Washington State Department of Commerce

Homelessness in Washington

2024 annual report to meet requirements in RCW 43.185C

January 2025

Report to the Legislature

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HOUSING DIVISION

v3.5

Acknowledgments

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Executive summary

Overview

This annual report complements the State of Washington Homeless Housing Crisis Response System Strategic Plan 2019-2024. It fulfills reporting requirements outlined in several Homeless Housing and Assistance Act chapters, including RCW 43.185C.010, 040, 045. 170, 340, and RCW 43.63A.305 and 311.

Key findings:

- The most reliable data indicates that **homelessness peaked in 2023 in Washington** (12% above the January 2020 level), and has at least stabilized, if not declined slightly, since then.[1] However, changes in eligibility for Medicaid and other programs make it difficult to ascertain the actual trend. The Snapshot of Homelessness report estimated approximately 157,964 people were experiencing homelessness in Washington in January 2024.[2] This equates to about 2% of Washington's population.[3]

- The number of people visibly experiencing homelessness increased after 2020. **Since 2022, visible homelessness has decreased in many communities** by either moving people into housing after extensive outreach, or by breaking up encampments and working to get encampment residents into housing whenever possible.[4]

- **Youth and young adult homelessness declined 40% between 2016 and 2023**, demonstrating that at-scale deeper investments governed by leadership from a steering committee of people with lived experience effectively reduces homelessness.

- **Rental housing prices have continued to increase**, outpacing lower fixed incomes including federal disability assistance, putting additional people at risk of homelessness. And COVID-related federally funded rent assistance has expired, after which evictions increased.

Programmatic highlights:

- **Racial equity performance measures have been expanded to the state's primary homeless grants** to local homeless crisis response systems: The Consolidated Homeless Grant and the System Demonstration Grant.

- **Commerce published the updated** 2024-29 State Homeless Strategic Plan **in the fall of 2024**, which will serve as a guide for state and local efforts to address homelessness in the coming years.

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[1] Washington State Department of Commerce, "Snapshot of Homelessness in Washington State for January 2020," and "Snapshot of Homelessness in Washington State for January 2023"
[2] Washington State Department of Commerce, Snapshot of Homelessness reports
[3] Washington State Office of Financial Management, April 1 official population estimates, (April 2024)
[4] Washington State Department of Commerce, Rights-of-Way Safety Initiative, (2024)

Annual statutory reporting requirements

Table 1: Guide to annual reporting requirements in this report

Subsection	Excerpted reporting requirements	Location in report
RCW 43.185C.045: Homeless housing strategic plan—Annual report of the department and local governments.		
(1)(a)	"An assessment of the current condition of homelessness in Washington state and the state's performance in meeting the goals in the state homeless housing strategic plan;"	Assessing the current conditions of homelessness, Homeless system performance, State Plan accomplishments
(1)(b)	"A report on the results of the annual homeless point-in-time census conducted statewide under RCW 43.185C.030;"	Point-In-Time Count
(1)(c)	"The amount of federal, state, local, and private funds spent on homelessness assistance, categorized by funding source and the following major assistance types: (i) Emergency shelter; (ii) Homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing; (iii) Permanent housing; (iv) Permanent supportive housing; (v) Transitional housing; (vi) Services only; and (vii) Any other activity in which more than five hundred thousand dollars of category funds were expended;"	Homeless housing project expenditure and data report ("the GOLDEN")
(1)(d)	"A report on the expenditures, performance, and outcomes of state funds distributed through the consolidated homeless grant program, including the grant recipient, award amount expended, use of the funds, counties served, and households served;"	State-funded homeless housing reports
(1)(e)	"A report on state and local homelessness document recording fee expenditure by county, including the total amount of fee spending, percentage of total spending from fees, number of people served by major assistance type, and amount of expenditures for private rental housing payments required in RCW 36.22.250;"	Homeless housing project expenditure and data report ("the GOLDEN")
(1)(f) and (g)	"(f) A report on the expenditures, performance, and outcomes of the essential needs and housing support program meeting the requirements of RCW 43.185C.220; and (g) A report on the expenditures, performance, and outcomes of the independent youth housing program meeting the requirements of RCW 43.63A.311;"	State-funded homeless housing reports
(3)	"…the department must produce and post information on the local government's homelessness spending from all sources by project during the prior state fiscal year in a format similar to the department's report under subsection (1)(c) of this section."	Homeless housing project expenditure and data report ("the GOLDEN")
(3)	"Any local government receiving state funds for homelessness assistance or state or local homelessness document recording fees under RCW 36.22.250 must provide an annual report on the current condition of homelessness in its jurisdiction…"	Planning, reporting, and auditing
RCW 43.185C.170: Interagency council on homelessness—Duties—Reports.		
(1)	"The interagency council on homelessness, as defined in RCW 43.185C.010 ... shall report to the appropriate committees of the legislature annually by December 31st on its activities."	Interagency Council on Homelessness
RCW 43.185C.220: Essential needs and housing support program—Distribution of funds.		
(7)(c)	"In collaboration with the Department of Social and Health Services, submit a report annually to the relevant policy and fiscal committees of the legislature. A	State-funded homeless housing reports

	preliminary report shall be submitted by December 31, 2011, and must include (c)(i), (iii), and (v) of this subsection. Annual reports must be submitted beginning December 1, 2012, and must include: (i) A description of the actions the department has taken to achieve the objectives of chapter 36, Laws of 2011 1st sp. sess.; (ii) The amount of funds used by the department to administer the program; (iii) Information on the housing status of essential needs and housing support recipients served by housing support entities, and individuals who have requested housing support but did not receive housing support; (iv) Grantee expenditure data related to administration and services provided under this section; and (v) Efforts made to partner with other entities and leverage sources or public and private funds;"	
RCW 43.185C.340: Students experiencing homelessness—Grant program to link families with housing—Program goals—Grant process—Requirements—Grantees report to the department.		
(8)	"(a) Grantee organizations must compile and report information to the department. The department shall report to the legislature the findings of the grantee, the housing stability of the homeless families, and any related policy recommendations. (b) Grantees must track and report on the following measures including, but not limited to: (i) Length of time enrolled in the grant program; (ii) Housing destination at program exit; (iii) Type of residence prior to enrollment in the grant program; and (iv) Number of times homeless in the past three years. (c) Grantees must also include in their reports a narrative description discussing its partnership with school districts as set forth in the memorandum outlined in subsection (4) of this section. Reports must also include the kinds of supports grantees are providing students and families to support academic learning."	State-funded homeless housing reports
RCW 43.63A.311: Independent youth housing program—Subcontractor organization performance review and report.		
(2)(a) through (f)	"The independent youth housing program report must include, at a minimum, an update on the following program performance measures, as well as any other performance measures the department may establish, for enrolled youth in consultation with the department of social and health services, to be measured statewide and by county: (a) Increases in housing stability; (b) Increases in economic self-sufficiency; (c) Increases in independent living skills; (d) Increases in education and job training attainment; (e) Decreases in the use of all state-funded services over time;"	State-funded homeless housing reports

Assessing the current conditions of homelessness

According to the Snapshot of Homelessness reports, homelessness increased an estimated 9% statewide from January 2019 to January 2024. From January 2023 to January 2024, the number of people experiencing homelessness declined slightly (2%), from 160,735 to 157,964 across Washington. This this change may be driven by changes in Medicaid eligibility, reducing the overall number of people accounted for in state data systems.[5]

The stubborn persistence of the homelessness crisis results from the interplay of structural factors and individual characteristics. Societal factors create environments that elevate homelessness risk (e.g., systemic inequalities, geographic location, an insufficient social safety net, macroeconomic trends, and housing affordability).[6] Individual characteristics such as mental health, substance use disorders (SUD), socioeconomic status, disability, employment, and family instability combine with these structural factors to elevate a household's risk of homelessness. Where barriers to overcoming homelessness persist and worsen, homelessness continues to increase.[7] This section of the report describes the current conditions of these structural factors and individual characteristics that underlie contemporary trends in homelessness.

Adult and family homelessness

Community-level indicators describe the incidence of homelessness

Housing affordability

Research has shown that the cost and availability of housing directly contributes to community-level incidence of homelessness.[8] In 2023, the University of Washington reported an average rent in Washington of $1,763 monthly,[9] a 21.5% increase when compared to 2019. This follows a trend of increases of 50% between 2013 and 2021.[10] One in 10 people in Washington have incomes below $15,060 and are therefore at risk for housing instability based on their income to market rent ratio.[11] A person working a minimum wage job would need to work 83 hours per week to afford a 1-bedroom rental home at fair market rental costs.[12] The National Low Income Housing Coalition estimates that rental rates would need to be at most $911 per month for people living at or below 30% of the area median income.[13] This disparity causes many people to experience housing instability and gives rise to homelessness.

Black, Native American, and People of Color disproportionately experience homelessness

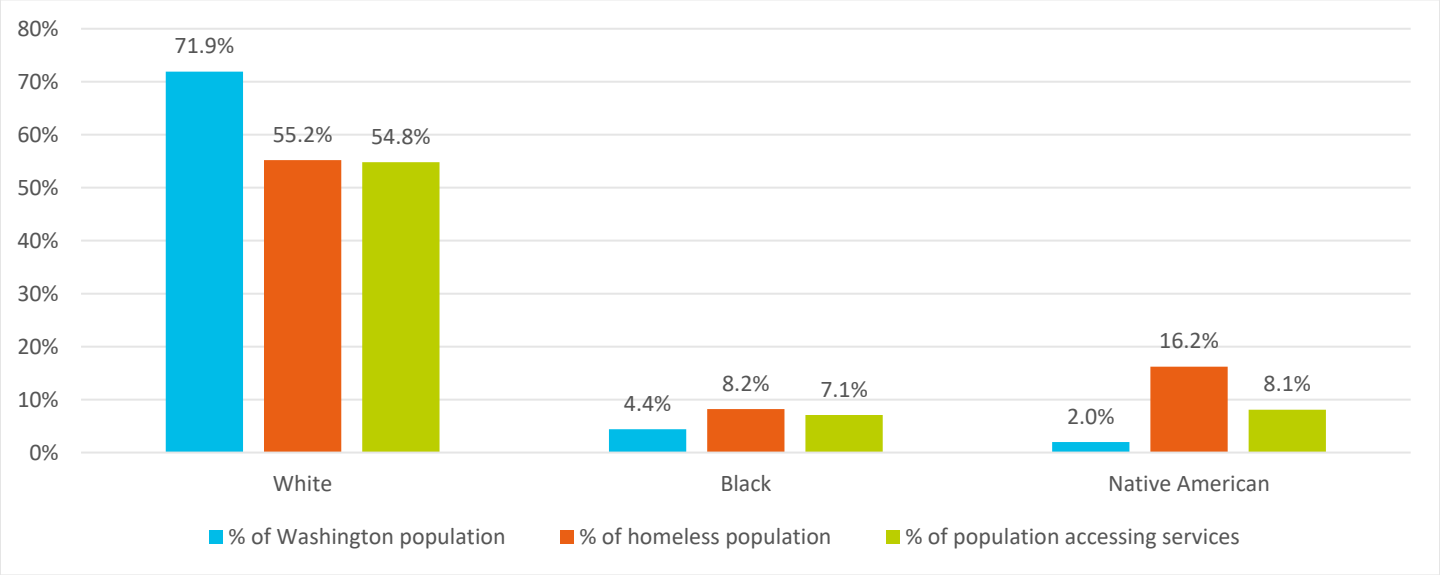
The history of racist and exclusionary policies by governments in Washington continue to manifest in the incidence of homelessness among Black and Native American communities. These policies and practices included redlining, economic and social displacement, gentrification, restrictive covenants, ongoing discriminatory lending practices, and unfair housing practices. Though many of these have fallen out of

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[5] Washington State Department of Commerce, "Snapshot of Homelessness Report," (2024)
[6] William D. Ruckelshaus Center, "Pathways to Housing Security," (2023),
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] University of Washington Runstad Department of Real Estate, "Washington State Apartment Market Report," (2023)
[10] William D. Ruckelshaus Center, "Pathways to Housing Security," (2023)
[11] University of Washington Runstad Department of Real estate, "Washington State Apartment Market Report," (2023)
[12] Ibid.
[13] National Low Income Housing Coalition, "Out of Reach Washington," (2024)

practice, their legacies continue to harm communities.[14] As a result, Native American and Black communities experience homelessness at rates disproportionate to their presence in Washington's population, and at much higher rates than their White peers.[15]

Figure 1: Disparities in incidence of homelessness and access to services



Many of Washington's marginalized communities have similar incidences of homelessness, disproportionately higher compared to their presence in the general population.[16] The inequitable occurrence of homelessness for People of Color and the history of over-policing of Communities of Color contributes to a cycle of incarceration and homelessness.

Increasing criminalization of homelessness

In June 2024, the US Supreme Court decision in Grants Pass v. Johnson removed any requirement that local jurisdictions provide an alternate place to live before citing or arresting unhoused individuals.[17] Consequently, local jurisdictions have continued to invest in law enforcement measures to address homelessness despite the lack of evidence for their efficacy. A survey of mayors found that 59% say police enforce quality-of-life arrests against homeless people, and 78% stated that the police shape the local response to homelessness.[18] Local prohibitions can effectively criminalize sitting or lying, being present in specific geographic areas, accessing public accommodations to meet basic needs such as toilets, and seeking rest, safety, or privacy when using tents, tarps, or vehicles.

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[14] National Community Reinvestment Coalition, "HOLC 'REDLINING' Maps: The persistent structure of segregation and economic inequality," (2024)
Berkeley Public Health, 50 years after being outlawed, redlining still drives neighborhood health inequities, (2024)
[15] United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Homeless Populations and Subpopulations," (2023)
[16] Washington State Office of Financial Management, Washington state population by race, (2022);
Washington State University Division of Governmental Studies and Services, "Status of Fact Finding Year 3," (2023)
[17] Supreme Court of the United States, "City of Grants Pass, Oregon v Johnson et al., Slip Opinion," (2024)
[18] Hanna Love and Thea Sebastian, Brookings, "Safe places and safe sleeping: Cost effective and humane recommendations for local leaders after Grants Pass," (2024)

Household characteristics contribute to a higher individual risk of homelessness

Substance use and mental health disorders

Systemic factors contribute to a community's incidence of homelessness when they interact with individual characteristics. People struggling with mental health or SUD are overrepresented among those experiencing homelessness at a rate of 43% compared to 33% among the general population.[19] Regardless of whether these co-morbidities manifest during an episode of homelessness or represent a root cause behind a household's loss of housing, their presence requires a holistic response that goes beyond simply providing access to housing.[20] Some of the most visible people experiencing homelessness are those who are concurrently experiencing SUD or a severe mental crisis.

Employment

Housing affordability is a ratio between the price of housing and the income received by a household. If prices and incomes rise, housing remains relatively affordable for a household. A job loss, family break-up, incapacity or death all may represent both personal tragedy and income loss to a household. When combined with the structural factors in a particular community and other household characteristics, this income loss can serve as a precipitating event in destabilizing a household, possibly resulting in homelessness. Despite struggling to find stable housing, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness estimates that 40%-60% of those unhoused continue to work or seek employment.[21]

Tailored interventions show promise

Washington has made significant investments in temporary and permanent housing for people experiencing homelessness. Permanent supportive housing (PSH) has shown successful outcomes for people who are experiencing a behavioral health challenge, such as SUD or mental illness.[22] In addition, the Encampment Resolution Initiative is an example of a successful housing intervention. Since the inception of the initiative, from July 2022 to February 2024, more than 1,000 people have moved from encampments into shelters or housing.[23] Of the 83% who were moved into housing, 72% are still stably housed.[24] The program's success illuminates a need for more housing solutions that demonstrate meaningful change.

Homeless rates remain too high in Washington

In summary, systemic barriers create conditions that cause an increase in rates of homelessness. When combined with individual characteristics, the odds increase that people will end up living unhoused.

The elevated rates of homelessness result from several factors, including:

- A continued decrease in housing affordability, especially for lower income households[25]
- Historic racist and exclusionary policies and their legacies

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[19] United States Department of Health and Human Services, SAMHSA Announces National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) Results Detailing Mental Illness and Substance Use Levels in 2021, (2023);
United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Homeless Populations and Subpopulations," (2023)
[20] Washington State Department of Commerce, "2024-2029 State Homeless Housing Strategic Plan,"
[21] United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, Data and Trends, (2023)
[22] Urban Institute, Denver Supportive Housing Social Impact Bond Initiative, (2024)
[23] Washington State Department of Commerce, Rights-of-Way Safety Initiative
[24] Ibid.
[25] National Low Income Housing Coalition, Washington, (Accessed December 2024)

- The rising criminalization of homelessness
- An inadequate supply of housing assistance
- The increasingly complex task of addressing the needs of a homeless population struggling with substance use disorder, severe mental health disorders, and physical disabilities

Youth and young adult homelessness

Washington stands out as a national leader in addressing youth and young adult homelessness. Through robust collaboration among state leaders, philanthropic organizations, community-based initiatives, advocacy groups, and, most crucially, the young people themselves, Washington has emerged as a model of innovation in tackling the complex challenges faced by unaccompanied youth and young adults experiencing homelessness.

In February 2024, the Office of Homeless Youth, in partnership with A Way Home Washington, released a pivotal state-level report titled "Yes to Yes" Washington State: Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adult Homelessness Landscape Scan. This report provides a comprehensive overview of the data, highlights the progress achieved, and identifies remaining gaps in addressing homelessness among youth and young adults.

The report reveals a significant 40% reduction in youth and young adult homelessness from 2016 to 2023. This remarkable progress aligns with several key initiatives, including the establishment of the Office of Homeless Youth, the launch of the community-based Anchor Community Initiative, the creation of the pioneering Homeless Student Stability Program, efforts to close geographic service gaps, and increased investment in prevention strategies.

Despite these advances, more than 14,000 young people remain unstably housed or homeless. Youth of color and LGBTQIA2S+ individuals are disproportionately affected. These young people, aged 12 to 24, face homelessness or unstable housing situations without the support of a parent or guardian.

Contributing factors to their circumstances include family dysfunction, conflict, or rejection due to sexual orientation or gender identity, which can lead to separation from family. Additionally, failures within foster care, juvenile justice, and behavioral health systems increase the risk of homelessness. Structural issues such as economic instability, underemployment, wages that fail to meet regional cost of living, generational poverty, and institutional racism also play a significant role in creating the broader conditions that contribute to homelessness and other adverse outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

Progress

Significant developments in preventing and ending youth and young adult homelessness since 2016 include:

- **A 40% reduction in youth and young adult homelessness between 2016 and 2023**
- **Near-closure of geographic services gaps:** Compared to 2016**,** when fewer than half of all Washington counties had any housing or shelter, today, more than three-quarters have housing or shelter and all but two counties have some form of housing support services
- **A culture shift to "Yes to Yes"** championed by A Way Home Washington's Anchor Community Initiative in which a community and the system are well prepared to say "yes" when a young person says "yes, I need support"

- **Five U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program awards totaling $20 million**
- **75% of young people permanently housed in 2020 remained housed after two years**
- **Progress on prevention,** with leadership from a steering committee that includes youth with lived experience and a cross-system prevention workgroup; increased investments in diversion efforts and flexible resources; and targeted grant programs to ensure young people exit public systems into safe and stable housing

Gaps

Significant gaps remain that stand in the way of young people securing stable housing:

- **Lack of housing support for pregnant and parenting young people**
- **Limited housing options and services for minors that can be accessed legally without parental consent**
- **Lack of affordable, low-barrier housing** especially for BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ young people and young people with mental health issues and/or SUD
- **BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ young people experience homelessness and housing instability disproportionately** and need population-specific, culturally sensitive care
- **Higher mental health needs** and shortage of mental health practitioners and resources, especially for BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ young people and in rural communities
- **Unmet basic needs** such as lack of access to transportation, food, and youth/young adult-specific shelter and housing, especially in rural communities

Challenges to reducing homelessness

The previous section describing the current conditions of homelessness identified key community- and household-level indicators that raise the risk of homelessness incidence. The following section expands on the current economic, political, and societal barriers to reducing and eliminating homelessness by examining both systemic factors and individual characteristics.

Increasing housing costs, lack of affordable housing and insufficient wage gains

Housing prices have grown faster than incomes. Between 2020 and 2023, the median income in Washington rose 17%.[26] However, for that same period, average rents increased 19% statewide.[27] At the same time, the proportion of renter households considered "rent-burdened" increased from 45% of households to roughly 50%.[28] While people facing homelessness can find work, they cannot find work that pays a housing wage in Washington.[29] As a result, they are paying a greater share of their income on housing.

Households with a federal disability benefit are particularly vulnerable to economic displacement. The National Low Income Housing Coalition estimates that their affordable monthly rent would be $294, or 30% of their Social Security Disability Insurance payment. A $294 monthly rent is $1,469 less than the current average rent in Washington.[30] Other populations on fixed incomes, particular people over 55 years of age, face the same pressures. In 2010, 12% of Washington's residents were 65 or older, but by 2022 that increased to 17%.

Once a household enters an episode of homelessness, further structural barriers at the service provider level can impact a person's ability to reintegrate into the workforce and become re-housed. Many shelters require check-in times, which often do not align with work schedules for individuals who are experiencing homelessness. People end up having to choose between entering shelters or keeping their jobs.

Increases in evictions

These economic pressures lead to housing instability and the threat of eviction. In November 2023, the Office of Civil and Legal Aid reported a 100% increase in the number of eviction filings.[31] This comes after the expiration of many COVID-19 related housing protections and assistance programs. The passage of Chapter 115, Laws of 2011 (2ESSB 5160) established a right to counsel for indigent tenants facing eviction. However, OCLA notes that the surge in filings threatens the program's ability to provide services. Collinson and Reed (2018) of New York University's School of Law note, "Evictions cause large and persistent increases in the risk of homelessness, elevate long-term residential instability, and increase emergency room use."[32] Often, housing assistance eligibility guidelines require a household to wait until an eviction action is imminent before applying for aid. The pressure of eviction and the tight window to receive assistance can destabilize a household and result in homelessness. The resultant damage to the household's rental record creates barriers to re-housing.

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[26] Washington State Office of Financial Management, Median household income estimates, (2024)
[27] University of Washington, Washington Center for Real Estate Research, "Washington State Market Report - Fall 2020," (2020); University of Washington Runstad Department of Real Estate, "Washington State Apartment Market Report," (2023)
[28] United States Census Bureau, "DP04-Selected Housing Characteristics- 1year to 5 year estimates,"
[29] National Low Income Housing Coalition, "Out of Reach Washington," (2024)
[30] Ibid.
[31] Washington State Office of Civil Legal Aid, "Memorandum to Superior Court Judges' Association, re: Availability of Appointed Counsel Following 100% increase In Unlawful Detainer Filings" (2023)
[32] Robert Collinson and Davin Reed, New York University School of Law, "The Effects of Eviction on Low-Income Households," (2018)

Demand for assistance exceeds available resources

To prevent episodes of homelessness, many people need housing assistance. Unfortunately, available subsidized units and rental vouchers in Washington fall short of demand.[33] In 2024, Commerce reported that Washington has approximately 155,214 housing units affordable to households with low or moderate incomes.[34] Public housing authorities manage an additional 64,472 Housing Choice Rental Vouchers.[35] However, the US Census Bureau estimates that more than 540,000 households are eligible to benefit from these programs, with some estimates as high as 700,000.[36] Without additional subsidized units or vouchers, people will continue to face housing instability and homelessness in Washington.

For those experiencing homelessness, the demand for homeless emergency housing exceeds supply. The January 2024 Point-In-Time (PIT) Count identified 16,215 people living in places not meant for human habitation across the state.[37] According to HUD's 2023 Housing Inventory Count Report, Washington had only 13,909 emergency shelter beds, many of them occupied or reserved for specific sub-populations (i.e., people fleeing sexual assault or domestic violence).[38]

Finally, the increased presence of asylum seekers places further strain on homeless crisis response systems. Riverton Park United Methodist Church in King County estimated more than 2,000 unhoused asylum seekers sought help between 2022 and 2024.[39] With long waits for federal work permits and residency documents,[40] many people seeking asylum remain in areas not meant for human habitation while they look for emergency housing assistance, rent assistance, and permanent housing. In the 2023-2025 biennium, the Legislature appropriated $32 million in assistance administered by the Department of Social and Health Services Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (DSHS OIRA) and Commerce's Community Services Division.[41] If current trends in immigrant and refugee arrivals continue, Washington's already overloaded homeless crisis response systems will struggle to render effective housing and homelessness assistance.

Racist policies continue to impact communities

Native American and Black communities are disproportionately represented among people experiencing homelessness, as described in the section on Current Conditions of Homelessness. Often the individuals experiencing homelessness have intersectional identities, that is, they may identify with one or more of the following: youth, LGBTQIA2S+, survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault, having a history of mental health diagnosis, having an SUD, or having a disability. In addition, they carry the generational trauma of racist government policies such as the Indian Removal Act, the forced assimilation through the Indian boarding school system of the twentieth century, chattel slavery, and the Jim Crow system, among many others.

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[33] Washington State University Division of Governmental Studies and Services, "Status of Fact Finding Year 3," (2023)
[34] Washington State Affordable Housing Advisory Board, "Housing Advisory Plan 2023-2028," (2024)
[35] US HUD Office of Public and Indian Housing, Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Data Dashboard, (Accessed August 2024)
[36] United States Census Bureau, "DP04-Selected Housing Characteristics- 1year to 5 year estimates;"
Washington State Affordable Housing Advisory Board, "Housing Advisory Plan 2023-2028," (2023)
[37] Washington State Department of Commerce, "Snapshot of Homelessness in Washington State for January 2024," (2024)
[38] United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Housing Inventory Count Report," (2023)
[39] Gene Johnson, AP News, "Hundreds of asylum-seekers are camped out near Seattle. There's a vacant motel next door" (2024)
[40] Anna Patrick, Seattle Times, "State announces where 16.4 million in asylum-seeker aid will go," (2024).
[41] Washington State Legislature, "Chapter 153, Laws of 2024, Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance," (2024);
Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance, "Welcoming Washington," (2024)

Consequently, individuals who identify as Native American or Black face significantly higher barriers to re-housing.[42] Members of these communities may have a justified distrust of government and assistance programs. In addition, they must navigate services that lack a basic understanding of their experiences and cultural backgrounds. They face daily mistreatment due to implicit bias and outright discrimination, and their communities have proportionally fewer affordable housing options.[43] What housing options exist often remove people from their community or are located in areas that either lack needed services, have a greater concentration of environmental hazards, or have limited access to economic opportunities.[44]

Incarceration perpetuates a cycle of arrest and release to homelessness

According to the Brookings Institute, "Homelessness and incarceration have long been linked in the United States, with many people cycling between jails, prisons, and homelessness."[45] As described in the Section on Current Conditions of Homelessness, many local governments see policing as an effective tool to manage the visible impacts of homelessness. With the recent US Supreme Court decision in Grants Pass v. Johnson, many local governments are investing more resources in ordinances, encampment clearances, citations, fines, and arrests to address the impacts of unsheltered homelessness.[46] However, strategies that criminalize actions related to people living outside create a cycle of incarceration, perpetuate inequities for marginalized communities, and extend homelessness in Washington.[47]

Those who have been justice-impacted face societal stigma. Formerly incarcerated people face obstacles to gainful employment and discrimination in securing permanent housing.[48] HUD found that more than 50,000 people enter shelters directly from jails and prisons each year.[49] That does not account for those who live outside immediately following incarceration.[50] Furthermore, people who are formerly incarcerated are 10 times more likely to be homeless.[51] The Prison Policy Initiative (2018) found that when someone has been incarcerated more than once, their risk of homelessness is 13 times higher than the general public.[52] This revolving door of incarceration creates a challenge to reducing homelessness.

Inadequate or inaccessible substance use and mental health treatment

The absence of mental health disorder and SUD treatment options in a community represents a structural factor that raises a community's rates of homelessness. An individual experience of SUD or mental health disorder can lead to or perpetuate an episode of homelessness. The US Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration estimates that 21% of individuals experiencing homelessness have a serious mental

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[42] Jackie Micucci, National League of Cities, Rooted in Trauma: Homelessness in Native Communities, (2023)
[43] National Alliance to End Homelessness, Serving Native Women Experiencing Homelessness: From Trauma to Transformation, (2019)
[44] National Alliance to End Homelessness, Homelessness and Racial Disparities, (updated December 2023)
[45] Hanna Love and Thea Sebastian, Brookings Institution, Safe places and safe sleeping: Cost effective and humane recommendations for local leaders after Grants Pass, (2024)
[46] City of Grants Pass v. Johnson, No. 23-75, "Slip Opinion," (2023); Matt Vasilogambros and Robbie Sequeira, Washington State Standard, "'That was my home' Around the U.S., homeless residents face uncertainty as encampment sweeps gain steam," (2023)
[47] Washington State University Division of Governmental Studies and Services, "Status of Fact Finding Year 3," (2023)
[48] Lucius Couloute, Prison Policy Initiative, Nowhere to Go: Homelessness among formerly incarcerated people, (2018)
[49] Urban Institute, Five Charts That Explain the Homelessness-Jail Cycle-and How to Break It, (2020)
[50] Ibid.
[51] Lucius Couloute, Prison Policy Initiative, Nowhere to Go: Homelessness among formerly incarcerated people, (2018)
[52] Ibid.

health diagnosis, and 16% have a SUD.[53] Many obstacles exist for obtaining treatment for these issues. The behavioral healthcare workforce faces critical shortages in providers,[54] while narrow or inadequate insurance coverage makes care inaccessible to those unable to cover the high out-of-pocket costs.[55] People seeking to access inpatient treatment beds face significant financial and geographic barriers. Many who identify as youth, LGBTQIA2S+ and/or People of Color face additional systemic inequities and discrimination.[56] According to the Washington State Department of Health, although there are 3,000 available licensed inpatient treatment beds, as many as 500 remain unoccupied at any given time. Systemic barriers block people experiencing homelessness from assessment and treatment.

Age-related challenges

In 2023, HUD estimated 135,248 adults over the age of 55 experience homelessness in the United States.[57] Nationally, nearly 1 in 4 people living in conditions not meant for human habitation were over the age of 55.[58] Although the root causes of homelessness in older adults are diverse, some risk factors include "medical problems, health-related behaviors such as SUD, social factors (e.g., social isolation, barriers to transportation), and financial insecurity."[59] Similar to the broader population experiencing homelessness, discrimination, and structural racism affect aging individuals with diverse, intersectional identities.

Conclusion

Available data suggests that significant challenges to reducing homelessness remain. In addition, significant state and federal investments have proven insufficient or too short-term to combat an increase in homelessness in Washington. Market rate rent increases mean that at least 10% of Washington's population needs to earn higher incomes or receive subsidized rent. While incomes have increased, they have not kept pace with housing costs. Available assistance does not meet the need. People facing barriers to housing stability due to substance use and severe mental health challenges struggle to find adequate, affordable treatment options. The criminalization of living outside does not lead to reduced homelessness. The public and private sectors must do more in order to achieve lasting reductions in homelessness.

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[53] Mark Saldua, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Addressing Social Determinants of Health Among Individuals Experiencing Homelessness, (2023)
[54] Washington Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, "Washington's Behavioral Health Workforce Barriers and Solutions," (2020)
[55] Mark, T.L. and Parish, W.J., RTI International, "Behavioral health parity-Pervasive disparities in access to in-network care continue," (2024)
[56] The White House, FACT SHEET: Improving Access and Care for Youth Mental Health and Substance Use Conditions, (2021)
[57] United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Homeless Populations and Subpopulations," (2023)
[58] National Alliance to End Homelessness, Older Adults, (2023)
[59] Ibid.

Homeless system performance

Goals and targets

In July 2017, Commerce introduced performance improvement requirements to the Consolidated Homeless Grant (CHG). For contracts starting in July 2023, new performance requirements integrated concepts introduced in Chapter 214, Laws of 2021 (ESHB 1277). This law includes concepts of racially equitable access to homeless crisis response systems and racially equitable outcomes from programs.

For each intervention type funded by CHG, grantees must adopt the required housing outcome performance measure outlined in Table 2 below. Grantees must also make progress toward the statewide performance target, which states the level of desirable performance and indicates a high-performing system. Additionally, the housing outcomes of the exited households must be similar, regardless of race or ethnicity.

Table 2: Required housing outcome performance measures

Intervention type	Performance measure	Calculation	Performance target
Drop-in emergency shelter	Increase exits to positive outcomes	Of people in emergency shelters who exited, those who exited to positive outcome destinations	50%
Emergency shelter	Increase exits to permanent housing	Of people in emergency shelters who exited, those who exited to permanent housing destinations	50%
Transitional housing	Increase exits to permanent housing	Of people in transitional housing who exited, those who exited to permanent housing destinations	80%
Rapid re-housing	Increase exits to permanent housing	Of people in rapid re-housing who exited, those who exited to permanent housing destinations	80%
Permanent supportive housing or any permanent housing type (excluding rapid re-housing)	Increase exits to or retention of permanent housing	Of people in permanent support housing those who remained in PSH or exited to permanent housing destinations	95%
Testing: homelessness prevention	Testing: ○ Housing retention after one month ○ Housing retention after six months	Testing: of the people in homelessness prevention who exited to a permanent housing destination, those who did not enter the homeless system after exit	Not established

*Drop-in emergency shelters offer night-by-night living arrangements that allow households to enter and exit on an irregular or daily basis and often use a night-by-night tracking method in Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

**Excludes drop-in emergency shelters

Racially equitable outcomes

Starting July 2023, CHG's performance requirements included the equitable outcomes performance measure. The measure is a key component to promoting racial equity within the homeless crisis response system. The equitable outcomes performance measure looks at housing outcomes (specifically, exits to positive outcomes) of exited households across racial and ethnic demographics. Shelters are considered in compliance with this performance measure when the housing outcomes of the exited households across racial and ethnic demographics are not significantly less than the overall rate. This is measured across each intervention type already included in outcomes-based performance monitoring: drop-in emergency shelter, emergency shelter, transitional housing, rapid re-housing, and PSH. We conducted the mid-point performance assessment of the equitable outcomes measure in the summer of 2024.

This assessment provided grantees with an update on their performance based on the measure so that they:

- Understand the equitable outcomes measure and requirements under the CHG guidelines
- Are aware of any outcome disparities that exist in their community and have opportunities for diagnosing and improving outcome disparities
- Are prepared for the formal performance monitoring

Additionally, the mid-point performance assessment provided Commerce the opportunity to test the monitoring methodology and incorporate feedback from grantees to ensure that future monitoring of this measure is accurate and meaningful.

Commerce performed an internal assessment of the outcomes data in accordance with the measure. We reviewed data at the system (county) level to assess disparities across all race and ethnicity categories and all intervention types. We scored this evaluation against a rubric to assess which grantees will be selected for technical assistance with the intention of selecting grantees with more significant outcome-based racial disparities. All grantees received documentation of the results of their community's assessment.

Performance results disaggregated by race and ethnicity can be found on the CHG Performance Tracker, which is updated quarterly.

This short video series is available for more information on the background of performance monitoring, current requirements and racial equity-related performance measurement.

Racially equitable access

Nationally and in Washington, People of Color are dramatically overrepresented in homeless and unstably housed populations. Commerce supports communities in improving equitable access by publishing access data, developing resources, and facilitating activities focused on data literacy. Additionally, Commerce provides technical assistance on strategies that improve access, including support with Coordinated Entry. These resources and activities include grantee workshops, one-on-one technical assistance opportunities, data visualizations, trainings, and toolkits.

To assess the impact of equitable access strategies, Commerce maintains the Washington Balance of State Equitable Access Dashboard. This dashboard compares the race and ethnicity of households entering the homeless system as measured using Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data to the race and ethnicity of the homeless and unstably housed population as reported in the Snapshots of Homelessness reports. Communities are encouraged to use this data to identify underserved populations, assess the impact of their access strategies and ultimately work to improve equitable access as needed.

In 2024, Commerce provided an Equitable Access Workshop Series in which grantees had the opportunity to explore equitable access. Each workshop covered a different topic, and attendees heard from Commerce Staff, outside experts and each other. We recorded each workshop, provided an accompanying toolkit and held dedicated office hours for attendees to discuss equitable access with the workshop facilitators.

Snapshot of homelessness in Washington

The Snapshot of Homelessness reports (Snapshot reports) combines client information from several state agency data systems to provide a comprehensive estimate of the homeless and unstably housed population in the state. We publish it twice a year, in January and July.

According to the Snapshot report, we estimate that there were 198,176 people experiencing homelessness or housing instability in Washington in the month of January 2024. Of those, 13.1% were American Indian or Alaska Native and 19.6% were Black or African American.

The Snapshot report can help community members, policymakers, and planners understand service needs in their communities and the characteristics of individuals who were homeless or unstably housed during the reporting month.

The Snapshot report is the most comprehensive count of the homeless and unstably housed population. It combines information on housing status from Provider One (P1), the Automated Client Eligibility System (ACES), and the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

What is P1?

P1 is the Medicaid claims system administered by the Washington State Healthcare Authority. When people access medical services covered by Medicaid, diagnoses and procedure codes associated with homelessness can be used to identify homeless individuals.

What is ACES?

ACES is a data system management by the Washington State Department of Commerce. Local service providers use HMIS to collect and manage data gathered while providing assistance to people experiencing homelessness or a housing crisis.

What is HMIS?

HMIS is a data system management by the Washington State Department of Commerce. Local service providers use HMIS to collect and manage data gathered while proving assistance to people experiencing homelessness or a housing crisis. This includes information about their current and prior living arrangements.

Table 3 describes how a person would be categorized as homeless or unstably housed in each data system.

Table 3: Administrative data sources for the Snapshot of Homelessness reports

Data system	Homeless	Unstably housed
P1	International Classification of Diseases (ICD) codes that indicate an individual is homeless: V600, C601, Z 590, Z591	No ICD codes for unstably housed
ACES	Client reports one of the following current living arrangements: • Domestic violence shelter • Emergency shelter • Homeless without housing i.e. unsheltered • Inappropriate living situation Address field: A client reports their address as "homeless," "couch surfing," or "general delivery" IRP activities: A client accessing TANF services has "resolving homelessness" as a work activity in their IRP	Client reports current living arrangement: • Homeless with housing
HMIS	The client is entered into one of the following HMIS project types: • Emergency shelter • Street outreach • Safe haven • Transitional housing	Client is entered into one of the following HMIS project types: • Homelessness prevention • Coordinated entry (first month of service only)

Data system	Homeless	Unstably housed
	All permanent housing type projects, including rapid re-housing and PSH: the first month of services and any time prior to move-in date.	○ Day shelter

State Plan accomplishments

Homeless Housing Strategic Plan vision, mission and guiding principles

In 2005, the Washington Legislature passed the Homeless Housing Assistance Act (RCW 43.185C). The act outlined policies to address homelessness and directed Commerce to "prepare and publish a five-year homeless housing strategic plan which must outline statewide goals and performance measures."

2019-2024 Homeless Housing Strategic Plan vision, mission and guiding principles:

- **Vision:** No person left living outside.
- **Mission:** Support homeless crisis response systems that efficiently reduce the number of people living outside, and when scaled appropriately, can house all unsheltered people.
- **Guiding principles:**
  - All people deserve a safe place to live.
  - Urgent and bold action is the appropriate response to people living outside.
  - Interventions must be data-driven and evidence-based.

Commerce completed the 2019-2024 Homeless Housing Crisis Strategic Plan in November 2019. To learn more, visit the Strategic Plan, Annual Reports and Audits webpage.

Commerce released the 2024-2029 Homeless Housing Strategic Plan in October 2024. Commerce will distribute updated guidance to county governments to update their local plans by December 2025.

2019-2024 Homeless Housing Strategic Plan objectives

This is the last report on the 2019-2024 Plan objectives. The new 2024-2029 Strategic Plan will guide the next five years of state action to reduce and end homelessness in Washington.

Objective 1: Quickly identify and engage people experiencing homelessness through outreach and coordination with systems that assist homeless subpopulations.

Connection to the goal: People living unsheltered cannot be housed if they are not identified, and progress toward the goal of ending homelessness cannot be accurately assessed without knowing the universe of people experiencing homelessness.			
Commerce action	**Measure of success**	**Timeline**	**Update**
Provide effective problem-solving strategies and technical assistance on how to identify and engage people living in places not meant for human habitation.	Office of Family and Adult Homelessness and Office of Homeless Youth grantees access technical assistance. Coordinated Entry Systems comply with Coordinated Entry System requirements.	Ongoing	Trainings continue to be updated in preparation for the grant period that aligns with the 2025-2027 biennium, including offerings in diversion and problem solving when engaging with people experiencing homelessness. The trainings are led by subject matter experts and made available online at no cost.

Provide technical assistance to ensure coordinated entry process accessibility, safety, and confidentiality for households whose members are fleeing violence (including domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking or trafficking).	Coordinated Entry Systems access technical assistance and comply with Coordinated Entry requirements.	Ongoing	All communities are required to work with their local victim service providers to ensure a safe and confidential process per the Commerce Coordinated Entry guidelines. Commerce provides quarterly training to local Coordinated Entry staff including guidance regarding processes for people fleeing violence. Most importantly, Commerce provided direct technical assistance to communities that had challenges in assuring a safe and confidential Coordinated Entry process for people fleeing violence.

Objective 2: Prioritize housing for people who have the greatest need for immediate access to assistance.

Connection to the goal: When people who have the greatest needs are left outside, they are more likely to experience trauma or injury, making it more difficult to ultimately bring them inside.			
Commerce action	**Measure of success**	**Timeline**	**Update**
Provide training and technical assistance on the Washington State Coordinated Entry Guidelines.	Office of Family and Adult Homelessness (OFAH) and Office of Homeless Youth (OHY) grantees access technical assistance.	ongoing	Commerce provides training to local Coordinated Entry staff and Coordinated Entry Committee meetings quarterly. Commerce responds to requests for technical assistance on specific, locally identified challenges.
Assess the coordinated entry process performance and compliance with requirements and provide technical assistance on any deficiencies.	Assess 60% of counties in 2019 and 40% in 2020. Develop a plan to ensure compliance with federal Coordinated Entry Requirements.	2019-2021	Commerce worked in partnership with local communities in the Balance of State region to establish a Coordinated Entry governance structure in 2021 that complies with federal Coordinated Entry requirements.
Explore performance improvement requirements and benchmarks for successful housing placements or housing retention of prioritized people.	Establish performance improvement requirements and benchmarks for successful housing placements or housing retention of prioritized people	2024	Chapter 214, Laws of 2021 (E2SHB 1277) created a program that funded project-based vouchers and other housing assistance services. This program required each county receiving this program funding to take actions to prevent and reduce homelessness. A steering committee was formed to provide recommendations to satisfy this requirement and create a cross-sectional group of stakeholders to advise Commerce. From November 2021 through the 2022 calendar year, Commerce and the steering committee underwent a significant stakeholder co-creation process to develop a performance framework in compliance with the bill. The Steering Committee proposed that each county receiving program funding must take actions associated with increasing housing capacity, improving financial and supportive services, increasing housing placements, and addressing racial disparities. Chapter 277, Laws of 2023 (SSB 5386) removed the program created in HB 1277 that funded project-based vouchers and other housing assistance services. The changes did not remove the performance framework but applied it to the Home Security Fund. Because of this change, the specific performance

			proposals developed by the steering committee were not feasible and not implemented. RCW 43.185C.185 required Commerce to develop performance measures that promote both racially equitable program access and racially equitable program outcomes. Performance requirements associated with equitable access and outcomes were added to the Consolidated Homeless Grant starting in July 2023. The performance monitoring and corrective action process required by RCW 43.185C.060 will be incorporated into the Consolidated Homeless Grant starting July 2025.
Annually monitor the unsheltered prioritization performance improvement requirements and provide technical assistance on any deficiencies.	80% of counties move into compliance after any corrective action.	2019-2023	Starting in July 2023, the homeless system performance requirements included in the Consolidated Homeless Grant were updated to remove prioritization requirements. Performance monitoring was postponed due to the pandemic and new legislation directed the development of new measures in RCW 43.185C.185 and 43.185c.060.

Objective 3: Work toward people living unsheltered having immediate access to temporary housing.

Connection to the goal: Living outside is a barrier to resolving the issues that contribute to people becoming homeless.			
Commerce action	**Measure of success**	**Timeline**	**Update**
Publish estimates of the unmet temporary housing and services need and the costs of meeting the state's vision that no person is left living outside.	Estimates include: ○ Rents increase at the same rate as inflation ○ Rents annually decrease 2% below the rate of inflation ○ Rents annually increase by 2% above the rate of inflation	2020	New requirements in RCW 36.70A070(2), 35A.21.430, and 34.21.683 provide additional targets that local governments are required to use as part of the Growth Management Act.
Monitor low-barrier requirements and provide technical assistance on any deficiencies.	Assess 80% of counties in 2019 and 20% in 2020. Counties receive technical assistance plans that, if implemented, would bring them into compliance with state low-barrier requirements.	2019-2021	Monitoring is ongoing through 2024.
Support state-funded projects to reduce barriers and expand low-barrier requirements	80% of counties expand low-barrier programs and facility access by 2025.	2022-2024	After stakeholder feedback, Commerce is requiring that by July 1, 2025, no less than 80% of a county's Consolidated Homeless Grant-funded projects (programs and facilities) be low-barrier. This is on track.

Objective 4: Work toward people experiencing homelessness having permanent housing options.

Connection to the goal: People living in temporary housing are considered homeless, so moving people into permanent and stable housing options is central to the goal of ending homelessness.			
Commerce action	**Measure of success**	**Timeline**	**Update**
Publish estimates of the unmet permanent housing and services need and the costs of meeting the state's vision that no person is left living outside.	Estimates include: ○ Rents increase at the same rate as inflation; ○ Rents annually decrease 2% below the rate of inflation; and ○ Rents annually increase by 2% above the rate of inflation	2020	New requirements in RCW 36.70A070(2), 35A.21.430, and 34.21.683 provide additional targets that local governments are required to use as part of the Growth Management Act.
Apply annually for federal Continuum of Care funds for the Balance of State projects and comply with reporting requirements.	Applications include new and existing projects. Submit applications and reports on time.	Ongoing	Applications will be submitted on time for annual renewals and new projects in the Balance of State Continuum of Care competition in 2024. Applications were submitted for renewals and new Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project projects in 2024.
Actively seek new federal fund opportunities for Balance of State counties to expand housing inventory.	Award applications.	Ongoing	In 2024, all reporting deadlines to HUD for Point in Time Count data and Housing Inventory Count for Balance of State Continuum of Care projects were met.

Objective 5: Prevent youth and young adults from experiencing homelessness.

Connection to the goal: Preventing youth and young adults from becoming homeless directly contributes to the goal of ending homelessness.			
Commerce action	**Measure of success**	**Timeline**	**Update**
Ensure that youth who exit public systems of care exit into safe and stable housing, per Chapter 82, Laws of 2018 (SSB 6560). Public systems of care include foster care, juvenile justice, behavioral health and the Office of Homeless Youth programs.	Submit a state plan to the Legislature by Dec. 31, 2019. Develop data-tracking mechanisms to measure the number of youth and young adults experiencing homelessness or housing instability within 12 months of exit from a public system. Implement and evaluate system-of-care/innovation grants to test innovative approaches to prevent youth from exiting systems of care into homelessness	2018, ongoing	In 2020, OHY and the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) submitted a state plan to the Legislature focused on: ○ Effective transitions from care ○ Community connections ○ Housing OHY, DCYF and the Healthcare Authority (HCA) continue to collaborate through the Chapter 82, Laws of 2018 interagency workgroup to support the transition process for young people in child welfare, juvenile rehabilitation, and inpatient behavioral health treatment. OHY led a Transitional Living Pilot for youth ages 16 and 17 and, through Chapter 154, Laws of 2022 (SB 5566) expanded the Independent Youth Housing Program for former foster youth and young adults in Extended Foster Care. In 2020, OHY and DSHS's Research and Data Analysis Division developed a dashboard measuring homelessness or housing instability among youth and young adults three to 12 months after

Connection to the goal: Preventing youth and young adults from becoming homeless directly contributes to the goal of ending homelessness.			
			exiting public systems. OHY and RDA update the dashboard at least semi-annually. In 2022, OHY and state agency partners implemented components of Chapter 137, Laws of 2022 (SHB 1905), deploying $4,434,00 of state funds to end exits to homelessness from public systems of care for: • Forming a Rapid Response Team of OHY, DCYF, HCA, and DSHS staff supporting youth with complex cases exiting public systems of care • Expanding flexible homelessness diversion supports for youth exiting systems of care • Creating grants for Housing Stability for Youth in Courts (HSYNC) programs in six counties to prevent exits to homelessness from county juvenile detention facilities • Expanding the System of Care grant program to fund community-based services that prevent youth from exiting public systems of care into homelessness In 2023, OHY hired a Prevention Manager to serve on the Rapid Response Team and support grantees implementing prevention initiatives. OHY launched a Prevention Community of Practice for organizations to share learnings and coordinate approaches.
Develop policy and funding solutions that provide families and youth in crisis with the supports they need to become or stay healthy and resilient.	Submit recommendations to the Legislature through the Families and Youth in Crisis report (2018 supplemental operating budget, section 127, subsection 24).	2018, ongoing	In 2020, the Legislature tasked the Office of Homeless Youth, with financial support from the Raikes Foundation, with drafting a strategic plan to prevent youth homelessness. After drafting a plan outlining existing prevention efforts and identifying root causes, OHY and two grassroots, BIPOC-led organizations worked with a steering committee of people with lived experience to identify recommendations in the report "Shifting Services and Systems to Prevent Youth Housing Instability." The final strategic plan outlines recommendations under four main pillars of prevention: Support and invest in whole family well-being Eliminate trauma and racism in systems that serve youth and families Shift power to BIPOC communities Universal support for fundamental human rights In 2022, the Legislature directed Commerce to establish an interagency work group to oversee the implementation of the strategic plan for youth homelessness prevention. OHY received funding from the Legislature to re-establish the steering committee of people with lived experience to continue to inform the implementation of the recommendations outlined in the plan. In 2024, OHY worked with Communities of Color Coalition (C3) to re-establish the steering committee of young people with lived experience to help guide the implementation the state's strategic plan on youth homelessness prevention. OHY staff also created and currently co-leads a new interagency Youth Homelessness Prevention Workgroup alongside partners at the Department of Children, Youth, & Families and the Healthcare Authority to enhance the strategic alignment of our collective efforts to prevent and end youth and young adult homelessness.

Connection to the goal: Preventing youth and young adults from becoming homeless directly contributes to the goal of ending homelessness.			
Make diversion an allowable activity through the Office of Homeless Youth's Street Outreach Services grant. Provide technical assistance to grantees on effective diversion strategies. Measure effectiveness and implement continuous quality improvement processes.	Update the 2019-21 Street Outreach Services program guidelines to include diversion as an allowable cost. 90% of Street Outreach Services grantees receive technical assistance. Data reflects that youth and young adults served through diversion avoid entering the homeless crisis response system.	2019, ongoing	In 2020, OHY updated the Street Outreach Services grant guidelines to include diversion as an allowable expense and activity. Beginning July 1, 2020, the OHY issued grants to operate the Homeless Prevention and Diversion Fund (HPDF) to provide diversion services and flexible funding to youth and young adults in the Anchor Communities (Spokane, Walla Walla, Pierce, and Yakima counties). In 2022, the Legislature passed Chapter 137, Laws of 2022 (HB 1905), which included a new flexible fund program for young people exiting public systems of care to ensure they obtain stable housing. This new program, the Youth Diversion Infrastructure Project (YDIP), is a partnership with A Way Home Washington and Building Changes, which leverages both organizations' expertise in the centralized diversion fund model to propagate diversion-first principles within systems of care in Clark, Spokane, Walla Walla, Pierce, and Yakima counties. A Way Home Washington provides technical assistance and delivers a comprehensive curriculum to train community partners on diversion best practice approaches and how to utilize flexible funding to meet the needs of young people to avoid homelessness. In 2024, Commerce expanded the HPDF program to operate in all 10 counties participating in the Anchor Community Initiative: Clallam, Clark, Jefferson, Pierce, Skagit, Spokane, Thurston, Wall Walla, Whatcom, and Yakima. Additionally, YDIP was able to expand into King County. OHY is using the lessons of flexible funding to develop a new pilot program to provide Direct Cash Transfers to young adults experiencing or at risk of homelessness and housing instability. OHY staff are working with national technical assistance provider, Point Source Youth to co-design this pilot program with young people with lived experience all across Washington through in-person and virtual engagement opportunities.

Objective 6: Make certain that youth experiencing homelessness are offered age and developmentally appropriate access to services that support safe and stable housing, family reconciliation, permanent connections, education and employment and well-being.

Connection to the goal: Services can help youth build resiliency that prevents homelessness and promotes stability through increased income, connections to supportive social networks and general well-being.			
Commerce action	**Measure of success**	**Timeline**	**Update**
Through the Office of Homeless Youth, lead the Interagency Workgroup on Youth Homelessness to engage state agencies in addressing the education, employment, and well-being needs of youth and young adults experiencing homelessness. Implement the Office	2019-21 program contracts include performance measures and data-reporting requirements. The Interagency Workgroup on Youth Homelessness develops	2019, ongoing	The final performance measures were included in OHY program guidelines in January 2023. In January 2023, Commerce published the OHY Performance Dashboard. This dashboard illustrates current grantee performance and guides performance monitoring.

Connection to the goal: Services can help youth build resiliency that prevents homelessness and promotes stability through increased income, connections to supportive social networks and general well-being.			
of Homeless Youth program performance measures that evaluate outcomes related to stable housing, education, employment, permanent connections, and social and emotional well-being.	cross-sector strategies to address youth and young adult homelessness.		Performance monitoring began in January of 2024. Grantees with the most significant performance issues are receiving technical assistance to improve grantee performance and outcomes for youth and young adults accessing their services.

Objective 7: Address inequities in services and outcomes among people experiencing homelessness.

Connection to the goal: Systems that cannot effectively engage all people cannot end homelessness.			
Commerce action	**Measure of success**	**Timeline**	**Update**
Conduct data analysis to understand the scope of inequities as it relates to race, ethnicity, disabilities, people who identify as LGBTQIA2S+, and other marginalized communities.	Conduct research and publish a report.	Ongoing	All newly published performance dashboards included program outcomes disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and other demographic factors. The Equitable Access Dashboard compares the race/ethnicity of the population in need of services to the population receiving services.
Work with stakeholders to develop equity measures and benchmarks that are added to the state and county report cards and included in contracts for state homeless housing funds.	Hold feedback sessions with stakeholders to identify measures and benchmarks after publishing the report.	2021-2023	RCW 43.185C.185 required Commerce to develop performance measures that promote both racially equitable program access and racially equitable program outcomes. From November 2021 through the 2022 calendar year, Commerce and a steering committee underwent a significant stakeholder co-creation process to develop a performance framework in compliance with RCW 43.185C.185. We added performance requirements associated with equitable access and outcomes to the Consolidated Homeless Grant starting in July 2023.
Procure trainer on protected classes for Commerce homeless housing staff and grantees.	Trainer under contract	2020, ongoing	Ongoing
Use an equity tool to review and evaluate homeless program guidelines and policies and ensure the equitable distribution of resources.	Identify subject matter experts and peer state agency consultants to advise on the equity tool. Develop policies to use the tool to ensure equitable resource distribution.	2020	The Housing Division and the broader Department of Commerce are developing policies to ensure equitable resource distribution.

Objective 8: Maintain an effective, efficient and transparent homeless crisis response system.

Connection to the goal: Improved efficiency increases the number of people who can be housed with limited resources, and a system that transparently demonstrates its efficiency is more likely to receive the resources necessary to end homelessness.

Commerce action	Measure of success	Timeline	Update
Publish Washington's homeless system performance as compared to other states	Publish performance results annually.	2019, ongoing	Continuum of Care System Performance Data
Publish state, county, and project-level homeless system performance outcomes.	Publish annual and quarterly performance outcomes.	2019, ongoing	The Washington State Homeless System Performance County Report Card is updated annually. Program-specific performance dashboards are updated quarterly and can be found on the Data and Performance Unit website.
Complete annual state and federal reporting.	Submit accurate reports on time.	Ongoing	All federally required reports were submitted on time, including the Action Plan, Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report, Housing Inventory Count, and Point in Time Count data.
Require progress toward homeless system performance targets as a condition of state funding.	The Consolidated Homeless Grant contracts include the homeless system performance improvement requirements for rapid rehousing, emergency shelter, transitional housing and PSH.	2019, ongoing	The Consolidated Homeless Grant contracts include homeless system performance improvement requirements for rapid rehousing, emergency shelter, transitional housing and PSH. Grantees are required to make progress from their baseline towards the statewide performance targets. We are incorporating the performance monitoring and corrective action process required by RCW 43.185C.060 into the Consolidated Homeless Grant starting July 2025. Mid-point performance assessments will occur January 2026 and formal performance monitoring will occur July through September 2026.
Provide technical assistance and training on homeless system performance improvement strategies. Develop performance improvement plans for grantees who are not meeting performance improvement benchmarks.	The percentage of exits to permanent housing reaches the level of the top-performing 20% of homeless systems nationwide. Reduce returns to homelessness after exits to permanent housing to less than 10%. Reduce the average length of time homeless to fewer than 90 days.	2019-2024	
Improve homeless system performance measures through consultation with national experts and peer agencies on the Washington State Interagency Council on Homelessness.	Meet with the Washington State Interagency Council on Homelessness quarterly. Maintain a contract with a performance consultant.	Ongoing	Ongoing
Engage people who have experienced homelessness to provide meaningful opportunities for input and experience-based advice.	Schedule listening tours and meet with advocacy groups to gather feedback on the Office of Family and Adult Homelessness and Office of Homeless Youth program policies.	Ongoing	The Homelessness Assistance Unit launched a lived experience advisory committee. The Committee will provide insight and recommendations to improve, strengthen, and make more equitable homeless crisis response systems across Washington. The first meeting took place in November of 2024.
Pursue federal and state policy changes necessary to achieve the state's	Provide feedback on federal homeless housing policy changes and advocate for	Ongoing	In the 2023-2025 biennium, the Legislature adopted $400 million in the capital budget for the development of affordable housing. In addition, the Legislature adopted an

vision that no person is left living outside.	program improvements. Develop budget requests that increase funding for homeless housing programs.		operating budget that included $290 million for homeless services and housing programs.
Provide training on the core competencies of homeless service provision, including trauma-informed care, mental health first aid, racial equity, LGBTQIA2S+ competency, and other training identified by the Office of Homeless Youth and Office of Family and Adult Homelessness.	Homelessness Assistance Unit and Office of Homeless Youth grantees comply with the training requirements.	Ongoing	The training plan for the 2025-2027 biennium encompasses best practices when engaging with individuals experiencing homelessness. The plan includes the following: Racial Equity 101 and Advanced training, LGBTQIA2S+ Competency and Advanced training, Lowering Barriers and Harm Reduction, Trauma Informed Services, and Introduction to Case Management Training Series. Information about how to schedule new training for Consolidated Homeless Grant contractors, Coordinated Entry staff and Balance of State counties is coming soon.

Planning, reporting, and auditing

State Strategic Plan and local homeless plans

Commerce produced a 2019-2024 State Homeless Strategic Plan in 2019 and this is the final periodic update for that plan. Commerce recently published the 2024-2029 State Homeless Strategic Plan.

Local county plans and annual reports are available on the Commerce website.

Audits

More information on state audits and examinations of Commerce's management of the homeless funding and programming is on the State Strategic Plan section of the Commerce website.

Procurement

HOME Tenant-Based Rental Assistance and Emergency Solutions Grant

Annually, Commerce completes an action plan to secure federal HOME Tenant-Based Rental Assistance (TBRA) and Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) homeless housing funding. More information on the annual action plan and five-year Consolidated Plan for ESG and HOME TBRA is located on the Plan webpage.

Balance of State Continuum of Care

Commerce applies for HUD Continuum of Care (CoC) Program funding on behalf of the Balance of State (BoS) CoC, which is comprised of 34 counties in Washington (the large counties, including King, Pierce, Snohomish, Clark and Spokane, each manages their own CoC program). In the federal fiscal year 2023 competition for CoC and Youth Homeless Demonstration Program (YHDP) grant funds, HUD awarded the BoS CoC $19,159,071 of annually renewable funding for:

- 50 renewal projects providing permanent housing solutions to families and single adults experiencing homelessness
- 18 renewal and 19 new YHDP projects for youth and young adults experiencing homelessness
- 5 new permanent housing projects, including some dedicated to serving survivors of domestic violence

New projects started in mid-to-late 2024.

More information on the CoC funding is located on the CoC webpage.

Table 4: Federal grant funds

FFY 2024 Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG)	FFY 2024 HOME Tenant-Based Rental Assistance (TBRA)	New non-YHDP BoS CoC Project Funds	Non-YHDP BoS CoC Funds for Existing Programs	BoS Youth Homeless Demonstration Program (YHDP)
$2,711,119	$2,406,909	$1,654,143	$12,666,588	$4,838,340

Interagency Council on Homelessness

The Interagency Council on Homelessness met quarterly through state fiscal year 2023 to maintain cross-agency communication and coordinate activities addressing homelessness. Additional details on the Council's work are on the Commerce Homeless Councils webpage.

Organizational outline

The Housing Division is composed of eight units and offices in response to legislative requirements and responsibilities.

Units and offices within the Housing Division:

- Housing Division Administration Unit
- Homelessness Assistance Unit
- Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Programs
- Data and Performance Unit
- Office of Apple Health & Homes and Permanent Supportive Housing
- Housing Policy and Strategic Initiatives Unit
- Multifamily Housing Unit
- Home Ownership Unit

Units and offices responsible for the information within this report:

- Homelessness Assistance Unit
- Office of Homeless Youth Protection and Prevention Programs
- Data and Performance Unit
- Office of Apple Health & Homes and Permanent Supportive Housing

Homelessness Assistance Unit

The Homelessness Assistance Unit administers state and federal fund sources granted to local governments and nonprofits.

Table 5: Homelessness Assistance Unit fund sources

Grant	Fund source
Consolidated Homeless Grant/ System Demonstration Grant	Housing surcharge/document recording fee and General Fund-State
Housing and Essential Needs	General Fund-State
Diversion Program Grant	General Fund-State
HOME Tenant-Based Rental Assistance	Federal
Emergency Solutions Grant	Federal
HOME America Rescue Plan Grant	Federal

More information is available on the Homelessness Response webpage.

Balance of State Continuum of Care and Reporting Office

The Balance of State Continuum of Care and Reporting Office in the Homelessness Assistance Unit works with 34 counties in Washington's Balance of State Continuum of Care to submit a consolidated application for funding from Commerce to Housing and Urban Development. It is also responsible for coordinating the annual Point-in-Time Count.

More information is available on the CoC webpage.

Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Programs

The Office of Homeless Youth (OHY) Prevention and Protection Programs administers state fund sources granted to local governments and nonprofits. More information is available on the OHY webpage.

Table 6: Fund sources of Office of Homeless Youth-managed grants

Grant	Fund source
Crisis Residential Centers	Housing surcharge/Document recording fee
Secure Crisis Residential Centers	Housing surcharge/Document recording fees
HOPE Centers	Housing surcharge/Document recording fee
Independent Youth Housing Program	Housing surcharge/Document recording fee/General Fund-State
Street Outreach Services	General Fund-State/Housing surcharge/Document recording fee
Young Adult Shelter	General Fund-State
Youth Adult Housing Program	Housing surcharge/Document recording fee/ General Fund-State
Transitional Living Program	General Fund-State
Ancillary Therapeutic Services	General Fund-State
System of Care	General Fund-State
Homeless Student Stability Program	Housing surcharge/Document recording fee/General Fund-State
Homelessness Prevention Diversion Fund, formerly Centralized Diversion Fund	General Fund-State
Anchor Community Initiative	General Fund-State
Youth Homeless Demonstration Program	Federal
Diversion	General Fund-State
Housing Stability for Youth in Courts	General Fund-State
Community Support Teams	General Fund-State
Doorway Project	General Fund-State
Arlington Drive Youth Campus	General Fund-State

Data and Performance Unit

Homeless System Performance Team

The Homeless System Performance Team leads compliance efforts with coordinated entry requirements for Consolidated Homeless Grant grantees. In partnership with the Analytics and Reporting team, they produce reports and dashboards to monitor the performance of homeless housing and services grants.

Learn more about how this office provides information on the Homeless System Performance webpage.

Homeless Management Information System Administration Team

This team administers the state's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). It provides solutions for the BoS CoC and King County Continuums and data integration technology to bring the other continuum data

into the statewide database. HMIS is the data source for most of the information used in Commerce's performance reports. Homeless housing service providers use HMIS to collect and manage data gathered while providing housing assistance to people experiencing homelessness.

More information is on the HMIS webpage.

Analytics and Reporting Team

The Analytics and Reporting Team produces the Homeless System Performance Reports and County Report Cards, dashboards on homeless interventions, the Annual Expenditure Report ("the Golden"), and more. They work in partnership with the Homeless System Performance team and the Homelessness Assistance Unit to produce reports that assist with monitoring homeless housing and services contracts.

Office of Apple Health and Homes-Permanent Supportive Housing

In the last decade, the Washington Legislature has made significant investments in PSH. In 2022, the Legislature created a PSH Advisory Committee to provide guidance and recommendations on the administration of PSH resources managed by the Department of Commerce, including recommendations to ensure alignment of capital, services, and operating investments and fidelity with the provision of PSH.

RCW 36.70A.030 defines permanent supportive housing as:

> Subsidized, leased housing with no limit on length of stay that prioritizes people who need comprehensive support services to retain tenancy and utilizes admissions practices designed to use lower barriers to entry than would be typical for other subsidized or unsubsidized rental housing, especially related to rental history, criminal history, and personal behaviors. Permanent supportive housing is paired with on-site or off-site voluntary services designed to support a person living with a complex and disabling behavioral health or physical health condition who was experiencing homelessness or was at imminent risk of homelessness prior to moving into housing to retain their housing and be a successful tenant in a housing arrangement, improve the resident's health status, and connect the resident of the housing with community-based health care, treatment, or employment services. Permanent supportive housing is subject to all of the rights and responsibilities defined in Chapter 59.18 RCW.

Simply put, PSH is housing provided to persons exiting homelessness, with attached services that we understand as necessary to prevent that person's return to homelessness.

The Apple Health & Homes (AHAH) Initiative is a multi-agency effort that pairs healthcare services with housing resources for some of the state's most vulnerable residents. Created under Chapter 216, Laws of 2022 (ESHB 1866), the initiative aligns housing resources (capital financing and rental/operations assistance) with supportive services through the Health Care Authority's (HCA) Foundational Community Supports (FCS) program. FCS provides supportive housing and supportive employment services designed to enable program participants to lead independent and self-directed lives in their own homes. HCA has contracted with Wellpoint to be the coordinating entity that confirms eligibility for participants in conjunction with local FCS providers across the state.

The Office of Apple Health and Homes-Permanent Supportive Housing was created in 2022 to manage Commerce's role in the AHAH initiative and to manage several other programs dedicated to expanding, sustaining and increasing the quality of PSH. A full list of those programs can be found on the AHAH-PSH website.

Homeless housing project expenditure and data report

RCW 43.185C.045 requires that each county in Washington report all expenditures by funding sources (federal, state, and local) for homeless housing projects in their community. Commerce combines expenditures data with HMIS data to create a comprehensive report that includes expenditures and links them to outcomes. In the state fiscal year 2023, projects spent over $600 million assisting households who were homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness. The table below summarizes the number of beds and cost per intervention.

Table 7: Homeless housing project expenditures for state fiscal year 2024

Service type	Beds	Total expenditures	Cost per day per household	Cost per successful exit per household
Rapid Rehousing	NA	$100,456,462	$55	$24,962
Emergency Shelter	12,933	$255,156,474	$96	$47,338
Transitional Housing	3,435	$31,751,221	$54	$28,649
Homeless Prevention	NA	$107,996,396	$44	$11,706
Permanent Supportive Housing	12,660	$224,079,350	$59	$332,704
Other Permanent Housing	4,718	$38,584,513	$46	$106,210
Street Outreach	NA	$26,548,141	$7	$12,009
Services Only	NA	$33,502,199	$15	$18,922
Coordinated Entry	NA	$9,516,658	$1	$865
Day Shelter	NA	$12,025,760	$9	$42,796
Safe Haven	76	$2,521,509	$115	47,576
Other, Unknown, NA	NA	$38,881,255	$20	$21,487
Totals	**NA**	**$881,019,938**	**NA**	**NA**

The state fiscal year 2024 homeless housing project expenditure and data report are on the State Strategic Plan, Annual Reports and Audits webpage. More information on how the Data and Performance Unit uses the expenditure and data report is on the Homeless System Performance webpage.

State-funded homeless housing reports

Several RCWs require Commerce to report on expenditures, performance and outcomes for the following:

- Consolidated Homeless Grant: RCW 43.185C.045
- Housing and Essential Needs: RCW 43.185C.220
- Homeless Student Stability Program: RCW 43.185C.340
- Independent Youth Housing Program: RCW 43.63A.311

Commerce reports include the grant recipient and service area, expenditures, interventions and the number of households assisted. They may also include additional specific information required in each RCW.

The state fiscal year 2024 state-funded homeless housing reports are on the State Strategic Plan, Annual Reports and Audits website.

Point-In-Time Count

The Point-in-Time (PIT) Count is an annual count of people experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness carried out on one night in January. The Department of Commerce leads the PIT to ensure compliance with the data collection requirements outlined in RCW 43.185C.030 and CFR Part 578. Commerce supports local county governments or designated leads in coordinating the PIT Count in each county within the Balance of State CoC. The PIT is carried out by local paid staff and volunteers.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides guidance on PIT data collection methodology. The data we collect through the PIT is reported to HUD and used to inform policy, advance advocacy efforts, and understand the unique landscape of homelessness in our state.

King County does not conduct an unsheltered count annually, so odd years do not include King County. However, they do conduct a count of those in shelters and housing programs on the PIT night.

Summary of PIT Count results

Homelessness has increased year over year, and this trend continued in 2024, with 31,040 people experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness in Washington on the night of the PIT Count. This is a 5% increase in sheltered homelessness from 2023 and a 26% increase in unsheltered homelessness since 2022. When King County is removed from 2024 unsheltered data, the result is 21,230 people experiencing homelessness, which is a 4% increase from 2023.

There has been an increase in homelessness across all housing types, with transitional housing programs seeing the biggest increase at 8% (3,243 up from 2,994 in 2023) and emergency shelter programs increasing by 4% (11,524, up from 11,035 in 2023). People in transitional housing and emergency shelters meet the definition of experiencing sheltered homelessness because their stay in those programs is temporary. In 2024, those experiencing unsheltered homelessness accounted for 52.2% of the total homeless population, at 16,215 people. Sheltered homelessness accounts for 47.8% of the total homeless population, with 37.1% in emergency shelters, 10.4% in transitional housing, and 0.2% in safe havens (temporary accommodations for people experiencing homelessness and mental illness). The 2024 Housing Inventory Count indicated that on the night of the PIT, 7,961 people occupied Rapid Re-Housing beds, and of the 20,735 Permanent Housing beds (which consists of PSH and OPH housing programs), 17,666, or 86%, were occupied.

The Point-In-Time County Summary, which includes results by county, is available on the Annual Point in Time (PIT) Count webpage.

Table 8: Summary PIT Count results by housing status, 2022 to 2024

Homelessness category	2022	2023	2024
Emergency shelter	9,636	11,035	11,524
Transitional housing	2,852	2,994	3,243
Safe Haven	55	54	58
Unsheltered	12,909	6,316*	16,215
Totals	**25,452**	**20,399***	**31,040**

*2023 unsheltered and total counts exclude King County, as they did not complete an unsheltered count that year. King County typically represents approximately 50% of the total unsheltered count.

Figure 4: Changes in total people experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness, 2022 to 2024

