INTRODUCTION

This report provides an initial review of available data for the Cambridge community to assess for racial and ethnic disparity in the occurrence of homelessness, provision of homeless services, and outcomes of those services. These topics warrant more comprehensive examination, and the following information aims to establish a starting point for future analyses, planning, and actions to understand and address racial disparity in the Continuum of Care (CoC).

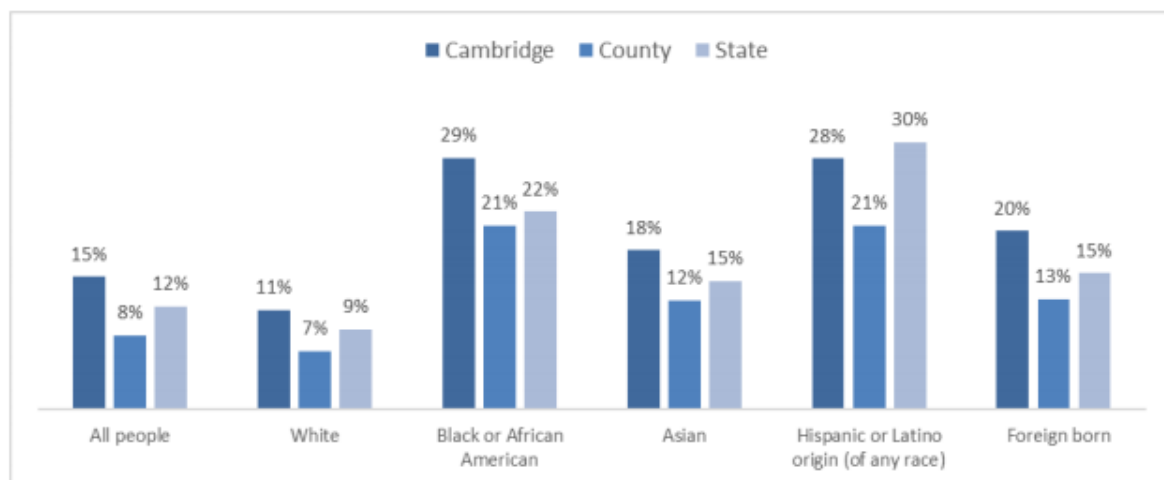## PRIOR ASSESSMENTS OF RACIAL & ETHNIC DISPARITY IN CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge is a racially and ethnically diverse city with a rising cost of living and shrinking middle class. One of the top five largest cities in the state, Cambridge is known for prestigious academic institutions and thriving life sciences and tech industries. The city's institutions and industries create an atmosphere of prosperity that contrasts starkly with the significant number of residents living in poverty. Racial and/or ethnic disparities in Cambridge have been documented in numerous areas of life, including incidence of poverty, income, housing and homelessness, food security, education, vulnerability to crime, and health. Ending race-based disparities and achieving racial equity has been identified as a goal through the City's current community-wide strategic planning process (Envision Cambridge).

The most recent Census (2010) found that Cambridge has a population of 105,162 with a racial and ethnic composition that is more diverse than the State. The City's population is 68% White, 15% Asian, 11% Black or African American, and 7% is Hispanic or Latino (of any race).

According to a recent comprehensive needs assessment[1] conducted for the City of Cambridge,

> People of color experience poverty at higher rates than the overall population in Cambridge and the state. The poverty rate among people who identify as Black or African American and those who are of Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race) is nearly double the overall rate of poverty in Cambridge. Asians also have higher rates of poverty, though not as far from the average. Interestingly, Hispanics in Cambridge have a lower poverty rate than the statewide average for this group, while African Americans in Cambridge experience poverty at a higher rate than African Americans statewide. Immigration also appears to be a factor. In Cambridge, 20% of individuals born outside the United States are living in poverty, as opposed to the 15% city average.[2]

Figure 1. Poverty by race and ethnicity, excerpted from City of Cambridge Community Needs Assessment

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Selected Characteristics of People at Specified Levels of Poverty in the Past 12 Months." 2010-2014 American Community Survey (2014).

As highlighted by the City of Cambridge Community Needs Assessment, residents impacted by poverty and financial insecurity are also likely to face housing insecurity. Figure 2 compares median income by race to the minimum income
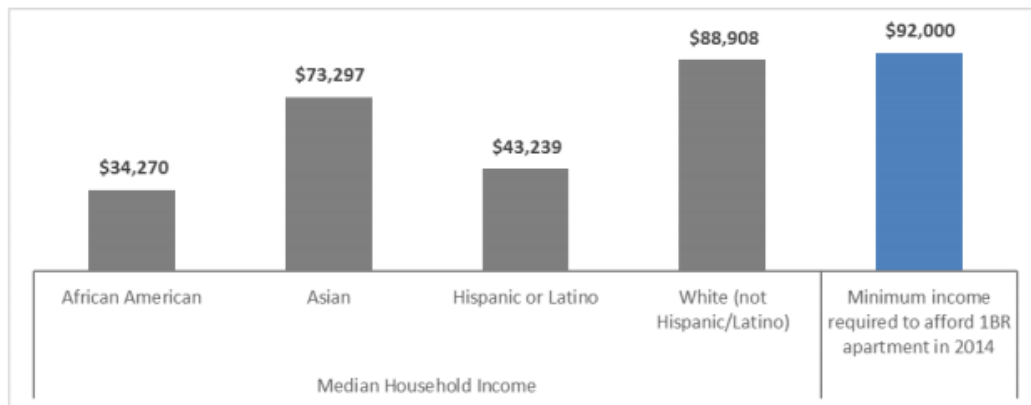
---

[1] 2017. City of Cambridge Community Needs Assessment. 2017. Prepared by TDC.
http://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/News/2017/4/~/~/media/D6E35EF2822B411986DC72B6FEC9CD6B.ashx
[2] 2017. City of Cambridge Community Needs Assessment.

required to afford a 1-bedroom apartment in Cambridge and demonstrates the disparity between racial groups related to housing affordability.
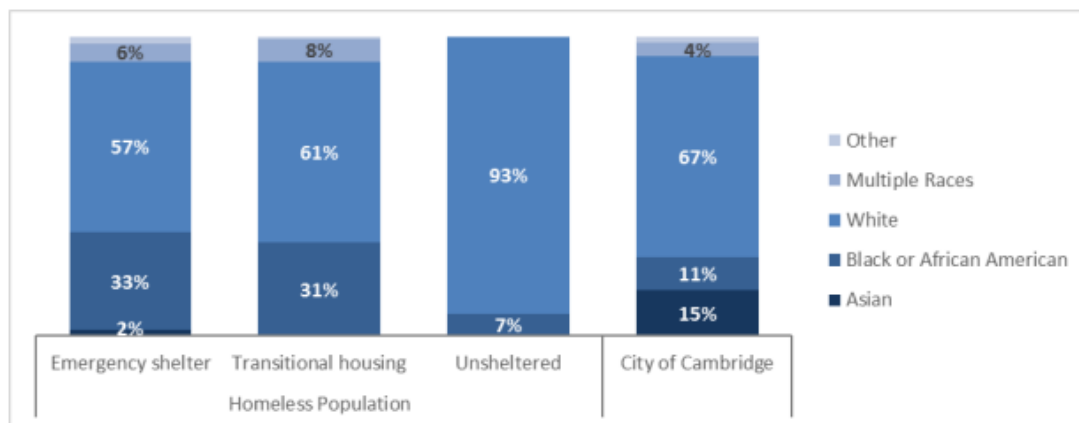
Figure 2. 2014 Median Income by Race vs. Income Needed to Rent 1 Bedroom, excerpted from Community Needs Assessment

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, "Median Household Income in the Past 12 Months," 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2014); Cambridge Community Development Department, Cambridge Housing Affordability Gap Chart (2015).

The disparity observed in relation to housing affordability extends to rates of homelessness. As shown in Figure 3, persons identifying as Black or African American experience homelessness at disproportionately high rates compared to the overall racial composition of the city.

Figure 3. Racial Composition of Homeless Population vs, City of Cambridge, excerpted from Community Needs Assessment

Source: Cambridge Department of Human Service Programs, City of Cambridge: 2016 Census of Persons Experiencing Homelessness.
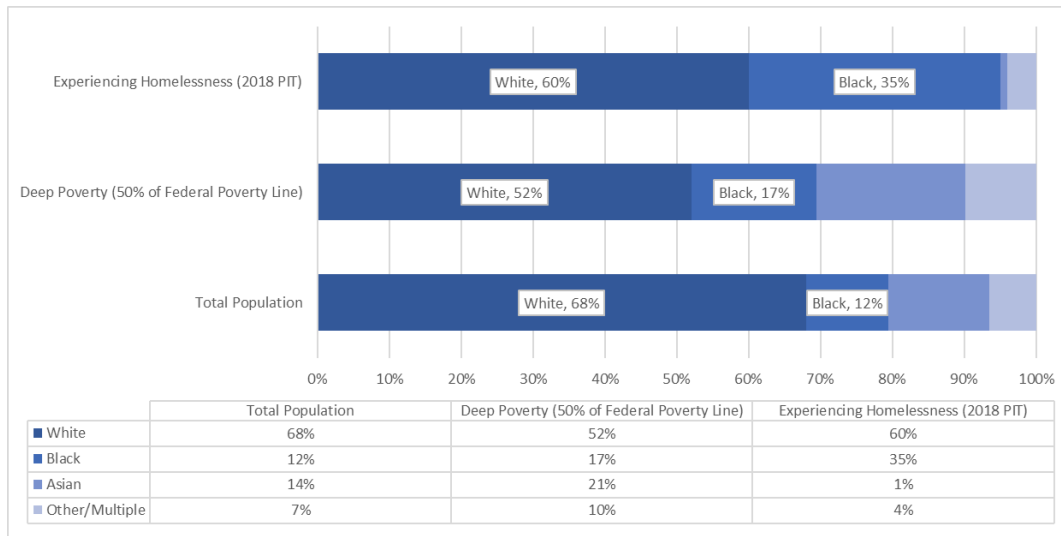
RACIAL & ETHNIC DISPARITY IN OCCURRENCE OF HOMELESSNESS

Data from the most recent Point-in-Time (PIT) count of persons experiencing homelessness in Cambridge are consistent with findings of racial disparity in occurrence of homelessness published in the City of Cambridge Community Needs Assessment, and with some of the national findings recently published by Supporting Partnerships for Anti-Racist Communities (SPARC). The SPARC study compared overrepresentation of racial and ethnic groups in the homeless population to levels of overrepresentation in the population living in deep poverty, defined as 50% or below the Federal Poverty Line[3]. As shown in Figure 4, the 2018 PIT found that 35% of persons experiencing homelessness are Black or African American while that group makes up only 12% of the overall population and 17% of the population living in deep poverty. This demonstrates that overrepresentation of Black or African American persons in the homeless population is

---

[3] 2018. Center for Social Innovation. Supporting Partnerships for Anti-Racist Communities, Phase One Study Findings. http://center4si.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/SPARC-Phase-1-Findings-March-20181.pdf

not fully attributable to poverty rates because overrepresentation in the homeless population exceeds the proportion of the Black population living in deep poverty.
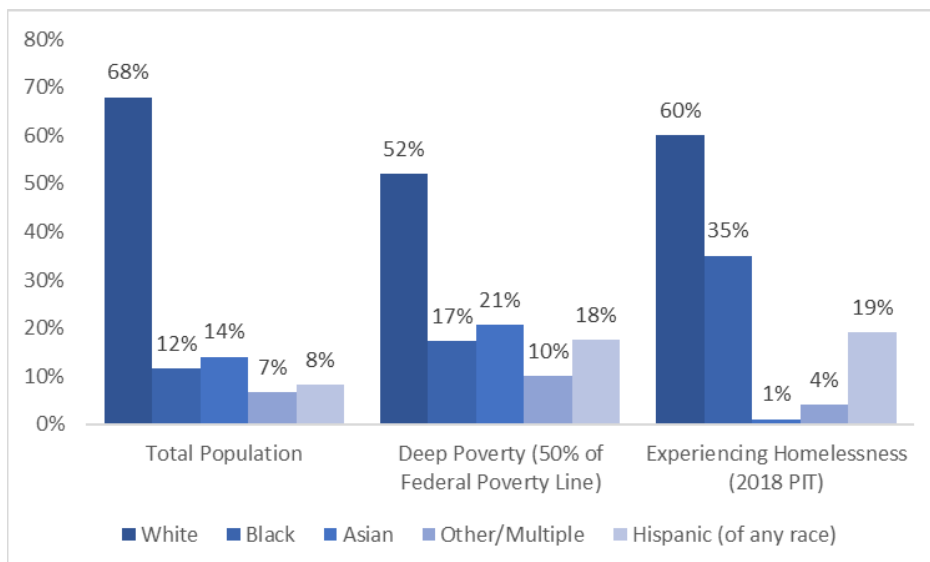
Figure 4. 2018 PIT Racial Composition Compared to Overall Population and Population in Deep Poverty

	Total Population	Deep Poverty (50% of Federal Poverty Line)	Experiencing Homelessness (2018 PIT)
White	68%	52%	60%
Black	12%	17%	35%
Asian	14%	21%	1%
Other/Multiple	7%	10%	4%

Sources: 2018 PIT, 2012-2016 American Community Survey, S1703: Selected Characteristics of People at Specified Levels of Poverty

The U.S. Census Bureau's 2012-2016 American Community Survey indicates that 8% of Cambridge's population is Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race), and that 18% of the estimated 7,095 persons living in deep poverty (50% or less than the Federal Poverty Line) identify as Hispanic or Latino. Of the 561 persons counted in the 2018 PIT, 19% were Hispanic or Latino, which indicates that Hispanic persons are overrepresented in the homeless population compared to their proportion of the overall population, but the extent of overrepresentation is similar to that found in the population living in deep poverty. The data show that persons identifying as Asian and Other (American Indian and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander) and/or multiple races are overrepresented in the population experiencing deep poverty, but that overrepresentation is not evident in the homeless population.

Figure 5. Racial & Ethnic Composition of Total Population Compared to Population Living in Deep Poverty & Population Experiencing Homelessness
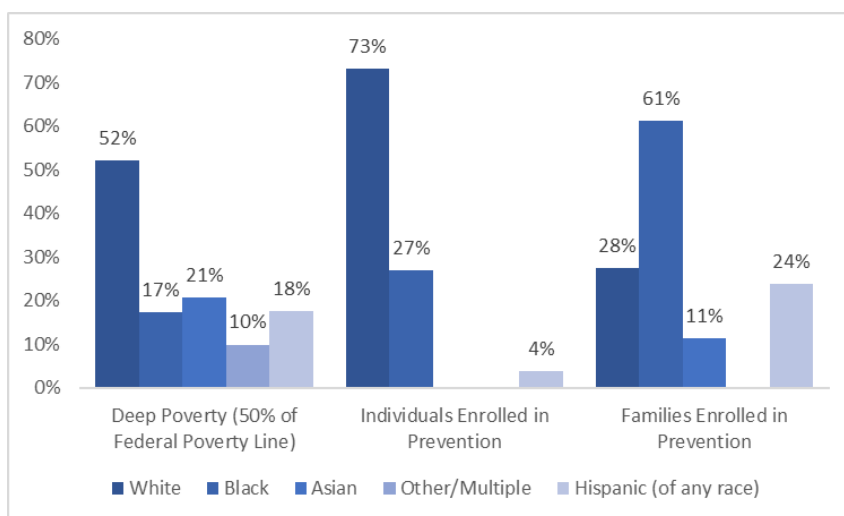

Sources: 2018 PIT, 2012-2016 American Community Survey, S1703: Selected Characteristics of People at Specified Levels of Poverty

PROVISION & OUTCOMES OF HOMELESS ASSISTANCE

To assess whether there is disparity in the provision of homeless assistance, the racial and ethnic composition of households receiving homelessness prevention assistance was compared to the composition of the population living in deep poverty. As shown in Figure 7, the racial and ethnic composition of households accessing prevention assistance is significantly different for individuals and families. Future analysis should examine rates of deep poverty by household type to determine whether apparent disparities align with poverty rates by household type. Overrepresentation of White individuals and Hispanic families, and underrepresentation of White families and Hispanic individuals among prevention assistance recipients compared to their proportion of the deep poverty population may be a result of the deep poverty data including both household types, and should be examined further in future analyses.

Despite the limitation noted above, the data show that compared to the population in deep poverty, Black or African American households, particularly families with children, are overrepresented in the population of households receiving homelessness prevention services in FY 2017. This information warrants further examination as it may be attributable to a number of different factors including but not limited to: disparities in rates of eviction (an eligibility criterion for some prevention assistance), higher rates of "network impoverishment[4]" among these groups, and successful outreach and engagement with populations in need of prevention assistance.

Figure 6. Racial & Ethnic Composition of Population in Deep Poverty Compared to Composition of Individual and Family Households Receiving Homelessness Prevention Assistance
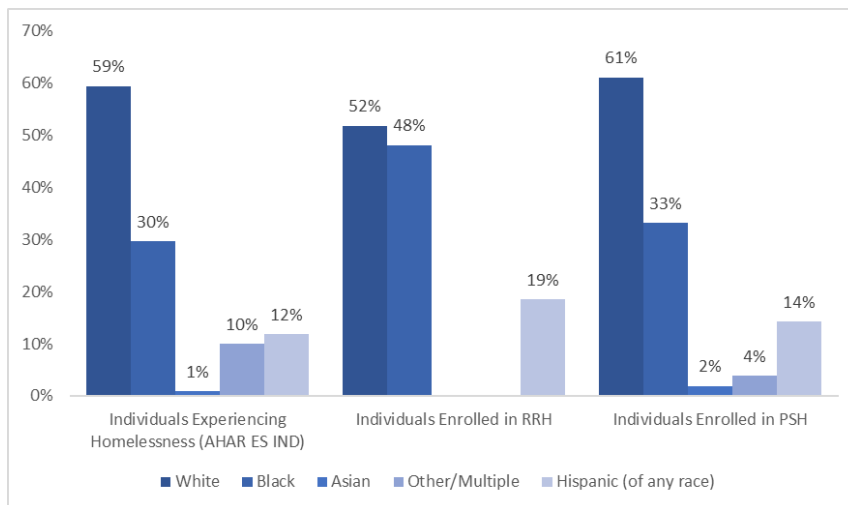

Sources: Cambridge Homeless Management information System (HMIS) report on Prevention Enrollments for Federal FY 2017, 2012-2016 American Community Survey, S1703: Selected Characteristics of People at Specified Levels of Poverty

Figure 7 compares the racial and ethnic composition of individuals who accessed emergency shelter in Cambridge during federal fiscal year 2017 to the composition of individuals enrolled in Rapid Rehousing (RRH) and Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) in the same time frame to assess whether there is disparity in positive outcomes of homeless assistance, defined broadly here as enrollment in a permanent housing program.

---

[4] The SPARC study describes "network impoverishment" as a phenomenon in which not just the individual or family experiences poverty but their social networks function in an impoverished state, marked by lack of financial capital and lack of emotional support. For example, "people are not unwilling to double up, take people in, or live in another person's home – but they do not have the capacity to accommodate the additional consumption of resources (e.g., food and household goods)."

Figure 7. Racial & Ethnic Composition of Individuals Accessing Emergency Shelter Compared to Composition of Individuals Enrolled in Rapid Rehousing (RRH) and Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)

Sources: Cambridge Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) report on RRH and PSH Enrollments for Federal FY 2017, Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) for Federal FY 2017 (Oct. 1, 2016 – Sept. 30, 2017)

White individuals comprised 59% of the shelter population, 52% of RRH enrollments, and 61% of PSH enrollments; Black individuals comprised 30% of the shelter population, 48% of RRH enrollments, and 33% of PSH enrollments; Hispanic individuals comprised 12% of the shelter population, 19% of RRH enrollments, and 14% of PSH enrollments; and individuals identifying as other or multiple races comprised 10% of the shelter population, 0% of RRH enrollments, and 4% of PSH enrollments. The data show that the racial and ethnic breakdown of enrollments in permanent housing programs is largely representative of the racial and ethnic composition of individuals staying in emergency shelters, except for the Other/Multiple races category, which is underrepresented in both RRH and PSH enrollments. The apparent underrepresentation of individuals identified as Other/Multiple races in permanent housing enrollments should be examined further to determine whether this is a result of data quality issues or differences in reporting race and ethnicity in a shelter enrollment compared to permanent housing. It may be the case that individuals with a "Don't Know or Refused" response to race in the shelter enrollment are recorded in a specific race category in housing enrollments, which tend to have better data quality at the point of assessment.

CONCLUSION

Data reviewed for this report indicate that racial disparity clearly exists in the occurrence of homelessness in the Cambridge CoC, and that the observed disparities for occurrence of homelessness among Black or African Americans cannot be fully explained by poverty rates. Additional information and analysis is required to accurately assess the existence and extent of racial disparity in the provision and outcomes of homeless services, particularly related to provision of homelessness prevention assistance. The data reviewed in this initial report show that the racial composition of Permanent Supportive Housing enrollments corresponds with the racial and ethnic composition of the individual emergency shelter population, which indicates a lack of disparity in achievement of a positive outcome of homeless assistance (permanent housing placement). Further analysis should be conducted to assess if there are disparities in long-term stability and housing retention for persons placed in permanent housing.

Additional analysis should be conducted to assess: racial and ethnic disparities within the context of Metro Boston/regional data; racial disparities for persons identifying as Multiple or Other races; the impact of the state family shelter system on access to services within specific geographies; racial and ethnic disparities in the unsheltered population and among unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness; and disparities in access to housing and services through the Coordinated Entry assessment and prioritization system.