



# Characteristics and Trends among Minnesota's Homeless Population

## *Initial Findings from Face-to-face Interviews Conducted in 2018*

On October 25, 2018, Wilder Research and its partners conducted 4,279 face-to-face interviews with adults and unaccompanied youth in emergency shelters, domestic violence shelters, transitional housing, and in non-shelter locations such as encampments, hot-meal programs, and other drop-in service sites. This fact sheet is the first in a series of reports that highlight the characteristics of those experiencing homelessness on that day, as well as important trends that Wilder Research has seen over the course of conducting the Minnesota Homeless Study.

Initial findings show that:

- ▶ Availability of **affordable housing** is still a critical issue.
- ▶ More of the homeless population is staying **outside of a formal shelter setting**.
- ▶ African Americans, American Indians, and youth who identify as LGBTQ are particularly **over-represented** among the homeless population.
- ▶ Nearly one-third of homeless adults are **employed**, the same as in the last study.
- ▶ The majority of the homeless population has a **chronic mental or physical health condition**.
- ▶ Homelessness is often preceded by **adverse childhood experiences**.
- ▶ **Violence and abuse** often continue past childhood, especially among women experiencing homelessness.



### Counts report

On October 25, 2018, Wilder Research counted **10,233** people experiencing homelessness in Minnesota. Details about this count can be found in our [Single Night Count of People Experiencing Homelessness](#) fact sheet, released March 2019.

Findings showed the overall number of:

- ▶ People experiencing homelessness is **up 10% from 2015**.
- ▶ Homeless children and youth age 24 and younger are **similar to levels counted in 2015**; together, they represent nearly half of the homeless population (46%).
- ▶ Families experiencing homelessness **decreased by 5%**.
- ▶ Homeless adults **increased** from 2015, particularly among those 55 and older (up 25%).
- ▶ People not in a formal shelter (outside or temporarily doubled up) **increased** considerably since 2015 (up 62%).

## ► Availability of affordable housing is still a critical issue

2018 interview data show that the most common reasons adults (age 18 or older) left their last housing were because they were evicted (39%), they could not afford their housing (38%), or they lost their job or had their hours cut (31%). Over half (56%) of those experiencing homelessness said they had difficulty finding housing because there was nothing they could afford. [Minnesota Housing Partnership's State of the State's Housing 2019 report](#) illustrates the gap between income and housing costs in Minnesota. According to this report, between 2000 and 2017, median rent increased by 13% to \$906 per month and median home values increased by 15% to \$199,700.

In the 2018 Minnesota Homeless Study, adults reported a median income of \$550 during the month of the study (\$600 in the Twin Cities metro area and \$500 in greater Minnesota). Sixty-two percent of people experiencing homelessness said they would need only an efficiency or one bedroom apartment; however, 14% would need three or more bedrooms due to their larger family sizes.

Every three years, Wilder Research conducts a one-day statewide study to better understand the prevalence of homelessness in Minnesota, as well as the circumstances of those experiencing homelessness. The study took place on October 25, 2018, and included two components that captured information on that date:

- 1) **Face-to-face interviews** with people throughout the state who meet a [federal definition of homelessness](#).
- 2) **A count** of people experiencing homelessness. Because point-in-time counts and surveys can never completely include all people experiencing homelessness, especially those not using shelters, the numbers represented in the count should be considered a minimum.



## ► More of the homeless population is staying outside of a formal shelter setting

One of the primary findings from the [Single Night Count](#) report released in March 2019 was that the number of people *not* in a formal shelter (i.e., outside or temporarily doubled up) increased considerably from the 2015 study. Based on our research, as well as anecdotal evidence from stakeholders, we know that people experiencing homelessness are often forced to find different living arrangements from night to night.

2018 interview data show that 27% of adults experiencing homelessness spent more than a week out of the past month staying outside (compared to 18% in 2015). In addition, 17% spent more than a week doubled up (16% in 2015). In 2018, 22% of youth (age 24 and younger) spent more than a week outside and 38% spent more than a week doubled up. Study results show that capacity, in both shelter and subsidized housing availability, does not meet the need.

### Among all homeless adults interviewed. . .



**32%** have been **turned away from a shelter** in the last 3 months due to lack of space



**50%** are on a subsidized housing **waiting list**



for those on a waiting list, **12 months** is the average time they have been waiting



According to the **counts data**, there was a 62% increase in the number of **people who were not in a formal shelter**. This may have been due to a combination of factors including:

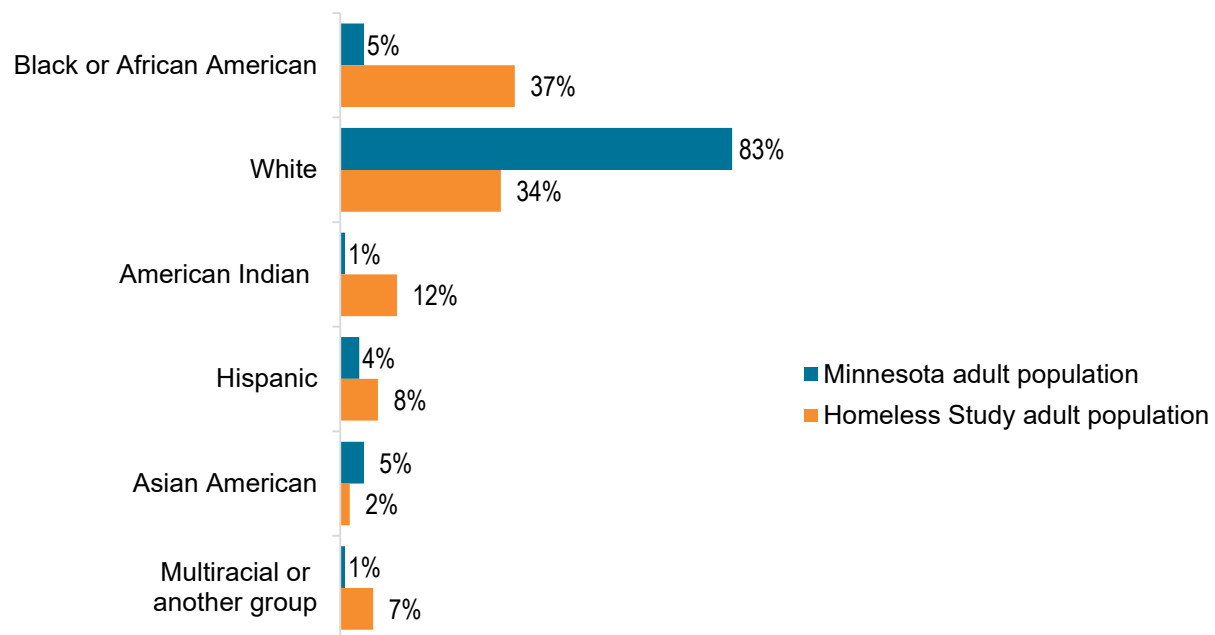
- Growth and increased visibility of encampments
- Limited availability of shelter space
- Increased use of trains and buses as a place to sleep
- Year-to-year variations in ability to locate and interview people
- An increase in the amount of payment to respondents for the time they take to participate in the interview

## ► African Americans, American Indians, and youth who identify as LGBTQ are particularly over-represented among the homeless population

Generational impacts of discriminatory housing policies and other systemic inequities have contributed to the overrepresentation of people of color in the homeless population. Those experiencing homelessness in 2018 were most likely to identify as black or African American (37%) or white (34%). However, relative to proportions statewide, people identifying as black or African American or American Indian are notably overrepresented in the homeless population. This disproportionality extends to homeless youth (age 24 and younger), where 35% of those interviewed identified as black or African American (compared to 9% of the Minnesota population) and 13% identified as American Indian (compared to 1% of the Minnesota population).

The percentage of people identifying as American Indian is an undercount, as it reflects only the data from the Minnesota Homeless Study; it does not include interview data from the companion study done on American Indian Reservations. Once these results are published, the percentages will be updated.

### RACE OF HOMELESS ADULTS (18 AND OLDER), COMPARED TO REPRESENTATION IN MINNESOTA POPULATION



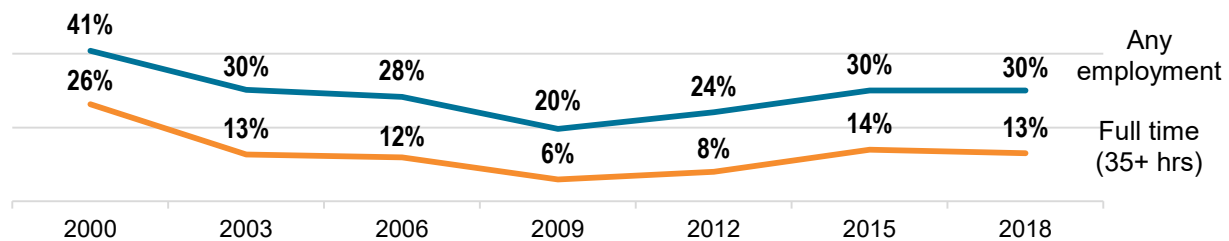
Source. Vintage 2017 Population Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau.

Discrimination is also associated with the overrepresentation of those who identify as LGBTQ in the homeless population. Twenty-two percent of youth (age 24 and younger) and 10% of adults (18 and older) experiencing homelessness identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning (LGBTQ).

## ► Nearly one-third of homeless adults are employed, the same as in the last study

In the 2018 study, 30% of homeless adults reported having some type of employment; 13% were employed full time. Since 2000, employment numbers in the Minnesota Homeless Study have dropped, reaching a low point toward the end of the Great Recession. Employment numbers increased to pre-Recession levels in 2015 and remained steady in 2018. Youth are slightly more likely to be employed, but have the same full-time employment rates as adults (39% any employment, 13% full-time employment).

### EMPLOYMENT AMONG HOMELESS ADULTS (18 AND OLDER), BY STUDY YEAR



## ► The majority of the homeless population has a chronic mental or physical health condition

The majority of those experiencing homelessness have a serious mental illness (adults: 64%, youth: 64%; see table note “a”) and over half of adults (age 18 and older) have a physical health condition (57%; see table note “b”). The incidence of chronic mental illness and physical health conditions has increased within the homeless population since 2000. In addition, nearly 6 in 10 (58%) adults have a physical, mental, cognitive, or other health condition that limits the work they can do or their daily activities.

### CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS AMONG THE HOMELESS POPULATION, BY STUDY YEAR

Adults 18 and older	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012	2015	2018
At least one chronic health condition	63%	69%	72%	74%	76%	77%	77%
Serious mental illness (except anxiety and panic disorder)	36%	47%	52%	55%	55%	57%	60% <sup>a</sup>
Physical health conditions	39%	43%	44%	46%	51%	51%	48% <sup>b</sup>
Substance use disorder	23%	25%	27%	23%	22%	21%	24%

Youth 24 and younger	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012	2015	2018
At least one chronic health condition	54%	56%	66%	61%	68%	68%	71%
Serious mental illness (except anxiety or panic disorder)	36%	42%	49%	46%	53%	54%	60% <sup>a</sup>
Physical health conditions	30%	29%	32%	31%	37%	36%	33% <sup>b</sup>
Substance use disorder	12%	15%	17%	14%	16%	13%	16%

<sup>a</sup> For consistency in the trend, “anxiety or panic disorder” (first asked in 2015) is omitted from “serious mental illness” in this table. When included, 64% of adults and 64% of youth experiencing homelessness report having a “serious mental illness.”

<sup>b</sup> For consistency in the trend, “cancer” and “chronic pain” (first asked in 2018) are omitted from “physical health conditions” in this table. When included, 57% of adults and 39% of youth experiencing homelessness report having a “physical health condition.”

## ► Homelessness is often preceded by adverse childhood experiences

“Adverse childhood experiences is the term used to describe all types of abuse, neglect, and other potentially traumatic experiences that occur to people under the age of 18.”<sup>1</sup> Most adults experiencing homelessness have had at least one adverse childhood experience (73%; average: 2.5 out of the 7 asked). Unaccompanied youth (age 24 and younger) experiencing homelessness are even more likely to have had at least one adverse childhood experience (84%; average: 3.2).

In 2018, the most common adverse childhood experiences among homeless adults and youth were having lived with someone who abused substances (52% adults, 61% youth) and witnessing the abuse of another family member (51% adults, 60% youth).

### ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (BEFORE AGE 18) AMONG THE HOMELESS POPULATION, BY AGE

	Adults (age 18 or older)	Youth (age 24 or younger)
<b>At least one adverse childhood experience</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>84%</b>
<b>Three or more adverse childhood experiences</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>59%</b>
Lived with someone who abused substances (alcohol or drugs)	52%	61%
Witnessed abuse of another family member	51%	60%
Had a parent or guardian with mental health issues	43%	59%
Was <i>physically</i> mistreated or abused	42%	48%
Was <i>sexually</i> mistreated or abused	28%	31%
Was neglected	22%	31%
Had a parent serve time in prison	20%	41%

Note. The Minnesota Homeless Study includes selected questions around adverse childhood experiences. It is important to note that the study does not include a comprehensive list of adverse childhood experiences. In addition, question wording differs from those on the Family Health History questionnaire used in the 1998 CDC-Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences Study.

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/aboutace.html>



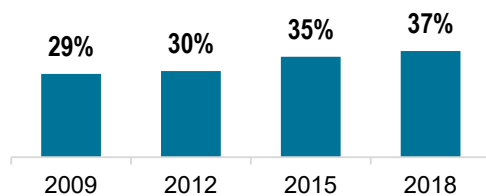
## ► Violence and abuse often continue past childhood, especially among women experiencing homelessness

People experiencing homelessness, especially women, often have more exposure to violence and exploitation. In the 2018 study, over half of women experiencing homelessness had at least one experience with violence or exploitation (adults: 67%, youth: 57%). Of the experiences, they most often stayed in an abusive situation because there were no other housing options. Trend data show that the percentage of women fleeing domestic violence has risen since 2009, with 37% fleeing domestic violence in the 2018 study. Although their numbers are small, rates of violence and exploitation are even higher among those who do not self-identify as female or male, with 83% of adults and 79% of youth reporting at least one experience with violence or sexual exploitation.

### EXPERIENCE WITH VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION, BY GENDER

	Adults (age 18 or older)		Youth (age 24 or younger)	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
<b>At least one experience of violence or sexual exploitation</b>	67%	40%	57%	43%
Stayed in an abusive situation due to no other housing options	53%	25%	43%	27%
Left last housing because of abuse by someone they lived with	33%	12%	28%	17%
Physically or sexually attacked while homeless	31%	18%	28%	18%
Had to be sexual with someone to get shelter, clothing, or food	23%	12%	22%	13%

### HOMELESS WOMEN FLEEING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, BY STUDY YEAR

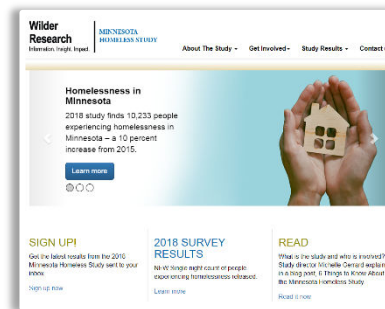


## What's next?

The initial findings reported above are based on face-to-face interviews conducted on October 25, 2018. Results are weighted to represent the known total homeless population as of that date. A more detailed report of interview findings, along with total single night and annual estimates of Minnesota's homeless population, is scheduled to be released in fall 2019.

Throughout the next year, Wilder Research staff will also publish a report about interviews conducted in partnership with six of Minnesota's Native American tribes, as well as specialized reports related to homelessness among older adults, youth, Veterans, people who identify as LGBTQ, and other populations.

For past reports, including the recently released 2018 counts fact sheet, please visit [www.mnhomeless.org](http://www.mnhomeless.org). Additional reports will be posted to this site as they become available, as well as a complete set of data tables for every question in the interview, broken out by gender, shelter type, and region.



The study is an independent initiative of Wilder Research in partnership with public and private funders and in-kind support from service providers throughout the state.

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For more information about this report, call Wilder Research, 651-280-2700, or visit [mnhomeless.org](http://mnhomeless.org).

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## Additional resources on homelessness in Minnesota

Wilder Research's triennial statewide study of homelessness is considered the most comprehensive source of descriptive information about homeless adults, youth, and children in Minnesota. It is not intended to be a complete count because no study strategy can locate all people experiencing homelessness. Other sources of information that complement our understanding of homelessness include:

- ▶ An annual January point in time (PIT) count of persons living in shelters, outdoors, and in places not meant for habitation. This count is required by the federal department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).
- ▶ The *Homeless Management Information System* (HMIS), which includes client information compiled by all providers of federal- and state-funded emergency shelter and supportive housing programming.

Together, these sources are used nationwide to inform federal, state, and local policies to prevent and end homelessness.