

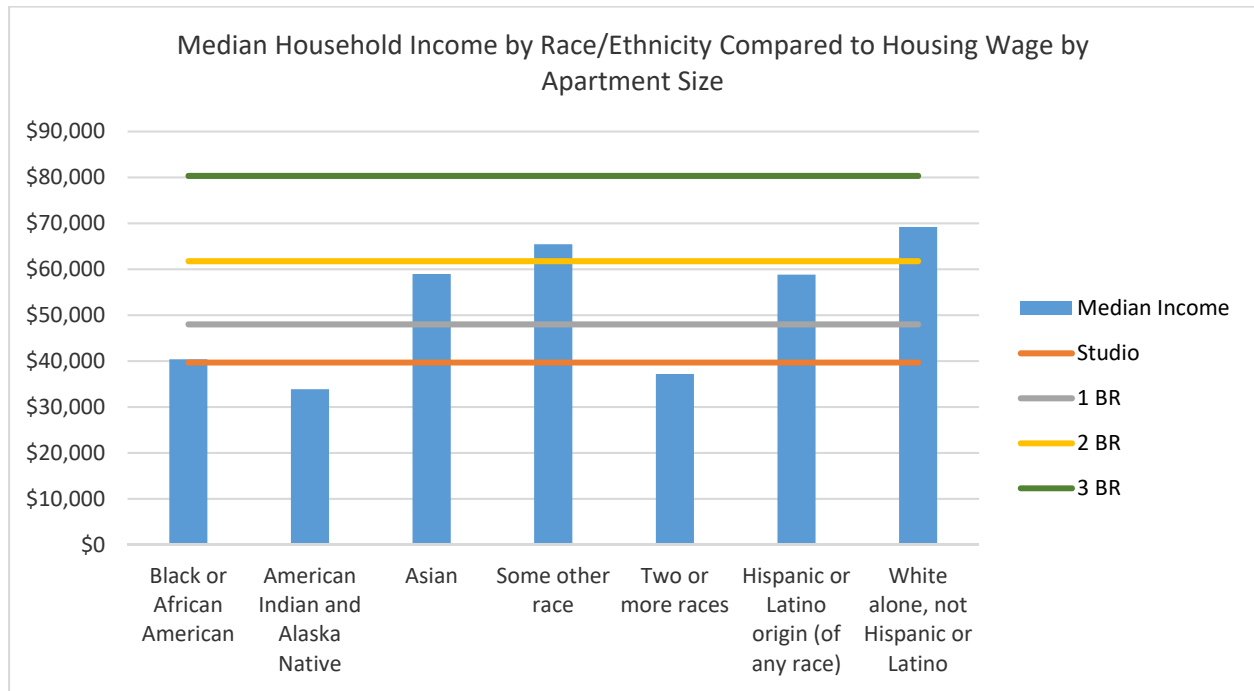
Methodology

To examine racial disparities in homelessness in Chittenden County, the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance used:

- Data from the 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Averages for Chittenden County;
- Data for the Burlington-South Burlington Metropolitan Statistical Area from the 2019 Out of Reach report prepared by the National Low Income Housing Coalition;
- Data from the annual Point in Time count for the Chittenden County Continuum of Care; and
- Data in our Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) for the 2018 federal fiscal year (10/1/17 to 9/30/18).

Community Disparities

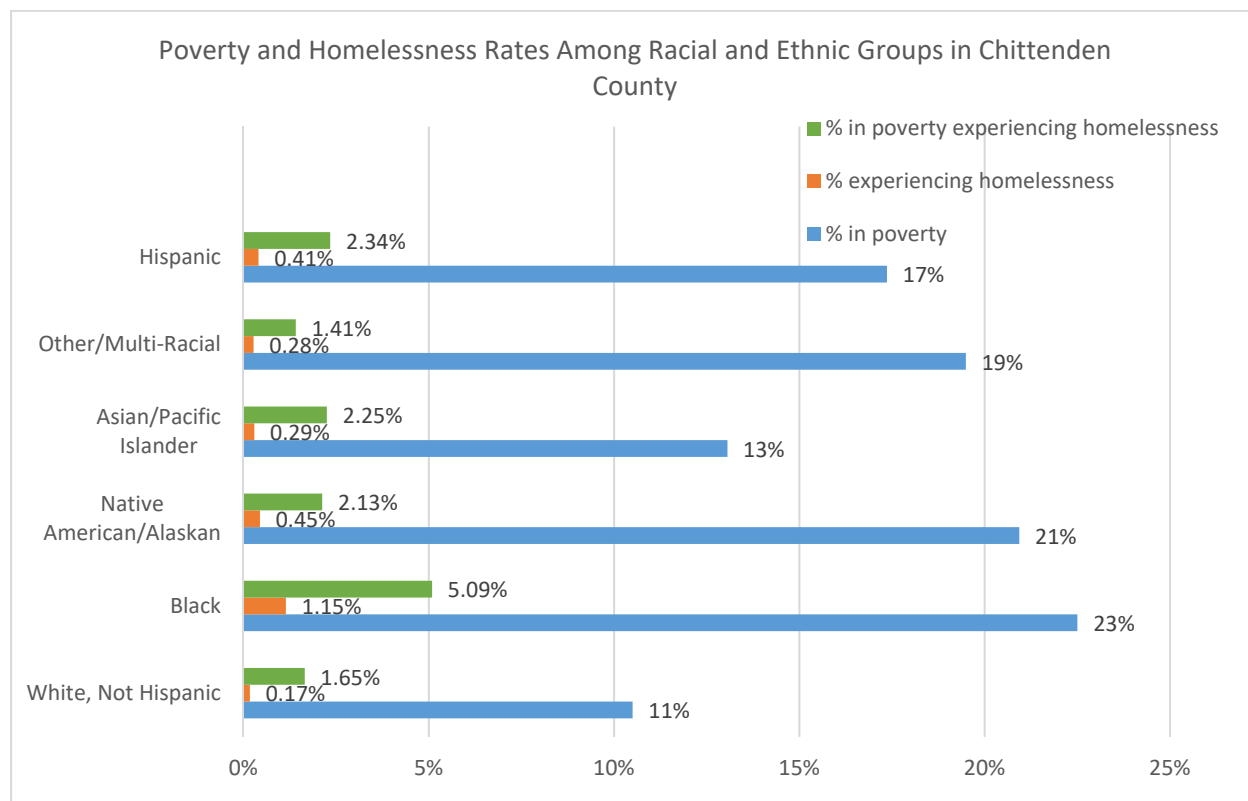
While many people are priced out of the Chittenden County rental market because of the gap between wages and the cost of housing, the unaffordability of housing disproportionately affects minorities - especially Black/African American and Native American/Alaskan Native residents and residents who identify as two or more races. The chart below shows the median household incomes for households based on their race/ethnicity and the amount a household needs to earn to be able to afford a studio, one-bedroom, two-bedroom and three-bedroom apartment.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Rent is “affordable” when a household pays no more than 30% of their income for housing, utilities and other housing costs. Housing wage by apartment size comes from the 2019 Out of Reach report prepared by the National Low Income Housing Coalition for the Burlington-South Burlington Metropolitan Statistical Area. Median income comes from the 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Averages.

But there are racial disparities among people experiencing homelessness that go beyond disparity in income. White Chittenden County residents are experiencing poverty<sup>2</sup> at a rate of 11% and homelessness<sup>3</sup> at a rate of 0.2%. **Black residents are experiencing poverty at a rate over two times greater and homelessness at a rate over five times greater than white residents.** Every other minority group also shows both higher rates of poverty and higher rates of homelessness.<sup>4</sup>

The first chart below compares, within each racial and ethnic group, the rate of poverty, the rate of homelessness and the rate of homelessness among those experiencing poverty.



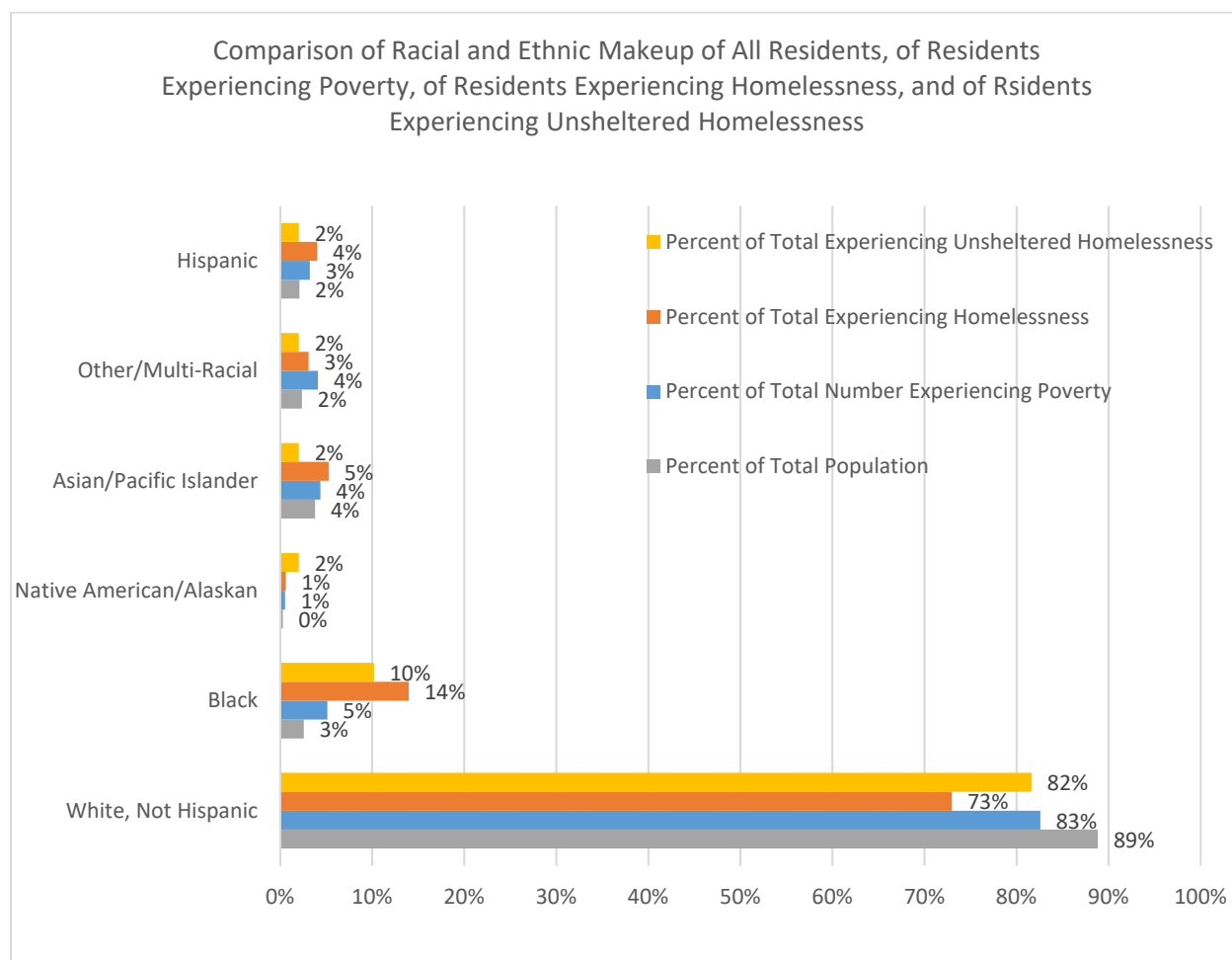
The next chart is a slightly different way to look at a comparison of poverty and homelessness rates. It compares the racial and ethnic percentages of the total population, of the total number of people living in poverty, of the total number of people experiencing homelessness, and of the total number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

<sup>2</sup> Poverty data comes from the 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Averages.

<sup>3</sup> Homelessness data comes from the 2019 Point in Time count.

<sup>4</sup> Because of the small sample size for most minority populations in Chittenden County, there are large margins of error for census data and the difference of one or two people can make a big difference in percentages for both census and point in time data.

For white residents, their share of all those experiencing poverty (the blue bar), homelessness (the orange bar) and unsheltered homelessness (the yellow bar) is less than their share of the population (the gray bar). For black residents, the opposite is true. Their share of those experiencing poverty, homelessness and unsheltered homelessness is greater than their share of the population: **while 3% of Chittenden County residents are black, and 5% of residents are living in poverty are black, 14% of those experiencing homelessness are black.** The same is true for other minority populations in everything except unsheltered homelessness.

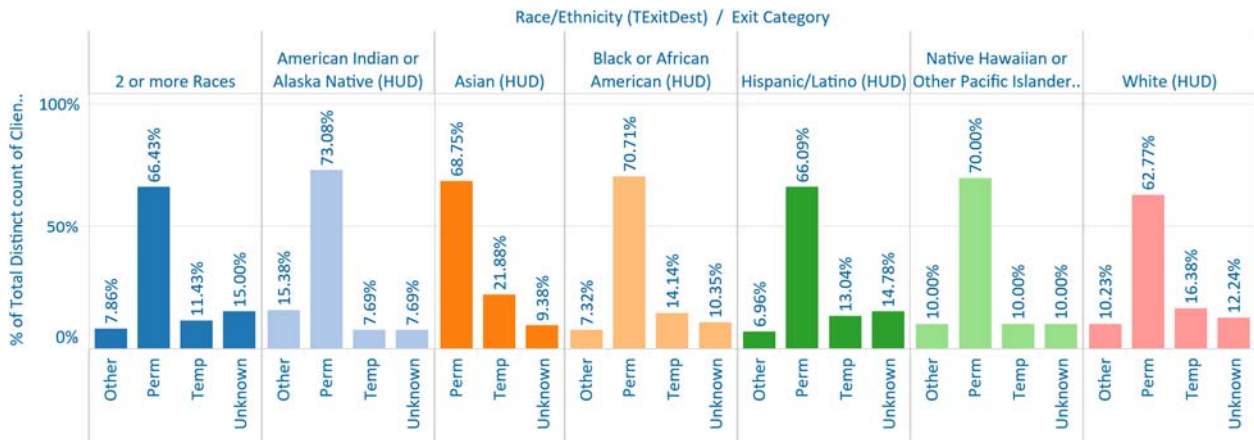


One factor that may be contributing to disparities in homeless rates is discrimination in the housing market. Testing conducted by Vermont Legal Aid in 2012-13 showed preferential treatment by landlords toward white testers of U.S. origin posed a significant barrier to equal housing opportunity for African Americans. (The study also found discrimination against those living with a disability, families with children and those with certain foreign accents.) We will explore that and other possible factors through community conversations.

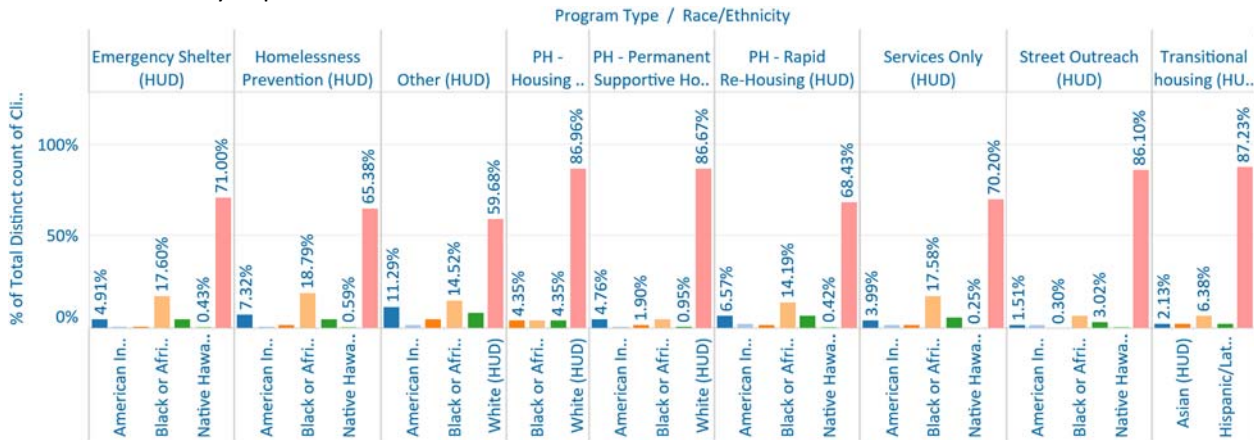
Disparities in the Homeless Response System

Our first look at consumers served by the local homeless response system – at who is served and what their outcomes are – comes from data in our Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) for the 2018 federal fiscal year (10/1/17 to 9/30/18). There are several limitations here. First, this information does not include those fleeing domestic violence whose information is kept in a separate confidential data system. Second, an important component of the local homeless response system – the state’s emergency housing (motel voucher) program – is not yet in HMIS. However, this information provides a starting place for looking at whether our system serves minorities equitably.

On the most important outcome – where do people go when they exit the system - most minority groups show rates of exit to permanent housing higher than that of white consumers.



Participation rates in various types of programs vary. Some program participation rates reflect the racial/ethnic makeup of all people experiencing homelessness while others do not. For example, black residents are a 14% share of the total population of people experiencing homelessness. They represent 16% of those participating in coordinated entry, 17% of those accessing emergency shelter, 19% of those accessing prevention resources and 15% of those accessing Rapid Rehousing programs. However, they represent only 5% of those reached through street outreach, 6% of those participating in transitional housing programs, 5% of those participating in Permanent Supportive Housing programs and 4% of those participating in other permanent housing programs. These are differences that we need to more fully explore and understand.



Finally, there are differences in reported disability rates among people experiencing homelessness. The higher prevalence of reported disabilities among white residents experiencing homelessness may be a factor in their higher utilization rate for Permanent Supportive Housing. But again, this is data that we need to more fully explore and understand.



**Recommendations for Action:**

1. Raise awareness of the racial disparities in homelessness and in the housing market in Chittenden County:

This report was discussed at the September 24, 2019 community meeting of the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance and will be posted on the Alliance website. In addition, the Mayor of Burlington is sponsoring a book group discussion on *The Color of Law* by Richard Rothstein.

2. Increase awareness of discrimination in the rental housing market, including avenues in which discrimination claims can be pursued.

The Alliance will work with the Fair Housing Project of the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity, Vermont Legal Aid, the Vermont Fair Housing Committee, and the Vermont Human Rights Commission to increase awareness among Vermont renters of their rights under federal and state fair housing law, and of the ways in which they can seek redress if they believe they have experienced discrimination in housing.

3. Advocate for prompt implementation of the 2015 Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule:

Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) is a legal requirement mandating that federal agencies and federal grantees further the purposes of the Fair Housing Act. This obligation to affirmatively further fair housing has been in the Fair Housing Act since 1968. The U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development’s 2015 Rule on Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing provides a more effective

planning approach to aid program participants in taking meaningful actions to overcome historic patterns of segregation, promote fair housing choice, and foster inclusive communities that are free from discrimination.

4. Ensure that all agencies serving people experiencing homelessness in Chittenden County have access to diversity / equity training for their staff.

Almost all active member organizations of the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance currently provide regular diversity / equity training for their staff. The Alliance will reach out to those organizations not currently providing such training on at least an annual basis and work with them to make training opportunities available.

5. Examine the programmatic differences in participation rates by minority groups:

The Alliance will work with its HMIS Lead Agency to analyze the reasons why there are disparities in participation in street outreach, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing and “other” permanent housing programs, and will re-examine all results in the crisis response system when the motel voucher program is added to HMIS this fall.