

Racial Equity Committee Interviews Summary

June 2021



The Sacramento Continuum of Care Racial Equity Committee (REQC) established a goal to better understand the local Black Indigenous & Persons of Color (BIPOC) homelessness experience through an interview process.

REQC members were encouraged to contribute names of persons with current or recent past experience with homelessness, who might be willing to be interviewed. 19 people were recommended for interview.

Based on the ability to connect, 20 REQC members were involved in surveying 14 people. Participants were provided with a gift card.

Participant Demographics Summary

14 people interviewed

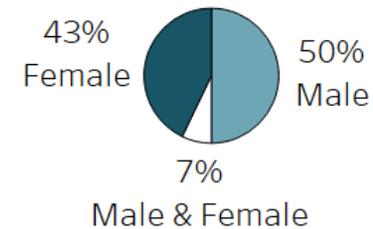
"How do you identify racially and ethnically?"

African American	5
African American/Black	2
Black	1
Native American /Black	1
Native/Black	1
Indigenous/Haitian/ Native American	1
Native American	1
Hispanic/Indian	1
Anglo/Asian/Latin	1

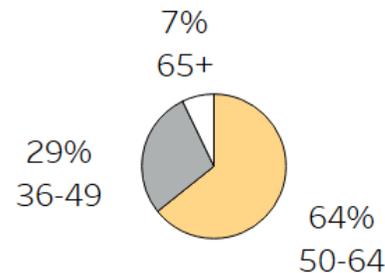
Current homelessness situation

Experiencing/connected to services	6
Experiencing/not connected to services	4
Resolved	4

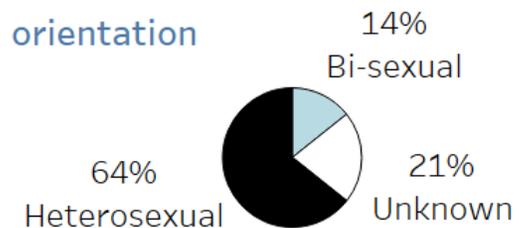
Gender



Age group



Sexual orientation



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Participant Demographics Detail:

Person ID	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Head of Household	Living w/ Disability	DV Survivor	Formerly Incarcerated	Veteran	Age Group	Current Situation
1	Black	Male	Straight	Yes	Yes	-	-	-	36-49	Experiencing/not connected to services
2	Indigenous & Haitian/ Native American	Male	Straight	Yes	Yes	-	-	-	50-64	Experiencing/connected to services
3	Native American	Female	Straight	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-	50-64	Resolved
4	Black/African American	Female	Bi-sexual	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	36-49	Experiencing/connected to services
5	Native American & Black	Female	Not answered	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	50-64	Experiencing/not connected to services
6	African American Black	Male	Straight	-	-	-	-	Yes	50-64	Resolved
7	African American	Male	Heterosexual	Yes	Yes	-	-	Yes	50-64	Resolved
8	African American	Female	Not answered	Yes	Yes	-	-	-	65+	Experiencing/connected to services
9	Hispanic/Indian	Female	Not answered	Yes	-	-	Yes	-	50-64	Experiencing/connected to services
10	Anglo Asian Latin	Male/Female/ Hesperus	Bi-sexual	Yes	-	-	-	-	50-64	Experiencing/not connected to services
11	African American	Male	Straight	Yes	-	-	Yes	-	36-49	Experiencing/connected to services
12	Native & Black	Male	Straight	Yes	Yes	-	-	-	50-64	Experiencing/connected to services
13	African American	Male	Straight	Yes	Yes	-	-	-	50-64	Experiencing/not connected to services
14	African American	Female	Straight	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	-	36-49	Resolved

- For Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Sexual Orientation, the participant self-identified and was not limited to any categories.
- For Head of Household, Living with a Disability, Domestic Violence (DV) Survivor, Formerly Incarcerated, and Veteran categories, participants were asked “Which of these descriptions best describe you?”
- For Current Situation, participants chose from three options.

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Length of time homeless

Of the 12 persons who responded, all indicated a length of one year or longer. It was in some cases difficult to tell if lengths were continuous or represented multiple cases of homelessness. The range reported spanned “about one year” to 30 years.

Those who had resolved their homelessness, reported shorter lengths of time homeless.

Current homelessness situation	Average years homeless
Experiencing/connected to services	9.2
Experiencing/not connected to services	10.3
Resolved	2.0
Overall average years homeless	8.3

Location of homelessness

The majority of persons had spent all of their time homeless in Sacramento.

Other locations mentioned were Los Angeles (experience was better in Sacramento) and Texas (experience was better in Sacramento).

Location of homelessness	Count
All Sacramento	8
Not just Sacramento	5
Total	13

Events leading to homelessness

All 14 persons identified events contributing to their homelessness.

8 people reported multiple events leading to homelessness, and each event was counted.

The most common themes were related to:

- Employment, including loss of job or inability to find work
- Health-related challenges, including illness or injury that prevented them from working, as well as related bills
- Family changes, including death of family member and separation from partner

Event type	Count
Multiple reasons	8
Employment	7
Health	7
Family change	6
Not enough money	5
Other	3
Drug addiction	1
Eviction	1
Total	38

Personal impact of homelessness

10 people answered a question on how homelessness affected them. 4 people focused on challenges (1 had resolved their homelessness). 5 people focused more on things they had learned (1 person had resolved their homelessness). 1 person spoke to both challenges and growth.

Challenges identified in response to this question included:

- bad weather
- no bathroom or shower
- health issues got worse
- addicted to living outside
- realize people look down on you
- things get stolen
- getting the “run around” from providers

Changes that reflect new understanding included:

- increased empathy
- more aware of world
- helped resolve personal issues
- increased understanding of self
- realized you need others to survive

Resources accessed

13 people indicated a wide variety of services and agencies accessed or attempted to access, including navigation, housing services, shelter, and drug-related programs. 2 persons (both not connected to services) indicated that they “haven’t really tried.” Sometimes resources were referred to generally, but specific programs were also mentioned.

Sacramento programs and providers mentioned

- 2-1-1
- Covered Sacramento
- Loaves & Fishes
- Sacramento Covered navigator
- Sacramento Self Help Housing
- Salvation Army
- Volunteers of America
- Union Gospel Mission
- Sacramento Housing & Redevelopment Agency (SHRA)
- Sacramento Native American Health Center (SNAHC)

Veteran programs mentioned

- Roads Home
- VASH vouchers
- Veterans advocate program

Other programs mentioned

- Section 8
- SSI

Housing Choice Vouchers

A little more than half (8 out of 14) indicated they had received Housing Choice Vouchers, 3 of whom reported that they received denials for vouchers or from apartments or landlords. An additional 2 people who did not receive Housing Choice Vouchers reported other housing-related denials. No reasons for denials were provided in response to this question, but related issues emerged for other questions, as captured elsewhere in this report.

Time to services

Of the 11 people who responded, 5 reported they were quick to get services (“immediate”/“daily”/“not long”). 2 people indicated months (1 of which was specific to housing), and 1 person indicated years (specific to housing). 1 person said it depends. 2 people said they had not yet received services.

Barriers to accessing services

11 out of 13 people indicated barriers to accessing services at some point in the interview. 2 people stated that they did not experience any barriers.

The most common barrier identified was transportation to appointments and/or to access services with 8 mentions, followed by health-related issues, and documentation issues.

Barriers identified	Count
Transportation	8
Health condition	4
Documentation	3
Hard to connect with providers	2
Men-only program	1
Locating housing	1
Politics	1
Long wait for housing/shelter	1
Drug use	1
Domestic Violence	1
Lack of opportunity	1
Lack of resources	1
Being a woman	1
Insurance changes	1

Reasons rejected or denied resources

Of the people who responded, half (6 out of 12) said they had been rejected or denied services. In some cases, details were provided.

- Person 2 was told that he was verbally abusive and an “angry black man” and doesn’t meet the criteria because of his attitude.
- Person 5 said the Sheriff’s Department denied her resources when they were around, and she noticed someone else of another race get vouchers, but she didn’t receive any.
- 3 people mentioned that the call-back process is an issue, and some programs do not return calls.
- Person 14 said no call-backs leaves people feeling lost. In addition, she said “So many places have denied me along the way for having a voucher and some take advantage that you do in all type of ways – profiling, indecent behavior, or just not helping at all.”

Alternatives that played a part in resolution of homelessness

Alternatives to the homeless-related services and programs were not cited by most. Person 2 indicated an alternative, which was making relationships with people who had housing. Persons 5 and 11 referenced jail-based programs.

Ability to meet basic needs

1 person not connected to services said they were not able to meet their needs. 3 people clearly stated that their needs were met. In total 12 people listed different ways they were able to meet at least some of their needs. In general, people spoke positively about the services available to meet their basic needs, but 2 people indicated it was difficult to meet their needs.

General ways meeting needs

- Resourcefulness
- Car sharing
- Doctor service
- Food closets
- Food/supplies delivery
- Navigator
- Shelter/housing
- Wellness center

Specific programs meeting needs

- Citrus Heights Food Closet
- Loaves & Fishes
- Maryhouse
- One Community Health
- Salvation Army
- Section 8
- SHRA
- SNAHC
- St Francis house
- VA health care
- Volunteers of America
- Roads Home

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History of homelessness or other social or economic challenges related to race in family

The majority of the 8 people who responded did not indicate that there was a family history of homelessness or other family challenges related to race.

Of those who indicated there was a history, Person 2 indicated it was job-related (“you’re not getting the job because you are a black guy with dreads”), and the Person 13 mentioned challenges of growing up in “the South.”

History related to race	Count
No	6
Yes	2
Total	8

Is there a difference compared to other races in the factors that played a part in becoming homeless?

3 people indicated there was a difference.

- Person 1 said being black in America is hard. He doesn’t blame his skin color, but he clarified that it does make it a little tougher.
- Person 10 said he gets rejected because of the way he looks.
- Person 13 said he has been “undercut” on construction jobs by other races who are willing to do the job cheaper.

Is there a difference compared to other races in applying for or accessing services?

A little more than half (8 out of 14) thought there was a difference by race in applying for and accessing services. Some people provided specific examples.

- Person 1 says sometimes people look to help certain other people faster than they help you. He feels that being black “puts you at the bottom of the totem pole.”
- Person 2 said he was frustrated and upset that his word isn’t taken at face value, he wants to be treated equally when requesting resources.
- Person 4 said “When I was at the river, Discovery, there were different services and groups come out; groups would have you write down your name and social and were going to call you. White females got calls and spoke highly of them; I couldn’t get a call back. And, I was pregnant at the time. Yes, like I was saying early a couple of people swear by these services; there was a pastor that got hotel, people who got the help were white. Never saw anybody who wasn’t get much help. Not until where I work now.”
- Person 5 said it is not fair that the only time she has access to services is when she is being taken to jail.

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- Person 6 mentioned being given a “not up to par” feeling by a particular provider who wound up not providing the sought-after service to him, but providing to two others.
- Person 7 did not think race was a factor and mentioned that because he used a phone line that may have helped since they didn’t know what color he was.
- Person 12 said “It’s a certain look...they’re not hiding it.”
- Person 13 said “Man I don’t know why they hate us, what did we ever do?...I’m at this stand, grabbing coffee, he’ll just look up and move away like I’m going to do something to him or something, that hurts more than anything.” He says he is not a threat to anyone, and it is sad for him to go through things like that.
- Person 14 said “I see many pick-and-choose situations with races.”

Were services denied or delayed due to labels such as "service resistant", "aggressive", "violent"?

Of the 11 people who answered the question, 4 said they were delayed or denied services due to labels more readily assigned to BIPOC individuals. Specific labels were mentioned by 3 people.

- Person 1 says he was called a “lazy son of a bitch” and told “it’s just like you people.”
- Person 2 despises the “angry black man” moniker that has been assigned to him in the past.
- Person 12 has been labeled “service resistant.”

An additional person answered no, but said she had observed others get labelled as “aggressive” and “service resistant.”

Person 4 said they had not been labelled, but is impacted by the possibility of being labelled. “I try to keep myself as calm as possible because I know this; I’m a black female and of course seen as aggressive especially coming off of drug addiction, coming off the river all stacked up against me, so I try to be as pleasant as possible.

What would a more racially just system look like?

All 14 people responded, with a general call for equal access and treatment echoed by almost all. In addition, there were a wide variety of other recommendations.

Changes

- Remove program limitations (e.g., one bag limit at shelter)
- Better leadership
- Learn more about people served
- Provide mailing addresses
- More mental health staff
- More communication
- More funding
- More housing
- Expand Roads Home program
- Allow more time in programs
- More promotion of programs
- More training for providers
- Equality
- Compassion
- Accept imperfections
- Challenge each other
- Individual role
- Stop killing each other
- God's judgment
- Accept authority

Person 1 wishes everyone would realize that we all bleed the same blood. We should be judged by the content of our character, not the color of our skin. We need to treat each other better instead of pulling each other down. They need to realize that we are all the same.

Person 2 says equality across the board is the start. Zero tolerance on both sides, both the provider and the participant. Organization leadership needs to set a proper example. The individual coming in for help needs to be open and put their biases aside as well. Funds, more money needs to be poured into this. This is a state of emergency and needs to be addressed as such.

Person 3 says God is the only one that can judge us. She wishes everyone would just get along because we are all children of God regardless of the race.

Person 4 says the professionals in the industry of helping along with education need some training with who they are dealing with. Every staff should have one person on staff for mental health, staff for drugs and alcohol and mental health for sure, it should be required. Need people who are compassionate or do understand that mindset. Need to know if there's mental issues. A training course once a month for the staff because they can be the breaking point for a person being homeless

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Person 5 says equal access to services for all, color of skin shouldn't matter. Start handing out vouchers for everyone who is living on the street. Help those that want to be helped, shouldn't discriminate beyond that. Remove limitations, such as "you can only take one bag with you" Don't place time constraints for individuals, such as showering in 10 minutes, taking only one bag. Also, mailing addresses are needed and often times identification cards are stolen and other things like that.

Person 6 says people should just be treated as people. People who care and listened, showed compassion, understood the system are key to his/and everyone's success. Not everyone is "Cinderella." The attitudes of the employees of non-profits and legislators who are hired/and elected needs to change. They are there to serve the homeless population and he feels that they don't really follow through sometimes. When he was in the service, his job was to protect and serve the country. As a provider of services, they need to do the same. They need to care, that is paramount. You are in the public services to care and empathize with whatever your role entails that is what needs to happen.

Person 7 says if Roads Home could expand their services beyond veterans, it could be very helpful in getting more people off the street.

Person 8 says build more apartments and buildings. More funding to keep more homeless people off the street all the time.

Person 11 says try to love each other more. We got to stop killing each other before we worry about police killing us. As a whole, my race needs to take authority. We don't take authority that well, we don't like other people telling us what to do, that's what we have to get past, until we can do that, then nothing will change. Everyone's perception has to change and in order to do that, we have to look out for each other more. It falls back on that four-letter word, love.

Person 12 says a just system has no barriers holding specific races back. We should be challenging each other on how to better ourselves, society, and the world. We should come together as one, get back into the lawbooks to represent the people as one.

Person 13 says help everyone and everyone get along. Be more communicative, learn about people, don't go about old sayings and what you were you were taught in your household. Things have changed, and I hope so, we're not bad people man, we just need a break like everybody else. Everyone needs to learn how to let it flow and be good human beings. Equality is the goal, doesn't believe it'll happen in his lifetime, but he mentioned that even a little bit of change in his lifetime would be positive.

Person 14 says the reach out should be genuine to where it doesn't matter what race you are but based on the situation you are in and the desire to get out of your situation.