



2025 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count of Persons Experiencing Homelessness:

Unsheltered PIT Volunteer Training



Eastern and Western PA Continuums of Care

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on behalf of the PA Department of Community
and Economic Development (DCED)

What is the PIT count?

“Point-in-Time” (PIT) = a **snapshot** of the number of people experiencing homelessness on a given night

Includes people sleeping in:

SHELTERED locations. This can include emergency shelters, domestic violence shelters, sometimes motels, transitional housing

UNSHELTERED locations. You will count people experiencing homelessness in **UNSHELTERED** locations

Required by HUD nationally during last 10 days of January

What is the unsheltered count?



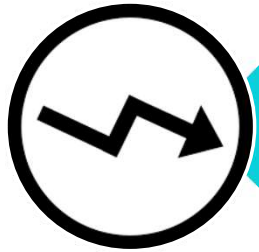
What does UNSHELTERED mean?

Individuals or families whose primary nighttime residence is a public place not meant for human habitation

What does COUNT mean?

Obtaining basic demographic information on each person and household

Why do we do a PIT count?



To measure and monitor trends and changes in homelessness on local and national levels



To help our community understand what resources we need and strategize the best ways to use them to end homelessness



To comply with federal regulations and requirements

When is the
PIT count
conducted?



2025 Unsheltered PIT Count Date: **Wednesday, January 22, 2025**

This refers to where someone slept during overnight hours on Wednesday evening Jan. 22nd through Thursday morning Jan. 23rd.

NOTE: The date cannot be changed by one county or region/RHAB. The entire CoC must conduct the count on the same date.

Unsheltered Count: Guiding Principles

Safety

Anonymity

Each person
counted

Each person
counted once

Unsheltered Count - Locations

Where will we find families and individuals who are experiencing homelessness?

You will be assigned to a particular area of the county where you will seek people staying in the following types of places:

- Streets
- Vehicles
- Parks
- Hunting cabins
- Tents
- Campgrounds
- Barns
- Truck Stops
- Abandoned buildings
- Transportation depots
- Chicken coops
- Railroad cars
- Storage units
- Lumberyards

Unsheltered Count - Locations

Where will we find families and individuals who are experiencing homelessness?

- Some counties utilize a service-based count, where volunteers go to locations such as soup kitchens, community centers, etc. to identify and survey persons experiencing homelessness.
- Some counties do a street count and canvas the entire county, or hot spots within the count.
- Some counties combine both strategies.

Your count coordinator will inform you of the local strategy for conducting the PIT count.

Unsheltered Count: Locations

Unsheltered Count DOES NOT include individuals living in these locations:

- Hotels/motels not funded through public/ charitable resources
- Shelters, transitional, or permanent homeless programs
- Jails/prison
- Emergency rooms/ hospitals
- Halfway houses
- Recovery houses
- Residential/medical facilities
- Youth in custody of state in foster care or other out-of-home placement
- Doubled up in the homes of family/friends

Unsheltered Count – Who?

All household types are included:

- Households with children
- Households without children
 - Couples- married and unmarried
 - Single individuals
 - Other makeups where the persons define themselves as a household (intergenerational households of adults, siblings, etc.) and there are no children
- Youth
 - unaccompanied children < age 18
 - unaccompanied youth, 18-24
 - parenting youth

Unsheltered Count – How?

Unsheltered PIT surveys are conducted either via:

- Brief Interviews
- Observation Only

Unsheltered Count – How?

1. **Brief interviews – preferred**

- Complete one Interview Form for each household
- If a household has more than five members please record additional data on a second form, clearly indicating that they are part of same household
- If a household includes more than one person, please ensure that data is recorded on the form consistently recording the data based on the assigned “person #”.
 - e.g. If LH is person # 1 and BH is person # 2 on page 2, please ensure that BH is also person # 2 on the subsequent pages.

Unsheltered Count – How?

- 2. Observation** - If someone will not or cannot provide the information requested on the Interview Form, complete the observation only section at the bottom of page 1 of the survey.
- It is very important that you **fill out the entire section**.
 - **This section is where we tend to see the most errors or issues.** *More info on this in a few slides.*

Conducting interviews

Survey Forms: Before beginning

- Write your county name at the top left.
- Please write your name or team name/number on the top right of the form, along with the date/time of count. **This is very important in case we have questions about your survey.**

Step-by-Step Guide to Conducting Interviews

Step 1: Approach & Introduction

- Approach the person and introduce yourself
- Ask if the person has a few minutes to answer some questions
- Keep in mind:
 - Individuals sleeping outside may be dealing with active addiction, mental health concerns, and significant trauma histories. Do not sneak up on or startle people. Never shine flashlights in people's faces.
 - Maintain eye contact (if possible) and an open stance with your hands visible. Use a tone of voice that's approachable. Speak slowly, be polite, and don't shout.



Hi, my name is [name]. I am with [org.] we're out here trying to talk to folks who might not have a safe place to sleep tonight. Can I ask you a few questions?

Step-by-Step Guide to Conducting Interviews

Step 2: Explain what you're doing & get consent

- Explain why you're there (sample script on next slide)
- If you are providing supplies/ survival packs/ etc, your county coordinator will provide info on how to make these available (please do not make it contingent on participation)
- If they consent to answering your questions, continue with the interview. If they don't, thank them for their time, and use the observation form (if you believe them to be experiencing homelessness).

Step-by-Step Guide to Conducting Interviews

We are conducting a survey to count people experiencing homelessness in order to learn more about people experiencing homelessness, what kinds of problems they face, and to better understand what services are needed to address homelessness. Your participation is voluntary and your response to each question is voluntary.

I will ask for your initials and your age, but I will not need your name, date of birth, social security number, or any other information that could be traced back to you. The responses to these questions will not be shared with anyone outside of our team. I will need to read each question all the way through.

Step-by-Step Guide to Conducting Interviews

Step 3: Conduct the interview using the survey form

→ Go through each question in the survey form.

- Remember: people have the right to not answer some or all questions!

→ Add any notes that may be helpful

- Example: If a person says that they have their own apartment, but they're sitting on a bench outside of a 24-hour grocery store at 2:00 am with what appear to be all of their belongings, write down that you think there may be a discrepancy in what they are saying vs. where they will sleep that night.

Step-by-Step Guide to Conducting Interviews

Step 4: Closing the interview

- Thank the person for their time
- Refer them to any services or resources they may have asked about or may need.
 - If you have the ability to provide transportation to shelter, please offer that to anyone you encounter. (Make a note indicating that shelter was provided, if applicable.)

Step 5: Recording what you heard and observed

- Walk away from the person interviewed to a safe place
- Take a few minutes after your conversation to double check that you've completed the whole survey form
- Include any additional notes or details
- Make sure everything you have written is readable

Brief surveys

Brief Surveys: What information are we collecting?

- Number of persons in household
- For each person in household:
 - Age
 - Race/Ethnicity (select all that apply)
 - Gender (select all that apply)
- Additional data collected for adults or youth under 18 who are head of household:
 - Number of homeless episodes and length of time homeless
 - Domestic violence status (not asked in front of two adults who have identified that they are part of the same household)
 - Veteran status
 - Disability information

Brief Survey: Where did you sleep?

Where are you sleeping/did you sleep the night of Jan. 22nd

UNSHELTERED LOCATIONS:	SHELTERED LOCATIONS:
<input type="checkbox"/> Street / sidewalk <input type="checkbox"/> Vehicle (car, van RV, truck) <input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Bus / train station / airport <input type="checkbox"/> Under bridge / over pass <input type="checkbox"/> Woods or outdoor encampment <input type="checkbox"/> Behind stores or shopping center <input type="checkbox"/> Abandoned building <input type="checkbox"/> Other. → Specify: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Emergency Shelter. Name: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> In a hotel/motel/rent-a-room: If yes, who paid for the room: <input type="checkbox"/> Self/friend/family (STOP. DISCONTINUE SURVEY*) <input type="checkbox"/> church <input type="checkbox"/> charitable/service organization <input type="checkbox"/> government program <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Other. → Specify: _____
<p>Description of unsheltered location & details to help ensure household is only counted once (REQUIRED):</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> In the home of a family member or friend → ⊘ PLEASE CHECK OFF, SAY THANK YOU & DISCONTINUE SURVEY* <input type="checkbox"/> In a home that I own/rent → ⊘ PLEASE CHECK OFF, SAY THANK YOU & DISCONTINUE THE SURVEY* <p>*NOTE: if all household members appear to be under age 25, please skip to YOUTH ADDENDUM on last page</p>



Households in the locations above will be included in the unsheltered PIT count.

***** Even if not eligible for survey based on the above, please ask questions on Youth Addendum (last page) of households that appear to include only persons under age 25.**

Brief Survey: Where did you sleep?

- In addition to checking off the appropriate unsheltered location, please write down any details about location.
- **This is very important.** This information is used to ensure a household is not double counted. If you do not have time to fill this out in the moment, please make sure you complete it before turning in your surveys.
- Please provide as much identifying information as possible.
 - e.g. Blue tent behind Walmart in Pennsylvaniatown;
sleeping in brown van in Flying J Truck Stop in Centralville

Brief Survey: Where did you sleep?



Emergency Shelter. Households in emergency shelters will be counted in the sheltered PIT count. If you transport a household to shelter, please coordinate how the information on this Interview Form will be collected, on the Unsheltered Interview Form or by the Shelter.



In a hotel/motel/rent-a-room: If yes, who paid for the room? If a household is sleeping in a hotel room on 1/22/25 that is paid for by government/non-profit, they should be included in the sheltered PIT count. Programs that provide hotel vouchers are included in the sheltered PIT count. If you encounter someone sleeping in a hotel on the PIT night and they have not yet completed an interview form, please complete the interview. If you provide transportation to a hotel and/or hotel vouchers during your unsheltered PIT count, please complete this Interview Form.



Other. → Specify: Depending on the location, this household may or may not count in the unsheltered or sheltered PIT count.



In the home of a family member or friend → PLEASE CHECK OFF, SAY THANK YOU & DISCONTINUE THE SURVEY



In a home that I own/rent → PLEASE CHECK OFF, SAY THANK YOU & DISCONTINUE THE SURVEY

YOUTH ADDENDUM → for households where all persons are aged 24 and below AND did not complete the PIT survey because their question 3 indicated “SHELTERED LOCATION”

Instructions: Please ask these questions of any unaccompanied (without a parent/guardian) or parenting youth you encounter during the PIT Count who is age 24 and under, even if the youth identified that they are not unsheltered. We want to gather this information from any unaccompanied or parenting youth who may be unstably housed or homeless.

INTRO: We have a few additional questions that we are asking of youth and young adults ages 24 and under. This information will be used to identify specific needs for youth in Pennsylvania. Would you be willing to answer a few additional questions? Reminder that your participation is voluntary and your response to each question is voluntary. The responses to these questions will not be shared with anyone outside of our team. I will need to read each question all the way through.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. **How old are you?** _____ If estimating age, please select: Under 18 18-24*
* If over age 24, please say thank you and end the interview.

2. **Initials** _____

3. **Is the place you are staying now a safe and stable place to stay?** yes no*
*If appropriate to offer/ and desired: National Domestic Violence Hotline available at 1-800-799-7233

4. **Think about the last time you felt that you were living in safe and stable housing. How long ago was that?**

- Less than 1 month ago 1-3 months ago 4-6 months ago
 7 months to 1 year ago More than 1 year Never felt stably housed
 Don't know/ refused

5. **Are you pregnant, a parent, or a stepparent?** yes no Don't know/ refused

6. **Which of the following best fits how you think about your sexual orientation?**

- Heterosexual/ Straight Lesbian Gay
 Bisexual Queer Other, please specify: _____
 Don't know/ refused

7. **Were you ever involved in the foster care system, such as a foster home, group home, or child welfare placement?** yes no Don't know/ refused

Youth Addendum

In 2025, we are collecting additional data on youth identified through the PIT count.

If a household in a “SHELTERED LOCATION” appears to be under 25 years of age, move to the Youth Addendum (p. 5-6) of survey.

Questions 1-12 should be asked of households that do not include a household member aged 25+.

Brief Survey Questions

- If you identify that the household is unsheltered, please complete the remaining questions.
- Inform participants participation is voluntary. Individuals may refuse to answer some or all questions.
- Information is self-report: please do not assume any information.

Brief Survey Questions

- Initials only, no name. If person refuses to give initials, assign initials and complete rest of interview.
- Age – If a person does not wish to share, please estimate age range.
- Gender, ethnicity, and race – Read the lists out loud and have the person self-identify their response. Please do not assume a response.

Unsheltered Interviews – Brief Survey Count

- Ask all questions as written on the Interview Form or within the Mobile App.
- Individuals may refuse to answer some or all questions.
- Refusal to participate will not result in a denial of shelter, service, or other assistance.
- If a household/individual does not want to provide any information but you believe them to be experiencing unsheltered homelessness, please complete an observation only count.
- If person refuses to give initials, assign initials and complete rest of interview.

Unsheltered Count – Observation Only

Observation Only Section

OBSERVATION ONLY. Interviewer: If you are unable to survey an individual/household that you believe to be experiencing homelessness, because individual/household is asleep or is unable or unwilling to be interviewed or to complete the full interview, please provide the following information to the best of your ability based on what you can observe for each person within the household. (Each household should be submitted as a separate survey.)

- **# adults in Household:** _____
 - **Estimated age of adults:** # age 18-24 = _____ # age 25-59 = _____ # age 60+ = _____
- **# children (under age 18) in Household:** _____
- **Details as to how you know/why you believe this household is unsheltered (REQUIRED):** _____

- **Description of location, clothing and any other details that would help to ensure this household is only counted once (please be as specific as possible) (REQUIRED):** _____

MUST fill out details and description sections. Without enough information sometimes we have to exclude the survey and not count the individual.

Unsheltered Count: Observation Only

When to conduct count by observation only

- Observation only count must be conducted the late **night hours** of January 22 or early morning of January 23.
- Individual/household is asleep/bedded down (*need to write this on the form*)
- Individual/household is unwilling to be interviewed/complete the full interview, but you believe them to be experiencing homelessness (*need to write the details on the form*).
 - E.g., on a park bench outside in winter with all of their belongings
 - E.g., the individual is known to you and your team

Unsheltered Count: Observation Only

Write down as much detail as possible that helps to make the person identifiable and to provide clues on their housing status.

- What is the person **wearing**? (e.g., “black beanie, navy sweatshirt, jeans, and tan utility boots.” or “bundled in a grey, puffy sleeping bag that covered their face.”)
- What does the person **look like**? (e.g., “shoulder-length grey hair, white, female, 50-60 years old”)
- **Why** were you unable to complete a survey with them? (e.g., “They said they did not want to complete a survey, but they were awake.”)
- **Where** did you see them? (e.g., “In front of the TD bank at the corner of 6th and Cedar St.”)
- What makes you think that they are or may be **experiencing homelessness**? (e.g., “They were sleeping on a park bench with a large bag of their belongings next to them.”)

Unsheltered Count: Observation Only

When is an observational survey NOT appropriate?

- “Standing on side of road, Ford Blvd., dark clothing”
- “Person has been in the same spot for a while outside 7/11. Appears disoriented.” (*no time filled out on survey*)
- “Male is in his car. It appears there are pillows in the back seat.” (*no time filled out on survey*)
- Flying J said there is a man who hangs out sometimes who is homeless.

Why not appropriate?

- Not enough detail (age, appearance, location, TIME OF DAY, *details of why you believe they are experiencing homelessness*)
 - If we have more information, the unsheltered coordinator can work to make sure they were not counted by another team or an emergency shelter
- Third party reports are not appropriate to include in the PIT count. The person must be counted/observed by your team.

Unsheltered Count: Observation Only

We need your help to ensure that the observation only section is filled out properly. If we do not have details about the sleeping location and details to help ensure the household is only counted once, we often must exclude the survey.

After the Interview

Record what you heard and observed

- Walk away from the person interviewed to a safe place
- Take a few minutes after your conversation to double check that you've completed the whole survey form
- Include any additional notes or details
- Make sure everything you have written is readable

Please turn all forms in to your county unsheltered PIT coordinator at the conclusion of the count. If your county is using the PIT mobile app, surveys will be submitted automatically as they are completed.

Walk through survey form

Best Practices and Safety Considerations

Best Practices

Keep in mind:

- Individuals sleeping outside may be dealing with active addiction, mental health concerns, and significant trauma histories. Do not sneak up on or startle people. Never shine flashlights in people's faces.
- Maintain eye contact (if possible) and an open stance with your hands visible. Use a tone of voice that's approachable. Speak slowly, be polite, and don't shout.

Best Practices

- Remember that you are speaking to highly vulnerable people and asking some very sensitive questions. Always lead with respect for the person you're speaking with and respect for their dignity.
 - Introduce your self
 - Ask them their name
- Everyone has the right to refuse to answer any or all of your questions.
- Ask all questions, unless the person has already given the answer to the question over the course of your conversation.
- Always ask questions as they are written; do not ask questions in a way that shows you think you already know the answer.
 - Example: Ask: "How do you identify your gender?" Do not ask: "You're male, right?"

Best Practices

- If this is your first PIT count or you would like more guidance on how to approach an individual who is unsheltered, we recommend this video from the Homeless Hub out of Canada:

How to approach an individual on the street training video:

- <https://www.homelessnesslearninghub.ca/library/resources/how-approach-individual-street-video>

Considerations for Domestic Violence Survivors

- As indicated on the survey form, you are interviewing two adults together you will SKIP the safety section of the interview.
- If you identify someone who is fleeing DV or identifies as a domestic violence survivor during the PIT Count:
 - If the survivor is interested, refer to local DV program for safety planning assistance
 - PIT volunteers are not expected to safety plan, but if engaged, listen to the survivor and ask what they need.

Considerations for Domestic Violence Survivors

- Make sure the survivor knows that all collected information from the PIT count is non-identifiable
- Make sure the survivor knows that you will not share their disclosure and/or story with anyone, other than submitting non-identifiable data
- If a survivor feels uncomfortable sharing, don't press for information



Safety Considerations

The safety of all PIT count volunteers is of highest priority. Please do not enter a situation that is unsafe. This may include:

- Building that is not structurally sound.
- Traveling down unpaved/ snow covered roads unless you are in a car that can handle those conditions.
- Approaching an individual or group of people if it does not feel safe.

Volunteers should always go out in teams (should never conduct interviews or observations alone).

Next Steps

Items to review with your county unsheltered PIT coordinator:

- Schedule
- Key Contacts
- Safety Protocols
- What to bring
- Method for submitting surveys
- Any other questions you have

Additional Resources:

If you would like additional resources on the Point in Time Count:

How to approach an individual on the street training video:

- <https://www.homelessnesslearninghub.ca/library/resources/how-approach-individual-street-video>

HUD sample handout with tips and resources for volunteers conducting the PIT Count:

- <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/PIT-Count-Volunteer-Training-Toolkit-Sample-Refresher-Handout.docx>

Contact Information

Pease contact your county unsheltered PIT coordinator with questions. If you still need help you can email pahomelesscount@dma-housing.com

CoC PIT Count website:

- <https://pennsylvaniacoc.org/2025-point-time-pit-count-and-housing-inventory-count-hic>
- All PIT materials will be posted here

FINALLY...

THANK YOU for
Giving your time
Caring
Helping
Showing up!

**THANK YOU FOR BEING PART OF THE
2025 UNSHELTERED PIT COUNT!**