

# Standing Together: A Prevention-Oriented Approach to Ending Homelessness in Oakland

By Tim Tsai  
Goldman School of Public Policy  
Master of Public Policy Student  
Class of 2019



Photo taken by Tim Tsai at High Street Encampment, Oakland, April 2019

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# Executive Summary

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The City of Oakland faces a rising homelessness crisis and does not dedicate sufficient resources to funding effective prevention measures which will address the structural and systems failure factors causing Oaklanders to lose their homes.

From February to April 2019, The Housing & Dignity Project (The Village, East Oakland Collective, Dellums Institute/Just Cities) formed a team of one graduate student and four unhoused activists to conduct a community survey and a series of interviews with 95 persons living in ten homelessness encampments around Oakland and 33 persons from OUSD and Laney College. The team engaged 18 people in interviews or informal conversations. Through academic literature review, demographic data analysis and participation from the community, the team found the following factors caused homelessness in Oakland:

## ***Structural Causes:***

1. **Gentrification** - 50% of respondents to the community survey reported that they previously inhabited the lowest-cost housing available in the city (\$1,000 or below) and were still spending over 30% of their income on rent/mortgage. Gentrification causes rents to climb faster than income, making housing unaffordable to the city's poorest residents.
2. **Jobs and Income Inequality**- The labor market in Oakland is split between well-paying jobs requiring degrees and certifications and poorly-paid service jobs. The racist history of active government and private sector discrimination against African American communities and neighborhoods impoverished these areas more than others in the city and prevented them from getting the education and resources they need to flourish in the tech economy. Without an adequate income to keep up with rising costs, many Oaklanders leave the city while the most vulnerable become homeless or housing insecure.

## ***Systems Failure Causes:***

1. **The Carceral System**- The wave of mass incarceration that began in the 1980s disproportionately affected thousands of Oaklanders of color who were arrested, labeled with a record, and incarcerated. Incarceration records prevent individuals from obtaining work, shut many out of HUD housing, and serve as a rationale for landlords to deny housing. 73% of encampment residents reported being previously incarcerated and 70% of the OUSD and Laney College respondents reported being previously incarcerated.
2. **Lack of Social Safety Net**- The welfare system in Oakland is overwhelmed, not accessible to encampment residents with disabilities, and specifically the Oakland/Berkeley/Alameda County Continuum of Care cannot provide services to the growing numbers of people becoming homeless in the region. In 2018, 2,174 newly-homeless people entered the Continuum of Care's tracking system. At the same time, the Continuum of Care successfully housed only 1,158 people. For every two people who become homeless in Oakland, only one will obtain permanent housing under the current system. The Oakland Housing Authority (OHA) serves 14,020 households every year, but potentially over 64,600 households need OHA's services.

**Individual Causes:**

Individuals at all income levels experience periodic crises. Sicknesses, deaths of relatives, and bouts of mental illness and addiction afflict all members of society, but given the structural and systems failure causes of homelessness, these crises can trigger years of housing instability and homelessness. Residents interviewed for this project almost universally cited instances of personal crises that resulted in their current spell of homelessness.

**Current Spending on Homelessness:**

Table 3-1 shows how much has been spent in the City of Oakland to address homelessness from Fiscal Years 2017-2019:

<b>Table 3-1: Total Homelessness Funding In Oakland (FY17-19)</b>		
<b>Category</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Homelessness Services	\$40,416,728	78.3%
Homelessness Prevention	\$3,852,436	7.5%
Displacement Prevention	\$7,350,000	14.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$51,619,164</b>	100.0%

**Gaps in Spending:**

- Homelessness Services:** Everyone Home reports that the current Continuum of Care spending of \$106 million needs to be increased to over \$333 million (an increase of 69.2%). The City of Oakland should continue to provide services to reduce suffering, but increases to services without sustainably increasing exits to permanent housing won't reduce the demand for services.
- Homelessness Prevention:** Several service providers focus their efforts on emergency rental assistance. There is no clear picture about what the demand is, but estimated costs are between \$3,000 and \$25,000 per family. For permanent housing subsidies, the Oakland Housing Authority estimates that they require \$13,619 to keep an average household housed per year. 64,645 renter households in Oakland qualify for assistance, and it would cost \$880 million to subsidize them. Just focusing on subsidizing the 34,180 extremely low-income renter households (0-30% AMI) would cost \$465 million.
- Displacement Prevention:** Displacement prevention agencies serving individuals between 0-80% AMI report that they need \$180,000 additional per year in housing counseling and outreach. They also report that \$3,056,438 is needed to provide renter legal representation.
- Affordable Housing Construction:** There were \$204 million in public funds spent on affordable housing construction between 2017-2019, which will create potentially 1,419 units of affordable housing. 495 of these units will be set aside for extremely low-income (0-30% AMI) households to meet a potential need of 12,100 households<sup>1</sup>, 1.2% of what it would take to house those who are either homeless or most at-risk of homelessness.

<sup>1</sup> Calculated using Urban Institute calculation methodology found in their 2015 report "The Housing Affordability Gap for Extremely Low-Income Renters in 2014" which assumed an affordable housing gap of 40 units for every 100 ELI renters. Calculations are as follows:

$(34,180 \text{ ELI renter households}) - (14,020 \text{ HUD households}) - (0.4 \times (\text{ELI-HUD Households})) = 12,096$

# Final Recommendations

## 1. Make Living in Oakland More Affordable

- a. Increase availability of cash and income supports for ELI residents through programs such as General Assistance. Increase the time length of assistance, and increase the total amount of assistance.
- b. Implement a permanent housing subsidy targeted at ELI households making 0-30% AMI and paying over 30% of their income in rent.
- c. Increase affordable housing construction for 12,100 ELI households and look for alternatives to traditional housing development.

## 2. Remove Unnecessary Policy Barriers to Housing

- a. “Ban the Box” for private rental units: make it illegal for landlords to conduct an incarceration background check for prospective renters.
- b. Reform OHA criminal background check policies to be more transparent, incorporate an appeals process, and overlook marijuana-related offenses.
- c. Address veteran bad paper discharges: work with Operation Dignity and similar service member-based organizations to organize campaigns where advocates work with veterans to upgrade their discharge statuses.

## 3. Fund More Early Outreach

- a. Provide the City of Oakland with the capacity to maintain a client-to-worker ratio of 25 clients per caseworker and 100 clients per outreach worker.

## 4. Increase Eviction Protection

- a. Pass a renter protection package ordinance that includes a) targeted community outreach and counseling, b) targeted legal services, c) starting a housing rental subsidy fund, d) increasing landlord mediation services, and e) increasing targeted emergency rental assistance funding.

## 5. Provide More Supportive Housing

- a. Assist Everyonehome to increase the supply of permanent supportive housing units in the Continuum of Care to at least 5,000 units.

# Section 1: Introduction and Project Methods

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## ***The Problem***

Too many Oaklanders at the lowest levels of income (0-30% AMI) and vulnerability become homeless every year due to rapidly rising rents amidst the recent wave of gentrification and development in the city. The current funding structure doesn't fund interventions to sufficient scale to meet the overall demand, does not prioritize the correct strategies, and does not efficiently target the people who need it the most.

Every year, approximately 2,174 people become homeless for the first time in Alameda County, and no amount of money under the current funding paradigm is reducing that number.<sup>2</sup> The Mayor's proposed FY19-21 budget funds homeless services and emergency solutions such as Community Cabins without providing permanent housing units for people to exit into.<sup>3</sup>

With thousands of Oaklanders already living on the streets, thousands more joining them every year, and a looming recession<sup>4</sup> putting more people at risk of homelessness, the current trends point to the problem only getting worse after this current budget cycle.

## ***Our Project***

Just Cities, in coordination with The Village, HAWG, UC Berkeley's Center for Civility and Democratic Engagement, and the Housing and Dignity Project, conducted a study from February to April of 2019 to determine a) what caused homelessness in Oakland, b) what will prevent homelessness, c) current spending on homeless prevention, homeless services, and affordable housing construction funding, and d) funding gaps for those programs.

The current flurry of legislative activity and media coverage leaves out the voices of the unhoused. If they are involved at all, they are merely the subject of a news story or guinea pigs in studies. The Village in Oakland, an activist group of unhoused persons, working with the advice and assistance of one Goldman School of Public Policy graduate student, designed, administered, and interpreted the results of this study. This report merges community feedback, practitioner input, and academic research to tell the story of Oakland's struggle with housing insecurity and homelessness from the holistic perspective of the entire community.

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<sup>2</sup> "How many people became homeless for the first time (annually)?" Everyonehome Results-Based Accountability Committee Scorecard <https://embed.resultsscorecard.com/Indicator/Embed?id=121590>

<sup>3</sup> Mayor's Proposed 2019-2021 Budget accessed 5/18/2019

<https://cao-94612.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/FY-2019-21-Proposed-Budget-Book-WEB-VERSION.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Weissman, Jordan (March 26, 2019) "One of the Most Important Recession Indicators Is Beginning to Flash. Is It Time to Worry Yet?" *Slate*

<https://slate.com/business/2019/03/recession-indicator-yield-curve-economy-worry.html>



## **Methodology for Community-Based Surveys and Interviews**

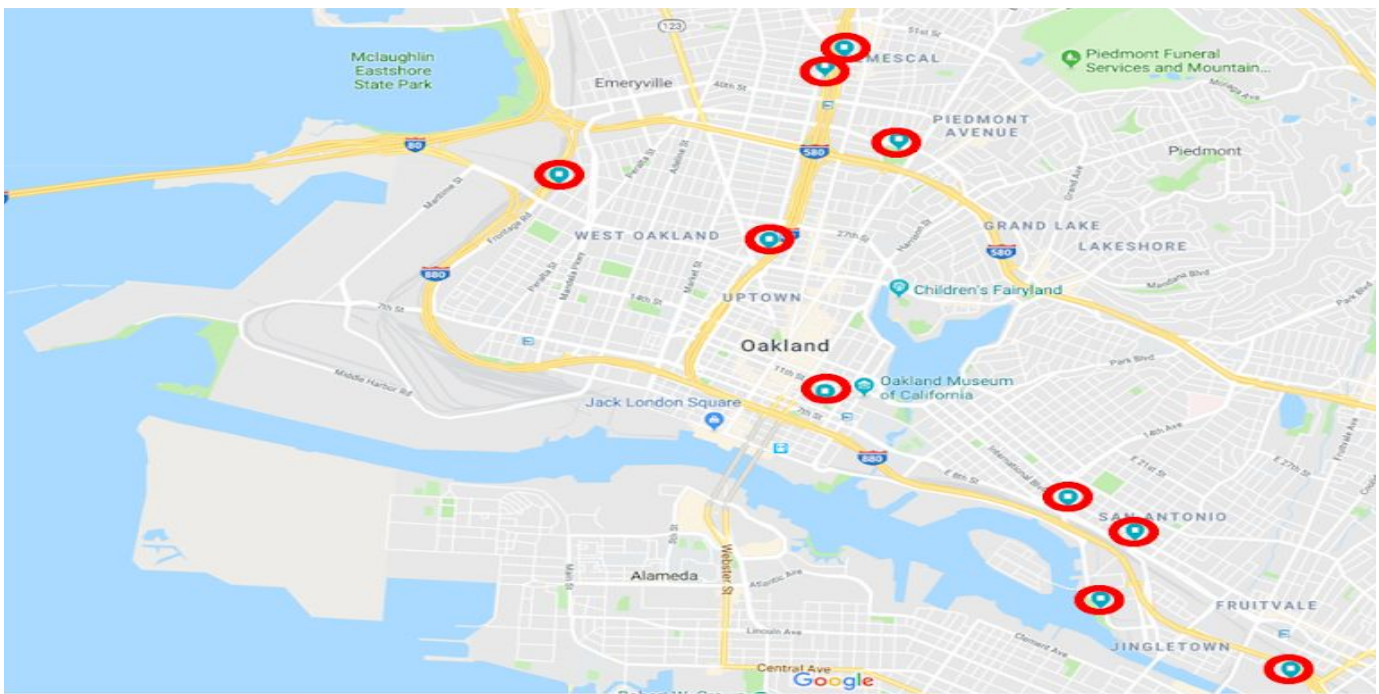
### **Sample Selection**

The research team, consisting of 4 members of The Village and the author of this report, surveyed as many homeless and at-risk individuals as possible from the residents encampments, service providers, and activists (both housed and unhoused). The team surveyed a diverse selection of 10 encampments located throughout Oakland (seen in Figure 1-3 circled in red). The team visited a few of the sites multiple times. The project also enlisted the aid of Oakland Unified School District (OUSD)'s McKinney-Vento Office and the Restoring Our Communities organization at Laney College to reach students and families who are either homeless, at-risk of homelessness, or provisionally accommodated.

The research team contacted Talia Rubin from the Community Housing Services Division of the Human Services Department of the City of Oakland for input on the city's current homelessness prevention strategies. The team also interviewed Roger Viet Chung from Restoring Our Communities at Laney College, and Needa Bee with The Village. The staff at Just Cities helped with logistics and provided their own input and expertise to aid the project.

The team visited 2 encampments in West Oakland, 2 encampments in Temescal, 2 encampments in downtown, 2 encampments in San Antonio, 1 encampment in Jingletown, and 1 encampment near Fruitvale

**Figure 1-3 Map of Sites Visited (Blue markers circled in red)**



## **Outreach and Respondent Recruitment Methodology**

Encampments: The research team traveled to encampments at least one day before administering the survey and handed out fliers to raise awareness and prepare residents to answer the questions. On the day of the survey, the research team brought food, hygiene products, and socks as incentives to participate in the study. The team carefully selected items to both a) be of value to the population in question and b) not be so valuable as to constitute coercion or potentially used as an unethical “carrot” by third parties in exchange for coercive requests. When distributing life-essential items such as food in the encampments, the team gave items to everyone regardless of whether they filled out the survey or not. Whenever possible, the research team connected residents who could be helped with various services such as legal help and counseling.

Once a resident indicated on a survey that they were willing to speak with the research team, the researcher connected with the individuals in question and inquired about their comfort with participating, having some informal conversations beforehand to establish rapport, and provided some food and bottled water. The team postponed some follow-up meetings to actually conduct the interview due to the fact that the residents in question were not feeling well or were unable to do the interview for various reasons. Respondents could, at any time, say no to the process.

Service Providers and Other Organizations: The research team also sampled individuals who were not living in encampments. The team secured the help of Oakland Unified School District’s McKinney-Vento Office and the Restoring Our Communities organization at Laney College. The respondents from this sample ranged from unsheltered homeless individuals to provisionally accommodated individuals in public housing or shelter accommodations.

The team offered OUSD survey respondents \$5 gift cards to common stores such as Walgreens or Starbucks, and these incentives were specifically offered as an incentive for participation in the research. Other service providers did not ask for incentives. The team offered providers and organizations a choice in which incentive structures they’d like to request and they themselves made the determination for which incentive structure to use for the surveys.

To ensure a representative sample, the team spoke with informal leaders as well as residents at the encampments if they knew of other sites to visit and survey. The team also consulted service providers about which sites to visit to ensure that many voices were informing site selection, not just any one group.

Interviews: If the survey respondents left their contact info on the survey, the team reached out to them either over the phone or in person by visiting their encampments or schools for follow-up interviews. Overall, three individuals were interviewed. There were some incentives



offered to make the conversation easier. The interviewer gave two respondents McDonald's and Taco Bell food from the \$0.99 menu and bottled water. The residents participated in the interviews while eating with the researcher at their respective encampments. The third respondent was not interested in eating at the time, and received only a bottle of water and spoke with the interviewer at their camp site.

### **Question Design and Relationship to Research Questions**

The team designed the survey with input from individuals with lived experiences of homelessness, activists who are advocating for the homeless, and input from academic research by Dr. Margot Kushel. The questions fall into four categories:

- 1) Questions 1, 4, 5, 6, and 7 ask about underlying risk factors such as income and former stable housing type for the respondent. These questions were based on academic research on rent cost burdens in relation to homelessness,<sup>5</sup> the risk factors for homelessness identified by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness,<sup>6</sup> and the methodology used by Dr. Kushel's team to determine characteristics relating to the first instances of homelessness.<sup>7</sup>
- 2) Questions 2 and 3 directly asked about what caused the respondent to become homeless and asked them to elaborate on solutions that would have helped them. These questions were created with input from individuals with lived experience of homelessness and homeless activists to address gaps in the Alameda County Point-in-Time Count survey.
- 3) Questions 8-11 ask what social assistance respondents currently use, and what their experiences were either getting or not getting the assistance they needed. Individuals with lived experiences of homelessness and activists provided input for these questions.
- 4) Questions 13-21 ask about basic demographic info to get a sense of who responded to the survey. These questions resemble demographic questions asked in the Alameda County PIT Count Survey, but the team altered them based on input from individuals with lived experiences of homelessness and activists.<sup>8</sup>

People with lived experiences of homelessness and housed allies edited the survey questions so that the questions would be considerate and not offend the respondent. See Appendix B for full interview questions and harm reduction letter.

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<sup>5</sup> Glynn, Byrne, and Culhane (2018) *Inflection Points In Community-level Homeless Rates*  
[https://works.bepress.com/dennis\\_culhane/228/](https://works.bepress.com/dennis_culhane/228/)

<sup>6</sup> Canadian Observatory on Homelessness "A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention"  
<https://www.homelesshub.ca/ANewDirection>

<sup>7</sup> Lee, Christopher Thomas, David Guzman, Claudia Ponath, Lina Tieu, Elise Riley, and Margot Kushel. "Residential Patterns in Older Homeless Adults: Results of a Cluster Analysis." *Social Science & Medicine* 153 (2016): 131-40. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2016.02.004.

<sup>8</sup> Alameda County 2017 Point In Time Count Full Report  
<http://everyonehome.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2017-Alameda-County-8.1-2.pdf>

## **Survey and Interview Administration Techniques**

The team printed the survey on paper, gave them to respondents, then manually entered the results into a non-public Google Sheets document. The team also made a digital version of the survey via Google Forms and provided the link to service providers. The digital survey is virtually identical to the physical one and the data inputting procedures were the same as well.

## **Confidentiality and Consent in Surveys and Interviews**

The project had strict guidelines to not administer surveys or interviews to persons who could not consent to it due to mental illness, the influence of substances, or other types of mental impairment to include emotional state. Furthermore, all persons surveyed had the option of saying no to the survey at any time.

The team anonymized virtually all data from the survey to protect the privacy of respondents. Many homeless individuals don't want to be known as homeless due to the stigmatizing nature of homelessness. Others don't want to be found by individuals who would want to harm them. Still more individuals don't want their families or children to find out they're homeless. To further this end, the research team did not make asking for contact information a mandatory question. Additionally, only one team member kept all survey responses on a secured Google Sheets document and this report only displays aggregate data. The team member also curated all free-response survey questions to eliminate identifying info.

To avoid re-traumatization stemming from discussing painful topics, the team took extra precautions by providing a flier with mental health resources and the team's phone numbers for people to either call the research team to talk about how they felt afterwards or to talk to nonprofit services which provide crisis counseling (See Appendix C). Interviewers fully informed respondents about the risks of discomfort associated with the interview beforehand and asked checking questions to ensure understanding before proceeding. This methodology came from the methodology Dr. Kushel uses in her research.<sup>9</sup> To provide total anonymity for respondents, the interviewer used a tape recorder to record the conversation but then transcribed the audio recording into text before destroying it.

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<sup>9</sup> Dunn, L. "Enhancing Informed Consent for Research and Treatment." *Neuropsychopharmacology* 24, no. 6 (2001): 595-607. doi:10.1016/s0893-133x(00)00218-9.

## **Conflicts of Interest and Safety Concerns**

There were several moments over the course of the project where the team encountered situations involving police interaction with encampment residents or evictions. Recognizing that some members of the project are activists, the non-activist researchers would stay back, only record and observe interactions, and not assist the activists in any way. The only crimes the team would report would be if someone was at risk of injury or death. Luckily, the team did not witness crimes of this nature, and did not have a reason to report anything.

Government officials contacted for interviews in this report were fully informed about the research team's work with The Village, who are in active litigation against the City of Oakland. The team sent questions beforehand and agreed on parameters of discussion before the meeting took place to avoid legal complications.

## Survey and Interview Results

**Table 1-4: Summary of Encampment Sample**

Age	Number	Percentage	Race	Number	Percentage
Under 18	1	1%	Black/African American	36	40%
18-24	2	2%	White	35	39%
25-50	56	60%	Mixed/Other	6	7%
Over 50	35	38%	Hispanic/Latino	5	6%
Incarceration	Number	Percentage	Asian	4	4%
Yes	64	73%	Native American	3	3%
No	24	27%	LGBTQIA Status	Number	Percentage
First Time Homeless?	Number	Percentage	No	67	75%
Yes	41	44%	Prefer not to say	17	19%
No	52	56%	Yes	5	6%
Work Status	Number	Percentage	Last Stable Housing	Number	Percentage
N/A, not working	65	75%	Place that I rented	60	64%
Less than \$500	9	10%	Place that my partner or someone else rented	16	17%
\$501-\$1000	0	0%	Home that my partner or someone else owned	11	12%
\$1001-\$2000	5	6%	Home that I owned	3	3%
\$2001-3000	6	7%	Chronically Homeless	3	3%
Over \$3000	2	2%	Public Housing	1	1%
Immigration Status	Number	Percentage	Total number in sample: 95		
US Citizen	84	92%	Some parts of this table do not sum up to 100% due to missing responses		
Green Card	4	4%			
Undocumented	3	3%			

**Table 1-5 Summary of OUSD and Laney College Sample**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Under 18	0	0%	Black/African American	19	70%
18-24	5	23%	Hispanic/Latino	6	22%
25-50	13	59%	Asian	2	7%
Over 50	4	18%	White	0	0%
			Mixed/Other	0	0%
			Native American	0	0%
<b>Incarceration</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>LGBTQIA Status</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	23	70%	Yes	7	21%
No	10	30%	No	19	58%
<b>First Time Homeless?</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	Prefer not to say	7	21%
Yes	18	55%	<b>Last Stable Housing</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
No	15	45%	Place that I rented	19	59%
<b>Work Status</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	Place that my partner or someone else rented	6	19%
N/A, not working	11	52%	Chronically Homeless	4	13%
Less than \$500	8	38%	Home that my partner or someone else owned	1	3%
\$501-\$1000	0	0%	Home that I owned	1	3%
\$1001-\$2000	2	10%	Public Housing	1	3%
\$2001-3000	0	0%			
Over \$3000	0	0%			
<b>Immigration Status</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	Total number in sample: 33		
US Citizen	17	74%	Some parts of this table do not sum up to 100% due to missing responses		
Green Card	3	13%			
Undocumented	3	13%			



**Interview Results:**

Interviews were formal, long-form conversations conducted with prepared questions. Conversations were conducted informally during encampment visits. Researchers took notes during these conversations and the data from these notes were used to inform the direction of the project.

**Table 1-6: Summary of Interviews and Conversations**

<b><u>Interview Number</u></b>	<b><u>Interviewee</u></b>	<b><u>Interview topics</u></b>
1	Unsheltered hispanic woman	Crime, displacement, services
2	Unsheltered hispanic woman	Outreach experiences, displacement, gentrification, encampment life
3	Unsheltered black man	Crime, incarceration, family crises, substance abuse
4	Unsheltered hispanic man	Job loss, general poverty, lack of opportunities
5	Trish Andersen, OUSD McKinney-Vento Officer	Displacement patterns, causes of homelessness, challenges that clients face
6	Roger Viet Chung, Laney College Faculty, Restoring Our Communities	Challenges facing justice-impacted students and how Oakland Housing Authority declines people for background checks
7	Talia Rubin, Program Analyst II, Human Services Department of the City of Oakland	Homelessness prevention, efforts by city to address crisis, encampment management
8	Needa Bee, The Village	Displacement, housing issues, homelessness, poverty in general
<b><u>Conversation Number</u></b>	<b><u>Conversation Participant</u></b>	<b><u>Conversation topics</u></b>
1	Unsheltered white woman	Retraumatization from recounting stories of homelessness
2	Unsheltered asian man	Immigration, lack of supports for immigrants who lack English speaking skills
3	2 unsheltered hispanic/white men, 1 unsheltered white woman	Attitudes of encampment residents towards city, society in general
4	Unsheltered black man	20-year chronic homelessness and lack of support
5	Unsheltered white man	Dangers of life on the street, informal economy, foster care
6	Unsheltered hispanic man	(Through translator) Lack of supports for immigrants, undocumented status
7	Unsheltered black woman	Domestic violence
8	Provisionally accommodated black man	Incarceration, troubles with finding housing, lack of opportunities, foster care

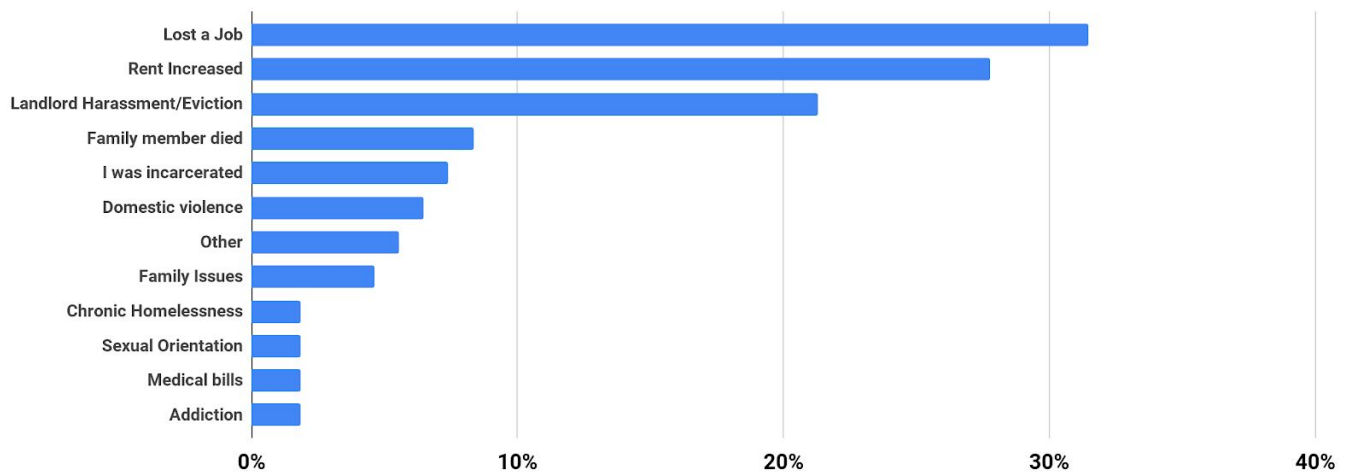
## Section 2: What Causes Homelessness in Oakland?

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The survey respondents listed three top causes of homelessness: jobs, rents, and evictions (potentially tied to the rental market). These trends represent causes originating from structural factors in the economy, labor market, and housing market. The next top responses were: domestic violence, incarceration, and deaths of family members, which are causes arising from policy systems failures due to the fact that individual circumstances lead to those events, but the systems of incarceration and welfare create the situations that cause people to lose housing who could otherwise afford it. Based on the community feedback, literature review, and borrowing heavily from work done by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) and Zillow, the team determined that there were three primary causes of homelessness: structural causes, systems failure causes, and individual causes.<sup>10</sup>

**Figure 2-1: Self-Reported Causes of Homelessness**

n = 95



\*Since the question allowed for multiple responses, the numbers in this chart exceed 100% when totaled together. This chart shows what percentage of respondents selected each response.

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<sup>10</sup> For a full discussion of the methodology and theoretical research, see Appendix D

## **Structural Causes of Homelessness**

COH defines structural causes of homelessness as “...broad systemic economic and societal issues that occur at a societal level that affect opportunities, social environments, and outcomes for individuals. It should be noted that such structural factors may affect a much larger segment of the general population than people who experience homelessness.”<sup>11</sup> This includes poverty, discrimination, lack of affordable housing, and the effects of colonization on indigenous people. In Oakland’s situation, gentrification and an inequitable labor market contribute the most to homelessness in Oakland.

### **Gentrification**<sup>12</sup>

Rapidly increasing housing costs associated with gentrification contribute the most to homelessness in Oakland. The lack of construction over the past 40 years, the expense of construction, and the legal environment that governs the real estate market all contribute to the rising rents and home prices.<sup>13</sup>

According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, a renter household would have to earn an hourly wage of \$29.62 to afford an efficiency apartment in Oakland<sup>14</sup>. The affordability only gets worse as the property size increases:

<u>Housing Wage</u>	<i>California</i>	<i>Oakland-Fremont HMF</i>
ZERO-BEDROOM	\$21.75	\$29.62
ONE-BEDROOM	\$25.67	\$35.67
TWO-BEDROOM	\$32.68	\$44.79
THREE-BEDROOM	\$45.01	\$61.90
FOUR-BEDROOM	\$51.97	\$75.88

The average renter household in Oakland only earns \$22.07,<sup>15</sup> barely enough for a studio. It would be much easier for lower-income Oaklanders to afford market rents if the rental market wasn’t so expensive, and it would be cheaper for the housing crisis response systems such as the Oakland Housing Authority (OHA) and the Alameda County Continuum of Care (CoC) to obtain housing units as well.

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<sup>11</sup> Canadian Observatory on Homelessness “Framework for Preventing Homelessness” <http://homelesshub.ca/ANewDirection> p.18

<sup>12</sup> For a full discussion of how gentrification is defined and used in this paper, please see Appendix C.

<sup>13</sup> Taylor, Mac (2015) “California’s High Housing Costs: Causes and Consequences” California Legislative Analyst’s Office <https://lao.ca.gov/reports/2015/finance/housing-costs/housing-costs.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> National Low Income Housing Coalition Website <https://reports.nlihc.org/oor/california>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

To examine whether this problem is getting better or worse, Table 2-2 below shows how housing affordability in Oakland has changed over time using HUD’s Fair Market Rent measure, the Zillow Rental Index (ZRI), and Area Median Income (calculated as a percentage of area rental costs):

**Table 2-2: Rent Affordability in Oakland<sup>16</sup>**

Year	HUD FMR	ZRI	Median Renter Income	% Median Income spent on rent (FMR)	% Median Income spent on rent (ZRI)
2012	\$1,402	\$1,721	\$34,915	48.19%	59.16%
2013	\$1,361	\$1,777	\$35,690	45.76%	59.75%
2014	\$1,578	\$2,009	\$36,657	51.66%	65.76%
2015	\$1,585	\$2,491	\$38,222	49.76%	78.21%
2016	\$2,103	\$2,905	\$40,321	62.59%	86.46%
2017	\$2,173	\$2,935	\$44,746	58.28%	78.71%
2018	\$2,329	\$2,964	\$58,989	47.38%	60.30%
2019	\$2,126	\$3,021	N/A	N/A	N/A

The rents as a percentage of median income spike at around 2016 but rapidly decline again. Rising median renter incomes explain this trend, though it isn’t known if this is because the poorest households are getting richer or because more wealthy renters are moving into Oakland. The spiking homelessness numbers seem to indicate the latter.

To get a better picture of how this plays out on the ground, the research team asked Oakland’s unsheltered homeless residents how much in rent they were paying per month prior to becoming homeless and what percentage of their income this was.

Figure 2-3: Rent Paid During Last Stable Housing Period



According to Figure 2-3, the majority of the encampment residents surveyed were already occupying the lowest-priced homes and apartments before they became homeless.<sup>17</sup>

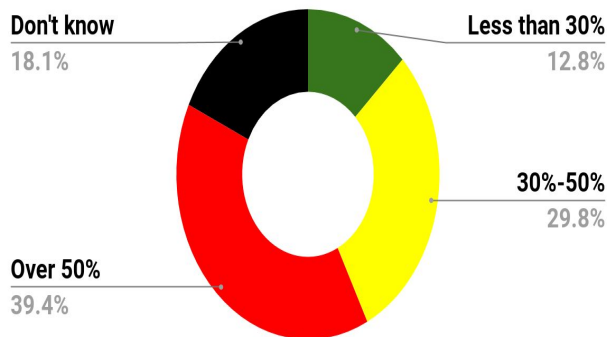
<sup>16</sup> US Census Bureau American Fact Finder, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS\\_17\\_5YR\\_S2503&prodType=table](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_17_5YR_S2503&prodType=table)

Zillow Rental Index Time-Series: Multi-Family, SFR, Condo/Coop, \$ by Zipcode <https://www.zillow.com/research/data/>

<sup>17</sup> Community-based survey, Encampment Respondents, Question #4

Figure 2-4: Percentage of Income Paid for Rent During Last Stable Housing

n = 95



Additionally, as Figure 2-4 shows, most respondents (69.3%) paid over one-third of their incomes in rent despite the low cost.<sup>18</sup> The fact that so many people in the encampments paid so much in housing costs relative to their incomes before they lost their homes matches the findings of Glynn, Byrne, and Culhane (2018) about the relationship between housing costs and homelessness.<sup>19</sup> As rents go up relative to income in any given city or locality, the poorest are pushed out. The higher rents go above median income, the more people below the median lose stable housing.

From this, the team concluded that homeless individuals in Oakland were originally low income persons living in the cheapest housing available in the city and became homeless after losing their housing and not finding another unit they could afford.

The qualitative data from the research team's interviews and conversations provide evidence that housing affordability is only getting worse. Encampment residents told the team that the skyrocketing rents presented a huge obstacle to obtaining housing after a precipitating crisis event. People with low earnings who stayed with family suddenly found themselves unable to pay rent when a family member died.<sup>20</sup> Many respondents also told the team that they formerly worked as property managers and lost both their homes and their jobs when their landlord/employer sold the property.<sup>21</sup>

This combination of federal, community and practitioner data provides substantial support for the hypothesis that rising housing costs can be a contributing factor to housing instability and homelessness, and that the specific local factors unique to Oakland's housing market directly contributed to people becoming homeless in the city.

<sup>18</sup> Community-based survey, Encampment Respondents, Question #5

<sup>19</sup> Glynn, Byrne, and Culhane (2018) Inflection Points In Community-level Homeless Rates [https://works.bepress.com/dennis\\_culhane/228/](https://works.bepress.com/dennis_culhane/228/)

<sup>20</sup> Interview #3, unsheltered black man

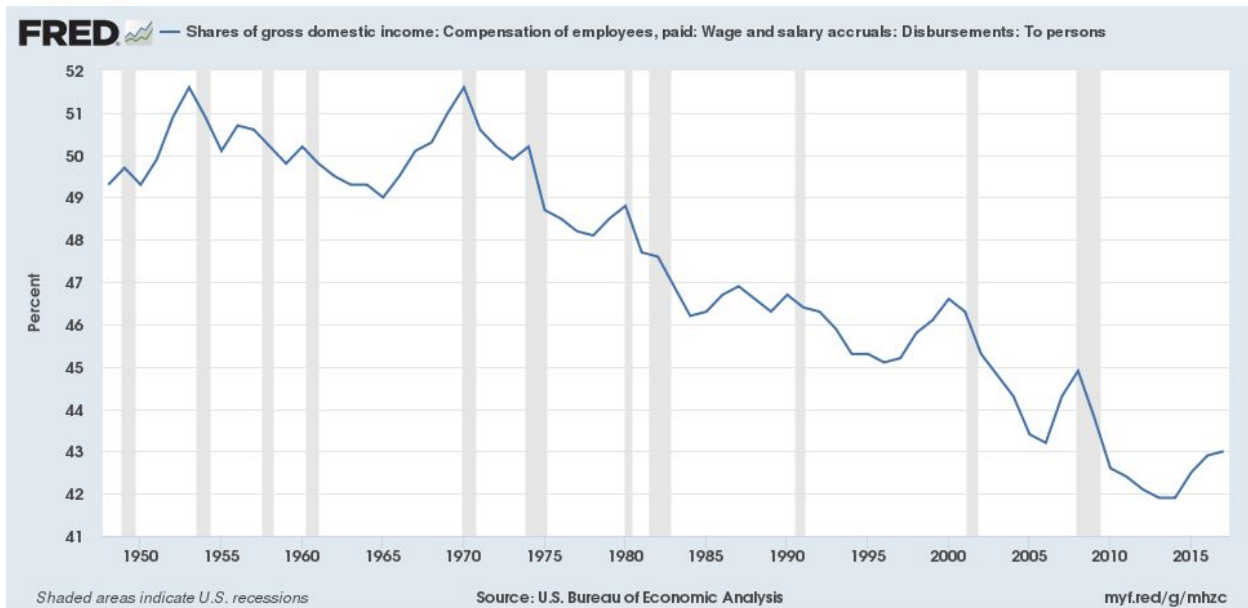
<sup>21</sup> Interview #2, unsheltered hispanic woman, Interview #4, unsheltered hispanic man



## Jobs and Income

The rising housing costs wouldn't be an issue if incomes were keeping up as well, but federal data shows this isn't the case both nationally and locally in Oakland. The trends in the City of Oakland are actually a part of a much larger national trend in wage stagnation for workers in the United States going back to the 1980s.

**Figure 2-5: Labor Share of Gross Domestic Income**



U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Shares of gross domestic income: Compensation of employees, paid: Wage and salary accruals: Disbursements: To persons [W270RE1A156NBEA], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/W270RE1A156NBEA>, December 3, 2018.

Figure 2-5 above shows how labor's share of all income generated in the country fell during the 1970s and 1980s and has continued its steep downward trajectory since then. In short, working doesn't pay as much as it used to. Very few San Francisco Bay Area residents share in the gains from the economic boom taking place in this region while others' wages stagnate.

Figure 2-6 below shows how, when adjusted for inflation, workers' pay in the country hasn't increased in terms of purchasing power.

**Figure 2-6: Wage Stagnation Since 1964**

**Americans' paychecks are bigger than 40 years ago, but their purchasing power has hardly budged**

*Average hourly wages in the U.S., seasonally adjusted*

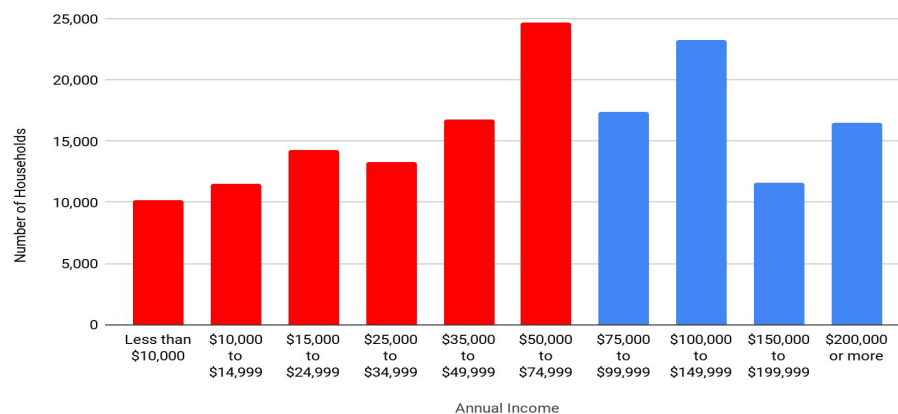


Note: Data for wages of production and non-supervisory employees on private non-farm payrolls. "Constant 2018 dollars" describes wages adjusted for inflation. "Current dollars" describes wages reported in the value of the currency when received. "Purchasing power" refers to the amount of goods or services that can be bought per unit of currency. Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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Figure 2-7 shows that in the city of Oakland, only the top 40% of income earners by distribution can rent median units in the city without being cost-burdened. The bars in red represent individuals who would pay more than 30% of their income in rent according to the more conservative HUD 2017 FMR. The blue bars represent those who would not. By this measure, 90,684 households or 57% of all households in Oakland cannot afford to rent out the median property in Oakland without paying more than 30% of their income in rent<sup>22</sup>

Figure 2-7: Distribution of Household Income in Oakland, CA



<sup>22</sup> American Fact Finder Selected Economic Characteristics. American Community Survey 5-year estimates (2017) [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS\\_17\\_5YR\\_DP03&prodType=table](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_17_5YR_DP03&prodType=table)

**Table 2-8: Table of Mean Wages in Oakland by Occupation (2017)<sup>23</sup>**

Major occupational group	Percentage of Total Employment	Monthly Wage	
Food preparation and serving related	8.4%	\$2,281.60	
Personal care and service	5.4%	\$2,334.40	
Farming, fishing, and forestry	0.1%	\$2,548.80	
Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance	2.7%	\$2,894.40	
Healthcare support	2.3%	\$3,046.40	
Production	5.7%	\$3,328.00	
Transportation and material moving	6.1%	\$3,340.80	
Office and administrative support	14.3%	\$3,505.60	
Sales and related	9.4%	\$3,643.20	
Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media	1.7%	\$4,344.00	
Community and social service	1.6%	\$4,451.20	
Installation, maintenance, and repair	3.2%	\$4,524.80	Jobs that don't pay enough to live in Oakland Based on FMR for 1-bedroom
Education, training, and library	6.5%	\$4,780.80	
Protective service	1.8%	\$4,881.60	
Construction and extraction	4.9%	\$5,244.80	74.1%
Business and financial operations	6.1%	\$6,886.40	26.0%
Life, physical, and social science	1.6%	\$6,952.00	Jobs that pay enough to live in Oakland Based on FMR for 1-bedroom
Architecture and engineering	2.5%	\$7,612.80	
Healthcare practitioners and technical	5.2%	\$7,931.20	
Computer and mathematical	3.6%	\$8,299.20	
Legal	0.7%	\$9,419.20	
Management	6.3%	\$10,795.20	
<b>Total, all occupations</b>	100%	\$4,832.00	

Table 2-8 shows the top jobs that pay enough for people to afford rent in Oakland require high skills, credentials and degrees which the poorer residents of Oakland cannot access. This fundamental skills and pay mismatch prevents many Oakland residents from remaining in Oakland. Many choose to voluntarily live outside Oakland and take on longer and longer

<sup>23</sup> Occupational Employment and Wages in Oakland-Hayward-Berkeley — May 2017  
[https://www.bls.gov/regions/west/news-release/occupationalemploymentandwages\\_oakland.htm](https://www.bls.gov/regions/west/news-release/occupationalemploymentandwages_oakland.htm)

commutes, but others who are not able to earn an adequate living in this job market stay because they have no means of leaving, fear relocating, or decide to stay to be near family, friends, or social networks.<sup>24</sup>

These people become precariously housed, doubling or tripling up, staying with abusive partners, or live out of their cars. Many choose to send their children away to stay with relatives in Oakland and live on the streets themselves rather than leave. 44% of the encampment residents interviewed for this project reported having dependents when they lost their housing.<sup>25</sup> Most of those individuals did not appear to have their children staying with them in the encampments, and informal conversations confirmed that most sent their children away to live with relatives while the respondent remained homeless.<sup>26</sup>

Once on the streets, exclusion from the formal economy drives many to the informal economy. People most commonly earn a living by recycling cans and bottles for money. This is a time-consuming process which requires someone to either leave all their possessions on the street to be stolen, or take it around with them. Many choose to live in encampments, where the safety offered by the numbers of people at the encampments are a better alternative to being by themselves. Others start informal businesses such as barbershops, clothing shops, or car repair services to make ends meet. Still more encampment and precariously housed residents resort to working for “gig economy” companies such as Caviar or doing temporary party security jobs.<sup>27</sup> Another common method of earning income appears to be stripping down, repairing, and/or building bikes for resale. It is not uncommon to see mounds of bike frames piled up in the encampments where residents run their informal businesses out of their tents.

The lack of good paying jobs in the formal job market drives people to participate in a secondary economy existing separate and apart from the formal economy. If nothing is done to help the people who are resorting to these practices to earn a living in an economy that is almost designed to shut them out, it will only force more people to resort to this informal economy and drive more people into homelessness. In the words of one encampment resident, when he looks across the bay at the Salesforce Tower, he doesn't see a beacon of progress, he instead sees a “...giant middle finger pointed at all us poor folks who got no place in their society.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> EveryoneHome Report (2018) “2017 Everyone Counts Homeless Point-in-Time Survey”  
[http://everyonehome.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/ALAEMDA\\_7-1.pdf](http://everyonehome.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/ALAEMDA_7-1.pdf) p.29

<sup>25</sup> Community-based survey, Encampment Respondents, Question #6

<sup>26</sup> Conversation #3 and conversation #7

<sup>27</sup> Interview #4

<sup>28</sup> Conversation #3, multiple participants

## **Systems Failure Causes of Homelessness**

COH defines systems failure causes of homelessness as “those situations where inadequate policy and service delivery contribute to the likelihood that someone will become homeless.”<sup>29</sup> This includes barriers to accessing public systems, failed transitions from publicly funded systems, and silos and gaps between government-funded departments and systems.

The Alameda County Continuum of Care is revamping service provision for homeless and at-risk individuals at the moment with the incorporation of Coordinated Entry program, so a discussion of how the current social service provision system can be improved will be outdated by the time the full changes are completed. Instead, this report shall focus on the two systems that have had the greatest impact on the lives of the respondents to the surveys and interviews: the carceral system and the complicated and inadequate public welfare system.

### **The Carceral System**

The carceral system directly contributes to homelessness in Oakland by first depriving formerly incarcerated people of their homes, then failing to facilitate their transition back into society. A criminal record, which is a form of “secondary punishment”, follows a formerly incarcerated person and prevents them from easily getting jobs or even applying for housing. There is even evidence that the Oakland Housing Authority uses criminal background checks as a screening method for denying housing services to applicants.<sup>30</sup>

The wave of mass incarceration disproportionately affected certain communities in Oakland and disadvantaged those communities in lasting ways that are still being felt today. For an in-depth discussion about the carceral system and its impact on housing for systems-impacted persons, please refer to another Just Cities-sponsored APA: “A Just Return Home.”<sup>31</sup>

The Oakland Police Department itself has a long and troubled history with incidents such as the Rider Scandal<sup>32</sup> eroding the trust between the community and the police. While the department is fixing its policies and attempting to rectify some of its past injustices,<sup>33</sup> the communities which experienced the policing of earlier decades still experience the downstream consequences of the initial over-policing.

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<sup>29</sup> Canadian Observatory on Homelessness “Framework for Preventing Homelessness”  
<http://homelesshub.ca/ANewDirection> p.24

<sup>30</sup> Oakland Housing Authority Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy  
<http://www.oakha.org/AboutUs/ReportsPolicies/Documents/ACOP%20FT%20final.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> Rodriguez, Anthony (2019) “A Just Return Home: Identifying and Removing Barriers to Housing for Formerly Incarcerated Residents Through Suggested Policies for County of Alameda” Report for Just Cities and Goldman School of Public Policy.

<sup>32</sup> PBS Frontline Documentary Moughty (2011), “*The Oakland Police Department’s Troubled History*”  
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/the-oakland-police-departments-troubled-history/>

<sup>33</sup> Hetey et al. (2016) “Data for Change: A Statistical Analysis of Police Stops, Searches, Handcuffings, and Arrests in Oakland, Calif., 2013-2014” <https://stanford.box.com/v/Data-for-Change>



Not only does the initial episode of incarceration disrupt people's lives by removing a potential income earner from the household, but the fees, debts, and other financial burdens incurred for running afoul of the law add up and reduces the affected individual's income and increases housing insecurity amidst an unprecedented housing affordability crisis.<sup>34</sup>

After being incarcerated, people exiting the system face even more barriers. Individuals with an incarceration record now have a mark against them when applying for HUD housing. HUD will deny applicants based on "criminal activity" which involves drug-related activities, violence, activity that will threaten the health, safety, or enjoyment of other residents on the premises, or sexual assault or abuse.<sup>35</sup> While many of these standards are quite reasonable for the population that HUD intends to serve, it leaves people with such backgrounds without a means of securing affordable housing as HUD operates almost all the affordable housing inventory in Oakland.

The housing discrimination against formerly incarcerated persons also extends to private housing where landlords routinely do background checks, and even if the formerly incarcerated person has a paying job and refrains from using drugs or getting arrested again, they are still denied housing. An incarceration record also follows the formerly incarcerated in the job market, making it hard to find good paying work in a job market that is already stacked against them. This is why, when the research team spoke to unsheltered encampment residents, they found that 73% of them had previously been incarcerated and 70% of the OUSD and Laney College unsheltered and provisionally accommodated respondents had been incarcerated.<sup>36</sup>

Arguments can be made on the grounds of justice and fairness that this current system shouldn't change to accommodate people who broke the law. However, setting aside value judgments, these punishments that American society has decided to heap upon individuals for breaking the law directly feeds into the city's homelessness crisis. Whether this is fair or not is beyond the scope of this paper to answer, but this does not change the fact that incarceration and contact with the system exacerbates the structural causes of homelessness and can be a precipitating factor for someone becoming homeless, thus any homelessness prevention efforts should target interventions at people who were formerly incarcerated, are families of incarcerated people, or exiting the prison system. For an in-depth discussion on how carceral system contact may be removed as a barrier to housing, please see the "A Just Return Home" Advanced Policy Analysis report by Anthony Rodriguez.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Duxbury, Micky "Lessening the Effects of Incarceration in Oakland" USC Annenberg Center for Health Journalism <https://www.centerforhealthjournalism.org/fellowships/projects/lessening-effects-incarceration-oakland>

<sup>35</sup> Oakland Housing Authority "Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy" <http://www.oakha.org/AboutUs/ReportsPolicies/Documents/2014%20ACOP.pdf> p.3-20

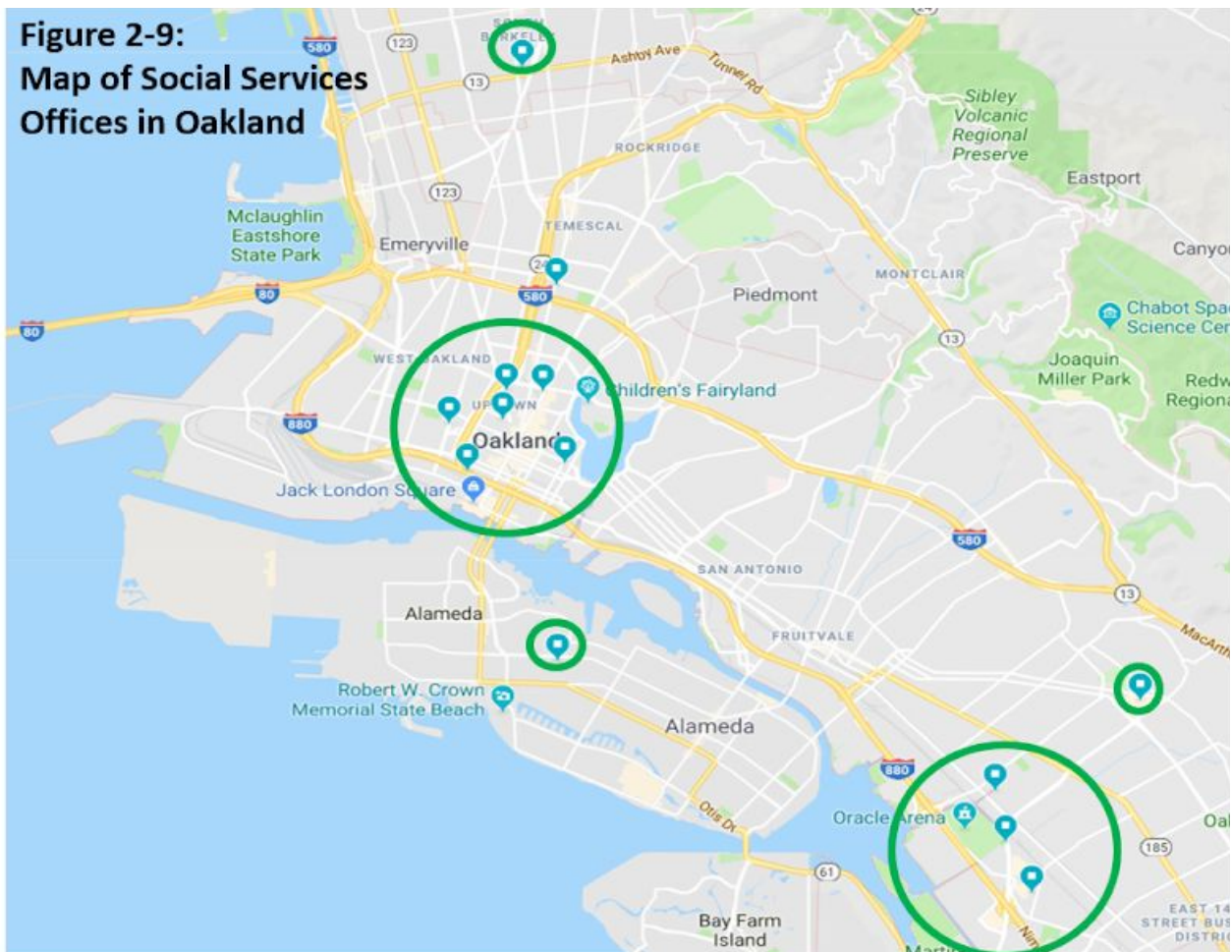
<sup>36</sup> Community-based survey question #17

<sup>37</sup> Rodriguez, Anthony. *A Just Return Home: Identifying and Removing Barriers to Housing for Formerly Incarcerated Residents Through Suggested Policies for County of Alameda*. Report. Advanced Policy Analysis Project conducted for fulfillment of Master of Public Policy Degree, Spring 2019.

## Lack of Social Safety Net

The social welfare system seems daunting, byzantine in its complexity, and inaccessible to people who are in deep poverty and facing crisis. The research team acknowledges that there are offices full of dedicated, caring, and well-meaning public servants at all levels of government struggling to provide services in a challenging operating environment. However, the fact remains that many of the individuals these government and nonprofit agencies are trying to help do not find their services accessible due to a) distance, b) the lack of available housing resources to pair with service outreach, and c) the challenges of daily life interfering with the ability to go apply for benefits. Agencies all over the region are switching their homeless service data collection procedures to the new Coordinated Entry System (CES) so this analysis may be outdated in the coming years, but this report accurately reflects the difficulties reported by survey and interview respondents at the time of this writing.

- a) Distance: Figure 2-9 below shows the locations of social welfare offices for programs run by the county, city, and federal government:



The social welfare/services offices are mostly clustered in three major physical locations: first is a cluster of offices downtown near city hall, the second is a group of offices near the Oakland Coliseum, and finally there is a large complex of offices in Eastmont Mall in East Oakland. In between these office locations, there is a large physical gap that requires the low-income families to travel long distances on unreliable public transportation to arrive in time for appointments and to fill out paperwork. Most low-income families are capable of making this commute or doing paperwork remotely on their phones and computers. However, the families in the deepest crisis and who are in the deepest need find this distance insurmountable. Furthermore, individuals with disabilities cannot easily make it to these offices. One of the project's interviewees was so cripplingly disabled, she could not stand or walk for longer than 10 minutes before needing to sit down. She stated that one of the greatest obstacles to her obtaining help to get housed is the fact that the offices are so far away, and that she doesn't have a phone or a permanent address so her only option is to physically go to an office.

- b) Lack of housing resources: One of the most discouraging observations respondents in both interviews and surveys reported was that there weren't enough housing units to help them out of homelessness even when service providers reached out to them. The Oakland, Berkeley/Alameda County CoC runs three types of homeless-targeted housing programs: transitional housing (which provides a temporary living arrangement for up to 24 months), rapid rehousing (which provides a recipient with limited financial aid and assistance in finding a new home), and permanent supportive housing (meant for the highest-need individuals which provides them an indefinite period of stay at a property with a caseworker and services assigned to them). The CoC's homeless housing services (emergency shelter (ES), transitional housing (TH), rapid rehousing (RRH), and permanent supportive housing (PSH)) served 8,016 unique individuals in FY2018.<sup>38</sup> That same year, 2,174 were newly homeless that year and the rest are existing clients. There are only 887 emergency and transitional beds and 2,046 permanent beds available in the entire system. Finally, within the whole system, only 1,158 people exited the system into permanent housing.<sup>39</sup> Over 2017-2018, 15% of people exiting into permanent housing (around 378) return to homelessness within two years. Figure 2-10 below illustrates the system's performance.

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<sup>38</sup> "Unduplicated count of individuals served in Emergency Shelter/Transitional Housing/Rapid Rehousing/Permanent Supportive Housing programs during FY2018" Everyonehome Results-Based Accountability Committee Scorecard <http://everyonehome.org/the-2018-practitioner-scorecard/>

<sup>39</sup> "Are we successfully moving people into permanent housing?" Everyonehome Results-Based Accountability Committee Scorecard <https://embed.resultsscorecard.com/PerfMeasure/Embed?id=372878>

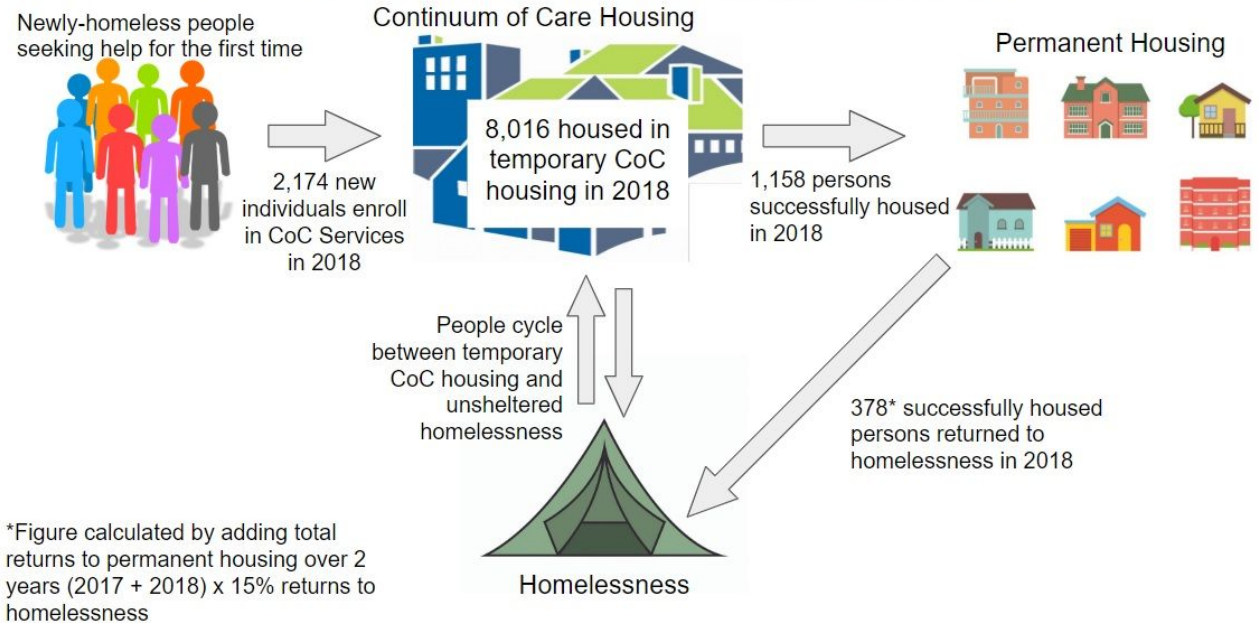
Figure 2-10: Flow Chart of Berkeley/Alameda/Oakland CoC Performance Bottleneck (2018)

Data sources:

- Everyonehome 2018 Practitioner Scorecard <http://everyonehome.org/the-2018-practitioner-scorecard/>

- 2018 Urban Institute Report <https://homelessness.acgov.org/homelessness-assets/docs/final-report-urban-institute.pdf> p.12

- Everyonehome 2018 Strategic Plan Update <http://everyonehome.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Everyone-Home-Strategic-Update-Report-Final.pdf> p.15



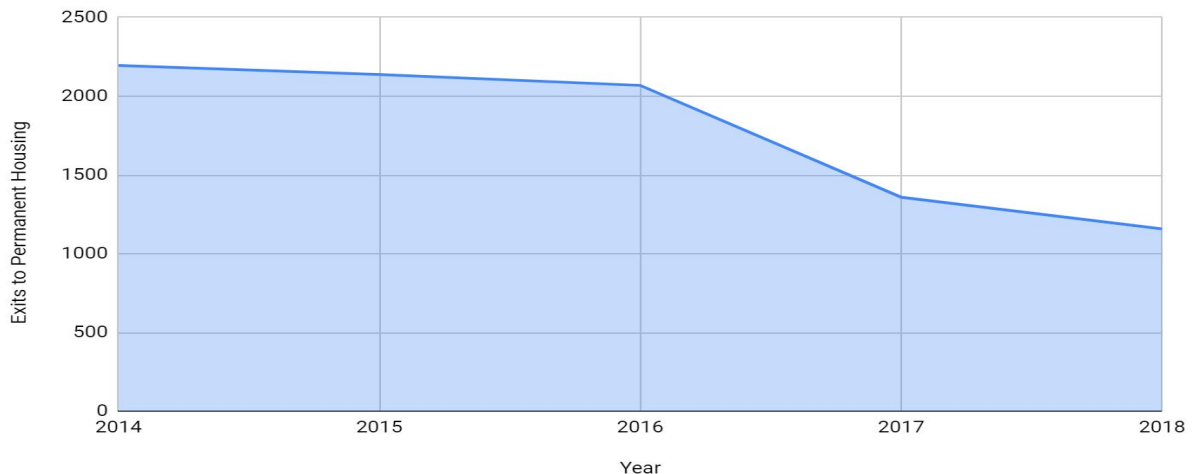
The Continuum of Care lacks the resources needed to house such large numbers of homeless individuals. A 2018 Urban Institute report evaluated the Oakland/Berkeley/Alameda CoC performance over time and found that the system was keeping people in “transitional” and “emergency” housing for longer, was serving fewer people, and were not able to serve as many newly homeless individuals because of “bottlenecks” in the services meant to move people out of the homelessness services sector and into permanent housing.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Brown, Batko, Leopold, and Shroyer (2018) Final Report and Recommendations on Homelessness in Alameda County, CA <https://homelessness.acgov.org/homelessness-assets/docs/final-report-urban-institute.pdf> p.11

The trend is also getting worse over time. Figure 2-11 shows fewer people successfully exiting the Continuum of Care to permanent housing between 2014-2018:

Figure 2-11: Exits to Permanent Housing (2014-2018)

Data Sources: Urban Institute Report (2018), EveryoneHome Strategic Plan Update (2018), 2018 Practitioner Scorecard



The interviewees and survey respondents for this project reported that they were disillusioned with the current services system, and were not receptive to aid workers or outreach employees because they knew that applying for homelessness services would only lead back to the street. The residents of the encampments were especially pessimistic about public services and vociferously stated that they would rather take their chances living on the street than suffer the indignity of waiting in a dirty, crowded, and restrictive shelter where you can't have many of your belongings or your pet only to be told there weren't any permanent housing units available for you.

Not only does such a situation discourage recipients from seeking out and applying for services, but it also certainly has an impact on the agencies forced to work within this system, causing workers to become frustrated and demoralized.

### c) Hassles and Perils of Life on the Streets

People in poverty face unique difficulties and challenges compared to people who are financially stable. People living on the street face even more challenges than those who are simply in poverty. While they represent only a fraction of the people who are in need of homelessness prevention services, these individuals face the most obstacles to acquiring services compared to everyone else.

Residents of encampments face a myriad of dangers in the night. Poorly-constructed tents often blow away in the springtime high winds. Robbers can sometimes attack sleeping residents, and in response, many residents get animals to serve as literal



watchdogs for security at night.<sup>41</sup> Despite these precautions, sleep at night is often short and light, resulting in the resident waking up the next day (usually later in the day than the person would like) tired and unrested. The resident then has to struggle with recycling cans, fixing bikes, panhandling, or waiting in line at a soup kitchen to sustain themselves for the day. When the sun sets, the cycle begins anew. Many turn to drugs or alcohol to help them get through the constant stress and adversity and fall into cycles of addiction.

These conditions create obstacles to the encampment resident reaching out to find help. One individual said that the biggest obstacle to finding help is locating the motivation within himself to leave the tent, disrupt his day, and seek out help from an agency that isn't guaranteed to help him at all.<sup>42</sup> All of the aforementioned events in the typical day of a homeless encampment resident create obstacles which serve to keep them in the streets. An encampment resident in this man's situation is going to need proactive, patient, and persistent outreach to overcome his obstacles and get him off the street.

City of Oakland Department of Human Services Staff acknowledge that this difficulty exists, but state that the resources for outreach are not enough. Furthermore, there are some instances and locations where workers directly employed by the city cannot easily access such as abandoned warehouses, illegal dwelling units, or encampments that have a bad history with city personnel. In these instances, nonprofits and community-based organizations are probably better suited to outreach if provided proper funding.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Interviews #1 and 3, Conversation #5

<sup>42</sup> Interview #3

<sup>43</sup> Talia Rubin Interview, April 22, 2019

## **Individual Causes of Homelessness**

While it is impossible to generalize about the most common path that sends an individual into homelessness, the COH framework provides some common characteristics or risk factors that might lead an individual to become homeless: crises such as fires or sickness, sudden unemployment, or eviction, housing precarity in the form of paying more than 30% of income for substandard housing, interpersonal or relational problems, disabling conditions such as physical disability or mental illness, interpersonal violence which covers racial abuse, misogyny, and domestic violence, and the lingering debilitating effects of trauma.<sup>44</sup>

It was beyond the scope of this project to research which factor most influenced an Oaklander's chance of becoming homeless. Instead, the team came to the realization that these factors are present in every society and every municipality in the world. There will always be those who are poor and facing challenges. However, the culture and governance of the Bay Area as a region turns these barriers into insurmountable walls which have marginalized the individuals who do not fit into the dominant societal narrative and increased their risk of homelessness.

### **Summary**

Low-income residents have always been disadvantaged in the City of Oakland. Successive waves of intentional discriminatory practices such as redlining, racial housing covenants, and racially prejudiced urban design left behind a legacy of underserved and underprivileged populations. Crack cocaine, as told to the research team by the residents interviewed for this project, destroyed families and neighborhoods and brought about the over-policing and mass incarceration that followed.<sup>45</sup>

With the inbuilt structural disadvantages, gentrification has pushed many Oaklanders at-risk of homelessness into homelessness and increased the risk of homelessness for many working-class families. Given these conditions, individual factors already present in all communities often trigger homelessness episodes which in turn have detrimental effects on the individual's mental health, physical health, and ability to reintegrate back into society.

Over the course of this project, the research team came across countless stories all telling of different paths to homelessness among the individuals we spoke with, but in the specific context of the City of Oakland, the team was able to identify one overarching theme of poverty as described in the "Pushed to the Bottom" report by ATD Fourthworld.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Canadian Observatory on Homelessness "A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention" <https://www.homelesshub.ca/ANewDirection> p.22

<sup>45</sup> Interview #3 and Conversation #3

<sup>46</sup> Broxton et al. (2019) "Pushed to the Bottom: The Experience of Poverty in the United States" ATD Fourth World <https://map.4thworldmovement.org/download-map-report/>

In the report's conclusion, the authors quote UN Special Rapporteur on Poverty Philip Alston in saying that in the United States there is a social narrative which creates a dichotomy of the "deserving" poor and the "undeserving" poor. This causes many who are poor to internalize their own poverty, losing hope and blaming themselves for a situation that potentially has been generations in the making due to intentionally discriminatory and/or exclusionary public policies originating from the federal government. This in turn has shaped the systems of aid and policing in the U.S. that demands the poor "live up to" certain expectations of them or risk losing their "deserving" status.<sup>47</sup>

This dynamic is alive and well today in the Bay Area. The homeless and precariously housed individuals interviewed for this project feel that the meritocratic middle class and upper class individuals hold certain toxic conceptions of the poor and are actively disrespectful towards individuals who didn't "make it." The unhoused feel this in the dirty stares that desperate people receive when begging for money on the BART train. It is present when an immigrant store owner throws a homeless man out of his store for daring to ask for a cup of water. It is demonstrated when a neighborhood association raises \$100,000 to fight against a homeless navigation center being set up in The Embarcadero.<sup>48</sup> The homeless individuals faced with such discrimination feel like they are treated as a nuisance at best, and a liability to be driven out at worst. What is missing from this conception is the fact that these individuals were here before the tech boom brought tens of thousands of high-paid well-educated professionals into the Bay Area. These people are the legacy of decades of discrimination, deprivation, and repression, and they are acutely aware of how unwanted they are by the new arrivals to their city.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p.35

<sup>48</sup> Green, Matthew (2019) "S.F. Port Commission Approves Controversial Embarcadero Navigation Center" KQED News, accessed May 1st, 2019.  
<https://www.kqed.org/news/11741972/s-f-port-commission-approves-lease-for-controversial-embarcadero-navigation-center>

## Section 3: What is the Current Structure of Homelessness Funding in Oakland?

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### **What Programs are Funded by the City of Oakland?**

The City of Oakland's homelessness response system is not a single coordinated effort led by any single agency. A multitude of actors and funders operate in the city to provide services and housing to homeless and housed residents. The city funds some of these efforts using both city funds and external government and private funds. The categories of services offered under this funding regime are:

1. **Displacement Prevention**: These interventions are focused on preventing people from being displaced from their homes and is not specifically targeted at the people most at-risk of becoming homeless. Specifically, anti-displacement measures are meant for people who can earn up to 80% of the area median income and, given how woefully unfunded these services are relative to the scale of the need, do not offer enough resources specifically targeted to the most vulnerable demographic of people at-risk of becoming homeless to significantly reduce the number of people becoming homeless.
2. **Homelessness Services**: These are short-term interventions designed to deal with the immediate consequences of homelessness. These include support services, shelters, rapid rehousing, and transitional housing. Specific examples include the Community Cabins program, the navigation centers, and various services related to providing healthcare to homeless persons and representing them when applying for benefits.
3. **Homeless Prevention**: Services which are targeted at preventing people in the highest-risk category (those earning between 0-30% of area median income) from losing their homes and ending up on the street. These services include permanent housing subsidies, legal intervention and renter mediation to prevent evictions (before the unlawful detainer stage) targeted at persons making 0-30% AMI.

In addition to homeless services, the City of Oakland funds **affordable housing development** which can be targeted at people earning up to 80% of area median income and is not formally considered a homelessness service or prevention intervention. However, the most effective homelessness prevention strategies require affordable housing units to successfully and sustainably reduce the numbers of persons experiencing homelessness. Therefore, this report also considers affordable housing funding to determine if production and funding is meeting demand.

## **How Much is Being Spent on Homelessness in Oakland?**

Table 3-1 below summarizes the funding amounts directly being spent by the city on homelessness services, displacement prevention, and homelessness prevention between fiscal years 2017 through 2019:

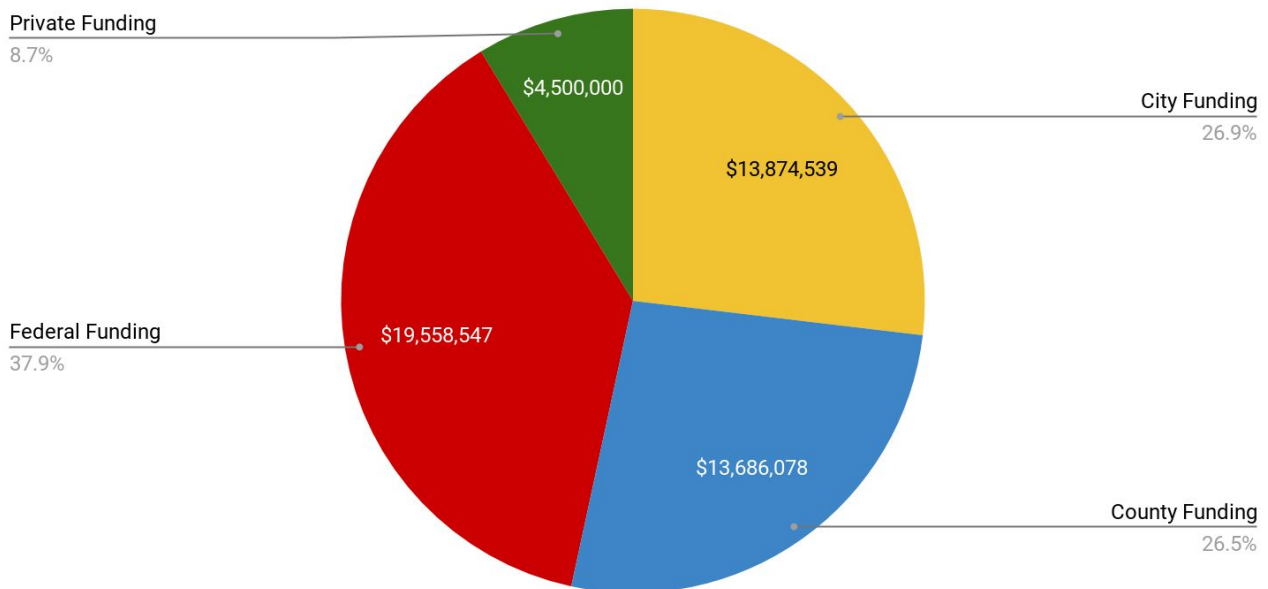
<b>Table 3-1: Total Homelessness Funding In Oakland (FY17-19)<sup>49</sup></b>		
<b>Category</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Homelessness Services	\$40,416,728	78.3%
Homelessness Prevention	\$3,852,436	7.5%
Displacement Prevention	\$7,350,000	14.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$51,619,164</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

## **Where Does the Money Come From?**

Figure 3-2 shows where the total homelessness funding in the city came from, and how much of the total funding it represents. Note that affordable housing development is not counted in this estimation, but will be discussed afterwards:

Figure 3-2: 2-Year Total Oakland Homelessness Funding Sources (FY17-19)  
(Affordable housing not counted)

Source: City of Oakland Public Records Request #18-3146



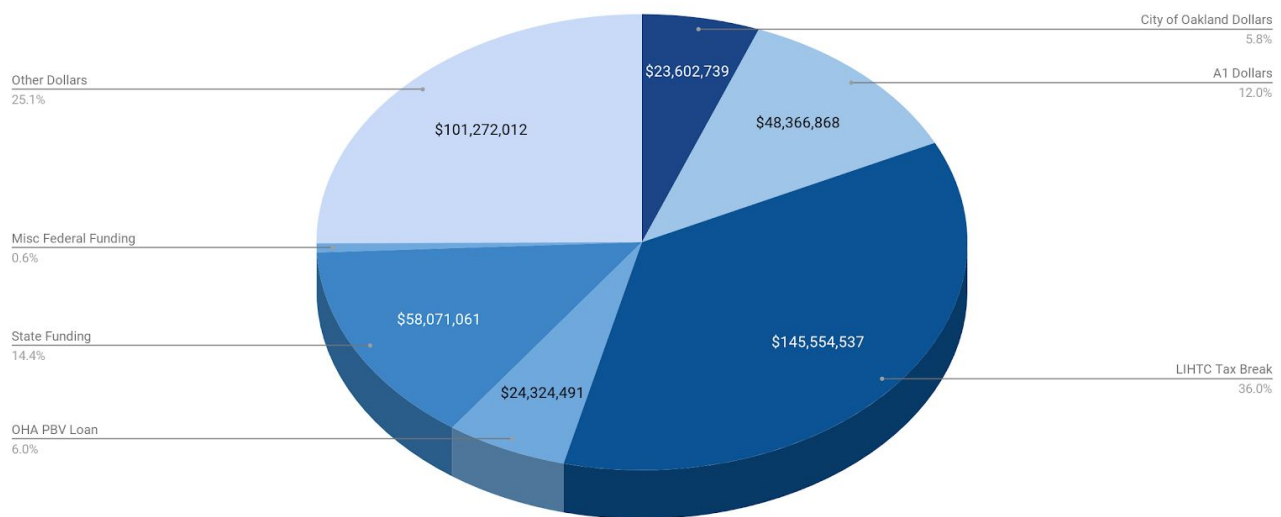
<sup>49</sup> City of Oakland Public Records Request #18-3146

**Federal Spending:** According to a spending summary provided by the City of Oakland in response to a public records request, \$19,558,547 of Oakland’s homeless services funding came from federal sources in FY 2018-19.<sup>50</sup> Federal funding represents 38% of all non-affordable housing development funding used in the City of Oakland.

In terms of affordable housing development, the federal government is the single largest funder of affordable housing development funding in the region. To illustrate how big a role the federal government plays in affordable housing development in Oakland, figure 3-2 below tabulates all the various funding sources leveraged for Oakland’s Measure A1 funding allocation in calendar year 2017.

Figure 3-3: Measure A1 2017 Project Summary by Funding Source

Source: Measure A1 City of Oakland Project Summaries as of April 2018



In the year 2017, \$172,467,279 or 42% of all funding used to develop the 626 housing units approved that year through the use of Measure A1 city-specific funds came from the federal government either through direct funding or through tax credits. Furthermore, the Oakland Housing Authority (OHA) provides \$190,940,557 in housing voucher funding for 14,020 households.<sup>51</sup> Even in a political environment where the federal government does not actively support the goals of creating more affordable housing or homelessness prevention, they are

<sup>50</sup> City of Oakland Public Records Request #18-3146 <https://oaklandca.nextrequest.com/requests/18-3146>

<sup>51</sup> Oakland Housing Authority “Making Transition Work: FY2019 Annual Plan” <http://www.oakha.org/AboutUs/ReportsPolicies/Documents/FY2019%20MTW%20Plan%20-%20for%20website.pdf>

still a large contributor relative to the other affordable housing development entities in the area. Finally, the federal government runs substantially all HUD-related homelessness services through the Continuum of Care (CoC) model where HUD contracts with Everyonehome to facilitate grant programs and competitive funding pools, as well as monitor the performance of the homelessness services system in the region.<sup>52</sup>

**State Spending:** The State of California funds homelessness services via direct funding to the City of Oakland and Alameda County departments of Health & Human Services and Housing & Community Development. As seen in figure 3-2, the State of California also plays a significant role in the funding of affordable housing development, providing 15% of all 2017 monies leveraged by measure A1 and city funds. The state also funds numerous other affordable housing development projects in Oakland through the state HCD department.<sup>53</sup>

**Local Spending:** Local homelessness funding consists of county and city funding via specific taxes as well as some monies from the general funds of both governments. The city provides the majority of service funding, primarily through the use of Measure KK funding to rehabilitate properties into transitional housing.<sup>54</sup> Most city funds go towards leveraging other funding sources such as the Homeless Emergency Aid Program or private charities. The county contributed \$5,417,357 in homelessness services primarily through the use of “boomerang” funds made available by the dissolution of the CA redevelopment agency.<sup>55</sup> The county plays a much larger role in affordable housing development, facilitating the input of state funds from the CA HCD and federal funds through the continuum of care system.

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<sup>52</sup> Everyonehome Results-Based Accountability Committee website

<http://everyonehome.org/about/committees/results-based-accountability-committee/>

<sup>53</sup> California Department of Housing and Community Development website

<http://www.hcd.ca.gov/grants-funding/index.shtml>

<sup>54</sup> City of Oakland Report of Measure KK Funding Progress, May 1st, 2019

<https://oakland.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=7200226&GUID=84E0EDCD-386F-4DC5-88E5-A2EF9AECB263>

<sup>55</sup> City of Oakland Public Records Request #18-3146 <https://oaklandca.nextrequest.com/requests/18-3146>

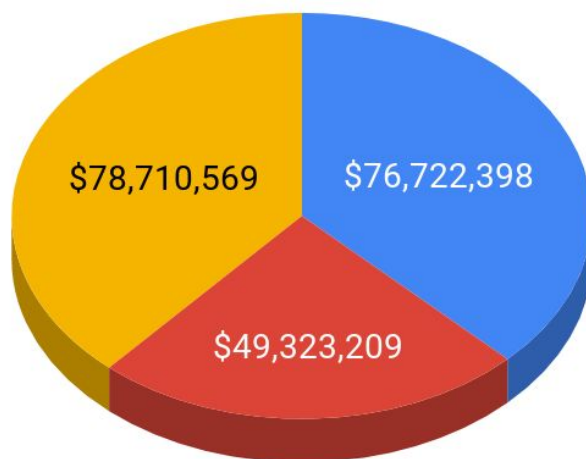


**Affordable Housing Production Spending:** Figure 3-4 below shows where over \$204 million in affordable housing monies spent by the City of Oakland and Alameda County between 2017-2019 originated:

### Figure 3-4: Public Funding for Affordable Housing Construction in Oakland FY17-19

Source: Various public documents from the city and county

- City of Oakland Dollars (Various Funding Sources)
- City A1 Dollars
- Regional A1 Dollars



\$128 million of the new construction funds came from measure A1 in the form of City and Regional allocations. The remaining \$76 million came from the City of Oakland through public bond measures like Measure KK and smaller grants which are yearly recurring grants such as the federal HOME grant, the city’s affordable housing trust fund, and the successor redevelopment agency funds from the state. Table 3-5 below outlines by project how those funds were allocated. A total of 1,419 units were built. 495 of those units were targeted to individuals at 0-30% AMI. 445 of the units targeted to individuals at 0-30% AMI were permanent supportive housing specifically meant for homeless people. Only 50 units were targeted to 0-30% AMI persons who weren’t already homeless.

**Table 3-5: Affordable Housing Projects in Oakland FY2017-2019**

Project Name	<a href="#">City of Oakland Dollars (Various Funding Sources)</a>	<a href="#">City A1 Dollars</a>	<a href="#">Regional A1 Dollars</a>	All Affordable Units @ 80% AMI (All Units)	Affordable Below 30% AMI (All Units)	PSH for Homeless	Source
Estrella Vista Property	\$2,053,632	\$1,900,000	\$0	86	28	0	<a href="#">Measure A1 2018 Staff Report Update</a>
Coliseum Connections	\$12,000,000	\$2,500,000	\$0	109	0	0	<a href="#">Measure A1 2018 Staff Report Update</a>
Casa Arabella	\$2,347,207	\$6,350,000	\$0	93	23	20	<a href="#">Measure A1 2018 Staff Report Update</a>
Embarc Apartments	\$0	\$2,700,000	\$0	61	31	54	<a href="#">Measure A1 2018 Staff Report Update</a>
Camino 23	\$1,200,000	\$4,200,000	\$0	39	14	5	<a href="#">Measure A1 2018 Staff Report Update</a>
657 West MacArthur Apartments	\$2,600,000	\$6,447,872	\$0	43	43	43	<a href="#">Measure A1 2018 Staff Report Update</a>
3268 San Pablo	\$1,000,000	\$7,180,000	\$0	50	13	0	<a href="#">Measure A1 2018 Staff Report Update</a>
Coliseum Place	\$1,600,000	\$4,400,000	\$7,398,421	58	25	54	<a href="#">Measure A1 2018 Staff Report Update</a>
Oakland and the World	\$2,981,900	\$12,688,996	\$0	78	20	20	<a href="#">Measure A1 2018 Staff Report Update</a>
Empyrean and Harrison	\$9,100,000	\$0	\$4,685,000	146	66	66	<a href="#">Measure A1 2018 Staff Report Update</a>
Fruitvale Transit Village	\$5,229,000	\$0	\$16,227,175	46	46	46	<a href="#">Measure A1 2018 Staff Report Update</a>
Brooklyn Basin Parcel	\$12,442,000	\$0	\$9,698,000	129	26	26	<a href="#">Measure A1 2018 Staff Report Update</a>
NOVA Apartments	\$1,600,000	\$0	\$13,766,776	56	56	56	<a href="#">Measure A1 2018 Staff Report Update</a>
Fruitvale Studios	\$500,000	\$0	\$3,484,309	23	11	12	<a href="#">Measure A1 2018 Staff Report Update</a>
West Grand and Brush	\$1,700,000	\$0	\$11,610,606	58	32	28	<a href="#">Measure A1 2018 Staff Report Update</a>
2227 International	\$3,500,000	\$0	\$11,840,282	76	31	15	<a href="#">Measure A1 2018 Staff Report Update</a>
95th & International	\$6,868,659	\$956,341	\$0	55	<a href="#">27</a>	0	City of Oakland Jan 17 2019 HCD Staff Report Oakland Housing Authority April 29 2019 Special Meeting Minutes
7th & campbell	\$3,000,000	\$0	\$0	78	0	0	Item #4.1-4.3 City of Oakland Public Records Request #19-904
Friendship senior rental housing	\$2,000,000	\$0	\$0	50	30	0	Item #5.1-5.3 City of Oakland Public Records Request #19-904
Harp Plaza Apt (430 28th st)	\$3,000,000	\$0	\$0	20	0	0	Item #4.1-4.3 City of Oakland Public Records Request #19-904
285 12th street	\$2,000,000	\$0	\$0	65	0	0	Item #5.1-5.3 City of Oakland Public Records Request #19-904
	\$76,722,398	\$49,323,209	\$78,710,569	1,419	50	445	
	Grand Total Oakland and A1 Dollars		\$204,756,176				

## **What is the Gap Between Spending and Need?**

EveryoneHome, the chief agency responsible for coordinating homelessness services and funding in the Alameda County Continuum of Care, points out in its 2018 strategic update that under the current system, only one person enters permanent housing for every 2 people who become homeless every year.<sup>56</sup> A successful reduction strategy must reduce the inflow of people into homelessness and increase the outflow of people into permanent housing while also keeping them housed.

The City of Oakland currently dedicates 17% of its housing and homelessness-related spending on homelessness services targeting people who are currently homeless. 77% of the spending is dedicated to affordable housing construction. Only 1.6% of the spending is used for interventions which constitute homelessness prevention.

To get a sense for whether this number is adequate for the current need, the analysis below measures the gap between spending and need:

### **Homeless Services**

Everyone Home calls for a budget increase of \$228 million to expand homelessness services across the county. There is currently \$106 million being spent on homelessness in the continuum of care. We question whether the 69% increase will result in any major improvements in the situation given that the requested increases primarily serve people who are already homeless and don't have provisions that help prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place. The City of Oakland should continue to provide services to reduce suffering, but increases to services without sustainably increasing exits to permanent housing won't reduce the demand for services.<sup>57</sup>

### **Homelessness Prevention**

**Emergency Rental Assistance:** Estimates of what it would take to successfully fund an emergency rental assistance program vary wildly by program type, population served, and type of entity administering the program. Catholic Charities of the East Bay (CCEB) intends to use \$3 million to help 120 Oakland families between 2018-2019. It is unclear whether this represents one-time assistance, time-limited assistance, or a permanent subsidy.<sup>58</sup> Alameda

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<sup>56</sup> Alameda County Report "Homelessness Action Plan 2018-2020"

<https://homelessness.acgov.org/homelessness-assets/docs/action-plans/CountyHomelessnessActionPlan.pdf>  
p.17

<sup>57</sup> Alameda County Report "Homelessness Action Plan 2018-2020"

<https://homelessness.acgov.org/homelessness-assets/docs/action-plans/CountyHomelessnessActionPlan.pdf>  
p.21

<sup>58</sup> Kendall, Marisa (2019) "Nearly 500 Families Won't Become Homeless, Thanks To New Oakland Housing Program"

<https://www.mercurynews.com/2019/01/08/500-fewer-homeless-families-new-oakland-housing-aid-program-shows-early-success/>

County, on the other hand, predicts that \$3 million used to provide one-time assistance would help 1,000 families.<sup>59</sup> There is no good estimate of potential need for time-limited emergency rental assistance, but evidence shows the cost could be between \$3,000 and \$25,000 per family.

**Permanent Housing Subsidies:** permanent subsidies are the most cost-effective tool to combat homelessness.<sup>60</sup> “Housing First,” or the strategy of putting people in affordable, private, and quality housing of their own choosing has shown the greatest positive outcome for ending homelessness out of all other interventions.<sup>61</sup> It is also the most frequently requested service the research team heard from unhoused residents of both the encampments and the other settings that were sampled. Unfortunately, it is also the most expensive intervention out of all the service-based interventions analyzed.

The Oakland Housing Authority (OHA) currently spends \$190,940,557 on its housing voucher program which consists of Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV), Project-Based Vouchers (PBV), and Public Housing (PH) programs, as well as a few other specialty voucher programs. OHA services 14,020 households, costing \$13,619 per household per year.

HUD Estimates that 64,645 renter households in Oakland make below 80% of the Household Adjusted Median Family Income (HAMFI), qualifying them for HUD programs. Table 3-6 below summarizes

**Table 3-6: Potential Need for Permanent Housing Subsidies (Renter Households)<sup>62</sup>**

Low Income (50%-80% HAMFI)	13,850
Very Low Income (30%-50% HAMFI)	16,615
Extremely Low Income (<30% HAMFI)	34,180
<b>Total</b>	<b>64,645</b>

Currently, the federal housing system provides housing assistance to just 21.7% of the target population.<sup>63</sup> There are currently 53,000 households (or around 82% of the remaining population) on waitlists for federal housing vouchers. Providing subsidies to the entire 64,645 household population would cost a total of \$880 million.<sup>64</sup> To provide subsidies to just the Extremely Low Income population would cost \$465 million.<sup>65</sup> The city doesn’t have the

<sup>59</sup> Alameda County Report “Homelessness Action Plan 2018-2020”

<https://homelessness.acgov.org/homelessness-assets/docs/action-plans/CountyHomelessnessActionPlan.pdf> p.9

<sup>60</sup> Gubits et al. (2015) “Family Options Study Short-Term Impacts of Housing and Services Interventions for Homeless Families [https://www.huduser.gov/portal/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/FamilyOptionsStudy\\_final.pdf](https://www.huduser.gov/portal/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/FamilyOptionsStudy_final.pdf)

<sup>61</sup> Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Website “Housing First”

<https://www.homelesshub.ca/solutions/housing-accommodation-and-supports/housing-first>

<sup>62</sup> “Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) Data 2012-2016” U.S. Dept of Housing and Urban Development. Accessed October 29, 2019. [https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/cp.html#2006-2016\\_query](https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/cp.html#2006-2016_query).

<sup>63</sup> 14,020 households served/64,645 estimated households that qualify

<sup>64</sup> \$13,619 per household cost reported by OHA multiplied by 64,645 low-income and below households

<sup>65</sup> \$13,619 per household cost reported by OHA multiplied by 34,180 extremely low-income households

resources to meet the entirety of the potential need, but vouchers tend to be cheaper than building new units if landlords can be convinced to rent to low-income residents.

### **Displacement Prevention**

Displacement prevention as defined by the city means all low-income residents (0-80% AMI) and doesn't target the people who are most at risk of homelessness (0-30% AMI).

**Housing Counseling and Outreach:** Causa Justa Just Cause (CJJC) estimated that in 2017, they received 3,000 requests for assistance from Oakland residents and were only able to help 800 of them due to funding restrictions.<sup>66</sup> No 2018 data for CJJC was available. Based on this number and with an estimate of \$60 per family, the funding gap is currently \$180,000/year from the city.

**Renter Legal Representation:** Centro Legal provided legal representation or services for 731 renters facing eviction in 2018. Given that there were 1,977 unlawful detainer suits that year, that leaves a need of potentially up to 1,246 cases.<sup>67</sup> Using the 2017 estimate of service costs (which there is no reason to believe have changed significantly), that leaves \$3,056,438 of unmet need.<sup>68</sup>

### **Affordable Housing Construction**

The City of Oakland needs affordable housing units targeted at households making 0-30% AMI to solve its Continuum of Care services bottleneck. The Bay Area Economic Council conducted a study of what it would take to build homes for the homeless in 2019. They concluded that it would cost \$12.7 billion to build a single unit of housing for each of the 28,200 homeless people counted by HUD in 2017.<sup>69</sup> Applying their calculations to Oakland's homeless population of 2,761<sup>70</sup> and using the average cost of constructing affordable housing in Alameda County, the total cost for housing Oakland's homeless is \$1.46 billion.

Getting such funding is theoretically possible for the city and county. Using the model of affordable housing development through the Measure A1 program in 2017, the City of Oakland spent \$23.6 million of city funds to leverage \$48.3 million in Measure A1 funds which together generated \$331,810,352 in federal and private funding for a 14x return on each city dollar

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<sup>66</sup> City of Oakland Report "Anti-Displacement Services Program" June 22, 2018. Attachment A, p.4

<sup>67</sup> City of Oakland Report "Rent Adjustment Program Annual Report: 2014-15 Through 2017-18 DATE: February 20, 2019" Attachment C, p.2

<sup>68</sup> 1,246 multiplied by \$2,453 per resident cost estimate in City of Oakland Report "Anti-Displacement Services Program" June 22, 2018. Attachment A, p.4

<sup>69</sup> *Bay Area Homelessness: A Regional View of a Regional Crisis*. Report. Bay Area Economic Council Institute. April 2019. p.20

<sup>70</sup> UPDATE: Since the time of this writing, the homeless count in Oakland has increased 47% to 4,071 Alameda County 2017 Point In Time Count Full Report

<http://everyonehome.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2017-Alameda-County-8.1-2.pdf>

allocated.<sup>71</sup> Using this calculation, and assuming the city and county can leverage the same amount of funding with the initial investment, it would take \$267 million to leverage the \$1.46 billion required to build the 2,760 units.<sup>72</sup>

However, this is still not enough. Even if the city places every single officially-counted unhoused person in a housing unit, there will still be approximately 2,000 persons per year becoming newly homeless. The city must construct enough housing to meet the demand for housing affordable at extremely low-income (0-30% AMI) levels, which is around 12,100 households.<sup>73</sup> The city is currently spending \$76.7 million of city funds to build 1,419 units, only 495 of which are affordable at 0-30% AMI, and only 50 of which are meant for people who are not already homeless.

“Building our way out of the crisis” is not realistic. The state, county, city, and housing developers cannot hope to muster the required resources, overcome the regulatory hurdles, and build fast enough for development alone to be effective.<sup>74</sup> We do not advocate for a cessation of affordable housing development, but policymakers must explore alternatives. For lower-cost housing strategies, please refer to the Dellums Institute/Just Cities’ 2018 “Housing Oakland’s Unhoused” report.<sup>75</sup>

## **Conclusion**

There are not enough resources being invested across all homelessness and housing-related service types. The scale of resources needed would be far beyond what the City of Oakland could hope to raise by itself, and absent a strategy to leverage private or outside sources of funding at the scale needed to solve the problem, the city must begin targeting the scarce current resources to individuals who are most likely to become homeless (0-30% AMI) and considering alternative permanent affordable housing development options.

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<sup>71</sup> Refer to figure 3-2

<sup>72</sup> UPDATE: Since the time of this writing, the homeless count in Oakland has increased 47% to 4,071

<sup>73</sup> Calculated using Urban Institute calculation methodology found in their 2015 report “The Housing Affordability Gap for Extremely Low-Income Renters in 2014” which assumed an affordable housing gap of 40 units for every 100 ELI renters. Calculations are as follows:

$(34,180 \text{ ELI renter households}) - (14,020 \text{ HUD households}) - (0.4 \times (\text{ELI-HUD Households})) = 12,096$

<sup>74</sup> Lin, Margareta, Daniel Lindheim, and Minkah Eshe-Smith. “Housing Is Essential: A Commonsense Paradigm Shift to Solve the Urban Displacement and Racial Injustice Crisis.” Berkeley Planning Journal 29, no. 1 (2017).

<https://doi.org/10.5070/bp329138436>.

<sup>75</sup> Elhalaby, Rawan *Housing Oakland’s Unhoused*. Report. Advanced Policy Analysis Project conducted for fulfillment of Master of Public Policy Degree, Spring 2018.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55c573a9e4b014e7aace0627/t/5bd20b85e5e5f0695b10ef1a/1540492174988/Final+Elhalaby%2C+Rawan+APA+5-11-2018+for+DISJ.pdf>

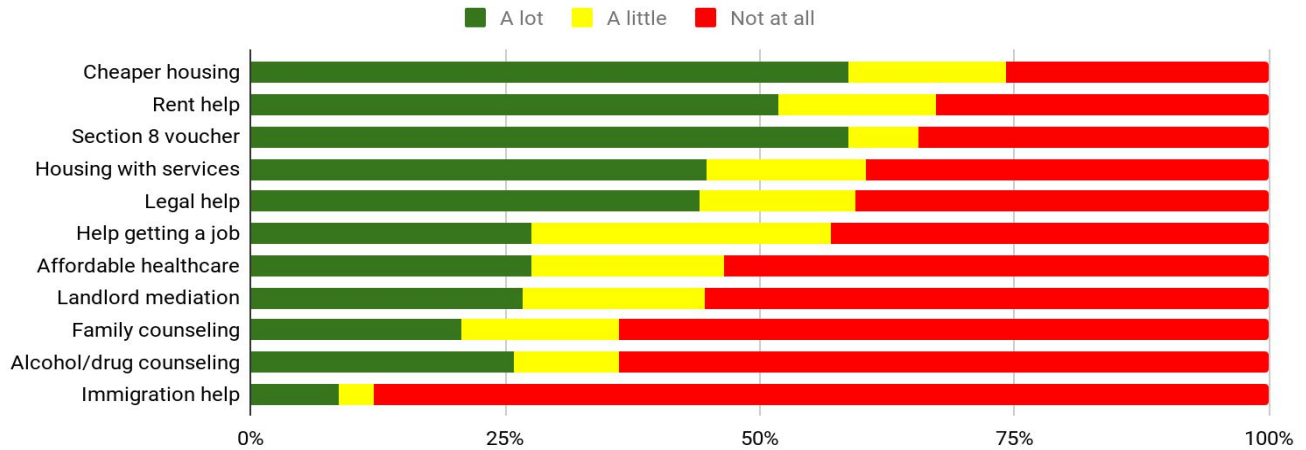


## Section 4: Final Recommendations

Figure 4-1 shows the results of the community-based survey given to encampment residents asking what they would have needed to stay housed and prevented them from becoming homeless

Figure 4-1: What Encampment Respondents Needed to Stay Housed

n = 58



Based on the results of the survey, housing-related supports are the top most desirable interventions to prevent homelessness among encampment residents. The Laney College and OUSD group reported the following as the most desired interventions:

Figure 4-2: What Laney College and OUSD Respondents Needed to Stay Housed

n = 33

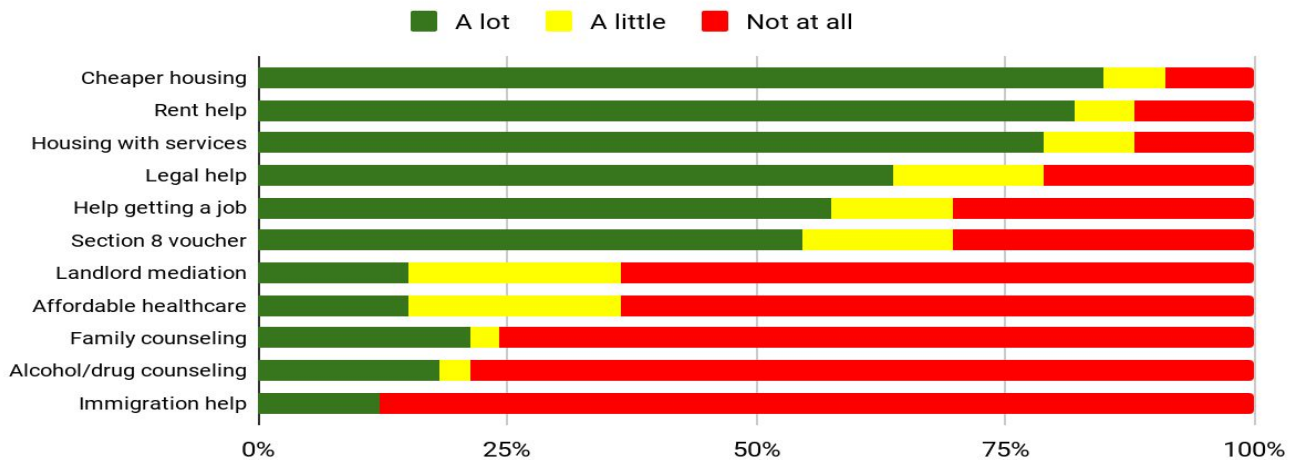


Figure 4-2 shows similar prevention measure preferences among the respondents sampled from OUSD and Laney College with the exception that “Legal Help” is prioritized over job help due to the respondents’ extensive contacts with the carceral system.

With this feedback in mind, the research team recommends that the City of Oakland adopt the following broad principles supported by their respective specific policies:

### **Making Living in Oakland More Affordable**

This form of intervention provides supports which counteract the structural factors which lead to homelessness. In the context of Oakland’s homelessness situation, this involves massively increasing income supports and rental assistance targeted at ELI households and encourages the city to look at alternative forms of permanent housing development in addition to increasing funding for permanent, deeply affordable housing.

- **Increase income supports:** to combat gentrification and unequal access to jobs and education, the City of Oakland should work with the County of Alameda to increase cash benefits and assistance to ELI households such as increasing the eligibility period or the amount of assistance available under the general assistance program.
- **Implement a permanent rental subsidy:** the subsidy should be aimed at people who are earning between 0 to 30% of AMI and are paying over 30% of their income in rent. This system should subsidize all 34,180 households identified as potentially in need of help. Giving \$13,619 per household like HUD does would result in a cost that’s far too high for the city to sustain. The city should make this intervention feasibly by reducing the total amount given using existing funds. For example, dedicating all \$8.9 million of the HEAP dollars proposed by the Mayor’s 2019-2021 budget to the housing subsidy would give \$500 of housing subsidy a month to 1,483 families in total.<sup>76</sup> This would be nearly triple the number of people helped compared to the Keep Oakland Housed effort<sup>77</sup> and would be almost triple the current 533 people being helped by the current homelessness shelter system.<sup>78</sup>
- **Increase affordable housing construction for ELI households and look for alternatives to traditional housing development:** so far, the city has embarked on a \$200 million effort to construct, acquire, or rehabilitate affordable housing.<sup>79</sup> The city must continue to encourage affordable housing development, but must also look at different strategies to house 12,100 ELI households with dignity.

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<sup>76</sup> Mayor of Oakland 2019-2021 proposed budget

<https://cao-94612.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/FY-2019-21-Proposed-Budget-Book-WEB-VERSION.pdf>

<sup>77</sup> Kendal, Marisa (2019) “Nearly 500 families won’t become homeless, thanks to new Oakland housing program” Mercury News

<https://www.mercurynews.com/2019/01/08/500-fewer-homeless-families-new-oakland-housing-aid-program-shows-early-success/>

<sup>78</sup> City of Oakland Public Records Request #19-2103 <https://oaklandca.nextrequest.com/requests/19-2103>

<sup>79</sup> *Measure A1 City of Oakland Project Summaries*. Report. Department of Housing and Development, County of Alameda. April 18, 2018. <https://www.acgov.org/cda/hcd/documents/CityofOakland.pdf>.



## **Remove Unnecessary Policy Barriers to Housing**

This form of prevention addresses government policies and procedures that create barriers to housing for certain populations and shortcomings in housing policy for individuals transitioning out of government institutions such as prisons, hospitals, or the military. For Oakland, this means reducing landlord discrimination against people with criminal backgrounds, reforming the OHA criminal background check policy, helping veterans upgrade their “bad paper” discharges, and reforming the transition system for people coming out of prison.

- **“Ban the box” for rental units:** an incarceration record could potentially ruin a renter’s chances of securing housing in Oakland. Some of the most affordable units are out of reach for formerly incarcerated individuals due to renter discrimination and the high proportion of formerly incarcerated individuals in Oakland merits such a protection to prevent them from becoming homeless and to re-house the homeless who disproportionately have criminal convictions on their records.<sup>80</sup>
- **Reform OHA criminal background check policy:** currently, the Oakland Housing Authority conducts background checks to determine if individuals have had any convictions for drug-related or violent crimes. Several respondents to this project as well as the Restoring Our Communities group report that applicants to OHA programs have encountered unfair denials of admission based on criteria outside the stated reasons for denial of admission as published by OHA. The Housing Authority should review its policies concerning criminal background checks, such as creating a way to overlook marijuana-related convictions that both complies with federal law, but also doesn’t penalize families for being convicted of possession or distribution of a drug that is now legal and widely used in California.<sup>81</sup>
- **Work with Operation Dignity and the local VA office to help veterans who have “bad paper” discharges:** this study interviewed one veteran and the research team spoke with several veterans who had been discharged with “other than honorable” or “dishonorable” discharges.<sup>82</sup> Once a service member leaves the military, the character of their discharges determines whether or not they receive VA benefits. Many veterans were discharged for misconduct stemming from actions such as DUIs, assault, or various other crimes which not only kicked them out of the service, but also marked them forever in their employment histories and denied them VA services. In 2017, the Department of Defense realized that many of these veterans who were discharged were suffering from the mental wounds incurred through military service and put out guidance telling their human resources agencies to give “liberal consideration” to veterans asking for their discharges to be upgraded.<sup>83</sup> The minimum level of discharge to be eligible for

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<sup>80</sup> Conversation #8

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Roger Viet Chung, Laney College Faculty, Restoring Our Communities

<sup>82</sup> Interview #1 and conversation #4

<sup>83</sup> Department of Defense August 28th, 2017 press release “DoD Clarifies Liberal Consideration for Veterans’ Discharge Upgrade Requests”

<https://dod.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1292904/dod-clarifies-liberal-consideration-for-veterans-discharge-upgrade-requests/>

most VA benefits is “General under honorable conditions” and this should be the goal that agencies and nonprofits should seek to help homeless veterans.

### **Fund More Early Outreach**

This form of intervention targets individuals who are going through crisis at the point of occurrence and speeds them into housing, preferably without having to make use of the “homeless service” sector. Preferably, these cases are brought to the attention of the local safety net service providers and an advocate or caseworker is assigned to the individual or family to get them into housing rapidly before they spend too much time on the street. In Oakland, the primary need is for outreach workers working for either the city or nonprofits.

- **Fund City Outreach:** In an interview with Talia Rubin who works in the Community Housing Services Division of the Human Services Department of the City of Oakland, she stated that there is a gap between the city’s capacity to conduct street outreach and the need that is out there. Based on the estimates of the unsheltered street population from the Everyonehome Point-in-Time Count, that would mean at least 1,902 individuals<sup>84</sup> need street outreach. Going by the metric of 25 clients per caseworker and 100 clients per outreach worker, that means The City of Oakland needs at least 76 caseworkers and at least 19 outreach workers. It is currently unclear how many city employee and client nonprofit workers the City of Oakland has at the moment, but Talia states that the number of cases the workers in her office handle routinely exceed the benchmark guidelines.<sup>85</sup>

### **Increase Eviction Protection**

This intervention focuses on providing as many resources as possible to tenants to fight unlawful evictions and to stay in their housing. The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness categorizes eviction protection as: “...rent controls and supplements, housing education, and crisis supports for those imminently at risk of eviction. These programs are geared at renters, but the same programs are often effective for homeowners at risk of foreclosure. Eviction prevention is seen as an ‘upstream’ solution to homelessness by reducing the number of people who become homeless.”<sup>86</sup> While the city is already funding interventions along these lines under its current anti-displacement program, the resources are not enough to target the entire population of people vulnerable to displacement to include individuals who are most at risk of homelessness. The following interventions must be targeted at residents in the 0-30% AMI income bracket in order to effectively function as homelessness prevention measures.

- **Pass a Renter Protection Package Ordinance:** The City of Oakland can pass a comprehensive ordinance to mandate that a series of tenant protection measures should be funded: a) targeted community outreach and counseling, b) targeted legal

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<sup>84</sup> Alameda County 2017 Point In Time Count Full Report

<http://everyonehome.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2017-Alameda-County-8.1-2.pdf>

<sup>85</sup> Talia Rubin Interview, April 22, 2019

<sup>86</sup> Canadian Observatory on Homelessness “A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention” <https://www.homelesshub.ca/ANewDirection> p.70

services, c) starting a housing rental subsidy fund, d) increasing landlord mediation services, and e) increasing targeted emergency rental assistance funding.

- **Increasing RAP Activity in Oakland:** the Rent Adjustment Program’s board recently obtained a fee increase to fund more activities related to proactive enforcement as opposed to passive complaints-based enforcement. Empowering the RAP board to more proactively protect renters could potentially prevent up to 6,848 tenants per year who receive eviction notices and 1,977 tenants per year involved in unlawful detainer lawsuits.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, ramping up RAP activities would allow the RAP board to properly enforce existing anti-housing discrimination ordinances. The community members this project spoke with all reported discrimination by landlords based on race, incarceration status, and sexual orientation, and a proactive RAP board would both conduct aggressive outreach and education to ensure that residents know their rights and conduct aggressive enforcement to act upon complaints against landlords who discriminate against tenants.

### **Provide More Supportive Housing**

This intervention type focuses on all the elements of getting and retaining housing. For some high-need individuals, this represents a significant commitment on the part of service providers. In the context of Oakland, the entity that handles this intervention type is the Oakland/Berkeley/Alameda County Continuum of Care (CoC). While this system has proven ineffective at stemming the flow of people into homelessness or speeding their way out of homelessness, their programs dealing with permanent supportive housing have shown great promise and have the fewest returns to homelessness of any program that the Continuum of Care runs. Currently, the system runs 2,925 units of permanent supportive housing. Due to the uncertainty around the numbers of high-need individuals who need permanent supportive housing and not simply regular interventions, the city should support EveryoneHome’s goal of adding 5,000 PSH units to their inventory.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> City of Oakland Report “Rent Adjustment Program Annual Report: 2014-15 Through 2017-18 DATE: February 20, 2019” Attachment C, p.2

<sup>88</sup> Alameda County Report “Homelessness Action Plan 2018-2020”

<https://homelessness.acgov.org/homelessness-assets/docs/action-plans/CountyHomelessnessActionPlan.pdf>

p.21

## **Final Conclusion**

If no action is taken, homelessness in Oakland will only increase and eventually turn into an institution, a permanent way of life for a group of Oakland's worst-off residents.

Entire generations of people will only know the precarious life of struggling for housing or living in an encampment. The first children of the current generation of homeless are growing up sleeping in cars, hiding in abandoned buildings, and facing the grim reality of the streets at the time of this writing as entire families cycle through the various homeless services systems and the encampments.<sup>89</sup>

The City of Oakland must reconsider its approach to the issue of housing and homelessness and depart from traditional ways of addressing the problem to embrace strategies that make sense in this new crisis we face today. Future generations will judge all of us for what we choose to do about the suffering we see every day on our streets.

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<sup>89</sup> Brown RT, Goodman L, Guzman D, Tieu L, Ponath C, Kushel MB (2016) Pathways to Homelessness among Older Homeless Adults: Results from the HOPE HOME Study. PLoS ONE 11 (5): e0155065. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0155065

# Appendices

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## **Appendix A: The Expanded Definition of Homelessness**

Merriam-Webster defines “homelessness” as “having no home or permanent place of residence.”<sup>90</sup> In the realm of homelessness and housing policy as understood by the government, nonprofits, and activists, the term has been operationalized to allow it to be used effectively by public agencies. The definition used by agencies matters because such a definition not only determines who the government decides to help, and in turn how many people the government helps, but also such a definition shapes the strategy for addressing the problem. The U.S. government’s current approach to tries to target services and resources to the people who need it the most instead of targeting assistance at all low-income persons facing housing insecurity. This very narrow definition, as described below, comes with severe limitations and partly contributes to the issues with service provision.

The federal government has several overlapping definitions of homelessness under several different statutes included in Title 42 U.S.C.<sup>91</sup> The Department of Housing and Urban Development operationalizes the federal definition in its four categories of homelessness: 1) the literally homeless whose primary nighttime residence is unsuitable for human habitation, 2) those who are at-risk of imminent homelessness due to losing their housing in 14 days, 3) homeless youth, and 4) victims fleeing domestic violence. A full description of the HUD categories is below. Another definition of homelessness can be found in the McKinney-Vento Act which applies mainly to children in precarious housing situations.<sup>92</sup>

### **HUD Definitions of Homelessness:**

(Category 1) Individuals or families who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning: (i) Has a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not meant for human habitation; (ii) Is living in a publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state and local government programs); or (iii) Is exiting an institution where (s)he has resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution.

(Category 2) Individual or family who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence, provided that: (i) Residence will be lost within 14 days of the date of application for homeless assistance; (ii) No subsequent residence has been identified; and (iii) The individual or family lacks the resources or support networks needed to obtain other permanent housing.

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<sup>90</sup> Merriam Webster s.v. “homelessness,” accessed March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/homelessness>

<sup>91</sup> *The Public Health and Welfare* US Code 42 § 11302

<sup>92</sup> *The McKinney-Vento Definition of Homelessness*, The National Center for Homeless Education Website, <https://nche.ed.gov/mckinney-vento-definition/>

(Category 3) Unaccompanied youth under 25 years of age, or families with children and youth, who do not otherwise qualify as homeless under this definition, but who: (i) Are defined as homeless under the other listed federal statutes; (ii) Have not had a lease, ownership interest, or occupancy agreement in permanent housing during the 60 days prior to the homeless assistance application; (iii) Have experienced persistent instability as measured by two moves or more during in the preceding 60 days; and (iv) Can be expected to continue in such status for an extended period of time due to special needs or barriers.

(Category 4) Any individual or family who: (i) Is fleeing, or is attempting to flee, domestic violence; (ii) Has no other residence; and (iii) Lacks the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing.

### **Using Another Definition for a Prevention-Oriented Framework:**

This definition is inadequate for use in a prevention-oriented framework. The definition lacks the ability to be translated into a context-based understanding of the full host of factors that lead to homelessness and excludes many people who are at-risk of homelessness until they are literally 14 days away from losing their homes. Forcing a family that is already on a waitlist that is 53,000 people long in Oakland alone<sup>93</sup> to wait until they are literally 14 days away from losing their homes before additional help is offered is hardly a solution. The current, limited definition encourages siloing of resources into “homeless-only” categories which do not fully leverage the entire spectrum of community resources that are required and available to prevent people from becoming homeless.

The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, one of the largest homelessness research organizations in the world, defines homelessness somewhat more expansively: “1) Unsheltered, or absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation; 2) Emergency Sheltered, including those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence; 3) Provisionally Accommodated, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure, and finally, 4) At Risk of Homelessness, referring to people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards.”<sup>94</sup>

This report uses the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness’ (COH) definition of homelessness due to its more expansive nature and orientation towards a holistic, prevention-oriented approach to thinking about the issue. Below is a further explanation of the definition categories and how they relate to the current U.S. government understanding of homelessness.

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<sup>93</sup> *Oakland Housing Authority FY2019 Making Transition Work Plan*  
<http://www.oakha.org/AboutUs/ReportsPolicies/Documents/FY2019%20MTW%20Plan%20-%20for%20website.pdf> p.18

<sup>94</sup> Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Definition of Homelessness  
<https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/canadian-definition-homelessness>

## 1. Unsheltered Homeless Individuals Definition

- People Living In Public Or Private Spaces Without Consent Or Contract: This refers to “people living in public spaces, such as sidewalks, squares, parks, forests, etc. and private spaces such as vacant buildings (squatting).”<sup>95</sup>
- People Living In Places Not Intended For Permanent Human Habitation: This refers to “people living in cars or other vehicles, living in garages, attics, closets or buildings not designed for habitation, and people in makeshift shelters, shacks or tents.”<sup>96</sup>

This definition is similar to the federal government’s HUD category 1 definition of homelessness.

## 2. Emergency Sheltered Homeless Persons Definition

- Emergency Overnight Shelters For People Who Are Homeless: “These facilities are designed to meet the immediate needs of people who are homeless. Such short-term emergency shelters may target specific sub-populations, including women, families, youth or Aboriginal persons, for instance. These shelters typically have minimal eligibility criteria, offer shared sleeping facilities and amenities, and often expect clients to leave in the morning. They may or may not offer food, clothing or other services. Some emergency shelters allow people to stay on an ongoing basis while others are short term and are set up to respond to special circumstances, such as extreme weather.”<sup>97</sup>
- Shelters For Individuals/Families Impacted By Family Violence: “These shelters provide basic emergency and crisis services including safe accommodation, meals, information, and referral. They provide a high security environment for women (and sometimes men) and children fleeing family violence or other crisis situations. Residents are not required to leave during the day. These facilities offer private rooms for families and a range of supports to help residents rebuild their lives.”<sup>98</sup>
- Emergency Shelter For People Fleeing A Natural Disaster Or Destruction Of Accommodation Due To Fires, Floods, Etc.: this explanation is considered self-explanatory.<sup>99</sup>

This homelessness definition is similar to the federal government’s HUD category 1 and 4 definitions of homelessness.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid

<sup>96</sup> Ibid

<sup>97</sup> Canadian Observator on Homelessness Definition of Homelessness  
<https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/canadian-definition-homelessness>

<sup>98</sup> Ibid

<sup>99</sup> Ibid



### 3. Provisionally Accommodated Persons Definition

- Interim Housing For People Who Are Homeless: In the United States, the equivalent service to Interim Housing would be time-limited “transitional housing” which offers services and privacy but is not permanent in nature.<sup>100</sup>
- People Living Temporarily With Others, But Without Guarantee Of Continued Residency Or Immediate Prospects For Accessing Permanent Housing: “Often referred to as ‘couch surfers’ or the ‘hidden homeless’, this describes people who stay with friends, family, or even strangers. They are typically not paying rent, their duration of stay is unsustainable in the long term, and they do not have the means to secure their own permanent housing in the future. They differ from those who are staying with friends or family out of choice in anticipation of prearranged accommodation, whether in their current hometown or an altogether new community. This living situation is understood by both parties to be temporary, and the assumption is that it will not become permanent.”<sup>101</sup>
- People Accessing Short Term, Temporary Rental Accommodations Without Security Of Tenure: “In some cases people who are homeless make temporary rental arrangements, such as staying in motels, hostels, rooming houses, etc. Although occupants pay rent, the accommodation does not offer the possibility of permanency. People living in these situations are often considered to be part of the ‘hidden homeless’ population.”<sup>102</sup>
- People In Institutional Care Who Lack Permanent Housing Arrangements: This includes people living in penal institutions, medical/mental health institutions, residential treatment programs or withdrawal management centers, and children’s institutions/group homes.<sup>103</sup>
- Accommodation/Reception Centers For Recently Arrived Immigrants And Refugees: People who are recent refugees or asylees in the U.S. who have no community connections and no ability to get jobs or housing are also considered homeless.<sup>104</sup>

This homelessness contains many component units of HUD’s category 1 of homelessness, but goes above and beyond it to include temporary renters and has a broader definition of people exiting institutional care without the 90-day maximum stay cap imposed by the federal definition. It also takes into account immigrants and refugees.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid

<sup>101</sup> Ibid

<sup>102</sup> Canadian Observator on Homelessness Definition of Homelessness  
<https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/canadian-definition-homelessness>

<sup>103</sup> Ibid

<sup>104</sup> Ibid



#### 4. Persons At Risk of Homelessness Definition

- Persons At Imminent Risk Of Homelessness: “Imminent risk” as defined by COH refers to specific precipitating factors that will cause an individual or family to lose their housing. This includes: precarious employment, sudden unemployment, supported housing with supports that are about to be discontinued, households facing eviction, severe and persistent mental illness, active addictions, substance use and/or behavioural issues, divisions/conflict within the household, violence/abuse (or direct fear thereof) in current housing situations, and institutional care that is inadequate or unsuited to the needs of the individual or family.<sup>105</sup>
- Persons Who Are Precariously Housed: “Precariously housed” as defined by COH refers to individuals who are having trouble finding housing that is affordable, adequate, and suitable. “Adequate housing is reported by residents as not requiring any major repairs. Housing that is inadequate may have excessive mold, inadequate heating or water supply, significant damage, etc. Affordable dwelling costs less than 30% of total before-tax household income. Those in extreme core housing need pay 50% or more of their income on housing. It should be noted that the lower the household income, the more onerous this expense becomes. Suitable housing has enough bedrooms for the size and composition of the resident household, according to National Occupancy Standard (NOS) requirements.”

This definition of people at-risk of homelessness **does not exist** in the U.S. homeless services system. The closest definition the U.S. government has to this is the “imminent risk of homelessness” definition found in HUD’s category 2. The COH definition goes above and beyond category 2 by taking into account all the aspects which could precipitate loss of housing above and beyond a simple eviction notice.

With this expanded definition of homelessness in hand, a thorough analysis of the causes of homelessness in Oakland may be conducted.

#### Definition of Homelessness Used

A prevention-oriented approach to helping the homeless is meaningless unless the concept of homelessness and its causes is defined. For the purposes of this project, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) expanded definition shall be used, which consists of the following: “1) Unsheltered, or absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation; 2) Emergency Sheltered, including those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence; 3) Provisionally Accommodated, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure, and finally, 4) At Risk of Homelessness, referring to

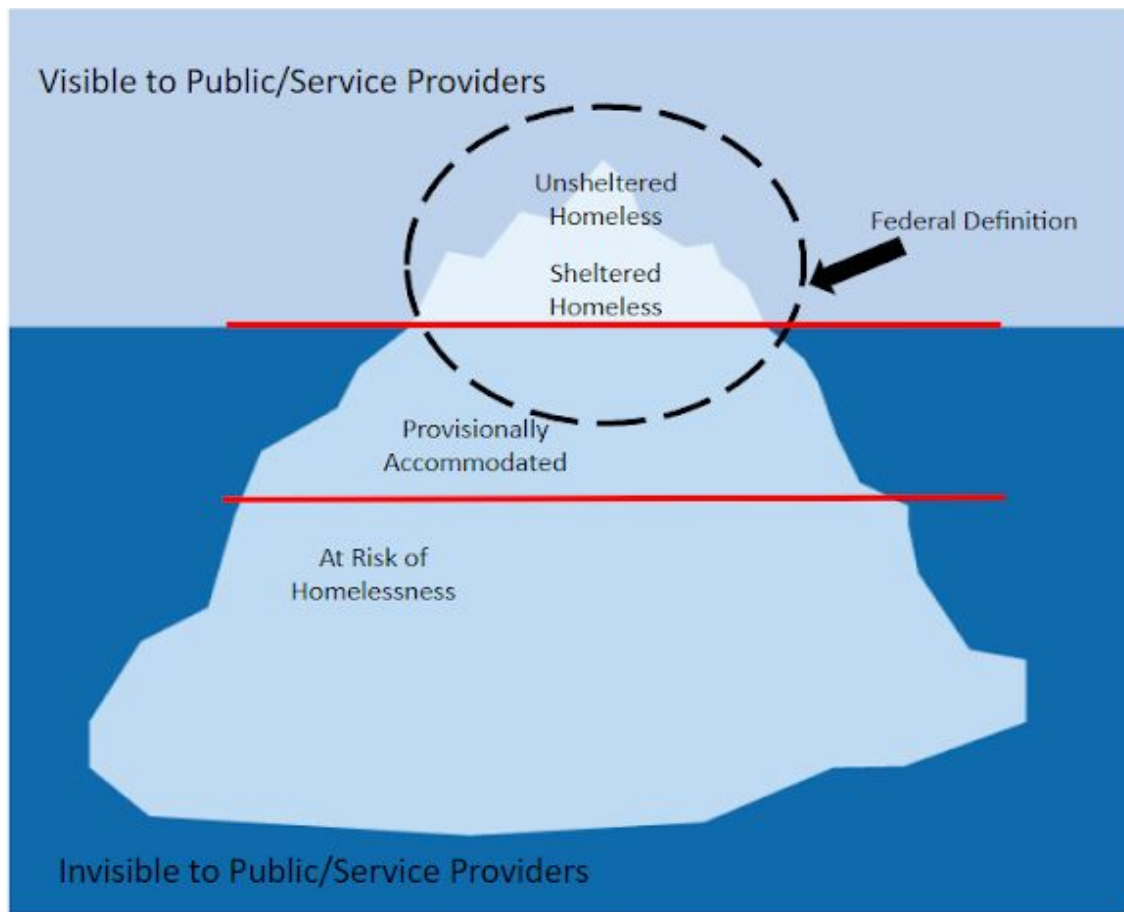
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<sup>105</sup> Ibid

people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards.<sup>106</sup>

Using this definition of homelessness provides a more expansive view of what options are available to address the root causes of homelessness and is most compatible with the COH prevention-oriented framework. A full discussion of the merits of the COH definition compared to the current federal definition is in Appendix A of this report.

**Figure 1-1: Diagram of Shortcomings in Federal Definition of Homelessness**



### Definition of Homelessness Prevention Used

“Prevention” in the context of homelessness prevention is also on the surface a self-evident term. Merriam-Webster defines “prevent” as “to keep from happening or existing” or “to hold or keep back,”<sup>107</sup> but for the definition to have any use in policymaking, some specifics must be established. Culhane et al. (2011) conceives of prevention in the homelessness context as a series of interventions undertaken by the government or nonprofits that efficiently targets the populations most at-risk of becoming homeless (as opposed to the larger population of

<sup>106</sup> Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Definition of Homelessness <https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/canadian-definition-homelessness>

<sup>107</sup> Merriam Webster s.v. “prevent,” accessed March 6th, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prevent>

low-income individuals) and effectively prevents their homelessness by ensuring that the resources provided will permanently keep them from becoming homeless again.<sup>108</sup>

Culhane et al. (2011) envisions the types of interventions as falling on a spectrum of three somewhat overlapping categories based on the stage of homelessness they're designed to target: primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention.

**Primary prevention** takes place before the recipient(s) become homeless at all by providing services such as landlord mediation and short term or in-kind rental assistance.

**Secondary prevention** takes place immediately after the recipient(s) lose their home and seeks to re-house the recipient(s) as fast as possible and minimizing their exposure to homelessness. Rapid rehousing and transitional housing are two such services in this category.

**Tertiary prevention** is longer-term and focuses on treating underlying causes that primary and secondary prevention cannot address adequately. This type of intervention temporally can take place anywhere from before the recipient(s) first become homeless all the way to years into an individual or family's spell of chronic homelessness. Tertiary interventions provide services such as mental health, disability assisted living, and drug addiction counseling to address the recipient's underlying issues which prevent them from obtaining and keeping stable housing.<sup>109</sup>

The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness has operationalized this framework and made this prevention-centered approach the cornerstone to their homelessness research. Figure 1-2 below gives a precise definition of homelessness prevention as understood by COH:

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<sup>108</sup> Culhane, Dennis P., Stephen Metraux, and Thomas Byrne. "A Prevention-centered Approach to Homelessness Assistance: A Paradigm Shift?" *Housing Policy Debate* 21, no. 2 (2011). doi:10.1080/10511482.2010.536246. p.295-302.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. p.298-300

## **Appendix B: Definition of Homeless Prevention Used**

**Figure 1-2: COH Definition of Homelessness Prevention<sup>110</sup>**

### **Definition of the Prevention of Homelessness**

Homelessness prevention refers to policies, practices, and interventions that reduce the likelihood that someone will experience homelessness. It also means providing those who have been homeless with the necessary resources and supports to stabilize their housing, enhance integration and social inclusion, and ultimately reduce the risk of the recurrence of homelessness.

The causes of homelessness include individual and relational factors, broader population-based structural factors, and the failure of many public institutions to protect people from homelessness. This suggests that homelessness prevention must not only include interventions targeted at individuals, but broader structural reforms directed at addressing the drivers of homelessness. That not only communities but all orders of government, and most departments within have a responsibility to contribute to the prevention of homelessness is in keeping with a human rights perspective.

The authors of the COH framework emphasize that prevention does not mean simply one type of program or intervention functioning on its own unless it's part of a package of services that get the homeless person or family immediately into housing.<sup>111</sup>

The structure of a prevention program that the framework authors suggest is one that implements the primary, secondary, and tertiary interventions along the following categories:

- a) Structural Prevention: These interventions target both the broader community at large and also are targeted at specific subpopulations. Governments accomplish this “by promoting poverty reduction, income security, access to appropriate housing, inclusion, safety, wellness, and security of tenure.”<sup>112</sup> This would represent a sea change in the basic theory behind the American welfare system that

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<sup>110</sup> Canadian Observatory on Homelessness “Preventing Homelessness”

<https://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/homelessness-101/preventing-homelessness>

<sup>111</sup> Canadian Observatory on Homelessness “A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention”

<https://www.homelesshub.ca/ANewDirection> p.39

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. p.44

- b) **Systems Prevention:** These interventions examine the relationship between various government policies and procedures that place barriers to housing for certain populations. It also examines how individuals' transitions out of institutions such as prison, hospitals, and the military can make them more vulnerable to homelessness and seeks to address them.
- c) **Early Intervention:** These interventions work to identify families and individuals who have previously experienced or are currently experiencing homelessness and helps them navigate complex systems and facilitate their connections to the local community and their jobs by providing temporary housing.
- d) **Eviction Prevention:** These interventions look at legislation that governs the relationship between landlords and tenants, rent controls and supplements, emergency rental assistance, education and outreach, and eviction defense representation.
- e) **Housing Stability:** These interventions provide services and support to individuals and families who have repeated history of homelessness and are meant to keep the individual housed, which represents an ongoing investment.

## **Appendix C: Process Tracing the Paths to Homelessness**

Many empirical studies have successfully established correlation between structural factors in a locality and homelessness such as the study looking at the relationship between rent increases, local community factors, and homelessness rates conducted by Glynn, Byrne, and Culhane (2018)<sup>113</sup>, the relationship between early childhood and young adulthood experiences and the age at first onset of homelessness<sup>114</sup>, the economics of housing affordability and income inequality conducted by Mansur et al. (2001), and so many other factors that it would take far more than the scope of this project to answer properly.

To narrow down the potential causes of homelessness as understood by the community, the research team conducted a survey of homeless and provisionally accommodated individuals using a survey designed with input from the Village, the Homeless Advocacy Working Group (HAWG), and the Beloved Community Action Network (BCAN). The research team administered the survey to a sample of 130 homeless and provisionally accommodated individuals in Oakland to ask them what caused their homelessness. The top three results by far were: losing a job, inability to afford rent, and evictions. Based on the survey results, the team selected the process of gentrification to examine as a primary cause of Oakland's homelessness crisis. The definition and causal framework of gentrification came from a working paper from the University of Pennsylvania's School of Design, Department of City Planning.<sup>115</sup> Below is a summary of that definition:

Gentrification, the process by which capital and development pours into a neighborhood for the purposes of economic revitalization which displaces poorer residents and causes them to become homeless or greatly increases their risk of homelessness by 1) increasing housing costs, 2) encouraging rent-seeking behavior from landlords, and 3) causing housing insecurity.

<sup>116</sup>

There are two key assumptions that should be evaluated in order for the model to hold: the first is that gentrification is in fact pushing low-income people out of their housing in Oakland and the second is that the resulting displacement causes homelessness. The other assumptions won't change the ultimate outcome predicted by the model, and therefore won't be examined. Following Lorentzen, Fravel, and Paine (2017)'s definitions for assessing models<sup>117</sup>, this model will be evaluated based on its assumptions and implications:

**Assumptions:** a) displacement is happening because of gentrification, b) displacement causes homelessness.

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<sup>113</sup> Glynn, Byrne, and Culhane (2018) *Inflection Points In Community-level Homeless Rates* [https://works.bepress.com/dennis\\_culhane/228/](https://works.bepress.com/dennis_culhane/228/)

<sup>114</sup> Brown RT, Goodman L, Guzman D, Tieu L, Ponath C, Kushel MB (2016) Pathways to Homelessness among Older Homeless Adults: Results from the HOPE HOME Study. *PLoS ONE* 11(5): e0155065. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0155065

<sup>115</sup> Artusio et al. (2017) "Comparative Gentrification Policy: Displacement, Housing Instability, and Homelessness"

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. p.7, summary of the authors' explanation.

<sup>117</sup> Lorentzen, Peter, M. Taylor Fravel, and Jack Paine. "Qualitative Investigation of Theoretical Models: The Value of Process Tracing." *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 29, no. 3 (2016): 467-91. doi:10.1177/0951629816664420.

**Implications:** a) there will be a net out-migration in absolute and relative terms of certain groups, most likely of a certain socio-economic demographic. There will be a rise in evictions. Certain groups will not show improved socio-economic indicators such as median income. b) assuming a) to be true, not all people who are displaced end up moving to another locality. Instead, they become homeless and live either in precarious housing situations such as doubled and tripled up in inadequate housing or they live in encampments on the street.

Note: there is a root assumption made that gentrification is in fact occurring. That is treated as true by this analysis because of the sheer volume of writing about how the last decade has brought tech to the Bay Area and by extension Oakland as well as the skyrocketing median incomes here.

### **Test needed to prove causal process:**

The problem with analyzing the phenomenon of homelessness is that there are many possible causes of somebody becoming homeless. It is nearly impossible to establish a logical pathway to homelessness that holds true even between two individuals. Collier (2011) offers a method to use whereby he uses hoop tests to eliminate all other possible explanations and using a combination of hoop tests to create a doubly decisive test of multiple hypotheses to establish causality.

In this case study, rather than looking at every single homeless person's experiences in relation to gentrification, a series of hoop tests shall be conducted evaluating alternative explanations both for whether or not gentrification is occurring and whether or not it is causing displacement and homelessness. The purpose of this test will be to establish that gentrification is causing displacement and that displacement is creating the conditions whereby more people are becoming homeless. Once competing explanations for the component assumptions of the gentrification model have been eliminated, the combination of all the component assumptions backed by empirical study and field research shall establish a doubly decisive test which proves that gentrification directly created the conditions in Oakland that led to the current increases in homelessness.

a) Hoop tests for proving displacement: it is a sad fact that in the United States, race can serve as a proxy for class and income demographic for certain areas. The principle holds true in Oakland where the African American population, once comprising 47% of the entire population according to the 1980 census<sup>118</sup>, faced discriminatory housing practices which concentrated them in high-poverty areas of the city and discriminatory urban development decisions which built freeways that disrupted neighborhoods and denied people access to equitable transportation. If the black population remains stable or increases, and/or the median income of the black person increasing over time, the hypothesis that gentrification causes displacement is debunked. If true, it offers some necessary but insufficient evidence for displacement. Another competing hypothesis is that everyone's income in Oakland failed to rise, which has some evidence in studies of wage stagnation and income inequality. If true, then the plight of the homeless and the displaced is more akin to the

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<sup>118</sup> Bay Area Census <http://www.bayareacensus.ca.gov/cities/Oakland50.htm>



plight of the working class in the country as a whole instead of just the poor in Oakland, debunking the gentrification inference.

- b) Hoop tests for displaced people becoming homeless: this implication requires establishing that the individuals being displaced by rising housing costs are inhabiting the streets. To test this, three hypotheses must be tested: first, that people on the street are indeed from Oakland and not other localities, also that they are from the same low-income primarily black population as outlined in implication a). Second, the people on the streets are there primarily because of housing costs. Third, it must be proven that Oaklanders who are evicted or otherwise displaced from their homes do not simply move to cheaper areas and instead choose to live on the street. Evidence will be gathered from people directly on the streets via a survey asking residents in encampments how they became homeless and how they could have kept their housing. Additionally, the Alameda County Point-in-Time Count's numbers for the amount of people who are homeless and where they used to live before they became homeless will be used to establish that the people on the street are indeed from Oakland. Qualitative, in-depth interviews will be used to determine why certain individuals decided to live on the street instead of moving away from Oakland.
- c) Conclusion: having established that displacement of low income, primarily black communities is happening (which somewhat weakens the null), and that this displacement is causing some of this population to become homeless (which somewhat weakens the null), a final doubly-decisive test will be carried out against the proposition that gentrification is not happening and that displacement is not causing homelessness, and a final study of the relationship between community factors, poverty, and housing costs with homelessness will be used to support the hypothesis that housing costs do indeed contribute to increases in the rates of homelessness nationwide and especially in Oakland.

#### Analysis:

1. An analysis of census data reveals that in between 2000 and 2017, Oakland went from a population of 142,460 African Americans, 35% of a total population of 399,484<sup>119</sup> to a population of 101,482 African Americans, or 24% of a total population of 417,442<sup>120</sup>. African Americans are indeed leaving Oakland. A table on citydata.com shows that out of all the demographic groups between 2000 and 2016, African Americans barely increased their income at all compared to other groups such as non-hispanic whites, who effectively doubled their income.<sup>121</sup> This all takes place amidst a backdrop of increasing prosperity in Oakland with the median income rising from \$48,000/year in 2012 adjusted for inflation to \$58,000/year in 2016.<sup>122</sup> The hypothesis that everyone is not doing well in Oakland is debunked.

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<sup>119</sup> Bay Area Census <http://www.bayareacensus.ca.gov/cities/Oakland.htm>

<sup>120</sup> American Community Survey 2012-2017 estimates

[https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community\\_facts.xhtml?src=bkmk](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml?src=bkmk)

<sup>121</sup> CityData Oakland Profile (Using ACS estimates)

<http://www.city-data.com/income/income-Oakland-California.html>

<sup>122</sup> Civic Dashboards Using ACS Data

[http://www.cividdashboards.com/city/oakland-ca-16000US0653000/median\\_household\\_income](http://www.cividdashboards.com/city/oakland-ca-16000US0653000/median_household_income)

2. An analysis of the 2017 Alameda PIT count revealed that out of all Oakland's homeless population, 86% of them reported that Alameda County was their place of residence prior to homelessness. All but 12% had been in Alameda County for at least one year and 62% had spent 10 years or more living in Alameda county, disproving the theory that these homeless people are from somewhere else.<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, the 2017 Point in Time Count found that 68% of the homeless population in Oakland counted that day were black, compared to their current demographic representation of 24%. As mentioned in the introduction, a survey of 130 homeless people in Oakland yielded the result that 79.3% of them had already been paying at least 30% of their income in housing, and of these individuals, 37%, 30%, and 23% reported that jobs, rising rents, and eviction respectively were the primary causes of their homelessness, outstripping the results of all the other questions by 2:1. Finally, in the Alameda County Point in Time Count Survey, 45% of all unsheltered homeless reported that they were staying in their current location to be near family & friends. 41% reported that it's because they felt safe where they were staying. Only 10% reported that they stayed here to be near services. Our ethnographic work revealed that the precarity homeless people experience causes daily life to be a constant battle for safety, predictability, and to maintain their ability to be with family. Leaving Oakland is simply a worse option than staying unsheltered but nearby.

Conclusion: for implication a), we've established that the gentrification is displacing low-income, primarily black communities by showing that out of all the racial demographic groups, only African Americans are not sharing in the increases in income brought about by the tech boom and out of all the racial demographic groups, only African Americans are experiencing a population decline. For implication b) we've shown through the "we went out there and talked to them" method that the resulting displacement caused by gentrification meant that some of the aforementioned population chose to stay here for various reasons and are currently on the street.

Qualitative interviews with the respondents, along with ethnographic research data suggests that the population in question lacks the social capital (knowing people) and the educational capital (a degree in coding or healthcare) to participate in the new economy which has come into the area. Without the ability to access higher-paying jobs, and with a waitlist of 53,000 people<sup>124</sup> to get affordable housing from the Oakland Housing Authority, there is ample evidence that there is strain on the housing market which causes many to become unable to afford the housing market in Oakland. Not wanting to leave their location for fear of losing touch with family and relatives or out of fear for their safety, many residents become homeless, adapting strategies to survive in the streets rather than leave.

Taken together, these factors establish a clear causal path from gentrification to the conditions which lead to homelessness in Oakland.

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<sup>123</sup> Alameda County 2017 PIT Count

<http://everyonehome.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/City-of-Oakland-ES.pdf>

<sup>124</sup> Oakland Housing Authority FY2019 Making Transition Work Plan

<http://www.oakha.org/AboutUs/ReportsPolicies/Documents/FY2019%20MTW%20Plan%20-%20for%20website.pdf> p.18

## **Appendix D: Methodology for Researching Homelessness Causes**

### **Methodology**

A cursory examination of the causes of homelessness reveals that everyone experiencing homelessness has a unique path to get to a state of not having stable housing. Furthermore, some individuals find it easier than others to exit homelessness and either find some form of provisional accommodation, or better yet, return to stable housing. A systemic examination of every single homeless Oakland resident's story would yield a dizzying array of factors which have different implications between individuals.

To provide a structured way of thinking about all the varied causes of homelessness in Oakland, this report borrows the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH)'s categories for causes of homelessness:

#### **Figure 1-1: Categories of Homelessness Causes**<sup>125</sup>

1. **Structural factors**, such as economic and societal issues that affect opportunities, environments, and outcomes for individuals. This includes **poverty, discrimination, lack of affordable housing**, and the impact of **colonialism on Indigenous Peoples**.
2. **Systems failures**, where systems of support are inadequately delivered. Barriers to **accessing public systems** (health, social services, and legal supports), and **failed transitions** from publically funded institutions (child welfare, hospitals, and corrections) are examples of systems failures.
3. **Individual and relational factors** where personal circumstances, such as crises (like sudden unemployment or a house fire), **mental health and addiction, housing insecurity**, and **interpersonal violence**, can lead to homelessness.

The research team took this and sought evidence to determine what caused homelessness in Oakland by examining various data sources:

- **Practitioner and government data:** Some of the insights for the number of homeless individuals in Oakland came from the Alameda County Point-in-Time (PIT) Count and Survey. The PIT count is widely recognized as an undercount,<sup>126</sup> so the data will be augmented from other sources. The numbers for people at-risk of homelessness came from a combination of American Community Survey 5-year adjusted income estimates, the Zillow Rental Index (ZRI), and HUD's determination of fair market rent (FMR). The data

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<sup>125</sup> Canadian Observatory on Homelessness "Preventing Homelessness"

<https://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/homelessness-101/preventing-homelessness>

<sup>126</sup> Alameda County Health Care for the Homeless Program (2015) "Healthcare Needs Assessment for Persons Experiencing Homelessness"

[https://www.achch.org/uploads/7/2/5/4/72547769/achchp\\_homeless\\_health\\_care\\_needs\\_assessment\\_2014-2015.pdf](https://www.achch.org/uploads/7/2/5/4/72547769/achchp_homeless_health_care_needs_assessment_2014-2015.pdf)

from this source was primarily used to answer questions about structural causes of homelessness.

- **Community-based surveys:** The Homeless Advocacy Working Group (HAWG), the Beloved Community Action Network, and The Village #feedthepeople designed a survey (see Appendix A) to be administered to homeless and provisionally accommodated persons to get a sense of what events specifically precipitated people to become homeless. The group held two meetings in February 2019 to go over the survey questions and goals, and The Village designed the survey question wording and administration procedures. This survey sought to understand personal, structural, and systems failure causes of homelessness.
- **Qualitative data from academic literature on homelessness:** ethnographic and interview-based studies were analyzed to find the factors that presented barriers for re-entering housing for people already on the street, as well as shortcomings in service provision. This data was used to determine what the systems failure causes of homelessness were.
- **Community-based interviews:** The author of this report interviewed individuals with lived experiences of homelessness, government and nonprofit service providers, and precariously housed individuals to understand personal, structural, and systems failure causes of homelessness.

The research team used these categories to create a list of specific factors and went out to ask unsheltered homeless individuals and provisionally accommodated individuals what caused them to become homeless. The following chart shows what the encampment community self-reported as the primary factors that caused them to lose their stable housing:<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Community-based survey, Encampment Respondents, Question #2

## Appendix E: Community Surveys

### Homelessness Prevention Community Action Survey

The Village is trying to raise awareness about homelessness and get more homelessness prevention funding from Oakland. If you are currently or have ever previously experienced homelessness, we would like to ask about your experiences. Your answers will not be shared with anyone else except the survey research team.

1. Think back to the last time you had stable housing for 12 months continuously. Please describe what your living situation was:
    - Place that I rented
    - Place that my partner or someone else rented
    - Home that I owned
    - Home that my partner or someone else owned
    - Other (please state) \_\_\_\_\_
  2. What caused you to lose your stable housing?
    - 1. I or my partner/relative lost a job
    - 2. Medical bills
    - 3. Rent increased and I couldn't pay
    - 4. Domestic violence/partner abuse
    - 5. Landlord harassment and/or unjust eviction
    - 6. Pushed out because of sexual orientation
    - 7. Family member or partner died
    - 8. I was incarcerated
    - 9. Other (please state) \_\_\_\_\_
  3. How much would the following things have helped keep you housed?

A lot	A little	Not at all	Legal help
A lot	A little	Not at all	Rent help
A lot	A little	Not at all	Affordable healthcare
A lot	A little	Not at all	Section 8 voucher
A lot	A little	Not at all	Help getting a job
A lot	A little	Not at all	Alcohol/drug counseling
A lot	A little	Not at all	Family counseling
A lot	A little	Not at all	Landlord mediation
A lot	A little	Not at all	Immigration help
A lot	A little	Not at all	Housing with services
A lot	A little	Not at all	Cheaper housing
A lot	A little	Not at all	Other: _____
  4. Back when you were last stably housed, how much did you or the person renting/owning the place pay in rent/mortgage per month?
    - Under \$500
    - \$501 - \$1,000
    - \$1,001 - \$1,500
    - \$1,501 - \$2,000
    - Over \$2,000
  5. Back when you were last stably housed, how much of your (or the person you were staying with's) income was being paid towards rent?
    - Less than 30%
    - 30%-50%
    - Over 50%
    - Don't know
  6. When you lost your stable housing, did you have dependents living with you?
    - Yes
    - No
  7. Is this your first time being homeless?
    - Yes
    - No
  8. What social service programs did you apply for?
    - 1. Food stamps/SNAP/WIC/CalFresh
    - 2. Medi-Cal/Medicare
    - 3. General Assistance (GA)
    - 4. SSI/SSDI/Disability/Social Security
    - 5. CalWORKs/TANF
    - 6. VA benefits
    - 7. Section 8 housing voucher
    - 8. Legal help
    - 9. Immigration or asylum services
    - 10. Other (please state) \_\_\_\_\_
- Survey Location: \_\_\_\_\_



9. Have you ever been turned away by social service programs? Please state which programs you were turned away from.

- 1. Food stamps/SNAP/WIC/Calfresh
- 2. Medi-Cal/Medicare
- 3. General Assistance (GA)
- 4. SSI/SSDI/Disability/Social Security
- 5. CalWORKs/TANF
- 6. VA benefits
- 7. Section 8 housing voucher
- 8. Legal help
- 9. Immigration or asylum services
- 10. I have not been turned away
- 11. Other (please state) \_\_\_\_\_

10. Please tell us why you were turned away by the services you selected above. (Select all that apply)

- 1. My income is too high
- 2. I am undocumented
- 3. I don't have a permanent address
- 4. Racial/Gender Discrimination
- 5. They didn't have the resources to help me
- 6. I have a felony record/warrant
- 7. I have not been turned away

11. If you did not apply for a service or services, please tell us why.

- Doesn't apply to me
- I didn't know how to apply
- I don't have a phone number
- I don't have a permanent address
- I don't think they will help me (If so, please state why) \_\_\_\_\_

12. (Optional) I would like to attend town halls, give interviews, and participate in longer discussions about this issue. My contact information is below:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Social Media Handle \_\_\_\_\_

**We will not share this contact info with anyone outside of the survey research team**

**Tell us about yourself:** This information is strictly confidential and collected only to ensure a diverse survey sample. Your responses will not be connected to any other questions or personal information.

13. Age	<input type="checkbox"/> Under 18 <input type="checkbox"/> 18-24 <input type="checkbox"/> 25-50 <input type="checkbox"/> Over 50
14. Race (Check all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> White <input type="checkbox"/> Black/African American <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic/Latino <input type="checkbox"/> Native American <input type="checkbox"/> Asian <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please state)
15. Gender	<input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Trans Female <input type="checkbox"/> Trans Male <input type="checkbox"/> Nonbinary
16. Do you identify as LGBTQIA?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
17. Have you ever been incarcerated?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
18. Has anyone in your family been incarcerated?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
19. How much money do you get per month from benefits?	<input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> \$1 - \$500 <input type="checkbox"/> \$501 - \$1,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,001 - \$2,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$2,001 - \$3,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Over \$3,000
20. If you are working, how much do you make per month?	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A, not working <input type="checkbox"/> Less than \$500 <input type="checkbox"/> \$500 - \$1,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,001 - \$2,000 <input type="checkbox"/> \$2,001 - \$3,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Over \$3,000
21. Immigration Status	<input type="checkbox"/> Green Card <input type="checkbox"/> US Citizen <input type="checkbox"/> Undocumented

## **Appendix F: Interview Statement and Questions**

**RAP STATEMENT:** Interviewer reads the paragraph below word by word.

“Today I’d like to talk to you about how you became homeless, whether or not you looked for help, and what your experiences were like while looking for help getting housed. Your story will be part of a written report that we will share with everyone to make sure they hear the voices of the unhoused community. This interview may bring back hurtful memories or emotions. You may also feel uncomfortable answering certain questions. All questions in this interview are optional and you can tell us “I don’t want to answer that” and you won’t have to answer the question. You may also ask to stop at any time and we will stop the interview right away. After the interview is complete and you change your mind about wanting to have your answers shared, you may contact any member of our team and ask us to delete all records of your answers. We appreciate your time and for sharing your story with us. What you tell us will help us advocate for more funding from the City of Oakland and Alameda County, which will help you and many others experiencing housing instability or homelessness.”

**CHECKING QUESTIONS:** Ask the respondent these questions to test if they understood the instructions. If the respondent gets any of these wrong, please correct them and ask again. If the respondent doesn’t seem like they are capable of understanding what you just told them, politely end the interview.

“How do you think the information in this interview is going to be used?”

“Will your name be attached to anything we write about this interview?”

“Will you be able to end this interview whenever you want?”

“Who can you contact if you have any questions, or feel like you want us to delete what you just told us?”

Interview questions:

1. Back when you were last stably housed for 12 months continuously, what was your living situation like?
2. What pushed you out of your stable housing? What was the event that caused that?
3. Did you try applying for services to get housed? If so, what was it like trying to get help to stay housed?
4. What kind of help would have prevented you from becoming homeless?
5. What kind of help do you need right now to get housing?

End the interview and thank them for their time.



**Appendix G: Mental Health Resources Letter and Research Team Contact Info**



**The Village In Oakland**  
4799 Shattuck Ave  
Oakland, CA 94609  
510-355-7010

Dear Friend,

Thank you for participating and sharing your story with us. Your story will be part of a written report that we will share with everyone to make sure they hear the voices of the unhoused community. What you told us may be quoted directly in the report, but your name will not be attached to your answers.

This interview may have brought back hurtful memories or emotions. If you need somebody to talk to, you can always reach out to us at **510-355-7010**. If you want, you can also contact the Alameda County 24-Hour Crisis Line at **1-800-309-2131** for help and referral to counseling services. We've also included a comprehensive list of services which may help you deal with the possible negative feelings that might have come up as a result of this interview.

After the interview is complete and you change your mind about wanting to have your answers shared, you may contact any member of our team and ask us to delete all records of your answers. Feel free to email us at [thevillage@omnicommons.org](mailto:thevillage@omnicommons.org) or call the research team at **510-355-7010**. We appreciate your time and for sharing your story with us. What you told us will help us advocate for more funding from the City of Oakland and Alameda County, which will help you and many others experiencing housing instability or homelessness get the help you need to find a place to live.

In solidarity,

The Village

Program: Adult and School-Based Mental Health Services  
Agency: Community Health for Asian Americans (CHAA)  
[www.chaaweb.org](http://www.chaaweb.org)  
268 Grand Avenue  
Oakland CA 94610 United States  
Phone: 510-835-2777

Program: BACS Housing Education & Counseling CES  
Agency: ALAMEDA COUNTY (COORDINATED ENTRY SYSTEM)  
BACS Housing and Education & Counseling program is designed to guide you from homelessness ...  
Phone: 510-613-0330

Agency: Bay Area Immigrant and Refugee Services  
[www.bairscares.org](http://www.bairscares.org)  
2515 Santa Clara Avenue  
Alameda CA 94501 United States  
Phone: 510-759-3508

Program: Behavioral Health Services  
Agency: DAVIS STREET FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER  
Phone: 510

Program: Alameda County Public Nursing  
Eastmont Town Center  
Public Health Nursing Unit  
7200 Bancroft Avenue Suite 202  
Oakland, CA 94605  
Tel: 510-577-7080 / 510-383-5218  
Fax: 510-577-7078-347-4620, EXT 141

Program: Crisis Text Line  
Text "HOME" to 741741

## **Appendix H: Notes on Causality and Bias**

### **Rationale for Sample Selection**

On the surface, it appears that the case selection methodology suffers from the flaw of selecting on the dependent variable: people who are already homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Collier and Mahoney (1996) state that selecting cases based on the dependent variable biases both qualitative and quantitative studies in a way that reduces the effect of the independent variable because of a truncated sample.<sup>128</sup> In the case of our study, this means that by only looking at the people who are homeless or who are seeking homelessness-related services, we miss out on the full universe of people in Oakland who either succeed with very little service program assistance or are well-served by the current service program system, thus understating the effect of service programs on the homeless population. This is a valid critique, and the author acknowledges that this study will tend to understate the impact of spending on homelessness if a strictly quantitative approach is taken. However, the practical difficulties in measuring and studying homelessness, as well as the gains in the ability of this methodology to explain this difficult-to-assess phenomenon easily justify this risk of bias.

The chief problem of studying homelessness is that the status of “homeless” does not persist permanently, can be either acute (happening once, then never happening again) or chronic (lasting years or occurring over and over again), and takes on different connotations for different groups of people. Students may become “homeless” in between semesters but come out of it on their own with no adverse consequences. Disaster victims who are provided assistance above and beyond the available community programs are also considered homeless. Oakland is also home to a sizeable population of artists and individuals who live alternative lifestyles which cause them to choose life on the streets or in warehouses. It is also difficult to locate people who are in precarious housing situations. It is even more difficult to generalize the effect of homelessness prevention funding across all cases. For example, if family A and family B are identical in all respects (race, income, education, etc) there is still the possibility that one family will become homeless because of some intrinsic, almost impossible-to-measure variable (such as personal ability, social networking skills, propensity towards alcohol addiction, and luck in terms of job market and landlord outcomes) while the other family remains housed while using the same amount of service program resources. The independent variables which cause the status of homelessness are infinitely numerous, varied, and difficult to measure. Therefore, selecting our cases based on neighborhood, race, income, mental health status, former incarceration status, or any combination of such factors, will not provide a properly predictive combination of variables which explain the causes of homelessness and by extension how funding of programs affect the outcome of homelessness. Collier and Mahoney (1996) address this point in their discussion on causal

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<sup>128</sup> Collier, David, and James Mahoney, “Insights and Pitfalls: Selection Bias in Qualitative Research,” *World Politics*, 49 (October 1996): 56-91.

heterogeneity. They state that some phenomena, like homelessness, possess so many potential explanations for the same dependent variable outcome, that narrowing the sample is required despite the concerns about bias.<sup>129</sup> This study, seeking to produce results that are informative to policymakers, narrows the scope of investigation into the causes of homelessness for people who are on the streets involuntarily and for whom help is required and desired by the recipient. Thus, this study selected the two cases where people are most negatively affected by homelessness, are actively seeking help, or can be assumed to be seeking help, and for whom resources are currently deemed insufficient.

### **Plans to Overcome Bias and Establish Causality**

To overcome the costs of bias imposed by such a truncated sample, this study will rely primarily on the process tracing via in-depth interviews to establish causal relationships between the causes of homelessness, personal experiences navigating the array of social service programs, and outcomes. Van Evera (1997) states that process tracing “investigates the chain of events or decision-making process by which the initial case conditions are translated into case outcomes.”<sup>130</sup> In this study, spending on homelessness is not just examined in a quantitative sense, but the individual experiences in obtaining, using, and benefiting from such services is examined. If the City of Oakland spends \$1 million on legal assistance per year to help keep people from being unjustly evicted, and it helps 100 people per year, is it because there is insufficient spending on the problem, and throwing a few more millions into the program would help more? Or would a widespread outreach campaign informing renters of their rights and directing them to legal help be a more cost-effective solution? The service providers currently do not keep track of this data, so the answer is impossible to find from quantitative datasets, however a concerted process-tracing study design might be able to answer the question in the absence of good quantitative data.

The study will use interviews as the primary drivers of the process-tracing explanation. After a satisfactory number of interviews is obtained, the transcripts will be examined and categorized according to common themes which appear. This method runs the risk of generating so many possible explanations for the effects of service program spending on homelessness that the study starts taking on an indeterminate character. King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) offer a way of narrowing down the focus of the study by suggesting to either narrow down the possible explanations or analyzing more observations at a different level of analysis.<sup>131</sup> Taking their advice, this study will seek to narrow down the explanatory findings to those that nonprofit and government service providers can directly affect through funding or program changes. For

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid

<sup>130</sup> Van Evera, Stephen. 1997. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. Chapter 2 (“What Are Case Studies? How Should They be Performed?”) p.64

<sup>131</sup> King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, Chapter 4.

example, the interviews will seek to define the path that led the respondent into homelessness in the first place, then seek to deliberately locate where in that path the respondent sought aid and whether a program was available in the first place. Checking the interview against the availability of resources narrows the focus of the study into interventions that the current service programs can affect and can establish causal patterns for reasons why service programs are currently ineffective.

### **Issues with Additional Sources of Bias and Inferences**

Even with careful study design and the acknowledgement of the sources of bias found in selecting off the dependent variable, additional sources of bias exist. Homeless encampments contain a high number of individuals who are mentally incapacitated due to mental illness or substance abuse. They may be violent, unapproachable by the interviewer, or incapable of consenting to an interview, much less providing useful information. There is a risk that the exclusion of these individuals from the analysis may bias the findings of this study towards an ableist set of interventions. However, due to the impracticality of including such a population into the study given the current study design and resources, this is a tradeoff that, regrettably, must be made. Furthermore, approaching individuals who have suffered trauma and deprivation to speak about a painful subject may inherently cause the sample of respondents who actually spoke with the research team to consist of only the friendliest of individuals. The survey and interview teams attempt to overcome this source of bias via building rapport and repeat visits, however, there may still be a population of individuals who are excluded.

## **Appendix I: Oakland Homelessness Funding Data**

For a full accounting of Oakland homelessness spending, click or type in the link below:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Gvrh8StFRwr3jycoGh7EeThj91mJAgmIkc3mE3jeQRA/edit?usp=sharing>