

SUPPORTING UNACCOMPANIED WOMEN
EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Los Angeles City Council

Homelessness and Poverty Committee

August 26, 2021



DOWNTOWN **WOMEN'S** CENTER

DOWNTOWN WOMEN'S CENTER –
AMY TURK, CEO

DOWNTOWN WOMEN'S CENTER – MISSION, SERVICE PROVISION

- The Downtown Women's Center ("DWC") is the only organization in Los Angeles focused exclusively on serving and empowering women experiencing homelessness and formerly homeless women.
- Founded in 1978, DWC is the first: PSH provider for women in the United States; women's health clinic provider in Skid Row; women-only Access Center in the city of Los Angeles (and remains the only one to this day).
- DWC currently provides services to approximately 5,500 women each year through a variety of programs, including: 119 units of PSH across two buildings in Skid Row; the drop-in Access Center; clinical case management; workforce development; Trauma Recovery Center; DV Rapid Rehousing; Community Based Housing; Project Roomkey; the social enterprise "MADE by DWC."
- Since 2001, DWC has conducted a Women's Needs Assessment every three years to fill the gaps in research and understanding of the unique challenges faced by unhoused women in Los Angeles; the 2019 Needs Assessment was the first of its kind to focus on the entire city of Los Angeles.

UNACCOMPANIED WOMEN – DEFINITION

Unaccompanied women - individuals who identify as women who are experiencing homelessness without children or other dependents.

Unaccompanied women are disproportionately survivors of trauma - according to a 2019 CA Policy Lab report analyzing national HUD data, **80% of unsheltered, unaccompanied women became unhoused as a result of trauma.**

The CA Policy Lab also found unsheltered, unaccompanied women **wait on average more than 10+ years** to access stable housing, a rate more than twice of men.

THE IMPORTANCE OF “SUBPOPULATION” DESIGNATION

In the last decade, HUD has formally recognized specific subgroups – veterans, families, chronically unhoused, and youth – in the overall homeless population with unique needs and characteristics.

Subpopulation designation brings increased awareness, research, tailored programs, specific funding streams (i.e. youth set-aside in state HHAP dollars), which have effectively reduced houselessness amongst all groups.

Historically invisible to policymakers, unaccompanied women – who are not eligible for programs dedicated to families – have largely fallen through the cracks.

UNACCOMPANIED WOMEN – NATIONAL SNAPSHOT

There remains a dearth of research on unaccompanied women, as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”) only disaggregated statistics by gender in the 2015 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (“AHAR”).

Unaccompanied women constitute **29%**, or nearly **1-in-3** of all unhoused individual adults nationally, for a total of 120,015 women.

As women’s homelessness nationally remained flat over the last 5 years, unaccompanied women’s homelessness has increased by 20%. Unaccompanied women now make up **53% of all women who are unhoused.**

Source: [The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, “The 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report \(AHAR\) To Congress,” January 2021.](#)

2020 PIT Count by Subpopulation

Total people experiencing homelessness	161,548
Individuals	134,981
Unaccompanied women	53,505
Chronically homeless individuals	48,723
Families with children	25,777
Unaccompanied youth	12,172
Veterans	11,401

UNACCOMPANIED WOMEN STATISTICS – CALIFORNIA

- Of the 161,548 Californians who were experiencing homelessness in January 2020, **33% were unaccompanied women.**
- 44% of all unaccompanied women in the United States live in California.
- Unaccompanied women make up 40% of all unhoused individual Californians.
- Unaccompanied women are more than double the number of unhoused youth and veterans *combined*, and double that of unhoused families.

DWC'S POLICY ADVOCACY SUPPORTING UNACCOMPANIED WOMEN

To gain greater recognition and support for unaccompanied women, DWC has advocated across all levels of government, with the following outcomes:

- **Federal:** Rep. Jimmy Gomez (CA-34) is drafting a letter to HUD Secretary Marcia Fudge in support of designating unaccompanied women as a unique homeless subpopulation.
- **State:** CA State Senator Susan Rubio (SD-22) introduced SB 678, "Unaccompanied Women Experiencing Homelessness Act of 2021"; the bill is on Suspense in Assembly Appropriations.
- **County:** DWC successfully engaged Board Supervisor Solis in Summer 2020 to have L.A. County recognize unaccompanied women; Supervisors Solis and Mitchell authored the June 2021 motion to study DWC's "**Every Woman Housed Action Plan for Women and Families in Skid Row.**"
- **City:** DWC worked with Council President Martinez to pass 11/2020 motion to have the City of L.A. recognize unaccompanied women and for **CLA to report on better supporting the subpopulation.**



The Los Angeles County
HOMELESS INITIATIVE
REAL HELP. LASTING CHANGE.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY HOMELESS INITIATIVE –
CHERI TODOROFF, INTERIM DIRECTOR

UNACCOMPANIED WOMEN STATISTICS – LOS ANGELES CONTINUUM OF CARE

- There were 13,569 unaccompanied women in the L.A. CoC, per the 2020 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count.
- Unaccompanied women make up nearly **65% of all unhoused women in Los Angeles.**
- 80% of unaccompanied women are unsheltered, and 50% are chronically homeless, rates higher than that of men.
- 48% of unaccompanied women report DV / IPV experience.

2020 PIT Count by Subpopulation

Total people experiencing homelessness	63,706
Individuals	51,290
Unaccompanied women	13,569
Chronically homeless individuals	23,075
Families with children	12,416
Unaccompanied youth	3,098
Veterans	3,681

Sources: [LAHSA, "2020 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count - Unaccompanied Women," Appendix to 7/21/21 CLA Report](#), [LAHSA, "2020 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count - Los Angeles Continuum of Care."](#)

9/29/2020 BOARD MOTION –
“ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF UNACCOMPANIED
WOMEN EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS”

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors unanimously passed a motion authored by Supervisor Hilda Solis on 9/29/2020, recognizing unaccompanied women as a distinct homeless subpopulation in L.A. County.

The motion included the following directives:

- Require LAHSA to incorporate data on unaccompanied women into the Greater LA Homeless Count and public-facing dashboards;
- Support unaccompanied women through Measure H where possible;
- Direct DWC to lead the first ever Countywide Needs Assessment of women experiencing homelessness to be completed by 2023;
- LAC Legislative Advocates in Sacramento and Washington to support legislation recognizing unaccompanied women as a unique subpopulation.

6/08/2021 BOARD MOTION –
“SUPPORTING UNHOUSED WOMEN AND FAMILIES
RESIDING IN SKID ROW”

- The Board of Supervisors passed a motion authored by Supervisors Hilda Solis and Holly Mitchell on 6/8/2021 to explore the feasibility and potential implementation of the Downtown Women’s Center’s **“Every Woman Housed Action Plan for Women and Families in Skid Row,”** to house the approximately 600 unsheltered women and 55 families residing in Skid Row.
- The CEO-HI convened a workgroup of relevant County and regional stakeholders, including DPH, DMH, DHS Housing for Health, LAHSA, and DWC; the final report will be released in mid-September.
- The report will include a plan exploring the feasibility of using existing and new resources to support DWC’s proposal, including locating landlords for women already enrolled in rental assistance and social service programs, providing financial resources for rapid placement into permanent housing, creating linkages to mental health and substance abuse treatment beds, and providing interim housing placements; additionally, an exploration of existing or incoming funding to support the proposal.



CITY OF LOS ANGELES, CHIEF LEGISLATIVE ANALYST—
PRANITA AMATYA, LEGISLATIVE ANALYST

**COUNCIL FILE 20-1425:
11/25/2020 CITY COUNCIL MOTION –
UNACCOMPANIED WOMEN / DATA COLLECTION**

The Los Angeles City Council unanimously passed on 11/25/2020 a motion authored by Council President Martinez recognizing unaccompanied women as a distinct homeless subpopulation in the city of Los Angeles, the first municipality in the country to do so.

The motion had three directives:

1. That LAHSA incorporate data on unaccompanied women into the annual Point-in-Time (PIT) Count and other data collection systems;
2. That the CLA and CAO report back with recommendations on strategies and resources to assist and house unaccompanied homeless women;
3. The CLA to include in its report feedback from appropriate organizations such as DWC, Shields for Families, Jenesse Center, and A New Way of Life.

7/21/2021 CLA REPORT – UNACCOMPANIED WOMEN EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

- As dictated by the 11/25/2020 motion, the Chief Legislative Analyst issued its report on 7/21/2021 regarding how the city can better support unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness. The report also includes an official memo from LAHSA, as directed by the motion.
- Some key findings:
 - 62.9% of FamilySource Center clients are women;
 - 2,963 DV survivors and family members were supported through the 10-month Project Safe Haven; there are only 1,000 permanent set-aside DV shelter beds in L.A. County;
 - **The lack of permanent housing** was identified as the single greatest unmet need; other major key issues included: access to hygiene, better relationship with and understanding of the role of the criminal justice system, better services for trans women, employment programs, and access to healthcare;
 - Specialized outreach and engagement teams, trained in trauma-informed practices, harm reduction, and supporting DV survivors would increase the efficacy of service provision.
- The CLA report includes various recommendations to address the key concerns discussed in the report.



LOS ANGELES HOMELESS SERVICES AUTHORITY

DATA ON UNACCOMPANIED WOMEN, 2020 PIT COUNT

- In response to the County and City motions, LAHSA has produced data on the demographics of unaccompanied women, derived from the 2020 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count, that provides an unprecedented understanding of the subpopulation.
- LAHSA is also working to incorporate data on the subpopulation into additional public-facing dashboards.
- LAHSA introduced new questions to its PIT survey, including: the addition of a new age range (i.e., 25-54); expanded gender identity response options; broader questions that address the continuum of violence and trauma experienced by women; specific questions that capture experiences with human trafficking.

Population	Sheltered	Unsheltered	Total	Prevalence among Pop. (%)
TOTALS				
Total Persons Experiencing Homelessness	17,616	46,090	63,706	-
All Unaccompanied Females	2,756	10,813	13,569	100%
Adults 25+	2,427	10,177	12,604	93%
Transitional Age Youth 18-24	319	622	941	7%
Unaccompanied Minors (Under 18)	10	14	24	0%
VETERANS				
All Veterans	37	188	225	2%
CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS				
Persons Experiencing Chronic Homelessness	885	5,913	6,798	50%
Chronically Homeless Veterans	8	91	99	1%
GENDER				
Transgender	81	235	316	2%
RACE / ETHNICITY				
American Indian/Alaska Native	21	119	140	1%
Asian	48	137	185	1%
Black/African American	1,299	2,873	4,172	31%
Hispanic/Latino	727	3,526	4,253	31%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	18	17	35	0%
White	573	3,880	4,453	33%
Multi-Racial/Other	70	261	331	2%
AGE				
Under 18	10	14	24	0%
18 - 24	319	622	941	7%
25 - 54	1,647	7,947	9,594	71%
55 - 61	462	1,548	2,010	15%
62 and Over	318	682	1,000	7%
SEXUAL ORIENTATION				
Straight	2,386	9,622	12,008	88%
Gay or Lesbian	106	369	475	4%
Bisexual	144	677	821	6%
Sexual Orientation Non-Conforming	120	145	265	2%

Source: [LAHSA, "2020 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count - Unaccompanied Women," Appendix to 7/21/21 CLA Report.](#)

LAHSA RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTING UNACCOMPANIED WOMEN

As part of the CLA report, LAHSA provided the following recommendations on measures to better support unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness:

- 1. Expand Prevention Resources and Evaluate Access to these Resources for Unaccompanied Women at Risk of or Experiencing Homelessness**
- 2. Additional Investments to Enhance Citywide Hygiene Infrastructure**
- 3. Build on Successes of Interim Housing for Women**
- 4. Increased investments in Rapid Rehousing/Domestic Violence Housing First for Women**
- 5. Expand Housing Retention Resources for Unaccompanied Women, Particularly for Black Women**
- 6. Continue to Implement Systemwide Principles of Gender-Responsive and Trauma-Informed Care**
- 7. Strengthening Workforce Development Programs**