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# Mapping the Way to Health Equity: Assessing the Health Needs Among Californians Experiencing Homelessness

## Introduction

In 2022, the State of California and the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS), began a multiyear initiative called California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal (CalAIM). The goal of this initiative was to improve care and outcomes for millions of Medi-Cal enrollees by creating a more coordinated, person-centered, and equitable health system. In this system, members would have access to new and improved services to get well-rounded care that goes beyond the doctor's office or hospital and addresses all of their physical and mental health needs.

## Population of Focus

Individuals and families experiencing homelessness are among the highest-need and most vulnerable individuals in Medi-Cal. Every January, the federal government conducts a "point-in-time" (PIT) count of the nation's homeless population on a single night. The 2023 PIT Count released in December estimated that more than 180,000 people were experiencing homelessness in our state—up 6% from the previous count. California accounted for 28% of all people experiencing homelessness in the United States. California accounts for more than half of all unsheltered people in the U.S experiencing homelessness in California on any given night

**Largest Increases in Experiences of Homelessness**
By State During the Pandemic, 2020-2022

| | |
|---|---|
| California | 9,973 / 6.2% |
| Louisiana | 4,200 / 132.4% |
| Tennessee | 3,311 / 45 6% |
| Oregon | 3,304 / 22 5% |
| Arizona | 2,574 / 23 4% |

Source: U.S. HUD

## Summary of Need

Individuals and families experiencing homelessness often have extensive medical and behavioral health needs that are difficult to manage due to the social factors that influence their health. The unsheltered experience higher rates of diabetes, hypertension, and HIV in comparison with the general population. This can result in reduced quality of life and high utilization of costly services in EDs and inpatient settings that could be avoided with more timely and appropriate care management and potentially the provision of Community Supports.

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## Methods

To visualize the landscape of assets, demographics, and needs of the homeless population a data analytic tool was assembled with a goal to create three views:

- Data of the population in each county,
- The CalAim population in each county,
- The population accessing services

Furthermore, we expanded on this by adapting Lauran Hardin's Homeless System of Care Snapshot into a version focused for CalAIM populations. In addition to key interviews of multiple homeless system of care contacts, a three-stage research process was employed:

Search the Continuum of Care (CoC) site to gather resources → Search 211, the Homeless Task Force and any reports that would inform the assets → Google search by service categories, previously established by the NHAA

**"There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about."**

– Margaret J Wheatley

Finally, in collaboration with a local housing society, a survey analysis was completed. The goal of the surveys were to identify needs of the homeless population and understand potential intervention opportunities. The data from the surveys were manually pulled into an excel database. A summary and recommendations were made based upon the outcomes of the data. Further recommendations were made on survey improvement and tracking measures.

## Conclusion

The three views of the Data analytic tool will help communities understand the opportunities and impact available. Meanwhile the visual snapshot of existing community resources can function as a resource document and improve evaluation of the System as a whole, including parts of the continuum that may be well-developed or under-developed. This snapshot has been shared across multiple counties in community forums with providers and is meant to be a dynamic document that will change with time as services evolve. Collectively, both tools will create a more connected community of care to better address the needs of vulnerable populations.

United States Department of Housing & Urban Development. (2023). *The 2023 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress Part 1: Point-In-Time Estimates of Homelessness December 2023*
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National Healthcare & Housing Advisors. (2023). *System of Care Snapshot: King and Tulare Counties, California*.