

Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative



University of California
San Francisco

Black Californians' Experiences of Homelessness: Findings from CASPEH

2/21/2024



Toward Equity

Understanding Black Californians' Experiences of Homelessness

Findings from the California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness



February 2024

Benioff Homelessness
and Housing Initiative

UCSF

University of California
San Francisco

Save to Phone | Hold Finger on QR Code



Webinar Agenda

1. Opening Remarks
2. Findings & Policy Recommendations
3. Audience Q&A

Content Warning

- This presentation contains discussion of the following:
 - Physical and sexual violence
 - Suicide
 - Discrimination

Panelists



Joy Moses, JD
she/her
Vice President of
Research & Evidence,
National Alliance to End
Homelessness



Kara Young Ponder, PhD
she/her
*Director of Community
Engagement and Racial
Justice, BHHI*



**Robynne Rose-
Haymer, MEd**
she/her
*CASPEH Lived
Expertise Advisory
Board Member*



Sage Johnson
she/her
*CASPEH Lived
Expertise Advisory
Board Member*

Welcome & Opening Remarks

Overview of the Study



Toward a New Understanding

The California Statewide Study
of People Experiencing Homelessness

June 2023

Benioff Homelessness
and Housing Initiative

UCSF

University of California
San Francisco



Save to Phone | Hold Finger on QR Code

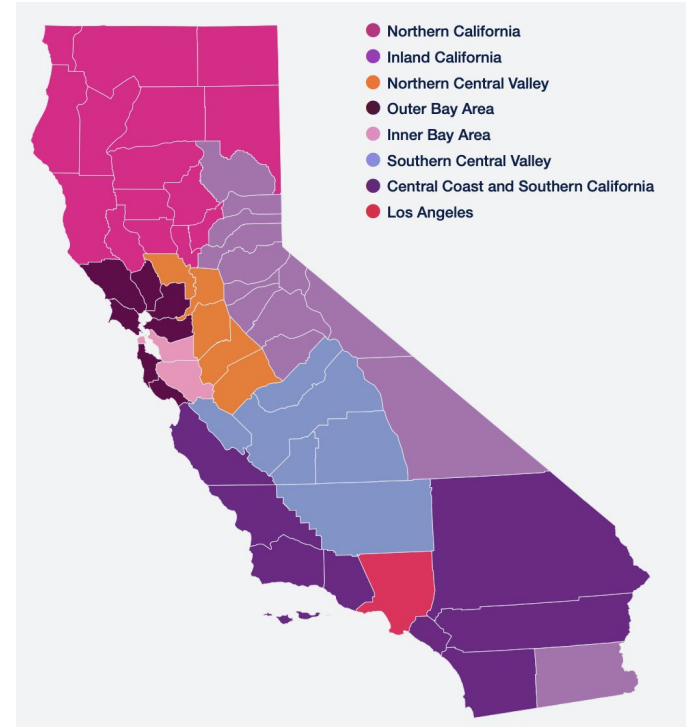


About the CASPEH

- Largest representative study of homelessness in US since 1990s
- Conducted at the request of the California Health and Human Services Agency to answer critical questions about homelessness facing CA policymakers
- Funded by UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative, Blue Shield of California Foundation, California Health Care Foundation
- *Toward Equity: Understanding Black Californians Experiences of Homelessness* report funded with additional funding from CHCF

Study Methods

- **8 counties** representing 8 regions (exact counties confidential)
- Target population: **Adults 18+** experiencing homelessness
- Mixed Methods
 - **3,200 questionnaires**
 - **365 paired in-depth interviews**
- English and Spanish (and interpreters)
- Community engaged practices (3 community advisory boards)



Black Californians Report Details

- Qualitative substudy focused on Black Californians experiences of homelessness (N=50)
- Interview guide focused on:
 - *Participants' experiences of anti-Black racism*
 - *How anti-Black racism impacted their journey into homelessness and access to housing and other services*
 - *What strategies they deployed to navigate homelessness and housing*
- All interviews conducted by Black interviewers
- Other studies included Black participants (N=122)

Historic Context: *Anti-Black Racism*

Historic Context: Anti-Black Racism

Anti-Black racism is a term used to describe a set of beliefs, ideologies, and practices (both individual and institutional) based on the idea that those with Black skin are inherently inferior to those with white or brown skin. It is a system held in place by anti-Black policies, institutions, and ideologies that systematically marginalizes Black people.

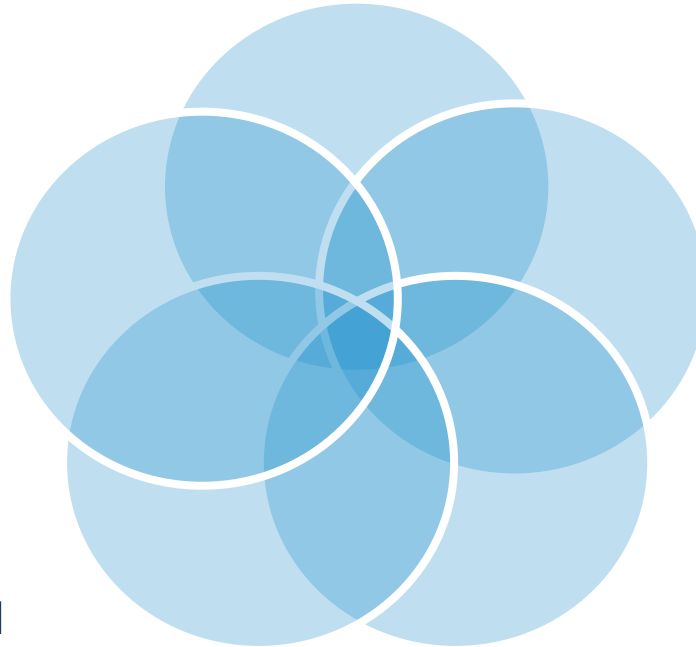
Historic Context

The overrepresentation of Black communities in the homeless population arises from 400 years of anti-black racism entrenched in the structures, institutions, ideologies, and social norms of American life, starting with slavery.

Historic Context

Slavery as a state of
homelessness

Connection between
the education, carceral,
and employment
systems with
homelessness



Jim Crow

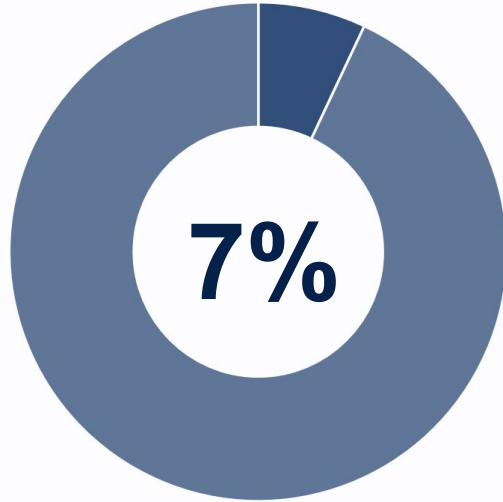
Racial wealth and
homeownership gaps

Redlining

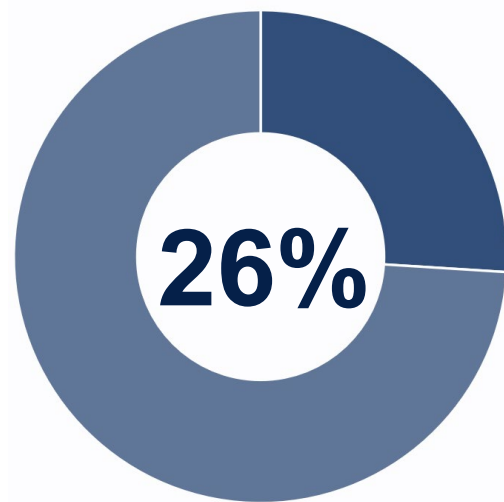
Who In the Black Community Experiences Homelessness



Black Californians are disproportionately represented in the state's population of people experiencing homelessness



of California's total population



of Californians experiencing homelessness



- **75%** of Black participants identified as cis-gender men
- **64%** of white participants and **68%** of those from other racial groups identified as cis-gender men



© Sam Comen

- **90%** Black single adults (age 25+ without a minor child)
- **6%** Black adults in families (currently living with minor child)
 - however, **27%** of single adults and TAY had minor children not living with them
- **4%** Black transition aged young adults (TAY) (18-24 without minor child)

Median age of Black Californians experiencing homelessness: 50

- **51%** of single adults were 50+
- **36%** of this group first became homeless at 50 or older



History of homelessness among Black Californians

71%

of Black Californians were not in their first episode

- Black single adults (**72%**) and TAY (**78%**) were more likely to report recurrent episodes of homelessness than Black adults in families (**59%**)

History of homelessness among Black Californians

32%

of Black Californians experienced chronic homelessness

Chronic homelessness is defined as both

1. Experiencing homelessness for at least 12 months or having four or more episodes of homelessness in the prior three years that together total more than 12 months and
2. Having a disabling condition

Higher prevalence of severe lifetime mental health symptoms among Black Californians

37%

Indicated that they had ever attempted suicide

32%

Reported that they had been hospitalized for a mental health condition in their lifetime

31%

Reported hallucinations in their lifetime

High rates of lifetime incarceration

80%

of Black participants had been incarcerated in jail or prison in their lifetime

43%

of Black participants reported a prison stay in their lifetime

- **31%** of white and **37%** of those from other races reported a prison stay

Lower lifetime prevalence of regular substance use

- **58%** of Black Californians reported using illicit drugs regularly at some point in their lifetime
- **74%** of white and **65%** of those from other races reported using illicit drugs regularly at some point in their lifetime
- **58%** of Black Californians reported heavy episodic alcohol use at some point in their lifetime

Pathways to Homelessness



Where were
Black Californians
prior to
homelessness?

46%

Non-leaseholding arrangements

33%

Leaseholding arrangements

22%

Institutional settings (medical facility,
group home, jail or prison)

Income and housing costs prior to homelessness among Black Californians

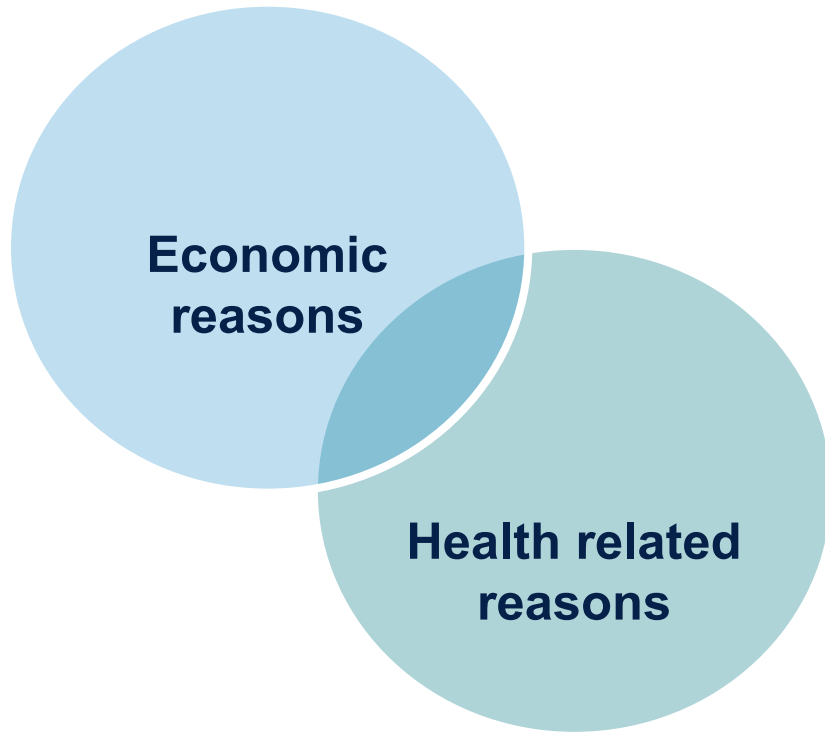
- All:
 - Median monthly household income: **\$1000**
- Non-leaseholders:
 - Median monthly household income: **\$960**
 - Median monthly housing costs (among those who paid rent): **\$400**
- Leaseholders:
 - Median monthly household income: **\$1200**
 - Median monthly housing costs: **\$675**

Pathways to Homelessness



**Economic
reasons**

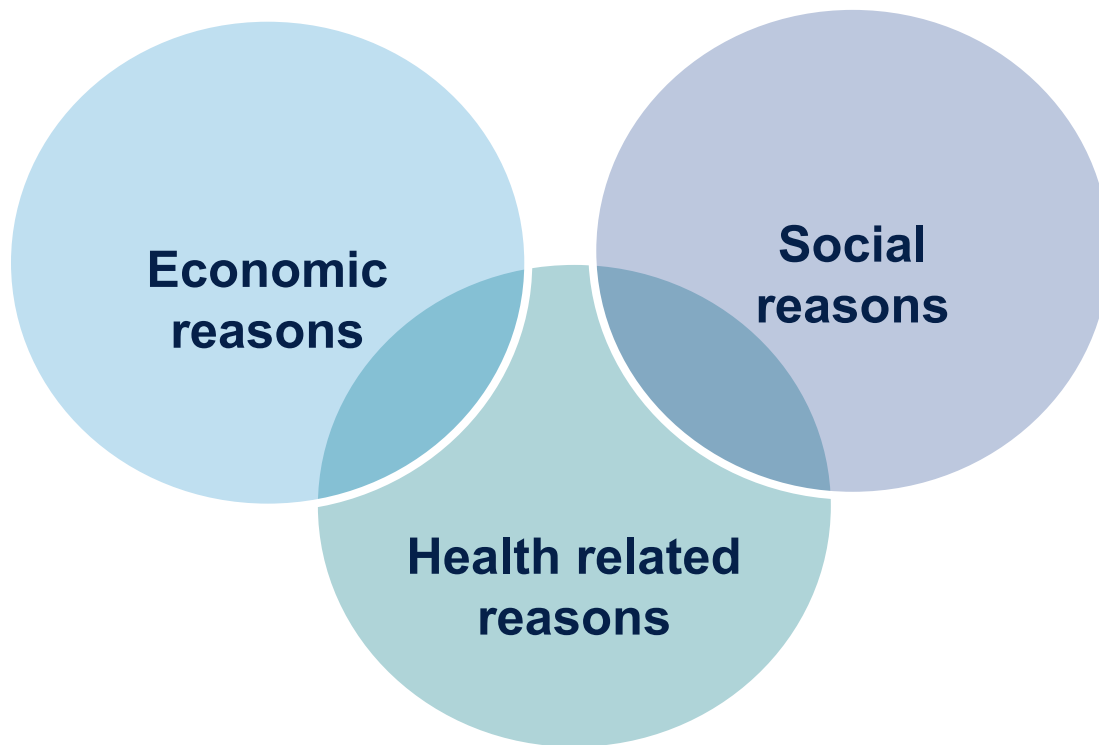
Pathways to Homelessness



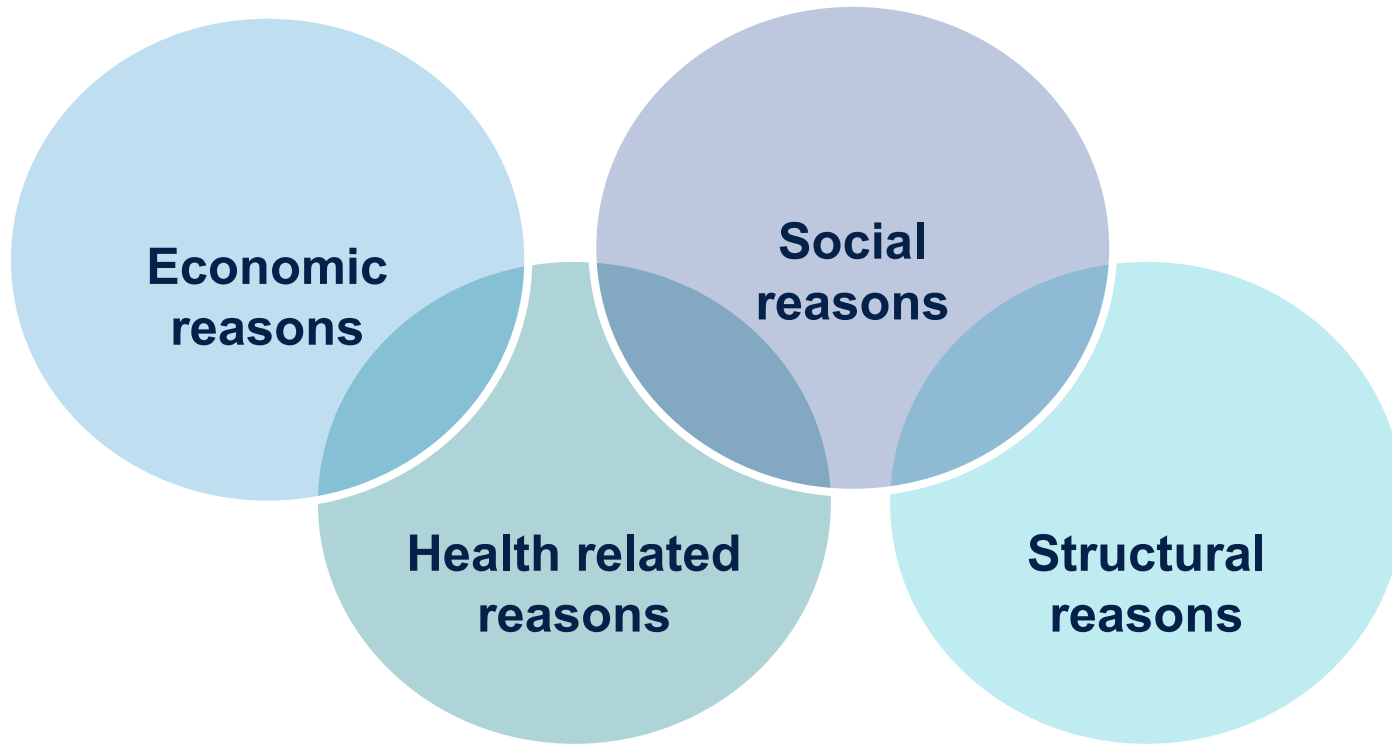


“That's kind of making it bad for me because I really can't do too much. They have me as disabled because of my back and my leg, so I really can't do all the things I used to do... *I got hurt at work just before COVID*. And when COVID came, it just messed up everything, so. *That's how I became homeless.*”

Pathways to Homelessness



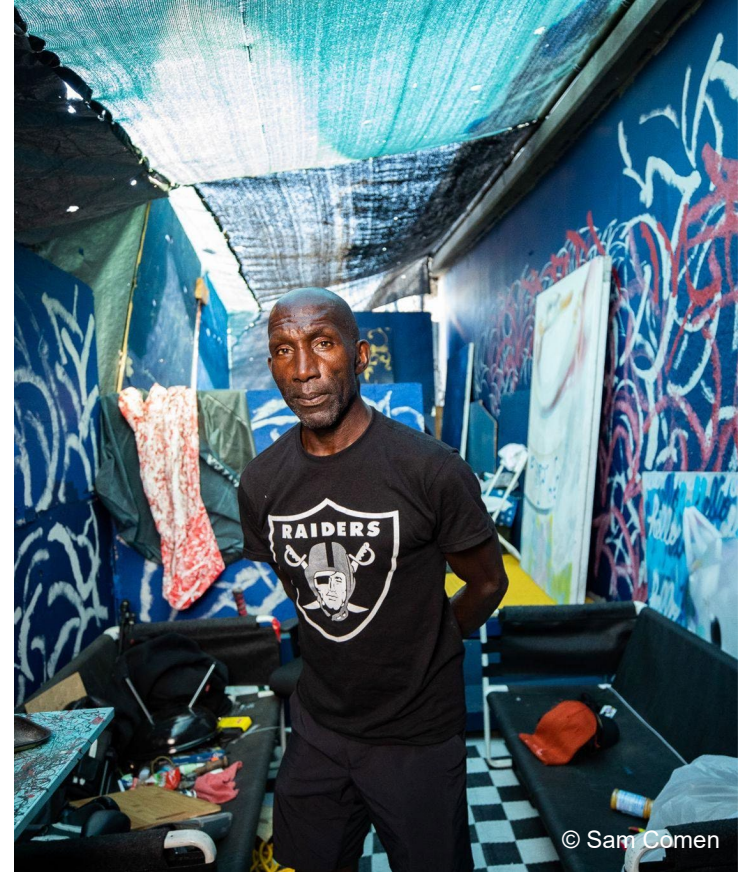
Pathways to Homelessness





“Yeah, one of the roommates was very racist. And he had been basically attacking me and messing with me. And they gave him permission to do it. Destroyed my property and all kinds of stuff. They just made it very, very hard for me to stay.”

Experiences During Homelessness



Where did Black Californians sleep?

Places slept most often in the past 6 months

59% outdoors

15% in vehicles

17% in shelters

Photo: Barbara Ries



Health and healthcare utilization among Black Californians

- More likely to report a chronic medical condition
 - **67%** Black
 - **58%** white
 - **58%** Non-Black & non-white



“Sometimes I feel as though I have to beg for [the doctor] to take care of me. You know, all I’m looking for is my painkillers and they keep coming at me with this, ‘You’re going to overdose,’ and I keep telling them, ‘I’m not in it for the high.’ I don’t even know what the high feels [like]. I know what the pain feel like without it so I keep trying to tell them, ‘I’ll sign whatever you need me to sign,.’ White people walk out there with a [bag] full of [pills] and there’s no problem for them, but I got to fight tooth and nail for some [thing] I really need.”

Health and healthcare utilization among Black Californians

- More likely to have been hospitalized overnight in the past 6 months
 - **28%** Black
 - **16%** white

High rates of current mental health symptoms among Black Californians

- Depression or anxiety: **51%**
- Trouble remembering: **38%**
- Hallucinations:
 - **18%** Black
 - **8%** white
 - **11%** Non-Black & non-white



“I cry because I’ve been so discouraged that I don't think I’m worth living. I just go to the bridge because that's the way that I will kill myself. Free housing creates a huge opportunity to work towards your image and your personal development. You don't have to have three jobs to pay rent. You don't have to have your fear, and your worries. That’s the basic foundation to just make you a man, and give you time to land a good job that’s going to provide good housing.”

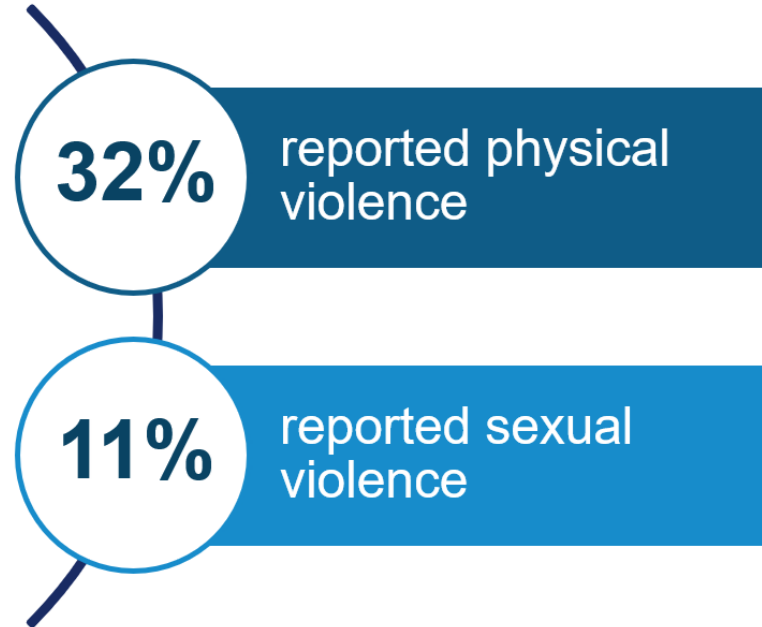
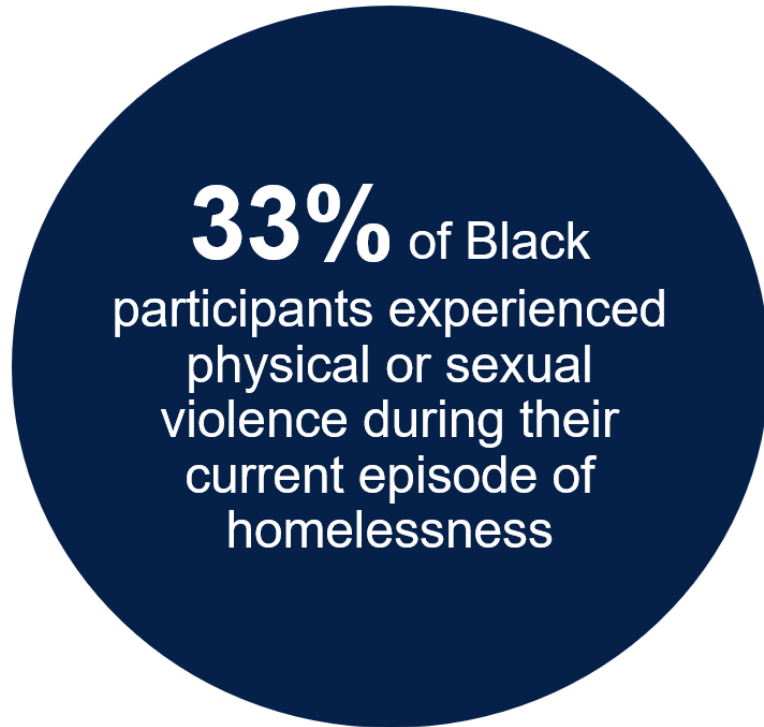
Lower rates of current substance use among Black Californians

- **38%** of Black participants reported either current, regular illicit drug use or heavy episodic alcohol use
 - **47%** of white and **44%** of those from other races did so

Jail stays during current episode among Black Californians

- Over a quarter (**28%**) of Black Californians experienced one or more short-term jail stay during the current episode of homelessness.
- Many discussed being unfairly targeted by law enforcement because of their homelessness.
- Other races reported similar proportions of short-term jail stays during the current episode of homelessness.

Homelessness leaves individuals at risk for experiencing violence



Discrimination was common

78% of Black Californians reported experiencing discrimination in their daily lives.



“It's no different than when I'm not homeless, other than the fact that *being homeless and Black is worse than just being homeless*, I think. But it's not any discrimination that I haven't dealt with every day. You know, just, if I go into a restaurant Black, they might look at me like I'm not going to pay, but they won't make me pay for my food before they give it to me. Being homeless, they make you pay for your food before they serve it, which is like, embarrassing. When you're the only people in there that's paying for your food before they bring.”

Barriers and Facilitators of Returns to Housing



Barriers to Exiting Homelessness for Black Californians



Lengthy waitlists delayed exits from homelessness

- **59%** of Black Californians noted that these long waitlists were a barrier keeping them homeless
 - **48%** of white and **49%** of those from other racial groups did



“...I got money put away to move in somewhere. But it’s got to be affordable... And we went there. And they said it takes anywhere from one year to two years.”

Discrimination

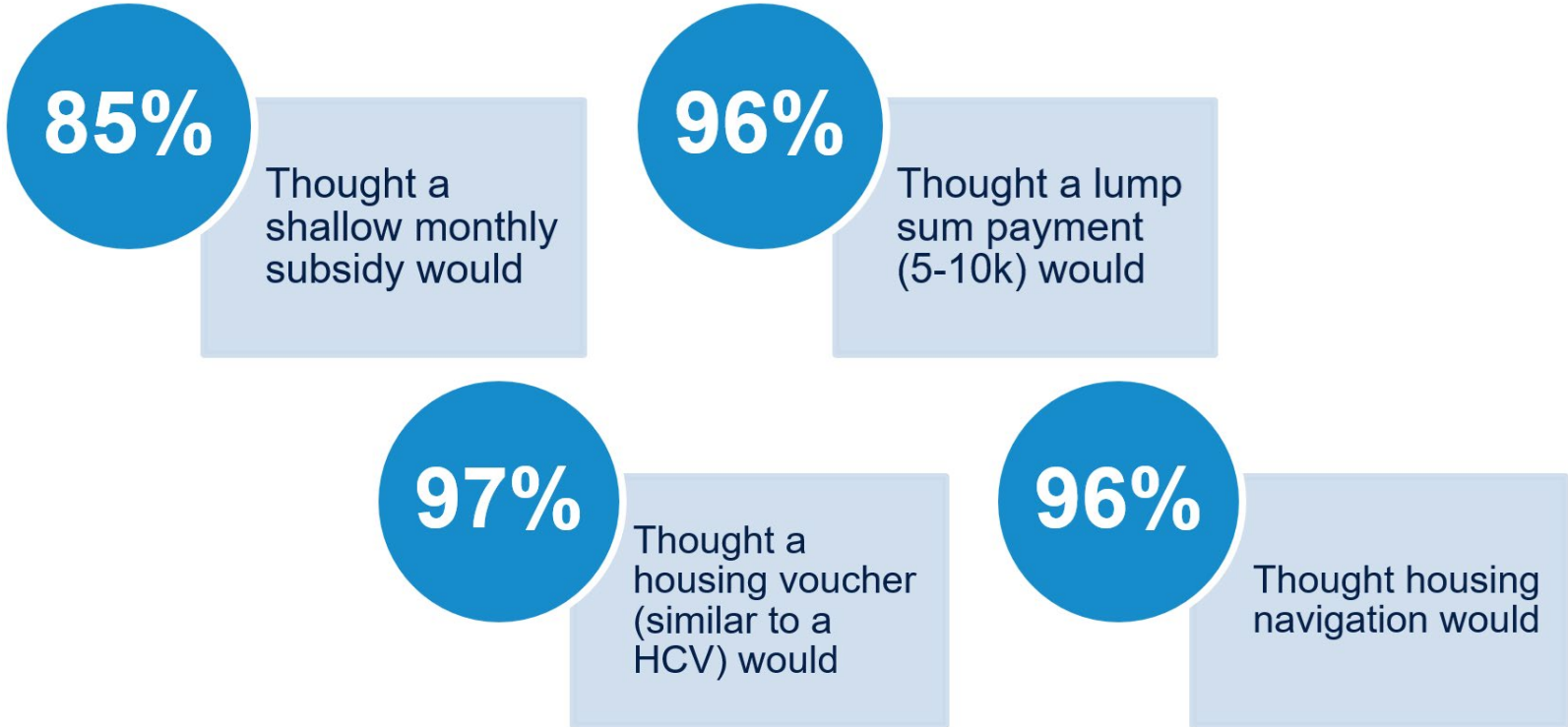


31% of white Californians reported this



“If I’m going to go into what I consider to be a decent neighborhood... Sometimes the person will come out to show you the place and they’ve already got me figured out. They’ve got me pegged. I’m Black. They say, ‘What type of work do you do?’ Well, I was homeless. I’m heavily scrutinized like that. Somehow or another, it’s like we got homeless on our foreheads or something, invisible.”

Hypothetical interventions to support returns to housing for Black Californians



Policy Recommendations

Policy Recommendation Areas

- 1. Address economic marginalization of Black Americans**
- 2. Increase access to affordable housing options**
- 3. Strengthen homelessness prevention efforts**
- 4. Address the the criminal justice system to homelessness cycle**
- 5. Ensure equity is centered in homelessness response systems**
- 6. Support equitable health outcomes**

Address economic marginalization of Black Americans

- Provide direct cash assistance through reparations and guaranteed income
- Increase employment support
- Support efforts to raise the minimum wage

Increase access to affordable housing options

- Bolster efforts to minimize discrimination in the housing market
- Invest in housing navigation
- Incentivize affordable housing production and preservation
- Increase availability of rental subsidies
- Increase payment standard of federal rental assistance

Strengthen homelessness prevention efforts

- Expand and enforce eviction prevention efforts
- Engage in affirmative outreach to Black communities
- Prevent recurrence of homelessness for Black Californians through targeted prevention and housing retention efforts

Address the criminal justice system to homelessness cycle

- Strengthen re-entry supports for people exiting carceral settings
- Adopt approaches to addressing unsheltered homelessness that minimize law enforcement involvement and prioritize connections to permanent housing
- Lower housing barriers for those with criminal justice records
- Expand "clean slate" approaches to carceral records
- Increase embedded support in transitional housing and ensure connections to permanent housing

Support equitable health outcomes

- Address biases in healthcare systems through evidence-based training for healthcare workers
- Increase availability of racially concordant physical and mental health services
- Increase use of peer health promotion models
- Increase availability of Permanent Supportive Housing and voluntarily services
- Strengthen connections between housing and healthcare systems

Ensure equity is centered in homelessness response systems

- Improve assessment tools to address racial disparities in Coordinated Entry Systems (CES)
- Ensure that CES recognizes the needs of parents separated from their children due to homelessness
- Invest in Black leadership in homeless services systems
- Provide training for staff at all levels of homeless service system delivery continuum
- Create pathways for meaningful engagement with Black Americans with lived experience of homelessness



@UCSFBHHI



homelessness@ucsf.edu

Benioff Homelessness
and Housing Initiative



University of California
San Francisco

CASPEH Black
Californians' Report



homelessness.ucsf.edu/CASPEH

