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**UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative Releases Findings
on Black Californians' Experiences of Homelessness**

SAN FRANCISCO (February 21, 2024) – The University of California, San Francisco [Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative](#) (BHHI) today released a special report on Black Californians' experiences of homelessness. The analysis is based on survey data and in-depth interviews from the [California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness](#) (CASPEH), the largest representative study of homelessness in the United States since the mid-1990s.

[Toward Equity: Understanding Black Californians' Experiences of Homelessness](#) explores who in the Black community experiences homelessness, how they lost their housing, their experiences while homeless, and the barriers they face to regaining housing. The goal of the report is to inform evidence-based solutions for preventing and ending homelessness for Black Californians.

Black Californians are significantly overrepresented in the state's homeless population—while 7% of California's population identifies as Black, they represent over 26% of people experiencing homelessness in the state.

“The overrepresentation of Black Californians' experiencing homelessness is deep seated. It arises from centuries of anti-Black racism, embedded in policies and practices,” **said Kara Young Ponder, BHHI Director of Community Engagement and Racial Justice and lead author of the report.** “Ending homelessness among Black Californians will require a dramatic increase in affordable housing, economic support to help them afford this housing, and dedicated efforts to navigate a challenging housing market and to enforce anti-discrimination laws.”

Consistent with the state's overall homeless population, Black Californians are aging, with 51% older than 50. While 79% entered homelessness from housing, nearly half (46%) entered without the legal protections of a lease. Furthermore, they had extremely low incomes—a median household income of \$1,200 per month for those with leases and \$960 for those without leases in a state where the median monthly rent for a one-bedroom is \$1,600.

High housing costs are the main barrier for Black Californians returning to housing and discrimination plays an outsized role, with 51% indicating it impeded their search for housing, compared to 31% of white Californians experiencing homelessness.

“The situation for unhoused Black Californians is dire, but it is not insurmountable,” said **Tiana Moore, BHHI Policy Director and report co-author**. “In the long term, we must recognize and reduce the many factors that impede their search for a permanent home. In the short term, even modest financial support could help stave off their homelessness.”

The report further found that compared to white and other racial groups, Black Californians experiencing homelessness are:

- More likely to have had multiple episodes of homelessness (71% versus 62% of white and 54% of those from other races).
- More likely to be male (75% versus 64% of white Californians and 68% of those from other racial groups).
- More likely to have entered homelessness from a prison or an extended jail stay (18% versus 10% of white Californians and 15% of those from other racial groups).
- More likely to experience a hospitalization for a physical health concern in the prior six months than white Californians: 28% versus 16%.
- Less likely to have used illicit drugs at some point in their lifetime (58% versus 74% of white and 65% of those from other races). Yet, they have a higher prevalence of hallucinations, suicide attempts, and mental health hospitalizations.

Despite these challenges, many participants were optimistic that modest financial interventions and housing navigation could support their exit from homelessness: 85% thought a shallow monthly subsidy would help them return to housing, 96% thought a lump sum payment would, 97% thought a housing voucher (similar to a Housing Choice Voucher) would, and 96% thought housing navigation would.

Based on the report findings, **BHHI endorses policy recommendations in six key areas**: address economic marginalization, increase access to affordable housing options, strengthen homelessness prevention efforts, address the criminal justice system to homelessness cycle, support equitable health outcomes, and ensure equity is centered in homelessness response systems.

[*Toward Equity: Understanding Black Californians’ Experiences of Homelessness*](#) is the second in a series of deep dives into CASPEH data released by BHHI. Additional reports include [*Intimate Partner Violence*](#), and the forthcoming *Aging and Homelessness, Latino/x Experiences of Homelessness, and Behavioral Health and Homelessness*.

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Media Contact: To schedule an interview with Dr. Ponder or Dr. Moore, please contact Beth Weaver at BHHImedia@ucsf.edu or 301-814-4088.

About UCSF BHHI

The [UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative](#) provides accurate, timely policy-oriented research about homelessness for local, state, and national policymakers and practitioners. Funded by a generous gift from Marc and Lynne Benioff and based at the UCSF Center for Vulnerable Populations, UCSF BHHI is a trusted source for evidence-based practice, policy, and scalable solutions—turning evidence into action to prevent and end homelessness.