

Point-in-Time Count Methodology Sheltered & Unsheltered Homeless Populations

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Overview

This document outlines the methodology that Connecticut will employ to count both the sheltered and unsheltered homeless populations for the annual Point in Time (PIT) count. This year, due to the SARS-CoV-2 global pandemic, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has offered a variety of options to conduct the unsheltered count safely amid the current national and statewide surge in COVID cases that is expected to continue into the winter months. The sheltered count will remain as it has in the past, with a count of those who slept in emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, and safe havens. This year will also include counts of those who have slept in hotels that have been provided by the state Department of Housing (DOH) as a result of the pandemic. In addition, this will be the first year that Connecticut will leverage the year-round data in the Connecticut Homeless Management Information System (CTHMIS) to count the unsheltered population. Provisions will be made to include outreach projects that are not mandated to report into the CT HMIS, and will include an effort to streamline the entire outreach intake process. This document details the specifics of both the sheltered and unsheltered methodologies for the *CT PIT 2021*.

Sheltered and Unsheltered Count Methods

CT PIT 2021 will be the fifteenth year in which the CT HMIS will provide demographic data for clients in emergency shelters, and transitional housing programs, the second year for safe havens, and the first year for street outreach and PATH programs. The CT HMIS will be the main source to verify population count information provided by homeless programs into a separate *CT PIT* database. CT HMIS data is used to provide population-level detail and for the purposes of extrapolating data for missing data values. Providers also will use the CT PIT database to document their housing inventories and confirm population demographics.

A consistent and rigorous methodology ensures that the data are reliable and comparable across years and can be used to design effective interventions to help people experiencing homelessness. Although Connecticut has implemented a consistent and uniform statewide methodology for *CT PIT* implementation since 2007, 2021 will be different due to the pandemic, yet the results will be comparable to previous years' data with the exception of calculations and weighting for 'low-probability' census tracts

The inclusion of Connecticut's year-round street outreach and Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) program data in CT HMIS will take the place of a one-night, volunteer-led effort for the unsheltered count. In addition, this year's unsheltered count will not include census tracts or high- and low-probability sampling focusing instead on its current state-wide outreach data and no weighting factors will be included. The unsheltered counts will be actual confirmed counts based on data in HMIS and any data collected via paper forms and an online form. Because previous years' 'high probability' areas were based on regions known to include unsheltered homeless individuals, Connecticut is using the existing PATH and street outreach enrollments in the same manner.

Connecticut is aware that changing its methodology may raise concerns about a potential undercount of people in low-probability areas or unknown to outreach. Last year, however, only 11 people were found in the randomly sampled low-probability areas. Due to the weighting factor for those found in low probability areas they were counted as 50 people. It is possible the weighting factor artificially increased the actual estimated

number of unsheltered in those areas. Although no methodology is perfect, Connecticut strives to use a data-driven approach in all of its activities and PIT is no different. Connecticut is committed to serving this population and earnestly desires to employ the most accurate means available. Collecting year-round data and increasing the outreach efforts are steps in the right direction. To assist in year-round collection of unsheltered people experiencing homelessness, CCEH is enlisting the support of towns and municipalities across the state in a long-term endeavor to search for and report this vulnerable population.

Sheltered Count

CT PIT 2021 will be conducted the night of Tuesday, January 26, 2021.

The Sheltered Count includes three main components: the collection of demographic or characteristic data on persons in emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, safe havens, and shelters dedicated to survivors of domestic violence; the collection of client population counts among shelters, transitional housing programs, safe havens, rapid rehousing programs, permanent supportive housing programs, other permanent housing for the homeless, and shelters dedicated to serving survivors of domestic violence; and the collection of bed and unit inventory for all program types. The majority of clients who were either relocated from shelters to hotels or who were placed into hotels directly during the pandemic have emergency shelter enrollments. This will allow for the reporting on the demographic and characteristic data.

This year, providers entered the bed counts in the PIT database in November based on the capacity they expect to have on the night of PIT. Since most shelters were decompressed due to COVID and were reduced to 50% capacity, many providers used hotel beds to house the clients displaced during the decompression. The number of individuals and families staying in hotels on the night of PIT will be captured in the PIT database on Tuesday, January 26, 2021. The state is expected to receive additional housing funding to accommodate additional people in the assigned hotels, although the number is not yet known.

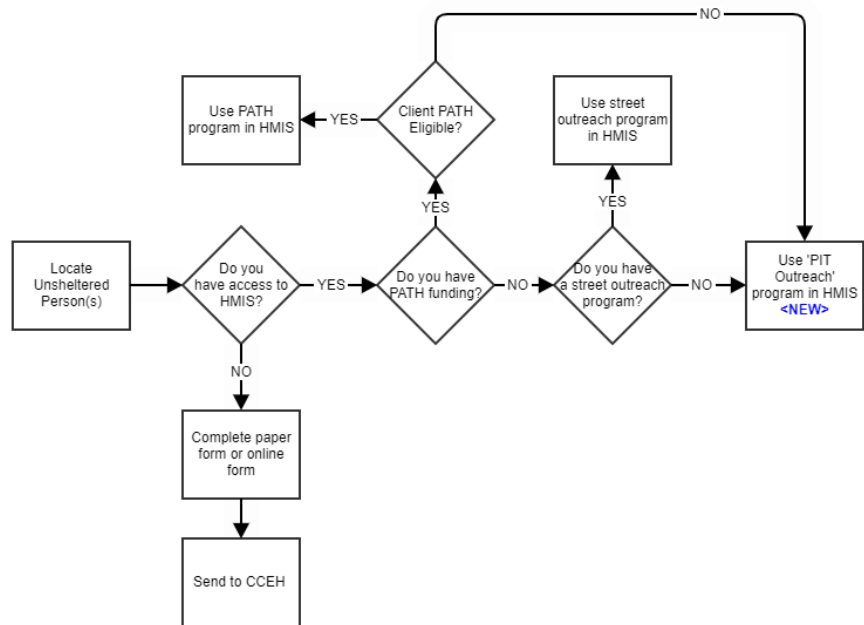
Unsheltered Count

The Unsheltered Count will leverage professional outreach staff to accomplish the unsheltered count in a way that advances our goal of year-round improvements in HMIS outreach data. In addition, the outreach workers will verify within 14 days of the night of the PIT that those in their programs were unsheltered on Tuesday, January 26, 2021. The outreach workers may call the clients or physically observe the individuals are still unsheltered within this timeframe. If this is not feasible within the allotted time, any individual who has an open outreach or PATH enrollment who was not enrolled in a permanent housing and/or emergency shelter program will be counted as unsheltered. Additional funding this year from the CT Department of Housing will increase the outreach staff capacity in the field.

The CT Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH) will also leverage municipal employees across the state through various partnerships with statewide organizations, such as the CT Conference of Municipalities, as well as regional PIT coordinators. The program begins in January 2021 and is intended to be a permanent program to engage towns and cities across the state through the years. Since the program is beginning only a few weeks prior to the PIT count, it is not expected that many towns will be ready to begin counting unsheltered in their regions. Over time, however, the participation of the municipalities will provide insight into a broader geographic coverage of the state than was previously possible. The municipalities will play a significant role in canvassing the previous 'low-probability' areas and provide insight into homelessness in areas that have not been traditionally part of the PIT count.

The long-term goal is to have a mobile application available year-round to both HMIS users and non-HMIS users. This technology will not be available in time for the PIT but will be implemented shortly after the PIT.

The unsheltered count will include data from all open HMIS street outreach programs, including the PATH programs, which the outreach workers have entered into CT HMIS throughout the year – not just on the night of the count. It will also include vetted and de-duplicated data from any paper or online forms received from those who do not have HMIS access.



The HMIS data will be filtered by those clients who have indicated a literally homeless location for the 'Residence Prior' field and who are actively enrolled in the program on the night of PIT. It will also be filtered by clients who have a move-

in date for a permanent housing program or who have an open emergency shelter enrollment. PATH and street outreach workers will contact, either in person or by phone, all clients in their open programs to confirm they were unsheltered on the night of the PIT within 14 days of January 26, 2021. And, as stated above, any individual was not able to be contacted but who has an open outreach or PATH enrollment and who was not enrolled in a permanent housing and/or emergency shelter program will continue to be counted as unsheltered.

This year will also include a new outreach program for any organizations that currently do not enter outreach data designed to not only reflect the questions previously asked in the unsheltered PIT surveys, but will also serve as a streamlined enrollment into a valid CT HMIS program – not just for the purposes of PIT. For organizations that are not required to enter data into CT HMIS, such as municipal governments, human services agencies, police departments and others who in the past have contributed to the unsheltered count as volunteers, but whom this year’s methodology will be able to incorporate as data sources akin to traditional outreach workers, a paper form or online data collection form, will be provided to enable data collection. CCEH will provide data entry assistance for any paper forms that are used and will collect and vet the data prior to entering into the CT HMIS. The diagram depicts the process flow for the various entry points into CT HMIS.

Leveraging CT HMIS to report on all populations – sheltered and unsheltered – will benefit the system as a whole by not only using the statewide database for data entry and tracking, but will improve the quality of the data year-round. Connecticut has an advanced CT HMIS and it is logical that the state pursue a strategy that takes full advantage of the features it offers for robust reporting.

Data Quality

This section covers capturing client demographics, how the chronic homeless status will be verified, data on sub-populations, and the data extrapolation method to be used if the data quality is poor. Since this year’s PIT is centered on professional outreach staff data collection, not volunteer-based observational surveys, it is

anticipated that data quality will be higher than in previous years. This year's count will pivot from canvassing headcounts to querying data.

This will be the first year that data from municipalities, for example, will be collected. Since the municipal campaign is rolling out in January, it is unlikely that there will be a significant participation in time for the 2021 PIT. Over time, the municipalities will play a critical role in helping identify people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in the more rural regions of the state, which in past PIT counts would be considered the 'low probability' census tracts. The plan, however, is to encourage participation year-round.

For other non-HMIS participating organizations that may opt to use the paper form to identify unsheltered people, there is always a risk that the person prefers to remain anonymous or provides false information. This is the same challenge that professional outreach workers experience. As such, CCEH will attempt to de-duplicate with the information provided but this is always a factor to be considered and is a part of working with the unsheltered community. CCEH believes it is more important to make contact and account for each person even if this may mean a duplicate record exists than to err on the side of not entering the person into the system for fear of increasing the unsheltered count.

Client Demographics

Information on key demographic characteristics will be collected from open enrollments for all persons staying in Connecticut's emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, safe havens, and shelters dedicated to survivors of domestic violence on the night of the count as well as for open street outreach and PATH enrollments. Data elements collected for the purposes of CT PIT have been aligned with the everyday intake assessment which all emergency shelters, transitional housing projects, safe havens, and street outreach/PATH usually use to enter clients. If data was properly and fully entered for all active clients in CT HMIS on the night of the count, shelters, transitional housing, safe haven and street outreach/PATH projects have no additional demographic data to collect as this data will be pulled from the CT HMIS. Shelters for survivors of domestic violence will enter the data for their clients directly into the PIT database. These records will be extracted and added to the overall counts.

For clients staying in emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, and safe havens that do not participate in CT HMIS, demographic data will be collected in aggregate and entered into the Point-in-Time database designed to capture this information, as well as bed and unit inventory for the Housing Inventory. The non-CT HMIS participatory projects enter their aggregate data directly into the PIT database. There will be a new street outreach project available via paper or online for any organizations that do not participate in CT HMIS.

Chronic Homelessness Verification

Confirming the chronic homeless status for the sheltered population is a key element in the PIT and is required by HUD for reporting purposes. CCEH will use the By Name List (BNL) data in CT HMIS to determine the Chronic Homeless Status of people experiencing homelessness in CT. The BNL is more accurate than the client-level self-reported data as the chronicity information has been confirmed or rejected by a case manager. This includes verifying the person has the required length of time homeless: 1 year or longer, or 4 or more episodes in the last three years with a total length of time homeless of 1 year or longer; as well as verifying that they have a qualifying disability based on the requirements outlined in HUD's Final Rule on Defining Chronic Homelessness found here: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Defining-Chronically-Homeless-Final-Rule.pdf>.

As in previous years, the BNL data will be cross-referenced with all people in CT HMIS participating shelters and all people identified as unsheltered homeless, including PATH and Street Outreach programs, to determine the most accurate number of verified chronically homeless adults and families in each Continuum of Care. This includes using CT HMIS IDs, First Name, Last Name, and Date of Birth to electronically match records from CT HMIS participating projects to the BNL. Since domestic violence (DV) shelters do not participate in CT HMIS, their chronic homeless numbers will be based on self-reported data.

Electronically verifying the data is not enough, however. Coordinated Access Network staff will need to verify that all of the people experiencing chronic homelessness were, in fact, still homeless on the night of the count. Clients residing in an emergency shelter will be considered verified as they were in a shelter on the night of the count and therefore we know that they were still experiencing homelessness on the night of the count. CCEH will work with Coordinated Access Networks in advance of the Point-in-Time Count to ensure they have enough staff available to outreach clients on their By-Name-List that were not staying in shelter.

For clients who self-identify as chronically homeless by answering the questions that meet the criteria for chronic homelessness (*literally homeless, have a disability of long duration, and have a length of time homeless that meet the requirements outlined in HUD's final rule on defining Chronic Homelessness: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Defining-Chronically-Homeless-Final-Rule.pdf>*), but do not appear on the By-Name-List will retain their chronic categorization for the purposes of PIT.

Sub-Populations

Demographic and the various sub-population data for sheltered people experiencing homelessness on the night of the PIT count will be pulled from the CT HMIS self-reported intake assessments for those persons residing in an emergency shelter, transitional housing, or safe haven project. Data includes disabling conditions, veteran status, current domestic violence, and if they are part of a family. The questions include whether or not the person has HIV or AIDS; a physical or developmental disability; a chronic health condition; or any mental health or substance abuse issues. In addition, questions regarding veteran status and if the person is currently experiencing homelessness because they are fleeing domestic violence are included.

Ninety percent of shelter, transitional housing projects, and safe havens in the state participate in CT HMIS. The remaining 10% of projects that do not participate will provide client-level survey data. This approach allows for a complete census count of sheltered homeless and will be a flagship year to report on the unsheltered homeless using CT HMIS data, and allows for capturing all population and subpopulation data.

For the unsheltered population, the sub-population data is captured on the PATH enrollments, many outreach enrollments, and on the new PIT unsheltered enrollment. There are a few street outreach programs currently in the system, however, that do not require collection of this data as part of their intake.

In order to avoid duplication of any paper or non-HMIS online forms received, several prevention methods are used:

- Mandatory duplication checks in CT HMIS when entering a new client for any program
- Comparison of personally identifying information (PII), such as name, date of birth, and Social Security Number
- Blitz count of persons in shelters (i.e., count occurred at same time to avoid double-counting)

Extrapolation of CT HMIS Data to Inform Subpopulations

In previous years, volunteers completed surveys for the unsheltered population to gather key data and observational surveys. More than 40% of last year's surveys were observational, meaning the volunteer did not actually speak with the person and instead completed the survey based on their observations. This resulted in the need to extrapolate data in order to complete the missing fields. This year, however, the focus will be on the professional outreach teams and/or trained partners collecting the data as part of the existing year-round street outreach or PATH enrollments or with the new streamlined program for new unsheltered clients. No weights or confidence intervals will be applied to the estimates obtained from the PATH and street outreach programs. These would be the equivalent in past years' to the 'high-probability' areas and therefore there is no sampling error.,

If, however, the data quality is low, particularly for data collected via the paper or online application, data extrapolation may be needed. In order to account for a potential high rate of non-responses, all completed responses will be proportionally applied to those who did not respond. This will maximize the sample size of completed responses. If, for example, 25% of completed questions of gender indicate that they are female, this rate will be applied to all non-responses for gender.

Additional Considerations

COVID-19 Data for 2021

Due to the SARS-CoV-2 virus in 2020, data fields have been added to the homeless management information system (CT HMIS) in CT to capture those who are experiencing homelessness due to the pandemic. This data will be reflected in the PIT count as determined by HUD.

Evacuee Data for 2021

In the event a natural disaster brings evacuees experiencing homelessness to CT, counting protocols will be put into place to include this population. The level of detail in the data received from FEMA or other government agencies involved with the evacuee population will determine the capacity to provide extrapolated estimates of subpopulation data, i.e. chronic, veteran, severe mental illness, chronic substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, and domestic violence.

Youth Data

The 2021 PIT will include any youth (those aged 18-24) found either sheltered or unsheltered on the night of the PIT. In previous years, the PIT report included data from a week-long Youth Outreach and Count (YOC) effort. Due to the different methodologies for capturing the youth data, CCEH determined that for PIT 2021 any data captured in the YOC will be documented in a separate report that focuses specifically on youth. It has not yet been determined if a YOC will be conducted in 2021. The PIT will continue to report on any youth found in shelters, transitional housing, or safe havens, as well as those found unsheltered the night of the PIT.