

# 2011 POINT-IN-TIME

## Count of Homelessness in Portland/Multnomah County, Oregon



Presented to: Portland Housing Bureau, 211info, and Multnomah County

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# Taking Action to End Homelessness



**Nick Fish**  
Commissioner  
City of Portland



**Deborah Kafoury**  
Commissioner  
Multnomah County

We believe that everyone should have a safe, decent, and affordable place to call home. However, on any given night, thousands of our neighbors live without a home – a basic necessity.

We hope as you read this report you allow the data to touch your hearts and minds. Attached to these numbers are women, children and men – our neighbors, friends and families – who do not have a place to call home.

By bringing together government, non-profit organizations, the faith community, and business partners, we have made a real difference in the lives of those who need help.

Since 2004, when we began Home Again, our community's plan to end homelessness, our shared efforts have moved more than 7,000 people from the streets and shelters into homes.

We prevented thousands more from becoming homeless with assistance that allowed them to stay in their homes until they were back on their feet.

This June, we opened the Bud Clark Commons, a cornerstone to our community's plan, which will provide 130 units of permanent housing, a day access center that connects people to services and a men's shelter.

Through these efforts, we learned about the most effective ways to prevent and end people's homelessness.

We focus on helping people move into housing first, and then connect them with the supportive services, jobs and sustaining benefits they need to stay there. We provide rent assistance, which is an immediate short-term solution for individuals and families in crisis. And, we continue to invest locally in building more homes that people can actually afford.

However, the results of this report remind us that we must do more.

In the coming years, we will adapt our approach to address today's challenges. We will work together to end the practice of discharging vulnerable individuals from our hospitals, prisons, and foster care system to the street. We will retool our outreach, shelter, and rent assistance programs to better prevent homelessness and to quickly find homes for those who become homeless, with increased emphasis on veterans, families, and children. We will address the continuing crisis caused by the unraveling of our mental health and addictions treatment systems, and we will better meet the stark reality that domestic violence remains a significant cause of homelessness among women and families.

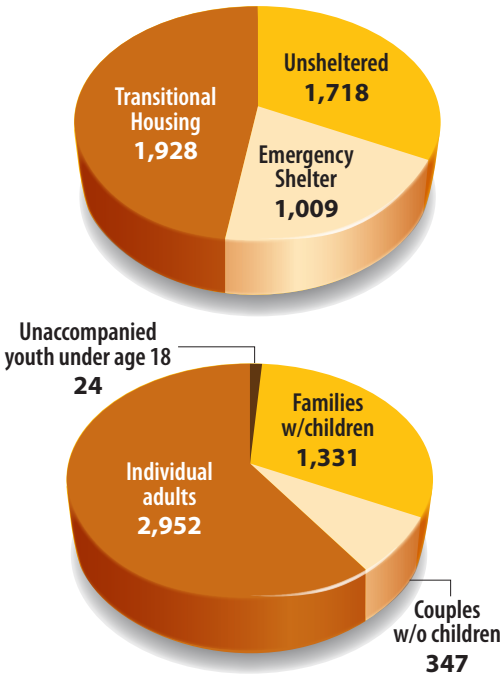
We commit to taking action every day to end homelessness in Portland and Multnomah County. We invite you to join us in working to make that vision a reality. For more information, go to:

<http://www.portlandonline.com/phb/streetcount>

The simple truth is that we can't afford to do anything less.

The point-in-time count of homelessness in Portland and Multnomah County provides a snapshot of the individuals and families experiencing homelessness on a given night in our community. The data collected from the count ensures our community's continued eligibility for state and federal funding and helps the City of Portland, Multnomah County and their nonprofit partners plan for the funding and services needed to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness in our community.

### Homeless Individuals



Data for the point-in-time count comes from the Street Count, which is sponsored by the Portland Housing Bureau, and the One Night Shelter Count, which is sponsored by Multnomah County. In 2011, the City, County, and their partners worked together to achieve unprecedented levels of coordination between the two counts. This report represents the first time that the findings from both counts have been analyzed together and released in a joint report.

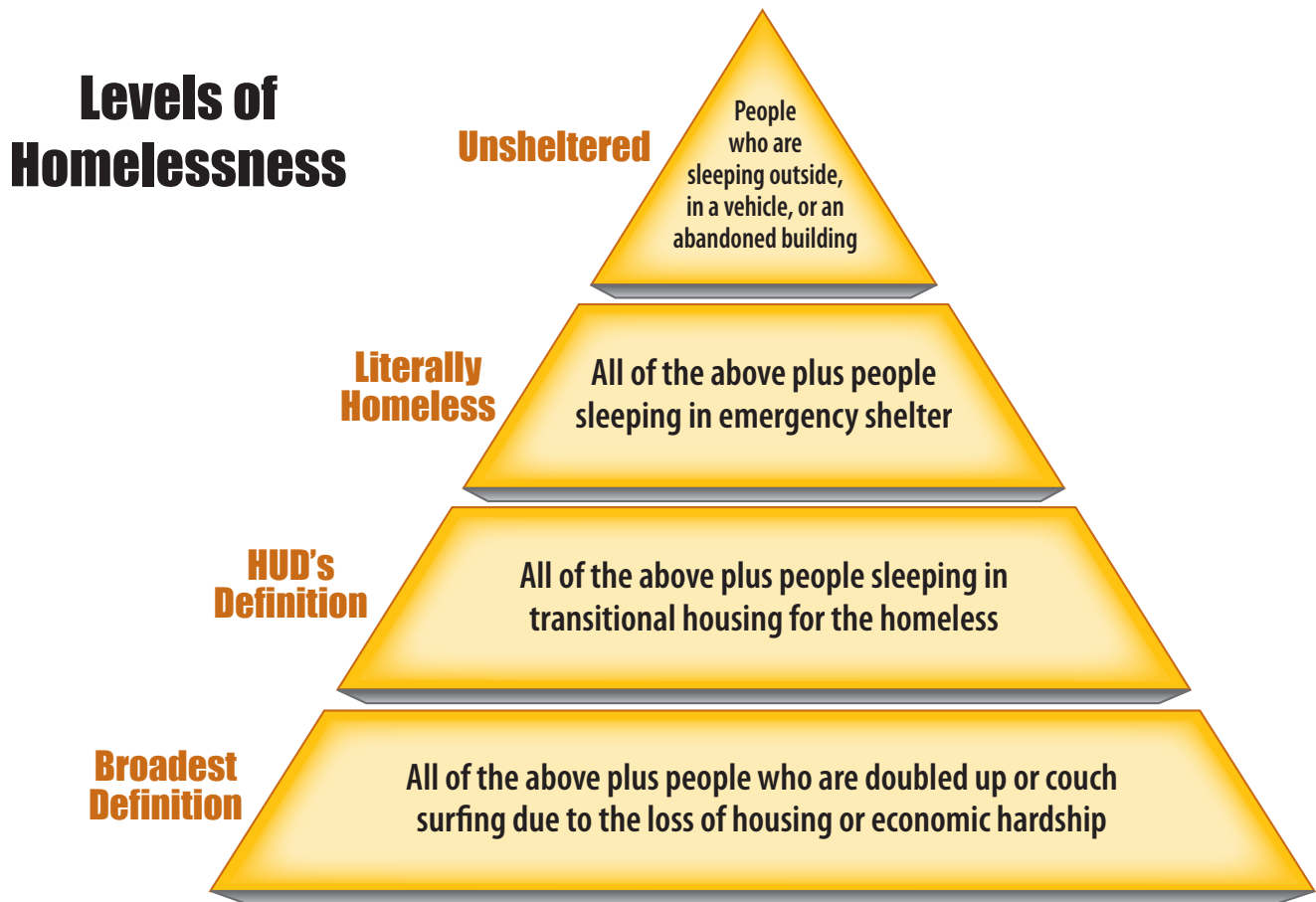
The 2011 count identified 2,727 people who were “literally homeless” – sleeping in an emergency shelter, vouchered into a motel, or unsheltered – on the night of January 26. This number includes 1,718 people who were unsheltered (sleeping outside, in a vehicle, or abandoned building) and 1,009 people who were sleeping in an emergency shelter or vouchered into a motel. An additional 1,928 people were sleeping in transitional housing on the night of the count, bringing the total homeless count to 4,655.

This figure represents 1,331 individuals in families with children (including 751 children), 347 individuals in couples, 2,952 individual adults over age 18, and 24 unaccompanied youth under age 18.

The count did not capture comprehensive information on households who were doubled up, but an analysis of available data suggests that there may be four times as many people in that situation as are on the streets or in shelters. The count also documented 1,871 people who received rent assistance or permanent supportive housing on the night of the count who would most likely have been homeless without that support.

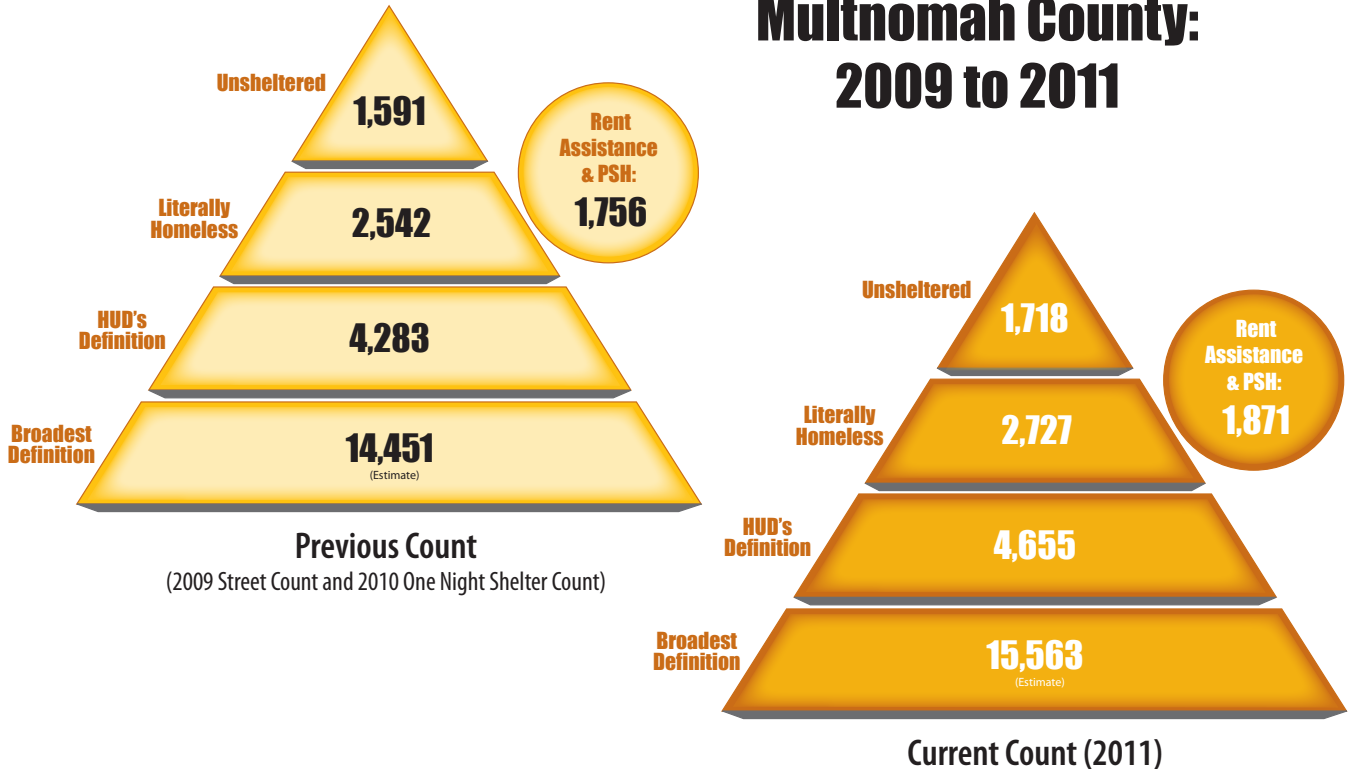
Due to the inherent difficulties of obtaining a complete count of everyone who is homeless in Multnomah County on a given night, the count represents an estimate rather than a complete enumeration. The actual number of people who are homeless in our community on a given night is likely higher than the number documented in this report.

The point in time count's findings represent an increase in the levels of homelessness in Multnomah County since the most recent Street Count and One Night Shelter Count took place in 2009 and 2010 respectively. The extent of the increase depends on how we define homelessness:



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- **Unsheltered:** The most visible homeless population is the unsheltered homeless, including people sleeping outside, in vehicles, abandoned buildings, or other places not intended for human habitation.
  - **Literally Homeless:** The federal department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) uses the term “literally homeless” to refer to the unsheltered homeless as well as people sleeping in emergency shelters or vouchered into motels.
  - **HUD's Definition:** HUD's definition of homelessness for the point-in-time count includes the literally homeless as well as those sleeping in transitional housing for the homeless.
  - **Broadest Definition:** Some advocates and government agencies (including the Department of Education) define homelessness more broadly to include individuals and families who are sharing the housing of other persons due to the loss of housing or economic hardship.
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## Homelessness in Multnomah County: 2009 to 2011



Levels of homelessness in Multnomah County were 7% to 9% higher in 2011 compared with the most recent counts in 2009 and 2010:

- The unsheltered homeless count increased by 127 people, or 8%.
- The number of literally homeless increased by 185 people, or 7%.
- The number meeting HUD's definition of homelessness increased by 372 people, or 9%.
- The number meeting the broadest definition of homelessness increased by an estimated 1,112 people or 8%.

The One Night Shelter Count also captures information on people who are receiving rent assistance or living in permanent supportive housing (PSH). This data provides an important context for interpreting the other numbers in the count by showing the movement of people out of homelessness into housing. Without these resources, the 1,871 people who were served by these programs would probably have been included in the homeless numbers.

The increase in Multnomah County's homeless population can be attributed to the unprecedented economic challenges that we have faced in our region and nationally over the past few years, as well as improvements to the count itself that resulted in more comprehensive data.

The Portland metro region has been among the worst hit by the recession, with record unemployment rates and per capita incomes that trail the national average. Point-in-time count respondents cite unemployment as one of the primary reasons for their homelessness and note that the recession has made it harder to find and retain adequate work.

Despite declining incomes, the cost of housing in the region has increased in recent years, making it more difficult for low-income residents to afford market rate rents. According to a recently released national report, a minimum-wage earner in Multnomah County would need to work 82 hours per week, or earn \$17.40/hour in a full-time job, to afford the area's fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment. Forty-nine percent of Multnomah County's renter households and 35% of owner households currently pay more than 30% of their gross income for rent/mortgage and utilities.

Any crisis, from a medical emergency to job loss, can put a household with this level of rent burden at risk of homelessness. The high housing costs also make it extremely difficult for households already experiencing homelessness to transition off the streets. Point-in-time count respondents cite their inability to afford rent as one of the two primary reasons for their homelessness, along with unemployment.

In addition to these economic factors, a portion of the increase in the count numbers can also be attributed to improvements in the count methodology that resulted in more complete data. These improvements include expanded partnerships that strengthened the comprehensiveness of the unsheltered count and more extensive data collection for transitional housing and permanent supportive housing units. These factors are discussed in more detail in the body of the report.

#### **Other key trends revealed by the 2011 count:**

- **Homeless Families:** The number of unsheltered homeless families with children has increased by 35% since 2009;
- **Veterans:** Veterans make up 12% of the homeless population;
- **Populations of Color:** Populations of color make up 46% of the homeless population compared with 29% of the overall population of Multnomah County. The over-representation is particularly high for Native Americans and African Americans;
- **Disabling Conditions:** Half of the homeless population has a disabling condition;
- **Domestic Violence:** 18% of the homeless population and 35% of homeless women are affected by domestic violence;
- **Geographic Location:** The unsheltered population is distributed throughout the county and is no longer concentrated in downtown Portland;
- **Chronic Homelessness:** Chronic homelessness has increased slightly among the unsheltered population since 2009 but has decreased among the sheltered population;
- **Persistent Homelessness:** More than half of the unsheltered population was also homeless and unsheltered in January 2009 when the last Street Count took place.