# 2019 Racial Disparities Study Summary

Purpose: This document will summarize findings from a study of racial disparities in the provision and outcomes of homeless assistance in the Upstate Continuum of Care. Conclusions and recommendations are provided at the end of the report.

Date Range: Calendar Year 2018 (1/1/2018 to 12/31/2018), unless otherwise stated.

Provision of Services Questions:

1. Does the racial composition of the Upstate CoC homeless population mirror the Census racial demographic of our 13-county region?
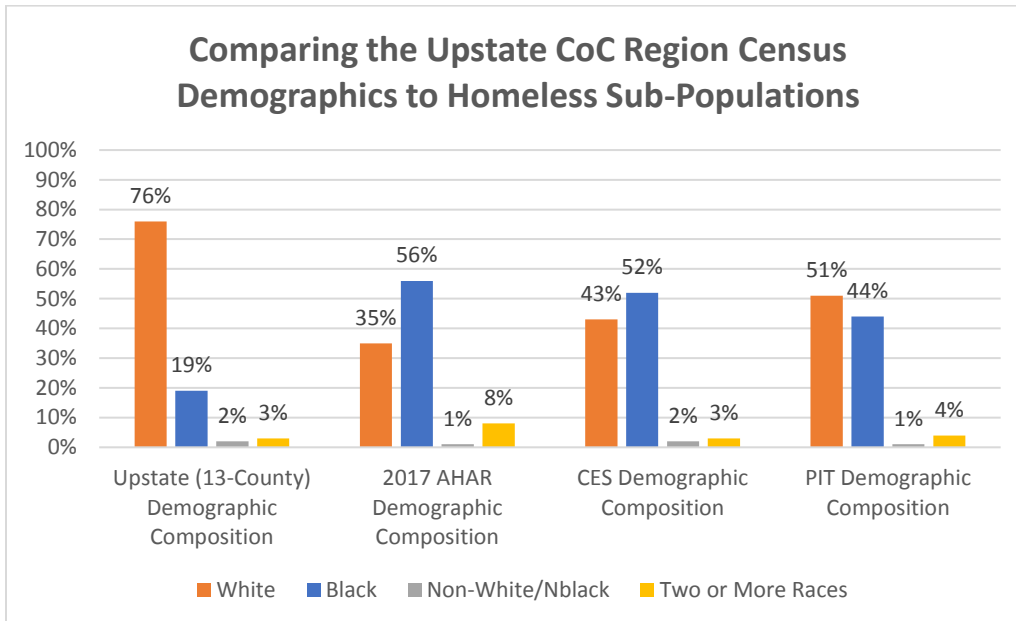
When the Census demographics of our 13-county region (source: American Community Survey) was compared to data on homelessness in our region (subpopulations include Annualized HMIS/AHAR data, Coordinated Entry System data, and the 2019 Point in Time Count data), a disturbing trend emerged. Across all three homeless subpopulations, the homeless data showed a large over-representation of Black/African Americans in the homeless population (hovering around 50%) compared to Census-level information (19% of the total 13-county population). This disproportionate skew was particularly pronounced in our HMIS/AHAR (56%) and CES (53%) samples, and to a lesser extent in the PIT sample (44%). The answer to our original question is a resounding NO – the racial composition of the homeless population does not in-the-least mirror the general population of residents in our 13-county region. Compared to the general racial composition of the Upstate region, Black/African Americans are vastly over-represented in the homeless population.

2. Are there differences in the provision of homeless service resources based on race?

2019 NOFA - Comparison of Primary Race Among Clients in Various Project Types
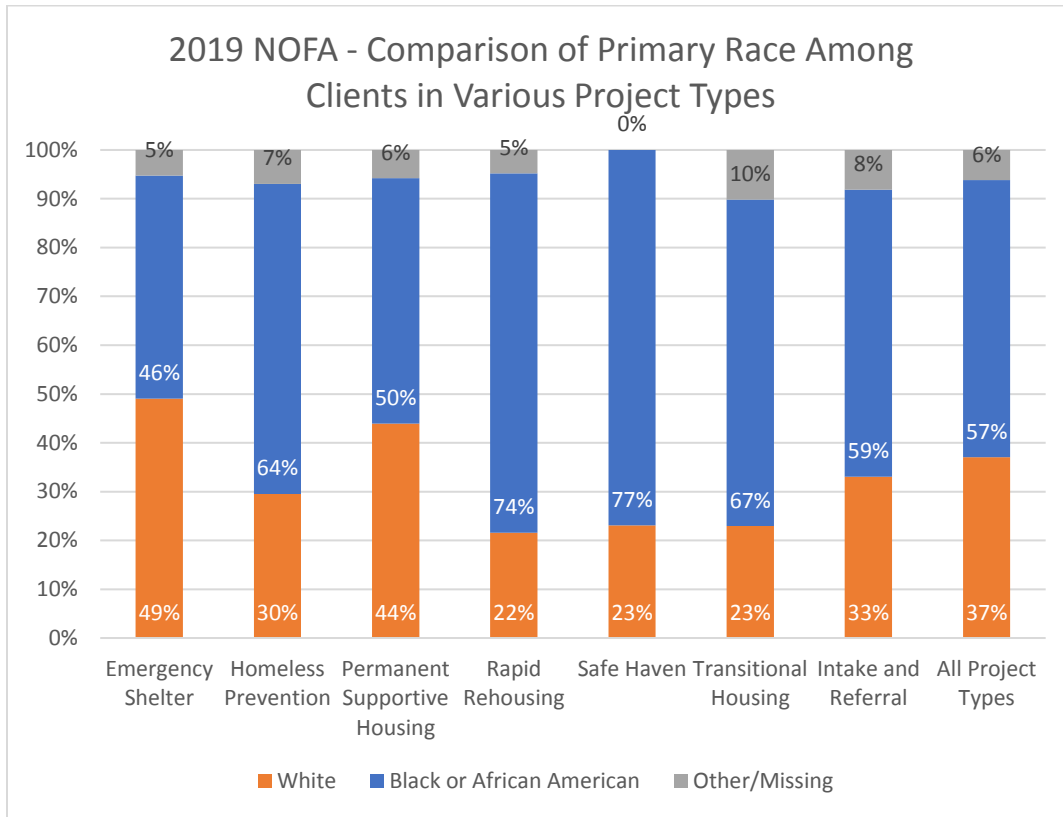
The figure above conveys the percentage of persons entering specific project types by primary race. Across "All Project Types" (far right of figure), 57% of those who were served described themselves as primarily Black/African American. Thirty-seven percent described themselves as primarily White – the remainder were another race/races or had missing information.

When specific project types were considered, some differences began to arise. Compared to utilization data from all project types, a disproportionately high percentage of Whites entered Emergency Shelter and Permanent Supportive housing. In both cases, a higher percentage of Whites (+12% for Emergency Shelter and +7% for PSH) entered these projects than would be expected compared to the omnibus "All Project Type" benchmark.

Conversely, a significantly higher percentage of Black/African Americans accessed Rapid Rehousing, Transitional Housing, Safe Haven (small sample N=13), and Homelessness Prevention resources compared to entrance rates across all project types. This high usage-rate among Black/African Americans does not indicate a disparity in access to program enrollment. However, data from two major project types (Emergency Shelter and Permanent Supportive Housing) does indicate a slight over-representation of Whites accessing these important resources. Engagements with Intake and Referral – an initial starting point for many persons experiencing homelessness – most closely mirrored the "All Project Types" benchmark.

Outcome of Services Questions:

In addition to focusing on the equitable provision of homeless assistance, these analyses intended to identify disparities in the outcomes of homeless services between White and Black/African American clients. Four of the seven HUD-defined System Performance Measures (SPM) were used to assess outcomes across the two racial groups. The four SPMs analyzed were:

1. Length of Time Homeless (Metric 1)
2. Exits to and Retention of Permanent Housing (Metric 7)
3. Returns to Homelessness (Metric 2)
4. Increases in Income (Metric 4)

To guide the analysis of potential racial inequities in the outcomes of services provided, four questions were developed that all reference the following prompt:

"When comparing the White and Black/African American populations in HMIS, are there differences in…"

1. The length of time a person is experiencing homelessness?
2. The percentage of clients who 1) exited from ES, SH, TH, and RRH to a permanent housing destination and 2) the percentage of clients in permanent housing projects who exited to a permanent housing destination or remained in an applicable permanent housing destination during the study period?
3. The percentage of clients who return to homelessness within two years after originally exiting to a permanent housing destination?
4. The percentage of clients who increased their income while participating in a CoC-funded project?

Data was compiled for the 2017 and 2018 calendar years. Where appropriate, comparisons were made between the two years to identify trends.

Length of Time Homeless

Length of Time in Emergency Shelter, Safe Haven, and Transitional Housing
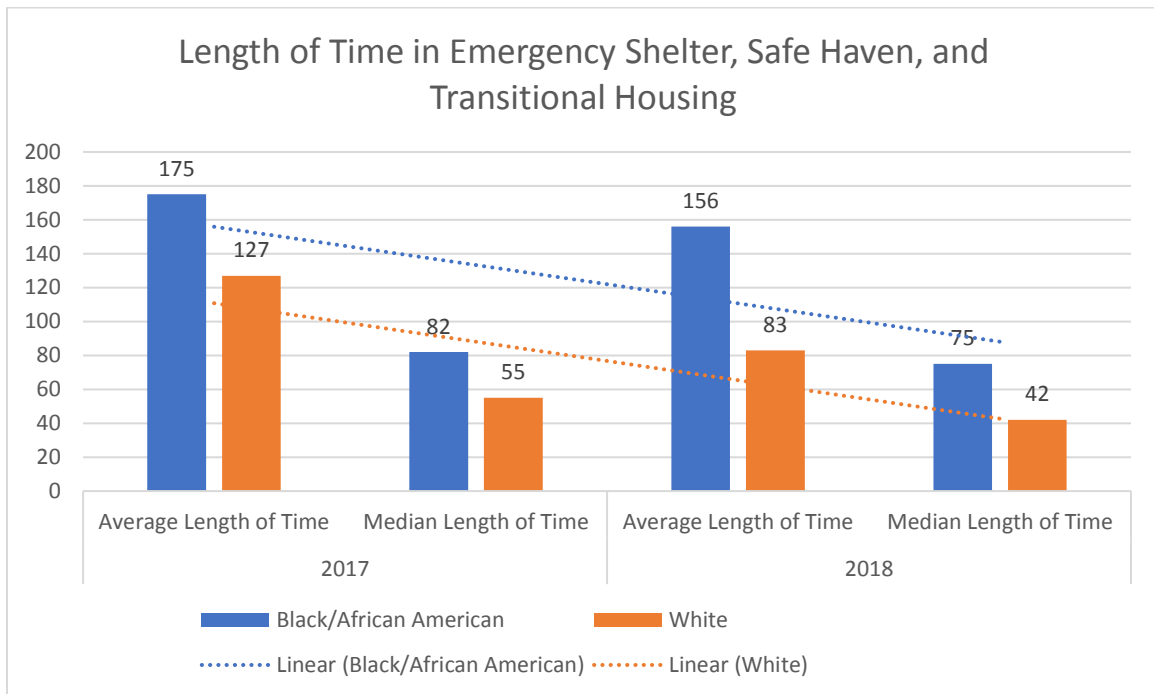
Similar to 2017 data, Black/African Americans in 2018 were more likely to have longer median and average lengths of stay in sheltered settings. While both demographic groups experienced declines in average and median lengths of stays, the rate of decrease was not equivalent across the two races. The average (-44 days) and median (-13 day) length of stay for Whites decreased more substantially than the average (-19 days) and median (-7) stay for Black/African Americans.

At the median (the most accurate measure of length of time homeless), White respondents during 2018 stayed 33 fewer days than Black/African Americans. This gap between Whites and Blacks was up six days compared to 2017 (27 days at the median).

Exits to and Retention of Permanent Housing

Exits to and Retention of Permanent Housing
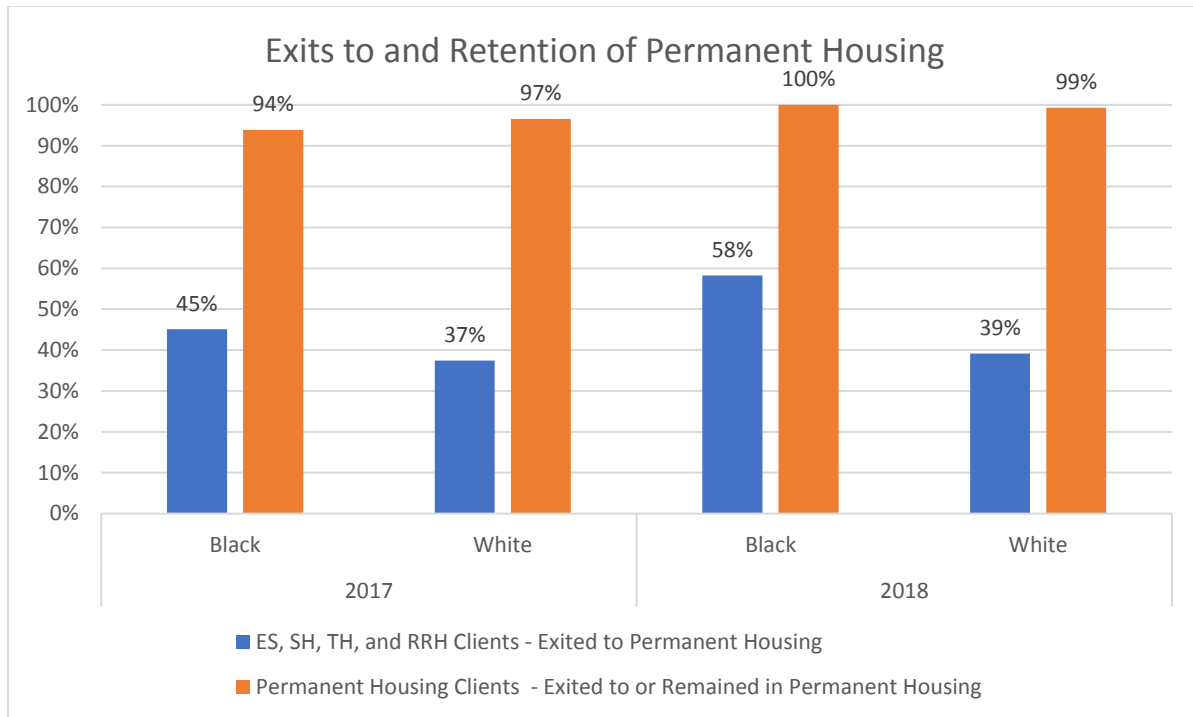
Regarding race, permanent housing clients during 2018 were equally likely to exit to or remain in permanent housing (100% and 99%). This near perfect rate of permanent housing retention increased from levels observed in 2017. From 2017 to 2018, the housing retention rate Black/African American permanent housing clients rose 6% compared to a 2% rise among White permanent housing clients.

The rate of exits to permanent housing for ES, SH, TH, and RRH clients also rose from 2017 to 2018. Among Black/African American clients, the rate of permanent housing exits rose 13% (45% in 2017 to 58% in 2018). The rate of permanent housing exits among Whites rose at a slower, almost negligible 2% (from 37% in 2017 to 39% in 2018).

In both years, permanent housing exit rates for Black/African Americans far exceeded the rate of White clients securing permanent housing after exiting (+8% in 2017 and +19% in 2018).

Returns to Homelessness

Percentage of Returns Within Two Years of Exiting to Permanent Housing
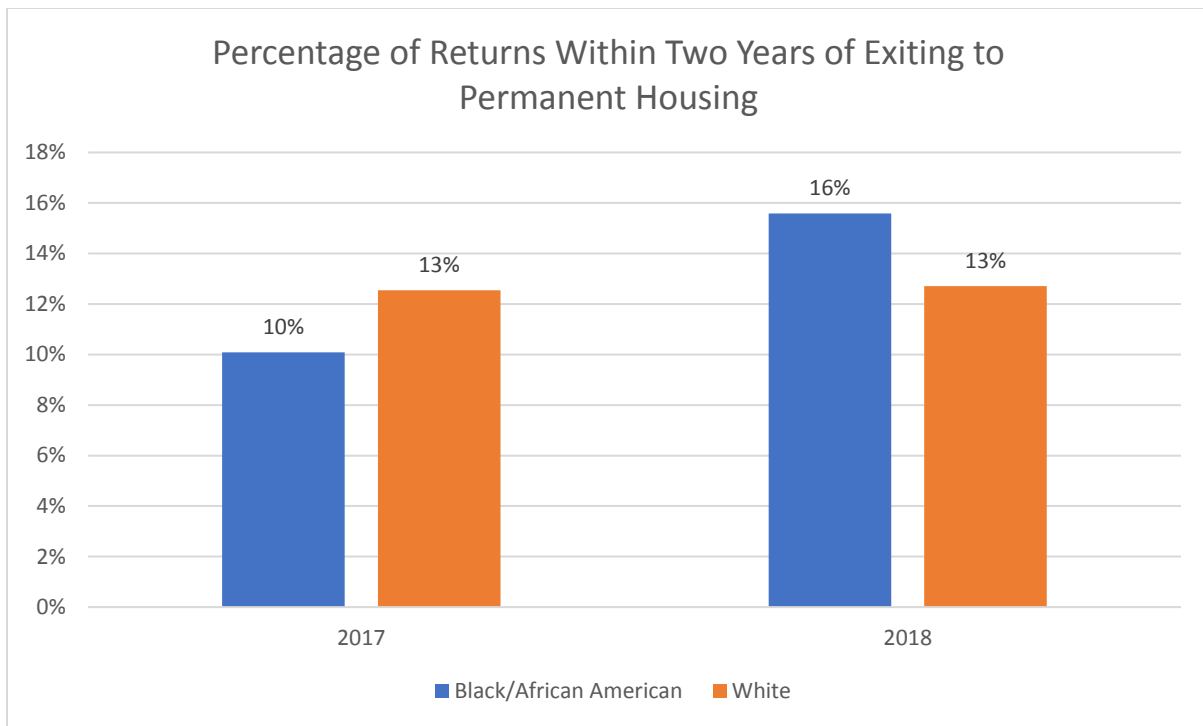
Contrary to 2017, White clients in 2018 were less likely to return to homelessness within two years after exiting to a permanent housing destination compared to Black/African American clients (13% compared to 16%). This reverses a trend observed in the 2017 data.

Whereas the rate in which White's returned to homelessness remained the same across the two samples (13%), there was a 6% increase in the rate Black/African Americans returned to homelessness from 2017 to 2018. This negative trend indicates maintaining permanent housing has been more difficult for Black/African Americans than it has been for Whites.

Increases in Income

Increases in Income by Stayers and Leavers

Black/African American ■ White
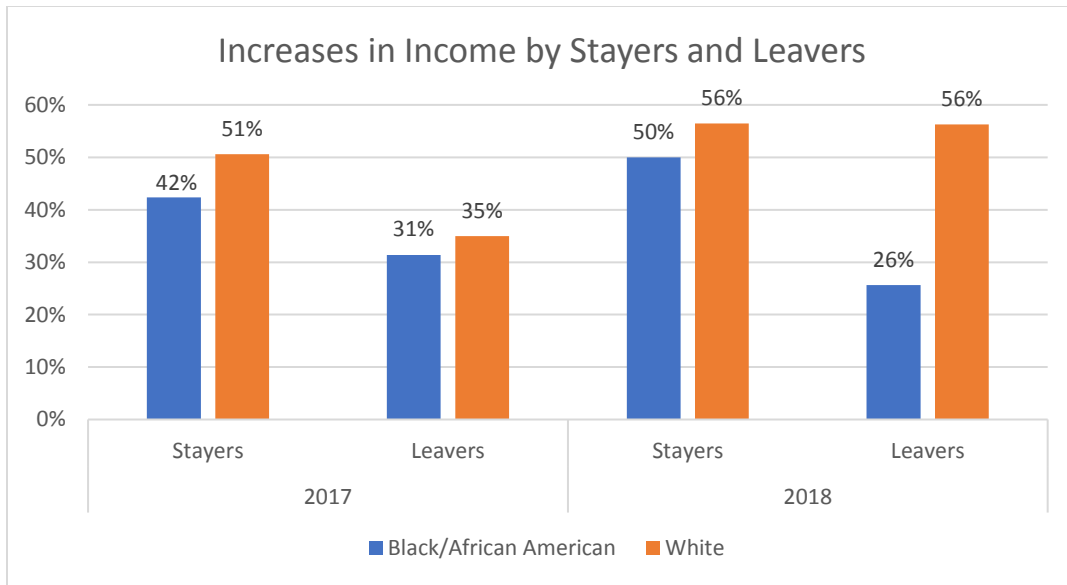
As in 2017, clients who primarily identified as White were more likely to experience increases in income than Black/African American clients. This was particularly true for leavers – in 2018 56% of White leavers increased their income upon exit, compared to only 26% of Black/African American leavers.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on this analysis, there are real and profound disparities between White and Black/African Americans in the provision and outcomes of homeless assistance programs. While Black/African Americans compose less than a 20% of the general Upstate SC population, the same demographic makes up over half of the population experiencing homelessness. Additionally, while enrollments in specific homeless service project types was relatively equitable across most opportunities, there were inequities observed in access to Emergency Shelter and Permanent Supportive Housing. In both cases, enrollments were skewed against serving Black/African American clients, implying barriers to access exist.

Disparities also existed in the outcomes of homeless services. These disparities, for the most part, trended negatively for Black/African Americans compared to White clients. At the average and the median, Black/African Americans spend significantly longer in shelter. Most recent data indicates Black/African Americans were more likely to return to homelessness than White clients. Black/African American clients were also less likely to increase their incomes during enrollment in a homeless assistance program. One positive trend emerged: Black/African Americans were more likely to exit to permanent housing and remain enrolled in permanent housing than White clients.

While much of the observed disparities are likely the result of structural inequities rooted in hundreds of years of discrimination, there are a number of actions the CoC can take to relieve the inequities observed. The recent *Supporting Partnerships for Anti-Racist Communities (SPARC) Report* frames this problem well by stating, "Because of the complex underlying issues that drive high rates of homelessness among people of color, it is important to address multiple levels simultaneously. It is not possible to solve these issues at the programmatic level alone." (p. 18). The *SPARC Report* concludes with numerous tangible recommendations on how to respond to the inequities driving these racial disparities. The recommendations span the Policy, Research, Organizational, and Individual Dimensions and all represent tangible steps towards addressing homelessness through a more racially equitable lens.

With this local disparity analysis, the Upstate CoC has taken the first step in identifying where inequities exist. The next steps will require concerted Continuum-wide dialogues on what changes to the homeless response system are needed to ensure a higher level of equity across programming, leadership, and service. These localized recommendations will fit well within the new Continuum-wide Strategic Plan, targeted for release during 2020.

Contact

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