

The background features a vibrant, stylized illustration. On the left, a person's face is rendered in shades of orange and red. On the right, another person's face is rendered in shades of purple and blue. A large, detailed blue heart is positioned between their chests. Numerous blue circular patterns, resembling ripples or bubbles, are scattered around the faces and heart. The overall background is a bright, textured yellow.

“Yes to Yes” Washington State: Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adult Homelessness Landscape Scan

February 2024

Liz Harding Chao, MPA
Leeze Castro

Cover Art by:
Cristina “Pink” Varela

First and foremost, thank you to the BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, and pregnant/parenting young people who generously shared their stories, perspectives, and recommendations.

Without you, this report wouldn't have been possible.

Supported by:



Co-Authored by:



Researched and Coordinated by:



Contributions by:

Awdy Love
Ben Henry, MPA, A Way Home Washington
Cora Bryant
Elisha Pritchett, A Way Home Washington
Jayme Khoo, Data and Performance Unit, Department of Commerce
Joy Turner, MPA, PMP, System Change Partners
Kim Justice, Office of Homeless Youth, Department of Commerce
Kira Moravec
Vishesh Jain, MS, System Change Partners



Thank you to the following individuals and staff at these organizations who participated in interviews and content development.

- | | |
|--|--|
| African Community Housing & Development | OlyCAP |
| Azia Ruff | OUR Journey Youth Empowerment Group |
| BIPOC Apostrophe Foundation | OWL360 |
| Blue Mountain Action Council | Pend Oreille County Juvenile Department |
| Building Changes | Point Source Youth |
| Campaign to End and Prevent Youth and Young Adult Homelessness in Pierce County* | REST |
| Catholic Charities of Central WA | Rods House |
| Catholic Charities Walla Walla | Ryan's House for Youth* |
| Cocoon House | Safe Harbor Support Center |
| Coffee Oasis | SDM Consulting |
| Communities in Schools | Seattle YMCA and Y Social Impact Center - Arlington* |
| Community Youth Services | Serenity House of Clallam County |
| Council for the Homeless | Shelton Youth Connection |
| County of Walla Walla | Skagit YMCA |
| Department of Children Youth and Families | Spectrum Center Spokane |
| Everett Public Schools | Spokane Public Schools |
| Innovations Human Trafficking Collaborative | TeamChild |
| Isaac Sanders | The Health Center Walla Walla |
| Janus Youth Programs | The Mockingbird Society* |
| Kitsap Mental Health Services | The REACH Center |
| Lavender Rights Project | Thurston County |
| Legal Counsel for Youth and Children | University of Washington School of Social Work |
| Mason County HOST | Volunteers of America |
| Metropolitan Development Council | Yakima County |
| MHA Speakout Speakup | Yakima Youth Advisory Council* |
| New Moon Network | Yakima Neighborhood Health Services |
| NorthStar Advocates | YES of Pend Oreille County |
| Northwest Youth Services* | YouthCare |

*Special thank you to these organizations that helped us recruit young people with lived experience.

Foreword

In the ever-evolving landscape of addressing unaccompanied youth and young adult (YYA) homelessness in Washington, this report serves as a comprehensive reflection of the strides made since the [last landscape scan in 2016](#). The journey, marked by significant progress and collaborative efforts, paints a vivid picture of Washington's commitment to creating a more supportive and inclusive environment for its young people.

From the inception of the Anchor Communities to the first-in-the-nation Homeless Student Stability Program, Washington has become a beacon of innovation in tackling the multifaceted challenges of unaccompanied YYA homelessness. The tireless dedication of grassroots BIPOC and LGBTQIAS+ organizations has played a pivotal role in providing essential, population-specific resources. Investments in stabilizing YYA exiting public systems of care, the establishment of sophisticated data systems, and the strategic deployment of flexible funds showcase the state's holistic approach to addressing the issue.

One of the remarkable achievements highlighted in the report is the nearly complete closure of the geographic service gap identified in 2016. Over two-thirds of the state now have OHY and/or federal Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program-funded youth or young adult housing or shelter, with services extending to all but two counties. The success is attributed to robust public-private partnerships and the influential role played by philanthropy in funding innovative solutions at both local and state levels.

While celebrating these victories, it is crucial to acknowledge the candid voices of providers and YYA who emphasize that our work is far from done. Challenges persist, especially in rural communities, where unaccompanied YYA still struggle to find safe housing and shelter, particularly for LGBTQIA2S+, BIPOC, and pregnant/parenting young people. The mantra of "Yes to Yes" echoes, yet the reality often falls short, with young people recounting instances of repeated "no's."

This report not only showcases Washington as a national leader in addressing YYA homelessness but also emphasizes the key ingredients to this success. The presence of both an office in state government and a community-based movement, both dedicated to preventing and ending unaccompanied YYA homelessness, has proven instrumental.

The report and its recommendations lay out a roadmap and vision for a Washington where every unaccompanied young person can receive the help they need promptly and within their community.

We invite readers to delve into the rich tapestry of progress, challenges, and aspirations detailed in the full report. It is a testament to the collaborative spirit and unwavering commitment of Washington in creating a brighter, more inclusive future for its young people.



Kim Justice, Executive Director,
Office of Homeless Youth



Elisha Pritchett,
Data & Evaluation Director



Executive Summary

This report focuses on unaccompanied youth (12-17) and young adults (18-24) experiencing homelessness or housing instability without a parent or guardian, and young families with all members under the age of 25. In 2016, the Raikes Foundation funded a youth homelessness landscape scan report for the then newly-formed Washington [Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection](#) (OHY) and [A Way Home Washington](#) (AWHWA). Using 2014 data, it was estimated that 13,000-15,000 unaccompanied youth and young adults (YYA) experienced homelessness in one year. And over half of Washington's counties lacked any homeless services for young people.¹ Updated and more accurate data used in this report show that 13,000-15,000 was a severe undercount.

Report Purpose

1. Use updated data to estimate how many unaccompanied young people experienced homelessness in 2022 and understand their characteristics: race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, pregnant/parenting status, disability status, and intersections of these identities where possible.
2. Update the 2016 YYA homeless services landscape scan.
3. Provide recommendations for next steps on how to address identified gaps.
4. Support a shared understanding of the data and qualitative experiences to inform policy, funding, and practice solutions.

Findings

- OHY has almost completely closed the geographic service gap. Only two counties are not served by OHY or federal Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program funding.
- More than one quarter of the state has real-time data on unaccompanied YYA experiencing homelessness and housing instability through By-Name Lists.
- New, improved data shows a 40% decrease of YYA experiencing unaccompanied homelessness from 23,961 young people in 2016, to 14,410 in 2022.
- Unaccompanied students identified as homeless and housing unstable almost doubled between 2015-2019.
- There has been increased action on preventing YYA homelessness including flexible fund diversion programs in ten counties, a statewide prevention strategy created by young people with lived experience, OHY, and partners, and investments in preventing exits from public systems of care into homelessness.
- Half of the YYA who accessed the homelessness system in 2022 were Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Almost 1 in 10 were Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Questioning, and other (LGBQ+), although this is likely an undercount because most sexual orientation data were unknown. More than one third of YYA were disabled. More than 1 in 10 were pregnant/parenting.
- There is need for a coherent and measurable statewide equity strategy that adopts a targeted universalism approach.
- The two most mentioned systemic barriers were a lack of affordable, low-barrier housing and the mental health crisis.
- There are limited service options for unaccompanied minors and pregnant/parenting YYA.

Data Summary: Unaccompanied YYA Homelessness in 2022

14,410

Unstably housed or homeless in **one month**.²

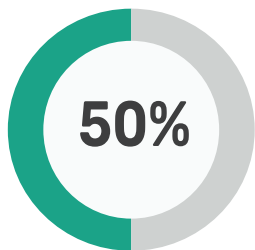
15,338

Accessed homeless services in **one year**.³

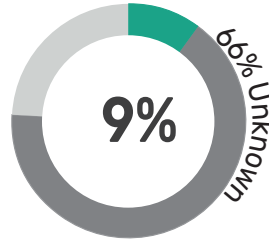
5,001

Unaccompanied students in the **school year**.⁴

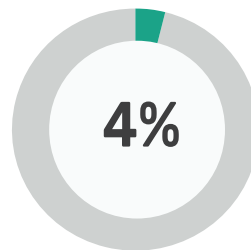
In 2022, of the 15,338 unaccompanied young people who accessed the homelessness system, there were:



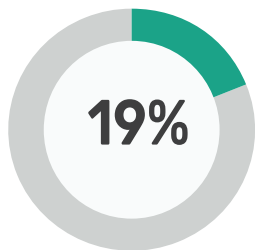
BIPOC



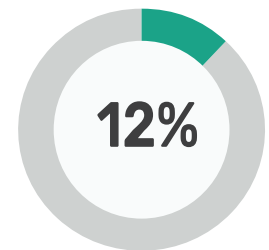
LGBTQ+



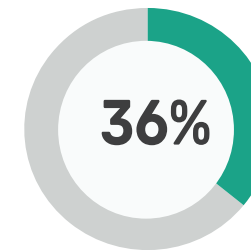
Gender Expansive



Minors



Pregnant/Parenting



Disabled

Data Source: HMIS.

Before accessing homeless services, young people were:



31%
unsheltered



24%
staying with friends or family



19%
sheltered within homeless system



10%
permanently housed



16%
unknown

Data Source: HMIS.

1 in 100

Young people aged 10-24⁵ in WA accessed the homeless system

Data Source: Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and US Census.

Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander young people were

9 times

more likely to access the homeless system than White young people

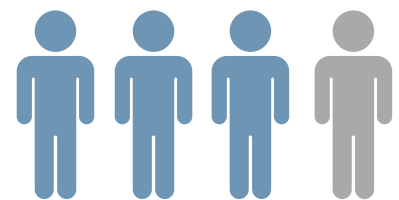
Black and African American young people were

7 times

more likely to access the homeless system than White young people

Data Source: HMIS and WA Office of Financial Management.

Of the unaccompanied young people permanently housed in 2020...



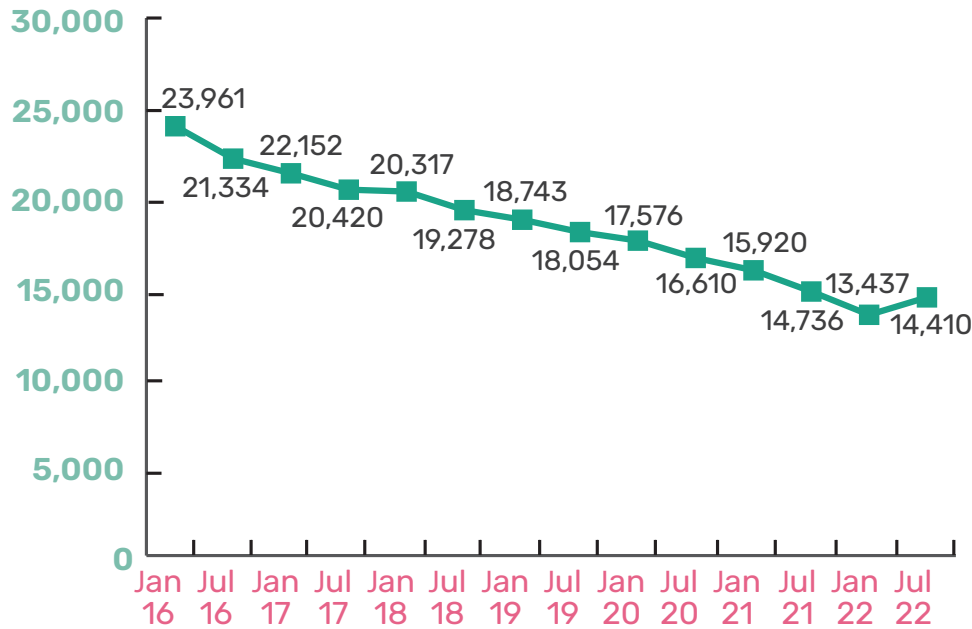
75%

retained housing after two years

Data Source: HMIS.

Data Over Time

Number of Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults Experiencing Homelessness and Housing Instability, 2016-2022



Data Source: Department of Commerce Snapshot of Homelessness Reports.

The Department of Commerce’s Snapshot Data provides a twice yearly estimate of the number of unaccompanied YYA experiencing homelessness in one month, based on combined Medicaid, Automated Client Eligibility System (ACES), and Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) populations. It is the only dataset that comprehensively accounts for YYA experiencing homelessness and housing instability across multiple state datasets over time. The dataset is more expansive than the HMIS, accounting for some YYA who are not being served by the homeless system.

Snapshot Data shows that between 2016 and 2022, YYA homelessness has decreased by 40% from 23,961 unaccompanied YYA to 14,410. This data didn’t exist when the last youth homelessness landscape scan was produced in 2016. The decrease is mostly among young adult (18 to 24) households. The vast majority of these households are single adults. It is notable that the decrease started well before the pandemic and continued throughout the pandemic, with a slight uptick between January and July 2022.

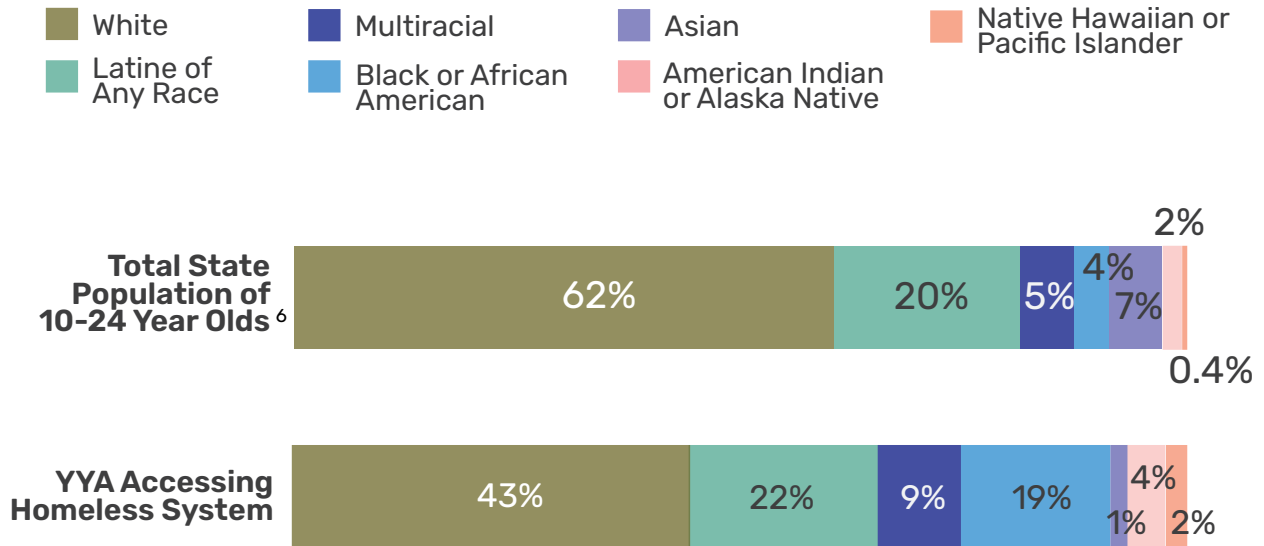
However, Snapshot Data only provides an indication of how many unaccompanied YYA accessed the homeless, Medicaid, and other systems. Homeless service providers and young people with lived experience we interviewed emphasized that this data is an undercount because many unaccompanied YYA, especially BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ young people (particularly minors), are not accessing these systems and even if they are, their data may not be uniformly entered.

“Just because we see statistical decreases in homelessness counts does not mean that we see a decrease in homelessness in lived realities.”

Queer and/or Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (QTBIPOC) Young Person

Racial Disproportionality

Racial Disproportionality in the Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adult Homelessness System, 2022



Data Sources: WA Office of Financial Management, Homeless Management Information System. YYA = unaccompanied youth and young adults. 1,789 YYA with unknown race/ethnicity in the HMIS were removed from the count of YYA that accessed the homeless system. Our population of interest is 12-24 year olds, but Census data on 10-24 year olds are used as best available data.

2020 Census Estimates by the WA Office of Financial Management (OFM) were available for the age ranges 10-14, 15-19, and 20-24. These age groups were combined to create a population estimate for young people aged 10-24 years old, but our population of interest is 12-24 year olds. While this should be kept in mind when comparing the populations, the inclusion of 10 and 11 year olds should not alter the race/ethnicity proportions significantly. Race/ethnicity was unknown for 1,789 (12% of the total) of YYA who accessed the homeless system in 2022. These young people were removed from the count of YYA who accessed the homeless system to provide a more useful comparison. OFM estimates show that 62% of the state’s population of 10-24 year olds is White and 38% are BIPOC. However, among the population of YYA who were enrolled in the HMIS in 2022, only 43% were White and 57% were BIPOC.

When examining the populations by race and ethnicity, Black and African American YYA experience the greatest disproportionality. Only 4% of WA’s 10-24 year old population is Black or African American, while 19% of YYA who accessed the homeless system in 2022 were Black or African American. Black YYA accessed the homeless system almost five times more than their proportion in the general population of 10-24 year olds. Although a small number in both the general population of 10-24 year olds and those accessing the homeless system, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander YYA accessed the homeless system five times more than their proportion in the general population. Asian and White YYA were the only racial groups who accessed the homeless system less than their proportion in the general population of 10-24 year olds.

“[I want them to know] that Black Trans Youth experiencing homelessness deserve safe housing resources.”

QTBIPOC Young Person

Progress

Our findings from extensive interviews and connections with more than 100 young people with lived experience and stakeholders show that WA is an innovator in the YYA homelessness space, with unique, collaborative initiatives, public-private partnerships and investments, and first-in-the-nation programs. These are only some of the developments made since the last landscape scan was conducted in 2016.

OHY Service Expansion	Closed the geographic service gap; only two counties aren't served by OHY or federal Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program funding.
"Yes to Yes" Culture Shift	Culture of saying "yes," Anchor Community Initiative (ACI) service dollars, By-Name Lists , and the Homelessness Prevention and Diversion Fund (HPDF).
BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ By and For Resources	Young people emphasized the power of BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ led programming and resource centers, and the need for more.
Homeless Student Stability Program (HSSP) and Technical Assistance	Increased collaboration between schools and the homeless system bolstered by Building Changes' technical assistance and the ACI.
Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP)	Cross-system collaboration and leadership by young people with lived experience.
Progress on Prevention	Cross-government work with community to outline a statewide strategy to prevent YYA homelessness; and preventing exits from public systems of care into homelessness through investments from SHB 1905 .
YYA Leadership	Young people changing systems through The Mockingbird Society , OHY , the ACI and the state-level Y4Y board.
Creative Housing Solutions	Growth of Supportive Leasing ⁷ (also known as Master Leasing) and Host Homes, especially in rural communities.

Gaps Analysis Findings

While WA has made a great deal of progress in addressing unaccompanied YYA homelessness since 2016, some of the same gaps still remain. This is a high-level summary of the most commonly identified system gaps and issues raised by interviewees, some of which are at crisis proportions. The lack of affordable housing and the mental health crisis were the two most mentioned across all regions of the state.

Pregnant/Parenting

Lack of supportive housing options for young families that allow all types of families to stay together.

Minors

Limited services, housing options, and support for minors that are accessible legally without parental consent.

Housing Crisis

Lack of affordable low-barrier housing especially for BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, and young people with mental health and/or substance use issues.

Mental Health Crisis

Higher mental health needs and shortage of mental health practitioners and resources, especially for BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ young people and in rural communities.

System Exits

The behavioral health system is disconnected from the homeless system, causing young people with complex mental health needs to be exited into homelessness.

Unmet Basic Needs

Lack of access to transportation, food, and YYA-specific shelter and housing, especially in rural communities.

Disproportionality

BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ young people experience homelessness and housing instability disproportionately and need population-specific, culturally sensitive care.

Statewide Equity Strategy

No intentional, targeted, and measurable statewide strategy on racial and LGBTQIA2S+ equity and youth leadership.

Insufficient Funding

Government contracts are inflexible, don't increase with inflation, and don't provide enough staffing funds, resulting in low wages and programming driven by contract specifications rather than YYA needs.

Lack of Real-Time Data

Most counties aren't using accurate real-time data to improve their homeless response system and don't share an inclusive definition of homelessness.

Recommendations

Recommendations were gathered from extensive interviews, surveys, and focus groups with more than 100 BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, and pregnant/parenting young people with lived experience, service providers, and stakeholders around the state. Recommendations from young people are marked with an asterisk and are shown first. Most of the recommendations came from young people because we uplifted their ideas first and foremost.

We didn't conduct assessments of feasibility and cost because we wanted to follow YYAs' lead in dreaming big. Our goal is to provide a roadmap for how governments at all levels, philanthropy, communities, young people with lived experience, and service providers can work together to prevent and end unaccompanied YYA homelessness.

"Youth and young adults appreciate hearing that our voices, stories, testimonies are not going unheard. Those that lose hope and don't believe a change is coming often end up giving up on life. Death rates of youth and young adults that are pleading for help and a miracle or even a voice that say we hear or see you are rising quickly."

QTBIPOC & Parenting Young Person

These recommendations exist against a backdrop of adultism, white supremacy, anti-Blackness, genocide and land theft against Indigenous Peoples, ableism, queerphobia, and transphobia. All of which we must also be working to change if we expect to end unaccompanied YYA homelessness.

"Direct Cash Transfers as prevention (DCT-P) is providing more money specifically for that prevention piece. That's really important in areas where there are no Rapid Re-Housing programs to fund, where there is no transitional housing. Prevention is one of the main ways to get those numbers down and hopefully get us to Functional zero.⁸"

Milo Edwards
Manager DCT-P and Policy, Point Source Youth

Recommendations Summary

- 1. Youth-led and Population-specific Resources:** Invest in youth-led, LGBTQIA2S+ and BIPOC resources, prevention strategies, and programming.*
- 2. Individualized Aftercare:** Provide aftercare that tapers off in alignment with individual needs after young people are housed, especially for BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ individuals, offering culturally responsive mental health care.*
- 3. Meaningful Careers for Young People:** Create a variety of meaningful employment and career options in positions of power for young people to lead the movement to prevent and end YYA homelessness.*
- 4. Affordable Housing and Basic Needs:** Increase availability of affordable housing, transportation, food, and shelter; address poverty and ensure access to basic needs.*
- 5. Increase Services for Minors:** Fill critical service gaps for unaccompanied minors.*
- 6. More Mental Health Resources:** Address the mental health crisis by providing more financial resources generally and specifically for peer counseling and mentoring programs.*
- 7. Increase Supportive Leases and Improve Host Homes:** Scale creative housing solutions such as Supportive Leasing (also known as Master Leasing) and continue improving on the Host Homes model to create more accessible housing options.*
- 8. Improve Relationships with Schools and Colleges:** Continue to improve service connections between schools, colleges, and the homeless system as the first point of contact for unaccompanied students.*
- 9. Scale Proven Prevention Programs:** Bring proven prevention initiatives such as the [Homelessness Prevention and Diversion Fund](#) (HPDF), the [Youth Engagement Team](#) (YET), InREACH, and Direct Cash Transfers (DCT) to all communities in the state.*
- 10. Increase Pay for Front-Line Workers:** All funders should provide more flexible grants that increase over time with more staffing dollars, so that providers can pay front-line workers a living wage.*
- 11. Strengthen Public Systems' Capacity to Prevent Homelessness:** Expand efforts to ensure young people exiting child welfare, inpatient behavioral health, and criminal legal systems are stably housed and housing outcomes are measurable in real-time.*
- 12. Statewide Equity Strategy:** Organizations and governments with a mission to end YYA homelessness should unite their approaches and collaborate on a measurable statewide equity strategy.
- 13. Invest in Real-Time Data:** Streamline data collection and reporting statewide to prioritize real-time data and adequately resource communities to establish quality By-Name Lists.

* Recommendations with an asterisk were provided by YYA with lived experience.

Definitions

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC): Young people who identify as any combination of the below:

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Latine of any race
- Multiracial
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

By-Name List (BNL): real-time accounting of all unaccompanied YYA experiencing homelessness or housing instability.

Disabled: The HMIS definition is used for disability which includes a physical, mental, or emotional impairment, including alcohol or drug abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, or brain injury that is continuing or indefinite and substantially impedes the individual's ability to live independently. Developmental disabilities are also included.

Disabled Person: This report uses identity-first language for disabilities because YYA explicitly asked for this terminology to be used.

Gender-expansive: Transgender, non-binary, genderqueer, culturally-specific gender, gender non-conforming, or gender fluid.

Homelessness: For the purposes of this report, homelessness is defined as inclusively as possible and includes young people:

- experiencing unsheltered homelessness or living in a place unfit for human habitation;
- in shelter or temporary housing within the homelessness system;
- at risk of homelessness;
- unstably or unsafely housed including doubled up or couchsurfing; and
- fleeing domestic violence and/or sex trafficking.

Homeless Management Information System (HMIS): A local information technology system used to collect data on the provision of housing and services to people experiencing homelessness.

LGBTQIA2S+: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or gender-expansive, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual, Two-Spirit, and others.

LGBQ+: LGBQ+ is used to differentiate sexual orientation from gender identity because these are collected separately in the homelessness and other data systems. When in reality, many queer young people are also gender-expansive and vice versa.

Permanently Housed: Young person who exits into permanent housing for formerly homeless persons, a property owned or rented by the young person (with or without an ongoing subsidy or Housing Choice Voucher), staying or living with family or friends permanently, or Rapid Re-Housing.

Pregnant/parenting: At project entry, clients are asked if they are pregnant. In the HMIS, each parent is split into their own household, with the child only under one parent who is flagged as parenting. Pregnant/parenting young people are flagged if either of these conditions are true.

QTBIPOC: Queer and/or transgender and also Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

Return to Homelessness: Permanently housed in 2020 and returned to homelessness by June 2022.

SOGI: Sexual orientation and gender identity.

Unaccompanied: Young people experiencing homelessness or housing instability without their parent or guardian and includes young parents with minor children.

Youth: Minors aged 12-17.

Young adults: Aged 18-24.

Young People: Minors and young adults aged 12-24.

Endnotes

1 Noble, C. (2016). *Youth Homelessness in Washington Landscape Scan*. https://www.awayhomewa.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/YouthHomelessnessWA_LandscapeScan_August-2016.pdf

2 Department of Commerce. (2016-2022). *Snapshot of Homelessness in WA*. <https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/s/hnpkedlkifogzx8i892cu0k34nzsrbtp/file/1192641696848>

3 Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) Fiscal Year (FY) 2021-2022.

4 Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) 2021-2022 School Year Unaccompanied Student Data (limited to unaccompanied students in Grades 6-12 in efforts to only capture 12-17 years olds, recognizing that it may include a small number of students outside this age range), provided by OSPI.

5 Our population of interest is 12-24 year olds, but Census data were only available for 10-24 year olds. While this should be kept in mind while comparing populations, the inclusion of 10 and 11 year olds should not significantly alter the race/ethnicity proportions.

6 WA Office of Financial Management. *Estimates of April 1 population by age, sex, race and Hispanic origin*. <https://ofm.wa.gov/washington-data-research/population-demographics/population-estimates/estimates-april-1-population-age-sex-race-and-hispanic-origin>

7 Young people from The Mockingbird Society decided in early 2024 that they would change the name of Master Leasing to Supportive Leasing (SL) to discard the negative and racist connotations of the word “master,” balance the property owner-tenant power dynamics, and move toward a name that more accurately reflects their goals for how SL can effectively support young people. The WA Healthcare Authority has also chosen the name Global Leasing and will be releasing an informative toolkit soon. Work is being done across these organizations to coordinate efforts.

8 Functional zero means that a community can quickly house as many YYA as are actively experiencing homelessness, few return to homelessness, and there are equitable outcomes for LGBTQIA2S+ and BIPOC YYA.