

Thurston County Rent Assistance Survey 2023

Survey of Thurston County residents who received COVID-19 rent assistance, also known as Emergency Rent Assistance Program (ERAP) and Treasury Rent Assistance Program (T-RAP).



Elisa Sparkman, Communications Specialist
Office of Housing & Homeless Prevention
Thurston County Public Health & Social Services
412 Lilly Rd. NE Olympia, WA 98506

COVID-19 rent assistance (ERAP & T-RAP) in Thurston County

- Just over \$53.5 million in rent and utility assistance to Thurston County residents from 2020-2023.
- Funded by CARES Act and American Rescue Plan Act specifically for communities to implement the Emergency Rent Assistance Program and the Treasury Rent Assistance Program.
- In August, survey sent via email to 1,982 ERAP & T-RAP clients.

Purpose of survey: to learn how this program impacted Thurston County renters and what the current needs are for rent assistance.

Survey type & tool: Online survey made with SurveyMonkey in English and Spanish. The survey link was sent via email directly to rent assistance clients.



Estimated response rate: Approximately 30%

541 eligible, complete surveys included in data.

Response rate is estimated because exact number of recipients is unknown.

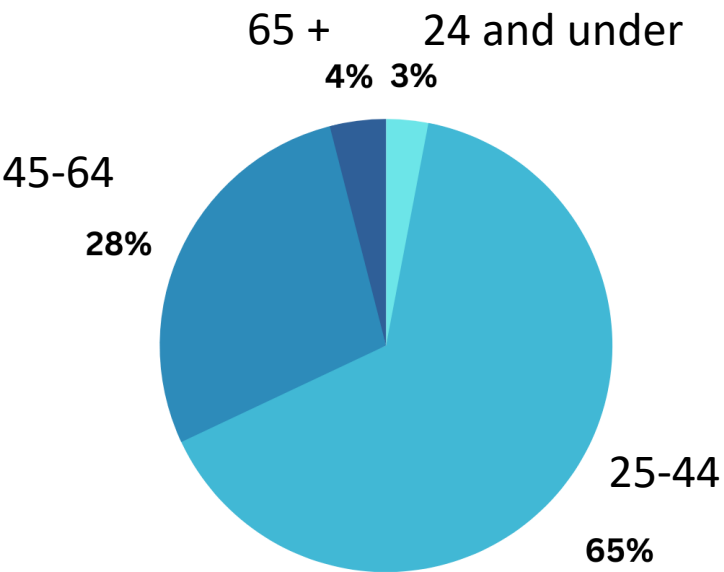
- Duplicate email addresses
- Ineligible recipients
- Undeliverable emails

Incentive offered: 15 random winners

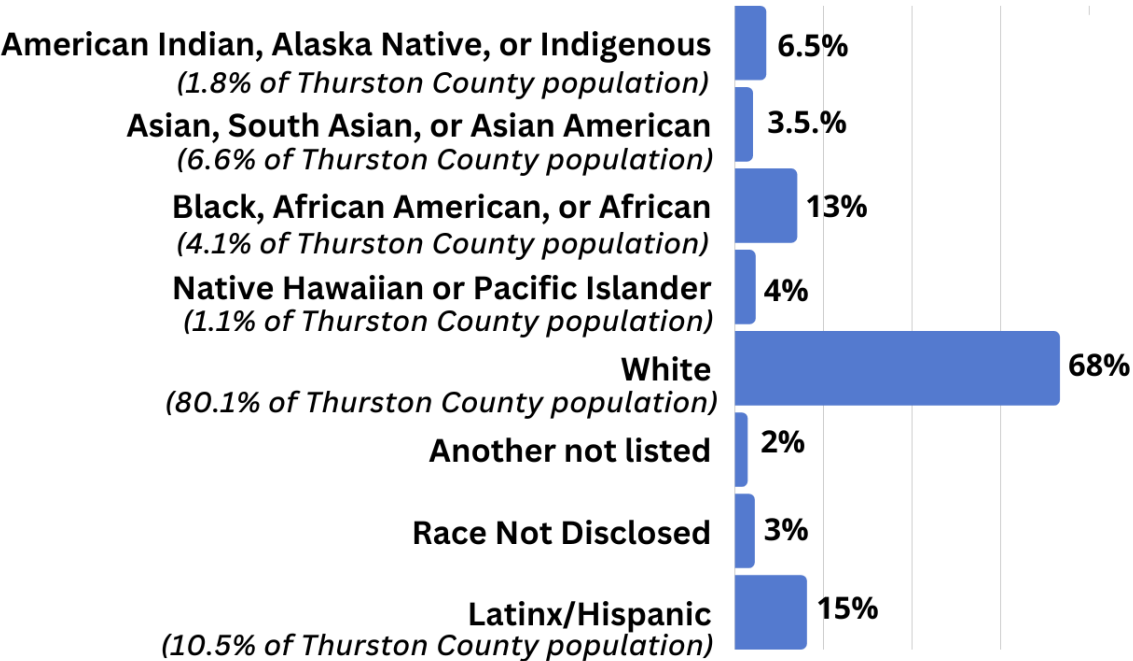


Respondent Demographics – Heads of Household

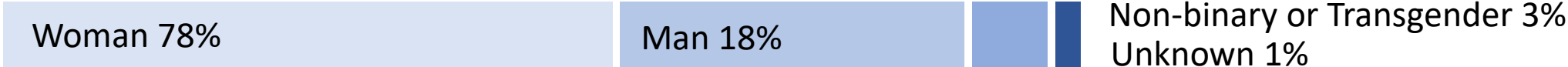
Age



Race & Ethnicity

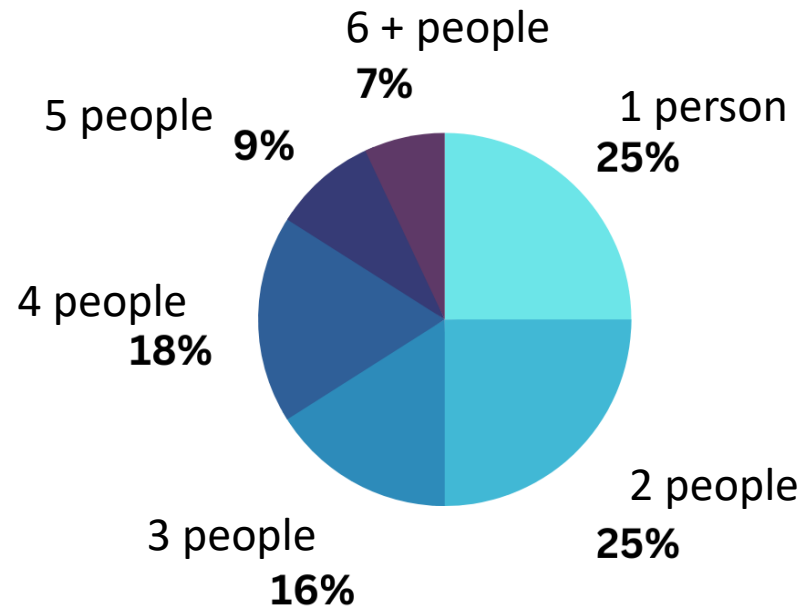


Gender Identity



Household Type

Household Size

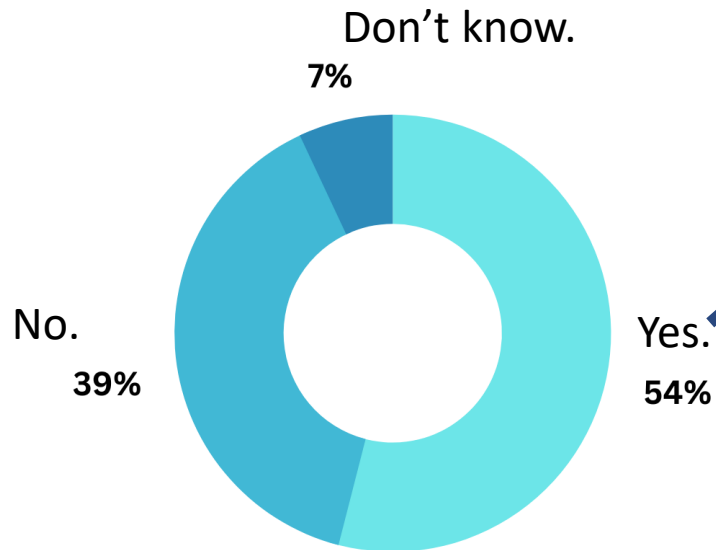


What is your current living situation?

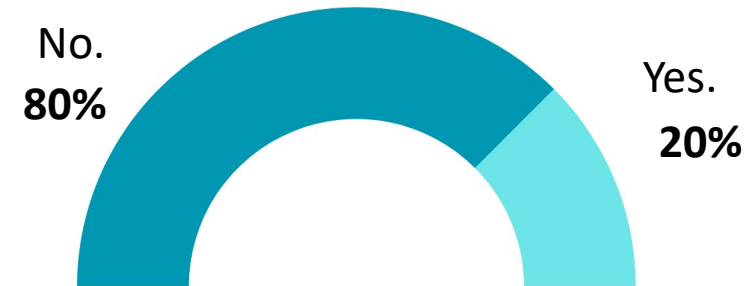
- 19 households – homeless, in-between places or living with friends & family.
- 2 households no longer rent because they now own a home.
- Remaining responses varied among common rental situations. Over half of respondents rent an apartment.

Utility Assistance

Did you receive utility assistance along with rent?



Did you receive a utility shut-off notice after receiving utility assistance?



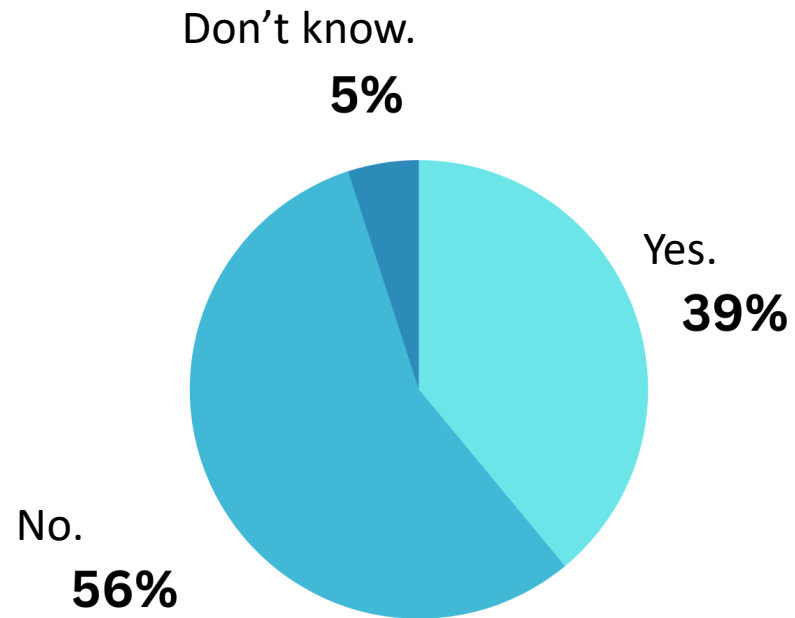
Of those who received a shut-off notice.

76% I paid before my utilities were shut off.

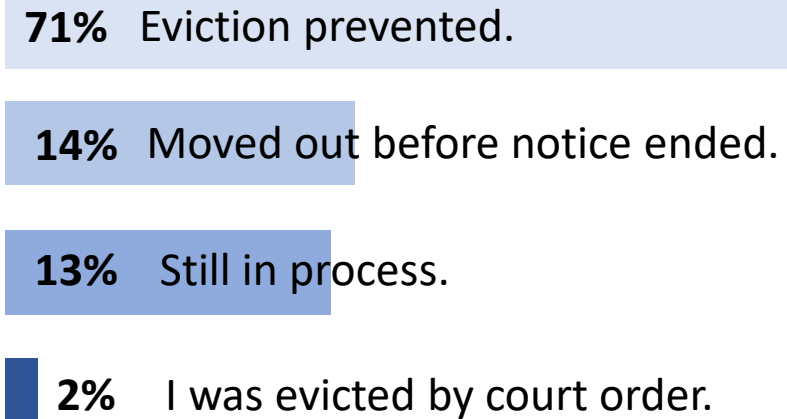
19% My utilities were shut off, but they're back on now.

Evictions

Were you served a notice to pay or vacate *after* receiving rent assistance?



What was the outcome of the pay or vacate notice?

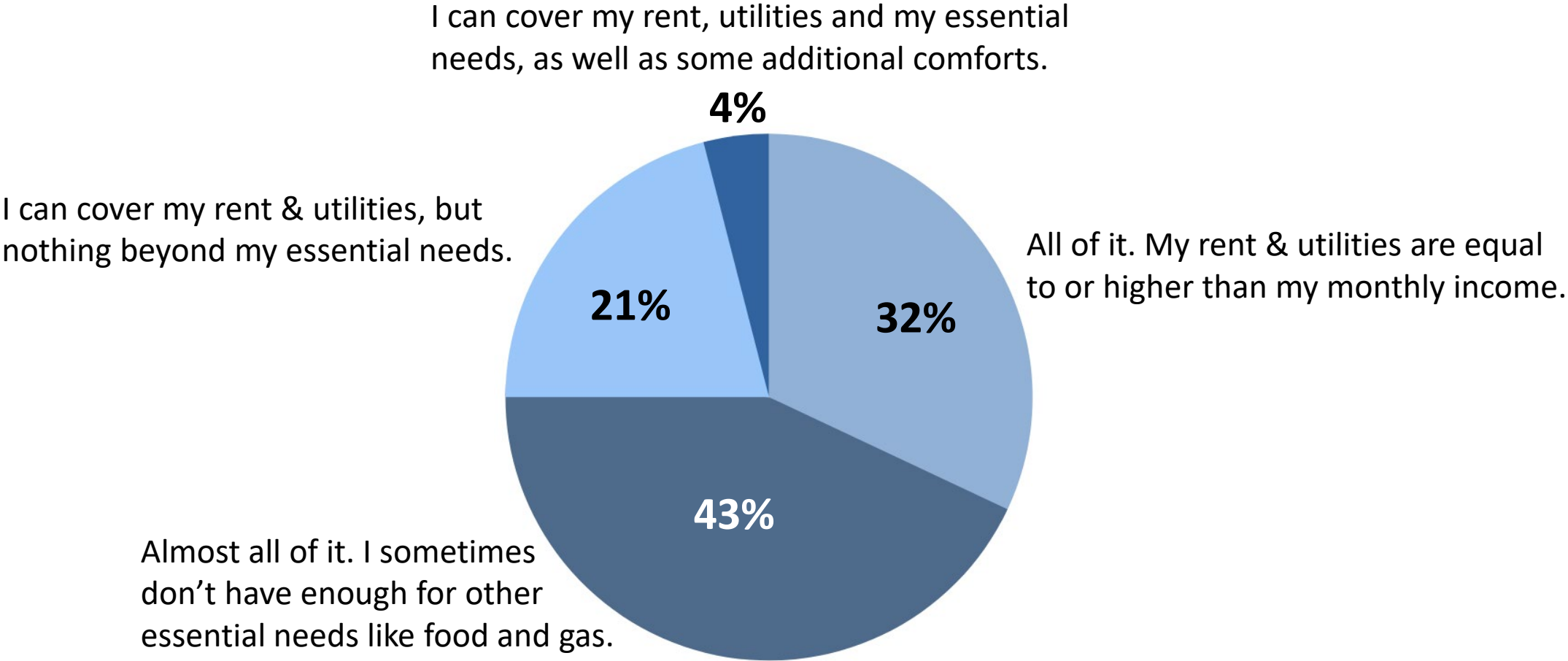


How was your eviction prevented?

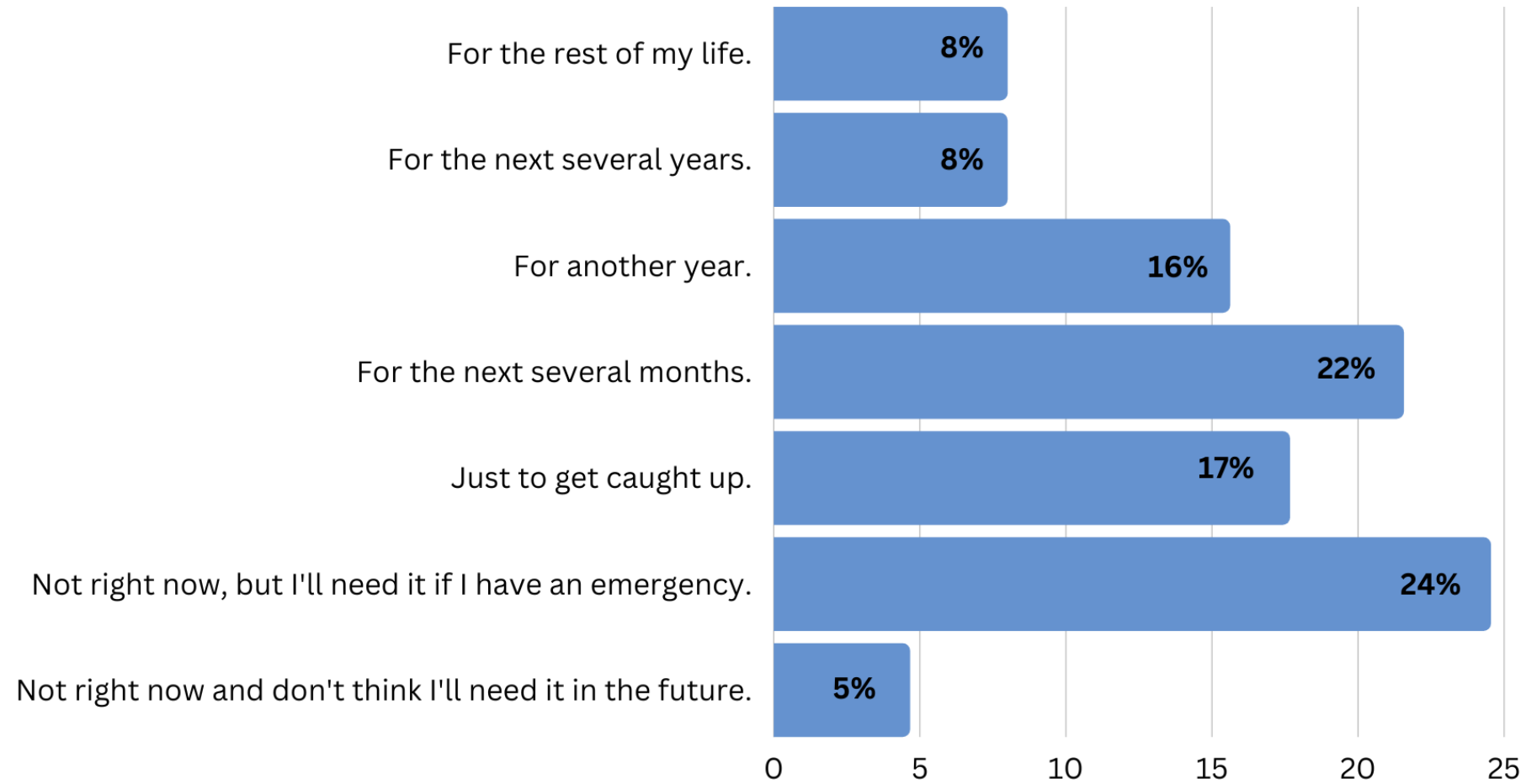
58% I found a way to pay the rent.

34% The Eviction Resolution Pilot Program helped with a repayment plan.

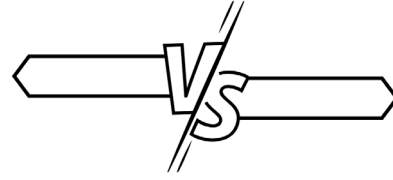
How much of your current income goes to rent and utilities?



What are your current needs for additional rent assistance?



Need for Rent Assistance



71% of respondents currently need rent assistance.

381 households reported they need rent assistance now.
- 86 of these reported to need long-term assistance.

25% of respondents will need rent assistance if they have an emergency.

132 households reported to be just barely getting by financially.

4% of respondents feel stable in their housing.

Only 25 households reported they don't need rent assistance and don't think they'll need it in the future.

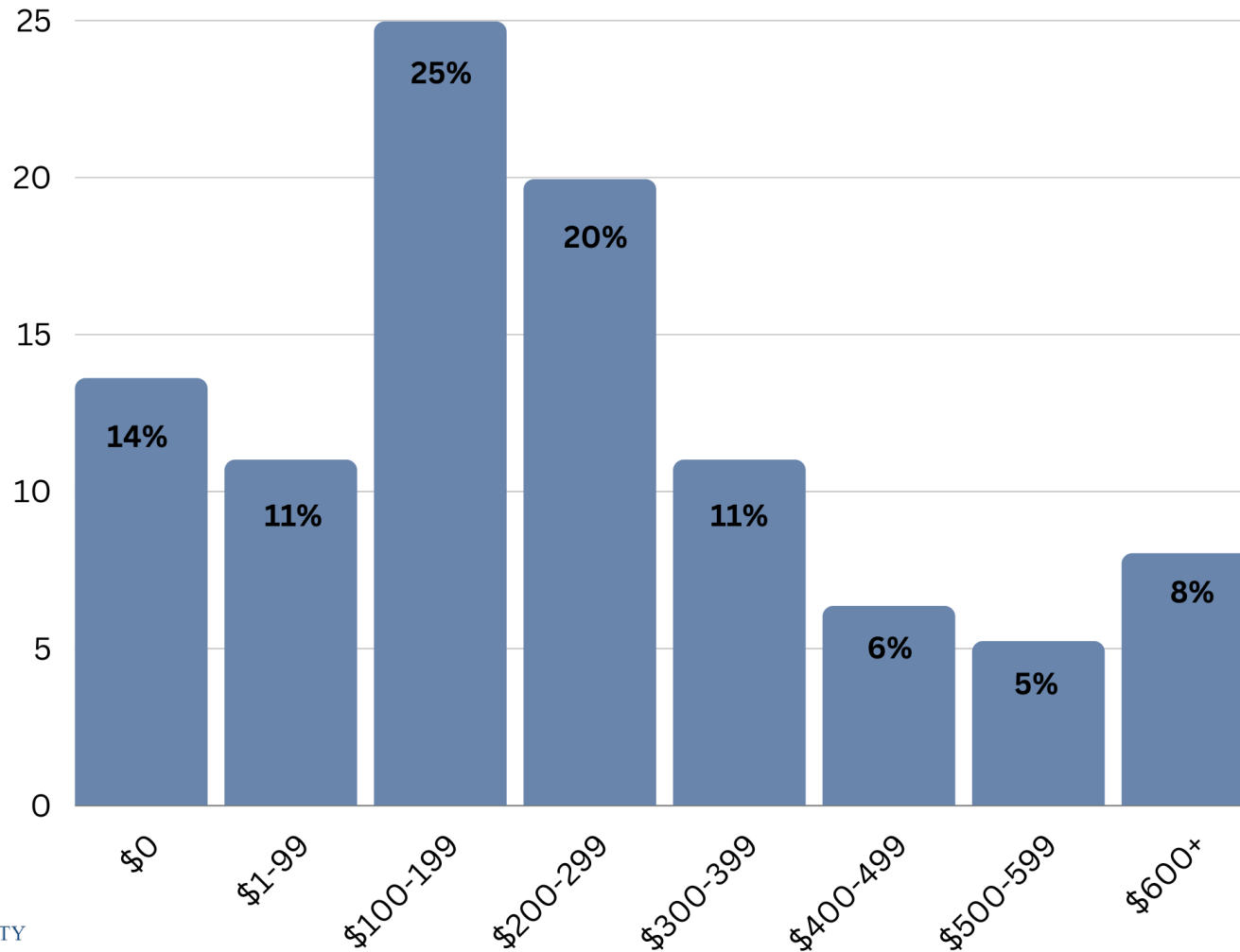


Availability of Rent Assistance

Eviction Prevention Rent Assistance (EPRA) in Thurston County

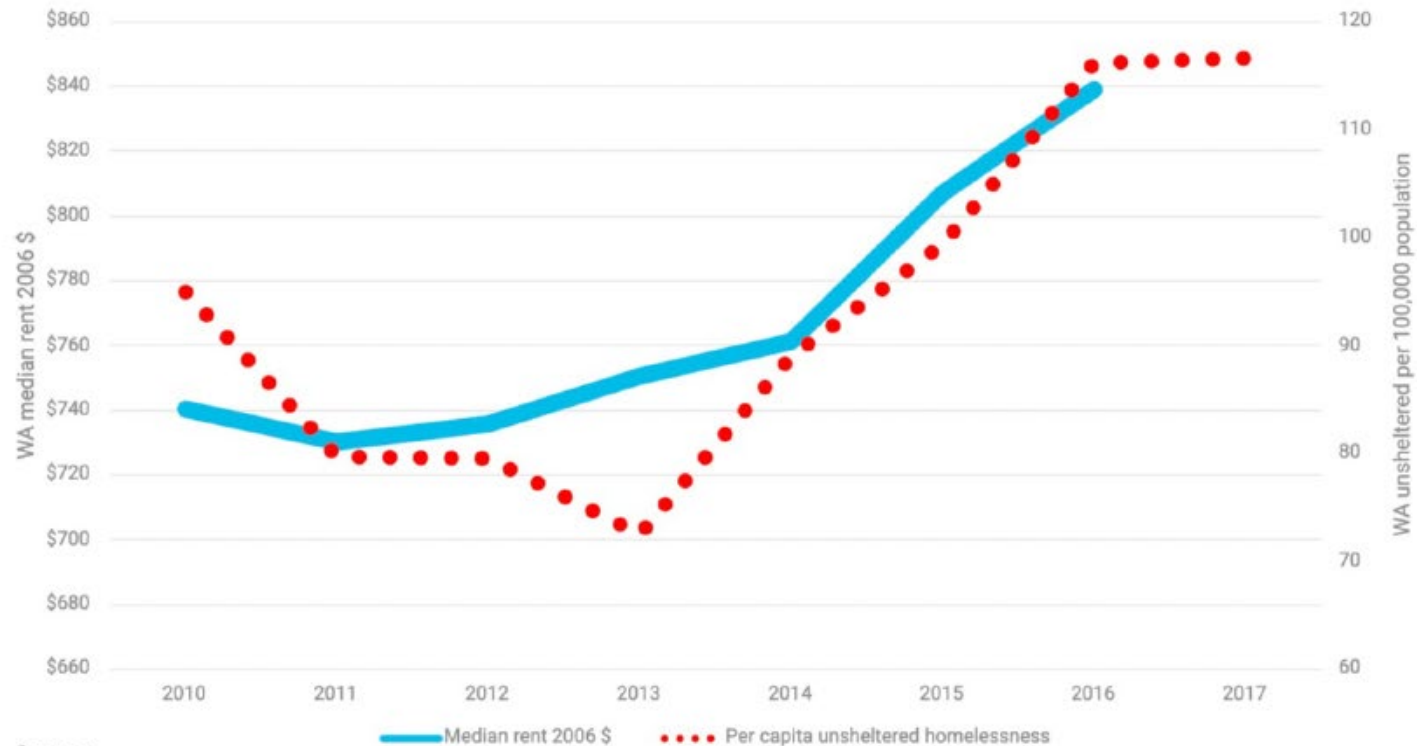
- New in 2023.
- Permanently funded through provision of Document Recording Fees.
- Began serving clients in April 2023.
- Served 162 households from April - September 2023.
- Program at capacity with closed waitlists due to high demand.
- Falls short of community need for rent assistance.
- Around \$1.5 million funded for 2023.

How much has your rent increased per month since October 2021?



How do rising rents
impact homelessness?

Homelessness and Housing Stability Highly Correlated with Rent Increases



Sources:

Rent: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey one-year estimates for Washington State, B25058, inflation adjusted using Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI-U

Homelessness: WA point in time count, adjusted by : U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey one-year population estimate for Washington State

1 - Journal of Urban Affairs, *New Perspectives on Community-Level Determinants of Homelessness*, 2012

2 - Dynamics of homelessness in urban America, arXiv:1707.09380

Source: Washington State Department of Commerce

Households and individuals who have a recent experience of homelessness are at higher risk for returning to homelessness.

34%

185 out of 539 respondents.

Of respondents reported that a member of their household has experienced homelessness in the last five years.

Is there anything else about your experience with rent assistance that you want to share?

Gratitude



Current rent assistance availability

Eviction Prevention Rent Assistance (EPRA)

- Funded through the provision of a document recording fee on the sale or refinance of a home in Washington State. This funding amount varies based on the number of home sales and refinancing in the state. The funds collected through these document recording fees have drastically decreased with the rise in interest rates.
- Around \$1.5 million for 2023.

Limited short-term rent assistance through

- Faith communities
- School districts
- Some Homeless Services agencies

Evictions in Thurston County

We're already seeing an unprecedented rise in evictions.

Increases demand and costs for legal aid organizations and court systems.

A history of eviction creates a future of housing instability for tenant families.

Eviction is a leading contributor to homelessness.

Evictions Filed in Thurston County

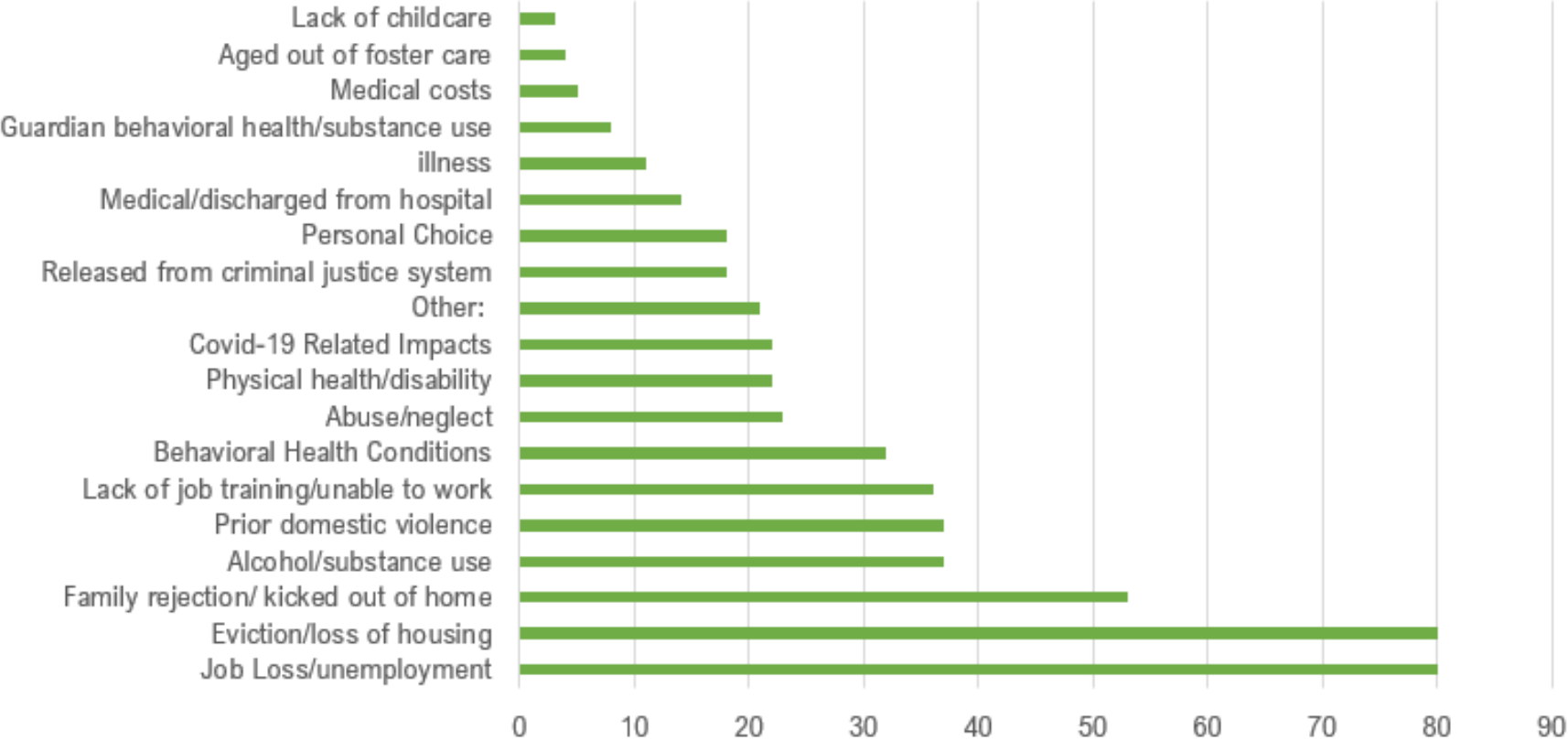
Jan. - June 2023 : 47.8 average per month

End in COVID-19 rent assistance

July - Dec. 2023: 73.6 average per month

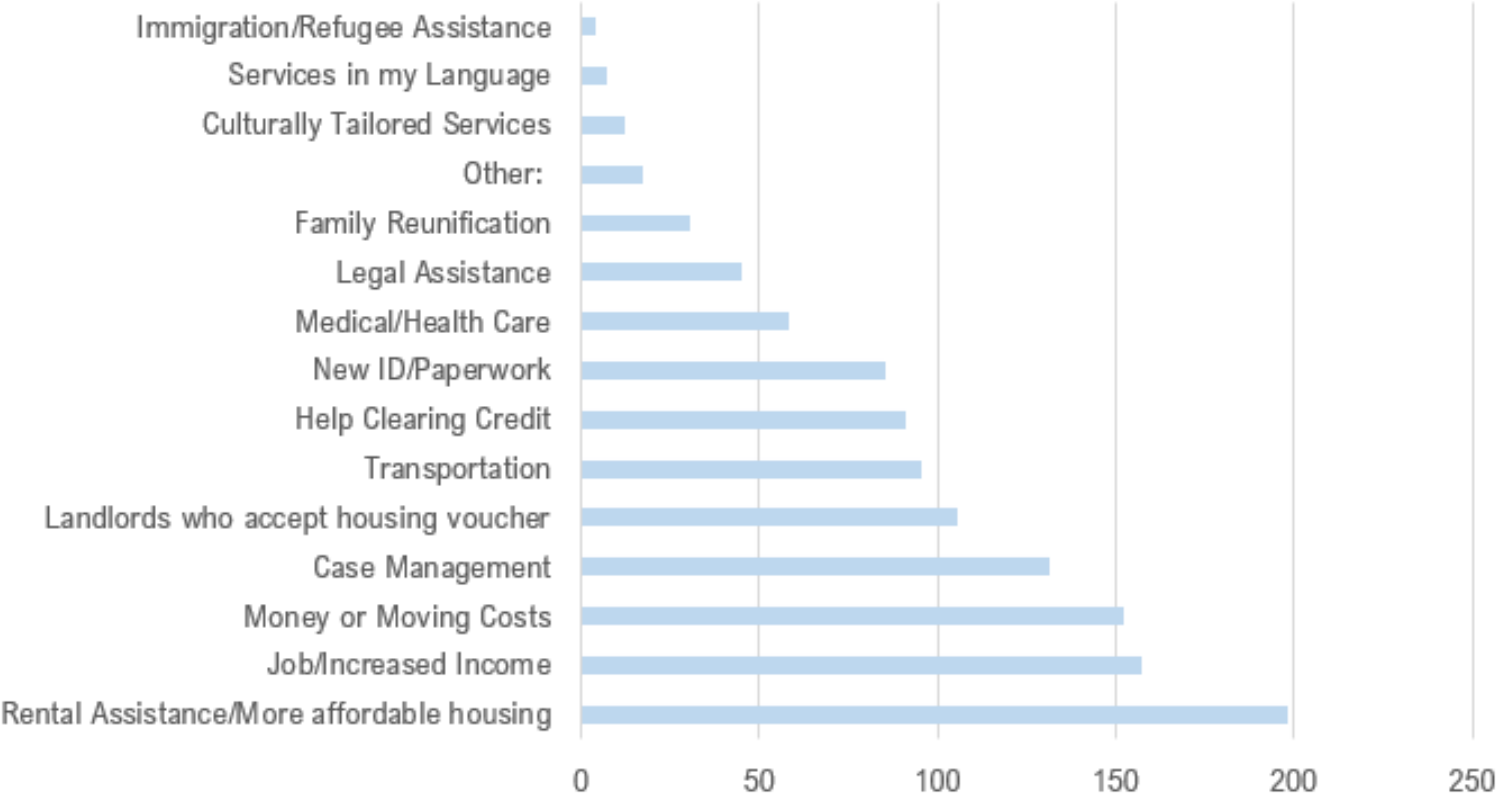
2023 Point in Time Count (Homeless Census Survey)

What led to your homelessness?
Select all that apply.



2023 Point in Time Count (Homeless Census Survey)

Support Needed to Obtain Permanent Housing Select all the apply.



Increase in Homelessness

Responding to homelessness costs more than preventing evictions and keeping people housed.

An increase in homelessness means additional financial and emotional strain on Homeless Crisis Response System - shelter capacity, homeless service agencies, frontline staff, etc.

An increase in homelessness means more strain on community services overall - behavioral health services, hospitals, schools, law enforcement, incarceration, etc.

An increase in homelessness means an increase or re-emergence of encampments.

Childhood homelessness interrupts education and has lifelong impacts on health and wellbeing.

People who are homeless have higher rates of illness and die on average 12 years sooner than the general U.S. population.

Homelessness creates new health problems and exacerbates existing ones.

Summary

With an approximate 30% response rate, the results of this survey carry the voices of many of the households that received rent assistance in the past few years.

The survey responses align with what housing service providers are seeing.

Many residents of Thurston County need significant financial support to maintain housing now and in the future.

Recommendation:

Help prevent homelessness by supporting legislation and policy:

- to increasing rent assistance funding.
- for rent stabilization and tenant protections.

Final survey report available online at
bit.ly/ThurstonHousing



Elisa Sparkman, Communications Specialist
Elisa.Sparkman@co.thurston.wa.us
360-490-7648



Office of Housing & Homeless Prevention
Thurston County Public Health & Social Services
412 Lilly Rd. NE Olympia, WA 98506

Thurston County Public Health & Social Services Rent Assistance Survey Team:

Office of Housing & Homeless Prevention (OHHP)

- Elisa Sparkman, Communications Specialist
- Tom Webster, OHHP Manager
- Arielle Benson, Homeless Program Specialist
- Keylee Marineau, Homeless Response Program Manager
- Leah Tangeman, Program Assistant

Disease Control & Prevention Division

- April Gunderson, Epidemiologist

Partner organizations:

- Family Support Center of South Sound
- Innovations Human Trafficking Collaborative (Innovations HTC)
- FORWARD Platform (LiveStories)
- Senior Services for South Sound

