

Homelessness in the Twin Cities and Greater Minnesota

How do people experience homelessness differently across the state?



Homelessness is a result of multiple system failures. This includes a profound shortage of housing for people with extremely low incomes, as well as inadequate systems to support complex, interrelated needs. In addition to a lack of housing, homelessness can be caused and sustained by trauma, systemic racism, unemployment, or personal health challenges. As a result, homelessness is different for every person who experiences it.

Geography also plays an important role in homelessness. People who are homeless in a large, urban setting enter and experience homelessness differently than those living in areas that are farther from an urban center. This brief explores the ways in which homelessness is different between the Twin Cities metropolitan area and greater Minnesota.

Issue Brief

This brief is part of a series that examines interview data from the 2023 Minnesota Homeless Study. Each report will explore a specific aspect of homelessness and provide detailed data that can be used to inform services, interventions, and policies across our state.

For all available results from the study, as well as the Reservation Homeless Study, visit mnhomeless.org.

Key findings



In Minnesota, two-thirds of people experiencing homelessness are in the Twin Cities metro and one-third live in greater Minnesota.¹



There is an alarming overrepresentation of Native American, Black, and Hispanic/Latino people experiencing homelessness in both the Twin Cities metro and greater Minnesota.



Across the state, a concerning number of people are spending most of their time unsheltered. People who are homeless in greater Minnesota are more precariously sheltered, spending more time doubled up, more often moving from place to place for shelter, and experiencing more repeat episodes of homelessness.



While more people experience homelessness in the Twin Cities metro, those who are homeless in greater Minnesota have higher rates of complex challenges that perpetuate the cycle of homelessness, including trauma, violence, and significant health issues.



Lack of affordable housing for very low-income people remains a top challenge to finding housing, both in greater Minnesota and the Twin Cities metro.

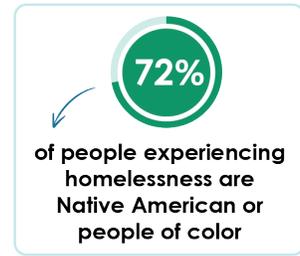
¹ The Twin Cities metro, including the cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul, is comprised of seven counties: Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington. For this analysis, we define greater Minnesota as all other counties outside of the 7-county metro.

There are severe racial disparities within Minnesota's homeless population.

Systemic racism, including a history of genocide, slavery, segregation, and anti-Black and Brown policies, has created huge racial disparities in wealth and homeownership in our country. Discriminatory policies have inhibited generations of African American and Native American people from building wealth, resulting in severe inequalities within the homeless population.

Although Minnesota's adult population is overwhelmingly White (78%),² just over one-third of the adult population experiencing homelessness in Minnesota identify as White (38%; Figure 1).

Shockingly high proportions of people experiencing homelessness (relative to their population size in Minnesota) identify as Native American, Black, or Hispanic/Latino. The disproportion is especially high in the Twin Cities metro where more than three-quarters (77%) of people experiencing homelessness identify as a person of color, and nearly half the homeless population identifies as Black (45%).



In greater Minnesota, a quarter of the homeless population identifies as Native American (24%), and nearly all people interviewed through the Reservation Homeless Study were Native American (97%). Note that this is the only place where tribal interview data are used in this brief. See *About the Study* for more information on the Reservation Homeless Study.

1. Racial and ethnic identities of Minnesota adults experiencing homelessness

	Statewide (N=6,934)	Twin Cities Metro (N=4,200)	Greater Minnesota (N=1,827)	Participating Reservations (N=907) ^a
White	38%	33%	66%	5%
Black or African American	32%	45%	17%	1%
Hispanic or Latino	15%	20%	10%	3%
Asian	3%	4%	2%	0%
Native American	30%	18%	24%	97%
Unknown	2%	2%	1%	0%
Native American or people of color (includes those who identify as 2 or more groups)	72%	77%	48%	98%

Source. 2023 Minnesota Homeless Study interviews.

Note. Respondents could choose more than one racial or ethnic identity.

^a These data are from the 2023 Reservation Homeless Study, with permission from participating tribes.

Like systemic racism, homelessness has traumatic impacts that are passed down through generations, further perpetuating a cycle of homelessness for Native Americans and people of color. For example, more than half (51%) of people experiencing homelessness in Minnesota were first homeless as a child or youth, 24 or younger; 29% were first homeless as a child under 18 years old. Proportions are similar between people experiencing homelessness in the Twin Cities and greater Minnesota.

² U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *Population Estimates Program 2022 Vintage*. Retrieved February 2024, from www.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest.html

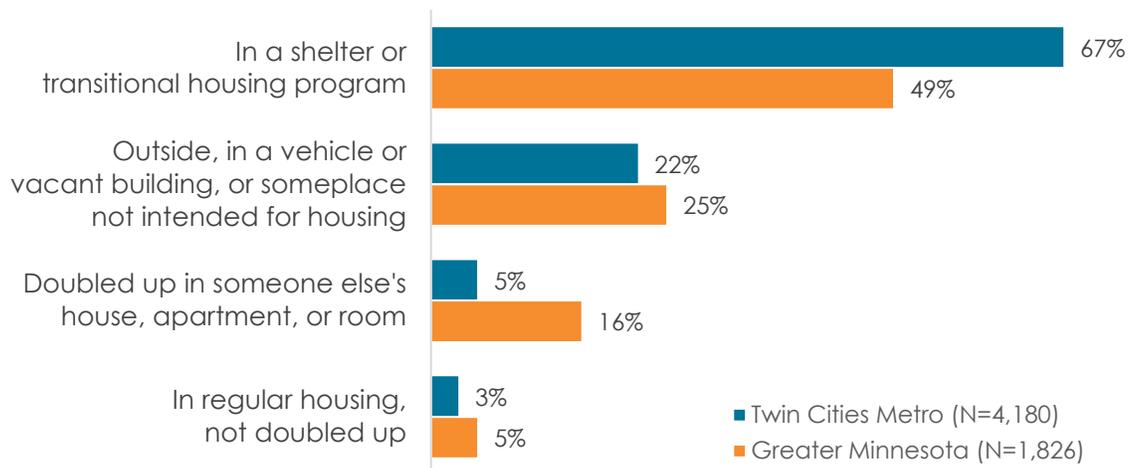
People face precarious shelter options, especially in greater Minnesota.

In both the Twin Cities metro and greater Minnesota, there is a concerning number of people spending most of their time unsheltered. Nearly one-quarter of the homeless population has spent at least half of the previous month unsheltered (outside, in encampments, etc.). Rates are similar between greater Minnesota (25%) and the Twin Cities metro (22%; Figure 2).

On top of this, people experiencing homelessness in greater Minnesota are more likely to:

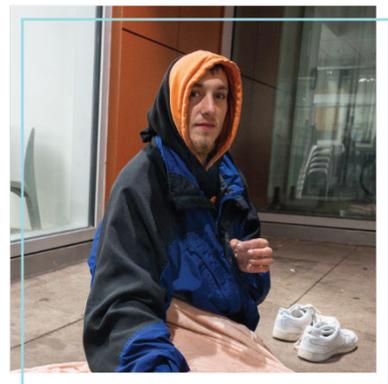
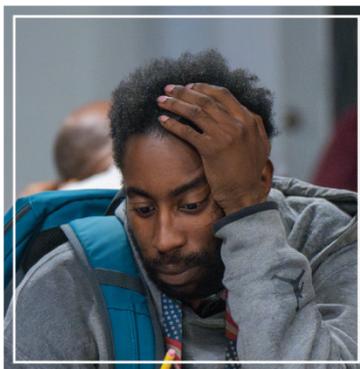
- Be doubled up, as opposed to staying in a formal shelter
- Move from one place to another in a 60-day period
- Be homeless multiple times in their life

2. Sleeping situation 15+ days out of the month



Source. 2023 Minnesota Homeless Study interviews.

Note. 3-5% of respondents were in "some other type of place." Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

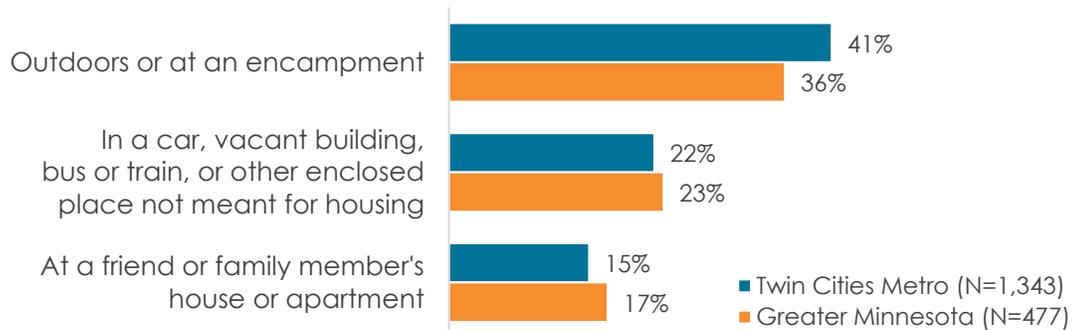


Within the previous three month period, one-third of homeless adults had been turned away from a shelter, more so in the Twin Cities metro (35%) than in greater Minnesota (28%). When people are turned away from shelter, the majority have to stay outside, in their car, or on transit (Figure 3). Even if shelter beds are available on a given night, they may not meet the needs of the person seeking shelter. Capacity is a complex puzzle that means having enough beds at the right place and the right time, with adequate staff to provide resources and supports.



1 out of 3 homeless adults are turned away from shelter

3. Top 3 locations slept at after being turned away from a shelter



Source. 2023 Minnesota Homeless Study interviews

The lack of shelter beds is critical, as seen in the [national debate](#) related to criminalizing camping on public property and the *City of Grants Pass, Oregon v. Johnson* Supreme Court case.

The National Coalition for the Homeless, which “has documented nearly 2,000 incidents of violence against people who were homeless” over the past 23 years, reports an increase on attacks against people experiencing homelessness. They draw a direct connection between recent legislation and “vigilantism and hatred directed towards people who are forced to live outdoors” (2024).³

It is important to focus policies on decreasing violence against people experiencing homelessness (which is already too high, as discussed in the next section) to help break the compounding factors that perpetuate homelessness.



³ National Coalition for the Homeless. (2024). *Criminalization has consequences*. <https://nationalhomeless.org/criminalization-has-consequences/>

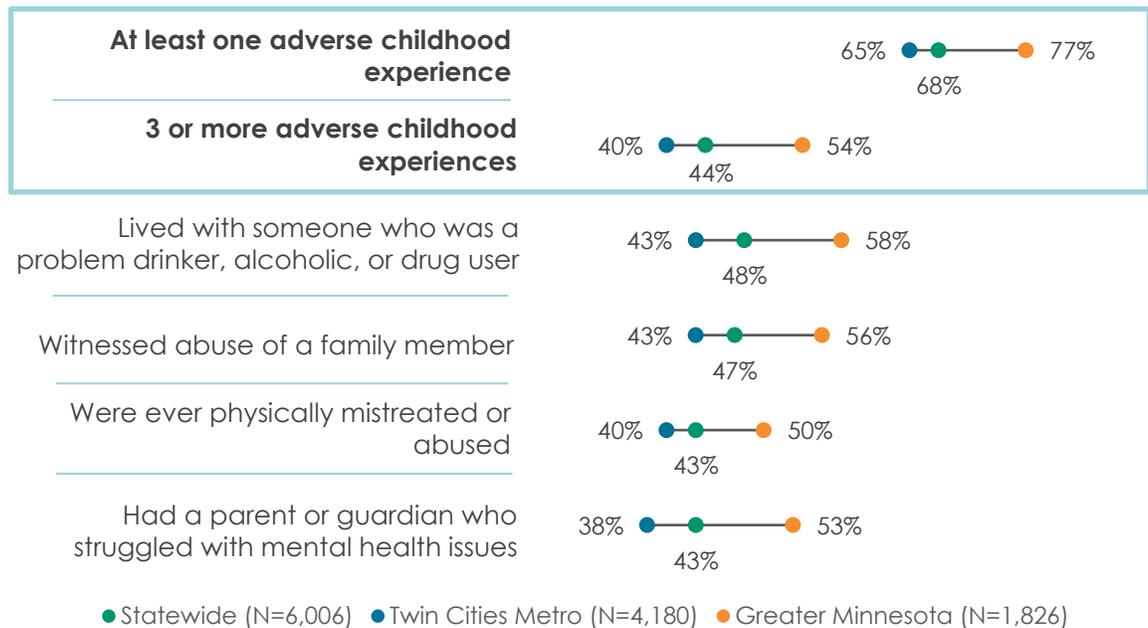
Experience with trauma and violence is higher in greater Minnesota.

Homelessness can be caused and exacerbated by trauma. Adverse childhood experiences refer to potentially traumatic experiences during childhood, like abuse or neglect. As a whole, over two-thirds (68%) of people who are homeless in Minnesota have experienced trauma as a child.

People experiencing homelessness in greater Minnesota are more likely to have at least one adverse childhood experience (77%, compared to 65% in the Twin Cities metro; Figure 4). People most often reported a childhood experience of:

- Living with someone who used substances
- Witnessing abuse of a family member
- Being physically mistreated or abused
- Having a parent or guardian who struggled with mental health issues

4. Adverse childhood experiences among Minnesota adults experiencing homelessness



Source. 2023 Minnesota Homeless Study interviews

Note. This chart includes the top four (out of seven) adverse childhood experiences asked about in the Minnesota Homeless Study. The study itself does not include a comprehensive list of adverse childhood experiences, and question wording differs slightly from the Family Health History questionnaire used in the 1998 CDC-Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences Study.

Experiences of violence are also higher in greater Minnesota (59%), compared to the Twin Cities metro (52%; Figure 5). In particular, people stayed in an abusive situation because there were no other housing options (46% in greater Minnesota, compared to 36% in the Twin Cities metro). Rates of other violent experiences—being attacked or assaulted while homeless (35% statewide) and fleeing domestic violence (22% statewide)—were similar between the Twin Cities metro and greater Minnesota.

5. Experienced violence while homeless



Statewide
(N=6,006)



Twin Cities Metro
(N=4,180)



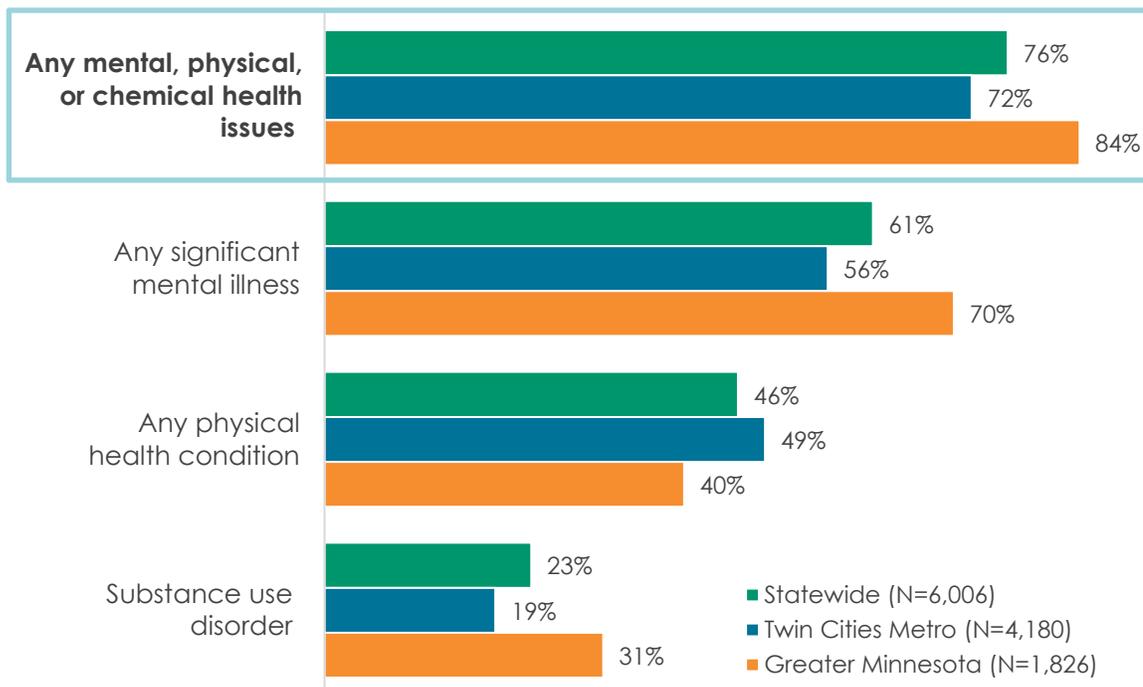
Greater Minnesota
(N=1,826)

Source. 2023 Minnesota Homeless Study interviews

Significant health issues are more prevalent among people in greater Minnesota.

Like traumatic experiences, health has huge impacts on a person’s ability to find and maintain housing. The majority (76%) of people experiencing homelessness have significant health issues (Figure 6). While these numbers are staggeringly high across Minnesota, rates are even higher in greater Minnesota (84%) than in the Twin Cities metro (72%). This includes higher rates of the most common mental health concerns—anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder—and substance use disorder.

6. Health conditions among Minnesota adults experiencing homelessness



Source. 2023 Minnesota Homeless Study interviews

Note. Chart includes those who report a significant mental illness or substance use disorder in the past 2 years or a chronic physical health condition in the past 12 months.

Affordability for those with very low incomes remains a top challenge to finding housing in both greater Minnesota and the Twin Cities metro.

When asked about challenges to finding housing, the top reason was “no affordable housing,” which has remained consistent throughout the 30 years of this study. Nearly half (49%) of people experiencing homelessness say this is an issue for them (Figure 7). Higher percentages of people experiencing homelessness in greater Minnesota have had challenges with affordable housing, credit problems, and rental history.

7. Challenges to finding housing

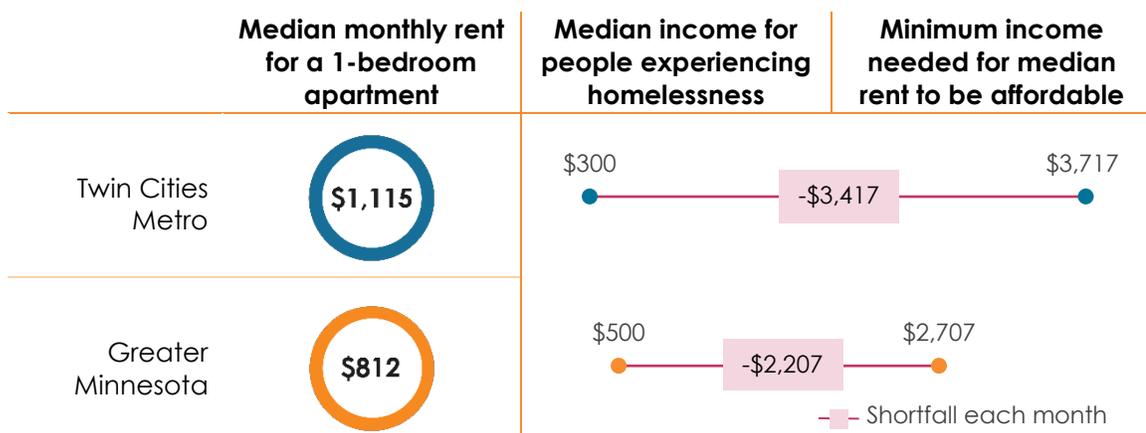
	Statewide (N=6,006)	Twin Cities Metro (N=4,180)	Greater Minnesota (N=1,826)
No affordable housing	49%	46%	55%
Credit problems	34%	31%	41%
No local rental history or references	26%	24%	29%

Source. 2023 Minnesota Homeless Study interviews

Note. Respondents were asked about several types of housing challenges. Only the top 3 are reported here.

To put affordability into context, the median income for people experiencing homelessness in greater Minnesota is \$500 per month, and only \$300 per month in the Twin Cities metro. However, in the Twin Cities metro, median rent is nearly four times that amount (\$1,115; Figure 8). Housing is considered affordable if the occupant spends 30% or less of their income on housing costs.⁴ Therefore, to afford the median rent for a 1-bedroom apartment in the Twin Cities, someone would have to earn at least \$3,717 per month, nowhere near \$300.

8. Median monthly income for people experiencing homelessness, compared to median monthly rent in 2023



Source for median monthly rent: Housing Link. (2024). *Rental Revue* data.

⁴ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. <https://archives.hud.gov/local/nv/goodstories/2006-04-06glos.cfm>

Lack of affordable housing for very low income people is an obvious challenge to finding housing, but additional factors—systemic racism, high rates of trauma and violence, and complex health conditions—make it nearly impossible for some people to access even deeply affordable housing. Layered on top of each other, these factors create a cycle of homelessness that is difficult to break. This complexity highlights the intense need for our state to fund intentional, robust services and supports that address the multiple needs of people experiencing homelessness.

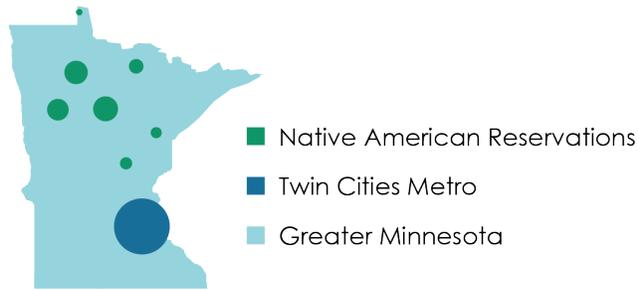
In the Twin Cities metro, Minnesota Homeless Study data speak to the **breadth** of needs for those experiencing homelessness, while data show the **depth** of need in greater Minnesota.

Wilder will continue to look at study data to highlight findings that can equip housing providers, advocates, and lawmakers with information to improve services and advance public policies.

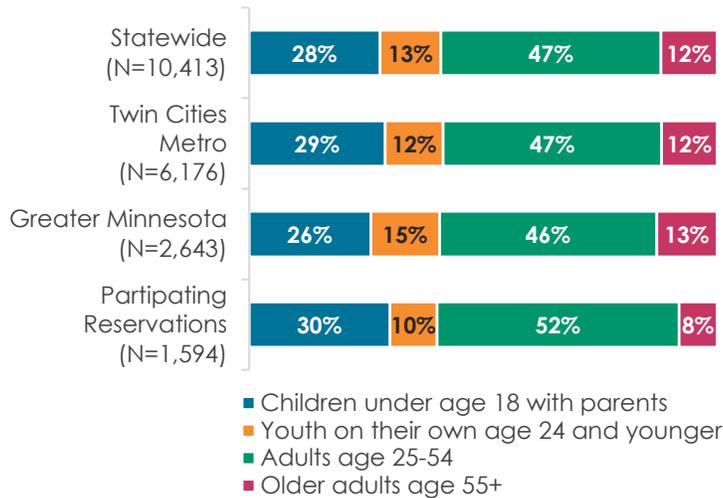


Demographics of people experiencing homelessness in Minnesota⁵

Geographies included in the Minnesota Homeless Study



Age, by geography



Age



Children and youth (age 24 and younger) account for 4 out of 10 people experiencing homelessness in Minnesota.

Family type



People in families (with children under 18) account for nearly half (47%) of people experiencing homelessness in Minnesota.

About the study

Every three years, Wilder Research conducts a one-day statewide study to better understand the prevalence of homelessness in Minnesota and the circumstances of those experiencing homelessness. The most recent study took place on October 26, 2023, and included:

- **Face-to-face interviews** with people throughout the state who meet a [federal definition of homelessness](#).
- **A count** of people experiencing homelessness.

In addition, six tribes in Minnesota partnered with Wilder Research to conduct the 2023 Reservation Homeless Study. This study took place during a similar time as the Minnesota Homeless Study and honors tribal ownership of their data. With permission from participating tribes (Bois Forte, Fond du Lac, Leech Lake, Mille Lacs, Red Lake, and White Earth), Wilder Research combined reservation counts with statewide counts to get a more complete number of people experiencing homelessness in Minnesota. However, *interview* data are not combined.

A note about sample sizes. Throughout this report, sample sizes, or Ns, vary by question. For ease in reporting, the overall, weighted Ns are shown at the top of each table (Statewide, N=6,006; Twin Cities metro, N=4,180; greater Minnesota, N=1,826). Readers should not try to calculate question-level Ns based on these tables. Instead, visit mnhomeless.org for detailed, question-by-question data tables.

The study is an independent initiative of Wilder Research in partnership with public and private funders and in-kind support from service providers throughout the state. For more information about this report, call Wilder Research, 651-280-2700, or visit mnhomeless.org.

Authors: Stephanie Nelson-Dusek, Michelle Decker Gerrard, and Rebecca Sales

Report design: Maureen McGovern

⁵ Demographics are based on 2023 Minnesota Homeless Study counts data.