



Counts of Homelessness: Different Counts and What They Mean

There are a few different ways Washington State counts the number of homeless individuals and families each year. This paper will walk you through four of the counts and will describe the uses and limitations of each. Because of the complexity of homelessness and because of funding requirements, no one method is more accurate or comprehensive than another. The different counts are meant to provide the most information possible about the numbers of people experiencing homelessness and housing instability. The counts discussed in this paper are:

- Count of people served by, entered into, and/or exited from a housing assistance program over the course of a year according to the homeless management information system (HMIS);
- Count of homeless students each school year;
- Count of people homeless on a single day in January each year;
- Snapshot of homelessness in Washington State.

1. Count of people served by, entered into and/or exited from a housing assistance program over calendar year 2016 according to the homeless management information system (HMIS):

	People in Households with Children & Adults			People in Households with only Adults			People in Households with only Children			Total People		
	Served	Entered	Exited	Served	Entered	Exited	Served	Entered	Exited	Served	Entered	Exited
Homelessness Prevention	8,969	6,488	6,175	8,594	4,244	3,639	284	186	86	17,847	10,918	9,900
Rapid Rehousing	12,923	8,257	7,845	8,099	5,246	4,736	179	128	91	21,201	13,631	12,672
Emergency Shelter	11,236	9,295	9,188	24,827	19,073	16,835	1,602	1,441	1,368	37,665	29,809	27,391
Transitional Housing	5,077	1,980	2,362	2,988	1,715	1,621	129	91	64	8,194	3,786	4,047
Permanent Housing (all types)	5,594	1,480	1,294	7,969	1,648	1,084	65	28	17	13,628	3,156	2,395
Total	43,419	27,232	26,763	52,335	31,734	27,863	2,240	1,856	1,616	98,535	61,300	56,405
	Households with Children & Adults			Households with only Adults			Households with only Children			Total Households		
	Served	Entered	Exited	Served	Entered	Exited	Served	Entered	Exited	Served	Entered	Exited
Homelessness Prevention	2,564	1,859	1,805	8,087	3,854	3,258	258	166	73	10,909	5,879	5,136
Rapid Rehousing	3,770	2,381	2,309	7,178	4,831	4,337	154	119	77	11,102	7,331	6,723
Emergency Shelter	3,491	2,910	2,871	23,747	18,860	16,617	1,580	1,428	1,351	28,818	23,198	20,839
Transitional Housing	1,598	634	771	2,865	1,688	1,590	117	84	59	4,580	2,406	2,420
Permanent Housing (all types)	1,752	490	431	7,569	1,612	1,061	45	23	11	9,366	2,125	1,503
Total	13,045	8,185	8,149	48,900	30,754	26,815	2,138	1,804	1,563	64,775	40,939	36,621

Homeless System Interventions are defined as follows:

- ✓ Homelessness Prevention: short-term rent assistance to prevent evictions from rental units
- ✓ Rapid Rehousing: short-term rent assistance (usually less than six months) to move homeless people into housing, typically in a private, for-profit rental
- ✓ Emergency Shelter: typically up to 90 days of emergency housing, in a shared space filled with bunk beds

- ✓ Transitional Housing: up to two years of housing and services, typically in a dedicated building
 - ✓ Permanent Housing including Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH): deep, long-term rental subsidies and/or permanent housing in a dedicated building for chronically homeless people with severe and persistent disabilities
- **Who collects the count?** All homeless service providers receiving public funding are required to enter personal identifiers and other information about people served each day by their programs. State law¹ ensures that vulnerable populations like unaccompanied minors, people fleeing domestic violence situations, and/or people with HIV/AIDS are exempt from providing identifiers to the system while still being eligible to receive services.
 - **Who does the count represent?** People experiencing homelessness according to the homeless management information system (HMIS) are defined as people who are sleeping out of doors, people who are sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation (car, bus station, etc.), or people staying in temporary facilities like emergency shelters and transitional housing programs. Assistance received may include one or more of the interventions defined above.
 - **What is collected for this count?** HMIS data standards² determine what data are collected. Elements vary by fund source, and may include program types, entry and exit dates, prior living situations, and destinations at exit. Personally identifying data including social security number, date of birth, first name and last name are collected when authorized by the client in writing.
 - **What is the data source for this count?** HMIS is a secure, web-based database managed locally to provide a repository for federally mandated data elements. HMIS data are available on a statewide level to Commerce and DSHS for research and evaluation purposes, but is also used locally for system planning and measurement of homeless system performance.
 - **When are people counted?** HMIS is used by local provider case managers every day, in every county, for ongoing data collection and case management. Software companies and lead system administrators provide help desk support locally to ensure HMIS is available up to 99.99% of every working day for live data entry. This also means the data in HMIS is dynamic and regularly reviewed for accuracy. Counts pulled from HMIS may be improved over time and it is expected that, for example, the same report pulled day one may have different numbers if pulled again on day thirty.
 - **Where are people counted?** Computers sitting on case managers' desks are hooked up to the internet and can access the HMIS database at any time, from any location. Two-factor authentication and other security requirements ensure data confidentiality. There are mobile and other technologies to help case managers in local provider agencies use HMIS as frequently and easily as possible for the best data quality.
 - **Why do we count this way?** In 2004 the US Congress directed Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to collect information on unique individuals served with HUD Homeless Assistance. HUD developed HMIS Data Standards, communities implemented software to comply with the reporting requirements, and other funders started requiring use of HMIS for their homeless assistance as well. In 2006, the state legislature enacted the Homeless Housing Assistance Act, requiring HMIS for state funded programs. However, this data is limited if not all homeless service providers are providing data to HMIS, which they don't have to do if they aren't publicly funded.

¹ <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=43.185C.180>

² <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hmis/>

2. Count of homeless students each school year:

OSPI Homeless Student Count 2015-2016 School Year ³	Number (Percent of Total)
Shelters	6,174 (16%)
Doubled-Up	28,942 (73%)
Unsheltered	2,134 (5%)
Hotel/Motel	2,421 (6%)
Total	39,671

- **Who collects the count?** All local educational agencies (LEAs) are required to count the number of homeless students throughout each school year. LEAs are typically school districts, but can also include charter schools, Tribal Compacts, Educational Service Districts, and other education agencies.
- **Who does the count represent?** Students counted as homeless may be sleeping outdoors, in cars, or other places not meant for human habitation, in temporary facilities like emergency shelters or transitional housing, in hotels or motels due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations, or who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship or a similar reason. They may self-declare, or be identified by trained staff during the school year as a student who meets the McKinney-Vento definition of homeless and may need additional educational supports (like supplies, transportation, nutrition, or housing assistance) to ensure they are stabilized and can be successful at school.
- **What is collected for this count?** CEDARS gathers the same personally identifiable information, school information, and situational information on each student enrolled in Washington public schools.
- **What is the data source for this count?** OSPI uses the Comprehensive Education Data and Research System (CEDARS), a longitudinal data warehouse of educational data, to record student data, including demographics, enrollment information, schedules, grades, and program participation. Client consent is not required for the CEDARS database, and each LEA manages its own data via web-based Student Information Systems, that then sends information to CEDARS. CEDARS is managed by OSPI and is used for research, evaluation, and to comply with state and federal reporting requirements.
- **When are people counted?** Submission of data to CEDARS occurs throughout the school year, with final counts of homeless students due to OSPI (through a coordinated submission process) each August.
- **Where are people counted?** LEAs and schools are responsible for verifying homeless student counts each August through a web-based application managed by OSPI.
- **Why do we count this way?** Research shows that housing instability leads to poorer educational outcomes. Annual counts of students identified as homeless are an important measure to identify the scope of the issue from the perspective of educational outcomes, and not just housing outcomes. A student defined as homeless under the US Department of Education’s definition may or may not be counted as homeless by other methods because the different definitions used by other agencies serving the needs of homeless individuals do not always align. However, the OSPI count of homeless students provides important context for the larger conversation about which programs and policies have the most impact on ending current homelessness and preventing future homelessness.

³ <http://www.k12.wa.us/homelessed/>

3. Point In Time (PIT) Count of homeless people on a single day in January:

2016 Point in Time Count ⁴	Households with Adults and Children		Households with Only Adults		Households with Only Children		Total	
	Households	Persons	Households	Persons	Households	Persons	Households	Persons
Emergency Shelter	659	2093	4565	4605	53	54	5277	6752
Transitional Housing	1222	3888	1616	1653	29	35	2867	5576
Safe Haven	0	0	42	42	0	0	42	42
Total Sheltered	1881	5981	6223	6300	82	89	8186	12370
Unsheltered	308	963	7145	7496	15	15	7468	8474
Total Sheltered and Unsheltered	2189	6944	13368	13796	97	104	15654	20844

- **Who collects the count?** Volunteers and homeless service providers go out of doors and into shelters and other gathering places to enumerate people experiencing homelessness on a single day in the last week of January.
- **Who does the count represent?** The definition of homelessness for purposes of the PIT count are people who are living outside, people who are living in places not meant for human habitation (like cars or bus stations) and people who are housed in a temporary facility like emergency shelter or transitional housing. The PIT count does not include people living doubled up with friends or families, nor does it include anyone receiving rapid rehousing or eviction prevention rent assistance. It also does not count people in permanent supportive housing for formerly homeless persons, or any other long-term subsidy in which the person doesn't have to leave the housing even if the subsidy ends.
- **What is collected for this count?** Upon client written consent, personal identifiers may be collected. Tally marks on a piece of paper may be the only data collected for some people found out of doors. People counted in shelter or transitional housing will have full HMIS data elements collected either on the day of the count or at the time of program entry.
- **What is the data source for this count?** For the out-of-doors count surveys are conducted, much like a census. Volunteers approach people appearing to be experiencing homelessness and engage in conversation with them to gather the appropriate information to complete the count. Shelter and transitional housing counts are conducted through HMIS reporting.
- **When are people counted?** HUD allows each Continuum in our state to designate any day in the last week of January to be the day that a PIT count is performed. Most of the time the PIT count is performed on the last Thursday in January each year.
- **Where are people counted?** Out of doors locations, known gathering sites, canvassed areas, Homeless Connect points, emergency shelters, day shelters, transitional housing facilities, food banks, known encampments, and other places designated by the local government.
- **Why do we count this way?** The PIT count presents an opportunity to understand homelessness on a single day instead of cumulatively over the course of a calendar year or school year. Additionally, the PIT count presents an opportunity to capture information on people experiencing homelessness that might not otherwise be engaging in homeless assistance or educational attainment and would therefore go uncounted by the counts described above. And, because methodology changes are minor, the longitudinal perspective the PIT count provides is valuable in trending and other types of analysis of the issue (like comparisons to other single-day data sets).

⁴ <http://www.commerce.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/hau-pit-final-summary-2016.pdf>

4. Snapshot of Homelessness in Washington State (i.e.: Supplemental Point In Time Count):

Snapshot of Homelessness in Washington State for January 2016 ⁵		Homeless or Unstably Housed		Homeless Only	
PERSONS	Denominator	New and Continuing	New Only	New and Continuing	New Only
In child-only households, excluding parenting teens	497	248	7	64	12
In parenting teen households	180	41	2	3	0
Ages 18 to 24 in households without children	52,444	20,630	816	6,436	558
Ages 25+ in households without children	395,495	77,014	2,916	28,819	1,763
In households with both children and adults, single parent	381,764	31,028	2,030	4,801	472
In households with both children and adults, two parents	352,071	12,481	1,036	1,997	271
Where unknown household type	136	22	0	8	0
Total	1,182,587	141,464	6,807	42,128	3,076
Snapshot of Homelessness in Washington State for January 2016		Homeless or Unstably Housed		Homeless Only	
HOUSEHOLDS	Denominator	New and Continuing	New Only	New and Continuing	New Only
In child-only households, excluding parenting teens	497	248	7	64	12
In parenting teen households	84	19	1	1	0
Ages 18 to 24 in households without children	50,953	20,416	801	6,370	551
Ages 25+ in households without children	355,220	74,938	2,752	28,218	1,701
In households with both children and adults, single parent	128,358	11,407	722	1,766	168
In households with both children and adults, two parents	76,171	2,962	235	481	68
Where unknown household type	59	11	0	4	0
Total	611,342	110,001	4,518	36,904	2,500

- **Who collects the count?** Case managers in homeless provider agencies, case workers at social service offices, field representatives, and clients may provide counts to separate databases throughout the state. Staff at the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) Research and Data Analysis (RDA) have access to multiple datasets and provide the technical knowledge to pull the various counts into a single supplemental count of homeless people using administrative data.
- **Who does the count represent?** People receiving basic food assistance from DSHS, which includes recipients, denials, closings, and associated household members. “Homeless Only” refers only to unsheltered or those living

⁵ <http://www.commerce.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/hau-hmis-snapshot-homelessness-1-2016.pdf>

in emergency shelter whereas “Homeless or Unstably Housed” includes all “Homeless Only” as well as doubled up with friends or family.

- **What is collected for this count?** There are multiple client-level databases containing personally identifying information as well as service records and histories.
- **What is the data source for this count?** Data was extracted from Provider One (P1), the Integrated Client Database (ICDB) and the Automated Client Eligibility System (ACES) through an interagency agreement (IAA) between RDA and Commerce.
- **When are people counted?** Upon application for DSHS-funded basic food and other service based interactions with state agencies providing data to the ICDB, clients are added or updated in various state agency databases. Twice a year under the Commerce/RDA IAA, an administrative data pull is performed. The pull looks at the index (i.e.: report) month and the month prior to the index month and determines whether to count the client as homeless or unstably housed in the index month, as well as whether to count them as new or continuing, based upon the presence of the housing status in the month prior.
- **Where are people counted?** At the provider level and/or at DSHS Field Offices.
- **Why do we count this way?** The supplemental point in time count of administrative data is performed to examine the broad low income population to determine if there are gaps in service or a housing need that isn’t being elevated through the traditional homeless system.