



**Linked Together: A Five-Year Plan to Address
Homelessness in Bucks County (2024-2029)**

Prepared October 2024

Executive Summary

No one in Bucks County should be homeless. On any given night, however, hundreds of individuals and families in our community lack a home they can call their own. That sobering figure drives this strategic plan.

The plan aims to strengthen, expand and focus the work of the dozens of public, nonprofit and religious organizations that are working to prevent and end homelessness in Bucks County. It is the product of extensive input from civic leaders, program directors, frontline staff and people with lived experience of homelessness. Their guidance, combined with a detailed analysis of system data, helped identify the strengths and needs of the current system.

The past 5 years have presented significant challenges and there is much to be proud of in the Housing Link response. With the onset of the COVID pandemic, our community used grant dollars to invest significantly in additional services for the most vulnerable such as the creation of a street medicine program, shared housing program, drop-in center, and protocols to temporarily increase non-congregate sheltering. It disbursed tens of millions of dollars in funding and other support to people at imminent risk of homelessness or who have just become homeless to help them stabilize their housing situation. Unfortunately, the funding for such programs has expired or will be expiring over the next several years and thoughtful action is needed to maintain a robust and comprehensive homeless response system.

Another bright spot from the past several years is the creation of the Bucks Landlord Incentive Program (BLIP). Our County has a very competitive and expensive rental market. That can make it particularly challenging to persuade landlords to accept tenants with housing subsidies and take on the challenges of navigating a government program. The Landlord Incentive Program makes it easier for landlords to participate, providing a variety of financial incentives and supports both for those who join the program and those who recruit others. It is a model program, employing strategies that are recognized as best practices nationally. Since launch, 60 new landlords have begun working with the Housing Link.

Alongside these and other successes, we recognize that we have some big challenges to address as well. More people come into the homeless system of care each year than leave, making homelessness a growing community concern. When someone becomes homeless, it can take a year-and-a-half or more, for them to become permanently housed again.¹ We do not have nearly enough housing, especially housing with the kinds of services required by people with extensive experiences of homelessness and acute needs, such as serious mental illness, substance use disorder, and significant health challenges. While our case workers and other service providers

“We want to provide for ourselves, better ourselves, to sustain ourselves - we’ve come into this unfortunate situation, and we are optimistic that with a little bit of help we can get through it. But it’s disheartening when there are no options. If we had any other options, we wouldn’t be here. It’s tough.”

-Participant in focus group for people with lived experience of homelessness

¹ See the “Length of Time Homeless” discussion at p. 63 below.

do their best to meet people's needs, and to meet people where they are, more support is needed.

Some of the issues that surfaced go well beyond the homelessness response system. It is clear, for example, that systemic and structural factors make many people of color in our community particularly vulnerable to homelessness. As a result, people of color are overrepresented in the homelessness response system. That system, alone, cannot change those structural factors. That's a challenge that we as a community – and, indeed, a society – must address collectively.

But we do have some control over how the system serves the people who encounter it. There, too, we have challenges to address. During listening sessions, people of color reported that they often felt disrespected and mistreated in their interactions both inside and outside the homeless system of care. They note that too few of the staff and leadership at provider agencies are people of color. The data shows that people of color, and especially families of color, are exiting the system at lower rates than people or households identifying as white. Additionally, based on consumer feedback, language access remains an issue in some parts of the system for those with limited English proficiency.

In view of these and other challenges detailed below, we have crafted a set of six goals to guide the work of the homelessness response system over the next five years. More details about these goals, and specific strategies and action steps to implement them may be found in the pages that follow.

Implementation of this plan, including all funding decisions and program standards, will be carried out in full compliance with applicable federal and state statutes, regulations, and Presidential Executive Orders, as interpreted through current HUD and other federal program requirements.

Homelessness is a problem that **we can** solve. The hard work and dedication of the staff and volunteers at our many community partners is critical, but so is the commitment and support of the entire Bucks County Community. It is our sincere hope that this report will serve as a galvanizing call to the community to come together to achieve our vision that homelessness in Bucks County be rare, brief, and nonrecurring.

-Bucks County Housing Link Strategic Planning Committee

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<p>Permanent housing is the ultimate goal in ending homelessness. It brings security and safety, allowing individuals and families to focus their efforts on maintaining a job, getting their kids to school or childcare, and improving or preserving their health and well-being. Some people experiencing homelessness would benefit from permanent housing coupled with supportive services, such as independent living skills, job training, and/or health and behavioral health services. Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) allows people with higher needs to achieve housing stability and long-term self-sufficiency. Rapid Rehousing (RRH) helps people for up to 2 years with housing vouchers and supportive services that can enable them to become independent and stably housed by the end of the program. Transitional Housing (TH) programs use master leasing or leases in the person’s own name while providing more intensive case management and supports to move towards self-sufficiency and permanent housing.</p>	
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Mission, Vision & Guiding Principles

Strategic Plan Vision

We envision a community where homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring.

Strategic Plan Mission

We will engage the community to achieve this mission by maintaining a coordinated, comprehensive, and compassionate system of care for our neighbors facing homelessness.

Guiding Principles

The following Guiding Principles serve as the foundation for achieving the mission, vision, and goals outlined in this Strategic Plan:

- *Resolving homelessness requires the entire Bucks County community to invest in the effort.* No one person or organization can resolve homelessness. Working together, however, individuals, nonprofits, faith-based institutions, service organizations, businesses and local governments can make a real difference. Homelessness affects everyone in our community, and it is our collective responsibility to address it.
- *Center the perspectives of those most impacted.* People with lived experience should be valued in every level of decision-making.
- *Treat people with dignity and respect.* Everyone in the system of care should recognize the impact of trauma on individuals and provide compassionate, collaborative care that is respectful of their dignity and right to self-determination.
- *Promote a coordinated community of care.* The members and partners of Bucks County Housing Link should work together, not in silos, to address homelessness.

Strategic Plan Goals and Strategies

Goal A: Center the Voices of People with Lived Experience of Homelessness



- Strategy A.1: Create pathways to achieve improved outcomes, foster trust and share decision-making power to improve access and the provision of services
- Strategy A.2: Establish practices to drive progress on identifying and modifying policies that contribute to poor outcomes in the system

Goal B: Stop Homelessness Before It Begins



- Strategy B.1: Target and improve prevention and diversion services for vulnerable populations
- Strategy B.2: Improve coordination to ensure people are not discharged into homelessness

GOAL C: Increase Access to Shelter & Homeless Crisis Response Services



- Strategy C.1: Strengthen outreach to more effectively and efficiently serve individuals and households living unhoused
- Strategy C.2: Expand access to safe, low-barrier temporary housing options to make shelter available to all who need it
- Strategy C.3: Expand services to support exits from homelessness and maintain housing stability

GOAL D: Increase Access to Permanent, Affordable, Low-Barrier Housing



- Strategy D.1: Continue to prioritize the development of low-barrier permanent supportive housing (PSH) units
- Strategy D.2: Expand rapid rehousing (RRH) units as needed
- Strategy D.3: Partner with housing providers to lower barriers to housing
- Strategy D.4: Advocate for policies and practices that promote the development of more dedicated affordable housing

GOAL E: Partner Across Bucks County to Build Collective Solutions



- Strategy E.1: Establish shared practices, policies, and procedures across the system of care
- Strategy E.2: Strengthen collaboration and coordination among key county agencies
- Strategy E.3: Improve engagement with local municipalities

Goal F: Strengthen Data Systems to Promote Continuous Improvement



- Strategy F.1: Improve systems and practices to ensure data quality
- Strategy F.2: Use available system performance data to enhance system decision-making

About the Strategic Plan

The decision to develop a strategic plan to prevent and reduce homelessness was collectively made by Bucks County and the Housing Link Continuum of Care. On behalf of the CoC, Bucks County contracted with Homebase — a national technical assistance provider, helping communities prevent and reduce homelessness — to conduct a needs assessment and create a strategic plan to address homelessness for the region.

Why a Strategic Plan

Strategic planning is an important process that builds consensus on goals, facilitates group prioritization of key actions, fosters creative and collaborative problem-solving, provides a platform to consider resource needs and opportunities, and creates a concrete plan for action.

The purpose of developing a strategic plan was to identify specific key changes needed to move the needle on homelessness in Bucks County over the next five years and to build a roadmap for implementing those changes. This plan also includes recommendations designed to improve the homeless system of care and to provide opportunities to build upon current efforts to better meet the needs of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Key goals of the planning process in Bucks County were to:

- **Establish achievable common goals that align with state and federal strategic plans relating to homelessness.**
- **Build and enhance partnerships.**
- **Center the voices of people with lived experience of homelessness.**
- **Guide all parties in a common direction, and**
- **Develop overall and annual metrics to track progress.**

This strategic plan was drafted in 2023-2024, following in depth research, community meetings and listening sessions, focus groups, interviews, and a survey to identify and analyze the needs, perceptions, resources, barriers, and ideas relating to responding to homelessness throughout Bucks County. A Strategic Plan Committee comprised of Bucks County Housing Link leadership and local stakeholders from the homeless system of care was established. Interviews were conducted and surveys and focus groups were completed with key stakeholders and with people with lived experience of homelessness.

Throughout the research and development process, Bucks County and the Strategic Planning Committee met to share their feedback and experience and to discuss community input; federal, state, and local priorities; research and best practices; and specific ideas to leverage the resources, expertise, and opportunities in Bucks County to create a customized and coordinated response to homelessness.

Implementation of this plan, including all funding decisions and program standards, will be carried out in full compliance with applicable federal and state statutes, regulations, and Presidential Executive Orders, as interpreted through current HUD and other federal program requirements.

Strategic Planning Process

The strategic planning process included feedback gathered from 2023 – 2024 from a diverse range of Bucks County residents and stakeholders, research on applicable best practices, and an analysis of relevant available data.

Because of the fluid nature of homelessness, data about people experiencing homelessness is never perfect. Bucks County and the Housing Link are consistently working to improve data collection through the annual Point-In-Time count and the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). The strategic plan relies on multiple sources of data using the best information available to understand the demographics of the homeless population and the needs and challenges faced by the community in addressing homelessness. The following data sources were used in the strategic planning process: Point-In-Time (PIT) counts, Housing Inventory Counts (HIC), System Performance Measures (SPMs), the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), the Coordinated Entry System (CES) by-name list (BNL), and U.S. Census data.

Sources of Quantitative Data	
Coordinated Entry By-Name List (BNL):	The Coordinated Entry By-Name List (BNL) is a list of every person experiencing homelessness who has been assessed/encountered by the homeless system of care. The BNL includes information collected and shared with the individual's consent including their name, family composition, demographic information, history, health considerations, current housing situation, length of time homeless, service and housing needs, etc.
Homeless Management Information System (HMIS):	The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is a countywide, shared database used to collect client-level data and data on the provision of housing and services to homeless individuals and families and persons at imminent risk of homelessness. Each person participates in a variety of intake and assessment surveys when they first interact with the system or are referred to a new program. These intakes and assessments provide important information about each person and household. In addition, as a person starts working with a program, information about their progress and updated assessments are stored in HMIS as well.
Housing Inventory Count (HIC):	The Housing Inventory Count is conducted annually to collect information about how many units of housing in the region are active and reserved for people experiencing homelessness. This includes Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, Rapid Re-Housing, and Permanent Supportive Housing. To be included in the HIC, the units must be reserved for people experiencing homelessness. In addition, to be included on the HIC, any Rapid Re-Housing units must have been actively in use by a particular client on the night of the count – subsidies that are available but are not currently being used to pay rental assistance on a particular apartment are not included in the count.

Point-in-Time (PIT) count:	<p>Every year, Bucks County, in collaboration with Housing Link (the Continuum of Care), conducts a Point-in-Time (PIT) count² of people experiencing homelessness on a single night in the last ten days of January. The sheltered PIT count accounts for people who are currently enrolled in temporary housing in either emergency shelter or transitional housing. The unsheltered count accounts for people who are literally homeless in other locations, such as vehicles, parks, abandoned buildings, or the streets. The sheltered count takes place every year, but the unsheltered count is only required every two years. The PIT count provides helpful data on the size and characteristics of the homeless population over time. It helps communities understand the dimensions of homelessness, improve system efficiency, target scarce resources, and promote effective interventions to help reduce or eliminate homelessness.</p> <p>The number of people who experience homelessness in Bucks County over the course of a year, however, is much higher than measured by the PIT count alone. This is because the PIT count only measures the number of people who are homeless and participate in the count on a given day. It does not account for the many people who fall in and out of homelessness during the rest of the year. PIT count data is also limited in that the count uses a specific definition of homelessness set by the Department of Housing and Urban and Development that does not include households that are doubled up sharing spaces or individuals living on couches. It also does not provide comprehensive information on the characteristics of the population experiencing homelessness compared to when an individual or household does an intake with the homeless system of care. Due to the limitations of PIT data, the strategic plan analysis is also informed by other data sources.</p>
System Performance Measures (SPMs):	<p>System Performance Measures (SPMs) measure the performance of the whole coordinated homeless system of care, as opposed to only analyzing performance based on specific projects or project types. HUD designed the system measures for each CoC, which include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measure 1: The length of time persons remains homeless • Measure 2: Returns to homelessness • Measure 3: The number of people experiencing homelessness • Measure 4: Employment and income growth for people experiencing homelessness • Measure 5: First-time homelessness • Measure 7: Successful placement from street outreach to permanent housing
U.S. Census Bureau:	<p>The U.S. Census Bureau conducts a demographic survey that measures income, poverty, education, health insurance coverage, housing quality, crime victimization,</p>

²The Point-in-Time count uses a definition of homelessness mandated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This definition counts people as homeless when they are living in a place not meant for human habitation (such as an encampment, tent, or vehicle), emergency shelters, or transitional housing. People who are doubled up (more than one household in a unit meant for a single household) or couch surfing are not counted as homeless under this definition.

computer usage, and many other subjects. The U.S. Census data helps to understand the overall composition and conditions in each community.

To capture community feedback, outreach was conducted to many sectors including businesses, service providers, County staff, persons with lived experience of homelessness, CoC members, law enforcement, faith-based groups, health care representatives, advocacy organizations, local municipalities, and other community members.

Activities that occurred during the strategic planning process to gather qualitative data included:

	<p>An in-depth review of existing reports and data about Bucks County:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing Housing Link CoC governing documents and policies and procedures Bucks County Consolidated Plan/Action Plan and previous homeless strategic Plan The demographics of the community and people experiencing homelessness including PIT, HMIS, HIC, SPMs, and US Census Bureau data; and Local plans, programs, efforts, and interventions already underway.
	<p>4 community presentations, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overview of homelessness in Bucks County and discussion of gaps and needs and prioritization of potential interventions and enhancements Presentations and facilitated discussions on key topics: Prevention and Diversion, Temporary Housing, and Permanent Housing solutions to Housing Link CoC and Executive Committee.
	<p>Meetings and Convenings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bi-weekly planning meetings with Strategic Planning Committee comprised of Bucks County Staff, Housing Link Executive Leadership, nonprofit service providers, and a representative with lived experience of homelessness Vision, mission, guiding principles development; goals and strategy development
	<p>Community surveys:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over 238 people completed online surveys where community members, local municipalities, stakeholders, housing and service providers, and people with experience of homelessness answered questions about the local gaps and needs, priorities, challenges, and goals around preventing and ending homelessness.
	<p>Focus Groups/Listening Sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two focus groups with direct service providers and CoC stakeholders. Two focus group/listening sessions with people at risk of or with lived experience of homelessness. Most attendees were Black, Indigenous, or other People of Color, which aligns with the demographics of the Bucks County homeless population.
	<p>Stakeholder Interviews:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15 stakeholder interviews with representatives from County staff, Housing Link Leadership, the Coordinated Entry System Call Center, the Code Blue Shelter System, the Housing Access System, community-based organizations, service providers, health care representatives, outreach organizations, educational representatives, and faith-based organizations.

Context

Bucks County, part of the Delaware Valley metropolitan statistical area, is a populous suburban/rural community located northeast of Philadelphia. Despite its overall wealth, a significant portion of the population struggles to make ends meet. Bucks County home prices have increased substantially in recent years, and the stock of low-cost rental housing has shrunk, leaving many individuals and families precariously housed. Black and Hispanic households especially feel the economic burdens of high housing costs. More than half of all Hispanic households and two-thirds of all Black households pay more than they can afford for housing. The disparities have led to an over-representation of Black and Hispanic households in the Bucks County homeless system of care.

Geography

Bucks County is one of five Pennsylvania counties that make up the Philadelphia metro area. Montgomery County borders Bucks to the west, and Lehigh and Northampton counties are located to the north. The Delaware River separates Bucks County from New Jersey to the east.

Bucks County was home to approximately 645,163 residents in 2022.³ Some of its larger communities include the townships of Bensalem (population 62,569), Bristol (population 54,233), Middletown (population 45,886), and Northampton (population 39,852).⁴ Dozens of smaller communities also fill the county. Despite being the fourth-most populous county in Pennsylvania, Bucks County maintains a rural and suburban feel, with many acres of farmland, rolling hills and picturesque parklands. Bucks County residents work locally and in employment centers in and around Philadelphia, Montgomery County, the Lehigh Valley, Central New Jersey, and New York City. Health care, retail, manufacturing, tourism, construction, and professional, scientific and technical services are among its top industries.

The County is commonly divided into three regions:

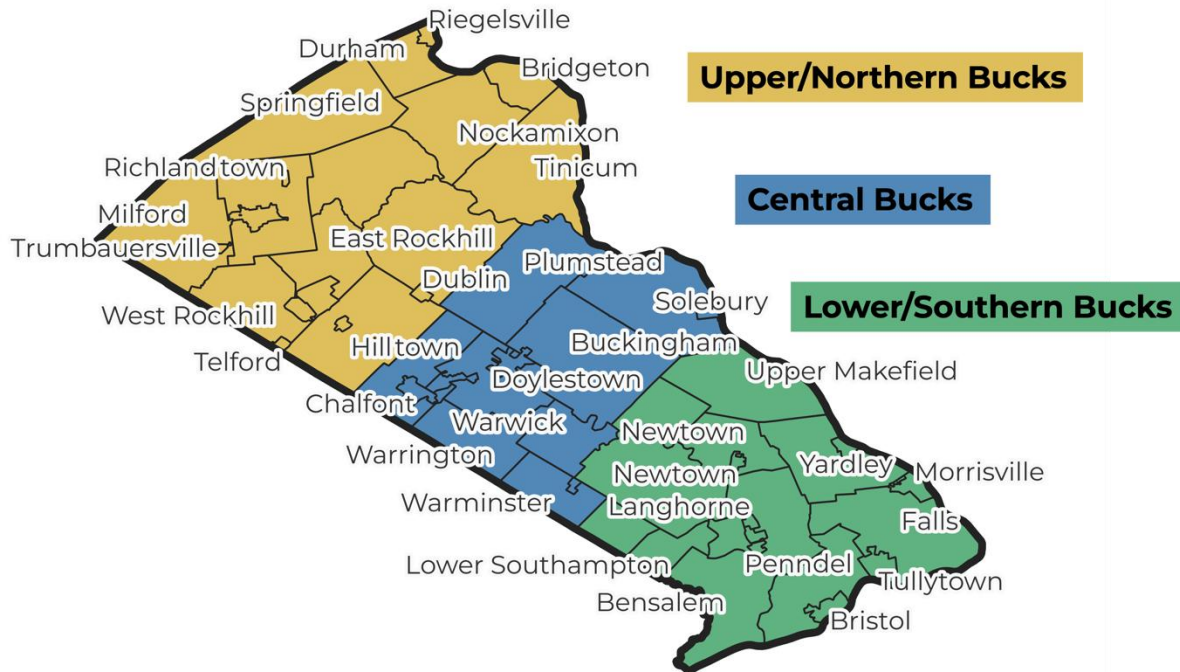
- **Upper/Northern Bucks.** Comprising roughly the northern third of the county, Upper/Northern Bucks is more pastoral and lightly populated compared to the rest of the county.
- **Central Bucks.** Home to the county seat (Doylestown Borough) and many other small towns, Central Bucks represents some of the highest income areas of the county, with correspondingly high home prices.
- **Lower/Southern Bucks.** Occupying the southern third of the county, Lower / Southern Bucks is the most urbanized and densely populated part of the county and is home to much of the County's industrial base. Median incomes and home values are lower here compared to elsewhere in the county.

FIGURE 1: REGIONS OF BUCKS COUNTY

³ U.S. Census Bureau. "ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table DP05, 2022, [https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP5Y2022.DP05?q=population&g=050XX00US42017\\$0600000](https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP5Y2022.DP05?q=population&g=050XX00US42017$0600000). Accessed on March 26, 2024.

⁴ Ibid.

Bucks County Regions



Demographics

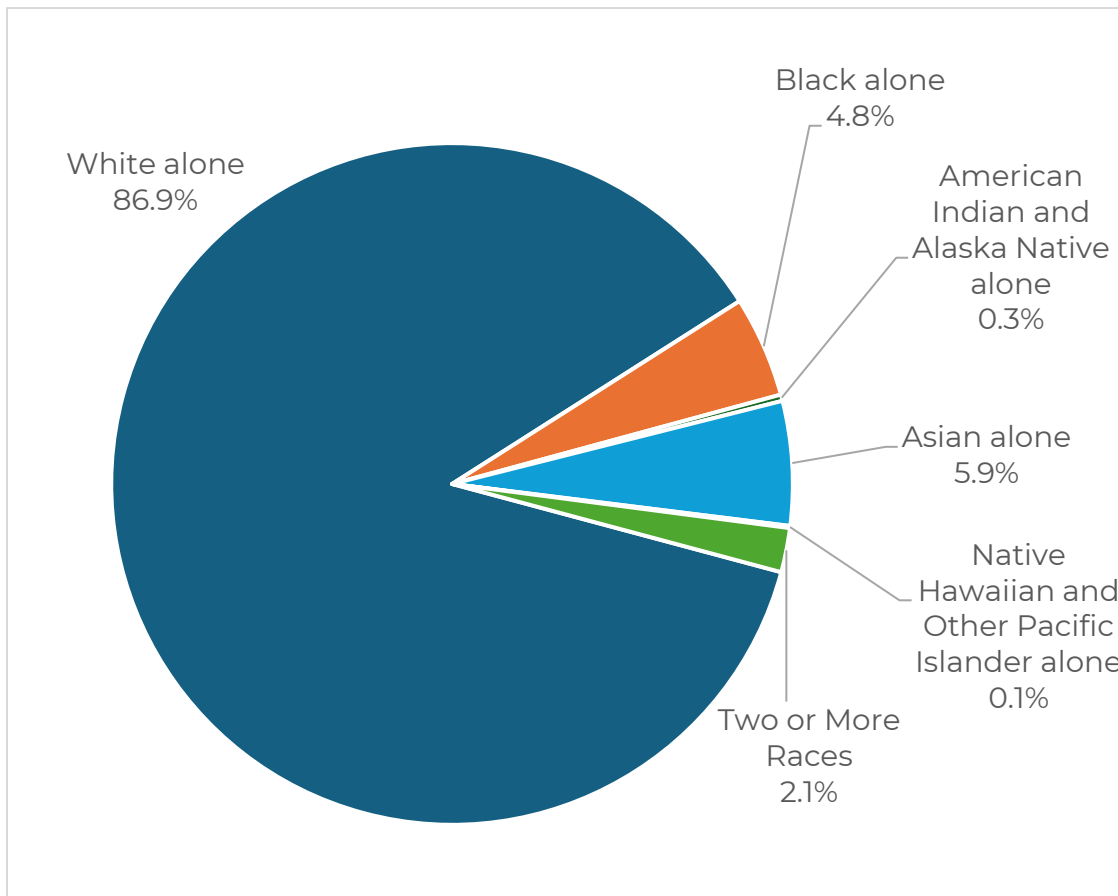
Bucks County is a predominantly White, non-Hispanic community that is becoming increasingly diverse, both racially and ethnically.⁵ The Census Bureau estimates that 86.9% of Bucks County residents were White (alone) in 2023. The County was less racially diverse than Pennsylvania or the nation, where 80.6% of state residents and 75.3% of the national population identified as White. The percentage of representation across the remaining 13% of the population included: 5.9% Asian residents, 4.8% Black residents, and less than 1% Native American and Pacific Islander residents. 2.1% of Bucks County residents identified as two or more races.⁶

⁵ See Bucks2040 Vision Plan (January 2024) at p. 13, available at https://www.flipsnack.com/9CBE6FBBDC9/bucks2040_vision_final/full-view.html

⁶ [Quick Facts, Bucks County, PA](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/buckscountypennsylvania,PA,US/PST045223), U.S. Census Bureau.

Ethnically, 6.7% of Bucks County residents identified as Hispanic or Latino, compared to 8.9% in Pennsylvania as a whole and 19.5% nationally. Bucks County was less diverse both racially and ethnically than either Pennsylvania or the nation.

FIGURE 2: BUCKS COUNTY POPULATION BY RACE



SOURCE: [U.S. CENSUS BUREAU QUICK FACTS](#), POPULATION ESTIMATES, JULY 1, 2023 (V2023)

Geographically, the county's racial and ethnic diversity varies across each of the regions. In 2022, Lower Bucks was the most racially diverse region with 19.7% of the population identifying as a race other than White. That percentage dropped to 12.6% in Central Bucks. Upper Bucks was the least racially diverse region, with just 9.7% of people identifying as a race other than White. The pattern was similar for ethnicity. 7.2% of the population in Lower Bucks identified as Hispanic or Latino. In Central Bucks this figure was 4%. In Upper Bucks, it was 4.6%.⁷

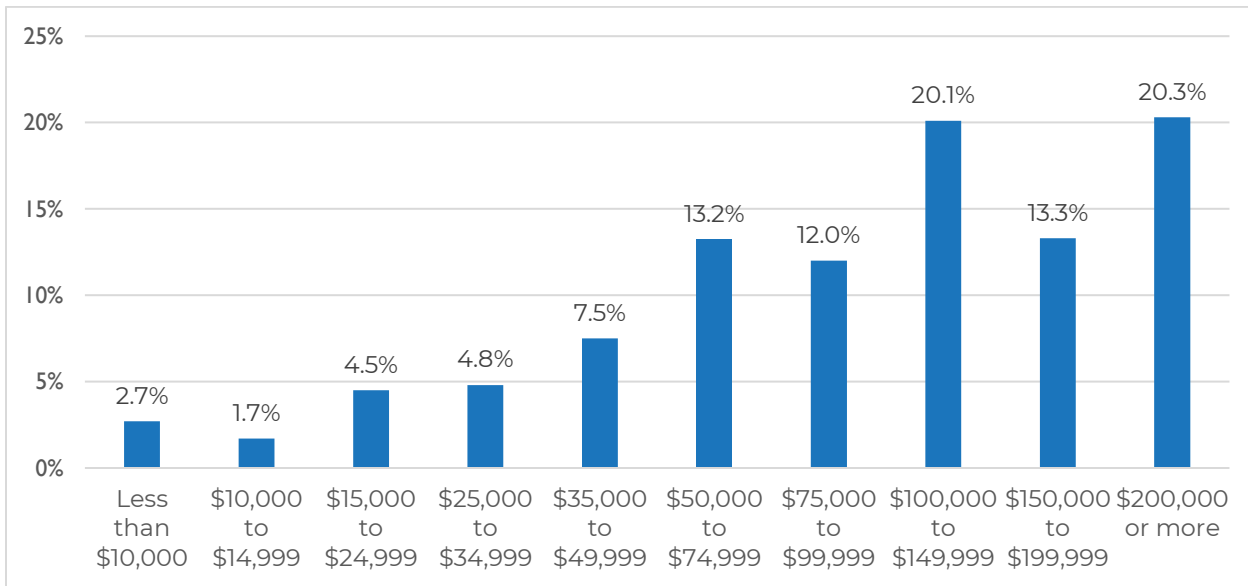
⁷ The regional race and ethnicity figures in this paragraph are based on Homebase calculations from U.S. Census Bureau 2022 American Community Survey five-year estimates reported in [Tables B02001](#) (Race) and [B03002](#) (Hispanic or Latino Origin by Race).

Income

Overall, Bucks County is both a wealthy community and an expensive place to live. Median household income in the County was \$107,826 in 2022 dollars,⁸ well above the Pennsylvania median of \$73,170,⁹ and the U.S. median of \$75,149.¹⁰ The Economic Policy Institute estimates that a family of four would have needed to earn at least \$119,727 annually (or \$9,997/month) in 2023 in order to have a “modest yet adequate standard of living” in Bucks County.¹¹ Less than one third of Pennsylvania households have enough income to meet that standard of living.¹²

Although the household income of many Bucks County residents is relatively high, a significant number of households earn much more modest income. The chart below shows the distribution of households by income level in Bucks County in 2022, the most recent year for which this data is available. While 20.3% of households earned more than \$200,000, 34.4% of Bucks County households earned less than \$75,000 in 2022. Other data show that approximately 5.9% of Bucks County residents had incomes below the federal poverty level in 2022 of \$23,030 for a family of three or \$13,590 for single adults.¹³

FIGURE 3: PERCENT OF HOUSEHOLDS BY INCOME IN BUCKS COUNTY IN 2022



SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU. "HOUSEHOLD INCOME IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS (IN 2022 INFLATION-ADJUSTED DOLLARS)." AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY, ACS 5-YEAR ESTIMATES DETAILED TABLES, [TABLE B19001](#), 2022. ACCESSED ON MARCH 27, 2024.

⁸ [Quick Facts, Bucks County, PA](#), U.S. Census Bureau.

⁹ [Quick Facts, Pennsylvania](#), U.S. Census Bureau.

¹⁰ [Quick Facts, United States](#), U.S. Census Bureau.

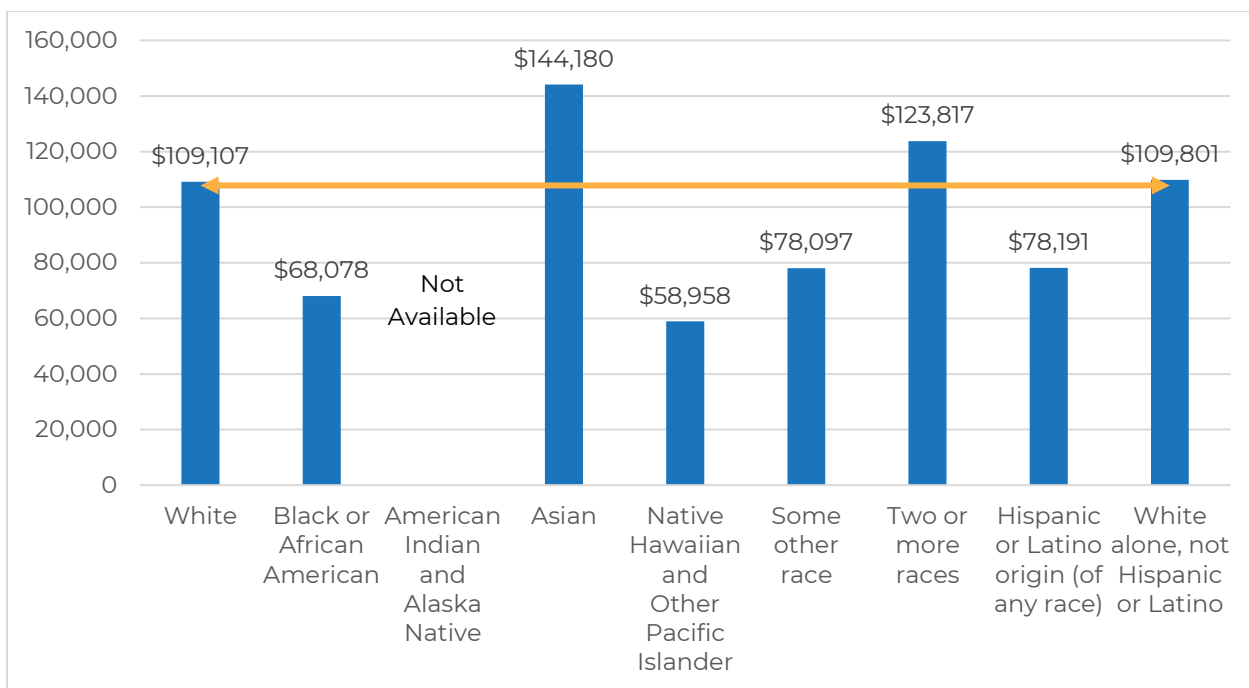
¹¹ [Family Budget Fact Sheet](#), Bucks County, PA, Economic Policy Institute, 2023.

¹² [Mean Income in the Past 12 Months](#), Table S1902, U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2018-2022,

¹³ [Quick Facts, Bucks County, PA](#), U.S. Census Bureau.

Analyzing County income data by race and ethnicity reveals significant income differences. The median income for White and Asian households (2022), as well as households that identified as two or more races, was at or well-above Bucks County median household income. At the same time, median household income for all other racial and ethnic groups was significantly below the County median. Hispanic households earned 72.5% of the County median household income, whereas Black households earned only 63% of the County median household income. The income difference by race and ethnicity likely contributes to the higher numbers of Black and Hispanic households in the homeless system of care, as Bucks County’s high cost of living places lower-income households on a precarious economic footing.

FIGURE 4: MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME IN BUCKS COUNTY IN 2022 BY RACE & ETHNICITY



SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU. "MEDIAN INCOME IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS (IN 2022 INFLATION-ADJUSTED DOLLARS)." AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY, ACS 5-YEAR ESTIMATES SUBJECT TABLES, [TABLE S1903](#), 2022. ACCESSED ON MARCH 28, 2024.

Housing & Housing Affordability

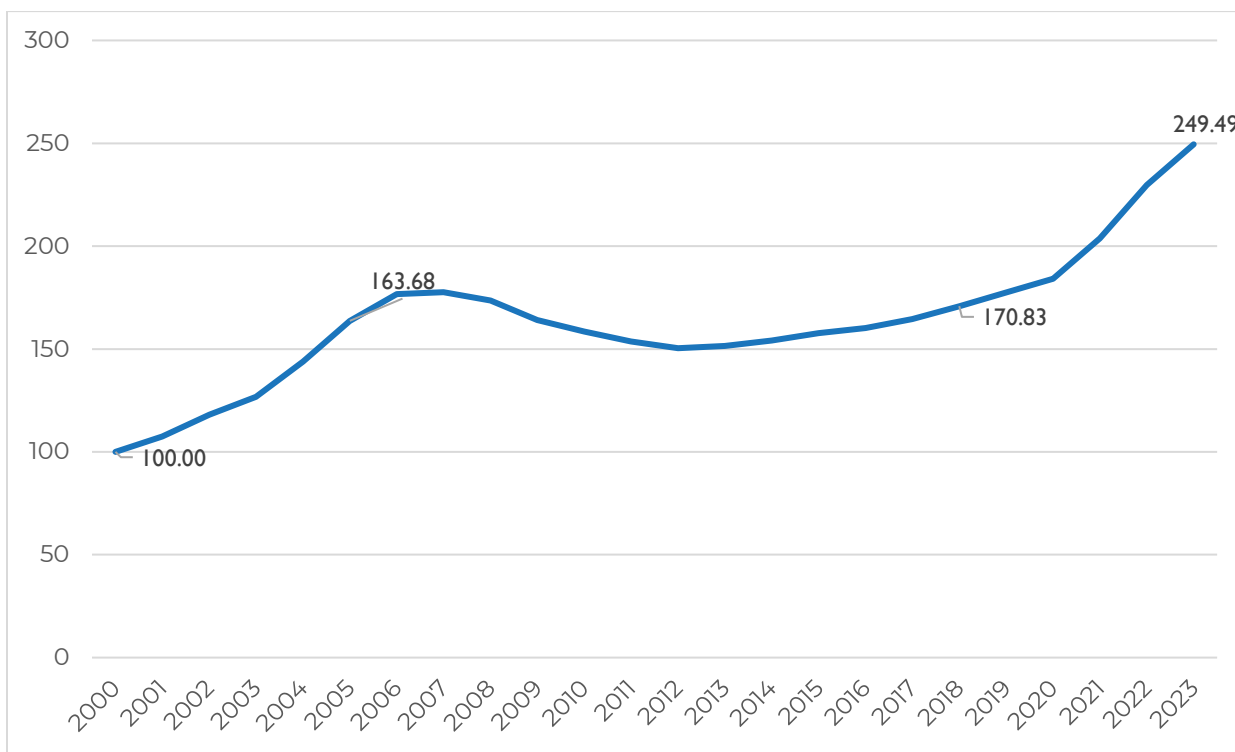
Homeownership

Bucks County is largely a community of homeowners. Of the 246,834 occupied units in Bucks County in 2022, 78% were owner-occupied, well above the owner-occupancy rate of both

Pennsylvania (69%) and the United States as a whole (65%).¹⁴ Home values are also comparatively high in Bucks County. The median value of a home in Bucks County in 2022 was \$395,800.¹⁵ This was well-above the statewide median of \$226,200¹⁶ and the national median of \$281,900.¹⁷

Homes have gotten significantly more expensive in Bucks County in recent years. The Federal Housing Finance Agency assembles a Housing Price Index that measures changes in single-family home values based on data that extends back to the mid-1970s. The chart below shows how Bucks County home prices have increased since 2000. Between 2000 and 2006 (only six years) home prices rose more than 50%. While the prices stabilized between 2006 and 2012, prices began a slow but steady climb back up to 2006 levels by 2019. The year 2020 marked the beginning of a steep incline in Bucks County home prices, which has continued through 2023.

FIGURE 5: ALL-TRANSACTIONS HOUSE PRICE INDEX FOR BUCKS COUNTY 2000-2023



Source: U.S. Federal Housing Finance Agency, All-Transactions House Price Index for Bucks County, PA [ATNHPIUS42017A], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/ATNHPIUS42017A>, Accessed April 4, 2024

¹⁴ [Demographic Characteristics for Occupied Housing Units](#), Table S2502, American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, U.S. Census Bureau, 2022.

¹⁵ [Quick Facts, Bucks County, PA](#), U.S. Census Bureau.

¹⁶ [Quick Facts, Pennsylvania](#), U.S. Census Bureau.

¹⁷ [Quick Facts, United States](#), U.S. Census Bureau.

Rental Units

For the 22% of Bucks County households who rent, rental prices are high. Median gross rent in Bucks County is \$1,461.¹⁸ Bucks County rents are more than 31% higher than Pennsylvania's statewide median of \$1,110,¹⁹ and 15% higher than the national median gross rent of \$1,268.²⁰

Lower-income renters in Bucks County are particularly challenged in finding affordable units.

The chart below compares the cumulative share of renters below specified income levels to the share of the rental stock that is affordable to households with those specified incomes.²¹ The chart shows a significant rental housing supply shortage in Bucks County for those at the lowest income levels. 19% of renter households, for example, earn less than \$20,000 per year, but just 8.9% of rental units (including those units offered through public housing) are affordable to households at that income level. Similarly, 36.1% of households earn less than \$35,000 per year, but just 22.5% of rental units are affordable to them. Significantly, some of the units identified as "affordable" to people of a specified income level may, in fact, be occupied by households with higher incomes, further reducing the stock available for lower-income households. (Note that the chart includes public housing units, which mainly serve low-income households). As one stakeholder commented, "Lots of people are hanging on by a thread. The rent is increasing, and people can't afford it."

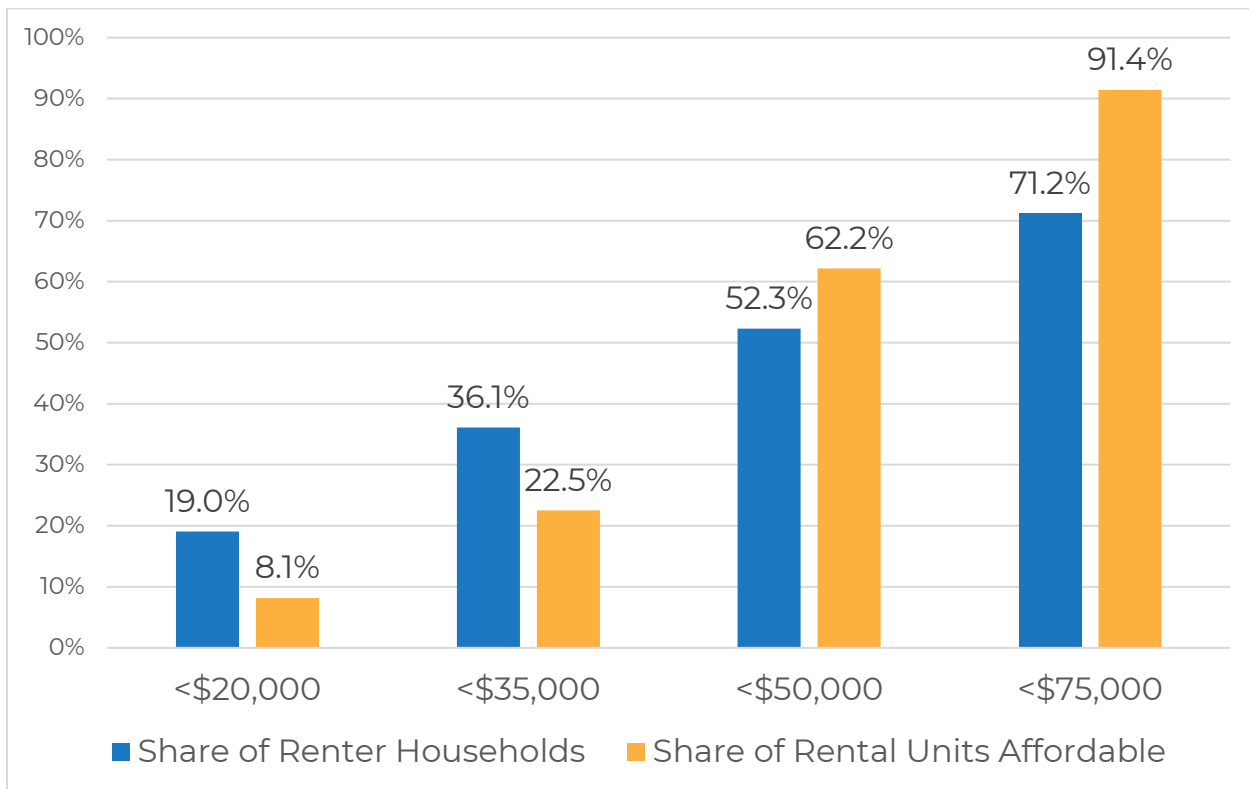
¹⁸ [Quick Facts, Bucks County, PA](#), U.S. Census Bureau.

¹⁹ [Quick Facts, Pennsylvania](#), U.S. Census Bureau.

²⁰ [Quick Facts, United States](#), U.S. Census Bureau.

²¹ Based on [PolicyMap calculations](#) from 2020 U.S. Census Bureau Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS).

FIGURE 6: DISTRIBUTION OF RENTER HOUSEHOLDS BY INCOME COMPARED TO AFFORDABLE RENTAL UNITS AVAILABLE AT THE SAME INCOME LEVEL 2020



Bucks County has lost a significant portion of its low-cost rental units in recent years. In 2017, 32.7% of rental units in Bucks County had a monthly rent of \$1,000 or less. By 2022, just 17.0% of such units rented for \$1,000 or less. This amounts to a 52% decline in the availability of such low-cost units. Based on the standards defining an affordable rent (an amount that is at or below 30% of household income), a monthly rent of \$1,000 would be affordable to households with annual incomes of \$40,000 or more. However, between 13.7% and 21.2% of Bucks County households earned \$40,000 or less in 2022.²²

Housing Cost Burden

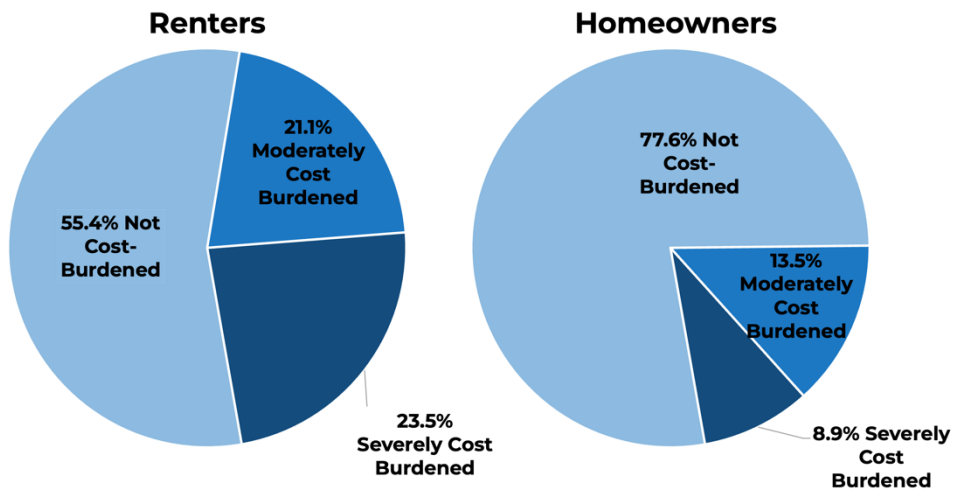
Many Bucks County households are paying more than they can afford for housing. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) considers households who pay more than 30% of their income for housing (including rent or mortgage and utilities) to be “cost-burdened.” Cost-burdened households typically have difficulty affording necessities such as food, clothing, transportation, and medical care. HUD deems those who spend 50% or more of their income on housing to be “severely cost-burdened.” Severely cost-burdened households not only

²² U.S. Census Bureau. "Household Income in the Past 12 Months (in 2022 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars)." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, [Table B19001](#), 2022. Accessed on March 27, 2024. (The data indicates that 13.7% of households earned less than \$35,000 per year, and another 7.5% earned between \$35,000 and \$49,999 per year).

have difficulty affording necessities, but they also are at high risk for losing their homes, as their financial resources are stretched thin and any disruption in pay or unexpected expense could leave them unable to make their housing payment.

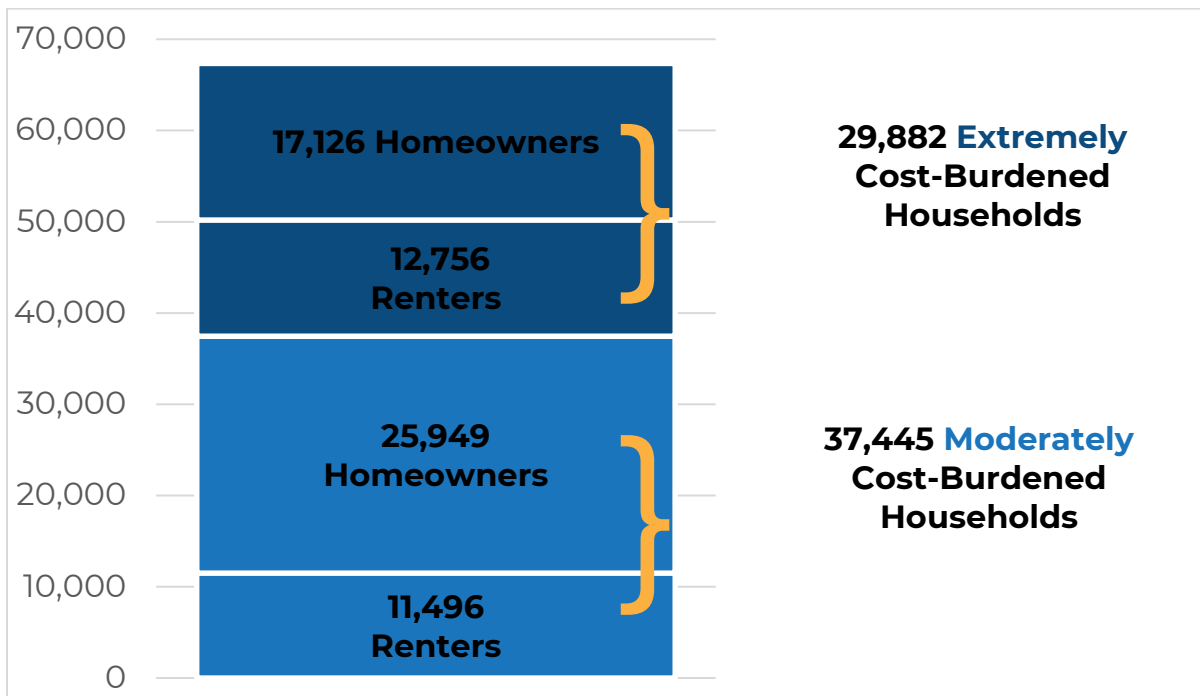
In Bucks County, renters are much more likely than homeowners to be housing cost-burdened. According to the Census Bureau’s most-recent figures (2022), close to half of Bucks County renter households (44.6%) were cost-burdened, which included 23.5% of renter households that were severely cost-burdened (spending 50% or more of their household income on rent). By contrast, less than a quarter of homeowner households (22.4%) were housing cost-burdened, with an even lower percentage (8.9%) of homeowner households who were severely cost-burdened.

FIGURE 7: SHARE OF COST-BURDENED RENTER AND HOMEOWNER HOUSEHOLDS IN BUCKS COUNTY IN 2022



While a smaller *percentage* of homeowners than renters are housing cost-burdened, homeowners significantly outnumber renters in Bucks County. Accordingly, **the number of cost-burdened homeowner households is greater than the number of cost-burdened renter households.** All told, 67,327 households in Bucks County were cost-burdened, including 24,252 renter households and 43,075 homeowner households. Among cost-burdened households, 29,882 Bucks County households spent more than half of their income on housing, including 12,756 renter households and 17,126 homeowner households.

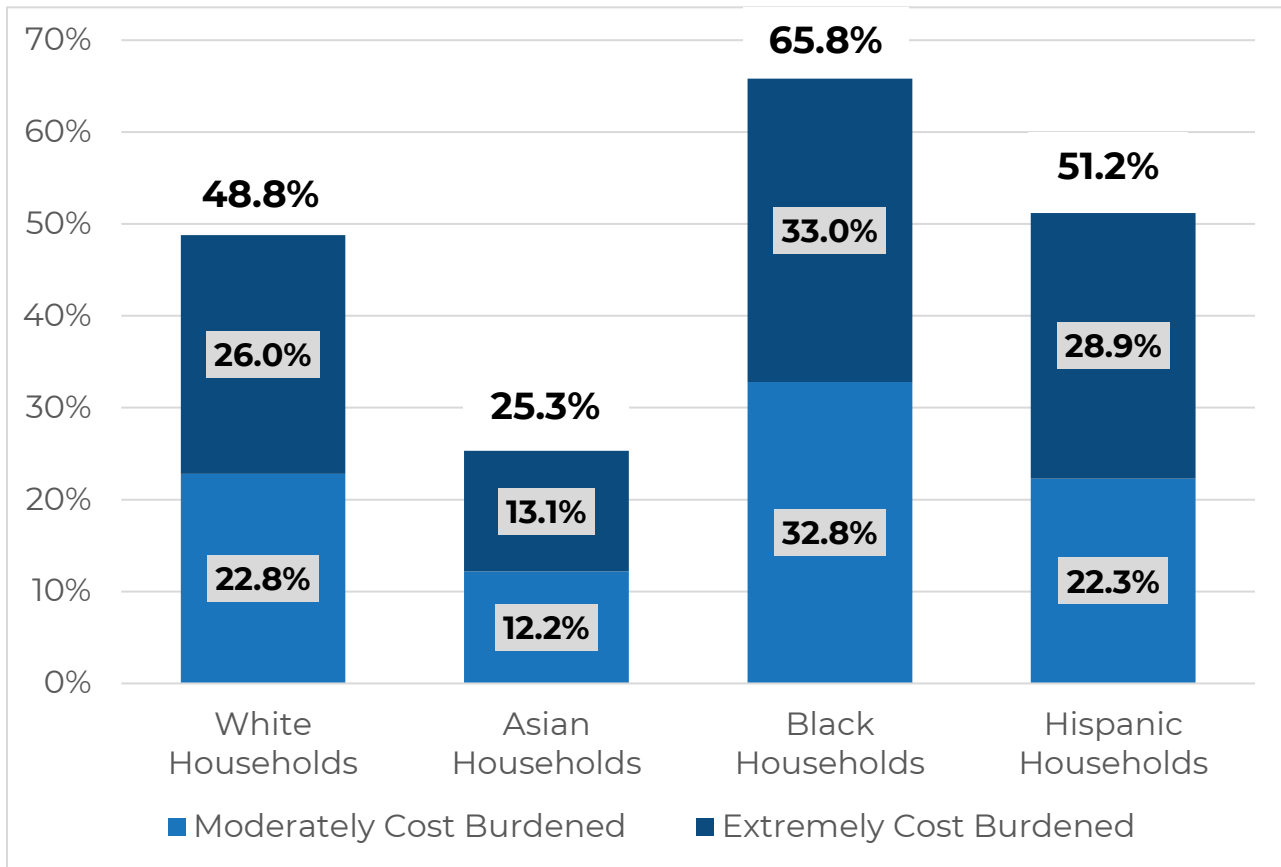
FIGURE 8: COST-BURDENED HOUSEHOLDS IN BUCKS COUNTY IN 2022



While the above figures are concerning, when they are broken down by race and ethnicity, they are even more troubling. White and Asian renter households were significantly less likely to be cost-burdened than Black renter households in Bucks County in 2020, the most recent year for which such data is available.²³ Forty-eight percent of White renter households and 25.3% of Asian renter households were cost-burdened. By contrast, two thirds (65.8%) of Black households paid 30% or more of their income in rent. More than half (51.2%) of Hispanic or Latino renter households were cost-burdened in Bucks County. Estimates were not available for renters in other racial groups in Bucks County, nor was data available for cost-burdened homeowners broken down by race and ethnicity.

²³ Based on [PolicyMap calculations](#) from 2020 U.S. Census Bureau Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS).

FIGURE 9: RENTER COST BURDEN BY RACE AND ETHNICITY IN BUCKS COUNTY 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "Gross Rent as a Percentage of Household Income in the Past 12 Months." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B25070, 2022, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT5Y2022.B25070?q=b25070&q=050XX00US42017>. Accessed on April 12, 2024.

Conclusion

For many in Bucks County, it is hard to make ends meet. With low or modest incomes, they find few housing options to meet their budgets. Too often, they pay more than they can afford for housing. The burden of high housing costs falls disproportionately on people of color in Bucks County, making them particularly vulnerable to housing instability and homelessness. As detailed in the next section, people of color are overrepresented in Bucks' County's homelessness response system.

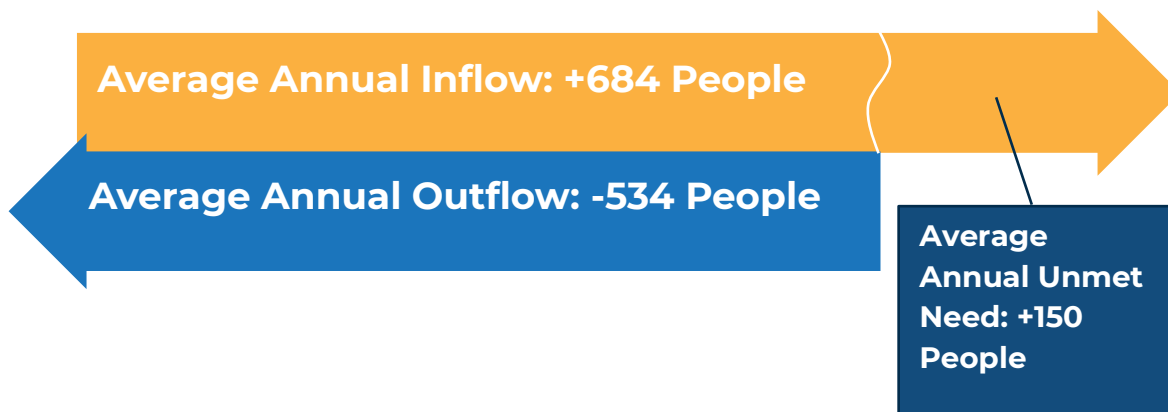
Homelessness in Bucks County

Homelessness is a growing challenge in Bucks County. On average, nearly 700 men, women and children flow into the Bucks County homeless system of care each year, and just 534 people exit. Moreover, a larger share of people who are experiencing homelessness are living unsheltered, compared to previous years. HMIS records show that a majority of the households in the system are adults with children, while 44% are single adults without children. A disproportionate number of people in HMIS are Black or Hispanic. On average, it takes people over a year and a half to find a permanent home after they become homeless.

Overall

According to the 2023 Point-in-Time count, there were 320 sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness on a given night in Bucks County. However, this number does not capture the full picture of homelessness in the county. The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is a more accurate estimate of how many people are experiencing homelessness in Bucks County. HMIS data show that, on average, 684 people flow into the homeless system of care each year, and just 534 exit the system. This leaves an average unmet need of approximately 150 people each year.²⁴

FIGURE 10: SYSTEM INFLOW, OUTFLOW & UNMET NEED



The following charts and analyses explore more about who is experiencing homelessness in Bucks County by comparing HMIS data, Point-in-Time Count data, and Census data.

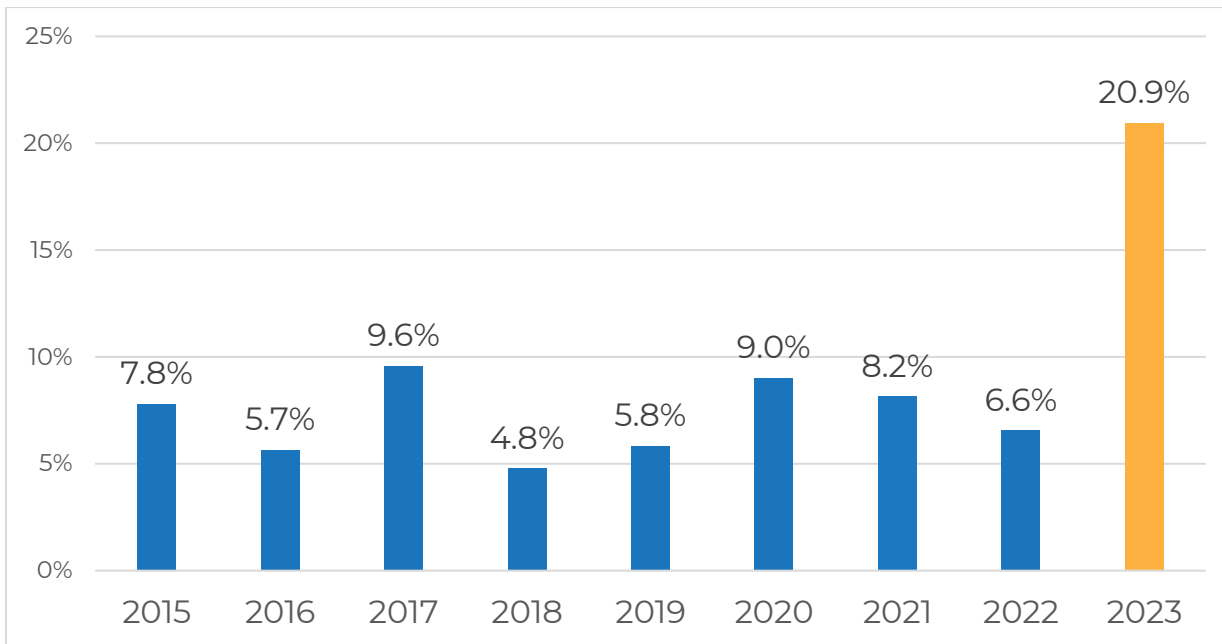
²⁴ System averages were calculated based on HMIS data from 2016-2023. The inflow and outflow figures include projects classified as Services Only, Street Outreach, Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, Rapid Rehousing, and Permanent Supportive Housing, but excludes Coordinated Entry, PATH programs, Homelessness Prevention and other project types. More details about system inflow and outflow are discussed in the System Performance section below.

Sheltered & Unsheltered Homelessness

People experiencing homelessness who are living unsheltered in Bucks County is a growing concern.

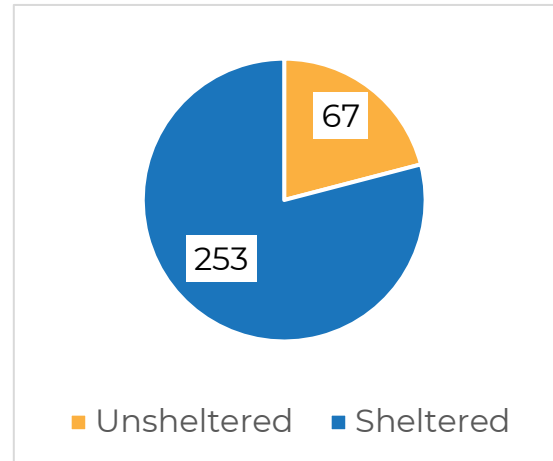
Of the 320 people identified as experiencing homelessness during the County's annual Point-in-Time (PIT) count in 2023, 67 were living unsheltered (see Figure 11). This is approximately 21% of the PIT count total and is more than three times higher than the comparable figure in 2022 (see Figure 12). Indeed, since at least 2015, the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness had not exceeded 10% of the total number of people experiencing homelessness in the annual PIT counts until 2023 (see Figure 12).

FIGURE 32: PERCENT OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS WHO WERE LIVING UNSHELTERED AS RECORDED IN ANNUAL PIT COUNT 2015-2023



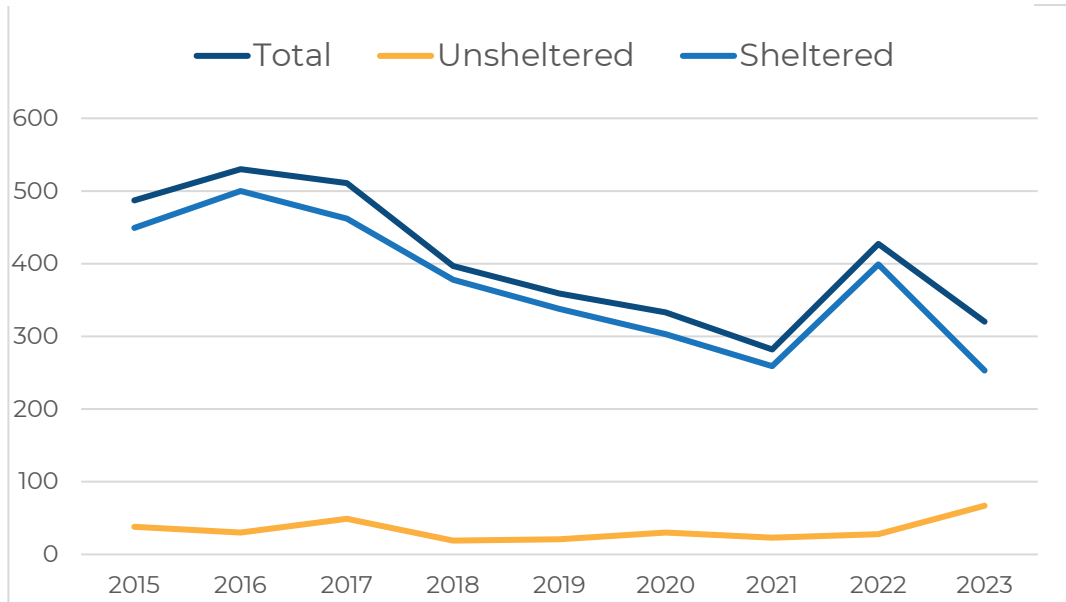
This increase in the proportion of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness is concerning. People experiencing unsheltered homelessness face distinct challenges and barriers in obtaining permanent housing. They are also uniquely vulnerable and, according to stakeholders, need significant additional supports to exit homelessness and maintain permanent housing. Reducing unsheltered homelessness was identified by stakeholders as essential to addressing homelessness in Bucks County.

FIGURE 21: PERSONS EXPERIENCING SHELTERED AND UNSHELTERED HOMELESSNESS IN 2023 POINT-IN-TIME COUNT



Despite the increase in the proportion of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, the overall PIT count data from 2023 was encouraging. The total number of people identified in the PIT Count as experiencing homelessness declined between 2022 and 2023, from 427 to 320. As shown in Figure 13, the 2023 count is in line with the number of people identified as experiencing homelessness in the years leading up to the COVID pandemic (2018-2020) and makes the 2022 figure appear to be a short-term spike.

FIGURE 13: POINT-IN-TIME COUNT RESULTS 2015-2023



Race and Ethnicity

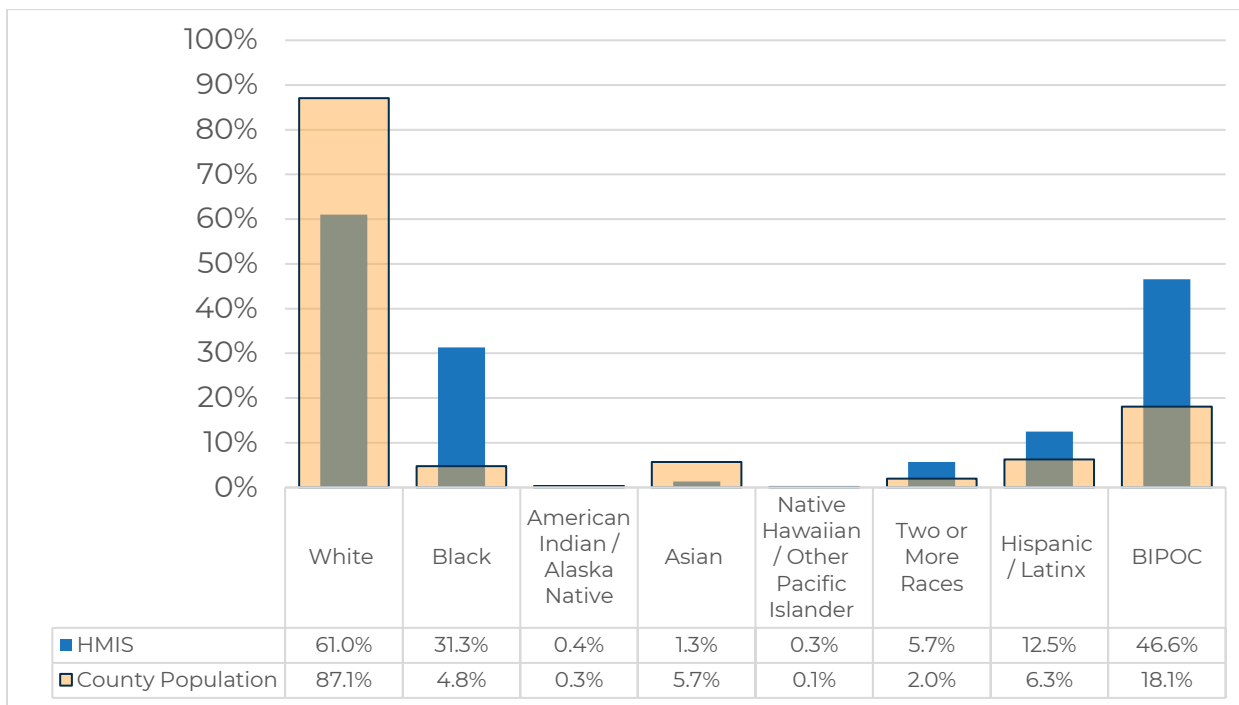
The racial and ethnic composition of those experiencing homelessness in Bucks County's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) does not align with the racial and ethnic composition of Bucks County residents. The racial and ethnic demographics of the people experiencing homelessness in Bucks County should mirror the demographics of the County's population as a whole. People who identify as white earn more money and spend much less of their income on housing. For others, any economic disruption – an illness or a costly car repair or an unexpectedly high utility bill – can start a cascade of problems that ultimately leaves them homeless. People reported feeling discriminated against in Bucks County. As one focus group participant commented, “Everyone is not treated the same, even though they are in similar situations.”

The County's homelessness data reflects this added vulnerability. Whereas 4.8% of the County identifies as Black, 31.3% of the people in HMIS identify as Black. This is more than 7 times the number of Black residents experiencing homelessness than would be expected based on County demographics alone. Hispanic and Latino residents appear in HMIS at twice the percent that would be expected based on County demographics. People of multiple races, Native Hawaiian, and American Indian and Alaskan Natives also experience higher rates of homelessness in Bucks County. By contrast, 87.1 % of County residents identify as White, but just 61.0% of those in HMIS

identify as White. Similarly, 5.7% of County residents identify as Asian, while just 1.3% of those in HMIS identify as Asian.

In sum, a disproportionate number of Black, Indigenous and Hispanic residents are experiencing homelessness in Bucks County, while white and Asian residents experience homelessness at lower rates than County demographics would predict.

FIGURE 14: RACE AND ETHNICITY OF BUCKS COUNTY POPULATION COMPARED TO RACE AND ETHNICITY OF PEOPLE IN HOMELESS MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM (HMIS) RECORDS IN 2023*



*HMIS DATA INCLUDES PEOPLE ENROLLED IN ANY HMIS PROJECT BETWEEN JANUARY 2020 AND JULY 2023 EXCLUDING PATH.

Household Type

HMIS records show that families (adult and child households) account for the greatest share of people experiencing homelessness in Bucks County. 56% of people in HMIS are in adult and child households, while approximately 44% are single adults or otherwise in adult-only households.

TABLE 1: NUMBER (AND PERCENT) OF PEOPLE IN HMIS BY HOUSEHOLD TYPE

		Including Coordinated Entry Project	Excluding Coordinated Entry Project
<i>Adult Only Households</i>	Number	6,590	2,109
	Percent	44%	44%
	Number	8,348	2,677

*Adult & Children
Households*

Percent	56%	56%
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* HMIS DATA INCLUDES PEOPLE ACTIVE IN ANY HMIS PROJECT BETWEEN JANUARY 2020 AND JULY 2023²⁵

Notably, stakeholder and survey feedback identified families with children as high-priority populations for housing and services across Bucks County

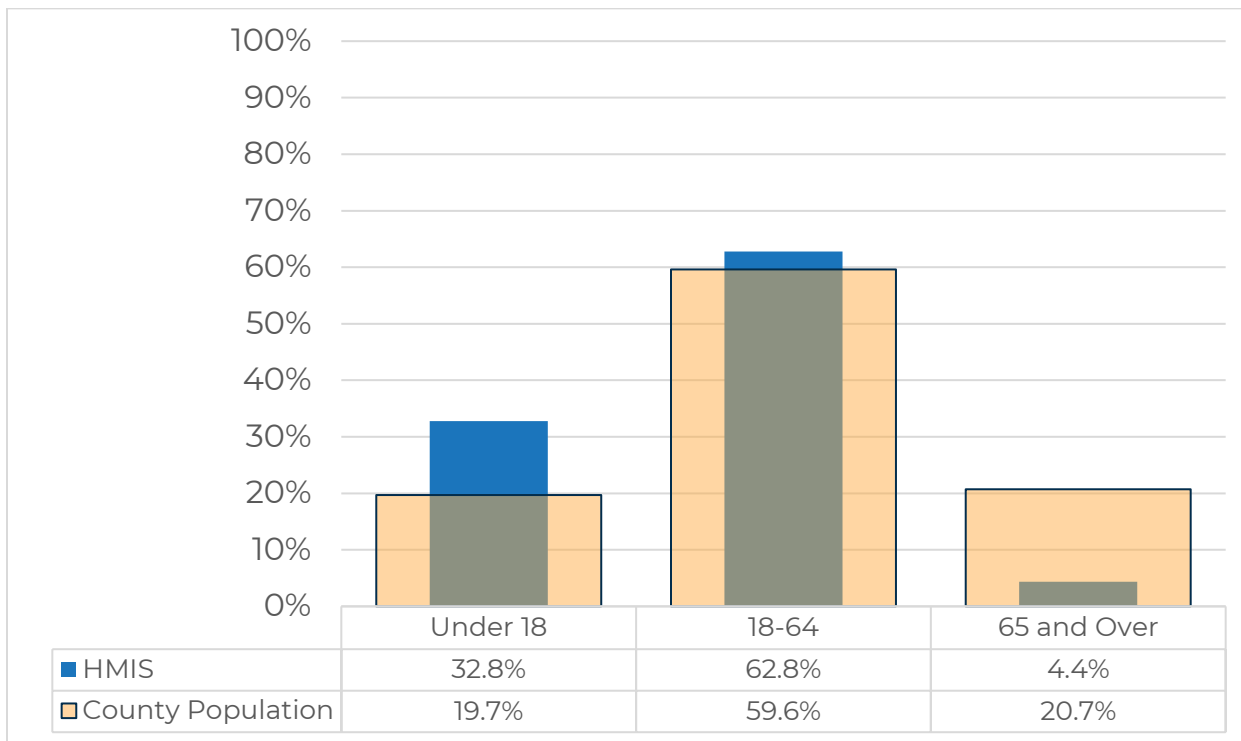
Age

Age data in HMIS show that children make up a comparatively large portion of those experiencing homelessness in Bucks County, and older adults make up a comparatively small portion. While people under the age of 18 make up just 20% of the population of Bucks County, they represent 33% of those in HMIS. Conversely, people aged 65 and over make up about 21% of the population of Bucks County, but account for just 4% of the people in HMIS. For adults aged 18 to 64, the figures are more proportional. They make up 60% of the county population and 63% of those in HMIS.²⁶

²⁵ When excluding the coordinated entry project from the sample the proportions remain the same; however, the total number of people decrease considerably to 2109 people in adult-adult-only households and 2677 people in adults with children households.

²⁶ System averages were calculated based on HMIS data from 2016-2023. The calculations include projects classified as Services Only, Street Outreach, Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, Rapid Rehousing, and Permanent Supportive Housing, but excludes Coordinated Entry, PATH programs, Homelessness Prevention and other project types.

FIGURE 16: AGE OF BUCKS COUNTY POPULATION COMPARED TO AGE OF PEOPLE IN HOMELESS MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM (HMIS) RECORDS IN 2023



* HMIS DATA INCLUDES PEOPLE ACTIVE IN ANY HMIS PROJECT BETWEEN JANUARY 2020 AND JULY 2023, EXCLUDING PATH.²⁷

HMIS provides more detailed age data for people in its database than the U.S. Census Bureau provides for the Bucks County population as a whole. HMIS data show that 11.2% of people experiencing homelessness are aged 55-64 – falling just below the “65 and Over” age group. This may signal an increase in the proportion of older adults experiencing homelessness, which is a rising concern nationally.²⁸

TABLE 2: PORTION OF PEOPLE IN BUCKS COUNTY HOMELESS MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM BY AGE GROUP

	0-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	55-62	54-62
HMIS	33.3%	11.7%	14.1%	14.2%	11.5%	11.2%	4.0%	9.3%	10.4%

²⁷ When excluding the coordinated entry project from the sample, the Under 18 years becomes 35.6%, 18-64 becomes 60.6% and people over 65 become 3.73%.

²⁸ See [Housing America's Older Adults](#), Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University (2023). See also [Toward Dignity: Understanding Older Adult Homelessness](#), Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative of the University of California – San Francisco.

*HMIS DATA INCLUDES PEOPLE ACTIVE IN ANY HMIS PROJECT BETWEEN JANUARY 2020 AND JULY 2023, EXCLUDING PATH.

Stakeholder and survey feedback identified transition age youth as a high-priority population for housing and services across Bucks County. Of the adult-only households experiencing homelessness, approximately 7% are transition age youth (ages 18-24). Stakeholder feedback noted the need for additional services and housing opportunities specifically for transition age youth who feel uncomfortable accessing many of the programs designed for adults experiencing homelessness.

Veteran Status

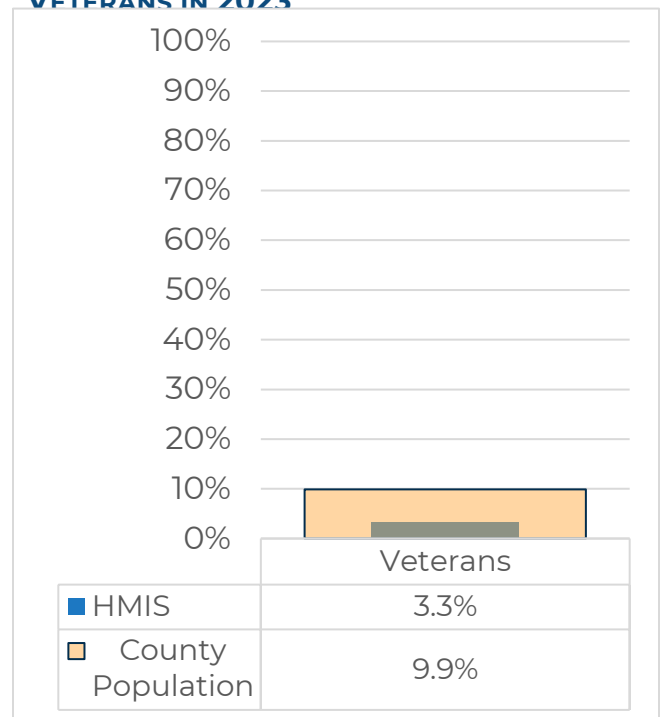
Comparatively few people experiencing homelessness in Bucks County are veterans. Veterans make up about 10% of the population of Bucks County, but account for just over 3% of the people in HMIS.

Chronic Homelessness

People experiencing chronic homelessness have been homeless repeatedly or for extended periods of time while struggling with a serious mental illness, substance use disorder, or physical disability. Under the federal definition, they have a disabling condition and have lived unhoused for at least a year or have had four episodes of houselessness over the last three years. Chronic homelessness severely impacts the health, safety and welfare of those who experience it. Helping them secure and maintain permanent housing is a distinct challenge that requires significant and ongoing support.

Unfortunately, the HMIS sample provided (January 2016 to July 2023) did not have reliable data on who is experiencing chronic homelessness. However, as data quality continues to improve, this is expected to change. According to the 2023 PIT Count, about 42 of the 320 people counted – or 13% -- were experiencing chronic homelessness. HUD’s “Stella P” visualization of Longitudinal Systems Analysis data for Fiscal Year 2023 shows that among adults and heads of households enrolled in emergency shelters and transitional housing, 21% experienced chronic homelessness.²⁹ Of note, most recent PIT Count data shows that 83% of households with pets are experiencing chronic homelessness. Now that PATH data is higher quality and as coordinated entry data continues to improve, more reliable data chronic homelessness should be available in the future.

FIGURE 17: PERCENT OF BUCKS COUNTY POPULATION WHO ARE VETERANS COMPARED TO PERCENT OF PEOPLE IN HOMELESS MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM (HMIS) RECORDS WHO ARE VETERANS IN 2023



²⁹ See Appendix C for Stella P (All Household Types)

Unaccompanied Youth

Unaccompanied youth, or young people aged 18 to 24 experiencing homelessness without a family or guardian, face unique challenges. Without a support system, they often lack access to basic necessities like food, shelter, and healthcare. They may also struggle with emotional and psychological trauma, as well as feelings of isolation and disconnection. Additionally, unaccompanied youth may be more vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and human trafficking. They often have limited opportunities for education, employment, and socialization, and lack rental or credit histories or steady incomes, making it harder for them to break the cycle of homelessness and achieve stability.

Bucks County's 2023 PIT Count found 12 unaccompanied youth; half of whom were living unsheltered. Additionally, there was one unaccompanied child (under age 18) in emergency shelter.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence and homelessness often co-occur, presenting unique challenges to individuals and communities. Without support, survivors may be forced to choose between returning to an abusive situation or struggling to secure stable housing, both for themselves and for their children. Additionally, the lack of stable housing can exacerbate the trauma of domestic violence, making it more difficult for survivors to access support services and rebuild their lives. Furthermore, both issues are often compounded by systemic issues, such as socioeconomic disparities and lack of resources, making it crucial to address them holistically. In 2023, 16 of the 320 people (5%) identified in the PIT Count indicated that they were survivors of domestic violence.

Current System of Care

Overview

An effective homelessness system of care quickly identifies and connects people who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness to shelter, rehousing assistance, and other services. It works because it aligns a community, its programs, and services around one common goal — to make homelessness rare, brief, and nonrecurring.

The Bucks County community has established a strong network of passionate, impactful providers dedicated to addressing homelessness. The system includes outreach programs, a helpline, prevention and diversion services, emergency shelters, housing counselors, supportive services, and housing programs. Unfortunately, the demand for services and support exceeds the system's ability to provide it. Moreover, Homebase's analysis revealed that the system is serving some people and households better than others, and there are opportunities to strengthen the coordination and implementation of existing services and supports to better serve those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

This section of the strategic plan provides an overview of the homelessness system of care in Bucks County and highlights the challenges it faces in striving to achieve far-reaching goal – to make homelessness rare, brief and nonrecurring – with too few resources to achieve it.

Components of the Bucks County Homelessness System of Care

	<p>The Housing Link Helpline, the county-wide access point of Bucks County’s coordinated entry system for families and individuals experiencing homelessness or who are at imminent risk of becoming homeless</p>
	<p>Eviction Prevention for households unable to pay their rent and at risk of becoming homeless</p>
	<p>Housing Planning for unstably housed households to remain or return to safe and stable housing.</p>
	<p>Street Outreach Teams dedicated to engaging and supporting those experiencing unsheltered homelessness.</p>
	<p>Code Blue Shelters that operate when overnight temperatures are extreme.</p>
	<p>Housing-Focused Emergency Shelter services to help families and individuals experiencing homelessness to transition to more permanent housing arrangements.</p>
	<p>Housing Locators to quickly identify housing for families and individuals experiencing homelessness.</p>
	<p>Housing Programs dedicated to serving homeless individuals and families, including transitional housing, rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing, and other permanent housing.</p>

Leadership and Coordination

Goals and Strategies to Enhance Leadership and Coordination

- Goal A: Center the Voices of People with Lived Experience of Homelessness
 - Strategy A.1: Create pathways to achieve improved outcomes, foster trust and share decision-making power to improve system access and the provision of services
 - Strategy A.2: Establish practices to drive progress on identifying and modifying policies that contribute to poor outcomes in the system
- Goal E: Partner Across Bucks County to Build Collective Solutions
 - Strategy E.1: Establish shared practices, policies, and procedures across the system of care
 - Strategy E.2 Strengthen collaboration and coordination among key county agencies
 - Strategy E.3 Improve engagement with local municipalities

Current System

Homelessness is a community-wide challenge that requires partnership between jurisdictions, agencies, organizations, and different sectors. Bucks County has established a strong foundation for coordinated partnerships between providers through the Bucks County Housing Link (“BCHL” or “Housing Link”).

BCHL serves as the “Continuum of Care” for Bucks County – the principal body that leads and coordinates the county-wide response to homelessness. Membership in the Housing Link is open to any interested member of the public including volunteers, non-profits, businesses, government, and philanthropy. The entire CoC meets every other month and has several committees that carry out its business in accordance with the Housing Link Governance Charter.

Local partners active in BCHL include a wide range of organizations:

- **A Woman’s Place**
- **Advocates for the Homeless of Upper Bucks (AHUB)**
- **Advocates for Homeless & Those in Need (AHTN)**
- **Bucks County**
- **Bucks County Housing Group**
- **Bucks County Opportunity Council**

- **Coalition to Shelter and Support the Homeless (CSSH)**
- **Credit Counseling Center**
- **Family Service Association of Bucks County**
- **Legal Aid of Southeastern Pennsylvania (LASP)**
- **St. Luke’s Penn Foundation**
- **Pennel Mental Health Center**
- **Quakertown Community Outreach**
- **Reach Out Foundation**
- **United Way of Bucks County**
- **Valley Youth House**
- **Veterans Multi-Service Center**
- **YWCA**

BCHL receives significant staff support from the Bucks County Department of Housing & Community Development (HCD). HCD serves as the lead agency for the CoC, overseeing planning, funding, and data for homeless services in Bucks County. HCD is also the HMIS Lead that administers the CoC’s Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

Much of the decision-making authority of the Housing Link rests with the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee is comprised of up to 18 members. It is led by two co-chairs, a vice chair and a secretary. One of the co-chair positions is reserved for the Director of the Department of Housing & Community Development; the other is elected by the Housing Link membership. Up to four additional seats are reserved for the County, as the HMIS Lead (1 seat), the CoC Lead Agency (2 seats), and the Director of the Division of Human Services (1 seat). The bulk of the remaining Executive Committee positions are filled by the chairs of each of the Housing Link’s 8 standing committees. Two additional seats are elected as at-large representatives of the CoC membership, and one seat is designated for people with lived experience of homelessness. The Governance Charter notes that one person may fill multiple roles, so the actual number of people on the Executive Committee may be fewer than eighteen.

Opportunities for Improvement

Stakeholders throughout the homeless system of care see a need for enhanced leadership and coordination. Two specific areas for growth emerged:

- *Siloing*. The challenges of homelessness are multi-faceted and cut across various sectors, including health, housing, social services, and education. In interviews and focus groups, stakeholders noted that the system works best when these sectors work

Stakeholder Feedback

- “There needs to be more communication and people working together. We need to work more as a system. It can feel like people are operating in a silo.”
- “There’s been a very positive change in the county in the last year. Division of Human Services is separate from Housing. DHS is youth, aged and aging, alcohol.... There was a meeting that was called to talk about housing issues. It happened after an encampment in lower bucks was cleared. A meeting was called to look at the system, how it works. At the next meeting, it became a case conferencing conversation — we were talking about individual clients. That was so helpful.”
- “One of the more important things is for the partnering providers to communicate more to each other. Meetings are unstructured and hard to manage. We need to make clear decisions, and they need to be communicated to everyone. Things are moving in that direction. There’s a person at HCD who is kind of overseeing that and they’re doing a wonderful job.”

together³⁰. Some participants specifically expressed frustration that responsibility for addressing homelessness at the County level seems to be held largely by the Housing and Community Development Department. They called for stronger participation by other county departments, especially the Department of Health and the Division of Human Services. Some noted that when the Division of Human Services convened a cross-sector group to conduct case conferencing, solutions to clients' challenges were more readily identified. They would like to see more multi-sector efforts like these to build collaboration county-wide.

- *The challenge of siloing isn't limited to county government.* Stakeholders also commented on fragmentation between the county and providers. "If leadership at our agencies work to develop relationships with these departments, it would help everyone better coordinate their work."
- *Stakeholders also cited siloing between programs as a concern.* Too often, programs see clients as the sole responsibility of the programs to which they are assigned. This impression is reinforced by challenges programs face in sharing case management information across agencies. Stakeholders called for leadership to establish a culture shift so that all programs feel a shared responsibility for all clients. As one stakeholder put it, "We need to move toward a culture of Housing Link clients accessing Housing Link resources."
- *Messaging.* Stakeholders see room for greater CoC leadership in the public conversation around homelessness. Stakeholders noted that it can be challenging to site new housing for people experiencing homelessness due to widespread stigma. "The biggest barrier in Bucks County is stigma. Because our county is affluent, because it is not very diverse, I think that people who have special needs - whether it's substance use disorder, mental health, housing insecurity - I think that stigma is the biggest issue in our county." Stakeholders called for the CoC to develop a public education and outreach campaign to counter this stigma and share accurate, factual information about homelessness.

Coordinated Entry System

Current system

Coordinated entry (CE) provides a centralized approach to connect the county's residents experiencing a housing crisis to housing resources. Launched in 2012, CE is a system designed to ensure that limited resources are used to assist those most in need of services in an efficient and equitable manner. The Bucks County CE system is called the Housing Link, and is comprised of a public-private partnership of government and non-profit organizations throughout the county. The Bucks County Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) provides

³⁰ See Appendix E for list of community engagement activities

oversight of the Housing Link as the CoC Lead. Designated CE Access points throughout the county provide initial determination of eligibility, intake, and provide information and referral.

- *Housing Link Helpline.* Family Service operates the Housing Link Helpline (HLH), which is the CoC's centralized intake call center. All populations are eligible for intake through the HLH. HLH can complete a housing needs assessment for Category 2, Category 4, HUD At Risk, and some Category 1 populations³¹.
- *The Hub.* Operated by the Bucks County Department of Human Services, The Hub provides walk-in and call-in assistance for all residents of the county who need connection to human services resources. The Hub provides intake for all populations. The HUB does not complete housing needs assessments.
- *A Woman's Place (AWP).* AWP operates a domestic violence (DV) hotline and has a dedicated DV CE Specialist that serves those that are fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence (Category 4). The DV CE specialist can complete a housing needs assessment for Category 4.
- *Bucks County Opportunity Council (BCOC) Walk-In Centers.* BCOC provides walk-in intake for those that are experiencing unsheltered homelessness at their offices throughout the county. Residents that are unable to complete an intake over the phone may be assisted via walk-in as well. The walk-in centers do not complete a housing needs assessment.
- *Street Outreach.* All street outreach teams provide intake to those that have not yet engaged with coordinated entry. Through canvassing and attending community events, street outreach ensures that those least likely to ask for assistance are engaged. Street Outreach teams can complete a housing needs assessment for Category 1.

The Bucks County **Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)** is a centralized database for tracking service delivery and impact. Through the HMIS, the community monitors the performance of individual programs and the overall system for continued improvement. The data collected through HMIS helps ensure that the Bucks County community understands the homeless population and can tailor its services to meet those needs. HMIS also can support coordinated service provision for individuals that may move frequently and are often difficult to track. The HMIS meets state and federal requirements, ensuring competitiveness for funding. The HMIS generates all HUD-mandated reports along with many other useful reports for agency and system-level performance management. Bucks County has made substantial progress in recent years in improving the quantity and quality of data in HMIS. This has increased the system's capacity to identify changing needs and opportunities for system improvements.

Opportunities for Improvement

The coordinated entry system has areas for improvement in terms of system capacity, language access, and a lack of uniformity in assessment, prioritization and placement practices:

³¹ Please see definitions of [Categories of Homelessness](#) on the HUD Exchange.

- *System Capacity*. The coordinated entry system receives a high volume of calls. In just nine months in 2022, the Housing Link Helpline handled 22,143 calls from people seeking assistance³². Data limitations make it difficult to determine how many of these calls are returned and how quickly, but staff report that it is difficult to keep up with demand for assistance and people with lived experience of homelessness say that it can take a long time to receive help.
- *Language Access*. Stakeholder interviews and focus groups with people with lived experience of homelessness revealed significant challenges with language access for those with limited English proficiency. Limited language access continues to be a concern at individual programs within the system of care and many make do with free services such as Google Translate.
- *Assessment, prioritization and placement practices are not uniform across the system of care*. HUD expects all access points in a CES to provide equal access to emergency services, use common assessment approaches and tools, and prioritize persons for available resources using a standardized approach that is detailed in the CoC’s coordinated entry policies and procedures.³³ Housing Link’s policies and procedures reflect this expectation. However, Homebase’s analysis of coordinated entry data revealed significant deviations. Two different concerns emerged.
 - *Some clients were prioritized for housing without an assessment score entered into HMIS*. Reasons differed for why this occurs. In some cases, program staff identified an opportunity for a chronically homeless person or family to obtain housing, but the staff were unable to complete the referral without an assessment score in HMIS. Because the clients were chronically homeless, staff were confident that the clients would be prioritized for housing. In those cases, staff may enter a “0” as an assessment score in the system simply to streamline the referral. In other cases, program staff have lost confidence in the accuracy and fairness of the VI-SPDAT, leading to less fidelity to the assessment process. A third reason that the assessment process is not uniform is that program staff sometimes will not administer an assessment if they feel that a client will not score high enough to receive a housing referral.
 - *Adult Only households living unsheltered or in emergency shelters are significantly less likely than households with children to be assessed for vulnerability*. Of the households engaged in the system for 180 days or more in Emergency Shelter and/or Street Outreach, 81% of Adults with Children households have been assessed, while only 55% of Adult Only households have been assessed.

“This is scary, and I’m stressed out. I’m scared. The process is too much to try and get the help I need. It needs to be easier and less stressful.”

-Participant in focus group for people with lived experience of homelessness

³² Between March 1, 2022 and December 13, 2022, the Housing Link Helpline handled 22,143 calls, which includes both in-bound (answered live and voicemail) and outbound calls. This data was pulled from the Family Service NICE inContact call center software system.

³³ See [Coordinated Entry Core Elements](#), at page 15.

- *These inconsistencies in the assessment process are concerning.* HUD calls for a uniform

Goals and Strategies to Bolster Coordinated Entry

- Goal A: Center the Voices of People with Lived Experience of Homelessness
 - Strategy A.2: Establish practices to drive progress on identifying and modifying policies that contribute to poor outcomes in the system
- Goal E: Partner Across Bucks County to Build Collective Solutions
 - Strategy E.1: Establish shared practices, policies, and procedures across the system of care
- Goal F: Strengthen data systems to promote continuous improvement
 - Strategy F.1: Improve systems and practices to ensure data quality
 - Strategy F.2 Use available system performance data to enhance system decision-making

assessment process, in part, to reduce the potential for bias – whether intentional or unconscious – to influence who has access to resources in the homeless system of care. These inconsistencies also lead to significant gaps in HMIS data, making it more difficult for BCHL to monitor system performance and identify disparities that need to be addressed. BCHL has received approval for and recently engaged with technical assistance from HUD to develop an assessment process, including an assessment tool, that will be trauma informed.

Prevention & Diversion

Current System

Living without stable housing, even briefly, is a traumatizing experience, and many never recover from the physical, emotional and financial impacts. By preventing homelessness before it begins, individuals and families are able to avoid the economic, social, mental, and physical challenges that result from homelessness – often at a much lower cost than it takes to serve people after they lose their housing.³⁴ When prevention does not occur or succeed, the next-best solution is to divert a person or household who presents at an entry point to the homeless system of care to alternate housing arrangements or supports that help them immediately return to housing. In practice, prevention and diversion efforts use similar strategies, which may include financial assistance (to pay rent, utility bills, security deposits, moving costs, etc.) or supportive services (such as housing advice, landlord or family mediation, benefits advocacy, etc.), or both.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, BCHL provided a single homelessness prevention program with minimal financial support available to households that were unstably housed, which includes

³⁴ See, for example, Evans WN, Sullivan JX, Wallskog M. The impact of homelessness prevention programs on homelessness. Science. 2016 Aug 12;353(6300):694-9. doi: 10.1126/science.aag0833. Epub 2016 Aug 11. PMID: 27516600, available at: <https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/Impact-of-homelessness-prevention.pdf>

those facing eviction as well as those that are doubled-up (staying with friends or family while not on a lease or mortgage) or self-pay in hotel. Households that were unstably housed received diversion case management services. Financial assistance for households facing eviction was funded primarily through HAP, was capped at \$1500, and required households to show an ability to maintain their housing going forward.

CARES funding was used during the COVID-19 pandemic to expand homelessness prevention, though need far exceeded the capacity of BCHL administratively. CARES was funded by the passage of the American Rescue Plan and the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP), which in Bucks County was implemented as the [Bucks Emergency Rental Assistance \(BERA\) Program](#). BERA was available to eligible Bucks County residents and landlords with units in Bucks County. A dedicated call center (the BERA Helpline) was available to assist tenants and landlords with their applications for rental assistance. The program targeted its assistance to individuals and households facing eviction with risk factors indicating a household's difficulty finding and maintaining housing in the future. These risk factors include a prior history of homelessness, past evictions, and a history of criminal legal system involvement. Unfortunately, funding for BERA has been primarily exhausted with no current indication of additional funding being allocated to eviction prevention at the federal level.

Households experiencing housing instability are referred to homelessness prevention case managers for the purpose of developing housing plans. Housing planning uses motivational interviewing techniques and the empowerment model to support clients in preventing homelessness, leveraging the resources available to the household during the crisis. Certain households may qualify for one-time financial assistance, contingent upon demonstrating the ability to sustain housing long term. The Bucks County Opportunity Council (BCOC) offers homelessness prevention services for the BCHL and facilitates a court mediation service. BCOC reports that in 2022-23, its homelessness prevention projects helped 463 households avoid eviction.³⁵

Opportunities for Improvement

Funding and resource targeting are the two principal areas of focus facing BCHL in this area:

- *Funding and Resource Targeting.* As noted, funding for BERA has primarily been exhausted, and the community needs to secure new funds to maintain its prevention and diversion efforts. Of particular importance is securing flexible funding that can be used for a range of needs, from paying arrears to making utility payments to funding security deposits. The community anticipates that fewer funds will be available for this work than in the past. Consequently, it is also interested in developing a prevention and diversion protocol that reliably targets resources to the households at highest risk that have been prioritized for BCHL assistance. Work is already underway on both fronts.

³⁵ <https://bcoc.org/housing-services/>, visited August 16, 2024.

Goals and Strategies to Enhance Homeless Prevention and Diversion

- Goal B: Stop Homelessness Before It Begins
 - Strategy B.1: Target and improve prevention and diversion services for vulnerable populations
 - Strategy B.2: Improve coordination to ensure people are not discharged into homelessness

Street & Encampment Outreach

Current System

Street Outreach Teams meet people where they are to provide connections to services. Many people with extensive histories of homelessness are disconnected from the network of services that could help them return to housing. They often have deep-seated trauma and negative experiences with the safety net system that may make them reluctant to engage with providers.

When outreach workers go to where people are living, they can build trust, better understand the circumstances that people are facing, and offer advice and support in a more meaningful and relevant way, which can provide a better chance for people to move to more supportive environments. Outreach specialists use proven engagement techniques, such as Trauma Informed Care, Critical Time Intervention, and Motivational Interviewing, to build relationships of trust and to help people connect to the services and support they need to find and keep housing.

Organizations who provide Street Outreach in Bucks County include Bucks County Opportunity Council, Valley Youth House, Family Service Association of Bucks County, and Pennel Mental Health Center. Individuals and families living on the streets or in encampments who touch Housing Link are referred electronically to one of the street outreach teams. Upon referral, street outreach staff follow-up directly with households to verify their homelessness status, confirm housing program eligibility, make appropriate referrals to housing programs/services; and provide ongoing engagement and support as needed and requested. Street outreach offered in Bucks County includes:

- Three outreach staff at [Bucks County Opportunity Council](#), who provide street outreach to individuals and families throughout the entire geographic region.
- Two outreach staff at [Valley Youth House Synergy Project](#) who help runaway, nomadic, and street youth aged 24 and under, as well as families with children and/or youth.
- Three outreach staff at [Pennel Mental Health Center's PATH Program's](#) "Project for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness," who serve individuals who are homeless or unstably housed and have a significant mental illness or co-occurring diagnosis.
- Three staff at [Family Service Association of Bucks County's Street Medicine Program](#) to assist individuals with medical frailty to provide nurse navigation services, as well as care for chronic conditions and preventative care. The team is comprised of medical staff, including

a nurse and Certified Recovery Specialist that work out of a mobile van. The team also includes staff who can assist clients with acquiring insurance, finding primary care, and referrals for ongoing care, and offers vaccine clinics.

The County government, municipal partners and the Housing Link work collaboratively to address encampments of people experiencing homelessness. While an approach may vary based on the unique situation, in general, HCD will interface with municipalities and/or private owners to see if it is possible to avoid a clearance. When not possible, HCD will work on communication to ensure residents have as much notice as possible, are connected to services, and ideally connected to housing options. Encampment policies will balance the health and safety of encampment residents with the safety, cleanliness, and lawful use of public spaces for the broader community.

Opportunities for Improvement

Pathways to Housing PA evaluated the street outreach efforts in Bucks County and prepared a detailed report with recommendations for improvement. Three areas stood out from that report as they aligned with some feedback gathered for the Strategic Plan: The need for more client-centered practices, the need for clarity regarding the work of street outreach, and better coordination among outreach providers. The strategic planning process revealed a fourth concern: the need for better-developed encampment resolution policies and practices.

- *Client-Centered Policies & Practices.* The Pathways Report details a variety of policies and practices that are not client-centered. For example, the Bucks County Housing Link Coordinated Entry Guidebook places responsibility on at-risk clients to check-in with housing planning or call center staff every 30 days to stay on the By-Name-List. As the Pathways Report explains, “Folks experiencing housing instability or homelessness are scrambling each day to meet their basic needs. People lose their phones, forget what day it is, etc. Putting the onus on participants to call and ‘check in,’ is not realistic” (p. 7). One person with seven years of lived experience of homelessness specifically called-out the potential benefits of training for mental health outcomes: “There is a need for better education on mental health impacts specifically for people of color. Teaching holistic self-reinvestment and providing culturally specific supports are crucial for improving mental health outcomes.”
 - *As another example, the Pathways Report cites significant differences in how outreach staff at different providers approach their work.* In one program, staff make appointments to meet people experiencing homelessness and stick very closely to the schedule they have made. In a different program, staff will stop to engage people experiencing homelessness wherever they see them, regardless of whether they have an appointment with them. They will also allow a generous window of time for clients who may be late to scheduled appointments. Similarly, in some programs, staff will advise clients in how to secure needed documents, while in other programs, staff will be more proactive, for example by driving or arranging transportation to the government offices that clients need to visit to secure missing documents. These and other examples in the Pathways Report point to a need to develop a culture of client-centered support and engagement that is shared by all outreach providers in the County.

- *Street Outreach Roles.* The Pathways Report notes that outreach staff carry a heavy burden. Not only are their caseloads high, but the work they do is more akin to “mobile case management” than it is to traditional street outreach. Street outreach staff are expected to connect clients to mainstream and community services, including childcare, food security resources, etc., while also verifying their homelessness status, conducting VI-SPDAT assessments, and helping clients become “document ready.” The report notes that “this is unsustainable at current staffing and caseload levels and contributes to confusion among participants and duplication of services” (p. 6). It recommends separating outreach and mobile case management roles. Outreach workers would be tasked with identifying and connecting with clients, and then facilitating a warm handoff to case managers when feasible and appropriate.
- *Coordination.* The Pathways Report noted significant challenges in coordinating effective service delivery within and between providers. It noted that staff spend a significant amount of time driving across the County to meet with clients. Better scheduling practices (e.g. clustering visits by location or basing staff closer to significant populations of people living unhoused) could make these trips more efficient. One provider noted, “The mobile crisis team is mostly in Southern Bucks, and it is not always practical for them to make the hour drive north. It can be hard to make an appointment with them and get mental health services to the clients.” Another person pointed out that “Street medicine operates during the day, but the Code Blue shelters operate only at night.” The report notes that there are some significant challenges in relationships between providers that has resulted in communication and coordination difficulties.
- *Encampments.* While the County, its municipal partners, and the Housing Link work collaboratively to formulate responses to encampments, recent responses and closures have created a sense of distrust among former encampment residents and people experiencing homelessness. Outreach staff reported that these clearance efforts have significantly hampered their ability to build trust with people with lived experience. They called for a more consistent and coordinated approach toward addressing encampments. People with lived experience of homelessness were particularly concerned about efforts to remove people from land when there is nowhere else for them to go. They also noted that

Goals and Strategies Related to Street and Encampment Outreach

- Goal C: Increase Access to Shelter and Homeless Crisis Response Services
 - Strategy C.1: Strengthen outreach to more effectively and efficiently serve individuals and households living unhoused
 - Strategy C.3: Expand services to support exits from homelessness and maintain housing stability

when they must relocate, they lose touch with outreach workers, access to community, and their sense of safety. They called for more supported, alternative housing options such as tiny home villages, safe parking, and sanctioned encampments.

The Emergency Shelter and Homeless Crisis Response System

Current System

Emergency shelters and warming centers provide safe places for people to stay at night and help connect people to services and the Coordinated Entry System. When the programs are housing-focused and low-barrier, they are an important part of the system to engage people and help them exit homelessness to permanent housing.

Bucks County has four operating year-round shelters.

- [Bucks County Emergency Homeless Shelter](#), operated by Family Service and located in Lower Bucks, serves individuals and families with children that are experiencing homelessness or who are victims of domestic violence. The shelter provides onsite nursing and case management services and in-house supports to help shelter guests meet housing and employment goals.
- [Valley Youth House Shelter](#), dedicated to serving runaway and homeless youth aged 17 years and under, is open 24 hours a day and 365 days a year. They use an individualized, brief counseling and crisis intervention model within a Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework. Services they offer include: case management, crisis counseling, individual counseling, group counseling, parent counseling, family counseling, life skills education, adventure-based experiential education and recreational activities, information/referral services, community integration, and therapeutic follow-up and aftercare services.
- [A Woman's Place](#) Domestic Violence Shelter, dedicated to serving individuals and families fleeing domestic violence.
- [YWCA Haven House Shelter](#) is dedicated to serving victims of human trafficking who get a safe place to reside and receive supportive services until they are placed in their own apartment through rapid rehousing (RRH). During their stay in the temporary shelter, participants will continue to receive crisis advocacy, trauma informed counseling, and other supportive services.

In Bucks County, shelter stays are intended to be short in duration, with the goal of exiting the individual or family to safe housing on their own or through assistance in a Housing Link program. The Housing Link system uses a shelter waitlist to prioritize households for bed openings. There are no walk-in admissions for any of the four shelters in the County.

In addition to the four year-round shelters in Bucks County, there are three [Code Blue Shelters](#) that are open when the County's Emergency Management Agency declares a Code Blue at 20 degrees or below; however each of the Code Blue shelters maintains their own threshold which is substantially higher than the County's.

The Code Blue Shelters are:

- [Lower Bucks Code Blue](#), operated by Advocates for Homeless and Those in Need (AHTN), is open annually from December 1st to March 31st. AHTN has two 15-passenger vehicles that their volunteer drive team uses to pick up guests and bring them to their Code Blue shelter, which rotates among various faith-based organizations.
- [Central Bucks Code Blue](#), operated by the Coalition to Shelter and Support the Homeless (CSSH), is open annually from December 1st to March 31st. The Central Bucks shelter will open if there is a prediction of excessive precipitation, even if the weather is above 26 degrees. Each month, a different faith-based organization opens its doors to provide shelter in Central Bucks.
- [Upper Bucks Code Blue](#), operated by Advocates for the Homeless of Upper Bucks (AHUB) at the Quakertown Masonic Lodge, is open annually between November 15th and April 15th each year.

Bucks County also currently has a day center through Reach Out Foundation of Bucks County for individuals experiencing homelessness. The center provides access to computers, laundry, showers, and meals. In addition, meeting space is available to connect with street outreach and other supports on housing plans and goals. The center does not provide any overnight sheltering.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- *There are not enough emergency shelter beds.* The Bucks County Emergency Homeless Shelter is the primary shelter for people experiencing homelessness in Bucks County. Its 75-90 beds are not enough to meet demand. Wait times to get into the shelter can be five months or longer. A significant reason for these long wait times is that too few people can move from the shelter into permanent housing. (See below for more details). System modeling conducted by Homebase using HUD's Stella M system indicates that BCHL would need an additional 233 shelter beds to eliminate the wait time for shelter. As more permanent housing options come online and people exit the system, the number of needed shelter beds should decline. Family Service recently sought funding to build a new non-congregate shelter and renovation of the current shelter. This project would expand bed capacity to as many as 150 beds. Through renovation, expansion, or partnerships, there are also opportunities for improvements to serving those experiencing homelessness with pets, which is largely the chronically homeless population. This could be done through temporary foster sites or possible co-sheltering.
- *People experiencing homelessness in Central and Upper Bucks do not have easy access to shelter.* The primary emergency shelter for those experiencing homelessness is in Lower Bucks, but homelessness occurs throughout the county. When people in Central or Upper Bucks experience homelessness, they must find their way to Lower Bucks if they need emergency shelter. This can be a challenge, given the limited public transit options available in Bucks County. As one provider noted, "Getting someone to the shelter is hard and would cost like \$100 just to Uber someone from Upper bucks to the shelter." Likewise, those who do stay in the Lower Bucks shelter can find it difficult to maintain the jobs and support networks they had in Central and Upper Bucks. In interviews, surveys and focus groups, both providers and people with lived experience of homelessness called for expanding shelter options in Central or Upper Bucks.

- *Shelters are generally not equipped to serve the medically frail.* Medically frail individuals are those who have significant health conditions or disabilities that make them more vulnerable and dependent on medical care. They typically require significant support and resources to maintain their health and well-being while experiencing homelessness. This can include requiring access to specialized medical care, medication management, and social services to help them manage their health and maintain their housing. Bucks County has only a handful of shelter beds for medically frail individuals. Program staff report that they often must turn away medically frail individuals. Program staff expressed frustration about local hospitals discharging medically frail patients to the shelters when hospitals deem they don't require sufficient care to keep them hospitalized. When the shelters are not equipped to support patients' needs, they must be turned-away. Staff emphasized that this is not a consistent problem; it seems to depend on which social work staff are working at the hospital at the time of discharge. They called for strengthening training for social work staff to make sure they do not discharge clients to the shelter and to understand that the shelter is not equipped to support the medically frail. Overall, there is a need for improved communication between the hospitals and shelters.
- *The Code Blue Shelter system.* The Code Blue system is rightfully a point of pride for the Bucks County community. It embodies a spirit of generosity and compassion that many communities aspire to, but few attain, let alone sustain year after year. Stakeholders also report that connections between the Code Blue shelters and the homeless system of care have strengthened in recent years, so that "warm hand-offs" to other system providers are more common than they were in the past. Nonetheless, as a component of the homeless system of care, the Code Blue system has its challenges.
 - *It is run largely through volunteers with limited training.* At least some of the people experiencing homelessness whom the volunteers encounter have serious mental illness and substance use disorders. Their behaviors can be difficult to address even for trained social workers. Others are medically frail individuals who may require assistance with wound care, toileting, medication management, etc. Volunteers in the Code Blue system report feeling unqualified and unprepared to work with these clients and turn them away when necessary. Volunteers also expressed frustration that hospitals sometimes discharge medically frail individuals directly to Code Blue shelters.
 - *The Code Blue Shelter system needs a steady funding stream.* Organizers report that a significant amount of their time is spent fundraising for the shelters and chasing grant dollars. A steady funding stream would ease this administrative burden substantially.
 - *The Code Blue Shelter system is not required to adhere to Low Barrier Shelter principles.* Shelters that embrace a "Low Barrier" approach grant access to shelter to those in need, with no prerequisites, and work to eliminate barriers to access. However, people with lived experience of homelessness reported that Code Blue shelters do not always adhere to these principles. People who appear to have been using drugs or alcohol may be turned away. Community feedback indicated that some felt unwelcome or uncomfortable in the churches that host the Code Blue shelters. It was also reported that some Code Blue shelters are not easy to access for those with physical disabilities.

Goals and Strategies to Bolster Shelter and Homeless Crisis Response Services

- Goal A: Center the Voices of People with Lived Experience of Homelessness
 - Strategy A.2: Establish practices to drive progress on identifying and modifying policies that contribute to poor outcomes in the system
- Goal C: Increase Access to Shelter and Homeless Crisis Response Services
 - Strategy C.2: Expand access to safe, low-barrier temporary housing options to make shelter available to all who need it
 - Strategy C.3: Expand services to support exits from homelessness and maintain housing stability

Housing-Focused Services

Current System

Many people experiencing homelessness in Bucks County have been homeless for an extended period. These individuals are often disconnected from the resources they need to exit homelessness and achieve stability. Supporting people with extensive histories of homelessness and related trauma requires significant outreach and engagement. In addition, those experiencing homelessness with pets face further challenges in placement of long-term housing and may require further partnerships and creative solutions such as incentives for landlords.

While long-term solutions to homelessness require community-wide investment in permanent solutions – especially supportive housing – housing-focused services help people connect to these long-term solutions and address the barriers that keep them from becoming housed. The goal is to help people exit homelessness as soon as possible. Once housed, people can work on the underlying challenges that undermine their stability.

Bucks County offers a number of housing-focused supportive services, including:

- *Housing Locators* assist residents who are currently working with a Housing Link program, the Department of Behavioral Health/Developmental Programs, the Bucks County Department of Children and Youth, and the Department of Aging and Adult Services. They help households locate safe and affordable housing in the County. They assist clients with landlord outreach, inspections, lease signing, and negotiations. They also administer the Bucks Landlord Incentive Program (BLIP) (see call-out box) and are a point of contact to landlords to assist with any questions or concerns that may arise with their tenants or the program. Housing Locators receive electronic referrals for services from a range of local partners.
- *Housing-Focused Case Management* incorporates motivational interviewing and the empowerment model to assist clients to avoid or exit homelessness with whatever resources the household has available at the time of the housing crisis. Street Outreach staff and shelter case management staff administer the VI-SDPAT tool to assess vulnerability, prioritize client needs, develop a client-centered service plan and ensure appropriateness of assistance needed for high-risk families and individuals. Through system-wide case conferencing, homeless households are appropriately prioritized for more time intensive financial assistance with supportive services including rapid-rehousing, supportive housing, and permanent supportive housing.
- *Other Services* available to people experiencing homelessness include assistance applying for benefits, mental health and substance use services, outpatient health services, information and referral services, childcare, education, life skills training, employment assistance and job training, transportation (limited), food assistance, and risk assessment and safety planning (particularly for individuals and families experiencing domestic violence).

The Bucks Landlord Incentive Program (BLIP) administers **Bonus Bucks for Landlords**, a selection of incentives offered to landlords and realtors who participate in the Housing Link's fight against housing insecurity by leasing units to tenants who are Housing Link program participants. Incentives include **bonus rent** for newly participating landlords when they lease to a Housing Link participant, a **finder's fee** for realtors and landlords who help recruit other landlords to lease to a Housing Link participant, and **continuity payments** of up to one month in between leases for landlords who rent to Housing Link program participants. So far, Bonus for Bucks has **added 60 new landlords** to the Housing Link.

Opportunities for Improvement

- *Documentation required for program enrollment can often be difficult to obtain.* In most cases, a household will not be placed from the by-name list to the priority list until they are document-ready. In practice, this has sometimes meant that clients who are able to advocate for themselves or are easiest to find and have their eligibility and homelessness verified first, are often the ones who get prioritized for housing, not necessarily those with the greatest need. As one of the primary access points, the Housing Link Helpline will do a referral to street outreach to verify homelessness, but if street outreach has difficulty

finding the household, this could mean a delay in the household being enrolled in a housing project and being connected to housing location services. Additionally, when a project may have additional requirements, like verification of disability, getting access to a clinician or the documentation required to verify that disability can be a challenge with the lack of clinicians available. Collectively, these issues can build significant barriers to securing housing opportunities for those most in need.

- *Increasingly selective requirements from landlords and a lack of understanding on the part of many landlords is limiting housing options even for those with vouchers or subsidies.* With a lack of available housing opportunities in Bucks County, landlords have been able to become increasingly selective as years have gone by. Not only has this meant that rental prices of units have become increasingly out of range of program rental limits, but landlords have also been able to be more selective with additional requirements such as income, credit ratings, criminal histories, or rental history. In one focus group with housing providers, a provider mentioned that they have seen credit rating requirements go from being around 500 to 675 in under a few years' time. Apartment complexes that were once affordable and sources of rental stock for housing locators have now become unaffordable with additional requirements that are often difficult for their clients to meet.

Misunderstandings have also limited people's housing options. In focus groups and community surveys, providers frequently referenced a misunderstanding among landlords about what services would or would not be provided with various housing subsidies, and what kind of additional burden there would be for them as the property owners. This misinformation, in conjunction with landlords who simply do not want to take any kind of housing voucher or client with a subsidy has created a challenge for housing locators when trying to connect clients to actual units.

- *Available housing and housing-focused services are not always appropriate or tailored to certain subpopulations or geographies.* Most of the governmental agencies and services are clustered in lower Bucks County. As a result, a housing placement in the upper or central portions of Bucks can create additional barriers related to transportation or accessibility. With limited public transportation options in Bucks County, transportation access can be a significant barrier in terms of obtaining important documentation, attending to medical needs, or being connected to services and mainstream benefits. For those with physical impairments or other disabilities, it can be difficult to find a unit that is not only a geographic fit, but also that can meet access needs. Whether this means finding a unit with elevator or ramp access or finding matching spacing and height requirements an individual might have, ADA compliant units that can pass a Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspection presents an additional challenge when trying to provide housing-focused services. While housing locators try to match clients with the most suitable units they can, this is all based within a limited affordable housing market. Furthermore, for those that

might prefer or require languages other than English, another barrier is added in that it may be difficult to access housing-focused services in languages other than English.

Housing Programs

Goals and Strategies to Improve Housing-Focused Services

- Goal C: Increase Access to Shelter and Homeless Crisis Response Services
 - Strategy C.1: Strengthen outreach to more effectively and efficiently serve individuals and households living unhoused
 - Strategy C.3: Expand services to support exits from homelessness and maintain housing stability
- Goal D: Increase Access to Permanent, Affordable, Low-Barrier Housing
 - Strategy D.2: Expand available rapid rehousing (RRH) and transitional housing (TH) units as needed
 - Action D.2.1: Continue efforts to increase landlord participation through education, incentives and other recruitment efforts.
- Goal E: Partner Across Bucks County to Build Collective Solutions
 - Strategy E.1: Establish shared practices, policies, and procedures across the system of care

Current System

Permanent housing programs, such as Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) and Rapid Rehousing (RRH), are well-established as some of the most cost-effective and successful strategies to address homelessness.

These programs provide subsidized housing, combined with the supportive services the household needs to retain that housing and attain long-term stability. Services can include case management, connections to employment and public benefits, medical, mental health, and substance use treatment, housing planning with housing navigators/housing locators. The programs tailor services to the unique needs of each household and successfully support many Buck County residents each year to permanently exit homelessness and regain self-sufficiency.

- *Transitional Housing (TH)*. Programs focused on special populations that use master leasing or leases in the person's own name while providing more intensive case management and supports. In 2023, there were four transitional housing programs and one TH-RRH joint program in Bucks, offering a total of 90 transitional housing beds, with most of those programs offering family beds (66 of 90 beds or 73%).
- *Rapid Rehousing (RRH)*. The rapid rehousing program provides rental housing subsidies and tailored supportive services for up to 24-months, with the goal of helping people

achieve permanent housing stability. RRH is considered a permanent housing solution by HUD. In 2023, there were 269 RRH beds available in Bucks County.

- *Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)*. These programs provide long-term housing with intensive supportive services to persons with disabilities. They typically target people with extensive experiences of homelessness and multiple vulnerabilities and needs who would not be able to retain housing without significant support. In Bucks County in 2023, there were six programs offering a total of 90 PSH beds (14% or 13 of 90 beds were available for families). Only 22 of the PSH beds are available to all populations. Others are targeted to specific populations, such as Veterans, people living with HIV/AIDS, etc.

Opportunities for Improvement

- *There are too few permanent supportive housing beds available in Bucks County.* The County's 22 PSH beds that are not targeted to specific populations are not enough to meet demand. Program staff report that they frequently must place high-acuity individuals – such as those with complex mental health or trauma needs and histories of chronic homelessness – into rapid rehousing units instead of permanent supportive housing units because there are no PSH beds available. This is problematic because the RRH programs are not equipped to address the clients' complex needs. Inadequate support may exacerbate clients' physical and mental health conditions. Moreover, the RRH program may not provide sufficient time for high-acuity clients to adjust to their living situation, potentially leading to ongoing housing instability and increased risk of homelessness. Homebase estimates that Bucks County needs an additional 234-257 PSH beds to meet current and projected demand.³⁶
- *The available permanent supportive housing is not low barrier.* Many of the county's PSH beds have been funded with a mix of federal and state dollars. The state funding places significant restrictions on who can occupy the PSH units. Specifically, active substance users and those who do not meet sobriety requirements are excluded. Due to these barriers, many of the highest-acuity clients cannot access PSH beds. To address this challenge, the County is in the process of implementing a "master leasing" program that aims to lease a significant number of units, which can then be sublet to tenants with housing subsidies paired with significant supports.

Stakeholder Comments

"There are people who need PSH level of care, but we are putting them into RRH because there are not other options."

"We don't have any model of producing units with services tied to them; we don't have a pathway to producing any true PSH."

"If we had 300 units of PSH, we would eliminate street homelessness."

"We have tried really hard to get the PSH project to only take chronic homeless individuals. It hasn't worked."

³⁶ See appendix D for more detailed information in the Stella M Analysis (Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) data analysis tool)

- *Limited Other Permanent Housing (OPH) options for Housing Link clients.* While low-barrier PSH is vital, it targets people who are experiencing chronic homelessness, which is defined as experiencing homelessness for an extended period of time (one year or longer) and have a disabling condition. Furthermore, the 22 PSH beds that are not targeted to specific sub-populations only serve Adult Only households. Having units dedicated to Housing Link clients who might not fall into these categories is crucial to addressing housing needs in the CoC. OPH units may have rental subsidies or have fixed, affordable rents with mobile supportive services that may not be as robust as permanent supportive housing.
- *High rents and low vacancies make it difficult for people with rapid-rehousing subsidies to find housing.* Bucks County has an outstanding landlord incentive program to encourage landlords to accept tenants with housing subsidies. Despite this program, however, housing navigators and people with lived experience of homelessness report significant challenges in finding units that will accept tenants with subsidies. This is likely a function of the tight housing market in Bucks County.
- *Housing affordability is a problem for many people in Bucks County.* As discussed above, housing affordability is a challenge for many households in Bucks County. Tens of thousands of households pay more than they can afford for housing. Consistently in surveys and focus groups, respondents named housing affordability as the top concern they wish to see addressed in Bucks County.

Goals and Strategies to Increase Housing Accessibility and Availability

- Goal A: Center the Voices of People with Lived Experience of Homelessness
 - Strategy A.2: Establish practices to drive progress on identifying and modifying policies that contribute to poor outcomes in the system
- Goal D: Increase Access to Permanent, Affordable, Low-Barrier Housing
 - Strategy D.1: Continue to prioritize the development of low-barrier permanent supportive housing (PSH) units
 - Strategy D.2: Expand available rapid rehousing (RRH) and transitional housing (TH) units as needed
 - Strategy D.3: Partner with housing providers to lower barriers to housing
 - Strategy D.4: Advocate for policies and practices that promote the development of more dedicated affordable housing
- Goal E: Partner Across Bucks County to Build Collective Solutions
 - Strategy E.1: Establish shared practices, policies, and procedures across the system of care

³⁷³⁸Lived Experience Advisory Board (LEAB).

System Performance

Homebase collected and analyzed data from HMIS, PIT, HIC, and the American Community Survey. The client pool for the HMIS data included clients who accessed any project in Bucks County from January 1, 2016, to July 7, 2023. The extraction date for the data pull was July 7, 2023. However, due to data quality issues, the analysis excluded all Coordinated Entry Data, PATH program data, and Homeless Prevention data, unless otherwise specified.

PATH data was not included in system performance analyses because of data quality concerns. However, PATH projects have made significant improvements in data quality since 2022. Therefore, when conducting similar analyses in the future, including PATH is suggested. Regarding the analyses below, the impact of excluding PATH may be reducing the length of time in the system and returns to homeless rates to some degree; however, we find a large degree of overlap between code blue shelters (included) and PATH (excluded). Therefore, impacts of excluding PATH is expected to be minimal.

The following table outlines the data sources used in the analysis section:

TABLE 3: DATA SOURCES USED IN ANALYSIS SECTION

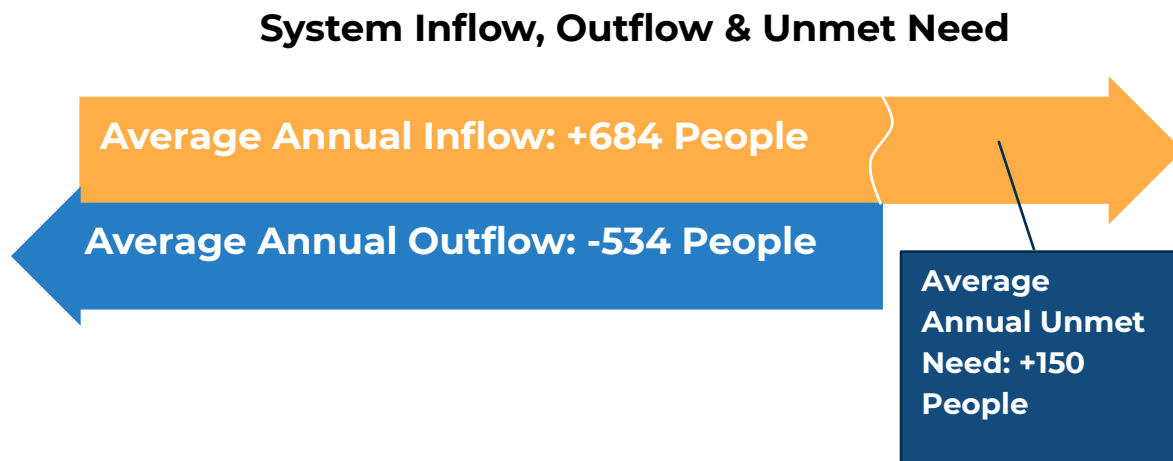
<i>Analysis section</i>	Data sources	Universe parameters
<i>Inflow and Outflow</i>	HMIS (2016-2023)	People & Households
<i>Access to system</i>	HMIS (2020-2023), PIT (2023), ACS (2023) – ACS Pulled May 1, 2024	People & Households
<i>Access to Project types/ Demographics</i>	HMIS (2020-2023)	Households
<i>Access to Project types/ Demographics</i>	HMIS (2020-2023) Cut CE and HP	Households
<i>Assessment</i>	HMIS (VI- SPDAT)	Households
<i>Movement</i>	LSA/Stella P & HMIS (2016-2023)	Households
<i>Outcomes, Outcomes Connections, Exits to permanent Destination</i>	HMIS (2020-2023)	Households
<i>Returns to homeless</i>	HMIS (2016-2023)	Households

<i>Length of time homeless</i>	HMIS (2016-2023)	Households
<i>Stella M</i>	LSA/Stella P & HIC	Households

System Inflow, Outflow & Unmet Need³⁹

- More people enter the homelessness system of care each year than exit it. On average, between 2016 and 2022, 684 people in 437 households came into the homelessness system of care, while 534 people in 358 households exited it.⁴⁰ This leaves an average unmet need of approximately 150 people (79 households) each year.

FIGURE 18: SYSTEM INFLOW, OUTFLOW, AND UNMET NEED



- Between January 1, 2016, and July 1, 2023, the Bucks County homeless response system projects, which collect information in the Homeless Management Information System, interacted with 7,543 people seeking and receiving services. When including Call Center data and Coordinated Entry data, the number of people seeking and receiving services grows significantly. However, due to concerns with data quality, most of the analysis excludes Coordinated Entry, Call Center, and Homeless Prevention projects. The following table outlines different samples of people that encountered the homeless response system:

³⁹ This system inflow and outflow analysis is based on Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data that included people and households who accessed any project in Bucks County from January 1, 2016 to July 7, 2023. It includes data from projects classified as Services Only, Street Outreach, Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, Rapid Rehousing, and Permanent Supportive Housing. However, due to data quality issues, it excludes data from projects classified as Coordinated Entry, PATH, Homelessness Prevention and other project types. See appendix D for more detailed information in the Stella M Analysis (HUD's data analysis tool)

⁴⁰ A person leaving the system is defined as someone who exits and does not return for at least 12 months or who moved into a Permanent Supportive Housing project type and is still enrolled.

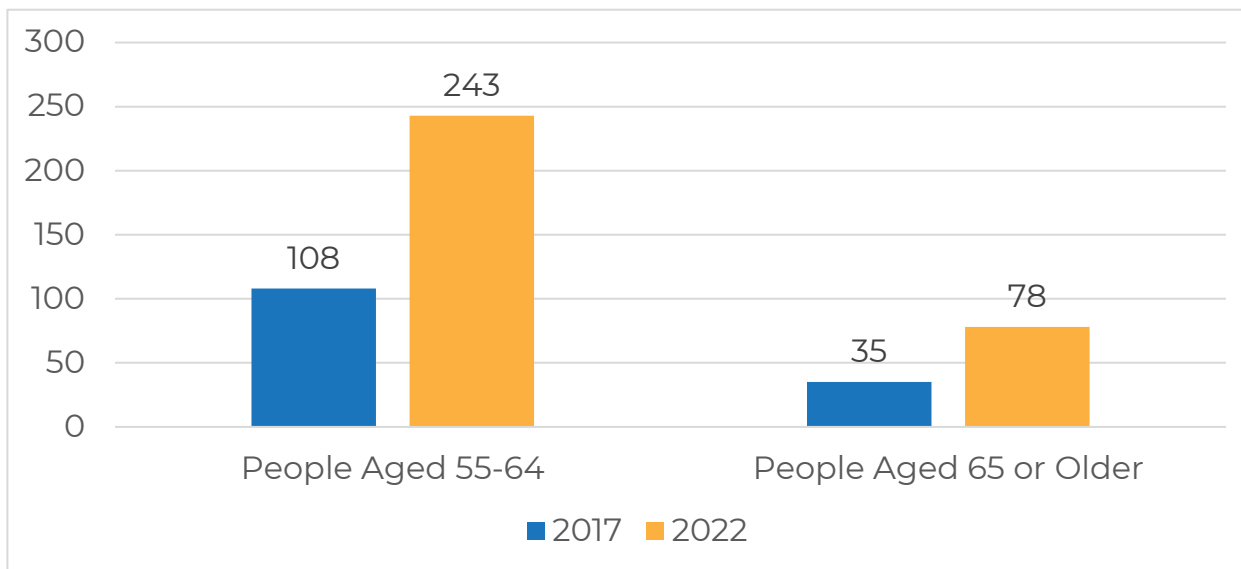
TABLE 4: PEOPLE SEEKING ASSISTANCE

Data source and sample	Number of People	Time period
<i>Housing Link Helpline (Call Center)</i>	22,143 calls, in- and outbound	03/01/2022 – 12/31/2022
<i>All HMIS (without PATH)</i>	20,412 People	01/01/2016 – 07/01/2023
<i>HMIS (without Coordinated Entry and PATH)</i>	7,543 People	01/01/2016 – 07/01/2023
<i>HMIS (without Coordinated Entry and Homelessness Prevention and PATH)</i>	6,134 People	01/01/2016 – 07/01/2023

- Families are leaving the system at a lower rate than adult-only households. While 81% of inflow results in outflow for adult only households, just 74% of inflow results in outflow for households with children. A person leaving the system is defined as someone who exits and does not return for at least 12 months or who moved into a Permanent Supportive Housing project type and is still enrolled. Therefore, if we use the past data to predict the future, we expect that any given family would have a 25% less chance of exiting the system when compared to an adult-only household.
- Some households are exiting the system at different rates
 - Clients that are Latino have an exit rate 16% lower than others
 - Clients that are Black have a 21% lower exit rate than others
 - Clients that are White exit at a 77% higher rate than others
- The number of older adults in the system is growing because too few people are able to exit the system of care. Inflow of older adults into the system of care has been relatively stable over the years. However, the shortage of affordable permanent housing options means that many people are unable to leave the system. As a result, people age into the “older adult” category while in the system and continuing to experience homelessness. In 2017, the number of 55–64-year-olds in the system was 108, and the number aged 65 and older was 35. In 2022, those numbers had more than doubled to 243 and 78 respectively.⁴¹
- As Figure 19 indicates, a significant portion of people active in HMIS between 2020 and 2023 are Older Adults, whether that group is defined (as various programs do) as those 54-62, 55-62, 55-64, and/or 65

⁴¹ This analysis is based on Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data that included people and households who accessed any project in Bucks County from in 2017 or 2022. It includes data from projects classified as Services Only, Street Outreach, Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, Rapid Rehousing, and Permanent Supportive Housing. However, due to data quality issues, it excludes data from projects classified as Coordinated Entry, PATH, Homelessness Prevention and other project types.

FIGURE 194: NUMBER OF OLDER ADULTS IN THE BUCKS COUNTY HOMELESS MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM 2017 & 2022



*HMIS data includes people active in any HMIS project between January 2020 and July 2023, excluding PATH

TABLE 5: PORTION OF PEOPLE IN BUCKS COUNTY HOMELESS MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM BY AGE GROUP

Age	0-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	55-62	54-62
HMIS	33.3%	11.7%	14.1%	14.2%	11.5%	11.2%	4.0%	9.3%	10.4%

*HMIS DATA INCLUDES PEOPLE ACTIVE IN ANY HMIS PROJECT BETWEEN JANUARY 2020 AND JULY 2023, EXCLUDING PATH.

Length of Time Homeless

The length of time homeless is an important measure of system performance for homeless systems of care. It reflects the effectiveness of the system in providing support and resources to individuals experiencing homelessness. Local economic conditions and housing availability also impact the length of time homeless. A shorter length of time homeless indicates that the system is successfully helping people to quickly and effectively exit homelessness. Lengthy periods of homelessness can signal problems in the system. Lengthy periods of homelessness are particularly problematic due to the significant impact that they can have on an individual's physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Prolonged homelessness increases the risk of exposure to communicable diseases, malnutrition, and mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Additionally, prolonged homelessness may result in social isolation, decreased employment opportunities, and a diminished ability to maintain stable housing, which can perpetuate the cycle of homelessness.

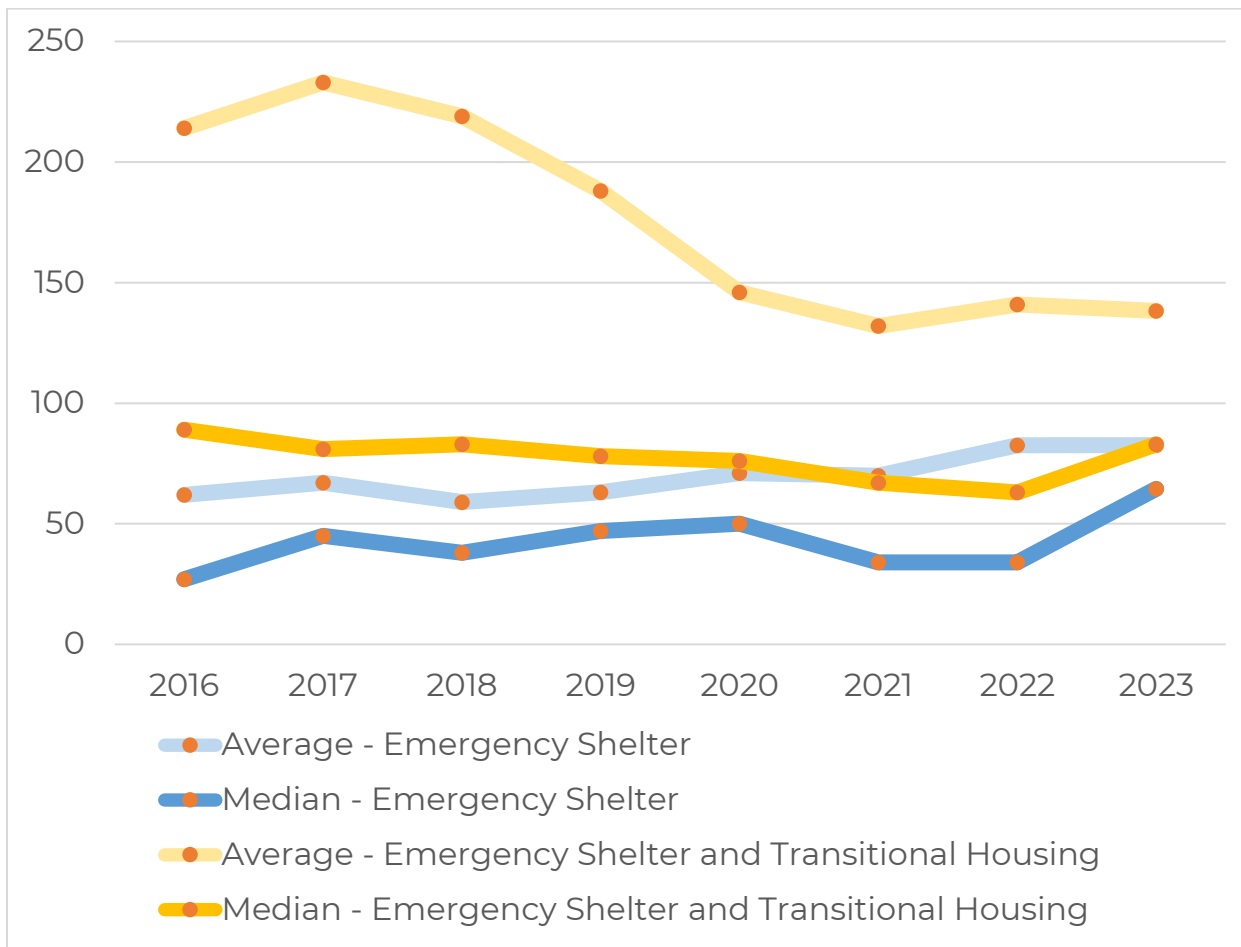
HUD produces two standard measures of Length of Time Homeless as part of its System Performance Measures. One measure (Metric 1.1) considers the length of time that people in emergency shelter projects spend homeless before exiting to a permanent destination. The other measure (Metric 1.2) extends this analysis to include people in transitional housing (TH) projects (in addition to those in emergency shelter). Inasmuch as people tend to spend longer in transitional housing, Metric 1.2 figures tend to be higher than Metric 1.1 figures⁴².

Figure 20 shows mixed progress on these measures of length of time homeless. What stands out most in this figure is the decline in the average length of time homeless for people in emergency shelter and transitional housing programs. From a high of 233 days in 2017, it fell to a low of 132 days in 2021 and was most recently calculated as 138 days in 2023. While this decline is notable, a significant portion of this apparent improvement is attributable to a shift in both the number and the mix of temporary housing beds offered by the homelessness response system. In 2017, the system had 467 temporary housing beds, of which about 76% were in transitional housing. However, prior to 2020, a majority of transitional housing projects recorded in HMIS were functioning as scattered-site rapid rehousing, and as such were providing a misleading number of clients in sheltered situations. These projects were reclassified accordingly, leading to a notable decrease in the number of transitional housing beds. By 2023, the system had fewer than half of those temporary housing beds (224 total beds). Moreover, transitional housing beds accounted for just 40% of the total temporary housing beds in the system. Accordingly, far fewer people were staying in transitional housing, both in absolute terms and as a share of temporary housing offered in the system. For this reason, the longer periods of time that people tend to stay in transitional housing played a declining role in HUD's calculation of Length of Time homeless in Metric 1.2 (ES, SH, TH). This explains a significant portion of the apparent decline in Metric 1.2 between 2017 and 2021.

The remaining measures in Figure 20 show much smaller fluctuations. Both the average and median length of time homeless in emergency shelter (Bucks County has no Safe Haven beds) has generally trended upwards in recent years. This suggests that people in these programs are finding it harder to move to permanent housing destinations. Notably, the median length of time homeless – whether looking just at emergency shelter or also including transitional housing – saw a sharp increase from 2022 to 2023. This suggests that for those who are not able to find permanent housing immediately, the time it takes to exit the system is increasing. The timing of this increase coincided with the COVID pandemic and increasing rental prices making it more difficult to obtain and maintain housing.

⁴² HUD System Performance Measures 1.1 and 1.2 also include Safe Havens, a legacy CoC project type that is a form of supportive housing that serves persons with severe mental illness. This is not applicable to Buck's County.

FIGURE 50: AVERAGE AND MEDIAN LENGTH OF TIME HOMELESS 2016-2023



Homebase also calculated length of time homeless for the broader data set it used throughout its analysis for this plan.⁴³ In addition to the programs included in HUD’s measures, this data set includes data from Street Outreach programs (among others). As a result, it captures the length of time that people experience homelessness while living unsheltered. Periods of unsheltered homelessness can be very lengthy. Indeed, much of the work that Street Outreach does is build trusting relationships with a community of people who often have a deep-seated sense of mistrust and skepticism toward service providers and government programs. Building that trust takes patience, understanding and consistency, all of which requires time. Accordingly, including street outreach programs in the calculation of length of time homeless will almost invariably lead to longer estimates of the length of time homeless. Simply put, Homebase’s measure of the length of time homeless measures the time between a household’s first interaction with the system until move in or the household exits from the system to a permanent destination for

⁴³ This data set includes data in HMIS from projects classified as Services Only, Street Outreach, Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, Rapid Rehousing, and Permanent Supportive Housing, and spans the period from January 2016 through June 2023. Due to data quality issues, it excludes data from projects classified as Coordinated Entry, PATH, Homelessness Prevention and other project types.

which they do not return for at least one year. This centers the person's experience rather than the shelter beds being occupied. Lastly, this is a household level analysis rather than an individual level analysis in HUD's SPMs. It results in a measure of the length of time homeless that is more representative of the range of experiences of people in the system of care than HUD's more narrow measures.

Homebase's analysis shows that a person on average spends 538 days – *more than a year-and-a-half* – from first encounter in the system to a permanent housing move-in or permanent exit. The median length-of-time-homeless using this data set is 291 days, meaning that half of all people in the system spend more than nine months before exiting homelessness. As a broad indicator of system performance, this measure shows that the system is falling short of its goal of ensuring that homelessness is a brief occurrence. Indeed, as HUD's measures of the length of time homeless indicate, the time it takes to find permanent housing or otherwise exit the system appears to be getting longer.

- There are significant disparities in how long people in the system remain homeless based on certain individual or household characteristics:⁴⁴
 - Families spend 168 days longer in the system than adult-only households.
 - Female heads of household spend 283 days longer in the system.
 - White identifying households spend 91 days less in the system on average
 - Black identifying households spend 104 days longer on average in the system.
 - Non-white identifying households spend 72 days longer on average in the system.

Exits to permanent destinations⁴⁵

- Some groups – including adult-only households, parenting youth, male heads of household, and veteran heads of household – are exiting from Rapid Rehousing (RRH) to permanent housing at lower rates than others:
 - 67% of adult-only households exit RRH to permanent housing, while 75% of households with children exit to permanent destinations.
 - 58% of parenting youth (age 18-24) in RRH exit to permanent housing, while 77% of parents aged 25 and older exit to permanent housing.
 - Male heads of household exit to permanent housing at 61%, while female heads of household exit to permanent housing at 73%.
 - Veteran heads of household exit RRH to permanent housing 53% of the time compared to 71% for nonveterans.

⁴⁴ As above, these figures are based on Homebase's analysis of data in Bucks County's Homeless Management Information System from projects classified as Services Only, Street Outreach, Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, Rapid Rehousing, and Permanent Supportive Housing, and spans the period from January 2016 through June 2023. Due to data quality issues, it excludes data from projects classified as Coordinated Entry, PATH, Homelessness Prevention and other project types

⁴⁵ This analysis of exits to permanent destinations is based on data in Bucks County's Homeless Management Information System for the period January 2020 through June 2023.

These statistics indicate that adult-only households, parenting youth, male heads of household and veteran heads of household may need more support than they are receiving to exit RRH to permanent housing.

- *There are fewer disparities in exits from transitional housing (TH).* Nonetheless, adult-only households and younger parents succeed less often in exiting to permanent housing compared to their counterparts.
 - 58% of adult-only households exit TH to permanent housing, while 64% of households with children exit to permanent destinations.
 - Younger parents with children exit TH to permanent housing at lower rates than older parents. Each year of parental age equates to 7% greater odds of exiting to permanent housing.
- Again, these statistics indicate that adult-only households and parenting youth may need more support to exit TH to permanent housing.

Outcome Connections⁴⁶

“Outcome connections” refers to the types of permanent housing destinations to which participants exit when leaving a housing program. These destinations may include friends and family, subsidized housing or “leasing without subsidy” (meaning the household exits to a lease of their own without subsidy). Due to data limitations, only connections from rapid rehousing (RRH) were reviewed.

RRH is a program intended to serve individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness, who can be moved into permanent housing quickly, and who are a match for the level of services in the program. Typically, the goal for RRH is to stabilize households through RRH so they can eventually move into a lease without subsidy. However, in many cases RRH is used more as a bridge to permanent supportive housing or for households who need assistance on a more permanent basis. Table 6 indicates that just over 40% of RRH households that exit the program to permanent destinations exit with a lease without subsidy. Half or more exit to subsidized housing. This may be an indicator that many of the people assigned to RRH programs would have been better served by permanent supportive housing, which typically includes more intensive supports.

TABLE 6: OUTCOME CONNECTIONS OF HOUSEHOLDS IN RAPID REHOUSING 2020 - 2023

Rate of permanent destination at exit	Of those exiting to permanent destinations: Exits to friends and family	Of those exiting to permanent destinations: Exits to leases without subsidy	Of those exiting to permanent destinations: Exits to housing subsidy
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⁴⁶ This analysis of outcome connections is based on data in Bucks County’s Homeless Management Information System for the period January 2020 through June 2023.

<i>Adult-Only Households</i>	67%	6%	42%	52%
<i>Adult(s) with children households</i>	75%	9%	41%	50%

For both adult-only and adult-with-children households, heads of households with disabling conditions exited to “leases without subsidy” destinations at the lowest rates and to units with ongoing housing subsidy at the highest rates (see Table 7).

TABLE 7: OUTCOME CONNECTIONS FOR HOUSEHOLDS IN RAPID-REHOUSING WITH DISABLING CONDITIONS 2020 - 2023

	Rate of permanent destination at exit	Of those exiting to permanent destinations: Exits to friends and family	Of those exiting to permanent destinations: Exits to leases without subsidy	Of those exiting to permanent destinations: Exits to housing subsidy
<i>Adult-only households w/ disabling condition</i>	67%	7%	38%	55%
<i>Adult with children households w/ disabling condition</i>	75%	5%	29%	67%

Returns to Homelessness

The goal of permanent housing projects is to ensure that people are stably housed, so that no one who was at risk of or experienced homelessness needs to come back to the system. “Returns to homelessness” is a measure of the system’s success on this goal. For this plan, returns to homeless was calculated by observing whether a household returned to the homeless system of care through emergency shelter, transitional housing, or street outreach after the most recent exit to permanent destinations between January 1, 2017 and July 1, 2022.

As Table 8 indicates, returns to homelessness range from 11.5% to 15.6% for transitional housing, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing programs. This means that more than a thousand households who had exited homelessness to permanent destinations returned to the homeless system of care during the study period. With the already low rates of exit to permanent housing for RRH, and lower rates of people exiting to a lease without subsidy destination, these returns add to the congestion straining an over-taxed system.

TABLE 8: RETURNS TO HOMELESSNESS 2017-2022

Project Type	Percent Returns	Number of Returns
<i>Transitional Housing</i>	14.5%	228
<i>Rapid Rehousing</i>	15.6%	744
<i>Permanent Supportive Housing</i>	11.5%	87

No significant differences were found with regards to race, ethnicity and returns to homelessness. Accordingly, households appear to be equally successful in maintaining housing stability when they exit the system regardless of the racial or ethnic composition of the household. However, there were some differences found when comparing adult-only households and adult with children households with rates of return for RRH, as shown in Table 9.

TABLE 9: RETURNS TO HOMELESSNESS FOR ADULT-ONLY AND ADULT WITH CHILDREN HOUSEHOLDS BY PROJECT TYPE

Project Type	Household Type	Percent Returns	Number of Returns
<i>Transitional Housing</i>	Adult-Only	19.4%	72
	Adult with Children	12.2%	156
<i>Rapid Rehousing</i>	Adult-Only	19.2%*	401
	Adult with Children	12.0%*	350
<i>Permanent Supportive Housing</i>	Adult Only	9.2%	65
	Adult with Children	18.0%	<10
*Statistically significant p<.05			

The rate of return for homeless prevention was very positive. For those enrolling in homeless prevention from a permanent destination, the rate of return was only 5.5% (see Table 10). For adults with children households, this figure was even stronger: just 2.7%. Adult-only households returned to homelessness at 9.6%, suggesting these households may need additional support to avoid returns to homelessness. The screening criteria used for homelessness prevention helped ensure the high rate of success. The program was targeted to those who had the income to sustain their housing situation following the short-term intervention of rental assistance under the Bucks County program.

TABLE 10: RETURNS TO HOMELESSNESS FOR HOUSEHOLDS IN HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION PROJECT

Household Type	Percent Returns	Number of Returns
<i>Adult-Only</i>	9.6%	230
<i>Adult with Children</i>	2.7%	331
<i>Total</i>	5.5%	561

Resource Need

Homebase used HUD’s Stella M analysis tool to develop a model of Bucks County’s homeless response system. Stella M uses the community’s data on homelessness, combinations of project types, and performance goals to calculate the inventory of housing, shelter, and services needed to fully meet the community’s needs. Based on the analysis, Bucks County would need to house 150 more people in 79 households per year to stop the increase of homelessness across the CoC. To do this they will need to decrease inflow through homeless prevention and diversion programs and increase permanent housing options for all household types, specifically targeting those who are exiting the system at lower rates (people of color and families). Bucks County must also respond to a growing population of older adults experiencing homelessness who are aging within the system while unable to exit to positive destinations.

The Strategic Planning Committee set the stability of emergency shelter and the expansion of PSH as the priority goals for investment for the Strategic Plan over the next five years. Leveraging HUD’s Stella M Modeling tool, the Strategic Planning Committee estimated the quantity of resources needed. See Table 11 below.

TABLE 11: STELLA M PROJECTIONS OF UNIT NEED BY HOUSING TYPE

	Emergency Shelter	Transitional Housing	Rapid Rehousing	Permanent Supportive Housing
<i>Current Units in Bucks County</i>	142	61	81	88
<i>Stella M Model 1: Single Year Estimate of Unit Need</i>	375	86	339	234
<i>Stella M Model 2: 5 year - Multi Year Estimate of Unit Need (at Peak)</i>	199	51	234	257
<i>Estimate of Need Average</i>	287	69	287	246

Table 11 includes two estimates of need based on different models. Model 1 projects the number of units of each type of housing or shelter that would need to be provided to eliminate homelessness immediately (within a year). It shows a fairly large number of units across all housing and shelter types to address the backlog of clients waiting for assistance. Model 2 projects the number of units that would need to be produced to eliminate homelessness over a 5-year period. Compared to the 1-year model, it incorporates more complex dynamics and feedback loops to account for longer-term trends and interactions. For example, the model assumes that as more permanent housing units come online, Bucks County will see increased flow through the system, decreasing the demand for emergency shelter beds. Accordingly, Model 2 projects a need for 199 shelter beds, instead of 375 (as projected in Model 1). The projected need for Transitional Housing units and Rapid Rehousing Units is also lower in Model 2 compared to Model 1, while the need for Permanent Supportive Housing Units is slightly higher. The final line of Table 11 provides an average of the need estimates produced by the two models.

The Stella M models are helpful for providing a sense of the scope of need across different housing types. However, the precise figures should be viewed with a healthy dose of skepticism. All complex models are based on some foundational assumptions which may not prove accurate as underlying conditions continue to evolve. Changes in the economy, or program rules or public benefits, etc., may significantly impact the need for units across housing types. Accordingly, the lesson to be drawn from the Stella M models above is that there is a significant need for additional units or beds across all housing types.

Table 12 includes low and high projections for the number of units the county is likely to produce in the next five years, based on past performance. Based on the average of these low and high projections, the County is not projected to meet the need for rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing. (See Table 13). There will likely be a gap for these households. However, if transitional housing and emergency shelter targets are met and the community pushes forward with homeless prevention and diversion dollars, the need for rapid rehousing could drastically

decrease. Additionally, prevention and diversion efforts may be enough to support additional households in exiting homelessness, thereby slowly and steadily decreasing homelessness across the county if conditions remain the same.

TABLE 12: PROJECTED HOUSING PRODUCTION 2024-2029

	Emergency Shelter	Transitional Housing	Rapid Rehousing	Permanent Supportive Housing
<i>Current Units in Bucks County</i>	142	61	81	88
<i>2029 Low Projected Target</i>	199	64	81	106
<i>2029 High Projected Target</i>	217	67	81	108
<i>Projected Average of 5 years of Production</i>	208	66	81	107

TABLE 136: PROJECTED DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AVERAGE UNIT NEED AND AVERAGE UNIT PRODUCTION 2024-2029

	Emergency Shelter	Transitional Housing	Rapid Rehousing	Permanent Supportive Housing
<i>Current Units in Bucks County</i>	142	61	81	88
<i>Estimate of Need Average</i>	287	69	287	246
<i>Projected Average of 5 years of Production</i>	208	66	81	107
<i>Difference of Averages</i>	79	3	205.5	139

Conclusion

There is a tremendous amount of work happening throughout Bucks County to prevent and end homelessness. Through the Strategic Planning process, strengths and achievements as well as potential areas for growth were identified. Six key goals were identified (**center lived experience; prevent homelessness; increase access to shelter options; increase access to safe, affordable permanent housing; build collective response; strengthen data systems**) each with tailored strategies and action steps for response. The strategic plan goals, strategies and action steps were developed through extensive community engagement and the work of a Strategic Planning Committee with input from residents with lived experience of homelessness.

Not all the proposed solutions in the plan can be implemented at once and each has differing levels of anticipated effort required and impact expected. Additionally, many of these actions build off existing programs and resources or current efforts to improve the system. Other actions will require significant new resources or creative new solutions. By working together to identify the most promising and timely solutions and match resources and partners to those efforts, the region can begin to lay the foundation for future success.

At this time, the CoC can and should reflect on the great work that has already occurred in the community over the past several years. There is strong collaboration and leadership that exists resulting in the Housing Link Continuum of Care successfully providing a safety net for many households who are precariously housed or who are unsheltered. In partnership with Bucks County, the CoC is currently working on new initiatives to bolster the homeless system of care, including master leasing projects, additional low-barrier shelter options, and increased access to permanent housing.

Looking ahead, the community can build on its strong relationships by implementing the strategic plan strategies. This includes focusing on improving the accessibility and administration of the system to help identify and serve those most in need and more effectively match people to the appropriate housing and services. Regular assessment of disparities and system performance will be essential in evaluating the success of these efforts.

The next stage in the process will be to work together with CoC partners, nonprofit organizations and other service providers, city and county officials, business leaders, neighbors, and individuals experiencing homelessness to develop an implementation plan with priorities and metrics for the first year.

With action in these key areas, the community will be well positioned to enhance and improve the current system and anticipate and address the challenges ahead.

Goals, Strategies and Action Steps

Introduction

Together the six overarching **Goals** address the key challenges and needs identified above.

Each goal has beneath it a set of **Strategies** to enable the community to achieve the goal. Under each strategy, this roadmap outlines a series of **Action Steps** that the community can undertake to move the strategy forward.

Goal A: Center the Voices of People with Lived Experience of Homelessness

Housing and services should be accessible and positive to all. This requires analyzing outcomes, identifying barriers to housing and services, and then targeting resources and removing barriers to ensure access for all.

People who have experienced homelessness are often the best equipped to understand and address the issues surrounding homelessness. A goal of the plan is to better integrate people with lived experience of homelessness into the decision-making processes of the homeless system of care.

Goal A: Strategy & Action Steps

- Strategy A.1: Create pathways to achieve improved outcomes, foster trust and share decision-making power to improve system access and the provision of services
 - Action A.1.2: Establish a Lived Experience Advisory Board (LEAB) for people with lived experience of homelessness (ensure decision making and policy making power)
 - Action A.1.3: Increase the presence of lived experience within decision making and voting power at the CoC provider and system-level to be more reflective of the homeless population and needs
 - Action A.1.4: Integrate representation from LEAB into CoC leadership, committees and other work, including funding allocation
 - Action A.1.5: Develop annual goals, action plan and outcomes for LEAB
- Strategy A.2: Establish practices to drive progress on identifying and modifying policies that contribute to poor outcomes in the system
 - Action A.2.1: Conduct a quality review of policies and procedures with the Lived Experience Advisory Board, to include but not be limited to the CoC Charter, Shelter Policies, and Coordinated Entry policies.
 - Action A.2.2: Continue to monitor improvements in access, placement, length of time homeless, and exits from system for all populations/household types, with a focus on special populations such as older adults and youth, and those who fit the chronically homeless definition
 - Action A.2.3: Implement continuous feedback loops to have meaningful exchange of information with people experiencing homelessness and local administrators, planners, and providers.

Goal B: Stop Homelessness Before It Begins

Due to the high housing costs in the nation and in Bucks County, more people are just one paycheck or financial crisis away from losing their housing. Often it only requires a small intervention to prevent them from becoming homeless, such as one-time financial resources to provide a security deposit or back-rent, legal assistance to prevent eviction, help learning to balance a budget, mediation with a landlord or assistance finding childcare. Preventing homelessness by supporting individuals and families before they become homeless is not only more humane, but also more cost-effective. Homeless prevention can be a low-cost strategy that

can be implemented through problem-solving immediately at any agency serving homeless clients.

Diversion protocols identify people and divert them from homelessness - back to stable housing options that they may not have been able to reach themselves. Diversion can help at-risk households mediate interactions with a landlord, fund reliable transportation, reunify with family members or support systems, or brainstorm about other options. Additionally, working closely with partners from medical, law enforcement, and foster care systems create interagency referral networks that proactively prevent homelessness for people exiting these systems.

Goal B: Strategy & Action Steps

- Strategy B.1: Target and improve prevention and diversion services for vulnerable populations.
 - Action B.1.1 Improve diversion services, including integration into street outreach, shelter front door, and emergency response services
 - Action B.1.2: Support a targeted emergency rental assistance program
 - Action B.1.3: Standardize training for problem-solving techniques and resources for front door of the system
- Strategy B.2: Improve coordination to ensure people are not discharged into homelessness.
 - Action B.2.1: Collaborate with McKinney Vento Liaisons (Bucks County Intermediate Unit) to better share resources to identify and assist households before they become homeless
 - Action B.2.2: Work with health systems to more reliably code people experiencing homelessness outside of HMIS
 - Action B.2.3: Strengthen discharge planning and creative problem solving with institutional partners including hospitals, jails and foster care.

Goal C: Increase Access to Shelter and Homeless Crisis Response Services

The total number of people identified in the PIT Count as experiencing homelessness declined between 2022 and 2023, which was in line with the number of people identified as experiencing homelessness in the years leading up to the COVID pandemic. However, of the people identified as experiencing homelessness, approximately 21% were living unsheltered. This is more than three times higher than the comparable figure in 2022. This increase in the proportion of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness is concerning. People experiencing unsheltered homelessness face distinct challenges and barriers in obtaining permanent housing. They are also uniquely vulnerable and, according to stakeholders, need significant additional supports to exit homelessness and maintain permanent housing. Reducing unsheltered homelessness was identified by stakeholders as essential to addressing homelessness.

The County, Housing Link CoC, and other partners can work collectively to help those most in need get the services and support that they require to exit homelessness by expanding access to safe, low-barrier, temporary housing options countywide, increasing coordinated and countywide street outreach, and developing more countywide comprehensive supportive services to help people obtain and maintain stable housing. Within Bucks County, there are populations at risk of or experiencing homelessness who require special attention, such as families, older adults, and individuals who are chronically homeless. By understanding their special needs and directing

services that allow professionals to focus and tailor their care, the community can ensure that the system is accessible to some of the most vulnerable community members in Bucks County. When permanent housing is unavailable, households in crisis need a continuum of low-barrier emergency service options, such as low-barrier housing focused shelter and supportive services.

Goal C: Strategy and Action Steps

- Strategy C.1: Strengthen outreach to more effectively and efficiently serve individuals and households living unhoused
 - Action C.1.1: Strengthen cooperation, coordination and communication between street outreach programs to prevent duplication of services and ensure efficient delivery of services
 - Action C.1.2: Clarify roles and responsibilities across the system regarding street outreach, case management and document readiness to ensure that appropriate entities are carrying out each function
 - Action C.1.3: Utilize encampment resolution policies and practices to minimize legal citations against unsheltered households and expedite unsheltered households facing displacement moving quickly into housing or shelter.
- Strategy C.2: Expand access to safe, low-barrier temporary housing options to make shelter available to all who need it
 - Action C.2.1: Increase shelter capacity to come closer to meeting current and anticipated needs in all areas of Bucks County
 - Action C.2.2: Increase shelter options for specific populations, including medically frail, those fleeing domestic violence, and households with pets
 - Action C.2.3: Develop strategies to decrease average shelter length of stay to increase access to shelter
- Strategy C.3: Expand services to support exits from homelessness and maintain housing stability
 - Action C.3.1: Improve training and support for frontline workers engaged with clients with behavioral health issues and severe mental illness.
 - Action C.3.2: Expand access to mental and physical healthcare services (i.e. multidisciplinary outreach, street medicine)
 - Action C.3.3: Improve population specific services to be better able to serve older adults, youth, DV, Veterans, etc.
 - Action C.3.4: Expand resources and capacity to address issues of transportation and vehicle repair.

Goal D: Increase Access to Permanent, Affordable, Low-Barrier Housing

Across all the surveys, interviews, focus groups, and data analyzed, there was a strong consensus that Bucks County needs more affordable housing to effectively address homelessness. Access to affordable housing is vital to enable individuals who have become homeless to regain housing. It also provides an essential base for ongoing stability, which in turn prevents future homelessness.

Permanent housing is the ultimate goal in ending homelessness. It brings security and safety, allowing individuals and families to focus their efforts on maintaining a job, getting their kids to school or childcare, and improving or preserving their health and well-being. Some people experiencing homelessness would benefit from permanent housing coupled with supportive services, such as independent living skills, job training, and/or health and behavioral health services. Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) allows people with higher needs to achieve housing stability and long-term self-sufficiency. Rapid Rehousing (RRH) helps people for up to 2 years with housing vouchers and supportive services that can enable them to become independent and stably housed by the end of the program. Transitional Housing (TH) programs use master leasing or leases in the person's own name while providing more intensive case management and supports to move towards self-sufficiency and permanent housing.

Goal D: Strategy and Action Steps

- Strategy D.1: Continue to prioritize the development of low-barrier permanent supportive housing (PSH) units
 - Action D.1.1: Expand the supply of permanent supportive housing by:
 - Working with state and local partners to expand the housing development pipeline
 - Improving connections to community-based services when embedded supports are not available.
 - Enhancing the capacity of local partners to develop and operate permanent supportive housing
 - Action D.1.2: Use master leasing and other similar agreements to increase the availability of low barrier, permanent supportive housing.
 - Action D.1.3: Strengthen “moving-on” policies and practices to support stable transitions out of permanent supportive housing, to increase flow through the system.
- Strategy D.2: Expand available rapid rehousing (RRH) and transitional housing (TH) units as needed
 - Action D.2.1: Continue efforts to increase landlord participation through education, incentives (landlord support and mitigation funds) and other recruitment efforts.
 - Action D.2.2: Use master leased transitional housing and other similar agreements to increase the availability of low barrier supportive housing.
- Strategy D.3: Partner with housing providers to lower barriers to housing.
 - Action D.3.1: Increase access to pet inclusive permanent housing
- Strategy D.4: Advocate for policies and practices that promote the development of more dedicated affordable housing
 - Action D.4.1: Provide resources and information to localities to support local development of affordable, multifamily housing.
 - Action D.4.2: Support efforts to lower barriers that make it difficult for tenants to obtain affordable housing.
 - Action D.4.3: Expand the use of alternative housing models countywide (e.g. shared housing, bridge housing) to increase the availability of affordable housing.

Goal E: Partner Across Bucks County to Build Collective Solutions

No one strategy, agency, or government entity alone can end homelessness in Bucks County. Deeper partnerships and greater engagement throughout the region will strengthen and build leadership and community support for solutions to address homelessness more effectively. The public and private systems created to help people in times of need are often patchwork, i.e., programs have different eligibility requirements, are run by different agencies, and at times do not work collaboratively to address the breadth of needs that individuals or families may have. It is often the municipalities' employees in emergency services departments that often encounter and support those residents experiencing homelessness, and each municipality has a unique set of local laws, ordinances, and codes. Improving collaboration, coordination, and leveraging investments across the many systems and throughout different areas of the county can help the community more effectively address homelessness, gather support for homeless solutions, and implement strategies more quickly and efficiently. Working together, engaging people with lived experience of homelessness, and focusing collectively on implementing the strategies can help ensure the community is well positioned to prevent and end homelessness in Bucks County. To be successful, Bucks County can continue to build on the coordination efforts of the Housing Link CoC and between the CoC and the broader community. The community needs a systematic and multi-faceted approach that engages the entire community – it requires investments from both the public and private sectors, dedicated resources with a focus on proven strategies, and collaboration and coordination across all sectors.

Goal E: Strategy and Action Steps

- Strategy E.1: Establish shared practices, policies, and procedures across the system of care
 - Action E.1.1: Develop policies and training to:
 - Standardize homelessness assessment and prioritization practices across providers
 - Support the document readiness process so that it does not serve as a barrier for people accessing referrals and housing
 - Ensure that clients have up-to-date housing plans that address immediate and long-term needs, and that those plans are acted upon in a timely manner before clients exit from the system of care.
 - Promote a cultural shift to see people as Housing Link clients instead of clients at individual agencies
 - Action E.1.2: Explore data sharing and referral coordination opportunities
- Strategy E.2: Strengthen collaboration and coordination among key county agencies
 - Action E.2.1: Improve coordination and collaboration among County agencies, including Housing and Community Development, Human Services, the Department of Health, the Intermediate Unit, and Workforce and Economic Development
- Strategy E.3: Improve engagement with local municipalities
 - Action E.3.1: Coordinate with local municipalities to better understand their challenges and engage with them to best serve their residents experiencing homelessness

Goal F: Strengthen data systems to promote continuous improvement

Sound decision-making and evaluation of outcomes both require access to reliable, valid data. Without access to such data, decision makers do not have the proper basis to make informed choices necessary to guide planning processes, prioritize resources, or evaluate and measure performance in a manner designed to increase the likelihood of preventing or ending homelessness. In addition, key funders—including state and federal governments—rely on data collected through the Point-in-Time count and System Performance Measures, to allocate limited resources. It is imperative that CoCs develop and implement policies, procedures, and systems to ensure that quality information is contained within the HMIS. The responsibility extends to every HMIS-participating agency to commit the resources necessary to collect and contribute timely data accurately.

“Data quality” refers to the reliability and validity of client-level data as collected and maintained within the community’s HMIS. Where data quality is high, it will accurately reflect the circumstances of persons experiencing homelessness in the real world, enabling CoC leadership to make the decisions necessary to improve the overall system of care and impact the lives of individuals and families in a positive manner.

Goal F: Strategy and Action Steps

- Strategy F.1: Improve systems and practices to ensure data quality
 - Action F.1.1: Improve call center and CoC data tracking to enhance ability to evaluate coordinate entry systems, to assess effectiveness of homelessness prevention efforts, and to generate a better prediction of resource needs
 - Action F.1.2: Continue to improve data quality to build on significant improvements since 2020.
 - Action F.1.3: Track move-in dates for all people in CE, RRH, OPH, PSH.
 - Action F.1.4: Continue to monitor access, placement, length of time homeless, and exits from system for disparities, with a focus on special populations such as TAY and youth, and those who fit the chronically homeless definition
- Strategy F.2: Use available system performance data to enhance system decision-making
 - Action F.2.1: Continue to run Stella M models and other performance modeling with community input to track progress and changing need
 - Action F.2.2: Implement continuous feedback loops to have meaningful exchange of information with people experiencing homelessness and local administrators, planners, and providers.