

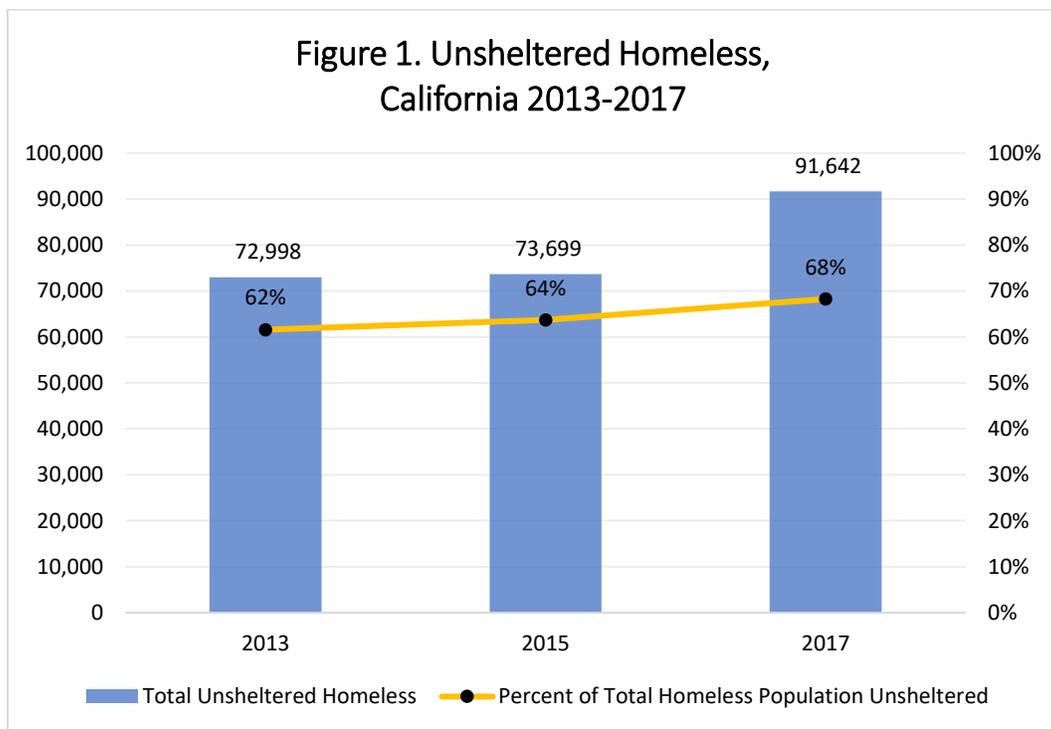


## Criminal Justice System Involvement and Mental Illness among Unsheltered Homeless in California

November 2018

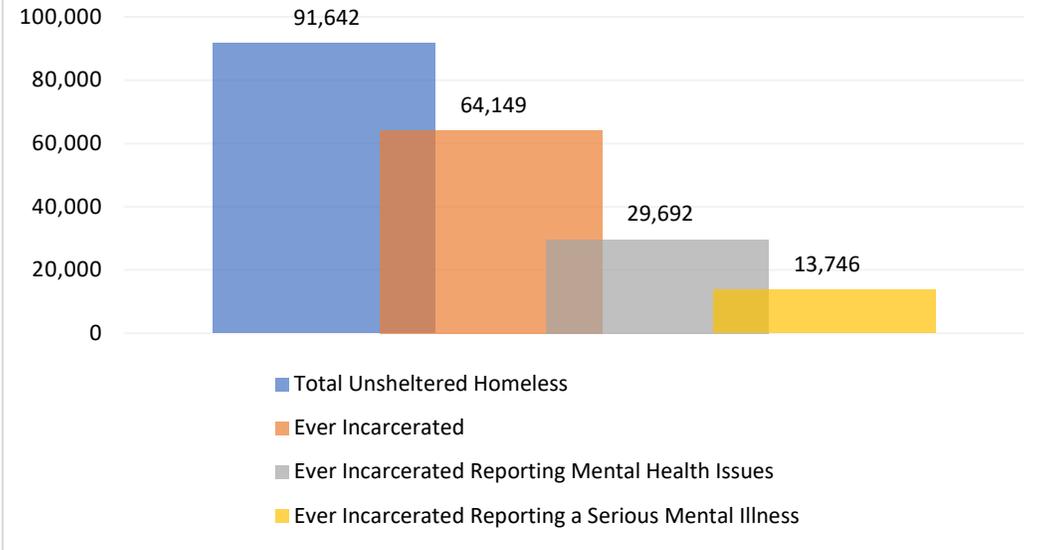
### Estimated Criminal Justice System Involvement and Mental Illness among the Unsheltered Homeless in California, 2017

	Estimate	Percent of Unsheltered Homeless Population
<b>Ever Incarcerated</b>	64,149	70%
<b>Recently Incarcerated</b>	25,660	28%
<b>Presently Justice Involved</b>	11,913	13%
<b>Ever Incarcerated Reporting Mental Health Issues</b>	29,692	32%
<b>Ever Incarcerated Reporting a Serious Mental Illness</b>	13,746	15%



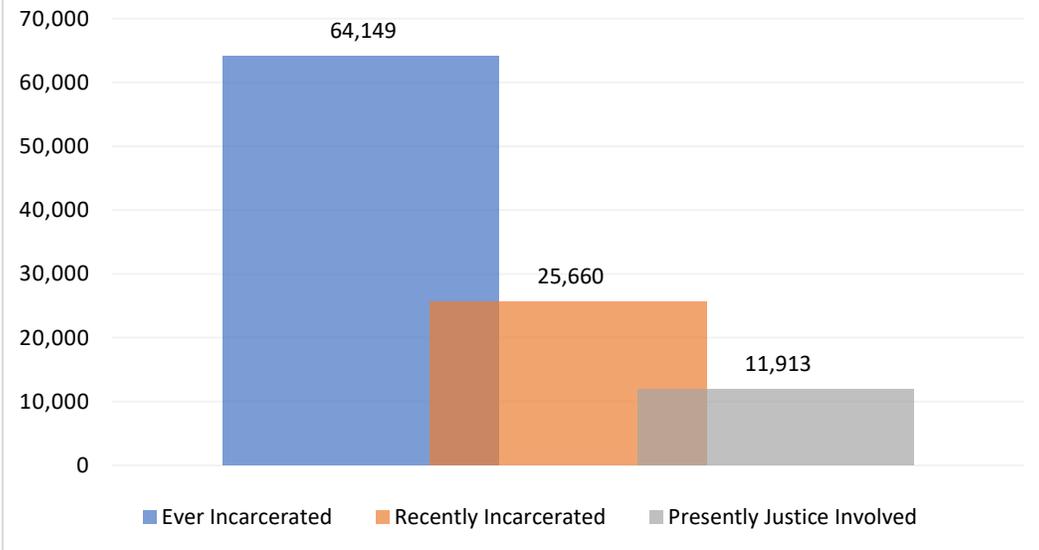
Source: U.S. HUD PIT data from all California CoCs

**Figure 2. Estimated Number of Individuals with a History of Incarceration and Reported Mental Illness, California 2017**



Source: Author calculations from U.S. HUD California PIT data, San Diego WeAllCount Annual Point-in-Time Count (2018), Los Angeles County Point-in-Time Count (2018), and Orange County CoC Homelessness Count & Survey Report (2017)

**Figure 3. Estimated Number of Individuals with Criminal Justice System Involvement, California 2017**



Source: Author calculations from U.S. HUD California PIT data, San Diego WeAllCount Annual Point-in-Time Count (2018), Los Angeles County Point-in-Time Count (2018), and Orange County CoC Homelessness Count & Survey Report (2017)

## Overview

It is often assumed that a significant segment of the unsheltered homeless population in California has been involved with the criminal justice system in some way and/or is mentally ill. There are no statewide data to test these assumptions. This report estimates the number of unsheltered homeless individuals who have histories criminal justice system involvement and who report that they have mental health issues or illness. We base these estimates on Point-in-Time homelessness survey results from the three largest counties -- San Diego, Orange, and Los Angeles -- from 2017 and 2018.

## Findings

We derive the following six findings:

- **The number of unsheltered homeless has increased by 26%.** The number of unsheltered homeless individuals increased from 72,998 people in 2013 to about 91,642 people in 2017.
- **70% of unsheltered homeless report a history of incarceration.** We estimate that about 64,149 unsheltered individuals have ever been incarcerated.
- **28% of unsheltered homeless individuals report having recently been released from jail or prison.** We estimate that 25,660 unsheltered individuals are recently justice involved.
- **13% of unsheltered homeless individuals report being presently under community supervision.** We estimate that 11,913 unsheltered homeless individuals are presently on either probation or parole.
- **32% of unsheltered homeless individuals report *both* having “mental health issues” and being ever incarcerated.** We estimate that about 29,692 individuals have been previously incarcerated at some point and currently report having mental health issues.
- **15% of unsheltered homeless individuals report *both* a “serious mental illness” and being ever incarcerated.** We estimate that about 13,746 individuals have both been previously incarcerated at some point in their lives and report having a serious mental illness.

## Data & Methodology

### Unsheltered Homelessness Data for California, 2013-2017

For this report we relied on data pertaining to the size of the unsheltered<sup>1</sup> homeless population across all of California during the year 2013, 2015, and 2017. Specifically, we obtained Point-in-Time (PIT) survey counts for the number of unsheltered homeless living within the geographic boundaries of California's 43 Continuums of Care (CoCs). Every CoC is mandated to undertake an effort to enumerate all people experiencing homelessness in their jurisdiction within a twenty-four-hour period during the last ten days of January each year. This effort, known as the Homeless PIT Count, is congressionally-mandated for all communities that receive HUD funding for homeless programs. The data is publicly available online.<sup>2</sup> The methodologies used by each respective CoC for their PIT count follows the HUD guidelines.<sup>3</sup> From this data we derive our variable "total unsheltered homeless."

### County Unsheltered Homelessness Survey Results

In addition to the Homeless PIT Count that each CoC conducts, some counties survey the unsheltered homeless population to learn about their specific needs. This brief uses the results from the unsheltered surveys in San Diego, Los Angeles, and Orange counties to estimate some key subpopulations of the homeless, assuming that the rates measured in these large counties are reasonably representative of the state.

- ***Ever Incarcerated.*** In San Diego (2018) 3,493 of unsheltered individuals surveyed reported having ever been to "juvenile hall, jail, or prison." In other words, approximately 70% of the unsheltered in San Diego have been incarcerated at some point in their lives.<sup>4</sup> We use this rate to estimate the number of ever incarcerated individuals statewide.
- ***Recently Incarcerated.*** Orange county asks a more specific question about incarceration, whether it has occurred within the last 12 months. A total of 729 unsheltered homeless adults or about 28% of surveyed reported being released from jail or prison in the last 12 months. We use this to estimate the total number of recently incarcerated individuals statewide.
- ***Presently Justice Involved.*** In San Diego (2018) 643 individuals surveyed reported being on probation. Additionally, 132 people surveyed reported being on parole. Taken together, this represents 13% of unsheltered survey respondents in San Diego. We use this rate to estimate the statewide number of individuals presently under community supervision.

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<sup>1</sup> According to HUD an unsheltered homeless person resides in a place not meant for human habitation, such as a car, park, sidewalk, abandoned building, or the street.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/3031/pit-and-hic-data-since-2007/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/PIT-Count-Methodology-Guide.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> San Diego WeAllCount Annual Point-in-Time Count, 2018

- ***Ever Incarcerated and Reporting a Mental Health Issue.*** In the San Diego WeAllCount 2018 survey about 327 or 32.4% of the unsheltered people surveyed reported having ever been to juvenile hall, jail, or prison, in addition to also reporting “mental health issues.”<sup>5</sup> We use this rate to estimate the number of individuals that report both ever being incarcerated and having mental health issues.
- ***Ever Incarcerated and Reporting a Serious Mental Illness.*** In 2017 Orange County reported that 474 of the unsheltered homeless people surveyed or 12% reported having a serious mental illness.<sup>6</sup> In 2018 Los Angeles County had roughly 11,395 unsheltered individuals who reported having a serious mental illness, amounting to 28% of their unsheltered homeless population.<sup>7</sup> Averaging these two statistics we estimate that 20% of the population has serious mental illness.

Neither county reported what share of their unsheltered population have both a history of incarceration and a serious mental illness. We can calculate that rate easily by multiplying the rate of incarceration history by the rate of mental illness, but only if the rate of mental illness were the same for both those homeless with and without incarceration histories (i.e., if these two measures were uncorrelated). However, data from San Diego suggests that individuals with a history of incarceration have a higher incidence of mental health issues. We can use this San Diego data to adjust the uncorrelated estimate (20% times 70 %, or 14%) for the latent correlation. The adjusted estimate is 8% higher than the uncorrelated amount, so the resulting estimate of the population with both incarceration history and serious mental illness is approximately 15% of the unsheltered population. We use this rate (15%) to estimate the number of individuals reporting both ever being incarcerated and having a serious mental illness.

## Limitations

The purpose of this report is to provide a starting point for discussions about targeted approaches to better serve unsheltered homeless individuals with some form of criminal justice system involvement and mental illness. The estimates presented in this report are likely to be conservative approximations because of a few limitations. These limitations are as follow:

- **There are differing methodologies and definitions used in homeless surveys.** Surveys ask about the presence of mental illness using different questions, which creates problems with direct comparisons between the county reports. “Serious mental illness” is the most restrictive term for mental illness. “Mental health issues” is not commonly defined but is likely to be a less restrictive term, which includes more people than the term “serious mental illness.”

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<sup>5</sup> This figure is not available publicly. CalHPS obtained this figure from direct correspondence with the San Diego Regional Taskforce on Homelessness.

<sup>6</sup> Orange County CoC Homelessness Count & Survey Report, 2017

<sup>7</sup> Los Angeles County Point-in-Time Count, 2018

- **Mental illness is self-reported in surveys.** Mental illness is likely *under-reported* in homeless surveys for two reasons. First, the stigma associated with mental health means that people may not report their illness if questioned by a stranger. Second, homeless individuals may not be fully aware of their mental health status and may not have an official diagnosis.
- **Criminal records are self-reported in surveys.** Surveys of the homeless population likely *underestimate* the actual rate of past or present involvement with the criminal justice system. Criminal records are stigmatizing, and homeless individuals live precarious, vulnerable lives. Many people may inaccurately report their criminal justice system involvement history or simply refuse to answer questions on the topic entirely.

## About the Authors

- **Konrad Franco** is a Researcher with CalHPS. He is currently pursuing a PhD in Sociology with an emphasis in Statistics at the University of California, Davis.
- **Dr. David Maxwell-Jolly** is a Senior Advisor with CalHPS. He has over thirty years of experience with the California state government and has held a series of senior executive positions. He was the former Chief Deputy Executive Director at Covered California, Undersecretary and Deputy Secretary at the Health and Human Services Agency, and Director of the Department of Health Care Services.
- **David Panush** is the President of CalHPS. He has over thirty-five years of experience in the California State Legislature, serving as a policy and fiscal advisor to five state senate leaders, and as External Affairs Director for Covered California.

## About the Reentry Health Policy Project

This brief is part of the Reentry Health Policy Project, which seeks to identify state and county level policies and practices that impede the delivery of effective health and behavioral health care services for formerly incarcerated individuals who are medically fragile (MF) and living with serious mental illness (SMI), as they return to the community. The report also offers specific recommendations and best practices for addressing these barriers. The Reentry Health Policy Project was managed by California Health Policy Strategies LLC with support provided by the California Health Care Foundation.

## About California Health Policy Strategies (CalHPS), L.L.C.

- CalHPS is a mission-driven health policy consulting group based in Sacramento. For more information, visit [www.calhps.com](http://www.calhps.com).
- The research undertaken for this policy brief was funded by the California Health Care Foundation as part of the Reentry Health Policy Project.