Causes of Homelessness among the Unsheltered Population in Las Vegas

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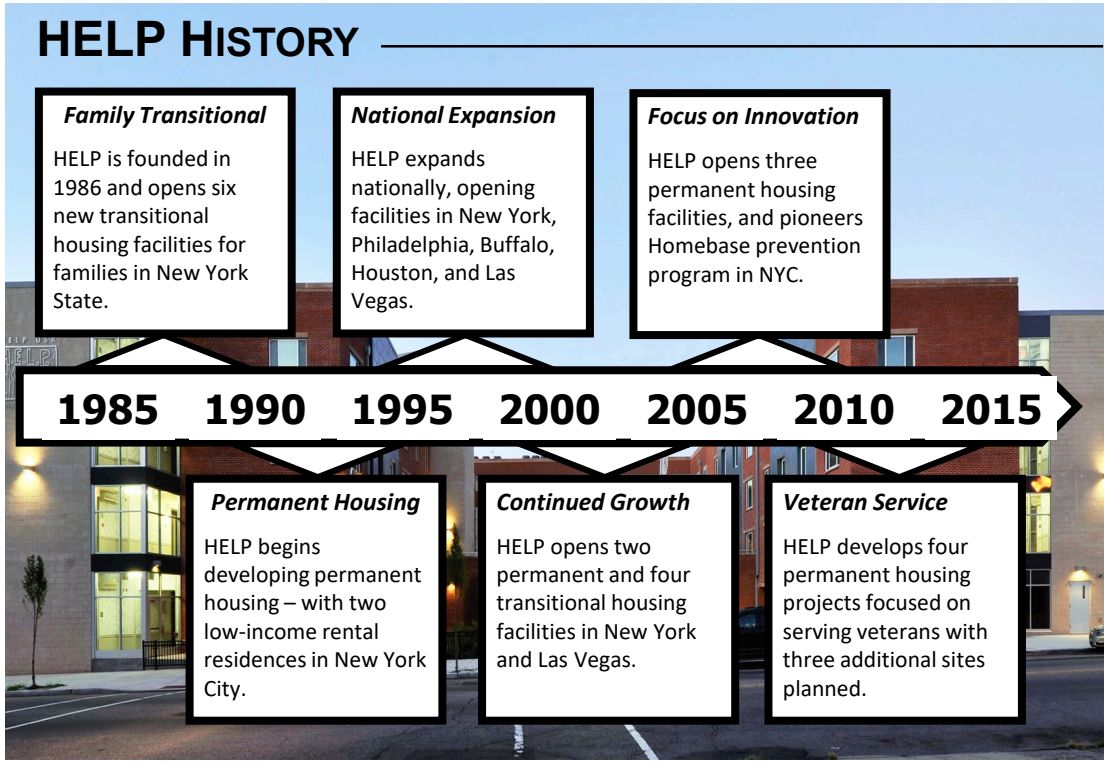
HELP USA

Building Better Lives

OVERVIEW

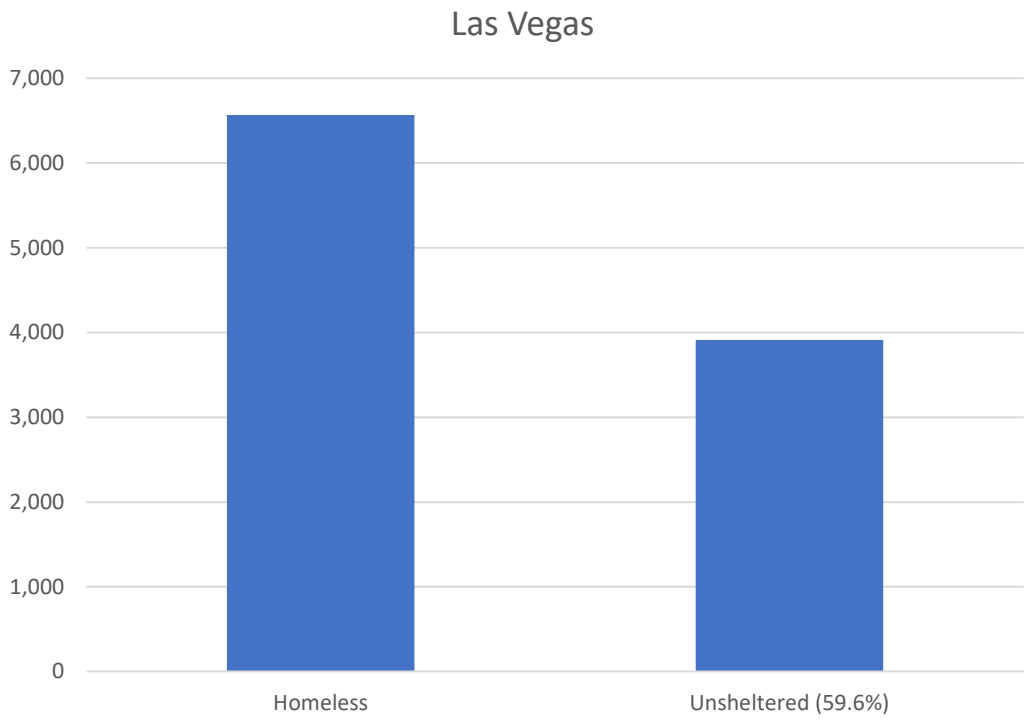
HELP USA is a national housing and homeless services organization. We opened our first family shelter in New York City in 1986 and have grown to include over 65 programs and residences across five U.S. states. Our annual operating budget is over $140M and we employ more than 1,200 people. We have 143 units of transitional housing and 57 units of permanent housing for low-income single adults in Las Vegas.



Unsheltered homelessness is acutely concentrated in western states

Highest vs. lowest rates of unsheltered homelessness

State	Homeless	Unsheltered	% Unsheltered
Highest rates			
California	181,399	123,423	68
Oregon	20,142	13,004	64.6
Hawaii	6,223	13,004	62.8
Arizona	14,237	7,615	53.5
Nevada	8,666	4,555	52.6
Lowest Rates			
Vermont	3,295	137	4.2
New York	103,200	5,007	4.9
Maine	4,258	29	7
Massachusetts	19,141	1,362	7.1
Wisconsin	4,861	458	9.4
National	653,104	256,610	39.3



Source: The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2023 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress

Region	Affordable rental units per 100 poor rental households
U.S.	33
west*	30
Nevada	18
Las Vegas	14

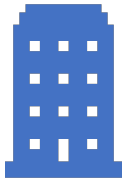
Source: NLIHC (2022); * = Harvard (2021)

Factors of "extreme poverty" and rental crisis in Las Vegas

- **Cost burden:**
  - 75% of renter households with incomes 80% or less than Area Median Income (AMI) pay more than 30% on rent
- **Job precarity:**
  - 28% of workers are "precarious[ly] employed" in the dominant hospitality and leisure sector (Seymore and Akers, 2021)
- **"Financialization" of the rental market**
  - Las Vegas had the highest "Great Recession" foreclosure rate in the country (12% at the peak of the crisis)
    - concentrated in Black and Latino communities (Bocian et al, 2010; Maycock and Malacrida, 2018; Seymour and Akers, 2022; Wargo, 2010)
    - Housing ownership declined and continues to trail the national average (54% vs 64%) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021; Schuetz, 2019)
    - Private investors also began seizing foreclosed properties and converting them into market-rate rental units (Andrews & Sisson, 2018; Semuels, 2019; Seymour & Akers, 2021)
    - These events spiked rental prices which reduced access to housing for poorer renters and increased evictions

Summarizing trends in Las Vegas

Staggering shortages of affordable rental units for the poorest individuals and families



Scarce federal rental subsidies

High risks, among the city's working poor, to job insecurity and unemployment

Limited mechanisms to move the unsheltered homeless population into housing

Research Questions and Frame

Questions

What are the major causes of homelessness in Las Vegas?

What are the pathways into homelessness?

- Places of origin
- Types of residences before homelessness
- Experiences in institutions (e.g., incarceration)

Frame

Structural drivers (e.g., rent burden, job precarity)

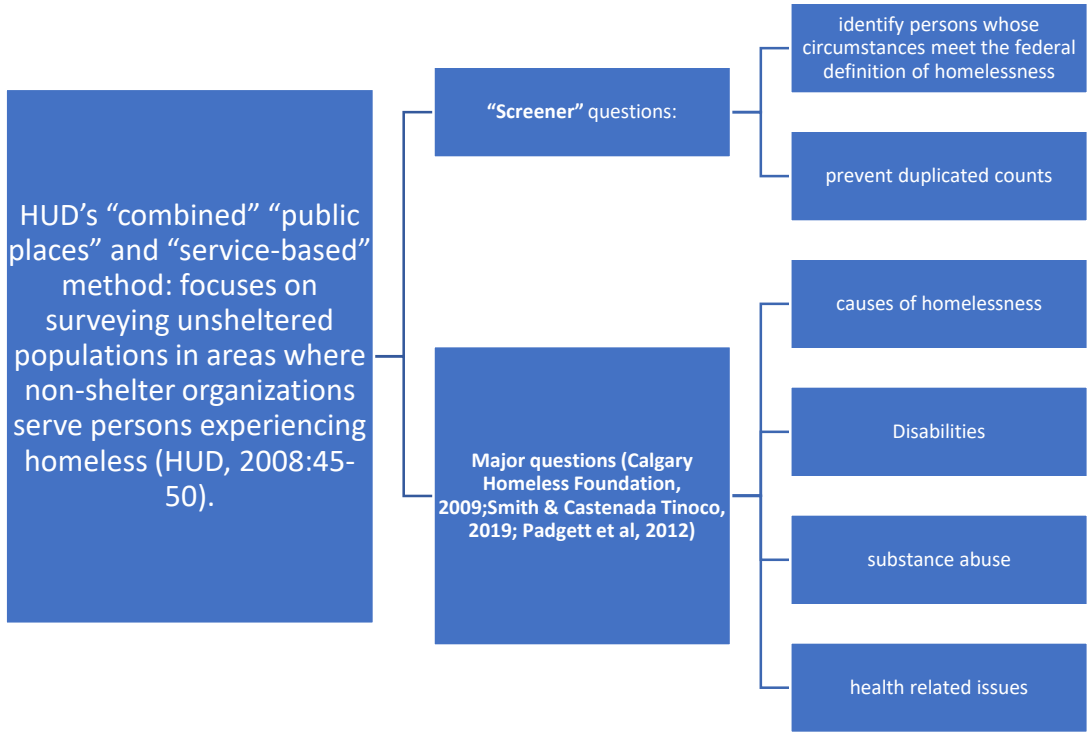
Bi-directional risks factors

- Substance use problems
- Health burdens

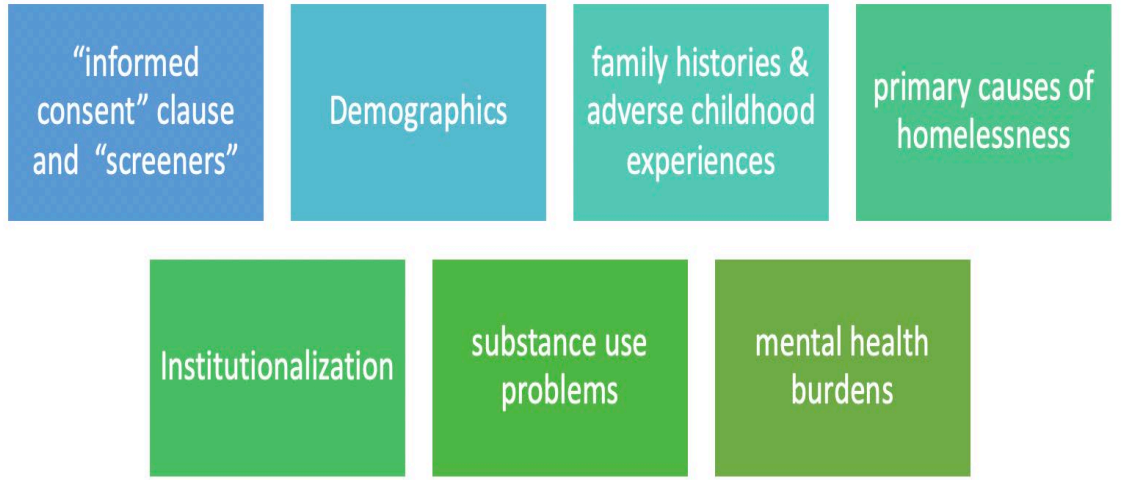
Adverse childhood experiences (ACE)

Survey Design

Combined federal and local methods



HELP USA Las Vegas Courtyard Survey



Administrators and Participants

Survey Teams

- Las Vegas Neighborhood Services Department
- Local community-based organizations
- HELP USA

Participants at a glance

The team administered 400 surveys.

360 (90%)were completed *and* useable for analysis

We disqualified 40 surveys in cases where respondents:

- did not meet the federal definition of homelessness (qualifier questions)
- selected “refuse to answer” in several fields *or*
- did not answer questions (missing data).

Survey Results: Key similarities and differences between HELP USA and PIT Survey (HHH, 2022)

Similarities

Single adult homeless persons	• 90%, HHH 2022 • 89.43%, HELP 2023
Mental health burdens	• 33%, HHH, 2022 • 32.2% HELP 2023
Domestic violence experience	• 3%, HHH, 2022 • 1.6% our survey

Differences

- adults (over 24)
  - 88%, (children = 6%), HHH 2022
  - 98.89% (average age = 50.1) HELP 2023
- Unsheltered
  - 51%, HHH 2022
  - 53% (Courtyard) + 14% (another unsheltered location), HELP 2023
    - 25% (emergency shelter
    - 8% (another location)

Results: Demographics

	Total
Age	50.097
Gender	
female	20.83%
male	78.33%
transgender	0.28%
gender non-conforming	0.28%
did not identify with any of the above	0.28%
household status	
individual	89.42%
family	10.58%
primary language	
English	86.67%
Spanish	10.28%
Other	3.06%
place of origin (region)	
(1) West (outside Nevada)	30.97%
(2) Midwest	16.48%
(3) Nevada	13.92%
(4) Outside US	12.78%
(5) Northeast	12.22%
(6) Southwest	7.10%
(7)Southeast	5.68%
(1) and (4)	0.57%

Results: demographics

race & ethnicity	
White (non-Hispanic)	32.29%
Black or African-American	31.73%
Latinx	24.65%
Asian or Pacific Islander	5.95%
Multiple races	4.53%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.85%
education	
did not complete high school	27.58%
high school	32.87%
some college	23.40%
graduated from college	11.98%
some graduate school	2.23%
completed graduate school	1.95%
veterans	7.78%
employment status	
employed	10.83%
unemployed and	
looking for work	55.00%
not looking for work	34.17%

Results: survey measures

(1) primary drivers of homelessness

primary cause	n	%
unemployment	144	40.00%
family problems (discord or loss/death of household member)	47	13.10%
health problems (physical, mental and substance related)	50	13.90%
loss of housing (foreclosure, eviction, burned down, affordability)	41	11.40%
loss of public assistance or identification documents	13	3.60%
relocation/deportation/immigration/seeking asylum	14	3.90%
released from institution	12	3.30%
personal issues	9	2.50%
violence	9	2.50%
other or refused to answer	21	5.80%
total	**360**	**100.00%**

(2) health and substance use problems

- a physical disability (n=118; 32.8%)
- abused drugs or alcohol (n=156; 43.3%)
- used injection drugs (n=25 6.9%)
- received treatment for alcohol or drug abuse (n=83; 23.1%)
- ever experienced psychotic symptoms, such as hallucinations or delusions (n=54; 14.7%)
- received treatment for mental health issues (n=116; 32.2%)
- been hospitalized for mental health reasons against their will (n=50; 13.9%)

(3) adverse childhood experiences (ACE) and (4) incarceration

- had ever failed a grade or dropped out of school (n=133; 36.9%)
- grew up while one or both parents experienced unemployment (n=115; 31.9%)
- had ever been in the foster care system (n=53; 14.7%)
- were abandoned by one or both parents (n=88; 24.4%)
- experienced the death of a mother or stepmother (n=46; 12.8%)
- experienced the death of a father or stepfather (n=56; 15.6%)
- were ever physically abused by a parent or guardian (n=82; 22.8%)
- ever been incarcerated in a jail or prison (n=229; 63.6%)

methodology of analysis: Latent Class Analysis (LCA)

What is LCA?

a probabilistic model that identifies different groups of people, or “classes”, in a sample based on patterns of individual responses to multiple “categorical” questions (Tsai et al, 2013; Weller et al, 2020)

“observed” categories vs “latent” “classes”:

Survey responses are “observed” measures (each respondent has answered each question that was directly posed to them)

“classes” represent “unobserved” – or, “latent – measures because they arise from statistically significant combinations of the “observed” measures (B.O. Muthen & L.K Muthen, 2000; Wolke et al., 2013; Weller et al, 2020)

Objective:’ -

identify **specific patterns – “classes” -** of the **observed measures** associated with entering homelessness in Las Vegas, where our observed measures include all variables in the previous 3 slides

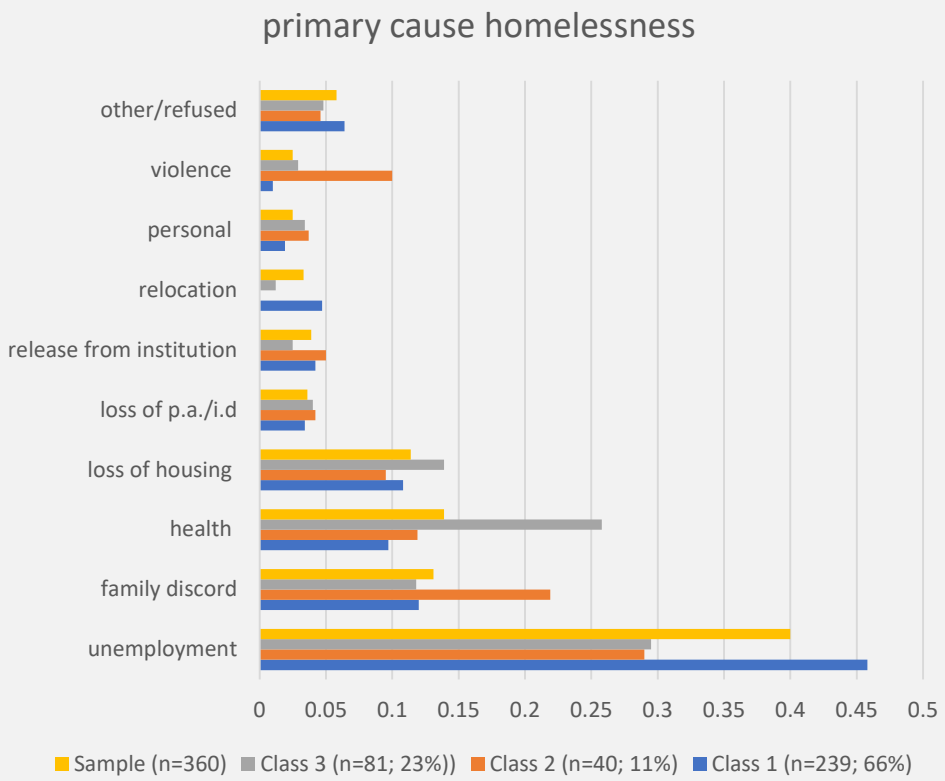
Findings: Three Latent Class Solution

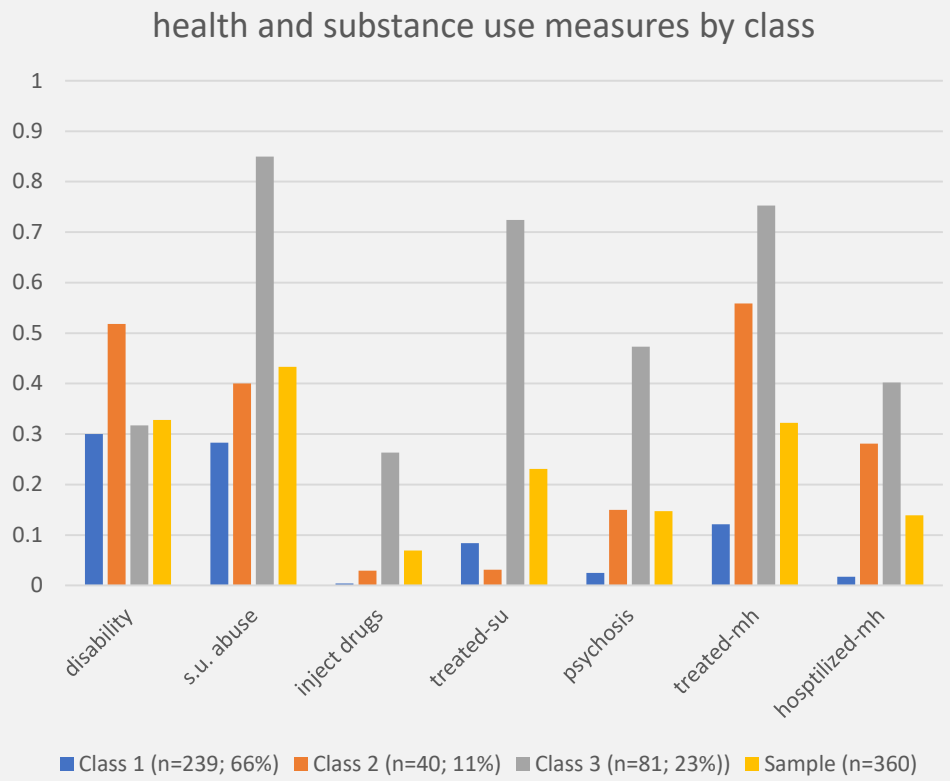
Class 1 (n=239; 66%): *the highest likelihood of entering homelessness due to unemployment with the least likelihood of encountering adverse experiences during childhood, or health and substance use problems before entering homelessness.* We call this class ***unemployment***.

Class 2 respondents (n=40; 11%): *the highest likelihood of entering homelessness due to family problems and violence, with the highest likelihood of enduring multiple adverse childhood experiences* ***and incarceration***. We call this class ***family problems, violence, disabilities, and multiple adverse childhood experiences.***

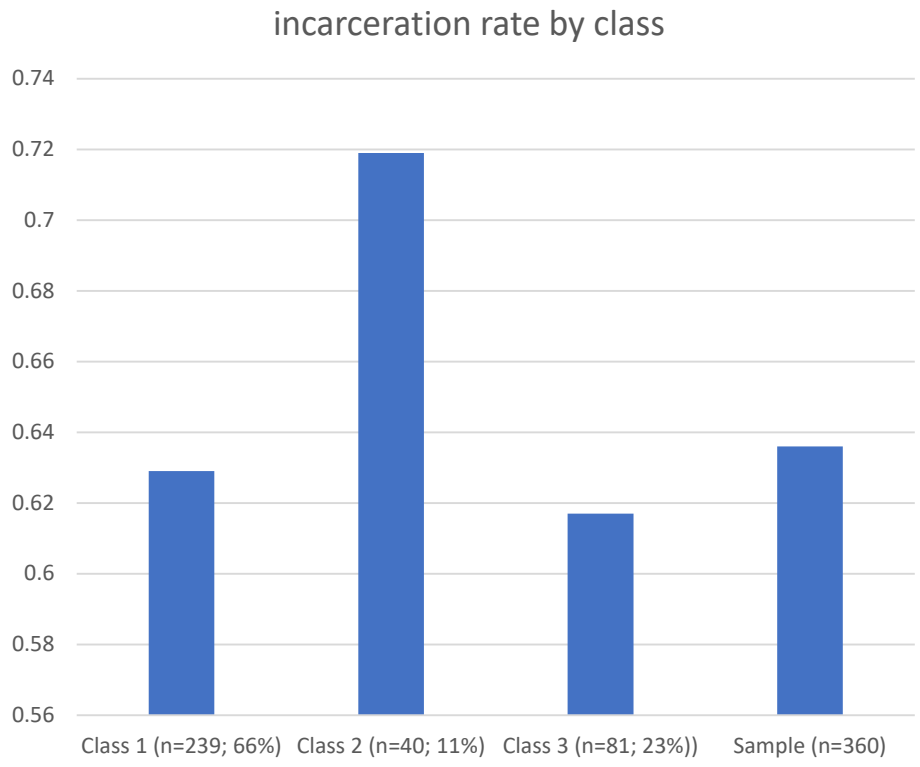
Class 3 (n=81;23%): *the highest likelihood of entering homelessness due to health problems and the loss of housing (due to external forces; e.g. eviction) with the highest likelihood of substance use and mental health problems*. We call this class ***health and substance use problems with histories of abandonment and paternal death***.

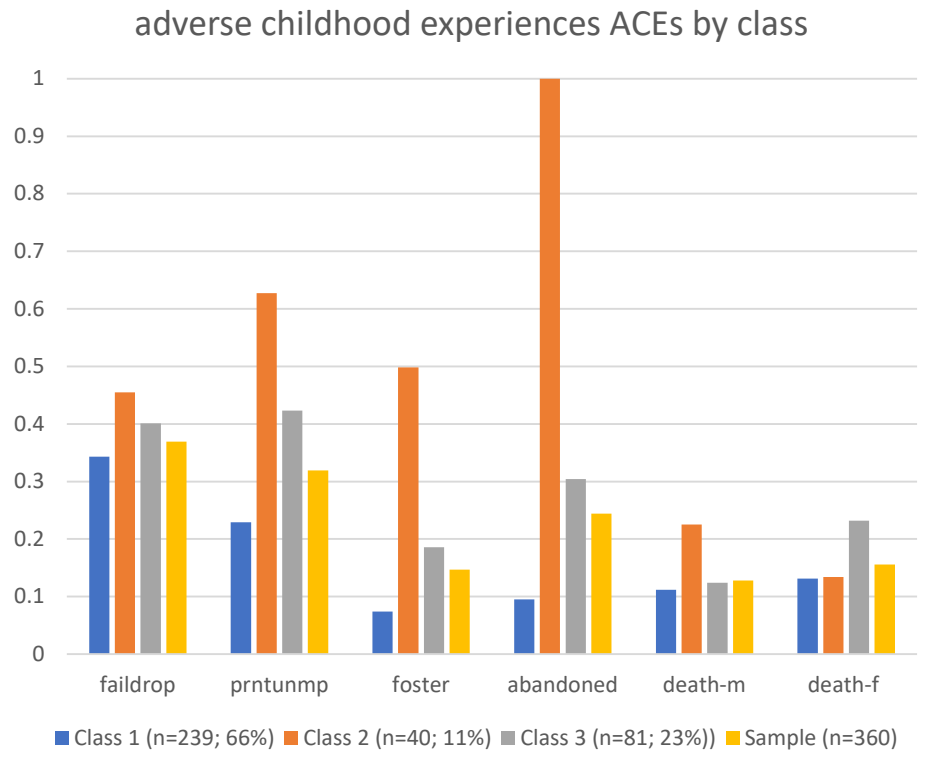
Findings: Study measures by latent class





Findings: Study measures by latent class (continued)





Findings: Significant demographic characteristics by class

Gender	Unemployment (class 1)	Family conflict & multiple ACEs (class 2)	Health & substance use burdens/abandonment and paternal death (class 3)	Sample
female	17.57%	**37.5%***	22.22%	20.83%
race & ethnicity				
White (non-Hispanic)	27.12%	**43.24%***	**42.5%**	32.29%
Latinx	28.39%	**10.81%***	20.00%	24.65%
primary language				
Spanish	12.97%	5.00%	**4.94***	10.28%
place of origin (region)				
Outside US	17.37%	5.26%	**5.13^**	12.78%
region before homelessness				
Clarke County	68.62%	62.50%	**51.85^**	64.17%
Nevada (outside CC)	2.51%	5.00%	2.47%	2.78%
out of State	28.87%	32.50%	**45.68%***	33.06%
accommodation before homelessness				
staying w friends	9.21%	**22.50%***	7.41%	10.28%
	* = p<0.05; ^ = p<0.01			

Conclusions

Structural factors contributed to homelessness

- Class 1 (66%) “Unemployment” implies that interplay between multiple structural risk factors induces homelessness:
  - Lack of formal benefits associated with low-skilled jobs
  - Class 1 was more likely to hail from immigrant and Latinx communities that had lived in Clark County immediately before entering homelessness -- plausible link to the Great Recession’s higher foreclosure rates among minority communities
  - Unemployment amid a vast shortage of affordable rental units can prevent one from making a housing payment or lead to chronic unemployment

Housing instability was correlated with histories of health and substance use problems

- Class 3 (23%) “health and substance use with histories of abandonment and paternal death” were also more likely to report:
  - The loss of housing caused homelessness
  - They had lived in another US state immediately before entering homelessness
  - They had grown up in the United States itself
- It is, therefore, possible that conditions of housing instability that led to homelessness among this group occurred in another state and influenced their migration.
- The influx of people from LA and Orange County to Nevada from 2000 to 2010 accounted for 56% of the state’s in-migration during those years but “only wealthier people” were able to comfortably secure housing (Seymore & Akers, 2021).

Conclusions: Trauma-induced homelessness is concentrated among women

- Class 2 (11%) "***family problems, violence, disabilities, and multiple adverse childhood experiences"*** were also more likely
  - To be female
  - To have lived with friends immediately before entering homelessness

- This potentially indicates that these respondents' experiences of traumas (childhood abuse) and poverty (parental unemployment) in childhood was linked to lack of social support in adulthood preceding or associated with becoming homeless (Herman et al, 1997; Shelton et al, 2009; Lieu et al, 2021)

Recommendations for policy & legislation

focus on/implement employment and job placement services

- May help people who became homeless due, primarily, to unemployment (class 1) to secure and retain housing

Increase the number of transitional housing sites in the city

- Model should cater to the single adult homeless population and provide employment and job placement, housing placement, and harm reduction-based substance abuse services.
- Case management services should also link clients to benefits and healthcare services.
- Services can address the mental health, substance use, and trauma that afflict over one-third of this surveyed population (classes 2 and 3)

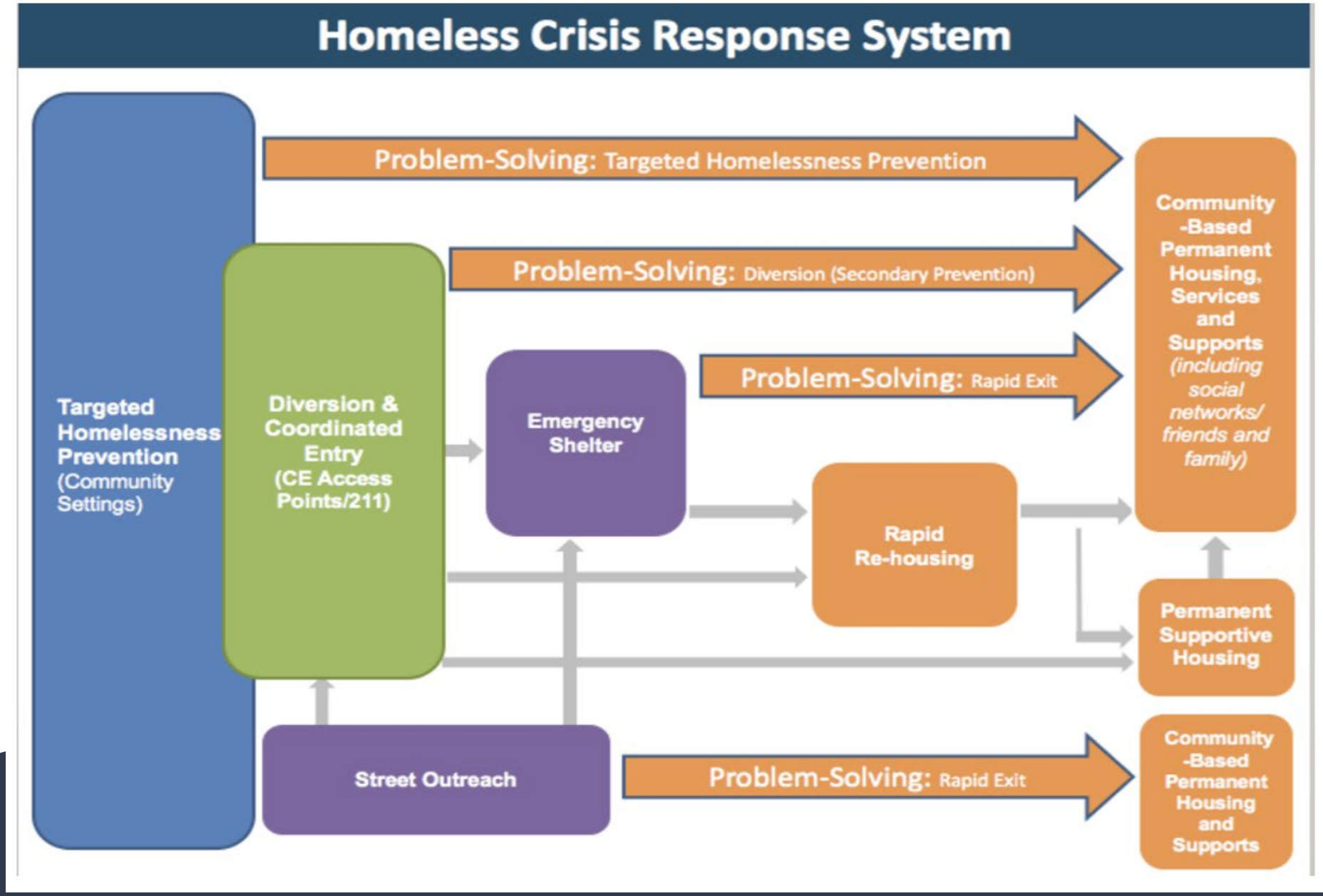
fund trauma-informed mental health care models

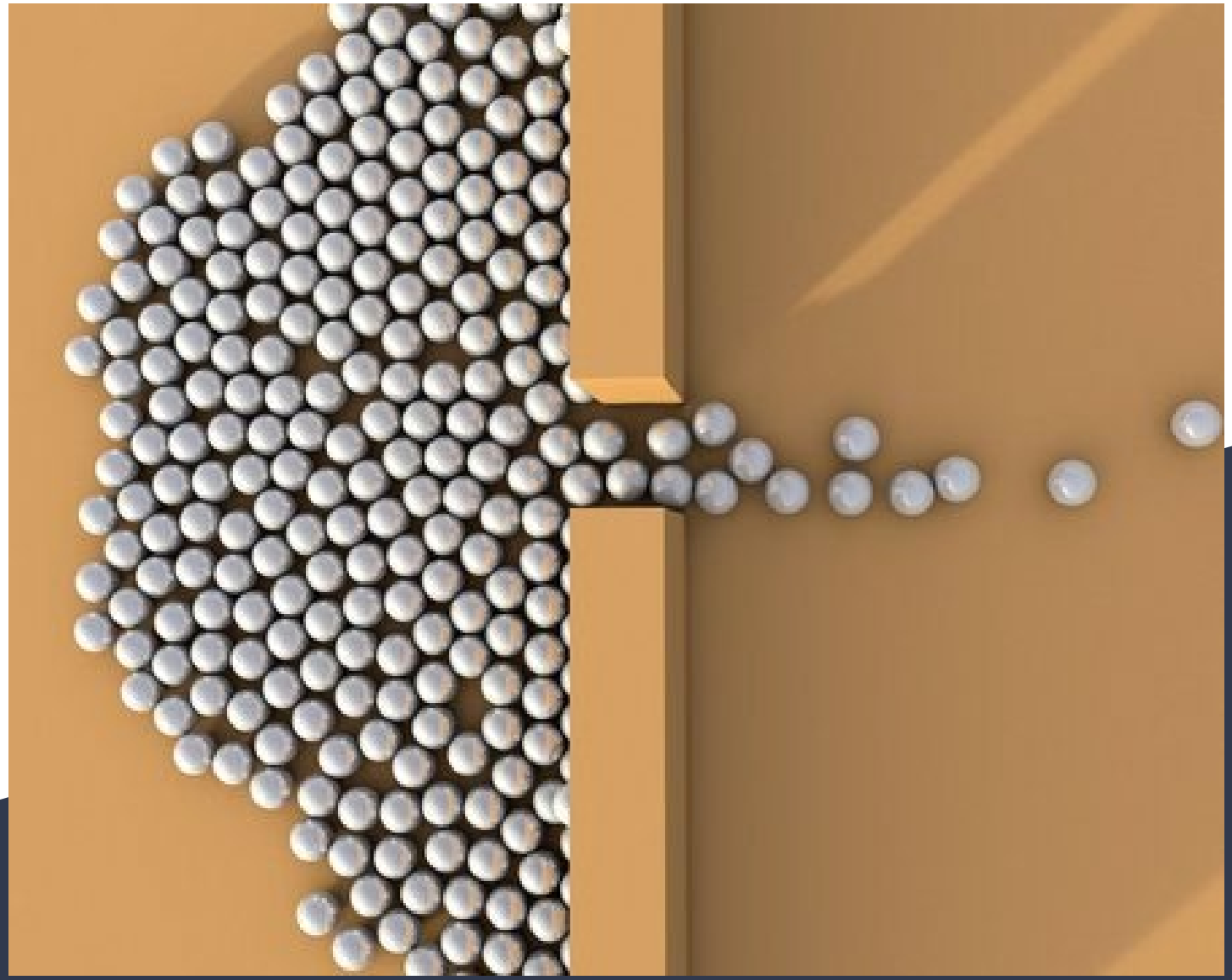
reduce the deficit in affordable rental units for the poorest renters

- Address the volatility of the local housing market
- Increase housing ownership rates, particularly among members of the Black and Latinx communities
- Reduce the cost burden of poor renters
- Enabling multi-year leases (with pre-determined annual rent increases)
- Implement tenant protection policies (e.g., landlord mediations to prevent evictions)

Recommendations to Support a Restructured Regional Approach to Homelessness

Las Vegas City Council Meeting, January 17, 2024


Homeless Crisis Response System
Targeted Homelessness Prevention (Community Settings)
Problem-Solving: Targeted Homelessness Prevention
Problem-Solving: Diversion (Secondary Prevention)
Problem-Solving: Rapid Exit
Diversion & Coordinated Entry (CE Access Points/211)
Emergency Shelter
Rapid Re-housing
Street Outreach
Problem-Solving: Rapid Exit
Community -Based Permanent Housing, Services and Supports (including social networks/ friends and family)
Permanent Supportive Housing
Community -Based Permanent Housing and Supports



Immediate Opportunities for Impact

- Invest in **housing problem solving -** approx $4.64M annually to divert or rapidly exit an estimated 1800 HH.
- Identify a **coordinated entry lead entity** to center housing outcomes - estimated additional $347,000 annually
- Develop a cross-jurisdiction, **coordinated approach to unsheltered homelessness** - the $15M SNOFO investment will require a housing match to be effective
- Create a steady **pipeline of both affordable and supported housing development**

Contact

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