



Alameda County Homeless Mortality Report

Calendar Year 2023

Executive Summary

A responsible and just community must work to be closely aware of the deaths of all its members, strive to learn from those deaths and implement policies and practices to reduce preventable deaths, support equitable and appropriate end-of-life services, and work to reduce the harm that preventable deaths create for families, friends, caregivers, and the community. A just community will review places and moments of death to ensure that people do not die alone and experience death in as peaceful a manner as possible.

The Alameda County Health Care Services Agency’s Health Care for the Homeless (ACHCH) program and the Public Health Department’s Community Assessment, Planning, and Evaluation (CAPE) unit carried out Alameda County’s first-ever homeless mortality report in 2020 for deaths from 2018 to 2020 and do this report on an annual basis.

This report is based on identifying homeless deaths through data matching across County homeless services utilization lists, community and clinical reporters, and California Comprehensive Death File (CCDF) records in the California Vital Records Business Information System.

Because of the methods used, Alameda County’s homeless death numbers will appear higher than those of other localities that rely solely on medical examiner/coroner’s reports of homeless deaths.

Key Findings in the 2023 Alameda County Homeless Mortality Report

In calendar year 2023, 342 persons were determined to have died in homelessness in Alameda County. In addition, there were 300 deaths of persons with a recent experience of homelessness but were housed at the time of their death, and 101 persons with a recent history of homelessness but whose housing status at the time of death was not possible to determine.

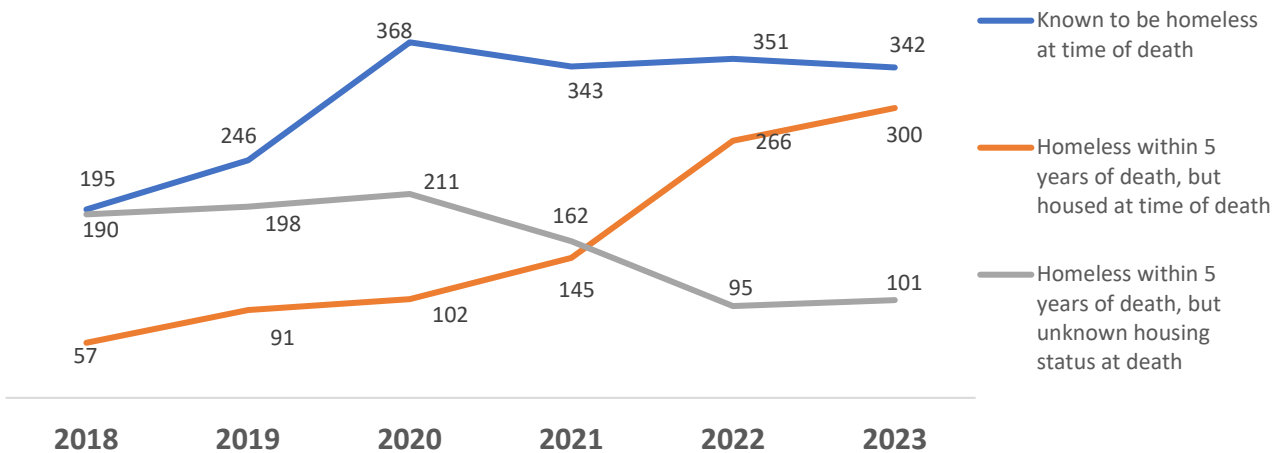
Alameda County 2023 Homeless Deaths	Count
People determined to have died while experiencing literal homelessness	342
People with recent (<5 years) experience of homelessness but determined to be housed at the time of death	300
Persons with recent (<5 years) experience of homelessness but with unknown/undetermined housing status at the time of death	101

The number of annual homeless deaths grew considerably between 2018 and 2020 and continues to remain at a very high level through 2023. Between 2018 and 2023, 1,845 Alameda County residents have died while experiencing homelessness:

Alameda County Homeless Deaths 2018-2023 by Homeless Status

Year	Known to be homeless at time of death	Homeless within 5 years of death, but housed at time of death	Homeless within 5 years of death, but unknown housing status at death
2018	195	57	190
2019	246	91	198
2020	368	102	211
2021	343	145	162
2022	351	266	95
2023	342	300	101
Total	1,845	961	957

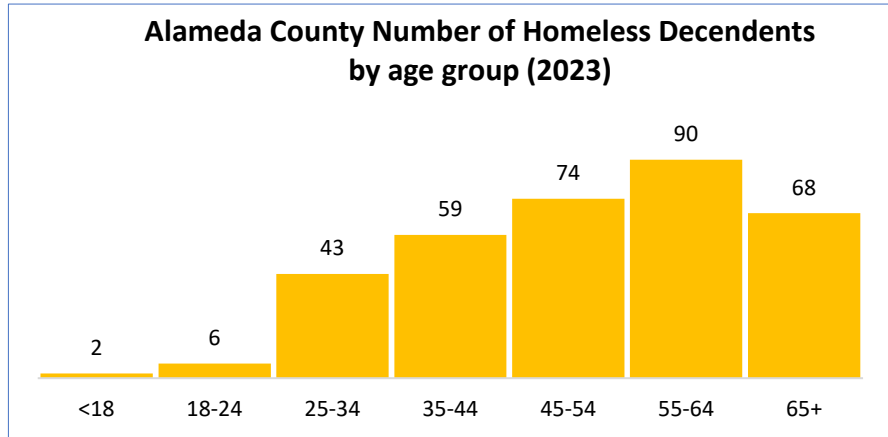
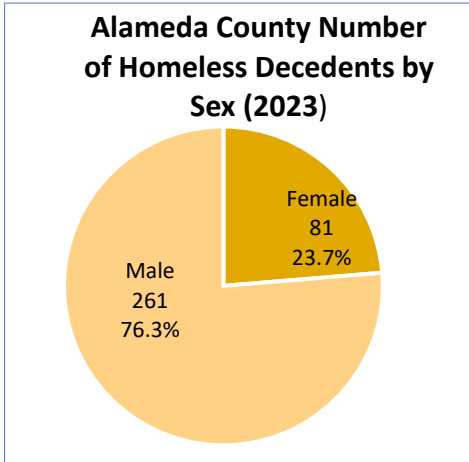
Alameda County Trends in Homeless Deaths, By Housing Status (2018-2023)



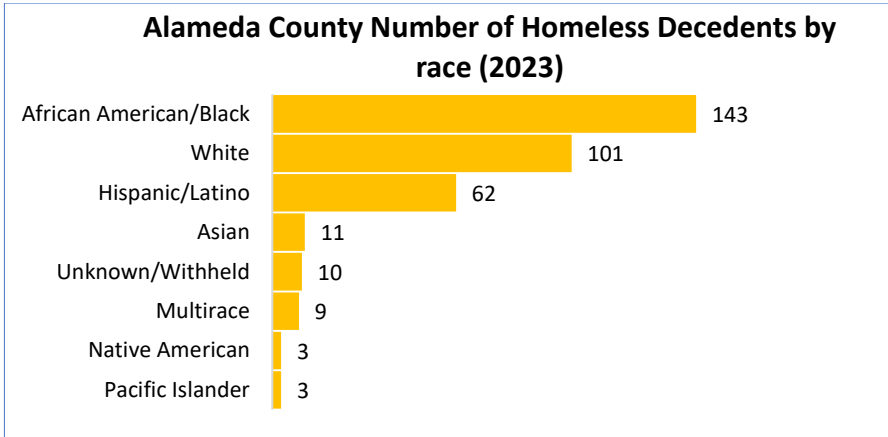
Alameda County Number of Homeless Deaths by Region of Last Residence (2018-2023)

Year	Berkeley/ Albany	Mid-County (Hayward, Alameda, San Leandro, Unincorporated)	Oakland/ Emeryville	South County (Fremont, Union City, Newark)	Tri-Valley (Livermore, Dublin, Pleasanton)
2018	21	50	101	18	5
2019	22	62	126	25	11
2020	30	83	211	24	20
2021	28	55	213	33	14
2022	32	69	207	30	13
2023	29	70	205	27	11
Total	162	389	1063	157	74

CY 2023 Homeless Mortality Overview



Median age at time of death of people experiencing homelessness:
54 Years



Mortality rate: The age-adjusted mortality rate for people experiencing homelessness in Alameda County in 2023 was 2,939 homeless deaths per 100,000, or 5.4 times that of the general population of Alameda County. For many leading causes of death, mortality rates continue to be many times higher for people experiencing homelessness than the general population.

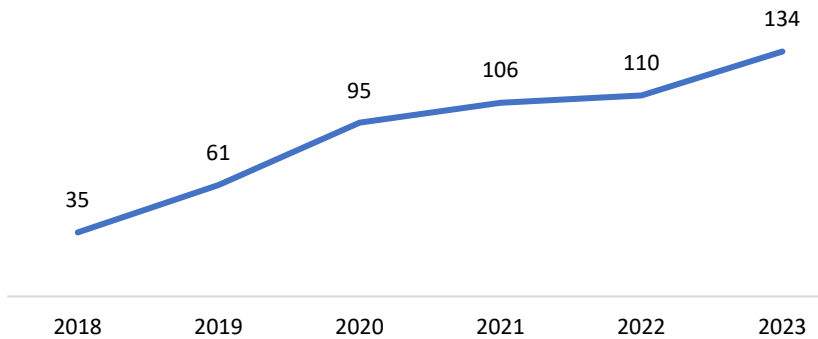
Unattended deaths: Seventy-two percent (232) of homeless deaths took place outside of a medical setting (e.g., hospital or nursing facility), instead occurring outdoors; on streets or sidewalks; in shelters, encampments, vehicles; other’s residences; and other locations. Twenty-eight percent of homeless acute/chronic disease-related deaths (38 out of 100) occurred in these “unattended” settings, a 16% decline from last year.

Disparities by race/ethnicity and gender: African American/Black persons represent 42% of homeless deaths, compared to 18% of general population deaths and 11% of the general population. Men represent 76% of homeless deaths, compared to 53% of general population deaths. The median age at death among people experiencing homelessness is 54 years, compared to 77 years in the general population, a difference of 23 years.

Characteristics of Homeless Deaths in 2023

Drug overdose: Thirty-nine percent of homeless deaths in 2023 (134) were directly due to unintentional and unknown intent drug overdoses (hereafter called ‘drug overdoses’). The number of drug overdoses among people experiencing homelessness continued to rise sharply. Eighty percent of drug overdose deaths took place in outdoor settings. People experiencing homelessness have 47.8 times the drug overdose death rate of the general population.

Alameda County Trends in Number of Homeless Drug Overdose Deaths (2018-2023)



- **Acute/chronic medical conditions:** Forty percent of the homeless deaths in 2023 (138) were due to acute/chronic medical conditions, led by heart and cardiovascular disease and followed by cancer, cerebrovascular disease diabetes, respiratory disease, liver disease, COVID-19, and others. Twenty-eight percent of acute/chronic disease-related deaths were unattended, occurring outside of medical/clinical settings.
- **Accidental injuries** (excluding drug overdose) accounted for 21 (6.1%) homeless deaths, the large majority being pedestrians and cyclists hit by automobiles, followed by falls and struck by trains. Homeless pedestrians/bicyclists are 35 times more likely to be killed by cars than the general population.
- **Homicide** accounted for 23 (6.7%) deaths of people experiencing homelessness, mostly due to shootings and stabbings taking place in the street and outdoors. The death rate for homicide among people experiencing homelessness is 16.9 times that of the general population.
- **Suicide:** Nine people experiencing homelessness took their own lives in 2023, a rate 9.6 times that of the general population.
- **Shelter residents:** Forty-eight persons were known to be residing in homeless shelters at the time of death in 2023. Sixty-five percent of them died of acute/chronic diseases, 25% of drug overdoses, and the remaining by suicide, accident, and homicide. The percentage of shelter overdoses increased from 17% in 2021 to 25% in 2023.
- **Encampments:** At least 24 people died in homeless encampments in 2023. Eighty-three percent of them died of drug overdoses, 13% of acute/chronic diseases, 8% from homicide, and 4% were due to exposure or an accident.
- **Vehicle dwellers:** About 18 persons were reported as having died inside their vehicle of residence in 2023. This is in addition to those who might have died in facilities but lived

in their vehicle. Of them, 66% died of drug overdoses, 22% of acute/chronic disease, and the remainder by homicide and unknown cause.

- **COVID-19:** COVID-19 was the cause of death for 2 persons experiencing homelessness in 2023.
- **Hospice-eligible deaths:** In a review of the homeless deaths, ACHCH determined that at least 45 (13.2%) of the homeless deaths appeared to be “hospice-eligible” or “expected” deaths due to terminal illness. Of these 45 deaths, 16% were unattended. Of the 38 hospice-eligible deaths that occurred in hospital, more review is needed to determine if the decedents received appropriate palliative or hospice care services.

Alameda County Number of Homeless Death, by Categories of Causes (2018-2023)

Category	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2018-2023	Percentage
Acute/chronic disease	96	114	179	152	154	138	833	45.2%
Drug overdose/ substance abuse-related	49	76	105	109	122	141	602	32.6%
Accidental injury	21	27	34	31	33	21	167	9.1%
Homicide	16	15	28	22	22	23	126	6.8%
Suicide	10	9	16	9	10	9	63	3.4%
Unknown (R99)	3	5	6	20	10	10	54	2.9%
Total	195	246	368	343	351	342	1,845	100.0%

Alameda County Number of Homeless Causes of Death, by Specific Underlying Causes (2018-2023)

Cause	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2018-2023	Total %
Overdose Unintentional or undetermined intent	36	61	97	102	110	134	540	29.3%
Heart disease	40	34	42	54	50	48	268	14.5%
All other diseases	17	23	43	35	28	35	181	9.8%
Homicide	16	15	28	22	22	23	126	6.8%
Cancer	15	18	16	16	21	20	106	5.7%
All other injuries	9	11	14	17	21	8	80	4.3%
Chronic liver disease and cirrhosis	11	13	23	8	10	5	70	3.8%

Suicide	10	9	16	9	10	9	63	3.4%
Pedestrian/bike crash	7	11	15	9	7	9	58	3.1%
Sequelae of drug and alcohol abuse & dependence	9	11	7	7	10	7	51	2.8%
R99 (ill-defined, unknown cause or missing code)	3	5	6	20	10	10	54	2.9%
Chronic lower respiratory disease	2	9	10	7	5	6	39	2.1%
Cerebrovascular disease	4	7	11	4	6	7	39	2.1%
Other communicable diseases	1	4	11	3	7	6	32	1.7%
Diabetes mellitus	3	1	7	4	10	5	30	1.6%
COVID-19			6	9	6	2	23	1.2%
Pedestrian or bicyclist struck by train unintentional/undet.	4	4	4	4	4	3	23	1.2%
Hypertensive renal disease/essential hypertension	1	3	3	6	6	2	21	1.1%
Alcohol overdose	5	4	3		2	0	14	0.8%
HIV	1	1	3	5	3	1	14	0.8%
Exposure (heat or cold)	1	1	2	1	1	1	7	0.4%
Pregnancy; perinatal;		1	1		1	0	3	0.2%
Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and other dementias				1	1	1	3	0.1%
Total	195	246	368	343	351	342	1,845	100%

Alameda County Age-Adjusted Mortality Rates by Cause of Death, Homeless vs. General Population (2023)

Cause of Death	Homeless Deaths 2023	Age-Adjusted Mortality Rate Homeless	Total General Population deaths	General Population Age-Adjusted Rate	Homeless vs. General Mortality Rate Ratio*
Total Deaths	342	2939.1	10807	533.2	5.5
Overdose, unintentional or undetermined intent	134	1108.4	410	23.2	47.8
Heart disease	48	435.4	2109	102.2	4.3
All other diseases	34	290.0	1727	84.4	3.4
Homicide	23	134.9	136	8.0	16.9
Cancer	20	205.2	2175	105.1	2.0
R99 (ill-defined, unknown cause or missing code)	9	91.3	48	2.8	32.3
Suicide	9	76.0	143	7.9	9.6
Pedestrian or bike crash	9	70.9	55	3.1	22.7
All other injuries	8	67.9	264	13.7	5.0
Cerebrovascular disease	7	64.3	761	36.5	1.8
Sequelae of drug and alcohol abuse & dependence	7	49.1	66	3.4	14.6
Chronic lower respiratory disease (CLRD)	6	62.3	336	16.1	3.9
Other communicable diseases	6	60.8	188	9.2	6.6
Chronic liver disease and cirrhosis	5	32.4	142	7.2	4.5
Diabetes mellitus	5	34.8	386	18.7	1.9
Pedestrian or bicyclist struck by train unintentional/undeterm.	3	21.1	8	0.4	48.4
COVID-19	2	9.9	183	8.8	1.1
Hypertensive renal disease/essential hypertension	2	0.0	253	12.2	NA
All other causes	1	5.0	20	1.1	4.4
Alzheimer's, Parkinsons, and other dementias	1	12.6	1227	58.6	0.2
Exposure (heat or cold)	1	9.8	2	0.1	75.5
HIV	1	9.8	31	1.6	6.0
Alcohol overdose			8	0.5	NA
Pregnancy; perinatal			62	4.1	NA

** A mortality rate ratio of 1.0 indicates equal mortality rates between the homeless and the general population. A rate ratio greater than 1.0 indicates a higher rate of mortality among people experiencing homelessness. For example, people experiencing homelessness have a rate of drug overdose death 47.8 times higher than the general population.*

Next Steps

This Alameda County homeless mortality report focuses on data and accurately enumerates deaths among our unhoused communities. To advance this work, in 2023 the County of Alameda convened a [Homeless Mortality Review Team](#) to further analyze these data, inform the development of future mortality reports and the coming dashboards, and make recommendations to reduce preventable deaths among people experiencing homelessness.

Beginning in early 2025, instead of publishing a detailed annual homeless mortality report and analysis, Alameda County Health Care for the Homeless (ACHCH) and Community Assessment, Planning, and Evaluation (CAPE) staff will produce an online, public-facing, user-driven, and filterable data dashboard for homeless mortality data which will allow providers and the public to analyze countywide homeless mortality data. For updates, go to <https://www.achch.org/alameda-county-homeless-mortality.html>.

Specific homeless mortality data questions or requests can be sent to achch@acgov.org. Press inquiries should be directed to hcsa-pio@acgov.org.

Acknowledgments

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We depend upon and deeply thank our community of providers and community members who supported this effort and our collective efforts to reduce mortality, improve health and end homelessness in Alameda County.

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