

2020 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count of People Experiencing Homelessness
in the Western Pennsylvania Continuum of Care (PA-509)

2020 PIT Count Date: Wednesday, January 22, 2020

METHODOLOGY – Approved by Western PA CoC Board on December 11, 2019.

Purpose

The purpose of the 2020 Point-in-Time count is to produce a point-in-time estimate of people who are experiencing homelessness in the Western PA CoC's 20-county geographic area.

Through the CoC Program interim rule (Section 578.7), HUD requires CoCs to plan and conduct a Point-in-Time Count of homeless persons within the geographic area. The Point-in-Time Count is to be "carried out on one night in the last 10 calendar days of January or at such other time as required by HUD" (Section 578.3).

Components of the PIT Count

The Point-in-Time Count methodology has three primary components:

- The ***unsheltered count***, an enumeration and demographic survey of unsheltered individuals and families on the streets, in tents, in vehicles and sleeping in other locations not intended for sleeping.
- The ***sheltered count***, an enumeration and demographic survey of individuals and families in emergency shelters, domestic violence shelters, transitional housing programs and in hotels/motels paid for through community resources.
- ***Housing Inventory Chart*** update, through which homeless assistance providers report the number of units, beds, funding sources and other programmatic information.

The Planning Process

Date: The date of the PIT count falls on the fourth Wednesday of January each year. As such, the 2020 PIT date is January 22, 2020. The PIT date was announced during the full meeting of the CoC on October 16, 2019. This information was also distributed to PIT contacts via email and posted to Workplace.

Data collection tools:

- Unsheltered count: During the unsheltered PIT count, the HUD required data will be collected using either paper interview forms provided by the CoC or through the use of ArcGIS by Esri, a mobile app designed to collect the PIT data. 2019 was the first

year the CoC used a mobile app and this will be continued in 2020. There are multiple versions of the unsheltered PIT interview forms, including: a street-based interview form for conducting the count on Wednesday night, a street-based interview form for conducting the count on Thursday, and a service-based interview form for conducting the count on Thursday.

- **Sheltered count:** During the sheltered PIT count, the preferred data source for all PIT data will be PA-HMIS for all HMIS-participating projects that pass data quality tests. Non-HMIS participating projects, or those that do not have reliable and timely data entry, will need to submit their data using either the sheltered paper interview forms provided by the CoC or through the ArcGIS by Esri PIT survey. This app has been designed to collect data from both sheltered or unsheltered households.
- **Housing Inventory Chart:** Data need for the HIC is collected through an online survey (SurveyGizmo). While all project types must complete the online survey, HMIS will be the primary data source for Rapid Re-Housing projects that are not operated by Victim Service Providers.

Updates to the data collection tools are made annually to ensure compliance with HUD's *Notice for Housing Inventory Count (HIC) and Point-in-Time (PIT) Data Collection for Continuum of Care (CoC) Program and the Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) Program*. In addition, questions about disability were revised to mirror the language used in the ArcGIS mobile app. Additional guidance and prompts were imbedded into the survey to assist PIT volunteers in asking domestic violence related questions.

Webinar: A webinar was held on November 15 to provide an update about the changes for the 2020 PIT. The webinar included the following presentations:

- Jessica Sones and Leigh Howard from DMA provided an overview of the requirements for the 2020 PIT count.
- Brendan Auman from DCED provided an overview of the PIT mobile app (ArcGIS by Esri) and provided a demonstration of the ArcGIS mobile app.
- Chris Kapp from Cumberland County Housing and Redevelopment Authorities presented on best practices for the unsheltered PIT count, including strategies for engaging community partners and strategies for counting youth.

The recorded webinar and other materials are available on the CoC's website.

Unsheltered PIT count: The planning process around the actual implementation of the unsheltered PIT count occurs through a team of volunteers in each county. The implementation of the count is reported back to the CoC via an Unsheltered Count Summary Form, which are submitted by each county's unsheltered coordinator.

Methodology

Unsheltered Methodology: Each county’s identified coordinator works locally to plan and implement the unsheltered count. Responsibilities of the county coordinator include recruiting and training volunteers. Unsheltered Count Summary forms and Interview Forms are provided to the county contact. All forms are requested to be returned within two weeks of the PIT count. Counties may alternatively opt to use the ArcGIS mobile app, which submits all PIT data immediately following each interview.

In addition, all counties must adhere to the minimum standards for counting youth. The document that describes these standards is provided below as Attachment A to this document. Standards include:

1. Coordinate with other systems serving youth
 2. Engage youth
 3. Identify hot spots
 4. Plan with safety in mind
 5. Provide local training
- Each county will choose one or more of the following methodologies based on geography, capacity and number of volunteers engaged, population density and other factors:
 - Outreach to places not intended as regular sleeping accommodations for human beings (“street count”). When possible interviews with individuals/ households experiencing homelessness will take place. If an interview cannot occur, individuals observed as unsheltered will be counted as such. The street count may be conducted as a complete census where the entire county is covered or using a known locations approach, focusing on specific locations where people who are unsheltered are known or believed to be living.
 - Interviews with people at service providers such as soup kitchens, day centers, food pantries, health clinics and other locations likely to be utilized by people experiencing homelessness (“service-based count”).
 - “Come and be counted” events where youth experiencing housing instability are encouraged to attend and be interviewed.
 - Street counts will be conducted the night of January 22, 2020 or on January 23, 2020, using the street-based interview forms or the ArcGIS mobile app to collect HUD-required data. If an individual/household is asleep, does not agree to be interviewed, or is unable to be safely reached, volunteers will only record observed information which includes household size, age, gender, race, and ethnicity.
 - Service-based counts will be conducted on January 23, 2020, using the service-based interview forms or the ArcGIS mobile app to collect HUD-required data.
 - Each County coordinator is responsible for ensuring that all volunteers receive training on safety and conducting interviews. A very basic PowerPoint presentation is provided by the CoC, which can be customized in each county based on the details of their PIT count approach.

- To ensure the quality of the data, the CoC uses the following strategies during the unsheltered PIT count:
 - Consistent training across the entire geographic area via the county coordinator webinar and a volunteer PowerPoint template provided.
 - “Blitz” count, which includes conducting interviews within a 24+ hour period of time;
 - A unique identifier, which includes an individual’s initials and age, which are used to check for duplication of data;
 - A survey question asking if an interview already took place; and
 - Questions for recording HUD required data for individuals who do not or cannot provide consent to be interviewed. This includes household size, estimated age, gender, race and ethnicity.
 - The interview form includes a space for recording any unique characteristics about the individual being interviewed and about their location (e.g. blue tent behind Walmart).

Sheltered Methodology: A complete census count method is used to complete the sheltered PIT count. This includes data collected using standardized interview forms, data collected using the ArcGIS mobile app and data from HMIS. The CoC maintains a provider list, which is updated throughout the year as changes are made known. All programs and contacts are confirmed annually.

- Interview Forms: Interview Forms will be emailed to all non-HMIS participating Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing programs and VA-funded programs classified as emergency or transitional. These forms will be completed with each household served the night of January 22, 2020. Interview forms collect all of the HUD-required data and include questions designed to allow for de-duplication. Interview forms will be due within two weeks of the PIT count.
- ArcGIS: Sheltered providers may opt to utilize the ArcGIS mobile app for collecting sheltered PIT data.
- HMIS: HMIS generated data will provide the PIT data for HMIS-participating programs where HMIS data quality is high. For Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing programs, this includes HUD’s required population, subpopulation, and demographic information on participants in programs.
- To ensure the quality of the data, the CoC uses the following strategies during the sheltered PIT count:
 - Interview forms include written instructions and each provider receives a Sheltered PIT Count PowerPoint, which provides an overview of the Interview Forms.
 - The number of persons reported via the Interview Forms will be checked against the number of persons reported via the online housing inventory survey to ensure accurate reporting.

- The Interview Forms provided by each program will be reviewed for duplication.
- A demonstration was provided on the ArcGIS mobile app. Additional training can be provided if needed.
- A “test” of HMIS data to determine the frequency of data entry and data quality for each program. This “test” determines which HMIS-participating agencies are exempted from collecting client-level PIT data.

Housing Inventory Methodology:

- Online survey (Survey Gizmo): Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, Rapid Re-Housing and Permanent Supportive Housing providers throughout the Continuum of Care (CoC) will complete an on-line survey that collects each project’s bed inventory and occupancy on the PIT night. Providers will be sent the survey link prior to the PIT date. Responses will be requested within two weeks following the PIT count.
- HMIS: HMIS will be the data source for all project types with a Housing Inventory properly set-up and timely data entry. For Rapid Re-Housing specifically, HMIS will be the data source for housing inventory data, with the exception of DV RRH projects and any SSVF projects not entering data into PA-HMIS, due to the methodology for counting Rapid Re-Housing beds (occupancy = inventory).
- Inventory Update Forms (paper): A small number of providers consistently request paper forms in lieu of completing the online survey. These providers will be sent Inventory Update Forms, to be returned within two weeks of the PIT date. In addition, most veterans programs will be emailed Inventory Update Forms. This includes the following VA-funded programs: Health Care for Homeless Veterans, Community Contract Emergency Housing (HCHV/EH), Grant and Per Diem, Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF-RRH) if not on HMIS, and HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Programs (VASH).

Reporting/Submission of Data

The following data will be submitted to HUD by/before the established deadline. All data will be submitted via the Homelessness Data Exchange (HDX).

- Point-in-Time data, which includes those counted during the unsheltered and sheltered counts
- Housing Inventory Chart, which includes a list of homeless assistance programs throughout the CoC, as well as the number of beds, units, target population, HMIS participation rate, funding source and other required data.

Upon submission of the CoC-level data, an analysis of the county-level data will be completed and distributed. This data will be posted on the CoC’s website and will also be provided to Con Plan jurisdictions.

2020 POINT-IN-TIME COUNT STANDARDS FOR COUNTING YOUTH FOR THE WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA COC

Youth (defined):

A household with no household members over age 24. A youth household includes:

- Children under age 18 who are living without a parent/guardian
- Unaccompanied individuals aged 24 and below
- Two or more individuals aged 24 or below living in a household with no other person over age 24
- Individuals aged 24 and below with their own children ("Parenting Youth")

STANDARDS FOR COUNTING YOUTH: EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL COUNTIES

1. Coordinate with other systems serving youth
2. Engage youth
3. Identify hot spots
4. Plan with safety in mind
5. Provide local training

Coordinate with one or more other systems serving youth. These include:

- Regional Coordinators of Pennsylvania's Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH).
 - To find your Regional ECYEH Coordinator, visit <https://directory.center-school.org/homeless/contacts/>
- School District Liaisons for Homeless Students.
 - To find the school district liaison for your geographic area, visit <https://directory.center-school.org/homeless/liaison/search>
- Child welfare. This may include foster care, independent living specialists, etc.
- Juvenile or adult justice system. This may include parole/probation officers, reintegration workers, etc.
- Behavioral health. This may include coordination with the child and adult MH system.
- Other organizations serving youth.
 - Some communities within our CoC have organizations and programs that specifically serve or target youth. These may include homeless assistance providers, Boys & Girls Clubs, mental health organizations, employment programs, GED providers, LGBTQ organizations, etc.

Engage Youth

- Youth can assist and enhance your PIT efforts by:
 - identifying locations where youth experiencing housing challenges congregate;
 - identifying service locations utilized by youth;
 - providing volunteer training for interacting with youth;
 - participating in the count on the PIT date; etc.
- Focus groups may provide youth an opportunity to provide input on planning.
- The systems identified above and local homeless assistance providers are a good resource to help connect you with youth to invite to participate in the PIT count process.
 - While not a requirement, many communities have offered payment or other incentives to youth as compensation for their participation in the PIT.

Identify Youth Hot Spots

- In many communities, youth have been historically under-represented in their PIT count. It may be that youth gather, obtain services and/or sleep in locations other than those that have been previously targeted for the PIT count.
- Youth and/or the organizations that serve them may be able to enhance your PIT planning efforts by identifying *youth hot spots*, locations where youth experiencing housing challenges may gather and/or go to receive services.

Plan with Safety in Mind

- Precautions should be taken to ensure that participation in the PIT survey is voluntary and that the safety and privacy of youth are respected.
- Extra precautions about safety should be considered when identifying specific subpopulations of youth (such as LGBTQ). It may be helpful to hold focus groups with these youth at provider locations or drop-in centers where they already gather.
- If your community is hosting a “come and be counted” type of event, safety must be considered within the context of advertising for the event. Considerations include ensuring that youth know where to go, but stop short of informing the larger community about the date and time that vulnerable youth will be gathering.
 - Instead, the school district liaisons may be helpful in getting event information directly to youth experiencing housing challenges.

Provide Local Training: Language and Safety

- Many youth who lack a permanent housing arrangement do not self-identify as “homeless.” Additionally, youth who are experiencing homelessness or unstably housed are often not visually distinguishable from youth who are stably housed. For that reason you may wish to use the terminology “housing challenges” rather than homelessness when explaining why you are conducting the PIT Count survey.
- Local training should include tips for approaching youth in order to ensure safety.

If you need assistance with meeting these minimum standards, please contact Diana T. Myers & Associates, Inc. (DMA) at pahomelesscount@dma-housing.com