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Recent Trends Among the Unsheltered in Three Los Angeles Neighborhoods

An Annual Report from the Los Angeles Longitudinal Enumeration and Demographic Survey (LA LEADS) Project



Photo by Jason Ward

Los Angeles' unprecedented homelessness crisis has become the region's most serious policy problem according to both voters (Hart Research Associates, 2021) and policymakers (Oreskes and Wick, 2021). The two mayoral candidates on the November 2022 ballot in Los Angeles, Karen Bass and Rick Caruso, both expressed an intention to declare an emergency on day one of their term to address the issue (Klein, 2022; Rohrllich, 2022). Timely data on the number and characteristics of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness are a critical ingredient for the formulation of effective policies to address unsheltered homelessness.

KEY FINDINGS

- The Los Angeles Longitudinal Enumeration and Demographic Survey (LA LEADS) project, a unique effort to conduct repeated enumerations of people living unsheltered in three hot-spot neighborhoods in Los Angeles, found that the overall number of unsheltered people increased by 18 percent from September 2021 to October 2022. By neighborhood, we found the following: Hollywood increased by 14.5 percent, Skid Row increased by 13 percent, and Venice increased by 32 percent.
- Although we observed periodic declines in the size of our counts related to encampment cleanups and other events over our observation period, these activities did not result in longer-term decreases in the overall levels of unsheltered people, vehicles, and encampments.
- Our counts and Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) annual point-in-time count data from late February 2022 are often consistent. But at times they vary significantly within a given census tract or tracts. These discrepancies may be related to such factors as differences in training and experience between our field workers and LAHSA volunteers and technical problems with LAHSA's newly introduced phone app technology.
- Among the more than 400 unsheltered individuals we surveyed, nearly 80 percent reported being continuously homeless for over a year, and 57 percent reported being continuously homeless for more than three years. About 50 percent of the sample reported a chronic health and/or mental health condition.
- Among the survey sample, 90 percent of respondents indicated interest in receiving housing and 29 percent reported currently being on a wait list for housing.
- Among survey respondents, between 83 percent and 87 percent said they would accept offers of placement into permanent supportive housing, a hotel or motel, or a private shelter setting.
- The most common reasons that respondents cited for not moving into housing were never being contacted for move-in (44 percent), lack of privacy (40 percent), housing safety (35 percent), and paperwork issues (29 percent).

Abbreviations

COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
LAHSA	Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority
LA LEADS	Los Angeles Longitudinal Enumeration and Demographic Survey
PIT	point in time
SPA	service planning area

As noted in our interim report on this project from May 2022 (Ward, Garvey, and Hunter, 2022), policies enacted during the height of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak (including the reduction of routine street cleaning and sidewalk sanitation) contributed to the expansion of tents,

encampments, and makeshift shelters across the city of Los Angeles. After the start of the pandemic, the courts and political leaders took several actions to reduce the number of people living on city streets. These actions included

- the clearing of more than 200 individuals living in Echo Park in March 2021 (Chiotakis, 2021; Oreskes, 2021)
- a ruling by Judge David O. Carter in April 2021 for city and county government to address the homelessness crisis in Skid Row with the provision of shelter (Oreskes, Dolan, and Zahniser, 2021; Williams, 2021)
- the clearing of more than 200 individuals living on the Venice oceanfront boardwalk in summer 2021 (Oreskes and Molina, 2021; Tchekmedyian, Smith, and Rector, 2021)
- updates to City Ordinance 41.18 that allow more-rigorous enforcement of a camping ban

in numerous areas of the city (Office of the City Clerk, 2021).

To the best of our knowledge, these policies and activities were formulated without the aid of any current, high-quality data on the number of people living unsheltered in these areas. Nor did decision-makers appear to be using data about the specific housing experiences, needs, and preferences of people living unsheltered in Los Angeles.

In 2021, the annual, countywide point-in-time (PIT) count and demographic survey conducted by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) was canceled because of concerns about the risk of spreading COVID-19 (Pollack, 2020). The annual PIT count was resumed in late February 2022 after a roughly one-month delay from its original planned date in January (Oreskes, 2022). This data gap was an additional motivating factor for our study.

Although it has become an essential tool for regional decisionmaking, the annual PIT count and demographic survey effort has important limitations. First, it does not allow one to understand changes in the number of people living unsheltered that occur between the annual counts, such as movement because of enforcement policies, increases in housing resources, or seasonal weather changes. Second, the methodology has drawbacks that may affect the accuracy of the counts. Finally, the demographic survey component does not collect information about housing experiences, needs, or preferences among the unsheltered.

To augment the annual PIT and demographic survey effort and address these limitations, we launched the Los Angeles Longitudinal Enumeration and Demographic Survey (LA LEADS) study in autumn 2021. LA LEADS is an ongoing project to enumerate and survey individuals who are unsheltered in three neighborhoods in Los Angeles: Hollywood, Skid Row, and Venice. We selected these neighborhoods because of historically high concentrations of street homelessness and the potential for ongoing policies to affect these areas—for example, through migration or displacement because of enforcement or increases in housing resources.

The LA LEADS study is the first to conduct monthly or more-frequent enumerations over a full

year in multiple prominent hot spots for unsheltered homelessness. We used a dedicated team of professionally trained field workers to conduct enumerations and administer surveys on demographic characteristics and housing needs and experiences across these neighborhoods over 12 months.

This report provides data from a full year of enumerations conducted from late September 2021 to early October 2022. We also report on results from a survey administered to more than 400 unsheltered Angelenos in these neighborhoods. Finally, to contribute to a body of research about the accuracy and consistency of PIT counts of unsheltered homelessness, we use these enumeration and survey data to make several comparisons with the findings from LAHSA's most recent PIT count and demographic survey, conducted in early 2022.

Our study contributes to a relatively scant body of evidence about the sizes and characteristics of unsheltered populations in these Los Angeles neighborhoods, measuring changes over time in the number of people living on the streets and providing important information about the housing experiences, needs, and preferences of those targeted by policies that the city is undertaking to address unsheltered homelessness. This report will be useful to policymakers, providers of homelessness services, housing planners, and the residents of Los Angeles as they consider the best approaches and the most effective allocation of resources for addressing the city's homelessness crisis.

Study Geography

For this study, we selected three neighborhoods—Hollywood, Skid Row, and Venice—partly because of their historically high rates of unsheltered homelessness and their relevance to evolving policies aimed at addressing this problem, but also because neighborhood-specific data tabulations for these areas have been made available in past years as part of the annual LAHSA PIT count and demographic survey, making possible certain comparisons over time. For each neighborhood, we settled on specific boundaries for our study via a combination of input from service providers and other stakeholders and neighborhood

assessments by our field workers to identify areas of significant encampment activity. In our interim report (Ward, Garvey, and Hunter, 2022), we describe in greater detail these neighborhoods and the specific policies and events related to unsheltered homelessness motivating their inclusion in the study.¹ Figure 1 shows the locations of these three neighborhoods in relation to the rest of central Los Angeles.

LA LEADS Methodology

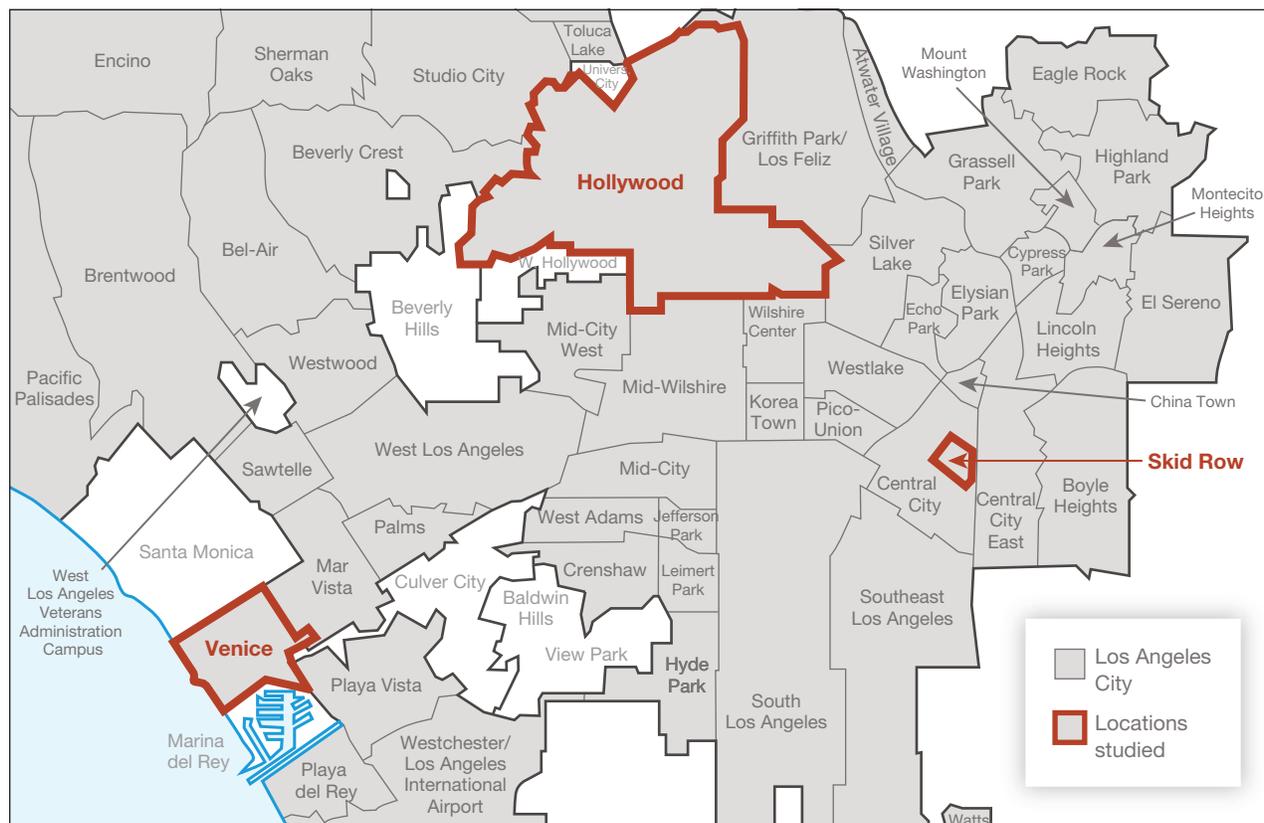
Enumeration Method

We conducted counts of unsheltered individuals, along with cars, vans, RVs, tents, and other makeshift shelters used by those experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Our counts took place approximately twice monthly in Skid Row and monthly in Hollywood

and Venice. We alternated the timing of these counts between early-morning hours (6 to 9 a.m.) and nighttime hours (9 p.m. to midnight) to allow us to assess whether there was significant variation in population counts depending on the time of day. We also varied the days of the week (Monday through Friday) and the time of the month of each count over the study period to allow exploration of patterns of variation in the size of unsheltered populations along these lines. In addition, for each count in an area, we varied the starting location and the direction of movement of our survey teams to ensure that the counts were not influenced by systematic patterns, such as individuals waking up in the morning and moving to an area meal service at the same time each day.

These counts were conducted by two teams of three individuals each. In Skid Row, each team covered one-half of the neighborhood on foot. One

FIGURE 1
Map of Neighborhoods in Central Los Angeles (city)



NOTE: LA LEADS study areas comprise portions of the neighborhoods indicated on this map. Please see the separate online appendix for more-detailed geographical renderings of the study areas.

person on each team used a hand clicker to count individuals, and the other two used paper forms to record the observed numbers of vehicles, tents, and makeshift shelters. Each field worker counted independently; then, at the end of each block, the two counts were averaged to the nearest integer value. In Hollywood, our teams counted from cars. One person drove while the other two counted, using the same process for reconciling the two counts already described. In Venice, our approach was a hybrid of these two methods: One team walked the area near the oceanfront, and two other teams drove through the eastern portion of the neighborhood.

We did not approach vehicles or structures to assess whether they were occupied. They were simply counted when observed. The multiday orientation given to each member of our field team included training on how to identify vehicles serving as places of residence by using signs suggesting the vehicle was not being regularly moved (such as low tire pressure) and other signals, such as having covered windows, fogged up windows, or large amounts of possessions in or around the vehicle. Additionally, several of our team members had significant amounts of experience working or volunteering in homelessness services or adjacent fields.

Additional details on our enumeration method are in Ward, Garvey, and Hunter (2022).

Survey Method

We collected survey data on separate days from our enumeration shifts. During each outing, our goal was to collect 40 completed surveys in Skid Row, 50 in Hollywood, and 34 in Venice. Over the course of the study, we visited Hollywood twice (in November and late December), Skid Row five times (in mid- and late November, late December, mid-January, and late February), and Venice three times (in early October, early December, and early February). We varied the time of the week and month for each site visit. Each survey shift began at approximately 8 a.m. with two teams of three field workers. During each shift, we approached individuals who appeared to be living unsheltered and made an offer to participate in a ten-minute survey for \$5 in cash. To introduce randomization to this process, we approached only every third person encountered

in Skid Row and every other person encountered in Hollywood and Venice (because of the lower density of individuals per block in these areas).

Eligibility Criteria

Each potential respondent was screened for eligibility with two questions. The first question was taken from the LAHSA demographic survey and asked where the individual had spent most of their nights over the past 30 days. The second asked whether the individual had another place to stay, such as a bed in an interim housing facility, a hotel room, or a room in a transitional housing facility. Only respondents who reported staying in an unsheltered location for most of the past 30 nights and not having another place to stay were eligible for the survey.

Among respondents who reported spending most of their nights in a car, van, RV, camper, tent, or other makeshift structure, we asked how many other people shared this shelter with them so that we could create a set of multipliers to apply to our counts of these types of informal shelters to get a more accurate estimate of the total number of individuals living unsheltered in each neighborhood.

Response Rates

Over the course of the study, we approached 621 people. Of these, 498 were screened, 431 were determined to be eligible and participated in the survey, and 67 were determined to be ineligible. Of those we approached but who were not screened, 106 declined the offer, four walked away, and 13 were not screened because they were disoriented, intoxicated, cognitively impaired, or had a language barrier. Counting all these cases together as refusals results in an overall refusal rate of 20 percent.

As part of our data cleaning, we looked for evidence of any survey *repeaters*—individuals who took the survey more than once—so that any duplicate responses were excluded from analyses. We assessed this possibility by asking survey respondents their age, date of birth, gender, education, and marital status. From checking for exact matches across these response items, we dropped one probable repeat respondent from our analytic sample for a final sample size of 418 (this total is 430 if we

include 12 respondents on Veterans Row, who are included only in results in Appendix C in the separate online-only appendix file [Ward, Garvey, and Hunter, 2023]).

Survey Administration and Content

Eligible respondents were asked whether they wanted to complete a paper survey themselves or have it administered by a field worker. More than 95 percent of respondents requested that the field staff administer the survey.

The survey comprised 27 questions about age; month and day of birth; sex or gender; race; Hispanic ethnicity; marital status; educational attainment; lifetime length of homelessness; age at first spell of homelessness; length of current spell of homelessness; length of time in survey neighborhood; last location prior to current location; interest in obtaining housing; acceptable housing options; housing wait list status; whether offered housing in Los Angeles since becoming homeless; issues that prevented moving into housing since becoming homeless; specific housing needs; issues that would prevent a move into housing; health status; presence of a chronic health condition, mental health condition, or substance use disorder; substance use; and incidence of arrest or incarceration in the past 30 days.

In several cases, we reproduced survey items from previous questionnaires; in some cases, we modified these questions to reduce respondent burden. For example, the items regarding gender, age at first homelessness experience, and length of time of current homelessness experience mirrored questions asked in the LAHSA demographic survey, but we used simplified versions of some of the response options (e.g., rather than asking respondents to tell us a specific number of days, months, or years for length of time, we gave response options as ranges, such as “less than 90 days” or “more than 3 years”). The health status questions were taken from such standardized surveys as the Patient-Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System (PROMIS) (Cella et al., 2010) and the National Health Interview Survey (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022), which have been used with similar populations in previous studies.

Some survey items were developed specifically for this effort, including housing interest, housing option acceptance, housing wait list status, housing offering, issues that prevented housing move-in, housing needs or requirements, and issues that would prevent moving into shelter or housing. As part of the development of these items, we consulted with researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles (Randall Kuhn), and the University of Southern California (Benjamin Henwood) who were contemporaneously implementing a web-based survey for people experiencing homelessness to increase the comparability of these efforts. Because our survey contained questions that had not been used before, we piloted it first in Venice with a handful of respondents to ensure that the items and response options were understood by participants.

Survey Data Analyses

We conducted statistical tests to determine whether there were any statistically meaningful differences among respondents from the three neighborhoods (with one test for differences for either Hollywood or Venice from Skid Row and a second test for differences between Hollywood and Venice). These tests were to detect statistically significant differences at the 90-percent confidence level; differences exceeding this threshold are indicated in the tables provided throughout the report.

Constructing Multipliers for Cars, Vans, RVs, Tents, and Makeshift Structures

As mentioned previously, part of our process for screening individuals into the survey component of our study was to ask where they spent most of the past 30 nights. If a screened individual answered that they had been staying in one of our specified informal shelter types (a car, van, RV, tent, or makeshift structure), then we asked them how many people they shared this shelter with. We used these screener responses (249 for tents and makeshift structures, ten for cars and vans, and seven for RVs), collected over multiple survey data collection shifts, to generate estimates of the number of people residing in each of these shelter types. We did this by generating an estimate of the mean value and the uncertainty around

these estimates for each of these informal shelter types (this was done by neighborhood for tents and makeshift structures, since we had a much larger sample size for these shelter types, whereas we generated single estimates across all three neighborhoods for cars and vans and for RVs).

Table 1 presents these multipliers and compares them with the most-relevant multipliers estimated by LAHSA in 2020 and 2022 (which are calculated at much larger service planning areas [SPAs] rather than by neighborhood, as we have done). LAHSA

calculates distinct multipliers separately for cars versus vans and for tents versus makeshift shelters; therefore, our multipliers are not directly comparable, but we reproduce the relevant LAHSA multipliers alongside the more aggregated LA LEADS multipliers to give a sense of how they compare with one another. In general, our multipliers are slightly larger than the associated LAHSA multipliers—except for our RV multiplier, which is slightly smaller than the average of the two LAHSA 2022 estimates. Our Skid Row multiplier for tents and other makeshift shelters

TABLE 1
LA LEADS and LAHSA Multipliers

LA LEADS Neighborhood	LA LEADS Multiplier	Los Angeles County SPA	2020 LAHSA Multiplier	2022 LAHSA Multiplier
Tents and makeshift shelters				
Hollywood	1.77 (0.16)	SPA 4 tents	1.45 (0.06)	1.38 (0.05)
		SPA 4 MSS	1.64 (0.16)	1.60 (0.17)
Skid Row	1.52 (0.83)	SPA 4 tents	1.45 (0.06)	1.38 (0.05)
		SPA 4 MSS	1.64 (0.16)	1.60 (0.17)
Venice	2.02 (0.21)	SPA 5 tents	1.47 (0.07)	1.41 (0.07)
		SPA 5 MSS	1.65 (0.17)	1.57 (0.16)
Car or van	1.80 (0.51)	SPA 4 cars	1.38 (0.11)	1.51 (0.09)
		SPA 4 vans	1.68 (0.22)	1.46 (0.14)
		SPA 5 cars	1.37 (0.13)	1.39 (0.14)
		SPA 5 vans	1.66 (0.23)	1.43 (0.15)
RV	1.57 (0.30)	SPA 4	1.32 (0.15)	1.82 (0.22)
		SPA 5	1.51 (0.20)	1.69 (0.14)

NOTE: MSS = makeshift shelter. LAHSA multipliers (also referred to as *conversion factors*) are calculated at the larger SPA level, so both Hollywood and Skid Row use SPA 4 weights. Our multipliers are derived through a simple regression of the number of individuals indicated by respondents on a constant term, which generates an estimate of the mean and a standard error of this estimate (in parentheses). Note that we reproduce the multipliers used by LAHSA for individuals rather than families because the relative estimated weight between these multipliers is typically between 95 percent and 99 percent on individuals and only 1 percent to 5 percent on families.

is very close to a simple average of the four distinct LAHSA measures shown.

Counts of the Unsheltered Populations in Hollywood, Skid Row, and Venice

In this section, we present evidence on the size of unsheltered populations in the three neighborhoods we studied, explore trends over time in these populations, and consider two approaches to convert our counts of cars, vans, RVs, tents, and makeshift shelters into adjusted estimates of the total number of individuals living unsheltered in each neighborhood.

Key Takeaways

We found that the population of unsheltered Angelenos in all three neighborhoods we focused on increased over the 12-month study period. Table 2 presents results from a simple linear regression model of our unadjusted count data (totals of individuals, vehicles, and tents and makeshift shelters) on weeks and percentage change values scaled to a full year.

An overall model that uses data from all three neighborhoods generates a statistically precise estimate of 18 percent over the full course of the study. The lowest growth rate over the year was in Skid Row, at 13 percent. This corresponds to a change from an initial level of around 1,300 in late 2021 to around 1,450 a year later. In Hollywood, we estimated a 14.5-percent change, corresponding to an increase from roughly 650 to 750, but this estimate is only marginally precise in statistical terms, reflecting significant variation in

levels over the year. Venice showed the largest increase, by far, at nearly 32 percent—rising from around 480 to more than 600 across the 12 months.

How Multipliers Affect Estimates of the Unsheltered Population

Since the multipliers shown in Table 1 are all greater than one, applying these factors to the counts of informal shelter types leads mechanically to estimates of the unsheltered population that are larger than the unadjusted sum of individuals, vehicles, and tents and makeshift shelters. How much of a difference these adjustments make overall depends on the relative shares of individuals, cars, vans, RVs, tents, and makeshift shelters. For example, if an area were counted and found to have 90 individuals and 10 tents and we applied a multiplier for the tents of 1.5 (suggesting that every other tent had one additional person residing in it), then the adjusted count would increase from 100 (90 individuals plus 10 tents) to 105 (90 individuals plus $10 \times 1.5 = 15$ estimated individuals living in tents). But if an area were found to have 50 individuals and 50 tents, then the adjusted count would increase to 125.

Figure 2 presents the average totals, by category and overall, from our counts across the full 12-month study period both without adjusting these numbers using category-specific multipliers and after making this adjustment. As can be seen, the adjustment has a smaller effect in proportional terms in Skid Row, where nearly one-half of the unadjusted count comprises individuals rather than informal shelter types (i.e., vehicles or tents and makeshift shelters). For Skid Row, the total estimate increases from 1,427 to

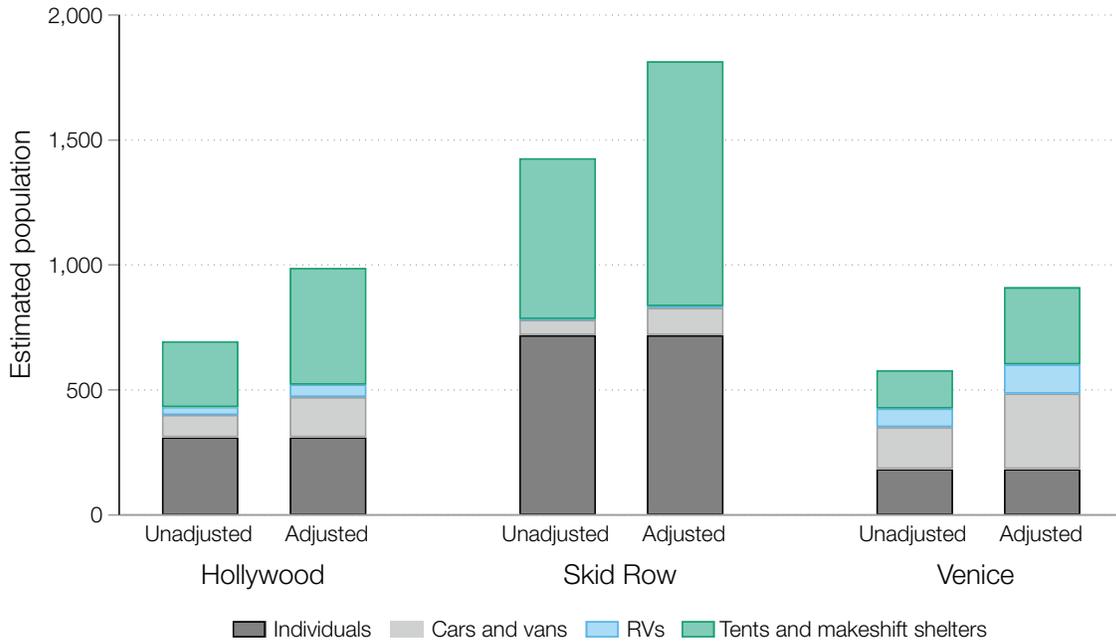
TABLE 2
Regression-Based Estimates of Population Changes over 12 Months

	Overall ^a	Hollywood	Skid Row	Venice
Percentage change, full year [p-value]	18.2% [0.000]	14.5% [0.105]	13.0% [0.002]	31.7% [0.004]
R-squared	0.97	0.22	0.33	0.55
Observations	52	13	26	13

NOTE: Results are from a bivariate regression of the natural log of our unadjusted count data on an integer variable counting the weeks of our study period beginning with the last week of September 2021, the date of our first enumeration of Skid Row. The annual percentage change value given in the table is scaled from the change-per-week point estimate to reflect a 12-month change through the following formula (point estimate $\times 100 \times 52$ [weeks]). The p-value, in square brackets, is from the regression point estimate.

^a The "Overall" estimate includes neighborhood fixed effects to control for persistent differences in overall levels across neighborhoods.

FIGURE 2
Effects of Adjustment Using Multipliers on Neighborhood-Specific Population Estimates



NOTE: Divisions within each bar show the average share of each category of informal shelter (cars and vans, RVs, or tents and makeshift shelters) in our enumerations by neighborhood across the 12 months of data collection. The “Unadjusted” column presents the actual sum of individuals and informal shelters we counted; the “Adjusted” column is the sum when units of informal shelter are scaled using the multipliers presented in Table 1.

1,815, an increase of 27 percent. The adjustments are much larger proportionally in our other neighborhoods, increasing the Hollywood total by 42 percent and the Venice total by 57 percent.

Generating Upper- and Lower-Bound-Adjusted Population Estimates

We note however, that applying the full value of the multipliers to each informal shelter type, as we did in Figure 1, implicitly assumes that all of the individuals we counted were not associated with any of these units of informal shelter. That is, we assume that every unit of informal shelter we counted has a distinct person associated with it that we did not count on the street nearby. For this reason, we would suggest that this approach represents an approximate upper bound on the true size of the population in these areas, since it is likely that some portion of the individuals we counted were actually the residents of some of these various informal shelters that we also counted.²

Therefore, we also tried to consider an approach to generate a plausible lower bound on our estimates of the true population size in the three neighborhoods that adjusts for the likelihood that some individuals we observed were associated with a unit of informal shelter. To generate this estimate, we used another data point from our survey eligibility screening instrument. Screened individuals were given a variety of response options when asked about where they spent most of their past 30 nights that included answers indicating staying literally unsheltered in any way, such as “Street, sidewalk, or alley,” “Campground or woods,” and “Other outdoor location.” The shares of screened individuals who gave such answers were 35 percent in Hollywood, 34 percent in Skid Row, and 20 percent in Venice.

We used these shares to generate an alternative estimate by assuming that the individuals we counted were not associated with some unit of informal shelter that we also counted. In practice, this means that we reduced the total estimated number of unsheltered individuals by discarding one minus that share

of individuals from our count data. That is, when we adjusted the count data using the multipliers for cars and vans, RVs, and tents and makeshift shelters, we also scaled down the number of individuals we counted, reducing our estimate of the population that was literally sleeping outdoors with no type of informal shelter.

Figures 3 through 5 combine these upper- and lower-bound estimates with the unadjusted count totals. In these figures, the simple sum of individuals, vehicles, and tents and makeshift shelters is shown as a thick purple line. Our upper- and lower-bound estimates of the true unsheltered population are represented by the top and bottom of a shaded gray area that we suggest is likely to contain the true population value of each neighborhood at each point in time we conducted counts.³ For visual clarity, we use connected lines and a connected area between each distinct enumeration event. This should not be taken to imply that these linear imputations between points are an accurate estimate of the day-to-day unsheltered population of these areas.

Evidence on the Influence of Discrete Events on Estimates of the Unsheltered Population

In each figure, we also indicated discrete events that we believe directly influenced the number of individuals counted during the subsequent enumeration. Figure 3 (Hollywood) highlights two such events. In late February 2022, our field workers observed evidence of increased sanitation cleanup activity in multiple locations when our count total was down 24 percent relative to the prior count the month before. In the second case, our team noted considerable cleanup activities prior to the beginning of the weeklong “Summit of the Americas” conference that featured visits from such dignitaries as President Joe Biden, which is reflected in the roughly 9-percent decline in the June 2022 count relative to the month before.

In Figure 4, the dashed line indicates a day in early December 2021 when our count coincided with a large-scale COVID-19 testing operation in Skid Row. The 18-percent spike in the count totals for that day likely reflected the effects of this event

FIGURE 3
Hollywood Unsheltered Population

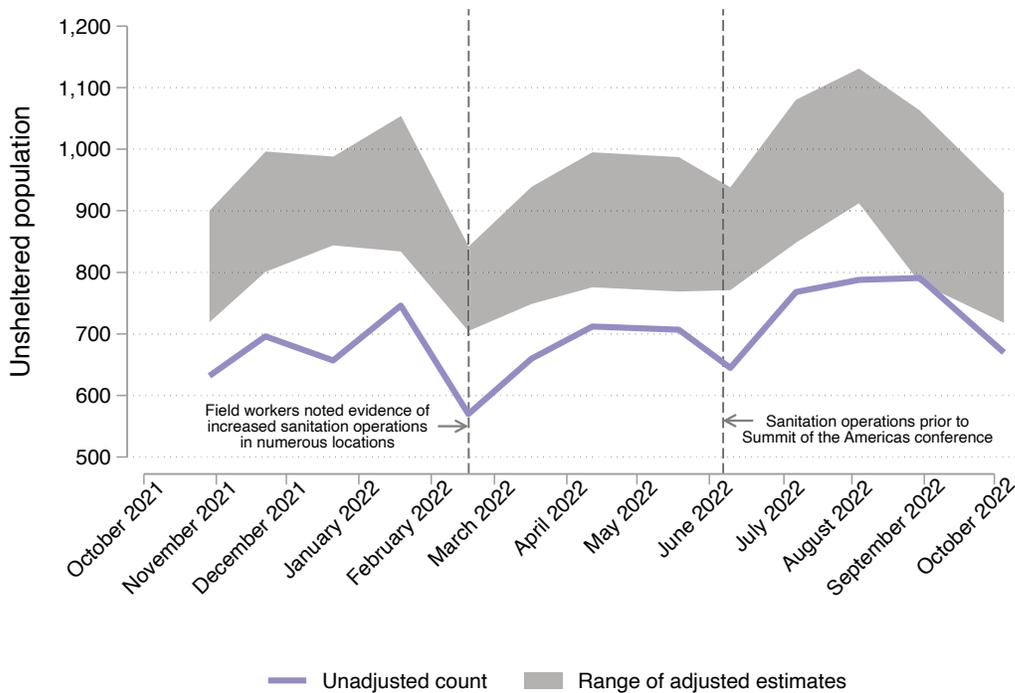


FIGURE 4
Skid Row Unsheltered Population

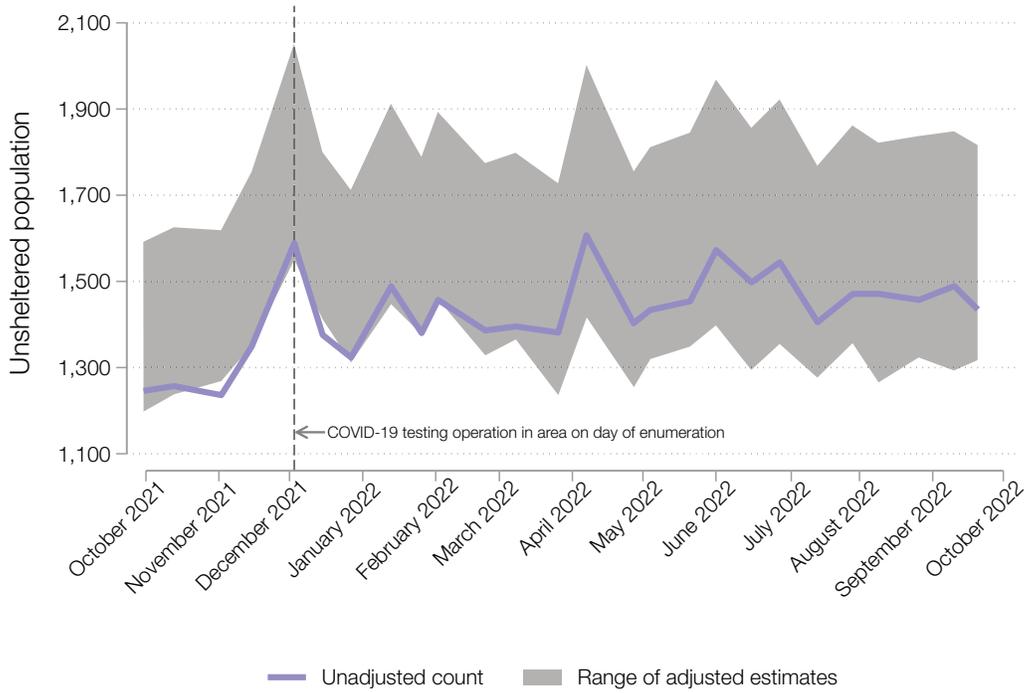
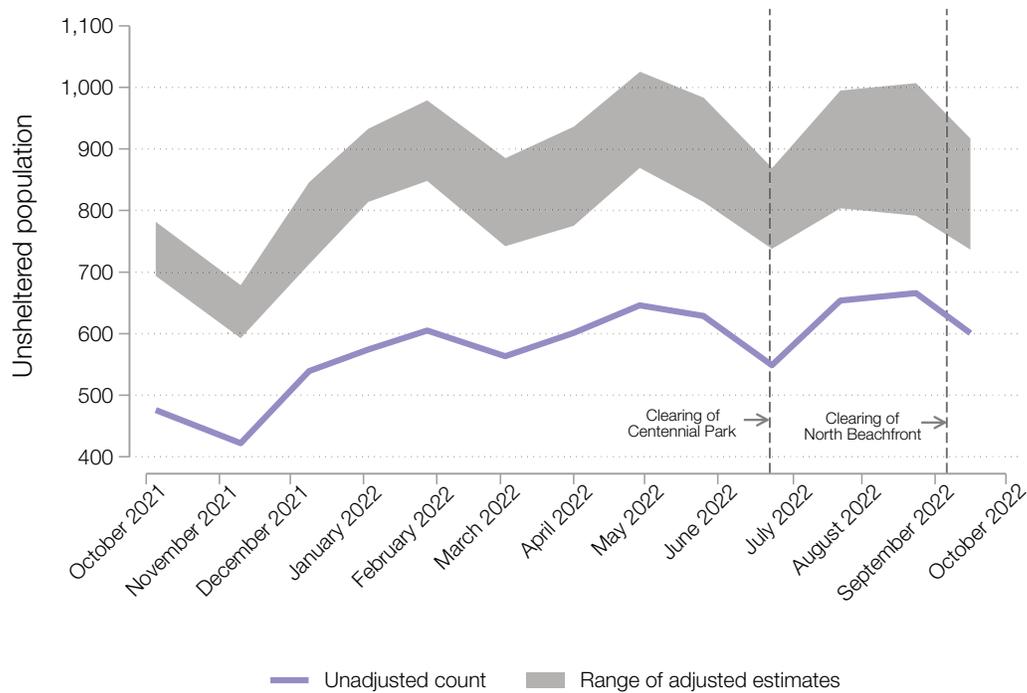


FIGURE 5
Venice Unsheltered Population



drawing individuals to the area from elsewhere and potentially drawing individuals onto the streets from the considerable stock of permanent supportive housing and shelter beds in the area. Consistent with this conjecture, the observed increase was entirely owing to larger numbers of individuals and cars and vans in the area; the number of tents and makeshift structures did not show a jump.

Finally, in Figure 5 (Venice), we indicate two events that affected the numbers we counted. The first event was the multiday clearance of a strip of green space in Centennial Park in late June 2022. The area had a large tent encampment that had grown significantly over the previous few months. The clearance resulted in a 13-percent decline in our total count the following July, with the decline concentrated among tents and makeshift shelters—but not cars, vans, or RVs, which were not subject to the mandatory clearance. Furthermore, the overall numbers of unsheltered individuals fully rebounded to the prior trend by our next enumeration later that same month. The second event, in early September 2022, near the end of our 12-month study period, was the joint operation between Venice and Santa Monica aimed at clearing an encampment of around two dozen tents that had materialized in the so-called no man’s land on the beach along the southern border of Santa Monica (“City Agencies Join Efforts . . .,” 2022).

The upper- and lower-bound estimates we have presented suggest that the assumptions informing this type of estimation strategy have important implications for the results. For example, looking at our results from late August 2022 in Hollywood, the lower-bound assumption results in a population estimate that is nearly identical to the unadjusted count total while the upper-bound approach (which mirrors the approach used by LAHSA) increases the estimate by more than 30 percent. In Skid Row, these two approaches result in population estimates that run from around 15 percent below the unadjusted count to more than 20 percent above it. And in Venice, the lower-bound estimate is around 20 percent larger than the unadjusted count data while the upper-bound estimate is more than 50 percent larger.

Survey of Unsheltered Residents

We collected survey data between early October 2021 and late February 2022. Overall, we collected data from 418 respondents ($n = 104$ from Hollywood; $n = 211$ from Skid Row; $n = 103$ from Venice).

Key Takeaways

As shown in Table 3, about seven out of ten unsheltered individuals we surveyed were men, five out of ten were Black, and about six out of ten were 45 years or older. The respondents from Skid Row were more likely to be older than the respondents in Hollywood and Venice. About 60 percent of respondents in Venice were White, compared with 35 percent in Hollywood and 15 percent in Skid Row. In contrast, 66 percent of respondents from Skid Row were Black, as were nearly 50 percent of the respondents from Hollywood. Although the compositions across the neighborhoods were different, all three neighborhoods were composed of much higher proportions of Black individuals than found among the City of Los Angeles population overall (8 percent), emphasizing the vast overrepresentation of this racial group among the local unsheltered population. There were no meaningful differences reported in the presence of a chronic physical health condition, mental health condition, or substance use disorder. More than one-half of the sample reported having a mental health condition (57 percent), and nearly one-half reported a chronic health condition (44 percent). About one-fifth (21 percent) reported that a doctor had told them they had a substance use disorder.

In Table 4, we present the results from respondents regarding their experiences with homelessness. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the basic demographics of our samples across the three neighborhoods, the respondents from Hollywood and Venice were more likely than the population from Skid Row to report being younger at the time of their first spell of homelessness. Similarly, the reported duration of their current spell of homelessness was more likely to be three years or longer among the respondents from Skid Row (66 percent); in Hollywood and Venice, one-quarter of respondents reported that their current spell was

TABLE 3

Demographic Characteristics of Survey Participants (percentages)

Participant Characteristic	All (N = 418)	Hollywood (n = 104)	Skid Row (n = 211)	Venice (n = 103)
Age				
18–24	5	5	2	9*
25–34	18	40*	8	17*, +
35–44	19	21	13	28*
45–54	25	14*	29	25+
55–64	24	13*	32	19*
65 and older	10	7*	16	2*, +
Gender				
Male	70	73	69	67
Female	27	22	28	27
Nonconforming	2	3	1	4
Missing	2	2	1	2
Hispanic ethnicity	20	18	21	22
Race				
American Indian or Alaska Native	16	13	16	17
Asian American	5	7	4	7
Black or African American	52	49*	66	26*, +
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	3	3	3	4
White	31	35*	15	60*, +
Other	15	15	13	17
Health				
Chronic health condition (yes)	44	38	46	45
Mental health condition (yes)	57	54	60	51
Substance use disorder (yes)	21	19	23	21

NOTE: Participants could indicate membership in more than one race or ethnicity, so these sum to greater than 100 percent. Mutually exclusive percentages might not sum to exactly 100 because of rounding. We performed statistical tests of differences across neighborhoods for each category by creating indicator variables for membership in each group (e.g., age 18–24) and regressing each indicator variable on indicator variables for the Hollywood and Venice neighborhoods (with Skid Row as the omitted neighborhood so that coefficients measure differences with the mean value for Skid Row). A second, analogous regression tests differences between Venice and Hollywood (omitting Hollywood). Results for Hollywood and Venice that are statistically significantly different from Skid Row at the 90-percent confidence level are indicated with a star (*). Results for Venice that are statistically significantly different from Hollywood at the 90-percent confidence level are indicated with a plus sign (+).

less than one year. Relatedly, more than 90 percent of the sample across all the neighborhoods reported experiencing homelessness for more than one year in their lifetimes, with nearly 75 percent reporting three years or longer; this was most prevalent (81 percent) among respondents in Skid Row. The length of these

spells is important because, in order for an individual to be considered chronically homeless by the federal government, documentation of spending one year continuously homeless, or up to one year homeless over a three-year period, is required. It appears that most of the people living unsheltered in Los Angeles would

TABLE 4

Measures of Homelessness Experiences of Survey Participants (percentages)

Participant Characteristic	All (N = 418)	Hollywood (n = 104)	Skid Row (n = 211)	Venice (n = 103)
Age at first spell of homelessness				
Less than 18	21	27*	15	28*
18–24	24	30*	21	24
25–34	24	26	24	21
35–44	13	7*	15	14
45–54	11	6*	14	10
55–64	7	5*	10	4*
65 and older	1	0*	1	0*
Duration of current spell of homelessness				
Less than 1 year	21	25	18	25
1 to 2 years	11	13	8	15
2 to 3 years	11	13	8	15*
3 years or longer	57	50*	66	46*
Lifetime duration of homelessness				
Less than 1 year	9	10	8	12
1 to 2 years	7	12*	3	10*
2 to 3 years	10	10	9	13
3 years or longer	74	69*	81	66*
Duration at current location				
Less than 3 months	16	15	11	26* +
3–6 months	8	11	6	9
More than 6 months	76	74*	83	65*
Location prior to current location				
Los Angeles County	59	57	61	57
Elsewhere in California	11	12	10	13
Outside California	26	24	26	28
Incarcerated	1	4	1	0* +
Missing	3	4	3	2+

NOTE: Mutually exclusive percentages may not sum to exactly 100 because of rounding. We performed statistical tests of differences across neighborhoods for each category by creating indicator variables for membership in each group (e.g., age 18–24) and regressing each indicator variable on indicator variables for the Hollywood and Venice neighborhoods (with Skid Row as the omitted neighborhood so that coefficients measure differences with the mean value for Skid Row). A second, analogous regression tests differences between Venice and Hollywood (omitting Hollywood). Results for Hollywood and Venice that are statistically significantly different from Skid Row at the 90-percent confidence level are indicated with a star (*). Results for Venice that are statistically significantly different from Hollywood at the 90-percent confidence level are indicated with a plus sign (+).

qualify as chronically homeless on the basis of their current spell of homelessness alone.⁴

Although the majority of respondents in all three neighborhoods (76 percent) reported spending six or more months in their current locations, the sample from Venice comprised more respondents who spent less than 90 days in their current locations. We speculate that this difference may have been the result of an effort to rapidly house more than 200 individuals who were encamped along the Venice beachfront walk in summer 2021 (Smith, 2022a), as it might have resulted in removing people with longer homelessness stints from the unsheltered population. There were no statistically significant differences in the reporting of prior locations (i.e., elsewhere in Los Angeles County, outside Los Angeles County but in California, or elsewhere) among the respondents from the three neighborhoods, with the majority reporting living in Los Angeles County previously. None of the respondents from Venice reported being

incarcerated prior to living in their current locations, and only a few reported this in Hollywood and Skid Row (1 percent across the sample).

Housing Needs and Preferences

Table 5 presents our findings about respondents' housing experiences, needs, and preferences. Ninety percent of survey respondents reported that they were interested in receiving housing, similar to the results from our interim report that were derived from roughly one-half of this sample (i.e., 216 respondents). About 29 percent reported being on a wait list, and 40 percent reported that they had been offered housing since experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles. The wait list and housing offer figures are slightly lower than what we reported in May 2022 (32 percent and 46 percent, respectively) but of roughly similar magnitudes. The May 2022 report presented survey results from data collection that

TABLE 5
Housing Needs and Preferences of Survey Participants (percentages)

Need or Preference	All (N = 418)	Hollywood (n = 104)	Skid Row (n = 211)	Venice (n = 103)
Interested in housing ^a	90	85*	94	86*
Currently on a wait list	29	28	25	39*
Offered housing since homeless in Los Angeles	40	38	38	43
Factors that prevented housing move-in				
Never contacted for move-in	44	36*	47	45
Lack of privacy	40	49*	38	35 ⁺
Housing safety	35	45*	31	33 ⁺
Paperwork issues	29	31	27	29
Hours or curfew	25	23	23	33*
Housing location	26	27	23	32
Housing cleanliness	26	26	29	20*
Other housing rules	20	22	16	27*
Partner not allowed into housing	17	18	17	18
Handicap accessibility	10	10	13	4*
Pets	9	8	6	15*
Possessions	11	13	10	12
Other issues that prevented past move to housing ^b	23	25	22	24

Table 5—Continued

Need or Preference	All (N = 418)	Hollywood (n = 104)	Skid Row (n = 211)	Venice (n = 103)
Acceptable housing options				
Permanent stay in motel or hotel setting	87	82*	92	82*
Supportive housing (own apartment with case management)	85	86	89	76*, +
Shelter or hotel with private room	83	80	87	77*
Interim housing with access to services	62	60	67	55*
Safe camping (organized tent space)	49	54	45	54
Shared housing (shared apartment or house)	49	52	46	53
Bridge housing (temporary shelter with onsite services)	52	50	52	55
Group shelter	30	25	33	31
Recovery or sober living housing	35	34	39	28*
Specific housing or shelter needs or requirements				
Needs to be in particular neighborhood	33	36	29	38
Storage for possessions	31	36	33	24 ⁺
Allowed to stay with partner, spouse, child, roommate	27	32	24	27
Allowed to stay with pet(s)	22	23	20	22
Handicap accessible	21	19	25	15*
Other ^b	12	14	8	16*
Factors that would prevent future housing move-in				
Lack of safety	62	73	63	56
Lack of privacy	63	71*	61	59 ⁺
Lack of cleanliness	50	49	51	49
Negative interactions with staff	42	36	41	50 ⁺
Hours or curfew	35	40*	29	44*
Other rules	26	23	26	30
Other ^b	4	5	2	8*

NOTE: Mutually exclusive percentages may not sum to exactly 100 because of rounding. We performed statistical tests of differences across neighborhoods for each category by creating indicator variables for membership in each group (e.g., age 18–24) and regressing each indicator variable on indicator variables for the Hollywood and Venice neighborhoods (with Skid Row as the omitted neighborhood so that coefficients measure differences with the mean value for Skid Row). A second, analogous regression tests differences between Venice and Hollywood (omitting Hollywood). Results for Hollywood and Venice that are statistically significantly different from Skid Row at the 90-percent confidence level are indicated with a star (*). Results for Venice that are statistically significantly different from Hollywood at the 90-percent confidence level are indicated with a plus sign (+).

^a Of respondents not answering “yes” to this question, one-half (5 percent of the total) answered “maybe” in a similar pattern across each neighborhood.

^b In Table C.3 in the separate, online appendix (Ward, Garvey, and Hunter, 2023), we provide discrete tabulations of these “other” responses.

occurred from early October through early December 2021. The full sample reflects the inclusion of additional data collected through late February 2022, incorporating responses from people living on the streets during the winter months.

Next, we present results concerning factors that prevented respondents from moving into housing in Los Angeles since the time they became homeless. We provided participants with 12 options and also allowed them to offer a response that was not

provided. Never being contacted for move-in was the most commonly endorsed factor, with 44 percent of respondents endorsing this item. This finding is consistent with the notion that periodic sweeps of encampment areas may result in disruptions that could make it more difficult for outreach workers to provide follow-up for housing placements because of the forced relocation of people experiencing homelessness (Cohen, Yetvin, and Khadduri, 2019). About 40 percent of respondents were concerned with a lack of privacy offered in the housing options available to them, suggesting that a significant expansion of congregate and other shared living options may not be an effective policy for resolving unsheltered homelessness. Other common factors were housing safety (35 percent) and paperwork issues (29 percent). About 25 percent of respondents listed “hours/curfew,” “housing location,” and “housing cleanliness” as factors. Such concerns as allowing for one’s partner, pet, and/or possessions were not frequently endorsed as factors preventing move-in relative to the administrative and structural barriers, consistent with requirements of a recently passed “low barrier” shelter statute (California Government Code, 2021; Colletti, 2019). These endorsement rates mirror the May 2022 findings.

The factors that respondents endorsed as preventing a move into housing were in alignment with the types of housing options that respondents found acceptable. More specifically, housing options that provided privacy—and, ostensibly, higher levels of safety—had relatively higher endorsement ratings than housing options that provided minimal levels of privacy. These findings are especially important as Los Angeles considers the design and scale-up of interim and more-permanent forms of housing for the unsheltered, which has been noted as one of the top issues facing policymakers (Littlejohn, 2022). More specifically, our results suggest that proposed plans, such as the building of 30,000 congregate shelter beds (Oreskes and Smith, 2022), may succeed only in inducing roughly one-third of the people currently living on the streets to come indoors.

Although providing more private housing options is a challenging short-term goal, it is important to note that nearly one-half of the sample endorsed safe camping (i.e., organized tent communities) as an acceptable

option. This option may represent an effective interim step in addressing unsheltered homelessness.

We also observed that overall acceptance ratings were generally higher than previously reported; we speculate that this may be the result of the inclusion of survey data collected during the winter months, when inclement weather may have resulted in a higher willingness to accept most shelter options (with the exception of safe camping and group shelter options, whose ratings stayed consistent over time).

Comparisons of LA LEADS and LAHSA 2022 Data

To receive U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funding, Continuums of Care (regional or local planning bodies used to coordinate homelessness funding and service provision) across the United States have been required since 2005 to conduct biannual PIT counts of individuals experiencing homelessness (Holland and Alpert, 2013). LAHSA has conducted these counts and the associated demographic survey annually in Los Angeles County since 2016 (Yee, 2022). These efforts have increased our knowledge of the state of homelessness. In the late 1980s, before such systematic efforts, estimates of the number of people experiencing homelessness in the United States ranged from 250,000 to more than 2 million (Weare, 2019).

Yet, for several reasons, these once-per-year counts likely represent a significant undercount of unsheltered homelessness. Some of these reasons, such as conducting the count on a winter night, represent explicit policy choices.⁵ Others, such as the use of lightly trained volunteers, represent logistical constraints that are difficult to address in a large metropolitan area. These limitations have led to various suggested reforms. Some of these have been implemented, such as the use of digital technology, either in tandem with or in lieu of paper recordkeeping (Flaming and Burns, 2017). Others have not, such as substantially increasing the quality and intensity of volunteer training (Flaming and Burns, 2017) or using alternative methods, such as the “two-list method,” as a check on the traditional volunteer count approach (Weare, 2019).

Issues of accuracy and consistency in these data have become increasingly important as the problem of unsheltered homelessness has grown and become more polarizing across communities. Additionally, the dramatically increased levels of resources devoted to this issue at both the state and national levels have raised the stakes for getting the data right.

The LA LEADS study provides a useful alternative data source that can be used to assess some important aspects of the accuracy of the annual PIT count and demographic survey data. In this section, we conduct comparisons with LAHSA data using both our survey and enumeration findings.

Comparability with 2022 LAHSA Survey Data

We compared demographic characteristics between our survey sample and the area-level demographic reports produced by LAHSA for these three neighborhoods. The age and gender of survey participants in these three neighborhoods were similar to what is reported in the LAHSA 2022 area reports. The differences between the LAHSA and LA LEADS data in self-reporting of race or ethnicity (specifically Black or African American and Hispanic), male gender, and age group are presented in Table 6.

In general, we reported a higher proportion of Black or African American participants, primarily in the Hollywood sample. Compared with LAHSA, we surveyed fewer people who reported being Hispanic in Hollywood and more in Venice. In terms of gender, the results are virtually identical for Skid Row, but we estimate a modestly lower number of men in Hollywood and a substantial difference (11 percentage points, or 14 percent, lower) in Venice.

Our estimates of age shares differ in several cases. For example, our share of survey respondents who were 18 to 24 years old in Venice was more than double the LAHSA estimate. On Skid Row, we surveyed considerably fewer 25- to 54-year-olds and more individuals ages 55 or older.

These differences may be influenced by differing methodologies. For example, LAHSA weights its data for nonresponse propensity using estimated demographic characteristics (age, gender, race or

ethnicity) for nonrespondents recorded from visual conjecture by each surveyor. We did not make this type of nonresponse adjustment. However, our nonresponse rates overall were below 20 percent (around one-half the nonresponse rate in the LAHSA demographic survey). Without access to unadjusted sample data from LAHSA, it is unclear how much of an effect the weighting approach has on the estimates, but the fact that the differences across surveys vary in both directions in some cases and closely agree in others leads us to believe that nonresponse differences and associated weighting approaches are unlikely to fully explain these discrepancies in our survey data. Differences may have arisen from the fact that we conducted multiple survey rounds over approximately four months whereas the demographic survey is conducted in each neighborhood only over a few days. Thus, leaving aside any differences arising from the use of weighting, the LAHSA data may more strongly reflect short-term population characteristics while the LA LEADS data may reflect longer-term average population characteristics.

Comparison of LA LEADS Enumeration Data and 2022 LAHSA Point-in-Time Data

The 2022 PIT count represented an important change in the data collection approach, moving from paper-based tabulations of each census tract to a system where volunteers used a purpose-built app on their own smartphones to enter count data (Ward, 2022). These data were released after a two-month delay and showed that the rate of growth of the estimated population of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in the city had slowed, increasing by just 1.7 percent versus an increase of more than 31.9 percent from 2018 to 2020 (Wagner, 2022). But these numbers quickly came under scrutiny because of multiple city council members questioning the results in their districts and media coverage focused on a count of zero people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in a high-profile census tract (included in the LA LEADS study area) in northwest Venice, a problem that appears to be

TABLE 6
Demographic Characteristics of Unsheltered Individuals
(by percentage shares)

	LAHSA 2022	LA LEADS	Percentage Difference
Black or African American			
Skid Row	58	66	+14
Hollywood	30	49	+63
Venice	24	26	+8
Hispanic or Latinx			
Skid Row	20	21	+5
Hollywood	26	18	-31
Venice	17	22	+29
Male			
Skid Row	68	69	+1
Hollywood	78	73	-6
Venice	78	67	-14
Ages 18–24			
Skid Row	0	2	N/A
Hollywood	7	5	-30
Venice	4	9	+150
Ages 25–54			
Skid Row	62	50	-20
Hollywood	77	75	-2
Venice	74	70	-5
Ages 55 and older			
Skid Row	37	48	+30
Hollywood	15	20	+30
Venice	21	21	+1

NOTE: Percentages for the LAHSA Demographic Survey data are from tabular data released by LAHSA and are calculated by dividing the number of unsheltered individuals under a given characteristic or trait by the total number of unsheltered individuals in each area using the “All Persons” data point. In each case, percentage differences between the two survey data points are calculated as (LA LEADS percentage–LAHSA percentage)/LAHSA percentage*100. Note that we are unable to test for statistically significant differences because we do not have access to the underlying LAHSA survey data. N/A = not applicable.

related to the phone app failing to transmit data that volunteers attempted to upload (Smith, 2022b). Organizers of the count pointed to other issues complicating the 2022 effort, notably a decrease in the number of volunteers (Kanter, 2022), which is important because the number of individuals counting has been shown to be positively correlated with the magnitude of the resulting counts (Weare, 2019). Past research on the broader accuracy of the

count has focused on other issues. For example, a 2017 report found that the total number of people on General Relief (a small cash welfare payment provided to individuals living in deep poverty) estimated to be experiencing unsheltered homelessness and on other programs with eligibility based on homelessness status during the month of the count has at times exceeded the estimated number of people experiencing homelessness from the

PIT count by more than 80 percent (Flaming and Burns, 2017).

Another reason that the LAHSA volunteer count may not accurately reflect the true population of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness even if the counting is done accurately is the influence that specific events, such as site clearances or inclement weather, may have on the number of people observed. Additionally, the training that volunteers for the LAHSA PIT count have received in recent years on how to accurately identify individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness typically comprises no more than perhaps two minutes in a ten- to 12-minute training video. Furthermore, errors in handling and compiling the paper documents used in past counts and errors related to the smartphone app used in 2022 could have contributed to inaccuracy. Finally, counting is being done by thousands of individuals who typically only count a single census tract (or a portion of one) so that it is impossible to measure variation in accuracy or consistency across volunteers, and simple human error across some portion of the army of volunteers used each year is likely also a meaningful factor.

To better understand the extent of such mechanisms affecting the accuracy of the annual count, we generated small-area comparisons of our own count data occurring prior to and following the LAHSA PIT count data collected in late February 2022. Our comparison data span five months in Hollywood and Venice (where we conducted monthly enumerations) and around two and a half months in Skid Row (where we conducted enumerations twice per month). For each small-area comparison, we present a short time series of enumeration results from equal periods before and after the LAHSA PIT count in late February. Because our counts were conducted by a small, consistent team of field workers who underwent multiple days of in-person training, were closely supervised, and surveyed the same areas several times over the course of a year, we believe that our counts represent a high-quality benchmark against which to consider the results of the LAHSA volunteer counts.

It is important to note that our LA LEADS survey areas are composed of blocks that are only

occasionally exactly coincident with census tracts (and census tract subdivisions) used in the PIT count. That is, our study block designations were designed to optimize data collection.

We did not design our study to compare directly with the LAHSA PIT count figures. Thus, these comparisons represent a combination of exact single-tract matches (in cases where we did use census tracts as our blocks), matches that are exact over multiple census tracts (where, for example, three to six census tracts might equal two of our blocks), and very close area matches across multiple LA LEADS sub-geographies or census tracts where we were confident that any geographic differences were unlikely to drive meaningful differences in counts (according to survey team knowledge and documentation about the distribution of encampment activity within each area).

In Figures 6–14, we include notes defining the boundaries of the comparison areas. In Appendix A in the separate, online-only appendix file (Ward, Garvey, and Hunter, 2023), we provide maps outlining the correspondence between our study neighborhood blocks and the 2020 census tracts used in the LAHSA PIT count. Note that, in each figure, we connect our monthly or bimonthly enumerations with a line to make the figure easier to read and to highlight the stability or lack of stability of our small-area counts over time, but these lines should not be interpreted as providing a valid measure of the number of individuals, cars and vans, or tents and makeshift shelters in each category during the periods between our observations.

Key Takeaways

Overall, these small-area comparisons present mixed results. In many cases, the 2022 LAHSA count data agree very closely with our own data from periods very close to the date of the PIT count across individuals, cars and vans, RVs, and tents and makeshift shelters. But in other cases, the counts for three of these categories might agree while the fourth is very different. And in still other cases, all four categories differ substantially, being all smaller in some examples and all larger in others.

How big are these differences overall? In totaling up the counts for all the comparisons we make in this report, LA LEADS counts are 15 percent larger than the comparable LAHSA 2022 counts. However, it is important to note that the set of comparison areas we consider is an arbitrary subset of these neighborhoods that were amenable to exact or very close geographic matching.

As we discuss in more detail in the rest of this report, the differences that we see most likely reflect a mix of factors, such as technology issues, differences in training and experience, and actual differences in numbers of individuals on the streets at different times.

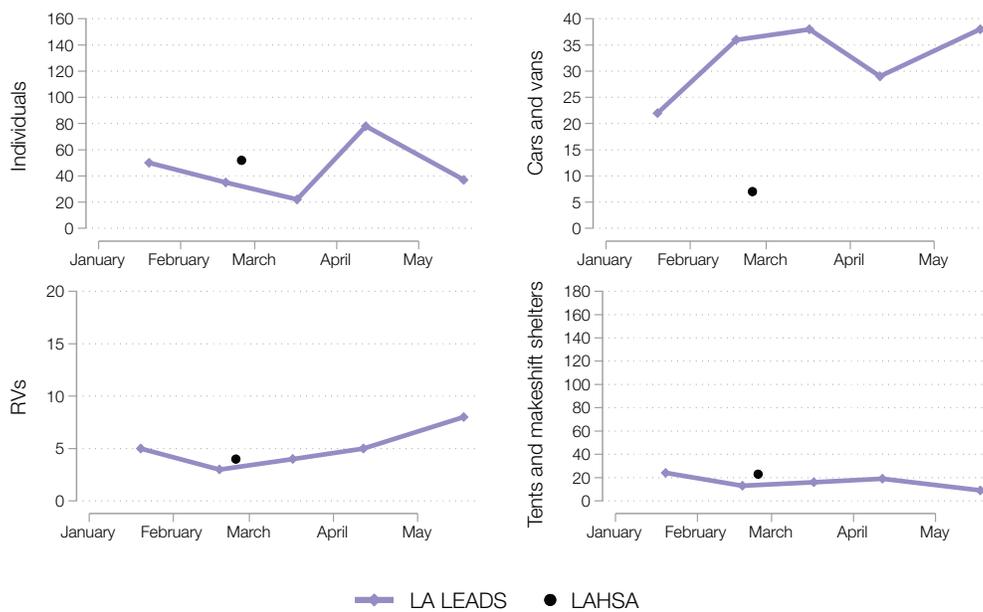
Hollywood

We compare three areas in central Hollywood comprising multiple census tracts but that each represent two contiguous LA LEADS blocks.

Figure 6 focuses on a northeastern portion of central Hollywood. In this area, we see fairly stable patterns of RVs and tents from January through May 2022 in the LA LEADS data but more variation in individuals and cars and vans. For all categories except cars and vans, the LAHSA count data closely accord with our closest count a few days beforehand, but there is a large discrepancy in terms of cars and vans, with LA LEADS results showing an average of 37 over the period around the LAHSA count but the LAHSA data showing only 7.

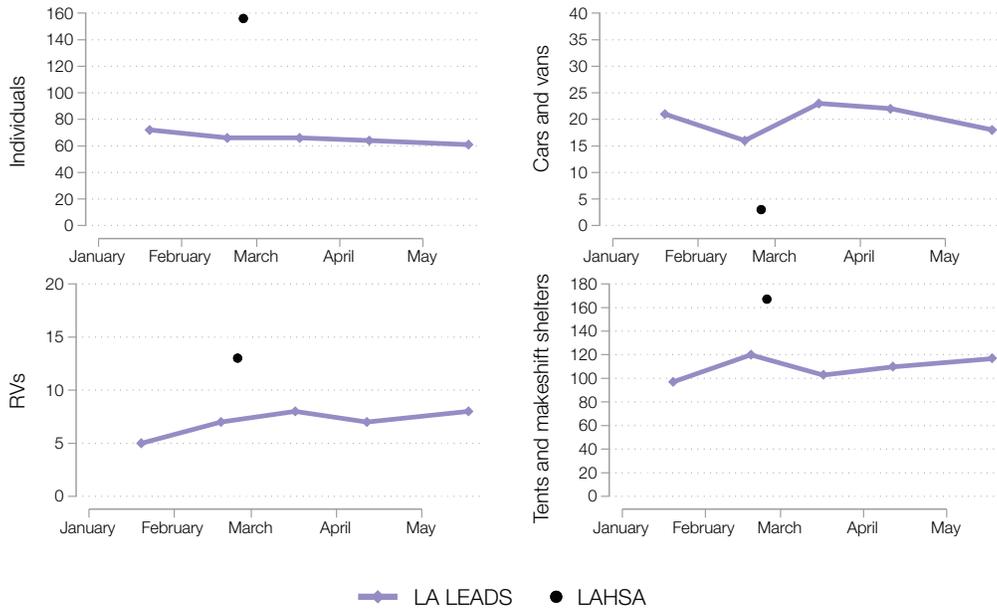
The second comparison, in Figure 7, covers an area immediately to the west of the geography in Figure 6. In contrast to the results in Figure 6, the LAHSA counts for this group of census tracts vary from the LA LEADS counts conducted around the same period by between 30 percent and more than 100 percent, with all LAHSA counts higher except for cars and vans.

FIGURE 6
Comparison of LA LEADS and LAHSA Unadjusted Count Data for Census Tracts 189201, 190401, 190402, 190520, 191110, 191120, 191201, 191203, and 191204 in Hollywood



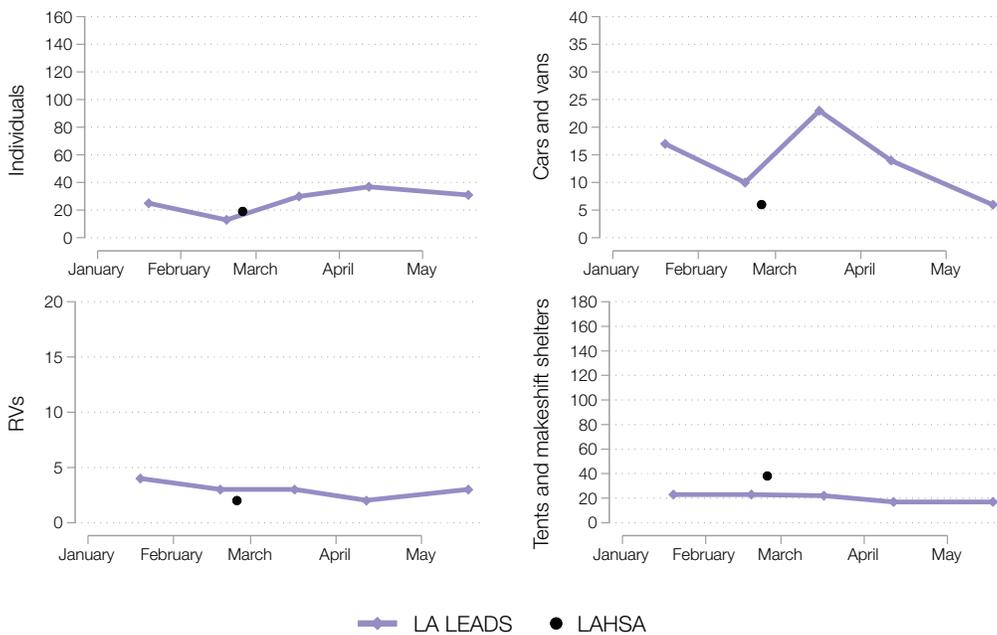
NOTE: These eight census tracts correspond closely to LA LEADS blocks 2303-02 and 2404-02, bounded by Franklin Avenue to the north, North Vermont Avenue to the east, Santa Monica Boulevard to the south, and North Western Avenue to the west. Census tract 190520 has a western boundary of North Serrano Avenue, which is one block east of North Western Avenue; LA LEADS geography stays constant along North Western Avenue, so it is slightly larger.

FIGURE 7
 Comparison of LA LEADS and LAHSA Unadjusted Count Data for Census Tracts 190301, 190510, and 191000 in Hollywood



NOTE: These two census tracts correspond closely to LA LEADS geography for blocks 2202-02 and 2303-01, bounded by Franklin Avenue to the north, North Western Avenue to the east, Sunset Boulevard to the south, and Vine Street to the west. Census tract 190510 has an eastern boundary of North Serrano Avenue, which is one block east of North Western Avenue, but the LA LEADS geography stays constant along North Western Avenue, so it is slightly smaller.

FIGURE 8
 Comparison of LA LEADS and LAHSA Unadjusted Count Data for Census Tracts 190801, 190902, 191610, and 191620 in Hollywood



NOTE: These four census tracts are bounded by Sunset Boulevard to the north, North Western Avenue to the east, Santa Monica Boulevard to the south, and Vine Street to the west. This match is exact with LA LEADS blocks 2202-04 and 2404-01.

Finally, Figure 8 compares counts for a geography immediately south of the north central Hollywood geography compared in Figure 7. Here, the counts are very close for individuals and RVs, with a modest gap for cars and vans and a larger gap for tents and makeshift shelters (38 for the LAHSA counts versus an average number in the surrounding LA LEADS counts of 22.5).

Skid Row

We made two comparisons in the western portion of Skid Row, presented in Figures 9 and 10. The first of these covers the northwestern corner of the neighborhood. The corresponding LA LEADS area extends slightly farther west than the partial census tract used by LAHSA, but our counts consistently found little evidence of significant numbers of unsheltered individuals or encampment activity in this non-overlapping area, with the exception of one short block that typically contained multiple cars and vans and may explain the discrepancy (6 for LA LEADS versus 0 for LAHSA) in this category. Both counts show no RVs and very similar numbers of tents and makeshift shelters. The LAHSA count of individuals is about one-third lower than the LA LEADS count conducted shortly before this count, but this discrepancy is consistent with other LA LEADS counts in the same area in the surrounding weeks.

We observe a similar pattern for the area immediately to the south, shown in Figure 9. Again, the discrepancy for cars and vans may relate to a similar modest geographic difference in the comparison areas (LA LEADS geography is similarly slightly larger than the partial census tract used by LAHSA). The number of tents and makeshift shelters is essentially identical, but the number of individuals is much lower in the LAHSA estimate. A factor that could explain at least part of this difference (though it applies to both comparisons) may be the effect of counting at different times of day or night, as daily patterns of mobility across this densely populated area may vary considerably across a single day.

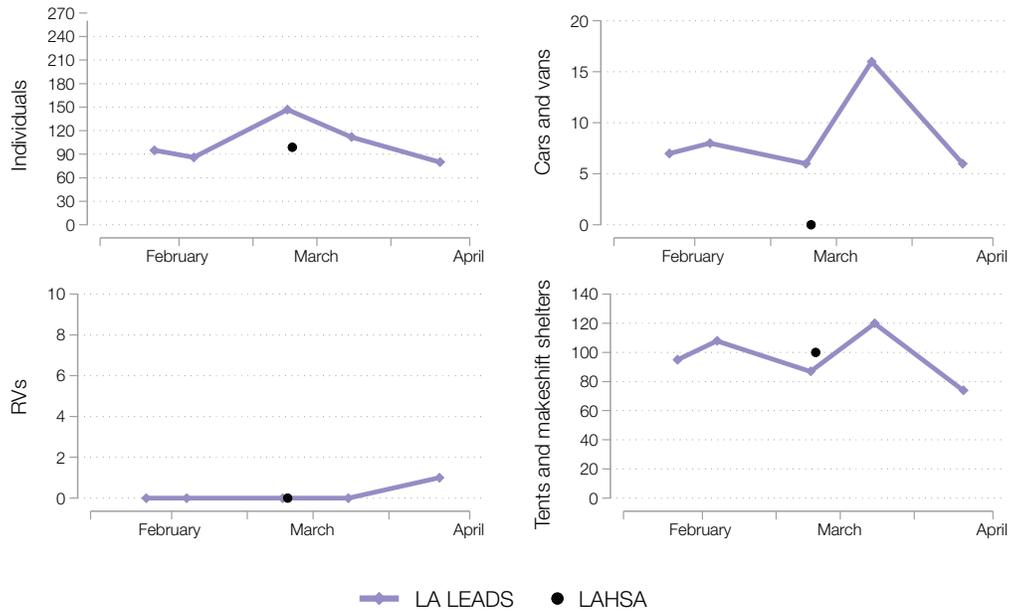
Venice

We make comparisons between our time series of unadjusted count data and LAHSA PIT count results in five Venice census tracts, two of which we combine to match up better with our block definitions. Broadly, we find that our raw count data and the most recent LAHSA volunteer count are often in fairly close agreement, but they do have some important differences across the four comparisons.

In Figure 11, which compares data for a north-eastern portion of central Venice, we see that our count data in the two counts closest to the LAHSA PIT count are in fairly close agreement with the LAHSA data for individuals, cars and vans, and RVs. The LAHSA count for tents in these tracts is similar to our count from around one month before but significantly higher than our result from approximately one week later. However, it is possible that such a discrepancy could be explained by sanitation cleanup activity that occurred shortly after the LAHSA count but before our next count in early March—we recorded a significant rebound in the number of tents during our count from late March.

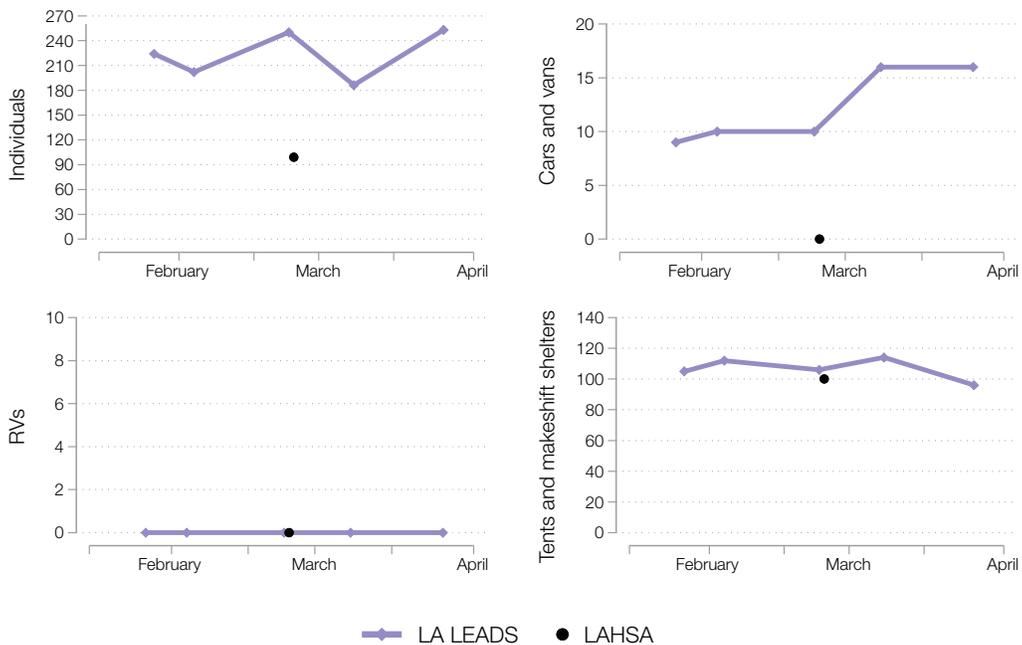
Figure 12 presents comparisons for the high-profile northwest corner of Venice that drew attention in the media because of the census tract-level LAHSA data reporting zeros in all categories (Smith, 2022b). Our unadjusted data show significant levels of individuals and informal shelter use across all categories (totals before and after the LAHSA count average around 200 individuals, cars and vans, RVs, tents, and makeshift shelters). A blog post from an individual who reported counting this area but encountering problems submitting the data through the phone app that LAHSA employed included screenshots of the numbers that he attempted to upload (LeGras, 2022). These numbers are consistent with our surrounding counts for individuals but considerably larger for cars and vans (72 versus around 42) and for tents and makeshift shelters (121 versus around 50). However, this may be related, at least in part, to the fact that our LA LEADS block geography does not continue south for the full length of the census tract, ending at Brooks Avenue to the south rather than Westminster Avenue. We added a portion of the count from the next census tract to the

FIGURE 9
Comparison of LA LEADS and LAHSA Unadjusted Count Data for Census Tract Split 206200a in Skid Row



NOTE: This partial census tract is bounded by East Third Street to the north, San Pedro Street to the east, East Fifth Street to the south, and Los Angeles Street to the west. The LA LEADS geography for blocks 1101-01, 1101-02, 1202-01, and 1303-01 represents a close match except that blocks 1101-01 and 1101-02 extend west to Main Street. Our survey teams noted several cars and vans on Winston Street between Main and Los Angeles that may account for the difference in this category.

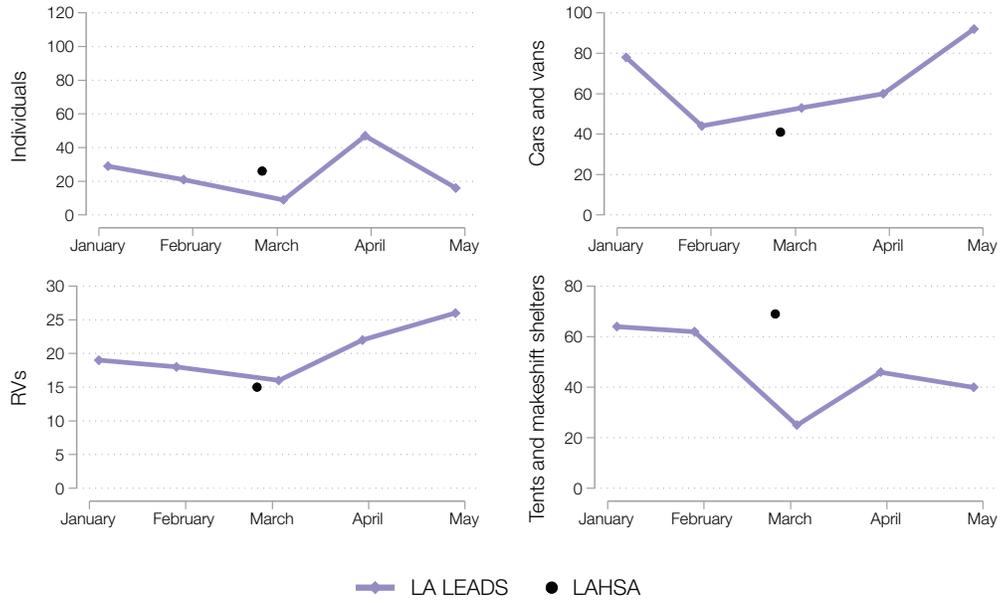
FIGURE 10
Comparison of LA LEADS and LAHSA Unadjusted Count Data for Census Tract Split 206300a in Skid Row



NOTE: This partial census tract is bounded by East Fifth Street to the north, San Pedro Street to the east, East Seventh Street to the south, and Los Angeles Street to the west. The LA LEADS geography for blocks 1101-03, 1101-04, 1202-02, and 1202-03 represents a close match except that blocks 1101-03 and 1101-04 extend west to Main Street.

FIGURE 11

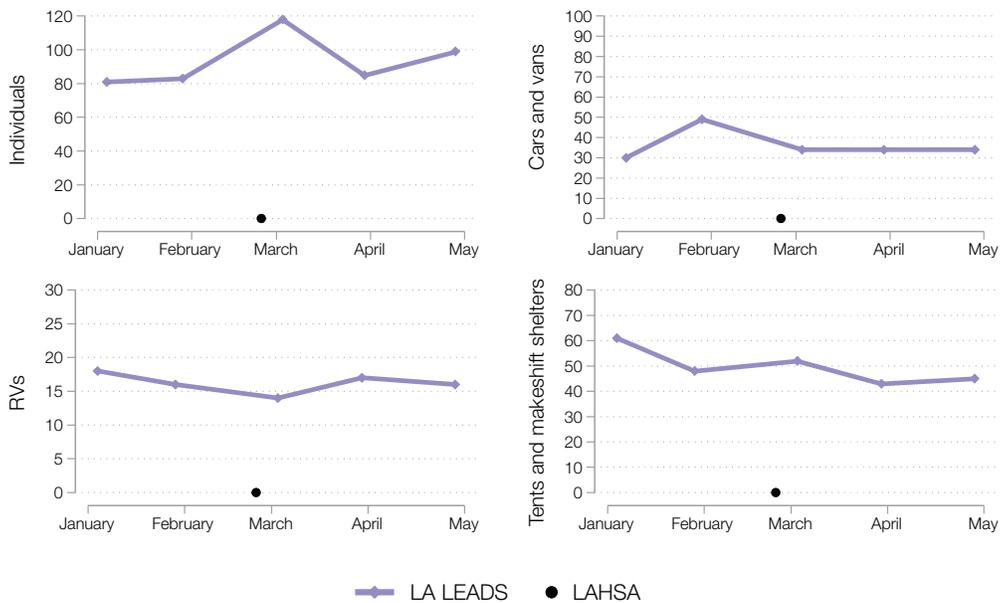
Comparison of LA LEADS and LAHSA Unadjusted Count Data for Census Tracts 273200 and 273300 in Venice



NOTE: This pair of census tracts is bounded by Sixth Avenue to the northeast, Marine Court and Dewey Street to the northwest, Hampton Drive to the southeast, and Abbot Kinney Boulevard to the south (connecting with Sixth Avenue via a small stretch of California Avenue). LA LEADS blocks 3101-01, 3101-02, and 3101-03 are a virtually exact match except that we count one block farther north to Marine Street west of Sixth Avenue and Ozone Street between Lincoln Boulevard and Sixth Avenue.

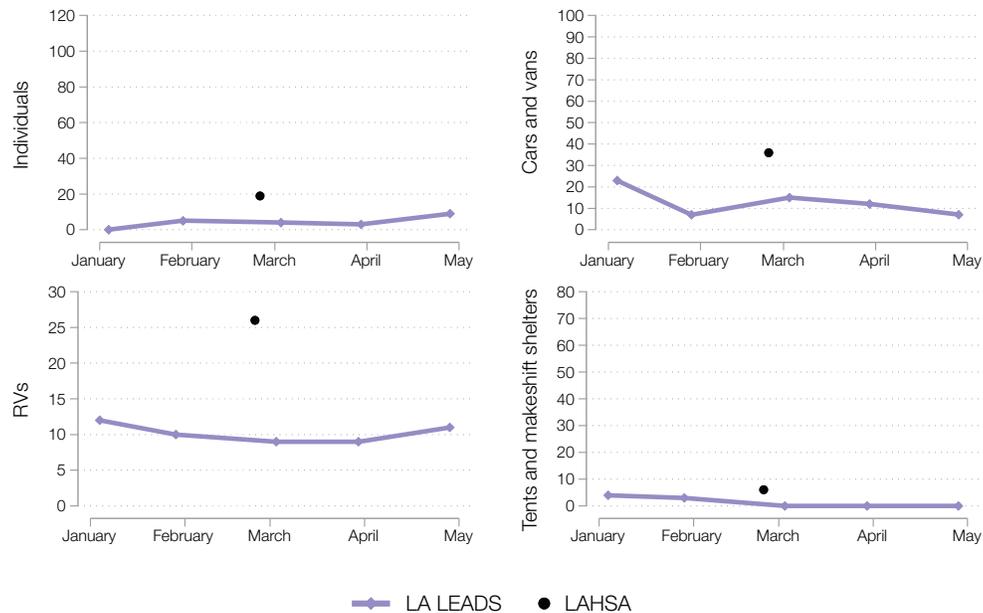
FIGURE 12

Comparison of LA LEADS and LAHSA Unadjusted Count Data for Census Tract 273400 in Venice



NOTE: The LAHSA data reported all zeros for this census tract, which is bounded by Marine Court to the northwest, Hampton Drive and Abbot Kinney Boulevard to the northeast, Westminster Avenue to the southeast, and the beachfront to the southwest. LA LEADS blocks 3202-01 and 3202-02 are slightly smaller, ending at Brooks Avenue to the south. Thus, our comparisons may represent an undercount relative to the actual population residing in this tract.

FIGURE 13
 Comparison of LA LEADS and LAHSA Unadjusted Count Data for Census Tract 273600 in Venice



NOTE: This census tract is bounded by California Avenue to the northwest, Lincoln Boulevard to the northeast, Venice Boulevard to the southeast, and Abbot Kinney Boulevard to the southwest. LA LEADS block 3303-01 follows this census tract exactly.

LA LEADS totals for this comparison, but this heuristic approach, using field workers' notes and discussions, may still represent a modest undercount for the census tract.

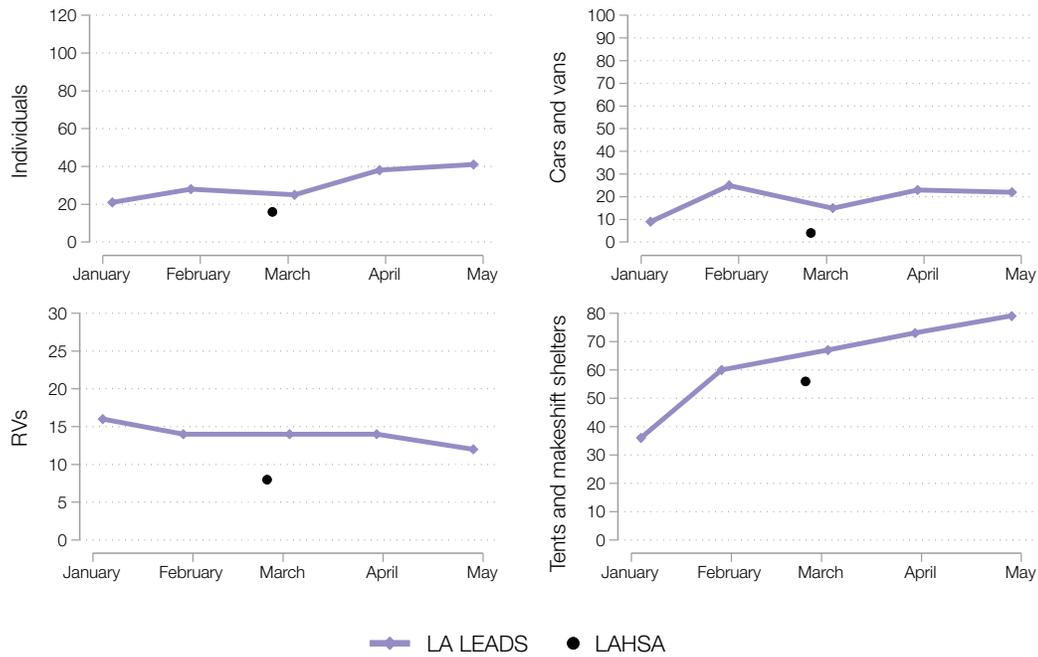
The comparison we explore in Figure 13 is for a census tract in central Venice. Our geography exactly followed the tract. However, we see that in each category, the LAHSA count is roughly two to four times higher than our surrounding data points. The discrepancy in actual terms for tents and makeshift shelters is small (six versus three), but other differences (36 cars and vans versus 7 roughly a month before and 15 a few days later) suggest that the LAHSA volunteers may have used a lower visual threshold for considering a car or van to be a source of informal overnight shelter. However, this distinction is unlikely to explain the higher number of RVs (26 versus our surrounding counts of 7 and 15), which are much more likely to actually be overnight shelter, conditional on being on the street in this part of the city, suggesting that other factors, such as double-counting, might have played a role in these fairly large differences.

The last tract we compare, in Figure 14, is where southwest Venice borders Marina del Rey. Again, our study used the exact census tract in this case. Here we see a converse pattern, where all of the LAHSA counts are between roughly one-half and one-quarter the size of our surrounding counts, which are all quite stable over time. The difference in the count of individuals is quite small and plausible, as is the difference in the number of tents and makeshift shelters. But the differences in cars and vans and RVs, given the stability of the numbers we counted in the surrounding LA LEADS counts, suggest that the volunteer counters may have differed in some aspect of their approach to counting these units.

Overall, many of the volunteer counts are in close agreement with the longer series of data the LA LEADS field team collected. But, aside from the apparent app-based issue in tract 273400, there are important differences across many of the comparisons we were able to create. The most common difference was in the counting of vehicles. It was slightly more common for counts of cars and vans to differ between LA LEADS and LAHSA count data. This

FIGURE 14

Comparison of LA LEADS and LAHSA Unadjusted Count Data for Census Tract 273900 in Venice



NOTE: This census tract is bounded by North Venice Boulevard to the northwest, the ocean to the southwest, Washington Boulevard to the southeast, and a northern boundary that follows Abbot Kinney Boulevard and Oxford Avenue. LA LEADS blocks 3202-04 and 3404-02 follow this census tract exactly.

could be related to differences owing to, for example, street cleaning days requiring that cars move. But the differences in counts across sources go in both directions across the comparisons we make, and we note that, in most cases, our longer time series of observations are quite stable, suggesting that daily variation is not likely to be the main source of discrepancies. We also see several cases of RVs differing meaningfully. Although the city lifted a moratorium on towing RVs in April 2022 (Uranga and Vives, 2022), the impression from our field team is that there has been relatively little enforcement in our survey areas, suggesting that the counts in these categories should be quite stable, as observed in most of our data series. It appears more likely that these often large differences suggest that volunteers are using very different criteria for identifying vehicles being used as shelter.

These comparisons also suggest potentially important differences in the way tents are counted (for example, whether long, contiguous makeshift shelters are counted as a single unit or multiple segments and how tents obviously used for storage are treated).

Finally, as discussed earlier, we see evidence of more broad-based differences (affecting all categories in a given comparison) that are consistent with app-related problems (incorrect data entry or only partial uploading of data) or other human errors (for example, double-counting or missing one side of a street).

Limitations

This report represents data from a full year of enumerations, although the collection of the survey data was completed within the first six months of the study (by March 2022) and may not represent perspectives from residents following winter 2022. Survey responses, however, were fairly consistent from autumn 2021 (as reported in Ward, Garvey, and Hunter, 2022) to winter 2022. Also, although our neighborhoods were not in exact alignment with census tracts or with LAHSA’s characterizations of these three neighborhoods, we were able to make one-to-one comparisons with a subset of census tracts and to construct broadly comparable estimates in other cases.

Conclusions

Key Findings from the Enumeration Effort

Our enumerations indicate that the number of people living unsheltered in Hollywood, Skid Row, and Venice has increased from autumn 2021 to autumn 2022 by an average of 18 percent, and changes because of enforcement or encampment sweeps have not resulted in any long-term changes in the number of people living unsheltered in these neighborhoods. The results from this study also contribute to a very small evidence base exploring issues related to using PIT counts or other snapshot approaches to characterize unsheltered populations. Broadly, our repeated enumerations suggest that outlier events—such as cleanup activities, inclement weather, or other one-off occurrences—can meaningfully influence estimates of this hard-to-track population.

Our exploration of multiple approaches to the application of multipliers for informal shelter types (specifically, whether an assumption linking individuals counted outside such shelter units to enumerated shelters is made) shows that the approach taken is consequential for the magnitude of estimates of the unsheltered population.

Our comparisons between recently released LAHSA PIT count data at the census tract level and LA LEADS count data from the surrounding period

suggest that in many cases, volunteer-led counts result in accurate estimates of the area unsheltered population. But in other cases, we see evidence of fairly large discrepancies that suggest possible room for improvements to the county process, such as (1) using more-specialized teams of enumerators for dense or high-profile areas of the county, (2) providing more in-depth training on accurately visually identifying individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness and cars and other vehicles used by these individuals as informal shelter, and (3) providing more guidance on the paths that volunteers should walk to cover a given census tract and avoid confusion that could result in such errors as missing one side of a street or double-counting a street in an unfamiliar area.

Key Findings from the Survey Effort

Our results from surveying more than 400 people living unsheltered in these neighborhoods remained largely unchanged from what we reported previously (Ward, Garvey, and Hunter, 2022). Our key findings are as follows:

- Most respondents reported being continuously unsheltered for substantial periods of time, with more than 50 percent indicating that their current homelessness spell has been three years or longer and more than 90 percent reporting their current spell as over a year.

Our enumerations indicate that the number of people living unsheltered in Hollywood, Skid Row, and Venice has increased from autumn 2021 to autumn 2022 by an average of 18 percent, and changes because of enforcement or encampment sweeps have not resulted in any long-term changes in the number of people living unsheltered in these neighborhoods.

- LAHSA recently reported that the increase in unsheltered homelessness slowed between 2020 and 2022 as the result of thousands of housing placements, but our enumeration results indicated steady growth in the unsheltered population over the twelve-month period we studied. Moreover, many survey respondents demonstrated high acuity on multiple dimensions that would make them a priority for housing placement, but they have not been contacted with offers of housing despite expressing an interest in obtaining housing and despite the fact that most have been living continuously unsheltered for years.
- Most respondents reported residing in Los Angeles County or California before their current locations; one-quarter reported residing out of state. These findings challenge the notion that the homelessness crisis is caused by the migration of people to the Los Angeles area to live unsheltered and is consistent with past and recent data from LAHSA showing that the majority of unhoused people were local residents before becoming homeless (Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, 2020).
- Nearly all respondents reported interest in housing, particularly private forms of housing, with about one-half interested in safe camping, shared housing, or Bridge housing and about one-third interested in group shelter or recovery or sober living housing. About one-third indicated that being in a specific area was important to them. These results are relevant for optimizing the nature and location of the homeless housing stock in Los Angeles.
- The number one reason that respondents cited for having not been housed was that they were never contacted for move-in. This finding suggests that decreasing displacement, increasing case worker continuity (Thompson et al., 2021; Tobias, 2022), and reducing the delays between identification of need and housing receipt may yield large dividends in housing those most in need.

Notes

¹ We also included the Veterans Row encampment along San Vicente Boulevard in front of the West Los Angeles Veterans Affairs campus in our early survey and enumeration efforts. We continued to monitor the area after an autumn 2021 cleanup effort, but no significant encampment activity occurred; therefore, no new data were collected after the periods covered in the interim report for this project (Ward, Garvey, and Hunter, 2022).

² There are at least two other conceptual sources of upward bias in any count of this type. First, some individuals whom we counted as unsheltered because they were present on the street and displayed visual characteristics that our field workers associated with unsheltered homelessness may have been residing in a formal shelter setting (e.g., emergency shelter, Bridge housing, interim housing, or a more permanent housing setting). However, evidence on the probable extent of this issue is provided by our screening instrument for administering the demographic survey, which asks people whether they have an overnight place to stay that meets the definition of *shelter*. Of the 462 individuals who completed the screening, only 13 percent were ineligible because of this criterion. Additionally, unlike our late-morning survey shifts where this screening was conducted, our enumerations primarily occurred during early-morning and nighttime hours when people were more likely to be where they would actually sleep for the night. Second, though we endeavored to identify unoccupied tents and makeshift shelters used only for storage, we may have counted some of these structures as occupied. It is also the case that, anecdotally, some formally sheltered individuals maintain tents and makeshift shelters on the street, potentially leading to a modest upward bias in the number of people associated with these informal shelter types. Our overall impression is that these sources of upward bias are not likely to be important enough to substantially affect our estimates.

³ In Appendix B in the separate online-only appendix file (Ward, Garvey, and Hunter, 2023), we present the discrete values for each of these figures.

⁴ The federal definition of *chronic homelessness* also requires documentation of a diagnosed disability, such as a chronic physical health condition, mental health condition, or substance use disorder. Our measure of a chronic condition is based on a self-report item on whether a “doctor ever told you,” which might not accurately reflect the true underlying prevalence rate.

⁵ HUD requires the count to be conducted during the last ten days of January—generally among the coldest nights of the year—as a way to raise public awareness about the plight of those experiencing homelessness. However, conducting the PIT on these nights also likely leads to a large, systematic undercount because of the increased likelihood that people will attempt to shelter out of sight for increased protection from the elements (Boone, 2019).

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About This Report

Homelessness is perceived by many as the most serious public policy problem facing Los Angeles today. However, information is limited about the unsheltered populations living on the city's streets. To fill this knowledge gap and help inform the development of effective policy, RAND researchers set out to determine the number of people living unsheltered over the course of a year in three areas of Los Angeles with high concentrations of unsheltered homelessness: Hollywood, Skid Row, and Venice. This is the first systematic effort to monitor changes in the number of people living unsheltered over a full year, helping to bolster what is captured by the annual Los Angeles County point-in-time count that provides a snapshot in time of this population. The researchers also conducted surveys of unsheltered people in these neighborhoods to provide information about the demographic characteristics, past experiences with the housing system, and housing needs and preferences of unsheltered Angelenos in these neighborhoods.

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