

IDAHO YOUTH HOMELESSNESS ASSESSMENT

2026



Submitted to the House Idaho Collaborative, Our Path Home, and the Youth Action Board in April 2026
by Boise State University's Idaho Policy Institute and Agnew::Beck Consulting.

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- Cottonwood Creek Behavioral Hospital
- Corpus Commons
- Eastern Idaho Community Action Partnership
- Head Start Association
- Idaho Department of Health and Welfare
- Idaho Youth Ranch
- Ignite Idaho Family Resource Center
- Interfaith Sanctuary
- JEMFriends
- Lewis Clark Valley Youth Resource Center
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- Nampa School District
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- Optimist House
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- Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of Duck Valley Indian Reservation
- South Central Community Action Partnership
- Support, Prevention, and Resource Center (SPaRC)
- St. Luke's
- Terry Reilly Health Services
- The Village
- Treasure Valley YMCA
- United Way of Treasure Valley

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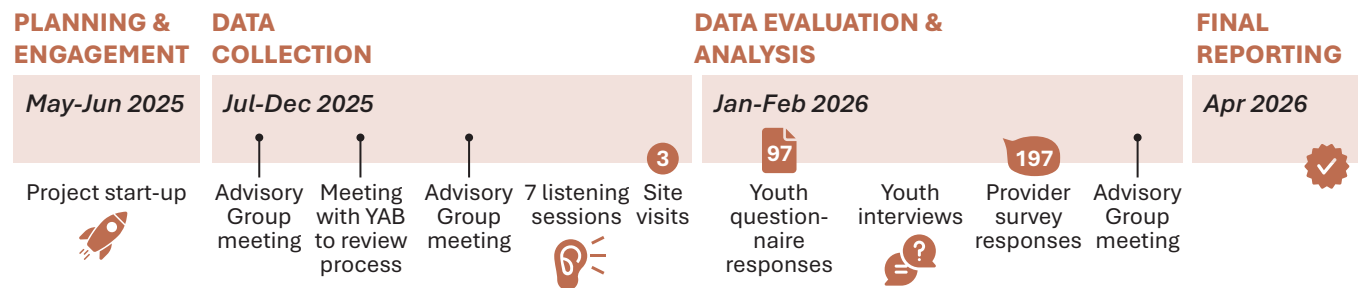
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PROJECT SUMMARY

The Idaho Youth Homelessness Assessment determined the number of Idaho youth experiencing housing instability and homelessness, uncovered causes of housing instability, identified system gaps and strengths, and developed actionable recommendations to ensure homelessness among young people becomes rare, brief, and non-recurring.



Number of Idaho Youth experiencing homelessness in **2024**.

2,392

Of those, **321** were unaccompanied minors and **2,071** were in households with adults.

TOP RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

These recommendations, built from assessment process findings, will have the greatest impact on addressing youth homelessness

1. Expand youth-dedicated housing statewide
2. Strengthen housing pathways with flexible and sustained supports
3. Build a youth-centered crisis response system
4. Establish a statewide “no wrong door” access model
5. Shift from referral-based systems to active navigation and real-time capacity
6. Invest in a youth homelessness workforce strategy
7. Expand transportation access as a core service component
8. Reduce inflow through systems change and prevention
9. Build regional infrastructure for rural service delivery
10. Center youth leadership and lived experience

YOUTH INSIGHTS

Youth voice was integrated into the assessment process through a youth questionnaire and youth interviews.

Barriers that most impact Idaho youth include feeling uncomfortable or embarrassed and not knowing available support options. Youth note key resources during housing instability or homelessness are trustworthy, caring adults, financial support, and a safe space to stay.

“Resources are extremely limited as an unaccompanied minor.”

“The system failed me. If they had believed me, I would not have experienced domestic violence. The system is failing children because they want to believe that the parent is a good parent.”

“Never really had stable housing in our life since my dad got laid off even though he’s been applying everywhere.”

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT INSIGHTS

This research and best practices indicate the five key strategies for engaging youth.



ASK YOUTH TO TALK WITH YOUTH: Because there are high instances of embarrassment in accessing services and/or resources, the Youth Action Board suggested that youth should be trained to engage other youth for increased comfortability.



PROVIDER PARTNERS ARE KEY: Engagement is most successful when a trusted provider serves as a liaison to their youth client population. To increase youth participation, build strong relationships and clear goals with youth-specific providers.



TAKES TIME: Engagement work is already time intensive, doing so with harder-to-reach populations requires even more time investment and adaptability. Continuous follow up and relationship development are impactful ways to utilize time and create strengthened engagement.



FORMALIZED YOUTH GROUPS HAVE IMPACT: The Youth Action Board was a strong proponent for this opportunity for deepened engagement and input on similar work.



IT IS VALUABLE TO HEAR FROM YOUTH DIRECTLY: Youth engagement would not be complete without hearing from youth directly. It is important and worthwhile investing in resources and capacity to ensure youth voice is incorporated into any efforts about them.

OVERVIEW



PROJECT BACKGROUND AND PROCESS

Youth homelessness is a complex and growing challenge that requires coordinated, data-informed, and youth-centered solutions. Across Idaho, youth experiencing housing instability face unique barriers to accessing safe, stable housing such as limited youth-specific resources, service fragmentation, and gaps in prevention and early intervention. At the same time, communities across the state are working to strengthen systems, improve coordination, and better support youth before and during housing crises.

To support these efforts, Idaho Housing and Finance Association, the Idaho Balance of State (BoS) Continuum of Care (CoC) - House Idaho Collaborative (HIC), the Boise City/Ada County CoC - Our Path Home (OPH), and the Youth Action Board commissioned this study. The purpose of this project is to better understand the scope and drivers of youth homelessness in Idaho, identify system strengths and gaps, and develop actionable recommendations that improve outcomes for youth and young adults experiencing housing instability. This assessment aligns with broader statewide planning efforts and informs coordinated strategies across systems, including housing and homelessness services, child welfare, education, behavioral health, and justice. By integrating perspectives from youth, providers, and system partners, this work aims to facilitate an understanding of shared challenges and opportunities across Idaho's diverse communities.

This assessment was guided by a comprehensive, data-informed, and youth-centered approach to better understand youth homelessness in Idaho. The project employed a mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative data with qualitative insights from youth, service providers, and system partners to reflect both system-level patterns and lived experiences. Engagement efforts prioritized trauma-informed, youth-centered practices and included collaboration with the Youth Action Board and stakeholders across housing, education, behavioral health, child welfare, and justice systems. The assessment also emphasized statewide representation, capturing both urban and rural perspectives, and incorporated an equity-focused lens to better understand disparities among youth populations.

Grounded in collaboration and outcomes-oriented analysis, this four-phase study was designed to generate actionable recommendations that strengthen housing pathways for youth currently experiencing homelessness, improve crisis response systems, reduce inflow into homelessness, and elevate youth leadership in solutions design, thereby addressing each phase of the housing continuum below.



PROJECT PHASES

PHASE 1: PLANNING AND ENGAGEMENT (MAY-JUNE 2025)

This phase confirmed both the project's scope of work and the engagement strategy and focused on gathering background information, establishing an Advisory Group, and developing a larger statewide contact list.

PHASE 2: DATA COLLECTION (JULY-DECEMBER 2025)

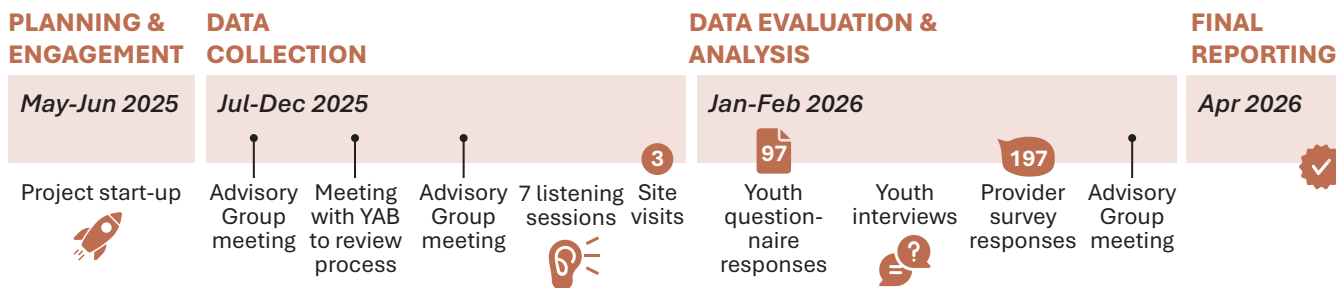
The second phase compiled data from a multitude of state, regional, and local data systems. It also included 1) preliminary outreach and engagement with the Youth Action Board (September) to review the process and get their input, 2) provider listening sessions with seven different sectors to get their input on how they coordinate across systems and refer youth experiencing housing instability, 3) two Advisory Group meetings (one held in July to provide input on the process, and the second in November to provide feedback on engagement and data found to date), and 4) site visits to Idaho Falls, Pocatello, and Twin Falls. This work culminated in a dynamic youth homelessness system map. This map, filterable by category and region, catalogues available services across sectors throughout the state.

PHASE 3: DATA EVALUATION AND ANALYSIS (JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2026)

The third phase utilized all engagement from earlier phases to develop, distribute, and analyze a youth questionnaire and provider survey. This phase also included a series of youth interviews that contextualized youth questionnaire findings. A third Advisory Group meeting reviewed the preliminary findings of the youth questionnaire and provider survey. The youth questionnaire, provider survey, and data served as the foundation for developing a gaps analysis and initial recommendations.

PHASE 4: RECOMMENDATIONS AND FINAL REPORTING (MARCH-APRIL 2026)

In the final phase of work, data analysis and literature informed the final set of recommendations. These recommendations were divided into categories to provide further clarity on addressing youth homelessness in Idaho.



HOW TO USE THIS REPORT



DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Highlights secondary and qualitative data (bifurcated into Youth Engagement and Provider Survey Findings) gathered through the assessment process. *Describes* identified gaps at the end of these key subsections.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Shares key gaps which condenses and evolves the identified gaps noted in previous sections. *Features* recommendations in four strategic action areas: Housing Exits, Crisis Response, Systems Change and Prevention, and Youth Empowerment.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS



The study relied on two distinct types of data: 1) secondary data collected from existing partner data sets and 2) primary data gathered through engagement with youth and providers. This section summarizes relevant data collected and analyzed during the project period.

SECONDARY DATA

Several data systems were investigated to determine an informed estimate of youth and young adults under the age of 25 experiencing homelessness in Idaho. A variety of data sources were used including ones from Continuums of Care, victim services providers, child welfare institutions, corrections facilities, the Idaho Department of Education, and other local service providers. To create a well-informed estimate that is both expansive and methodologically consistent in each Idaho region, data sources were gathered from organizations that collected statewide data (see Table 1). This table is followed by methodology, data learnings, and limitations for each of the data sources.

While data was collected from a variety of sources, there is no complete count for Idaho youth experiencing homelessness - this is for a variety of reasons. Foremost, different definitions across data systems present a significant challenge in understanding the full scope of youth homelessness in Idaho. Systems such as the Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) rely on the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition of homelessness which focuses primarily on youth who are unsheltered or accessing homelessness services. In contrast, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento) uses a broader definition that includes youth who are unstably housed, such as those who are doubled-up with friends or family. As a result, these systems capture overlapping but distinct populations, making direct comparisons difficult and contributing to inconsistent estimates of youth homelessness. These definitional differences also have practical implications as eligibility for services, funding, and program design often depend on how homelessness is defined. Understanding these distinctions is critical for interpreting data accurately and for developing coordinated strategies that address both literal homelessness and housing instability among youth.

TABLE 1. DATA SOURCES AND VARIABLES

DATA SOURCE	COLLECT HOUSING DATA	VARIABLES OF INTEREST
Continuums of Care Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS)	Yes	Coordinated entry, family classification, age, region, race
Idaho Department of Education	Yes	McKinney-Vento eligibility, race, region
Idaho Department of Health and Welfare / Fostering Court Improvement	Yes	Region, removal reason, housing information related to out of home care placement
Idaho Department of Corrections	No	Age, facility location
Idaho Department of Juvenile Corrections	No	Age, facility location
Idaho Youth Assessment Centers	No	Region, number youth served

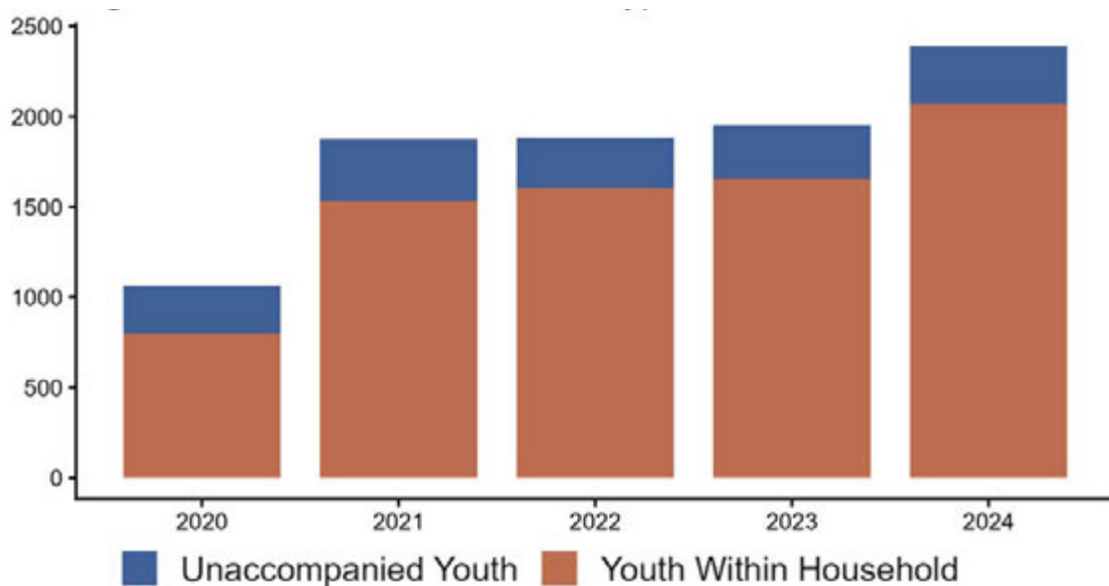
CONTINUUMS OF CARE AND HMIS

Idaho has two regional Continuums of Care (CoCs) that are charged (via HUD) with coordinating a system response through housing and services funding for homeless families and individuals within their geography: Boise City / Ada County's Our Path Home and Idaho Balance of State's House Idaho Collaborative. These CoCs each manage their own Coordinated Entry (CE) systems that work directly with households that are identified as experiencing homelessness and seeking supportive housing services. Individual level data on those currently experiencing homelessness and those currently receiving supportive housing services are compiled regionally by service providers within Our Path Home and House Idaho Collaborative. These two CoCs are required by federal guidelines to collect the same data (universal data elements), however, because they are separate jurisdictions, they each manage and maintain their own HMIS databases. This division of data collection between the two CoCs presents unique challenges when mapping the youth homelessness landscape in Idaho. For instance, at the time of this research, deduplication of HMIS data was not undertaken nor was cross-system analysis of the aforementioned data sources. That said, HMIS currently captures the best estimate of the number of homeless youth under the age of 25 in Idaho which was 2,392 in 2024 (2,071 of those youth being part of households with adults and 321 of those youth being unaccompanied). While the Idaho Department of Education and other organizations collect housing information for youth 18 and under, HMIS was the only entity that compiled statewide data for the entire under-25 population statewide. Throughout the course of this research, it became evident that future cross-system data analysis would improve enumerating youth experiencing homelessness and better identify those vulnerable to homelessness.

HMIS DATA FINDINGS

At a statewide level, the number of youth (0-24 years old) that entered Coordinated Entry from 2020-2025 is detailed in Figure 1. The number of youth that entered Coordinated Entry with a head of household older than 24 years old far outweighs the number of unaccompanied youth. In other words, more youth are minors / dependents part of a household with an adult than unaccompanied youth or parenting youth. While the pandemic is likely a contributor to low client volume in 2020, there was a 22% increase in the overall number of youth present in Coordinated Entry from 2023 to 2024.

FIGURE 1. YOUTH IN COORDINATED ENTRY | 2020-2025



When looking at the number of unaccompanied youth and youth with families that are in Coordinated Entry by CoC, there is an increase in overall youth in both CoCs from 2023 to 2024. House Idaho Collaborative (see Figure 2) saw a slight decrease in the number of unaccompanied youth in Coordinated Entry while Our Path Home (see Figure 3) shows a 40% increase from 2023 to 2024.

FIGURE 2. HOUSE IDAHO COLLABORATIVE - YOUTH IN COORDINATED ENTRY | 2020-2025

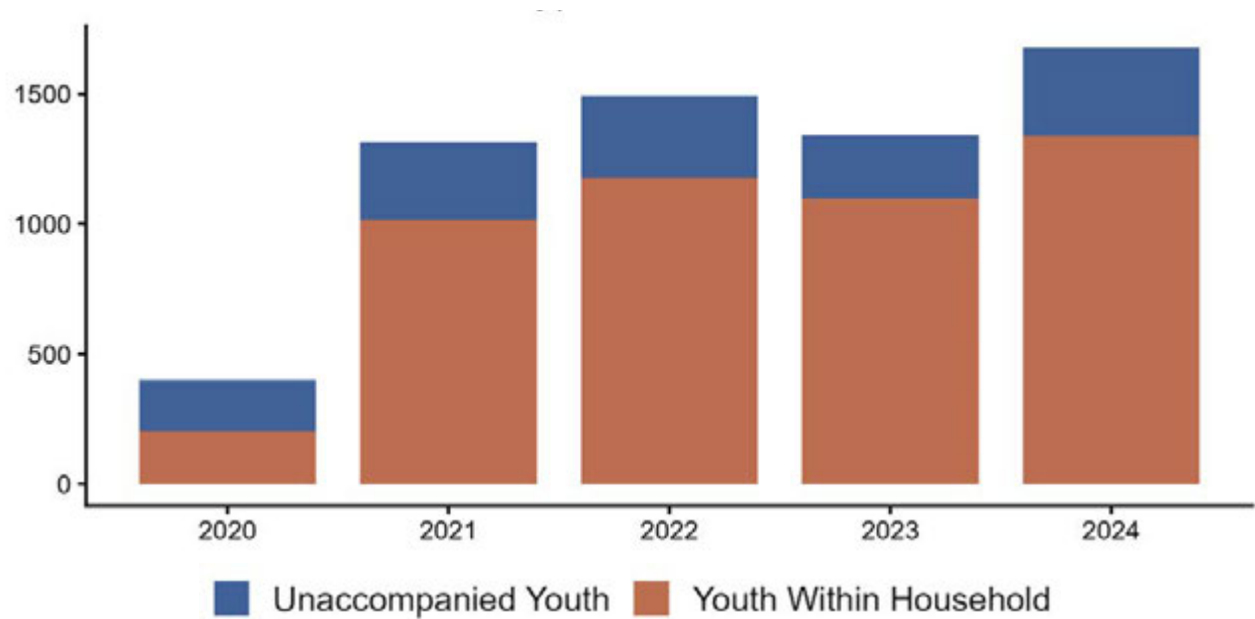
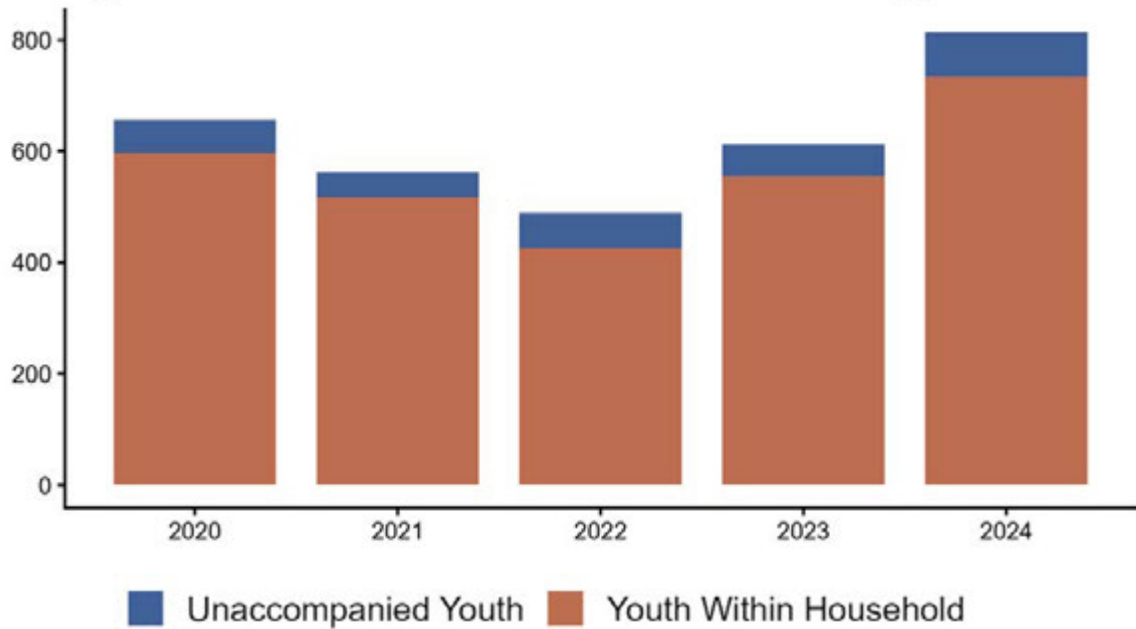


FIGURE 3. OUR PATH HOME - YOUTH IN COORDINATED ENTRY | 2020-2025



HMIS DATA LIMITATIONS

As mentioned, client-level data are collected independently by each CoC. Because cross-CoC deduplication was not conducted, some individuals may be counted more than once across regions. For example, a youth who enters Coordinated Entry in Ada County through Our Path Home and later enters Coordinated Entry in Canyon County through the House Idaho Collaborative would be counted in both systems. As a result, the total number of clients presented in Figure 1 may include duplicate individuals and should be interpreted as an unduplicated count within each CoC rather than a fully deduplicated statewide total.

In addition, the Continuums of Care (CoCs) use different approaches to reporting Coordinated Entry data, which affects comparability across regions. For example, the House Idaho Collaborative categorizes clients into two Coordinated Entry groups: individuals currently experiencing homelessness and those seeking homelessness prevention services. Clients in House Idaho Collaborative's Coordinated Entry system remain active until they exit to housing; however, for this analysis, only individuals currently experiencing homelessness were included. In contrast, Our Path Home was in the process of updating its HMIS data during the data collection period to ensure that only active clients were reported. As a result, OPH provided annual counts of new Coordinated Entry entries rather than including individuals carried over from previous years.

While HMIS provides the most comprehensive statewide data available on youth experiencing homelessness in Idaho, covering all regions and individuals within the targeted age range (0–24), it is important to note its limitations. HMIS captures only individuals who access homelessness services, meaning youth who do not engage with service providers are not reflected in the data. Research consistently indicates that this results in an undercount, particularly among unaccompanied youth and families who may avoid formal systems or rely on informal supports. Additionally, individuals included through Coordinated Entry are identified using the HUD definition of homelessness, therefore the data does not include youth who are unstably housed, such as those temporarily staying with friends or relatives. As a result, while HMIS provides the most comprehensive administrative data available, it likely underestimates the full scope of youth homelessness and housing instability across Idaho.

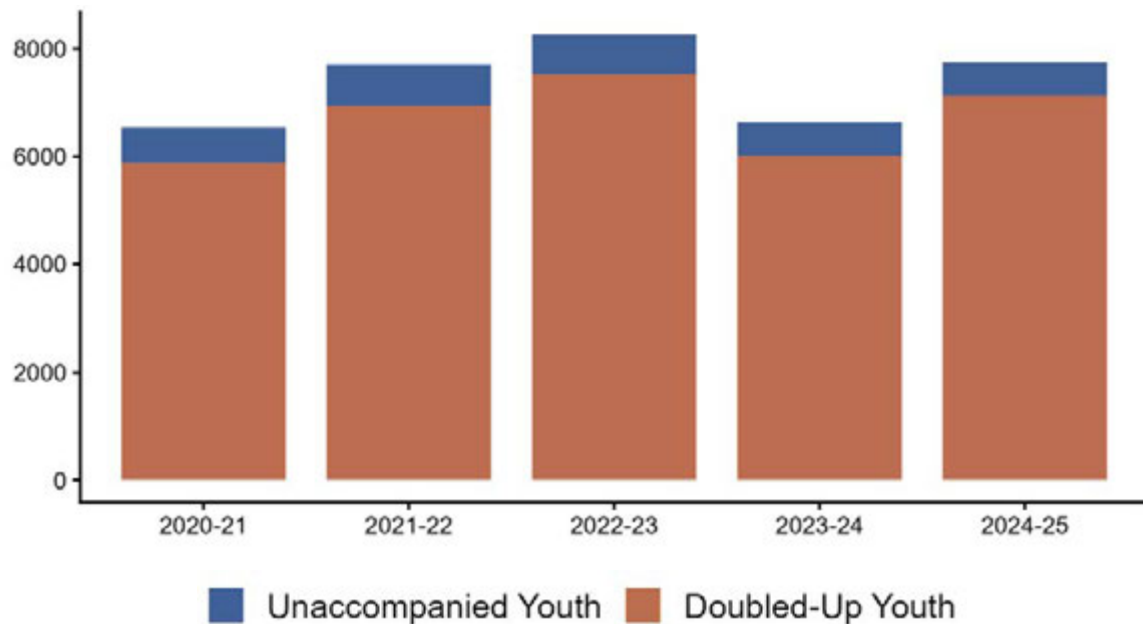
IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The McKinney-Vento program is designed to address the problems that children and youth experiencing homelessness have faced in enrolling, attending, and succeeding in school. Under this program, the Idaho Department of Education must ensure that each youth experiencing homelessness has equal access to public education. In Idaho, the number of students eligible for assistance under McKinney-Vento due to homelessness or being unstably housed is collected at the school district level. McKinney-Vento defines “homeless children and youth” as individuals who lack a regular and adequate nighttime residence. This definition includes youth that are sharing housing with other persons due to a lack of housing, economic hardship, or other traumatic event. When a child is sharing housing because of hardship, the status is referred to as “doubled-up” and is the most common type of living situation McKinney-Vento eligible youth are experiencing across Idaho.

MCKINNEY-VENTO DATA FINDINGS

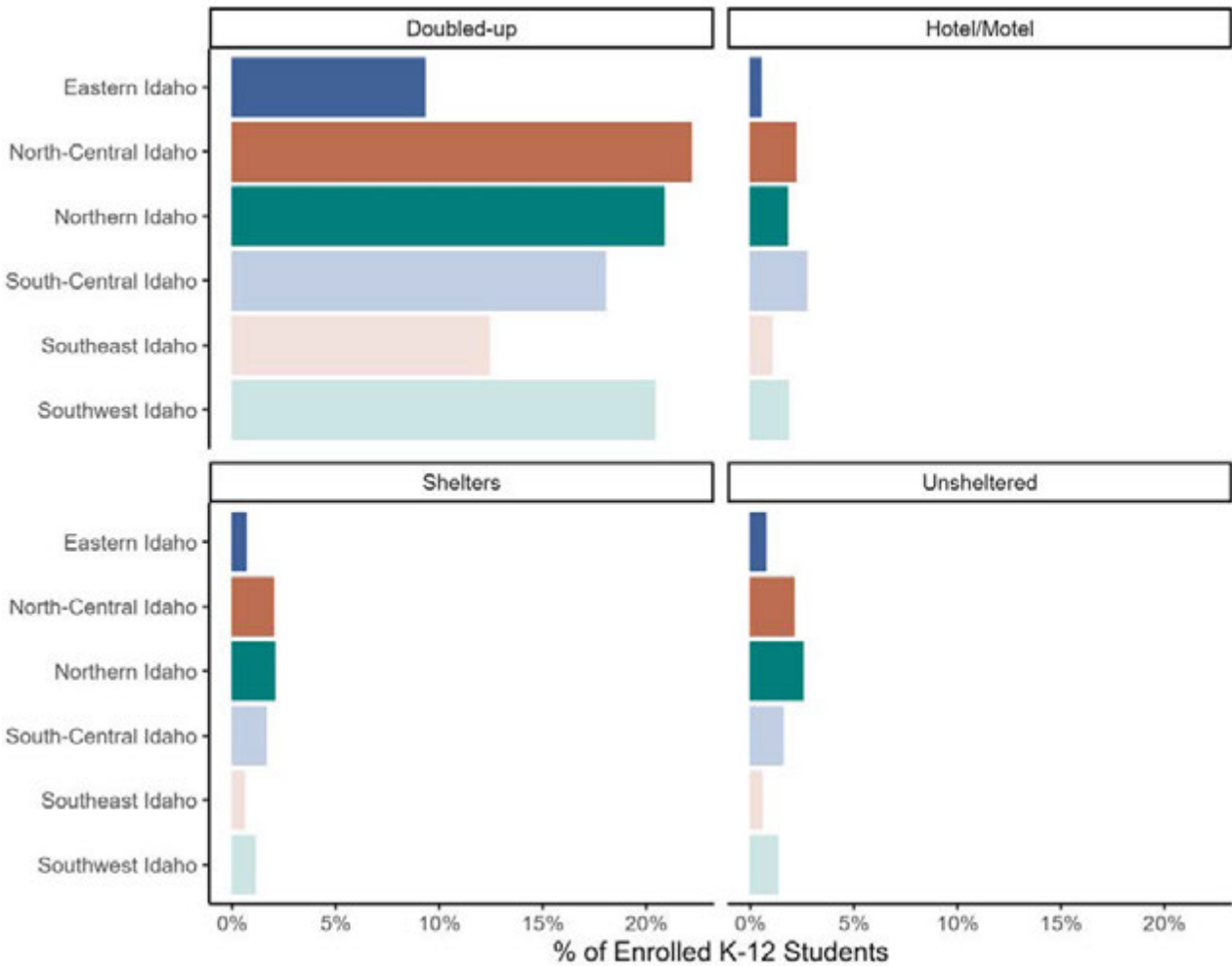
Figure 4 displays the number of individual Idaho youth eligible under McKinney-Vento by school year. When compared to HMIS findings, the number of youth is largely those that are doubled-up and not unaccompanied youth. What stands out is the number of youth captured in this dataset. In the 2024-25 school year, over 3.2 times more youth (presumably 18 years old or younger) were McKinney-Vento eligible when compared to those aged 0-24 captured in HMIS. This likely indicates that the majority of youth experiencing homelessness seek temporary solutions through other family members and friends instead of seeking out formal homelessness services whether they are with a family or unaccompanied.

FIGURE 4. MCKINNEY-VENTO ELIGIBLE YOUTH | 2020-2025



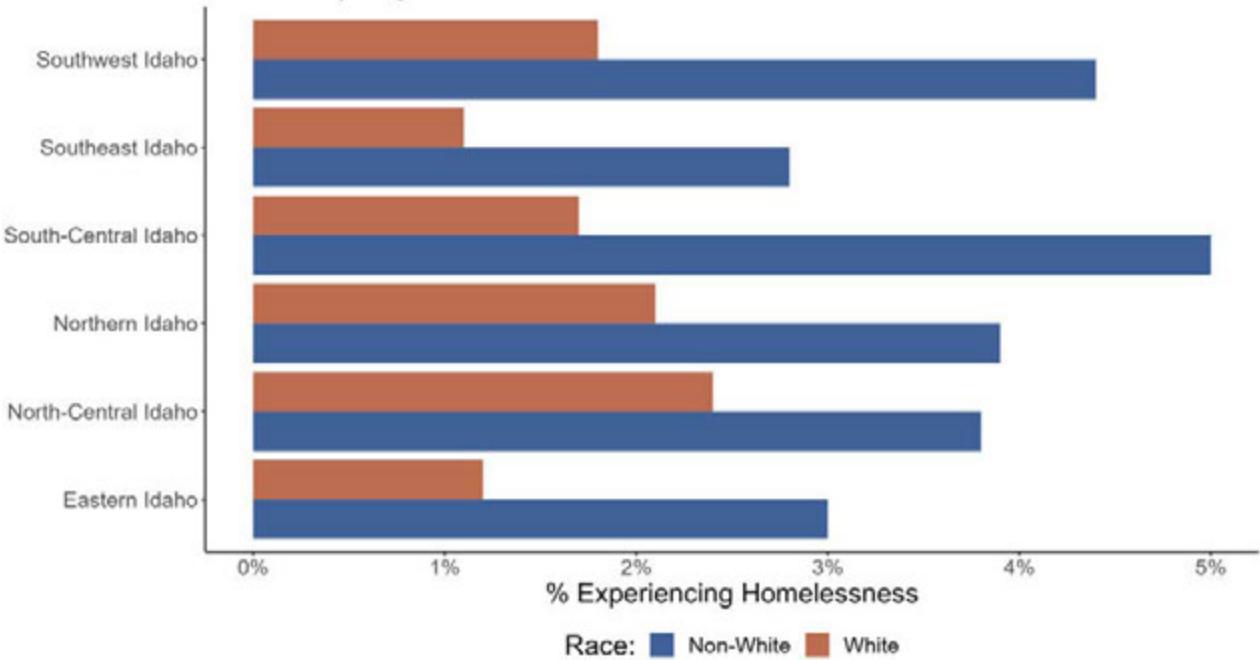
Looking at the most recent school year with data available (2024-25), doubled-up students comprise the majority of those eligible for McKinney-Vento (see Figure 5). It is notable that South-Central Idaho (also known as the Magic Valley), has the largest proportion of enrolled students that are currently doubled-up, living in shelters, and hotels / motels.

FIGURE 5. STUDENT HOMELESSNESS BY REGION AND RESIDENCE | 2024-25 SCHOOL YEAR



Seen in Figure 6, in the Magic Valley, a disproportionate number of Non-White students are present in the McKinney-Vento population for the 2024-25 school year. As illustrated, one out of every 20 Non-White students enrolled were eligible for McKinney-Vento benefits compared to one out of every 50 White students.

FIGURE 6. STUDENT HOMELESSNESS BY REGION AND RACE | 2024-25 SCHOOL YEAR



When considering McKinney-Vento information for a statewide count of youth experiencing homelessness, it is not a comprehensive dataset since it is limited to Idaho public school districts and the dataset also does not include many individuals aged 18-24.

McKinney-Vento data is collected at the school district level and reported to the Department of Education. At the time of this report, there does not seem to be any cross-collaboration between McKinney-Vento personnel from different school districts around the state. With the definition of homelessness under McKinney-Vento being less formalized, it was not verified if this definition is being applied equally across districts and regions. This may mean that an individual considered McKinney-Vento eligible in one school district may not be considered such in a different district.

Like all other homelessness information, the accuracy of this information relies on the ability and willingness of a youth and / or their family to communicate their housing needs to school personnel. There are likely situations where there is reluctance or hesitation to do this. There is also a likely overlap between youth deemed eligible for McKinney-Vento and those in Coordinated Entry across Idaho.

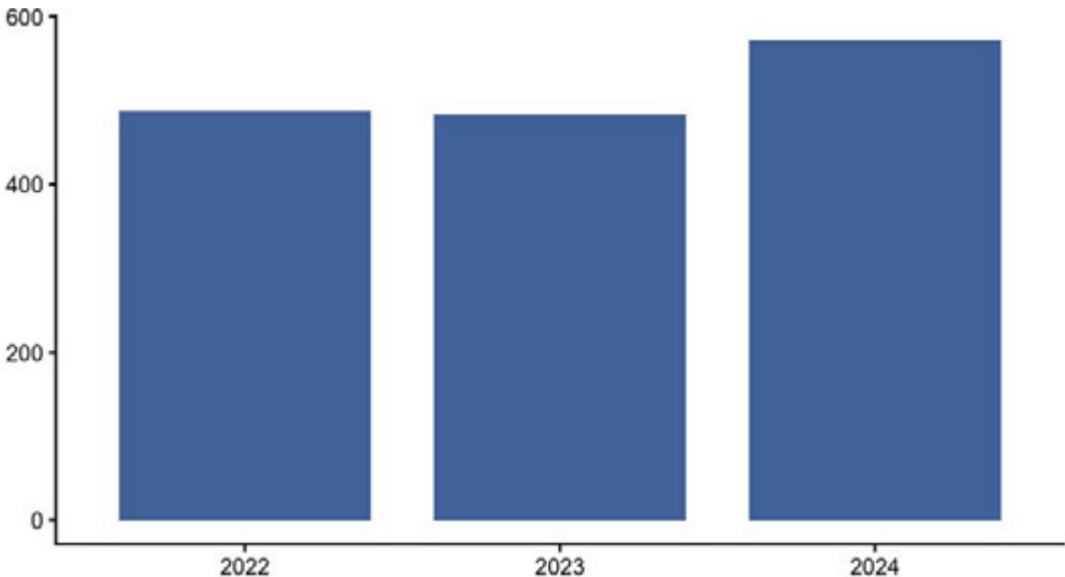
IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND WELFARE AND FOSTERING COURT IMPROVEMENT

The Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (IDHW) is responsible for administering foster care and other out-of-home care services for children under age 18 who have been removed from their homes. IDHW also oversees Child Protective Services (CPS), which receives reports of child maltreatment that may result in the removal of a child from their current living situation. Fostering Court Improvement (FCI) is a national nonprofit organization that supports dependency courts and child welfare agencies by transforming administrative child welfare data into accessible, actionable reports. FCI integrates data from federal sources, including the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System, to help inform decision-making and improve outcomes for children and families. Currently, FCI provides data for 14 states, 11 of which make the information publicly available. Idaho is one of the states where FCI data is accessible to the public, providing an additional source of information to better understand foster care trends and outcomes statewide.

IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND WELFARE AND FOSTERING COURT IMPROVEMENT DATA FINDINGS

IDHW does not systematically document the housing status of children when CPS reports are filed. However, when a child is removed from their parent or guardian’s custody the social worker must select a removal reason. The number of removals by year where the reason documented is “homeless” or “unstable home environment” is shown in Figure 7. These types of removals increased by 18% from 2023 to 2024. It is notable that 50% of these removals recorded statewide in 2024 came from Health and Welfare District 4 (Central District Health). This district includes Ada, Boise, Elmore, and Valley counties and represents approximately 28% of Idaho’s overall population.

FIGURE 7. CPS HOMELESS / UNSTABLE HOME ENVIRONMENT REMOVALS | 2022-2024



FCI data did not include specific data about youth experiencing homelessness in Idaho but did give insight into the number of youth aging out of foster care annually. From October 2024 through September 2025, the average daily number of children in foster care statewide was 1,385. On September 20, 2025 there were 1,288 youth in out-of-home care and 5% (66) were 17 or older. Of all youth in out-of-home care,

17% (229) were placed in congregate care settings. These settings include group homes, institutions, or independent living arrangements not in a family home environment.

Extended foster care is available for youth up to age 23, with 81 youth enrolled in this statewide program in 2024. This number increased to 137 in 2025 where 35% of enrollees reside in IDHW District 3 (Southwest Idaho). This was the largest of any district statewide and includes Adams, Washington, Payette, Gem, Canyon, and Owyhee counties.

IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND WELFARE AND FOSTERING COURT IMPROVEMENT DATA LIMITATIONS

While Idaho collects data related to youth in foster care, comprehensive statewide information on housing outcomes for youth exiting care remains limited. Recent Idaho child welfare reports and federal data indicate that approximately 80 to 130 youth exit foster care annually in Idaho. National Youth in Transition Database reporting provides additional context, suggesting that between 15% and 25% of Idaho youth experience housing instability within one to two years of exiting foster care, with approximately 8% to 15% reporting episodes of homelessness. These estimates should be interpreted cautiously due to small cohort sizes and challenges in tracking youth after they exit care; however, they are consistent with national research indicating elevated homelessness risk among youth transitioning out of foster care.

FCI data are updated periodically and provide useful insights into child welfare trends; however, the structure and aggregation of the data are predetermined, which limits the types of analyses that can be conducted. Similarly, while IDHW publishes annual reports on CPS activity and foster care populations, detailed information such as removal reasons is not routinely included and was obtained for this analysis through a public records request. Additionally, foster care and out-of-home care data present challenges similar to those found in homelessness data, as youth may enter and exit care multiple times within a year. These dynamics make it difficult to track unique individuals over time and to draw direct comparisons between foster care involvement and housing outcomes.



OTHER DATA SOURCES

Idaho has 12 youth assessment centers across the state’s seven judicial districts (Districts 4 and 5 have two centers each) that connect youth and families with resources based on individual need to prevent entry or deeper involvement in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. Although there wasn’t housing data available about the youth served, justice-involved youth are often overrepresented in populations of youth experiencing homelessness and, therefore, an important population to track. Across Idaho, 2,896 youth were served by a youth assessment center from July 2023-June 2024 (See Table 2).

TABLE 2. NUMBER OF IDAHO YOUTH SERVED BY ASSESSMENT CENTERS IN 2025

DISTRICT							
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	TOTAL
127	51	415	737	692	655	219	2,896

Both the Idaho Department of Corrections and the Idaho Department of Juvenile Corrections do not collect housing status information for youth. When individuals are on parole (aged 18-24), if they report experiencing homelessness, procedure dictates they are sent back to an institution. For this reason, the accuracy of this data was not able to be utilized to enumerate youth homelessness or housing instability.

Data gathered from some local organizations were unable to provide specific demographic information about the housing status of clients served. These organizations were contacted for other parts of analysis but their data was not considered when compiling a statewide count of youth experiencing homelessness.

GAPS

Four main gaps emerged after assessing the secondary data.

SCALE OF NEED

- Significant mismatch between HMIS and McKinney-Vento counts suggests not all youth needing formal housing support enter into the state’s Coordinated Entry systems
- Majority of youth experiencing housing instability are doubled-up and not accessing formal housing placement services
- Lack of reliable statewide estimate of youth homelessness
- Inconsistent tracking of youth housing exits and outcomes across CoCs

SYSTEM DATA GAPS

- Data collected across systems is not integrated or matched (HMIS, education, child welfare, justice)
- Limited cross-system data analysis

YOUTH POPULATION DATA GAPS

- Limited data on youth aging out of foster care at risk of homelessness
- Limited housing status data for justice-involved youth
- Limited housing data from youth assessment centers
- Limited demographic data across local organizations

REGIONAL DATA GAPS

- Inconsistent data collection across regions and systems limits ability to accurately enumerate and compare youth homelessness

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Engagement with youth was fundamental to this project. The YAB, a youth questionnaire, and interviews with youth gathered information directly from youth with lived experiences. The questionnaire was shared with key youth service providers across the state (see Appendix B). The questionnaire was based on preliminary engagement, including provider listening sessions, a Youth Action Board meeting, and regional site visits.

Youth interviews were promoted alongside youth questionnaire distribution outreach. Interested youth were compensated \$35 for having a short phone call (typically 15-20 minutes in length) where they shared their experience with housing services and other systems. Youth interviews utilized a general outline but encouraged all participating youth to talk about whatever they felt comfortable sharing. Interested youth were able to call, text, or email when scheduling their phone interview.

YOUTH QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

The project team received 116 youth questionnaire responses and analyzed 97 of those; 19 questionnaires were excluded because they either were out of state or reported no experience with housing instability AND not accessing resources or supportive services.

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS AND DATA

There was strong representation across the board for survey respondents. However, there remains clear opportunity to better engage and learn from populations that were underrepresented in this questionnaire.

GEOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION: There were responses from all seven Idaho regions, however many questionnaire respondents indicated they live in either Region 2 (42% of responses) or Region 6 (34% of responses). Geographic representation for questionnaire responses was also concentrated in more urban areas with few rural responses.

AGE: The questionnaire received strong participation from a diverse range of age groups, particularly those aged 13-17 (64% of responses) and 18-24 (25% of responses). There was not significant participation from respondents 12 or younger (7% of responses) and respondents 25 or older (4% of responses).

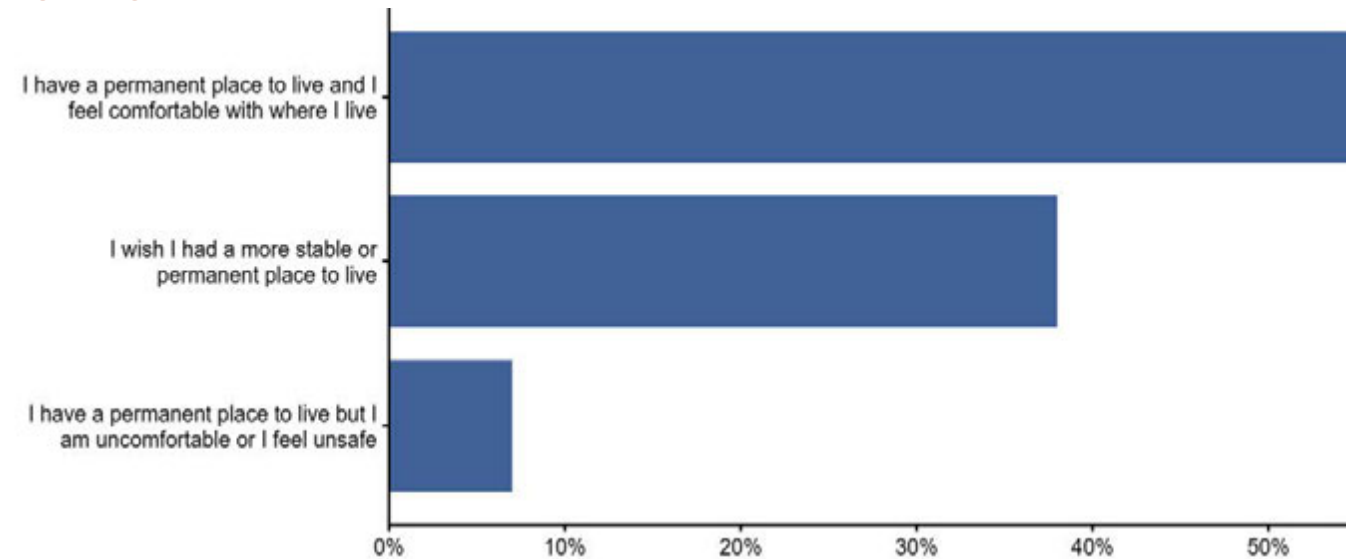
RACE: The questionnaire saw good representation from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds except Asian respondents (no responses were received from this group).

GENDER: Of the questionnaire responses, 50% were from girls / women, 48% were from men / boys, and 2% indicated they identify as transgender or another gender identity.

LGBTQIA+: Respondents were asked if they identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community and most respondents indicated no (79% of responses). However, 14% of respondents indicated that they do identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community and 7% of respondents indicated that they are unsure or questioning.

When asked “How do you feel about where you live right now?” most respondents indicated that they have a permanent place and feel comfortable where they live (55% of responses). However, a significant 38% of respondents indicated that they wish they had a more stable or permanent place to live and 7% of respondents noted that they have a permanent place to live but are uncomfortable or feel unsafe (see Figure 8).

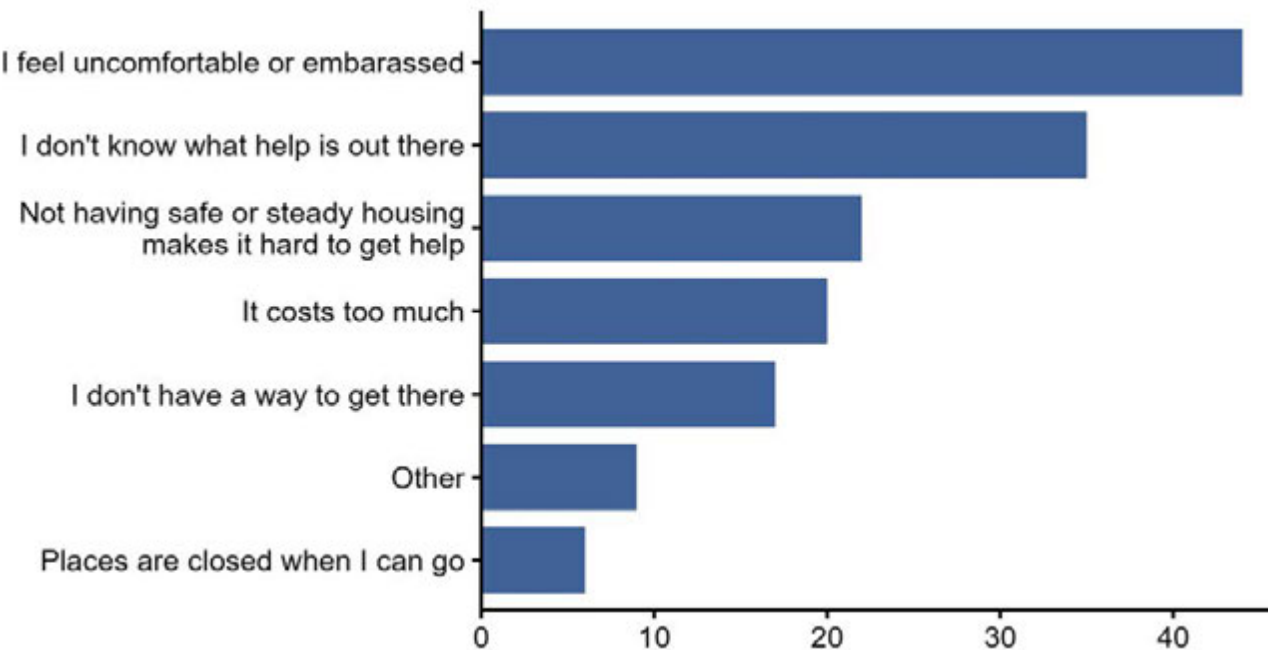
FIGURE 8. YOUTH QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS | HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT WHERE YOU LIVE RIGHT NOW?



Respondents were also asked about their interactions with other systems which included if (1) they have ever been in foster care or (2) spent time in juvenile detention or jail / prison. One quarter (25%) of respondents noted that they have been in foster care, while nearly one fifth (18%) indicated that they have spent time in juvenile detention or jail / prison.

When asked “What has made it hard for you to ask for help or use support services?” over one quarter of respondents (29%) expressed that they felt uncomfortable or embarrassed, making it harder to get help and access resources (see Figure 9). Another key barrier noted by nearly one quarter of respondents (23%) was that they didn’t know what help was available. Other responses for barriers experienced while accessing services included unclear times to access services, lacking ways to check for resources, services not being available, being a teen single mom, parents not allowing youth to access services, and being too exhausted.

FIGURE 9. YOUTH QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS | WHAT HAS MADE IT HARD FOR YOU TO ASK FOR HELP OR USE SUPPORT SERVICES?



Open-ended questions allowed for more in-depth discussion of youth’s lived experiences. Many respondents indicated that household conflict (such as divorce or getting kicked out), guardian substance use, finances (such as job loss), and guardian abuse or neglect were the most prevalent causes of their housing instability. Respondents noted that family, friends, or others were the most impactful during their housing instability. However, the second most common theme indicated by respondents was that nothing or no one supported them during this housing instability. When respondents were asked about what would best help to secure a safe and steady place to live common themes included trustworthy, caring adults; financial support; a safe space to stay; and physical supports, including food or clothes. When asked about rent affordability, most respondents (54%) indicated that they could afford \$999 per month or less, this excludes responses that indicated \$0 which made up 12% of all responses. Additional youth questionnaire results for this section are available in Appendix B.

YOUTH INTERVIEWS

Youth interviews were held from January 21 - February 16, 2026, and all youth interviewees were compensated for talking about their experience with housing services and other systems. All information from these conversations was anonymized to protect youth participants. Because brave youth shared their stories and experiences, these interviews deepened the context and understanding gained from the youth questionnaire results.

Youth interviews were summarized into high-level themes noted below, however, it should be emphasized that these conversations represent Idahoan youth who are currently experiencing or previously experienced some form of housing instability. There is a lot of struggle behind these stories including abuse, neglect, abandonment, parental job loss,

“Never really had stable housing in our life since my dad got laid off even though he’s been applying everywhere.”

withheld medical care, and other negative experiences and challenges. To provide a better system of support for Idaho's youth and change this narrative, youth and their experiences must be believed, and youth voices must be incorporated into the solutions.

LIMITED ACCESS: Many youth described various challenges in accessing services and / or resources in housing and other related systems. These challenges ranged from feeling embarrassed to being unable to receive help as an unaccompanied minor.

“Resources are extremely limited as an unaccompanied minor.”

PETS: A common barrier identified by youth was the lack of support if they had any pets. One interviewee noted: “It’s hard to find places to stay because I have my dog. People harass me because I have an Emotional Support Animal, since I have no physical disability.”

SYSTEM FRUSTRATION: Notably, there were several interviewees who expressed frustration in navigating supports. As one interviewee put it, “The system failed me. If they had believed me, I would not have experienced domestic violence. The system is failing children because they want to believe that the parent is a good parent.”

LACK OF AGENCY: For youth under the age of 18 who were navigating supports as an unaccompanied minor, there were extreme challenges accessing needed services. One interviewee discussed how their parent withheld necessary medical care from them to the point that youth nearly died from lack of medical care.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT ANALYSIS

Engaging youth with lived experiences provided rich data about their experiences, needs, and mechanisms for empowering them to address issues around youth homelessness.

ASK YOUTH TO TALK WITH YOUTH: Because there are high instances of embarrassment in accessing services and/or resources, the Youth Action Board suggested that, for youth interviews and direct engagement, youth should be trained to engage other youth for increased comfortability.

PROVIDER PARTNERS ARE KEY: Questionnaire responses were most successful when there was a provider who strongly promoted the questionnaire with their youth client population. To increase youth participation, build strong relationships and clear goals with youth-specific providers.

TAKES TIME: Engagement work is already time intensive, doing so with harder-to-reach populations requires even more time investment and adaptability. Continuous follow up and relationship development are impactful ways to utilize time and create strengthened engagement.

FORMALIZED YOUTH GROUPS HAVE IMPACT: The Youth Action Board was a strong proponent for this work and has opportunity for deepened engagement and input on similar work.

IT IS VALUABLE TO HEAR FROM YOUTH DIRECTLY: Youth engagement would not be complete without hearing from youth directly. It is important and worthwhile investing in resources and capacity to ensure youth voice is incorporated into any efforts about them.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES ARE IMPORTANT: As with support for any vulnerable population, it is critical to ensure trauma-informed practices are incorporated throughout service provider organizations to reduce harm and support healing.

PRE-PACKAGED TOOLS ARE CLEARER: Specific to youth questionnaire distribution, the project team found it most useful to bring a question bank to providers for them to evaluate what questions to include and how best to distribute with their youth population. During earlier iterations and while trying to determine the best way to engage youth, the lack of specificity caused confusion and lack of provider commitment.

INCENTIVES ARE GOOD, REQUIRE INVESTMENT: When compensating youth for their time and experience during youth interviews, there was strong value in providing stipends. Despite this, providing compensation requires time and capacity to be able to adequately support payment distribution and any troubleshooting. It is also important to consider the payment format, i.e. gift cards, check, direct deposit, etc. Confirm with participants how they would like to be compensated and try to accommodate to promote accessibility.

HARD TO REACH SOME YOUTH POPULATIONS: During various engagement points, youth referenced accessing informal support pathways such as staying with friends or other family members or utilizing their personal networks to get support such as churches. Because youth are savvy navigating these informal support pathways, they are less likely to rely on or access additional resources and services offered by communities or organizations.

GAPS

Based on youth engagement to date, the following shares identified gaps.

HOUSING AND STABILITY

- Youth experience significant housing instability and reliance on informal supports
- Youth report lack of safe places to stay
- Youth report financial barriers to housing
- Youth report limited access to stable housing options

SYSTEM NAVIGATION

- Youth lack awareness of available services and resources
- Youth uncertainty about how to access or navigate services
- Youth frustration navigating systems
- Youth report lack of trustworthy adults or navigation support

ACCESS BARRIERS

- Youth reluctance to access services due to stigma or embarrassment
- Unaccompanied minors face significant barriers accessing services
- Youth face transportation barriers
- Youth report services not available when needed
- Youth experience unclear eligibility requirements

SYSTEM INTERACTION GAPS

- Youth report limited coordination between systems
- Youth report limited meaningful support beyond temporary solutions

PREVENTION AND DRIVERS

- Family conflict is a major driver of youth homelessness
- Guardian substance use and abuse identified as drivers
- Financial instability and job loss identified as drivers
- Aging out of foster care identified as driver

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT GAPS

- Limited peer support opportunities
- Youth want youth-to-youth engagement
- Limited youth leadership opportunities
- Youth voice not consistently integrated into system design

PROVIDER SURVEY FINDINGS

A provider survey, designed with feedback from project partners, asked respondents about organizational characteristics, such as headquarter location, area served, populations served, and services provided, in addition to challenges facing service organizations and gaps in Idaho’s system for preventing and responding to youth homelessness.

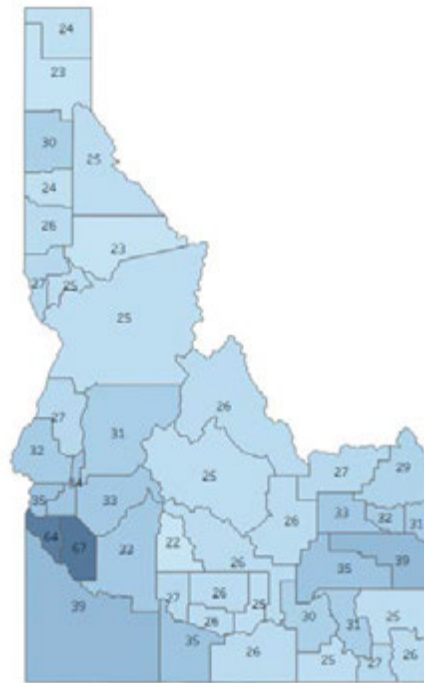
The survey was conducted February 4-18, 2026. Links were sent out directly via email to 818 individuals representing 661 service organizations across the state. Three reminders prompted responses. From this sample, 194 individuals responded to the survey, resulting in a 24% response rate. Anonymous links were also sent out through project partners, resulting in three additional responses, for a total of 197. Most responding organizations (69%) are headquartered in one of Idaho’s nine “urban” counties (Ada, Bannock, Bonneville, Canyon, Kootenai, Latah, Madison, Nez Perce, Twin Falls), while 31% fall into Idaho’s rural counties. In terms of organizational scope, 35% of responding organizations provide services to a single county, 44% provide services to a regional subsection of Idaho, and 9% provide services statewide.

While most organizations in our sample are headquartered in Idaho’s most populated counties, respondents often noted that their service coverage extends beyond those regions, resulting in service availability covering a much broader area of the state (see Figures 10A and 10B). However, rural counties did generally see less service availability.

FIGURE 10A. NUMBER OF PROVIDER SURVEY ORGANIZATIONS HEADQUARTERED IN COUNTIES



FIGURE 10B. TOTAL NUMBER OF PROVIDER SURVEY ORGANIZATIONS SERVING EACH COUNTY

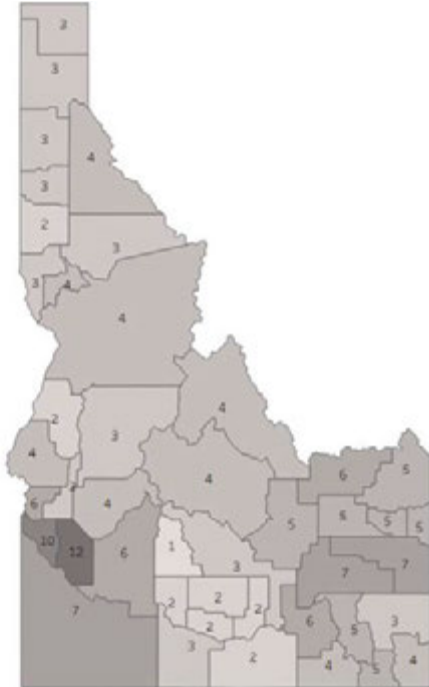


Comparatively, Figures 11A and 11B shows the same information specific to housing services.

FIGURE 11A. NUMBER OF PROVIDER SURVEY ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDING HOUSING SERVICES HEADQUARTERED IN COUNTIES



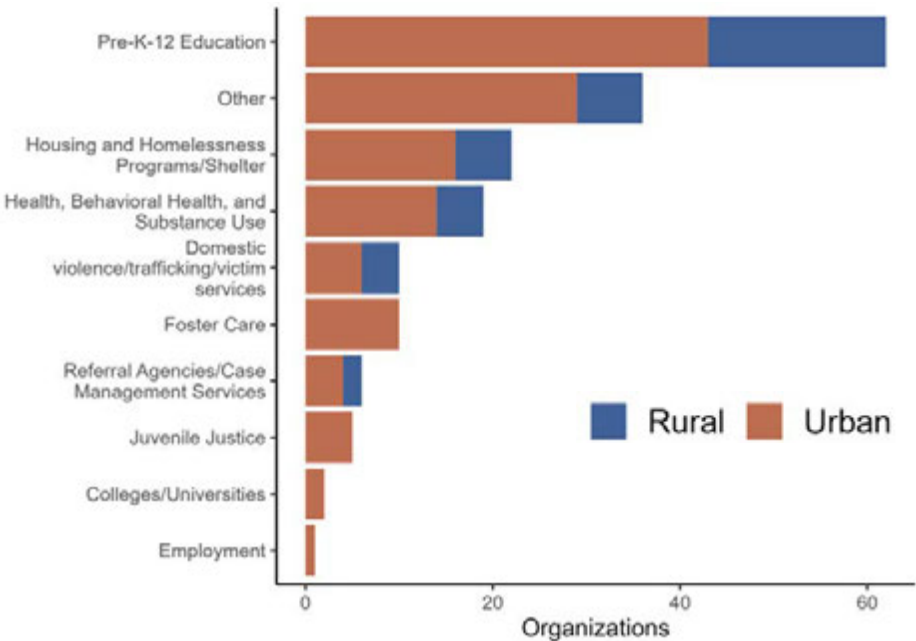
FIGURE 11B. NUMBER OF PROVIDER SURVEY ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDING DIRECT HOUSING SERVICES WITHIN EACH COUNTY



ORGANIZATIONAL INFORMATION

To understand the range of organizations responding, the provider survey asked about each organization’s primary service category, in addition to the entire range of services that they provide (Figure 12).

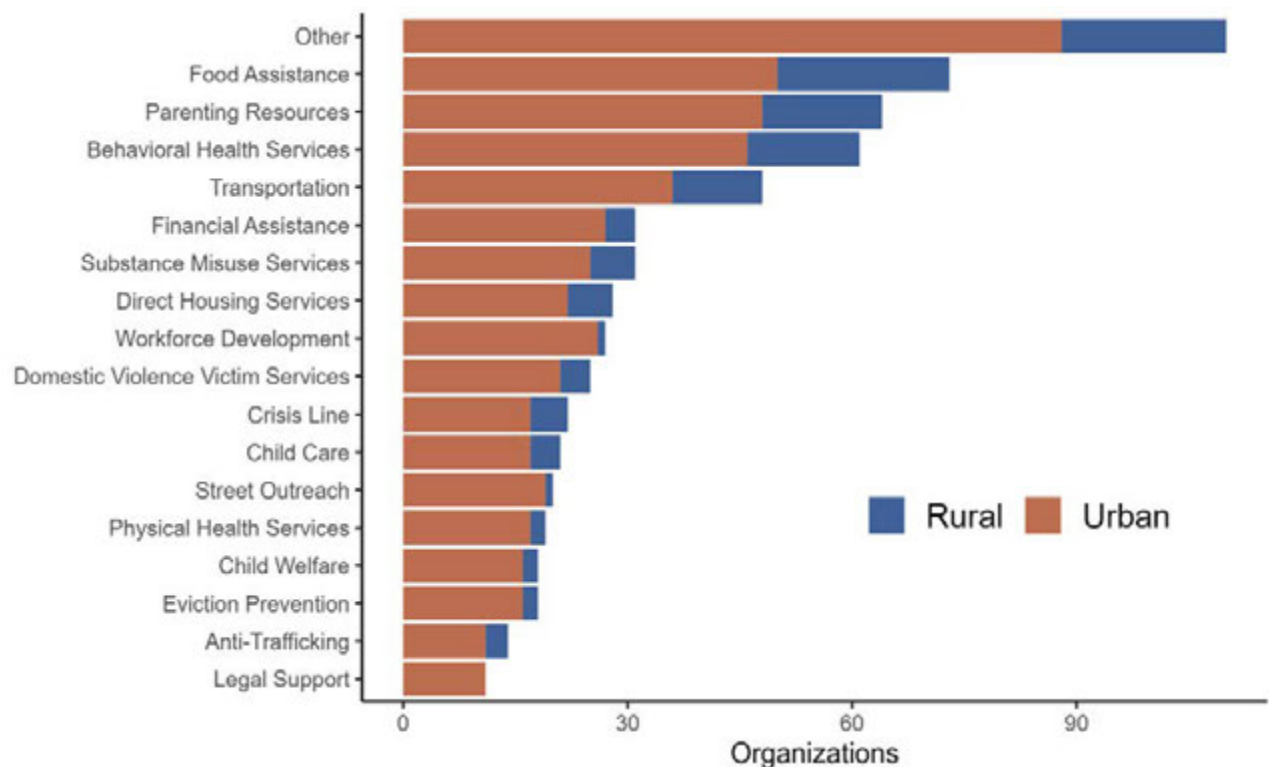
FIGURE 12. PRIMARY SERVICE CATEGORY BY HEADQUARTER RURALITY



The most common primary service category among responding organizations is Pre-K-12 education (which also has the highest proportion of rural respondents), followed by “other” (descriptions varied broadly), then by housing and homelessness programs / shelter. Foster care was the most substantial primary service category to lack any rural service providers in the sample. Employment was the least common service category.

When asked what services they provide, organizations most commonly said “other” (reflecting a broad diversity of services), followed by food assistance, parenting resources, behavioral health services, and transportation. Beyond these top categories, organizations offered a broad variety of services (see Figure 13).

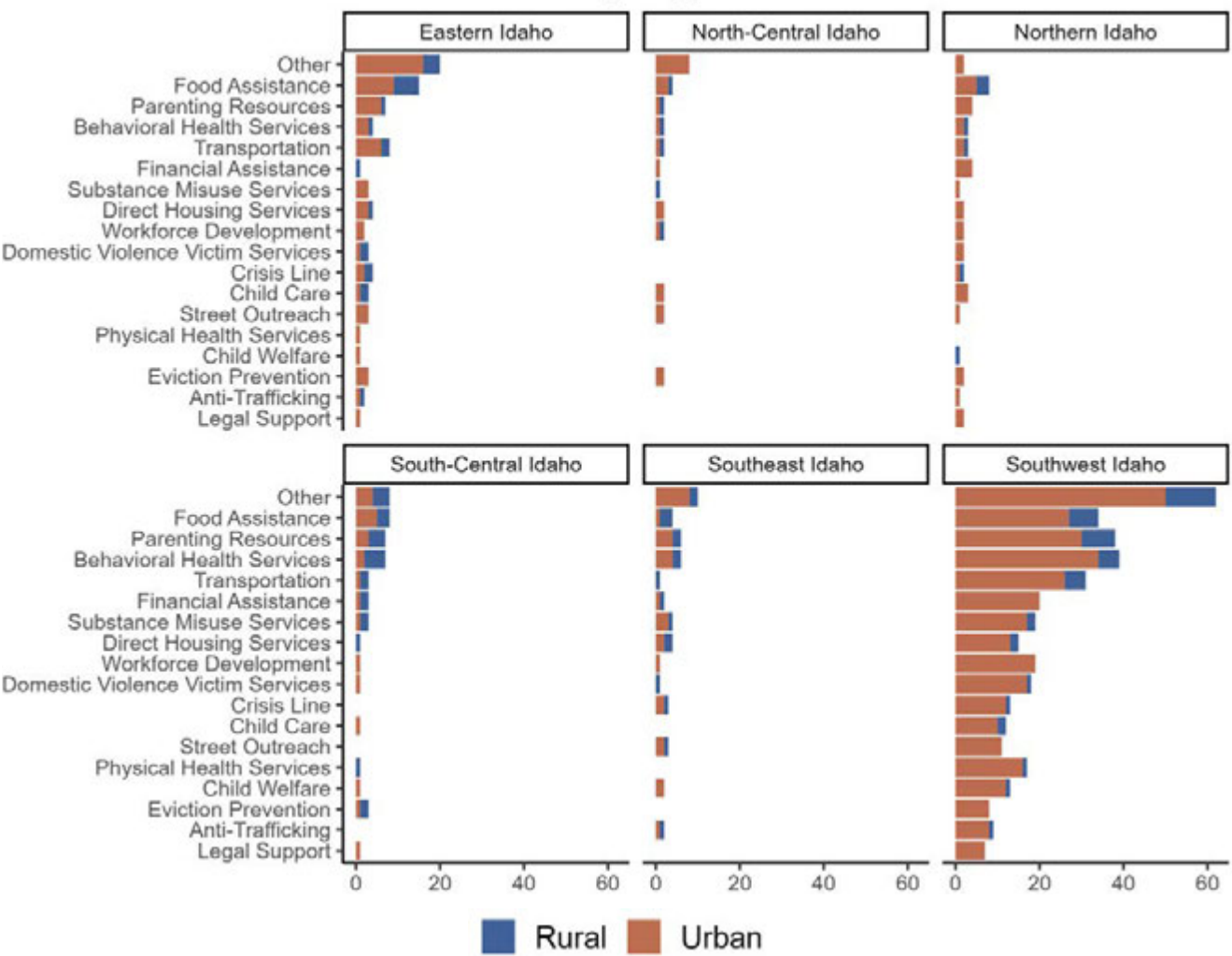
FIGURE 13. SERVICES OFFERED BY HEADQUARTER RURALITY



Most services across the state are offered by organizations with headquarters in urban counties, including services offered in rural counties. However, examining services offered by the county where they are offered (whether the organizations offering the services are headquartered in rural counties or not), many rural counties are covered by a variety of services, although some services (such as legal support) are limited in both urban and rural areas.

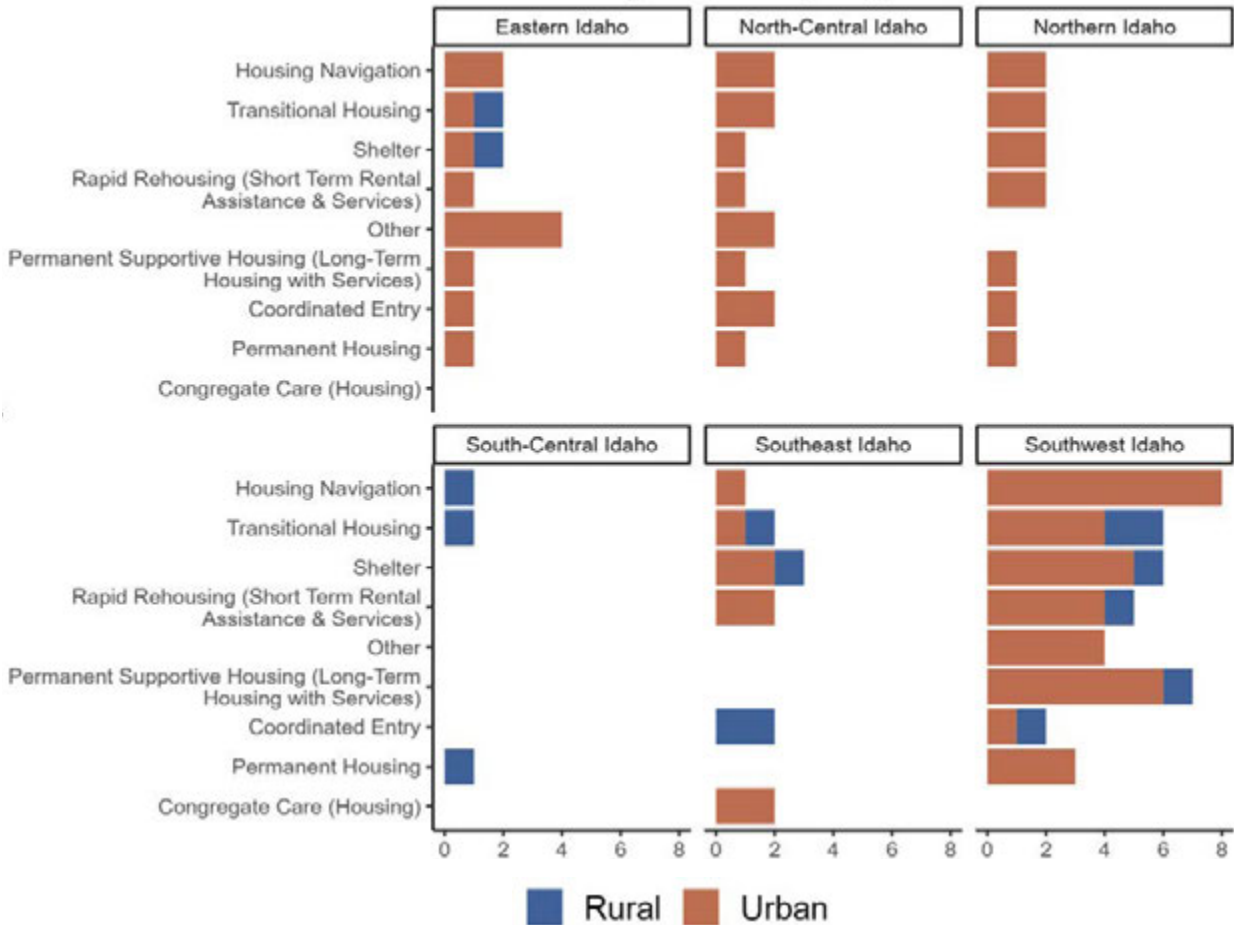
Examining services offered by region (see Figure 14), a large proportion of service providers (and thus services offered) are in Southwestern Idaho. While this trend reflects the population distribution of Idaho to some degree, other parts of the state may potentially be lacking critical services, or may require long travel times to reach those services. South-Central Idaho, as an example, is one of the fastest growing regions in the state, yet appears to be short on many of the services available in Southwestern Idaho. In Idaho, physical health services, child welfare, eviction prevention, anti-trafficking services, and legal support are the most lacking, with legal support falling in last place.

FIGURE 14. SERVICES OFFERED BY REGION



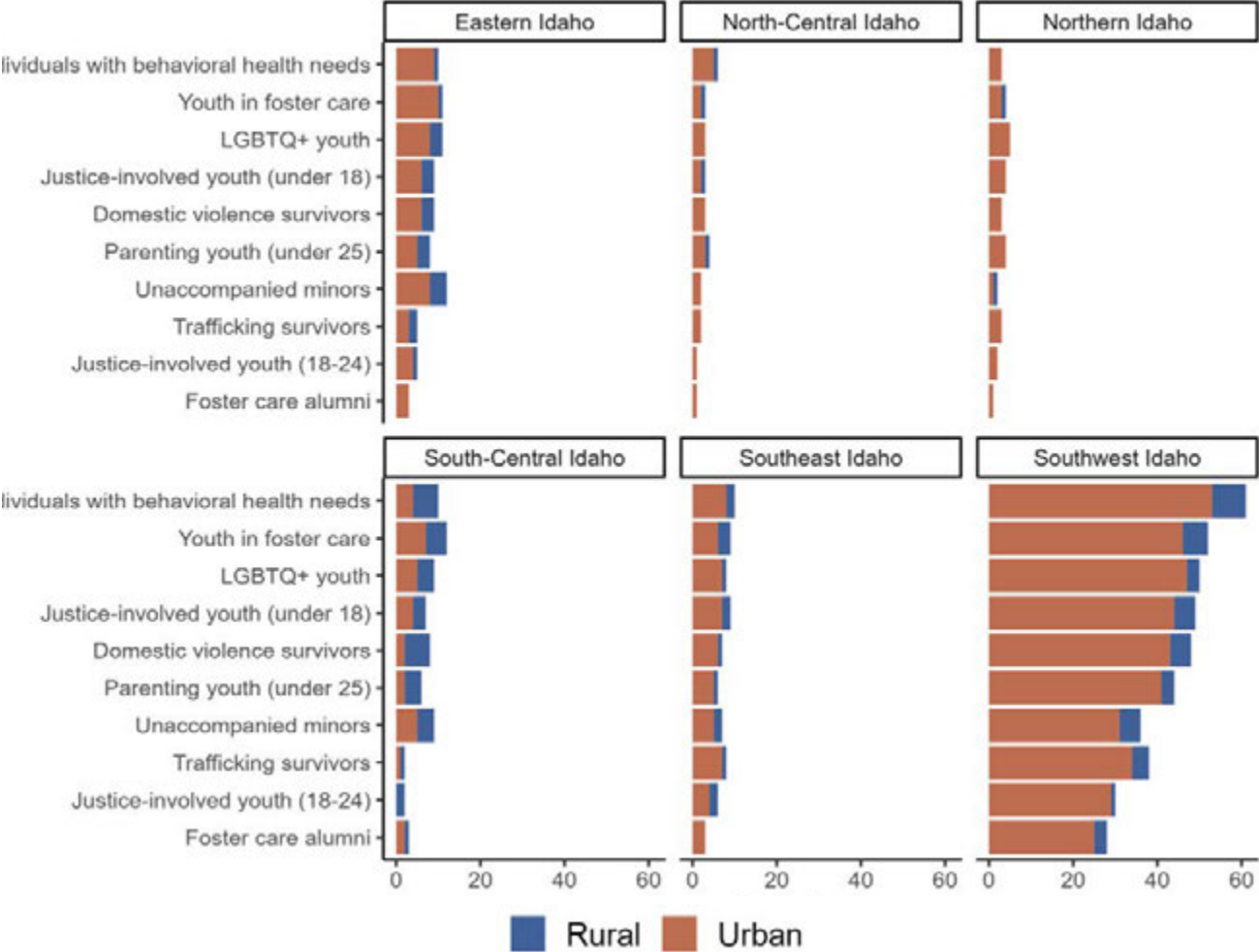
Approximately 1/6th of responding organizations (15%) report offering direct housing services (see Figure 15). Southwestern Idaho contains the largest proportion of these organizations, while South-Central Idaho appears to have the largest shortage of direct housing services available, in addition to the fewer types of services available. This is a notable gap, as Southwestern Idaho is rapidly growing, and shows many indicators of housing crisis over recent years.

FIGURE 15. DIRECT HOUSING SERVICES BY REGION



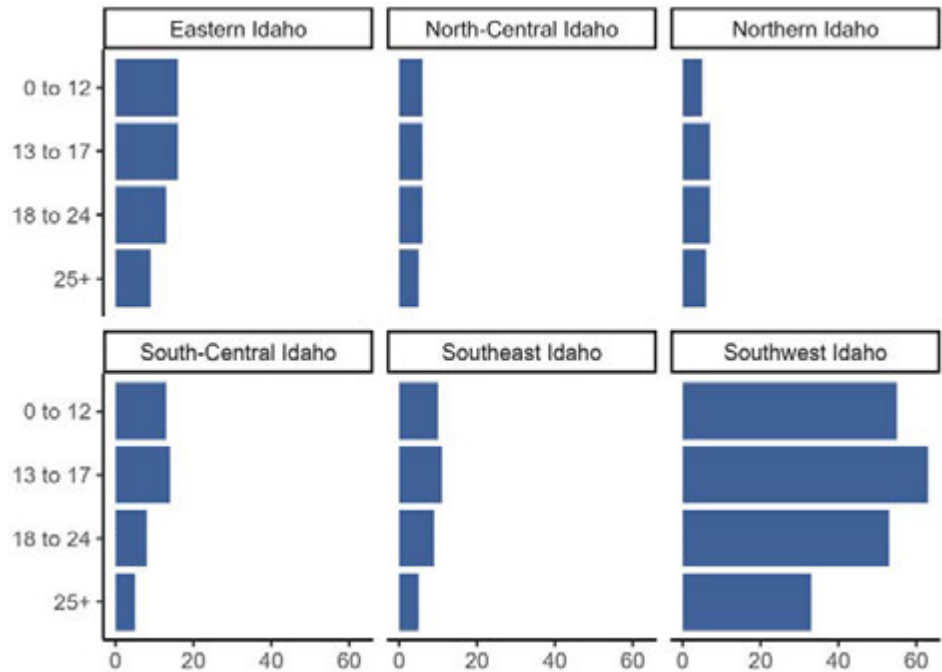
Examining populations served by region, services for foster care alumni and justice-involved youth aged 18 to 24 are limited across the state, especially in Northern, North-Central, and South-Central Idaho. Unaccompanied minors, trafficking survivors, and justice-involved youth aged 18 to 24 also see lower rates of services across the state than other youth groups, (see Figure 16).

FIGURE 16. POPULATIONS SERVED BY REGION



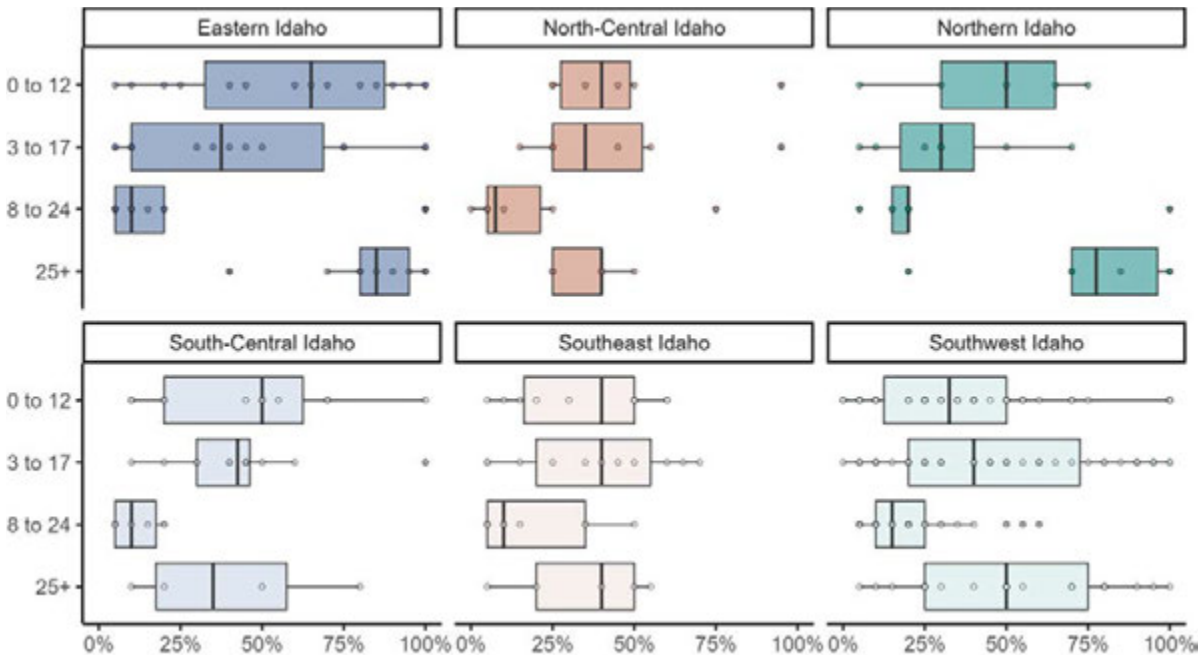
Across Idaho’s regions, there is a fairly even distribution of ages served. The smaller proportion of organizations serving individuals aged 25+ reflects the targeting of the survey (see Figure 17).

FIGURE 17. AGES SERVED BY REGION



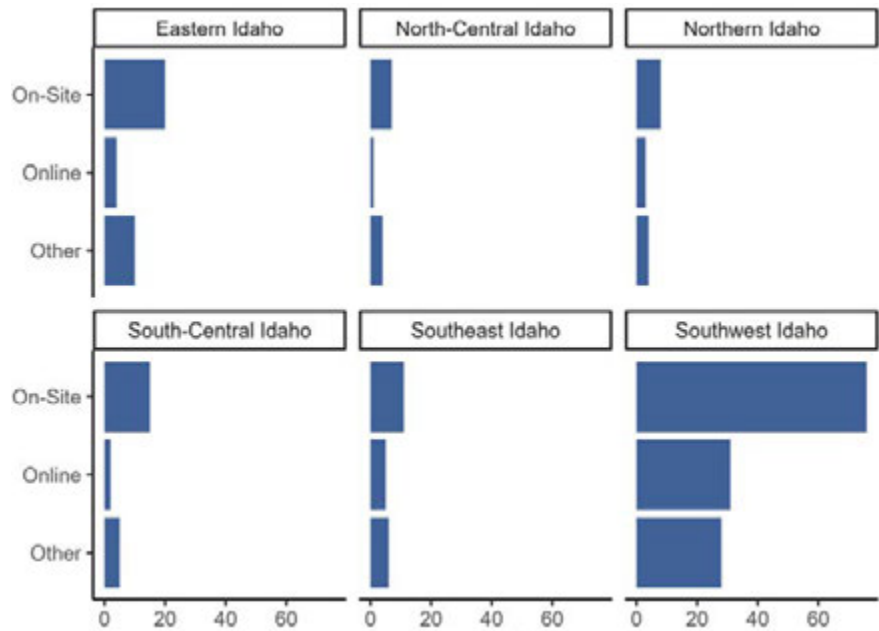
However, when examining the actual reported proportions of clients served, many responding organizations note that they serve fewer clients aged 18 to 24 than other groups (see Figure 18). This result may point to smaller numbers of clients in this age group, but it could also indicate a lack of services for, or a lack of connection with, potential clients in this age group.

FIGURE 18. PROPORTION OF AGES SERVED BY REGION



The provider survey asked organizations how they deliver services, and most provide services on-site, with a smaller proportion offering online services (those responding “other” most commonly referred to phone-based services) (see Figure 19). Online services may help to address transportation barriers, especially for those in rural areas, but appear to be limited in more rural regions of the state. However, online services offered in more populated areas may still be available across the rest of the state.

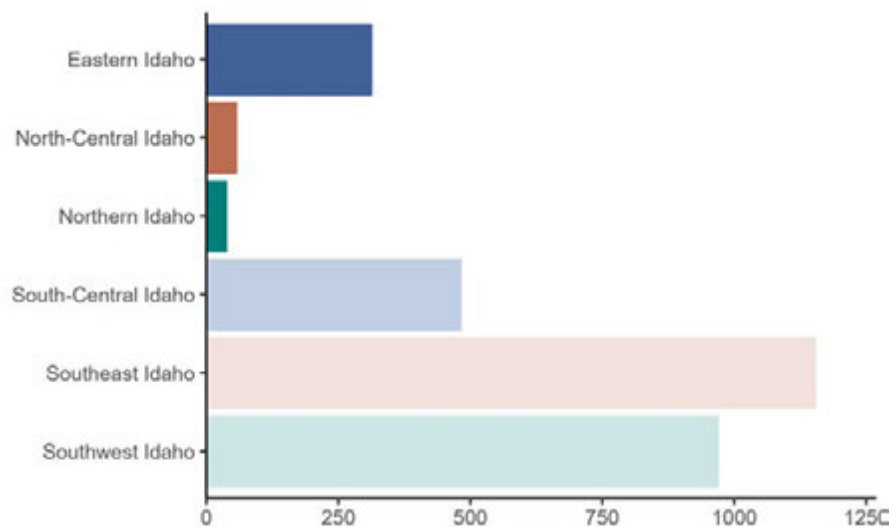
FIGURE 19. SERVICE DELIVERY BY REGION



ORGANIZATIONAL OPERATIONS

To better understand service capacity across the state, the provider survey asked organizations to indicate how many full-time equivalents (FTEs; a full-time employee is one full-time equivalent, while a half-time employee would be 0.5 full-time equivalent) they have dedicated to providing youth services (see Figure 20).

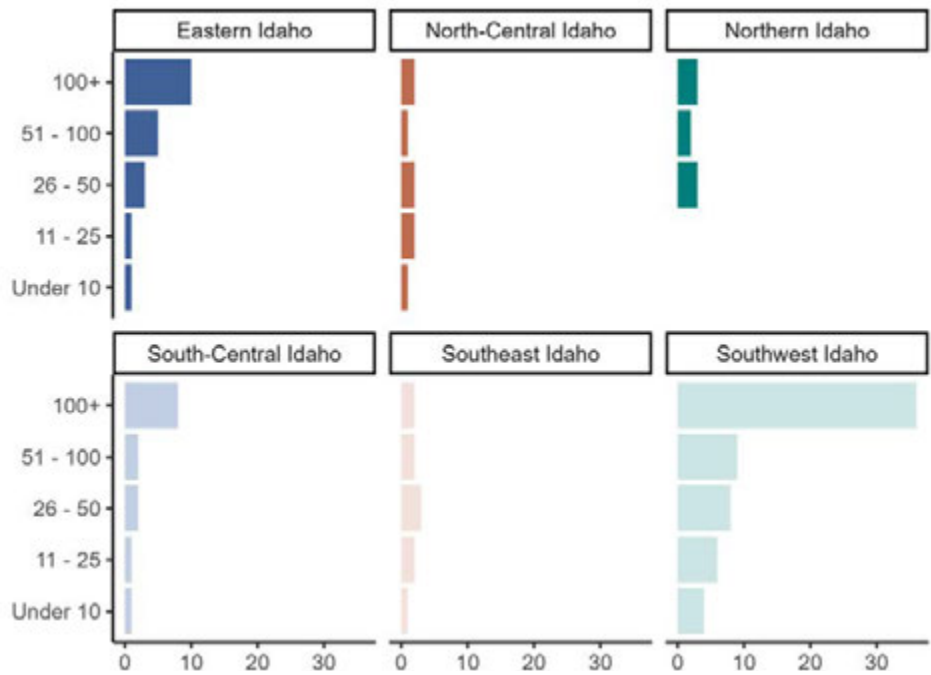
FIGURE 20. NUMBER OF FTEs SERVING YOUTH BY REGION



While some especially large organizations may be impacting these numbers (especially in Southeast Idaho), numbers of FTEs largely reflect Idaho’s population distribution, although South-Central Idaho has a relatively large number of staff serving youth relative to the variety and number of services provided. Northern and North-Central Idaho, on the other hand, may be facing capacity shortages, owing to relatively low numbers of FTEs present in the region.

Switching to the approximate numbers of individuals served by responding organizations as seen in Figure 21, these numbers largely reflect the FTE numbers. Southwest Idaho has the highest proportion of large organizations serving 100+ individuals per month, while Northern and North-Central Idaho have fewer large organizations, which, again, could present service capacity challenges.

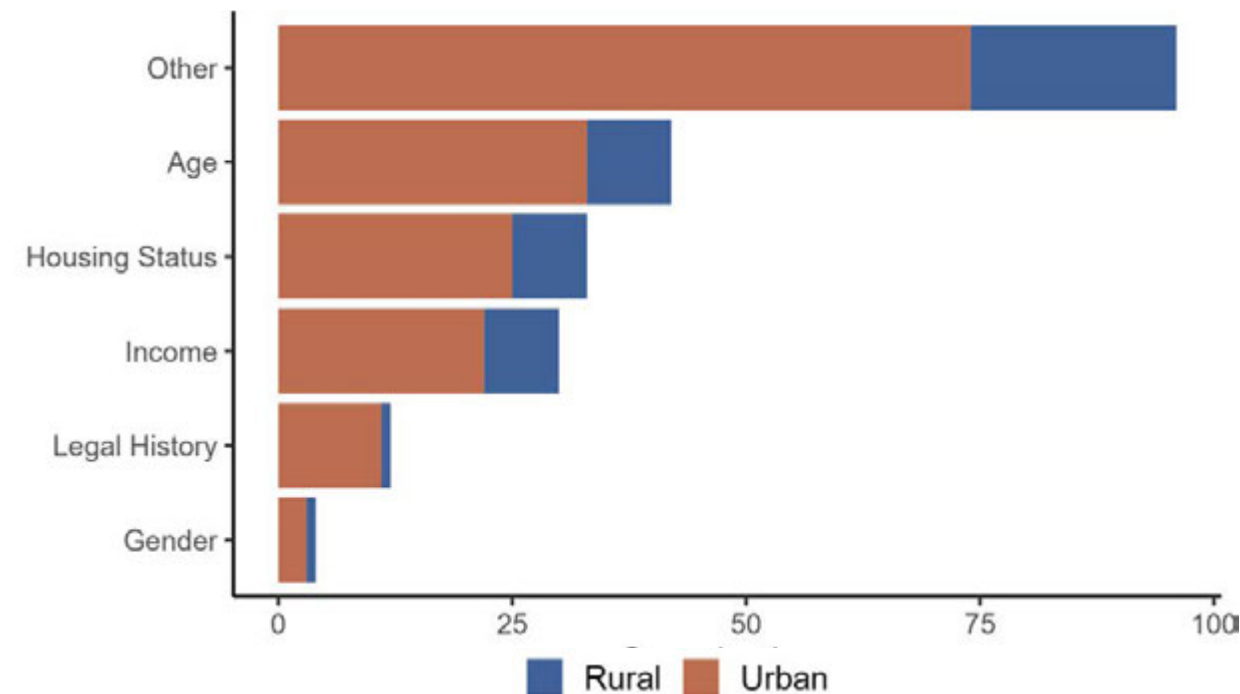
FIGURE 21. INDIVIDUALS SERVED PER MONTH BY REGION



SERVICE NEED

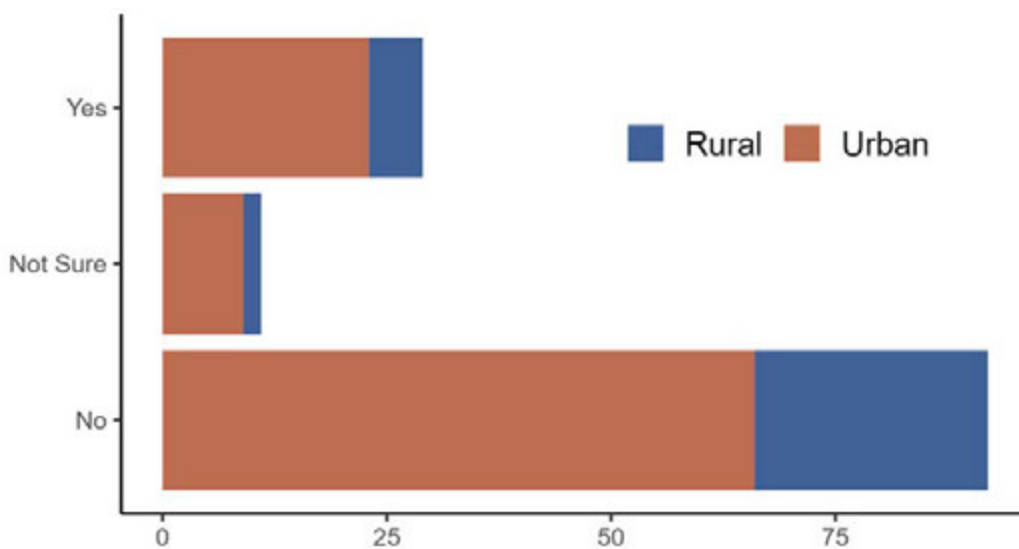
To understand service limitations and opportunities, organizations were asked which criteria they use to determine service eligibility among potential clients (see Figure 22). The most common response, “other,” spanned a broad variety of responses, including victimization, living within a service district, service history, referral, and need. Age was the second most common criteria used for determining service eligibility, followed by housing status and income. Gender was the least commonly used service criteria.

FIGURE 22. CRITERIA FOR SERVICE ELIGIBILITY



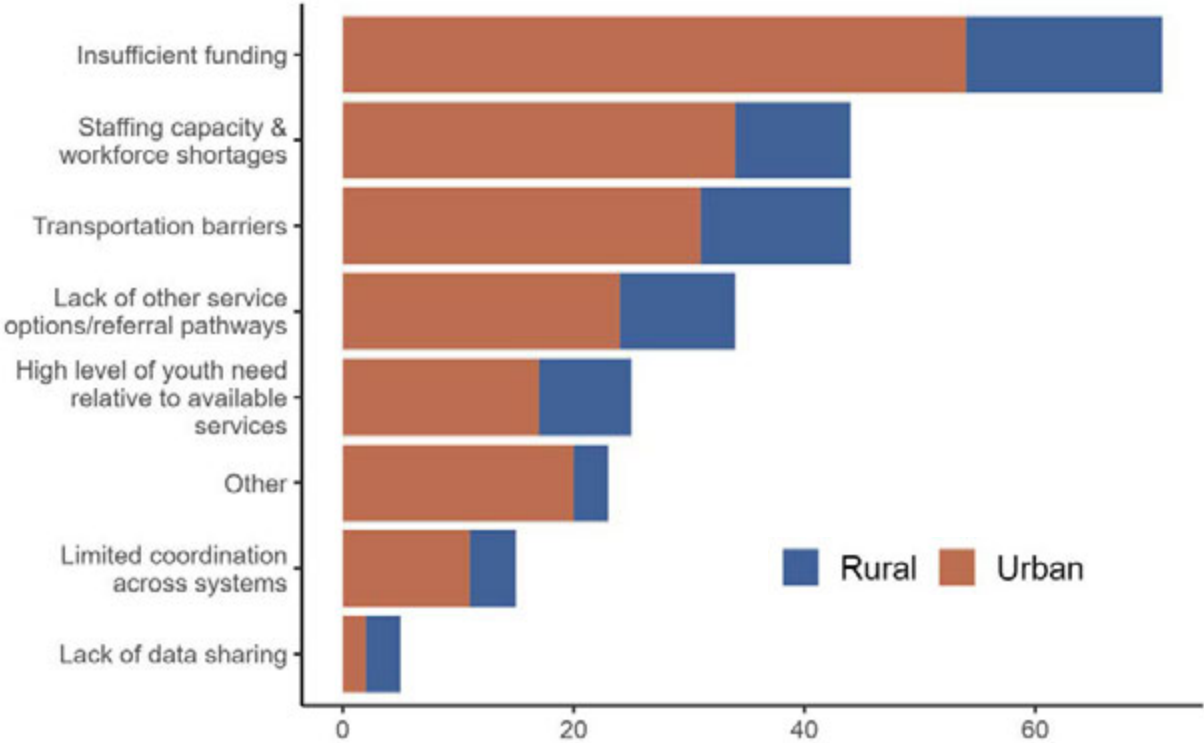
To understand service needs and capacity, the survey asked organizations whether they have a waitlist for services or not (see Figure 23). Most organizations do not, and while rural organizations are more likely to say ‘no’ to this question than ‘yes’, the proportions are not notably different between rural and urban organizations.

FIGURE 23. WAITLIST BY RURALITY



As another way of investigating service needs and capacity, organizations were asked about the challenges they face that most limit their ability to serve Idaho youth under the age of 25 (organizations were allowed to choose up to three from the list). Insufficient funding is the clear top response, followed by staffing capacity and workforce shortages, and transportation barriers (see Figure 24). Rural organizations are most likely to point to insufficient funding as well, but transportation barriers come in second for them.

FIGURE 24. NUMBER OF ORGANIZATION FACING SERVICE CHALLENGES

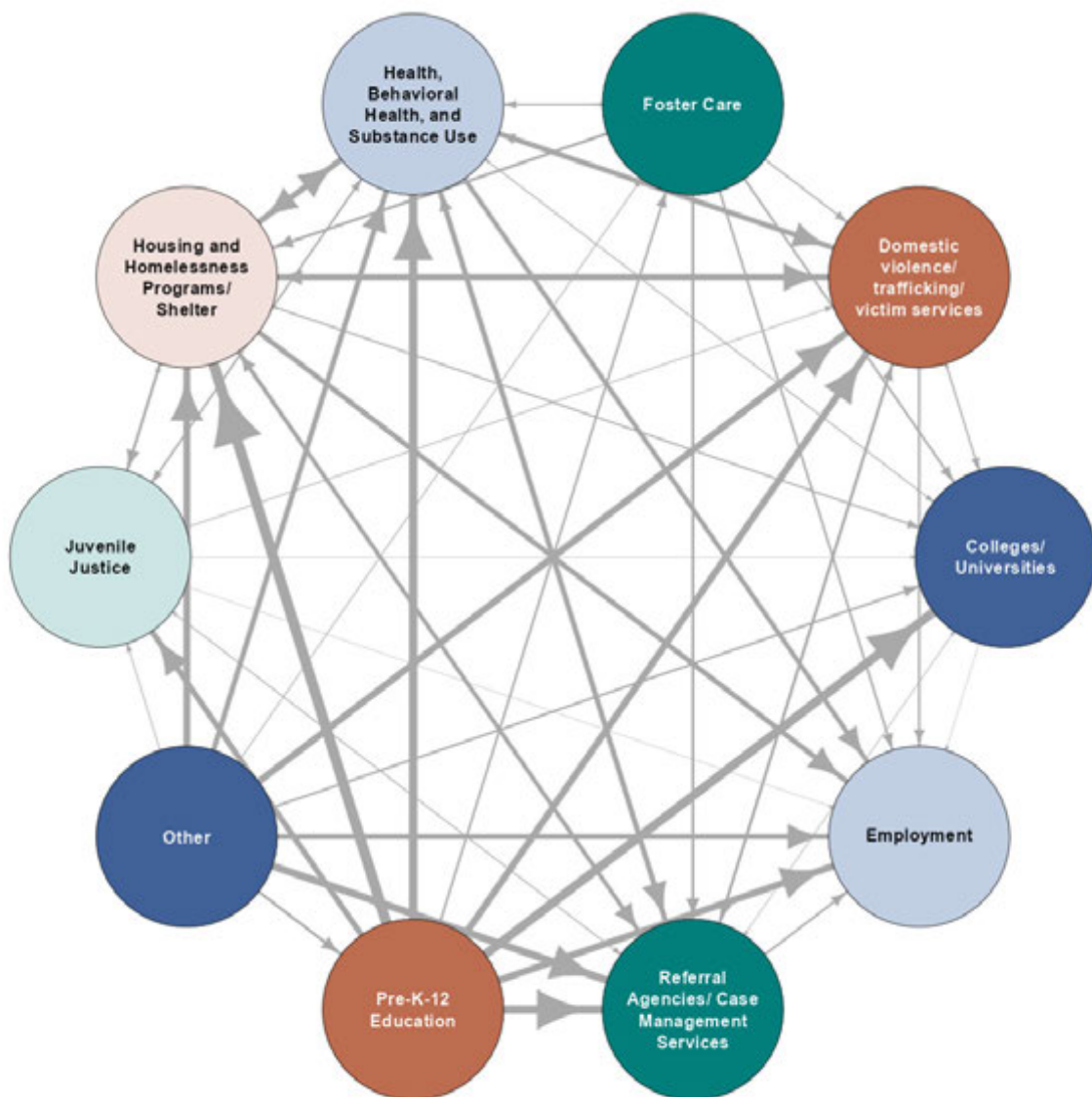


Survey respondents were asked an open-ended question about the top gaps in Idaho’s system for preventing and responding to youth homelessness. After coding those responses for common themes, the top response relates to a shortage of affordable and youth-specific housing options, including shelters. The second theme ties to insufficient funding, specifically inadequate state funding, limited financial resources, and funding restrictions. The third major theme relates to barriers facing youth trying to access services as a result of poor coordination between service agencies, difficulty identifying homeless youth, and state laws requiring parental consent that prevent minors from accessing shelter and support services.

COLLABORATION AND NETWORKING

The provider survey concluded by asking organizations about their collaboration with other service sectors, including referring clients to organizations in other sectors, receiving referrals from other sectors, and coordinating services with other sectors. The results show that Pre-K-12 educational organizations are acting as a clearing house of sorts, driving a high number of referrals to other sectors. Figure 25 illustrates that Pre-K-12 educational organizations drive high numbers of referrals to other sectors with arrows indicating the direction of referral and line thickness in indicating the level of collaboration through referrals (thinner lines illustrate a less strong collaboration between the indicated sectors while thicker lines describe a strong collaboration).

FIGURE 25. SYSTEM REFERRALS MADE



Health, behavioral health, and substance use organizations, on the other hand, receive a large number of referrals from other sectors, as do housing and homelessness programs / shelter organization (see Figure 26).

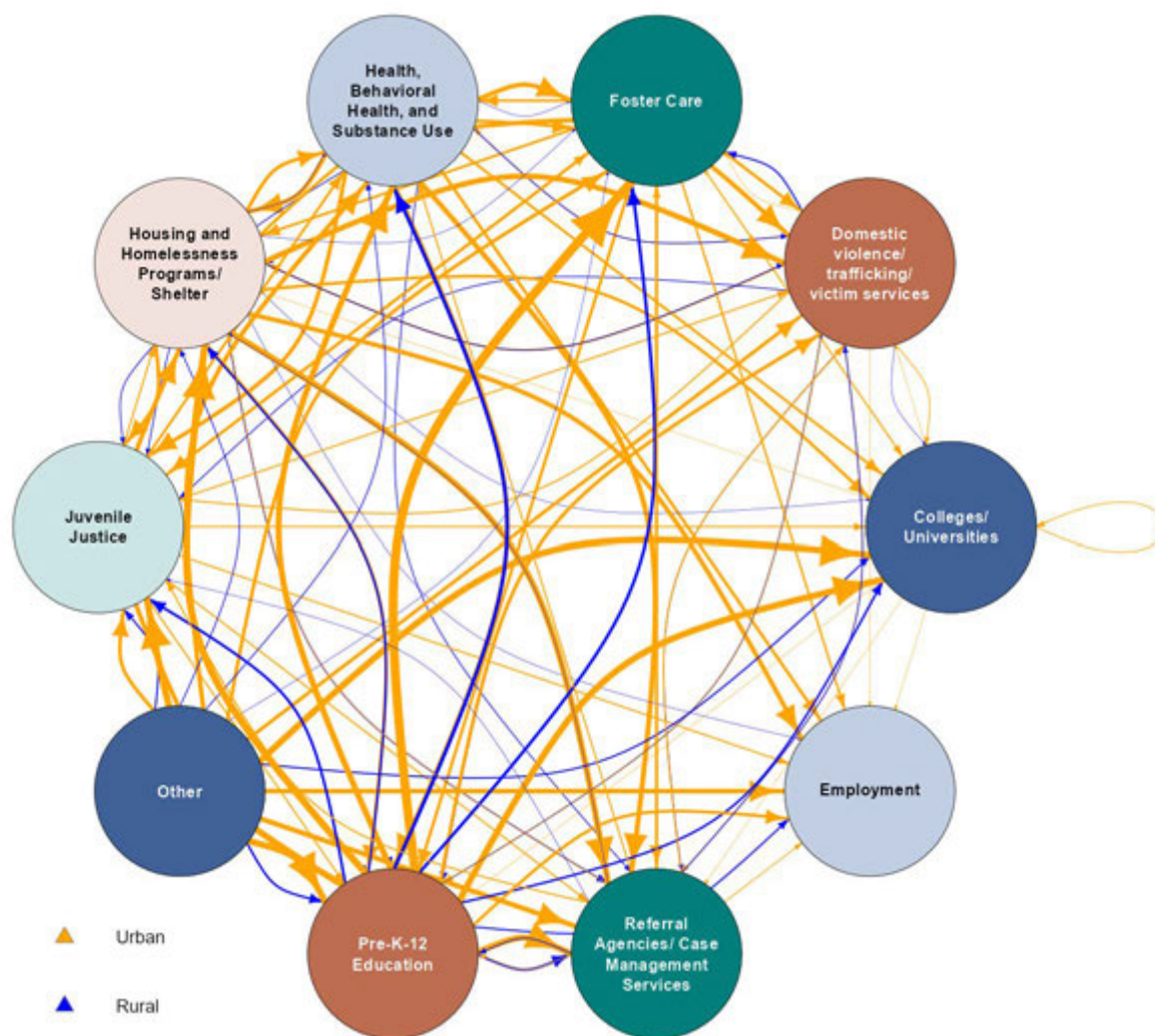
FIGURE 26. SYSTEM REFERRALS RECEIVED



Interestingly, the service coordination network looks somewhat different from the referral networks (see Figure 27). Colleges / universities play a stronger role in service coordination than in service referrals, as do foster care organizations, although, like referrals, much of this coordination is done alongside Pre-K-12 education agencies. Employment organizations appear to show less coordination than others, but this likely stems from employment being the smallest service category in the data.

Most coordination of services is done by urban organizations, while Pre-K-12 education organizations represent the large majority of rural service coordination. This may reflect a ‘hub-and-spokes’ service network, in which rural Pre-K-12 education agencies refer to and coordinate services with larger service agencies in urban areas.

FIGURE 27. COORDINATION OF SERVICES - URBAN/RURAL



These charts provide a snapshot — they do not indicate whether one sector is better coordinated with another. Instead this should be interpreted as a piece of information that can inspire deepened collaboration across sectors, regions, and organizations to better support youth with complex needs.

Gaps

By examining providers serving youth experiencing homelessness and vulnerable youth populations, several gaps in the system are identified.

HOUSING AND SERVICE AVAILABILITY

- Shortage of youth-specific housing options
- Limited direct housing services statewide
- Limited shelter options for youth
- Regional shortages of services (especially South-Central Idaho)
- Limited services for justice-involved youth (18-24)
- Limited services for foster care alumni
- Limited services for trafficking survivors

CAPACITY AND RESOURCES

- Insufficient funding
- Staffing shortages
- Workforce capacity limitations
- Limited organizational capacity in rural regions
- Limited large organizations in Northern and North-Central Idaho

ACCESS AND BARRIERS

- Transportation barriers
- Funding restrictions
- Service eligibility barriers
- Difficulty identifying youth experiencing homelessness

SYSTEM COORDINATION

- Poor coordination across service providers
- Referral gaps across systems
- Limited collaboration across sectors
- Fragmented service delivery

GEOGRAPHIC DISPARITIES

- Service concentration in Southwest Idaho
- Limited services in rural regions
- Long travel distances for services

SERVICE GAPS

- Limited legal services
- Limited eviction prevention services
- Limited physical health services
- Limited child welfare-related services
- Limited anti-trafficking services

POLICY AND STRUCTURAL GAPS

- Parental consent laws creating barriers
- Limited state funding
- Funding structure limitations

RECOMMENDATIONS



TOP PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following ten recommendations were identified as priorities that can have the greatest impact on addressing youth homelessness.

IMMEDIATE IMPACT

These actions directly support youth currently experiencing homelessness.

1. EXPAND YOUTH-DEDICATED HOUSING STATEWIDE.

Increase the supply of youth-specific housing (ages 18–25), prioritizing non-congregate models and regional equity.

2. STRENGTHEN HOUSING PATHWAYS WITH FLEXIBLE AND SUSTAINED SUPPORTS.

Expand rapid rehousing with longer durations, increase permanent supportive housing, and provide flexible funding to remove barriers to housing placement.

3. BUILD A YOUTH-CENTERED CRISIS RESPONSE SYSTEM.

Develop youth-specific shelter options and redesign Coordinated Entry to be youth-appropriate, low-barrier, and navigation-focused.

SYSTEM PERFORMANCE

These share improvements for the way the system functions and delivers services.

4. ESTABLISH A STATEWIDE “NO WRONG DOOR” ACCESS MODEL.

Ensure youth can access services through multiple entry points (schools, providers, community hubs, etc.) with consistent pathways to housing and support.

5. SHIFT FROM REFERRAL-BASED SYSTEMS TO ACTIVE NAVIGATION AND REAL-TIME CAPACITY.

Develop real-time service availability tracking and move from passive referrals to active placement and navigation support.

6. INVEST IN A YOUTH HOMELESSNESS WORKFORCE STRATEGY.

Address staffing shortages and burnout through competitive compensation, training, and expansion of peer support and navigation roles.

7. EXPAND TRANSPORTATION ACCESS AS A CORE SERVICE COMPONENT.

Integrate transportation supports (vouchers, gas cards, mobile services) into crisis response, housing access, and service delivery.

LONG-TERM CHANGE

These offer longer-term structural changes to reduce inflow and strengthen long-term outcomes.

8. REDUCE INFLOW THROUGH SYSTEMS CHANGE AND PREVENTION.

Ensure no youth exits public systems without a housing plan and expand family conflict prevention, school-based identification, and behavioral health supports.

9. BUILD REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE FOR RURAL SERVICE DELIVERY.

Develop regional service hubs, shared staffing models, and coordinated multi-county approaches to address rural service gaps.

10. CENTER YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND LIVED EXPERIENCE.

Expand youth action board engagement, compensate youth for participation, and scale peer-led navigation and outreach models.

The recommendations are grouped into four strategic action areas to support implementation and cross-sector alignment:

Housing Exits	Crisis Response	Systems Change and Prevention	Youth Empowerment
Supporting youth currently experiencing homelessness	Strengthening response when youth newly experience homelessness	Reducing inflow into homelessness	Reducing inflow into homelessness

These intervention recommendations respond to the identified gaps. Recommendations do not strictly correlate with individual gaps; recommended interventions often address multiple gaps. Ultimately, through these final recommendations, this report seeks to provide a comprehensive response to youth homelessness that operates across the full continuum of housing stability.

STRATEGIC ACTION AREA GAPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final section provides more detail on the gaps and recommendations for each strategic action area.

Housing Exits	Goal: Ensure youth currently experiencing homelessness can quickly access stable, appropriate housing.
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Key Gaps

- Severe housing shortage limits access statewide
- Youth-dedicated housing is rare and often transitional or congregate
- Most providers rely on resource lists rather than direct housing solutions
- Limited access to rental assistance and higher intensity supports
- Existing programs are not consistently aligned with the intensity and complexity of youth needs, particularly for youth with co-occurring behavioral health challenges, histories of trauma, or limited rental readiness

Recommended Actions

Expand Youth Housing Supply

- Develop youth-dedicated units (ages 18–25) in all regions.
- Prioritize non-congregate models (scattered site, small-scale, converted units).

Increase Housing Access Supports

- Expand rental assistance and flexible funding.
- Provide tenant education and landlord engagement strategies.
- Invest in flexible funding mechanisms that allow providers to address immediate barriers to housing placement including application fees, deposits, identification, and transportation.

Scale Housing Interventions

- Expand longer-duration housing supports, particularly within rapid rehousing models, to better reflect youth developmental needs and pathways to stability.

- Increase integration of housing services with wraparound services, including behavioral health, life skills, and employment supports.
- Develop permanent supportive housing for high-needs youth.
- Increase access to youth-specific housing navigation services.

Crisis Response

Goal: Provide immediate, safe, and effective support when youth experience a housing crisis.

Key Gaps

- Lack of youth-specific shelter options
- Coordinated Entry systems are not designed for youth
- Limited diversion and rapid resolution tools
- Rural areas lack crisis response infrastructure
- Youth face barriers due to stigma, fear, and system mistrust
- Transportation barriers significantly limit youth ability to access services, particularly in rural areas where services are geographically dispersed
- Referral systems often lack real-time availability, resulting in “dead-end” referrals where no actual service openings exist
- Youth awareness of available services and how to access them remains limited, particularly for those not already connected to formal systems

Recommended Actions

Strengthen Youth Crisis Infrastructure

- Develop youth-specific shelters (ages 18–24) that feature low-barrier access, flexible rules (curfew, length of stay), and onsite case management

Redesign Coordinated Entry for Youth

- Create youth-specific prioritization criteria
- Eliminate waitlists for youth under 25
- Shift from referral-based models to active navigation models that support youth through successful service connection
- Develop real-time service availability tracking to strengthen Coordinated Entry and reduce ineffective referrals
- Enable mobile and community-based enrollment (schools, justice systems)

Expand Diversion and Rapid Resolution

- Provide flexible financial assistance (rent, deposits, transportation, IDs)
- Implement youth-centered diversion practices
- Support safe mediation when appropriate
- Establish Statewide Access Points
- Expand “no wrong door” model in every county
- Utilize community hubs (schools, libraries, youth centers)
- Establish flexible transportation supports (gas cards, transit vouchers, rideshare partnerships) as a core component of crisis response
- Deploy mobile services for rural communities
- Expand youth-centered outreach and navigation tools including mobile-first platforms and peer-led engagement strategies

Systems Change and Prevention

Goal: Prevent youth from entering homelessness and improve transitions from public systems.

Key Gaps

System Discharges into Homelessness

- Youth exit foster care, justice, and behavioral health systems without housing
- Lack of coordinated discharge planning

Policy Barriers

- Parental consent laws delay or prevent access to services
- Provider confusion regarding consent requirements
- Funding structures are often too rigid to meet the real-time and flexible needs of youth experiencing housing instability

Family Instability

- Family conflict is a primary driver of youth homelessness
- Limited access to prevention and behavioral health services

System Fragmentation

- Weak coordination across sectors
- Limited shared data and accountability
- Rural service delivery systems lack coordinated regional infrastructure resulting in fragmented and inconsistent access across counties

Capacity

- Workforce capacity constraints (staffing shortages, burnout, and limited compensation) significantly limit the ability of providers to meet youth demand

Recommended Actions

Reform Public System Discharges

- Ensure no youth exits systems without a housing plan especially in foster care, juvenile and adult justice, and behavioral health systems
- Require pre-release housing planning (≥60 days)
- Embed housing specialists in system settings

Strengthen Policy and System Alignment

- Reform and clarify parental consent policies
- Expand shared staffing and regional service delivery models to support multi-county coordination and reduce rural service fragmentation (could be through formal MOUs across systems - child welfare, justice, behavioral health)
- Create a statewide Theory of Change
- Establish shared accountability metrics and goals
- Support cross-training of staff across housing, behavioral health, education, and justice systems to improve integrated service delivery

Expand Prevention and Early Intervention

- Scale family conflict mediation and support services
- Provide respite care for high-need families
- Strengthen school-based identification and referral systems

- Expand youth service hubs/drop-in centers
- Improve behavioral health access statewide

Improve Data Systems and Infrastructure

- Align Homeless Management Information Systems across Idaho's Continuums of Care
- Develop cross-system data sharing agreements
- Standardize housing status screening at intake
- Establish statewide performance benchmarks

Invest in the System

- Develop and fund a statewide youth homelessness workforce strategy, including competitive compensation, training, and retention incentives particularly for rural providers
- Increase availability of flexible and braided funding streams that allow providers to respond to immediate and individualized youth needs

Youth Empowerment

Goal: Ensure youth with lived experience are central to system design, implementation, and evaluation.

Key Gaps

- Youth are often expected to navigate complex systems independently without sufficient support, contributing to disengagement and unmet needs
- Youth engagement is strong in some areas but inconsistent statewide
- Limited compensation and leadership pathways
- Peer support models are underdeveloped
- Youth input is not consistently integrated into decision-making

Recommended Actions

Strengthen Youth Leadership Structures

- Expand and formalize the Youth Action Board
- Ensure compensation for all youth participation
- Embed youth in governance and decision-making roles

Build Peer Support Workforce

- Expand peer navigation models that pair youth with lived experience to support service access, engagement, and housing stability
- Create career pathways and credentialing opportunities
- Provide training (trauma-informed care, housing navigation, etc.) as well as clinical supervision and support

Embed Youth in System Design

- Require youth input in program design, evaluation, and policy development
- Expand peer-led outreach and engagement strategies
- Invest in youth-facing, youth-inspired communication tools that clearly and simply explain how to access services including "start here" entry points

Scale Effective Engagement Models

- Build on successful approaches such as the youth questionnaire and Youth Action Board
- Strengthen partnerships with trusted youth-serving organizations

CONCLUSION

This assessment highlights that youth homelessness in Idaho is both a statewide challenge and a solvable one. Across data sources, youth engagement, and provider input, consistent themes emerged: youth face significant barriers to stable housing, services are unevenly distributed across regions, and systems often lack coordination and youth-centered design. At the same time, Idaho benefits from strong partnerships, committed providers, and growing momentum to strengthen prevention, crisis response, and housing pathways. By centering youth voices, improving system coordination, and expanding housing and supportive services, Idaho has a meaningful opportunity to reduce inflow into homelessness and improve long-term outcomes for youth across the state.

The recommendations outlined in this report provide a roadmap for coordinated action through strengthening housing exits, improving crisis response, advancing systems change and prevention, and elevating youth leadership. Implementing these strategies will require sustained collaboration among state and local partners, continued investment in youth-specific solutions, and a shared commitment to data-informed decision making. With coordinated leadership and continued engagement of youth and community partners, Idaho can build a more responsive, equitable, and effective system - ensuring that homelessness among young people becomes rare, brief, and non-recurring.



APPENDICES



APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACRONYMS

AFCARS	Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System
CASA	Court Appointed Special Advocates
CoC	Continuum of Care
CPS	Child Protective Services
HIC	House Idaho Collaborative
IDHW	Idaho Department of Health and Welfare
FCI	Fostering Court Improvement
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
HMIS	Homeless Management Information System
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and additional identities
McKinney- Vento	McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act
OPH	Our Path Home
YAB	Youth Action Board

DEFINITIONS

At-Risk Youth

Youth who are not currently experiencing homelessness but face conditions that increase the likelihood of housing instability or homelessness, including system involvement, family conflict, economic hardship, or unsafe living environments.

Behavioral Health Services

Services that address mental health and substance use needs.

Child Welfare Involvement

Youth involved with child welfare systems, including foster care, child protective services, or family preservation services.

Continuum of Care (CoC)

A regional or local planning body responsible for coordinating housing and services funding for individuals and families experiencing homelessness, designated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Coordinated Entry

A standardized process used to assess, prioritize, and refer individuals experiencing homelessness to appropriate housing and services.

Doubled-Up

A living situation in which individuals or families temporarily stay with friends or relatives due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar crisis. This category is included under the McKinney-Vento

definition but not the HUD definition of homelessness.

Equity-Focused Approach

A framework that prioritizes identifying and addressing disparities in outcomes and access to services across populations.

Homelessness

Individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Definitions vary across systems, including the HUD definition and the broader McKinney-Vento definition used in education.

Housing Instability

Situations where individuals lack stable or permanent housing but may not meet formal definitions of homelessness, including frequent moves, doubled-up arrangements, or risk of eviction.

Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)

A local or statewide data system used to collect information about individuals accessing homelessness services.

Justice System Involvement

Youth involvement with juvenile justice or criminal justice systems, including detention, probation, or incarceration.

McKinney-Vento Definition of Homelessness

Children and youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including those who are doubled-up, living in shelters, or staying in places not meant for habitation.

Mixed-Methods Approach

A research approach that integrates quantitative and qualitative data.

Regions

Idaho is organized into multiple regional frameworks across systems, including education, corrections, and health. For the purposes of this report, references to regions reflect Idaho's housing and homelessness planning regions (see Figure 28).

FIGURE 28. IDAHO HOUSING REGIONS

REGION	COUNTIES
1	Benewah, Bonner, Boundary, Kootenai, Shoshone
2	Clearwater, Idaho, Latah, Lewis, Nez Perce
3	Adams, Boise, Canyon, Elmore, Gem, Owyhee, Payette, Valley, Washington
4	Blaine, Camas, Cassia, Gooding, Jerome, Lincoln, Minidoka, Twin Falls
5	Bannock, Bear Lake, Bingham, Caribou, Franklin, Oneida, Power
6	Bonneville, Butte, Clark, Custer, Fremont, Jefferson, Lemhi, Madison, Teton
7	Ada



Trauma-Informed Approach

A framework recognizing the impact of trauma and emphasizing safety, trust, and empowerment in engagement and service delivery.

Unaccompanied Youth

Youth experiencing homelessness who are not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.

Unsheltered

Individuals living in places not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, abandoned buildings, or encampments.

Youth

For the purposes of this report, youth refers to individuals' aged 0-24.

Youth Action Board (YAB)

A group of young people with lived experience of homelessness or housing instability who provide guidance, feedback, and leadership for planning and decision-making.

Youth-Centered Approach

A framework that prioritizes youth voice, lived experience, and participation in program design and evaluation.

APPENDIX B: YOUTH QUESTIONNAIRE

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT AND RESULTS

In regards to distribution, providers selected which questions from the 16-question bank they'd like to include in their organization's questionnaire distribution. The questionnaire was further tailorable to either be shared as a paper version or an online SurveyMonkey, and all providers who agreed to collect questionnaire responses received individualized promotional flyers.

To encourage responses, the questionnaire was written at a fourth-grade level, making it accessible and easy to understand. The youth questionnaire was anonymous. It was available from December 22, 2025 - February 28, 2026, for the purposes of analysis for this report, but will continue to be available through the Idaho Housing and Finance Association for continued collection and future analysis. Questions covered demographics, types of housing instability experienced, resource needs, barriers to services, and opportunities to improve systems. The questionnaire sought responses from Idaho residents under the age of 25 who have experienced some degree of housing instability and/or accessed resources or services.

The project used multiple Survey Monkey collectors, including individualized collectors for providers to distribute and a general collector for distribution through the Youth Action Board and direct outreach from the Idaho Housing and Finance Association. The Youth Action Board provided feedback and shared out social media content promoting the youth questionnaire. The following organizations received the questionnaire:

- Boise Libraries
- Boise Rescue Mission
- Boise School District
- Canopy Village
- CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) of Southwest Idaho
- Club Inc.
- Coeur d'Alene School District
- Community Youth in Action / Support, Prevention, and Resource Center (SPARC)
- Crisis Center of South Central Idaho
- East Idaho Youth Home
- Hays House
- Heritage Health
- Idaho Department of Juvenile Corrections
- Idaho Falls YMCA
- Idaho Youth Ranch - Coeur d'Alene
- Lewis Clark Valley Youth Resource Center
- Nampa Family Justice Center
- Nez Perce Tribal Housing Authority
- ProActive Youth and Family Crisis Center
- Safe House - Twin Falls
- Simply Hope
- South Central Community Action Partnership
- The Village
- Twin Falls Optimist House
- Valley House
- Valley Mission
- West Central Mountains Youth Advocacy Coalition

Respondents were asked about their interactions with other sectors which included if (1) they have ever been in foster care or (2) spent time in juvenile detention or jail / prison. One quarter (25%) of respondents noted that they have been in foster care, while nearly one third (18%) indicated that they have spent time in juvenile detention or jail / prison.

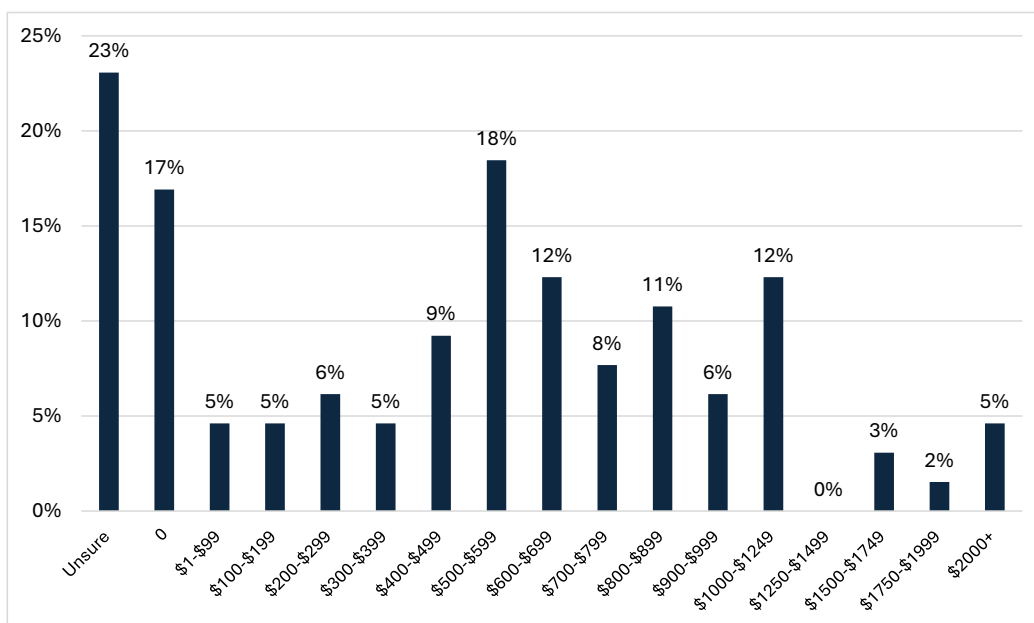
EXPANDED QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Respondents were asked open-ended questions; the summary of responses for each of these questions is shared below with the number at the end indicating the number of responses that were categorized in that theme.

- When you did not have a safe or steady place to live, what caused it?
 - Household conflict including divorce, getting kicked out (22)
 - Guardian substance use (10)
 - Finances, including job loss (10)
 - Guardian abuse or neglect (9)
 - Guardian death (3)
 - Other responses included: Aging out of foster care, fear for safety (gunshots in neighborhood), overcrowding, and eviction
- What things or people helped you when you didn't have a safe or steady place to live?
 - Family, friends, or others (45)
 - Nothing / no one (8)
 - Nonprofits (4)
 - Youth center (4)
 - Food (3)
 - Other responses included: Reading books, resources, group homes, dog
- What help do you wish you had when you didn't have a safe or steady place to live?
 - Trustworthy, caring adults (21)
 - Financial support (11)
 - Safe space to stay (11)
 - Physical supports including food, clothes (8)
 - Easy resource navigation(4)
 - Remove unsafe people (4)
 - Mental health support (2)
 - Improved systems including Child Protective Services, police (2)
 - Meaningful support, not temporary fixes

The questionnaire asked an open-ended question about affordable monthly rent; the results are summarized in Figure 29. Most respondents (54%) indicated that they could afford \$999 per month or less, this excludes responses that indicated \$0 which made up 12% of all responses.

FIGURE 29. YOUTH QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS | WHAT AMOUNT OF RENT WOULD BE AFFORDABLE TO YOU (MONTHLY)?



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