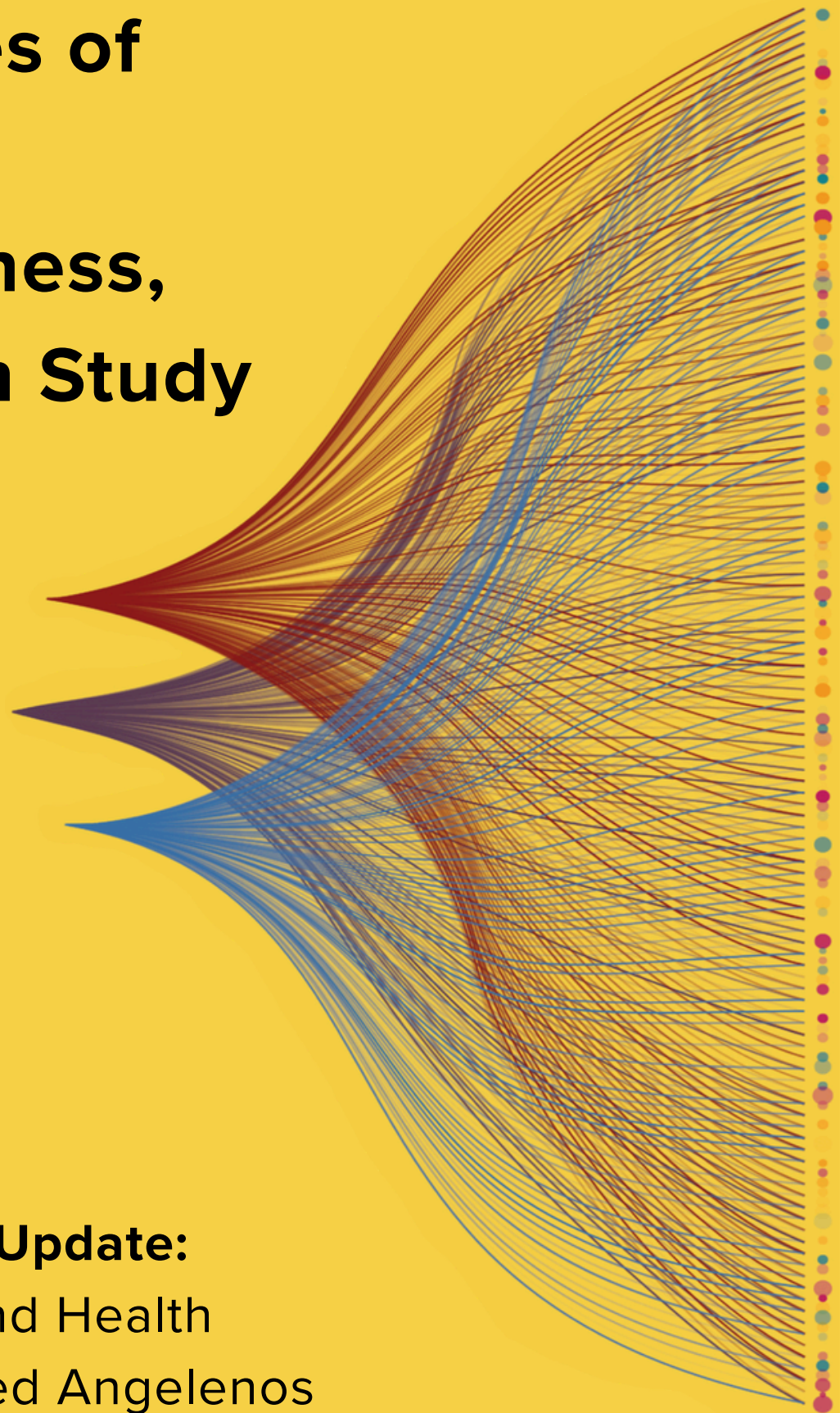


Periodic Assessment of Trajectories of Housing, Homelessness, and Health Study (PATHS)



February 2026 Update:
Extreme Heat and Health
Among Unhoused Angelenos



**Periodic Assessment of Trajectories of Housing,
Homelessness and Health Study (PATHS):
Extreme Heat and Health Among Unhoused Angelenos**

Saachi Pavani, *Fielding School of Public Health, UCLA*
Gabrielle Arreglo, *Fielding School of Public Health, UCLA*
Jessie Chien, *Fielding School of Public Health, UCLA*
Randall Kuhn, *Fielding School of Public Health, UCLA*
Benjamin Henwood, *Dworak-Peck School of Social Work, USC*
Evan M. Shannon, *Geffen School of Medicine, UCLA*

INTRODUCTION

Extreme heat has emerged as a major public health hazard in Los Angeles (LA) County. Rising temperatures, longer heat seasons, and more frequent heat waves are placing greater strain on public health systems and disproportionately affecting populations with limited ability to avoid exposure. Unhoused individuals face especially heightened risks during heat events due to prolonged outdoor exposure, underlying health conditions, and structural barriers to health care and cooling resources.

As climate change continues to exacerbate extreme heat, these risks are likely to intensify. Unhoused individuals are widely recognized as among the most vulnerable during heat events, yet population-level evidence documenting how extreme heat is experienced, how it affects health, and how people cope remains limited. Much of the existing evidence relies on emergency department data or mortality records, which capture only the most severe outcomes and overlook the everyday health burdens of heat exposure.

This brief examines the extent and consequences of extreme heat exposure among unhoused Angelenos using monthly survey data from the Periodic Assessment of Trajectories of Housing, Homelessness and Health Study (PATHS) collected during the summer and early fall of 2025. We document patterns of heat exposure, heat-related symptoms, coping strategies, and access to information and resources. Understanding how extreme heat affects unhoused communities, including where existing systems may fall short, is critical for informing heat preparedness, service delivery, and climate adaptation strategies as extreme heat becomes an increasingly common feature of life in LA.

METHODS

PATHS is a longitudinal study that currently follows a cohort of approximately 800 unhoused individuals living in LA County and collects monthly online survey responses via text message and email, allowing for timely assessment of changing conditions and emerging public health threats. To learn more about the PATHS survey, visit the website (<http://paths.la>). Methodological details can be found in this [protocol paper](#).

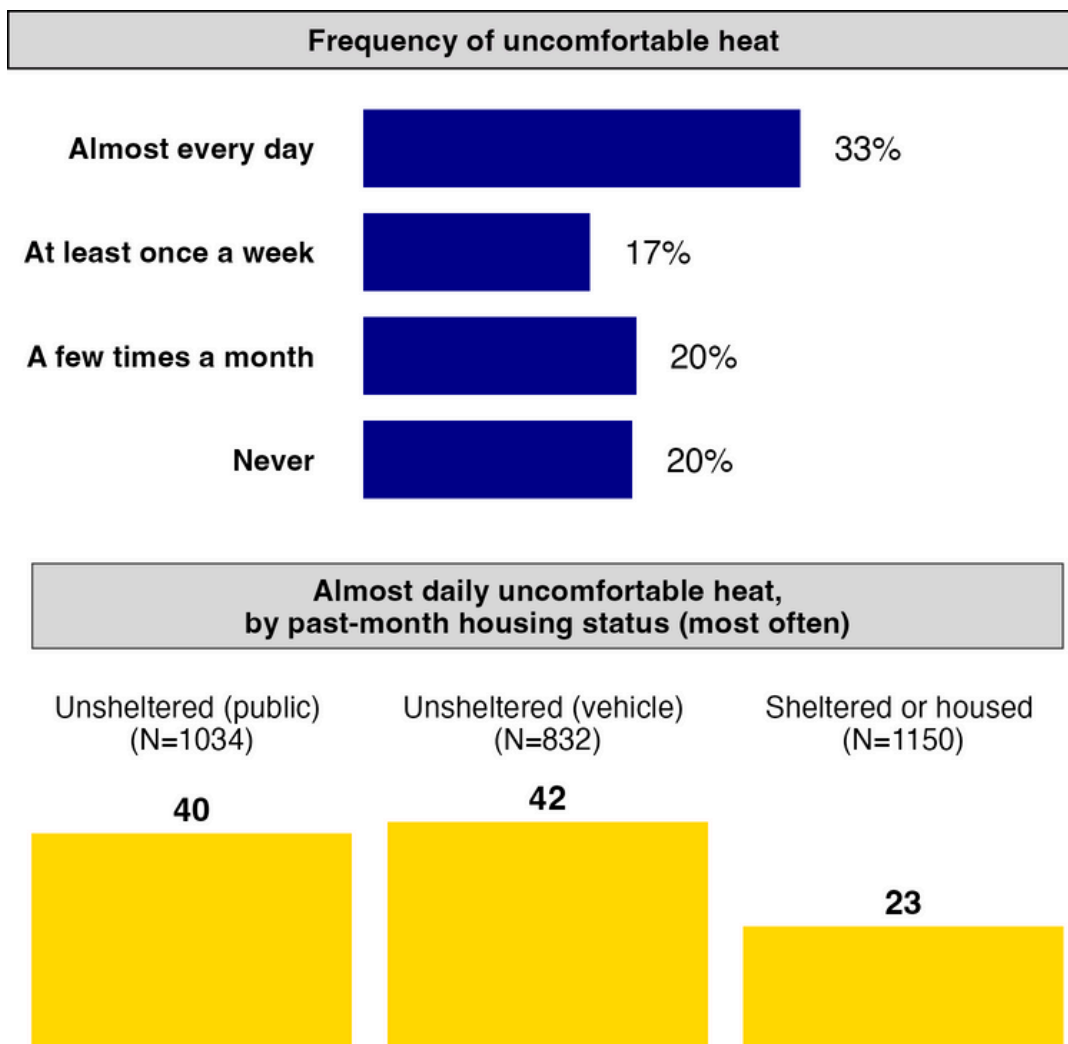
Between July and October 2025, PATHS participants were asked a set of questions focused on extreme heat experiences in the past month. These questions assessed five key domains: (1) frequency of experiencing uncomfortable heat; (2) heat-related health symptoms; (3) strategies used to cope with extreme heat; (4) sources of information about places or ways to stay cool; and (5) ways respondents helped others access heat-related resources.

The following analyses include all 3,389 monthly survey responses collected from 1,022 individuals during this period (July=865 survey responses; August=852; September=852; October=820) . Note that because surveys are collected monthly, individuals may contribute data in multiple months. Descriptive analyses examine differences by housing status, demographic characteristics, and geography.

FINDINGS

Between July and October 2025, periods of extreme heat across LA County were associated with widespread heat exposure among PATHS participants. Across all survey responses during this period, half (50%) reported experiencing uncomfortable heat at least weekly, including a third who reported uncomfortable heat almost every day. Experiences of uncomfortable heat were markedly more frequent among unsheltered respondents, regardless of whether they were living in public spaces or vehicles. In both unsheltered groups, over 40% reported experiencing uncomfortable heat almost daily, compared with 25% among sheltered or housed respondents.

Figure 1. Frequency of uncomfortable heat in the past month



Heat exposure also showed clear geographic variation across the county’s Service Planning Areas (SPAs). Rates of experiencing uncomfortable heat almost daily between July and October were highest in the San Fernando Valley (47%) and San Gabriel Valley (43%), and lowest in Metro (downtown) LA (31%) and West LA (22%). These patterns closely mirrored regional temperature differences, with inland SPAs (i.e., Antelope Valley, San Fernando Valley, San Gabriel Valley) experiencing the highest maximum temperatures during the summer months. Across nearly all SPAs, both maximum temperatures and reports of almost daily uncomfortable heat peaked in August and declined by October, indicating a strong alignment between ambient heat conditions and lived heat exposure. However, reports of almost daily heat discomfort remained elevated even in some areas with more moderate temperatures, which may signify that other socioenvironmental factors, such as housing conditions and access to cooling resources, influence heat perceptions beyond ambient temperature alone.

Figure 2. Frequency of almost daily uncomfortable heat by Los Angeles County Service Planning Areas (July-October 2025)

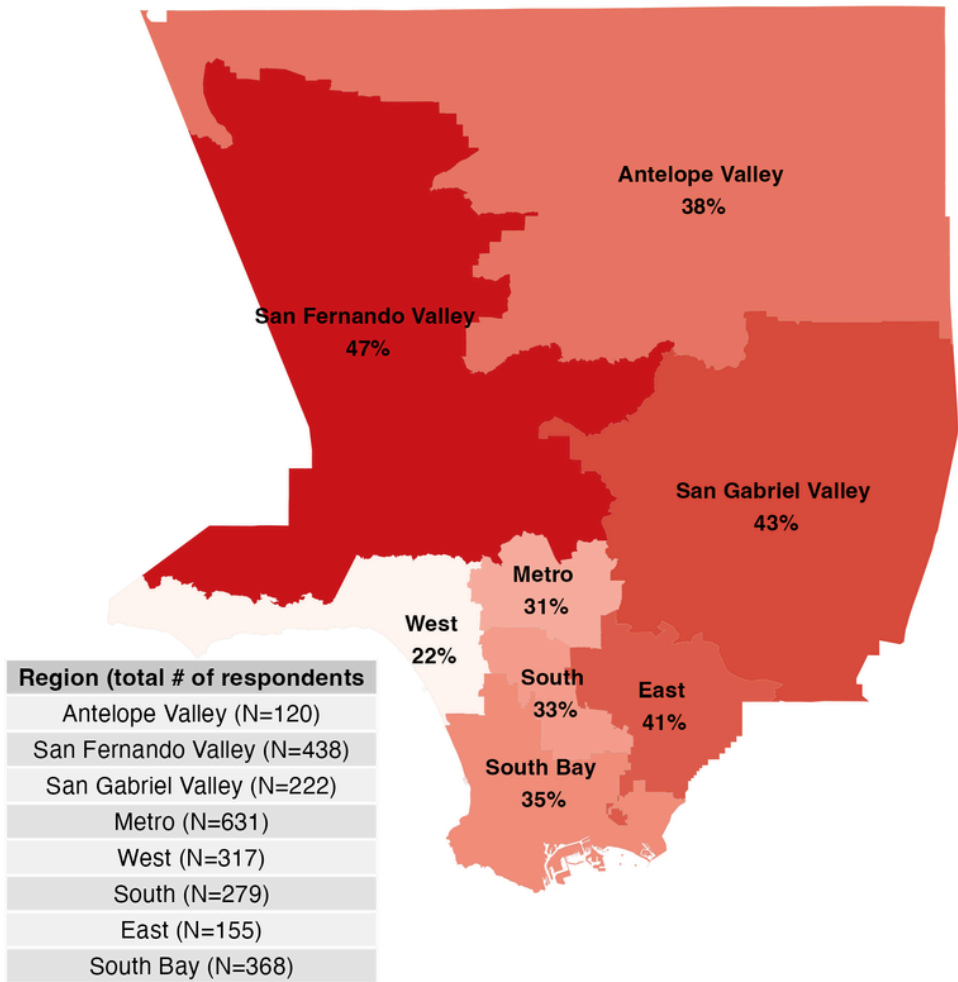
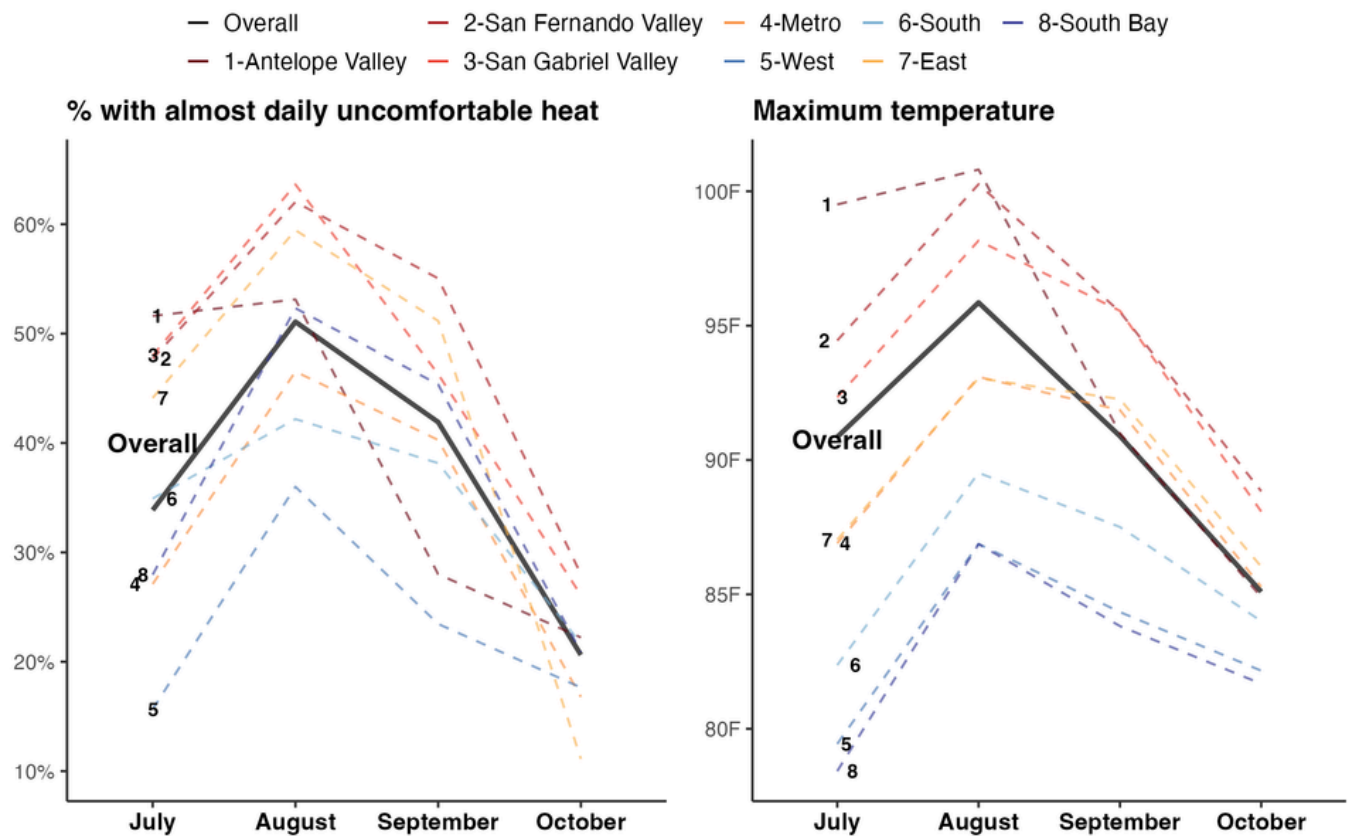


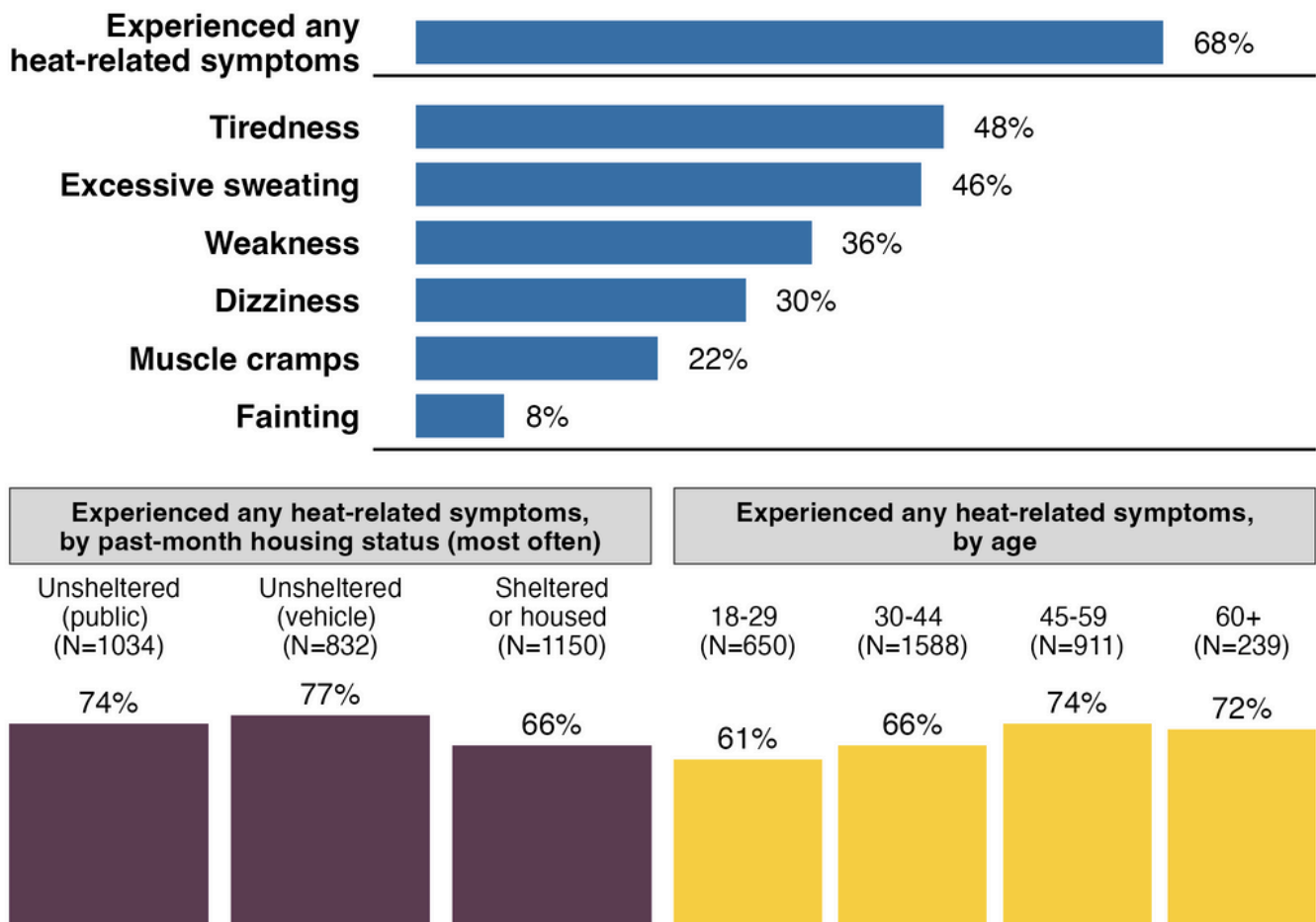
Figure 3. Trends in almost daily uncomfortable heat and maximum temperatures across Los Angeles County Service Planning Areas, by month, summer 2025



Heat exposure translated into substantial health impacts. Across all survey responses, just over two-thirds (68%) reported experiencing at least one heat-related symptom in the past month. The most commonly reported symptoms were feeling tired (48%) and excessive sweating (46%), followed by feeling weak (36%), dizziness (30%), and muscle cramps (22%). Although less common, fainting was reported in 8% of responses, demonstrating severe heat-related effects for a subset of respondents. Consistent with patterns of heat exposure, unsheltered respondents—both those living in public spaces and in vehicles—experienced a higher burden of heat-related symptoms than sheltered respondents.

Approximately three-quarters of unsheltered responses reported at least one heat-related symptom, compared with about two-thirds of sheltered or housed responses. Older adults were disproportionately affected: a little over 70% of responses from adults aged 45 and older reported heat-related symptoms, compared with lower rates among younger age groups. Women also reported a higher prevalence of heat-related symptoms than men (73% vs. 63%).

Figure 4. Frequency of heat-related symptoms in the past month

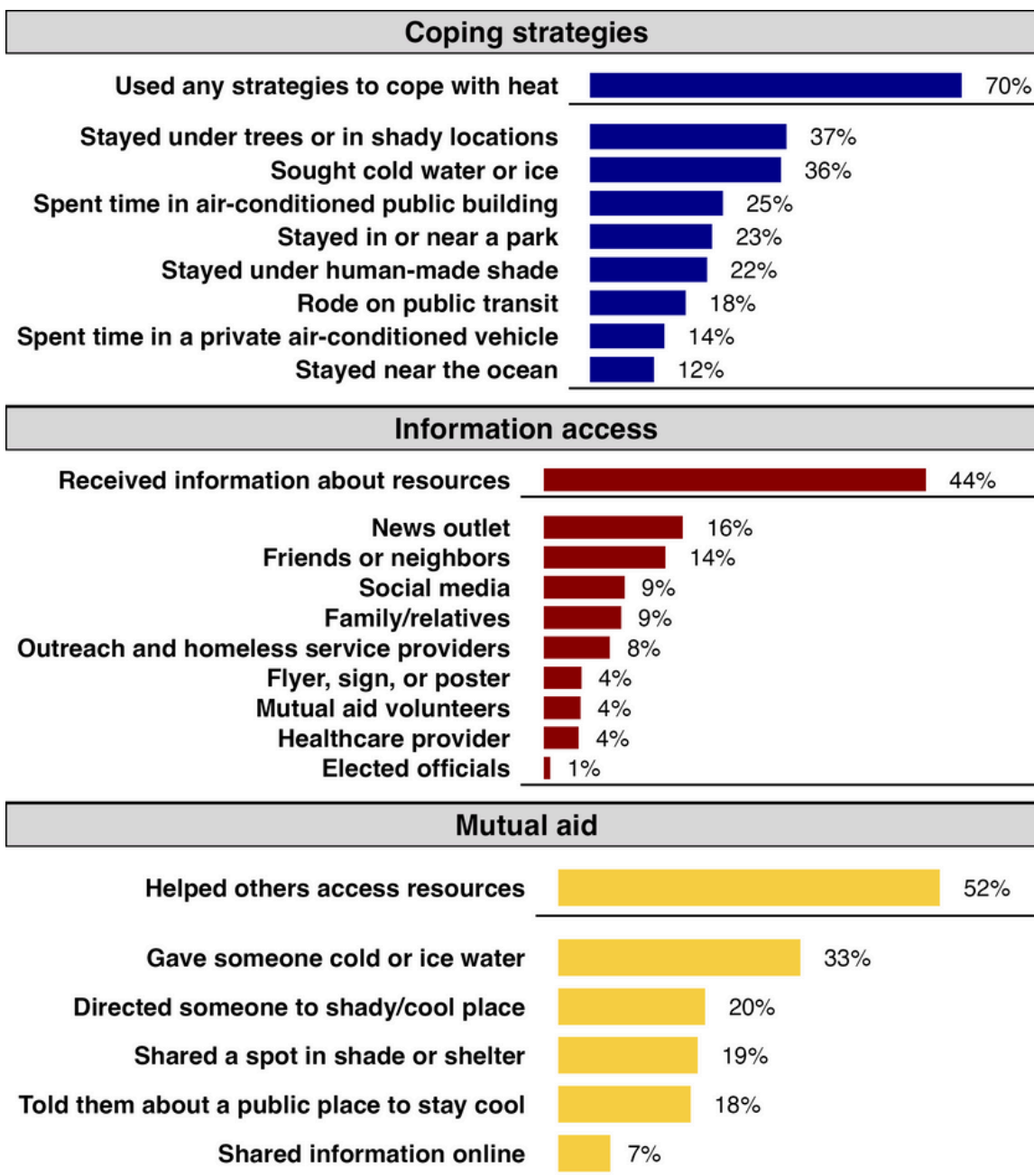


Despite these health challenges, many respondents reported engaging in coping strategies to deal with extreme heat. Seventy percent of respondents reported using at least one strategy to cope with the heat in the past month. Around a third (37%) reported staying under trees or in shady locations, in air-conditioned public buildings (25%), in or near a park (23%), in human-made shade (22%), in a private air-conditioned vehicle (14%), or near the ocean (12%). Respondents also reported other coping strategies such as seeking cold water or ice (36%) and riding on public transit (18%).

At the same time, access to information about heat relief remained limited. Fewer than half of respondents (44%) reported receiving information about places or ways to stay cool during extreme heat. When information was received, it most often came through news outlets (16%) or friends, neighbors, and acquaintances (14%), with fewer respondents citing social media (9%), family or relatives (9%), or outreach workers, case managers, or homeless service providers (8%).

Although formal information and resources were limited, respondents reported frequently supporting one another during extreme heat events. More than half (52%) reported helping others access heat-related resources, most often by providing cold or ice water (33%), directing someone to a shaded or cool location (20%), sharing shade or shelter (19%), or informing others about public places to stay cool (18%). A smaller share also reported sharing information online (7%), highlighting the role of peer support and informal networks in responding to extreme heat.

Figure 5. Coping strategies, information access, and mutual aid during extreme heat



CONCLUSION

Extreme heat posed a substantial burden on unhoused Angelenos during the summer of 2025. Unsheltered respondents consistently experienced the highest levels of heat exposure and heat-related symptoms, underscoring that lack of stable shelter remains a key driver of vulnerability during heat events. Future research can explore the extent to which such extreme heat exposures affect short- and long-term health.

In the absence of adequate affordable housing or shelter options that can provide protection from heat exposure, our findings point to clear gaps in access to heat relief information and formal support. Despite extensive heat exposure, fewer than half of respondents reported receiving information about places or ways to stay cool. These gaps suggest opportunities to strengthen heat-specific outreach, including clearer communication about cooling locations and hours.

Furthermore, policies that expand access to shade, water, transportation, and cooling infrastructure, particularly in high-heat inland regions, may help reduce health harms from extreme heat. Mobile and street-based interventions, including wellness checks during heat events and distribution of cooling supplies, may be particularly important for reaching unsheltered individuals who face barriers to accessing fixed-site services.

We note that an increasing share of the unsheltered population are engaged with field-based medical providers. These providers may serve as an essential source of support during extreme heat events, particularly in avoiding any negative heat interactions with prescription medicines.

At the same time, the widespread reliance on peer support observed in this study highlights the importance of investing in community-based and mutual aid efforts alongside formal emergency response systems.

As extreme heat becomes more frequent and intense due to climate change, and without social policy that ensures adequate housing and shelter options for people experiencing homelessness, integrating lived experience data from unhoused communities into heat preparedness and response planning will be essential. PATHS provides a critical platform for generating this evidence and informing more equitable and effective heat mitigation strategies across LA County.