



# ESTIMATE OF HOMELESS PEOPLE IN CHICAGO

CHICAGO COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS  
2020

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An estimated 76,998 people experienced homelessness in Chicago throughout 2018, the latest year for which U.S. Census data is available, and the proportion of them living on the street or in shelters grew appreciably. Homelessness afflicted people of all races, genders, age and employment status. This report chronicles some of the most profound impacts.

During the 2018-19 school year, 16,451 Chicago Public Schools (CPS) students experienced homelessness.<sup>1</sup> Only 11% of these Chicago students were served by the shelter system, including unaccompanied youth no longer living with a parent or guardian.<sup>2</sup> Most stay wherever they can, often forced to move frequently among unstable living situations—sleeping in motels, cars, and trains, or temporarily staying with others. These living situations can quickly break down due to overcrowding, tensions that develop, and the primary tenant’s fear of losing their housing.

**In the 2018-19 school year, 14,403 CPS students reported temporarily staying with others, also known as “couch-surfing” or “doubling-up.”**

Temporarily staying with others is a form of homelessness that is not unique to Chicago. During the 2017-18 school year, 1,508,265 public school students nationwide experienced homelessness and 74% of those students reported temporarily staying with others.<sup>3</sup> These data are

collected by the U.S. Department of Education, which recognizes all forms of homelessness that children and youth might experience.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has a far more limited scope. By not recognizing the homeless status of those who temporarily stay with others, HUD shuts out millions of homeless children and their families from homeless assistance programs.

**HUD homeless assistance eligibility criteria excluded 1,117,144 students nationwide from accessing these essential programs and services in the 2017-18 school year.<sup>4</sup>**

For communities nationwide, accurately measuring homelessness is more than informative. Counts of homeless populations help determine which communities receive essential federal housing, transportation, and public health assistance. Recognizing that school-age children are not the only people temporarily staying with others, Chicago Coalition for the Homeless (CCH) developed a model to estimate the total scope of people experiencing homelessness, incorporating people living in these doubled-up situations.

<sup>1</sup>Students in Temporary Living Situations data, Chicago Public Schools, 2018-19.

<sup>2</sup>STLS data, Chicago Public Schools.

<sup>3</sup>Federal Data Summary, School Years 2015-16 Through 2017-18: Education for Homeless Children and Youth,” National Center for Homeless Education, 2020.

<sup>4</sup>Federal Data Summary, 2020.

## APPROACH

### *Street and Shelter Homelessness*

For those experiencing street and shelter homelessness, CCH obtained data from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), managed by All Chicago Making Homelessness History. HMIS is the information system federally-mandated by the HUD and locally-administered to record and analyze client, service, and housing data for individuals and families who experience homelessness.

For the analysis, we requested an unduplicated count of people served in the homeless service system in the 2018 calendar year (January 1, 2018 - December 31, 2018) and Chicago Public Schools' academic year (September 4, 2018 - June 18, 2019). This excludes those who were housed with temporary or permanent housing subsidies for the entirety of the year. Given that rapid-rehousing programs are only temporary, in previous years, this analysis included those living in rapid re-housing. However, the local HMIS administrator asked to exclude this population because rapid re-housing programs are considered permanent housing by HUD and the Continuum of Care (CoC). Therefore, those enrolled in rapid re-housing for the entire 12-months of 2018 are not included in this estimate. This is a slight modification from the methodology of prior years.

### *Temporarily Staying with Others*

For those temporarily staying with others, CCH utilized data from the American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS is a yearly assessment administered by the U.S. Census Bureau, gathering in-depth household information of roughly 3.5 million households across the United States.<sup>1</sup> These data help describe changes in communities through demographic, social, economic, and housing characteristic information.

<sup>1</sup>Data extracted from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series. Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, Erin Meyer, Jose Pacas and Matthew Sobek. IPUMS USA: Version 10.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.18128/Doi10.V10.0>

## BRIGETTE

*Interviewed by Samantha Alonis, Strategic Operations Director at Center for Health Equity Transformation of Northwestern Medicine*

Brigette grew up on Chicago's South Side and has lived there her whole life. Now 45 years old, she raised six children on her own and now cares for two grandchildren.

Brigette's housing instability and homelessness began in 2014. Brigette was caring for ten children in a 3-bedroom apartment. Her landlord ignored serious problems. "I put plastic up and you would hear the rodents running across the plastic at night," she recalled. Brigette needed to move, but rent used her entire income and she could not find anything cheaper.

Around the same time, one of Brigette's daughters had a seizure and died in Brigette's home. Brigette folded her daughter's two children into the household.

Unable to keep up financially, the family became homeless, sleeping in cars, hotels, and temporarily staying with family and friends. As often as possible, Brigette tried to book a hotel room. Brigette remembers some nights sneaking as many as 12 people into a single hotel room. Meanwhile, rent was unaffordable and landlords refused to rent to her large family.

Some of her children were in school at the time, and Brigette made sure they were well-prepared every day. After awhile, someone at the children's school found out they were homeless and suggested a housing waitlist. Brigette added her name in 2017 and in 2018 secured her own subsidized apartment.

"This situation that I went through with you all is hard. It's hurtful. Sometimes, it's embarrassing," she remembers telling her son. "It's so hard to get the resources that you need because there's so many of you guys."

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“ IT WAS A VERY DAUNTING EXPERIENCE – AND IT WAS VERY SAD AND VERY SCARY – BECAUSE WE DIDN’T KNOW WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN. ”

-April, Formerly Homeless Mother

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The ACS does not directly ask whether individuals staying in a particular household are experiencing homelessness, but it gathers enough characteristic data that can be used to identify those experiencing homelessness. The estimates provided are based on methodologies developed by the Social IMPACT Research Center of Heartland Alliance. The 2018 data is the most recent data available.

#### *Data Deduplication and Limitations*

Total figures of this analysis remove duplicative data. HMIS data included 4,961 people who utilized the shelter system and temporarily

stayed with others at some point in the year. When reporting total figures for this analysis, all those who utilized the shelter system that also reported temporarily staying with others were categorically removed from the street and shelter data.

This estimate does not include data on those living on the street or other places not meant for habitation who had no contact with service providers. This also does not include people experiencing homelessness who do not want to be found because of the potential negative impact to their safety and wellbeing, such as those involved in sex work. People detained in jail who were experiencing homelessness prior to incarceration are not included, nor does it include those staying in healthcare institutions for the entirety of the year.

## LEANETTE

*Interviewed by Hannah Kardon, Pastor at Urban Village Church*

**“I’ve always felt that housing instability seemed like a theme in my life.”**

Leanne was 9 months old when she and her mother moved to Chicago. As her mother struggled to make ends meet, Leanne remembers staying with friends and relatives until adulthood. She remembers living on her own for around a decade of her childhood.

At age 8, Leanne and her mother faced immigration issues returning to the U.S. while on a trip to Ghana. This trip turned into a four year stay in a country unfamiliar to Leanne. “Forming lasting relationships was difficult,” she said. “I moved to a school in a different country. I felt very ungrounded.”

Leanne returned to the U.S. ahead of her mother and resumed staying with family friends and relatives. At age 13, Leanne started working after school as a golf course caddy. “I was able to save for moments I really needed it to pay for food, transportation, or temporary housing.”

Some living situations did not allow for access to the kitchen, so Leanne recalls years of buying food that was already prepared and storing it at relatives’ homes. When someone would allow her to sleep in their home, she never felt connected or grounded. “There were different feelings, but there was ultimately a feeling that it wouldn’t last. It felt fleeting.”

At age 19, Leanne earned enough income that she was able to move into permanent housing for the first time. “Life has only felt stable in the last five or six years. It’s been weird getting to stay in one place—in one apartment—for five years.”

Leanne recognizes that she did not fully understand the importance of housing until she was living in a place of her own. “To feel like you’re connected to a physical space. I need those grounding forces in my life to feel grounded and awake and whole. Home is so important for that reason.”

# KEY FINDINGS ON CHICAGO HOMELESSNESS

An estimated 76,998 people experienced homelessness in Chicago throughout 2018. Findings suggest that the total decreased by 4,282 people from 2017 to 2018, though there was a significant increase (of 1,973) in those who lived on the street or in a shelter.

**1 Most Chicagoans experiencing homelessness temporarily stay with others at some point throughout the year.** Of the 76,998 people experiencing homelessness in 2018, 76% were temporarily staying with others. According to HMIS data, 23,087 people utilized the homeless service system and 21.5% reported temporarily staying with others at least once in 2018.

**2 Homelessness disproportionately impacts Black and African-American Chicagoans.** Chicagoans who identify as Black or African-American make up 61% of the total population experiencing homelessness in 2018. Of those coping with street and shelter homelessness, 78% identified as Black or African-American.

**3 Unaccompanied youth who are homeless seldom stay on the street or in a shelter.** In 2018, 11,376 people experiencing homelessness were unaccompanied youth (ages 14-24) and 90% of whom temporarily stayed with others. In total, 22,324 minors (under age 18), with or without a parent present, experienced homelessness.

**4 Most families experiencing homelessness temporarily stay with others.** In 2018, 30,681 people in families with children were experiencing homelessness and 77% were temporarily staying with others. HMIS data suggest that 1,307 people experienced homelessness in families headed by youth (age 24 and younger).

	TOTAL	STREET AND SHELTER <sup>1</sup>	TEMPORARILY STAYING WITH OTHERS
Single Adults (25 and older)	34,299	9,738	24,561
Couple (without children)	545	87	458*
Families (with children)	30,681	7,048	23,633
Unaccompanied Youth (24 and younger)	11,376	1,156	10,220
Unknown Household Type	97	97	0

\* indicates that this total should be used with caution (coefficient of variation ≥ 30).

<sup>1</sup>Raw data for this and other sections were provided by Chicago's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), administered by All Chicago Making Homelessness History. All Chicago was not involved in the data analysis included in this report, and the conclusions in this report do not represent the views of All Chicago.

# COUNT OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN CHICAGO

An estimated 76,998 people experienced homelessness in Chicago throughout 2018.

As a means of comparison, ↑ increases and ↓ decreases in the totals from 2017 to 2018 are provided for each subpopulation.<sup>1</sup>

	TOTAL	STREET AND SHELTER	TEMPORARILY STAYING WITH OTHERS <sup>2</sup>
Number of Individuals	76,998	18,126	58,872
<b>AGE</b>			
0-4	9,544 ↑1,443	1,714 ↑428	7,830 ↑1,015
5-17	12,780 ↓573	2,227 ↑396	10,553 ↓969
18+	54,571 ↓5,139	14,082 ↑1,162	40,489 ↓6,301
Unknown Age	103 ↓13	103 ↓13	0
<b>RACE</b>			
White	20,626 ↓1,788	3,243 ↑16	17,383 ↓1,804
Black or African-American	46,996 ↓408	14,071 ↑1,929	32,925 ↓2,337
American Indian or Alaska Native	1,173 ↑110	276 ↑79	897* ↑31
Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Other Pacific Islander	2,113 ↑536	194 ↑11	1,919* ↑525
Other Race	4,471 ↑1,126	0	4,471* ↑1,126
Two or More Races	644 ↑258	0	644* ↑258
Unknown Race	340 ↓64	340 ↓64	0
<b>ETHNICITY</b>			
Hispanic/Latino	17,889 ↓3,144	1,833 ↑260	16,056 ↓3,404
Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino	58,934 ↑3,875	16,118 ↑1,024	42,816 ↑2,851

\* indicates that this standalone total should be used with caution (coefficient of variation ≥ 30).

<sup>1</sup>Reported changes from 2017 to 2018 use the 2018 methodology. Totals may vary slightly from previous reporting.

<sup>2</sup>The estimates provided are based on methodologies developed in partnership with the Social IMPACT Research Center of Heartland Alliance. Data extracted from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series. Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Ronald Goeken, Josiah Grover, Erin Meyer, Jose Pacas and Matthew

# DEFINING HOMELESSNESS

The definition of homelessness for the purposes of this estimate is as follows:

## *Street and shelter homelessness*

The term “homeless” as defined by HUD includes the following conditions:

- an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and
- an individual who has a primary residence that is—
  - a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing);
  - an institution that provides a temporary residence for those intended to be institutionalized; or
  - a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

## *Temporarily staying with others*

This analysis defines poor individuals and families—at or below 125% of the federal poverty level—as “temporarily staying with others” when they fall outside of the conventional household composition and cannot afford to live in housing of their own or formally contribute to housing costs.

The project team recognizes that people share housing for many reasons that are sometimes the norm. Single, childless, adult siblings may choose to share housing. Similarly, there may be non-economic reasons for elderly relatives to stay with family members. The project team worked alongside people with lived experience to determine what living situations may be outside of typical home-sharing circumstances. The project team made the following exclusions for this analysis:

- Children (adopted, step, and foster) under age 25 without children;
- Partner’s children (adopted, step, and foster) under age 25 without children;
- Children ages 25 and older who are single, without children, and not in an overcrowded situation;
- Minor children (adopted, step, and foster) under age 18 with and without children;
- **NEW!** Siblings when neither parent is present, neither sibling has children, and neither sibling is partnered;
- Grandchildren for whom the grandparent claims responsibility for basic needs;
- Relatives who are over age 65;
- **NEW!** Partners of relatives over age 65;
- Roommates, housemates, roomers, boarders, and their partners; or
- People in institutions or group lodgings.

In 2019, CCH reported 86,324 people experienced homelessness in 2017. The methodology has since changed to create a more precise estimate of people temporarily staying with others. Using the revised methodology, new findings suggest that 81,280 people experienced homelessness in 2017 — that is 5,044 people less than what was reported. This difference is due to more restrictive parameters of “temporarily staying with others” in this methodology and is not a reflection of people exiting homelessness. In order to provide an accurate year-to-year comparison, this report uses the revised methodology to report increases and decreases from 2017 to 2018.

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