

# Executive Summary

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE (IPV), defined as violence or abuse by a current or former intimate partner, increases the risk of homelessness for survivors, particularly those with limited financial resources. To better understand the experiences of survivors of IPV who are currently experiencing homelessness, the UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative analyzed data related to IPV in the California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness (CASPEH)—the largest representative study of homelessness since the mid-1990s. The mixed-methods study includes data about participants' experiences of violence across the lifecourse, in the six months prior to homelessness, and during their current episode of homelessness. We present these findings to advance evidence-based solutions for preventing and responding to homelessness among survivors of IPV. *Key findings from this report include:*

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## INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IS A PRECURSOR TO HOMELESSNESS

Experiencing intimate partner violence places a person at risk of homelessness by disrupting agency, social and economic support, and creating an imminent need to flee housing in search of safety.

■ **Intimate partner violence prior to homelessness is common.** In the six months prior to homelessness, 8% of participants had experienced IPV; 17% of all cisgender women did. Participants described experiencing multiple forms of IPV during this period (including physical, sexual, financial, and emotional violence). Nearly all who reported IPV in this period (94%) experienced physical violence.

■ **Participants impacted by IPV were extremely low income.** Among participants who reported IPV in the six months prior to homelessness, the median monthly household income in that same period was \$1000.

■ **Survivors reported violence or abuse in the household as a reason for leaving their last housing.** Among survivors who experienced IPV in the period prior to homelessness, 40% indicated violence was a reason for leaving their last housing; 20% noted it was their primary reason for leaving.

■ **The need to ensure safety superseded usual protections against homelessness.** Participants reported leaving their homes as a survival strategy, even when they had rental subsidies. Of participants who reported IPV in the period prior to homelessness, one in five leaseholders held a rental subsidy in their last housing, which they left behind to flee IPV.

■ **Survivors faced barriers to seeking help to prevent homelessness.** Barriers included not knowing about specialized domestic violence resources, child care responsibilities, fears that their intimate partner would find out, and pandemic-related constraints (such as increased time at home or closures of physical service locations). Male survivors, LGBTQI+ survivors, and survivors of color discussed barriers, including discrimination and stigma.

■ **Participants believed that modest financial support could have averted their homelessness.** Among participants who reported IPV in the six months prior to homelessness, 73% believed that a shallow monthly subsidy would have staved off homelessness for at least two years; 83% believed a lump-sum payment would have done so. Almost all (92%) believed a housing voucher that limited their household's contribution to rent would have kept them housed for at least two years.

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## EXPERIENCES DURING HOMELESSNESS

Without access to DV services or shelters, IPV can continue or worsen during homelessness. With limited access to DV shelters, many survivors experiencing violence continue to experience IPV while homeless.

■ **Many participants who experienced IPV in the six months prior to homelessness, experienced IPV during homelessness.** Of all participants, 8% reported IPV during the current episode of homelessness; 15% of cisgender women did. Among those who reported IPV in the six months before homelessness, 42% reported IPV during the current episode.

■ **Homelessness leaves survivors vulnerable to additional violence.** Participants described how, to protect themselves from future abuse, they needed to change locations frequently and be vigilant of their surroundings.

■ **Survivors spent most of their time during homelessness unsheltered; this increased their vulnerability to future violence.** Of participants who reported IPV prior to homelessness and indicated violence was a reason they lost their housing,

60% spent most of their nights unsheltered; 81% of those who experienced IPV during the current episode spent most of their nights unsheltered.

■ **Few survivors accessed DV shelters during homelessness; those who stayed in shelters used the mainstream homeless shelter system more than DV shelters.** Among participants who reported IPV prior to homelessness and indicated violence as a reason for losing their housing, 5% spent most of their nights in a DV shelter; 15% spent at least one night in a DV shelter. Those who reported IPV during the current episode of homelessness were less likely to report having stayed in DV shelters: 2% spent most nights in a DV shelter; 5% spent at least one night in a DV shelter.

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## BARRIERS TO EXITING HOMELESSNESS

Survivors faced many obstacles to regaining housing.

■ **High housing costs impede survivors' efforts to return to housing.** Nearly all survivors (95%) indicated that high housing costs were a barrier to returning to permanent housing.

■ **Survivors discussed other barriers, including lack of support finding housing, lack of housing-relevant documents, having poor credit and eviction history.**

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## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, we offer policy recommendations in four domains:

- **Increase access to affordable, permanent housing options for survivors**
- **Promote policies and programs that center violence and homelessness prevention**
- **Increase support for survivors currently experiencing homelessness**
- **Promote equity in responses to intimate partner violence**