

**STEMMING THE RISE OF  
LATINO HOMELESSNESS:  
LESSONS FROM LOS ANGELES COUNTY**

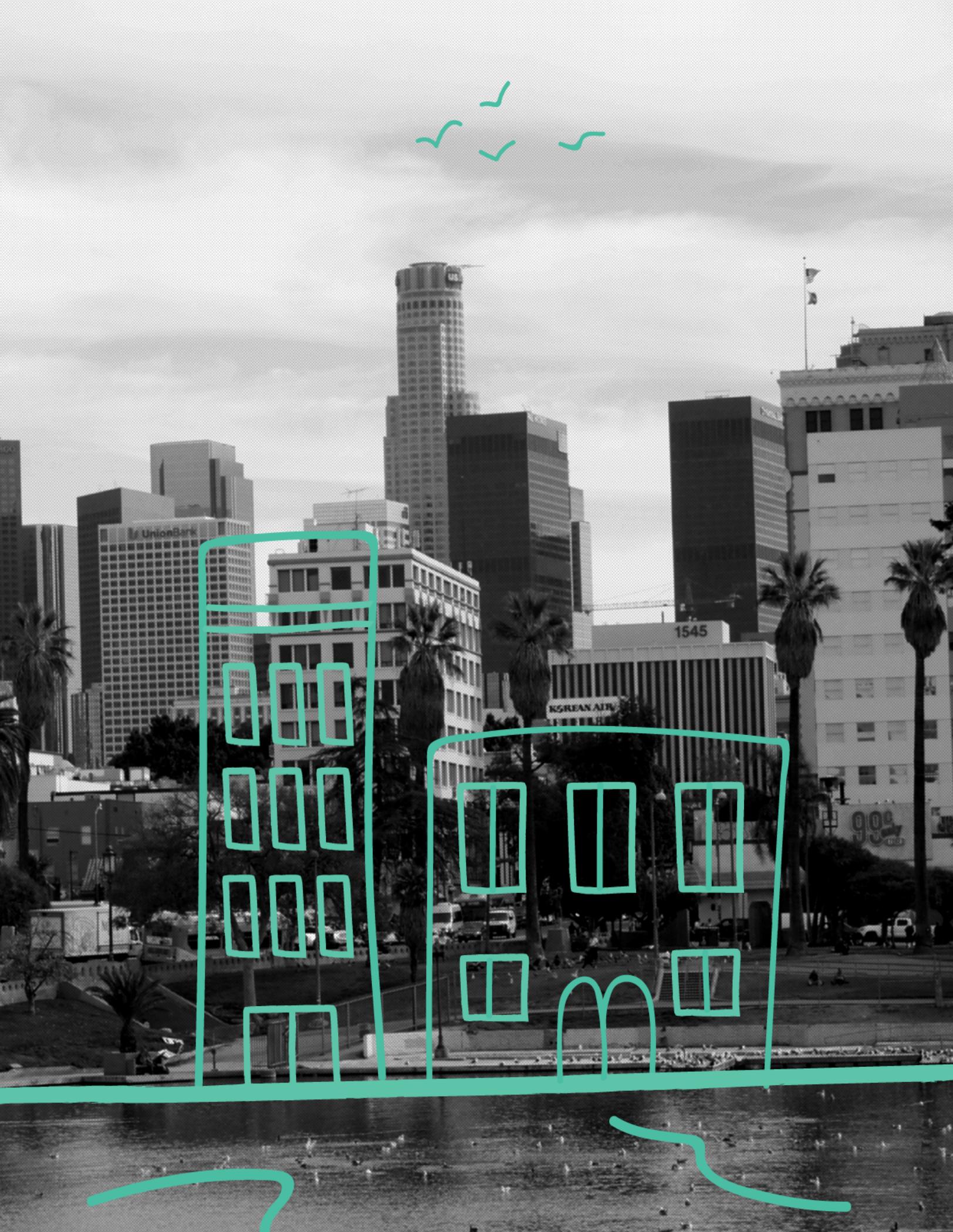
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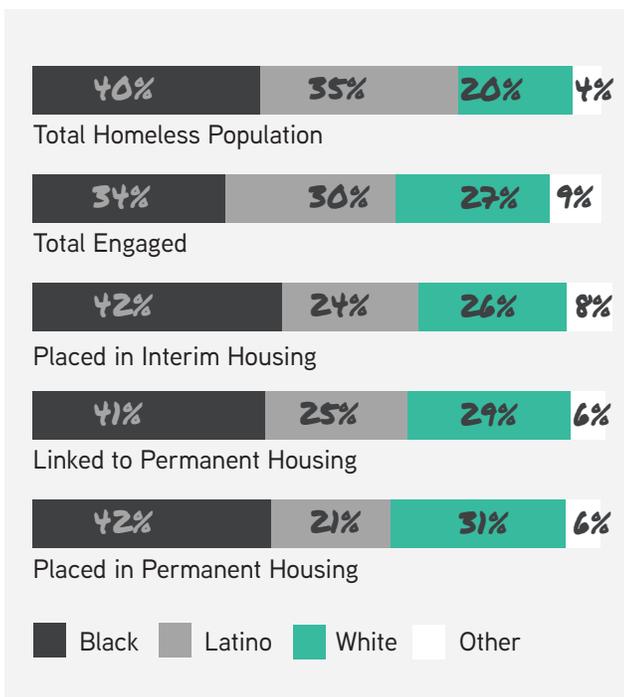




# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FIGURE 1

## ENGAGEMENT IN HOMELESS SERVICES BY RACE/ETHNICITY



**SOURCE:** Homelessness Policy Research Institute and CA Policy Lab. 2018. "Examining Equity in the Homeless Service System Through Data." Presented at the LAHSA Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness, May 21, 2018.

**HOMELESSNESS** is a national concern and for many municipalities a local crisis. Los Angeles County has the largest number of unsheltered homeless individuals of any jurisdiction in the nation. In 2017, there were an estimated 55,048 individuals experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles County (LAHSA 2017). In Los Angeles County, Latinos made up 48 percent of the county's population, and 35 percent of the homeless population (LAHSA 2017). However, Latinos are likely to be undercounted in homeless counts; they are more likely to live outside of traditional homeless spaces (e.g., homeless shelters and encampments), rely heavily on social networks, and use public services at lower rates than other racial/ethnic groups (Conroy and Heer 2003; Molina 2000). Latinos are also more likely to live in overcrowded households (Burr, Mutchler, and Gerst 2010; Krivo 1995; Myers and Lee 1996), a characteristic not captured in official homeless counts but one that likely contributes to unstable housing.

Compared to other racial/ethnic groups, Latinos are least likely to be engaged with homeless services. During fiscal year 2017-2018, LAHSA estimated that Latinos made up 35 percent of the homeless population, but represented only 30 percent of those engaged by initial homeless outreach. Moreover, Latinos were engaged in housing services at even lower rates, making up only 24 percent of those placed in interim housing, 25 percent of those linked to permanent housing, and 21 percent of those placed in permanent housing (Homelessness Policy Research Institute and CA Policy Lab 2018) (Figure 1).

Latino homelessness remains an understudied subject with minimal research examining causes of housing instability and service engagement patterns. Through qualitative interviews with stakeholders across Los Angeles County, including affordable housing

## " COMPARED TO OTHER RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUPS, LATINOS ARE LEAST LIKELY TO BE ENGAGED WITH HOMELESS SERVICES "

and homeless service providers, legal advocates, researchers, and leaders in government, philanthropy, and homelessness policy, we find that Latino homelessness is complicated by a number of factors: immigration status, cultural and language barriers, and low-income status. Further, these factors frequently overlap, creating a complex picture of homelessness.

*Stemming the Rise of Latino Homelessness* identifies challenges, opportunities, and steps for addressing Latinos' distinct housing and service needs. Through our interviews we find that there are significant resource and knowledge gaps that need to be addressed to assure that Latinos experiencing a housing crisis are served through our current safety net and homeless service systems. Language and cultural barriers continue to impact service engagement. Monolingual populations find it particularly difficult to identify and obtain assistance, while cultural beliefs around self-sufficiency prevent individuals from seeking services. Furthermore, current immigration debates, including changes to public charge policy and growing xenophobic public discourse, have created widespread fear and service disengagement among undocumented immigrants (i.e., individuals lacking documents for legal immigration or residency) and mixed-status households. We find that undocumented individuals are highly vulnerable, and that resources targeting this population are extremely scarce.

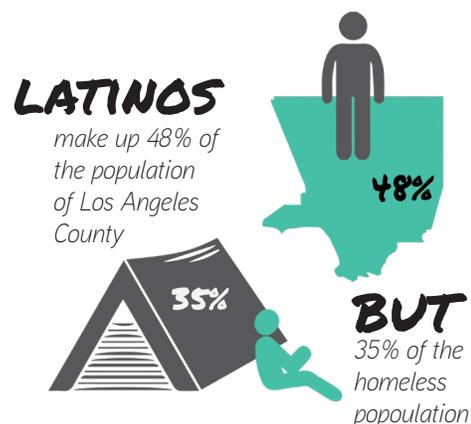
Given interviews with stakeholders, there are several ways in which advocates, policymakers, and funders can begin to address the needs of the Latino community that face or are at risk of facing homelessness. In general, homeless prevention efforts must educate renters on tenant rights, including information regarding illegal rent increases and evictions, and how to have evictions removed from rental records. Furthermore, Latinos appear less likely than other populations to engage with the homeless service system, and to self-identify as homeless. Therefore, efforts to engage Latinos in homeless services must look

toward trusted local institutions. In addition, bilingual information about services is essential and more attention should be paid to culturally relevant interventions and the identification of best practices.

*Stemming the Rise of Latino Homelessness* provides a starting point for conversation on issues impacting Latino households experiencing or at the risk of experiencing homelessness. Additional research is critically needed to properly address the needs of this population. This report is organized into core domains along the continuum of homeless services found in the literature (Wong, Park, and Nemon 2006): Causes of Homelessness; Homeless Prevention; Outreach and Service Engagement; Shelters and Rapid Rehousing; and Permanent Housing. The report concludes with recommendations for addressing this critical issue.

FIGURE 2

### LATINO COUNTY POPULATION VS. LATINO HOMELESS POPULATION



SOURCE: LAHSA. 2017. "2017 Homeless Count Full Report." <https://www.lahsa.org/news?article=408-revised-2017-homeless-count-results&ref=hc>.

# LATINO HOMELESSNESS IN LA COUNTY

Latinos remain the second largest ethnic group among homeless residents in Los Angeles County (Flaming, Burns, and Carlen 2018). In 2017, they made up 48.6 percent of the county's population and 35 percent (18,334) of those experiencing homelessness.<sup>1</sup> In three out of eight Service Planning Areas (SPA) (i.e., SPAs 2, 3, and 7) Latinos made up the largest proportion of individuals experiencing homelessness (LAHSA 2017).

Latinos are a socially and economically vulnerable population. In Los Angeles County 37.6 percent of Latino adults over the age of 25 lack a high school diploma (U.S. Census 2017a). Latinos also have some of the lowest median earnings at about \$35,00 for men and \$31,000 for women, compared to \$79,000 for non-Latino White

men and \$62,000 for non-Latino White women (U.S. Census 2017a). The numbers for foreign-born Latinos are starker. About 53 percent of foreign-born Latinos lack a high school degree and foreign-born Latinos have median earnings of about \$32,000 for men and \$26,000 for women (U.S. Census 2017a). In Los Angeles, Latinos are more likely to be first time homeless compared to other ethnic groups (Flaming et al., 2018), and more likely to experience homelessness with children; 41 percent of Latinos experience homelessness with children compared to 28 percent for blacks and 12 percent for Whites. Latino households experiencing homelessness are also more likely to include intergenerational family members (Homelessness Policy Research Institute and CA Policy Lab 2018).

# METHODOLOGY

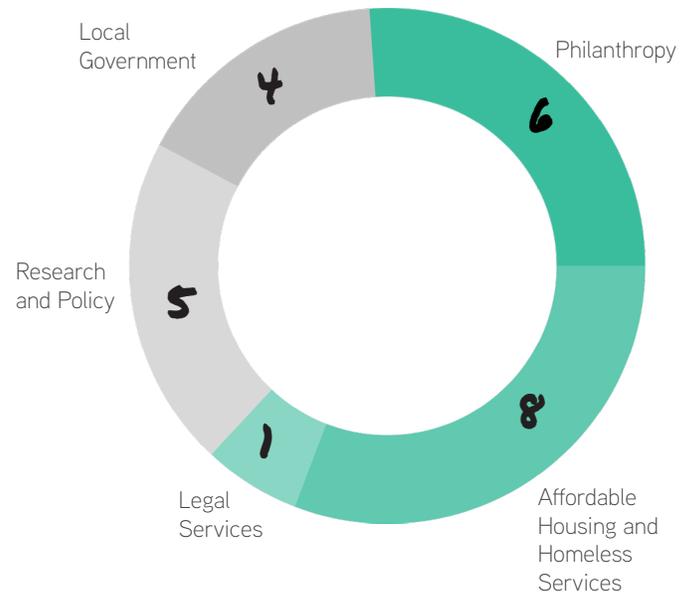
Homelessness is a systemic issue that cuts across various sectors. In order to understand the state of Latino homelessness in Los Angeles County, we performed a literature review on the issue area and interviewed 24 stakeholders working in several sectors between July and October 2018 (Figure 3). Interviewees included program directors, executive directors, outreach workers, and researchers. Interviews were semi-structured and ranged from 30-60 minutes in length. Aims were three-fold: (1) understand why Latinos are becoming homeless; (2) detect what efforts, if any, are tailored to meet the needs of Latinos experiencing homelessness; and (3) identify resource gaps and policy roadblocks that make it difficult to assist Latinos in precarious living situations.

Interview field notes were used to assess prevalent themes across stakeholder interviews. Findings from interviews and the literature review were organized by phase in the continuum of homeless services, ranging from prevention to housing stabilization (Wong, Park, and Nemon 2006). Emergent themes were also used to inform recommendations for next steps. This report is organized into the following sections:

- >> **CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS**
- >> **HOMELESS PREVENTION**
- >> **OUTREACH AND SERVICE ENGAGEMENT**
- >> **SHELTERS AND RAPID REHOUSING**
- >> **PERMANENT HOUSING**
- >> **RECOMMENDATIONS**

FIGURE 3

## INTERVIEWEES BY SECTOR



# CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS



Interviewees were asked what is driving Latino homelessness in Los Angeles County. Interviewees gave three primary reasons: (1) high rental costs; (2) a housing system that is challenging for immigrant and monolingual populations to navigate; and (3) individuals exiting jails, prisons, foster care, and immigration detention centers.

## 1.1 HOUSING PRESSURES, REDEVELOPMENT, AND GENTRIFICATION

Many low-income communities throughout Los Angeles have experienced redevelopment that has fueled increased housing costs and the displacement of low-income households (UCLA Center for Neighborhood Knowledge 2016). Individuals living in regions without rent control can see their cost of living increase from one month to another.<sup>2</sup> Those living in buildings covered by the Rent Stabilization Ordinance in the City of Los Angeles are protected from exuberant rent increases.<sup>3</sup> However, only 80 percent of the City of Los Angeles' rental housing is covered under rent control (UCLA Luskin Center 2018). Illegal rent increases are common and, for low-income households struggling to make rental payments, even increases permissible under rent control can make a unit unaffordable.

Interviewees noted that landlords are using various tactics to displace low-income households and increase profits from rental units. Landlords were described as using "cash for keys," offering renters a lump sum to vacate a unit. While "cash for keys" can occur under rent control laws, many renters are unaware that they are not obligated to take a "cash for keys" offer or that under current law they likely qualify for more than what the landlord may be offering. In addition, interviewees described some individuals as becoming homeless due to substandard housing. A lack of unit upkeep may be the

# **"IMMIGRANTS AND MONOLINGUAL RENTERS ARE OFTEN UNAWARE OF THEIR RIGHTS AND ARE EITHER AFRAID OR LACK THE KNOWLEDGE TO ASSERT THEM"**

result of a negligent landlord or, in some cases, an active tactic used to remove tenants from rent-controlled units.

## **1.2 CHALLENGES OF AN IMMIGRANT AND MONOLINGUAL POPULATION**

Several interviewees working in affordable housing and homeless services noted that immigrant and monolingual Latinos have a particularly difficult time in the rental market. Monolingual Spanish speakers have a challenging time understanding English documents, including leases and eviction notices. Monolingual renters may sign a rental lease without fully comprehending what it contains and inadvertently violate a stipulation. Interviewees described instances in which renters, in an effort to afford rental costs, unintentionally violated their lease by allowing someone not on their original lease to move into the unit with them. Further, interviewees noted that immigrants and monolingual renters are often unaware of their rights and are either afraid or lack the knowledge to assert them. An increasingly hostile climate for immigrants in the country is also said to impact undocumented individuals' (i.e., individuals lacking documents for legal immigration or residency) willingness to assert their rights for fear of deportation. Interviewees noted that immigrant and mixed status households are less likely to fight an eviction or an illegal rent increase.

The experts we interviewed also stated that undocumented elderly immigrants are particularly vulnerable to homelessness. Undocumented elderly Latinos do not qualify for social security benefits. In addition, low wages, unstable income, and remittances to one's home country during working years, make this population unlikely to have significant retirement savings. If individuals do not have social support networks to assist them, they are likely to end up on the streets with little to no recourse for housing and connection to homeless services.

## **1.3 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO LATINO HOMELESSNESS**

Understanding Latino homelessness requires a closer look at the various systems—including criminal justice, foster care, and immigration detention centers—that may be contributing to current homeless numbers. While more research is needed to investigate the degree to which these factors are fueling Latino homelessness, the experts we interviewed noted that the release of low-level offenders is increasing the number of individuals exiting the criminal justice system, a system in which black and Latino men are overrepresented (PEW Research Center 2018). Homeless count numbers also indicate a growing number of transitional age youth, an issue also noted by interviewees. These youth are likely to have been involved in foster care, another system that disproportionately affects blacks and Latinos (Lanier et al. 2014). Lastly, interviewees providing homeless services have seen increases in referrals for unaccompanied youth from immigration detention centers. These youth are fleeing dangerous situations in their home countries and often have few social supports locally.

# A CLOSER LOOK AT THE UNDOCUMENTED

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In 2017, Latinos made up 48 percent of Los Angeles County's population (U.S. Census 2017b); 40 percent of Latinos in Los Angeles County were foreign born, 61 percent of which were not naturalized citizens (U.S. Census 2017c).<sup>4</sup> While difficult to establish an exact count, estimates suggest that 9 percent of all foreign born individuals living in LA County are undocumented (Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration 2018).

Undocumented individuals face significant challenges. Undocumented individuals tend to be employed in low-paying jobs with high turnover and few benefits (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002; Passel, Director, and Lopez 2009). They have lower levels of education when compared to U.S. born residents. Undocumented individuals are more likely than permanent residents and citizens to be forced to move because they cannot afford to pay rent, experience periods of decreased income, have difficulty with transportation for work, and experience periods of homelessness (Chavez 2012). These individuals are also likely to feel stigmatized by public discourse that characterizes them as "drains" on public resources (Keusch, Wilentz, and Kleinman 2006).

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Latino immigrants have complex needs, many are refugees that have fled their home countries due to violence and economic strife, and may require services that address health needs, as well as, financial concerns. Obtaining resources can be difficult as undocumented individuals are barred from receiving public benefits, including cash assistance and federal housing subsidies.

In recent years, California has moved to increase its protections of immigrants by declaring itself a sanctuary state. Locally, County of Los Angeles has adopted "sanctuary policies" that direct law enforcement to limit its cooperation with federal immigration enforcement agents. Nonetheless, homeless service providers find themselves in a difficult position in which they are serving immigrant populations that have unique needs but, given today's national nativist climate, find it difficult to advocate for these populations for fear of public backlash and risk to program participants' safety. Programs serving undocumented populations remain limited, making this a particularly vulnerable population.

# HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

Prevention efforts for Latinos will benefit from focusing on economic stability and housing affordability. Latinos are disproportionately represented among the working poor (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018). Low pay and unstable employment make this population vulnerable to experiencing homelessness as a direct result of economic challenges. Homeless Latinos are more likely to report being employed, actively looking for work, or being engaged in informal work when compared to other ethnic groups (Flaming et al., 2018). Latinos are also likely to double up (i.e., more than one family to a household), living in overcrowded households (Burr, Mutchler, and Gerst 2010). These households are on the edge of homelessness, but under current policies do not qualify for homeless services.

## 2.1 EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES

Interviewees noted that the current anti-immigrant climate has raised alarm among non-citizens. Particularly for immigrants not granted work permits in the United States, finding stable employment can be challenging. Moreover, threats of deportation make it difficult for individuals to stand up against labor violations, including wage theft. Efforts to assure a living wage and increase worker protections are essential. Interviewees also noted that having a criminal record negatively affects employment outcomes. Fair employment and Ban the Box legislation (i.e., mandated removal of conviction history from job applications) are central for increasing employment opportunities. However, more resources are needed to assist individuals with record expungement.

## 2.2 HOUSING RIGHTS AND AFFORDABILITY

Interviewees acknowledged a need for tenant rights education among the Latino community, including information regarding illegal rent increases, illegal evictions, and how to remove evictions from rental records. In addition to knowing their rights, Latinos

need more information about where they can access programs to assist in the event of a housing crisis. Interviewees stated that many Latinos are unaware of what type of assistance is available or may not know how to navigate the system in order to obtain public benefits. In addition, housing that is not maintained up to housing codes creates unsafe and unsanitary living conditions, which, left unaddressed, can lead individuals to vacate a unit. Interviewees noted that renters have the right to report maintenance issues to local government agencies. However, a shortage of housing inspectors makes enforcement of citations difficult. If there is no follow-up by inspectors, this creates a situation where the tenant becomes vulnerable to landlord retaliation if they file a complaint. Therefore, there is a need to increase the bandwidth of City and County code enforcement programs. Lastly, interviewees believed that wealth building in low-income communities has focused on homeownership; yet, homeownership is economically out of reach for many households. Therefore, it is important to promote other avenues of wealth building among low-income households.



# OUTREACH AND SERVICE ENGAGEMENT

There is indication that Latinos are not engaging with mainstream homeless services as a result of cultural differences and growing distrust of government due to an anti-immigrant climate. Homeless service providers noted that outreach workers have witnessed a rise in the number of Latinos living on the streets, but fewer entering service agencies to receive support. Interviewees attributed this discrepancy to three primary reasons: 1) gaps in service provision; 2) language and cultural barriers; and 3) fears surrounding immigration and public charge designation.<sup>5</sup>

## 3.1 GAPS IN SERVICE PROVISION

Individuals that become homeless generally stay in the area they were previously housed. However, not all communities are service rich, and gaps in homeless services can create barriers to service utilization. Interviewees noted that initial engagement is difficult in communities that do not have sufficient outreach staff. In addition, if individuals are reached, but services are not available in the area, they may refuse to accept assistance due to a desire to remain in place. Furthermore, according to interviewees, Latinos experiencing homelessness are likely to be found in remote areas, such as riverbeds and highway overpasses, making them a difficult population to identify and engage. Latinos also appear to be less likely to seek services from traditional homeless service providers and more likely to identify themselves as experiencing homelessness in nontraditional settings, such as medical clinics and churches. For Latinos, familiarity of and trust in local institutions appears to be key. Interviewees working in homeless service provision noted that Latinos

often hear about services through word of mouth. Trust is essential, particularly with immigrant households that may be distrustful of government institutions. Interviewees believed that institutions that have an established reputation in the community are likely to be most successful in encouraging service participation.

Interviewees in homeless services noted that it is challenging to provide mental health support for Latinos. For one, culturally, mental health remains a taboo subject. It is difficult to convince individuals to acknowledge that they would benefit from, and subsequently receive, mental health services. Even when someone does agree to receive mental health services, if they are monolingual, it is challenging to find Spanish-speaking therapists able to consistently provide services. One interviewee stated that it is difficult to find bilingual therapists and, even when she is able to connect her clients to someone that speaks Spanish, employment turnover at agencies providing mental healthcare can trigger a long wait for a new bilingual therapist. This in turn decreases trust among clients and negatively impacts service engagement.

Lastly, interviewees described clear service gaps for undocumented individuals. Several public programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and federal housing subsidies, do not serve undocumented individuals. One interviewee also stated that there is no medical assistance for the chronically ill undocumented. Once they are released from a hospital there is nowhere for them to go for long-term care.

### **3.2 LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL BARRIERS TO OUTREACH**

There are several language and cultural barriers preventing Latinos from engaging with homeless services. Interviewees stated that a lack of bilingual staff and translation of documents makes it difficult for monolingual Latinos to access services. One interviewee noted that while some agencies, such as the Department of Public Social Services, offer translation services, individuals must be eligible for service provision from the agency. In addition to language barriers, a lack of familiarity with the service system can be challenging. In particular, immigrants have a difficult time navigating and understanding how systems function in the United States. Interviewees working in homeless outreach and service provision stated that more resources are needed to assist with immigrant integration, including workshops informing individuals of their rights and how to navigate legal and public service systems.

Homeless service providers and outreach workers believed that a reluctance to engage in services is also tied to cultural differences in how Latinos perceive homelessness. Several interviewees noted that Latinos are hesitant to identify themselves as experiencing homelessness. When offered services, Latinos were described as expressing “pride” and/or “shame.” Latinos do not appear to identify with mainstream perceptions of homelessness, instead seeing themselves as part of the working poor and homelessness as something that they can remedy through individual perseverance. Further, Latinos experiencing housing insecurity may double up or live in untenable housing situations, such as converted garages and other substandard housing. Due to these dynamics, interviewees expressed a need to raise public awareness regarding the prevalence and causes of homelessness within the Latino community.

### **3.3 PUBLIC PROGRAMS AND PUBLIC CHARGE DESIGNATION**

Various interviewees stated that immigrants are not engaging with public assistance for fear of being labeled a “public charge.” If someone hopes to one day obtain U.S. citizenship or permanent residency, being labeled a public charge can deem this person ineligible. Given increasing hostility toward immigrants, there is a rising fear that any program that provides public assistance will negatively affect an individual’s immigration status. Interviewees described this belief as preventing individuals experiencing, or at the brink of experiencing homelessness, from seeking and accepting assistance. However, not all public programs label someone a public charge and those that do are primarily considered to fall under two categories: (1) the receipt of public cash assistance for income maintenance, or (2) institutionalization for long-term care at government expense (USCIS 1999). In addition, while a non-citizen parent may be ineligible for government programs, their U.S. born children can qualify to receive various services (e.g., Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). However, the current anti-immigrant climate appears to have increased questions regarding the use of public services.

Interviewees noted that a lack of information has led many immigrants to view all public services as presenting a potential risk to their immigration status in the U.S. Further, the Trump administration has proposed expanding the definition of public charge to include the receipt of non-cash assistance, such as medical assistance (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, DHS 2018). If this proposal becomes law, millions of authorized immigrants and mixed status families will be affected. Nationally, estimates suggest that nearly 50 percent of non-citizens and one third of U.S. born persons could be affected, including 10.4 million citizen children with at least one noncitizen parent (Perreira, Yoshikawa, and Oberlander 2018). These individuals are likely to withdraw themselves and their children from service receipt and refuse all forms of public assistance.

# SHELTERS AND RAPID REHOUSING



Shelters are an important part of the homeless service system. Shelters can be a place for individuals to be assessed and linked to services, including rapid rehousing support (USICH 2018a).<sup>6</sup> Rapid rehousing is designed to help individuals and families quickly exit homelessness through assistance with housing identification, move in assistance, and case management services (USICH 2018b). Rapid rehousing is a best practice for addressing homelessness, and aims to ensure that assistance can be provided to the greatest number of people. Consequently, an operating principle is that “households should receive ‘just enough’ assistance to successfully exit homelessness and avoid returning to the streets” (USICH 2018b). When it comes to serving Latinos experiencing homelessness, according to our interviews, there are challenges with rapid rehousing policy, as well as using shelters as a point of service entry.

## 4.1 SHELTER USE

Interviewees noted that Latinos experiencing homelessness are less likely to use shelters, and more likely to rely on social networks or use vehicles as a source of temporary housing. According to the experts we spoke with, there are several reasons why Latinos may choose not to use homeless shelters. For one, Latinos are more likely to experience homelessness as part of a family unit, and spaces in family shelters can be limited. Further, Latinas fleeing domestic violence fear being separated from male children in women only quarters. Other individuals avoid shelters because they believe that the Department of Children and Family Services will remove their children from the household if they are identified as being homeless. Interviewees working in homeless service provision also noted that Latinos report discrimination in the shelter system both by staff and other shelter participants. For undocumented individuals,



**" FOR UNDOCUMENTED INDIVIDUALS, RUMORED IMMIGRATION RAIDS AND THE THREAT OF DEPORTATION ARE ALSO REASONS TO AVOID SHELTER USE "**

rumored immigration raids and the threat of deportation are also reasons to avoid shelter use. Lastly, as with other homeless services, interviewees believed that Latinos are reluctant to identify themselves as homeless and harbor overall negative perceptions of the shelter system.

**4.2 RAPID REHOUSING AND PERFORMANCE FUNDING**

Interviewees noted that there are no formal programs to assist undocumented individuals and, even when these individuals qualify for mainstream homeless programs, they are not prioritized. An interviewee in homeless services stated that undocumented individuals are not prioritized because paperwork is difficult to obtain, resulting in a greater amount of time and effort for program enrollment. A shift toward performance-based funding can disadvantage organizations serving groups that have a difficult time being "paper ready" and/or take longer to achieve housing stability.

One interviewee gave the example of rapid rehousing funds. The rapid rehousing program is intended to assist individuals in maintaining stable housing by providing rental assistance and service connection. Service organizations apply for funds through a competitive process in which they detail the amount of funding requested and the number of people to be served. Organizations are allowed to assist someone under rapid rehousing for a maximum of 24 months. However, most providers aim to taper services off by 6 months to spread funds amongst a larger number of program participants. If an organization is not able to serve the number of individuals stated in their funding contract, it may not be considered competitive for future funding when contrasted with others that have met stated goals. Nevertheless, an organization's ability to perform well is in direct relation to the population it serves and, according to interviewees, it is particularly difficult to serve immigrant populations

who may have limited access to public services and struggle with inconsistent employment and low wages. These individuals require longer-term assistance to assure stabilization. Furthermore, in order to access many services, individuals must possess identification cards, which can be challenging for immigrants to obtain. Interviewees noted that the Los Angeles's Coordinated Entry System (CES), a countywide system linking individuals experiencing homelessness to resources, is aimed at quickly getting someone through the system but sometimes this means a focus on "paper readiness," which may be leaving harder-to-serve populations out. Given these various challenges, not all organizations may feel equipped to handle immigrants' unique needs. Not surprisingly, providers with reputations for serving Spanish-speaking populations report seeing increases in referrals from other homeless service providers.



# PERMANENT HOUSING

There is a clear need for more affordable housing throughout Los Angeles County. Advocates estimate that the county needs over 500,000 new units of affordable housing to meet the housing demands of very low and extremely low-income earners (California Housing Partnership 2017). Los Angeles County's local and municipal elections suggest widespread public support for addressing the housing affordability crisis through taxpayer-approved appropriations. Although not able to meet all affordable housing needs in the county, in 2016, voters approved the Homelessness Reduction and Prevention, Housing, and Facilities Bond, known as Measure HHH, and a new sales tax for homeless services and prevention, Measure H. Measure HHH is a \$1.2 billion bond measure for the development of affordable housing targeted towards homeless individuals in the City of Los Angeles (LA County Homeless Initiative 2018). Measure H will provide an estimated \$3.5 billion over 10 years for rent subsidies and services. Together, Measures HHH and H will create or subsidize an estimated 15,000 permanent supportive housing units. However, there are challenges to assuring that Latinos are adequately served through these homelessness measures.

## 5.1 BUILDING FOR THE LATINO COMMUNITY

Interviewees working for affordable housing providers noted that the majority of units constructed to serve homeless populations target singles and do not accommodate families. This represents a significant challenge when serving Latinos, who, according to interviewees, frequently have intergenerational

households and are more likely to experience homelessness as a family unit. Consequently, larger housing units are important for keeping families intact. In addition, interviewees stated that obtaining support for affordable housing construction can be difficult in Latino communities. They attributed this to a lack of knowledge regarding how affordable housing works, a fear that new development will drive housing pressures, and a lack of visible Latino leadership championing affordable housing developments in their communities. Interviewees working in the area of affordable housing stated that local leadership is essential to assure trust in the process of affordable housing development. However, applications for development funds currently give no advantage to organizations that work and have a relationship with the community that they propose to build in. Having local providers develop housing can be one way to address local resistance.



# CONCLUSION

This report is intended to expand the conversation on Latino homelessness. We find that culture, language, socioeconomic status, and immigration distinctly shape the experience of homelessness among Latinos. Efforts to address the needs of the Latino community will require increased political will and leadership. Latinos clearly face unique challenges, but we need more research aimed at understanding how Latinos experience homelessness and best practices for addressing this populations' needs.

Increasing homeless service engagement will require improved language access, public awareness regarding service availability, and culturally informed outreach efforts (e.g., taking into consideration the cultural primacy of family). Noncitizens face particular challenges when it comes to service receipt, including fears of being labeled a public charge and threats of deportation. Furthermore, undocumented immigrants do not qualify for most services resulting in a shortfall of resources for this population. There is a need for increased partnerships between legal aid and homeless services to assist with immigration concerns and assess service eligibility. In addition, it is important to build trust within immigrant communities. Providers should be trained on protecting undocumented populations, including how to address incidents involving Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Latinos experiencing homelessness are also not likely to identify as homeless and are more likely than other populations to connect with homeless services through non-traditional connection points (e.g., medical clinics) and to obtain information regarding service availability from social networks. Consequently, trust in local providers and community social supports play central roles for Latinos.

Immigrant populations, particularly those that are undocumented, may have a difficult time accessing affordable housing programs. As previously noted, possible changes to the federal public charge policy will have negative effects on service engagement of

non-citizens, including participation in public housing and Section 8. Further, the number of housing programs that undocumented individuals qualify for are extremely limited. Given these challenges, there is need to explore alternative affordable housing models, including shared housing and the use of local funds that are not limited by federal immigration policy. Latino households are also often intergenerational and require affordable housing developers to invest in larger unit sizes. Furthermore, community trust is essential and local organizations that have been in the community for several years are well positioned to advocate for affordable housing developments in their community.

Keeping Latinos housed requires that they be informed of their rights as renters and how to obtain assistance fighting illegal rent increases and evictions. Immigrant households are frequently unfamiliar with rent control and tenant right laws, which can potentially keep individuals housed in decent, safe, and sanitary housing. City and county code enforcement agencies can play an important role in informing renters of their rights and enforcing building codes, but these programs need to be adequately funded and staffed to reach all renter households. Prevention must also address overcrowding; doubled up households live on the edge of homelessness, but under current policies do not qualify for homeless services. Additional research that increases our understanding of the Latino homeless experience and best practices for addressing this populations' needs will be critical to improve care.

Addressing Latino homelessness will require a number of strategies. Some of these strategies are applicable across racial/ethnic groups, while others are specific to the Latino community.

## SYSTEMIC

There is a notable lack of research on Latino homelessness. More research is required to identify the needs of this population and best practices.

### Future research:

- >> Analyze and evaluate existing data
- >> Examine how Latinos experience homelessness
- >> Identify best practices for outreach targeted towards Latinos
- >> Develop understanding of how Latinos navigate the homeless service system

It is important to bring together providers that serve Latinos experiencing homelessness. Providers would benefit from knowledge sharing and the opportunity to work together to advocate for resources and policy change.

### Coalition Building:

- >> Establish Los Angeles Homelessness Service Authority Ad Hoc Committee on Latino Homelessness

In addition to using data to assess current efforts to address Latino homelessness, it would be beneficial to establish goals and measures of success for service engagement and housing stability among this population.

### Measures of Success:

- >> Outline what success looks like for Los Angeles County's efforts to address Latino homelessness

## HOMELESS PREVENTION

Low-income Latinos are likely to live in inadequate housing, while living on the edge of homelessness they do not qualify for homeless services.

### Early identification and intervention:

- >> Expand definitions of homelessness to include substandard and overcrowded housing

There is a need for increased affordable housing across Los Angeles County. This includes the creation of new units, as well as preserving current units.

### Increase affordable housing and renter's rights:

- >> Support efforts to expand rent control
- >> Increase awareness of tenant rights
- >> Invest in housing code enforcement programs

Social supports play an important role in homeless prevention, particularly for Latino households who rely heavily on informal supports to prevent or exit homelessness.

### Build community:

- >> Invest in community building in low-income Latino communities

Undocumented individuals have a difficult time finding well paying stable employment. It is important to identify strategies to improve economic stability among this group.

### Increase economic stability:

- >> Support self-employment, including street vending and day labor
- >> Increase opportunities for youth employment

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## OUTREACH AND SERVICE ENGAGEMENT

Homeless services targeted toward Latinos would benefit from stronger bilingual, and culturally-competent approaches.

### **Increase access to services:**

- >> Increase language access through bilingual staff and translation of materials
- >> Increase public awareness through Spanish media on why Latinos are becoming homeless and services available
- >> Expand homeless outreach to non-traditional homeless service connection points (research must be done to identify these)
- >> Identify best practices for culturally informed outreach (including the role of family)

Non-citizen Latinos face unique challenges with regards to service receipt, including a lack of access to various public services and the threat that service receipt will affect their immigration status in the U.S.

### **Fill service gaps:**

- >> Promote partnerships between legal and homeless services
- >> Advocate for services that meet the unique needs of undocumented individuals

For Latinos, familiarity of and trust in local institutions appears to be key to service engagement.

### **Build community trust:**

- >> Continue to take steps to assure the safety of immigrant populations
- >> Emphasize shelters as “sensitive locations” protected from immigration enforcement
- >> Increase awareness of services that all Angelinos qualify for regardless of citizenship status

## SHELTER AND RAPID REHOUSING

Regardless of race/ethnicity, economic opportunities are essential in assuring housing stability.

### **Increase economic opportunities:**

- >> Need for employment counseling

Performance based funding can make it difficult to assist hard to serve populations. This appears to be particularly true for homeless service providers assisting Latino immigrants who may be employed in unstable and low paying jobs.

### **Consider alternatives to performance based funding:**

- >> Funders should take into account challenges of populations served, not just the total number of individuals assisted

## PERMANENT HOUSING

Latino households experiencing homelessness may have unique housing needs, including a need for larger units to accommodate intergenerational family members. Furthermore, undocumented individuals do not qualify for federal housing programs. Consequently, there is a need to explore additional housing resources for this population.

### **Increase housing options:**

- >> Explore alternative housing models including shared housing
- >> Build larger affordable housing units to accommodate intergenerational households
- >> Support local housing developers looking to build in the communities they are based

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## Endnotes

- 1 While proportionately the Latino homeless population is smaller than the overall Latino population in the county, the 2017 count represented a 55 percent increase from the previous year (2016), which found Latinos made up 27 percent (11,861) of the homeless population. In 2017, seven out of the eight Service Planning Areas (SPA) saw significant increases in their Latino homeless population. However, the accuracy of the count has been brought into question ("Economic Roundtable | Who Counts" 2017) and, in 2018, the number of Latinos experiencing homelessness stabilized at 35 percent (17,540).
- 2 In September 2018, Los Angeles County supervisors voted to temporarily restrict rent increases in unincorporated Los Angeles to 3 percent.
- 3 In the City of Los Angeles, the Rent Stabilization Ordinance (RSO) applies to rental properties that were built on or before October 1, 1978. The RSO covers allowable rent increases, registration of rental units, legal reasons for eviction, evictions requiring payment of tenant relocation assistance, and buyout disclosures.
- 4 Individuals that are not naturalized may still be authorized to live and work in the states via work permits or residency status. However, a significant number of individuals may be undocumented.
- 5 According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigrations Services (USCIS), a public charge is a noncitizen that the government believes has or is likely to become primarily dependent on government assistance.
- 6 The lexicon has begun to shift from "shelters" to "bridge housing." Bridge Housing emphasizes the role that temporary shelters play in transitioning individuals out of homelessness and into permanent housing.



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