



BAKERSFIELD-KERN REGIONAL HOMELESS COLLABORATIVE 2021 PIT COUNT REPORT

The Bakersfield-Kern Regional Homeless Collaborative (BKRHC), also known as the Bakersfield/Kern County Continuum of Care (COC) CA-604, has completed the annual 2021 Point-in-Time Count following guidance from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for those who are sheltered and unsheltered. There was a total of 2,150 unduplicated persons sleeping in shelters and unsheltered on January 27th, 2021. The PIT Count resulted in 569 persons who were sleeping in shelters and 1,581 who were unsheltered.

Due to the ongoing pandemic, BKRHC undertook a modified methodology to determine the unsheltered count. The BKRHC is one of seven COCs out of 44 in California to conduct a modified unsheltered PIT count, while the remaining COCs did not conduct an unsheltered count. Because the methodology differs, caution should be taken when making comparisons to reported findings from prior years.

Table 1. Kern County Homeless Population on January 27, 2021

Homeless Population				
Sheltered Status	Adults	Adults w/ Children	Children	Total Count
Sheltered	421	47	101	569
Unsheltered	1212	127	242	1581
2021 Combined Total	1633	174	343	2150

Both sheltered and unsheltered counts are likely to have been influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic and housing inventory impacts. Shelters reduced bed capacity to follow Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommended practices for congregate sheltering. The increase in unemployment, lack of affordable housing, and record low rental vacancies are reasonably believed contributors to the unsheltered total¹. These impacts were most notably seen in BKRHC system performance metrics for the fourth quarter (October-December) of 2020 when inflow of those

¹ Unemployment increased throughout 2020, reaching a high of over 18% in April – see Employment Development Department Press Release [https://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/file/lfmonth/bake\\$pd.pdf](https://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/file/lfmonth/bake$pd.pdf). The Housing Authority of County of Kern reports 18,624 households on public housing waiting list – see <https://kernha.org/menus/policies-and-resources.html>. Record low rental vacancy rates are now below 1% with zero vacancies in East Bakersfield in the first quarter of 2021 – see https://www.bakersfield.com/news/bakersfields-citywide-apartment-vacancy-rate-drops-to-1/article_4c0ff72a-928a-11eb-852d-7bd37fbf4ab4.html

experiencing homelessness for the first time rose while outflow of individuals who achieve permanent housing solutions decreased².

In order to follow public health guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic and support infection control, HUD approved the BKRHC exception to conduct the unsheltered count using Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data and extrapolation methods. In previous years, the unsheltered count required hundreds of volunteers to conduct a single day survey in January. This methodology change, further discussed below, was approved by HUD to ensure the safety of individuals experiencing homelessness, staff, and community members.

PIT Count

The PIT Count is a single-day, nationwide count of sheltered and unsheltered individuals experiencing homelessness. In Kern County the PIT count is usually performed annually via a concerted volunteer effort by homeless service providers and their staff, community volunteers, City and County officials, and other interested parties. The PIT Count is important in determining homeless population trends for Kern County and other participating Continuums of Care throughout the United States. Though HUD requires a biennial count, the BKRHC completes an annual count every January in an effort to better understand changes and needs within the community. Though helpful, the PIT count of individuals experiencing homelessness is best understood when taken in context with other data points regularly reported by BKRHC. For a current list of reports and presentations, please see the BKRHC website at www.bkrhc.org.

PIT Count Methodology

The annual unsheltered PIT count normally utilizes an in-person interview of individuals experiencing homelessness throughout Kern County currently sleeping on the streets (e.g., tents, encampments), in cars, or other places not otherwise meant for human habitation. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the BKRHC and PIT Count Committee determined that to balance the interest in completing the unsheltered PIT count with the safety of staff and individuals experiencing homelessness, other methodology options should be considered following the guidance provided by HUD.

The PIT Committee, with the support of the Chair of HMIS Data Quality, undertook a review of the HMIS system, timeliness of data entry and comparison of HMIS data to the 2020 unsheltered PIT count total. This analysis was presented to the BKRHC PIT Count Committee and Governing Board for review, approval, and subsequent approval was received by HUD.

A custom HMIS report was created and pulled on January 27, 2021. Several filters were used to scrub or clean the data. To ensure additional integrity, the client's unique identifier was used to de-duplicate and ensure that no single unique identifier was present twice or more in the data set. A randomized selection and a sampling process was used to ensure data quality and provide the ability to extrapolate as needed. To validate the HMIS unsheltered data, sampling and validation was performed per HUD specifications by outreach teams.

² See BKRHC Board of Supervisors Presentation https://bkrhc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/973280_BKRHC-Board-of-Sups-Presentation_210319-v2.pptx.pdf

The HUD data extrapolation tool was used to complete the data set for the demographic data (gender, ethnicity, race). HMIS data was entered into the HUD tool, automatic calculations performed to obtain the extrapolated totals, and built-in error tracking review completed to ensure any data warnings were corrected. HDX (HUD) and the associated data entry also provided real-time error tracking to ensure that any discrepancies not otherwise caught during the data scrubbing, extrapolation, or data balancing would be flagged for follow up and correction.

Demographic Characteristics of Homeless Population

Household Status

Of the 2,150 individuals included in the 2021 PIT count, there was a total of 1,747 households (Table 2). There were 117 households where there is at least one adult and one child and 1,630 households were adults without children. There were no households with unaccompanied minors (children only households).

- 24.0% of the total 2021 PIT Count were households with at least one adult and one child while 76.0% were single adults.

Table 2. Household Status of Homeless Population in 2021

Household Status of Homeless Population in 2021								
Household Type	Households		Adults		Children		All People	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
At least one adult and one child	117	6.7%	174	9.6%	343	100.0%	517	24.0%
Children only (no adults)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Adult without children	1630	93.3%	1633	90.4%	n/a	n/a	1633	76.0%
Total	1747	100.0%	1807	100.0%	343	100.0%	2150	100.0%

Gender

Breakdown of data by gender revealed that females made up 38% of the total sheltered count, while males made up the remaining 61.7%. For unsheltered females and males, there was an even distribution at 49.5% and 50.3% respectively. Transgender and gender non-conforming individuals both represented below 1% of the population (Table 3).

Table 3. Gender and Sheltered Status of 2021 Homeless Population

Gender				
Gender	Sheltered Count	Percent Sheltered	Unsheltered Count	Percent Unsheltered
Female	216	38.0%	782	49.5%
Male	351	61.7%	796	50.3%

Transgender	1	0.2%	3	0.2%
Gender Non-Conforming	1	0.2%	0	0%
Total	569	100%	1581	100%

Age

For age groups, we find that children under 18 years made up 16% of the total PIT count, while youth were 6% and adults represented 78% of the remaining total. Of the total 343 children, 71% (242 individuals) were unsheltered. 72% (99 individuals) of the total youth count were unsheltered. For the total adult population, 3 out of every 4 adults were unsheltered (78% or 1669 individuals) (Table 4).

Table 4. Age Breakdown of 2021 Homeless Population

Age				
Age Group	Count	Percent of PIT Total	Percent Unsheltered	Unsheltered Count
Children (under 18)	343	16%	71%	242
Youth (18 - 24)	138	6%	72%	99
Adults (over 24)	1669	78%	74%	1240
Total	2150	100%		

Ethnicity and Race

The 2021 PIT count showed that individuals that identify as American Indian/Alaska Native comprised 1.9% of the homeless population and individuals that identify as Black/African American make 22.0%. Review of HUD's Racial Equity tool revealed that there is an overrepresentation of American Indian/Alaska Native and Black/African American groups within Kern County's homeless population. For the Black/African American population, there is a demonstrated overrepresentation among those experiencing homelessness when compared to the most current Kern County census figure (6.3%).

Table 5. Ethnicity and Race Breakdown of 2021 Homeless Population

Ethnicity & Race		
	Count	Percent
Ethnicity		
Hispanic/Latino	730	34.0%
Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino	1420	66.0%
Race		
American Indian/Alaska Native	40	1.9%
Asian	8	0.4%
Black/African American	474	22.0%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	9	0.4%
White	1532	71.3%
Multiple Races	87	4.0%

Sheltered and Unsheltered Homeless

There was a total of 26.5% sheltered and 73.5% unsheltered individuals for the 2021 PIT count (Figure 1). Of the 26.5% sheltered individuals, 20.4% were in emergency shelters and 6.0% were in transitional housing (Figure 2). Due to COVID-19 related CDC guidance, shelter bed capacity was reduced to properly socially distance individuals within congregate shelters. This precaution resulted in a decreased bed capacity.

Sheltered VS. Unsheltered Homeless in 2021

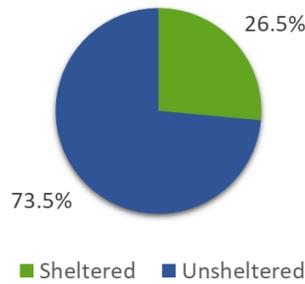


Figure 1. Sheltered and unsheltered percentages for total 2021 PIT count population.

Sheltered VS. Unsheltered Homeless Countywide in 2021

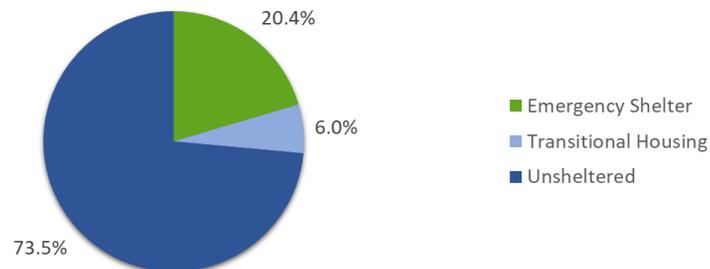


Figure 2. 2021 countywide shelter breakdown between sheltered individuals in emergency shelters or transitional housing and unsheltered individuals.

Homeless Adult Subpopulations

Some subpopulations, such as those who are chronically homeless or veterans are identified to address their unique housing placement and supportive services needs. Subpopulations in the PIT count also include those individuals with serious mental illness, substance abuse disorder, HIV/AIDS, and domestic violence survivors (Table 6).

Chronically Homeless Individuals

Chronically homeless are, as defined by HUD, those individuals or families who have been homeless for at least a full year or four times in the last three years, and in which cases the individual or adult family head has a chronic mental or physical disability and/or substance abuse disorder. Because of the multiple variables contributing to chronicity (health comorbidities/factors, unsheltered status, and length of time homeless), there has been an increased focus to address the needs of this group due to their vulnerability.

Of the 1,872 homeless adults included in the subpopulations, fewer than 1% (0.1%, 1 adult) was chronically homeless. This represents a sustained and committed effort by homeless service providers to engage and prioritize this subpopulation for housing. In January 2021, BKRHC was recognized by Community Solutions, a nationwide organization that works to address homelessness, for achieving Functional Zero for Chronic Homelessness.

Veterans

Veterans accounted for 2% (40 adults) of the total homeless subpopulation. Among those, 75% were sheltered. This relatively small subpopulation is likely the positive result of substantial efforts by our homeless service providers to ensure housing placements and supportive services are provided quickly.

Mental Illness

Of the total adult homeless subpopulation count, there were 487 adults (26%) who reported serious mental illness, two-thirds of whom were unsheltered.

Substance Use Disorders

There were 730 adults (39%) who reported having a substance use disorder. More than eight of ten of those were unsheltered.

HIV/AIDS

Eleven homeless adults (1%) make up the subpopulation living with HIV/AIDS.

Domestic Violence Survivors

150 adults (8%) comprised the domestic violence survivor homeless subpopulation. Domestic violence emergency shelters and transitional housing provided data for this group.

Table 6. Adult Homeless Subpopulations for 2021 PIT Count

Adult Homeless Subpopulations						
Adult Subpopulations	Sheltered		Unsheltered		Total Adults	% All Adults
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
All Homeless Adults	468	25%	1404	75%	1872	100%
Veterans	30	75%	10	25%	40	2%
Chronically Homeless	0	0%	1	100%	1	0.1%
Serious Mental Illness	163	33%	324	67%	487	26%
Substance Use Disorder	115	16%	615	84%	730	39%
HIV/AIDS	5	45%	6	55%	11	1%
Domestic Violence Survivors	35	23%	115	77%	150	8%

Discussion

The pandemic played a major role in Kern County, affecting the way in which the 2021 PIT count was conducted and likely the sheltered and unsheltered counts. Reduction in shelter beds and an extraordinarily low inventory of available housing has made housing placements and supportive services challenging for homeless services providers.

The 2021 PIT count numbers reflect much of what was seen in the 2020 4th quarter System Performance Measures (SPM) presentations to the Bakersfield City Council and Kern County Board of Supervisors. During 4th quarter 2020 (October – December), there was an increase from the prior quarter in the number of individuals experiencing homelessness for the first time (inflow) with 756 people identified. Subsequently, there was a decrease from 328 (3rd quarter) to 210 (4th quarter) individuals experiencing homelessness who achieved permanent housing (Figures 4). The SPM also showed an increase in the Length of Time Homeless (LOTH), to an average of 517 nights an individual spent in either an emergency shelter or transitional housing before achieving permanent housing (Figure 5).

The observed increase in the number of monthly intake calls to the 211 system within the 4th quarter was also indicative of the impact COVID-19 had on Kern County. The 211 system serves as one of several entry points into the homeless services system (Figure 6).

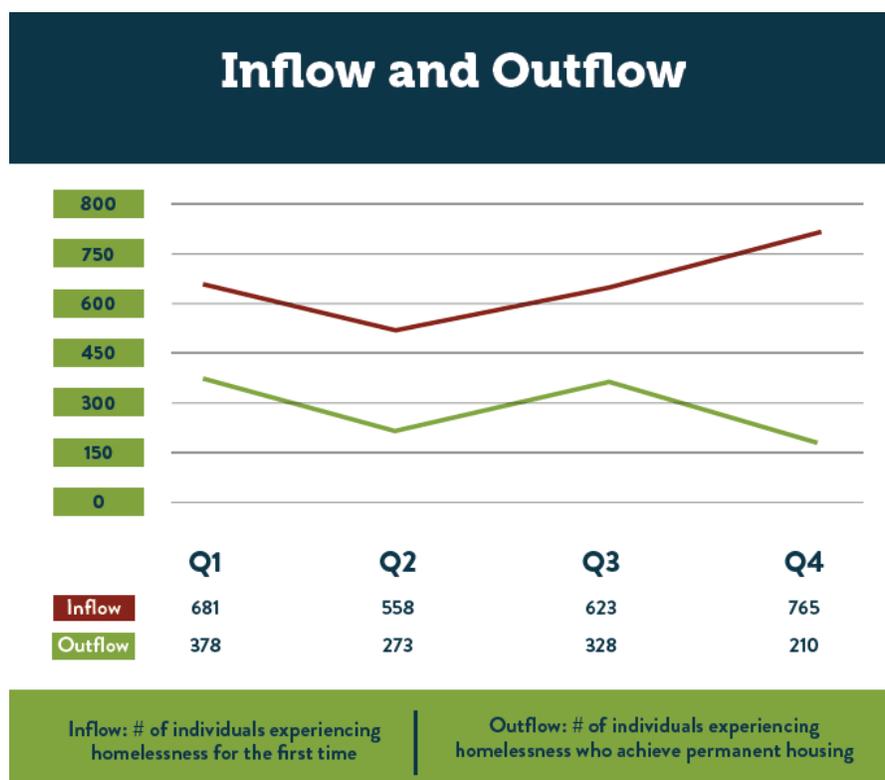
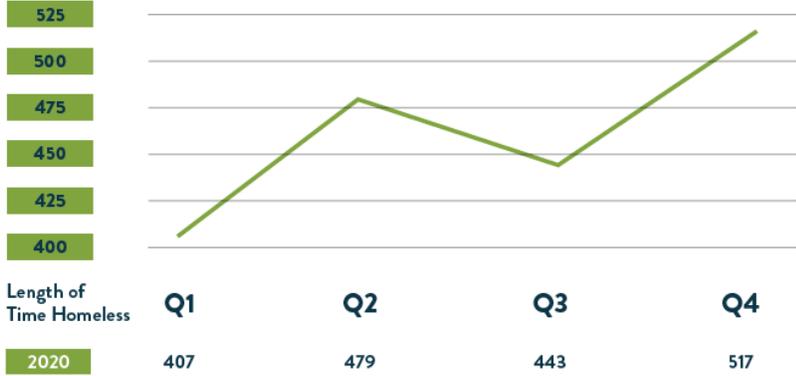


Figure 4. Inflow and outflow for Kern County homeless population.

Length of Time (LOT) Homeless



Average # of nights an individual stays in an Emergency Shelter or Temporary Housing before achieving permanent housing. Does not account for nights living unsheltered

Figure 5. Length of time (LOT) homeless for individuals in emergency shelter or transitional housing.

2-1-1 Intake Calls, 2019 vs 2020



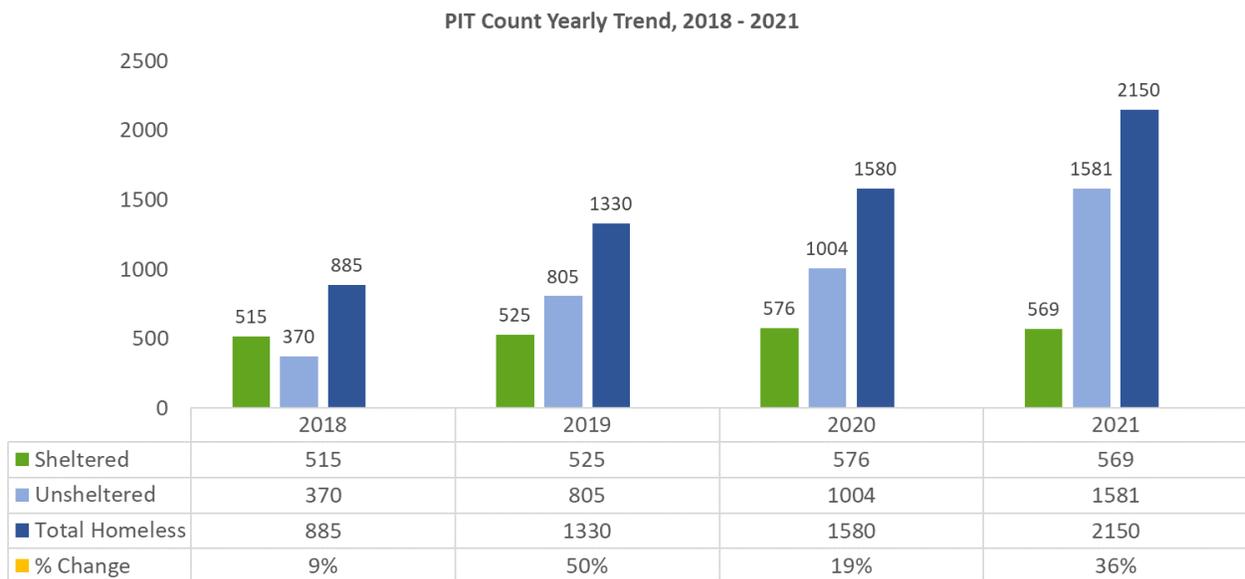
Figure 6. 211 intake calls for 2019 and 2020 by percentage increase.

Subpopulation-based Approach

While BKRHC has made strong inroads in responding to the unique needs of several subpopulations (Chronically Homeless and Veterans), the PIT continues to demonstrate the need to expand that work so that the finite supply of resources can be used efficiently and tailored to the unique needs of each group. That children and young adults continue to make up a large percentage of the population is an area of concern. It is well documented that extraordinary trauma and developmental delays take place when a child experiences homelessness. In addition, it is also concerning that several racial and ethnic groups are well-overrepresented. Finally, those experiencing serious mental illness and substance use disorders make up the majority of those experiencing homelessness, with a very high proportion of those sleeping in places not meant for human habitation. It is evident that efforts to address their long-term housing needs and treatment options should continue.

Data Limitations

While every effort was made to ensure that the 2021 PIT count data maintained its integrity through multiple reviews and embedded error tracking features within HUD’s extrapolation tool and HDX website, it is important to acknowledge the need to always use multiple data points to triangulate findings. In this case, the findings mirror other known community data elements that are known to influence or cause homelessness. **As a result of substantially changing methodologies, interpretation of trend data should be undertaken with caution.** In 2019, efforts to improve the PIT resulted in doubling the number of volunteers supporting the unsheltered count. Similarly, in 2020 the number of volunteers again increased. Meanwhile, in 2021, the methodology changed entirely, resulting in the use of HMIS data to determine the unsheltered count.



Acknowledgements

We wish to extend gratitude to the Point in Time Committee Chair, Margarita Rosson and the entire committee membership for their tireless efforts in navigating truly unprecedented times. Adventist Health has provided generous and ongoing support of the Point In Time count for which we are especially grateful.

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