

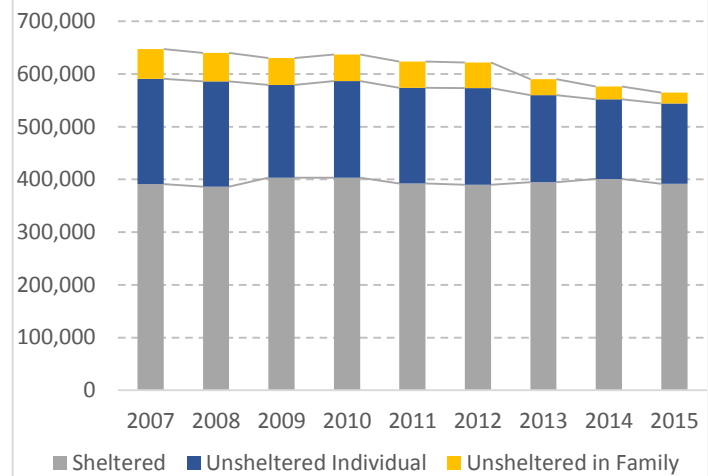
# UNSHELTERED PIT COUNTS TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

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## NATIONAL TRENDS

Our efforts to end homelessness in the U.S. seem to be working, according to the Annual Point in Time (PIT) counts of sheltered and unsheltered persons experiencing homelessness, which show a 13% decrease in homelessness between 2007 and 2015. As seen in Chart 1, counts of sheltered homelessness changed little during this period, but unsheltered counts decreased by 32% overall and 64% for individuals in families. Counts of unsheltered chronically homeless and veterans, which on average account for 31% and 11% of unsheltered persons, respectively, both decreased by 24% over this period.

Chart 1. Sheltered and Unsheltered Homeless Persons in the U.S., 2007-2015



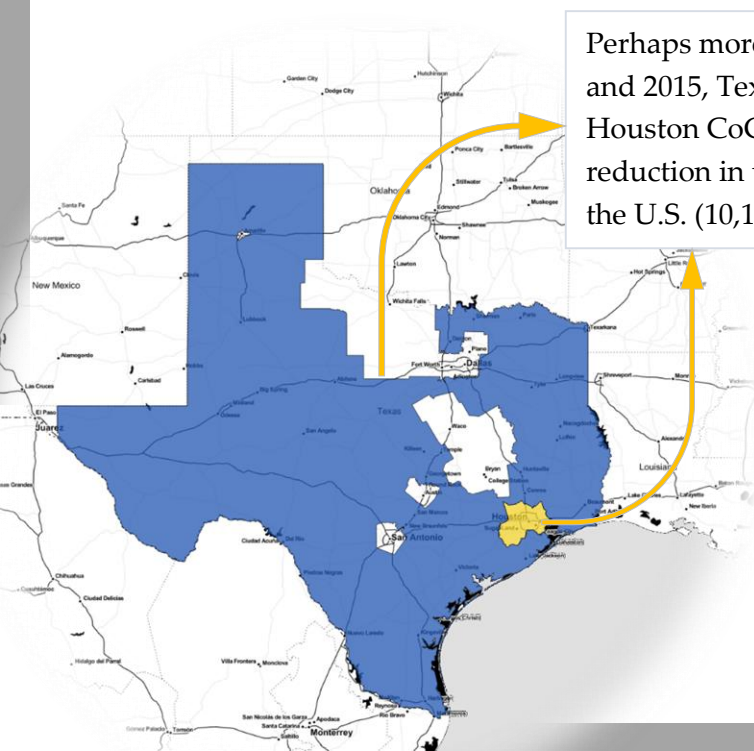
## COC-LEVEL HIGHPOINTS

CoC-level PIT data reveals that few CoCs see a reduction in unsheltered homelessness year after year. CoCs who find that their counts vary greatly are not alone. Of the 400 CoCs for whom we have data since 2011, 46% (182) saw a decrease in unsheltered counts in 2015. Only 19% (74), however, saw a decrease for a second consecutive year, 9% (37) for a third, and 3% (13) for a fourth (see Table 1). In fact, between 2011 and 2015, that 3% of CoCs accounted for 29% of the nationwide reduction in unsheltered homelessness (16,789 of 58,204).

Table 1. Unsheltered Count Decrease for 4 Consecutive Years

CoC #	Average Decrease
OK-504	-45%
MD-502	-35%
MO-602	-33%
LA-503	-33%
PA-501	-29%
AL-500	-28%
NY-508	-23%
TX-607	-25%
TX-700	-18%
VA-604	-17%
AL-504	-17%
AZ-501	-16%
UT-503	-14%

Perhaps more surprising, between 2011 and 2015, Texas' Balance of State and Houston CoCs accounted for 17% of all reduction in unsheltered homelessness in the U.S. (10,131 of 58,204).



Congress, HUD, and other federal partners use PIT data to advise resource allocation. The overall reduction in unsheltered homelessness is an important indicator of progress. However, within states and CoCs, unsheltered counts can fluctuate widely from year to year (see Chart 2). Each CoC must ensure that their unsheltered count methodology is sound, consistent, and able to withstand scrutiny.

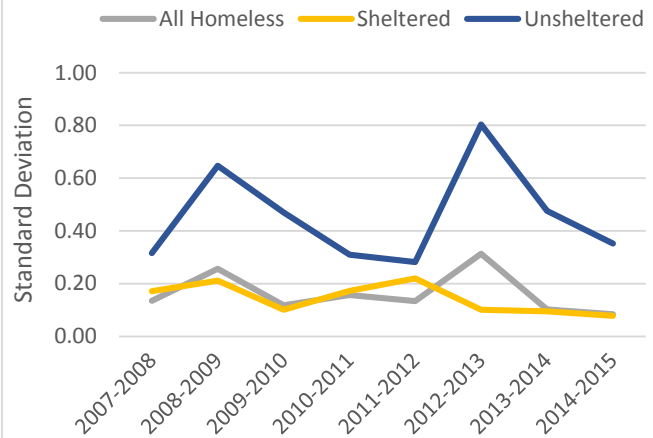
## CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

While the decline in unsheltered counts is encouraging, the unsheltered PIT count is prone to significant weaknesses, such as:

- The risk of seeing success in a lower count rather than recognizing flaws in methodology;
- Diverse and changing methodologies necessitate caution when comparing data from year to year;
- Unsheltered youth counts are widely considered to be unreliable. In the 2015 Las Vegas count, 27% of all people counted were unsheltered youth. Across other CoCs: a median of 1% and a mean of 2%;
- Developing proper sampling and extrapolation methodology can be prohibitively expensive;
- Even the best-planned methodology relies on projected volunteer turnout and strong training;
- Data is self-reported; it can be difficult to truly measure chronic homelessness (etc.) in this way;
- Conclusions from the data are limited: it represents homelessness in the U.S. on one given night only.

### Chart 2. Volatility of the Data

PIT count data shows that unsheltered counts see much wider fluctuations year-to-year than overall and sheltered counts. The following chart illustrates this variation and is based on the % homelessness changed in each state per year.



Note: two outliers were removed from unsheltered data:  
North Dakota '12-'13 (2,532% increase)  
Wyoming '10-'11 (1,217% increase)

## TIPS FOR AN IMPROVED COUNT

### *Expect changes, but don't wait for HUD.*

HUD will likely announce changes 2 to 3 months before the count, which could be 4 to 6 months after you started planning. Set a timeline early.

### *Enlist an expert.*

A full census count is not feasible for most CoCs, so take great care to ensure your method of sampling and extrapolation will be valid. Consult universities, police, urban planners, etc.

### *Enough volunteers is crucial.*

Use a *conservative* estimate of volunteers to ensure that each census or sampled area is fully canvased. Seek diversity. Give strong training.

### *Worry about accuracy, not the numbers.*

Top priority is to understand homelessness in your CoC, not to preserve a trend or a NOFA score. Strengthen methodology now before system performance measures are in full force.

### *Customize, but don't overdo.*

Consider coordinated entry assessments, updated by-name lists, or added data elements, but long surveys risk fewer counts and fewer completions.

### *Think about the youth.*

This is likely a weak spot in your methodology. Keep your eye on HUD and NAEH guidance, the Urban Institute's *Youth Count!* study, and Chapin Hall's *Voices of Youth Count* initiative. Practice.

### *Utilize the Planning Grant.*

While it cannot pay for participant incentives, almost everything PIT-related is eligible: hire an expert or organizer, increase volunteer turnout, etc.

### *Use the HUD resources.*

On HUD Exchange, review the methodology guide and implementation tools like the *PIT Count Planning Worksheet* and survey tools. Don't overlook the F.A.Q. section. Use *Ask a Question*.