



SPECIAL TOPICS



ESTIMATING CALIFORNIA'S HOMELESS YOUTH POPULATION



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About the Author

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CRB reports can be found online at <http://www.library.ca.gov/> under CA Research Bureau Reports; HYP reports are available at <http://cahomelessyouth.ca.gov>.

About the Project

The California Homeless Youth Project (HYP) is a multi-year research and policy initiative of the California Research Bureau, in collaboration with the California Council on Youth Relations, a project of New America Media. The HYP highlights issues and solutions for youth ages 12 to 24 who are living "on the edge" of homelessness or are currently homeless in California. In particular, the HYP engages these youth directly in research and policy discussions, giving voice to their experiences and recommendations as well as those of researchers, practitioners and policy experts. The HYP is supported by funding from The California Wellness Foundation.

INTRODUCTION

The term “homeless youth” in this report refers to unaccompanied minors through age 17 who are living apart from their parents or legal guardians and young adults ages 18 through 24 who are economically and/or emotionally detached from their families and are experiencing homeless situations or are in unstable or inadequate living situations. These living situations include sleeping on friends’ couches, staying in shelters, and living under bridges, in abandoned buildings, or on the street.

Too many young people in California are homeless – on their own in a state with one of the highest rates of homelessness.¹ National and state data on the homeless population – data needed to identify trends and make policy decisions – did not exist until 2005.² Five years later, information on chronically homeless adults, homeless families, and other homeless groups has greatly improved as prevalence and characteristics data on adults and families is routinely collected on the local and federal level. This is not the case for homeless youth.

Young adults who are homeless share some issues with other homeless populations (e.g., young parents with homeless families, young adults recently discharged from the military with homeless veterans, and older youth who have been on the streets for several years with the chronic homeless population). However, homeless youth have unique needs, experiences, and characteristics. It is a young, vulnerable, and particularly at risk group. To prevent and address youth homelessness, policymakers need to understand these young people and the issues they face. Data on their population size and characteristics is essential for planning, allocating and targeting resources, monitoring trends, and evaluating state efforts.

This Special Topics Report, ***Estimating California’s Homeless Youth Population***, identifies what we know – or, more accurately, don’t know – about the size of California’s homeless youth population. It does not describe population characteristics. Instead, the report provides national data and estimates of homeless

youth for context and comparison. It explains why data is difficult to collect for this population, and why California does not have specific state-level information. It also identifies and discusses the current federal and state data sources that provide information on homeless youth.

The report concludes that a reliable statewide estimate of the number – and characteristics – of homeless youth does not exist and that it is important that such an estimate be determined. The final section of this report presents Action Steps developed by a diverse group of stakeholders for improving the population estimate of homeless youth in California.

THE NUMBER OF HOMELESS YOUTH

...national estimates on the prevalence of all subgroups of homeless people vary widely, but this seems particularly true in the case of homeless youth. Estimates vary depending on the source and methods used to obtain the estimates. They also vary based on the time frame considered.³ (Paul Toro, February 2010)

Data documenting the breadth and depth of homelessness among youth is neither consistent nor complete. There is no one source of data on the homeless youth population as a whole. Information comes from several different sources, including national surveys, reports, and management information systems. These sources generally collect information on one or more subpopulations (see box on page 2), while large numbers of homeless youth remain uncoun­ted.

Reliable, consistent data on the number of homeless youth are difficult to develop for several reasons. First, there is no single, federal definition of the term “homeless youth.” For example, both “homeless youth” and “runaway youth” are defined in the federal *Runaway and Homeless Youth Act*. The federal *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act* provides one definition of unaccompanied homeless youth receiving education services, and a separate definition for purposes of eligibility for housing programs. These definitions are described in Appendix B.

*The recent GAO report, **Homelessness: A Common Vocabulary Could Help Agencies Collaborate and Collect More Consistent Data** (June 2010), addresses how differences in definitions impact effectiveness in serving those experiencing homelessness, as well as the availability, completeness, and usefulness of federal homeless data.⁴*

A related matter is the distinction between runaway and throwaway youth, which includes issues such as what constitutes runaway behavior, and the failure of many families to report their children's absences. Although labeled differently, the distinctions between many runaway and other homeless youth are artificial as neither have a home to which they are willing or able to return. Federal studies and surveys on runaway youth include throwaway youth because many experience both circumstances. And, in fact, the categorization of an episode as runaway or throwaway frequently depends upon whether the information was gathered from the youth or from the parent/caregiver.⁵

The wide and varied age ranges associated with "youth homelessness" also affect data. Based on the research, most homeless youth are age 13 or over.⁶ Homeless youth services generally establish age criteria based on funding source requirements. Youth ages 12 through 17, or through age 21, are commonly eligible for services, while some programs continue serving young adults through age 24 or older. In addition, the age range for homeless youth includes both minors and adults. Because public agency programs generally serve minors or adults, data must be drawn from different sources and national surveys. Estimates need to be cobbled together from different sources, or special surveys have to be conducted, each of which employ various sampling and estimation methodologies with their own limitations.⁷

Homeless youth are found in urban, suburban, and rural areas throughout the nation. However, they are generally most visible in large cities, including Los Angeles and San Francisco.⁸ Homeless young people are difficult to identify and locate: they generally try to avoid detection

Homeless Youth Subpopulations

Researchers have identified homeless youth subpopulations that represent important distinctions among youth with respect to the reasons they are homeless and their experiences of homelessness. These categories – which are neither static nor mutually exclusive – affect data collection.

- *Throwaway Youth:* youth who a) are abandoned or deserted, b) are told to leave home by a parent or other adult in the household, c) leave home and are prevented from returning home, or d) run away and whose parents/ caretakers make no effort to recover them or do not care if they return.
- *Runaway Youth:* minors age 14 years or younger who have left home for one – or those age 15 and older who have left home for two – or more nights without parental permission. Most have short-term experiences with homelessness.
- *System Youth:* youth who have been involved in government systems – foster care, mental health and juvenile justice – due to abuse, neglect, illness, incarceration, or family homelessness.
- *Street Youth:* youth who spend a significant amount of time on the street and in other areas (such as abandoned buildings) that increase their risk for sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, and drug abuse. These youth generally are disconnected from traditional services (such as shelters).

and often distrust adults and social service systems, frequently out of fear of being taken into custody or forced to return to the family environment from which they ran. Their living arrangements are often hidden, and homeless youth are typically transient and not in a fixed place long enough to be counted. They may be homeless for short periods of time – repeated several times over several years – or may spend years on the street.

National Estimates of Homeless Youth

Nationally, between 1.6 and 2.1 million youth and young adults ages 12 to 24 are estimated to be homeless over the course of a year. These numbers were developed from national survey data (see box) and other sources, and were provided by Urban Institute homeless policy expert Martha Burt during 2007 congressional testimony.⁹ Although dated, these estimates continue to be the best available on homeless youth and are commonly cited. Further breakdowns by age are:

- Ages 12 through 17: from 1.6-1.7 million over a year; about 300,000-400,000 youth might be expected to be homeless on a single day.
- Ages 18 to 19: about 80,000-170,000 over a year; about 22,000-44,000 (five percent of the adult homeless population) on a single day.
- Ages 20 to 24: about 124,000-236,000 over a year; about 31,000-59,000 (seven percent of the adult homeless population) on a single day.

The *Runaway and Homeless Youth Act*, as last amended by the *Reconnecting Homeless Youth Act of 2008*, requires that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in consultation with the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, prepare and submit a report by 2010 (and at five year intervals) that estimates the incidence and prevalence of runaway and homeless youth between 13 and 25 years of age. However, this study has not been undertaken because Congress has not appropriated the necessary funding authorized in the Act for this activity.¹⁰

Runaway Youth

“Even one night on the street exposes homeless young people to danger and a host of risky behaviors.”¹² (Jacqueline Baker, Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs Team Leader)

National Incidence Studies

According to the 2002 National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway and Thrownaway Children (NISMART II) – the most recent data available – an estimated 1,682,900 youth had a runaway/ throwaway episode in 1999. The NISMART II included large national surveys of parents and youth ages 10 to 18, and a survey of residential facilities. A new study is scheduled to be conducted by the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in 2011.

A recent 2010 Urban Institute lifetime prevalence study tracked a nationally representative sample of 12 year-olds until they reached age 18. It found that nearly one-in-five (20 percent) youth run away from home at least once by age 18. Over half of these youth run away more than once: about 22 percent run twice and about 30 percent run three or more times.¹¹

Homelessness among Foster Care and Other System Youth

Youth who have been in foster care have a high rate of homelessness. Nationally, estimates vary (from 13 to 25 percent) but are generally 20 percent or greater.¹³ While there are not good estimates of the number of juveniles or young adults who become homeless after being released from detention or incarceration, these individuals are also at high risk.

The percentage of homeless youth who report having previously been in foster care or another institutional setting (such as juvenile detention or a mental health facility) also varies across studies, ranging between 21 and 53 percent.¹⁴

State Estimates of Homeless Youth

The total number of young people who are staying in shelters, sleeping on their friends' couches and floors, staying in abandoned buildings, camping in parks or woods, and living on the streets in California is not known. In addition, there is not a reliable estimate based on state-level data. While limited data on homeless youth is reported to one department, the state has not collected information on this population through periodic surveys and does not have a comprehensive reporting system.

The John Burton Foundation for Children without Homes and the California Coalition for Youth extrapolated the following state estimate from national data: **200,000 homeless youth ages 12 to 17, along with numerous 18 to 24 year-olds, are likely to be homeless over the course of a year.*** In the absence of an established and reliable statewide estimate of homeless youth, this number has been widely adopted.

Some data on the state homeless youth population, including the following 2008-09 numbers, are available from federal data sources (these are more fully described in the Data Sources section). Federal data sources generally compile information on subsets of the homeless youth population for specific purposes. They use different definitions and methodologies; there is some duplication (youth counted more than once) among these data sources as well as within some data sources. In addition, service providers and researchers agree that the number of youth identified through these data sources represent a serious undercount of the actual number of young people experiencing homelessness in California.

- Local programs funded by the federal *Runaway and Homeless Youth Act* reported providing about 81,000 services to homeless youth statewide through shelter, transitional housing, and street outreach programs.

*This estimate is based on applying California's proportion of the national youth population (12 percent) to national estimates of homeless youth as described in the cover letter to The John Burton Foundation and the California Coalition for Youth report, *Too Big to Ignore: Youth Homelessness in California*, November 2009, at <http://www.cahomelessyouth.org/pdf/Too%20Big%20to%20Ignore.pdf>.

State Needs Access to Reliable Data

The Governor's Ten Year Chronic Homelessness Action Plan (released February 2010) addresses the importance of data when it states that California's efforts to address chronic homelessness should be grounded in data about the characteristics and needs of this population. The Plan also directs that – subject to the availability and appropriation of funding – a Statewide Data Clearinghouse be established that collects and analyzes data on chronic homelessness and client outcomes to monitor implementation of the state action plan and guide ongoing policy and program development and decisions.

[Plan available at http://www.hcd.ca.gov/Final_Ten_Year_Chronic_Homelessness_Action_Plan.pdf]

- California's 90 local education agencies that collect this information reported that over 4,300 unaccompanied homeless youth were enrolled in their schools.
- California's Continuum of Care jurisdictions, using a point-in-time methodology described on page 6, counted about 1,900 sheltered and unsheltered homeless youth under age 18 statewide during their Annual Homeless Survey in January 2009.

Information on the number of young people who are homeless also comes from local jurisdiction counts and estimates available in a small number of areas throughout the state, and from individual program utilization data. For example, San Francisco Human Services Agency counted

45 unsheltered youth age 12-24 during its 2009 point-in-time homeless survey while Larkin Street Youth Services reported approximately 5,700 homeless and marginally housed youth ages 12-24 in that city during 2009.¹⁵ Local data sources are often inconsistent and sometimes hard to interpret.

DATA SOURCES FOR UNACCOMPANIED HOMELESS YOUTH

National surveys, like the NISMART II, provide data that has been used to estimate the number of homeless youth on the national level. However, there is no similar state data source available to estimate California's homeless youth population.

Existing data on homeless youth comes primarily from federal data sources, with some state sources. Following are descriptions of relevant federal and state data sources. These are also listed in the Table on page 10.

Federal Data Sources on Homeless Youth

■ **Runaway and Homeless Youth Management Information System (RHYMIS)¹⁶**

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Family and Youth Services Bureau, authorizes funding for Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) programs that provide a range of supports. RHYMIS, a national database, is the automated tool that captures demographic and service data on youth being served by specific RHY-funded programs. Service providers report data to Congress and the Executive Branch every six months; they use RHYMIS data to plan, develop funding proposals, and educate their communities about the needs of homeless youth. A count of the number of individual youth served is reported for RHY shelter and transitional living programs; RHY data for street outreach programs represent a count of services provided, and may include multiple service contacts with the same youth.¹⁷

In 2008-09, RHY shelter and transitional living programs nationwide reported serving 43,934 unaccompanied youth (from under age 12 to age 21); in addition, RHY street outreach programs reported 812,418 contacts with homeless youth.

California: In 2008-09, RHY shelter or transitional living programs statewide reported serving 4,976 unaccompanied youth (from under age 12 to age 21). RHY street outreach programs reported 76,296 contacts during that time period.

Limitations: RHY shelter and transitional living program data may include duplicate counts when individuals receive services from programs in a different continuum or geographical area. In addition, data is not always submitted in the correct reporting period.

A larger issue is that many homeless youth do not have access to RHY-funded housing options or other programs and services. These youth are not identified nor counted through RHYMIS.

■ **Continuum of Care (CoC) Point-In-Time Count**

The CoC is the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) local planning process involving public agencies, service providers, and advocates who assess the needs of the homeless populations in their communities and develop a plan to prevent and end homelessness and deliver services. Forty-three geographic jurisdictions in California (cities/counties/regions) develop their own CoC plan, which serves as an application for HUD's McKinney-Vento federal homeless assistance grant programs.

HUD's competitive funding application requires that CoCs conduct a one-night, point-in-time (PIT) count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons in January of every other year. HUD encourages CoCs to conduct these counts annually, and approximately two-thirds of

CoCs nationwide conduct more frequent PIT counts. These data provide counts of people in three types of homeless households: 1) persons in households without children (adults only); 2) persons in households with at least one adult and one child; and 3) persons in households with only children under age 18. The third household grouping is a new reporting requirement for the 2010 application; it includes unaccompanied youth, adolescent parents and their children, adolescent siblings, or other household configurations composed only of children.¹⁸

Homeless counts are broken down into the following subpopulation categories: chronically homeless, persons with severe mental illness, persons with chronic substance abuse, victims of domestic violence, veterans, persons with HIV/AIDS, and unaccompanied youth. In addition to the information generated by the Homeless PIT Counts, the CoC plans also include Housing Inventory Count information about all of the beds and units for homeless individuals in the community, categorized by program type and unmet need.¹⁹

The CoC PIT count for unaccompanied youth shows a continued decrease from January 2006 when youth represented 4.7 percent of the homeless population counted. In January 2008, youth represented 2.1 percent of the total homeless counted and 1.4 percent in January 2009. The reason for this continued decrease in the share of youth counted is not known; it may reflect changes in reporting methodology or other factors.²⁰

*Either our current systems do not capture youth homelessness well, or the problem is much smaller than people have thought. It is probably a combination of these, but this is an area in need of much further study.*²¹ (Dennis Culhane, Homeless Research Institute)

California: CoC geographic jurisdictions report directly to HUD; the state does not collect this data. HUD's 2009 CoC *Homeless Populations and Subpopulations*

Summary for California reports that the total population of unaccompanied youth (under age 18) in these jurisdictions is 1,861 (1,045 sheltered and 816 unsheltered).²² Data on unaccompanied homeless youth was not required and ten of the 43 CoCs reported no unaccompanied youth. While most CoCs identified homeless youth through the traditional PIT data gathering process, some jurisdictions incorporated targeted youth counts designed to locate and count both sheltered and unsheltered homeless youth in recognition that they are not adequately identified through the traditional PIT process.

In the City and County of Los Angeles, for example, a separate March daytime count of unsheltered unaccompanied homeless youth under age 18 was conducted in addition to the January Homeless Count: 638 unaccompanied homeless youth were identified along with 3,572 homeless young adults age 18-24.²³ San Jose counted 373 sheltered and unsheltered youth under age 23 through a youth census. In Sonoma County, 92 youth under age 18 were identified and 140 surveys of youth under age 22 were administered by youth advocates and trained peer interviewers.²⁴

Limitations: While improving, CoC data has not been uniform among local jurisdictions. HUD itself cautions users about the limitations of its use: since compliance with HUD standards may vary among CoCs, the reliability and consistency of the homeless counts may also vary. In addition, changes in methodology to count the homeless, or specific subpopulations, affect the results and the ability to make comparisons between reporting periods.²⁵

There also are challenges in any PIT count that quantifies the size of the homeless population at a given point during the year. Single point-in-time counts will always underestimate those who move in and out of homelessness over time and many youths' experiences with homelessness are episodic. These counts do not usually provide information on whether a young

person was homeless for one day or a longer period of time. Homeless youth are likely to be overlooked because they are not found in typical homeless locations frequented by adults; instead, they can often be found doubled up with friends. Counting them requires a different approach than the traditional homeless night count.

■ Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS)²⁶

The HUD HMIS, which generates unduplicated counts of clients served, is designed to capture information over time (longitudinal data) about persons moving in and out of the homeless assistance system; information includes changes in residential status, family composition, and service use. HUD developed technical data standards for the HMIS which allows communities to adapt their locally developed data systems to meet HUD standards.

Programs receiving McKinney-Vento funding are required to report aggregated data on the homeless individuals and families they serve. In addition, all homeless programs, regardless of funding source, are encouraged to report. HMIS data provides detailed information on persons, including unaccompanied youth, who access emergency shelters or transitional housing over the course of a year (October 1 to September 30). Starting in 2010, data on persons served in permanent supportive housing programs will also be collected.

Based on data reported by 334 jurisdictions nationwide, unaccompanied youth and several-children households represent two percent of the sheltered individuals in 2009.²⁷

California: Local CoC jurisdictions collect and maintain data on homeless individuals and report data directly to the HMIS. Other programs serving homeless individuals report data to the HMIS on a voluntary basis. The state does not collect this data, nor is homeless data collected statewide.

Limitations: HMIS data only reports on those homeless individuals who are sheltered. The HMIS data on annual estimates comes from only about half of the communities nationwide, and information from all California counties is not represented in the HMIS. In addition, the estimates of youth in shelter facilities likely undercount the total number as some programs that specifically target homeless youth – such as RHY programs – are not participating in the HMIS. For example, bed inventory information reported by CoCs for 2009 suggests that only about 62 percent of all beds targeted to homeless youth currently participate in the HMIS.²⁸

As a result, similar to the RHYMIS and CoC PIT data, HMIS data reflects an undercount of both the total homeless youth population and the number of youth receiving services.

■ Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR)²⁹

HUD issues the AHAR, which provides aggregate data of the national homeless population (data is not reported by state), describes their demographic characteristics and service use patterns, and explores changes in homelessness. The AHAR is the only national report on homelessness to use longitudinal data as both HMIS data and CoC PIT data on homeless populations provide data sources for the report. The 2009 AHAR includes qualitative information (interviews with local service providers) to provide a context for understanding how homelessness is changing.

According to HUD, AHAR data shows that unaccompanied youth are about 2.2 percent of the sheltered population, or about 22,700 youth. The data also indicate that approximately 110,000 homeless youth (ages 12-17 and 18-24) are unsheltered.³⁰

California: As previously discussed, the state does not collect data.

Limitations: The limitations for the AHAR data are the same as those for the HMIS and CoC PIT data which have previously been discussed.

■ McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Data

The U.S. Department of Education requires states to submit reports that include data on the actual school enrollment of homeless students in all local educational agencies (LEAs). LEAs receiving McKinney-Vento EHCY sub-grants must provide additional data on the number of homeless students served; the number of preschool, migrant and unaccompanied youth; educational support services; barriers to their education; and academic progress.

Nationally, LEAs with sub-grants reported that 52,950 unaccompanied homeless youth were enrolled in 2008-09, an increase of close to 70 percent over the previous two years.³¹

California: The California Department of Education also collects data from the 90 LEAs with EHCY sub-grants. In 2008-09, these LEAs reported that 4,329 homeless unaccompanied youth were enrolled. (No data on unaccompanied youth is required nor collected from the remaining LEAs.)

Limitations: The number of unaccompanied homeless youth attending school is considerably larger than the number reported. McKinney-Vento EHCY data represents an undercount because only those school districts that receive sub-grants are required to count and report. In addition, some school districts have not been identifying the homeless children and youth who are already enrolled; and others have not been enrolling homeless children and youth, including unaccompanied homeless youth.

While some districts report that there are no homeless youth in their communities,

this runs contrary to research that youth homelessness is prevalent in urban, suburban, and rural areas. Because data on the number of homeless children and youth served does not determine or affect the McKinney-Vento funding received, LEAs may lack the incentive to expend significant time and resources to identify homeless children and youth.³²

■ National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) Crisis Line

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Family and Youth Services Bureau established and funds the NRS to assist youth who have run away, or are considering running away, and their families. With its database of more than 16,000 resources, the NRS hotline (1-800-RUNAWAY) operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to link youth in crisis and their families across the country to shelters, counseling, medical assistance, and other services. The crisis line generally handles more than 100,000 calls annually, more than half from youth living on the street.

In 2009, half of the total calls to the NRS, 58,805, were from youth ages 12-21. Fifty-five percent of youth callers – 32,343 – were living on the street as runaway, throwaway, or homeless youth when they called for help.³³

California: 14,011 California callers contacted the NRS crisis line in 2009, including 7,006 youth ages 12-21; 3,853 of these youth were on the street when they called.

In 2009, runaways, at 42 percent, were the largest group of crisis callers to the National Runaway Switchboard (NRS); homeless youth (nine percent) and throwaway youth (five percent) also called the crisis line. However, from 2000 to 2009, the number of throwaway youth calling the NRS increased by 68 percent and the number of crisis calls from homeless youth jumped more than 550 percent.³⁴ (The National Runaway Switchboard)

State Data Sources on Homeless Youth

■ Homeless Youth and Exploitation Program (HYEP)

The California Emergency Management Agency (Cal EMA) administers the grant-funded HYEP to help homeless youth under age 24 exit street life; the four projects are located in Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, and Santa Clara counties. The HYEP has two components: the Homeless Youth Emergency Services Program and the Child Sexual Exploitation Intervention Program that provides specialized services for youth up to age 18 who are involved in sexually exploitative activities. Services provided under the HYEP include outreach and access to food, shelter, counseling, referrals to other agencies, screening for basic health needs, and long-term stabilization planning. During the 2008-09 state fiscal year, initial outreach services were provided to 4,921 youth. In addition, the projects reported that 16,206 services were provided to youth.³⁵

Limitations: While HYEP initial outreach service data generally includes specific, unduplicated numbers of youth, the remaining service data includes duplicated counts as the same youth can use some or all of the services available. More importantly in relation to determining a statewide population estimate, HYEP data includes duplicate counts from those projects that receive funding from RHY and other sources and report the same data to these different sources.

■ California Youth Crisis Line

Cal EMA also oversees the statutorily mandated telephone referral network to connect youth in need with appropriate resources: the California Youth Crisis Line.³⁶ Operated by the California Coalition for Youth (CCY), the Crisis Line is a statewide, toll-free, 24-hour, confidential hotline targeted to youth and young adults ages 12-24, and available to adults supporting these

youth. CCY staff and volunteers provide support, encouragement, and referrals to about 12,000 callers each year. During the 2009-10 state fiscal year, CCY received 1,511 calls from youth; one-fifth of the callers (302) were unaccompanied homeless youth.³⁷

■ Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS)

The CWS/CMS is California's version of the federal Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System; it provides case management, services planning, and data collection and reporting about children and youth in the system. According to CWS/CMS data, 5,521 youth were reported as emancipated from California's foster care system in 2008-09.³⁸ Using an estimate of 20 percent, around 1,100 of these young adults emancipated into homelessness.³⁹

Limitations: The CWS/CMS does not collect data on youth once they have left the child welfare or foster care system.

Other state data sources could be utilized to provide information on homeless youth. One example is the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS), the most comprehensive source of health information on California's diverse population. The CHIS, conducted every two years, provides information for the state and most counties on a variety of health issues, such as access to healthcare and health behaviors. It provides health statistics for adolescents, ages 12 to 17, by county and state. While the survey does not currently collect data about housing stability and homelessness, there is a process for questions to be added.⁴⁰

In conclusion, a reliable statewide estimate of the number of unaccompanied homeless youth in California does not exist. In addition, the current federal and state data sources do not provide the level of information necessary to determine such an estimate.

ESTIMATES OF UNACCOMPANIED HOMELESS YOUTH BY ONGOING DATA SOURCES						
DATA SOURCE	TIMEFRAME	POPULATION	AGE	NATIONAL	CALIFORNIA	
Runaway & Homeless Youth Management Information System (RHYMIS)	2008-09	1) Unaccompanied youth served through the Basic Center/Transitional Living programs 2) Contacts with unaccompanied youth through the Street Outreach Program	Under 12-21	1) 43,934 2) 812,418	1) 4,976 2) 76,296	
Continuum of Care Plan (CoC)/ Point-in-Time (PIT) Data	2009	Unaccompanied sheltered and unsheltered youth counted on one night in January; distinction between unaccompanied minors and transitional-age adults	Under 18 and 18-24	9,364 (PIT) (5,712 sheltered; 3,652 unsheltered)	1,861 (PIT)	
Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR)	2009	Unaccompanied sheltered and unsheltered youth	12-24	132,700 (22,700 sheltered; 110,000 unsheltered)	Not reported by state	
McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children & Youth (EHCY) Reports	2008-09	Unaccompanied youth enrolled in school reported by local education agencies with sub-grants	Generally 18 and under	52,950	4,329	
National Runaway Switchboard (NRS) Crisis Calls	2009	NRS callers "on the street" at the time they called (includes runaway, throwaway, and homeless categories)	12-21	32,342	3,853	
Homeless Youth & Exploitation Program (HYEP)	2008-09 SFY	1) Unaccompanied youth provided initial outreach services through the HYEP 2) Services provided to unaccompanied youth through the HYEP	Under age 24	N/A	1) 4,921 2) 16,206	
California Youth Crisis Line Calls (California Coalition for Youth/CCY)	2009-10 SFY	Callers: 20% of 1,511 total callers identified as unaccompanied youth at time they called	12-24	N/A	302	
California Child Welfare Services/ Case Management System (CWS/CMS)	2008-09 SFY	Youth who have emancipated from foster care; number who experience homelessness estimated at 20% of total 5,521	Generally 18 and over	N/A	1,100	

ACTION STEPS FOR IMPROVING THE CALIFORNIA HOMELESS YOUTH POPULATION ESTIMATE:

The state needs data on homeless youth to assist in its efforts to prevent and address homelessness, and to keep homeless youth from becoming chronically homeless adults. The final section of this report presents Action Steps for developing a reliable population estimate of homeless youth in California developed by a diverse group of stakeholders.

Stakeholder Discussions

In early February 2010, the California Homeless Youth Project (HYP) convened a group of stakeholders – including policymakers, researchers, service providers, and advocates – to discuss the estimated number of homeless youth in California and the policy relevance of developing a better statewide population estimate and description of characteristics. See Appendix A for the list of stakeholders involved in this process.

Through discussions that continued in April, August, and September, the participants agreed that a reliable statewide number of homeless youth – and a description of their characteristics – is important to all stakeholders, including all levels of government, homeless youth-serving agencies, advocacy organizations, and research institutions. Policymakers among the stakeholders group suggested that interest in an issue drives state policy action to a greater degree than specific numbers. As a result, a reliable statewide estimate, as opposed to a specific and accurate number, is effective for this purpose. In addition, being able to measure change over time is an important state policy consideration.

In order to develop a reliable estimate for the homeless youth population in California, we recommend implementing the Action Steps on the following page.

ACTION STEPS

1. **Establish a state interagency council on homelessness** to plan, coordinate activities, and access additional federal funds related to all homeless populations, including homeless youth.
2. **Convene a statewide task force on youth homelessness data with participation by the Legislature, state agencies, researchers, service providers, advocates, youth, and other stakeholders** to determine the relevant data needed for state-level policy and funding purposes and to implement an ongoing mechanism to collect the data required.
3. **Coordinate existing state-level homelessness data collection efforts among state agencies** (as required in the *Governor's Ten Year Chronic Homelessness Action Plan*) to better identify the homeless youth population and collect consistent and complementary data across systems.
4. **Coordinate with existing federal and local homelessness data collection efforts** to better identify the homeless youth population and collect consistent and complementary data. (Local sources include homeless youth service agencies that gather information about the characteristics of the population served and public agencies that collect survey data). Promote increased and unduplicated reporting on homeless youth.
5. **Utilize and modify existing statewide surveys and research efforts** to identify and define the characteristics of homeless youth (e.g., add questions about unaccompanied youth and housing stability to the CHIS and the U.S. Census).
6. **Establish and implement uniform approaches and methods of collecting data** at the state and local levels.
 - **Develop, distribute and promote a *best practices toolkit* with CoC jurisdictions** to encourage and assist them in conducting a separate Homeless Youth Survey during the Annual Homeless Count.* Work with HUD Region IX and local jurisdictions to increase participation, including convening regional meetings and piloting a CoC Homeless Youth Survey in one or more counties to demonstrate how it can be done efficiently and at relatively little additional cost.
 - **Work with CDE to increase data from LEAs on unaccompanied homeless youth.**
7. **Promote increased and unduplicated reporting on homeless youth** at the local, state, and national levels.
8. **Collaborate with national studies and other efforts** to identify the homeless youth population (e.g., support appropriation of federal funding for the *RHY Act* incidence and prevalence study of homeless youth; use national studies to collect state-specific data to extent possible).

*CoC jurisdictions are required by HUD to report *unaccompanied youth* during the 2010 Count but are not required to conduct a separate survey. A ***best practices toolkit*** would include background information on homeless youth, effective strategies for counting this population, and sample questions.

APPENDIX A: POPULATION ESTIMATE STAKEHOLDER GROUP

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APPENDIX B: DEFINITIONS OF HOMELESS YOUTH

■ Runaway and Homeless Youth Act

The federal *Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Act* (42 USC 5701) defines “homeless youth” as individuals who are not more than 21 years of age or not more than 18 years of age if seeking shelter in a center, or not less than 16 years of age if seeking services in a transitional living program, and for whom it is not possible to live in a safe environment with a relative, and who have no other safe alternative living arrangement.

[Source: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/content/aboutfysb/RHYComp.pdf>]

■ McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

The federal *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act* (42 USC 11302) defines youth receiving Education for Homeless Children and Youth services as homeless if they “lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence,” including sharing housing or living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or campgrounds due to lack of alternative accommodations; living in emergency or transitional shelters; and living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar places.

[Source: http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/mv_full_text.pdf]

- The *Homeless Emergency and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act* of 2009 amends and reauthorizes the *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act* with substantial changes, including an expansion of HUD’s definition of homeless:

- An individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; is living in a place not meant for human habitation, in emergency shelter, in transitional housing, or is exiting an institution where they temporarily resided. The primary change from existing practice is that people will be considered homeless if they are exiting an institution where they resided for up to 90 days (previously 30 days), and were homeless immediately prior to entering that institution.
- An individual or family who is losing their primary nighttime residence, which may include a motel or hotel or a doubled-up situation, in 14 days (previously seven days) and lacks resources or support networks to remain in housing.

The Act also identifies a new category of homeless: unaccompanied youth and families who are homeless under other federal statutes (such as the education definition or the *RHY Act* definition) who have experienced a long-term period without living independently in permanent housing, have experienced persistent instability as measured by frequent moves, and can be expected to continue in such status for an extended period of time due to chronic disabilities, chronic physical health or mental health conditions, substance addiction, histories of childhood abuse, the presence of a disability, or multiple barriers to employment.

(Note: The *HEARTH Act* prohibits HUD from requiring communities to count any of the newly added categories of homeless.)

[Source: <http://www.hudhre.info/documents/HomelessAssistanceActAmendedbyHEARTH.pdf>]

■ California Government Code Section 11139.3

For purposes of facilitating and supporting the development and operation of housing for homeless youth, “homeless youth” is defined as either A) a young person not older than 24 years who is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, is no longer eligible for foster care on the basis of age, or who has run away from home; or B) a young person less than 18 years who is emancipated and is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

[Source: <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/cgi-bin/displaycode?section=gov&group=11001-12000&file=11135-11139.7>]

NOTES

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(which oversees the HYPE per Penal Code Section 13837) responsibility for this report transferred to the agency responsible for the SAG: the Board of Corrections.

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