

2015 Point-in-Time Count FAQs:

Why did the number of people who are homeless drop significantly?

The 2015 Point-in-Time Count identified 6,556 homeless individuals in Santa Clara County in January 2015, compared to 7,631 individuals in January 2013. This represents a decline of 14% and is the lowest number counted in Santa Clara County in over ten years.

The 2015 Point-in-Time count identified 4,063 homeless individuals in San Jose. This point-in-time count represents a 15% decrease from the number identified in the 2013 census, when 4,770 individuals were counted.

These decreases in homelessness reflect extensive efforts to respond to the needs of unhoused populations in the community. In particular, strategies to move people directly into housing through the provision of rental subsidies and supportive services have been successful. For example:

- In 2013, the City of San Jose embarked on a pilot project to provide housing and employment services to individuals living in a targeted homeless encampment, resulting in over 175 people housed to date.
- Housing 1000 – a local campaign led by Destination: Home designed to house the most vulnerable residents began in 2011. By December 2014 the campaign has housed 865 chronically homeless participants.

Is this census an accurate count of the total homeless population?

The 2015 Point-in-Time count employed best practice federally-approved methodologies that are consistent with methodologies used in prior counts. Point-in-Time counts are generally considered to undercount homeless populations because they are based on visual identification of unsheltered populations. Additionally, homeless persons generally attempt to stay out of sight and make efforts to avoid detection. However, this consistent methodology has been applied in the community for over a decade so that the counts can be compared to each other to assess trends over time.

Unaccompanied youth and families can be especially hard to count. The 2015 Count included special efforts to reach out to these populations, including a targeted youth count and collaboration with the Santa Clara County Office of Education to count families. Special efforts were also made to find and count people living in encampments and vehicles. In addition, we recruited a higher number of volunteers for the count than in years past, allowing for a more thorough street count.

What was the impact of encampment abatement efforts? Is that the reason for the reduction?

Knowing that some large encampments had been dispersed shortly before the 2015 count, special efforts were made to identify active encampments, including smaller encampments. Active encampment areas were identified prior to the census count and special teams of Outreach Workers, familiar with these areas, were organized to count people residing in these active encampments on the dates of the count. Targeted encampment areas were identified on general street count maps and Outreach Workers, rather than the volunteer teams, counted homeless persons residing in encampments. The result was an even more comprehensive profile of people residing in homeless encampments compared to 2013 when encampment outreach focused solely on creeks and waterways.

Were there any changes to the Point-in-Time count methodology in 2015?

The Point-in-Time count methodology remained consistent with prior counts, with some minor improvements based on Federal recommendations and best practices utilized in other communities. In particular, the 2015 count utilized mobile technology to improve the efficiency of the count. Community Technology Alliance, a local nonprofit partner, developed a mobile application for census workers. The application was used for the first time to record data for the encampment and youth counts.

Why does it seem like there are more homeless people on the street if the numbers are going down?

Even with the decline reported in the 2015 Point-in-Time count, Santa Clara County still has a very high rate of homelessness and, in particular, a high rate of people who are unsheltered and living on the streets. Homeless individuals seek safe, accessible locations that still keep them connected with the community while also providing a place for rest. As a result they often sleep in parks, empty lots, and street locations accessible by foot or public transportation. Community awareness has increased in part due to the City of San Jose funded Homelessness Concerns Hotline and Outreach efforts, giving residents a mechanism to report homeless individuals and encampments in their area.

This report demonstrates that while the extensive community efforts to address homelessness are working, there is still a considerable amount of work to be done and thousands of people remain unsheltered in our community.

How many people are homeless in a year? Why isn't there an annual estimate this year?

The 2015 Point-in-Time Count does not include an annual estimate of the number of people who are homeless because it is no longer recommended to extrapolate annual numbers from point-in-time data. In prior years, an estimate was made based on a Federally-approved formula that used point-in-time data and survey questions about length of homelessness. Most communities have moved away from using formulas because a small margin of error in a survey question can lead to a huge margin of error in the estimates.

How does Santa Clara County's Point-in-Time count compare to other counties in the Bay Area, California, and the U.S.?

The San Mateo County Point-in-Time Count reflects a 47% reduction in the number of homeless individuals from 2013 to 2015. Data from San Francisco city/ County and Alameda County are not yet available. Los Angeles city and County report a 16% increase overall to 41,174 individuals and an 85% increase in those living in makeshift shelters, tents, cars since 2013.

Nationwide data has not been released by HUD yet.

Why did the homeless population in South County increase?

Overall, the homeless population in Santa Clara County declined significantly over the past two years. However, jurisdictions in the southern part of the county, including Gilroy, Morgan Hill, and San Martin, experienced increases in homelessness. Some possible explanations for this change include:

- There is more uninhabited land in South County, where it is easier for people to camp, stay out of the way and avoid being disturbed.
- Smaller cities in South County have fewer law enforcement resources to enforce trespassing ordinances which may make it easier for individuals to stay in South County.
- There are fewer services and resources for those who are homeless in South County, making it more difficult for people to escape homelessness.

Why is the number of homeless families so low?

The Point-in-Time count follows HUD's definition of homelessness, which only includes people living in shelters or on the streets. Families are more likely to live in overcrowded apartments or stay temporarily with family or friends or in hotel rooms. During the Point-in-Time Count, the Santa Clara County Office of Education found that most homeless families contacted through the schools were staying doubled up with family or friends or temporarily staying in hotel rooms they paid for themselves. While these families may consider themselves homeless and would benefit from access to housing and services, they are not counted under HUD's definition of "Literally Homeless" and therefore they are not included in the Point-in-Time Count.

Why was there a decrease in the number of transition age youth and unaccompanied children?

Countywide, the population of unaccompanied homeless children and youth declined at a higher rate than the general homeless population. The additional decline is likely due in part to minor adjustments to the methodology that staff believe produced a more accurate count. Homeless youth are difficult to count. They make efforts to blend in and the Point-in-Time count uses visual identification to count unsheltered people. In 2015, staff followed the best practice approach of using homeless youth to identify other homeless youth based on behavior, not just "hotspot" locations as was done in prior counts. In addition, staff identified parenting youth in the 2015 count for the first time, counting transition age youth and their children.

Additionally, a significant subset of the homeless youth population is couch surfing or temporarily staying with friends or relatives, and thus, while they may still need services, they are not captured in this count.

There has been a lot of national attention on ending veteran homelessness this year. How are we doing on this in Santa Clara County?

The 2015 Point-in-Time count found that there were 703 homeless veterans in Santa Clara County at a point in time in January 2015, with 500 in the City of San Jose. Despite local efforts to house homeless veterans, this is only a very slight decrease from the 718 veterans that were counted in 2013. However, the count does show a decrease in unsheltered veterans. In 2013, just 19% of counted veterans were staying in shelters, while in 2015 37% of veterans were sheltered. This is due in part to the opening of the Veterans Housing Facility in San Jose in 2013. Previously, this facility which provides shelter and transitional housing to 125 veterans was located on the grounds of the VA Palo Alto Health Care System in Menlo Park. Additionally, four Santa Clara County non-profit agencies were recently awarded VA funding for Homeless Veteran Families, with over 6 million dollars in funding over the next 3 years to further assist the community in ending homelessness for veterans.

How many people are chronically homeless?

The 2015 Point-in-Time count estimates that there are 2,207 chronically homeless individuals (including people in chronically homeless families) in Santa Clara County at a point in time, making up 34% of the homeless population. This is a decrease of over 300 individuals in the last two years. The 2013 Point-in-Time Count found 2,518 chronically homeless individuals (33% of the homeless population at that time).

Why are some racial and ethnic groups over or underrepresented among the homeless population as compared to the total Santa Clara County population demographics?

The 2015 Point-in-Time count shows that some racial and ethnic groups are over or underrepresented in the homeless population. A higher percentage of homeless individuals are Hispanic or Latino (39% of the homeless population compared to 27% of the general county population). Those who identify as Black or African American are also significantly over represented, with 16% of the homeless population, compared to just 3% of the general population. In contrast, those who identify as White or Asian are underrepresented among the homeless population. 32% of the homeless population identified as White (compared to 54% of the general population) and 3% as Asian (35% of the general population).

The racial and ethnic distribution of people who are homeless reflects disparities among those who experience poverty and other negative life indicators in Santa Clara County. Disproportionately, people of color – particularly those who identify as Hispanic/Latino and Black or African American – face higher rates of poverty and homelessness and lower access to education, living wage jobs, and other opportunities for success. People of color are also more likely to face discrimination in finding and maintaining housing.

How is this report different from the recently released cost study “Home Not Found: The Cost of Homelessness in Silicon Valley”?

The Point-in-Time Count uses a federally-approved methodology to estimate the number of people who are homeless in Santa Clara County at a point-in-time. In contrast, the cost study examined actual case records from the justice system, health care, social service, nonprofit, and housing agencies to understand the public costs of homelessness. While both reports provide valuable information, there are a few key differences:

- The Point-in-Time count follows the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s definition of “literally homeless,” which includes people staying in emergency shelters or transitional housing programs and people staying in places not meant for human habitation, such as the streets, encampments, and vehicles. In contrast, the cost study also includes those who are “couch surfing” or temporarily staying with family or friends.
- The Point-in-Time Count estimates homelessness at a single point in time (January 27-28, 2015), while the cost study looked at data from 2007 – 2012.
- Demographic and subpopulation data reported in the Point-in-Time count report are based on self-reported responses to survey questions from individuals experiencing homelessness while Home Not Found analyzed over 25 million individual records of 104,000 people experiencing homelessness during the six year study window.

The cost study found higher rates of persistent homelessness among females, but this report did not. Why is that?

The cost study found relatively equal gender distribution between males and females in the general homeless population and higher rates of persistent homelessness among females: Of the overall homeless population, 17% of females were persistently homeless in an average month, compared to 14% of males. In contrast, the Point-in-Time count found that 63% of the homeless population is male and only 36% is female. Among those who are chronically homeless, the percentage of females is even smaller: 71% are male and 29% female.

This difference presents an interesting question for further study. Most likely, the difference is due in part to the varying needs of the different groups of people studied in these two efforts. The Point-in-Time count estimates the number of people who are “literally homeless” on the streets and in shelters at a point-in-time while the cost study measures people who self-identify as homeless, including people who are couch surfing or temporarily staying with family or friends.

What is the difference between chronic homelessness and persistent homelessness?

The Point-in-Time count uses HUD’s definition of chronic homelessness: An adult (or family with at least one adult member) with a disabling condition who has been continuously homeless for one year or more and/or has experienced four or more episodes of homelessness within the past three years.

The cost study uses the term “persistent homelessness” in place of chronic homelessness because verifying the HUD definition for chronic homelessness after the study window was difficult. Persistently homeless individuals counted in the cost study are those who were identified in agency records as homeless for twelve or more months continuously or who had four or more episodes of homelessness in a three-year interval.

What is it going to take to effectively respond to homelessness?

THERE ARE SOLUTIONS AVAILABLE TO THE COMMUNITY TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS. Homelessness prevention, rapid re-housing and supportive housing are proven strategies that work.

- **INVEST IN HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION** By investing in prevention, we can channel resources to keep people housed and prevent them from falling into long term homelessness, which is often costly and difficult to escape. These types of programs ensure that a family does not become homeless because they cannot make a rent payment, that young adults do not exit foster care without a home, and that every veteran transitioning out of the military has a place to return to.
- **EXPAND LOCAL RAPID RE-HOUSING PROGRAMS** The data from our experience with the federal Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing program, demonstrated that 93% of participating families remained housed after the program ended. If we invest in short-term housing rental subsidies, resiliency will grow, and resources can be diverted to those who are in crisis and require a deeper investment.
- **BUILD PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING AND CREATE NEW HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES** Those who suffer the most require the deepest levels of support. For disabled and long term homeless

men and women, stable housing is the foundation of recovery. Santa Clara County can dedicate itself to increasing the supply of housing and creating new housing opportunities to alleviate this worst kind of suffering.