



# 2024 Annual Update on Homelessness

New report uses multiple sources to provide a more comprehensive picture of housing instability in Whatcom County

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# Executive Summary

Many households continue to receive services and achieve housing stability in Whatcom County, but the overall rate of homelessness remains relatively stable because new instances of homelessness are emerging as quickly as they can be resolved. The primary reason that homelessness continues to persist is due to a lack of affordable housing in the private market and insufficient publicly-funded projects. Housing instability is distributed unequally among race and age categories, and across the school districts of Whatcom County. At the household level, economic conditions, behavioral health challenges, medical conditions, and unstable household dynamics (especially domestic violence) contribute significantly to housing loss and remain obstacles as households work towards achieving housing security.

## Introduction

This report draws on data from multiple sources, an expansion on prior years that drew more narrowly from the Point in Time Count (PITC). The PITC is often referenced at the local, state, and national level because it's required by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to receive federal funding and has a consistent methodology across jurisdictions. There's a common understanding among service providers and the public that the PITC undercounts households and individuals because it cannot possibly count every person experiencing homelessness. Outreach teams reported in 2024 that there were noticeably more people who chose not to participate in the survey compared to previous years. Because participation in the PITC is voluntary and the individuals who chose to participate are not necessarily representative of those who declined to participate, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the data source. Still, the PITC can provide important insights and its findings are used throughout this report.

Several additional sources of information provide context to the local housing and homelessness crisis, as described below:

Source	Description
<b>Coordinated Entry Housing Pool</b>	<p>Local data that describes unhoused households in Whatcom County who are eligible and have sought services through a local, publicly-funded coordinated entry, intake, and referral system.</p> <p>This data is updated through periodic check-ins to determine if households are still eligible and in need of services, but limited because those check-ins are infrequent for some households and may be several months old. As a result, information from the housing pool should be viewed as an approximation; it does not include all households who are eligible for services because not all households have completed intakes.</p>
<b>Homeless Management Information System</b>	<p>Standardized client and program-level data on housing and services currently or previously provided to participating individuals and families at risk of, currently, or formerly experiencing homelessness.</p> <p>This data includes only households who are currently engaged in housing services offered by participating housing partners. It is updated for each household as they enroll in services or change projects.</p>
<b>Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction</b>	<p>Data from 2022-23 school year that reports cumulative incidents of housing instability, including doubled-up households, by district and grade.</p> <p>This data includes students and their families, and uses a less strict definition of homelessness than other sources. Some episodes of housing instability may be</p>

	undetected by school staff and not included in this data set. The true number of students experiencing instability is likely higher.
<b>Point in Time Count</b>	An annual standardized count to identify and survey households staying outdoors, in encampments, emergency shelters, transitional housing, or other places not meant for human habitation.  For unsheltered households in particular, many surveys are not completed because potential participants are either unwilling to participate or because outreach works are unable to locate them. For this reason, the unsheltered count is necessarily lower than the true number of unsheltered households.
<b>US Census Bureau, American Community Survey</b>	An ongoing survey that provides vital information on a yearly basis about our nation and its people. Information from the survey generates data that helps inform how federal funds are distributed each year.  This information provides context around demographics and housing conditions for the community but does not focus specifically on homelessness.

The definition of homelessness may be different depending on the data source. The definition most commonly used by local, state, and federal governments considers someone homeless if:

- They lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence
- Their primary nighttime residence is a public or private place not meant for human habitation
- They are living in a publicly or privately-operated shelter
- They are exiting an institution where they have resided for 90 days or less such as a jail, hospital, foster care, or substance use treatment facility; and they lived in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution
- They are fleeing, or are attempting to flee, domestic violence without another place to go.

*This is the HUD definition of homelessness used for the Coordinated Entry Housing Pool, the Point in Time Count, and the Department of Commerce Housing Division Dashboards. Broader definitions focusing on housing instability are used for the Snapshot of Homelessness Report and Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.*

## Measuring Homelessness

Whatcom County Health and Community Services and the Whatcom Homeless Service Center recognize that the state of homelessness is best understood through the use of multiple data sources. The figures presented are estimates based on the data available, with consideration on each data source's strengths and weaknesses. As this annual report transitions away from a sole focus on the PITC, a full summary of the PITC data from 2020-2024 is included in Appendix A. Additionally, Appendices B and C include January Housing Pool data from 2020-2024 and Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction data from the 2018-2019 school year to the 2022-2023 school year.

### Coordinated Entry Housing Pool

Housing Pool data represents the households and individuals who are eligible for and seeking housing services through Whatcom County's Coordinated Entry (CE) system. Households access CE and apply for the Housing Pool through engagement with outreach staff or by visiting one of several physical access points. In January 2024, a total of 684 households were known to be in the Housing Pool.

The Housing Pool is a strong source of data for unsheltered homelessness because:

- Outreach teams assist in completing intakes for the Housing Pool and are in regular communication with this population year-round.
- It includes individuals who could not be contacted during the PITC survey.
- It is further validated by the number of people who utilize related services. For example, the new shower truck offers services to primarily people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and served a similar number of people.

Although Housing Pool data is not perfect, it is the best source to most accurately describe households experiencing unsheltered homelessness in Whatcom County, particularly with respect to changes from year to year. However, the Housing Pool does have important limitations:

- There are an unknown number of individuals who decline Housing Pool participation or avoid engagement with service providers altogether. It is exceptionally difficult to collect information about these individuals.
- It is inherently difficult to contact and locate people without a fixed address when their priority is on survival and getting their basic needs met.
- It is difficult to know how many people are unsheltered at any specific time because housing stability is often changing for some households who will or will not meet specific definitions of homelessness on different days of the same week. For example, children are sometimes temporarily sheltered or housed with extended family while their parent or guardian is experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Others may stay in shelters periodically and stay unsheltered at other times. The status of each household in the Housing Pool is updated periodically but not each time the household changes location.

When compared to 2023, the 2024 Housing Pool data show that there were about the same number of unsheltered households seeking services compared to last year.

### Point in Time Count Survey

The Point in Time Count (PITC) is a survey of households and individuals experiencing homelessness on a single night in January. In total, 671 households were surveyed for the 2024 PITC.

The PITC is the preferred data source for sheltered homelessness because all participating shelters can provide an accurate number of guests on that night. The 2024 PITC data show that fewer sheltered homeless households were counted on PITC night this year compared to last year. Some people chose not to stay in shelters, and in other cases, programs phased out or changed their model from transitional to permanent housing.

The PITC survey provides insight into the populations experiencing homelessness, particularly sheltered homelessness. Instead of focusing on the “big number,” analyzing the changes in sheltered homelessness is the best use of this survey data. Housing Pool data is useful to understand who is accessing and eligible for referrals to housing programs that participate in Coordinated Entry. Not every household who is experiencing homelessness has applied to the Housing Pool; likewise, not every household who is experiencing homelessness was surveyed for the PITC. Still, looking to this data as a survey can be a good indication of the types of housing and services that is necessary to meet the community housing needs.

### Affordability Challenges in Whatcom County

While the PITC alone is not believed to be the best source of information to estimate the total number of people experiencing homelessness, the sample of households who participated provide valuable insight into the affordability challenges in Whatcom County. Including all households (sheltered and unsheltered) who responded to the PITC survey, seventy percent of households disclosed one or more circumstances that led to their homelessness. The

most commonly reported reasons, from a set of potential contributors, was housing affordability, followed by job loss or unemployment, mental illness, family rejection, physical health or disability, alcohol or substance use, domestic violence, and eviction. “Housing affordability” was not one of the selectable contributors in previous PITCs, so this is the first year that it is being reported; the 2020 and prior PITCs had the option of “eviction or loss of housing,” which has historically been a leading self-reported contributor towards homelessness.

In order for housing to be affordable for everyone, the construction of all types of housing, including supportive, transitional, and emergency shelter, must catch up and keep up with the community need. According to the City of Bellingham’s Planning and Community Development department, a balanced housing market should have vacancy rates at about 5-7% for rentals and 2% for homeowners. However, Bellingham’s rate has been low for many years and is currently around 3% for rentals and 1% for homeowners, which makes it extremely competitive for prospective renters and home purchasers. According to the University of Washington Center for Real Estate Research’s Quarter 1 2024 Washington [Apartment Market Report](#), average Whatcom County rent prices have increased moderately by 2.6% from a year prior. In the first quarter of this year, the average rent price for a one-bedroom apartment is \$1,320 and \$1,605 for a two-bedroom. Housing affordability is widely acknowledged to be a primary driver of homelessness.

Despite only modest gains in 2023, prices remain high and competition for available units is strong. The 5-year estimate of the 2022 American Community Survey tells us that approximately one third of all households in Whatcom County are cost-burdened, meaning that they pay more than 30% or more of their income on housing costs. Among renters, more than half pay 30% or more of their income on rent. Studies have shown that when households pay more than 30% of their income towards housing costs their likelihood of becoming homeless increases. Locally, the homelessness prevention services in Whatcom County are not resourced at the level necessary to meet the demand. Households are routinely denied prevention assistance despite being eligible because there is not enough money to provide services to all the people who qualify.

The majority of people who are homeless in Whatcom County reported that their last permanent residence was in Whatcom County. Of those who participated in the PITC this year, 69% reported that their last permanent address was in Whatcom County. This rate has been consistent with Housing Pool trends over time.

## Coordinated Entry and the Housing Pool

Coordinated Entry (CE) is a person-centered best practice promoting system-wide coordination for a more effective and strategic response to homelessness. Whatcom County has been utilizing CE since 2008. Most local continuous-stay shelters, transitional housing, and all rapid re-housing and permanent supportive housing openings are accessed through the CE system. CE works by using a consistent assessment, prioritization, and referral process to connect people in the Housing Pool to available housing and supportive services provided by a network of partner agencies. In recent years, the system has become overwhelmed by the large number of people seeking services.

Whatcom County is one of 34 small and medium-sized counties that make up [Washington State’s Balance of State Continuum of Care](#). Communities within Continuums of Care are mandated by The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and by extension the Washington State Department of Commerce, to use a centralized assessment and referral system (CE). While housing programs that receive funding from state and federal agencies require participation in CE, programs may choose to participate even if they’re not required. Participation is encouraged, and sometimes required, as a way to ensure that households are prioritized according to community-guided values.



## Overwhelming Demand for Services

Coordinated Entry (CE) facilitates prioritized access to the homelessness crisis response system that is operated by partner agencies in Whatcom County. Eligible households who access CE are added to the Housing Pool, as opposed to a waitlist. Referrals to housing programs are prioritized from the Housing Pool by assessed need, length of time homeless, other factors that indicate increased acuity. Program eligibility is also determined based on data collected during intakes, but eligibility does not guarantee a referral because referrals are limited by the number and type of program openings becoming available. Program openings can only occur when a new project is launched or when a household in an existing housing program no longer requires services.

The majority of people who access the homeless crisis response system increasingly need permanent, supportive interventions (rapid re-housing or permanent supportive housing). A household's needs may also change over time while waiting for services. This may happen because the longer someone remains homeless the more vulnerable they typically become, and also, they may undergo changes in household composition with new people joining or leaving the family that can change which programs match their needs.

Housing intakes and program referrals both reached new highs in 2023. At the end of 2022, 439 households had active applications in the Housing Pool. In 2023, an additional 1,028 households applied for housing assistance, which is more than ever before. The number of referrals to housing programs in 2023 is also highest on record in Whatcom County. The pandemic and the eviction moratorium likely account for the low number of referrals to permanent housing programs in 2021, particularly rapid re-housing.

There are many reasons why someone may not get a referral from the Housing Pool to a housing program. Some common reasons include:

- Lack of program openings creates lengthy delays, especially for households who with fewer of the prioritization factors
- Not meeting criteria for the programs that have openings
- Resolving their homelessness independently without the need for supportive services
- Stopped engaging with CE system administrators
- Moving out of area and losing eligibility
- Dying before services are offered
- Becoming institutionalized for more than 90 days and temporarily losing eligibility

Year	Housing Pool Intakes	Referrals to Rapid Re-Housing and Permanent Supportive Housing Programs
2023	1028	220
2022	1022	142
2021	747	97
2020	654	157

### 530 Households Receive New Support with Transitional and Permanent Housing in 2023

The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is an electronic record system that enables information-gathering and continuous case management of homeless persons and households across agencies in a particular jurisdiction. According to 2023 HMIS data, there were 1,912 households (more than 2,000 individuals) who benefited from a stay at either a one of several emergency shelters or from a publicly-funded motel room.

Over the course of 2023, there were 1,365 households (2,397 individuals) who received new or ongoing permanent and transitional housing support from Whatcom County’s Coordinated Entry housing partners, including eviction prevention. Of the 1,365 households, two in five of those households (530) benefited from new program openings in 2023, while the rest received ongoing services that continued from prior years. Almost 20% of the 1,365 households connected to services received assistance to prevent an eviction.

In June 2023, Whatcom County saw a large, federal eviction prevention package expire. Between October 1, 2022 and June 30, 2023, this funding allowed more than 2,409 unique households to access assistance used to prevent evictions, primarily through payment of past-due rent and one-on-one services to work through the challenge contributing towards late rent payments. This assistance was not recorded in the management database and is not included in the figures above. The expiration of federal funding means that significantly fewer eviction-prevention resources are available to the community now than in recent years.

### Population Highlights: Singles, Seniors, Families with Children, Young Adults, and Students

	Household Type	Housing Pool Jan 2024 (n=328)	Housing Pool Change from Jan 2023	PITC 2024 (n=206)	PITC Change from 2023
Unsheltered	Single Adults	222	+1%	182	-42%
	Seniors (60+)	36	-14%	17	-56%
	Families with Children	81	-16%	15	+114%
	Young Adults (18-24)	23	+10%	13	-43%
	Veterans	16	-11%	10	-60%

	Household Type	Housing Pool Jan 2024 (n=351)	Housing Pool Change from Jan 2023	PITC 2024 (n=465)	PITC Change from 2023
<b>Sheltered</b>	Single Adults	238	-6%	391	-9%
	Seniors (60+)	53	-22%	90	-23%
	Families with Children	102	-1%	61	-24%
	Young Adults (18-24)	23	+10%	30	-3%
	Veterans	27	+42%	29	-17%

Selected information collected from our two primary data sources is shown above. For some population groups, these two sources are very similar, but for others there are large differences. This underscores the need to consider multiple sources and recognize that there is no complete database to provide an accurate count of the number of people or households experiencing homelessness in Whatcom County.

**Single Adults**

Single adults who use shelters are among the easiest to count. Although not all shelter providers regularly engage with the Housing Pool, there was strong participation for the PITC and for that reason the PITC is the preferred data source for sheltered adults. For single adults (and other adults-only households) who typically do not stay in shelters, the PITC is problematic because participation rates are lower than they are for the Housing Pool. The unsheltered population is hard to survey for the PITC because there is greater mobility in this population and they are more difficult to locate. This population, which is not participating with shelter providers, is also more likely to avoid participation with the surveys of the PITC. These reasons explain why the number counted was higher for sheltered adults with the PITC and higher for unsheltered adults with the Housing Pool.

- In January 2024, Housing Pool data show that 222 single adults were experiencing unsheltered homelessness at the time of their last check in. This was about the same as January 2023 and a 16% increase from January 2020.
- 2024 PITC data show that on a single night in January 2024, 391 single adults were counted in shelters. This was a 9% decrease from the 2023 PITC, but a 22% increase from the 2020 PITC.

**Seniors (60+ years old)**

The same reasons contributing to a higher count of sheltered single adults with the PITC and higher count of unsheltered adults with the Housing Pool also apply to senior adults. Some seniors who regularly use shelters have chosen not to engage with the Housing Pool, and some seniors who are unsheltered will engage with the Housing Pool but were not located or declined to participate in the annual PITC.

- In January 2024, Housing Pool data show that 36 senior households were experiencing unsheltered homelessness at the time of their last check in. This was a 14% decrease from January 2023 and a 10% decrease from January 2020.
- 2024 PITC data shows that on a single night in January 2024, 90 senior households were counted in shelters. This was a 23% decrease from the 2023 PITC, but a 66% increase from the 2020 PITC.

**Families with Children**

Unsheltered families with children are one of the most difficult groups to locate because they have many reasons to avoid being found. They are more likely to live in vehicles than adults-only households and less likely to live in large encampments. Many are fleeing abusers who have subjected them to domestic violence. Safe places to park in Bellingham, where there is the greatest outreach activity, became scarcer in 2023. In contrast, the Housing Pool is a

more useful resource for understanding unsheltered families with children because families are generally more proactive in seeking housing assistance and there are more services available for this group. Families benefit from more frequent program openings for both shelters and permanent housing opportunities. This may contribute to the unique phenomena where the delay in housing pool updates could cause a higher number in the Housing Pool tally of sheltered families experiencing homelessness than the PITC, which is usually more accurate than the Housing Pool for sheltered populations. In addition, it is common for families with children to frequently move from shelters to unsheltered locations, and to staying with family/friends more often than other household types.

- In January 2024, Housing Pool data show that 81 families with children were experiencing unsheltered homelessness at the time of their last check in. This was a 16% decrease from January 2023, but 131% increase from 2020.
- 2024 PITC data show that on a single night in January 2024, 61 families with children were counted in shelters. This was a 24% decrease from the 2023 PITC, but a 17% increase from the 2020 PITC.
- Three out of four families with children in the Housing Pool in January 2024 reported that they had experienced domestic violence. Of the families who reported surviving domestic violence, 30% reported fleeing domestic violence at the time they completed an intake for the Housing Pool and the other 70% reported they had experienced domestic violence within the last five years).

### Young Adults (18-24 years old)

Young adults tend to engage with the housing system's shelters and Housing Pool in a similar way as other adults. This group follows the typical pattern of being represented with a higher number on the PITC for shelters and the Housing Pool for unsheltered. Young adults, as a whole, are among the groups most likely to couch-surf or stay informally in the homes of others. These scenarios are not officially included in most definitions of homelessness and make it challenging to estimate the number of young adults who are precariously housed without the formal protections of a lease. The lack of shelter capacity dedicated to this population and responsive to its unique needs may also contribute to the low number of young adults using shelters.

- In January 2024, Housing Pool data show that 23 young adult households were believed to be experiencing unsheltered homelessness and waiting for services. This was a 10% increase from January 2023 and about the same as January 2020.
- 2024 PITC data show that on a single night in January 2024, 30 young adult households were counted in shelters. This was about the same as the 2023 PITC and 7% increase from the 2020 PITC.

### Veterans

Veterans are one of the few groups of households experiencing homelessness who are showing reduced numbers at the national level. Approximately \$800 million of funding from the Veterans Administration at the federal level lead to more than 46,500 homeless veterans being placed into permanent housing in 2023. Data from Whatcom County shows a decline in sheltered veteran homelessness in the PITC and a decline in unsheltered veteran homelessness on the Housing Pool. Although the number of sheltered veterans did increase in the Housing Pool, this is likely following a similar pattern seen with the families with children where faster placements result in a lag for the Housing Pool data.

### Students (Pre-K through grade 12)

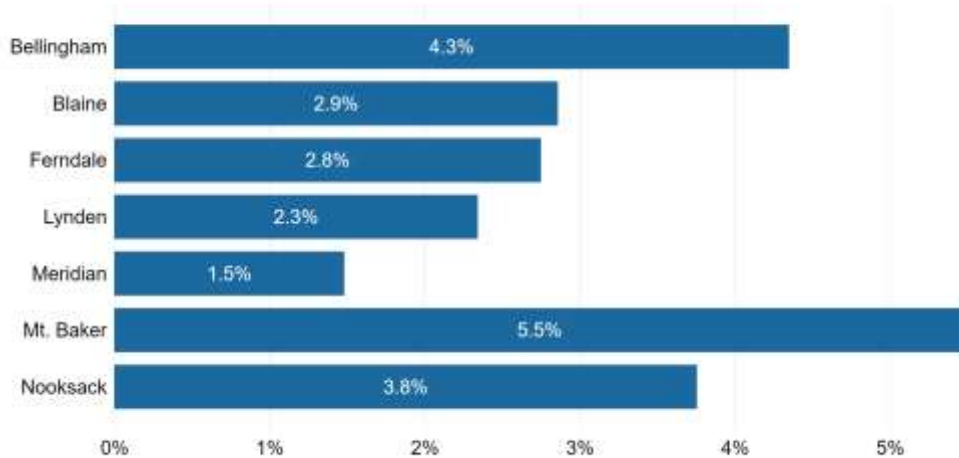
The [McKinney-Vento Act](#) provides federal funding to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) that supports districts to serve their homeless students. The Act defines homelessness more broadly than described earlier in the report, specifically as "individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence."

Additionally, the numbers shown are a cumulative count of students who experience housing instability over the course of the school year – not a snapshot of instability in January as is reflected in this report’s other data sources.

OSPI data shows a gradual increase in student homelessness year-over-year since the 2020-2021 school year. During the 2022-2023 school year, Whatcom County school districts identified 972 students that met the definition of homelessness under the McKinney Vento Act (4% of all students). Notably, there was a significant number of families residing in the Ferndale, Meridian, Lynden, Mt. Baker, and especially the Nooksack Valley school district that were displaced by flooding in late 2021. Notably, some school districts have rates of housing instability that are two or even three times higher than others in Whatcom County, further indicating that the distribution of housing challenges is not evenly dispersed around the county.

### Homelessness among Enrolled Students in Whatcom County

Percent of Pre-K-12 students experiencing homelessness by school district, 2022-2023 School Year



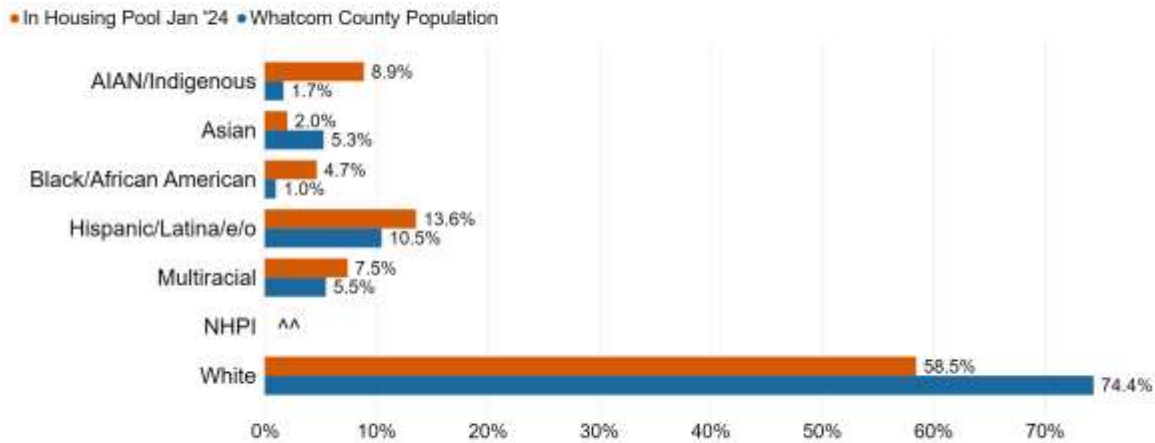
Data Source: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

## Race Inequities

The chart below highlights where racial inequities exist among the households who are accessing Coordinated Entry for housing assistance. The comparison between 2024 Housing Pool and general population data suggests that heads of households who identify as American Indian/Alaska Native/Indigenous, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latina/a/o, or Multiracial qualify for and access the Coordinated Entry system at a higher rate than other race groups. The [National Alliance on Ending Homelessness](#) states that “most minority groups, especially African American and Indigenous people, experience homelessness at higher rates than Whites, largely due to long-standing historical and structural racism.” Poverty, segregation and rental housing discrimination, incarceration, and access to quality health care are effects of structural racism and impact a person’s housing stability.

## Homelessness Racial Inequities in Whatcom County

Percent of householders in the January 2024 housing pool by race & ethnicity, compared to the general population of Whatcom County



AIAN = American Indian/Alaska Native; NHPI = Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

^^ Data not reported due to small number limitations.

Data Source: 2024 Whatcom County Housing Pool; U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 American Community Survey

## Positive Developments and Permanent Solutions

### Affordable Housing

Several affordable housing projects have opened their doors or had their affordability requirements preserved over the past five years. Funding has been committed for future projects that will add capacity in the coming years. Thanks in part to the City of Bellingham, Mercy Housing Northwest, and Opportunity Council's leadership, five newer developments include units reserved for households exiting homelessness. Although there were many units set aside for households who were homeless on entry, more than the required number of units were leased to households exiting homelessness. Many households in the Housing Pool were able to move into these units.

Developments with units reserved for households who are homeless prior to entry:

- Mercy Housing Northwest's Trailview Apartments (16 reserved units in Fall 2022)
- Bellingham Housing Authority's Samish Commons (14 reserved units between 2023-2024)
- Mercy Housing Northwest's Millworks Apartments (15 reserved units in Spring 2024)
- Opportunity Council's Laurel Forest Apartments (10 reserved units in Spring 2024)
- YWCA's Garden Street Apartments (11 reserved units in Early Winter 2024)

Other affordable housing projects over the last five years:

- Kulshan Community Land Trust and Habitat for Humanity's Telegraph Townhomes (12 completed units of the 54-unit project)
- Mercy Housing Northwest's Evergreen Ridge Apartments (preserved affordability for 145 existing units)

### Permanent Supportive Housing

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) is an approach that offers stable, permanent housing in combination with supportive services. It is an evidence-based best practice that supports people with disabilities who have experienced 'chronic homelessness,' meaning they have been homeless for more than a year. Local human service

agencies contribute about 350 units of affordable, supportive housing to the inventory of housing for some of the most vulnerable people living in Whatcom County. These units are sometimes clustered in apartment buildings, and other times use the “scattered site” approach to promote community integration throughout the county. Recent years have seen newly developed affordable housing developments set aside a number of units for households exiting homelessness (as shown above) and also provide supportive services to help households achieve stability in their new units.

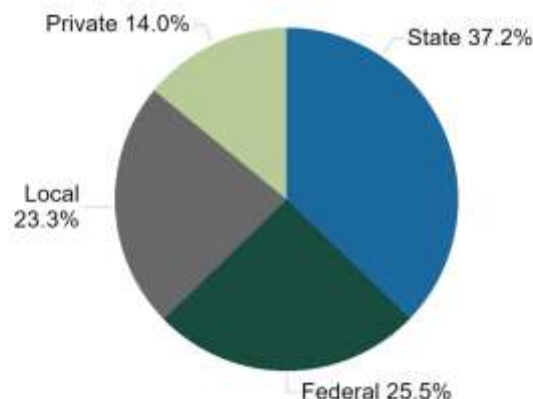
## How Housing Programs are Funded

Organizations that provide homeless housing and services to households at risk of or experiencing homelessness can receive funding from local, state, federal, and private sources. To receive public funding for specific programs, agencies typically apply through a public bidding process. The Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) Continuum of Care (CoC) program provides funding to government agencies and nonprofits to address homelessness. In Whatcom County, Health and Community Services is the lead agency that receives and distributes state funding via the Department of Commerce (Commerce). Partner agencies are also supported by CoC grants when they apply for funds on behalf of the Balance of State CoC, which is made up of 34 small and medium-sized counties in Washington State. There are also opportunities for programs to receive CoC funding directly from Commerce. Other local funding sources collected through document recording fees, sales and use taxes, and property taxes are used to support homeless housing programs in Whatcom County.

Homeless housing programs are largely supported by public funding that is exclusively set aside for responding to homelessness. In addition, many nonprofits also rely on support from the City of Bellingham, private donations, and philanthropic organizations to fill gaps and expand programming. Significant rental assistance resources for low- and moderate-income households are also provided by the Bellingham/Whatcom County Housing Authority, and the City of Bellingham further contributes to rental assistance and housing services. According to the State Fiscal Year 2023 Annual County Expenditure Report, approximately \$25.3 million was spent operating homeless housing programs in Whatcom County, with state and federal sources contributing the most.

The chart below shows the origin of funding sources. Federal funds are generally provided by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, state funds are granted through the Washington State Department of Commerce, local funds are the result of sales tax, document recording fees, and property taxes collected by cities and the county, and private contributions are provided either by individual donors or charitable foundations.

Funding Sources for Homeless Programs in Whatcom County, SFY 2023 (7/1/2022-6/30/2023)



## Conclusion

The data sources used in this report have unique strengths and limitations. Combined, they offer a more complete, though imperfect picture of the county's housing needs. The Point in Time Count survey offers a comprehensive snapshot that quantifies households and individuals who were utilizing emergency shelters in January 2024. Among the most important findings from these surveys is that a comparison of the 2024 numbers (465 households) to numbers reported in 2023 shows a decrease of 11% for emergency shelter use. Emergency shelters provide basic and essential services for guests, and because they offer safety and stability they can be used as a platform for engaging with other resources. Because of this, it is concerning to see a decrease in the number of shelter beds used while simultaneously seeing the persistence of unsheltered homelessness. There is no evidence of a decreasing need for shelter beds, and this will be an important area of focus as the continuum of housing services seeks to grow in response to corresponding growth in demand for services and facilities. The provision of shelter beds is not a solution to homelessness, but shelter stays can be important steps towards achieving housing stability and they offer critical services and personal safety to reduce the harms of homelessness. Unsheltered homelessness is more harmful than sheltered homelessness and it persists when either shelter capacity is reached or when shelters are unable to meet the service needs of people experiencing homelessness.

This report also uses data taken from the Housing Pool report, which also has strengths and limitations. This information source cannot precisely report how many households or individuals were unsheltered in January 2024, but it can provide the number of known households who were likely to be unsheltered and seeking services at the time. Comparing the same data source from a year prior, the 2024 report indicates that there was a decrease of 1% in the number of unsheltered households who were seeking services, which is within a reasonable margin of error. The large number of service-seeking households who completed intakes for the Housing Pool but were still unsheltered demonstrates a growing challenge for this community. Further work must be undertaken to better respond to the needs of this growing demographic. The persistence of unsheltered homelessness suggests two important actions are necessary: the creation of new shelter spaces that offer meaningful benefit to people who would otherwise be unsheltered, and the development of permanent housing units that can make long term stability possible for families and individuals who are enduring the many hardships of homelessness.

The homelessness crisis response system and accompanying services provided in Whatcom County are making a meaningful difference in the community, and immeasurable difference for those who have been assisted to achieve housing stability. Without significant effort of many stakeholders the rate of homelessness in Whatcom County would be substantially higher. However, the services offered are not meeting the demand, and further investment is needed to expand services that will meet the needs of Whatcom County's unhoused community. Most urgent is the creation of new service-enhanced shelter beds and additional permanent housing units that offer people who have experienced homelessness the support they need to achieve lasting stability.

## How to Get Involved

The **Whatcom County Coalition to End Homelessness** will work in 2024 and 2025 to support a five-year update to the local strategic plan to end homelessness in Whatcom County. To learn more about the coalition, contact the Whatcom Homeless Service Center at 360-734-5121 x1131.

Major policy and funding decisions are made with input from the **Whatcom County Housing Advisory Committee**. To learn more about the committee, apply to become a member, or attend one of the open public meetings, visit <https://www.whatcomcounty.us/639/Housing-Advisory-Committee-of-Whatcom-Co>. Housing service providers can maximize their impact with help from interested community members. To learn more about **volunteer opportunities** visit [whatcomvolunteer.org](http://whatcomvolunteer.org).

# Appendix A: Whatcom County Point in Time Count Survey Data 2020-2024

The figures below represent the households who were surveyed for the Point in Time Count. This data does not depict everyone that is experiencing homelessness in Whatcom County.

\*Ethnicity was separate until the 2024 PIT. Head of households that indicated 'Hispanic' and another race in 2024 was counted as the other race in the race section and below in the ethnicity section. In 2024, head of households could choose 'Hispanic' as a race. If only 'Hispanic' was indicated in 2024, they are in the race section as Missing Data and counted in the Ethnicity section as 'Hispanic.'

\*\*Calculations do not include households in transitional housing because households in transitional housing cannot be chronically homeless

\*\*\*Percentage calculated using the number of people that answered the question

Demographic	% of Households Counted				
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>Last Permanent Housing***</b>					
Last Permanent Housing in Whatcom County	64%				69%
Last Permanent Housing Outside of Whatcom County	36%				31%
<b>Head of Household Gender</b>					
Man (Boy, if child)	47%	52%	55%	58%	51%
Woman (Girl, if child)	41%	42%	42%	40%	38%
Culturally Specific Identity e.g. Two-Spirit					0%
Gender Nonconforming	0%	0%			
Non-Binary			<11	<11	<11
Questioning			0%	<11	0%
Transgender	<11	<11	<11	0%	<11
Multiple Gender Selections			<11	<11	<11
Missing Data	12%	6%	2%	1%	1%
<b>Head of Household Sexual Orientation</b>					
Heterosexual (18+ only)					53%
Bisexual (18+ only)					2%
Gay (18+ only)					<11
Questioning Sexual Orientation/Unsure (18+ only)					<11
A Sexual Orientation Not Listed (18+ only)					2%
Missing Data					42%
<b>Head of Household Race/Ethnicity*</b>					
American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous	7%	8%	7%	10%	10%
Asian or Asian American	<11	<11	<11	<11	2%
Black, African American, or African	3%	5%	4%	4%	5%
Middle Eastern or North African					<11
Missing Data	25%	19%	14%	11%	13%
Multi-Racial	3%	3%	5%	4%	4%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	<11	<11	<11	<11	<11
White	61%	62%	68%	69%	65%
<b>Head of Household Ethnicity*</b>					
Hispanic/Latina/e/o	8%	7%	9%	10%	12%
<b>Household Type</b>					
Families with Children	12%	15%	13%	10%	11%
Young Adults (18-24)	7%	8%	7%	6%	6%
Unaccompanied Minors	<11	<11	<11	<11	<11
Single Adults	84%	81%	84%	88%	85%

2+ Adults, No Children	5%	3%	3%	1%	3%
Seniors 60+	13%	15%	19%	18%	16%
Veterans	7%	6%	7%	7%	6%
<b>Sheltered/Unsheltered Status</b>					
Sheltered	68%	69%	75%	61%	69%
Emergency Shelter	81%	82%	89%	84%	95%
Transitional Housing	19%	18%	11%	25%	5%
Unsheltered	32%	31%	25%	39%	31%
Slept in Abandoned Building	<11	<11	<11	<11	2%
Slept Outdoors (street, tent, etc.)	20%	59%	15%	74%	62%
Slept in RV/Boat w/o Amenities	2%	15%	3%	12%	11%
Slept in Vehicle	9%	25%	6%	13%	25%
City/Town Where Staying was Bellingham	89%		86%	91%	82%
City/Town Where Staying was Outside Bellingham	11%		14%	9%	18%
<b>Domestic Violence</b>					
Fleeing Domestic Violence					15%
<b>Chronic Homelessness**</b>					
Chronically Homeless Families with Children					2%
2+ Chronically Homeless Adults, No Children					2%
Chronically Homeless Single Adults					41%
<b>Re-entry***</b>					
Last 6 Months - Jail/Prison	10%				11%
Last 6 Months - Juvenile Detention	<11				0%
Last 6 Months - Inpatient Treatment	3%				6%
Last 6 Months - Psychiatric Hospital	<11				4%
Last 6 Months - Any Re-Entry	13%				11%
<b>Household Reasons for Homelessness***</b>					
Housing Affordability					47%
(2020 only) Eviction/Loss of Housing	39%				
Job Loss/Unemployment	25%				37%
Mental Illness	30%				28%
Family Rejection/Kicked Out	13%				24%
Physical Health/Disability	27%				22%
Alcohol/Substance Use	20%				22%
Domestic Violence	23%				20%
Eviction					19%
Lack of Job Training/Unable to Work	11%				14%
Abuse/Neglect	8%				10%
Discharged from Criminal/Juvenile Justice System	5%				7%
Discharged from Hospital or Medical Facility	5%				7%
Illness	7%				6%
Guardian Mental Health/Substance Use	1%				4%
Medical Costs	3%				3%
Lack of Childcare	2%				2%
Aged Out of Foster Care					2%
<b>Household Income***</b>					
No Income	19%				43%
Earned Income	13%				11%
Unemployment Income	1%				1%
SSI/SSDI	39%				30%
TANF	13%				6%
General Assistance					9%
Social Security Retirement					2%
Private Pension					1%

Veterans Administration	3%				0%
Private Disability Compensation					0%
Workers Compensation					0%
Temporary Disability	8%				
Child Support	2%				2%
Spousal Support					0%
Relatives/Friends	3%				
Panhandling	3%				
Medicare/Medicaid	27%				
Other Income					2%
<b>Head of Household Disabilities and Health Conditions***</b>					
Substance Use Disorder	17%				29%
Physical Disability	26%				39%
Developmental Disability	8%				18%
Mental Health Condition	37%				49%
Chronic Health Condition	19%				33%

## Appendix B: Whatcom County Coordinated Entry Housing Pool Data 2020-2024 (January)

The figures below represent the households who were eligible for a housing program referral through the Coordinated Entry System. This data does not depict everyone that is experiencing homelessness in Whatcom County.

\*Ethnicity was separate until October 2023. Anyone who selected 'Hispanic' in either the race or ethnicity categories in 2023 and 2024 were placed in the 'Hispanic' race category.

Demographic	% of Households in Pool				
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>Last Permanent Housing</b>					
In Whatcom County	59%	61%	65%	55%	61%
Outside of Whatcom County	30%	23%	18%	11%	12%
<b>Head of Household Gender</b>					
Man	48%	49%	43%	46%	48%
Woman	51%	51%	56%	53%	51%
Transgender	<11	<11	<11	<11	0%
Gender Nonconforming	0%	<11	<11		
Non-Binary				0%	<11
More than One Gender				0%	<11
Other				<11	<11
<b>Head of Household Race*</b>					
American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous	8%	8%	6%	8%	9%
Asian or Asian American	<11	<11	<11	2%	2%
Black, African American, or African	5%	5%	4%	5%	5%
Hispanic/Latina/e/o				14%	14%
Middle Eastern or North African					<11
Multi-Racial	3%	4%	6%	6%	7%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	<11	<11	<11	<11	<11
White	68%	70%	62%	61%	58%
<b>Head of Household Ethnicity*</b>					
Hispanic/Latina/e/o	10%	9%	14%	14%	12%
<b>Household Type</b>					
Families with Children	11%	21%	29%	29%	27%
Young Adults (18-24)	9%	10%	13%	6%	7%
Single Adults	85%	74%	66%	68%	68%
2+ Adults, No Children	3%	5%	5%	4%	5%
Seniors 60+	16%	15%	8%	16%	13%
Veterans	8%	10%	6%	5%	6%
<b>Sheltered/Unsheltered Status at Last CE Check-in</b>					
Sheltered	39%	36%	45%	45%	50%
Unsheltered	52%	46%	50%	47%	48%
<b>Domestic Violence</b>					
Fleeing Domestic Violence	27%	23%	24%	19%	22%
Experienced Domestic Violence in last 5 Years	29%	34%	34%	42%	38%

<b>Chronic Homelessness</b>					
Chronically Homeless	47%		39%	43%	40%
<b>Head of Household Disabilities and Health Conditions</b>					
Developmental Disability	35%	32%	39%	43%	46%
Mental Health Condition	74%	79%	81%	74%	75%
Chronic Health Condition	52%	56%	48%	53%	51%
Medical Fragility	26%	23%	26%	30%	30%
Alcohol Issue	9%	9%	7%	8%	8%
Drug Issue	10%	11%	12%	13%	15%
<b>Intervention Needed</b>					
Rapid Re-housing	37%	41%	34%	40%	36%
Permanent Supportive Housing	54%	50%	55%	50%	49%
Deposit Assistance	7%	5%	7%	6%	4%

## Appendix C: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction Homeless Student Data

*OSPI defines homelessness more broadly than HUD, specifically as "individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence."*

Public School District	% Homeless Students				
	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Bellingham	4%	3%	3%	3%	4%
Blaine	2%	2%	2%	2%	3%
Ferndale	2%	2%	2%	2%	3%
Intergenerational High School					6%
Lynden	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%
Meridian	2%	3%	2%	2%	1%
Mt. Baker	4%	5%	6%	5%	5%
Nooksack Valley	3%	4%	3%	12%	4%
All Whatcom County Students	3%	3%	3%	3%	4%