

Introduction to Youth Homelessness

2023 NCSL Youth Homelessness Fellows

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Youth Homelessness: from Missed Opportunities to New Opportunities

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National Conference of State Legislatures
Youth Homelessness Fellows
Nashville, TN



Overview

- How do adolescence and young adulthood matter in a lifecourse perspective?
- What does youth homelessness look like in the US?
- What are its determinants and consequences?
- What is the evidence that interventions can help? Which ones?
- Can we prevent youth homelessness and if so, how?

Brain Development: Resilience and Vulnerability

The brain is actively developing through the lifespan, with important changes in adolescence and early adulthood: sophistication in thought, judgment, reasoning, planning, and problem solving.

Executive Functioning

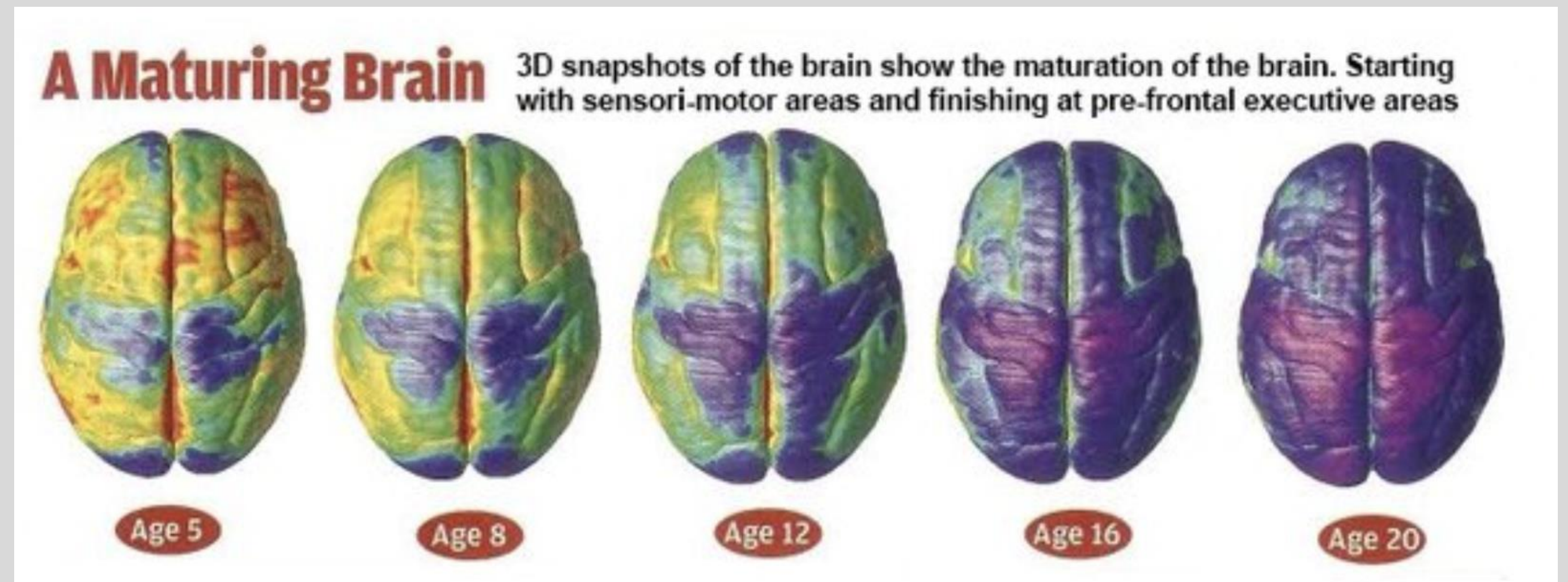
Prefrontal cortex: Myelination and pruning
Connections among areas of the brain

Trauma

Can disrupt these natural processes

Plasticity and Resilience

Refers to the innate ability of the human brain to “bounce back” from stress and injury.
Adolescents and young adults are remarkably adaptive and resilient.



University of Denver



ENGLISH BREAKFAST
EARL GREY
TURMERIC TONIC
GINGER PEACH
Kilogram Beer

SWEET VALENCIA ORANGE
POWER GREENS
KALE, ROMAINE, CELERY, PINEAPPLE, MINT
MANGO, ORANGE & PINEAPPLE
BLUE BOOST
PURE BLUEBERRY JUICE, WHITE GRAPE, BASIL

BETRIX
COFFEE ROASTE

From determinants to outcomes



Determinants

The field *in motion*

2016-2018: *Voices of Youth Count*

- Mixed-methods, multicomponent study
- First-ever national incidence & prevalence, characteristics
- Point in time counts in 20 communities (toolkit)
- In-depth interviews with ≈216 YYAs experiencing homelessness

Investment in research, practice, and policy on the increase

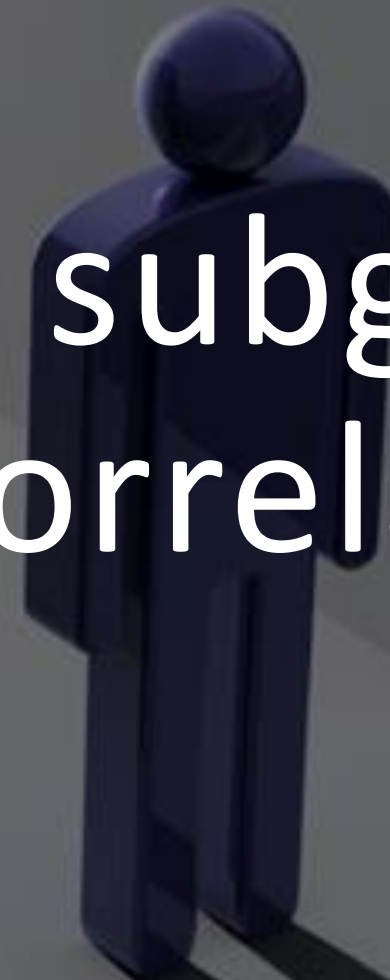
- NIH: \$200m for 191 research projects on homelessness (2022)
- HHS: about \$300m (2023)
- Recent meta-analysis on case management included 64 studies
- Pandemic-era interventions inspire new strategies

Lived experts, acknowledging disproportionality, new strategy

- Lived expertise increasingly recognized as critical
- USICH develops updated strategy: *All In*
- Moving upstream to prevention

The Challenge

incidence, prevalence, subgroups
consequences and correlates



Missed

Opportunities:

Voices of Youth Count revealed the broad, fluid, and hidden challenge of youth homelessness in America

1ⁱⁿ 10

young adults ages 18-25 experienced a form of homelessness over a 12-month period.

That's 3.5 million young adults. About half of them involved explicitly reported homelessness while the other half involved couch surfing only.

1ⁱⁿ 30

youth ages 13-17 experienced a form of homelessness over a 12-month period.

That's about 700,000 youth. About three-quarters of them involved explicitly reported homelessness (including running away or being kicked out) and one-quarter involved couch surfing only.



Wait what definition was that???

Missed opportunities start with unequal risk

33%

Hispanic, non-White youth

had a 33% higher risk of reporting homelessness.



83%

Black or African American youth

had an 83% higher risk of reporting homelessness.



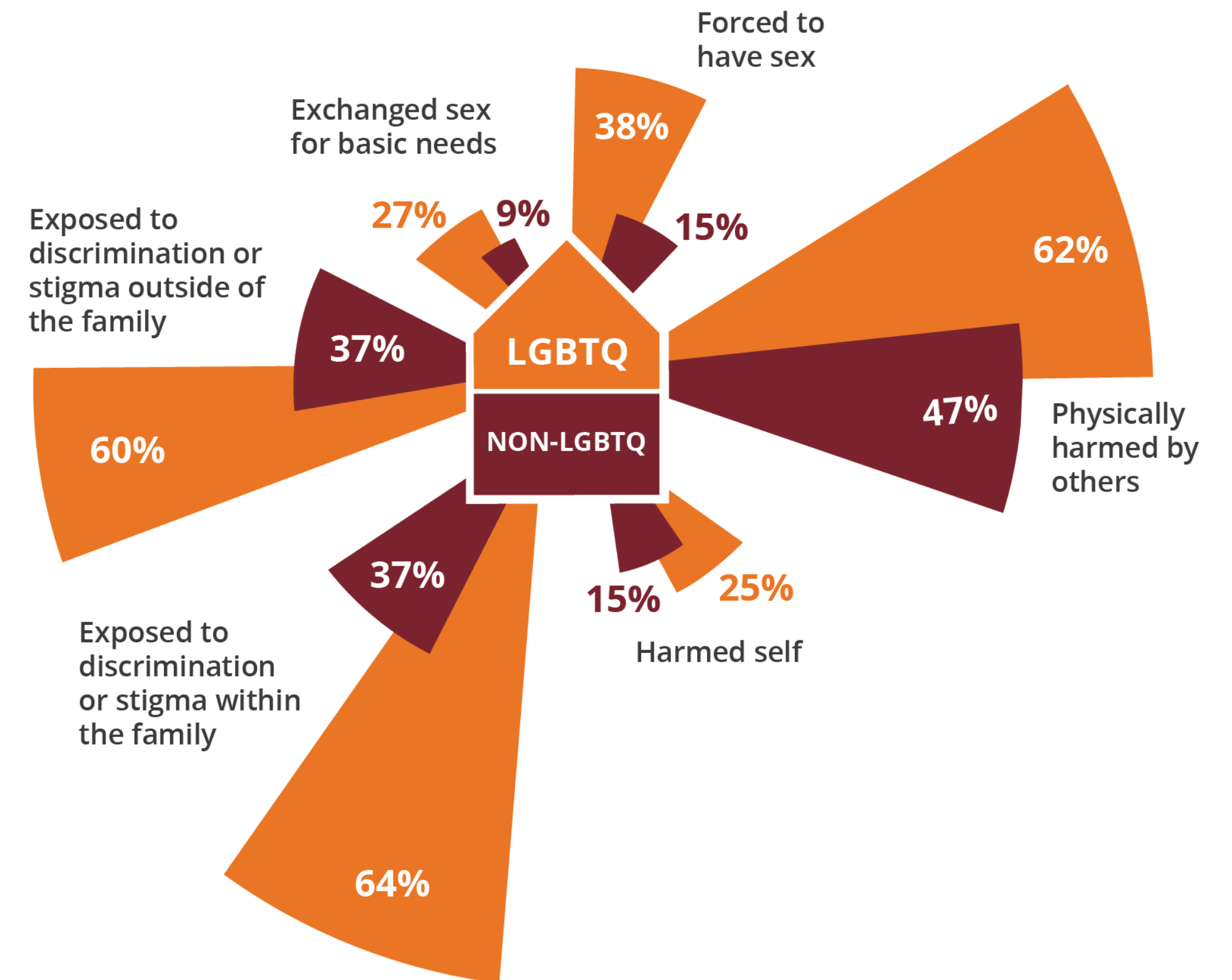
2.2x

LGBTQ youth

had 2.2 times the risk of reporting homelessness.

Source: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago

LGBTQ youth endured especially high levels of adversity among youth experiencing homelessness



(Source: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago)

346%

Youth with less than a high school diploma or GED

had a 346% higher risk than their peers who completed high school.

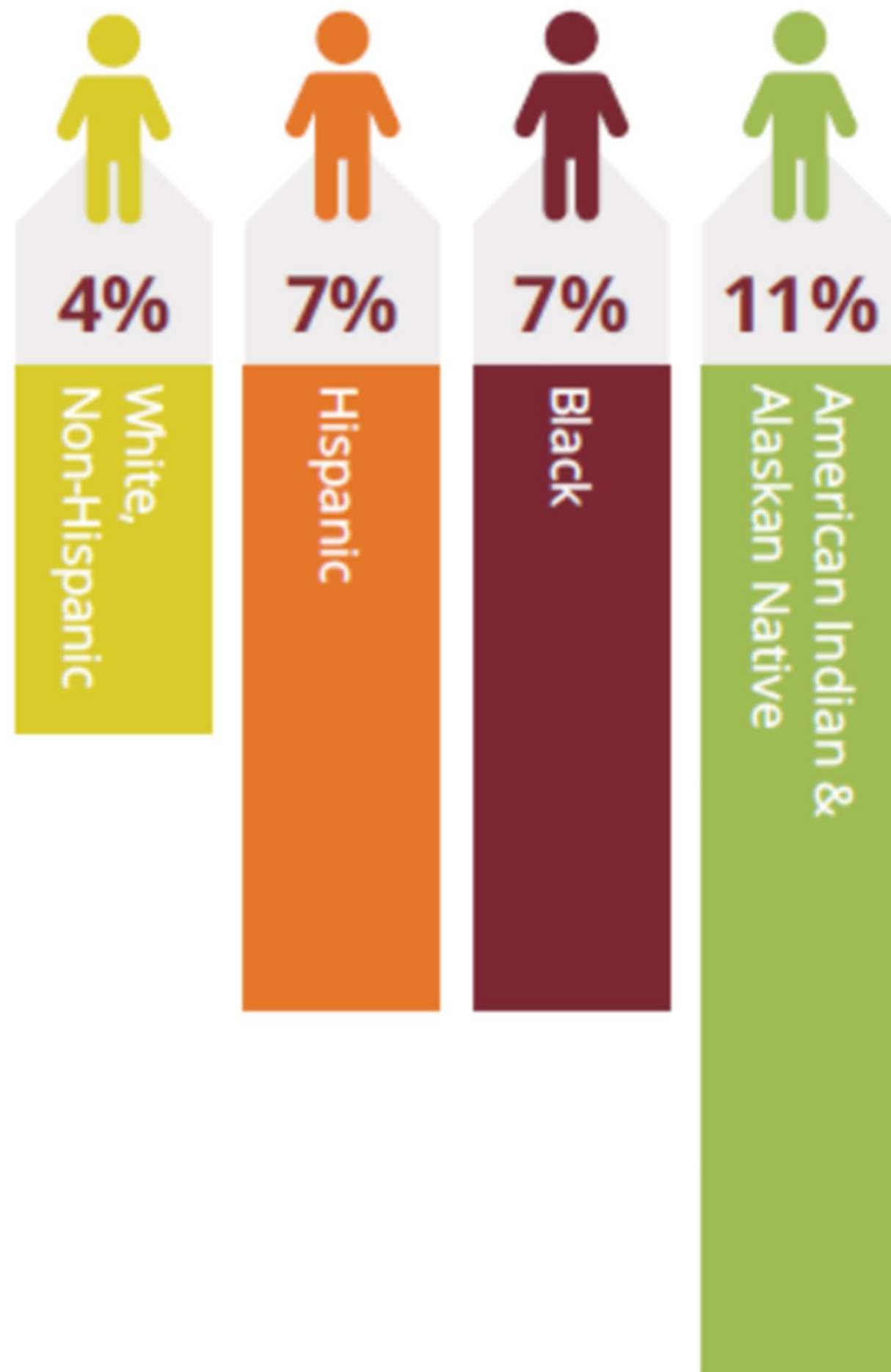
162%

Youth reporting annual household income of less than \$24,000

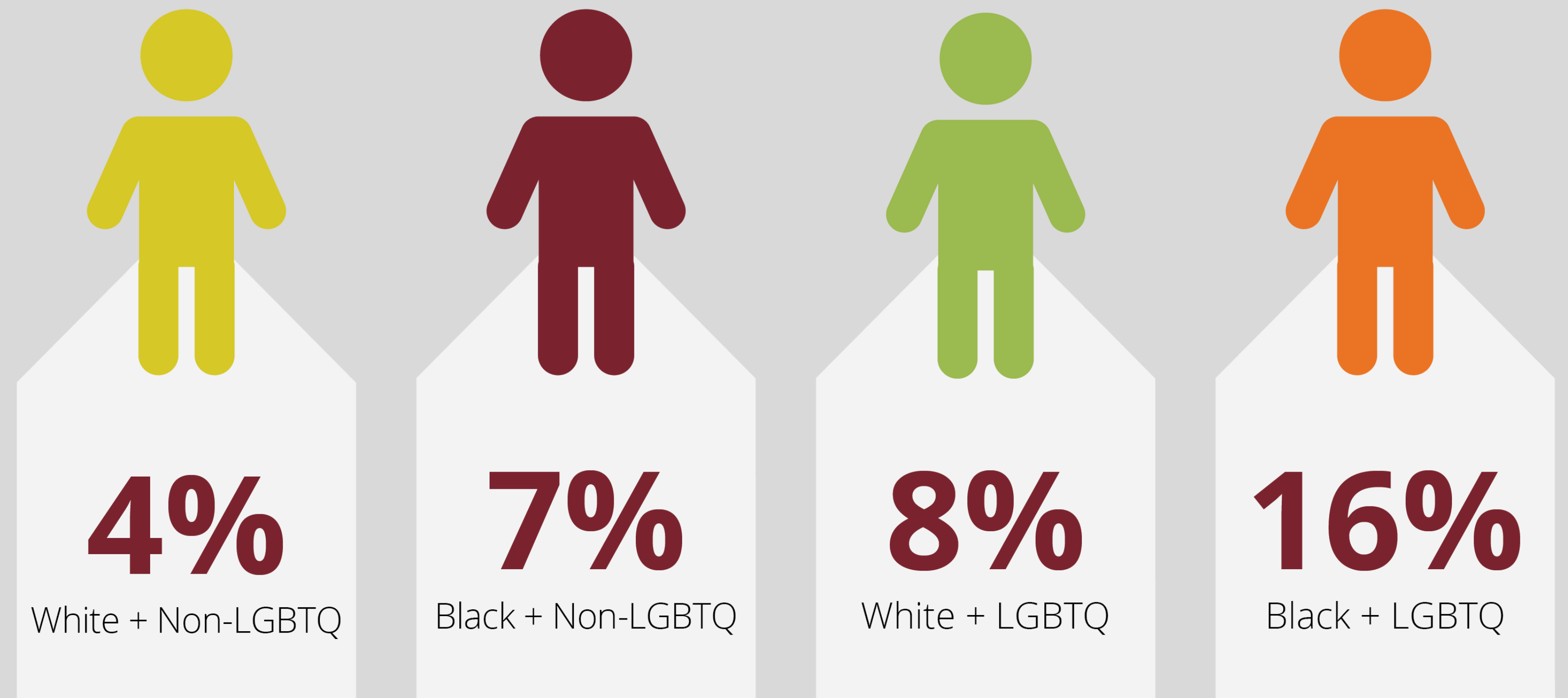
had a 162% higher risk of reporting homelessness.

Missed opportunities are intersectional

Youth of color experience higher rates of homelessness.



Explicit homelessness over the last 12 months, self-reported by young adults, ages 18-25. These estimates do not include reports of couch surfing only.



(Source: VoYC National Survey)

Missed opportunities are equally rural and urban

Rates of youth experiencing homelessness were similar in rural and nonrural areas.

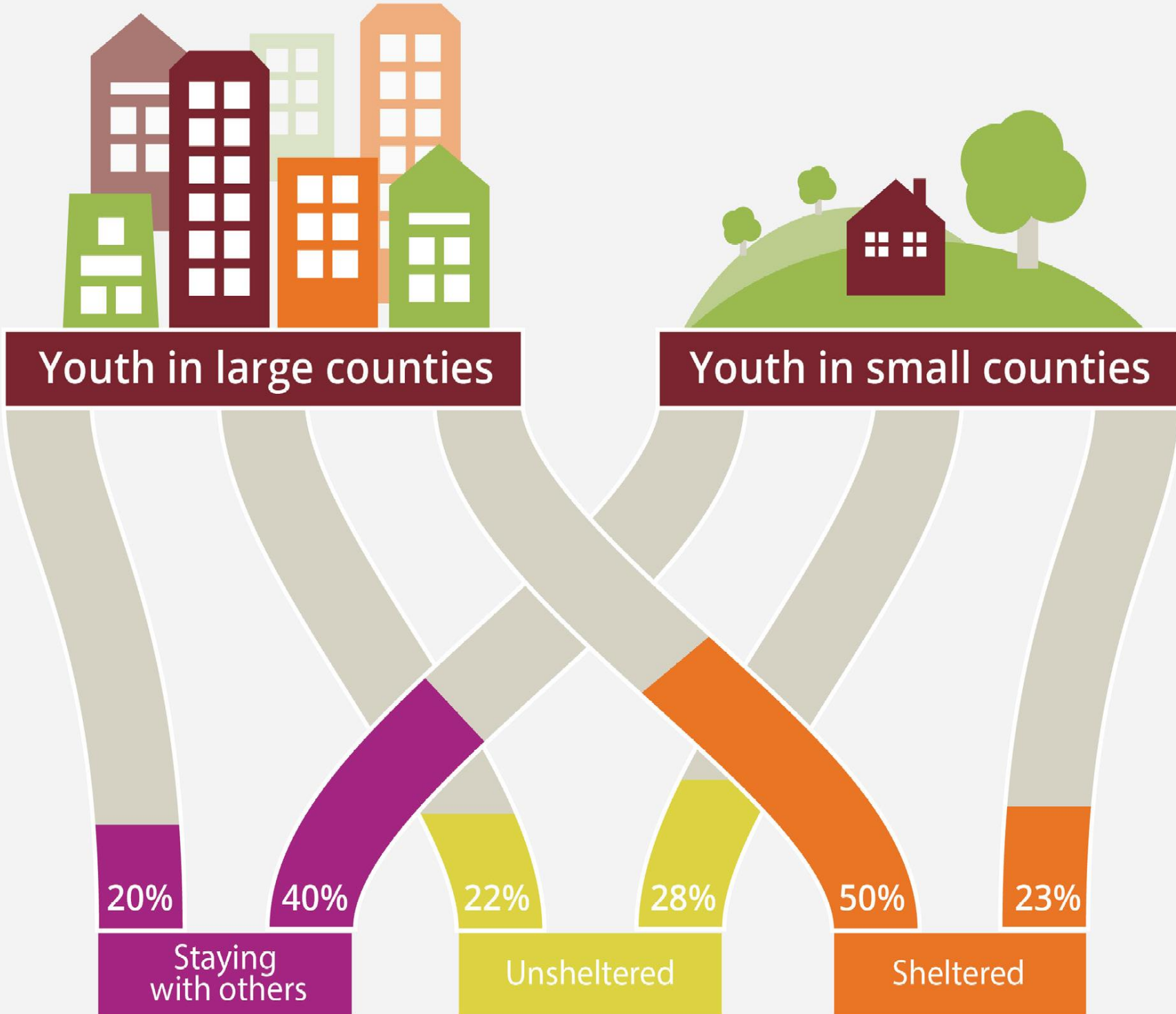
Youth 13-17
4.2%
Household prevalence in urban counties.

4.4%
Household prevalence in rural counties.

Young Adults 18-25
9.6%
Population prevalence in urban counties.

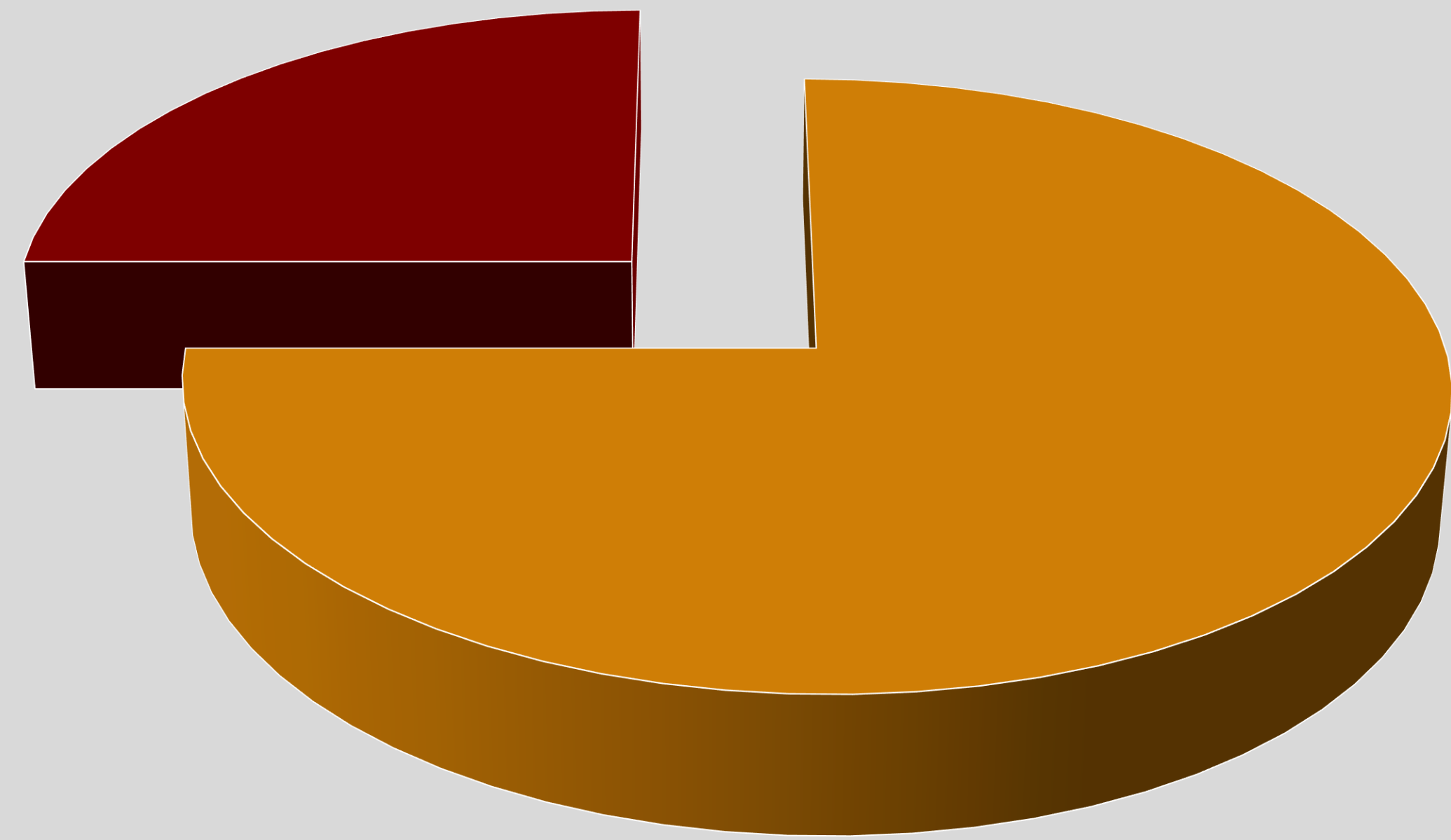
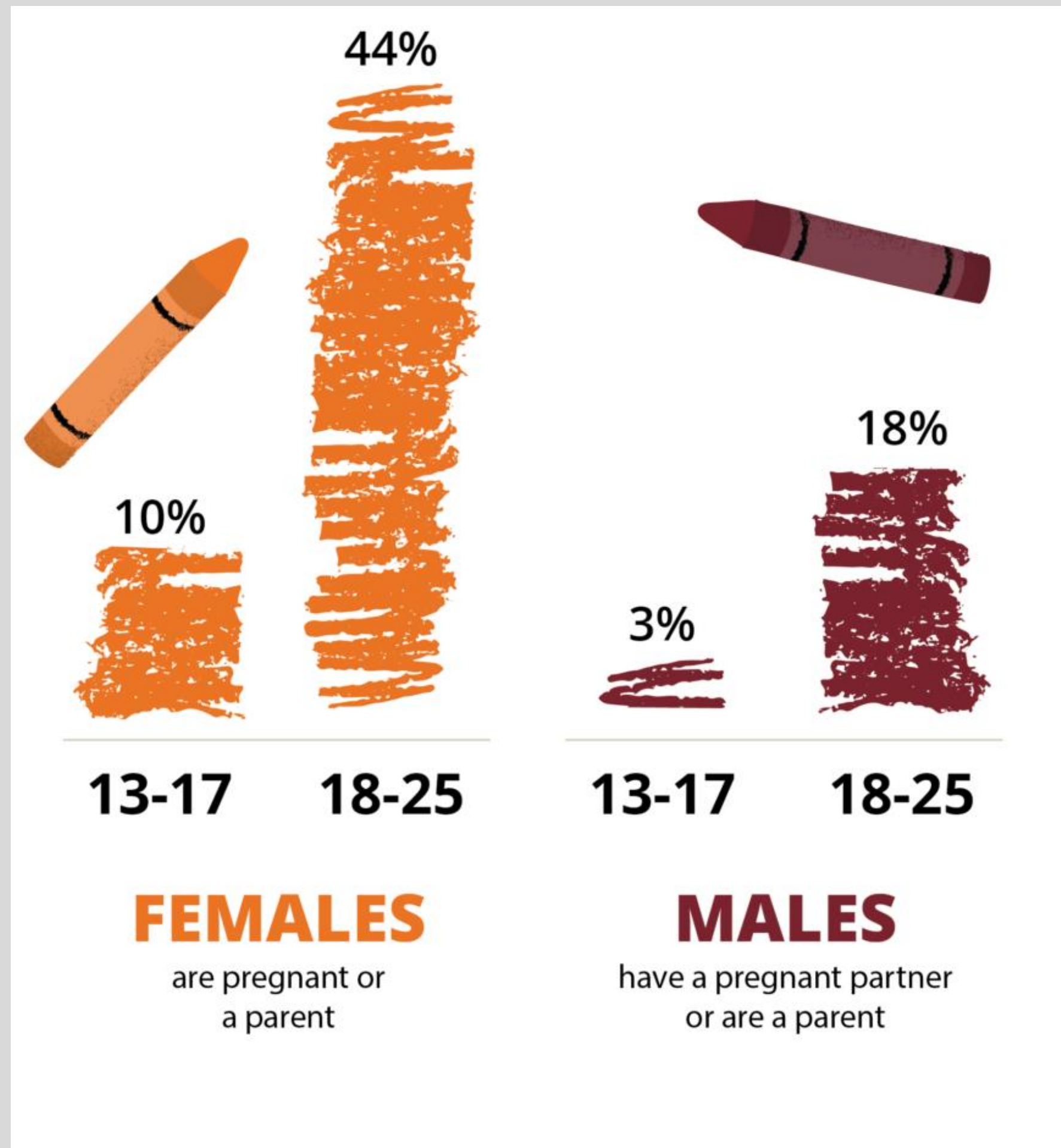
9.2%
Population prevalence in rural counties.

Where youth experiencing homelessness stayed on the night of the youth count.



Source: VoYC Brief Youth Survey

Missed opportunities are intergenerational



About a quarter of young people we interviewed first experienced accompanied homelessness as children with their families.

Missed opportunities cross public systems

Among youth experiencing homelessness on a given night:

46%
ever in **Detention
or Incarceration**
vs. 15% of general
(older) youth
population

29%
ever in **Foster
Care**
vs. 2% of general
youth population

34%
had less than high
school diploma/GED
(ages 18-25)
vs. 11% of general youth
population

(Source: Chapin Hall, VoYC Youth Count surveys)

In Washington State, the largest number of youth facing homelessness after a public system:

19%
from **residential
behavioral health**
became homeless
within 12 months

(Source: [WA DSHS, 2020](#))

Consequences and correlates

Youth homelessness is associated with:

- Educational disengagement
- Early pregnancy and parenting
- Physical and mental health problems
- Substance use/misuse
- Suicidality
- Early death

Youth Homelessness is linked with older adult (chronic) homelessness, which itself is associated with poor health outcomes and early death.

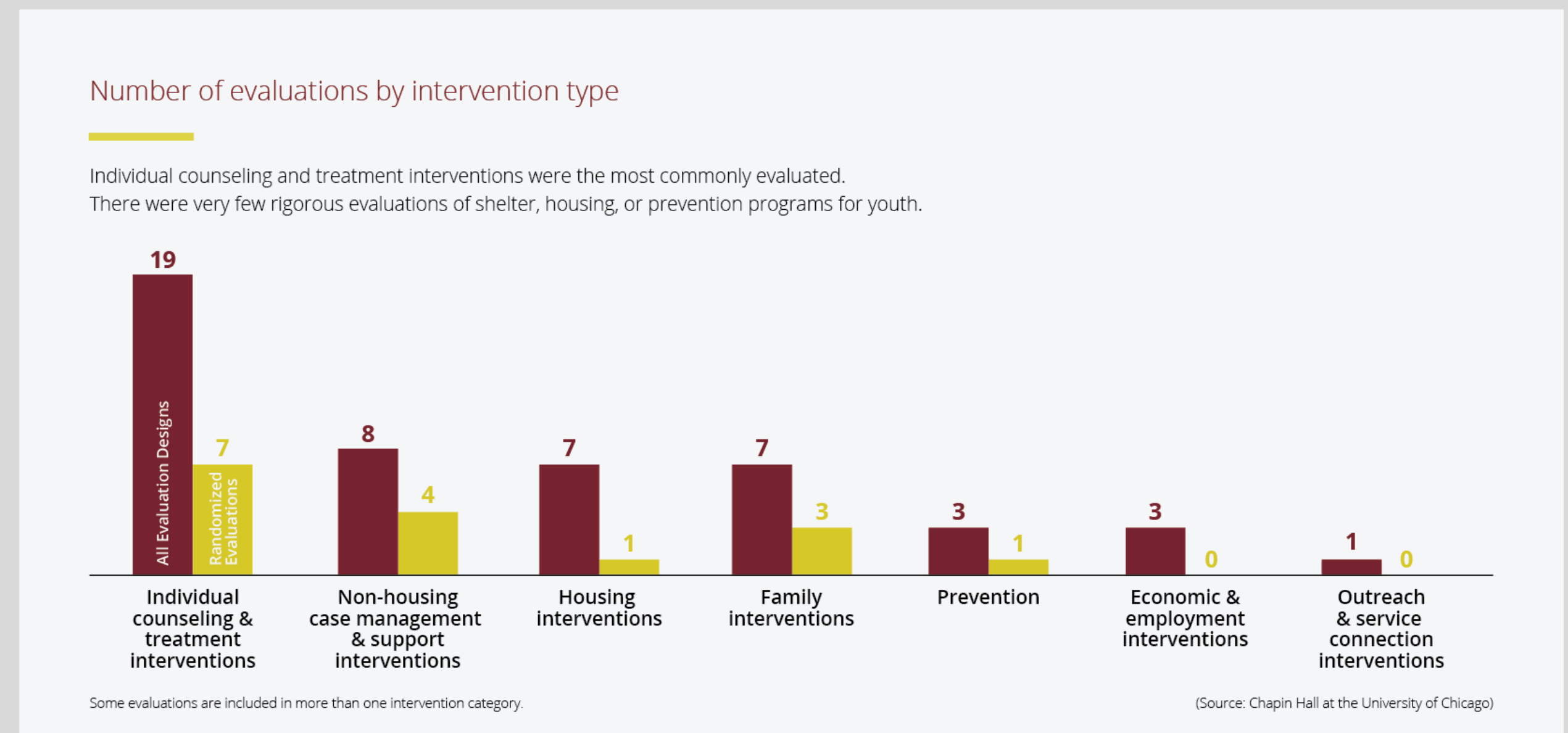
A looming intergenerational public health concern

Interventions and Support

YH Interventions: Systematic Evidence Reviews

- We found 62 studies that evaluated prevention of YH
- What does the evidence say about prevention? 😊
 - Um, not much ...
 - Just two studies addressed prevention
- Most are non-systematic observations of post-crisis interventions

Another review of practices for YEH found cognitive behavior therapy for depression, family-based therapy for substance use, and housing programs for housing stability.



Short answer: We don't know enough.

What if...



 **NEW
OPPORTUNITIES**

...we waited for people to die in motor vehicle accidents?

There has been a **25% reduction** in the number of fatalities on the nation's roadways.

Move from passive restraint to active avoidance systems.



...we waited for youth to end up in detention?

Since 2000, a record year for youth detention, the number of incarcerated youth has **decreased by nearly 40%** nationwide.

However, Black, Latinx, and American Indian youth now make up a larger share of those incarcerated than in 2000.

...what if we ensure they have a place to go when they leave?

In WA State, about 1/4 of young adults leaving detention experienced homelessness (2016-2020).



...we waited for young people to experience homelessness?

Until recently, US policy and practice have been largely reactive.

Progress: TBD.



A tall, dark metal ladder stands in the center of a vast, arid desert landscape. The ground is sandy and uneven, with rolling hills in the distance under a bright blue sky filled with scattered white clouds. The ladder's shadow is cast on the ground to the right.

From Missed Opportunities to New Opportunities

Preventing Youth Homelessness

Our Commitments



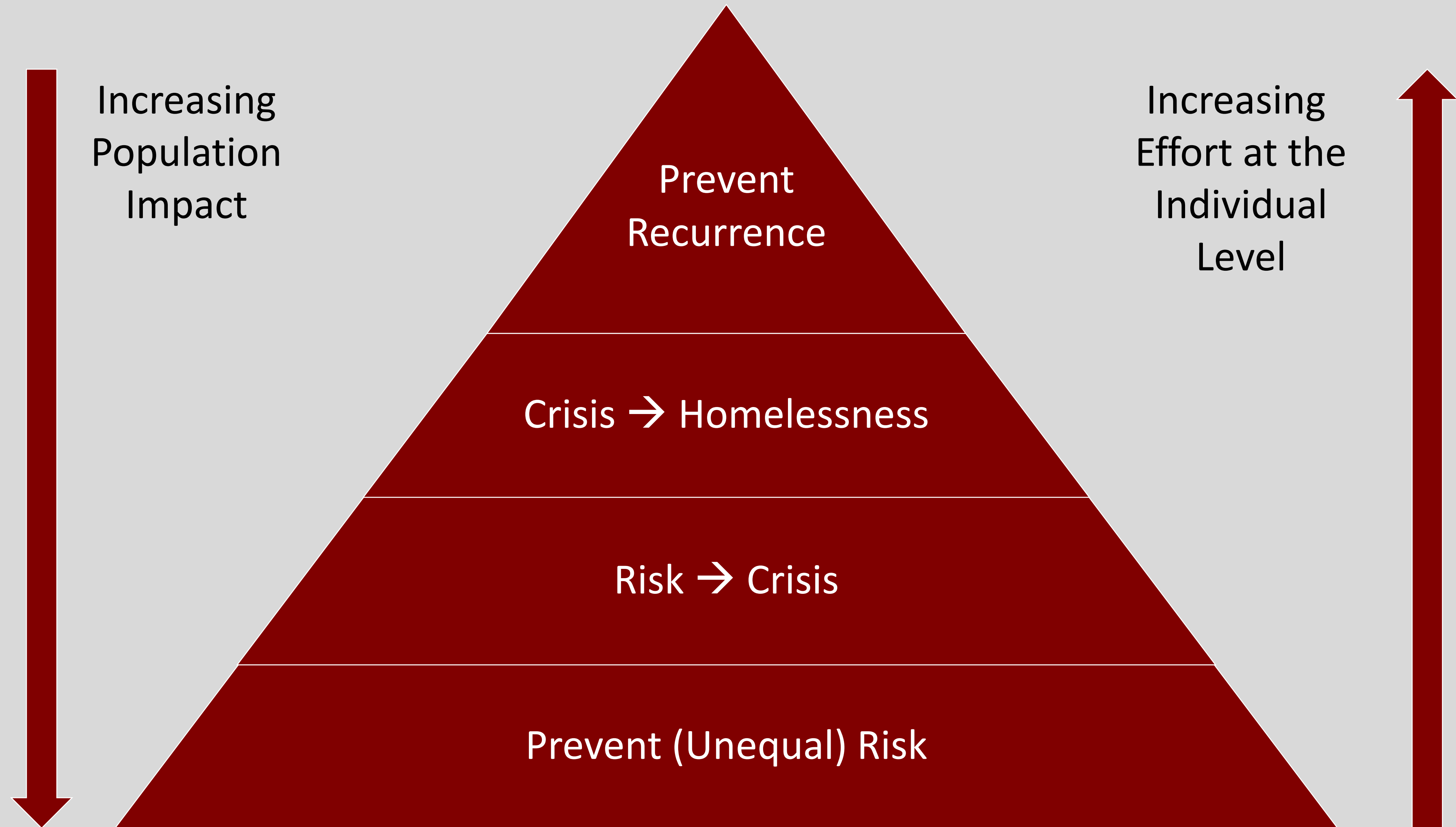
Equity Centered

Youth Powered

Evidence Informed

Cross Systems

New Opportunities: Perspective on Prevention



Levels of Prevention

1 Prevent (Unequal) Risk

- Structural, social, historical, and policy conditions that establish (uneven) risk
- Segregation, insufficient housing stock, racism/discrimination, social determinants of health, disparities in access to health care and education, disparate involvement in systems, intergenerational poverty, community violence, ACEs

2 Prevent risk from becoming crisis (imminent risk)

- Buffers: Economic supports; affirming medical/social/educational supports; community programs (afterschool, child care); social emotional learning; screening and surveillance
- Compounding factors: negative, hostile, non-affirming classrooms; discriminatory discipline practices and sentencing; rejection by family/peers.

Levels of Prevention

3: Prevent crisis from causing homelessness

- Upstream creates new opportunities and resources to prevent crisis (and even chronic housing instability) from triggering homelessness and disengagement
- Community awareness, community services, school services and support

4: Prevent recurrence; promote safety, permanency, well-being

- If instability & homelessness are unavoidable, how can we ensure stability, brief duration, and plan for permanent, sustainable exits?
- Federal policy has not mentioned prevention or incentivized youth homelessness grantees (changing).

Aims of New Opportunities

Align with federal strategy: *All In*

Strategy to move the nation toward prevention of YH.

- Support, empower, and create opportunities for long-term success among young people
- Leverage lived expertise, evidence, recommended practices, understanding of inequity and its effects
- Support new pilots and their evaluation
- Recognize that a diverse set of strategies is needed based on youth identities and experiences
- Enable youth and young adults experiencing and at risk for housing instability and homelessness new forms of stability that enable focus on building futures
- From surviving to thriving



Preventing Youth Homelessness Strategy

The why

Public health model with 4 levels:

- (1) prevent (unequal) risk,
- (2) prevent risk from turning into crisis,
- (3) prevent crisis from becoming homelessness,
- (4) prevent recurrence, support thriving

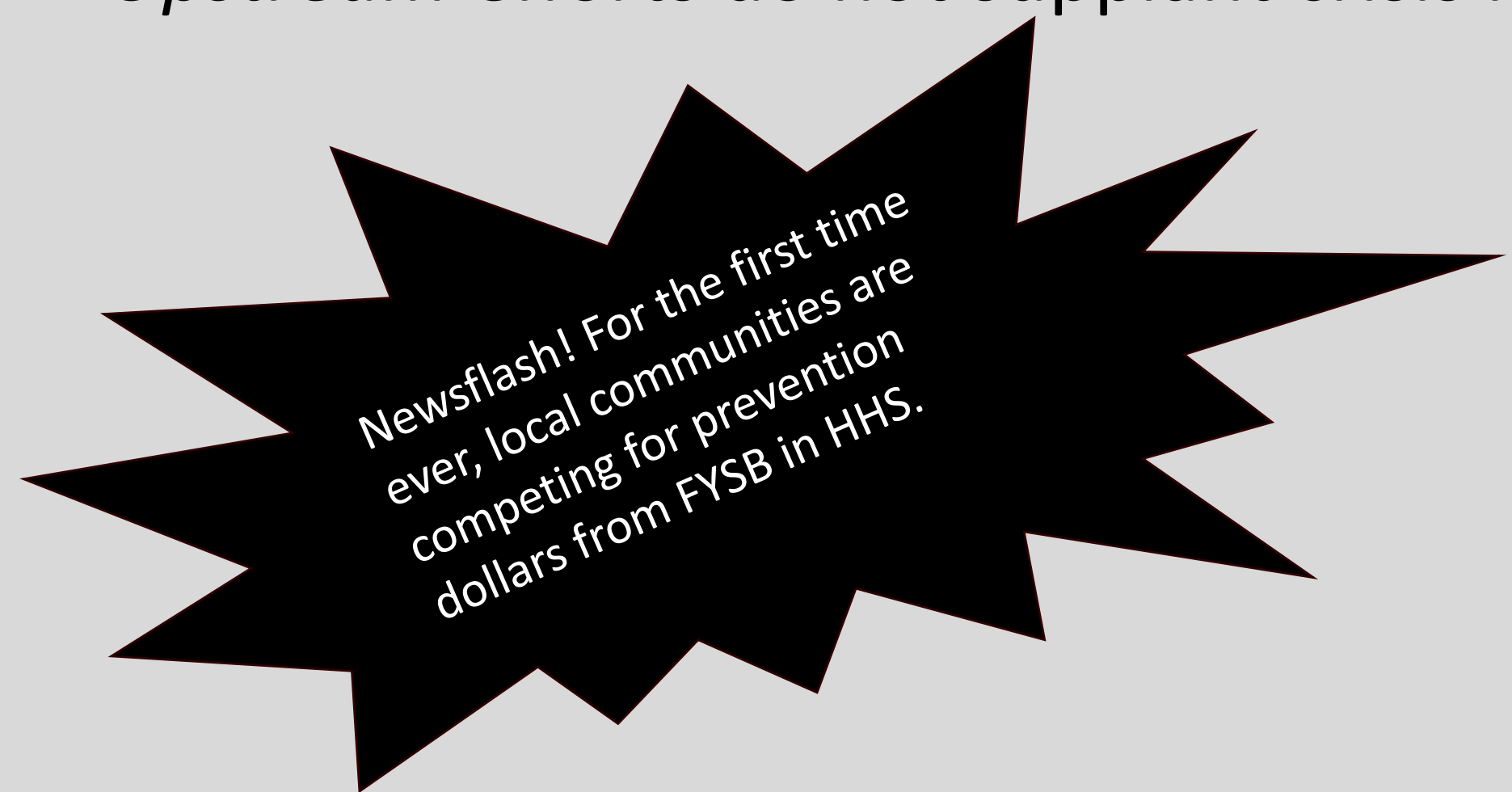
Upstream efforts do not supplant crisis response.

Strategy Levels 1-4

Each level contains missed opportunities and new opportunities

Apply to policy, practice, research (3 each=9 per opportunity=27 per level)

Total of 108 strategies built by young people, policymakers, advocates, practitioners, researchers, educators





Moving upstream

Two examples:
Direct Cash Transfers ~ Upstream in Education

Direct Cash Transfers

What are they?

- Periodic funds transfers to young people experiencing homelessness
- Can be conditional (contingent) or unconditional (no strings)
- May be accompanied by supportive services (“plus”)
- Time limited and targeted to housing outcomes (not guaranteed income)

Why and why now?

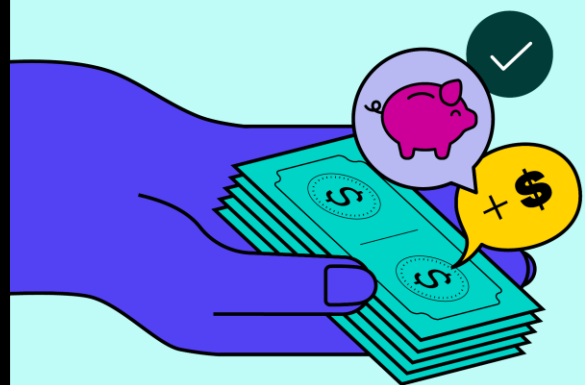
- Vast international evidence base on effectiveness
- Shifting political landscape; pandemic brought new flexibilities
- Informed by lived experts
- Non-paternalistic
- Circumvents barriers
- Combine with services for cash plus
- Not a basic income program: designed to help *launch* young people
- Moving upstream just a little *not prevention*





FOR YOUNG PEOPLE,
BY YOUNG PEOPLE:

Direct Cash Transfers



Cash Plus Model

CO-DESIGNED WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

CASH


- Unconditional payments (24 months)
 - Monthly amount supporting a housing outcome (NYC: \$1,200)
 - One-time lump-sum (NYC: \$3,000)
- Multiple payout options
 - Venmo
 - PayPal
 - Direct deposit
 - Prepaid card



Cash Plus Model

Co-Designed with Young People

PLUS

- **Support team:** Coach (social worker), peer support, program manager
 - **Services:** Strengths-based coaching, benefits counseling, housing navigation, financial coaching, connections to care, education & career support
 - **Evidence-based/informed** if possible
 - **Flexible:** Virtual & in-person
- 

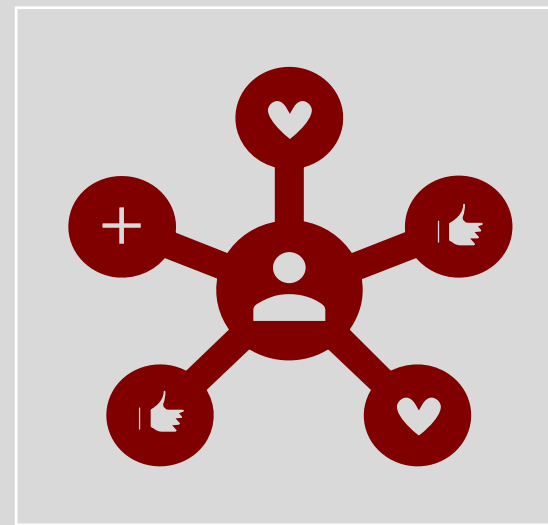
Essential & Adaptable Elements: Direct Cash Transfer



Essential Elements



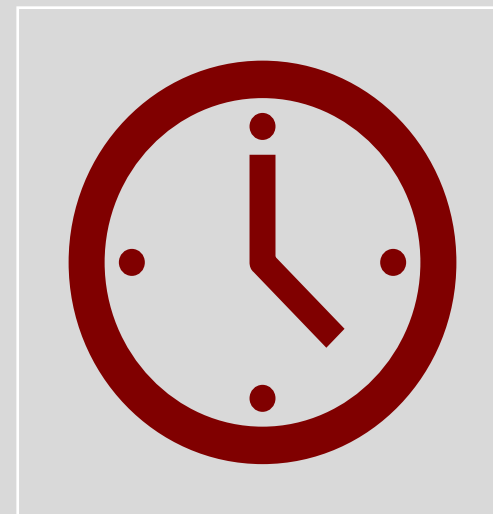
Population: Young Adults (18-24) experiencing homelessness or housing instability



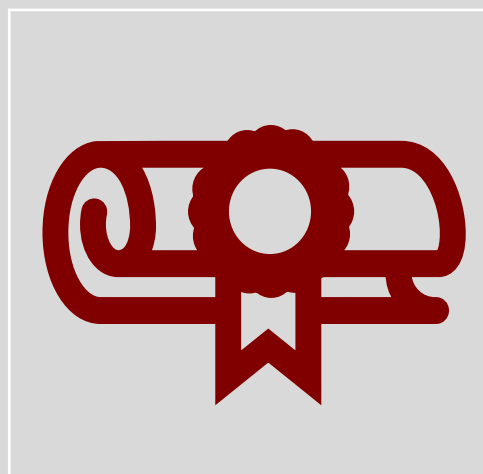
Online Payment: Unconditional DCTs delivered online on a flexible platform



Payments: Monthly cash transfer; 1-time cash transfer to exit homelessness (e.g., pay debt, buy furniture, security deposit)



Duration: At least 18-24 months



Plus: Youth-driven, optional supportive programming

Additional/Adaptable

- Housing arrangements that inform cash transfer amount(s)
- Customize supportive programming; delivery innovations
- Select local partner(s) to deliver supportive programming – stay true to context
- Local youth engagement to co-create, adapt, refine all service components

Evaluation is essential ... and adaptable, too.

Pathways Study

- 29 in Trust Youth Initiative, 78 overall
- Recruited from 3 shelters and 3 drop-in centers in 4 boroughs
- 12-month average survey response $\approx 84\%$

Early Findings – Savings

- Long-term apartment goal
- Emergency fund/safety net
- Expenses: Phone bills, food, Health and beauty aids, clothes
- Establishing credit
- Documents (e.g., ID, birth certificate)
- Securing housing

No negative consequences reported

New York City Update

Upstream

In education:
An overview



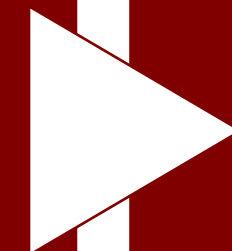
Upstream in Education

Pre-implementation planning

Work with school and community to adapt Upstream

Engage school, students, families, community, providers

Planning: adapt screening tool, train on roles



Implementation

Why Upstream?

Advantages

- Large evidence base on prevention and MTSS in education
- Can work! Australian and Canadian evidence
- Reduces human and financial costs
- Centers equity
- Adapts to local context and characteristics
- Sustainable systems change

Challenges

- Long-term commitment
- Internal resistance? Buy-in is critical. Change is hard.
- Faithful implementation
- Perseverance: 3-5 years to full implementation



The best intervention will be breaking the cycle of youth homelessness. It ends up costing more to whoever's funding if you don't solve a problem *now*.

– a youth with lived experience



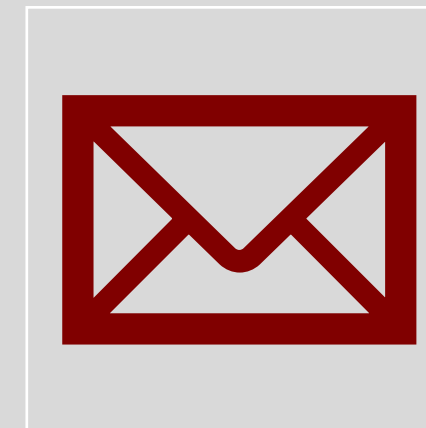
THANK YOU!



**Discussion and
questions**



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Helpful sources

[Definitions of Homelessness/HUD:](#)

(1) literal (2) imminent risk (3) homeless under other federal statute: <25 YO, persistent instability (4) fleeing domestic violence

[Definitions of Homelessness/McKinney Vento:](#)

(1) lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (2) literal: doubled up, public place, places not fit for habitation, migratory children

[Voices of Youth Count](#)

[All In](#) (US Interagency Council on Homelessness, USICH)

[2022 State Index on Youth Homelessness](#) (National Homelessness Law Ctr.)

[State Fact Sheets](#) (from the Index)

[Homeless Hub](#) (Canadian Observatory/A Way Home Canada)

[Prevention Brief](#) (Annie E. Casey Foundation)

[HUD Exchange](#)

[Social Work Today article](#) on Youth Homelessness/Prevention