

A FIRST LOOK AT CURBING THE RISE IN LATINO/A HOMELESSNESS

2024

Office of Mayor Karen Bass

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Extra Space Storage

Executive Summary

Latino/a homelessness in the City of Los Angeles has grown by over 200% between 2015 and 2023. The latest demographic data for 2023 shows that Latinos/as made up 41% (18,871) of all people experiencing homelessness (PEH) in the City of Los Angeles. A great majority (72%) are unsheltered. Similarly large increases in Latino/a PEH are happening nationally and in California. This troubling trend calls for urgent action.

The Latino/a Homelessness Advisory Group (LHAG) is releasing this first-ever report on the rise in Latino/a homelessness in the City of Los Angeles. Mayor Karen Bass directed the creation of this group in the Fall of 2023 to explore solutions to this growing crisis. Other government entities have followed in pursuing similar Latino/a PEH focused responses, presenting a rare opportunity to align policy and address service gaps in unison. LAHSA inaugurated a Latinx taskforce to tackle the growth in the Latino/a PEH population, and a related effort within Los Angeles County is also underway. Additionally, recently published research on the rise of Latino/a PEH in the United States and precariously housed Latino/a households is helping to guide and bolster this critical work. As of this writing, common conclusions for better serving Latino/a PEH are already emerging in this parallel work.

Effectively curbing the increase in Latino/a homelessness necessitates a reimagining of the homelessness infrastructure and prevention resources. The LHAG identified leading barriers that include language access, stigma about receiving services, and trust building, among others. Currently, impacted Latinos/as are not receiving the available support. Interim housing programs serve Latino/a PEH at a lower rate than their representation in the PEH population. The LHAG emphasized the importance of improving cultural competency within interim housing providers because language remains a barrier, and there is a frequent unmet need for employment resources. Crucial data and research are also needed to better understand Latino/a PEH and improve access and engagement.

The complexity of immigration requires adapting the homelessness service delivery system to provide trauma-informed care and create funding opportunities explicitly for undocumented Latino/a populations. Undocumented Latino/a PEH face many challenges in finding housing opportunities and consequently require extended lengths of stay in interim housing. Without an explicit dedication of government resources to support undocumented

41%

Of all people experiencing homelessness in the City of Los Angeles identified as Latino/a in 2023

72%

Of Latinos/as experiencing homelessness were unsheltered in 2023

Latino/a PEH in their housing trajectory, Latino/a migrants will continue to feed into the City's homelessness numbers. The current system is not designed to accommodate the inflow of newly arrived migrants and new interim housing models are critical to explore at this time.

Subgroups of Latino/a PEH such as seniors, LGBTQ individuals, and those that are formerly incarcerated also have unique needs that are overlooked and require highly tailored services to successfully engage and assist them. For instance, seniors need bicultural services with special mobility and health care accommodations. For others, the location of interim housing options must be carefully selected as it can expose a formerly incarcerated Latino/a PEH to rival gang activity.

Homelessness prevention must be a major part of addressing Latino/a homelessness. Despite the well documented housing insecurity among Latino/a households during COVID-19 and beyond, Latino/a households have been underrepresented by crucial rental assistance programs compared to their needs. The City of Los Angeles' rental assistance support through United to House Los Angeles (ULA) can reshape the infrastructure to improve outreach and support to the most disadvantaged Latino/a neighborhoods. This will help ensure program requirements do not disqualify many Latino/a individuals and families in tenuous living arrangements, reducing their risk of homelessness.

Latino/a households are more likely than other ethnic groups to have informal housing arrangements where they double-up or triple-up without a lease. Prohibiting housing subsidies, shallow subsidies or rental assistance for those that double-up or triple-up is detrimental to keeping precariously housed Latinos/as in their housing accommodations. These circumstances may be the precursor to homelessness and requires intentional and creative support especially with an unforgiving rental market that makes independent living arrangements out of reach for many families.

Housing insecure Latino/a households are in dire need of information about housing rights, anti-harassment protections, and rental assistance applications to keep them stably housed. Heavy reliance on social media and online forums to communicate information, however, limits awareness and deprives Latino/a households with little access to technology or no technology literacy. In Latino/a neighborhoods most impacted by the lack of housing affordability, the in-person, bicultural and bilingual support must match the growing demand for housing protections and rental assistance services.

A look at homelessness through the racial equity lens reveals major disparities. There are many areas of overlap between this report and LAHSA's Report and Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness. With the over-representation of Latinos/as and African Americans among the homeless population and the high rates of precarious housing among both groups, an opportunity for coalition building to reduce the devastating growth in homelessness is critical.

The goal of this report is to produce thoughtful recommendations and mobilize needed advocacy and resources to implement field-based solutions and scale successful existing models. A financial analysis and investments to right-size the additional workforce needs must be conducted with special attention to service provider and departmental bandwidth as well as addressing pay-rate equity needs. This should be given the highest priority to effectively achieve the recommendations. While this report on Latino/a homelessness is not comprehensive, it does capture significant areas of focus on the issue to begin implementing solutions timely and build momentum with other parallel efforts already in motion.

Background



Current Conditions

Latino/a* homelessness has risen sharply, not just locally, but across the country. According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the 2023 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress found that Latinos/as experiencing unsheltered homelessness increased by 28% between 2022 and 2023. In California, Latino/a homelessness has increased by 22% since 2020, that is over three times the overall state increase of 6.2%.[1] Latino/a PEH in Los Angeles County has steadily climbed in recent years. Latinos/as comprise 49% of the Los Angeles County population but in 2020 they were 36% of the population of PEH and by 2022 they were 44% of the population experiencing homelessness. This is especially concerning because research shows that compared to other racial/ethnic groups, Latinos/as are least likely to be engaged with homeless services[2] and are understudied with very limited research examining causes of housing instability and barriers to service receipt.[3]

In a city of 3.8 million residents, Latinos/as make up the largest segment of the population with 1.9 million (48%) persons. While homelessness in the City of Los Angeles has grown by 80% since 2015, Latino/a homelessness in the City has undergone an alarming growth of over 200% between 2015 and 2023. According to the 2015 Point-In-Time (PIT) count, there were 5,411 Latino/a people experiencing homelessness (PEH) in the City of Los Angeles and by 2023, there were 18,871 (41%) Latino/a PEH with 28% living in a shelter and the majority (72%) being unsheltered. Up until 2020, Latinos/as remained the second largest group of PEH in the City. Immediately following the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, this group became the largest ethnic group experiencing homelessness in 2022 (17,470) and the numbers have continued to climb (18,871) in 2023.

Latinos/as are facing the ripple effects of the termination of pandemic era rental assistance and protections, a daunting affordable housing shortage, the rise of inflation, and persistently low-wages.[4] All these conditions are straining families' budgets and threaten to push more Latino/a households into housing insecurity and homelessness. This concurrence of detrimental factors requires decisive action to prevent an escalation of our humanitarian crisis. **Action is urgently needed.**

** While the report uses the term Latino/a to refer to a population born in or with family roots in Latin America beginning with Mexico, Central America, expanding to the Caribbean and through South America, the insights and recommendations are inclusive of people that self-identity with a variety of terms within the population. Latino/a, Chicano/a, Latinx, Latine, Hispano, Hispana, and Afro-Latinos points of view are represented through the diversity of the Latino/a Homelessness Advisory Group and the population they serve.*



200%

Increase in Latino/a homelessness since 2015

48%

Of Angelenos identified as Latino/a in the City in 2023

41%

Of all people experiencing homelessness in the City identified as Latino/a in 2023

72%

Of Latinos/as experiencing homelessness were unsheltered in 2023

ABOUT THE MAYOR'S LATINO/A HOMELESSNESS ADVISORY GROUP (LHAG)

In response, Mayor Karen Bass convened the Latino/a Homelessness Advisory Group (LHAG) in the fall of 2023. Regular meetings were held over twelve weeks with fourteen Latino/a homelessness response leaders serving the community in the City of Los Angeles. Expertise ranged from nonprofit executive and senior service provider staff, to government representatives, and street-based social workers, among others. Participants brought critical perspectives from having boots on the ground, lived experience, and from representing Latino/a serving organizations that have witnessed the rise in Latino/a homelessness. See Appendix B for contributing LHAG members and acknowledgements.

The Approach

The Latino/a Homelessness Advisory Group (LHAG) met biweekly to identify and discuss key focus areas. The aim of these meetings was to foster organic conversations and unreserved perspectives. LHAG included guest participants that could provide special insight into the leading causes for the sharp rise in Latino/a homelessness and to guide conversations about policy and service gaps. In depth conversations were held with program leads and government officials to help "ground truth" the recommendations.

The Latino/a Homelessness Advisory Group of Mayor Karen Bass is heartened to share this report on Latino/a homelessness. The report provides detailed recommendations unique to the City of Los Angeles to help stem the devastating number of Latinos/as falling into homelessness in recent years. It aims to highlight problems and elevate insights provided by Latino/a leaders in the homelessness space who have long witnessed, reflected on, and considered the recommendations in this report a priority. The recommendations also aim to reduce or remove barriers to accessing homelessness services and homelessness prevention programs for Latinos/as. The goal is to speedily translate proven field-based solutions into systematized policies and scalable programming.

The following key City departments, mayoral offices, and partners will be instrumental in implementing the recommendations citywide, the Mayor's Office of Housing and Homelessness Solutions (MOHHS), the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA), the Community Investment and Family Department (CIFD), the Los Angeles Housing Department (LAHD), Department of Aging (DA), the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA), and the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO). In addition, strong partnerships through subcontracting with nonprofit and faith based partners will be essential to quickly scaling with a talented pipeline of culturally competent experts. This work will overlap with LAHSA's Latino/a/e/x Taskforce currently underway and has the potential to inform their outcomes and influence work and conversations taking place outside of the City of Los Angeles as well.



The Little We Know



Although very limited,[5] research on Latino/a homelessness reveals characteristics that are different from other ethnic groups of PEH. Latino/a homeless adults tend to be newly homeless meaning that their unhoused condition is a brand-new experience that has been going on for less than one year.[6] The population tends to be less likely to report mental health issues and is also less likely to report using a homeless shelter[7] or engage with homeless services.[8] Furthermore, they are more likely to report sleeping in an informal setting such as a "theater, abandoned building, car, or other arrangement".[9] These research findings match the LHAG's observations that interim housing programs serve Latino/a PEH at lower rates than their proportion in the PEH population.

Being that Latino/a PEH do not access public resources or formal shelters, understanding the experiences of unsheltered Latinos/as is critical to creating effective solutions for the population. Recent research on unsheltered Latino/a PEH demonstrates that the population is largely male and more likely to report alcohol and drug use than sheltered Latino/a PEH.[10] In comparison to unsheltered African-American and White PEH, unsheltered Latino/a PEH are slightly more likely to be employed but earning low wages and are also more likely to report family conflicts or separation from a significant other as causes that brought about their homelessness circumstances.[11] Effectively reaching Latino/a PEH will require a re-envisioning of the existing homeless infrastructure and service delivery systems to more immediately meet the needs of homeless Latinos/as that are disconnected from homeless resources and have fractured social networks.[12]

Homelessness Prevention

Developing a housing response system to prevent homelessness can be informed by a deeper understanding of the Latino/a housing conditions. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Latinos/as were disproportionately affected, experiencing the highest rates of hospitalizations, deaths and suffered some of the largest job losses.[13] In a post pandemic era, Latino/a communities face economic uncertainty marked by rising rents, overdue rent payments, low wages, and inflation.

In the City of Los Angeles, Latino/a households exhibit the lowest median income ($36,580),[14] the lowest rate of homeownership, and highest rates of rent burden across ethnic groups.[15] The per capita income for Latino/a households is three times lower than for white households ($20,273 compared with $66,939).[16] To navigate these challenges, Latino/a households often resort to doubling or tripling up with other families or other households resulting in a rate of overcrowding seven and a half times greater than that of white households, and five times the rate of Black households.[17]

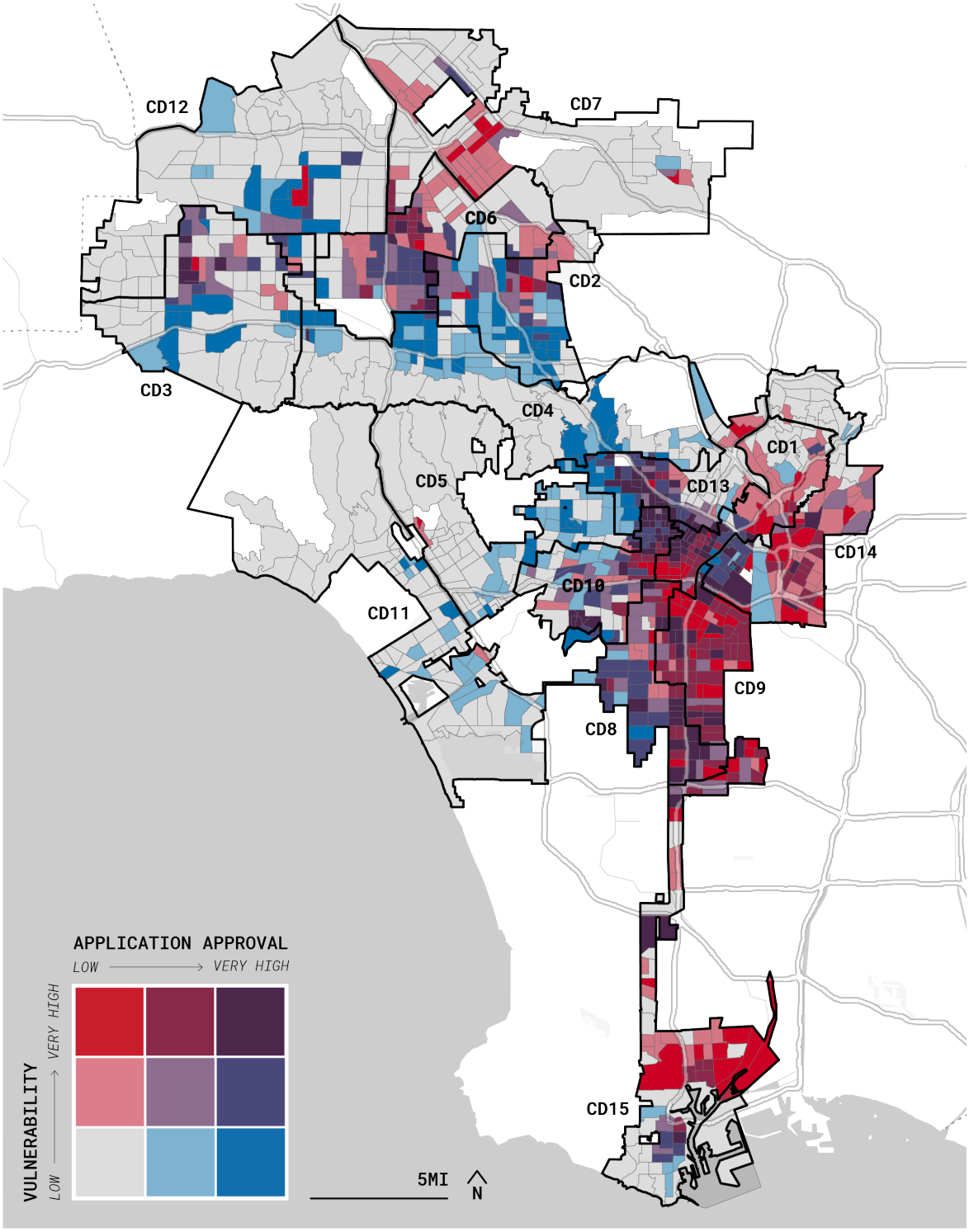
Given these circumstances, Latinos/as face one of the highest rates of precarious housing.[18] Economic and housing insecurity, characterized by problems with housing affordability and stability, significantly increases the risk of homelessness for many families. The situation is exacerbated for immigrant undocumented Latino/a households, as they are forbidden from accessing federal housing assistance programs such as Public Housing, Housing Choice Vouchers, Project-Based vouchers, federally sponsored rental assistance, and other affordable housing funded with federal grants. Locally generated flexible funding for affordable housing and rental assistance can play a crucial role in keeping Latino/a individuals housed and preventing further homelessness in these challenging circumstances.

An analysis of the City's pandemic era Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) provides insights into future similar programming as it shows that Latino/a households were not adequately served by the government sponsored program. While Latinos/as in the City of Los Angeles represent 48.07% of the population, only 33% of approved (106,068) applications were for applicants identifying as Latino/a.[19] Areas of the City of Los Angeles with a predominantly Latino/a population were found to have the highest unmet need for rental assistance and highest vulnerability due to housing instability and disproportionate COVID impacts (see map on next page). With the size of the Latino/a population (48.07%) being 15% higher than approved rental assistance applicants, undoubtedly Latinos/as were underserved by this vital housing assistance program. This unmet need requires further research into the factors that led to such a low number of Latinos/as receiving rental assistance despite the well documented COVID-19 driven financial hardships and housing insecurity among Latinos/as.

Another troubling finding is that while the average Latino/a household size is significantly larger than any other racial group (3.45 people for renter occupied housing), [20] the majority of approved rental assistance applications were from single-person and two-person households (68.98%).[21] With a relatively larger household composition among Latino/a renters and a greater likelihood for multigenerational living arrangements, this finding signals that large Latino/a households were not well served by the pandemic-era rental assistance programs.

MAP 1: APPROVED RENTAL ASSISTANCE APPLICATIONS BY HOUSING & COVID VULNERABILITY

City of Los Angeles By Council District



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Eviction Risk & Rental Assistance Needs Analysis Report - August 2022
Housing Solutions Team - Mayor's Office of City Homelessness Initiatives

With the City of Los Angeles recently launching a new rent relief program[22] to help low-income tenants pay off overdue COVID-19 rent debt, a new opportunity has opened to collaborate and innovate in helping the most needy and hard to reach Latino/a households that are struggling with housing insecurity in part due to lack of awareness and access.

This brief snapshot brings to light profound deficiencies in the housing supportive systems for both unhoused Latinos/as and Latinos/as at risk of homelessness. There is a real lack of connection between Latino/a PEH and the formal homelessness and housing programming structures.

Critical Insights



Key Cultural Dynamics

To better serve Latino/a PEH, we need to understand their homelessness experience and household circumstances when they become at risk of homelessness. Latino/a serving organizations and professionals have a wealth of knowledge and expertise reaching this population. The feedback below provides guidance that the Latino/a Homelessness Advisory Group (LHAG) routinely applies to support this community with honesty and respect. Systemizing what is already working based on what the LHAG members and their organizations carry out in the field is the motivation behind the reflections and recommendations presented.

LANGUAGE

Language access is regarded as much more than simply providing bilingual services in Spanish. Knowing how and when to use Spanish or English is important. Often, there's a different type of Spanish spoken among immigrants than Latinos/as of a second or subsequent generation born and raised in the United States. Differences in speakers' pronunciation and vocabulary quickly link a person to a country or a region and begin to lay the foundation for acceptance or reluctance toward accessing resources and the homelessness system. Language is intimately tied to trustworthiness. In outreaching to a community of day laborers, for example, an LHAG member noted that the quality and authenticity of an outreach worker's Spanish language skills is important in gaining access and trust. This indicates that a Latino/a focused homelessness services and homelessness prevention workforce must be diverse and include monolingual Spanish speakers that have lived experience and can build rapport with certain subgroups of Latino/a PEH. In addition, indigenous languages deserve equal attention in ensuring we can communicate effectively with indigenous communities from Latin America who many times get labeled Latino/a, but do not identify as such and have unique cultural and language needs.

Documents with important information about the services and programs offered and others requiring a signature or agreement are often not offered in the preferred language. In some instances, clients do not understand what they are signing. Some contract language can be complex and it is not translated or explained verbally to monolingual Spanish/Indigenous language speaking Latino/a or Indigenous PEH. To better serve Latino/a and Indigenous PEH, all must have access to information in their preferred language.

BUILDING TRUST

LHAG emphasized that the outcome of Latino/a PEH outreach efforts is heavily dependent on the cultural competency of those conducting outreach, their ties to the community they are working in, and their ability to communicate in the appropriate language of PEH or offer translation services. All are vitally important components to gaining the trust and enhancing engagement of Latino/a PEH.

Among Latino/a PEH, government is perceived as a source of stress. There is distrust of the myriad requirements and lengthy questionnaires. Some of this comes from an immigrant experience that in recent years has become more punitive. To worsen an already difficult situation, the lack of shelter beds and homelessness prevention programming cause promises of stable housing and services to go unfulfilled. Not delivering consistently and reliably impairs engagement with and trust in service providers. In this environment, outreach workers

offering homelessness services or rental assistance are unable to gain the trust needed to serve housing insecure Latinos/as and Latino/a PEH.

By contrast, long established Latino/a serving organizations including faith based organizations are considered sanctuaries for both Latino/a PEH and immigrant undocumented Latino/a PEH. Employees look like the people being served and there are no language barriers. New arrivals, including recent immigrants, easily connect to the staff as one advisory group member pointed out, "people may not tell the service provider [their situation] but they do tell the priest". With culturally competent behaviors and policies, some Latino/a serving organizations are well known safe havens that have been trusted for decades and effectively guide Latino/a PEH to housing and financial stability. A deeper examination is necessary to unlock and replicate the features that eliminate fear and allow services to be rendered with trust.

STIGMA

The LHAG underscored that stigma about receiving services and benefits is a barrier for many Latinos/as. This is evident when potential program participants say they "don't want a handout and just want work". Especially for foreign-born immigrants, the male is typically given the role of, or perceived to be, the primary breadwinner of the household and as such, the male must be able to financially support his family if he should be deemed a good partner, husband, and/or parent.

Outreach workers witness first hand that asking a male breadwinner "if he needs help" is counterproductive in achieving program engagement. Offers of service and assistance to male Latinos, and especially foreign-born Latino immigrants, must be carefully framed to not come across as a handout. In one representative example, an outreach worker approached a family living in a vehicle and directed the offer of assistance to the male head of household. The offer was rejected with the male responding by saying that his family was "fine" , meanwhile through nonverbal cues feelings of failure became evident. This points to a need for research to understand how to approach Latino/a PEH to achieve positive engagement. Individuals with lived experience should be consulted to inform these engagement strategies. Findings should be translated to training curriculums for outreach workers.

BUILDING COMMUNITY

A central element to skillfully engage Latino/a PEH is to bring them together to build community as they navigate services and housing options. It is well established that Latinos/as emphasize collective values that foster interdependence in fulfilling their potential. Creating cohorts of people with similar cultural backgrounds capitalizes on the cultural collectivism. The regular interface with one another as they navigate the challenging and lengthy housing placement process allows trust to form and deepen. Through conversations that normalize the shared experience, participants recognize that others like them are also dealing with similar difficulties.

Building community through the creation of cohorts unintentionally results in participants supporting one another. Latino/a Homelessness Advisory Group (LHAG) members have found that participants have resources that others in the group need and do not know how or where to access. Organically, a network of support and mutual benefit evolves. Initially focused on homeless services over time this community progresses to a supportive group that through word of mouth refers each other to mental health aid, help with food access, child care and other basic necessities that improve prospects for housing stability. According to the LHAG, the communal experience encourages the necessary repeat engagement that improves housing intervention outcomes.

Street Homelessness

In this report, we take the opportunity to examine Latino/a PEH from an equity lens and bring to the forefront the experiences of Latino/a subgroups whose homelessness experience is unique and exceptionally challenging yet under-explored.

UNDOCUMENTED COMMUNITIES

National immigration dynamics are overwhelming immigrant-friendly cities like Los Angeles. Coming from widely diverse countries, recent migrants are without natural networks in Los Angeles so they have no support to rely upon. In response, local Latino/a nonprofits are thrust into serving large numbers of recent arrivals without dedicated resources.

Fear of accessing services dominates the unhoused experience of undocumented immigrant Latinos/as. An undocumented status will keep them stuck in a system where they do not qualify for government sponsored permanent housing. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Latinos/as staying in interim housing need more than the average four to five months allowed since permanent housing options are unavailable, especially for undocumented Latino/a migrants. In these conditions, Latino/a unhoused migrants are likely staying longer in interim shelter as compared to those with documentation or regrettably feeding into the City's homelessness numbers. Estimates from providers reveal that about 15% of Latino/a PEH are potentially undocumented and will have limited options for transitioning to permanent housing without flexible subsidies and employment.

Organizations are breaking through the fear but the prospects for success are dismal without an infrastructure that supports integration into society. Immigration status questions can be terrifying. Recent Latino/a immigrants are skeptical and fearful of service organizations. They come with concerns about the questions they will be asked, about their picture being taken, of being filmed, or of triggering the federal "public charge" rule that can impact someone's ability to apply for permanent residency.

Service providers work through the apprehension with compassion by having conversations in Spanish and demonstrating an understanding of the difficulties of crossing the border into the United States. Being able to relate to their experience is key for making a connection and allowing clients to become receptive to services. Initial questions focus on the help that may be needed such as, "what are you looking for?, what are your difficulties at the moment?, are you experiencing violence in your household?".

The timing of immigration status questions is vitally important. To ask someone their immigration status during a first interaction is imprudent. Service providers assess how to ask about immigration, the most appropriate time to ask, and where the conversation will happen. There is a lot of nuance. Proxy questions can also help identify their status without directly asking about their immigration status.

Coming from nontraditional countries of origin in South America, recent immigrants are without family connections or friends in the City of Los Angeles and must rely entirely on service organizations to survive. Providers witness the



stress, trauma, and mental health needs during the initial intake. Discussions about immediate plans, including asylum claim submissions, court hearings, temporary protection status, entrances without an inspection, and cost of living exacerbate the mental health trauma. The situation is overwhelming for both immigrants and existing providers that are operating with limited staff and no room in shelters. Organizations are not able to build rapport with Latino/a immigrants coming in large numbers and in need of support that does not exist. Inevitably, many undocumented Latino/a immigrants go into the shadows and then likely become homeless. Both immigrant and non-immigrant Latino/a families in need of shelter are served by interim housing programs not tailored for them.

Providers noted that many who utilize vehicle dwellings as shelter are families, including immigrant families. For these families, the threat of Child Protective Services (CPS) and child welfare are intimidating and impact effective engagement and follow through. As encampment resolution programs begin to look at targeting vehicle dwellings, appropriate shelter and supportive services programming for Latino/a families, including undocumented families will need to be mobilized. Interim shelter and permanent housing will need to include options that can accommodate families with multiple bedrooms in a unit.

To have a chance of being successful, Latino/a immigrants and their families need essential services to support their integration into society. Trusted nonprofits intimately familiar with the immigrant experience must staff low-barrier shelters with bicultural and bilingual employees. In a unique case, with limited foundation dollars, a faith based organization brought Latino/a immigrants into a single shelter, to live as a community, surrounded with a number of supportive services. A majority found work and went on to live independent and prosperous lives. Dedicated resources such as these that exclusively support undocumented immigrant families in group settings on their trajectory toward housing and economic stability are lacking.

Securing work or assistance with work permits and legal status for job seeking is a matter of great concern for undocumented Latinos/as. LHAG recognizes a lack of support with employment resources within the homelessness services infrastructure. This points to a need for homeless service providers to develop partnerships with worksource centers, local employers, immigrant legal resources and other job training organizations specifically targeting the needs of the Latino/a PEH and undocumented Latino/a PEH.

Immigration is a complex, multilayered issue encompassing undocumented status, tremendous fear, and distrust of authority. In these complicated circumstances, local government and its frontline departments must be encouraged to openly discuss the circumstances surrounding undocumented Latino/a PEH and their needs. City staff and leadership should be directed to explore new resources and programming for this highly vulnerable and growing segment of the Latino/a PEH community. Also, trauma informed engagement strategies need to be developed and tailored to immigrant populations to best serve them.

RE-ENTRY POPULATIONS/ STREET GANG IMPACTS

The County of Los Angeles is not only home to some of the highest concentrations of unsheltered homelessness in the country, it is also home to the largest prison system. While the Los Angeles County Office of Diversion and Reentry offers case management and supportive housing, the lack of housing options, resources, and safety net support systems for those exiting the criminal justice system lead many to fall into homelessness and/or back in the prison system. On a number of occasions homelessness intervention teams encounter Latino/a PEH recently released from prison who engage in criminal activity to survive. Accepting shelter without the stability of promising job opportunities can impact their ability to come indoors.

Intervention teams also encountered others who are involved with or are impacted by gang activity in certain areas of the City where encampment resolution or interim housing operations occurred. There is a consistent overlap with reentry and gang affiliated groups encountered in the field. According to our LHAG thought partners, there are about 20 active Latino/a gangs throughout the City that are intertwined with homeless encampments.

Program operators have found that Latino/a PEH in interim housing are receptive to offers of motel rooms. However, on numerous occasions individuals involved with gangs or who are impacted by their presence do not feel safe staying in motels located in areas where rival gangs occupy that territory. Also placing rival gang members in the same motel can present additional challenges for clients and staff alike. The fear of retaliation from "shot callers" (gang leaders with authority) is of concern as well. Providers and team members with lived experience, from the local neighborhood and even those with visible tattoos tend to have a stronger ability to connect with reentry Latino/a PEH. They also have a deeper understanding of the resources and emotional intelligence needed to truly engage and assist those coming out of prison and struggling to disconnect from their street gang associations.

Organizations, like Homies Unidos, who specialize in outreach and engagement to reentry/gang affiliated populations have been utilized by council offices and service providers to serve as a sort of "pre-outreach" team that goes into these encampments prior to general outreach engagement to identify the hierarchy of the encampment, instill an openness to services, and extract information that is key to the public safety of the community and success with housing placements. Additional thought partnership with organizations such as these as well as with the Los Angeles County's Office of Diversion and Reentry could create opportunities for better supporting Latinos/as in interim housing programs.

Health and wellness programming at interim housing sites could also be key to enhancing the wellbeing and outcomes of this demographic of Latino/a PEH. Confinement to a small motel room could trigger feelings and memories of prison. Many coming from the prison system are used to a routine that is centered around physical fitness and activity. Opportunities for wellness programming would enhance their mental and physical health, and keep them focused on working towards a stable path. Workforce development and appropriate partners to support this demographic are also key to creating job opportunities once permanent housing is achieved. There is a need for more lived experience Latino/a staffing from impacted neighborhoods and a workforce development pipeline would help expand efforts in other neighborhoods and provide job opportunities for Latino/a encampment resolution participants.

SENIOR LATINO/A HOMELESSNESS

Older Latinos/as represent 28.4% of the City's older adult population and they are becoming a demographic of concern for frontline homelessness service providers. The City's own Department of Aging has expressed concerns about the older adult population they serve being at high risk of falling into homelessness.[23] Senior Latino/a PEH and those at-risk of homelessness typically hold low wage jobs working as day laborers, housekeepers, childcare providers, and other entry level service-industry positions. With low salaries and a high cost of living it is impossible to establish savings, so a rainy day fund to get through hard times is unavailable. Any minor reduction in hours or a sudden job loss is severely destabilizing for senior Latinos/as for whom it is very difficult to find work.

Coming indoors after living on the streets is an especially shocking transition for elderly with physically deteriorated bodies. Healing and gaining stability takes time. A notable model by Proyecto Pastoral that successfully transitions senior Latino/a PEH to permanent housing is a faith-based dedicated shelter for senior Latino/a PEH. Clients are guaranteed a bed for up to one year and live with other senior Latino/a PEH where they have an opportunity to engage with others like them. The traditional shelter model is not equipped with a long-term, culturally sensitive supportive infrastructure. LHAG have found that the predictability of a bed and a like minded community facilitate physical and mental stability. Culturally, senior Latinos/as have a strong belief in reciprocal relationships and inevitably become involved in the shelter's community activities. Some meet in the shelter and leave together to rent an apartment as roommates. This intimate, culturally sensitive setting has proven successful and should be replicated.

Seniors may also need special mobility and health care accommodations as it relates to interim housing and shelter placement, and to the use of motels. It will be critical to ensure that those needs are met and appropriate shelter options and services are provided for seniors.

LGBTQ LATINO/A HOMELESSNESS

LGBTQ Latino/a PEH in the City of Los Angeles are not well understood or documented. The LHAG describes witnessing a large number of LGBTQ Latino/a PEH and young adult LGBTQ Latino/a PEH entering homelessness and interim housing programs, but precise counts are complicated. The LAHSA PIT Homeless Count first began reporting sexual orientation in 2019 for the City of Los Angeles but the data is not publicly classified by race or ethnicity. Heightened sensitivity about asking a person's sexual orientation raises concerns about data reliability. The LHAG expressed a lack of trust in the existing data especially because questions about sexual orientation are very personal and culturally sensitive in the Latino/a community. Traditional cultural norms and religious beliefs cause many Latino/a LGBTQ to hide their gender identity. These conditions can directly contribute to LGBTQ Latino/a PEH invisibility in the City of Los Angeles. Understanding how to ask LGBTQ Latino/a PEH about their sexual orientation is a first step to collecting reliable data and better understanding the size of the LGBTQ population among Latino/a PEH citywide.

Homelessness Prevention

Meaningfully curbing the Latino/a homelessness inflow in the City of Los Angeles necessitates helping precariously housed Latinos/as before they become homeless.

HOUSING INSECURITY

Housing insecure Latino/a households lack the time resources needed to access financial and non-financial housing programs as well as advocate for themselves. Latino/a serving nonprofits report tremendous challenges in bringing rental assistance to their communities. Limited staff capacity and onerous rental assistance application requirements cause families to feel defeated when they cannot quickly provide the documentation required within the tight deadlines. Support with the rental assistance application process is largely managed within the City or accessible online and not widely communicated in Spanish. These options leave out Latino/a families managing multiple jobs, family responsibilities, and childcare as well as those with language barriers and no technological literacy. Precariously housed Latinos/as struggling to make ends meet cannot afford to take time off of work to learn about this support and submit an application. Access to resources needs to be better tailored to the Latino/a household circumstances.

Another barrier is that the City's own United to House Los Angeles (ULA) Emergency Renters Assistance Program is not widely advertised through traditional methods in the Latino/a community. The program's reliance on social media, limits awareness and disadvantages Latino/a households with little access to technology or no technology literacy. In this system, only the more educated and technologically savvy are informed and stand to benefit. As an example, in the last ULA rental assistance funding round, faith-based Latino/a serving organizations who serve seniors with excessive COVID-19 rental debt, were unaware of the ULA rental assistance funding. Critically, none of the ULA rental assistance is proactively set-aside for undocumented households that lack a safety net because they do not qualify for federal or state assistance programs.

Another major barrier to housing stability is that rental assistance exclusively supports households with a formal lease agreement. This requirement disqualifies Latino/a households that are doubled-up or tripled-up without a lease because they have difficulties affording rent. This type of vulnerable and overcrowded housing may be the precursor to homelessness and requires intentional and creative support especially with the high rental rates and low vacancy rates that render independent living arrangements in separate rental units unattainable for many individuals and families.

A recently published policy brief found that in Los Angeles County, Latinos/as represent 77% of doubled-up individuals. This is a critical finding that shines light on an otherwise neglected housing arrangement that is largely disregarded as substandard housing. This perception ends

In the City of Los Angeles, United to House Los Angeles (ULA) provides an extraordinary opportunity to use locally generated, flexible dollars to support nontraditional shared housing accommodations.

up disqualifying mostly Latino/a occupants from critical rental assistance resources. The research shows creative ways that other cities have found to support doubled-up households by expanding the local definition of homeless. In the City of Los Angeles, ULA provides an extraordinary opportunity to use locally generated, flexible dollars to support nontraditional shared housing accommodations. This local fund is not hampered by federal or state regulatory restrictions. Supporting the large number of vulnerably housed Latino/a households must be a core component of homelessness prevention.[24]

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

On-the-ground presence is essential for effective outreach to a Latino/a audience. Latino/a and faith-based organizations that serve as trusted community sanctuaries have long recognized that Latino/a individuals are most receptive when the organizations host program representatives in person within the communities where people live. Yet, in the fight against displacement and homelessness prevention, the very successful face-to-face service delivery model is severely deficient. Especially in the Latino/a neighborhoods most impacted by the lack of housing affordability, the in-person support does not match the growing demand for these services. Housing insecure Latino/a households are in dire need of actionable information about housing rights, anti-harassment protections, and rental assistance applications to keep them stably housed.

LHAG members report a considerable need for continuous outreach on housing programs and resources. This need is acknowledged by the Chief Legislative Analyst's recent recommendation that various departments expand outreach and public education to increase awareness of homelessness prevention programs.[25] An earnest investment in outreach to the Latino/a population however will require scalability and a focus on labor intensive relationship and trust building.



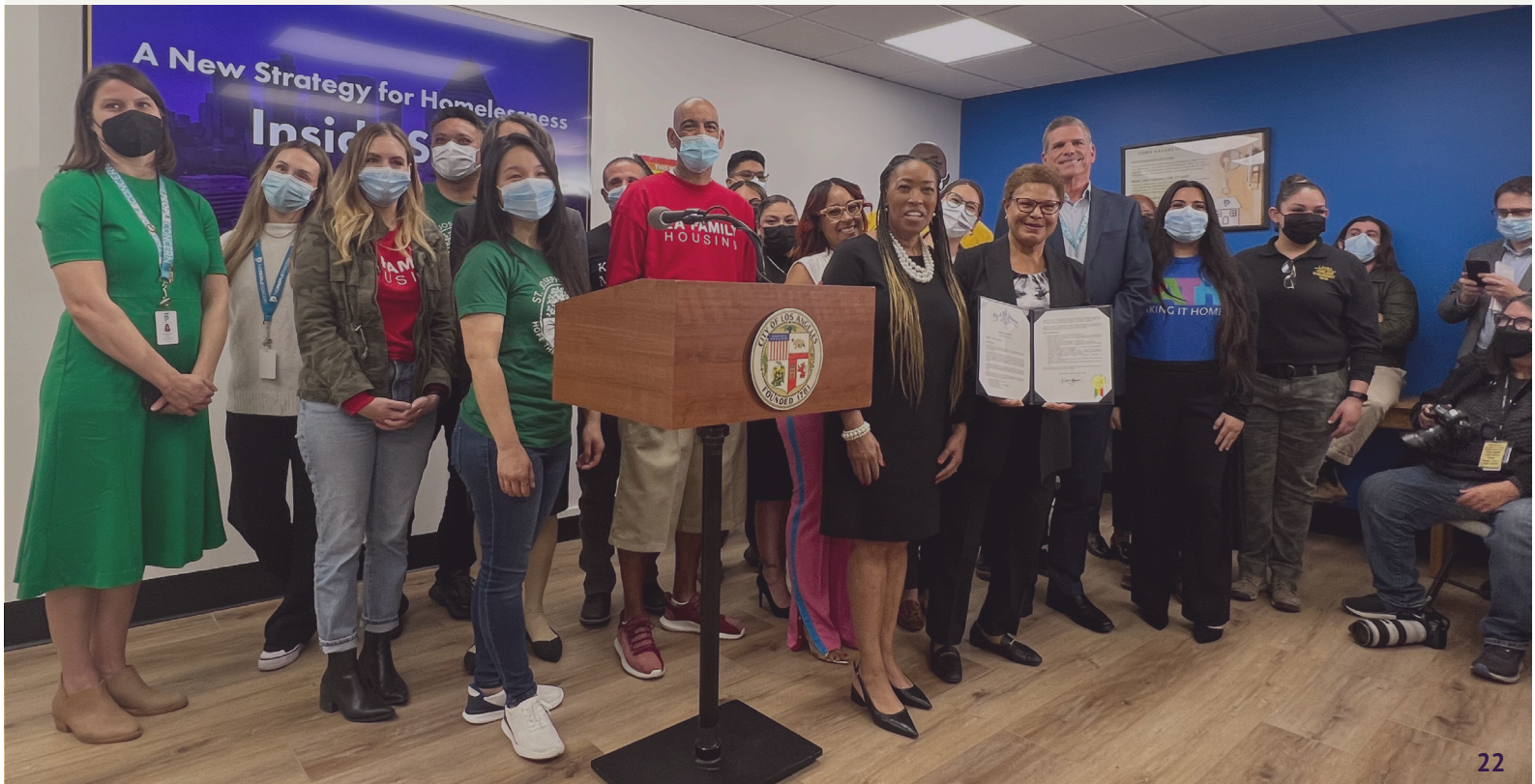
FAMILY STRUCTURES

Latinos/as are more likely to be part of a household that's multigenerational when compared to those who are White.[26] There is not a lot of data about Latino/a family structures and household composition however. Anecdotal evidence from service providers tells us that many low-income Latino/a families, as well as undocumented Latino/a families in the City of Los Angeles, live in Rent Stabilized apartments or in units with below market rate rents that are considered Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH). Despite a lower rental rate, the threat of displacement is ever present for Latino/a tenants living in these private market apartments subject to market conditions. In other cases, Latino/a families in government sponsored affordable housing must adhere to occupancy limits causing families to separate and lose the financial and social support of a multigenerational household. And, in a related way, when a qualifying family member moves out, the remaining relatives may become disqualified especially if they are undocumented. Latino/a homelessness prevention requires a deeper examination and consideration of multigenerational family configurations common to the Latino/a community.

Coalition Building

As of 2023, Latino/a and Black PEH make up 74% of the unhoused population in the City of Los Angeles. Latinos/as and African Americans that are housing insecure or experiencing homelessness in the City of Los Angeles share many racial disparities. Both are overrepresented in the homeless population and have the highest rates of precarious housing.[27] Similarly, they are not found to be vulnerable at the same rate as they are represented in the PEH population. A recent investigation of the PEH vulnerability screening tool designed to guide housing recommendations and interventions found that 39% of White adults in Los Angeles were placed in the highest vulnerability group compared to only 35% of Latino/a adults and just 33% of Black adults in Los Angeles.[28] Disparities persist for both groups in the homeless services system and other systems of care. Focused attention, investment, and representation in senior leadership amongst these groups will be necessary in our quest to solve homelessness.

As the City and its partners reflect on opportunities to alleviate Latino/a homelessness, it will be important to also revisit conversations and recommendations that have been uplifted, but perhaps not yet implemented, for improving the conditions and systems impacting Black PEH.[29] While the experiences are truly unique, where there is overlap in solutions, there are opportunities for advocacy and coalition building. We cannot have an "either/or" conversation when it comes to investing in solutions impacting both groups. A joint coalition advocating for equitable policies can strengthen justice goals and help to advance the collective well-being.



Latino/a Data & Research

The severe lack of data on Latino/a PEH and those at-risk of homelessness makes it difficult to engage and tailor programs for the population. Nevertheless, the LHAG believes that key metrics outlined here have high impact and high urgency and must be prioritized.

A top priority is LAHSA's Point In Time (PIT) Count that is the only source of annual demographic data on Latinos/as for the City of Los Angeles but the figures are delayed. Data timeliness is critical for allocating resources during annual budget negotiations and for policy making. Another critical data point is the undocumented status of an individual or family that plays a significant role in informing the appropriate, time sensitive, service(s) that must be provided.

The efficacy of homelessness assistance programs on the ground is not well understood. More granular program evaluations through an ethnic and racial lens can help inform how well programs are working for Latino/a PEH. A system that tracks referrals to external partners and disaggregates data by race and ethnicity, such as referrals to the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (DMH) can inform if a referral was fulfilled and if additional outreach or advocacy from an elected office is needed. Within interim housing and encampment resolution programs, it would be beneficial to identify and document key practices from the intervention teams and front line staff partners. Sharing these practices across the system and incorporating them into staff training can enhance overall effectiveness. Finally, near real time data on encampment populations and any trends in movement of Latino/a encampments in the City can help inform encampment resolution and interim housing strategies to prioritize the growing number of Latino/a PEH.



Actions: Recommendations Rooted in the Latino/a Experience





After engaging in rich, in-depth conversations with the LHAG, it became evident that many areas exist where cultural competency needs integration into homelessness programming. There is also a significant need to broadly expand outreach efforts related to housing rights and rental assistance, among other tenant protective measures. While not comprehensive, the recommendations below are intended to achieve a variety of goals. Many are designed to remove barriers or immediately adapt programs to better meet Latino/a PEH needs, some are intended to collect basic data to generate discussion about exceptionally challenging issues, and others are research based and will require more time and investment.

We urge that the City Administrative Officer (CAO) and the Mayor's Budget Team conduct a rigorous budgetary analysis to determine the resources and staffing required to competently perform the recommendations. Adding new programs and more work responsibilities to the current staff and existing infrastructure would be unduly burdensome and will cause system failures. Already, the work of serving people experiencing homelessness and those that face significant housing barriers, is a heavy undertaking. Burnout and high turnover rates among PEH serving professions such as social workers, case managers, residential coordinators, and on-the-ground-service providers, among others, is a significant challenge. A financial investment that is based on a right-sizing of both the City's additional workforce needs, as well as subcontracted, or outsourced seasonal workers, is essential to fulfilling the recommendations in this report.

Specific timelines have yet to be designated to each recommendation but should be considered over a 12-month period. Recommendations outside of the City's purview will require additional collaboration and coordination.

A financial analysis and investments to right-size the additional workforce needs must be conducted with special attention to addressing pay-rate equity needs. This should be given the highest priority to effectively achieve the recommendations.

Outreach & Engagement

A tailored outreach approach for Latino/a PEH will create more consistency and trust building opportunities that foster greater program engagement and outcomes among the population.

1. **MOHHS/LAHSA:** Fund and issue a Request For Proposals (RFP) for providers to develop and expand a wide variety of Latino/a multifaceted street engagement teams tailored to satisfy the needs of the Latino/a PEH community being served. Teams must also support smaller Latino/a serving organizations on a regular schedule to build rapport and be the liaison to those organizations and the community. Ensure pay-rate equity for staff, including additional pay for Spanish speaking staff.

2. **MOHHS/LAHSA:** Using the findings in this report and through consultation with LHAG members, create a toolkit that uplifts key practices and systematizes every diverse aspect of outreach and engagement to Latino/a PEH. The toolkit must include training manuals and presentations, scripts and a regularly updated resource handout. The toolkit and corresponding manuals and forms must be available in Spanish.

3. **MOHHS/LAHSA:** Create a formalized Latino/a outreach training through LAHSA's Centralized Training Academy inclusive of items and partners referenced in this report. Provide the Latino/a outreach training and other relevant training modules in Spanish.

4. **MOHHS/LAHSA:** Fund and issue an RFP to expand on existing programs and initiatives of Latino/a serving organizations to scale existing shelter, outreach, and proactive models that have been shown to be effective as well as consideration for new pilot programs. Ensure pay-rate equity for staff.

5. **MOHHS/LAHSA:** Fund and issue an RFP with local City funds that expands on successful homelessness programming of Latino/a serving nonprofit and faith-based organizations with annual operational budgets under $5M. To enable small nonprofits to compete and have equitable procurement opportunities, reshape the RFPs to minimize requirements, reporting, and allow for cash advances. RFPs must be explicit about allowing the use of funds to support undocumented populations. Ensure pay-rate equity for staff.

Street Homelessness

Adapting programming to target Latino/a encampments and meet the needs of Latino/a subgroups will help the existing homeless infrastructure reach and serve more Latino/a PEH.

6. **MOHHS:** Fund long-term interim options for undocumented Latino/a PEH with culturally competent programming that includes bicultural and bilingual staff.

7. **MOHHS:** Utilize blanket exemptions from exit requirements for interim housing participants who are undocumented after six months or when other program time limits are reached.

8. **MOHHS/MOIA:** A dedicated full-time equivalent (FTE) staff person in the Mayor's Office of Housing and Homelessness Solutions experienced in working with undocumented and homelessness populations to support the encampment resolution/intervention and interim housing teams. The staff person will serve as a liaison to the Office of Immigrant Affairs with planning and housing support for migrants bused or otherwise sent to the City of Los Angeles.

9. **MOHHS/LAHSA:** Fund long-term interim options for Latino/a seniors to support their unique mobility and cultural needs. Consider the use of faith-based providers as operators for these sites.

10. **MOHHS/LAHSA:** Utilize blanket exemptions from exit requirements for interim housing participants who are Latino/a seniors after six months or when other program time limits are reached.

11. **MOHHS/COUNTY:** Direct interim housing provider to partner with service providers that specialize in job search resources for undocumented and reentry populations as well as immigration legal services. Ensure a consistent presence and continuity for clients.

12. **MOHHS:** Create a new assessment tool for encampment resolution programs when assessing encampments for potential operations that involve Latino/a PEH. Integrate appropriate partners with specialized experience if necessary.

13. **MOHHS:** Develop a data driven strategy when planning future encampment operations to equitably focus on encampments with majority Latino/a PEH as well as encampments located in majority Latino/a neighborhoods.

Prevention

Dedicated resources and tailored programming targeting vulnerably housed Latinos/as can help to curb the Latino/a inflow into homelessness.

14. **MOHHS/HACLA:** Federal advocacy to fund housing navigation support for Latino/a families and individuals with vouchers. The support must include searching for vacant units, negotiating lease terms, filling out leases, and preparing documentation.

15. **MOHHS/HACLA:** Federal advocacy to allow Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) to be used in shared housing circumstances where individuals rent a room but share a kitchen, living space, and bathroom facilities.

16. **MOHHS/LAHD:** Conduct an analysis and report back to the Mayor on how the ULA's rental assistance funding can support Latino/a households that double or triple up without a lease. Consider a time-limited shallow subsidy for households in overcrowded, vulnerable housing accommodations.

17. **MOHHS/LAHD:** Create a permanent ULA sponsored time-limited subsidy or rental assistance program for Latino/a undocumented immigrants who do not qualify for other rental subsidies.

18. **MOHHS/LAHD:** Modify the rental assistance application process to minimize the documentation required. Issue a report to the Mayor on the changes made.

19. **MOHHS/LAHD:** Fund community based organizations to train a cadre of peer advisors or "promotoras" to perform outreach on the City's ULA rental assistance program. Assistance must include helping households to prepare their documentations, helping applicants fill out and submit their applications, and answer program questions. A continuous in-person presence with appropriate follow-up capacity is essential.

20. **MOHHS/LAHD:** Require affordable housing and interim housing programs to set-aside units for multigenerational households. Creating allowances for grandparents or adult children supports housing stability and prevents homelessness.

21. **MOHHS/MOEO/CIFD:** Expand CIFD's Universal Basic Income (UBI) program with a targeted focus on Black, Indigenous, and Latino/a populations exiting interim housing in transition to permanent housing.

22. **MOHHS/LAHD:** Expand the Family Source Centers by bringing online any pending locations and increase the amount of staff dedicated to support with the ULA rental assistance at all sites to better match the demand for this program.

23. **MOHHS/CIFD:** Explore the consideration of CIFD as the lead coordinator across City departments in homelessness prevention related work and support with resources to build appropriate capacity within a reasonable timeline.

24. **MOHHS:** Federal advocacy to allow the use of housing programs (e.g. Section 8) and rental assistance in nontraditional housing arrangements (e.g. roommates, coliving, doubled-up households, etc.) where households in need are not leaseholders.

25. **MOHHS/LAHD:** Launch a citywide marketing campaign using traditional methods in Spanish language news outlets and print media to raise awareness about the ULA rental assistance program rounds and to educate the Latino/a community about program requirements ahead of deadlines. Present a marketing proposal to the Mayor.

26. **MOHHS/LAHD:** Report to the Mayor on a ULA hiring plan to fast-track the staffing needs and execute on the ULA goals. Include planned RFPs and work to be performed by subcontractors or seasonal workers as well.

Coalition Building & Mentorship

To alleviate the disparity among Latino/a, Black, and Indigenous PEH, a deliberate union among people of color accelerates the collective well-being.

27. **MOHHS:** Annual retreat and/or conference convening leaders around the shared challenges of Latino/a, Black, and Indigenous people experiencing homelessness, inclusive of those with lived experience, with a focus on solutions and investments.

28. **MOHHS/LAHSA/COUNTY:** Work with partners on overlapping recommendations related to Latino/a PEH and the Ad-Hoc Committed on Black People Experiencing Homelessness to accelerate recommendations yet to be implemented.

29. **MOHHS/Philanthropy:** Identify service provider partners with interest in creating a leadership pipeline within their organizations aimed at developing Black, Latino/a, and Indigenous leaders and those with lived experience to have access to leadership coaching and training. Engage a philanthropic roundtable to consider investing directly in such infrastructure. Enlist the support of the Mayor's Fund LA to convene.

30. **MOHHS:** Develop a mentorship pipeline. Offer fellowships to mid-career Black, Latino/a, and Indigenous professionals in the housing and homelessness field to conduct research, lead new programs recommended in this report, and support the annual retreat on Latino/a, Blacks and Indigenous populations experiencing homelessness. Prioritize those with lived experience for the fellowship opportunities.

Latino/a Data & Research

Strategic prioritization of key data metrics will help to more expeditiously support Latino/a PEH and prevent more Latino/a from falling into homelessness.

31. **MOHHS:** Quarterly assessments surveying at least 50% of participants in interim shelter programs to ensure Latino PEH are being served properly and needs are being met.

32. **MOHHS/LAHSA:** Provide timely and consistent Latino/a demographic survey PIT Count data for the City of Los Angeles and provide quarterly reports on program utilization and City of Los Angeles shelters.

33. **MOHHS/DA:** Develop measurements and metrics for collecting data on Latino/a seniors that could be at-risk of homelessness with the goal of supporting policy and program development.

34. **MOHHS/MOIA:** Convene a working group of Latino/a serving organizations and researchers to inform how to best gather data on undocumented immigrant Latino/a PEH citywide to help design policy initiatives and funding allocations.

35. **MOHHS/LAHSA/Philanthropy:** Identify options for funding research to understand how to continue achieving positive engagement among Latino/a people experiencing homelessness and unique groups that are heavily impacted such as LGBTQ, Reentry, and undocumented populations.

Next Steps



The Mayor's Office of Housing and Homelessness Solutions will manage the responsibility of overseeing the implementation of the recommendations through the Latino/a Homelessness Advisory Group (LHAG) meeting monthly as a group to advise and oversee implementation of the recommendations. In addition, multiple Latino/a sub-committees with a deeper focus on pressing issues and unique demographics are expected to emerge.

This report is a starting point and some recommendations are expected to continue evolving through the monthly meetings. In addition to serving as an accountability platform to track the completion of the recommendations and lend support, the continued regular meetings of the LHAG will also serve to identify obstacles or issues that may impeded the City's ability to perform the recommendations within the established timeline.



APPENDIX A: LIST OF ACRONYMS

CAO: City Administrative Officer
CIFD: Community Investment for Families
DA: Department of Aging
DMH: Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health
HACLA: Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles
LAHD: Los Angeles Housing Department
LAHSA: Los Angeles Homelessness Services Authority
LHAG: Latino/a Homelessness Advisory Group
LHTF: Latino/a Homelessness Task Force
MOHHS: Mayor's Office of Housing and Homelessness Solutions
MOED: Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity
MOIA: Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs
PIT: Point In Time
ULA: United to House Los Angeles
YDD: Youth Development Department

APPENDIX B: LATINO/A HOMELESSNESS ADVISORY GROUP (LHAG) MEMBERS

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