

How Hospital Data Can Inform State Homelessness Policy

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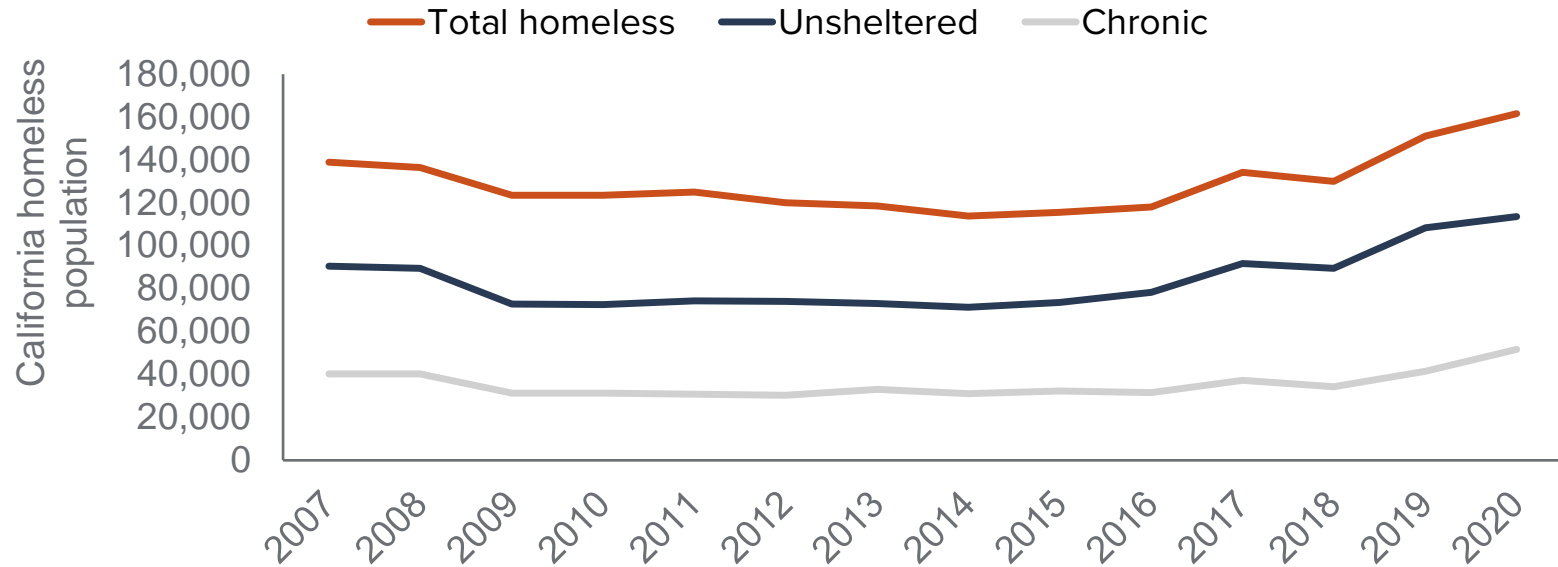
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Few data sources document the size and needs of Californians experiencing homelessness

- Local homeless assistance agencies are the primary source of information
- Hospital emergency department data could provide another important source of information...
- ...especially if combined with other data resources

What do we know about Californians experiencing homelessness?

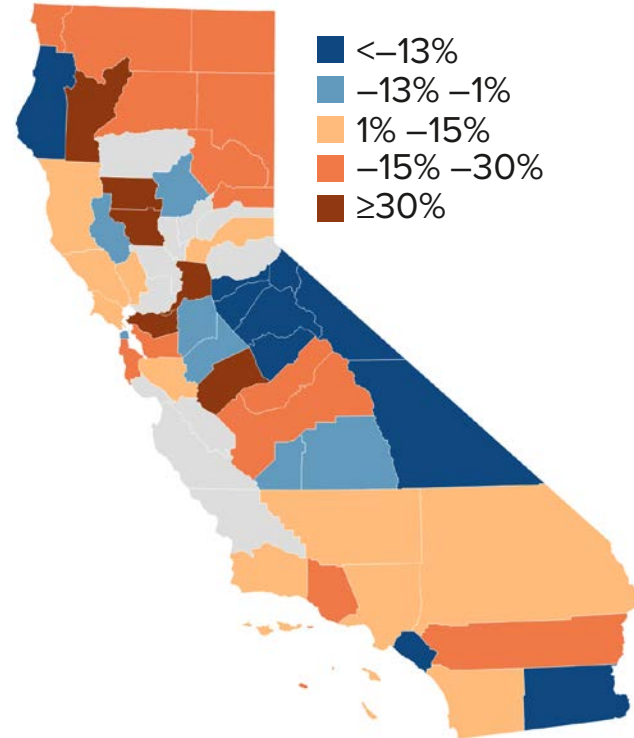
California's homeless population has increased in recent years



Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD); CoC Homeless Population and Sub-Population Reports

Homelessness rose in most counties according to available 2022 counts

- Los Angeles county reported a 4% increase
- Sacramento county reported the largest jump with homelessness rising 68%
- Whereas San Francisco and Orange counties reported declines



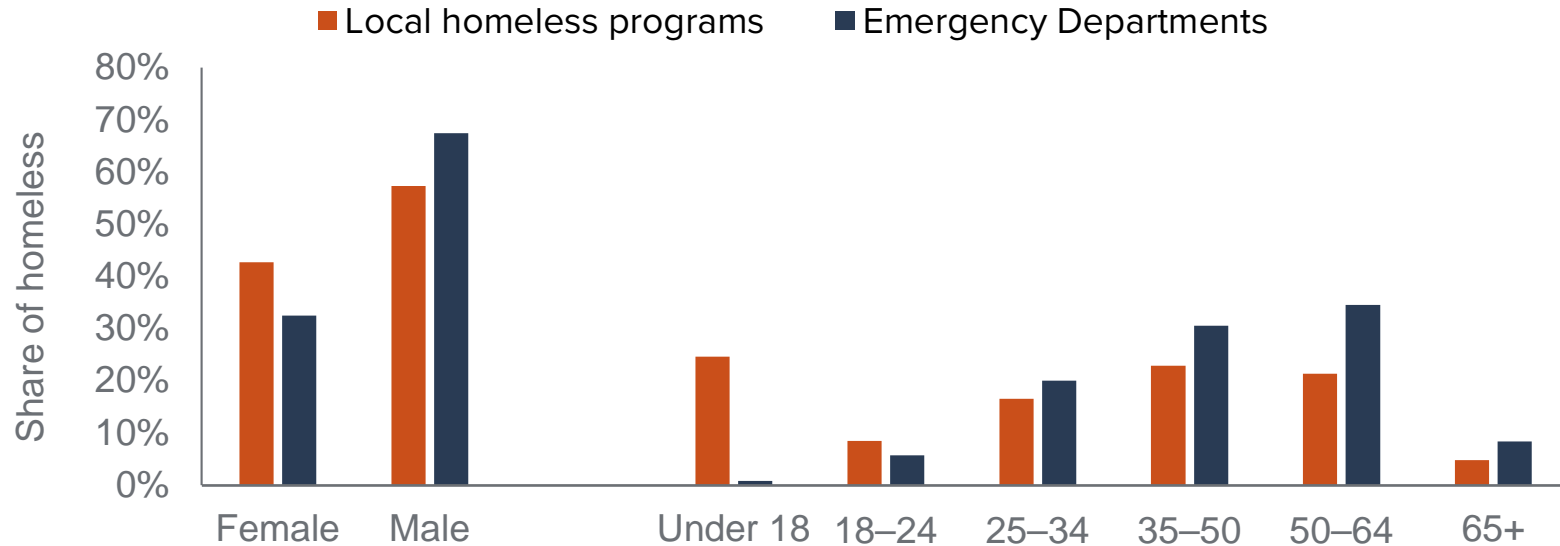
Emergency departments are key service providers for people experiencing homelessness

- Federal law requires EDs to treat everyone who seeks care
- In California, SB 1152 has brought more focus to screening patients for homelessness in hospital EDs
- We conducted interviews with ED staff to better understand how information is collected and recorded
- Challenges to screening; certain people more likely to be identified as homeless

Patient registration staff reported difficulties assessing people's housing status

“Some patients give you an address, but they’re really staying at an unstable place.... For the patients that are disclosing that they’re at a shelter or they’re carrying a lot of bags, it’s almost a little easier to identify that they’re homeless. It’s really the ones that, like I said, are a little bit more stable. They might even be staying in an RV and maybe still working, and really trying to capture it is hard because homelessness is broad when you really look at the actual definition of it.”

Hospital EDs report treating more men, fewer children than homeless assistance programs

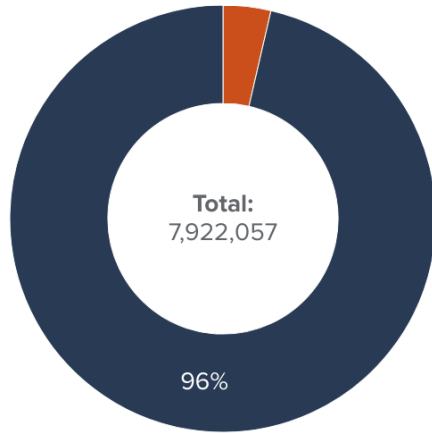


Source: Authors' analysis of HCAI hospital discharge data, 2019; California Homeless Data Integration System (HDIS), 2019.

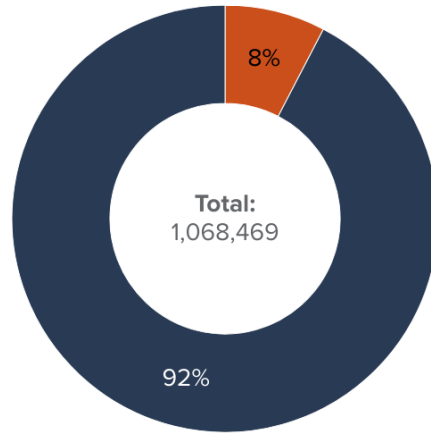
What does the discharge data tell us about hospitals treating people experiencing homelessness?

About 4% of ED visits statewide were by patients identified as homeless

Homeless Not Homeless



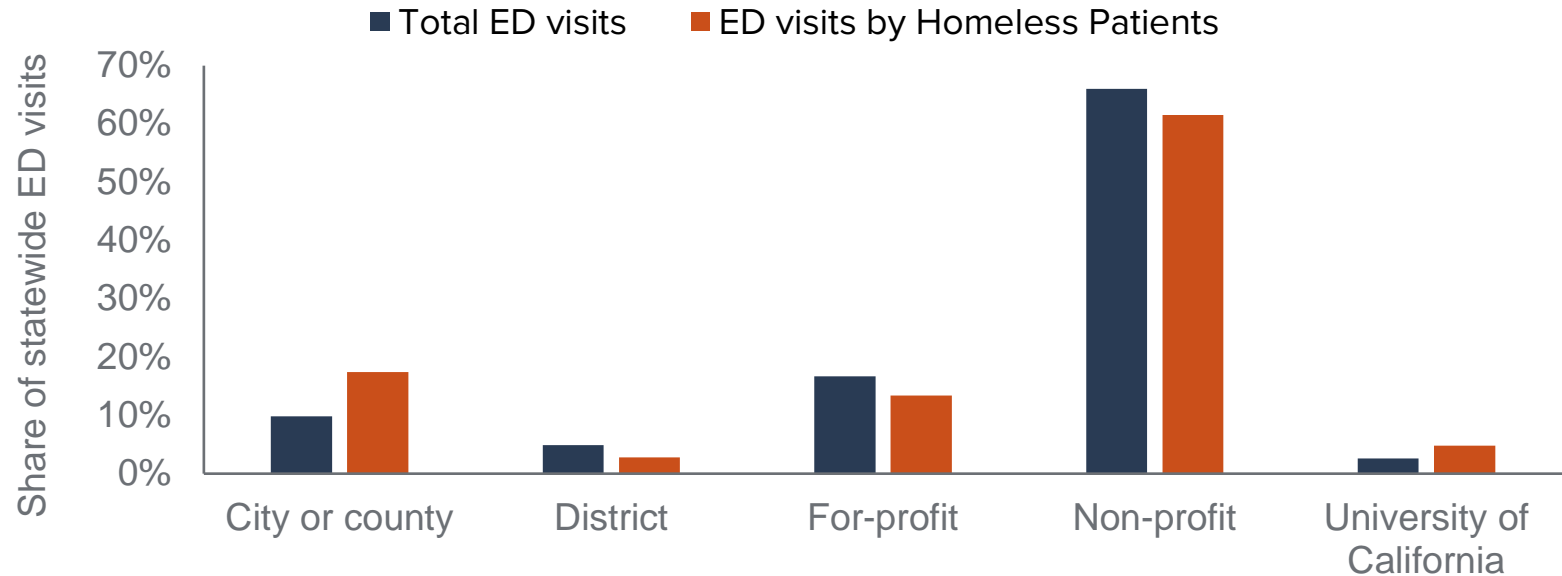
ED outpatient visit



ED admission

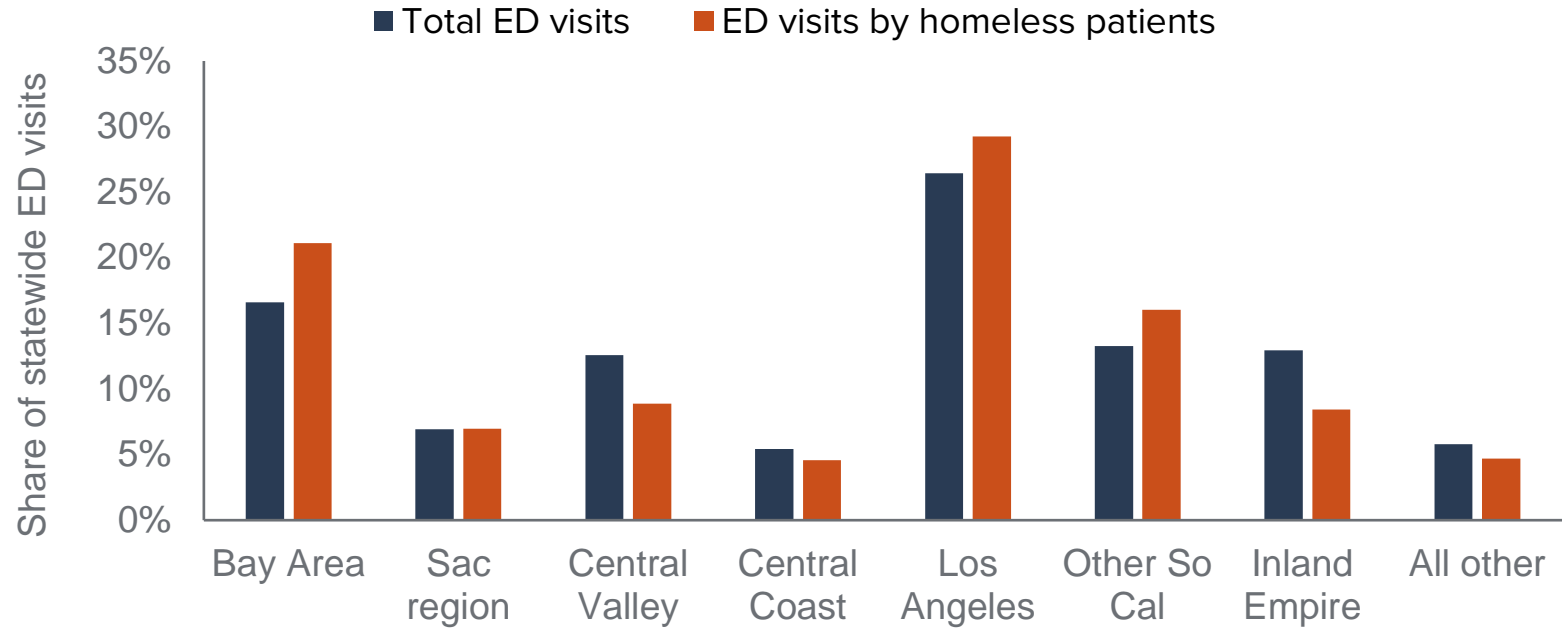
Source: Authors' analysis of HCAI discharge data, 2019.

County and UC hospitals report serving higher shares of homeless patients



Source: Authors' analysis of HCAI discharge data and hospital annual financial reports, 2019.

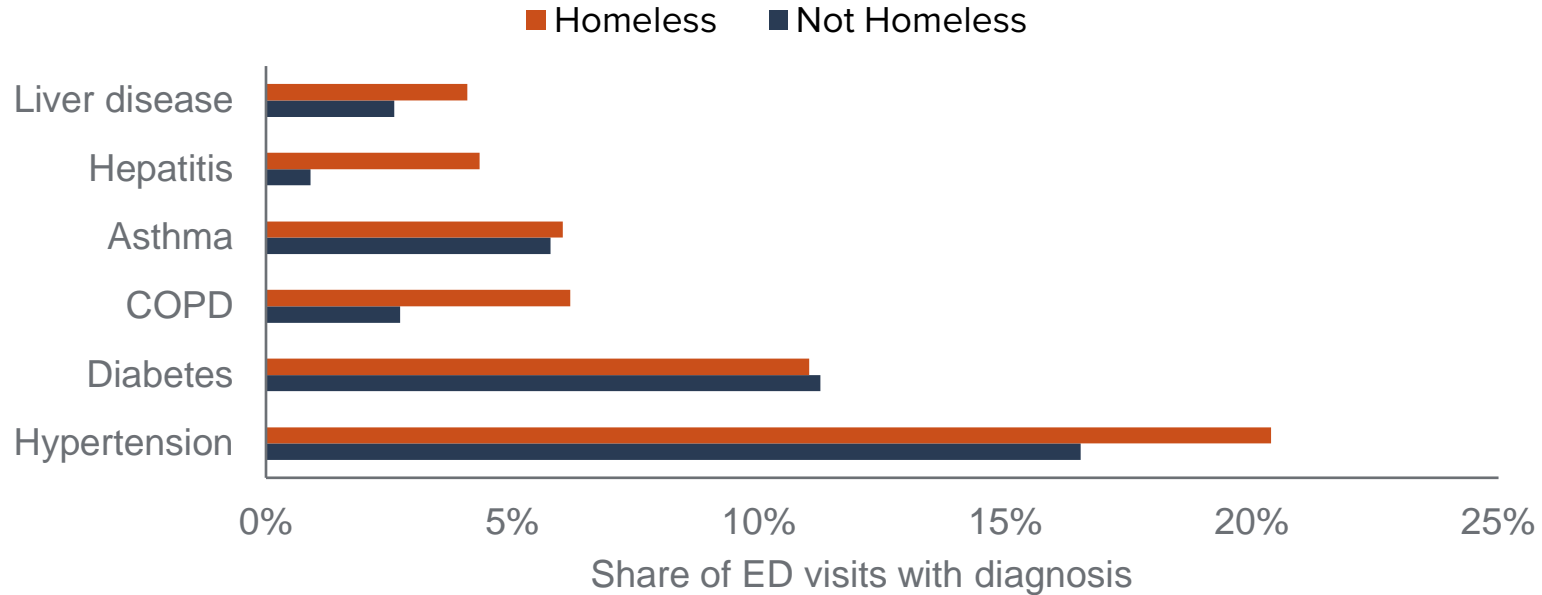
As do Bay Area and Los Angeles-area hospitals



Source: Authors' analysis of HCAI discharge data and hospital annual financial reports, 2019.

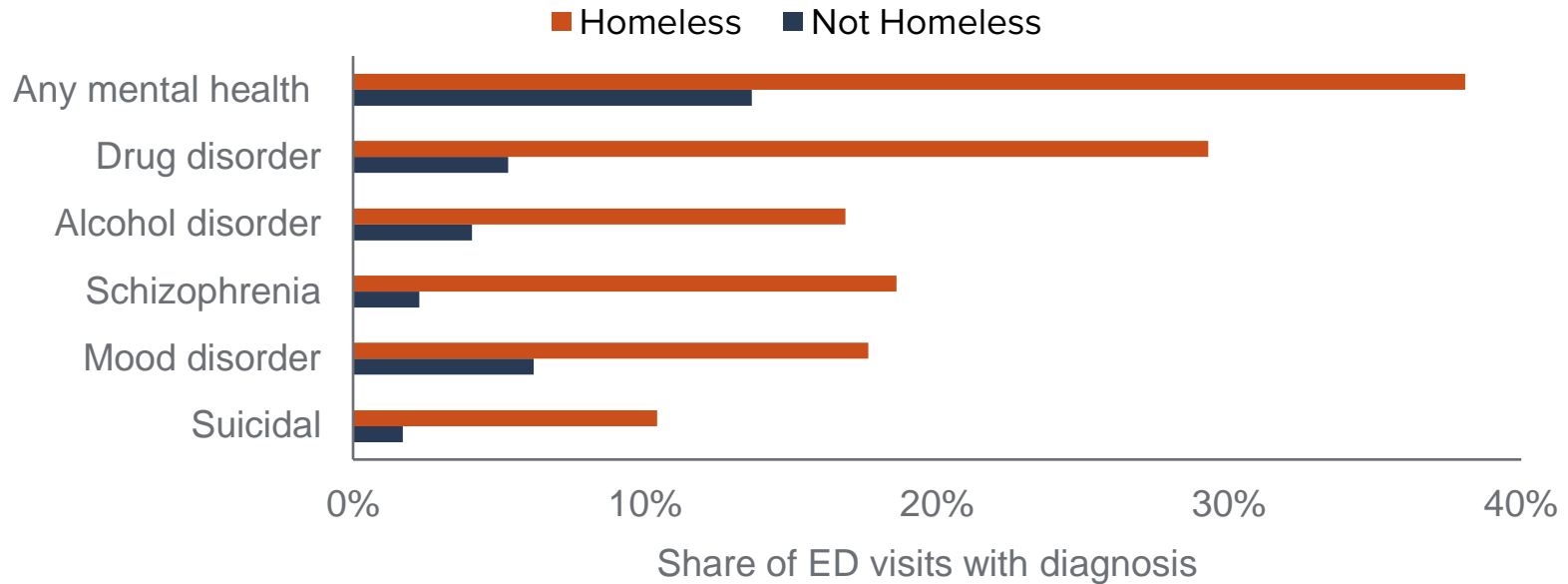
What else does the discharge data tell us?

Some chronic conditions are diagnosed more often during ED visits with homeless patients



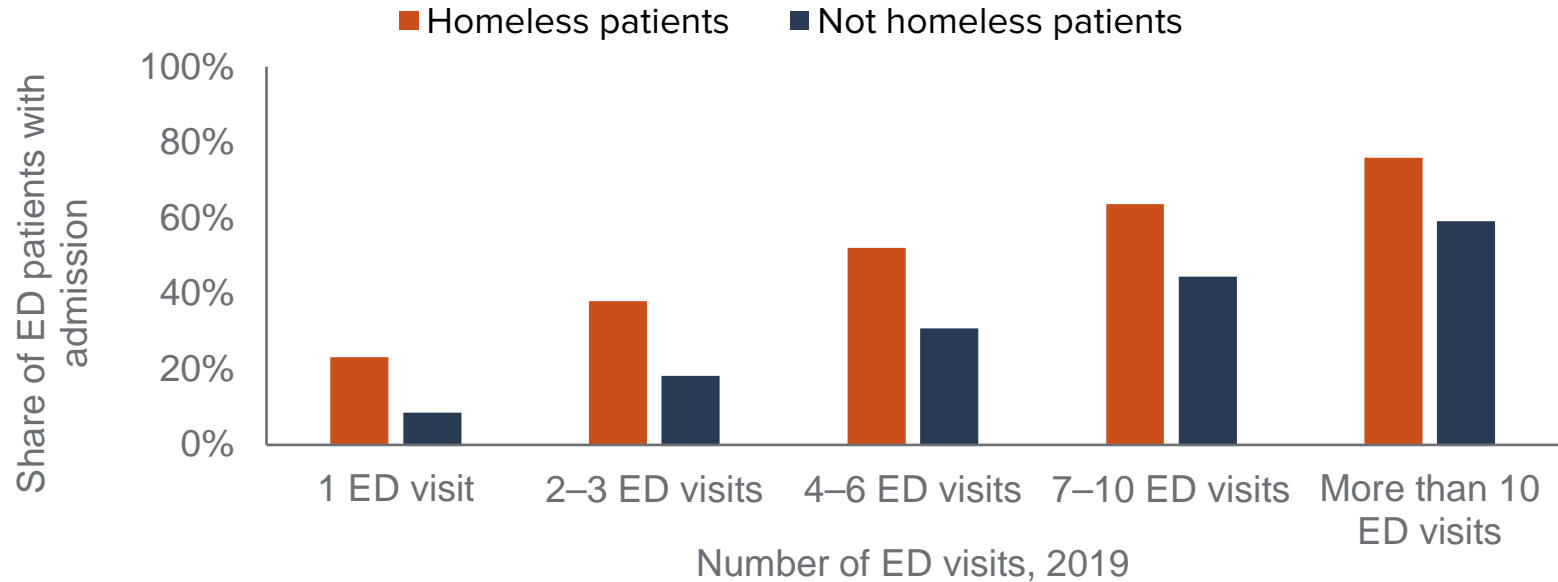
Source: Authors' analysis of HCAI discharge data, 2019.

Especially when we look at behavioral health conditions



Source: Authors' analysis of HCAI discharge data, 2019.

Patients identified as homeless have much higher admission rates



Source: Authors' analysis of HCAI discharge data, 2019.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- ED discharge data, especially if linked with other administrative data, would be a valuable resource
- In 2019, more than 400,000 ED visits were made by patients identified as homeless
- Increased state investments and policy focus require better data to evaluate the effectiveness of programs and funding

Notes on the use of these slides

These slides were created to accompany a presentation. They do not include full documentation of sources, data samples, methods, and interpretations. To avoid misinterpretations, please contact:

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Thank you for your interest in this work.