

Preparing for Point-in-Time Counts of Homeless Persons and Annual Housing Inventory Updates: Standards, Methods, and Key Steps



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Session Overview

- Review HUD's expectations for conducting point-in-time (PIT) counts of homeless people + updating housing inventory
- Discuss methods for counting sheltered and unsheltered homeless people
- Identify key considerations and steps in planning and implementing your PIT count

Benefits of Accurate Data on Homelessness

Communities need accurate data to:

- Determine the size and scope of homelessness at the local level
- Plan services and programs to appropriately address local needs
- Measure progress in addressing homelessness

HUD needs data to:

- Understand the extent and nature of homelessness throughout the country
- Provide Congress and OMB with information on services provided, gaps in service, and performance
- Inform funding decisions

Types of Information Requested by HUD

- Point-in-Time Counts – Biennial
 - Unduplicated one-night count or estimate of sheltered and unsheltered homeless people
 - Subpopulation information
- Housing Inventory Charts – Annual
 - Inventory of beds for homeless persons, including seasonal and overflow beds

Homeless Population/Subpopulations Chart

Part 1: Homeless Population	Sheltered		Unsheltered	Total
	Emergency	Transitional		
Number of Families with Children (Family Households):				
1. Number of Persons in Families with Children:				
2. Number of Single Individuals and Persons in Households without Children:				
(Add Lines Numbered 1 & 2) Total Persons:				
Part 2: Homeless Subpopulations	Sheltered		Unsheltered	Total
a. Chronically Homeless (For sheltered, list persons in emergency shelter <i>only</i>)				
b. Severely Mentally Ill			*	
c. Chronic Substance Abuse			*	
d. Veterans			*	
e. Persons with HIV/AIDS			*	
f. Victims of Domestic Violence			*	
g. Unaccompanied Youth (Under 18)			*	

HUD Point-in-Time Count Requirements

- Conduct counts at least every other year; annual counts are encouraged
- One-night count must occur during last seven days in January
- Must collect information about chronic homelessness from all homeless people
- PIT counts must be based on reliable methods, not guesstimates
 - Count people seen on the night of the count
 - If sampling and extrapolating, use statistically acceptable methods

Information Reported from PIT Count

- The following PIT information is reported in Part 1 of the Population and Subpopulations Chart in the McKinney-Vento application (Exhibit 1, Chart K):
 - Counts of sheltered and unsheltered adults, children, and unaccompanied youth
 - Sheltered homeless people reside in emergency shelter or transitional housing (including hotel or motel vouchers for homeless people)
 - Unsheltered homeless people reside in places not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings, on the street
 - Count the number of households and number of persons in households

Information from Sheltered PIT Count

- For HUD purposes, count and report:
 - People residing in emergency shelter and transitional housing
 - Include:
 - Domestic violence shelters
 - Residential programs for runaway / homeless youth
 - Hotel, motel, or apartment vouchers paid for by a public or private agency because the individual or family is homeless

Information from Sheltered PIT Count (cont.)

- For HUD, do not report:
 - Formerly homeless persons living in permanent supportive housing (SHP, SRO, or S+C permanent housing)
 - Individuals living in doubled-up situations
 - Children or youth who are temporarily residing in institutions due to a parent's homelessness or abandonment (i.e. emergency foster care, treatment facilities)
 - Adults living in mental health, chemical dependency, or criminal justice facilities
- Although not required for HUD, this information may be useful for local purposes

Information from Unsheltered PIT Count

- Report only the number of unsheltered people actually counted during the point-in-time count
- Can use statistical sampling and extrapolation to estimate unsheltered homeless population, but must use reliable methods
 - May need to consult an expert
- Do not use unscientific adjustment factors or multipliers

Subpopulation Information from PIT Count

- Subpopulation information is reported in Part 2 of the Population and Subpopulations Chart in the McKinney-Vento application (Exhibit 1, Chart K)
- Required to report information on seven subpopulations for sheltered homeless persons:
 - Chronically homeless
 - Severely mentally ill
 - Chronic substance abuse
 - Veterans
 - Persons with HIV/AIDS
 - Victims of domestic violence
 - Unaccompanied youth (under 18)

Subpopulation Information from PIT Count (cont.)

- Subpopulation information is optional for unsheltered homeless persons, except for chronically homeless
 - Definition of chronically homeless: An unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more **OR** has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years
 - Sheltered chronically homeless people are those living in emergency shelter only (not those living in transitional housing)
- Subpopulation information is reported on adults and unaccompanied youth only

Housing Inventory Chart

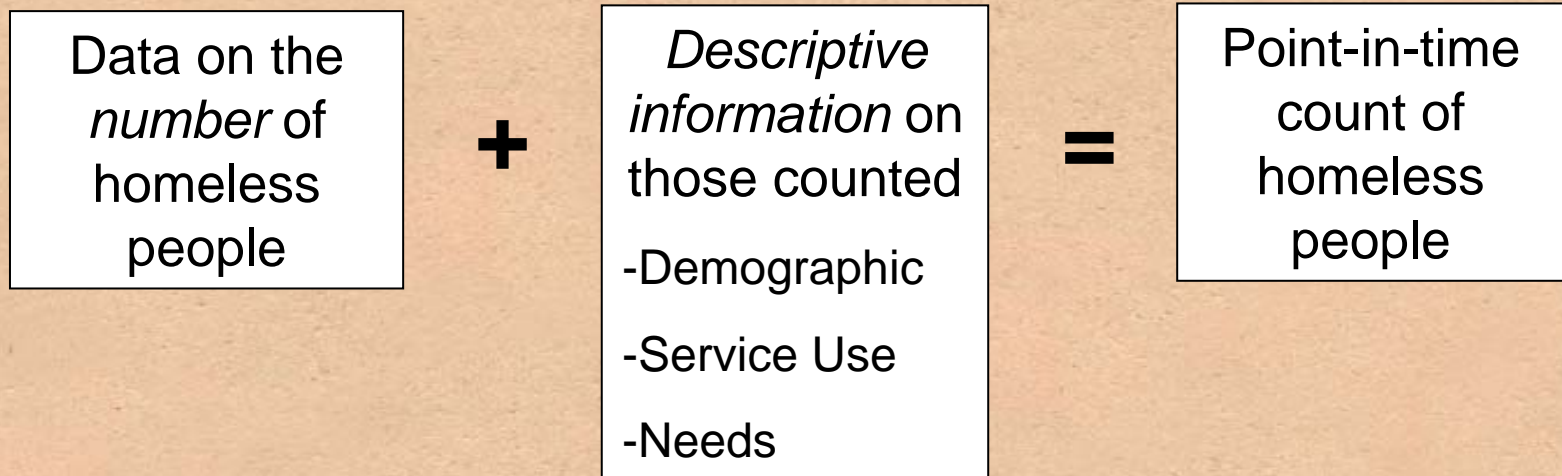
- Purpose:
 - To understand bed capacity of the shelter system at the local and national levels
- Required Data:
 - Annual bed and unit capacity:
 - Emergency shelter (include seasonal and overflow)
 - Transitional housing
 - Permanent supportive housing
 - Program level data
 - Target population served
 - Extent of HMIS data collection and participation

Methods for Conducting Point-in-Time Counts of Homeless Persons



Methods for Counting Homeless Persons

- A “count” = collecting information about the sheltered and unsheltered homeless population in your community



- It is possible just to do a count, but preferable to gather descriptive information, too – it will make your count much more valuable and informative!

Methods for Counting Homeless Persons

- Methods differ for counting sheltered and unsheltered homeless people
- For each group CoCs must make decisions about how, where, and when homeless persons will be counted

Counting Unsheltered Homeless Persons

- How to count unsheltered homeless people
 1. Simple street count with observation
 - No interviews – enumerators record observations of people
 2. Street count plus interviews
 3. Service-based count
 - Interviews at non-shelter service locations that unsheltered homeless people rely on to survive – soup kitchens or food bank, drop-in centers, healthcare centers, emergency rooms
- Probability sampling is a variation on a street count
 - Count a sample of study areas and extrapolate to entire CoC
 - Requires statistical expertise; typically used by large cities

Counting Unsheltered Homeless Persons (cont.)

- Where to count unsheltered homeless people
 1. Complete coverage (block-by-block)
 - Canvassing every block of a large area, like a downtown or entire city
 2. Known locations
 - Canvassing only those locations where homeless persons are known to live, sleep, and congregate
 3. Non-shelter services (i.e. soup kitchens, healthcare centers)
 - Services that unsheltered homeless people typically use
 4. A combination of the three geographies

Counting Unsheltered Homeless Persons (cont.)

When to count unsheltered homeless people

- CoCs need to make two different decisions related to time:
 1. Choosing a night for the count
 - Must be during the last seven days in January
 2. Deciding on the timing of data collection
 - 24 hours or less
 - Typically incorporates a ‘blitz’ count which is a few hours in early morning or very late evening
 - More than 24 hours
 - Typically a service-based count at non-shelter locations

Counting Unsheltered Homeless Persons (cont.)

When to count unsheltered homeless people (cont.)

- The longer the time period for data collection, the greater the chance for duplicate counting
 - Information collected with interviews helps reduce the chance for counting people more than once
- Always ask about homelessness on the night designated for the point-in-time count
 - If data collection lasts longer than a few hours or into the following day, ask if the person was homeless on the night of the point-in-time count and where he or she slept

Counting Sheltered Homeless Persons

- Sheltered Counts
 - Already know where and when, still need to decide how
- Where to count sheltered homeless people
 - Emergency shelters and transitional housing programs
 - Temporary emergency hotel/motel/apartment vouchers for homeless people
- When to count sheltered homeless people
 - Night designated for the point-in-time count
 - Gather data the day of the count or in the days after

Counting Sheltered Homeless Persons (cont.)

- How to count sheltered homeless people
 1. Homeless Management Information System
 - Extract client-level count and subpopulation data
 - Requires high provider coverage and excellent data quality
 2. Provider report or survey
 - Count of people in program
 - Subpopulation information or estimate for entire population
 3. Client-level survey using standardized instrument
 - Interview each client or a sample of clients
 - Program staff complete survey based on case records or knowledge of client

Methods for Collecting Housing Inventory

- Use HMIS
 - Requires bed management function
 - Can supplement with manual survey for non-participating providers
- Survey providers
 - During point-in-time population count
 - Have providers update the Housing Inventory Chart from the previous year
- Include instructions on how to count seasonal beds, overflow beds, family units, vouchers

Planning and Implementing Point-in-Time Counts of Homeless Persons



Session Overview

- Planning for a point-in-time count
 - An integrated approach
 - Establish a timeline
 - Key steps in preparing for the count
- After the point-in-time count
 - Analyzing and distributing point-in-time data
 - Evaluating the point-in-time process

Planning for a Point-in-Time Count

- An Integrated Approach

- Plan for one point-in-time count, minimize duplicate effort between sheltered and unsheltered components
- How can you maximize effort for the point-in-time count?
 - One planning group with key staff
 - CoC staff person
 - HMIS administrator
 - Unsheltered count coordinator or outreach representative
 - If you are conducting interviews, can the survey instrument be the same for sheltered and unsheltered count?
 - Decide if and how you can use HMIS

Establish a Timeline – Before the Count

- 6 months:
 - Begin to assess HMIS data quality
- 4 months:
 - Finalize data collection approach for sheltered and unsheltered counts (HMIS only, HMIS + client/provider surveys, client/provider surveys only)
- 3-4 months:
 - If using HMIS, begin/continue data clean-up
 - If using client-level surveys, decide whether or not to sample and, if so, develop a sampling/extrapolation strategy
 - Develop or revise client and provider surveys
 - Decide who will conduct each piece of the count (CoC staff, providers, or volunteers)
 - Update the list of emergency and transitional housing providers

Establish a Timeline – Before the Count (cont.)

- 2 months:
 - Reach out to providers
 - Recruit volunteers, if applicable
 - Finalize count materials
- 1 month:
 - Conduct training sessions for providers and volunteers
- 2 weeks:
 - Distribute count materials to providers
 - Prepare packets of materials for the unsheltered count
 - Remind providers about HMIS data collection procedures, if applicable
- A few days
 - Final HMIS data quality checks
 - Remind providers and volunteers about the count

Key Steps in Preparing for a Point-in-Time Count

- Identifying locations to count
- Selecting a date and time
- Deciding who should conduct the count
- Preparing count materials
 - Designing survey instruments
 - Developing interviewing procedures
- Preparing to deal with duplication
- Training enumerators
- Planning for logistics on the night of the count

Identifying Locations to Count

- Sheltered Count:

- Identify all emergency and transitional housing programs, including non-McKinney-Vento providers
- Will you include permanent supportive housing in the count? (Not needed for CoC application)

- Unsheltered Street Count:

- Identify ‘known locations’ where homeless people are typically found
 - Solicit input from stakeholders:
 - Outreach workers, currently or formerly homeless persons, providers, police, community or neighborhood groups, etc.
 - Think about how the number of homeless people at ‘known locations’ varies depending on time of day

Identifying Locations to Count (cont.)

- Unsheltered Street Count (cont.)
 - Decide how enumerators should deal with difficult locations, especially those that present safety concerns:
 - Parks, alleys, encampments, under overpasses, in cars, all night commercial establishments, abandoned buildings
 - Divide ‘complete coverage’ locations into study areas to assign to teams of enumerators
 - Enumerators should be able to canvass area in a few hours
 - Take advantage of existing barriers (railroad tracks, rivers)
 - Maintain consistency of study areas from year to year
 - If expanding the overall geography of the count, create new study areas to add, do not re-draw boundaries of existing areas

Identifying Locations to Count (cont.)

- Unsheltered Service-Based Count:
 - Identify non-shelter service providers that typically serve homeless people
 - Soup kitchens, emergency food programs
 - Street outreach programs
 - Day shelters, drop-in centers
 - Health care centers, emergency rooms
 - Outpatient mental health, substance abuse treatment facilities
 - If not interviewing at every location, be sure that your sample of non-shelter programs is representative
 - Example: Do not just interview at soup kitchens, if your community also has other services that unsheltered homeless people use

Selecting a Date and Time

- Sheltered Count:
 - Collect information on clients in the program on the night designated for the count; data can be collected the day of or in the days after
- Unsheltered Street Count:
 - Typically a 'blitz' count, very late at night or very early in the morning – 12 a.m. to 5 a.m.
- Unsheltered Service-Based Count:
 - Service-based data collection period can be extended up to or longer than 24 hours, but ALWAYS ask about homeless status for the night of the count
 - Some rural areas include mainstream social service agencies in service-based counts and collect data for several weeks

Deciding Who Should Conduct the Count

- Sheltered Count:
 - Always need to reach out to providers to secure buy-in – need bed inventory, count, and subpopulation information
 - If CoC is conducting client interviews for subpopulation information, program staff may be willing to conduct client interviews
 - May need assistance from volunteers or CoC staff
- Unsheltered Street Count:
 - Typically need a large group of people
 - Outreach workers may anchor the effort, but volunteers are generally needed
 - Consider requesting help from formerly homeless people, police, other knowledgeable persons in the community

Deciding Who Should Conduct the Count (cont.)

- Unsheltered Service-Based Count:
 - Program staff at some non-shelter services may be willing, but some may be uncomfortable asking questions of clients
 - Most likely will need volunteers or CoC staff at each location
- Volunteer enumerators could be recruited from:
 - Public and private social service agencies
 - Currently or formerly homeless people
 - Community or church service organizations
 - Colleges and universities

Preparing Count Materials

- Sheltered Count:

- If using provider and client-level surveys, might need to develop:

- Provider survey
- Client-level survey
- Bed inventory questionnaire
- A brief summary of enumeration procedures

Remember to include detailed written instructions for each questionnaire or survey, even if you are providing training

- If using HMIS, might need to:

- Prepare reports to help administrators check data quality starting 4 to 6 months before the count (www.hmis.info)
- Provide a crosswalk between HMIS data elements and the Population and Subpopulations Chart (See Sheltered Guide)

Preparing Count Materials (cont.)

- Unsheltered Street Count:
 - Client-level survey
 - Tally / observation sheets for enumerators
 - A brief summary of enumeration procedures
 - Maps of each study area with boundaries clearly marked
 - List of emergency contacts
- Unsheltered Service-Based Count:
 - Client-level survey – be sure this includes screener question(s) to determine homeless status on the night designated for the count
 - A brief summary of procedures

Designing Survey Instruments

- Provider survey (sheltered count only)
 - Provider reports number of people in program
 - Provider reports subpopulation information on clients as a group (if CoC is not using client-level survey)
- Client-level survey
 - Homeless person is interviewed or a provider completes based on case records/ experience
 - Can collect demographic, service use, history of homelessness
 - Limit to 15 minutes with incentive
 - Must ask for enough information to complete Part 1 + 2 of the Population and Subpopulation Chart

Designing Survey Instruments (cont.)

Required Information

- Age or date of birth
- Household type
- Length of time the person has been homeless *
- How many times the person has been homeless *
- Disability status by category *
(mental illness, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, other)
- History of domestic violence
- Veteran status

Optional Information

- Name or initials
- Gender
- Race/ethnicity
- The last place / city the person lived in before becoming homeless
- Reasons for homelessness
- Employment status
- Income and sources of income
- Housing and supportive services needs
- Questions about local issues

* Needed to determine chronic homelessness

Developing Interviewing Procedures

- Sheltered Count:

- Interview every sheltered person or a sample
 - Must count every sheltered person
 - Can sample for interviews / subpopulation information
 - Random sample of clients from every provider
 - Group providers according to program type (ES, TH) and type of client served (individual or family) and select a stratified sample of providers
- Each provider should always report client count as a quality assurance step
- If a provider is participating in HMIS – encourage them to use it to provide sheltered information

Developing Interviewing Procedures (cont.)

- Unsheltered Street Count:
 - Interview every unsheltered person or a sample
 - If a sample, decide on needed sample size and interview every nth person
 - Consider providing incentives (toiletries, food vouchers / cards, phone cards)
- Unsheltered Service-Based Count:
 - MUST interview everyone to screen for homelessness
 - “Where do you usually sleep?”
 - “Did you sleep there last night?”
 - If person is homeless, follow-up with full survey

Preparing to Deal with Duplication

- Sheltered Count:
 - Primarily an issue in relation to unsheltered count – the longer the count, the more important the de-duplication strategy
 - Possibly an issue if facilities have high client turnover
- Unsheltered Street Count:
 - Duplication not much of an issue if a 'blitz' count late at night or early in the morning
 - Make sure study area boundaries are clear to teams
 - If count lasts more than a few hours, need method for dealing with duplication

Preparing to Deal with Duplication (cont.)

- Unsheltered Service-Based Count:
 - Must ALWAYS collect enough information to de-duplicate, especially when combining service-based and street count methods
- Ways to De-duplicate:
 - Collect enough information for a unique identifier
 - For example: initials, date of birth, gender, race
 - ERWI112074FW
 - Include question in the survey for unsheltered count:
 - “Has anyone else asked you these questions tonight?”

Training for the Sheltered Count - Providers

- If program staff will be collecting data for the sheltered count, they may need training
 - Keep it brief – one hour or less
 - Try to offer more than one session or use some time at a CoC meeting to review instructions
 - Even if you conduct a training, include detailed instructions with every data collection form distributed to providers
 - Always provide contact information for a CoC staff person who can answer questions

Training for the Sheltered Count - Volunteers

- If volunteers are participating in your sheltered point-in-time count, they will need to be trained
- Training for volunteers should include:
 - Background on the count and why it is important
 - A review of the client survey instrument
 - A review of the sampling strategy, if applicable
 - A review of the client confidentiality policy
 - Logistics for the night or day of the count
 - Where to go, who will be in charge, what time to arrive, etc.

Training for the Unsheltered Count

- Training is needed for everyone who is participating in an unsheltered count
- Training for a street count should include a review of:
 - The ground rules
 - Who to count and what information to record
 - How to count each type of public place – park, street, alley, abandoned buildings, underpasses, etc.
 - Enumeration and interview forms
 - Safety precautions and procedures
- Training is often done for an hour or two before the count

Planning for the Night of the Count

- Sheltered and Unsheltered Counts
 - Make sure that providers have received all necessary materials (surveys, instructions, etc.) before the count
 - If volunteers or CoC staff are assisting, ensure they know where go and when to arrive
 - Prepare packets of materials for unsheltered teams ahead of time, include: a map of the area, sufficient copies of surveys or observation sheets, emergency contact information, etc.
 - Assign sites appropriately – to teams with enough people and experience
 - Prepare a back-up plan, if volunteers do not show-up or the count is postponed

Collecting the Data

- Sheltered Count:
 - Providers should submit data within 2 to 3 days of the count
 - A CoC staff person should follow-up on missing data or with any questions about sheltered information
 - If data is collected by the CoC via phone, this collection should begin the day following the count

Collecting the Data (cont.)

- Unsheltered Street Counts:
 - Survey or observation sheets should be reviewed as teams return to the deployment site
 - Questions should be addressed immediately
- Unsheltered Service-Based Count:
 - Survey sheets should be reviewed immediately after the count at each service-based location to clarify any questions

Analyzing and Reporting Data

- Sheltered Count:
 - If applicable, extrapolate for missing provider data (survey non-respondents or non-participants in HMIS)
 - Extrapolate client-level subpopulation survey results, if you used a sampling approach
- Unsheltered Street and Service-Based Counts:
 - Extrapolate for subpopulation information, if you used a sampling approach
- Assemble findings for distribution to providers, community, and funders

Evaluating the Process

- Develop written recommendations on count planning activities to improve the process for next year
 - How did the planning group function? What changes should be made for next year?
 - Does your planning timeline need to be adjusted?
 - What changes to count procedures should be made for next year?
 - What revisions to the survey(s) or observation form(s) should be made for next year?

Additional Resources

- A Guide to Counting Unsheltered Homeless People

http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/library/webcast101006/street_count_guide.pdf

- A Guide to Counting Sheltered Homeless People

http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/library/webcast101006/guide_to_counting_sheltered.pdf

- www.hmis.info

- Information on assessing and improving HMIS data quality

- PIT Technical Assistance

- PITcounts@abtassoc.com

1-877-789-2427