

Preference Assessment of Temporary Shelter/Housing for People Experiencing Homelessness¹

Survey findings by the PSU Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative

May 18, 2020

Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, homelessness was a massive social crisis, starkly manifesting racial disparities in housing and health. With an unprecedented public health emergency now at hand, it is crucial that cities figure out how to more effectively manage and alleviate homelessness. To better understand where some people experiencing homelessness would prefer to live *temporarily* during the threat of coronavirus/COVID-19, we conducted a survey in Portland, Oregon. We know that people experiencing homelessness differ in their needs, circumstances, and preferences. Some people stay in tents or shelters, while others live temporarily with friends or family or in vehicles. We sought to understand the range of complex circumstances in order to know how to advocate for resources that people experiencing homelessness need and want.

In this survey, we asked about a variety of potential options for temporary shelter/housing, as well as the level of services people would like to be attached to these options. We also asked people where they live right now, along with some demographic questions focused on marginalized social identities, to see how people experiencing homelessness in different ways might differ in their needs.

Interpreting Results

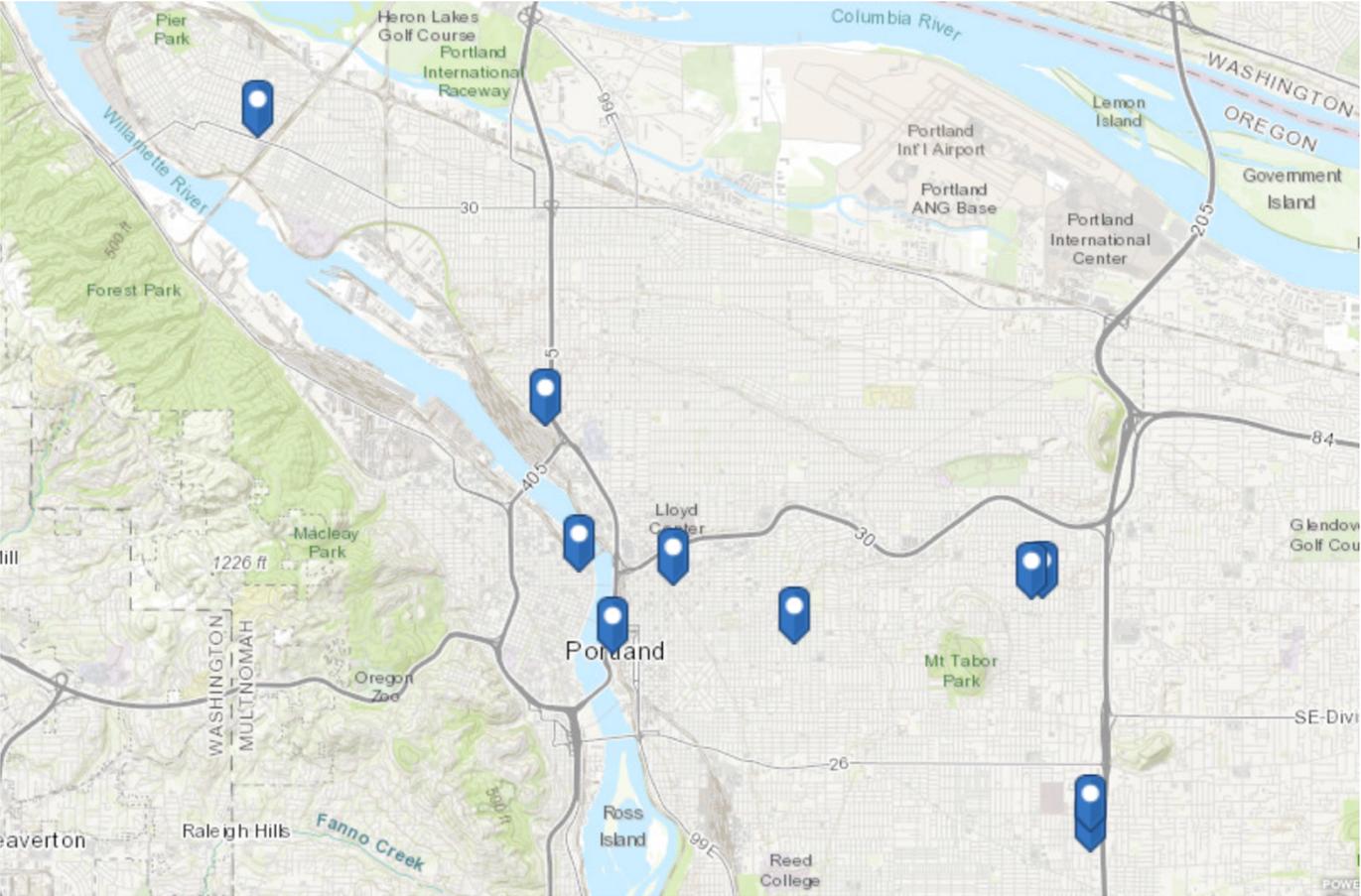
This was a short survey meant to capture people's thoughts at a moment in time, and most people who took this survey were unsheltered (i.e., on the street, not in a shelter or other indoor situation). As more organizations or people are able to take the survey, we will update findings. We consider the survey to be a starting point for additional work to better understand people's short-term preferences, particularly for homeless populations not reflected in this survey. While we report on majority perspectives in the findings, we also want to emphasize that all preferences should be considered. We also believe that people should not be forced to take any one particular path. Finally, we emphatically believe that any temporary housing, hoteling, sheltering options provided should be part of a longer-term strategy to provide housing and stability to all.

¹ Survey created and disseminated by Stop the Sweeps PDX, Street Roots, Northwest Pilot Project, Coalition of Communities of Color, PSU Faculty, and others

Survey Approach

The survey was developed in collaboration and with feedback from people with lived experience of homelessness, advocates, service providers, and researchers including Stop the Sweeps PDX, Street Roots, Northwest Pilot Project, Coalition of Communities of Color, and PSU faculty, along with others. Both paper/pencil and online administration formats were used. Paper copies were placed in bags along with tips for survey administration that focused on social distancing (e.g., standing six feet away when asking questions and recording responses); pens and pencils; and food and supplies to provide to people taking the survey. Members of Street Roots, Stop the Sweeps PDX, and other organizations (e.g., Beacon PDX, Rahab’s Sisters) administered surveys to people they came in regular contact with in the course of their daily routines, volunteer activity, or professional work. In addition to the paper survey, an online survey link was sent to a variety of service providers, advocates, and organizations so they could directly record the responses of unhoused individuals they work with.

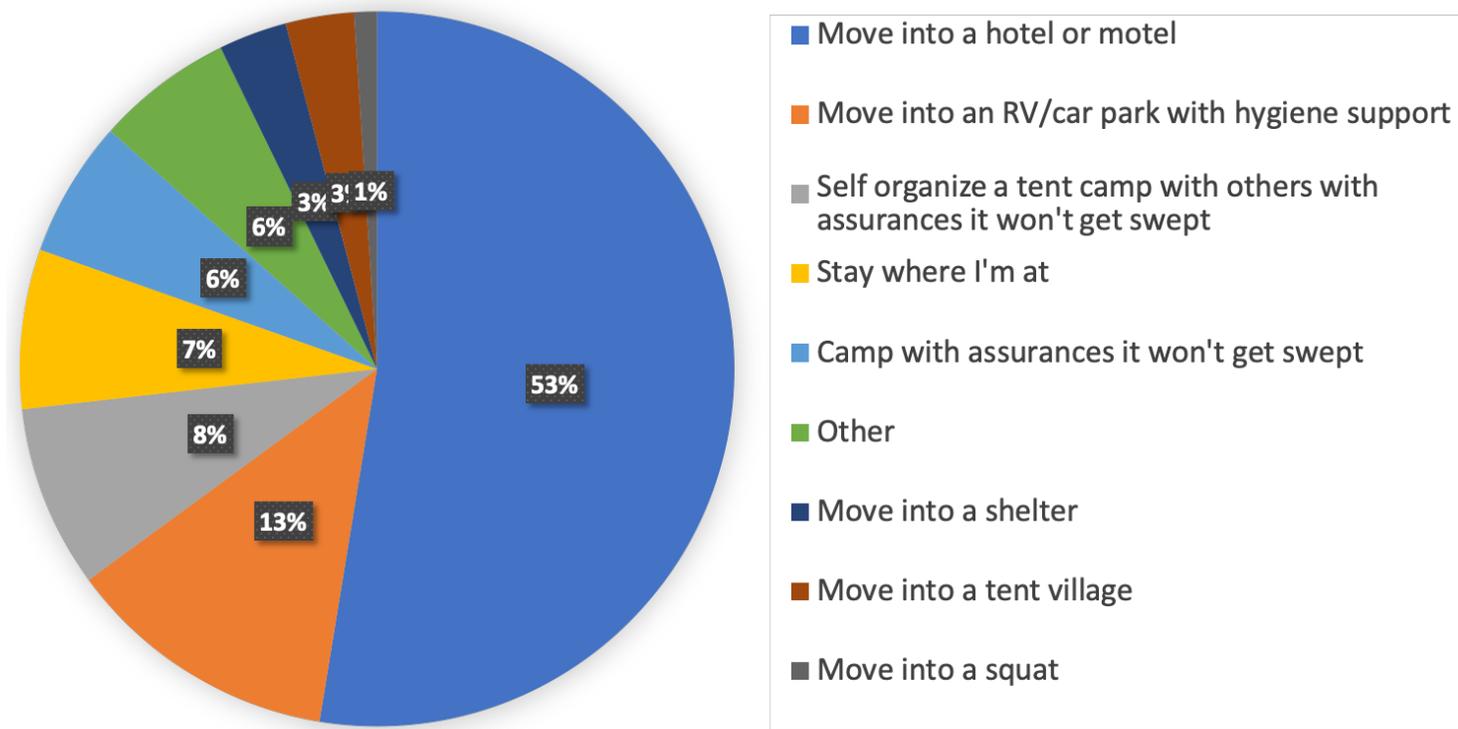
Data collection occurred from April 24 to May 14. See map below for primary survey locations:



Findings

A total of 97 people were interviewed. Below, we summarize data corresponding with each question, followed by subgroup analyses to better understand peoples' specific preferences.

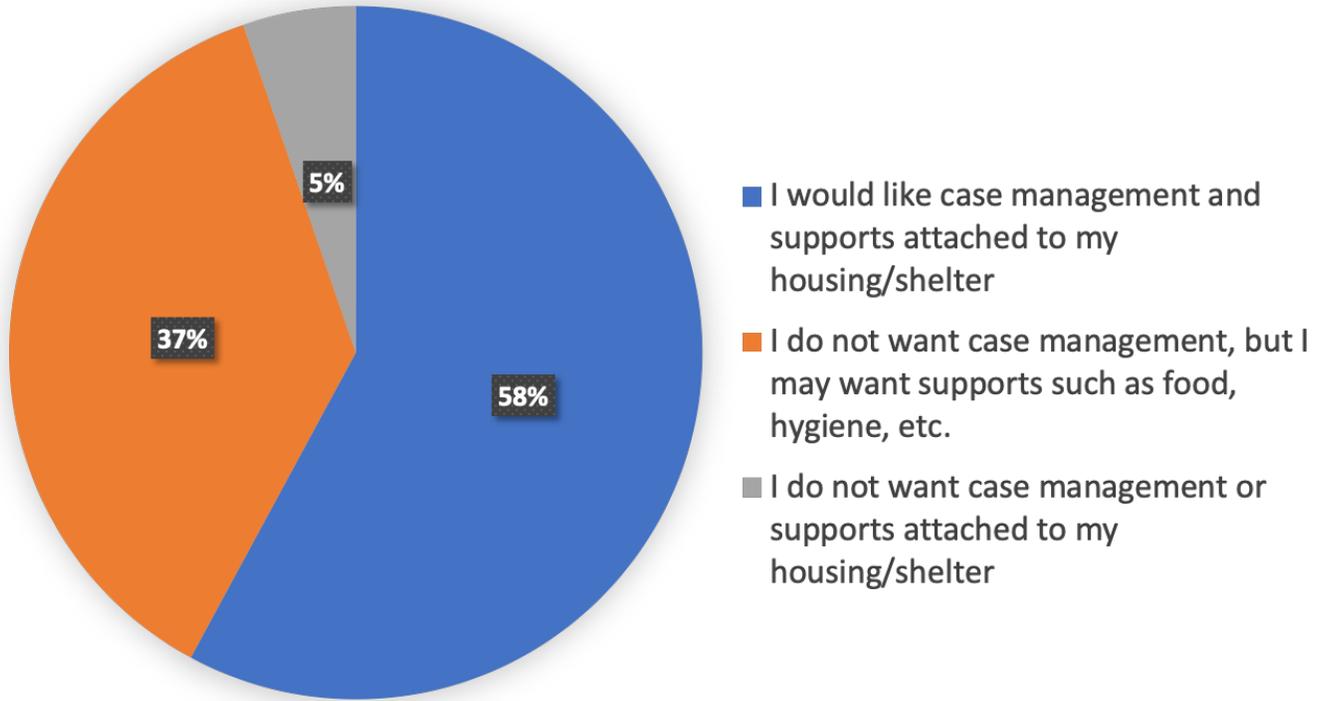
Question 1: In the coming weeks, would you prefer to temporarily (select your top preference):



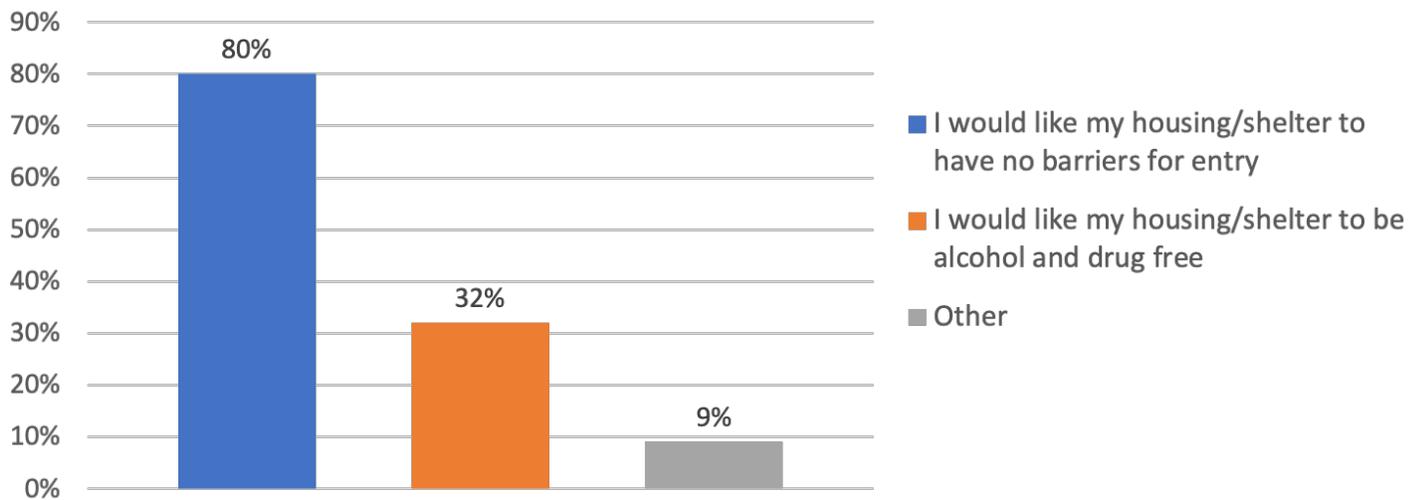
“Other” responses included staying with friend, tiny home village, and selecting multiple options.

Question 2: To help us better understand your needs and preferences for housing/shelter, please respond to the following:

2a. Select one of the following three options that best fits your needs:

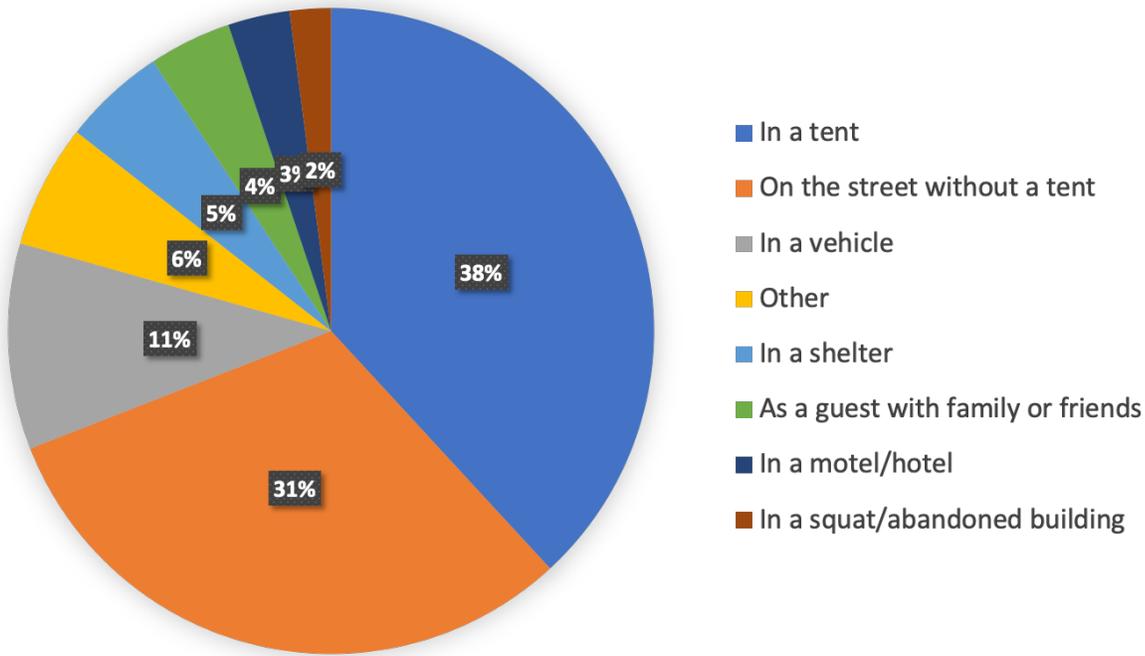


2b. Select any of the following that best fit your needs (you can select more than one):



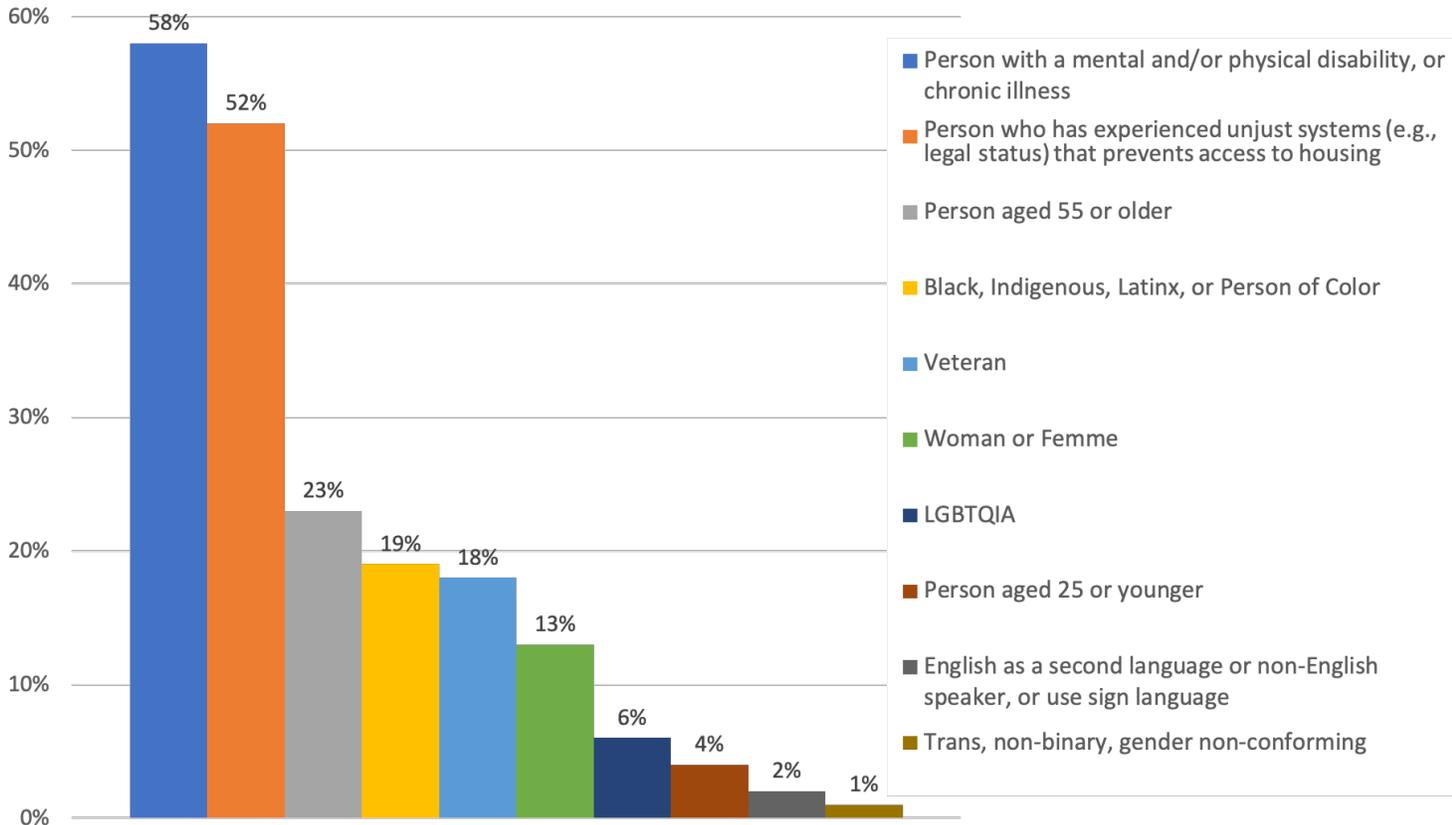
“Other” responses included ADA-approved housing/shelter, felony-friendly, self-governing, and art/political minded housing

Question 3: In the last few nights, I mostly slept:



“Other” included tiny home village, staying with friends, and selecting multiple options

Question 4: I identify as a (pick all that apply):



Highest preferences by group:

Group	Top Preference
Person with a mental illness and/or physical disability or chronic illness	Motel or hotel (57%)
Person who has experienced unjust systems that prevents access to housing	Motel or hotel (48%)
Person aged 55 or older	Motel or hotel (50%)
Black, Indigenous, Latinx, or POC	Motel or hotel (56%)
Veteran	Motel or hotel (24%) and Camp with assurances it won't be swept (24%)
Woman or Femme	Motel or hotel (69%)
LGBTQIA	Motel or hotel (50%)
Person aged 25 or younger	Motel or hotel (50%)
English as a second language or non-English speaker, or uses sign language	Motel or hotel (100%)
Trans, non-binary, gender non-conforming	Other (live in a house) (100%)

Conclusions

1. The majority of respondents (53%) reported “motel or hotel” as their top preference for shelter during the pandemic. The other top choices included a combined 14% of people who preferred camping alone or in a self-organized encampment with others with assurances they would not be swept; and 13% who preferred staying in an RV/car park.
2. Across all survey locations and demographic groups included in this survey, motel/hotel was the top preference for temporary shelter, or tied as the top preference. One exception to this was one trans, non-binary, or gender non-conforming respondent who stated they preferred to live in a house.
3. The majority of respondents (58%) reported wanting case management and supports attached to their shelter/housing, while 37% want supports but no case management.
4. The majority of respondents (80%) reported wanting housing with few to no barriers for entry, meaning they can bring pets or belongings, live with partners, and not be

required to engage in services. 32% of participants stated a preference for alcohol and drug-free housing.

5. While motels/hotels emerged as the top preference in this survey, people should not be required or coerced into hotels or any other shelter situation. Further, those who access hotels should not be mandated to receive case management services, or abide by curfews or other rules that do not pertain to other hotel guests.
6. What is being recommended is for emergency response only—to an ongoing housing crisis coupled with a pandemic—and is not intended as a substitute for permanent housing. We hope this information is helpful to individuals and organizations advocating to support the needs of people experiencing homelessness during and after the pandemic.

Contact Information:

For more information about the survey and to learn how the Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative plans to use these findings, contact Marisa Zapata at mazapata@pdx.edu or Greg Townley at gtownley@pdx.edu

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For more information about how Northwest Pilot Project Plans to use these findings, contact Marisa Espinoza at marisae@nwpilotproject.org