HOMELESSNESS AND CRISIS:
Who Will Answer the Call?

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to complete data analysis on crisis calls among sheltered and unsheltered persons receiving START services in the CA region. According to the 2022 Solano County Point-in-Time Count, 1,179 people were living in shelters or on the streets in Solano County, 454 of whom live in Vallejo. This is significant as North Bay START covers the region of Solano County, which includes the city limits of Vallejo, CA. Of the 1,179 counted as living in shelters or on the streets in Solano County, 12% experience mental health or physical disabilities. These numbers are even more staggering across the state of California. A crisis can be defined as "an upset in a person's baseline level of functioning- a disruption in homeostasis. In a crisis, a person's usual coping methods are insufficient; there is a marked increase in anxiety and tension or depression and defeat; the person does not function at his or her normal level, and he or she searches for new methods or strategies to deal with the situation (Callahan, 1994)". During the search for methods or strategies, who will answer the call of sheltered and unsheltered persons?

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 analyzes 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.

TURNING POINT COMMUNITY PROGRAMS
A Path to Mental Health

CALIFORNIA START North Bay

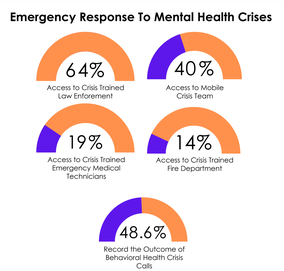


Figure 1

Just under half of the respondents (18 of 37) said that the outcome of behavioral health calls (for example, if the person is brought to a hospital) is recorded in the CAD or other system. (48.6%) "From personal experience, I've responded on the same person hundreds of times over my career," said Jerry May with San Jose Fire Fighters Local 230.

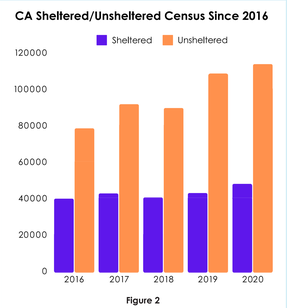
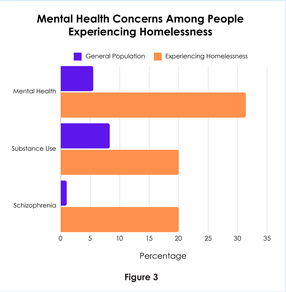


Figure 2



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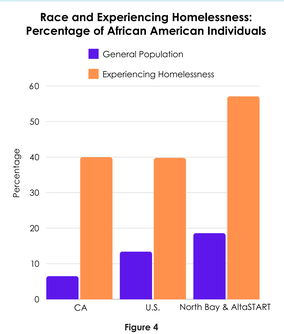

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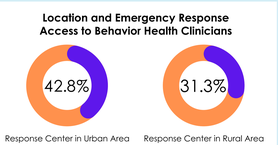
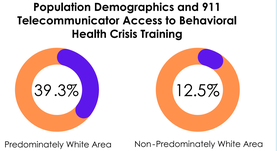


Figure 5



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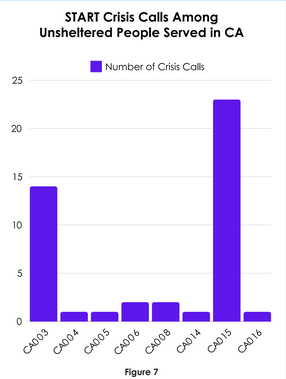

Figure 7

DISCUSSION

The findings within this data analysis of the unsheltered population crisis in Solano County and California demand urgent attention and effective response strategies. Understanding the utilization patterns of crisis intervention services among this demographic is crucial for devising targeted support mechanisms. This research devels into the dynamics of crisis response utilization 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 illness, according to California's growing census nearing 130,000, an 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 persist in California at unsheltered rates, affecting Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders populations disproportionately. Nationally, 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 57.1% 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 6 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 NB-START. As a collective across the California region, approximately 45 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 calls will be answered by well-informed mental health professionals who will aid in stabilizing, maintaining community, and linkage to continued mental health support.

IMPLICATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

This data analysis contained a small sample of persons served through START services in California living unsheltered. However, this small sample draws attention to our understanding of the growing concern 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 utilization preferences for sheltered and unsheltered persons.