



Using Homelessness and Housing Needs Data to Tailor and Drive Local Solutions

No single source of data tells the whole story of homelessness and other housing needs in our country. There are a variety of different data sources that can and should be used at the community level to drive local planning and action, to drive resource investments, to strengthen the coordinated responses we need to end people's homelessness, and to address broader housing needs. This document provides an overview of some key data sources—including both annual and point-in-time (PIT) data—describes what they measure, and highlights how communities can use that range of information to strengthen their efforts to address homelessness, housing instability, and other housing needs.

We encourage you to also read [Setting the Course for the Work Ahead: Findings and Implications from Recent Reports and Data](#) for our more in-depth analysis of information and trends within the following data sources:

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

When considered comprehensively and used proactively, the data that inform those reports can help ensure that every community responds with the right solutions at the right scale to address homelessness and housing crises among its residents—and to set them on a path to achieving their personal goals.

Federal Definitions of Homelessness and Other Housing Needs

Homelessness Definitions

There are different definitions of homelessness within federal statutes and programs (see appendix on pages 10-11). While recognizing that it can, at times, be confusing to navigate these differences, we encourage communities not to think of them as competing definitions. Rather, these differentiated definitions allow us to recognize meaningful distinctions among the individuals and families experiencing housing needs and crises in our communities, making it possible to more effectively tailor our responses, use our resources most efficiently, and engage the larger array of mainstream systems and services in order to best address current and projected needs.

The biggest difference in the definitions revolves around people who are paying for their own temporary stays in hotels/motels due to lack of stable housing or who are sharing the housing of other people due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason (often referred to as living in “doubled-up” arrangements or “couch-surfing”). For example, in order to inform planning for its statutory programs, HUD prepares its Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress to estimate the number of people who are unsheltered or are sheltered in emergency shelters or transitional housing at a given point in time, and the number and

demographics of people who seek help from HUD-funded emergency shelters and transitional housing programs over the course of the year. The data sources for these reports, however, do not include estimates of the number of people who are sharing the housing of others, or paying for their own stays in hotels/motels, due to lack of stable housing.

In order to address their programming mandate of ensuring that every child and youth has equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, and of making sure students are receiving the supports they need to succeed in school, local education agencies gather and report data that includes children and youth who are identified as sharing the housing of others or who are paying for temporary stays in hotels/motels due to lack of stable housing. (For more distinctions between HUD and public school data, please see the box at right.)

It is essential to remember that definitions of homelessness used to gather and report data do not fully determine whether an individual or family is eligible to access a variety of federally funded programs. For example, people who are being sexually exploited or abused or are fleeing violence or trafficking while living in hotels/motels or sharing the housing of others are immediately eligible for HUD-funded emergency shelter.

Other Housing Needs Definitions

In addition to the differentiated data on homelessness, there are other categories of housing status that we use to assess housing needs, such as:

- **Rent burdened:** Households that are paying more than 30% of household income for housing

Differences among HUD and Local Education Agency (LEA) Public School Data

(excerpted from the [2015 AHAR: Part 2](#))

The LEA data reported by the U.S. Department of Education differ from the HMIS and PIT data reported to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in several other ways:

- LEA data are reported by school administrators and generally verified by local liaisons and state coordinators. HMIS data are reported by homeless service provider staff. PIT count data are reported by communities based on counts of people in shelter programs and unsheltered locations.
- LEA data cover a July 1 to June 30 period; however, data on school children during the summer may be limited. HMIS data used in the AHAR cover a period from October 1 through September 30. PIT count data are for a single night in January.
- LEA data include children and youth living in hotels or motels if they are judged to be there because of a lack of alternate, adequate accommodation. HMIS data include people living in hotels or motels only if those accommodations were subsidized through a homeless assistance program.
- The LEA data reflect information on public school children from age 3 through grade 12. HMIS and PIT count data include children under age 3. The LEA data include some young adults (18 and older) who are still in public school. The HMIS data and PIT count data report all people 18 and over in a separate category from those under 18. The PIT count data report all youth who are ages 18 to 24 in a separate category.

- **Severely rent burdened:** Households that are paying more than 50% of household income for housing
- **Living in worst-case housing:** Very low income renters who do not receive government housing assistance and who pay more than half of their income for rent, live in severely inadequate conditions, or both

We should use all this data to develop the fullest possible understanding of the range of housing needs in our communities, to most strategically respond to that range of needs, and to assess the impact of our efforts. That understanding can also inform decisions about how many affordable housing opportunities are needed, how much capacity is required within homelessness crisis response systems, and how much mainstream programs and resources must be engaged.

Understanding Point-in-Time and Annualized Data

In order to analyze the data effectively, it is important to understand—and to communicate to stakeholders and officials—the differences between point-in-time and annualized data.

Point-in-Time Data

HUD's PIT Count: Through HUD's annual PIT count, communities count how many people are experiencing unsheltered or sheltered homelessness on one night in late January. That data, which is reported through HUD Continuums of Care and analyzed in [Part I of the Annual Homeless Assessment Report](#), helps us estimate the number of people experiencing homelessness within a community or geographic region, the scale of the need for homelessness services and housing on any given day, and how that need is changing from year to year. PIT data also helps us measure our progress toward the goals of the federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness (see table 1 below). PIT data by Continuum of Care and by state is available on [HUD Exchange](#).

Table 1: Nationally Aggregated Point-in-Time Data for 2016

Population	Total	Sheltered	Unsheltered	Percentage Change 2015-2016	Percentage Change 2010-2016
All People	549,928	373,571 (68%)	176,357 (32%)	-2.6%	-14%
Individuals*	355,212	198,008 (56%)	157,204 (44%)	-0.9%	-10%
Veterans	39,471	26,404 (67%)	13,067 (33%)	-17%	-47%
Chronically Homeless People	77,486	24,596 (32%)	52,890 (68%)	-7%	-35%
Family Households	61,265	55,265 (90%)	6,000 (10%)	-5%	-23%

* People in households without children under 18, or people in households comprised of only children under 18.

The 2016 PIT data estimated that there were 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 national 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 estimate for measuring progress on youth homelessness.

Worst-Case Housing. HUD's [Worst Case Housing Needs 2015 Report to Congress](#), based upon the American Housing Survey conducted by the Census Bureau in 2013, provides an estimate of how many renters there are at any given time 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 found that there were an estimated 7.72 million renters with worst-case housing needs in 2013. However, the survey indicates that the number of worst-case housing needs began to decline in 2013, after a long period of growth: there was a 9% reduction in worst-case housing needs during the 2011-2013 period, which followed a 43% increase during the 2007-2011 period. Survey data for 41 metropolitan areas can be accessed and analyzed through the Census Bureau's [American Housing Survey](#).

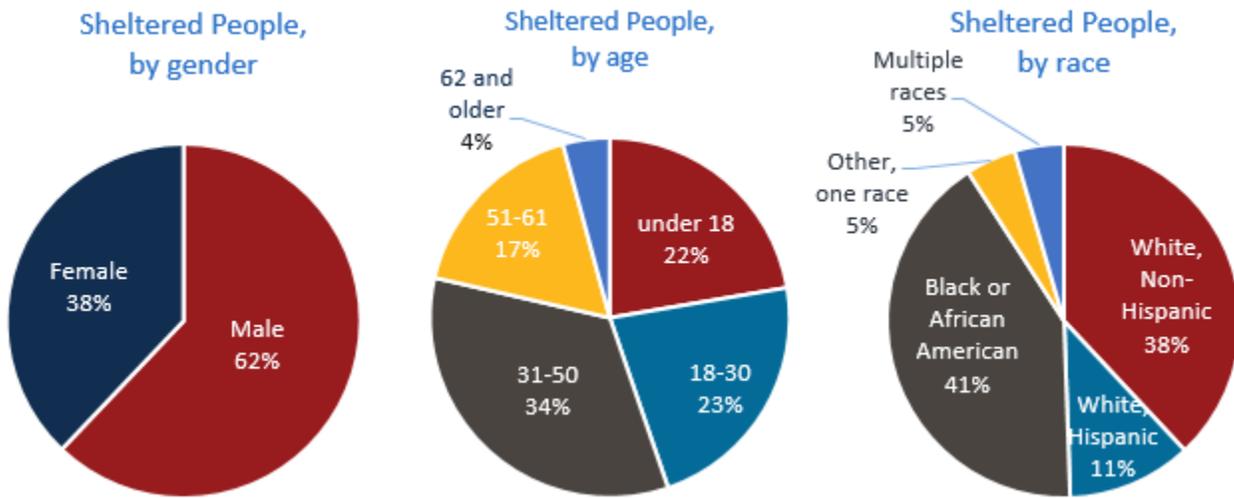
Annualized Data

Sources of annualized data help us understand the number and characteristics of people who experience housing instability or homelessness over the course of a year. Such data are critical to understanding the level of need in our communities and the resources necessary to provide every individual and family with an appropriate and effective level of housing assistance and connections to services to address those needs.

Homeless Management Information Systems: In [Part 2 of the Annual Homeless Assessment Report](#), HUD reports on data that is gathered through local homeless management information systems (HMIS). This data estimates the number and demographics of people who use the nation's emergency shelters and transitional housing projects during a 12-month period. For examples of such demographic data, see figure 1 below.

The most recent report estimated 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. Local data should be available through the organization that manages [your local Continuum of Care](#)'s HMIS data.

Figure 1: Demographics of Sheltered People, 2015 AHAR Report Part 2



Local Education Agency (LEA) Public School Data: For understanding the scope and scale of homelessness among youth and families with children, we also closely consider [data gathered by schools for the U.S. Department of Education](#). This data from the McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program documents the number of children enrolled in public schools who are identified as experiencing homelessness at some point during the school year, including students who were identified as: unsheltered; in shelters, transitional housing, or awaiting foster care; sharing the housing of others (“doubled-up”) due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; or living in hotels/motels due to the lack of alternate, adequate accommodations. As documented in table 2, during the 2014-2015 school year, more than 75% of the students identified as experiencing homelessness were sharing the housing of other people, while 14% were in shelters, 7% were in hotels/motels, and 3% were unsheltered.

Although the EHCY data doesn’t include children younger than three, youth beyond high-school age, youth receiving an education outside of the public school system, or those who are disconnected from school entirely, it does help us understand the challenges facing families, children, and young people in our communities and speaks to the significant need for access to a range of affordable housing options, including both options that are provided through the private market and also through publicly subsidized programs. In addition to the federal data summary, publicly available LEA data on enrollment of students experiencing homelessness is available through the Department of Education’s [EDFacts Data Files](#).

Table 2: Data from the McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program

Residence	School Year 2012-2013	School Year 2013-2014	School Year 2014-2015	Percent Change 2012-2014
Total	1,202,507	1,298,236	1,261,461	4.7%
Shelters, transitional housing, awaiting foster care	174,715 (14.5%)	186,265 (14.3%)	181,386 (14.4%)	3.7%
Doubled-up because of loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason	919,370 (76.5%)	989,844 (76.2%)	958,495 (73.8%)	4.1%
Hotels/Motels, due to lack of alternate, adequate accommodations	69,179 (5.7%)	80,124 (6.2%)	82,159 (6.5%)	15.8%
Unsheltered	39,243 (3.2%)	42,003 (3.2%)	39,421 (3.1%)	0.5%

Importance of Gathering Real-Time Data

Individuals and families across the United States need the foundation of safe and stable housing to go on to achieve their educational, professional, and personal goals. All these sources of data are critical to understanding and responding to homelessness and housing needs in our communities. When looked at comprehensively, the data helps to ensure that we respond with the right solutions, at the right scale, to address current and projected housing 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 drive progress toward the goals of ending homelessness. By including a full range of data at the center of their decision-making processes, communities can stretch the resources they have further—and understand where new resources are needed—while getting better results.

Responding to the Data at the Local Level

Communities should use this full range of data to plan, to make decisions, and to build capacity to respond to the different experiences of individuals and families with a full array of interventions and opportunities—affordable housing, rapid re-housing, supportive housing, and other tailored solutions and services that can help households attain and sustain housing and help set them on a path to lasting success.

As described within table 3 on pages 7 through 10 below, there is no one-size-fits-all solution, but the data can help drive the conversation about your community's current resources and efforts to end homelessness and address a broad range of housing needs. These [tools and documents](#) can help your community implement strategies described in table 3.

Table 3: Key Questions to Consider and Discuss in Response to Your Community’s Data

If your data indicates ...	Consider and discuss the following key questions ...
<p>A large or increasing unsheltered population</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="531 269 1999 370">❑ Can your community deploy additional strategies to strengthen and coordinate outreach and engagement to ensure all people experiencing unsheltered homelessness are being identified, are known by name, regularly contacted, and understand the shelter, services, and housing opportunities available to them? <li data-bbox="531 394 1976 495">❑ Can your community assess whether there are subpopulations among the unsheltered population that are increasing, such as youth under 25 or survivors of domestic violence, in order to develop targeted outreach and engagement strategies? <li data-bbox="531 519 1976 620">❑ If shelter utilization rates are low, can your community assess the current shelter model and identify opportunities to increase shelter utilization, such as through the removal of barriers that prevent people from seeking, accessing, or being eligible for shelter, or implementation of age- and culturally appropriate practices? <li data-bbox="531 644 1969 745">❑ If utilization rates are not low, can your community implement efforts to reduce lengths of stay in emergency shelter by improving housing placement rates and expanding rapid re-housing opportunities, therefore maximizing the number of households that can be assisted each year through the existing supply of shelter? <li data-bbox="531 769 1955 833">❑ Can your community also maximize the number of people that can be assisted by targeting any long-term stayers in shelter for specialized service and housing interventions like supportive housing? <li data-bbox="531 857 1969 956">❑ Can your community strengthen diversion efforts, preventing people from entering emergency shelter by assisting people experiencing housing crises to retain or identify immediate safe alternate housing arrangements and focusing shelter interventions on people who have no such alternate options? <li data-bbox="531 980 1898 1081">❑ Can your community strengthen prevention and in-reach efforts to prevent unsheltered homelessness through stronger discharge planning practices in coordination with public systems, including but not limited to state institutions, county facilities, hospitals, and foster care and child welfare agencies? <li data-bbox="531 1105 1999 1169">❑ Can your community strengthen efforts to link people who are unsheltered to permanent housing opportunities even if they choose to not enter shelter? <li data-bbox="531 1193 1965 1294">❑ If you have a growing population of unsheltered youth under 25, can your community expand the scope and scale of available youth-specific interventions, including rapid re-housing, host homes, transitional housing, and non-time-limited housing opportunities for youth? <li data-bbox="531 1318 1990 1419">❑ Even if all of the strategies above are implemented, can your community assess whether additional low-barrier temporary shelter opportunities are necessary in order both to protect people’s health and safety and to provide rapid exits from homelessness to permanent housing?

<p>A large or increasing sheltered population</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Can your community implement efforts to enhance services and resources provided through emergency shelter programs to reduce lengths of stay and increase exits to permanent housing through rapid re-housing and connections to other permanent, affordable housing opportunities? <input type="checkbox"/> Can your community prioritize and target any people who are long-term stayers in shelter for specialized service and housing interventions, like supportive housing, in order to reduce the number of people who are using a significant number of bed nights and maximize the number of people that can be assisted? <input type="checkbox"/> If you have a growing population of sheltered youth under 25, can your community expand the scope and scale of available youth-specific interventions including rapid re-housing, host homes, transitional housing, and non-time-limited housing opportunities for youth? <input type="checkbox"/> Can your community strengthen diversion efforts, assisting people experiencing housing crises to not have to enter emergency shelter to access assistance by helping them retain or identify immediate safe alternate housing arrangements and, if necessary, connecting them with other services and financial assistance to help them access or sustain permanent housing? <input type="checkbox"/> Can your community prioritize people staying in shelter for access to employment and job placement services and other supportive services, including child care and transportation, to help ensure their successful stabilization in permanent housing? <input type="checkbox"/> Can your community strengthen efforts to link people who are unsheltered to permanent housing opportunities, even if they choose to not enter shelter? <input type="checkbox"/> Can your community assess factors influencing demand for shelter, such as seasonal variations, eviction rates, and/or changes in housing market, and determine whether, even if all the strategies above are implemented, additional low-barrier temporary shelter opportunities are necessary in order both to protect people’s health and safety and to provide rapid exits from homelessness to permanent housing?
<p>A large or increasing number of people paying for their own temporary stays in hotels/motels due to lack of stable housing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Does your community response include partnering with owners/operators of hotels/motels to identify and engage people who are staying in such temporary living arrangements to make sure they are regularly contacted and understand the shelter, services, and housing opportunities available? <input type="checkbox"/> Does your community response ensure that people who are living in hotels/motels at their own expense have access to permanent housing interventions for which they are eligible, or assist them to find other safe, temporary living arrangements while they obtain permanent housing? <input type="checkbox"/> Can your community prioritize people staying in hotels/motels for access to employment and job placement services, and other mainstream resources and programs, to help them increase their incomes and access other housing opportunities and ensure their successful stabilization in permanent housing?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Can your community expand the supply of rapid re-housing interventions, using a variety of funding sources, in order to target households in such living situations? <input type="checkbox"/> Can your community increase access to the private rental market through assistance to reduce screening barriers, flexible financial assistance, and other landlord incentives? <input type="checkbox"/> Can your community assess whether the pipeline of affordable housing meets the projected needs within the community, and seek strategies to expand affordable housing opportunities to provide appropriate and affordable alternatives, if needed?
<p>A large or increasing number of people sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Can your community identify those at risk of or living in dangerous situations and prioritize them for crisis services, or assist them to find alternate safe temporary living arrangements, and connect them with other services and financial assistance to help them access or sustain permanent housing? <input type="checkbox"/> Can your community prioritize people in such circumstances for access to employment and job placement services, and other mainstream resources and programs, to help increase their incomes and access other housing opportunities and ensure their successful stabilization in that housing? <input type="checkbox"/> Can your community assess whether the pipeline of affordable housing meets the projected needs within the community for all populations, including youth under 25, and, if needed, seek strategies to expand affordable housing opportunities, including through changes to regulations regarding land use and zoning requirements to provide appropriate and affordable alternatives?
<p>A large or increasing number of people living in worst-case housing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Can your community identify those living in severely inadequate conditions and prioritize them for crisis services, if needed, or assist them to find alternate safe temporary living arrangements and connect them with other services and financial assistance to help them access or sustain other permanent housing? <input type="checkbox"/> Can your community prioritize people in such circumstances for access to employment and job placement services, and other mainstream resources and programs, to help increase their incomes, to reduce their housing cost burdens, and/or to help them access other housing opportunities and ensure their successful stabilization in that housing? <input type="checkbox"/> Can your community assess whether the pipeline of affordable housing meets the projected needs within the community, and, if needed, seek strategies to expand affordable housing opportunities, including through changes to regulations regarding land use and zoning requirements, to provide appropriate and affordable alternatives?

Appendix: Federal Definitions of Homelessness

Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

HUD [defines homelessness](#) for their programming into four categories. The categories are:

Category 1: Literally Homeless

Individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning:

- (i) Has a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not meant for human habitation;
- (ii) Is living in a publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, and local government programs); or
- (iii) Is exiting an institution where (s)he has resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution

Category 2: Imminent Risk of Homelessness

Individual or family who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence, provided that:

- (i) Residence will be lost within 14 days of the date of application for homeless assistance;
- (ii) No subsequent residence has been identified; and
- (iii) The individual or family lacks the resources or support networks needed to obtain other permanent housing

Category 3: Homeless Under Other Federal Statutes

Unaccompanied youth under 25 years of age, or families with children and youth, who do not otherwise qualify as homeless under this definition, but who:

- (i) Are defined as homeless under the other listed federal statutes;
- (ii) Have not had a lease, ownership interest, or occupancy agreement in permanent housing during the 60 days prior to the homeless assistance application;
- (iii) Have experienced persistent instability as measured by two moves or more during in the preceding 60 days; and
- (iv) Can be expected to continue in such status for an extended period of time due to special needs or barriers

Category 4: Fleeing/Attempting to Flee Domestic Violence

Any individual or family who:

- (i) Is fleeing or attempting to flee their housing or the place they are staying because of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions related to violence that has taken place in the house or has made them afraid to return to the house, including:
 - Trading sex for housing
 - Trafficking
 - Physical abuse
 - Violence (or perceived threat of violence) because of the youth's sexual orientation;
- (ii) Has no other residence; and
- (iii) Lacks the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing.

Department of Education (ED)

Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. § 11434a(2)) [defines homeless children and youth](#) as: A) individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (within the meaning of section 11302(a)(1) of this title); and B) includes

- i. children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;
- ii. children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings (within the meaning of section 11302(a)(2)(C) of this title);
- iii. children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
- iv. migratory children (as such term is defined in section 6399 of title 20) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act defines ‘unaccompanied youth’ as a youth not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian (42 U.S.C. § 11434a(6)).

Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) (42 U.S.C. §5732a) [defines homeless youth](#) as individuals who are “less than 21 years of age ... for whom it is not possible to live in a safe environment with a relative and who have no other safe alternative living arrangement.” This definition, used for the Basic Center and Transitional Living programs, includes only those youth who are unaccompanied by families or caregivers. Additionally,

- For the **Basic Center Program**, a homeless youth is an individual who is less than 18 years of age, or is less than a higher maximum age if the state where the center is located has an applicable state or local law (including a regulation) that permits such higher maximum age in compliance with licensure requirements for child-and youth-serving facilities.
- For the **Transitional Living Program**, the age is defined as 16-21 years of age, or 22 years of age if previously in care under certain circumstances.

In addition, the **Basic Center Program** serves:

- Runaway Youth: An individual who is less than 18 years of age and who absents himself or herself from home or a place of legal residence without the permission of a parent or legal guardian, and
- Youth at Risk of Separation from the Family: An individual— (A) who is less than 18 years of age; and (B) (i) who has a history of running away from the family of such individual; (ii) whose parent, guardian, or custodian is not willing to provide for the basic needs of such individual; or (iii) who is at risk of entering the child welfare system or juvenile justice system as a result of the lack of services available to the family to meet such needs.

The **Street Outreach Program** also uses the following definition of ‘street youth’: An individual who— (A) is— (i) a runaway youth; or (ii) indefinitely or intermittently a homeless youth; and (B) spends a significant amount of time on the street or in other areas that increase the risk to such youth for sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, prostitution, or drug abuse.