



DATA BRIEF

People Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness in Allegheny County: A Point-in-time Cohort Analysis

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The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) considers people “unsheltered” if they are sleeping in a place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation (e.g., abandoned buildings, train stations, camping grounds). The Allegheny County Department of Human Services’ (DHS) street outreach team works with people who are experiencing unsheltered homelessness, offering them immediate in-person support and help with basic needs, while also connecting them to emergency shelter, housing and critical services. Street outreach staff from DHS and partner organizations maintain a shared list of unsheltered individuals in Allegheny County with whom they are in contact, allowing staff to coordinate efforts and engage in basic case conferencing.

This data brief focuses on a point-in-time cohort—156 individuals—who were on the street outreach list on a single day in October 2022. The brief characterizes that cohort in terms of demographics, veteran status, public benefit receipt, employment, and recent service and criminal justice involvement to inform programs and policies to better support these individuals. A similar data brief on those experiencing sheltered homelessness is forthcoming.

METHODOLOGY

On October 18, 2022, there were 158 individuals on the shared street outreach list described above; the list is extensive, but not exhaustive list of all people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in Allegheny County. DHS was able to find information in the Allegheny County Data Warehouse for 156 of these individuals. The Data Warehouse is Allegheny County’s electronic repository of information pertaining to publicly funded human services utilization. The Data Warehouse contains approximately two billion records representing more than one million distinct clients and includes data from 35 sources representing a wide range of human services program areas. These data can be used to describe the encounters or service history of individuals over time across both internal and external service providers and systems. Data Warehouse information does not, however, provide a full picture of need or answer “why” questions.

This brief focuses on a single point in time, which does not consider shifts in who is experiencing unsheltered homelessness from day to day. Those on the street outreach list were located throughout Allegheny County — concentrated in, but not limited to, Downtown (central business district), North Side and South Side.

DHS is engaging in further quantitative and qualitative research to gain a fuller picture of the needs of those experiencing homelessness in Allegheny County.

KEY FINDINGS

- The most common age groups among these individuals were 25 through 34 (31%) and 35 through 44 (30%), followed by those 45 through 54 (22%). There were no children (under age 18) in this cohort (See **Figure 2**).
- Sixty-five percent of this cohort were male and the majority (59%) were non-Hispanic White individuals, though People Of Color were overrepresented. (See **Figure 1, Table 1**).
- Among those with a recorded location (N=118), 48% (N=57) were staying in unsheltered locations in the North Side in October 2022. An additional 18% (N=21) were staying Downtown (central business district) and 18% (N=21) in South Side Flats (**Figure 3**).
- In the most recent quarter for which we have employment data (April-June of 2022), fewer than 17% (N=25) of these individuals had any formal employment (defined as being in an Unemployment Insurance (UI)-covered job). Among this population, the most recent median quarterly earnings were just under \$2,000 (See **Figure 4, Figure 5**).
- Thirteen percent of this cohort had exited a supportive housing program in the last year. Fourteen percent were concurrently enrolled in a housing program and sleeping outside, most often because they were still searching for a rental unit.
- Among those enrolled in Medicaid (N=129), 70% visited the emergency department in the last year. (See **Table 4**).
- Among those enrolled in Medicaid (N=129), almost half (43%) accessed drug and alcohol services in the last year. Opioid use disorder and alcohol use disorder were the most common substance use diagnoses among those with a behavioral health service in the last year (N=86) (See **Table 4, Table 5**).
- Among those with a behavioral health service in the last year (N=86), the most common mental health diagnoses were depressive disorder (N=20), adjustment disorder (N=16) and schizophrenia (N=16) (See **Table 6**).
- In the last year, 62% (N=96) of the cohort had criminal justice system involvement. Thirty-eight percent (N=59) had a new criminal filing and 21% (N=32) were on community supervision with Allegheny County Adult Probation. Thirty-five percent of the cohort (N=55) were booked in the Allegheny County Jail at some point during the last year (See **Table 7**).
- Of the 38% (N=59) with a new criminal filing, the majority (56%, 33) only had low-level (misdemeanor) charges. Sixty-one percent (36) only had one criminal filing and the most common types of crime were property crimes (39%, 23) and drug crimes (34%, 20). (See **Table 8**).

DEMOGRAPHICS

Sixty-five percent of this cohort was male and the majority were non-Hispanic White individuals (Figure 1 and Table 1).¹ Non-Hispanic Black individuals, especially, were overrepresented, as they accounted for 30% of the cohort but only 14% of Allegheny County’s population.²

FIGURE 1: Gender Makeup of Cohort (N=156)³

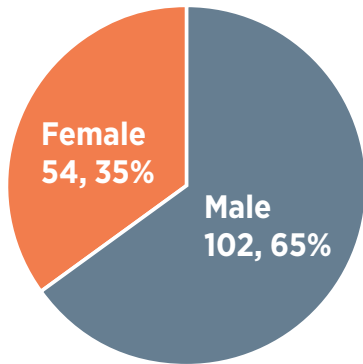
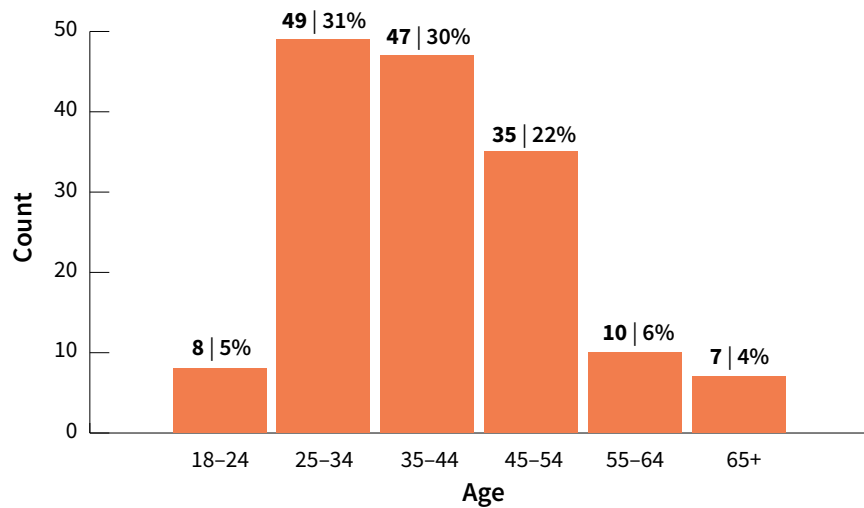


TABLE 1: Racial/Ethnic Composition of Cohort (N=156)

RACE	#	%	ALLEGHENY COUNTY %
White (not Hispanic)	92	59%	78%
Black (not Hispanic)	47	30%	14%
Hispanic (of any race)	7	4%	2%
Unknown race, Unknown ethnicity	5	3%	n/a
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2	1%	<1%
Unknown race (not Hispanic)	2	1%	n/a
White (unknown ethnicity)	1	1%	n/a

This cohort was made up of all adults. Eighty-three percent were between the ages of 25 and 54 (Figure 2). Individuals’ ages ranged from 18 through 69.

FIGURE 2: Age Makeup of Cohort (N=156)



1 The Allegheny County Data Warehouse integrates information from many sources. The information on gender, race and ethnicity that appears here was most frequently associated with an individual’s unique identification number in the Warehouse. Other sources may include self-reported data and others assigned by a provider.

2 U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census

3 These categories are imperfect for a couple of reasons. First, they do not encompass the full sex/gender continua, for which two discrete categories is insufficient. Second, the local data source uses the terms “male” and “female,” which typically describe a person’s biological sex (i.e., a person’s chromosomes, anatomy and hormones) and places these terms in a category called

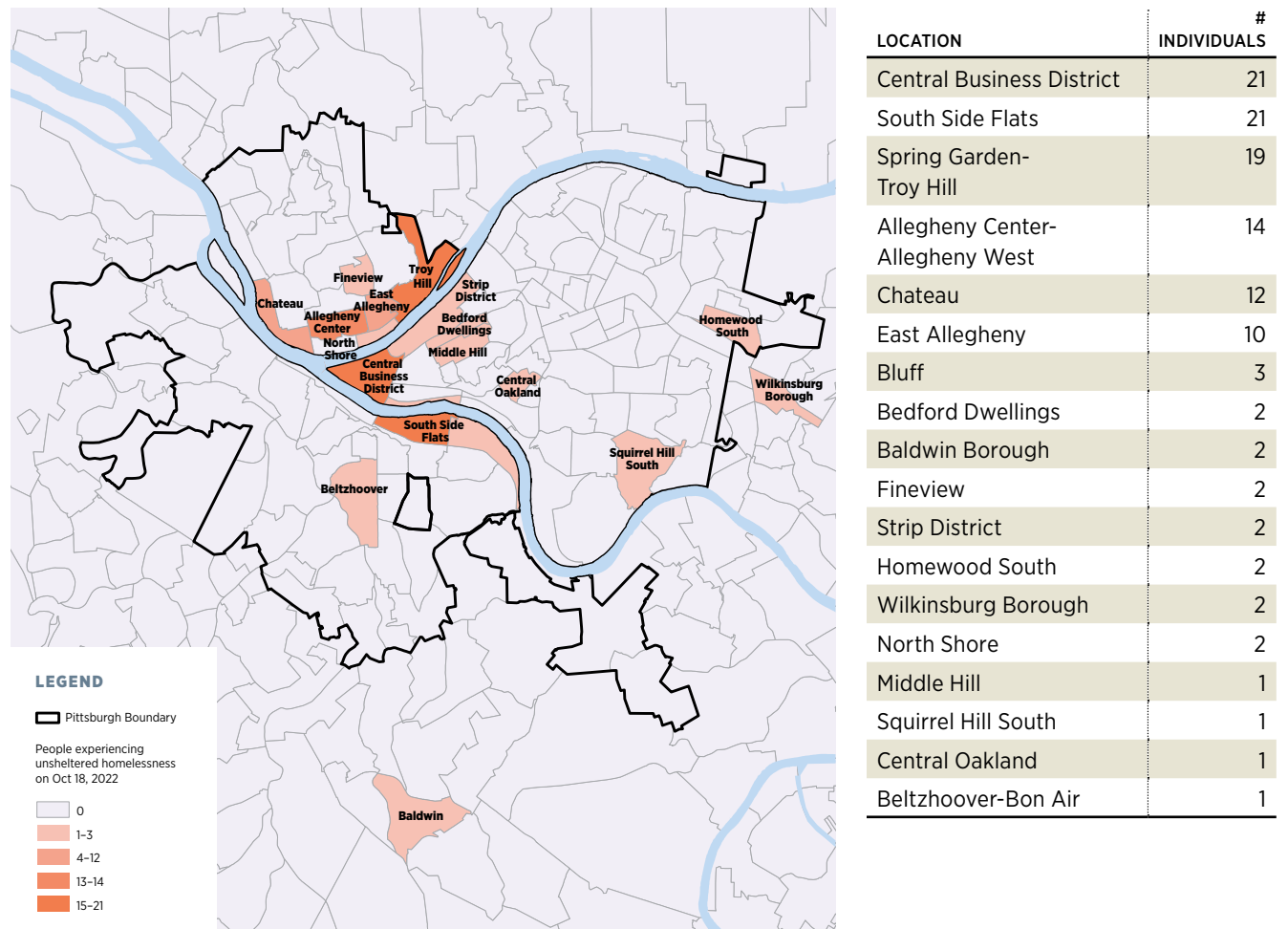
“gender” (i.e., a social construction whereby a society assigns certain behaviors masculine or feminine). As such, the data source conflates the terms and does not allow for the possibility that a given individual’s assigned sex does not correspond with their gender identity. Gender identity is not consistently captured in the Allegheny County Data Warehouse, except in child welfare data.

Only four individuals were identified as veterans. Allegheny County continues to partner with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and local veterans-focused service providers to prioritize veterans experiencing homelessness and quickly refer them to housing options.

LOCATION OF INDIVIDUALS ENGAGED WITH STREET OUTREACH

Street outreach staff from DHS and partner organizations keep track of the locations of unsheltered individuals with whom they are in contact, to help ensure continual engagement. People experiencing unsheltered homelessness may move among unsheltered locations, or sometimes stay in a shelter and then return to an unsheltered location. Among those with a recorded location in the shared street outreach list (N=118), most individuals were located Downtown (central business district), North Side, or South Side (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3: Locations of Unsheltered Individuals on October 18, 2022



PUBLIC BENEFITS RECEIPT

Many individuals in this cohort were enrolled in Medicaid and/or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) benefits in the last year (Table 2).⁴ Sixteen percent of the cohort received Supplemental Security Income (SSI), which is designed to help older people and those with disabilities who have little or no income meet basic needs for food, clothing and shelter.

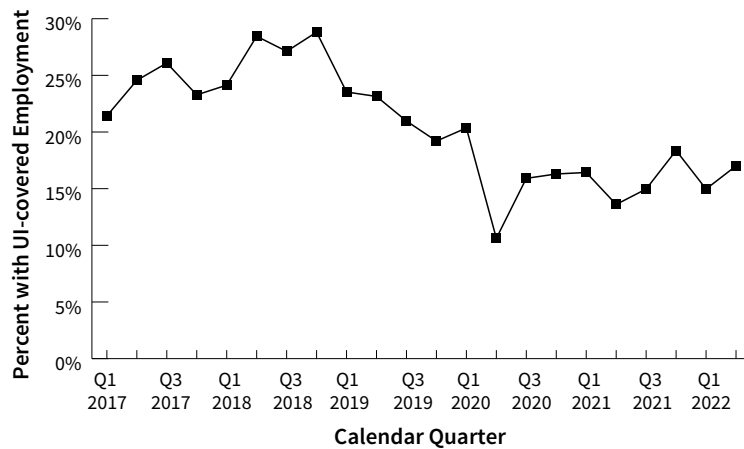
TABLE 2: Public Benefits Receipt, 9/2021 through 8/2022

PUBLIC BENEFITS	#	% RECEIVED IN LAST YEAR (N=156)
Medicaid	139	89%
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	125	80%
Supplemental Security Income (SSI)	25	16%

EMPLOYMENT

DHS was able to access Pennsylvania labor information for 148 individuals in this cohort (95%).⁵ Between the first quarter of 2017 and the first quarter of 2019, the percentage of those who had **Unemployment Insurance (UI)-covered employment**⁶ hovered between about 15% and 30%. There was a notable drop in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic; since that time, the percentage of this cohort with UI-covered employment has not surpassed 20% in any quarter (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4: Quarterly UI-covered Employment Rate, Q1 2017 through Q2 2022



4 Last year = 9/2021 through 8/2022

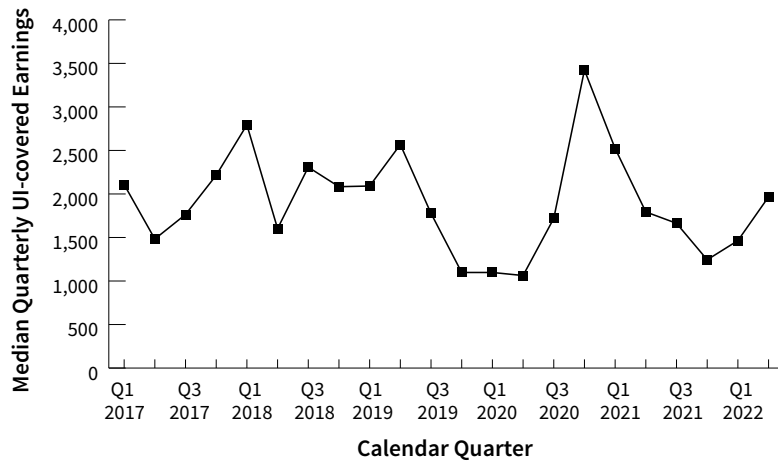
5 DHS began receiving quarterly Unemployment Insurance data from the PA Department of Labor and Industry in January 2017.

6 As defined by employment in an Unemployment Insurance (UI)-covered job. Pennsylvania UI does not cover certain types of employment, including: military and federal government jobs, self-employment, paid employment between family members, work for agricultural businesses that employ fewer than 10 employees for any part of a day in at least 20 weeks out of the year or that pay less than \$20,000 in total wages

in the year, domestic work for private households, local college clubs, fraternities or sororities that pay less than \$1,000 in quarterly wages for four consecutive quarters, informal work and any employment that takes place outside of PA. See here for more details.

Among those individuals who had UI-covered employment, earnings were low. **Figure 5** illustrates median quarterly UI-covered earnings over time, excluding those with zero earnings in a quarter. Earnings ranged from \$1,000 to \$3,500 quarterly, which is \$333 to \$1,167 per month.

FIGURE 5: Median Quarterly UI-covered Earnings over Time among Those Employed, Q1 2017 through Q2 2022



The three most common employment industry classifications were:

- accommodation and food services
- administrative & support and waste management & remediation services
- retail trade

Fewer than 3% of this cohort received UI benefits since 2017. Pennsylvania residents can file for UI benefits if they are working in a job that is covered by UI and they lose the job through no fault of their own. It is not surprising that so few clients in this cohort have received UI benefits in recent quarters, because these benefits require the client to have more than a certain minimum level of earnings in the five quarters prior to filing their unemployment claim.

SERVICE INVOLVEMENT

In the last year,⁷ 60% of this cohort received some form of **DHS-administered housing support**, including emergency shelter (37%), a permanent housing program (27%) and/or supportive services such as case management (13%). Very few received rental assistance (4%) (**Table 3**).

TABLE 3: DHS Housing Supports, 10/1/2021 through 9/30/2022

SERVICE CATEGORY	# ACTIVE IN LAST YEAR	% ACTIVE IN LAST YEAR (N=156)
DHS Housing Supports	93	60%
Homeless Services – Emergency Shelter	58	37%
Permanent Housing for Formerly Homeless (Permanent Supportive Housing or Rapid Rehousing)	42	27%
Homeless Prevention and Other Supportive Services	27	17%
Supportive Services (case management, etc.)	20	13%
Homeless Prevention/Rental Assistance (including ERAP)	7	4%

Permanent housing programs for those who were formerly homeless include Rapid Rehousing (RR) and Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH). RR helps individuals move quickly into permanent housing in the community through housing search assistance, rental assistance and service coordination. PSH is available for those with disabilities and for those experiencing chronic homelessness.

Forty-two individuals in this unsheltered cohort were enrolled in a RR or PSH program in the last year. Among them, nearly half (N=20) had exited a program, some with seemingly positive transitions and others to unsheltered homelessness. When information on housing at exit was available, destinations included:

- a place not meant for human habitation (N=3)
- staying with family or friends (N=4)
- renting with no subsidy (N=3)
- a substance use treatment facility (N=1)
- other housing for formerly homeless (N=1).

For those who had exited a program, median lengths of stay were 117 days for those in RR and 179 days for those in PSH.

7 Last year for service involvement and criminal justice involvement = 10/1/2021 through 9/30/2022

The other 22 individuals enrolled in a RR or PSH program in the last year had no exit date as of 9/30/2022, meaning that they were still searching for a rental unit through the program (an estimated 16 people) or for some reason left or lost their housing (an estimated six people). Quickly finding housing for those enrolled in these programs and supporting those who are enrolled and housed is critical to reducing unsheltered homelessness.

In the last year (10/1/21 through 9/30/22), 129 of the 156 individuals in this cohort were enrolled in Medicaid. Among those individuals:

- 75% received **behavioral health services**, including inpatient and outpatient mental health and substance use services.
- Nearly 90% received **physical health services**.
- 70% visited the **emergency department** (Table 4).

These data provide insight into who is receiving services but may not describe the full picture of health challenges that people are facing, as some individuals may not be accessing services they need.

TABLE 4: Health Services among Those Enrolled in Medicaid, 10/1/2021 through 9/30/2022

SERVICE CATEGORY	# ACTIVE IN LAST YEAR	% ACTIVE IN LAST YEAR (N=129)
Behavioral Health Services	97	75%
Drug / Alcohol Services	55	43%
Mental Health Outpatient Treatment	49	38%
Mental Health Crisis Services	43	33%
Mental Health Inpatient Treatment	20	16%
Physical Health Services	112	87%
Emergency Department Visits	90	70%

Among those who were enrolled in Medicaid and for whom DHS could access a behavioral health claim in the last year (N=86),⁸ 41% had been diagnosed with an opioid use disorder and 23% with an alcohol use disorder (Table 5).

8 In some instances (Involuntary Commitment and Mental Health Crisis, for example), DHS can access data on behavioral health service usage, but not behavioral health claims.

TABLE 5: Common Substance Use Diagnoses among those Accessing Behavioral Health Services, 10/1/2021 through 9/30/2022

THREE MOST COMMON SUD DIAGNOSES	# ACTIVE IN LAST YEAR	% ACTIVE IN LAST YEAR (N=86)
Opioid	35	41%
Alcohol	20	23%
Cocaine	8	9%

The most common mental health diagnoses were Depressive Disorder (23%) followed by Adjustment Disorder (19%) and Schizophrenia (19%) (Table 6).

TABLE 6: Common Mental Health Diagnoses among those Accessing Behavioral Health Services, 10/1/2021 through 9/30/2022

FIVE MOST COMMON MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSES	# ACTIVE IN LAST YEAR	% ACTIVE IN LAST YEAR (N=86)
Depressive Disorder	20	23%
Adjustment Disorder	16	19%
Schizophrenia	16	19%
Acute Stress Reaction	13	15%
Bipolar Disorder	11	13%

In the last year, 10% of the cohort was involved in the **child welfare system** as a parent. No individuals were involved as children in the last year, but only one person was age eligible (i.e., under 18 at some point in the last year). If we consider individuals who were age eligible since 2002 (the earliest data available) (N=77), 13% (10 individuals) were involved as children.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE INVOLVEMENT

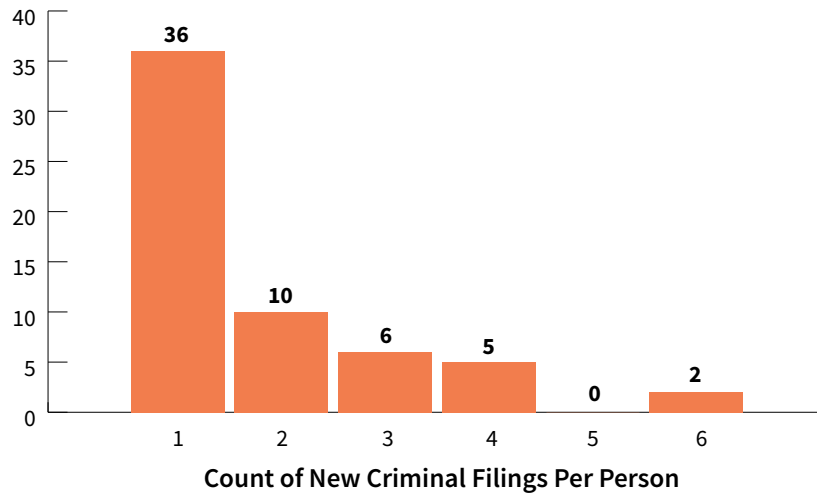
In the last year, 62% of the cohort was active in the **criminal justice system**, including being incarcerated in the Allegheny County Jail (35%) and being supervised by Allegheny County Probation (21%) (Table 7). No individuals in this cohort were active in the juvenile justice system in the last year, but only one person was age eligible. If we consider individuals who were age eligible since 2007 (the earliest year of available data) (N=52), 29% (15 individuals) were involved in the juvenile justice system.

TABLE 7: Criminal Justice Involvement, 10/1/2021 through 9/30/2022

SERVICE CATEGORY	# ACTIVE IN LAST YEAR	% ACTIVE IN LAST YEAR (N=156)
Adult Criminal Justice	96	62%
New Criminal Filing	59	38%
Jail	55	35%
Adult Probation	32	21%

Thirty-eight percent of the cohort (59 individuals) had a new criminal filing in the Fifth Judicial District of PA during the last year. Most commonly, those individuals had just one new criminal filing in the last year (Figure 6).

FIGURE 6: Count of Criminal Filings among those with New Filings, 10/1/2021 through 9/30/2022



Among those 59 individuals with new criminal filings in the last year, nearly 40% had property-related charges, followed by drug charges (34%) and person-related charges (31%). About 76% of individuals had misdemeanor charges; 44% had felony charges (Table 8).

TABLE 8: Number of New Cases Filed by Charge Type and Grade, 10/1/2021 through 9/30/2022

	FELONY	MISDEMEANOR	TOTAL (TYPE)
Drugs	1 (1.7%)	19 (32.2%)	20 (33.9%)
Person	11 (18.6%)	16 (27.1%)	18 (30.5%)
Property	14 (23.7%)	13 (22.0%)	23 (39.0%)
Public Order	2 (3.4%)	9 (15.3%)	11 (18.6%)
Weapons	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.4%)	1 (1.7%)
TOTAL (GRADE)	26 (44.1%)	45 (76.3%)	

SUMMARY

This data brief focused on a point-in-time cohort of 156 individuals who were experiencing unsheltered homelessness in October 2022. This snapshot suggests that those experiencing unsheltered homelessness in Allegheny County skew non-Hispanic White, between the ages of 25 and 44, and male. Many have accessed some form of DHS-administered housing support, including emergency shelter, in the last year. Few are employed and, for those that are, they have very low earnings. They do, however, have high rates of enrollment in Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance benefits. Most of those with Medicaid are engaging in both physical and behavioral health care, and many individuals have visited the emergency room in the last year. Among those with a behavioral health claim in the last year, opioid use disorder and alcohol use disorder were the most common substance use diagnoses. This brief provides insight into who is receiving services but may not describe the full picture of health challenges that people are facing, as some individuals may not be accessing services they need.

DHS is engaging in further quantitative and qualitative research to gain a fuller picture of those experiencing unsheltered homelessness in Allegheny County, as well as those using emergency shelters. A similar data brief on those using emergency shelters is forthcoming. In addition, DHS staff are exploring ways to improve data collection among those experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness; using administrative data to identify common service needs, homeless system trends and housing demands; and talking to people with lived experience in the homeless system to reduce barriers to stable housing.