



Definitions of Homelessness

San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH)

Updated March 2026

San Francisco's programs serving people experiencing homelessness are organized by three primary populations: **adults, families with minor children, and youth.**

For each of these populations, HSH has adopted categories of homelessness according to [federal](#), [state](#), and local definitions that refer to:

- (1) Population**
- (2) Living situation** (housing or homeless status)
- (3) San Francisco connection**

Definitions of homelessness for San Francisco's homelessness response system *are not the same* as eligibility requirements, which may be narrower than the broadest definition. People may be asked to document their household type, living situation, and/or San Francisco connection to access shelter, housing, and services in the San Francisco homelessness response system. Shelter, housing, and service programs have additional eligibility requirements.

Households may be eligible for a variety of housing programs and other assistance that are not currently available. Requests for housing assistance in the San Francisco homelessness response system often exceed capacity. HSH prioritizes households for housing based on *vulnerability, barriers to housing, and chronicity of homelessness*. [More information is available in the Coordinated Entry Written Standards.](#)



Population Types

All people experiencing homelessness are covered by *at least* one population or household type. For example, a pregnant adult without children is included in both “adult” and “families with minor children.” People ages 18-24 are considered both “youth” and “adults.” People can choose to utilize services designated for either or both populations.

Adult	A person aged 18 or over.
	A person aged 18 or over living with one or more people without minor children. <i>I.e., Single adults, married or cohabitating couples without children, adult roommates, adult siblings or group of adults ages 18 or over.</i>
	A person under 18 who has been legally emancipated.
Families with minor children	One or more adults with physical and legal custody of one or more minor children.
	One or more adults living together, including a person who is pregnant.
	One or more adults with one or more minor children not currently in their custody who are expected to reunify in less than 90 days and who have a letter from Child Protective Services stating that the only barrier to reunification is lack of shelter or housing.
Youth	A person ages 18 to 24 years old (often called “transitional age youth”).
	A person ages 18 to 24 years old living with one or more youth. <i>I.e., Youth couples, roommates, or group of people between the ages 18 to 24.</i>
	A person aged 25-27 years old who used homelessness response system services in San Francisco between the ages of 18 and 24 years old.
	An unaccompanied person under 18 who has been legally emancipated.



Living Situation (Housing or Homeless Status)

All households in the following situations are considered to be experiencing homelessness. These local definitions are largely based on [federal](#) categories, with points of variation shown in the footnotes.

Homeless	<p><u>For all populations, meet one of the three categories:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Having a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not meant for people to live (i.e., staying outdoors, sleeping in a car); or 2. Living in a publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, and local government programs); or 3. Leaving an institution (including a jail, substance use or mental health treatment facility, hospital, or other similar facility) and was in a homeless shelter or a public/private place not meant for people to live immediately before entering that institution.¹ <p><u>Families with minor children</u> are also considered to be experiencing homelessness when they are:²</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Living in single room occupancy (SRO) housing; or 2. Living overcrowded in housing with one or more additional households.
Imminent risk of homelessness	<p>Households that will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence, provided that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Their residence will be lost within 14 days of the date of application for homeless assistance; and 2. No subsequent residence has been identified; and 3. They lack the resources or support networks needed to obtain other permanent housing. <p>Note: Includes housing the household owns, rents, shares with others, or lives in without paying rent.</p>

¹ The federal government only considers people to be experiencing homelessness when they are leaving institutions and have been there for 90 days or less. San Francisco does not include a limit on length of stay in the City’s definition.

² San Francisco uses a broader definition than the federal government for homeless living situations for families. Locally, these two additional living situations are considered a homeless living situation for families.



Definitions of Homelessness: Population, Living Situation, San Francisco Connection

<p>Fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence</p>	<p><u>Households that:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are fleeing, or are attempting to flee, domestic violence; and 2. Have no other residence; and 3. Lack the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing. <p>Domestic violence includes dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, human trafficking and other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence against the individual or family member that either takes place in or has made them afraid to return to their primary nighttime residence.</p>
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San Francisco Connection

In addition to meeting the living situation requirements, households experiencing homelessness are considered connected to San Francisco if they meet the following requirements.

Adults	Families with Minor Children	Youth
<p>All populations: Stayed in San Francisco at least one (1) of the last seven (7) nights.</p>		
	<p>or, have a head of household who is currently or formerly a ward of San Francisco who currently resides in another county</p>	
	<p>or, have one or more children enrolled in school, preschool, or childcare in San Francisco.</p>	

