"Yes to Yes" Washington State: Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adult Homelessness Landscape Scan

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*Special thank you to these organizations that helped us recruit young people with lived experience.

Foreword

In the ever-evolving landscape of addressing unaccompanied youth and young adult (YYA) homelessness in Washington, this report serves as a comprehensive reflection of the strides made since the last landscape scan in 2016. The journey, marked by significant progress and collaborative efforts, paints a vivid picture of Washington's commitment to creating a more supportive and inclusive environment for its young people.

From the inception of the Anchor Communities to the first-in-the-nation Homeless Student Stability Program, Washington has become a beacon of innovation in tackling the multifaceted challenges of unaccompanied YYA homelessness. The tireless dedication of grassroots BIPOC and LGBTQIAS+ organizations has played a pivotal role in providing essential, population-specific resources. Investments in stabilizing YYA exiting public systems of care, the establishment of sophisticated data systems, and the strategic deployment of flexible funds showcase the state's holistic approach to addressing the issue.

One of the remarkable achievements highlighted in the report is the nearly complete closure of the geographic service gap identified in 2016. Over two-thirds of the state now have OHY and/or federal Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program-funded youth or young adult housing or shelter, with services extending to all but two counties. The success is attributed to robust public-private partnerships and the influential role played by philanthropy in funding innovative solutions at both local and state levels.

While celebrating these victories, it is crucial to acknowledge the candid voices of providers and YYA who emphasize that our work is far from done. Challenges persist, especially in rural communities, where unaccompanied YYA still struggle to find safe housing and shelter, particularly for LGBTQIA2S+, BIPOC, and pregnant/parenting young people. The mantra of "Yes to Yes" echoes, yet the reality often falls short, with young people recounting instances of repeated "no's."

This report not only showcases Washington as a national leader in addressing YYA homelessness but also emphasizes the key ingredients to this success. The presence of both an office in state government and a community-based movement, both dedicated to preventing and ending unaccompanied YYA homelessness, has proven instrumental.

The report and its recommendations lay out a roadmap and vision for a Washington where every unaccompanied young person can receive the help they need promptly and within their community.

We invite readers to delve into the rich tapestry of progress, challenges, and aspirations detailed in the full report. It is a testament to the collaborative spirit and unwavering commitment of Washington in creating a brighter, more inclusive future for its young people.

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A WAY HOME WASHINGTON

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Executive Summary

This report focuses on unaccompanied youth (12-17) and young adults (18-24) experiencing homelessness or housing instability without a parent or guardian, and young families with all members under the age of 25. In 2016, the Raikes Foundation funded a youth homelessness landscape scan report for the then newly-formed Washington [Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection](#) (OHY) and [A Way Home Washington](#) (AWHWA). Using 2014 data, it was estimated that 13,000-15,000 unaccompanied youth and young adults (YYA) experienced homelessness in one year. And over half of Washington's counties lacked any homeless services for young people.[1] Updated and more accurate data used in this report show that 13,000-15,000 was a severe undercount.

Report Purpose

1. Use updated data to estimate how many unaccompanied young people experienced homelessness in 2022 and understand their characteristics: race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, pregnant/parenting status, disability status, and intersections of these identities where possible.
2. Update the 2016 YYA homeless services landscape scan.
3. Provide recommendations for next steps on how to address identified gaps.
4. Support a shared understanding of the data and qualitative experiences to inform policy, funding, and practice solutions.

Findings

- OHY has almost completely closed the geographic service gap. Only two counties are not served by OHY or federal Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program funding.
- More than one quarter of the state has real-time data on unaccompanied YYA experiencing homelessness and housing instability through By-Name Lists.
- New, improved data shows a 40% decrease of YYA experiencing unaccompanied homelessness from 23,961 young people in 2016, to 14,410 in 2022.
- Unaccompanied students identified as homeless and housing unstable almost doubled between 2015-2019.
- There has been increased action on preventing YYA homelessness including flexible fund diversion programs in ten counties, a statewide prevention strategy created by young people with lived experience, OHY, and partners, and investments in preventing exits from public systems of care into homelessness.
- Half of the YYA who accessed the homelessness system in 2022 were Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Almost 1 in 10 were Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Questioning, and other (LGBQ+), although this is likely an undercount because most sexual orientation data were unknown. More than one third of YYA were disabled. More than 1 in 10 were pregnant/parenting.
- There is need for a coherent and measurable statewide equity strategy that adopts a targeted universalism approach.
- The two most mentioned systemic barriers were a lack of affordable, low-barrier housing and the mental health crisis.
- There are limited service options for unaccompanied minors and pregnant/parenting YYA.

Data Summary: Unaccompanied YYA Homelessness in 2022

14,410
Unstably housed or homeless in **one month.**[2]

15,338
Accessed homeless services in **one year.**[3]

5,001
Unaccompanied students in the **school year.**[4]

In 2022, of the 15,338 unaccompanied young people who accessed the homelessness system, there were:

50%
BIPOC

9%
66% Unknown
LGBQ+

4%
Gender Expansive

19%
Minors

12%
Pregnant/ Parenting

36%
Disabled

Data Source: HMIS.

1 in 100
Young people aged 10-24[5] in WA accessed the homeless system

Data Source: Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and US Census.

Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander young people were

9 times
more likely to access the homeless system than White young people

Black and African American young people were

7 times
more likely to access the homeless system than White young people

Data Source: HMIS and WA Office of Financial Management.

Before accessing homeless services, young people were:

31%
unsheltered

24%
staying with friends or family

19%
sheltered within homeless system

10%
permanently housed

16%
unknown

Data Source: HMIS.

Of the unaccompanied young people permanently housed in 2020...
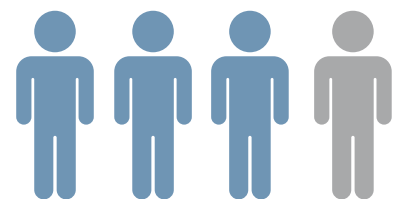
75%
retained housing after two years

Data Source: HMIS.

Data Over Time

Number of Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults Experiencing Homelessness and Housing Instability, 2016-2022
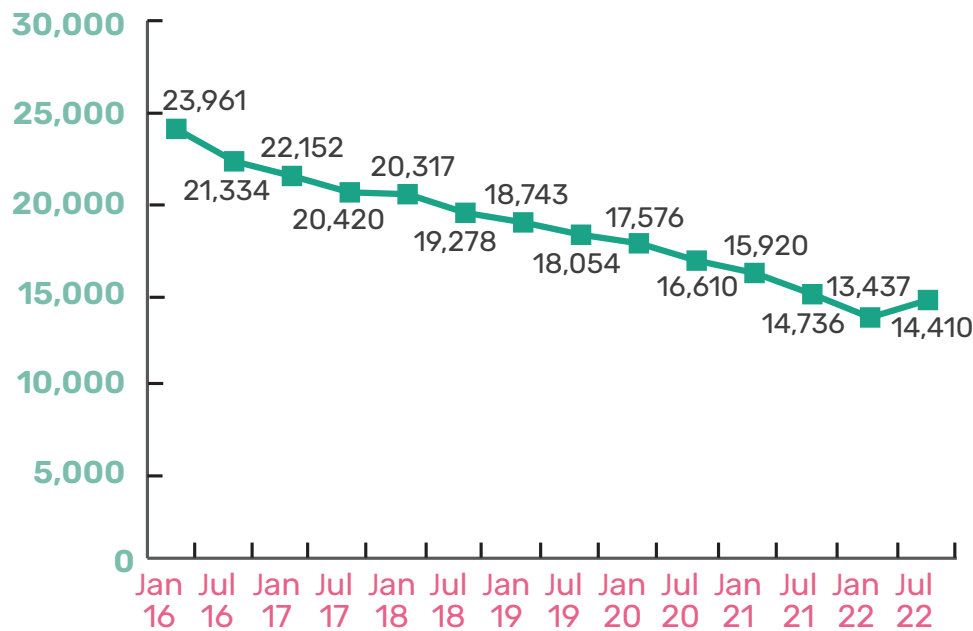
Data Source: Department of Commerce Snapshot of Homelessness Reports.

The Department of Commerce's Snapshot Data provides a twice yearly estimate of the number of unaccompanied YYA experiencing homelessness in one month, based on combined Medicaid, Automated Client Eligibility System (ACES), and Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) populations. It is the only dataset that comprehensively accounts for YYA experiencing homelessness and housing instability across multiple state datasets over time. The dataset is more expansive than the HMIS, accounting for some YYA who are not being served by the homeless system.

Snapshot Data shows that between 2016 and 2022, YYA homelessness has decreased by 40% from 23,961 unaccompanied YYA to 14,410. This data didn't exist when the last youth homelessness landscape scan was produced in 2016. The decrease is mostly among young adult (18 to 24) households. The vast majority of these households are single adults. It is notable that the decrease started well before the pandemic and continued throughout the pandemic, with a slight uptick between January and July 2022.

However, Snapshot Data only provides an indication of how many unaccompanied YYA accessed the homeless, Medicaid, and other systems. Homeless service providers and young people with lived experience that we interviewed emphasized that this data is an undercount because many unaccompanied YYA, especially BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ young people (particularly minors), are not accessing these systems and even if they are, their data may not be uniformly entered.

> "Just because we see statistical decreases in homelessness counts does not mean that we see a decrease in homelessness in lived realities."
>
> **Queer and/or Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (QTBIPOC) Young Person**

Racial Disproportionality

Racial Disproportionality in the Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adult Homelessness System, 2022

Legend:
- White
- Latine of Any Race
- Multiracial
- Black or African American
- Asian
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Total State Population of 10-24 Year Olds [6]: White 62% | Latine 20% | Multiracial 5% | 4% | 7% | 2% | 0.4%

YYA Accessing Homeless System: White 43% | Latine 22% | Multiracial 9% | Black or African American 19% | 1% | 4% | 2%
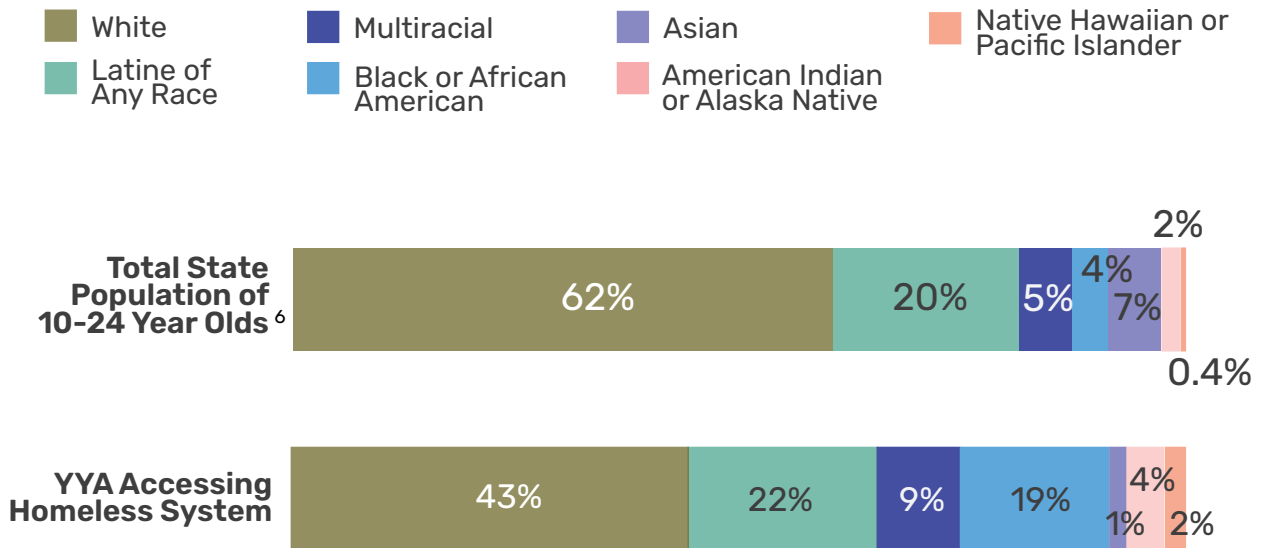
Data Sources: WA Office of Financial Management, Homeless Management Information System. YYA = unaccompanied youth and young adults. 1,789 YYA with unknown race/ethnicity in the HMIS were removed from the count of YYA that accessed the homeless system. Our population of interest is 12-24 year olds, but Census data on 10-24 year olds are used as best available data.

2020 Census Estimates by the WA Office of Financial Management (OFM) were available for the age ranges 10-14, 15-19, and 20-24. These age groups were combined to create a population estimate for young people aged 10-24 years old, but our population of interest is 12-24 year olds. While this should be kept in mind when comparing the populations, the inclusion of 10 and 11 year olds should not alter the race/ethnicity proportions significantly. Race/ethnicity was unknown for 1,789 (12% of the total) of YYA who accessed the homeless system in 2022. These young people were removed from the count of YYA who accessed the homeless system to provide a more useful comparison. OFM estimates show that 62% of the state's population of 10-24 year olds is White and 38% are BIPOC. However, among the population of YYA who were enrolled in the HMIS in 2022, only 43% were White and 57% were BIPOC.

When examining the populations by race and ethnicity, Black and African American YYA experience the greatest disproportionality. Only 4% of WA's 10-24 year old population is Black or African American, while 19% of YYA who accessed the homeless system in 2022 were Black or African American. Black YYA accessed the homeless system almost five times more than their proportion in the general population of 10-24 year olds. Although a small number in both the general population of 10-24 year olds and those accessing the homeless system, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander YYA accessed the homeless system five times more than their proportion in the general population. Asian and White YYA were the only racial groups who accessed the homeless system less than their proportion in the general population of 10-24 year olds.

> "[I want them to know] that Black Trans Youth experiencing homelessness deserve safe housing resources."
>
> **QTBIPOC Young Person**

Progress

Our findings from extensive interviews and connections with more than 100 young people with lived experience and stakeholders show that WA is an innovator in the YYA homelessness space, with unique, collaborative initiatives, public-private partnerships and investments, and first-in-the-nation programs. These are only some of the developments made since the last landscape scan was conducted in 2016.

OHY Service Expansion	Closed the geographic service gap; only two counties aren't served by OHY or federal Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program funding.
"Yes to Yes" Culture Shift	Culture of saying "yes," Anchor Community Initiative (ACI) service dollars, By-Name Lists, and the Homelessness Prevention and Diversion Fund (HPDF).
BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ By and For Resources	Young people emphasized the power of BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ led programming and resource centers, and the need for more.
Homeless Student Stability Program (HSSP) and Technical Assistance	Increased collaboration between schools and the homeless system bolstered by Building Changes' technical assistance and the ACI.
Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP)	Cross-system collaboration and leadership by young people with lived experience.
Progress on Prevention	Cross-government work with community to outline a statewide strategy to prevent YYA homelessness; and preventing exits from public systems of care into homelessness through investments from HB 1905.
YYA Leadership	Young people changing systems through The Mockingbird Society, OHY, the ACI and the state-level Y4Y board.
Creative Housing Solutions	Growth of Supportive Leasing[7] (also known as Master Leasing) and Host Homes, especially in rural communities.

Gaps Analysis Findings

While WA has made a great deal of progress in addressing unaccompanied YYA homelessness since 2016, some of the same gaps still remain. This is a high-level summary of the most commonly identified system gaps and issues raised by interviewees, some of which are at crisis proportions. The lack of affordable housing and the mental health crisis were the two most mentioned across all regions of the state.

Pregnant/Parenting
Lack of supportive housing options for young families that allow all types of families to stay together.

Minors
Limited services, housing options, and support for minors that are accessible legally without parental consent.

Housing Crisis
Lack of affordable low-barrier housing especially for BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, and young people with mental health and/or substance use issues.

Mental Health Crisis
Higher mental health needs and shortage of mental health practitioners and resources, especially for BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ young people and in rural communities.

System Exits
The behavioral health system is disconnected from the homeless system, causing young people with complex mental health needs to be exited into homelessness.

Unmet Basic Needs
Lack of access to transportation, food, and YYA-specific shelter and housing, especially in rural communities.

Disproportionality
BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ young people experience homelessness and housing instability disproportionately and need population-specific, culturally sensitive care.

Statewide Equity Strategy
No intentional, targeted, and measurable statewide strategy on racial and LGBTQIA2S+ equity and youth leadership.

Insufficient Funding
Government contracts are inflexible, don't increase with inflation, and don't provide enough staffing funds, resulting in low wages and programming driven by contract specifications rather than YYA needs.

Lack of Real-Time Data
Most counties aren't using accurate real-time data to improve their homeless response system and don't share an inclusive definition of homelessness.

Recommendations

Recommendations were gathered from extensive interviews, surveys, and focus groups with more than 100 BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, and pregnant/parenting young people with lived experience, service providers, and stakeholders around the state. Recommendations from young people are marked with an asterisk and are shown first. Most of the recommendations came from young people because we uplifted their ideas first and foremost.

We didn't conduct assessments of feasibility and cost because we wanted to follow YYAs' lead in dreaming big. Our goal is to provide a roadmap for how governments at all levels, philanthropy, communities, young people with lived experience, and service providers can work together to prevent and end unaccompanied YYA homelessness.

"Youth and young adults appreciate hearing that our voices, stories, testimonies are not going unheard. Those that lose hope and don't believe a change is coming often end up giving up on life. Death rates of youth and young adults that are pleading for help and a miracle or even a voice that say we hear or see you are rising quickly."

QTBIPOC & Parenting Young Person

These recommendations exist against a backdrop of adultism, white supremacy, anti-Blackness, genocide and land theft against Indigenous Peoples, ableism, queerphobia, and transphobia. All of which we must also be working to change if we expect to end unaccompanied YYA homelessness.

"Direct Cash Transfers as prevention (DCT-P) is providing more money specifically for that prevention piece. That's really important in areas where there are no Rapid Re-Housing programs to fund, where there is no transitional housing. Prevention is one of the main ways to get those numbers down and hopefully get us to functional zero."

Milo Edwards
Manager DCT-P and Policy, Point Source Youth

Recommendations Summary

1. **Youth-led and Population-specific Resources:** Invest in youth-led, LGBTQIA2S+ and BIPOC resources, prevention strategies, and programming.*

2. **Individualized Aftercare:** Provide aftercare that tapers off in alignment with individual needs after young people are housed, especially for BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ individuals, offering culturally responsive mental healthcare.*

3. **Meaningful Careers for Young People:** Create a variety of meaningful employment and career options in positions of power for YYA with lived experience to lead the movement to prevent and end YYA homelessness.*

4. **Affordable Housing and Basic Needs:** Increase availability of affordable housing, transportation, food, and shelter; address poverty and ensure access to basic needs.*

5. **Increase Services for Minors:** Fill critical service gaps for unaccompanied minors.*

6. **More Mental Health Resources:** Address the mental health crisis by providing more financial resources generally and specifically for peer counseling and mentoring programs.*

7. **Increase Supportive Leases and Improve Host Homes:** Scale creative housing solutions such as Supportive Leasing (also known as Master Leasing) and continue improving on the Host Homes model to create more accessible housing options.*

8. **Improve Relationships with Schools and Colleges:** Continue to improve service connections between schools, colleges, and the homeless system as the first point of contact for unaccompanied students.*

9. **Scale Proven Prevention Programs:** Bring proven prevention initiatives such as the [Homelessness Prevention and Diversion Fund](#) (HPDF), the [Youth Engagement Team](#) (YET), InREACH, and Direct Cash Transfers (DCT) to all communities in the state.*

10. **Increase Pay for Front-Line Workers:** All funders should provide more flexible grants that increase over time with more staffing dollars, so that providers can pay front-line workers a living wage.*

11. **Strengthen Public Systems' Capacity to Prevent Homelessness:** Expand efforts to ensure young people exiting child welfare, inpatient behavioral health, and criminal legal systems are stably housed* and housing outcomes are measurable in real-time.

12. **Statewide Equity Strategy:** Organizations and governments with a mission to end YYA homelessness should unite their approaches and collaborate on a measurable statewide equity strategy.

13. **Invest in Real-Time Data:** Streamline data collection and reporting statewide to prioritize real-time data and adequately resource communities to establish quality By-Name Lists.

Overview
Definitions

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC): Young people who identify as any combination of the below:
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Latine of any race
- Multiracial
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Balance of State: Continuum of Care which includes WA's 34 most rural counties.

By-Name List (BNL): real-time accounting of all unaccompanied YYA experiencing homelessness or housing instability.

Continuum of Care: A regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for families and individuals experiencing homelessness.

Cisgender: People who identify as their sex assigned at birth.

Disabled: The HMIS definition is used for disability which includes a physical, mental, or emotional impairment, including alcohol or drug abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, or brain injury that is continuing or indefinite and substantially impedes the individual's ability to live independently. Developmental disabilities are also included.

Disabled Person: This report uses identity-first language for disabilities because young people explicitly asked for this terminology to be used.

Gender-expansive: Transgender, non-binary, genderqueer, culturally-specific gender, gender non-conforming, or gender fluid.

Homelessness: For the purposes of this report, homelessness is defined as inclusively as possible and includes young people:
- experiencing unsheltered homelessness or living in a place unfit for human habitation;
- in shelter or temporary housing within the homelessness system;
- at risk of homelessness;
- unstably or unsafely housed including doubled up or couchsurfing; and
- fleeing domestic violence and/or sex trafficking.

LGBTQIA2S+: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or gender-expansive, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual, Two-Spirit, and others.

LGBQ+: LGBQ+ is used to differentiate sexual orientation from gender identity because these are collected separately in the homelessness and other data systems. When in reality, many queer young people are also gender-expansive and vice versa.

Permanently Housed: Young person who exits into permanent housing for formerly homeless persons, a property owned or rented by the young person (with or without an ongoing subsidy or Housing Choice Voucher), staying or living with family or friends permanently, or Rapid Re-Housing.

Pregnant/parenting: At project entry, clients are asked if they are pregnant. In the HMIS, each parent is split into their own household, with the child only under one parent who is flagged as parenting. Pregnant/parenting young people are flagged if either of these conditions are true.

QTBIPOC: Queer and/or transgender and also Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

Return to Homelessness: Permanently housed in 2020 and returned to homelessness by June 2022.

SOGI: Sexual orientation and gender identity.

Unaccompanied: Young people experiencing homelessness or housing instability without their parent or guardian and includes young parents with minor children.

Youth: Minors aged 12-17.

Young adults: Aged 18-24.

Young People: Minors and young adults aged 12-24.

See the Appendix for more definitions.

Methodology

Qualitative Research and Analysis
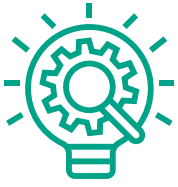
A Rapid Ethnographic Assessment was the primary approach used for the qualitative part of this project. This included intensive techniques of key informant interviews, brief surveys, case studies, group discussions, and document and literature reviews. Responsive to the need for timely, usable data that is critical when serving marginalized, hidden, and hard-to-reach populations ,Rapid Ethnographic Assessment produces rich, practical data within a short period.[8] Researchers engage participants in problem solving, learn from people closest to the issues, form new relationships, and inform program and policy improvement.

The following methods were used to collect qualitative data:

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 80 stakeholders, service providers, criminal legal, child welfare, behavioral health personnel, and public officials across 56 organizations that covered the whole state except Asotin and San Juan counties.
- Two focus groups were held with BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ young people aged 17-24 with current or previous lived experience of homelessness and housing instability.
- 21 BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+ and pregnant/parenting young people with lived experience completed a brief survey with closed and open-ended questions.
- 12 individual interviews were conducted with BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+ and pregnant/parenting young people with lived experience of homelessness and housing instability.
- Attended The Mockingbird Society's Supportive Leasing work group meetings to observe and workshop recommendations.

In total, 22 unique young people from 11 urban and rural regions were interviewed as part of two focus groups, short surveys, or individual interviews. BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+ and pregnant and/or parenting young people were specifically recruited because of their over-representation in youth homelessness data. A $40 stipend was provided to honor their time and expertise. Young people with lived experience aged 16 to 24 were recruited through the OHY and AWHWA's networks, as well as Arlington Drive, The Mockingbird Society, Northwest Youth Services, and Ryan's House. Some young people had professional experience as service providers. Almost all YYA had been involved with the criminal legal, child welfare, and/or behavioral health systems. At least four were currently staying in shelters or otherwise unstably housed. Some service providers also had recent and relevant lived experience.

The young people interviewed and surveyed were by no means representative of the whole population of unaccompanied young people experiencing homelessness in WA. But their thoughts, opinions, and expertise provided a powerful insight into the reasons why BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, and pregnant/parenting young people are experiencing homelessness and recommendations on how to prevent and end unaccompanied YYA homelessness.

Research methods, surveys, interviews, and focus groups were co-designed and facilitated with a young adult with lived experience of homelessness. YYA with current and previous lived experience also reviewed and edited the report before publishing.

Quantitative Research and Analysis

Without one comprehensive dataset, multiple datasets were used to estimate the number of young people who experienced unaccompanied homelessness in 2022 and learn more about their characteristics.

Researchers were not involved in the extraction of any datasets from their original databases, as data were received from the Department of Commerce and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) in an already aggregated format. This limited researchers' control over the quantitative data that could be gathered and used for the report and the ability to explore young people's intersectional identities. Wherever possible, researchers requested and gathered county-level race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, gender identity, pregnant/parenting data, and intersectional data. However, this data was not always available.

The following datasets were used:

- **WA Department of Commerce Snapshot of Homelessness, 2016-2022:** Based on combined Medicaid, Automated Client Eligibility System, and Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) populations and includes YYA who are unstably housed or experiencing homelessness. Unstably housed or experiencing homelessness refers to all clients or households experiencing any homelessness or housing instability (e.g. they are literally homeless/unsheltered, receiving housing services that indicate housing instability, residing in transitional housing, or couchsurfing).[9] This data is publicly available here. Limitations for the Snapshot Data is provided here.

- **OSPI Unaccompanied Youth and Students Experiencing Homelessness Counts, 2022:** Includes all unaccompanied youth and students from grades 6-12 based on identification at any point during the 2021-2022 school year according to the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness. This data was requested and provided directly from OSPI as they aren't publicly available.

- **Department of Commerce Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) Data, 2022:** For the purposes of this report, HMIS refers to the Balance of State HMIS maintained by Commerce, as well as data from independent HMIS' maintained by King, Pierce, Snohomish, Spokane, and Clark counties. The dataset includes any unaccompanied youth (12-17) or young adult (18-24) client that had an active enrollment anytime during the 2022 state fiscal year, which began July 1, 2021 and ended June 30, 2022. Young people who returned from housing were those who exited to permanent housing during 7/1/2019-6/30/2020 and returned in a 2-year period between 7/1/2020-6/30/2022. This data was provided by the Department of Commerce as they aren't publicly available.

- **Point in Time Count, 2022:** The Point in Time Count is a count of people experiencing homelessness conducted once a year, usually by volunteers who count people sleeping outside. People in shelter or transitional housing are added to create a comprehensive count. This data is publicly available here.

Data Limitations

HMIS and Snapshot Data should be used as an indicator of how many unaccompanied young people accessed the homeless system and other systems. While this data is the best available data at present, it only provides a glimpse into the true numbers of young people who experience unaccompanied homelessness and housing instability and are likely an undercount.

Unaccompanied young people, especially youth, are more likely than older adults to experience homelessness "invisibly," particularly in rural areas. Young people are more commonly doubled up or couchsurfing with family or friends, rather than accessing shelter.[10] In many rural communities, there are no youth-specific shelters for young people to access. Further, BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ young people are even less likely to access systems, due to a lack of safety, stigma, racism, queerphobia, and transphobia. Service providers consider OSPI data more reliable than the HMIS data for unaccompanied minors because of the more expansive definition of homelessness used by the education system and the role of schools as the first point of contact for unaccompanied students. But OSPI data is limited to individuals 18 and younger who were enrolled in school and are only gathered on a yearly basis. A limitation of the HMIS data is that it is restricted to individuals who received services from state or federally funded entities and who consented to have their data entered into the system. Detailed limitations of Snapshot Data can be found here.

Researcher and Author Positionality

Research was primarily conducted by three researchers, all of whom are queer, trans or non-binary, and BIPOC. Their racial and ethnic identities are: Asian/White, African American, and Multiracial. The team consists of two QTBIPOC older adults without lived experience of homelessness and one young adult with lived experience. Two members are members of the community they researched, having worked in the YYA homelessness sector in WA for over five years. The primary author is an older QTBIPOC adult without lived experience. Three YYA with lived experience and other intersecting identities: BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, disabled, and parenting, were paid report reviewers. Another QTBIPOC YYA with lived experience was paid to create cover art for the report. This information is shared because our perspectives as QTBIPOC individuals and community members with and without lived experience shape our gathering, interpretation, and synthesis of data. This report is researched and written through these intersecting lenses.

> "[I want them to know] that while we may be homeless, it doesn't mean we did it to ourselves. Most people end up homeless due to the housing crisis, getting kicked out of their parents home/foster care (be left behind as soon as they turn 18) or the minimum wage being too low to support themselves. The blame for us being homeless doesn't fall onto us entirely, it also falls onto the tax payers/the government."
>
> **LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person**

Trigger warning: This report contains mention of suicide, sexual assault, and abuse. If you are a young person that needs help, please see this list of mental health resources. Resources for older adults can be found here. In an emergency, call 911 or 988, the new national mental health crisis hotline.

Introduction & Background: Saying "Yes" to Young People

The young people with lived experience of homelessness we talked to spoke of the many times they said "yes." "Yes" to their doctor, to their school counselor, to their therapist, to homeless service providers, to going to substance use treatment, to being placed in foster care. They said they were turned away so many times that they would "lose hope." Sometimes it was because of a lack of information on the housing and homeless services available in the community - people just didn't know where to send them. Another time, at 17 years old, they were told they were "too old" to be placed into foster care. Or, the wait time for housing was one year. A year of couchsurfing without a place to wash their clothes or take care of basic needs.

> "A million no's before you get that one yes."
> **QTBIPOC Parenting Young Person**

> "A lot of young people get a lot of no's, when it's not a no - it's just a lack of knowledge of the people that we're working with."
>
> **Rachel Reynolds**
> **Youth Engagement Coordinator,**
> **Rods House**

Even when faced with a year-long wait, being forced to stay in an adult shelter, or couchsurfing for five years because no one in their community knew how to help them, young people persevered. Met with a "million no's," they kept going until they found that one "yes." They worked multiple jobs while they stayed in a shelter with their toddler. They walked around Seattle during the COVID-19 pandemic, without access to a phone or internet, trying to find someone who would point them to a shelter. They enrolled in college and got into financial debt so that they could get housed. They bunked in with their families or friends, some of whom were in stable housing for the first time.

Youth and young adult (YYA) homelessness is the result of system failure, not individual failure. Even after experiencing these failures, young people were hopeful about the future, citing community collaboration as a vehicle for solving the systemic issues that cause youth homelessness. It was often a young person's community who held them up. The young person who couchsurfed for five years eventually found housing through a mentor they met at their local LGBTQIA2S+ resource center. School staff were a constant source of kindness, support, and resources for one young person - they are now studying to become a peer counselor for youth. Another young person's case manager, listed in their phone as "shelter mom," still checks on them, years afterward.

> "It's bigger than people think...it takes all of us to work together and really push for youth homelessness to end. It's systems of care...it's people uniting...it's weeding out things that don't work and honing in on the things that do."
> **LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person**

A "Yes to Yes" Washington is when a young person says "yes," providers have the resources and capacity to say "yes" back. Young people don't need to leave their home communities to get access to the support they need to be safely and stably housed. "Yes to Yes" means ending the overrepresentation of BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ young people experiencing unaccompanied homelessness.

Why BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+ and Pregnant/Parenting Young People Experience Unaccompanied Homelessness

The reasons unaccompanied young people experience homelessness identified here were drawn from focus groups and individual interviews with BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, and pregnant/parenting young people with lived experience. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but provides a sense of the many reasons why young people who hold these identities experience homelessness and housing instability. As much as possible, young people's exact words were used to describe their experiences.

Family Disconnection and/or Fleeing Violence

- Rejected by parents
- Needing to flee abuse, domestic violence and/or sexual assault
- Unable to resolve family conflict
- Death in the family
- Exiting a toxic relationship
- Being abandoned when family members move

Intergenerational Poverty and Cyclical Homelessness

- Parents losing their job
- Forced to couchsurf even when parents "worked themselves to death" they "didn't have enough money"
- An "endless cycle of hoops to jump through" which are "impossible to clear" because of a "lack of stable income and no resources to help"

Exited or Kicked out of a Housing or Other Program

- Exited or kicked out of foster care without supports
- Trauma from foster care can result in young people feeling alienated
- Exiting a housing program, juvenile detention, or behavioral health facility without resources or housing plan

Mental Health and/or Substance Use

- Post traumatic stress disorder
- Trauma
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Mental illness and trauma contribute to homelessness but also are a result of experiencing homelessness
- "Being introduced to harder drugs on the street"

LGBTQIA2S+ and Intersecting Identities

- Forced to leave home out of fear for their safety
- Racism, transphobia, and homophobia, especially discrimination against trans people who don't align with the gender binary
- Coming out as queer or trans and being kicked out
- Experiencing discrimination by faith-based service providers and being fearful of seeking services

COVID-19

- Being forced to stay in toxic and abusive situations, which negatively impacted physical and mental health
- Prolonged homelessness because YYA couldn't access community spaces and resources
- Schools were closed and remote-only; resources weren't accessible
- Deaths of parents and guardians left YYA unaccompanied

Lack of Affordable Housing and Financial Barriers

- Lack of affordable and accessible housing
- Rising rents and not being able to afford new costs
- Income requirements and credit scores in housing applications
- "Housing is expensive"

> "The housing crisis, getting kicked out of their parents' home/foster care (being left behind as soon as they turn 18) or the minimum wage being too low to support themselves."
>
> **Young Person**

> "LGBTQIA2S+ young people experience homelessness because we don't have safety to live how we want to. It's generally unsafe to come out and experience identity as one wants to, and having that met with discrimination or hatred. People might need to move out of the place they live in because they fear for their safety, and they might not be able to find another safe place to live for a while."
>
> **LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person in Thurston**

Challenges of Being a Young Parent

- "Not being able to afford taking care of another person and being financially stable for both"
- "Not having support from the child's other parent is difficult and having it all on your shoulders"
- "Stressful to deal with a newborn baby"

Scarce YYA Resources, High Staff Turnover and Burnout

- "There wasn't a lot support because of the sheer volume of homelessness during COVID-19, case managers were getting burnt out"
- Wanting to access supportive services but deciding not to because the "wait was 2 years long"
- Couchsurfing for 1 year while waiting for Rapid Re-Housing
- Lack of youth-specific shelters, forcing young people to go to adult shelters

> "I want them to know about the lack of resources and how hard it is for youth to be in adult-oriented shelters."
>
> **Young Person in Clark**

> "Homelessness can happen to anybody at any time. Homelessness can happen from a death, a gamble, an addiction."
>
> **Parenting Young Person**

Data Analysis: Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adult Homelessness in Washington State, 2022

14,410
Unstably housed or homeless in **one month.**[11]

15,338
Accessed homeless system in **one year.**[12]

5,001
Unaccompanied students in the **school year.**[13]

Figure 1: Race, Sexual Orientation, and Gender of Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults Accessing HMIS, 2022

n=15,338

50%
BIPOC

White	38%
Latine of Any Race	19%
Black or African American	17%
Multiracial	8%
American Indian or Alaska Native	3%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2%
Asian	1%
Unknown	12%

9%
66% Unknown
LGBQ+

Heterosexual	25%
Bisexual	5%
Other	3%
Gay/Lesbian	2%
Unknown	66%

4%
Gender Expansive

Cis-Female	49%
Cis-Male	41%
Transgender	2%
Gender Non-conforming	2%
Unknown	5%
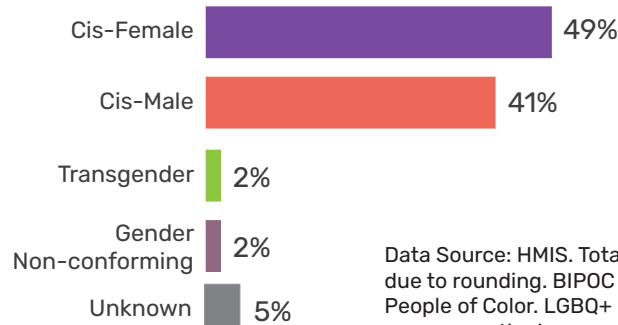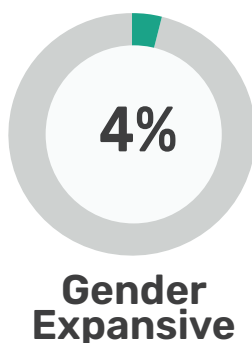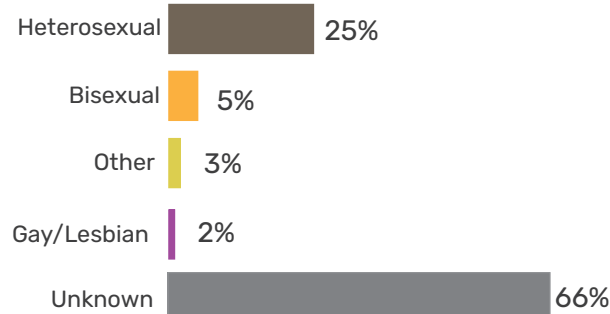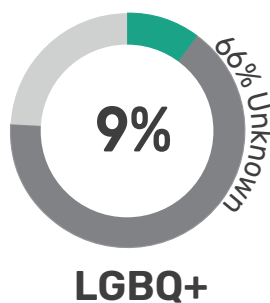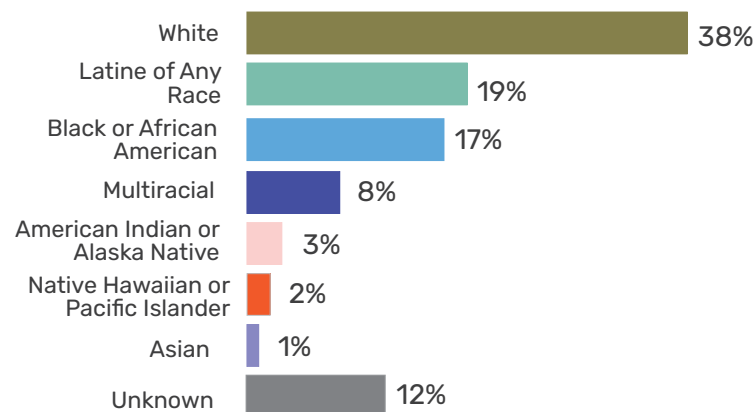
Data Source: HMIS. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding. BIPOC = Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. LGBQ+ = lesbian, gay, bisexual, gay or questioning.

Figure 2: Age Group, Pregnant/parenting, and Disability Status
n=15,338

19% Minors

12% Pregnant/Parenting

36% Disabled
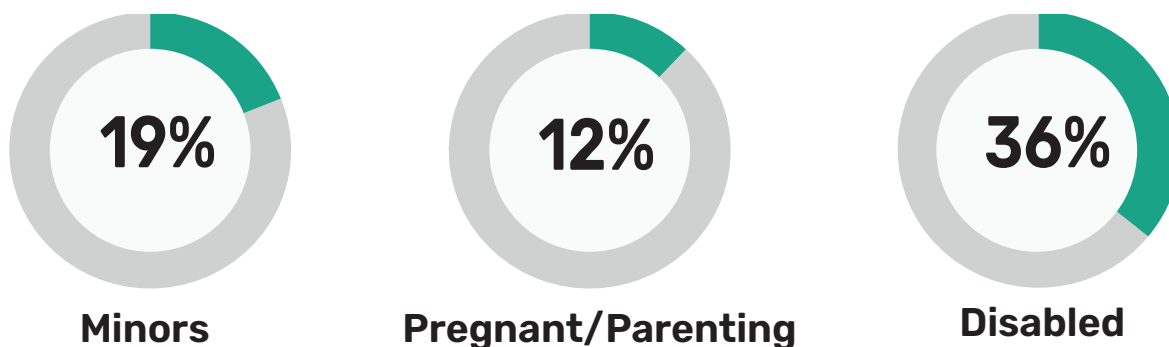
Data Source: HMIS.

15,338 unaccompanied youth and young adults (YYA) accessed the homeless system in 2022 and were enrolled into the HMIS. Almost 1 in 5 of these YYA were minors. But the number of minors in the HMIS is widely considered an undercount because minors are often unstably housed, doubled up, or couchsurfing and therefore don't access the limited emergency shelter services. Many communities don't have services for minors. Thus, minors often don't get entered into the HMIS.

Just over 1 in 10 young people were either pregnant or parenting. The number of parenting young people may also be an undercount because of the way the data is structured in HMIS. Each parent is split into their own household, with the child only under one parent who is flagged as parenting. This means that both parents won't show up as parenting - only one will. See the Appendix for more information.

More than one third of the unaccompanied young people who accessed the homeless system were disabled. The HMIS definition is used for disability which includes a physical, mental, or emotional impairment, including alcohol or drug abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, or brain injury that is continuing or indefinite and substantially impedes the individual's ability to live independently. Developmental disabilities are also included.[14]

"We didn't choose to be homeless. I have experienced so much in my little life, I was just surviving."

LGBTQIA2S+ Youth

"The way that HMIS captures young people experiencing homelessness is typically HUD-funded categories of homelessness. I think it's a significant undercount in terms of how young people experience homelessness, which is many times couch hopping, so, not accessing shelters or other systems of care. And so then they are lost or not counted."

Rhea Yo
Director of Legal Services, Legal Counsel for Youth and Children

Figure 3: County HMIS Counts of Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults, 2022

Data Source: HMIS
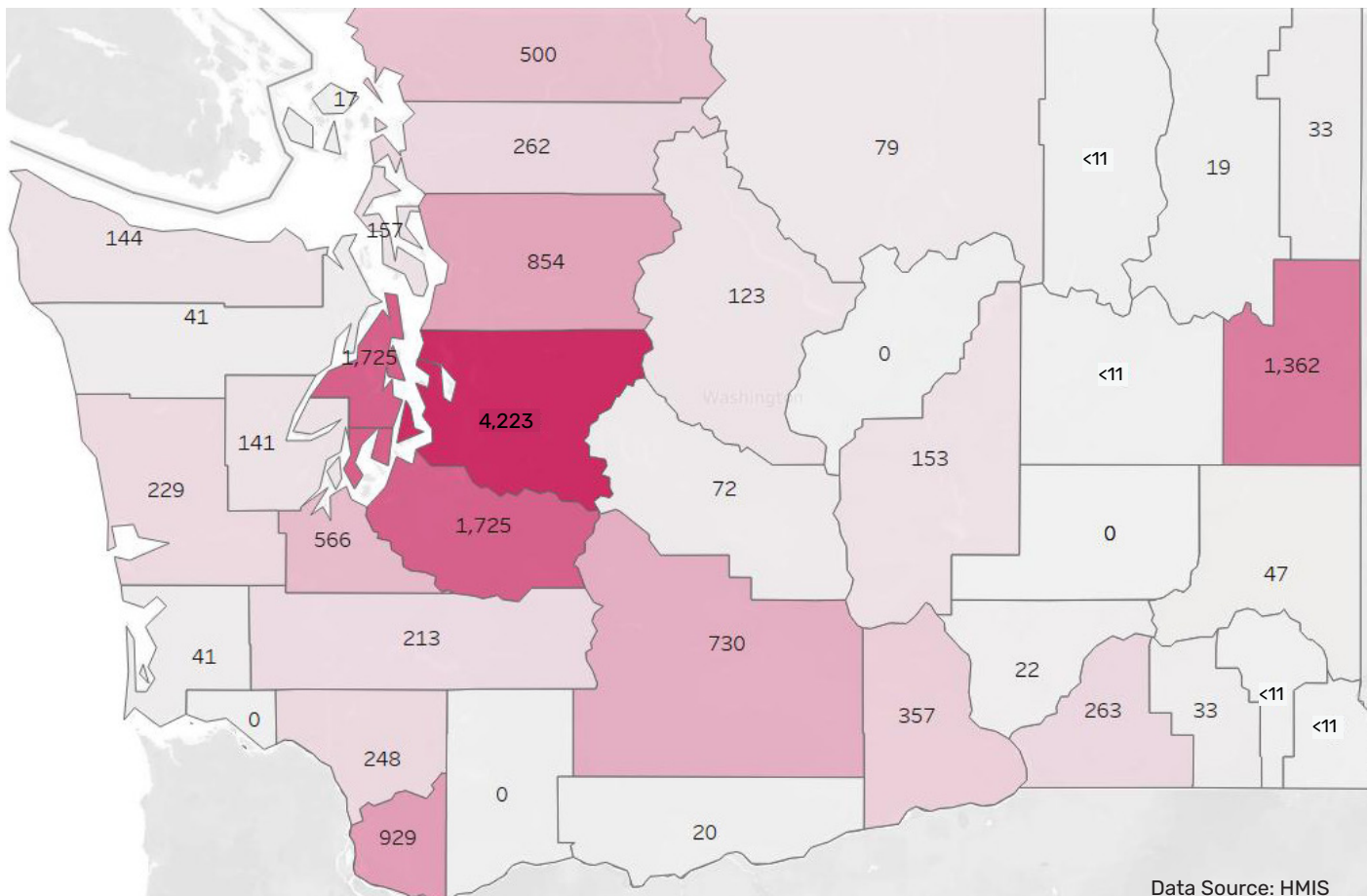
1 in 100

10-24 year olds in WA accessed the homeless system in 2022.

Top 10 Counties with Highest Rates of Unaccompanied YYA per 100 10-24 year olds:

1. Columbia: **6** in 100
2. Kitsap: **3** in 100
3. Grays Harbor: **2** in 100
4. Walla Walla: **2** in 100
5. Pend Oreille: **2** in 100
6. Lewis: **2** in 100
7. Pacific: **1** in 100
8. Mason: **1** in 100
9. Clallam: **1** in 100
10. Spokane: **1** in 100

Data Source: HMIS and US Census.

HMIS counts by county are an indicator of how many unaccompanied YYA accessed the homelessness system in each county in 2022. Generally, the HMIS counts align with the general population size of each county. But comparing HMIS counts to the population of 10-24 year olds in each county tells a different story. Our population of interest is 12-24 year olds, but Census data is only available for 10-24 year olds. Rural counties had the highest rates of unaccompanied YYA accessing the homeless system per 100 10-24 year olds in 2022.

Overall, at least 1 in 100 10-24 year olds in WA[15] accessed the homeless system in 2022. The rate of homeless system access in Columbia County was six times higher than the state rate, with 6 out of every 100 10-24 year olds accessing the homeless system in 2022. Overall, the counties with the highest rates of homeless system access were more rural counties.

HMIS counts in Ferry, Lincoln, Garfield, and Asotin were less than 11 and subject to suppression. No unaccompanied YYA in Skamania, Wahkiakum, Adams, and Douglas counties were enrolled into the HMIS.

See Appendix B for the full list of counties.

Data Over Time

Figure 4: Number of Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults Experiencing Homelessness and Housing Instability, 2016-2022
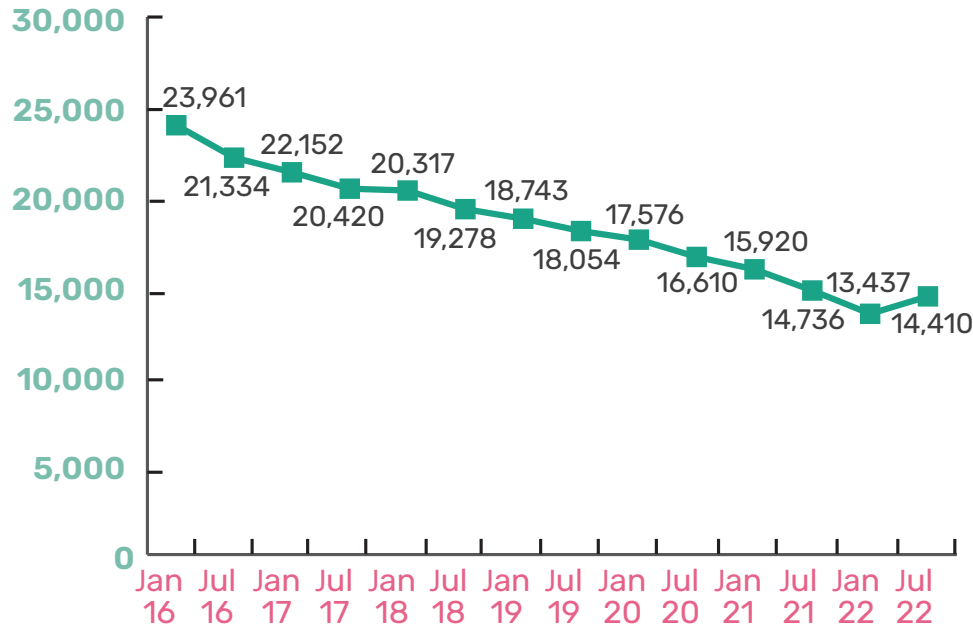
Data Source: Department of Commerce Snapshot of Homelessness Reports. Both the HMIS and Snapshot Data include young people who are unstably housed and/or at risk of homelessness.

The Department of Commerce's Snapshot Data provides a twice yearly estimate of the number of unaccompanied YYA experiencing homelessness in one month, based on combined Medicaid, Automated Client Eligibility System (ACES), and HMIS populations. It is the only dataset that comprehensively accounts for YYA experiencing homelessness and housing instability across multiple state datasets over time. The dataset is more expansive than the HMIS, accounting for some YYA who are not being served by the homeless system.

Snapshot Data shows that YYA homelessness has decreased by 40% from 23,961 unaccompanied YYA to 14,410 from 2016-2022. This data didn't exist when the last youth homelessness landscape scan was produced in 2016.

Limitations of Snapshot Data include:
- State administrative data is based on individuals engaged in state systems at the time. Anyone not coming into contact with these systems is not reflected in the data.
- It is difficult to identify unaccompanied YYA using state administrative data.
- The data includes unaccompanied students only if they are receiving some form of assistance recorded in ACES or have received housing services recorded in the HMIS.
- Data on a client's living situation may not be updated on a monthly basis.
- Head of household living arrangement data is updated more regularly, but data on other household members is not.
- Only includes people who consent to share their information.

Upcoming Report on Youth Homelessness

A report leveraging the same integrated homelessness data used to produce this report will be released in 2024 by the Department of Social and Health Services Research and Data Analysis Department. The report will provide information on the characteristics of YYA experiencing homelessness in WA, including demographics, system involvement, social/health services, behavioral health indicators, and risk factors.

Washington is a national leader in homelessness data with its sophisticated integrated databases that allow connections across multiple state administrative datasets and homeless system data. While HMIS data is only a small portion of the Snapshot Data, the qualitative data and quotes in this section mostly center on shortcomings of homeless system data because service providers and young people with lived experience are most familiar with this data. Homelessness data has well known limitations: restrictive definitions based on government funding, inconsistent data entry and under-reporting, and disconnection from BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ communities. Service providers are the main entry point for homeless system data, which creates significant data quality challenges because of the heavy workload, chronic underpayment, and understaffing of front-line workers. These issues are not unique to WA and are commonly faced by communities across the country.

In recognition that YYA are rarely asked about data that relates to them, we showed Figure 4 to 35 YYA service providers, stakeholders, and YYA with lived experience and asked whether it reflected their own data and lived experiences. Quotes from these interviews are presented side by side with quantitative data to show various perspectives on the data. Even with the limitations identified by YYA and service providers, Snapshot Data is currently the best available and most comprehensive data on the numbers of YYA experiencing unaccompanied homelessness. All feedback from community members was provided in the spirit of improvement and a desire to see homelessness and other system data more accurately reflect their realities as young people and service providers.

Only a handful of service providers trusted the Snapshot Data enough to believe that a decrease of 40% had occurred. One provider was based in Walla Walla, which is the only community in the state that has decreased unaccompanied YYA homelessness by more than 70% in the last two years, according to their real-time By-Name List. An expert in the youth homelessness field attributed the 40% decrease to the opening of the OHY and the extensive public and private investments in unaccompanied YYA homelessness since 2016, but also encouraged deeper analysis to determine correlation and causation.

Qualitative reflections from YYA and other experts:

- Deeper causal analysis would need to be conducted to determine the connection between the decrease in YYA homelessness and death. But there are well-researched connections between homelessness and high mortality rates as well as suicide.

> "This graph [Figure 4] doesn't adequately represent what I'm seeing out in the world. I wonder how much of this decrease has just been brought about by people dying– I was a young adult who was homeless several times during this time period. It doesn't feel very reflective of my experience. I imagine a lot more folks have gone underground and are not accessing the services that they may need."
>
> **Tatyana Barron**
> **Youth Department Site Manager, Serenity House of Clallam County**

Almost all participants interviewed questioned the accuracy of Snapshot Data because many providers don't enter data into the HMIS and YYA aren't usually captured in state administrative datasets. BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+ service providers and young people were the most skeptical and mistrusting of the data. Providers and YYA with lived experience stated that a decrease in the data was possible during the COVID-19 pandemic because of school, facility, and program closures, but not because of an actual decrease in homelessness. Some providers also mentioned that Rental Assistance funding that came during the pandemic was a "great revealer" of the actual need in the community, which was much more than previous data had shown.

Qualitative reflections from YYA and other experts:

- Rental assistance programs allowed communities to connect with and collect data from many more people who weren't accessing the homeless system before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Reflections from young people and service providers indicated that the Snapshot Data is only reflective of the YYA who accessed the homeless and other public systems, but the real scale of homelessness is much larger due to under-reporting and poor data quality.

"Because of Rental Assistance Programs we learned just how many young adults in our community were just one paycheck away from homelessness. That's indicative of a whole population that wasn't utilizing homeless and housing services, but just how close they were to homelessness. I think the data is reflective of what was entered into the systems, but I don't think it by any means captures the reality."

Derek Harris
Chief Executive Officer, Community Youth Services

"Just because we see statistical decreases in homelessness counts does not mean that we see a decrease in homelessness in lived realities."

QTBIPOC Young Person

"I think there's a lot of under reporting that has been very common and persistent when it comes to gathering data around homelessness, especially when it comes down to youth who are experiencing homelessness…And there's also other varieties of data that should be reviewed before like trusting one particular source, right? They use a specific definition of what homelessness is and that creates a barrier for people who exist outside of that definition."

QTBIPOC Young Person

Figure 5: Number of Unaccompanied Minors Experiencing Homelessness and Housing Instability, 2016-2022

Data Source: Department of Commerce Snapshot of Homelessness Reports. Minors = 12-17 year olds.
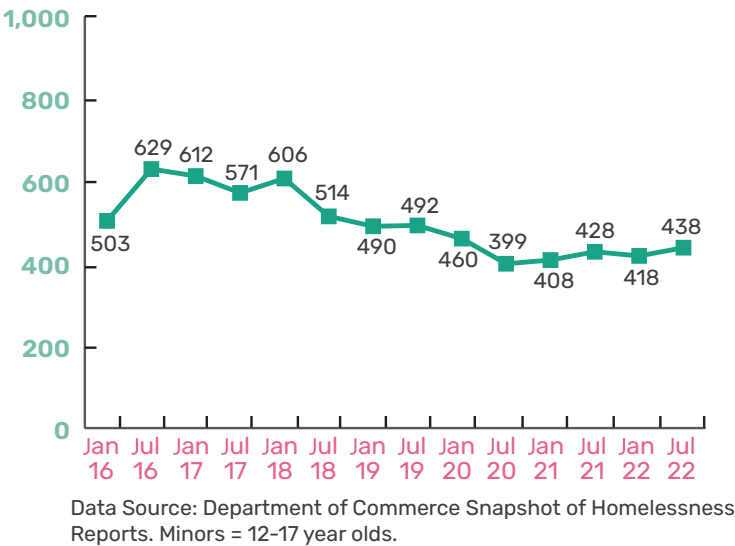
Figure 6: Number of Unaccompanied Young Adults Experiencing Homelessness and Housing Instability, 2016-2022

Data Source: Department of Commerce Snapshot of Homelessness Reports. Young adults = 18-24 year olds.
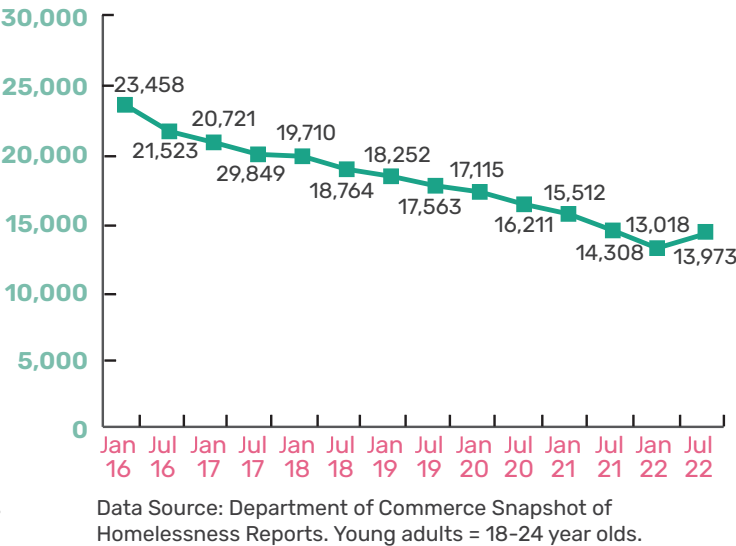
Figure 5 shows the number of unaccompanied minors (12-17 year olds) who experienced homelessness and housing instability from 2016-2022 according to Snapshot Data. The numbers of unaccompanied minors in the Snapshot Data didn't decrease as dramatically as the young adults. A limitation of Snapshot Data is that it only includes unaccompanied minors receiving cash, food, medical, or housing assistance.

Figure 6 shows the number of households that only include members who are between the ages of 18 and 24 who experienced homelessness and housing instability from 2016-2022. The vast majority of these households are single adults. According to Snapshot Data, homelessness among young adult households decreased by 40% between 2016-2022. It is notable that the decrease started well before the pandemic and continued throughout the pandemic, with a slight uptick between January and July 2022.

Service providers we interviewed said these data didn't align with their program-level data. They saw decreases during the COVID-19 pandemic because of provider closures, but their numbers are starting to reach pre-pandemic and even higher than pre-pandemic levels due to increased need.

Qualitative reflections from YYA and other experts:

• While Snapshot Data is the best available quantitative data currently, young people emphasize the need for communities to make decisions based on multiple data sources, especially qualitative data.

> "A lot of federal and state funding use that data in order to set their priorities in funding, services and overall actions. That's why it's important to call out inaccurate data - the people funding these programs and services are taking this data to be concrete, and can create misconceptions that these policies and approaches are working and should therefore be continued and I think that is a misguided way to be moving."

Mahkyra Gaines
Community Engagement Manager, Lavender Rights Project

Figure 7: Total and Other Households Experiencing Homelessness and Housing Instability, 2016-2022
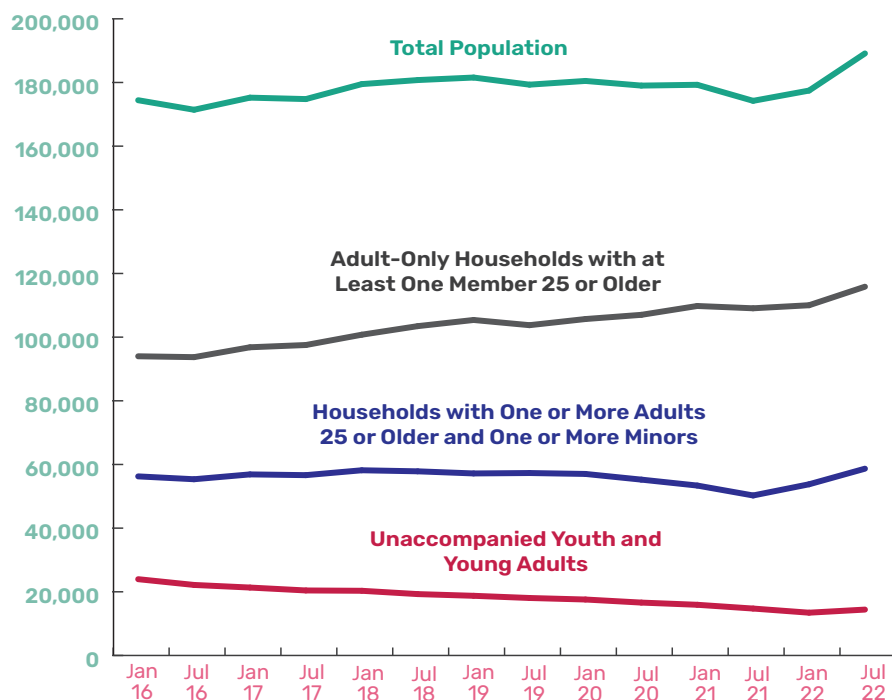
Data Source: Department of Commerce Snapshot of Homelessness Reports.

Figure 7 shows that overall, the total population of people experiencing homelessness in WA has remained level with an increase in 2022. Homelessness among adult-only households increased and homelessness among households with adults and children also remained level with an increase in 2022. This is in contrast to the young adult population (illustrated in Figure 6), which showed a dramatic decrease.

Reflections from lived and other experts:

- The decrease in the Snapshot Data could be showing that less YYA are accessing the homeless system, but more research and analysis is needed.

"It doesn't seem realistic that homelessness would be going down over this period of time [during COVID]. Programs are so oversaturated with so many people living unsheltered on the street. It indicates a decreasing reliance from the community on these types of services. People aren't accessing the regular system as much because it hasn't worked."

Ashley Barnes-Cocke
Director of Direct Cash Transfers as Prevention, Point Source Youth

Figure 8: Number of Unaccompanied Youth and Students Grades 6-12 Experiencing Homelessness, 2015-2022
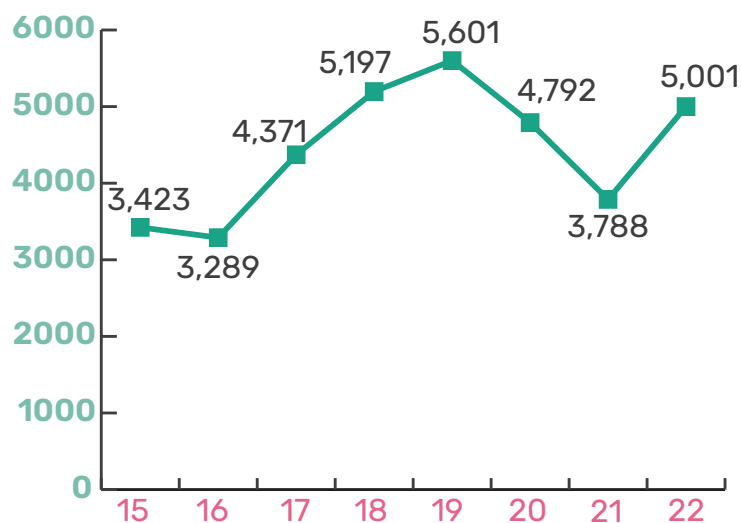
Data Source: Provided on request by OSPI.

Figure 8 shows the number of unaccompanied youth and students who experienced homelessness and housing instability from 2015-2022, but is limited only to students in grades 6-12 in efforts to capture 12-17 year olds.[16] Service providers consider OSPI data on unaccompanied students and youth to be the most accurate available data on minors experiencing homelessness and housing stability. However, students are only identified once a year and the data is only reported annually, not in real-time.

OSPI data in Figure 8 shows that unaccompanied youth and student homelessness was increasing and had almost doubled before the pandemic. This could be attributed to increased investments (the Homelessness Student Stability Program) and more accountability in counting students experiencing homelessness since 2015-16. OSPI data is more comprehensive in that it can potentially include information on all youth enrolled in schools across the state, while Snapshot Data only includes youth who received cash, food, medical, or housing assistance. Qualitative interview findings also suggest that unaccompanied youth have difficulties accessing state benefits, so they may be underrepresented in Snapshot Data.

In contrast to OSPI data, the number of unaccompanied minors in the Snapshot Data in Figure 5 started to decrease after January 2018, even before the pandemic started in 2020. Generally, the Snapshot Data on minors in Figure 5 tracks more closely to OSPI data; whereas the young adult Snapshot Data in Figure 6 shows more pronounced declines.

Interviewees also mentioned that many students dropped out, went missing, or were not counted during the pandemic because of school closures, which is reflected in Figure 8. Further, a recent study by the Urban Institute found an enrollment loss of 10,614 students in WA between 2019-2020 to 2021-2022 that couldn't be explained by population changes or moves to private school and homeschooling.[17]

> "The older students, the teens, they get depression. The lack of sleep then adds to their mental health issues, along with their physical health issues. They just don't sleep well. Obviously they don't eat well cause you can't really eat well when you're homeless or even those who are couchsurfing. It's just not a physically healthy situation and then you add the depression and anxiety of being homeless. Not having access to be a normal child as others do. There's expectations of doing homework, but well, it's not that easy for students who are homeless."

Norma Hernández
Executive Director, The Health Center Walla Walla

Racial and Other Disproportionality in Youth and Young Adult Homelessness

Figure 9: Comparison of Homeless System Access Rates by Race/Ethnicity, 2022

Actual Homeless System Access Rate per 100 10-24 year olds

Race/Ethnicity	Rate
White	0.66
Latine of Any Race	1.03
Multiracial	1.58
American Indian or Alaska Native	2.32
Black or African American	4.69
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	5.88
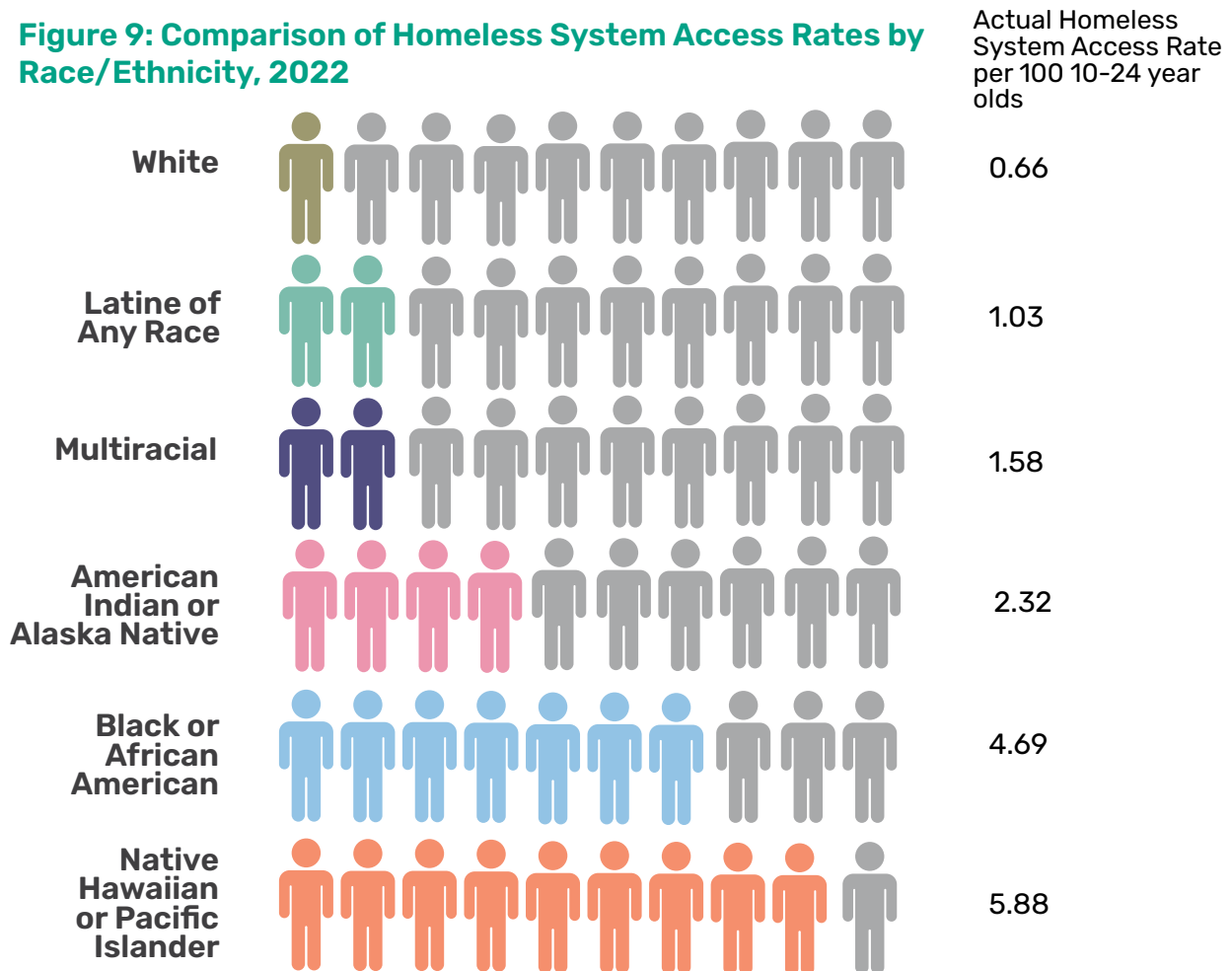
Data Sources: HMIS and WA Office of Financial Management (OFM). Rates of HMIS enrollment calculated per 100 10-24 year olds for each racial/ethnic group using 2020 OFM estimates. Our population of interest is 12-24 year olds, but Census data on 10-24 year olds are used as best available data.

2020 Census Estimates by the WA Office of Financial Management (OFM) were available for the age ranges 10-14, 15-19, and 20-24. These age groups were combined to create a population estimate, even though our population of interest is 12-24 year olds because we aren't able to remove the 10 and 11 year olds. While this should be kept in mind when comparing the populations, the inclusion of 10 and 11 year olds shouldn't alter the race/ethnicity proportion significantly.

In Figure 9, rates of accessing the homeless system were examined by race/ethnicity to account for the varying population sizes of each racial and ethnic group. Comparison of the rates of homeless system access per 100 10-24 year olds of each racial group shows that Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander young people were nine times more likely than White young people to access the homeless system. Similarly, accounting for their population size, Black and African American young people accessed the homeless system seven times more than White young people.

YYA and service providers told us that BIPOC young people are less likely to access services, so these ratios may not fully capture the disproportionalities that exist. See Appendix C for a corresponding data table.

Figure 10: Racial Disproportionality in Unaccompanied Student Homelessness, 2022

Legend:
- White
- Latine of Any Race
- Multiracial
- Black or African American
- Asian
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

WA Student Population Grades 6-12
n = 991,613[18]
50% | 25% | 9% | 5% | 9% | 1% | 1%

Unaccompanied Homeless Students Grades 6-12
n = 5,001[19]
42% | 33% | 10% | 7% | 2% | 3% | 3%

Data Source: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.
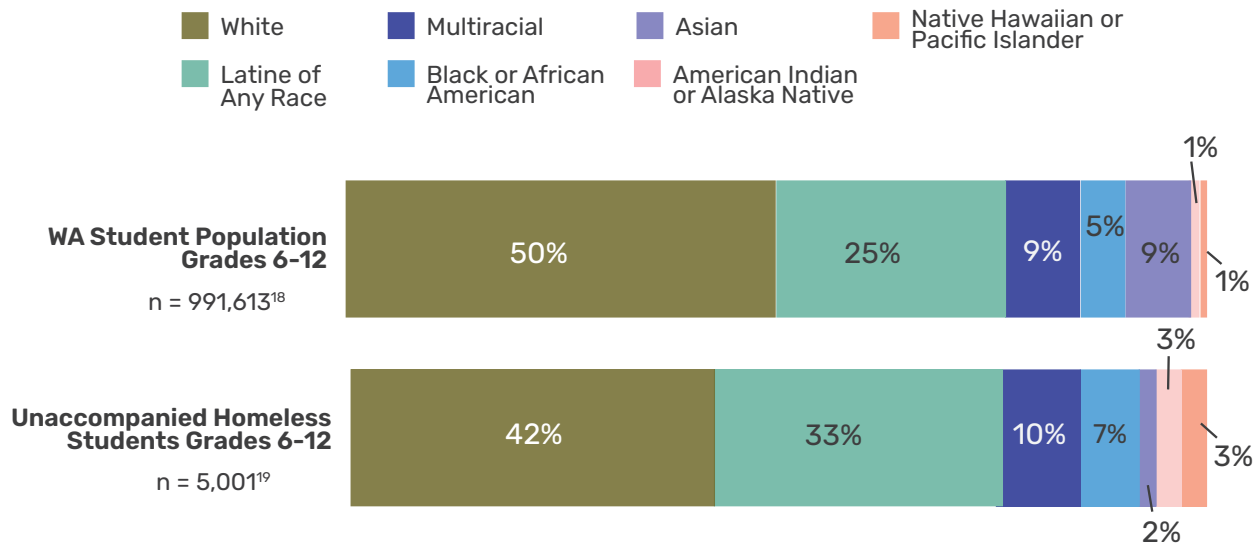
In the 2021–2022 school year, according to data from the Office of Superintendent for Public Instruction (OSPI), 5,001 students in grades 6 through 12 were identified as experiencing unaccompanied homelessness in WA. Our population of interest is unacccompanied students aged 12-17. Grade 6 through 12 data may include a small number of students that are outside the age range (11 year olds or 18 year olds).

OSPI uses the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness, which includes children and youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship or similar; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; another place that is not designed for habitation by human beings; living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings etc.[20]

Figure 10 shows that 58% of the unaccompanied students in grades 6-12 who experienced homelessness were BIPOC, compared to 50% of all grade 6-12 students. The greatest disproportionality was among American Indian and Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (NHOPI) students who experienced unaccompanied homelessness three times more than their proportion in the general student population. These high rates of racial disproportionality among American Indian and Alaska Native and NHOPI unaccompanied students are particularly concerning because of the long-term effects on their trajectory, including lower graduation rates,[21] increased trauma-related mental illnesses,[22] and a higher likelihood of experiencing homelessness as an adult.[23,24]

> "Youth homelessness can easily happen to anyone, and there are many hoops to jump through to recover from it and become stable again."
>
> **LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person**

Figure 11: Student Discipline Rates by Homeless and Foster Care Status, 2015-2022 (%)
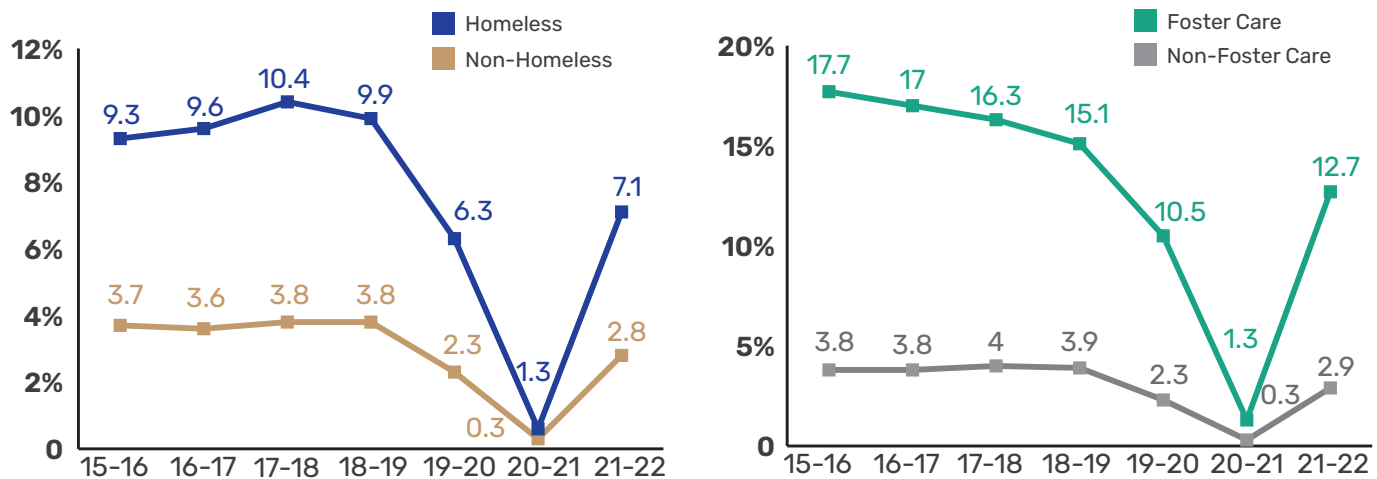
Data Source: OSPI Report Card.

Figure 11 shows the percentage of students who were excluded in response to a behavioral violation. This includes short-term and long-term suspension and expulsion.[25] In 2018-2019, the last full school year before the pandemic, students experiencing homelessness were three times more likely to be disciplined than students not experiencing homelessness. Similarly, students in foster care were four times more likely than students not in foster care to be disciplined. Housing and foster care were even higher predictors of discipline than race, with the discipline rate for Black or African American students at 8.2%, 7.6% for American Indian and Alaska Native students, and 6.3% for Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders.[26]

While discipline rates decreased dramatically because of the COVID-19 pandemic causing school closures in 2020-2021, discipline rates are starting to return to the levels they were before the pandemic, and the pre-pandemic disproportionate rates between housed and unhoused students, and foster and non-foster care students are still evident.

"I was a LGBTQ youth in foster care and many of the youth in foster care are also LGBTQ in fact more than 30% are. As well as that, there's an over representation of people of color who are also LGBTQ within foster care. And a lot of the outcomes for foster care does lead to homelessness."

LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person

Figure 12: Racial Disproportionality in the Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adult Homelessness System, 2022

Legend:
- White
- Latine of Any Race
- Multiracial
- Black or African American
- Asian
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Total State Population of 10-24 Year Olds
n = 1,423,159[27]
- White: 62%
- Latine of Any Race: 20%
- Multiracial: 5%
- Black or African American: 4%
- Asian: 7%
- American Indian or Alaska Native: 0.4%
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander: 2%

YYA Accessing Homeless System, 2022
n = 13,549
- White: 43%
- Latine of Any Race: 22%
- Multiracial: 9%
- Black or African American: 19%
- Asian: 1%
- American Indian or Alaska Native: 4%
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander: 2%

Exits to Permanent Housing, 2020
n = 2,732
- White: 44%
- Latine of Any Race: 20%
- Multiracial: 9%
- Black or African American: 21%
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander: 3%
- American Indian or Alaska Native: 2%

Returns to Homelessness, 2022
n = 674
- White: 40%
- Latine of Any Race: 20%
- Multiracial: 12%
- Black or African American: 21%
- Asian: 1%
- American Indian or Alaska Native: 4%
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander: 1%

Data Sources: WA Office of Financial Management, Homeless Management Information System, Department of Commerce Returns to Homelessness Report 2022. YYA = unaccompanied youth and young adults. 1,789 YYA whose race/ethnicity was unknown in the HMIS were removed from the count of YYA that accessed the homeless system. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding. Our population of interest is 12-24 year olds, but Census data on 10-24 year olds is used as best available data.

2020 Census Estimates by the WA Office of Financial Management (OFM) were available for the age ranges 10-14, 15-19, and 20-24. These age groups were combined to create a population estimate for young people aged 10-24 years old even though our population of interest is 12-24 year olds. While this should be kept in mind when comparing the populations, the inclusion of 10 and 11 year olds should not alter the race/ethnicity proportion significantly. Race/ethnicity was unknown for 1,789 (12% of the total) of YYA who accessed the homeless system in 2022. These young people were removed from the count in Figure 12 to provide a more useful comparison. OFM estimates show that 62% of the state's 10-24 year old population is White and 38% are BIPOC. However, among the population of YYA who accessed the homeless system in 2022, only 43% were White and 57% were BIPOC, when removing YYA whose race/ethnicity was unknown.

When examining the populations by race and ethnicity, Black and African American YYA experienced the greatest disproportionality. Only 4% of WA's 10-24 year old population were Black or African American, while 19% of YYA who accessed the homeless system in 2022 were Black or African American. Black YYA accessed the homeless system almost five times more than their proportion in the general population of 10-24 year olds. Although a small number in both the general population of 10-24 year olds and those accessing the homeless system, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander YYA accessed the homeless system five times more than their proportion in the general population. Asian and White YYA were the only racial groups who accessed the homeless system less than their proportion in the general population of 10-24 year olds.

Generally, the proportions at which young people that accessed the homeless were permanently housed and returned to homelessness were similar. This shows that the homeless system is housing BIPOC young people proportionately.

Intersectional Identities

Figure 13: Disproportionality by Intersectional Identities of Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults, 2022

Legend: BIPOC (teal), White (grey)

Data in chart:
- Percentage of the general population (10-24 year olds) that are BIPOC and White: 38% / 62%
- Percentage of unaccompanied YYA that accessed homeless system that are BIPOC and White, after removing unknowns: 57% / 43%
- Percentage of LGBQ+ unaccompanied YYA that are BIPOC and White: 52% / 48%
- Percentage of pregnant or parenting unaccompanied YYA that are BIPOC and White: 64% / 36%
- Percentage of disabled unaccompanied YYA that are BIPOC and White: 50% / 50%
- Percentage of gender expansive unaccompanied YYA that are BIPOC and White: 35% / 65%

Data Source: WA Office of Financial Management and HMIS. YYA = youth and young adult. LGBQ+ = lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning and others (doesn't include trans, non-binary or gender-expansive YYA because gender data is collected separately). BIPOC = Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. Gender-expansive = trans, non-binary, gender fluid YYA, culturally-specific gender. Our population of interest is 12-24 year olds, but Census data on 10-24 year olds are used as best available data. All unknown race/ethnicity data was removed.
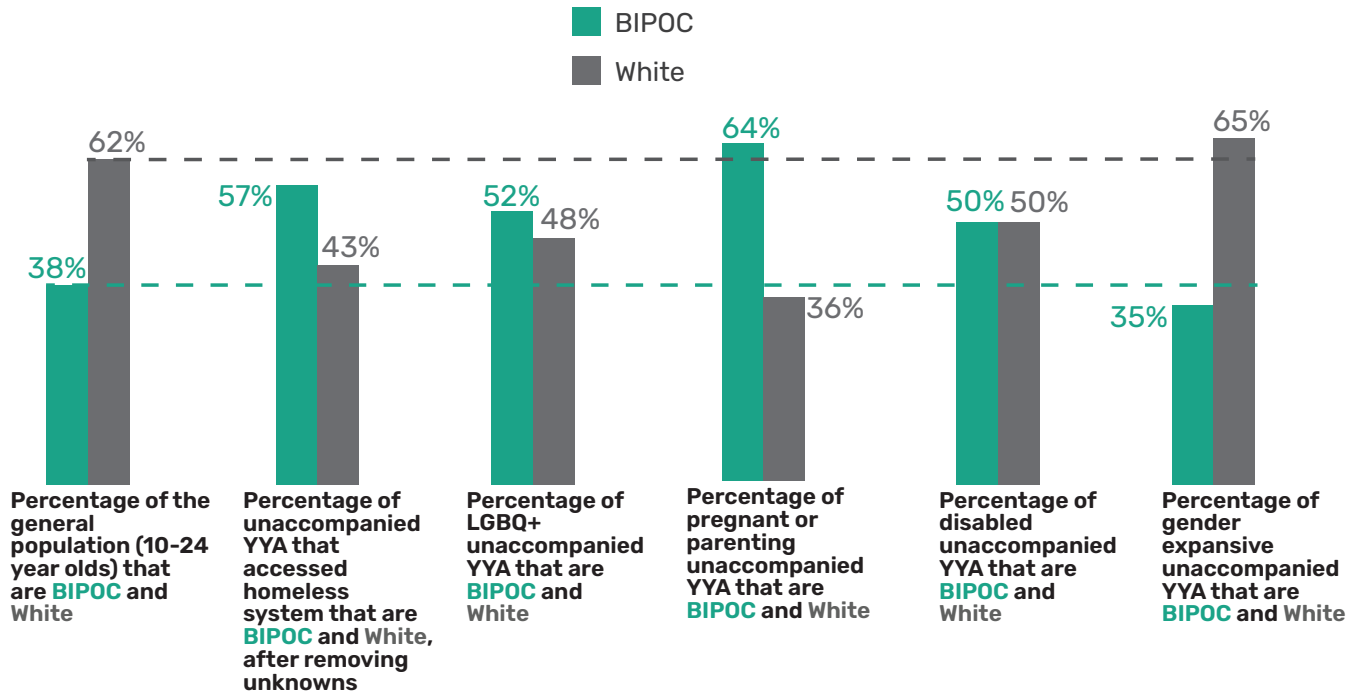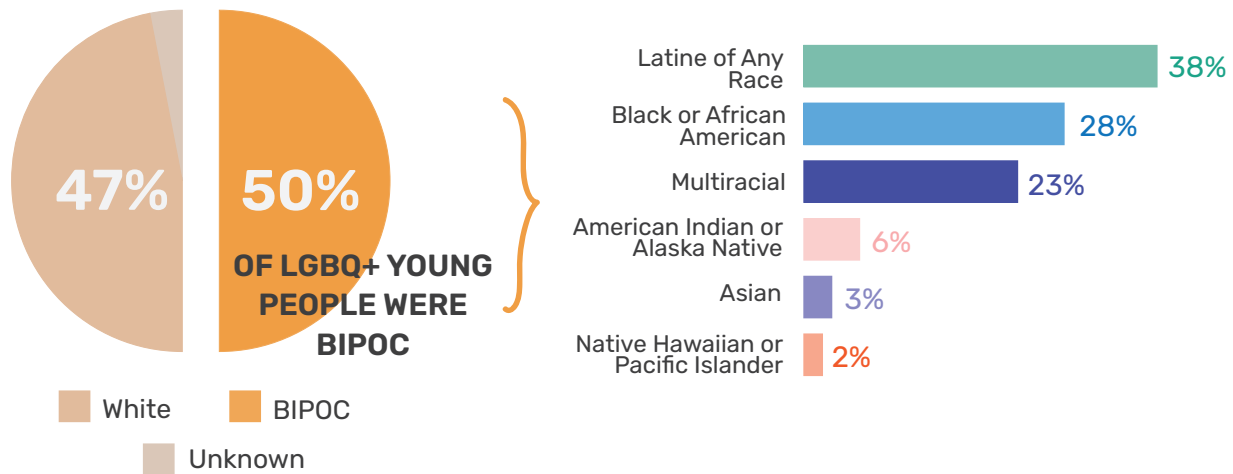
When removing the YYA whose race/ethnicity was unknown, 57% of unaccompanied YYA who accessed the homeless system in 2022 were BIPOC and 43% were White. Figure 13 shows rates of disproportionality amongst unaccompanied YYA that hold intersecting identities compared to the rates that BIPOC and White YYA access the homeless system and their presence in WA's general population of 10-24 year olds. BIPOC YYA are overrepresented across all categories (except gender) when comparing their rates of homeless system access to their overall percentage in the general population of 10-24 year olds. But the most apparent disproportionality is for pregnant/parenting BIPOC YYA. BIPOC YYA were 64% of all pregnant parenting YYA, but only 38% of the general population of 10-24 year olds, and 57% of unaccompanied YYA that accessed the homeless system.

Figure 13 could also be showing that gender-expansive BIPOC YYA are much less inclined to identify themselves to homeless service providers due to fear for their safety and intersecting queer/transphobia and racism. Only 35% of gender-expansive YYA that accessed the homeless system were BIPOC, which is much less than the overall percentage of BIPOC YYA that accessed the homeless system (57%). Similarly, although less pronounced, fewer BIPOC LGBQ+ YYA identified themselves than would be expected. 52% of LGBQ+ unaccompanied YYA were BIPOC, which was less than the overall percentage that accessed the homeless system (57%). Instead, there is an overrepresentation of White LGBQ+ YYA.

Further racial breakdowns are provided in Figures 14 to 17 below.

Figure 14: Percentage of LGBQ+ Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults that were also BIPOC, 2022

n = 1,364 LGBQ+ YYA, or 9% of all YYA that accessed HMIS in 2022.

47% **50%**

OF LGBQ+ YOUNG PEOPLE WERE BIPOC

- White
- BIPOC
- Unknown

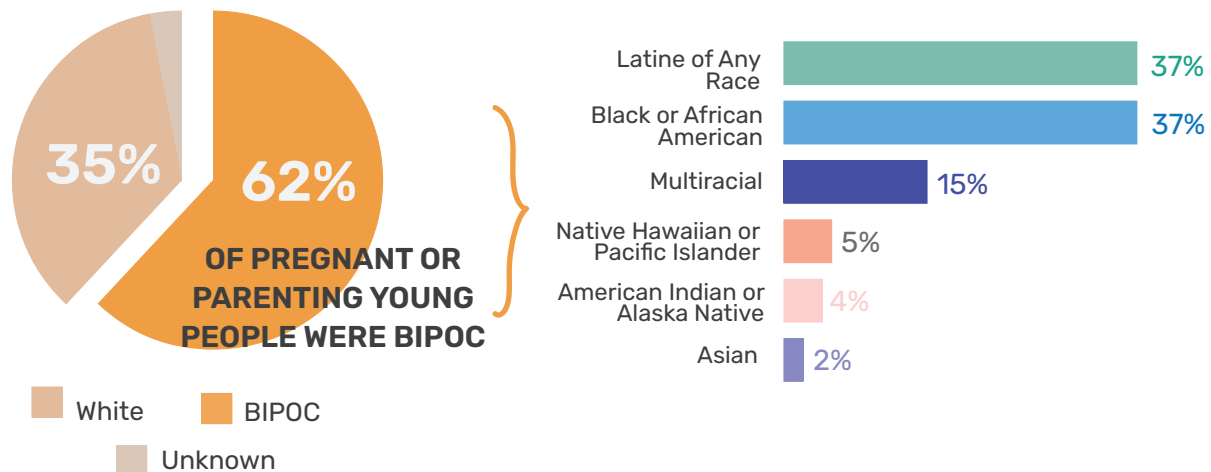| Race	Percentage
Latine of Any Race	38%
Black or African American	28%
Multiracial	23%
American Indian or Alaska Native	6%
Asian	3%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2%

Data Source: Homeless Management Information System. BIPOC = Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. LGBQ+ = lesbian, gay, bisexual, gay or questioning. YYA = youth and young adults.

Out of the 1,364 unaccompanied YYA who were LGBQ+ and enrolled in HMIS in 2022, half were also BIPOC. Latine YYA made up the greatest share of BIPOC, followed by Black or African American and Multiracial young people.

Figure 15: Percentage of Pregnant or Parenting Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults that were also BIPOC, 2022

n = 1,854 Pregnant/Parenting YYA or 12% of all YYA that accessed HMIS in 2022.

35% **62%**

OF PREGNANT OR PARENTING YOUNG PEOPLE WERE BIPOC

- White
- BIPOC
- Unknown

Race	Percentage
Latine of Any Race	37%
Black or African American	37%
Multiracial	15%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	5%
American Indian or Alaska Native	4%
Asian	2%

Data Source: Homeless Management Information System. BIPOC = Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. YYA = youth and young adult.

1,844 unaccompanied YYA were pregnant or parenting and enrolled in the HMIS in 2022. Almost two-thirds of these pregnant or parenting young people were also BIPOC. Latine and Black or African American young people were almost three quarters of these BIPOC and pregnant and parenting YYA.

Figure 16: Percentage of Disabled Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults that were also BIPOC, 2022

n = 5,543 Disabled YYA or 36% of all YYA that accessed HMIS in 2022.

47%

49% OF DISABLED YOUNG PEOPLE WERE BIPOC

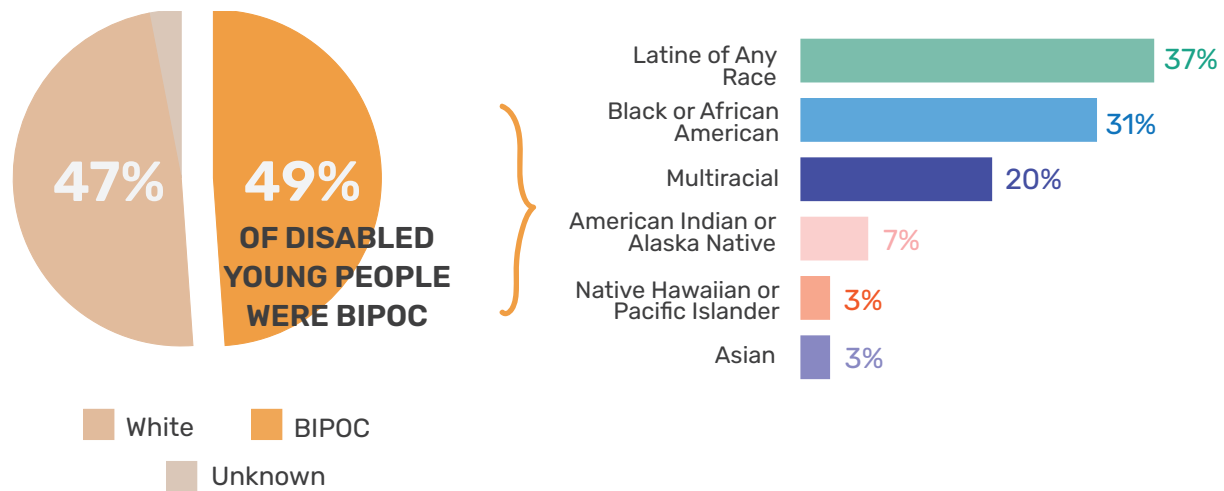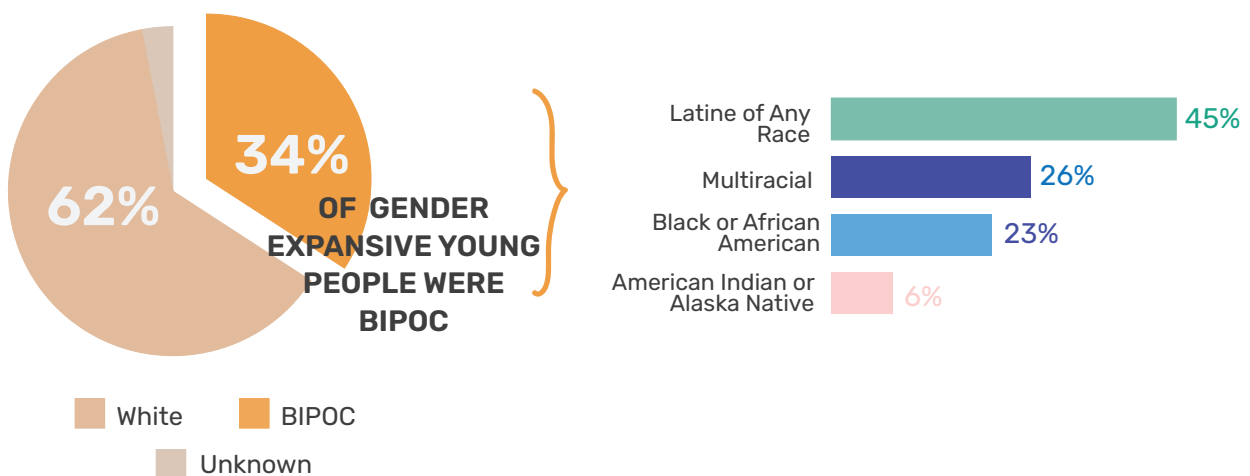|	
Latine of Any Race	37%
Black or African American	31%
Multiracial	20%
American Indian or Alaska Native	7%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	3%
Asian	3%

White BIPOC Unknown

Data Source: Homeless Management Information System. BIPOC = Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. YYA = youth and young adult.

Out of the 5,543 unaccompanied YYA who were disabled and enrolled in HMIS in 2022, almost half were also BIPOC. Latine YYA were the greatest share of BIPOC young people with disabilities, closely followed by Black or African American YYA.

Figure 17: Percentage of Gender-expansive Youth and Young Adults that were also BIPOC, 2022

n = 656 Gender-expansive YYA or 4% of all YYA that accessed the homeless system in 2022.

62%

34% OF GENDER EXPANSIVE YOUNG PEOPLE WERE BIPOC

Latine of Any Race	45%
Multiracial	26%
Black or African American	23%
American Indian or Alaska Native	6%

White BIPOC Unknown

Data Source: Homeless Management Information System. BIPOC = Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. YYA = youth and young adult. Gender-expansive = trans, non-binary, gender fluid YYA.
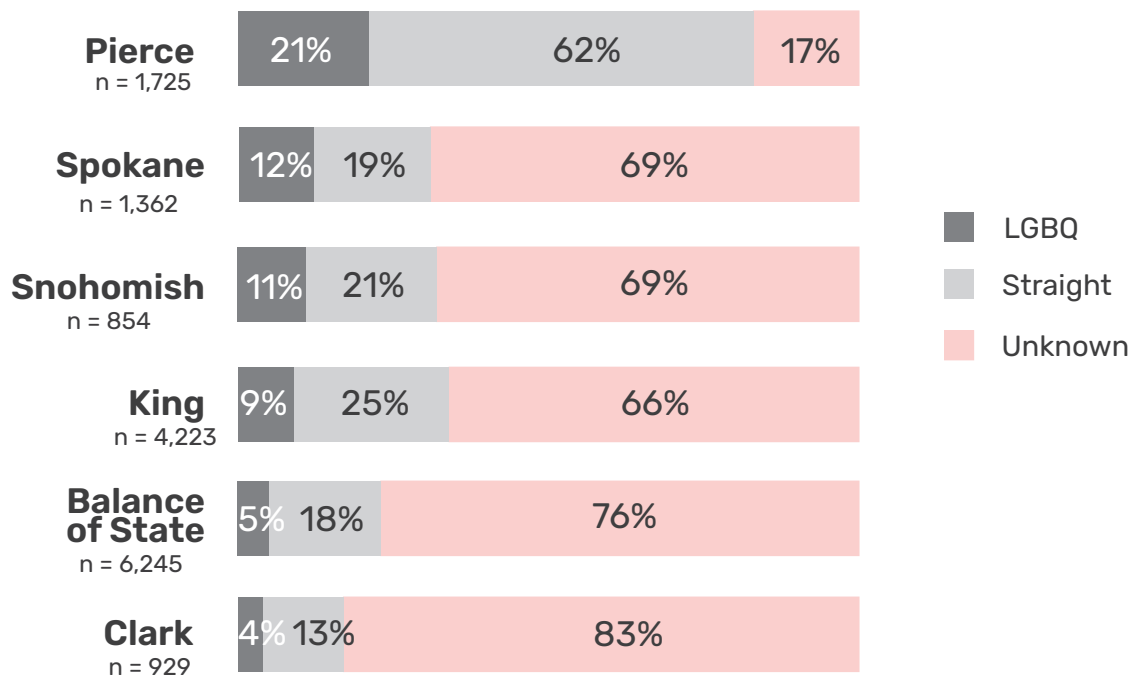
656 gender-expansive unaccompanied YYA were enrolled in the HMIS in 2022. Just more than one third were also BIPOC. Latine YYA were the greatest share of BIPOC gender-expansive YYA.

Our analysis of intersectional identities was limited as we weren't provided with row-level data which is required to perform a deeper analysis.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Figure 18: Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults' Sexual Orientation by Continuum of Care, 2022

Continuum of Care	LGBQ	Straight	Unknown
Pierce n = 1,725	21%	62%	17%
Spokane n = 1,362	12%	19%	69%
Snohomish n = 854	11%	21%	69%
King n = 4,223	9%	25%	66%
Balance of State n = 6,245	5%	18%	76%
Clark n = 929	4%	13%	83%

Data Source: Homeless Management Information System. LGBQ = lesbian, gay, bisexual or questioning. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Gender data in the HMIS is much higher quality than sexual orientation data because gender is a required field, whereas sexual orientation is only required for OHY and Runaway Homeless Youth projects, which are only a small minority of projects. In all Continuums of Care (CoCs) except for Pierce County, sexual orientation data was unknown for the majority of unaccompanied young people who were enrolled in the HMIS in 2022. Pierce County's sexual orientation data is the best quality of all CoCs in the state. Sexual orientation has been a required field in Pierce's Coordinated Entry assessment for all populations for many years now and is widely collected across service providers.

We showed this data to young people with lived experience during a LGBTQIA2S+ focus group and asked why they thought the percentage of unknown data was so high. They responded:

- YYA don't want to disclose their personal information because the service provider could be discriminatory.
- YYA don't feel safe talking to service providers about their sexual orientation.
- Intake questions can be invasive, which makes YYA less comfortable answering.
- Homophobia and transphobia are common, especially in smaller communities where there are only faith-based service providers and particularly against "obviously" trans YYA.

"The shelters in Kitsap are usually pretty Christian based which well it's not always completely LGBT inclusive. It's not always the greatest because some Christians are just not always as accepting because of their religion."

LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person

Table 1: Percent LGBQ Young People of Total Sexual Orientation Known by Continuum of Care (CoC), 2022

CoC	LGBQ	Total Sexual Orientation Known	Percent LGBQ Young People
Spokane	159	417	38%
Snohomish	91	268	34%
King	373	1,432	26%
Pierce	362	1,430	25%
Clark	38	161	24%
Balance of State	341	1,478	23%

Data Source: Homeless Management Information System. LGBQ = lesbian, gay, bisexual or questioning. CoC = Continuum of Care.
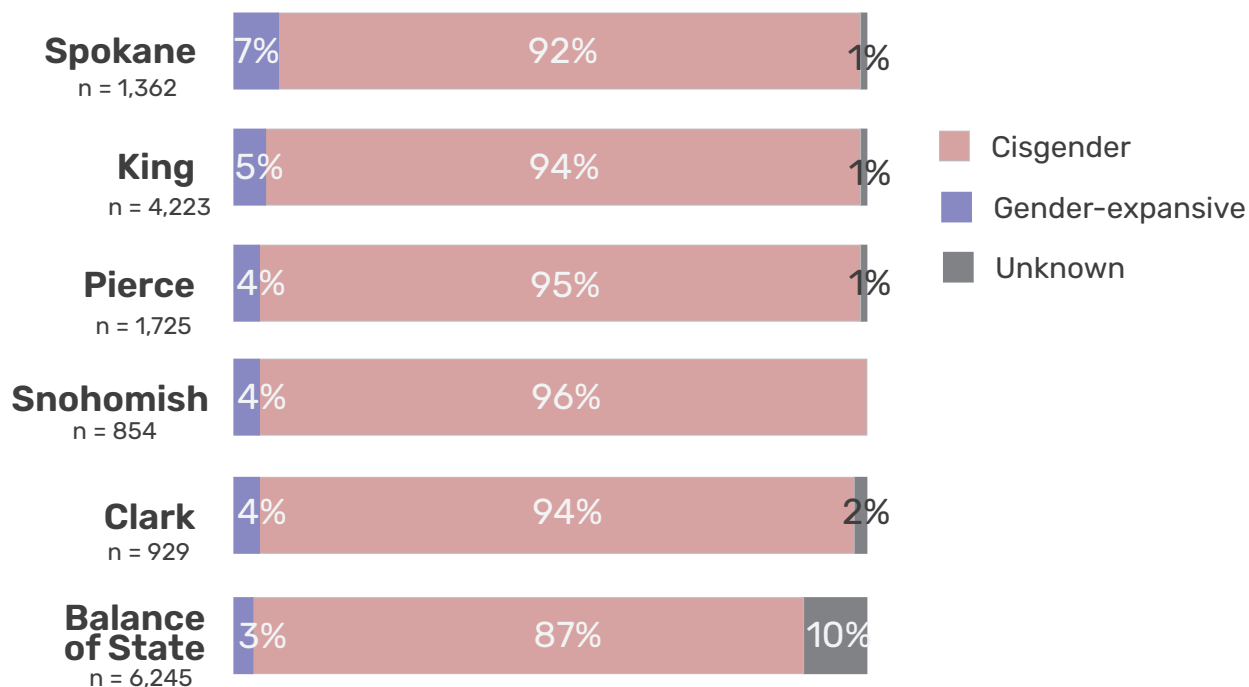
In attempts to extrapolate from the known data to make assumptions about the number of LGBQ+ young people that accessed the homeless system in 2022, the large proportion of unknown data (66%) was excluded. But this data is likely skewed because of the high number of unknowns and can only be used as a rough estimate. When isolating only the YYA whose sexual orientation was known in the HMIS, CoCs served between 23-38% LGBQ+ young people in 2022. Out of the 417 total unaccompanied YYA whose sexual orientation was known in Spokane, 38% were LGBQ+. A recent study by System Change Partners using Census data showed that 41% of young adults in WA identified as LGBQ+ in 2022.[28] Similarly, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that one third of students in WA identify as LGBQ+.[29] When extrapolating on "known" HMIS data only, there is relative parity between the HMIS data and estimates of LGBQ+ young people in WA.

Given the generally poor quality of the sexual orientation data, with the majority of sexual orientation data missing, HMIS data on LGBQ+ young people can only provide a conservative impression of how many unaccompanied LGBQ+ YYA accessed the homeless system in 2022. There were only 1,364 LGBQ+ YYA identified in the HMIS in 2022 which was 9% of the total number of unaccompanied YYA. If we assume the actual rate of LGBQ+ identities is 38%, then 5,828 of the 15,338 unaccompanied YYA would be LGBQ+, which is much higher than the observed data in the HMIS. However, qualitatively, we know that LGBQ+ YYA experience high rates of trauma and adversity.[30]

> "It didn't help that my mom was off working herself to death and like I was living in my friend's house because she couldn't afford to take care of me. So I was kind of at that point couchsurfing and we just didn't have any money, no food stamps, no nothing. And my friend's family wasn't always the greatest host because if you didn't eat the food they provided, they got real mad."
>
> **LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person**

Figure 19: Gender Identity of Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults by Continuum of Care, 2022

	Gender-expansive	Cisgender	Unknown
Spokane n = 1,362	7%	92%	1%
King n = 4,223	5%	94%	1%
Pierce n = 1,725	4%	95%	1%
Snohomish n = 854	4%	96%	
Clark n = 929	4%	94%	2%
Balance of State n = 6,245	3%	87%	10%

Data Source: Homeless Management Information System. Gender-expansive = transgender, non-binary, genderqueer, culturally-specific gender, gender non-conforming, or gender fluid. Cisgender = People who identify as their sex assigned at birth.

Gender identity and sexual orientation are split into two categories because they describe different identities and are collected as separate categories in the HMIS. However, in reality, many queer young people also identify as gender-expansive and vice versa. In WA, Census data shows that as many as 1 in 10 young adults are both gender-expansive and LGBQ+[31] and more than 1 in 10 young adults are gender-expansive.[32] However, some estimates for WA are much lower: 1% of youth aged 13-17 and 2% of young adults aged 18-24 identified themselves as transgender.[33]
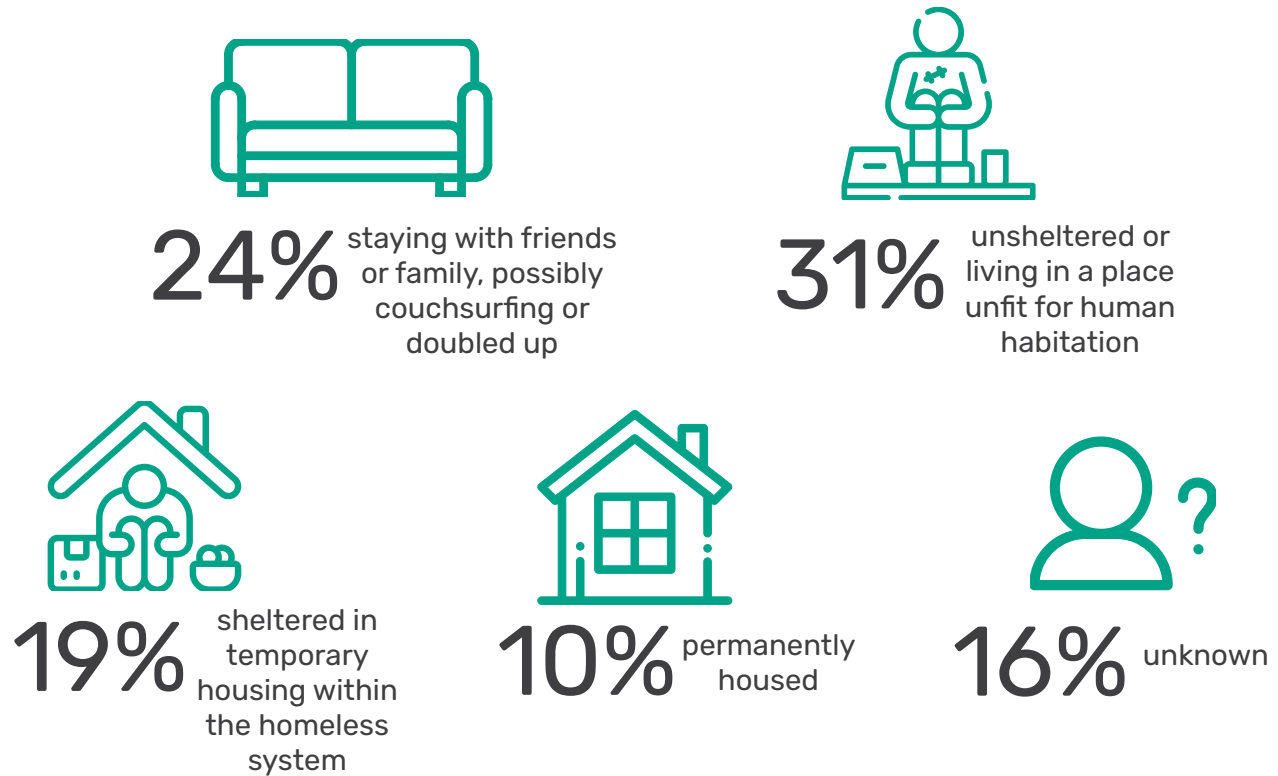
Figure 19 shows that gender-expansive unaccompanied young people were served in every CoC and at a much higher rate than some population estimates, suggesting that gender-expansive young people experience homelessness at much higher rates than they are present in the general population. On the other hand, from what we heard from gender-expansive YYA, Figure 19 could also show an undercount due to young people not wanting to, or not being able to share their true gender identity due to safety concerns, fear of discrimination, and/or retaliation.

> "When we're talking about reporting and data and who is counted we need a better racial and gender analysis. I live in a very intersectional world. A lot of folks who are experiencing homelessness, especially youth, live in a very intersectional world. So I think that our reporting and our data should be reflective of that."
>
> **Mahkyra Gaines**
> **Community Engagement Manager, Lavender Rights Project**

Types of Homelessness

Figure 20: Prior Living Situation Before Accessing Services of Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults, 2022

24% staying with friends or family, possibly couchsurfing or doubled up

31% unsheltered or living in a place unfit for human habitation

19% sheltered in temporary housing within the homeless system

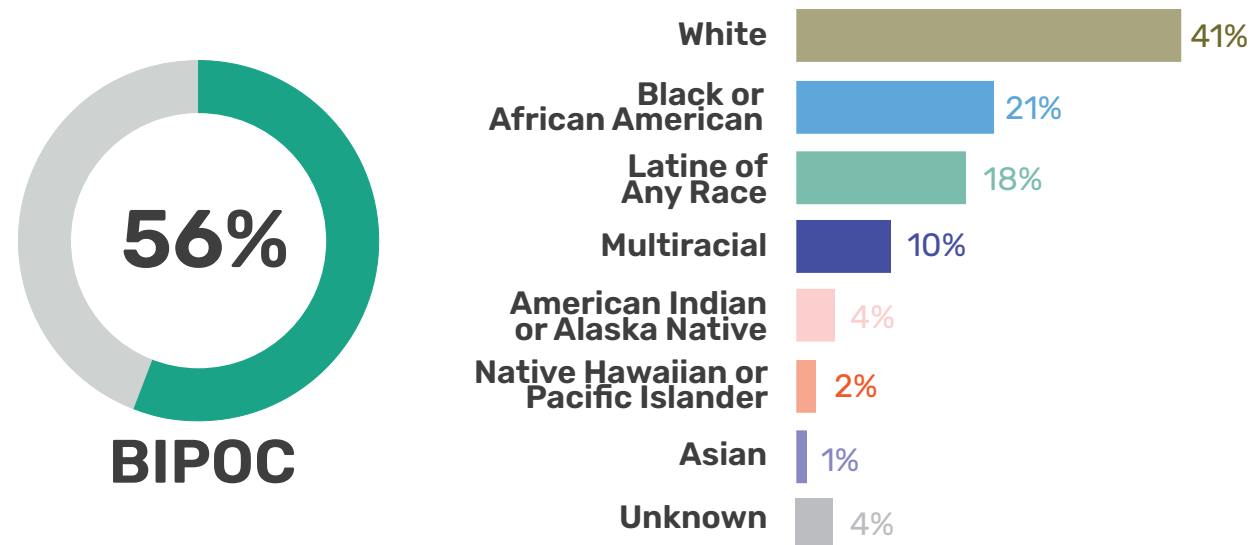**10%** permanently housed

16% unknown

n = 15,338

Data Source: Homeless Management Information System.

"Prior Living Situation" (PLS) is a HMIS standard field used to collect a client's living situation type just prior to accessing services. The HMIS field "Current Living Situation" (CLS) provides more insight into a young person's living situation while they are experiencing homelessness. However, because this is a newer field and is not included in all HMIS projects, the data is incomplete, which is why PLS is used here as the best substitute.

Most of the unaccompanied young people accessing the homelessness system in 2022 were either unsheltered or staying with friends or family (possibly couchsurfing or doubled up). Almost one third of all unaccompanied young people were unsheltered or living in a place unfit for human habitation. Almost one quarter were staying or living in a family member or friend's room, apartment or house (possibly couchsurfing or doubled up). And almost 1 in 5 were in shelter or temporary housing within the homelessness system, public system of care, or institution, including: emergency shelter (including hotel or motel), transitional housing, institutions such as psychiatric facilities, substance use treatment facilities, hospitals, jails or prisons, foster care, and non-crisis Host Homes. 1 in 10 unaccompanied young people were permanently housed in a property owned or rented by the client prior to accessing services.

Disproportionalities were also observed in the types of homelessness experienced by YYA.
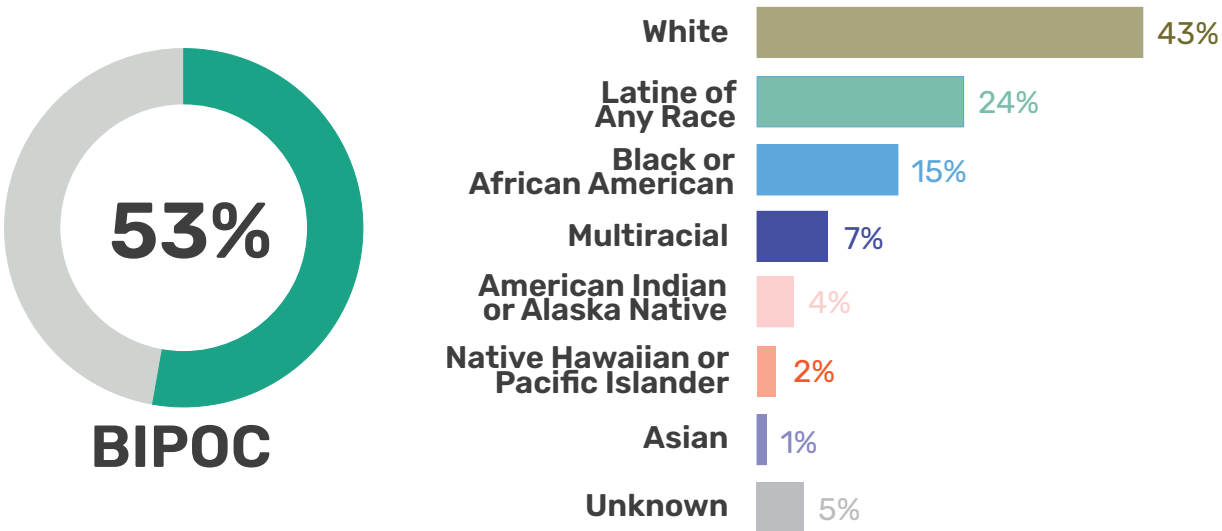
Figure 21: Unsheltered Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults by Race/ Ethnicity, 2022

56%

BIPOC

White	41%
Black or African American	21%
Latine of Any Race	18%
Multiracial	10%
American Indian or Alaska Native	4%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2%
Asian	1%
Unknown	4%

n = 4,755

Data Source: Homeless Management Information System. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding. BIPOC = Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

More than half of the unaccompanied young people who experienced unsheltered homelessness in 2022 were BIPOC. Black or African American young people were the largest share of BIPOC young people, closely followed by Latine young people.

Figure 22: Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults Staying or Living with Family or Friends by Race/Ethnicity, 2022
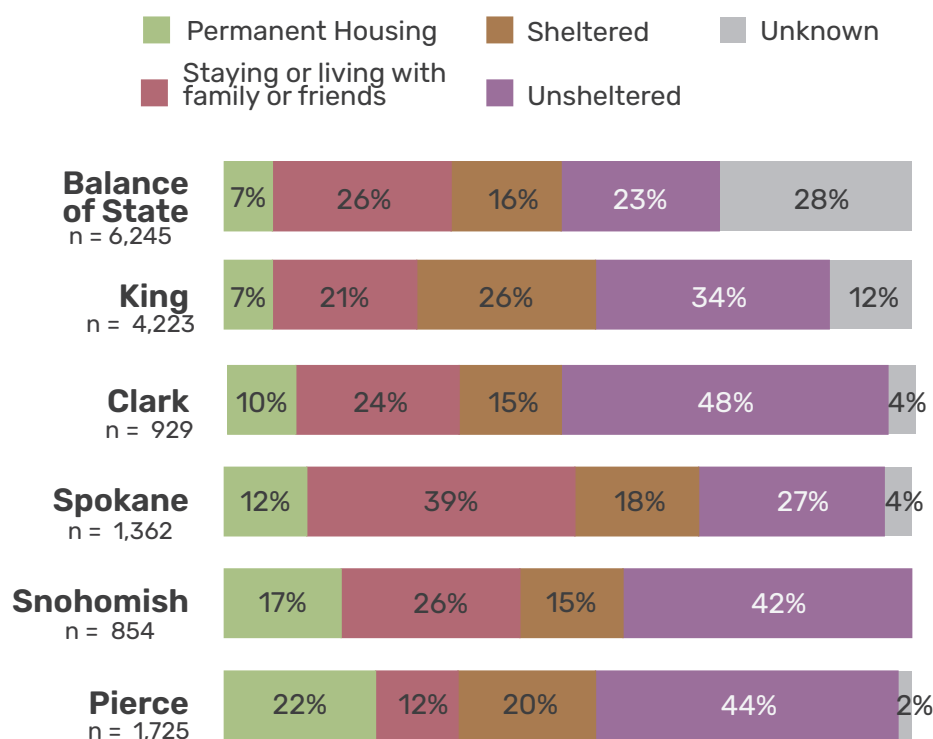
53%

BIPOC

White	43%
Latine of Any Race	24%
Black or African American	15%
Multiracial	7%
American Indian or Alaska Native	4%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2%
Asian	1%
Unknown	5%

n = 3,835

Data Source: Homeless Management Information System. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding. BIPOC = Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

Similarly, more than half of the unaccompanied young people who were staying or living with family or friends (possibly couchsurfing or doubled up) in 2022 were BIPOC. This time, Latine young people were the largest share of BIPOC young people. 1 in 4 young people staying or living with family or friends were Latine. Latine homelessness is often more "hidden" than amongst other racial and ethnic groups. Latine people are less likely than others to utilize the shelter and homelessness system[34] and have a higher likelihood of reliance on social networks, which leads to couchsurfing and doubling up in substandard or overcrowded housing.[35]

Figure 23: Prior Living Situation of Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults by Continuum of Care, 2022

Legend:
- Permanent Housing
- Staying or living with family or friends
- Sheltered
- Unsheltered
- Unknown

CoC	Permanent Housing	Staying or living with family or friends	Sheltered	Unsheltered	Unknown
Balance of State n = 6,245	7%	26%	16%	23%	28%
King n = 4,223	7%	21%	26%	34%	12%
Clark n = 929	10%	24%	15%	48%	4%
Spokane n = 1,362	12%	39%	18%	27%	4%
Snohomish n = 854	17%	26%	15%	42%	
Pierce n = 1,725	22%	12%	20%	44%	2%

Data Source: Homeless Management Information System. Totals may not be 100% because of rounding.

In King, Clark, Snohomish, and Pierce CoCs, unaccompanied young people experiencing unsheltered homelessness were the greatest share of young people who accessed the homelessness system in 2022. As unsheltered young people meet the HUD definition of homelessness, it is more common for these young people to go through the Coordinated Entry System and be included in HMIS counts.
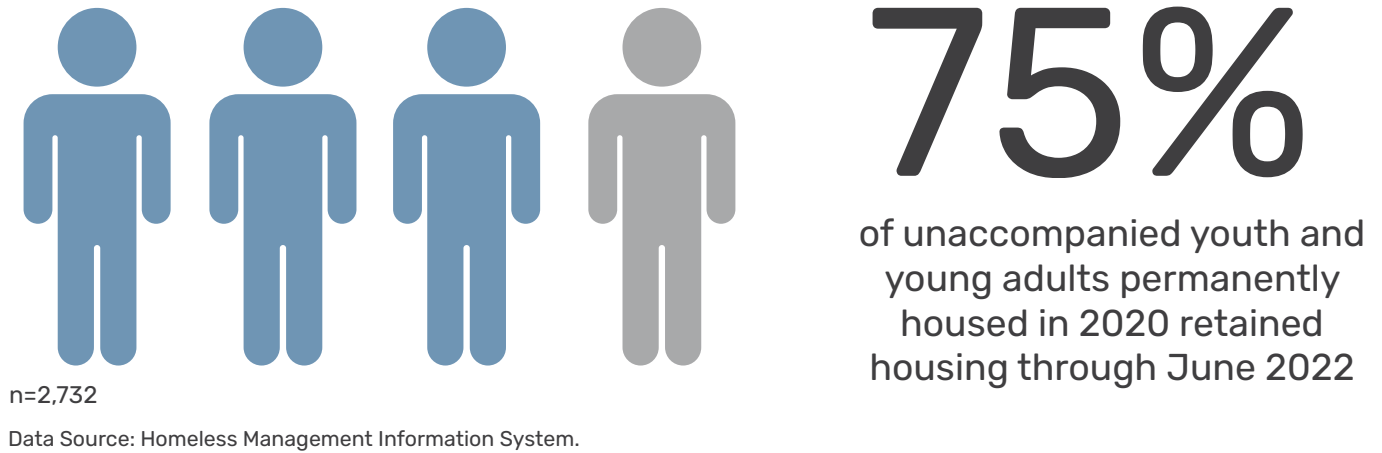
Spokane had the highest percentage of unaccompanied young people who were staying or living with family or friends prior to experiencing homelessness. The community attributes this to their work as an Anchor Community and their innovative InREACH team. The Anchor Community Initiative (ACI) expanded their definition of homelessness to include unstably and/or unsafely housed YYA in 2018, and ACI-OHY pass-through funding created the InREACH team. InREACH has effective partnerships with behavioral health, the criminal legal system, and schools. The team has taken referrals under any definition of homelessness since 2020 and ensures that young people are included on their community's By-Name List by actively enrolling them into the HMIS and connecting them with services. Before InREACH and the ACI, unstably housed young people were not being identified and enrolled in the HMIS.

> "[InREACH is impactful because] we're reaching a population that traditional homeless crisis response systems did not reach out to before, so it allows us to reach a population we've never worked with. I also attribute InReach for the increase in our YYA homeless population, as we are able to identify more unstably housed YYA, through the different systems they touch. We are actually getting a more accurate picture of YYA experiencing homelessness."

Bridget Cannon
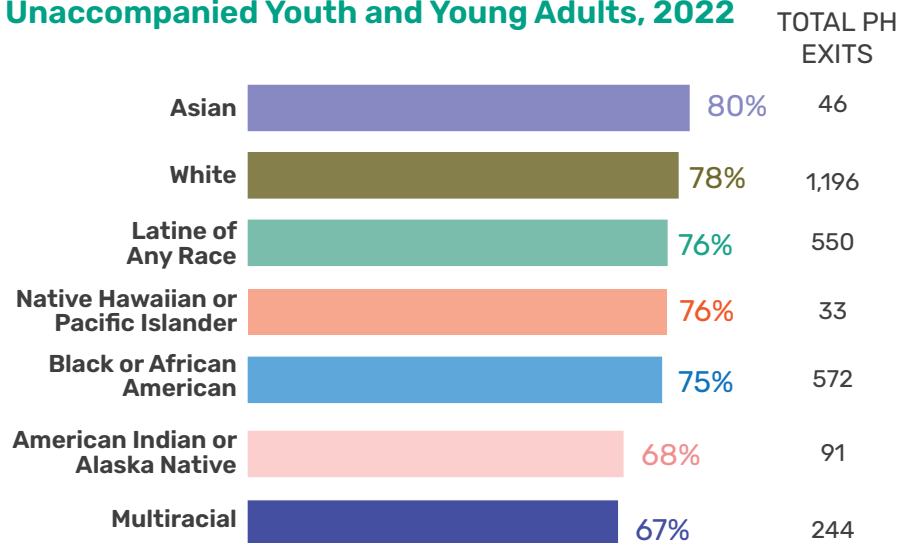**Senior Vice President of Shelter Services, Volunteers of America Spokane**

Housing Retention

Figure 24: Housing Retention of Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults, 2020-2022

n=2,732

Data Source: Homeless Management Information System.

75%

of unaccompanied youth and young adults permanently housed in 2020 retained housing through June 2022

Out of the 2,732 young people who were permanently housed in 2020, three quarters retained stable housing through June 2022.
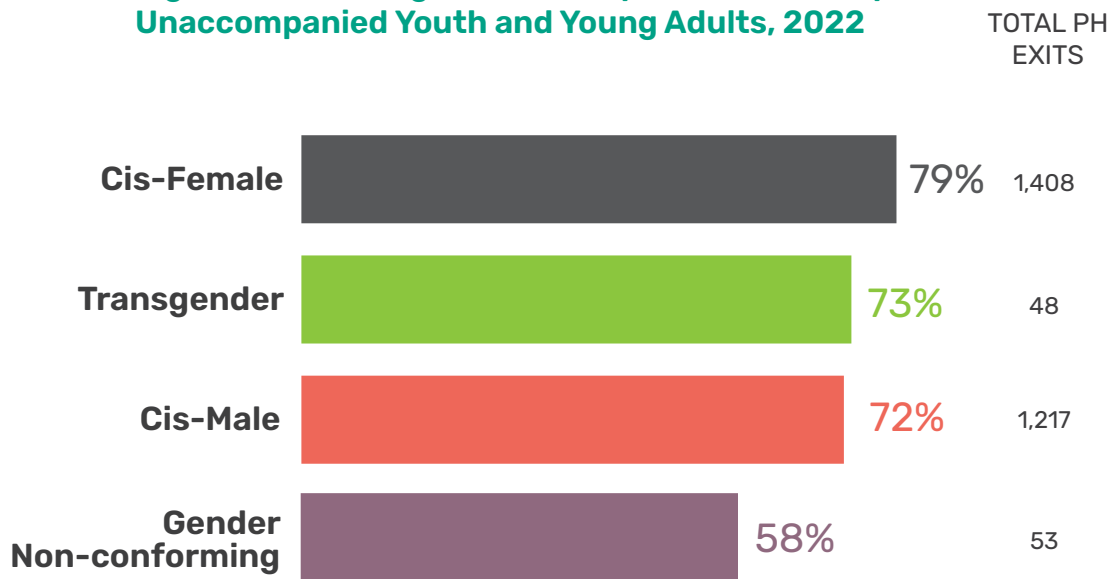
Figure 25: Housing Retention by Race/Ethnicity of Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults, 2022

Race/Ethnicity	Retention	TOTAL PH EXITS
Asian	80%	46
White	78%	1,196
Latine of Any Race	76%	550
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	76%	33
Black or African American	75%	572
American Indian or Alaska Native	68%	91
Multiracial	67%	244

Data Source: Homeless Management Information System. PH = permanent housing.

Disaggregating housing retention by race shows that White and Asian young people were retained in housing at higher rates than racial groups, and higher than the overall housing retention rate of 75%. Black or African American YYA, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and Latine YYA housing retention rates were almost on par with the state rate. Most notably, American Indian or Alaska Native and Multiracial YYA were retained in housing at 7 percentage points and 8 percentage points less than the state rate.

Figure 26: Housing Retention by Gender Identity of Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults, 2022

TOTAL PH EXITS

Gender Identity	Retention	Total PH Exits
Cis-Female	79%	1,408
Transgender	73%	48
Cis-Male	72%	1,217
Gender Non-conforming	58%	53

Data Source: Homeless Management Information System. PH = permanent housing. The 6 young people whose gender identity data was unknown are not shown in this chart.

When disaggregated by gender identity, cis-female young people were retained in housing at the highest rates. Gender-expansive (gender non-conforming and transgender) young people made up only 4% of the total exits to permanent housing in 2020. While the numbers are small and likely an undercount, gender non-conforming young people were retained in stable housing 17 percentage points less than the state housing retention rate of 75%. Data on sexual orientation, disability or pregnant/parenting status were not available.

"I will get client referrals from the LGBTQ Center at the university I go to of young people trying to go and get services as the [service provider] and like either feeling really discriminated against, just saying "oh, we can't help you", or just feeling uncomfortable. I've had two referrals. Both of them queer Indigenous young people. They did not get help with what they needed."

LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person

"Having my first on-campus job being in the queer and trans support center was really helpful because I didn't feel the pressure of conforming to a white supremacist attitude in how I moved and how I worked and how I spoke. Having those spaces where I think it just comes down to safety and being able to feel safe around people was really important to me."

QTBIPOC Young Person

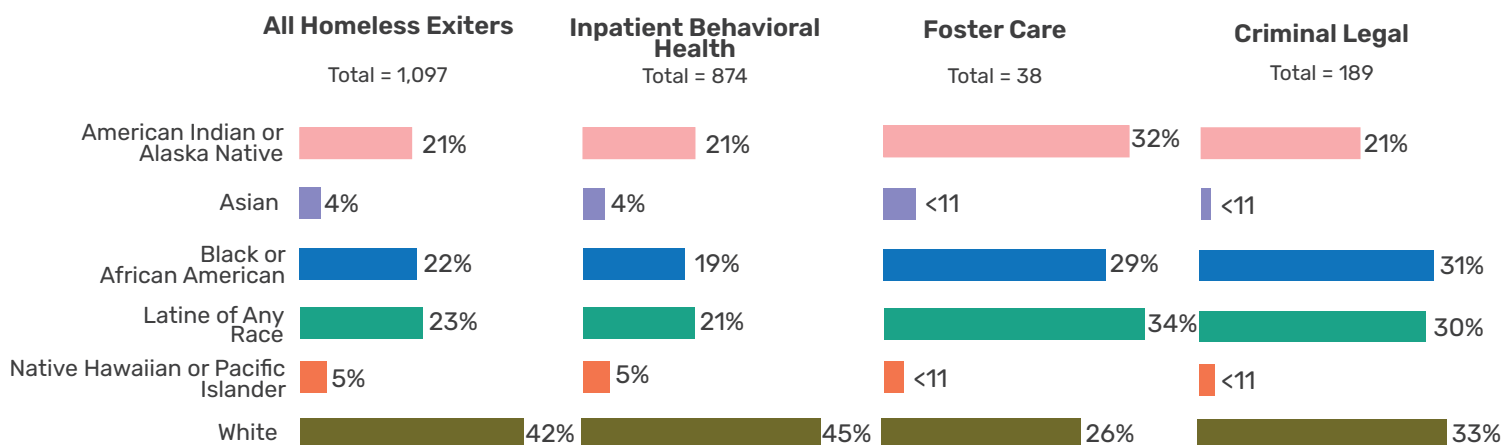# Exits from Public Systems of Care into Homelessness

Figure 27: Percent of Youth and Young Adults Exiting Public Systems of Care into Homelessness at 3 Months and 12 Months After Exit, 2023[36]
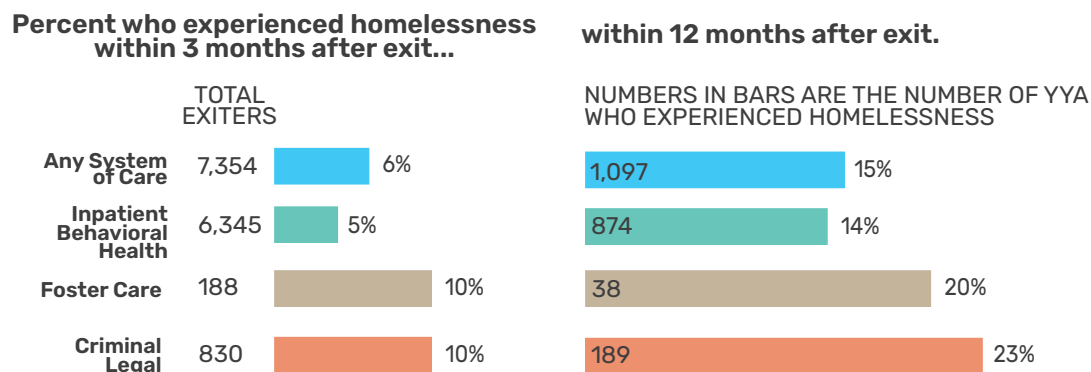
Percent who experienced homelessness within 3 months after exit...

within 12 months after exit.

	TOTAL EXITERS	3 months		NUMBERS IN BARS ARE THE NUMBER OF YYA WHO EXPERIENCED HOMELESSNESS	12 months
Any System of Care	7,354	6%		1,097	15%
Inpatient Behavioral Health	6,345	5%		874	14%
Foster Care	188	10%		38	20%
Criminal Legal	830	10%		189	23%

Recreated from the Department of Social and Health Services Research and Data Analysis Dashboard. The totals may not equal 100% because multi-racial young people are counted across categories and suppression is applied for counts <11.

This data shows YYA exiting WA inpatient behavioral health, foster care, and criminal legal systems into homelessness from July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021. Young people released from these systems were followed over a 12 month period using state administrative data.[37] Exit rates into homelessness for young people exiting inpatient behavioral health almost tripled at the 12 month mark.

Figure 28: Racial Characteristics of Youth and Young Adults Exiting Public Systems of Care Into Homelessness Within 12 Months After Exit, 2023

	All Homeless Exiters Total = 1,097	Inpatient Behavioral Health Total = 874	Foster Care Total = 38	Criminal Legal Total = 189
American Indian or Alaska Native	21%	21%	32%	21%
Asian	4%	4%	<11	<11
Black or African American	22%	19%	29%	31%
Latine of Any Race	23%	21%	34%	30%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	5%	5%	<11	<11
White	42%	45%	26%	33%

Recreated from the Department of Social and Health Services Research and Data Analysis Dashboard.

Figure 28 shows that BIPOC young people, especially Latine, Black or African American, and American Indian or Alaska Native young people were the greatest share of young people exiting systems of care into homelessness within 12 months. This reflects the racial disproportionality present in all public systems of care, but particularly foster care and the criminal legal system.

2022 Point in Time Count

The Point in Time count is conducted every year in Washington. It is primarily a one night count of sheltered and unsheltered homelessness conducted by volunteers who fan out in areas known to have people sleeping outside. People in shelters are then added to the count. Data is then used by various government agencies to identify trends.

PIT data showed that 3,076 unaccompanied YYA experienced homelessness on one night in 2022. 34% of these YYA were experiencing unsheltered homelessness and 66% were sheltered in emergency shelter or transitional housing.

Figure 29: Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adult Point in Time Count, 2022

3,076[40]

Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults experienced homelessness on one night in 2022

1 in 3
YYA were unsheltered

2 in 3
YYA were sheltered
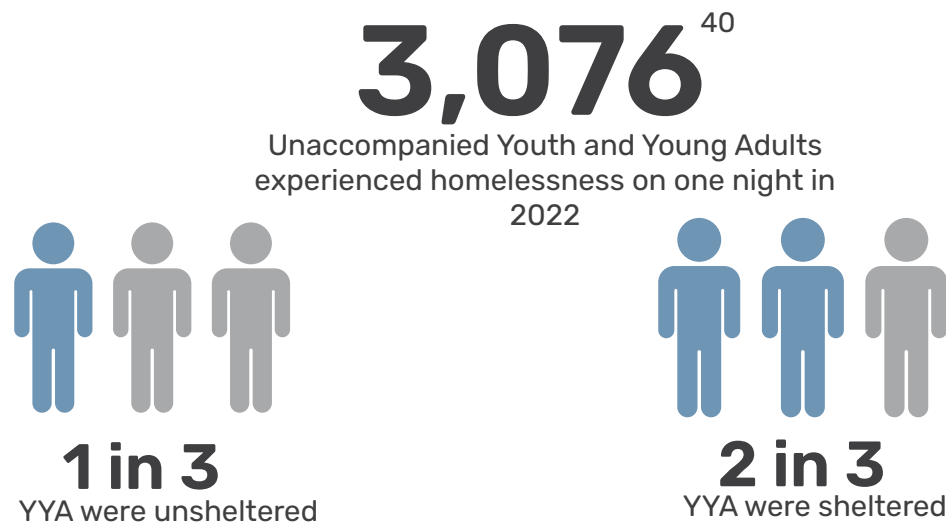
Data Source: Department of Commerce. YYA = unaccompanied youth and young adults.

PIT data is not an accurate representation of unaccompanied YYA homelessness in a community because it does not include YYA who are couchsurfing or doubled up.[38] Couchsurfing is a common way that unaccompanied young people experience homelessness.[39] These YYA are the most invisible because they are not accessing shelter or other services as they are not included in HUD's overall definition of homelessness. For these reasons, PIT count data is not used in this report to estimate the number of YYA experiencing homelessness in the state, rather, this data is provided as an indication of how many YYA experienced homelessness in one night in 2022.

> "I got a big problem with that [PIT data] because they just don't accurately represent who is experiencing homelessness. It's a flawed system and it really only accounts for who the people who are doing the counts see at the time and during a specific timeframe. It doesn't accurately represent the very nuanced reasons why someone would not be reported and who would not be in a shelter during that time."
>
> **QTBIPOC Young Person**

Progress: Service Expansion, Model Programs, and Innovations

Our findings from extensive interviews and connections with more than 100 young people with lived experience and stakeholders show that WA is an innovator in the YYA homelessness space, with unique, collaborative initiatives, public-private partnerships and investments, and first-in-the-nation projects. These include, but are not limited to:

OHY Service Expansion	Closing the geographic service gap; only two counties aren't served by OHY or federal Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program funding.
"Yes to Yes" Culture Shift	Culture of saying "yes," Anchor Community Initiative (ACI) service dollars, By-Name Lists, and the Homelessness Prevention and Diversion Fund (HPDF).
BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ By and For Resources	Young people emphasized the power of BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ led programming and resource centers, and the need for more.
Homeless Student Stability Program (HSSP) and Technical Assistance	Increased collaboration between schools and the homeless system bolstered by Building Changes' technical assistance and the ACI.
Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program	Cross-system collaboration and leadership by young people with lived experience.
Progress on Prevention	Cross-government work with community to outline a statewide strategy to prevent YYA homelessness; and preventing exits from public systems of care into homelessness through investments from HB 1905.
YYA Leadership	Young people changing systems through The Mockingbird Society, OHY, the ACI, and the state-level Y4Y board.
Creative Housing Solutions	Growth of Supportive Leasing and Host Homes, especially in rural communities.

Expansion of OHY Services

The OHY was created by the Legislature in 2015 with funding for HOPE and Crisis Residential Centers and street outreach. All programming was for minors only. Since 2015, the OHY biennial budget has increased from $10 million to $90 million. The OHY has expanded its outreach program to serve young adults as well as minors, created a young adult housing program, and expanded the Independent Youth Housing Program. New programming brought online by the Office also includes the Transitional Living Program (longer-term housing for minors), young adult shelter, prevention programs such as the Homelessness Prevention and Diversion Fund (HPDF), Housing Stability for Youth in Courts (H-SYNC), System of Care Grants, and therapeutic services.

Figure 30: Map of Office of Homeless Youth and/or Federally-Funded Youth and Young Adult Services, 2023

Legend:
- OHY Program Does Not Exist in the County
- OHY program Exists in the County

Data Source: Office of Homeless Youth.
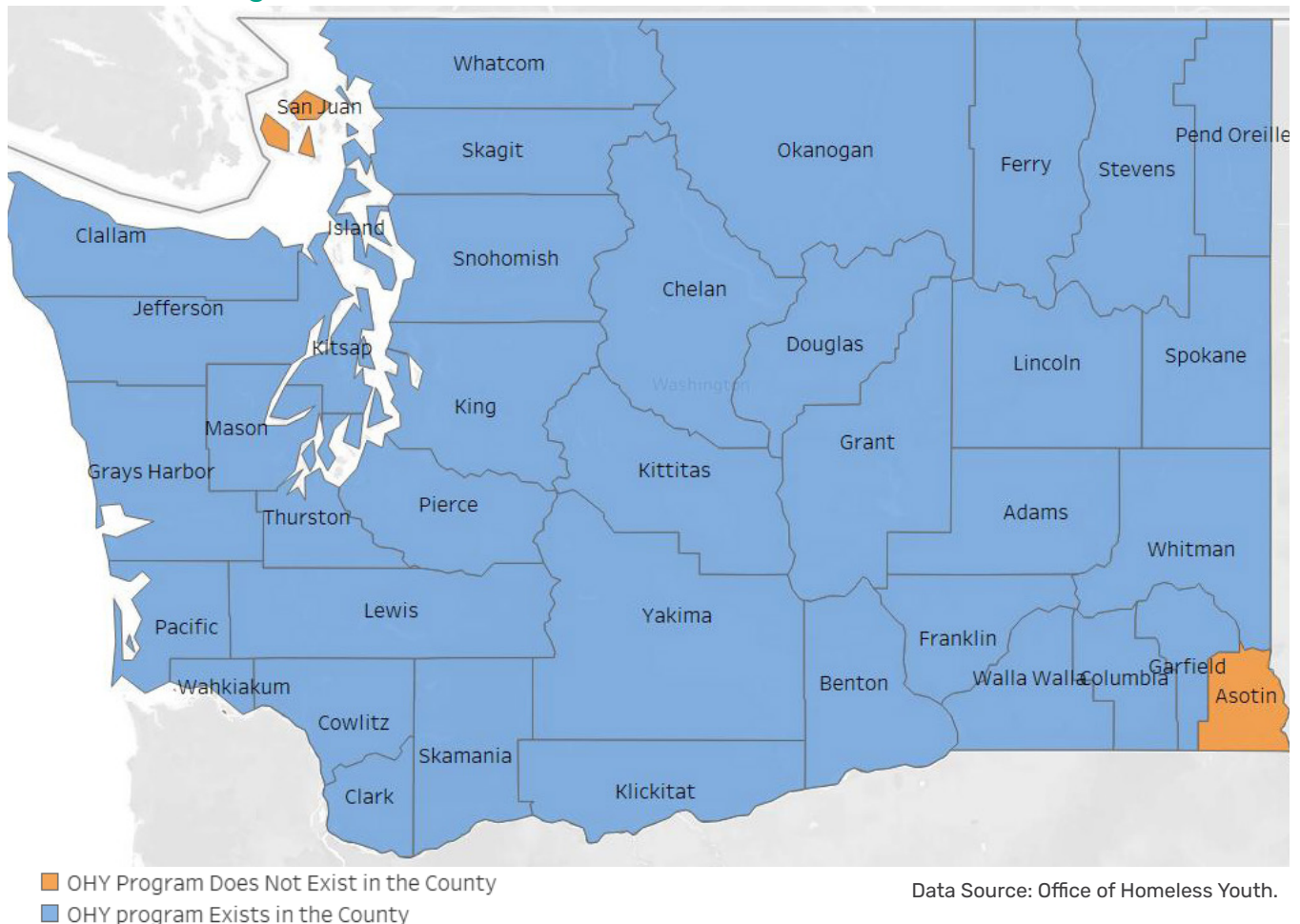
The Office's reach now spreads across 37 out of 39 counties, providing funding for:
- Therapeutic services for minors
- Transitional Living Programs for young people aged 16+
- HOPE and Crisis Residential Centers (shelter) for minors
- Young Adult Housing Programs
- Outreach including Street Outreach Services and Young Adult Shelter
- Prevention Programs such as the Homeless Student Stability Program, the Homelessness Prevention and Diversion Fund, Youth Diversion Infrastructure Project, Housing Stability for Youth in Courts, and System of Care Grants
- Youth Homelessness Demonstration Projects (YHDP) such as Rapid Re-Housing and Supportive Services

In 2016, more than half of the 39 counties didn't have any dedicated YYA housing or shelter beds. Now there is youth or young adult housing or shelter in 27 counties – more than two-thirds of the state. Geographic gaps remain in the Northeast, Southwest, and South for YYA housing and/or shelter. Only five counties have OHY funding for both youth and young adult shelters: King, Pierce, Skagit, Thurston, and Whatcom. The below map shows the counties that are funded for youth or young adult housing or shelter programs. Additionally, in 2023, the OHY is funding services in 19 counties that it wasn't reaching in 2016, which is a vast improvement. These counties include: Jefferson, Mason, Skamania, Lincoln, Kittitas, Stevens, Okanogan, Douglas, Walla Walla, Island, Pacific, Wahkiakum, Lewis, Whitman, Columbia, Garfield, Cowlitz, Grant, and Adams Counties.

Figure 31: Map of Counties with Office of Homeless Youth and/or Federally-Funded Shelter or Housing for Youth or Young Adults, 2023

■ OHY Program Does Not Exist in the County
■ OHY program Exists in the County

Data Source: Office of Homeless Youth.
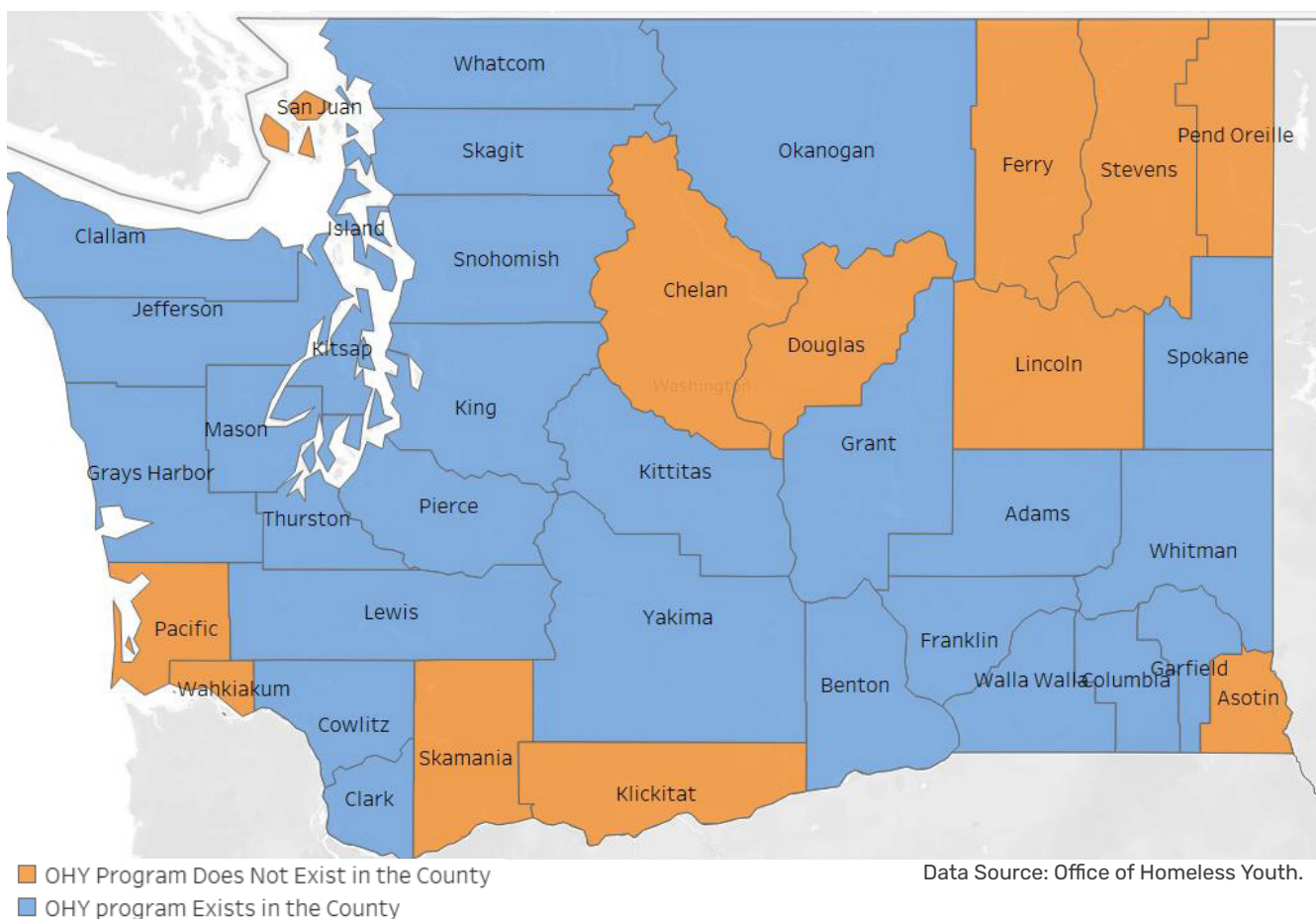
"OHY is the answering of a direct ask of young people."

Azia Ruff
Artist and Advocate

Generally, stakeholders were complimentary of the OHY's efforts in closing service gaps and affirmed the need for a government office specifically dedicated to the YYA population. But grassroots BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ led organizations were more critical as they wanted to see more opportunities for organizations led by and serving these populations to receive financial support and resources. BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ leaders and young people observed that bigger, White, cis-heteronormative organizations have more resources to apply for government funding and to do mandatory data entry and reporting. This perpetuates a cycle of inequity, with grassroots led and serving organizations being less able to break through into government funding spaces.

"We can't make every organization and group fight for the same pot of money. Funding needs to be provided to particular groups like Black, LGBTQ+...It goes back to intention behind the money. Elephant organizations with no ties to the community usually get all the money."

BIPOC Service Provider

While there has been significant progress in filling the geographic service gap, service providers and young people spoke of the need for more housing and shelter options specifically for the YYA population, especially in rural areas. Young people, particularly QTBIPOC young people, have been traumatized staying at adult shelters when they had nowhere else to go. While interviewees were aware that a brick and mortar shelter in every community is not be feasible, they stressed the importance of a diverse array of service options for young people, including flexible funds and Direct Cash Transfers.

"There is a big issue with youth homelessness, Not enough youth shelters in Washington State."

LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person

"When they're put in this environment as a very vulnerable person...Now they've just become a target unfortunately for some of the adults. Financial exploitation is a major thing that we see a lot with youth specifically regarding things like their food stamps or the youth benefits. Things like cell phones get stolen...It's an eye opening experience when you're walking into a [adult] shelter with a youth for the first time. As a provider it's probably the worst. It's a low low as a provider."

Mike Woolson
Young Adult Housing Navigator, Blue Mountain Action Council

Anchor Community Initiative

Launched in 2018 with four communities based on the Built for Zero model by Community Solutions, A Way Home Washington's (AWHWA) Anchor Community Initiative (ACI) is built on a foundation of collaboration, youth leadership, real-time data, racial and LGBTQIA2S+ equity, innovation, prevention, and diversion.

In 2022, supported by private philanthropy and the state legislature, the ACI expanded to include five new communities across six counties. Clallam/Jefferson, Skagit, Whatcom, Thurston, and Clark Counties joined Walla Walla, Yakima, Pierce, and Spokane Counties on the journey of "Yes to Yes." By creating a quality real-time By-Name List that includes all unaccompanied YYA between the ages of 12-24 experiencing homelessness and housing instability, communities know and have the capacity to quickly connect all unaccompanied young people with safe and stable housing. Anchor Community members who were interviewed for this report cited saying "yes" to young people and "Yes to Yes" as a positive culture shift for their communities.

Anchor Communities create cross-system Improvement Teams and build Youth Advisory Boards to set specific, measurable goals toward functional zero - a functional end to YYA homelessness. Functional zero means that a community can quickly house as many YYA as are actively experiencing homelessness, few return to homelessness, and there are equitable outcomes for LGBTQIA2S+ and BIPOC YYA. A collaborative approach moves the community toward ending homelessness, rather than just managing it. With data and system coaching from AWHWA, communities engage young people directly and use their real-time data to rapidly develop and test solutions to end the disproportionate representation of BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ young people in the homelessness system and strive toward functional zero.

"I think the most impactful [thing] right now is the whole concept of not saying no - Yes to Yes, and having buy-in all the way from the top. We need to take care of our youth and young adults, that's the commitment and the investment. We need to prioritize them."

Annette Rodriguez
Homeless Services Officer, Yakima Neighborhood Health Services

"After I think it was our third or fourth try of going for the YHDP, the reason we finally got it was because of the ACI and AWHWA because of the infrastructure they brought. The Youth Advisory Board was phenomenal even though we had one before, it wasn't nearly as robust."

Bridget Cannon
Senior Vice President of Shelter Services, Volunteers of America Spokane

The ACI consists of three major components:

1. Real-time Data

Establishing a real-time, quality By-Name List to know every unaccompanied young person aged 12-24 in the community experiencing homelessness or housing instability.

2. Reducing Homelessness

Reducing homelessness on a month by month basis using Continuous Quality Improvement to make system improvements that center racial and LGBTQIA2S+ equity.

3. Ending Homelessness

Reaching functional zero, including ending racial and LGBTQIA2S+ disproportionality. The homelessness system has the capacity to quickly house all unaccompanied YYA experiencing homelessness. Sustaining functional zero.

All nine Anchor Communities have real-time By-Name Lists (BNLs) which allow them to track in real-time how many unaccompanied YYA are experiencing homelessness or are unsafely or unstably housed in their community. Five communities have reached real-time quality, reliable data which means they are able to say with a high degree of certainty that their BNL includes all unaccompanied YYA aged 12-24 in their community known to the homelessness system and other public systems of care. While communities have outreach efforts in place to identify and serve all unaccompanied YYA that are known to systems, there may be some YYA that are missing from the HMIS data and the BNL.

Quality data is attained when communities complete an in-depth qualitative assessment tool and reach a quantitative threshold that measures the margin of error in the BNL. The qualitative assessment tool is called the Youth and Young Adult Scorecard,[41] originally created by Community Solutions and altered to the WA context by AWHWA. With 47 questions, the Scorecard asks communities to build cross-system partnerships with child welfare, behavioral health, and criminal legal systems, schools, and Tribal Nations. Communities must also have sustainable and documented BNL policies and procedures, and be working towards higher quality sexual orientation data. A community is certified with a quality, real-time, reliable BNL once they complete the scorecard and reach the data reliability threshold, which measures whether the community's active number is accurately accounting for the numbers of YYA entering and exiting their system.

Pierce, Spokane, Walla Walla, Yakima, and Clark counties have all reached quality, reliable data on unaccompanied YYA experiencing homelessness. There are only two other communities in the country who have reached this milestone - Rockford, IL and Gulf Coast, MS - both Built for Zero communities.

What is a Real-Time, Quality By-Name List?

A BNL is a real-time accounting of all unaccompanied youth and young adults (YYA) who meet the definition of homelessness in a community (usually a Continuum of Care). A BNL helps communities quantify the levels of homelessness at a system-level so that they can effectively design interventions, but ultimately a BNL is a real-time tool to identify and house YYA as quickly as possible according to their unique needs. A BNL can be used for Case Conferencing and creating a priority pool, but includes the full universe of YYA experiencing unaccompanied homelessness currently known to the system. A priority pool is a ranked order of assessed clients based on their vulnerability index and is usually a subset of a real-time BNL. In WA, BNLs are created by transforming raw data extracted from the HMIS, using custom Python and Tableau infrastructure built by AWHWA.

How is a By-Name List Used?

Develop individualized solutions
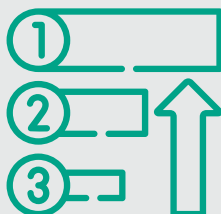
Prioritization and optimization

Real-time data-informed decision making

Service coordination through Case Conferencing

Identify, measure, and end racial and LGBTQIA2S+ disproportionality

Monitor and evaluate system-level goals and progress

"It [real-time data] allowed us to really be able to look at the number of youth that are actively experiencing homelessness. And then we can go to our funders, our local funders and partners and say this is what we are seeing. The point in time wasn't good data and that's what we were operating on for so long. But now when somebody says to me, 'how many young people are experiencing homelessness?' I could give them a number...'Here's the number today.'"

Tim Meliah, Director, Catholic Charities Walla Walla

What is the Impact of a Real-Time, Quality By-Name List?

Better outcomes for young people	Able to track inflow, length of time in the homelessness system, housing outcomes, and returns to homelessness by program and project. Data supports continuous improvement, enhancing service quality.
Increased accountability	Young people aren't just part of one program, there are policies and processes for all providers and systems of care across the community to be accountable for every YYA on the list.
Better collaboration	Fewer young people fall through the cracks because of stronger system-wide (and cross-system) collaboration.
Improved planning and resourcing	System resourcing becomes more proactive and based on decisions grounded in real-time data which accurately reflects the identities and needs of young people in the community.
Increased action on racial and LGBTQIA2S+ equity	By being able to identify specific areas of the system where disproportionality exists, the CoC has information to take targeted action.
Increased data reliability and faster crisis response	HMIS Entry-Exit data may show the magnitude of youth homelessness but a BNL goes further by providing a cleaner, actionable list of clients, making the overall crisis response faster and more efficient.

Once Anchor Communities reach quality, real-time, reliable data they move on to the "Reducing Phase" where they use Continuous Quality Improvement to rapidly test and evaluate system changes. Two communities - Walla Walla and Spokane have measurably reduced unaccompanied youth and young adult homelessness. The chart below shows Walla Walla's system-level data between April 2021-2022 and the 59% reduction in unaccompanied YYA homelessness. The power of real-time data means that Walla Walla is able to attribute their reduction to specific system changes that were introduced between April 2021-February 2022, as annotated on the chart.

Figure 32: Walla Walla Annotated Run Chart of Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults Experiencing Homelessness, April 2021-February 2022
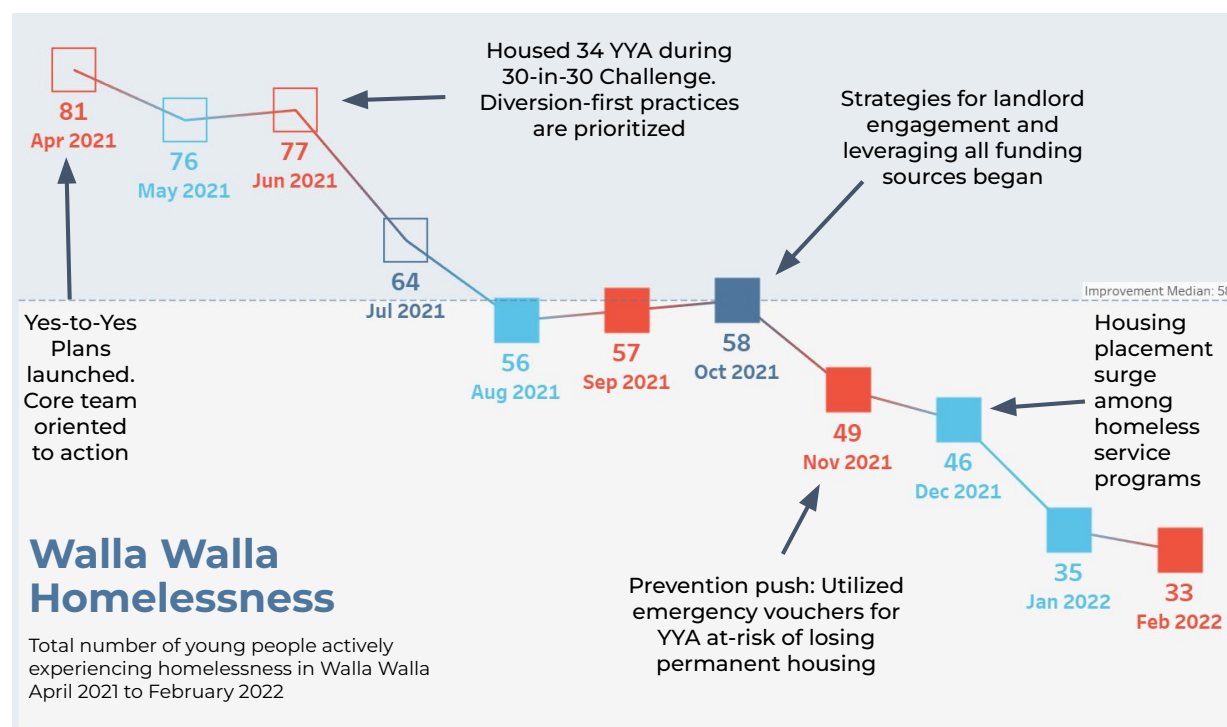
Source: A Way Home Washington Case Study. YYA = Youth and Young Adults.

"Utilizing a youth by-name list has helped our community become more engaged with our data. We are currently Case Conferencing our youth BNL on a weekly basis. This helps improve our understanding of what is happening within our system so that we can set better goals and identify areas of improvement that we can test...We are increasing data literacy, data quality, and community will and momentum towards our goals. The practice oour by-name list on a weekly basis ensures that we are creating and sustaining a culture of cross-community problem solving."

Sam Jackle
Homeless Housing System Engagement Coordinator, County of Walla Walla

Inclusion of Unstably Housed Young People

The ACI definition of homelessness includes unaccompanied young people who are unsafely and/or unstably housed, doubled up or couchsurfing. AWHWA believes that it isn't possible to end homelessness without also ending it for young people who are unstably housed. Young people are more likely than older adults to be unstably housed and couchsurfing, rather than living unsheltered or in encampments, making their homelessness more "invisible" but still homelessness nonetheless.

While including this population in the youth homelessness definition is a best practice, communities around the country struggle to operationalize it in practice. Including these young people requires intentional relationship building and whole-system changes. In Walla Walla, the community was looking for where to send young people who, prior to the ACI, wouldn't have "qualified" for traditional services. The Youth Engagement Team (YET), which consists of a licensed attorney and housing navigators, made pathways clearer for the YYA and the community. These were strategies adopted by Walla Walla and Anchor Communities to include unstably housed YYA and can be adopted by any community:

Expand Coordinated Entry (CE)

- Previously in most communities, CE was only completed for those who were experiencing unsheltered or sheltered homelessness
- CE access points were required to expand their definition

Outreach in Schools

- Youth experiencing doubled up, couchsurfing, or unstable housing were not aware they could receive services
- Navigators and the YET did outreach in high schools, charter schools, and the community college to bring awareness

Building Relationships

- YET met early with programs across sectors including the criminal legal system and county jail, shelters, behavioral health transitional living, child welfare, McKinney-Vento liaisons, recovery support services, police officers, first responders, YMCA boys and girls club, etc

"Young people who are unstably housed are often experiencing invisibility in their crisis. Traditional housing services generally operate from a binary view of homelessness based on eligibility requirements and social narratives. This results in missing out an entire population of young people who don't fit in those boxes, giving an inaccurate picture of youth and young adult homelessness overall. We've heard from young people that this form of homelessness is common for their age group and the hardest to receive services for."

Elisha Pritchett
Data & Evaluation Director, A Way Home Washington

Further coaching strategies used by AWHWA coaches to support Anchor Communities to include unstably housed YYA include:

Additional HMIS Project	Skagit, Whatcom and Clallam/Jefferson counties created a new catch-all HMIS project that had minimum data elements and could be used across the county with multiple access points
Scaling YYA-Specific Approaches	YYA services usually already account for unstably housed because of OHY and Runaway Homeless Youth funding. Communities were coached to scale these approaches to adult services
Robust Referral Processes	Whatcom created a referral system across the county and tracks numbers of referrals. Walla Walla created the YET referral process which links to Coordinated Entry and Navigation
Diversion-Centered Approaches	The Homelessness Prevention and Diversion Fund and Youth Diversion Infrastructure Projects contributes to the identification and enrollment of unstably housed YYA onto the By-Name List
Policies and Procedures	Communities re-evaluated their Street Outreach procedures to include Prior Living Situation and Current Living Situation questions that included doubled up and couchsurfing

"Youth homeless in Washington is very real and happening to more people than you could expect. I've been "homeless" (couchsurfing) for the last 3 years trying to make it happen for me. I've just been unlucky a few times than not. Most of the time kids that are homeless are due to the parent(s) decision to remove the kid from the house and most of the time the parents want the kid to come back. Due to the lack of power the parent feels they have. And most of the time the kid will not put themselves back into that environment "

Young Person in King County

Improving Sexual Orientation Data Quality: Clark County

In 2022, AWHWA added a quantitative data standard to the YYA Scorecard to create a pathway for improving sexual orientation data quality. This was the result of learning from Cohort 1 communities who reached quality data without having quality sexual orientation data. With the high amounts of unknowns, it wasn't possible to use their sexual orientation data for improvement or to reduce and end disproportionality. The updated demographic data standard requires communities to work toward knowing the sexual orientation of at least 70% of the YYA on their By-Name List. There are no other initatives in the nation coaching communities to measurably and quantifiably improve their sexual orientation data for the YYA population.

Figure 33: Clark County System Inflow of Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults by Sexual Orientation, March 2023-September 2023

Source: Clark County HMIS.
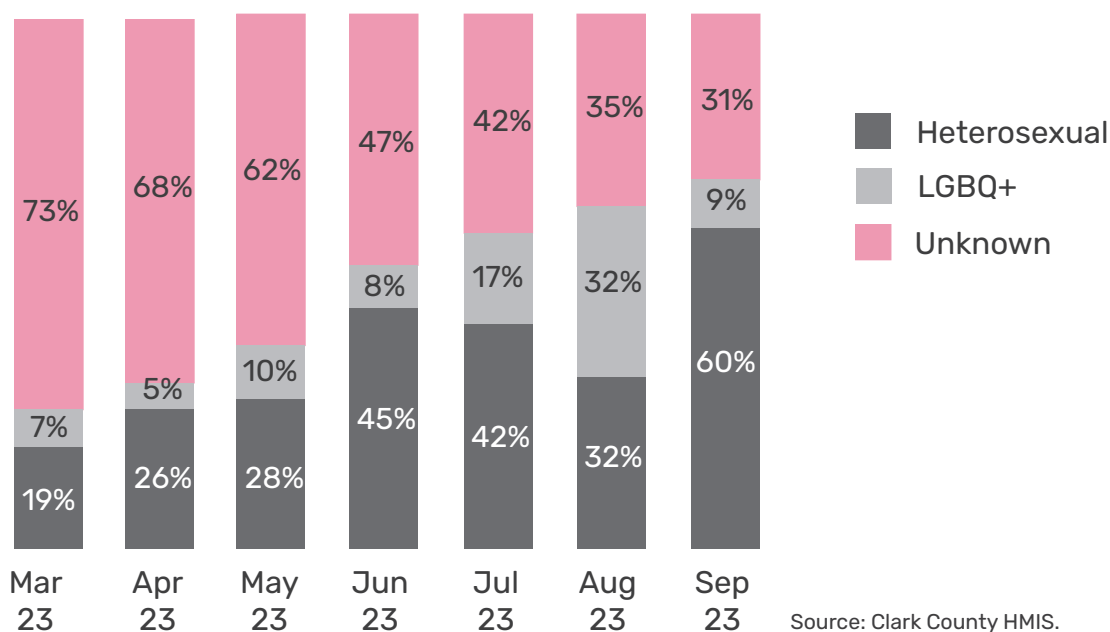
In 2023, through testing the sexual orientation data standard with Clark County, the AWHWA Data Team developed a menu of coaching strategies, which the Clark County team implemented with great success. As shown in Figure 33, Clark County increased the percentage of known sexual orientation data at system inflow from 26% to 69% between March and September 2023, and they are still working.

> "Prior to broad collection of this data, we were making a lot of assumptions about who in our community was experiencing homelessness but we never had the data to back up those assumptions. As a community, quality data has been crucial in identifying gaps in services and without accurate gender and sexual orientation data, we cannot say we have been doing our best to understand the unique needs of our LGBTQ community. I am very excited that we have achieved quality data and this is just the first step to better serving everyone in our community. We have a lot still to do, but I am proud of the work of our YAB, entire ACI team, and community who put in a lot of hard work to make some big changes."
>
> **Sunny Wonder**
> **Deputy Director, Council for the Homeless**

How Clark improved their YYA sexual orientation data in six months:

Policies and Procedures	• Continuum of Care (CoC) policy was implemented in May 2023 to include sexual orientation as a required field in all HMIS projects after community buy-in and decision-making • Sexual orientation was included as a required field at intake screen and entry assessment • There is also an explanation under the question in the HMIS that outlines why this data is collected
Provider Onboarding and Training	• The CoC set up trainings for collecting SOGI data and have a plan for regular trainings • Lead team discussed the demographic data collection policy at their recurring HMIS end user meetings • Lead team worked closely with Youth Advisory Board and community partners to create HMIS questions and person-centered messaging for the community
Project-level Deep Dive	• The data work group completed a project-level deep dive to identify HMIS projects with high numbers of unknown sexual orientation data • Outreach was conducted to service providers to review demographic data collection standards and troubleshoot barriers
Continuous Monitoring and Improvement	• Since the inclusion of the sexual orientation question, the data work group regularly monitors the data • They prioritize projects showing high numbers of unknowns for outreach and support

Using Real-time Data to House Young People: Case Conferencing

Case Conferencing is a collaborative, action-oriented process where key partners across systems problem-solve and identify key steps to move every young person on their By-Name List (BNL) towards the housing they need and want. Providers can get aligned and strategize as a community, creating a culture of "OUR young people." Case Conferencing has been a key tool used by Walla Walla to dramatically reduce unaccompanied YYA homelessness.

Communities create a prioritization process for their BNL to determine which population they will case conference at each meeting such as unsheltered, longest on the list, parenting, and often rotate over several meetings. At each meeting, every young person on the list is discussed and providers coordinate resources, identify action items, and assign who will be responsible to carry out next steps. It is not a space for status updates, but rather an intentional working session with housing solutions as the goal.

In order to case conference effectively, a community needs to have real-time, reliable data. If a BNL is not up to date or has inaccuracies or unknowns, providers are limited in their ability to gauge the current situation and might miss young people. But it is equally as challenging for communities to get consistently reliable data without Case Conferencing their BNL. Case Conferencing provides the opportunity to regularly review data and spot inaccuracies early and often. In Anchor Communities, there is a feedback loop between the Case Conferencing workgroup and data workgroup that functions as consistent troubleshooting for a BNL's quality. The process of Case Conferencing also illuminates system issues in real time that are then elevated to the community Improvement Team to design improvement projects around.

Youth and Young Adult Engagement

AWHWA provides funding for Anchor Communities to hire a youth and community engagement coordinator (YCEC) to support the communities' YABs and engagement with local by and for organizations. AWHWA also provides coaching support to these YCECs to meet the ACI Gold Standard of Youth Engagement as well as stipends to support paid YYA participation. The Gold Standard sets out guidelines to support a baseline YYA engagement standard and includes:

- Requiring communities to have a structure in place for a body of young people outside the Improvement team to contribute system change ideas
- The Improvement Team implements system change ideas identified by the young people
- At least two young people participate in Improvement Teams as full members

Communities such as Walla Walla and Clark that have made the most success as Anchor Communities are also the communities who are meeting the Gold Standard. These communities have active YCECs who support and grow community YABs and have Improvement Teams that prioritize collaborating with young people.

Homelessness Prevention and Diversion Fund (HPDF)

Preventing homelessness is also a focus of ACI communities. Currently, all Anchor Communities either have HPDF or are setting it up. The HPDF is a flexible pool of money that can be drawn upon by youth workers in consultation with their clients – unaccompanied young people between the ages of 12-24 experiencing housing instability, homelessness, and at risk of not having a place to live. The model was first developed by Africatown in collaboration with Building Changes.

With the HPDF, anyone who works with young people can be trained to administer diversion services, coupled with help for anything that might execute a housing plan, such as acquiring a state-issued identification card, filling out rental applications, and applying for student financial aid. The HPDF is designed to be as low-barrier as possible and requires minimal documentation. It can be used for anything that will result in a young person being housed outside of the homelessness system within 30 days. Examples include paying for child care so that a young parent can go to work and stabilize their housing situation, paying for a rental security deposit so that a young person can move into a new home, or buying a bus ticket so that the young person can travel to be reunited with friends or family.

In 2022-2023 **90%** retained housing at 3 months **71%** either at risk or couchsurfing **59%** BIPOC served

AWHWA's HPDF is unique in that it was the first centralized flexible fund in the state to serve minors and also to include young people at risk of homelessness. The Fund continues to be the number one source of housing placements in Anchor Communities. In 2022-2023 alone, 397 households were housed across seven counties. It is also a powerful tool in addressing racial and LGBTQIA2S+ disproportionality by providing flexible fund resources to smaller BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ led organizations who wouldn't necessarily have these resources on their own. Further, BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ young people don't need to access the homeless system in order to be housed, which reduces the likelihood of encountering systemic racism, homophobia and/or transphobia.

The HPDF is funded with a mixture of public funds through the OHY and private dollars through the Schultz Family Foundation. Private dollars are integral to the program and allowed for more flexibility to pay for gift cards at the start of the program when this wasn't possible with public funds. Now, private dollars supplement public funding and help motivate local funders to also fund the program in their community. In 2022, the expansion and maintenance of the HPDF was secured with a $5 million investment from the state legislature.

> "We were able to use the Centralized Diversion Fund (HPDF). Honestly, just being able to put cash in hand to keep someone in their home so that homelessness can be prevented."
>
> **Anne Johnson**
> **Director of Community Care, Spectrum Center**

Cross-System Collaboration: Innovative Outreach Models

Each Anchor Community receives $1 million each biennium from the state legislature passed through the OHY to fund critical services for unaccompanied young people. Communities have used these funds to increase young adult housing, establish street outreach teams, and create innovative programming such as the multi-disciplinary Youth Engagement Team (YET), cross-system InREACH model, and LGBTQIA2S+ specific outreach capacity.

Youth Engagement Team in Walla Walla

The following is written by Elisha Pritchett, former member of the YET in Walla Walla

The YET in Walla Walla was inspired by the model in King County, which includes a mental health professional, but this role wasn't filled in Walla Walla. The Walla Walla YET consists of 2-3 YYA Housing Navigators at Blue Montain Action Council and a licensed Legal Counsel for Youth and Children (LCYC) attorney who coordinate services for unaccompanied young people (12-24) experiencing or at risk of experiencing imminent homelessness. The team supports navigation through the system and legal barriers that prevent YYA from accessing safe and stable housing. Referrals are direct and immediate across the YET and young people have the option to work with one person or the entire team. The YET conducts street and school outreach both as a team and separately. The strengths of the Walla Walla YET include:

- **Immediacy of access to services:** Legal and housing services in Walla Walla have long waitlists. Prior to the YET, YYA wouldn't even be given access to housing services if they were unstably housed or at imminent risk. Free and affordable legal services were a barrier to access and YYA-specific legal services were almost unheard of. The YET provided direct access to both for YYA.

- **Resolving legal barriers:** One of the most difficult challenges of housing young people under 18 is navigating the legal system and consent. The LCYC attorney held more authority when dealing with legal guardians or the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). Minors worked directly with the attorney on emancipation, negotiating a safe housing option with legal guardian consent, and youth-led options through DCYF. Complimentary to this, the navigators were able to work with the youth to find housing and access flexible funds or direct ACI dollars for other supports.

- **Bilingual services:** The LCYC attorney is bilingual and this was instrumental in working with Latine and undocumented YYA. In one case, we were able to work with a young person whose documentation was unclear and their legal guardian left them in the US with a family friend and went back to Mexico. The LCYC attorney and I worked together to fight for documentation and lined up housing for their upcoming 18th birthday. This would've been impossible prior to the YET, according to the young person, because they were always told they were undocumented and didn't have any legal recourse.

- **Flexibility:** We met young people where they were - in school, outside their friends' house, in the courtroom, at a park, whichever was most convenient for them. Young people demonstrated that flexibility was paramount to participation in services. They were never required to come into the office.

InREACH, Spokane County

In 2022-2023   **35%** BIPOC served   **61%** couchsurfing or doubled up at entry   **79%** with disabilities

Spokane's InREACH team at Volunteers of America was established in 2019 funded by ACI-OHY passthrough dollars. The team has been taking referrals, including self-referrals under any definition of homelessness since August 2020. Their focus is on relationships with McKinney-Vento liaisons, inpatient behavioral health partners, and other systems of care. Building relationships with schools has been a long road and finally in 2022, InREACH was able to start holding office hours in some Spokane area schools. InREACH ensures that young people are included on Spokane's By-Name List by actively enrolling them in the HMIS and connecting them with services, including housing. It is unique and innovative because it allows VOA to reach a population that traditionally homeless response systems haven't reached before. InREACH is also particularly important for reaching BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, and disabled young people. 11% of young people served in 2022-2023 were gender-expansive and more than a quarter (27%) were LGBQ+. More than half of young people served by InREACH (54%) exited to permanent housing destinations.

Originally only funded by ACI-OHY passthrough dollars, InREACH is now funded by the OHY Systems of Care grant and a grant from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to expand outreach in schools.

LGBTQIA2S+ Street Outreach Specialist, Pierce County

ACI-OHY pass-through dollars also fund part of an LGBTQIA2S+ specific street outreach position in Pierce County on the REACH Center's ACT Team. This position was created in response to a growing need for LGBTQIA2S+ responsive outreach and supportive services. A young person might identify themselves as LGBTQIA2S+ at intake and is then connected to the LGBTQIA2S+ street outreach specialist. They are then connected with safe housing, gender-affirming clothing, drop-in centers where they feel safer, and other LGBTQIA2S+ service providers. The ACT Team is focused on prevention and helping young people get to stable housing, which includes helping young people get job opportunities, housing, and educational resources.

"We actually have a grant that helps us support young people who identify as LGBTQ and facing housing instability. That's how my job role got created, it was based in this need because before I was here, there was nobody that did any of that. It's a huge population that's not being served to the best of their ability because there was no one that actually identifies them and can connect with them and build the network of resources that was necessary to provide the needs that young people were looking for."

Devin Williams
Lead LGBTQ+ Peer Outreach Specialist, The REACH Center

BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+
By and For Resources

Young people we interviewed told us how important BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ specific resources are for them. These resources made young people feel understood and safe to be themselves. Service providers across all regions of the state also reiterated the statewide need for more culturally appropriate mental health, housing, and shelter services for BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ young people. The following section highlights just a few of the impactful BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ led, by and for organizations supporting young people across the state. By and for organizations are those that are led by BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ people and also focus on serving these populations.

Spectrum Center Spokane

Spectrum Center's mission is to create a safe, intersectional, intergenerational, 2SLGBTQIA+ community gathering space that celebrates a resilient, healthy community through social connectedness and support, arts and culture, access to resources, and leadership development.[42] Spectrum is an Indigenous, trans, and queer-led organization and centers these identities in their work. They provide critical services for the 2SLGBTQIA+ in Eastern Washington and Idaho and have served 8 year olds through to 72 year olds. Spectrum is currently launching formal peer support groups facilitated by mental health providers and social workers for trans youth, parents of queer and trans young people, adults, and QTBIPOC people.

Spectrum supports gender-affirming name changes through their Gender-affirming Products program where they pay for clients' official name change and provide additional funds to purchase gender-affirming clothing, or to pay for replacing passports and other documentation. They go with clients to court, and support them throughout the process. In 2023, so far they have received more than 275 applications for the program, with some people just applying out of curiosity and then coming back later when they're ready to move forward. Spectrum has also utilized AWHWA's flexible funds to house unstably housed young people.

> "For the unhoused youth I work with, it's because they were unable to be housed with their family. One clients' parents had lost their jobs and needed to downsize to a smaller apartment. They said 'sorry, we love you but you have to find your own place.' The other thing that I see a lot of is young folks who are kicked out because their parents are homophobic or transphobic and so they come out and then are no longer allowed to stay in the home. One thing I would love to see for our region is a Host Home or something like that that can be a supportive housing environment for queer and trans youth."
>
> **Anne Johnson**
> **Director of Community Care, Spectrum Center**

BIPOC Apostrophe Foundation, King County

BIPOC Apostrophe's mission is to promote equity and empowerment for BIPOC youth by advocating for their rights and well-being through legislative efforts, and by providing a range of support services.[43] The reason for the name is that an apostrophe indicates possession, "which can be used for intentional exclusion or intentional inclusion."

BIPOC Apostrophe's Restorative Program offers protection, healthcare, and mental health counseling resources to support youth coming out of juvenile detention or trafficking. Serving South King County, BIPOC Apostrophe also engages with state representatives and locally-elected officials to advocate for homeownership and rent control. BIPOC Apostrophe's education and training programs are available to 12-25 year olds and help to grow skills in financial literacy, money management, job readiness, and independent living skills. Youth from underserved communities are also trained in aviation.

A priority of BIPOC Apostrophe is to address homelessness among Black LGBTQIA2S+ youth. This is important to the organization because in their experience, in communities of color and among Black immigrants there can be limited exposure to LGBTQIA2S+ culture, which can create friction between LGBTQIA2S+ youth and their families. The goal is to help families understand LGBTQIA2S+ identities, especially within families from patriarchal systems as a means to help keep them together.

African Community Housing & Development, King County

African Community Housing & Development (ACHD) supports African diaspora and refugee individuals, families, and communities through a holistic approach focused on health and housing stability, economic development, high-quality education, and referrals to legal services.

ACHD's Youth & Family Homelessness Program serves youth and families at imminent risk of homelessness. Case managers work directly with households to create a plan for safe and secure housing that prioritizes keeping families together. ACHD also works in concert with McKinney-Vento school liaisons to provide aid to African diaspora youth in local school systems serving as a bridge between a student's family and school-based supports. As part of these efforts, ACHD provides translation services to families navigating legal and social services and makes efforts to address cultural differences that may arise during the process.

One key to ACHD's work is the prevention of homelessness through its Eviction Prevention Program. Through this program, ACHD can work with a family who receives an eviction notice, help them pay the rent, and in turn, support them in keeping their home. If unable to mitigate eviction themselves, ACHD provides legal referrals for assistance to those at risk of homelessness.

"Home ownership is key. It is not a quick fix, but it is a long term solution and necessary particularly for the Black community."

Hamdi Abdulle
Executive Director, ACHD

Strengthening Connections Between Schools and the Homeless System

Schools are often the first point of contact for unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability. The 2016 landscape scan report identified recommendations to support schools in identifying and supporting students experiencing homelessness. These included: flexible funding, reducing suspensions, capitalizing on the Homeless Student Stability Program (HSSP) which was new at that time, exploring ways to improve data sharing between the systems, and increasing availability of in-school counselors and school-based health clinics. While some of these recommendations are still valid, there has been significant improvement in coordination between schools and the homeless response system through HSSP, the ACI, and technical assistance from Building Changes, a Seattle-based non-profit that focuses on student and family homelessness statewide.

Building Changes' ABC Tool, Technical Assistance and Trainings

In partnership with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), Building Changes provides statewide technical assistance and training to school districts. This has been a breakthrough in providing a deeper level of support to communities that hasn't been available before. The OSPI's role has traditionally centered around compliance and not necessarily providing school districts with unique and creative ways to support youth with their allotted funds.

Building Changes' Assessment Building Capacity (ABC) Tool helps school districts strategize their support for youth experiencing homelessness. Liaisons answer a series of questions and receive a scorecard which shows the strategies they should focus on. This tool is powerfully paired with between $3,000-$12,000 in flexible funding for districts to invest in identified strategies. Some examples include: professional development, creating a food pantry, and providing funds to support move-in costs or to replace a driver's license.

Building Changes is also filling knowledge and professional development gaps for staff serving students experiencing homelessness in 37 out of 39 Washington counties. 80+ community-based organizations have participated in their trainings, with 175 out of 205 school districts represented, including both urban and rural areas. There are seven different trainings on offer. Topics include: Navigating the Housing System, Diversion in Schools, Building School/Housing Community Partnerships and Capturing Data for McKinney-Vento Storytelling.[44]

"It was just $567 that was preventing them from having permanent housing… We were able to directly work with the landlord and they were able to move in the next day."

Tukwila School District Staff[45]

Homeless Student Stability Program (HSSP)

Created by the legislature in 2016, the HSSP is the first program of its kind in the nation, requiring coordination between education and housing services. Grants are made to both school districts and nonprofits to identify students experiencing homelessness, coordinate support, and provide housing resources to students and their families.

The HSSP provides funding through two state agencies: the OSPI and the OHY. The OSPI awards grants to school districts for staff, training, and support services for students experiencing homelessness. OHY awards grants to nonprofit organizations to connect students and families with housing services and flexible funding for urgent needs such as emergency rental assistance, move-in costs, and utility payments. Building Changes facilitates collaboration between these two agencies and provides training and technical assistance, capacity building, and research and evaluation support.[46]

According to the most recent data, the HSSP has a high success rate. In the last HSSP cohort, OHY grantees served 473 households, with 1,412 clients including 761 students. Of the households that exited a program, 66% secured stable housing. OSPI grants served 13 districts and 6,145 students.[47]

The HSSP is impactful because for many youth, it is their only avenue of support. Since K-12 students are predominately under 18 years old, a significant barrier is that there are very few housing solutions (primarily short-term shelters and host homes) and parental consent laws are a barrier. There is also an overwhelming unmet need reflected in the HSSP grant application process. In the last procurement cycle, applicants requested almost three times the amount the OSPI had available to grant and almost five times the amount OHY had available to grant.[48]

"When I actually first became homeless I was 15-16 and then at like 18-19. I would say at my school they had a couple of resources that were really helpful. The counselor she got me monthly bus passes for free (our buses are free now) but back then there were fares and so I got those. If I was late to school or if I didn't show up they were just generally really kind. I felt pretty supported, they were kind and patient with me as I was struggling"

LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person

"We help communities get more creative with the tools that they have."

Mehret Tekle-Awarun
Director of Practice Innovation, Building Changes

School and Homeless System Partnerships
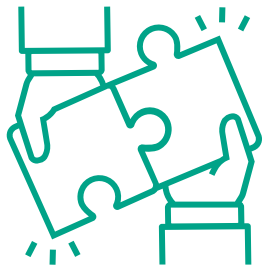
A significant challenge that homeless service providers mentioned during our interviews was the inability to share data across the school and homelessness systems. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is often cited as a barrier to data sharing. For Anchor Communities, building referral connections with schools is a fundamental part of reaching quality, real-time data on unaccompanied young people experiencing homelessness. Anchor Communities are also training school district staff to administer the Homelessness Prevention and Diversion Fund (HPDF) and the Youth Diversion Infrastructure Project (YDIP) so that unaccompanied students have access to these diversion resources. Students who access these funds are enrolled in the HMIS as part of their intake.

Clark County takes a layered approach by using both the HSSP and the ACI to identify and support unaccompanied students. When students register for school, they are asked to fill out a housing questionnaire. Students are prompted to answer what their housing situation is (doubled up/couchsurfing, motel, car/vehicle, shelter, camping, etc.). The housing questionnaires are automatically sent to the Council for the Homeless team where staff review them and reach out to the school for a McKinney-Vento referral. For the HSSP program, Clark has identified six schools that can refer to the HSSP. Further, Evergreen, Vancouver, and Camas District Staff are also HPDF and YDIP trained.[49]

Spokane's InREACH team accepts referrals under any definition of homelessness from McKinney-Vento staff working with youth in Spokane's six school districts. InREACH also conducts office hours in schools to increase awareness of their services. InREACH provides the following services to unaccompanied students: Coordinated Entry assessment, diversion from the homeless crisis response system, assistance in locating and applying for identification and other documentation needed for housing placement, transportation or accompaniment to potential housing options and necessary appointments, case management to maintain engagement, support independence, and connection to needed services such as legal assistance, employment, education, non-cash benefits, mental health, and chemical dependency services.[50] A Spokane McKinney-Vento liaison also has read-only access to the community's HMIS.

> "InREACH was found to have rather equitable outcomes, evidenced by the fact that QTBIPOC young people exited from the program to permanent housing at a greater rate than their white, cisgender, heterosexual peers, which I think points to the program's youth centered model that provides for a flexible, accessible and mobile approach to services."
>
> **Isaac Fall**
> **Prevention Manager, Office of Homeless Youth**

The Snohomish County community is strengthening connections between school districts and the homeless system in a number of innovative ways, including providing a McKinney-Vento liaison with HMIS access, using Homeless Student Stability Education Program (HSSeP) funding to support a Cocoon House (YYA homeless service provider) advocate to identify and support unaccompanied high school students, and utilizing community college dorms to house unaccompanied and foster youth experiencing homelessness.

Amy Perusse, Kids in Transition (KIT) Coordinator at the Everett School District has had HMIS access since 2015-2016, originally through a Building Changes pilot program. Amy uses HMIS to make interactions between her clients and the homeless system more seamless. She doesn't enroll clients or do Coordinated Entry intakes, instead, when a client calls, she immediately looks up client records to view their notes and information. She is able to see in the HMIS that oftentimes case workers have attempted to contact clients multiple times and their phone number is incorrect, or the client was exited from a program without realizing. When Amy finds this out, she is able to help clients get back in contact with case workers and sometimes expedite their case.

Minors' information isn't accessible to Amy in the HMIS, but the school district uses HSSeP funding to partner with Cocoon House to hire an advocate that works in high schools and provides wraparound support for unaccompanied youth. The advocate has set times they're in high schools, drop-in hours, and is also available on call. There is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in place between the school district and Cocoon House that enables data sharing. Before COVID-19, Everett School District hit a 100% graduation rate for their students experiencing homelessness and Amy says strong partnerships between the homeless system and the school district were a factor.

Further, Cocoon House, Housing Hope, and Everett Community College (EvCC) are partners on an inspiring project called Onward Learning. Over the last three years Cocoon House, in collaboration with the Snohomish County nonprofit organization Housing Hope, have been referring youth that want to go to college to enroll at EvCC and stay in the dorms. Youth are able to use their financial aid for housing costs and are supported with wraparound services, budgeting skills, and mental health support as they go from high school to college. There is even funding support provided by Snohomish County to help pay rent if a student gets behind or if financial aid doesn't come through in time. The goal is that the young person can concentrate on school without worrying about meeting their basic needs. The community is planning to scale this project to Edmonds Community College.

"It [HMIS access] helps you coordinate services better. You're connecting the need with the service much more quickly and efficiently, and there's less likelihood of families falling through the gaps. With these connections, we can get way more creative. We can do things like pull together deposit assistance through the YWCA and through some of the private donors that we have access to, plus some of our other agencies and we've done that a lot where we've just said 'let's pool our resources together.'"

Amy Perusse
Kids in Transition (KIT) Coordinator, Everett Public Schools

Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program(YHDP)

The YHDP is a federal program administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that supports selected communities to develop and implement a coordinated community approach to preventing and ending youth homelessness. The YHDP requires communities to convene a Youth Action Board (YAB) and bring together a wide variety of youth-serving system stakeholders. A number of WA communities have received YHDP funding:[51]

- 2016: $5.2 million to Seattle/King County.
- 2018: $2.39 million to Snohomish County and $4.6 million to 23 Balance of State (BoS) Counties.[52]
- 2020: $2.7 million to Spokane.
- 2022: $5.1 million to 11 WA BoS Counties.[53]

Youth for Youth (Y4Y) Board

The Y4Y board for young people with lived experience in BoS counties was established through YHDP funding in 2017. The Y4Y consists of around 30 young people with lived experience who are stipended for their work. Since its inception, the board has been instrumental in key system changes, including:

- Recreated the Coordinated Entry prioritization tool in some BoS communities to be more equitable and youth-focused. The Y4Y also provided trainings for organizations on how to use the new tool
- Informed new legislation including Senate Bill 6560 about young people exiting systems of care into stable housing
- Changed requirements for YHDP grantees and is involved in reading and deciding on grantee applications
- Created system performance measures in addition to HUD-required measures

YHDP also connects Y4Y participants with a network of national YHDP communities' youth boards to learn from each other and build community. The Y4Y is a launching pad for young people, with many participants gaining successful careers in government, service provision, and technical assistance.

"YHDP gives opportunities to young people in those smaller counties who otherwise wouldn't have access to doing any advocacy work or build those skills. I literally have a career and a pathway out of poverty because I got to help start the Y4Y Board when I was 17 and if our community hadn't got YHDP that would have never happened."

Milo Edwards
Direct Cash Transfers as Prevention Manager, Point Source Youth

YHDP Funding Snapshot

YHDP funds are used to create and sustain a variety of critical YYA services in communities. In Spokane, their funding proposal for the YHDP included Youth Transitional and Rapid Re-Housing (RRH), Street Outreach, and Coordinated Entry (CE) as identified in collaboration with young people. As a result, the YHDP expanded housing options for young adults and included RRH for young adults when previously they only had Transitional Housing. Spokane is also starting their young adult Coordinated Entry system by building out more robust diversion and hiring a diversion case manager. King County funds their YET work with YHDP funds.

Balance of State communities sought funding for outreach and drop-in centers, Transitional Housing, RRH, Host Homes and joint component projects which are Transitional Housing and RRH combined. Additionally, the Youth Lead Project is funded by supportive services only funding.

Youth Lead Project

The Youth Lead Project was created by the BoS Y4Y Board who requested that peer advocates be embedded into projects created with the YHDP. Originally the program was partially funded by private funds, but is now fully funded through the YHDP and state funds. First starting with six Youth Program Specialists, the program has grown to eleven different organizations across WA hiring and hosting eleven specialists.

Youth Program Specialist positions open up opportunities for young people with lived experience to deliver direct service activities such as street outreach and/or case management and also participate in statewide leadership and decision-making bodies. They are embedded in YHDP programs. The positions are between 0.5 to 1.0 Full Time Employees (FTE) and are ongoing roles that require recent and relevant lived experience. They are compensated at a rate of no less than Financial Year (FY) 2023 Low (80%) Income Limits for the county where the young person lives or works, whichever is higher.

The Y4Y Board was instrumental in designing the Youth Program Specialist positions, from coming up with the initial idea, to developing a consistent job description. Y4Y members including the Youth Program Specialists meet weekly virtually, providing community and support. Some might be the only young people with lived experience employed in the homeless system within their community.

> "If I hadn't been on the youth board I don't know what I would have done because that provided an opportunity regardless of what my housing situation was or my employment was. I still knew that I had that stipend. I still knew that I had something that I could be involved in and a larger network of services that could help me. If I wasn't on Y4Y I would have been homeless multiple times over."
>
> **Young Person**

Progress on Prevention

In 2018, the legislature passed Substitute Senate Bill 6560, which set a goal that the state would discharge youth into stable housing after exiting a publicly funded system of care. Systems of care include child welfare, juvenile justice, the behavioral health system, and OHY programs. In 2022, through House Bill (HB) 1905 the state legislature bolstered this goal with financial investments. HB 1905 resulted in four programs to support young people exiting public systems of care (outlined below).

Further, in 2021, the OHY brought together young people with lived experience, community-based organizations, and state-level agencies, publishing the *Shifting Services and Systems to Prevent Youth Housing Instability* Strategic Plan.

Youth and Young Adult Housing Response Team (YYAHRT)[54]	• Requires relevant state agencies to work together to coordinate resources for YYA to secure housing and other supports as they exit a publicly funded system of care • Most referrals are coming from minor youth in behavioral health settings
Housing Stability for Youth in Courts (H-SYNC)[55]	• H-SYNC identifies youth at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness in juvenile court systems • YYA and their families are referred to prevention and housing services • Operational in King, Pierce, Spokane, Snohomish, Kitsap, and Okanogan Counties
System of Care Grants	• Flexible grants to organizations to support YYA exiting publicly funded systems of care, including behavioral health services, civil legal aid, navigation, family reconciliation, employment and education support, case management, housing and financial support • Operational in Whatcom, Island, Clallam, Grays Harbor, Mason, Thurston, Pierce, Walla Walla, and Spokane Counties
Youth Diversion Infrastructure Project	• Flexible funding and diversion support to help YYA exiting a publicly funded system of care to secure safe housing • Operational in Pierce, Clark, Yakima, Walla Walla, and Spokane Counties

Statewide Prevention Strategic Plan

In January 2021, the OHY brought together YYA with lived experience, community-based organizations, and state-level agencies, publishing the *Shifting Services and Systems to Prevent Youth Housing Instability* Strategic Plan by the Steering Committee on Prevention of Youth Homelessness. The creation of the plan was led by mostly BIPOC YYA with lived experience, and caregivers from urban, rural, and Tribal areas. The plan focused on understanding the underlying root causes of YYA homelessness and system gaps and responses to the issues.

It provides recommendations that centered on equity along four main pillars:[56]

1. **Supporting whole family well-being.**
2. **Universal support for basic human rights.**
3. **Eliminating racism in systems and supporting youth and families impacted by them.**
4. **Shifting resources to BIPOC communities.**

The plan focuses on **universal, primary and early secondary prevention** to prevent crisis in the family unit, ensuring access to services and prevention of escalation and system involvement.

- **Universal prevention:** education for the larger population of the state, youth, and families.
- **Primary prevention:** supporting youth and families prior to system involvement to reduce risk of housing instability for youth.
- **Early secondary prevention:** early system interaction that does not lead to out of home placement or incarceration.

High-Priority Recommendations

1. Co-design with young people a single-entry point to a comprehensive, multi-generational, preventative well-being service system.
2. Require modification to local zoning laws across WA to increase different high density housing options.
3. Employ, train, and support marginalized YYA as peer specialists in service delivery and system navigation.
4. Invest in stigma-free, flexible respite for caregivers or youth.
5. Provide a variety of options for parental consent for emergency housing and other placements.
6. Require history, diversity, equity, and anti-racism training for all state agency workers.
7. Divert the majority of state funding to BIPOC and "By and For" organizations.
8. Create inclusive, low-barrier, state-funded housing programs for pregnant/parenting YYA.
9. Improve comprehensive relationship education.
10. Increase entry-level positions in high growth industries.

Many of the Steering Committee's recommendations are also reflected in this report.

Youth and Young Adult Leadership

In interviews with service providers, many highlighted increased levels of YYA engagement and leadership in local homelessness and statewide systems as a significant improvement over the last few years. Many also identified this as a system gap and area of improvement.

YYA leadership was emphasized as a major component of any statewide equity strategy, especially making the culture shift from *power over* young people to *shifting power to* young people. It was identified that there should be greater coordination across statewide YYA boards, including Y4Y, ACI YABs, local community YABs, and The Mockingbird Society (TMS). TMS plays a pivotal role in uplifting the voice of YYA with lived experience in efforts to end YYA homelessness and are a strategic partner of the OHY and AWHWA. The OHY is also a leader in co-creating priorities and solutions with young people in a way that is rarely seen in state government.

Office of Homeless Youth

The Office of Homeless Youth has prioritized the role of young people with lived experience in its work, particularly in setting funding priorities and informing grant award decisions. This work is happening in a way that has not been seen before in state government. Young people with lived experience have taken a lead role in shaping funding opportunities, developing application scoring criteria, and analyzing funding requests through the lens of their own personal experience.

The OHY has convened YYA with lived experience from across the state in numerous events spanning multiple days in which young people review and evaluate applications for funding. More recently, OHY hosted regional funding application reviews in five locations across the state (Spokane, Yakima, Port Townsend, Olympia, and Seattle). Travel, meals, child care, lodging, and other accessibility needs are arranged and young people are paid for their time during these events. The OHY has been a pioneer in compensating young people with lived experience, with a stipend policy in place since 2018.

"To improve equitable outcomes for all communities, it's essential that we center the experiences of people in those communities. State government has the tools to embrace co-creation and advance the reality that people are the experts of their own lives and leaders in the decisions that impact them. This is the path to transformative change."

Kim Justice
Executive Director, Office of Homeless Youth, Department of Commerce

The Mockingbird Society

TMS' mission is to transform the foster care system and end youth homelessness. TMS supports and advocates for racially equitable, healthy environments that develop young people at risk of or experiencing foster care or homelessness.[57] TMS' programming is based on state legislative advocacy cycles. Young people with lived experience of foster care and/or homelessness are supported to become powerful self-advocates.

Based on their lived experience, YYA identify challenges in the homeless and other systems and find solutions by meeting with policy experts and legislators. Their ideas are formally presented to state entities at their annual Youth Leadership Summit. Young people then refine their proposals with support and feedback and identify which asks are administrative or legislative. Then young people advocate for changes at the legislature.

The Mockingbird Family™ model is a program of TMS that provides a preventative component to youth homelessness. The program builds a constellation structure that replicates extended, multigenerational support with multiple adults and children at different ages. In the Mockingbird Family™ model, which has been scaled nationally and internationally, the hub family (one main foster family) supports six to ten other foster families. They meet once a month around food and provide support and community. A Washington State Institute on Public Policy (WSIPP) evaluation in 2017 found that youth placed in constellations had greater placement stability in their foster homes.[58] Additionally, WSIPP found greater sustainablility amongst foster families with 92% of foster families in constellations continuing to foster after two years, compared to 25% in other areas.[59]

"We listen to youth and young adults first. There are no greater experts than those that are closest to the issues."

Natalie Lente
Executive Director, The Mockingbird Society

"Uplift the voice of those impacted, give them a seat at the table, and help them create their own tables. Users need to design the things that they are going to maintain and use."

Azia Ruff
Artist & Advocate

Creative Housing Solutions

The lack of housing across WA was mentioned by service providers and YYA with lived experience in all regions of the state. Communities in WA are using creative solutions to house young people in spite of the housing crisis, including Host Homes, Supportive Leasing[60] (SL - also known as Master Leasing), and simply just building their own young adult housing units. While not representative of all YYA with lived experience, the young people that we interviewed all enthusiastically supported SL with supportive services, and Host Homes received mixed reviews.

Host Homes

Host Homes originate from the Black queer and trans Ballroom community where families are built on kinship connection. Chosen family members often live together in a House setting, supported by a House Mother.[61] In WA, a good number of communities are utilizing the Host Home model to house young people with local families stipended on a monthly basis. Host Home projects are present in: Pacific, Klickitat, Skamania, Pend Oreille, Mason, Yakima, Spokane, and Seattle/King Counties.

Rods House in Yakima has had an active Host Homes Program with the majority of young people staying 24 months. Two young people were adopted by their host families. Out of the eight young people exited from the program over the past five years, six have exited to permanent housing. While Rods House recognizes this is a small sample size, they take pride in this 75% success rate which exceeds that of shelters or resource centers. They are very intentional about their vetting to make sure young people are a good fit and aren't retraumatized by their experience.

Rods House takes on an educational role in the community, starting the conversation about Host Homes creatively by centering conversations on what housing for young people can look like to dispel the myths about young people. Rods House also named education as a challenge because Host Homes are a newer concept that provide an alternative to shelter. Further, community members mistakenly equate Host Homes to foster care. Host Homes are different than foster care because of young people's autonomy and choice in matching. Young people are able to opt out and their choice is honored.

> "One hurdle is biases within the community, these thoughts that the young people we are working with are homeless because they're addicts and they don't do anything with their lives, and so why are we going to open up our doors to this? Trying to educate our community that homeless individuals are not all drug addicts, they're still human beings and everybody deserves love, shelter, food, all those basic things that we all love."
>
> **Lori Arreguin**
> **Director of Housing, Rods House**

OWL360, Jefferson County

OWL360 is a non-profit located in Port Townsend in Jefferson County, Washington. Their mission is to offer community connections and resources in a safe and accepting environment.[62] With a background in providing cognitive behavioral programming to young people in the criminal legal system, Executive Director Kelli Parcher knew there were many young people in her community who needed safe housing. To solve this problem, OWL360 linked up with OlyCAP, a local community action agency who had been gifted a decrepit, 1888 building - Pfeiffer House. It was a win-win as OlyCAP was not interested in doing property management.

OWL360 created a SL (Supportive Lease - also known as Master Lease) with OlyCAP for Pfeiffer House. OlyCAP retains ownership of the building while OWL360 holds the SL. OWL360 refurbished the building with a complete gut and renovation. The SL gives OWL360 the ability to rent the six, one bedroom units to whomever they choose to, based on income guidelines. They sublease to young adults between the ages of 18-25 who earn below 50% of the Area Median Income (AMI). Rapid Re-Housing dollars are used to subsidize rent. But each SL can be different depending on the property owner. Some homeowners just want to make sure that their property is housing young people.

Important supportive services are also provided to residents, including behavioral health, case care, help establishing a budget, and how to improve their credit. The different housing structures provide young people with independent living skills - some properties have independent apartment units and some have shared rooms.

"We're actually using some of our ACI dollars for OWL360 to master lease a second property to expand that model. This has been the most beneficial partnership we've had since I started. We're supposed to be a Housing First organization that can get people into housing quickly. But we'll have people sit in our programs for months at a time and work with them, but it's just that final step - connecting the funding that we have with the actual physical space - that's the biggest challenge."

Sam Schroeder
Housing Grants Manager, OlyCAP

"It's low-barrier to obtain and maintain the housing. Behavioral health services and basics like that are required and that really helps with maintenance and prevention of deterioration and keeping housing."

Emily Abell
Pfeiffer House Resident and Youth Services Manager at OlyCAP

Arlington Drive Youth Campus, Pierce County

The Tacoma Housing Authority (THA) owns 3.5 acres called Arlington Drive just above downtown Tacoma. The THA built a 58 unit apartment complex to specifically house young adults experiencing homelessness, aged 18 to 24. There are 48 one bedroom units and 10 two bedroom units. THA provides an onsite property management team while the YMCA of Greater Seattle provides all social and community services in the building; funding for the project was provided by the OHY and other small grants. Each unit is assigned an area median income (AMI) and most are 30% AMI. Arlington serves young people who are literally homeless, but also has a focus on those aging out of foster care and domestic violence survivors.

Arlington merges services under one roof including 24/7 on-site case management, behavioral health services, high intensity case management, domestic violence support, and provision of various trainings, workshops, and community-building activities. Built in 2020, Arlington started to get leased up in October 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the quarantine it was challenging to actualize the full vision of the campus without being able to hold community events.

62 Young Adults   **32** Children under 7   **48%** Black or African American   **26%** LGBTQIA2S+

Since overcoming these initial challenges, Arlington provides a critical resource in Pierce County where young people are often either priced out of renting or outright discriminated against because of their age. At Arlington, young people hold the leases themselves so they are able to build up rental and credit history even while their housing is subsidized. When young people have been successfully living there for a year, paying rent and utilities, and are in good standing with the property owner, they can apply for a Choice Mobility Voucher. This voucher can be kept until the young person's income goes above the threshold. The young person can utilize the voucher anywhere in the community within three miles of Tacoma and are able to skip the THA waitlist, receiving their voucher within several months. Arlington also supports young people that are moving out with their move-in fees and they have seen deposits as high as $6,000. Property owners have been known to increase their deposits when they find out an organization is supporting the young person's move-in costs.

> "It's [Arlington] really important because there's so few things that are really earmarked for special populations now. We know that landlords are hesitant to rent to young people. They don't have credit history. It allows them access to that voucher and support services and so many of our young folks don't have or have not learned what it means to be an adult. They didn't have a support network. So really being able to give them Housing First and let them figure out the rest is really important..."
>
> **Amber Rowe Mosley**
> **Program Director III, Arlington, Y Social Impact Center**

Community-Centered Responses to YYA Homelessness

Young people we interviewed maintained that the most effective resources are born out of the communities most impacted, are tailored for the needs of the most marginalized young people, and cater to mental health needs. Yakima Neighborhood Health Services' The Space was created in response to YYA homelessness as a public and mental health crisis. Mason County HOST serves unaccompanied young people while also working to change systems.

Mason County HOST
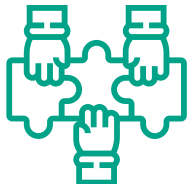
Mason County HOST provides critical assistance to unaccompanied youth and young adults experiencing homelessness and housing instability in their community, including assistance locating a Host Home, educational supports (tutoring and college planning), independent living skills, financial management training, and life planning.[63] They also actively undertake a variety of system change work.

Some examples of their system change work include:
- Created an educational scholarship opportunity specific to unhoused youth. They committed $5,000 a year over the next three years and are seeking community support for matching funds.
- Working with a local high school to increase awareness on water conservation and education because there are a lot of young people sleeping in the woods who don't have access to clean water.
- Provided summer school food for high schoolers.
- Held a juvenile justice conference focusing on re-building public-private partnerships between attorneys, guardian ad litems, social work staff, and DCYF staff that have fallen away through the pandemic.
- Partnering with the public defender and the prosecutor's office to build a pipeline for Spanish-speaking students to build proficiency in translation and eventually be hired after high school.
- Planning to create a cooperative for therapists to provide better pay so that they stay in the community.

Mason County HOST doesn't take any funds from public systems and the government in order to be most responsive to YYA, community, and staff needs.

> "Money for food, maybe even more importantly is money for things that matter to you: going out to a movie, having a cell phone. It's just such a basic thing. That's why in my program we just buy kids cell phones all the time because it's the right thing to do. I think that we're not looking at the quality of life for youth either, like when we're thinking about kids who are on the edge that go from a home that is stable to unstable, a lot of it has to do with their happiness. We're talking about looking at what matters to you to keep that from evolving into a full on sleeping on the street situation."

Kim Rinehardt
Executive Director, Mason County HOST

Yakima Neighborhood Health Services - The Space

LGBTQIA2S+ young adults with lived experience we interviewed spoke of the importance of Yakima Neighborhood Health Services' (YNHS) youth and young adult LGBTQIA2S+ resource center. They said The Space needs more resources so that it can continue expanding in a community where there are not many safe options for LGBTQIA2S+ young people experiencing homelessness. The Space was created in 2016 in response to community requests to start a youth drop-in center specifically for LGBTQIA2S+ youth. YNHS saw how The Space aligned with their values and mission as a public health provider by providing a safe space and resources for LGBTQIA2S+ YYA who were facing discrimination and alienation in the community and at home.

> "I love that I work for an organization that sees housing as healthcare, sees it as recovery."
>
> **Annette Rodriguez, Homeless Services Officer, YNHS**

When YNHS first surveyed LGBTQIA2S+ young people who visited The Space, they were troubled to see the percentage of young people who were thinking about suicide. They started to prioritize services and provided a behavioral health therapist regularly. Programming has kept evolving over the years, becoming more youth-led. More surveys showed that young people were starting to feel better and more confident. They also found that the young people at highest risk of becoming homeless were LGBTQIA2S+. Many young people who were coming into The Space were at risk or already experiencing homelessness. These young people were also looking for safety away from their families. The Space started offering a curriculum on safe relationships, how to come out to family, and they started a mentoring program to bring more youth voices to the table.

> "A year or two ago they [The Space] started this mentor program. I met my mentor through there and she was the person that helped me get housed."
>
> **QTBIPOC Young Person**

How The Space engages young people:
- With a seed grant from AWHWA's Innovation Grants program in 2022, The Space hired two young people with lived experience to be social media influencers. The influencers ran The Space's Instagram, posting about the calendar and activities. Engagement with young people grew exponentially after that. The Space still has these positions and has received funding to hire them on full time.
- Young people developed their own group for The Space called the Space Force that meets twice a month to develop the calendar, curriculum, and share concerns about staffing and the environment.
- Young people brightened up The Space in 2022 by bringing in new furniture and items to make it more comfortable.
- Young people decided it was time to update The Space's community agreements.

Young people have said now that The Space requires staff to go through mandatory training about LGBTQIA2S+ issues before starting work and is hiring more queer and trans staff "a lot [of young people] have started coming in more because they just feel more comfortable."

State-Level Data Improvements

WA has made a great deal of progress since 2016 with its sophisticated use of administrative data to provide valuable insights on unaccompanied YYA as well as the Anchor Communities' real-time data work and shared measurement strategy.

Minors Able to Provide HMIS Consent	• In 2018, unaccompanied minors over the age of 13 became able to give consent for the collection of their personally identifying information in WA.[64] • This means that homeless system providers are better able to capture data on unaccompanied minors but many minors are still missing because they are often not entered into the HMIS.
Snapshot Data	• Commerce's Snapshot Data provides the only available and most comprehensive data to track trends in unaccompanied YYA homelessness over time across multiple administrative datasets, despite its limitations.
State Data Dashboards	• Although unable to be used to accurately track trends or conduct improvement work in real-time, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) Research and Data Analysis' dashboard reports on homelessness among youth exiting systems of care. • Commerce's multiple data and performance dashboards.
Ten Counties With Real-Time BNLs	• Ten counties (more than one quarter) are tracking inflow, actively homeless, and outflow, and demographic data on unaccompanied YYA and have real-time BNLs. • These communities are committed to including unstably housed YYA across their system and to reaching a shared definition of functional zero that includes ending racial and LGBTQIA2S+ disproportionality.

Gaps and System Issues

Interviews, focus groups and surveys were conducted with over 100 service providers, stakeholders, and BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+ and pregnant/parenting young people with lived experience. This is a high-level summary of the most commonly identified system gaps and issues raised by interviewees, some of which are at crisis proportions.

Pregnant/Parenting
Lack of supportive housing options for young families that allow all types of families to stay together.

Minors
Limited services, housing options, and support for minors that are accessible legally without parental consent.

Housing Crisis
Lack of affordable low-barrier housing especially for BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, and young people with mental health and/or substance use issues.

Mental Health Crisis
Higher mental health needs and shortage of mental health practitioners and resources, especially for BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ young people and in rural communities.

System Exits
The behavioral health system is disconnected from the homeless system, causing young people with complex mental health needs to be exited into homelessness.

Unmet Basic Needs
Lack of access to transportation, food, and YYA-specific shelter and housing, especially in rural communities.

Disproportionality
BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ young people experience homelessness and housing instability disproportionately and need population-specific, culturally sensitive care.

Statewide Equity Strategy
No intentional, targeted, and measurable statewide strategy on racial and LGBTQIA2S+ equity and youth leadership.

Insufficient Funding
Government contracts are inflexible, don't increase with inflation, and don't provide enough staffing funds, resulting in low wages and programming driven by contract specifications rather than YYA needs.

Lack of Real-Time Data
Most counties aren't using accurate real-time data to improve their homeless response system and don't share an inclusive definition of homelessness.

Population-Specific Supports

Populations that were most often mentioned by service providers and young people that lack sufficient tailored supports include: BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, minors, undocumented YYA, young people with mental health and/or substance use issues, and pregnant and/or parenting young people.

Service providers and young people in all regions of the state expressed the need for more resources specifically for BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ young people. These include shelter, housing, and supportive services. BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ young people raised the challenges of accessing services through faith-based providers and providers who generally serve older adults. Young people told us about how they or other YYA they knew were the last prioritized for services, if at all, and they were afraid of disclosing their LGBTQIA2S+ identity for fear of discrimination. The unavailability of YYA-specific and population-specific services made them less likely to seek services.

The lack of housing options for young families that allow families of all types to stay together is also concerning. There is only one federally funded program for maternity care. Volunteers of America (VOA) Spokane is the only organization in the state that receives funding for this program but it is only open to mothers and children, not fathers or parents of other genders. Providers told us about there being absolutely no options for young single-father households with kids as well as the difficulties of finding housing or shelter for minors with babies.

Only thirteen counties have shelter or housing options for minors which include HOPE and Crisis Residential Centers and Transitional Living Programs. Providers around the state mentioned the difficulty of serving minors, especially older youth between 15-17 years old. For youth that can't go home, there is "simply nowhere for them to go" because they either can't be or don't want to be in foster care, they can't rent an apartment on their own, and the only other option is an emergency overnight youth shelter if a community even has one. There are not enough resources across the state to support unaccompanied minors with shelter and housing, but also, minors' ability to consent to services was named as a barrier that needs legislative intervention to solve.

"We need so many more interventions for that under 18 demographic specifically, cause it's like minors don't really have any power, but when you don't have a family or parents to be the adults in your life, you have to be that, but then you're not able to like advocate for yourself in the same way. You're not able to sign up for the food bank on your own. In Washington you have to have a work permit and you have to get through parents' sign off on stuff like that. But what about the young people whose parents just are not there?"

LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person

OUR Journey, Skagit County

OUR Journey Youth Empowerment Group is a Latine-led organization in Skagit County that supports gang-involved and marginalized young people re-integrate back into society. They provide resources, support systems, and programming that builds rapport and trusting relationships. OUR Journey's approach is trauma-informed and rooted in family and community. The young people they serve are oftentimes dealing with generational trauma and are feeling misunderstood, resorting to drugs or violence. OUR Journey provides spaces where they can simply show up and find belonging. For these young people, school or home might be unsafe, causing them to be in survival mode.

Gang-involved young people are often going from couch to couch. OUR Journey helps them connect with support systems and various resources in their community so that they can start to re-enter society. But gang-involved young people often face additional challenges of stereotypes and stigma. As soon as the words "gang involvement" are mentioned, the resources dry up. Genaro Sanchez, Executive Director and Tony Cienfuegos, Mentor, say it takes the whole community to support young people and welcome them back into society, especially when it's oftentimes the community and systems that failed them in the first place.

At the time of our interview, OUR Journey were aware of two youth in Echo Glenn Detention Center who were being held past their release date because they had nowhere to go - one youth was being held six months past release, and the other three months past. OUR Journey expressed the critical need for flexible funds to support these young people with housing downpayments and rent, so that they could leave Echo Glenn as soon as possible. They also expressed frustration at the many layers of bureaucracy, policies, and hoops that young people have to jump through to get help. Even when young people have the courage to say "yes" to support, there is no support available or given. OUR Journey wants this to change. They also want to see more funding for re-entry programs for young people which will help them get their driver's license, provide access to mental healthcare and counselling, and get them back into school. Funding for a specialist gang involvement position at Cocoon House would also fill a much-needed gap.

"They're reaching out and reaching towards something but you know all we have to offer as a community here in Skagit County is words of resources. Like there's this program, but yet there's a policy that prevents you from working with that youth. There's shelters for women to try to get out of situations but if you're 12 or 13 years old, or from the age of 15, you got nowhere to go. A lot of kids whether they're going to a program or they're finding their courage and being brave enough to ask for help and just to be told 'there's nothing we can do for you, there's nowhere that we can put you...no place we can take you.'"

Tony Cienfuegos
Mentor, OUR Journey

Housing Crisis

The lack of affordable housing in WA was the most mentioned resource gap by providers and young people in all regions of the state. Even if young people work full-time, they can rarely afford an apartment, which is reflected in the state's wage and rental data. In WA, 37% of the population are renters.[65] Using the 2022 minimum wage of $14.49, a renter earning minimum wage would only be able to afford $753 monthly rent.[66] A person earning minimum wage would need to work 72 hours per week at minimum wage to afford a 1-bedroom rental home at fair market rent.[67] This is 1.8 full-time jobs.

The situation is even worse when disaggregating by race and ethnicity. Black, Latine, and Native American workers are more likely than White workers to be employed in the service or production sectors, which have lower median wages.[68] Income inequality is the product of historical and ongoing systemic racism, including housing discrimination, unequal employment and educational opportunities, redlining, and locking these communities out of intergenerational wealth.

In late 2022, the average apartment rent statewide across all bedroom types was $1,848.[69] King and Snohomish counties had the highest apartment rental levels ($2,083 and $1,912, respectively), while Yakima and Walla Walla Counties had the lowest ($899 and $981).[70] But annual rent growth was the highest in Walla Walla County at 11.7%.[71] Statewide vacancy rates were also extremely low at 5.7%.[72] The lowest vacancy rates were in Whatcom and Skagit Counties (1.7% and 2.1%).[73]

YYA experiencing homelessness or housing instability are often the most disadvantaged when it comes to renting - they are unable to afford a rental working a minimum wage job and have next to no credit and rental history. If a young person has an eviction on their record and/or bad credit, it is almost impossible to get a property owner to rent to them. Sometimes, even if a young person has a perfect rental application and good credit, property owners won't rent to them simply because of their age.

"There's nowhere to rent. Spokane's available rental rate is usually under 2%. And then there's a lack of landlords to rent from. If you can find a place, is this going to be someone who you can trust with the fullness of your identity?"

Anne Johnson
Director of Community Care, Spectrum Center

"There's not a ton of access to affordable housing right now. There's a ton of single family units and there's a lot of apartments that are very run down or the neighborhood is really bad. There needs to be more opportunities for individuals who are being paid the average wages of Tacoma to be able to rent their own apartments. It shouldn't be the standard to have a roommate."

Elaina Darrington
ACI Coordinator, The REACH Center

A major issue that providers are facing is that even though they are Housing First, there is limited housing for young people to move into. For communities without YYA shelter, the situation is even more dire because there is no shelter for the immediate crisis and very few housing options for the longterm. While a considerable improvement from 2016, only ten counties currently have access to flexible funds through the Homelessness Prevention and Diversion Fund (HPDF). HPDF and Direct Cash Transfers (DCTs) are critical interventions that provide YYA with options when there is no shelter or limited housing. Further, flexible funds and DCTs may be the most low-barrier, cost effective, and easily scalable way to increase prevention and housing options, moving systems away from the above emergency response system model in Figure 34 and more towards the bottom model.

Figure 34: Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness

How do we go from this?

To this?

Source: A Way Home Canada

DCTs and flexible funds put more power and choice in the hands of recipients which is why they are so effective. A recent, peer-reviewed study in Vancouver, Canada found that when providing a one-time unconditional cash transfer of CAD$7,500 to each of 50 individuals experiencing homelessness, they spent fewer days homeless, increased savings, and saved the homeless system $8,172 per person per year. This resulted in a net societal savings of $672 per person per year, showing that DCTs can actually save governments and taxpayers money.[74]

"One thing I really do want to see is more Direct Cash Transfers as prevention. In larger areas people can actually put funding into housing, into already structured programs. But there's so many areas, especially in Washington State where there's none of that. And so giving cash to young people is the only feasible option really. In these tiny towns everyone is really poor, no one can really afford to be a host family. And so I think cash would be the best."

LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person

"Flexible funding has confirmed for me that we need to shift from a system that is overly focused on emergency shelter beds to one that first asks young people: 'Where can you live and what would it take to make that happen?' We do need some amount of emergency shelter, but what we see with the brick-and-mortar approach is that we spend millions of dollars for x number of beds and end up with young people on long waiting lists and no long term solution. Flexible funds/DCTs can prevent young people from ever spending one night on the streets, significantly reducing trauma and exploitation. What's not to like?"

Jim Theofelis
Founder and Executive Director, Northstar Advocates

Mental Health Crisis

Trigger warning: *Mention of suicide. If you are a young person that needs help, please see [this list](#) of mental health resources. Resources for older adults can be found [here](#). In an emergency, call 911 or 988, the new national mental health crisis hotline.*

Rates of child and adolescent mental health concerns and suicide rose steadily between 2010-2020. By 2018, suicide became the second leading cause of death for youth ages 10-24.[75] But the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing struggle for racial justice worsened this crisis in child and adolescent mental health, causing "soaring rates" of depression, anxiety, trauma, loneliness, and suicidality[76] amongst youth and young adults. This prompted Governor Inslee to sign an emergency proclamation in March of 2021 recognizing a mental and behavioral health emergency among WA's children and youth.[77] Many national organizations also saw mental health challenges so widespread that they called on policymakers at all levels of government and child and youth advocates to join in critical actions,[78] some of which are re-produced in the [recommendations section](#).

Inequities in Mental Health

Further, in November 2021, 150 in every 100,000 children 14-17 years of age in WA had lost a parent or caregiver to COVID-19.[79,80] Structural inequities including systemic racism caused more loss for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander and Indigenous families.[81] There are also inequities in mental health and access to care. Young people who lack trusted adults and experience bullying, family rejection, racism, and discrimination are at higher risk of having poor mental health.[82] In particular, LGBTQIA2S+ and disabled young people are at highest risk. As seen in Figure 35, they are two to four times more likely to consider suicide and attempt suicide than heterosexual, cisgender, and nondisabled peers.[83]

Figure 35: Mental Health Inequities Among WA 10th Graders, 2021[84]

	Bullied	Considered Suicide	Attempted Suicide
LGBQ+	23%	42%	18%
Heterosexual	11%	13%	4%
Gender Expansive	29%	52%	23%
Cisgender	12%	17%	6%
Disabled	26%	41%	19%
No Disability	9%	13%	4%
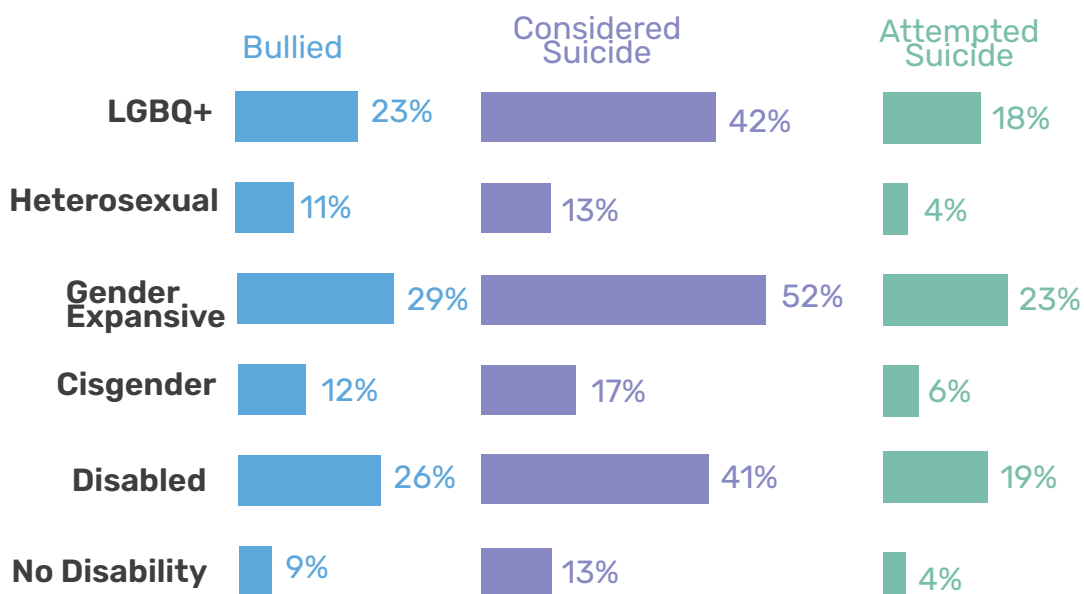
Source: Healthy Youth Survey 2021 and WA State Department of Health

Mental Health and YYA Homelessness

Next to housing, mental health was the most mentioned resource gap and need across all young people and providers we interviewed. It was rare for communities to have access to on-site mental healthcare for young people, although we did hear some examples of how this was successful and critical:

- Walla Walla: partnership between The Health Center Walla Walla, an independent school-based mental health center, and The Loft, the HOPE and Crisis Residential Center for minors.
- Jefferson County: behavioral health support provided to young people at OWL360's master leased properties.
- Snohomish and King Counties: a mental health specialist is part of the communities' Youth Engagement Teams which consists of a licensed civil attorney, housing navigator, and mental health counselor.

The OHY recognizes mental health services as a critical need and has a grant program specifically to integrate behavioral health supports onsite in youth shelters. They have awarded $3.6 million for these grants in the 2023-25 biennium.

LGBTQIA2S+ and BIPOC young people were vocal in their need for culturally responsive mental healthcare after being housed. They described the trauma of homelessness and how it impacts their lives, even after being housed. They also described the difficulties of finding care, even if they had insurance. This was reiterated by providers who said there were months-long waitlists, if there were any providers to refer to. Community members said that the pay for therapists is so low that they just end up leaving after a few months. Finding LGBTQIA2S+ and BIPOC mental health professionals was even more challenging.

Another significant challenge raised by young people, service providers, and Department of Commerce employees is working with behavioral health facilities to ensure young people are released from treatment into stable housing. We heard from a youth who was suddenly discharged from substance use treatment to an uncomfortable temporary housing situation that they didn't choose. Then they ended up in shelter. Most of the referrals to the statewide YYA Housing Response Team (YYAHRT) that works across systems to ensure stable housing for YYA exiting systems of care are for young people with intensive and complex behavioral health needs. These young people are in psychiatric hospitals or hospitals and can't return home. DCYF staff recognized that more work needs to be done to better support these young people so that DCYF is not shouldering gaps between the child welfare and the behavioral health system.

"Mental health resources– post-housing depression. Being reintegrated into regular housing can be a lot harder without mental health support. When you're homelessness, you're forced into social situations and you have friends that you meet. For people who are especially extroverted, it can be really difficult when you're moving into housing. You could be alone and you might not have a sense of community, and it can be hard to have community again when you're dealing with the trauma and the stigma of being someone who's experienced homelessness."

LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person

The Health Center Walla Walla

The Health Center in Walla Walla is a non-profit school-based health clinic that provides low-barrier, free mental health services to students within schools. There are 73 school-based clinics in WA but only three are independent of the government - two are tribal and the other is the Health Center. This means that the Health Center doesn't get constant state funding. While the Health Center prefers to be unaffiliated with the government to avoid their interference, this comes with financial challenges. "Every cent has to be fundraised," said Executive Director, Norma Hernández. Seven weeks into the 2023 school year and they are already at capacity with no more room to take any more students. Students' mental health needs far surpass the availability of therapists. In 2022-2023, the Health Center served almost 200 students experiencing housing instability.

In Walla Walla School District when school staff find out a student is experiencing homelessness, they are connected with the Health Center. Norma says that homelessness has deep physical and mental impacts on young people. Anxiety and depression are common. When teenagers get depressed they tend to stop sleeping which adds to mental and physical health issues. They aren't able to eat well and it's difficult to do homework.

While therapy isn't a solution to homelessness it does provide students with tools to help their depression and anxiety and the strain on their mental and physical health. The Health Center needs more sustained financial support from state entities that also allows them to continue their flexible and community-centered approach.

"Homelessness is a form of trauma, like it's very traumatizing. It's very hard and it's something that you do have to recover from. It's something that you can't just let go of even if you get stable housing afterwards. But as a Black queer person finding therapy is so hard.

QTBIPOC Young Person

"It's especially difficult for LGBTQIA+ students because they have less alternative options for homes. They don't have family members. They don't have parents of the friends who might let them stay at their house for a while. They don't get much community support. Migrant students and families come and then they want to try to stay after the season is over and their kids might end up couchsurfing or living in their cars. They have less support systems because of their language barrier and they are more often homeless with families, whereas our LGBTQIA+ students are generally homeless alone."

Norma Hernández
Executive Director, The Health Center Walla Walla

Unmet Basic Needs

BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+ and pregnant/parenting young people told us that it was hard to meet their basic needs, especially in isolated rural communities. The most common unmet basic needs were: housing, lack of access to transportation, healthcare, food, hygiene services, and YYA-specific shelter.

The lack of transportation was particularly acute in rural areas with no access to ride sharing services or Lime Bike and other similar scooter or bike sharing services. These communities were at a loss how to solve this problem beyond buying a van and having a staff person drive young people around, which isn't feasible because of cost and practicality. Lack of transportation contributed to homelessness because YYA weren't able to afford housing close to work, which forced them to couchsurf. Young people told us that providers expected them to have access to transportation to get to their appointments, even as minors. Sometimes young people were placed in stable housing opportunities that were far from public transportation or job opportunities. They also expressed the need for free or reduced transportation options that could be utilized by YYA in housing crises.

Young people living in isolated rural areas without transportation also could not access food. Further, young people relied on school for food, so when school was out, they went hungry. Young people also named food resources as an important aftercare resource for after a young person is housed.

Hygiene resources such as public toilets and laundry facilities are also a need. YYA expressed how difficult it was while unhoused to tend to basic needs without the ability to shower or do laundry.

Currently only fourteen counties have youth shelters (either HOPE or Crisis Residential Centers or Transitional Living Programs) and six have young adult shelters. YYA and providers want to see all counties with access to shelter or creative alternatives such as flexible funds, Direct Cash Transfers, and Host Homes.

"One of the reasons that I had to start couchsurfing was because I had a job, but I lived so far out of town that if I went back to my mom's house I couldn't go to work. And so I would just stay at people's houses who lived in town a lot of the time."

LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person

"It's not all too great that when you are like 14 years old, homeless, and without a legal guardian, the people supposed to help you expect you to act like an adult with proper means of transportation."

QTBIPOC Young Person

Statewide Equity Strategy

In the 2016 landscape scan it was identified that WA needed a coherent statewide equity strategy to end unaccompanied YYA homelessness. Stakeholders we interviewed said that the creation of the OHY itself was also an important part of a statewide equity strategy because of its role uplifting YYA voice and leadership, and setting statewide priorities that would further any equity agenda.

While there is no measurable statewide equity strategy, the OHY brought together young people with lived experience, community-based organizations, and government partners to produce the 2021 *Shifting Services and Systems to Prevent Youth Housing Instability* Strategic Plan by the Steering Committee on Prevention of Youth Homelessness. Led by mostly BIPOC YYA with lived experience, and caregivers from urban, rural, and Tribal areas, this strategic plan made prevention recommendations that centered on equity and mirrored many of the strategies outlined in this report.

Service providers and young people want any statewide equity strategy to:
- Create powerful, paid leadership positions for young people, especially BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, disabled, and pregnant/parenting young people with lived experience.
- Prioritize YYA-led solutions such as flexible funds and Direct Cash Transfers.
- Adopt targeted universalism.
- Create measurable equity goals and track progress with real-time data.
- Shift power toward and sustainably fund organizations led by and serving primarily BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ young people.
- Start prevention efforts further upstream at school and with families.
- Uplift and center the most marginalized young people and those at the intersections of multiple identities, including young adult sex workers, gang-involved, incarcerated/formerly incarcerated, undocumented, non-English speaking, disabled, pregnant/parenting YYA, and QTBIPOC young people.
- Align on an inclusive definition of homelessness that includes unsafely, unstably housed, couchsurfing, and/or doubled up YYA.
- Address systemic inequities such as the racial wealth gap, intergenerational poverty, and institutional racism, ableism, adultism, and queer/transphobia.

> "We haven't even started watering the plant of equity, we haven't even planted the seed of equity."
>
> **Kim Rinehardt**
> **Executive Director, Mason County HOST**

> "[We should] expand the definition of homelessness to include youth who are often criminalized and sent through the school to prison pipeline, and students and youth who often have to engage with street economies and other methods of survival that often lead to homelessness and/or incarceration. I'd love to see more funding going back to the good people who are engaged in that work and doing sustainable data collection around that."
>
> **QTBIPOC Young Person**

Targeted Universalism

Service providers, stakeholders and young people recommended that the OHY and the DCYF adopt targeted universalism. Stemming from john powell's research, unlike strategies based on providing the same supports to all groups, the premise of targeted universalism is that equity can be achieved by transforming the system to provide greater supports and opportunities to the groups with the worst outcomes.[85] By focusing on the most marginalized, we make systems better for everyone.

Targeted universalism has been adopted by Seattle Public Schools (SPS) to intentionally focus on African American boys and teens. SPS was the first school district in WA and is one of few in the whole country to adopt this approach.

Developing targeted universalism policies consists of a five-step process:[86]

Step 1: Establish a universal goal.
Step 2: Assess general population performance relative to the universal goal.
Step 3: Identify groups and places that are performing differently with respect to the goal and disaggregate them.
Step 4: Assess and understand the structures that support or impede each group or community from achieving the universal goal.
Step 5: Develop and implement targeted strategies for each group to reach the universal goal.

The SPS Office of African American Male Achievement (AAMA) was created to be a driver of systemic change by reconstructing school systems to meet the unique needs of Black boys and teens and attend to their social, emotional, and educational needs.[87] This approach was modeled on the Oakland Unified School District's AAMA, created in 2010, which was the first dedicated office designed specifically to address the needs of African American male students in the country.[88] The Oakland AAMA was created in response to longstanding data that showed poorer academic performance among the district's African American male students, including high rates of chronic absence, persistently lower performance on standardized tests, and harsher school discipline.[89] Actions taken by the Oakland AAMA were two pronged: working at the systems level to transform adults, while directly serving African American male students at school.[90]

While SPS is in the beginning stages of implementing their AAMA, this model could be a useful prototype for the OHY and the DCYF to respond to disparities outlined by the data in this report. Anchor Communities already follow a targeted universalism approach by using disaggregated data to set goals and track outcomes across BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ populations. The ACI's definition of ending homelessness (functional zero) involves ending racial and LGBTQIA2S+ disproportionality. Similarly, the OHY's program performance data is disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, making them well positioned to adopt the ACI's definition of functional zero, which could provide a measurable equity framework for the whole state.

> "The notion that you need to be a law-abiding citizen to deserve the right to live or the right to support is egregious."
>
> **Isaac Sanders**
> **PhD Student, University of Washington**

Insufficient and Inflexible Funding

An issue mentioned by all YYA that we interviewed, whether they were currently or previously receiving services was the lack of aftercare support and how staff turnover negatively affected the quality of services. YYA recognize that high turnover and burnout is likely due to low pay and overwork. YYA are supportive of raising wages to more adequately reflect the difficulty and importance of front-line work. They also want to see more BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, and people with lived experience hired into direct service roles and paid well. Further, lived experience should be compensated as a professional skill just like speaking a second language.

Almost all the service providers we interviewed also said that front-line workers need to be paid more. A barrier to this is that grants don't increase with inflation or the cost of living and that 10-15% in administrative costs aren't enough to pay front-line workers livable wages. A provider told us that they are still receiving the same funding amount for a federal contract that started 40 years ago.

A recent study by the University of Washington showed that non-profit human service workers are paid 37% less than in non-care industries.[91] Human services work is generally seen as "women's work" which means it is valued less economically. Further, BIPOC workers are over-represented in the lowest-paid human services jobs, including front-line care work.[92] The OHY has successfully lobbied for the last two years to increase staffing dollars, but this is unsustainable. There should be built-in mechanisms in funding contracts that adjust for cost of living and inflation over time. All funders across government and philanthropy need to escalate their funding and pay more for staffing so that providers aren't constrained by the requirements of particular funding sources when paying staff.

Beyond pay, affordable healthcare and other benefits are important to front-line workers. Front-line workers are sometimes as close to homelessness as their clients, while also experiencing vicarious trauma. We heard that staff can't afford the co-pay for their own mental healthcare. At a bare minimum, staff should have affordable healthcare, but ideally they should be receiving free mental healthcare services due to the intensity of their work.

"It's not a very lucrative position and it's also a position that requires you to operate out of a lot of different roles that potentially weren't the list of roles that you had signed up for when you were hired. For myself personally I can't afford a co-pay to go get mental health treatment. And very recently I was doing everything for the entire county of folks 12-24. A lot of the things it'd take to solve these issues are very out of line with the values of our society."

Service Provider

Lack of Real-Time Data

Currently only Anchor Communities (10 counties out of 39) have real-time By-Name Lists (BNLs) with an expansive definition of homelessness that includes unstably and/or unsafely housed YYA. Seattle/King County is building one with support from private philanthropy and Snohomish County uses a list of YYA in Coordinated Entry housing. While Anchor Communities work towards knowing every unaccompanied YYA by name in their community, they are also able to track inflow, actively homeless, and outflow numbers on a monthly basis. Some Anchor Communities like Walla Walla are using their data weekly. The Department of Commerce and non-Anchor Communities rely on yearly or six-monthly counts such as the Point in Time and Snapshot Data to inform funding and decision-making.

But real-time data isn't even just about the data. It's about the culture shift. Anchor Communities like Thurston County say that their BNL helped organize the community around a shared goal. Thurston was able to build accountability across providers and systems. As a result, Anchor Communities have stronger cross-system partnerships and referral processes. BNLs build a whole-community mentality. Instead of young people being part of one program, the whole system takes accountability. This is especially the case when communities case conference their BNL. They are able to test system improvements and immediately see and assess the impact.

The major challenge with a real-time BNL is the capacity it takes to build and maintain. As BNLs are not mandated by the federal or state government, communities don't receive funding to implement one. Communities often don't have the technical skills necessary to build the data tools required to transform HMIS data into a BNL. They also need to improve outreach efforts to ensure they are identifying all unaccompanied young people. Initial issues with setting up BNLs have been somewhat alleviated for Balance of State (BoS) communities because they have access to a standardized HMIS report. But there is little to no data capacity support provided to Anchor Communities and no capacity or support provided to non-Anchor Communities in the BoS to build real-time data systems.

"In all my time in this community [30 years], the Anchor Community Initative has been the first time in this community that we've actually taken the youth group out of all the other system groups and just solely focused on how to make it better than it is today. And do that with humility. Like let's look at what we're not doing well and do better."

Derek Harris
Chief Executive Officer, Community Youth Services

"Coordinated Entry completely changed in Thurston County. When I started we had three providers that each was entering and exiting on the same day. Service providers wondered 'why would we change the way we're doing this? We've done this for years,' to 'why would we not change to this new way of doing it that's going to let us have better data quality?' It went from 'why' to 'of course.'"

Arielle Benson
Homeless Program Specialist, Thurston County

Consensual Sex Work is Criminalized

Decriminalizing sex work focuses on adult consensual sex work, including the removal of criminal precedents to arrest and criminal penalties for adults doing any consensual sex work, including prostitution. Minors under 18 are considered trafficked and are not involved in consensual sex work. In WA, with the passage of HB 1775 in 2020, as of January 1, 2024, no one under 18 can be charged with prostitution.[93]

New Zealand is the only country in the world that has decriminalized sex work. Prominent organizations that support decriminalization include the ACLU, the World Health Organization, the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and many more.[94]

Young people with lived experience involved in the ACI are vocal in their advocacy to decriminalize sex work in WA. Young adults experiencing homelessness and housing instability often experience barriers to employment and may participate in sex work: webcamming, selling pictures, in person work that isn't prostitution, or full-service sex work. It can be a means to make income or to have a place to stay. Young adults in survival mode may not identify as sex workers or identify their actions as sex work.

Decriminalization is beneficial to young adults who are housing unstable or homeless. These young adults are more susceptible to violence and exploitation, especially if they are in the sex trade. If a young adult is working within a criminalized sector like sex work, is facing exploitation, and wants to leave, there may be no way out for fear of self-incrimination. BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ young adults are disproportionately criminalized. Between 2019 and 2022, eleven young adults aged 19-24 were convicted of felony Promoting Prostitution[95] in WA. All but one were African American. Their sentences were 2.5 years on average, ranging from 0 to 4.5 years.[96] Data on misdemeanor prostitution wasn't available.

An alternative to decriminalization is the Nordic model, which criminalizes third parties or clients. Some local WA organizations support the Equality Model which is similar to the Nordic Model but also provides exit services. However, it is considered incremental change by many in the decriminalization movement. Exploitation in the sex industry often happens because the third party or client is holding capital or housing, creating a power imbalance. The third party or client has these resources while the sex worker or exploited person doesn't. When they are criminalized and the sex worker isn't, they can charge more as a manager or drive prices down as a client. This reduces sex workers' negotiating power and makes them less able to screen their clients, creating an unsafe environment.

> "When you asymmetrically criminalize you increase that power differential because then the client and third parties end up charging more or charging more of a cut if they're a manager, or driving your prices down as a customer because they're the ones who are being criminalized and not you. So they get to call the shots even more. It [the Nordic Model] reduces negotiating power and often leads to folks taking on more unsafe appointments because they're unable to screen."

Melodie Garcia
Co-Director, New Moon Network

Recommendations

Recommendations were gathered from extensive interviews and connections with over 100 BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, and pregnant/parenting young people with lived experience, service providers, and stakeholders around the state. Recommendations from young people are marked with an asterisk and are shown first. Most of the recommendations came from young people because we uplifted their ideas first and foremost.

Recommendations were included without assessments of feasibility and cost because we wanted to follow YYA's lead in dreaming big. Our goal is to provide a roadmap for how governments at all levels, philanthropy, communities, young people with lived experience, and service providers can work together to prevent and end unaccompanied YYA homelessness.

We also recognize that these recommendations exist against a backdrop of adultism, white supremacy, anti-Blackness, genocide, and land theft against Indigenous Peoples, ableism, and queer/transphobia. All of which we must also be working to change if we expect to end unaccompanied YYA homelessness.

Recommendations Legend:

Funding Solution

Primary need is funding. Policies and practices are in place, but additional resources are needed to expand capacity.

Practice Solution

Requires a change in the way services are delivered or the way agencies operate. Does not require a change in law.

Policy Solution

Requires a change in law.

Legislative Directive

Does not require a change in law, but legislative directive may be needed to ensure implementation.

> "Many youth exiting or aging out of foster care end up homeless with little life skills and few social connections to get the support they need. This lack of community compounded by the stigmatization of foster youth and people experiencing homelessness makes it very difficult for many others, including myself at one point, to get the resources and safety we need due to a system that has failed us."
>
> **LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person**

Recommendations Summary

1. **Youth-led and Population-specific Resources:** Invest in youth-led, LGBTQIA2S+ and BIPOC resources, prevention strategies, and programming.*

2. **Individualized Aftercare:** Provide aftercare that tapers off in alignment with individual needs after young people are housed, especially for BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+, offering culturally responsive mental healthcare.*

3. **Meaningful Careers for Young People:** Create a variety of employment and career options in positions of power for young people with lived experience to lead the movement to prevent and YYA homelessness.*

4. **Affordable Housing and Basic Needs:** Increase availability of affordable housing, transportation, food, and shelter; address poverty and ensure access to basic needs.*

5. **Increase Services for Minors:** Fill critical service gaps for unaccompanied minors.*

6. **More Mental Health Resources:** Address the mental health crisis by providing more financial resources generally and specifically for peer counseling and mentoring programs.*

7. **Increase Supportive Leases and Improve Host Homes:** Scale creative housing solutions such as Supportive Leasing (also known as Master Leasing) and continue improving on the Host Homes model to create more accessible housing options.*

8. **Improve Relationships with Schools and Colleges:** Continue to improve service connections between schools, colleges, and the homeless system as the first point of contact for unaccompanied students.*

9. **Scale Proven Prevention Programs:** Bring proven prevention initiatives such as the Homelessness Prevention and Diversion Fund (HPDF), the Youth Engagement Team (YET), InREACH, and Direct Cash Transfers (DCT) to all communities in the state.*

10. **Increase Pay for Front-Line Workers:** All funders should provide more flexible grants that increase over time with more staffing dollars, so that providers can pay front-line workers a living wage.*

11. **Strengthen Public Systems' Capacity to Prevent Homelessness:** Expand efforts to ensure young people exiting child welfare, inpatient behavioral health, and criminal legal systems are stably housed* and housing outcomes are measurable in real-time.

12. **Statewide Equity Strategy:** Organizations and governments with a mission to end YYA homelessness should unite their approaches and collaborate on a measurable statewide equity strategy.

13. **Invest in Real-Time Data:** Streamline data collection and reporting statewide to prioritize real-time data and adequately resource communities to establish quality By-Name Lists.

1. Invest in youth-led, LGBTQIA2S+ and BIPOC resources, prevention strategies, and programming.*

a. Re-design government and private funding processes to prioritize smaller BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ led organizations.*

b. Ensure all service providers are accountable for upholding policies and practices that affirm the needs and fundamental rights of LGBTQIA2S+ and BIPOC young people.*

c. Provide seed funding to create and sustain BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ led organizations, services, and programming that focus on the YYA popuation and family reconciliation.*

d. Increase resources for undocumented youth and their families, including culturally relevant outreach, access to college and career readiness, legal aid, and translation services.*

e. Resource homelessness systems for sustainability, particularly peer support programs, street outreach, housing navigation and data capacity.*

f. Fund more family strengthening reconciliation services that are culturally responsive to the unique needs of BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ young people and exist outside of punitive systems. This could include providing peer support groups for parents of BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ young people led by trained professionals.*

g. Explore the decriminalization of consensual sex work as a young adult-led strategy for preventing and ending YYA homelessness by engaging with young adults with lived experience and the broader community.*

h. Create transitional housing beds specifically for LGBTQIA2S+ young people.*

> "We are going to present to the Core Team to make full-time positions for a peer support program which provides peer support to young people navigating the system. To make sure they don't get lost because a lot of times you start at one organization, they send you somewhere else, but they don't have the resource they once had. Peer support would help you get from place to place so you don't get lost in the system, help you get to appointments if you need it, and provide advocacy and support in appointments."
>
> **Awdy Love**
> **Yakima Youth Advisory Council Member**
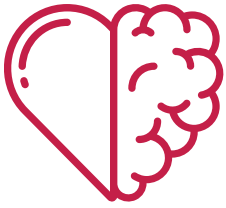
2. Provide aftercare that tapers off in alignment with individual needs after young people are housed, especially BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ culturally responsive mental healthcare.*

a. Suggested aftercare support includes:*

   i. Mentoring and peer support;*

   ii. Independent living skills and classes on finances, budgeting, and home ownership;*

   iii. Trauma-informed, culturally responsive mental healthcare;*

   iv. Property owner-tenant rights education;*

   v. Food resources;*

   vi. Child care;*

   vii. Legal support;*

   viii. Information on education options*; and

   ix. Optional case management.*

b. Create service hubs in centralized locations where YYA can access the services mentioned above in one place. Ensure these are sufficiently advertised.*

> "If there was just somebody or something that would hold their hand and help guide them, something or somebody that would just give them hope, maybe they would still be alive."
>
> **BIPOC Young Person**

> "Financial literacy would also help, even just having lessons so you can pay your bills and do taxes. I still don't fully know how to do a lot of financial literacy things."
>
> **LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person**

> "Having a case manager would really help and being able to meet with one maybe once a week. [Help with] getting into therapy, navigating my school enrollment and getting to places. Oh my gosh, getting to places is really hard. So like rides would be really, really helpful."
>
> **LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person**
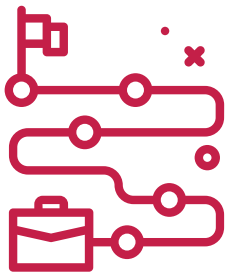
3. Create a variety of employment and career options for young people with lived experience in positions of power to lead the movement to prevent and end youth and young adult homelessness.*

a. Provide a range of employment opportunities in positions of power for young people with lived experience and those actively experiencing homelessness, from casual stipended work to ongoing full-time roles.*

b. Create more employment and career development pathways for YYA, including paid internships in different sectors, training programs, and apprenticeships.*

c. Build strong relationships with private sector industries to create and increase entry-level positions in high growth industries across the state.*[97]

d. State agencies and organizations should remove barriers to hiring young people with lived experience, such as degree requirements, and include lived experience to count towards years of experience.*

e. Hire more YYA with lived experience into full time, paid, ongoing, benefited roles with career growth and educational possibilities.*

f. Compensate front-line workers with lived experience for their expertise, similar to providing a bonus to staff who can speak a second language.*

"If I wasn't on the youth advisory board (YAB) I would have been homeless multiple times over. Getting young people involved in YABs is really big and expanding access to those and expanding the power of those young people is huge. More remote work opportunities for young people too that are more entry level."

LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person

"I think there should be a mix [of paid roles] because up until now I've been a high school student and then a college student so I wouldn't have had time for full-time stuff, but I was able to support myself through college and high school because I had those stipended positions. Having those stipended positions for people who are students or have other part-time jobs or other commitments is really important, but also having those full-time positions for when they move on from that or for people who are ready for that from the get go."

LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person
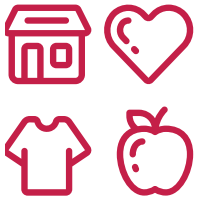
4. Increase availability of housing, transportation, food, and shelter, address intergenerational poverty and the racial wealth gap, and ensure access to basic needs.*

a. Use school buses during the summer to bring isolated folks into town and to drop-in centers.*

b. Address transportation gaps in rural areas by creating community shuttle services.*

c. Provide funds for the laundromat and gym memberships while young people are unhoused and/or waiting for housing so that they can do their laundry and take showers.*

d. Provide free public transportation for young people aged 12-24 statewide.*

e. Increase the availability of youth and young-adult focused shelters and extreme weather shelters, especially in rural communities.*

f. Each county should have at least one young adult-specific shelter (that allows pets) paired with flexible funds, diversion, and/or Direct Cash Transfers.*

g. Prioritize funding housing programs for pregnant/parenting young people that allow for all kinds of families to be housed together.

h. City and County governments should adequately fund safe parking programs that provide a safe place for people to sleep in their vehicles, as well as basic amenities.

i. Require modification to local zoning laws across the state in urban, rural, and sub-urban areas to increase different high density housing options.[98]

j. Ensure new developments (for- or nonprofit) have 15-20% reserved for low-income (80% Area Median Income -AMI) people under 24 years or families. And 5-10% of the set aside is reserved for those with 30% AMI.[99]

k. Increase the state minimum wage to align with the cost of housing.

l. Implement recommendations from the 10-Year Plan to Dismantle Poverty in WA to undo structural racism, improve equitable education, income growth, and wealth-building opportunities, make the cost-of-living more affordable, and strengthen health supports.

> "In a lot of the smaller areas there just is no public transportation and like the more impoverished you are the more far away from town that you are."
>
> **LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person**

> "I wish there were like either free or reduced emergency transportation services. I don't know how you're expected to get around to get to the places that you need to go because you probably don't have a car and you rely solely on public transportation which has huge limitations especially in less urban parts of the state."
>
> **LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person**
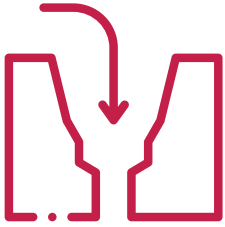
5. Fill critical service gaps for unaccompanied minors.*

a. Create more long term housing options for minors and pregnant and parenting minors by co-designing solutions with youth.*

b. Ensure DCTs and flexible funds are available for minors.*

c. Explore expansion of Host Homes for minors in rural communities with thorough trauma-informed training, infrastructure, and supports for hosts and young people.*

d. Allow minors to consent to same-day short-term housing placements when a legal guardian is not available or refuses to consent to an arrangement outside of their home.* This includes shelter, transitional living, friends or family members, as long as safety assessments are conducted.*

e. Expand access to direct legal services embedded in communities for unaccompanied minors experiencing homelessness or housing instability, including emancipation.*

f. Provide training and create a resource guide for service providers to support emancipated minors.*

g. Establish governmental capacity through the OHY to lead system coordination for unaccompanied minors by creating regional offices across the state.[100]

> "If we could expand access to emancipation...I was no longer stuck in [city] and I was able to move to [bigger city] and sign a lease on a bedroom and I got a job...I feel like a lot of these young people are already acting as adults, they should have legal access to sign for themselves. But also we need to train service providers on how to deal with these young people...I want to increase accessibility to emancipation but also make sure that service providers don't leave those young people in the dust because you're in that gray area between child and adult."
>
> **LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person**

> "They [minors] are not going into foster care, they don't want to be in foster care, can't rent an apartment, there's no place for them to be that's not an emergency overnight youth shelter."
>
> **Bridget Cannon**
> **Senior Vice President of Shelter Services, Volunteers of America Spokane**

6. Address the mental health crisis by providing more financial resources generally and specifically for peer counseling and mentoring programs.*

a. Provide more mental health financial resources for services providers to provide in-house care, especially for BIPOC-focused and queer and trans affirming care.*

b. Address the overall lack of mental health professionals by funding peer counseling programs where young people can be trained to provide support to their peers.*

c. Create more housing options for young people with high mental health needs and substance users.*

d. Provide a mixture of life skills, mindfulness, and spiritual wellness programming led by BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ practitioners that center Indigenous and cultural ways of healing.*

e. Create healing spaces for front-line service workers to process secondary trauma and ensure they are paid enough to afford their own mental health treatment.*

f. Make mobile mental health services available statewide.*

g. Increase funding for school-based mental healthcare supports.[101]

h. Strengthen efforts to reduce the risk of suicide through increasing resources for prevention programs in schools, primary care, and community settings.[102]

i. Implement strategies to address long standing workforce challenges in child and adolescent mental health, including: creating innovative training programs, providing loan repayment, and recruiting underrepresented populations.[103]

> "I just called every single place [mental health provider] and a lot of them were like 'we're not taking new clients right now' or a lot of them were calling me back and they were like 'well, we don't cover your insurance and so you'll have to pay this amount." And it's like dude I just really need some help with this. It was so hard trying to find a place and I still haven't. I feel like more resources for mental health support [are needed]."
>
> **LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person**

> "Right now we're seeing tons of youth asking for mental health services, especially queer affirming mental healthcare. Between wait lists and cost, it's really hard to connect young people to that service."
>
> **Eve Smason-Marcus**
> **Sr. Director of Advocacy and Community Action, Northwest Youth Services**

7. Scale creative housing solutions such as Supportive Leasing (also known as Master Leasing) and continue improving on the Host Homes model to create more accessible housing options.*

a. Establish salaried residential advisor positions to support young people in Supportive Leased (SL) properties.*

b. Expand on the WA Healthcare Authority's Global Leasing Handbook by creating a cross-community learning cohort in collaboration with OWL360 (a non-profit with expertise in SL) and The Mockingbird Society to make YYA-specific start-up information more accessible to communities across the state.

c. Ensure that communities know that various OHY funding sources can be used by SL organizations to help pay for property damage, legal fees, relocation, and unpaid rent.

d. Fund seed grants for nonprofits to start SL projects in more communities. These seed grants can include money for: property management, renovations, furnishings, and rental assistance dollars.

e. Retain an attorney to provide guidance on SL, contracts, and property owner-tenant issues.

f. Provide young people with more choice and agency regarding their Host Home placement and ensure there are regular check-ins with young people and hosts.*

g. Improve vetting and training of Host Home hosts.*

h. Recruit more LGBTQIA2S+ and BIPOC hosts to provide more culturally responsive housing options to these populations.*

i. Invest in a community-led oversight body to work in partnership with YYA with lived experience to standardize Host Home processes, conduct community education, and hold responsibility for scaling the model once improvements have been made.*

Scaling Supportive Leasing and the SL recommendations provided here are supported by The Mockingbird Society's (TMS) SL Working Group. TMS is a key partner of OHY and AWHWA.

> "Pfeiffer House does not require background or credit checks, or rental history and works patiently with partners/providers, like OlyCAP, to get rent paid/subsidized. It is a very low-barrier program for young people. Most rentals by owners are more critical and deny young people even if they have rental history and enough money to pay rent on their own. Sometimes even using a pet or other excuse to deny. Ultimately young people get denied based on their age."
>
> **Emily Abell**
> **Pfeiffer House Resident and Youth Services Manager at OlyCAP**

> "I feel like Host Homes and Rapid Re-Housing are good programs if the organizations are doing it correctly but otherwise it can be really harmful."
>
> **LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person**
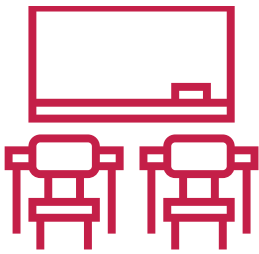
8. Continue to improve service connections between schools, colleges, and the homeless system as the first point of contact for unaccompanied students.*

a. Provide more school programming during the summer break.*

b. Provide BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ college students more support with navigating the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) application process.*

c. Offer more housing grants and no-interest student loans for QTBIPOC young people.*

d. Partner with colleges to identify and house YYA who want to go to college in dormitories.*

e. Proactively complete Housing Choice Voucher applications with young people finishing high school who are unsure of their living situations after graduation.

f. Implement the Geelong Model (Upstream) to identify at-risk K-12 students through data and provide early interventions.

g. All school districts should implement Building Changes' recommendations[104] for reducing school discipline rates as an equity issue.

h. Ensure that all McKinney-Vento liaisons in Anchor Community school districts are trained to access flexible fund projects.

i. Continue to strengthen referral connections between schools and the homelessness system and explore ways to share housing-related data between systems, building on in-roads created by Snohomish and Spokane counties.

> "The emphasis now is on working with young people that have gone unidentified...Who's the first one to identify homeless students or young people? It's schools. If we can get them while they're still in school... whether it's families or individually to try and get them stabilized. That's the prevention piece."
>
> **Bridget Cannon**
> **Senior Vice President of Shelter Services, Volunteers of America Spokane**

> "During the summer times it was really hard because during the school year we got free breakfast and lunch from school. We were able to be fed that way, but during the summer we didn't have access to food and there were times that I would walk three hours to get to Safeway so that I could use the money I had saved on food or to go to the food bank."
>
> **LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person**
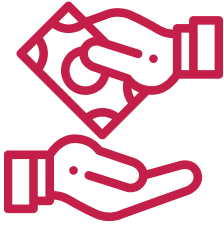
9. Bring proven prevention initiatives such as the Homeless Prevention and Diversion Fund (HPDF), the Youth Engagement Team (YET), InREACH, and Direct Cash Transfers (DCT) to all communities in the state.*

a. Make low-barrier diversion flexible funds available in all counties through the Homelessness Prevention and Diversion Fund (HPDF).*

b. Create DCT programming specially tailored toward young people experiencing highest rates of homelessness: BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, pregnant/parenting, and disabled young people, especially in rural areas.*

c. Expand funding to scale the Youth Engagement Team model across the state and ensure it has the following core components:[105]

   i. Access to flexible funding to support any chosen living situation, including living with friends and family;

   ii. Rental assistance funds for emancipated minors and for youth reunified with family;

   iii. Legal services directly accessible to youth;

   iv. Voluntary therapeutic services; and

   v. Voluntary case management services.

d. Scale the Spokane InREACH model across the state to ensure strong partnerships and prevention efforts between all systems of care, schools, and the homelessness system.

> "Anything that gets more flexible resources in the hands of young people is the solution. But there's never enough - being able to increase that spending would help and we need to convince lawmakers that it's worth it."
>
> **Sam Martin**
> **Chief Executive Officer, SDMC**

> "Direct Cash Transfers as prevention (DCT-P) is providing more money specifically for that prevention piece. That's really important in areas where there are no Rapid Re-Housing programs to fund, where there is no transitional housing. Prevention is one of the main ways to get those numbers down and hopefully get us to functional zero."
>
> **Milo Edwards**
> **DCT-P Manager, Point Source Youth**

10. All funders should provide more flexible grants that increase over time with more staffing dollars, so that providers can pay front-line workers a living wage.*

a. Increase the salaries of front-line service workers.*

b. Hire more BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ frontline staff with lived experience, pay them a living wage, and provide professional development resources.*

c. All funders should specify a minimum wage and minimum staffing mandate for the human services sector.

d. All funders should escalate their grants year on year to account for cost of living and inflation increases.

e. Get creative with benefits for front-line service workers eg. free therapy, gym memberships, extra mental health days, a coffee cart.*

f. All funders must redesign their funding processes to provide more unencumbered, flexible dollars, and bump up available dollars for staffing. Providing 10-15% in administrative costs is not enough. Requiring funding matches is also a barrier.

g. Service providers should flatten their hierarchies to decrease the number of director-level positions and increase the number of front-line service workers.

> "There's this other resource center for young people but it's very limited. They usually only have one case manager at a time because case managers tend to quit a lot. In my city specifically we are overloaded with homeless people so there's not a lot of support and many case managers get burnt out."
>
> **QTBIPOC Young Person**

> "Young people continuously express their desire for shared identity with their service providers...Young case workers need to see there's a viable pathway to self-sufficiency within the industry. It's not enough to just invoke passion in a person...but then we pay them at a rate where they're eligible for services...And then also we need to have a realistic talk about a livable wage income."
>
> **Rodney Robinson**
> **Director, Campaign to End and Prevent YYA Homelessness in Pierce County**

> "Between restrictions of funding and reporting requirements, it's so much time and work that we could be spending doing direct service."
>
> **Eve Smason-Marcus**
> **Sr. Director of Advocacy and Community Action, Northwest Youth Services**

11. Expand efforts to ensure young people exiting child welfare, inpatient behavioral health, and criminal legal systems are stably housed* and housing outcomes are measurable in real-time.

a. Recognize the different shapes and forms of kinship care, chosen family, and community as valid housing placements.*

b. Ensure the homeless system and behavioral health providers are creating strong referral processes to make sure no young people are falling through the cracks when discharged from behavioral health facilities.*

c. Establish housing options for unaccompanied young people being released from inpatient behavioral health services, providing long-term housing planning and other programming to support connection with family and community.*

d. Develop data infrastructure and an accompanying equity-focused measurement strategy to track housing outcomes of HB 1905 programming more effectively.

e. DCYF should adopt a targeted universalism approach to center the needs of the most marginalized young people and use real-time, disaggregated data to improve outcomes.

f. Fund BIPOC-led and serving organizations to provide certified peer counselors, credible messengers, and staff with lived experience to work with young people being released from the criminal legal system.

g. Provide more support for youth with complex behavioral health needs involved in the child welfare system, especially young people with developmental disabilities.

h. Expand access to short-stay stabilization and respite options to provide temporary housing outside of emergency rooms for YYA at risk of homelessness and also experiencing other medical and/or behavioral health issues.

i. Young people exiting the child welfare system need more financial support much earlier, beyond what is provided through Extended Foster Care (EFC).

"I just got out of treatment...and so I've been having to set literally everything up because the treatment I went to, the way they graduated me, they didn't help me get into anything...The whole facility caught COVID so they had to send everyone home but I didn't have anywhere to go so they had to send me to go live with a teacher in [city name]...This teacher didn't want me to live with them. It was like I have nothing, I wasn't prepared. Like how do you know I'm not gonna relapse?"

LGBTQIA2S+ Youth

12. Organizations with a mission to end YYA homelessness should unite their approaches and collaborate on a measurable statewide equity strategy.

a. Secure political and financial buy-in from mayors and city/county leaders for ending youth homelessness.*

b. Conduct a communications campaign to change the narrative away from blaming individual young people to system failures that cause homelessness.*

c. Recognize ending youth homelessness as crime prevention and a public health response by adjusting government budgets accordingly. Re-allocate funding from prisons and incarceration to housing and healthcare.*

d. OHY must work with communities to ensure homeless services and programs are widely marketed, otherwise they are extremely difficult to find.*

e. OHY and AWHWA should develop shared infrastructure and planning across organizations to deliver on a time-bound, measurable strategy to end unaccompanied youth and young adult homelessness, which addresses racial and LGBTQIA2S+ disparities.

f. OHY and DCYF should follow the lead of Seattle Public Schools, which has adopted a targeted universalism approach by focusing specific efforts on students furthest from educational justice.

> "[I want them to know] the individual impact as well as the overall impact it [YYA homelessness] has on communities. As well as the economic impact of not ending youth homelessness."
>
> **QTBIPOC Young Person**

> "It costs less to house someone than it does to incarcerate them."
>
> **LGBTQIA2S+ Young Person**

> "A big hurdle for me in my county was access and knowledge. A lot of the programs are not knowledgeable about each other. So if I wasn't a good fit, or I needed help they didn't know where to send me."
>
> **QTBIPOC Young Person**

13. Streamline data collection and reporting statewide to prioritize real-time data and adequately resource communities to establish quality By-Name Lists.

a. Commerce should conduct an audit of all data collection and reporting requirements to understand what can be substituted for real-time data from By-Name Lists.

b. Commerce and philanthropy should invest in community data capacity to ensure each county in the state has at least one data analyst dedicated to working on community By-Name Lists who also has Looker (HMIS reporting software) access, although communities recommend two.

c. The Balance of State Continuum of Care (CoC) should respond to community requests to make sexual orientation a required field for all HMIS projects.

d. Other CoCs such as King and Snohomish should also make sexual orientation a required field for all HMIS projects (Spokane, Clark, and Pierce have already done so). YYA are able to opt out by selecting "prefer not to answer."

e. In concert with making sexual orientation a required field, all CoCs should conduct regular sexual orientation and gender identity data collection training and audits with all counties under their purview to drive a culture shift, ensuring LGBTQIA2S+ YYA feel comfortable and safe when sharing their sexual orientation and gender identity.

f. All CoCs should institute and ensure compliance with an "Expected Completeness Measure" of 85-95% for sexual orientation data across projects similar to the race and ethnicity fields in the HMIS (non-Balance of State CoCs: King, Snohomish, Spokane, Pierce, and Clark are independent entities with autonomous decision making procedures).

g. More resources should be provided to the Commerce HMIS Team to provide more hands-on capacity building and skill building resources for data leads in communities.

h. Embed more capacity at the Department of Commerce to support scaling real-time data and By-Name Lists across the state, beyond the current 0.5 FTE dedicated to ACI data.

i. OHY should adopt the real-time By-Name List data model including data definitions, functional zero measurement strategy, and equity measures at the state level.

j. OHY should create a statewide real-time data dashboard to track progress toward shared goals and equity outcomes.

> "It is not the role of one case manager or one organization to reduce homelessness... This culture shift of wrapping support around young people and creating multiple touch points...has been crucial in building our success. Using the BNL to center and ground ourselves helps us to focus on individuals, while also capturing systemic barriers and challenges that our community needs to address."

> **Sam Jackle**
> **Homeless Housing System Engagement Coordinator, County of Walla Walla**

Final Thoughts

This comprehensive analysis of homelessness in Washington focuses on unaccompanied youth and young adults (YYA) and the effectiveness of current interventions. The report uses updated and improved data to estimate the number of YYA experiencing unaccompanied homelessness across the state, updates the homeless services landscape scan, and provides almost 100 actionable recommendations, most of which are from young people with lived experience of homelessness. Washington has nearly closed the geographic service gap for YYA services identified in the last landscape scan in 2016. And while the new data suggests a 40 percent decrease in YYA experiencing unaccompanied homelessness and housing instability between 2016 and 2022, feedback from individuals with lived experience and service providers suggests that drop isn't necessarily reflective of what they are seeing on the ground.

The report highlights the importance of investing in a holistic suite of services tailored to meet the diverse needs of YYA, as well as infrastructure that is supporting service providers to engage in impactful upstream work, which contributes to a reduction in YYA homelessness.

Furthermore, the report underscores the crucial role of cross-community, cross-sector, and public/private partnerships in sustaining the current progress achieved in reducing homelessness in Washington. These collaborative efforts are deemed essential for fostering innovation, resource-sharing, and maximizing impact. In addition, it is critical that Washington continues investing in such partnerships to ensure ongoing success in reducing homelessness.

By taking these actions, stakeholders can build upon current progress and work towards further reducing homelessness in Washington. It is imperative that all sectors come together to prioritize this issue and commit to implementing evidence-based strategies that create lasting change.

> "I want my story out there somehow. I would like it to help someone. With every tragic thing that happened all I ever felt was that this never happened to anyone. I was abused and held captive…This should never happen to anyone else…It was quite lonely throughout everything…It was very emotionally damaging. I hope it helps anyone who ever feels that way to know they aren't crazy and doing it alone."
>
> **QTBIPOC Parenting Young Person**

> "Resources, execution, and community are all steps that should be taken towards ending homelessness. The smaller we break things into groups and take action towards helps the big picture as a whole."
>
> **BIPOC Young Person**

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Landscape Study for Youth and Young Adults - HMIS Report Specifications

The purpose of Landscape Study for Youth and Young Adults is to look at various data sources that concern homeless or housing insecure youth and young adults in Washington State and to evaluate the data landscape to determine what we know about the population and what is missing. This document describes the HMIS data source.

Contents

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Data Sources

Data is pulled from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). HMIS is used by homeless housing service providers to collect and manage data gathered during the course of providing housing assistance to Youth and Young Adult (YYA) households experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of homelessness. For more information on HMIS, please refer to [Commerce's HMIS webpage](#).

Find current HMIS data standards at the [HUD HMIS Data Standards page.](#)

Level of Measurement

HMIS data is tracked at the enrollment level. This report shows counts at the client level where a client can have multiple enrollments. When a client has more than one enrollment, a de-duplication process is used to prioritize what gets counted. Prioritization focuses on unsheltered homeless first, then sheltered homelessness, then people who are housed, but receiving assistance because they are housing insecure.

Item	Explanation	Process
Multiple enrollments	If clients have multiple enrollments, how are they de-duplicated?	Prioritized as follows: 1. For ES, TH, PH, HP projects only, if exit available, then select latest exit. 2. For all others and if no exits available for the above projects, select latest enrollment. 3. Follow Project Type Deduplication process below for the rest.
Project Type Deduplication	If clients are enrolled in multiple project types, which project enrollment is used?	Prioritized as follows: 1. ES/TH/SH 2. ES NBN 3. Any PH with a Move-In Date 4. HP 5. SO/SSO/Day Shelter/Other 6. CE 7. PH with no move-in date that do not have any other project types associated to that client
Project Type Deduplication	If clients are enrolled in multiple "SO/SSO/Day Shelter/Other" project types, which project enrollment is used?	Prioritized as follows: 1. SO 2. SSO 3. Day Shelter 4. Other
Project Type Deduplication	If clients are enrolled in multiple "PH" project types, which project enrollment is used?	Prioritized as follows: 1. PSH 2. OPH 3. RRH

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Project Type Deduplication	If clients are enrolled in multiple "ES/TH" project types, which project enrollment is used?	Prioritized as follows: 1. TH 2. ES
Project Type Deduplication	How should duplicates within the same project be addressed?	Keep the record with the most amount of information. If duplicates are exactly the same, keep the "latest" record (largest Enrollment ID)

ES: Emergency Shelter; **TH:** Transitional Housing; **PH:** Permanent Housing; **HP:** Homelessness Prevention; **SH:** Safe Haven; **ES NBN:** Night-by-Night Emergency Shelter; **SO:** Street Outreach; **SSO:** Services Only; **PSH:** Permanent Supportive Housing; **OPH:** Other Permanent Housing (not Rapid Re-Housing or PSH)

Reporting Periods

The data reviewed is for the 2022 state fiscal year (SFY), which begins July 1, 2021 and ends June 30, 2022. Any unaccompanied youth (ages 12-17) or young adult (ages 18-24) client that had an active enrollment during this time period are included.

Definitions

Demographics

Below are the demographic categories, filtering options/sub-categories, and applicable HMIS answers that apply to each sub category. You can find all available response options as well in the FY 2022 HMIS Data Standards Manual.

Age
Age in this report is defined as the age at project entry by subtracting the Date of Birth from the Project Start Date. Youth that do not share their date of birth or approximate date of birth are not included in the report.

- **Minor or Youth:** Ages 12-17 at project entry. The youth included in this report are unaccompanied, meaning that they are not part of a household that includes an adult who is 18 or over.
- **Young Adults:** Ages 18-24 at project entry

Gender
Gender is a multi-select field and responses are categorized in the following ways:

- **Cisgender:** Only Male or only Female was chosen
- **Gender Expansive:** A gender other than singularly female or male (e.g., non-binary, genderfluid, agender, culturally specific gender), Transgender, or Questioning was chosen. Also, the client could have chosen Male or Female with any of options above, or chose both Male and Female.
- **Unknown**: Data not collected, client refused, or client doesn't know

Race/Ethnicity
Race/ethnicity is pulled from two data elements: a multi-choice race field and single-select ethnicity field. If a client chose the Hispanic/Latin(a)(o)(x) option for ethnicity, they are counted in the Hispanic/Latin(a)(o)(x) category, regardless of the race selected. For example, if someone is both Black, African American, or African

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and also Hispanic/Latin(a)(o)(x), they are only counted in the Hispanic/Latin(a)(o)(x) category. For all other combinations not involving the Hispanic/Latin(a)(o)(x), they are counted under the Multi-Racial category.

- American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous
- Asian or Asian American
- Black, African American, or African
- Hispanic/Latin(a)(o)(x)
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White
- Multi-Racial: More than one answer from the options above were selected
- Unknown: Client doesn't know, client refused, or data not collected

- **Person of Color (POC):** Client's ethnicity is Hispanic/Latin(a)(o)(x) and/or the client's race is American Indian, Alaska Native or Indigenous, Asian or Asian American, Black, African American, or African, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or more than one race was selected (Multi-Racial).
- **White Alone:** When the only race selected was White and ethnicity was Non-Hispanic/Latin(a)(o)(x)
- **Unknown:** Client's race and ethnicity is entered as client refused, client doesn't know, or data not collected.

Sexual Orientation

This question is collected only on projects funded or partially funded by the Office of Homeless Youth. Many projects that youth and young adults participate in do not have this field, so there are a lot of 'null' values. Sexual Orientation response options are grouped in the following way:

- **Straight:** Heterosexual
- **LGBQ+:** Gay, lesbian, bisexual, questioning/unsure, other
- **Sexual Orientation Unknown**: Client doesn't know, client refused, or data not collected, or null

Disabling Condition

Clients are asked a Yes/No question if they have a disabling condition. The responses are categorized as follows:

- **Disabling Condition:** Yes
- **No Disabling Condition:** No
- **Disabling Condition Unknown**: Client doesn't know, client refused, or data not collected

Pregnant or Parenting

At project entry, clients are asked if they are pregnant.

- **Pregnant or Parenting:** Either pregnant or parenting conditions are true.
- **Not Pregnant or Parenting:** Both pregnant and parenting conditions are not met.
- **Pregnant:** At entry, the client is asked if they are pregnant.
- **Parenting:** Parenting

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OHY Project
If a project is funded completely or in part by the Office of Homeless Youth (OHY), it is considered an OHY Project. Clients may be enrolled in multiple projects, some of which might be funded by OHY and some are not. If the enrollment selected during the de-duplication process is not an OHY-funded project, they will not be included as being in an OHY project.

Prior Living Situation Categories

Prior Living Situation
There are 29 different prior living situations that would describe the living situation the client was in the night before they were enrolled in a project. A complete list that explains each code is in Appendix A of FY 2022 Data Standards Manual. The numbers show the field number in Appendix A that is counted in each category.

- **Couch Surfing/Doubling Up:** 35, 36
- **Permanent Housing:** 3, 10, 11, 13, 19, 20, 21, 23, 26, 27, 28, 29, 31, 33, 34
- **Sheltered Homelessness**: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 14, 15, 18, 25, 32
- **Unsheltered Homelessness**: 16

Returns to Homelessness

Returns to Homeless metric is expressed as a percentage. It looks at a different dataset than the rest of the information described in this report specification. The measure is calculated by pulling every enrollment from 7/1/2019 to 6/30/2022. The denominator is a count of all the clients that had an exit to permanent housing between 7/1/2019 - 6/30/2020. If the client had multiple exits to permanent housing, it chooses the first occurrence. The numerator is calculated by seeing if any of those clients had a new enrollment after their original exit date and before 6/30/2022 where the client re-entered homelessness.

Data Limitations

Sexual orientation data missing for non-OHY projects
This question is collected only on projects funded or partially funded by the Office of Homeless Youth. Many projects that youth and young adults participate in do not have this field, so there are a lot of 'null' values.

Parenting
Determining if someone is parenting is limited because it can only be counted for people who are listed as the head of household. If they are the head of household, the data counts how many people in the household are listed that their relationship to the head of household is "Child of Head of Household." If a 15 year old father and 16 year old mother are both parenting, but in the program enrollment, the children are listed only under the mother, the father will not be considered parenting although the father might participate in child rearing.

Identifying projects targeted towards youth
Projects are marked as an OHY Project if the project was funded by the Office of Homeless Youth. This information was provided in an attempt to get a sense of how many youth and young adults are in projects that are targeted to that population. However, just counting OHY Projects paints an incomplete picture as many

projects targeting youth could be funded by other resources such as federal, county, municipal or non-profit sources, most notably projects funded by the federal Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.

Appendix B: Rates of Homeless System Access per 100 10-24 Year Olds, 2022

County	Unaccompanied YYA in HMIS	WA Total 10-24 Year Olds	Rate of Homeless System Access per 100 10-24 year olds
Adams	0	5,484	0.0
Asotin	0	3,676	0.0
Benton	357	43,370	0.8
Chelan	123	14,955	0.8
Clallam	144	10,750	1.3
Clark	929	98,498	0.9
Columbia	33	586	5.6
Cowlitz	248	20,028	1.2
Douglas	0	8,913	0.0
Ferry	0	975	0.0
Franklin	22	23,892	0.1
Garfield	0	334	0.0
Grant	153	23,371	0.7
Grays Harbor	229	12,607	1.8
Island	157	13,895	1.1
Jefferson	41	3,378	1.2
King	4,223	390,820	1.1
Kitsap	1,725	50,762	3.4
Kittitas	72	11,928	0.6
Klickitat	20	3,503	0.6
Lewis	213	14,096	1.5
Lincoln	0	1,892	0.0
Mason	141	10,525	1.3
Okanogan	79	7,411	1.1
Pacific	41	3,025	1.4

Pend Oreille	33	2,137	1.5
Pierce	1,725	180,201	1.0
San Juan	17	2,109	0.8
Skagit	262	22,695	1.2
Skamania	0	1,809	0.0
Snohomish	854	147,162	0.6
Spokane	1,362	104,659	1.3
Stevens	19	7,877	0.2
Thurston	566	52,277	1.1
Wahkiakum	0	655	0.0
Walla Walla	263	14,507	1.8
Whatcom	500	51,568	1.0
Whitman	47	19,832	0.2
Yakima	730	60,120	1.2

Data Source: HMIS and US Census

Appendix C: Rates of Homeless System Access per 100 10-24 Year Olds by Race/Ethnicity, 2022

Race/Ethnicity	Unaccompanied YYA in HMIS	WA Population of 10-24 Year Olds	Rate of Homeless System Access per 100 10-24 Year Olds
American Indian or Alaska Native	505	21,801	2.32
Asian or Asian American	183	95,664	0.19
Black or African American	2,567	54,692	4.69
Latine of Any Race	2,935	285,665	1.03
Multiracial	1,210	76,718	1.58
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	318	5,406	5.88
White	5,831	885,213	0.66
Race Unknown	1,789	-	-

Data Source: HMIS and WA Office of Financial Management