

## Youth Homelessness in California:

### What Impact has the 5% Youth Set-Aside in the Homeless Emergency Aid Program had so far?

#### KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

In recognition of the severe housing crisis facing Californians, the State's 2018-19 budget included a one-time investment of \$500 million to address homelessness. The funding was administered as the Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP), and communities were required to designate a minimum of five percent to address youth homelessness.

John Burton Advocates for Youth issued a report in May 2019 exploring early HEAP implementation, with a focus on how HEAP funds for homeless youth have been spent, including how many jurisdictions invested more than the minimum five percent on youth, the lessons learned in the process of distributing youth HEAP funding, the impact of the youth set-aside, and policy implications for future investment in youth homelessness.

Findings were drawn from from the 43 Continuums of Care (CoCs) and 11 large cities that were allocated HEAP funds in addition to other stakeholders.

For the full report, please visit  
<https://www.jbaforyouth.org/heap-youth-2019/>

To view a web seminar on the report, please visit  
<https://www.jbaforyouth.org/5-23-19-webinar/>

## FINDINGS

### *Distribution Process*

1. More than three-quarters (78%) of the state's HEAP funding will be awarded or committed at the local level by July 1, 2019.
2. HEAP funding was predominantly awarded through a comprehensive, competitive process at the local level; large cities were more likely than CoCs to sole source.
3. The technical assistance provided by the HCFC greatly assisted jurisdictions with adhering to tight timelines associated with administering their HEAP funding.

### *Utilization of Funds*

4. Shelter was the most common intervention category funded by the HEAP youth set-aside, followed by transitional housing.
5. Spending on homeless youth exceeded the state-mandated five percent required by HEAP, reaching ten percent (\$51.6 million) statewide.
6. CoCs with the smallest HEAP allocations were less likely to exceed the five percent minimum youth set-aside.
7. Jurisdictions located in the coastal and central regions of California were more likely to exceed the five percent minimum youth set-aside.
8. The percentage of HEAP funding CoCs invested in addressing youth homelessness was not typically proportionate to the percentage of youth in their homeless populations.
9. Jurisdictions that were currently or previously engaged in organized efforts to address youth homelessness were more likely to exceed the five percent minimum youth set-aside.

### *Recipient Organizations*

10. HEAP funding for homeless youth largely went to entities currently funded by local CoCs.
11. Youth providers that had never received CoC funding required technical assistance to become successful HEAP applicants.
12. Select jurisdictions used HEAP to address the issue of student homelessness.

## **Funding, Planning and Collaboration**

13. There was consensus among jurisdictions interviewed that set-aside funding for youth is necessary.
14. CoCs are an effective entity to distribute and coordinate funding for homeless youth; city departments have varying capacities to do so.
15. HEAP highlighted the lack of adequate funding for homeless youth.
16. HEAP highlighted the need to improve the Point-In-Time Count for homeless youth.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. Any funding to address homelessness should include a youth set-aside.**

While close to half of jurisdictions opted to exceed the minimum five percent set-aside on youth, representatives interviewed expressed considerable concern that given federal funding priorities which are focused on chronic homelessness among adults, statewide, without a youth set-aside, youth needs will dissolve among the many priorities for adult funding.

### **2. The minimum youth set-aside in future one-time funding to address homelessness should be set at 20 percent.**

Statewide, unaccompanied homeless youth up to age 24 account for 9.5 percent of the overall homeless population. Any future funding to address homelessness should require a minimum of 20 percent of funding to be directed toward addressing youth homelessness based on two factors: 1) As a result of historic lack of investment in homeless youth, the State has significant catching up to do. In many communities, HEAP highlighted youth homelessness as a glaring problem that has been largely ignored by the Federal Government. 2) Acknowledging that the youth PIT Count methodology requires improvement and produces an undercount resulting in artificially lower numbers of homeless youth, California should be investing more than the percentage established by the PIT Count.

### **3. Reducing youth homelessness in California requires an ongoing funding commitment.**

Despite the challenges of funding housing interventions with one-time funding, the majority of the HEAP youth set-aside funding was put toward shelter, followed by transitional housing, Rapid ReHousing, and Permanent Supportive Housing. This is an indication that the most pressing need in California among homeless youth is actual housing. While one-time funding motivates creativity and provides the opportunity to pilot new approaches that can quickly ramp up then wind down, ongoing funding is required to expand housing capacity coupled with the services required to reduce youth homelessness in our state.

### **4. The youth Point-in-Time (PIT) Count process must be refined to produce a more accurate snapshot of youth homelessness at the local level.**

Understanding that the PIT Count is the tool that will be used to determine future funding levels for addressing homelessness, improving the methodology of the youth PIT Count to avoid undercounts leading to artificially low numbers of homeless youth should be prioritized as a strategy to address youth homelessness.

### **5. Continuums of Care are well-positioned to administer youth homelessness funding locally.**

The purpose and role of a CoC is to coordinate housing and service providers on a local level, contributing to a more structural and strategic approach to both housing and providing services. CoCs are also tasked with tracking and monitoring the homeless community in their area by engaging in the biannual Homeless PIT Count. This enables CoCs to manage and coordinate a system where resources are directed where most needed. One-hundred percent of the CoCs interviewed indicated they felt it was “in their wheelhouse” to administer funding to address youth homelessness, and that CoCs were capable of coordinating the stakeholder input necessary to direct HEAP funding to meet local needs.

### **6. The provision of technical assistance should be included in any future state funding plans to address homelessness.**

One of the contributing factors to jurisdictions feeling equipped to administer HEAP funding was the availability of technical assistance and the accessibility of the HCFC to the CoCs and large cities administering funding at the local level.