Temporarily staying with others (or “doubling up”) is the way that most people—particularly families with children—experience homelessness in Illinois. Homeless services are equipped to provide shelter and transitional housing to only a fraction of those experiencing homelessness, so temporarily staying with others is a means of survival.

In 2020, Illinois estimated 10,431 people experiencing street and shelter homelessness on any given day, as reported by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).¹ The Point-in-Time count tallies people experiencing street and shelter homelessness on a designated night of the year—usually every January.

The Point-in-Time count is used to determine which communities receive essential federal housing, transportation, and public health assistance, including COVID-19 relief funds, but this HUD-mandated count fails to account for the way most people experience homelessness in Illinois: temporarily staying with others.

The U.S. Department of Education recognizes all forms of homelessness that children and youth might experience, inclusive of families that are experiencing homelessness by temporarily staying with others. In the 2019-20 school year, Illinois schools identified 47,445 students experiencing homelessness, or 2.4% of Illinois school enrollment.²

To better reflect all forms of homelessness one might experience, researchers at Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, Vanderbilt University, and the Heartland Alliance Social IMPACT Research Center developed a model to better estimate the total scope of people experiencing homelessness, incorporating people experiencing homelessness by temporarily staying with others.

Any estimate of people experiencing homelessness is limited to what is documented, and no single data source is a complete reflection of all homelessness. This report summarizes data from four different datasets that are imperfect as standalone measures, but together provide more insight into the scope of homelessness.

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Homelessness describes a situation where someone lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence—but what is fixed, regular, and adequate? It depends who you ask.

For the U.S. Department of Education, the definition of homelessness acknowledges that these experiences are not linear. Most people experiencing homelessness stay wherever they can, often forced to move frequently among unstable living situations—sleeping in motels, cars, and trains, or temporarily staying with others. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has a far more limited scope of homelessness. HUD requires that someone have a nighttime residence that is either a shelter or a place not meant for human habitation to be considered homeless. People that are couch-surfing are excluded from the HUD definition of homelessness.

What is at stake? Defining homelessness is a first step toward ending homelessness. Counts of people experiencing homelessness determine which communities receive essential federal housing, transportation, and public health assistance, including COVID-19 relief funds.

For people experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness, the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s definition of homelessness includes someone staying in a publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations, as well as public or private places not designed for, or typically used as, a regular sleeping accommodation.³

For people experiencing homelessness by temporarily staying with others, this report defines poor individuals and families in poor households as “temporarily staying with others” when they fall outside of the conventional household composition and cannot afford to live in housing of their own or formally contribute to housing costs. Read more about our approach at chicagohomeless.org/approach.

People experiencing homelessness by temporarily staying with others need crucial homeless services, but the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s method for enumerating homelessness excludes these arrangements.

³ Criteria and Recordkeeping Requirements for Definition of Homeless, HUD Exchange, available at hudexchange.info/resources/.
HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS BY DOUBLING UP IN ILLINOIS?

IL STATE
TOTAL: 109,842
Age 0-4: 14,040
Age 5-13: 13,295
Age 14-17: 6,585
Age 18-24: 30,954
Age 25+: 44,968

NORTHWEST
TOTAL: 9,420
Age 0-13: 1,862
Age 14-17: 1,151
Age 18-24: 2,733
Age 25+: 3,674

CENTRAL
TOTAL: 8,451
Age 0-13: 1,781
Age 14-17: 1,090
Age 18-24: 2,533
Age 25+: 3,047

COLLAR COUNTIES
TOTAL: 35,097
Age 0-13: 9,032
Age 14-17: 1,690
Age 18-24: 9,127
Age 25+: 15,248

SOUTH
TOTAL: 7,289
Age 0-17: 1,898
Age 18-24: 2,378
Age 25+: 3,013

CHICAGO
TOTAL: 49,585
Age 0-13: 12,891
Age 14-17: 2,525
Age 18-24: 14,183
Age 25+: 19,986


The Department of Housing and Urban Development reports 10,431 people experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness in January 2020. The Point-in-Time count is used to determine which communities receive essential federal housing, transportation, and public health assistance, including COVID-19 relief funds, but this HUD-mandated count fails to account for the way most people experience homelessness in Illinois: temporarily staying with others.

**IN 2020, AT LEAST 39,421 ILLINOIS PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS EXPERIENCED HOMELESSNESS—MORE THAN TRIPLE THE HUD COUNT OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS THAT SAME YEAR.**

People experiencing homelessness by temporarily staying with others need crucial homeless services, but until the HUD definition is changed to better reflect the true scope of homelessness, many Illinois families are barred from these services—especially Black and Brown people.

In 2020, only 23.9% of people experiencing homelessness by doubling up identified as White. System-embedded white supremacy continues to limit Black and Brown Illinoisans’ access to crucial resources. The homeless services system continues to prioritize White people experiencing homelessness over Black and Brown people—especially Black mothers. Recent research finds that White women that have experienced traumatic life events are consistently perceived as more vulnerable than Black women that have experienced the same events. In a system that prioritizes housing opportunities based off of vulnerability, Black and Brown families are kept homeless.

**IN ILLINOIS, AN ESTIMATED 109,842 PEOPLE EXPERIENCED HOMELESSNESS BY DOUBLING UP IN 2020.**

![Homeless Population by Race and Ethnicity]


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4 HUD 2020 Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Homeless Populations and Subpopulations (Illinois), HUD Exchange.
An estimated **65,611 people were experiencing homelessness in Chicago in 2020**. This in-depth analysis includes sheltered, unsheltered, and people temporarily staying with others, and it is a 7,338-person increase (+12.6%) from 2019, immediately prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Fewer Chicagoans experienced sheltered and unsheltered homelessness, but Chicago saw a large spike (+20%) in people temporarily staying with others (or “doubling up”).

### RACE & ETHNICITY

- **Due to longstanding structural and historical racism, homelessness continues to disproportionately impact Black/African American Chicagoans.** Black/African American Chicagoans make up 55.8% of the total population experiencing homelessness in 2020. Of people experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness, 75.9% identified as Black or African American.

- **Chicago saw a spike in Hispanic/Latíné people experiencing homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic.** In 2020, an estimated 18,272 Hispanic/Latíné Chicagoans experienced homelessness; in 2019, an estimated 12,813 people identified as Hispanic or Latino. Many Hispanic/Latíné Chicagoans experiencing homelessness are barred from crucial homeless services because Hispanic/Latíné people experiencing homelessness are more likely to stay with others than stay in an emergency shelter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>Sheltered &amp; Unsheltered*</th>
<th>Temporarily Staying with Others**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RACE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>36,613</td>
<td>12,159 (↓ 820)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Race</td>
<td>9,424</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or More Races</td>
<td>8,928</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>8,215</td>
<td>2,885 (↓ 261)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1,464</td>
<td>122 (↓ 51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race Not Recorded</td>
<td>708</td>
<td>708 (↑ 282)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>152 (↓ 67)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **ETHNICITY** | | |
| Non-Hispanic and Non-Latino | 45,352 | 14,039 (↓ 956) | 31,313 (↑ 2,796) |
| Hispanic/Latino | 11,032 | 1,489 (↓ 189) | 18,272 (↑ 5,459) |
| Ethnicity Not Recorded | 498 | 498 (↑ 188) | 0 |

* Chicago Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), All Chicago Making Homelessness History. All Chicago was not involved in the data analysis included in this report, and the conclusions in this report do not represent the views of All Chicago.


*** indicates that this total should be used with caution (coefficient of variation ≥ 30)
**TYPE OF HOMELESSNESS**

Most Chicagoans experiencing homelessness temporarily stay with others at some point throughout the year. Of the 65,611 people experiencing homelessness in 2020, 75.6% were temporarily staying with others. According to HMIS data, 20,011 people utilized the homeless service system and 1 in every 5 people reported temporarily staying with others at least once in 2020.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>Sheltered &amp; Unsheltered*</th>
<th>Temporarily Staying with Others**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - 4</td>
<td>7,503</td>
<td>1,811 (age 0-2)</td>
<td>5,242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>268 (age 3-4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 17</td>
<td>11,032</td>
<td>800 (age 5-13)</td>
<td>9,992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>240 (age 13-17)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 and Older</td>
<td>47,076</td>
<td>12,907</td>
<td>14,183 (age 18-24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19,986 (age 25+)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHANGE OVER TIME**

The rate of people experiencing street and shelter homelessness has seen little change. While Chicago has seen large fluctuations in the population of people experiencing homelessness by temporarily staying with others, the city has seen very little change in the population experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness.

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**Report author & design:** Samuel Carlson  

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