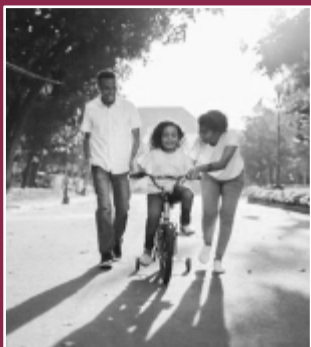


# San Antonio, Together to End Homelessness: Strategic Plan Summary and Call to Action



CITY OF SAN ANTONIO  
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

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## Summary

San Antonio is a compassionate community that has dedicated a great deal of time, resources, and collaborative effort to preventing and ending homelessness. **Since 2011, there has been an overall 11% decrease in homelessness on a given night in San Antonio/Bexar County<sup>1</sup>**, bucking the trend seen among many large American cities of significant increases in homelessness over the same period. Through significant community planning and coordination efforts, San Antonio has developed a highly sophisticated homeless response system, consisting of diverse funding sources, engagement from agencies and programs across the community, and a variety of service offerings, including: prevention, outreach, emergency shelter, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, affordable housing, and other supportive services.

Yet, despite the community's strong commitment and coordinated efforts to address homelessness, there are still opportunities for continuous improvement:

- **San Antonio is experiencing a surge in population growth and rising rent costs, putting more individuals at-risk of experiencing homelessness.** An estimated 88,496 (14%) households in Bexar County are severely cost burdened and spend 50% or more of their household income on housing.<sup>2</sup> These households represent a large portion of San Antonio's population who are highly vulnerable to eviction and at risk of entering homelessness.
- **Unsheltered homelessness is more visible than ever**, both downtown and in the emergence of encampments across the county. Over the past ten years, there has been an 8% increase in unsheltered homelessness, including a 7% increase in total unsheltered homelessness and 15% increase in street homelessness from the 2019 to 2020 Point-in-Time Count.<sup>3</sup>
- **Family homelessness increased by 12% between 2016 and 2020, despite only a 5% increase in homelessness overall.** This is consistent with existing reports and feedback from stakeholders that identify rent affordability as a challenge for families and the need for more targeted prevention, shelter and permanent housing options to meet the needs of at-risk and homeless families in San Antonio.<sup>4</sup>
- **Homelessness in San Antonio is disproportionately increasing among certain age-cohorts, particularly youth and young adults (ages 18-24) and aging adults (ages 50+).** Both subpopulations of persons experiencing homelessness have been identified by stakeholders as experiencing distinct vulnerabilities that increase their need for targeted homelessness interventions.

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<sup>1</sup> San Antonio/Bexar County Point in Time Count.

<sup>2</sup> Census American Community Survey (ACS) 2018 5-Year Estimates, as cited in *County Health Rankings*, <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/texas/2020/measure/factors/154/datasource>

<sup>3</sup> South Alamo Regional Alliance for the Homeless (SARAH), "2020 Point-In-Time Count Report: San Antonio and Bexar County," page 11, <https://www.sarahomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2020-PIT-Report- 5.14.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> SARAH, "Everyone Counts: 2019 Point-in-Time Count Summary Report," page 5, [https://www.sarahomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019-PIT-Report\\_Digital-Copy.pdf](https://www.sarahomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019-PIT-Report_Digital-Copy.pdf)

From 2019 to 2020, San Antonio contracted with the homelessness technical assistance firm, Homebase, to review local data and speak with direct stakeholders over a six-month period to develop a *Strategic Plan to Respond to Homelessness in San Antonio/Bexar County*. Ultimately, this included over 50 distinct meetings with hundreds of stakeholders across San Antonio/Bexar County, as well as a review of systemwide homelessness data from 2018 and 2019. The Strategic Plan analyzes current data and trends in San Antonio around homelessness, contributing factors to homelessness, the current state of the San Antonio/Bexar County homeless response system, feedback from key stakeholders on strengths and weaknesses of current homeless response efforts, and a set of actionable recommendations for improving San Antonio’s coordinated community response to homelessness.

Implementation of these recommendations will require community-wide, multi-sector collaboration, including from San Antonio’s neighbors and citizens. *No one agency or organization can end homelessness in San Antonio on its own – it will take San Antonio, together, to make a difference for our neighbors experiencing homelessness.*



# Who is Experiencing Homelessness in San Antonio and Bexar County?

## How Many People are Experiencing Homelessness?

In 2020, San Antonio/Bexar County counted **2,932 people experiencing homelessness** in its annual Point in Time (PIT) count, representing an increase of 151 individuals (or 5%) since 2016. While the overall count is gradually increasing compared to other metropolitan areas across the United States, following groups are growing at much more rapid rates:

- **Unsheltered homelessness:** The number of individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness increased by 12%—from 1,137 in 2016 to 1,274 in 2020. The majority of these (99%) are single individuals.
- **Family homelessness:** The number of family households experiencing homelessness increased from 235 to 271 (an increase of 15%) between 2016 and 2020. Individuals in families now represent 50% of the sheltered homeless population in San Antonio/Bexar County. ***In other words, 1 of 2 individuals in shelters are families.*** This increase shows that homelessness in San Antonio has quickly become a challenge for families and not just single adults.
- **Youth and young adult (YYA) homelessness:** The number of youth and young adults (18-24) experiencing homelessness increased from 128 to 185 (45% increase) from 2019 to 2020. In addition, 73% are parenting youth experiencing homelessness.
- **Aging adults experiencing homelessness:** The number of homeless individuals aged 50 years or older is 781 according to the 2020 PIT Count, which is a 27% increase from 2019. Data indicates this growing population reported greater occurrences of chronic illnesses, physical disability and severe mental illnesses (SMI).

## Demographics of Homelessness

Demographic data highlights the diverse experiences of homelessness among persons in San Antonio and Bexar County. Homelessness impacts persons across all demographic groups, including persons of all genders, age groups, races and ethnicities. An analysis of demographic data however shows a number of trends that are unique to San Antonio and Bexar County that emerge:



- **Gender:** According to data from 2018 and 2019, men experiencing homelessness significantly outnumber women (59.6% compared to 40%). This mirrors trends from homeless response systems across the country.
- **Age:** Most individuals (53.3%) in San Antonio experiencing homelessness are between 30 and 59 years of age. The second largest group are those under 20 years of age (22.5%), which mirrors recent increases in family homelessness. Individuals ages 60 and older made up only 9.7% of all individuals in HMIS, but this population is significant because they have significant health, housing and supportive service needs that often require specialized care and interventions.

- **Race:** The 2020 PIT Count found that 72% of individuals experiencing homelessness are White and 24.4% of total homeless individuals are Black/African American, despite Black/African American persons making up only a small percentage of the total Bexar County population (8.5%). However, Black/African American individuals appear to access several homeless programs at higher rates than their rates of homelessness, which indicates that housing and services are equitably accessible to persons once connected to the homeless response system regardless of their racial group. The 2020 PIT Count found that 2% of persons experiencing homelessness were Multi-Racial, 1% Native American, 0.5% Asian American, and 0.1% Pacific, which is a smaller or similar share of the homeless population compared to the county overall.
- **Ethnicity:** Hispanic/Latino individuals made up a smaller percentage of individuals experiencing homelessness from 2018 to 2019 compared to the overall population of Bexar County according to HMIS data (47% versus 60.5%). Similarly, Hispanic individuals were 28% more likely to exit to permanent destinations than Non-Hispanic individuals. This data suggests that the homeless response system has been effective in reaching Hispanic/Latino individuals and connecting them to appropriate housing and services, including homelessness prevention to permanent housing options. However, it is important to note that in the 2020 PIT Count, increases in overall homelessness disproportionately impacted the Hispanic/Latino population, with a 4% increase in Hispanic/Latino homelessness since 2019.

## Causes and Contributing Factors to Homelessness in San Antonio and Bexar County

### Causes of Homelessness

The factors that contribute to homelessness are often complex, making it difficult to identify one cause or reason into homelessness. Individuals experiencing homelessness helped identify several “entry points” – or shared circumstances and experiences – that contribute to the loss of housing and onset of homelessness for many low-income individuals and households in San Antonio and Bexar County:

- **Evictions**, which destabilize a household’s current housing situation, damages credit and makes it more difficult to rent an apartment in the future.
- **Mental health and substance use issues**, which can impact a person’s ability to attain and sustain housing by disrupting their ability to complete essential aspects of daily life and fracturing relationships with family and friends that could help prevent homelessness.
- **Physical health issues and disabilities**, which can make it more difficult to obtain sufficient income to afford housing costs and to identify accessible housing units.
- **Involvement in the criminal justice or foster care system**, which often lead to exits into unstable housing or homelessness. Stigma and restrictions on housing options are also significant barriers for persons involved with the criminal justice system.
- **Fleeing domestic violence**, which often requires survivors to leave behind their support networks and any financial resources that could help prevent homelessness.
- **Natural disasters and crises** such as the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak that can result in physical housing damage, financial instability, increased health costs and concerns, and a number of other impacts that can destabilize housing for low-income households.

## Contributing Factors to Homelessness

The factors listed above that often result in a person's entry into homelessness are often exacerbated by underlying structural challenges that face San Antonio and Bexar County currently overall. For example:

- **1 in 5 five residents live in poverty**, and the San Antonio-New Braunfels Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) currently ranks highest for poverty among the 25 most populous MSAs in the United States;
- **Minimum wage is \$7.25 per hour**, which is only a third of the income required to afford a two-bedroom apartment without being housing cost burdened (\$20.19/hour).
- **San Antonio continues to see significant population growth**, which has caused rent and mortgage prices to increase substantially.
- There is a gap of **16,400 affordable housing units for households with incomes at or below 30% AMI** in order to meet current housing need.

Given the level of poverty, increasing cost of housing, and lack of affordable housing options, many individuals and families in Bexar County are **only one crisis away** from homelessness.

## San Antonio and Bexar County's Homeless Response System: Community Strengths and Areas of Opportunity

### Community Strengths

Key stakeholders in San Antonio and Bexar County, including persons with lived experience of homelessness, identified a number of strengths and assets that already exist within the community to help prevent and end homelessness, including:

- **A "can do" attitude and spirit of innovation.** The community's ability to quickly respond to the emerging needs among persons experiencing homelessness reflects a "can do" attitude and spirit of innovation that is unique to San Antonio.
- **Culture of compassion and empathy.** The City is "an inherent collaborative and compassionate city" with a desire to develop compassionate solutions to homelessness.
- **Strong public-private partnerships to support homelessness efforts.** This creates a stronger base of homelessness initiatives than relying on public funding alone.
- **Well-established network of homeless service providers.** Stakeholders widely recognized the expertise and strengths of existing homeless service providers.
- **Increasing engagement of partners from outside the homeless response system.** Several organizations outside the homeless response system expressed excitement at increased engagement around preventing and ending homelessness in San Antonio.



- **Ethos of continuous improvement.** Stakeholders demonstrate a commitment to trying new models and expand on current successes to decrease homelessness in San Antonio.
- **Strong data systems and wide participation.** Agencies across San Antonio, both within and outside the homeless response system, actively participate in entering data into the homeless management information system (HMIS), which increases its utility both to provide services and improve systems. In addition, the roll-out of Outreach Grid – a mobile app software used to improve data and service coordination amongst providers engaging with the unsheltered population which will interface with HMIS – will further opportunities for participation in data collection efforts.

## Opportunity Areas

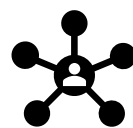
In addition to areas of strength, key stakeholders shared their feedback and insights on opportunity areas for the San Antonio homeless response system based on their own knowledge and experience. Six themes emerged that capture the cross-cutting areas of improvement identified by stakeholders:



**Need for more permanent, affordable housing options and services:** Stakeholders noted the need for expanded permanent, affordable options and services that reflect local realities, such as rising rents, limited affordable housing stock, and a scarcity of mental health and substance use treatment options.



**Large unsheltered homeless population:** Unsheltered homelessness has increased steadily in the past five years and has raised concerns around health and safety concerns for both for those living in unsheltered situations as well as for community members. This includes questions about how to balance public safety alongside the priority to connect unsheltered persons to available shelter and services and how to best utilize outreach to achieve positive outcomes for persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness.



**Limited coordination and communication:** There is a need for increased coordination and communication at the community, provider, and systems levels. Additionally, the COVID-19 crisis in 2020 has demonstrated the need for organizations to be able to respond quickly and in a coordinated manner to address the urgent needs of persons experiencing homelessness.



**Need for cross-system partnerships:** While many organizations outside the homeless response system have begun to engage, increased involvement will enhance opportunities for response (e.g. discharge from criminal justice or health care) and identification of clients engaged in multiple systems of care. In addition to collaborating with partners to expand access to homeless services by making them accessible throughout the community and not primarily concentrated in the downtown area.



**Additional funding with more flexibility:** More funding will be needed to support the development of housing and services. Additionally, stakeholders expressed concern that there is a lack of flexible funding available to develop new, innovative interventions that reflect the reality of homelessness and housing.



**Adjusting responses for unique groups experiencing homelessness:** Stakeholders expressed the need for distinct trauma-informed, culturally-responsive interventions and strategies to address the needs of specific subpopulations experiencing homelessness, including youth, older adults, survivors of domestic violence, and persons with histories of criminal justice involvement.

## Strategic Plan Recommendations

Based upon quantitative data regarding local homelessness trends and qualitative data shared by key stakeholder, Homebase proposed the following six high-priority recommendations for the improvement of San Antonio and Bexar County's response to homelessness:

**RECOMMENDATION #1: Implement a single collective-impact leadership group for San Antonio and Bexar County.** This collective-impact leadership group will provide systems level coordination for San Antonio and Bexar County and will be the owner of the issue of homelessness throughout the community. This groups' role will be to serve as the coordinator and connector of the various funding streams and systems of care that impact homelessness in San Antonio/Bexar County, with oversight on measuring success, coordinating policy and funding, and identifying gaps and program needs.

**RECOMMENDATION #2: Increase investment in community-based housing and service options.** Homebase recommends investing in the grassroots desire from faith-based and local organizations to develop and build permanent housing solutions in the community. This process can be assisted and accelerated by offering targeted pre-development loans along with development expertise to interested groups to more effectively facilitate a timely development process. These loans can be targeted to the needs and gaps identified in the Homeless Strategic Plan.

**RECOMMENDATION #3: Increase capacity and effectiveness of outreach through improved structure for coordinating diverse outreach efforts across San Antonio/Bexar County and expansion of homeless outreach clinician pilot program.** There is a significant need to increase the number of outreach workers serving San Antonio and Bexar County. The development of an outreach coordinator role that could work across outreach teams to disseminate information and provide real-time updates and coordination regarding resources available would also improve county-wide outreach capacity. Additionally, developing cross-agency agreements and structure around the goals and outcomes of outreach will help ensure that outreach efforts are successfully resulting in connections to shelter, housing, and services. It will be also helpful to ensure homeless resources are accessible throughout the Bexar County/San Antonio area and not primarily centralized downtown. An example could be the Homeless Resource Hub model which was implemented by San Antonio during the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to engage and connect clients to services and provide assistance for basic needs.

San Antonio/Bexar County has also received very positive feedback regarding the homeless clinician outreach pilot. Expansion of this program would help create new touch points between clinicians, law enforcement officers, and persons experiencing homelessness region-wide to build rapport with the most frequent users of police and emergency services and connect them to housing and services.

**RECOMMENDATION #4: Conduct a Frequent User System Engagement (FUSE) analysis to identify high utilizers of public resources among persons experiencing homelessness and connect them to appropriate housing and resources.** A FUSE analysis looks at utilization of the medical, mental health, and criminal justice system among persons experiencing homelessness to identify those individuals that are frequently moving between the street and institutions and utilizing significant public resources. It also helps identify those clients who are touching and cycling between multiple systems, but have not been able to gain housing stability due to significant vulnerabilities such as mental health, substance use, criminal justice involvement, and chronic health conditions. San Antonio/Bexar County should use this information to establish a baseline understanding of how frequently services are being utilized and by whom to ensure these individuals are offered navigation assistance, placed on waitlists for housing and services, and encouraged to utilize available post-institution services (such as group homes, halfway houses, and family reunification services).

**RECOMMENDATION #5: Develop detailed prioritization policies and targeted interventions to most effectively connect persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness to stable housing.** San Antonio/Bexar County must consider how it prioritizes individuals who have been living outdoors for extended periods of time for housing interventions. Establishing a proportional set-aside of housing units for this population has been seen to help to reduce unsheltered homelessness. San Antonio/Bexar County should also explore temporary shelter and controlled outdoor living options targeted for individuals who have spent a significant period living in unsheltered situations that are being implemented in other jurisdictions. These models include sanctioned encampments, community-run tent cities, tiny home communities, and navigation centers, all incorporating wraparound service models. Such models provide time limited assistance to the unsheltered population, usually by invitation only, to assist in the documentation and housing readiness process. Some communities have paired these models with requirements of use after encampments are closed. Although many of these models are new, they have showed early success at easing the transition from the street to system-focused care for the unsheltered population.

**RECOMMENDATION #6: Increase focus on consumer engagement and equity throughout the homelessness response system.** The insights of persons with lived experience of homelessness were critical to the development of the Homeless Strategic Plan. Consumer engagement has also been an incredibly successful part of San Antonio's Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) and the development of youth-focused homelessness strategies and interventions. San Antonio/Bexar County should expand upon these efforts to establish more forums and methods for authentic consumer engagement in the design of strategies and interventions to address homelessness. It is also important that these efforts bring a focus on equity and equitable representation of persons with different lived experiences, including Veterans; persons experiencing chronic homelessness; persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness; and families.

# Metrics of Success for San Antonio and Bexar County Homeless Strategic Plan

San Antonio's progress towards implementing the goals and recommendations in this plan can be measured in two ways: improved **outcome measures** related to homelessness and **changes in process** that respond to identified gaps and needs.



## Outcome Measures

- **Decrease the percentage of unsheltered homelessness** during the annual Point in Time Count by 20%.
- **Decrease first time homelessness**, according to HMIS data, by 20%.
- **Increase number of units on Housing Inventory Chart (HIC)** by 15%, including increases in units appropriate for families and those experiencing chronic homelessness. This is inclusive of emergency shelter beds and transitional housing units.
- **Increase the housing stock** for affordable housing and Permanent Supportive Housing unit by at least 10%.
- **Increase the number of individuals connected to behavioral health services** by 35%.
- **Decrease the number of clients entering homelessness from correctional facilities and penal institutions** by 15% through improved coordination and reentry efforts.



## Process Changes

- Create a **homeless governance structure** in San Antonio.
- **Scale “upstream” prevention and diversion programs** to reduce entries into homelessness when possible.
- Increase **outreach services, staffing and coordination** to meet need.
- Foster **partnerships with different agencies** to create permanent housing options for persons experiencing homelessness utilizing new and different funding streams.
- Incorporate an **equity focus** into all service delivery and housing models.
- Build partnerships between the homeless response, behavioral health, and medical communities to create housing that is supportive of San Antonio's most vulnerable populations.
- **Build capacity** among local homeless service providers.
- **Maintain rapid response policies and protocols** for responding to COVID-19 among persons experiencing homelessness in San Antonio.

# How Can You Help Address Homelessness in San Antonio and Bexar County?

Preventing and ending homelessness in San Antonio and Bexar County is a **community-wide effort**. We need the support of government agencies, non-profit service providers, businesses, friends, families, neighbors and citizens from across San Antonio and Bexar County to make meaningful change in the lives of persons experiencing homelessness here in our community.

*Here are a few ways that you can get involved and help persons experiencing homelessness today. **No one agency or organization can end homelessness in San Antonio on its own – it will take San Antonio, together, to make a difference for our neighbors experiencing homelessness.***

**LEARN ABOUT LOCAL RESOURCES:** There are over 5,000 programs offered by congregations, non-profit organizations, government agencies, and compassionate groups in and around San Antonio.



Check out [SACRD.org](http://SACRD.org) to learn more about how these programs are working to address the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

**DONATE:** Consider making a donation directly to a homeless service provider in San Antonio/Bexar County or through one of the following campaigns:

**COVID-19 Response Fund:** The City of San Antonio’s COVID-19 Emergency Housing Assistance Program, supported through the COVID-19 Response Fund, will help individuals and families in need of emergency housing assistance during the COVID-19 crisis.

- Individual smaller **donations can be made online** or by texting “HousingHelpSA” to 41444.
- More substantial donations through businesses, corporations and philanthropic partners will be collected via **email** by the San Antonio Area Foundation.

**Change the Way We Give:** This alternative giving campaign is a meaningful way that residents can compassionately give to organizations serving people experiencing homelessness in lieu of donating to people directly on the streets.

The funds will be donated directly to the Homelessness Continuum of Care Lead Agency, the South Alamo Regional Alliance for the Homeless (SARAH), to be distributed equitably to agencies serving people experiencing and at-risk of homelessness. To donate to the initiative, text “SA GIVES” to 41444 or visit <https://www.sanantonio.gov/humanservices/Alternative-Giving-Campaign> .



**Volunteer:** Homeless service providers often need volunteers to help provide services to the large amount of individuals and families experiencing homelessness that they serve. Volunteers often assist with serving meals, sorting clothes, engaging with clients (arts/crafts, singing, etc.) and helping with everyday program operations. Volunteer opportunities include:

- [SARAH Volunteer Registration](#)
- [Haven for Hope Volunteer Opportunities](#): contact [volunteers@havenforhope.org](mailto:volunteers@havenforhope.org) or call 210-220-1549
- [SAMMinistries Volunteer Registration](#): contact [volunteer@samm.org](mailto:volunteer@samm.org) or call 210-321-5639
- You can also use [SACRD.org](http://SACRD.org) to identify organizations, including congregations, that may have volunteer opportunities that are right for you!



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**KNOW WHO TO CALL:** Knowing the right number to call about an issue or concern related to homelessness can help ensure that the issue is resolved in an effective and compassionate way for the person experiencing homelessness and the community.

**[Homeless Connections Hotline](#):** The City of San Antonio has launched a Homeless Connections Hotline to assist people experiencing homelessness. Callers can discuss their current circumstances and receive counseling and education regarding available resources.

- The hotline number is 210-207-1799
- Community members may also email [HomelessOutreach@sanantonio.gov](mailto:HomelessOutreach@sanantonio.gov) to seek help for themselves or others

**[311](#):** If you are concerned about an encampment or other non-urgent health and safety concerns related to homelessness, please call 311 – San Antonio’s non-emergency line – or reach out to the City of San Antonio’s Department of Human Services.

**[911](#):** If you are concerned about the urgent health or safety of someone experiencing homelessness or about a dangerous or unsafe situation that is taking place, please **immediately call 911**.