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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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First-of-its-Kind Study Identifies Institutional Racism as Main Driver of Black Homelessness, Gives Comprehensive Policy Recommendations

LAHSA report shows how structural racism, discrimination, and unconscious bias in housing, employment, criminal justice, and child welfare policies have led to overrepresentation of Black people experiencing homelessness

LOS ANGELES, CA—More than 100 county, city, and community leaders gathered today to highlight racial disparities and address systemic racism in public policy affecting Black people experiencing homelessness across Los Angeles County.

Black people make up 9% of the population of LA County, but more than one-third of its population experiencing homelessness—an overrepresentation that is consistent demographically across other jurisdictions in the United States. A [groundbreaking new report by LAHSA's Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness](#) sheds light on why, and puts forth a broad set of targeted recommendations to reverse this injustice.

The report, a culmination of nine months of work by the 26-member Ad Hoc Committee, includes 67 recommendations to create a broad framework that will advance equity and eliminate disparities that impact Black people experiencing homelessness across LA County. The report is the first step of a dynamic process of collaboration between stakeholders to implement recommendations, which include interweaving a racial equity lens throughout homelessness policy and service delivery systems as well as across public, private, and philanthropic institutions.

A theme that cut across the committee's work was that racism, discrimination, and unconscious bias in our public systems and institutions has contributed to, and remains intertwined with, homelessness. Ending homelessness will require a collective commitment to dismantling racism and addressing racial disparities, and sustained support from funders, policymakers, mainstream systems of care, service providers, and community partners. The report highlights persistent cases of systemic bias in policies affecting housing, employment, criminal justice, and child welfare—and identifies ways to advance racial equity in our homeless services system.

“This report is a critical first step to address the collective failings of systems and institutions that—de facto and de jure—have been designed to deliver the painful disparities that affect so many of our brothers and sisters,” said Los Angeles County Supervisor **Mark Ridley-Thomas**. “Hard work lies ahead to counter this tragic inheritance. If our region is to prosper, it is not only a moral imperative, it is an absolute economic imperative that all who call Los Angeles home are able to attain their full measure of dignity and self-worth.”

“We have long understood the painful reality that a disproportionate number of African-Americans are caught in the grip of homelessness—and we have to be more intentional about how to confront and end this crisis,” said Los Angeles Mayor **Eric Garcetti**. “This report puts the spotlight where it needs to be, and helps us focus efforts on the individuals, families, and communities that need the most help.”

“Homelessness is the greatest issue facing Los Angeles and racism is amplifying the impacts of economic inequality and housing access,” said Los Angeles City Councilmember **Marqueece Harris-Dawson**. “Now is the time to directly address the root causes of homelessness and racism remains one of the biggest causes.”

“This report is a launching pad for a new level of collaboration,” said LAHSA Commissioner **Jacqueline Waggoner**, chair of the Ad Hoc Committee and VP and Southern California Market Leader of Enterprise Community Partners, Inc. “It reflects a diversity of voices, including people who have experienced homelessness, service providers, and community members, and creates a blueprint for change. This is just the beginning of the work, and we will keep applying a racial equity lens to our systems and policies as we move forward.”

“Only by acknowledging and naming the painful truth about how our systems and policies have created these unjust racial disparities can we do the hard work together to reverse them,” said **Kelli Bernard**, chair of the LAHSA Commission and vice chair of the Ad Hoc committee. “I’m hopeful about the impact we can make by attacking these systemic obstacles in such an intentional way, and the lives that can be changed for the better as a result.”

A summary of insights and recommendations from the report is listed below. Additional resources:

- [Key Messages](#)
- [Full Report](#)
- [Executive Summary of the Report](#)

Summary of Key Insights from the Report

- For lasting change to occur, **institutional barriers** across agencies and mainstream systems must be dismantled to eliminate the racial disparities and systemic racism affecting Black people experiencing homelessness.
- The mounting **affordable housing crisis** across the state, especially in the Los Angeles region, paired with persistently low, stagnant, and declining wages, exacerbates homelessness and particularly affects Black people.
- The interconnectedness of **incarceration and homelessness** creates a revolving door that only serves to make the plight of homelessness more challenging and complex.
- Black people experiencing homelessness have disproportionately high rates **of child welfare system involvement**.
- **Care and empathy** are crucial components of outreach and case management services—and of policy and program design. These components must be embedded within agency leadership and decision-making bodies that support direct service delivery. When asked,

“What would have kept you from becoming homeless?” participants, in different words, responded, “having someone who cared about me.”

- The **inclusion of Black people with lived experience of homelessness** in all aspects of program and policy design, implementation, evaluation, and service delivery, is critical to ensuring that programs and services effectively meet the needs of those they are intended to serve.
- The **quality of interim housing varies** across facilities, and for some, living in a shelter can be a traumatizing or re-traumatizing experience.
- Despite local investment to expand the permanent housing resources within the Los Angeles County Coordinated Entry System (CES), a **gap in housing availability remains**, as the number of participants in need of permanent housing resources greatly exceeds the available supply.
- This scarcity of resources often results in people living in unsheltered conditions or in interim housing for extended periods of time. Although CES appears to place Black people experiencing homelessness into housing at proportional rates, **Black people served through CES permanent housing interventions experienced a higher rate of returns to homelessness than all other race and ethnic groups**. This points to a significant need for further research to better understand what is causing this disparity and what additional supports are needed to improve housing stability and retention.

Summary of Report Recommendations

- Improve **data collection, analysis, and collaborative research to better understand and track issues affecting Black people experiencing homelessness**.
- Advance **racially equitable policies, programs, and funding** across institutions, including LAHSA, homeless service providers, and city and county agencies.
- Enhance **cross-system collaboration and partnerships** to more effectively prevent and reduce the time spent in homelessness and improve housing retention and stability for Black people experiencing homelessness.
- **Expand capacity building and training opportunities** to ensure service providers understand the impact of institutional racism and racial bias on Black people experiencing homelessness.
- Target investments and **funding enhancements to initiatives aimed at reducing disparities** and ensuring sufficient funding for services and programs supporting Black people experiencing homelessness.
- Implement **targeted improvements to service delivery** within the Los Angeles County CES and other systems of care in which Black people experiencing homelessness are overrepresented, to address barriers and improve outcomes for Black people.

- Expand advocacy at federal, state, and local government levels for **progressive and racially equitable policies, programs, and (direct or indirect) funding** impacting Black people experiencing homelessness.

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The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) is a joint powers authority of the city and county of Los Angeles, created in 1993 to address the problems of homelessness in Los Angeles County. LAHSA is the lead agency in the HUD-funded Los Angeles Continuum of Care, and coordinates and manages more than \$300 million annually in federal, state, county, and city funds for programs providing shelter, housing, and services to people experiencing homelessness. For more information visit www.lahsa.org.