

2009 PORTLAND/ MULTNOMAH COUNTY STREET COUNT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Street Count provides a snapshot of those sleeping outside – on the street, in a car or abandoned building – on a given night in Portland/ Multnomah County. In combination with the One Night Shelter Count, which is conducted on the same night, it enhances our understanding of the levels of homelessness in our community and the need for services.

The 2009 Street Count collected information on individuals and families throughout Multnomah County who were homeless and sleeping outside on Wednesday night, January 28, 2009. The count identified 1,591 unduplicated individuals who met these criteria. This includes 78 individuals in families with children, 248 individuals in couples, eight unaccompanied youth under age 18, and 1,225 individual adults.

The Street Count is coordinated by the City of Portland, but the timing and parameters of the count are set by the federal government. Due to the inherent difficulties of obtaining a complete count of everyone sleeping outside in Multnomah County on a given night, the Street Count represents a rough estimate rather than a complete enumeration. An analysis of the count's methodological limitations suggests that the actual number of unsheltered persons on a given night in our community is likely higher than the number documented in this report.

The One Night Shelter Count (ONSC), conducted by Multnomah County on the same night, identified 820 individuals in emergency shelter and 27 individuals vouchered into motels. This includes 175 individuals in families with children, 16 individuals in couples, five unaccompanied youth under age 18, and 651 individual adults. Comprehensive data is not available on households who are doubled up or couch surfing, but the available data suggests that there may be more than twice as many households in that situation as are on the streets or in shelters.

The 2009 Street Count identified 153 more unsheltered homeless persons than the 2007 count, an increase of 11%. The combined sheltered and unsheltered count was 13% higher than in 2007. The increase in the sheltered count largely reflects the addition of new seasonal warming shelter beds in 2009. Without that increased capacity, the additional persons counted in the ONSC probably would have been counted in the Street Count. The increase in the unsheltered count may be partially attributable to improvements in implementation of the Street Count methodology, but much of the increase is probably due to the economic downturn.

Thirty-seven percent of Street Count respondents for whom data is available reported that they had been homeless for less than a year, including 21% who had been homeless for six months or less. Many cities across the country, including several that saw reductions in homelessness in recent years, have reported increases in their homeless populations since the recession began. Portland's increases would almost certainly have been higher without the City and County's investments in homeless services and affordable housing.

In the face of the economic recession, holding the line against further expansions in homelessness will require increased investments. The number and percentage of veterans and chronically homeless individuals with disabilities has increased at a greater rate than the rest of the homeless population. This population tends to be more expensive to house than adults without disabilities. The data also suggest that the impact of the economic downturn is only beginning to be felt on the streets. Increased demand for services such as rent assistance and food stamps indicates that more households will be at risk of homelessness in the upcoming months.