

# Regional Gap Analysis on Homelessness, Addiction, & Food Insecurity

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This is the first study of it's kind in the nation.

**754**

**perspectives from  
people experiencing  
homelessness**

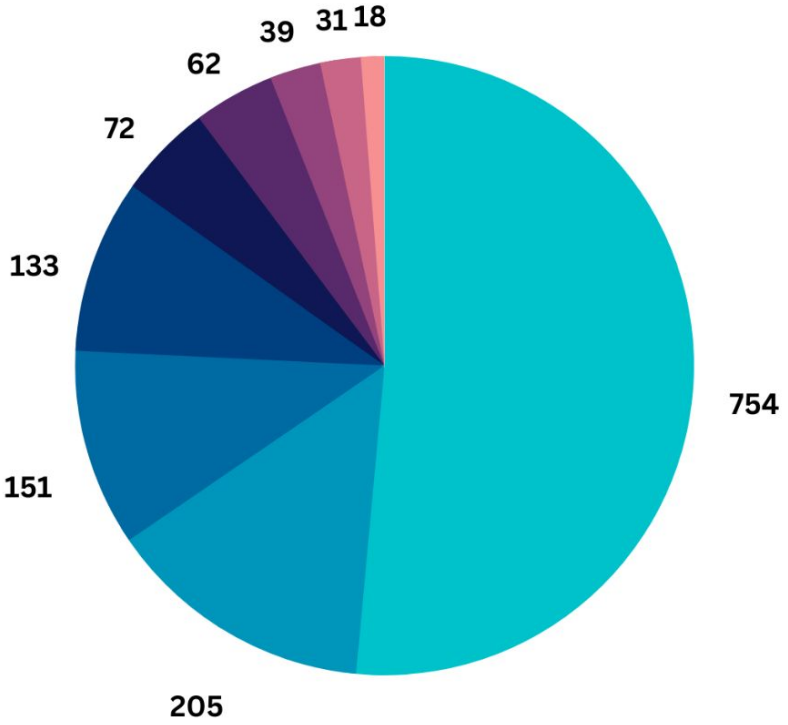
**10**

**cities across  
Maricopa County**

**12+**

**Regional  
partners**

# Total Number of Surveys & Interviews = 1,465



- 754 people experiencing homelessness
- 205 people at food banks (currently not experiencing homelessness)
- 151 staff and clients at the TLC and CLC
- 133 community members surrounding the TLC
- 72 elected officials, city staff, & first responders
- 62 people experiencing addiction (currently not experiencing homelessness)
- 39 business owners & neighborhood leaders
- 31 direct service providers
- 18 faith partners

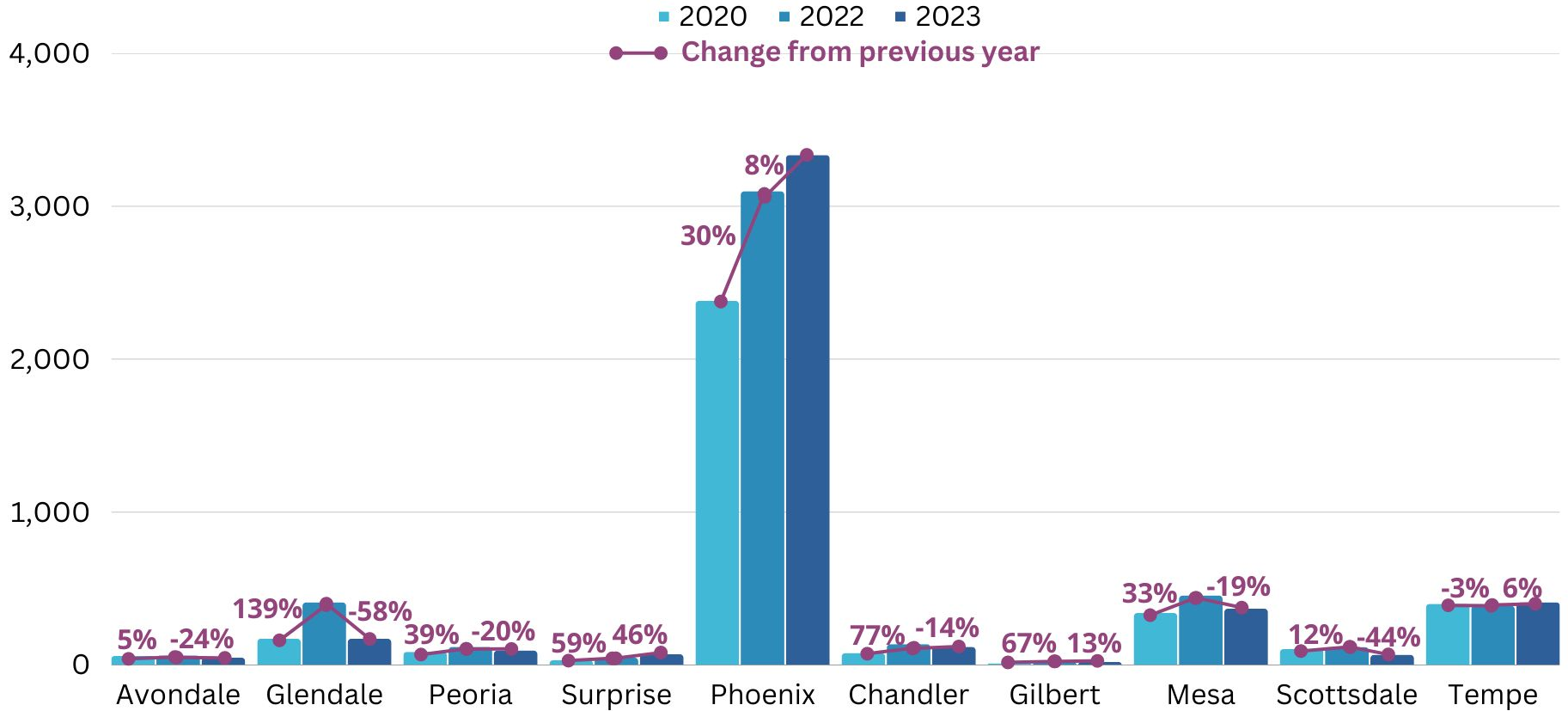
**Across Maricopa County, rates of homelessness, addiction, and food insecurity are increasing.**

## Percent Increases in 211 Calls for Services between 2021 and 2022

City	Housing	Shelter	Addiction	Food
Phoenix	168%	203%	196%	350%
Mesa	238%	78%	200%	369%
Glendale	212%	161%	150%	216%
Tempe	218%	207%	250%	278%
Chandler	230%	262%	33%	107%
Scottsdale	310%	610%	150%	250%
Peoria	196%	250%	200%	80%
Gilbert	235%	229%	0%	533%
Surprise	260%	100%	50%	667%
Avondale	192%	167%	0%	680%

# Unsheltered Count by Municipality

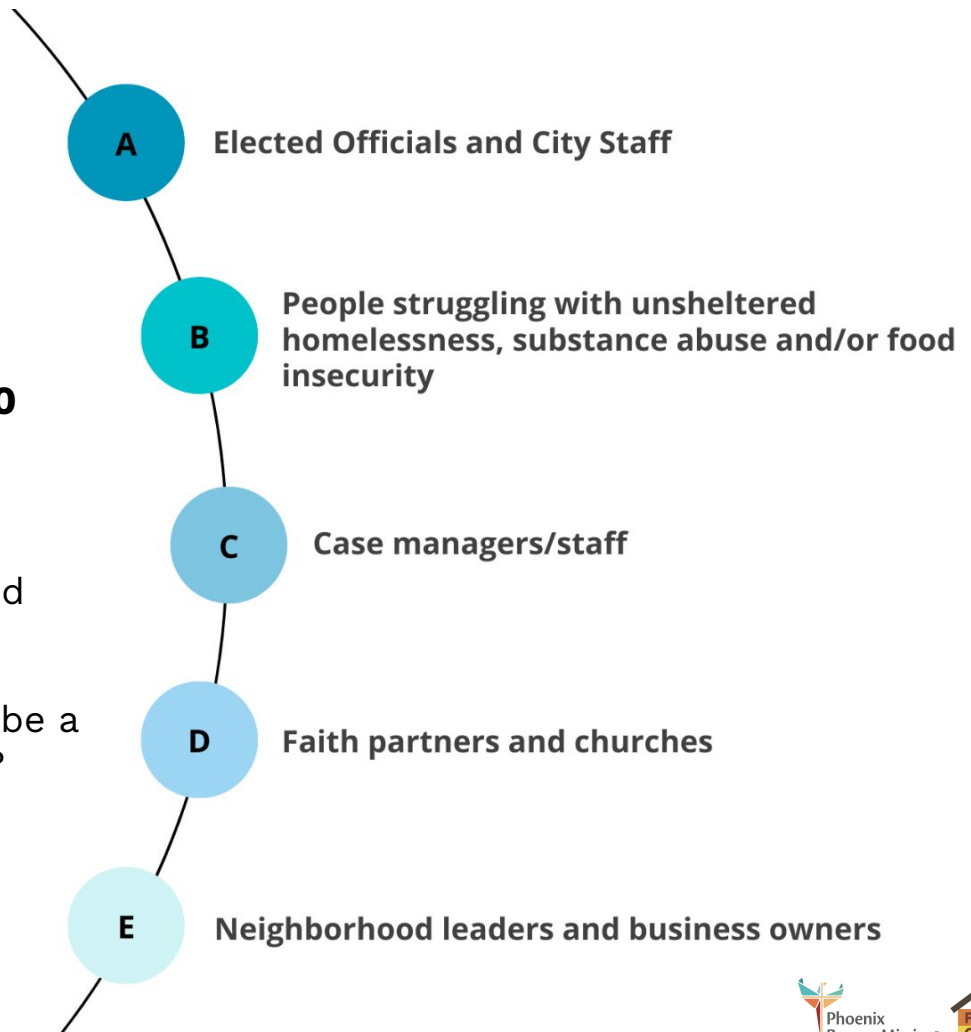
Source: Maricopa Association of Governments Point-in-Time Count Report (2023)



# Phase 2 Overview

**With a focus on homelessness, addiction, and food insecurity in the 10 largest cities in Maricopa County:**

1. What are the available resources and unmet needs?
2. How might Phoenix Rescue Mission be a partner in addressing unmet needs?



# Methodology

## Data from 10 Cities:

- Phoenix
- Mesa
- Chandler
- Scottsdale
- Glendale
- Gilbert
- Tempe
- Peoria
- Surprise
- Avondale

## Mixed-methods study

- **Literature review** of municipal plans, reports, and regional data
- **Quantitative data** collection (Likert scale questions and multiple choice questions)
- **Qualitative data** collection (open response questions)

## 2 methods of data collection

- **In-person** (in parks, alleys, parking lots, soup kitchens, & food banks)
- **Virtual/online** (focus groups and interviews via zoom and online surveys using Survey Monkey)
- Individuals experiencing homelessness received a **\$10 Visa gift card**
- Surveys were anonymous, offered in Spanish and permissible by informed consent



## **Homelessness:**

Data, client perspectives,  
and analysis



## PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN MARICOPA COUNTY

### AGE

#### AGES ARE FAIRLY EVENLY DISTRIBUTED

The largest group of people were between the ages of 35-44 years old, and the smallest were under 18 years old and over 65 years old. Our sample did not show an elevated number of seniors as we expected.

### GENDER

#### MOST PEOPLE ARE MEN

67.6% of our sample were men, 31.6% were female and the rest of individuals reported being transgender or gender non-conforming, which aligns with county-wide homelessness data.

### ETHNICITY

#### 29% OF OUR SAMPLE IS HISPANIC/LATINX

This aligns with county-wide census data (32% Hispanic/Latinx), but there are more Hispanic/Latinx people in our sample than county homelessness data.

### VETERAN STATUS

#### 8% OF OUR SAMPLE ARE VETERANS

5% of people experiencing homelessness in Maricopa County are veterans.

### CHRONIC STATUS

#### 63% OF OUR SAMPLE IS CHRONICALLY HOMELESS

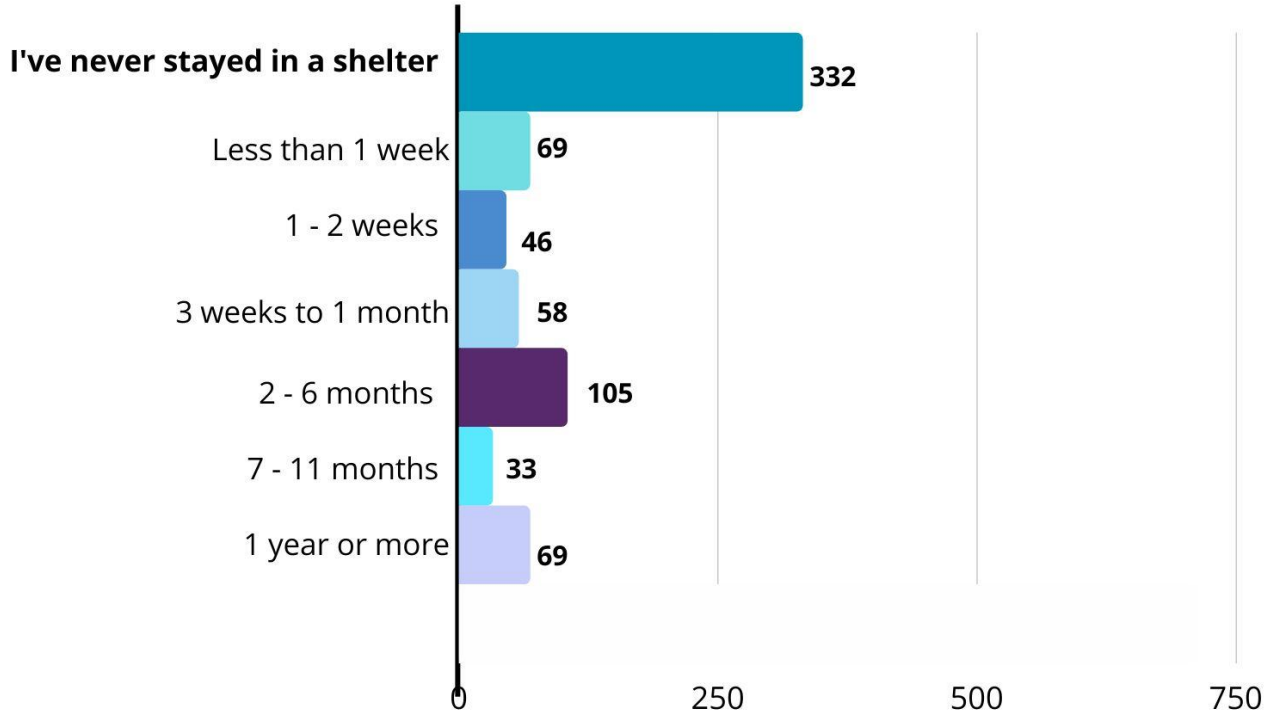
The number of people who qualify as chronically homeless is significantly higher in our study than in county-wide homelessness data (about 20%)

### RACE

#### OVER-REPRESENTATION OF PEOPLE OF COLOR

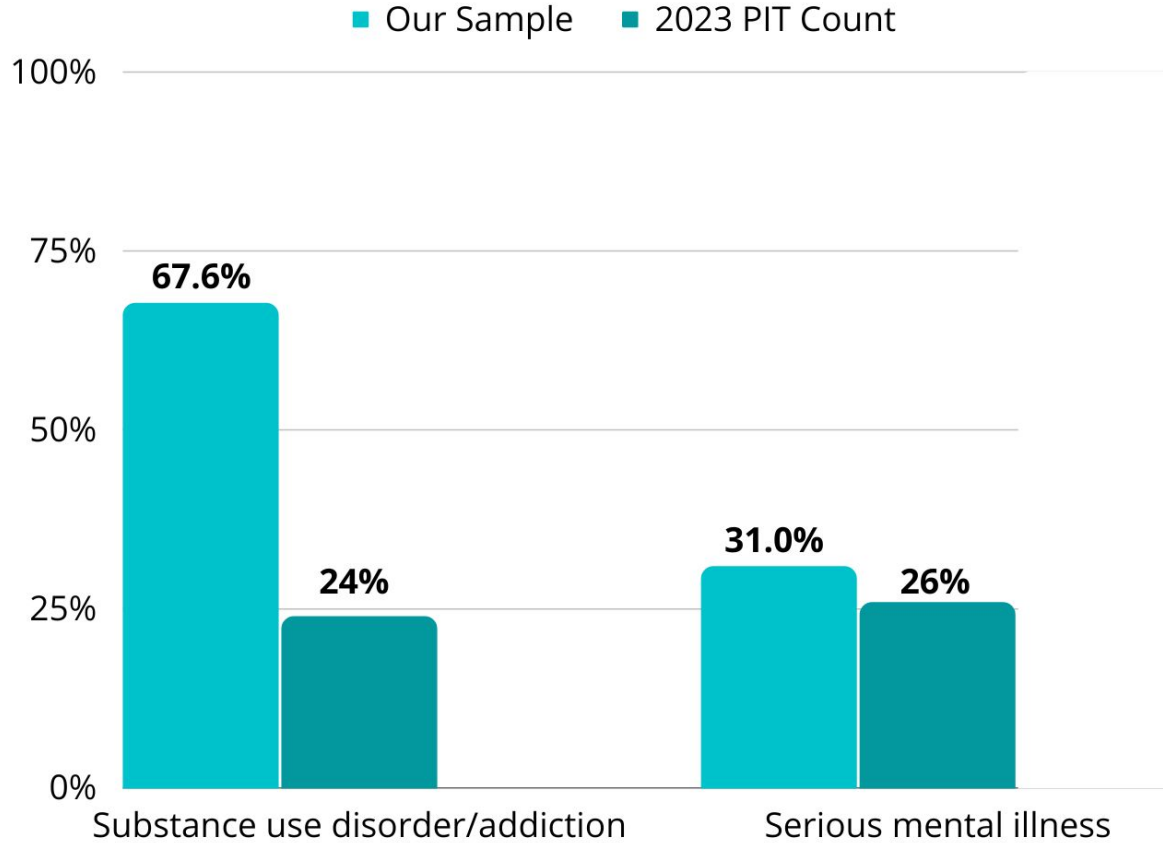
There are more people who are Black or African American, American Indian and multiple races than county-wide homelessness and census data

# What is the longest amount of time you've ever stayed in a homeless shelter?



n=712

# Do you identify with any of the following?



n=567

# What is the primary reason you ended up not having a place to stay?

#1

## Economic Factors (28.2%)

- Lost job
- Lack of work
- Finances/money

#2

## Health Issue (25.5%)

- Substance abuse/addiction
- Medical issue/disability
- Mental illness

#3

## Familial Issue (21.5%)

- Includes death of a loved one, domestic violence, family conflict etc.

#4

## Lack of Affordable Housing (10.9%)

- Includes rent increases and lack of affordable units

## Other top responses in order of frequency

- Eviction/Landlord issues (8.7%)
- Legal system (5.5%)
- COVID related (5.2%)
- Disaster/Accident (4.3%)
- Personal choice (4%)

n=599

"Bad car accident, broke my jaw, couldn't move, then evicted."

"Doing drugs, that came first other than paying my bills."

"Hard to keep a job."

"My rent went up and I couldn't afford to pay it."



**What is the primary reason that you ended up not having a place to stay?**

"In an abusive relationship, left apartment, no family, they don't talk to me because of my addiction."

"Girlfriend passed away and I started doing drugs and drinking."

"My mom died, was living with her and didn't have anywhere else to go."

"Had back issues, could not work and then couldn't afford to pay rent."

## Our data aligns with similar findings in other homelessness data

### ASU's Top Reasons for Homelessness (2013)

- #1 Economic Factors
- #2 Familial
- #3 Health
- #4 Substance Abuse

### Our Sample's Top Reasons for Homelessness

- #1 Economic Factors
- #2 Health Issue (includes substance abuse)
- #3 Familial



## A NEW LOOK: A SURVEY OF ARIZONA'S HOMELESS POPULATION

**E.C. Hedberg, Ph.D.  
& Bill Hart**

Morrison Institute  
for Public Policy

## If you aren't currently in shelter, why not?

#1

### **Negative Experience with Shelter (49.9%)**

(factors that could be addressed by providers)

- Safety/security
- Overcrowding
- Cleanliness

#2

### **Shelters are Inaccessible (19.3%)**

- No shelters available
- Lack of information about shelter
- Transportation

#3

### **Curfew/Rules (8.8%)**

#4

### **Personal Choice (7.4%)**

### **Other top responses in order of frequency**

- Negative perception of shelter (5.1%)
- Substance abuse (3.5%)

n=431



“Too much of my freedom is taken.”

“It’s filthy, smelly and lots of trash everywhere.”

“I didn’t like the rules.”

“I tried...it was dangerous, scary and too many people.”



**If you aren't currently in shelter, why not?**

“I don’t know how to get into them. I don’t know where they are.”

“I don’t want the small amount of my belongings I have left to be stolen.”

“I’ve heard many bad experiences from other females and I don’t want to put myself in that position.”

“I am constantly being told there are no beds or rooms available.”

# Perspectives about homelessness from 35 interviews with elected officials, city staff, and first responders

## What's working ✓

1. Partnerships
  - Interdepartmental city partnerships
  - Partnerships with service providers
2. Designated homelessness response teams
3. Electronic triage/ticket systems for homelessness

## What's not working ✗

1. Lack of housing
2. Lack of public education/awareness
3. Mental health system
4. People refusing services
5. Relying on policing

"I assure you that no one became a police officer to address homelessness. And over time, our job has become a matter of quality of life issues." - Police Officer

"Our behavioral health system is so broken."  
- City of Mesa

"Shelter capacity was neglected for years and now we are trying to make up for it."  
- City of Phoenix



## **Quotes about homelessness from elected officials, city staff, and first responders**

"Public education is so important. There are people who don't want to support these services [because] they don't understand the need for them."  
- City of Chandler

"We have a skyrocketing eviction rate." - City of Tempe

"We can all agree. The gap is housing."  
- City of Avondale

"The perception on homelessness is a big challenge...there is often a lot of judgement due to a lack of understanding. There's a stigma associated with homelessness."  
- City of Gilbert

# Perspectives about homelessness from faith partners, business/neighborhood leaders and case managers/direct service providers

## What's working ✓

1. Partnerships\*

## What's not working ✗

1. Lack of resources/programs
  - Housing
  - "appropriate" shelter
2. Prevalence of addiction/substance use
3. Lack of public education/awareness
4. Clients lacking personal support systems



“I don’t really know that we are solving all the problems people need help with. People needing food may need counseling and other help.” - Faith Partner

“People are so opposed to shelter. People are not informed, they don’t want their real estate values to go down. They have a fear mentality. I think the best thing you can do is to gently inform and help people empathize and it softens someone’s heart.”  
- Faith Partner

## **Quotes about public education from case managers, faith partners, and business owners**

"People sometimes don't want services because they don't like asking for help. It hurts to see people in that state knowing they need help."  
- Case Manager

“The community does not have enough information on how to access resources for food access/food security.”  
- Neighborhood Leader

“If someone calls in and says there’s a homeless person, police go and arrest them but then they’re back there. The problem gets pushed down the road.”  
- Faith Partner

# Summary: Homelessness

- **Partnerships** are a key component in addressing homelessness
- Homelessness is the **result** of many problems, such as:
  - \*Inaccessible and ineffective **shelter** programs
    - 69% of the sample cited a barrier to accessing shelter
  - A lack of **housing**
  - Economic factors like unemployment and **rising costs of living**
  - Inefficient and under-resourced **healthcare systems** to address medical issues, mental illness and substance abuse/addiction
  - A lack of **public education/awareness** about these issues
  - A lack of **familial support**

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HOMELESSNESS

## Yes, Homelessness Is a Housing Problem

It's time to acknowledge that our lack of housing created something like a natural disaster and as we begin the years-long effort to catch up, the crisis should be treated just like the catastrophe it is.

SHOTS - HEALTH NEWS

## More older Americans become homeless as inflation rises and housing costs spike

November 10, 2022 - 7:01 AM ET

npr KJZZ

*The New York Times*

## If Housing Is a Health Care Issue, Should Medicaid Pay the Rent?



*The Atlantic*

## THE OBVIOUS ANSWER TO HOMELESSNESS

And why everyone's ignoring it

By Jerusalem Demsas

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## We can reduce homelessness if we follow the science on what works

Decades of research have shown that focusing on housing, without making sobriety or mental health treatment a prerequisite, is the most effective way to reduce homelessness.



## Lack of affordable housing in 'superstar cities' like LA exacerbate homelessness

Jan. 05, 2023 HOUSING & DEVELOPMENT

*The New York Times*

## The Long Emergency of Homelessness

If we understood the loss of housing as a collective challenge engulfing our communities, how would it guide our response?

# Food Insecurity:

Data, client perspectives,  
and analysis



Image credit: fabaz.com



## People who are currently housed and still struggling to access food

**47%**

have been struggling  
with food access for less  
than 6 months

**47%**

utilize food bank  
services 2-3 times per  
month

### The top 3 responses for what would make healthy food easier to access include:

- #1 More farmer's markets
- #2 Another grocery store in my community
- #3 More food distribution agencies & pantries

## If there was one thing that could be done to help you with having access to affordable and healthy food, what would it be?

### #1 Food Banks are Inaccessible (37.6%)

- Transportation
- More food banks
- More food bank hours

### #2 Economic Factors (36.5%)

- Inflation / cost
- Work issues
- Lack of money

### #3 Food Quality (28.2%)

- Fresh food
- More choice in types of food
- More farmers markets

n=85



"Making too much money to qualify for additional services, but still not enough to meet my daily needs."

"Knowing where more food banks are."

"Eating healthy. Doctor says I need to lose weight but food is so expensive it doesn't last."

**What could be done to help you with having access to affordable & healthy food?**

"I'm a single mother of 3 and just lost my food stamps because my gross income was \$300 [per month,] too high for a family of 4."

"Reliable and affordable transportation."

"Transportation. A ride to the center without struggling to carry food."

"A little more food, food that is not spoiled or expired."

## Perspectives about food insecurity from:

- elected officials, city staff, and first responders
- faith leaders
- case workers
- business owners and neighborhood leaders

### What's working ✓

1. Partnerships
2. Funding sources from pandemic relief funds

### What's not working ✗

1. Accessibility
  - Transportation
2. Economic factors
  - Limits of SNAP/EBT benefits
  - Inflation
3. Lack of information for clients

# Summary: Food Insecurity

- The key gaps re: food insecurity are centered around **accessibility**, i.e. needing
  - Food banks **dispersed** throughout communities
  - **Transportation** to/from food banks
  - Additional **evening and weekend hours** of operation
- Access to **healthy/fresh food** also emerged as a key gap, which could be met by:
  - Providing additional farmer's markets and grocery stores with produce and healthier food options (this aligns with findings from Phase 1)
- When asked about how to increase access to food overall, **economic factors** emerged as a key theme, which included:
  - References to increases in the **cost of living**
  - **Not enough food stamps** to cover cost of living increases

## Long lines are back at food banks in Phoenix, nationwide as inflation soars

Jul 14, 2022, 7:52 AM | Updated: 10:41 am

## Beyond 'food deserts': America needs a new approach to mapping food insecurity

Caroline George and Adie Tomer · Tuesday, August 17, 2021

*The Atlantic*

## Stranded: How America's Failing Public Transportation Increases Inequality

The nation's crumbling infrastructure makes it hard for those living in poverty to access jobs, quality groceries, and good schools.

By Gillian B. White

## The end of a pandemic-era boost to SNAP benefits is compounding the burden low-income households already face

Eighteen states have already ended the emergency allotment of at least \$95 extra a month, and the rest of the country will soon follow, even as grocery prices remain high.

## Foodbank users and volunteers reveal 'shame' and 'stigma' that stop some families getting vital help

May 23, 2019

## The High Cost of Transportation in the United States

# Substance Abuse and Addiction:

Data, client perspectives,  
and analysis



Image Source:  
Patina Wellness  
Center, Native  
American  
Connections

## What has been the most challenging part in receiving help for substance abuse?

#1

**Pride/Shame (34.3%)**

- Being ready to quit
- Belief in self
- Taking the first step

#2

**Addiction itself (19.9%)**

- Addiction itself
- Staying clean
- Withdrawals / detox

#3

**Lack of Support System (15.7%)**

- Lack of social support
- Being around people who use
- Separation from family

#4

**Services are Inaccessible(13.6%)**

- Transportation
- Finding the right program

#5

**Meeting basic needs (7.2%)**

- Food, water, shelter

n=236



"Finding a place to stay, transportation."

"Finding people that really care about me and my situation."

"I was clean for awhile but then we lost our house and kids."

"Relapsed while on the streets, finding something to care about a reason to be sober."

## **Quotes from people experiencing homelessness & addiction**



"That I still have no one."

"My family not being supportive or having my back."

"Finding a good sponsor and good group."

## What has been the most challenging part in receiving help for substance abuse?

### #1 **Pride/Shame (21.3%)**

- "Admitting I need help"
- Asking for help

### #2 **Services are Inaccessible (19.1%)**

- Includes waitlist, transportation, and affordability

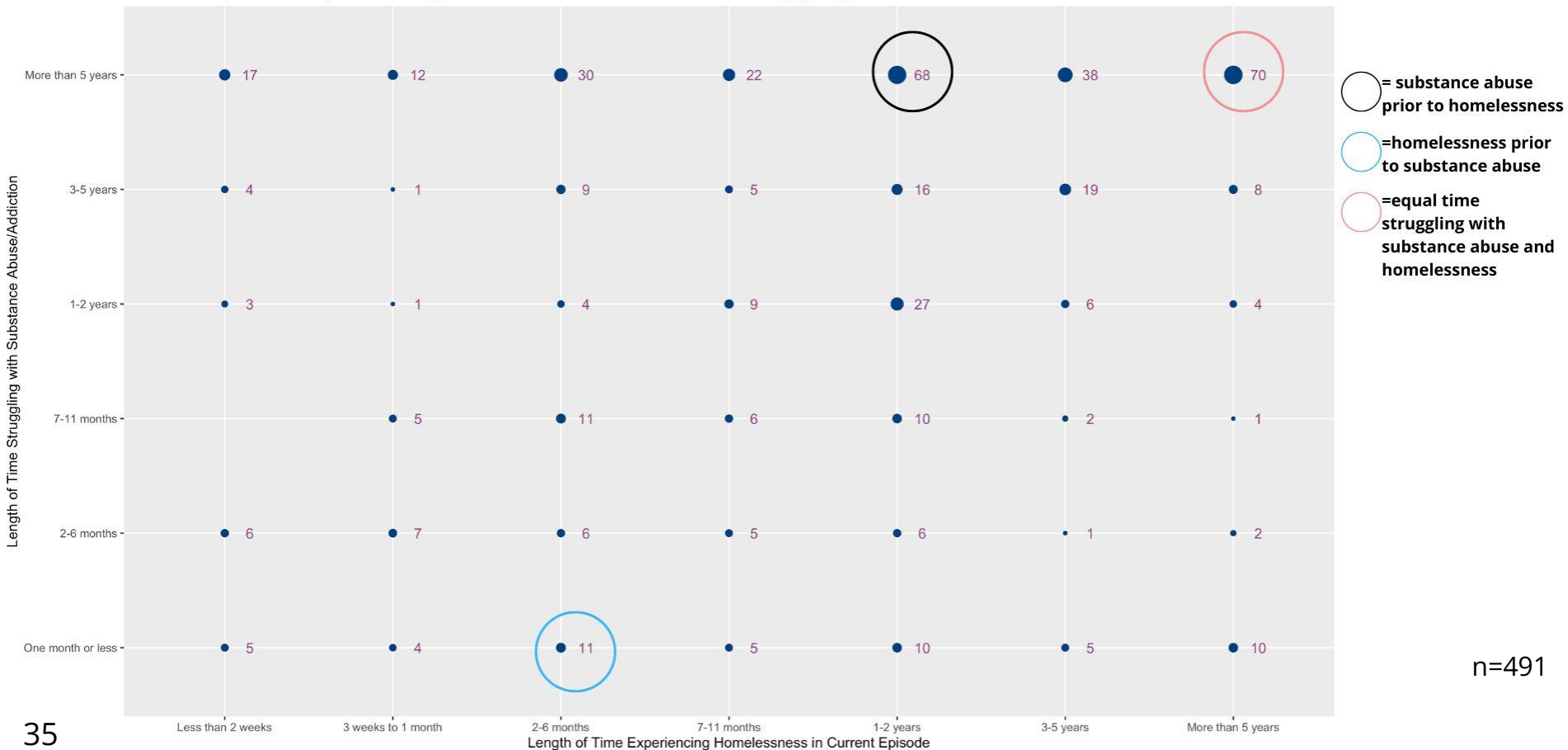
### #3 **Health Issue (14.9%)**

- Mental health (57%)
- Lack of "after care" (29%)

n=47

# Multivariable Analysis

## Time Experiencing Homelessness vs. Time Struggling with Substance Abuse/Addiction



# Summary: Addiction & Substance Abuse

1. People do not seek services for substance abuse because of **pride/shame**
  - a. **35%** of people experiencing homelessness and substance abuse reported pride/shame as the most challenging part in addressing their addiction
  - b. Pride/shame was the **top response** for people in treatment for substance abuse
2. People experiencing homelessness and substance abuse reported a **lack of familial support** as a key challenge in recovery
3. People also reported that substance abuse services are inaccessible, due to a **barrier to service** or because the **services don't exist nearby**
  - a. Barriers include health issues, costs for treatment, waitlists, transportation and availability of treatment
  - b. This was also a key theme in interviews with elected officials, first responders and city staff

# Regional trends across Phase 2

→ **Among people experiencing homelessness, there is a high level of movement between cities.**

## According to likert scale data,

- Across all cities, there is a gap in providing adequate and accessible shelter
- Across all cities, there is a gap in providing enough food for people who visit food banks/pantries
- Across all cities, there is a lack of information/awareness about addiction and the resources available.

## How much do you agree with the following statements? 1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree

- The statement that received the lowest scoring mean was the statement, "There are accessible and adequate homeless shelters in my city", mean=2.24
  - This statement was also the **lowest scoring statement** by any one population (for people experiencing homelessness, mean=1.68)
- For people experiencing food insecurity, the biggest gap is not receiving enough food to last until their next visit to a food bank or pantry
- Across all groups, there is the least amount of awareness about homeless services compared to other services, mean=2.85 followed by substance abuse services, mean=2.88
- Across all groups, categories, and questions, people experiencing homelessness reported the lowest scores

### Key takeaways from likert scale data

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### Sample likert scale statements

- *"Members of the community are informed about the resources and programs available to people experiencing homelessness"*
- *"The services for people struggling with food insecurity are adequate and accessible"*

Thank you to Phoenix Rescue Mission for your investment in addressing these community issues.

**850+**

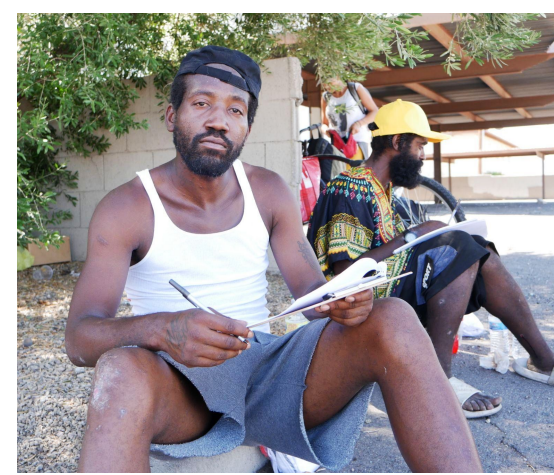
**consulting hours for  
survey design, data  
collection &  
analysis**

**760**

**\$10 giftcards for  
homeless survey  
participants**

**infinite**

**possibilities for  
ways to use this  
data to address  
regional gaps**



Thank you to everyone who contributed to this study, especially:

- People experiencing homelessness, addiction and food insecurity who gave their time and feedback
- Our municipal and regional partners
- Our partners at MAG, AZHC and various direct service agencies





# How can this data be used for decision-making?

## **For Phoenix Rescue Mission**

Organizational vision-casting and strategic planning, program planning, etc.

## **For From the Ground Up**

Future contracts to increase education and awareness, to mobilize and organize faith partners, etc.

## **For the region at large**

Surveys and focus groups, budget planning, coalition-building, advocacy, etc.

# Discussion & Reflection Questions

1. What are your initial reactions to the findings from this study?
2. Was there anything that surprised you?
3. For social workers and direct service providers, have you seen any of these findings in your work with people?
4. How might you/your organization be able to use this data?
5. Do you have any further questions or data points that you'd like more information on?