

Homelessness in San Diego County Arrestees

The issue of homelessness has been a growing concern both locally and nationally. A SANDAG [survey](#) found that homelessness was the number one area of concern for residents and recent [statistics](#) showed that almost 3,300 individuals were living without shelter in the City of San Diego, a 32% increase from 2022 and a record high. With jurisdictions working on ways to address this issue, this CJ Flash highlights recently released 2022 data from the Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program. As part of SAM, adults arrested and booked into jail are interviewed within 48 hours and asked to complete a voluntary and confidential interview, as well as provide a urine sample to be tested for drugs.

Highlight 1

The majority of individuals booked and interviewed in 2022 had a history of homelessness and just over 1 in 3 had some level of recent housing instability (Figure 1). When those who reported being homeless in the 12 months prior to their arrest were asked where they stayed most often, the central (44%) or east suburban (15%) areas of the county were most frequently mentioned.

Figure 1

Almost two-thirds of San Diego County arrestees report ever experiencing homelessness



Highlight 2

Although there are individual differences within populations with a history of homelessness and justice involvement, these data revealed some statistics that could inform interventions, including the age of first homelessness, where homelessness began, frequency of mental health diagnoses, and the most common self-reported reason for becoming homeless (Figure 2). These analyses also revealed insights on current drug use habits, demonstrating that homeless individuals were more likely to test positive for methamphetamine (78% vs 22%) and marijuana (73% vs 27%), compared to individuals with stable housing.

Figure 2

Characteristics of justice-involved homeless individuals



Highlight 3

While only around two-thirds (63%) of those who were homeless in the last year thought they would have stable housing one year from now, only 31% reported staying in a shelter in the past 12 months. When asked why they didn't stay in the shelter, the most common responses included rules and restrictions (32%), safety concerns (21%), wait lists (14%), and being ineligible to stay due to others who they would want to accompany them (13%).



Although [data](#) shows housing navigation as one of the top three greatest needs of those with a history of incarceration, fewer than two in five individuals receive related services. Innovative regional collaboration and coordinated care will be important as jurisdictions move forward in addressing this issue.

