

Homelessness on Minnesota Native American Reservations

Findings from the 2023 Minnesota
Reservation Homeless Study

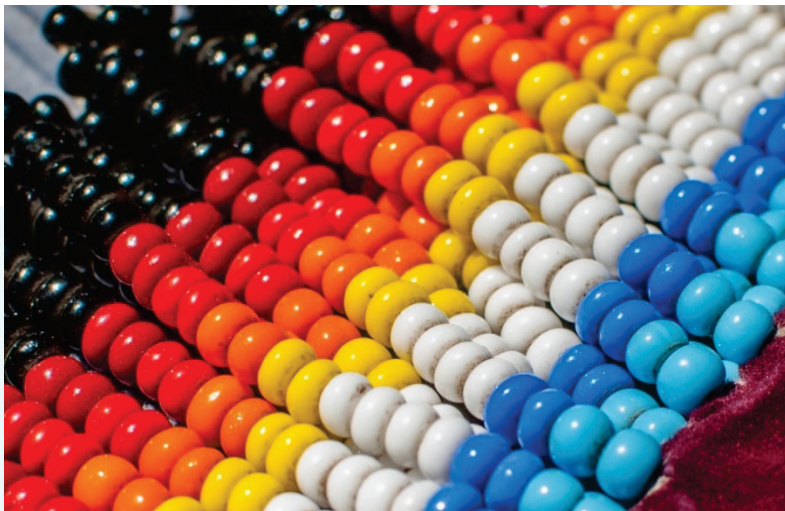


Photo by Barta IV – [Beads-7700](#)

This report provides results from the 2023 survey of homelessness on six Native American reservations that share geography with Minnesota, including: Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, Red Lake Nation, and White Earth Nation. These six nations are members of the [Minnesota Tribal Collaborative to Prevent and End Homelessness](#). The findings from this study help to inform the collective work of the Collaborative and the efforts of each nation to address homelessness in their communities.

Our partners

We are honored to partner with the following Native nations – in addition to the Minnesota Tribal Collaborative – on the 2023 Reservation Homeless Study. To respect the data sovereignty of each participating nation, results specific to each reservation are maintained and kept confidential by the nation to which the data belong. All nations that share geography with Minnesota are invited to participate in the Reservation Homeless Study.



Bois Forte Band of Chippewa

Zagaakwaandagowiniwag



Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa

Nah-gah-chi-wa-nong



Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe

Gaa-zagaskwaajimekaag



Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe

Misi-zaaga'iganiing



Red Lake Nation

Miskwaagamiiwi-Zaagaiganing



Upper Sioux Community

Pezihutazizi



White Earth Nation

Gaa-waabaabiganikaag



Contents

Our partners 2

Contents 3

Methods & definitions 4

Overall numbers: Reservation Homeless Study..... 6

Characteristics of people interviewed..... 7

Causes of homelessness and barriers to obtaining housing..... 9

Housing affordability and access..... 10

Where did reservation respondents stay in the past month? 11

Doubled-up respondents and overcrowding 13

Employment 15

Incarceration 16

Trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) 18

Physical and mental health 20

Substance use..... 22

Access to health insurance and public benefits 24

Youth on their own 29

Conclusion..... 33

Minnesota Tribal Collaborative to Prevent and End Homelessness 34

The Mission:..... 34

Vision 34

References 35

Appendix 36



Methods & definitions

How was the 2023 Reservation Homeless Study conducted?

The 2023 Reservation Homeless Study is based on 1,046 face-to-face interviews conducted in October and November 2023 across the six¹ participating Native American² Reservations. Interviews were conducted by Tribal staff from each respective nation, as well as staff and volunteers, as requested, from Wilder Research and the State of Minnesota. Respondents were identified by Tribal housing staff and others who work with people experiencing homelessness and near-homelessness on these reservations. For more on the methodology, please see the Appendix.

How does the Reservation Homeless Study connect to the Minnesota Homeless Study?

The Reservation Homeless Study is conducted every three years in conjunction with the Minnesota Homeless Study, a statewide study of homelessness that Wilder Research has directed every three years since 1991. This report compares similar data points from the statewide study to show meaningful differences in the experiences and histories of respondents from the Reservation Homeless Study.

For all publicly available statewide results from the 2023 Minnesota Homeless Study, visit mnhomeless.org.

¹ Upper Sioux Community joined the Minnesota Tribal Collaborative during the 2023 study period and completed a pilot assessment using the Reservation Homeless Study survey instrument in spring 2024. Because of the differences in timing and methodology, Upper Sioux Community's data are being used for their own internal planning purposes with the intention that the reservation will be fully integrated into the next study cycle.

² The Minnesota Tribal Collaborative uses the term "Native American" when referring to the individuals, families, and communities that make up their nations. The term "American Indian" is used in this report when referring to the U.S. Census category or state-funded programs since that is the term they used.



Who is counted as homeless?

This report includes people living on participating Minnesota Native American reservations who meet the federal definition of *homelessness* and those experiencing *near-homelessness*. Since the last Reservation Homeless Study was conducted in 2018, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) further defined and expanded the living situations that would qualify for federally funded homeless services (referred to in this report as “the federal definition of homelessness”). While many of the living situations experienced by 2023 Reservation Homeless Study respondents were similar to prior studies, the expanded definition meant that a greater percentage of 2023 respondents met the definition of homelessness. According to HUD:

Homelessness includes:

- People who are staying in a shelter, transitional housing, or a place not intended for housing, or those who face eviction and have no other place to go
- Some who are temporarily staying with others (doubled up) if their situation is precarious
- People fleeing violence

Near-homelessness includes:

- People who are staying with others (doubled up) in relatively more stable conditions

Why include those experiencing near-homelessness?

This study has included doubled-up populations since it began in 2006. Doubling up (staying temporarily with family or friends) is a common response to homelessness, especially in rural areas and Native American communities, who often welcome struggling friends and family into their homes, even if the space is overcrowded.

Though we may expect those experiencing near-homelessness to be doing better than those who meet the federal definition of homelessness, we often find that the challenges and barriers they face are similar. Therefore, the Reservation Homeless Study includes individuals experiencing near-homelessness throughout the report, instead of reporting data separately for those who are homeless and near-homeless.



Overall numbers: Reservation Homeless Study

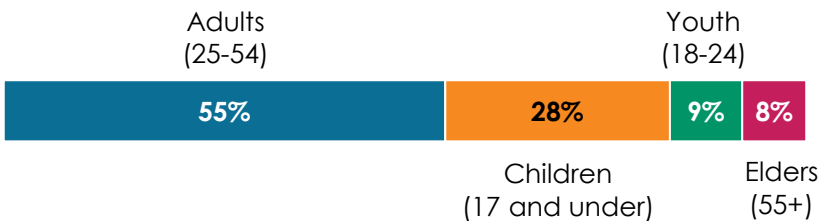
In October and November 2023, a total of 1,046 people were interviewed on six reservations that share geography with Minnesota.³ On the day they were surveyed, these respondents were accompanied by 638 additional people, including spouses/partners and children. An additional 75 individuals who were staying in shelters on reservations were also added to the overall count. In total, 1,759 people were counted as part of the study – which included people who are experiencing *homelessness* and *near-homelessness*.

Meeting the federal definition of homelessness: Of the 1,759 people counted as a part of the study, 1,594 people met the federal definition of homelessness across the six reservations – that is, at the time of the survey, they were staying in a shelter, outside, in another space not intended for habitation, or temporarily staying with others (doubled up in a precarious situation).

Number of people experiencing near-homelessness: In addition to the people who met the federal definition of homelessness, 165 people who participated were experiencing near-homelessness at the time of the study – that is, staying with others (doubled up) in relatively more stable conditions.

Children, youth, and elders make up 45% of the homeless or near-homeless populations on reservations (Figure 1).

1. Ages of people experiencing homelessness or near-homelessness in the Reservation Homeless Study (N=1,759)

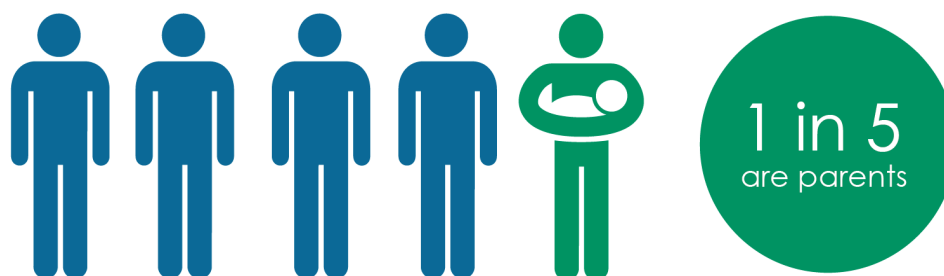


Note. Because respondents are not asked the specific age of an accompanying adult, this chart assumes that respondents and accompanying adults are in the same age category.

³ Participating reservations included Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, Red Lake Nation, and White Earth Nation.

Characteristics of people interviewed

One in five (22%) respondents were parents accompanied by their children. In total, there were 466 children with their parents (ranging in age from under 1 to 17 years old). Respondents also included 119 unaccompanied youth (age 18 through 24) and 4 unaccompanied minors (age 14-17). On average, parents had two children with them. Nearly half (43%) of all children with these parents were age 6 or younger.



Most respondents were experiencing long-term homelessness. 81% of respondents met the Minnesota definition of long-term homelessness: those who have been without a permanent residence for at least one year, or four or more times during the last three years.

Reservation respondents were more likely to become homeless as a child or youth. Nearly one-third (29%) of reservation respondents first became homeless as a child (under age 18). Compared to the homeless population in other areas of Minnesota, respondents who participated in the reservation study were younger the first time they experienced homelessness. The average age of respondents' first experience of homelessness was 24; in the statewide study, the average age was 28. The average age of reservation respondents (39 years) was similar to that of statewide respondents (40 years).

Two-thirds of respondents (69%) were living on a reservation before becoming homeless or near-homeless. Of all respondents, 91% had their last permanent residence somewhere in Minnesota, but outside of the 7-county metro area of Minneapolis/Saint Paul. Between the time they were born and age 16, 78% of respondents lived outside of the 7-county metro area in Minnesota.

Many experiencing homelessness spend nights unsheltered. Among respondents who met the federal definition of homelessness, 49% spent at least one of the previous 30 nights outside, in a car or vacant building, or in some other place not intended for housing.



Demographics and Tribal affiliation

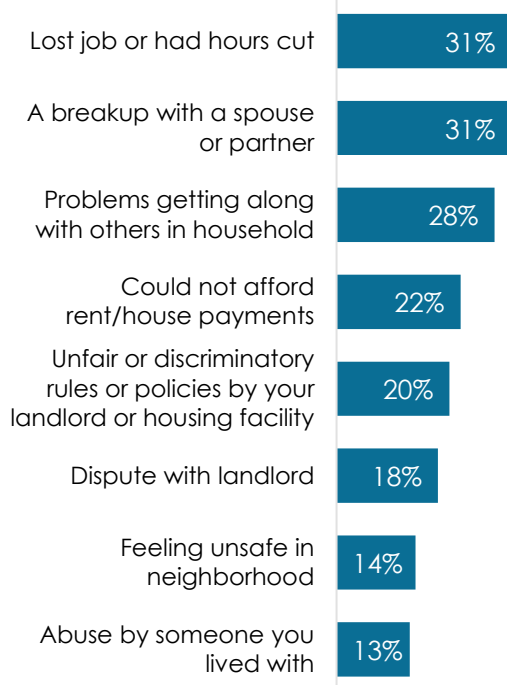
- Most respondents identified as Native American (97%) and were enrolled Tribal members (91%).
- The majority were living on their home reservation at the time of the interview (85%).
- 68% had completed high school or obtained a GED.
- 50% of reservation respondents identified as men, 49% identified as women, and less than 1% identified as non-binary or another gender identity; 3% identified as transgender or Two-Spirit.
- Of all people interviewed, 94% identified as heterosexual or straight and 6% identified as LGBTQ (including gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, queer, identifying in a different way, or unsure).
- Few respondents were Veterans (3%).

Causes of homelessness and barriers to obtaining housing

How respondents became homeless

Most respondents left their last permanent housing because of financial or relationship reasons. The most common reasons why respondents became homeless or near-homeless were losing their job or having their hours cut, breaking up with a spouse or partner, or problems getting along with others in the household (Figure 2). Respondents also cited the inability to afford rent or housing payments as a common reason for leaving their last permanent housing.

2. Reasons for leaving last permanent housing (N=1,036)



Barriers to obtaining housing

Lack of affordable housing is the most common barrier to obtaining housing. More than one-third of respondents cited the lack of affordable housing as a challenge to getting housing – which has been consistently identified as a primary barrier to obtaining housing through the 2012, 2015, and 2018 Reservation Homeless Studies. Respondents also mentioned a lack of transportation, a criminal background, no local rental history, and credit problems as common barriers to securing a place to live (Figure 3).

3. Barriers to obtaining housing (N=1,042)



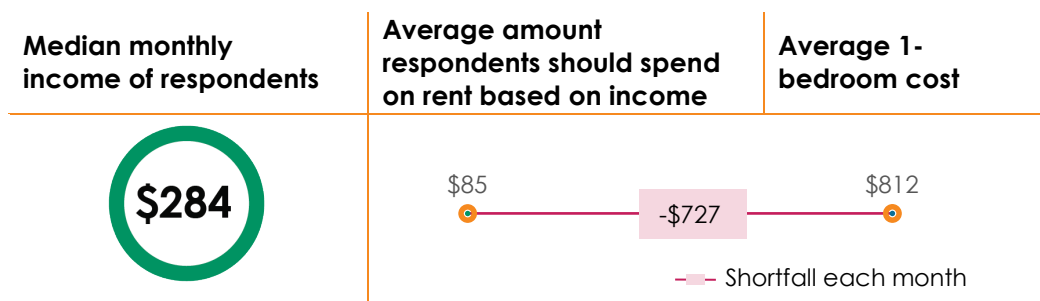
Note. Respondents could select multiple response options for questions related to reasons for leaving their last permanent housing (Figure 2) and barriers to obtaining housing (Figure 3).

Housing affordability and access

Housing affordability

Median income of reservation respondents indicates the need for more affordable or subsidized housing on reservations. According to HUD, households should spend no more than 30% of income on housing to make it “affordable.” Respondents’ median monthly income from all sources was \$284, and 28% of respondents had no income. Following these guidelines, the average respondent should spend no more than \$85 a month in rent and utilities – a markedly lower price than the 2023 fair market rent of \$812 for a one-bedroom apartment in greater Minnesota (Housing Link, 2023).

4. Significant gap between the cost of housing and what respondents can afford to pay for housing each month



Access to subsidized housing

Reservation respondents were less likely to be on a subsidized housing waiting list than people experiencing homelessness in greater Minnesota. 30% of reservation respondents were on a waiting list for subsidized housing, compared with 51% in greater Minnesota. This could be due to differences in the availability of housing for which a waiting list is available. The 30% of reservation respondents on a waiting list in 2023 is similar to the 31% on a waiting list in 2018. Among respondents who were not on a waiting list, 10% reported not being able to get on a waiting list because it was closed.

While the average time reservation respondents spent on a housing waiting list has decreased over time, 20% of respondents have been waiting for more than a year. This is slightly larger than the percentage of respondents in greater Minnesota that have been waiting for more than a year (14%). On average, reservation respondents had been waiting 13 months, compared with 8 months for those in greater Minnesota.

The average time reservation respondents spent on a housing waiting list has decreased over time. The average time reservation respondents were on a housing waiting list in 2015 was 21 months, compared to 14 months in 2018, and 13 months in 2023.

Where did reservation respondents stay in the past month?

The 2023 Reservation Homeless Study survey asked respondents where they stayed during the previous month. In the 30 days before the survey:



77% spent at least one night temporarily **doubled up** with friends or family (64% spent half or more of that time doubled up)



43% spent at least one night **outside or in a place not intended for habitation** (21% spent half or more of that time outside or in a place not intended for habitation)



14% spent at least one night in a **shelter or transitional housing** (7% spent half or more of that time in a shelter or transitional housing)

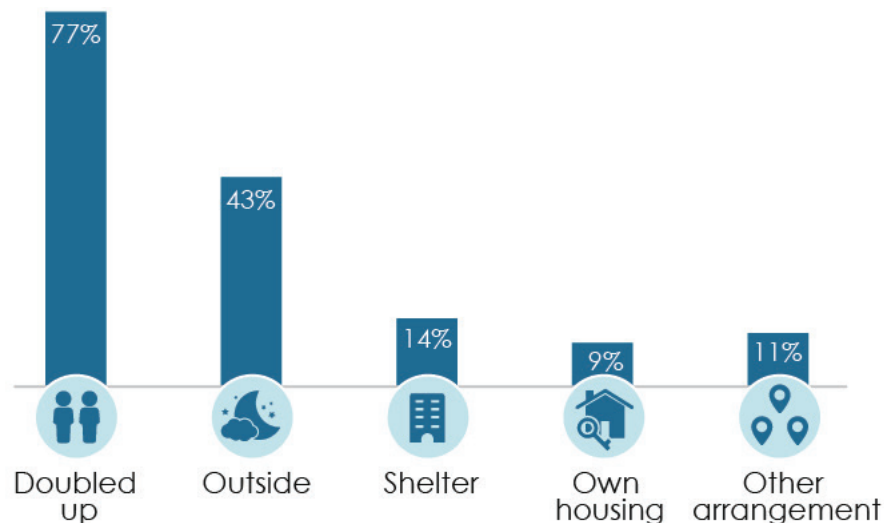


11% spent at least one night in **some other arrangement** (6% spent half or more of that time in some other arrangement including hotels, hospitals, treatment facilities, incarceration, etc.)



9% spent at least one night in **regular housing of their own** (5% spent half or more of that time in regular housing)

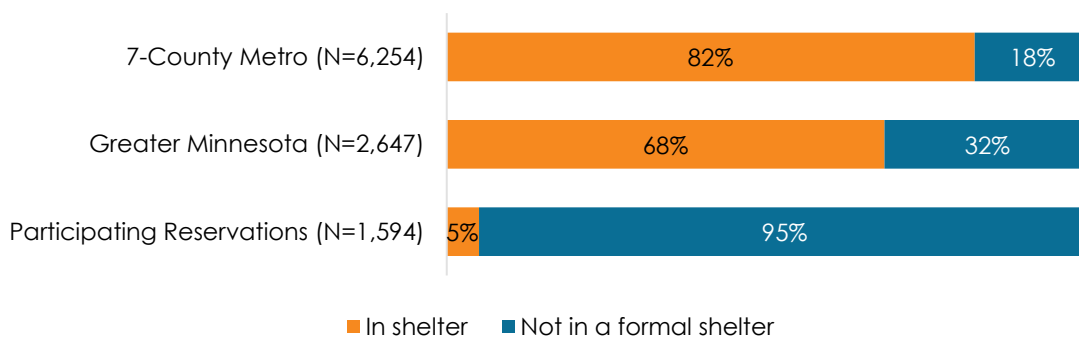
In the past month, respondents most frequently doubled up (77%) or stayed outside (43%). Fewer stayed in a shelter (14%), regular housing of their own (9%), or in some other arrangement (11%).



People experiencing homelessness on reservations rarely stay in formal shelters (and few shelters are available) – especially when compared to people experiencing homelessness in the rest of Minnesota.

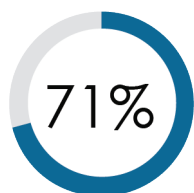
Reservation respondents are less likely to stay in shelters compared to other people experiencing homelessness. The 2023 Reservation Homeless Study found that only 5% of reservation respondents were in formal shelters, due to fewer shelter options. In contrast, 82% of individuals experiencing homelessness in the Twin Cities metro and 68% in greater Minnesota were in shelters (as shown in the statewide study; Figure 5).

5. People living in a shelter versus not in a formal shelter, by geography



Doubled-up respondents and overcrowding

Doubling up has historically been the most common form of homelessness on reservations. There are very few shelters on reservations despite the unmet need for shelter beds on reservations as demonstrated through this study. Anecdotally, we know that doubling up is a strong cultural tradition in Native American communities, who often welcome friends and family into their homes when they need a place to stay. However, those who are doubled up often face uncomfortable conditions and unstable situations. Some lack basic amenities.



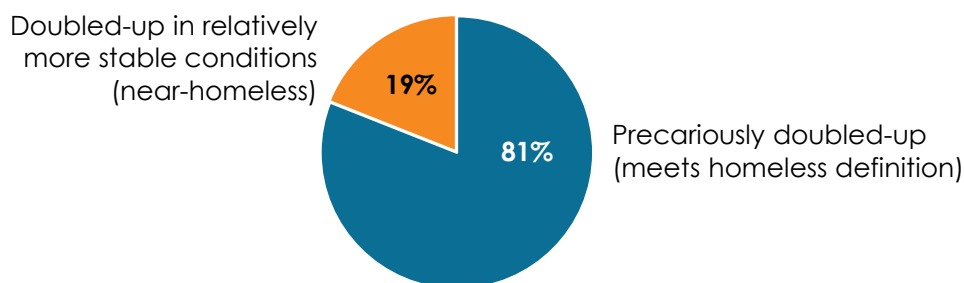
At the time of the survey, 71% of respondents were doubled up with others, staying with a family member or someone else they knew.

Doubling up is not a common preference among the Native Americans surveyed. Nearly all respondents (98%) would live in their own housing – not doubled up with family or friends – if they could find or afford it.

Many doubled-up respondents face considerable difficulty finding a consistent place to stay for the night. During the month before the survey, 33% of doubled-up respondents had spent at least one night outside or in a location not intended for housing; 16% had done so for more than a week.

Most doubled-up respondents meet the homeless definition. Among those doubled up with others, 81% met the federal definition of homelessness because their doubled-up situation was precarious – such as individuals fleeing domestic violence, at imminent risk of being homeless, or having spent at least one day outside in the previous 30 days. The remaining 19% were doubled up with others in relatively stable conditions (Figure 6).

6. Percentage of doubled-up respondents who meet the definition for homelessness (N=706)

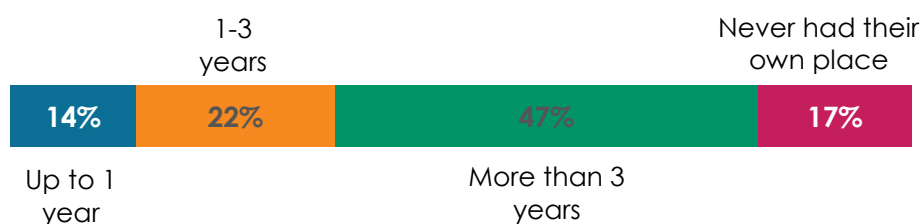


Respondents living in precariously doubled-up situations made up more than half of all study respondents (55%). The higher incidence of doubling up on reservations may make homelessness less visible on reservations and hide the true extent of need for stable, long-term housing.

Doubled-up arrangements are often unstable. 86% of doubled-up respondents lived in two or more places during the previous year; 43% had lived in four or more places. Over half (62%) were confident they could stay where they were for another month without being asked to leave, while 16% were unsure, and 22% felt they could not remain where they were currently staying for another month.

For doubled-up respondents, lacking their own place to stay is a long-term problem. 86% of doubled-up respondents had been without their own place for more than one year; 17% of doubled-up respondents had never had a place of their own (Figure 7).

7. Time spent doubled up, without housing of their own (N=675)



Overcrowding⁴ continues to be a serious problem on Minnesota's Native American reservations. The Census Bureau considers a home *overcrowded* if the number of residents is greater than the number of rooms in a house, and *severely overcrowded* if there are more than 1.5 residents per room. In 2023, the average number of people per room was 1.6; this is similar to previous reservation studies.

- 63% of doubled-up respondents were living in overcrowded spaces
- 43% of doubled-up respondents were living in severely overcrowded spaces

One in four doubled-up respondents (26%) was living in substandard housing. Among the living situations of all doubled-up respondents:

- 23% lacked central heat
- 16% lacked one or more of the following: a sink, oven/cook-top, hot and cold running water, a flush toilet, or a bathtub/shower

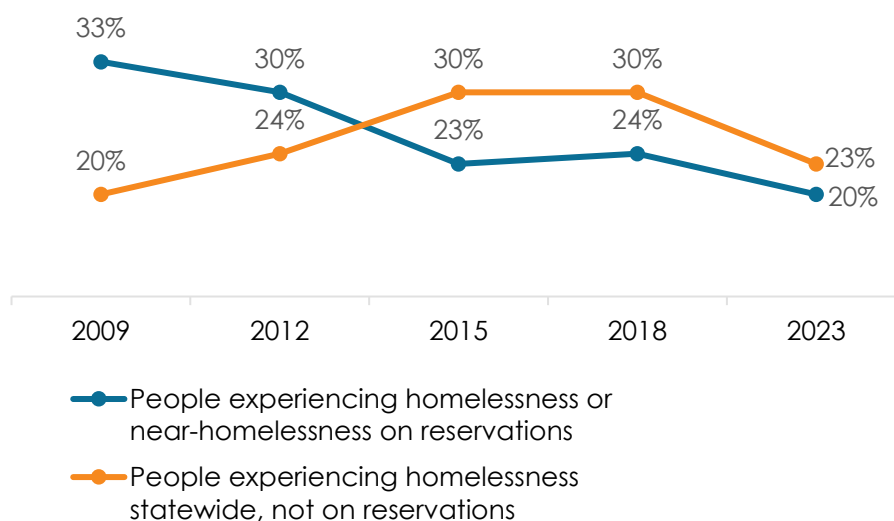
⁴ The 2023 Reservation Homeless Study is not a comprehensive study of overcrowding on Native American Reservations in Minnesota. There are likely many more overcrowded households who do not meet the criteria for being doubled up, near-homeless, or the federal definition of homelessness, and are, therefore, not included in this study.

Employment

Consistent with previous years, losing one's job or having hours cut was the most frequently cited reason for *becoming* homeless or near-homeless (Figure 3, pg. 9).

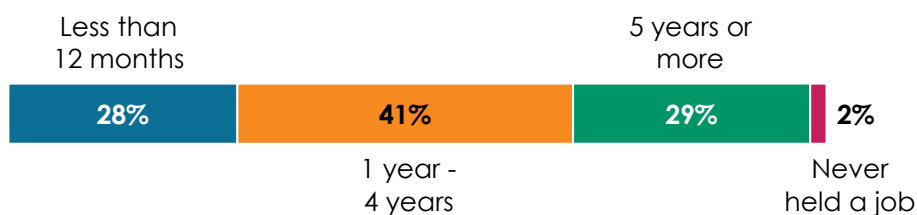
The employment rate among 2023 reservation respondents is low (20%) and has continued to fall over time. During the previous four study years (2009, 2012, 2015, and 2018), employment rates among reservation respondents have decreased or remained relatively low (Figure 8). Employment rates among statewide homeless study respondents fell to a similar level in 2023 (23%).

8. Employment rate of Reservation Homeless Study respondents and Statewide Homeless Study respondents, 2009-2023



The majority of reservation respondents (80%) were unemployed at the time of the study; of those, 72% were unemployed for a year or more (Figure 9). This is similar to respondents from greater Minnesota, where 74% of adults experiencing homelessness were unemployed, and, of those, 70% had been unemployed for a year or more.

9. Length of time unemployed, for those unemployed, 2023 (N=761)



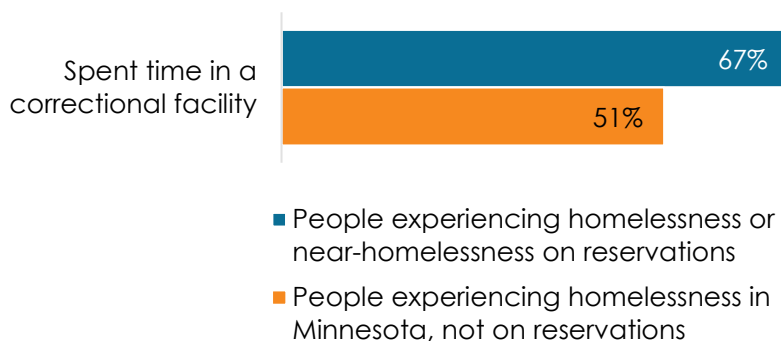
For respondents who were employed at the time of the study: Nearly half (48%) reported being employed full time (working 35+ hours each week) and 57% made \$15/hour or more.

Incarceration

A history of incarceration or criminal activity can hinder one's ability to secure both housing and employment due to systemic discrimination against people with criminal backgrounds (Couloute, 2018; Couloute & Kopf, 2018). In this report, we define time in a correctional facility as ever having spent time in a juvenile detention center, a county jail or workhouse, or a state or federal prison.

Compared with statewide respondents, a higher percentage of reservation respondents spent time in a correctional facility (Figure 10). These findings reflect the over-representation of Native Americans at all levels of Minnesota's criminal justice system (Vera Institute of Justice, 2019). Native Americans and other people of color are over-represented in the U.S. criminal justice system in large part due to income inequality, lack of access to resources, and biased law enforcement and judicial processes (Franklin, 2013; Hinton et al., 2018; Nellis, 2016).

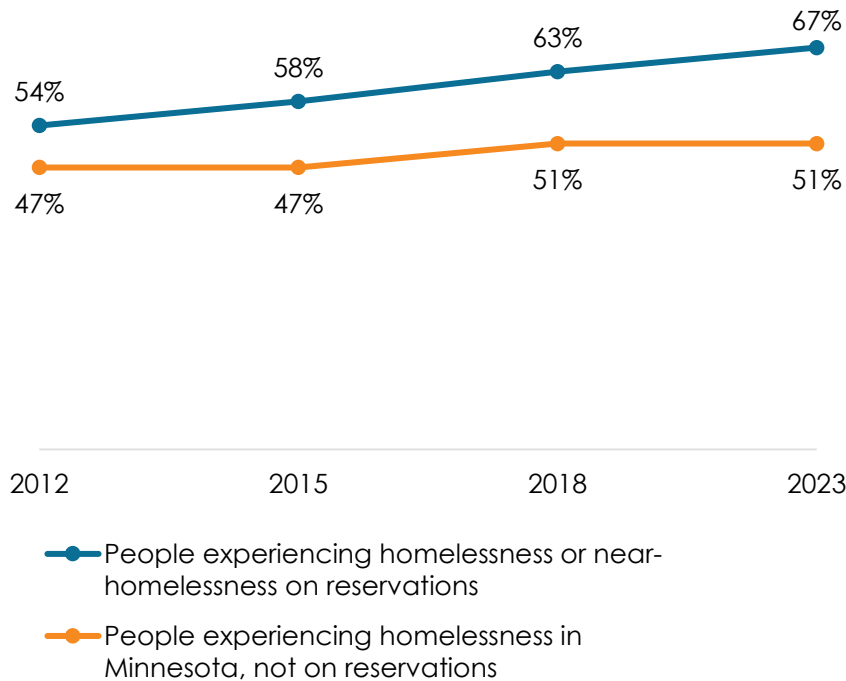
10. Ever spent time in jail or correctional facility



A sizable percentage of unaccompanied youth respondents experienced parental incarceration. Among unaccompanied youth respondents (age 24 and younger), 53% had parents who had been incarcerated at some point in their lives. In addition, 17% of those age 20 or younger had a parent who was currently incarcerated. This finding suggests that parental incarceration may be one contributing factor to homelessness among young people.

The percentage of respondents who have spent time in a correctional facility has increased over time (Figure 11). When compared with respondents from the statewide homeless study, reservation respondents have seen a bigger percentage point increase in incarceration since 2012.

11. Percentage of respondents who have spent time in any correctional facility



Note. Correctional facilities include county jail or workhouse, juvenile detention center, and state or federal prison.

Reservation respondents with a recent history of incarceration faced housing challenges before and after their incarceration. For reservation respondents who left correctional facilities during the year prior to the study:

- 81% were homeless upon entry to the correctional facility
- 59% did not have a stable place to live when they left the facility

Criminal history is a barrier to securing housing. Over one-quarter (29%) of all respondents reported that their criminal history was a barrier to securing housing.



Trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)

Violence and abuse often lead to unstable housing situations. This includes both recent violence and violence experienced or witnessed as a child. As women were more likely to experience violence or abuse than men, some responses in this section are reported separately for each group.

Domestic violence

Leaving domestic abuse situations was a direct contributor to homelessness for 13% of all reservation respondents. This was higher for women (19%) than for men (6%). There are very few domestic violence shelter options available on reservations, and likely not enough capacity to serve all those in need. This means that many people fleeing domestic violence are not able to rely on temporary housing in domestic abuse shelters, or may stay in abusive situations if they have nowhere else to go.

- 33% of respondents (43% of women, 23% of men) had stayed in an abusive situation in the past because they did not have other housing options
- 21% of respondents (29% of women, 12% of men) had been in a physically abusive relationship in the past year
- 16% of respondents (30% of women, 3% of men) reported having ever lived in a domestic violence shelter

Many respondents (42%) experience violence or sexual exploitation while homeless. This includes respondents who reported having been assaulted while homeless (20%) or having stayed in an abusive situation due to a lack of other housing options (33%).

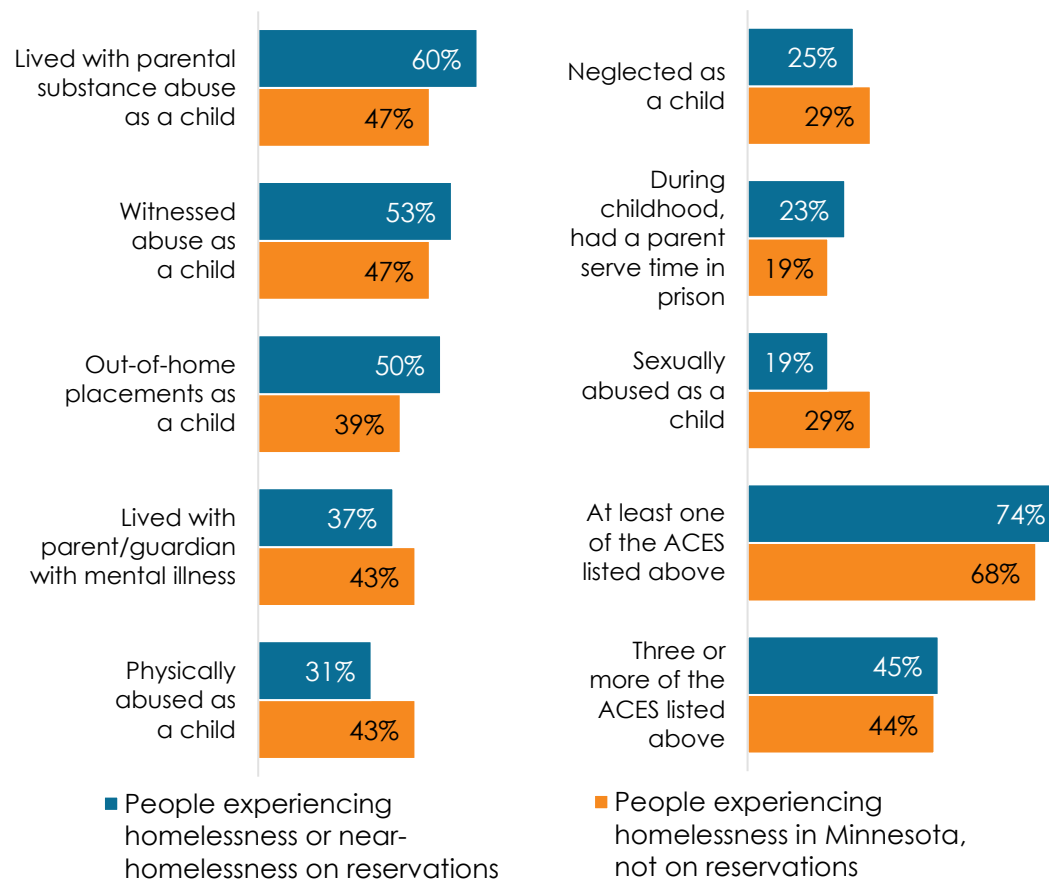
Childhood abuse and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are prevalent among reservation respondents. When asked whether they had experienced any of seven different adverse childhood experiences,⁵ three-quarters (74%) had experienced at least one, and nearly half (45%) reported three or more ACEs (Figure 12). Research suggests that three or more ACEs is a significant threshold for being a contributor to an increase in poor health outcomes later in life.

⁵ The Minnesota Reservation Homeless Study survey asks respondents whether they had experienced any of seven different adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), as described by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It should be noted that, generally, there are 11 ACEs measured, but, for the purposes of this research, we only ask about the seven most severe (and combine emotional and physical neglect into one category).

Reservation respondents and statewide respondents report many similarities in ACEs, with some key differences. On several measures, a similar proportion of reservation respondents reported ACEs compared with respondents statewide (Figure 12). However, compared with those in the rest of Minnesota, reservation respondents more frequently reported an out-of-home placement as a child and having lived with parental substance abuse, and they were less likely to report having lived with a parent or guardian with mental health problems or being physically or sexually abused as a child.

12. Selected adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), reservation respondents (N=1,046) and statewide study respondents (N=6,006)



Note. While "out-of-home placements as a child" was not included as an adverse childhood experience (ACE) in the initial CDC-Kaiser Permanente ACE study, many consider out-of-home placements to be a significant trauma for children (Alberton et al., 2020), especially for Indigenous children who have historically been placed with non-Native families. In the 2023 Reservation Homeless Study, out-of-home placements include spending time in a foster home, treatment facility, or a juvenile detention center. Out-of-home placements are not included in the table categories, "at least one of the above ACEs," and "three or more of the ACEs listed above."



Naytahwaush Health Center on White Earth Nation. The exterior design visually depicts water and wild rice that invokes a connection to the land.

Physical and mental health

People experiencing homelessness and near-homelessness face substantial risks to health and well-being. Some health conditions can be a result of trauma experienced while homeless and pose a significant barrier to getting stable housing. Health can also have an effect on employment prospects: physical health is cited as a barrier to employment among 18% of respondents who are not employed.

Physical and mental health

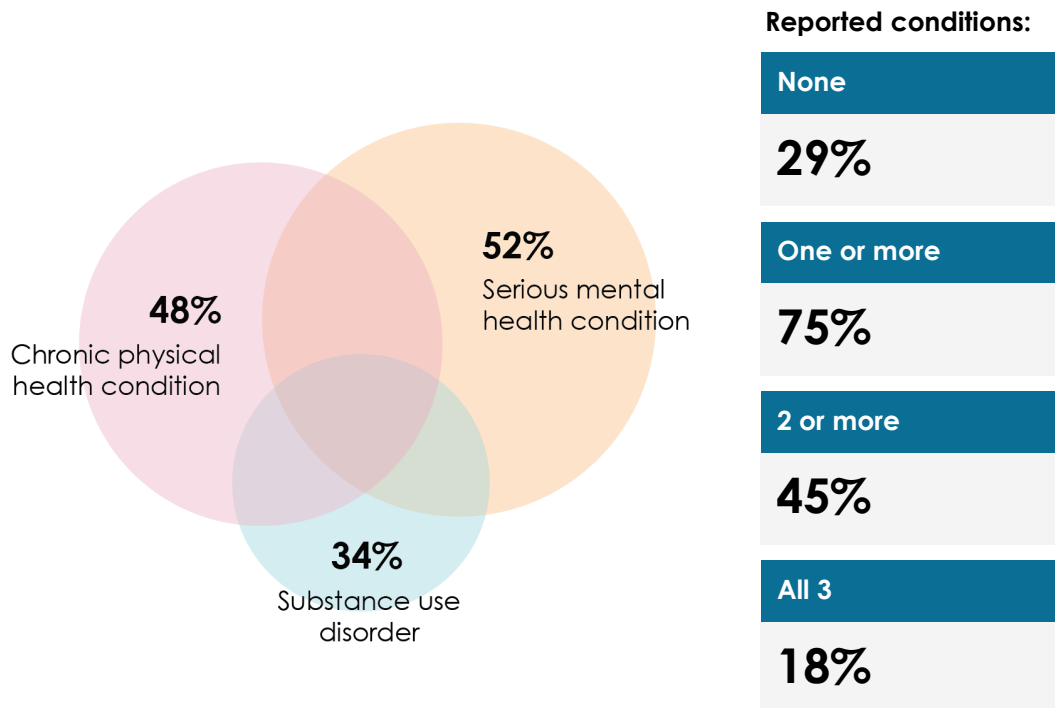
Chronic physical health conditions and mental health conditions were each reported by about half of reservation respondents. However, reservation respondents less frequently reported chronic physical health conditions and/or mental health conditions when compared with people experiencing homelessness statewide.

- 48% of reservation respondents have a chronic physical health condition (54% statewide). These included high blood pressure (23%), severe chronic pain (21%), asthma (13%), and diabetes (13%).
- 50% of reservation respondents have been told they have a serious mental illness within the last two years (59% statewide). The most common mental health diagnoses included anxiety or panic disorder (40%), depression (32%), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; 29%).

Co-occurrence of health issues


Co-occurrence of health issues is common among people experiencing homelessness or near-homelessness. Overall, 45% of reservation respondents reported having two or more of either a chronic physical health condition, a serious mental illness, or a substance use disorder (18% reported all three; Figure 13).

13. Mental, physical, and substance use conditions among reservation respondents (N=1,046)



One of four respondents said they have physical or mental health disabilities that impacted their ability to work or carry out daily activities.

- 25% had a physical or mental health condition, or disability, that limits the work they can do
- 25% reported often feeling confused, having trouble remembering things, or having problems making decisions to the point that it interferes with daily activities
- 14% had a physical or mental health condition that makes it difficult to perform daily activities, such as bathing, eating, and getting dressed



Brain injuries are a substantial concern among those experiencing homelessness or near-homelessness on Native American reservations that share geography with Minnesota.

One in four respondents (25%) answered a series of questions in a way that indicates they have likely experienced a traumatic brain injury (TBI).

Brain injuries can contribute to physical, mental, and emotional problems that prevent individuals from completing daily tasks such as bathing, getting dressed, and other activities (CDC, 2024). Living in unstable and substandard conditions can also make people more vulnerable to situations in which they could get a head injury.

Substance use

Substance use and mental health interact with homelessness in multiple ways. Untreated, mental health conditions or substance use can contribute to becoming homeless. They can also create barriers to accessing shelter or stable housing, due to sobriety policies or problematic behaviors that could impact other residents. At the same time, homelessness can worsen a person's substance use or mental health condition, perpetuating the cycle of homelessness.



Among illegal substances, methamphetamine use has increased the most among reservation respondents (Figure 14). Methamphetamine use grew by 9 percentage points between 2018 and 2023, with 14% of respondents having used it in the past 30 days in 2018 and 23% having used it in the past 30 days in 2023. It should be noted that the Reservation Homeless Study began asking specifically about fentanyl use in 2023; therefore, we are unable to measure changes in its use among reservation respondents over time.

Fentanyl and other opioids are commonly used by reservation respondents.

While respondents were more likely to use marijuana, alcohol, or meth, a large proportion (20%) of respondents reported opioid use. This included fentanyl (17%); heroin (8%); and/or codeine, morphine, or another opiate (5%).

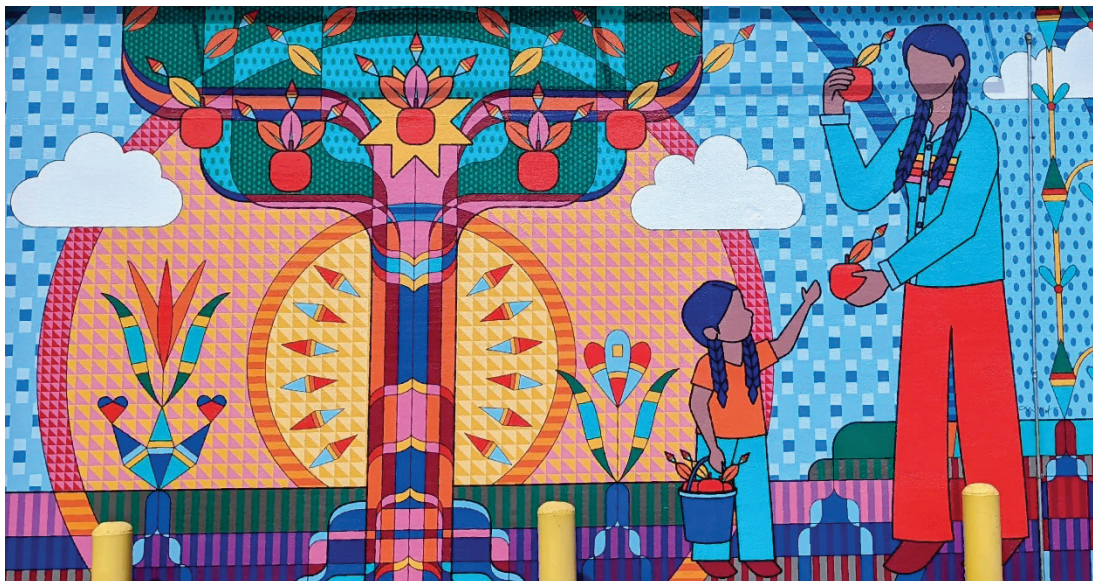
Among legal substances, only marijuana use increased between 2018 and 2023, growing from 41% to 55%. This increase is likely due in part to social desirability bias, such that respondents likely underreported marijuana use before recreational cannabis use was legalized in Minnesota in 2023, and more individuals may be using marijuana now that it is legal. Even so, the 2023 reservation study rate is higher than the statewide study rate of 36%.

14. Substance use during the past 30 days, 2012-2023

Substance	2012	2015	2018	2023
Cigarettes (not including e-cigarettes, vaporizers, or other tobacco products)	86%	81%	85%	84%
E-cigarettes or vaping	n/a	7%	7%	41%
Marijuana	23%	31%	41%	55%
Alcohol	35%	30%	32%	30%
Methamphetamine	4%	7%	14%	23%
Any opioid (fentanyl, heroin, or another opioid)	n/a	n/a	11%	20%
Fentanyl	n/a	n/a	n/a	17%
Heroin	2%	6%	6%	8%
Codeine, morphine, or another opioid	n/a	n/a	8%	5%
Prescription or pharmaceutical drugs (not opioids) not intended for you	10%	13%	6%	5%

Note. Two percent or less of respondents reported use of cocaine, inhalants, or Xylazine. Also, due to changes in the question wording around substance use, the percentage of respondents who used "any opioid" or "fentanyl" are not available for several past studies.

Access to health insurance and public benefits



Rooted: Caring for Posterity (Target) Mural by [Marlena Myles](#). Photo courtesy of Target Corporation.

Health care needs

While reservation respondents reported unmet health care needs, they reported *fewer* unmet health care needs than statewide respondents. Specifically, fewer reservation respondents reported unmet health care needs for dental, physical, and emotional or mental health problems when compared with statewide respondents (Figure 15).

The largest difference in unmet needs between reservation and statewide respondents was seen in dental problems, with 18% of reservation respondents reporting an unmet need in this area compared with 27% of statewide respondents. The need for care for alcohol and drug problems was similar for reservation respondents (8%) and statewide respondents (7%).

Native Americans tend to have poorer health outcomes and experience more chronic health conditions than other Minnesotans. However, the experiences and cultural traditions of Native Americans may shape their perceptions of health, leading to different expectations about what constitutes unmet health care needs (MartinRogers, 2012). Therefore, these findings should be interpreted with caution and should not be taken to mean that individuals experiencing homelessness on Native American reservations have fewer health care needs than other groups of people experiencing homelessness.



15. Reported unmet health care needs, reservation and statewide respondents

Need care for...but not getting it	Reservation respondents (N=1,034)	Statewide respondents (N=5,824)
Dental health problem	18%	27%
Physical health problem	14%	22%
Emotional or mental health problem	10%	18%
Alcohol or drug problem	8%	7%
One or more of the above health care needs	29%	42%

Experiences of trauma and discrimination in the Western health care system

Many Native Americans have first-hand discriminatory experiences in health care settings or have heard about these experiences from other family or community members, which may make them more reluctant to seek care in Western health care settings (MartinRogers, 2012). These and other factors have certainly impacted the health disparities faced by Native American populations in Minnesota.

However, Native American cultures also tend to conceptualize health and well-being more broadly and holistically than mainstream definitions which tend to focus on medical diagnoses and presence or absence of diseases. These factors may lead Native American respondents to answer survey questions about their health and well-being differently.



The Vermilion Clinic, a part of Bois Forte Health Services.

Health care and insurance

65% of reservation respondents had health insurance or medical coverage in October 2023. This is *higher* than the 58% of reservation respondents who reported health insurance coverage in 2018, but *lower* than the 70% of people experiencing homelessness statewide who reported health care coverage in 2023. The percentage of reservation respondents with health insurance has been consistently lower than statewide respondents since the 2012 survey.

65% of reservation respondents regularly sought care at Indian Health Services clinics. While 18% reported not having a regular place to go for medical care, this was less than half of the 39% of statewide respondents who had no regular provider.

Public benefits

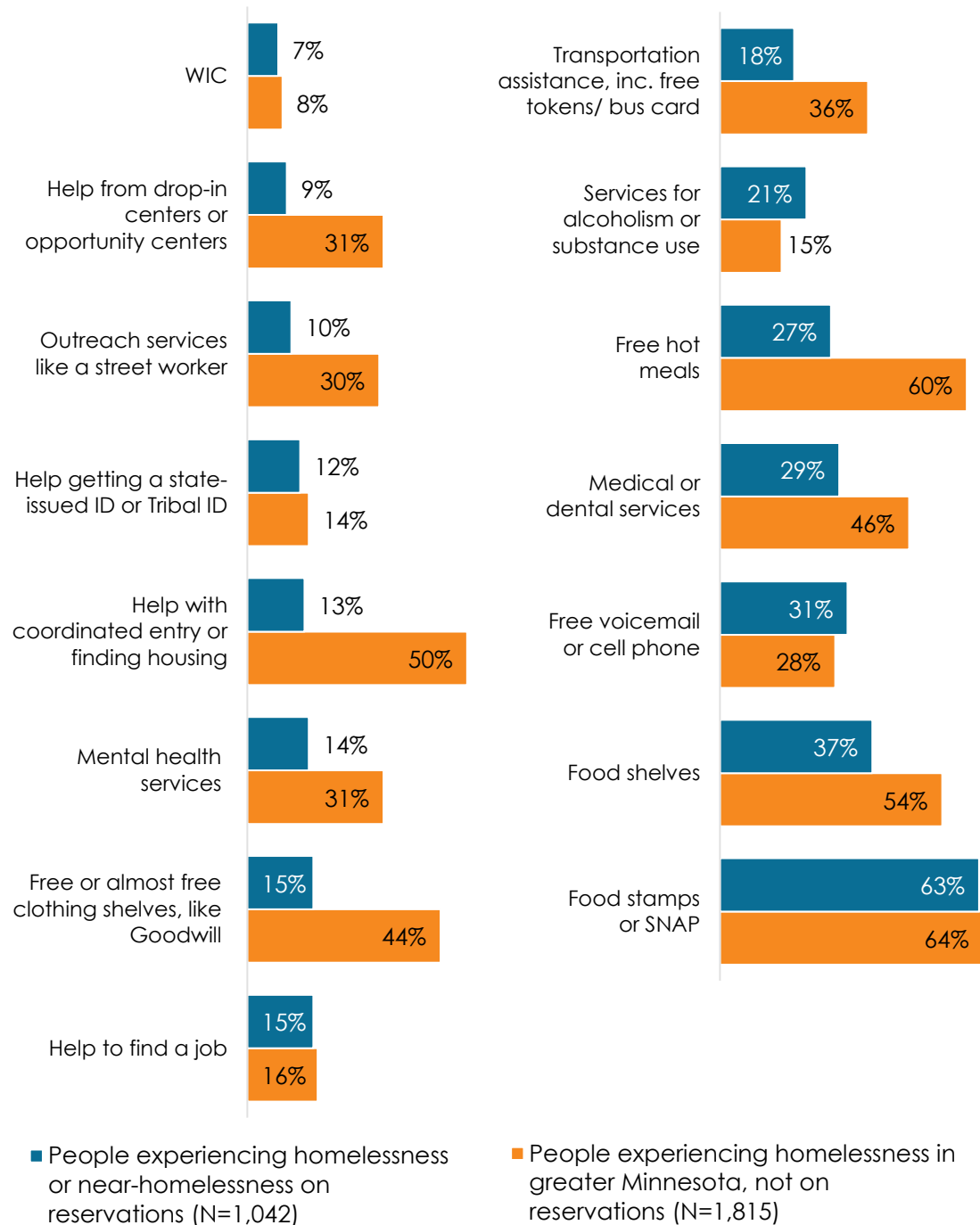
Since rural areas may face different challenges to accessing public benefits and services than urban areas, the following sections compare utilization of public benefits and services by respondents on reservations to respondents in greater Minnesota to minimize differences in access.

Less than half of reservation respondents reported receiving public assistance in the form of cash benefits. Overall, 39% of reservation respondents received one or more of the following public cash benefits in the month prior to the survey. Respondents most commonly reported receiving cash benefits from MFIP (18%), a Social Security program like Disability Insurance (10%), General Assistance (15%), and Emergency Assistance (6%). While the survey does not allow us to determine how many people are eligible for these benefits, it is likely that many more people are eligible than are receiving benefits.

Other benefits and services used

Reservation respondents generally reported relatively low utilization of benefits and services, most often utilizing food stamps (63%) and food shelves (37%) during the month prior to the study (Figure 16).

16. Services most often accessed in October 2023, reservation and greater Minnesota respondents





In most cases, a lower percentage of reservation respondents accessed services than respondents in greater Minnesota. People experiencing homelessness in non-reservation areas of greater Minnesota were more likely to access help with coordinated entry or finding housing (50% in greater Minnesota vs. 13% on reservations) and to access help from drop-in centers (31% in greater Minnesota vs. 9% on reservations). Additionally, compared with respondents on reservations, respondents from greater Minnesota were more likely to report accessing mental health services, free clothing shelves, free hot meals, and transportation assistance. Differences in service utilization could be due to differences in need and access.

Youth on their own

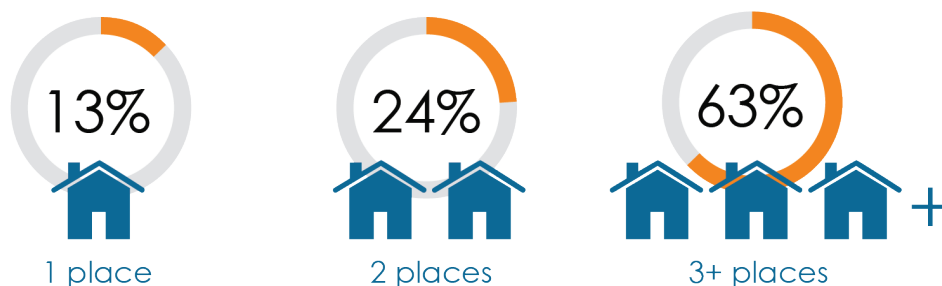


Young adults and unaccompanied minors (referred to collectively here as “youth”) are some of the least visible among the homeless population. During the 2023 reservation study, 4 unaccompanied minors (age 17 and under) and 119 young adults (age 18-24) were interviewed. Together, this group comprises 12% of all respondents.

Living situation for doubled-up youth

- The majority of youth (78%) were doubled up with others. Of these doubled-up youth, 70% were looking for housing, and nearly all (96%) would prefer their own housing if they could find or afford it.
- Nearly two-thirds (63%) of doubled-up homeless and near-homeless youth have lived in three or more places in the past year (Figure 17).

17. Number of different places where doubled-up youth have lived in the past 12 months (homeless & near-homeless; N=89)



One-quarter (23%) of homeless and near-homeless youth are parents who had their children with them. Of youth who have children, about half (47%) did not have their child(ren) living with them at the time of the study.



Common reasons for leaving home

During their interview, youth age 20 and younger were asked about a series of factors that often contribute to homelessness, and whether each factor was a “main cause,” “part of the cause,” or “not really a factor” in leaving home. Figure 18 presents the percentage of youth who named each as either a “main cause” or “part of the cause.”

Youth experiencing homelessness and near-homelessness on reservations most commonly left home due to problems with others living there. They most often reported general problems such as fighting with their parents (55%) or leaving because of their parents’ use of drugs or alcohol (41%; Figure 18).

18. Most common reasons for leaving home, youth on their own age 20 or younger (N=30)

Reason for leaving home	% of youth who identified each reason as a “main cause” or “part of the cause” for leaving home
Fighting frequently with their parent	55%
Parents' use of drugs or alcohol	41%
Neglect	38%
Youth's own use of drugs or alcohol	34%
Home too small for everyone to live there	31%
Not willing to live by their parents' rules	30%
Felt unsafe with the people in household	28%
Leaving a group home or other placement with no place to go	14%
Lack of tolerance for their sexual orientation or gender identity	3%

Note. Respondents could give more than one response. While young adults in this study include those age 18-24, this question was only asked of respondents age 20 and younger.

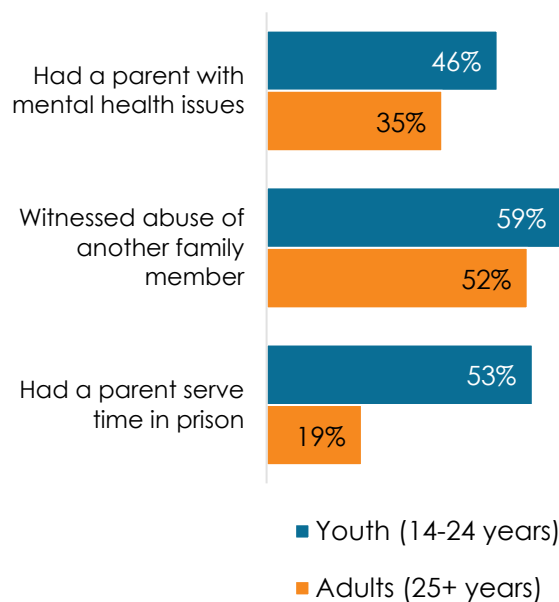
Trauma in childhood

Youth experiencing homelessness or near-homelessness often face multiple complex challenges to their health and well-being. In particular:

- 68% of reservation youth respondents have lived in a foster home, a treatment facility, and/or juvenile detention center
- 52% had a serious mental illness
- 28% had been physically abused as a child
- 27% had been neglected by their parents
- 16% had been sexually abused as a child

Youth more frequently reported some ACEs than older respondents. When compared with adult respondents (age 25+), youth respondents were more likely to have had a parent with mental health issues, to have had a parent who had been to prison, and to have witnessed abuse of another family member (Figure 19).

19. Selected adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), youth and adult respondents (N=121-922)





Red Lake Nation Tribal College

Education and employment among youth

Homeless and near-homeless youth on reservations face education and employment challenges – especially when compared with homeless youth in greater Minnesota. Though low levels of educational attainment and employment are a problem among all those experiencing homelessness or near-homelessness on reservations, it is particularly a challenge among *youth* on reservations when compared to homeless youth in greater Minnesota.

- 62% of youth experiencing homelessness on reservations were without a high school diploma or GED (54% in greater Minnesota)
- 21% had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP, meaning they received special education services) while in school (56% in greater Minnesota)
- 15% of reservation youth respondents were employed (36% in greater Minnesota)
- 19% of reservation youth respondents were enrolled in a school or educational program at the time of the study

Transportation is the most common barrier to employment for youth respondents on reservations. For those youth who reported a barrier to employment, the most commonly reported were transportation (56%), housing (37%), and lack of resources to look for work (23%).



Rooted: Caring for Posterity (Target) Mural by Marlena Myles. Photo courtesy of Target Corporation.
The poem below was given to Marlena Miles to inspire her mural with the theme of "rooted."

Conclusion

We will root our stories deeply.
As seeds of courage and change.
We will keep each other grounded.
With hope, resilience and strength.
There is healing here to grow from.
Our renewal to stand as one.
Community means everything.
Together is where we belong.

Boarding schools and other forced removal of children from families, a history of genocide, active suppression of language and culture, and removal from homelands have created disparities in wealth and homeownership across Native nations. For Native American people experiencing homelessness, these disparities are evident in the stories and responses provided through the Reservation Homeless Study.

The work of each nation and collective efforts through the Minnesota Tribal Collaborative to Prevent and End Homelessness have increased the use of data to plan services, access funds, create housing, and promote well-being in multiple ways. We hope that the stories courageously shared through the 2023 Reservation Homeless Study support this ongoing work and plant seeds of change, hope, resilience, and strength in each nation.

Minnesota Tribal Collaborative to Prevent and End Homelessness

The Minnesota Tribal Collaborative is an innovative approach to addressing housing and homelessness of Native Americans in Minnesota. In 2014, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed by the Tribal Councils of five nations: Bois Forte, Leech Lake, Mille Lacs, Red Lake, and White Earth. This agreement allows these nations to collaboratively plan and collectively problem solve. From their inception, the vision of The Collaborative has been to “address historical barriers and unique needs” of Tribal members experiencing housing instability and homelessness through collaboration with one another.

The Mission:

While honoring Tribal sovereignty, we will work together to maximize resources and obtain sustainable housing options through innovative efforts of our Tribal governments and communities.

Vision:

Through revisiting traditional values, we will address historical barriers and unique needs of our Tribal members and families to prevent and end homelessness.





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Appendix

A. About the study

This is the sixth study of homelessness on Native American reservations sharing geography with Minnesota. Interviews were conducted in October 2023. Seven Native nations participated in the study: Bois Forte Band of Chippewa (Zagaakwaandagowiniwag), Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa (Nah-gah-chi-wa-nong), Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe (Gaa-zagaskwaajimekaag), Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe (Misi-zaaga'iganiing), Red Lake Nation (Miskwaagamiiwi-Zaagaiganing), Upper Sioux Community (Pezihutazizi/Oyate), and White Earth Nation (Gaa-waabaabiganikaag). Due to differences in timing and methodology, data from Upper Sioux Community will be used for their own internal planning purposes with the intention that the reservation will be fully integrated into the next study cycle.

The Reservation Homeless Study is conducted in conjunction with the Minnesota Homeless Study, a statewide study of homelessness that Wilder Research has directed every three years since 1991. With permission from participating tribes, the number of people experiencing homelessness in Minnesota includes the number of people identified as part of the Reservation Homeless Study who met the same federal definition of homelessness used in the Minnesota Homeless Study. The 2023 Minnesota Homeless Study and Reservation Homeless Study counted 10,522 people experiencing homelessness in Minnesota. Of these, 1,594 (15%) were counted on the six participating Native American Reservations.

Respondents were identified by Tribal housing staff and others who work with people experiencing homelessness and near-homelessness on these reservations. This study is not a comprehensive count of those experiencing homelessness on reservations, as it is difficult to find people not staying in a shelter or using services in a time- and resource-limited study that takes place across a large rural geographic area.

Special thanks go to the seven tribes' governing bodies who approved their tribes' participation, as well as the Minnesota Tribal Collaborative and other Tribal staff who organized outreach and recruited volunteer interviewers. Thanks also go to the Minnesota Department of Human Services and Minnesota Housing Finance Agency, which have been instrumental in collaborating with the tribes on planning for the study and interviewing respondents.

Finally, we thank the people who shared their experiences with us. In total, there were 1,759 homeless and near-homeless individuals counted during the study, which includes 1,046 respondents, as well as their family members.



B. How the data are used

This report includes selected data from Wilder's survey of homelessness and near-homelessness on participating Minnesota Native American reservations. Each participating tribe receives complete data tables of their reservation-specific data, and of the aggregate data from all participating tribes. To honor and respect Tribal sovereignty, each tribe is the sole owner of its own data.

Tribes use the study data for policy and planning purposes. The data have been used to create long-term plans for ending homelessness, as well as to obtain grants and other funding. The Minnesota Tribal Collaborative to Prevent and End Homelessness is one of the primary groups contributing to this work. Since it was formed in 2014, the Minnesota Tribal Collaborative has worked together to use data to bring change and to combat many of the challenges identified in the study. The Collaborative includes representatives from nearly all of Minnesota's Tribal nations. This group meets regularly to share ideas and learn about new resources to address homelessness. Before the group was established, tribes frequently competed against one another for funding.

The Collaborative has succeeded in making several changes to address homelessness on their reservations. According to the Collaborative's representatives, its accomplishments include:

- Conducting the Reservation Homeless Study—the first study of its kind in the country—which other Tribal communities have sought to replicate.
- Generating Tribal-specific plans to end homelessness; all Collaborative tribes utilize these findings to assist in their internal efforts to address areas of need and communicate progress to external stakeholders.
- Advocating for and securing changes to the statute language for two statewide grants—the Long-Term Support Services Dollars Grant and the Family Homeless Prevention and Assistance Program Grant—to allow tribes to act as eligible applicants.
- Applying for and being awarded more than \$1 million in Long-Term Homeless Supportive Services funding to serve 184 households across the five reservations.
- Collaborated on a bipartisan bill with U.S. Senators Tina Smith (D-Minn) and Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), along with other U.S. representatives, that enables tribes and Tribal housing entities to access funding for homelessness on Tribal lands. The *Tribal Access to Homeless Assistance Act* allows Tribal nations to apply for Homeless Assistance Grants provided by the Department of Housing.
- Collaborative members participate in several statewide workgroups and have become more engaged in their Continuum of Care regional efforts, fostering deeper relationships with providers in their communities. The Minnesota Tribal Collaborative is also engaging in steps towards becoming their own Continuum



of Care which would enable them to coordinate resources and funding across participating reservations.

C. Beyond federally defined homeless; including overcrowded and doubled-up populations

This study includes a broader population of people than those defined as “homeless” by the federal government (set by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)) and Wilder’s Minnesota Homeless Study team.

Homelessness and near-homelessness

For the Reservation Homeless Study, we use the term “homeless” to refer to people who meet the federal definition of homelessness. The federal definition includes people who are staying in a shelter, transitional housing, or a place not intended for housing, or those who face imminent eviction and have no other place to live. It also includes people fleeing violence.

Two groups of temporarily “doubled-up” people (who are staying temporarily with family or friends) are also considered homeless under the federal definition: any individual who cannot remain where they are staying more than the next 14 days, and families who are highly mobile (have moved more than twice in the past 60 days) and include a parent with a disability or chronic health condition.

The reservation study also includes people experiencing near-homelessness: people who are doubled up in less precarious situations (i.e., those who are doubled up, but do not fit the federal definition of homelessness).

Why include those experiencing near-homelessness?

This study has included doubled-up populations since it began in 2006. Doubling up (staying temporarily with family or friends) is a common response to homelessness, especially in rural areas and Native American communities, who often welcome struggling friends and family into their homes, even if the space is overcrowded.

Though doubling up is a common response to homelessness in the Native American community, it is not a preference. Consistent with past years, this year’s data show that nearly every respondent (98%) experiencing near-homelessness on these reservations would prefer their own housing, if only they could find and afford it.

Though we may expect those experiencing near-homelessness to be doing better than those who meet the definition of homelessness, we often find that the challenges and barriers they face are similar. Therefore, we feel it is appropriate to include individuals experiencing near-homelessness throughout the report, instead of reporting data separately for those homeless and near-homeless.



D. Methods

The Reservation Homeless Study was first conducted in fall 2006 by a group of Tribal representatives, Wilder Research, and the Corporation for Supportive Housing's Minnesota Program through the American Indian Supportive Housing Initiative. The Minnesota Department of Human Services has been instrumental over the years in providing technical assistance, support, and volunteer interviewers when the tribes request it.

Each tribe organized its own plan for outreach and interviewing. Most outreach was conducted through advertisements in Tribal newspapers, on Tribal radio stations, and through fliers in other locations. Volunteers interviewed respondents at a number of different sites, including shelters and transitional housing units, community centers, Tribal government buildings, and some known outdoor camps and shelters.

Interviews were conducted in October and November 2023. Respondents were paid an honorarium for sharing their time and experiences. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and respondents could skip questions if they preferred not to answer. This is one of the reasons that some sensitive items may be underreported.

Percentages reported here are generally based on valid responses, meaning that the denominators include everyone who answered the question and omit those who skipped the question, refused to answer it, or said they didn't know the answer.

Note that these numbers are a minimum, not an estimate. It was not possible to interview every person who lacked adequate housing during the survey period, and not all of those eligible chose to participate. Hence, we know that these numbers are lower than the actual number of people or households experiencing homelessness and near-homelessness at the time of the study.

Making comparisons to the statewide Minnesota Homeless Study

In some places, this report compares the results of the reservation study to the Minnesota Homeless Study. Note that the populations described in each report differ. Only those who meet the federal definition of homelessness are surveyed in the Minnesota Homeless Study, whereas the reservation study additionally includes people experiencing near-homelessness.

To ensure the participating tribes maintain their data privacy (respect for Tribal sovereignty), reservation data are NOT included with the statewide Minnesota Homeless Study datasets published online. Data and reporting for the two studies are entirely separate, unless otherwise noted for special analyses. Throughout the report, comparisons to "statewide" or "greater Minnesota" data reflect homelessness in all areas of Minnesota *excluding* the participating reservations. In our study, "greater Minnesota" refers to the 80 counties outside the seven-county Twin Cities metro area.

Native Americans are disproportionately affected by homelessness

In the past, Wilder Research has used findings from its Minnesota Homeless Study—which summarizes homelessness in non-reservation areas of the state—to show that Native Americans are disproportionately affected by homelessness. This has been



true every year of the study, including in 2023, when Native Americans accounted for 20% of homeless adults and 25% of homeless youth surveyed in non-reservation areas. This is despite the fact that American Indians make up just 2%⁶ of the total population in the state. This disproportionality is larger for Native Americans than for any other racial or ethnic group.

D1. Proportion of Native Americans in the state population and the overall homeless population

Disparities are widespread between Native American respondents and the broader pool of statewide respondents on a number of measures that may increase the likelihood of experiencing homelessness and make it more difficult to access housing after becoming homeless. Compared to the full set of statewide respondents, Native Americans statewide were:

- More likely to be unemployed at the time of the survey (83% vs. 75%)
- Nearly twice as likely to have both a mental health condition and a substance use disorder (31% vs. 17%)
- More likely to report Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) for each of the 7 ACEs included in the survey
- More likely to have experienced at least one ACE and to have experienced multiple ACEs (77% vs. 66% for at least one ACE and 57% vs. 41% for three or more ACEs)

See Table D2 for additional information about the disparity between Native American statewide respondents and the full set of statewide respondents on these measures.

⁶ Source: 2023 U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey.



D2. Native American statewide respondents vs. all statewide respondents: Select measures

	Native American study respondents (Statewide)	All study respondents (Statewide)
Employment		
Currently unemployed	83%	75%
Chronic physical and mental health conditions		
Any chronic health condition in last 12 months	58%	53%
Any chronic mental health diagnosis in last 2 years	65%	57%
Diagnosed with mental health condition AND substance use disorder in last 2 years ("dual diagnosis")	31%	17%
Diagnosed with or treated for significant mental illness in past 2 years	67%	59%
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)		
Had a parent serve time in prison	29%	17%
Someone in household was a problem substance user	64%	44%
Witnessed abuse of another family member	59%	45%
Parent or guardian had mental health issues	53%	40%
Mistreated or abused as a child	53%	40%
Sexually mistreated or abused as a child	38%	27%
Without food, shelter, or medical care, or left alone for long periods when too young to be alone	39%	26%
Lived in out-of-home placement (e.g., foster home, group home) as a child	44%	33%
At least one of the above ACEs	77%	66%
Three or more of the above ACEs	57%	41%

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the participating tribes for their contributions to the Reservation Homeless Study:

- Bois Forte Band of Chippewa
- Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe
- Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe
- Red Lake Nation
- Upper Sioux Community
- White Earth Nation
- Minnesota Tribal Housing Collaborative

We would also like to thank the many agencies that helped to coordinate the study and conduct interviews, including:

Minnesota Housing Finance Agency

The Minnesota Department of Human Services, Minnesota Housing, and the Minnesota departments of Corrections, Education, Employment and Economic Development, Health, Transportation, and Veterans Affairs

We would also like to thank the following Wilder Research staff members who contributed to the study:

Jackie Aman, author
Carrie Au-Yeung, author
Walker Bosch, author
Phil Cooper, author
Marilyn Conrad
Michelle Decker Gerrard, author
Heather Loch
Nicole MartinRogers, author
Stephanie Nelson-Dusek
Kerry Walsh

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