



Seattle Homeless Needs Assessment 2009

Report on Findings



United Way of King County



City of Seattle



COMMITTEE TO END
HOMELESSNESS
KING COUNTY

Committee to End Homelessness

The City of Seattle would like to thank...

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- United Way King County

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And our more than 500 volunteers!!

November 2009

Questions about this report or the homeless needs assessment survey?
Contact the City of Seattle Office of Housing at (206) 684-0721

Unsheltered Homeless Needs Assessment Findings

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SUMMARY

In the evening of April 13, 2009, community volunteers walked along Seattle sidewalks, through parks and parking areas and under bridges, to survey homeless people who would spend that night unsheltered. The survey was designed to gain a better understanding of the individuals and families who are living outside in Seattle. 297 surveys were completed and demographic data was recorded for another 89 individuals who did not complete the survey. Unsheltered homeless people were surveyed throughout the city, 75% were surveyed outside central downtown core.

Key Findings

The Homeless Needs Assessment showed that many of the people who are living on Seattle's streets, in cars and under bridges have lived unsheltered for many years. They have significant health conditions, both physical and mental, and are three times more likely than the general population to be veterans. Almost all would like to find housing, but cannot. Instead, they live by going to foodbanks and hygiene centers and sleeping outdoors. Most lived in Seattle before they became homeless.

- **91%** of the people who are living outdoors and who participated in the Homeless Needs Assessment Survey **would like to find housing.**
- **Majority reported health conditions requiring professional care (60%):**
 - 36% were hospitalized in the past year,
 - 35% reported mental health treatment in the past year, and
 - 31% were taking medications.
- **70% were homeless for more than one year.** Nearly **1/4** of those surveyed had been homeless **for six or more years.**
- **Most were Seattle residents when they became homeless.** 58% reported living in Seattle, and 19% elsewhere in Washington, when they became homeless. 21% were already homeless when they moved to Seattle from outside Washington State.
- **Most were male (83%) and single individuals (78%).** However, 16% reported being a member of a family with children.
- **Majority were people of color (57%).** Compared to Seattle's population there was a disproportionate number of African Americans (29%) and Hispanic or Latinos (13%).
- **Disproportionate number of veterans.** 22% were veterans, three times the rate in Seattle's population.

- **62% working or looking for work.** 20% reported they were working. 42% reported they were looking for work.
- **Extremely low or no incomes.** One quarter received social security (SSI or SSDI), another 15% received State General Assistance-Unemployable (GAU) payments. Only 8% reported earned income, while 26% said they had no financial resources at all.

Use of Services

- **Food and hygiene programs the most common service used.** 70% reported using a food bank in the last six months and 48% used meal programs. About half reported using hygiene centers.
- **Most not using emergency shelters.** Only 37% reported staying in a shelter during the last six months.
- **People who received medical care access services at a higher rate.** Respondents with recent hospitalization or mental health treatment made greater use of meal programs, hygiene centers, shelter, and other services than those not receiving medical care.
- **People have limited information about services.** 67% learned of available services through word of mouth or on the street, while only 10% reported learning of services from an agency or program.

Housing Needs and Preferences

- **Housing assistance wanted but few people on waiting lists.** More than 9 out of 10 individuals surveyed were interested in housing while less than 3 out of 10 reported they were currently on a housing waiting list.
- **Limited funds available for rent.** Most respondents (83%) reported some ability to pay for housing; 30% indicated that \$200 or less per month was an affordable range and 32% stated \$201-400 was affordable. Even these low rents, however, could consume half or more of the very low incomes reported.
- **Many were receptive to housing alternatives.** Respondents reported they were willing to live in housing traditionally not provided to the homeless population. 59% were willing to live with roommates they did not know, and 44% said that paying weekly rent would make it easier to afford housing.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

- **Increase Affordable Housing Stock for People with Little or No Income and Significant Health Needs.** Although 91% of people living on the streets would like to find housing, the housing waiting lists are long and entail several years wait. As one example, Plymouth Housing Group's waitlist has over 700 people who are homeless on their list and averages a two-year wait before housing becomes available. Seattle should continue to increase the stock of housing for community members who have severe mental and physical conditions and few financial resources.
- **Explore Alternative Housing Models.** People reported interest in living with roommates and paying weekly rent as a way to increase access to housing. This interest suggests further research is needed about how well these approaches have worked in our area and other communities, and what kind of residents would be most likely to succeed in these housing types. Implementing these housing programs may require changes to funding policies and local development regulations.
- **Help People Living on the Street Make Connections to Housing Providers.** The data show that unsheltered people have significant barriers to accessing housing, including just getting on a housing waiting list. This points to the need to work with supportive housing providers to seek out and prioritize unsheltered people with long histories of homelessness as new housing comes on line. In addition, more work can be done with case managers who can help their clients get on housing waiting lists and apply for housing.
- **Help People Living on the Street Make Employment Connections.** While 62% of respondents said they were working or looking for work, very few had earned income, indicating that employment was very limited or intermittent. Seattle has some employment assistance targeted or welcoming to homeless people, but more resources could help people connect to day labor or intermittent work that might provide a starting point in the workforce. In addition to providing income, even part-time employment can provide stability and motivation for people in overcoming homelessness.
- **Effective Outreach to People who are Unsheltered.** The data collected on the services used most often indicates an effective way to communicate with unsheltered homeless people is through food banks, meal programs and hygiene centers. Future communications strategies should consider using these locations for information and referral to both services and affordable housing.
- **Improve Discharge Planning from Institutions.** Improving discharge planning from institutions will better connect homeless people with employment and services, and help them apply for benefits and secure housing. It is also a chance to address barriers to housing such as a lack of proper identification. Although there are some highly effective programs in the community, these types of efforts need to be greatly expanded.

FINDINGS

1. Survey Methodology

In an effort to gain more understanding about who is homeless and why, the City of Seattle partnered with the United Way of King County, the University of Washington, and the Committee to End Homelessness to develop a statistically significant method to survey unsheltered homeless people in the city. This effort complements existing data collection methods such as the Safe Harbors Homeless Information Management System and the annual One Night Count of homeless people in King County. Many large cities conduct similar efforts. Specifically, Seattle examined the best practice methods used by Toronto, Canada, which focus on statistical sampling and individual surveys of people on the streets conducted by volunteers.

The survey was created by staff from the City of Seattle and consultants from the University of Washington with help from the United Way of King County, the Committee to End Homelessness, and the Seattle King County Coalition for the Homeless.

Using existing data and the expertise of outreach workers, a map of the city was created for the assessment. The city was divided into 570 geographic areas, based on census block groups that were categorized according to likely density of unsheltered homeless people. There were 105 block groups with a designation of high density, and 16 block groups with a designation of medium density because they contain services relevant to the homeless population. All 105 high density areas were included in the survey, and four of the medium block groups were randomly sampled. The rest of the block groups (449) were designated low density and 30 of them were randomly sampled for inclusion in the study. Quality assurance volunteers were used to add statistical validity to the assessment. People of various ages, and dressed in different ways, were placed in study areas throughout the city as quality assurance volunteers. At the end of the night, volunteers reported how many quality assurance volunteers were discovered.

Five hundred and fifty-one volunteers signed up on the Homeless Needs Assessment website. Over 400 of the volunteers were trained at 14 different trainings conducted during the two weeks prior to the assessment. On April 13th, 512 volunteers arrived at the field offices: Seattle City Hall, Greenlake Community Center, Miller Community Center, and Rainier Community Center. Twenty-three additional volunteers assisted with the field office operations. Teams of three volunteers were assigned to canvass study areas beginning at 9:00 pm, carrying clipboards, maps, surveys, and compensation for the respondents. The United Way of King County donated small gift cards to be used as compensation for the survey respondents' time, as is common in qualitative research. Volunteers

were trained to ask every person they encountered in their study area the filter question – Will you be indoors, in housing or a shelter, tonight? This was to ensure that volunteers did not allow any stereotypes or biases to influence who they asked to participate in the survey.

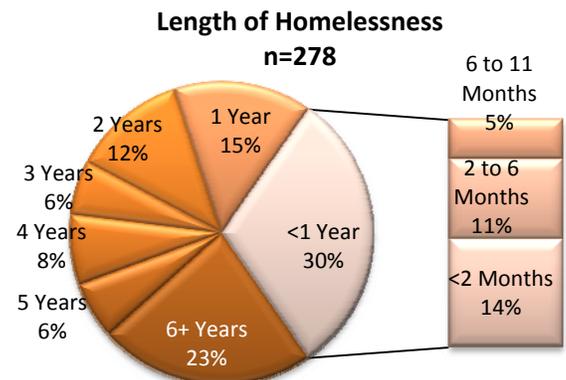
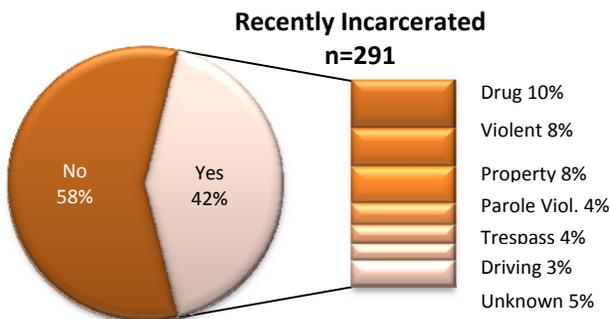
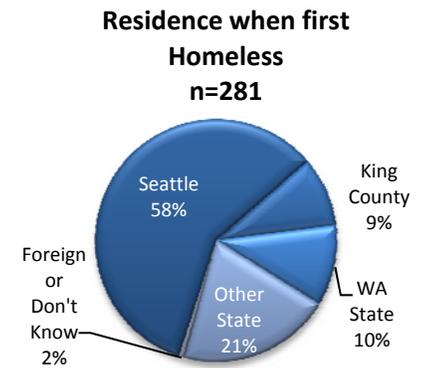
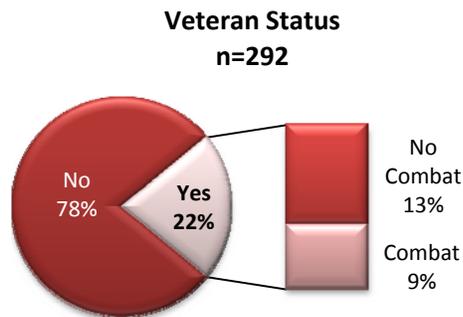
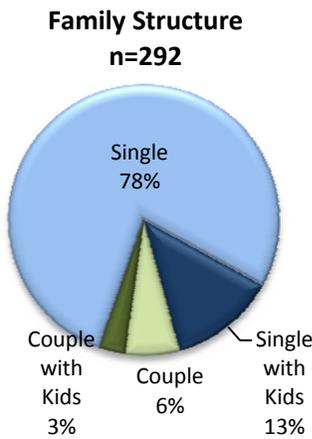
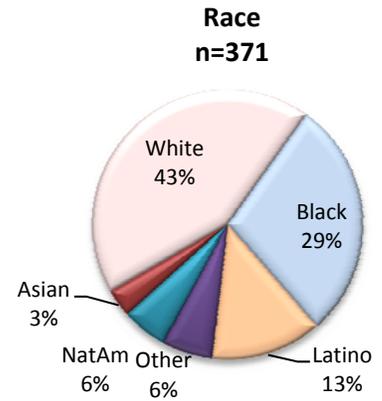
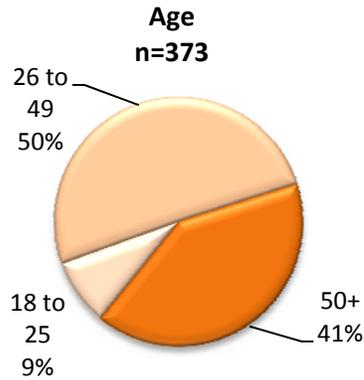
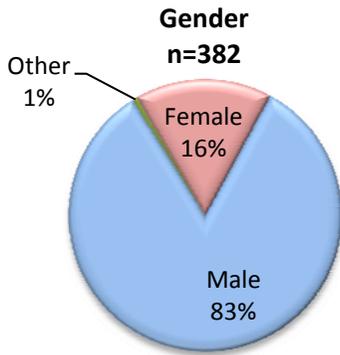
In addition, three teams of specially trained volunteers were sent to target areas earlier in the evening. These teams conducted surveys in the West Queen Anne Greenbelt and areas frequented by car campers in South Ballard and SoDo.

At 12:00 a.m., volunteers returned to their assigned field office, turned in the completed surveys and were asked to complete a volunteer feedback form. Volunteers successfully conducted 297 surveys. 159 additional unsheltered people were observed and, of those, we gained observational information for 89 people. In total, 462 individuals were assessed by our volunteers and much was learned during Seattle's first Homeless Needs Assessment.

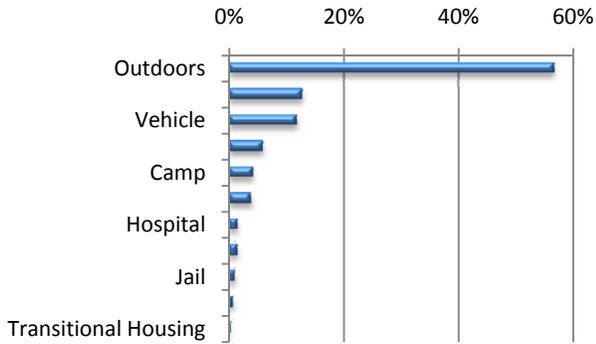
Limitations of the Data

There are a few notes to be aware of when interpreting this data. This data was collected from a survey of individuals who reported they were staying outdoors that evening. The data collected cannot be interpreted to reflect the entire Seattle homeless population. Individuals living outside may differ in some ways from those who tend to stay in shelters. Also, participation in the survey was voluntary and the data in this Needs Assessment is self-reported. The results may reflect some characteristics of individuals that inclined them to voluntarily answer the survey not held by those who chose not to.

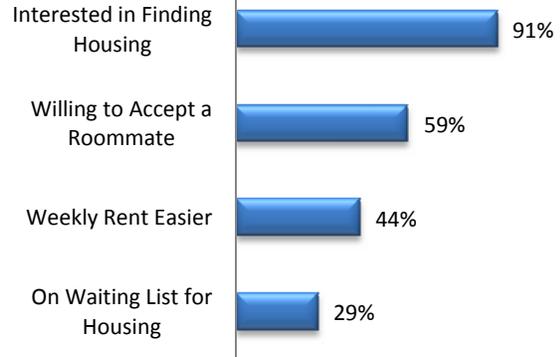
2. Survey Findings for All Respondents



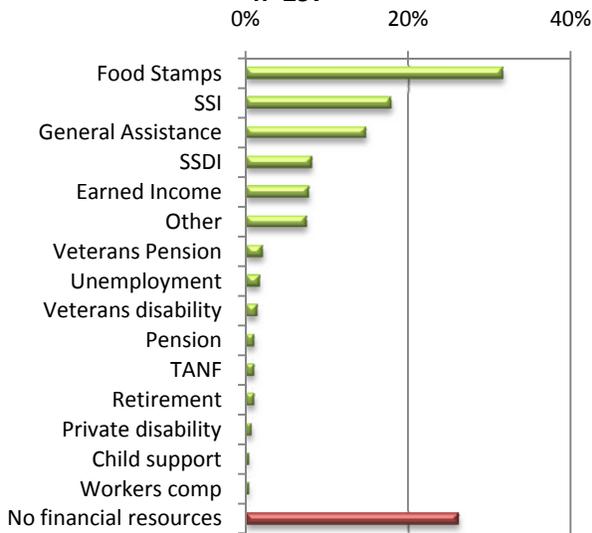
Where did you stay last night?
n=289



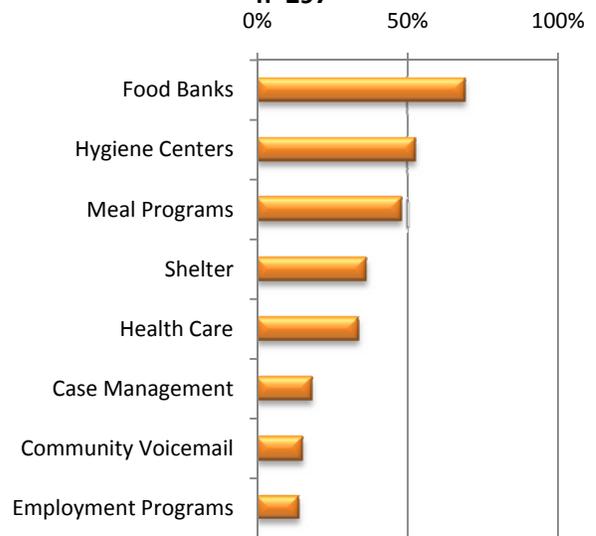
Housing Questions
n=297



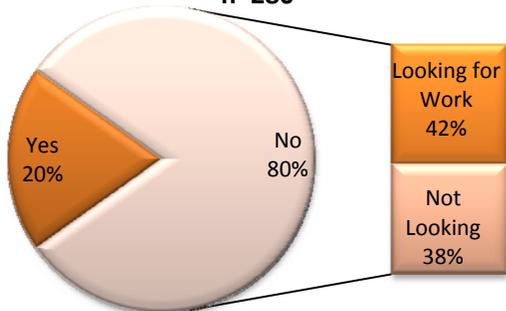
Financial Resources
n=297



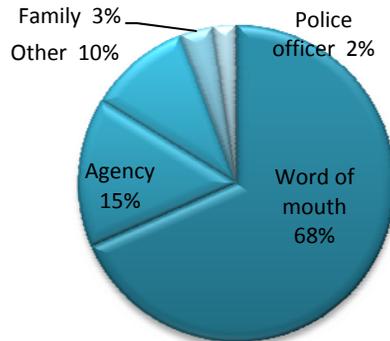
Services Used in Last Six Months
n=297

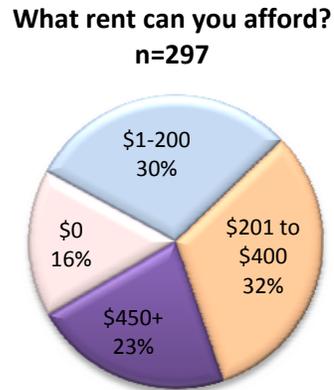
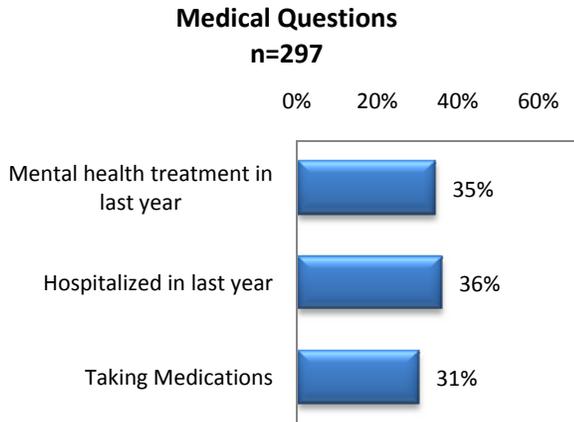


Employment
n=280



Where do you learn of services?
n=297





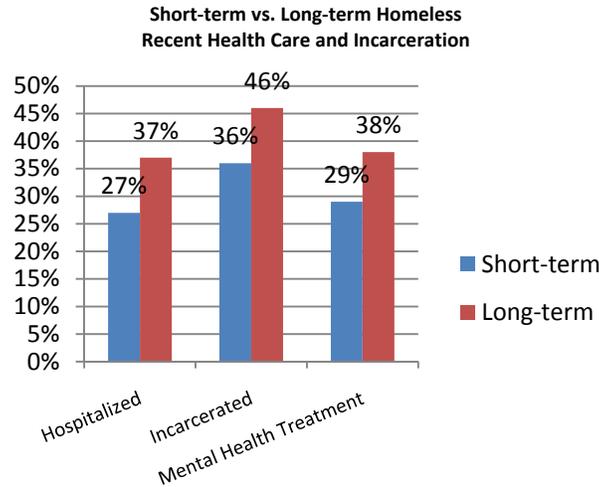
3. Findings for Specific Groups

The following groups were examined for characteristics that differed from the survey as a whole:

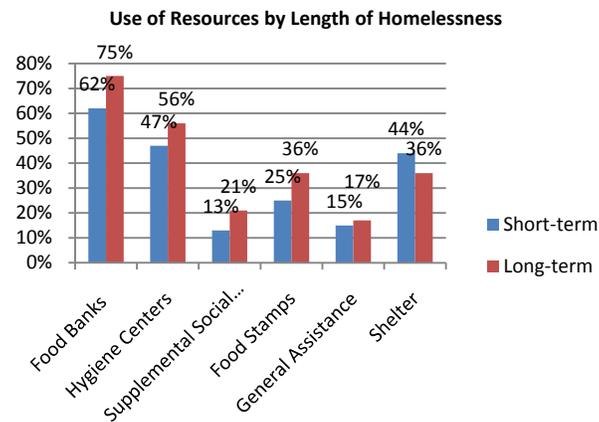
- Short-term homeless versus long-term homeless
- Veterans
- Those who had been hospitalized in the last year
- Those who received mental health treatment in the last year
- Those who had been incarcerated in the last year
- People who are working
- People who became homeless in Seattle versus those from other communities
- People who have not used shelter in the past six months

Short-term Homeless (less than 1 year) vs. Long-term Homeless (one year and longer): 85 respondents (31%) reported being homeless for less than one year while 193 (69%) reported being homeless for one year or greater.

These two groups did not differ much from each other nor the survey group as a whole in terms of age, race, and gender demographics. However, differences were observed when looking at their rates of hospitalization, incarceration, and mental health treatment. Long-term homeless respondents were 10% more likely to report having been hospitalized or incarcerated and 9% more likely to have received mental health treatment in the last year than those that had been homeless for less than one year (see graph below).



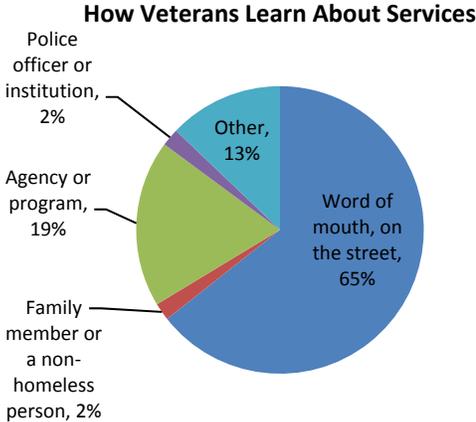
Long-term homeless persons are more likely to have become homeless outside of Seattle compared to short-term homeless respondents (61% vs. 54%). Also, those who reported being homeless for longer periods of time are more likely to use a food bank and hygiene center, and are more likely to be receiving financial public assistance (see graph below). Long-term homeless are less likely, however, to have stayed in a shelter in the past six months (36% for long-term homeless vs. 44% for short-term homeless).



Veterans: 64 survey respondents (22%) were military veterans. This is a disproportionately high rate of veterans, three times the rate in Seattle’s adult population.

Veterans were overwhelmingly male (97%), and more than half were over 50 years old. They were more likely to be White relative to the survey population (47% vs. 41%). They were also more likely to report being homeless for more than one year (75% vs. 69%) and more likely to have stayed outdoors or on the street the night before (61% vs. 57%).

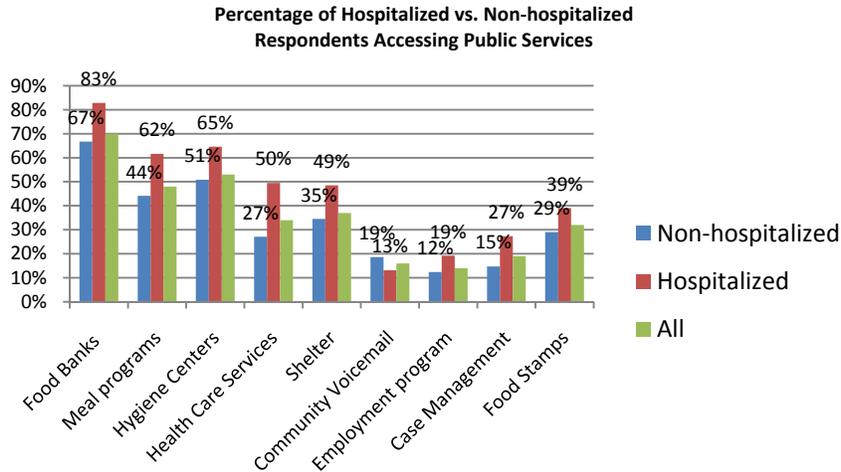
Compared to all the respondents, veterans tend to be better connected to public services and resources. 19% of veterans reported learning of services through an agency or program compared to 10% of the total survey population (see graph below). With the exception of food banks, veterans reported higher rates of accessing public services than non-veterans, including employment programs (22% vs. 12%) and case management (27% vs. 16%). Veterans were similar to non-veterans in the rate receiving public financial resources such as Supplemental Social Security, and Social Security Disability; only those indentifying as veterans, however, reported receiving veteran pension and disability funds.



Recently Hospitalized: 106 respondents (36%) reported having been hospitalized in the last year.

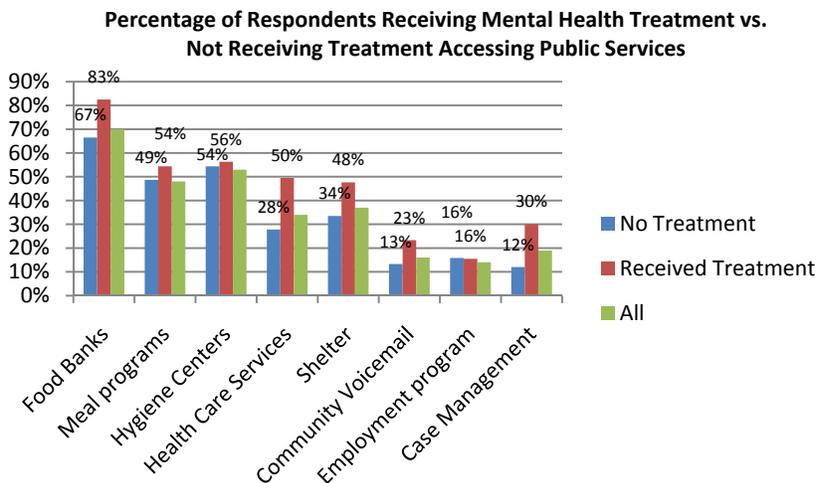
This group was similar in race, age, and gender demographics to those of the whole survey group with the exception of slightly more females (18% vs. 15%) and Caucasians (46% vs. 41%). Compared to the whole survey group they were also more likely to have been homeless for one year or greater (74% vs. 69%) and more likely to have become homeless in Seattle (67% vs. 58%).

Being recently hospitalized was correlated with receiving public services and some public financial resources (See graph below). Half received health care services versus 27% of those not recently hospitalized. Those who reported being recently hospitalized were 10-20% more likely to receive a public service and 10% more likely to receive food stamps than those that did not.

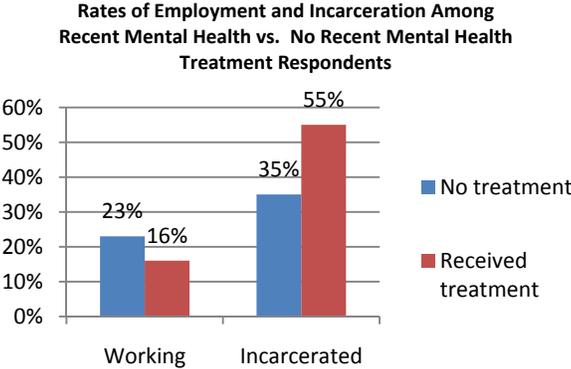


Recent Mental Health Treatment: 115 respondents (39%) reported having received mental health treatment during the previous year.

The data collected from individuals who received mental health treatment in the last year showed some of the same results as those reporting to have been recently hospitalized or incarcerated. Compared to respondents who reported no mental health treatment, they are more likely to have been homeless for more than one year (75% vs. 63%), have higher reported rates of accessing public services, are more likely to receive service information from agencies (19% vs. 14%), and have a greater likelihood of having become homeless in Seattle (62% vs. 55%).



Those who recently received mental health treatment were also less likely to be working (16%) and more likely to have become incarcerated (55%) in the past year than those who had not received mental health treatment (see graph below). This data is consistent with research findings¹ showing that people who had received mental health treatment have difficulty securing employment and are more often incarcerated than those without mental illness.



Recently Incarcerated: 122 respondents (42%) reported having been incarcerated during the previous year.

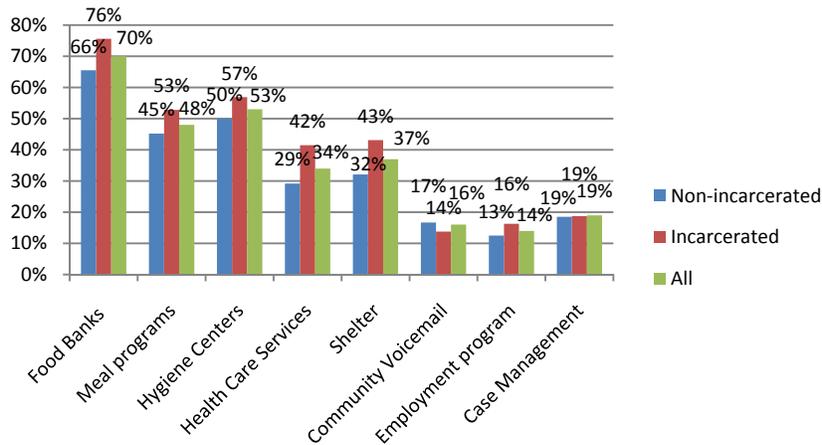
The age, race, and gender demographics of respondents of this group do not diverge significantly from those of the survey population. They are slightly more likely to have served in the military (24% vs. 21%), have been homeless for one year or more (74% vs. 69%), and have become homeless in King County outside of Seattle (13% vs. 9%) than compared to all survey respondents. This group receives more information about services from an agency or program, 15% compared to 10% in the whole survey group.

Nearly half of recently incarcerated respondents, 46%, reported receiving mental health treatment in the past six months, compared to 28% of respondents who were not recently incarcerated. In addition, compared to respondents reporting no recent incarceration, recently incarcerated respondents were less likely to report having a job (14% vs. 20%).

The graph below demonstrates recently incarcerated respondents access services at a higher rate than respondents who did not report having been incarcerated, although not to the same extent as those recently hospitalized or receiving mental health treatment. This higher use of services may be due to the overlap with respondents receiving mental health treatment.

¹ National Coalition for the Homeless. 2008. "Mental Illness and Homelessness: NCH Fact Sheet #5." Washington, DC: National Coalition for the Homeless.

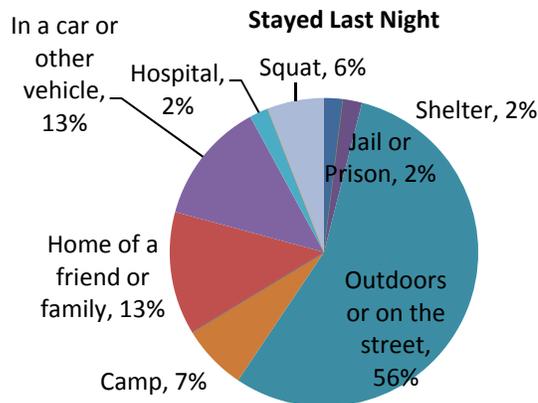
Percentage of Incarcerated vs. Non-incarcerated Respondents Accessing Public Services



People who are Working: 59 respondents (19%) reported having some form of employment.

A greater proportion of working respondents were between the ages 26 and 49 (66% vs. 57%), White (53% vs. 41%), and male (93% vs. 84%) compared to the whole survey group. There was a low rate of African Americans compared to the survey group as a whole (18% vs. 29%). Workers had the highest rate of becoming homeless in another state (37%) and had the lowest rates of incarceration (31%) and mental health treatment (31%) than any other group described in this report.

A few indicators suggested that working homeless do not access many public services compared to the survey population as a whole. They were the group least likely to use the various services with the exception of hygiene centers (57%) and employment programs (17%). They were more likely to have slept in a squat (7% vs. 1%) or car (13% vs. 9%) and less likely to have slept in a shelter the night before (2% vs. 6%). They were also somewhat more likely to have heard of services through word of mouth rather than through an agency or program (70% vs. 67%).

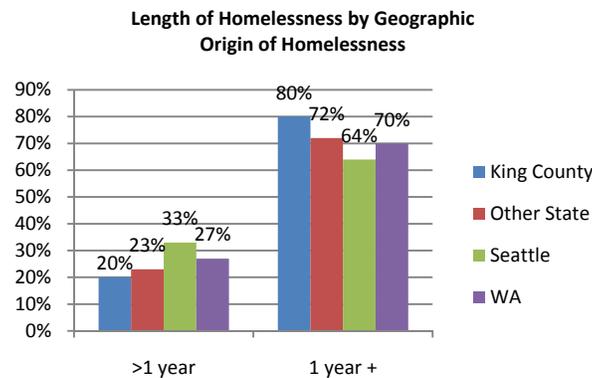


People who became homeless in Seattle versus those from other communities: 163 respondents (58%) reported that they were living in Seattle at the time they became homeless. The table below shows the geographic areas where all survey respondents reported becoming homeless.

Location of Residence when Becoming Homelessness		
	Percentage	Number
City of Seattle	58%	163
Outside of Washington State but in USA	21%	57
Washington state (outside King County)	10%	30
King County (outside of Seattle)	9%	26
Outside of USA	1%	2
Don't know	1%	3

In general respondents who became homeless in Seattle used the most public services and had the least financial resources. They had the highest rate of usage for all services except shelters (Other states), community voicemail (Washington) and hygiene centers (King County). They reported the highest rate of no financial resources (30%) and, with the exception of General Assistance, had the lowest rate of receiving any of the public monetary resources such as social security.

Respondents who became homeless in Seattle were slightly more likely to be on a housing waiting list than survey respondents as a whole (33% vs. 29%). Respondents from King County (outside Seattle) had the highest housing waiting list rate (39%). A lower proportion of Seattle respondents were homeless for more than one year (64%) compared to respondents from other geographic areas (see graph below).

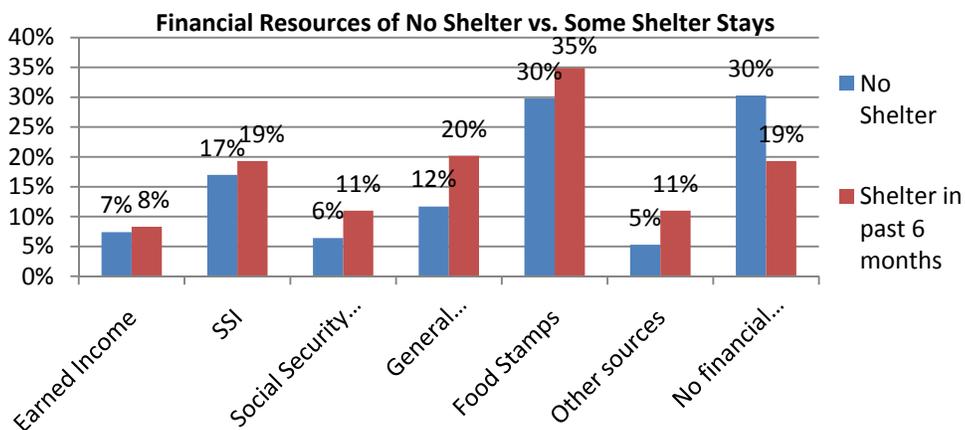
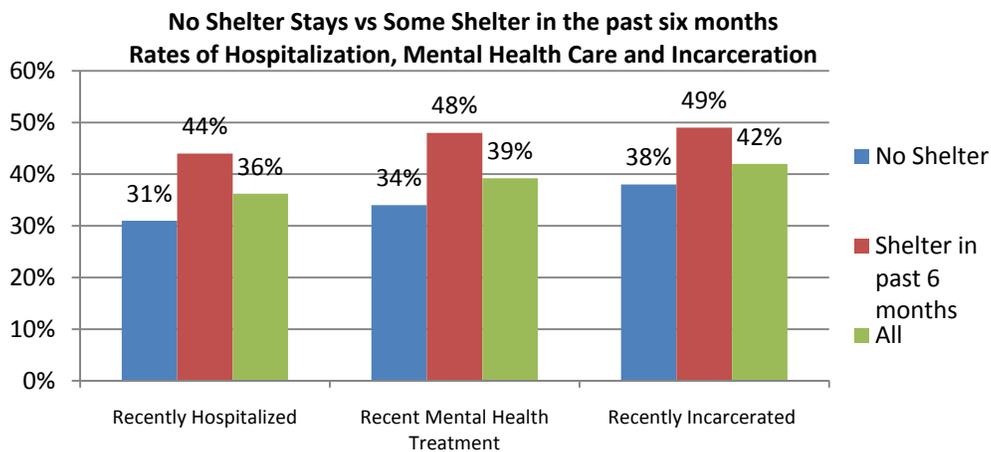


Low or average rates of being recently hospitalized were seen across all groups when compared to the rate of total survey population (36%). High rates of recent mental health treatment were seen within Washington state respondents (46% vs. 39%) and even higher rates of recent incarceration were seen within the King County respondents (56% vs. 42%) compared to the rates of all survey respondents.

People who have not used emergency shelter. 179 respondents (63%) reported they not had stayed in an emergency shelter over the past six months.

Some distinct differences were observed between respondents who had not recently stayed in an emergency shelter and those who had. Respondents who had not used a shelter were 8% more likely to be 50+ years old and 16% more likely to be Caucasian. They were also 9% more likely to be homeless more than one year. 61% reported becoming homeless in Seattle compared to 56% among those who had stayed in an emergency shelter.

Interestingly, respondents who had not recently stayed in shelter showed some of the lowest rates of incarceration, hospitalization, and mental health treatment compared to the survey as a whole (see graph below). Also interesting was their reported financial resources. They reported lower rates of receiving any of the major financial resources, and were 11% more likely to report no financial resources than respondents who had used shelter (see graph below).



4. Housing Related Questions

Responses to questions about housing were analyzed for different population groups to determine peoples' preferences:

- Interested in obtaining housing
- Affordable rent levels
- Housing waiting list
- Willingness to live with a roommate
- Weekly rent would help to afford housing

Interested in Obtaining Housing: 270 survey respondents (91%) were interested in obtaining housing.

Those interested in housing were analyzed for their reported financial resources. Those reporting financial resources most frequently received them from General Assistance (16%) and Supplemental Social Security (17%). Interestingly, of the 9% of respondents stating they were not interested in housing, 82% reported having some form of financial resources.

One statistic that may be indicative of their desire for housing or at least their preference for sleeping under a roof is 41% had slept in a shelter in the last six months compared to a rate of 37% for all survey respondents and 7% for those not interested in housing. Other services were also more highly utilized and 15% of respondents learned of services through agencies or programs.

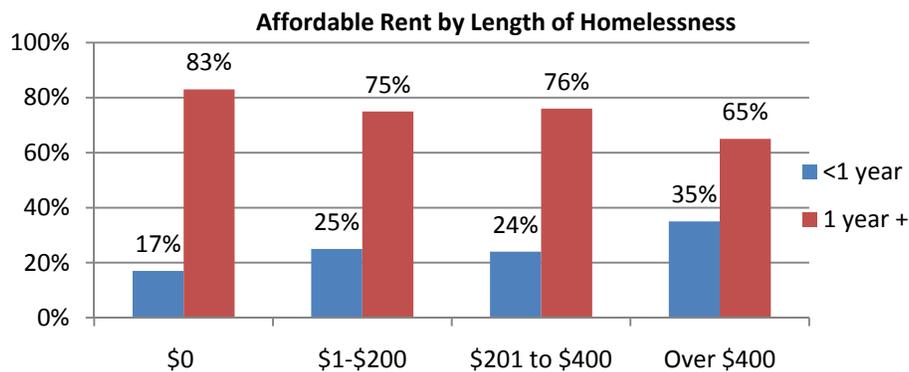
Affordable Rent Levels: The chart presents the percentage of survey respondents who stated an ideal rent level in one of the four rent categories. 222 of 297 respondents answered this question. The results for this question should be considered along with the financial resources question. In the financial resources question, approximately 25% said they had no financial resources, while only 16% of this question said they had no resources to pay rent.

What rent could you afford to pay?		
	Percentage	Number
\$0	16%	35
\$1-\$200	30%	67
\$201-\$400	32%	72
Over \$400	22%	48

There were not many distinguishing patterns in the age, race, and gender data among the four rent affordability categories with the exception that the respondents who could not afford any amount of rent and the respondents that could afford over \$400 in rent were disproportionately male compared to the survey population (89% vs. 83% and 94 vs. 83%). Of the no rent group Hispanics were also

disproportionally represented compared to the survey population (20% vs. 13%) and Caucasians were underrepresented (26% vs. 40%).

The graph below illustrates the dramatic difference in reported rent affordability between respondents who have been homeless for less than one year and those that have been homeless for one year or longer. The lower rent categories were made of a larger majority of long-term homeless individuals than the over \$400 category where 35% had been homeless for less than one year compared to 17% in the \$0 rent category.



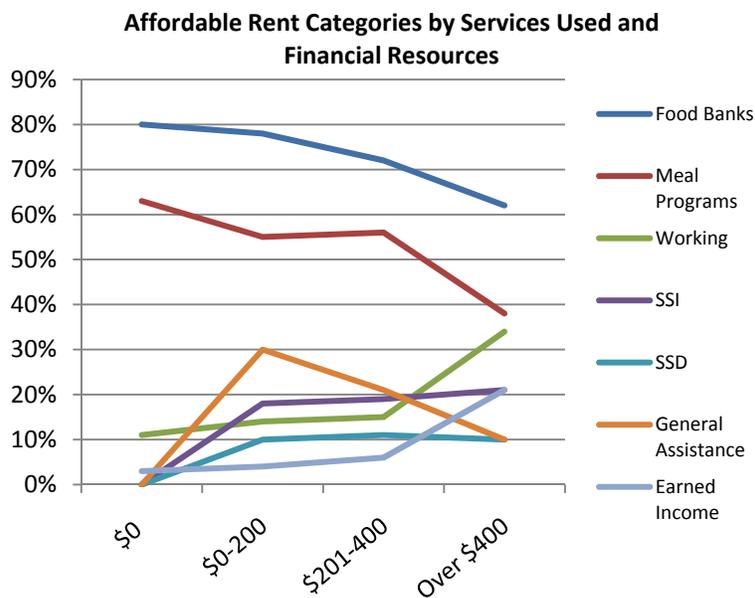
One third of the members of the higher rent group reported working, which could help explain their ability to pay higher rents. Another possible explanation of respondents' ability to pay some rent is found when analyzing the data on receiving public resources. The percentage of respondents who receive public monetary resources such as social security is positively correlated with their ability to pay higher rents with the exception of General Assistance where you see a sharp drop off above the \$200 rent level (see graph below). Conversely, respondents who receive non-monetary resources such as food banks and meal programs report being able to pay lower rents.

Average Public Assistance Amounts		
	Individual	Couple
SSI ²	\$674	\$1,011
SSD ³	\$744	NA
GA ⁴	\$206-\$339	\$412-\$678

² <http://www.ssa.gov/OACT/COLA/SSlamts.html>

³ <http://www.ssa.gov/cgi-bin/benefit6.cgi> based on a previous year salary of \$30,000 and retiring at age 62

⁴ Arshad Khan, Washington State Department of Social and Human Services

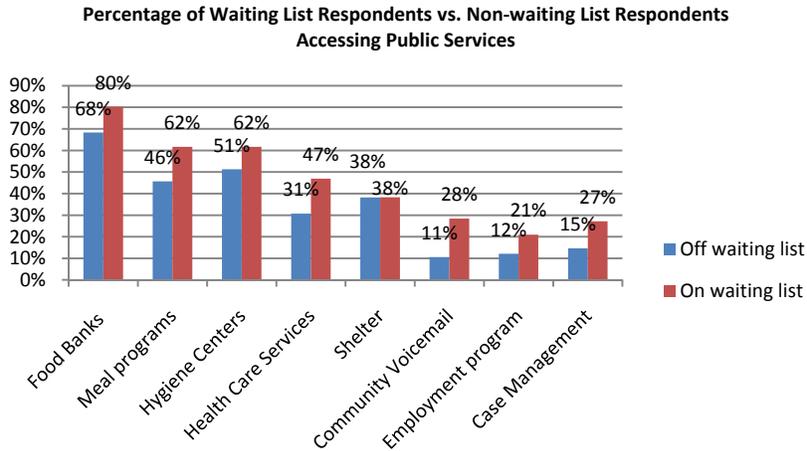


Housing Waiting List: 86 survey respondents (29%) were on waiting lists for housing.

There were demographic differences between respondents on housing waiting lists and those not on a list. Those on waiting lists were more likely to be female (24% vs. 15%), more likely to be 50 years or older (43% vs 32%), and more likely to be African American (36% vs. 27%). They were less likely to be Caucasian (35% vs. 43%) or to be Hispanic or Latino (7% vs. 14%). Those on waiting lists were also more likely to report being part of a family with children (18% vs. 10%) and more likely to be a veteran (25 vs. 19%).

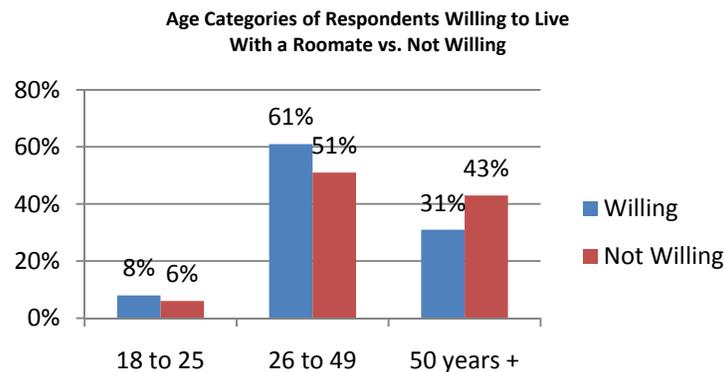
The individuals who sought out housing waiting lists also tended to access services at a higher rate. They reported the highest rates of using food banks (80%) and community voicemail (28%) than all other groups detailed in this report (see graph below). They were also more likely to have case management (27% versus 15% for those not on a list), which helps explain their access to housing waiting lists and available services.

Respondents who were not on a housing waiting list tended to have more barriers to housing than those on waiting lists: they were 10% more likely to have been incarcerated recently (46%) and 5% more likely to have recent mental health treatment (41%). They relied more heavily on word of mouth to learn about services (71% vs. 60%). Surprisingly 21% reported being employed compared to only 12% of those on housing waiting lists. Shelters were the only service they reported using as frequently as those on waiting lists (38%).



Willing to Live With a Roommate: 175 respondents (59%) reported a willingness to live with roommates they did not previously know. An additional 35 (12%) stated they “did not know” whether they would live with a roommate but many of those made comments to the effect they would live with a roommate if they could meet them first.

Interestingly, there was little difference between the group willing to have a roommate and the group not willing in their length of homelessness, gender make-up, or whether they had children. The willing group was younger, more likely to be single (80% vs. 74%), less likely to be working (15% vs. 22%), and tended to prefer to pay less rent than those not willing to live with a roommate.



Weekly Rent Would Help Afford Housing: 130 respondents (44%) said it would be easier to afford housing if they could pay on a weekly basis. An additional 35 (12%) stated they did not know and many commented they would need a job first. The race, age, and gender demographics of those agreeing to this model of housing were very similar to the demographics of the whole survey population. In fact, there was nearly no distinction between any of these groups on any of the following categories: length of homelessness, rent affordability, family structure, employment, or interest in housing.

5. Service Related Questions

Responses to service related questions were analyzed for several groups:

- Users of various services
- How people learn of services

Characteristics of those using services: The table below contains the percentages of the survey population that used each public service listed in the survey.

Services Used		
	Percentage	Number
Food Banks	70%	207
Hygiene Centers	53%	157
Meal programs	48%	142
Shelter	37%	109
Health Care Services	34%	100
Case Management	19%	56
Community Voicemail	16%	47
Employment program	14%	42

There were notable differences in the age, race, and gender demographics of each service using group compared to the whole survey population. All services were used by a higher proportion of African Americans and Native Americans than the survey population as a whole while at a lower rate by Latinos. Health care services were used by a higher proportion of respondents 50 years+ (43% vs. 34%), while voicemail and shelters were used by a higher proportion of the 26-49 year old group (64% and 62% respectively vs. 57%). Female respondents were more likely to use community voice mail (29% vs. 16%) and health care services (26% vs. 16%) than the survey population as a whole.

Users of almost all services listed in the survey reported higher rates of recent hospitalization, incarceration, and mental health treatment than in the survey population as a whole. This is especially the case for those using shelters and food banks. Shelters, employment programs, and case management services are all used by a higher ratio of short-term homeless individuals. Food banks, hygiene centers and food stamps, on the other hand, are used by a higher proportion of long-term homeless (See Appendix C for data).

How People Learn of Services: The table provides the percentage of all respondents who stated that they learn about public services through the modes of communication listed in the survey.

How do you learn about public services?		
	Percentage	Number
Word of mouth	70%	207
Information from an agency or program	15%	44
From a family member or a non-homeless person	3%	8
From a police officer or correctional institution	3%	8
Other	9%	26

There are some racial differences in how respondents learned about services. The proportion of Caucasians who are more likely to hear about services from an agency or program is higher (51% vs. 41%). The proportion of African American respondents who learn of services from a family member was higher (40% vs. 29%), although the sample size is too small to be conclusive.

6. Policy Implications and Recommendations

The Homeless Needs Assessment showed that many of the people who are living on Seattle’s streets, in cars and under bridges have lived unsheltered for many years. They have significant health conditions, both physical and mental, and are three times more likely than the general population to be veterans. Almost all would like to find housing, but cannot. Many who lack employment say they are interested in working. Instead, they live by going to foodbanks and hygiene centers and sleeping outdoors.

- **Increase Affordable Housing Stock for People with Little or No Income and Significant Health Needs**

The survey respondents’ high demand for housing and low rate of being on a housing waiting list points to a need to focus on access to and availability of housing for people with little or no income and significant barriers to finding housing. Wait lists for housing are years long and have hundreds if not thousands of people on the lists. It is increasing housing, not better waitlists, that is the solution. As the survey shows, the longer people live on the streets, the more their health deteriorates.

Seattle should continue to increase the stock of housing for community members who have severe mental and physical conditions and few financial resources. In addition to increasing the affordable housing stock, alternative models that address their housing and services needs should be explored.

- **Explore Alternative Housing Models**

58% of the people surveyed would be willing to live with a roommate who they did not know and 41% said paying weekly rent would help them afford housing. This level of interest suggests two avenues for exploring new models of housing. Further research is needed about how well these approaches have worked in our area and other communities, and what kind of residents would be most likely to succeed in these housing types. The survey suggests, for example, that working people would benefit the most from paying rent on a weekly basis, while those receiving monthly public assistance would probably not benefit. Additional research questions include: how the housing is financed; how it is managed; what size and location are most successful; how residents are identified and selected; and what services should be provided.

- **Help People Living on the Streets Make Connections to Housing Providers**

Among those surveyed, people on a housing waiting list were more likely to have a case manager, which suggests that case managers are helping their clients to apply for housing and maintain a place on the list. However, not all those surveyed who had case managers were on housing waiting lists, so additional work could be done through case management providers to help unsheltered homeless clients gain access to housing.

Another effective approach to improving access to housing is to work with supportive housing providers to seek out unsheltered people with long histories of homelessness as new supportive housing projects come on line. In the past few years, Housing First projects by the Downtown Emergency Services Center and Plymouth Housing Group have demonstrated that people with long histories of homelessness and significant service needs can be successful in permanent housing. Recent housing projects have prioritized housing people who are were high utilizers of expensive public health systems. Housing developments that are coming on line soon could consider additional priorities that would capture other long-term homeless people as reflected in this survey.

- **Help People Living on the Street Make Employment Connections**

Forty percent of people living on the street who had no employment said they were interested in working. In addition to providing income, even part-time employment can provide stability and motivation for people in overcoming homelessness. Seattle has some employment assistance targeted or welcoming to homeless people, including the YWCA's Worksource Center at Opportunity Place. More resources are needed to assist persons seeking day labor or intermittent work that might provide a starting point in the workforce for someone living on the street.

- **Effective Outreach to People who are Unsheltered**

The data collected on the services used most often indicates an effective way to communicate with unsheltered homeless people is through food banks, meal programs and hygiene centers. Future communications strategies should consider using these locations for information and referral to both services and affordable housing. Food banks were used by 70% of those surveyed. Since the food bank network serves a range of clients, not only homeless people, communication efforts should first identify those locations, such as downtown and Cherry Street, most commonly used by homeless people. Meal programs and hygiene centers were used by half of those surveyed, but since these services are used primarily by homeless people, they could be especially effective locations for outreach.

- **Improve Discharge Planning from Institutions**

A large number of people surveyed had been discharged by an institution in the past year – 42% had been incarcerated and 36% were hospitalized. Improving discharge planning for homeless people is a major priority of the Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness in Seattle-King County. The survey findings support that priority. A homeless person's release from incarceration is an opportune time to connect them with services, help them apply for benefits, and get them on housing waiting lists. It is also a chance to address barriers to securing housing such as a lack of proper identification. Similarly, people released from hospitals should be connected to housing and services.

The survey revealed that people who had been hospitalized or incarcerated, or who received mental health treatment, were more likely to access services. This may be the result of successful referrals made at the time of discharge. However, those surveyed were not successfully accessing housing. In recent years advances have been made to connect people with housing at discharge, including short-term rent assistance and outreach to landlords. These types of efforts need to be greatly expanded.