



# The Count: Youth Homelessness

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ChapinHall.org

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## CHAPIN HALL POLICY BRIEF

### THE ISSUE

Youth and young adult homelessness is a significant problem with serious human capital implications and marked by great disparities.

In 2016, in fulfillment of Section 345<sup>1</sup> of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA), HUD and private philanthropy awarded \$6 million (\$2 million and \$4 million, respectively) to Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago to carry out the *first and only* national research and policy initiative on the prevalence and incidence of youth homelessness. Known as Voices of Youth Count (VoYC), this project produced data and evidence that have changed policy, practice, and public and philanthropic efforts for addressing youth homelessness.

A global pandemic, stagnant wages, interruptions in educational attainment, and a deepening housing crisis have exacerbated risk factors for youth homelessness. Carrying out the next national prevalence and incidence study is vital to informing resource allocations and making program decisions.

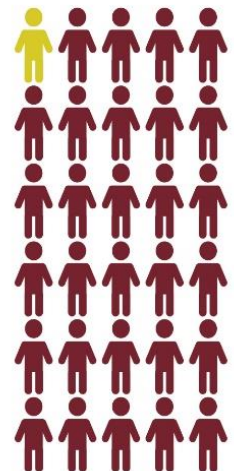
This policy brief summarizes prior evidence developed through Chapin Hall’s Voices of Youth Count project and identifies opportunities to future support regular and reliable data collection.

### THE EVIDENCE

**A National Estimate** in 2018 provided the first snapshot of 12-month prevalence of youth homelessness in the U.S. for ages 13–25. Chapin Hall worked with Gallup to twice survey a nationally representative sample of adults whose households included 13-to-25-year-olds. Through this we learned that over the course of a year, about 1 in 30 youth ages 13 to 17 years of age experience homelessness and 1 in 10 individuals ages 18 to 25 experienced some form of homelessness. (see Figure 1) The estimate also showed Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous youth, and youth identifying as LGBTQ+, were at higher risk for

Figure 1  
Adolescents and young adults experiencing homelessness in a 12-month period

1 IN 30  
ADOLESCENTS  
(AGE 13-17)



1 IN 10  
YOUNG ADULTS  
(AGE 18-25)

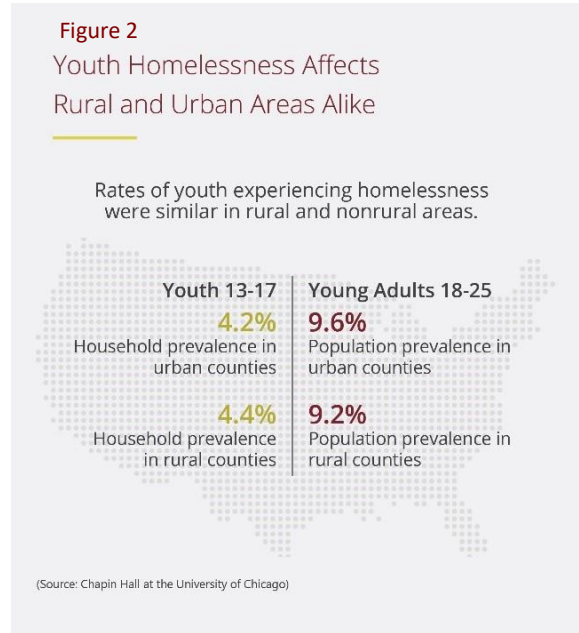


<sup>1</sup> Section 345 requires Health and Human Services, at 5-year intervals, to use “the best quantitative and qualitative social science research methods available to produce estimates of the incidence and prevalence of runaway and homeless individuals who are not less than 13 years of age but are less than 26 years of age; and . . . that includes with such estimate an assessment of the characteristics of such individuals.” Statute at Large 122 Stat. 4068 - Public Law No. 110-378 (10/08/2008).

homelessness, as were youth who were parents and did not have a high school diploma. Rates of youth homelessness were also similar in rural and nonrural areas (see Figure 2).

**In-depth interviews** looked more closely at the experiences and viewpoints of youth experiencing homelessness across five diverse U.S. counties. Over half of the youth had their first experience of homelessness between the ages of 16 and 18. Interviews with youth also revealed that youth homelessness is not a single event. Rather, it is preceded by complex social and familial challenges related to poverty, family conflict, and parental mental health.

**A systematic review** of evidence on the effectiveness of interventions to prevent and address youth homelessness revealed several interventions that can measurably reduce the incidence and prevalence of youth homelessness. The review also showed, though, a dearth of evidence around effective programs for housing stability and access to resources beyond crisis interventions.



## WHAT'S NEXT

The next rigorous youth homelessness prevalence and incidence study provides an opportunity to update data on youth experiencing homelessness *and* establish a process for regular repeated cross-sectional studies over time (every 3 years). This will allow for analysis of trends over time toward the goal of ending youth and young adult homelessness and reducing disparities. Table 1 summarizes these opportunities.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Appropriate funds to support youth homelessness counts every 3 years.** A commitment to funding a regular, national count like Voices of Youth Count would offer a significant contribution to the country's efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness.
- 2. Update data collection tools (quantitative survey modules and qualitative data collection tools) to carry out an updated national count on youth homelessness.** Refining current data collection tools will improve data capture on youth homelessness prevalence data for youth ages 13–25.
- 3. Pass the Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act of 2023 to reauthorize funding for critical programs and support regular and reliable data collection.**

**Table 1. Summary of Voices of Youth Count (VoYC) Key Data Collection Components and Opportunities**

VoYC Component	Data collection under first VoYC	Opportunities for carrying out the next VoYC	Estimated cost, time for completion
<p><b>National Survey:</b> Estimate of 12-month prevalence of youth homelessness in the U.S. for ages 13–25</p>	<p>Integration of brief 19-item youth homelessness module into to Gallup, Inc.’s U.S. Politics and Economics Daily Tracking Survey (DTS) Detailed follow-up interviews with a subsample of 150 youth</p>	<p>Develop an updated survey module for capturing self-reported data from youth based on a select set of questions related to their housing situation/ homelessness over the last year, characteristics, and past experiences.</p> <p>Create a new, or support the use of an existing, nationally representative survey, with a cross-sectional sample of adolescent minors (age 13-17) and young adults (age 18-25) to capture the data.</p>	<p>Cost: \$2 million for national data collection and follow-up interviews with subsample of population</p> <p>Timing: 24 months: 12-18 months (two rounds of survey data collection; subsample interviews); 6 months data analysis</p>
<p><b>In-depth interviews:</b> In-depth interviews to capture the trajectories, experiences and viewpoints of youth experiencing homelessness across five diverse counties throughout the U.S.</p>	<p>Selection of five diverse counties; recruitment of over 40 youth in each county. Data collection includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1:1 interview with youth and young adults</li> <li>• The Housing Timeline Tool (mapping housing experience)</li> <li>• Background survey</li> </ul>	<p>Carry out in-depth interviews with youth in five diverse counties throughout the U.S.</p>	<p>Cost: \$1.5 million for in-depth interviews across five diverse counties</p> <p>Timing: 18 months: 12 months data collection; 6 months data analysis</p>
<p><b>Systematic Evidence Review:</b> A comprehensive synthesis of evidence on programs and practices from evaluations of interventions to prevent or address youth homelessness</p>	<p>Review of nearly 4,000 relevant publications; narrowed down to 87 relevant publications that met rigorous inclusion criteria. Analysis of core outcomes, rigor of evaluations, research, and evaluation opportunities</p>	<p>Update the systematic evidence review to include evidence on new international, federal, and state investments in youth homelessness</p>	<p>Cost: \$500,000 for updated systematic review</p> <p>Timing: 8–12 months</p>

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## Contact Information

Chapin Hall is an independent policy research center that provides public and private decision-makers with rigorous research and achievable solutions to support them in improving the lives of children, families, and communities. We partner with policymakers, practitioners, and philanthropists to construct actionable information, practical tools, and, ultimately, positive change for families. Chapin Hall's areas of research include child welfare systems, community capacity to support children and families, and youth homelessness.

For more information about Chapin Hall, visit [www.chapinhall.org](http://www.chapinhall.org) or @Chapin\_Hall.

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