



SAN DIEGO  
HOUSING  
COMMISSION



# San Diego Housing Commission Homelessness Services Compensation Study

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## Message from the Interim President & CEO

Case management and other supportive services are essential to help individuals and families experiencing homelessness successfully transition from the streets into different housing options and ultimately achieve housing stability.

However, recruiting and retaining qualified people for frontline positions—outreach workers, case managers, housing specialists, housing navigators, behavioral health specialists and many others—has become more and more challenging. While compensation is not the only challenge, it is an important factor the homelessness services sector must address.

Toward that end, the San Diego Housing Commission (SDHC) initiated a compensation study in two phases. For the first phase, SDHC worked with LeSar Development Consultants and Moss Adams to perform the study that is the basis of this report. The goal of the study is to re-benchmark key frontline and case management level positions, with the intent to more effectively attract and retain staff, reduce system vacancies, and increase system performance.

This analysis demonstrated that homelessness services sector wages are well below the cost of living in San Diego, and the majority of frontline staff in this sector cannot afford a one-bedroom rental housing unit unless they spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing.

The first phase of the compensation study includes important recommendations to address these issues. The second phase will leverage the analysis from this Phase 1 report to identify targeted areas of focus for further research and benchmarking. It will also identify opportunities to enhance workforce morale and retention through non-traditional benefits or employment resources and provide final reports and analysis to support future years' budgeting and policy advocacy efforts.

The compensation study continues SDHC's broader efforts in recent years, such as initiatives to right-size federally funded legacy programs. Until recently, these programs had not experienced budget increases since their inception.

Continuity, stability, and wellness of frontline staff who work closely with individuals and families experiencing homelessness is necessary to strengthen and build capacity of the homelessness response system.

SDHC looks forward to continuing to work with the City of San Diego, service providers and funders to address and resolve compensation issues as well as other factors to support the frontline staff in the homelessness services sector and strengthen the sector's capacity and skilled workforce.

**Jeff Davis**  
Interim President & CEO  
San Diego Housing Commission



## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The homelessness crisis response system in the City of San Diego is experiencing challenges recruiting, hiring and retaining qualified staff. As of May 31, 2022, of the 384 positions in the homelessness sector, 21 percent were vacant. The vacancy rate for positions that provide direct services across City-funded shelters was 29 percent.

The outreach workers, case managers, housing specialists, housing navigators, behavioral health specialists and many others who work on the front line to address homelessness are the linchpins that make the crisis response system viable. However, the system cannot operate most effectively unless enough qualified employees fill these positions and remain in them long-term.

San Diego Housing Commission (SDHC) staff made a presentation on May 5, 2022, to the SDHC Board of Commissioners regarding the impact of workforce shortages on local efforts to address homelessness. The presentation shared challenges the homelessness services sector is experiencing locally related to identifying, recruiting, and retaining staff and initiatives SDHC has been undertaking to support the sector in mitigating those challenges, including a compensation study. To view the full presentation to the SDHC Board of Commissioners on May 5, 2022, [click here](#).

As a component of SDHC's broader efforts to address workforce challenges and build capacity of the homelessness services sector, SDHC contracted with LeSar Development Consultants (LeSar), which collaborated with Moss Adams LLP (Moss Adams), for a compensation analysis of the regional homelessness services sector.

This analysis identified the annual living wage for the San Diego metro area based on the composition of a family and that the median wage of homelessness services sector frontline positions is well below the living wage. Across all geographies in San Diego, the median homelessness services sector wages of the 16 benchmarked frontline positions analyzed in this study represented an average of only 60 percent of the cost of living in San Diego, which was 38 percent below the national average.

Further analysis demonstrated that the majority of frontline staff identified in the homelessness services sector cannot afford a one-bedroom unit without being cost-burdened, which means that they would have to spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing.

SDHC requested LeSar to conduct a sector-level comparison of average market compensation levels in the homelessness support services sector to better understand the current compensation conditions. LeSar retained Moss Adams to complete that review. Moss Adams performed the following activities to provide compensation benchmarking services:

- In collaboration with SDHC and LeSar, identified a selection of representative positions for frontline workers in the homelessness services and housing sector.
  - This report defines frontline workers as employees who interact directly with members of the community and must physically show up to perform many of their job duties.
- Queried market compensation databases for 16 positions across 23 geographies (cities/counties across the country).
  - Pulled median compensation data for the 16 positions in San Diego, CA.



- Pulled Renter’s Cost-of-Living data from Economic Research Institute (ERI) for each position for geographic analysis.
- Analyzed results and drafted preliminary recommendations
  - Compared median total compensation as a percentage of the average cost of living across the geographic locations.
  - Compared the existing gaps of individual position-compensation levels to cost-of-living levels.

The recommendations in this report will support ongoing efforts to address the challenges of vacancies and staff turnover in the homelessness services sector and will facilitate further action toward identifying and implementing changes in compensation to resolve these challenges.

## Recommendations

<b>1.</b>	Coordinate among SDHC, the City of San Diego and regional service providers to collectively identify funding resources and opportunities and develop actions to increase frontline worker wages. This will provide more competitive compensation that attracts and supports retention of a workforce to further the goals of the Community Action Plan on Homelessness for the City of San Diego.
<b>2.</b>	Coordinate among SDHC, the City of San Diego and regional service providers to support service providers with additional capacity-building resources related to administrative functions, such as finance, human resources, facilities and technology.



## II. BACKGROUND, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

### A. BACKGROUND

The purpose of this study is to understand current compensation levels for frontline and mid-level workforce in the homelessness services sector, including their compensation compared to other regions, sectors, and local costs of living. This San Diego Housing Commission (SDHC) report, developed in consultation with LeSar Development Consultants (LeSar) and Moss Adams LLP (Moss Adams), works in tandem with other SDHC initiatives that identify non-compensation solutions to address staffing challenges. With the high staff turnover and vacancy rates in the homelessness services sector, SDHC understands that significant changes must be made to continue the work in addressing and reducing homelessness. With this report, SDHC lays the groundwork for San Diego’s policy makers, community stakeholders and the homelessness services sector to coordinate, , and advocate for compensation that is competitive, sustainable, and equitable for the homelessness services workforce. Increasing workforce compensation is one step toward increasing the capacity of the response to address the homelessness crisis, strengthening and improving system performance in alignment with the [Community Action Plan on Homelessness for the City of San Diego \(Community Action Plan\)](#).

Frontline workers, particularly those who work in homelessness services, perform a variety of tasks and responsibilities. They are asked to care for and show empathy toward their clients, walk alongside individuals in crisis, and problem-solve in high-stress situations to avoid additional trauma, among other tasks. Frontline homelessness services sector workers are imperative to addressing homelessness.

While many will attest to getting into this line of work because of their passion and empathy, people are not able to continue in it without their most basic mental and physical needs being met. In a study that examined burnout and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the homelessness services sector across 234 individuals from 10 participating organizations in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, 23 percent of workers reported high levels of burnout and vicarious traumatization, while 30 percent

When you bring up staff turnover or vacancies with any provider or advocate, they nod vigorously. The mostly government-contracted private organizations serving people experiencing homelessness have waged an uphill battle to recruit and retain workers into their fast-growing workforce, including some formerly homeless individuals.

L.A.-based People Assisting The Homeless, or [PATH](#), which serves about a fifth of the state’s homeless population, has hired seven recruiters to help fill 340 vacancies, out of 1,100 jobs, said CEO Jennifer Hark Dietz. It’s now taking an average of four months to fill any given spot.

And that’s before the latest homelessness budget, approved last summer by Gov. Gavin Newsom and the Legislature, floods providers with [\\$12 billion over the next two years](#). The state says the funding will require thousands of new positions in the homeless response system.

“We have all this money,” said Farrah McDaid Ting, a senior legislative representative with the California State Association of Counties. “Can we really do this if we don’t have the people? I think there could be a real limitation.”

Source: Will worker shortage disrupt California homeless strategy? CalMatters. 27 Jan. 2022. Accessed May 2022. <https://calmatters.org/economy/labor/2022/01/california-homeless-worker-shortage/>.



reported significant symptoms linked to PTSD.<sup>1</sup> People Assisting the Homeless (PATH) conducted a Critical Incident Stress Debrief (CISD) group composed of staff from a local San Diego interim shelter and facilitated by a doctoral level licensed clinical supervisor trained in CISD. The group shared experiences that largely resembled those of first responders, such as disaster workers, healthcare workers, social workers, and other high-risk occupational groups, and described involvement in traumatic events, such as providing crisis intervention during psychiatric emergencies<sup>2</sup>.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, frontline homelessness services sector workers were considered “essential workers,” alongside other important human service positions like first responders. In one study, research on perspectives of trauma in the workplace shifted how the national statistical branch re-categorized frontline shelter workers as a “distinct group within the federal government”; similarly, the Alberta government included frontline social workers alongside police, firefighters, EMTs, and members of the military in their recognition of PTSD.<sup>3</sup> Research shows that emergency workers generally experience trauma by helping “suffering people,” often leading to compassion fatigue.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the wide range of emergency work responsibilities (e.g., perceived workload and time pressure, stress related to client situations, the emotional toll of working in a caregiving role, etc.) directly relate to burnout.<sup>4</sup> These demands for emergency workers accurately describe those placed on frontline homelessness services sector workers as well. However, as noted in the data in this report, these frontline positions are not compensated at comparable rates to first responders, despite their similarly high exposure to crisis, trauma, or stressful environments.

Not only can the work itself have hazardous health implications, but the lack of sufficient pay also impacts well-being. Speaking with many homelessness services organizations across the state of California, CalMatters discovered that most start frontline workers between \$16 and \$18 an hour.<sup>1</sup> This is just above the state minimum wage, and it is not sufficient when considering the cost of living throughout the state of California. When comparing general frontline staff (not specific to emergency response) in the COVID-19 pandemic and remote workers across industries, the average earnings of most frontline staff are less than \$30,000 per year; in general, frontline workers earn \$10,000 less than a typical worker in California.<sup>5</sup>

It is also noteworthy that frontline staff in the homelessness services sector are disproportionately Black and Latinx; these frontline positions are often paid the least and may be at greater risk in the

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Burnout and PTSD in Workers in the Homelessness Sector in Edmonton. Homeless Hub CA. Feb. 2016. Accessed May 2022. <https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/PTSD%20and%20Burnout%20in%20Edmonton%20February%202016.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> PATH Critical Incident Debrief for Interim, Study conducted by People Assisting the Homeless (PATH) and shared with SDHC by Regional Director of PATH on May 2022

<sup>3</sup> Source: Social Work study examines how frontline workers are coping through the pandemic. University of Calgary. 9 Nov. 2020. Accessed May 2022. <https://socialwork.ucalgary.ca/news/social-work-study-examines-how-frontline-workers-are-coping-through-pandemic>.

<sup>4</sup> Source: Emergency Workers' Quality of Life: The Protective Role of Sense of Community, Efficacy Beliefs and Coping Strategies. Social Indicators Research. 14 Jan. 2009. Accessed May 2022. <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s11205-009-9441-x.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Source: COVID-19 and the Labor Market: Who are California's Frontline and Remote Workers? Legislative Analyst's Office. 8 Dec. 2020. Accessed May 2022. <https://lao.ca.gov/LAOEconTax/article/Detail/593>.





course of their workday.<sup>6</sup> When considering the categorization of frontline workers across industries throughout California as it relates to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a significant overrepresentation of individuals identifying as Latinx. According to the Legislative Analyst's Office of California, Latinos make up only 38 percent of the total workforce but half of the frontline workforce.<sup>5</sup> The Center for Economic and Policy Research also depicted the basic demographics of those who make up the frontline workforce. In "Community Food and Housing and Emergency Services" positions, as categorized by the U.S. Census Bureau's Industry Codes, 64.2 percent were female, 43 percent were non-white, 11.1 percent were foreign-born, and 27 percent were below 200 percent of the federal poverty line.<sup>7</sup> Black individuals were most overrepresented in "Child Care and Social Services" at 19.3 percent of the workers in this category.<sup>7</sup>

Compensation may best be considered in relation to cost of living, which includes characteristics of the regional housing market. When considering the cost of living, it is crucial to look at the cost-burden placed on renters in California. To afford a one-bedroom unit at Fair Market Rent (FMR), an individual in the San Diego/Carlsbad metro area would need to earn \$65,680 a year, or \$32.84 an hour.<sup>5</sup> In this scenario, the majority of the frontline staff identified in the homelessness services sector cannot afford a one-bedroom unit without being cost-burdened.

The average job tenure of someone working in the homelessness services sector is less than two years, which contributes to the high turnover rates and vacancies plaguing the industry.<sup>8</sup> Similarly in San Diego County, homelessness services providers have faced significant staff turnover in recent years, reflected in Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) user license turnover.

Homelessness services providers use HMIS, a web-based information technology system, to capture and report utilization, performance, and outcomes on client, project, and system-level information. The Regional Task Force on Homelessness (RTFH), as a Lead HMIS agency and administrator of the database, trains HMIS users and provides licenses for accessing the HMIS database. The usage of licenses of HMIS can give insight into the turnover rate or role changes in service providers. Based on the data in HMIS, the number of HMIS license users increased about 25 percent from 2020 to 2021. The new licenses that were added in 2020 and 2021 calendar years are 37 percent and 42 percent of the total number of users in each calendar year. At the same time, about 29 percent of the system user licenses were deleted in each calendar year. The data further show that of those who were deleted in a year, the percentage of the licenses that were added and then deleted in the same year were 20 percent in 2020 and 29 percent in 2021.

Most HMIS users are frontline staff who directly interact with clients, so the data RTFH provided may indicate high turnover rates and low retention of frontline staff in the homelessness services sector in recent years.

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<sup>6</sup> Source: Investing in the Care and Retention of Workers in the Homeless Response Sector. Social Justice Partners LA. 16 Sept. 2021. Accessed May 2022. <https://www.sjpla.org/news/investing-in-the-care-and-retention-of-workers-in-the-homeless-response-sector>.

<sup>7</sup> Source: A Basic Demographic Profile of Workers in Frontline Industries. Center for Economic and Policy Research. Apr 2020. Accessed May 2022. <https://cepr.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2020-04-Frontline-Workers.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Source: Homelessness Services Worker Retention Strategies. Homelessness Policy Research Institute. 2022. Accessed May 2022. [https://socialinnovation.usc.edu/homeless\\_research/homelessness-services-worker-retention-strategies/](https://socialinnovation.usc.edu/homeless_research/homelessness-services-worker-retention-strategies/).

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POSITION TITLE(S)	POSITION DESCRIPTIONS	COMPARABLE KEY POSITIONS
<b>Community Health Educator; Health Educator (Non-Technical)</b>	Creates, arranges, and conducts health education programs, disease management programs, prevention programs, and health screenings for group and community needs. Recruits and engages members of the community who are high risk or have special needs.	Health Navigator, Community Engagement Specialist
<b>Community Health Worker</b>	Arranges and conducts basic health education, including disease prevention and management, counseling, and support for group and community needs. Prepares and administrates educational classes and events. Assesses individual, family, and community needs and helps these groups develop health goals, life goals, and care plans to achieve these goals.	Health Navigator, Community Engagement Specialist, Benefit/Enrollment Specialist
<b>Community Outreach Worker</b>	Explains supportive services, programs, and resources available to members of the community. Creates and distributes literature and multimedia materials, such as fliers and brochures, that advertise available programs. Arranges and conducts programs, services, and special events that strengthen and engage the community and develop relationships.	Outreach Worker/Outreach Specialist, Information and Referral Specialist
<b>Community Placement Worker; Intake Worker; Social Service Caseworker; Social Worker; Social Service Worker</b>	Guides and counsels individuals and families in crisis, ranging from the unemployed to children who need foster homes to elderly people who have no one to care for them. Assists clients in obtaining government funds, education, or treatment. Secures information, such as medical, psychological, and social factors contributing to client's situation, and evaluates these and client's capacities.	Case Manager
<b>Community Program Aide / Case Aide</b>	Assists Caseworker providing services to clients and family members, under close and regular supervision and tutorage of Caseworker or Casework Supervisor. Performs community contact work on simpler aspects of programs or cases.	Peer Support Specialist
<b>Counselor</b>	Advises and provides guidance services with personal, family, educational, mental health, and career decisions and problems. Collects, organizes, and analyzes information about individuals through records, tests, interviews, and professional sources. Counsels individuals and provides group educational and vocational guidance services. Excludes paraprofessional positions.	Case Manager, Employment and Education Services (EES) Specialist
<b>Counselor Substance Abuse; Substance Abuse Counselor, Chemical Dependency Counselor, Intervention Specialist</b>	Advises and aids individuals and families requiring assistance dealing with substance abuse problems, such as alcohol or drug abuse. Develops program for treatment and rehabilitation of client, using knowledge of drug and alcohol abuse problems and counseling and treatment techniques. Typically requires certification by State or other governing body.	Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) Counselor, Substance Use Disorder (SUD) & Service Coordinator



POSITION TITLE(S)	POSITION DESCRIPTIONS	COMPARABLE KEY POSITIONS
<b>Domestic Violence Advocate</b>	Talks to domestic violence victims, providing advocacy, support, and referrals for social services, such as counseling, housing, transportation, food stamps, and childcare. Gives victims information about different options available to them; gives them emotional support and helps support them in their decision making; helps find resources and assists them in navigating the civil and legal systems including legal filings such as protection orders, crime victims' compensation applications, and court accompaniment. Instructs staff, volunteers, and the public on issues associated with domestic violence including victimization, crime prevention, safety planning, victims' legal rights and protections, and the criminal justice process.	Client Support Facilitator
<b>Domestic Violence Counselor</b>	Executes intake and exit interviews, collects information, and provides assessments and counseling for victims of emotional, physical, psychological, or financial abuse. Consults with new clients, determines whether they may be a victim of domestic violence or at risk of becoming a victim, and supports and helps them improve their situation, which may include designing a safety plan, one-on-one therapy sessions, and/or support group meetings with others in the same or similar situation. Provides support and assistance to victims, working in settings such as private practices, hospitals, governmental organizations, primary care settings, crisis hotlines, shelters for battered women and their children, domestic violence advocacy organizations, or drop-in crisis counseling centers.	Case Manager, Intake Specialist, Service Coordinator
<b>Housing Coordinator</b>	Coordinates a housing program and provides housing assistance for disabled, homeless, and other clients with housing needs. Aids the Director in the process of lease-up, landlord negotiations, and contracts. Develops, implements, and maintains programs, services, policies, and procedures on housing, which may include eligibility, lease agreements, petitions, retention, emergency or temporary housing, special interest housing, and riders to leases.	Housing Navigator, Housing Specialist, System Navigator
<b>Licensed Clinical Social Worker</b>	Administers social service programs and provides clinical social work services to clients or patients and their families. Counsels and provides crisis intervention for clients, including assessment and treatment of emotional and behavioral problems. Coaches clients on how to manage ongoing mental health conditions and provides therapy to help them make positive behavior changes. Aids clients, including individuals, families, or groups, easing them through transitions, hardships, and mentally hard times. Researches and assists them in finding the proper resources to get the care they need to sustain a certain quality of life.	Clinical Supervisor
<b>Mental Health Counselor, Mental Health Clinician</b>	Administers mental health assessments, identifies mental and emotional disorders, develops individualized treatment plans, and advises and provides guidance to individuals needing emotional or psychological support. Heads individual or group therapy sessions and runs mental health and wellness classes or workshops. Offers guidance to individuals, couples, families, and groups who are dealing with issues that affect their mental health and well-being; helps them develop coping strategies or finds ways to change behaviors and seeks to relieve their mental and emotional suffering without resorting to drugs or invasive medical methods.	Serious Mental Illness (SMI)/ Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Case Manager



POSITION TITLE(S)	POSITION DESCRIPTIONS	COMPARABLE KEY POSITIONS
<b>Registered Behavior Technician</b>	Assists in developing and implementing behavior support and intervention. Applies behavioral principles consistently in all interactions with clients. Helps clients to acquire academic and life skills. Observes and reports the condition and behavior of the clients	Clinical Supervisor
<b>Residential Facility Specialist</b>	Manages and oversees the operations a residential facility, certifies that residents are provided adequate amenities, services, and housekeeping. Sustains a clean, safe, and secure environment for residents. Facilitates accommodations for residents such as meals, medical care, transportation, and appointments. Works closely with case management departments, psychologists, and social works to ensure the safety and wellbeing of residents. Records various datapoints regarding residents, including move-in and move-out dates, issues, incidents, leave requests, activities, and complaints. Observes and assess resident wellbeing and progress towards recovery.	Residential Coordinator, Residential Service Specialists, Residential Monitor, Security Monitor
<b>Social Services Aide</b>	Assists professional staff of public social service agency, performing a variety of tasks. Asks individuals and family members questions to compile information on social, educational, criminal, institutional, or drug history. Calls on individuals in homes or participates in group meetings to provide information on agency services, requirements, and procedures.	Assessments Specialist, Case Manager, Employment and Education Navigator

## Queries of Market Compensation Data

Compensation market benchmark data were obtained from two sources—databases from Economic Research Institute (ERI) and PayScale—both of which are national sources of compensation data. Specific source citations are identified below.

### Compensation Databases

- *ERI Executive Compensation Assessor*. ERI Economic Research Institute. Database as of April 1, 2022.
  - All ERI data are employer-provided and come from a variety of sources. ERI collects data through internally conducted salary surveys, and additional salary data are purchased from salary survey vendors. Data are also gathered through the digitization of Proxy and 10-K data and Freedom of Information Requests in the U.S.
  - **Cost-of-Living**: The cost-of-living data that goes into ERI databases are downloaded from existing sources. These data include rental rates, income taxes, property taxes, gasoline prices, medical costs/services, major retail grocery and drug store prices, etc.
- *PayScale Market Reports*. PayScale. Effective date of March 4, 2022.
  - PayScale administers the largest employee-reported, real-time salary survey in the world with more than 250,000 new records on average added every month. The database has more than 55 million salary profiles and is updated nightly.

For this study, customized queries of these databases were created and run for the 16 benchmarked positions, including geographic comparison reports from ERI’s “Renter’s Cost of Living” data. This proprietary tool uses a form of linear regression analysis to create a comparison for a selected position across various geographic areas. Cost of living indicates the comparable local buying power for any given salary.



## Sector Resources

The following additional resources were leveraged during the analysis.

- **Annual Homeless Assessment Report:** The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) published its most recent Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) in February 2022. The AHAR is a report to the U.S. Congress that provides nationwide estimates of homelessness, including information about the demographic characteristics of people experiencing homelessness, service use patterns, and the capacity to house people experiencing homelessness. The report is based on Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) data.
  - Link: <https://hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/ahar/#2021-reports>
- **Living Wage Calculator:** This tool was developed by Dr. Amy Glasemeier, first in 2004, to help individuals, communities, and employers understand the local wage rate that allows residents to meet minimum standards of living. Published by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the living wage model is an industry leader in attempting to quantify an alternative measure of basic needs. It is a market-based approach that draws upon geographically specific expenditure data related to a family's likely minimum food, childcare, health insurance, housing, transportation, and other necessities (e.g., clothing, personal care items, etc.) costs. The living wage draws on these cost elements and the rough effects of income and payroll taxes to determine the minimum employment earnings necessary to meet a family's basic needs while also maintaining self-sufficiency. The data set does not include provisions for eating in a restaurant, buying gifts, repaying educational debt, saving for retirement, unexpected expenses, or taking vacations.
  - Source website: <https://livingwage.mit.edu>
- **City of San Diego Salary Table Effective 01/01/2022.** The City of San Diego's most recently published salary schedule.
  - Source website: <https://sandiego.gov/>
- **King County Nonprofit Wage & Benefits Survey:** King County (located in Washington State) contracted with 501 Commons to administer a wage survey in 2021. The final report was published in March 2022. The online database of results is intended to make data on nonprofit employee compensation freely and widely available to nonprofit agencies, other governments, philanthropic funders, and the public.
  - Source website: <https://501commons.org/>



### III. BENCHMARKING RESULTS

A wide variety of workers are necessary for successful delivery of homelessness and housing assistance services. These complex services include shelter operations and case management, homelessness outreach, shelter diversion and housing problem-solving, rapid rehousing, case management and housing navigation, supportive housing program operations, and supportive housing case management.

The table below presents the range of market compensation data for selected positions using the 25<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup> (median), and 75<sup>th</sup> percentiles for comparison. The percentiles represent the point on a rank-ordered scale, found by dividing a group of observations into parts in order of magnitude from lowest to highest. The first percentile approximates the lowest/bottom number found, while the 100th percentile is the highest reported. The 25th percentile is the value at which 25 percent of the data is below that value, and 75 percent of the data is above that value. **Table 2** below represents the total cash compensation levels. Total cash compensation is defined as the sum of base salary and incentive pay—the sum of all cash payments made to an individual for services during a given year.

This report uses the median wage (50<sup>th</sup> percentile) in the analysis to reduce the risk that extreme high and low data points would skew the data.



**TABLE 2**

<b>SAN DIEGO, CA – TOTAL COMPENSATION</b>	<b>25TH PERCENTILE</b>	<b>MEDIAN</b>	<b>75TH PERCENTILE</b>
CASEWORK SUPERVISOR	\$68,799	\$73,752	\$80,037
COMMUNITY HEALTH EDUCATOR	\$46,729	\$49,452	\$53,137
COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER	\$43,920	\$46,555	\$50,258
COMMUNITY OUTREACH WORKER	\$49,919	\$52,279	\$55,677
COMMUNITY PROGRAM AIDE	\$36,852	\$38,399	\$40,773
COUNSELOR	\$64,956	\$69,043	\$74,615
COUNSELOR SUBSTANCE ABUSE	\$50,580	\$54,273	\$59,413
CRISIS COUNSELOR	\$44,189	\$47,115	\$51,205
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ADVOCATE	\$42,781	\$45,248	\$48,780
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COUNSELOR	\$46,375	\$49,623	\$54,011
HOUSING COORDINATOR	\$45,073	\$48,842	\$54,110
LICENSED CLINICAL SOCIAL WORKER	\$72,973	\$77,271	\$83,101
MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELOR	\$49,573	\$52,382	\$56,389
REGISTERED BEHAVIOR TECHNICIAN	\$46,887	\$49,908	\$54,126
RESIDENTIAL FACILITY SPECIALIST	\$34,388	\$36,061	\$38,680
SOCIAL WORKER	\$51,801	\$54,571	\$58,477

## **ANALYSIS BY GEOGRAPHY**

For this study, 22 geographic locations were selected for benchmarking compensation data, including the San Diego Metropolitan Statistical Area. For comparison purposes, this report also presents the U.S. national average. The selected geographic regions had the highest Point-in-Time (PIT) counts of people experiencing homelessness from the February 2022 AHAR, as well as some geographic areas SDHC identified, including neighboring counties.

**Table 3** below presents the average difference between the median wage of the 16 benchmarked homelessness services sector frontline positions and the region’s average cost of living. Across all geographies in San Diego, the median sector wages of the 16 sector positions represented an average of only 60 percent of the cost of living in San Diego, which was 38 percent below the national average. The benchmarking exercise confirmed that across the geographic regions with some of the





highest levels of individuals experiencing homelessness, the median compensation of frontline employees in these 22 geographies averaged only 74 percent of the regional cost of living.

Even outside the homelessness services sector, crisis response workers in San Diego appear to be paid less than the cost of living. This table also includes a comparison of the median wages of an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), shown as a percentage of the area's cost of living. This comparison shows that the gap between wages and the cost of living in San Diego is not limited to the homelessness services sector.

**TABLE 3**

<b>MEDIAN WAGE AS PERCENT OF COST OF LIVING</b>		
<b>GEOGRAPHY</b>	<b>SECTOR AVG.</b>	<b>EMT</b>
San Francisco, California	57%	59%
Miami, Florida	57%	56%
Boston, Massachusetts	57%	59%
New York, New York	59%	56%
San Diego, California	60%	62%
District of Columbia - District Average	62%	59%
Seattle, Washington	64%	66%
Los Angeles, California	66%	65%
Oakland, California	67%	69%
Chicago, Illinois	68%	66%
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	72%	72%
Santa Clara, California	74%	75%
Denver, Colorado	75%	74%
Alameda, California	78%	81%
Portland, Oregon	80%	83%
Orange, California	81%	80%
Riverside, California	83%	83%
Austin, Texas	83%	81%
Phoenix, Arizona	85%	90%
Dallas, Texas	87%	84%
Sacramento, California	88%	92%
Las Vegas, Nevada	96%	97%
United States Average	<b>98%</b>	<b>98%</b>



## Living Wage in San Diego

The MIT Living Wage Calculator<sup>9</sup> provides living wage data by geographic location. This tool was developed by Dr. Amy Glasemeier, first in 2004, to help individuals, communities, and employers understand the local wage rate that allows residents to meet minimum standards of living. The living wage model is an industry leader in attempting to quantify basic needs, drawing upon geographically specific expenditure data related to a family's likely minimum food, childcare, health insurance, housing, transportation, and other necessities (e.g., clothing, personal care items, etc.) costs. The data set does not include provisions for eating in a restaurant, buying gifts, repaying educational debt, saving for retirement, unexpected expenses, or taking vacations. The methodology behind the living wage tool draws on various cost elements and the rough effects of income and payroll taxes to determine the minimum employment earnings necessary to meet a family's basic needs while also maintaining self-sufficiency.

The full data set for the San Diego metro area is presented in **Appendix A** and includes data showing the varying levels of what constitutes a living wage by household size (variables include the number of working adults and the number of children). For ease of comparison, this study used the average value for the San Diego living wage, which was \$75,705 across all household sizes.

The data in **Table 4** show some living wage levels set by different family compositions in San Diego and the current minimum wage threshold. The living wage data estimate the living wage needed to support families of 12 different compositions (mixes of number of adults, the number of adults working full-time, and the number of dependent children). The federal poverty measure does not take into consideration family composition, which drastically impacts costs like childcare and health care. Family composition also determines factors like the ability to work and the potential hardships associated with balancing employment and other aspects of everyday life. For example, in the table below, the annual living wage for a family with two adults (one working) and two children is \$88,691 because the cost of childcare is lower if one adult is not working.

These are all significantly above the current minimum wage threshold of \$31,200 per year (\$15 per hour) in San Diego. The minimum wage salary in San Diego only represents approximately 41 percent of the average living wage across all family composition types. Even assuming an individual adult with no dependents, the minimum wage represents only 74 percent of the living wage, meaning the minimum wage is insufficient to meet a minimum survival level of living.

**TABLE 4**

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA	ANNUAL WAGES (PER WORKING ADULT)	MINIMUM WAGE IS:
Living Wage (Average) <i>Across all family compositions</i>	\$75,705	41% of this livable wage
Living Wage <i>2 adults (1 working), 2 children</i>	\$88,691	35% of this livable wage
Living Wage <i>1 adult, 1 child</i>	\$84,115	37% of this livable wage

<sup>9</sup> Source: "Living Wage Calculation for San Diego-Carlsbad, CA." MIT Living Wage Calculator, 2020-2021 Update. Dec. 2021. Accessed April 2022 < <https://livingwage.mit.edu/metros/41740>>.



<b>Living Wage</b> <i>2 adults (both working), 1 child</i>	\$45,552	68% of this livable wage
<b>Living Wage</b> <i>1 adult, 0 children</i>	\$41,995	74% of this livable wage
<b>Minimum Wage</b> <i>No account for family composition</i>	\$31,200	--

### **Sector Comparison - Typical Annual Salaries**

The data in **Table 5** represent the typical annual salary for various occupational areas in San Diego Metropolitan Statistical Area, according to the MIT Living Wage tool. This study looked at the percentage difference of these salaries to the average living wage threshold, as noted in **Table 4**.

**TABLE 5**

<b>SAN DIEGO-CARLSBAD, CA</b>		
<i>These are the typical annual salaries for various professions in this location.</i>		
<b>Occupational Area</b>	<b>Typical Annual Salary</b>	<b>% Difference from Avg. Living Wage</b>
Management	\$132,231	175%
Business & Financial Operations	\$80,625	106%
Computer & Mathematical	\$108,648	144%
Architecture & Engineering	\$99,082	131%
Life, Physical, & Social Science	\$86,263	114%
Community & Social Service	\$51,167	68%
Legal	\$104,507	138%
Education, Training, & Library	\$59,096	78%
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, & Media	\$60,626	80%
Healthcare Practitioners & Technical	\$102,078	135%
Healthcare Support	\$33,726	45%
Protective Service	\$51,510	68%
Food Preparation & Serving Related	\$31,768	42%
Building & Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance	\$35,460	47%
Personal Care & Service	\$33,052	44%
Sales & Related	\$35,075	46%
Office & Administrative Support	\$46,834	62%
Farming, Fishing, & Forestry	\$32,271	43%
Construction & Extraction	\$60,669	80%
Installation, Maintenance, & Repair	\$58,208	77%
Production	\$42,265	56%
Transportation & Material Moving	\$35,642	47%



The major risk facing the homelessness services sector is the continued acceleration of the trend, which is seeing employees exit the sector entirely, leaving for better paying jobs that are measurably less stressful.<sup>10</sup>

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) projects that about 31 percent of the social worker separations projected to occur each year over the 2016–26 decade will be from people leaving the labor force, such as to retire. However, more than half (56 percent) are projected to arise from people transferring out of social work entirely to other occupations.<sup>11</sup>

### **Sector Comparison – First Responder Positions**

Traumatic situations are ubiquitous in the lives of people experiencing homelessness. Homelessness services sector frontline workers (e.g., residential coordinators, housing navigators, case managers, and outreach workers) can find themselves working in high-intensity, emotionally draining, and sometimes traumatic circumstances. These working environments are similar to the conditions that healthcare workers and first responders (police officers and firefighters) experience. Frontline staff work directly with people in crisis, and are frequently engaging with people who are experiencing physical and emotional trauma. While not fully comparable, these strong similarities are worth consideration. Many of the hardest frontline jobs within the homelessness services sector are exposed to high levels of stress and trauma but are primarily paid very low wages, especially when compared to other healthcare and first-responder positions. Research has also demonstrated that workers in the sector face major challenges related to post-traumatic stress disorder, burnout, and discrimination.<sup>12</sup>

Table 6 includes the median annual salaries for a Police Officer and Firefighter across all pay scales for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022. The annual salary range for Police Officer is \$71,858 to \$96,180, representing 95 percent to 127 percent of the living wage threshold. The salary range for Firefighter is \$47,796 to \$67,356, representing 63 percent to 89 percent of the living wage threshold. Across all three levels (and pay scales) of Police Officer, the average median wage was \$86,524 – this represents 114 percent of the living wage threshold. The average median wage was \$59,764 across all three levels of Firefighter, representing 79 percent of the living wage threshold.

**TABLE 6**

<b>FIRST RESPONDER MEDIAN WAGES – CITY OF SAN DIEGO<sup>13</sup></b>		
<b>POSITION</b>	<b>MEDIAN WAGE (PAY SCALE C)</b>	<b>% DIFFERENCE FROM AVG. LIVING WAGE</b>
<b>Police Officer 1</b>	\$71,856	95%

<sup>10</sup> Vargas, J., Templeton, A., Scrapper, H., & McElroy, B. Social workers are rapidly burning out. These homeless service providers demand action. *Voices of San Diego*. (2022, March 31). Accessed July 2022. <https://voiceofsandiego.org/2022/03/31/social-workers-are-rapidly-burning-out-these-homeless-service-providers-demand-action/>

<sup>11</sup> Torpey, Elka. *Careers in social work: Outlook, pay, and more*. Career Outlook, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2018). <https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2018/article/social-workers.htm>

<sup>12</sup> Waegemakers Schiff, J., Lane, A.M. PTSD Symptoms, Vicarious Traumatization, and Burnout in Front Line Workers in the Homeless Sector. *Community Ment Health J* 55, 454–462 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-018-00364-7>

<sup>13</sup> Source: *Salary Table Effective 01/01/2022*. The City of San Diego. 22 Dec. 2022. Accessed April 2022 <<https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/saltable.pdf>>.



FIRST RESPONDER MEDIAN WAGES – CITY OF SAN DIEGO <sup>13</sup>		
POSITION	MEDIAN WAGE (PAY SCALE C)	% DIFFERENCE FROM AVG. LIVING WAGE
Police Officer 2	\$91,536	121%
Police Officer 3	\$96,180	127%
<b>All Police Officer Levels:</b>	<b>\$86,524</b>	<b>114%</b>
Firefighter 1	\$47,796	63%
Firefighter 2	\$64,140	85%
Firefighter 3	\$67,356	89%
<b>All Fire Fighter Levels:</b>	<b>\$59,764</b>	<b>79%</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

<b>1. RECOMMENDATION</b>	Coordinate among SDHC, the City of San Diego and regional service providers to collectively identify funding resources and opportunities and develop actions to increase frontline worker wages. This will provide more competitive compensation that attracts and supports retention of a workforce to further the goals of the Community Action Plan on Homelessness for the City of San Diego.
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Lasting changes will need to be made so the homelessness services sector can attract and support a skilled workforce that can be retained over time to strengthen the longevity, experience and capacity of the workforce. A living wage represents the income necessary for an individual or household to afford housing, childcare, healthcare, transportation, food, and basic living expenses – the threshold for maintaining a standard of living above the poverty level. Organizations must shift away from using minimum wage as a benchmark, since these rates almost always produce an income below the poverty level. Instead, organizations should establish base salaries using living wage data.

The data in **Table 7** below compare the percent difference between the median wage for each position and the average living wage benchmark of \$75,705 in San Diego from the Living Wage Calculator tool from MIT. Out of the 16 positions, only one position has a median wage above the living wage threshold – the Licensed Clinical Social Worker. A comparable position in the homelessness services sector in the San Diego region is a Clinical Supervisor. The positions with the largest wage gaps include the Residential Facility Specialist, which is comparable to a Residential Monitor/Coordinator, (48 percent of a living wage); the Community Program Aide, which is comparable to a Peer Support Specialist (51 percent of a living wage); and the Domestic Violence Advocate, which is comparable to a Client Support Facilitator (60 percent of a living wage).



**TABLE 7**

<b>LIVING WAGE COMPARISON IN SAN DIEGO BY POSITION</b>			
<b>POSITION</b>	<b>2022 MEDIAN WAGE</b>	<b>% DIFFERENCE FROM AVG. LIVING WAGE</b>	<b>GAP</b>
<b>Casework Supervisor</b> <i>(Case Manager Supervisor)</i>	\$73,752	97%	\$1,953
<b>Community Health Educator</b> <i>(Community Engagement Specialist)</i>	\$49,452	65%	\$26,253
<b>Community Health Worker</b> <i>(Benefit/Enrollment Specialist)</i>	\$46,555	61%	\$29,150
<b>Community Outreach Worker</b> <i>(Outreach Worker)</i>	\$52,279	69%	\$23,426
<b>Community Program Aide</b> <i>(PEER Support Specialist)</i>	\$38,399	51%	\$37,306
<b>Counselor</b> <i>(Case Manager)</i>	\$69,043	91%	\$6,662
<b>Counselor Substance Abuse</b> <i>(AOD Counselor)</i>	\$54,273	72%	\$21,432
<b>Crisis Counselor</b>	\$47,115	62%	\$28,590
<b>Domestic Violence Advocate</b> <i>(Client Support Facilitator)</i>	\$45,248	60%	\$30,457
<b>Domestic Violence Counselor</b> <i>(Case Manager)</i>	\$49,623	66%	\$26,082
<b>Housing Coordinator</b> <i>(Housing Navigator)</i>	\$48,842	65%	\$26,863
<b>Licensed Clinical Social Worker</b> <i>(Clinical Supervisor)</i>	\$77,271	102%	N/A
<b>Mental Health Counselor</b> <i>(SMI/SUD Case Manager)</i>	\$52,382	69%	\$23,323
<b>Registered Behavior Technician</b> <i>(Clinical Supervisor)</i>	\$49,908	66%	\$25,797
<b>Residential Facility Specialist</b> <i>(Residential Coordinator)</i>	\$36,061	48%	\$39,644
<b>Social Worker</b> <i>(Assessments Specialist)</i>	\$54,571	72%	\$21,134

This study supports ongoing data-driven efforts to address the continuous challenges of vacancies and staff turnover in the homelessness services sector. Coordination with regional service providers and policy makers will be essential to identify opportunities and develop actions that make the shift to using living wage data to set baseline salaries for frontline workers. In addition, this study will also help facilitate the planning and communication between organizations around this effort.

The Living Wage Calculator is updated annually in the first quarter of every year, and its data can be combined with wage escalator rates from sources such as the Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM), World at Work, or The Conference Board.

One approach to make changes to the sector could be to set starting pay ranges for positions based on a combination of market data and living wage data. There is a greater need for transparency



around pay as employers in this sector move toward increasing base salaries to retain and attract employees.

## 2. RECOMMENDATION

Coordinate among SDHC, the City of San Diego and regional service providers to support service providers with additional capacity-building resources related to administrative functions, such as finance, human resources, facilities and technology.

The frontline workers and mid-level management staff are not the only positions at risk within the homelessness service sector. Critical administrative functions – such as finance, human resources, facilities, etc. – are required for the continued operation and ongoing success of programs. The traditional emphasis on the idea that “100 percent go directly to program participants” perpetuates the existing cycle of underinvestment in the sector. The *King County Nonprofit Wage & Benefits Survey* report notes that pay and benefits challenges in nonprofit organizations are often a direct result of an organization having insufficient human resource capabilities (e.g., compensation systems and practices). This gap then results in a higher level of risk that employees are not paid fairly.

The increase in frontline worker wages found in recommendation one will also impact other critical mid-level direct service and administrative positions. SDHC and other local stakeholders can also help build this capacity by providing service partners access to resources that help them develop their financial, human resources, management, and technology infrastructure to meet living wage standards. These core pieces of any organization are critical to successfully creating a functional and supportive workplace.



## APPENDIX A – ADDITIONAL DATA

LIVING WAGE DATA FOR SAN DIEGO-CARLSBAD, CA <sup>14</sup>												
	1 ADULT				2 ADULTS (1 WORKING)				2 ADULTS (BOTH WORKING)			
# OF CHILDREN	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3
LIVING WAGE	\$41,995	\$84,115	\$103,834	\$141,045	\$62,941	\$77,730	\$88,691	\$102,981	\$30,347	\$45,552	\$57,699	\$71,531
POVERTY WAGE	\$12,875	\$17,430	\$21,965	\$26,499	\$17,430	\$21,965	\$26,499	\$31,034	\$8,715	\$10,982	\$13,250	\$15,517
MINIMUM WAGE	\$31,200	\$31,200	\$31,200	\$31,200	\$31,200	\$31,200	\$31,200	\$31,200	\$31,200	\$31,200	\$31,200	\$31,200

<sup>14</sup> Source: "Living Wage Calculation for San Diego-Carlsbad, CA." MIT Living Wage Calculator, 2020-2021 Update. Dec. 2021. Accessed April 2022 <<https://livingwage.mit.edu/metros/41740>>.