

UCSF BHHI Brief Spotlights the Experiences of Californians in Unsheltered Settings

Provides tools for policymakers and practitioners to connect encampment residents to housing.

SAN FRANCISCO (September 12, 2024) – The University of California, San Francisco [Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative](#) (BHHI) today released a topic brief that **sheds new light on the 78% of all Californians experiencing homelessness who live in unsheltered settings** (i.e. outdoors, in a vehicle, in a place not meant for human habitation). It **provides policy recommendations** for reducing unsheltered homelessness through a combination of prevention, shelter, and permanent housing.

“Unsheltered homelessness is associated with significant health and safety risks, including limited access to hygiene facilities and healthcare, heightened exposure to certain infectious diseases, weather elements, and violence,” said Margot Kushel, MD, BHHI Director. “We need to bring people inside using a coordinated, multi-system strategy – not through sweeps.”

To help jurisdictions address unsheltered homelessness, BHHI also **released tools to support evidence-based encampment resolution**. These tools are designed to help communities balance competing issues and priorities: urgently responding to encampments and all forms of homelessness, the shortage of housing and shelter resources, and the health and safety issues that encampments can represent.

“Using an encampment resolution approach that prioritizes housing and shelter placements over displacement actions, in connection with broader system reforms, is how communities can chart a path forward while addressing the complexity of these interrelated concerns,” said Marc Dones, BHHI Policy Director. “We hope these tools will serve as a valuable resource to all those involved in helping people transition to permanent housing.”

The three companion documents – *Unsheltered Homelessness: Findings from the California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness*, the *Encampment Prioritization Tool*, and the *Encampment Resolution Guide* – are available [here](#).

The unsheltered homelessness topic brief is based on survey data and in-depth interviews from the 2023 [California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness](#) (CASPEH), the largest representative study of homelessness in the United States since the mid-1990s. It is part of a series of reports based on this data, including the [comprehensive study](#), reports on [intimate partner violence and homelessness](#), [racial equity and Black people experiencing homelessness](#), and [older adults experiencing homelessness](#), and a topic brief on [pregnancy and homelessness](#). BHHI is planning to release additional reports, including Behavioral Health and Homelessness, and Latino/x Experiences of Homelessness, among others.

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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.