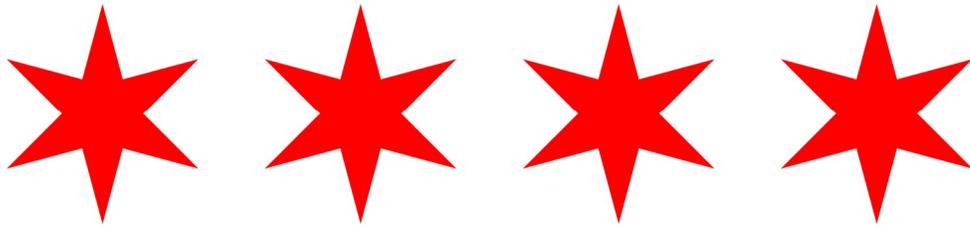


# City of Chicago 2021 Homeless Point-in-Time Count & Survey Report



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# INTRODUCTION

The 2021 Point in Time (PIT) count and survey of unsheltered and sheltered homeless persons in Chicago, led by the City of Chicago Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS), was modified to accommodate health and safety concerns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While it took place on the evening of January 26, 2021, the unsheltered count was conducted over the course of several days up to January 29, 2021. A mandate by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the intent of the PIT is to produce a picture of Chicago’s homelessness at one moment in time. Data is collected annually to monitor trends over time and support the City, All Chicago, and the Continuum of Care (CoC) in understanding the housing and service needs of people experiencing homelessness.

This report describes the methodology used to conduct the 2021 PIT and presents findings on the characteristics and experiences of individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

This report does not delve into the driving factors behind the findings. However, it is critical to note that homelessness is driven by a variety of systemic factors, including racism, economic inequality, and inequitable access to services. Chicago’s crisis of people experiencing homelessness must be understood in context of these broader dynamics.

This report also does not present Chicago’s strategies and policies toward preventing and ending homelessness. Rather, it presents a “data snapshot” of homelessness in Chicago that should be used as one tool in a larger toolbox to support the ongoing work of policymakers and service providers.

# ROLE OF PARTICIPATING AGENCIES AND CONSULTANT

## *Chicago Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS)*

DFSS was responsible for coordinating the PIT count; collecting survey and tally data; reviewing data collection tools, data analysis, and reports produced by the consultant; and disseminating findings.

## *All Chicago*

All Chicago provided coordination assistance for the PIT count; supplied HMIS data for the shelter count; and provided input to survey development and results of preliminary data analysis and findings.

All Chicago and DFSS chaired and staffed the CoC’s PIT Subcommittee that reviewed the 2021 methodology and survey and provided input on data analysis.

## *Lead & Other City Agencies*

DFSS relied on outreach staff and lead agencies, rather than the usual force of 500 plus staff and volunteers, to participate in the unsheltered count. Outreach teams involved in the count included Featherfist, Haymarket, The Night Ministry, The Salvation Army, and Thresholds. Other homeless service agencies also participated in the Count including Ignite and Howard Brown. The Chicago Police Department, Chicago Transit Authority, Chicago Department of Aviation, and Chicago Park District assisted with planning and coverage. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development also supported the count.

**Consultant**

The Nathalie P. Voorhees Center for Neighborhood & Community Improvement at the University of Illinois at Chicago was contracted by DFSS to assist in completing the PIT count. This included:

- Reviewing HUD guidance and recommending how to address any required changes to the data collected on the tally, in the survey or both; coordination of the count; and/ or requirements related to subpopulations such as chronic or youth.
- Advising DFSS staff on data entry and creating a database to house the data.
- Analyzing the data collected by DFSS and producing the data tables required for submission to HUD as part of the Homeless Data Exchange (HDX).
- Producing a final report on the methodology, data, and analysis of populations, subpopulations, and trends including data beyond what is required for the HDX submission.

## METHODOLOGY

The 2021 methodology was approved by the PIT Subcommittee and presented to the collaborative partners and Chicago Continuum of Care Board of Directors. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chicago PIT Count methodology was adapted to reduce risks of COVID spread and accommodate the limited capacity of the CoC community.

### *Counting and Surveying in Shelters*

Chicago worked with all shelters to conduct a comprehensive count of all persons staying in Chicago's emergency and transitional shelters on the night of the count. Chicago used the Chicago CoC Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data to obtain counts for most shelters. For those shelters where HMIS data was unavailable, a designated staff person was responsible for reporting all people staying at the shelter that evening in a tally spreadsheet. HMIS data accounted for 73 percent of persons staying in shelters on the night of the count originated from HMIS. Tally spreadsheets were used to report information for the remaining 27 percent.

In order to keep participants safe from COVID-19, shelter staff followed COVID-safe practices when surveying participants, including maintaining social distancing, wearing masks, and providing PPE.

The sheltered count also looked different in the context of COVID-19 since shelters serving clients in congregate spaces reduced the number of active beds, in line with public health guidance. Chicago implemented several solutions to partially restore bed capacity, so the sheltered count also included clients served at alternate shelter locations and clients served with hotel vouchers.

### *Counting and Surveying in Unsheltered Locations*

HUD released updated guidance allowing CoCs to obtain an exception from some or all of the unsheltered PIT count requirements, including permitting the use of a survey-based count in order to maximize safety.<sup>1</sup> HUD also allowed jurisdictions to

opt out of conducting an unsheltered count entirely, which several large cities did, including Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, and Austin. The City of Chicago and CoC decided to conduct a survey-based count.

Due to the risk of spreading COVID-19 and limited capacity of the CoC community, Chicago utilized a sampling approach rather than conducting a complete canvas of the city (See Appendix for details). The process also involved partners who specialize in serving veterans and youth for coverage of those important subpopulations experiencing homelessness. DFSS relied on outreach staff, rather than the usual force of 500 plus staff and volunteers, to conduct counts that covered randomly selected areas throughout the city.

Surveys were administered over multiple days rather than a single night in order to collect demographic information. Rather than the mix of observation and survey in the previous counts, where the majority of individuals counted were by observation, the 2021 unsheltered count was completely survey-based using a weighted sample to estimate the total (See Appendix).

Following HUD guidance, the approach yielded an **Official Estimate** based on a count conducted by outreach teams of residents who were willing to be surveyed, identified themselves as experiencing homelessness on the night of January 26, 2021, and affirmed that they slept in an unsheltered location on that night.

While this approach increased certainty about a person's homeless status, it also reduced the number of people who were actually counted because only a fraction of those encountered were willing to complete the survey and provide this information. The survey-based count resulted in a high non-response rate compared to an observation-based estimate in 2020.

When the requirement that only people who completed the survey was relaxed, we also estimated a **Range Estimate** of people who may have been experiencing unsheltered homelessness. This included

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/6213/conducting-the-2021-unsheltered-pit-count/>

all people who responded to the survey AND all people who outreach teams engaged but who were not willing to complete a survey.

***Limitations***

The 2021 PIT Count looked different than previous years given the need to protect the health and safety of all involved during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of the 2021 PIT Count are not comparable to past years due to methodology changes and unique circumstances of COVID-19.

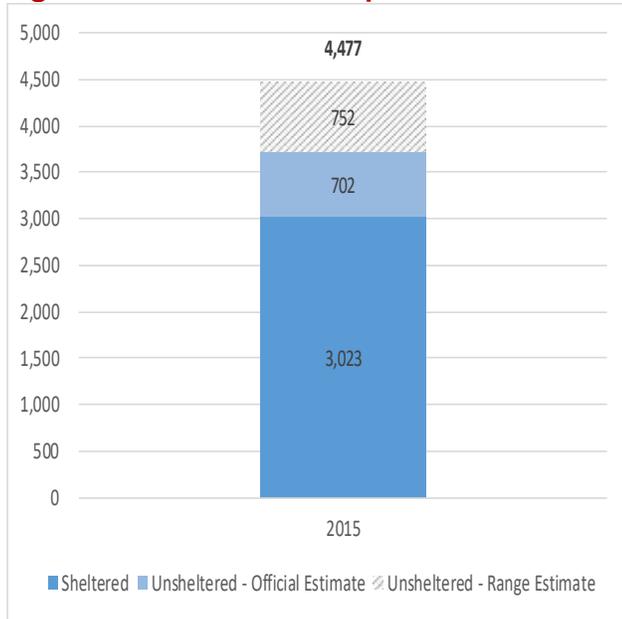
The PIT count captures a snapshot of people experiencing homelessness at a moment in time rather than everyone who experiences homelessness in a year. The PIT count does not capture everyone who experiences housing instability but rather focuses on those who meet HUD’s definition of homelessness.

Because of the one-night nature of the count, locations and visibility of those experiencing homelessness can vary depending on weather conditions and other factors. The 2021 PIT was conducted on the evening of Tuesday, January 26<sup>th</sup>. The 2021 count was colder than the 2020 count (low of 35F). According to Weather Underground, temperatures on the night of the count hovered around 25F from 10pm to 3am, with winds averaging 10-15 mph. During the unsheltered survey count from the 27<sup>th</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup>, temperatures ranged from 26F to 16F, 24F to 12F, and 32F to 20F, respectively.

# CHICAGO'S POPULATION EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

The 2021 PIT Count estimated a total of 4,447 people experiencing homelessness. The count identified 3,023 individuals experiencing homelessness residing in shelters and an estimated 702 to 1,454 people experiencing homelessness on the street (See Figure 1).

**Fig. 1: Total Homeless Population, 2021\***



Source: 2021 PIT Count \*2021 used a different methodology and did not include a comprehensive street count of the unsheltered population

The results of the 2021 PIT Count are not comparable to past years due to methodology changes and unique circumstances of COVID-19. The total number of people counted in the sheltered count and unsheltered count decreased from 2020 to 2021, but these do not necessarily reflect a decrease in homelessness.

There are a couple key reasons that fewer people were counted in shelter in 2021. Due to the pandemic, shelters with shared sleeping spaces were operating fewer beds to allow for safe distancing in line with public health guidance. The City was operating several alternate shelter facilities to restore beds, but not to full pre-COVID capacity. Shelter bed utilization was also lower than previous years, particularly in shelters serving families, due to potential factors such as the eviction moratorium, economic stimulus

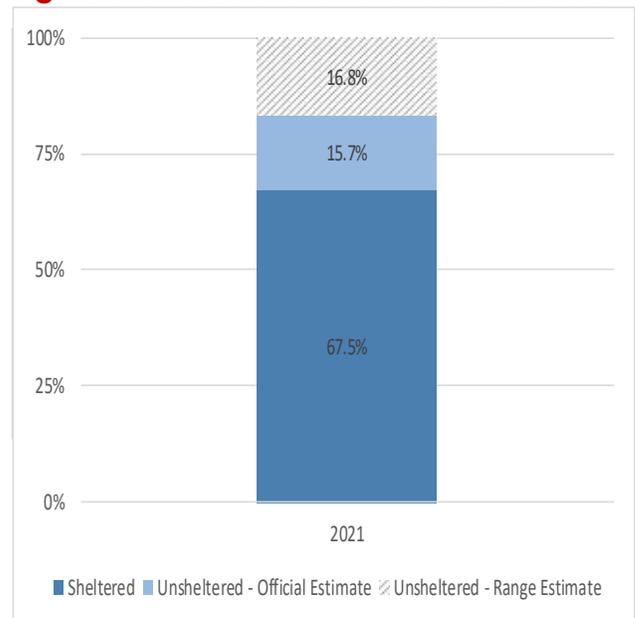
payments, increased housing and homeless prevention resources, and client reluctance to access shared spaces.

Fewer individuals were also counted on the street this year due to changes in methodology due to the pandemic, see Methodology section for detail. Key changes included use of a survey-based count, rather than a mix of survey and observation; counting in a sample of areas of the city, rather than a complete canvas; and counting over the course of several days, including during daytime hours.

## SHELTERED AND UNSHELTERED

The 2021 count identified 3,023 homeless individuals residing in shelters and an estimated 702 to 1,454 people experiencing homelessness on the street or other locations not meant for human habitation (See Figure 2). Including the unsheltered range estimate, the number of sheltered individuals made up 68 percent of all people counted, while the number unsheltered individuals accounted for 32 percent of all people counted, a slight increase compared to previous years.

**Fig. 2: Sheltered & Unsheltered Homeless**



Source: 2021 PIT Count

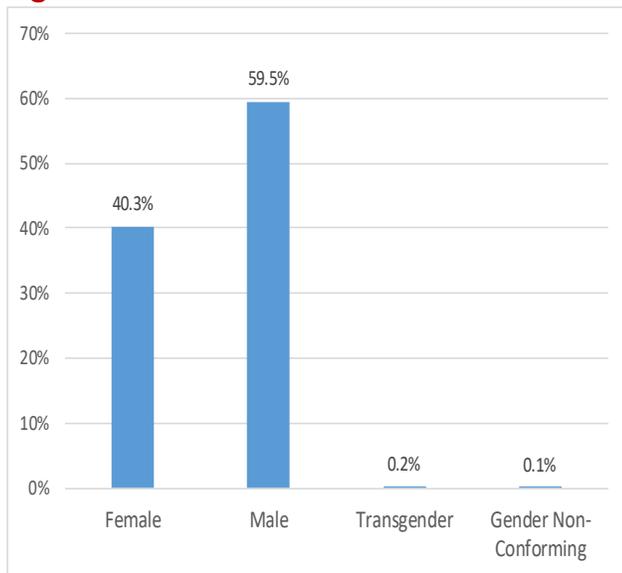
## POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic data was collected from 3,725 people experiencing homelessness (3,023 homeless individuals residing in shelters and the Official Estimate of 702 individuals on the street) from all household structures. Demographic data collected includes gender, age, race, and ethnicity.

### Gender

Males continue to be the dominant gender group among the population making up just under 60 percent of all individuals (See Figure 3). Similar to last year, 0.2 percent of the population identified as transgender. A small number of people identified as gender non-conforming.

**Fig. 3: Gender**



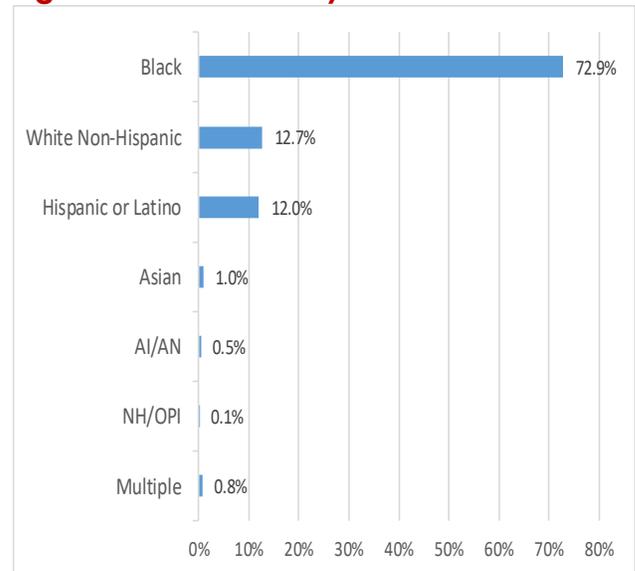
Source: 2021 PIT Count

### Race & Ethnicity

Despite making up about one-third of the city of Chicago’s total population, Black/African Americans are overrepresented at 73 percent of the homeless population. White Non-Hispanics comprise 12.7 percent of the homeless population. People of Hispanic or Latino origin accounted for 12 percent. The percentages of African Americans and White Non-Hispanics have remained stable since 2017. (See Figure 4).

The percentage of individuals of Hispanic/Latino origin is 12 percent, a slight increase over the rate from 2020.

**Fig. 4: Race & Ethnicity\***

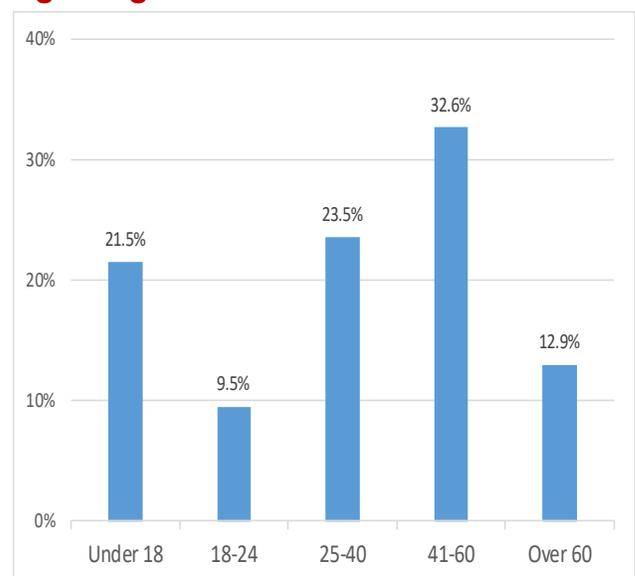


Source: 2021 PIT Count \*All categories are mutually exclusive

### Age

The age distribution has remained stable over the past few years. The 25-40 and 41-60 cohorts make up the greatest proportion of the age distribution. Individuals aged 18-24 comprise 9.5 percent of the population, while children account for 21.5 percent of the overall population (See Figure 5).

**Fig. 5: Age**



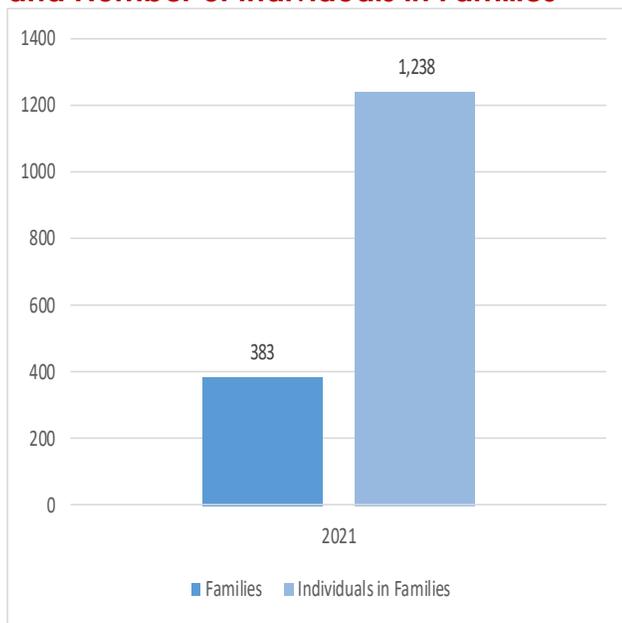
Source: 2021 PIT Count

## FAMILIES

### Number of Families with Children and Individuals in Families

All families with children experiencing homelessness on the night of the Count were counted in shelters. The figures below summarize data on the 383 families that were living in shelters with children. This is a decrease from 2020, however, this reflects shelter decompression, lower utilization rates, and other factors mentioned in previous sections. There were 1,238 individuals in families with children in 2021, a decline that mirrored the decrease in the absolute number of families (See Figure 6).

**Fig. 6: Number of Families with Children and Number of Individuals in Families**

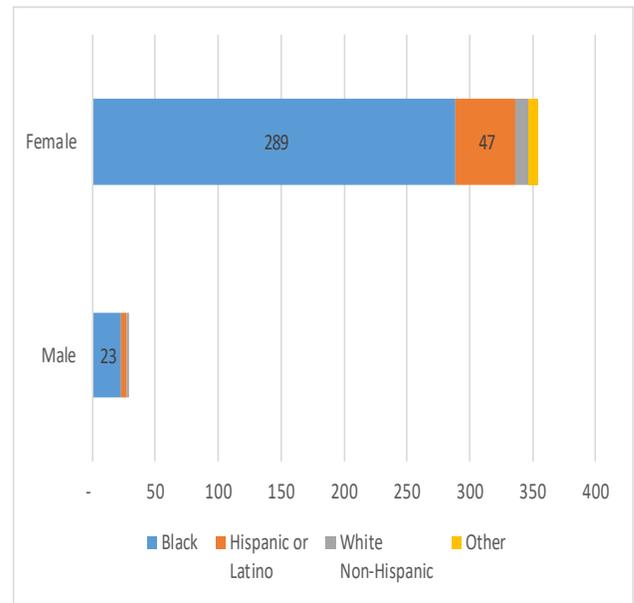


Source: 2021 PIT Count

Approximately 75 percent of the heads of household in the 383 families with children are Black females. About 12 percent of the heads of household in families with children are Latina (See Figure 7). A significant portion of heads of household are young – 27 percent are between 18 and 24 years old. Another 58 percent are 25-40 years old. Only 15 percent are 41 or older (See Figure 8).

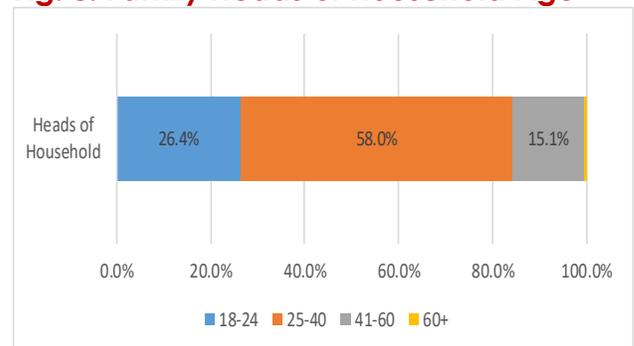
**Fig. 7: Family Heads of Household Gender by Race & Ethnicity\***

Gender	Black	Hispanic or Latino	White Non-Hispanic	Other	Total
Male	23	4	2	-	29
Female	289	47	11	7	354
<b>Total</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>383</b>



Source: 2021 PIT Count \*All categories are mutually exclusive

**Fig. 8: Family Heads of Household Age**



Source: 2021 PIT Count

### **Parenting Youth**

In 2021, 100 of the 383 homeless families were parenting youth households (parents or legal guardians of children who were not accompanied by an adult household member over age 24). 105 of the 106 parenting youth were between the ages of 18 and 24 and all of them were in shelters (See Figure 9). These families had 137 children for a combined total of 243 persons living in households headed by parenting youth, which was a decrease from last year. As Figures 10 and 11 illustrate, parenting youth experiencing homelessness were overwhelmingly female and Black/African American.

**Fig. 9: Age of Parenting Youth**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Sheltered</b>	<b>Unsheltered</b>
Under Age 18	1	0
Age 18 to 24	105	0

Source: 2021 PIT Count/Survey

**Fig. 10: Gender of Parenting Youth**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Sheltered</b>	<b>Unsheltered</b>
Female	101	0
Male	5	0
Transgender	0	0
Unknown	0	0

Source: 2021 PIT Count/Survey

**Fig. 11: Race of Parenting Youth**

<b>Parenting Youth - Race</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
White	4.7%
Black/African American	93.4%
Other	1.9%

Source: 2021 PIT Count/Survey

**Fig. 12: Ethnicity of Parenting Youth**

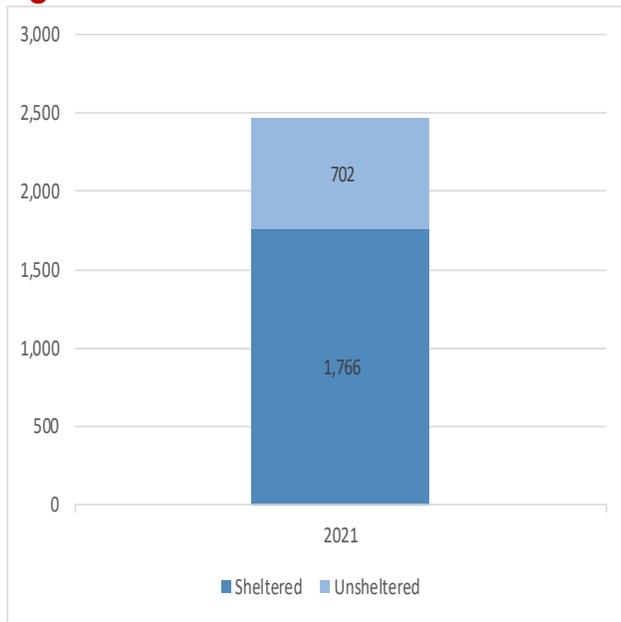
<b>Parenting Youth - Ethnicity</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
Non-Hispanic/Latino	93.4%
Hispanic/Latino	6.6%

Source: 2021 PIT Count/Survey

## INDIVIDUALS

The 2021 PIT identified a total of 2,468 homeless individuals, defined here as persons not living in families with children. Individuals include members of adult couples and families in which every member is over 18, in alignment with HUD reporting standards. Of the individuals not in family households, 1,766 were in shelters and 702 were unsheltered. (See Figure 13).

**Fig. 13: Number of Individuals**



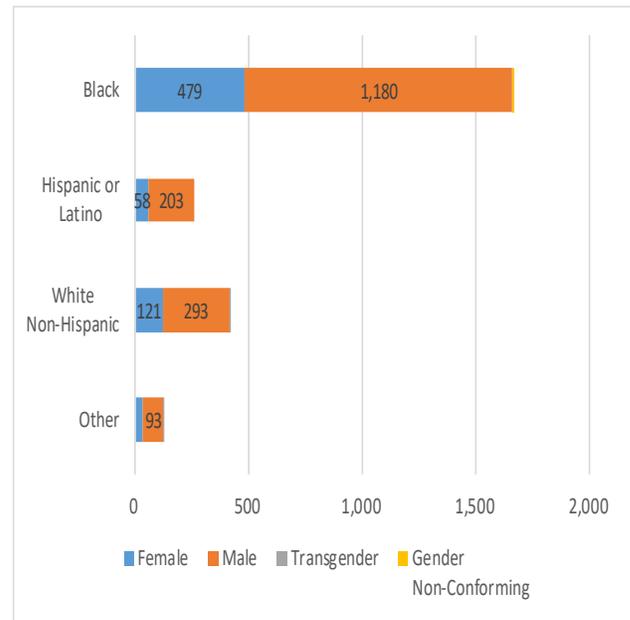
Source: 2021 PIT Count

Of the 2,468 people experiencing homelessness not living in families, 91 percent were adults over the age of 24. The remaining 9 percent of these homeless individuals were age 18-24.

The racial and ethnic composition of individuals experiencing homelessness not in families differs slightly from that of the overall population. Approximately 67 percent were Black/African American, 11 percent were people of Hispanic or Latino origin, and 17 percent were White Non-Hispanic. More than 72 percent of people experiencing homelessness not in families were male, a rate which was relatively consistent across racial and ethnic groups. Nine people identified as transgender or gender non-conforming (See Figure 14).

**Fig. 14: Individuals Gender by Race & Ethnicity**

Gender	Black	Hispanic or Latino	White Non-Hispanic	Other	Total
Female	479	58	121	32	690
Male	1,180	203	293	93	1,769
Transgender	4	0	2	1	7
Gender Non-Conforming	2	0	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,665</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>2,468</b>



Source: 2021 PIT Count

# YOUTH

## Unaccompanied Youth

Since 2013, Chicago has been working with its partners to develop a methodology to determine the number of youth experiencing homelessness.

Chicago typically collects data on young people experiencing homelessness in two ways: (1) youth are counted as part of the overnight PIT Count and (2) supplemental data is collected by youth-led teams during extended hours before and after the count. However, this year the separate Supplemental Youth Count was forgone in order to minimize the risks of COVID spread.

The total number of unaccompanied youth counted in 2021 was 213. About 89 percent of these youths were residing in shelters, while the remaining 11 percent were unsheltered on the street or other locations not meant for human habitation. Of the unaccompanied youth tallied, nearly all of the sheltered and unsheltered youth were between 18 and 24 years of age. This was similar to 2020. (See Figure 15).

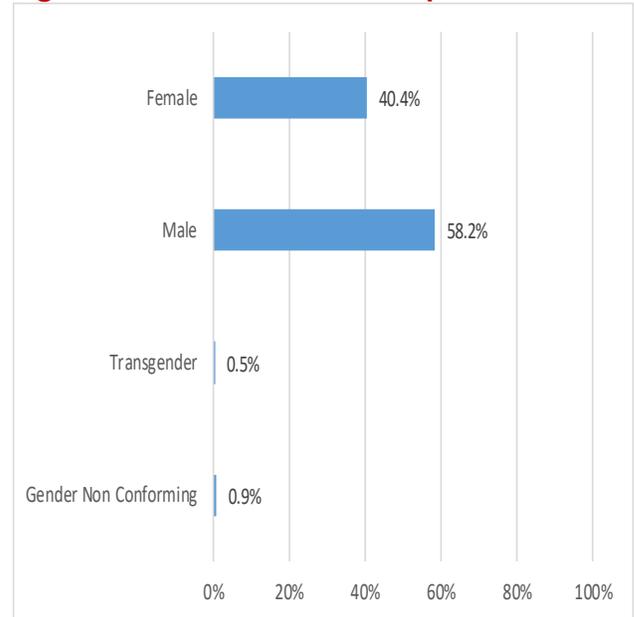
**Fig. 15: Unaccompanied Youth**

Unaccompanied Youth	Sheltered	Unsheltered
Under Age 18	17	0
Age 18 to 24	173	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>23</b>

Source: 2021 PIT Count/Survey

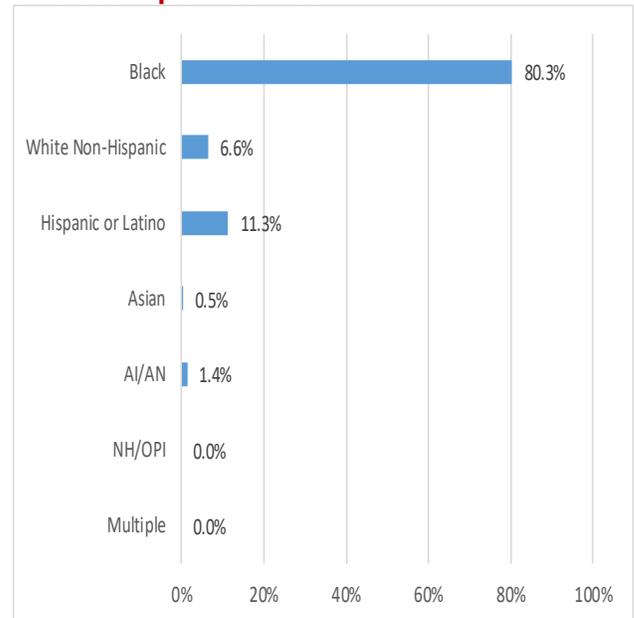
This population was 58% male, 40% female, (See Figure 16), and largely Black/African American and Non-Hispanic (See Figure 17).

**Fig. 16: Gender of Unaccompanied Youth**



Source: 2021 PIT Count/Survey

**Fig. 17: Race & Ethnicity of Unaccompanied Youth**



Source: 2021 PIT Count/Survey

### ***Chronic Homelessness***

Homeless individuals and families are defined by HUD as experiencing chronic homelessness if they meet all of the following criteria:

- Are residing on the street/place not meant for human habitation or emergency shelter
- Have been continuously homeless for at least 12 months OR have at least four occasions of homelessness over the past three years totaling a minimum of 12 months
- Have a disabling condition

Due to changes in methodology given the need to protect the health and safety of all involved during the COVID-19 pandemic, information on chronic homelessness was omitted from the unsheltered survey.

In 2021, 475 people in shelters were experiencing chronic homelessness, or 16 percent of the sheltered population.

While most chronic homeless are individuals not in families, 44 families in shelter were classified as experiencing chronic homelessness in 2021. The proportion of adults who are veterans in shelters and experiencing chronic homelessness was 7.2 percent in 2021.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF POPULATION THAT CAN INFORM SERVICE NEEDS

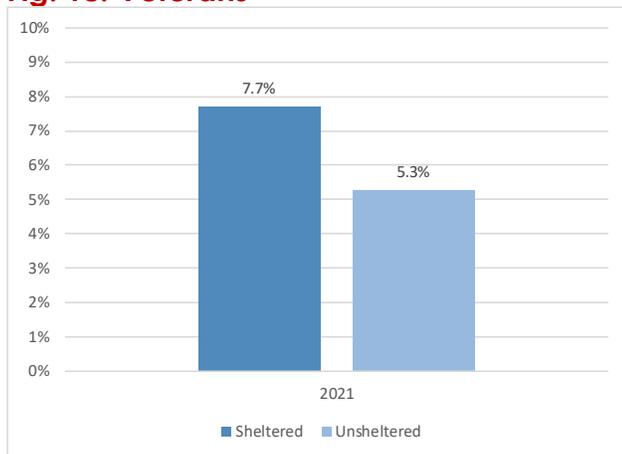
The PIT survey includes a series of questions related to specific populations. The purpose is to understand the challenges and needs across subpopulations experiencing homelessness. It is important to note that all data is self-reported by the individual being interviewed and represents only a subset of all people experiencing homelessness in Chicago.

### Veterans

Chicago has focused on housing veterans through the Ending Veteran Homelessness Initiative which began in 2014 and coordinates housing resources available for veterans from Chicago's partners including the many providers that serve veterans, HUD, the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, Corporation for Supportive Housing and the Chicago Housing Authority.

As seen in Figure 18, veterans accounted for around 7.7 percent and 5.3 percent among sheltered and unsheltered populations respectively, including 171 veterans experiencing homelessness residing in shelters and 37 veterans experiencing homelessness on the street.

**Fig. 18: Veterans**



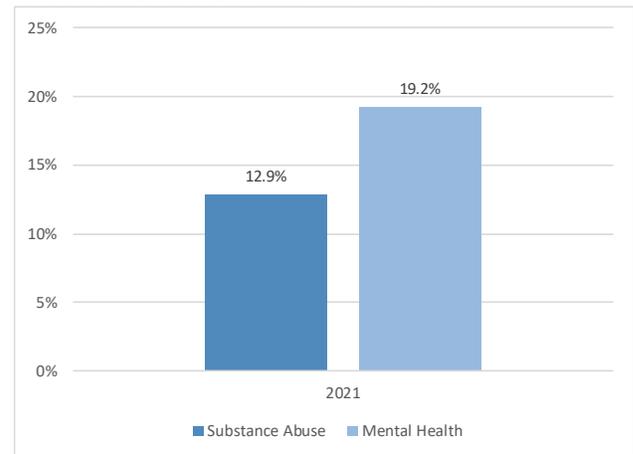
Source: 2021 PIT Count

### Substance Use & Mental Health

Almost 13 percent of the sheltered population reported receiving, or that felt they would be helped by receiving, services for substance use (alcohol and/or drug use). The number of sheltered persons receiving, or that felt they would be helped by receiving, these services has decreased by 6 percent from 2020.

The proportion of people experiencing homelessness reporting they were receiving, or that felt they would be helped by receiving, mental health services was 19 percent for the sheltered population in 2021, a slight increase from last year (See Figure 19).

**Fig. 19: Received, or Feel Would Be Helped by Receiving, Services for Substance Use or Mental Health**

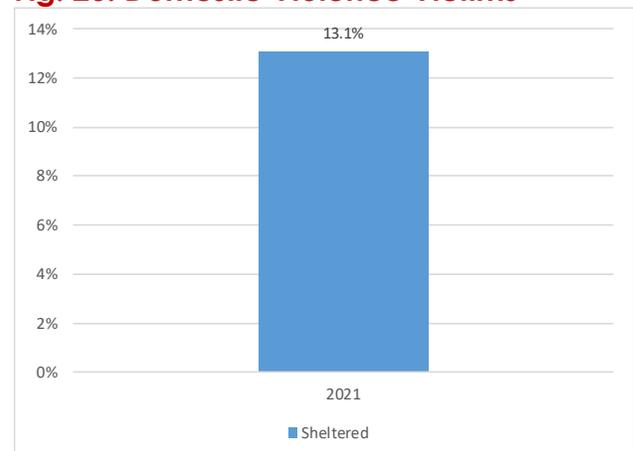


Source: 2021 PIT Count

### Domestic Violence

The PIT survey asks if the individual is being threatened or harmed by someone you know or is fleeing a violent relationship. The portion of persons reporting domestic among the sheltered population was 13 percent (See Figure 20).

**Fig. 20: Domestic Violence Victims**

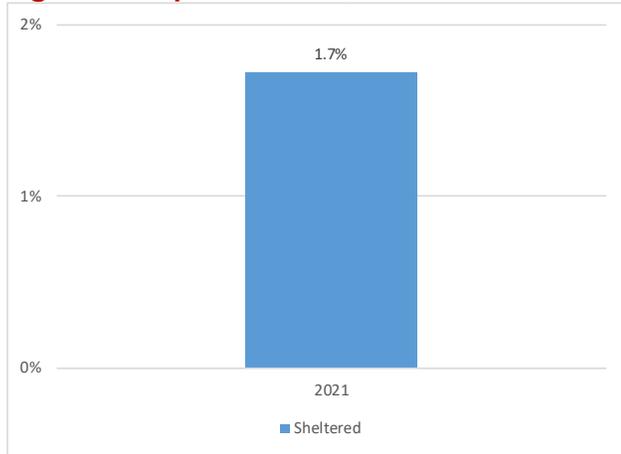


Source: 2021 PIT Count

### **HIV/AIDS**

About 1.7 percent of sheltered persons experiencing homelessness report having HIV/AIDS. This percentage is similar to last year's rate (See Figure 21).

**Fig. 21: People with HIV/AIDS**

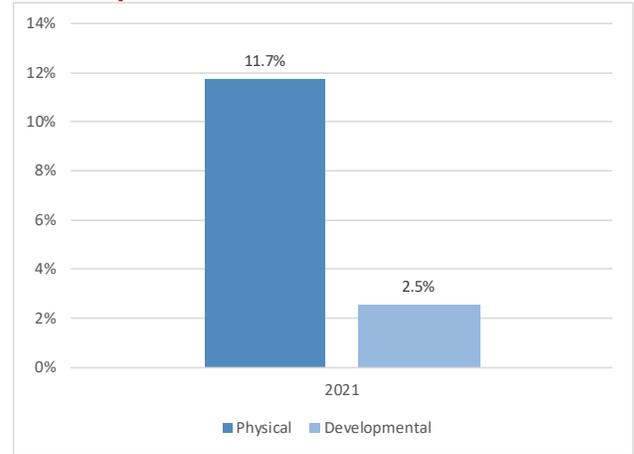


Source: 2021 PIT Count

### **Disability**

Almost 12 percent of people experiencing homelessness residing in shelters reported having a physical disability. Another 2.5 percent of sheltered persons reported a developmental disability (See Figure 22).

**Fig. 22: People with Physical or Developmental Disabilities**



Source: 2021 PIT Count

## CONCLUSION

The 2021 PIT Count looked different than previous years given the need to protect health and safety of all involved from the spread of COVID-19. While pandemic precautions and methodology changes limit the ability to compare this year's results with previous years, this year's count still provides a valuable snapshot of people experiencing homelessness in Chicago.

The 2021 PIT Count estimated a total of 4,447 persons experiencing homelessness. The count identified 3,023 individuals experiencing homelessness residing in shelters and an estimated 702 to 1,454 people experiencing homelessness on the street. While this year's counts are not comparable to 2020, the proportion of people experiencing homelessness residing in shelters (68%) versus those on the street, which includes encampments, 24-hour establishments, and CTA trains and buses, (32%) is similar to previous years.

Black people continue to be overrepresented in the population experiencing homelessness in Chicago. While about one-third of Chicago's total population is Black/African American, 73 percent of the homeless population are Black/African American.

In 2021, an estimated 383 families with children were experiencing homelessness, all residing in shelters. The majority of these households (76%) are headed by Black females. Another 12 percent of the heads of household in families with children are Latina. A significant portion of these heads of household are young – 27 percent are between 18 and 24 years old.

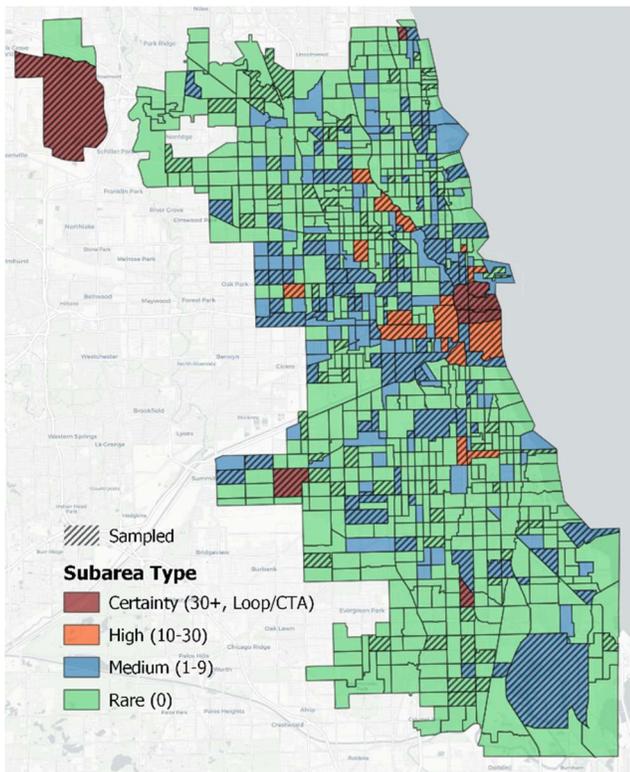
The 2021 PIT Count identified a total of 2,468 homeless people not living in families with children, including members of adult couples and families in which every member is over 18. The racial and ethnic composition of people in these households has remained steady compared to previous years. Almost half (48%) of single people experiencing homelessness, or as a member of an all adult household, were Black males.

The PIT Count is only one measurement used gauge progress in preventing and ending homelessness. It cannot capture the experience of all individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Chicago in a given year. However, along with HMIS data and data collected through the year from service providers and persons with lived experience, it provides critical information in helping the City, the CoC, and many partners make progress on the shared goal of making homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring.

# APPENDIX: UNSHELTERED SAMPLING METHOD

Chicago utilized a sampling approach rather than conducting a complete census of the city. In consultation with academic partners at the University of Illinois Chicago, DFSS used location data from the 2020 PIT unsheltered count to divide the CoC geography into subareas to sample. Following HUD’s guidance, this data was used to categorize Chicago’s 801 Census Tracts into four subarea types based on the density of people experiencing homelessness in 2020: Certainty (30+ people plus the Loop and CTA); High (10-30); Medium (1-9); and Rare (0) (See Figure 25).

**Fig. 25: Unsheltered Sampling Approach**



**Fig. 26: Unsheltered Sampling Results**

Subarea Type	Census Tracts	2020 Count (%)*	Tracts Sampled	Sample Weight	Official Estimate	Range Estimate
Certainty (30+, Loop/CTA)	9	721 (48.2%)	100%	1.000	148	148
High (10-30)	17	301 (20.1%)	100%	1.000	27	62
Medium (1-9)	189	473 (31.6%)	50%	1.989	110	271
Rare (0)	586	0 (0%)	10%	9.932	417	973
<b>Total</b>	<b>801</b>	<b>1,495</b>	<b>22.5%</b>	—	<b>702</b>	<b>1,454</b>

\*this does not include 34 people with no location data, total N=1,529

Depending on the subarea type, a weight was attached to account for the sampling used. The weight for the sampled subareas is the inverse of the probability of being selected for the sample, calculated as the total number of subareas in the sampling category divided by the number selected for the sample.

Following HUD guidance, the approach yielded an **Official Estimate** based on a count conducted by outreach teams of residents who were willing to be surveyed, identified themselves as experiencing homelessness on the night of January 26, 2021, and affirmed that they slept in an unsheltered location on that night.

While this approach increased certainty about a person’s homeless status, it also reduced the number of people who were actually counted because only a fraction of those encountered were willing to complete the survey and provide this information. The survey-based count resulted in a high non-response rate compared to an observation-based estimate in 2020.

When the requirement that only people who completed the survey was relaxed, we also estimated a **Range Estimate** of people who may have been experiencing unsheltered homelessness. This included all people who responded to the survey AND all people who outreach teams engaged but who were not willing to complete a survey (See Figure 26).