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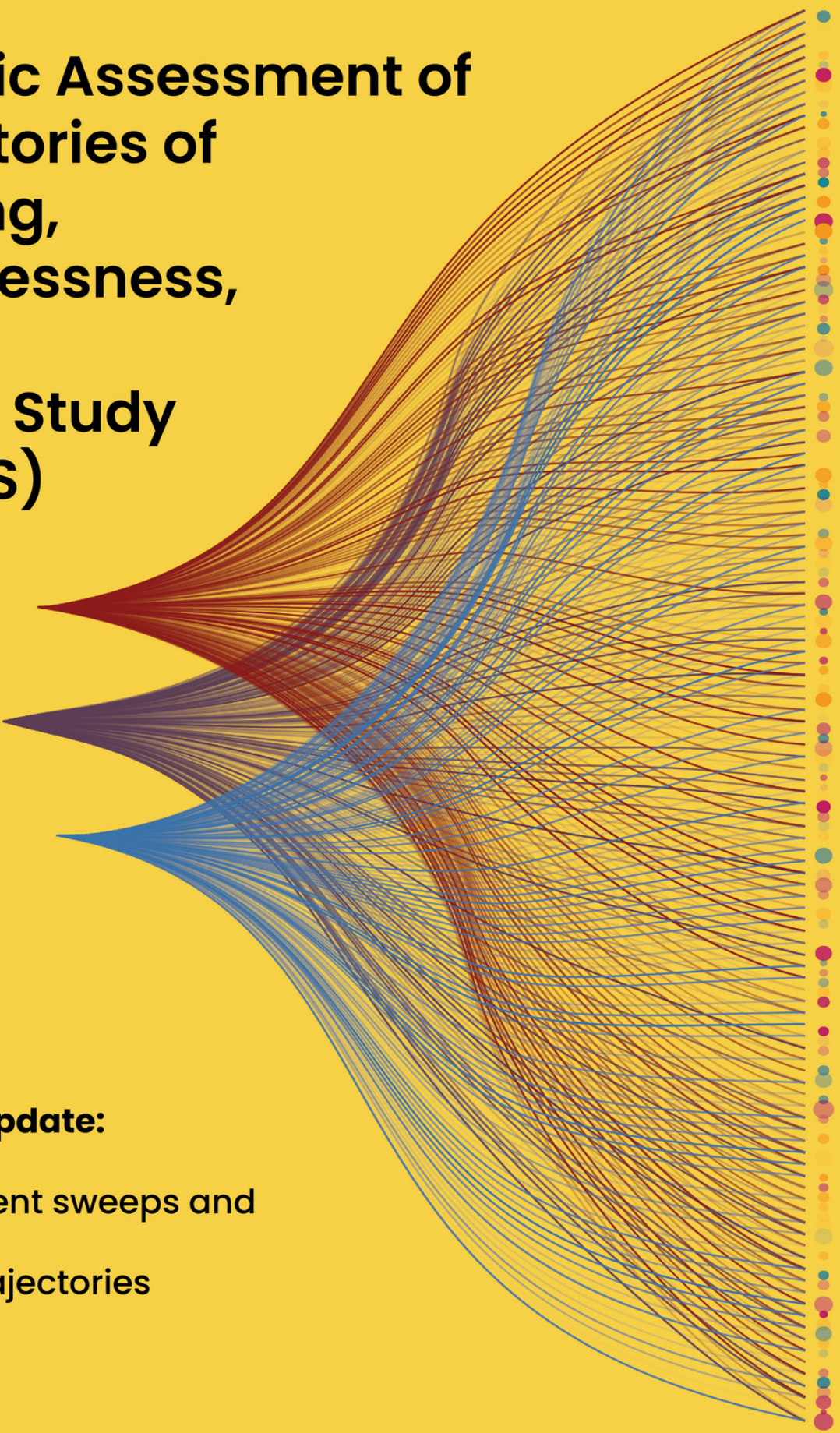
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Periodic Assessment of Trajectories of Housing, Homelessness, and Health Study (PATHS)



Fall 2023 Update:
Encampment sweeps and
housing trajectories



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**Periodic Assessment of Trajectories of Housing,
Homelessness and Health (PATHS):**

Fall 2023 Update: Encampment Sweeps and Housing Trajectories

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INTRODUCTION

In Los Angeles (LA) County, it is estimated that there are more than 75,000 people experiencing homelessness (PEH) on any given night, with more than 70% living unsheltered on the streets, in tents or makeshift shelters, or in vehicles (LAHSA 2023). In 2022, 1,692 PEH died on the streets of LA (Colletti 2023). Unsheltered PEH face additional health risks relating to violence, policing, environmental exposure, food insecurity, and sleep deprivation (Richards & Kuhn 2023). The past few years have seen an array of initiatives aimed at reducing the size of LA County's unsheltered population through the expansion of camping ordinances that make it illegal to sleep in public. Proponents of these laws argue that enforcement and encampment cleanups will be accompanied by offers of housing that will expedite processes of rehabilitation. Opponents have argued instead that housing and shelter offers are unlikely to meet the needs or expectations of PEH, most offers will be temporary and not lead to permanent housing, and PEH will be exposed to greater risk of abuse and disruption.

The Periodic Assessment of Trajectories of Housing, Health and Homelessness Study, or PATHS, is a joint initiative between USC and UCLA aimed at shining a light on the lives and experiences of PEH in LA County. PATHS features a representative sample of PEH who were unsheltered at study baseline, with ongoing monthly survey tracking on housing, health, and well-being even if respondents move into housing or shelter. In October 2022, we released an initial baseline report titled "[Under Threat](#)," which revealed substantial concern among PEH about the threat posed by camping ordinances.

This report extends on these initial findings by reporting on experiences of encampment sweeps occurring April-September 2023 and on housing and health trajectories observed throughout 2022-2023. Key findings include:

- Over half of unsheltered respondents experienced a sweep, with most experiencing more than one sweep. Sweeps occur regularly across all parts of LA City and County. Respondents were predominantly informed about sweeps by law enforcement officers (53%), not by outreach workers, resulting in a four-fold increase in the monthly risk of police citation for months in which a sweep occurred vs. other months (9% vs. 2%). Shockingly, only 13% of respondents received a shelter/housing offer during a sweep, 9% actually moved into the offered shelter/housing, and just 5% stayed for even a month.

- Looking beyond the specific context of sweeps, the study also explores the tenuous progress in rehousing efforts more broadly. Over the past year, we track little trend in the rates of shelter or housing among the PATHS panel. We do observe considerable churn out of and back into homelessness, with 53% leaving the streets at some point. But temporary options of shelter/interim housing showed poor success, with half of those who spent time in shelters later becoming unsheltered. Permanent housing performed considerably better, with >90% retention, yet only 7% of our sample were able to access permanent housing.
- Our analysis of health care access by housing status further established the advantages of permanent housing relative to temporary options. In months spent in permanent housing, respondents reported 25% to 60% improvements in health care access. Months spent in shelters showed little advantage over unsheltered, with the exception of lower levels of food insecurity. While current samples are small, we did find that respondents staying in agency-run hotels were half as likely to visit the ER in a given month and saw fewer missed doctor's appointments.

The structure of this report that includes our full set of findings is as follows:

Section 1: Review PATHS methodology and characterize our current sample.

Section 2: Investigate the trajectories and outcomes of those who reported having been involved in a street sweep.

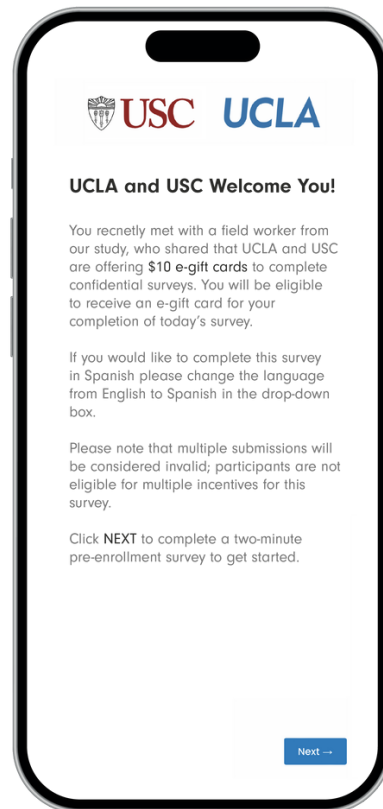
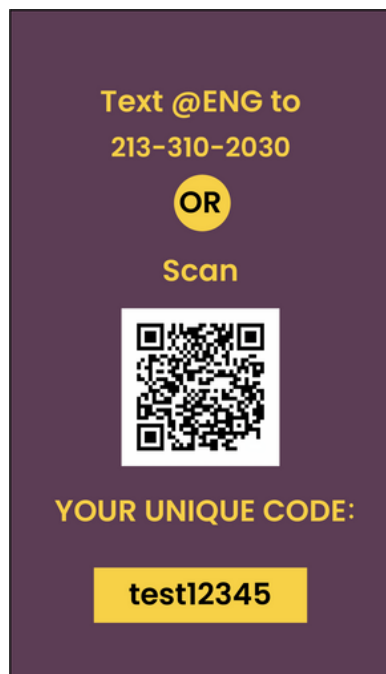
Section 3: Examine the overall housing and homelessness trajectories of our sample over time and the impact of those trajectories on health.

METHODS

Methodology and sample demographic characteristics

PATHS is carried out jointly by investigators at the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health and USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work. PATHS set out to enroll a representative sample of unsheltered PEH in LA County by conducting in-person recruitment with skilled interviewers—all of whom had experience surveying PEH and several who had lived experience of homelessness. Initial funding came from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation in September 2021. Protection of human subjects was overseen by the UCLA IRB (#21-001148). Recruitment took place from January to June in 2022 and 2023, during and immediately after the fieldwork for the LA County Homeless Count Demographic Survey, which USC led.

Prospective respondents had two enrollment options: (a) recruiters offered to collect contact information and send a study invitation directly to respondents via email or text message or (b) recruiters distributed cards to prospective respondents, who could then enroll by scanning a QR code or texting a phone number.



Prospective respondents received a text message linking them to a website with study information and a screening survey. All enrollment and consent procedures were self-administered by prospective respondents on their phones. To be eligible for PATHS, respondents had to meet the following criteria: (a) be homeless in an unsheltered (street, vehicle, tent, or makeshift shelter) or sheltered setting at least one night in the past month; (b) live in LA County; and (c) be 18 years old or older.

UCLA/USC Research: You are eligible for the study. Complete the next survey and receive a \$10 e-gift card.
Reply STOP to opt out.

Prospective respondents who met these criteria received a follow-up text inviting them to complete a baseline survey. Upon completion of the baseline survey, they were enrolled in the study and subsequently sent a link to the monthly survey on the third Monday of each month. Baseline and monthly surveys had median completion times of 5 and 17 minutes, respectively.

All surveys were conducted on a secure mobile website that could be accessed on a phone or computer. Surveys were available in English or Spanish. A critical innovation of this survey is the delivery of electronic incentives for participation.

Upon completion of each survey, respondents were connected to a portal where they could register to receive an electronic gift card. The initial incentive was \$5 per survey, which increased to \$10 per survey in February 2022. Gift cards were available from a wide range of vendors, including grocery stores and restaurants, and delivered to respondents via email. In 2023, the PATHS survey saw several key innovations, including: (a) reconnecting with respondents lost to follow-up through email, (b) enabling in-depth in-person qualitative interviews via the PATHS platform, and (c) asking new questions on sweeps, policing, and access to benefits, the focus of Section 2 of this report.

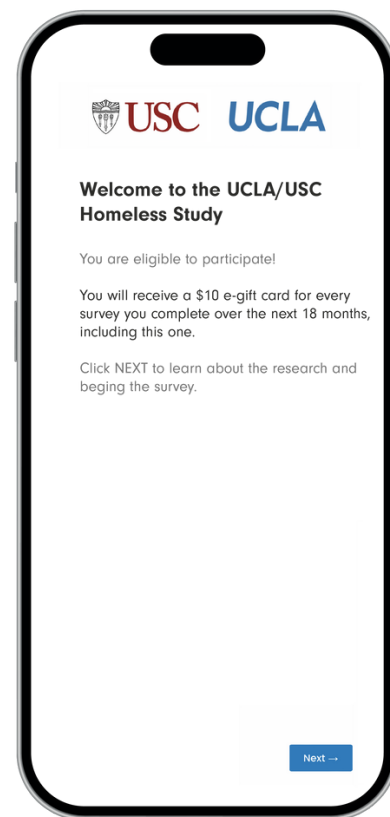
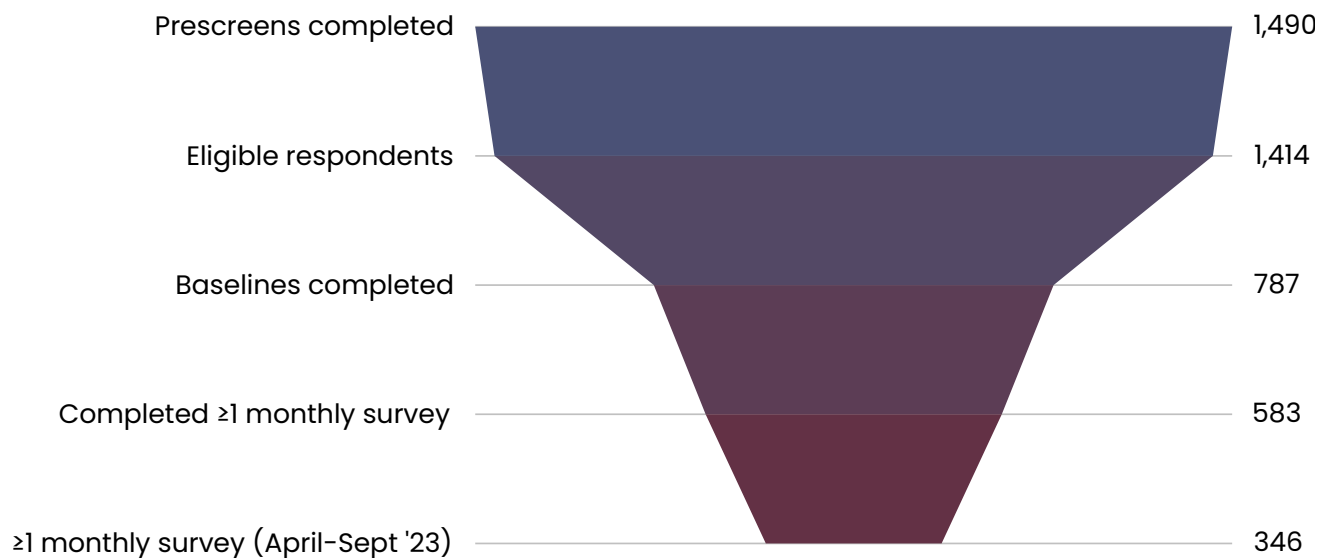


Figure 1. Screening and enrollment funnel from December 2021 to September 2023



Given the substantial reduction of the sample at each stage of the recruitment funnel, it is reasonable to ask whether the PATHS survey population remains representative of LA County's unhoused population. At baseline and follow-up, the PATHS sample looks broadly representative of LA County's unhoused population, as shown in Table 1, which compares PATHS baseline and follow-up samples to the 2023 LA County Homeless Demographic Survey. At baseline, PATHS had a similar racial and ethnic composition, a slightly younger sample (which is unsurprising given the use of mobile phones), and a slightly more female sample (which is typical of most surveys). From baseline to follow-up between April and September 2023, we see little change in composition.

Table 1. Demographic comparison of PATHS baseline and monthly survey respondents to LA County Homeless Demographic Survey

Characteristic	LA County Homeless Demographic Survey 2023	Overall PATHS Baseline Sample	Monthly respondents April-Sept 2023*
	(N= 3,202)	(N= 787)	(N= 346)
Age			
18-24	6%	9%	10%
25-39	33%	48%	46%
40-49	23%	21%	21%
50-59	21%	16%	15%
60+	16%	6%	8%
Sex			
Male	68%	54%	52%
Female	29%	43%	45%
Another sex	3%	3%	1%
Race/ethnicity			
White (NH)	23%	28%	27%
Black/African American (NH)	33%	29%	29%
Asian American (NH)	2%	1%	2%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (NH)	0%	1%	0%
American Indian/Alaskan Native (NH)	2%	1%	1%
Hispanic/Latino	35%	33%	32%
Multiracial (NH) or another race	5%	7%	8%

NH= Non-Hispanic

*= Sample of respondents who provided at least one monthly survey response from April-September 2023
 Prefer not to answer responses are not shown but are factored in the percent calculations.

SWEEPS

Starting in April 2023, we introduced new questions on sweeps. The principal question added was worded in the following way:

In the past 30 days, did anyone tell you that you had or were going to have to move from the area you were sleeping in because of a “sweep” or of a no camping or sitting/sleeping/lying law? [Select all that apply]

- 1. Yes, I was told by police or law enforcement official(s)*
- 2. Yes, I was told by a sanitation worker*
- 3. Yes, I was told by a homeless outreach worker*
- 4. Yes, I was told by another person*
- 5. No, I have not been told by anyone that I was going to have to move because of a sweep or a no camping law*
- 6. Don't know or can't remember*
- 7. Prefer not to answer*

During the 6 months since introducing those questions (April through September 2023), 346 study participants responded to those questions, with the average respondent contributing 3.9 monthly surveys (1,365 total survey months). Across all surveys, 183 (53%) participants reported having been subject to at least one street sweep. Table 2 compares the demographic characteristics and life experiences of those who did or did not experience a sweep. Those who experienced a sweep were somewhat more likely to be Hispanic or Latino; the groups were otherwise demographically similar. Individuals who experienced sweeps had a substantially longer duration of homelessness, with 48% having 5 or more years of homelessness compared to 31% of those who were not swept. Those who experienced a sweep were also somewhat more likely to have reported a history of substance use treatment (34% vs. 25%, respectively) or criminal justice involvement (54% vs. 42%).

Table 2: Respondent demographics by swept status between April to September 2023

Characteristic	Never swept	Ever swept
	(n= 163)	(n= 183)
Race/ethnicity		
White (NH)	29%	25%
Black/African American (NH)	29%	30%
Hispanic/Latino	29%	36%
Sex		
Male	51%	54%
Female or another sex	48%	45%
Years homeless *		
Less than 1 year	24%	12%
1-4 years	45%	40%
5-9 years	16%	28%
10 years or more	15%	20%
Diagnosed with a physical health condition	42%	45%
Previously received substance use treatment *	25%	34%
Prior criminal justice involvement *	42%	54%

NH= Non-Hispanic

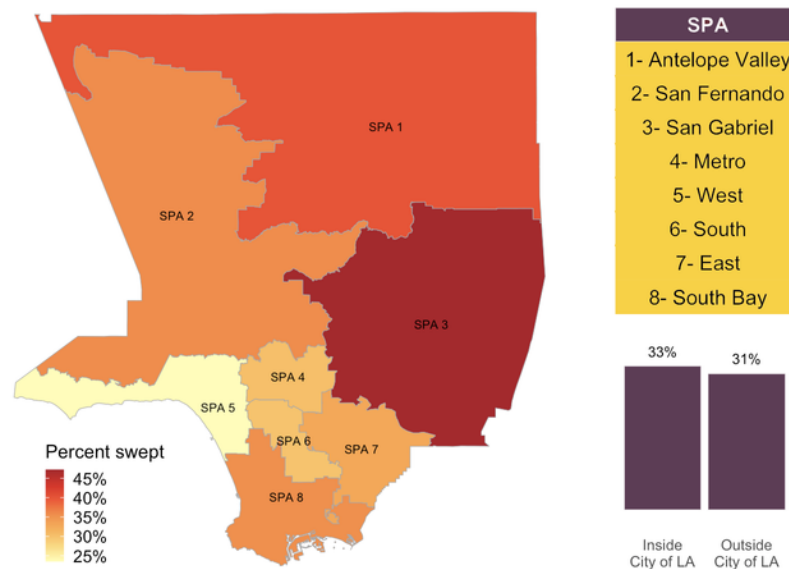
* = Statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) from Chi-square tests.

Column percentages are shown. Prefer not to answer responses are not displayed but are factored in the percent calculations.

It is critical to note that a substantial majority of respondents who were ever swept had experienced more than one sweep (66%), with 36% facing three or more sweeps. As a result, the 183 respondents who experienced a sweep reported 430 months in which they experienced a sweep, or 32% of the 1,363 monthly survey observations. We note that an additional 7.4% of monthly observations were from respondents who preferred not to answer and 10.7% who reported that they did not know or couldn't remember whether they had experienced a sweep. This means that the true share of monthly observations from respondents experiencing sweeps in a given month could be as high as 50%. But we nevertheless counted only affirmative reports as a sweep experience.

We first look at the geography of sweeps in Figure 2. Although sweeps are most closely associated with widely publicized ordinances in the City of LA, we found that the monthly risk of being swept was almost identical inside (33% per month) and outside (31% per month) the city. Among LA County's service planning areas (SPA), the highest monthly rate of being swept occurred in SPA 3 (San Gabriel Valley; 47%) and SPA 1 (Antelope Valley; 40%), neither of which overlap with the City of LA.

Figure 2. Experiences of sweep in April to September 2023 survey months by respondent location



Were respondents notified about sweeps in advance? Under most camping ordinances, particularly the one established in the City of LA, sweeps are supposed to be preceded by the posting of signs like the one shown below. We presented PATHS survey respondents with an image of this sign, and asked:

In the past 30 days, have you seen any signs about special enforcement zones or no camping, sleeping, sitting, or lying in the areas where you have slept?

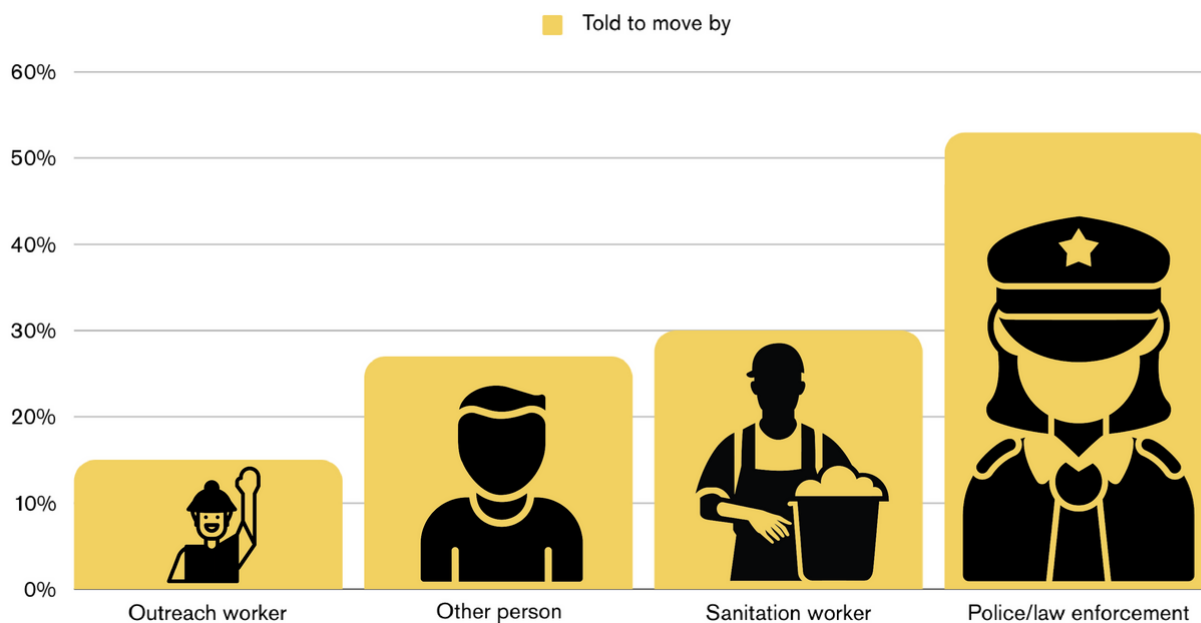


Source: LA Times

We found that 34% of respondents reported seeing these signs, but this group did not perfectly align with the group that actually experienced sweeps. Instead, we observed that around half (54%) of those who were swept had seen one of these signs before they were swept.

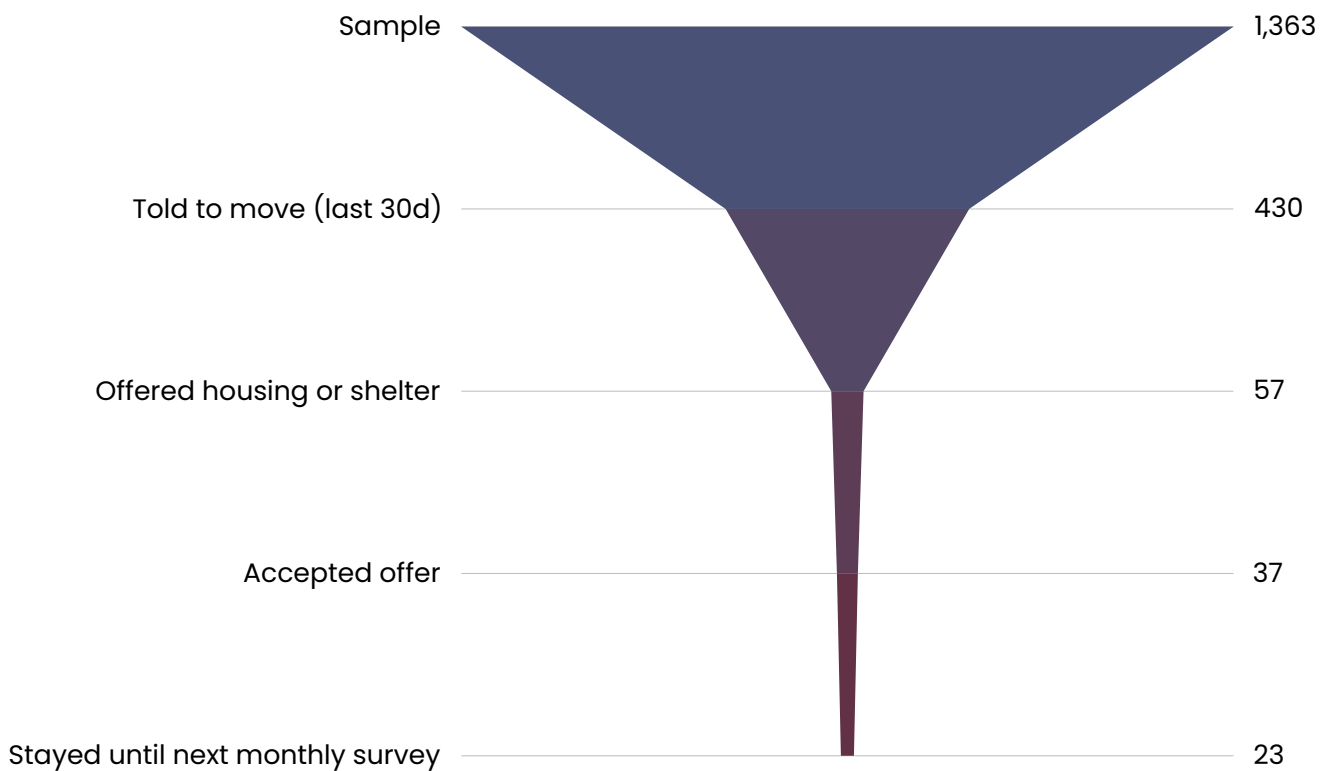
How were respondents notified about sweeps? Figure 3 shows that among those who reported experiencing sweeps, the notification came from different public personnel, but rarely—only 15% of the time—by homeless or housing outreach workers. By far the most common contact was with police (53%). Another 30% reported hearing from a sanitation worker. Among those reporting “other person” (27%), respondents most commonly reported learning about the sweep from a fellow unhoused person.

Figure 3. Notification of sweeps in April to September 2023 survey months (n=430 sweeps)



What were the effects of sweeps? As shown in the sweep-to-housing funnel in Figure 4, across all 430 instances of a reported sweep, 89% reported remaining unsheltered and only 9% reported moving into housing or shelter after a sweep. We note that this limited movement into housing does not appear to be driven by refusals and instead reflects the small share of respondents who were offered housing. In total, housing offers were reported among only 13% of reported sweeps, or 57 offers. Among these 57 offers, the most common types offered were a temporary hotel or motel stay (32%), bridge housing (23%), and group shelter (23%). Only two of 57 (4%) were offered permanent housing and three were offered a tiny home (5%). Respondents reported accepting 37 of these 57 offers (65%). Although the sample of 57 offers is too small to make strong conclusions about the most attractive offers, we note that acceptance rates were higher than average for hotels (13 of 18, or 72%) and bridge housing (11 of 13, or 85%), but lower for group shelter (7 of 13, 54%). Among the 37 respondents who accepted a housing offer, 23 remained in that housing in the subsequent survey month (62% of those who accepted, 40% of those who received an offer). Putting all the pieces together, only 23 of 430 reported sweeps, or 5.3%, resulted in an individual being housed for even a month.

Figure 4. Outcome of sweeps in April to September 2023 survey months



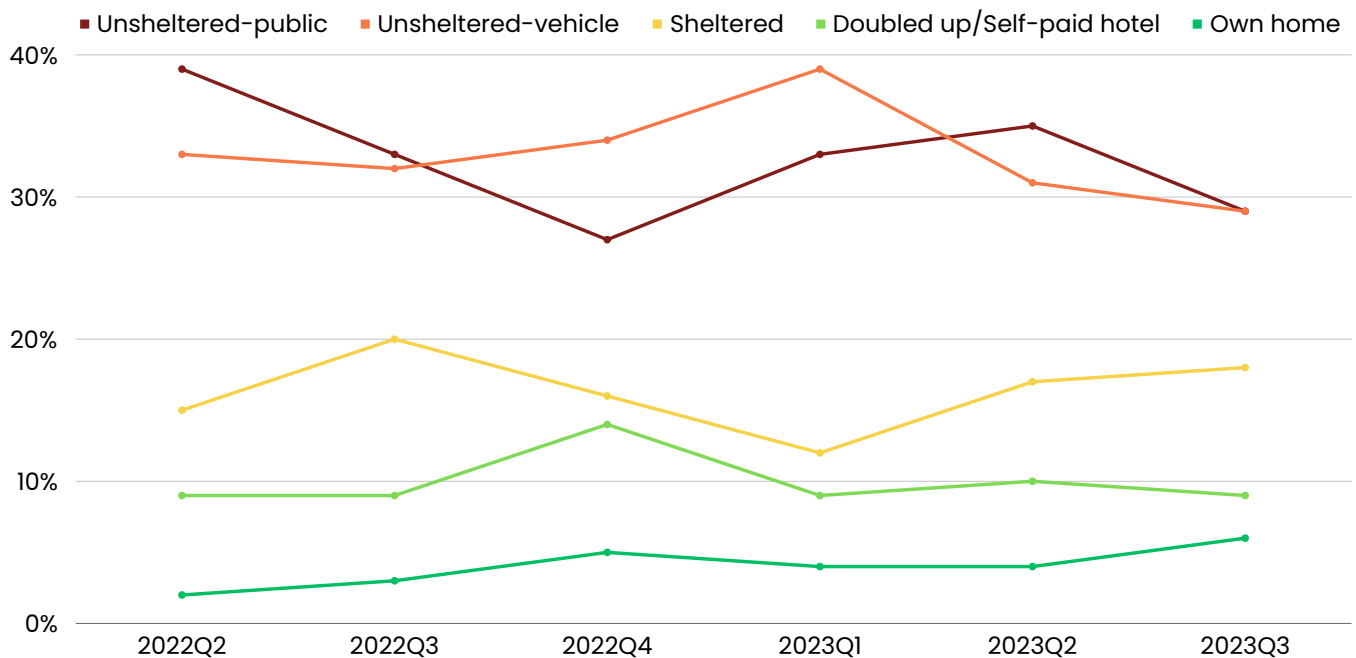
Sweeps also caused considerable disruption among respondents who experienced them. During the month of a sweep, 9% of respondents reported having received a citation from police, compared to only 2% of respondents during months that did not involve a sweep. Sweeps also caused considerable residential disruption. Respondents experiencing sweeps reported 3.7 location moves in the month of the sweep, compared to 2.0 for those who did not experience a sweep. When respondents were asked how sweeps affected their residential location, 55% ended up in the same unsheltered location in which they resided before the sweep, with slightly less than half of them never leaving the location and slightly more than half leaving temporarily before returning. Another 29% remained unsheltered but changed location.

HOUSING STATUS

AND ITS IMPACT ON HEALTH

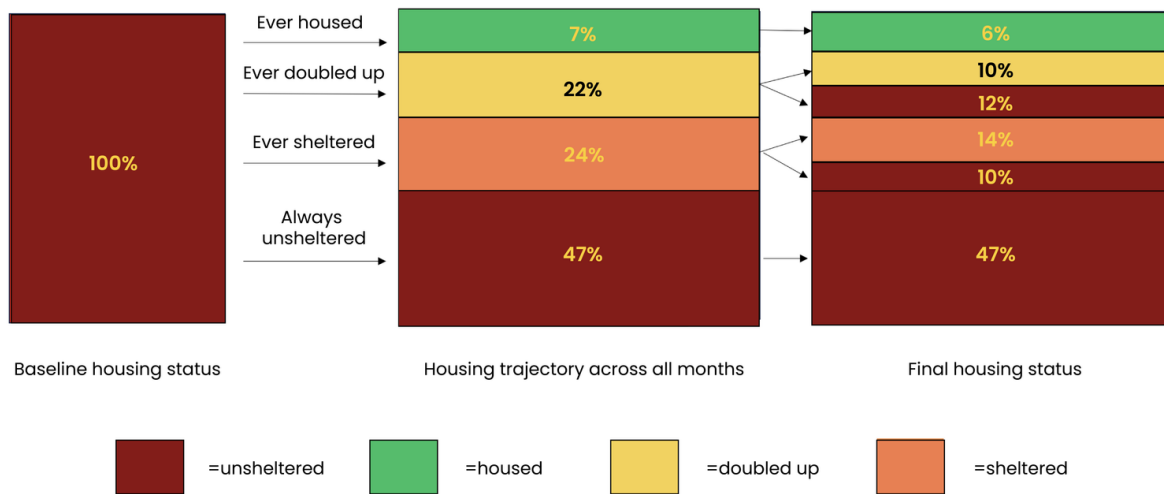
Given LA County’s goal of providing more housing to PEH and efforts to move people from being unsheltered to sheltered, this section steps back from a narrow focus on sweeps to examine the overall residential trajectories in our entire sample. Figure 5 depicts the cross-sectional proportion of all participants in our sample who reported staying in different housing settings (i.e., unsheltered outside or in a public area, in a vehicle, sheltered, doubled up in someone else’s apartment or home or in a hotel they paid for, or in one’s own home) on a quarterly basis between April 2022 and September 2023. Although occasional fluctuations occurred, the long-term trend suggests that levels of vehicle and public unshelteredness decreased only slightly. Between 15% and 20% of respondents consistently reported staying in a shelter or interim housing, a category that includes transitional or bridge housing (33%), a hotel or motel paid for by an agency (28%), and emergency shelter (23%). The trend of those who reported living in their own home is positive, though at a very low level. This suggests that at the population level, a small and slow movement out of unshelteredness and into shelter or housing is occurring.

Figure 5. Last night housing situation across all survey months between April 2022 to September 2023 (n=3,214 survey months)



Housing trajectories: Figure 6 adds to this story by depicting the trajectories of exit from and return to unshelteredness over time for any respondent whom we followed for at least 3 months since their enrollment (average follow-up period of 9 months since baseline, range: 3–21). Only a small share of respondents have entered permanent housing (7%), but most of them have remained housed (91%, or 6.4% of the total). A larger proportion (24%) have entered temporary shelter or interim housing, but 41% of these respondents (9.6% of the total) have returned to being unsheltered, thus leaving only 13.7% currently in shelter. Another 22% spent time doubled-up with friends or family or paying for a hotel room, meaning that they were not technically homeless for that month, yet more than half of them eventually returned to unsheltered homelessness. As a result, of the 70% of respondents who reported being unsheltered in their most recent monthly survey, about two-thirds were persistently unsheltered (47% of the total sample) and another third spent at least some time precariously sheltered or housed (23% of the total).

Figure 6. Housing trajectories of respondents unsheltered at prescreen (n=312 respondents*)



*Among respondents with 3 or more survey months

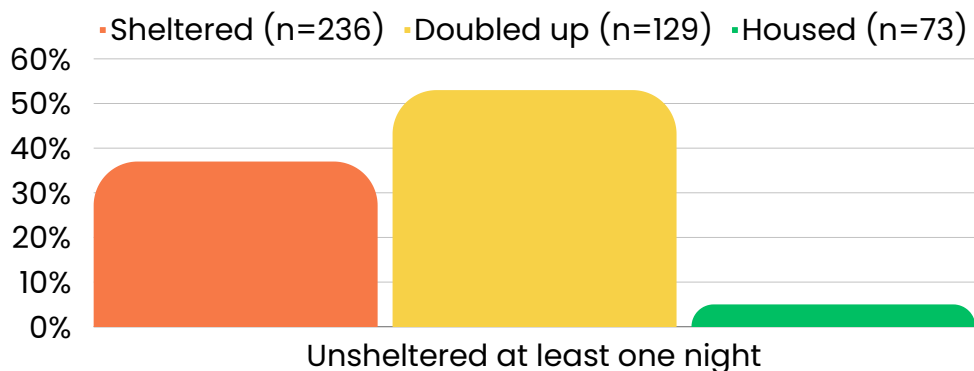
These long-term trajectories illustrate the precarity of temporary housing solutions over the long haul. To understand how precarious temporary housing may be in a given month, in September 2023, we added a question with the following response options:

*Please indicate all places where you have slept for at least one night in the past 30 days
[Select all that apply]*

- 1. In shelter, emergency/temporary housing, or hotel provided by an agency*
- 2. Outside*
- 3. Tent or makeshift shelter*
- 4. In a bus station, train station, airport*
- 5. Abandoned building*
- 6. In a vehicle (car, van, truck, RV)*
- 7. My own apartment or home*
- 8. Someone else's apartment or home*
- 9. Hotel I paid for*
- 10. In an institution, hospital, or facility*
- 11. In a tiny home*

As shown in Figure 7, among those who reported being doubled-up the prior night, 53% reported multiple housing situations during the past month. By contrast, only 5% of those in permanent housing reported spending a night unsheltered. Among those who had shelter the night before the survey, 37% reported spending some time unsheltered. These data suggest that being doubled-up is merely an extension of unshelteredness, simply a transitory moment when an unsheltered neighbor sleeps indoors due to temporary need or opportunity. Staying in a shelter or transitional housing was only slightly more stable. We also observe this housing fluidity in the fact that 39% of currently unsheltered respondents spent at least one night in another housing situation, with doubled-up being the most common setting. Taken together, these data suggest that permanent housing is by far the most stable option.

Figure 7. Within-month housing instability, by last night housing



Housing and health: The preferability of permanent housing options to PATHS respondents is revealed by data on the health outcomes experiences by those who remained unsheltered or moved into different shelter or housing options. PATHS is the first study to follow a cohort of unhoused or unsheltered respondents as they progress through housing, shelter, and other transitional housing trajectories. Although PATHS is only now building up to the necessary sample size to conduct robust tracking of rehoused versus unhoused samples, the preliminary results in Table 3 provide emphatic evidence of the benefits of permanent housing.

When comparing survey months during which respondents were unsheltered to the small number of months when people were housed (i.e., “housed in own home” responses), we observe 25% to 60% reductions in a wide range of negative health outcomes. When participants reported being housed, they were less than half as likely to report visiting the ER in the past month (6% housed vs. 14% unsheltered), 60% less likely to report delayed or averted health care (9% vs. 24%, respectively), half as likely to be food insecure (35% vs. 68%), and 60% less likely to report poor sleep quality (16% vs. 43%) compared to participants who reported being unsheltered. Differences in illicit drug use were smaller and less statistically significant (20% vs. 26%) but are suggestive of possible benefits that deserve future exploration. Notably, although being sheltered or doubled-up may be perceived as better options than being unsheltered, we did not observe many advantages for these groups, with the possible exception of food insecurity (45% sheltered, 57% doubled-up, 68% unsheltered). Rates of ER visits were almost identical for unsheltered (14%), sheltered (15%), and doubled-up (12%).

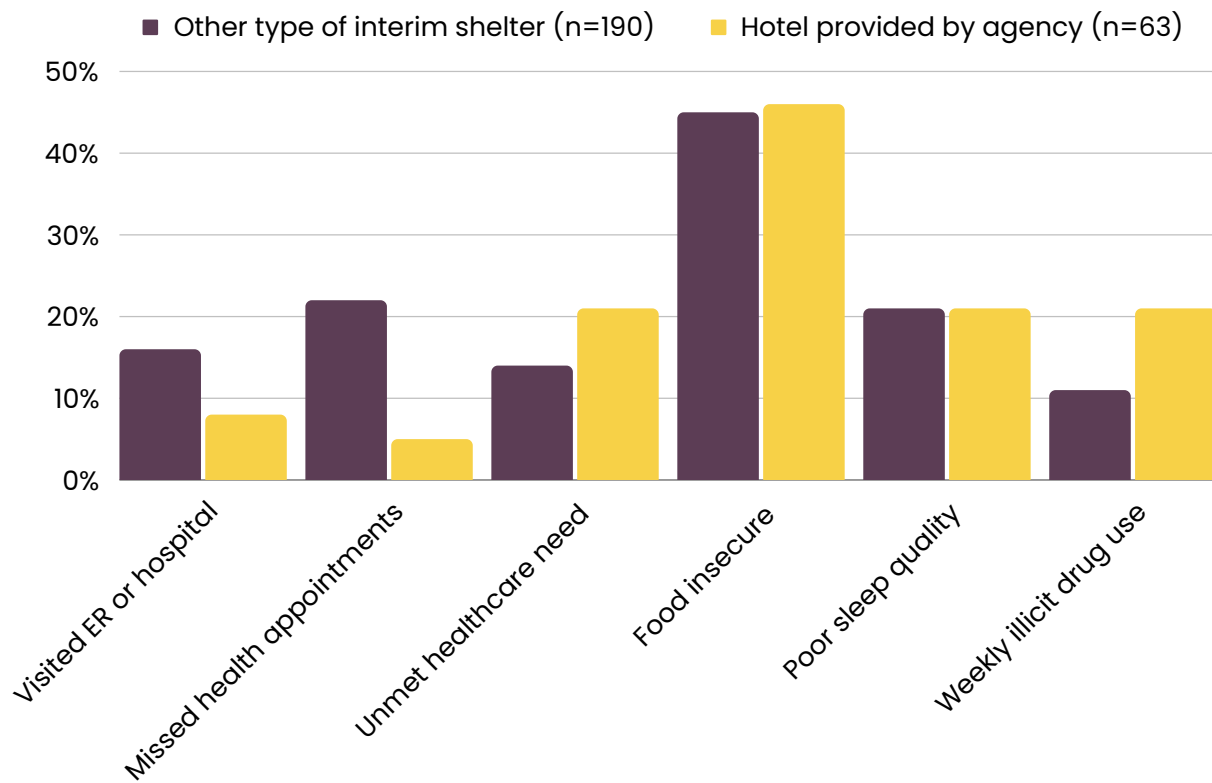
Table 3: Health care access and other basic needs, by housing status in current month (n= 2,808 survey months)

Characteristic	Unsheltered	Sheltered	Doubled up/Self-paid hotel	Housed in own home
	(n= 2118)	(n= 253)	(n= 255)	(n= 86)
Visited ER or hospital	14%	15%	12%	6%
Missed health appointments	16%	19%	18%	12%
Unmet health care need *	24%	31%	18%	9%
Food insecure *	68%	45%	57%	35%
Poor sleep quality *	43%	41%	33%	16%
Weekly illicit drug use	26%	26%	28%	20%

* = Statistically significant difference (p<0.05) from Chi-square tests.

One critical policy question is how different types of shelter compare to one another, particularly how hotel-based programs such as Inside Safe compare to other types of shelter. We do not yet have a sufficient sample size to make definitive conclusions, but preliminary results based on a sample of 63 reported months spent in hotels suggest that hotels may produce better outcomes than other types of shelter and may be far more comparable to those achieved in permanent housing. Compared to other types of shelter, monthly responses regarding hotel stays had half the rate of ER visits (8% vs. 17%) and a much lower rate of missed appointments (5% vs. 23%). However, rates of averted health care and food insecurity were no lower. Rates of illicit drug use were slightly higher, though this difference was well within the statistical margin of error.

Figure 8. Health care access and other basic needs among sheltered respondents, by shelter type (n=253 survey months)



DISCUSSION

Our analysis shows that sweeps have become a regular part of life for a large share of LA County's homeless population across all areas and demographic groups, representing a recurrent experience for many. Our results appear to reinforce concerns held by opponents while not necessarily fulfilling the greatest hopes of proponents. Most sweeps involved contact with law enforcement, resulting in an extraordinarily high 9% monthly rate of citations in the month in which a sweep was experienced. A far smaller share of sweeps involved contact with housing outreach workers, and as a result, only 13% of individuals were offered shelter/housing in the month of a sweep, only 9% accepted a housing offer, and only 5% remained in housing by the next month's survey. Sweeps also doubled the rate at which respondents moved locations, and yet most eventually returned to the same location, many being swept again.

Looking more broadly at LA County's rehousing efforts, we see little uptick in the rate at which members of the PATHS cohort are shifting toward permanent housing. After 6 to 18 months of follow-up, 76% of PATHS respondents remained unsheltered. Although a majority of respondents spent some time indoors, this mostly consisted of interim or short-term solutions, whether agency-provided or self-directed. Most temporary solutions were associated with a high level of attrition, frequent moves between indoor and outdoor living, and minimal improvement in access to health care, food, or other basic necessities. In short, sheltered and doubled-up living arrangements were merely extensions of unsheltered life. By contrast, permanent housing resulted in high levels of retention and dramatic health care advantages, yet only 7% of respondents were able to access this scarce resource.

One potential glimmer of hope lies in hotel-based transitional housing programs. Although the number of placements in our sample is simply too small to provide much confidence in our estimates, respondents placed in hotels appeared to achieve levels of health care access comparable to those in permanent housing, though levels of food insecurity remained high.

This report provides only a preliminary view of the trajectories of housing and health among LA County's unhoused population. In the coming months, we will continue to increase our sample size to gain more knowledge on the impact of sweeps and camping laws. Our analysis would be greatly enhanced by government data on the timing and location of sweeps and camping enforcement zones, which are not currently made available. Providing such data would allow for a more systematic review of the impact of the current enforcement-led approach to street sweeps that appear to pose a clear health risk to unhoused Angelenos.

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