

Racial Disparities and Equity: Homelessness in Delaware



Across the United States, Black/African American households are 4.6 times as likely to experience homelessness than White households. Racial discrimination and disparities in housing, criminal justice, health care and more often contribute to higher rates of homelessness among Black/African American individuals and families. This is not only true at a national level, but also in every jurisdiction that has examined racial disparities among its local homeless population. This report serves as an essential first step in identifying, examining and addressing racial disparities and equity in Delaware's homeless population.

With this report, the Continuum of Care presents its commitment to understanding the negative impact of homelessness on people and communities of color in Delaware. This report highlights known racial disparities in homelessness in Delaware, identifies gaps in knowledge, and proposes actions steps for moving towards a more equitable future.

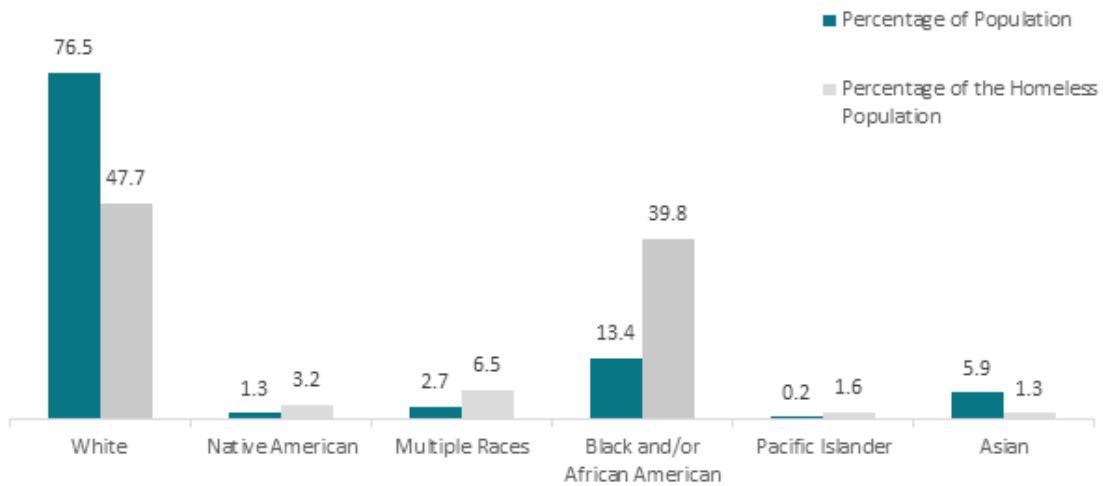
Racial Disparities in Homelessness

Throughout the United States, the racial makeup of households experiencing homelessness does not match that of the general population. The chart below shows a demographic breakdown of each race as a percentage of the U.S. general population compared to the percentage of people within that race who are experiencing homelessness. This data was collected from 2019 Point-in-Time Counts conducted by Continuums of Care across the country.

While 13.4% of the U.S. population is Black/African American, 39.8% of people who experience homelessness are Black/African American. Similarly, 2.7% of the U.S. population identify as multi-racial, while 6.5% of people who experience homelessness identify as such.

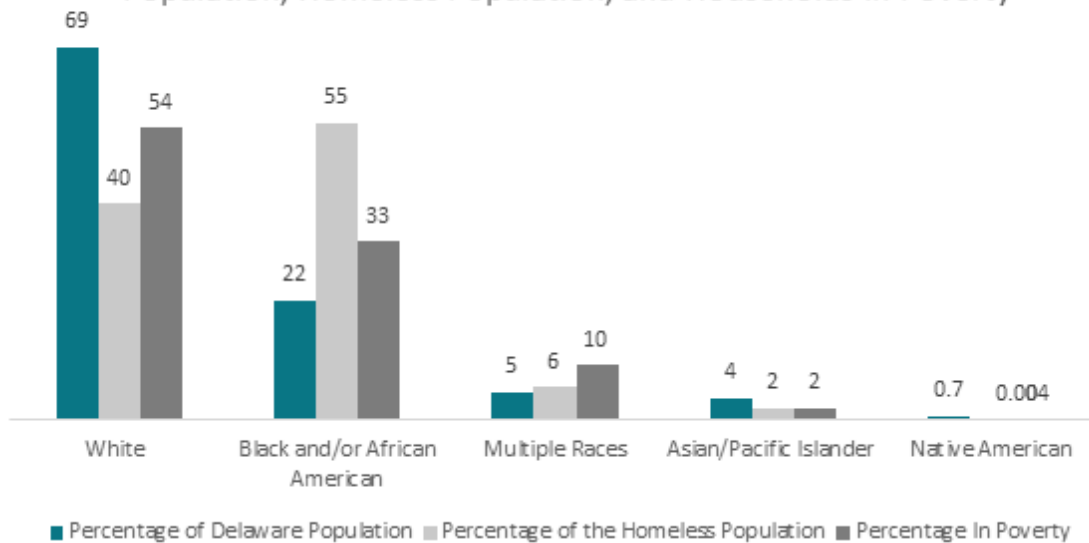
Conversely, 76.5% of the U.S. population identifies as White, while 47.7% of people who experience homelessness are White.

Members of Racial Groups as a Percentage of the Homeless Population and of the General Population of the United States



The composition of the homeless population in Delaware mirrors racial disproportionality of the US population. The chart above, using Delaware's 2019 Point in Time data, shows the racial distributions of Delaware's overall and homeless populations. Based upon these findings, Black Delawareans experience homelessness at a rate that is 4.3 times higher than White Delawareans.

Members of Racial Groups as a Percentage of Delaware Population, Homeless Population, and Households in Poverty

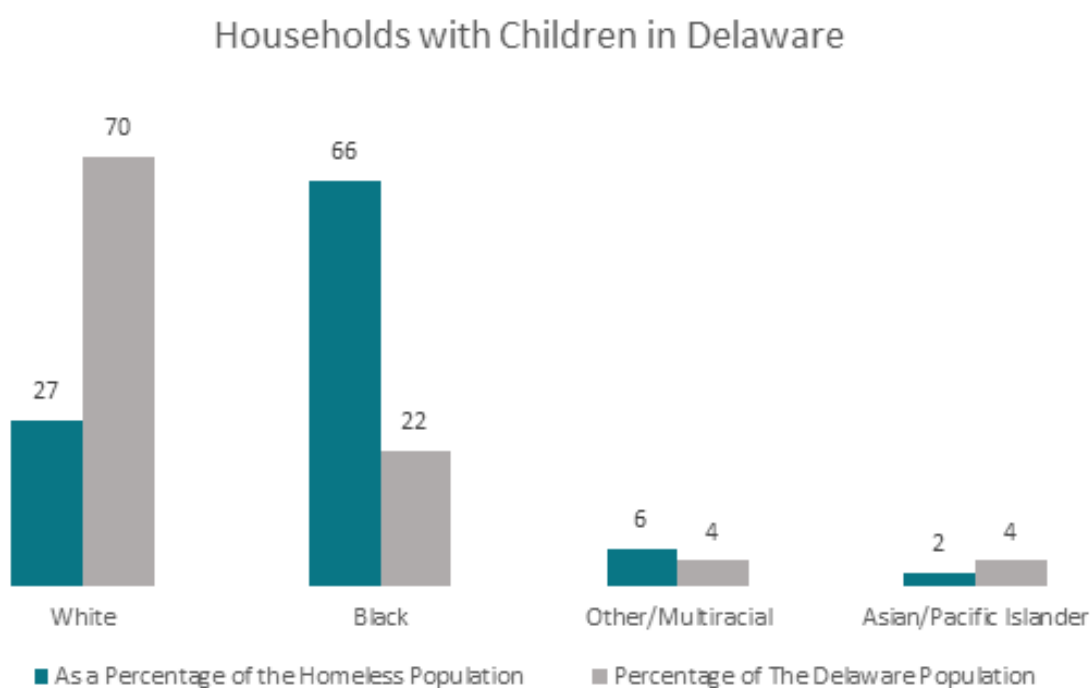


The chart above also displays poverty rate by race in Delaware. It has been suggested that Black/African American households experience homelessness at a higher rate due to higher rates of poverty among this group. However, as seen above, Black/African American households in Delaware experience homelessness at a rate 22% higher than they experience poverty. Comparatively, White Delawareans experience homelessness at a rate that is 14% lower than they experience poverty.

In Delaware, White households are less likely to experience homelessness than Black/African American households, regardless of their poverty status. So, while race and economic status are associated, economic disparities and poverty rate are inadequate explanations of the racial disparities among Black/African American households experiencing homelessness in Delaware.

Data collected throughout the year in the Delaware Community Management Information System (DE-CMIS) by participating homeless service providers was also examined to see if the same racial disparities were present outside of the annual Point-In-Time Count. This data indicates even greater margins, as residents who identified as Black/African American were five times more likely to experience homelessness than White residents in Delaware.

The discrepancy in rates of homelessness across race is even more prominent among families with children. Based on 2020 Point in Time Count Results, families with children where the head of household is Black/African American are **eight times more likely to experience homelessness than families with a White head of household.**



Although Black/African American families with children make up only 22% of all families in Delaware, they comprise 250 of the 379 (66%) of families experiencing homelessness on any given night.

This may be explained by other factors that were not explored in this report, such as the impact of criminal justice involvement on housing access and stability, or the impact of racism and discrimination in access to housing and/or evictions. Nationally, Black/African American renters are almost twice as likely to have evictions filed against them, a process that can serve as a barrier to stable housing for the rest of a person's life. In particular, Black/African American renters who identify as female have been disproportionately impacted by evictions*.

Health Consequences of Being a Person of Color and Experiencing Homelessness

People experiencing homelessness face significant health challenges as a direct result of homelessness. One way that health impacts of homelessness manifest is in lowered life expectancy. Single men and women sleeping in emergency shelters have been found to have an average life expectancy of 64.2 and 68.6 years-- a much lower life expectancy than the general population*.

The health challenges associated with homelessness often intersect with the disparities in health outcomes experienced by people of color. In Delaware, the average life expectancy of a non-Hispanic, White person born in 2018 is 78.5 years. In comparison, the life expectancy of a non-Hispanic, Black/African American person born in the year 2018 is 75.9. Black/African Americans who are at the intersection of both race and homelessness face significantly heightened health risks.

People in Delaware who are both Black/African American and experiencing homelessness face multiple, compounding threats to health as well as increased vulnerability to public health events, as was made evident during the COVID-19 pandemic.*** Decreased life expectancy based upon both race and housing status demonstrates the increased health risks for people of color in addition to the negative impacts of homelessness.



*This number comes from Metraux et al's 2011 article " The Impact of Shelter Use and Housing Placement on Mortality Hazard for Unaccompanied Adults and Adults in Family Households Entering New York City Shelters: 1990-2002"

**From "Communities of Color at Higher Risk for Health and Economic Challenges Due to COVID-19" published by the Kaiser Family Foundation at: <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/communities-of-color-at-higher-risk-for-health-and-economic-challenges-due-to-covid-19/>

Disparity in Delaware's Homeless Response System

While structural and institutional systems play a fundamental role in reinforcing racial disparities, communities can critically examine their homeless response systems to ensure that local responses to homelessness do not deepen or contribute to or (re)produce disparate outcomes for certain groups of people.

In Delaware's homeless responses system, CMIS data indicates that all racial groups appear to utilize shelter and housing resources available in Delaware's homeless response system at similar rates. This includes emergency shelter, transitional housing, rapid re-housing, and permanent supportive housing. There does not appear to be disparity in access to these resources across racial groups. A similar, and even slightly higher proportion of Black/African American households experiencing homelessness enter crisis housing, including emergency shelter and transitional housing, than white households.

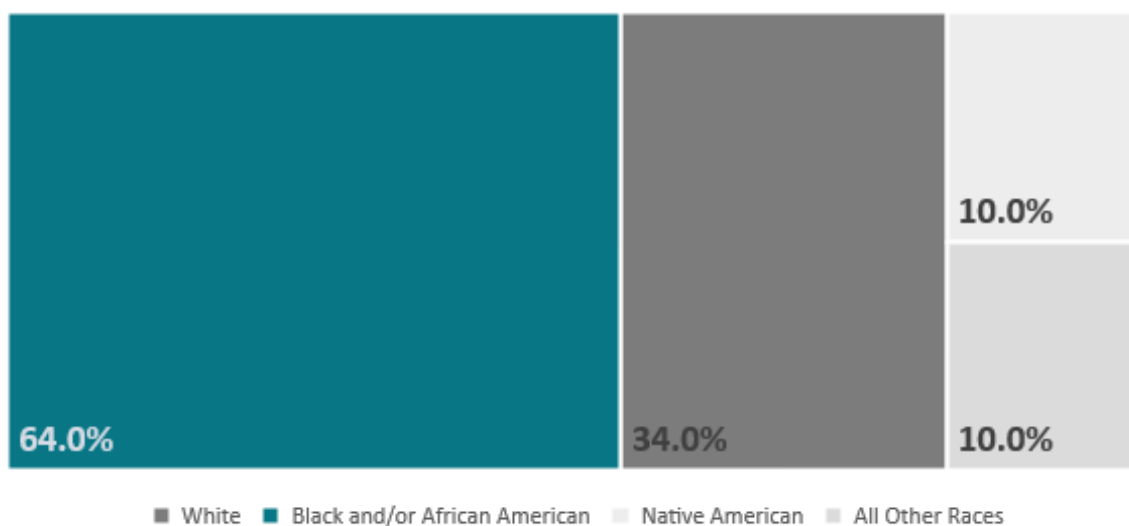
Exits to permanent housing from homelessness show a similar trend. 60 percent of all homeless households in Delaware are Black/African American, while 66 percent of all households exiting to permanent housing are Black/African American. 39 percent of all homeless households in Delaware are White, while 33 percent of exits to permanent housing are White households. Relative to the homeless population, a higher proportion of exits to permanent housing are Black/African American households than white households.

However, there is a difference between the average length of time that households who used homeless services stayed homeless. The average number of days spent homelessness for all households who access homeless services in Delaware is 102 days. The average number of days spent homeless for White, Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino households is 98 days, while the average for Black/African American Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino households is 107 days. Black/African American households spent a week longer than average, while White households spent four less days than average.

Black/African American households have worsened outcomes than their White counterparts, but seem to have higher rates of service utilization relative to the total population. Black/African American households experience homelessness at a higher rate than their White counterparts and spend a longer amount of time homeless, but seem to simultaneously have higher rates of service use.

Some people in Delaware will exit homelessness to permanent, stable housing, and subsequently return to homelessness. Of those who return to homelessness, almost twice as many people who return to homelessness (64%) are Black/African American as White (34%). In addition, returns to homelessness is the only category examined in which people who identified as Native American/Pacific Islanders had diminished outcomes compared to other groups.

Percentage of People Who Return to Homelessness Who Identify as a Member of Each Group



Overall, Black/African American households in Delaware experience homelessness at significantly higher rates than other racial groups. The most readily accessible data in the homeless response system reflects similar rates of service rates of use and outcomes for the Black/African American homeless population compared to other groups. At first pass, it would seem as though the disparity is being largely produced by external forces, such as economic disparity. However, as shown by the analysis of poverty rates, economic disparity in our communities does not appear to sufficiently explain the higher rates of homelessness among Black/African American households in Delaware. Further research is still required.



Recommended Next Steps

As an initial analysis of available data in the Delaware Homeless Reponse System, this report represents a first step toward better assessing the nature of local inequities. Moving forward, additional actions from the Delaware Continuum of Care are required to understanding the nuances of disparities initially identified create a path forward for establishing a more equitable system. Next steps that are recommended are:

- Deeper quantitative assessment
 - A deeper quantitative analysis could consider how people experiencing homelessness access income or health/behavioral health care across racial groups, or how evictions in Delaware impact households across racial groups.
- Qualitative Assessment
 - A qualitative assessment could help determine why, and how, disparities are being perpetuated for people of color experiencing homelessness in Delaware
- Commitment
 - The Continuum of Care must commit to a more equitable system
- Planning, Action, and Change
 - Collective actions to create a more inclusive and equitable system must be planned, implemented and then evaluated

Who Should be Involved?

Everyone! All members of the community should be part of the team as we tackle issues of equity and inclusion. This includes administrators, case managers, social workers, clients, and other members of the Delaware Continuum of Care community.

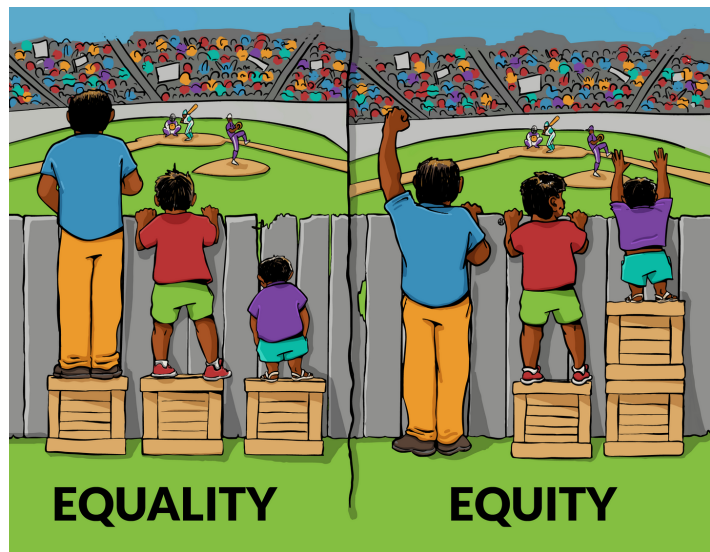
In an inclusive system, all people are invited to participate and engage on fair footing. Each person is considered valued and made to feel welcome. People will see themselves represented, in both leadership and decision-making.

*This information provided by the ACLUS report:: Clearing the Record: How Eviction Sealing Laws Can Advance Housing Access for Women of Color

Defining Equity

In an equitable system, identity does not predict outcomes. Outcomes look similar across groups of people and identities, such as race, gender, ethnicity, etc.

In addition, in an equitable system people are treated fairly and provided with access to the support that they need. This support may look different for different populations or people in order to achieve equitable outcomes among diverse groups.



Understanding Inequalities Through Qualitative Data

In January 2020, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness explained the roles of quantitative and qualitative methods for analyzing inequalities, explaining: “Quantitative data analysis is most useful for determining “if” and “where” inequities exist within a system. Qualitative analysis, particularly information collected from persons with lived experience, is integral to understanding “why” these inequities exist.

Qualitative data is non-numeric data that is collected to understand the elements of a situation that cannot be captured in numbers. Taken together, quantitative and qualitative analysis can enable the Delaware Continuum of Care (CoC) to ensure that the homelessness crisis response system isn’t exacerbating existing inequities while also developing solutions to address inequities community-wide”. This report summarized analysis of quantitative data; the next step of this process is conducting a qualitative process for understanding why inequalities persist for the purpose of identifying effective strategies for dismantling them.

A comprehensive qualitative study recently conducted in Los Angeles indicated that structural racism, discrimination, unconscious bias in housing, employment, criminal justice, and child welfare policies have contributed to the over representation of Black/ people experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles*.

*Full Report from the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority at: <https://nhhc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/la-black-people-experiencing-homelessness.pdf>

Action Steps for Qualitative Understanding

- Engage with Community Members, including service providers, as well as people of color and people with lived experiences to understand what is driving these disparities
- Conduct listening sessions for people of color who experience homelessness
- Solicit Feedback and provide open opportunities for public input
- Explore needs of additional subgroups, people of different ages, gender identities, and sexual orientations

Achieving Justice & Equity

While additional information is being gathered through qualitative methods, action steps for making changes and addressing disparities as they emerge can begin. Best practices collected from other Continuums of Care are provided below. These steps provide a starting point, as actions specifically tailored to the Delaware system will emerge through community-engaged work.

Action Steps For Changing Systems

- Develop cross-sector collaborations with mainstream organizations also working to address disparities, like healthcare systems and restorative justice and population-specific organizations
- Establish race-specific metrics and outcomes throughout the homeless system
- Develop infrastructure to institute change once research and identification process has concluded
- Meaningfully incorporate people of color and people with lived experiences in decision-making
- Provide anti-racism and implicit bias training and education opportunities
- Enact systematic changes to remove barriers to access
- Examine Leadership and organizational structures throughout the homeless response system for equal representation

Additional Resources

- National Alliance to End Homelessness Racial Equity Network Toolkit
<https://endhomelessness.org/resource/the-alliances-racial-equity-network-toolkit/>
- HUD : Building A Foundation of Equity in the Context of COVID-19
- https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/COVID-19-Homeless-System-Response-Rehousing-Activation-and-Racial-Equity-Part-1-Equity-as-the-Foundation.pdf?utm_source=HUD+Exchange+Mailing+List&utm_campaign=1088eb8856-SNAPS-COVID-19-Digest-06-08-2020&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_f32b935a5f-1088eb8856-19569117
- National Health Care for the Homeless Council: "Anti-Racism" toolkit
- <https://nhchc.org/clinical-practice/homeless-services/ethical-and-cultural-issues/anti-racism/>
- Health Inequalities in the First State
- https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/sites.udel.edu/dist/1/6206/files/2020/06/PHC_PolicyBrief_smaller-003.pdf

Race and Equity Reports from Other Continuums of Care

- Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
- <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59e4bd08d7bdce1e8a5b15bb/t/5c77eced6e9a7f75cd22af5e/1551363312965/Your+Way+Home+Racial+Equity+Evaluation+Phase+I+Report.pdf>
- Los Angeles, California
- <https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=2823-report-and-recommendations-of-the-ad-hoc-committee-on-black-people-experiencing-homelessness>
- Supporting Partnerships for Anti-Racist (SPARC) Communities
- <https://c4innovates.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/SPARC-Phase-1-Findings-March-2018.pdf>