

# Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in Rural America

*Foundational evidence for understanding the scale, scope and urgency of homelessness among youth in rural America*

October  
2018

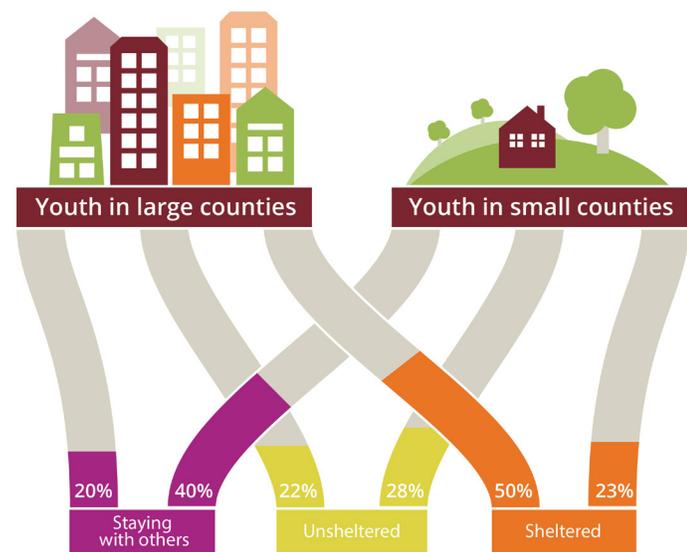
All of our nation's young people, regardless of where they live, deserve the best possible start in life. Every day of housing instability and the associated stress represents a missed opportunity to support healthy development and transitions to adulthood. Voices of Youth Count gives voice to young people across America who lack the support they need to achieve independence and pursue their full potential.

*Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in Rural America* is among the first national assessments of the similar risk for homelessness experienced by rural and urban young people in America. **When considered as a share of population size, the study's findings show that youth homelessness is just as much of a challenge for rural communities as it is for urban ones.**

The lack of evidence of what works in supporting young people in rural contexts limits our ability to identify effective programs or practices to serve them. This matters. In rural communities, we may need different program models (or, at least, implementation approaches). Intervention delivery is challenging in rural areas due to limited service infrastructure, greater remoteness, widely dispersed populations, and the unique economic, political, and social realities of rural communities. However, our research highlights critical systemic changes that we can make today to better address youth homelessness in rural America.

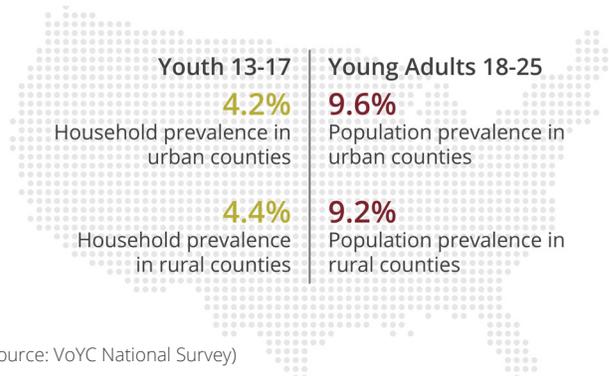
No more missed opportunities.

Where youth experiencing homelessness stayed on the night of the youth count.



(Source: VoYC Brief Youth Survey)

Rates of youth experiencing homelessness were similar in rural and nonrural areas.



(Source: VoYC National Survey)

## Recommendations

1. Reexamine federal programs and funding to ensure that young people in every part of the country have access, within a reasonable distance, to youth-specific homelessness services and supports.
2. Establish ongoing grant programs and technical assistance to address youth homelessness in rural communities. These efforts can be designed by considering examples in other sectors, such as federal programs to improve rural health care service delivery.
3. Engage tribal nations, organizations, and young people to devise concrete, culturally sensitive federal policy strategies for both rural and urban communities to address the high risk for homelessness among American Indian and Alaska Native youth.
4. Supplement shelter- and street-based counts, especially in rural areas and small towns, with creative methods to identify and count the full range of youth experiencing homelessness.
5. Add a priority focus for youth experiencing homelessness to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Youth Development Grant program and Rural Community Development Initiative.
6. Develop trauma-informed toolkits for rural youth through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.
7. Engage rural school systems and broader youth-serving organizations (e.g., after-school, mentoring, and faith-based programs not specific to homelessness) as leaders and partners in helping to avert young people from homelessness.
8. Provide funding to support innovation and rigorous evaluation for tailored housing and service delivery models for youth in rural and small-town communities.