



Homeless Count FAQ's

prepared by N. Wilcox, January 2018

Homeless Count General Questions

1. Why isn't the Count conducted in the summer?

HUD mandates that the "Point-In-Time"(PIT) Count be conducted the last 10 days in January across the entire country. People with extremely limited income who cycle in and out of homelessness typically are not housed toward the end of the month (they have used up their funds on motels and other expenses). The nationwide results are published in a report to Congress called the "Annual Homeless Assessment Report" (AHAR).

2. Why does it take three days to complete LA's Street Count?

The LA Continuum of Care of such a large geographic area that the Street Count is conducted across three days for logistical purposes.

3. Do we include people who are "couch surfing"?

No. HUD defines "homelessness" as being *literally* homeless. This does include, however, sleeping in vehicles or tents.

4. Do all the federal agencies define "homelessness" the same way?

No. The US Department of Education includes people who are "couch surfing" (or "doubled-up") as homeless. Local statistics from school districts use this definition when it asks families/students to voluntarily identify themselves as experiencing homelessness. These annually published statistics from the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) report a much larger number than the PIT numbers for families with minor aged children because of this expanded definition.

5. Why is it important to conduct the count annually?

HUD requires CoC's to hold a bi-annual PIT Count during the odd-number years. Beginning in 2016, the LA CoC started holding these annually to get a more timely assessment of homelessness. Funders of large homelessness programs, such as the VA, also wanted annual snapshots to understand how their programs were impacting homelessness.

6. Does the City of Long Beach CoC, which is also in SPA 8, conduct an annual Homeless Count?

No. It holds it on the HUD mandated odd-numbered years. It conduct its Street Count at dawn and has a short survey volunteer teams ask every person they find who is experiencing homelessness. HUD does require that each CoC submit its "Homeless Inventory Count" annually. The HIC includes the number of how many people were in shelters at the end of January.

7. How are the homeless count numbers used?

They are used for two primary purposes: (1) to understand where people are experiencing homelessness and to get their demographics; (2) to better target resources (funding, shelter, etc.) to those areas of most need.

8. When will the LA CoC results be published?

The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) is responsible for conducting and then reporting the Count statistics to HUD. HUD generally has a due date of late spring (in 2017, it was early May), though historically this used to be later. LAHSA releases the Homeless Count data in two waves: (1) right after the HUD submission, with the overall County, CoC, Supervisorial Districts, City of Los Angeles Council Districts, and SPA-level findings; (2) generally in June/July, with the independent city level statistics (sometimes called the “Opt-In” reports).

9. Why does it take so long?

The demographic information gathered for the LA CoC is quite extensive so the analysis takes time to process and verify. LAHSA uses an academic consultant that helps to generate these statistics. Starting with the 2017 Count, USC has had this contract (previously it was performed by the University of North Carolina). Many different views of the homeless population are published by LAHSA throughout the remaining year as well. For the 2017 Count, separate reports on Veterans, women, youth, families, and those who are chronically homeless were created (they are posted on LAHSA’s website).

LA CoC’s Street Count

1. Why is the LA CoC’s Count conducted at night (except for SPA 1)?

The methodology LAHSA uses is to count the unsheltered when they are bedding down for the night. Those experiencing homelessness are more mobile during the daytime and might be counted twice. This is especially true of people living in their vehicles.

2. Is the Count postponed if it is raining?

No. We count regardless of the weather.

3. Do some cities conduct “sweeps” so their Count number will be lower?

We ask cities to not conduct cleanup sweeps prior to the Count because we want an accurate number of people who are experiencing homelessness in the region. These sweeps just displace people a short distance from where they generally reside. Other organizations that have specialized jurisdiction, like Caltrans, are also asked to refrain from these types of activities.

4. Is it common to see families during the Street Count? Why or why not?

No, finding a family with minor aged children is a rarity across the entire County. Many parents fear their children will be taken away from them if found so they generally remain quite hidden during the Street Count.

5. How about youths? Why or why not?

Youths are difficult to identify because they blend in so well with the community. While there is a category of Youth ages 18-24 on the Street Count Tally Sheet, it is also challenging to confirm the age of young adults since we are asked to keep a respectful distance from people we encounter that night who are experiencing homelessness.

6. How come we don’t talk to people experiencing homelessness that we find during the Street Count?

This is part of LAHSA’s LA CoC methodology.

7. How does LAHSA figure out the detailed demographics since we don't talk to them?

LAHSA conducts a separate "Demographic Survey" component to get this information. USC assists with the extrapolation to determine the individual demographics such as age, gender, race, Veteran status, disabling condition, fleeing domestic violence, etc.

8. How many SPA 8 road miles will be covered during the Street Count?

Over 4,500.

Homelessness in LA

1. What type of services are available for people who are experiencing homelessness?

There are several services including: street outreach and access centers, emergency shelter, "bridge" housing for those waiting to move into permanent housing, permanent housing, case management, and housing retention. Many of these are specialized by population, such as for individuals, families with minors, transitional age youth (typically ages 18-14), Veterans, domestic violence survivors, those with mental illness, etc. With the recent passage of Measure H, there is even more funding for these services.

2. Why don't some people accept our services?

There can be many reasons for this. Sometimes there is a distrust that creates a barrier. Mental illness, along with unresolved past traumatic events, can make it difficult for people to accept services. There are, unfortunately, a lack of some services in the South Bay such as emergency (or "Crisis") housing; many are unwilling to get shelter in other SPAs, especially in Skid Row. Having pets can pose unique challenges.

3. Did homelessness go up or down between 2016 and 2017 in the LA CoC?

Homelessness went up by 23%, from 46,874 to 57,794. Unsheltered prevalence remained unchanged from '16 to '17 (74% of total homelessness), but increased from 34,701 to 42,828.

4. What are some of the reasons homelessness rose in LA?

Many feel people are getting priced out of the housing market. About 25% spend >50% of their income on housing, and another 23% spend >30%. This is also reflects the shortage of affordable housing in LA. Wages are not keeping up with rental increases.

5. Why do so many people live in vehicles?

In the LA CoC, the number who lived in vehicles from 2016 to 2017 rose by over 30%. This is probably reflective of the rise of rents across the county. People who live in vehicles typically have a steady income or savings, but not enough to move into an apartment (e.g., 1st/last month's rent, security deposit). They often have a compromised credit history making it more difficult for a landlord to accept them.

South Bay Homelessness

1. How much did homelessness go up in the South Bay between 2016 and 2017 (without Long Beach)?

It rose by 17%, from 3,663 to 4,282.

2. Which has more homeless, SPA 8 or Skid Row?

The South Bay unsheltered population is 55^ larger than Skid Row's.

- 3. What were the top three South Bay communities that had the highest unsheltered homeless in 2017?**
Wilmington (558), San Pedro (382), and Carson (378).
- 4. Is the number of older individuals who are homeless in the South Bay increasing or decreasing?**
Increasing, a troubling trend we are seeing across the entire county. From 2016 to 2017, the percentage of people 55 or older experiencing homelessness in SPA 8 (minus Long Beach) increased by 42% (from 841 to 1,193)
- 5. Where is the large encampment found in the South Bay?**
Unincorporated Carson
- 6. How many people secured stable housing this past year in the South Bay through the Coordinated Entry System?**
692
- 7. What can I do after the Homeless Count to stay involved?**
Join our homeless coalition, contact a homeless services provider to volunteer, contact SBCEH for other ideas. Be an advocate and active voice in your community; help us fight homelessness stigmas so we can open more services, shelter, and housing in your city.