THE PULSE OF ORANGE COUNTY

Data-Driven Solutions for Better Care Coordination

211

Orange County
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WHAT THE DATA IS TELLING US: FINDINGS FROM THE PULSE OF OC

On February 11, 2026, 2-1-1 Orange County (211OC) convened nonprofit, public sector, and community partners for the second annual Pulse of Orange County on National 211 Day. The Pulse of OC is designed to translate community-level data into shared insight, supporting better alignment across systems and stronger care coordination for Orange County residents.

This report summarizes key findings shared during the 2026 event and provides brief context to support interpretation and use. The insights reflect rising complexity across needs, including housing instability, food insecurity, behavioral health, and the growing vulnerability of older adults. Throughout, the focus is not data for data's sake, but what the trends signal about where systems are strained, where people get stuck, and where coordinated responses can improve outcomes.

As a central access point for health and human services, 211OC is positioned to help partners move from trends to action, strengthening referral pathways, supporting shared learning, and informing decisions about resources, programs, and collaboration.

About This Analysis

The findings in this report are based on a multi-year review of community-level data to identify critical needs, emerging trends, and populations experiencing increased vulnerability.

- **Timeframe:** November 2022 through October 2025
- **Data Sources:**
  - 211OC Contact Center data.
  - Orange County Homeless Management Information System (OC-HMIS) data; includes unduplicated clients served in Street Outreach, Coordinated Entry, Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, Homelessness Prevention, and clients in Permanent Housing projects searching for housing.
- **Focus:** Critical needs across the community and growing populations of focus, with an emphasis on how overlapping needs impact care coordination and service delivery.

Key Terms

To support consistency and clarity throughout this report, the following terms are used:

- **211OC Contact Center data:** Referrals provided to residents who contacted the 211OC Contact Center by phone, text, or chat for assistance.
- **Orange County Homeless Management Information System (OC-HMIS):** A secure electronic data system that stores person-level information on individuals accessing the homeless services system; participating agencies contribute data on services and housing outcomes.
- **Behavioral Health:** Includes mental health and substance use referrals, as well as individuals who self-reported a mental health or substance use condition within OC-HMIS.
- **Seniors:** Individuals age 62 and older.

BEHIND THE DATA: THE PULSE OF OC TEAM

The Pulse of OC Data Team combines analytics expertise and community insight to translate complex data into clear, actionable findings. Their work ensures that the trends shared in this report are grounded in real experiences and relevant to partners working across systems to strengthen care coordination.

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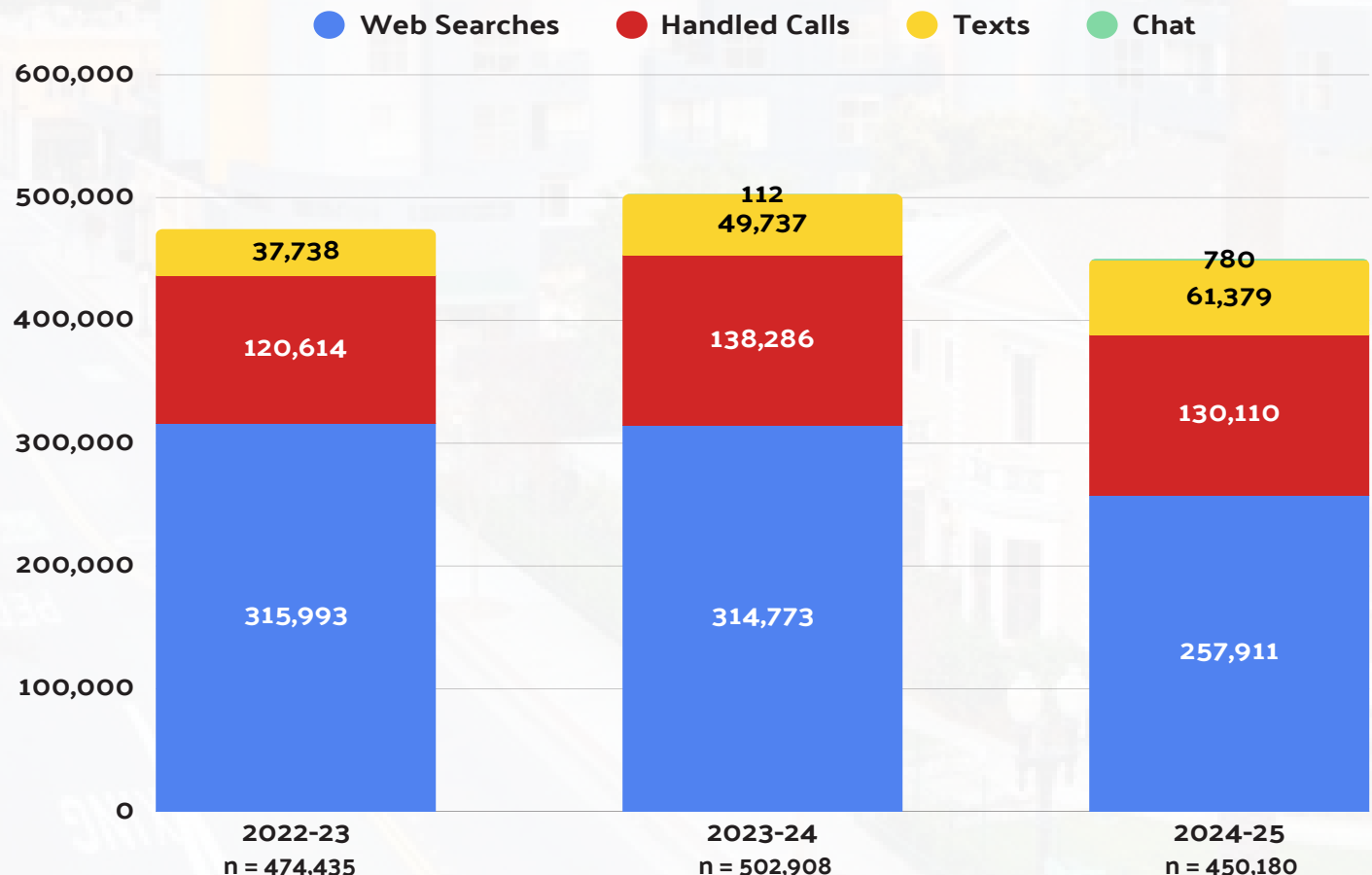2-1-1 Orange County
Orange County United Way

KEY DATA INSIGHTS

Residents are Increasingly Turning to Calls, Texts, and Chat

Over the past three years, how residents contact 211OC has continued to shift, reflecting changing preferences and growing complexity in how people seek support. While overall contact volume has fluctuated year to year, demand across live engagement channels remains strong.

- **Text contacts increased 63%** over the past three years, while calls **increased 8%.**
- **Web searches declined 18%,** suggesting greater user proficiency and a growing preference for live interaction when needs are complex.
- **Chat functionality,** launched in August 2024, has steadily grown in its first year of use, expanding access for residents who may prefer or require non-voice options.
- **Total contact volume increased 6% in 2023–24,** followed by a **10% decrease in 2024–25,** reflecting year-to-year fluctuation rather than a decline in demand for support.

Together, these trends highlight the importance of maintaining multiple access points to ensure residents can connect with support in the ways that work best for them.

Legend: ● Web Searches ● Handled Calls ● Texts ● Chat

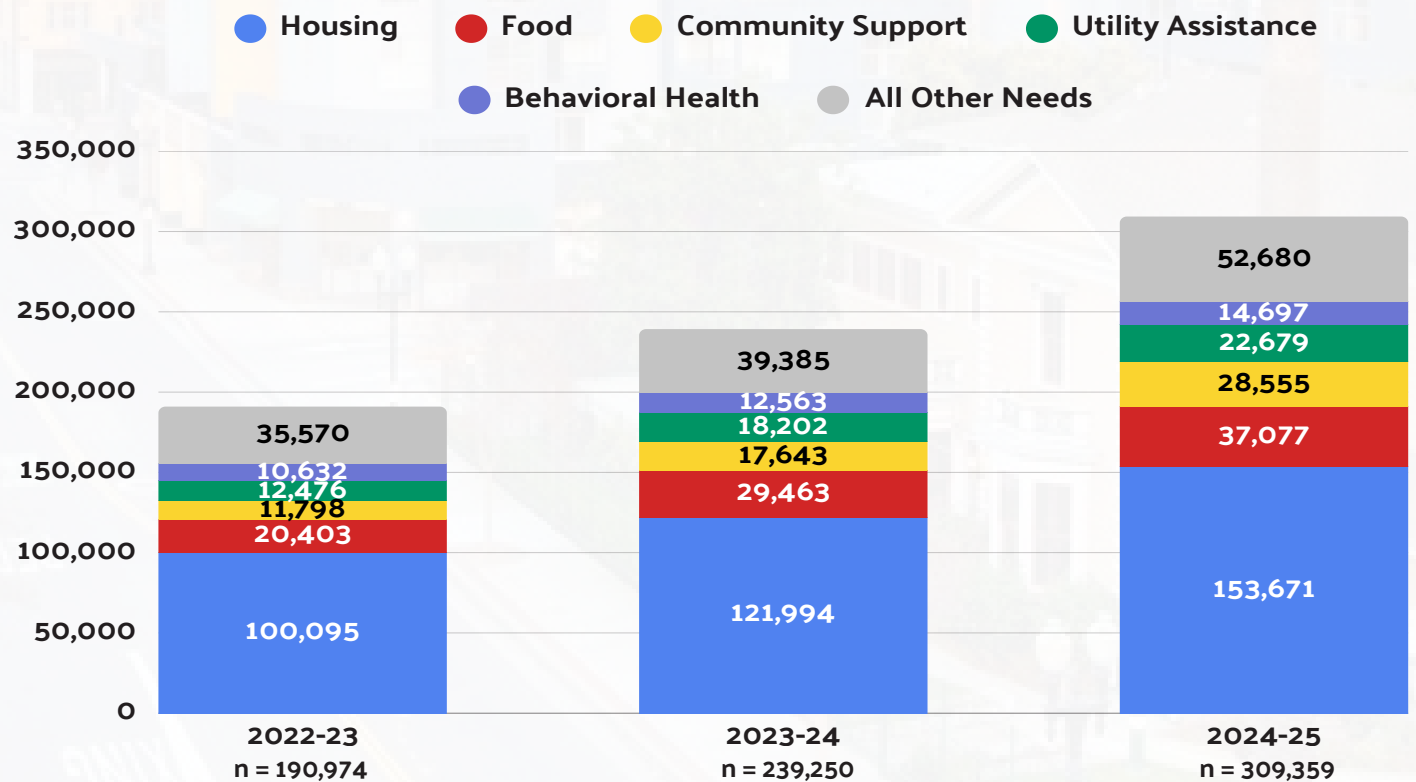|	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Chat		112	780
Texts	37,738	49,737	61,379
Handled Calls	120,614	138,286	130,110
Web Searches	315,993	314,773	257,911
	n = 474,435	n = 502,908	n = 450,180

Source: 211OC Contact Center data

Residents are Rising as Needs Deepen and Care Assessments Improve

While overall requests for assistance have fluctuated, the number of referrals provided by 211OC has increased significantly over the past three years, reflecting both deeper, overlapping needs and improvements in how those needs are identified and addressed.

- **Total referrals increased 62%** over the past three years, driven by an increase in referrals per request from **3 to 5,** suggesting more comprehensive needs assessment and more complex client situations.
- **Referrals increased 25% in 2023–24** and an **additional 29% in 2024–25,** indicating sustained growth in service coordination activity year over year.
- **Housing consistently accounts for approximately half of all referrals,** underscoring its central role in community stability.
- The largest referral increases over the three-year period include:
  - **Community support services,** including case management and street outreach **(+142%)**
  - **Food assistance (+82%)**
  - **Utility assistance (+82%)**
- **All Other Needs referral category** includes healthcare, behavioral health, income support, education, employment, legal services, transportation, and additional community-based resources.

Taken together, these trends point to a shift from single-need requests toward more layered, coordinated responses, as 211OC staff conduct deeper assessments and connect residents to a broader range of supports.

Legend: ● Housing ● Food ● Community Support ● Utility Assistance ● Behavioral Health ● All Other Needs

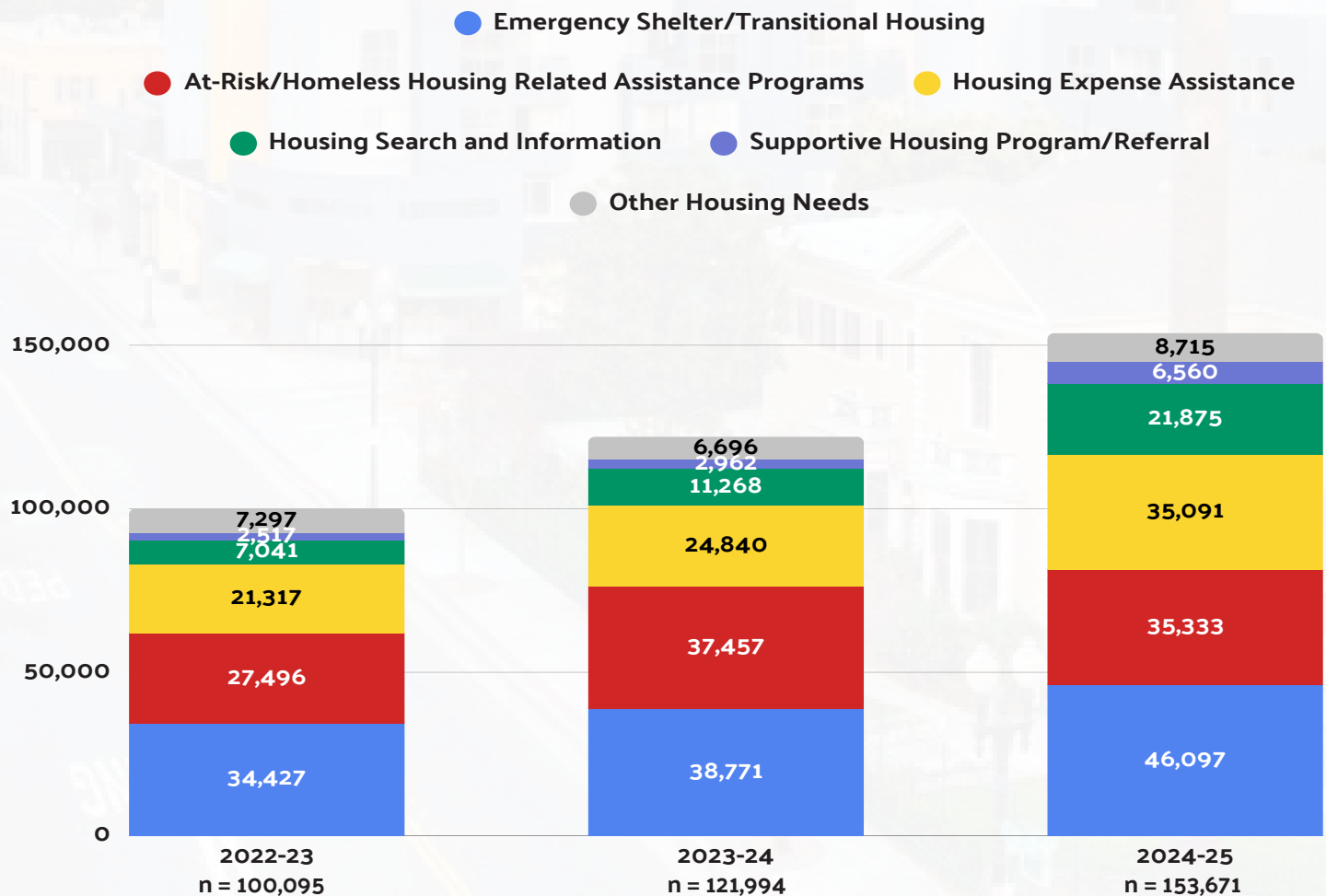|	2022-23 n = 190,974	2023-24 n = 239,250	2024-25 n = 309,359
All Other Needs	35,570	39,385	52,680
Behavioral Health	10,632	12,563	14,697
Utility Assistance	12,476	18,202	22,679
Community Support	11,798	17,643	28,555
Food	20,403	29,463	37,077
Housing	100,095	121,994	153,671

Source: 211OC Contact Center data

Affordable and Senior Housing Needs Increased Significantly

Housing continues to be the most persistent and central need reflected in 211OC referral data. Over the past three years, housing-related referrals have risen steadily, driven by increased demand for affordable housing options, senior housing, and assistance navigating housing costs.

- **Housing referrals increased 54%** over the past three years.
- **Referrals increased 18% in 2023–24** and an **additional 26% in 2024–25,** indicating sustained upward pressure on the housing system.
- The largest increases within housing-related referrals include:
  - **Housing Search and Information,** including affordable housing resources **(+211%)**
  - **Supportive Housing Programs,** including senior housing **(+161%)**
  - **Housing Expense Assistance (+65%)**
- Other Housing Needs category includes emergency shelter and transitional housing, homelessness prevention programs, home accessibility and modification, housing counseling, landlord-tenant assistance, and additional residential housing options.

These trends highlight both growing housing instability and increased reliance on navigation support, particularly for residents seeking affordable and senior housing in an increasingly constrained market.

● Emergency Shelter/Transitional Housing

● At-Risk/Homeless Housing Related Assistance Programs   ● Housing Expense Assistance

● Housing Search and Information   ● Supportive Housing Program/Referral

● Other Housing Needs

	2022-23 n = 100,095	2023-24 n = 121,994	2024-25 n = 153,671
Other Housing Needs	7,297	6,696	8,715
Supportive Housing Program/Referral	2,517	2,962	6,560
Housing Search and Information	7,041	11,268	21,875
Housing Expense Assistance	21,317	24,840	35,091
At-Risk/Homeless Housing Related Assistance Programs	27,496	37,457	35,333
Emergency Shelter/Transitional Housing	34,427	38,771	46,097

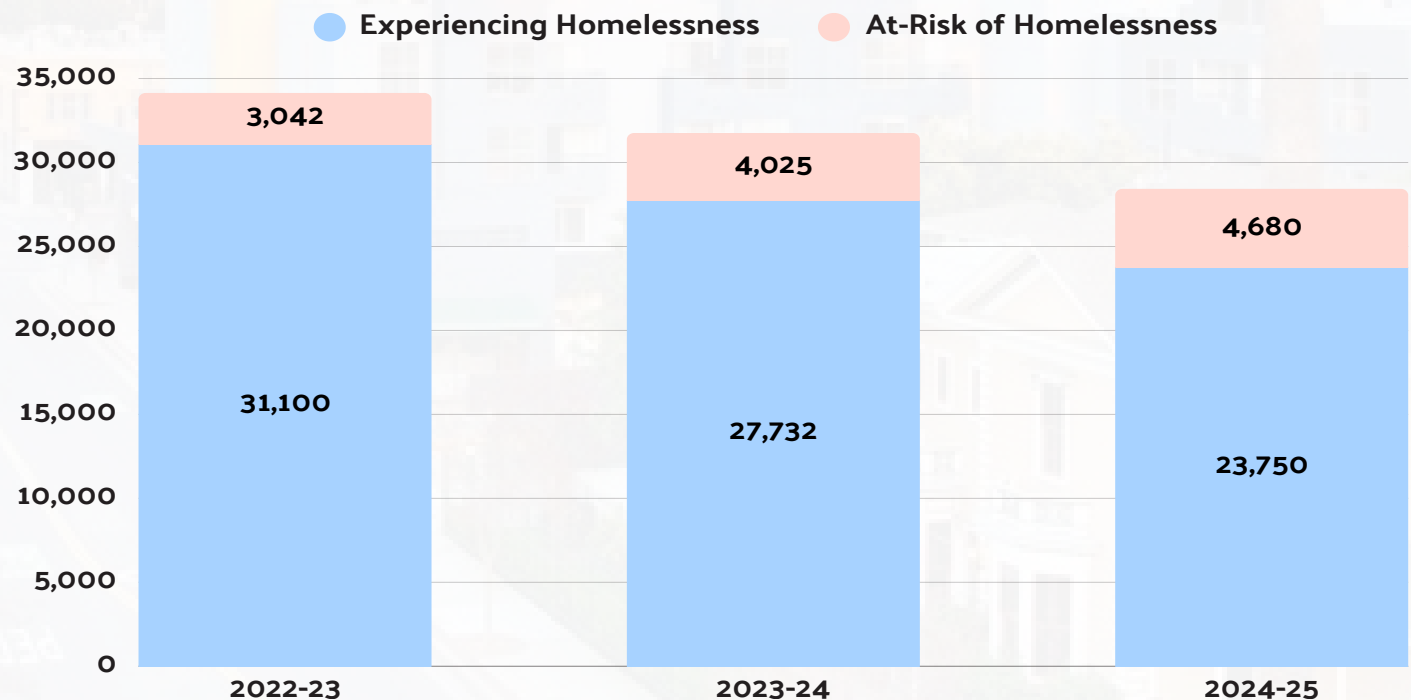**Source:** 211OC Contact Center data

Funding Shifts Are Reducing Street Outreach While Prevention Surges

Recent funding shifts are changing how homelessness-related services are delivered across Orange County. While demand for street outreach continues to rise, fewer individuals experiencing homelessness are being served through these projects due to changes in funding availability and program capacity.

- **Referrals to street outreach have increased,** signaling continued need among people experiencing homelessness.
- **The number of individuals served through street outreach has declined,** reflecting funding shifts that have reduced program capacity.
- At the same time, increased investment in **homelessness prevention** has led to a **54% increase in the number of people served who are at risk of homelessness,** before they enter crisis.
- Across homelessness-related services, the number of unduplicated clients served **decreased 7% in 2023–24** and an **additional 10% in 2024–25,** indicating system-level changes in who is being reached and when.

Taken together, these trends suggest a shift toward upstream intervention, prioritizing prevention for those at risk of homelessness, while capacity constraints continue to limit outreach and support for people already experiencing homelessness.

● Experiencing Homelessness   ● At-Risk of Homelessness

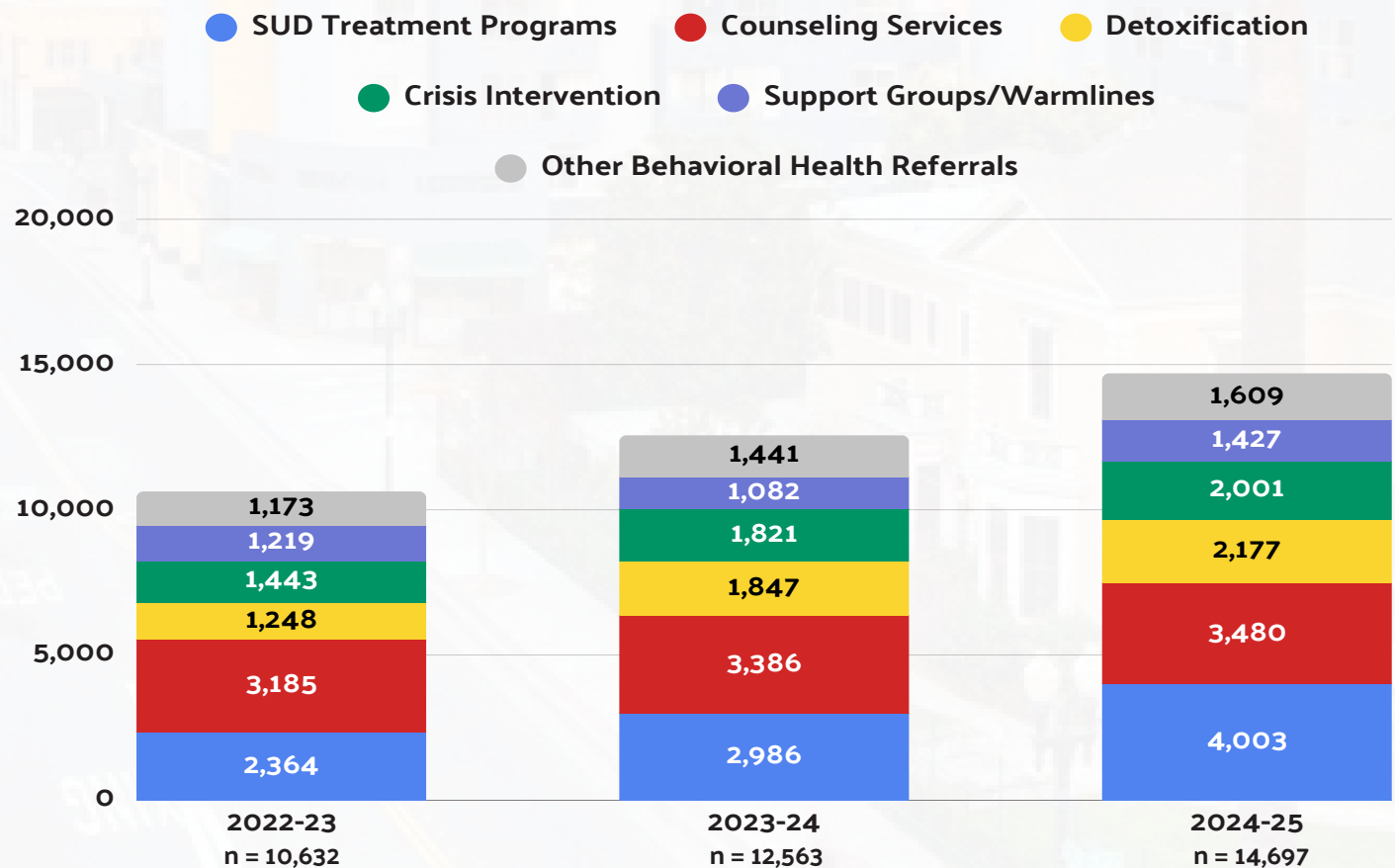| Year	At-Risk of Homelessness	Experiencing Homelessness
2022-23	3,042	31,100
2023-24	4,025	27,732
2024-25	4,680	23,750

Source: Orange County HMIS

Behavioral Health Needs Are Accelerating, Especially for Substance Use Treatment

Behavioral health needs continue to rise across Orange County, with particularly sharp increases in substance use–related referrals. These trends reflect growing demand for both crisis response and ongoing treatment, often alongside housing, food, and other social service needs.

- **Behavioral health referrals increased 38%** over the past three years.
- Referrals rose **18% in 2023–24** and an **additional 17% in 2024–25,** indicating sustained growth year over year.
- The largest increases within behavioral health referrals include:
  - **Detoxification services (+74%)**
  - **Substance use disorder (SUD) treatment programs (+69%)**
- Other behavioral health referrals include counseling services, crisis intervention, support groups and warmlines, child and adolescent psychiatry, geriatric psychiatry, co-occurring disorders treatment, and mental health evaluation and facility-based services.

These trends align with increases in mental health and substance use–related hospitalizations reported in the 2026 Community Indicators report, reinforcing the need for coordinated, cross-sector responses that address behavioral health alongside housing and other stabilizing supports.
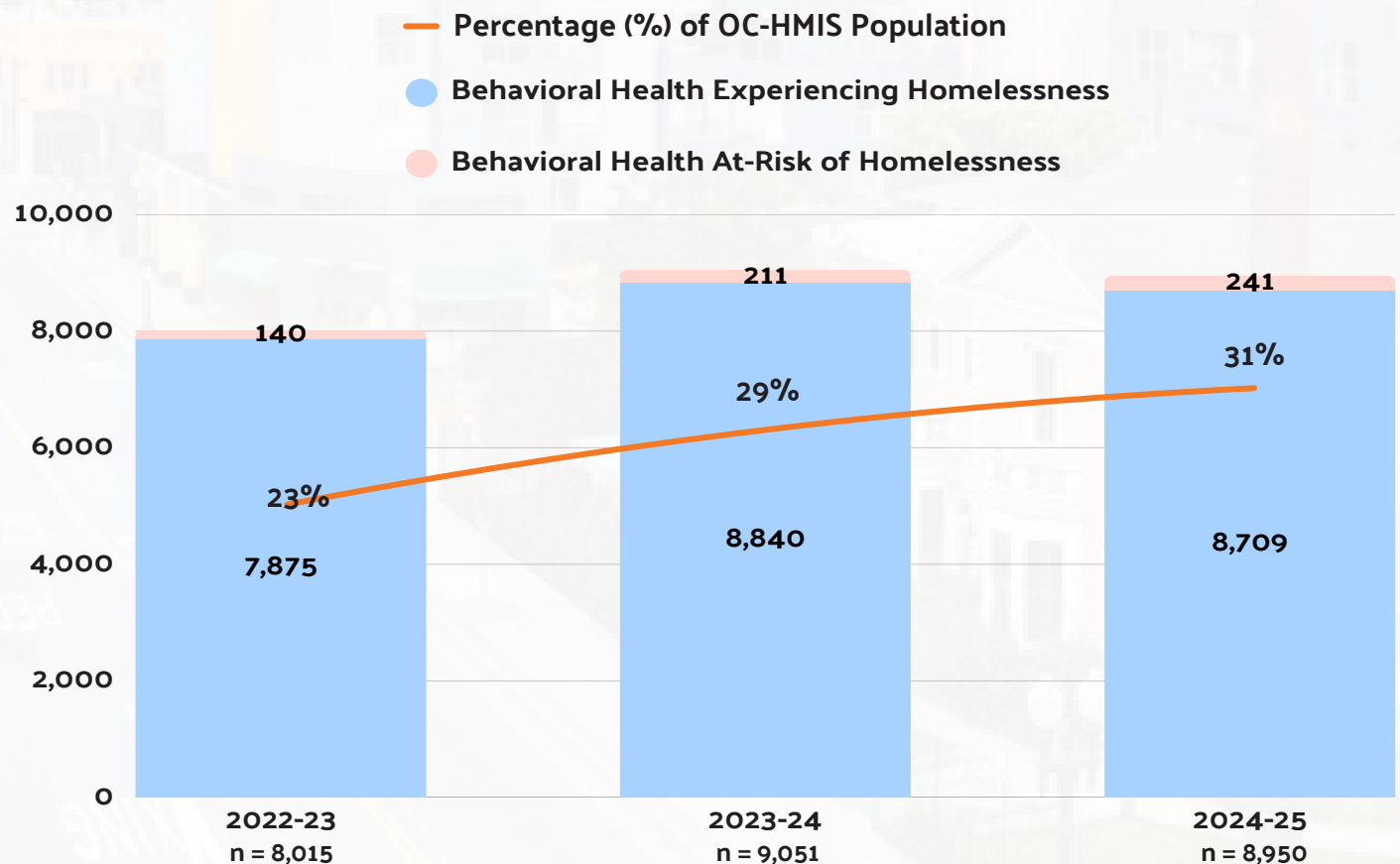
Legend: SUD Treatment Programs, Counseling Services, Detoxification, Crisis Intervention, Support Groups/Warmlines, Other Behavioral Health Referrals

Category	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Other Behavioral Health Referrals	1,173	1,441	1,609
Support Groups/Warmlines	1,219	1,082	1,427
Crisis Intervention	1,443	1,821	2,001
Detoxification	1,248	1,847	2,177
Counseling Services	3,185	3,386	3,480
SUD Treatment Programs	2,364	2,986	4,003
n	10,632	12,563	14,697

Source: 211OC Contact Center data

People Experiencing Homelessness Are Becoming More Vulnerable, With Higher Behavioral Health Needs

Data from the OC-HMIS shows that behavioral health needs among people experiencing homelessness are increasing, signaling growing vulnerability within the system of care. These trends suggest that individuals are entering homelessness with more complex needs and remaining in crisis longer.

- **The number of clients self-reporting a mental health or substance use condition in OC-HMIS increased 12%** over the past three years.
- Referrals involving behavioral health needs among people experiencing homelessness increased **13% in 2023–24,** followed by a **1% decrease in 2024–25,** indicating stabilization at a higher level of need rather than a return to prior conditions.
- The share of the OC-HMIS population reporting behavioral health conditions increased steadily, rising from **23% in 2022–23,** to **29% in 2023–24,** and **31% in 2024–25.**
- These trends correlate with longer lengths of time spent homeless, suggesting that homelessness itself may be intensifying behavioral health challenges.

Taken together, the data points to a population experiencing homelessness with higher acuity needs, reinforcing the importance of coordinated responses that integrate housing, behavioral health, and ongoing support services.

— Percentage (%) of OC-HMIS Population

● Behavioral Health Experiencing Homelessness

● Behavioral Health At-Risk of Homelessness

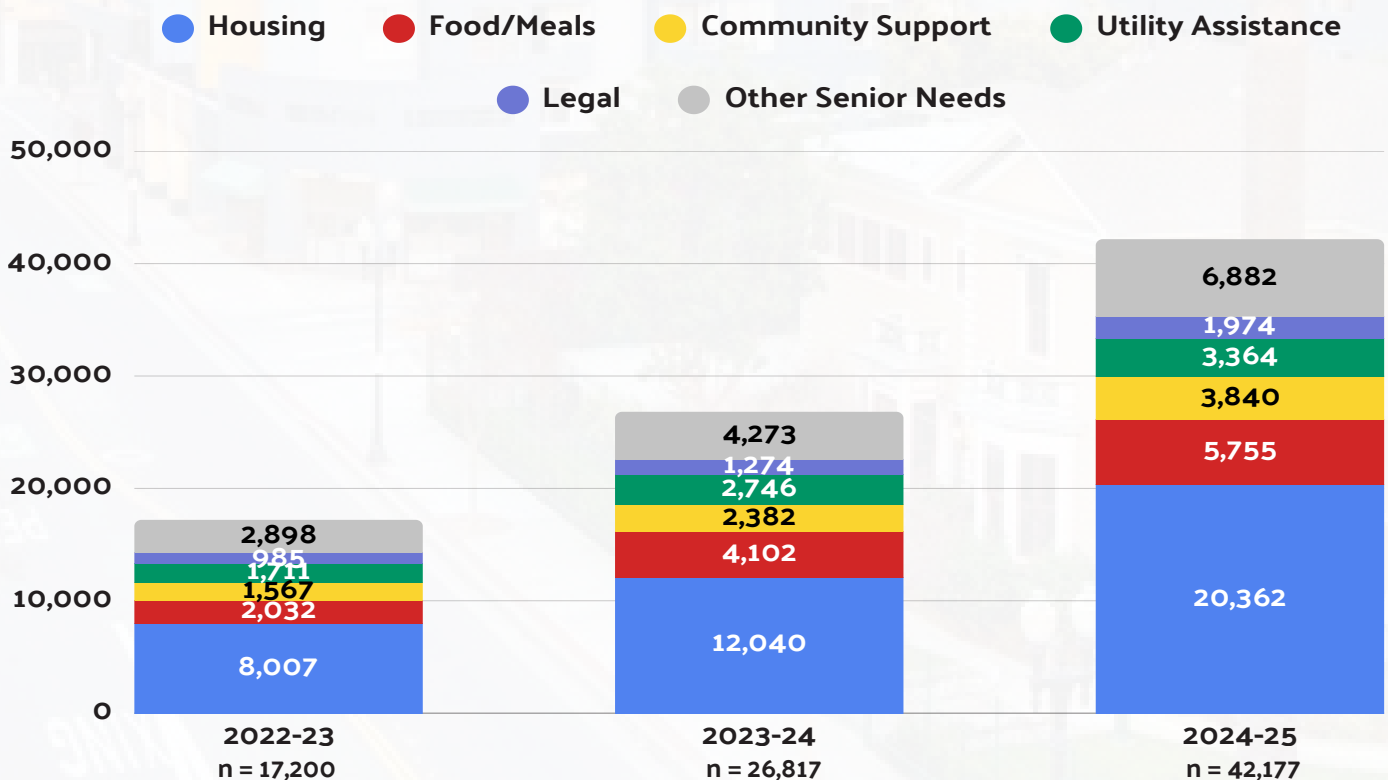|	2022-23 n = 8,015	2023-24 n = 9,051	2024-25 n = 8,950
At-Risk	140	211	241
Experiencing Homelessness	7,875	8,840	8,709
Percentage	23%	29%	31%

Source: Orange County HMIS

Senior Needs Are Increasing Dramatically, With Referrals More Than Doubling in Three Years

Referrals for older adults have risen sharply over the past three years, indicating a growing population of seniors experiencing instability and increasingly complex needs. The data points to seniors facing heightened risk across housing, food access, and care coordination.

- **Senior referrals more than doubled** over the past three years.
- Referrals **increased 56% in 2023–24** and an **additional 57% in 2024–25,** reflecting sustained and accelerating growth.
- The largest increases in senior-related referrals include:
  - **Food assistance,** including meals **(+183%)**
  - **Housing-related support (+154%)**
  - **Community support services,** including case management and street outreach **(+145%)**
- Referrals to **shelters, Coordinated Entry, and street outreach** have risen significantly, pointing to a growing number of seniors experiencing homelessness.
- Other Senior Needs category includes healthcare, behavioral health, income support, legal assistance, transportation, and additional community-based services.

These trends highlight the growing vulnerability of older adults and the need for coordinated, age-responsive approaches that address housing stability, food security, and ongoing support for seniors at risk of or experiencing homelessness.
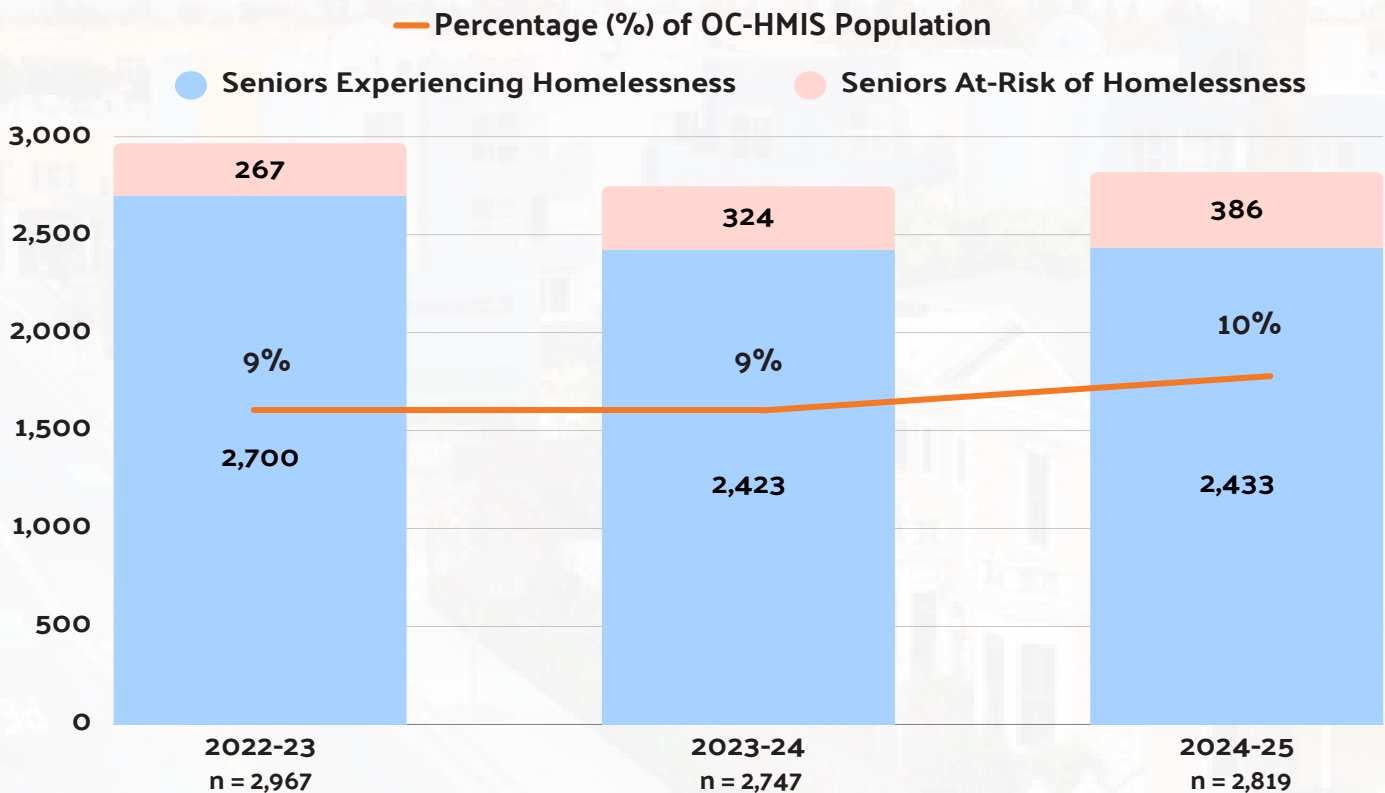
Legend:
- ● Housing
- ● Food/Meals
- ● Community Support
- ● Utility Assistance
- ● Legal
- ● Other Senior Needs

	2022-23 (n = 17,200)	2023-24 (n = 26,817)	2024-25 (n = 42,177)
Other Senior Needs	2,898	4,273	6,882
Legal	985	1,274	1,974
Utility Assistance	1,711	2,746	3,364
Community Support	1,567	2,382	3,840
Food/Meals	2,032	4,102	5,755
Housing	8,007	12,040	20,362

Source: 211OC Contact Center data

Services for Seniors Experiencing Homelessness Are Not Keeping Pace With Rising Referrals

While referrals for seniors have increased sharply, the number of older adults served within the homeless system has remained relatively stable. This divergence points to a growing gap between need and available service capacity for seniors experiencing homelessness.

- The number of **seniors served in OC-HMIS has remained fairly consistent** over the past three years, despite significant growth in senior-related referrals.

- Seniors served through homelessness-related programs **decreased 7% in 2023–24** and **increased 3% in 2024–25,** reflecting minimal net growth in system reach.

- In contrast, the number of **seniors at risk of homelessness has continued to rise,** aligning with broader trends across the at-risk population and suggesting more equitable access to prevention resources.

Together, these trends suggest that while prevention efforts are reaching seniors earlier, capacity constraints remain for serving seniors once they enter homelessness, underscoring the need for age-responsive housing and support options within the system of care.
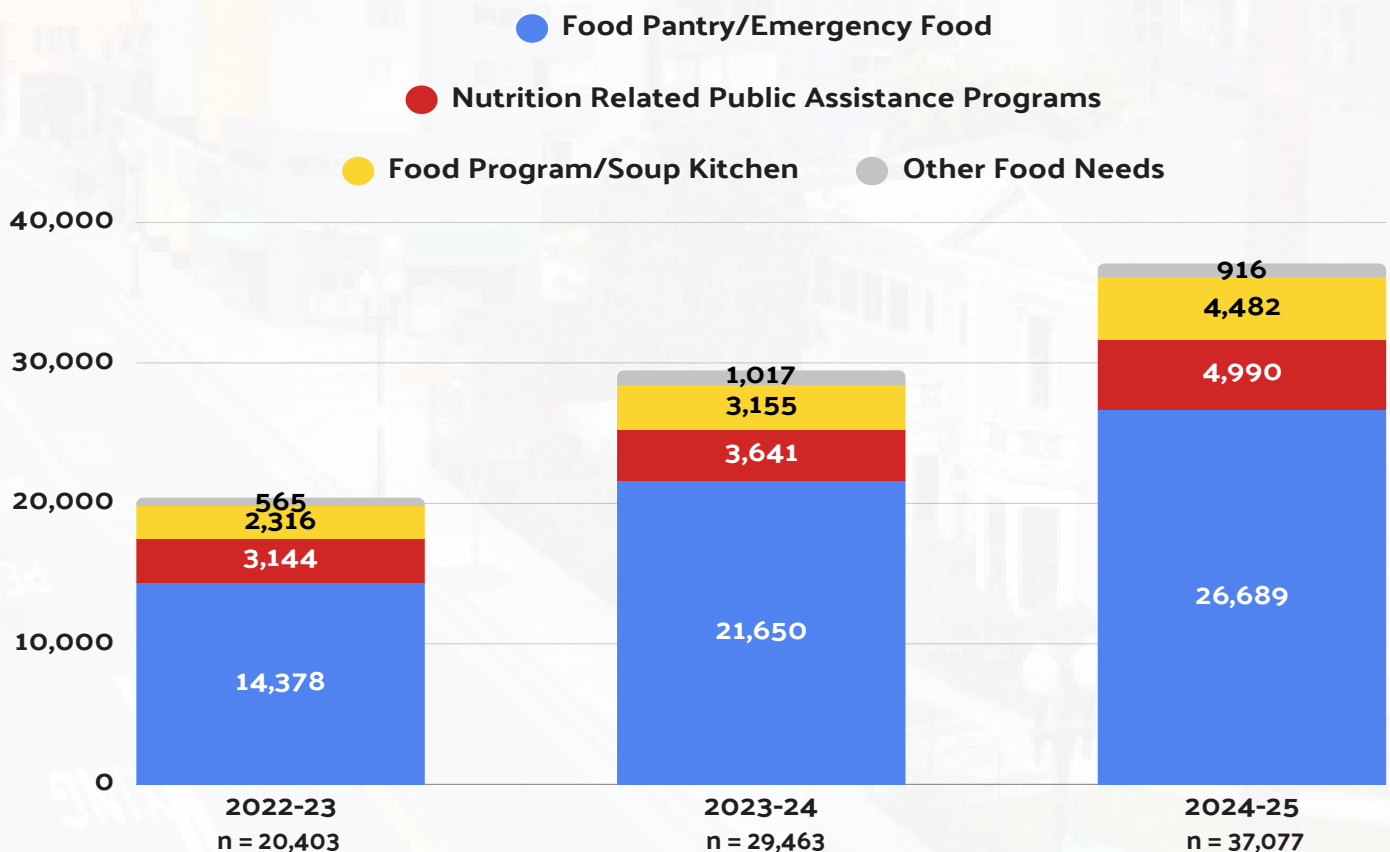
—Percentage (%) of OC-HMIS Population

● Seniors Experiencing Homelessness   ● Seniors At-Risk of Homelessness

	2022-23 n = 2,967	2023-24 n = 2,747	2024-25 n = 2,819
Seniors At-Risk of Homelessness	267	324	386
Percentage (%) of OC-HMIS Population	9%	9%	10%
Seniors Experiencing Homelessness	2,700	2,423	2,433

Source: Orange County HMIS

Food Insecurity Has Intensified, Driven Primarily by Food Pantry Demand

Food insecurity continues to rise across Orange County, with a growing share of residents relying on food pantries and emergency food programs to meet basic needs. The data reflects increasing demand for immediate food assistance, particularly among households experiencing broader financial and housing instability.

- **Food-related referrals increased 82%** over the past three years.
- Referrals **increased 44% in 2023–24** and an **additional 26% in 2024–25,** indicating sustained growth in need.
- **Three out of four food referrals are for food pantries,** highlighting the central role of pantry-based assistance.
- The largest increases in food-related referrals include:
    - **Food Pantry and Emergency Food services (+86%)**
    - **Food Programs and Soup Kitchens,** including home-delivered meals **(+94%)**
- Other food-related needs include nutrition-related public assistance programs, food banks and distribution sites, grocery delivery services, and retailers accepting EBT benefits.

These trends underscore food insecurity as a persistent and intensifying challenge, often intersecting with housing instability, fixed incomes, and rising living costs, and reinforcing the importance of coordinated food access and referral pathways.
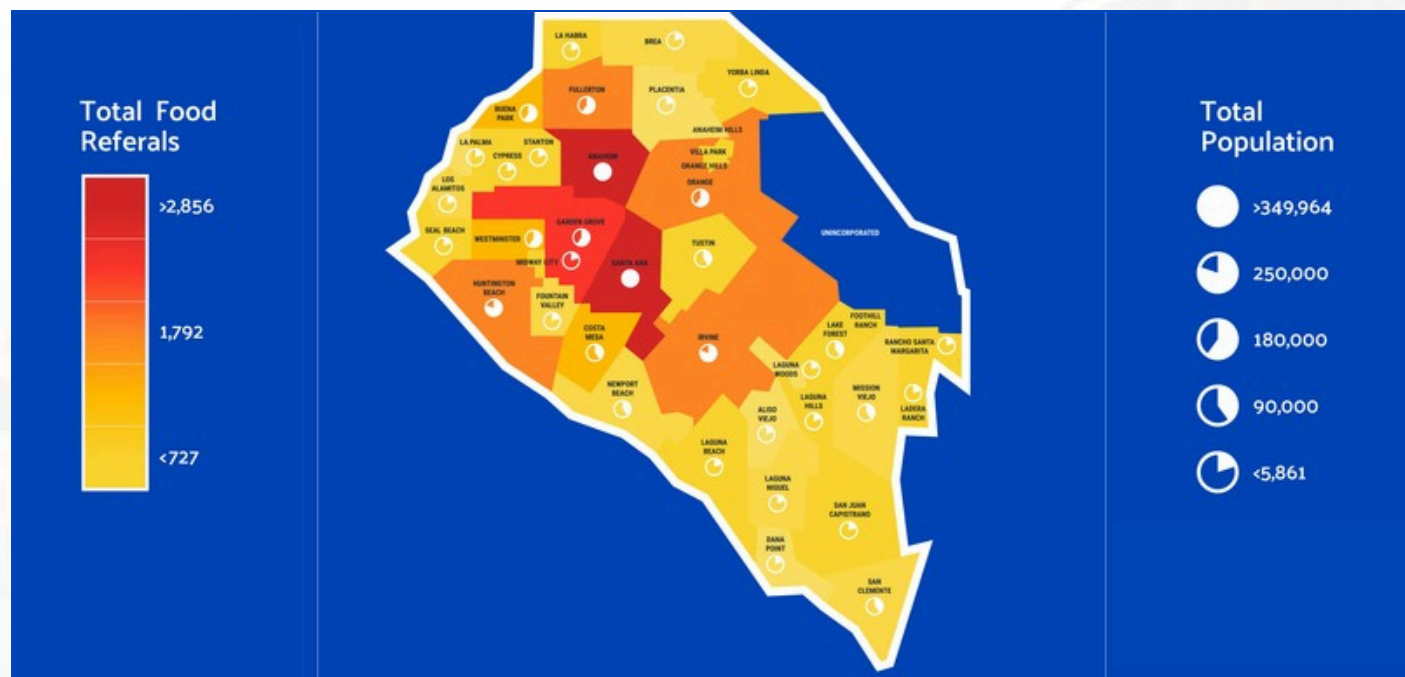
● **Food Pantry/Emergency Food**

● **Nutrition Related Public Assistance Programs**

● **Food Program/Soup Kitchen** ● **Other Food Needs**

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Other Food Needs	565	1,017	916
Food Program/Soup Kitchen	2,316	3,155	4,482
Nutrition Related Public Assistance Programs	3,144	3,641	4,990
Food Pantry/Emergency Food	14,378	21,650	26,689
n	20,403	29,463	37,077

Source: 211OC Contact Center data

Food Access Varies by Community and Geography

To better understand how food insecurity shows up across Orange County, 211OC developed a Food Service Area Map that visualizes food-related referrals alongside population data. The map highlights where demand for food assistance is concentrated and where service availability may not align with community need.

This geographic lens helps surface patterns that are not visible in countywide totals alone, supporting more informed conversations about access, coverage, and coordination at the local level.

Explore the interactive Food Service Area Map by visiting **OCUnitedWay.to/211OC-Map**

Source: 211OC Contact Center data

THE POWER OF A UNIFIED NETWORK

For more information about 211OC, the data shared in this report, or opportunities to engage with the 211OC Partner Network, please contact:

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