

Frequently Asked Questions

Homelessness in Paso Robles



Q: How many people are homeless?

A: On a given night in 2019, 1,483 people experienced homelessness in SLO County.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Veterans Affairs consider a person to be homeless if they are sleeping outside, in a place not meant for human habitation such as a car or abandoned building, or in an emergency shelter or transitional housing program. Other federal agencies have different definitions for homelessness.

In 2021 in Paso Robles on any given night there are more than 200 people sleeping outdoors, many in our riverbed. In the 2019 Point in Time Survey there were 221 unsheltered and 18 sheltered individuals in Paso Robles.

	COAST	SAN LUIS OBISPO	SOUTH COUNTY	NORTH COUNTY	TOTAL
Sleeping Accommodation					
Emergency Shelter	3	135	24	124	286
Transitional Housing	0	0	25	0	25
On the Street	55	199	70	112	436
Encampment Areas	60	140	28	91	319
Cars/Vans/RVs	91	97	61	138	387
Abandoned Buildings	14	0	3	13	30
Total	223	571	211	478	1,483

Figure 1 SLO County Point-In-Time Report 2019

Q: Who experiences homelessness?

A: On a single night in 2019 in the US, an estimated:

171,670 people in families, including children, experienced homelessness.

396,045 single individuals experienced homelessness.

96,141 individuals had chronic patterns of homelessness.

37,085 veterans experienced homelessness.

According to [ECHO](#), our local homeless services organization, **our homeless population is local: 85% lived in Paso Robles prior to becoming homeless.**

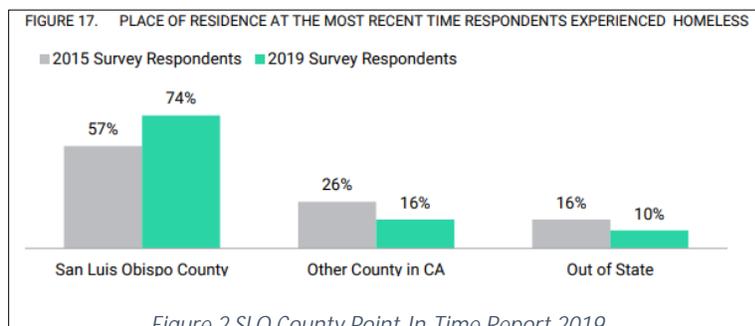


Figure 2 SLO County Point-In-Time Report 2019



Q: Why do people become homeless?

A: Reasons vary, but according to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the main reason people become homeless is **because they cannot find housing they can afford**. Other factors can include a chronic health condition, mental illness, domestic violence and more. [Read more about the causes of homelessness.](#)

Working together with Transitions Mental Health Association and ECHO, our Paso Robles Police Department's **Community Action Team** (CAT) has identified some of the primary reasons that someone may find themselves experiencing homelessness here. They include:

1. Those who are homeless due to circumstances beyond their control (such as limited housing options, financial challenges and domestic abuse) and seek a return to self-sufficiency.
2. Those suffering from mental, physical and behavioral health issues such as substance addiction and drug/alcohol issues.
3. Those who refuse help and choose to live outdoors, while observing the law.
4. Those who refuse help, make a conscious choice to be homeless, and may be engaging in illegal activity such as theft, public intoxication, trespassing, aggressive panhandling, and vandalism.

PRIMARY CAUSE OF HOMELESSNESS

The primary cause of an individual's inability to obtain or retain housing is often difficult to pinpoint, as it is often the result of multiple and compounding causes. An inability to secure adequate housing can also lead to an inability to address other basic needs, such as healthcare and adequate nutrition.

Thirty percent (30%) of respondents reported the primary cause of their homelessness being a result of job loss. Alcohol or drug use was the next most frequently reported cause of homelessness at 20%. Eviction was the next leading cause (17%) followed by a divorce or breakup (11%).

FIGURE 19. PRIMARY CAUSE OF HOMELESSNESS (TOP RESPONSES IN 2019)

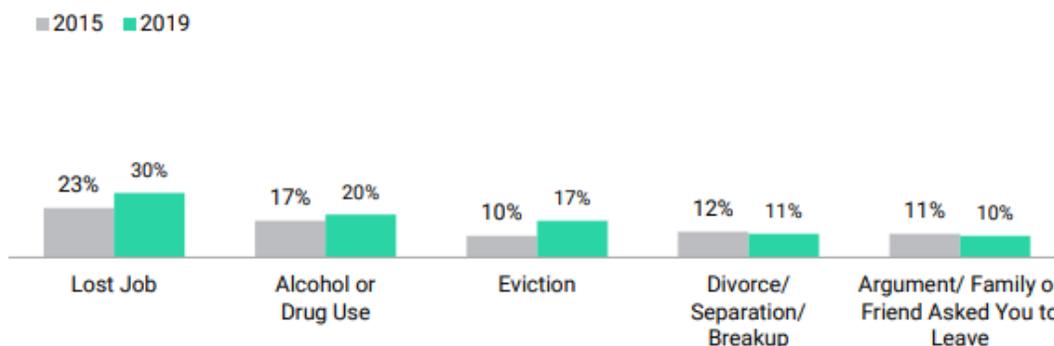


Figure 3 SLO County Point-In-Time Report 2019



Q: Is there a solution to homelessness?

A: According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the answer is housing. To end homelessness, the nation will need an adequate supply of housing that is affordable to lower income households. Until that problem is solved, local service providers will help people return to housing, connect to employment, and get needed services and support. [Read more about specific solutions to homelessness.](#)

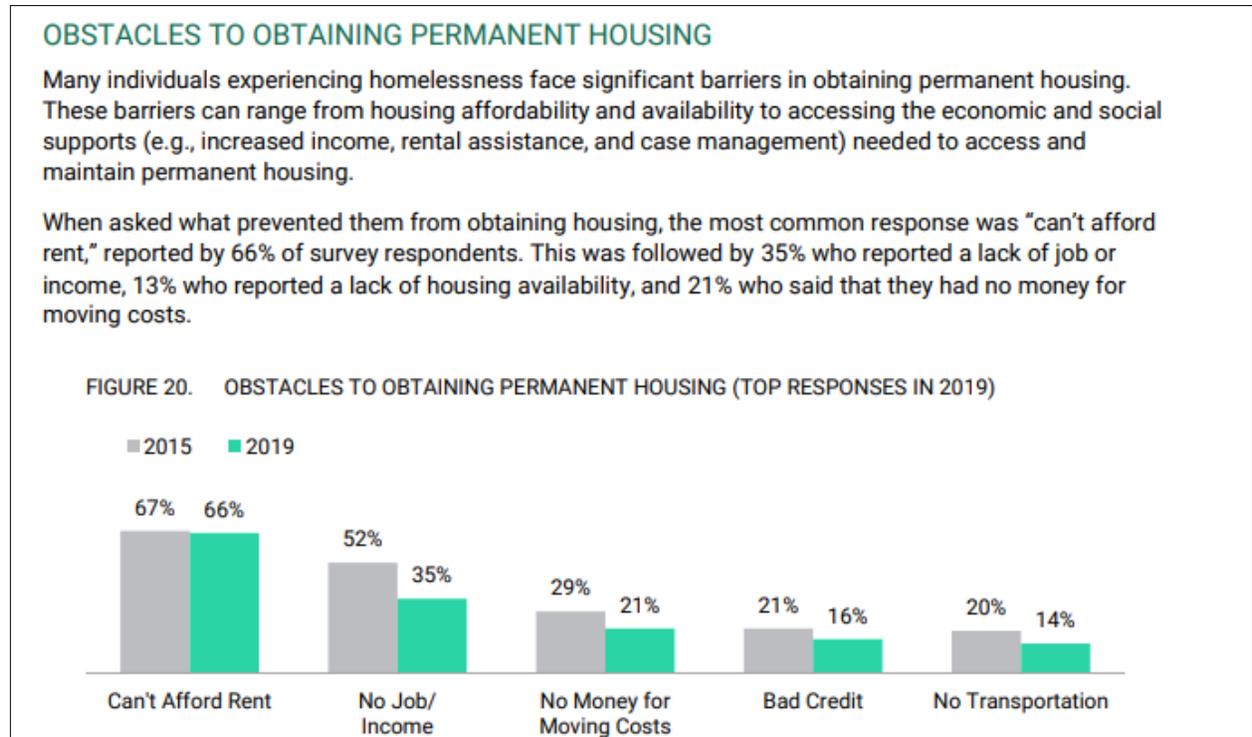


Figure 4 SLO County Point-In-Time Report 2019

Q: What is the City of Paso Robles doing to address homelessness?

A: Paso Robles has been addressing the challenges of reducing our homeless population with the resources we have available. Our ongoing priority is on safety and to provide access to help for those who are open to receiving assistance.

- Instituted the Community Action Team in 2019
- Reallocated a \$960,000 State Homeless Emergency Aid Program grant award to support the 60-bed ECHO homeless shelter in Paso Robles in 2020
- Allocated \$47,428 in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds in 2020 to ECHO
- Allocated \$16,515 in CDBG funds to ECHO and 5 Cities Homeless Coalition to date in 2021

In addition, the City approved construction of 299 units affordable to very low- and low-income households in its 2014-2021 Housing Element and has the quantifiable objective to assist in the approval of 5 affordable housing projects in its 2021-2028 Housing Element.



The City has approved two Specific Plans that would add more than 2,000 new housing units, including 299 low-income and affordable housing units; adopted an ADU policy to allow building of additional housing units on R1 parcels that cannot be used for short-term rentals and issued 20 ADU permits to date; and limited the number of non-hosted short-term rental permits to 325 total.

Q: What is the City doing to reduce the risk of fires associated with homeless individuals in the riverbed?

A: In 2019, City Council appropriated \$351,000 to conduct hazardous fuels mitigation work in the Salinas Riverbed. This work included grazing, masticating, and tree trimming.

In 2020, City Council appropriated \$278,000 to mitigate approximately 181 acres of hazardous fuels in the Salinas Riverbed. This work included grazing and mowing.

In 2020, the City of Paso Robles initiated a permitting process with the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) and Fish and Wildlife to develop a five-year plan/permit for reducing hazardous fuels in the riverbed. In April of 2021, RWQCB approved the five-year plan. Approval is also required from Fish and Wildlife to finalize the permitting process. It is estimated that the permit should be approved by Fish and Wildlife by July 1.

Since September 2020, approximately 83,790 pounds of garbage have been removed from the Riverbed to address fire hazards.

On October 6, 2020, the City Council adopted an urgency ordinance adopting Chapter 7.50 of the Paso Robles Municipal Code (PRMC) to amend the City's camping ordinance consistent with legal requirements while authorizing the Fire Chief to identify high fire risk areas where camping is prohibited.

Currently, over 650 [goats are grazing in the riverbed corridor](#) and work is expected to be complete by July 1, 2021. Once a permit has been finalized by Fish and Wildlife, Paso Robles Fire and Emergency Services (PRFES) will evaluate additional mitigation actions to include mowing and trimming.

PRFES was successful in obtaining a grant from the San Luis Obispo County Fire Safe Council for most of the riverbed work in FY 20/21. PRFES received a \$50,000 planning grant and \$180,000 operational mitigation grant.

On May 24, 2021, the Fire Chief declared the areas from Niblick Bridge north to the City Limits as high fire risk areas consistent with PRMC Chapter 7.50. Notices were posted throughout the Salinas riverbed stating that all persons must vacate, and all personal property must be removed from high fire risk areas prior to May 28, 2021, at 5 p.m. Efforts are on-going to ensure compliance with the order.



Q: What can the Police Department do to enforce camping, loitering and behavior issues?

A: The US 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, in *Martin v. City of Boise*, held that the Eighth Amendment of the United States Constitution, which prohibits cruel and unusual punishment, “prohibits the imposition of criminal penalties for sitting, sleeping, or lying outside on public property for homeless individuals who cannot obtain shelter.” The *Boise* case challenged the City of Boise’s enforcement of its Camping and Disorderly Conduct Ordinances against persons experiencing homelessness—those who need to sleep in public in the absence of adequate housing or shelter. The ruling means that homeless individuals who receive criminal citations can now proceed with constitutional claims against a city issuing such citations. Since the City of Paso Robles is under the jurisdiction of the 9th Circuit, the City must adhere to the court’s decisions.

As noted above, Section 7.50.040 of the Paso Robles Municipal Code was enacted to comply with the 9th Circuit’s *Boise* decision.

PRMC 7.50.040 A.

Absent exigent circumstances relating to immediate threats to the public health, safety, or welfare, including, but not limited to, conditions described in [Section 7.50.020](#), subsections C and D, the provisions of this chapter will not be enforced against indigent homeless persons sitting, lying, or sleeping on public property when no alternative shelter, including a publicly provided campsite, hotel vouchers, or similar accommodations, is available in accordance with the holding in *Martin v. City of Boise* (9th Cir. 2019) 920 F.3d 584.

As of May of 2021, after the declaration by the Paso Robles Fire Chief, the Police Department began actively enforcing Paso Robles Municipal Code 7.50.020 which prohibits camping upon sections of the Salinas River designated by the fire chief as a fire risk area. Fire risk areas are determined by the probability of wildfire through assessing vegetation, fire history, and topography.

Q: How many calls for service do we have each year related to homelessness issues?

A: The Police Department typically responds to approximately 1,000 calls per year for service related to homeless and mental health related needs. Midway through 2021 the PRPD has already responded to approximately 800 calls for service identified with mental health or homelessness components.



CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Homelessness and incarceration are often interrelated. Individuals without stable housing are at greater risk of criminal justice system involvement, particularly those with mental health issues, veterans, and youth. Individuals with past incarceration face significant barriers to exiting homelessness due to stigmatization and policies affecting their ability to gain employment and access housing opportunities.³

INCARCERATION

When asked if they had spent a night in jail or prison in the last 12 months, thirty-seven percent (37%) of respondents experiencing homelessness reported that they had, similar to 2015 (39%).

FIGURE 28. SPENT A NIGHT IN JAIL IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS

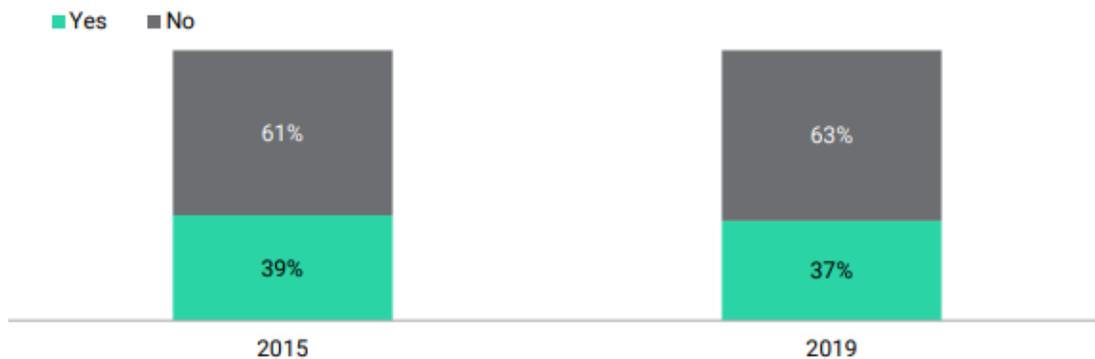


Figure 5 SLO County Point-In-Time Report 2019

Q: How can residents report issues related to homelessness, such as panhandling, abandoned belongings and other illegal activities?

A: Call the Paso Robles Police Department at 805-237-6464 or file an online police report at PRCITY.com

Q: What services are available in the area for those experiencing homelessness?

A: ECHO provides homeless services that include:

- 60 rooms in Paso Robles
- Emergency night-by-night shelter
- An intensive 90-day residency program
- Case Management
- Shower Program
- Mental & Behavioral Health
- NA Meetings
- Job Training/Employment Placement
- Financial Literacy
- CalFresh Sign Ups
- Children Enrichment Programs
- Hygiene Supplies
- Haircuts

To date in 2021, ECHO has served 388 men, 171 women and 29 children experiencing homelessness in Paso Robles. Here is a [full list of resources in SLO County](#).



Q: What is the City doing to improve access to services for persons with behavioral health and substance use needs?

A: The Paso Robles Police Department’s Community Assistance Team (CAT) partners with County Behavioral Health to make service referrals and coordinates street outreach with a number of service providers, including ECHO, the United Way, Transitions Mental Health and more (see Figure 6).

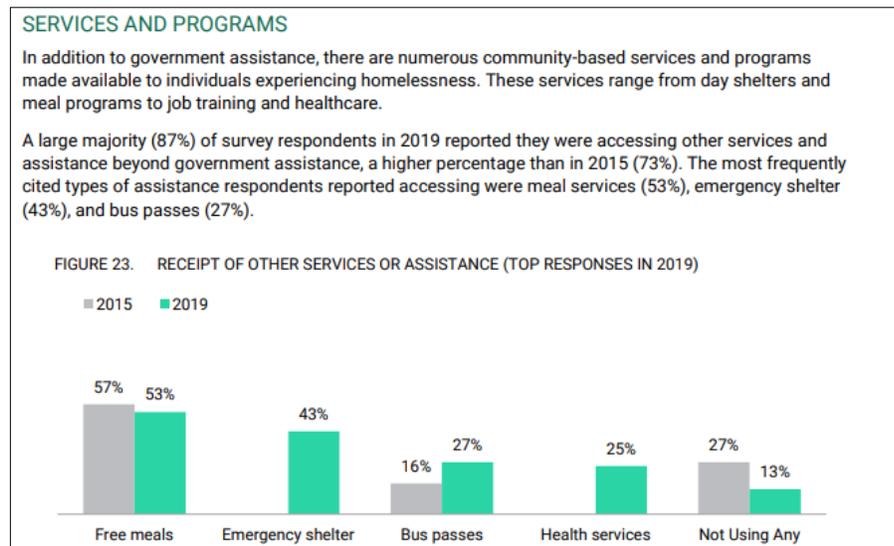


Figure 6 SLO County Point-In-Time Report 2019

Q: What can people do if they want to help?

A: Residents who would like to support and improve ECHO’s efforts can:

- Donate Funds – www.echoshelter.org/donate
- Volunteer – www.echoshelter.org/volunteer
- Sponsor a Fundraiser – www.echoshelter.org
 - Long Walk Home – September 2021
 - Turkey Trot – November 2021
 - Empty Bowls – April 2022

Q: Who can I contact if I have more questions regarding homelessness?

A: If you have questions that are not addressed here, you can contact:

- ECHO – Wendy Lewis wlewis@echoshelter.org
- PRPD CAT Team – Sergeant Afana tafana@prcity.com or call 805.237.6464
- City Staff – Julie Dahlen, jdahlen@prcity.com

To add an FAQ, contact Shonna Howenstine at shonna@prcity.com