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Latino Policy &
Politics Institute

THE FULL SPECTRUM OF LATINX HOMELESSNESS: UNDERSTANDING AND ADDRESSING DOUBLING UP

Melissa Chinchilla

PhD, MSHPM, MCP

Deyanira Nevarez Martinez

PhD, MSGIST, MSP

Molly Richard

PhD, MS

December 2023



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between 2020 and 2022, the number of Latinx individuals experiencing sheltered or unsheltered homelessness rose nearly 8 percent nationally (HUD 2022). COVID-19 was likely a contributing factor. Latinx¹ households disproportionately experienced negative economic and health impacts and challenges accessing emergency resources during the pandemic (Chinchilla, Moses, and Visotzky 2023). Many households were already living on the edge of homelessness and had adapted to Los Angeles' housing affordability crisis by doubling up in overcrowded, substandard housing. Scholars who have examined "doubled-up homelessness"—the practice of sharing housing because of economic hardship or housing loss—at the national level found that in 2019, Latinxs were nearly three times as likely as non-Latinxs to be doubled-up (Richard et al. 2022).

While scholars have estimated doubled-up homelessness at the national level, few have conducted analyses at the local level. Moreover, homelessness among Latinxs, including the factors that facilitate or impede their access to housing and homeless services, continues to be largely understudied. To address these gaps, we examined doubled-up homelessness in Los Angeles County—home to the largest number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness nationally and one of the regions with the largest share of Latinx residents—with a focus on estimating the scale and characteristics of those living in doubled-up households. Additionally, we used interviews with homeless service providers and policy advocates to understand how doubled-up homelessness may impact service access for Latinx households.

Our quantitative analysis shows that the number of individuals experiencing doubled-up homelessness between 2016 and 2020 in Los Angeles County was, on average, 3.5 times the number of those who experienced sheltered and unsheltered homelessness in 2020. Race and ethnicity were both significantly associated with doubling up, with Latinxs accounting for nearly 77 percent of all doubled-up individuals. When doubled-up individuals in renter households were compared to all individuals in renter households, the rate of doubling up was 6.2 percent for Latinxs. White non-Latinx individuals had the lowest rate of doubling up, at approximately 1.3 percent. When race as well as ethnicity was considered, Latinxs who identified as American Indian or Alaska Native had the highest rate of doubled-up homelessness, at 7.5 percent. In addition, age, unemployment, years in the United States, English language ability, and citizenship were all significantly associated with doubling up.

Our semi-structured interviews with community service providers and policy advocates revealed important challenges that were encountered by Latinxs who seek homeless services. These included how homelessness is defined for service provision, cultural stigma, language access, and citizenship status. Based on our quantitative analysis and interviews, we propose a set of recommendations for policymakers and system administrators to consider. These recommendations are strongly aligned with those emerging from the Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness (LAHSA 2018a), and efforts to address the needs of American Indian and Alaskan Native people experiencing homelessness (Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission 2023), and of immigrant and undocumented people experiencing homelessness (Department of Consumer and Business Affairs et al. 2021).

¹ The authors have chosen to use a more contemporary form of the term which replaces the "o" with a non-binary "x" at the end to be more inclusive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Program and Systems Level

1. Examine opportunities to track and measure doubled-up homelessness and consider this a vulnerability factor in homelessness prevention programs.
2. Support community organizing and coalition-building efforts in the Latinx community and across communities of color.
3. Explore opportunities to establish communication campaigns to fight cultural stigma around homelessness and mental health needs.
4. Engage with community-based organizations that are outside those usually associated with providing services to people experiencing homelessness but may be serving vulnerable populations. These include legal aid foundations, immigrant rights groups, community health centers, and faith based institutions.
5. Increase training for service providers regarding resources that are available to people experiencing homelessness regardless of their citizenship status.
6. Increase access to services by ensuring that they are culturally and linguistically appropriate.

Policy Level

1. Advocate for housing and financial assistance programs that use expanded definitions of homelessness including individuals and families experiencing doubled-up homelessness.
2. Explore alternative measures of local resource needs, including those that use census data to assess doubled-up homelessness.
3. Explore creating new resources and expanding those currently available to address doubled-up homelessness.
4. Explore opportunities to expand resources that address housing and homelessness regardless of an individual's citizenship status.
5. Examine opportunities to increase speedy access to the Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) to allow recent immigrants and refugees to work within the United States.
6. Continue to support funding that is intended to increase affordable housing and policies that protect tenants' rights.

WHAT IS DOUBLED-UP HOMELESSNESS?

The practice of sharing housing because of economic hardship or housing loss.

INTRODUCTION

Between 2020 and 2022, the number of Latinx individuals experiencing sheltered or unsheltered homelessness rose nearly 8 percent at the national level (HUD 2022) and a startling 26 percent in Los Angeles County (LAHSA 2022a). COVID-19 was likely a contributing factor. Latinx households disproportionately experienced negative economic and health impacts and challenges accessing emergency resources during the pandemic (Chinchilla, Moses, and Visotzky 2023). Large numbers of households were already living on the edge and had adapted to Los Angeles' housing affordability crisis by doubling up in overcrowded, and often substandard housing. COVID-19 was the last straw for many, forcing more Latinxs into homelessness.

Community advocates and researchers have noted that doubled-up homelessness—sharing housing because of economic hardship or housing loss—is the most common living situation before experiencing homelessness (Kushel 2023). Although doubling up can help people avoid shelters or the streets, those doubled-up are usually far from being adequately and stably housed. Doubling up is associated with negative health outcomes, including psychological distress, strains to social ties (Mora et al. 2016; Wright et al. 1998), and a high incidence of communicable disease (Ghosh et al. 2021). People experiencing unsheltered or sheltered homelessness often exit homelessness for doubled-up housing, but they become homeless again at high rates (Williams 2011). Additionally, in high-poverty communities, doubled-up living arrangements can create financial stress for host households, who are often in poverty themselves and at significant risk of losing their own housing (Vacha and Marin 1993).

New research in California shows that individuals who are doubled up, and are not leaseholders, typically receive one day's notice before being evicted, compared to ten days for leaseholders (Kushel 2023). Consequently, households that are doubled-up may have little time to seek help before finding themselves experiencing unsheltered homelessness—"in places not meant for human habitation"—or in an interim emergency shelter through a county's homeless services system (11). This research also found that nearly 50 percent of individuals that experienced homelessness in California in 2020–22 had not been previous leaseholders.

Policymakers have not assessed the scale of doubled-up homelessness in Los Angeles County or explored potential policies or programs that would help meet the needs of doubled-up households. Doing so could be particularly useful for stopping the rise in Latinx homelessness, and it has the potential to help prevent homelessness for all Los Angelenos who are precariously housed. In this policy brief we examine doubled-up homelessness in Los Angeles County from 2020 to 2022, with a focus on its scale and the characteristics of Latinxs who live in doubled-up households. We also summarize interviews conducted with homeless service providers and policy advocates to understand whether homeless services are currently able to meet the needs of Latinxs. Although our research focuses on Los Angeles County it can inform efforts to understand and address Latinx homelessness across the United States.

DEFINING AND MEASURING HOMELESSNESS IN THE UNITED STATES

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines homelessness as lacking a “fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” (HUD, n.d.). To be included in a homeless count, individuals must either have entered the homeless services system (i.e., sheltered homelessness) or been visually counted during an annual street count. HUD requires that local jurisdictions conduct one-night point-in-time (PIT) counts of sheltered and unsheltered homelessness (i.e., sheltered homelessness) to produce one-year administrative reports (HUD 2022). PIT counts are administered in all communities that receive federal funding for programs that address homelessness, and the counts are used to identify resource needs at local and federal levels. PIT counts also impact how homeless services are distributed across a region, and this can affect the proportion of service dollars a community receives. More broadly, homeless counts are used as a measure of how the most extreme form of housing instability changes over time and our nation’s ability to meet its population’s housing needs. How we measure homelessness is key to how we understand the scale of the problem and how we determine what resources are needed to address the housing crisis, which has continued to grow over the last decade.

It is difficult to estimate the number of individuals who are doubled up, living in substandard housing, or experiencing homelessness in hidden or hard to reach places. Inaccurate counts have possibly led to gaps in our homeless service system as well as inadequate service availability at the community level. This inability to accurately assess the scale of the problem prevents access to the investments needed to address homelessness locally and nationally. Experts on homelessness have argued for alternative methods of assessing homelessness that include counting those in doubled-up households (Roncarati, Byrne, and McInnes 2021; Williams 2011).

Researchers and advocates have examined the potential of American Community Survey (ACS) data to estimate doubled-up homelessness at the national (Richard et al. 2022) and local levels (Carlson 2022) to better understand community needs. A national study estimated that 2.4 percent of individuals identifying as Latinx (of any race) experienced doubled-up homelessness at any given point in 2019, compared to less than 0.9 percent of non-Latinxs (Richard et al. 2022). Estimating doubled-up homelessness is important for understanding the full scale of housing needs and it may be particularly impactful when considering needs in communities that are home to a large Latinx population.

SIGNIFICANCE OF DOUBLED-UP HOMELESSNESS WITHIN THE LATINX COMMUNITY

Scholars note that although Latinx households experience various vulnerabilities that are tied to homelessness, they have been historically underrepresented in homeless counts (Chinchilla and Gabrielian 2020; Conroy and Heer 2003). Research suggests that Latinxs are less likely to be included in official homeless counts as they tend to live outside of traditional homeless spaces such as homeless shelters and encampments and instead find themselves living with family and/or friends in overcrowded, and often substandard, residences (Burr, Mutchler, and Gerst 2010; Chinchilla and Gabrielian 2020; Krivo 1995; Myers and Lee 1996). Recent estimates of doubled-up homelessness corroborate these findings, showing that Latinxs have a much higher risk of experiencing doubled-up homelessness than other racial/ethnic populations (Richard et al. 2022). Furthermore, Latinx engagement with homeless services is complicated by barriers to access. These include fears regarding immigration status, a lack of culturally appropriate service designs, and language congruence (Chinchilla and Gabrielian 2020; Culhane et al. 2019). Latinx homelessness has rarely been understood within this context, and PIT counts remain the primary indicator used to assess the need for housing and services for people experiencing homelessness.



DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Research Aims

Our aims for this project were twofold: using US census data to examine doubled-up homelessness in Los Angeles County with a focus on the Latinx population; and employing interviews with homeless service providers and policy advocates to examine whether homeless services are currently able to meet the needs of Latinxs who seek assistance.

Setting

Los Angeles County has one of the largest number of people experiencing homelessness in any region of the United States. The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) estimates that on any given night in 2023, 75,518 individuals experienced homelessness (LAHSA 2023). In 2023, Latinxs made up an estimated 49 percent of Los Angeles County's population (US Census Bureau, n.d.). The number of Latinxs experiencing homelessness has grown exponentially, going from 35 percent (18,334) of the homeless population in 2017 (LAHSA 2018b) to 42.6 percent (30,350) in 2023 (LAHSA 2023).

Quantitative Methods

To estimate the number of individuals experiencing doubled-up homelessness in Los Angeles County and to identify their demographic characteristics, we used person-level data from the 2016–2020 5-year ACS (Ruggles et al. 2020). Conducted each year by the US Census Bureau, the ACS consists of nationally representative 1-in-100 random samples of the population. The pooled 5-year datasets, best suited for analyzing small subpopulations, describe average population characteristics over that time (US Census Bureau 2019). We adapted a methodology developed by researchers and advocates to estimate the population most likely to be sharing housing due to economic hardship or housing loss (Richard et al. 2022). It considers an individual’s relationship to the host household, overcrowding, and geographically adjusted levels of poverty. For our study of Los Angeles County, we further limited our sample to people who reported staying in a renter household. Most people who are doubled up live in renter households (Richard et al. 2022), and these situations can be tenuous due to, for example, restrictions that landlords place on the number of people who can be on a lease (potentially leaving some household members without the legal protection of a rental agreement) or on how long tenants can have guests (increasing the instability of a temporary arrangement). The counts we report are weighted estimates and include margins of error with confidence levels of 90 percent (US Census Bureau 2019). To explore how demographic characteristics were associated with doubling up, we conducted Rao-Scott adjusted chi-square tests, bivariate analyses that account for the complex survey design of the ACS (Rao and Scott 1981). Finally, to explore geographic variation, we employed spatial analysis using R packages—collections of statistical analysis functions written in R—to match geographic areas used in the ACS with Los Angeles County’s Service Planning Areas (SPAs). (See the appendix for a detailed description of the study sample.)

Qualitative Methods

Qualitative research included a review of federal and state housing resources for people who were experiencing homelessness and semi-structured interviews with service providers and policy advocates. The analysis of resources consisted of a review of program criteria, including how homelessness is defined and documented. A review of publicly available materials informed the development of a semi-structured interview guide. We conducted interviews with 12 staff who were overseeing and administering homeless programs. We also interviewed two policy experts working in local contexts in which the definition of homelessness has been expanded to include doubled-up homelessness (Table 1). The interviews, which lasted approximately 45 minutes, were audio recorded, professionally transcribed, and coded using rapid qualitative analysis (Hamilton 2013).

Table 1. Interview participants

Participant type	Number of participants
Executive leaders, including directors	7
Program coordinators and managers	3
Outreach workers	2
Policy experts	2
Total	14

FINDINGS

Quantitative Findings

Across Los Angeles County, an estimated average of 226,348 people were living doubled up from 2016 to 2020 (Table 2). This figure is about 3.5 times the number of people counted during the PIT count in 2020. Race and ethnicity were significantly associated with doubling up. Among individuals identified as experiencing doubled-up homelessness, 76.69 percent—173,582 individuals—were Latinx. Among all Latinx individuals in renter households, 6.22 percent were identified as doubled-up. White non-Latinx individuals had the lowest rate of doubling up (1.27 percent), and people identifying as “other race” or American Indian/Alaska Native had the highest (6.50 percent). Most individuals that identified as “other race” were Latinx.

Table 2. Race and ethnicity of individuals in renter households who were doubled up, Los Angeles County, 2016–20 (5-year average)

	Count of doubled-up individuals (n=226,348)	Margin of error, count (±)	Share of doubled-up population (%)	Margin of error, share (±)	Rate in the population ^e (%)	Margin of error, rate (±)
Ethnicity^a						
Latinx	173,582	6,221	76.69	1.20	6.22	0.22
Non-Latinx	52,766	3,269	23.21	1.20	2.31	0.14
Race^b						
White	87,341	4,121	38.59	1.44	3.86	0.17
White, Non-Latinx ^c	13,400	1,609	5.92	0.66	1.27	0.15
Black	17,068	1,990	7.54	0.84	3.54	0.41
Black, Non-Latinx ^d	16,651	1,982	7.36	0.84	3.58	0.42
American Indian or Alaska Native	2,780	738	1.23	0.33	6.50	1.62
Asian or Pacific Islander	20,019	1,657	8.84	0.70	3.22	0.26
Other race	85,772	4,775	37.89	1.61	6.50	0.35
Two or more major races	13,368	1,984	5.91	0.85	3.83	0.56

Source: 2016–20 5-year ACS

Notes: All estimates are calculated using person weights and exclude people living in group quarters.

^a $p < .0001$; $F = 700.02$.

^b $p < .0001$; $F = 47.16$.

^c Subset of White, not included in total n.

^d Subset of Black, not included in total n.

^e Rate is the percentage of the total population of individuals in renter households (defined by the row) who are doubled-up.

The ACS asks Latinxs to identify a racial category in addition to their ethnicity. When ethnicity and race were considered together, the rate for doubling up was highest for Latinxs who also identified as American Indians or Alaska Natives (7.53 percent) (Table 3). In terms of age, the highest rate by far (17.85 percent) was for Latinx young adults—those ages 18 to 24.

Table 3. Age, race, educational attainment, and employment status of Latinxs in renter households who were doubled up, Los Angeles County, 2016–20 (5-year average)

	Count of doubled-up Latinxs (n=173,582)	Margin of error for count (±)	Rate in the population ^e (%)	Margin of error for rate (±)
Age^a				
0–4	15,376	1,470	6.76	0.63
5–17	25,758	1,982	4.08	0.31
18–24	58,158	2,673	17.85	0.75
25–64	67,175	3,065	4.63	0.20
65 or over	7,115	1,083	4.61	0.68
Race^b				
White	73,941	3,644	6.14	0.28
Black	417	205	2.35	1.15
American Indian or Alaska Native	2,425	730	7.53	2.13
Asian or Pacific Islander	614	278	5.91	2.76
Other race	85,019	4,746	6.53	0.36
Two or more major races	11,166	1,969	4.95	0.86
Educational attainment^c				
Less than high school	32,568	2,074	5.70	0.34
High school graduate or equivalency	20,581	1,650	4.87	0.39
Some college	11,226	1,073	3.29	0.30
Bachelor's degree or higher	2,661	499	1.49	0.29
Employment status^d				
Employed	35,696	2,199	3.29	0.19
Unemployed	5,419	791	8.66	1.17
Not in labor force	26,060	856	8.55	0.58

Source: 2016–20 5-year ACS

Notes: All estimates are calculated using person weights and exclude people living in group quarters. For some variables the analysis was based on a subset of n, so totals are smaller than 173,582.

^a Chi square tests were not conducted for age because age is included in the construction of the measure.

^b $p < .003$; $F = 3.69$

^c Subset containing those ages 25 and over. $P < .0001$; $F = 58.28$

^d Subset containing those ages 25–64. $P < .0001$; $F = 202.16$

^e Rate is the percentage of the total population of individuals in renter households (defined by the row) who are doubled-up.

Between 2020 and 2022, the number of Latinx individuals experiencing sheltered or unsheltered homelessness rose nearly **8%** at the national level and **26%** in Los Angeles County.

Results related to employment and education support the theory that people who are in doubled-up situations often experience greater economic hardship than people who are living in poverty but in housing of their own. Rates of doubled-up homelessness were higher among Latinxs who were unemployed (8.66 percent) or not in the labor force (8.55 percent), and for those who had less than a high school education (5.70 percent) (Table 3). Those who were categorized as unemployed were in the labor force—that is, looking for a job—but not working. Individuals who were not in the labor force were not looking for work. People who were categorized as employed were working at any level of employment, whether full, part time, or even just a few hours per week.

Birthplace, citizenship status, and language spoken at home were also assessed. The largest number of Latinxs living in doubled-up housing were born in California (100,882, or 6.47 percent) (Table 4). Doubled-up housing was also significantly associated with the number of years an individual had been in the United States, their English language ability, and their citizenship status, suggesting that people who face barriers related to immigration are at an increased risk of doubling up. Rates of doubling up were especially high (11.59 percent) for Latinxs who had been in the United States for five or fewer years. Rates were high also for those who reported no English language ability (8.26 percent), and those who were not US citizens (7.22 percent).

Table 4. Birthplace, citizenship, and language of Latinxs in renter households who were doubled up, Los Angeles County, 2016–20 (5-year average)

	Count of doubled-up Latinxs (n=173,582)	Margin of error, count (±)	Rate in the population ^f (%)	Margin of error, rate (±)
Birthplace^a				
California	100,882	4,270	6.47	0.26
Another US state or territory	2,561	674	2.95	0.72
Mexico	44,705	2,561	6.07	0.32
Central America	23,736	1,946	6.82	0.52
South America	1,244	502	2.88	1.11
Other	454	215	2.81	1.29
Citizenship status^b				
Yes, not foreign born	103,443	4,323	6.28	0.26
Yes, naturalized	10,708	1,124	3.32	0.36
Not a citizen	58,008	2,959	7.22	0.33
Language spoken at home^c				
English	17,613	1,642	4.06	0.37
Spanish	140,317	5,203	6.62	0.23
Other	15,652	1,497	6.58	0.61
Speaks English^d				
Does not speak English	16,452	1,380	8.26	0.64
Yes, speaks only English	17,613	1,642	4.06	0.37
Yes, speaks very well	83,961	3,603	6.96	0.29
Yes, speaks well	18,463	1,575	5.49	0.46
Yes, but not well	21,717	1,694	5.61	0.42
Years in the US^e				
0–5 years	11,026	1,322	11.59	1.21
6–10 years	6,478	1,103	8.35	1.37
11–15 years	10,730	1,098	7.52	0.73
16–20 years	13,559	1,034	7.08	0.50
21 or more years	28,379	2,073	4.42	0.32

Source: 2016–20 5-year ACS

Notes: All estimates are calculated using person weights and exclude people living in group quarters. For some variables the analysis was based on a subset of n, so totals are smaller than 173,582.

a p <.0001; F = 44.66

b p <.0001; F = 44.66

c p <.0001; F = 42.88.

d Subset containing ages five and over. p <.0001; F = 30.23.

e Subset containing foreign-born persons and those born in outlying areas of the United States. p <.0001; F = 41.24.

f Rate is the percentage of the total population of individuals in renter households (defined by the row) who are doubled-up.

The Full Spectrum of Latinx Homelessness: Understanding and Addressing Doubling Up

Finally, ACS data can provide a high level of understanding of geographic variation in doubling up among Latinxs. Figure 1 and Table 5 show rates of doubling up by Service Planning Area (SPA). The highest rates were in SPAs 6 and 4 (7.82 percent and 7.21 percent, respectively), which correspond to South Los Angeles and Metro Los Angeles. SPAs 6 and 4 were also the regions with the highest concentration of Latinxs who were experiencing homelessness, according to the 2022 PIT count.

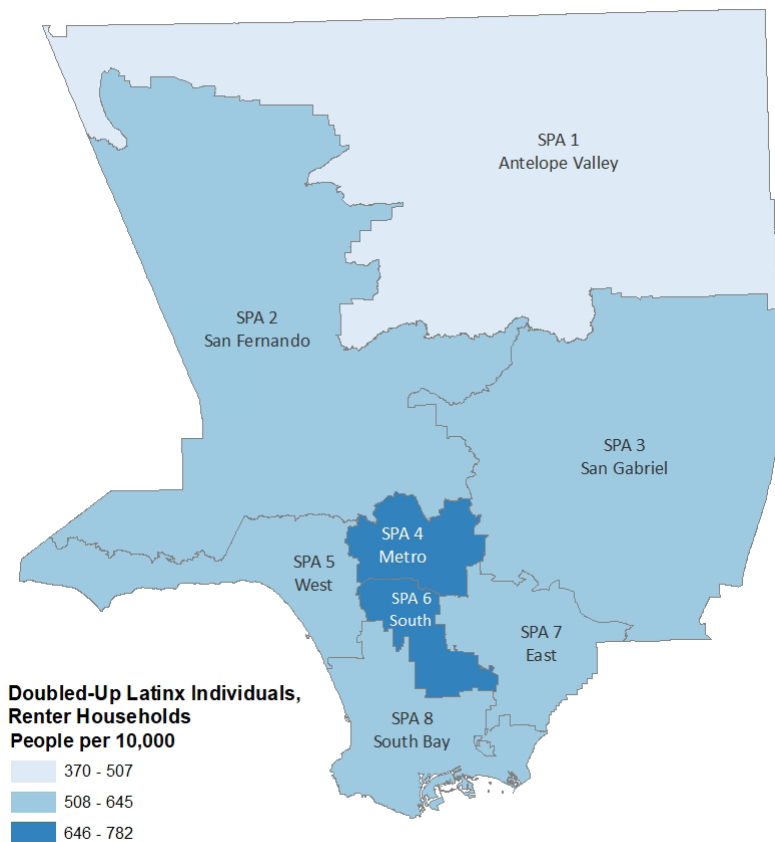
Table 5. Latinxs in renter households who were doubled up, by Service Planning Area (SPA), Los Angeles County, 2016–20 (5-year average)

SPA number	SPA name	Count of doubled-up individuals (n=173,582)	Rate in the population (%)	Share of all individuals in PIT count, 2022 (%)	Change from 2020 to 2022 (%)
1	Antelope Valley	2,634	3.70	4.01	+12.0
2	San Fernando	27,927	5.89	13.90	+5.0
3	San Gabriel	23,607	5.80	9.41	+18.0
4	Metro	30,968	7.21	23.62	+39.0
5	West	4,542	5.85	3.53	-18.0
6	South	33,504	7.82	22.97	+38.0
7	East	27,564	5.40	11.55	+20.0
8	South Bay	22,836	5.40	11.01	+64.0

Source: 2016–20 5-year ACS and Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority

Note: Rate is the percentage of the total population of individuals in renter households (defined by the row) who are doubled-up.

Figure 1. Latinxs in renter households who were doubled up, by Service Planning Area (SPA), Los Angeles County, 2016-20 (5-year average)



“In a perfect world we could capture folks who are doubled-up.”

Qualitative Findings

Our second research aim was to use qualitative interviews with professionals in the fields of homeless services and homeless policy to examine resource access for Latinx individuals and families. Interviews resulted in several insights regarding doubled-up homelessness and additional insights into programmatic challenges for serving Latinxs who are experiencing literal homelessness. Important themes included how definitions of homelessness impact who can be assisted through homeless services programs, barriers to the receipt of homeless services, and policy solutions.

Interviewees noted that receipt of services was dependent on the technical definitions of *homelessness* attached to funding mechanisms. For example, an individual at the executive level stated that the definition of homelessness “varies depending on the funding stream. . . . Most use the federal definition, which is quite literal, [that is,] living somewhere that’s not fit for human habitation and/or living in a temporary place or fleeing domestic violence.” This definition largely stems from guidance provided by HUD, which emphasizes that homelessness constitutes staying in a homeless shelter, staying in a place not meant for human habitation, or being at imminent risk of homelessness (HUD 2012). Some interviewees saw homelessness as distinct from doubled-up housing arrangements, with one saying, “Homelessness is you literally don’t have a home,” while others acknowledged the importance of providing services to doubled-up households in unsafe and substandard living conditions. “In a perfect world we could capture folks who are doubled-up,” said one interviewee. Frontline staff were more likely than those in leadership positions to believe that there was a need to provide homeless services for doubled-up households, as these were often households that they encountered through their work.

A few respondents in leadership roles acknowledged that a more expansive definition of homelessness would better suit the needs of the Latinx community. However, many respondents noted that resources are extremely limited, requiring a level of prioritization that accounts for the vulnerability of individuals experiencing street homelessness. As a result, some interviewees viewed doubled-up homelessness as a secondary issue, one that the system cannot address. Furthermore, several respondents in leadership roles expressed concern that an expansion in the definition would result in fewer resources for communities experiencing sheltered or unsheltered homelessness, with one saying, “There’s a finite amount of resources and so we have to, you know, essentially pick the most vulnerable, if you will.” Interviewees did note that housing insecurity among Latinxs was a growing concern in the neighborhoods they served.

All participants, regardless of their role within their organization, mentioned that a significant challenge for the Latinx community was immigration status. Providers acknowledged that immigrant populations are frequently afraid to seek services. They do not want their personal information to be entered in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), which logs needs assessments and links individuals to homeless services, for fear that the information will be shared with immigration enforcement or other local authorities. As one provider stated, HMIS is seen as a “system that you could be placed at risk in.” Other challenges included language barriers, finding accommodations for large family units, stigma around self-identifying as experiencing homelessness, income requirements, and the arduous application process for seeking services.

“Language is a barrier. . . . They can’t find a way to help somebody who is monolingual.”

Policy Solutions

When asked how homeless services could be improved locally, service providers offered a range of policy and program solutions. Several interviewees said that services that are culturally appropriate are critical to meet the needs of the Latinx community and that cultural awareness could be enhanced by providing training to staff and expanding bilingual services. One provider stated, “Language is a barrier. . . . They [staff] can’t find a way to help somebody who is monolingual.” Interviewees also noted the importance of educational campaigns to fight cultural stigma around homelessness and efforts to bring members of the homeless community together to discuss the importance of seeking help. Providers noted that it can be challenging when a person does not self-identify as experiencing homelessness yet may need services. These instances can leave providers in a situation where they are unable to confirm need in order to link a person to services. As one provider noted, “It’s that doubled-edged sword, where it’s like, ‘Don’t admit to it [homelessness], but we do need the help.’ And it’s teeter-tottering between that in order to get and be able to provide services.” There was also recognition that mental health services for the Latinx community are often scarce, and that cultural stigma continues to prevent individuals from seeking services and acknowledging their mental health needs.

Regarding immigration concerns, respondents noted that there is a need not only to expand the number of resources that are available for undocumented populations but also to ensure that providers understand what resources can currently be accessed regardless of immigration status. That means “having guidance across providers of what is acceptable and not acceptable,” as one interviewee noted. For those granted refugee status, respondents suggested that allowing them to access an ITIN could help them achieve housing stability more quickly by allowing them to work. Lastly, all interviewees acknowledged the critical need to increase the supply of affordable housing and to ensure that workers are paid a living wage.

In addition to local service providers, we spoke to policy advocates in Minnesota and Oregon who were working to increase attention to doubled-up homelessness in their regions. They both emphasized the importance of acting locally in the absence of federal action on the issue. These states have begun including doubled-up homelessness in official definitions of homelessness and using local resources to meet the needs of those that are doubled-up. Efforts to include doubled-up homelessness in official definitions were driven by a realization that doubled-up homelessness disproportionately affects communities of color, including Latinx and Indigenous (American Indian and Alaska Native) communities, and is associated with substandard living conditions that impact the health and well-being of individuals and families.

Our interviewee in Oregon echoed findings in our own study, stating that in Portland some “providers were resistant [to the expanded definition] because they were concerned about money allocations,” but that the expanded definition has been helpful in providing support to households that previously had none. Additionally, the City of Portland structured its funding so that only a portion of the funds for homelessness programs could be used for doubled-up households, which helped mitigate community concerns that those experiencing sheltered or unsheltered homelessness might be left unserved.

In Minnesota, the addition of doubled-up homelessness to official definitions has been instrumental in assisting Indigenous communities in accessing state resources and helping the region assess the scale of their housing problem. Our interviewee in Minnesota described efforts to enumerate individuals in doubled-up housing as follows: “We’ll keep track of those people, because we have state resources we could devote towards them. . . . [We may] put it in the HUD narrative, in the Continuum of Care [Program] application, saying we had this many doubled-up, or this many [in] substandard housing, that type of thing. But [we] won’t put it in the official count that goes up to HUD.” Advocates have been hopeful that by expanding the definition locally, HUD might acknowledge that homelessness can look different from how it is currently defined: living outside or in shelters. Furthermore, by including doubled-up numbers in their narrative report to HUD, Minnesotans hoped to draw federal attention to the scale of their state’s housing challenges. It is clear, however, that HUD currently does not consider individuals living in doubled-up housing as officially homeless.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A reliance on PIT counts fails to acknowledge that homelessness is experienced on a continuum that ranges from doubled-up homelessness in substandard housing to chronic homelessness, which is defined by living on the streets for extended periods of time. For some individuals, doubled-up homelessness may require interventions to prevent homelessness, or it may represent living situations that are unsafe, and in environments that are uninhabitable. By using ACS data to expand what we know about the spectrum of homelessness in Los Angeles County, we show that more than 6 percent of Latinxs living in renter households are experiencing doubled-up homelessness.

Although most of these Latinxs were born in California, those who were recent immigrants or noncitizens, and those who could not speak English fluently experienced higher rates of doubled-up homelessness. Latinxs who identified as American Indian or Alaska Native also reported disparate rates of doubled-up homelessness, which aligns with recent reports on the needs of Indigenous populations that are experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles (Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission 2023). Within Los Angeles County SPAs with a high share of the homeless population, as determined by annual PIT counts, also had a high prevalence of doubled-up homelessness, adding further evidence that efforts to address doubling up may help prevent other forms of homelessness.

Resources for people who are doubled-up are limited, but expanding options for these people might help address Latinx homelessness and homelessness prevention more broadly. Across the country, states such as Minnesota and Oregon can provide important lessons for how local dollars can be targeted toward such households. Additionally, interviews with homeless service providers in Los Angeles County suggest that access to homeless services remain a barrier for Latinx communities. Interviewees noted that services that are culturally and linguistically appropriate are critical for reaching the Latinx population. Further, in Los Angeles County about 40 percent of Latinxs are foreign born. In the county, about 9 percent of individuals are undocumented. Of these 9 percent, an estimated 80 percent are Latinx (Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration 2020). Immigration status remains a significant barrier to services for people experiencing homelessness, as few resources are available for noncitizen populations, and misinformation regarding service availability often poses a barrier even when people are eligible.

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Below we propose recommendations for policymakers and system administrators that are based on our findings. Several recommendations align with those provided by the Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness (LAHSA 2018a), and efforts to address the needs of American Indian and Alaskan Native people experiencing homelessness (Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission, n.d.), and of immigrant and undocumented people experiencing homelessness (Department of Consumer and Business Affairs et al. 2021).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Program and Systems Level

1. Examine opportunities to track and measure doubled-up homelessness and consider this a vulnerability factor in homelessness prevention programs.
2. Support community organizing and coalition-building efforts in the Latinx community and across communities of color.
3. Explore opportunities to establish communication campaigns to fight cultural stigma around homelessness and mental health needs.
4. Engage with community-based organizations that are outside those usually associated with providing services to people experiencing homelessness but may be serving vulnerable populations. These include legal aid foundations, immigrant rights groups, community health centers, and faith based institutions.
5. Increase training for service providers regarding resources that are available to people experiencing homelessness regardless of their citizenship status.
6. Increase access to services by ensuring that they are culturally and linguistically appropriate.

Policy Level

1. Advocate for housing and financial assistance programs that use expanded definitions of homelessness including individuals and families experiencing doubled-up homelessness.
2. Explore alternative measures of local resource needs, including those that use census data to assess doubled-up homelessness.
3. Explore creating new resources and expanding those currently available to address doubled-up homelessness.
4. Explore opportunities to expand resources that address housing and homelessness regardless of an individual's citizenship status.
5. Examine opportunities to increase speedy access to the Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) to allow recent immigrants and refugees to work within the United States.
6. Continue to support funding that is intended to increase affordable housing and policies that protect tenants' rights.

APPENDIX: DEFINING DOUBLED-UP HOMELESSNESS

We defined doubled-up homeless individuals as poor or near poor individuals (at or below 125% of poverty threshold, geographically adjusted) in a poor or near poor renter household who are either: a relative that the household head does not customarily take responsibility for (based on age and relationship); or a non-relative who is not a partner and not formally sharing in household costs (not roomers/roommates). Single adult children and relatives over 65 may be seen as a householder’s responsibility, so such cases are only included if the household is overcrowded (a ratio of more than two people per bedroom). Specifically, the definition includes the following household members:

Adult children and children-in-law	Who have children of their own, are married, or are single but living in overcrowded conditions.
Grandchildren	Minors or adults, <i>excluding</i> : <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Minor grandchildren of the household head if the household head claimed responsibility for their needs (question asked by the ACS). 2. Minor grandchildren whose single parent was under eighteen years of age (a teenage dependent) and was living at home.
Other relatives	Parents and parents-in-law, siblings and siblings-in-law, cousins, aunts and uncles, and unspecified relatives of the household head who were under the age of 65, <i>excluding</i> : <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Minor siblings of the household head if the minor’s parent was not present (the household head may assume responsibility for minor siblings). 2. Single and childless adult siblings of the household head, if the household head was also single with no children (analogous to roommates). <p>Other relatives of the household head who were over age 65.</p>
Nonrelatives	Individuals unrelated to the householder, including friends, guests, and nonrelatives described as “other,” <i>excluding</i> : <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Unmarried partners of the household head and/or their children, and roommates, housemates, roomers, or boarders.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Dr. Melissa Chinchilla is a Project Scientist in the Department of Psychiatry & Biobehavioral Sciences, David Geffen School of Medicine, University of California, Los Angeles; a Health Services Researcher with the VA Greater Los Angeles (GLA) HSR&D Center of Innovation (COIN): Center for the Study of Healthcare Innovation, Implementation, and Policy; and an Associate Investigator with the VA Rehabilitation Research and Development (RR&D) Center on Enhancing Community Integration for Homeless Veterans (THRIVE). Prior to joining the VA, Dr. Chinchilla was a Research Scientist with AltaMed Health Service's Institute for Health Equity. Dr. Chinchilla's research focuses on the social determinants of health, with an emphasis on housing and homelessness. She has conducted research on the community integration outcomes of formerly homeless Veterans and increasing our understanding of Latino homelessness including barriers. Dr. Chinchilla earned her doctorate in Urban Studies and Planning from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She holds a Master of Science in Health Policy and Management from UCLA and a Master of City & Regional Planning from the UC Berkeley.



Deyanira Nevarez Martinez holds a PhD in Urban and Environmental Planning and Policy from the University of California, Irvine and is currently a faculty member in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at Michigan State University. She also holds master's degrees in Urban Planning and Geographic Information Systems Technology from the University of Arizona. Her research focuses on homelessness, housing precarity, and the criminalization of poverty in the United States. She has also explored issues related to gentrification, racial equity in land use and transportation, racial segregation, and bail reform.





Molly Richard is a Postdoctoral Scholar at Boston University's Center for Innovation in Social Science (CISS). Molly holds a PhD in Community Research and Action, an interdisciplinary social science program in the Department of Human and Organizational Development in Peabody College at Vanderbilt University. Molly's research aims to inform strategies to prevent and end homelessness. Molly has a decade of experience conducting applied, policy-relevant research on homelessness. Their recent work focuses on understanding and addressing racial inequities in homelessness, including doubled-up homelessness. Molly's research has been enhanced by partnerships with the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, Racial Equity Partners, C4 Innovations, and other policymakers, researchers, advocates, and people experiencing homelessness across the US.

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latino@luskin.ucla.edu