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April 29, 2025 | Lancaster County Redevelopment Authority – Department of Human Services



Lancaster County's 2025 Homeless Count Reflects Service Capacity Shifts and Extreme Weather

The Lancaster County Homelessness Coalition is the administrative entity that manages local homelessness programs, allocates funding to local service providers and conducts the congressionally mandated annual Point in Time Count. The count is a census of sheltered and unsheltered individuals experiencing homelessness on a single night in January.

The count, conducted on January 22, 2025, revealed a total of 546 individuals experiencing homelessness in Lancaster County.

The 2025 PIT Count showed that:

- 482 individuals were in sheltered locations on the night of the count
- 64 individuals were unsheltered

Sheltered Count Shows Slight Increase

The 2025 sheltered count of 482 is a slight increase from the 475 individuals counted in 2024. In 2025 62% of sheltered individuals were staying in an emergency shelter facility and 38% were in transitional housing. This split is consistent with the split between emergency shelter and housing programs in 2024.

Several factors contributed to this slight shift. While Tenfold provided an additional 31 emergency shelter beds, the temporary closure of some family shelter beds resulted in a net loss of emergency shelter capacity.

Christopher Thomas, Data Compliance Analyst for the Office for the Lancaster County Homelessness Coalition (O4C) stated that “the situation of sheltered homelessness on the 2025 count is similar to what we saw last year, with gains in some parts of the system being offset by short-term losses in others. It’s important to note that the temporary shelter operated by Tenfold in its garage made a huge difference, not just on this night, but

throughout the winter. The 2025 count is also a reminder that while households without children may represent a more pressing need in the shelter system, households with children cannot be forgotten, especially given that there are fewer beds in the system dedicated to their use.”

Unsheltered Count Decreases

The 2025 unsheltered count showed a notable decrease, with 64 individuals identified compared to 122 in 2024 – a difference of 58 people. This figure, while a decrease, still represents the third-highest unsheltered count on record for Lancaster County.

The significantly cold weather on the night of the count, with temperatures reaching negative four (-4) degrees Fahrenheit, likely played a role in this decrease as individuals sought any available indoor shelter. While individual adults appeared to have utilized available emergency shelter beds, this trend was not observed for families with children due to limited existing capacity and operational models within family shelters.

Geographically, unsheltered individuals were found in similar locations as in previous years, however, the number of individuals counted in nearly all locations was lower. Notably, there were fewer individuals observed in traditional gathering spots within Lancaster City.

“The 2025 count, while lower than the previous year, involved the dedicated effort of 60 volunteers who connected with individuals across the county on the coldest night. Despite this decrease, the count remains one of the highest unsheltered totals Lancaster County has recorded, underscoring that unsheltered homelessness is still a significant problem requiring attention.” said Christopher Thomas, O4C. He continued that “at the same time, it is a reminder that as the situation of unsheltered homelessness locally changes, the approach to counting may need to change too. In planning for the 2026 count, we will explore strategies that focus on bringing unsheltered people in to be counted as a way of handling the more dispersed conditions we saw in 2025.”

Overall Count Remains Historically High

The 2025 PIT count of individuals is the second-highest count on record for Lancaster County in the decade since 2015, and the fifth highest ever PIT count since 2009. “It’s important to remember that the PIT Count denotes only a single night and does not fully

represent the ongoing and broader need for homelessness services in our community,” said Deb Jones, Director of the Office for the Lancaster County Homelessness Coalition.

Looking Ahead

Moving forward, the Lancaster County Coalition to End Homelessness will explore strategies to enhance the accuracy of future PIT counts. This includes expanding the post-count efforts at day shelters and day centers to capture individuals who may not have been visible on the night of the count.

“Technology has enhanced recent PIT counts. This year volunteers used an app-based survey. Having survey data collected digitally saves time and provides precise location data to tell us where each survey was collected. Our goal each year is to build on previous success and continuously improve the county-wide process. The Coalition will continue to collaborate with street outreach staff to gain further insights into the movement of individuals experiencing homelessness between 2024 and 2025” said Christopher Thomas, O4C

The Lancaster County Homelessness Coalition continues to work diligently with our unsheltered community members to secure safe and sustain housing to meet household needs and connect with services.

If you would like to support the work of the Lancaster County Homelessness Coalition donations can be made at <https://lchra.com/our-organizations/homelessness-coalition/donate/>. Donations will support local initiatives of street outreach to unsheltered individuals, financial assistance for clients to become housed, and the creation of affordable housing units.

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