



STUDY OF HOMELESSNESS IN YAKIMA COUNTY

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to Ellie Lambert whose enthusiasm and insight set us on the right path at the very beginning of our journey. Her caring for those who are experiencing homelessness and knowledge of their experiences gave us the courage to seek answers to our questions.



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INTRODUCTION

In 2017, The League of Women Voters of Yakima County voted at their annual meeting to conduct a study of homelessness in Yakima County which began in early 2018.

League Position Statement

The League of Women Voters uses a time-tested method for taking positions on issues. Members study an issue, use local League meetings to develop consensus on the issues raised in the study, and then adopt a written statement of position on the issue, which is approved by the Board.

LWVYC believes safe housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness is essential for a thriving community. The League supports:

- Expanding community understanding that homelessness is a social and health care issue that impacts some populations disproportionately more than others
- Addressing gaps in services and resources for housing solutions based on Best Practices
- Increasing strategies that address a range of services from Prevention to Permanent Housing
- Delivering basic hygiene needs to those who are unsheltered to mitigate public health issues

Acknowledgements

The League of Women Voters of Yakima County would like to thank the Study Committee who met and evaluated research to develop this study. Committee members include:

- Betty Van Ryder
- Carrie Huie-Pascua
- Ellie Lambert
- Jackie Call
- Jackie Hertel
- Marilyn Shearer
- Mary Stephenson

With special thanks to Lee Murdock, Editor and Technical Reviewer.

About the League of Women Voters of Yakima County

The Mission of the League of Women Voters of Yakima County is Empowering Voters. Defending Democracy. Their vision is a democracy where every person has the desire, the right, the knowledge, and

the confidence to participate. The League believes in the power of women to create a more perfect democracy.

Background

This study describes the reported causes, what services are provided and by whom, the adequacy of services to meet current needs, the roles of various government and non-governmental agencies, and conclusions about those services. The purpose of this study was to learn about conditions and factors affecting homelessness in Yakima County by asking the following questions:

- How is homelessness defined?
- What are the causes of homelessness?
- What are the services available to persons experiencing homelessness?
- Who provides those services?
- What are the gaps in services and housing?
- What funding streams are available to address those gaps?
- What is the role of government and non-government agencies?

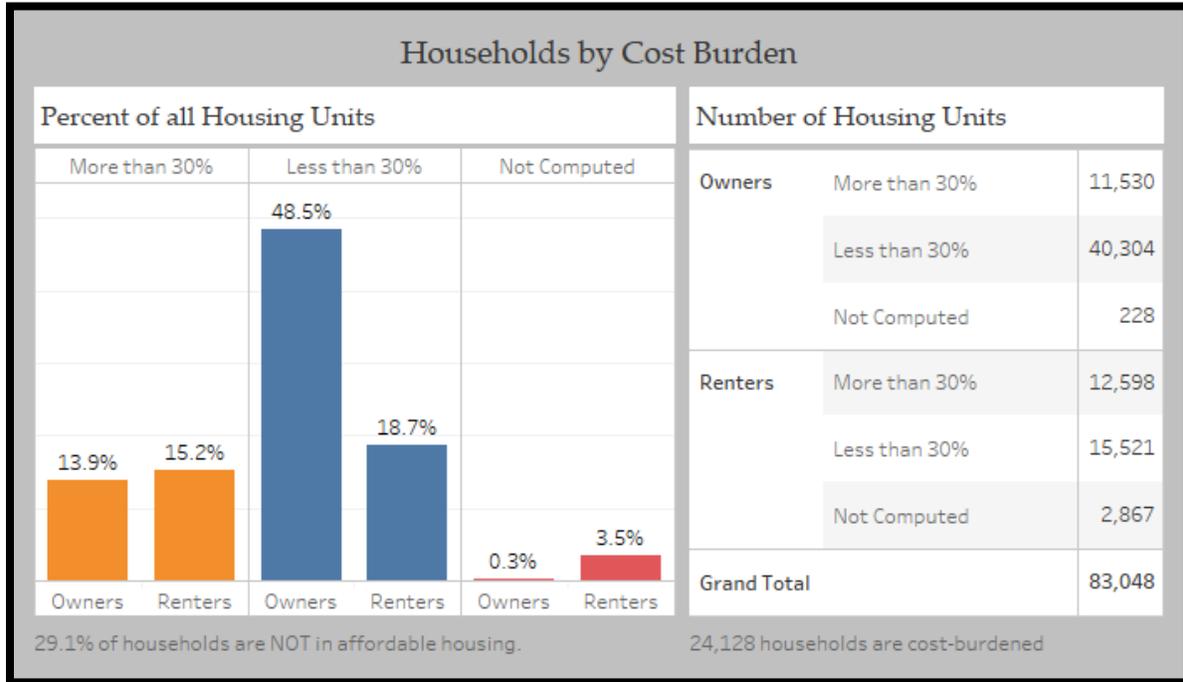
To begin the study, a survey was taken to learn if the cities and towns in Yakima County had a population of those who are experiencing homelessness. Most of the responses were that there were not many in their community, one response was that the city did not have a problem because the police removed individuals experiencing homelessness and one city did not respond.

Yakima County Description

Yakima County is the second largest county in Washington State by land surface (4,295 square miles) and the eighth largest by population (249,697)¹. Two-thirds of the population, or 66.1%, live in one of the 14 Cities and Towns. The largest population area in the county is the City of Yakima where 37.4%, or 93,413 people currently reside. The second largest population group, 34% or 84,779 people, are those who live in unincorporated county. Almost 2/3 of the county is comprised of federal land including the Yakima Training Center owned by the United States Department of Defense (165,787 acres), forests owned by the United States Forest Service (503,726 acres) and the Yakama Indian Nation – home to the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakima Nation (1,074,174 acres).

¹United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey – Five Year Estimates, 2019

The county has been identified as economically depressed and has a serious affordable housing shortage demonstrated by 24,128 total households paying more than 30% of their income towards housing costs as shown below²:



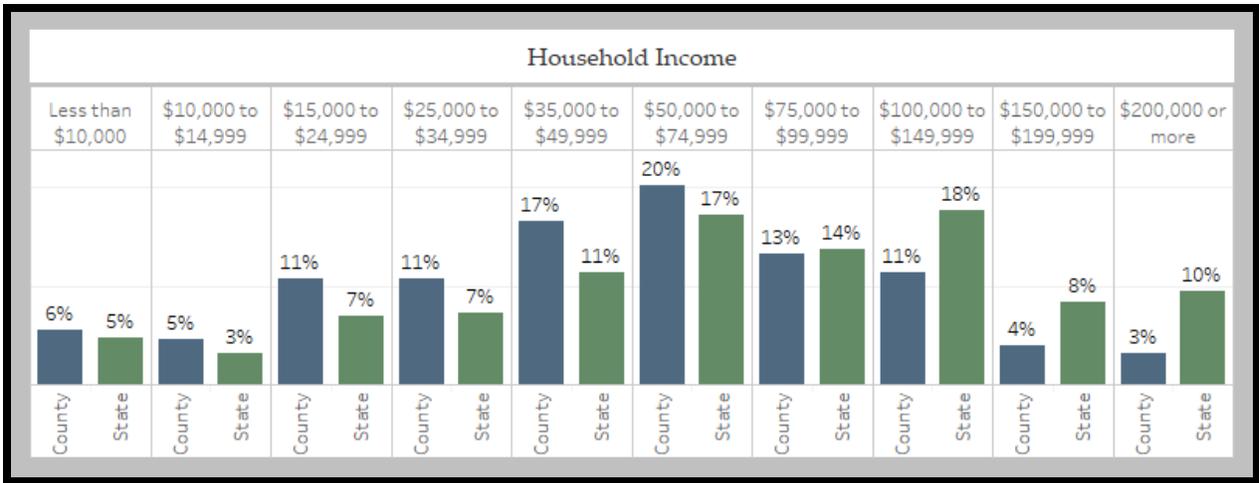
Yakima County has significantly more jobs in the Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining industry compared to the state and fewer jobs in the Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services industry³.

²Ibid.

³ United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey – Five Year Estimates, 2019

| Comparison of Industry | | |
|--|--------|-------|
| | County | State |
| Educational services, and health care and social assistance | 21.9% | 21.5% |
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining | 16.5% | 2.6% |
| Retail trade | 10.3% | 11.6% |
| Manufacturing | 8.7% | 9.9% |
| Transportation and warehousing, and utilities | 7.4% | 5.4% |
| Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services | 7.2% | 9.2% |
| Professional, scientific, and management, administrative and waste management services | 5.8% | 13.2% |
| Construction | 5.4% | 6.8% |
| Public administration | 4.9% | 5.0% |
| Wholesale trade | 4.3% | 2.8% |
| Other services, except public administration | 4.2% | 4.6% |
| Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing | 2.5% | 5.3% |
| Information | 0.9% | 2.2% |

The median household income in Yakima County is \$51,637 compared to the state rate of \$73,775⁴.



HOW DATA ON HOMELESSNESS IS COLLECTED

The primary method for collecting data regarding homelessness is from the Annual Point in Time count.

⁴Ibid.

Annual Point in Time Count

The Point-in-Time (PIT) count is a count of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness on a single night in January. HUD requires that communities conduct an annual count of people experiencing homelessness who are sheltered in emergency shelter, transitional housing, and Safe Havens on a single night. Each count is planned, coordinated, and carried out locally.

In Yakima County, this count is conducted by the Yakima County Department of Human Services. The methodology of the count is determined by HUD and monitored closely by the Washington State Department of Commerce. Once local results are collected, information is then included in the Annual Homeless Assessment Report II (AHAR)⁵. Together, the PIT and the AHAR tell us a tremendous amount about people experiencing homelessness and the problem of homelessness in our nation including:

- People's characteristics, including race, disability status, and age.
- Where people are staying and how long.
- Are the strategies we are using to end homelessness working?

They also report on performance measures to identify if current efforts to end and reduce homelessness is working, or whether it is being offset by the headwinds of housing affordability, low wages and benefits, poverty, racial inequality, etc. The PIT and the AHAR gather information on households that have no place — other than a facility that serves individuals who are homeless— in which to live. There are other households that are perhaps on the cusp of homelessness but have managed to avoid it. Although they may be unstably or poorly housed, since they are not literally homeless, they are not tallied in the PIT. This includes people staying with family or friends, who would prefer a place of their own but cannot afford one, or others who have a place to live but, for reasons of cost, end up moving frequently are also not tallied in the PIT count⁶.

⁵ To see the latest AHAR Report to Congress, see the HUD Exchange Web site at:
<https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/ahar/#2020-reports>

⁶ To see the current and previous local PIT, see the Yakima County Department of Human Services Web site at:
<https://www.yakimacounty.us/2392/Yakima-County-Homelessness-Data>

Definition of Homelessness

For the purposes of this study, the term homeless aligns with the definitions used by HUD⁷ which includes four categories including:

- 1) Literally homeless - Individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence
- 2) Imminent risk of homelessness - Individual or family who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence
- 3) Homeless under other Federal statutes - Unaccompanied youth under 25 years of age, or families with children and youth, who do not otherwise qualify as homeless under this definition
- 4) Fleeing/attempting to flee domestic violence

When conducting the annual Point-in-Time (PIT) count, the terms unsheltered and temporarily sheltered are used. The meaning of Unsheltered: An individual/family whose nighttime residence is a public/private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation.

- Unsheltered⁸
 - Outdoors/Tent
 - Vehicle/RV/Boat
 - Abandoned building
- Temporarily Sheltered
 - Emergency Shelter
 - Transitional Housing

Causes and Conditions

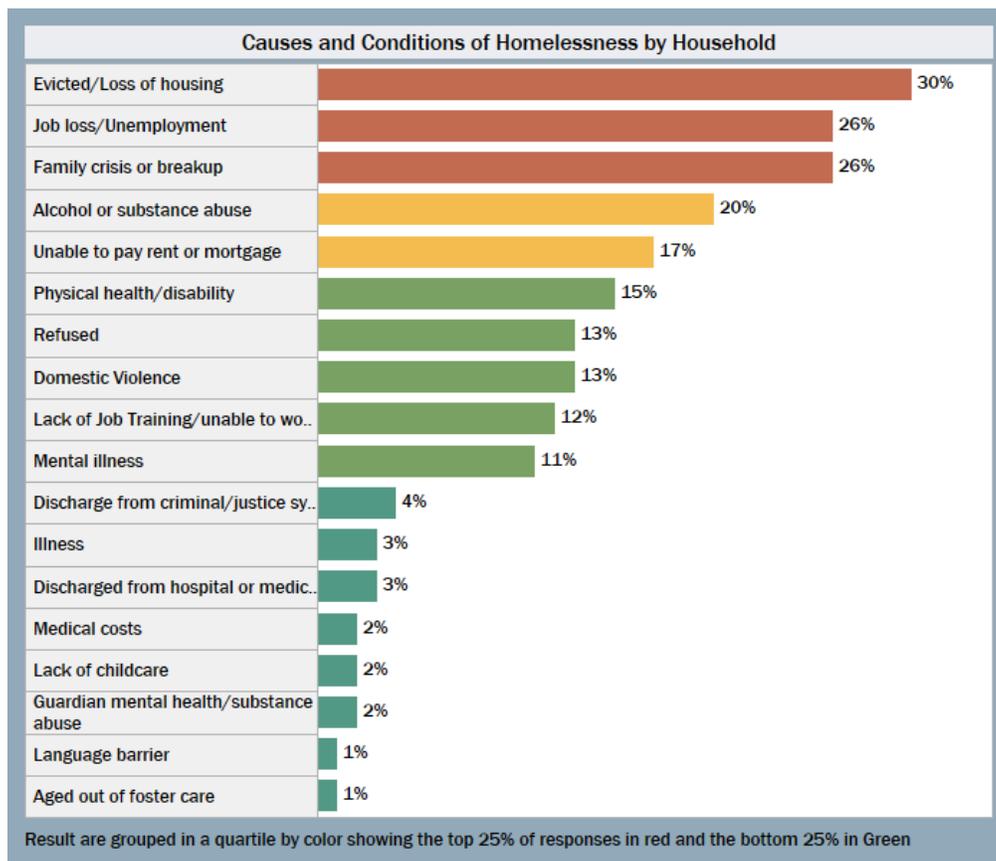
Homelessness has impacted communities across the nation and Yakima County is no exception. In trying to understand why people experience homelessness, there was not always one main cause that contributed. People experiencing homelessness oftentimes cite several reasons. The causes listed below are not an exhaustive list but help us to understand some of the major life areas impacted that led to homelessness.

⁷US Department of Housing and Urban Development - *HUD's Definition of Homelessness: Resources and Guidance*
<https://www.hudexchange.info/news/huds-definition-of-homelessness-resources-and-guidance/>

⁸ Includes both Sanctioned and unsanctioned encampments

Identifying causes is an important component of the Annual PIT survey conducted in Yakima County. In 2020, those interviewed were asked to identify the main causes of their current episode of homelessness:

- 1) Housing and Economic: Job Loss and Unemployment, Eviction/Loss of housing, Lack of Job training/Unable to work, Lack of childcare, Unable to pay rent/mortgage
- 2) System and Legal: Discharge from hospital or other medical facility, Discharge from criminal justice system, Aged out from foster care, Language barrier
- 3) Health Issues: Mental Illness, Physical Health/Disability, Alcohol/Substance abuse, Illness, Medical Costs
- 4) Family Conflict: Domestic Violence, Guardian mental health/Substance Abuse, Family Crisis or Breakup, End of Temporary Living Situation
- 5) The following list is not weighted but rather shows the number of households who listed that cause⁹:



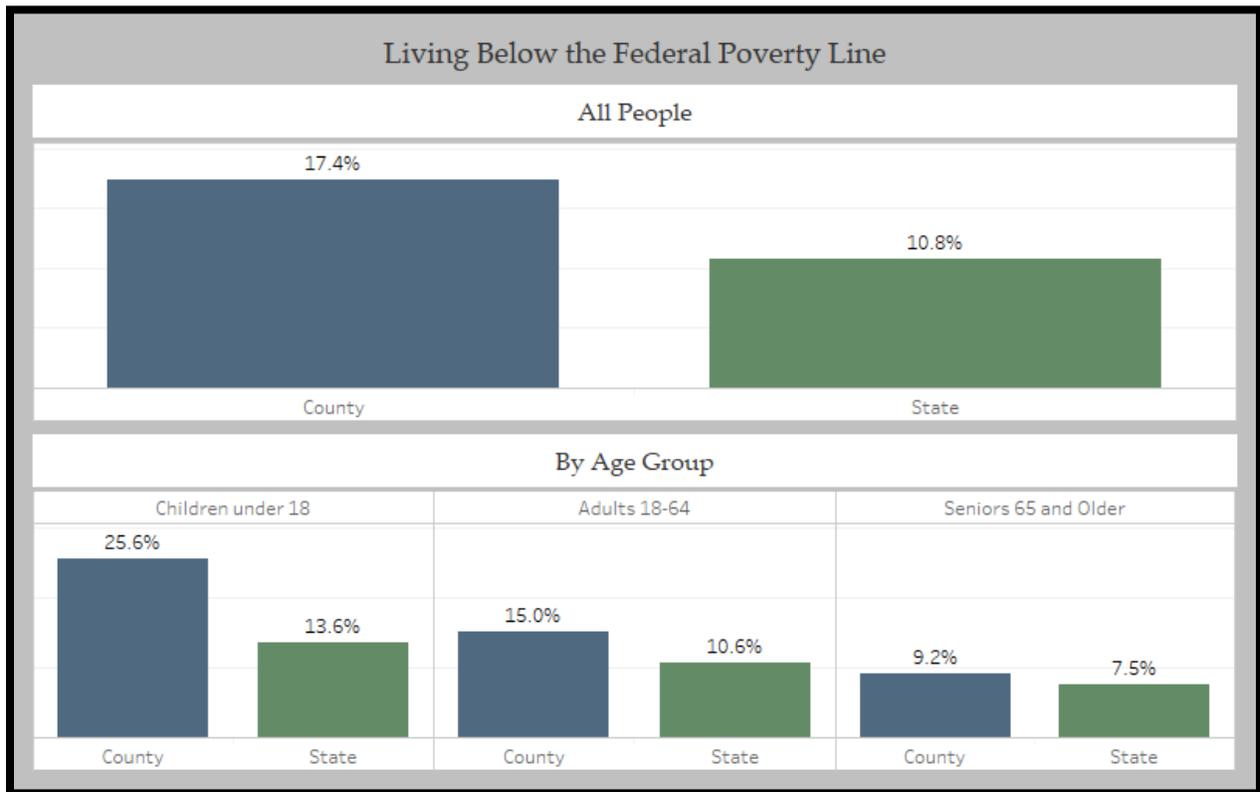
⁹Yakima County Department of Human Services: *Yakima County Yakima County Annual Point in Time Community Report 2020*

The top two causes identified by those surveyed in the 2020 PIT are in the Housing and Economic area with Family Crisis or breakup a close third.

On a statewide level, the *State of Washington Homeless Housing Crisis Response System Strategic Plan 2019-2024* cites “After examining potential drivers of the upward trend, it appears growing rents are overwhelmingly responsible for pushing people living at the margins into homelessness.”¹⁰

Underlying the above stated causes cited, there is a lack of affordable housing in Yakima County. Affordable housing is generally defined as housing on which the occupant is paying no more than 30% of gross income for housing costs, including utilities¹¹.

Poverty is an overarching consequence for many of the items described in this section. In 2019, 1 in 4 children were living in poverty in Yakima County and overall, the rates are much higher than in the state.



¹⁰Washington State Department of Commerce, *State of Washington Homeless Housing Crisis Response System Strategic Plan 2019-2024*, <http://www.commerce.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Homeless-Housing-Strategic-Plan-2019-2024.pdf>

¹¹US Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Glossary of Terms to Affordable Housing*, <https://archives.hud.gov/local/nv/goodstories/2006-04-06glos.cfm>

While the poverty rate has been slowly declining since 2014, a couple of factors were reported by those the League interviewed for continuing poverty:

- **Employment:** Even with unemployment rates declining, jobs are still hard to find. When people can find work, this does not automatically provide an escape from poverty. While employment and training programs geared to homeless people have proven to be effective in helping those who are homeless obtain work, successful completion of an employment program does not necessarily end his or her homelessness¹².
- **Public Assistance Programs:** The declining value and availability of public assistance is another contributing factor as once community members experience poverty, it is harder for them to escape it. Many families who have transitioned off public assistance struggle to get medical care, food, and housing via their income due to loss of benefits, low wages, and unstable employment.
- **Affordable Health Care:** Homelessness and health care are intimately interwoven. Poor health is both a cause and a result of homelessness. Inadequate health insurance is itself a cause for homelessness. Many people without health insurance have low incomes and do not have the resources to pay for health services on their own. A serious injury or illness in the family could result in insurmountable expenses for hospitalizations, tests, and treatment. For many, this forces a choice between hospital bills or rent.
- **Domestic Violence:** Battered women who live in poverty are often forced to choose between abusive relationships and homelessness. A domestic violence experience is common among youth, single adults, and families who become homeless. For many, it is the immediate cause of their homelessness. Survivors of domestic violence may turn to homeless service programs seeking a safe temporary place to stay after fleeing an abusive relationship. Others may turn to homeless service programs primarily because they lack the economic resources to secure or maintain housing after leaving an abusive relationship¹³.
- **Mental Illness and Substance Abuse:** A common stereotype of the homeless population is that they are all alcoholics or drug abusers and/or have a mental health condition. A high percentage of people experiencing homelessness do struggle with substance abuse and mental illness, but addictions and mental health conditions should be viewed as illnesses that require treatment,

¹²National Coalition for the Homeless, *Employment and Homelessness*, 2007

¹³ National Alliance to End Homelessness, *Understanding the connection between domestic violence and homelessness*, 2019

counseling, and support to overcome. Mental health conditions are a major cause of homelessness. However, with substance abuse, it is both a cause and a result of homelessness. According to the Treatment Advocacy Center, one third of people experiencing homelessness in the United States suffer from some form of severe mental illness¹⁴. In many situations, however, substance abuse is a result of homelessness rather than a cause. Substance use and abuse often arise after people lose their housing. People who are homeless often turn to drugs and alcohol to cope with their situations.

RESPONSES TO HOMELESSNESS

Successfully addressing homelessness in a community requires collaboration from multiple sectors as well as between federal, state, and local initiatives.

| | Funder | Program | Planning Body | Regulatory Guidance |
|---------|-------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|--|
| Federal | HUD | McKinney-Vento | Continuum of Care | The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act; As amended by The Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009 |
| | | HOME | HOME Consortium Board | 24 CFR Part 91 - Consolidated Plan Revisions and Updates and 24 CFR Part 92 - HOME Investment Partnership Program |
| State | Commerce | CHG | Housing Task Force | Guidelines for the Consolidated Homeless Grant Programs |
| Local | Board of County Commissioners | 2163 | Housing Task Force | RCW 36.22.179 and RCW 43.185C |
| | | 2060 | Housing Task Force | RCW 36.22.178 |

Federal

As the Federal Government realized the need to address the plight of those who were experiencing homelessness across the country, the first federal task force on homelessness was created in 1983. In response, Congress passed various bills that contained emergency relief measures, preventive measures,

¹⁴Carroll, Heather. "Serious Mental Illness and Homelessness." Treatment Advocacy Center. September 2016

and long-term solutions to homelessness. In 1987, The Stewart B. McKinney Act set up programs to help communities deal with homelessness. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) was assigned the responsibility of distributing funding to the communities and in 1995, HUD required communities to submit a single application for these funds.¹⁵

A Continuum of Care (CoC) process was developed by HUD in 1994 to coordinate the distribution of several competitive homeless assistance programs. This process was codified into law by Congress through the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009. Prior to the CoC process, organizations applied individually for funding from several homeless assistance programs. As a result, there was little coordination between these programs or between different organizations receiving funding in the same community. The CoC process was established to promote coordination within communities and between programs. It was also designed to bring together a broader collection of stakeholders such as public agencies, the faith and business communities, and mainstream service providers.¹⁶

Each year, HUD awards Homeless Assistance Grants to communities that administer housing and services at the local level. Specifically, the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) formula grant program and the competitive Continuum of Care (CoC) program fund the cornerstones of each community's homeless system. The ESG grant funds street outreach, homelessness prevention and diversion, emergency shelter, and rapid re-housing. The CoC program funds permanent supportive housing, rapid re-housing, transitional housing, and coordinated entry. ESG funds are distributed to both local communities (called "entitlement areas" and defined as metropolitan cities and urban counties) and states (called "non-entitlement areas") for distribution in communities that do not receive funds directly, through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program formula.

State

Washington State receives the above funds and distributes them through The Consolidated Homeless Grant (CHG). This provides resources to fund homeless crisis response systems to support communities in ending homelessness. Grants are made to both local governments and nonprofits. For more information,

¹⁵National Coalition for the Homeless, NCH Fact Sheet #18, June 2006

¹⁶National Alliance to End Homelessness, *2015 Advocates' Guide - Continuum of Care Planning*

go to: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/servingcommunities/homelessness/consolidated-homeless-grant>

The Consolidated Homeless Grant (CHG) combines state homeless resources into a single grant opportunity for county governments and other designated entities under the administration of the Washington State Department of Commerce. Funding for CHG comes from the Washington State Home Security Fund, Affordable Housing for All Fund, Transitional Housing Operating and Rent Account and the Homeless Housing Program. Yakima County Department of Human Services serves as the CHG Lead for the county and oversees the local 2163 filing dollars described below.

In 2005, the Washington State Legislature passed the Homeless Housing and Assistance Act which outlined several bold policies to address homelessness. The Act also required the Department of Commerce to develop a strategic plan. The plan includes specific minimum system performance requirements that were incorporated into state contracts with local governments and other housing providers.¹⁷

Local

Currently, there are two organizations which guide the planning around housing and homelessness in Yakima County: The Homeless Network of Yakima County and the Yakima County Homeless Coalition.

Homeless Network of Yakima County

In 2003, the Yakima Continuum of Care Homeless Committee was managed by the Yakima Coalition for the Homeless¹⁸. In 2003, the original members included Yakima County Department of Human Services, the City of Yakima, United Way of Yakima County, and the Yakima Coalition for the Homeless.

In 2004, more than 40 Service Providers and other homeless advocate organizations banded together to create the Homeless Network of Yakima County with the intention to end homelessness in Yakima County. While the Homeless Network of Yakima County operated under Yakima County Department of Human Services, an ambitious 10-year plan was created in 2005 to increase affordable housing and services known to be critical for successfully transitioning people out of homelessness.

¹⁷ State of Washington Homeless Housing Strategic Plan, WA Department of Commerce, January 2018

¹⁸ Note – the was an independent organization, not to be confused with the new Yakima County Homeless Coalition

In 2015, the Yakima County Department of Human Services closed, and the Board of County Commissioners subcontracted with the Yakima Valley Council of Governments (YVCOG) to take on roles associated with each funding source. These roles included becoming the following:

- Administrator for the local filing fee (2163) funds
- Lead Entity for state CHG funds
- Collaborative Applicant for Federal HUD McKinney funds

The Homeless Network of Yakima County stopped being an advisory body to the Board of County Commissioners and became a stand-alone organization. To date, the Network has 111 members including organizations and community members across multiple sectors.

Executive Committee

- **Network Chair** - Tom Gaulke - Entrust Community Services
- **Fair Housing Representative** - Meredith Bruch - Northwest Justice Project
- **Treasurer and Youth Coalition Co-Chair** - Rhonda Hauff - Yakima Neighborhood Health Services
- **Previous Network Chair** - Beth Dannhardt - Community Member
- **Collaborative Solutions Task Force Co-Chair** - Kellie Connaughton - Yakima Greenway Foundation
- **Collaborative Solutions Task Force Co-Chair** - Cheri Kilty - YWCA of Yakima
- **CE/IRIS Policy Team Chair** - Annette Rodriguez - Yakima Neighborhood Health Services
- **Data Committee Chair** - Kate Urwin - People For People
- **Youth Coalition Co-Chair** - Brian Ahern - Rod's House
- **City of Yakima Representative** - Soneya Lund - City of Yakima
- **South Valley Representative** - Janice Gonzales - City of Zillah
- **Yakama Nation Representative** - Vacant
- **Emergency Shelter Provider** - Geoff Baker - Generating Hope/Noah's Ark
- **Veteran's Representative** - Vacant
- **Public Housing Authority Representative** - Lowel Krueger - Yakima Housing Authority
- **Community Representative** - Neiri Carrasco - United Way of Central Washington
- **Community Representative** - Steve Hill - Community Member

Yakima County Homeless Coalition

In 2016, YVCOG formed a new planning body, the Homeless Planning and Policy Council, to serve as the Housing Task Force required by the funds. This body advised the Board of County Commissioners and allocated the Federal, State, and Local funds described above.

In 2017, YVCOG indicated they were no longer willing to be a Collaborative Applicant associated with the HUD McKinney Funds. The Continuum of Care Program is designed to promote communitywide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness; provide funding for efforts by nonprofit providers, and State and local governments to quickly rehouse homeless individuals and families while minimizing the trauma and dislocation caused to homeless individuals, families, and communities by homelessness; promote access to and effect utilization of mainstream programs by homeless individuals and families; and optimize self-sufficiency among individuals and families experiencing homelessness. No other qualifying entity was able to perform the responsibilities of a Collaborative Applicant without the other Homeless and Housing funding streams, so Yakima County lost its designation and became a member of the Balance of State along with 33 other counties in Washington. At the time, there were only 395 communities designated as a Continuum of Care in the Nation and 6 in Washington State.

In November of 2018, the Board of County Commissioners adopted a resolution which created a new Housing Task Force called the Yakima County Homeless Coalition and a Homeless Housing and Assistance Program Charter¹⁹. The primary purpose of the Yakima County Homeless Coalition, as defined by the charter, is to develop and review the Yakima County Homeless Five-Year Plan to ensure local homelessness is brief and rare.

In June of 2019, the contract with YVCOG to administer the Housing and Homeless Program expired and administration was conducted by the Yakima County Department of Financial Services.

In December of 2019, Yakima County reinstated the Department of Human Service and appointed Esther Magasis as the new director under which the Homeless Coalition was subsumed.

Executive Committee

- **County Commissioner Representative:** LaDon Linde
- **City of Yakima Representative:** Soneya Lund

¹⁹ This charter can be viewed at https://yakimacounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/23647/376-2018_Charter_signed

- **For Profit Business Representative:** Linda DiLembo
- **YVCOG Member Representative:** Joan Souders
- **Individual with Lived Experience of Homelessness:** Alicia Bell
- **Public Safety Representative:** Joseph Brusic
- **Coalition Representative:** Annette Rodriguez
- **Coalition Representative:** Mike Johnson
- **Coalition Representative:** Dave Hanson

Collaboration

While there are two planning bodies related to housing and homeless services in the County, both groups collaborated to together and in fact, jointly facilitate multiple committees. In 2020 and 2021, Yakima County contracted with the Homeless Network of Yakima County to assist with the annual Point in Time count.

HOUSING TYPES

There are multiple terms to describe the various housing types in the overall system – each term refers to various time restrictions, unit types, and special populations it is designed to serve. The following graphic shows the relationship between the various housing types:



Affordable Housing

Affordable Housing is housing that costs no more than 30% of an individual's income. Housing costs include utilities. Note – all households should be in affordable housing regardless of income-level. Affordable Housing can be either Fair Market Housing or Subsidized housing.

Fair Market Housing

Fair Market Housing is full-price, unsubsidized housing.

Subsidized Housing

Housing is subsidized when a government or private agency pays a portion of the rent to bring the monthly cost to a level within the income of those intended to occupy the housing. Like regular market-rate housing, virtually all the affordable housing that is developed today is privately built and owned –either by non-profit organizations or private businesses and corporations. These organizations use a combination of public subsidies and private loans to construct new homes and apartments that are affordable to very low-, low- and moderate-income families. In part because modern affordable housing contains a significant amount of public financing that comes with investor and lender oversight including affordability covenants that require its use as affordable housing for a long period of time, up to 40 years, developments are professionally managed to ensure that the new housing retains its value and remains attractive and affordable.

Special Needs Housing

Special Needs housing can be either time-limited or permanent.

Temporary Housing

Temporary, or time-limited, housing has been decreasing over time due to a nationwide shift to Rapid Rehousing described earlier in this document. The two forms of temporary housing include:

- Emergency Shelter
- Transitional Housing

Emergency Shelter

There are many types of homeless shelters that provide temporary residence for people experiencing homelessness. Many shelters provide a package of basic services in addition to a bed, shower and laundry facilities. Hot meals, mental health access and case management are available. In addition to the standard night-by-night shelter, there are also other types including:

- Extreme Winter Weather Shelter - This is a shelter that is open during the winter months, and accepts anyone – drunk or sober, referred or knocking at the door. This shelter is open only on nights when the weather is dangerous to the survival of people sleeping outdoors.
 - Hotel/Motel Vouchers - Individuals can be put up in a motel or hotel that accepts vouchers from a nonprofit to help address the lack of shelter space during the winter months
- Domestic Violence Shelter - This is a place established to provide temporary food and shelter, counseling, and related services to victims of violent situations, such as sexual assault, stalking, and domestic violence
- Medical Respite - This provides recuperative respite for the homeless by providing 24-hour care for unsheltered individuals not sick enough to be in the hospital, and for those coming out of the hospital but not well enough to return to the streets or a communal shelter.

Funding that supports local emergency shelters include local document recording fees and state CHG funds. In the past, the faith-based community has been heavily invested in sheltering the people experiencing homelessness. The shelters observed and interviewed were Noah's Ark, Rod's House²⁰, Yakima Union Gospel Mission, Yakima Nation Iniiitnu't Cold Weather Shelter, YWCA, Triumph Treatment Center, and Veterans Assistance program.

Transitional Housing

Transitional housing refers to a supportive accommodation to bridge the gap between emergency shelter and permanent housing by offering supervision, support, life skills, education and training. It is more long-term, service-intensive, and private than emergency shelters, yet remains time-limited. It is meant to provide a supportive environment where residents can overcome trauma and begin to address the issues that led to homelessness.

Transitional housing, as an approach, has long been seen as part of the housing continuum for people who are homeless, and in particular for sub-populations such as youth. However, in recent years it has become somewhat controversial, particularly considering the success of Housing First models, which do not require 'readiness' for a transition²¹.

²⁰ Operates an offsite Extreme Winter Weather Shelter

²¹ Homeless hub, Transitional Housing, accessed 2021

Permanent Housing

Stable Housing is a prerequisite for those experiencing homelessness to have a viable future. The document released by the United States Interagency Council of Homelessness entitled *The Evidence behind Approaches that Drive an End to Homelessness* presents a strong case for Housing First²². Documents prepared by various organizations and agencies bear this out and emphasize housing first.

Housing First is a homeless assistance approach that prioritizes providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness, thus ending their homelessness and serving as a platform from which they can pursue personal goals and improve their quality of life. This approach is guided by the belief that people need necessities like food and a place to live before attending to anything less critical, such as getting a job, budgeting properly, or addressing substance use issues.²³

Permanent Supportive Housing

Permanent Support Housing offers a place to live for individuals and families with special needs including physical and mental disabilities. Supportive housing provides on-site services – such as healthcare, job training, and counseling – to help people live independently in their own apartments. Supportive housing is the favored model for housing individuals who are homeless.

Unlike emergency shelter and transitional housing, permanent supportive housing is not time limited.

Encampments

Local responses to encampments are evolving in many communities, as stakeholders seek to identify the best strategies to address the growing number of individuals who are unsheltered. Specific activities range from sending police to quickly clear (“sweep”) the encampment—providing little or no support to help people find another place to stay—to formally sanctioning encampments and providing onsite services²⁴.

Characteristics of sanctioned encampments include:

- Encampments permitted by law or ordinance on public and or privately owned property, usually only in designated locations
- May have established rules that govern the size, location, or duration of encampments

²² United States Interagency Council of Homelessness, *The Evidence Behind Approaches that Drive an End to Homelessness*, 2019

²³ Fact Sheet: Housing First, National Alliance Homelessness, April 2016

²⁴ HUD, *Understanding Encampments of People Experiencing Homelessness and Community Responses: Emerging Evidence as of Late 2018*, 2019

- May have a public agency or nonprofit organization manage encampments
- Infrastructure and public services—which may include laundry and potable water, common spaces for eating and meeting, lockers for storing belongings (including on a longer-term basis), meal services and food donations, job training programs, access to mail and voice mail services—provided by the municipality and private or faith-based organizations and volunteers
- May provide case management, including assistance applying for transitional or permanent housing and other benefits, appealing denials, and managing funds

The encampment observed and interviewed was Camp Hope.

Current Housing Inventory

The following chart shows the current Shelter and Housing options available in Yakima County – this does not include Rapid Rehousing or Rental Assistance Programs. It does include the following 1,215 beds:

- Sanctioned Encampment - 100
- Temporarily Sheltered
 - Medical Respite - 5
 - Extreme Weather Winter Shelter - 157
 - Emergency Shelter - 385
 - Transitional Housing - 266
- Permanent Supportive Housing - 302

| Housing Type | Agency | Program | Beds | Special Population |
|---------------------------------------|---|-------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|
| Encampment | Grace City Outreach | Camp Hope | 100 | All |
| Medical Respite | Yakima Neighborhood Health Services | Respite 101 | 5 | Single men and women |
| | | Bonlender House | 5 | Single men and women |
| Extreme Weather Winter Shelter | Grace City Outreach | Toppenish EWWS | 50 | Single men and women |
| | Northwest Community Action Center | Hotel/Motel Vouchers | 20 | All |
| | Rod's House | Young Adult Shelter | 24 | Young Adults |
| | Yakima Neighborhood Health Services | Cosecha | 48 | All |
| | | Hotel/Motel Vouchers | 15 | All |
| Emergency Shelter | Generating Hope | Noah's Ark | 30 | Single men and women |
| | The Lighthouse - Advocacy, Prevention, and Education Center | DV Shelter | 8 | DV |
| | | Hotel/Motel Vouchers | 10 | DV |
| | Northwest Community Action Center | Hotel/Motel Vouchers | 6 | All |
| | | Hotel/Motel Vouchers | 32 | Farmworkers |
| | Rod's House | Sunnyside House | 8 | Young Adults |
| | Triumph Treatment Services | Family Shelter | 62 | Households with children |
| | Yakima Union Gospel Mission | Emergency Shelter - Men | 114 | Single Men |
| Emergency Shelter - Women | | 20 | Single Women | |

| Housing Type | Agency | Program | Beds | Special Population |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|
| Transitional Housing | | Family Shelter | 46 | Households with children |
| | YWCA | DV Shelter | 44 | DV |
| | Grace City Outreach | Hope House | 8 | Single Women |
| | | Jessie's House | 6 | Single Women |
| | | Faith House | 6 | Single Women |
| | | Tiny Homes | 2 | Single Women |
| | Yakima Union Gospel Mission | Bridge - Men | 20 | Single Men |
| | | Bridge – Women | 6 | Single Women |
| | | New Life | 20 | Single Men |
| | | New Life | 10 | Single Women |
| | | Discovery Program – Men | 20 | Single Men |
| | | Discovery Program - Women | 8 | Single Women |
| | Yakima Neighborhood Health Services | New Life | 8 | Households with children |
| | | RDH Resource Center | 31 | All |
| | YWCA | DV Transitional | 60 | DV |
| | | DV Tenant-based | 9 | DV |
| | Yakama Nation | Village of Hope – Singles | 36 | Single men and women |
| | | Village of Hope - Families | 16 | Households with children |
| | Permanent Supportive Housing | Comprehensive Healthcare | Vet House | 8 |
| Next Step Housing | | Pear Tree Place II | 12 | All |
| | | Clean House | 6 | Single men and women |
| | | Sommerset II | 6 | All |
| | | Pear Tree Place I | 19 | All |
| | | Pear Tree Place III | 9 | All |
| | | Sommerset | 11 | All |
| Triumph Treatment Services | | Becket House | 7 | Single Men |
| Yakima Housing Authority | | Pear Tree Place III (HUD VASH) | 8 | Veterans |
| | | Scatter Site HUD VASH | 83 | Veterans |
| Yakima Neighborhood Health Services | | Tamarack House | 6 | All |
| | | 904 Arlington | 5 | Single men and women |
| | | Imperial PSH5 | 5 | Single men and women |
| | | 906 Arlington | 14 | Households with children |
| | | Bright Futures | 22 | Single men and women |
| | | Bienestar | 24 | Households with children |
| | | Futuros Brilliantes Consolidated | 38 | All |
| | | Solutions | 19 | Households with children |

SERVICE PROVIDERS

Both the Yakima County Homeless Coalition and the Homeless Network of Yakima County have a membership representing multiple organizations, churches and community members who are invested in reducing homelessness in Yakima County. Some of these organizations provide services to those

experiencing homelessness including Yakima Neighborhood Health Services, Comprehensive Healthcare, Rod's House, Sunrise Outreach, Triumph Treatment, Catholic Charities, People For People, Northwest Community Action Center, and Yakima County Veterans Services. Each of these organizations was interviewed by members of the study group, who reported on their visit. These reports were compiled and are summarized below²⁵.

Yakima Neighborhood Health Services

Yakima Neighborhood Health Services is a multi-service agency whose mission is to provide accessible, affordable, quality healthcare, provide learning opportunities for students of health professions, end homelessness and improve the quality of life in the county's communities.



Figure 1 - The four individuals on the right are no longer homeless thanks to the efforts of organizations such as Neighborhood Connections. On the left is Annette Rodriguez, Director of Homeless Services

With 10 sites in Yakima County, 22,784 patients were served in 2017, 12% of whom were homeless. Neighborhood Connections provides services to those experiencing homelessness and is an access point for Coordinated Entry²⁶. Yakima Neighborhood Health Services manages units of housing as well as

²⁵ This report is a snapshot of homelessness in Yakima County and doesn't represent a complete list of service providers – rather the providers profiled are those interviewed by the Study Committee.

²⁶ Coordinated Entry is a centralized or coordinated process designed to coordinate program participant intake assessment and provision of referrals. A centralized or coordinated assessment system covers the geographic area, is easily accessed by individuals and families seeking housing or services, is well advertised, and includes a comprehensive and standardized assessment tool.

connecting clients via master leases. They also administer Hotel/Motel vouchers for emergency shelter when traditional congregate facilities are not appropriate. The Rhonda D. Hauff Resource Center provides a mix of both transitional and permanent supportive housing for 40 individuals. A Yakima Neighborhood Health Services nurse practitioner also staffs a primary care clinic at Comprehensive Health Services. They also provide Medical Respite to individuals who have been hospitalized. “The Space” provides safe affirming resources for LGBTQ youth and the BETSY project provides housing and services for single young women who wish to further their education or employment. A job match program employs and trains clients. A mobile unit goes to housing projects, schools and work sites. There is a need for more capacity for respite care and for more transitional and permanent housing.

Comprehensive Healthcare

Comprehensive Healthcare is a private non-profit organization that provides behavioral health, recovery-oriented services throughout Yakima, Kittitas, Klickitat, and Walla Walla counties as well as portions of Benton and Franklin counties. Comprehensive Healthcare’s mission statement is “To provide innovative integrated healthcare, community education and services to individuals, families and organizations”. Their numerous community partners include families, local businesses to assist their employees, clients and supporter, schools (including colleges and universities), law enforcement, jail services, criminal justice groups, and the Yakama Nation.

Their services include Prevention, Intervention, Outpatient, Inpatient, Residential and Crisis. Notable is the extensive array of supported living apartments of 68 units, a Veterans house with a capacity of 8 people, group homes (Gleed Orchard Manor and Stepping Stone) and long-term intensive treatment facilities (Garden Village). A full list of programs and services are available on their website: www.comphc.org/.

Rod’s House

Rod's House is a resource for youth and young adults experiencing homelessness and housing instability in the Yakima Valley. The organization believes all young people deserve support and the chance to succeed. There are no overnight accommodations, except for the Young Adults Extreme Weather Shelter from mid-November to mid-March that is housed at Englewood Christian Church²⁷. Its services include providing access to basic needs such as a hot meal, shower, laundry, clothing, hygiene products, internet,

²⁷ Due to COVID, this site moved to a local motel as the previous model relied heavily on volunteers.

TV, phone, mail service and access to other community resources. It supports youth and young adults with continuing their education, learning skills related to finding and keeping employment, resume-writing, acquiring ID. It also serves as a stable mailing address and phone number. Substance abuse and medical needs are referred to Neighborhood Health, Yakima Pediatrics and other service providers. It is piloting a host home program designed to provide young people with the space and opportunity to build independent living skills, gain stability, develop lasting relationships, and focus on goal attainment by matching their youth with a caring and supportive host home family.

Sunrise Outreach Center

Sunrise Outreach Center, founded by CEO David Hanson, is a Christian faith-based organization that operates in the public sphere. The organization is supported by a board of directors and an intercessory team comprised of people from varying denominations. Programs include a soup kitchen, four food banks, a mobile food pantry, and a weekend meal backpack program for children in need. In partnership with Celebrate Recovery three transitional group homes in Yakima are operated, two for men and one for women. Housing and counseling services for youth ages 12-17 are provided in cooperation with Youth Residential and Education Centers (YREC). The Camp Hope encampment in Yakima was also administered by Sunrise Outreach Center for a short time.

Triumph Treatment Services

Triumph Treatment Services is a non-profit organization that provides a wide range of social and treatment services. Their mission focuses on providing resources and treatment services for individuals and families impacted by chemical dependency, poverty, and homelessness. Programs offered include referral, inpatient, outpatient, residential and housing for men, women, and families. They operate 270 residential units and have staff of approximately 140. The outpatient center offers traditional individual, group and family counseling, relapse prevention and intensive outpatient case management. Triumph also offers mental health services and a Parent Child Assistance Program (PCAP) for families with children under 3 years old. Triumph offers several residential programs. Among them are James Oldham Treatment Center (an all-male facility), a Pregnant and Parenting Women's (PPW), and Transition to Housing continuum.

Catholic Charities

Catholic Charities is administered by the Diocese of Yakima. Services are available to the public. Multifamily housing is provided throughout the diocese for 3,300 families and migrant workers. Homeless

and transitioning foster youth (18-24) are assisted with housing and case management. Behavioral health counseling is available for individuals, families and children. The Yakima early learning center, which includes therapeutic childcare, serves 300 children. Services for elders include housekeeping, yard work, home repair and transportation.

People For People

People For People provides transportation from Yakima to Prosser for those with special needs, including non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) for Medicaid eligible clients. Meals on Wheels for seniors 60 and older is provided for the homebound and at 6 locations in Yakima. Education and training are provided at the Yakima facility.

People for People also administratively supports the regional office of the 211 information and referral service. Basic Food outreach is provided to 20 counties in eastern Washington. The Long-Term Ombudsman Program advocates for the residents of long-term care facilities. Services are contracted while volunteers support most of the programs, and certified trainers are used where needed.

Northwest Community Action Center

The Northwest Community Action Center (NCAC) is a division of the Yakima Valley Farmworker's Clinic that is in Toppenish, WA and available for clients throughout the Yakima Valley. Its goal is to create positive change for economically disadvantaged individuals and families. NCAC finds affordable housing and helps with home repairs and updating for energy efficiency. It is affiliated with Work Source and many services are offered to place people with jobs. It also provides parental support, community nutrition, youth education support, and adult education.

Yakima County Veterans Services

The purpose of the Yakima County Veterans Program is to connect veterans to assistance they need and may not be aware of. The program is funded by Yakima County Veteran's Assistance Fund and provides support for homeless as well as struggling veterans. Case management, coaching to work through hardships, vouchers for multiple needs such as food, transportation, rental assistance, housing and utility assistance are covered as well as medical care with referrals to local medical services and to the Walla Walla VA hospital. Supportive programs extend to veteran's families. In all, eighty services are offered.²⁸

²⁸ Interview with David Brown, Yakima County Veterans Program

Other Sectors

Law Enforcement and Legal Services

According to the Yakima Police Dept. 40% of their police work is dealing with the homeless population. While police try to be kind and empathetic, they must also be aware of the laws regarding homelessness. In and of itself, homelessness is not a crime, and a crime must be committed for a person to be taken to jail.

According to a police spokesman, the increase in Yakima's homelessness is due to an increase in the availability of methamphetamine. There is an increasing number of people dependent on meth, committing petty crimes to enable them to buy meth. Drugs are the usual way for the homeless person to become involved in the legal system.

Mental health is another issue that police deal with regularly. They sometimes have mental health workers ride along in the police cars. However, the mentally ill cannot be arrested unless they pose a threat to themselves or others. In this case they can be put on a 24-hour hold. Police do not like to transport the homeless, because they then become police responsibility.

The Yakima Police Department has taken several measures to help officers deal with the homeless including:

1. De-escalation training
2. Classes on how to deal with stress
3. Crises intervention training.

Police are also trying to arrange a diversion program for drug addicts but have not yet received funding.

In terms of the legal system itself, a lawyer with the Department of Assigned Council, County Public Defenders' Office, states that the adult homeless that they deal with are mostly drug addicts or have mental health issues. If a homeless person comes into the legal system, there are steps that are followed:

1. A person may be arrested for cause
 2. If there is cause, there are 14 days to charge
 3. Bail is set or the person is sent to jail
-

4. The court decides if a person is indigent; if so, they are assigned council.
5. A mental health assessment may be done.

If a person is convicted or sent to jail, their outside circumstances worsen i.e., money for rent etc., and when they are released, they are further enmeshed in homelessness.

Juveniles are not often dealt with in the court system because they are usually already connected to services. There are 3 categories of juvenile cases:

1. Criminal cases- these are treated the same as adults and receive services through probation
2. At-risk youth, a parent may bring a child to court for out-of-control behavior i.e. runaway, drug use
3. Truancy- The school can bring kids in for lack of attendance. Every juvenile gets a public defender regardless of ability to pay.

Schools and Students

All school districts are required to annually report the number of homeless students enrolled. They use the definition: *a homeless individual is one who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.* There are an estimated 2,561 homeless students in the Yakima Valley which includes elementary, middle, and high school students. One third of all homeless students live in the city of Yakima. The rate for the entire state is 3.7%.

Yakima Valley Libraries

The Yakima Valley Library system does not have a specific policy on people experiencing homelessness and they do not identify those people from other groups. Problems arise from people bringing in excessive baggage, leaving carts outside the building and bathing or shaving in the bathrooms. These issues are not limited to patrons experiencing homelessness; they may also be exhibited by patrons who are mentally ill or living in poverty. Library staff would appreciate training on how to work with persons experiencing homelessness.

FISCAL REVIEW

Background

Since 2004, local administration of dollars was conducted by the Yakima County Department of Human Services who staffed the Homeless Network of Yakima County. This staffing included meeting facilitation

and the administrative management of Federal, State, and Local dollars. Contract management was overseen by the Yakima County Corporate Council and the Yakima County Financial Services Department. In 2009, the City of Yakima and Yakima County Purchasing Divisions consolidated functions and ongoing procurement was managed by City/County Purchasing. This division managed various Federal, State, and Local dollars while the Network served as the planning body for each. The Network identified priority areas, established a set of objectives as well as strategies to accomplish each objective, and a time frame for carrying out what was necessary for the development of a Continuum of Care. This information was subsequently formalized into the original *Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Yakima County*. In keeping with the Continuum of Care guidelines published by HUD, these operating guidelines codified the Network’s policies and procedures as well as their governance structure as a Continuum of Care.

Administration

As described earlier in this document, the Board of County Commissioners determined that a Yakima County Homeless Coalition should be created to manage the planning and allocation of funds. The Board of County Commissioners approve the 5-Year Plan²⁹, then the Program Administrator creates a Competitive Process Scoring Committee (CPSC). The Program Administrator will then draft a request for proposals. The CPSC will be comprised of 7 neutral countywide community members, appointed by the BOCC, having subject matter expertise and appropriate training to properly evaluate the competitive funding process. This group will then make a recommendation which the Board of County Commissioners will either deny or approve. The Board of County Commissioners have the ultimate decision-making authority as to the final distribution of funds.

Expenditures

In 2019, program expenditures included the following:

| Organization | Allocated | Spent | Project |
|--------------------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------------------------------|
| ACR Business Consulting | \$36,600.00 | \$33,128.21 | PIT Count |
| Catholic Charities | \$46,806.00 | \$28,450.15 | TANF |
| | \$109,500.00 | \$108,491.16 | Rapid Rehousing |
| City of Yakima | \$100,000.00 | \$79,451.29 | Water/sewer installation at Camp Hope |
| | \$200,000.00 | \$177,319.54 | Water/sewer installation at Camp Hope |
| | \$50,000.00 | \$50,000.00 | Electrical installation at Camp Hope |

²⁹ This plan can be viewed at: <https://yakimacounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/23705/Yakima-County-5-Year-Plan-to-Address-Homelessness-2019-2024?bidId=>

| | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------------------------|
| Generating Hope | \$37,500.00 | \$37,500.00 | Shelter |
| Lower Valley Crisis | \$46,665.00 | \$46,665.00 | DV Shelter |
| NCAC | \$30,000.00 | \$28,725.75 | Extreme Winter Weather Shelter |
| | \$200,000.00 | \$198,040.00 | HEN |
| | \$25,000.00 | \$25,000.00 | TANF |
| | \$7,000.00 | \$7,000.00 | Coordinated Entry |
| | \$122,500.00 | \$112,797.64 | Rapid Rehousing |
| People for People | \$3,378.00 | \$2,017.69 | FEMA Administration |
| Rod's House | \$125,000.00 | \$12,583.70 | Capital Project |
| | \$9,000.00 | \$6,604.75 | Coordinated Entry |
| | \$62,500.00 | \$62,131.23 | Shelter |
| | \$15,000.00 | \$11,435.59 | Outreach |
| Transform Yakima | \$475,000.00 | \$474,996.72 | Shelter |
| | \$15,000.00 | \$ - | Outreach |
| YNHS | \$30,000.00 | \$30,000.00 | Coordinated Entry |
| | \$50,000.00 | \$47,829.06 | Extreme Winter Weather Shelter |
| | \$450,000.00 | \$450,000.00 | HEN |
| | \$311,176.00 | \$310,765.90 | Rapid Rehousing |
| YVCOG | | \$537,283.38 | Fund administration |
| YWCA | \$63,335.00 | \$63,334.99 | DV Shelter |
| TOTAL | \$2,620,960.00 | \$2,941,551.75 | |

CONCLUSION

Yakima County has addressed the needs of people experiencing homelessness over a long period of time. Needs are still urgent, and It will take commitment on the part of all parties to improve the situation for those who are experiencing homelessness. Yakima County citizens have demonstrated they care about all residents. We hope this study will provide information that will propel members of our communities to accelerate efforts to substantially reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness in our county.

In the words of the CEO of Neighborhood Health Services and League of Women Voters of Yakima County member, Rhonda Hauff:

“Concerted efforts to address at risk youth and youth homelessness have improved over the last two years, with Yakima County providers joining efforts to be designated as one of four Anchor Communities through A Way Home Washington. With the support of the recently reconstituted Yakima County Department of Human Services, homeless service providers collaborate to

maximize resources and strategies. The Anchor Community Initiative is one example where the collaboration was successful in bringing one million dollars-worth of services and resources to Yakima County that were not previously available. Hundreds of unaccompanied youths have been helped – back into school, into vocational programs, developing life skills, reuniting with family as a result of this effort.

Over the last two years, we have increased our capacity for emergency services (increased shelter) to provide safe haven for our unsheltered residents, which is a good thing. However, this has been at the expense of affordable supportive housing for those with chronic illness and disease. Shelter is shelter; shelter is not housing. As a community, we need to be mindful of our City’s Housing assessment that shows we need to issue one building permit a day in order to keep up with the current demand. Nearly a third of all Yakima residents spend more than 30% of their income for housing – a standard considered unaffordable. The National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) found the average cost to a community of an unsheltered person is roughly \$40,000 a year in police, emergency room, treatment, jail, ambulance, and shelter costs (often repeated), compared to an average cost of Permanent Supportive Housing with intensive case management in Yakima County of \$14,500 per year.

Another area where we have not made progress is handwashing stations for unsheltered residents. This is a public health crisis. With outbreaks like Hepatitis A and defense against these diseases are handwashing and social distancing, it is unimaginable we are debating in Yakima County whether public restrooms and handwashing stations are appropriate.

Homelessness should be evaluated and resolved as a social and health care issue - be it a job loss, family breakup, unexpected medical bills, mental health crises or substance use disorders. We assume people have hard times because they aren’t responsible. A psychotic break doesn’t just happen as a result of a personal weakness. Long term homelessness is the result of chronic mental health illness, substance use disorder, or physical disability. It requires supportive services tailored to the individual’s needs and based on Evidence Based Practices that show proven results.”

Lee Murdock, Director of the Homeless Network of Yakima County and League of Women Voters of Yakima County member states:

“One of the greatest improvements over the past two years has been the collaboration between the newly reinstated Yakima County Department of Human Services and the Homeless Network of Yakima County. In addition to partnering together for the Annual PIT Count, the Network and the County are jointly facilitating various community groups in an effort to streamline meetings and infrastructure. This includes:

- Coordinated Entry Meetings – there are two meetings – one for Policy (which includes leadership) and one for Providers (which includes line workers). Additionally, the Network has merged their IRIS³⁰ program with Coordinated Entry processes providing a funding mechanism to the collaborative case management which occurs at the Provider team.
- Data Committee – in addition to guiding the annual PIT process, this joint meeting also provides us with the ability to analyze data, work on data quality together, and guide the data related to the implementation of county programs (specifically the Consolidated Homeless Grant) and Network programs (specifically the Anchor Community Initiative).”

In conducting the study of homelessness in Yakima County, it is clear that much still needs to be done to end homelessness in Yakima. Many dedicated and committed partners have collaborated in laying a foundation, developing a strategic plan and moving forward to implementing program services. It is our hope that this report has cast an illuminating light on the situation people face in experiencing homelessness, the services/resources currently available and identified gaps to move Yakima County towards the goal of ending homelessness.

³⁰ IRIS stands for Interagency Resources for Individuals with Serious Mental Health Concerns which is funded by the Yakima Valley Community Foundation.