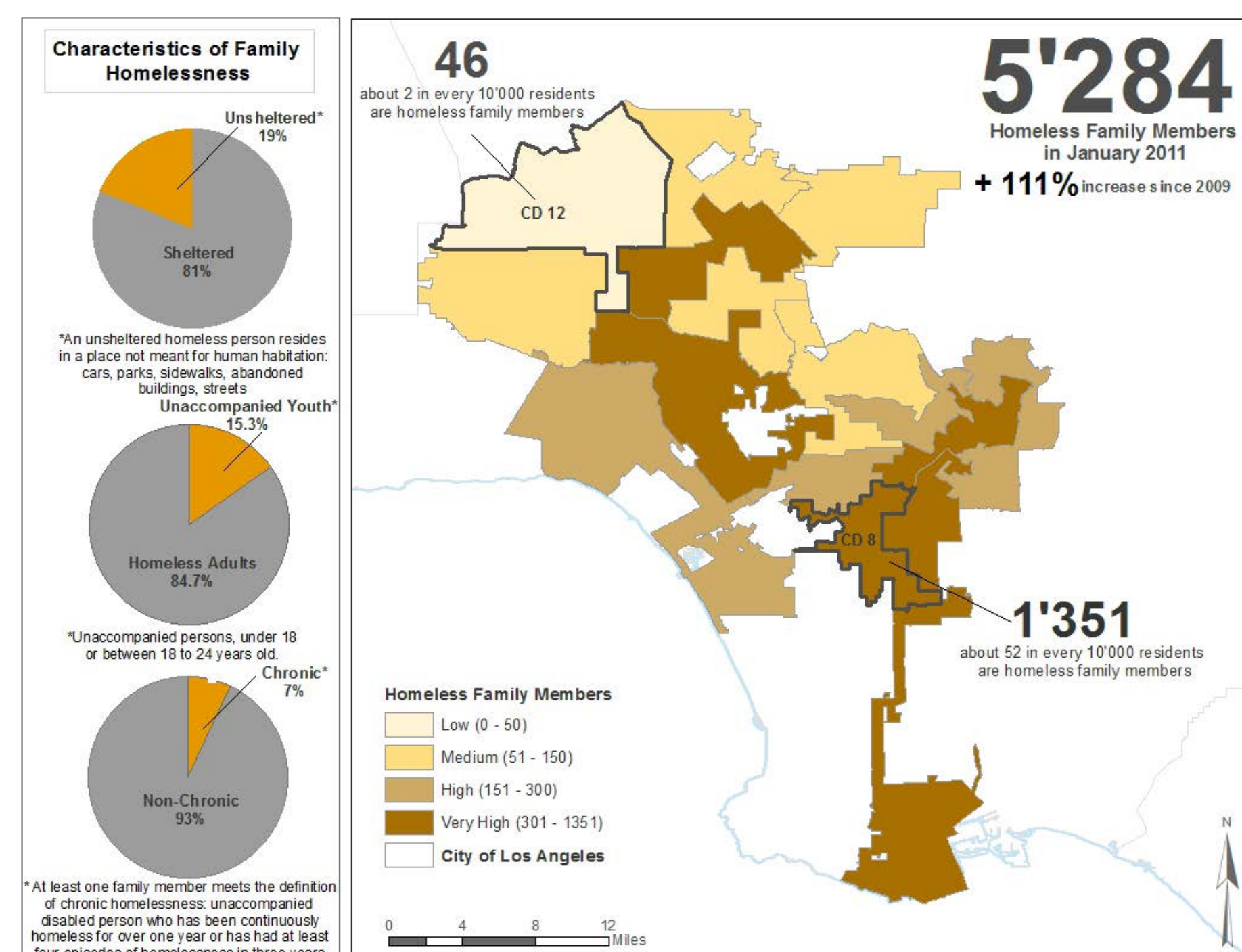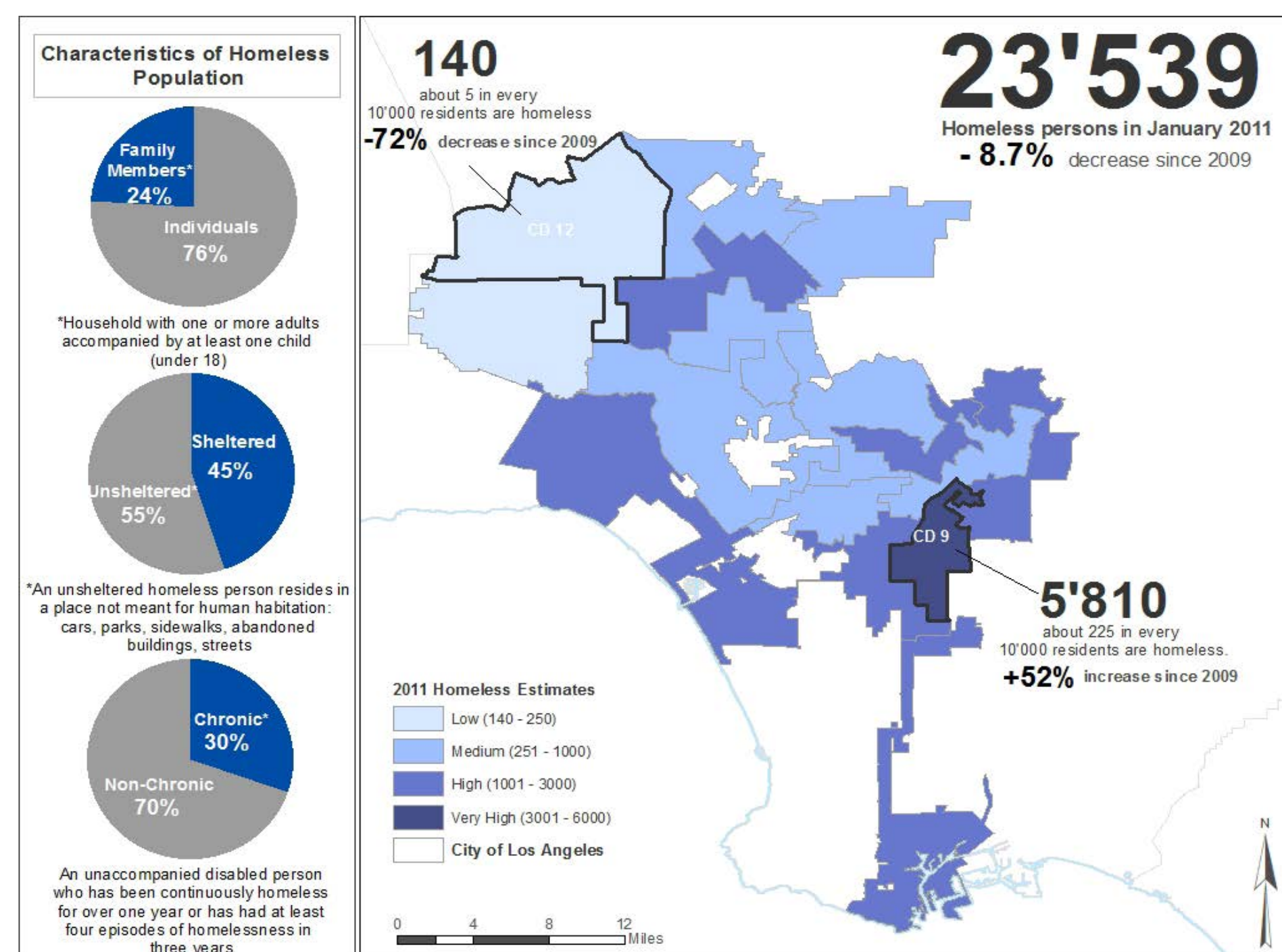# Addressing Rising Family Homelesness in the City of Los Angeles

## UCLA Lewis Center Annual GIS Contest

Prepared By:
Clarine Ovando-Lacroux

### Introduction

On a single night in January 2011 **California accounted for more than 1 in 5 homeless people in the United States** (21.4%), boasting the largest increase nationally since 2010. 62.7% of that population was unsheltered, living in places not meant for human habitation, placing the state in 4th place just after Florida for the largest unsheltered population (HUD). That same month, the City of Los Angeles accounted for 23'539 homeless persons (LAHSA, 2011), with over 55% of that population living unsheltered.

Despite the 8.7% decrease in overall homelessness in the City of Los Angeles between 2009 and 2011, family homelessness, which encompasses 19% of the total homeless population, has more than doubled in size over that same period of time (LAHSA, 2011). In fact, family homelessness, defined by the National Alliance on **Family Homelessness** as a family typically comprised of a mother in her late twenties with two children, represents the **fastest growing segment of the homeless population** (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation). The Los Angeles based non-profit organization Beyond Shelter cites the growing gap between housing costs and income as the primary cause of homelessness among families.
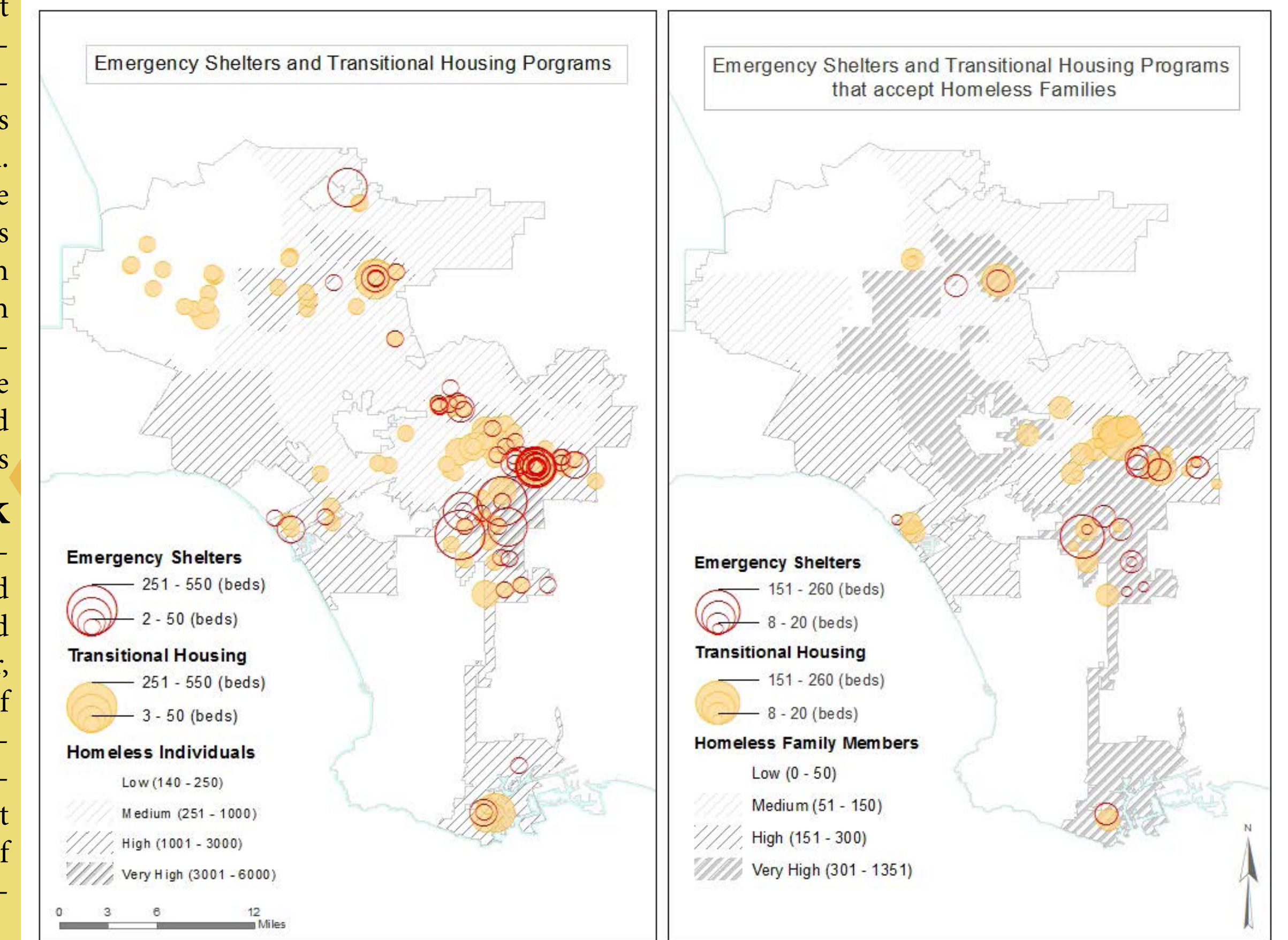
### Research Question

Given the multitude of **barriers** preventing homeless families from gaining access to traditional emergency shelters and transitional housing, there is a great need for social services to address this particular issue through targeted programs. The objective of this project is to determine whether there are areas within the city of Los Angeles showing a **spatial mismatch** between the number of homeless families and the available emergency shelters and transitional housing programs catering to their needs, in the hopes of not only guiding the allocation of limited resources for housing provision serving homeless families in particular but also attracting attention to the need for homeless prevention initiatives.

### Discussion

The number of shelters and transitional housing programs servicing homeless families in particular is significantly limited. Indeed, admission criteria for emergency shelters tend to systematically separate adult females, adult males and children whilst some transitional programs will refuse to serve parents who have a psychiatric disability, or children above a specific age (Beyond Shelter, 2011). In many cases families are forced to split up in order to find shelter. This has devastating effects on homeless families who as a result have greater chances of **family separation** than other families. The lack of available beds in shelters keeps individuals in **longer periods of literal homelessness** and can lead to devastating health issues or psychological trauma. In fact, children living on the streets are much more likely to experience multiple episodes of literal homelessness throughout their lives as a consequence (National Center on Family Homelessness).



Characteristics of Homeless Population

140 — about 5 in every 10'000 residents are homeless -72% decrease since 2009

23'539 — Homeless persons in January 2011 - 8.7% decrease since 2009

5'810 — about 225 in every 10'000 residents are homeless. +52% increase since 2009

Family Members 24% / Individuals 76%

Sheltered 45% / Unsheltered 55%

Chronic 30% / Non-Chronic 70%

2011 Homeless Estimates
Low (140 - 250)
Medium (251 - 1000)
High (1001 - 3000)
Very High (3001 - 6000)
City of Los Angeles



Characteristics of Family Homelessness

46 — about 2 in every 10'000 residents are homeless family member

5'284 — Homeless Family Members in January 2011 + 111% increase since 2009

1'351 — about 52 in every 10'000 residents are homeless family members

Unsheltered 19% / Sheltered 81%

Unaccompanied Youth 15.3% / Homeless Adults 84.7%

Chronic 7% / Non-Chronic 93%

Homeless Family Members
Low (0 - 50)
Medium (51 - 150)
High (151 - 300)
Very High (301 - 1351)
City of Los Angeles

Mapping the 2011 homeless Point in Time count estimates shows disproportionate rates of homelessness in the poorer neighborhoods of Downtown LA and South LA. More surprisingly however are the high levels of family homelessness in wealthier neighborhoods such as Westwood and Pacoima. With approximately 19'400 beds available on any given night to serve the homeless, many are forced to stay on the streets. This sheds light to a **shelter gridlock** problem whereby new shelter requests cannot be accommodated due to program overcrowding and extended stays (Beyond Shelter, 2011). Not only are the number of beds accessible to homeless families considerably fewer in number, but there is also a significant mismatch between the location of homeless families and the resources available to them.



Emergency Shelters and Transitional Housing Porgrams

Emergency Shelters
251 - 550 (beds)
2 - 50 (beds)
Transitional Housing
251 - 550 (beds)
2 - 50 (beds)
Homeless Individuals
Low (140 - 250)
Medium (251 - 1000)
High (1001 - 3000)
Very High (3001 - 6000)

Emergency Shelters and Transitional Housing Programs that accept Homeless Families

Emergency Shelters
151 - 260 (beds)
8 - 20 (beds)
Transitional Housing
151 - 260 (beds)
3 - 50 (beds)
Homeless Family Members
Low (0 - 50)
Medium (51 - 150)
High (151 - 300)
Very High (301 - 1351)

### Findings and Recommendation



Kernel Density on Number of Beds in Shelters + Density of Homeless Family Members + Euclidean Distance from Bus Transit Lines + Euclidean Distance from Department of Children and Family Services Sites



Close-up of Selected Area — City of Los Angeles

Hot Spot Index
1.8 - 2 (least ideal)
2.1 - 3
3.1 - 4
4.1 - 5 (most ideal)

= Spatial Analysis showing ideal location for the establishment of a program to assist homeless families, based on need, proximity to major bus lines, proximity to department of children and family services sites and lack of existing shelters and transitional housing

Creating additional emergency shelters and transitional housing programs serving homeless families in the areas showing high levels of homeless families but few to no beds is a feasible option. However, studies have shown that these options are not necessarily wise investments. In terms of human costs, traditional forms of emergency shelters and transitional housing programs incur tremendous strains on families whereby restrictive entrance requirements and rigid program rules are not always conductive to meeting the needs of families with children. There is therefore a vital need for alternative stable housing mechanisms bridging the gap from emergency shelters to permanent housing. One such alternative is the **scatter site master leasing model** which fits within the context of a Housing First approach, moving families out of shelters and into permanent housing of many different types as quickly as possible whilst receiving supportive services (Beyond Shelter, 2011).