

**CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY MANAGING DIRECTOR
FOR
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

2016 – 2017 PANHANDLING SURVEY

Executive Summary

Panhandling, or asking passerby by for money or food, has become growing issue in Philadelphia. Changes in the social and geographic landscape—such as the opioid epidemic and the closure and privatization of public spaces that had previously functioned as popular community spaces for vulnerable individuals—seem to be spurring this phenomenon. To better understand the drivers of panhandling behavior and the needs of the panhandling population, the Office of the Deputy Managing Director for Health and Human Services interviewed 129 persons found panhandling from November 2016 to January 2017. Interviewees responded to questions on panhandling behavior, income and benefits, housing, and health.

The key findings are:

- People who panhandle in Center City Philadelphia also live in Philadelphia.
- They treat their activity like a full-time job.
- They earn a meager wage, which they use for essentials.
- People who panhandle would like to be employed, but face significant barriers to employment.
- The panhandling population experiences housing instability.
- The opioid epidemic has had an apparent effect on panhandling in Philadelphia.
- Panhandling is an individual activity and is routinely censured by authorities.

Overall, the data suggests that greater access to housing and low demand employment would serve to reduce the number of individuals engaging in panhandling in Center City. More details on these finding are below.

People who panhandle in Center City Philadelphia also live in Philadelphia. 94% of respondents indicated that they live in Philadelphia. When asked where they would be sleeping that night, 66% selected Center City and 23% selected other Philadelphia neighborhoods.

People who panhandle treat their activity like a full-time job. Panhandling consumed much of the interviewees' waking hours. The median responses to how many hours spent panhandling each day and the number of days spent panhandling in the last month were six hours and 30 days, respectively.

People who panhandle earn a meager wage, which they use for essentials. Despite panhandling for extended periods of time, people who panhandle accrue modest daily sums. Respondents to the survey typically earned \$20 each day. When asked why they panhandle, nearly half of those interviewed noted that they needed the money for food, and 56% said they needed it for essentials such as food, housing, toiletries, and others.

People who panhandle would like to be employed, but face significant barriers to employment. Interviewees expressed interest in participating in an employment program that would hire them to do yard maintenance and street cleaning. 84% of survey participants said they would join such a program, if offered. Nevertheless, 16% indicated that they would not participate due to physical or mental health conditions. Further 58% reported having both mental health and substance abuse conditions, suggesting that any successful employment program for this population must be coupled with social services and supports.

The panhandling population experiences housing instability. While panhandling and homelessness are not always co-occurring, housing instability is common among individuals who panhandle in Center City.

When asked which accommodations they would be sleeping in on the evening that their survey was conducted, only 21% shared that they would be staying in their own room or couch surfing with family or friends. 52% reported that they would be staying outdoors or in a public space.

The opioid epidemic has had a considerable impact on panhandling in Philadelphia. 35% of interviewees had used opioids, such as fentanyl or heroin, in the past twelve months. 55% of the respondents were Caucasian; of this demographic, 56% were opioid users. Nearly half of respondents were age 45 or older (61), but the most commonly selected age duo-decile was 30-34 (28). Of those ages 30-34, 64% were opioid users. This differs notably from other populations served by the City. For example, older African American men predominate at Philadelphia's free meal sites, where 69% of guests are ages 40-55 and 70% of guests are African American.

Panhandling is an individual activity and is routinely censured by authorities. People asking for money on the streets of Philadelphia appear to be operating independently. When asked "Will you be required to give any of the funds you earn panhandling to someone else?" only 20% of respondents indicated that they would. This question is intended to create a proxy for estimating levels of coerced or even organized panhandling activity in Center City. People who panhandle in Center City receive regular reprimands from both informal and formal authority figures. 81% of survey participants had been asked to move or stop panhandling while engaging in this behavior over the course of the past year, with 78% identifying the police as the group that engaged them. These data indicate that panhandling is not merely a public safety issue.

Introduction

Panhandling has become an increasingly pressing issue, both locally and nationally. In Philadelphia, changes in the Center City landscape—particularly the closure and privatization of certain public spaces—have condensed the local street population. Many who would congregate in parks along the Ben Franklin Parkway or in LOVE Park have sought refuge in other parts of Philadelphia's downtown hub. Further, Philadelphia's street population has increased in the past year. Preliminary numbers from the 2017 Point in Time Count—the federally sponsored, annual homeless tally—indicate a significant increase in unsheltered chronic street homelessness. The opioid epidemic may be a driver of this uptick; 900 people died of a drug overdose in Philadelphia last year, a sum propelled by heroin, fentanyl, and prescription opioid use.¹ This displacement and growth has magnified quality of life issues associated with the street population, with panhandling being chief among them.

It is within this context that the Office of the Deputy Managing Director for Health and Human Services (HHS) crafted and initiated the 2016-2017 Panhandling Intercept Survey. As Philadelphia grapples with an urban commonplace like street begging, it is critical to have sound data that can inform initiatives to address these concerns. This survey accompanies and shapes the efforts of the Shared Public Spaces Workgroup, a public-private partnership convened by the Office of Homeless Services and the Managing Director's Office. As the workgroup devises strategies to ensure that Philadelphia's parks, plazas, and streets are hospitable to all, the survey findings will be a guide toward solutions that tackle the root causes of panhandling behavior.

Project Design and Implementation

The Philadelphia survey was modeled on a study conducted in Toronto, ON, Canada in 2001 titled "Income and Spending Patterns among Panhandlers."² HHS adapted this framework with questions from two additional sources. One was a 2013 panhandling survey based in San Francisco's Union Square Business Improvement District, which was provided to HHS by the San Francisco Department of

¹ Wood, Sam. "Fatal Drug Overdoses in Philly Surged to 900 in 2016." *Philly.com*. The Philadelphia Inquirer, 11 Jan. 2017. Web. Apr. 2017.

² Bose, Rohit, and Stephen W. Hwang. "Income and Spending Patterns among Panhandlers." *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 167.5 (2002): 477-79. CMAJ. Canadian Medical Association, 3 Sept. 2002. Web. Oct. 2016.

Homelessness and Supportive Housing. The second source was the annual survey of Philadelphians who seek free meal at sites sponsored by the Food Access Collaborative within the Mayor’s Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity. The resulting Philadelphia questionnaire featured five sections: panhandling behavior, income and benefits, housing, health, and demographics. Surveyors also noted the date, time, and location for each interview they completed. (The survey form appears in the appendix of this document.)

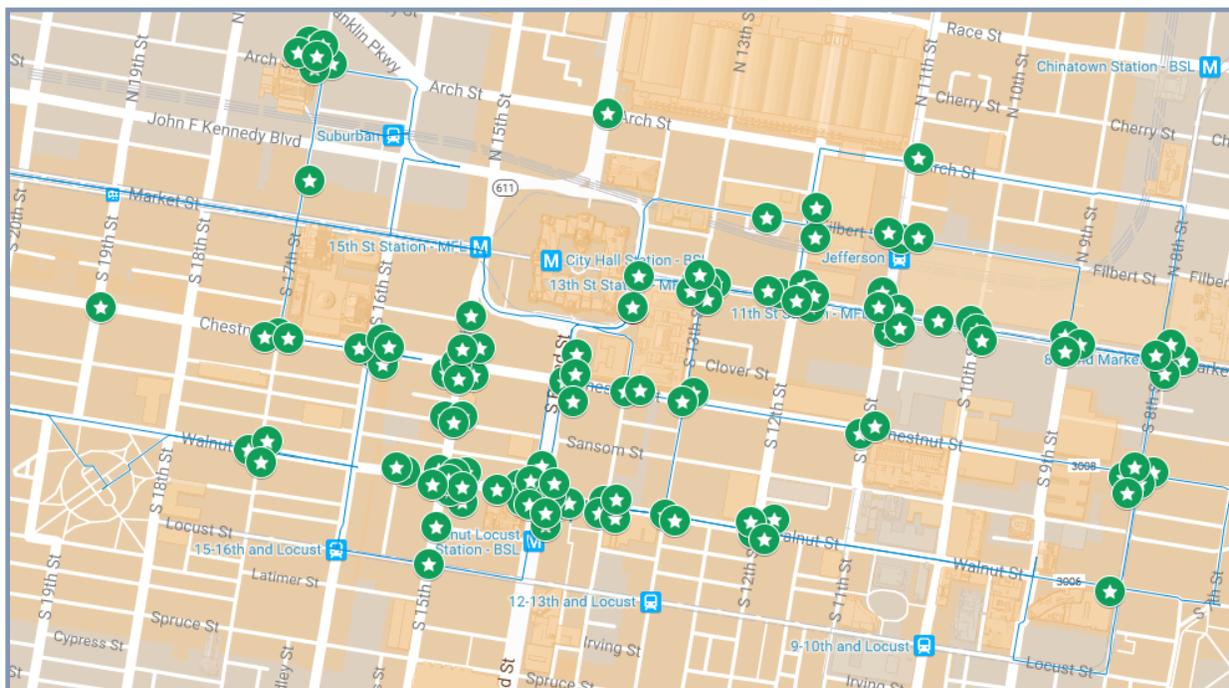


Figure 1: Interview and Route Map

Individual interviews are depicted with green star icons. Pre-assigned routes are depicted as blue lines. Surveyors were encouraged to scan additional city blocks after completing their designated routes, hence the interview icons that appear outside of the blue pathways.

To administer the survey, pairs of volunteer interviewers patrolled routes throughout Center City, targeting areas of interest such as the Pennsylvania Convention Center, Reading Terminal Market, and the entrances and exits to the Suburban Station Concourse. Most interview subjects were located along the commercial corridors of Walnut, Chestnut, and Market Streets, between 8th and 17th Streets. The interviews took place during shifts tethered to the morning rush hour (9:00a – 11:30a), lunchtime (11:31a – 3:30p), and the afternoon rush hour (3:31p – 6:00p). Slightly more individuals asking for money were identified and interviewed during the latest shift.

Surveyors intercepted individuals “flying a sign,” asking for money, or asking for food. Street performers and persons selling items like “loose” cigarettes or DVDs were excluded. All interviewees were compensated with two SEPTA tokens, a market value of \$3.60; potential subjects were notified of this incentive prior to agreeing to participate.

The survey was conducted anonymously. In order to further respect participants’ privacy, surveyors enabled their subjects to decline any questions at will. To preserve the validity of the data set and avoid duplication, surveyors always asked potential subjects if they had previously been interviewed for this project before making their initial offer to participate. Surveyors declined those who indicated that they had and discarded responses for those whose behavior connoted an overfamiliarity with the questionnaire. Ultimately the team of interviewers collected 129 responses, allowing HHS to develop a robust profile of the Center City panhandling population.

Findings

Housing & Residency

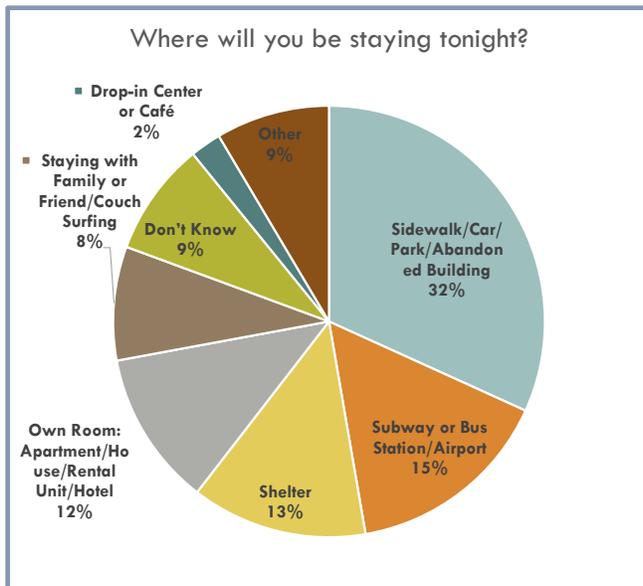


Figure 2: Where will you be staying tonight?

While national studies have underscored that “only a small percentage of homeless people panhandle, and only a small percentage of panhandlers are homeless,” data collected during the Panhandling Intercept Survey suggests that panhandling and homelessness tend to be intertwined phenomena in Center City Philadelphia.³ The survey included several questions on housing status to tease out this and other distinctions. To assess the prevalence of housing instability, the survey asked both “Have you experienced homelessness in the past year?” and “Where will you be sleeping tonight?” Homelessness was incredibly common among interview subjects—only 9% had not been homeless during the past year and 41% had experienced homelessness for a year or longer. The most frequent responses to “Where will you be sleeping tonight?” were Sidewalk/Car/Park/Abandoned Building (32%) and Subway or Bus Station/Airport (15%). Only 12% had secured their own room for the

evening.

Despite being unsheltered, interviewees largely make their home in Philadelphia. Ninety-four percent responded “yes” to “Do you live in Philadelphia?” When asked how far they had traveled to arrive at the location of their interview—i.e., the city block where the surveyors encountered and intercepted them—58% reported traveling 10 blocks or less. Thus, most respondents bedded down in Center City or an adjacent neighborhood.

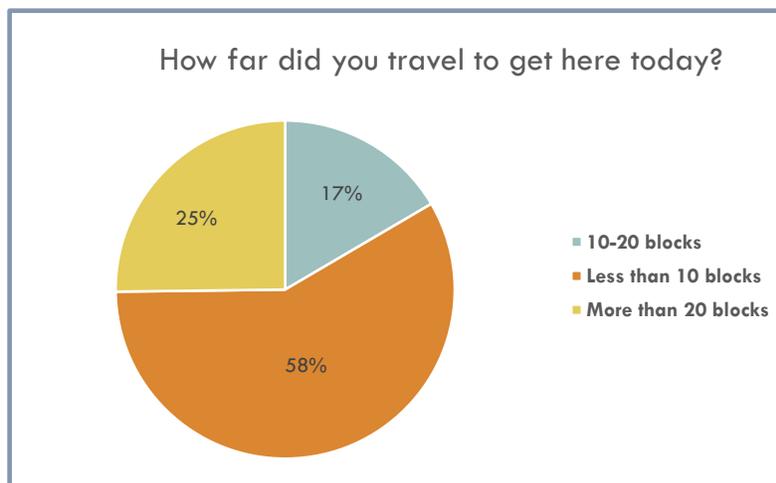


Figure 3: How far did you travel to get here today?

³ United States. Department of Justice. Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. *Problem-Oriented Guides for Police: Panhandling*. By Michael S. Scott. Center for Problem-Oriented Policing, 8 Sept. 2003. Web. Nov. 2016.

Panhandling Behavior

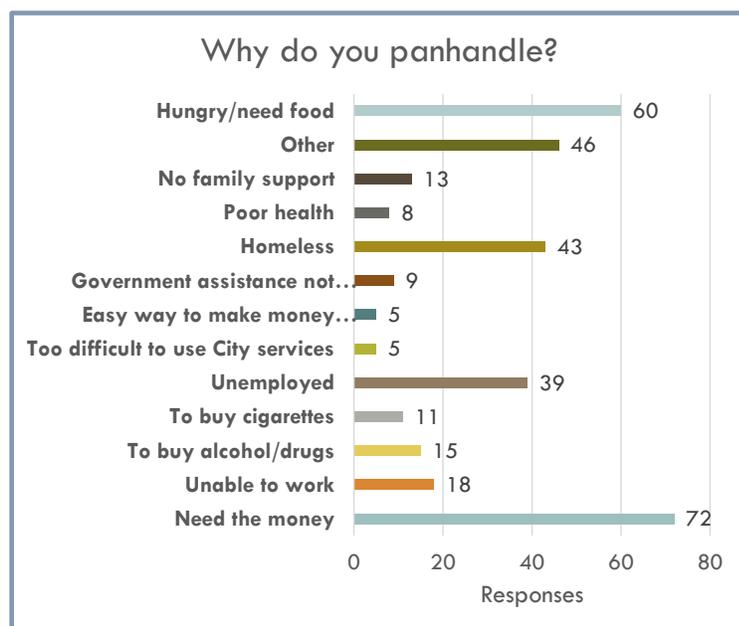


Figure 4: Why do you panhandle?

The Panhandling Intercept Survey posed questions designed to determine the frequency and duration of individuals' panhandling behavior, the range of funds they earn each day, and the rationale motivating their behavior. Findings rendered from the panhandling survey support a notion communicated by many Center City stakeholders—panhandling in Center City may be growing. Over half of the survey respondents (73) indicated that they had been panhandling for twelve months or less, suggesting that there may be new individuals asking for money on the streets. Survey data show that the returns for panhandling are low. While interviewees reported spending a median six hours each day engaged in this behavior, they rarely earn funds greater than \$60. A typical day of panhandling yields \$20 in earnings.

When asked why they panhandle, respondents pointed to causal factors similar to those cited by advocates for the homeless and indigent. Sixty panhandle because they were hungry or needed food, while 39 pointed to unemployment as their motivation. Those who selected “other” for this question often mentioned disabilities, needing funds for transportation, and even a desire to meet people. The latter motive reveals a degree of social isolation among the panhandling population.

Persons who panhandle to earn a certain amount, rather than panhandling to earn as much as possible, targeted \$35, on average. Thus, if the City or any of its cross-sector partners devise an employment pilot for persons who panhandle, the pilot would be a competitive offer if its hourly rate were set at or slightly above minimum wage.

Question	Median	N
How long have you been panhandling?	1 year	126
Thinking about the last 30 days, how many days did you panhandle?	30 days	126
How many hours do you spend panhandling each day?	6 hours	122
How much do you make panhandling each day?	\$20	127
What is the most amount of money that you earned in a single day of panhandling in the past 30 days?	\$60	124
What is the least amount of money that you earned in a single day of panhandling in the past 30 days?	\$7	126

Figure 5: Panhandling behavior summary

Income and Benefits

Panhandling is primarily an economic matter, so the survey asked a series of questions to assess respondents' connection to other funding streams, including earned income and public benefits. Few people who panhandle in Center City are employed. When asked about any money accrued in the past month, only eight had worked and received a wage. Public benefits were a more common source of funds, with 18 receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Supplemental Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), 23 receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and 22 receiving "other government checks or benefits." Forty-five percent of survey participants cited panhandling as their only income source.

These data highlight the structural factors impacting panhandling behavior in Philadelphia. Our fraying safety net, attenuated by state and national budget cuts, appears to be an insufficient buoy for public benefit recipients. Further, these data underscore a reluctance or inability to access public benefits, particularly SSI and SSDI. Fifty-two percent of interviewees have a mental health condition, yet only 18 of the 129 individuals surveyed received SSI or SSDI in the past month. In this context, panhandling appears to serve as a supplement to or replacement for state supports.

Moreover, persons found panhandling in Center City Philadelphia maintain a willingness to earn their income through work. Interview subjects responding to a prompt regarding their participation in a hypothetical day labor program showed an apparent interest in enrolling. If offered the opportunity to work shifts completing yard maintenance or street cleaning for \$7.25 an hour, 84% of respondents would enroll, while 16% would continue panhandling. Those interested in day labor often attributed their choice to a desire to be a contributing, productive member of society. Those who were not interested most commonly cited physical disabilities or poor health as the basis for their selection.

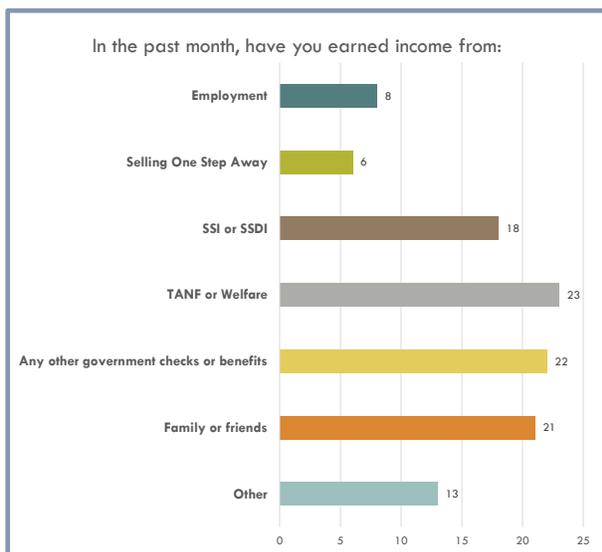


Figure 6: In the past month, have you earned income from...

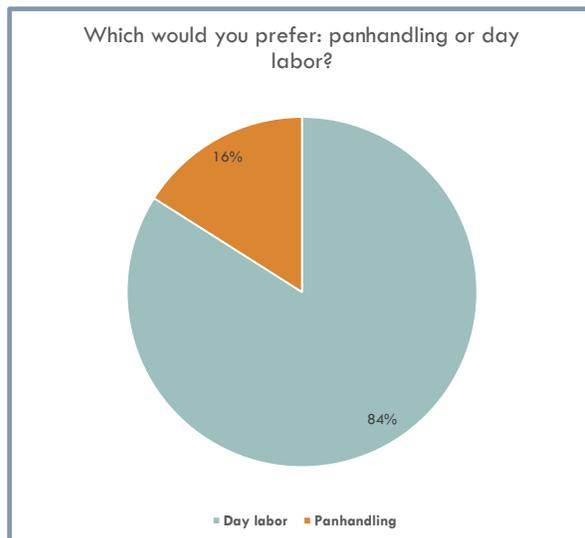


Figure 7: Which would you prefer: panhandling or day labor?

Health & Demographics

The results from the health section of the survey not only demonstrate the panhandling population's pronounced barriers to employment, but they also produce an evocative portrait of the prototypical person who engages in panhandling behavior. Survey participants answered questions on their mental health status and usage of illicit substances. Sixty-three percent had a substance abuse disorder, 52% had a mental health condition, and 35% had used opiates, such as fentanyl or heroin, in the past year. Without comprehensive behavioral health supports and substance abuse treatment, it will be difficult for panhandlers to maintain long-term employment.

The opioid data are critical, particularly when cross walked with the demographic data and considered in tandem with other City efforts to serve indigent individuals. Visitors to the free meal sites sponsored by the Philadelphia Food Access Collaborative are largely older, African Americans men. 2016 data from that project indicate that 69% of meal guests are ages 40-59 and 70% percent identify as African American.⁴ However, participants in the Panhandling Intercept Survey were predominantly Caucasian (55%). Of Caucasian participants, 56% were opioid users. Further, there was a noteworthy cohort of younger participants within the panhandling survey. Nearly half of respondents were age 45 or older (61), but the most commonly selected age duo-decile was 30-34 (28). Of those ages 30-34, 64% were opioid users. In addition, 81% of panhandling survey respondents identified as male.

This demographic profile—younger, Caucasian men—matches the profile that City agencies have compiled for opioid users in Philadelphia. According to the Medical Examiner's Office within the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, rates of opioid-related deaths in the city are highest among persons ages 25-29 and are two times higher for whites than for African Americans.⁵ The Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services (DBHIDS) reports that 82% of patients admitted to their prescription opioid treatment programs are male, 43% are ages 26-44, and 47% are non-Hispanic white.⁶ Thus, panhandling in Center City must be consider within the context of the opioid epidemic.

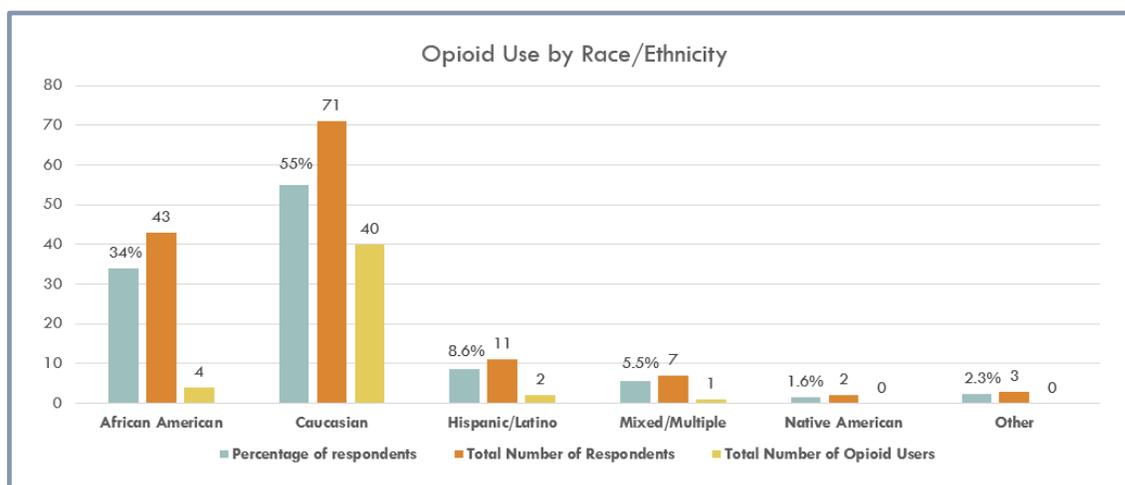


Figure 8: Opioid use by race/ethnicity

⁴ City of Philadelphia. Mayor's Internship Program. *Understanding the Faces of Hunger*. By Nayadis Couce, Devon Greenwood, Ani Jhanwar, Jasmine Joung, Vera Liu, Ruoxi Pan, Tiana Rodriguez, Kristin Yeakel, and Patrick Zancolli. Philadelphia Food Access Collaborative, 2016. Web. Apr. 2017.

⁵ Farley, Thomas. "The Epidemic of Overdoses From Opioids in Philadelphia." *CHART 1.1* (2016): 1-6. *Philadelphia Department of Public Health*. City of Philadelphia, June 2016. Web. Apr. 2017.

⁶ "Opioid Facts/Resources." *Mayor's Task Force to Combat the Opioid Epidemic in Philadelphia*. Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services, 2017. Web. Apr. 2017.

Next Steps

During summer 2017, the Shared Public Spaces Workgroup's four subcommittees will begin implementing solutions to quality of life issues impacting Philadelphia's public spaces. Those subcommittees include:

- Chronic Street Homelessness: to strategize and implement real solutions to chronic street homelessness.
- Code of Conduct, Service Alternatives: to establish clear standards for behavior in shared public spaces together with the tools and engagement to support it.
- Food Access, Safety, and Dignity: to improve access to indoor meals and improve dignity and safety to meals when served outdoors.
- Marketing and Public Education: to develop and implement messaging, public information and communications for all around shared public spaces – business, residents and visitors.

The 2016-2017 Panhandling Intercept Survey will inform the subcommittees' approach, laying the foundation for concerted, public-private strategies that reflect the panhandling population's underlying needs and are thus more likely to be successful. The ultimate products of the workgroup's deliberations and planning may include a day labor program, as discussed in the Income and Benefits section of this report, new avenues for soliciting and collecting donations for housing initiatives, and bolstered sites, both indoor and outdoor, for serving meals to indigent populations.

**APPENDIX
SURVEY FORM**

1. Do you live in Philadelphia? **[If yes]**, where in Philadelphia? **[If no]**, where do you live?

2. What do you like about where you live?

The next few questions are about panhandling.

3. How long have you been panhandling? _____

4. Thinking about the last 30 days, how many days did you panhandle? _____ days

5. How many hours did you spend panhandling...

Yesterday? _____ hours

Day before? _____ hours

Day before that? _____ hours

6. What amount did you make each day?

Yesterday? \$ _____

Day before? \$ _____

Day before that? \$ _____

7. On the days that you panhandled in the last 30 days, what was the most amount of money that you earned in a single day? \$ _____

8. On the days that you panhandled in the last 30 days, what was the least amount of money that you earned in a single day? \$ _____

9. On the days that you panhandle, do you usually try to earn as much as possible, or do you usually try to earn a certain amount and then stop?

As much as possible

Certain amount, then stop → Specify amount: \$ _____

Mixture of both

10. Do you panhandle in other places? If so, where?

11. Why do you panhandle? **[Check all that apply.]**

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hungry/need food | <input type="checkbox"/> Easy way to make money without working |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Need the money | <input type="checkbox"/> Homeless |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unable to work | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor Health |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To buy alcohol/drugs | <input type="checkbox"/> No family support |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To buy cigarettes | <input type="checkbox"/> Refused |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unemployed | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Too difficult to use City services | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Government assistance not enough to live on | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | |

12. The City of Philadelphia is looking at developing a program that would hire people who ask for money on the street as day laborers. Our day laborers would be paid minimum wage (\$7.25/hour) and be required to complete yard maintenance or street cleaning assignments. Each worker would be paid cash at the end of their shift. Which would you prefer:

- Working a six hour shift with the City, OR
 Panhandling

13. Why?

14. In the last 12 months, have you ever been asked to stop panhandling or asked to move from where you were panhandling? Yes No

15. How many times in the past 12 months? Who asked you to stop or move?

16. Will you be required to give or share the funds you earn panhandling with someone else?
 Yes No Refused

Now I'd like to ask about your income and benefits.

17. In the past month, have you earned income from:

- | | | | |
|---|-----|----|---------|
| Employment | Yes | No | Refused |
| Selling One Step Away | Yes | No | Refused |
| SSI or SSDI | Yes | No | Refused |
| TANF or welfare | Yes | No | Refused |
| Any other government checks or benefits | Yes | No | Refused |
| Family or friends | Yes | No | Refused |
| Any other income sources not previously mentioned | Yes | No | Refused |
| If other, please specify: _____ | | | |

18. Which, if any, of the following social service agencies do you use? **[Read all options to respondent.]**

- Bright Hope Baptist
- Broad Street Ministry
- Chosen 300
- Our Brother's Place
- St. John's Hospice
- Sunday Breakfast
- University City Hospitality Coalition
- Other: _____
- Don't use any
- Refused

19. Out of the following, what are the top two services you would like to access in Center City? **[Read all options to respondent.]**

- Housing Assistance
- Employment Services
- Counseling services (Mental health, Substance use)
- Social worker/case worker
- ID and Birth Certificate Services
- Education (computer/literacy/GED/skills training)
- Assistance applying for benefits (like food stamps)
- Refused

The next few questions are about housing.

20. In which area of the city will you be sleeping tonight?

- Center City
- Northeast
- Northwest
- Kensington/Bridesburg/Richmond
- North
- South
- Southwest
- West
- Other: _____
- Refused

21. How far did you travel to get here today?

- Less than 10 blocks
- 10-20 blocks
- More than 20 blocks
- Refused

22. Where will you be staying tonight? **[Only read the options out loud if respondent is unsure.]**

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Own Room: Apartment/House/Rental Unit/Hotel | <input type="checkbox"/> Hospital/VA Medical Center |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Staying with Family or Friend/Couch Surfing | <input type="checkbox"/> Drop-in Center or Café |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sidewalk/Car/Park/Abandoned Building | <input type="checkbox"/> Shelter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Subway or Bus Station/Airport | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't Know |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Refused |

23. Have you lived on the streets or in emergency shelter in the past year, say since last November?
[If yes] How long?

Months: _____ Weeks: _____

And now I'd like to ask you some questions about your health.

24. Do you have any kind of health insurance, such as: **[Ask about each.]**

Medicaid Medicare VA Private Insurance None Other

25. Have you ever had a mental health issue, or been told that you do?

Yes No Refused

26. Have you ever abused drugs/alcohol, or been told that you do?

Yes No Refused

27. During the past 12 months, have you used any opiates, such as fentanyl or heroin?

Yes No Refused

We are almost finished. I have just a few final questions.

28. Are you a veteran of the US Armed Forces or National Guard? Yes No Refused

29. How do you identify your ethnicity? **[Only read to respondent if unsure.]**

- African American
- Caucasian
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Native American
- Mixed/Multiple
- Other _____
- Refused

30. Do you consider yourself to be of Hispanic or Latino descent? Yes No Don't Know Refused

31. How do you identify your gender? **[Only read to respondent if unsure.]**

- Male
- Female
- Gender variant/Transgender
- Refused

32. What is your age?

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-29
- 30-34
- 35-39
- 40-44
- 45-49
- 50-54
- 55-59
- 60-64
- 65-69
- 70+
- Refused

33. What is the highest grade or year of school that you completed?

- Never attended school
- Elementary school (grades 1 to 8)
- Some high school
- High school
- Some college or university
- College/university graduate
- Other: _____

34. Is there anything else that you feel is important for us to know?

Thanks very much for speaking with me today. **[Give tokens.]**

UNSPOKEN, Completed by interviewer:

Date:

Time:

Location:

Weather:

- Raining/storming
- Off-and-on rain/sprinkling
- Not raining, clear/cloudy/sunny
- Head advisory

Incentive Given: Y N

Survey Administered by: _____