

# OREGON'S 2011 POINT IN TIME HOMELESS COUNT

## **Background & Purpose:**

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires that states receiving federal Continuum of Care funding coordinate a count of all people experiencing homelessness on a given night. HUD encourages annual counts and mandates that a count be done every two years. The count is scheduled for the last week of January, and volunteers from around the state are recruited by local organizations to go out into the community to conduct a count of everyone experiencing homelessness in Oregon on that night, whether they are sleeping in emergency shelters or camping underneath bridges. The count provides a snapshot of the situation for tens of thousands of Oregonians who do not have a permanent home to call their own and it provides important information that is used to better understand and address the problem.

The data collected allows the state to comply with HUD requirements for reporting data on homelessness. In Oregon the data is also used as a basis for distributing funds to community organizations for various state and federal homelessness-related programs.

In addition, the information generated from the count is used to better understand the problem of homelessness in the state. For example, it is because of this kind of count that we have been able to understand that one-third of all people who are currently homeless in Oregon are under the age of 18. Of those children, almost 10% of them are unaccompanied youth. In short, by collecting detailed population information through this point in time count we are better able to understand the problems affecting the people experiencing homelessness, better able to understand who they are, and better able to provide services that meet their needs.

## **Count Components:**

The Point In Time Homeless Count has two main components: a "shelter count" that includes all people using emergency shelter services, those turned away from services due to insufficient space, and those living in transitional housing; and a "street count" of all other people experiencing homelessness who are not using those services on the night of the count.

The shelter count is the more straightforward portion of the homeless count. It is a full and complete survey of everyone staying at emergency housing shelters or staying at transitional housing, a survey of all people "turned away" from services due to lack of space, and a survey of all people given alternative temporary housing (such as hotel/motel vouchers) due to lack of space at a shelter. The street count is more wide-ranging and is an attempt to contact anyone experiencing homelessness in Oregon who would not be counted by the shelter count. The methods for enumerating the homeless who are not already receiving services or shelter from community agencies can range from having volunteers go out into the community where known homeless camps exist to conducting special events with food/clothing/blanket giveaways to bring more people off of the street.

The shelter count has been conducted in Oregon, with varying degrees of participation and accuracy, going back to the late 1980's. It was initially only a "shelter" count and has since expanded in scope, particularly in the last decade with expanded street count efforts, to try to include everyone who is experiencing homelessness. The expansion of the scope of the count

has greatly increased the accuracy of the data collected, so that now the count better represents all of the people in Oregon who do not have the basic necessity of stable housing.

### **Defining Homelessness:**

While the general intent is to count every person in Oregon experiencing homelessness on that night, there are some distinctions to be made in the exact definition of homelessness. The differences between Oregon and Federal definitions of homelessness mean that when comparing data from the two sources there will, by definition alone, be a discrepancy. Oregon's Ending Homelessness Advisory Council (EHAC), which is responsible for overseeing the state's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, establishes the state's definition of homelessness. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) establishes the federal definition of homelessness.

Both the state and the federal definition of homelessness specifically include:

- any person staying at an emergency housing shelter out of necessity,
- any person living in transitional housing,
- any person living on the streets or staying somewhere not intended for human habitation,
- people who were turned away from emergency services, and
- people provided a voucher in order to stay at a motel, hotel or campground.

The federal definition of homelessness does not include people who are staying with other people out of economic necessity (often referred to as *doubled-up* or *couch-surfing*), while people in that situation are considered to be homeless under Oregon's definition.

The federal and state definitions of homelessness do not count people living in *permanent supportive housing* or those receiving *rental or mortgage assistance*. However, in previous counts the state encouraged all Community Action Agencies to collect and report information about this population along with the homeless count figures. In 2011 the state decided not to require collecting this data; this change was made because individual participating agencies did their own data entry rather than having it done centrally by the state. Because of this change, it is not always possible to compare these numbers between counties or within counties over multiple years.

### **Factors Influencing the 2011 Point In Time Homeless Count:**

A variety of factors can influence the results of the count from year to year. This section attempts to explain how some of those factors impacted this year's count.

One of HUD's stated reasons for holding the count in January is that the colder weather increases the likelihood that people in need of shelter will seek emergency services, which increases the likelihood that more people who are experiencing homelessness are counted. This year the weather was considered colder than usual in many areas and that might have hampered accurately counting people not staying at emergency shelters due to the capacity of volunteers to do outreach in the cold. Clackamas County Social Services Division, Community in Action, covering Malheur and Harney counties, and CAPECO, covering Umatilla, Morrow, Gilliam, and Wheeler counties, indicated that the colder weather limited the reach of their street count. In contrast, NeighborImpact, covering Deschutes, Jefferson and Crook counties, indicated that warmer than usual weather allowed volunteers to reach more people for the street count.

Good publicity leading up to, and especially the day of, the count means that more people in need of these services will turn out and be counted. Several groups indicated that the 2011 count had less publicity surrounding the event than in previous years, which might have reduced turnout. Some areas have had success combining providing free services with the night of the count in order to increase turnout. United Community Action Network (UCAN), covering Douglas and Josephine counties, reported that they combined the day of the count with free veterinary care, as well as other free services in order to encourage more people to turn out and be counted.

Lastly, several organizations noted that the work required to perform an accurate count has been enormous, and there was also a large amount of work put into last year's very successful effort to increase participation in the count. Housing has also been the focus of a great deal of attention in the last two years due to the foreclosure crisis, so many of the same agencies and volunteers who work on the homeless count have also been busy administering or working on projects to prevent people from losing their homes. The general effect has been a feeling of burnout and understaffing among some groups and volunteers working on these critical issues.

### **Reporting Changes:**

Previous to 2011, statewide Community Action Agencies collected homeless count information on enumeration *sheets* and the majority of these agencies sent the paper versions of the forms to Oregon Housing & Community Services while a few urban agencies entered the information electronically and sent them to OHCS via a data transfer. Once OHCS received these data, it would be entered by agency staff into an internal count database and cleaned up by program staff to comply with household composition standards. When questions arose about a particular household *sheet* the individual agency was contacted for further information, referencing the specific *sheet* number. This approach, though time consuming for OHCS staff, allowed for internal control over the data entry and review process.

In 2011, the data reporting approach changed significantly as the state contracted to use the Service Point *Homeless Management Information System* through the City of Portland, Oregon. In this revised method, each participating agency was given access to the web-based Service Point software and was responsible for data entry and review. This shift was made to both increase data ownership and understanding at the local level, as well as to allow for the data to be generated, in compliance with HUD regulations, from an HMIS system including *personally identifiable information* to ensure that households are not being reported by multiple organizations participating in the point in time count. One impact of transferring data ownership to local areas was an increase in ambiguity of household types, categories, and composition.

The statewide collection of data is broken down into six household types: one parent families with one or more children, two parent families with one or more children, single individuals, unaccompanied pregnant youth, unaccompanied youth, and couples without children. Some of the non-standard households seen in 2011 are: multi-generational households, households where not all members were surveyed during the count, parents under the age of 18, and parents who live apart from their children due to their present circumstances. For example, a single parent might have her child stay with friends while she continues to live on the street. While in the past there was standard treatment of these individuals, often dividing the household into their individual components, the shift in data ownership means that different agencies categorized these types of households differently. Because of this increased ambiguity in the structure of the households, the total number of households of any specific type will not necessarily add up to the expected total given the household composition.

In 2011 HUD and the Veterans Administration decided that instead of VA specific data, for the first time the nation's Point In Time Homeless Counts would become the source of the definitive federal estimate of veteran homelessness and issued guidance requiring the completion of this section of demographics (<http://www.hudhre.info/documents/2011PITVetGuidance.pdf> ). While the question of veteran status had always been asked, attention toward the issue resulted in a higher number of responses to the section. Reporting information about homeless veterans did not appear to be uniform across the state, but this year did see an increase in the number of people reported to be veterans. This increase is likely due to an increase in focus on veterans, as there is no evidence that there was an underlying increase in the number of veterans who are experiencing homelessness.

### **Data Differences:**

Counting a population without identifiable residences where they can be found and surveyed, like those experiencing homelessness, is a challenging endeavor in any situation. Furthermore shifting local level methods for collecting it have a significant impact on the data that gets reported year-to-year. These methodological changes can be due, in some cases, to turnover in staff or volunteers which impacts local knowledge on how to best capture information. In other cases, expanded efforts and media attention one year may be followed by minimal efforts or attention in the following year. As such, it is critical that caution is used when comparing these figures over time.

In addition to these predictable, yet largely unquantifiable, methodological shifts in homeless count figures we also wanted to point out a few numerically significant changes that we know to be true in examining this 2011 count against prior years:

- Multnomah County only conducts its street count every-other-year in odd years, so no street count was conducted in 2010. That street count captures 1000-2000 people, so a comparison of 2011 data to 2009 is preferred.
- Lane County's methodology in 2010 included approximately 1000 people that were not counted before and were not included in 2011. When making comparisons with previous years, 2009 is a better comparison for the 2011 data than 2010.
- Clackamas County's data had not been fully reported or included in the report prior to 2011; this issue was corrected in the 2011 count, so will be more accurate moving forward.

**Warning: Be cautious when comparing homeless counts over time as some shifts in numbers are due to methodology changes, not to actual changes in the number of people experiencing homelessness.**

## Report Tables:

All tables in the report only include those meeting the state definition of homeless (which does include those who are “doubled up”, meaning they are staying with friends or family due to economic necessity), and do not include any person living in permanent supportive housing or receiving rent or mortgage assistance, except for tables 8, 9, 10 and 11 which specifically include people receiving that form of assistance.

Specifically each table includes the following:

**Table 1:** includes general information about all people counted who were experiencing homelessness on the night of the count. This includes those who were: staying in emergency shelters or transitional housing, were turned away from a shelter due to lack of space, were provided a voucher for a motel or campground instead of space within an emergency shelter, or were living unsheltered.

**Table 2:** includes general information about all people counted who were experiencing homelessness on the night of the count who were staying in emergency shelters or were provided a voucher for a motel or campground instead of space within an emergency shelter

**Table 3:** includes general information about all people counted who were experiencing homelessness on the night of the count who were staying in transitional housing

**Table 4:** includes general information about all people counted who were experiencing homelessness on the night of the count who were turned away from a shelter due to lack of space or were living unsheltered.

**Table 5:** includes general information about all people counted who were experiencing homelessness on the night of the count who were living unsheltered.

**Table 6:** includes general information about all people counted who were experiencing homelessness on the night of the count who were classified as Chronically Homeless by HUD’s federal definition prior to 2011. The pre-2011 federal definition of person experiencing chronic homeless was: those **single individuals** who have **either been continuously homelessness for a year or more, or had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past year** as well as having a **disabling condition** (substance abuse, mental/emotional disorder). In 2011 the federal definition of chronic homelessness was altered to be consistent with the State of Oregon definition which does not limit chronic homelessness to those who are single.

This table is included only for comparability with previous homeless count reports.

**Tables 7** includes general information about all people counted who were experiencing homelessness on the night of the count who were classified as Chronically Homeless by the State of Oregon as well as HUD’s federal definition. The definition of person experiencing chronic homeless is: those **individuals** who have **either been continuously homelessness for a year or more, or had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past year** as well as having a **disabling condition** (substance abuse, mental/emotional disorder).

**Table 8:** includes general information about all people counted who were receiving housing assistance. Individuals receiving rent or mortgage assistance do not meet the State of Oregon

definition of homeless. This information was not necessarily collected by all agencies and areas conducting the count.

**Table 9:** includes information about the services provided for all people counted in the point in time count who meet the State definition of homelessness (staying in emergency shelters or transitional housing, were turned away from a shelter due to lack of space, were provided a voucher for a motel or campground instead of space within an emergency shelter, or were living unsheltered) as well as those receiving housing (rent or mortgage) assistance.

**Table 10:** includes information about the services provided with McKinney-Vento funds for all people counted in the point in time count who meet the State definition of homelessness (staying in emergency shelters or transitional housing, were turned away from a shelter due to lack of space, were provided a voucher for a motel or campground instead of space within an emergency shelter, or were living unsheltered) as well as those receiving housing (rent or mortgage) assistance.

**Table 11:** includes race & ethnicity information all people counted who were experiencing homelessness on the night of the count. This includes those who were: staying in emergency shelters or transitional housing, were turned away from a shelter due to lack of space, were provided a voucher for a motel or campground instead of space within an emergency shelter, or were living unsheltered.

**Table 12:** includes race & ethnicity information about all people counted who were experiencing chronic homelessness on the night of the count, according to the pre-2011 Federal/HUD definition. The pre-2011 federal definition of person experiencing chronic homeless was: those **single individuals** who have **either been continuously homelessness for a year or more, or had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past year** as well as having a **disabling condition** (substance abuse, mental/emotional disorder). In 2011 the federal definition of chronic homelessness was altered to be consistent with the State of Oregon definition which does not limit chronic homelessness to those who are single.

This table is included only for comparability with previous homeless count reports.

**Table 13:** includes race & ethnicity information about all people counted who were classified as Chronically Homeless by the State of Oregon as well as HUD's federal definition. The definition of person experiencing chronic homeless is: those **individuals** who have **either been continuously homelessness for a year or more, or had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past year** as well as having a **disabling condition** (substance abuse, mental/emotional disorder).

**Table 14:** includes present situation information by HOUSEHOLDS for all counted who were experiencing homelessness on the night of the count who were turned away from a shelter due to lack of space or were living unsheltered.

**Table 15:** includes present situation information by POPULATIONS for all counted who were experiencing homelessness on the night of the count who were turned away from a shelter due to lack of space or were living unsheltered.

**Table 16:** includes the stated causes of homelessness by HOUSEHOLDS for all counted who were experiencing homelessness on the night of the count. This includes those who were:

staying in emergency shelters or transitional housing, were turned away from a shelter due to lack of space, were provided a voucher for a motel or campground instead of space within an emergency shelter, or were living unsheltered.

**Table 17:** includes the stated causes of homelessness by HOUSEHOLDS for all counted who were experiencing homelessness on the night of the count who were staying in transitional housing, emergency shelters or were provided a voucher for a motel or campground instead of space within an emergency shelter

**Table 18:** includes the stated causes of homelessness by HOUSEHOLDS for all counted who were experiencing homelessness on the night of the count who were turned away from a shelter due to lack of space or were living unsheltered.

**Table 19:** includes the School Attendance by Grade Level for all counted who were experiencing homelessness on the night of the count. This includes those who were: staying in emergency shelters or transitional housing, were turned away from a shelter due to lack of space, were provided a voucher for a motel or campground instead of space within an emergency shelter, or were living unsheltered.

This table is based on answers given to two different questions asked as part of the count:

-Are you attending school?

-And what grade?

Both questions were not always answered, so there are numerous cases where we are certain the person is attending school, but we do not know which grade, and other cases where we know what grade but are not certain that the child regularly attends school. Because of this, the "Total Children by Grade Level" column is not necessarily equal to the sum of the two columns "Yes, Child is Attending School" and "No, Child is not Attending School."

**Table 20:** includes the School Attendance by Grade Level for all counted who were Unaccompanied Pregnant Youth (under 18 years of age) and experiencing homelessness on the night of the count. This includes those who were: staying in emergency shelters or transitional housing, were turned away from a shelter due to lack of space, were provided a voucher for a motel or campground instead of space within an emergency shelter, or were living unsheltered.

This table is based on answers given to two different questions asked as part of the count:

-Are you attending school?

-And what grade?

Both questions were not always answered, so there are numerous cases where we are certain the person is attending school, but we do not know which grade, and other cases where we know what grade but are not certain that the child regularly attends school. Because of this, the "Total Children by Grade Level" column is not necessarily equal to the sum of the two columns "Yes, Child is Attending School" and "No, Child is not Attending School."

**Table 21:** includes the School Attendance by Grade Level for all counted who were Unaccompanied Youth (under 18 years of age) and experiencing homelessness on the night of the count. This includes those who were: staying in emergency shelters or transitional housing, were turned away from a shelter due to lack of space, were provided a voucher for a motel or campground instead of space within an emergency shelter, or were living unsheltered.

This table is based on answers given to two different questions asked as part of the count:

-Are you attending school?

-And what grade?

Both questions were not always answered, so there are numerous cases where we are certain the person is attending school, but we do not know which grade, and other cases where we know what grade but are not certain that the child regularly attends school. Because of this, the "Total Children by Grade Level" column is not necessarily equal to the sum of the two columns "Yes, Child is Attending School" and "No, Child is not Attending School."

**Table 22:** includes the School Attendance by Grade Level for all counted who were children (under 18 years of age) in one parent families and experiencing homelessness on the night of the count. This includes those who were: staying in emergency shelters or transitional housing, were turned away from a shelter due to lack of space, were provided a voucher for a motel or campground instead of space within an emergency shelter, or were living unsheltered.

This table is based on answers given to two different questions asked as part of the count:

-Are you attending school?

-And what grade?

Both questions were not always answered, so there are numerous cases where we are certain the person is attending school, but we do not know which grade, and other cases where we know what grade but are not certain that the child regularly attends school. Because of this, the "Total Children by Grade Level" column is not necessarily equal to the sum of the two columns "Yes, Child is Attending School" and "No, Child is not Attending School."

**Table 23:** includes the School Attendance by Grade Level for all counted who were children (under 18 years of age) in two parent families and experiencing homelessness on the night of the count. This includes those who were: staying in emergency shelters or transitional housing, were turned away from a shelter due to lack of space, were provided a voucher for a motel or campground instead of space within an emergency shelter, or were living unsheltered.

This table is based on answers given to two different questions asked as part of the count:

-Are you attending school?

-And what grade?

Both questions were not always answered, so there are numerous cases where we are certain the person is attending school, but we do not know which grade, and other cases where we know what grade but are not certain that the child regularly attends school. Because of this, the "Total Children by Grade Level" column is not necessarily equal to the sum of the two columns "Yes, Child is Attending School" and "No, Child is not Attending School."

**Table 24:** includes secondary population characteristics for all people counted who were experiencing homelessness on the night of the count. This includes those who were: staying in emergency shelters or transitional housing, were turned away from a shelter due to lack of space, were provided a voucher for a motel or campground instead of space within an emergency shelter, or were living unsheltered.

**Table 25:** includes secondary population characteristics for all people counted who were who were experiencing chronic homelessness on the night of the count, according to the pre-2011 Federal/HUD definition. The pre-2011 federal definition of person experiencing chronic homeless was: those **single individuals** who have **either been continuously homelessness for a year or more, or had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past year** as well as having a **disabling condition** (substance abuse, mental/emotional disorder). In 2011 the

federal definition of chronic homelessness was altered to be consistent with the State of Oregon definition which does not limit chronic homelessness to those who are single.

This table is included only for comparability with previous homeless count reports.

**Table 26:** includes secondary population characteristics for all people counted who were classified as Chronically Homeless by the State of Oregon as well as HUD's federal definition. The definition of person experiencing chronic homeless is: those **individuals** who have **either been continuously homelessness for a year or more, or had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past year** as well as having a **disabling condition** (substance abuse, mental/emotional disorder).

**Table 27:** includes secondary population characteristics for all people counted who were NOT classified as Chronically Homeless by the State of Oregon as well as HUD's federal definition. The definition of person experiencing chronic homeless is: those **individuals** who have **either been continuously homelessness for a year or more, or had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past year** as well as having a **disabling condition** (substance abuse, mental/emotional disorder).

**Table 28:** includes length of homelessness data for all people counted who were experiencing homelessness on the night of the count. This includes those who were: staying in emergency shelters or transitional housing, were turned away from a shelter due to lack of space, were provided a voucher for a motel or campground instead of space within an emergency shelter, or were living unsheltered. As not everyone answered this question, the table includes only those that did.