HOMELESSNESS AND CRISIS: Who Will Answer the Call?

ABSTRACT

This research aims to complete data analysis on crisis calls among sheltered and unsheltered persons served by the North Bay START crisis services in California. The study found that 13.4% of the population but are 39.8% of the unsheltered population. In the state of California, 6.5% identify as Black or African American, but they account for nearly 40% of the state’s unsheltered populations. Through this data analysis, this trend marks persons served through START services in Solano and Sacramento County with 18.6% identified as Black/African American and 27.1% without shelter. Research showed limited access to Behavioral Support in non-predominately white areas (12.5%) compared to predominately white areas (39.3%). As well as reduced access to Behavioral Health Clinicians as shown in Figure 5. San Diego firefighters reported, 1 out of 4 calls are from unsheltered persons experiencing mental illness. Although this is a small sample, 7.02% of crisis calls received were from unsheltered persons served by the North Bay START as a collective across the California region, approximately 43 calls were received from persons unsheltered. Addressing mental health crises requires a multifaceted approach, including specialized training, alternative response teams, and legislative changes. Balancing safety, compassion, and effective intervention remains a critical challenge for law enforcement agencies across California. However, with the support of START National Services, further expansion across regions of California, one of California’s most vulnerable and growing population will be answered by well-informed mental health professionals who will aid in stabilizing, maintaining community, and linkage to continued mental health support.

METHODS

North Bay START gathered relevant datasets from various sources including government agencies, non-profit organizations, and emergency services. These datasets included demographic information, geographic location, mental health diagnoses, housing status, and details of crisis intervention calls. NB-START utilized geographic information systems to visualize spatial patterns and hotspots of homelessness and crisis intervention calls. NB-START analyzed spatial relationships between areas with high homeless populations and mental health service availability and the temporal trends in homelessness rates, mental health diagnoses, and frequency of crisis intervention calls over time. NB-START ensured that data analysis was conducted ethically, respecting the privacy and confidentiality of persons in the datasets. Implement anonymization techniques to protect sensitive information and adhere to legal and regulatory requirements. Interpret the findings of the data analysis in the context of addressing homelessness and mental health challenges. Generate comprehensive reports and visualizations to communicate insights to stakeholders including policymakers, social service providers, and community organizations.

DISCUSSION

The findings within this data analysis of the unsheltered population crisis in Solano and California demand urgent attention and effective response strategies. Understanding the utilization patterns of crisis intervention services among this demographic is crucial for developing targeted support mechanisms. This research reveals the dynamics of crisis responses utilized among sheltered and unsheltered populations, with a focus on North Bay START roles as a primary support avenue. A third of California’s unsheltered persons experience serious mental illnesses, according to California’s growing census revealing 180,000, or estimated 43,000 suffer from serious mental illness, as shown in figures 2 and 3. In addition, research shows a stark racial and ethnic disparities present in California’s unsheltered rates, affecting Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders populations disproportionately. Notably, people of color (Black/African American) account for 13.4% of the population but are 39.8% of the unsheltered population. In the state of California, 6.5% identify as Black or African American, but they account for nearly 40% of the state’s unsheltered populations. Through this data analysis, this trend marks persons served through START services in Solano and Sacramento County with 18.6% identified as Black/African American and 27.1% without shelter.

IMPLICATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

This data analysis contained a small sample of persons served through START services in California being unsheltered. However, this small sample shows attention to our understanding of the growing concerns of a vulnerable population in our region of origin. Currently, we understand the limitation of a small sample, and the lack of statistical power, and future research in this context should increase sample size. In addition, future research would benefit from a pre test/post test to track crisis intervention utility preferences for sheltered and unsheltered persons.