



Homelessness is one of the most difficult experiences people have in our community. In the five counties belonging to our continuum of care, 6,375 people are experiencing the traumatic instability that results from losing their home with about a fifth of them, 1,212 people, being in Niagara County. Compared to last year’s counts, the number of people experiencing homelessness decreased significantly (-26.5%), which is not surprising due to the impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on housing. At the beginning of the pandemic, an eviction moratorium was established that did not allow for eviction of tenants and has remained in place as of the time of this writing. The eviction moratorium has allowed people to remain permanently housed that otherwise would have been evicted and would have entered into homelessness. Social distancing protocols have also made an impact as there have been less opportunities for outreach and service efforts that normally would have been conducted in places such as care facilities and schools.

The Homeless Alliance of WNY operates the local Homeless Management Information System, also known as BAS-Net (Buffalo Area Services- NETWORK) which collects information on all HUD-funded and voluntarily participating non-HUD-funded homelessness alleviation providers, including outreach, emergency shelters, permanent supportive housing (including all housing first programs), rapid re-housing, and transitional housing providers. That information, other aggregate data shared by non-participating providers, and community demographic data from the American Community Survey are used to inform this report, which covers federal fiscal year 2020 (October 1, 2019 – September 30, 2020).

Key Findings

Annual Counts of People Experiencing Homelessness

	2019 HMIS	2019 Estimated Total Count	2020 HMIS	2020 Estimated Total Count	% Change
NY-508	5344	6963	4872	6375	-8.44%
Niagara County	1127	1649	849	1212	-26.5%

Table 1: Overall Homelessness in Niagara County

- 1,212 people experienced homelessness in Niagara County in 2020, a decrease of 26.5% compared to 2019
- The number of single clients served between 2019 and 2020 decreased 23.6%, a significant change compared to the 18.3% increase between 2018 and 2019
- The number of families served between 2019 and 2020 decreased 24.4%, indicating a continued downward trend when compared to the 18.2% decrease between 2018 and 2019

Demographics of Homelessness

Household Type and Homelessness

Household Type	Female	Male
Single Adult	21.2%	78.8%
Families	71.6%	28.4%
Couple With No Children	50.0%	50.0%
Female Single Parent	100.0%	0.0%
Male Single Parent	0.0%	100.0%
Grandparent(s) and Child	100.0%	0.0%
Two Parent Family	26.7%	73.3%

Table 2: Gender breakdown of household types based on all heads of households and their spouses/partners experiencing homelessness (730 clients)

Household Type	# of Households	% of Households	# of Clients	% of Clients
Single Adult	640	90.4%	640	75.4%
Families	68	9.6%	209	24.6%
Couple with No Children	7	1.0%	14	1.6%
Female Single Parent	39	5.5%	116	13.7%
Grandparent(s) and Child	2	0.3%	5	0.6%
Male Single Parent	5	0.7%	10	1.2%
Two Parent Family	15	2.1%	64	7.5%
Grand Total	708		849	

Table 3: Family type distribution of the households experiencing homelessness (1 single adult = 1 household)

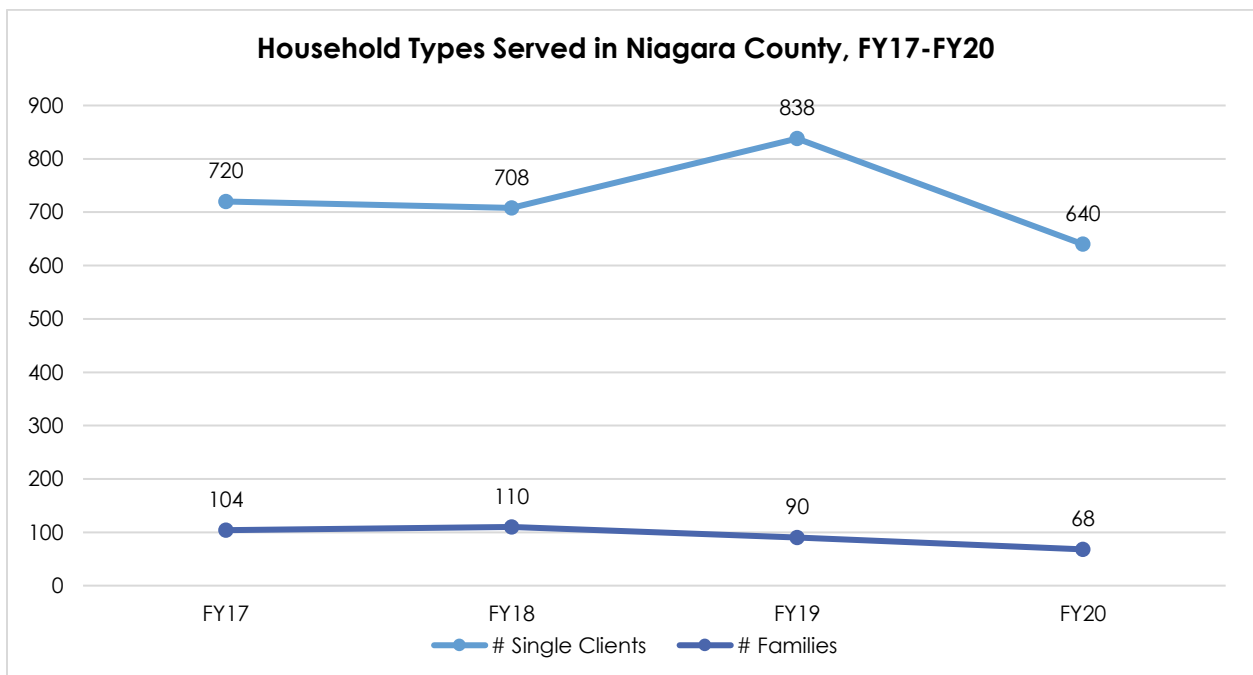


Figure 1: A look at the changes in the number of single clients and total families entering the homeless system over time.

Race, Ethnicity, and Homelessness

Race	% of People Experiencing Homelessness	% of All City of Niagara Falls Residents	% of All Niagara County Residents
Asian	0.5%	1.7%	1.1%
Black	36.3%	22.1%	7.0%
Native American	1.6%	1.2%	1.0%
Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian	0.2%	0.1%	0.0%
White	48.9%	68.0%	87.2%
Multiracial	8.0%	5.9%	2.8%

Table 4: Racial demographics of people experiencing homelessness who reported their race, residents of the city of Niagara Falls, and residents of Niagara County¹

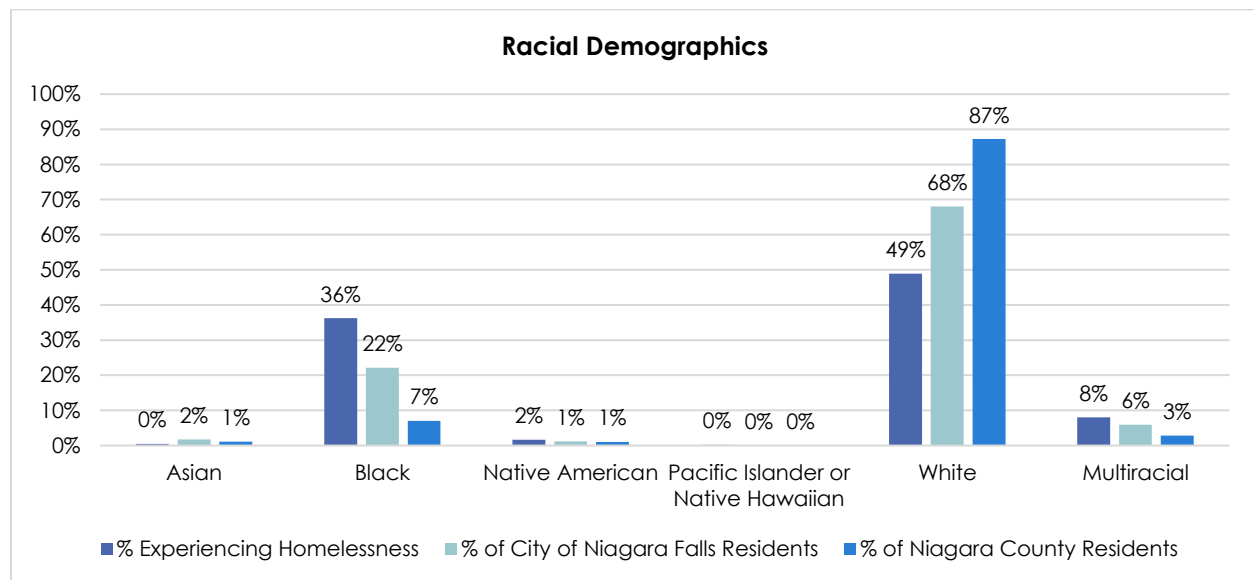


Figure 2: Percent of population in each racial category

Ethnicity	% of People Experiencing Homelessness	% of All City of Niagara Falls Residents	% of All Niagara County Residents
Hispanic or Latino	8.4%	5.3%	3.0%
Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino	91.6%	94.7%	97.0%

Table 5: Ethnicity demographics of people experiencing homelessness who reported their ethnicity, residents of the city of Niagara Falls, and residents of Niagara County²

¹ 2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles (data.census.gov)

² 2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles (data.census.gov)

Age, Gender, Household Type, and Homelessness

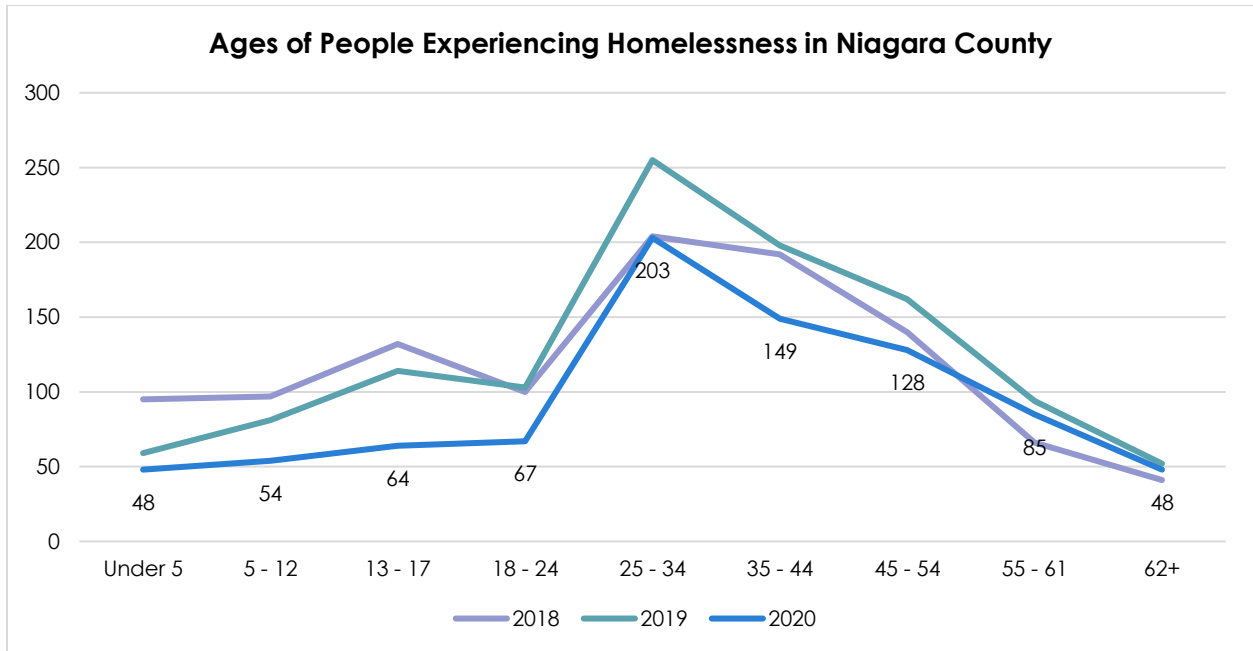


Figure 3: Age distribution of people experiencing homelessness 2019-2020

	Youth	Age 5 & Under	Age 5-12	Age 13-17	Adults	Age 18-24	Age 25-34	Age 35-44	Age 45-54	Age 55-61	Age 62+
Count	166	48	54	64	680	67	203	149	128	85	48
Percent	19.6%	5.7%	6.4%	7.6%	80.4%	7.9%	24.0%	17.6%	15.1%	10.0%	5.7%

Table 6: Total adults/children experiencing homelessness who provided a date of birth (846 clients)

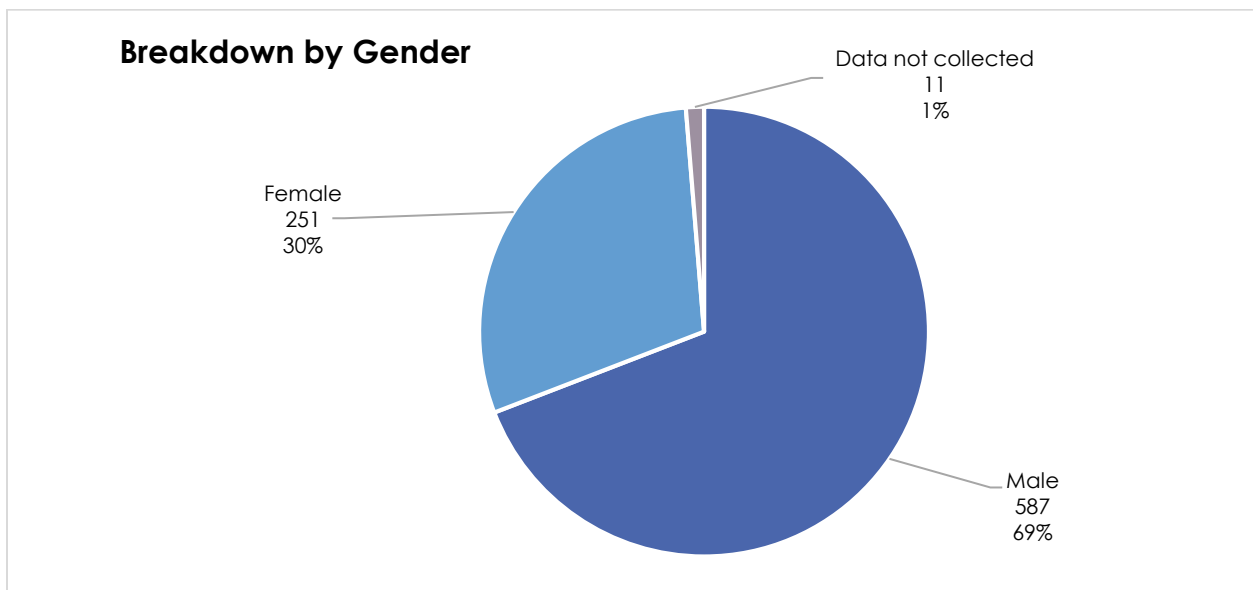


Figure 4: Gender distribution of all people experiencing homelessness

Disability Data

Just over a third (37.7%) of the 849 clients who provided their disability status report having at least one disability. Included in this rate is 6.4% of clients who reported having a disability but did not specify the type; as a result, we cannot determine how many disabilities they have. When only adults (ages 18+) are considered, this rate increases to 45.1%. People with disabilities are over-represented in the homelessness system. This is made clear by the discrepancies in the rates of people with disabilities in the city of Niagara Falls and general Niagara county (15.9%, 13.9% respectively) compared to the rates of people with disability experiencing homelessness in Niagara county seen here.³

	No Disability	1 Disability	2 Disabilities	3+ Disabilities	Number Unknown
% of Disabilities Reported	62.3%	16.0%	7.2%	8.1%	6.4%

Table 8: The disability status of those experiencing homelessness who reported their disability status (849 clients); if reporting yes to having a disability, the number of disabilities is indicated when data was provided

Disability Type	Count of Clients	% of All Clients w 1+ Disability	% of All Clients
Alcohol Abuse	63	19.63%	7.39%
Chronic Health Condition	72	22.43%	8.44%
Developmental	26	8.10%	3.05%
Drug Abuse	83	25.86%	9.73%
HIV/AIDS	4	1.25%	0.47%
Mental Health Problem	184	57.32%	21.57%
Physical	72	22.43%	8.44%

Table 9: Breakdown of the types of disabilities experienced by both clients with disabilities (320) and all clients (849)

³ 2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles (data.census.gov)

Before and After Homelessness

The situations that lead to homelessness, where people resided prior to entering a program, and where they go to after exiting

Primary Reason for Homelessness	Client Count	Percent
Release From Institution	142	34.2%
Eviction by primary tenant	59	14.2%
Loss of Job/Income (includes public benefits)	34	8.2%
Household Disputes (not DV)	31	7.5%
Problems with building	29	7.0%
Relocation from out of the NY-508 CoC Area	24	5.8%
Court eviction by landlord	23	5.5%
Mental Health	21	5.1%
Substance Abuse	17	4.1%
Domestic Violence	15	3.6%

Table 10: The top ten reasons cited for homelessness by heads of households, not including those who did not provide a response (415 clients)

Residence Prior to Project Entry	Client Count	Percent
Jail, prison or juvenile detention facility	111	20.8%
Staying or living in a family member's room, apartment or house	101	18.9%
Staying or living in a friend's room, apartment or house	85	15.9%
Emergency shelter, hotel/motel paid for w/ voucher, or RHY-funded Host Home shelter	58	10.9%
Place not meant for habitation	50	9.4%
Rental by client, no ongoing housing subsidy	41	7.7%
Psychiatric hospital or other psychiatric facility	15	2.8%
Safe Haven	14	2.6%
Transitional housing for homeless persons (including homeless youth)	13	2.4%
Hospital or other residential non-psychiatric medical facility	12	2.3%

Table 11: The top ten locations clients were residing at before entering the homelessness system according to heads of households, not including those who did not provide a response (533 clients)

Exit Destinations	Count	%
Permanent	199	30.2%
Owned by client, no ongoing housing subsidy	12	1.8%
Owned by client, with ongoing housing subsidy	1	0.2%
Rental by client, no ongoing housing subsidy	95	14.4%
Rental by client, with other ongoing housing subsidy	17	2.6%
Rental by client, with RRH or equivalent subsidy	6	0.9%
Staying or living with family, permanent tenure	45	6.8%
Staying or living with friends, permanent tenure	23	3.5%
Temporary	64	9.7%
Emergency shelter, voucher for hotel/motel, or RHY-funded Host Home shelter	4	0.6%
Hotel or motel paid for without emergency shelter voucher	4	0.6%
Staying or living with family, temporary tenure	22	3.3%
Staying or living with friends, temporary tenure	26	4.0%
Transitional housing for homeless persons (including homeless youth)	8	1.2%
Institution	35	5.3%
Foster care home or foster care group home	4	0.6%
Hospital or other residential non-psychiatric medical facility	5	0.8%
Jail, prison or juvenile detention facility	8	1.2%
Long-term care facility or nursing home	1	0.2%
Psychiatric hospital or other psychiatric facility	6	0.9%
Substance abuse treatment facility or detox center	11	1.7%
Unstable	2	0.3%
Place not meant for habitation	2	0.3%
No Data Available	359	54.6%
Client doesn't know	3	0.5%
Client refused	7	1.1%
Data not collected	4	0.6%
No exit interview completed	214	32.5%
Other	130	19.8%
Grand Total	658	

Table 12: Exit destinations provided by the heads of household at their latest exit in fiscal year 2020

Locations of Homelessness and Housing Costs

Zip Code of Last Permanent Address	Percent
14301	36.1%
14303	13.7%
14305	12.8%
14304	9.6%
14094	8.2%

Table 13: Top five zip codes of the last permanent address provided by heads of households (219 clients)

Percent of Income Towards Rent	City of Niagara Falls	Niagara County - All	Niagara County Excluding Niagara Falls
Less than 15.0 percent	15.2%	17.6%	19.1%
15.0 to 19.9 percent	10.5%	12.9%	14.2%
20.0 to 24.9 percent	9.0%	10.6%	11.6%
25.0 to 29.9 percent	10.6%	12.7%	14.0%
30.0 to 34.9 percent	7.4%	7.6%	7.8%
35.0 percent or more	47.4%	38.5%	33.4%

Table 14: Percent of people paying a certain percent of their income on their housing in the city of Niagara Falls, Niagara county, and Niagara county excluding the city of Niagara Falls⁴

The concentration of people experiencing homelessness in the city of Niagara Falls is not entirely surprising when you see that over half of renters (54.8%) pay more of their income towards rent than is considered affordable (30%). Efforts to ensure that residents of the city of Niagara Falls can maintain their rent should explore housing affordability initiatives, which include subsidies paid to renters.

Conclusion: Policy Recommendations

The solutions to homelessness is a home. Some people may need more support to remain housed but the basic solution is still finding people safe, affordable and decent housing. The biggest problem is there are not enough affordable housing units available for those at the lowest income levels.

While New York State's laudable initiative to create 100,000 affordable housing units and 6,000 supportive housing units is a good start, these projects often don't reach those at the lowest income levels. A soon-to-be released study by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) is going to verify and quantify the deficit of housing options for those at the lowest income levels. Until we address this deficit, homelessness and people living in substandard housing will continue to be an issue.

Even with the additional Section 8 vouchers provided by the federal government, homelessness will still be an issue because there are not enough available housing units. Some people are losing their allocated vouchers because they can't find housing.

National, State and local elected officials will proclaim they are doing the best they can to address this issue, and there is no doubt of their sincerity, it simply isn't enough. We all have to do better.

The Homeless Alliance of WNY recommends:

1. There are three ways to provide housing to those most in need:
 - a. Subsidize renters with more Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8)
 - b. Further subsidize the developers with HOME funds and project based Section 8 vouchers.
 - c. Invest in public housing through rehabilitation of existing units and the creations of new public housing units.

⁴ 2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles (data.census.gov)

2. The housing marketing study conducted by LISC cannot be allowed to collect dust on a shelf. Once it is released, all levels of government, nonprofits and the private sector must embrace and commit to building more affordable housing for those at the lowest income levels.
3. Housing is an undisputed Social Determinant of health. The medical community must be more involved in providing housing and end questionable releases of patients into homelessness and unstable housing.
4. There needs to be better discharge planning between correctional facilities and homelessness providers. Too often, people cycle between homelessness and corrections. It's been proven that stable housing reduces recidivism.

In conclusion, the solution to homelessness is housing, housing and housing. It isn't rocket science. There are no magic bullets. The solution is very easy and very complex at the same time. The question is do we have the collective will to finally end homelessness?