



Setting the Course for the Work Ahead: Findings and Implications from Recent Reports and Data

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Data is central to all the decisions we make as a Council to advance progress toward ending homelessness in our country. Continuing to focus on data will be essential for crafting effective strategies into the future, for sustaining our interagency efforts to deploy federal resources as efficiently and effectively as possible, and for supporting the critical efforts of states and communities.

As we review data regarding the number of people experiencing homelessness and housing instability to help set the course for the work ahead, we are focused especially on several reports:

- [Part 1 of HUD's 2016 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress \(AHAR\)](#)
- [Part 2 of HUD's 2015 AHAR](#)
- [Federal Data Summary \(Education for Homeless Children and Youth\) School Years 2012-13 to 2014-15](#)
- [Worst Case Housing Needs 2015 Report to Congress](#)

The 2016 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count Data

HUD released the 2016 PIT count data in November, based upon information gathered by communities across the country in January. Such data provides us with a snapshot of the estimated number and demographics of people who are experiencing homelessness at a given point of time, and helps us assess the impact of our strategic activities and the programs that we are implementing up until that point.

The 2016 PIT indicated significant reductions since 2010, especially in Veteran homelessness and unsheltered homelessness. Key data points include:

- **Overall Homelessness:** The PIT count data reported by communities estimated that 549,928 people were homeless on a given night in January 2016, a reduction of more than 87,000 people, or 14%, since 2010, and a reduction of 2.6% between 2015 and 2016.
- **Unsheltered Homelessness:** Of the nearly 550,000 people estimated to be experiencing homelessness through these PIT counts, most (68%) were staying in residential programs for people experiencing homelessness, and 32% were found in unsheltered locations. This data indicates that unsheltered homelessness has decreased by 25% between 2010 and 2016, but does show an increase of almost 2% between 2015 and 2016, the first such increase in any year since the 2010 count.
- **Veteran Homelessness:** The PIT data documents the greatest progress toward ending homelessness among Veterans, indicating an estimated 47% reduction between 2010 and 2016 in the number of Veterans experiencing homelessness, including a 57% reduction in the estimated number of Veterans experiencing unsheltered homelessness. There was a total reduction of 17% in the number of Veterans reported as experiencing homelessness between 2015 and 2016 alone.
- **Individual Homelessness:** The PIT data estimates that nearly two in three people experiencing homelessness were in households without children, and are referred to in the data as "individuals." The data shows a 10%

reduction in the number of individuals experiencing homelessness between the 2010 and 2016 counts, including a more than 14% reduction in the number of unsheltered individuals experiencing homelessness. There was a total reduction of approximately 1% in the number of individuals reported as experiencing homelessness between 2015 and 2016, accounted for by a nearly 4% reduction in unsheltered individuals and a nearly 3% increase in the number of sheltered individuals.

- **Family Homelessness:** PIT data indicates a 23% decline in the number of family households with children between 2010 and 2016, including a 65% reduction in families counted as experiencing unsheltered homelessness. There was a total reduction of 5% in the number of families with children reported as experiencing homelessness between 2015 and 2016.
- **Chronic Homelessness:** The PIT data estimates a 27% decline in chronic homelessness between 2010 and 2016, including a 16% reduction in unsheltered chronic homelessness. There was a total reduction of 4% in the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness between 2015 and 2016.
- **Youth and Young Adult Homelessness:** The 2016 PIT data estimates 35,686 unaccompanied youth and young adults (under the age of 25) experiencing homelessness, including 9,800 parenting youth and young adults. While we know communities are working hard to improve their approaches to counting youth, we don't think this number accurately represents the scope of youth homelessness yet. After providing guidance and technical assistance to communities over the last few years to strengthen their counts, federal agencies will be using the 2017 PIT count of unaccompanied youth as a baseline point-in-time estimate for measuring progress on youth homelessness.

Other Essential Sources of Data

At USICH, we know that while the estimates that we can draw from this PIT data are vitally important, they are not the only data that we need to consider — and are not the only data that communities should use — to guide the strategic decisions and tailor the interventions that we need to end homelessness. While we use the PIT data to compare our progress from year to year, this data does not represent the full scope and experience of homelessness in our country.

We also need to consider sources of annualized data that help us understand the number of people who experience homelessness and/or housing instability over the course of a year. Such data helps paint a more complete picture of the state of homelessness, and is critical to understanding the level of need in our communities and the resources necessary to assist every individual and family who is experiencing homelessness or housing instability.

- **HUD's Annualized Data from Homeless Management Information Systems Reports:** One important example of such data, [HUD's 2015 AHAR Part II](#), released in October, documented that 1.48 million people experienced homelessness in shelters at some point during 2015, a 0.3% decline between 2014 and 2015 and a nearly 7% decrease since 2010. This slight reduction is a return to a downward trajectory after an increase of almost 5% in people who used shelter the year before.
- **ED's Annualized Data Reported by Public Schools:** For understanding the scope and scale of homelessness among youth and families with children, we also closely consider the [data gathered by schools for the Department of Education](#) on children and youth enrolled in public schools who experience homelessness at some point during the school year. This data includes those who are living in shelters or those who are unsheltered, and also students staying in motels or in doubled-up arrangements.

According to the data released December 2016, public schools reported that 1,263,323 enrolled students were identified as experiencing homelessness at some point during the 2014-2015 school year. The total number of students reported by states who were identified as experiencing homelessness has increased by 3.5% over the last three school years. Unfortunately, comparisons across years are difficult because two states experienced significant data quality challenges with their collection and reporting methods during the years used to calculate the percent change.

Of those reported nationwide: approximately 76% of the students were sharing the housing of other people due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; 14% were in shelters; 7% were in hotels/motels; and 3% were unsheltered. Of these 1.26 million students, approximately 95,000 were identified as unaccompanied youth, not living with families.

- **American Housing Survey Data regarding Worst Case Housing Needs:** Finally, HUD's [Worst Case Housing Needs 2015 Report to Congress](#), based upon the American Housing Survey conducted by the Census Bureau in 2013, found that there were 7.72 million renters with worst case housing needs, indicating that they: 1) have very low incomes, lack housing assistance, and have severe rent burdens (in approximately 97% of cases); 2) live in severely inadequate housing (in approximately 6% of cases); or 3) are experiencing both problems (in approximately 3% of cases). The survey data does indicate that the number of worst case housing needs began to decline in 2013, after a long period of growth: there was a 9% reduction of worst case housing needs during the 2011-2013 period, which followed a 43% increase during the 2007-2011 period.

Implications of this Data

This data has many implications for our continued work to end homelessness in the United States, including:

- **While we have made progress, there is a great deal of work ahead of us.** While there are strong indicators of progress within the PIT data, all of the data sources discussed here indicate that our work to end homelessness is far from complete. In order to increase the pace of progress, we need to do more to translate and apply the strategies that are driving progress on Veteran homelessness to our efforts for other populations. The dramatic reductions in Veteran homelessness documented within the PIT counts – a 47% decline between 2010 and 2016, including a 17% reduction between 2015 and 2016 alone – are a testament to what is possible when we take urgent action at all levels of government and across all sectors. The bipartisan support for expanded investments into federal programs, such as the HUD-VASH program and the SSVF program, has made it possible to provide a range of housing and services interventions. State and local entities, and philanthropy, have aligned their own investments with these federal resources. Communities have formed stronger partnerships to deploy those resources through best practices, including coordinated entry and Housing First approaches. And governors, mayors, and other public officials have mobilized their communities in support of ambitious goals. These resource investments and implementation strategies provide us with the model for what is necessary to end homelessness for everyone.
- **Housing affordability remains one of the most significant challenges to achieving our goals.** While communities are making significant progress in reducing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness, the Department of Education data and the Worst Case Housing Needs data make it clear that there are still many people staying in unstable living situations. The findings from the [Family Options Study](#) provided powerful evidence of the impact of access to affordable housing on ending family homelessness, in particular. We need to do everything we can to expand access to housing affordable to people who are at risk of or are experiencing homelessness, including removing local policy barriers that limit the creation of affordable

housing options in the private market, prioritizing people experiencing homelessness for mainstream affordable housing resources, and investing into expanded affordable housing opportunities across all levels of government.

- **Racial disparities in the impact and experience of homelessness remain stark and clear.** For example, while African-Americans make up only 12% of the U.S. population, 39% of people counted in the PIT and 41% of annual shelter users were African-American. And while Native Americans make up 1.2% of the general population, they represented an estimated 2.8% of the people counted in the PIT data, despite the fact that very few tribal communities are included within PIT counts. We must do more to ensure that our housing and services strategies are not only culturally competent, but are also actively reducing these racial disparities. And we must strengthen our efforts to ensure that people exiting other systems with racial disparities, such as the justice system, do not fall into homelessness.
- **There are significant geographic differences in the trends seen within the data.** The PIT data from 37 states indicated that homelessness had declined between 2015 and 2016, while the data from 13 states and the District of Columbia indicated increases. CoCs from major cities reported a slight (less than 1%) increase in homelessness between 2015 and 2016, driven by increases reported in New York City and Los Angeles, and including a 7% increase in the number of people reported as living in unsheltered locations. In addition, the prevalence of worst case housing needs among very low-income renters is greater than the national average in the West. We must tailor our strategies, and the scale of our solutions, to reflect such differences in needs and housing markets.
- **No single source of data tells the whole story – and we must take action on the best real-time information possible.** All of these different data sources can and should be used at the community level to drive local planning and action, to drive resource investments, to strengthen the systems we need to end people’s homelessness, and to address broader housing needs. When looked at comprehensively, the variety of data helps to ensure that we respond with the right solutions, at the right scale, to address current and projected needs and crises. To provide specific housing and services interventions to households on a day-to-day basis, however, communities also need to develop real-time information regarding everyone experiencing homelessness, like the active lists that communities have been building to achieve the criteria and benchmarks for ending [Veteran](#) and [chronic](#) homelessness.

At USICH, we’re committed to helping communities to use all of this data holistically and proactively, and to helping shape strategies for the work that is ahead of us — the work that is ahead of all of us, together, to ensure that homelessness in our country is truly a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience.