

# CCEH Track Summary

## From the 2018 National Conference on Ending Homelessness



### Racism & Homelessness Track

A summary of the Racism & Homelessness Track by CCEH's Jackie Janosko.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness held three sessions on race and racism in homelessness at their annual conference in D.C. These sessions were powerful, impactful, and important to the work we do. This article provides the key takeaways from those sessions from the conference.

We need to have a frank conversation about racism and how it is affecting people experiencing homelessness. It's a conversation that needs to start with the systemic racism in the "feeder systems" that contribute to a disproportionate number of African Americans and Latinos falling into homelessness. However, it also needs to continue with an examination of what our population of clients' racial make-up is, and also what the racial make-up of our service delivery system is. The National Alliance to End Homelessness provided valuable insight into these critical pieces for examining racism and implicit bias in the important work we do as homeless service providers.

### The Big Picture: Feeder Systems

Systemic racism continues to be a very real problem in America today. While we have made many steps forward from our past filled with slavery, segregation and Jim Crow laws, minority groups still face discrimination in systems like housing, criminal justice, education, and employment. Racial discrimination in housing education employment, health and criminal justice system increase the risk for homelessness. African Americans make up 13% of the general population, yet they are 40% of the homeless population. Nationally the overall rate of homelessness has declined, but the rates of homelessness among minority groups is rising. There is a correlation between the "feeder systems" and future homelessness. According to the Urban League, the overall rate of incarceration in the US for men is 1 in 9, but look at these figures by race shows a staggering difference: 1 in 3 African American men will face incarceration, as will 1 in 6 Latino men; white men will face incarceration at a rate of 1 in 17. The numbers for women are also shocking: 1 in 18 black women will face incarceration compared to 1 in 45 Latina women, while the number for white women is only 1 in 111. Minorities are arrested, convicted, and sentenced more harshly than whites.



● 1 in 17 White Men Will Face Incarceration



● 1 in 6 Latino Men Will Face Incarceration

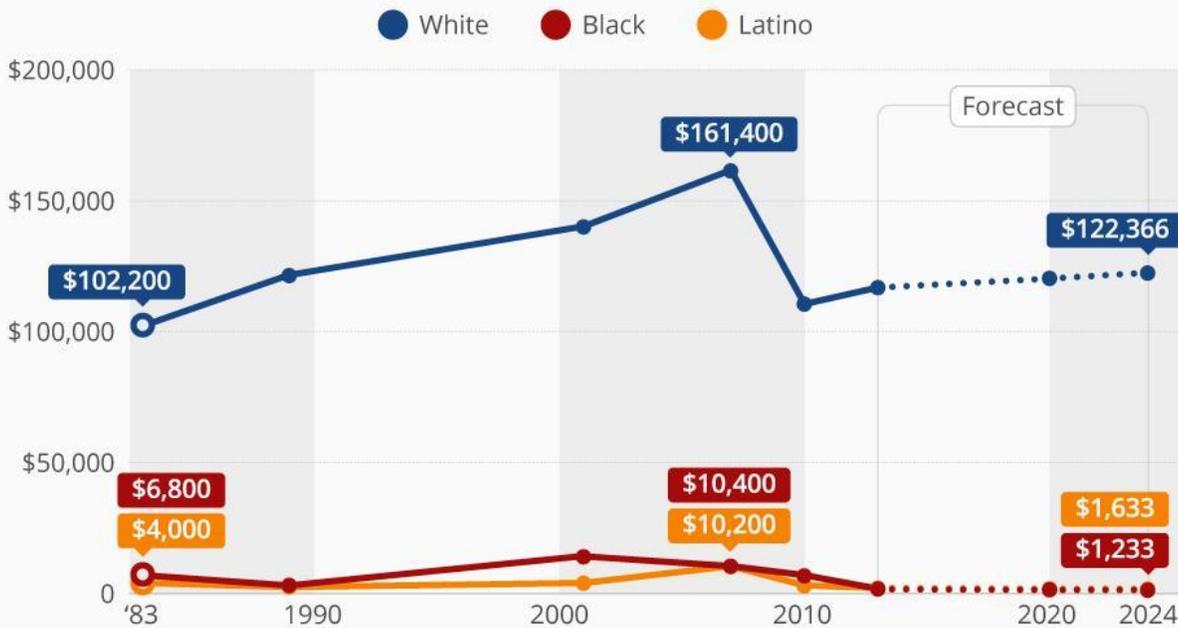


● 1 in 3 Black Men Will Face Incarceration

Income and housing numbers are just as dramatic. Most American families' wealth is based on home ownership. Over 50% of subprime loans in 2005 and 2006 went to African American borrowers and the foreclosure rate on these loans was TEN times higher than the rate of conventional mortgages. Because of this, during the recession, more than 50% of African Americans wealth was wiped out. Therefore, affordable housing is out of reach for African American and Hispanic households due to even lower median incomes.

## Racial Wealth Inequality Is Rampant In The U.S.

Median household wealth by race/ethnicity in the United States (1983–2024)

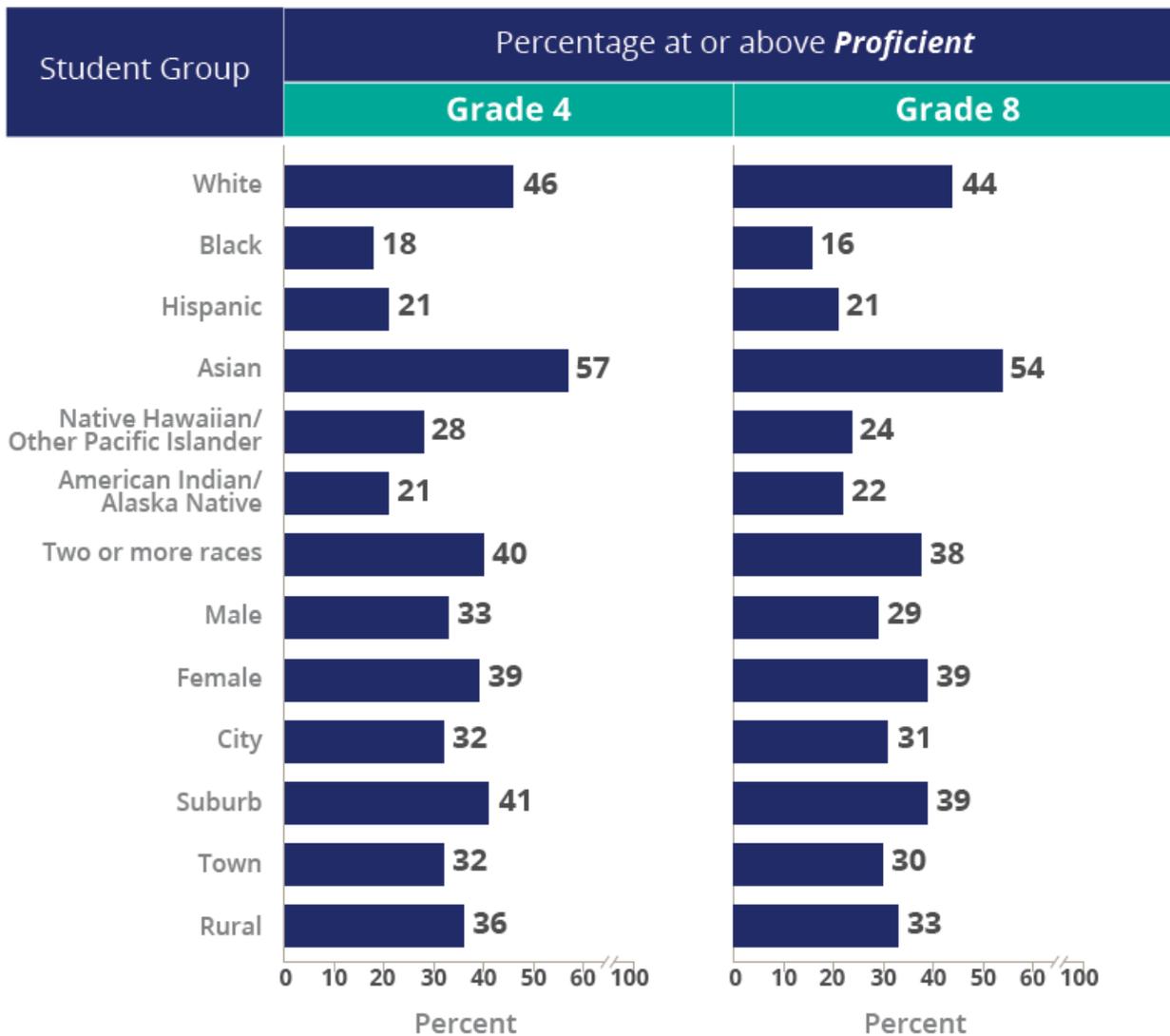


@StatistaCharts Source: Prosperity Now & Institute For Policy Studies

Forbes statista

Poverty wages are paid to African American and Hispanic workers at much higher rates than white. The average median household income disparities are staggering: \$56,516 for white households compared to \$36,898 for minority households. African American households are four times more likely to be considered food insecure. When it comes to employment income, the unemployment rate for African Americans has been DOUBLE the white rate since 1973. In the first quarter of 2018 the African American unemployment rate was 7.2%, Hispanic 5.1%, and white 3.3%.

Education systems also disproportionately favor white students. Fourth Grade Reading achievement rates are unequal. 47% of whites were proficient in reading at their grade level while only 20% of African American students were. 19% of African American students were proficient in math compared to 50% of white students.



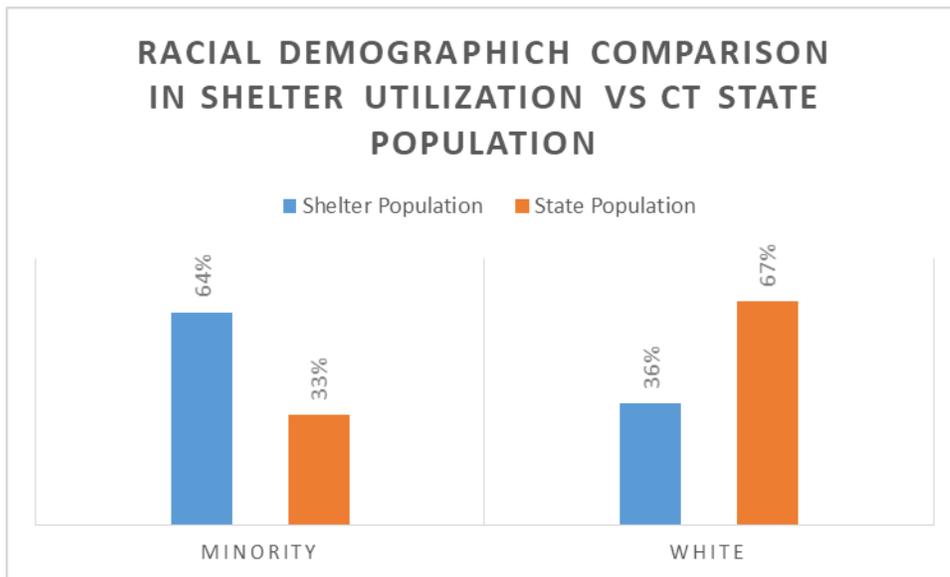
Source: <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov>

### Homelessness Data

Looking at your own homeless data is important for answering critical questions about racism and bias in our ability to effectively respond to someone’s homelessness crisis. We need to be able to answer questions like: Is your homelessness system creating disparate outcomes? Could we determine racial disparities in our system? Does HMIS data reflect the current housing and income factors in our community? If the homeless data was significantly different than the other community data, would we be able to determine the cause of that? If the data is comparable, is that sufficient evidence that there is no disparity?

A key place to start is looking at census data for your state or community. That provides the breakdown of race for your region. Then you need to evaluate the inflow into your system to see how that breaks down. Chances are pretty high that you will see a disproportionate number of minority populations entering shelter than there are reflected in the overall population. It’s then critical to check your housing placement rates by race to see if there is comparability to your inflow rates.

In CT we are just starting to analyze the data and we see a major over representation of minority populations in our homeless service system. The numbers are staggering:



There are also other potential areas of inequity to identify when evaluating your system: What percentage of the white client population is transient? How long have they been in the area? Is that number large enough to affect services for current residents? Is outreach engaging in areas of city where low income residents are located? Are there any complications or aspects to the coordinated entry process that may discourage or minimize the effectiveness to certain parts of the population of the area? Maybe the most difficult question to ask: Does the ethnic make-up of homeless services staff have an impact on housing placement?

### Implicit Bias

Often, our teams don't look like the people we're serving. We need to have real conversations about this. We need to examine not only who is providing direct services to clients, but also who is providing management, who provides leadership and who is serving on boards of directors. We need to infuse people of color to our work to bring their experiences to the equation.

Most of us are familiar with the meaning of explicit bias: the attitude and beliefs we have about a racial group on a conscious level manifested by discrimination, stereotyping, hate speech, violence, exclusionary practices, etc. Implicit bias refers to the attitude and beliefs we have about racial group on unconscious level. This also manifests itself in stereotyping, but also exclusionary thinking (my white client can't live in *that* neighborhood), and micro aggressions. Implicit bias happens through automatic processing in the brain. It's an unconscious process that happens fast. The only way to counteract it is to slow down and think about it and then respond.

Implicit bias in service delivery can have a major impact on the people we serve. Implicit bias can affect:

- Which services are offered
- Where services are offered
- How services are offered
- Who is delivering the services

And

- Who is MANAGING direct service providers

Racial bias + Power = Racism

According to Va Lecia Adams-Kellum, Ph.D., "Service providers wield power over who receives scarce resources—implicit racial bias in service provision worsens racial disparities in homelessness. You have power which means you have a really big responsibility."

Ultimately the provider workforce does not reflect the racial diversity of those we serve. Implicit bias can affect who gets hired, who managers trust with special assignments, and who gets promoted. No matter how well you think you're doing, if you open your heart you'll realize there's more for you to do. Recruit more intentionally: look for people with lived experience and pay them equitably, soften degree requirements, diversify at all staff levels.

There are many challenges in confronting implicit bias. The first is simply raising awareness among staff. Evaluating cultural competency and encouraging cultural humility is a critical step in the process. If your agency can hire people with lived experience, it's important to provide specialized training to them as well. Training managers in trauma-informed methods and furthering agency wide standards of trauma informed care is also key. The goal is progress.