

**A Report on Cold/Wet
Weather Shelter Utilization in
Los Angeles County**

**Presented by:
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Background

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- Cold/Wet weather shelters in Los Angeles have been operating since 1987.
- They were opened continuously from December 16, 1999 to February 29, 2000.
- They were weather activated from November 18, 1999 through December 15, 1999 and March 1, 2000 through March 31, 2000

Purpose

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- To understand the characteristics of the unique homeless population that accesses cold/wet weather shelters.
- To assess daily and yearly utilization patterns.
- To find out where winter shelter users stay the rest of the year.

Methodology

Survey Instrument

- Data were collected using a 7 question survey instrument.
- Surveys were designed in English and in Spanish.
- Surveys were designed at a reading comprehension level appropriate for most respondents.

Sample Population

- A convenience sample was used.
- An estimated 85% of cold/wet weather shelter users staying in one of the nine survey sites on any given day in February were captured.
- An estimated 46% of all individuals staying in Los Angeles County cold/wet weather shelters on any given day in February were captured.

Data Collection

- Surveys were administered at nine cold/wet weather shelters in the beginning of February.
- Surveys were self-administered, with help from Shelter Partnership or shelter staff when needed.
- Incentive packets were given to respondents.

Data Analysis

- 883 completed surveys were collected and analyzed.
- Descriptive statistics were used.
- Data were analyzed controlling for demographic variables, including gender and race/ethnicity.
- Data were also analyzed controlling for yearly utilization and Service Planning Area.

Sample Size by Agency

SPA	Agency	Number of Surveys
1	Catholic Charities	43
2	Institute for Urban Research and Development	87
2	Santa Clarita CDC	18
3	Pomona Neighborhood Center	64
4	Bright World Care Center	126
5	The Salvation Army-Culver City Armory	140
6	LA Community Services Inc. (LACS)	92
7	The Salvation Army-Bell Shelter	121
8	New Image-Long Beach Armory	192
	Total	883

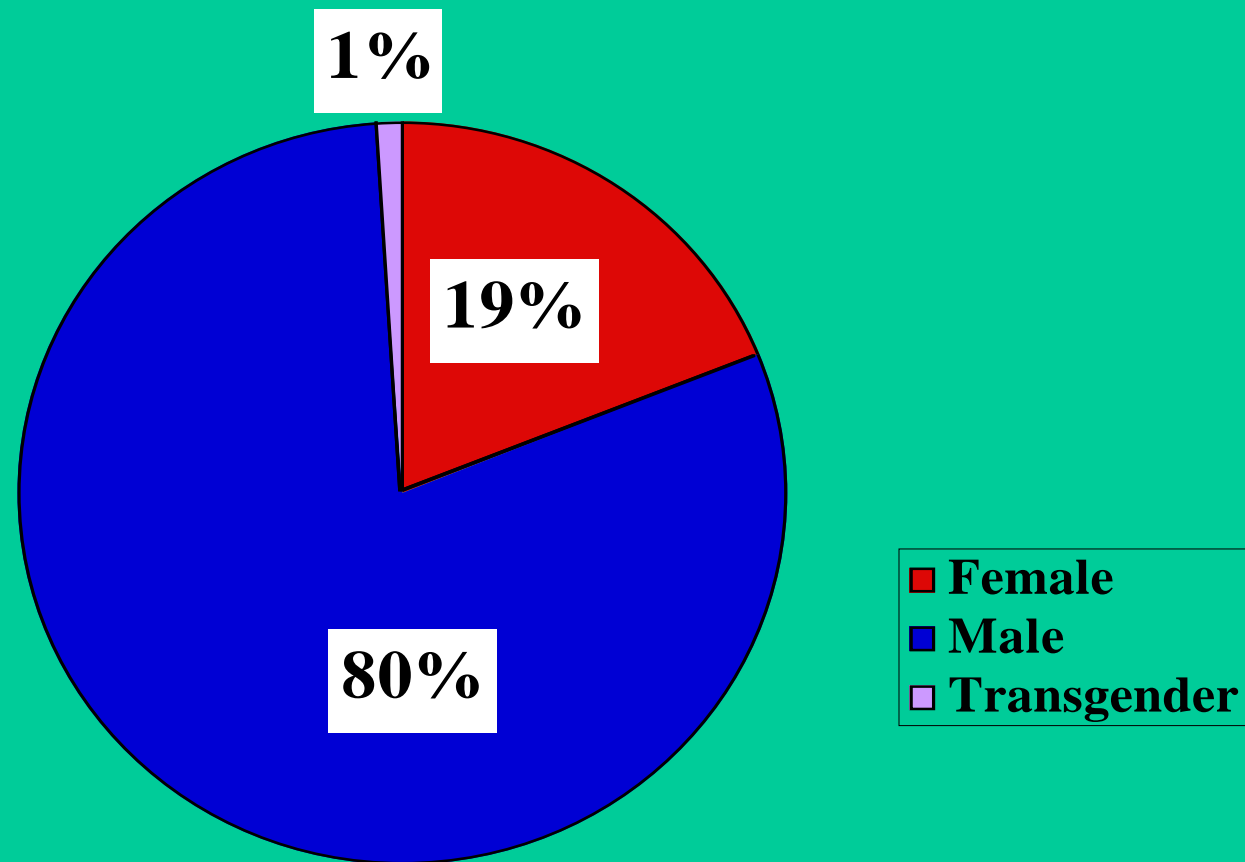
Findings

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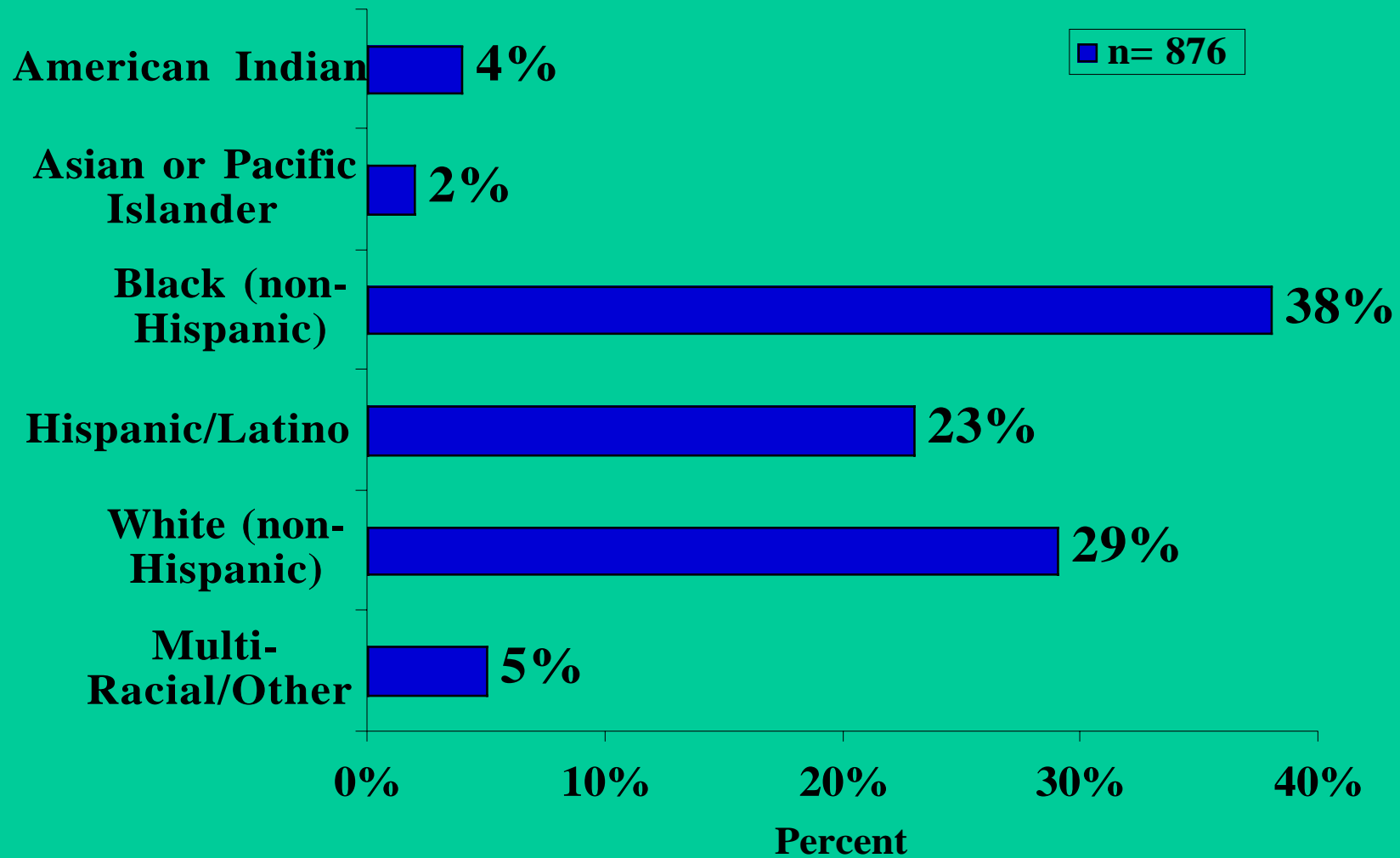
- **Overall Characteristics of cold/wet weather shelter users.**
- **Findings by gender**
- **Findings by race/ethnicity**
- **Findings by number of winters**
- **Findings by SPA**

Overall Characteristics

Distribution by Gender



Distribution by Race



Distribution by Age

Mean Age = 42 years

Less than 18	<1%
18-30	16%
31-40	29%
41-50	35%
51-64	18%
65 or over	3%

Shelter Utilization

- About half (52%) had stayed in the shelters for the first time.
- 25% had stayed in the shelters for two winters.
- 23% had stayed in the shelters more than two winters.

Shelter Utilization (continued)

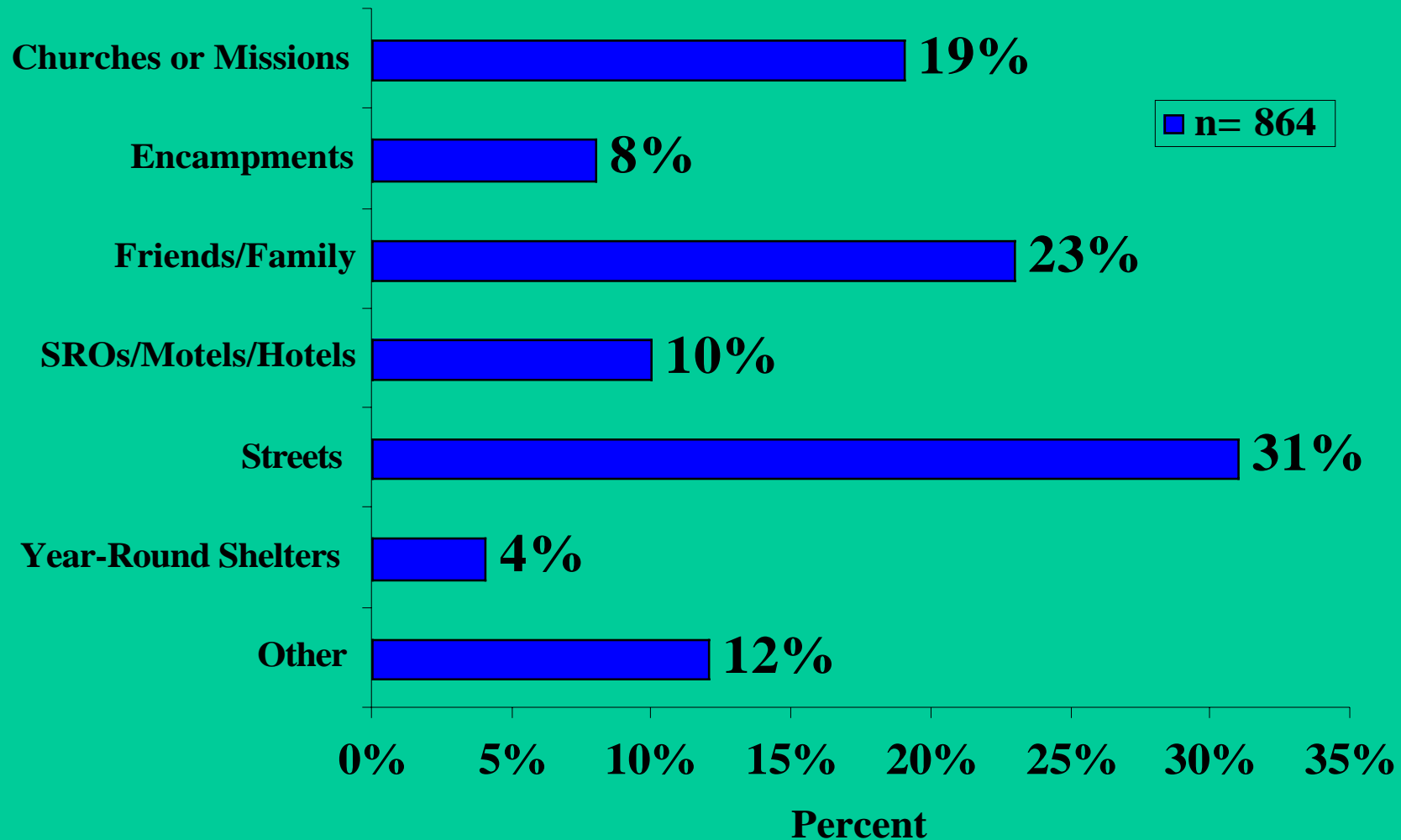
- Half stayed in the shelter every day.
- Less than a fourth (22%) stayed for up to a week.
- 21% stayed at least a week but less than a month.
- 7% stayed over a month but not every day.

Half stayed in other places besides cold/wet shelters.

- Many were literally without shelter, either staying on the streets (36%) or in encampments (8%).
- Some (23%) stayed with friends/family.
- Others in churches or missions (22%).
- Only 4% stayed in year-round shelters.

Before the cold/wet weather shelter was opened this past winter, where did these homeless people stay?

Places Stayed Before The Cold/Wet Shelters Opened



Findings by Gender

Female Respondents

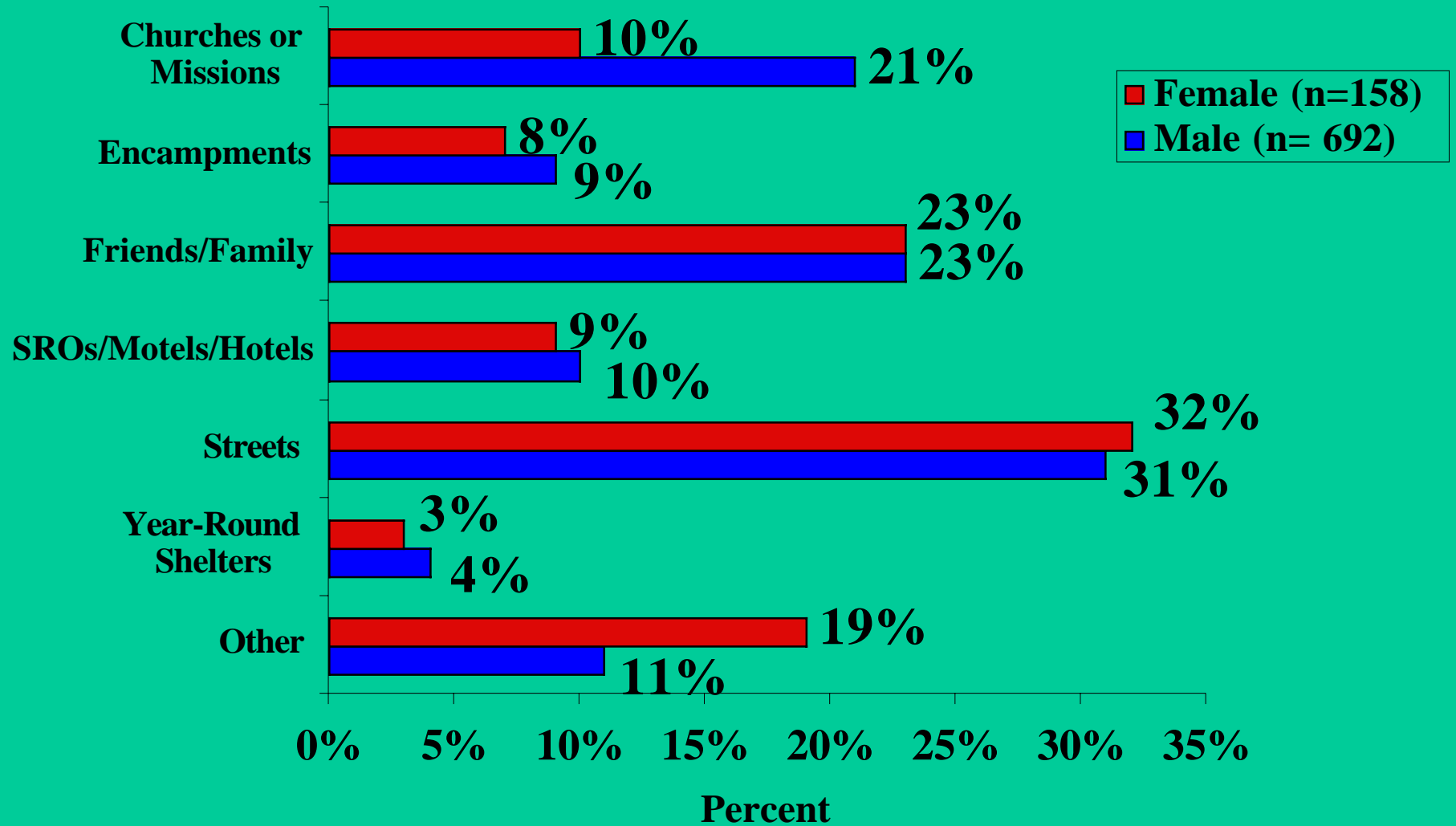
- Mean age was 41 years.
- 38% were white, 37% were black, and only 12% were Hispanic/Latina.
- About half were first-time winter shelter users, and a little over half (56%) stayed every day.

Male Respondents

- Mean age was 42 years, fairly similar to female mean age.
- 39% were black, 27% were white, and 25% were Hispanic/Latino.
- Again, about half were first-time winter shelter users and half (49%) stayed every day.

Where did males and females usually stay before the cold/wet weather shelters opened this past winter?

Places Stayed Before by Gender



Findings by Race/Ethnicity

Non-Hispanic Black Respondents

- 38% of total respondents were non-Hispanic black (n= 336).
- The distributions of gender and age were similar to overall distributions.
- They tended to stay slightly more in churches or missions and less on the streets than Hispanics or non-Hispanic whites.

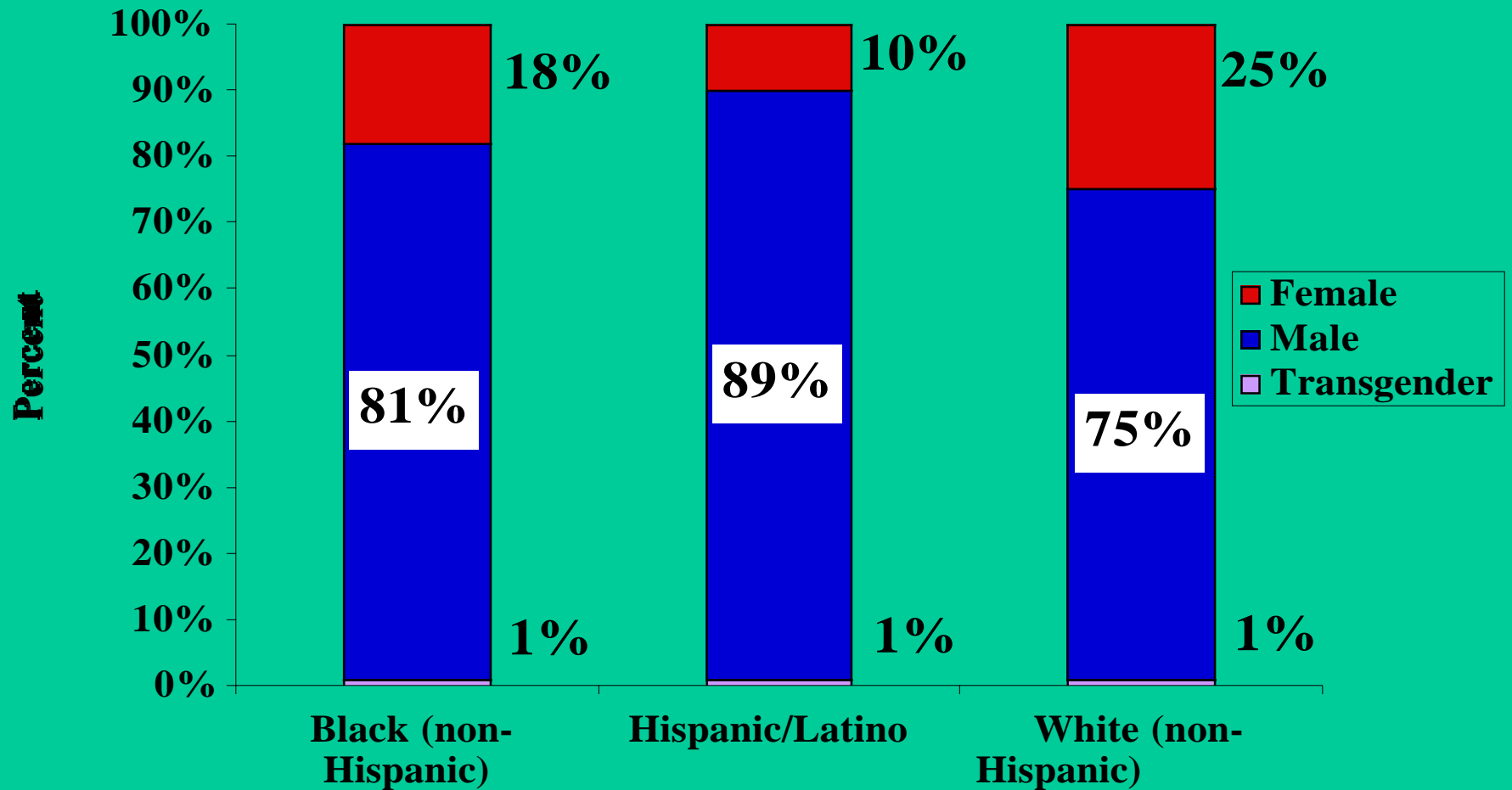
Hispanic/Latino Respondents

- 23% of total respondents were Hispanic/Latino (n= 198).
- Among them, there was a larger proportion of males (89%) than among non-Hispanic blacks or non-Hispanic whites.
- They tended to be slightly younger, with a mean age of 39 years.

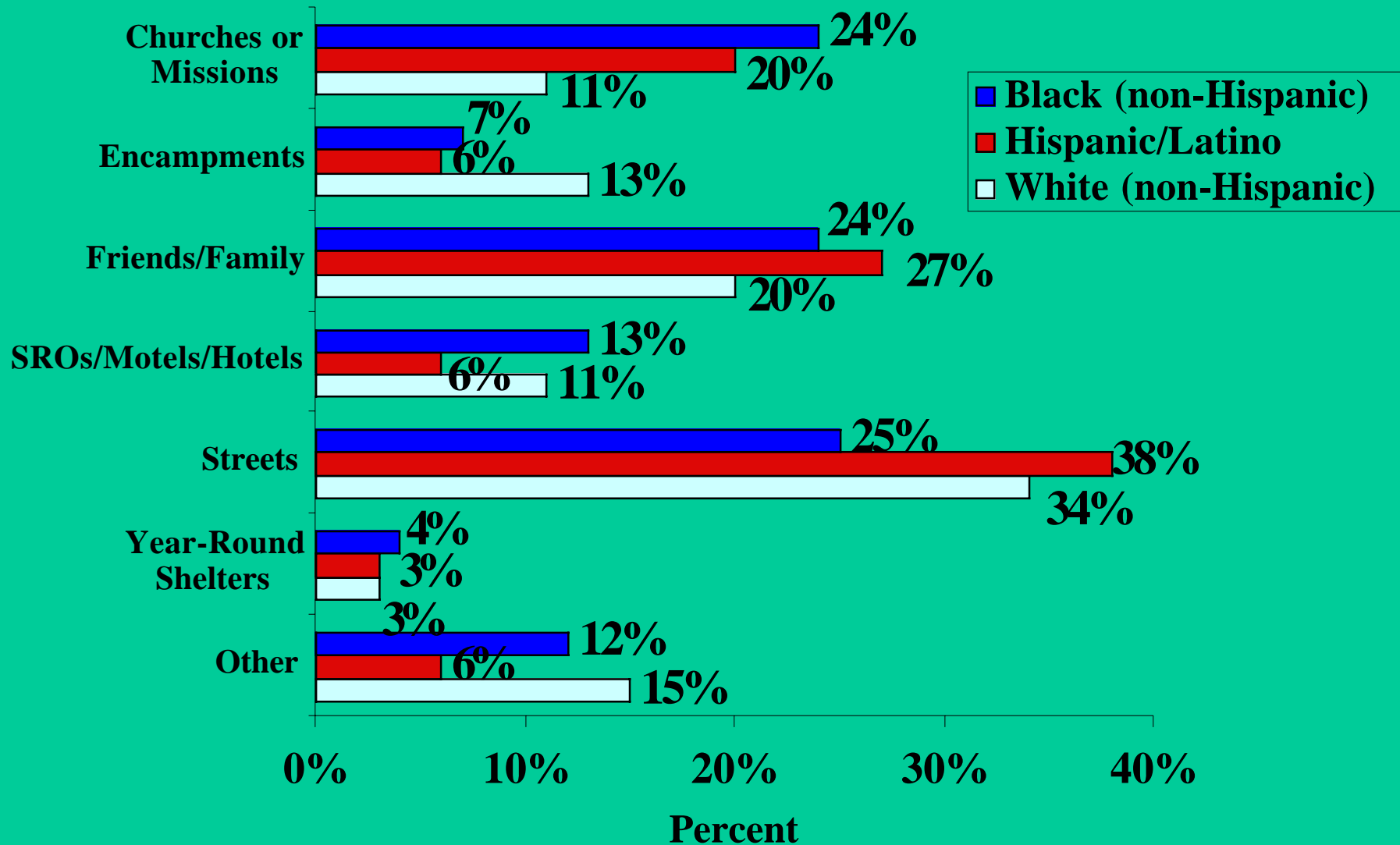
Non-Hispanic White Respondents

- 29% of total respondents were non-Hispanic white (n=252).
- 75% were male and 25% were female.
- The mean age was 44 years, 5 years older than for Hispanics/Latinos.
- There was less church or mission usage.

Distribution of Gender by Race/Ethnicity



Places Stayed Before by Race/Ethnicity



Findings by Number of Winters

First-Time Winter Respondents

Demographics

- About half (52%) the respondents indicated that it was their first winter in a cold/wet shelter.
- The gender and race/ethnicity distributions remained similar to the overall distributions.
- The mean age was 40 years.

Multiple Winter Respondents Demographics

- Almost half (48%) stayed in a cold/wet weather shelter for more than one winter.
- The mean age was 44 years, four years older than among first-time winter shelter users.
- The gender and race/ethnicity distributions remained comparable to the distributions among first-time winter shelter users.

First-Time Winter Respondents Utilization

- First-time winter respondents were not very dependent on cold/wet shelters.
- 39% stayed every night. 26% stayed up to a week.
- When not in the shelter every day, many stayed on the streets (34%) or encampments (6%).
- 27% stayed with Friends or family.

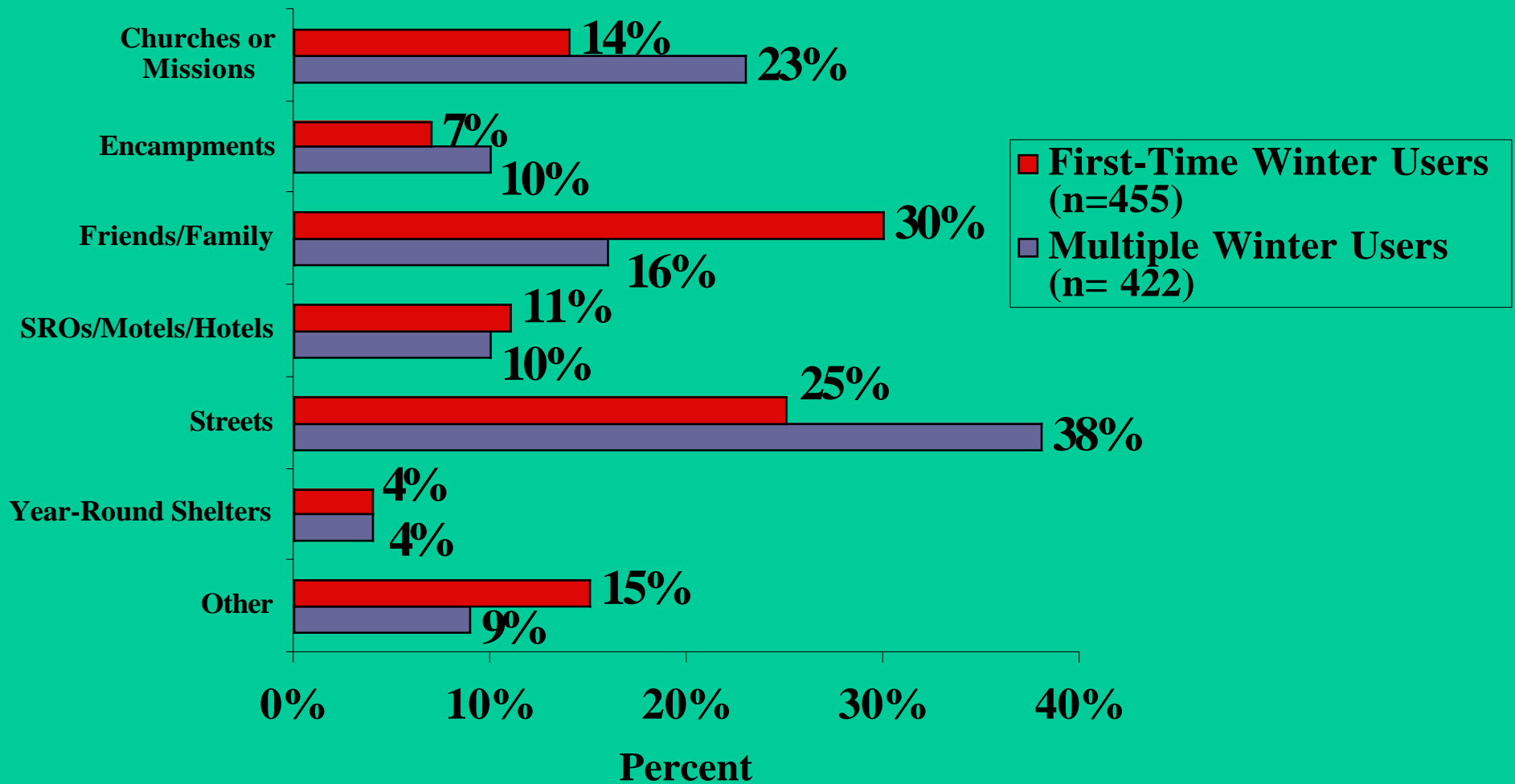
Multiple Winter Respondents Utilization

- Respondents staying in cold/wet shelters multiple times tended to be more dependent on the shelters every night.
- 62% stayed every night.
- When not in the shelter every night, over half were literally without shelter, either sleeping on the streets (41%) or in encampments (10%).

Where did first-time users stay
before the cold/wet weather
shelters opened?

Where did the multiple winter
users stay?

Where Respondents Stayed by Number of Winters



SPA Highlights

SPA 1/ Antelope Valley

- Respondents tended to be younger, with a mean age of 39 years. Only 6% were over 50.
- Most (61%) were first-time users and only about a third stayed every night. When not staying every night, 67% usually stayed on the streets.
- Only 3% indicated staying in churches/missions before cold/wet shelters opened.

SPA 2/ San Fernando

- Respondents tended to be older, with a mean age of 43 years. 31% were over 50.
- They tended to have more social support, with a third (33%) indicating having stayed with friends/family before the cold/wet weather shelters opened.

SPA 3/ San Gabriel

- More respondents in SPA 3 stayed in encampments than respondents in other SPAs. 19% indicated that they had stayed in encampments before the cold/wet weather shelters opened.

SPA 4/ Metro

- The cold/wet weather shelter tended to be more male dominated. Only 14% of the respondents were female.
- Many (33%) had stayed in churches/missions.
- Respondents in SPA 4 seemed to have fewer social supports, with only 8% having stayed with friends/family before the cold/wet weather shelters opened.

SPA 5/ West

- Most had been literally homeless, living outdoors before the cold/wet weather shelters opened.
- 54% had stayed on the streets.
- 13% had stayed in encampments.

SPA 6/ South

- The cold/wet weather shelter tended to be more male dominated. Only 11% of respondents were female.
- The respondents tended to be older, with a mean age of 44 years. 29% were over 50.
- Many (37%) had stayed in churches or missions before the cold/wet weather shelters opened.

SPA 7/ East

- Most (75%) were first-time users. 21% indicated that it was their second winter, and only 4% had stayed more than twice.
- There was a higher year-round shelter usage (8%) than among respondents in other SPAs.
- 46% had stayed with friends/family before the cold/wet weather shelter was opened.
- Only 9% had stayed on the streets.

SPA 8/ South Bay

- Only 2% had stayed in year-round shelters before the cold/wet weather shelters opened.

Findings and Recommendations

The recommendations are based primarily on the statistical findings from the survey data.

However, secondary data were incorporated for variables that were not gathered due to the exploratory nature of the research.

Finding 1a

- Only four percent (4%) of the respondents indicated that they had stayed in year-round emergency or transitional shelters before the cold/wet weather shelters were opened.
- This was true across gender and race/ethnicity.

Finding 1b

19% of the respondents indicated that they had stayed in churches or missions before the cold/wet weather shelters were opened.

Finding 1c

- Shelter operators perceived that the prevalence of mental illness among cold/wet weather shelter users was 64%.
- They perceived substance addiction prevalence to be 64% as well.
- They perceived that 42% had both a mental illness and a substance addiction problem.

Finding 1d

- Only 315 shelter beds (2% of total) in the County are targeted towards homeless persons with mental illness.
- Only 85 shelter beds (less than 1%) are targeted for “dually diagnosed” persons with both a mental illness and a substance addiction problem.

Finding 1e

- There were 2,965 shelter beds (22% of total) targeted for those with a substance addiction problem.
- The vast majority of these beds are within programs that require abstinence from any substance use.

Finding 1f

- Most cold/wet weather shelter users (58%) had no source of income.
- 17% received General Relief (GR).
- 8% received Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

Recommendation 1a

Individuals utilizing Los Angeles County's cold/wet weather shelters need a different form of housing than is currently available. The community needs to foster the development and expansion of **Safe Havens** as this high-tolerance, low demand philosophy is a more acceptable type of housing delivery for this sub-population.

Recommendation 1b

The community should support the expansion and continuation of the **AB 34 program**, which provides outreach to mentally ill persons who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and integrate its funding with other new state resources to create more Safe Havens and permanent, affordable supportive housing for the population.

Recommendation 1c

As a consistent source of income is critical in securing permanent housing, the community needs to address the reasons for lack of benefits, especially SSI, among cold/wet weather shelter users when most providers indicated that they perceived the prevalence of mental illness to be 64%.

Finding 2a

Nearly half (48%) of the respondents indicated that they had stayed in cold/wet weather shelters during multiple winters.

This finding was comparable across gender and race/ethnicity.

Finding 2b

- Among multiple winter users, 48% were literally staying outdoors, either on the streets or encampments, as compared to 32% of first-time winter shelter users.
- A small proportion of multiple winter shelter users indicated staying with friends/family (16%) as compared to almost a third (30%) of first-time winter shelter users.

Recommendation 2a

As people who are chronically homeless have less social supports and are more likely to stay on the streets and in encampments than do first-time cold/wet weather shelter users, it is critical that the community develop programs that address the different experiences and coping mechanisms of chronically homeless individuals as differentiated from first-time

Recommendation 2b

The purpose of the cold/wet weather shelters should be established and consistent among all providers.

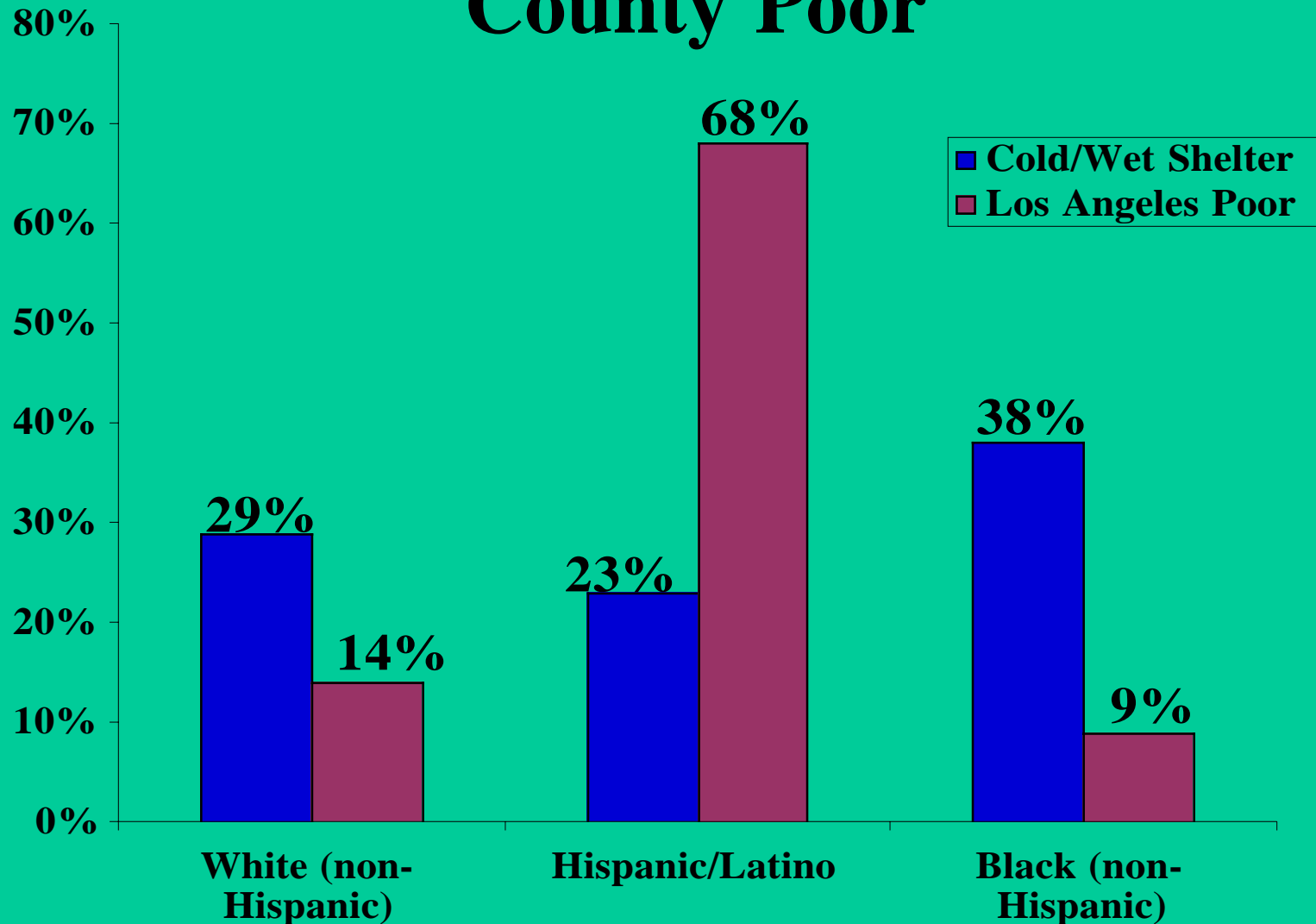
If the purpose goes beyond the simple prevention of death by exposure, and stable, permanent housing is the long-term goal, cold/wet shelters that partner with year-round emergency and transitional shelters for services should receive bonus/higher points in the application process.

Finding 3a

Thirty-eight percent of cold/wet weather shelter users were non-Hispanic black, 29% were non-Hispanic white, and 23% were Hispanic/Latino.

*Among the poor in Los Angeles County, 68% are Latino, 14% are white, and 9% are African American (United Way of Greater Los Angeles, 1999).

Distribution of Race/Ethnicity Among Shelter Users and L.A. County Poor



Finding 3b

Among homeless persons using funded services of the County's mental health system, 31% were African American, 16% were Hispanic, and 44% were white.

*Among the respondents, the racial/ethnic distribution was 38% non-Hispanic black, 23% Hispanic/Latino, and 29% non-Hispanic white.

Recommendation 3c

According to data from the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services (DHS) Alcohol and Drug Program Administration, the race/ethnic distribution among the homeless in their system was almost identical to the distribution among cold/wet weather shelter users. Among homeless individuals in this program, 38% were black/African American, 23% were Latino, and 34% were white.

*Among the respondents, the racial/ethnic distribution was 38% non-Hispanic black, 23% Hispanic/Latino, and 29% non-Hispanic white.

Recommendation 3

Although poverty is often used as an indicator for the risk of homelessness, the racial/ethnic distribution among cold/wet weather shelter users was very different from the distribution among the poor in the County.

However, the distribution was very similar to those who were homeless and in the Alcohol and Drug Program. The distribution was also more comparable to those who were homeless and in the Mental Health system. Further study is needed to determine how significantly mental health and substance addiction factors affect the cold/wet weather shelter users as compared to the general homeless population that accesses year-round shelters.

Finding 4

More than 20% of cold/wet weather shelter users were over 50 years of age. Among multiple winter users, about a quarter (26%) were over 50 years of age versus 16% among first-time winter users.

Recommendation 4

The community needs to begin exploring a different type of housing that would address the special needs of older homeless individuals.

Finding 5

The percentage of female non-Hispanic whites (25%) was more than double that among Hispanics (10%) and nearly a third higher than among non-Hispanic blacks (18%).

Recommendation 5

The community should consider further study to determine the reasons for the differences in gender proportions among racial/ethnic groups.

Finding 6

Among females, church/mission usage was half that of males.

Among non-Hispanic whites, usage was half that of both non-Hispanic blacks and Hispanics.

Recommendation 6

Consideration of church/mission appropriateness for females is needed since typically, they tend to be male dominated environments.

Further study should be considered to determine the reasons for low usage of church/mission programs by non-Hispanic whites.

The End

