

# City of Portland Health & Human Services

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## 2023 Year in Review: Homeless Services

# Introduction

In collaboration with other City of Portland departments and local partners, the Health and Human Services (HHS) team has been working to help people at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness in our community. The following “Year in Review” report takes a look back at the outcomes and lessons learned related to this work throughout 2023.

Conducting this review highlights the extent of HHS’ homeless services and demonstrates what a monumental year it was. HHS opened Maine’s two largest low-barrier shelters, thereby sheltering an additional 437 individuals in Portland. With the additional 50 shelter bed capacity that was approved by the City Council and came online at the end of the year, the City was able to start off 2024 by considerably minimizing the number of people living in tents through a community based effort to get people inside. January 2024 also saw Portland experiencing the first month in over two and half years where there were no overdose deaths and a 21% decrease from January 2023.

This report not only outlines what was accomplished last year, but attempts to compile three HHS data sources\* into a meaningful perspective on this segment of our community, with a particular focus on the chronically homeless, in order to know their needs, identify service gaps, and make more informed decisions.



Photo by Corey Templeton

## HHS Data Sources:

City of Portland. Oxford Street Shelter Database. 1/01/2023 - 12/31/2023.

City of Portland. Prevention and Diversion Intake Responses. 1/03/2023 - 12/31/2023.

City of Portland. Encampment Surveys. 11/30/2023 - 12/10/2023.

# Introduction

Some of the key lessons learned, which will be further discussed in this report, include:

- **The Homeless Services Center (HSC) has two primary guest streams: 1 group of guests (24%) meet the definition of chronically homeless, while the other group (76%) consists of those in a current housing insecure life situation.**
- **By demarcating asylum seekers and the more traditional homeless and housing insecure guests into two different shelter environments allowed for cultural and linguistic appropriateness and tailored wrap-around service provisions depending on the population served.**
- **The chronically homeless tended to be encampment occupants and were the most difficult to move into emergency or other forms of shelter. During intensive outreach, 90% of the Harbor View encampment respondents expressed reluctance to seek HSC beds and said their biggest barriers were loss of autonomy, transportation, and/or storage concerns.**
- **The combination of increasing cold weather, shelter bed availability, intensive outreach, reduction in barriers at the HSC, and ordinance enforcements worked to reduce encampments and persuaded people to take available shelter beds.**
- **Once individuals get to the shelter, they tend to stay-in 2023, the average length of stay was 64 bed nights.**
  - **The 645 individuals housed through the Harbor View outreach and resolution efforts have an average length of stay around 29.2 bed nights as of mid-February 2024.**
- **Finally, as overdose deaths declined in January, naloxone (Narcan) administrations increased at the HSC, suggesting a lifesaving correlation.**

Through the following review of accomplishments and lessons in 2023, Health and Human Services hopes to continue expanding its services and explore ways to better meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness in our community. The goal is to update and share the “Year in Review” report each year in order to increase accountability on departmental outcomes and keep the wider community informed about our work and future plans.

HHS hopes this report provides a useful and meaningful context on Portland’s homeless population and HHS’ ongoing efforts to serve them.

Thank you for reading.

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# Homelessness in the US in 2023

**The latest data from the national Point-in-Time (PIT) survey shows us that homelessness is an ongoing issue in the U.S.**

The Point-in-Time (PIT) survey, conducted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), counts the number of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> The count is taken on a single night in January.

In 2023, the PIT survey found that:

- In the U.S. overall, more than 650,000 people were experiencing homelessness<sup>1, 2</sup>
  - About 20 per 10,000 population
  - **a 12% increase from 2022**

Point-in-Time (PIT) Count results, January 2023<sup>2</sup>

	US	%
<b>Total homeless</b>	<b>653,104</b>	<b>100</b>
Of total, those who are / experience:		
Black or African American	243,624	37%
Hispanic / Latino	179,336	27%
Female	250,009	38%
Severely Mentally Ill	137,076	21%
Chronic Substance Abuse	108,035	17%
Veterans	35,574	5%
Victims of Domestic Violence	74,436	11%
Unaccompanied Youth	34,703	5%
Total Chronically Homeless Persons	154,313	24%

Data from the PIT surveys shows us that homelessness in the U.S. overall has been steadily rising since 2016. The major social and economic upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic threatened to put even more people out of their homes. However, federal protections such as the Emergency Rental Assistance program and the enhanced Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit were put in place to help keep people in their homes and prevent a spike in homelessness. The winding down of these protections in 2022, coupled with a historic lack of housing and increased rental costs, contributed to an increase in homelessness in the U.S. overall in 2023.

# Homelessness in Maine in 2023

In 2023, the PIT survey for the state of Maine counted:

- 4,258 people experiencing homelessness<sup>3</sup>
  - About 30 per 10,000 population
  - A 3.5% decrease from 2022, when counting people in Transitional Housing across both years<sup>3, 4, 5</sup>

Overall, there was a 3.5% decrease in total Maine PIT number between 2023 and 2022. Despite this small decrease, homelessness continues to be an issue impacting people and communities in Maine.

Homelessness in 2023 was an especially pronounced issue here in Cumberland County. **According to the Maine State Housing Authority, of the 4,258 individuals counted for the Maine PIT in 2023, almost half (47%) were located in Cumberland County.**<sup>5</sup>

State of Maine Point-in-Time (PIT) Count results, January 2023<sup>3</sup>

	ME	%
<b>Total homeless</b>	<b>4,258</b>	<b>100</b>
Of total, those who are / experience:		
Black or African American	2,013	47%
Hispanic / Latino	219	5%
Female	2,129	50%
Severely Mentally Ill	674	16%
Chronic Substance Abuse	299	7%
Veterans	123	3%
Victims of Domestic Violence	245	6%
Unaccompanied Youth	169	4%
Totally Chronically Homeless Persons	370	9%

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# Homelessness in Maine in 2023

The fact that almost **half the population experiencing homelessness during the 2023 PIT Count was located in Cumberland County** explains the impact of the role that HHS and its partners in the Portland area play as service providers.<sup>5</sup>

Some people experiencing homelessness in Portland are considered to be chronically homeless, and come from Maine, other parts of New England, as well as other states. **The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines chronic homelessness as living in a place not meant for habitation or emergency shelter for at least 12 months total in the last three years, or during at least four separate instances in the last three years.**<sup>6</sup>

Here in Portland, chronically homeless Individuals made up 24% of the total guest population seen at Oxford Street Shelter and the new Homeless Services Center in 2023 (304 out of 2,252 total guests.) The remaining 76% of guests at the HSC in 2023 were not considered to meet HUD's definition of chronic homelessness. This means that they may have been in a transitional housing situation, or have shorter or less frequent stays in emergency shelter.

# Homelessness in Maine in 2023

People who are chronically homeless face additional barriers to becoming housed. **HHS has worked throughout 2023 to collect more reliable data to better understand ways to help this population access and remain in shelter.** As a result, the focus of much of the following report is on data related to the 24% of guests at Oxford Street and the HSC who were identified as chronically homeless in 2023.

In 2023, the City of Portland also continued to see people seeking asylum arriving from the southern U.S. border, as well as California and New York. These individuals and families were primarily served by 166 Riverside and the Family Shelter. While not the focus of this particular report, these emergency shelters are an important part of the spectrum of services offered at HHS.



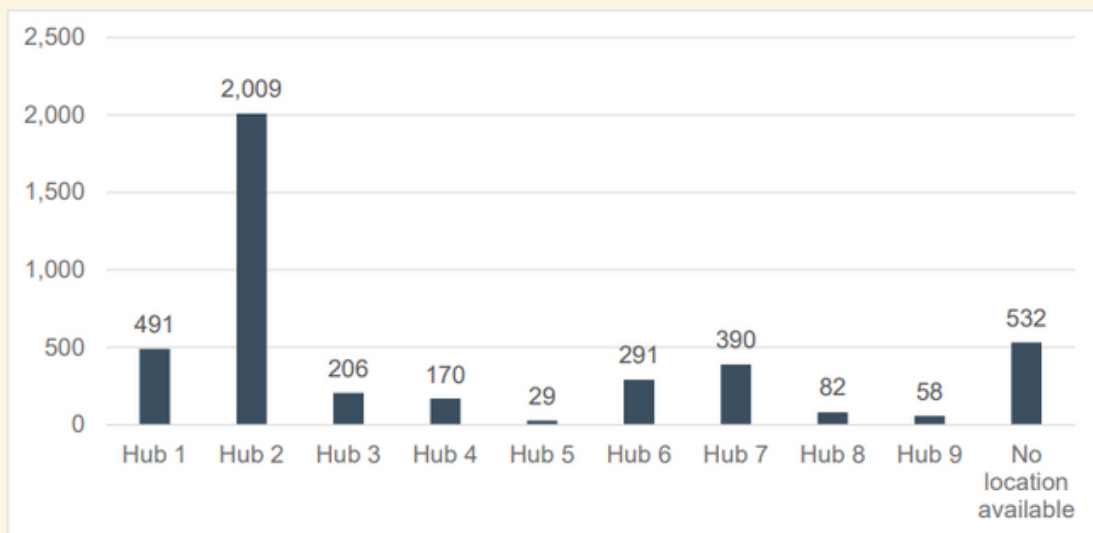
Photo by Corey Templeton



# Homelessness in Maine in 2023

State of Maine Point-in-Time (PIT) Count results, January 2023<sup>5</sup>  
*Graphic from Maine State Housing Authority*

Where People Were on the Night of the Survey



**Hub 1:** York County

**Hub 2:** Cumberland County

**Hub 3:** Midcoast - Sagadahoc, Knox, Lincoln, Waldo Counties and Towns of Brunswick and Harpswell

**Hub 4:** Androscoggin County

**Hub 5:** Western - Oxford and Franklin Counties and Towns of Livermore and Livermore Falls

**Hub 6:** Central - Somerset and Kennebec Counties

**Hub 7:** Penquis - Penobscot and Piscataquis Counties

**Hub 8:** Downeast - Washington and Hancock Counties

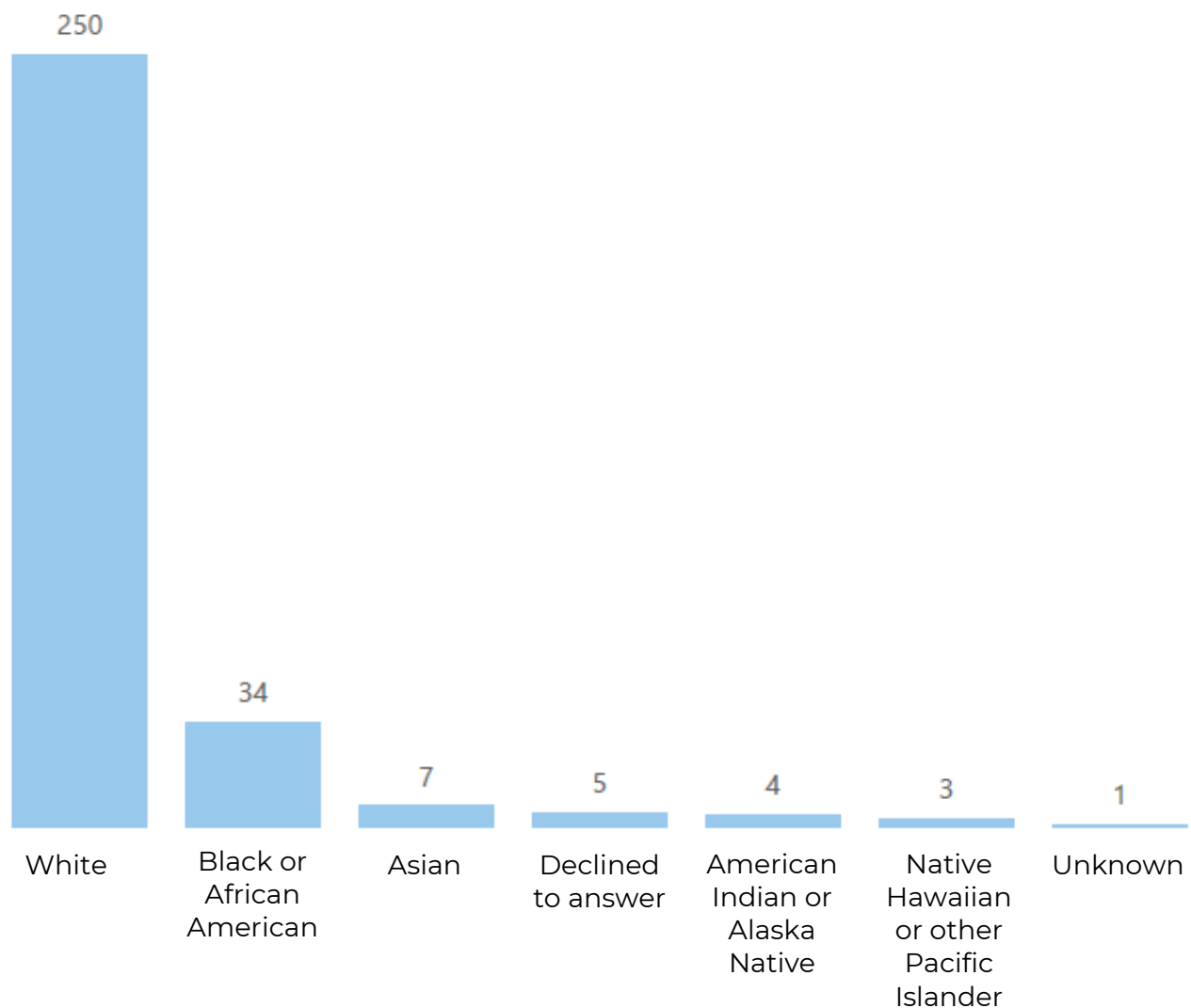
**Hub 9:** Aroostook County

# Chronically Homeless Guest Population Data for Oxford Street and the HSC in 2023

## Race of chronically homeless guests\*

N = 304, or 100% of chronically homeless HSC guests.

The visual below presents data from ALL HSC guests identified as chronically homeless in 2023 (304 possible responses, 304/1252 or 24% of the total guest population in 2023). Guests self-reported this information during intake.



\*Source: City of Portland. Oxford Street Shelter Database. 1/01/2023 - 12/31/2023

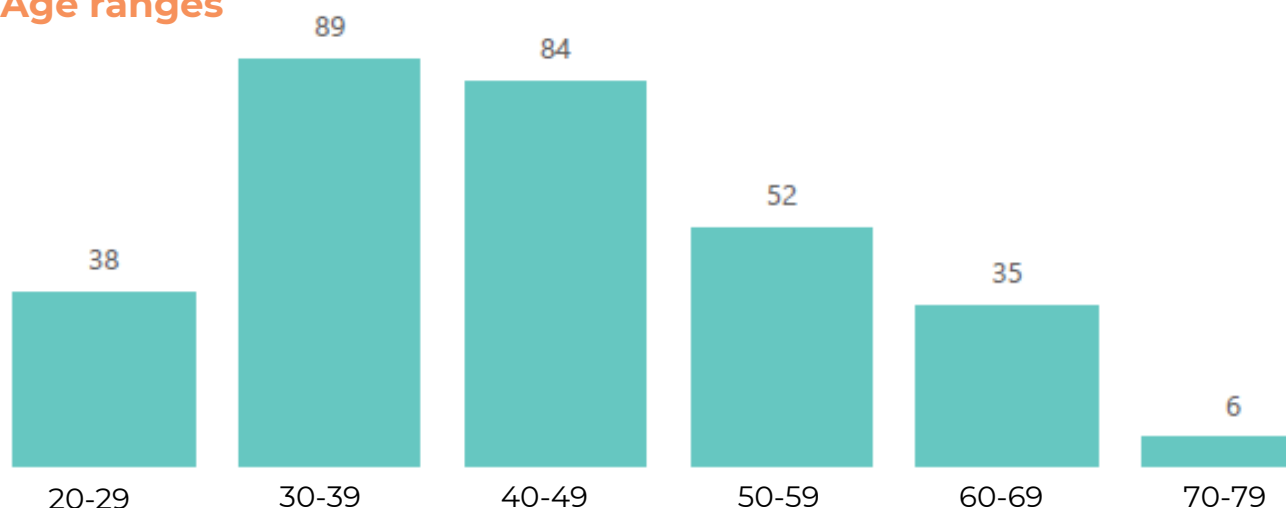
# Chronically Homeless Guest Population Data for Oxford Street and the HSC in 2023

## Age and gender of chronically homeless guests\*

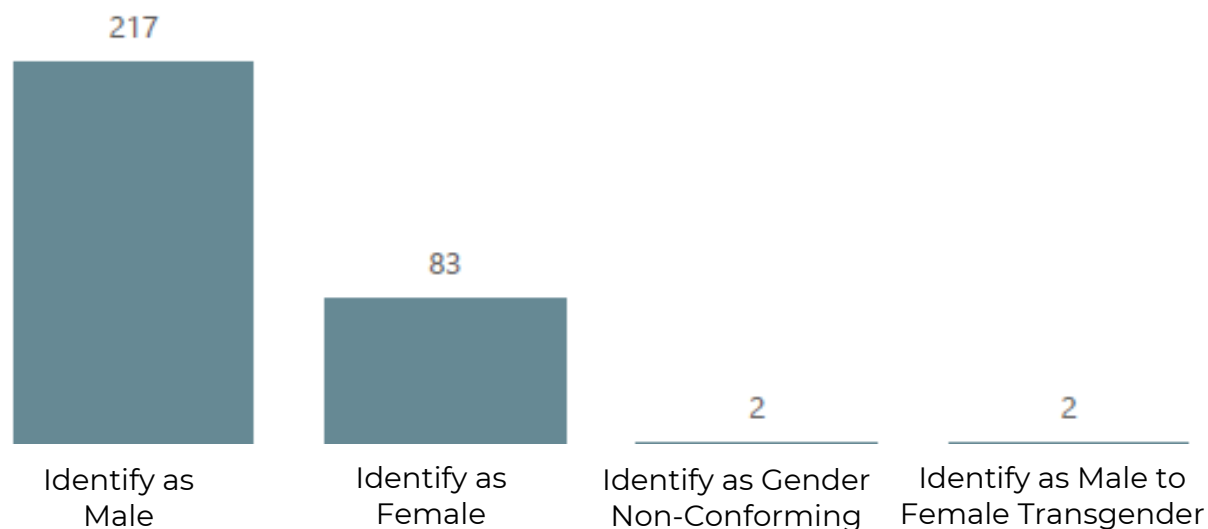
N = 304, or 100% of chronically homeless HSC guests.

The visuals below presents data from ALL HSC guests identified as chronically homeless in 2023 (304 possible responses, 304/1252 or 24% of the total guest population in 2023). Guests self-reported this information during intake.

### Age ranges



### Gender



\*Source: City of Portland. Oxford Street Shelter Database. 1/01/2023 - 12/31/2023

# Chronically Homeless Guest Population Data for Oxford Street and the HSC in 2023

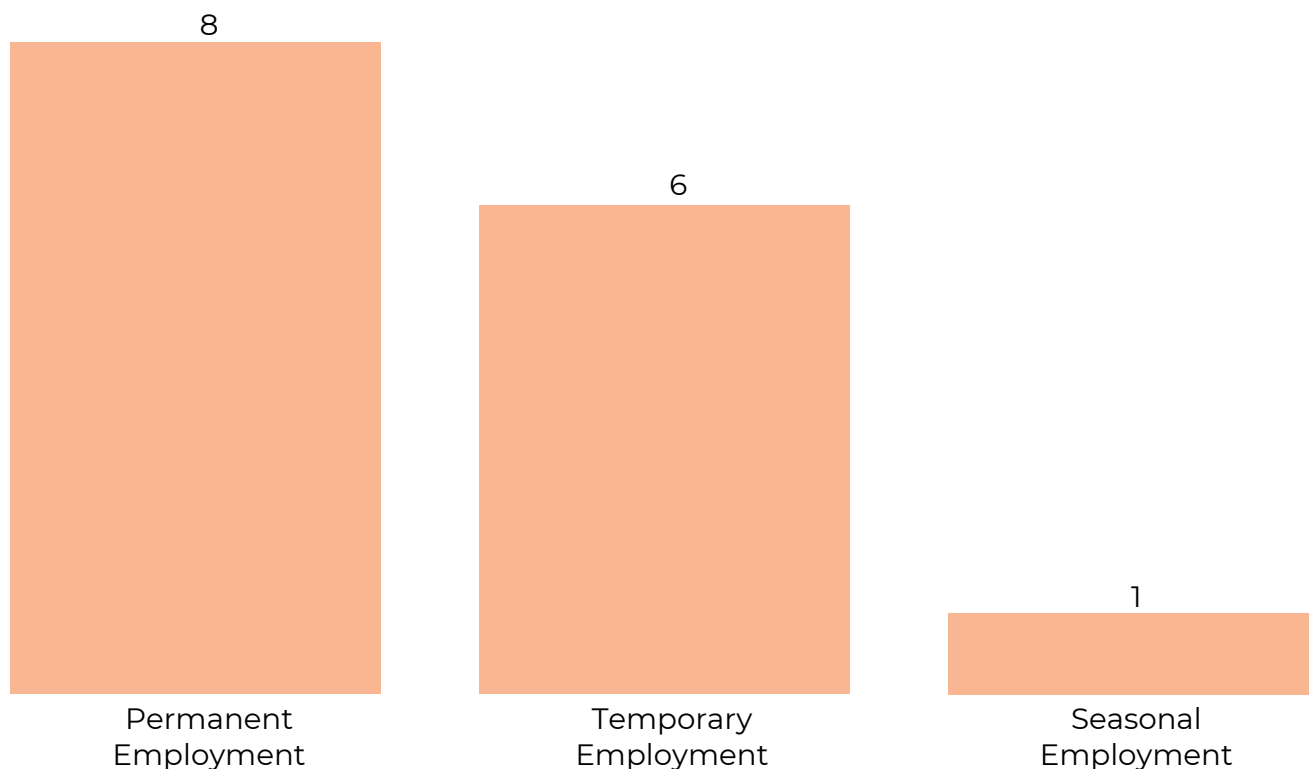
## Employment status of chronically homeless guests\*

The 203 chronically homeless HSC guests who completed shelter intake through the Prevention and Diversion program (203 out of 304 total chronically homeless guests) were asked whether they were employed on the P&D intake survey.

**8%** of chronically homeless HSC guests who went through P&D intake said they were employed (15/193, 10 responses missing)\*

### If you are employed, what type of employment?

N = 15, or 100% of chronically homeless guests who went through P&D intake and answered "Yes" to "Are you employed?"



\*Source: City of Portland. Prevention and Diversion Intake Responses. 1/03/2023 - 12/31/2023



# Chronically Homeless Guest Population Data for Oxford Street and the HSC in 2023

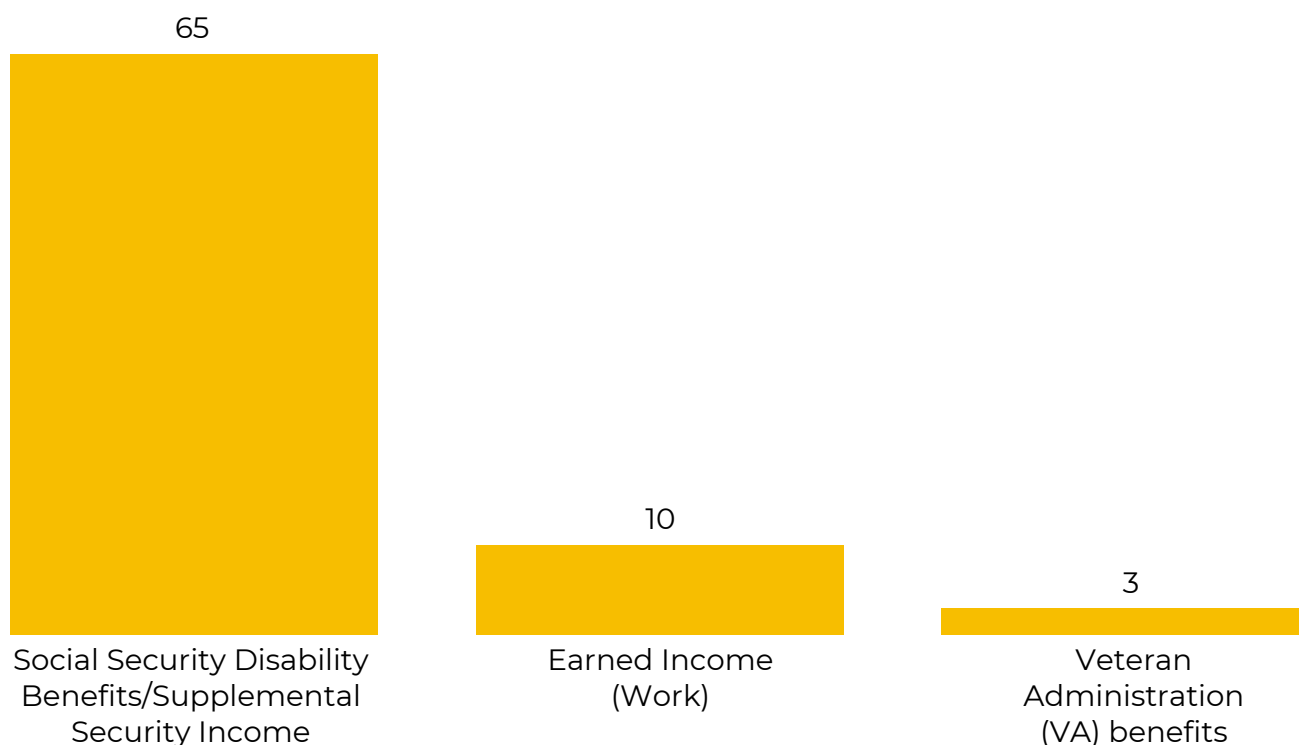
## Income of chronically homeless guests\*

The 203 chronically homeless HSC guests who completed intake through the Prevention and Diversion program (203 out of 304 total chronically homeless guests) were asked whether they had any source of income on the P&D intake survey.

**38%** of chronically homeless HSC guests who went through P&D intake said they had a source of income (77/203)\*

### If you do have income, what is the source of the income?

N = 78 responses from 77 respondents, or 100% of chronically homeless guests who went through P&D intake and answered "Yes" to "Do you have income from any source?"



\*Source: City of Portland. Prevention and Diversion Intake Responses. 1/03/2023 - 12/31/2023

# HHS Programs and Services

To provide housing and services to people who are chronically and circumstantially homeless, as well as to people seeking asylum in Portland, HHS operated 3 emergency shelters in 2023:

- **Homeless Services Center (HSC):** opened in March 2023 to replace the Oxford Street shelter, with services focused on assisting the chronically and circumstantially homeless
- **166 Riverside Shelter:** opened in November 2023, with services for single people seeking asylum
- **Family Shelter:** services for families, many of them people seeking asylum

Both HHS Public Health and Social Services Divisions provide additional wide-ranging services and programs serving people at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness in Portland:



**Harm Reduction and  
Overdose Prevention**



**Housing Services**



**Clinical Services**



**Mobile Housing Fairs**



**Prevention and  
Diversion**

Together, these programs and services:

- Provide low-barrier compassionate care
- Promote and protect individual and community health
- Seek to encourage dignity, self-respect, and self-reliance in the transition from public assistance to self-sufficiency

# Homeless Services Center (HSC)

The Homeless Services Center (HSC), as Maine's largest low barrier shelter, offers services tailored towards assisting people experiencing chronic and circumstantial homelessness.

## Services

- Opened in March 2023 with 208 beds, but beds increased by 50 with an emergency resolution for a current total of 258 beds

The HSC provides access to:

- Warm meals
- Healthcare
- Mental health support
- Housing and other wrap-around services

## Location

654 Riverside Street, Portland ME  
04103

## Contact the HSC



207-761-2072




[padstaff@portlandmaine.gov](mailto:padstaff@portlandmaine.gov)



# Homeless Services Center (HSC)

Low barrier shelters like the HSC play a vital role in the effort to shelter people experiencing chronic and circumstantial homelessness.



Low barrier homeless shelters offer *immediate refuge and essential services* to people who otherwise might go unsheltered.

Low barrier shelters provide a **critical alternative** for clients who might not meet the requirements for a traditional emergency shelter due to reasons like substance use or mental health issues.

Without strict entry conditions, low barrier shelters provide a safe, comfortable environment with access to:

- Warm meals
- Healthcare
- Mental health support
- Housing and other wrap-around services

## Low barrier shelter:

Does not  
require sobriety  
or background  
checks

Provides safe  
belonging  
storage

Provides  
housing-  
focused support  
and navigation

Operates 24/7  
to meet basic  
needs



# Homeless Services Center (HSC)

## Guest Amenities

The HSC offers the following guest amenities to **everyone** who comes to the HSC, even if they only stay for one night:

- Convenient check in times, with an 11 PM curfew
- Guest Wifi
- Phone and computer availability
- Device charging stations
- Dorms and showers open 11 AM - 7:30 AM
- Three large congregate areas, available 24 hours a day
- Shuttle services
  - 6 days a week, 7AM - 8PM
  - Other transportation services available when necessary
- Meals served on site
- Free laundry facilities
  - Shelter-provided detergent
- Secure and staff monitored storage, available 24 hours a day
- Library with rotating option of books
- Greater Portland Health (GPH) clinic services
- Narcan availability/overdose prevention safety measures



# Homeless Services Center (HSC)

## Longer-Term Guest Amenities

The HSC offers certain amenities to people who have longer stays at the HSC. These longer-term amenities include:

- Guaranteed bed availability for consistent guests
- Work bed accommodations available for those who may miss standard check-in times
- Curfew dismissal for employment obligations
- Assessments linking guests to housing navigation and case management
- Greater Portland Health Clinic Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) services
- Weekly Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings
- Peer support from Spurwink, with onsite office and full-time staffing
- Harm reduction, needle exchange, and patient navigation
- Pastoral services
- Monthly Homeless Voice for Justice meetings
- Veterans housing services from Preble Street
- Domestic violence services/outreach from Through these Doors
- Maine Department of Health and Human Services eligibility screenings for Medicaid, SNAP, etc.



# Homeless Services Center (HSC)

## 2023 Outcomes

# 1,252

Guests seen at HSC and Oxford Street Shelter:

- **887** Male
- **357** Female
- **5** Transgender
- **3** Gender Nonconforming guests
- **304** Chronically Homeless
- **30** Veterans

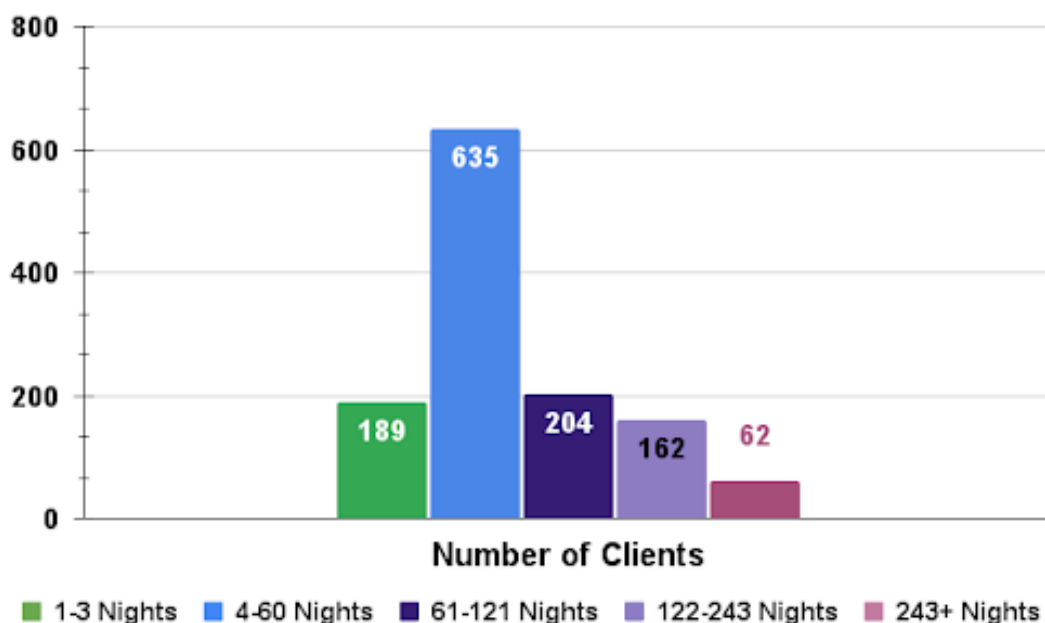
# 63.3

Average number of nights stayed at the HSC:

- 1-3 nights: **189** clients
- 4-60 nights: **635** clients
- 61-121 nights: **204** clients
- 122-243 nights: **162** clients
- 243+ nights: **62** clients

### Lengths of Stay for Individuals Sheltered in 2023\*

N = 1,252, or 100% of total guests seen at HSC and Oxford Street in 2023.



\*Source: City of Portland. Oxford Street Shelter Database. 1/01/2023 - 12/31/2023



# Homeless Services Center (HSC)

## Onsite Greater Portland Health (GPH) Clinic

### 2023 Outcomes

# 1,839

Clinic visits by HSC guests to onsite GPH Clinic providers:

- 845 visits to medical providers
- 355 visits to nursing staff (RNs)
- 211 visits to dental
- 142 visits to dental hygiene
- 102 visits to social work
- 100 visits to community health workers
- 11 visits to psych nursing staff

# 64

HSC guests provided financial assistance from GPH





# 166 Riverside Shelter

166 Riverside was opened in November 2023. It serves single people seeking asylum.

## Services

- 108 beds for males, 71 for females
- Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition provides meals
- Access to counselors who connect guests to:
  - Housing
  - Maine Needs
  - General Assistance (GA)
  - Medical care
  - Immigration services
- English classes and services from other onsite providers

## Location

166 Riverside Street, Portland ME  
04103

## Contact 166 Riverside



207-870-3311



166management@portlandmaine.gov

## 2023 Outcomes

# 134

**Individuals sheltered and provided services**

# 17

**Individuals placed in permanent housing**

# Family Shelter

The Family Shelter consists of a set of buildings and provides emergency housing and services to families experiencing homelessness.

## Services

- 146 total beds
- Housing location and placement services
- Life skills educational resources
- Household items
- Case management

## Location

Chestnut Street  
Portland ME

## Contact the Family Shelter



(207) 772-8339



[dlh@portlandmaine.gov](mailto:dlh@portlandmaine.gov)

## 2023 Outcomes

# 87

**Families, or 308 individuals served**

# 34,871

**Total bed nights**

# 55

**Families, or 199 individuals placed into housing**

# Harm Reduction and Overdose Prevention Services

Harm Reduction is a set of strategies and services whose main purpose is to help people reduce the harms associated with drug use. These harms include the risk of HIV, hepatitis C, other infections, overdose, and death.<sup>7</sup>

Harm Reduction also works to educate the community to reduce stigma associated with drug use disorders, and to promote pathways to additional prevention, treatment, and recovery resources.

The U.S. faces a significant overdose and substance use epidemic. According to the National Safety Council, ***in the U.S., people are more likely to die of overdoses than from car accidents.***<sup>8</sup>

The Harm Reduction and Overdose Prevention services provided through Health and Human Services are evidence-based, as services like these have been shown to save lives and reduce disease and stigma in communities across the world.<sup>7</sup>

## Services

- Syringe Service Program
- Naloxone distribution
- HIV/HCV Testing
- Treatment and other service referrals
- Basic needs, hygiene supplies
- Overdose prevention, recognition, and response trainings
- Sharps disposal
- Wound Care

## Location & Hours

39 Forest Avenue  
Portland, ME 04101  
Monday - Friday: 9AM - 4PM  
Encampment specific outreach is available as needed

## Contact



[kbarton@portlandmaine.gov](mailto:kbarton@portlandmaine.gov)

# Harm Reduction and Overdose Prevention Services

## Syringe Services Program (The Exchange)

### 2023 Outcomes

**806,000**

Sterile syringes distributed in  
6,178 total exchanges

**2,789**

Referrals provided to  
community-based orgs for  
support with physical and  
behavioral health, basic needs  
and recovery

**537,000**

Used syringes collected



# Harm Reduction and Overdose Prevention Services

## Naloxone Distribution Program

### 2023 Outcomes

**5,067**

Naloxone kits (over 10,000 doses) distributed through the Exchange

**15,276**

Naloxone kits (over 30,500 doses) distributed to partner naloxone distributors throughout Cumberland and York Counties



# Clinical Services

Health and Human Services offers several clinical services programs focused on meeting the healthcare needs of low income and uninsured residents in Portland, including people experiencing homelessness. These programs help people prevent and treat disease and live healthier lives. These programs include:

- **Maternal Child Health (MCH):** Nursing team that provides no cost, in-home wellness visits to Portland residents who are pregnant, recently delivered, have a newborn ( 0-1 years old) and/or have children under age 5 with a unique non-acute health need
- **Portland Community Free Clinic (PCFC):** Provides no charge primary care to uninsured, low-income adults living in Cumberland County
- **Immunization Program:** Provides childhood and adult vaccines for those who are insured and uninsured
- **Mobile Medical Outreach:** 20 non-uniformed City staff who collaborate with the Portland Fire Department to reduce both non-fatal and fatal overdoses by implementing community based medical care to those with substance use disorder

## Services

- Maternal Child Health (MCH) Program
- Portland Community Free Clinic (PCFC)
- Immunization Program
- Mobile Medical Outreach
- Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) Clinic
- Screening, Prioritization and Urgent Referral (SPUR) Program, new in 2023

## Contact Clinical Services



bnevers@portlandmaine.gov

- **Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) Clinic:** Provides testing, treatment and referrals to support sexual health
- **Screening, Prioritization and Urgent Referral (SPUR):** New program in 2023, Provides health screenings for New Mainers, along with referrals to Greater Portland Health



# Clinical Services

## 2023 Outcomes

# 1,513

Home visits made by the Maternal and Child Health Program (MCH)

- 691 were to people experiencing homelessness (sheltered and unsheltered)

# 663

Referrals provided by Mobile Medical Outreach to community-based providers for support with physical and behavioral health, basic needs, and recovery

# 191

Patients seen by the Portland Community Free Clinic (PCFC)

# 1,482

Patients seen in the Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) Clinic

# 3,494

Vaccines administered by the Immunization Program

# 768

People provided clinical services through Screening, Prioritization and Urgent Referral (SPUR) program

- 346 of these people (113 families) were provided services while being housed at the Expo



# Prevention & Diversion (P&D)

The Prevention and Diversion (P&D) team is intended to be a first point of contact for someone who is at risk of becoming homeless or who is currently homeless.

## The P&D team can assist someone by:

- Working with the individual to find solutions to their housing problems, and/or
- Assisting their access to the Homeless Services Center or other shelter.

## Services

Offers housing assistance services to:

- Someone who has received an eviction notice
- An individual who has somewhere safe and permanent to go, but needs assistance getting there
- An unhoused individual who is looking to access shelter

## Location

39 Forest Avenue, Portland ME 04101

Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. - 8 p.m.

## Contact P&D



207-761-2072



[padstaff@portlandmaine.gov](mailto:padstaff@portlandmaine.gov)

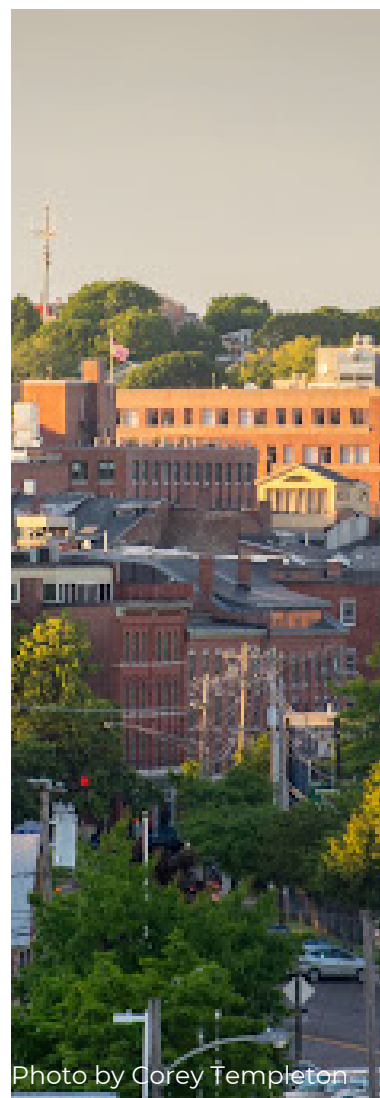


Photo by Corey Templeton

# Prevention & Diversion (P&D)

## 2023 Outcomes

# 913

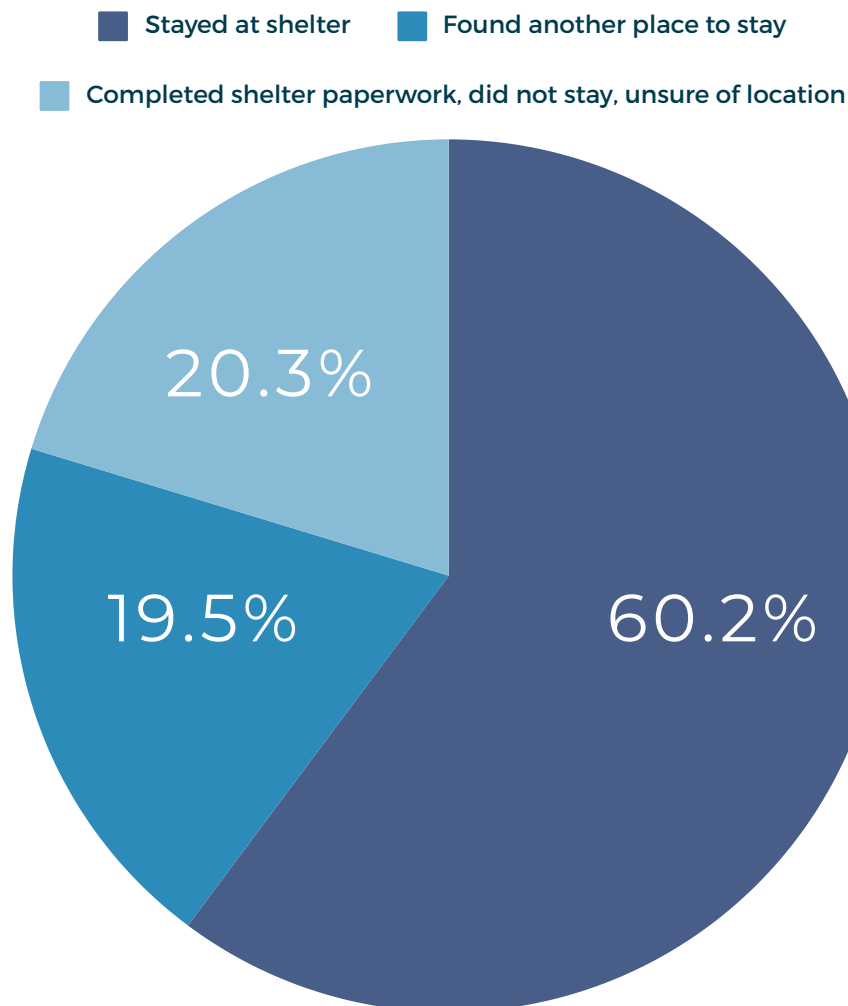
People seen, including those presenting for shelter assistance and Homeless Prevention assistance

# \$63,399.33

Provided in financial assistance to residents with Housing Problem Solving Funds

### Outcomes for Individuals Seen by P&D in 2023\*

N = 913 (This visual does not include asylum seeking individuals staying in hotels).



\*Source: City of Portland. Prevention and Diversion Intake Responses. 1/03/2023 - 12/31/2023

## Housing Services

The Housing Services program offered through Health and Human Services provides individualized housing plans based on the unique needs of HSC guests.

### Housing Services also include:

- Ongoing follow-up/retention services
- Bus ticket program available for those who have a confirmed/safe housing option elsewhere
- Homeless Prevention/Rapid ReHousing (RRH) services
- Collaboration with outside service providers to maintain continuation of care

## 2023 Outcomes

# 162

### Guests placed into housing

**Together, prior to being placed into housing, *these 162 guests collectively experienced 33,283 nights of homelessness* (equating to 91.19 years of homelessness):**

- **27** placements for guests who were **chronically homeless**
- **75** placements for guests who were **first-time homeless**
- **3** placements for guests who were **Veterans**
- **19** RRH/Prevention Placements
- **3** Emergency Solutions Grant placements
- **35** other miscellaneous placements




# Housing Services

## 2023 Outcomes

The 162 guests placed into housing received the following placements:

- **77** landlord placements (self-pay or GA), with the following vouchers used:
  - **12** Housing Choice vouchers
  - **6** Shelter Plus Care vouchers
  - **1** Bridging Rental Assistance Program (BRAP) voucher
- **37** subsidized unit placements
- **19** Bus tickets/reconnection with family or friends
- **10** ESG RRH/Prevention



These 2023 housing placements were overwhelmingly successful. Of the 162 guests housed last year, 161 remained housed in 2023. Only one person returned to homelessness.

## Mobile Housing Fairs

During mobile housing fairs, Health and Human Services staff and community partners met directly with people living in encampments to help them fill out housing applications. In 2023, these fairs took place at encampments located at Fore River and Marginal Way in Portland.

The purpose of these fairs is to meet people where they are at, and help them access shelter directly from the encampments.

## 2023 Outcomes

# 152

**Housing applications completed, including:**

- **9** Coordinated Entry applications
- **9** BRAP voucher applications
- **12** project based voucher applications through Portland Housing
- **18** public housing applications through Portland Housing
- **31** Centralized Housing Choice Voucher application new/reinstated)
- **31** other applications (individual housing applications, etc.)
- **41** Releases of Information





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## Encampment Outreach Surveys

In 2023, Health and Human Services (HHS), with the help of City and community partners, engaged directly with people experiencing homelessness to learn more about their needs and challenges. An emphasis was put on connecting with people who were experiencing chronic homelessness, or living in encampments.

The following pages present data collected from this outreach.

By engaging directly with people and understanding why they become homeless and the challenges they face, Health and Human Services will continue to learn how to most effectively serve people experiencing homelessness and connect them with housing and other resources.

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# Encampment Outreach Surveys

In November - December 2023, HHS piloted an outreach survey at Harbor View Encampment. Through conversations with encampment residents, the survey sought to collect information into the reasons why encampment residents decline to go to, or stay at, the HSC.

The intensive outreach team completed 83 tent surveys, reaching 142 individuals, to determine perceived barriers to going to the HSC. Most (90%) had never been to the HSC and reported their top three barriers accessing shelter. These reported barriers were:

## **1. Loss of autonomy**

## **2. Transportation**

## **3. Belongings and storage**

In response to these results, the Homeless Services Center made the following changes to help reduce barriers for people:

- Extended the HSC curfew to 11 p.m.
- Secured vans and established regular pick-up times to help individuals relocate to the HSC (these vans were separate from the HSC's guest transportation route, which continued as regularly scheduled)
- Improved education efforts regarding storage resources and capacity

## Encampment Outreach Surveys

**Outreach efforts, combined with other factors such as increasing cold weather, shelter bed availability, reduction in barriers at the HSC, and ordinance enforcements worked to reduce encampments and persuaded people to take available shelter beds. The impact of these efforts can be seen in** the number of tents counted by the City of Portland Parks Department in early 2024.

In early March 2023, Portland Parks and Recreation Department staff counted 85 tents, while in contrast to **early March 2024, Parks staff only counted 30 tents.**

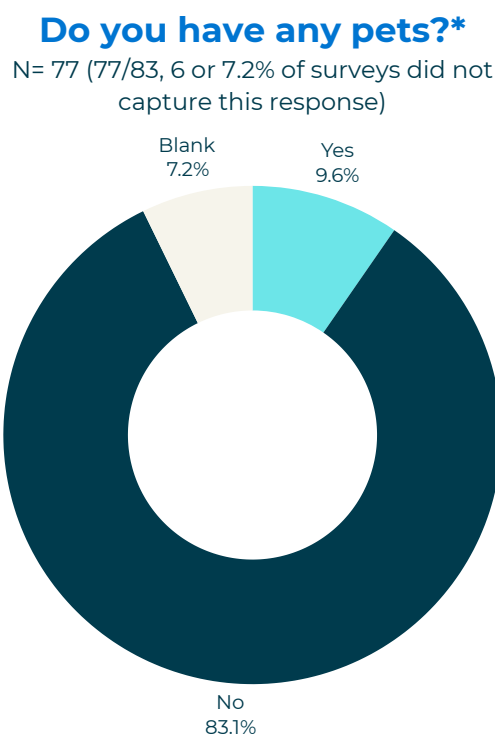
The early success of the collaborative outreach conducted by HHS and its partners illustrates the importance of collecting reliable and thoughtful data around peoples' experiences with homelessness. Collecting this data allows HHS to continue exploring ways to expand and improve services and better meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness in our community.

# Encampment Outreach Surveys

Several lessons were learned from the outreach survey pilot.

## Loss of Autonomy was the biggest reported barrier by far, reported more often than separation from partner or pets

Outreach survey results initially show that 10% of respondents had pet considerations, which is about the same for those respondents reporting they have partners they do not want to be separated from.



## External factors influence shelter bed intakes

Even with staff-led HSC changes, some members of the Harbor View encampment that had perceived barriers said they had never been to the HSC. As such, they needed additional factors to encourage them to access shelter including:

- Increasing cold and inclement weather events
- Dispelling perceived barriers and further adjusting where possible
- Coordinating City staff outreach and transportation
- Enforcing City ordinances

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# Encampment Outreach Surveys

## Homeless guests tend to stay a while at the HSC

Through the Harbor View outreach and resolution efforts the HSC has served 645 unique individuals (as of Feb. 13, 2024). Those 645 individuals have received a total of 18,877 bed nights, which equates to around 29.2 bed nights as an average length of stay thus far.

## Getting people to shelter may save their lives

In January 2024, the Police Department reported no overdose deaths. The last time that had happened was over 2 ½ years before, in April 2021. January 2024 also saw a 21% decrease in overdoses from January 2023.

While overdose deaths saw a significant drop in 2023, Naloxone administrations at the HSC experienced an increase, with 38 doses. Naloxone administrations had been an infrequent incident at the HSC before January 2024, but with the increase in administrations, the HSC added a new section to their incident reports.





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## Next Steps

City staff are committed to enhancing and expanding our prevention of and response to homelessness. The following new programs and services are planned to launch in 2024.

### **HOPE Project**

Portland City Council recently approved a one-year pilot program , serving 90 households through housing navigation assistance delivered at encampments. The goal is to stably house a minimum of 45 of those households over the course of 2024.

The HOPE project will employ three housing navigators by sub-contracted MaineHousing Emergency Shelter and Housing Assistance Program (ESHAP) partners. It will also employ a City of Portland program coordinator/landlord liaison. Funding would also cover client costs specific to the housing search, move-in process, and landlord incentives.

### **Outreach and Engagement Program**

HHS is hiring outreach and engagement workers as well as staffing up the new Overdose to Action program. With the establishment of a homeless outreach program working in tandem with other City agencies, the intent is to track, get to know, and understand Portland's unsheltered population.

These staff will provide a foundation for increased citywide case management, provide referrals to the housing navigation team, as well as establish tracking mechanisms for individuals referred to housing, treatment, and their outcomes.

## HHS Partners

- Anthem
- Greater Portland Health
  - Clinic in building
  - General Health, Dental, Psychiatric
- Preble Street
  - Provides and serves breakfast, lunch and dinner
  - Veteran Housing Services
- Spurwink Peer Support
- Greater Portland Peer Services
  - Weekly Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) Support Groups
- Through These Doors
- The Opportunity Alliance
  - Bi-Weekly Mobile Crisis Services
- Portland Public Library
  - Supplies guest library
- Milestone - Home Team
- Portland Trails
  - Guided trail tours and volunteer opportunities
- Maine Department of Health and Human Services
  - Bi Weekly benefit application assistance
- Spiritual Care Services of Maine
  - Weekly non denominational faith / spiritual work
- Sexual Assault Response Services of Southern Maine (SARSSM)
  - Upcoming outreach and educations
- Portland Peer Services
  - Weekly Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings
- University of Southern Maine
  - Master Gardener Program
- Portland Fire Department, Mobile Medical Outreach

## External References

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# Thank you

For questions or comments about this report, please email  
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Learn more about the Health and Human Services  
Department on the City of Portland website:  
[portlandmaine.gov/HHS](https://portlandmaine.gov/HHS)