# How Many People Experience Homelessness?

Attempts by the federal government to estimate the number of people who are homeless have only taken place on a regular basis for a little more than a decade. Prior to that, there had been several national estimates of homelessness but nothing both comprehensive and recurring.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is responsible for collecting and reporting data about the scale of homelessness. Congress initiated HUD's data collection efforts with a funding set-aside in the department's FY1999 appropriations bill, to be used to collect homelessness data. (See P.L. 105-276, which references House Appropriations Committee Report H.Rept. 105-610).

HUD implemented data collection through local Continuums of Care (CoCs), the cities, counties, or combinations of both that are the recipients of HUD's Homeless Assistance Grants. CoCs are expected to collect data and report to HUD. Since the mid-2000s, CoCs have regularly submitted data to HUD, which, in turn, releases information as part of Annual Homeless Assessment Reports (AHARs). HUD has released an AHAR each year from 2005 through 2017. (AHARs are available on HUD's website at https://www.hudexchange.info/hdx/guides/ahar/)

## HUD Data Sources

HUD reports two different estimates of homelessness in the AHARs: point-in-time counts from one day during the year and full-year estimates based on a sample of jurisdictions.

The two data sources have strengths and weaknesses, discussed below. This In Focus notes when and why one source or the other is used to present data.

### Point-in-Time (PIT) Counts

HUD requires communities receiving funds through the Homeless Assistance Grants to conduct annual PIT counts of people experiencing homelessness.

- **Time Period:** The counts are to occur on one day during the last week of January. Therefore, the counts are a snapshot of the number of people who are homeless on a given day. *They are not meant to represent the total number of people who experience homelessness over the course of a year*. PIT count results were first released for 2005.
- **Living Situation:** The counts are meant to capture *all* persons experiencing homelessness including those living in shelters, transitional housing, the streets, and other places not meant for human habitation.
- **Method:** The PIT count is meant to capture all people experiencing homelessness and is not an estimate based on a sample (though local CoCs may use samples to arrive at their totals). HUD aggregates all data received from CoCs.

### Full-Year Estimates

Data for the full-year estimates of persons experiencing homelessness come from local Homeless Management

Information Systems (HMIS). Through HMIS, local jurisdictions collect information about homeless individuals they serve, and this is aggregated in information systems at the community or state level.

- **Time Period:** The HMIS estimates differ from PIT counts in that they are based on a full year's worth of information (rather than one day). The estimates are also based on the federal fiscal year, from October 1 through September 30. Full-year estimates were first released for FY2007 (FY2005 and FY2006 estimates used three and six months of data, respectively).
- **Living Situation:** The HMIS estimates only include individuals who are sheltered—residing in emergency shelters or transitional housing during the relevant time periods. *Estimates do not include persons living on the street or in other places not meant for human habitation.*
- **Method:** The estimates are based on a sample of communities rather than an aggregation of all communities. As a result, the estimates include confidence intervals available as part of the AHARs and supporting documents.

Both PIT count and HMIS full-year estimates are published in HUD's AHARs. See **Table 1** for results from 2008 to 2017, though HMIS data are not yet available for 2017.

## Table 1. People Experiencing Homelessness

| Year | HMIS Full-Year Estimate | Point-in-Time Count |
|------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 2008 | 1,593,794 | 639,784 |
| 2009 | 1,558,917 | 630,227 |
| 2010 | 1,593,150 | 637,077 |
| 2011 | 1,502,196 | 623,788 |
| 2012 | 1,488,371 | 621,553 |
| 2013 | 1,422,360 | 590,364 |
| 2014 | 1,488,465 | 576,450 |
| 2015 | 1,484,576 | 564,708 |
| 2016 | 1,421,196 | 549,928 |
| 2017 | — | 553,742 |

**Source:** HUD's Annual Homeless Assessment Reports, https://www.hudexchange.info/hdx/guides/ahar/. Data from the 2007 to 2014 AHARs were revised in the 2015 AHAR, so numbers may be different from what was reported in previous years.
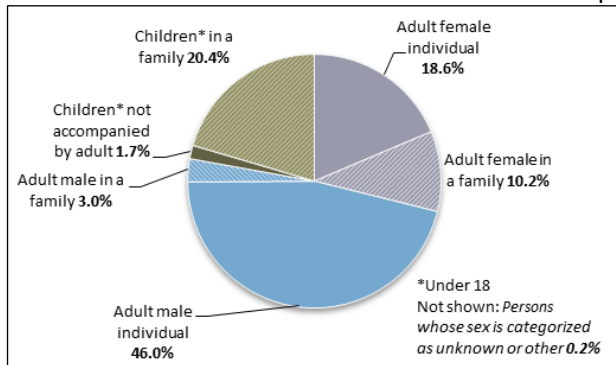
## Demographic Data

### Adults and Children

According to both PIT counts and HMIS estimates, the majority of homeless people are individual adults (i.e.,

those not accompanied by children). In FY2016, according to HMIS data, nearly 65% of people experiencing sheltered homelessness were individual adults. Children represented 22% of the sheltered homeless population. **Figure 1** shows the percentages of adults and children who are homeless, and their familial status, using HMIS data. (HMIS data were used because a greater range of data are available.)

**Figure 1. Homeless Adults and Children**
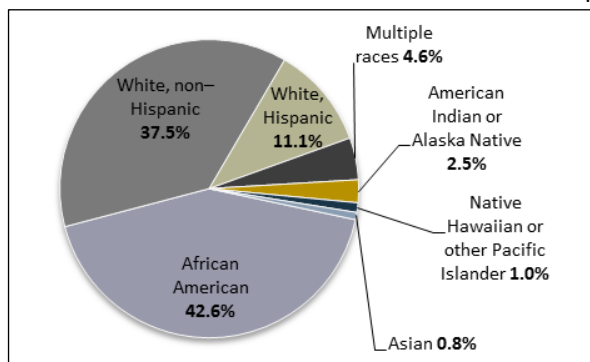2016 HMIS Full-Year Estimates of Sheltered Homeless People



**Source:** 2016 Annual Homeless Assessment Report and supporting materials; https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/5640/2016-ahar-part-2-estimates-of-homelessness-in-the-us/.

**Note:** Transgender adults are included based on their gender identity. Families are made up of at least one adult age 18 and over and one child under 18.

## Racial Composition

According to HMIS data, African Americans make up the largest percentage of homeless individuals, followed by white, non-Hispanics. See **Figure 2** for homeless people reported by race using 2016 HMIS data.

**Figure 2. Homeless Population by Race**
2016 HMIS Full-Year Estimates of Sheltered Homeless People



**Source:** 2016 Annual Homeless Assessment Report, https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/5640/2016-ahar-part-2-estimates-of-homelessness-in-the-us/.
**Notes:** The total exceeds 100% due to rounding. Percentages are based on persons with race known. Persons with unknown race made up 3.0% of all sheltered homeless persons.

## Select Subpopulations

The PIT counts separately report the number of homeless individuals who are veterans, who experience chronic homelessness, and who are unaccompanied youth. Homeless youth are those under age 25. Chronically homeless individuals have one or more disabling conditions

and have been homeless continuously for one year or had four or more episodes of homelessness in three years. HUD and the Department of Veterans Affairs began collaborating to report the number of homeless veterans starting in 2009.

**Table 2** contains numbers of homeless veterans, chronically homeless individuals, and unaccompanied homeless children and youth. PIT count data were used because HMIS full-year data do not break out all three subpopulations. (Note that veterans are also included in HMIS full-year estimates. See CRS Report RL34024, *Veterans and Homelessness*, by Libby Perl.)

**Table 2. Homeless Subpopulations**
2007-2017 PIT Counts of All Homeless People

| Year | Veterans | Chronically Homeless Individuals[a] | Unaccompanied Youth[b] (under age 25) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2007 | — | 119,813 | — |
| 2008 | — | 120,115 | — |
| 2009 | 73,367 | 107,212 | — |
| 2010 | 74,087 | 106,062 | — |
| 2011 | 65,455 | 103,522 | — |
| 2012 | 60,579 | 96,268 | — |
| 2013 | 55,619 | 86,289 | — |
| 2014 | 49,689 | 83,989 | — |
| 2015 | 47,725 | 83,170 | — |
| 2016 | 39,471 | 77,486 | — |
| 2017 | 40,056 | 86,962 | 40,799 |

**Source:** HUD's Annual Homeless Assessment Reports, https://www.hudexchange.info/hdx/guides/ahar/.
**Notes:** Data from the 2007 to 2014 AHARs were revised in the 2015 AHAR, so numbers may be different from what was reported in previous years. Individuals may be included in more than one subpopulation.
a. Does not include people in chronically homeless families, first reported in 2013.
b. HUD has only reported homeless youth under age 25 since the 2013 PIT count. HUD changed its methodology for counting homeless youth in 2015. Then, in 2017, HUD announced that it had "selected the PIT counts from January 2017 as the baseline measure of homelessness among unaccompanied youth." As a result, this table does not include counts from years prior to 2017.

## State and Community-Level Data

Data about the number of people experiencing homelessness are not available by congressional district. However, HUD does make PIT count data available by state and Continuums of Care. Go to HUD's CoC Homeless Populations and Subpopulations Reports website and filter by year and geographic entity (state or CoC): https://www.hudexchange.info/manage-a-program/coc-homeless-populations-and-subpopulations-reports/.

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