

2/3rds See Unhoused Residents Nearly Every Day, as County’s Homeless Crisis Worsens

Blacks Encounter More Neighborhood Homeless, Latinos See it in the County, and AAPI are Less Exposed

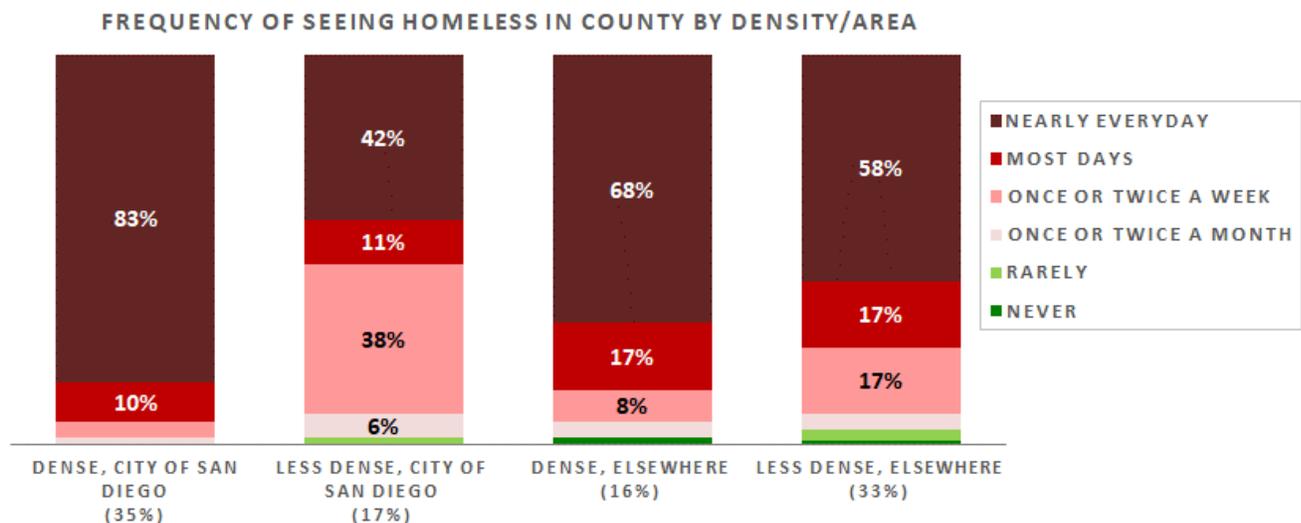
California is “home” to more than 160,000 homeless individuals -- the nation’s highest population of unhoused residents -- and one-fifth of the *entire* U.S. homeless population. About 8,400 homeless folks live in San Diego County, a 10% increase since January 2020. Residents of “America’s Finest City” and the region surrounding it are acutely aware of the presence of unhoused people: in an open-ended question, 22% say homelessness is the County’s *most* important issue. Local leaders should take note.

Homeless Visibility in San Diego County

A huge 65% of residents see at least one person experiencing homelessness in San Diego County *nearly every day*. Exposure to homelessness is therefore common and where you reside is the main factor driving how often one sees a homeless person.

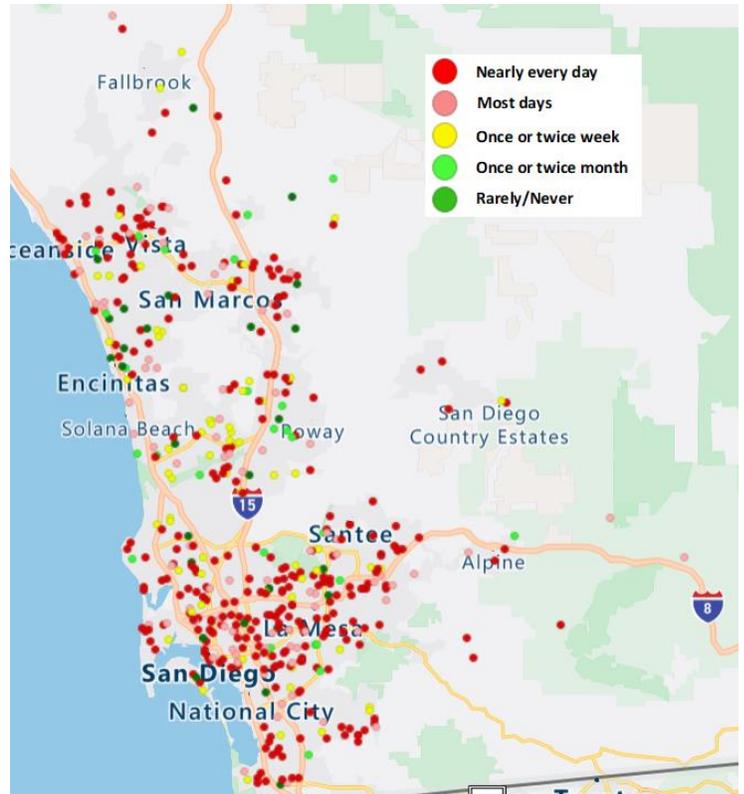


Homeless people are spotted more frequently in densely populated areas. More than four-out-of-five residents in the City of San Diego’s densest neighborhoods with more than 4,000 people per square mile (think residents in downtown, but also consider, for example, residents of Hillcrest, North Park, Linda Vista, Logan Heights, Rolando, and South San Ysidro) see the homeless nearly every day. That’s *double* the percentage of those living in the City’s less crowded areas. And residents in dense areas outside the City (think northwest Chula Vista, Lemon Grove, and east Oceanside) see the homeless more regularly than those who live in less dense neighborhoods outside the City. This suggests it is partly an area’s density, not only the jurisdiction, that leads to a greater and more visible homeless problem.



Another 14% see homeless people most days, so a whopping 78% of San Diego County residents encounter them *very* regularly. Fourteen percent recall seeing people experiencing homelessness once or twice a week, while only one-in-twenty spot them less often than that, underscoring how pervasive the problem truly is. The presence of homeless people is part of everyday life for nearly all San Diegans.

The map shows how frequently each respondent is exposed to homeless people in the county. Those in less dense areas *within* the City of San Diego -- such as the SR-56 corridor -- see fewer homeless than even residents in less dense areas outside the city.

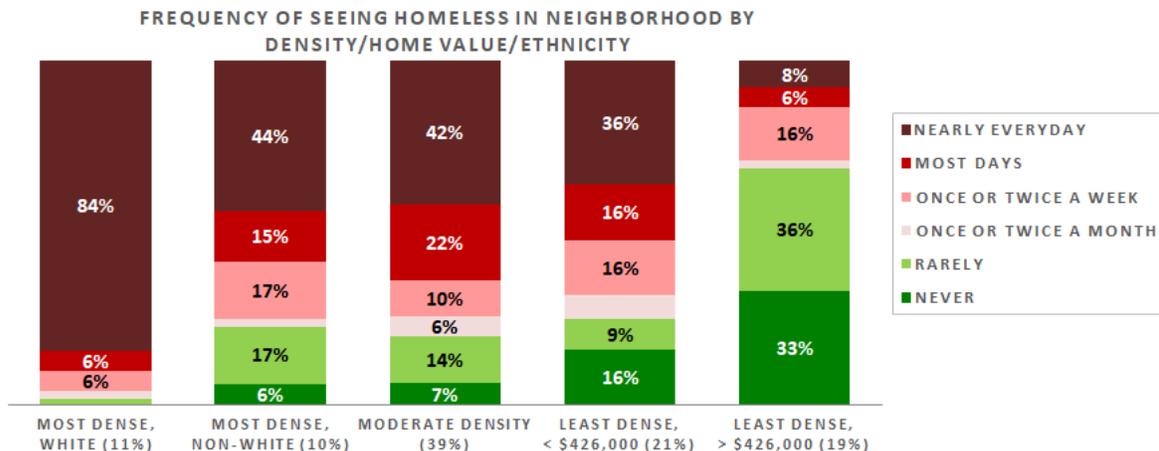


Homeless Visibility in Neighborhoods

By contrast, fewer residents encounter unhoused people in their neighborhood. Although a common sight, “only” 38% see homeless people in their neighborhood nearly every day, and another 15% say they see them most days. The reality: most residents come across the homeless *in their own community* more than twice a week. Although that’s a majority of residents, there is a big 25-point gap between seeing unhoused people in the County – in general – and experiencing homelessness in individual neighborhoods.

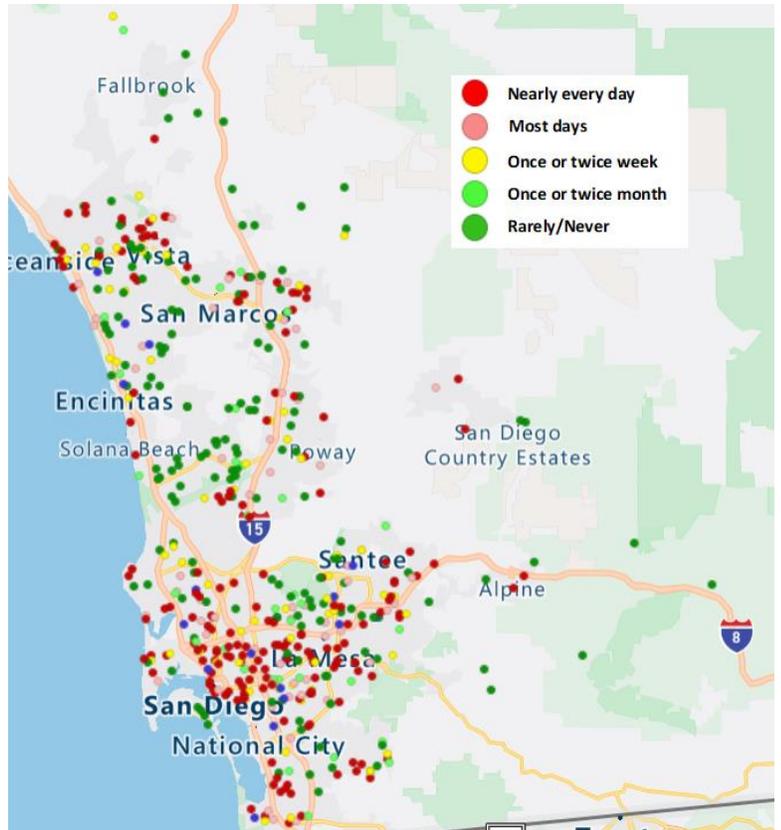


Neighborhood homelessness is also more concentrated in dense areas and declines in more rural areas. Sixty-five percent of residents in very crowded areas with more than 7,000 people per square mile (think



central areas of the City of San Diego like Golden Hill, Hillcrest, North Park, City Heights, Logan Heights, Encanto, and the College area) maintain they see the homeless in their neighborhood almost daily and that climbs to 84% among Whites. For non-Whites in those dense areas, 44% see unhoused people nearly every day.

Seventeen percent of adults say they see them once or twice a week or a couple of times a month, while three-in-ten assert they rarely or never see the homeless where they live. In the county's lower density areas and where home values are high (think La Costa, Rancho Santa Fe, 4S Ranch, Carmel Valley, University City and Eastlake), neighborhood homelessness is actually rare. In contrast to what the other 80% of the county is exposed to, only 8% of residents in those upscale areas report seeing unhoused people every day, while 36% rarely see them and one-third *never* do.

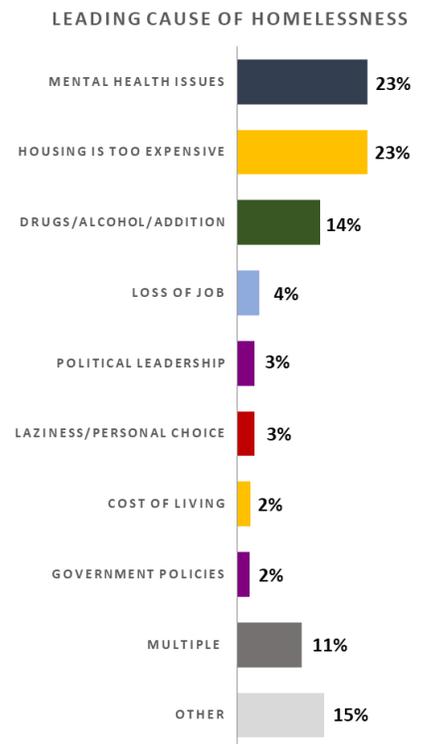


The map shows how frequently each respondent is exposed to homeless people in their neighborhood. Those in less dense areas upscale areas -- such Encinitas, 4S Ranch, the SR-56 corridor, and Eastlake -- see fewer homeless than even residents in less dense areas outside the city.

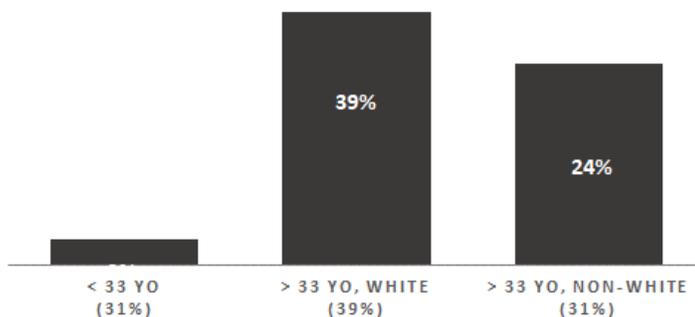
Leading Cause of Homelessness

San Diegans tend to zero-in on two causes for homelessness: mental health and the cost of housing. Almost half the population identifies one of these two as the main culprit.

Whites older than 33 identify mental health issues as the leading cause more frequently than others do. Thirty-nine percent of them cite mental health versus 24% of non-Whites in the same age group. Despite efforts



MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES BY AGE/ETHNICITY



to destigmatize mental health struggles – often led by younger celebrities – just 3% of residents younger than 33 pinpoint mental health as the biggest factor in why people experience homelessness. Folks in North County are twice as likely as residents elsewhere to point to high housing prices as the primary reason for homelessness.

Another 14% point to drug or alcohol addiction, but people exposed to a daily double shot of homelessness – that is, they see it everyday in their neighborhood as well as in the county – are more likely than others to feel addiction is the root cause of homelessness.

Eleven percent think homelessness is caused by multiple factors. However, residents in areas with very low home values (less than \$296,000, which is low by San Diego standards) are far more likely to feel there are multiple reasons why someone becomes homeless. Among those in areas with higher home values, low income-earners tend to see multiple factors at play. It seems socioeconomic status contributes to one’s outlook on how a person ends up on the street, with those perhaps closest to that situation perceiving that more than one thing does it.

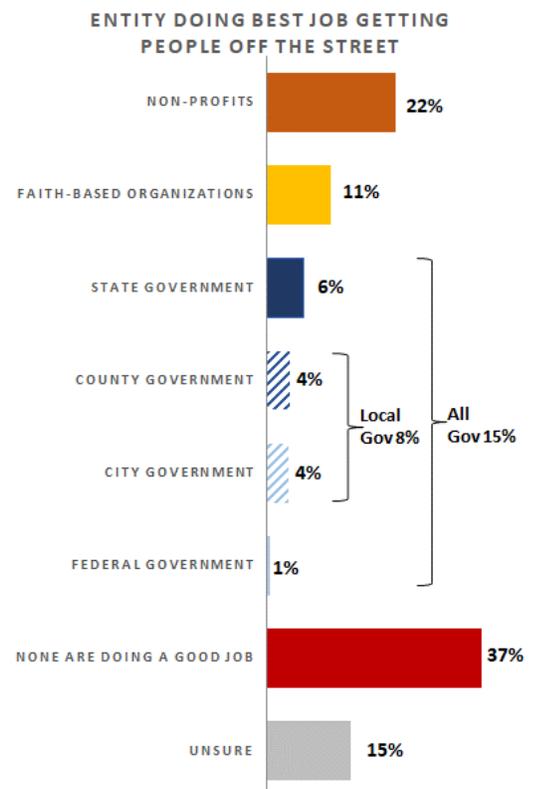
The remaining answers account for less than 5% each, so the primary causes of homelessness are fairly limited in most San Diegans’ opinion.

Getting People Off the Street

Numerous private and public entities work tirelessly to try to get as many unhoused people off the streets as they can. But a sizeable 37% of San Diegans think *none* are doing a good job at it. These folks tend to base their opinion on their own experiences: 43% of those who see people experiencing homelessness nearly every day in the county say no entity is doing a good job versus just 19% of those who see unhoused people twice a week or less. And this makes perfect sense: the more often you see homelessness, the less likely you are to think public and private entities are doing a good job at eliminating it. Claims to the contrary appear silly because personal evidence just doesn’t add up. This attitude is especially pervasive between SR-54 and SR-94 and in western north county; most in these areas feel no entity is doing a good job.

At 22%, non-profits top the list of entities doing the best job at getting homeless individuals off the street. Another 11% name faith-based organizations, so in total one-third believe non-governmental entities do the best work. Latinos are half as likely as non-Latinos to nominate non-profits, and Democrats rarely cite faith-based organizations as effective when it comes to helping the homeless.

Government-based efforts take a pounding. Only 15% name federal, state, county, or city government as doing the best job, so the vast majority of San Diegans view their attempts at tackling homelessness as second-rate, at-best. However, that feeling doesn’t entirely extend to the county’s poorest areas.



Thirty-seven percent of residents where home values average less than \$300,000 think government (in general) is doing the best job. These folks tend to have more experience with the safety net provided by government. Still, slightly more (39%) feel *none* of the organizations we asked about are doing a good job, so those in poor neighborhoods have their criticisms as well.

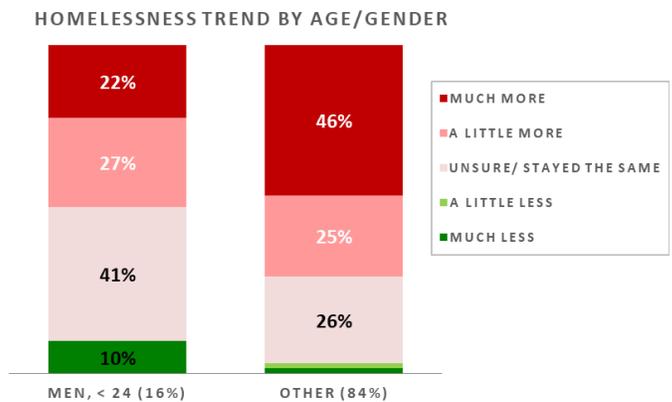
Focusing closer to home, only 8% feel the county (4%) or their city government (4%) do the best job, which doesn't speak well for their efforts. More Democrats give the county kudos, and for city governments, it's those living in the City of San Diego south of I-8 who are more laudatory. That said, only 11% in that area think city government is doing the best job while 42% think none of the entities we asked about are doing well at helping the homeless.

Trend in Homelessness

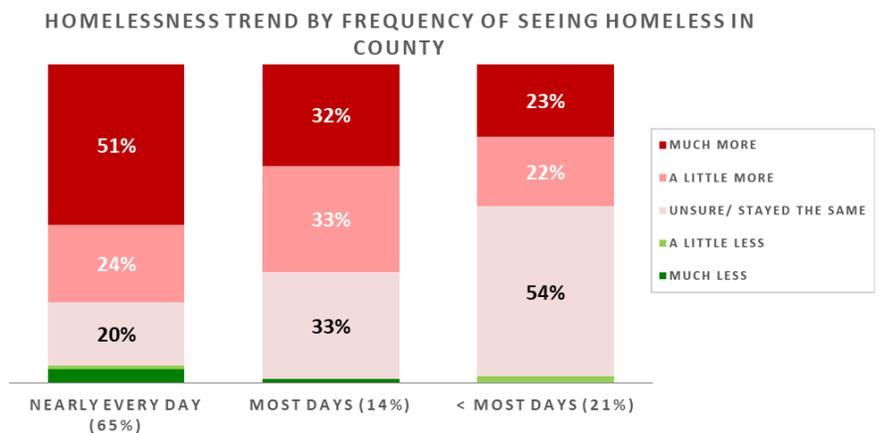
Residents decidedly believe homelessness in their part of the County is on the upswing compared to last year. A massive two-thirds say there is more homelessness now, and the lion's share – 42% – say there is *a lot* more. About one-quarter think it has stayed the same in 2022, which, given it was already a significant problem before 2021, isn't saying much. Only a miniscule 4% think homelessness has lessened.



Five things – led by age and gender – mainly explain the homelessness trend. Men younger than 35 are the only ones who don't overwhelmingly think the problem has worsened. Older men and women of all ages emphatically believe there is more homelessness now, and their opinions drown out those of younger males, who make up only 16% of the population.



Expectedly, the number of homeless seen in the County is also highly predictive. Most residents who see people experiencing homelessness nearly every day say homelessness is much worse than it was a year ago. For them, seeing is believing. Interestingly, seeing homelessness in your own neighborhood is much less important than seeing it elsewhere in the County, in general. This may come down to the severity of the situation, i.e., the large and highly visible homeless encampments that exist



in some non-residential areas (like near the railyard downtown) while similar setups are mostly absent from neighborhoods.

Race/ethnicity and location are also important. Most AAPI residents – 54% –are unsure whether there is more homelessness today versus 12 months ago and just 41% think it’s gotten worse. East suburban and backcountry residents are nearly three times as likely than the overall population to say there is much less homelessness, so it’s possible efforts to deal with the problem are paying off east of the urban core. However, since both AAPI and backcountry residents, much like younger males, account for small portions of the population, the views of these groups are overwhelmed by the opinion of the majority.

A Close Look at San Diego’s Communities of Color

		White	Latino	Black	Asian	Mixed	All
<u>In San Diego County, how often do you see at least one person who is homeless?</u>	Nearly everyday	60%	82%	75%	51%	65%	65%
	Most days	15%	11%	20%	11%	19%	14%
	Once or twice a week	18%	9%	5%	24%	7%	14%
	Once or twice a month	2%	1%	0%	11%	7%	3%
	Rarely	3%	0%	0%	0%	3%	2%
	Never	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%
	Unsure	2%	1%	0%	4%	0%	2%
<u>In your neighborhood, how often do you see at least one person who is homeless?</u>	Nearly everyday	41%	33%	63%	19%	43%	38%
	Most days	8%	26%	16%	15%	30%	15%
	Once or twice a week	11%	13%	5%	21%	10%	12%
	Once or twice a month	6%	4%	5%	6%	0%	5%
	Rarely	19%	14%	5%	17%	13%	17%
	Never	13%	11%	0%	23%	3%	12%
<u>What do you think is the leading cause of homelessness?</u>	Unsure	2%	0%	5%	0%	0%	1%
	Mental health issues	30%	14%	10%	11%	35%	23%
	Housing is too expensive	20%	18%	40%	41%	14%	23%
	Drugs/Alcohol/Addiction	15%	19%	15%	6%	7%	14%
	Loss of job	4%	1%	5%	7%	3%	4%
	Political leadership	2%	4%	0%	0%	7%	3%
	Laziness/Personal Choice	2%	6%	0%	2%	3%	3%
	Cost of living	2%	0%	0%	2%	14%	2%
	Government Policies	1%	3%	0%	2%	10%	2%
	Multiple	4%	26%	15%	9%	3%	11%
<u>There a lot of entities attempting to reduce homelessness and get people off the street. Please tell me which of the following is doing the best job in this regard...</u>	Other	19%	10%	15%	20%	3%	15%
	Non-profits	26%	13%	37%	25%	24%	22%
	Faith-based organizations	12%	10%	11%	9%	14%	11%
	State Government	1%	17%	0%	9%	0%	6%
	County government	4%	6%	0%	4%	0%	4%
	City government	5%	5%	0%	0%	0%	4%
	Federal government	0%	1%	0%	2%	0%	1%
<u>Compared to last year, do you think there is less homelessness or more homelessness in your part of San Diego County or has it stayed about the same?</u>	None are doing a good job	35%	41%	42%	32%	38%	37%
	Unsure	17%	8%	11%	20%	24%	14%
	Much more	46%	40%	45%	27%	40%	42%
	A little more	21%	37%	15%	14%	33%	25%
	Stayed about the same	26%	14%	40%	39%	23%	24%
	A little less	2%	0%	0%	2%	0%	1%
Much less	2%	6%	0%	4%	0%	3%	
Unsure	3%	4%	0%	14%	3%	4%	

The Black Community

- ✓ When it comes to the leading cause of homelessness, Blacks share similar views to all San Diegans.
- ✓ Black San Diegans are equally likely as the overall population to encounter people experiencing homelessness in the County, but they see the homeless in their neighborhoods far more often. Sixty-three percent in the Black community report seeing the homeless in their neighborhood nearly every day, but just 37% of others say the same.
- ✓ No Black residents, in our survey, feel government (at any level) is doing the best job at getting the homeless off the streets. For them, non-profits are more likely to be doing a good job.
- ✓ Despite this, Black views regarding the trend in homelessness agree with the wider mindset.

The Asian Community

- ✓ Not only are AAPI residents less likely to see unhoused people in the County, they also report fewer homeless in their neighborhoods. Half of AAPI folks say they spot people experiencing homelessness in the County nearly every day; just 19% claim the same for their neighborhood. Further, 23% see unhoused people in the County but *never* in their neighborhood, so nearly a quarter of AAPI residents live in highly insulated communities.
- ✓ AAPI San Diegans generally don't believe mental health or addiction are the leading causes of homelessness. Instead, they most commonly point to unaffordable housing, as 40% think that primarily drives homelessness.
- ✓ AAPI views concerning entities trying to get people off the street align with broader opinion.
- ✓ Most AAPI residents – 54% – are unsure whether there is more homelessness today versus 12 months ago and “only” 41% think it's gotten worse.

The Latino Community

- ✓ More than any racial/ethnic group, Latinos are the most likely to regularly see the unhoused population and a gigantic 78% claim to see homelessness nearly every day! However, homeless sightings *in their neighborhood* are on par with the overall population, suggesting they see more homelessness when commuting or near their workplace.
- ✓ Despite this, Latino opinions of the homelessness trend aren't different from overall views.
- ✓ Six percent say homelessness results from laziness or is a personal choice; twice what we find among non-Latinos. They also blame alcohol or drug abuse more often and are more than twice as likely to say multiple factors cause homelessness (25% to 11%).
- ✓ Fewer Latinos say non-profits are the best at helping people get off the street, and they are twice as likely as other San Diegans to credit any level of government with doing the best job.

Findings are based on the results from our poll of 505 San Diego County adult residents. The poll was conducted in English and Spanish by Competitive Edge Research & Communication (CERC), a national research firm based in San Diego, from June 2 through 7, 2022. The maximum margin of sampling error for the total sample is +/- 4.3%. The margin of sampling error for subgroups is larger. Interviews were conducted by trained professionals at CERC's El Paso, TX, facility, and via the web for residents with an e-mail address or cell phone number in the sample.