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Snohomish County Releases 2019 Point-in-Time Count of Homelessness

Increasing number of people experiencing homelessness outpaces housing efforts

EVERETT, Wash., May 7, 2019 – Today, the Snohomish County Human Services Department announced the results of their Point-in-Time (PIT) Count of people experiencing homelessness. The annual PIT Count was held on January 23, 2019. This survey was supported by the efforts of 288 volunteers, county, and partnering agency staff who came together to document 1,116 homeless individuals in Snohomish County.

The PIT Count is required by state and federal funders and is used in planning efforts. Snohomish County's continued push to increase the usability and accuracy of PIT Count data has led to a change in the methodology for locating homeless individuals during the 2019 survey, including a new strategy for finding families experiencing homelessness.

The PIT Count includes people residing in emergency shelter, transitional housing, and living without shelter. Due to the fact that the unsheltered count relies on volunteer survey takers who visit encampments, food banks, community resources locations, and known areas where people experiencing homelessness congregate, the methodology is prone to undercounting families experiencing homelessness. To mitigate that issue, Snohomish County leveraged data from Coordinated Entry, a system that is utilized to assist people experiencing homelessness.

This change in methodology is responsible for a significant portion of the increase observed (119 people were counted through navigator surveys) in the unsheltered count, particularly for families who accounted for 21.5% of the navigator surveys, but only 2.4% of the street and service based surveys. The overall increase in homelessness seen in this year's PIT Count parallels an increase in the number of individuals and families seeking and receiving housing services through the county-wide homelessness response system.

The data behind the PIT Count

Despite increased efficiencies and investments across the system which assisted 37.1% more households in attaining housing in 2018 than in 2015, the PIT Count is the highest it has been since 2012. From its lowest point in 2015, when we identified 829 people, the PIT Count is up 34.6% to 1,116 in 2019. The sheltered count, largely a reflection of system capacity, was unchanged from 2015 (517). Additionally, there was an increase of 92% in the number of people living without shelter from 2015 to 2019 (312 to 599).

The unsheltered count varied in important ways from previous years. When compared with 2018 data specifically, there was a higher proportion of young adults aged 18 to 24 (6.6% to 11.1%), adult females (31.6% to 44.2%), adults in families with children (4.5% to 10%), and People of Color (18.5% to 24.4%). The number of children increased from 28 to 59, and 11 were unaccompanied. The **proportion** of people living in households experiencing chronic homelessness decreased from 71% to 60% but the **number** of people increased from 270 to 358. The number of veterans increased slightly from 32 in 2018 to 35 in 2019.

A summary of the PIT Count and more detailed data may be found at the following link:

<https://snohomishcountywa.gov/PointInTime>.

While an imperfect measure, the PIT Count is one of the tools used to inform priorities for federal, state, and local funding, and it helps identify trends and craft solutions for addressing the needs of vulnerable individuals and families. The analysis and overall trend data are utilized by the Snohomish County Partnership to End Homelessness as one of many tools to track progress toward goals to prevent, reduce, and end homelessness. Great progress has been made in the collection, analysis, and evaluation of local homeless data. Some of that work is available through public dashboards which may be explored at <https://public.tableau.com/profile/SnoCoHMIS#!/>.

By the end of 2019, 142 additional units of housing specifically dedicated to addressing the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness will become available in Snohomish County. While this increase in housing should have an impact on the PIT Count in 2020, it will not be enough to meet demand based on current trends.

In response to this challenge and the impact of the rising cost of living on the availability and affordability of housing, Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers announced the formation of a Housing Task Force to launch a community discussion about potential solutions to the housing crisis. The Task Force will examine needs across the housing spectrum: affordable housing, subsidized and special needs housing, and alternative housing models, and it will create recommendations for increasing the supply of housing across all areas of need to provide more alternatives to those experiencing and at risk of homelessness.

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Please note: attached infographic may be used with attribution to Snohomish County.