# Status of Fact Finding

## YEAR 3

## DECEMBER 1, 2023

### Pathways to Housing Security

WSU EXTENSION
Division of Governmental Studies and Services

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## Status of Fact-Finding Overview

Over the past two years, fact-finding efforts have examined the historical chronology of homelessness in the United States, discussed the policy and regulatory responses to homelessness, and systematically reviewed the macro and micro-level predictors of homelessness at the national level. The factors impacting homelessness are numerous and complex with structural or macro factors, such as affordable housing, playing a significant role in homelessness across the country. This report provides an analysis of mostly structural-level conditions and their impact on homelessness in Washington State using publicly available data at the county-level from the Washington State Department of Commerce and the U.S. Census American Community Survey. Factors such as median rent, rent burden, income inequality, unemployment, and poverty rates were examined. It highlights county variations in key variables, such as median rent and rent burden, that impact their homelessness rates over time. While the multivariate analysis presented here is limited due to the small number of cases (counties) that can be included, it revealed that median rent for one-bedroom apartments was the strongest predictor of homelessness rates in Washington from 2016 to 2020 for all counties. When examining only rural counties, median one-bedroom rent remained the strongest predictor of homelessness rates. The second largest predictor was the percentage of the population 65 and over. For all counties, the proportion of single person households also significantly increased homelessness rates, but it was not a significant predictor for rural counties.

Additionally, this report briefly summarizes the evaluation of homeless services, programs, and service models to identify interventions that have been proven successful across several studies. Housing-First services are the most evaluated programs with case management, transitional housing, supportive housing, and clinical services specifically receiving much attention. Overall, studies highlight the importance of providing comprehensive services that meet the diverse needs of individuals experiencing homelessness and customizing interventions based on specific needs, goals, and characteristics of these individuals.

WSU researchers are still working with the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), Research and Data Administration (RDA) to collect individual quantitative data to predict entries into homelessness. Once this data is received, it will be paired with the county-level data used in this report to estimate more complete multivariate statistical models to identify the most important predictors of homelessness in Washington. These findings will be provided in an additional report by the end of the fiscal year to help further identify options and recommendations for the development of a long-term plan to address housing security in Washington State.

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# Introduction

Since the mid-2000s, according to official Point in Time (PIT) Count data, the number of people experiencing homelessness in the United States had been following a downward trend, but numbers began to increase nationally in 2017 (National Alliance to End Homelessness [NAEH], 2023). In Washington, this upward trend in homelessness began even earlier and has risen consistently over the past decade, making the state seventh in the nation for homelessness rates (NAEH, 2023). Moreover, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), in its 2022 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress, revealed that Washington ranked third in the nation in terms of total number of people experiencing homelessness (after California and New York). Washington also had specific Continuums of Care (COC) that topped national lists, including the third largest population of people experiencing homelessness in *Major City COCs* (Seattle/King County), the fifth largest population of people experiencing homelessness in *Other Largely Urban COCs* (Spokane City & County), and the third largest population of people experiencing homelessness in *Largely Rural COCs* (Washington Balance of State).

The causes of homelessness are complex, likely to be different for different states, and have been dramatically impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Accurate PIT counts of homelessness during the height of the pandemic are difficult to ascertain, since safety concerns prevented the usual collection of this data. Even so, it appears that intensive federal aid during the peak of the pandemic likely decreased homelessness temporarily (United States Interagency on Homelessness, 2023), but the collection of PIT counts for 2022, after the height of the pandemic, suggest homelessness is once again on the rise nationally. This report identifies similar trends in Washington, where homelessness appears to be on the rise once again. Given the salience of homelessness, both nationally and within Washington state, this report focuses on the systemic causes of homelessness affecting Washington residents.

## Homelessness in Washington, 2020 to 2023

Homelessness trends for the last few years in Washington have been difficult to assess accurately for two primary reasons: the COVID-19 pandemic and a change in data collection in King County. Homelessness is traditionally accounted for using data for sheltered and unsheltered individuals, collected at a single point in time in January of each year in an effort known as the PIT count. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development mandates an annual sheltered count but requires an unsheltered count every other year (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD], n.d.). Washington, however, opts to count both sheltered and unsheltered populations experiencing homelessness each year. In January 2021, each county in Washington suspended data collection for unsheltered people experiencing homelessness due to the disruption caused by the pandemic. Additionally, due to longstanding concerns about the accuracy of PIT counts, King County suspended its

traditional unsheltered count in 2022 to pilot an alternative data collection method for 2023 (King County Regional Homelessness Authority [KCRHA], 2022). As King County is the most populous state in Washington and accounts for a major portion of the statewide population experiencing homelessness, missing unsheltered data from the county results in an inaccurate statewide accounting of people experiencing homelessness in 2023.

The last report[1] submitted to the legislature by WSU's Division of Governmental Studies and Services noted a continued upward trend in homelessness from 2013. Since the unsheltered population went uncounted in 2021 and remains missing from King County for 2023 (a major portion of the state's overall homelessness counts), Figure 1 presents homelessness data in the state from 2013 to 2022, noting the discontinuity between 2020 and 2022 caused by the missing 2021 data.

*Figure 1: Washington PIT Count Data, 2013-2022*

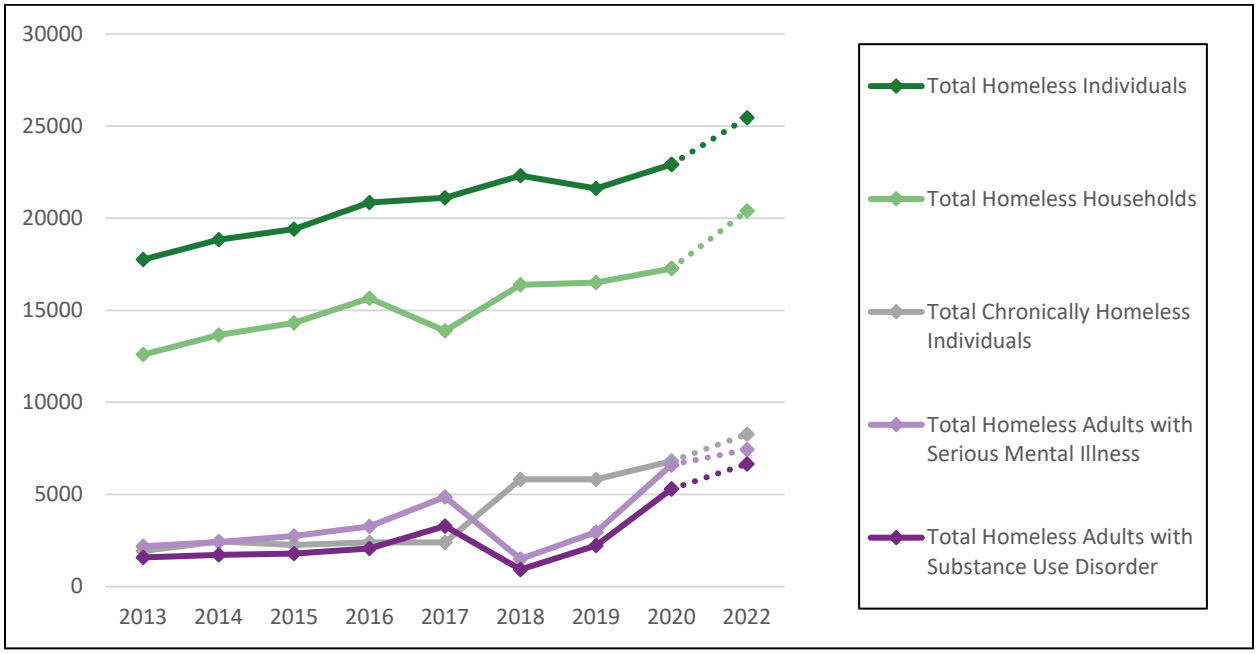



Figure 2 displays county-level changes in homelessness counts from 2013 to 2022. While most counties saw an increase over this time, several, particularly rural counties, experienced moderate to significant decreases. Both Asotin and Columbia Counties stand out as outliers in this map, reflecting a significant rise in homelessness counts in each county from 2013 to 2022. Asotin County counted five individuals experiencing homelessness in 2013 and 95 in 2022 (an increase of 1800%), and Columbia County counted one individual experiencing

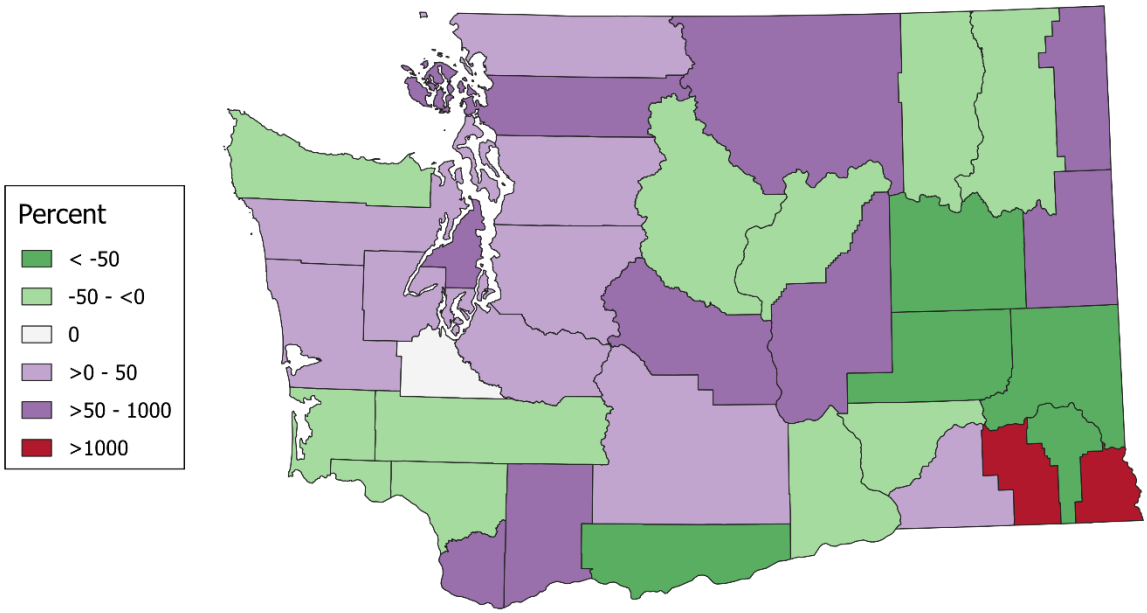
[1] https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2180/2022/12/Housing-Security_Fact-Finding_Year-2-Report_Revised-12.23.2022.pdf

homelessness in 2013 and 17 in 2022 (an increase of 1600%). While the counts are relatively small compared to other counties and account for a small fraction of the state total, the large percentage increases over these nine years may pose a problem for these two low-population counties that may not be prepared for even a small increase in homelessness rates.

Thurston County also stands out as having a 0% increase in individuals experiencing homelessness counts from 2013-2022, as counts in each year stood at 664.[2] Counties with more than a 100% increase in homelessness counts include Kittitas (229%), Pend Oreille (157%), Grant (151%), Kitsap (135%), San Juan (131%), Skamania (118%), and Clark (105%). Counties with the most significant decreases in homelessness counts include Adams, Garfield, and Lincoln, which all saw 100% decreases to 0 in 2022, and Whitman (-85%), Klickitat (-59%), and Ferry (-47%).

[2] In some years, small county-level PIT counts in certain categories are masked for privacy and are reported as <11, which is interpreted in this report as 10. The real number may be smaller than this. In 2022, Thurston County reported for some PIT count categories values of <11. While these were counted as 10 in this report, this means Thurston County's PIT counts in 2022 could be slightly less than 664, which might indicate a slight decrease in homelessness counts compared to 2013 rather than no change.

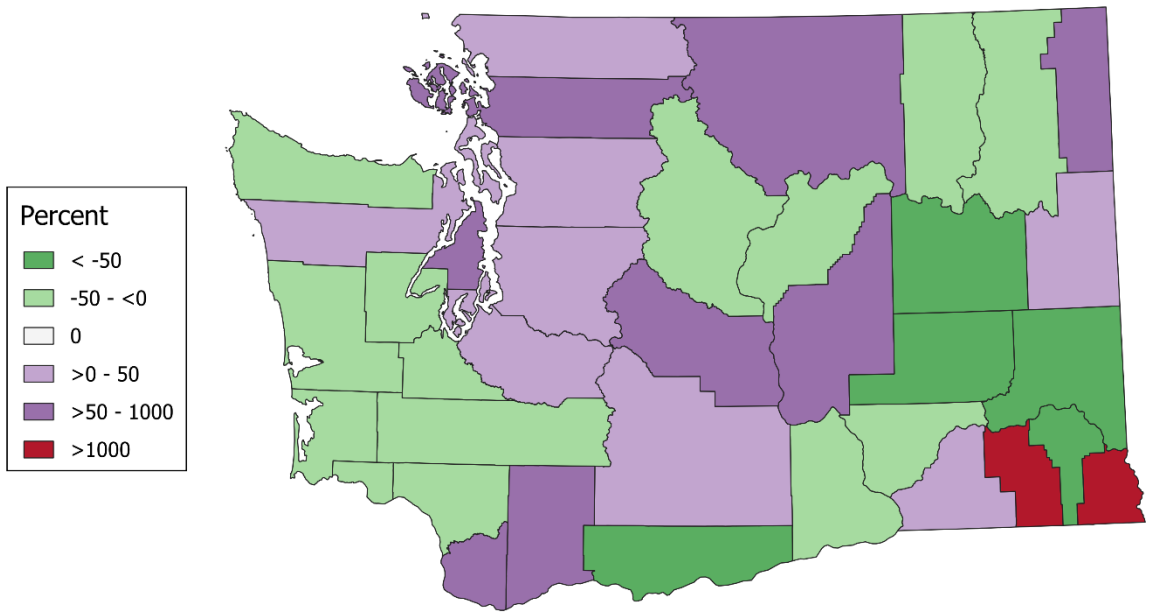
*Figure 2: Percent Change in Homelessness Counts in Washington Counties: 2013 – 2022*




Note: Benton/Franklin and Chelan/Douglas combine PIT Counts for most years. The percentage change in each is based on combined county data.

Figure 3 below displays a similar map, showing percentage change in homelessness rates from 2013-2022. While homelessness rates are adjusted to each county's population and provide better standardized comparisons between counties, the percentage change remains much the same in each county compared to homelessness counts. Both Asotin and Columbia Counties stand out again as showing significant percentage increases in homelessness rates. Asotin County saw an increase of 1,741%, from 2.3 individuals experiencing homelessness per 10,000 population to 42.2 individuals experiencing homelessness per 10,000 population. Columbia County saw an increase of 1600%, from 2.5 individuals experiencing homelessness per 10,000 population to 42.2 individuals experiencing homelessness per 10,000 population. Other counties with an increase in homelessness rates of over 100% include Kittitas (201%), Pend Oreille (135%), Grant (123%), and Kitsap (114%). The counties with the most significant decreases in homelessness rates include, again, Lincoln, Garfield, and Adams with homelessness rates dropping to 0, followed by Whitman (-86%), Klickitat (-64%), and Ferry (-46%).

*Figure 3: Percent Change in Homelessness Rates in Washington Counties: 2013-2022*




Note: Benton/Franklin and Chelan/Douglas combine PIT Counts for most years. The percentage change in each is based on combined county data.

## *The COVID-19 Pandemic*

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic presented a unique challenge to addressing homelessness and caring for populations experiencing homelessness. When the pandemic took hold and lockdowns began in earnest in the United States in March 2020, many of the traditional approaches to addressing homelessness became extremely difficult to implement. Social distancing requirements, stay-at-home orders, mass unemployment, and the threat of contagion all complicated how both sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness could be accommodated. Many shelters were compelled to reduce their capacity, economic opportunities dried up, and the already vulnerable population experiencing homelessness was subjected to the virus at high rates (Baggett et al., 2020). Studies have shown that vaccination rates among those experiencing homelessness tend to be lower than the general population, which further increases the vulnerability of this population to COVID-19 (Montgomery et al., 2021; Gibson et al., 2022).

In addition to health concerns, the economic effects of the pandemic have significantly affected the cost and availability of housing, a critical component of addressing homelessness. In 2022, yearly average inflation rates hit 8%, driven by supply chain disruptions, government policy responses to the pandemic, and the War in Ukraine (Stiglitz & Regmi, 2023). Moreover, the workplace disruption caused by the pandemic shifted many workers to remote work or otherwise compelled them to look for new employment, resulting in a change in the housing landscape in urban, suburban, and rural areas (Liu & Su, 2021; Althoff et al., 2022; Haslag & Weagley, 2022). These market disruptions dramatically affected housing costs nationally. The number of active housing listings decreased 60% in 2022 compared to 2020 availability, the median cost for a single-family home increased by 25% during the same period, and rent also increased nationally, rising on average 18% by 2022 from 2017 levels (Schaeffer, 2022). These trends also occurred in Washington, where median home prices increased by nearly 63% in 2022 compared to 2019, before the pandemic started.[3] Since the cost and availability of housing is one of the single most important factors determining homelessness in the United States and in Washington (see Colburn & Aldern, 2022), these pandemic-driven housing disruptions have undoubtedly affected homelessness in the state and have complicated efforts to address it.

Despite these challenges, emerging research is revealing some counterintuitive effects of the pandemic on homelessness in certain geographic areas. While the pandemic was highly disruptive, it also presented an opportunity for governments to implement intensive policies, the effects of which are now coming into focus. Mosites et al. (2022) describe several lessons learned from the response to COVID-19 for people experiencing homelessness, emphasizing that increasing horizontal and vertical cooperation between government agencies and non-profits improved their ability to help this population. Additionally, they suggest that using tailored approaches to specific geographic areas for populations experiencing homelessness made significant differences, as opposed to using a general, one-size-fits-all approach. Similarly, Nichols and Mays (2021) found that, in general, "increasing safe housing options, providing on-the-ground outreach and resources, and promoting clear, informative communications" were effective strategies that reduced the spread of COVID-19 among people experiencing homelessness. This study determined that when urban health departments tailored their response to individuals experiencing homelessness and their geographically specific needs, responses were much more effective.

One study found that these sorts of robust policy responses, when combined with local politics and social norms, may have even worked so well in some major cities that rates of unsheltered people experiencing homelessness were negatively associated with COVID-19 infection rates (Silver & Morris, 2023). In other words, cities with high numbers of unsheltered populations experiencing homelessness that invested resources and efforts into providing

[3] https://ofm.wa.gov/washington-data-research/statewide-data/washington-trends/economic-trends/median-home-price

shelter, medical aid, and other kinds of support saw lower COVID-19 rates of infection than expected given their vulnerable populations, implying that coordinated policy responses can overcome the risks associated with an otherwise vulnerable population. In its 2023 report to Congress on Worst Case Housing Needs, HUD noted that the robust federal response during the pandemic, which included stimulus payments, enhanced unemployment benefits, and rental assistance, "reduced the economic hardship experienced by renter households in 2021 and beyond" (p. 1), while also pointing out the urgent need for increased housing supply (Alvarez & Steffen, 2023). In Washington, specifically in Seattle/King County, similar approaches to policy changes to dramatically increase shelter supply while faced with capacity reductions brought on by social distancing was highly effective, leading to even more long-term shelter capacity overall and a new and lasting approach to addressing homelessness in the area (DuBois, Batko, & Boshart, 2022).

In sum, while the pandemic exacerbated the problem of homelessness in general, complicating responses and care to populations experiencing homelessness and making an already delicate housing situation worse, evidence suggests that robust policy responses that focus on housing availability and financial support for vulnerable populations, when implemented in cooperation with multiple government agencies and non-profit groups, are effective ways to address homelessness both generally and specifically in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Status of Fact-Finding

The Washington State Legislature passed House Bill 1277 (HB 1277) in 2021, providing an increase in state funding to improve housing stability and services preventing homelessness in Washington. This legislation also directed the William D. Ruckelshaus Center, in cooperation with the Division of Governmental Studies and Services at Washington State University, to research the status of homelessness in Washington through fact-finding and stakeholder discussions, to identify the primary explanatory factors of homelessness in the state and to make recommendations based on these findings to help address the problem of homelessness in Washington. Reports on these efforts have been developed and submitted to the legislature each year since the legislation passed. The 2021 Report reviewed the history of homelessness in the United States and presented a Macro-Micro framework for understanding the problem, and the 2022 Report built upon this foundation by both presenting a systematic review of the academic literature on the root causes of homelessness in the United States and providing descriptive statistics of homelessness assistance interventions in Washington.

This report documents the continued investigation of homelessness in Washington and builds upon the first two reports, presenting results from a mostly structural analysis of homelessness. Using data from several sources, this report identifies the primary structural variables that have contributed to homelessness in the state, and based on these results,

presents recommendations for how to address homelessness most effectively. Future plans to investigate individual factors contributing to homelessness are also presented.

## Defining Homelessness

It is important to restate the relevant definitions of homelessness to establish how homelessness is conceptualized and measured by both scholars and government agencies. The Department of Housing and Urban Development adopted Rossi's (1989) definition of "literal homelessness", described as a scenario where an individual "lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence", which may include living in a publicly available shelter, on the streets, in a vehicle, in a public space, or in a place not intended for human habitation, among others (Housing and Urban Development, 2017). HUD also differentiates between individuals who may be "at risk of homelessness" and those who are "chronically homeless", the former consisting of indicators that put someone at risk for "literal homelessness" and the latter defining someone who experiences "literal homelessness" for an extended period of time or for multiple times within a given time period (Housing and Urban Development, 2017). In PIT Count reports both nationally and at the state level, individuals experiencing homelessness are frequently categorized as either "sheltered" or "unsheltered", the former describing those who live in a publicly or privately operated shelter designed for temporary accommodation and the latter describing those who live outside or in a place not suitable for human habitation.

In short, definitions of homelessness generally describe both conditions of homelessness (literal homelessness, at risk of homelessness, sheltered/unsheltered) and patterns of homelessness (chronic or episodic/transitory). Nationally, 30% of people experiencing homelessness can be considered chronically homeless, while the remaining 70% are experiencing homelessness episodically. About 40% of those experiencing homelessness remained unsheltered (HUD, 2022). These distinctions matter, since the predictive factors of homelessness will vary depending on the condition and pattern of homelessness being examined. Moreover, individuals classified as chronically homeless tend to represent the most visible of those experiencing homelessness. Consequently, the attention of policymakers and the public tends to focus on people who are chronically homeless, even though they represent only 30% of the total population experiencing homelessness. This can influence the type of policy response to homelessness supported by the public and ultimately adopted by governments.

For more detailed information on definitions of homelessness and why they matter, see the Status of Fact-Finding Reports from both 2022[4] and 2021.[5]

[4] https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2180/2022/12/Housing-Security_Fact-Finding_Year-2-Report_Revised-12.23.2022.pdf
[5] https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2180/2021/12/Pathways-to-Housing-Security-Report-FINAL.pdf

# Root Causes of Homelessness

The 2022 Status of Fact-Finding Report[3] primarily focuses on the root causes of homelessness, presenting a detailed review of how homelessness has been conceptualized as a problem by policymakers, the public, health care experts, and scholars over the course of the last century. In short, homelessness evolved from being seen as an individual weakness in the first half of the 20th century to being understood today as a complex interaction of both structural inequalities (like housing availability, geographic location, poverty, macroeconomic trends, systemic inequalities, etc.) and individual determinants (such as disability, mental illness, socioeconomic status, microeconomic contexts, etc.). Since this report presents a quantitative analysis of structural determinants of homelessness in Washington, the following section summarizes relevant components of the 2022 Report and reiterates, in brief, the macro-micro framework for understanding homelessness, including a discussion on the major macro-level predictors of homelessness found in the literature.

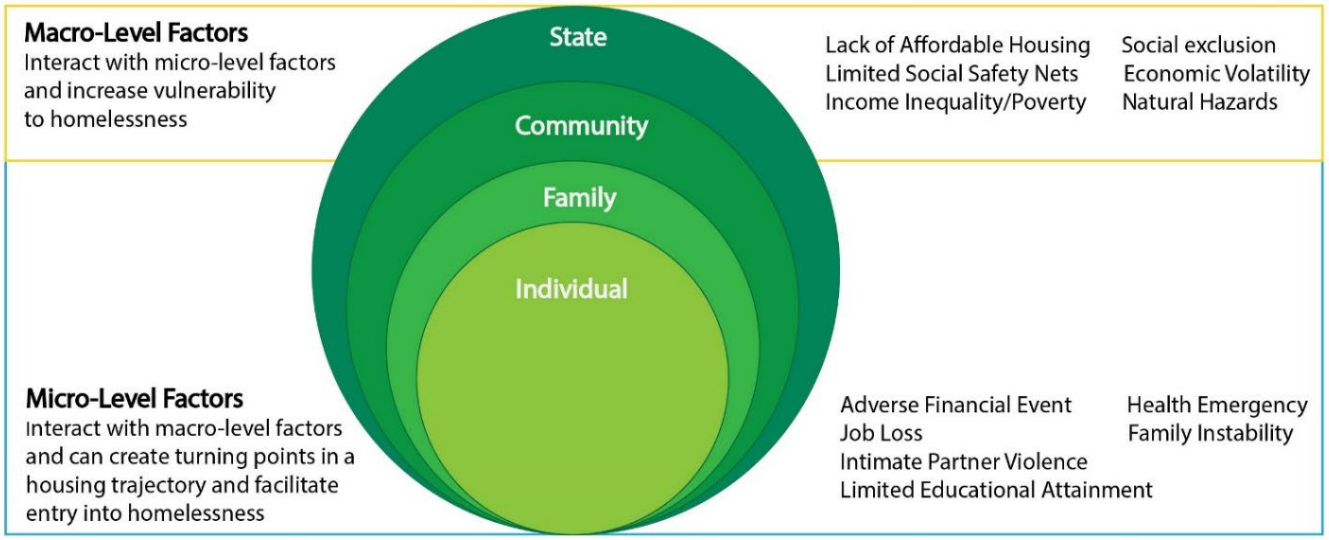
## Macro-Micro Framework

In general, contemporary research on the determinants of homelessness approaches the problem as a complex interaction of structural and individual factors. As noted in the 2022 Status of Fact-Finding Report, most research suggests that an episode of homelessness could depend on multiple community factors in any given location, including a limited affordable housing supply, income inequality, poverty rates, social exclusion, and existing or non-existent social welfare support. However, to what extent these community factors cause homelessness can be exacerbated or mitigated by individual factors that can increase or decrease someone's exposure or risk to homelessness. For example, limited affordable housing supply may be considered a primary determinant of homelessness rates in two different communities, yet homelessness rates in one may be much higher than in the other. This is a discrepancy that could be explained by how the same structural determinant in each community interacts with individual factors. This complex interaction reveals how important geographic location can be when considering what causes homelessness in any given community, and it is why a study limited to only Washington is worthwhile.

While the macro-micro framework of homelessness may seem to suggest that the problem is impossibly intricate, recent research suggests that there may be a keystone explanatory variable that is critical to understanding how homelessness is triggered, even when considering the myriad macro- and micro-level predictors: the availability of affordable housing (Colburn & Aldern, 2022). This variable may be key to understanding how homelessness can begin to cascade in a community, with other macro- and micro-level determinants also playing a role, depending on the context of the community in question. In short, the research shows that the root causes of homelessness do not have simple explanations, and geographic context is important.

Figure 4 below explains the macro-micro framework, emphasizing that variables at the state and community level, beyond the control or influence of an individual, are generally considered macro-level predictors of homelessness, while variables at the family and individual level are considered micro-level predictors. This framework shows how individual risk of homelessness, which can be increased by the experience of a job loss, health emergency, domestic violence, etc., is nested within the context of the family, community, and state. For example, sudden job loss can increase the risk of homelessness for anyone who experiences it, but that risk is exacerbated further for a family that lives in a community with limited affordable housing options versus a family living in a community with ample affordable housing (Byrne et al, 2012). In other words, an individual can be either insulated from or exposed to homelessness risk depending on both their individual circumstances *and* the contexts of the communities in which they live.

*Figure 4: The Macro-Micro Framework*




## Macro-Level Predictors

Macro-level predictors of homelessness consist of the structural conditions in a community or broader geography (McChesney, 1990; Shinn & Gillespie, 1994). While these may be numerous, they can be broadly categorized into conditions of poverty, the availability of affordable housing, social exclusion, and the absence of social support resources (Elliott & Krivo, 1991). As each of these structural conditions has worsened and intensified across the US over the last few decades, the problem of homelessness has also intensified. It must be noted, however, that despite these national trends, structural conditions vary significantly by geography. This means that how and to what degree these structural conditions affect homelessness likely differs from state to state and even from city to city. The 2022 Status of

Fact-Finding Report[6] delves into the literature surrounding these macro-level predictors of homelessness, so what follows is a summary of these predictors and why they remain relevant explanatory factors of homelessness.

Poverty is a major predictor of homelessness, although it should be emphasized that high poverty rates alone do not cause homelessness. As with all the macro-level predictors, the presence of high poverty rates in a community may exacerbate the conditions that cause homelessness, but other structural conditions, along with individual level predictors, still play a role in whether and how homelessness occurs. Broadly speaking, however, homelessness counts can increase in more impoverished areas (Byrne et al., 2021). This fact may be linked to the circumstances of impoverished communities, which tend to have a higher concentration of low-skill jobs and lower paying jobs, higher unemployment rates, less social capital, and fewer community services (Shinn & Khadduri, 2020). Additionally, income inequality can be an important predictor of homelessness, especially when explaining local patterns of homelessness brought on by income inequality within a single community (Byrne et al. 2021). This may explain, at least in part, why affluent cities in the US with high income inequality, like Seattle, see high rates of homelessness.

The availability of affordable housing also acts as a major predictor of homelessness. Past research has demonstrated a clear link between homelessness and both the availability of housing (McChesney, 1990; Shinn & Gillespie, 1994) and the cost of that available housing (Elliot & Krivo, 1991; O'Flaherty, 2004). These two dynamics are, of course, linked, as the cost of housing is largely determined (excluding confounding regional factors) by supply and demand—as housing availability increases, the cost of housing should lower. Moreover, Shinn and Khadduri (2020) assert that affordable housing supply is a key variable for addressing homelessness, and this claim has been supported in other research, both nationally and internationally (Bramley & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Colburn & Aldern, 2022; Johnson et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2021; Lutz & Buechler, 2021; Szeintuch, 2017).

Social exclusion, broadly defined as including the marginalization of certain groups—often based on factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, sex, and sexual orientation—can also act as a structural determinant of homelessness. People of color are greatly overrepresented among those experiencing homelessness (Fusaro et al., 2018). For example, HUD reported in 2022 that even though 12% of Americans identified as black, they comprised 37% of the population experiencing homelessness nationally. The role that race plays in homelessness has been widely studied and can be attributed to economic inequality, segregation, and housing discrimination (past or present), and the consequences of incarceration, which disproportionately affects populations of color in the United States (Shinn, 2010). These exclusionary forces have led to systemic social and economic disadvantages for people of

[6] https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2180/2022/12/Housing-Security_Fact-Finding_Year-2-Report_Revised-12.23.2022.pdf

color, which can dramatically increase their exposure to the risk of homelessness (Fowle, 2022; Olivet et al., 2021; Solari et al, 2021).

Finally, the presence of robust social support policies in a community can be predictive of homelessness, which may include subsidized assistance for housing, social welfare policy broadly speaking, eviction prevention assistance, and mental health treatment, among others. International research has demonstrated that countries with generous social welfare policies tend to experience lower homelessness rates (Benjaminsen & Andrade, 2015; O'Sullivan, 2010), and studies in the US have found similar results in communities that direct resources to solving social problems (Shinn & Khadduri, 2020). Indeed, despite the difficulties brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and the fear that the pandemic could greatly exacerbate the homelessness crisis nationally, HUD claims that "unprecedented federal interventions to stabilize housing during the pandemic succeeded in preventing a rise in homelessness, even as housing costs and burdens increased", noting too that "when those interventions and supports expired, the U.S. began to face (and continues to face) a rise in homelessness" (Greene et al., 2023). In short, evidence now suggests that robust policy interventions to prevent homelessness did indeed have a widespread positive impact across the country at the height of the pandemic, and the rise in homelessness after these policies expired confirms the importance of social support policies to prevent and reduce homelessness.

## Evaluating Strategies to Address Homelessness and Housing Insecurity

A variety of strategies to address homelessness have been used across the United States for decades, and the COVID-19 pandemic presented an opportunity to further test strategies for mitigating housing insecurity. Overwhelmingly, the federal government has prioritized for years services like Housing First, which seeks to rapidly house individuals experiencing homelessness without preconditions, setting them on a path to permanent housing. Other housing services include programs like Rapid Re-Housing, Supportive Housing, and Transitional Housing, all of which serve to provide some housing component, whether temporary or permanent, to individuals experiencing homelessness, supplemented by other programs addressing mental health or rehabilitation needs. Most of these programs also include elements of case management, where case workers can tailor needs to specific individuals experiencing homelessness, connect them with relevant services, and maintain short-term or long-term contact with them to ensure a successful, lasting exit from homelessness. Additionally, many services exist to address housing insecurity and prevent homelessness altogether for high-risk individuals, and the COVID-19 pandemic critically tested these services and proved their effectiveness. The following section summarizes the most successful programs used widely across the United States, including a brief discussion on how the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the effectiveness of several of these programs.

## Successful Strategies

As noted, most successful strategies include a housing component of some kind. Housing First is generally the program used most often, as it seeks to address first the most pressing concern – housing – without preconditions, creating a stable foundation to address other issues people experiencing homelessness may face. Housing First has been shown in several national studies and case studies around the United States to be an effective way of getting people housed quickly and keeping them housed longer (Mares & Rosenheck, 2011), and it can work effectively for the most vulnerable populations, including those with substance abuse disorders (Appel et al., 2012), mental illness (Gilmer et al., 2010), or recently incarcerated individuals with higher risk of recidivism (Clifasefi et al., 2012).

While Housing First seeks to provide long-term housing solutions to people experiencing homelessness before addressing other concerns, Rapid Re-Housing is a similar, but short-term approach to solving homelessness. Rapid Re-Housing has been found to provide some benefits to program recipients, including reducing school absences, increasing household income, and improving access to food, and because it focuses on temporary housing, it is often less expensive to implement than Housing First solutions (Gubits et al., 2018). However, the short-term nature of the program means that Rapid Re-Housing may not impact housing stability significantly and may be less effective for individuals who require more time to build up a stable income and exit homelessness permanently (Shinn et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2017).

Whether communities pursue long-term housing programs like Housing First or short-term housing programs like Rapid Re-Housing, each approach to solving homelessness is generally made more robust by combining them with both case management and access to clinical services for individuals who need them. Case management represents a targeted approach to solving homelessness, where individuals or families experiencing homelessness are matched with case workers who can target individual and family needs more precisely, thus resulting in more effective and long-term solutions. Studies have shown that case management, when well-funded and combined with Housing First or Rapid Re-Housing, further reduced recidivism in recently incarcerated individuals experiencing homelessness, reduced temporary homelessness, and reduced the number of individuals who became homeless (Lutze et al., 2015). Other research has also shown that case management increases housing stability for youth experiencing homelessness, reducing their risk of homelessness altogether and yielding a higher probability of employment and higher earnings (Lindquist et al., 2022). Cheng et al. (2017) also found that subsidized case management can reduce substance abuse in the most vulnerable populations experiencing homelessness, further increasing their probability of exiting homelessness.

In general, the most successful strategies to address homelessness are proven to be a combination of prioritizing housing for people experiencing homelessness while providing them with targeted, managed care that is well-funded and closely monitored. The above

research demonstrates the effectiveness of these programs, but the COVID-19 pandemic also presented a unique opportunity to stress-test these strategies. As noted earlier in this report, HUD found in 2021 that pandemic-related federal assistance, including economic impact payments, the enhanced Child Tax Credit, expanded unemployment benefits, Emergency Rental Assistance, and a national eviction moratorium (along with similar state and local moratoria) were effective at staving off expected worst-case scenarios during the peak of the pandemic (Greene et al., 2023). HUD notes that sheltered homelessness decreased nationally by 17% from 2019 to 2021, families with children using shelters declined in 2021 by 25% from 2019, there was a "substantial reduction" in the number of people entering homelessness in 2021, and PIT counts in 2022 showed a decrease in overall homelessness compared to 2020 (Greene et al., 2023).

These results show that a robust response to homelessness using a variety of tools and programs can have significant impacts on both preventing people from entering homelessness and helping people exit homelessness altogether. However, as HUD notes, the end of pandemic-era services is already having a negative effect, with homelessness numbers and the number of those precariously housed likely to increase in 2024. The observed results from intensive services implemented during the pandemic and the expected results as those services end, led HUD to come to a simple conclusion: addressing and ending homelessness requires more affordable housing options, eviction prevention through "stronger legal protections, emergency rental or financial assistance, and case management and engagement with landlords", and a prioritization of Housing First and Rapid Re-Housing strategies (Greene et al., 2023).

## Structural Analysis of Homelessness in Washington

To examine structural factors and their impact on homelessness in Washington, several measures used in Lee et al. (2003), Byrne et al. (2012), and Byrne et al. (2021) were collected at the county-level. For the dependent variable, Point in Time (PIT) counts for Washington counties from 2013 to 2022 were obtained from the Washington State Department of Commerce.[7] The number of individuals experiencing homelessness in the county per 10,000 population is calculated for each year.[8] For two sets of counties, Douglas and Chelan and

[7] PIT count data available here: https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/s/ek9pu2w07oz8d77gq6c1rlpxuwcw0515.

[8] Due to variation in how PIT rates are reported each year, this measure is calculated from total persons experiencing homelessness in years where it is available or adding total sheltered and unsheltered persons experiencing homelessness in other years. In some years, when the total persons experiencing homelessness in a county is less than 11 only <11 is reported. For these entries, 10 was used in the calculation. The Washington State Department of Commerce was able to provide unsheltered and sheltered homeless data separated for 2017, 2020, and 2022 upon request. However, <11 was reported for several smaller counties for each. Because these counts could not be used to differentiate sheltered and unsheltered for these counties and using both would double the count, the above approach was used to determine the homeless rate per county.

Benton and Franklin, PIT count estimates are combined for most years. Thus, there are thirty-seven counties or combined counties per year rather than thirty-nine.

For the independent variables, U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates were used. While the ACS 1-Year estimates are used in most studies and are more likely to show year to year fluctuations in each data point, 1-Year estimates are only available for areas with populations of 65,000 or more. Due to the focus on Washington State, the 5-Year estimates are used to examine impacts on homelessness for all counties.[9] Table 1 below provides a summary of the variables collected by WSU researchers.

[9] ACS 5-Year estimates will not be available for 2022 until December of 2023. Due to this, structural analysis does not examine 2022.

*Table 1: Variables Collected for Analysis*

| Variable[1] | | Source | Studies |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Homelessness Rate** | Persons Experiencing Homelessness Per 10,000 Population | Washington State Department of Commerce | Lee et al. (2003) |
| **Rent** | Median Gross Rent (rent and utilities) 1 Bedroom | ACS 5-Year Estimates | Byrne et al. (2012)[2] |
| | Median Contract Rent (rent and no utilities) | | Lee et al. (2003) |
| **Low-Income Household Rent Burden** | % Of Households making less than $20,000 per year paying more than 34.9% of income on Rent | ACS 5-Year Estimates | Bryne et al. (2021) |
| **Home Value** | Median Home Value | ACS 5-Year Estimates | Bryne et al. (2021) |
| **Income** | Median Household Income | ACS 5-Year Estimates | Bryne et al. (2021) |
| **Homeownership** | % Owner-Occupied Units | ACS 5-Year Estimates | Lee et al. (2003)<br>Bryne et al. (2012) |
| **Vacancy Rates** | % Vacant Housing Units | ACS 5-Year Estimates | Lee et al. (2003)<br>Bryne et al. (2012) |
| **Unemployment Rate** | % Civilian Labor Force Unemployed | ACS 5-Year Estimates | Lee et al. (2003)<br>Bryne et al. (2012) |
| **Poverty Rate[2]** | % Persons with Incomes Below 50% of Poverty Level | ACS 5-Year Estimates | Lee et al. (2003)<br>Bryne et al. (2012) |
| **% Black** | % Black in Total Population | ACS 5-Year Estimates | Lee et al. (2003)<br>Bryne et al. (2012) |
| **% Hispanic** | % Hispanic in Total Population | ACS 5-Year Estimates | Lee et al. (2003)<br>Bryne et al. (2012) |
| **Baby Boomers[3]** | % Persons 65 and Over in Population | ACS 5-Year Estimates | Lee et al. (2003)<br>Bryne et al. (2012) |
| **1-person households** | % Occupied housing units with single occupant | ACS 5-Year Estimates | Lee et al. (2003)<br>Bryne et al. (2012) |
| **Public Assistance** | % Households Receiving Public Assistance | ACS 5-Year Estimates | Lee et al. (2003) |
| **Social Security Benefits** | % Persons Receiving Social Security Benefits | ACS 5-Year Estimates | Lee et al. (2003) |
| **Income Inequality** | Gini Coefficient | ACS 5-Year Estimates | Byrne et al. (2021)[4] |
| **Mobility Rate** | % Moved in Past Year from Different County, State, or Country | ACS 5-Year Estimates | Byne et al. (2012)[5] |

[1] For combined counties, percentages are calculated by adding together individuals and dividing by combined populations (Poverty Rate, % Black, % Hispanic, Baby Boomers, Public Assistance, Social Security Benefits, and Mobility Rate). For all median variables and Income Inequality, an average of the two county measures was used.

[2] Byrne et al. (2012) uses Median Rent (in $100) for efficiency unit.

[3] Updated from previous studies to reflect current ages of demographic.

[4] Byrne et al. (2021) calculated their own Gini Coefficient.

[5] Updated from Byrne et al. (2012) to create county-level measure rather than US.

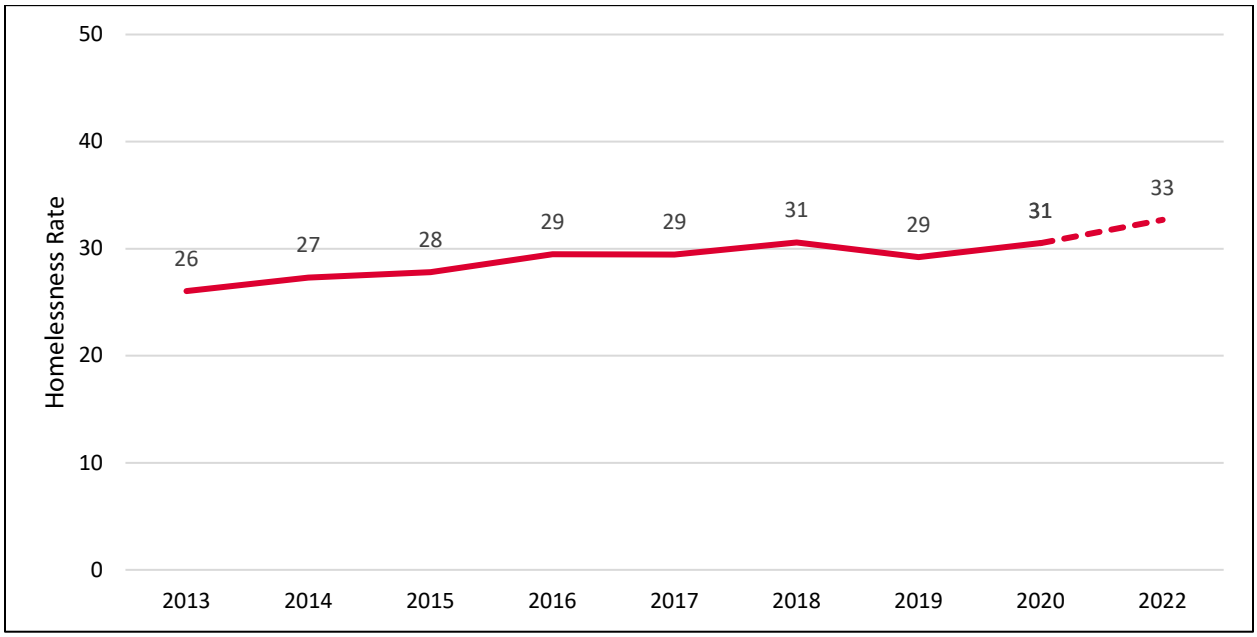
## Key Trends

There are many factors that may potentially impact homelessness in Washington. As a first step in this analysis, key trends for several important county-level characteristics found by prior research to impact homelessness are examined. The assessment of trends is useful because it provides important insight into changes in Washington and across counties over time, and it provides a guide for determining which characteristics may deserve further examination in the context of bivariate and multivariate analyses.

## *Homelessness Rates*

First, the homelessness rate in Washington from 2013-2022 (the number of individuals experiencing homelessness in the county per 10,000 population) is calculated for each year. As can be seen in Figure 5 below, overall, these rates have increased over the last decade. There is a slight decrease in 2019; however, the rate has increased since.[10]

*Figure 5: Homelessness Rates in Washington*

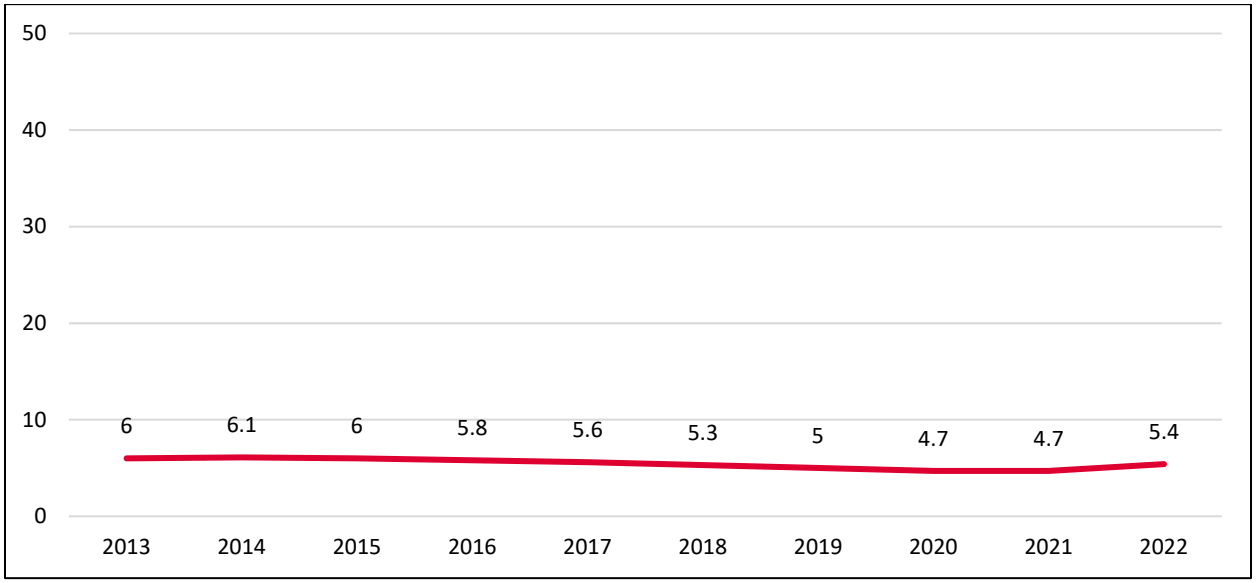



## *Poverty Rates*

The percentage of the population in Washington that is 50% below the poverty level decreased from 2015 to 2019 but began to increase after 2020 (see Figure 6 below). The percentage ranges from just above 6% in 2014 to just below 5% in 2021. The change in percentage of the population that is 50% below the poverty level is small over time, and the overall trend does not mirror the homelessness rate, which sightly increased over the same period.

[10] For changes at the county level. See Figures 1 and 2.

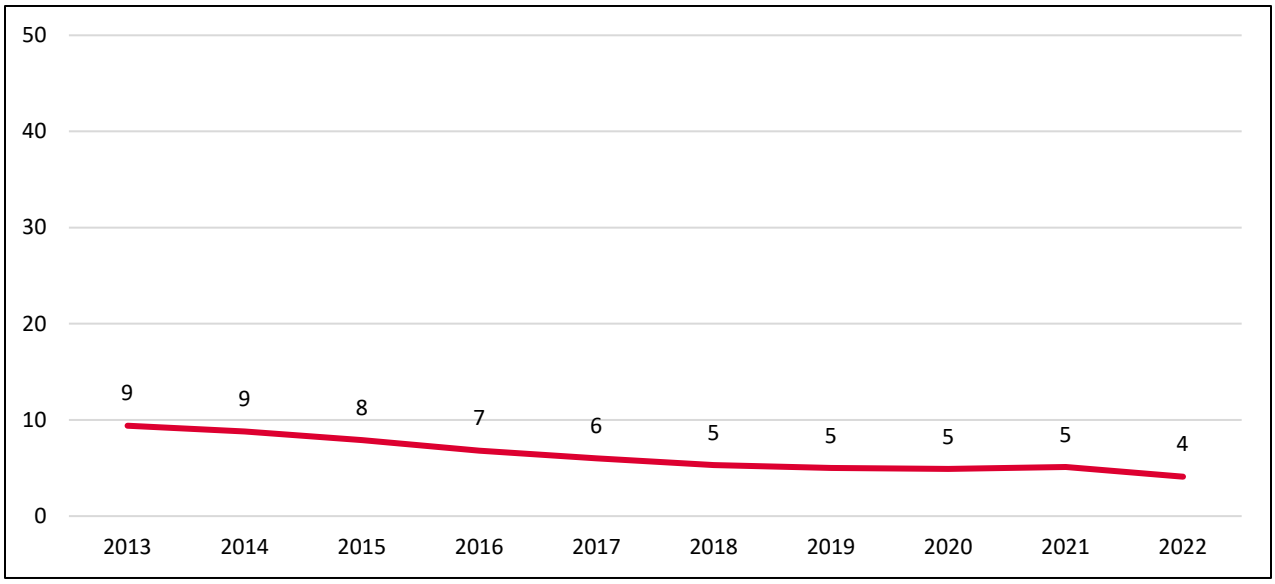
*Figure 6: Percent of Population in Washington 50% Below Poverty Level*




## *Unemployment Rates*

The Washington state unemployment rate has decreased from 2013 to 2022 (see Figure 7 below). Over this period, it was at its highest in 2013 and 2014 (9%) and lowest in 2022 (4%).

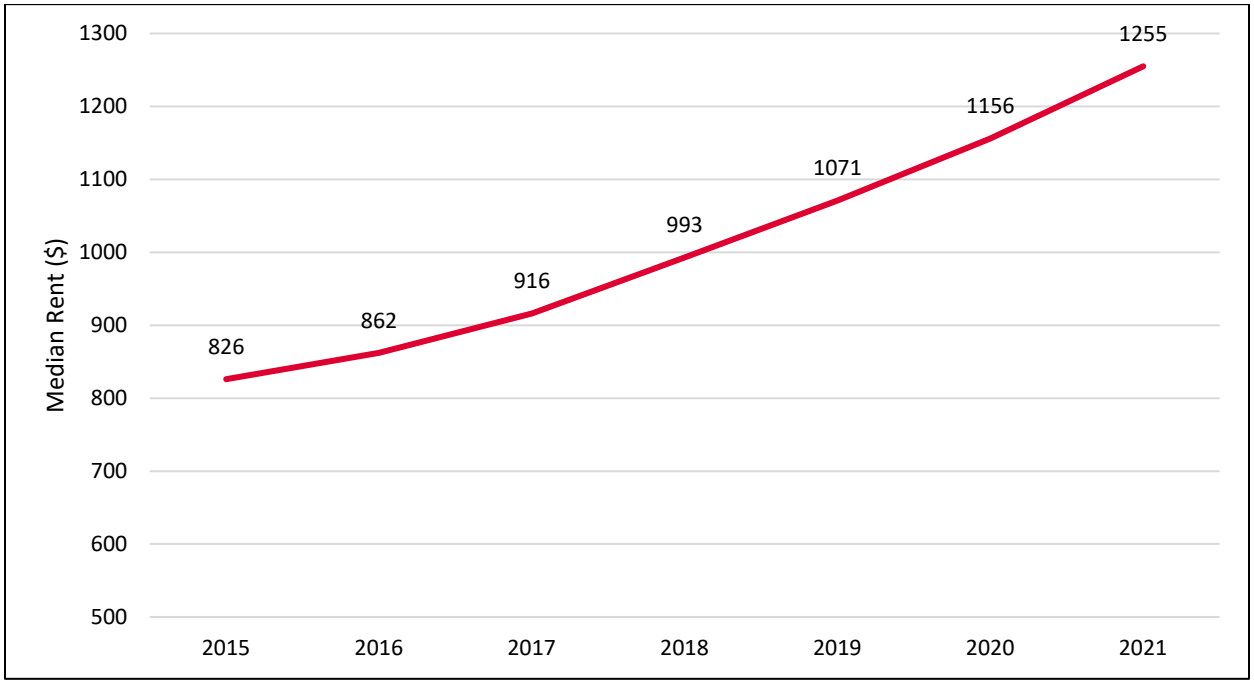
*Figure 7: Washington State Unemployment Rates*



## *Median Rent*

Median cost of gross rent for one-bedroom apartments in Washington has increased from 2015 to 2021.[11] Gross rent includes cost of rent and utilities. Median one-bedroom gross rent increased from just over $800 in 2015 to over $1200 in 2021, a 51.9% increase in six years.

*Figure 8: Median One-Bedroom Gross Rent in Washington*




A similar trend can be seen in median contract rents in Washington. Contract rent values include the monthly rent of a unit, excluding utilities, and the statewide medians include all rental units, regardless of the number of bedrooms. In 2013, the median contract rent in the state was over $800, increasing by 75% to just under $1500 in 2022 (see Figure 9 below). Compared to the data available for median one-bedroom rent, from the years 2015 to 2021, the median contract rent in Washington increased by 48%, similar to the increase in median one-bedroom gross rent in the same period.

[11] Data only available from 2015 to 2021.

*Figure 9: Median Contract Rent in Washington*

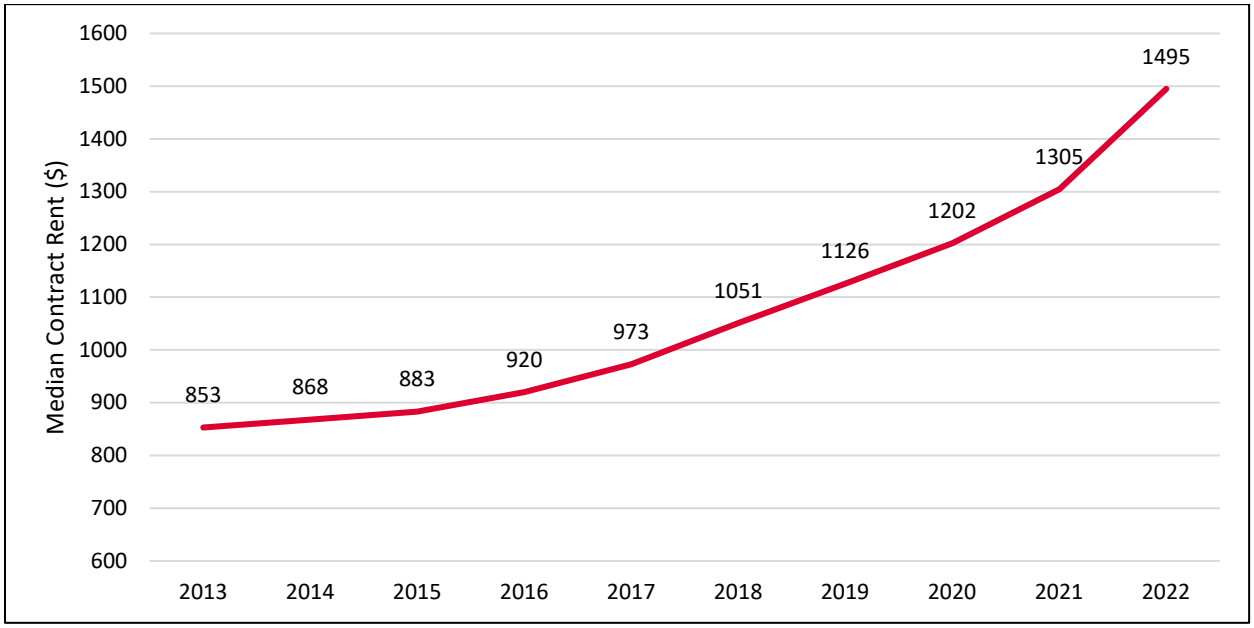
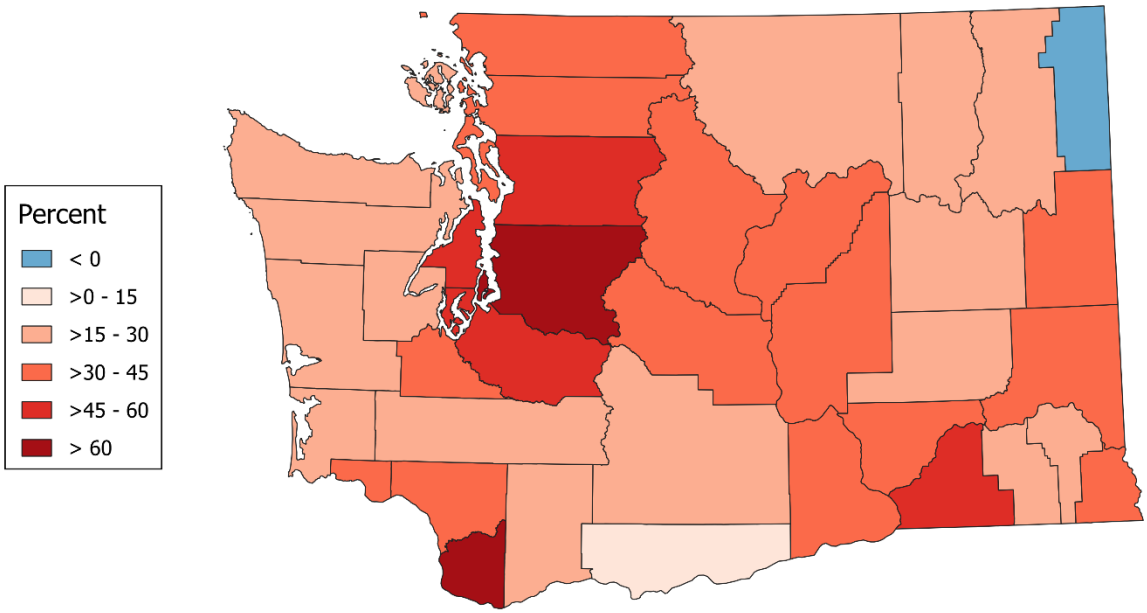



Figure 10 below displays percentage change in median contract rent from 2013 to 2021. Every county but one – Pend Oreille (-13%) – has seen a rise in median contract rent, with King County and Clark County both seeing increases of more than 60%. However, the counties experiencing 30% or more increases in median contract rent are geographically distributed across the state. Counties with increases near or over one standard deviation above the mean (32%), other than King and Clark, include Snohomish (56%), Pierce (48%), Kitsap (47%), and Walla Walla (46%). Counties with increases near or lower than one standard deviation below the mean, other than Pend Oreille, include Klickitat (14%), Columbia (16%), and Garfield (16%).

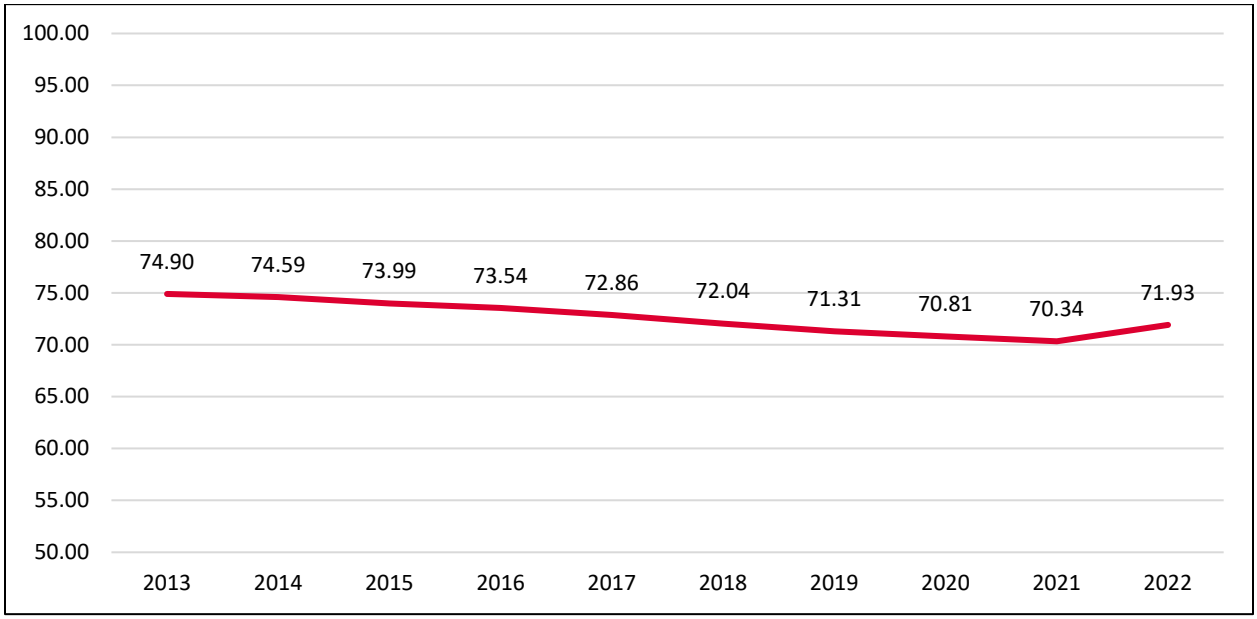
*Figure 10: Percent Change in Median Contract Rent by County, 2013 to 2021*




## *Rent Burden*

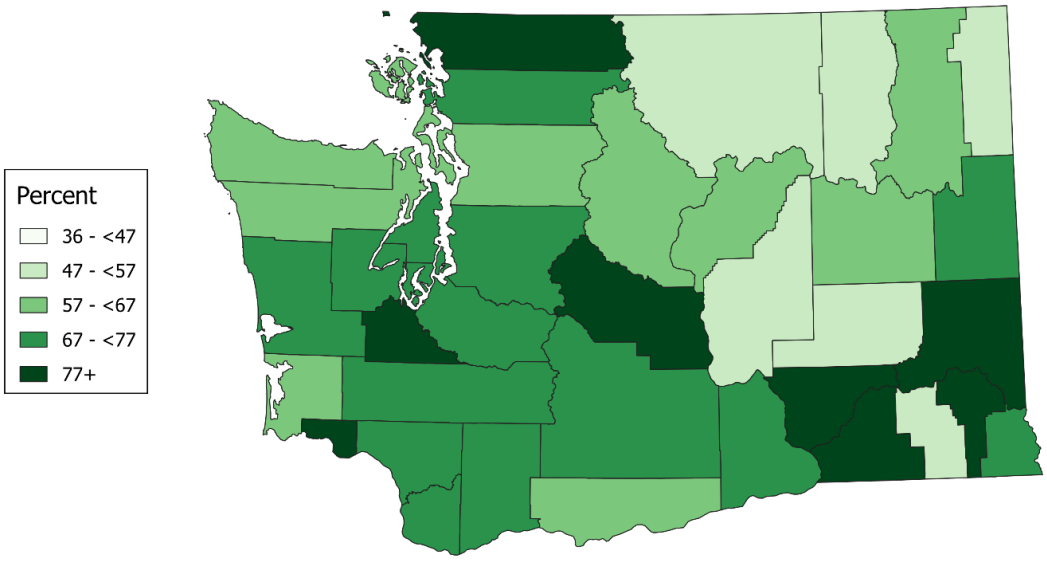
Increases in housing costs can lead to an increase in the number of households (both renters and homeowners) who are considered cost-burdened, meaning they spend 35% or more of their income on housing. This is especially true if incomes do not increase at a similar pace to meet these needs. As incomes do not increase equally across all income levels (See Byrne et al. 2021), low-income households are especially susceptible to housing cost increases. To examine rent burden, the percentage of low-income households (households making less than $20,000) paying more than 34.9% of their income on rent was calculated. As can be seen in Figure 11 below, most low-income households in Washington are cost burdened. While the percentage of the low-income households who are rent burdened slightly decreased from 2013 to 2021, the percentage remains high across all years. Starting in 2022, rent burden for low-income households increases.

*Figure 11: Percentage of Rent Burdened Low-Income Households*




Since the statewide proportion of low-income households that are rent-burdened is high across time, low income rent burden is also examined at the county-level for 2019 (See Figure 12 Below). This reveals particularly stark variation in this variable in Eastern Washington specifically, and it also identifies specific counties across the state on the highest end of this range, many of them rural. The counties with the most significant proportions of rent burden for low-income households include Walla Walla (86%), Wahkiakum (85%), Garfield (85%), Whitman (82%), Kittitas (80%), Thurston (79%), Franklin (78%), Whatcom (78%), and Spokane (77%). While both Ferry County (48%) and Okanogan County (47%) are the counties with the lowest proportion of low-income households considered rent-burdened, all other counties in the state have proportions at 50% or higher.

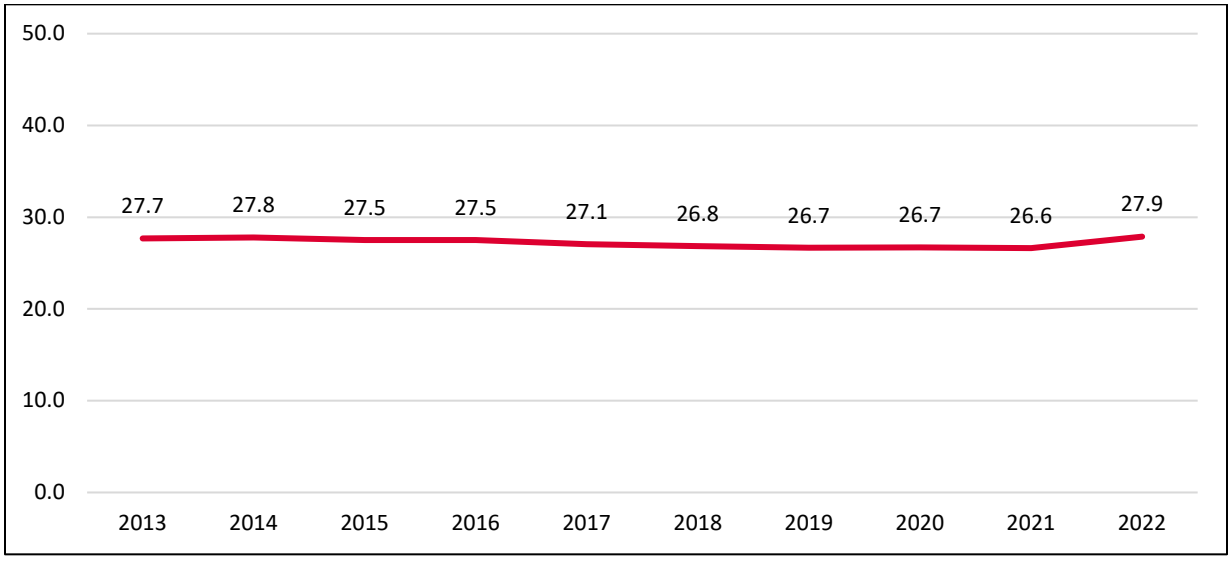
*Figure 12: Percentage of Rent Burdened Low-Income Households by County, 2019*




## *Single-Persons Households*

The percentage of single-person households in Washington has remained stable from 2013 to 2022 (Figure 13 Below). Over this period, it ranges from 26.63% to 27.9%.

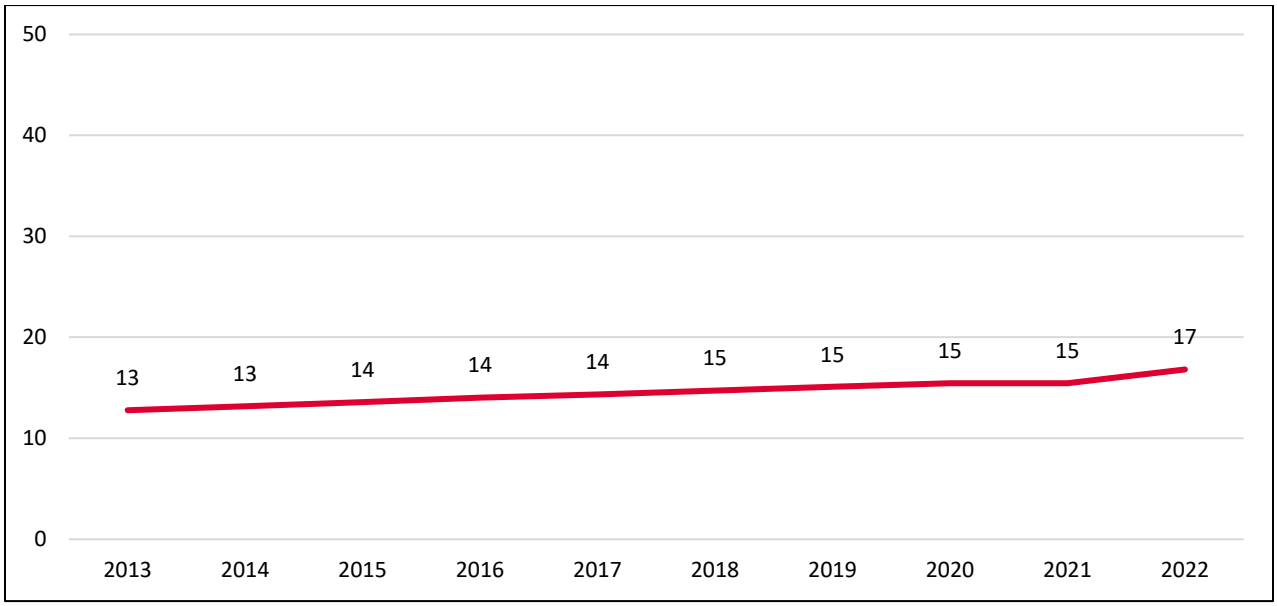
*Figure 13: Percent of Single Person Households in Washington*



## *Populations 65 and Over*

Figure 14 shows the change from 2013 to 2022 in the proportion of the population in the state aged 65 or more. In line with expected demographic trends, Washington has seen the proportion of people aged 65 and slightly increase steadily from 2013 onwards. In 2013, this proportion sat at just under 13%, increasing to just under 17% by 2022.

*Figure 14: Percent of Population in Washington Aged 65 Plus*




## *Summary of Key Trends*

While some of the key variables included in the structural analysis show only slight variation and reflect broadly flat trends over the last decade, a few trends reveal great variation in some of the data. The most obvious changes are visible in housing costs, with both median contract rent statewide and the median cost of rent for one-bedroom units appearing to rise substantially in the last decade. These trends, along with a gradually increasing homelessness rate, exhibit an important relationship also found in the structural analysis included in this report.

Moreover, even among key variables whose statewide trends appear to be relatively flat since 2013, the variation at the county level shows a much more nuanced picture. For example, while homelessness counts are highest in Washington's urban counties, particularly concentrated in King County, which accounted for over half of the PIT count in the state in 2022, the rates of change of both PIT counts and homelessness rates show important trends at the county level. Notably, these trends reveal that the increase in homelessness rates across the state are not just an urban problem and may pose significant challenges for rural

counties, which have also seen high rates of rent-burdened populations and significant increases in median rents.

Although trends can be useful for initially examining what may need to be included, data limitations, notably too few available cases for analysis, necessitate the exclusion of some variables from multivariate modeling. Bivariate Analysis was used to help narrow the number of factors that would be included in multivariate analysis, and this process is detailed below.

## Bivariate Analysis of Structural Predictors

In the next phase of analysis, bivariate relationships between key county characteristics and homelessness were examined. This strategy is useful for identifying key variables that may explain why homelessness rates vary across Washington's counties. Moreover, the findings from this phase of the analysis will help narrow the number of factors to be included in the subsequent multivariate analysis. More specifically, predictors of homelessness that emerge within the bivariate analysis will be selected for inclusion in a more rigorous multivariate analysis. To accomplish this, a bivariate regression (one independent variable and its impact on homelessness rates) was conducted for each potential independent variable.

According to bivariate regression results, median rent for a one bedroom is the strongest predictor of homelessness rates. Bivariate regressions reveal that unemployment, homeownership, vacancy rates, public assistance, social security benefits, and income inequality are not significant predictors of homelessness across counties. Based on bivariate regression, the following variables are potentially the strongest predictors of homelessness across Washington counties: median rent for a one bedroom apartment, poverty rates, median house value, median income, low income rent burden, and percentage of the population age 65 and over. The percentage of single person households is a significant predictor for all counties, but not for rural counties.

A few variables used in previous studies are too highly correlated to include both in multivariate analysis: median income and median home value, median income and median rent for a one-bedroom, and median rent for a one-bedroom and home values. When variables are too highly correlated, multiple regression models are unable to determine the unique effects each has on the dependent variable. Correlations higher than a .8 (ranging from -1 to 1) can create issues of multicollinearity which violates the assumptions of regression and produces inaccurate estimates for the impact of independent variables on the dependent variable. Because of the high level of correlations between these variables (over .8), the strongest predictors described above, except for median income and median house value, were included in the analyses. As rental costs are an important predictor of homelessness in other studies, median rent measures are used in this study rather than income and housing values.

## Multivariate Analysis of Structural Predictors

To provide a more rigorous assessment of the key correlates of homelessness that emerged in the bivariate analyses above, we estimated two Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) multiple regression models. These models estimated the effects of each correlate, while holding all other measures in the model constant. This allows for the isolation of the unique effect of each correlate of interest. This estimation strategy was applied to a model that included all of Washington's counties as well as a model that included only Washington's rural counties.[12] This allows for the possibility that correlates of homelessness may operate differently when excluding Washington's eight urban counties (Clark, King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish, Spokane, Thurston, and Whatcom counties), where homelessness tends to concentrate in terms of absolute numbers. These analyses focus on data from 2016 to 2020 due to issues in consistent and reliable data collection for PIT Counts in 2013 to 2015, incomplete PIT Count data in 2021, and ACS 5-year data being not available for 2022 until December 2023. In addition, since homelessness rates are constructed from PIT Counts that are collected in January of each year, the dependent variable is matched to the previous year's predictors.[13]

Although a broader spectrum of county-level characteristics was examined in the bivariate analyses above, fewer were examined in the OLS models that follow. This methodology was employed for two reasons. In some cases, the bivariate analyses revealed that specific county characteristics were not meaningful for explaining variation in homelessness rates across counties. In other cases, specific variables, such as median rent and median income, were too highly related to one another to be examined simultaneously in an OLS regression model.[14] It should be noted that there are limitations to these analyses due to the low number of cases that can be included. This prevents examining causes in urban counties separately and including all correlates of homelessness identified in bivariate analyses. Due to these limitations, the results should be treated with caution and likely do not represent the only predictors of homelessness rates in Washington State.

Table 2 below reports the findings of an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression model that examined—for all Washington State counties—the effects of key county-level characteristics on the rate of homelessness per 10,000 individuals in the population. In this model, several factors emerged as significant predictors of homelessness. First, median one bedroom rent costs were positively correlated with homelessness. On average, a one unit increase in median rent (i.e., $100 increase) led to an increase of approximately 3.5 persons experiencing homelessness per 10,000 individuals in the county's population. Second, the percentage of the rent-burdened, low-income population was also positively correlated with homelessness

[12] To determine rural or urban counties, the definition of RCW 82.1.370 was used.
[13] For example, 2020 PIT Count data is correlated with county-level measures for 2019, placing the county characteristics prior in time to the PIT count.
[14] When two variables are highly related with one another, OLS regression is not able to distinguish the unique effects of each variable on the outcome of interest.

across Washington counties. In this case, a one percentage point increase in the rent burdened, low-income population led to an increase of .292 persons experiencing homelessness per 10,000 individuals in the population. Put differently, a county with a population of 250,000 might expect to see approximately 7 additional people experiencing homelessness for each percentage point increase in their rent-burdened, low-income population. Third, the percentage of a county's population aged 65 and older was also positively correlated with homelessness. A one percentage point increase in the 65-plus population led to an increase in the rate of homelessness by .849 persons per 10,000 individuals in the population. Finally, the relationship between single person households and homelessness reported in the table was also positive. The relationship indicated that a one percentage point increase in a county's single person households led to an increase in the rate of homelessness by .730 persons per 10,000 individuals in the population. Additional caution is warranted, however, since this relationship did not meet the typical 95 percent confidence level for reporting effects. Instead, the finding approached this level of confidence (p = .068, 93.2 percent confidence).

*Table 2: Ordinary Least Squares Regression Model of the Relationship between County Characteristics and Homelessness, 2016-2020*

| | **Unstandardized Coefficient** | **S.E.** | **p-value** | **95% Confidence Interval** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Population 50 Percent Below Poverty** | -.541 | .521 | .306 | -1.598 | .516 |
| **Median Rent, One-Bedroom (in $100)** | 3.469*** | 1.046 | .002 | 1.348 | 5.589 |
| **Single Person Households** | .730* | .387 | .068 | -.055 | 1.514 |
| **Population Aged 65 Plus** | .849*** | .198 | .000 | .447 | 1.251 |
| **Rent Burdened Low-Income Population** | .292** | .133 | .034 | .024 | .561 |
| **Year 2017** | .878 | 2.060 | .673 | -3.300 | 5.056 |
| **Year 2018** | .360 | 2.451 | .884 | -4.611 | 5.330 |
| **Year 2019** | -1.934 | 2.882 | .506 | -7.78 | 3.912 |
| **Constant** | -54.449*** | 14.990 | .001 | -84.851 | -24.047 |
| **R-squared** | 0.427 | Number of Observations | 148 | | |

****** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.10***
**Note: Table reports robust standard errors, clustered at the county level.**

Table 3 below reports the findings from the same OLS regression model as presented above, but only for Washington's *rural counties*. The findings are very similar to those presented above. When examining only rural counties, the primary correlates of homelessness remain unchanged, with one exception. The measure for single person households no longer approached statistical significance. Each of the three remaining measures that emerged as

predictors across all Washington counties remained important predictors of homelessness among the subset of Washington's rural counties. These include a county's median one-bedroom rent cost, the percentage of a county's population that is rent-burdened and low-income, and the percentage of the county's population that is aged 65 or older. In addition, it can be seen in Table 3, that the magnitudes of these relationships also remain largely unchanged.

*Table 3: Ordinary Least Squares Regression Model of the Relationship between County Characteristics and Homelessness, 2016-2020, Rural Counties Only*

| | Unstandardized Coefficient | S.E. | p-value | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Population 50 Percent Below Poverty** | -.685 | .470 | .156 | -1.647 | .277 |
| **Median Rent, One-Bedroom (in $100)** | 3.467*** | 1.055 | .003 | 1.305 | 5.629 |
| **Single Person Households** | .316 | .329 | .345 | -.358 | .989 |
| **Population Aged 65 Plus** | .847*** | .226 | .001 | .383 | 1.310 |
| **Rent Burdened Low-Income Population** | .277** | .128 | .040 | .014 | .540 |
| **Year 2017** | .899 | 2.631 | .735 | -4.490 | 6.289 |
| **Year 2018** | 1.149 | 2.950 | .700 | -4.893 | 7.191 |
| **Year 2019** | -1.794 | 3.441 | .606 | -8.842 | 5.254 |
| **Constant** | -41.053*** | 12.939 | .004 | -67.558 | -14.549 |
| **R-squared** | 0.405 | Number of Observations | 116 | | |

****** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.10***

**Note: Table reports robust standard errors, clustered at the county level.**

## Conclusion

There are a multitude of factors impacting homelessness across Washington. This report has examined factors such as median rent, rent burden, income inequality, unemployment, population characteristics, and poverty rates to further understand causes that may be unique to Washington. Despite low unemployment and low poverty rates, homelessness remains high and is increasing. The analysis shows that median rent for one-bedroom apartments is the most significant predictor of homelessness rates in Washington from 2016 to 2020 for all counties and rural counties. It also shows great county-level variation in median rent increases and rent burden across the state. While studies may focus on the west side of Washington and specifically King County, counties across the state of Washington are experiencing significant increases in median rents and low income rent burden is high across the state. The second largest predictor is the percentage of the population 65 and over for all counties and rural counties. The proportion of single person households also significantly increases homelessness, but it is not a significant predictor for rural counties.

## Suggestions

The root causes of homelessness in Washington are complex and research examining how to design interventions that meet the specific geographic needs of populations across the state is important for addressing this issue. Yet, this research can be difficult to conduct, especially longitudinally, due to a variety of barriers. Some of these barriers stem from data collection practices. To be sure, the collection of PIT counts at the county-level has improved over time, and this should provide a method for examining the issue more robustly. It is recommended, however, that PIT counts at the county-level be reported in a standard way each year. For example, as the data is currently collected, unsheltered and sheltered homeless counts are reported as separate data points for some years while they are reported as only a combined total for other years. From a research standpoint, this means it is not possible to determine whether these distinct populations have unique causes of homelessness. A standard reporting system across years would help with longitudinal analysis of data.

Additionally, while PIT count methodology is improving, because King County adopted a new way to count people experiencing homelessness who are unsheltered (and did not report it for 2023), the ability to examine the impacts of COVID-19 on homelessness is greatly limited. As many measures to reduce the impact of COVID-19 were not lifted until 2021, this provides only one year (2022) to examine the impact of these measures. At least three to five years of data to fully understand the impact of COVID-19 on homelessness rates is recommended. Maintaining legacy data collection methodologies alongside newly adopted practices is suggested. This method would allow researchers to still conduct trend analysis using the older data until new practices have been implemented for a length of time sufficient to allow for effective trend analysis using the new data collection practices.

Despite these limitations, this report points to rent as an important predictor of homelessness in Washington State from 2016 to 2020. While this analysis is also limited by the number of cases that can be analyzed and the period examined (as 2022 data from the US Census is not available yet for all counties), the findings, in combination with studies conducted at the national level which also point to housing costs as a primary driver of homelessness rates, suggest that addressing housing costs and rent burden are important. Once individual-level data is received (see forthcoming plans), a more robust analysis of how factors at both the macro and micro-levels interact to cause homelessness in Washington State will be examined.

## Forthcoming Plans

The WSU research team is continuing to work with the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services' (DSHS) Research and Data Administration (RDA) to collect limited data to pair with publicly available data on county-level structural conditions to identify the most important predictors of homelessness in Washington State. The findings for a combined analysis of structural and individual factors will be provided in an addendum report to the

Washington State Department of Commerce and to the legislature by the end of the fiscal year. This will allow WSU researchers to conduct a more in-depth analysis of the macro and micro factors that impact homelessness in Washington State.

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