



CENTER FOR STUDIES IN DEMOGRAPHY & ECOLOGY
UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

RESEARCH REPORT

**King County, WA Point-in-Time Data:
Unsheltered American Indian & Alaska Native
Homelessness in King County, 2022–2026**

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October 6, 2026

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I. Executive Summary

American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) people are about 1–2% of King County’s general population (near 1% single-race, about 2% alone or in combination) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023), but a much larger share of its unsheltered population, and that share depends heavily on how AI/AN identity is counted. The federal HUD standard reports only a single primary race, which undercounts AI/AN people by roughly 2.6-fold and distorts the count of King County’s AI/AN unsheltered population. KCRHA and the University of Washington have collected detailed race, ethnicity, and tribal-affiliation data beyond the federal minimum, indicating AI/AN people are about 15% of its unsheltered population, roughly 8 to 12 times their share of the general population. King County has the opportunity, in partnership with Native organizations that serve this population, to utilize this count for policy, programs, and resource allocation that includes multiracial AI/AN, which follows the best practices recommended by the Urban Indian Health Institute, the nation’s leading urban AI/AN data organization.

Findings

- **The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) single-race reporting standard undercounts AI/AN by roughly 2.6-fold.** In 2026 it counts 6.1% of the unsheltered population as AI/AN, versus **16.1%** counted inclusively.
- **The number of AI/AN people experiencing unsheltered homelessness grew.** From 1,303 in 2022 to about 1,905 in 2026, reflecting the broader growth of unsheltered homelessness in King County, WA.
- **The inclusive share is stable across the three waves.** Ranging from 14.0% to 16.8%, with no statistically significant year-to-year change.
- **AI/AN are underrepresented in shelter.** Utilizing an inclusive count, they are 16.1% of the unsheltered population but only 6.5% of the sheltered population. Across both, AI/AN are about 12.7% of all people counted homeless in 2026 (95% CI 10.7–14.9%); because inclusive counting is conservative and the data still undercount AI/AN, we recommend the upper bound, about **14.9%**, as the planning figure for the combined unhoused population.
- **AI/AN are more often chronically homeless than the general population of King County.** In 2026, 50% met the HUD definition of chronic homelessness, versus 41% overall.
- **The burden is geographically concentrated.** About 51% of AI/AN people experiencing unsheltered homelessness are in Seattle Metro and 34% in South King County (2026).
- **AI/AN respondents were the most effective peer recruiters.** AI/AN recruited AI/AN peers at about 1.3 times the rate of other recruiters. Despite the hardships associated with being unsheltered, AI/AN people displayed deep relationships with their community.
- **Fully counting AI/AN needs dedicated community partnerships and outreach.** Despite the data showing AI/AN represent about 15% of unhoused people, this is likely an undercount and will continue to be so without the appropriate engagement with and allocation of resources to Native-led organizations and culturally specific sites (e.g., Chief Seattle Club, the Seattle Indian Health Board).

Recommendations

1. Report AI/AN as roughly 15% of the population of people experiencing homelessness, using the inclusive metric, not the single-race value of 4–5%.
2. Treat the shelter gap as an access problem and fund culturally-specific options.
3. In consultation with Native organizations, direct resources to where the AI/AN unsheltered population is most concentrated.
4. Report the inclusive race totals in federal data.
5. Do work around unsheltered AI/AN homelessness with Native communities as an ongoing partnership.
6. Research the AI/AN service gap, led by Native partners to reach community voices. Dedicate resources to field a survey designed and led by Native organizations to understand why the AI/AN community declines, leaves, or cannot use non-Native services, and use the findings to change current practices and develop new, culturally grounded options and initiatives.

Contents

I.	Executive Summary	2
II.	Introduction	4
A.	Measurement, Missing Data, and the AI/AN Undercount	4
B.	Why “Alone or in Combination”	5
III.	Data	6
IV.	Methods	6
V.	Findings	7
A.	The Single-Race Undercount	7
B.	Stable Share, Rising Numbers	8
C.	Disproportionately Unsheltered, 2026	8
D.	Annualized Estimates	9
E.	Unsheltered Demographic Profile, 2026	11
F.	Health, Wellbeing, and Chronic Homelessness, 2026	12
G.	Families and Children, 2026	13
H.	Regional Analysis, 2026	14
I.	A Connected, Resilient Community: the Recruitment Network, 2026	14
J.	Needs Assessment, 2026	15
VI.	Discussion	16
VII.	Recommendations	17
VIII.	Limitations and a Call for Future Work with Native Communities	18
IX.	Organizational Sponsors	19
X.	Acknowledgements	19
	Abbreviations	22
	Appendix A. Respondent-Driven Sampling and Estimation	23
	Appendix B. Chronic Homelessness Definition	25
	Appendix C. Sheltered and Unsheltered Definitions	25

II. Introduction

A. Measurement, Missing Data, and the AI/AN Undercount

American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) are often omitted in data collection and analysis. This occurs when AI/AN are categorized as “Other race” or “Multiracial,” grouped with other small populations, or misclassified as another race. As a result of these systemic inequities in data, AI/AN are undercounted in local and national statistics, which leads to an inaccurate representation of social, economic, and health measures, and results in insufficient resource allocation. Ensuring Indigenous peoples are included in data collection and analysis may require more resource-intensive approaches to collect relevant data elements, identify inclusive datasets, and apply appropriate statistical methods for small populations.

— Urban Indian Health Institute, “Erasure of American Indians and Alaska Natives in Data,” in *Improving Law Enforcement Data for Missing and Murdered People* (2024).

That guide, from the Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI), is the practical standard behind this report. It lays out how to collect and credit race, tribal affiliation, and ethnicity inclusively, how to analyze small populations, and how to report in a way that upholds Indigenous data sovereignty. It has a natural companion in Echo-Hawk and colleagues’ *How Should Epidemiologists Respond to Data Genocide?* (2025)([Echo-Hawk et al., 2025](#)), which examines the limits of single-race counting. These works inform the approach we take here; the choices in this report put UIHI’s recommendations into practice for the King County unsheltered count.

For AI/AN communities, reporting a single primary race, the standard HUD requires for federal reporting, is a well-documented source of undercounting. Counting by a single race is not a neutral technical choice; it removes Native people from the data that drive funding and policy. Some Native data-governance scholars use stronger language: Echo-Hawk and colleagues (2025) describe it as “data genocide,” the elimination of Indigenous people from data through aggregation and misclassification, and conclude that “there is no scientifically valid reason to use only a single-race AI/AN category.” King County’s 2026 Point-in-Time Count reported about 4.2% of people experiencing homelessness (sheltered and unsheltered) as AI/AN, the figure produced by HUD’s required single-race reporting standard.¹

¹Source: KCRHA [King County Point-in-Time Count](#) website, accessed 10/01/2026. In this report, the estimated share of AI/AN experiencing homelessness (sheltered and unsheltered) is 5.2%.

This report illustrates the significant increase in the AI/AN population when AI/AN people are counted the way Native data-governance experts recommend.

B. Why “Alone or in Combination”

AI/AN is one of the fastest-growing multiracial identities in the United States, and Tribal membership is a political status rather than a phenotype. Blood quantum, the fractioning of AI/AN people by “quantifying” degree of “Indian blood,” was utilized by the federal government to eliminate treaty and trust obligations, as it allowed them to determine who was Indian or not. However, under treaties, and upheld by the Supreme Court, only Tribal Nations can determine who is a tribal member. Yet this practice of only counting individuals who identify as single-race AI/AN is embedded in data practice, creating ongoing systems that eradicate AI/AN in the data. To correct this, UIHI’s *Best Practices for American Indian and Alaska Native Data Collection* ([Urban Indian Health Institute, n.d.](#)) recommends counting individuals who are AI/AN in any combination with any other race, including those who identify as Latinx/Hispanic, falling back to a less inclusive definition only when necessary.

This data erasure is prevalent across federal, state, and local data systems. UIHI has tirelessly advocated over the years alongside King County Native organizations for the appropriate counting of this population, yet it has largely fallen on deaf ears. Chief Seattle Club identified this discrepancy long before it appeared in formal analyses through its direct service, outreach, housing, and case-management work with Native people experiencing homelessness. This case illustrates the value of integrating community-based expertise with statistical and epidemiologic methods when measuring AI/AN populations. As a national organization, UIHI has provided similar advocacy and guidance in other jurisdictions that, unlike King County, have listened. In late 2018, UIHI assisted Los Angeles County with a needs assessment of its AI/AN population focused on the unhoused, and, guided by local Native organizations, worked with the County to adjust its methodologies to ensure appropriate counting. Los Angeles County has moved toward more inclusive AI/AN reporting: for its local homelessness data it now follows UIHI’s best practices and counts people who are AI/AN alone and in combination with another race, an approach adopted to “reduce misclassification, improve accuracy, and prevent erasure of Native communities” ([Los Angeles County ARDI, n.d.](#)). We follow that same standard here, and also count a reported tribal affiliation as an observed AI/AN identity, and encourage King County to adopt this practice across all datasets to ensure appropriate representation.

III. Data

Each year HUD requires every Continuum of Care (CoC) to report a Point-in-Time (PIT) count of people experiencing homelessness on a single night; the sheltered count is annual, but the unsheltered count is required only every two years. King County (CoC WA-500) draws its sheltered count from shelter administrative records and, since 2022, enumerates its unsheltered population with a respondent-driven sampling (RDS) survey run by KCRHA and the University of Washington (UW). This report uses the three RDS waves conducted to date: 2022, 2024, and 2026. These KCRHA-led surveys go well beyond the federal minimum, collecting detailed race, ethnicity, and tribal-affiliation information that many Continuums of Care do not gather; it is precisely this richer data collection that makes an inclusive AI/AN count possible.

Table 1: King County RDS waves and the resulting unsheltered PIT estimate. Respondent counts are survey sample sizes; the PIT estimate is the population figure reported to HUD.

Survey year	RDS respondents	Unsheltered PIT estimate
2022	616	7,755
2024	1,466	10,399
2026	2,165	11,829

From each sample, the size of the unsheltered population is estimated using the method developed in Almquist et al. (2025), which combines respondent-driven sampling with the sheltered count to produce a final unsheltered total, verified with Successive-Sampling Population Size Estimation (SS-PSE) RDS procedures (Handcock et al., 2014). The resulting figure, 7,755 in 2022, 10,399 in 2024, and 11,829 in 2026, is King County’s unsheltered PIT count for that year. It is reported to HUD, released locally, and incorporated into HUD’s national Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress (HUD, 2024). This report takes those counts as given and asks how the AI/AN share of them changes under an inclusive definition.

IV. Methods

All three waves use respondent-driven sampling (RDS), a peer-referral design for populations with no sampling frame, and are visibility-weighted with the RDS-II (Volz–Heckathorn) estimator; uncertainty uses the tree bootstrap. [Appendix A](#) describes the mechanics of RDS, the estimator, and the uncertainty method. Here we

define the measure at the center of this report: how we decide whether someone is AI/AN.

- **Single-race:** the respondent’s one assigned primary race is AI/AN. This excludes multi-racial AI/AN people (those who are AI/AN in combination with another race), which is the main reason it undercounts.
- **Inclusive (alone or in combination):** any of AI/AN selected among multiple races, AI/AN with Hispanic/Latine ethnicity, or a written-in tribal affiliation.

Confidence intervals (CIs) are 80% (design-based standard errors, normal approximation). Chronic homelessness follows the harmonized HUD definition (HUD, 2015): a disabling condition and either a year or more of current homelessness or four or more episodes over three years (full definition in Appendix B). Human-subjects research was conducted under University of Washington Institutional Review Board (IRB) approvals STUDY00024230 and STUDY00024236 (modification MOD00024808).

V. Findings

A. The Single-Race Undercount

The two definitions produce very different numbers. In 2026, counting AI/AN single-race yields 6.1%; counting inclusively yields 16.1%, nearly $2.6\times$ larger and close to the $\sim 15\%$ figure Native-led organizations say is much closer to the appropriate count while still remaining an undercount. The same pattern holds in every year.

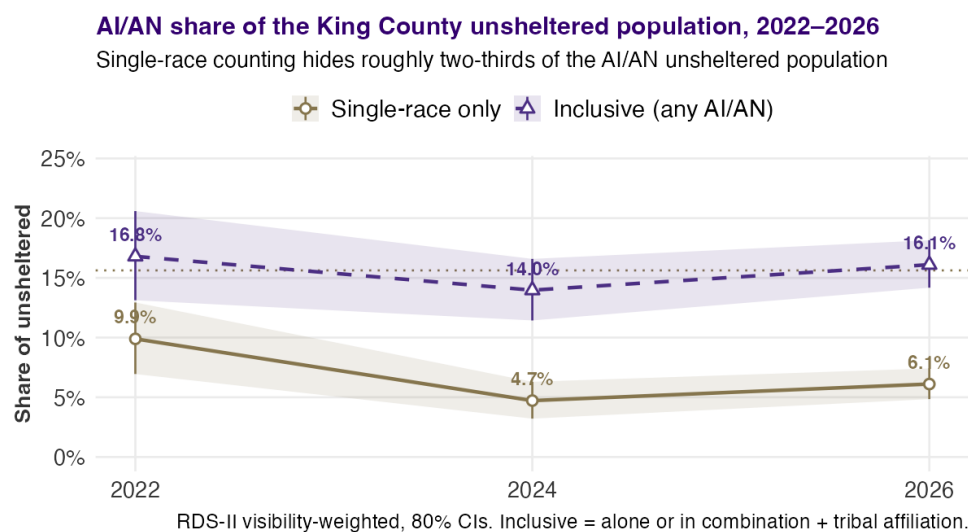


Figure 1: AI/AN share of the King County unsheltered population, 2022–2026. Single-race (solid) vs. inclusive (dashed), RDS-II visibility-weighted with 80% CIs.

Table 2: AI/AN unsheltered share and estimated persons, by definition.

Year	Definition	Share (80% CI)	Est. persons (80% CI)
2022	Single-race	9.9% [6.9, 12.9]	767 [539, 1,003]
2022	Inclusive	16.8% [13.1, 20.6]	1,303 [1,018, 1,597]
2024	Single-race	4.7% [3.2, 6.3]	491 [334, 654]
2024	Inclusive	14.0% [11.4, 16.6]	1,453 [1,189, 1,725]
2026	Single-race	6.1% [4.8, 7.4]	722 [573, 877]
2026	Inclusive	16.1% [14.2, 18.1]	1,905 [1,677, 2,147]

B. Stable Share, Rising Numbers

The inclusive share stayed roughly flat (~15–17%), but King County’s total unsheltered population grew, so the number of AI/AN people experiencing unsheltered homelessness rose by about a third.

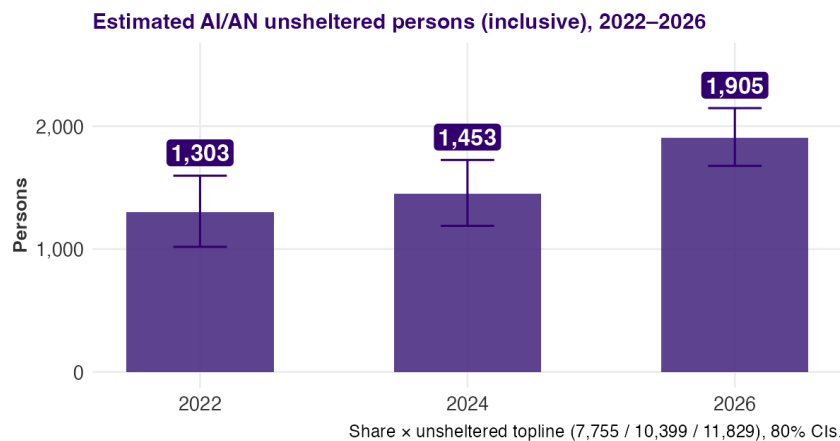


Figure 2: Estimated AI/AN people experiencing unsheltered homelessness (inclusive), 2022–2026, with 80% CIs.

C. Disproportionately Unsheltered, 2026

AI/AN people are underrepresented in the sheltered population relative to the unsheltered population. The unsheltered figures come from the RDS survey and the sheltered figures from HMIS records. In 2026, under the inclusive definition, AI/AN people were 16.1% of the unsheltered population but only 6.5% of the sheltered population. In the HMIS extract that 6.5% inclusive sheltered share drops to 3.6% when AI/AN is counted single-race,² a 1.8-fold undercount. Single-race counting

²The sheltered estimate carries three caveats: it excludes non-HMIS-participating enrollments (5,039 records versus more than 6,000), though the distribution should stay representative; it is not

understates AI/AN in the unsheltered count by even more, cutting 16.1% to 6.1% (a 2.6-fold undercount). Weighting the two systems by their official PIT totals (6,536 sheltered and 11,829 unsheltered), AI/AN were 5.2% of everyone counted homeless in 2026 under single-race reporting and 12.7% counted inclusively (95% CI 10.7–14.9%).³

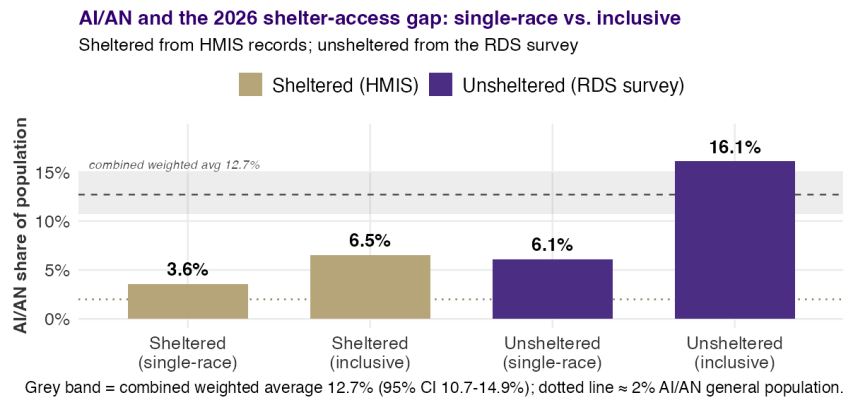


Figure 3: AI/AN and the 2026 shelter-access gap, single-race vs. inclusive. Sheltered from HMIS records; unsheltered from the RDS survey.

The gap between unsheltered and sheltered AI/AN is partly a measurement problem and partly an access issue. Counted inclusively, AI/AN people are 16.1% of the unsheltered population but only 6.5% of the sheltered population in 2026, about 2.4 times as concentrated in the unsheltered population as in the sheltered population. Single-race counting hides much of that gap, because it cuts the unsheltered share more sharply than the sheltered share, from 16.1% to 6.1% against 6.5% to 3.6%. Because HMIS and HUD record only one race per person, any number built on the single-race count will understate AI/AN homelessness.

D. Annualized Estimates

Because people enter and leave homelessness over the course of a year, the number of people who are unsheltered at some point during the year exceeds the single-night point-in-time count. Applying the Burt–Wilkins adjustment ([Appendix A](#)) separately to each group and year, the adjustment estimates the weekly inflow of newly homeless

identical to the prior submission, since enrollment records change over time and were not run through the Bitfocus (HMIS vendor) extrapolation; and it was drawn on the count date (29 January 2026) but may include later record changes.

³The interval is a nonparametric bootstrap over 20,000 replicates: we resample the 5,039 sheltered HMIS records with replacement, treat the roughly 1,500 non-HMIS enrollments as having an uncertain AI/AN rate drawn each replicate, and draw the unsheltered share from its RDS design-based interval, recombining by the PIT weights. The unsheltered survey dominates the resulting uncertainty.

respondents, along with the share of that inflow with prior homelessness, from the RDS unsheltered sample, so that a multiplier well above one points to substantial turnover across the year, whereas a multiplier near one points to a stable population.

Table 3: Annualized unsheltered estimates: local CSH formula (with 80% CI) vs. national 3–6× multiplier.

Year	Group	PIT (A)	B	C	Annual	80% CI	National 3–6×
2022	AI/AN (incl.)	1,303	1.3%	48%	1,764	[1,153, 2,514]	3,909–7,818
2022	General unsh.	7,755	0.7%	36%	9,475	[8,320, 10,673]	23,265–46,530
2024	AI/AN (incl.)	1,453	1.8%	37%	2,274	[1,488, 3,192]	4,359–8,718
2024	General unsh.	10,399	2.1%	32%	17,970	[15,668, 20,252]	31,197–62,394
2026	AI/AN (incl.)	1,905	0.4%	40%	2,163	[1,788, 2,619]	5,715–11,430
2026	General unsh.	11,829	1.0%	35%	15,701	[14,498, 17,005]	35,487–70,974

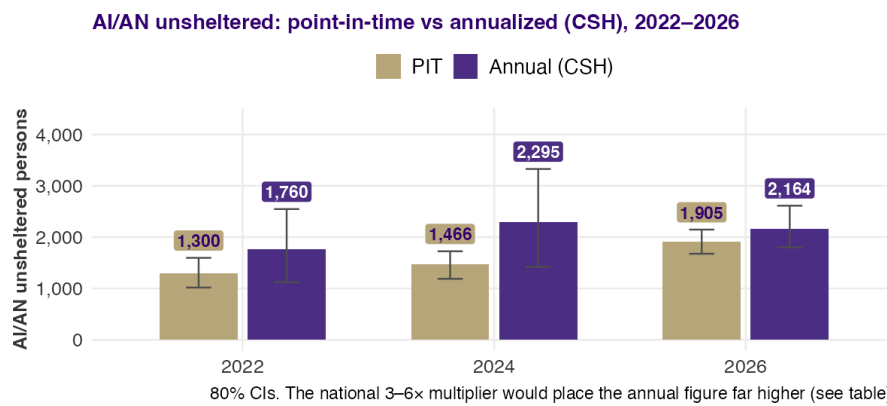


Figure 4: AI/AN unsheltered: point-in-time vs. annualized (CSH), 2022–2026, with 80% CIs.

The multipliers are modest, about 1.1–1.7×, because King County’s AI/AN unsheltered population has largely been homeless for a long time (about 83% for a year or more in the current episode), which leaves few new entrants each week. The local Burt–Wilkins formula puts the annual AI/AN unsheltered population between roughly 1,800 and 2,400 across the three waves. The lower figures reflect the subgroup’s own small measured weekly inflow, and applying the more stable county-wide multiplier to the AI/AN point-in-time count places the 2026 estimate near the upper end, about 2,400. AI/AN remain about 13–15% of the annual flow, mirroring their point-in-time share.

E. Unsheltered Demographic Profile, 2026

In this section, we compare the demographics of the AI/AN unsheltered population to the overall unsheltered population. Figure 5 compares the AI/AN (inclusive) group with the unsheltered respondents in 2026 across four dimensions: where people sleep, gender, age, and how long the current episode of homelessness has lasted. Each bar is the percent of that group; the two groups are not mutually exclusive, so the comparison shows relative concentration rather than a partition of the groups.

Demographic profile, AI/AN (inclusive) vs. all unsheltered, King County 2026

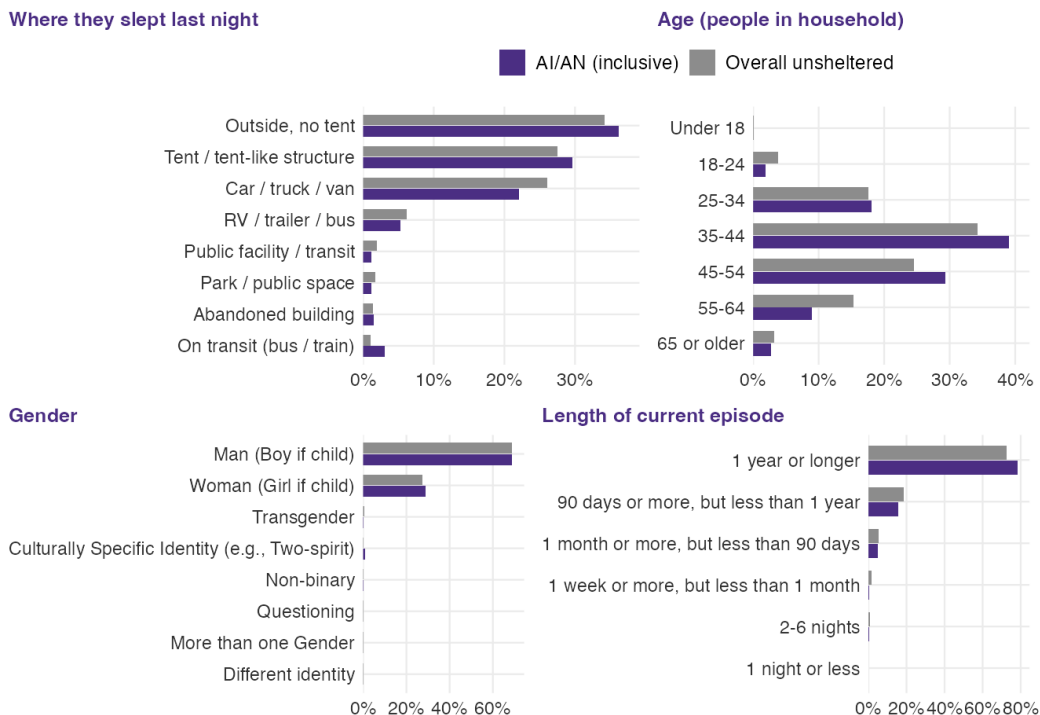


Figure 5: Demographic profile: AI/AN (inclusive) vs. the overall unsheltered population, King County 2026.

Among people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, AI/AN respondents were somewhat more likely than the overall population to sleep outside or in a tent and less likely to stay in a vehicle. About 36% slept outside without a tent (versus 34% overall) and 30% in a tent (versus 27%), while fewer were in a car, van, or RV (27% versus 32%); a small share slept on public transit (3% versus 1%). The AI/AN population skewed younger, with 68% aged 35–54 (versus 60% overall) and fewer people aged 55 and older (12% versus 19%). Further, the AI/AN population has experienced longer durations of homelessness, with 78% homeless for a year or longer in the current episode (versus 73% overall). A small but non-zero share reported Two-Spirit or other culturally specific identities that single-category reporting renders invisible.

The survey also records self-reported tribal identity. Of the 228 unsheltered AI/AN respondents in 2026, 163 wrote in a specific tribal affiliation, naming 38 distinct Tribal Nations from across the nation with a larger concentration from Washington and Alaska, Native identities that single-race reporting would erase.

F. Health, Wellbeing, and Chronic Homelessness, 2026

The AI/AN unsheltered population reports disabling and behavioral-health conditions at rates above the overall unsheltered population. About 59% report a disabling condition (versus 54% overall), 55% a substance use condition (versus 49%), and 40% a mental health condition (versus 35%).

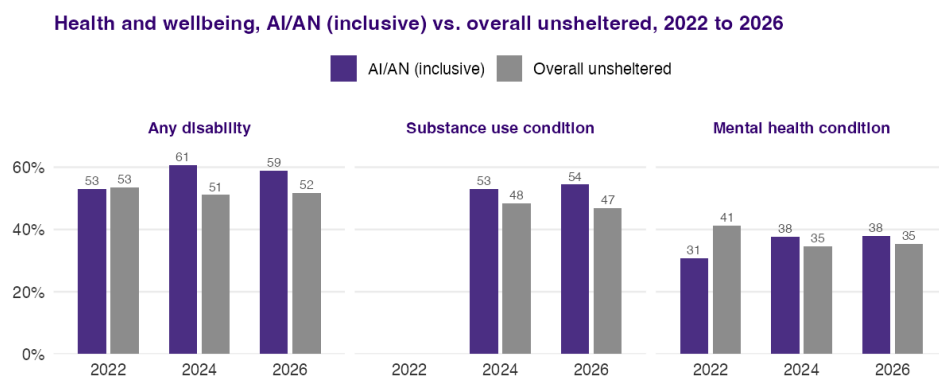


Figure 6: Self-reported disabling and behavioral-health conditions, AI/AN (inclusive) vs. the overall unsheltered population, King County 2022–2026 (RDS-II visibility-weighted shares; substance use was not collected in 2022).

The unsheltered AI/AN population experiences HUD-defined chronic homelessness at 50% compared to 41% in the overall unsheltered population. This is a gap reflecting both higher disability (59% versus 54%) and longer or more recurring homelessness (a year or longer in the current episode, 78% versus 72%; four or more episodes, 13% versus 10%). These findings are consistent with well-documented health inequities in Native communities, which are shaped by social determinants of health rooted in historical and ongoing systemic harm (Gameon et al., 2024).

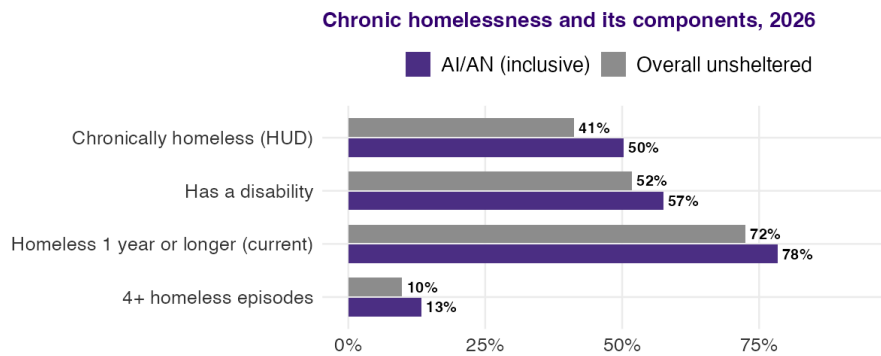


Figure 7: Chronic homelessness and its components, AI/AN vs. overall, 2026.

G. Families and Children, 2026

Most AI/AN people the survey reached were single adults, not families with children. Counting a household as AI/AN when the respondent or any household member is AI/AN, AI/AN were about 12% of unsheltered families, below their ~16.1% share of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, though not statistically distinguishable from it; reconciled to the countywide total (647 households, 2,224 people), that is roughly 75 AI/AN family households (80% CI 54–104; Table 4). These counts are almost certainly an undercount. Most families in the survey came in through the Mary’s Place family-services phone line, and families with children seldom sleep in the places a peer-referral survey reaches best. However, the deeper issue is that the survey did not work with local Native organizations that serve these families, who rarely access mainstream services and shelters; this contributed to the undercount. This is a limitation of any peer-referral (RDS) design for reaching families with children, and applies across all populations, not only AI/AN families. Because most children experiencing homelessness are doubled-up or in shelter rather than unsheltered, many AI/AN families never enter the unsheltered frame this count measures (see Limitations).

Table 4: AI/AN families in the 2026 King County unsheltered count (inclusive definition).

	AI/AN (incl.)	80% CI	All unsheltered
Share of unsheltered families	12%	[8, 16]	—
Family households (of 647)	75	[54, 104]	647
Mean household size (families)	2.7	[2.3, 3.1]	3.5
Mean children per family	1.5	[1.2, 1.8]	2.1

H. Regional Analysis, 2026

The survey provides rich data on where people slept last night, along with information on where they took the survey. We use a statistical model ([Appendix A](#)) to improve our estimates of where people sleep on any given night. The countywide estimate of 1,905 AI/AN identified people experiencing unsheltered homelessness is preserved by definition. We find that 969 AI/AN are identified in Seattle Metro and 651 in South King County, together about 85% of the total. AI/AN are about 16% of Seattle Metro’s unsheltered population but about 37% of South King County’s, meaning they are disproportionately concentrated in southern King County. This pattern is consistent with the historical redlining and racially restrictive covenants that shaped where Native people and other communities of color could live in King County ([Seattle Office for Civil Rights, 2018](#)).

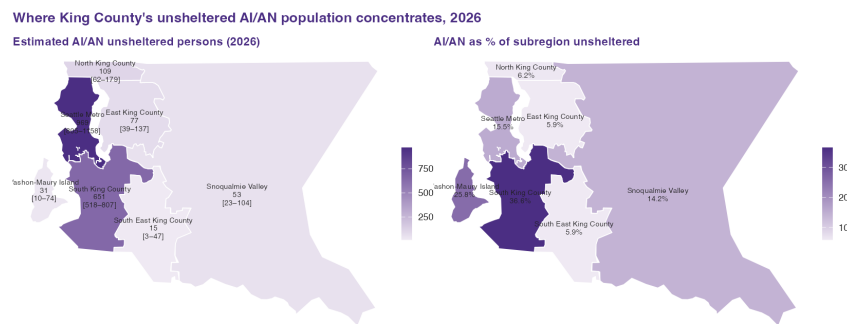


Figure 8: Relocation of the 2026 unsheltered AI/AN (inclusive) population across King County subregions. Top: estimated persons with 95% credible intervals (sum to 1,905). Bottom: AI/AN persons as a share of each subregion’s official unsheltered total.

I. A Connected, Resilient Community: the Recruitment Network, 2026

Because RDS recruits along existing social ties, the recruitment tree also reflects community social structure. In 2026, around 15% of the respondents in the full recruitment tree (all shelter statuses, since recruitment ties cross them) were AI/AN, counted inclusively. An AI/AN recruiter’s next recruit was AI/AN 21% of the time, versus 16% for a non-AI/AN recruiter, and AI/AN→AI/AN ties occurred 43 times against about 31 expected under random mixing (Coleman homophily = 0.07). A statistical model ([Appendix A](#)) puts this homophily at an incidence-rate ratio of 1.32 (95% CI 0.94–1.84, $p = 0.10$), meaning AI/AN recruiters bring in AI/AN peers at

about 1.3 times the rate of other recruiters. Further, AI/AN respondents sit within Native-connected peer networks that the survey reaches partly through those ties, which is why RDS reaches AI/AN people that a site-based convenience count would miss.

The recruitment chain with the most Native-to-Native referral, 2026 King County PIT
 ◆ Seed ● AI/AN (inclusive) ● Other recruit

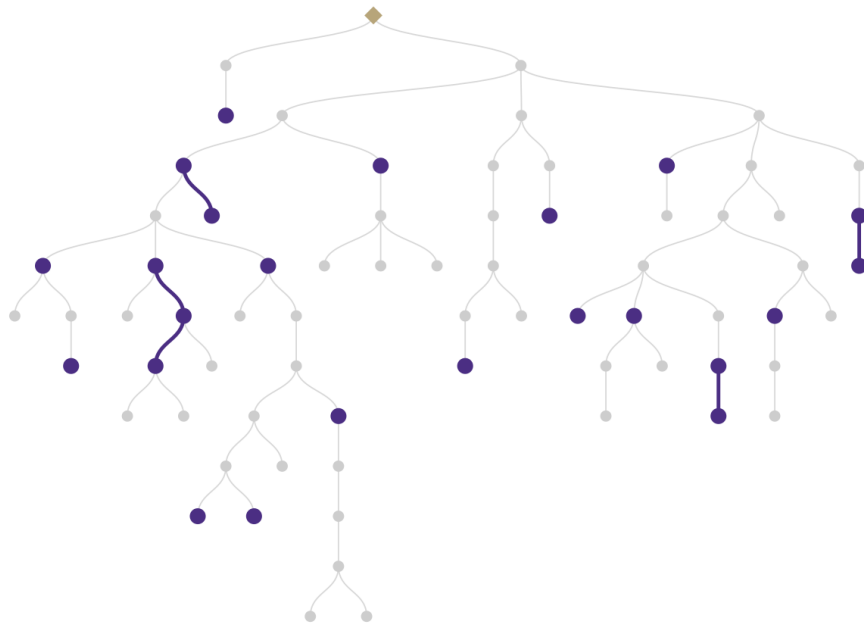


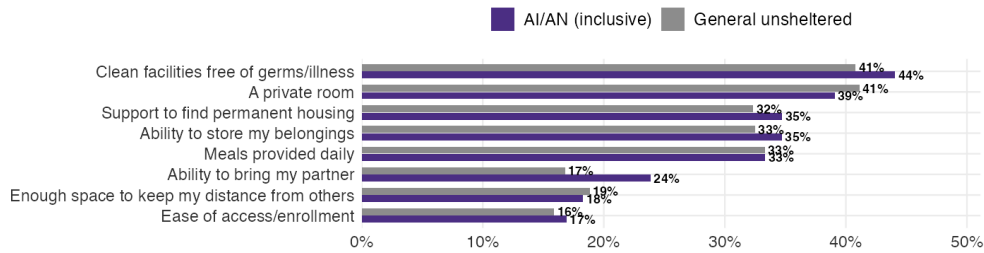
Figure 9: The single 2026 recruitment chain with the most Native-to-Native referral (71 people; gold seed at top). AI/AN (inclusive) respondents are purple; bold purple edges are AI/AN-recruits-AI/AN ties.

J. Needs Assessment, 2026

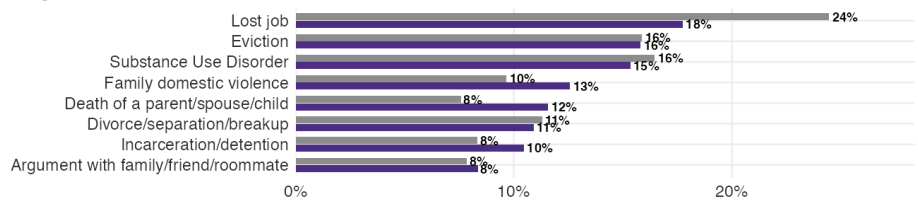
The 2026 survey asked respondents to select from multi-item checklists the shelter features they want, the events that led to their homelessness, and the basic amenities they can access (see Figure 10).

Needs assessment, AI/AN (inclusive) vs. general unsheltered, King County 2026

Desired shelter features



Precipitating events into homelessness



Access to basic amenities

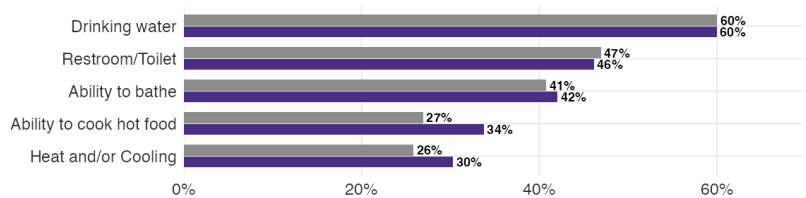


Figure 10: Needs assessment: AI/AN (inclusive) vs. the general unsheltered population, King County 2026.

The gaps cluster around relational and safety needs. AI/AN respondents are markedly more likely to want the ability to bring a partner into shelter (24% versus 18%) and to name bereavement and incarceration as precipitating events. Bereavement and incarceration are better understood as social determinants of health that AI/AN people experience at disproportionate rates, rooted in historical and ongoing systemic harm, rather than isolated triggers (Gameon et al., 2024). However, emotional connection to a partner indicates a cultural protective factor unique to the population. These point toward non-congregate, family-preserving shelter options designed with Native organizations.

VI. Discussion

Under the single-race standard HUD requires for federal reporting, AI/AN people appear to be about 4–6% of the unsheltered population and possibly declining. Counted alone or in combination and crediting tribal affiliation, as Native data-governance experts recommend, they are a stable ~15%, rising in absolute number, more chronically homeless, and among the racial and ethnic groups least likely to

be sheltered. These are not equally valid. The single-race standard systematically undercounts Native people, while the inclusive count follows Urban Indian Health Institute best practice and the approach a growing number of jurisdictions, led by Los Angeles County, have recently adopted. King County is well placed to do the same, and KCRHA supports adopting the inclusive standard locally. Given that precedent, KCRHA can move to this reporting process this year and going forward, recommending the inclusive number for local planning and funding.

VII. Recommendations

1. **Report AI/AN as roughly 15% of the population of people experiencing homelessness, using the inclusive measure, not the single-race figure of 4–5%.** The HUD mandated single-race number is a documented undercount; the inclusive count (alone or in combination, including tribal affiliation) is the published UIHI standard and matches what Native-led organizations report. It should guide planning, funding allocations, and public reporting for King County.
2. **Treat the shelter gap as an access problem and fund culturally-specific options.** Counted inclusively, AI/AN are 16.1% of the unsheltered population but only 6.5% of the sheltered population, more than twice as concentrated on the street as in shelter, even when both are measured the same way. The response is non-congregate, culturally-grounded shelter designed and operated by Native providers.
3. **Direct capacity to where the burden concentrates.** The AI/AN unsheltered population is concentrated in Seattle Metro (about 51%) and South King County (about 34%), together roughly 85% of the AI/AN unsheltered population.
4. **Report the inclusive number in federal data.** HMIS and the PIT already let people select every race that applies, but federal reporting rolls those answers up into a single-race count. Because the inclusive data are already collected, HUD and King County should report AI/AN alone or in combination; doing so would close the administrative undercount and reflect true AI/AN presence without collecting new data.
5. **Do this work with Native communities as an ongoing partnership.** Adopt the inclusive standard by default and design and develop the methodology, enumeration, analysis, and reporting in partnership with the Seattle Indian Health Board and Urban Indian Health Institute, Chief Seattle Club, and local Tribes.

6. **Research the AI/AN service gap, led by Native partners to reach community voices.** Dedicate resources to field a survey designed and led by Native-led organizations to understand why the AI/AN community declines, leaves, or cannot use non-Native services, and use the findings to change current practices and develop new, culturally grounded options and initiatives. A survey fielded by a non-Native entity risks reproducing the distrust and low participation seen with other providers and the PIT Count itself, and should center the sense of safety and belonging tied to culturally grounded services, not only document the gap.

VIII. Limitations and a Call for Future Work with Native Communities

Missing data and conservative bias. Respondents with missing race and no tribal write-in are counted as not AI/AN. Because racial misclassification and item non-response fall disproportionately on AI/AN respondents (Echo-Hawk et al., 2025), this makes our inclusive estimates lower bounds. The 2026 instrument in particular allowed Indigenous respondents, especially Latine-Indigenous people, to select a non-AI/AN primary race while writing in a tribe; we recovered 50 such cases, but others remain uncounted.

Small samples and survey mode. RDS subgroup estimates carry wide confidence intervals, and multi-select response rates fell across waves (33% in 2022 to 15% in 2026), which mechanically depresses any race-only inclusive count and is a further reason to include tribal affiliation.

A call for future work, with rather than about Native communities. Better counting here depends more on data governance than on statistical fine-tuning. Consistent with UIHI best practice and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2007), King County could adopt the alone-or-in-combination plus tribal-affiliation standard as its default AI/AN definition for local policy and funding, and encourage the federal government to consider it as well. We suggest working with the Seattle Indian Health Board and Urban Indian Health Institute, Chief Seattle Club, and local Tribes on improving the design and data collection for the race question and enumeration, with these partners able to review and advise on how AI/AN data are used. King County should report the inclusive measure in every area where federal or state rules allow it, and advocate for the ability to report the inclusive measure in the areas where it is not currently permitted.

IX. Organizational Sponsors

This report is sponsored and supported by the **University of Washington Population Health Initiative** (Tier 3 grant) and the **Center for Studies in Demography and Ecology (CSDE)** at the University of Washington, in partnership with **Chief Seattle Club** and the **Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI)**.

X. Acknowledgements

This work was supported by a University of Washington Population Health Initiative Tier 3 grant and by CSDE. We are especially grateful to the King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA), whose rigorous, community-centered data collection goes well beyond federal reporting requirements and made this analysis possible. We thank the KCRHA data team, who collaborated with us throughout and provided the HMIS data used in this report, and the survey respondents who shared their experiences. Human-subjects research was conducted under UW IRB STUDY00024230 and STUDY00024236 (modification MOD00024808). Any errors are the authors' own. The opinions and views expressed in this report are those of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the King County Regional Homelessness Authority or any other funding organization.

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Abbreviations

AHAR	Annual Homeless Assessment Report (to Congress)
AI/AN	American Indian and Alaska Native
BYM2	Besag–York–Mollié spatial model
CI	Confidence interval
CoC	Continuum of Care
CSDE	Center for Studies in Demography and Ecology
CSH	Corporation for Supportive Housing
HMIS	Homeless Management Information System
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
INLA	Integrated Nested Laplace Approximation
IRB	Institutional Review Board
KCRHA	King County Regional Homelessness Authority
PHI	Population Health Initiative (University of Washington)
PIT	Point-in-Time (count)
RDS	Respondent-driven sampling
RDS-II	Respondent-driven sampling II (Volz–Heckathorn estimator)
SS-PSE	Successive-sampling population size estimation
UIHI	Urban Indian Health Institute
UW	University of Washington
WA-500	King County Continuum of Care identifier
ZINB	Zero-inflated negative binomial

Appendix A. Respondent-Driven Sampling and Estimation

Respondent-driven sampling in brief. People experiencing unsheltered homelessness have no sampling frame, so a conventional random sample is impossible. RDS is a peer-referral design that allows researchers to recruit an initial set of seeds (the first people to take the survey who are currently experiencing unsheltered homelessness), and each respondent receives a small number of coupons to recruit peers from their social network. Recruitment spreads outward in waves, producing long referral chains that reach deep into the hidden population (Almquist et al., 2025).

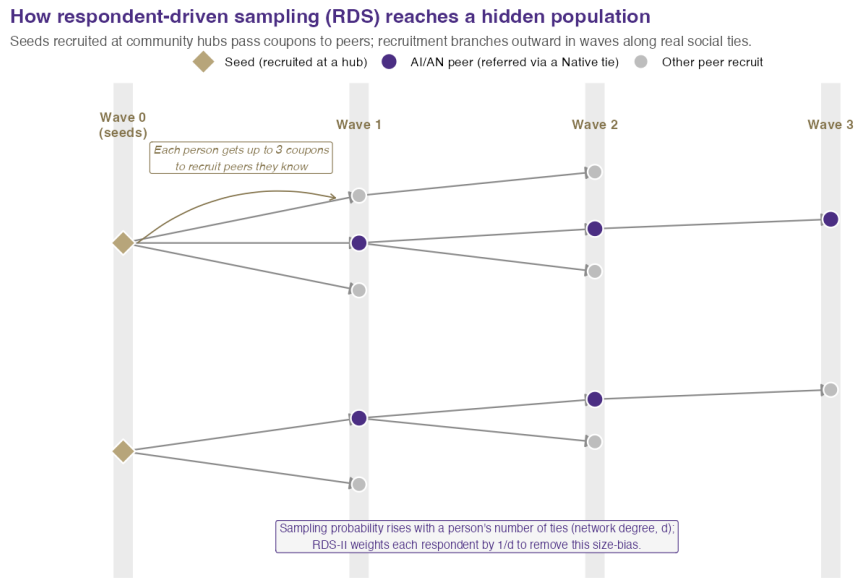


Figure 11: How respondent-driven sampling works: seeds recruited at community hubs pass coupons to peers, and recruitment branches outward in waves along real social ties.

Estimator. We estimate AI/AN population shares with the RDS-II estimator of Volz & Heckathorn (2008), implemented in the RDS package for R (Handcock et al., n.d.), on the unsheltered frame of each wave. It weights each respondent by the inverse of their reported network size, so more-connected respondents count for less. In practice, measurement error remains, so we use the imputed visibility score to improve our weights (McLaughlin et al., 2024).

Uncertainty. Referral chains make respondents statistically dependent, so ordinary binomial standard errors understate uncertainty. We use the tree bootstrap of Baraff et al. (2016), which resamples recruits within the observed recruitment tree and re-estimates the share on each replicate, and we report confidence intervals at 80%.

Recruitment homophily. We estimate the rate at which AI/AN recruiters bring in AI/AN peers with a zero-inflated negative binomial (ZINB) model. We model the number of AI/AN peers a recruiter brings in against whether the recruiter is AI/AN, using the recruiter’s total recruits as the exposure; we exponentiate the coefficient to obtain an incidence-rate ratio.

Geographic relocation. For the regional map, each 2026 respondent is placed not at the survey hub but by the region they reported traveling from, weighted by how far and how long they traveled, in a soft per-person subregion assignment. The aggregated AI/AN counts are then smoothed with an Integrated Nested Laplace Approximation (INLA) BYM2 spatial model over the King County subregion adjacency, and the posterior means are renormalized so the countywide AI/AN estimate (1,905) is preserved.

Annualization. A point-in-time count records who is unsheltered on a single night, yet the number of people who are unsheltered at some point during a year is larger, because people enter and leave homelessness continuously. The Burt–Wilkins adjustment (Burt & Wilkins, 2005) converts a single-night count into an annual estimate through the expression:

$$\text{Annual} = A + ((B \times 51) \times (1 - C)),$$

in which A denotes the point-in-time count, B the weekly rate of new inflow, and C the share of those new entrants who had already experienced homelessness at some earlier point. The weekly inflow B is taken to be the fraction of the counted population whose current episode began within the past week, drawn from respondents reporting an episode of six nights or less, and the prior-homelessness share C is the fraction reporting more than one lifetime episode, which discounts the inflow so that returns to homelessness are not counted as new people. We estimate both quantities from each group’s unsheltered population using RDS-II visibility weighting (Volz–Heckathorn), as implemented in the RDS package. The factor 51 carries the one-week inflow across the remaining weeks of the year, so that the product $B \cdot 51$ approximates how many additional people pass through over twelve months relative to the single night, while the further multiplication by $(1 - C)$ retains only those who are genuinely new rather than merely returning.

The multiplier is bounded below by one and increases as turnover becomes more pronounced across the year. A multiplier near one describes a largely stable population that changes little, whereas a larger value indicates that many people move through homelessness between successive counts. Because inflow differs from one year to the next, the multiplier likewise varies across years and cannot be regarded as a fixed property of a group. The adjustment rests on several assumptions that warrant care in interpretation. First, the estimator treats the observed weekly inflow

as representative of every week of the year and so does not capture seasonal surges in entry or exit; second, it scales the single-night count without separately modeling deaths or permanent moves out of the county; and third, it inherits the sampling uncertainty of the survey-based inflow and prior-homelessness rates. This same single-night-to-annual logic underlies the widely cited Los Angeles annualization work (Flaming et al., 2018), which likewise scales an enumeration to a yearly total using turnover and prior-homelessness rates.

Choice of multiplier. Three annualization benchmarks bracket the range for the full county unsheltered population. The local Burt–Wilkins formula gives an annual estimate that peaks near 18,000 over 2022–2026, against a single-night high of about 11,800. HUD’s national annual-to-point-in-time ratio of roughly $1.4\text{--}2\times$ (HUD, 2024) implies about 17,000–24,000 in 2026, and a turnover-based multiplier of the kind estimated for Los Angeles, about $3\text{--}6\times$. This report adopts the local Burt–Wilkins figure, the most conservative of the three and best matched to King County’s high chronicity; the same choice governs the AI/AN estimates reported in the findings.

Appendix B. Chronic Homelessness Definition

This report uses the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition of chronic homelessness (HUD, 2015), codified at 24 CFR 578.3. A *chronically homeless* individual is a person with a disability (a diagnosable condition that limits one or more major life activities, per the McKinney–Vento Act) who:

- lives in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or an emergency shelter; and
- has been homeless continuously for at least 12 months, or on at least four separate occasions in the last three years where the combined length of those occasions totals at least 12 months.

A family with an adult head of household (or a minor head of household if no adult is present) who meets these criteria, including a family whose composition has changed while the head of household remained chronically homeless, is also counted as chronically homeless. A stay in an institutional care facility of fewer than 90 days does not break the continuity of homelessness, provided the person was homeless immediately before entering.

Appendix C. Sheltered and Unsheltered (HUD PIT Definitions)

The Point-in-Time count classifies people experiencing homelessness on the night of the count into two categories, following HUD's PIT methodology (HUD, 2024):

- **Sheltered homeless.** People staying in an emergency shelter, transitional housing, or a safe haven on the night of the count. In King County, these are enumerated from administrative (HMIS) records.
- **Unsheltered homeless.** People whose primary nighttime residence is a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for people, including the street, a vehicle, a park, an encampment, an abandoned building, or a bus or train station. In King County, these are enumerated with the RDS survey.