

HONOLULU'S CONTINUUM OF CARE 2020-2021

# RACIAL EQUITY REPORT

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report examines racial equity in homeless services in Honolulu County by analyzing service enrollments and housing outcomes by racial group. Researchers examined 2020 Point-in-Time Count (PIT) data and service enrollments in the Honolulu Continuum of Care's (CoC) Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) between July 1, 2020 & June 30, 2021, comparing the percentage of each racial group comprising the indicator of interest (e.g., service enrollments) to the percentage of each racial group in the larger population (e.g., the homeless population). Ultimately, equity will be reached when no group is over/under-represented in homelessness or service enrollments and when all racial groups have what they need to be successful in housing.

## Why Racial Equity in Homeless Services?



Racial disparities in homelessness are well-documented nationwide and locally, with Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) disproportionately likely to experience homelessness. Locally, people who identify as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders (NHPI) are over-represented in the homeless population in Honolulu County, while individuals who identify as White or Asian are under-represented.

While these disparities are caused by systemic issues (e.g., poverty and discrimination in housing, healthcare, & the criminal justice system), emerging research demonstrates that these disparities may be exacerbated by homelessness service system itself.

## Honolulu CoC & University of Hawai'i Partnering for Racial Equity



In 2019, the Honolulu CoC formed a partnership with the University of Hawai'i to detect and address racial disparities within the service system. Pointing to issues related to HUD categorizations of race that did not allow disaggregation of multiracial and Asian-Pacific Islander groups, the CoC specifically asked for help disaggregating race data and understanding differences in racial group trajectories through the system. Hawai'i is the most ethnically and racially diverse state in the US, and a racial equity analysis requires a comprehensive disaggregated analysis of race. This report represents the third in a series of racial equity analyses for the CoC.

## Data Improvements



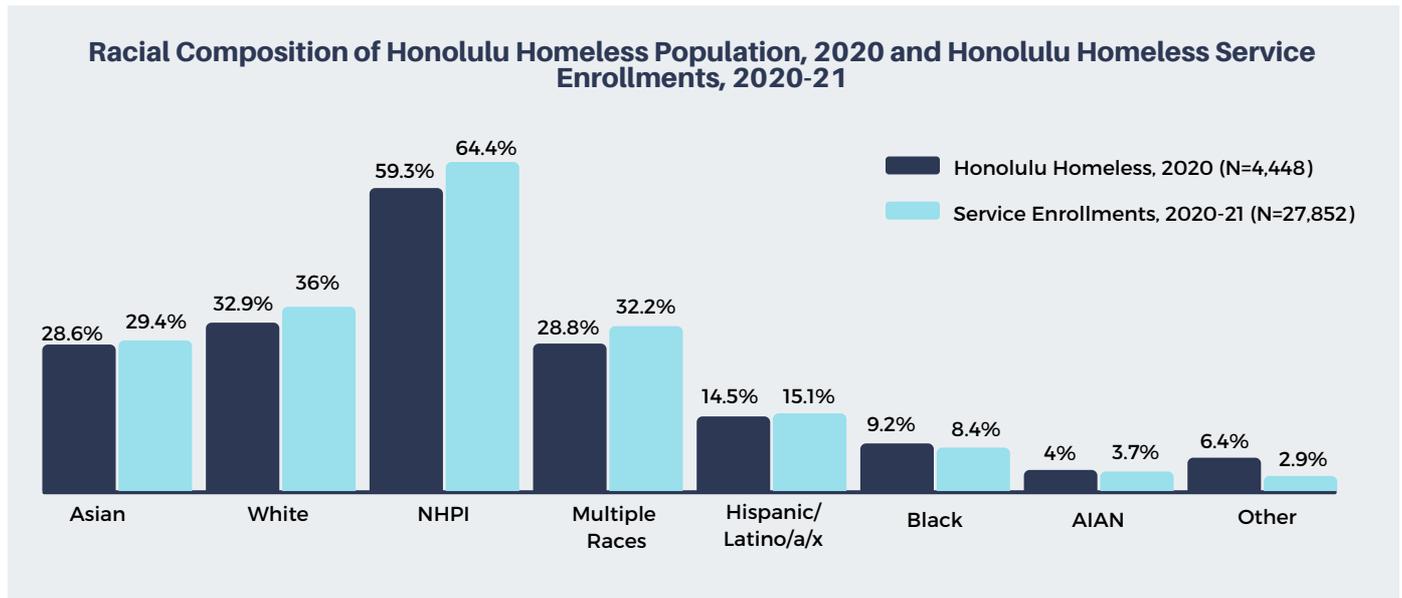
Since 2019, researchers have worked with the CoC HMIS team, which has made much progress: disaggregating race categories and examining recidivism (returns to homelessness). This report capitalizes on this progress and provides the first racial equity analysis that includes disaggregated race for Asian, multiracial, and NHPI categories.

# Major Findings

This report analyzed racial equity in access to services, service types, and housing outcomes, including exit destinations and recidivism. The following are some of the major findings.

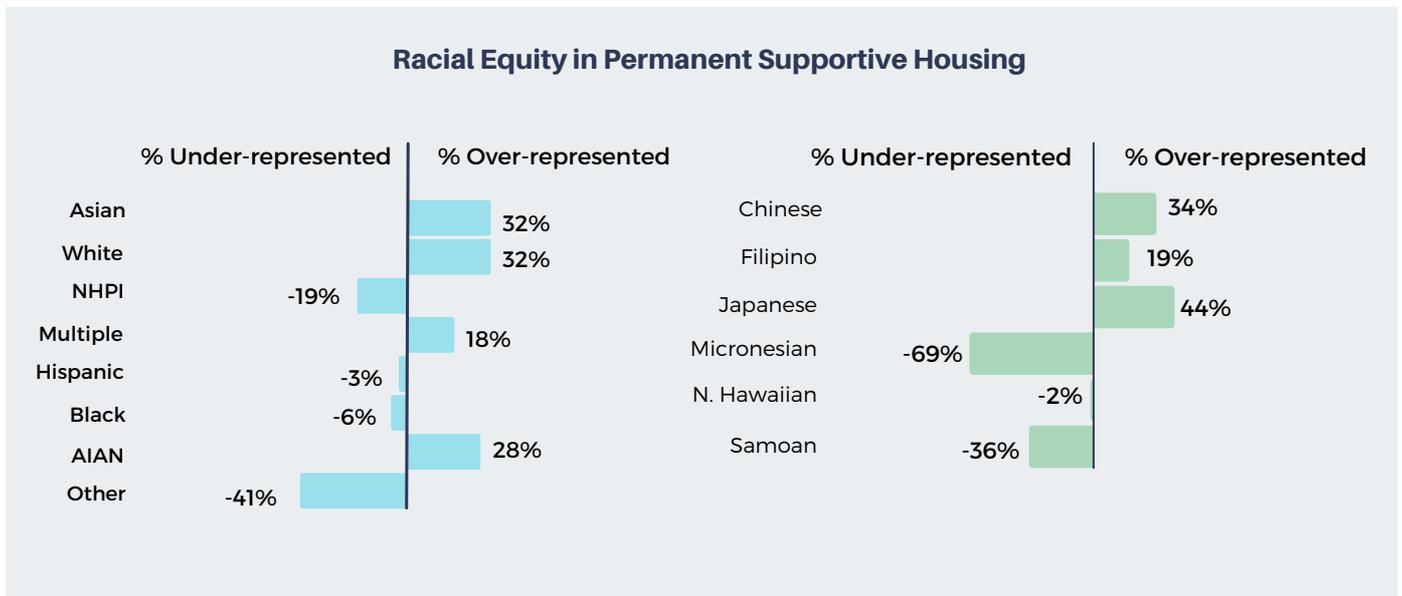
- Findings suggest racial equity in access to homeless services in Honolulu County

Although racial disparities exist in the overall homeless population on O'ahu, data shows that the racial composition of homeless service utilizers between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021 reflects the racial composition of the overall homeless population in Honolulu County, suggesting equity in access to services.



- Racial disparities emerged in the types of services utilized, particularly for enrollments in permanent supportive housing.

Individuals who identify as Micronesians and Samoans were under-represented in permanent supportive housing enrollments (PSH), while those who identify as Asian (particularly Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino), White, American Indian and Alaskan Native (AIAN), and multiracial groups were over-represented in PSH.



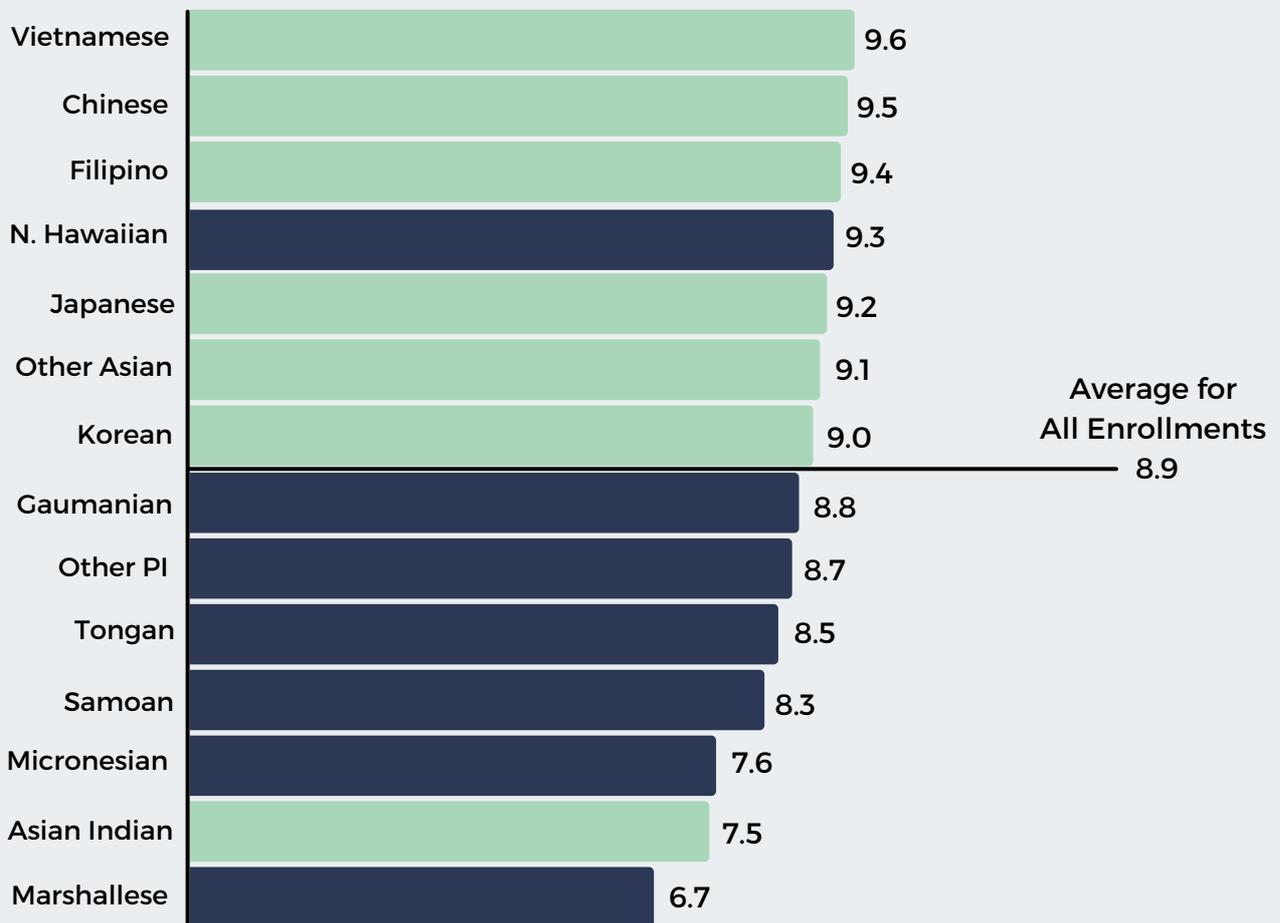
- Racial disparities were most pronounced for services that require CES entry prior to enrollment, suggesting that bias is introduced in the service prioritization process.

Disparities were most pronounced for those programs that require CES entry prior to enrollment, including permanent supportive housing, rapid re-housing, homeless prevention, & transitional housing. Fewer disparities were found for programs in which clients can self-select into: outreach services, emergency shelters, and services only [SSO] programs. Additionally, coordinated assessment enrollments showed racial equity, suggesting racial bias is introduced through the CES.

- The most likely contributor to this bias is the CES assessment tool, the VI-SPDAT. Disparities in VI-SPDAT scores help explain racial disparities in service type utilization by racial groups.

Researchers examined the average VI-SPDAT score per racial group. Individuals identifying as multiracial, White, and Asian had the highest VI-SPDAT scores and were more likely to be enrolled in PSH programs, which require the highest scores for prioritization. Individuals identifying as Micronesian and African American, African, or Black had the lowest VI-SPDAT scores and were more likely to be enrolled in Rapid Re-housing programs, which have the lowest threshold.

**VI-SPDAT Averages by Race (Alone or in Combination)  
for Asian & NHPI, Honolulu Homeless Service Enrollments, 2020-21**



- Non-White and non-Asian groups were slightly less likely to access outreach and services only programs, suggesting that services offered may not meet the needs of these groups.

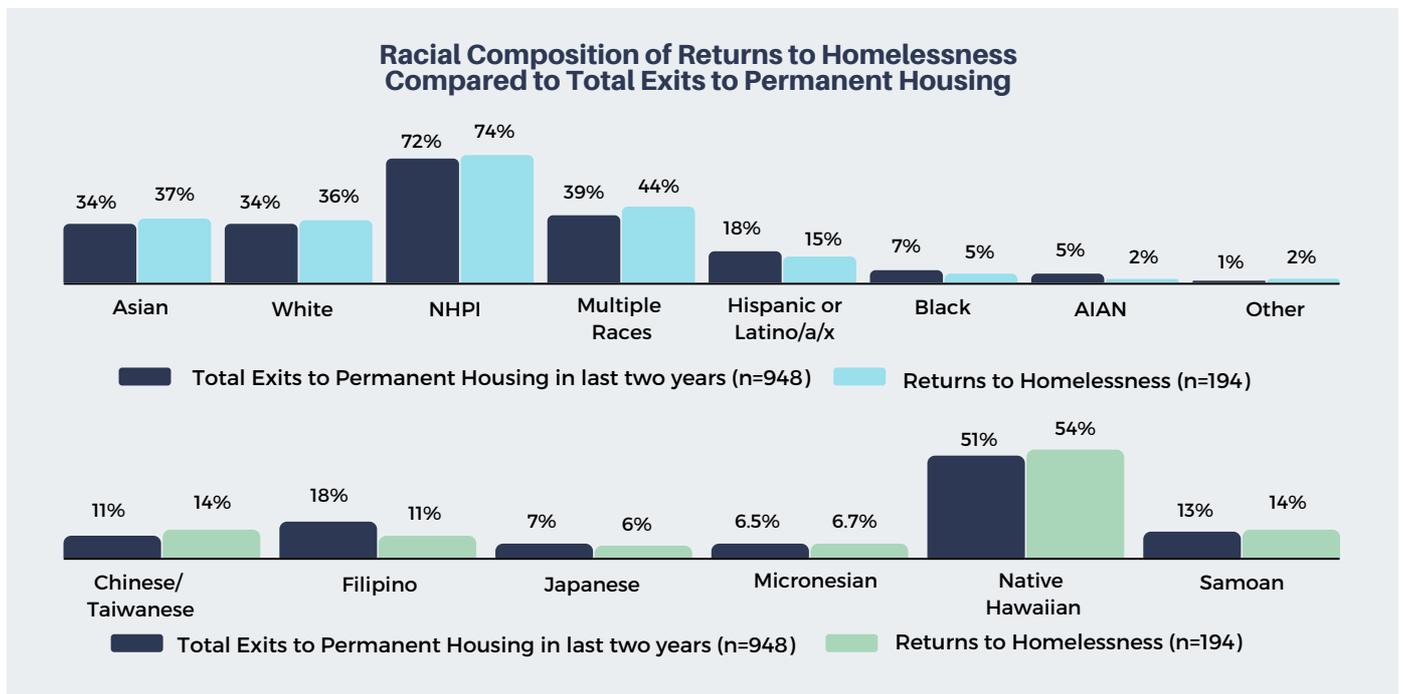
Fewer disparities were found for services in which clients can self-select and that do not require a VI-SDPAT threshold (e.g., outreach services, emergency shelters, and SSO programs). However, Black, Micronesians, & Samoan groups were less likely to be enrolled in outreach services, while Native Hawaiians were slightly more likely to be enrolled in outreach. Individuals identifying as NHPI were less likely to access SSO, while individuals identifying as White were more likely to be enrolled.

- Racial disparities emerge in exits to permanent and homeless destinations, with individuals identifying as White more likely to exit to literal homelessness and NHPI groups less likely to exit to homelessness and more likely to exit to permanent housing.

Individuals identifying as White were more likely to exit to literal homelessness and institutions. Micronesian & Samoan service users, were less likely to exit to homelessness and were more likely to exit to permanent housing. Micronesian and Chinese groups, were less likely to exit to institutions. Micronesians were also more likely to exit to temporary destinations. Service users who identify as Asian were less likely to enter temporary destinations.

- No major racial disparities found in returns to homelessness in major racial categories, suggesting once housed, each racial group is just as likely to remain housed.

HMIS calculated recidivism for all exits to permanent housing in the last two years. No major racial disparities were found in returns to homelessness; however, when disaggregating the Asian racial category, individuals identifying as Chinese more likely to return to homelessness, while individuals identifying as Filipino or Japanese were less likely to return to homelessness.



# Conclusions



Findings suggest that the Honolulu CoC is engaging with racial groups equitably and conducting coordinated assessments at an equitable rate. However, racial bias appears with regard to service types accessed, particularly for those programs accessed only through CES.

Results suggest that VI-SPDAT scores contribute to racial disparities in service type and that racial disparities are introduced systematically through the assessment used in the CES prioritization process. Once individuals move to permanent housing, each racial group is just as likely to remain housed, but all racial groups do not have equitable access to permanent housing programs and do not exit to permanent destinations at an equitable rate.

Additionally, disaggregating API and multiracial groups demonstrated important racial disparities that may have otherwise gone undetected. In particular, individuals identifying as Micronesian experienced some of the largest disparities. They were the most over-represented in transitional housing AND in exits to temporary destinations, suggesting that these service users are likely cycling in and out of transitional housing before ever accessing permanent housing. They tend to have the lowest average VI-SDPAT scores, suggesting that this tool may not capture vulnerabilities and needs specific to this population.

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## Recommendations & Next Steps



- Consider adopting a new CES assessment tool that demonstrates measurement invariance across racial groups.
- Continue disaggregation of race data and encouraging CoC partners to collect & report disaggregated race data.
- Investigate equity for other social groups and for intersections of different social identities (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, age, etc.).
- Consider conducting a needs assessment with under-represented racial groups. For example, conduct a needs assessment with NHPI service utilizers who are under-represented in SSOs to determine what types of services they need most.
- Similarly, conduct targeted outreach to ensure that Black, Micronesians, & Samoan groups are equitably outreached.
- Continue encouraging individuals with lived experience to serve on CoC boards & committees. Consider specifically recruiting individuals identifying as Micronesian as this group appears to experience the greatest disparities.