

**AUSTIN / TRAVIS COUNTY CONTINUUM OF CARE RACIAL DISPARITIES**

**By**

**Claire Burrus**

**Research & Evaluation Manager**

**Ending Community Homelessness Coalition, Inc.**



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# INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND:

The Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO) is committed to the equitable provision of homelessness services in Austin / Travis County and to proactively repairing racial and ethnic disparities in the Homelessness Response System (HRS). The 2022 Racial Disparities Report for the TX-503 Austin / Travis County Continuum of Care provides an analysis of racial and ethnic disparities in the HRS and describes the current steps that the system is taking to reach equity in homeless services. ECHO aims to better understand the differences in the prevalence of homelessness and homeless service outcomes between racial and ethnic groups in an effort to create racially equitable long-term solutions. We aim to ensure that access to housing stability does not differ based on race or ethnicity in the Austin / Travis County community.

**NOTE:** In this report, we have chosen to capitalize the names of all racial and ethnic categories. These categories are not natural groupings but rather social constructs with deep and complex history behind their use. When we capitalize “White” as well as “Black” we are acknowledging the mutual social construction of race that both terms emerged from, with both terms historically gaining meaning from their use in contrast to one another. Some authors, institutions, and style guides agree with this choice of capitalization, and others do not. There are many reasons that any given author might offer for their capitalization choice, and we are not suggesting that ours here is the correct one; we are simply offering our own reasoning for our choice in this report.

## DATA:

The data used in this report come from the Austin / Travis County Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), including client personal data, Coordinated Assessment data, and program entry and exit records. Population estimates for people experiencing homelessness are based on the client population actively engaged in the Homelessness Response System in 2021, as documented in HMIS and supplemented with U.S. census data for Travis County to analyze disparities in the population experiencing homelessness relative to the overall county population. Analyses of the intersection of HMIS data elements may result in slightly different totals or denominators for the same variable between different tables or figures, as some clients have missing data for some data elements but not others, and thus may be included or not included in a table or figure accordingly.

## **ABOUT ECHO**

The Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO)5 is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that serves as the Austin / Travis County Continuum of Care (CoC) Lead Agency, CoC Collaborative Applicant, Coordinated Entry System manager, and local HMIS database administrator. We are tasked with planning and coordinating community-wide strategies to end homelessness in the Austin and Travis County geographic region. We work in collaboration with people with lived experience of homelessness, community nonprofits, and government agencies to coordinate services and housing resources for the people who are experiencing homelessness in our community. ECHO uses research and evidence-based practices to advocate for the resources to bring the local Homelessness Response System to scale and meet our community's goal of ending homelessness.

# RACIAL DISPARITIES IN THE POPULATION EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

There are three racial/ethnic groups that together comprise over 90% of the total population actively engaged in the Homelessness Response System in 2021: non-Hispanic Black clients (32%), Hispanic/Latinx clients (32%), and non-Hispanic White clients (27%). All percentages are rounded up, and rounding may affect sums.

**Table 1.** Intersections of Race and Ethnicity Among 2021 Homelessness Services Clients:

Race	Hispanic/Latinx	Not Hispanic/Latinx	NA	Total
Asian	0% (8)	1% (127)	0% (0)	1% (135)
Black	2% (323)	32% (4231)	0% (21)	35% (4575)
Native/Indigenous	1% (80)	1% (73)	0% (2)	1% (155)
Pacific Islander	0% (12)	0% (18)	0% (0)	0% (30)
Two or more races	1% (173)	3% (453)	0% (0)	5% (626)
White	27% (3559)	27% (3532)	0% (42)	54% (7133)
NA	1% (127)	0% (26)	3% (401)	4% (554)
Total	32% (4282)	64% (8460)	4% (466)	100% (13208)

**NOTE:** In Table 2 and onward in this report, race and ethnicity are combined into one data element, with clients identifying as Hispanic/Latinx comprising one category, and all other clients categorized into each race category. All categories other than Hispanic/Latinx are non-Hispanic.

The 2021 client population is majority male, and this trend is consistent across all racial and ethnic groups (Table 2). Some groups are more disproportionately male than others, however. There is a statistically significant relationship between race/ethnicity and gender, with Native/Indigenous, Pacific Islander, and White clients more heavily leaning male, and Asian and Hispanic/Latinx clients less heavily leaning male ( $p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 2.** Intersections of Race/Ethnicity and Gender Among 2021 Homelessness Services Clients:

Race/Ethnicity	Female	Male	Nonbinary/No Single Gender	Other	Questioning	Total
Asian	46% (58)	54% (69)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (127)
Black	42% (1790)	58% (2457)	0% (2)	0% (2)	0% (0)	100% (4251)
Hispanic/Latinx	48% (2034)	52% (2228)	0% (7)	0% (5)	0% (0)	100% (4274)
Native/Indigenous	32% (24)	68% (51)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (75)
Pacific Islander	17% (3)	83% (15)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (18)
Two or more races	42% (190)	57% (260)	1% (3)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (453)
White	34% (1205)	66% (2345)	0% (13)	0% (4)	0% (2)	100% (3569)
Total	42% (5304)	58% (7425)	0% (25)	0% (11)	0% (2)	100% (12767)

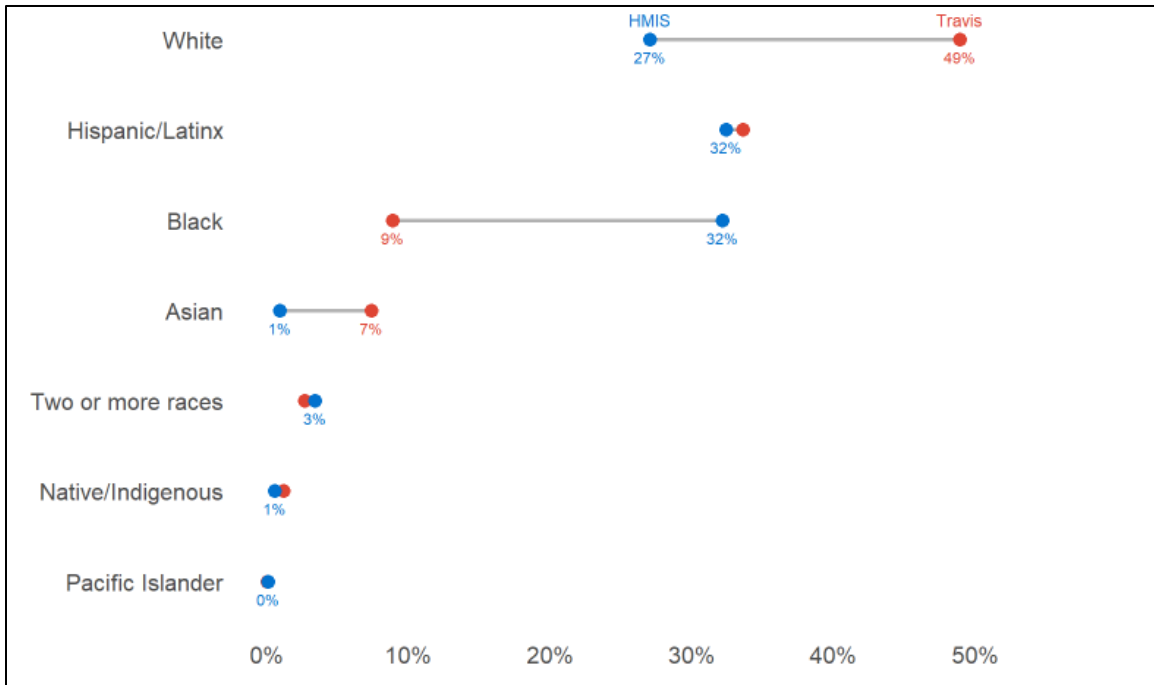
Race/ethnicity also has a statistically significant relationship with age, with Hispanic/Latinx and Black clients significantly more likely to be younger, and White clients significantly more likely to be older ( $p < 0.001$ ). Notably, a majority of both Black clients (54%) and Hispanic/Latinx clients (65%) are under the age of 35, and a majority of White clients (69%) are 35 and older (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Intersections of Race/Ethnicity and Age Among 2021 Homelessness Services Clients:

Race/Ethnicity	0 to 18	18 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 44	45 to 54	55 to 64	65 and Over	Total
Asian	27% (34)	13% (17)	24% (30)	16% (20)	13% (16)	6% (8)	2% (2)	100% (127)
Black	26% (1095)	11% (486)	17% (734)	14% (586)	13% (559)	14% (603)	4% (189)	100% (4252)
Hispanic/Latinx	33% (1393)	15% (628)	17% (715)	15% (628)	11% (485)	8% (338)	2% (95)	100% (4282)
Native/Indigenous	11% (8)	5% (4)	24% (18)	9% (7)	31% (23)	17% (13)	3% (2)	100% (75)
Pacific Islander	0% (0)	6% (1)	11% (2)	11% (2)	33% (6)	33% (6)	6% (1)	100% (18)
Two or more races	29% (130)	9% (42)	14% (62)	16% (71)	15% (68)	14% (64)	4% (16)	100% (453)
White	6% (205)	8% (282)	17% (603)	21% (749)	20% (727)	22% (780)	6% (228)	100% (3574)
Total	22% (2865)	11% (1460)	17% (2164)	16% (2063)	15% (1884)	14% (1812)	4% (533)	100% (12781)

The Black population in Austin / Travis County is more disproportionately overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness than any other racial or ethnic group (Figure 1). The probability of experiencing homelessness in Travis County for a Black/African American person is over six times than that of a White person, based on the racial composition of the population.

**Figure 1.** Percent of 2021 Clients in Homelessness Services by Race/Ethnicity Relative to Overall Travis County Population:



Several client subpopulation categories have key implications for targeted program eligibility, individual or household needs, and/or service provision strategies.



**Table 4. Intersections of Race/Ethnicity and Key Subpopulations Among 2021 Homelessness Services Clients:**

Race/Ethnicity	Youth	Veteran	Family	Experiencing Chronic Homelessness	Domestic Violence Survivor
Black	37 %	11 %	39 %	40 %	26 %
Hispanic/Latinx	47 %	4 %	48 %	29 %	32 %
Two or more races	38 %	13 %	36 %	47 %	42 %
White	14 %	18 %	10 %	46 %	32 %

The subpopulations included in Table 4 above are defined as follows:

- Youth: Clients under the age of 25
- Veteran: Clients who have served at any point in the United States military
- Family: Clients who are members of households with at least one adult AND at least one child
- Experiencing Chronic Homelessness: Clients who are living with a disability AND have been experiencing homelessness for at least 12 months or on at least four separate occasions in the past three years with a combined duration of at least 12 months
- Domestic Violence Survivor: Clients who have disclosed a history with domestic violence

Nearly half of Hispanic/Latinx clients are youth under the age of 25, and nearly half are members of family households with children. Black clients and clients of two or more races are also more likely than White clients to be youth or members of families with children. White clients are less likely to be youth or be in family households, which is consistent with the age dynamics described in Table 3 above, as White clients are generally older than other racial and ethnic groups.

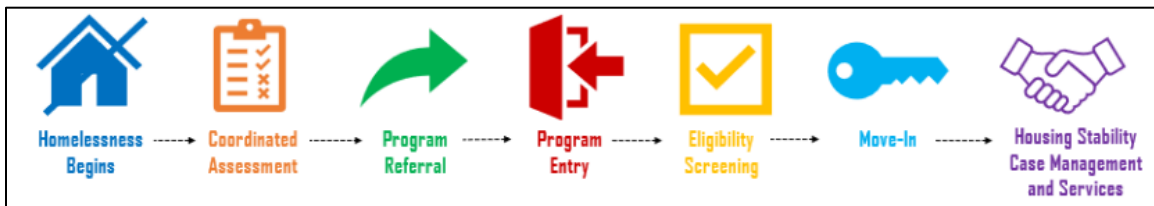
White clients are more likely than other racial or ethnic groups to be veterans, and Hispanic/Latinx clients are less likely to be veterans. Hispanic/Latinx clients are also less likely than other racial or ethnic groups to be experiencing chronic homelessness. Black clients are less likely than other racial or ethnic groups to be survivors of domestic violence.

All of these subpopulation proportions are based on data that are self-reported by clients to service providers in the system, and factors such as client comfort and recall could play a role in the accuracy of the data. For example, there may be cultural factors that play into clients' comfort disclosing sensitive information such as survivorship of domestic violence.

# SYSTEM FLOW ANALYSIS

Understanding any racial disparities in the amount of time it takes clients to navigate through the steps in the pathway from homelessness to permanent housing unit move-in within the Homelessness Response System is essential to ensuring that the system is racially equitable.

**Figure 2.** Streamlined System Flow Diagram:



**NOTE:** This diagram is simplified for the purposes of this report. True system flow includes homelessness prevention efforts that come before homelessness begins and have the potential to prevent progression to homelessness, as well as diversion efforts that come before Coordinated Assessment and, if successful, end the household’s homelessness.

Tables 5-8 show the time between steps of the system, for clients who were housed in PSH or RRH programs through the Coordinated Entry System. People waiting for a program referral or waiting to move into housing following referral are not included in these tables.

With the data available in HMIS, there is a statistically significant relationship between race/ethnicity and the time clients experience homelessness before accessing the Coordinated Assessment for the first time, with White clients experiencing homelessness for longer than other racial or ethnic groups pre-assessment ( $p < 0.001$ ). Our data are limited to people experiencing homelessness in the community who have completed a Coordinated Assessment. It is highly likely that there are people experiencing homelessness in Austin / Travis County that have never been connected to the Homelessness Response System, and we do not have any data on that group. Thus, it is possible that a different dynamic between race/ethnicity and Coordinated Entry accessibility exists, but we do not (yet) have the full data to measure it. More data is needed to understand this dynamic beyond the data displayed in Table 5 below.

It is also worth making note that the data available does not specify whether the date the client reports as the start of their homelessness was in the Austin area. Some clients may have fallen into homelessness in Austin / Travis County, and others may have fallen into homelessness elsewhere and moved to Austin / Travis County since. Black and Hispanic/Latinx clients are more likely to report having been born and/or raised in the Austin area (Table 12). Given that some clients may report a homelessness start date that occurred outside of the Austin area, and that those clients are likely disproportionately White, it is possible that Black and Hispanic/Latinx clients experience longer amounts of time experiencing homelessness in Austin / Travis County prior to their first Coordinated Assessment, relative to White clients. However, the data necessary to ascertain whether this is the case is not available at this time.

**Table 5.** Length of Time Experiencing Homelessness Prior to First Coordinated Assessment in 2021 by Race/Ethnicity:

Race/Ethnicity	Median	Mean	Clients
Black	393 days	876 days	976
Hispanic/Latinx	377 days	754 days	808
Two or more races	660 days	978 days	110
White	437 days	983 days	955

Table 6 shows the time between clients’ most recent Coordinated Assessment date prior to their program referral and their program referral date for clients who received a referral to a permanent housing program in 2021. The data in this table is limited only to clients who (A) have a completed Coordinated Assessment on file, and (B) received a referral. We are unable to calculate the time between Coordinated Assessment and referral for clients who are still awaiting referral. With this in mind, a substantial number of clients have and continue to await referral for longer periods of time than the numbers below may suggest. There is a statistically significant relationship between race/ethnicity and the amount of time between Coordinated Assessment and referral, with the average time White clients and clients of two or more races wait before program referral slightly longer than that of other racial or ethnic groups ( $p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 6.** Length of Time Between Coordinated Assessment and Program Referral in 2021 by Race/Ethnicity:

Race/Ethnicity	Median	Mean	Clients
Black	33 days	67 days	364
Hispanic/Latinx	34 days	72 days	338
Two or more races	35 days	84 days	47
White	31 days	86 days	259

Table 7 shows the time between program referral and program entry for clients who entered a permanent housing program in 2021. There is a statistically significant relationship between race/ethnicity and the amount of time between program referral and program entry, with the average time White clients wait between referral and entry longer than that of Black clients, and both White and Black clients waiting longer than other racial or ethnic groups ( $p < 0.001$ ).

Similarly to Table 6 above, the data contained in this table are limited to clients who have a program entry on file. There are some clients whose referrals are rejected and do not move to the next step of the system immediately following that referral, or who drop out of the process for any reason, and those clients are not reflected in the data below. This step overall is the shortest of the steps outlined in this report.

**Table 7.** Length of Time Between Program Referral and Program Entry in 2021 by Race/Ethnicity:

Race/Ethnicity	Median	Mean	Clients
Black	15 days	43 days	306
Hispanic/Latinx	17 days	33 days	268
Two or more races	16 days	21 days	38
White	23 days	67 days	234

Table 8 shows the time between program entry and housing move-in date for clients with 2021 move-in dates. Finding and acquiring units to move clients into can create lag in this step of the system flow. There is a statistically significant relationship between race/ethnicity and the length of time between program entry and housing unit move-in, with clients of two or more races waiting longer for move-in than other racial or ethnic groups ( $p < 0.001$ ). This step of the system flow process is the longest overall across all racial and ethnic groups.

**Table 8.** Length of Time Between Program Entry and Move-In in 2021 by Race/Ethnicity:

Race/Ethnicity	Median	Mean	Clients
Black	64 days	105 days	232
Hispanic/Latinx	68 days	104 days	193
Two or more races	110 days	143 days	22
White	78 days	116 days	162

When controlling for subpopulations and demographics other than race/ethnicity, the overall total system flow duration, between the date homelessness began and housing unit move-in date is not statistically significantly different based on race/ethnicity. For clients who moved into permanent housing program units in 2021, any difference between racial and ethnic groups in the time it took for those clients to go through the entire system flow from homelessness start to move-in is

not statistically significant, and thus could be due to random chance. Factors that do have a statistically significant relationship with the length of time between homelessness start date and housing move-in date include veteran status and gender, with veterans taking shorter amounts of time than non-veterans, and female clients taking shorter amounts of time than male clients ( $p < 0.001$ ).

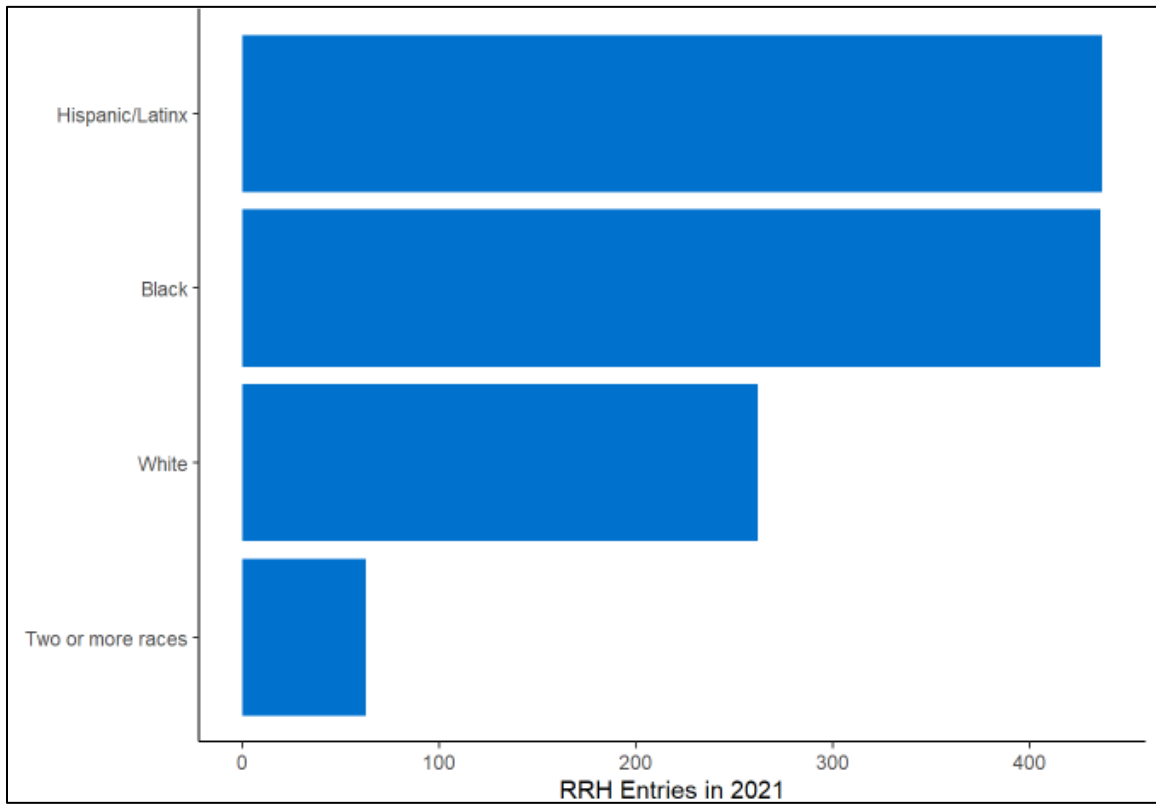
## PERMANENT HOUSING PROGRAM ENTRIES AND EXITS

In 2021, Black and Hispanic/Latinx clients were more likely than White clients to enter Rapid Re-Housing (RRH) projects (Figure 3). White clients were more likely to enroll in Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) projects (Figure 4). RRH and PSH are both permanent housing program types. PSH is a longer term program type than RRH, and includes more in-depth wrap around services, such as on-site mental health care in some cases. Thus, among clients who enrolled in RRH or PSH projects in 2021, White clients were more likely to receive longer-term, more in-depth support.

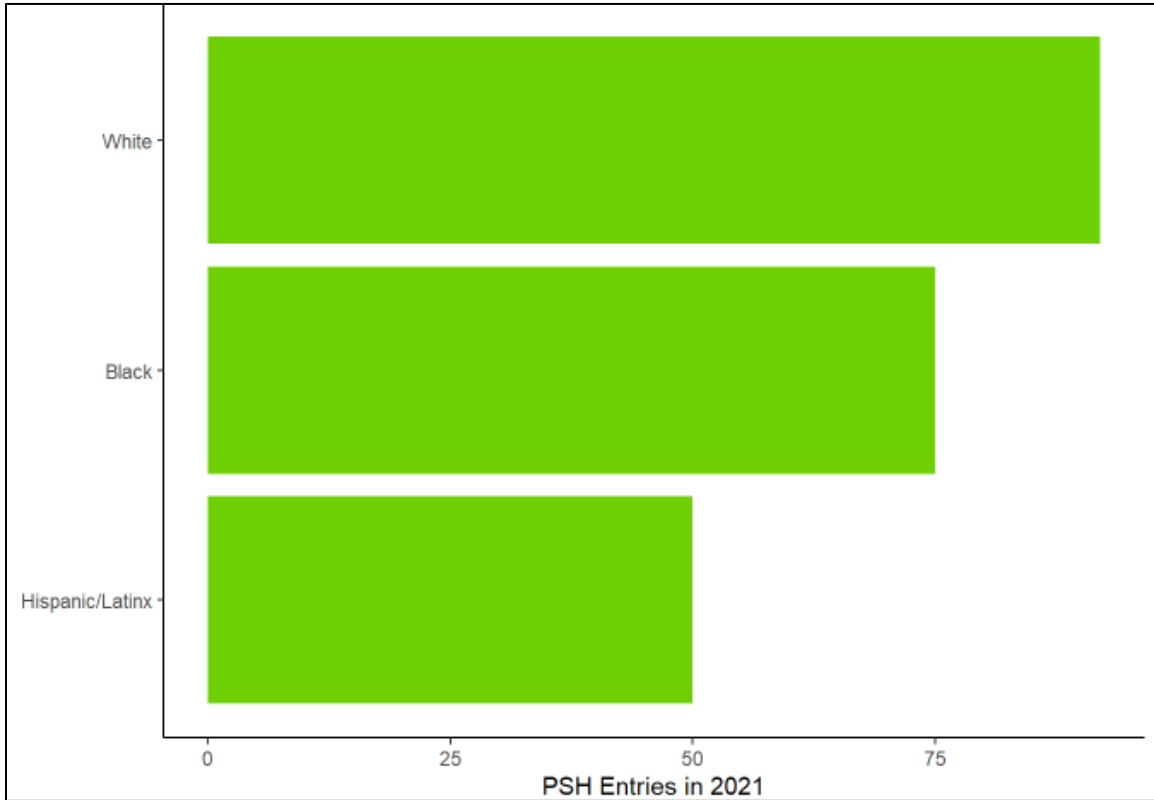
This trend in permanent housing program entries could, in part, be explained by differences in Coordinated Assessment (CA) scores between racial and ethnic groups. The Austin / Travis County Coordinated Entry System (CES) utilized the Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) as the CA tool for the majority of 2021, as well as for several years prior. White clients, in general, scored higher on the VI-SPDAT, which could have led to a greater number of PSH referrals and therefore PSH entries for White clients in 2021. The CES adopted a new CA tool during 2021, which went into effect in October. The new CA tool, the Austin Prioritization Index (API), was built by and for the Austin / Travis County community, with a racial equity lens. The change in the race/ethnicity distribution of CA scores between the use of the VI-SPDAT vs. the API in Austin / Travis County is visualized in Figure 6. ECHO will continue to analyze the impact of the switch over to the API as the system's CA tool, and we may expect to see changes in program entries in future years, once more time has passed with the API in effect.

The trend could also be explained in part by program eligibility criteria. 50% of entries into PSH projects in 2021 were entries into Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) projects, which require veteran status for entry. Veterans in the HRS are disproportionately White (Table 4).

**Figure 3.** Entries to Rapid Re-Housing Programs in 2021 by Race/Ethnicity:



**Figure 4.** Entries to Permanent Supportive Housing Programs in 2021 by Race/Ethnicity:



Among clients who exited from RRH or PSH programs in 2021, Black clients were disproportionately less likely to exit to homelessness, and White clients were disproportionately more likely. Hispanic/Latinx clients were more likely than any other racial or ethnic group to exit to permanent housing destinations (Table 9).

**Table 9.** Exits from Permanent Housing (PSH or RRH) Programs in 2021 by Race/Ethnicity:

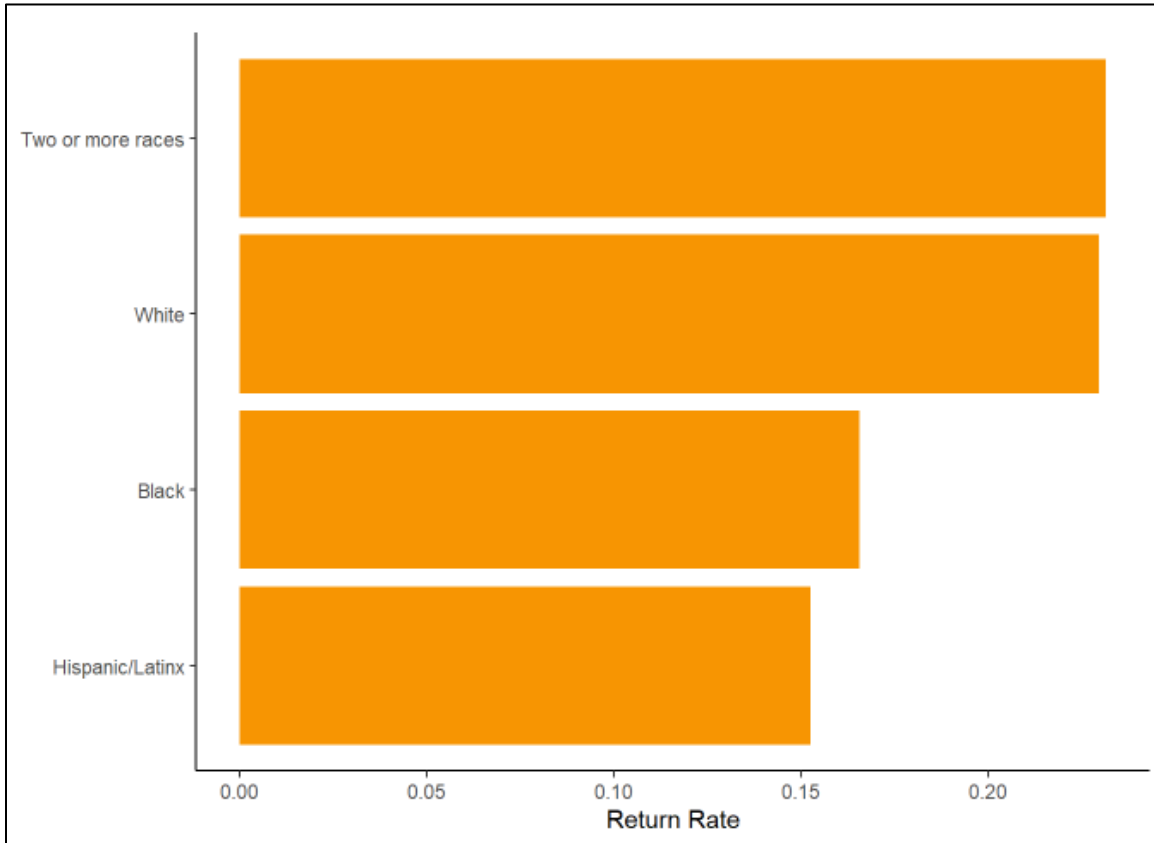
Race/Ethnicity	Deceased	Homelessness	Institution	Permanent Housing	Temporary Housing	Unknown	Total
Black	5% (13)	1% (3)	4% (11)	71% (193)	9% (25)	10% (28)	100% (273)
Hispanic/Latinx	2% (4)	3% (6)	4% (9)	73% (159)	6% (13)	13% (28)	100% (219)
Two or more races	4% (2)	6% (3)	4% (2)	63% (32)	4% (2)	20% (10)	100% (51)
White	7% (14)	9% (18)	5% (10)	65% (124)	4% (7)	10% (19)	100% (192)
Total	4% (33)	4% (30)	4% (32)	69% (508)	6% (47)	12% (85)	100% (735)

After exiting services to a permanent housing destination in 2019, clients of two or more races returned to homelessness within two years of their exit at the highest rate relative to other racial/ethnic groups, and Hispanic/Latinx clients returned at the lowest rate (Figure 5). In 2021, there is a larger gap between the return rates of Black and White clients than in years prior, with White clients returning to homelessness at a higher rate than Black clients. The overall return



rate has also decreased slightly, indicating a possible improvement in preventing returns to homelessness that happens to benefit Black clients even more significantly than other racial or ethnic groups.

**Figure 5.** Returns to Homelessness Within 2 Years of 2019 Permanent Housing Exit by Race/Ethnicity:



Among clients who returned to homelessness within 2 years of exiting services to a permanent housing destination, White clients returned to homelessness more quickly than did Black clients or Hispanic/Latinx clients. Hispanic/Latinx clients, on average, appeared to maintain permanent housing for longer before returning to homelessness, among those who returned to the system (Table 10).

**Table 10.** Length of Time to Return to Homelessness Within 2 Years of Permanent Housing Exit by Race/Ethnicity:

Race/Ethnicity	Median	Mean	Clients
Black	141 days	203 days	155
Hispanic/Latinx	133 days	238 days	92
White	122 days	185 days	118

# COORDINATED ASSESSMENT

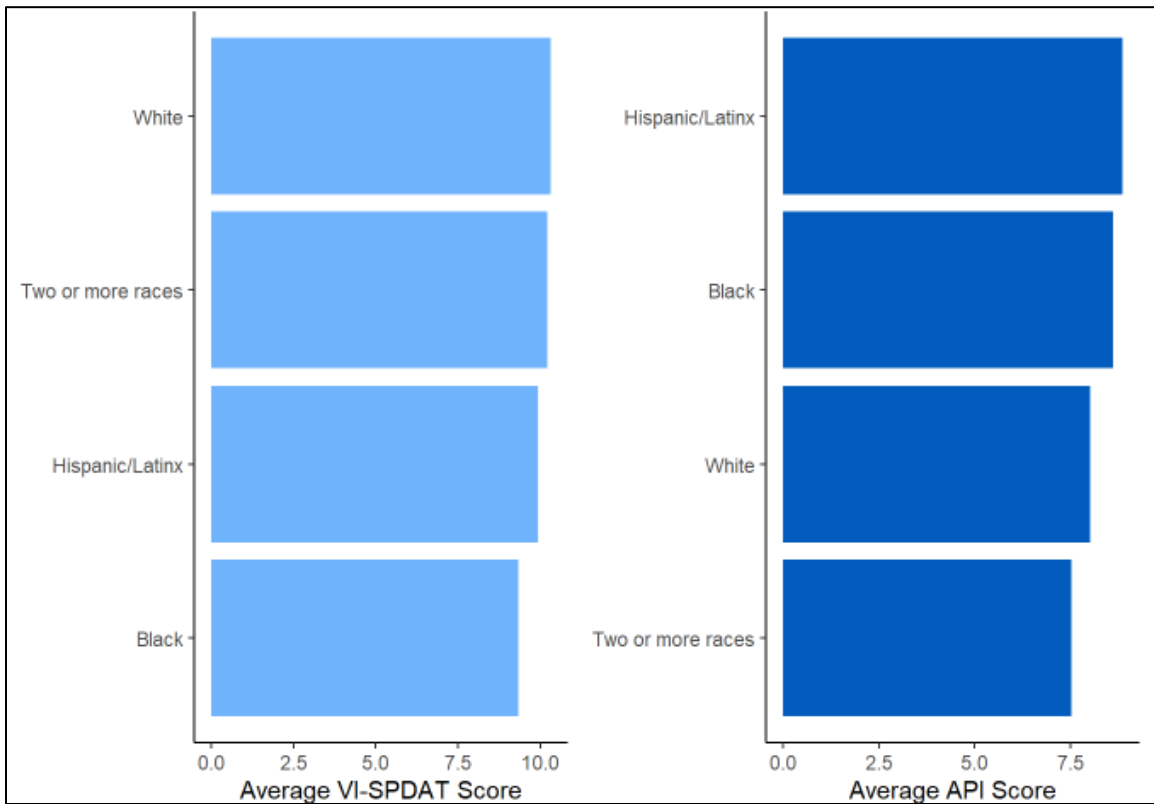
The Austin Prioritization Index (API) is the Coordinated Assessment (CA) tool currently used by the Austin / Travis County Coordinated Entry System. The API is intended to capture the situations and experiences of people experiencing homelessness, with points awarded for health conditions associated with disparate health outcomes, history of homelessness, and barriers to housing. Clients that score higher on the API are prioritized higher for housing opportunities as they become available in the system.

The API was implemented on October 1, 2021. Prior to the implementation of the API, the Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) was used as the CA tool for Austin / Travis County. In 2019, a group of concerned HRS staff established the Equity Task Group in the HRS governance structure with the goal of building out a new CA tool for the community to replace the VI-SPDAT. Both national and local data analysis revealed racial disparities in how the population experiencing homelessness scored on the VI-SPDAT, with White clients scoring higher than clients of other racial or ethnic groups. The Austin community began to take steps to find a better alternative with a racial equity focus in the Equity Task Group. After nearly two years of challenging conversations, piloting, and statistical analysis, the API officially replaced the VI-SPDAT as the CA tool for Austin / Travis County.

White clients scored approximately 1 point higher than Black clients on the VI-SPDAT, on average. On the API, White clients are scoring approximately 0.6 points lower than Black clients. Hispanic/Latinx clients still score higher than Black clients on the API, but Hispanic/Latinx clients now score higher than White clients. Additionally, White clients still score slightly higher than clients of two or more races. The change in the racial and ethnic distribution of CA scores following the implementation of the API will likely have implications on the racial and ethnic distribution of program referrals and entries, with a higher proportion of Black and Hispanic/Latinx clients prioritized for housing placements relative to White clients.

**NOTE:** The scale of the API is different than that of the VI-SPDAT, with clients overall scoring 1.5 points lower on the API than the VI-SPDAT. This has no impact on relative prioritization, however, because prioritization is based on the scores clients are awarded relative to one another on the same tool. Any difference in the raw scores of any given group on the API relative to that group's raw scores on the VI-SPDAT is not indicative of any real difference in the prioritization of that group.

**Figure 6.** Comparison of VI-SPDAT and API Score Distribution by Race/Ethnicity:



**Table 11.** Comparison of Average VI-SPDAT and API Scores by Race/Ethnicity:

Race/Ethnicity	Average VI-SPDAT Score	VI-SPDAT Clients	Average API Score	API Clients
White	10.32	4668	8.03	730
Two or more races	10.22	769	7.53	83
Hispanic/Latinx	9.93	3384	8.86	603
Black	9.34	4297	8.61	679

The API was built by members of the Austin / Travis County community, specifically for the local landscape and the population inhabiting it. The unique experiences of people experiencing homelessness in Austin / Travis County differ from the unique experiences of people living in other areas, and experiences also differ significantly across race and ethnicity. The API is not an “off the shelf” Coordinated Assessment tool, and must not be assumed to perform similarly in any community other than Austin / Travis County.

The process taken to build the API, however, could be replicated in other communities to produce similar results, tailored to the unique population of those other localities. The Equity Task Group was established as a part of the HRS governance structure, with recommendations or proposals from the group to be sent to the

CoC Board for final approval. The Equity Task Group included people with lived experience of homelessness, staff with experience conducting Coordinated Assessments, data analysts, service providers, and healthcare professionals, among others. Questions were brainstormed and written in this group, then piloted during Coordinated Assessments over the course of several months, and pilot data was analyzed with an eye for racial and gender equity. The results of each round of data analysis were brought back to the group, and the group used this information to decide which questions to include in the tool to be proposed to the CoC Board. The API was proposed to the CoC Board in August 2021, and rolled out in the Coordinated Entry System in October 2021.

The performance of the API is being continuously monitored, and the community has committed to keeping new questions in pilot at all times. In the coming years, questions currently included in the API may be removed entirely or replaced with revised versions, and the API may be supplemented with entirely new questions. All such decisions will be made by the HRS governance, and will be informed by thorough pilot data analysis.

# ROOT OF RACIAL DISPARITIES

Black people in Austin / Travis County are significantly more likely to experience homelessness than are members of other racial or ethnic groups. The only data we have to turn to regarding homelessness in the community at this time is HMIS data, which lacks context and only paints part of the picture of the dynamic between race and housing in the region. In this section, we turn to the history of the region to reveal a bit of the context that allows us to form a deeper understanding of the root of racial disparities in housing outcomes for people living in the Austin area today.

During Reconstruction following the Civil War, many Black Americans settled in Austin. By 1880, Black people comprised about a third of the total population in the city. The Black community was far too established in Austin to be entirely exiled by White people in power, so they were isolated in corners of the city and hidden from White communities instead (Prosperity Now 2019). Codified in the Austin Master Plan of 1928, local government officials in Austin, Texas established segregation in the city by forcing over 10,000 Black people into specific geographic districts designated for Black households' residence.

The wealth divide between Black and White communities perpetuated housing segregation even after explicitly race-based zoning laws became illegal. Many zoning ordinances designated residential areas for middle-class single-family homes - thinly veiled code for "White Families." As long as Black households were unable to join the middle class, those neighborhoods would remain populated by White people. The wealth divide between Black and White Americans is the historical legacy of the exclusion of Black people from entrepreneurship and business opportunities in the free market following emancipation, perpetuating freedmen's lack of capital and heavy reliance on meager wages from White business owners. Black people, as such, were unable to save wages or build enterprises off of any type of established capital (Rothstein 2017).

There is a strong relationship between race, income, wealth, and poverty in Austin that persists to this day. Black households are disproportionately impoverished in Austin (Prosperity Now, 2019). There is also a substantial disparity in homeownership rates between Black (44.0%) and White households (73.7%), which contributes to racial disparities in wealth and capital (Habitat for Humanity 2020).

Austin contains a higher proportion of renters relative to homeowners than Texas overall, and Texas contains a higher renter proportion than the United States overall. Renter households in general have significantly lower household wealth than homeowners, and are significantly more likely to be behind on housing payments

(U.S. Census Bureau 2019). This places renters at higher risk of housing insecurity among all households. Housing insecurity in general is particularly high in Texas, among several other southern states (Cai et al 2021).

Hispanic/Latinx and Black renters nationally experience housing insecurity at a higher rate than renters in other racial or ethnic groups, and housing insecurity has further risen among Hispanic/Latinx and Black renter households since 2019 (Cai et al 2021). Renters of color have experienced higher rent burden in recent years, related to the disproportionate economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people of color in the workforce, who were more likely to lose employment during the pandemic (Lake 2020).

Among people experiencing homelessness in Austin / Travis County who completed a CA between October 1, 2021 and March 31, 2022, nearly 2 in 5 people reported having been born and/or raised in the Austin area. Hispanic/Latinx and Black clients are disproportionately more likely to report having been born and/or raised in the Austin area (Table 12). This suggests that homelessness is an outcome produced within and by the Austin community, and that the dynamics producing this outcome fall more heavily on Hispanic/Latinx and Black members of the community. **The legacy of Austin’s racist history has implications on who keeps and who loses their housing in Austin today.**

**Table 12.** 2021-2022 Clients Reporting Having Been Born or Raised in Austin on the API:

Race/Ethnicity	Born and/or Raised in Austin	Not Austin Born/Raised	Total
Black	44% (278)	56% (351)	100% (629)
Hispanic/Latinx	54% (288)	46% (245)	100% (533)
Two or more races	32% (22)	68% (47)	100% (69)
White	25% (175)	75% (539)	100% (714)
Total	39% (763)	61% (1182)	100% (1945)

There is substantial overlap between Homelessness Response Systems and other social systems and institutions, many of which also disproportionately touch Black and Brown communities (Fowle 2022). Nationally, people of color experiencing homelessness have reported disproportionately more involvement with the child welfare, criminal justice, and behavioral health systems, among other social systems, as well as noting inadequate collaboration between systems (Olivet et al 2021). Understanding the tightly interwoven relationships between social systems, housing insecurity, and homelessness would allow for more effective homelessness services to be built out and maintained.

Social systems are not exempt from the white supremacist history that they were built within. Social systems can and do maintain and uphold systems of oppression on the community. As the Homelessness Response System is affected by racial

disparities in other social systems such as the education, criminal justice, and healthcare systems, those systems are affected by racial disparities in the Homelessness Response System. Inadequate efforts to undo racism in all such social systems, including the Homelessness Response System, results in poorer outcomes for all people who are systems-involved. Inadequate coordination between systems allows for people to slip through the cracks, resulting in further unintentional negative outcomes for people in need of assistance in the community.

## ONGOING EFFORTS

ECHO and the Austin / Travis County Homelessness Response System at large have made strides toward addressing racial disparities in the local community in recent years.

In 2021, the Austin / Travis County CoC governance was restructured under a new CoC Board, locally referred to as the Leadership Council. Five committees report to the Leadership Council, one of which is the Equity Committee. In January 2022, the Equity Task Group officially disbanded, and the Equity Committee was formed, taking on the role that the Equity Task Group once held in the CoC. The Equity Committee's purpose is to eliminate racial disparities within the Homelessness Response System, to increase the safety and accessibility of the Homelessness Response System to LGBTQ clients, and to address intersections of marginalization or groups that would not be served equitably without explicit focus.

Austin / Travis County participated in the first ever cohort of the HUD Racial Equity Demonstration Project from 2020-2021. In the Demonstration Project, our community set the following two-part goal: (1) Improve street outreach to Black unsheltered people experiencing homelessness, and (2) Increase access to the Homelessness Response System for Black unsheltered people experiencing homelessness. In the fall of 2021, ECHO applied for funding from the St. David's Foundation for the "Data for Equity" research grant in order to gather more information as to how to best approach this goal. ECHO was awarded the Data for Equity grant, and has been conducting a qualitative research project entitled Toward Racial Equity in Street Outreach for People Experiencing Homelessness in Austin throughout 2022 so far. The research product(s) for this project will be published in late 2022.

ECHO will continue to pursue and prioritize qualitative research projects that provide context for HMIS data and provide deeper information as to why we see the trends that we do in the system. All research projects will include a racial equity lens and will center race in the pursuit of information and knowledge of homelessness and the performance of homeless services in the community.



## STEPS FORWARD

Racial disparities in Homelessness Response System (HRS) staffing, which were identified in the 2021 Racial Disparities Report, likely remain a challenge in the system. ECHO plans to collect this information annually moving forward, and will work with HRS leadership and the Leadership Council to ensure full system participation, so that complete data is available for annual analysis and year-to-year monitoring of staffing trends.

Effective and comprehensive prevention programming to reduce first time homelessness in the community is needed. Prevention with a racial equity lens is essential for addressing disparities in homelessness for the Black community in Austin / Travis County. In Austin / Travis County in 2021, Black Austinites were over 6 times as likely as White Austinites to be experiencing homelessness. This trend is not new and will continue unless there is intentional effort targeted toward addressing the housing insecurity trends that contribute to homelessness.

A substantial overall expansion in system capacity - both in the number of units available for permanent housing programs and in agency/staffing capacity - would be a game changer across the board for addressing racial disparities. The only reason why prioritization in Coordinated Entry is necessary is because the system does not have capacity to serve every person when they begin to experience homelessness, and as a result our unhoused neighbors are forced to experience homelessness for a longer period of time before a resolution is made. Some folks may not be accessing the HRS at all, and an expansion in the capacity to reach people where they are at in the community is also essential, especially with an eye for racial and geographic equity.

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