

# Older Adults using Homeless and Housing Supports in Allegheny County, PA, 2015 through 2024



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Department of Human Services  
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<https://analytics.alleghenycounty.us/>

## OVERVIEW

Across the United States, homeless Continuums of Care are observing increasing rates of older adults experiencing homelessness.<sup>1</sup> Forecasts indicate that the number of older adults using homeless services will continue to grow throughout the next decade, representing a shift in the demographic makeup of the homeless population.<sup>2</sup> This brief examines these trends in Allegheny County, PA, where the share of the population age 65 and older is rising.<sup>3</sup>

In this brief, we looked at trends in older adults using emergency shelters over the last decade, including their demographics, lengths of stay and exit destinations compared to other adults using shelter. Although the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) supports individuals experiencing housing instability or homelessness in several ways—including through rental assistance and supportive housing programs—for this brief we specifically chose to focus on trends in emergency shelter usage for older adults. We anticipate that this exploration may provide insight into current and future housing support needs for this population, information DHS can use to create new or enhance existing supports for older adults experiencing housing instability or homelessness.

*Note: There are many ways to define ‘older adults.’ For this analysis, we have chosen to follow the U.S. Census Bureau and the National Institute on Aging and define older adults as people age 65 or older.<sup>4</sup>*

## OLDER ADULTS IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY’S EMERGENCY SHELTERS

In Allegheny County, a network of shelters provides a temporary place to stay for people experiencing homelessness. Allegheny County’s emergency shelter network includes facilities that serve only adults and others that offer accommodations to families with children or other dependents. Only about 1% of older adults accessing shelter use family shelters each year (fewer than 10 people annually); almost all older adults who are using the shelter system used adult-only shelters. **Thus, this report focuses on older adults who use adult-only shelters and all references to emergency shelter are to adult-only shelters.**<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2023. “[Addressing Homelessness Among Older Adults: Final Report](#).” (Prepared by Westat).

<sup>2</sup> Culhane, Dennis, et al. 2019. [The Emerging Crisis of Aged Homelessness](#).

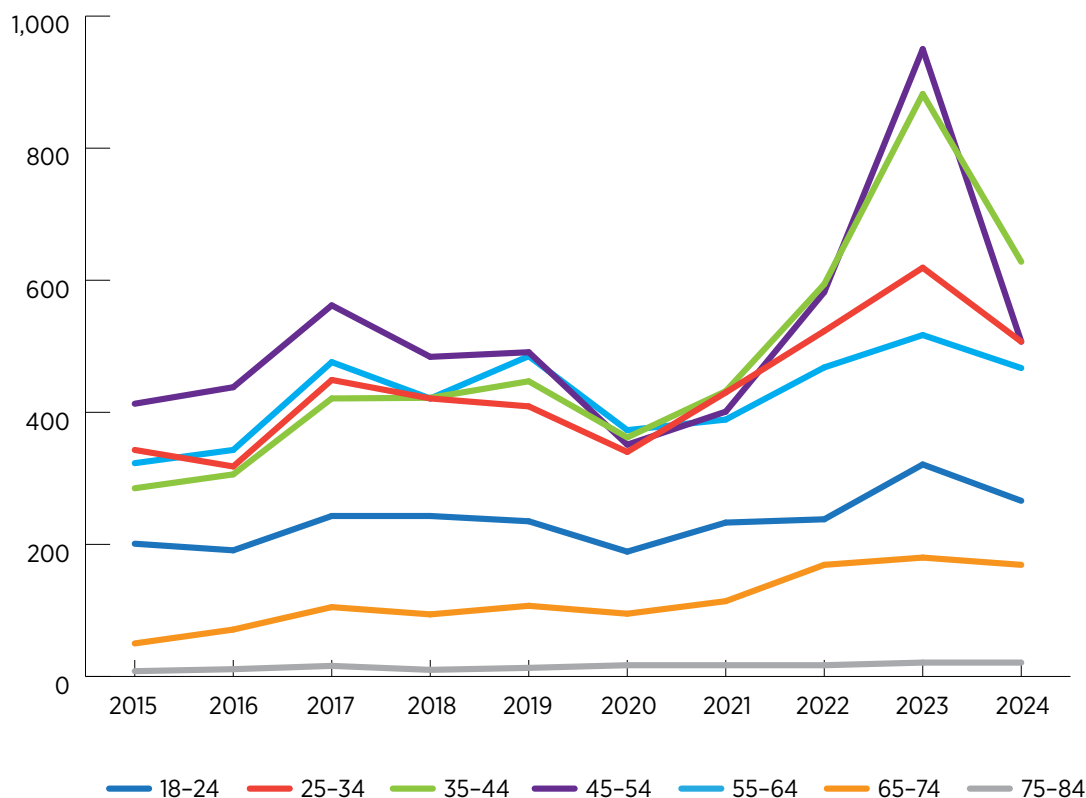
<sup>3</sup> University of Pittsburgh Center for Social and Urban Research. 2022. [State of Aging, Disability and Family Caregiving in Allegheny County](#).

<sup>4</sup> National Institute on Aging: Strategic Directions for Research 2020-2025. <https://www.nia.nih.gov/about/aging-strategic-directions-research>; U.S. Census Bureau. 2023. For example: <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2023/05/2020-census-united-states-older-population-grew.html>

<sup>5</sup> Data for this report come from the Homeless Management Information System, which stores information that agencies submit about their clients. This report does not include data from shelters for survivors of intimate partner violence, as they do not share client-specific data with DHS.

The number of older adults in shelter went from 23 to 191 in the last 11 years. Since 2015, the number more than tripled (from 58 to 191 clients), but older adults still comprise a small percentage of the overall adult shelter population (**Figure 1**). In 2024, the proportion of older adults in shelter was 7% (N=191), averaging around 15 new older adults per month entering shelter (**Table 1**). Since 2020, homeless shelter utilization has increased across all adult age groups, with those age 35 through 54 experiencing the greatest absolute and relative increases in shelter usage. Adult-only shelter *capacity* has also increased over the decade. In 2015, there were ten adult-only year-round emergency shelters and one winter shelter; in 2024, there were 11 year-round shelters plus seven winter or overflow shelter spaces.

**FIGURE 1: Number of people using adult-only emergency shelter, by age group, 2015 through 2024**



**TABLE 1: Number and share of people using adult-only emergency shelter, by age group, 2015 through 2024**

YEAR	AGE 18 THROUGH 64		AGE 65+		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	N
2015	1565	96%	58	4%	1623
2016	1596	95%	83	5%	1679
2017	2151	94%	126	6%	2277
2018	1991	95%	106	5%	2097
2019	2067	94%	123	6%	2190
2020	1615	93%	113	7%	1728
2021	1885	94%	131	6%	2016
2022	2405	93%	188	7%	2593
2023	3289	94%	204	6%	3493
2024	2375	93%	191	7%	2566

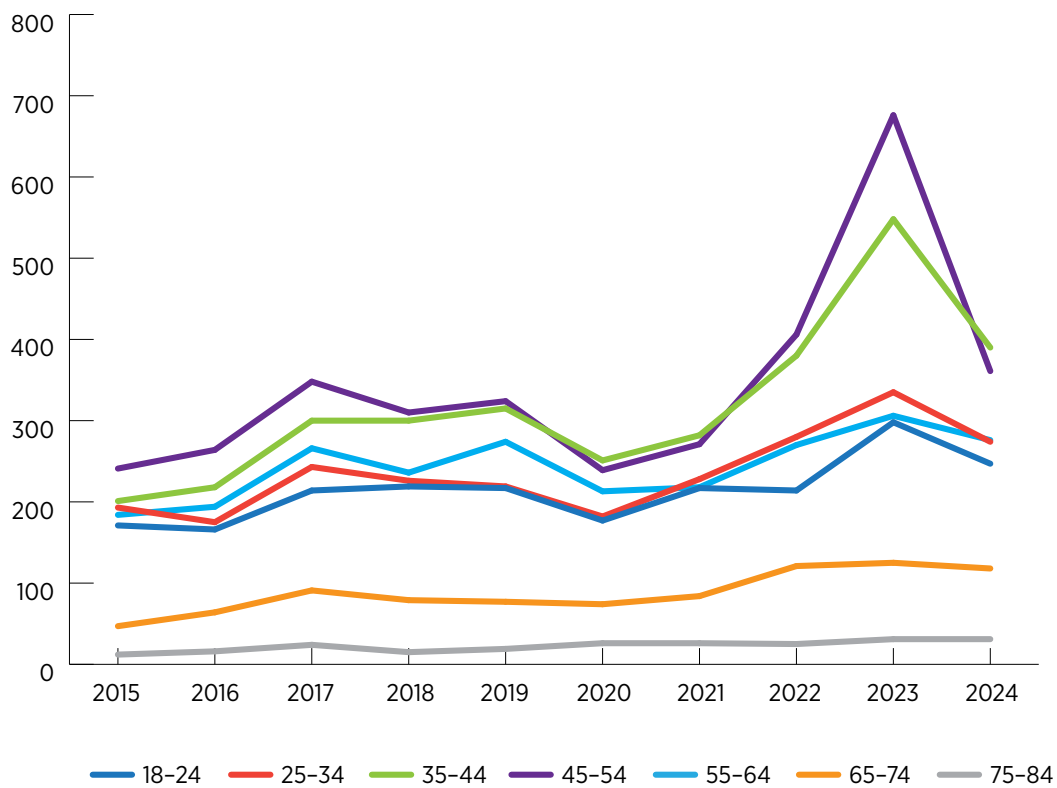
Among those age 65 and older, 62% were age 65–69 while enrolled in shelter, with an additional 25% age 70–74, 9% age 75–79 and 3% over 80 years old (**Table 2**). These ratios have not changed over the last decade, with people using shelter age 65–69, 70–74 and 75–79 growing at similar rates; there was a more than 200% increase from 2015 to 2024 in all three groups.

**TABLE 2: Age group of older adults using adult-only emergency shelter, 2015 through 2024**

YEAR	AGE GROUP				
	65–69	70–74	75–79	80–84	85+
2015	34	16	5	3	0
2016	54	17	9	2	1
2017	65	40	12	4	2
2018	65	29	10	0	2
2019	73	34	12	1	3
2020	67	28	14	3	1
2021	81	33	13	4	0
2022	130	39	15	2	2
2023	136	44	18	3	2
2024	113	56	16	5	1

The rate per 100,000 for older adults using shelter remains below that of other age groups in the County but has grown during this period. In 2024, there were 118 per 100,000 older adults age 65-74 who used emergency shelter (**Figure 2**).

**FIGURE 2: Rate of people using adult-only emergency shelter per 100k people in Allegheny County, by age group, 2015-2024**



\*2024 rates use 2023 U.S. Census data, the most recent available

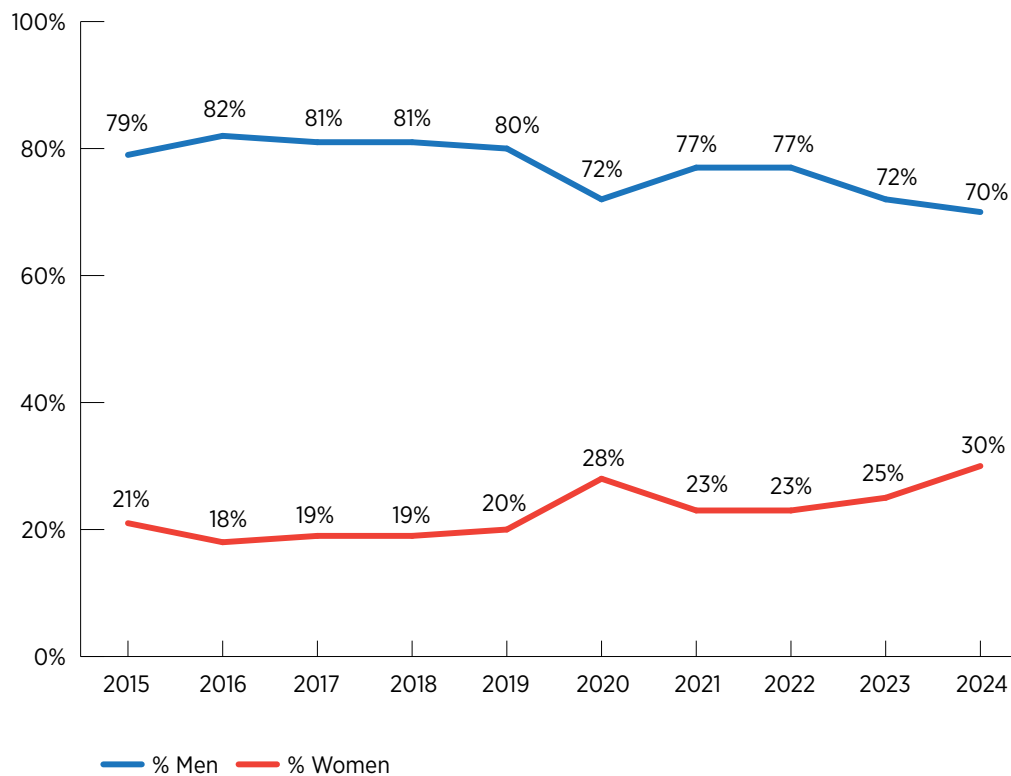
## DEMOGRAPHICS

From 2015 through 2024, 74% (N=611) of older adults using adult-only emergency shelter were men; among people age 18 through 64, that share was lower at 68% (N=8,686) (**Table 3**). **Figure 3** illustrates that over the course of the decade the share of older adult women using shelter has increased as the share of older adult men has decreased.

**TABLE 3: Number and share of people using adult-only emergency shelter, by gender and age group, 2015 through 2024**

	AGE 18 THROUGH 64		AGE 65+		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
GENDER						
Men	8,686	68%	611	74%	9,297	68%
Women	3,932	31%	199	24%	4,131	30%
Another Gender	23	<1%	0	0%	23	<1%
Unknown	205	2%	17	2%	222	2%
Total	12,846	100%	827	100%	13,673	100%

**FIGURE 3: Percent of older adult women vs. older adult men using adult-only emergency shelter, 2015 through 2024**



Forty-seven percent (N=385) of older adults using shelter over the last decade were Black compared to 41% (N=5,327) of other adults (**Table 4**). These percentages are slightly higher than the share of White individuals (42% of older adults, 40% of adults age 18 through 64) and indicate a significant racial disparity; in 2023, for comparison, Black individuals comprised just 9% of the entire 65+ population in Allegheny County and 17% of older adults living in poverty in Allegheny County.<sup>6</sup>

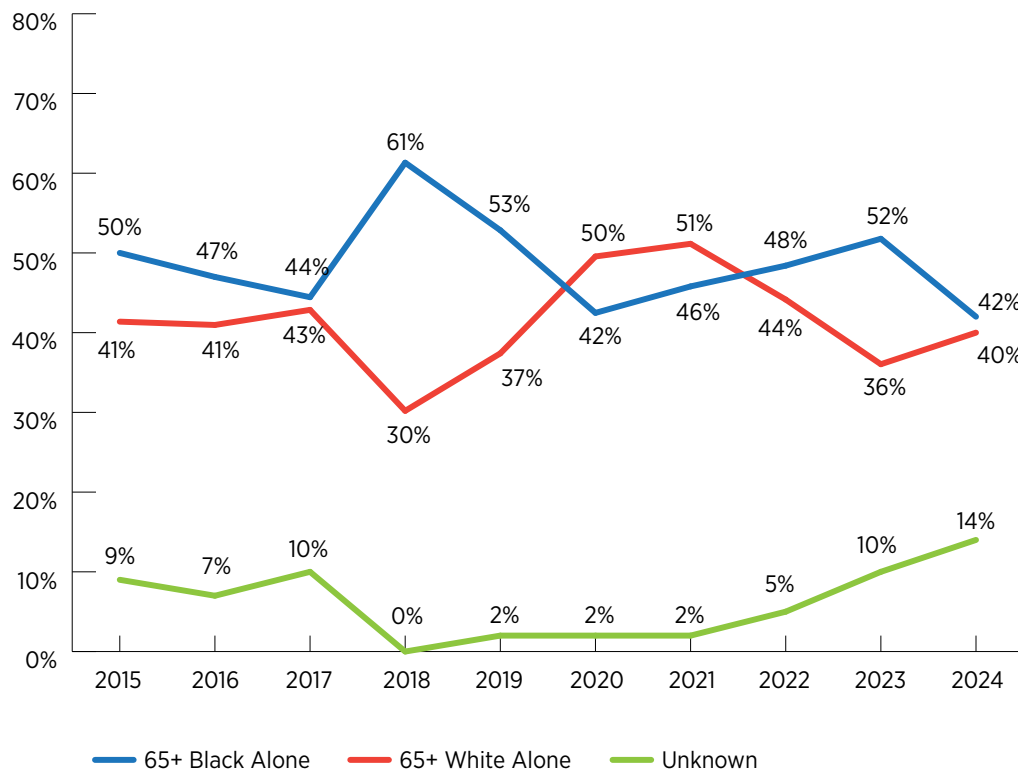
**TABLE 4: Number and share of people using adult-only emergency shelter, by race and ethnicity and age group, 2015 through 2024**

	AGE 18 THROUGH 64		AGE 65+		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
RACE AND ETHNICITY						
American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous Alone	79	1%	4	<1%	83	1%
Asian or Asian American Alone	81	1%	5	1%	86	1%
Black/African American Alone	5,327	41%	385	47%	5,712	42%
Hispanic/Latina/e/o, of any race	54	<1%	2	<1%	56	<1%
White Alone	5,185	40%	344	42%	5,529	40%
Multi-Racial	542	4%	19	2%	561	4%
Another Single Race	39	<1%	2	<1%	41	<1%
Unknown	1,539	12%	66	8%	1,605	12%
Total	12,846	100%	827	100%	13,673	100%

<sup>6</sup> American Community Survey 2023 1-year estimate. White individuals made up 87% of those 65+.

In 2024, the share of Black older adults using shelter (42%) was just a few percentage points higher than the share of White older adults (40%), although this has fluctuated over the decade and the percentage of those with no racial information recorded has increased (**Figure 4**).<sup>7</sup> The number and percent of older adults in other racial/ethnic categories has stayed consistently low over the course of the decade. By comparison, the number and percentage of Black and White shelter users age 18 through 64 has followed a more consistent, parallel pattern since 2021 and over the decade (See **Appendix**).

**FIGURE 4: Percent of older adults using adult-only emergency shelter, by race, 2015 through 2024**



<sup>7</sup> The 14% of older adults with an unknown race in 2024 represents 26 people, most of whom were enrolled at a winter or overflow shelter where their full demographic information was not collected.

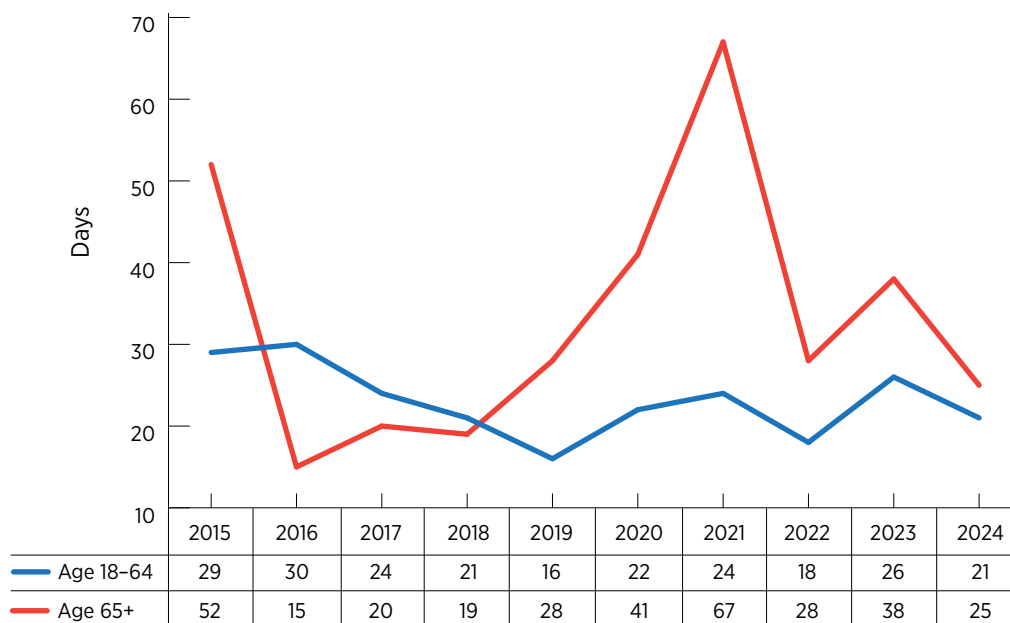


### LENGTH OF STAY: YEAR-ROUND ADULT-ONLY EMERGENCY SHELTERS

For this section, we considered lengths of stay among “leavers” (i.e., those who exited shelter) only, and if a person exited more than once, we included each of their stays. Unlike the sections above, we excluded seasonal and overflow shelters for which length of stay is calculated differently.<sup>8</sup>

Since 2019, older adults have consistently stayed longer in emergency shelter than adults age 18 through 64 (Figure 5, Table 5). However, older adults’ median length of stay has declined greatly after peaking in 2021. In 2024, older adults who left shelter had a median length of stay of 25 days (average: 70 days). This compares to a median of 21 days for adults under 65 who exited emergency shelter in 2024 (average: 56 days). (See Appendix for details on averages).

**FIGURE 5: Median length of stay among people exiting adult-only year-round emergency shelter, by age group, 2015 through 2024**

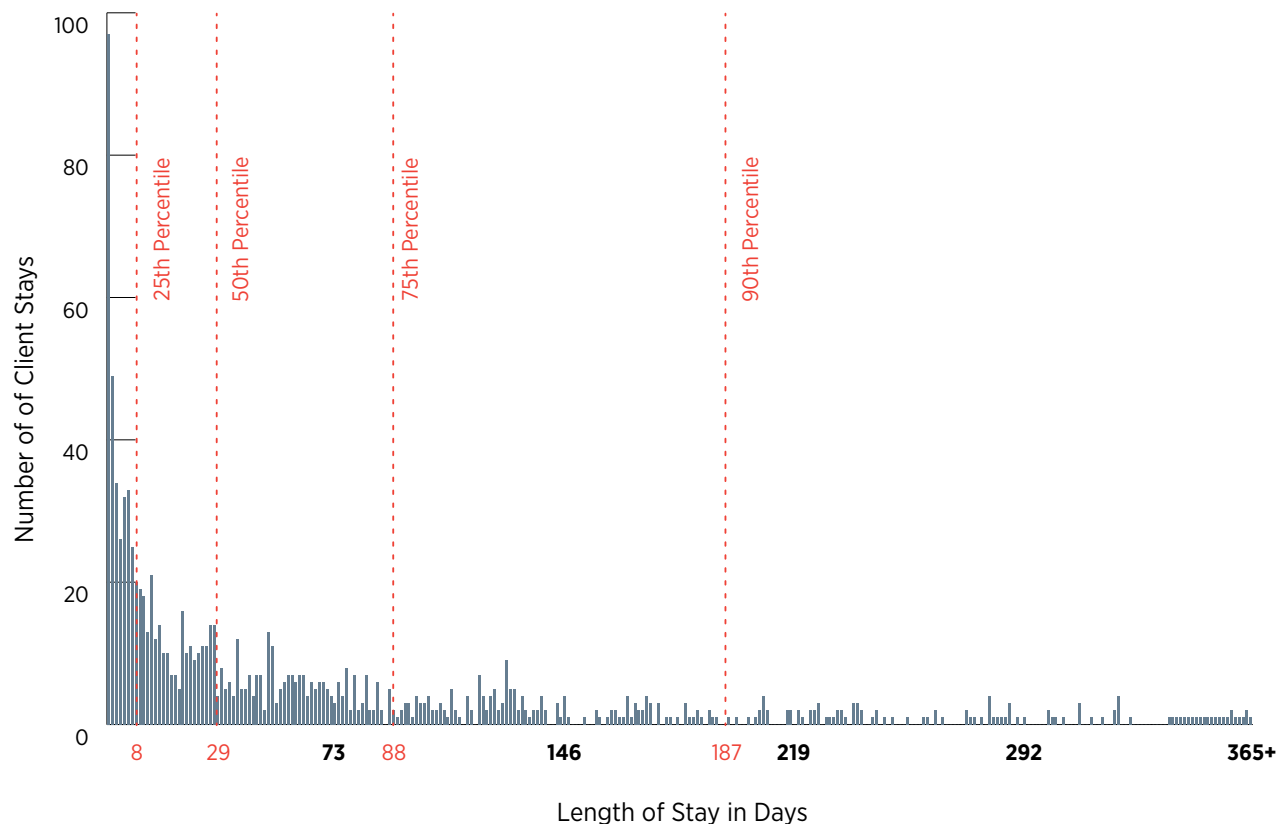


<sup>8</sup> This section and the next section *exclude* data from “night by night” project types as well as any “entry exit” project types that operated as seasonal or overflow shelters.

**TABLE 5: Median length of stay and number of exits from adult-only year-round emergency shelter, by age group, 2015 through 2024**

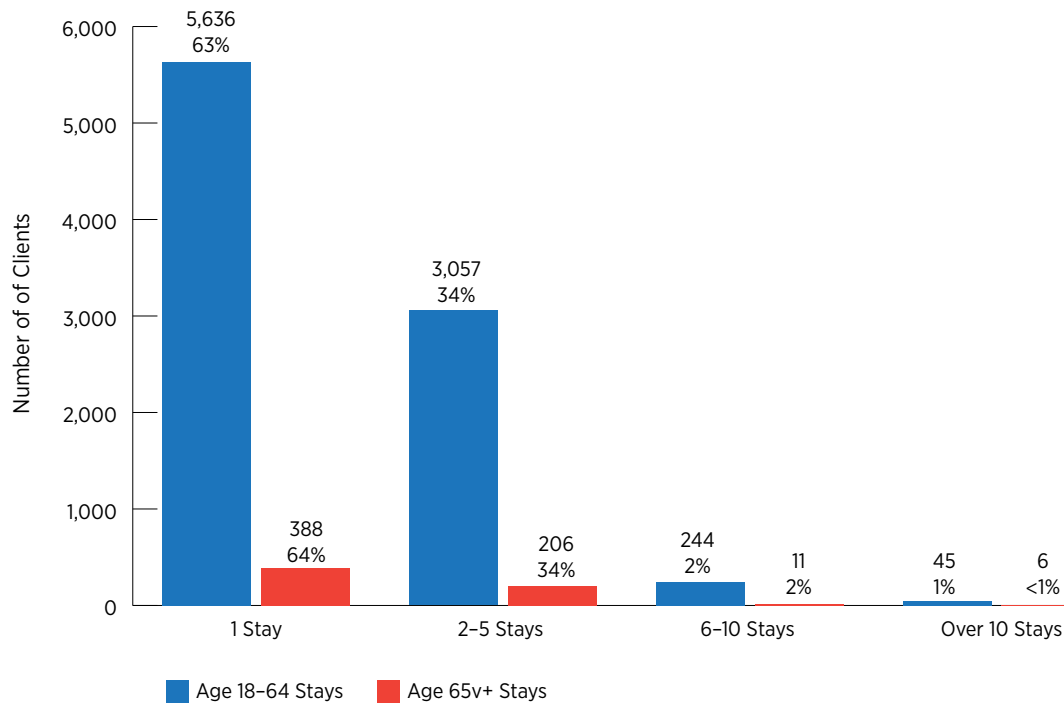
YEAR	AGE 18 THROUGH 64		AGE 65+	
	MEDIAN LENGTH OF STAY (DAYS)	NUMBER OF CLIENT EXITS	MEDIAN LENGTH OF STAY (DAYS)	NUMBER OF CLIENT EXITS
2015	29	1376	52	49
2016	30	1105	15	64
2017	24	1537	20	82
2018	21	1433	19	93
2019	16	1460	28	93
2020	22	1283	41	108
2021	24	1214	67	105
2022	18	1607	28	124
2023	26	2096	38	158
2024	21	2465	25	231

A quarter of older adult shelter stays over the decade lasted about one week and half of stays lasted 29 days. As **Figure 6** demonstrates, although rare, some stays lasted a year or more. This figure represents 1,107 stays for 611 clients age 65+.

**FIGURE 6: Length of stay distribution among older adults exiting adult-only year-round emergency shelter, 2015 through 2024**

As **Figure 7** shows, a majority of clients (more than 60%) had just a single stay in year-round shelter over the decade; only about 3% in each age group stayed more than five times.

**FIGURE 7: Number of adult-only year-round emergency shelter stays per client, by age group, 2015 through 2024**



### EXIT DESTINATIONS: YEAR-ROUND ADULT-ONLY EMERGENCY SHELTERS

When clients leave shelter, staff record their exit destinations.<sup>9</sup> Because exit destinations are not always known or shared, we augmented this information with administrative data from the Allegheny County Data Warehouse<sup>10</sup> to see if any of the people exiting who did not provide exit information were found in the homeless system, in jail, in mental health inpatient hospitals or in death records within 30 days of shelter exit. During the entire period (2015 through 2024), older adults were more likely than adults under age 65 to exit shelter to a housing unit with an ongoing subsidy (**Table 6**) (18% of 65+ exits with a known destination), whereas staying with family and friends was a more common exit destination for adults under age 65 (**Table 7**, 24% of 18 through 64 exits with a known destination). Both age groups exited to another shelter most frequently and exited to unsheltered locations at similar rates (11-13% of known exit destinations).

<sup>9</sup> As with the section above, in this section we exclude seasonal and overflow shelters, which frequently have missing exit data.

<sup>10</sup> The Allegheny County Data Warehouse integrates individual information from more than 20 unique source systems. [Read more about the warehouse here.](#)

**TABLE 6: Older adult exit destinations from adult-only year-round emergency shelter, 2015 through 2024**

DESTINATION	# EXITS TO DESTINATION, REPORTED AT EXIT	# EXITS TO DESTINATION WITHIN 30 DAYS, ADMINISTRATIVE DATA	% EXITS TO DESTINATION, AMONG THOSE WITH KNOWN EXIT DESTINATION
Shelter	144	135	30%
Owned or rented by client, with subsidy	157	6	18%
Staying with family or friends	133	—	15%
Unsheltered	67	33	11%
Institution	87	5	10%
Owned or rented by client, no subsidy	73	—	8%
Housing Program	41	11	6%
Other Housing	18	—	2%
Deceased	5	1	1%
Total Stays with a known destination	725	191	—

\*Missing = Information for 191 stays, or 17%

**TABLE 7: Age 18 through 64 exit destinations from adult-only year-round emergency shelter, 2015 through 2024**

DESTINATION	# EXITS TO DESTINATION, REPORTED AT EXIT	# EXITS TO DESTINATION WITHIN 30 DAYS, ADMINISTRATIVE DATA	% EXITS TO DESTINATION, AMONG THOSE WITH KNOWN EXIT DESTINATION
Shelter	1,734	1,402	25%
Staying with family or friends	3,041	—	24%
Unsheltered	1,131	568	13%
Owned or rented by client, with subsidy	1,379	75	12%
Institution	852	327	9%
Owned or rented by client, no subsidy	1,067	—	8%
Housing Program	490	330	7%
Other Housing	166	—	1%
Deceased	44	4	0%
Total Stays with a known destination	9,904	2,706	—

\*Missing = Information for 2,966 stays, or 19%

### Exit Category Definitions

**Housing program:** Includes non-emergency housing services such as subsidized rapid rehousing rentals; transitional housing; and permanent supportive housing for formerly homeless people

**Institution:** Includes jail, prison or juvenile detention facility; hospital or psychiatric facility; long-term care facility; foster care or foster care group home; and substance abuse treatment or detoxification facility

**Unknown:** Exit destination not collected; unknown; or declined to answer

**Staying with family or friends:** Permanent or temporary housing with family or friend

**Other housing:** Includes non-crisis host home; hotel/motel paid for without an emergency shelter voucher; and residential project or halfway house

**Shelter:** Includes emergency shelter; hotel/motel with an emergency shelter voucher; and Safe Haven

**Owned/rental, with ongoing subsidy:** Includes rent paid for/unit owned by a client with a voucher or subsidy; rental in a public housing unit

**Owned/rental, no ongoing subsidy:** Rent paid for/unit owned by client without a voucher or subsidy

**Unsheltered:** Residing in a place not meant for habitation (e.g., a vehicle, an abandoned building, bus/train/subway station/airport or anywhere outside)

### SUPPLY OF FEDERALLY ASSISTED RENTAL HOUSING FOR OLDER ADULTS

As described above, older adults exit shelter to subsidized units more often than adults under age 65, which can be explained by the share of assisted housing units specifically designated to serve this older population. In Allegheny County, there are nearly 8,000 federally assisted rental units dedicated to people who are elderly (defined by HUD as age 62+) and about 3,500 more set aside for people who are 62+ or with a disability (**Table 8**).<sup>11</sup> In total, over 41% of Allegheny County's federally assisted rental units are designated for the elderly or for the elderly or disabled.

**TABLE 8: Federally assisted rental properties and units in Allegheny County**

TARGET TENANT TYPE	# FEDERALLY ASSISTED RENTAL PROPERTIES IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY	# FEDERALLY ASSISTED RENTAL UNITS IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY	% FEDERALLY ASSISTED RENTAL UNITS IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY	AVERAGE OF AVERAGE MONTHS OF TENANCY <sup>12</sup>	AVERAGE OCCUPANCY RATE <sup>13</sup>
None specified	78	5,768	21%	118	93%
Disabled	23	431	2%	111	93%
Elderly	108	7,879	28%	81	93%
Elderly or disabled	50	3,581	13%	100	95%
Family	122	9,707	35%	84	88%
Mixed	7	357	1%	94	91%
Total	388	27,723			

<sup>11</sup> National Housing Preservation Database, <https://preservationdatabase.org/>. Data downloaded 2024

<sup>12</sup> Average amount of months tenants have lived at a property

<sup>13</sup> Percent of units at a property that are occupied

## SUMMARY

As in the U.S. overall, Allegheny County has seen a rise in the number of older adults using emergency shelter over the last decade, although they continue to make up a small percentage of the overall adult shelter population. Men and Black individuals are overrepresented among older adults using shelter. Older adults tend to stay in shelter longer than other adults but exit to subsidized housing at higher rates. This trend is likely due to the higher number of specially designated federally assisted units available to these individuals. DHS is working to expedite and increase stable exits from shelter for all individuals and families, and older adults stand to benefit from this work as well. In the last year, we have encouraged the shelter network to be housing-focused by identifying and supporting a persons' most likely pathway out of shelter. We have several new programs, including the Home Again program, which reconnects clients with kin; a Shallow Rent program, which provides a time-limited rent subsidy to supplement client income; and the Community Bridge program, which provides transitional housing with supportive services. Allegheny County's "500 in 500" initiative is partnering with local housing authorities and landlords to help people out of homelessness with a goal of making 500 additional affordable housing units available in 500 days. Moreover, the Department is engaged in upstream prevention work, identifying ways to keep people in their homes and apartments through programs such as eviction prevention and the statewide Shared Housing and Resource Exchange (SHARE), which connects people who have extra space in their homes with people who need a place to live.

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## APPENDIX

## APPENDIX

## Number of people using adult-only emergency shelter, by age group, 2015 through 2024

AGE GROUP	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
18-24	201	191	243	243	235	189	233	238	321	266
25-34	343	318	449	421	409	340	430	523	619	507
35-44	285	306	421	422	447	362	432	594	882	628
45-54	413	438	562	484	491	351	401	582	950	507
55-64	323	343	476	421	485	373	389	468	517	467
65+	58	83	126	106	123	113	131	188	204	191

## Number and share of people age 65+ using adult-only emergency shelter, by gender, 2015 through 2024

YEAR	MEN		WOMEN		DATA NOT COLLECTED		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
2015	46	79%	12	21%	0	0%	58
2016	68	82%	15	18%	0	0%	83
2017	102	81%	24	19%	0	0%	126
2018	86	81%	20	19%	0	0%	106
2019	98	80%	25	20%	0	0%	123
2020	81	72%	32	28%	0	0%	113
2021	101	77%	30	23%	0	0%	131
2022	145	77%	43	23%	0	0%	188
2023	146	72%	52	25%	6	3%	204
2024	124	65%	54	28%	13	7%	191

## Number and share of people age 18 through 64 using adult-only emergency shelter, by gender, 2015 through 2024

YEAR	MEN		WOMEN		ANOTHER GENDER		DATA NOT COLLECTED		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
2015	959	61%	570	36%	1	<1%	35	2%	1,565
2016	1,081	68%	496	31%	0	0%	19	1%	1,596
2017	1,516	70%	620	29%	0	0%	15	<1%	2,151
2018	1,394	70%	579	29%	0	0%	18	<1%	1,991
2019	1,388	67%	579	28%	2	<1%	98	5%	2,067
2020	1,117	69%	493	31%	3	<1%	2	<1%	1,615
2021	1,329	71%	528	28%	5	<1%	23	1%	1,885
2022	1,744	73%	629	26%	11	<1%	21	<1%	2,405
2023	2,244	68%	899	27%	21	<1%	125	4%	3,289
2024	1,523	64%	753	32%	26	1%	73	3%	2,375

## APPENDIX

## Number of people age 65+ using adult-only emergency shelter, by race, 2015 through 2024

YEAR	AMERICAN INDIAN, ALASKA NATIVE, OR INDIGENOUS ALONE	ASIAN OR ASIAN AMERICAN ALONE	BLACK ALONE	HISPANIC/LATINA/E/O, OF ANY RACE	WHITE ALONE	MULTI-RACIAL	ANOTHER SINGLE RACE	DATA NOT COLLECTED	TOTAL
2015	0	0	29	0	24	0	0	5	58
2016	0	0	39	0	34	3	1	6	83
2017	0	0	56	0	54	3	0	13	126
2018	0	1	65	0	32	8	0	0	106
2019	0	3	65	0	46	7	0	2	123
2020	1	1	48	0	56	5	0	2	113
2021	1	0	60	0	67	1	0	2	131
2022	1	0	91	0	83	4	0	9	188
2023	4	0	102	1	71	4	1	21	204
2024	0	0	80	0	77	0	0	26	191

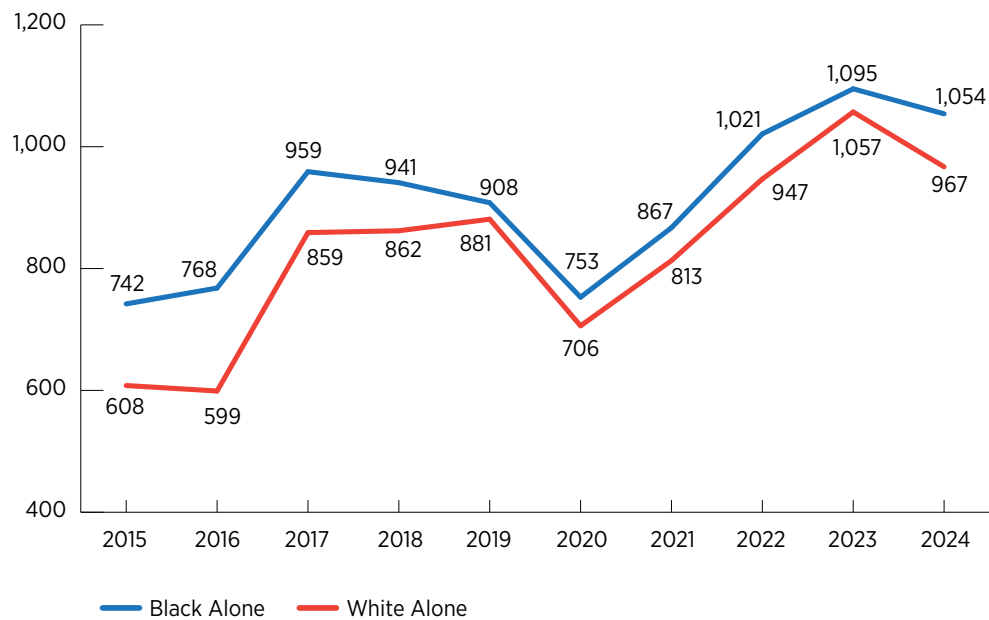
## Number of people age 18 through 64 using adult-only emergency shelter, by race, 2015 through 2024

YEAR	AMERICAN INDIAN, ALASKA NATIVE, OR INDIGENOUS ALONE	ASIAN OR ASIAN AMERICAN ALONE	BLACK ALONE	HISPANIC/LATINA/E/O, OF ANY RACE	WHITE ALONE	MULTI-RACIAL	ANOTHER SINGLE RACE	DATA NOT COLLECTED	TOTAL (N)
2015	1	6	742	0	608	83	1	124	1,565
2016	5	16	768	0	599	85	1	122	1,596
2017	11	13	959	0	859	118	3	188	2,151
2018	8	14	941	0	862	115	4	47	1,991
2019	7	15	908	0	881	131	3	122	2,067
2020	4	7	753	1	706	89	5	50	1,615
2021	15	14	867	1	813	109	2	64	1,885
2022	21	16	1,021	2	947	129	10	259	2,405
2023	22	22	1,095	16	1,057	125	14	938	3,289
2024	27	12	1,054	47	967	105	6	157	2,375

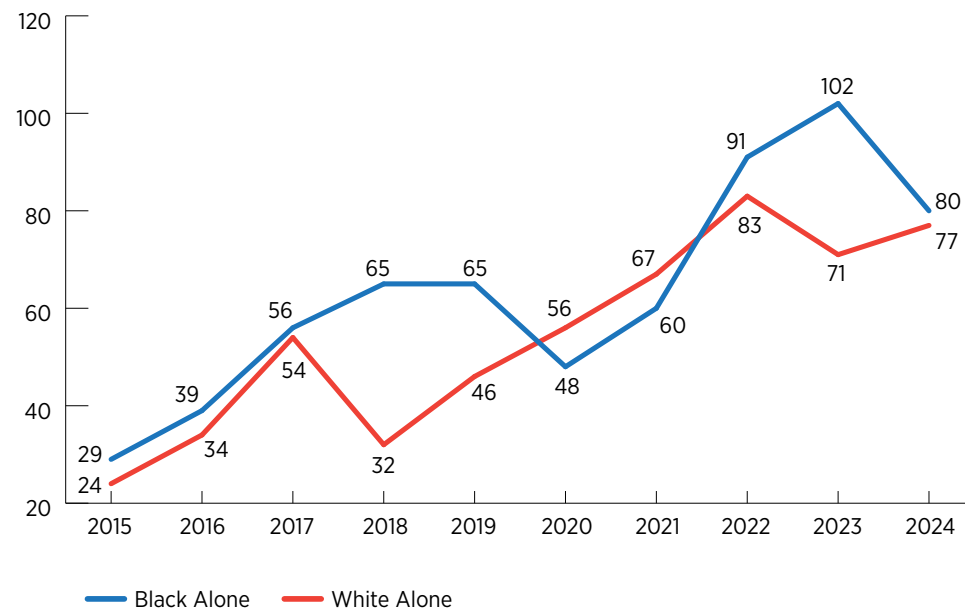


## APPENDIX

Number of people age 18-64 using adult-only emergency shelter, by race, 2015 through 2024

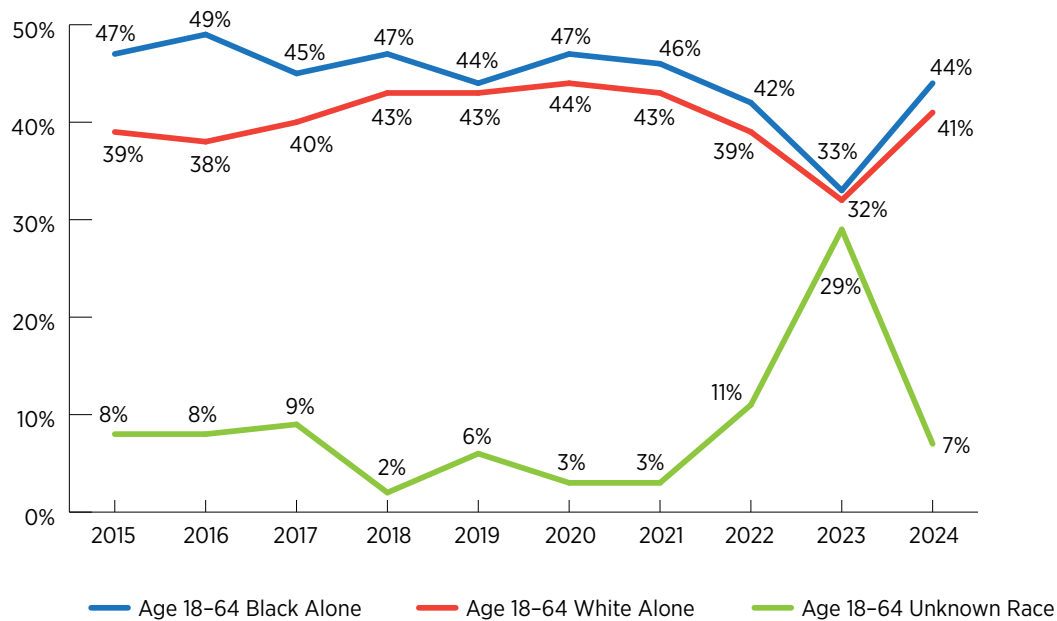


Number of people age 65+ using adult-only emergency shelter, by race, 2015 through 2024



## APPENDIX

Percent of people age 18 through 64 using adult-only emergency shelter, by race, 2015 through 2024



Average length of stay among people exiting adult-only year-round emergency shelter, by age group, 2015 through 2024

