Pandemic Impacts on Homelessness in Atlanta

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- Problem and Approach
- COVID Impacts
- Interventions
- Findings and Recommendations

Agenda

Problem Statement and Approach

- **How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact homelessness numbers and trends in Atlanta over the past several years, and how does that compare to the rest of the country?**
- **What groups are not being served by existing interventions in Atlanta?**
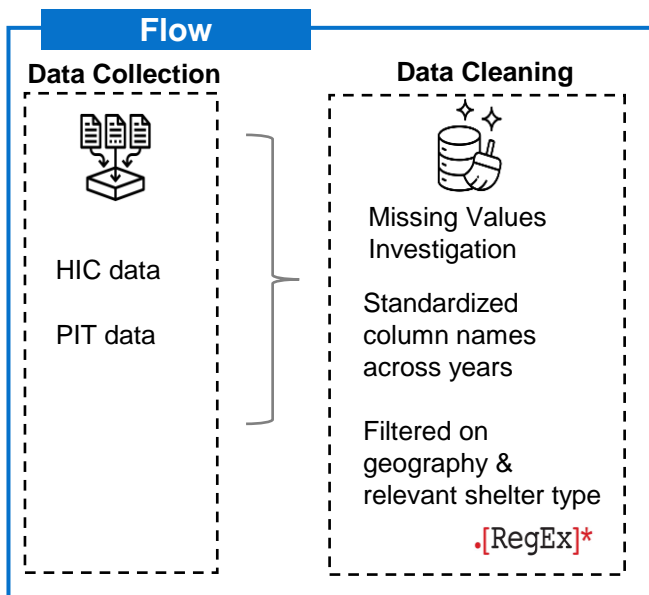- **Could resources be allocated more efficiently across intervention types Atlanta?**

Data Cleaning ▶ Data Exploration ▶ Visual and Insights

Flow

Data Collection

HIC data

PIT data

Data Cleaning

Missing Values Investigation

Standardized column names across years

Filtered on geography & relevant shelter type

.[RegEx]*

Stack used: python +ableau

- Combined yearly data into one time series dataset to explore trends over time

- Created integrated HIC-PIT dataset that matched overall beds and homelessness numbers, shelter types, and veteran and family status

- Data limitations:
  - More detailed demographic data only available beginning in 2015
  - HIC data not easily integrated with PIT data, as demographic indicators were different between datasets

- Developed Tableau dashboard to create more sophisticated, interactive visualizations at the county and demographic level for homelessness trends over time

- Developed additional graphics in Tableau/Python to explore intervention-level impacts and develop insights around resource allocation

Data Overview

I. Point-in-Time Counts

Count of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness on a single night in January

Data Since 2007

Shelter Type *Family Groups* *Chronically Homeless*

Data Since 2015

Racial demographics *Gender* *Veteran Status*

II. Housing Inventory Counts

Point-in-time inventory of provider programs within a Continuum of Care that provide beds and units dedicated to serve people experiencing homelessness

Data Since 2007

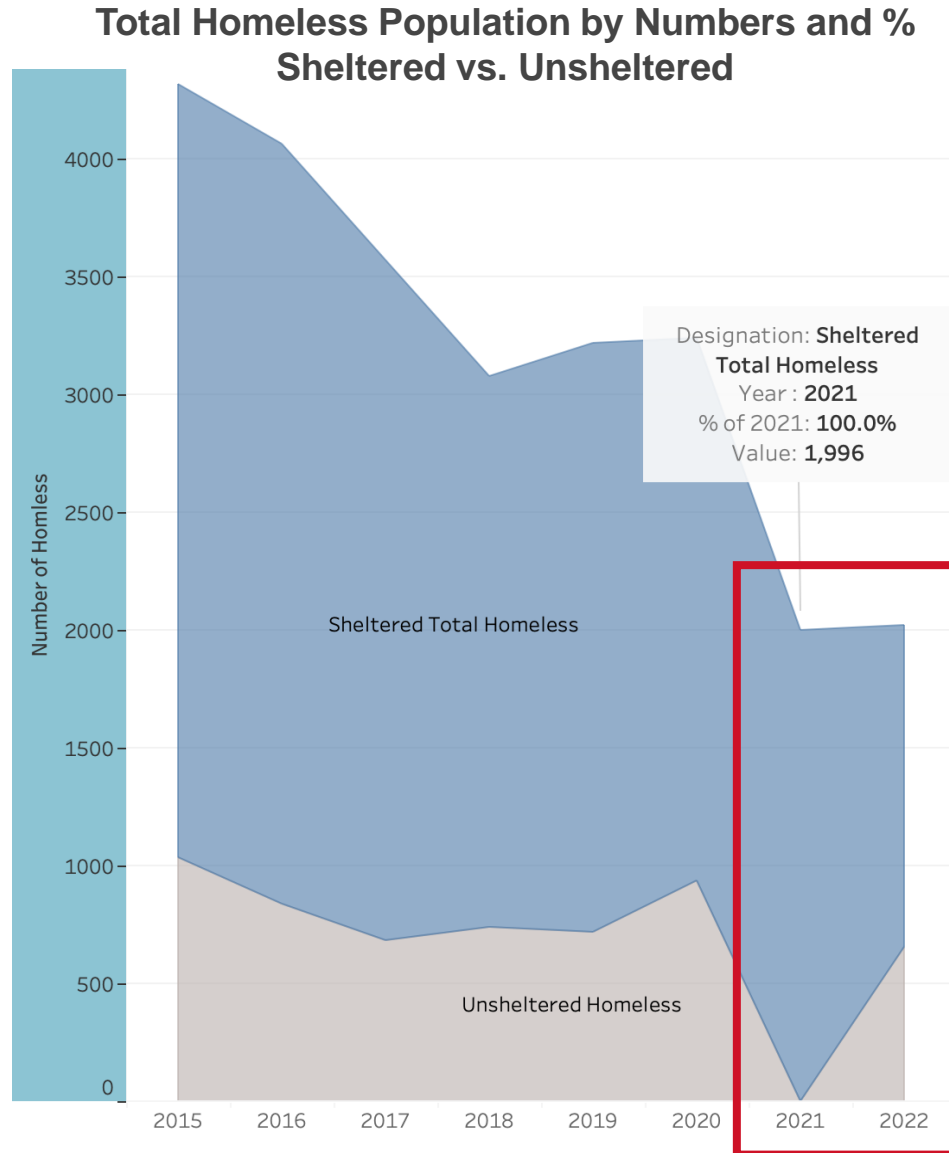*Shelter Type* *Family Groups*

Data Since 2015

Only children beds *Designated veteran beds*

The pandemic led to a significant decrease in both the overall homeless population and the unsheltered homeless population.

Total Homeless Population by Numbers and % Sheltered vs. Unsheltered

Designation: **Sheltered Total Homeless**
Year : **2021**
% of 2021: **100.0%**
Value: **1,996**

Number of Homless

Sheltered Total Homeless

Unsheltered Homeless

2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022
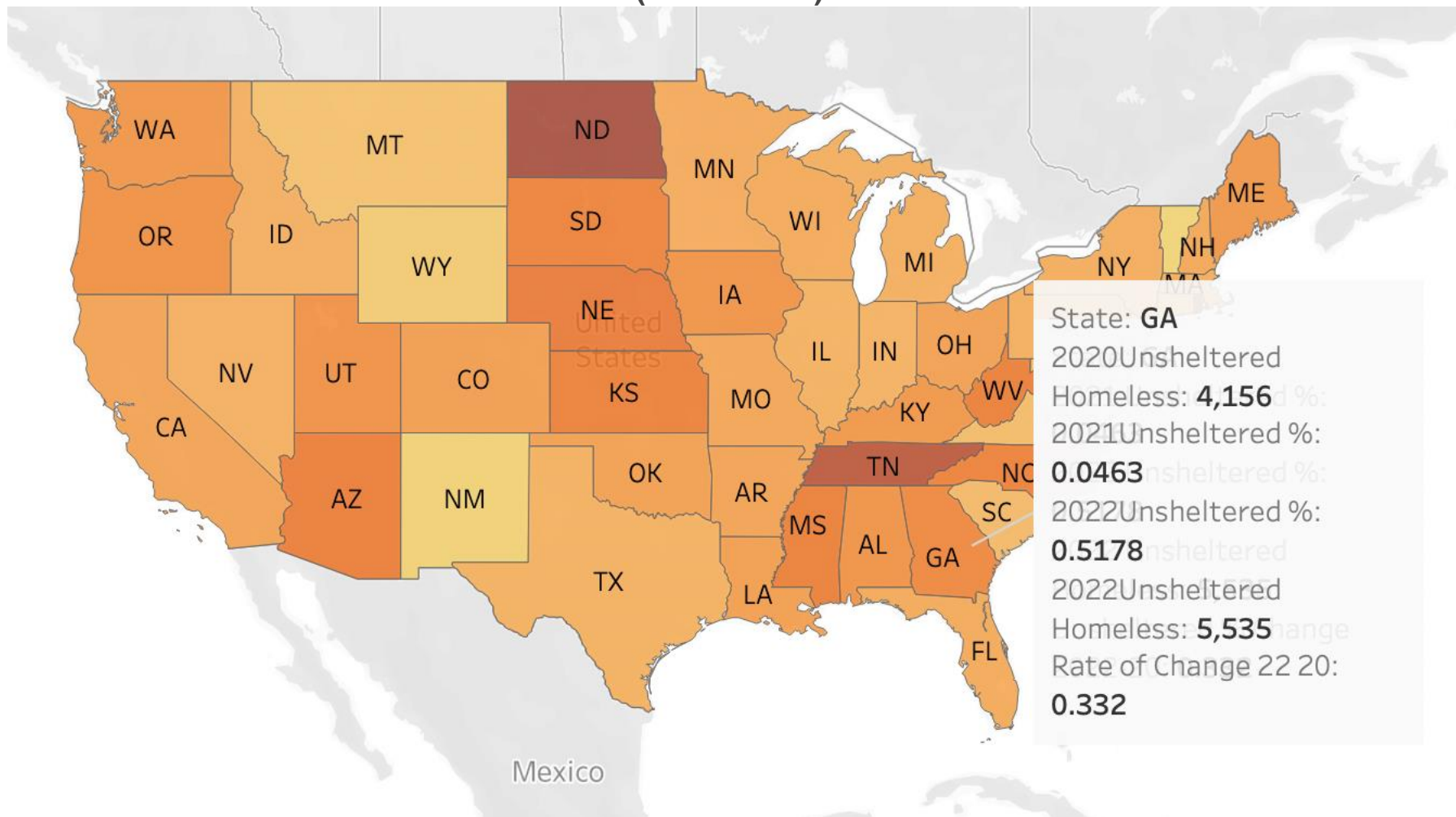
2021: Mid-Pandemic

- 100% of homeless people counted in 2021 were sheltered
  - Given historic trends, this is unlikely
  - Instead, PIT counts may have been unable to capture unsheltered homeless people due to pandemic restrictions
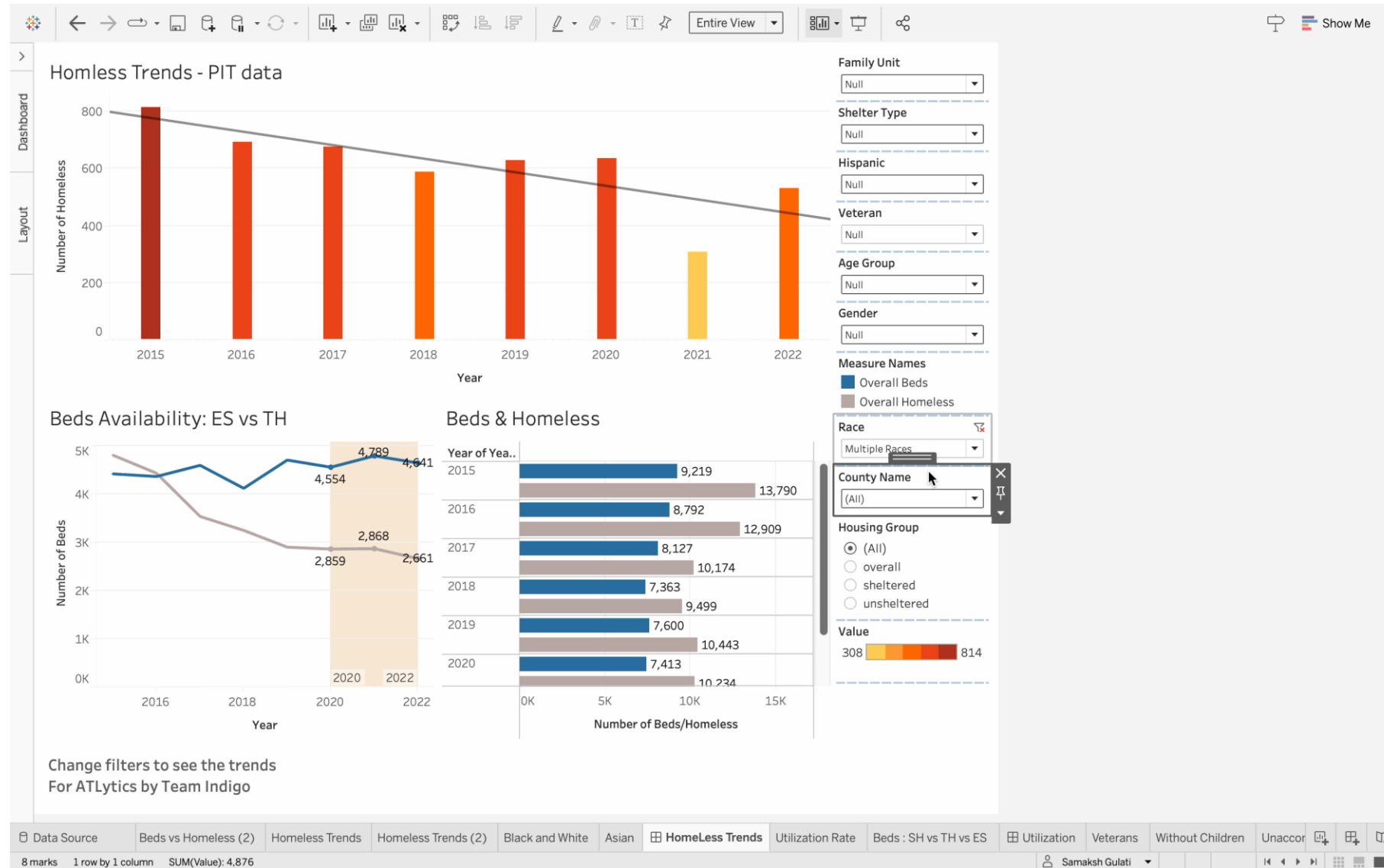
2022: Pandemic Recovery

- Unsheltered homeless count approached pre-pandemic levels while sheltered homeless counts remained low
  - Sheltered homeless are the least likely to be missed in PIT count
  - Suggests legitimate decreases in the overall homeless population in Atlanta post-pandemic
- Additional analyses after 2023 numbers are available will be critical to continue monitoring this impact
  - Most households still had higher savings from increased government assistance during the pandemic in 2022 than they do now

Many states saw significant decreases in unsheltered homelessness percentages in 2021.

Heatmap of Percent Increase in Unsheltered Homelessness during COVID-19 Pandemic (2020 – 2022)
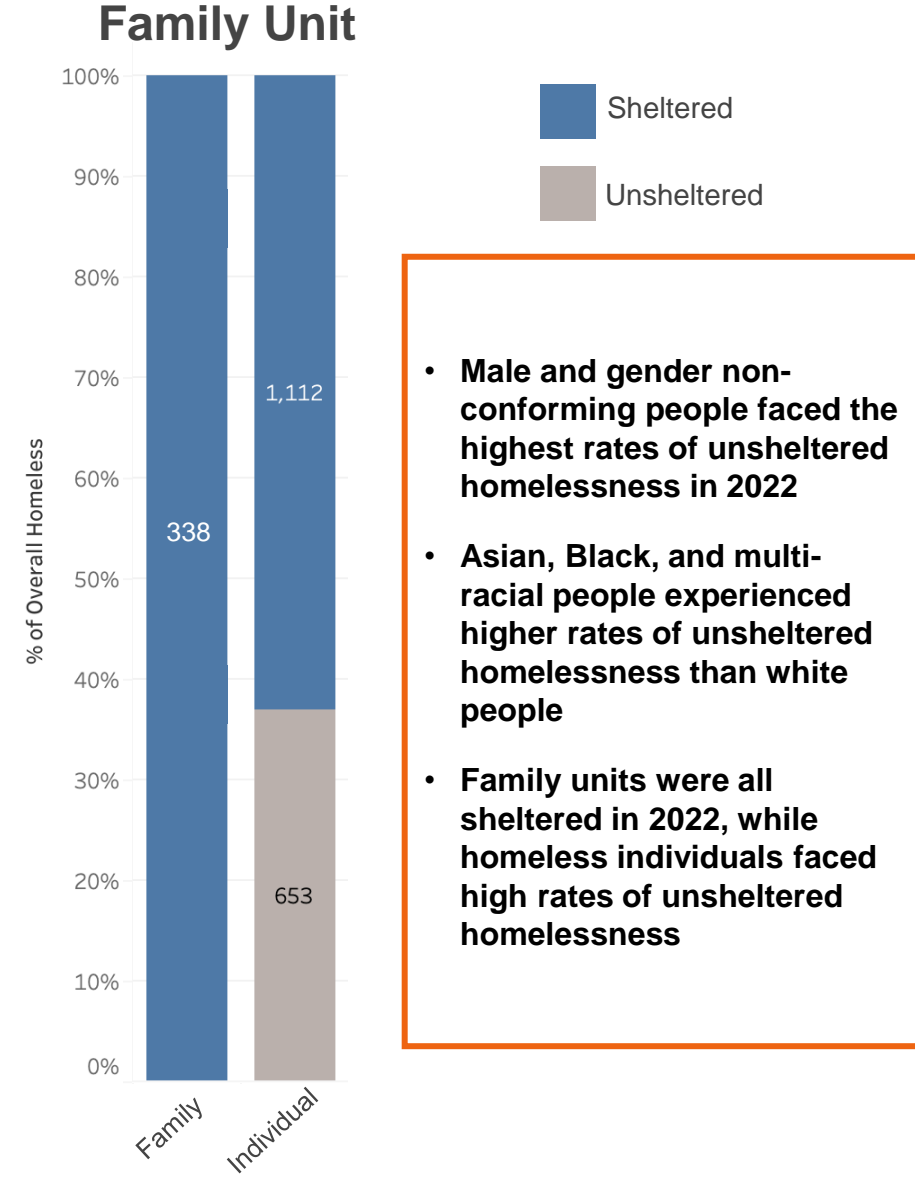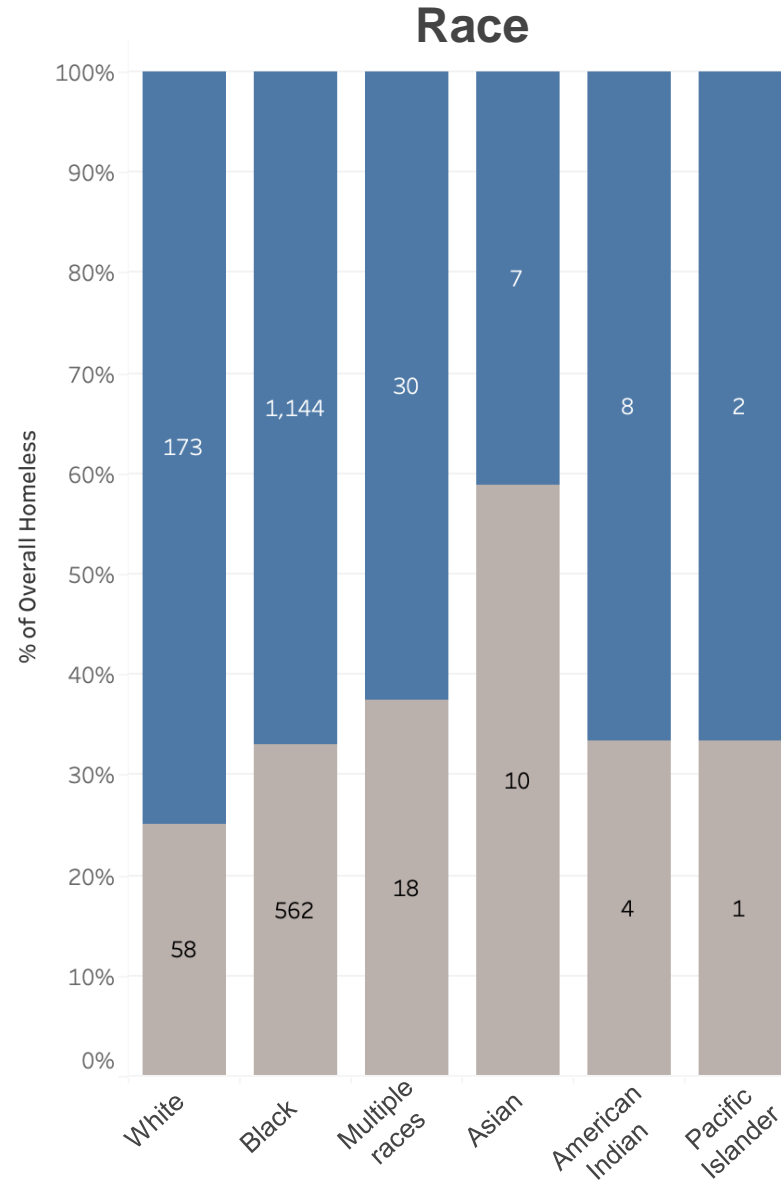

State: **GA**
2020Unsheltered Homeless: **4,156**
2021Unsheltered %: **0.0463**
2022Unsheltered %: **0.5178**
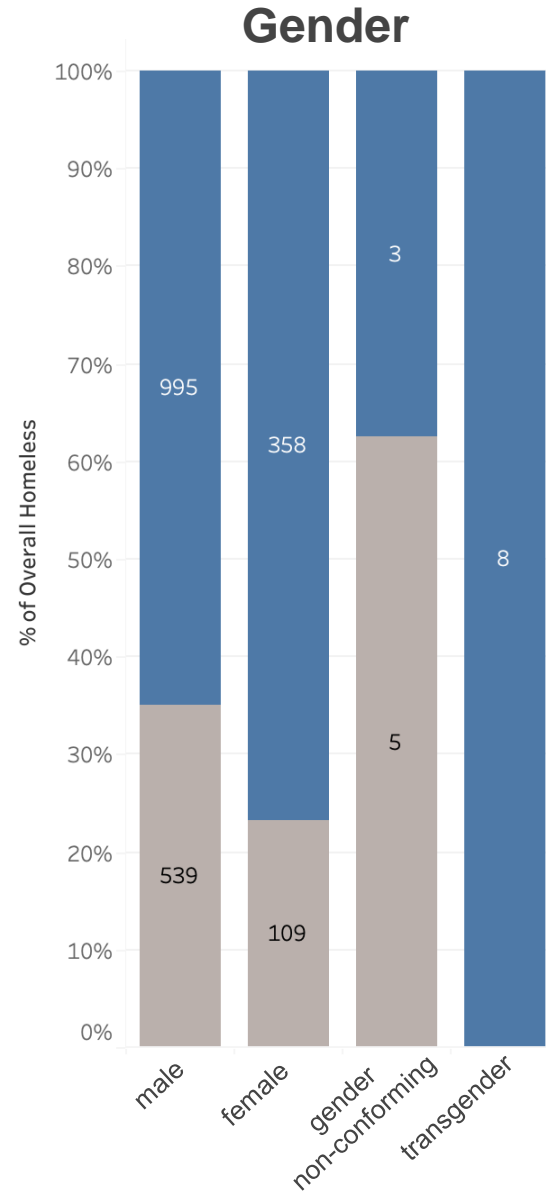2022Unsheltered Homeless: **5,535**
Rate of Change 22 20: **0.332**

A Tableau dashboard provides more detailed views of homelessness data across Georgia from 2007 – 2022.
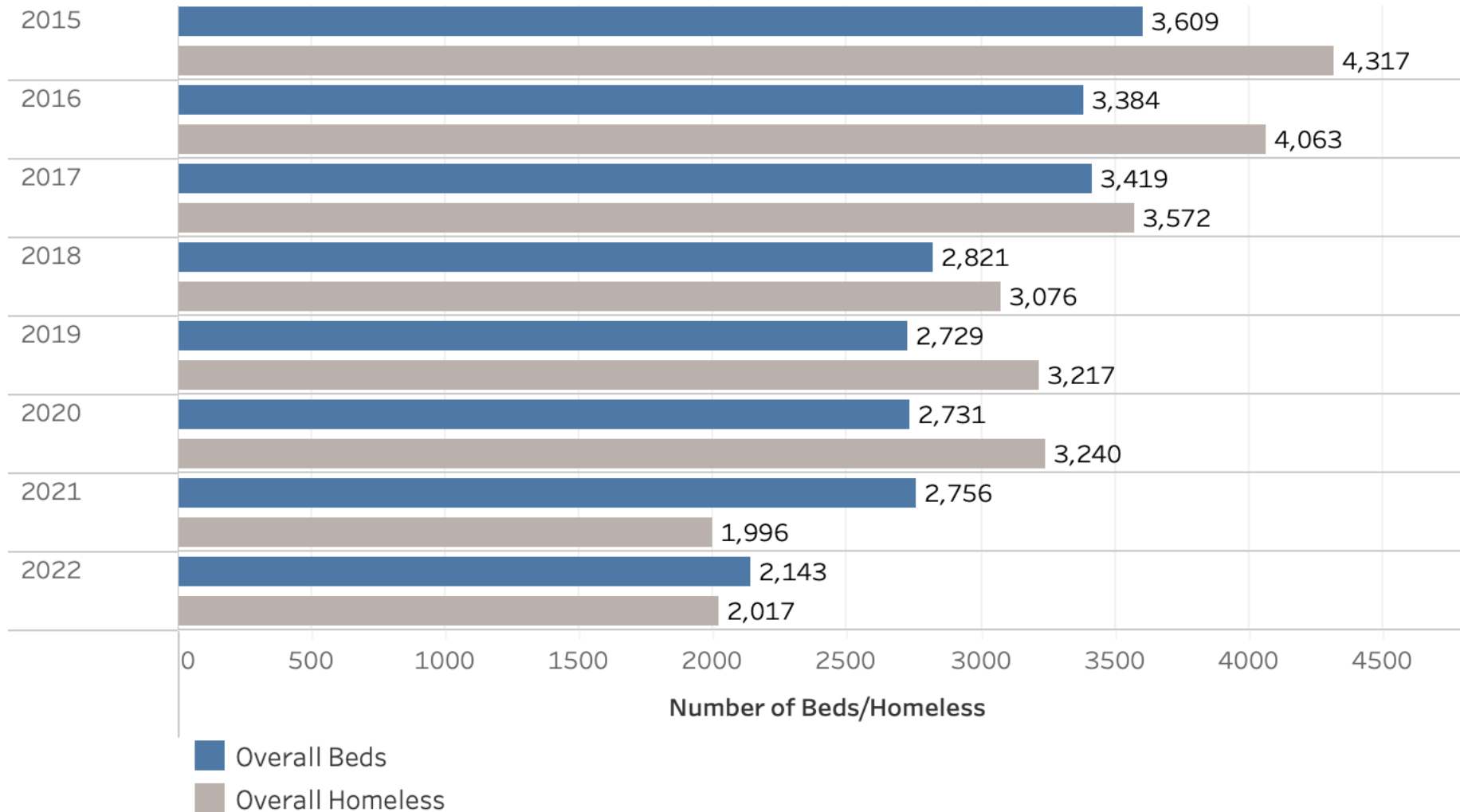

View dashboard here

In 2022, some demographics are being served more effectively by existing interventions and may need more targeted outreach.

Gender

Race

Family Unit

- Sheltered
- Unsheltered

- **Male and gender non-conforming people faced the highest rates of unsheltered homelessness in 2022**

- **Asian, Black, and multi-racial people experienced higher rates of unsheltered homelessness than white people**

- **Family units were all sheltered in 2022, while homeless individuals faced high rates of unsheltered homelessness**

Historically, there have never been enough beds to shelter every homeless person in Atlanta. That changed with the pandemic.
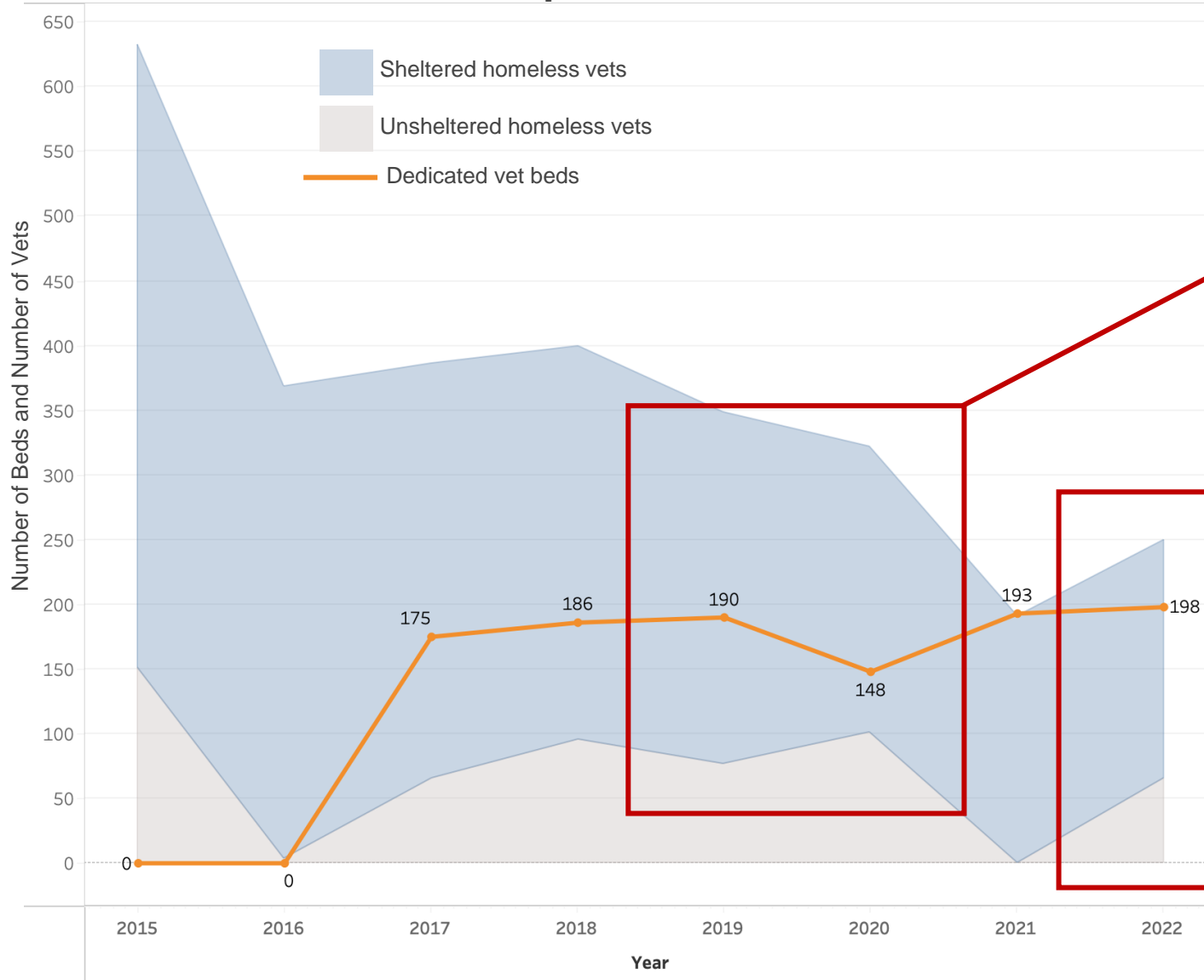
Overall Available Beds vs. Overall Homeless People

Year	Overall Beds	Overall Homeless
2015	3,609	4,317
2016	3,384	4,063
2017	3,419	3,572
2018	2,821	3,076
2019	2,729	3,217
2020	2,731	3,240
2021	2,756	1,996
2022	2,143	2,017

Number of Beds/Homeless

■ Overall Beds
■ Overall Homeless

- **There were almost 700 extra beds in 2021 compared to the January 2021 PIT-count, although we know this count likely missed unsheltered homeless people**

- **The number of 'extra' beds decreased in 2022. We predict another year of data will see a widening gap again, similar to 2018 or 2019 numbers, as households lose their COVID savings and the eviction moratorium is lifted**

Targeted interventions can have a major impact on sheltered rates.

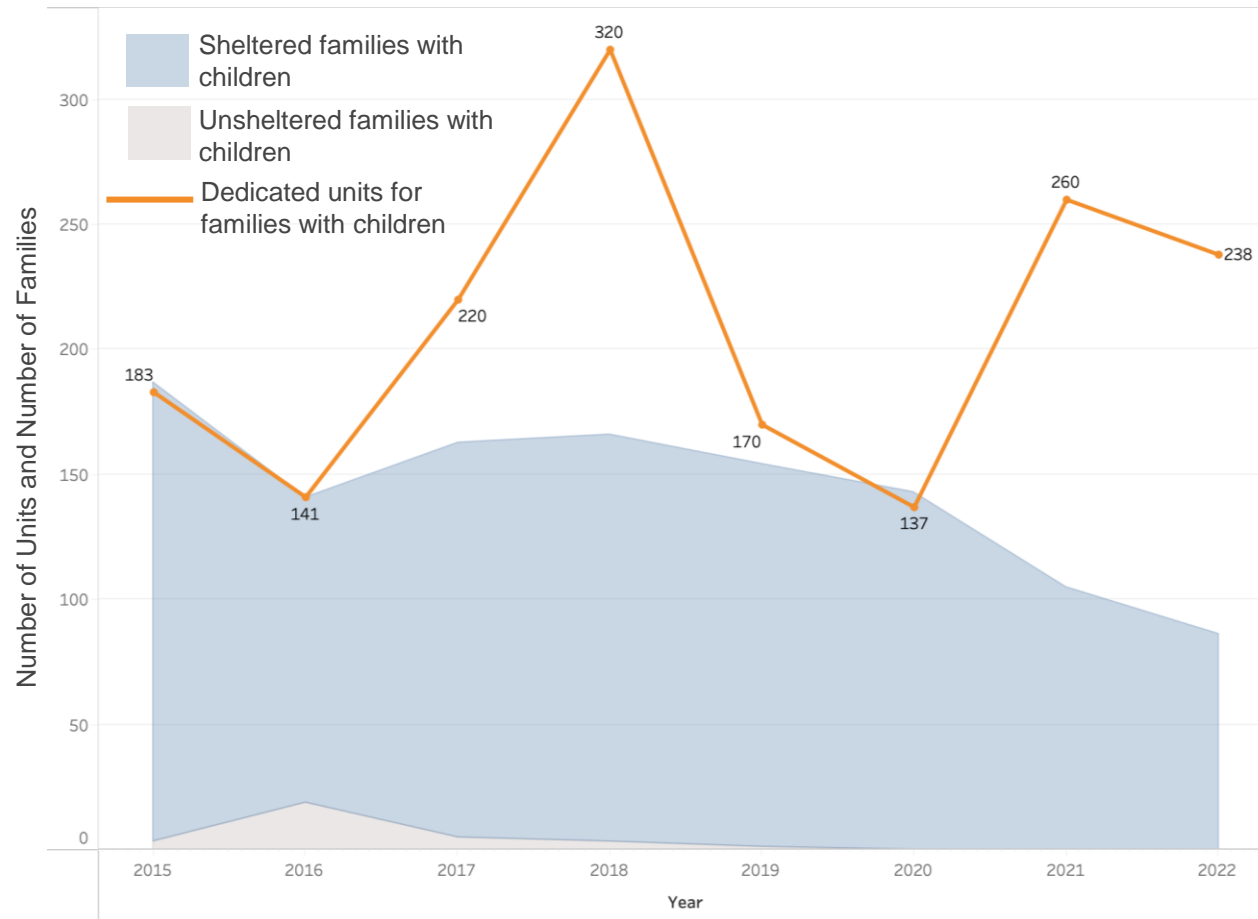## Veteran Homeless Population and Dedicated Vet Beds

Dip in Vet Beds

- When beds designated specifically for veterans dipped in 2020, the count of unsheltered veterans also increased
- This is a sign the designated veteran beds may be effective at reducing number of unsheltered vets
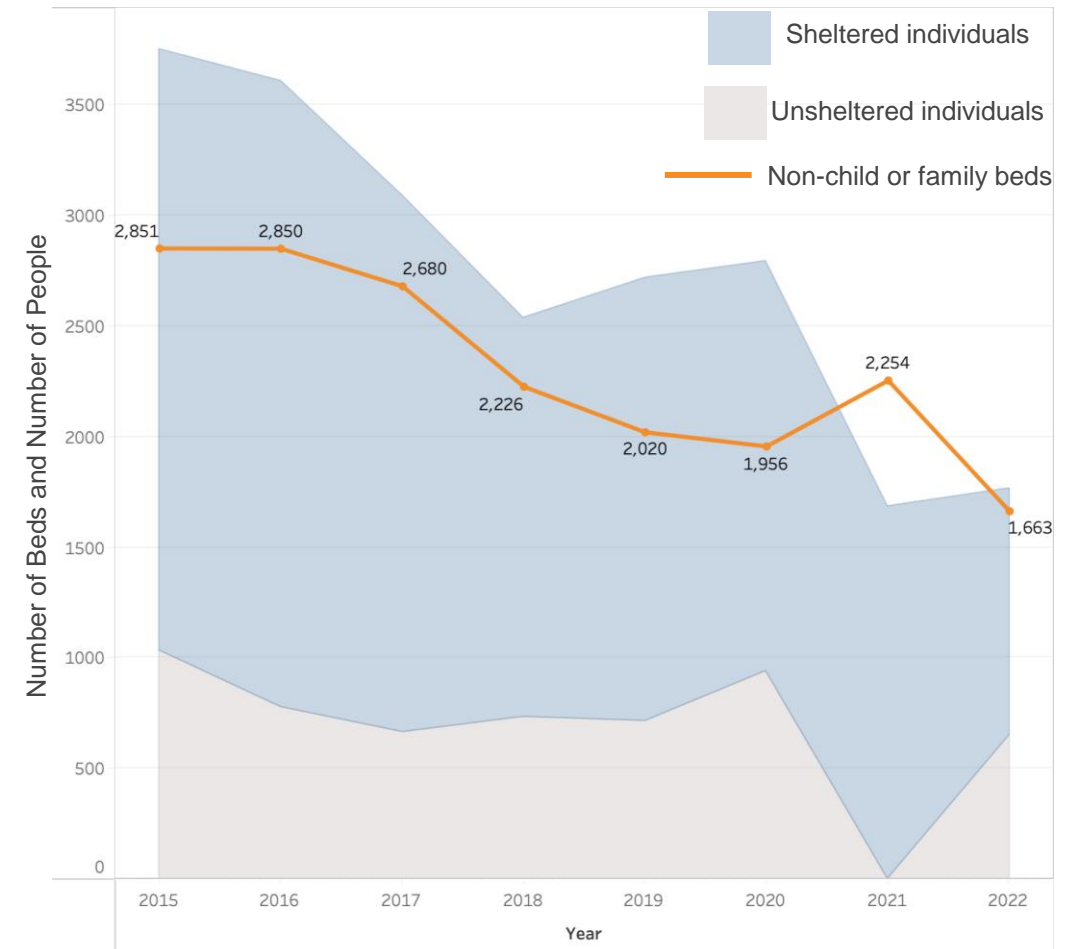
Vet Bed Shortage

- There were 52 more homeless veterans in 2022 than there were dedicated vet beds in 2022
- There were 66 unsheltered veterans in 2022
- This suggests increasing the number of designated vet beds could help close the gap

However, available beds don't always match community needs.

Homeless Families and Dedicated Family Units

Homeless Individuals and Child-Free Beds

- **Thankfully, almost all families with children are sheltered**
- **Since the pandemic, the number of units available for families with children is much higher than community needs**
- **In contrast, there are never enough individual beds**

The type of shelter matters too.

- **Transitional housing beds have decreased steadily over time while emergency shelters have fluctuated and increased.**
- **Utilization in emergency shelters is historically much higher than transitional housing, and even oversubscribed; this implies ES needs more resources.**
- **However, pandemic impacts show an increase in utilization for transitional housing and decrease in ES needs.**
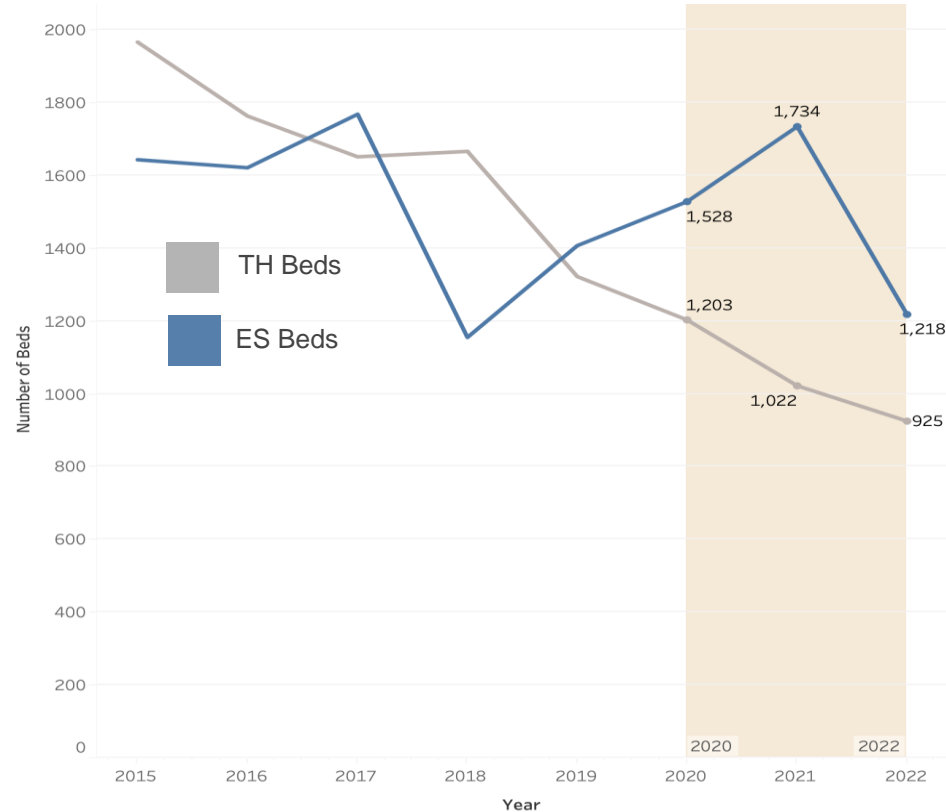
Emergency Shelters (ES): Provide support services and short-term stabilization for individuals and families before finding more appropriate long-term housing after an immediate crisis
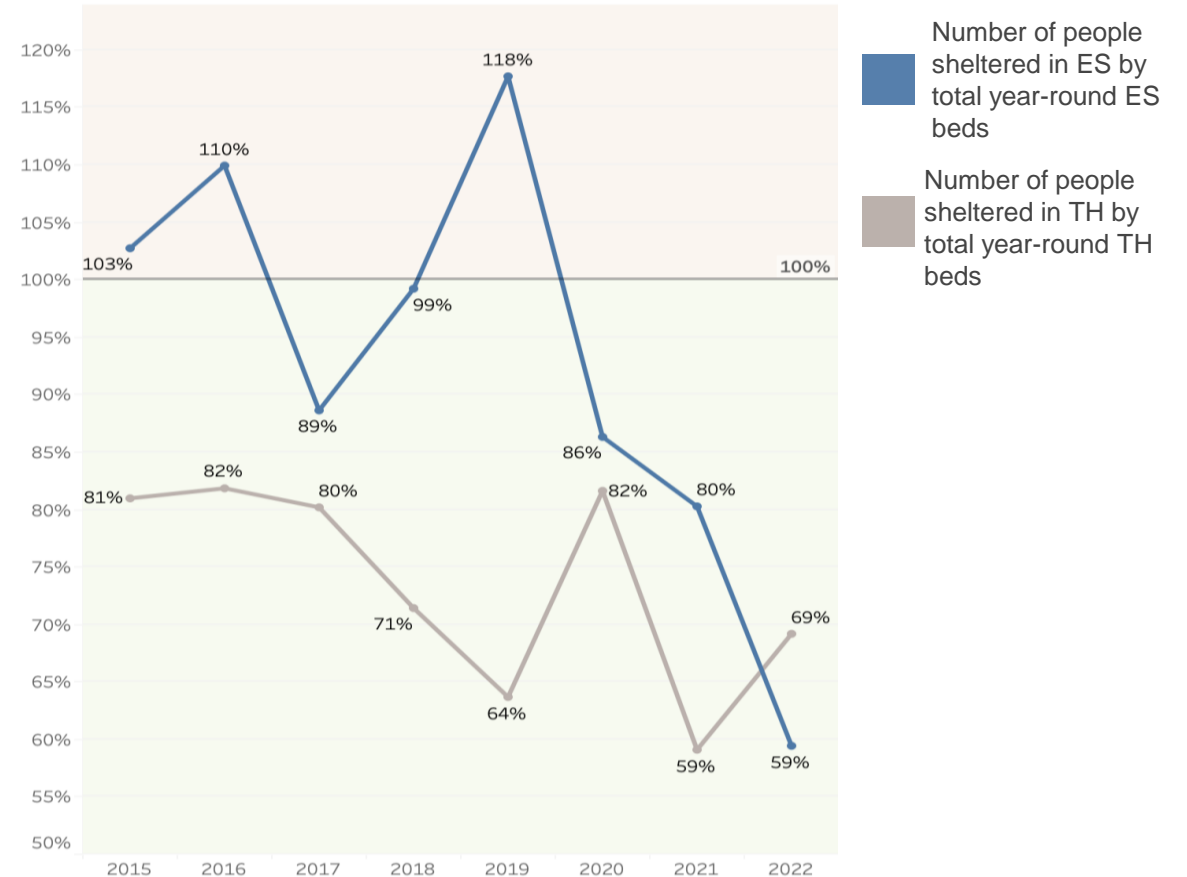
Transitional Housing (TH): Provides temporary residence (6 – 24 months) for people experiencing homelessness, often including supportive services

Total Year-Round ES vs. TH Beds Over Time

Percent Utilization by Shelter Type

Number of people sheltered in ES by total year-round ES beds

Number of people sheltered in TH by total year-round TH beds

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Key Questions	Recommendations	Potential Impacts
1 **How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact homelessness in Atlanta?**	• **Expand PIT methodology to count additional types of homelessness that may be missed in current counts.** • **Ensure additional supportive services are available in 2023 and 2024.**	• PIT methodologies only capture ES, TH, and unsheltered homeless, which especially during the pandemic, likely missed homeless people sheltered elsewhere • Agencies should prepare for large upticks in 2023 and 2024 as pandemic-era government assistance programs end to avoid large increases in overall and unsheltered homelessness.
2 **What groups are not being served by existing interventions in Atlanta?**	• **Increase available dedicated vet beds.** • **Develop targeted outreach to transgender and gender non-conforming homeless people and consider dedicated beds.** • **Increase support services and outreach to men and people of color.**	• Veterans have historically high percentages of unsheltered rates; increasing the number of available dedicated vet beds could help close the gap to shelter more vets. • Although they represent a small proportion of overall homelessness in Atlanta, they have high rates of being unsheltered; dedicated beds could help these particularly vulnerable populations. • Men and people of color are less likely to be sheltered than women and white people. Dedicated outreach and support to make existing shelters more accessible could help.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Key Questions	Recommendations	Potential Impacts

3

Could resources be allocated more efficiently across intervention types Atlanta?

- **Decrease available family units in exchange for more available individual beds in Atlanta.**

- **Increase available transitional housing units.**

- Increasing available individual units could help decrease the much higher rates of unsheltered individual homelessness in Atlanta compared to family unsheltered rates.

- Since the pandemic, transitional housing utilization is rising. This also represents a more permanent solution than emergency shelters. Having enough TH beds is critical to make sure people don't end up in emergency shelters if they don't need to be there.