

# **2024 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count of People Experiencing Homelessness in the Tennessee Valley Continuum of Care (TN-512)**

## **Coordinator Manual & Methodology**

**2024 PIT Count Date: Wednesday, January 31, 2024**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the 2024 Point-in-Time count is to produce a point-in-time estimate of people who are experiencing homelessness in the Tennessee Valley CoC's 12-county geographic area.

Through the CoC Program interim rule (Section 578.7), HUD (Housing and Urban Development) requires CoCs (Continuum of Care) to plan and conduct a Point-in-Time Count of homeless persons within the geographic area. The Point-in-Time Count is to be "carried out on one night in the last 10 calendar days of January or at such other time as required by HUD" (Section 578.3).

### **Components of the PIT Count**

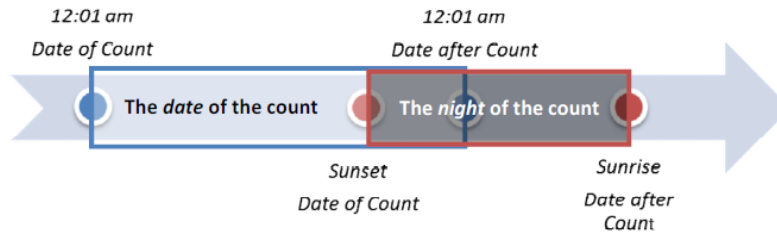
The Point-in-Time Count methodology has three primary components:

- The unsheltered count, an enumeration and demographic survey of unsheltered individuals and families on the streets, in tents, in vehicles and sleeping in other locations not intended for sleeping.
- The sheltered count, an enumeration and demographic survey of individuals and families in emergency shelters, domestic violence shelters, transitional housing programs and in hotels/motels paid for through community resources.
- Housing Inventory Chart update, through which homeless assistance providers report the number of units, beds, funding sources and other programmatic information.

### **The Planning Process**

#### **Date:**

The PIT count must be held within the last 10 days of January each year. Traditionally TN-512 holds the PIT on the last Wednesday of January each year. As such, the 2024 PIT date is January 31, 2024. The night of the PIT will be recognized as 8:00 pm 1/31/2024 to 8:00 am 2/1/2024. It is suggested that agencies start their count the morning of February 1<sup>st</sup>.



## Data collection tools:

### ***Unsheltered count:***

During the unsheltered PIT count, the HUD required data will be collected using either paper interview forms provided by the CoC or using Counting Us, a mobile app designed to collect the PIT data. 2019 was the first year the CoC used a mobile app, and this will be continued in 2024. There are 2 forms for the unsheltered PIT: the unsheltered interview form and the unsheltered observation form. The unsheltered interview form is to be used primarily when conducting the unsheltered PIT Count. This includes street, camp, and car interviews, as well as service location interviews, such as individuals who are interviewed at a soup kitchen. The unsheltered observation form is reserved for only if you are not able to speak with the individual due to the following reasons: they have refused an interview, they are asleep, they are under the influence of drugs and are unable to consent to an interview or are sleeping somewhere you are unable to approach due to safety concerns such as an abandoned building.

### ***Sheltered count:***

During the sheltered PIT count, the preferred data source for all PIT data will be TN Valley HMIS (Homeless Management Information System) for all HMIS-participating projects that pass data quality tests. Non-HMIS participating projects, or those that do not have reliable and timely data entry, will need to submit their data using either the sheltered paper interview forms provided by the CoC or through Counting Us PIT App. This app has been designed to collect data from both sheltered and unsheltered households.

### ***Housing Inventory Chart:***

Data needed for the HIC (Housing Inventory Count) is collected through an online survey (Google Form) or through a requested paper form. While all project types must complete the online survey or paper form, HMIS will be the primary data source for Rapid Re-Housing projects that are not operated by Victim Service Providers.

Updates to the data collection tools are made annually to ensure compliance with HUD's Notice for Housing Inventory Count (HIC) and Point-in-Time (PIT) Data Collection for Continuum of Care (CoC) Program and the Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) Program.

### ***Unsheltered PIT count:***

The planning process around the actual implementation of the unsheltered PIT count occurs through a team of volunteers and agencies in each county. The implementation of the count is reported back

to the CoC via an Unsheltered Count Summary Form, which is submitted by each county's unsheltered liaison.

### **Sheltered Count:**

The planning process around the actual implementation of the Sheltered PIT count is the responsibility of the CoC PIT/HIC chair and HMIS Lead. The PIT/HIC Chair and HMIS Lead will identify and contact agencies, organizations, and entities that shelter unhoused neighbors throughout the year. Data is collected via several methods and is reported to HUD and the CoC along with the unsheltered PIT count results.

### **Methodology:**

#### **Unsheltered Methodology:**

Each county's identified liaison works locally to plan and implement the unsheltered count. Responsibilities of the county liaison include recruiting and training volunteers. Support from the HMIS Lead team will be provided for things such as developing a volunteer recruitment plan and volunteer PIT count training. The county liaison must request this support. Unsheltered Count Summary forms and Interview Forms are provided to the county contact. All forms are requested to be returned within two weeks of the PIT count. Counties may alternatively opt to use the Counting Us mobile app, which submits all PIT data immediately following each interview.

#### **Counting People in Ambiguous Sleeping Locations:**

TN Valley CoC will use the following standards to determine whether a household experiencing homelessness should be considered unsheltered as opposed to sheltered. Note that these standards are limited to whether to consider a household unsheltered and do not represent eligibility for a specific program.

##### **1) Tents:**

- a. HUD always considers people sleeping in tents unsheltered if the tent is for an individual, or a single household.
- b. Persons sleeping communally in large tents, such as a Sprung shelter, are considered sheltered if it is located on a campus maintained by a government or other entity and provides barracks style sleeping accommodations for multiple individuals or households where toilets, showers, and communal food preparation.

##### **2) Tiny homes and sheds:**

Tiny homes are ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodation, so not all people living in tiny homes qualify as homeless under the McKinney-Vento Act. Sheds, including huts, storage sheds, and community cabins, are not ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodation, but under certain circumstances people living in sheds do not qualify as homeless under the McKinney-Vento Act. However, persons experiencing homelessness living in tiny homes and sheds are to be counted as follows:

- a. HUD considers persons living in these units unsheltered if the unit does not contain a toilet, shower, kitchen, sleeping and living space, or has those but is not connected to

water, sewer and utilities, or a septic system, well and generator, unless it is on a campus maintained by an organization, such as a governmental entity, nonprofit, or religious organization, where toilets, showers, and communal food preparation or food service areas are provided.

- b. Residents of these types of units are to be counted as sheltered
  - i. if the unit contains a toilet, shower, kitchen, sleeping and living space and is connected to sewer, water and utilities or a septic system, well and generator; or
  - ii. even if the unit does not contain a toilet, shower, kitchen, sleeping and living space, or is not connected to sewer, water and utilities or a septic system, well and generator, if it is located on a campus maintained by an organization, such as a governmental entity, nonprofit, or religious organization, where at least toilets, showers, and communal food preparation or food service areas are provided.
- c. Special considerations
  - i. If the unit is located on a campus, the campus must have enough toilets and showers per capita for the resident population within a reasonable distance from the units to count the residents as sheltered.
  - ii. In very cold and very hot climates where regular seasonal patterns fall below 32 degrees or above 100 degrees Fahrenheit, such as Iowa and Arizona, the unit must have heat or air conditioning to be counted as sheltered, but climate control would not be needed in moderate climates.

### 3) Vehicles:

- a. Cars, trucks, and vans: Households sleeping in cars, trucks, and vans are to be counted as unsheltered. This includes households sleeping in their vehicles in safe parking programs, in designated areas, or on a campus maintained by a government or other entity where toilets, showers, and communal food preparation or food service areas are provided.
- b. Recreational vehicles (RVs): RVs, including camper vans, are ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodation, so not all persons living in RVs qualify as homeless under the McKinney-Vento Act definition. However, people experiencing homelessness that live in RVs must be counted as:
  - i. sheltered if the RV (Recreational vehicles)
    - 1. is located in a mobile home park or campus that advertises itself as providing temporary stays and
    - 2. the RV is regularly connected to water, sewer and utilities or a septic system, well and generator, or the park or campus provide toilets, showers, and communal food preparation or food service areas; or
  - ii. unsheltered if the RV does not meet the criteria in i. for people experiencing homelessness that are sheltered in RVs.

### ***Counting in Abandon buildings & low visibility areas –***

- When counting people sleeping in RVs, tents, or other locations that have low visibility, do not simply count structures without having additional information about how many people are in those kinds of sleeping situations.
- Do not enter abandoned buildings or other low visibility areas to ensure your safety from environmental hazards and threats. You can announce yourself and count groups by calling into the area “Outreach”.

- If no one responds or shows themselves, do note the location and structures for future outreach.

### ***Count Type:***

Each county will choose one or more of the following methodologies based on geography, capacity and number of volunteers engaged, population density and other factors:

- Outreach to places not intended as regular sleeping accommodations for human beings (“street count”). When possible, interviews with individuals/ households experiencing homelessness will take place. If an interview cannot occur, individuals observed as unsheltered will be counted as such. The street count may be conducted as a complete census where the entire county is covered or using a known locations approach, focusing on specific locations where people who are unsheltered are known or believed to be living.
- Interviews with people at service providers such as soup kitchens, day centers, food pantries, health clinics and other locations likely to be utilized by people experiencing homelessness (“service-based count”).
- “Come and be counted” events where youth experiencing housing instability are encouraged to attend and be interviewed.
- Phone banking previously interacted unhoused neighbors interacted with through Coordinated Entry.

Street counts will be conducted the night of January 31, 2024, or on the morning of February 1, 2024, using the street-based interview forms or the Counting Us mobile app to collect HUD-required data. If an individual/household is asleep, does not agree to be interviewed, or is unable to be safely reached, volunteers will only record observed information which includes household size, age, gender, race, and ethnicity.

Service-based counts will be conducted on February 1, 2024, using the service- based interview forms or the Counting Us mobile app to collect HUD-required data.

### ***County Coordinator/Liaison:***

Each County coordinator is responsible for ensuring that all volunteers receive training on safety and conducting interviews. A very basic PowerPoint presentation is provided by the CoC, which can be customized in each county based on the details of their PIT count approach.

To ensure the quality of the data, the CoC uses the following strategies during the unsheltered PIT count:

- Consistent training across the entire geographic area via the county coordinator webinar and a volunteer PowerPoint template provided.
- “Blitz” count, which includes conducting interviews within a 24+ hour period of time;
- A unique identifier, which includes an individual’s initials and age, which are used to check for duplication of data;
- A survey question asking if an interview already took place; and
- Questions for recording HUD required data for individuals who do not or cannot provide consent to be interviewed. This includes household size, estimated age, gender, race and ethnicity.
- The interview form includes a space for recording any unique characteristics about

the individual being interviewed and their location (e.g., blue tent behind Walmart).

## **Sheltered Methodology:**

A complete census count method is used to complete the sheltered PIT count. This includes data collected using standardized interview forms, data collected using the Counting US mobile app and data from HMIS. The CoC maintains a provider list, which is updated throughout the year as changes are made known. All programs and contacts are confirmed annually.

### ***Counting people who are sheltered and unhoused:***

The follow in is guidance on situations where neighbors are unhoused but sheltered during the night of the PIT and which of them can be counted.

- 1) Motel/Hotel Stays – Include only vouchers paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local government programs for low-income individuals. Individuals who have paid for a motel or hotel stay for themselves or a friend or family member have paid do not count in the PIT as literally homeless.
- 2) Cold night shelters – Neighbors staying at a cold night shelter with inventory dedicated to people experiencing homelessness during harsh weather that are open the night of the PIT are included in the count
- 3) Jail – neighbors who are incarcerated the night of the PIT are not included in the count.
- 4) Hospital – neighbors who are staying in a hospital or medical facility the night of the PIT are not included in the count.
- 5) Treatment program - neighbors who are staying in treatment or rehab facility the night of the PIT are not included in the count.
- 6) House or Apartment – neighbors who are staying in an apartment or house the night of the PIT are not included, whether they:
  - a) rent or own it.
  - b) In a place you are being evicted from within two weeks
  - c) or are staying with friends or family.

### ***Data Collection Methods:***

- Interview Forms: *Interview Forms will be emailed to all non-HMIS participating Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing programs and VA-funded programs classified as emergency or transitional. These forms will be completed with each household served the night of January 31, 2024. Interview forms collect all the HUD-required data and include questions designed to allow for de-duplication. Interview forms will be due within two weeks of the PIT count.*
- Counting Us: *Sheltered providers may opt to utilize the Counting Us mobile app for collecting sheltered PIT data.*
- HMIS: *HMIS generated data will provide the PIT data for HMIS-participating programs where HMIS data quality is high. For Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing programs, this includes HUD's required population, subpopulation, and demographic information on participants in programs.*

***Data Quality:***

To ensure the quality of the data, the CoC uses the following strategies during the sheltered PIT count:

- Interview forms include written instructions, and each provider receives a Sheltered PIT Count PowerPoint, which provides an overview of the Interview Forms.
- The number of persons reported via the Interview Forms will be checked against the number of persons reported via the online housing inventory survey to ensure accurate reporting.
- The Interview Forms provided by each program will be reviewed for duplication.
- A demonstration was provided on the Counting Us mobile app. Additional training can be provided if needed.
- A “test” of HMIS data to determine the frequency of data entry and data quality for each program. This “test” determines which HMIS-participating agencies are exempted from collecting client-level PIT data.

**Housing Inventory Methodology:*****Types of Homeless Projects to include in the HIC***

For the HIC, CoCs will collect information about the beds and units in the CoC’s homeless system, categorized by the Project Types described below and that provide dedicated beds for persons who are homeless, not just those contributing client-level data in the local HMIS or receiving HUD funding. This includes projects funded by the other federal agencies (e.g., VA, HHS), faith-based organizations, and other public and private funding sources.

The Project Types included in the HIC, as identified in the most recently published HMIS Data Standards are:

- 1) Emergency Shelter (ES)
- 2) Transitional Housing (TH)
- 3) Safe Haven (SH)
- 4) Permanent Housing (PH)
  - a) Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)
  - b) Rapid Re-housing (RRH)
  - c) Other PH (OPH) – combines two project types from the HMIS Data Standards:
    - i) PH – Housing with Services (no disability required for entry); and
    - ii) PH – Housing Only

### **HIC Data Collection Methods:**

- Online survey (Google Form): Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, Rapid Re- Housing and Permanent Supportive Housing providers throughout the Continuum of Care (CoC) will complete an on-line survey that collects each project's bed inventory and occupancy on the PIT night. Providers will be sent the survey link prior to the PIT date. Responses will be requested within two weeks following the PIT count.
- HMIS: HMIS will be the data source for all project types with a Housing Inventory properly set-up and timely data entry. For Rapid Re-Housing specifically, HMIS will be the data source for housing inventory data, except for DV (Domestic Violence) RRH (Rapid Re Housing) projects and any SSVF (Supportive Services for Veteran Families) projects not entering data into TN Valley CoC-HMIS, due to the methodology for counting Rapid Re-Housing beds (occupancy = inventory).
- Inventory Update Forms (paper): A few providers consistently request paper forms instead of completing the online survey. These providers will be sent Inventory Update Forms, to be returned within two weeks of the PIT date. In addition, most veterans' programs will be emailed Inventory Update Forms. This includes the following VA-funded programs: Health Care for Homeless Veterans, Community Contract Emergency Housing (HCHV/EH), Grant and Per Diem, Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF-RRH) if not on HMIS, and HUD- Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Programs (VASH).

## **Reporting/Submission of Data**

The following data will be submitted to HUD by/before the established deadline. All data will be submitted via the Homelessness Data Exchange (HDX).

- Point-in-Time data, which includes those counted during the unsheltered and sheltered counts.
- Housing Inventory Chart, which includes a list of emergency shelter homeless assistance programs throughout the CoC, as well as the number of beds, units, target population, HMIS participation rate, funding source and other required data.

Upon submission of the CoC-level data, an analysis of the county-level data will be completed and distributed. This data will be posted on the CoC's website and will also be provided to Con Plan jurisdictions.