Austin/Travis County 2020 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count

Source Document

Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO)

July 9, 2020

ECHO would like to acknowledge the dedicated 2020 PIT Count volunteers,
our partner organizations, Austin and Travis County civic leaders, and
the community at large for your support in the 2020 PIT Count.
Thank you for your continued commitment to
ending homelessness in Austin/Travis County.

Table of Contents

Overview

Each year, the Austin/Travis County Point in Time (PIT) and Housing Inventory Count (HIC) aims to count people experiencing unsheltered and sheltered homelessness in our community, respectively. Required by Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and collectively referred to as the "PIT Count", the purpose is to understand the number, characteristics, and subpopulations of people experiencing homelessness in Austin/Travis County so that funding and services may be targeted appropriately. The data from this annual count contributes to both local and national efforts to end homelessness. With city ordinance changes that increased visibility of the homeless population, media attention, and community interest surrounding the issue of homelessness in 2019, the 2020 PIT Count saw a 39% increase in volunteer surveyors from the prior year. The transition from a paper survey to a web-based survey in 2020 allowed for increased survey response and faster overall survey administration in 2020. In addition, the re-organization and subdivision of geographic sections allowed for a more detailed and thorough survey of people experiencing homelessness in Austin/Travis County. Overall, these changes from 2019 to 2020 allowed for a deeper and more systematic survey of our homeless population in 2020. In 2019, the unsheltered homeless count was 1,086, while in 2020 the enhanced survey methodology revealed 1574 unsheltered people experiencing homelessness in our community. Meanwhile, the sheltered count dropped from 1169 in 2019 to 932 in 2020 resulting in a net overall increase in the count of the unsheltered and sheltered homeless population of 251 (11%).

Background

For many residents, Austin/Travis County is a growing and vibrant community. Unfortunately, not everyone is benefitting from greater Austin's growth and development. Austin has grown by approximately 24.7% from 2010 to 2019 and is projected to continue to grow at a similar rate in the next ten years (Robinson, 2019). Population growth has resulted in a dramatic increase in housing costs as demand for housing has rapidly risen. Home sales in Austin increased by 84% from 2010 to 2019, which led to a 64% increase in the median home price (Austin Board of Realtors, 2019). The economic impact of this influx is reflected in the city's GDP over time, which has increased an average of 61.6% per year for 10 years according to most recent figures (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2017).

Recent population and economic growth have come at the cost of housing stability for mid to low income Austin residents, who have experienced the impact of the rising cost of living in the city without reaping the economic benefits. For those relying on minimum wage income, the scale of economic growth in the city is not reflected in their finances. The federal minimum wage has remained the same for over a decade, at $7.25/hour. Lowest rent estimates are approximated at $1,220/month, or 143% the take home pay of minimum wage workers, meaning one would have to work nearly 50 hours a week just to make rent, let alone pay their other expenses such as food, utilities, and medical costs (Magnify Money, 2020). For many low-income individuals and families, such other expenses must come directly out of pocket. Texas opted out of the 2010 Affordable Care Act's Medicaid expansion, which as of 2019, left over 1.6 million Texans without health insurance coverage, 638,000 of whom have no realistic alternative access to health insurance (Norris, 2019). Minimum wage workers who fall into this group are faced with a choice: pay rent or pay medical bills. This leaves low income individuals and families at risk of homelessness, while the projections for population and housing costs continue to rise into the future (Robinson, 2019; Austin Board of Realtors, 2019).

The homelessness response system in Austin/Travis County functions at full capacity to find people experiencing homelessness stable housing and wraparound services when possible, yet the system does not currently have capacity to serve every person experiencing homelessness to compensate for the rate of inflow into homelessness in the community. The lack of affordable housing, rapid re-housing, and permanent supportive housing resources is an important obstacle to ending homelessness in Austin/Travis County.

Methodology

The PIT and HIC counts serve as a prevalence estimate of sheltered and unsheltered individuals in Austin/Travis County at a single point in time. During a six-hour data collection timeframe on January 25th, 2020 from 3am-9am, 886 staff and volunteers were deployed to survey 74 geographic sections in Travis County. Using a new web-based survey interface with geolocation capability, surveyors administered an 11-item survey to people experiencing homelessness in their designated section. Survey participants could choose to remain anonymous or provide contact information for subsequent community outreach. The survey questions covered age, gender, veteran status, disability status, description of sleeping circumstance, history of homelessness, barriers to housing, history of benefits, prior involvement in Coordinated Assessment, pet ownership, and contact info (optional). There was also an "observation only" option to count witnessed individuals with whom contact was not feasible.

Methodological factors actors that may have impacted the 2020 PIT Count results include: 1) transition to a web-based survey which increased survey response on individual survey questions, improved data integrity, decreased administrative burden, and faster overall survey administration; 2) sub-divided geographic sections: PIT Count sections were re-organized and subdivided from 36 to 74 geographic sections to allow for a more detailed and thorough survey of people experiencing homelessness in Austin/Travis County; 3) increased volunteer capacity over the last three years has allowed for a deeper and more systematic survey of unsheltered homelessness in Austin/Travis County.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the homeless population included in this report. Changes between 2019 – 2020 for all subpopulations included in this report were tested for statistical significance using t-tests for the difference in means. Statistical significance in this report is determined at the 95% confidence interval. P-values of less than 0.05 were considered statistically significant. Statistically significant t-tests in this report communicate a meaningful difference between the proportion of a given subpopulation between years with 95% confidence that the subpopulation proportion has changed between years. At the 95% confidence interval, there is a 5% chance that the difference in means between years is due to chance.

A Note on Counts versus Proportions

Throughout this report, counts and proportions are reported and compared between years. Counts communicate the total number of people identified in a certain group. Proportions communicate the amount of a given group that share some status. Proportions are used in visualizations of comparisons between years, as proportions are more comparable over time than are raw counts. For each proportion reported, the denominator from which the proportion is drawn is equal to the sum of all definitive answers provided to the prompt (excluding "Not Sure", "Refused", etc.). For some subpopulations discussed in this report, the count of individuals reporting a certain status may have increased between 2019 and 2020 counts, however the proportion of those who responded definitively to that prompt reporting that status may have decreased. For example, if 20 people answered the question in 2019, two of whom reported a certain status, and 500 people answered the question in 2020, with 8 people reporting that status, the count change between years is + 6, but the change in proportion from 10% in 2019 to 1.6% in 2020, would result in a decreased proportion of 8.4%. Because we do not know the status of all others who did not answer a survey question definitively, proportions provide more information about the rate of characteristics of those counted.

Results

Table 1: Comparison of Total Point in Time Count Numbers 2019 – 2020

Year	Volunteer Count	Unsheltered Homeless Count	Sheltered Homeless Count	Total Homeless Count
2020	886	1574	932	2506
2019	661	1086	1169	2255
Change	+ 255 (39%)	+ 488 (45%)	- 237 (20%)	+ 251 (11%)

In Table 1 The total number of people experiencing homelessness on January 25, 2020, including sheltered and unsheltered, was 2506, up 11% from the 2019 PIT Count. Of these, 932 were sheltered (down 20% from last year) and 1574 were unsheltered (up 45% from 2019).

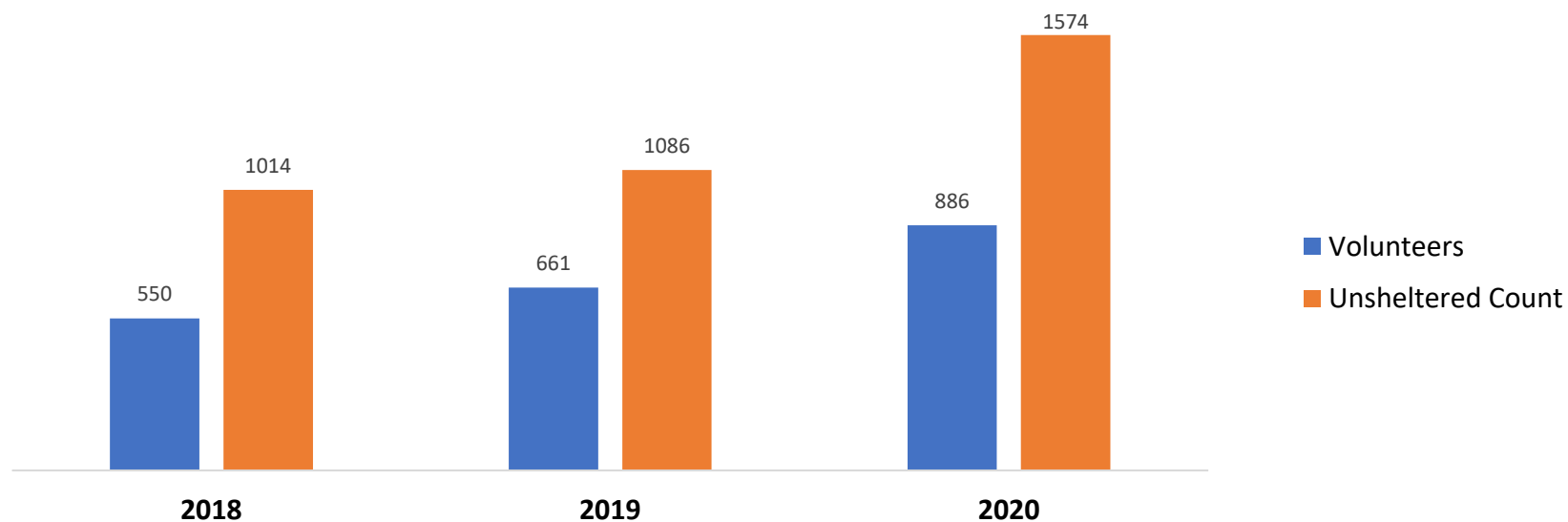**Figure 1: Increase in Volunteer and Unsheltered Counts 2018 – 2020**

Figure 1: An increase in volunteers was coupled with an increase in unsheltered count. The relationship between volunteer and unsheltered count was somewhat proportional across years, at 1.84 people counted per volunteer in 2018, 1.64 people counted per volunteer in 2019, and 1.78 people counted per volunteer in 2020.

The increase in volunteers over the last three years along with a transition to a web-based survey and more granular sub-division of geographic sections has increased ECHO's capacity to conduct more thorough surveys of the existing unsheltered homeless population in Austin/Travis County.

Figure 2: Austin/Travis County Point in Time Counts 2011 – 2020
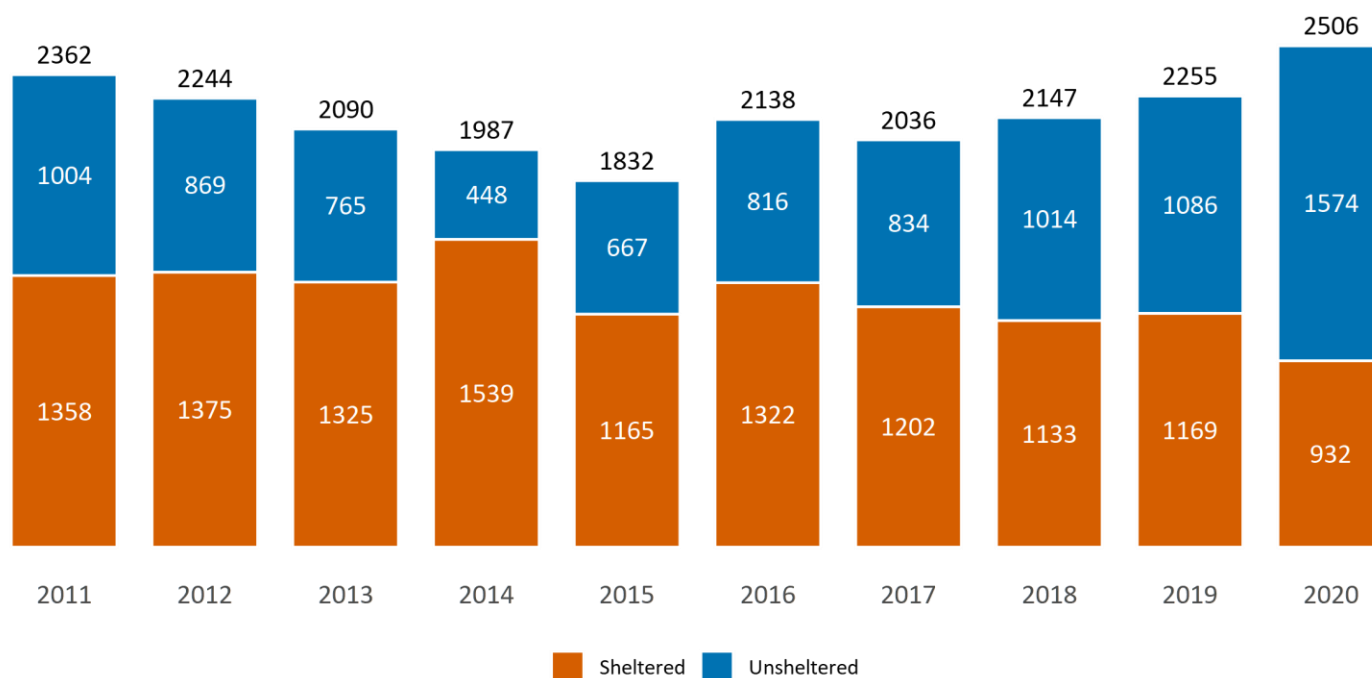
In Figure 2 variation was seen over time in both sheltered and unsheltered counts from 2010 to 2020. In Figure 2, total counts are in black above stacked bars for each year. Sheltered and unsheltered counts, respectively, are visualized in orange and blue, with labels in white.

The decrease in sheltered individuals was the result of a number of factors, including the shift by two shelters to a stronger housing-focused case management model that involves provision of case management to 100% of night shelter clients. This model supports individuals experiencing homelessness in a more comprehensive way but reduces the number of people each shelter can support. Additionally, a burst pipe on the night of the count forced another shelter to close during the PIT Count.

Figure 3: Point in Time Raw Count, Travis County Projected Population, and Point in Time Count Per Capita of Travis County Population 2011 – 2020
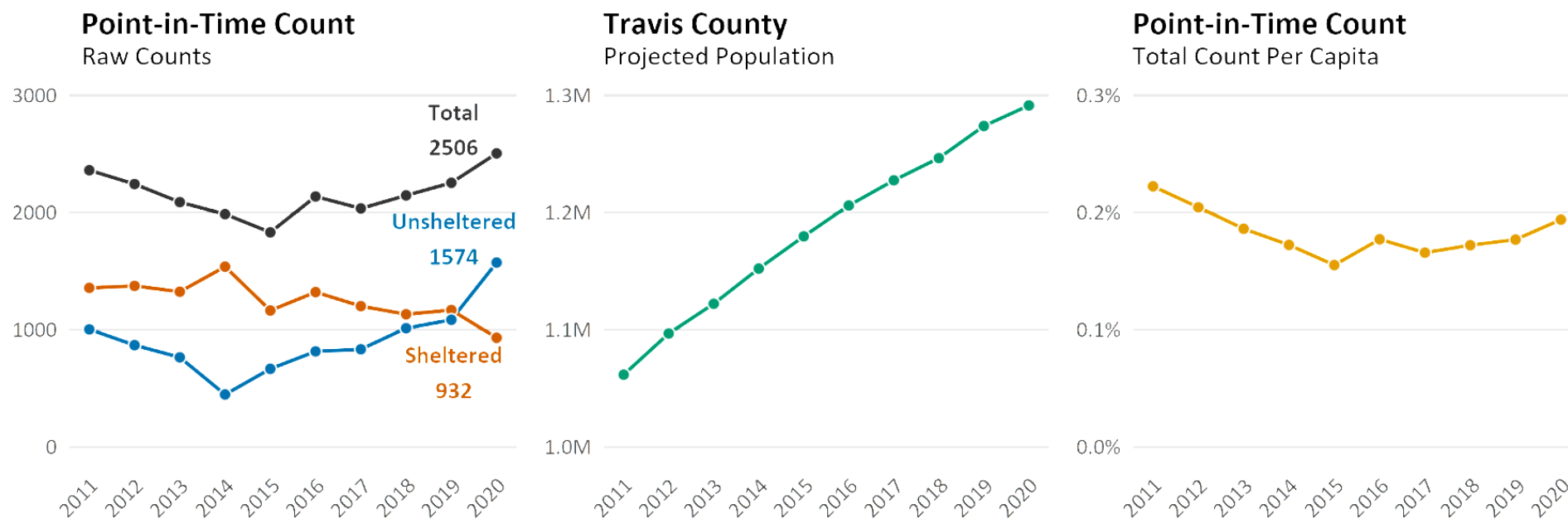
Source: 2011-2020 Austin/Travis County Point in Time Counts; Texas Demographic Center

Figure 3: There are small portions of the City of Austin that exist outside of the confines of Travis County. In 2020, 21 people were counted within Austin and outside of Travis county. This number is not available in previous years. Because of this, Figure 3 slightly overestimates the proportion of Travis County residents experiencing homelessness. In order to maintain consistency across years, the 2020 count has not been adjusted down to account for the overage.

While changes in City of Austin ordinances regarding the homeless population may have contributed to the appearance of an increased homeless population in Austin/Travis county, data show that, as the region grows, the percentage of people experiencing homelessness compared to the county population remains fairly constant.

Figure 4: Shift in Resource Capacity Toward Permanent Housing in Austin/Travis County 2011 – 2020
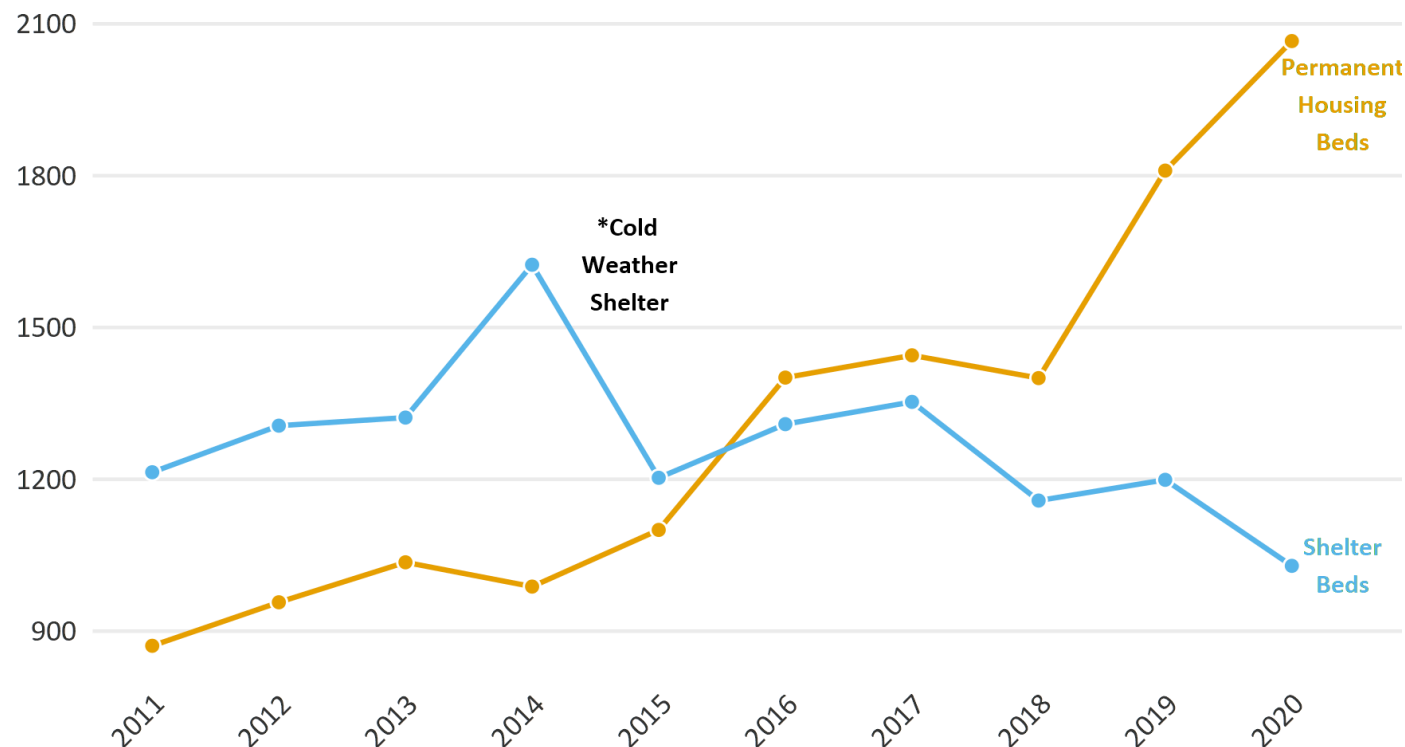
City of Austin (CoA) Motel Conversion Strategy In partnership with ECHO and community partners, the CoA is implementing a multi-faceted Motel Conversion Strategy that will create **300 additional permanent housing units** to assist people experiencing homelessness. The City acquired the Rodeway Inn in April of 2020 and will be seeking acquisition of additional properties in the future to contribute toward the goal of ending homelessness in Austin/Travis County.

Figure 4 suggests an inverse relationship between shelter capacity and permanent supportive housing capacity in the Austin/Travis County Continuum of Care from 2011 – 2020. Over time, resource allocation in Austin / Travis County has shifted away from shelter capacity and has shifted toward Housing First programs. This reflects an increasing focus in programming that ends homelessness, rather than treating the symptoms of homelessness. Figure 4 was updated on 7/9/2020 to reflect the Housing Inventory Count submitted to HUD. At the time of 2020 PIT release on 5/19/2020, PH bed data was not fully updated in our system.

The Housing First approach to homelessness has proven successful at reducing homelessness in our community. This approach focuses on quickly and effectively connecting individuals and families experiencing homelessness with permanent housing without preconditions or barriers to entry, such as sobriety, treatment or service participation requirements. However, increased permanent housing resources are needed to keep up with demand in Austin/Travis County. As emergency shelters provide increasingly efficient housing-focused case management, the City of Austin, ECHO, and community partners are coalescing to expand available permanent housing and services to meet the need.

Map 1: 2020 PIT Unsheltered Count Map – 74 PIT Sections
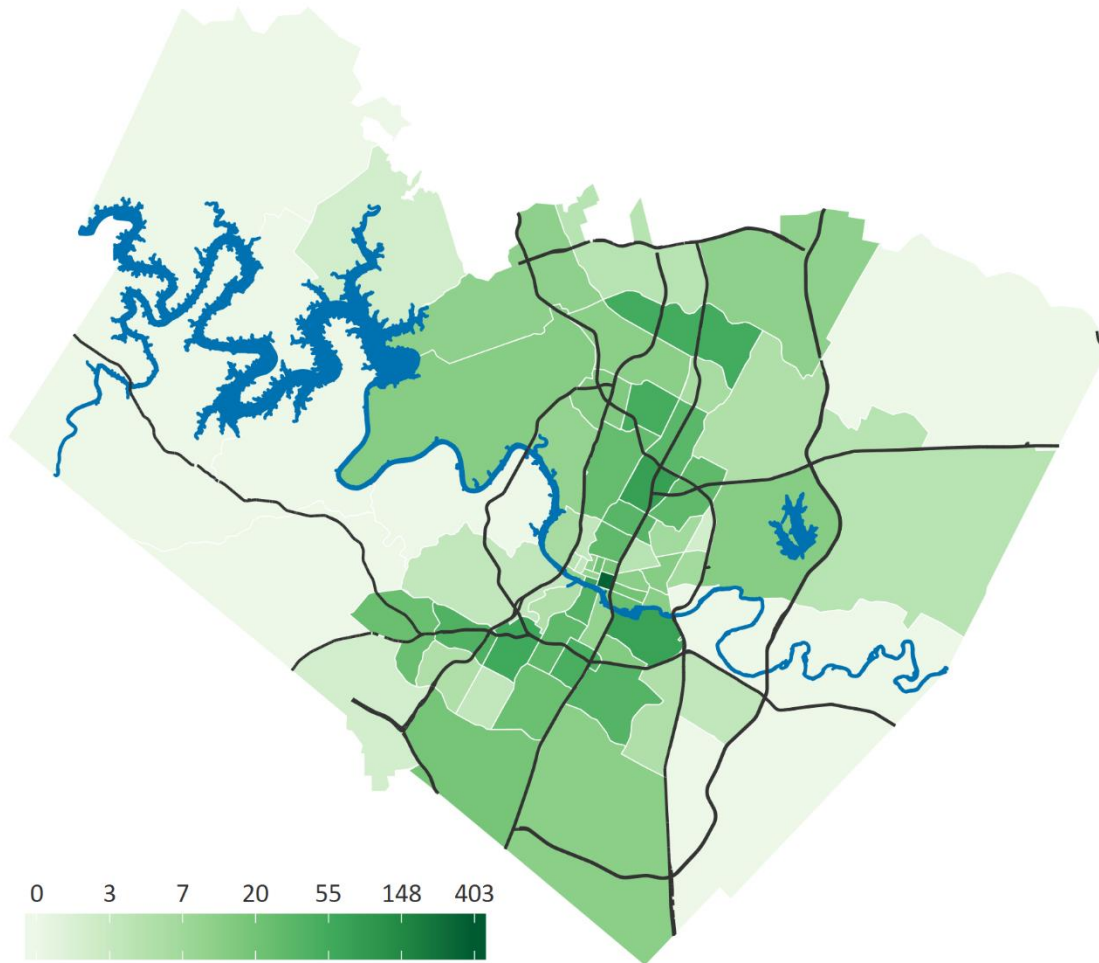
In Map 1, unsheltered counts were converted to log scale to provide contrast in mapping, with darker green representing higher counts, and labels were converted back to raw numbers for ease of interpretation by the reader. Black lines in Map 1 represent major thoroughfares, and white lines mark the boundaries of 2020 PIT sections. Highest counts align with major thoroughfares throughout the city and county.

Map 2: 2020 PIT Unsheltered Count Map – 10 City Council Districts
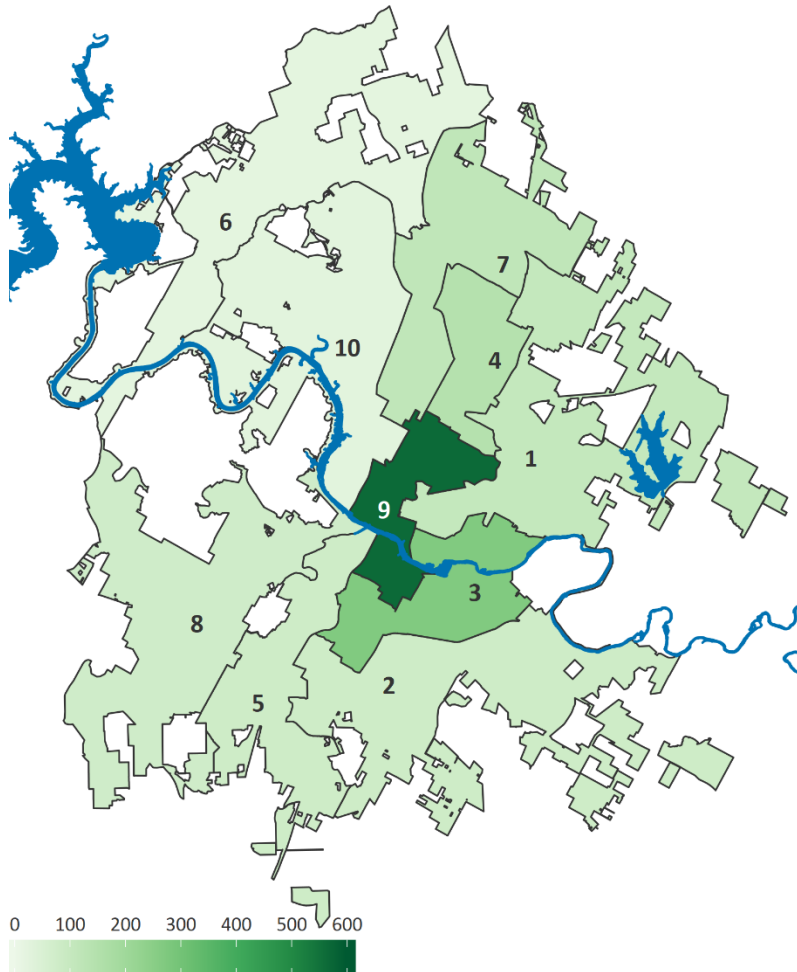
The map of **unsheltered homelessness by City Council District** shows that the population of people experiencing homelessness in Austin/Travis County remains concentrated in the city center. However, an analysis of dispersion showed that more unsheltered individuals in 2020 were counted away from the urban core than in 2019. The spread of the distribution of people experiencing homelessness counted in PIT Counts between 2019 and 2020 shifted outward to a statistically significant extent (t = -2.47, p = 0.01).

In Map 2, the unsheltered count labels were provided in equidistant categories, visualizing the sheer scale of the density of homelessness in the urban core of the city, with darker green shades representing higher counts. Black lines in Map 2 mark the boundaries of City Council districts. Although the unsheltered count was mostly concentrated around the urban core of the city, it was less centrally concentrated than in the 2019 geographic distribution.

Table 2: Comparison of 2019 – 2020 Unsheltered Count per Austin City Council District

Austin	2019	2020	Change
District 1	55	109	+ 54
District 2	34	83	+ 49
District 3	177	273	+ 96
District 4	77	148	+ 71
District 5	53	84	+ 31
District 6	24	23	- 1
District 7	118	120	+ 2
District 8	54	78	+ 24
District 9	439	567	+ 128
District 10	6	28	+ 22
Total	**1037**	**1513**	**+ 476**

Table 3: Comparison of 2019 – 2020 Unsheltered Count by Municipality (including Austin)

Municipality	2019	2020	Change
Austin	1037	1513	+ 476
Bee Cave	1	0	- 1
Elgin	0	1	+ 1
Jonestown	1	2	+ 1
Manor	0	4	+ 4
Pflugerville	0	3	+ 3
Sunset Valley	0	23	+ 23
Webberville	1	0	- 1
Unincorporated	46	28	- 18
Total	**1086**	**1574**	**+ 488**

Figure 5: Comparison of 2019 – 2020 Proportion of People Counted in PIT Count in each City Council District
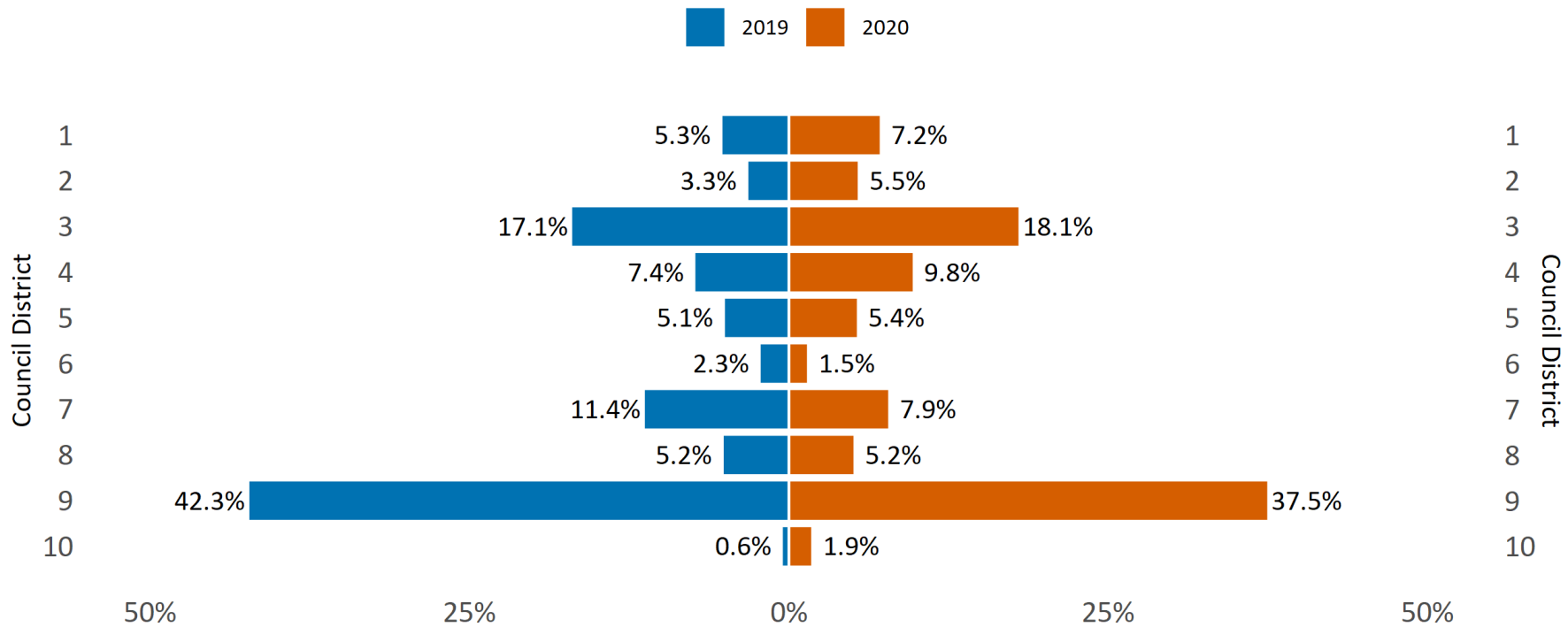
Figure 5 demonstrates the relative scale of each City Council District's count numbers by year, and proportional differences between years. For example, District 9 contained the largest proportion of the count in both 2019 and 2020. However, in 2020, District 9 contained a smaller proportion of the overall count than it did in 2019, while still containing the majority.

Map 3: 2020 PIT Unsheltered Count Map – 4 County Commissioner Precincts and 247 Election Precincts

Precinct 2:
232

Precinct 1:
273

Precinct 3:
603

Precinct 4:
444

0   3   7   20   55   148   403

The map of unsheltered homelessness by County Commissioner Precinct shows the largest count of people experiencing homelessness In Precinct 3 at 603
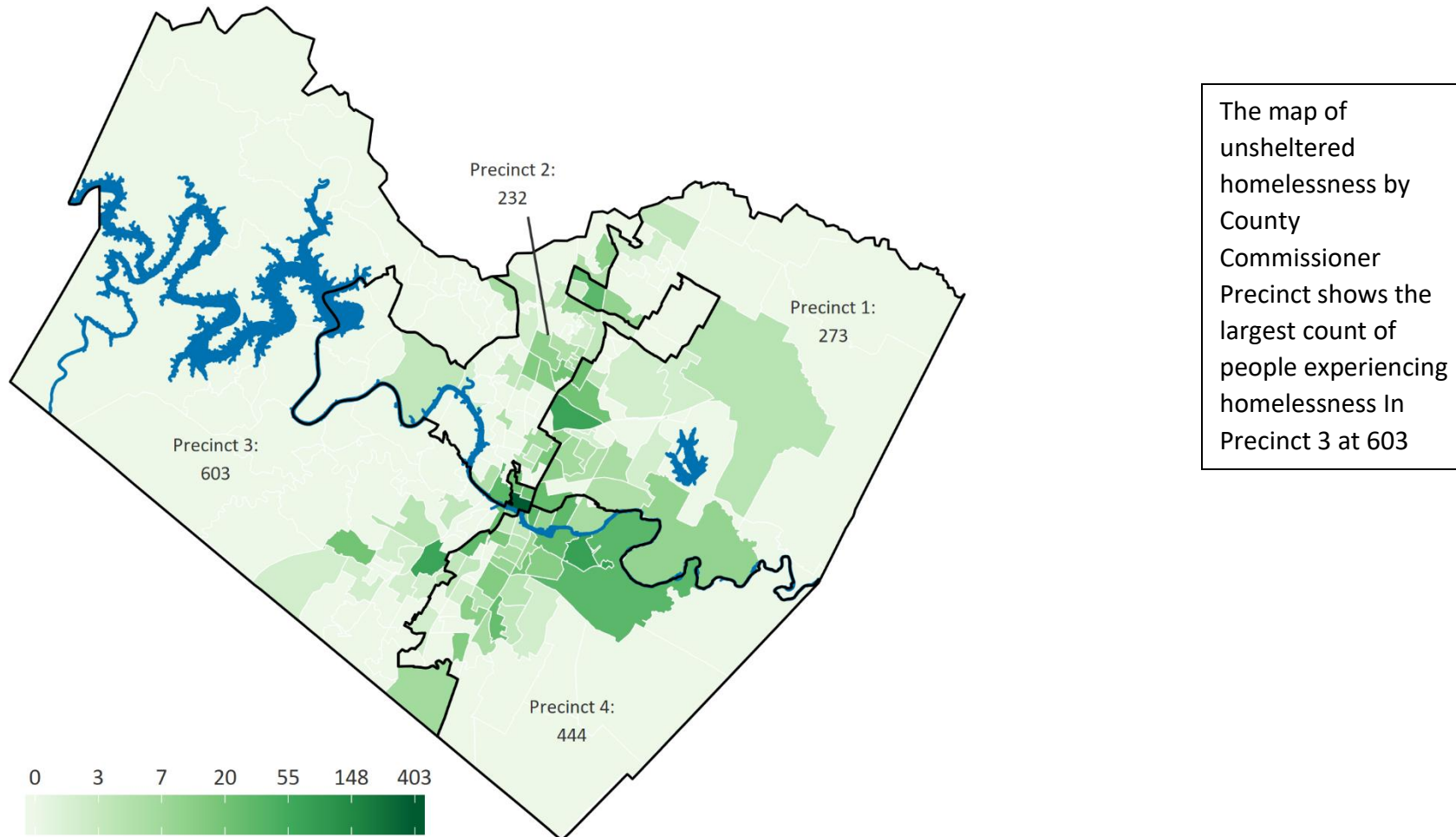
In Map 3 black lines denote borders of Travis County Commissioner precincts. White lines denote borders of election precincts. Unsheltered counts were converted to log scale to provide contrast in mapping, and labels were converted back to raw numbers for ease of interpretation by the reader.

Age

From 2019 to 2020 there was a decrease in the number of children (under age 18 years) counted in the Point in Time Count, an increase in the proportion of youth (ages 18 to 24) counted in the Point in Time Count, and an increase in the proportion of people over 24 years old counted in the Point in Time Count. The proportion of children (under age 18) in the interview and sheltered data consolidated decreased by 3.7% with 84 fewer children under 18 counted. The proportion of youth in consolidated interview and sheltered data increased by 1.3% with 13 additional youth counted. The count of people over 24 years old in consolidated interview and sheltered data increased by 2.4% with an additional 45 people over 24 counted. The decrease in children counted was statistically significant at the 99% confidence interval (t = 2.62, p = 0.009), meaning there is less than 1% chance that the decrease in children counted between 2019 and 2020 is due to chance. However, the increases in both youth and adults (over 24 years of age) categories were not statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval (t < 2.00, p > 0.05).

Figure 6: Comparison of Austin/Travis County 2019 – 2020 Age Subpopulations – PIT Count Sheltered + Unsheltered Interview Data
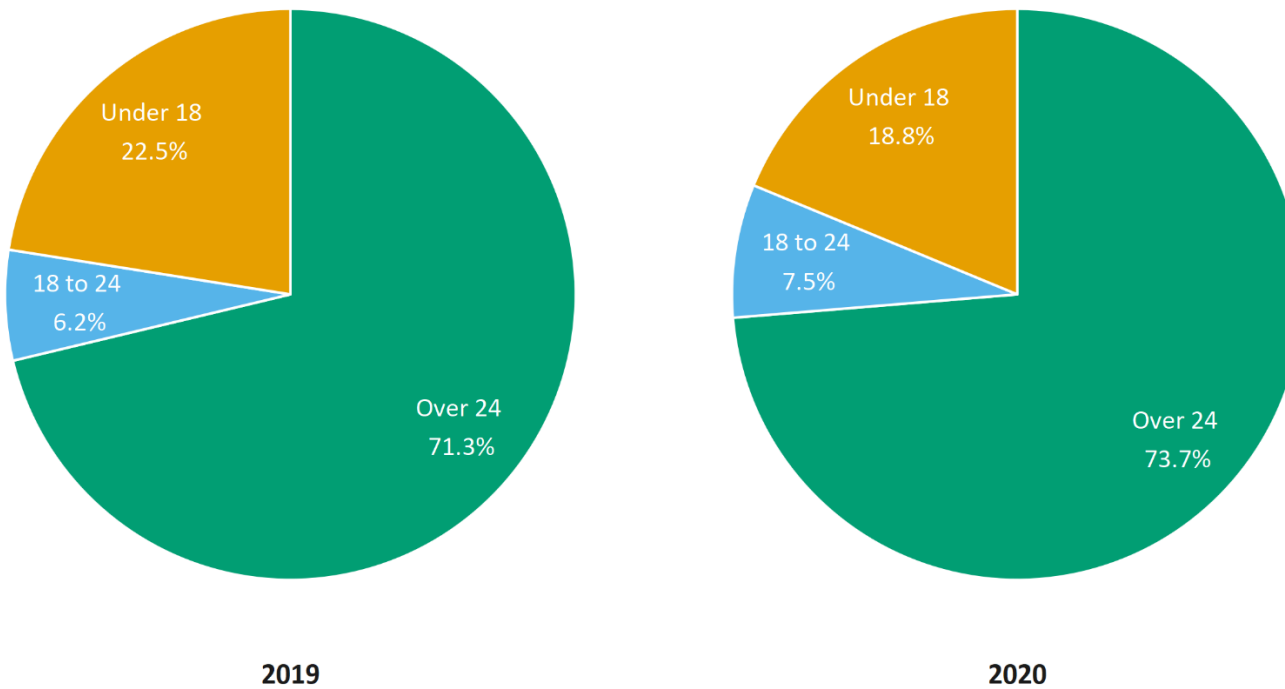
2019

2020

Veterans

From 2019 to 2020 there was a very slight increase of in the proportion of veterans counted in the Point in Time Count. The veteran rate in the consolidated unsheltered interview and sheltered data increased by 0.5% with 16 additional veterans counted. However, this increase was not statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval (t = -0.57, p = 0.57).

Figure 7: *Comparison of Austin/Travis County 2019 – 2020 Veteran Subpopulation – PIT Count Consolidated Unsheltered Interview + Sheltered Data*
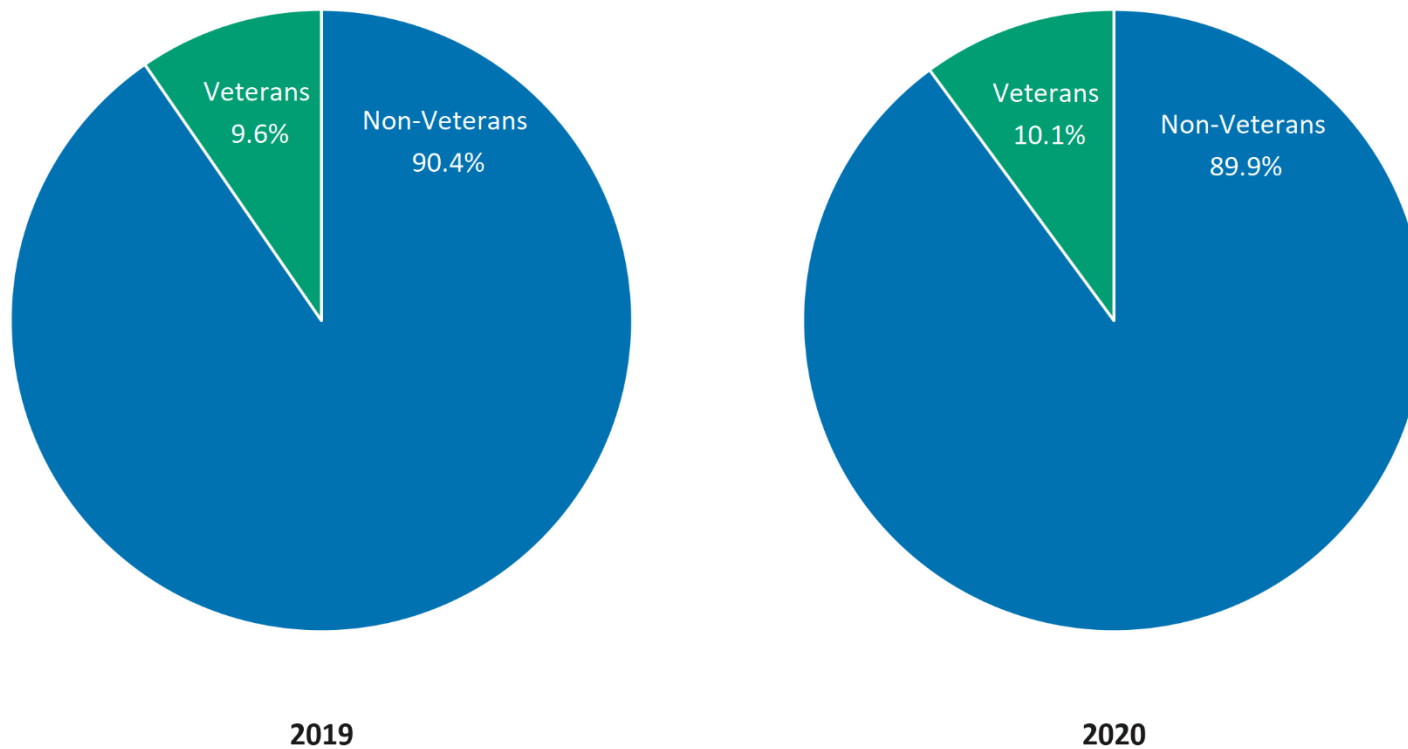
2019

2020

Race

From 2019 to 2020 there was an increase of 1.3% in the proportion of individuals experiencing homelessness identifying as Black/African American counted in the Point in Time Count, and a decrease of those identifying as White, Native American, Pacific Islander, or Asian. However, based on the results of t-tests for the difference of means, none of these changes in proportions were statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval (t < 2.00, p > 0.05). Black/African Americans represented 36.5% of the 2020 PIT count (over 1 in 3 individuals) but represented less than 1 in 10 individuals in the population of Travis County.

Figure 8: Comparison of Austin/Travis County 2019 – 2020 Race Subpopulations – PIT Count Consolidated Unsheltered Interview + Sheltered Data and Travis County Race Demographics (U.S. Census, 2018)

2019

- White, 62.1%
- Black, 35.2%
- Native American, 1.8%
- Asian, 0.5%
- Pacific Islander, 0.4%

2020

- White, 61.1%
- Black, 36.5%
- Native American, 1.1%
- Asian, 0.5%
- Pacific Islander, 0.4%

Travis County 2018

- White, 73.8%
- Black, 9.2%
- Other Race, 7.8%
- Asian, 7.6%
- Native American, 1.4%
- Pacific Islander, 0.2%

Ethnicity

From 2019 to 2020 there was a decrease in the proportion of Hispanic/Latinx individuals counted in the Point in Time Count. The Hispanic/Latinx rate in the interview and sheltered data consolidated decreased by 3.2% with 85 fewer Hispanic/Latinx individuals counted. However, while approaching significance, this decrease was not statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval (t = 1.93, p = 0.053).
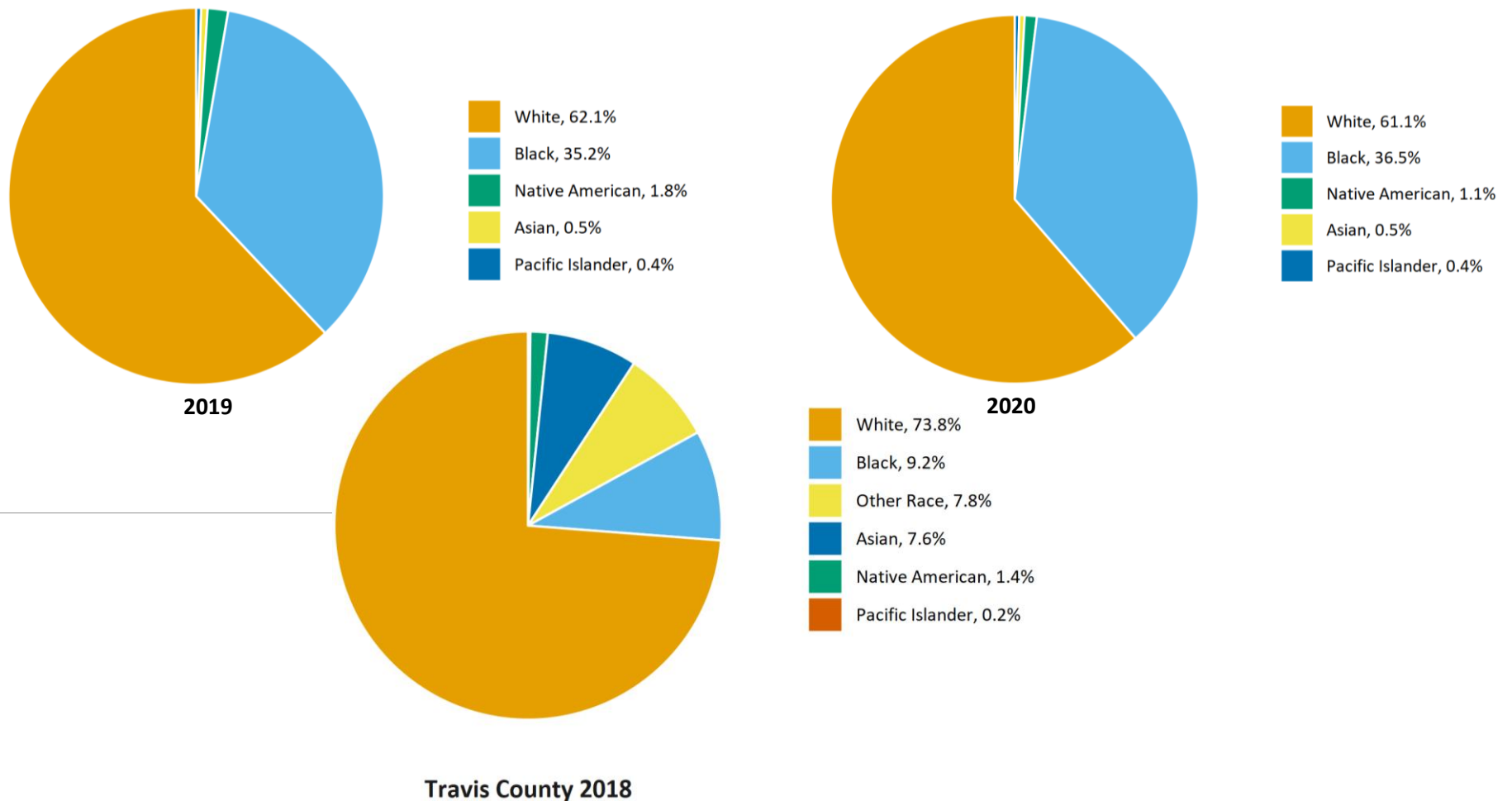
Figure 9: Comparison of Austin/Travis County 2019 – 2020 Ethnic Subpopulations – PIT Count Consolidated Unsheltered Interview + Sheltered Data and Travis County Ethnicity Demographics (U.S. Census, 2018)

2019   2020   Travis County 2018

Gender

From 2019 to 2020, the rate of male homelessness captured in the PIT Count decreased by 2.5% with a decrease of 179 individuals. The rate of female homelessness captured in the count increased by 2.3%, although the raw count decreased by 43 individuals. The transgender and gender nonconforming homelessness rate of those captured in the PIT Count increased by 0.2% with an additional 2 individuals. Based on the results of t-tests for the difference of means, none of these changes in proportions were statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval (t < 2.00, p > 0.10).
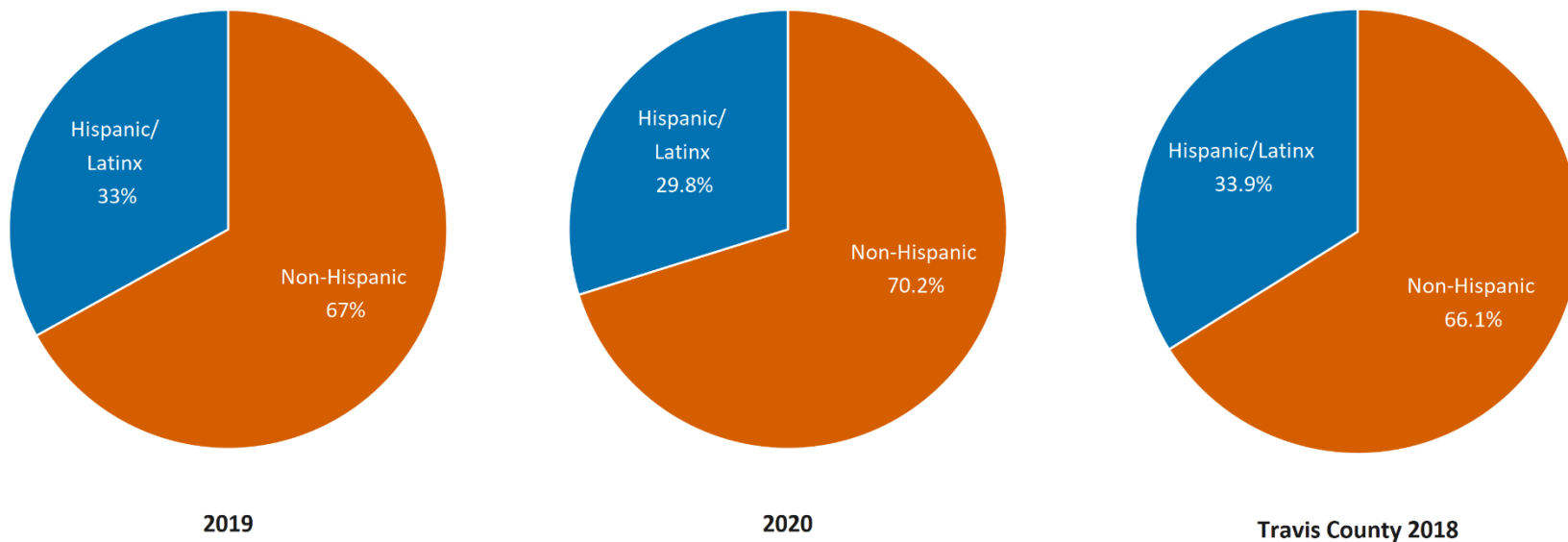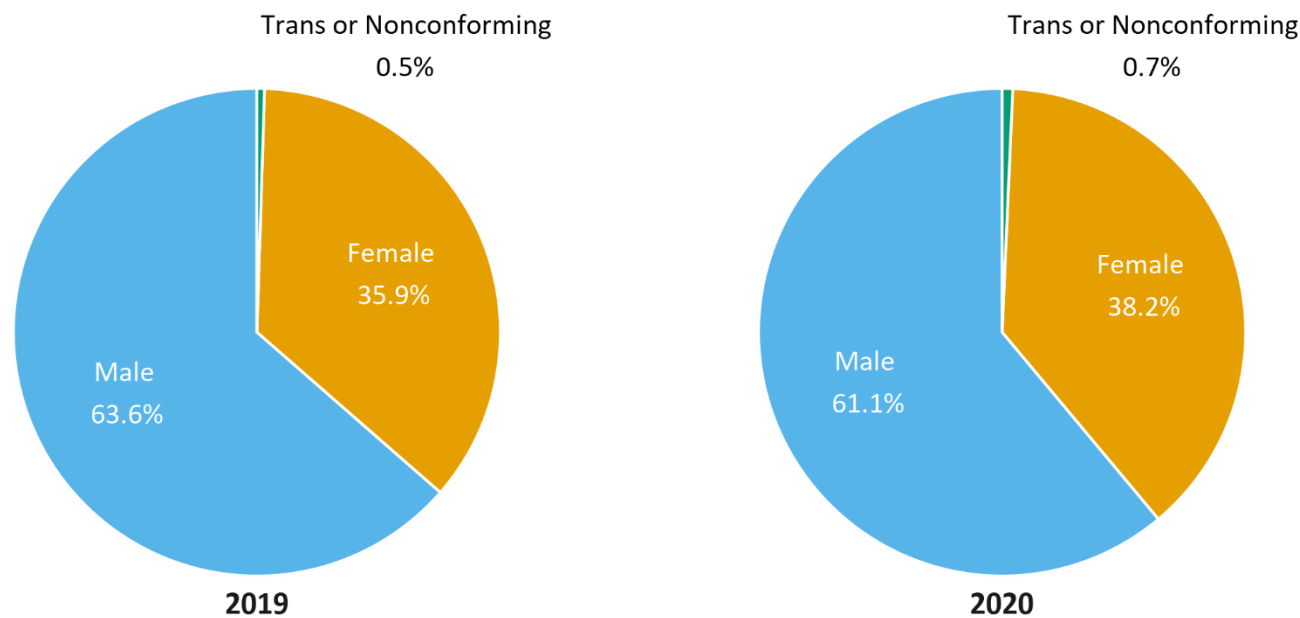
Figure 10: Comparison of Austin/Travis County 2019 – 2020 Gender Subpopulations – PIT Count Consolidated Unsheltered Interview + Sheltered Data

Prior Experience with Homelessness

From 2019 to 2020 there was an increase in the proportion of people with prior experience of homelessness counted in the Point in Time Count. The prior experience rate in the interview data increased by 3.5% with 113 additional people with prior experience of homelessness counted. However, this increase was not statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval (t = -1.09, p = 0.28).

Figure 11: Comparison of Austin/Travis County 2019–2020 Subpopulation with Prior Experience with Homelessness – PIT Count Unsheltered Interview Data

2019

2020

Location of First Experience of Homelessness

From 2019 to 2020, the rate of homelessness originated in Austin increased by 1.6%, with an increase of 64 individuals. The rate of homelessness originated in other Texas locations decreased by 1.7%, with 10 fewer individuals. Counts of homelessness having originated outside of Texas stayed relatively stable. Based on the results of t-tests for the difference of means, none of these changes in proportions were statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval (t < 2.00, p > 0.10).
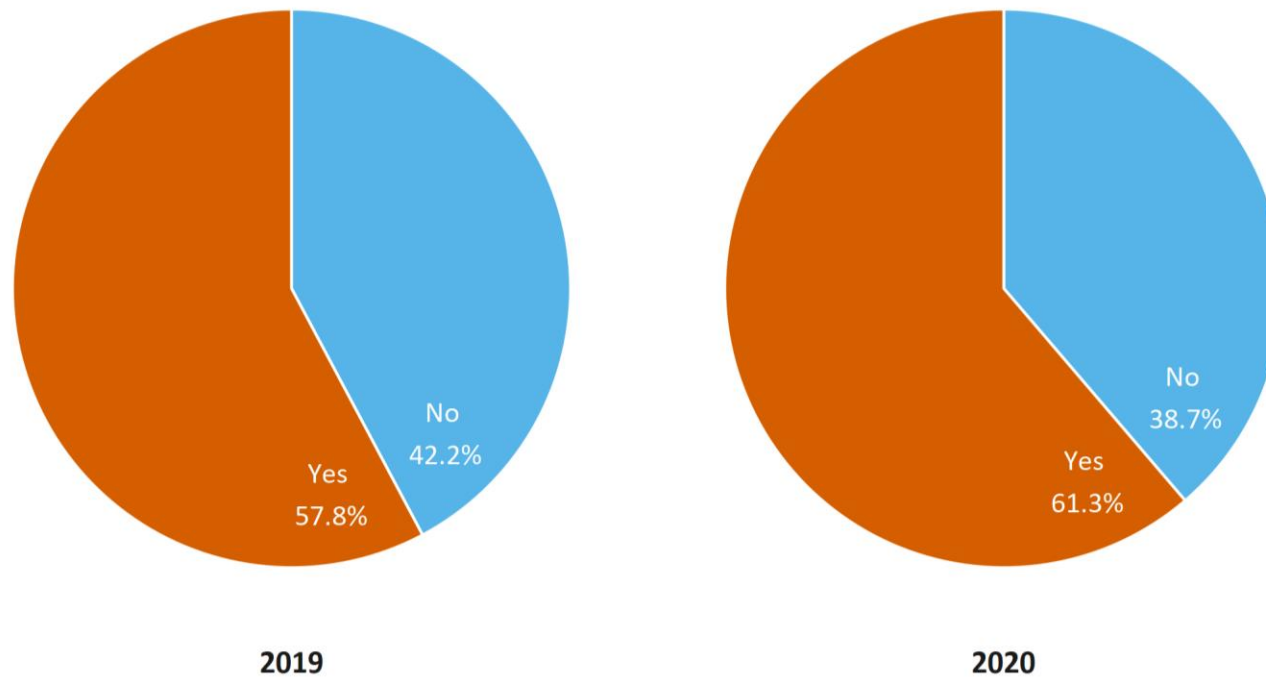
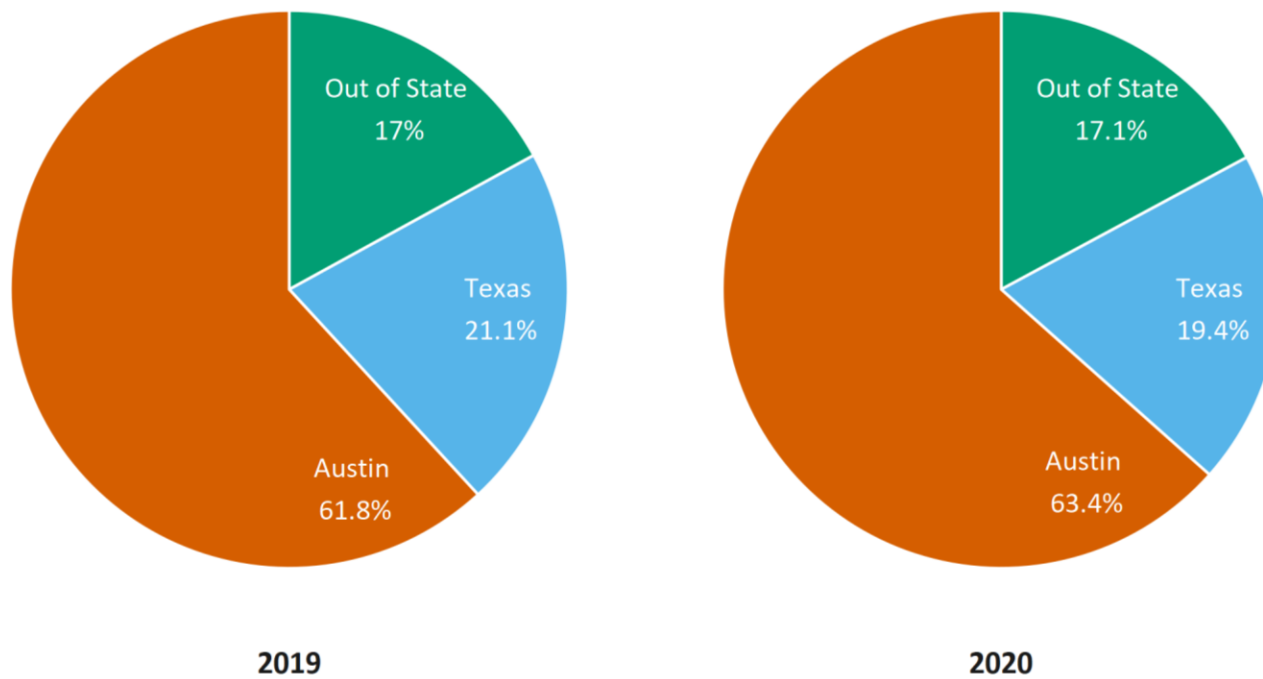**Figure 12: Comparison of Austin/Travis County 2019–2020 Subpopulations by Location of First Homelessness – PIT Count Unsheltered Interview Data**

2019

Out of State 17%
Texas 21.1%
Austin 61.8%

2020

Out of State 17.1%
Texas 19.4%
Austin 63.4%

System Progress Housing People Experiencing Homelessness

Table 4: Total number of clients housed in permanent housing, 2017 – 2019

| Clients Housed in Austin/Travis County (2017-2019)				
Year	PSH	RRH	MHA	Total
2017	222	679	714	1615
2018	198	851	969	2018
2019	172	921	1078	2171

Permanent Housing Includes:
Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH): is a housing intervention that includes ongoing rental subsidy and support services.
Rapid Re-Housing (RRH) is a short-term intervention that includes financial and support services.
Minimal Housing Assistance (MHA): Support services designed to assist individuals with low housing barriers or persons likely to self-resolve their homelessness.

Please note a change in the permanent housing calculation: Since the last PIT Count, one of the data elements used in the prior method to calculate number of clients housed was retired. We have updated our calculation methodology to use current elements defined in the 2020 HMIS Data Standards.

Figure 13: Total number of clients housed in Austin/Travis County, 2017 – 2019
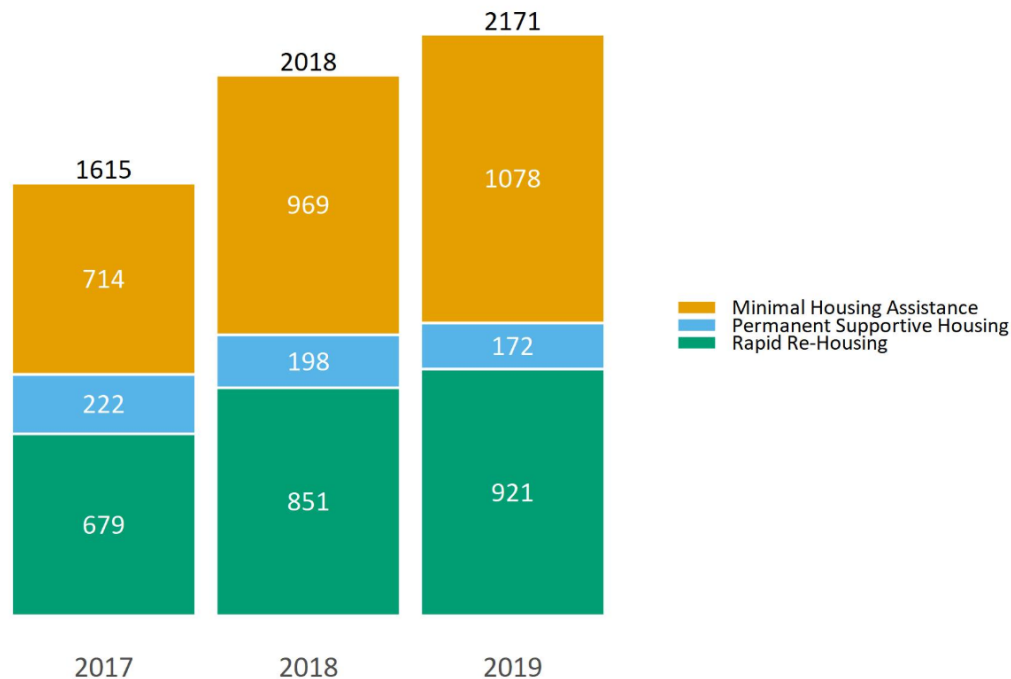
What is Housing First?

- This approach focuses on **quickly and effectively** connecting individuals and families experiencing homelessness with **permanent housing**
- **Removing barriers** to entry such as sobriety, treatment of service participation requirements

Research Shows that Housing First participants…

- Access housing faster and are more likely to remain housed (Woodhull, 2016; Gulcur et al, 2003; Tsemberis, 2000)
- Are less likely to use emergency services including hospitals, jails, and emergency shelters (USDHUD, 2015; Byrne, 2015)
- Can utilize up to **$23,000 less** per person per year in public resources than when in a shelter program (Tsemberis, 2007)

Table 5: Populations of Interest – PIT Count versus Coordinated Entry

Subpopulation	Percent Change in Subpopulation proportions from 2019 to 2020 PIT Counts	Percent Change in Homelessness via Coordinated Entry System in 2019
Black/African American	+1.3%	-1.9%
Veteran	+0.5%	-40.1%
Youth	+1.3%	-8.1%

What is Coordinated Entry?
ECHO's Coordinated Entry system provides a single-entry point for people experiencing homelessness to access vital community resources. The Coordinated Entry team develops, implements, and oversees a system that ensures community providers collaboratively and efficiently connect households to the services, support programs, and housing to help end their homelessness.

The annual PIT count provides a prevalence estimate or "snapshot" of homelessness in Austin/Travis County on a single day of the year. Whereas, the Coordinated Entry System, captured in ECHO's Homeless Management Information System, provides ongoing incidence data on new, existing, and resolved homelessness among populations served. While the 2020 PIT Count saw slight increases in the proportion of Black/African Americans, Veterans, and Youth counted, the Coordinated Entry system shows decreases of 1.9%, 40.1%, and 8.1% respectively in homelessness among those same populations during 2019. When self-resolved homelessness is accounted for in HMIS, Youth homelessness was reduced by 28% in 2019.

Ending Youth Homelessness (EYH)

EYH is a **collaborative moment** involving LifeWorks, SAFE, Caritas of Austin, ECHO, and numerous other organizations to end homelessness among youth populations in Austin/Travis County. Youth experiencing homelessness are a particularly vulnerable population, but they are also resilient and creative. When engaged with the right combination of **support, counseling, economic opportunity, and affordable housing**, youth experiencing homelessness can stabilize and thrive. With support from LifeWorks, many youths can self-resolve their homelessness. _**When this self-resolved homelessness is accurately captured in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) database, the EYH initiative reduced overall homelessness among youth in Austin/Travis County by 28% in 2019**_. LifeWorks and partners continue to work to ensure that youth homelessness is brief, rare, and non-recurring. "This project has shown that when the community comes together to support our youth, we can make substantial progress. This affirms that with the right combination of collaboration and resources, we can end Youth Homelessness by 2020", stated Susan McDowell, Executive Director of LifeWorks

Summary of Findings

The 2020 PIT count for Austin/Travis County saw an overall increase in the homeless population of 11% from 2019. The sheltered count dropped by 20% (from 1169 in 2019 to 932 in 2020) due to some shifts in shelter programming toward a more comprehensive, housing-focused case management model, housing program classification, and plumbing complications that occurred on the night of the count. Meanwhile, the unsheltered count rose from 1086 to 1574 – comprising a 45% increase from 2019. When examined over time from 2010 to 2020, the per capita PIT totals remain fairly constant despite over population growth in Austin/Travis county. The pattern and density of homelessness in Austin/Travis County follows major thoroughfares and concentrates most heavily in downtown Austin. Council District 9 remains the district with heaviest concentration of people experiencing homelessness. However, there was a statistically significant outward shift in the density of homelessness toward surrounding and outlying districts in 2020. County Commissioner Precincts 3 and 4 had the highest counts of people experiencing homelessness at 603 and 444 respectively.

The proportion of demographic subpopulations were compared from 2019 to 2020. Most year on year changes were not statistically significant among these subpopulations (except for the decrease in the proportion of children experiencing homelessness). However, there were some findings that are worth mentioning and monitoring. There was a 3.7% decrease in homelessness among children under 18 years of age. The population of homeless youth counted increased slightly from 2019 to 2020 (1.2% increase in unsheltered; 1.6% increase in unsheltered) by 1.3% overall. The population of veterans counted increased by 0.5% from 2019 to 2020. From 2019 to 2020 there was a slight increase in the Black/African American population (1.3%) while those identifying as White, Native American, Pacific Islander, and Asian saw minor decreases (of less than 1 percentage point). Meanwhile, there was a decrease of 3.2% in the Hispanic/Latinx population that approached statistical significance (p = 0.053). The proportion of women counted in 2020 increased by 2.3%. Individuals with prior experience with homelessness increased by 3.5%. Simultaneously, those reporting that their first experience with homelessness occurred in Austin increased by 1.6% while those reporting other locations in Texas decreased by 1.7% and those originating from out of state rose nominally by 0.1%.

Contextualization of Findings

These PIT Count findings must be contextualized within the landscape of housing and local economic factors in the area:

2019 Ordinance Changes and Visibility: While ordinance changes regarding the homeless population in Austin may have amplified the perception of unsheltered homelessness in Austin, the proportion of people experiencing homelessness per capita in Austin/Travis County has remained constant over time and was slightly lower in 2020 than a decade ago. The decriminalization of homelessness may have accounted for increased visibility (and higher proportions) of more vulnerable populations such as women and youth counted in the 2020 Pit Count.

Racial Disparities among our Homeless Population: While an increase in the proportion of Black/African American (1.3%) was not statistically significant, these findings are not in alignment with collective goals to address disparities in our community. In September of 2019, ECHO released a report on Addressing Racial Disparities in Austin/Travis County. The report recommends multi-pronged community actions that involve: 1) creating leadership and representation opportunities for people with lived expertise in homelessness, 2) reducing criminal justice barriers to housing, 3) ending homelessness for high utilizers of the criminal justice and healthcare systems and for vulnerable subpopulations, 4) raising awareness of domestic violence and other types of abuse, 5) creating equal access to diverse and affordable housing opportunities, and 6) promoting a low-barrier coordinated entry approach into our homeless response system for people experiencing homelessness. ECHO formed a Racial Equity Task Group, led by key partners, to examine the Homeless Response System and propose

solutions to mitigate any racial inequities. However, the problem goes beyond our homeless response system. Our community needs decision makers to tackle broader structural inequities that impact our most vulnerable populations.

Homelessness Originating in Austin: From 2019 to 2020, the rate of homelessness originating in Austin increased by 1.59%. Although this increase is not statistically significant, the increase in homelessness originating in Austin supports the notion that the lack of housing affordability in the city of Austin is contributing to homelessness for people who were previously housed in the city.

Rising Rent and Stagnant Minimum Wage: Rent has becoming increasingly less affordable in the city. Rent in Austin has increased 6.2% each year among bottom tier properties and 4.8% among middle tier properties (Zillow Rent Index, 2020). The lack of rent affordability is exacerbated by stagnated minimum wages, which have not increased since 2009. Based on analysis of the Joint Center of Housing Studies and the Economic Policy Institute data, Austin is the least affordable major U.S. city for minimum wage employees to live. Minimum rent is $1,220/month while minimum wage is $7.25/hour. Median rent is 143% of the take home pay of minimum wage workers – someone would have to work 200 hours/month to afford to pay rent (Magnify Money, 2020).

Lack of Health Insurance: The rate of uninsured in the Austin metro area has been increasing in recent years, from 11.7% in 2017 to 12.6% in 2018 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). A lack of health insurance places a heavy burden on families and individuals already struggling to make ends meet.

Income Inequality: Further, income inequality in Austin is higher than that of any other Texas city, and Texas is one of only nine states across the U.S. that saw a rise in income inequality, the gap between the highest and lowest incomes, in recent years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). As housing costs increase, higher income Austin residents fulfill demand, while those with lower incomes are left behind.

Addressing Homelessness in Austin: The per capita count of people experiencing homelessness in Austin/Travis county has remained fairly constant since 2011. In conjunction with City of Austin and Travis County staff and a cadre of diverse stakeholders, ECHO continues to address homelessness in the following goal areas via Austin's Action Plan to End Homelessness: 1) outreach services and shelters, 2) addressing disparities, 3) providing housing and support services, 4) strengthening our response system, and 5) building community commitment from both the public and private sectors. It will take a concerted effort and commitment on the part of our community to create additional affordable housing solutions, adequate support services in the realm of physical, behavioral, and mental health services, and ensure that all members of our community have their basic needs met in order to thrive.

Homeless Response System Initiatives toward the Action Plan to End Homelessness since the 2019 PIT Count

ECHO and community partners continue to work diligently toward implementing the Action Plan to End Homelessness:

- In the FY 2019/20 Budget, the Austin City Council included $62.7 million allocated toward homelessness services. This historic allocation emphasizes the fact that preventing and ending homelessness is Council's highest priority. The coordination of City funding also includes ensuring that City-funded programs and services are aligned with the action plan developed by the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO).

- City of Austin purchased the Rodeway Inn in April of 2020, utilizing converted hotels to increase stock of permanent supportive housing in our community. Rodeway Inn is the first of many hotel conversions the City is planning on acquiring to transition people experiencing homelessness off our streets and out of shelters and into low-barrier permanent supportive housing solutions.
- Continuum of Care (CoC) partners in the homeless response system collectively received over $10.3 million toward provision of programs, services, and housing in Austin/Travis County. Our partner organizations are doing amazing projects with this funding:
  - o Integral Care has opened the Terrace at Oak Springs housing development providing 50 units of permanent supportive housing using a Housing First and Harm Reduction approach. Ending homelessness for 50 of Austin's most vulnerable community members.
  - o SAFE is using HUD funding to expand housing to 55 additional households impacted by domestic violence during 2020 and beyond
  - o LifeWorks served more than 5000 Central Texas youth and families in areas of Housing, Counseling, and Education and Workforce and celebrated the opening of The Works II adding 29 more affordable housing units for youth and young families exiting homelessness
  - o Salvation Army's Rathgeber Center for Families opened in February of 2020 adding 212 beds to Austin/Travis County's emergency shelter capacity.
  - o Caritas of Austin's Youth Housing Stability initiative, a key component of the Youth Homelessness collaboration with LifeWorks and SAFE, permanently housed 30 youth ages 18-24 and provided support to build well-being.
  - o Front Steps' downtown Austin Resource Center for the Homeless (ARCH) transitioned more fully to a housing-focused model in August 2019 and now provides case management to 100% of night shelter clients. Since then, 80% of "top 25 stayers" have been housed. With an average age of 54 years, 50% had been clients at the shelter for over a decade, arriving long before case management was standard practice for all shelter clients.
- Family Eldercare has housed 26 older adults in the last six months alone, and they have enrolled 150 clients in a total value of $609,000 in benefits supporting homeless prevention since January 2020.
- Mobile Loaves and Fishes expect to complete their Phase II expansion of the Community First! Village during the summer of 2020 adding an additional 300 homes to their community.
- The Other Ones Foundation's alternative employment model paid working participants over $194,000, removed over 241,000 pounds of trash out of green space, and housed 35 individuals in 2019.

Limitations

PIT Counts across the nation are subject to documented limitations: 1) variations in count methodology from year to year within and across communities; and 2) unsheltered counts are subject to more variation in methodology due to geography, weather, and volunteer considerations (Schneider et al, 2018). In the Austin/Travis County PIT Count, surveyors use census data collection methods to gather information about the scale of homelessness and characteristics of the population experiencing homelessness. In this style of data collection, surveyors attempt to account for every individual in the population experiencing homelessness in the Austin/Travis County geographic area within a six-hour data collection period. Additional limitations include: 3) visibility challenges – per Housing and Urban Development (HUD) guidelines only individuals seen by a surveyor can be counted. Some groups and individuals happen to or choose to live in locations that are difficult to find or challenging to access;4) informally sheltered – the PIT count does not include homeless youth and families staying in

motels or temporarily with other people on the night of the count are not included in the total PIT Count, and with the exclusion of these groups, the count is likely lower than the true population of people experiencing homelessness in Austin/Travis County. The degree to which the overall population may be undercounted, however, is unclear; 5) <u>potential duplication</u> - despite best efforts to minimize survey area overlap and double-counting, and despite analysts' efforts to de-duplicate data collected, some individuals surveyed are accounted for more than once in the final count; 6) <u>selection bias</u> - It is possible that demographic data from the 2020 PIT count are subject to selection bias. Since responses are drawn from definitive survey responses, it is possible that those individuals who were counted as an observation only, refused to answer, or didn't know the answer to a particular demographic question differed from those who chose to respond definitively.

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