

Aging and Unhoused in Travis County



2022

Background

- Dec 2021 Aging and Homelessness Affinity group of ECHO engaged consultant group for research
- Grant provided by the St. David's Foundation to Aging is Cool
- Quantitative and qualitative data including:
 - # of older adults experiencing homelessness, demographics and trends
 - Gaps in awareness of senior resources among formal and informal providers
 - Types of supports needed
 - Challenges that impact older adults and their ability to be housing
 - Barriers to staying housed
- Focus age 50+ due to “street age”

Methodology

- Online survey of frontline workers
- Data review from the Homelessness Management Information System
- Literature review
- Interviews of individuals who are 50+ and unhoused
 - Participants included: Sunrise Homeless Navigation Center, Salvation Army, The Other Ones Foundation, SAFE and Front Steps



Aging and the Older Adult Population in Travis County

- In Texas, it is projected that the population of individuals ages 65 and older will increase by 114.3% between 2010 and 2030.
- 66 older adults are newly identified in the Austin/Travis County HMIS per month
- Of these, 22.5 older adults are housed per month
- Individuals identified as “Black or African American” are disproportionately represented in the older and unhoused population relative to the general population in the Austin Metropolitan Area

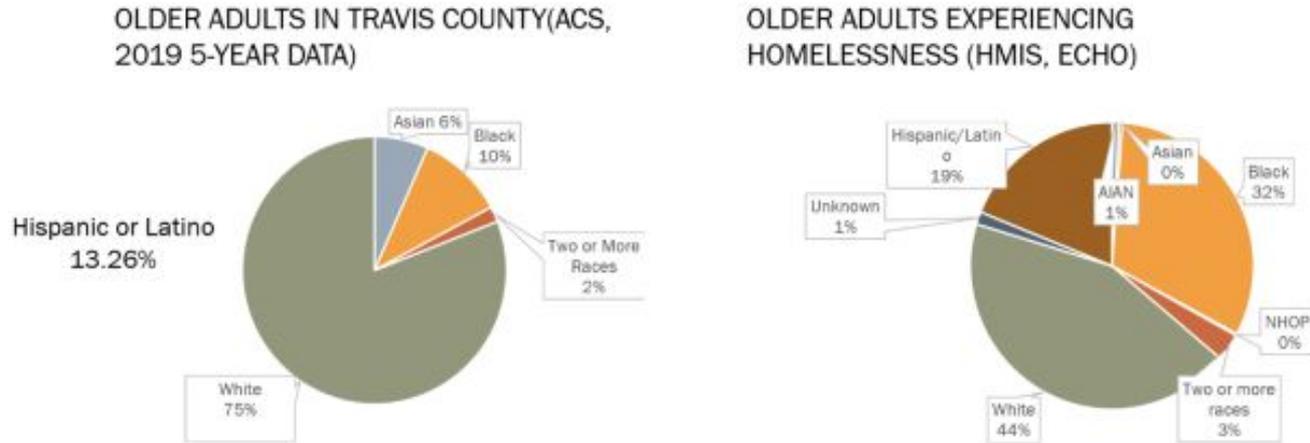


Figure 1. Racial/ethnic breakdown of unhoused older adult population in Travis County and HMIS

Literature review (Humphries and Canham 2021)

- Unsheltered older adults require specific shelter and housing accommodations as their cases are particularly complex- poorer health and increased needs
- Chronically homeless older adults are more likely to be men and 'difficult to house' due to substance use history, comorbid mental health and physical health issues and limited social support.
- Newly homeless older adults are more likely to have informal social support but experience barriers to accessing information about homelessness, healthcare and community services



Local data

- 70% of the unhoused older adult population in Austin/Travis County are men
- 22 people over the age of 55 were housed per month from January 2019 to May 2021. Within a 24-month period, an estimated 13 older adults over the age of 55 returned to homelessness after exiting a program for unhoused adults, which is higher than for younger populations
- Older adults in the Austin/Travis County have higher rates of the following compared to the overall unhoused population:
 - any disabling condition (81% vs. 52%),
 - HIV/AIDS (10% vs. 4%),
 - alcohol abuse (10% vs. 4%),
 - chronic health conditions (56% vs. 21%),
 - physical disability (56% vs. 20%),
 - mental health condition (45% vs. 36%) compared to the younger population of unhoused adults.

Survey findings: Service Providers (46 surveys)

- Top 3 reasons you see individuals become unhoused
 - Inability to pay housing costs
 - Substance abuse/mental health issues
 - Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of awareness or accessibility of guides specific to unhoused older adult services and assistance, as well as lack of awareness on services available to older adults
- Issues with discharges from hospital systems
- Transportation is inaccessible to older adults



Survey findings continued



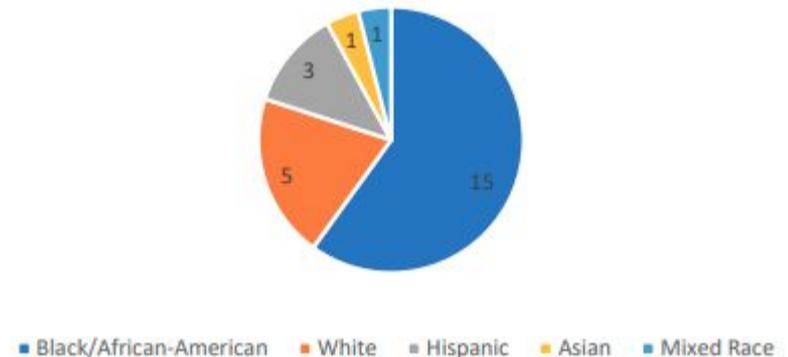
- Barriers to housing
 - Lack of income
 - Criminal background
 - Rental/eviction history
 - Lack of available units
 - Lack of documentation/identification
 - Inability to self-apply for housing

- 83% of the survey respondents identified specific issues they encounter when trying to connect older adults with cognitive disabilities
 - Difficulty of completing paperwork due to memory loss or confusion
 - Lack of “age-appropriate” housing options that can provide the level of care needed
 - Challenges maintaining housing which is related to the individuals’ limited abilities to perform Activities of Daily Living (ADL’S) which are activities related to personal care and include bathing or showering, dressing, getting in and out of bed or a chair, walking, using the toilet, and eating.

Interviews with Older and Unhoused Adults (26)

- 21 male, 5 female
- Ages:
 - 4 were aged between 50-54 years
 - 9 were aged between 55 and 59 years
 - 9 were aged between 60-64 years
 - 2 were aged between 65-69 years
 - 1 was aged between 70-74 years
- Reasons for becoming unhoused
 - Job loss 30%
 - Marital breakdown 24%
 - Death of a loved one 24%
 - Lack of social support 20%

Self-identified race of interviewees



Key Findings from Interviews with Older Unhoused Adults

- History of trauma
- Feelings of guilt and shame
- Women staying in unhealthy situations like domestic violence to avoid becoming unhoused
- The longer on the streets, the easier it is to stay on the streets
- Lack of income
- Feeling isolated when housed
- Poor communication with case managers- not feeling seen or heard
- Lack of affordability in Austin

Service needs

- Food, clothes, shelter, bus passes, healthcare
- Connections to senior, homeless and veteran programs
- Access to public bathrooms/showers
- Locked storage
- Protection from crime
- Better connection with and to case managers
- Coordinated information: central location to get information about resources
- Job training and education
- Support after being housed including social gatherings and positive reinforcement
- Safe and speedy housing placement

System Recommendations



- Increase relationship building between the aging providers and homeless serving organizations to increase knowledge of and referral to each other's services.
- Create a shared resource list for unhoused older adults.
- Provide SOAR training for all individuals serving unhoused older adults
- Create relationships and processes to address hospital discharge of older unhoused adults
- Make access to HMIS available for all organizations serving older unhoused adults
- Increase access to safe storage
- Increase stock of and access to affordable housing designed to serve older adults
- Provide greater access to substance abuse and mental health services targeted to older adults
- Assess food availability for unhoused older adults, especially on the weekends and in the evenings

Service Recommendations

- Provide cross-training for case managers on generational and aging issues
- Ensure all services are trauma informed
- Create sense of community and positivity within housing to help sustain housing retention
- Offer Peer support and navigation programs for older adults who are unhoused
- Connect with employment providers and provide access to job training and employment that are targeted to older adults

Next steps

- Training and relationship building between aging and homelessness providers/case managers
- Intern with the GRACE Program
- Exploration on hospital discharges
- Exploration on increasing SOAR training

