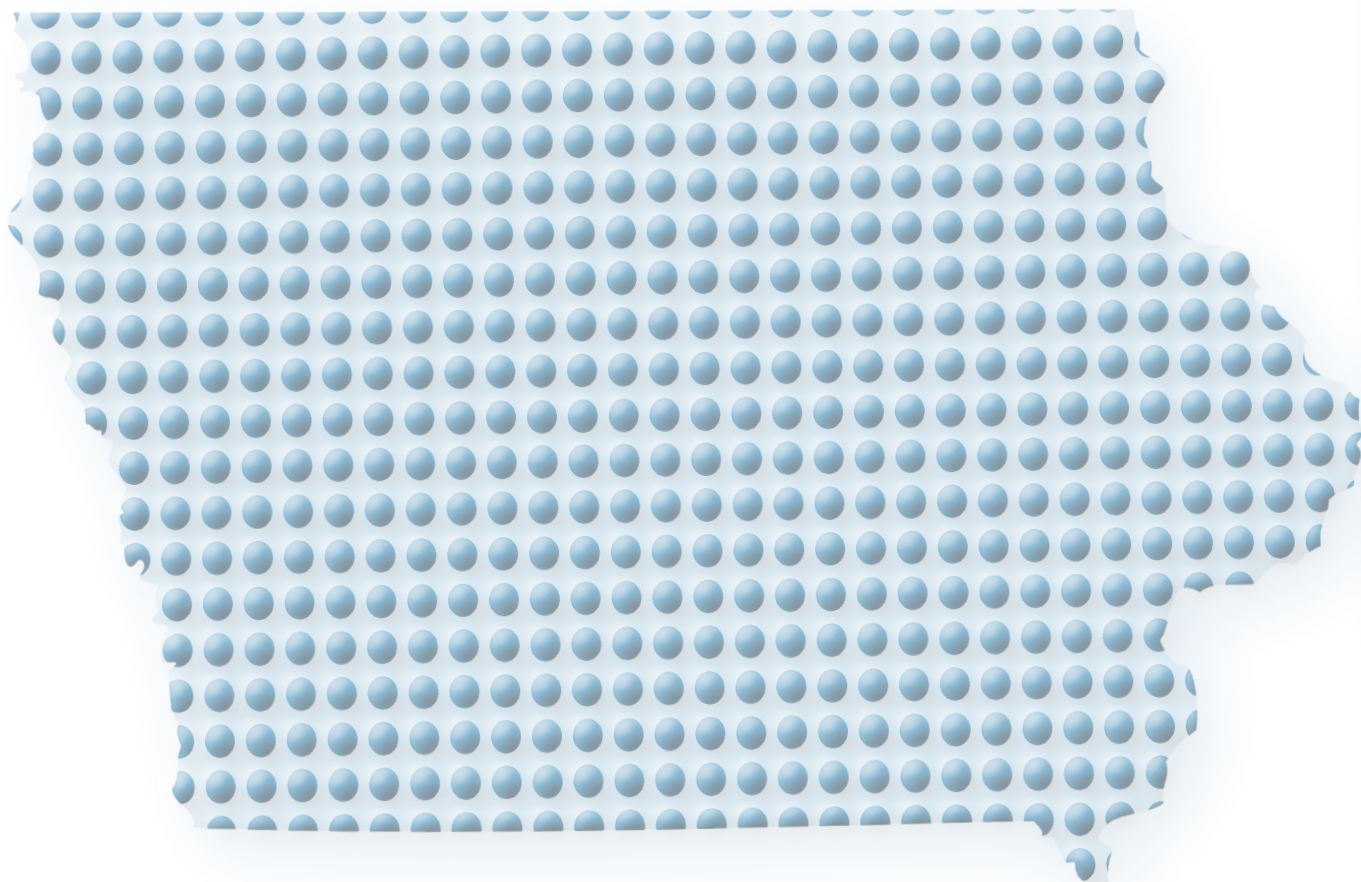# SNAPSHOT 2021-2022

OF SERVICE AND SHELTER USE
USING 2019, 2020 and 2021 CALENDAR YEAR DATA

IOWANS
EXPERIENCING
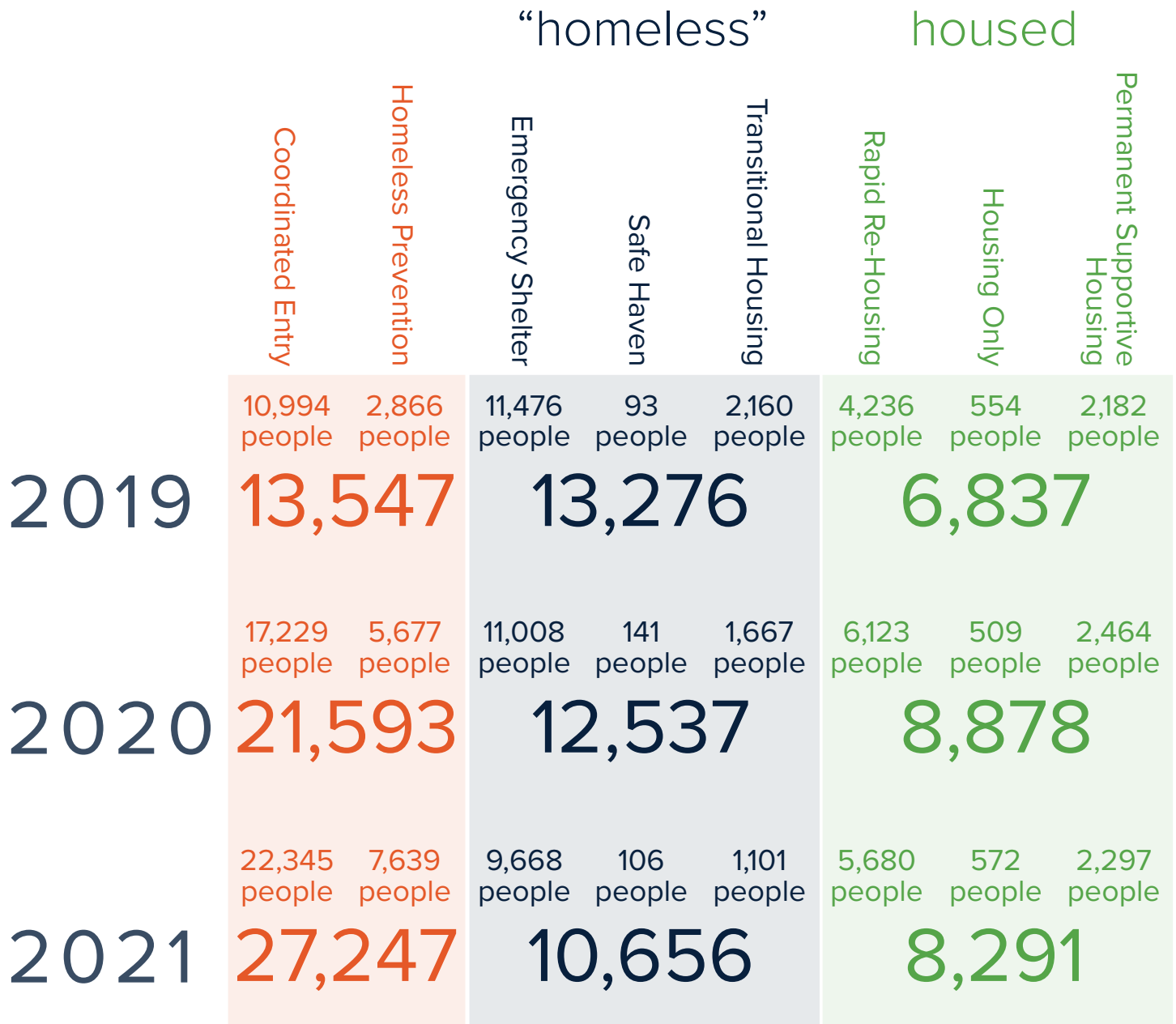## HOMELESSNESS

Institute for Community Alliances

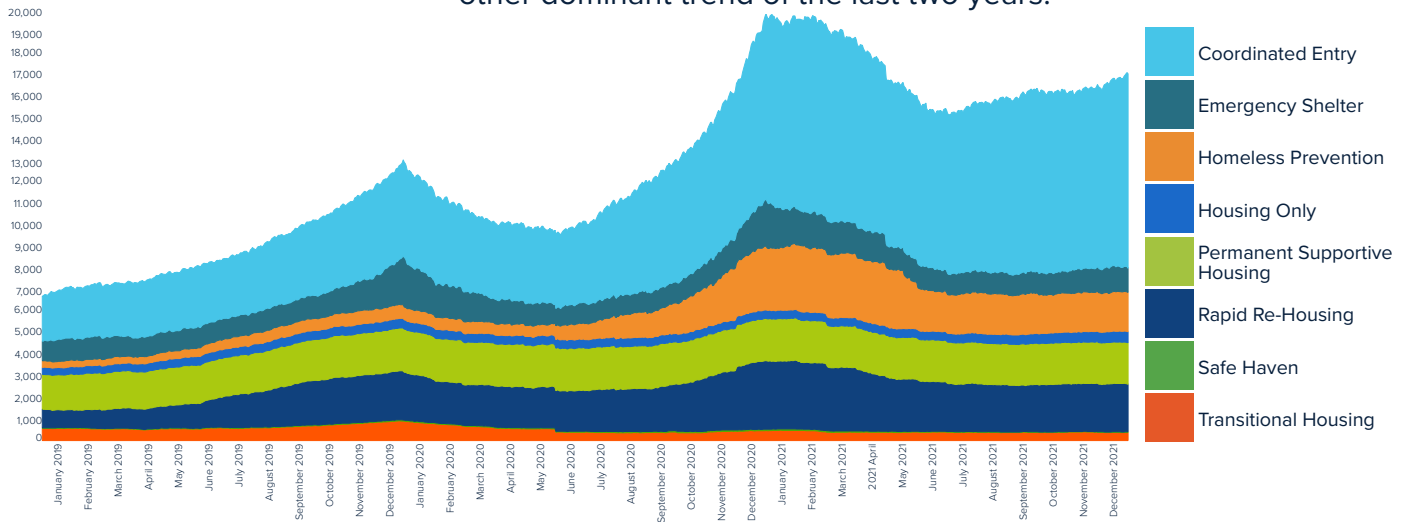**Produced by the Institute for Community Alliances**
Ehren Stover-Wright, PhD
Senior Analyst
Institute for Community Alliances

1111 9th St Suite 380
Des Moines, IA 50314

Phone: 515.246.6643
Fax: 515.246.6637
ehren.wright@icalliances.org
www.icalliances.org

"homeless"   housed

	Coordinated Entry	Homeless Prevention	Emergency Shelter	Safe Haven	Transitional Housing	Rapid Re-Housing	Housing Only	Permanent Supportive Housing
2019	10,994 people	2,866 people	11,476 people	93 people	2,160 people	4,236 people	554 people	2,182 people
	13,547		**13,276**			**6,837**		
2020	17,229 people	5,677 people	11,008 people	141 people	1,667 people	6,123 people	509 people	2,464 people
	21,593		**12,537**			**8,878**		
2021	22,345 people	7,639 people	9,668 people	106 people	1,101 people	5,680 people	572 people	2,297 people
	27,247		**10,656**			**8,291**		

The growth of prevention and coordinated entry, to deliver the best response and make the most of available resources, has been the other dominant trend of the last two years.


Legend:
- Coordinated Entry
- Emergency Shelter
- Homeless Prevention
- Housing Only
- Permanent Supportive Housing
- Rapid Re-Housing
- Safe Haven
- Transitional Housing

Organized by HUD's continua of care (COC), Institute for Community Alliances (ICA) operates HMIS systems in Iowa. Those Iowa COC are Polk County, Woodbury County, Pottawattamie County reports as part of the Omaha Nebraska COC, but in this report Pottawattamie providers are included in some tables, then across the state the remaining 96 counties comprise the Balance of State continuum of care.

The pattern of services and overall system growth is informative. While the total people experiencing homelessness in the form of shelter increased slightly in 2020 and went back down in 2021, the system as a whole grew significantly in permanent housing, rapid rehousing, and especially in homeless prevention and coordinated entry using supports and emergency vouchers.

From year to year many of the numbers in this report change very little, even within the data from Iowa's HMIS system. This report provides much data from other sources as well. Those sources tend to change even less. American Community Survey and Decennial Census data are from the United States Census Bureau. CHAS data is a product of the Census Bureau and HUD in collaboration. In those cases we used data from five year estimates. The Census Bureau collects data annually, but provides it in five year average ranges at the county level. We always use the most recent available data. While data is updated annually for homeless services, it may be compared to data from other systems for several years in a row.
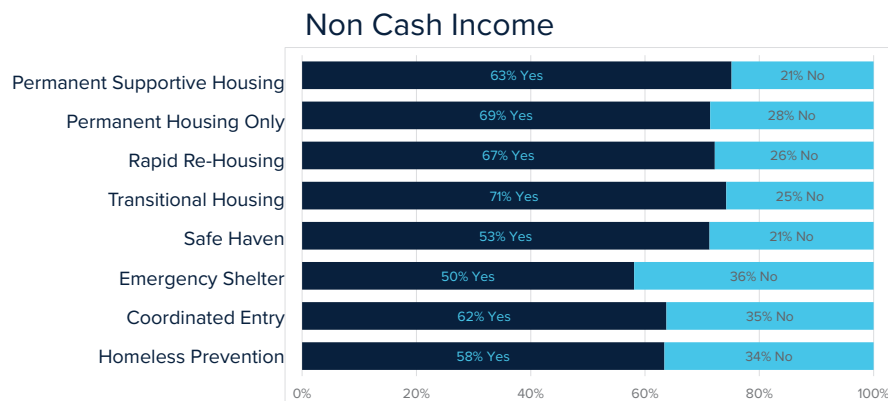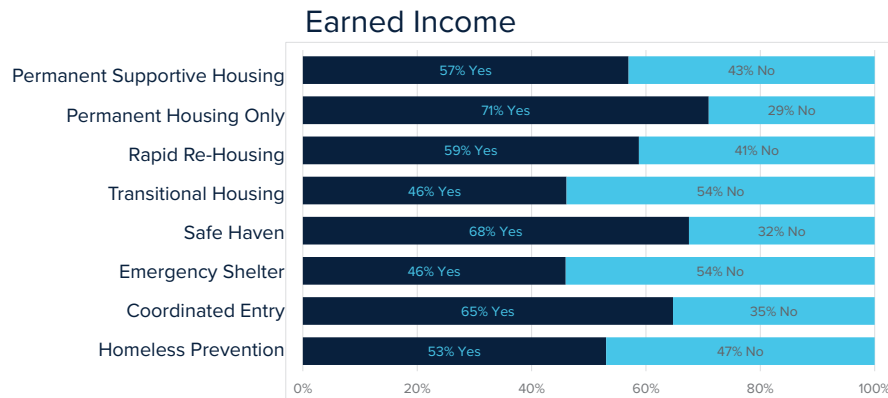
When we present a number as representing the homeless population in a specific category, each number in this report is an un-duplicated count. A person may be counted in multiple populations if they were in multiple populations during the year. For example, the population for a year that came from a specific county will be a count of unique individuals. But if one person is served by an emergency shelter and by a rapid rehousing program in the same year, they will appear in both of those counts. And so, the counts of more specificity may add up to a larger number than the total from which they were derived.
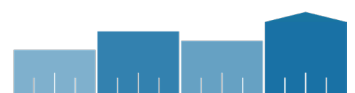
THE HIGH
COST OF LIVING

Predicting who will become homeless is not possible. Even knowing the chance people from a particular group will experience homelessness is difficult. A lot of people who become homeless have earned income or with social security income, and those households who have income often have what should be sufficient income, but the cost of housing has increased while those incomes have remained constant. These percentages represent the full three year average of the report.

Also, most households have access to resources like supplemental nutrition assistance, additional food pantry access from other sources, workforce development and counseling to offset costs like rent which must be paid in cash, and yet they were unable to afford the costs of living.

Earned Income

Program	Yes	No
Permanent Supportive Housing	57% Yes	43% No
Permanent Housing Only	71% Yes	29% No
Rapid Re-Housing	59% Yes	41% No
Transitional Housing	46% Yes	54% No
Safe Haven	68% Yes	32% No
Emergency Shelter	46% Yes	54% No
Coordinated Entry	65% Yes	35% No
Homeless Prevention	53% Yes	47% No

Non Cash Income

Program	Yes	No
Permanent Supportive Housing	63% Yes	21% No
Permanent Housing Only	69% Yes	28% No
Rapid Re-Housing	67% Yes	26% No
Transitional Housing	71% Yes	25% No
Safe Haven	53% Yes	21% No
Emergency Shelter	50% Yes	36% No
Coordinated Entry	62% Yes	35% No
Homeless Prevention	58% Yes	34% No

WHO SERVED IOWANS?

Type	2020 Beds	2021 Beds
ES	167	278
TH	81	76
RRH	107	95
PSH	53	52

Type	2020 Beds	2021 Beds
ES	929	1352
TH	270	533
SH	13	13
RRH	767	897
PSH	448	558
OPH	18	64

CONTINUUM OF CARE (CoC)
BED COUNTS

BALANCE OF STATE

SIOUXLAND

POLK COUNTY

COUNCIL
BLUFFS

Type	2020 Beds	2021 Beds
ES	412	436
TH	180	188
SH	15	15
RRH	270	331
PSH	492	502
OPH	175	205

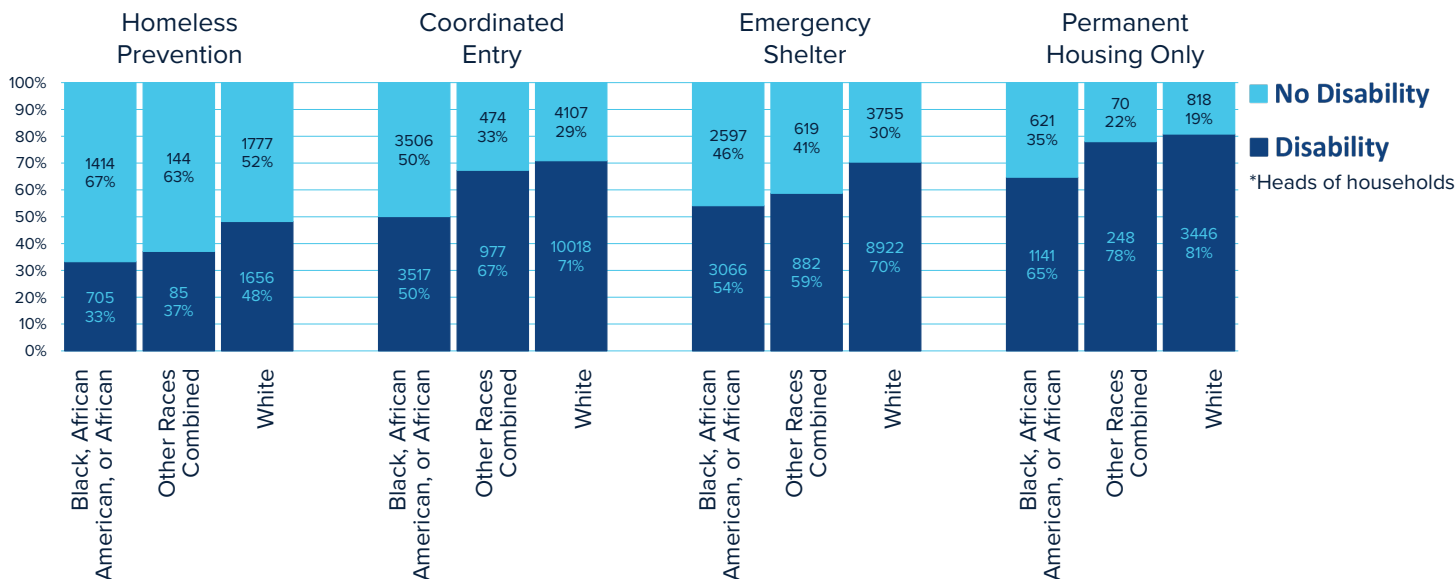| Type	2020 Beds	2021 Beds
ES	159	187
TH	11	0
SH	34	0
RRH	55	32
PSH	129	129
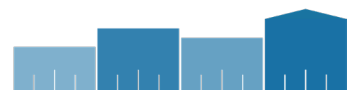
DEMOGRAPHICS OF HOMELESSNESS

Race, gender, and household composition have a complicated relationship in homeless services. These charts, taken together, represent the distributions across the three years of this report and who that there is a clear demarcation between races and genders among the project types. The last three years have seen the expanded funding of prevention and coordinated entry efforts. In prevention there is a clear over representation of African Americans compared to the general population, and further there is a strong tendency for those served to be in households. By contrast coordinated entry, while demonstrating some of the same trends, is where more white and unaccompanied people are found, though the representation of women is higher than we see entering shelter, suggesting that there is a need for emergency shelter among women not being met by current offerings.

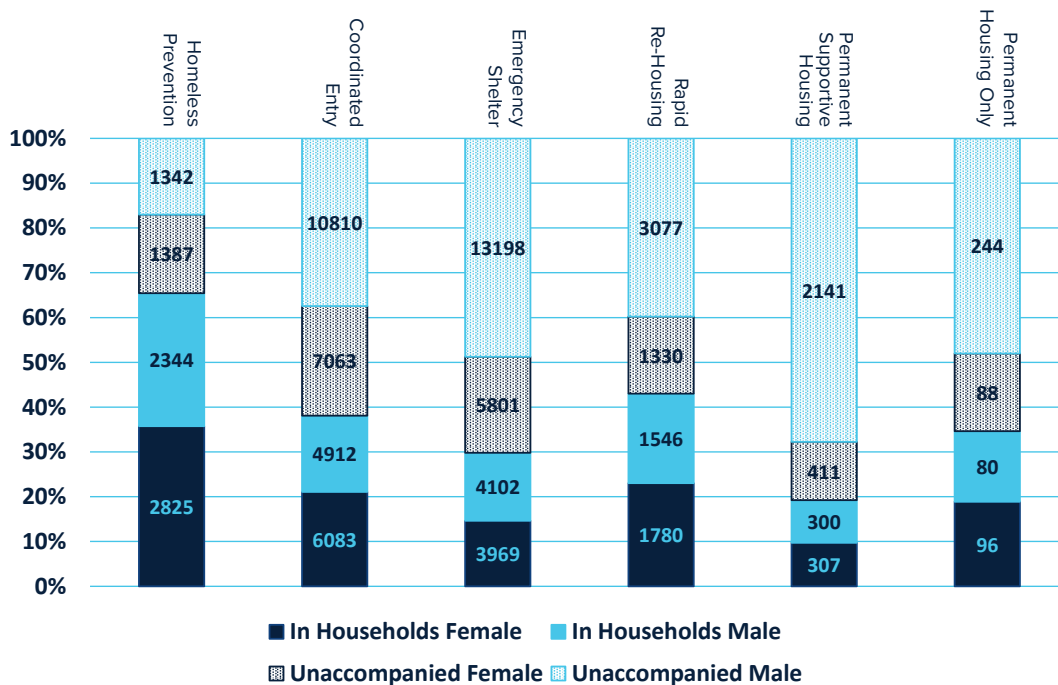**Race and Total People Served in Project Types By Year**

Legend:
- ■ Black, African American, or African
- ■ White
- ■ Unknown
- ■ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ■ American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous
- ■ Asian or Asian American
- ■ Multi-Racial

Top chart data (Disability / No Disability by race across program types):

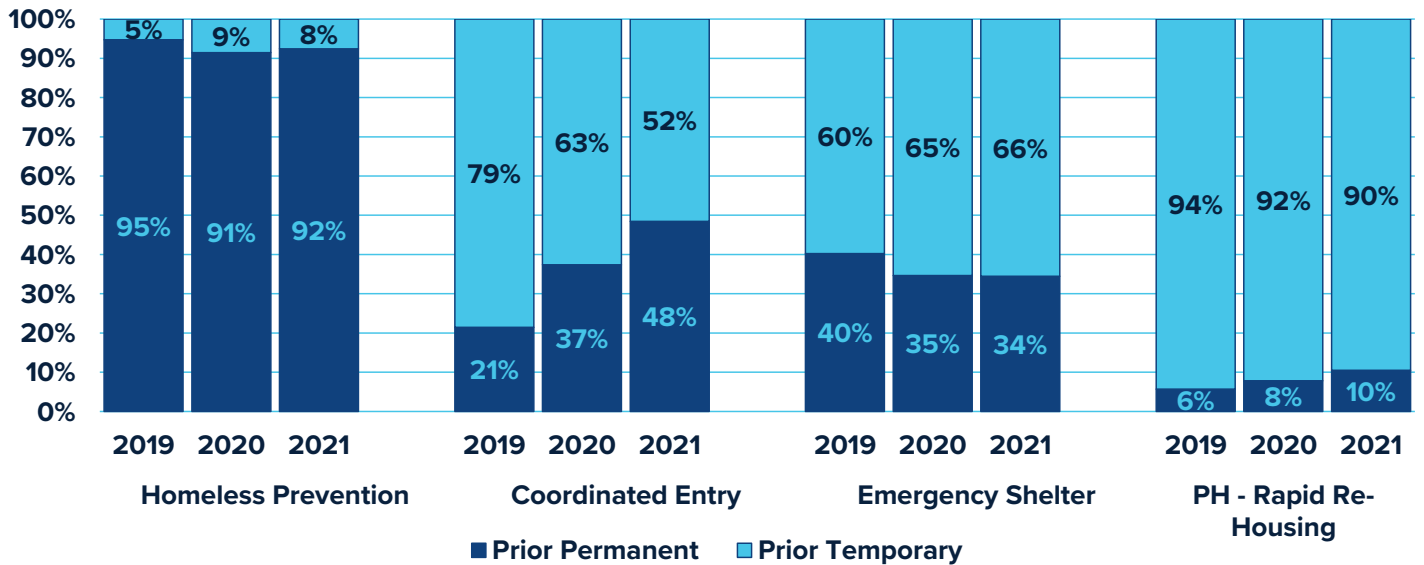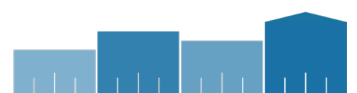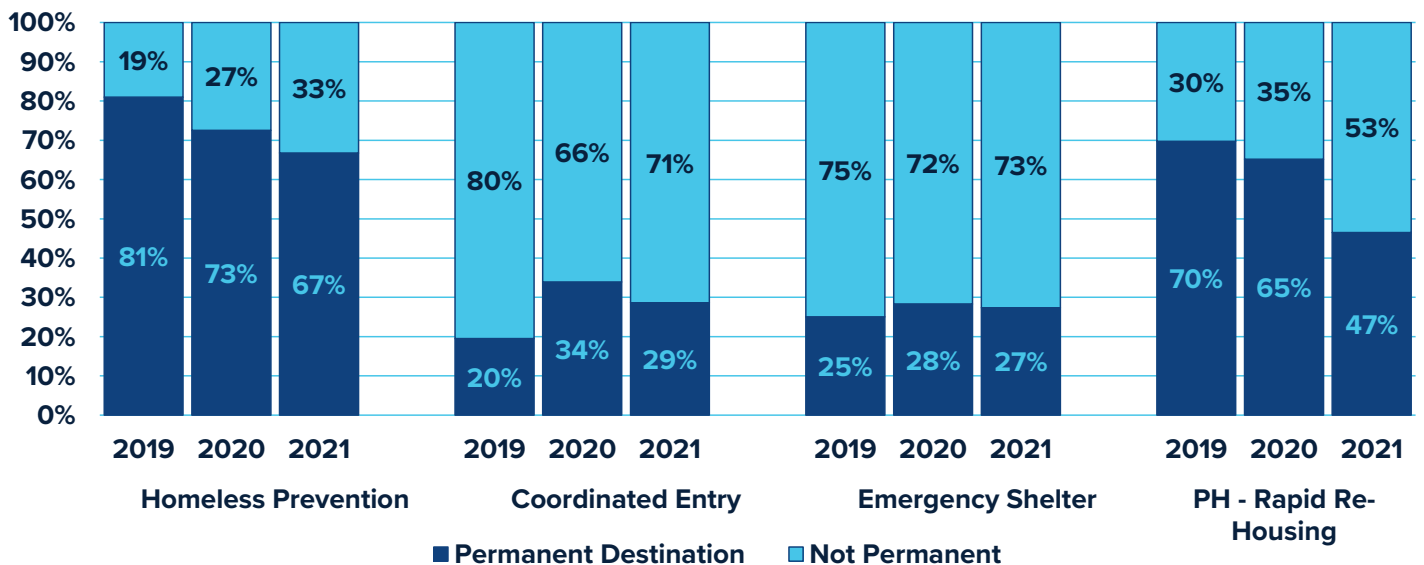|	No Disability	Disability
Homeless Prevention		
Black, African American, or African	1414 67%	705 33%
Other Races Combined	144 63%	85 37%
White	1777 52%	1656 48%
Coordinated Entry		
Black, African American, or African	3506 50%	3517 50%
Other Races Combined	474 33%	977 67%
White	4107 29%	10018 71%
Emergency Shelter		
Black, African American, or African	2597 46%	3066 54%
Other Races Combined	619 41%	882 59%
White	3755 30%	8922 70%
Permanent Housing Only		
Black, African American, or African	621 35%	1141 65%
Other Races Combined	70 22%	248 78%
White	818 19%	3446 81%

*Heads of households

When we look at rapid rehousing we see a further over representation of white, unaccompanied people and men when compared to those seeking services. Then when we look at permanent supportive housing the number of men who are unaccompanied and white are hugely overrepresented compared to the homeless population. This is largely a function of how qualification for chronic status functions, both by requiring a medical diagnosis and preferring easier to document episodes of homelessness. The end result is that prevention prioritizes households and women, while we see more single men in permanent housing.

These tables show 3 year totals.

Bottom chart data (by program type):

	Homeless Prevention	Coordinated Entry	Emergency Shelter	Rapid Re-Housing	Permanent Supportive Housing	Permanent Housing Only
Unaccompanied Male	1342	10810	13198	3077	2141	244
Unaccompanied Female	1387	7063	5801	1330	411	88
In Households Male	2344	4912	4102	1546	300	80
In Households Female	2825	6083	3969	1780	307	96

■ In Households Female ■ In Households Male
▦ Unaccompanied Female ▦ Unaccompanied Male

Chart 1: Prior living situation (Prior Permanent / Prior Temporary)

	2019	2020	2021
Homeless Prevention – Prior Temporary	5%	9%	8%
Homeless Prevention – Prior Permanent	95%	91%	92%
Coordinated Entry – Prior Temporary	79%	63%	52%
Coordinated Entry – Prior Permanent	21%	37%	48%
Emergency Shelter – Prior Temporary	60%	65%	66%
Emergency Shelter – Prior Permanent	40%	35%	34%
PH - Rapid Re-Housing – Prior Temporary	94%	92%	90%
PH - Rapid Re-Housing – Prior Permanent	6%	8%	10%

Legend: ■ Prior Permanent   ■ Prior Temporary

One of the best ways to know the effectiveness of an emergency intervention is looking at where people were before they became homeless and where they were after they left service. We divide these between permanent places, like a house or apartment with the person's name on the lease, and temporary places like an apartment with a time limited subsidy or staying at a friends house. This first table shows where people came from, then the second table shows where they went to.

Chart 2: Destination (Permanent Destination / Not Permanent)

	2019	2020	2021
Homeless Prevention – Not Permanent	19%	27%	33%
Homeless Prevention – Permanent Destination	81%	73%	67%
Coordinated Entry – Not Permanent	80%	66%	71%
Coordinated Entry – Permanent Destination	20%	34%	29%
Emergency Shelter – Not Permanent	75%	72%	73%
Emergency Shelter – Permanent Destination	25%	28%	27%
PH - Rapid Re-Housing – Not Permanent	30%	35%	53%
PH - Rapid Re-Housing – Permanent Destination	70%	65%	47%

Legend: ■ Permanent Destination   ■ Not Permanent

SYSTEM PERFORMANCE

Length of episode, permanent exits, returns from permanent exits to homelessness, and first-time homelessness form a set of vectors that can, in theory, lead to ending homelessness. There is some debate about ending homelessness as a goal. Often, when people talk about ending homelessness, then mean making homelessness rare, brief and one time.

With the number of days in shelter, we use average and median. Median is less impacted by outliers and gives a better sense of how many days most people spend in shelter. But if the average is far away from the median it is likely there were a few long-term stayers.

If we can get the length of stay down, the precent of first time up, the precent going to permanent exits close to 100%, and the returns to homelessness close to zero, we can declare that homelessness is functionally ended.

	Exited Permanent Housing to a Permanent Destionation in the previous 2 years, and returned to homelessness			Exited Shelter to a Permanent Destionation in the previous 2 years, and returned to homelessness		
	2019	2020	2021	2019	2020	2021
Polk County	24%	27%	24%	33%	32%	27%
Balance of State	13%	18%	16%	24%	29%	26%
Siouxland	17%	3%	27%	14%	8%	9%
Council Bluffs	28%	28%	29%	33%	60%	62%

	Average Days in Shelter			Median Days in Shelter		
	2019	2020	2021	2019	2020	2021
Polk County	48	49	39	26	30	24
Balance of State	40	43	43	25	29	38
Siouxland	52	44	96	56	27	95
Council Bluffs	67	81	81	32	41	38

|	Percent of First Time Homeless		
	2019	2020	2021
Polk County	67%	65%	67%
Balance of State	79%	76%	79%
Siouxland	95%	93%	83%
Council Bluffs	54%	60%	62%

SYSTEMS AND HOMELESSNESS

The persistent nature of homelessness and poverty is a social fact and point of confusion for many observers. A remarkably constant and predictable number of people are homeless at any given time. Why is it, how is it, that in such a wealthy economy full of opportunity so many people find themselves homeless?

Though people experiencing homelessness represent a small percentage of the population in any given year, over the course of 10 years about 4% of the population is served by homeless services projects that report into the homeless management information system (see our 2014 annual report for a further investigation into this theme). About half of the people served by homeless services agencies are served once by a single program and never seen again. Fewer than 20% of the people who are served remain homeless for more than a year or reappear in the persistently in the system. Far from the popular perception of a persistent and intractable population in homelessness, the reality of homelessness is more akin to a condition circulating among the population at risk, which is best defined in economic terms.

Yet, the remarkably persistent number of people experiencing homelessness at any given time suggests strongly that the individuals experiencing homelessness are largely blameless for their condition. Far from a series of bad decisions to be laid at the feet of those who enter homelessness, this constancy suggests a gravity well into which some must always fall. There is an apparent systemic need for homelessness and randomness about who among the vulnerable will become homeless. We see randomness when we regress demographic data points against the dependent variables of exits to permanent housing destinations or rapid-rehousing move-ins or, using event history or survival analysis, time to return to homelessness from a program exit. In short, for all efforts to show statistical relationships between any of the variables we capture and homelessness, we come up empty handed. This suggests a random nature about who becomes homeless.
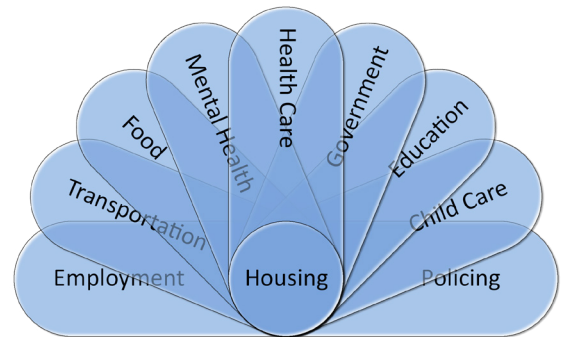
However, as we pull back from individuals to populations, we find strong statistical relationships. Populations with more poverty have more homelessness. It is also true that communities with more poverty receive more funding to address homelessness and when the number of beds is increased or the supply of permanent units or vouchers is expanded, the population needing those units rises to fill supply. This shows that there is an underserved population in need, making decision of what to sacrifice to make rent. Then when there is some relief, they take it.

This appears true in every community. It has more to do with demographics and economics than psychological factors. The lack of economic opportunity, community resources, and affordable housing appear more relevant than any individual decisions. Otherwise, we would see some relationship in client level data or some variability in the population.
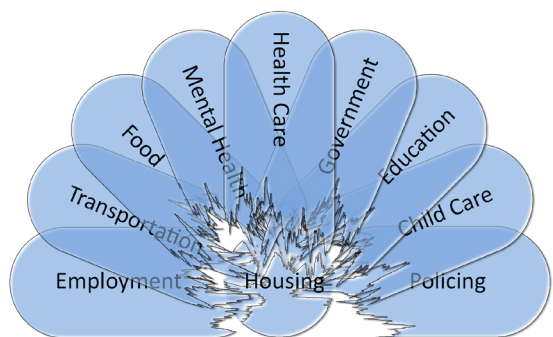
A picture emerges of systems. Each system demonstrates its own failures, where the impacts gravitate toward those least capable of mitigation through economic means. Within the housing system, some people experience homelessness while others see profits from investment property. For the profits at the top to continue there must be scarcity. This is true of any purely financialized system. The selection of which micro elements (people) are impacted by this macro reality (the housing system) is the result of how and where other related systems fail. If we look at systems like employment, transportation, food, mental health, healthcare, education, childcare, policing, and all the other systems with fundamentally economic natures we can understand why some people become homeless and others do not.

When one of those other systems fails, and the person subject to that failure can't find another (non-economic) way to cope, the economic pressure of that failure creates a sympathetic failure in the housing system. Here we begin to understand that the true causes of homelessness are not in the people who experience homelessness, but in the relationships between systems.

This is not a cause for hopelessness, but a way to understand the solution to homelessness is a real possibility. It begins by acknowledging the cause of homelessness is systemic and beyond the ability of the people who become homeless to address. So too must the solution be systemic. If we want to keep the profitable parts of the housing system, and there is no reason we can't, we must mitigate their impacts by redirecting some of that profit to fill the gap left by scarcity.

The tendency for service providers to feel overwhelmed and like there is no path to a world where all people have stable housing is the result of trying to fix homelessness by fixing people. The lesson here is not one of defeat, but of mission. As a community, we providers need to understand and internalize that there is no blame to be placed on the people experiencing homelessness for their homelessness, there is no such thing as housing readiness, and the people we serve do not lack for character or capacity. Instead, they are the subjects of social forces. Our best selves are reflected in housing first policy and acting as communication agents on behalf of the population experiencing homelessness, advocating with landlords, community leaders, and giving their voice a place in discussions around policy. It is the important work we can do as data professionals. The lasting solutions that will one day lead to a world free of homelessness are present today in the relationships between systems. Managing those relationships will be where we find the solutions.

It is with that spirit that this document is evolving into a data book format. With his data we can help community and policy leaders see the need to address homelessness from our prosperity, and that each system which provides a boon also has consequences for those without the economic resources to address failure on their own.

When people experiencing poverty have failures from systems like employment, transportation, food, mental health, healthcare, education, childcare, or policing, the result can be homelessness. When we look for those connections, we can find the necessary solutions.

This is also, in part, an acknowledgment of the incredibly turbulent time COVID has brought upon us. COVID introduced turbulence in all these systems, particularly housing and homeless response, that made analysis impossible. The 2021 Annual Report was in the works as COVID struck and threw any observable trends into uncertainty. We pivoted our efforts to increasing our training capacity for agencies so COVID related expansions could happen seamlessly and additional spending could move forward without any worry about the data gathering capacity. Now, as COVID has become less of an emergency and more of a constant element of planning and analysis, the time has come for us to unpack that impact.

The accompanying inaugural data book will include revised 2019 numbers (for Iowa counties aside from Pottawattamie, which implemented a new HMIS system and so has no data available for 2019) representing the before-time, along with 2020 number representing the transitional period, and 2021 numbers representing the 'new normal' after COVID and its impacts have settled down a bit. All of this includes an ever-present giant asterisk representing the ongoing housing crisis, the economic turbulence, the eviction moratorium, and the shifting nature of work. All of this is going to have to be a shadow, both acknowledged and delayed in addressing until another time while we will try to make space for the elements we can address.

SNAPSHOT 2021-2022

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INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY ALLIANCES