with 19.46% in 2000 increasing to 23.86% in 2017. This is especially evident in Littleton North where, in 2000, 3.91% of families living in poverty increased to 12.30% in 2017. Sheridan also saw increases from 13.41% of families living in poverty in 2000 to 23.47% in 2017 (Shift Research Lab, 2020).

The cost of housing has also increased in each of the Tri-Cities. According to the Piton Foundation, from 2000 to 2017, the percentage of Englewood residents spending more than 30% of their income on housing increased from 36% to 53%. In Littleton, the percentage of residents spending more than 30% of their income on housing increased from 36% to 45%, and in Sheridan the percentage of residents spending more than 30% of their income on housing increased from 41% to 59% (Shift Research Lab, 2020).

Increases in poverty and housing costs in Arapahoe County and across the country likely contribute to rising rates of homelessness. Unfortunately, nationally mandated standard homelessness data do not accurately reflect the number of individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Although the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds the national Point in Time (PIT) survey to assess homelessness counts, and the Department of Education mandates McKinney-Vento (MKV) programs that provide a count of school-aged homelessness, these data sources produce different results often leading to confusion



and misunderstanding about the scope of homelessness around the country. For example, 2019 PIT data show that a total of 228 households experienced homelessness in Arapahoe County, where 32 of the 228 were identified as “chronically homeless.” Current data from the 2020 PIT indicate that 245 households in Arapahoe County are experiencing homelessness and does not indicate the number of individuals who are chronically homeless. In contrast, the Arapahoe County 2018-2019 McKinney-Vento report shows a total of 2,897 students experiencing homelessness in the county (Colorado Department of Education, 2020). Some of these differences are based on differences in the definition of homelessness. Nevertheless, differences in reported homeless numbers can cause confusion and create challenges for policy makers and program administrators trying to deliver impactful homelessness services.

Further, validity and reliability issues likely exist in McKinney-Vento data as homelessness is very challenging to assess. People experiencing homelessness may not want this part of their identity known, and survey information is only able to identify aspects of a person’s life that they are willing to share.

Figure 1 below shows, according to McKinney-Vento data, the number of students experiencing homelessness in the Tri-Cities school districts over the course of four academic school years (2014-2019). *Figure 1* shows substantial changes year-to-year in student homelessness counts from McKinney-Vento. These steep changes could be due to policy and program changes. However, the changes could also be due to the challenges associated with assessing homelessness, particularly for people who don’t want to share their experiences. Additionally, the decrease in Englewood and Littleton students experiencing homelessness reflects a converse narrative about poverty and housing insecurity in the Tri-Cities when compared to the Piton’s Foundation report on the number of Tri-Cities residents who use at least 30% of their income toward housing costs.

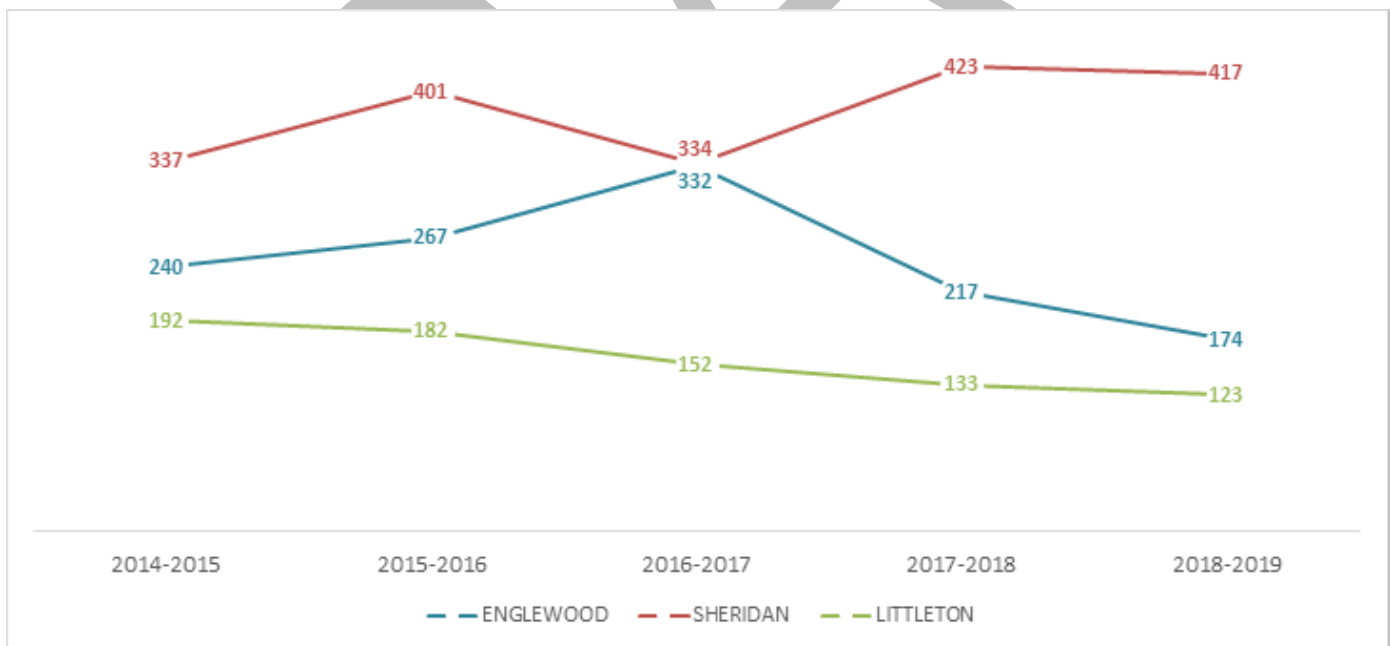


Figure 1. McKinney-Vento data. Number of homeless students in Tri-Cities school districts from 2014-2019.

In all, counting people experiencing homelessness is a challenging endeavor. These types of discrepancies across Point in Time and McKinney-Vento data reflect commonly raised critiques about the reliability and

validity of homelessness data. For the current study, CHHR was commissioned to provide a targeted, local assessment of homelessness that will provide the Tri-Cities Homelessness Policy Group with a more tailored, locally focused assessment of chronic homelessness in the Tri-Cities region.

Tri-Cities Chronic Homelessness Assessment

The purpose of the Chronic Homelessness Assessment was to collect reliable and valid data on chronic homelessness in the Tri-Cities region and to analyze this data for the Tri-Cities Homelessness Policy Group so that locally targeted policies, programs, and services can be implemented.

Assessment Questions

This report will provide information on three assessment questions:

1. What led individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in the Tri-Cities region to their experience of homelessness?
2. What prevents individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in the Tri-Cities region from exiting out of their experience of homelessness?
3. What services do, or do not, exist for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in the Tri-Cities region?

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A Note about COVID-19 and Our Methods

In March 2020, the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) spread through Colorado where, as of October 2020, there are currently 73,537 cases, with 1,968 deaths due to COVID-19 and a case rate of 1,291 cases per 100,000 people. On March 23, 2020, CHHR paused all data collection as instructed by the University of Denver and the University of Denver Human Subjects Institutional Review Board to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The first part of the methodology section describes the pre-COVID-19 methods used in the Tri-Cities chronic homelessness assessment. The second part of the methodology section describes our adapted, post-COVID-19 methods.

Pre-COVID-19 Data Collection

The Tri-Cities Chronic Homelessness Assessment took place in Englewood, Littleton, and Sheridan. With guidance from our assessment consultant, Mike Sandgren, our team identified local organizations and non-profits that would serve best as data collection sites and established data collection dates and times with these sites. More details about our methods can be found in Appendix A.

The CHHR staff and Tri-Cities stakeholders developed three categories of data collection access. The goals of the data collection access structure were 1) to evenly distribute access points throughout the Tri-Cities, 2) to diversify the pathways of access so as to make contact with as many sub-demographics within the homeless community as possible, and 3) to offer volunteer interviewers a wide array of data collection options, such as setting and location.

Weekly Access Points

From January to March 2020, CHHR staff conducted 53 interviews with individuals currently experiencing homelessness in the Tri-Cities area. Seven agencies throughout the Tri-Cities offered their physical spaces during regular hours of operation to host data collection. These agencies were either specific service providers for people experiencing homelessness, and therefore would consistently have potential participants in their spaces, or they were community organizations whose patrons are often experiencing homelessness. Four agencies were located in Englewood, two were in Littleton, and one was in Sheridan. On any given day, at least two agencies were prepared to host data collection. The seven agencies were:

- A Stronger Cord, Englewood
- Break Bread, Littleton
- Cafe 180, Englewood
- Giving Heart, Englewood
- Gracefull Cafe, Littleton
- The Sheridan Public Library, Sheridan
- The Well at Wellspring Church, Englewood

Special Events

Three agencies agreed to host one-time, large-scale events aimed to provide specialized incentives to bring large groups of potential participants to a specific location to take the survey. The presence of additional services at the events were added as an incentive. The events were planned several weeks apart throughout



March and April 2020. In order to access each of the Tri-Cities, one event was planned to be hosted in Englewood, one in Littleton, and one in Sheridan. On March 10, 2020, Ascension Lutheran Church hosted the first special event with the Severe Weather Network. Shortly after this event, the University of Denver paused all in-person data collection sponsored by University personnel in an effort to keep volunteers and participants safe from the spread of COVID-19. Unfortunately, due to the spread of COVID-19, the two additional special events were canceled. More information about all three events can be found in Appendix A.

Post-COVID Data Collection

The chronic assessment data collection resumed on June 8, 2020 and continued through September 4, 2020. Restarting data collection required alternative methods of recruiting participants and conducting interviews. To abide by Colorado state and local regulations, CHHR developed COVID safety protocols that were utilized during each interview. These protocols required data collectors and participants to have available Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), such as surgical masks, gloves, and hand sanitizer. All CHHR field staff were required to wear a mask and ask participants to do the same. All interviews conducted after June 8, 2020, were done outdoors or over the phone.

Data Collection Sites

The CHHR team also pivoted participant recruitment efforts to focus on locations and organizations that could accommodate outdoor interviewing. Our team collected data at several locations, one of which was the Platte River along the border of Englewood and Denver, commonly referred to as the “Greenbelt.” The Englewood Police Department suggested starting at 2700 of South Platte River Drive (which runs along the east side of the river about a quarter mile), as several folks there had stayed in the Tri-Cities area before. Three data collectors met near the Englewood Wastewater Treatment Plant (2900 S Platte River Drive) and approached individuals staying at the camp to assess their interest in participating in the chronic assessment. Many individuals living in the camp were staying in tents, trailers, and RVs.

Additionally, our team was able to continue weekly data collection at three of our original access points, Wellspring Church, Giving Heart, and Gracefull Café, where we felt data collection could occur in compliance with state and University of Denver Coronavirus guidelines.

Data Analysis

Interviews with people experiencing chronic homelessness were conducted in all three of the Tri-Cities. Data collection occurred with a trained staff or volunteer reading interview questions and taking notes on participants responses. Then, notes and survey data were entered into Qualtrics Survey Software and exported to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) where they were coded and analyzed. This is important, as several quotes on the causes of chronic homelessness and the barriers to exiting chronic homelessness represent notes taken by interviewing staff and volunteers (rather than verbatim quotes from a recording). Quotes are written in *italicized, red-colored font*.

Additional COVID Questions in our Survey Measures

The CHHR team added 11 questions about participants’ experience with COVID-19 as well as two questions on how they learn about services in the Tri-Cities area. [Table 1](#) provides examples of these questions.

Table 1. COVID-19 Questions used in Tri-Cities assessment.

Survey Measures	# of Questions	Examples
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Demographics	12 Questions	What is your gender?; In the past two years, have you lived in a shelter or on the street?; Where did you sleep last night?
COVID-19	13 Questions	Were you experiencing homelessness before the pandemic?; What services were accessible before the pandemic that are harder to reach now?
Causes Leading to Homelessness	One Question; 26 options	What factors, if any, led you to lose permanent housing/experience homelessness? E.g., loss of Job; illness; domestic violence; unable to pay rent
Barriers to Exiting Homelessness	One Question; 26 options	What factors, if any, prevent you from exiting homelessness? E.g., loss of job; illness; domestic violence; unable to pay rent
Available Services	Three Questions	What, if any, are services that you need or wish you had but are not available to you in the area where you reside?
Housing Experiences	Six Questions	Have you ever had permanent housing in Arapahoe County?; If you had to estimate, what percentage of your income did you spend on your rent/mortgage?
Final Open-Ended Questions	Two Questions	If you had a magic wand and could have three wishes to improve the lives of individuals experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity in your community, what three things do you think would have the greatest impact?

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121

Individuals experiencing homelessness participated in the Tri-Cities chronic assessment¹

This first section below provides descriptive statistics in the form of raw values (counts), percentages, averages (mean scores), and standard deviations (SD; indicating the range of participant scores around the mean). Low standard deviations indicate that participant responses cluster near the mean, while higher standard deviations indicate a greater range of responses. [Table 2](#) below shows the number of participant responses obtained by the beginning of March 2020 when data collection was paused, and the final number of responses collected at six months after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 2. Number of responses when data collection was paused in early March, and our current and final number of responses.

Early March 2020	End of September 2020
53	121

All data were collected within the Tri-Cities area. [Figure 2](#) shows 65 individuals reported living in Englewood, 29 in Littleton, and six in Sheridan. Several participants reported staying in two to three of the Tri-Cities. Thirteen participants reported staying in Aurora, Centennial, or Denver.²

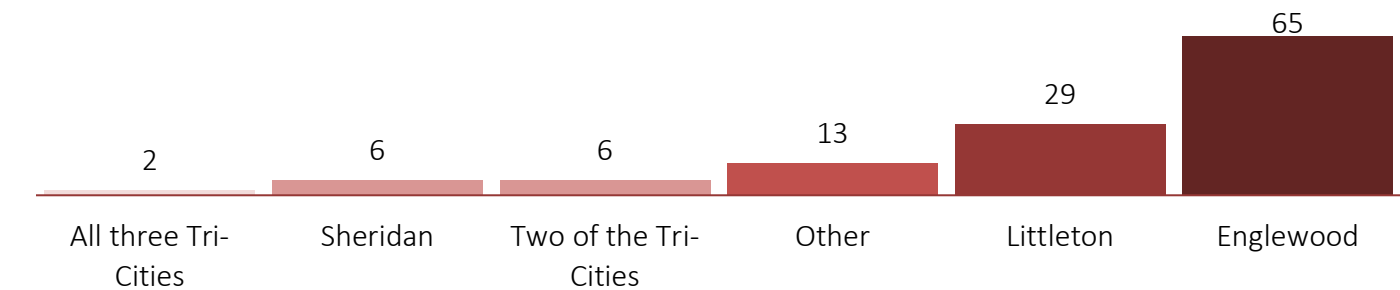
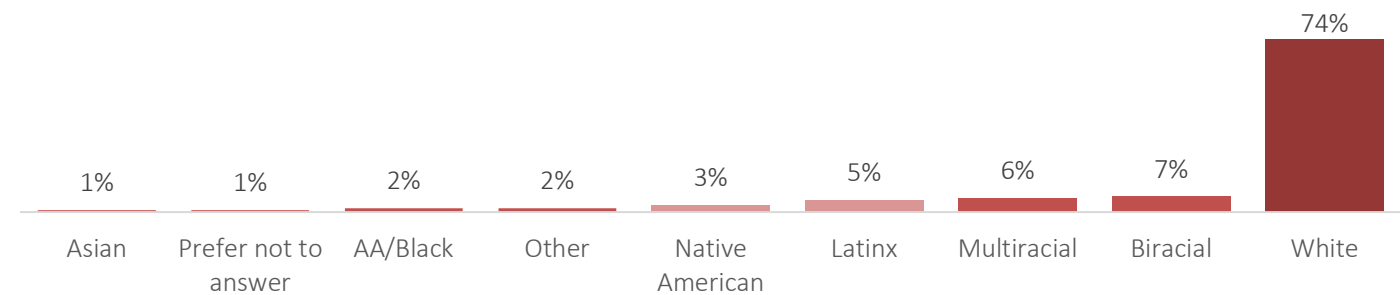


Figure 2. Response rate by city.



¹ A total of 137 surveys were collected. Sixteen duplicates were identified and removed from the dataset.

² Individuals experiencing chronic homelessness don't always identify that they live in a town, the way that housed people typically do. Therefore, some of the people experiencing chronic homelessness did not report that they live in Englewood, Littleton or Sheridan. Regardless, the interviews took place in the Tri-Cities interview locations and we choose to include the interview data as part of our results.



Figure 3 below show the majority of participants identified themselves as white (74%) and male (69%), with just under a third of participants self-identifying as female (29%) and 2% identified as non-binary. Individuals reported varying levels of education. Figure 4 shows that two percent reported post graduate education experience, 10% completed college, 21% reported completing some college, 17% have a GED, 30% have a high school diploma, 17% completed some high school, 3% completed 8th grade.

Figure 3. Reported percentages of participant racial demographics.

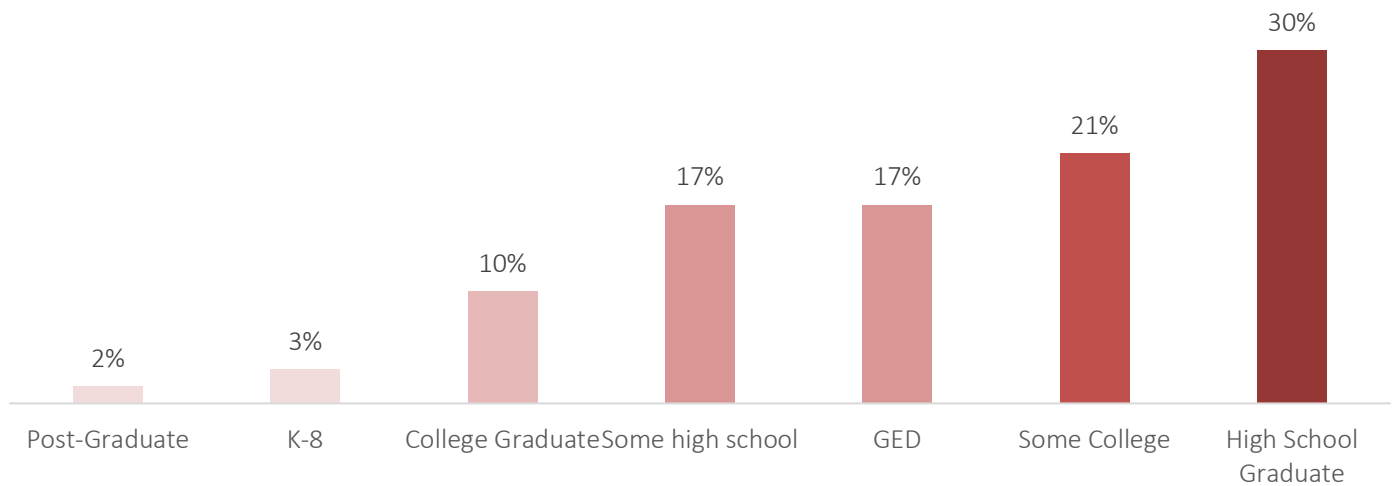
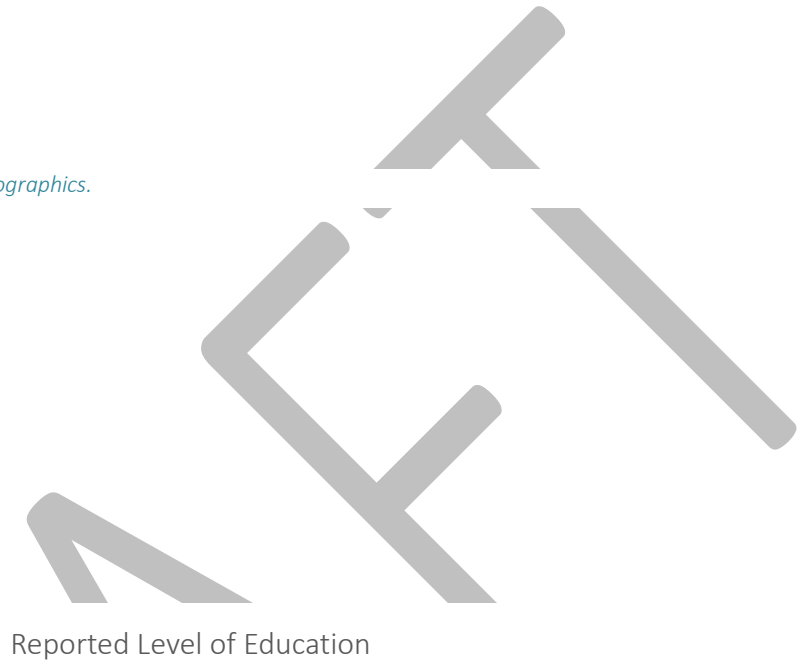


Figure 4. Reported level of education.



Figure 5 shows that almost a third of the individuals included in our assessment were between the ages of 51 and 60, while over a quarter were between the ages of 31 and 40.

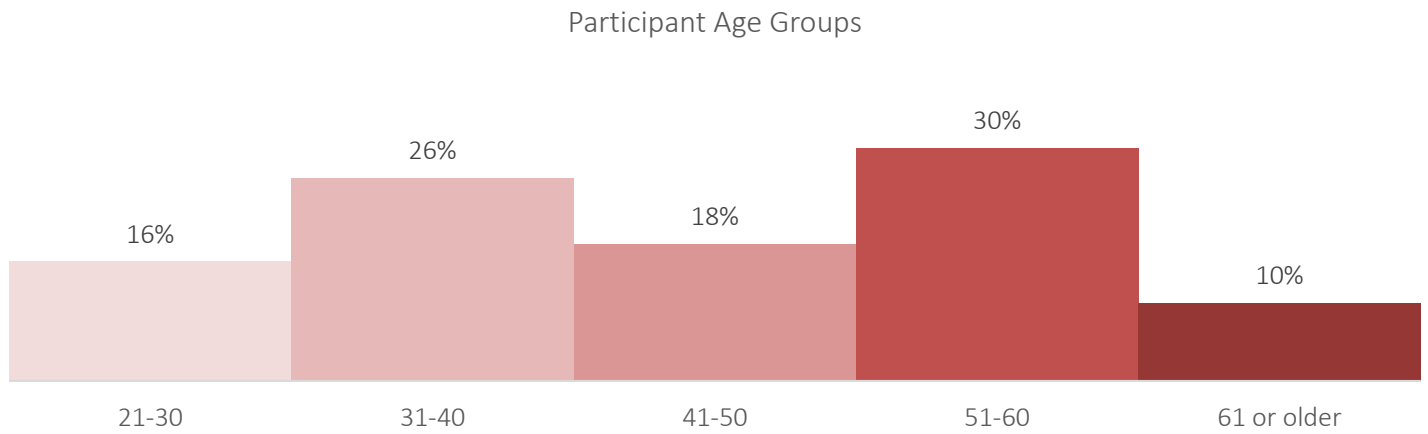


Figure 5. Percentage of participant age groups.

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Where are individuals experiencing homelessness in the Tri-Cities Sleeping?

Figure 6 reflects all reported locations where Tri-Cities participants stayed over the last two years as well as the night before completing the assessment. Participants reported living without permanent housing for an average of five years. This is also reflected in the fact that the majority of participants reported staying on the streets, in a hotel/motel, or a car over the past two years. When asked where they stayed the night before completing the assessment, most participants slept on the streets, in a car, or hotel/motel.

Counts of Where Participants Stay

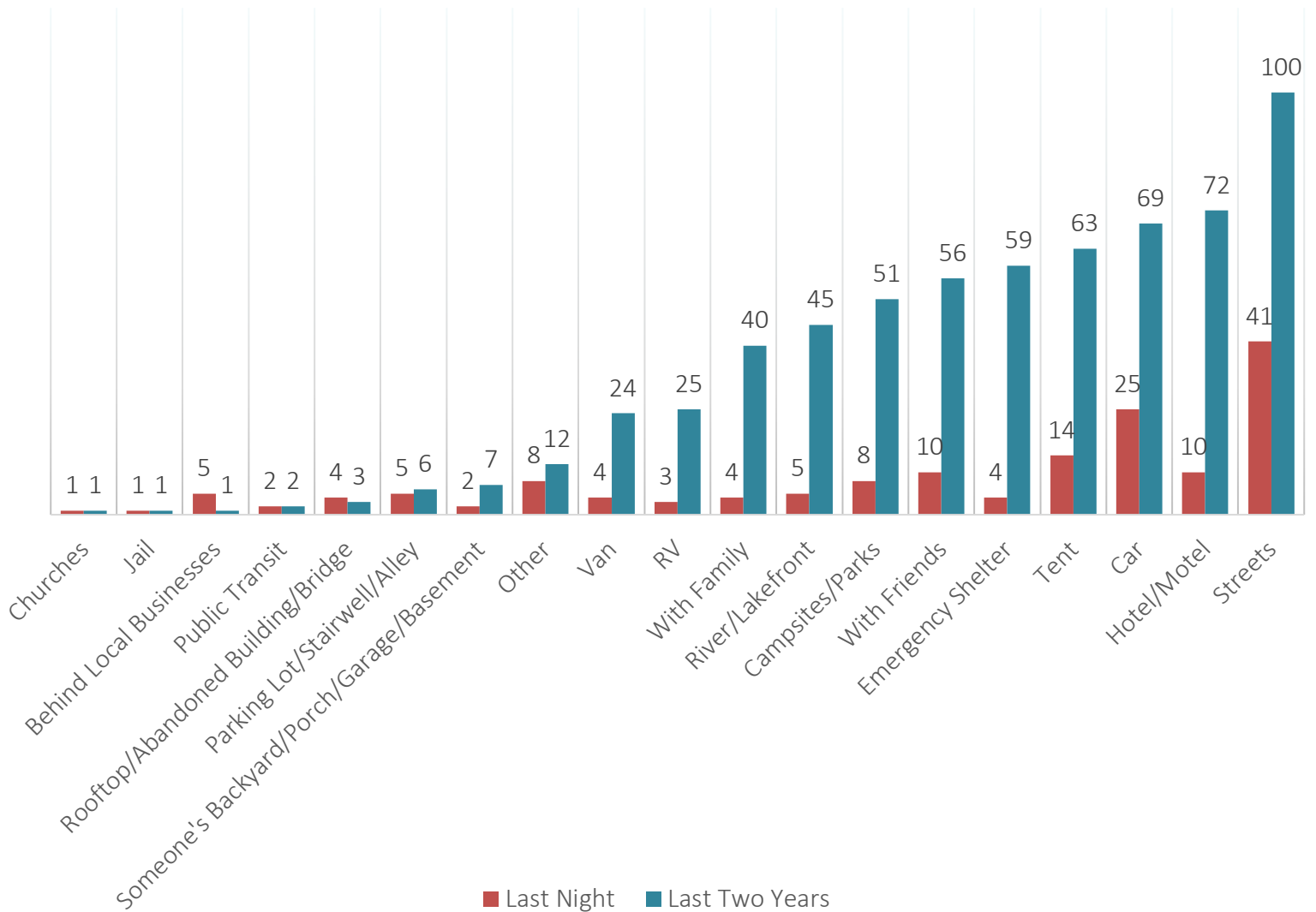


Figure 6. The reported counts of the places where participants stayed over the last two years; and where participants stayed the night before completing the chronic assessment.



Q1: What led individuals in the Tri-Cities region to their experience of chronic homelessness?

In this assessment, we asked participants to describe the factors that led to their experiences with homelessness as well as the factors that prevented them from exiting homelessness. **The following section illustrates that the most common issues faced by study participants in the Tri-Cities region stem from financial insecurity and financial burden.**

Individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in the Tri-Cities reported an average of 6.44 ($SD=4.18$) causes that led them into homelessness. When we consider this average, it is clear that individuals often experience more than one cause that leads them to homelessness. Additionally, several causal factors often have a “waterfall effect” that lead them into further financial hardship, making it difficult to retain their housing. For example, *Figure 7* shows “Change in Employment Status” as the third highest rated cause of homelessness—just below “Inability to Pay Rent”. This is understandable when considering that a loss of income would ultimately affect a person’s ability to make rent payments.

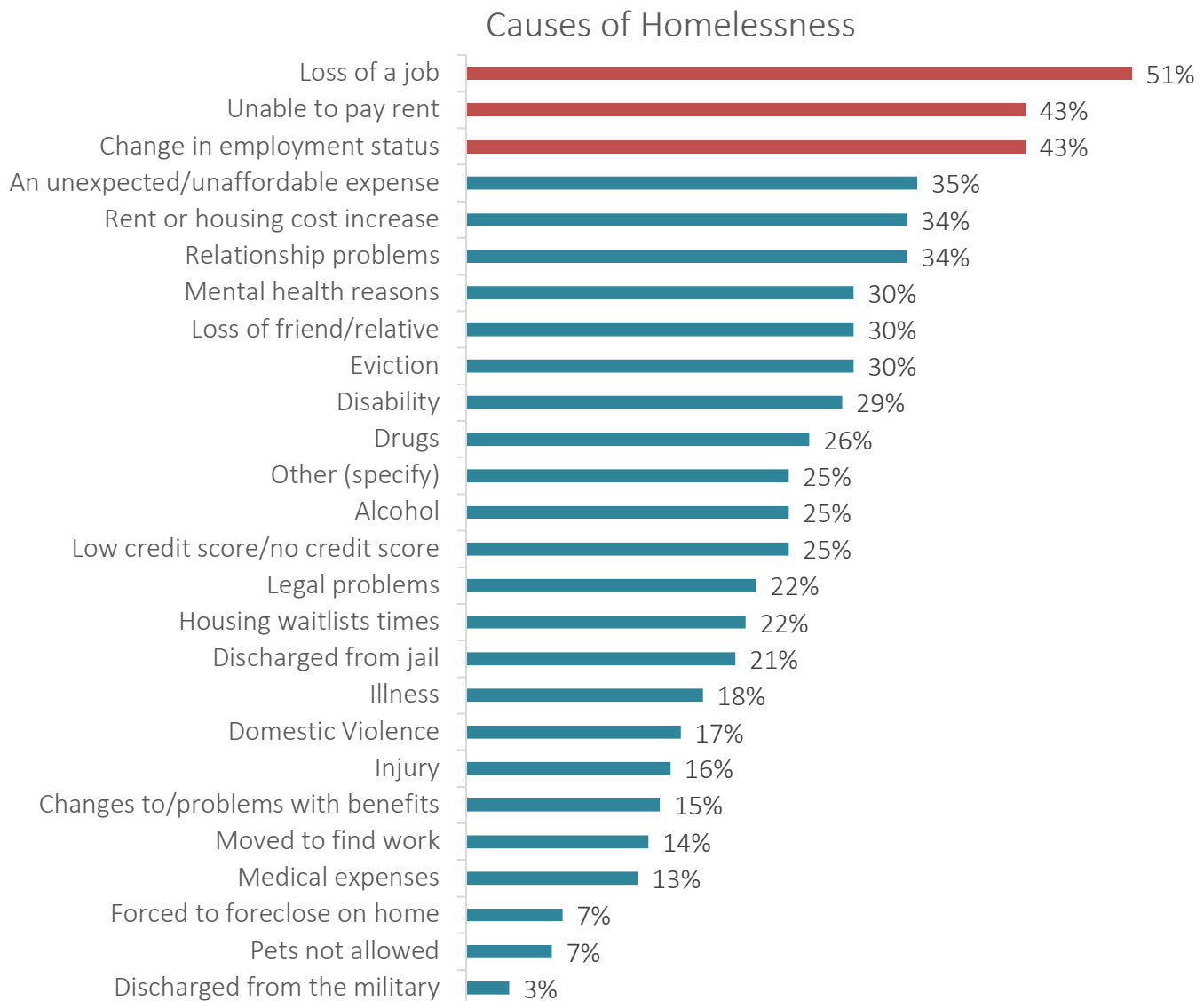


Figure 7. Reported causes of homelessness.



Participant Themes

The following themes were identified from participants' personal experiences about the causes of their homelessness and organized, alphabetically.

Causes

There are many and varied themes from interviews about what caused someone who is now residing in the Tri-Cities to experience chronic homelessness. Often, as the quotes show, homelessness was precipitated by a series of events, not a single event or theme. We have organized the causes of chronic homelessness into the following themes (in alphabetical order): crisis or unlivable housing; criminal justice and legal issues; employment; money and housing costs; relationships/behavioral; unsustainable housing with family. We then end with a section on multiple causes of homelessness. Each theme includes a narrative with quotes from interviewer notes. Interestingly, interviewer notes show that most often there are multiple causes that led to an experience of homelessness. Considering this, readers may want to attend to the layered causes, rather than focusing on each cause, or theme, in isolation.

Crises or Unlivable Housing

In some cases, interviewer notes show that there was some crisis or tragedy that made housing unlivable for a study participant. Notes show that the cause of one person's experience of homelessness was a *"House Fire. Was robbed of \$200k."* Another participant noted that their home became unlivable. Interviewer notes say, *"I had a house - it literally fell apart, mold - lost the house. Chicago - stayed with a friend, got kicked out. I went back to Indiana to help my mother until she died. Can't afford a place - working at 711 Littleton - can't earn enough/ they're cutting hours."* Unlivable housing was also part of the cause for another participant. The interviewer notes say, *"Apartment complex had mold and rats - shut down. Have not been able to find another place. Not enough money. I can't work."*

Criminal Justice & Legal Issues

Challenges due to the criminal justice involvement (and general legal issues), arose as another common theme from interview notes as a factor that caused participants to experience homelessness. Notes taken show that some participants only felt comfortable sharing minimal information about their difficulties, as two interviews noted that the participant had a *"criminal background,"* some shared that being *"discharged from prison"* was a cause of their homelessness, another interview noted that a participant had issues with *"drug dealers"* and *"gang members,"* and some notes detailed that participants cited their interactions with Child Protective Services as a cause to their homelessness (i.e., one participant said that *"social services took my daughter"*).

However, several interview notes detail how participants faced varying unique challenges and circumstances (due to their criminal justice involvement or legal issues) that led to homelessness:

- *"Has 2 masters and 1 bachelor's degree but gained felony charges in Texas (can no longer go back, despite children being there). Was previously a CNA, phlebotomist, and a carpenter... legal expenses related to divorce and drug use."*
- *"Was a pro athlete (wrestler) -- always on the road. Drank more and more. Went to jail after 3 DUI's. 'DUI's caused me to lose everything.' Went bankrupt, lost car, lost housing, etc."*



- *“Legal problems: Rental property owner would not do a walk-through of apartment with her (even when police arrived)... and she was eventually charged for damages to the apartment.”*
- *“Cops/legal issue: incident with the police in 1994. They were unfair in the case and led to psychological issues. All homelessness now is because of mental health issues caused by this.”*
- *“Is on drugs (at least \$100 per day). Is on probation. Will be going to jail in a couple weeks to serve short time.”*
- *“Has a felony charge and experienced an abusive relationship in Indiana, as well as Denver.”*
- *“I was living with girlfriend, we broke up around 4 years ago, stayed with brother for a while, seeped into alcohol, sunk low to cope and sleep at night. Ended up in jail, now out and got birth certificate and ID. We make our own choices.”*

A Story of Survival – Life After the Criminal Justice System

In particular, one interviewer took detailed notes when a single mother shared her story of a frustrating and lengthy battle with housing instability, challenges at shelters, and her struggle to survive brought on by her involvement with the criminal justice system. She shared that she had no support from caseworkers or shelters and that she *“had to get out and do all the work.”* This participant was quoted as saying that she had to fight to find housing that would rent to her, due to *“7 violent felonies”* on her criminal record and her husband’s charges for distribution of substances because *“no one wants to rent to us.”*

Once she finally found housing, the complex *“ended up being crack and meth central. People smoking crack and meth outside our door. We had to call the police 15-20 times a day,”* and that the property’s management ignored the problem. The participant went on to share that she ended up having to leave that apartment building in order to protect her children and ended up staying in a shelter (the Salvation Army Lambuth Center on 27th and Federal). The participant went on to detail that her stay at the shelter (while she was pregnant) was not only unsafe, sharing that *“a daughter and mother was trying to jump on me in the stairwell,”* but also that shelter staff members were cruel to her and that when she was pregnant *“they wouldn’t open the bathroom for me and I peed my pants and he laughed at me for it”* (these experiences had a lasting negative impact on her mental health).

Eventually, she was able to get on a rapid-rehousing list and was able to move into an apartment (with the assistance of Denver Human Services). However, this participant shared that she feared that *“If I become homeless again no shelter will accept me...They will take my daughters and husband and I will have to sleep in a car”* due to her most recent charge (for domestic violence).

Employment

The loss of a job caused the homeless experience for many of the people experiencing chronic homelessness that were interviewed. Interview notes say:

- *“Loss of job because of COVID-19. Savings was drained after losing job.”*
- *“Fired from job, related to a conflict of interest”*
- *“Lost job, economy bad, I have no income.”*



- “Change in employment status - Participant lost their job.”
- “Had to move to a new job/McDonalds location and had a reduction of pay (to \$8). Moved to find work: had to move to another McDonalds location due to store closure. Rent or housing cost increase: rent kept increasing and had more utility charges.”
- “Had a temporary job/work. Moved to find work: is an older man, hard to find server positions.”

For other people experiencing chronic homelessness, it was that their employment circumstances were detrimental to their well-being and they choose to leave a *“bad job.”* Interviewer notes show the following *“Works part time in strip club. Had abusive husband.”* Another participant expressed that their work was causing health concerns and they needed to leave. Interviewer notes say, *“Change in employment status: hanging jobs, moving jobs, developed injuries on the jobs and can't do job due to injury.”* Still one more set of interviewer notes say, *“Change in employment - bad companies.”*

Health Issues

While speaking to several participants, interviewers noted numerous health issues (including general health conditions, illnesses, and injuries) that led to individuals experiencing homelessness. Interviewer notes documented that several participants reported a health condition that they experienced as a contributing factor to the cause of their initial homelessness, while others shared how their health issue led to other factors that caused their homelessness (e.g., losing their job, or accruing medical & credit card debt, etc.):

- *“My previous husband in Oklahoma beat me up. I have an auto-immune disease. Workers comp injury/health issues. Fired because I tried to sue.”*
- *“Medical bills/credit card... can't work, hurt on the job; left eye blindness, left body muscular rupture; torn ligament and muscles... Parkinson's.”*
- *“Had a stroke about 9 years ago -- affected speech”*

Disability and Mental Health

Several individuals explained that living with a disability or debilitating injury is a cause that led to their experience with homeless. One interviewer noted a participant's experience with *“Raynaud's Syndrome (hands and feet freeze up/painful); can be dangerous in the Winter.”* Participants shared about a variety of issues such as *“severe back problems,” “bone disease,”* and problems with their *“eyesight.”* Interviewer notes show that at least two participants discussed their experience with traumatic brain injury. One reported, *“Concussion/TBI caused by partner's domestic violence. Received complete lack of support/concern from emergency services. Hospital staff did not treat her well and did not seem to care.”*

Interviewers documented several participant experiences with mental health issues. The following conditions were reported by the people we interviewed:

- *“Depression.”*
- *“Untreated depression.”*
- *“Dyslexia, ADHD, Autism, manic/depression.”*



- *“Manic/depressive.”*
- *“Suffer from migraines.”*
- *“I’m a veteran. I have PTSD. It’s difficult being in groups/loud noises set me back.”*
- *“OCD hoarding issues.”*
- *“PTSD due to trauma from House Fire.”*

Illness

Many other participants identified health issues when asked if an illness had been a factor that contributed to their experience of homelessness. Interviewer notes detailed participants that had reported a single illness (e.g., narcolepsy or cancer), while many participants shared their struggle with a combination of physical and mental health related illnesses. Often notes reported that participants’ illnesses led to a loss of their employment:

- *“I have narcolepsy - I fall asleep if I don't keep moving. (participant dozed off during the survey).”*
- *“Illness – Cancer”*
- *“Illness - I've been diagnosed with epilepsy; Loss of Job - I was required to drive 9 hours/day. I have epilepsy and lost my driver's license and I can't drive anymore, beginning dementia, Parkinson's.”*
- *“Illness: COPD, Emphysema, type 2 Diabetes, Neuropathy, Arthritis, PTSD... Job loss: was a chef and had to be on feet all the time, medical problems got in the way.”*
- *“Unable to work/massive pain. rheumatoid arthritis. Have constant fear when you're on the streets/anxiety/always afraid. No way to find your way back - worry about theft/raccoons destroy tent at night...I see a doctor way out at Anschutz - difficult to get there.”*

Injury

Notes from interviews show that an injury was a contributing factor to an experience of homelessness. Similar to other health conditions, interviewers also noted that injury was not a sole factor causing individuals to experience homelessness but that many had subsequently lost their job due to an injury.

- *“He has injured his back and has medical expenses related to drug use.”*
- *“Hip problems - can't bend without pain. Can't get care. Constant pain.”*
- *“Was an electrician, injured on job, workman’s comp would not pay...could not afford lawyer to fight for him. Worked at UPS for Christmas rush but neck injury prevented success.”*
- *“loss of job is injury related”*

Money and Housing Costs

As would be expected, a lack of money and housing costs caused an experience of chronic homelessness for many people interviewed. Notes from interviewers on the causes of an individual’s homelessness experience



were sometimes as simple as, “[Eviction] once in 1960”, “Lack of money (participant was evicted because he didn't pay rent),” and “Eviction cost \$7000”. Many participants expressed that they could not pay rent or tried to pay rent late and that this did not work and led to their homeless experience. Interviewer notes show the following:

- “Lost home because could not pay mortgage. Foreclosure.”
- “Unable to pay rent: Surprise charges on rent bill and late charges on rent.”
- “Unable to pay rent: “\$400 - 500 housing is not in this area.”
- “Eviction: Late payments were denied Relationship problems: relationship with landlord”
- “Eviction: Landlord would not accept late payment, and forced eviction, would not complete a walk-through, and charged lease breaking/damage fees which were not affordable.”
- “Landlord didn't take late payment.”

Relationships

Interestingly, notes from interviews show that challenges with relationships were often a cause of chronic homelessness. Of those who answered, 48% identified relationship problems like break ups, divorce, familial conflict, domestic violence, and death of a loved one as factors that led them to lose stable housing. The relationship issues weren't overtly violent or a crisis, as one might expect, but instead seemed to demonstrate some disconnect between societal expectations and an individual's behavior. Notes from interviewers said, “Kicked out of college, at Western Iowa Tech, for Alcohol Possession. My College Campus tried to bar/ban me from campus, like using the classroom/library/computers for her work (self-employed work, didn't specify). Being discriminated against as a person experiencing homelessness. Homelessness feels like you're getting kicked, it Beats you down. You lose stuff that's vital. I had to put out the 'immediate fires' before looking for work.” Another interviewer's notes show, “Landlord was unresponsive to my walk-out request (even when I called the police) and forced me to break my lease.” Another noted that they just weren't “prepared” to live on their own: “Moved to Denver area “unprepared.” Being banned from Airbnb, because he was using it for housing and was reported. Trauma, his family put him out on the street.”

Domestic Violence

Twenty percent of participants described fleeing domestic violence as a factor that led them to lose housing. Participants reported experiencing mental, emotional, financial and physical abuse.

Several individuals reported losing housing when their partner was arrested for domestic violence. Though temporarily safe from their partners, losing them ultimately left them unable to afford rent and stay in their home. One individual described “getting a concussion from being thrown down the stairs” by her partner and losing her home when he was arrested. She got on a waitlist at a domestic violence shelter and explained that her housing was “ripped out from under” her due to her abusive partner's “negligence.”

In addition to the common barrier of shelters being at capacity, others explained that they were unable to exit homelessness as they were ineligible for existing affordable housing. One individual recalled applying for housing when she had potential income from her cosmetology license and being told she did not qualify due to her lack of veteran status and/or disability.



Individuals described being distanced from their families for various reasons. One participant recalled leaving a violent family situation only to experience stalking and harassment from multiple others. She reported having to get restraining orders against them. Another participant expressed, *“Everything became turbulent after my issues with my family and the choices I made after that,”* referring to still being estranged from her family and experiencing domestic violence from a partner.

Inversely, one individual recounted losing his housing, car, and bank account when he was accused of and arrested for domestic violence. Since he and his wife divorced, he has been *“trying to get back on his feet ever since.”*

Loss of Relationships

Of those who shared about the causes that led to their experience of homelessness, 12% attributed this to the loss of a friend or relative, occurrences like the death of a partner, family member or friend, and being distanced or estranged from loved ones.

Several individuals expressed that the death of a loved one was the main factor that led them into homelessness, leaving the family with insufficient income to pay rent and/or resources to survive. One individual reported experiencing homelessness because their spouse passed away, while another explained that her ex-husband passed away at a young age, causing the loss of child support payments.

Others recalled the death of a parent, specifically the emotional toll and/or loss of financial support as factors leading to homelessness. Several individuals cited their mothers passing away as a factor leading to homelessness. One participant recounted, *“My mom died September 2019, a day after my baby was born. She had been helping with rent, she did get to see the baby. I’m happy for that. And Giving Heart helped me pay for my mom’s cremation.”* Another explained that before their mom died, they were working regularly and taking care of their baby while their mother paid the rent. She and the father are now on the streets, while their baby stays with extended family.

Several individuals cited divorce as a factor that caused chronic homelessness. Individuals spoke to both the *“emotional process”* as well as the tangible losses that can accompany divorce: *“lost home when broke up. My ex-wife stayed in the house. I have no income.”* Another recounted, *“My wife cheated on me, let’s leave it at that. I had a lot of money, I lost everything.”* A different individual stated that they became homeless after their partner had been stealing money from them.

Some individuals recalled family conflict leading to homelessness. One described, *“I lost 3 people in an 8-9-month period. I had a falling out with my sister and niece (each of which I was living with at one time).”* Another individual shared that the loss of family support was a factor leading to homelessness: *“They gave up on me.”* Similarly, a different individual described not receiving financial support from family. The interviewer notes say, *“Has a brother who lives out of state and is doing well financially that will not help him. Other family members will not allow him access to his inheritance (a house that he would inherit from his mother if/when she passes).”*

Unsustainable Housing with Family

Many people experiencing chronic homelessness that we interviewed mentioned family circumstances leading to their homelessness. Interview notes say, *“Entered homelessness to care for brother.”* Another set of notes say, *“ex stole place.”* Another set of notes say, *“Mothers brother in law kicked him out.”* And an additional set of interview notes says, *“Family owned a house and I stayed there. The police were called too often, and I got*



kicked out.” One other participant noted that the rules for their family subsidized housing was the cause of homelessness: *“Family-oriented housing but lost custody of children and was not considered family.”*

Multiple and Connected Causes of Chronic Homelessness

As can be read, although we have identified causes into primary themes, many times it was the accumulation of issues, rather than a single issue or theme that led to homelessness. Interviewer notes from one participant provides a good illustration: *“Unable to pay rent led to eviction. Injury: broken hip. Place I was in was condemned everyone was put out. Left homeless. No resources or other housing.”* Notes from another interview say, *“Him and his sister both lost their jobs because companies closed. Eviction: out of work/had an accident. Loss of friend/relative: father (failure to thrive); low credit score/no credit score: now it is, wasn't before; alcohol: after dad passed.”* Notes from another say, *“Change in employment status: lost job, Changes to/problems with benefits: no benefits, Relationship problems: mom kicked him out.”* One interviewer’s notes demonstrate the layered obstacles that led to an individual’s experience of homelessness: *“Change in employment status: had a hard time keeping a job because of his addiction/substance use. Loss of job: lost job at Starbucks due to an argument with co-workers. Disability/Injury: He was hit by a car 10 years ago, which caused a lower-back problem, which made it hard to keep his job at UPS. Housing waitlist times: subsidized housing costs too much and you have to be on a raffle to be chosen for housing. Mental Health reasons: Depression & Paranoia. Moved to find work: moved to Denver for work and had an interview set-up before coming. Relationship Problems: ‘I wish my family was more supportive.’ Alcohol: Used alcohol to cope with problems with his family, and the cost of weed/marijuana was too high. Drugs: Became dependent on Marijuana. Unable to pay rent: had a \$300 bill that he couldn't pay for on Airbnb.”*

In conclusion, while there are certainly themes from interviewers showing the different causes of chronic homelessness, it seems that in many cases, if not most cases, there were a series of related causes leading an interview participant to their homelessness experience. Housing is expensive, was often shared with family, and loss of a job, wages, or some other crisis made the dynamics of maintaining housing untenable, which ultimately led to an experience of homelessness.



Q2: What prevents individuals in the Tri-Cities region from exiting out of homelessness?

Figure 8 displays reported barriers to securing permanent housing by interviewees experiencing chronic homelessness in the Tri-Cities. Figure 8 shows participants reported an average of 5.30 ($SD=3.82$) barriers that prevent them from exiting homelessness, with Rent or Housing Cost Increase as the highest reported barrier followed by Low Credit Score/No Credit Score, and Inability to Pay Rent.

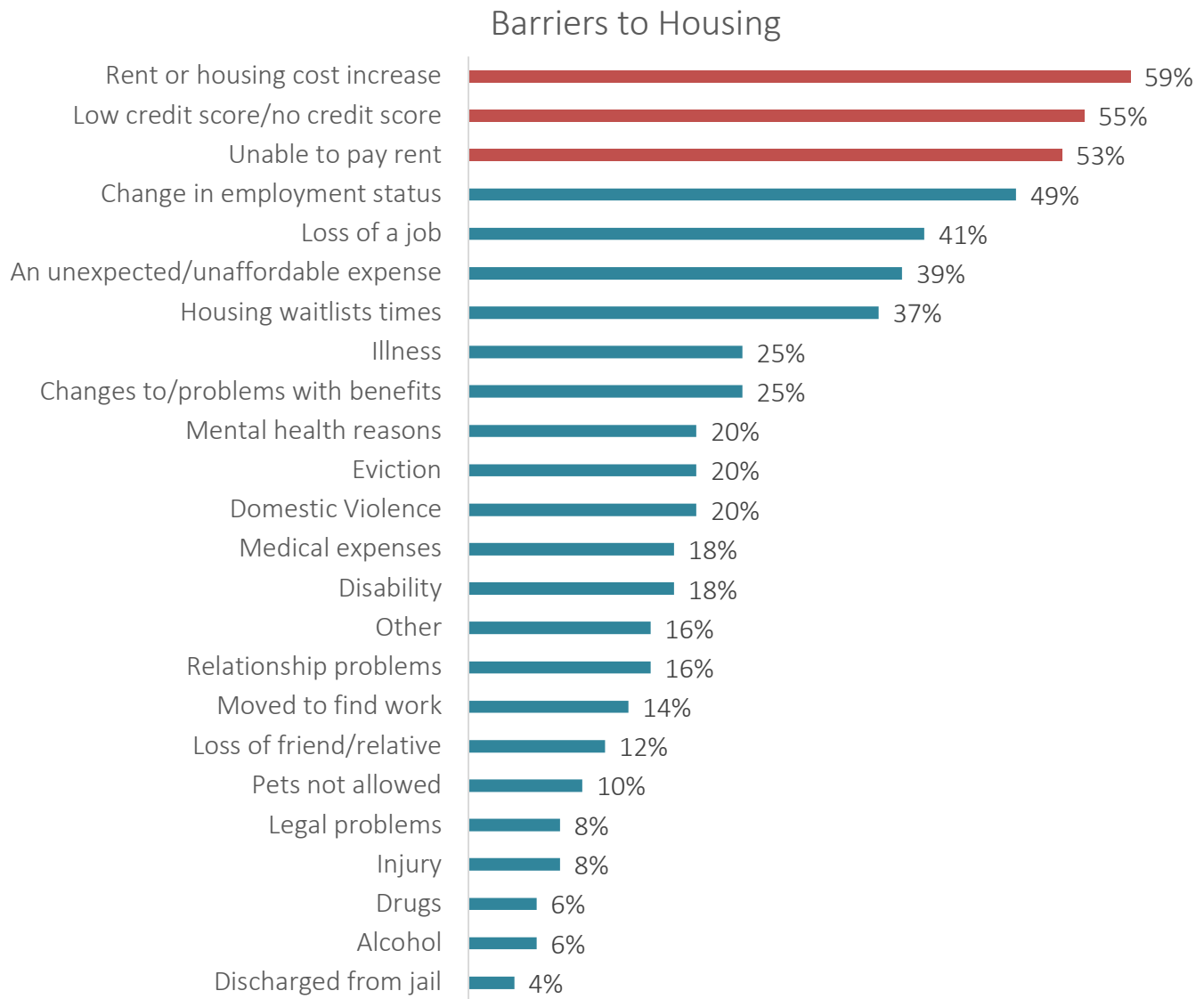


Figure 8. Reported barriers to securing permanent housing.



Participant Themes

Study interviews illuminated numerous barriers in individual's efforts to exit homelessness. Individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in the Tri-Cities area often reported that a single barrier would often snowball and culminate into a collection of roadblocks. Similar to our reporting of the causes of chronic homelessness, the barriers to exiting homelessness will be organized alphabetically. Many barriers to exiting homelessness were also seen as a frequent cause of homelessness. Thus, readers may want to reflect on the powerful impact some causes of homelessness have on an individual's ability to exit homelessness.

Criminal Justice & Legal Issues

Many participants reported their past involvement in the criminal justice system as a barrier to their ability to secure permanent housing and exit homelessness. Interview notes included examples of how several individuals were discriminated against when searching for housing, as participants found it challenging to find housing with their *"criminal background"* (e.g., a shoplifting charge, felony conviction, probation, or having warrants).

Notes from one interview report that an individual shared that after he was discharged from prison (after serving time for a felony), that he was *"considered a violent offender. Just the way I look prevents me from getting work or housing."* In another interview's notes, a participant shared that his felony charge limits his ability to secure housing for the next seven years. Because of these restrictions, he has never had housing in Colorado and added that his eviction in Indiana also prevents his access to permanent housing. Interview notes from another participant reported that they *"cannot get into shelters because of his felony."*

While the most common understanding of how a criminal background or conviction prevents access to housing is through background checks, participants reported other barriers to exiting homelessness associated with their criminal justice involvement. For example, in notes from one interview, a participant shared that *"I have two felonies from 15 years ago and I can't get them expunged. That costs \$2,000.00. I have no money. Can't get an apartment."*

Other notes from participant interviews state:

- *"Discharged from jail - somewhat impacts ability to get a new place."*
- *"Participant and her husband's criminal background prevents them from moving to find better housing in a safer location. They would like to move to Denver or closer to Denver."*

Finally, one participant reported that they had a trespassing charge *"because I was trying to use the bathroom."* When applied to people experiencing homelessness, such trespassing laws serve to, in effect, criminalize homelessness.

Domestic Violence

For some individuals, domestic violence served as more of a barrier than a cause of homelessness. Several individuals expressed that simply being a woman experiencing homelessness put them at higher risk of violence and sexual assault. One individual, a survivor of domestic violence, described how this risk is consistently in their mind: *"I am at risk of being a target (as a woman) of assault and stalking, and I'm having to always look over my shoulder."*



Another individual recounted having her truck stolen with her ID and tools inside. She reported being attacked and raped several times since experiencing homelessness and feeling as though the police did nothing to help. Without an ID, this individual expressed that she had been unable to get social security disability insurance (SSDI) or other benefits.

Employment

Interview participants experiencing chronic homelessness were able to describe to interviewers how not having employment and being homeless creates a cascade of issues that make it extremely challenging to get a job. One interviewer's notes show the following as a participant's barriers to exiting homelessness: *"Being Unemployed/Not having a Job. Not having somewhere to put my belongings, where they could, would like a place to store stuff for you at Ready Labor Denver a Day-Labor program that has limited Availability/and a Waitlist."* Another participant made the connection between being employed and securing housing clear: *"Not having an alarm clock or bathroom (makes it hard to get/keep a job)."* Interview notes from another participant simply said, *"Can't find a job being homeless."* One participant looked at employment as the key to exiting homelessness and is quoted as saying, *"If I get a job I can get off the streets."*

Other participants seemed to suggest that finding a job, or the right job, was a challenge. Notes from one interview state the following as a barrier to exiting homelessness: *"Finding a stable job that interests me."* Notes from another interviewer state *"No cell phone or tools for job."* One interviewer's notes seem to sum up the frustration and challenges that a lack of employment plays on exiting homelessness when they cite a participant as saying, *"employer terminated me. When you're in the hole, not easy to get out."*

Financial Well-Being

Interviews with people in the Tri-Cities experiencing chronic homelessness identified challenges with financial well-being as being a barrier to securing housing. Specifically, the themes of credit scores, eviction histories, and debt were cited as barriers to securing housing. One participant, as noted in interviewer notes, cited the following as a barrier to exiting homelessness: *"Low credit/no credit - Haven't established any credit, and have late payments/debt with Sprint."* Another participant (as stated in interviewer notes) simply stated, *"It is hard to build credit."* Another participant noted how their eviction history negatively impacted their credit, which prevents them from obtaining housing: *"The eviction from my apartment in February 2016 is still on my Credit Report/Rental History."* Another participant stated to the interviewer that it is the debt from their last housing that is keeping them from securing housing now: *"Still cannot afford the \$3,000 charge from apt for damages and breaking of the lease/eviction."*

Health Issues & Injuries

As one might expect, participants shared chronic health conditions as a primary barrier to their ability to obtain permanent housing. One participant reported her diagnosis of Raynaud's Syndrome (which causes her hands and feet to freeze up, resulting in significant pain) prevents her from being hired for many jobs that require physical labor. This woman went on to share that she was especially fearful for what might happen if she were to remain homeless during the upcoming winter season, as Raynaud's Syndrome can become especially dangerous in cold temperatures.

Interviewers also recorded that participants experienced varying injuries (some life threatening) that acted as barriers to exiting homelessness. In one interview, a participant was quoted saying that they were *"getting older"* (had a bad back and legs), which made it harder to find work. In that same interview, notes show that the participant shared that they were *"assaulted/stabbed."* Finally, another participant shared *"I was hit by a*



car,” and that the resulting injury understandably prevented him from walking for a period of time, and *“set me back”* for a while.

For other participants, the exasperating process of applying for and being denied Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits felt like the greatest barrier to exiting homelessness, especially for those who are unable to work because of their condition. Some interview notes captured that many people are qualified for SSDI and they have to apply multiple times before their applications are approved. Interviewer notes say:

- *“Can't get disability help.”*
- *“As a veteran it is hard to get on Disability. The process of getting disability services at the VA takes a long time.”*
- *“Disability = it is hard to get on Social Security Disability.”*
- *“Couldn't have Access to Physical Therapy, to help with his back problems so that he could keep his job. Many Homeless Services are only given to the elderly, families, children, and people with a disability.”*
- *“I haven't been able to get disability assistance. I have no income.”*
- *“Trying to get disability.”*
- *“Still waiting for SSDI.”*

Housing Costs

When asked about barriers to accessing affordable housing, participants overwhelmingly highlighted the current lack of affordable housing options in the Tri-Cities area. One participant noted, *“Housing easily costs two times as much as it did before.”* Another interviewer’s notes say, *“It costs \$1,000 for a studio (too much). Unable to pay rent: Costs too much.”* Another person experiencing chronic homelessness is quoted by the interviewer as saying, *“Can't just have one person in an apartment in order to pay rent (have to have house/roommates).”*

In addition to housing costs, the themes of employment, financial well-being, and inaccessible subsidized housing also emerged as barriers for people experiencing chronic homelessness to find and maintain housing.

Inaccessible Subsidized Housing

Whether personally experienced or perceived, many participants commented on the long waitlists and time burden associated with subsidized housing in the Tri-Cities area. Many stated that attempting to access housing support was not worth their time or energy. Interviewer notes state, *“I haven't applied because of what I have heard about the length of time it takes.”* Notes from another interviewer state the following about housing waitlists: *“Very long waitlists, so she hasn't bothered, and would rather just work for housing.”* Notes from another participant’s interview states, *“Got setup on a housing waitlist, but was never called back about status/placement.”*

Further, due to the administrative and time strain of navigating housing assistance programs, some individuals were simply not ready to begin the process. Another interviewer’s notes say, *“don't want the stress of having to look. I don't want to work about housing & work at the same time. Stuff has fallen so far apart, it is like being on*



a constant hamster wheel, and I want my stuff to be in order before I look for housing." Notes from another interview state, "Lack of permanent housing. Too many processes to getting services."

Loss of Relationships

Similarly, several participants reported relationship loss as a barrier to exiting homelessness. Specifically, individuals talked about the death of a loved one leading to mental health problems that made it difficult to obtain housing. One individual explained that their dad passing away six months before, coupled with alcohol use, led them to depression. They added that they also have a felony on their record from years ago that makes it difficult to get work.

Another individual shared that a friend or relative committing suicide affected her relationships, causing conflict with their sister and niece. The conflict contributed to a falling out with her sister and niece, which left her without family support and a place to stay. Another individual cited losing a friend to overdose as a barrier to exiting homelessness.

Several participants spoke about grief from the loss of a friend or relative affecting their ability to exit homelessness. One individual shared that her husband died, and her kids were out of the house, leaving her *"on her own."* She expressed needing a grief support group and help getting an ID. Another individual reported losing both their mother and daughter in a short time span. Finally, one individual explained how losing her mom and the housing they shared acted as a barrier to obtaining housing: they could not *"show good rental history or credit, have to have enough to pay rent. I have no steady job history, no pay stubs. Odd jobs are paid in cash and I never have much money."*



Q3: What services do, or do not, exist for individuals experiencing homelessness in the Tri-Cities region?

Existing Services

The CHHR team asked participants to identify services in the Tri-Cities they can access and use most often. **Figure 9** below presents these services in the form of a word cloud. Participants primarily reported frequent access to food through non-profits and faith-based organizations in the community. Many participants also noted public benefits, such as food stamps, social security, and Medicare or Medicaid. Several participants identified organizations like Wellspring Church, Giving Heart, and Gracefull Café as locations they go to for food and other basic needs. A full list of the aforementioned organizations can be found in Appendix C.



Needed Services

Participants were also asked to share about resources and services they find difficult to access in the Tri-Cities. **Figure 10** below shows that participants reported needing housing, access to restrooms and showers, dental care, access to transportation, childcare, job search assistance, and other types of assistance. An important result to note is that participants feel they have access to resources that address some of their immediate needs, such as food and clothing. As previously mentioned, these needs are met through services provided by non-profit organizations and public benefits. However, results from the survey show that participants do not have access to resources and services that affect their health in the short and long term; such as housing, regular access to hygiene care, and medical services. A completed list of needed services is provided in Appendix D. When making decisions around service provision and meeting the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness in the Tri-Cities, it will be very important to consider these holistic, health needs of individuals experiencing homelessness.



Figure 9. Word cloud of reported existing services.



Figure 10. Word cloud of reported needed services.



Challenges in Interviewing a Hidden Population

This study was commissioned with the understanding, that while the Point in Time (PIT) survey (MDHI, 2020) provides necessary and invaluable information about individuals experiencing homelessness in the Tri-Cities area, policymakers in Sheridan, Englewood and Littleton desired to gain a more robust, thorough, and inclusive understanding of unhoused individuals in their community. Previous research has highlighted several limitations of the PIT, such as its tendency to systemically undercount unsheltered adults and youth (National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2017).

Previous researchers (Weare, 2019) and policymakers (U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development, 2016) have recognized the challenges of studying the entire population of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness. Many individuals that may be categorized as “chronically homeless” are hidden and intentionally avoid being studied or contacted by representatives of the city or community organizations (National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2017; Weare, 2019).

Recognizing that many individuals experiencing chronic homelessness in the region do not seek out services or support from community organizations (and intend to stay hidden), our team made a concerted and deliberate effort to reach out to a community of individuals experiencing homelessness who often avoided accessing services. With the help of leadership from the Change the Trend network, our research team interviewed over a dozen individuals affiliated or staying at an encampment along the South Platte River (just blocks north of the Englewood-Denver border at the 2800 block of South Platte River Drive), which has been featured several times in the *Englewood Herald*, often referred to as the Greenbelt (Gilbert, 2020a; 2020b; 2020c).

It is important to note that both the demographics and results of this survey primarily reflect individuals who sought out and received support from homeless service providers in the Tri-Cities area (e.g., community organizations affiliated with *Change the Trend*) or were present at our data collection trip along the Platte River. Consequently, it is possible that the overall demographics, experiences, and challenges faced by the entire population of individuals experiencing homelessness in the Tri-Cities area may look different than those reported in this assessment.

In an effort to share some insight into our experiences collecting data “in the field,” our team provided the following reflection of data collection along the Greenbelt.

Impressions from Data Collection along the Greenbelt

Participants along the Greenbelt specifically stated that having a bathroom and trash service at the camp would make a big difference for both them and the public. Some also said the best way to find out about services is for providers to conduct outreach at campsites. Some people were familiar with local resources while others were not. One person believed he was eligible for SSDI and Medicare but wasn’t sure how to find out. The people with whom we spoke were familiar with sweeps happening regularly in the area and expressed frustration about having to move along without receiving helpful information about resources from the police. Our team learned that a couple weeks later, there was a sweep at this camp. The section below shares insight into why public places like the Greenbelt are preferable sleeping areas to shelters.

Where Individuals Experiencing Homelessness Stay



Several participants reported staying in “other” locations that serve as alternative or temporary shelters. One participant reported staying in an “*abandoned building*,” while another reported staying in “*a hole in someone’s backyard with a tarp covering the top*.” Several others mentioned sleeping on “*a bus or the light rail*” as a way to stay warm during the winter. Feeling safe is one of the primary reasons individuals choose to sleep outdoors rather than in shelters. One participant shared that they “*don’t like being inside [and] prefer to stay outside*.” Despite feeling vulnerable on the street, participants reported feeling safer there than staying in a shelter. One woman explained that she “*feels like [I’m] risking my life every day... [She reported] being attacked several times and just had all her stuff stolen. [Now she has] no clothes to keep her warm*,” but she chose to stay on the street because “*shelters are not a safe place to be*.”

Shelters often require individuals to separate based on gender and age, which is a deterrent for participants, as many reported feeling safer with their partner or friends. Participants recalled previous shelter stays where they were required to stay separated from their children if they were opposite genders. One participant was told their 13-year-old son could not stay with them and would have to sleep in the “men’s” section of the shelter, which ultimately led to their decision to sleep outside. Some female participants shared they had previously been sexually assaulted, so they did not feel safe sleeping near strangers and chose to sleep on the street with other trusted individuals rather than inside. **Staying inside, away from the elements, is critical to surviving Colorado’s varied climate, and feeling safe in those indoor spaces is also vital for individuals to maintain mental and emotional wellbeing, in addition to physical safety.** It is important to consider all facets of a person’s wellbeing when creating shelter/housing strategies for individuals experiencing homelessness.

Implications of Domestic Violence Leading to Homelessness

Female participants’ experiences in shelters often led to them sharing about experiences with domestic violence. This important finding is highlighted in our results because several female participants shared they are survivors of domestic violence. Existing literature also shows that domestic violence is highly prevalent among people experiencing homelessness, especially women and children. The American Civil Liberties Union (2006) (ACLU) reported that approximately 50% of people who are homeless reported domestic violence (DV)/intimate partner violence (IPV) as the primary cause for their loss of permanent housing, and this percentage is likely higher when considering that cases of DV/IPV are underreported. ACLU also reported the results of another survey that showed 57% of the parents who were surveyed reported leaving their permanent housing because of domestic violence, and another from 1990 that states “half of all homeless women and children are fleeing abuse” (ACLU, 2006).

Women and children fleeing abusive households are often not financially prepared to acquire their own housing because, in addition to physical violence and control, abusers often control several other aspects of survivors’ lives including finances and social networks. As a result, once they leave their abuser, survivors often have very little money or people they can turn to. Baker et al (2010) explain that, “Many women leaving abusive relationships and almost all women accessing domestic violence victim services are not immediately able to pay the deposit, first and last month’s rent and 100% of the ongoing rent. Thus, many women victims, without some kind of assistance to obtain permanent housing, may be left to find a temporary solution to their housing needs while hoping for permanent housing in the future.” Our results suggest a need to provide immediate financial support to survivors of domestic violence to help them leave their homes, the streets, and find housing to ensure their safety and allow them to mentally, emotionally, and physically heal.

Disability Benefits

Lastly, we will discuss issues around accessing Social Security Disability Income (SSDI). Lack of access to SSDI is a barrier for many individuals that participated in our study. In many cases, individuals living with a disability are



unable to work or work the same job they had prior to the event that led to their current condition leaving individuals unemployed or underemployed. Interviewer notes captured participants' belief that they could afford housing if they were able to acquire SSDI. It will be important for the Tri-Cities to examine the processes that individuals go through to access public benefits. Individuals experiencing homelessness do not have regular, consistent access to resources like phones or internet, which are required in order to apply for these benefits and present an additional barrier to acquiring benefits. It's important to reiterate that several participants who feel they likely qualify for SSDI also feel that acquiring these benefits would provide enough financial support to secure housing. It may be important to examine these government benefits systems to identify and potentially eliminate barriers within these processes to ensure qualified individuals are receiving benefits that could help them leave the streets

In conclusion, individuals experiencing homelessness in the Tri-Cities stay in a variety of places. The majority of our participants reported staying in the streets as well as other public spaces rather than in shelters. Staying outside seemed to provide a sense of safety and control for participants. This was also true among participants who had previously lived with violent partners. As the Tri-Cities continues to work towards securing places for individuals to stay that are off the street, it will be important to further understand how individuals experiencing homelessness prefer to be sheltered.

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One of the primary motivations behind conducting this study was to garner reliable data to support Tri-Cities stakeholders in building policies, programs, and services to address chronic homelessness. Based on the findings of the assessment, three categories of response seem appropriate. These categories include 1) the importance of holistic approaches, 2) the primacy of housing services, and 3) the importance of wrap-around services. Each is described below, along with specific policy/action opportunities.

Holistic Approach

The assessment's findings related to the compounded nature of the causes of homelessness (6.4 causes on average per respondent) indicate a notable multidimensionality to the path towards homelessness. While the top five causes of homelessness are primarily economic in nature (job loss, housing costs, employment status changes, unexpected expenses), the top ten involve significant personal issues (relationship problems, loss of friend/relative, mental health concerns, disability). Therefore, as stakeholders develop action steps to address the issue, a similarly multidimensional, holistic framework should be adopted in order to create strategies that truly meet presenting needs in their totality.

Housing

The collective voice of respondents is clear in its call for housing services as the primary need with regards to addressing homelessness. In response, stakeholders should explore how to provide as diverse an array of housing-centric services as possible, including, but not limited to:

- **Safe parking/camping spaces:** Given the number of people experiencing homelessness who indicated that they sleep on the streets or in a car, initiatives could be explored regarding designating space to allow for such activity in a safe, controlled manner.
- **Shelter:** The number of shelter beds in the Tri-Cities could be expanded, with particular focus on consistency of the service and connection to greater services at shelter locations.
- **Rapid Rehousing:** The Tri-Cities community may look into securing rapid-rehousing options for individuals and families to quickly provide help to anyone who finds themselves homeless. This service seems uniquely appropriate given the indications in the data that many respondents began experiencing homelessness as a result of a crisis situation. Immediate, short-term housing can be provided in conjunction with support services to help clients regain stability. A possible path to securing this type of service may be to contract with a local motel to access housing stock and partner with community organizations to provide services.
- **Permanent Supportive Housing:** Respondent data indicates that the general level of instability during the experience of homelessness and the journey out of homelessness can be a contributing factor to peoples' inability to leave homelessness behind. For individuals transitioning out of chronic homelessness in particular, offering permanent supportive housing may be the best option to facilitate long-term transformation in their lives and get them out of cycles of justice involvement, ER visits, and occupancy of private/public property.
- **Affordable Housing and Access:** From both a preventative and responsive standpoint, addressing the housing affordability crisis in the Tri-Cities area is a profoundly necessary step to lessening the impact of homelessness. Given the data indications that cost of living and the inability to afford housing is one of



the primary causes of homelessness and barriers to leaving homelessness, this step should be prioritized. Increasing housing density, removing barriers to accessing a lease, and promoting intentionally affordable housing units throughout the Tri-Cities are possible paths to promote housing affordability and access.

Wrap-Around Services

While the data around the causes of homelessness and barriers to leaving homelessness indicate a slight predominance of economic factors, other social, relational, and personal factors clearly play a compounding role as both causes and barriers. Therefore, all housing services ought to be accompanied and supported by a diverse array of wrap-around services including, but not limited to:

- **Healthcare:** Those experiencing homelessness and moving beyond homelessness need to have physical and mental health concerns addressed if they are to be set up for long-term stability. Partnerships with local healthcare providers, community mental health, free clinics, and organizations focused on Medicare/Medicaid support should be developed and implemented.
- **Employment Support:** Those individuals who are simultaneously homeless and employed or able to be employed ought to be supported in either accessing, maintaining, or growing in their employment endeavors. Access to meaningful, well-paying work can both secure economic stability and promote the restoration of dignity in the lives of those moving beyond homelessness.
- **Legal Aid:** Respondents indicate a clear trend of compounded justice-involvement and consequent legal matters to be an often-overwhelming barrier to leaving homelessness. Legal aid services may be deeply helpful for individuals seeking to sort through and resolve their justice involvement.
- **Relational Support:** Beyond specific services, the transition out of homelessness can often be lonely and intimidating. Therefore, relational support networks should be formed around those taking these steps towards stability, to walk with them on this journey on an organic level. This type of intangible support can be deeply impactful and truly solidify transformation in a person's life. A specific pathway forward to secure this service may be to partner with faith communities to provide mentorship and relational support.



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The following appendices include detailed descriptions of our methods as well as a copy of our survey measures.

Appendix A: Methodology

Participants

The assessment aimed to secure participation from adults (age 18+) experiencing homelessness who either lived in or spent a significant amount of time in Englewood, Littleton, and/or Sheridan, CO. The operational definition of “homeless” was intentionally broad so as to secure participation from as large a portion of the homeless community as possible. Any adult living without a permanent address, including individuals who may have been camping on the streets, staying in a shelter, living in a car or RV, staying in a motel, living with friends/family, were eligible to complete a survey.

Participants were recruited by working closely with local service providers and other community organizations. Many agencies exist throughout the Tri-Cities that see, serve, create space for, and interact with the homeless community on a regular basis. Recruitment for the assessment occurred by capitalizing on this already-established access and relationship. The Change the Trend Network (CTT), a group of agencies and stakeholders that seeks to build collaboration around addressing homelessness, played a large role in building the necessary bridges between researchers, service providers, and people experiencing homelessness. For example, agencies such as Gracefull Cafe in Littleton, Giving Heart Day Shelter in Englewood, and Cafe180 in Englewood were not only willing to host data collectors but to actively connect them with participants in their spaces.

Design

The Center for Housing and Homelessness Research (CHHR) staff developed the survey. Working in consultation with a select few stakeholders within the Tri-Cities, they then developed a plan to recruit and train volunteer surveyors and send them into the community to conduct surveys with people experiencing homelessness.

The CHHR staff and Tri-Cities stakeholders developed three categories of access for data collection. The goals of this structure were as follows: 1) to evenly distribute access points throughout the Tri-Cities; 2) to diversify the pathways of access so as to make contact with as many sub-demographics within the homeless community as possible; and 3) to offer surveyors a wide array of data collection options, such as setting and location. The options included:

Weekly Access Points: Seven agencies throughout the Tri-Cities offered their physical spaces during their regular hours of operation to host surveyors. These agencies were either specific service providers for people experiencing homelessness, and therefore would consistently have potential participants in their spaces, or they were community organizations whose patrons very often are experiencing homelessness. Four agencies were located in Englewood, two were in Littleton, and one was in Sheridan. On any given day, at least two agencies were ready and willing to host surveyors.

The weekly access points included:

- The Well at Wellspring Church, Englewood (Sundays, 11am - 2pm)
- The Sheridan Public Library, Sheridan (Mondays - Sundays, staggered hours)
- Cafe 180, Englewood (Mondays - Saturdays, 11am - 2pm)



- Giving Heart, Englewood (Tuesdays, 10am - 3pm and Thursdays, 1am - 2pm)
- Graceful Cafe, Littleton (Tuesdays - Saturdays, 7:00am - 2:00pm)
- A Stronger Cord, Englewood (Wednesdays, 6pm - 8pm)
- Break Bread, Littleton (Saturdays, 4pm - 6pm)

Special Events: Three agencies agreed to host one-time, large-scale events aimed to provide specialized incentives to bring large groups of potential participants to a specific location to take the survey. The presence of additional services at the events was an added bonus. The events were planned several weeks apart throughout March and April 2020. In order to access the Tri-Cities evenly, one event was planned to be hosted in Littleton, one in Sheridan, and one in Englewood. The Shelter Night at Ascension Lutheran Church was held on March 10, 2020. Unfortunately, due to the spread of COVID-19, the other two special events were canceled and will likely not be rescheduled to ensure the safety of participants and interviewers.

The events included:

- Shelter Night at Ascension Lutheran Church: The Severe Weather Shelter Network offered to open its shelter at Ascension Lutheran Church in Littleton, regardless of the weather, for the purpose of encouraging their regular clientele to participate. This event was planned for the evening of March 10th, 2020
- Shower vouchers at Sheridan Recreation Center: The Sheridan Recreation Center offered to host an event consisting of offering free shower vouchers for an afternoon along with providing space for interviews to happen in a meeting room. The event was scheduled for April 2, 2020. The date and time of the event was strategic in that it would happen alongside the Center's food bank in order to recruit some regular clients.
- Shelter Night at The Sacred Grace Church: The Sacred Grace, a local church in Englewood, offered to host a shelter night on April 24, 2020. This event would provide two meals and shelter for an evening. Additionally, Bayaud Enterprises offered their shower and/or laundry trucks to park in the church's parking lot to offer additional services.

Street Outreach: On a regular basis, teams of surveyors were scheduled to go into the community and recruit people experiencing homelessness to take the survey directly where they were staying. The AllHealth Network's Crisis Intervention Team, a group of mental health professionals contracted to co-respond with the Englewood, Littleton, and Sheridan Police Departments, offered to give direction and guidance regarding where to find people experiencing homelessness as well as best practices for engaging.

Volunteers

Change the Trend recruited 16 volunteers within their agencies to assist with data collection. Five additional CHHR staff and consultants brought the team total to 21. On February 29, 2020, Wellspring Church in Englewood hosted a volunteer data collection training led by the research team. The training included an overview of the context and purpose of the assessment, guidance on survey administration and scheduling volunteer shifts at weekly access points, planning around how surveys and incentives would be distributed to volunteers, and time for questions and answers. CHHR staff utilized the Sign-up Genius platform to schedule surveyors at specific access points on a weekly basis.

Materials

The following materials were utilized in order to facilitate the assessment:



Surveys: Surveys were conducted in printed format to accommodate the desires of the volunteer team. When developing the survey, CHHR staff adapted much of the content from the VI-SPDAT assessment to fit the primary question of the assessment: In the Tri-Cities, what factors contribute to homelessness and what factors prevent people from exiting homelessness?

Prior to starting the survey, interviewers were instructed to complete a cover sheet to help with tracking gift card distribution and to prevent survey duplication. This cover sheet asked for participant's first and last name, date of birth, the interviewer's name, date of interview, gift card number, and access point name. This sheet would be removed at a later time and the information used solely for gift card tracking and to prevent survey duplication. Cover sheets are stored in the CHHR office at the University of Denver and participant names and other identifying information will not be included in this report.

All interviewers received a script to utilize during data collection to maintain consistency across interviewers. The survey measures included a demographics section (current city of residence, length of homelessness, age, race, date of birth, education level, etc.) followed by a series of questions about factors that led the participant to experience homelessness as well as factors preventing them from leaving homelessness. Next, participants were asked a series of questions about services they currently access and/or wish were available followed by questions about their experience with housing. Two final open-ended questions were asked to give the participant a chance to offer any further data.

After each survey was completed, the interviewer dropped it off at LoveINC in Littleton. Once per week, CHHR staff picked up the completed surveys, entered the identifying information from the cover sheet into a Google spreadsheet, and distributed an updated list of participants to the surveyor team to avoid duplication.

Gift Card Incentives: Each participant was given a gift card to King Soopers as compensation for the service of their participation. The City of Sheridan provided 200 \$25 gift cards to be used for this purpose. In addition, Craig Hospital in Englewood donated \$500 to help fund incentives. CHHR staff distributed a stock of gift cards and surveys to each volunteer prior to each time they were present at an access point. The CHHR staff member who distributed the gift card marked the gift card number in a Google spreadsheet as they were given out. Additionally, each interviewer marked the gift card number on each survey as it was given to each participant. By comparing these two data pools, CHHR staff members were able to track each gift card and ensure that each one was distributed to a participant.

Partner Agencies: In total, 15 Tri-Cities agencies offered their partnership to help conduct the assessment. The agencies, as well as the capacity in which they partnered, are as follows:

- A Stronger Cord: served as a weekly access point
- AllHealth Network: offered CIT Team to consult on street outreach
- Ascension Lutheran Church: provided shelter for the first special event
- Bayaud Enterprises: offered shower and/or laundry truck for third special event
- Break Bread: served as a weekly access point
- Cafe180: served as a weekly access point
- Giving Heart: served as a weekly access point and as the warming station for the first special event
- Graceful Cafe: served as a weekly access point
- HAAT Force: mobilized volunteer surveyors
- LoveINC: mobilized volunteer surveyors, served as drop-off location for completed surveys
- Sheridan Public Library: served as a weekly access point
- Severe Weather Shelter Network: sponsored the first special event



- Sheridan Recreation Center: offered free shower vouchers and hosted second special event
- The Sacred Grace Church: hosted third special event
- Wellspring Church: served as a weekly access point, hosted the volunteer training, and mobilized volunteers to be surveyors
-

Digital Platforms: CHHR staff and volunteers utilized two digital platforms in order to facilitate data collection and incentive tracking. Sign-up Genius was used on a weekly basis to schedule surveyors at specific access points. Additionally, Google Drive was used to track gift card distribution and participants on a weekly basis so as to avoid duplication.

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Appendix B: Survey Measures

Cover Page

Before starting the survey, verify whether they ever or are currently experiencing homelessness in Littleton, Englewood, or Sheridan.

Participant First Name:	
Participant Last Name:	
Date of Birth:	
Interviewer Name:	
Date of interview:	
Gift Card Number – last four digits:	
Access Point Name:	

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Tri-Cities Survey on Individuals
Experiencing Chronic Homelessness

[Please read the following to participants at the start of the survey]

- Hello, My name is _[interviewer name]__
- Arapahoe County has partnered with the Center for Housing and Homelessness Research at the University of Denver to learn about individuals' experiences with homelessness in Englewood, Littleton, and Sheridan. I am here with the Center to learn about your experiences living without permanent housing.
- The goal of this project is to learn about the causes of homelessness among individuals residing in the Englewood, Littleton, and Sheridan area as well as factors that prevent individuals from gaining permanent housing. The Center for Housing and Homelessness Research will create a report for Arapahoe County with the information we learn to inform the county's decisions around services and policies to address homelessness in this region.
- Your participation is greatly valued by Arapahoe County. By sharing your experiences, you are helping to inform policies and county decisions.
- All of the information you share will be confidential and will only be shared in a summary of all of the interviews we collect. For tracking purposes, I will only ask for your full name and date of birth to help us track each interview and to help avoid survey duplication.
- The interview will take about 25 minutes.
- Your participation is voluntary. You can skip any question you prefer not to answer. Some of the interview questions might make you feel uncomfortable. At any time including after you've started the interview you may skip any of the questions, ask to take a break, and/or end the interview early.
- You will still receive a gift card if you skip questions, take a break, or end the interview early.
- Do you have any questions about the interview?
- Would you like to proceed with the interview?
 - Yes [continue interview]
 - No [end interview]

Are you currently experiencing homelessness?

- Yes
- No

If yes to this question, continue with the interview. If no, thank them for their time and end the interview.



Demographics

In which county do you currently reside? [Frequencies]

If they answer "Arapahoe," ask "How long have you been in Arapahoe County?" [Frequencies]

Years: _____

Months: _____

In which town do you currently reside? [Frequencies]

- Englewood
- Sheridan
- Littleton
- Other: _____

In the past two years, have you lived in a shelter or on the street? [Frequencies]

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

If so, how many times? _____

If "yes" to the previous question [Frequencies]:

What is an approximate length of time you have lived on the streets or in shelters? _____

Prefer not to answer

In the past two years, where have you slept? (Check all that apply) [Frequencies]

- Emergency Shelter
- Streets
- Car
- Van
- RV
- With family
- With friends
- River/Lake Front
- Campsites/Parks
- Tent
- Hotel/motel
- Other: _____

Where did you sleep last night? [Frequencies]

- Emergency Shelter
- Streets
- Car
- Van



- RV
- With family
- With friends
- River/Lake Front
- Campsites/Parks
- Tent
- Hotel/motel
- Other: _____

Are you currently on any housing waitlists? [Frequencies]

- Yes
- No
- If yes, for where and how long? _____
- Prefer not to answer

What is your gender? [Mark the most appropriate response] [Frequencies and phi correlation with factors]

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Transgender Female
- Transgender Male
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

What is your race? [mark all that apply] [Frequencies and phi correlation with factors]

- African American/Black
- Alaskan Native (specify): _____
- Asian
- Biracial
- Latinx
- Native American (specify): _____
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (specify): _____
- Multiracial
- White, non-Latinx
- Other
- Unknown
- Prefer not to answer

What is the highest grade in school you completed? [Frequencies and phi correlation with factors]

- K-8
- Some high school
- High School Graduate
- GED
- Some College
- College Graduate



- Post-Graduate
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

Do you have children? [descriptives and phi correlation with factors]

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

If yes, how many? _____

Are you raising children as a single parent? [frequencies and/or descriptives, phi correlation with factors]

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

Factors Section of the Survey

[First, I am going to ask you about a number of possible causes of homelessness. Please respond to all that apply to your experience and, if you're comfortable, feel free to share about these experiences.]

What factors, if any, led you to lose permanent housing/experience homelessness?			
Mark all that apply to you:	Yes	Prefer not to answer	Interviewer Notes
An unexpected, unaffordable expense			
Change in employment status			
Changes to/problems with benefits			
Disability			
Discharged from jail			
Discharged from the military			
Domestic violence			
Eviction			
Forced to foreclose on home			
Housing waitlist times			
Illness			
Injury			
Legal problems			
Loss of a job			
Loss of friend/relative			
Low credit score/no credit score			



Medical expenses			
Mental health reasons			
Moved to find work			
Pets not allowed			
Relationship problems			
Rent or housing cost increase			
Substance use:			
a. Alcohol			
b. Drugs			
Unable to pay rent			
Other (specify):			

What factors, if any, prevent you from exiting homelessness?			
Mark all that apply to you:	Yes	Prefer not to answer	Interviewer Notes
An unexpected, unaffordable expense			
Change in employment status			
Changes to/problems with benefits			
Disability			
Discharged from jail			
Discharged from the military			
Domestic violence			
Eviction			
Forced to foreclose on home			
Housing waitlist times			
Illness			
Injury			
Legal problems			
Loss of a job			
Loss of friend/relative			
Low credit score/no credit score			
Medical expenses			
Mental health reasons			
Moved to find work			
Pets not allowed			
Relationship problems			



Are you currently receiving any services/assistance from providers in the area?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

Please share the type of services that you find the most helpful that are available to you in the area where you currently reside (Probe: What about the services make them helpful?).

What, if any, are services that you need or wish you had but are not available to you in the area where you reside?

Rent or housing cost increase			
Substance use:			
b. Alcohol			
c. Drugs			
Unable to pay rent			
Other (specify): _____			

Services

[The next few questions ask about the services that are available to you in the area. As I mentioned earlier, we're also interested to learn about the services that are available to you, services you find helpful, and services that you wish were available but are not.]

What, if any, are services that you need or wish you had but are not available to you in the area where you reside?

Housing

When (year) was the last time you had permanent, stable housing? _____

And where was it?: _____

Have you ever had permanent housing in Arapahoe County? (yes/no): _____

***IF THE PARTICIPANT ANSWERS "NO", SKIP TO OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS



If so, approximately how much (in dollars) did you spend on your rent/mortgage each month?

If you had to estimate, what percentage of your income did you spend on your rent/mortgage?

- 0%, I own my home
- Less than 10%
- 10%
- 20%
- 30%
- 40%
- 50% or more of your income
- Prefer not to answer

Approximately, how much (in dollars) would your rent/mortgage need to decrease to allow you to sustainably afford to live in the home you're in now?

Open-ended Questions

1. If you had a magic wand and could have three wishes to improve the lives of individuals experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity in your community, what three things do you think would have the greatest impact?
2. Is there anything that we did not cover in the survey that you wished we had asked or that you would like to share as the Arapahoe County Commissioners strive to better understand the experiences of individuals experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity in your community?



Appendix C: Existing Services – List of Organizations Provided by Participants

Community-based	Public Benefits
Café180	Medicaid
Colorado Coalition for the Homeless	Medicare
Denver Rescue Mission	SNAP
Dry Bones	SSI
Father Woody's	
Giving Heart	
Gracefull Café	
Interfaith Food Bank	
Movement 5280	
St. Francis	
Wellspring Church	

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Appendix D: Needed Services – List of Services Provided by Participants

Basic Needs	Health Needs	Services Needed to Reach Sustainability
Food Assistance	Dental Care	Access to Transportation
Housing	Medical Services	Childcare
Restrooms	Mental Health Services	Financial Assistance
Section 8		Internet Access
Showers		Job assistance for individuals with a criminal background
		Job Services
		Rental Assistance

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