Homelessness is one of the most difficult experiences people have in our community, resulting in over 5800 people in Erie County experiencing the traumatic instability that results from losing housing.

Homelessness decreased slightly, however its persistence is cause for concern. Efforts in the community to reduce homelessness among particular subpopulations, such as the chronically homeless or veterans, have been successful due to data-driven, targeted efforts to ensure there are sufficient housing resources available that meet these population's needs. The same tactics can be applied to the broader community through efforts to secure more affordable, sustainable housing. The common denominator for everyone lost their housing is that they lived circumstances where they could not afford it.

The 2017 HUD Comprehensive Housing Market Analysis found that the rental market became tighter in the City of Buffalo, and attributes that to demolitions of "obsolete apartment communities" and "replaced by new communities in growing parts of the community". Median rent in the area has increased 18% over the last seven years. Looking into American Community Survey data, we found that an area's median percentage of income paid towards rent has the strongest impact on the homelessness rates. We need targeted efforts to make housing affordable for those who struggle, and we believe subsidizing tenants in need through housing vouchers to be the most effective strategy.

The data in this report, unless otherwise stated, comes from the Homeless Management Information System, which uses self-reported client-level information that is recorded on intake by homelessness alleviation providers. All data in this report is aligned with federal fiscal years. FFY2017 is October 1, 2016 – September 30, 2017. Data about community demographics comes from the American Community Survey, 2016 Five Year Estimates.

Main Findings

- 5824 people experienced homelessness in Erie County, a decrease of 2.17% from the previous year.
- African Americans were overrepresented in the homeless population, making up more than half (53%) of all people experiencing homelessness but only 13.1% of Erie County.
- African Americans in poverty had the highest rate of experiencing homelessness of other racial groups who experience poverty.
- 1197 children experienced homelessness in Erie County, nearly two-thirds were members of female single parent households and 229 were unaccompanied.
- 54.10% of all homeless people were male, and 94.63% of male adults were single
- The City of Buffalo is the modal place of origin for people experiencing homelessness
- Nearly 1/10 of people entering homelessness gave an institutional setting as their last place of residence.

Key Findings

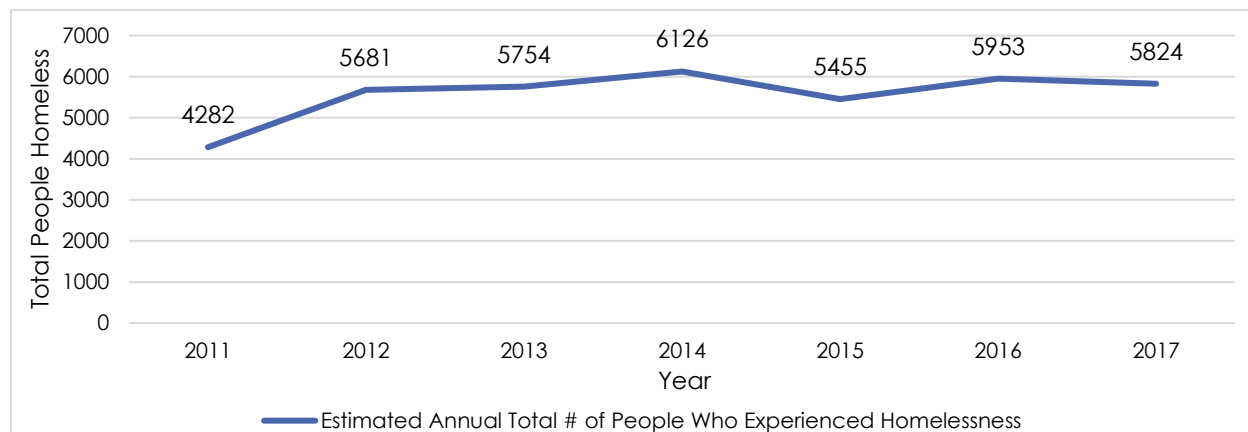|	2015 HMIS	2015 Estimated Total Count	2016 HMIS	2016 Estimated Total Count	2017 HMIS	2017 Estimated Total Count	% Change
NY-508	4769	7964	5240	8272	5378	8200	-0.8%
Erie County	4273	5455	4690	5953	4430	5824	-2.17%

Table 1: Overall Homelessness In Erie County

Figure 1: Homelessness in Erie County 2011-2017

		Households with Adults + Kids	Adult Only Households	Children-Only Households	Total
2017	Households	73	425	9	507
	Total People	**222**	**426**	**9**	**657**
2018	Households	67	428	14	509
	Total People	**229**	**430**	**14**	**673**

Table 2: Point in Time Data for Erie County, 2017-2018

Demographics of Homelessness

Race and Homelessness

Race	% of People Experiencing Homelessness	% of All City of Buffalo Residents	% of All Erie County Residents
Asian	1%	4.6%	3.1%
Black	53%	37.6%	13.1%
Native American	1%	0.43%	0.48%
Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian	0%*	0.04%	0.03%
White	35%	47.9%	78.9%
Multiracial	4%	3.6%	2.1%
Missing Data	6%	-	-

Table 3: Racial demographics of people experiencing homelessness, residents of the city of Buffalo[1], residents of Erie County *Very, very low incidence that rounds down to zero.

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[1] American Community Survey, 2012-2016 five-year estimates

Ethnicity	% of People Experiencing Homelessness	% of All City of Buffalo Residents	% of All Erie County Residents
Hispanic or Latino	13%	10.8%	5%
Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino	87%	89.2%	95%

Table 4: Ethnicity demographics of people experiencing homelessness, residents of the city of Buffalo[2], residents of Erie County
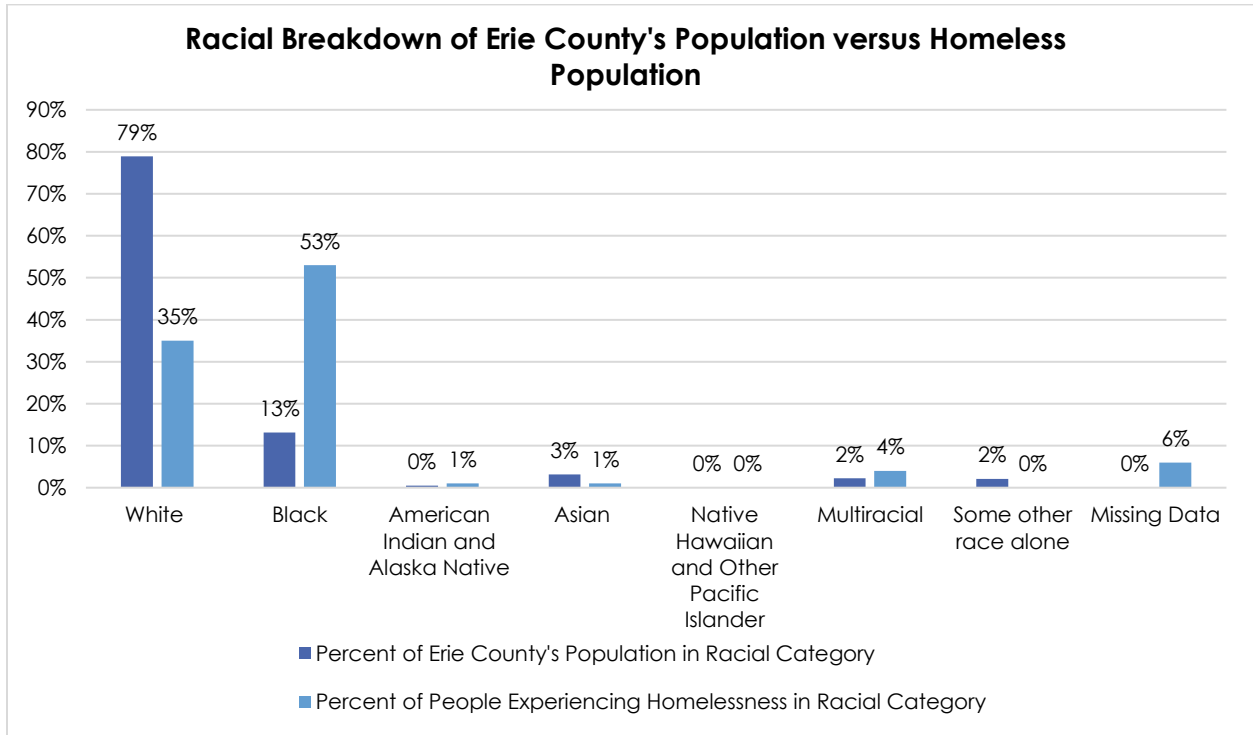

Figure 2: Percent of Population in each racial category for Erie County's Total as compared to the percent of homeless people who belong to a race

Differences in homelessness rates are a consequence of racism. Racial inequities in our society impact many domains of life, including education, housing access, and income. We see racial inequality present not just in homelessness, but in rates of poverty and the rates of how many people in different racial categories who are experiencing poverty become homeless. When someone becomes homeless, it is because they could not afford the housing they have access to.

First: more than half of all people experiencing homelessness are African American, while only 13.1% of Erie County and 37.6% of the City of Buffalo are. Nationally, research finds that African Americans are overrepresented in people experiencing homelessness[3].

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[2] American Community Survey, 2012-2016 five year estimates
[3] 2018, National Alliance to End Homelessness, "Racial Inequities in Homelessness by the Numbers". https://endhomelessness.org/resource/racial-inequalities-homelessness-numbers/

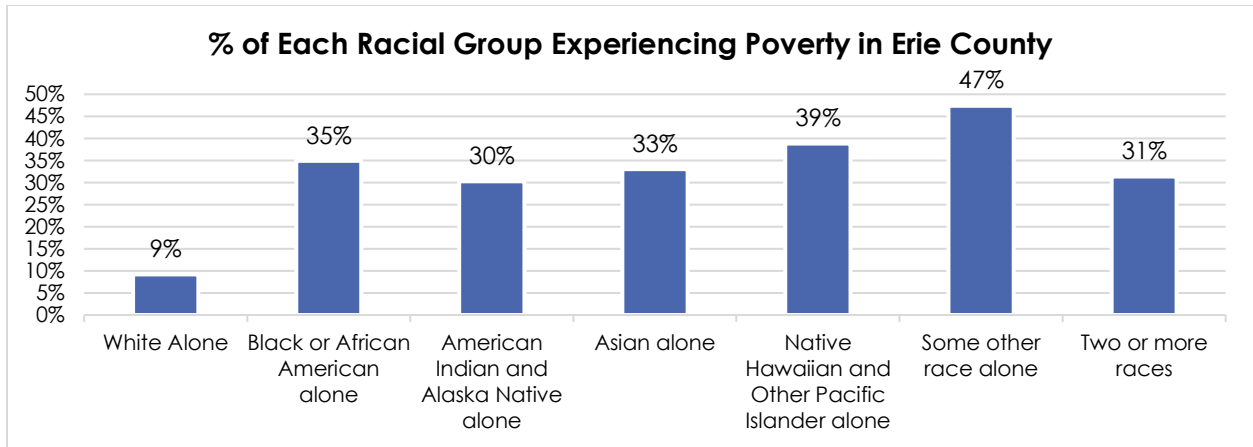**% of Each Racial Group Experiencing Poverty in Erie County**

Figure 3: The percent of each racial category in Erie County that is experiencing poverty

Poverty is not evenly distributed among racial groups in Erie County, as over a third of African Americans are experiencing poverty versus just 9% of White residents of Erie County.

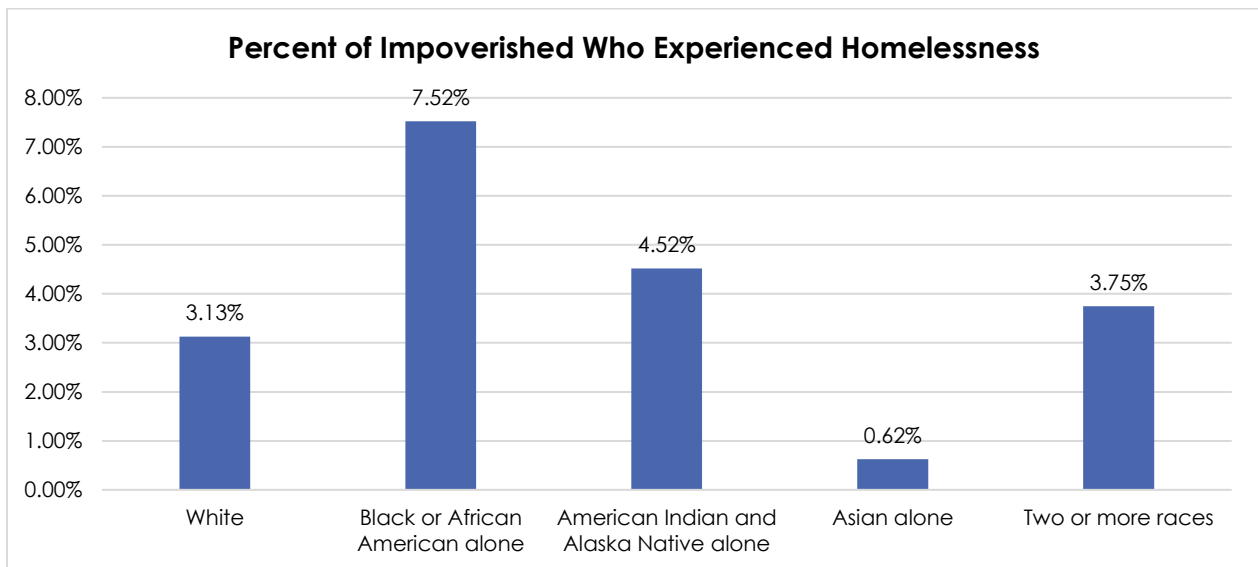**Percent of Impoverished Who Experienced Homelessness**

Figure 4: Rate of Homelessness of People in Particular Racial Groups Experiencing Poverty

The risk of homelessness is not the same for these groups, either. We used our data from HMIS to understand how many individuals were in each racial group against the number of people the American Community Survey estimates is experiencing poverty in each racial group to compute the rates. This assumes that everyone who experienced homelessness was living below the poverty line, and homeless people are thus a subset of that number. We see different incidences of homelessness among racial groups. African Americans in poverty had the highest rates of homelessness, more than twice that of whites: 7.5% of Black people living below the poverty line became homeless, compared to 3.1% of white people, 3.7% of multiracial people, 4.5% of Native Americans, or .6% of Asian-Americans in poverty. (Pacific Islanders were not computed due to very low numbers in both the general population and homeless population).

Homelessness is generally a housing problem, and inequitable access to financial resources by different racial and ethnic groups to resolve their housing crises. Disparate rates of homelessness follows inequitable rates of experiencing poverty. Racism is a systemic problem, and homelessness is a county-level consequence of racism.

Gender, Household Type, and Homelessness

Gender	Percent of people experiencing homelessness in the category
Male	54.10%
Female	42.61%
Trans Female (MTF or Male to Female)	0.23%
Trans Male (FTM or Female to Male)	0.06%
Missing Data	2.83%
Data not collected	0.17%

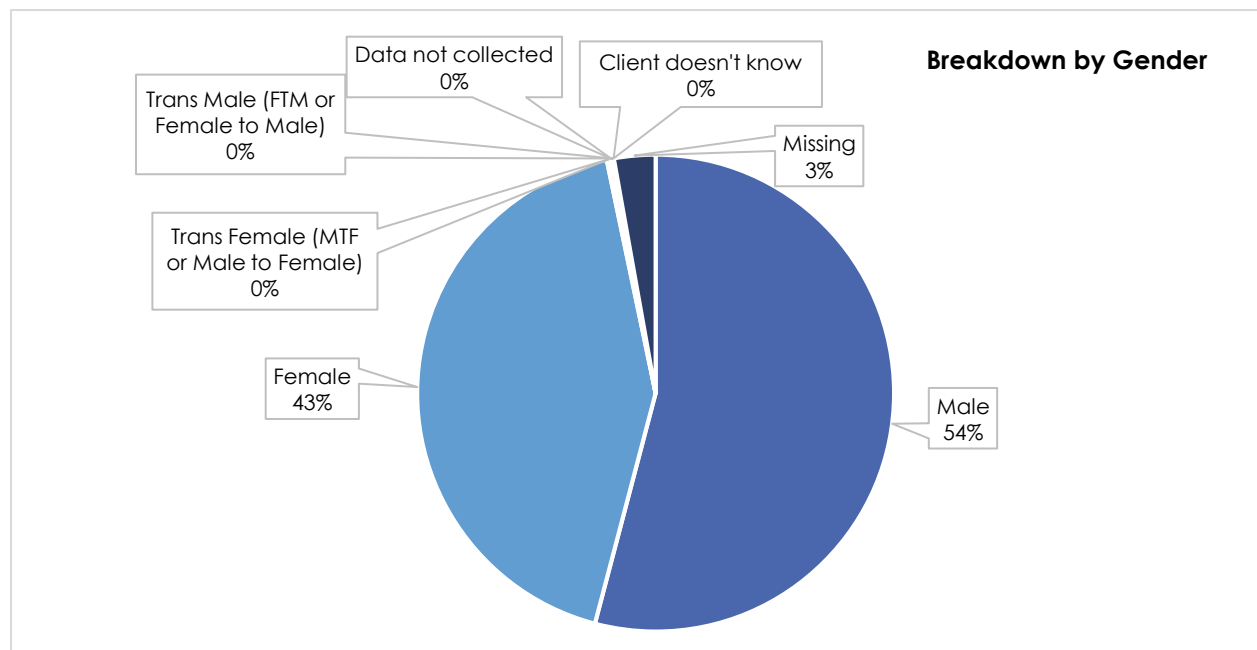Table 5: Gender of those experiencing homelessness

Figure 5: Distribution of Gender of People experiencing homelessness

Most of the people who experienced homelessness are men, and nearly 95% of them were single and without children in their care. The men in "Female single parent" are children of a female head of household who have reached the age of majority. While two-thirds of homeless women were single adults, over a quarter were single heads of households, parenting children alone.

Household Type	Female	Male	Trans Female (MTF or Male to Female)	Trans Male (FTM or Female to Male)	Missing Data
Single Adult	67.00%	94.63%	100.00%	100.00%	88.89%
Couple With No Children	1.35%	1.05%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Female Single Parent	26.65%	0.39%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Grandparent(s) and Child	0.24%	0.04%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Male Single Parent	0.00%	0.83%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Other Relative	0.47%	0.04%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Two Parent Family	4.29%	3.01%	0.00%	0.00%	11.11%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 6: Gender of adults experiencing homelessness by family type (columns are percent of members of that gender who experienced homelessness in a particular household)

Household Type	Percent of Household	Percent of People
Single Adult	85.99%	67.21%
Families	14.01%	32.79%
Couple With No Children	5.14%	3.30%
Female Single Parent	76.54%	74.86%
Male Single Parent	3.25%	2.45%
Two Parent Family	13.01%	17.46%
Grandparent(s) and Child	0.68%	0.57%
Other Relative	1.37%	1.37%

Table 7: Homelessness by Family Type

A household could be a single person or one unit with multiple members. We use both measures for different planning purposes.

Over 2/3s of people who experience homelessness are single adults. We routinely find an unmet need for low-cost, affordable housing that is sized to accommodate this population. An increase in the inventory of rooming houses and single-resident occupancy (SRO) units priced to be affordable for those who are at or near poverty would assist this population in avoiding and ending homelessness.

Nearly 11% of all households were female single parents, with nearly a quarter of all people experiencing homelessness (and two-thirds of the children) being members of that household type. Male single parent families and two parent families are relatively rare, suggesting that the social and economic forces that impact female single parents make them more vulnerable to homelessness. It is more challenging for women to maintain economic security. For instance, there is a $4,933 gap in the full-time, median yearly income of men ($40,965) and women ($36,032) in the city of Buffalo, and 53.8% of female single parent families in the city (41.3% in all of Erie County) are living below the poverty line. This percentage increases in the subset of female single parents who have children of childcare age (under 5 years-old): 57% in Buffalo, and 50% in all of Erie County.[4]

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[4] US. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates

	Percent
Adults	77.14%
Children	22.86%

Table 8: Adult/Children experiencing homelessness

We see the consequences of this struggle in the numbers. Nearly 1200 children (1197) experienced homelessness in Erie County, as recorded by HMIS participating providers. 229 of these children were unaccompanied. Homelessness is a childhood issue.

Ages of People Experiencing Homelessness in Erie County by HUD planning categories 2012-2017
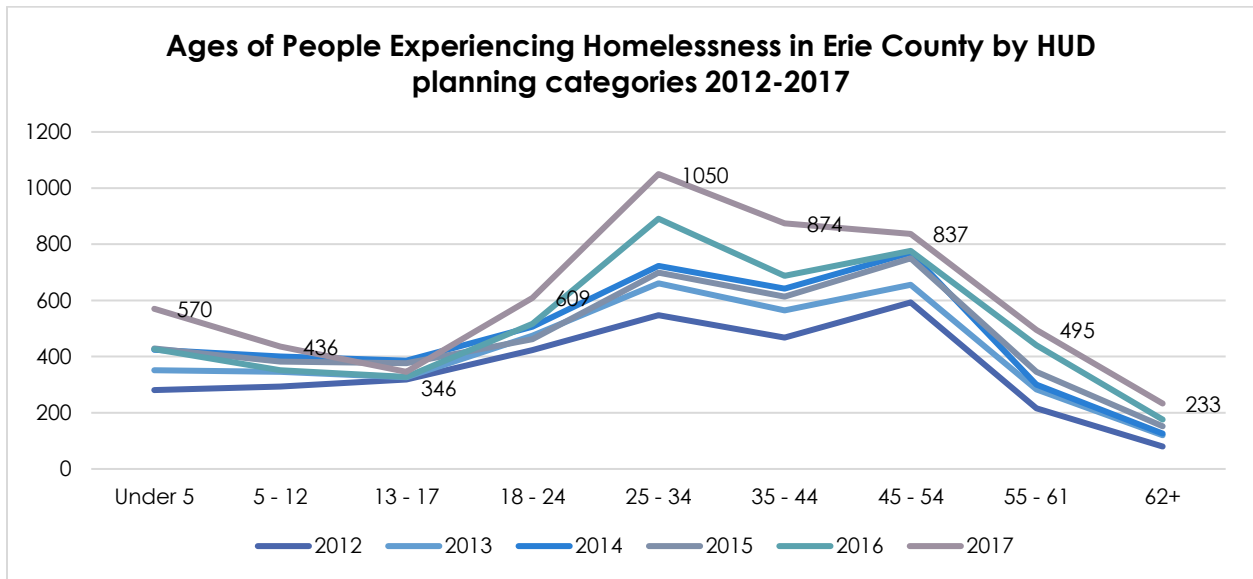
Figure 6: Age distribution of people experiencing homelessness in Erie County by HUD planning category

HUD measures age by categories which clusters people with similar programming needs. Be aware that these categories are not equally weighted in the number of years that exist within them, thus making it more likely that some categories would have more people if homelessness were evenly distributed.

There were 233 infants experiencing homelessness in 2017 in Erie County. This in fact is the highest number of people in any age group experiencing homelessness.

Causes and Locations of Homelessness

Primary Reason Adults Gave for Homelessness	Percent of Adults Who Cited This Reason
Household Disputes (not DV)	16.76%
Eviction by primary tenant	13.93%
Loss of Job/Income (includes public benefits)	10.55%
Release From Institution	9.87%
Domestic Violence	7.89%
Court eviction by landlord	7.84%
Ask to leave by landlord	7.38%
Relocation from out of the NY-508 CoC Area	6.69%
Mental Health	6.30%
Substance Abuse	5.99%
Problems with building	2.42%
Doubled-Up/Over Crowded	2.27%
Health/Safety Violation	2.08%
Problem with landlord	1.98%
Medical Condition	1.64%
Fire or Natural Disaster	1.25%

Table 9: The Top Reasons Cited for One's Homelessness

HMIS participating providers ask clients to give them reason they are currently homeless. What we see is that there is not one overwhelming immediate cause, but varied reasons. Worth noting is that nearly 10% of all people experiencing homelessness cite "release from an institution", which generally means a form of incarceration (prison or jail) or treatment programs. Much more work needs to be done with all the systems to prevent homelessness. Insights from successful rapid rehousing programs could be adopted by the NYS Department of Corrections to discharge those released from incarceration into temporary, and less expensive, rehousing programs instead of the mainstream homelessness system. As housing is important to one's sense of being a member of a community, we suspect that this could help reduce recidivism rates by helping those who have paid their debt to society bypass the trauma of homelessness.

Zip Code of Last Permanent Address	Percent	Location
14215	11.67%	City of Buffalo (Kensington Neighborhood)
14211	10.47%	City of Buffalo (East Side)
14213	4.53%	City of Buffalo (West Side/Elmwood Village)
14212	4.45%	City of Buffalo (East Side)/ Sloan
14207	4.42%	City of Buffalo (Black Rock/Riverside)/Kenmore
14208	3.90%	City of Buffalo (Downtown/Lower West Side)
14201	3.77%	City of Buffalo (South Buffalo)
14204	3.29%	City of Buffalo (Masten/ East Side)
14214	3.25%	City of Buffalo (East Side/Kaisertown/LoveJoy)
14206	3.13%	City of Buffalo (North Buffalo)

Table 10: Top Ten Most Commonly Given Zip Codes for Last Permanent Address (of those who reported a zip code)

We ask clients presenting at HMIS-participating homelessness alleviation providers to give the last zip code that they had a permanent address. We find that the zipcodes with the most people who have lost their permanent housing are in the city of Buffalo and in areas with notable poverty rates. Zipcodes do not line up neatly with municipal or neighborhood boundaries, so the approxiamte locations are given in the last column. The figure below demonstrates that while the experience of homelessness is concentrated with those originating in the city of Buffalo, it is not the exclusive domain of the city. People experiencing homelessness originate in nearly every zip code Erie County has.

Percent of Income Towards Rent	City of Buffalo	Erie County - All	Erie County Excluding Buffalo
Less than 15.0 percent	15.70%	15.81%	15.87%
15.0 to 19.9 percent	10.90%	12.17%	13.17%
20.0 to 24.9 percent	9.10%	9.80%	10.37%
25.0 to 29.9 percent	9.50%	9.71%	9.91%
30.0 to 34.9 percent	8.40%	7.87%	7.47%
35.0 percent or more	46.40%	37.60%	30.46%

Table 11: American Community Survey – percent of people paying a certain percent of their income on their housing in the city of Buffalo (ACS 2012-2016 estimates)

The concentration of people experiencing homelessness in the city of Buffalo is not entirely surprising when you see that, of renters, over half (54.8%) pay more of their income than is considered affordable for their rent, 30%. When one must pay more for rent, they must sacrifice other expenses. Efforts to ensure that residents of the city of Buffalo can maintain their rent should look into housing affordability initiatives, which include subsidies paid to renters. The median percent of income paid towards rent in Erie County as a whole is 29.7%, nearly exactly what is considered affordable.
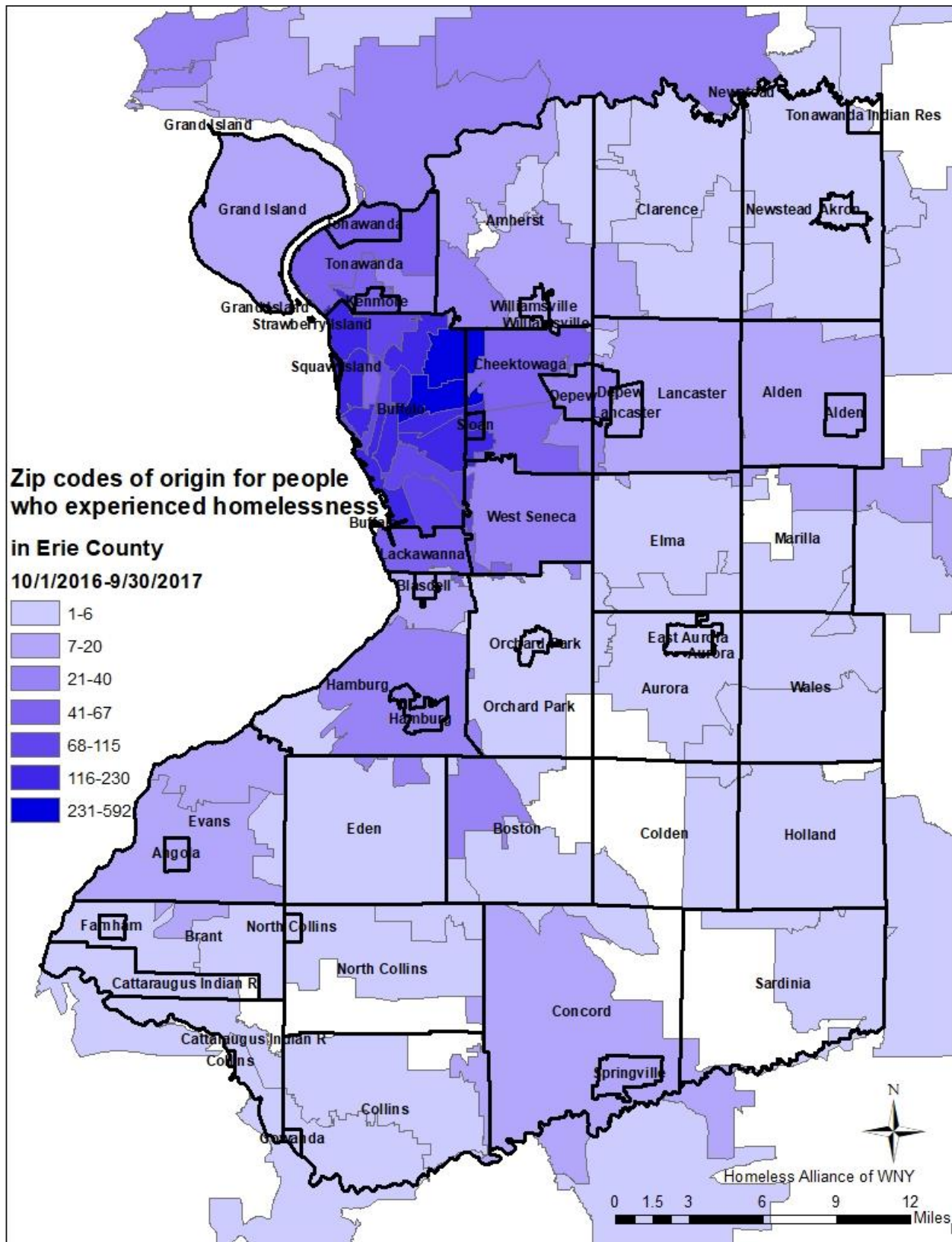
Figure 7: Zip Codes of Last Permanent Address for those who experienced homelessness in Erie County

Conclusion: Policy Recommendations

Homelessness continues to be a persistent social problem in Erie County, despite the slight decrease in the number of people who experienced it. We recommend the following:

- Tenant-based targeted interventions that make housing affordable, such as an increase in the Department of Social Service shelter allowance to match HUD Fair Market Rent
- The state should adopt and fully fund the Home Stability Support initiative
- The state should adopt a policy the requires any funding they provide for the provision of housing for those experiencing homelessness utilize Coordinated Entry in order to make these units available to those who are currently without housing
- More Housing Choice Vouchers need to be made available to HUD
- Market-based interventions to make housing more affordable, such as inclusionary zoning in the City of Buffalo
- An increase in the number of one bedroom and single-room occupancy units available for low-income individuals
- All Public Housing Authorities need to adopt a homeless preference based upon the HUD definition of "homeless"
- Better discharge planning by the Department of Corrections, or a rapid rehousing program funded by the department to keep the formerly incarcerated from immediately entering the homelessness system
- Efforts to assist female single parent households afford housing, particularly mothers of very small children
- Engaging in all efforts to eliminate institutional racism, such that all people have equal and equitable access to the social and economic institutions that lead to the acquisition of wealth and financial resources

The solution to homelessness is a home