

Data Sources for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness

There are two primary data sources that count homeless Veterans: the Point-in-Time (“PIT”) count and the Annual Homeless Assessment Reports (“AHAR”), which are released annually. The PIT count is an annual count of homeless persons and families collected by the Continuum of Care (“CoC”) Program. The CoC Program is comprised of HUD funded “local planning bodies responsible for coordinating the full range of homelessness services in a geographic area”.¹ The AHAR, alternatively, is estimated by HUD through a sample of three sets of homeless data from CoCs, but is primarily from CoC Homeless Management Information System (“HMIS”) data of a 12-month count of people experiencing homelessness.² HUD and the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (“VA”) cooperated starting in 2009 to produce both datasets.³

The CoC Interim Rule requires a PIT count, which is “a count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons carried out on one night in the last 10 calendar days of January or at such other time as required by HUD.”⁴ Sheltered homeless are counted every year and unsheltered homeless persons are counted every odd year.⁵ According to the HUD Notice released for the 2011 PIT count, HUD recommends asking the following questions to determine Veteran status:

1. Have you served in the U.S. Armed Forces?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don’t Know
 - d. Refused

2. Were you activated, into active duty, as a member of the National Guard or as a Reservist?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don’t Know
 - d. Refused⁶

If the person answers yes to either question above, he or she is counted as a Veteran. The count includes Veterans who were not activated into active duty if he or she answered yes to the first question and no to the second question.

The PIT, by its nature as a snapshot of homelessness, limits the number of people counted as homeless during a given year: it is not meant to be a running-count of persons or families experiencing homelessness all year. The PIT only occurs once a year during a designated day or few days within the last 10 days of January. The time period and questions provided in the HUD guidance limit the number of Veterans counted in the PIT count, but the HUD guidance on time period also limits the number of non-Veterans counted as homeless during the PIT count.

¹ U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development, November 15, 2015, p. 2.

² U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development, November 30, 2015.

³ Perl, 2015, p. 6.

⁴ 24 Code of Federal Regulations 578.3

⁵ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2014.

⁶ Homeless Resource Exchange, 2011.

The second annually-released data source is the AHAR. The AHAR is compiled from (1) PIT counts, (2) housing inventories, and (3) HMIS data. The PIT has already been described in the paragraph above. The housing inventories include emergency shelters, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, and Safe Haven programs.⁷ These types of housing are described under Section III, “Services for Veterans.” The HMIS collects unduplicated counts of individuals and families experiencing homelessness and was required by the Homelessness Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (“HEARTH”) Act of 2009. (The HEARTH Act allows an exception for the use of HMIS to domestic victim service providers, due to safety concerns of their clients. However, victim service providers must use a comparable database to track counts of homeless individuals and families experiencing homelessness.)⁸ The HMIS data is not personally identifiable, and includes homeless residential programs from October 1 through September 30 of each year.

The data reported for the AHAR is randomly selected from 102 Community Development Block Grant (“CDBG”) jurisdictions.⁹ Since 1974, HUD’s CDBG Program has been “a flexible program that provides communities with resources to address a wide range of unique community development need” through grants to general units of local government and states.¹⁰ Due to different boundaries of the CDBG jurisdictions and the CoCs, sometimes only a portion of the CoC is reported.¹¹

It should be noted that, while the PIT and AHAR are released annually, two other data records exist though the records do not yet appear to be available to the public: the VA collects data on Veterans who experience homelessness through its Homeless Operations and Management Evaluation System (“HOMES”) and patient medical records¹². HOMES was created in response to the United State Interagency Council for the Homeless release of *Opening Doors*. HOMES “allows real time access by VA providers, administrators, and medical center (“VAMC”), Veterans Integrated Service Network (“VISN”), and Central Office (“VACO”) leader to facilitate performance monitoring and decision making.”¹³ The homeless registry was created to track homeless Veterans through the VA’s system of care. As of 2011, data was entered into HOMES for the following programs:

- Housing and Urban Development VA Supported Housing (“HUD-VASH”)
- Healthcare for Homeless Veterans (“HCHV”)
- Grant Per Diem (“GPD”)
- Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans (“DCHV”)
- Compensated Work Therapy/Transitional Residences (“CWT/TR”)
- Healthcare for Re-entry Veterans (“HCRV”)
- Veterans Justice Outreach (“VJO”)

⁷ U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development, October, 2015, p. 1,

⁸ U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.3.

⁹ U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development, October, p 1-3, 2015.

¹⁰ U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development, December 1, 2015.

¹¹ U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development, October, 2015, pp. 1-3.

¹² United States Interagency Council for the Homeless, 2015.

¹³ LaSalle, 2011, p. 1.

Appendix D: Data Sources Veterans Experiencing Homelessness

As of this writing, HOMES appears solely for internal use at the VA, though there are efforts to integrate HOMES with HMIS.¹⁴ While this integration is pending, “in 2011, HUD and the VA have agreed to use the HUD PIT count as the definitive federal estimate of Veteran Homelessness.”¹⁵

The AHAR was not included in this study because it is a summary of national data; Texas data was not available.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 2-3.

¹⁵ Homeless Resource Exchange, 2011.