



American Indian and Alaska Native Homelessness

Background

Los Angeles County has a larger American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) population than any other county in the United States (165,513¹). The county also sits on the traditional homeland of three AIAN tribes: Fernandeno Tataviam, Tongva, and Chumash². However, the AIAN community is often underrepresented in sample data. Further, identity is often misclassified. For example, the 2019 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count found that approximately 1,800 people experiencing homelessness identify as AIAN (of both Hispanic and Non-Hispanic origin) – meaning that just over 1% of AIAN people in the county are experiencing homelessness. However, in the Healthy LA Natives study³, a 2016 survey of AIAN people in Los Angeles County, 14% of respondents reported experiencing homelessness. While the two data sources have different sample sizes and methodologies, the discrepancy in results warrants an examination of the underrepresentation of the AIAN population across sources for data available in Los Angeles County. Historical underrepresentation and misclassification are problematic in that it ignores the unique challenges of this population and may divert resources and services that are required to address the specific needs of the population. This brief builds off of Los Angeles County’s Community Forum on Native American Homelessness report and analyzes data specific to the AIAN population experiencing homelessness.

Key Takeaways:

- American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) people experiencing homelessness are likely under-identified in homelessness counts.
- Over 90% of AIAN people experiencing homelessness are unsheltered. Of this population, both men and LGBTQ individuals are overrepresented compared to the general population experiencing homelessness.
- Veterans are overrepresented in the AIAN unsheltered population, but report receiving Veteran’s Administration benefits less often than non-AIAN veterans experiencing homelessness.
- AIAN people experiencing homelessness disproportionately report “eviction or foreclosure” as a reason for being homeless compared to the general population.

¹ 2018 5-Year ACS Estimates Table B02010 (American Indian and Alaska Native Alone or in Combination With One or More Races)

² *As a result of Termination policies in the 1950s and 1960s which eliminated the protected status of many Native American trust lands in an effort to assimilate Native Americans into “mainstream” American society, none of these tribes are federally recognized nor have a land base. This also forced thousands of Native Americans to lose Federal recognition, which may contribute to underrepresentation of the total population today.*

³ County of Los Angeles Public Health (2018). Healthy LA Natives Study. <https://lanaic.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Healthy-LA-Native-Infographic.pdf>



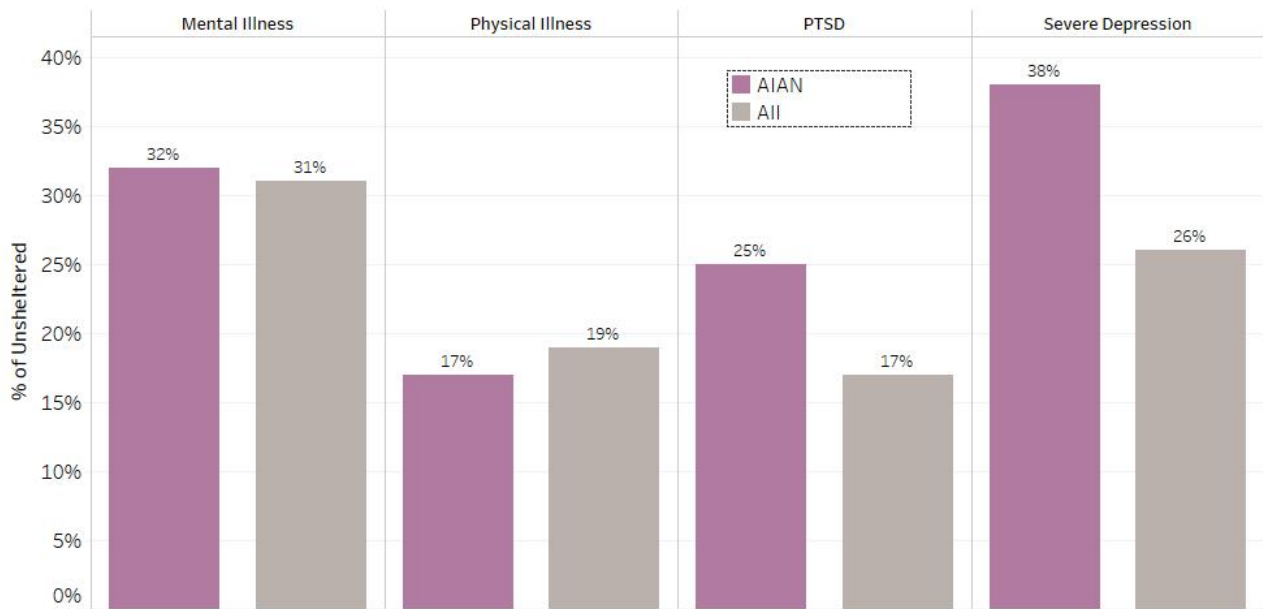
64% of unsheltered AIAN adults reported living on the street with no form of shelter while 23% reported living in tents or homeless encampments. Fewer AIAN adults (7%) reported living in a vehicle than the general population experiencing homelessness (12%).

AIAN were also classified as experiencing chronic homelessness⁹ at higher rates than the general population. Approximately 27% of sheltered AIAN adults were considered chronically homeless compared to 22% of all sheltered adults. Similarly, 50% of unsheltered AIAN adults were chronically homeless compared to 33% of all unsheltered adults.

Health Conditions & Access to Medical Care

Living on the streets presents a particular set of challenges for those with pre-existing medical diagnosis and disabilities. AIAN unsheltered adults reported higher rates of PTSD and severe depression than the general unsheltered population, while the prevalence of other types of physical and mental illness were roughly on par with the general population. Health conditions for AIAN unsheltered adults and all unsheltered adults are shown in Figure 3 below. Additionally, AIAN sheltered and unsheltered adults reported higher rates of HIV/AIDS (4%) than the general population experiencing homelessness (2%).

Figure 4: Health Conditions, AIAN & All Unsheltered People



⁹ Chronic homelessness describes people who have experienced homelessness for at least a year — or more than four times in the past three years — while struggling with a disabling condition such as a serious mental illness, substance use disorder, or physical disability.

