

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON BUDGET AND FISCAL REVIEW,  
SUBCOMMITTEE NO. 3 ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON BUDGET AND FISCAL REVIEW,  
SUBCOMMITTEE NO. 4 ON STATE ADMINISTRATION AND  
GENERAL GOVERNMENT**

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNANCE & FINANCE**

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING**

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES**

**February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

***Committee Background***

This background paper prepares the members of the Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, Subcommittee No. 3 on Health and Human Services; Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, Subcommittee No. 4 on State Administration and General Government; Senate Governance & Finance Committee; Senate Housing Committee; and Senate Human Services Committee for the February 24, 2021, informational hearing titled “**A Perfect Storm: Confronting California’s Homelessness Crisis during the Pandemic.**” Through this hearing, the Committees and Subcommittees will explore recent efforts to address homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic, local governments’ experiences with these recent efforts, and focus on the specific challenges facing transition age youth (TAY) experiencing homelessness.

At the hearing, the Committees will first receive an overview of the state’s recent actions to address the homelessness crisis, including Project Roomkey and Homekey. The second panel will highlight various local governments’ efforts to combat homelessness given both the unique circumstances within their jurisdictions and challenges brought on by the pandemic. Finally, the Committees will hear from direct service providers and individuals with lived experience on what is, and is not, working when it comes to the specific challenges TAY face.

This background paper:

- Examines the current state of the homelessness crisis and its evolution during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Outlines recent state and local level efforts to combat homelessness;
- Discusses how efforts undertaken state and local governments in California have addressed homelessness during the pandemic; and,
- Explores the specific challenges for TAY experiencing homelessness.

## **The evolution of California’s homelessness crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic**

How the homelessness crisis has evolved during the pandemic is relatively unknown because the available data predates the pandemic. According to a 2019 annual report by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which compiles the point-in-time (PIT) counts from regions across the United States, California had 151,278 homeless individuals in 2019, which accounted for 27 percent of the nation’s homeless population. In this count, most individuals experiencing homelessness across the nation lived in emergency shelters or transitional housing programs, while nearly 72 percent (108,432 people) of California’s homeless population remained unsheltered.<sup>1</sup> While these numbers provide a snapshot of the state’s homeless population during a single night in 2019, they likely underestimate the scope of the crisis because: (1) the HUD PIT count only measures the homeless population on one day of the year, and (2) it does not capture everyone experiencing homelessness, as some do not wish to be counted, while others cannot be counted because their location is not known to the counters.

Additionally, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on homelessness is difficult to measure, as the 2021 count is on hold because of the pandemic. HUD has not yet released the 2020 HUD PIT count, but due to the count having been conducted on a single night in January 2020, current data does not reflect the impact of the pandemic on California’s population of unhoused individuals. Even without current data regarding COVID-19’s impact, 2020’s PIT count suggests an increase in the number of individuals experiencing homelessness in California. According to the Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO), “although statewide homelessness data is not available for 2020 from HUD, some local entities have published data on their counts. In January 2020, over 66,000 people in Los Angeles County were experiencing homelessness, a nearly 13 percent increase from 2019. The City of Los Angeles experienced over a 16 percent increase in its homeless population, rising to over 41,000 individuals.”<sup>2</sup>

***The pandemic’s impact on homelessness.*** On March 4, 2020, Governor Newsom declared a state of emergency to facilitate the state’s response to the global COVID-19 outbreak. According to the LAO, “With the emergence of COVID-19, the state economy abruptly ground to a halt in the spring of 2020. While the state economy has experienced a modest rebound since

---

<sup>1</sup><https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2019-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://lao.ca.gov/handouts/localgov/2021/Homelessness-Challenges-in-Context-012121.pdf>

that time, the pandemic continues to disrupt the lives of all Californians in small and large ways, from changing how we interact in our communities to the way we work. However, for many, including the 1.4 million Californians who remain out of work, the effects of COVID-19 have been more dire.”<sup>3</sup> While the actual impacts of the pandemic on the homelessness crisis remain unclear, one analysis estimates that homelessness could increase in California by 20 percent and nationwide by as much as 45 percent.<sup>4</sup>

The homelessness crisis has evolved during the pandemic for many reasons, including: ongoing challenges with housing affordability; the rapid rise of unemployment; challenges faced by the unhoused related to COVID transmission and risk; and the impact the pandemic and its effect on the economy has on the compounding crises individuals experiencing homelessness, or at risk of experiencing homelessness, face.

First, the lack of housing affordability increases homelessness. It is difficult for many Californians to find housing that meets their needs at a price they can afford. This lack of affordable housing statewide plays a significant factor in causing individuals to become homeless, or creates obstacles for individuals experiencing homelessness to transition into stable housing. According to the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), home prices in California are much higher than in other large states. California’s 2019 median home value was \$550,800, more than two times higher than the nationwide median.<sup>5</sup> Renters also struggle; according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, a minimum wage worker in California would have to work 90 hours a week to afford a modest one-bedroom apartment.<sup>6</sup>

Second, as many Californians became unemployed due to the pandemic, more individuals at risk of homelessness have fallen into homelessness. According to the LAO, “Even before the pandemic, the high cost of housing in California placed renter households in a precarious position, particularly the 1.5 million low-income households who pay at least half of their income in rent. A pandemic-induced job loss adds further financial stress to these households. Due to the composition of the industries and occupations most affected by public health restrictions and declining economic activity, renter households have faced higher rates of job loss during the pandemic because job losses have been concentrated among lower-wage workers who are much more likely to rent than higher-wage workers”<sup>7</sup>

Third, many individuals experiencing homelessness have faced challenges with sanitation, social distancing, and access to food and supplies. While some local governments and community-based organizations have distributed handwashing stations, masks, and other sanitation supplies, it is unclear how many individuals experiencing homelessness have reliable access to these necessities. Additionally, some organizations have had trouble maintaining a consistent number of volunteers to help distribute food and supplies, further complicating outreach efforts.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/4312?>

<sup>4</sup> <https://community.solutions/analysis-on-unemployment-projects-40-45-increase-in-homelessness-this-year/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ppic.org/publication/californias-future-housing/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://reports.nlihc.org/oor/california>

<sup>7</sup> <https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/4312?>

<sup>8</sup> <https://calmatters.org/health/coronavirus/2020/03/california-coronavirus-covid19-homeless-gavin-newsom/>

Fourth, individuals experiencing homelessness, or at risk of homelessness, continue to face other compounding crises, including mental health challenges and substance use, which have likely worsened during the pandemic.

## **State and local efforts to combat homelessness prior to the pandemic**

*State efforts.* In 2016, the state's efforts to address homelessness shifted to the Housing First model. Housing First is an evidence-based strategy that uses housing as a tool, rather than a reward, for recovery that centers on providing or connecting homeless people to permanent housing as quickly as possible. Housing First providers offer services as needed or voluntarily requested, and does not make housing contingent on participation in services. The federal government has shifted to a Housing First approach over the last decade, and HUD housing programs utilize core components of this strategy. Since the implementation of this model, chronic homelessness in the US has decreased 27% between 2010 and 2016. Housing First was first embraced in California as a result of SB 1380 (Mitchell, Chapter 847, Statutes of 2016), which requires all state housing programs to adopt this model. SB 1380 established the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council (HCFC) to oversee implementation of Housing First regulations and to coordinate resources, benefits, and services aimed to prevent and end homelessness in California.

Since 2018, the state has allocated over \$3 billion to address homelessness. The state's recent investments to address homelessness fall into three categories:

- Programs that support the construction of new affordably priced housing;
- Programs that help individuals and families afford housing; and,
- Health and human services programs aimed at reducing or preventing homelessness.

In all three cases, the state generally allocates funds to local governments, who then direct resources to developers, service providers, and counties to either construct housing units or provide services. This funding does not include other moneys allocated to encourage affordable housing production. For more information on recent budget allocations to address homelessness, please see the February 2021 publication, *California's Homelessness Challenges in Context*, by the Legislative Analyst's Office.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to administering a host of anti-poverty programs that assist children, families, older adults, immigrants, and people with disabilities, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) oversees five housing and homelessness programs for targeted populations, which counties implement. For more information on these programs, please see the March 2020 background paper, *Confronting a California crisis: Homelessness. Advancing Solutions to one of our State's Most Pressing Challenges*, by the Senate Committees on Governance and Finance,

---

<sup>9</sup><https://lao.ca.gov/handouts/localgov/2021/Homelessness-Challenges-in-Context-012121.pdf>

Housing, and Human Services.<sup>10</sup> CDSS has also implemented new programs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which are discussed further below.

In February 2021, the California State Auditor released an audit of HCFC and Continuums of Care (CoCs) that found: (1) the state's approach to addressing homelessness is disjointed, (2) HCFC has not taken necessary steps to accomplish its 18 statutory goals, and (3) the CoCs they reviewed did not consistently apply best practices for planning and providing services.<sup>11</sup> The California State Auditor made a variety of recommendations to help address these findings. More information on the audit findings and the recommendations is available on the California State Auditor's website.<sup>12</sup>

**Local efforts.** Many local governments also made significant efforts to address homelessness, with some leveraging state funds. Leading up to the pandemic, local government strategies to combat homelessness generally fell into four categories:

- **Constructing additional housing for homeless residents.** Individual cities and counties in California have sought to raise money to finance housing construction for people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness within their jurisdictional boundaries. This can be accomplished through one-time investments (typically voter-approved general obligation bonds) or through ongoing sources of local funding or private donations, which are deposited into a local housing trust fund (HTF). HTFs are distinct funds established by local agencies or state governments that receive ongoing dedicated sources of public funding to support the preservation and production of affordable housing, as well as increasing opportunities for families and individuals to access decent affordable homes such as rental assistance.
- **Encouraging regional collaboration.** One way of creating a regional coordinated effort to address homelessness is through CoCs, which are regional or local planning bodies that coordinate housing and services funding for homeless families and individuals. In 1995, HUD began to require communities to submit a single application for federal homeless assistance grants to streamline the funding application process, encourage coordination of housing and service providers on a local level, and promote the development of CoCs. By requiring communities to submit a single application, HUD hoped to encourage a more structural and strategic approach to both housing and providing services to homeless people. A CoC is intended to provide this more strategic system by providing people experiencing homelessness with housing and services appropriate to their range of needs. In California, there are 44 CoCs, representing communities of all kinds, including major cities, suburbs, and rural areas.
- **Preventing individuals from becoming homeless.** In 2014, the County of Los Angeles created the Los Angeles County Flexible Housing Subsidy Pool (FHSP), which provides rent subsidies to move individuals out of homelessness and into permanent housing. The

---

<sup>10</sup>[https://sgf.senate.ca.gov/sites/sgf.senate.ca.gov/files/3.11.20\\_jt.\\_oversight\\_on\\_homelessness\\_background\\_paper.pdf](https://sgf.senate.ca.gov/sites/sgf.senate.ca.gov/files/3.11.20_jt._oversight_on_homelessness_background_paper.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.auditor.ca.gov/reports/2020-112/index.html>

<sup>12</sup> See the full audit report here: <http://www.auditor.ca.gov/pdfs/reports/2020-112.pdf>

program pairs these subsidies with other services including ongoing tenant services and intensive case management. As of the 2016-17 fiscal year, over \$40 million has been placed in the fund and over 1,400 individuals have been housed through various programs associated with FHSP.<sup>13</sup>

## **State and local efforts during the pandemic**

The state has taken additional steps to address the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness during the pandemic. On March 12, 2020, the Governor signed Executive Order N-25-20, which directed the California Health and Human Services Agency (HHS) and the state Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) to identify and make hotels and other similar facilities available as temporary residences for quarantining and treating individuals who have tested positive or have a high-risk exposure to COVID-19. On March 17, 2020, the Governor signed SB 89 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, Chapter 2, Statutes of 2020), which provided \$150 million in 2020-21 General Fund moneys to support state and local governments in protecting the health and safety of people experiencing homelessness in response to COVID-19. Of this funding, \$100 million was allocated to HCFC to provide funding to local governments, including large cities, counties, and CoCs. SB 89 allocated the remainder to DSS to support the use of hotel/motel occupancy agreements, self-contained trailers, and core operating support services associated with emergency placements. On March 18, 2020, the Governor signed Executive Order N-32-30, which authorized local governments to expand emergency shelter and isolation capacity for people experiencing homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, the state allocated \$500 million federal funds it received from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) to cities for various purposes, including to address homelessness. The CARES Act directly allocated nearly \$300 million federal grant funding to eligible California CoCs service areas through the Emergency Solutions Grant Program to address the pandemic's effects on individuals experiencing homelessness.

Finally, the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) allocated nearly \$140 million to local governments through HUD's Community Development Block Grant Program for COVID-19 response and recovery, which includes facility improvements related to COVID-19 health care and housing needs.<sup>14</sup>

***Project Roomkey.*** On April 3, 2020, Governor Newsom announced a new initiative, "Project Roomkey," to provide up to 15,000 hotel and motel rooms for individuals experiencing homelessness in California to protect them and the public from COVID-19. By providing non-congregate shelter options for individuals experiencing homelessness, Project Roomkey gives people who are experiencing homelessness and have been exposed to COVID-19, or who are

---

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.hiltonfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Flexible\\_Housing\\_Subsidy\\_Pool\\_Brief\\_Final.3.31.17-3.pdf](https://www.hiltonfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Flexible_Housing_Subsidy_Pool_Brief_Final.3.31.17-3.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.auditor.ca.gov/reports/2020-112/introduction.html>

experiencing homelessness and are at high risk for medical complications should they become infected, a place to recuperate and safely quarantine outside a hospital.

CDSS administers Project Roomkey, working in partnership with the state Department of General Services (DGS), the California Businesses, Consumer Services, and Housing Agency (BCSH), and CalOES. Under Project Roomkey, state and local governments receive up to 75 percent cost-share reimbursement from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for hotel rooms, motel rooms, and self-contained trailers, as well as wraparound supports such as meals, security, and custodial services. California was the first state to obtain FEMA funding for efforts to protect individuals experiencing homelessness from COVID-19. Local governments can also draw on the \$150 million SB 89 provides. On January 21, 2021, President Biden signed an executive order directing FEMA to provide 100% reimbursement through September 2021, and made this increase retroactive to the beginning of the pandemic.

Under Project Roomkey, the state provides dedicated support teams to counties, including assistance identifying hotels, negotiating and executing operating agreements, and providing technical assistance to local providers maintaining records necessary to receive federal reimbursement. Local governments must identify and select shelter clients or encampment residents for these hotel placements and transporting them to the hotels for intake.

Project Roomkey funding has been nearly fully awarded. Statewide, 14,000 rooms have been secured, of which 70 percent are occupied. The largest concentration of rooms are in Los Angeles County, where 65 percent of the available 3,700 rooms are occupied. Overall, the program has provided short-term housing for 23,000 people in 42 counties.<sup>15</sup>

**Homekey.** On July 16, 2020, Governor Newsom announced “Homekey” as the next phase in the state’s response to protecting Californians experiencing homelessness who are at high risk for serious illness and are impacted by COVID-19. Homekey provides \$600 million in grants to counties, cities, and other government entities, including housing authorities and federally recognized tribal governments within California. These funds may be used to purchase and rehabilitate housing, including hotels, motels, vacant apartment buildings, and other types of innovative housing, and convert them into permanent, long-term housing for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. To help spur these efforts, the Legislature passed AB 83 (Committee on Budget, Chapter 15, Statutes of 2020), which provides an exemption from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for Homekey project site acquisition.

The CARES Act provided initial funding for Homekey (\$550 million), with the remainder allocated from the General Fund (\$50 million). On October 23, 2020, the Governor announced that the Joint Legislative Budget Committee had approved his request for an additional \$200 million in CARES Act funds to fund approximately 20 additional Homekey projects. This brings the total funding for Homekey to \$800 million. Earlier in October, the Governor announced a partnership with Enterprise Community Partners, a nonprofit dedicated to developing affordable housing, to distribute \$45 million in funding (\$20 million from Blue

---

<sup>15</sup> <https://lao.ca.gov/handouts/localgov/2021/2021-22-Budget-Analysis-Housing-and-Homelessness-Proposals-020521.pdf>

Shield of California and \$25 million from Kaiser Permanente) to support operating subsidies for Homekey projects.

State and federal funding for these projects came with specific timelines and other spending requirements. For example, all awards stemming from CARES Act funds had to be spent by December 30, 2020, pursuant to federal requirements; while the \$50 million in General Fund monies must be spent by June 30, 2022. To have received funding, applicants had to demonstrate a five-year commitment to provide operating funds for the proposed project. The first two years of operating funds may include an award from the \$50 million in General Fund monies; matching contributions may come from federal, state, local, and private sources. The state has not allocated resources to cover operating costs beyond these first two years, which means local agencies would have to find additional funding to continue operating these programs.

HCD administers Homekey, which along with DGS, provides technical assistance to help local governments apply for funds in a timely manner to meet the abbreviated deadlines. HCD began accepting applications for Homekey on July 22, 2020, and received 138 applications from 67 jurisdictions across the state, which requested \$1.1 billion by the August 13, 2020 priority application deadline. HCD fully disbursed Homekey funding through 94 awards to local entities. The Administration indicates that the existing Homekey funding will create more than 6,000 units for individuals and families. The average statewide cost to Homekey is \$124,000 per housing unit; with an average local match of \$24,000, and an average total cost per unit of \$148,000.<sup>16</sup>

**Eviction moratoria.** Both the federal and state governments have enacted a number of measures aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19, as well as helping those experiencing financial hardship due to pandemic-related job losses, by helping individuals remain in their homes.

- **Federal action.** On September 1, 2020, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a temporary national moratorium on most evictions for nonpayment of rent, effective September 4, 2020 through December 31, 2020, to help prevent the further spread of COVID-19. The emergency COVID-19 relief measure enacted in December 2020, which included \$25 billion in emergency rental assistance, extended the moratorium through January 31, 2021. Subsequent federal action extended the moratorium until March 31, 2021.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, the CARES Act, enacted temporary protections for homeowners with federally backed loans (the lion's share of mortgages), including mortgage payment forbearance and a temporary moratorium on foreclosures.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> <https://lao.ca.gov/handouts/localgov/2021/2021-22-Budget-Analysis-Housing-and-Homelessness-Proposals-020521.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/09/04/2020-19654/temporary-halt-in-residential-evictions-to-prevent-the-further-spread-of-covid-19>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/02/16/fact-sheet-biden-administration-announces-extension-of-covid-19-forbearance-and-foreclosure-protections-for-homeowners/>



- **State action.** On April 6, 2020, the California Judicial Council adopted Emergency Rule 1, which effectively halted eviction statewide, with narrow exceptions for evictions necessary to protect public health and safety. However, several months later, the Judicial Council voted to rescind the rule effective September 1, 2020. In response to concerns about the moratorium ending and renters being forced to immediately pay months of back rent, the Legislature in August 2020 passed AB 3088 (Chiu, Chapter 37, Statutes of 2020). AB 3088 established a moratorium on evictions for nonpayment of rent due to COVID-19 financial hardship, subject to numerous conditions, until January 31, 2021. In late January, the Legislature passed SB 91 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, Chapter 2, Statutes of 2021), which extends the statewide moratorium through June 30, 2021. SB 91 also implements a program to distribute the federal emergency rental assistance funds.

**Governor’s 2021-22 budget proposal.** The Governor’s 2021-22 budget proposal continues these efforts. While many proposals touch on homelessness, three significant proposals include: (1) increasing funding for Homekey, (2) support for residential facilities serving vulnerable adults and seniors, and (3) support for behavioral health infrastructure. For more information on the specific provisions of the Governor’s proposal, please see the LAO’s February 5, 2021 publication, *The 2021-22 Budget: Analysis of Housing and Homelessness Proposals*. In this report, the LAO notes (1) the Governor’s response continues to focus on one-time solutions, primarily the acquisition and rehabilitation of properties; (2) the budget proposal does not include ongoing funding for supportive services and maintenance of these properties; and (3) the state lacks a clear, long-term strategy to ensure that the state’s investments have a meaningful, ongoing impact.<sup>19</sup>

## **A focus on Transition Age Youth (TAY)**

Even before the pandemic began, many individuals, including unaccompanied youth, older adults and families, found themselves living on the street, in shelters, or in other transitional housing arrangements, such as living with friends and family, for the first time. The causes of homelessness are varied and complicated. Economic hardship, high cost of housing, separation from the family, domestic violence, parental abuse or neglect, death of the family breadwinner, mental or behavioral health, and substance use disorders can all contribute to a person experiencing homelessness. For additional information on specific subpopulations that are homeless (e.g. students, LGBTQ, and veterans), please see the February 2020 background paper, *Homelessness and Housing*, by the Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review.<sup>20</sup>

While all of the aforementioned groups merit focused analysis, this hearing focuses on the particular challenges, needs, services, and solutions for TAY, typically defined as individuals

---

<sup>19</sup> <https://lao.ca.gov/handouts/localgov/2021/2021-22-Budget-Analysis-Housing-and-Homelessness-Proposals-020521.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> [https://sbud.senate.ca.gov/sites/sbud.senate.ca.gov/files/February\\_27\\_20\\_Housing\\_and\\_Homelessness\\_Agenda\\_Background.pdf](https://sbud.senate.ca.gov/sites/sbud.senate.ca.gov/files/February_27_20_Housing_and_Homelessness_Agenda_Background.pdf)

between 16 and 26 years old. Youth experiencing homelessness are five times more likely than their peers to experience long-term/chronic homelessness, and approximately 40 percent of unhoused youth do not receive government assistance.<sup>21</sup> In 2019, California reported the largest numbers of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness in the 2019 PIT count. HUD reports that over one third of all unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness are in California, or 11,993 individuals.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, California accounted for 9,465 unsheltered unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness, or 55 percent of the nationwide total. To put the scope of California's TAY homelessness in perspective, the state with the next highest number of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness was New York with 2,978 unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness. Additionally, the CoC for the City of Los Angeles and Los Angeles County reported the highest number of unaccompanied homeless youth out of all CoCs nationwide, with a reported 2,884 counted during the 2019 PIT count. The 2019 PIT count's magnitude shows that California faces unique needs and challenges in regards to TAY youth homelessness.

Additionally, certain youth subgroups are at greater risk to experience homelessness. Through their 2021 Policy Platform, California Coalition for Youth (CCY) highlights the disparate impact youth homelessness has on California's youth and young adults. The data shows:

- Youth without a High School Diploma or GED are at higher risk of experiencing homelessness by 346 percent;
- Unmarried parenting youth are at higher risk of experiencing homelessness by 200 percent;
- African American youth are at higher risk of experiencing homelessness by 83 percent; and
- Youth who identify as LGBTQ+ are at higher risk of experiencing homelessness by 120 percent.

Advocates report that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated California's youth homelessness crisis, by further complicating the path to stability for youth experiencing homelessness and contributing to additional homeless experiences. CCY received 312 responses from youth residing in 25 different counties. Collectively, the responses showed that COVID-19 added complexity to the typical concerns and instability presented by young people experiencing homelessness, as the pandemic created changes in their housing, education, and employment.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, in their *For the Good of Us All* report, the University of California, Berkeley (UCB) School of Public Health reported the risk of COVID-19 infection for youth experiencing homelessness "is increased by their tendency to have to frequently change where they are sleeping, to be intermittently unsheltered, and to change with whom they are sheltering."<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, youth experiencing homelessness are also at an unusually high risk for several

---

<sup>21</sup> <https://larkinstreetyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/CCY-RHY-Hearing-Paper-October-2017.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> <https://larkinstreetyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/CCY-RHY-Hearing-Paper-October-2017.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> <https://larkinstreetyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/CCY-RHY-Hearing-Paper-October-2017.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1V17mFUg3sbqrtbPCnua8bL9HPZjnzD73/view>

life-threatening conditions including “not having their basic food and shelter needs met, untreated mental health disorders, substance use, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV infection, sexual trafficking, physical and sexual abuse, and suicide” which may also increase their risk for COVID-19 infection.<sup>25</sup>

While TAY may be eligible for various types of state and local assistance, smaller amounts of funding are typically allocated specifically for youth needs. Recent state programs to broadly address homelessness have dedicated between 5 percent and 10 percent specifically to youth.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, there are some programs that provide more dedicated services to TAY, such as transitional housing. In California, three transitional housing placement options have been established for current and former foster youth including the Transitional Housing Placement Program (THPP) for current minor foster youth up to 18 years of age, Transitional Housing Placement Plus Foster Care Program (THP+FC) for current nonminor dependent foster youth ages 18 to 21, and Transitional Housing Program–Plus (THP-Plus) for former foster youth ages 21 to 25.

Service providers and stakeholders suggests that youth specific planning and programming is necessary to fully address California’s TAY homelessness crisis. Unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness are less likely to utilize adult shelters and services and more likely to see such services as a last resort. This stems from a variety of factors, including the risk of further victimization occurring at such sites.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, adult services may not be developmentally-appropriate for meeting the needs of youth experiencing homelessness and thus may not be successful in terms of preventing youth homelessness. For more information around addressing the needs of youth experiencing homelessness and ways to prevent and reduce youth homelessness see the University of California, Berkley’s Innovations for Youth white paper, *Youth Homelessness Should be Rare, Brief, and One-Time*.<sup>28</sup>

## Questions

As members hear from experts on the subject of homelessness, the Committees may wish to consider the following questions:

- Both the LAO and the State Auditor have recommended a clearer, less fragmented, and long-term strategy for addressing homelessness. What is the state doing to encourage such a strategy? What can the Legislature add to assist developing this strategy?
- How can the Legislature assist local governments solve the homelessness crisis? What steps should the Legislature take to encourage additional regional collaboration?

---

<sup>25</sup> <https://voicesofyouthcount.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/VoYC-National-Estimates-Brief-Chapin-Hall-2017.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> <https://calyouth.org/advocacy-policy/funding-needs/>

<sup>27</sup> To learn more about shelter and housing needs of accompanied youth experiencing homelessness see: [https://shum.senate.ca.gov/sites/shum.senate.ca.gov/files/10-10-17\\_joint\\_informational\\_hearing\\_background\\_paper\\_0.pdf](https://shum.senate.ca.gov/sites/shum.senate.ca.gov/files/10-10-17_joint_informational_hearing_background_paper_0.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1V17mFUg3sbqrtbPCnua8bL9HPZjnzD73/view>

- Which groups do Project Roomkey and Homekey currently serve? Which groups have had disproportionately less access to such programs?
- How have local agencies identified funding sources to commit to the five years of operational support necessary to apply for Homekey funds? Why hasn't the state provided resources to operate Homekey projects after the initial two years?
- What steps should the Legislature take to ensure that transition age youth receive targeted attention in state and local efforts to address homelessness?