DATA BRIEF:

Allegheny County Point-in-Time Homelessness Data, 2010 through 2014

DEFINITIONS

Based on definitions provided by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development

Continuum of Care (CoC): A community plan and related system that organizes and delivers housing and services to meet the specific needs of people who are homeless as they move to stable housing and maximize self-sufficiency. CoCs can represent cities, rural/regional areas or counties, as in the case of Allegheny County.

Emergency shelter: Any facility with overnight sleeping accommodations, the primary purpose of which is to provide temporary shelter.

Sheltered: Describes a person who has a primary nighttime residence that is a supervised shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations. Includes both emergency shelters and transitional housing.

Transitional housing: A facility designed to provide housing and appropriate supportive services to homeless people to facilitate movement to independent living within a reasonable amount of time, usually 24 months.

Unsheltered: Describes a person who is residing in a place not meant for human habitation.

Each year, Allegheny County's Continuum of Care (CoC) collects Point-in-Time (PIT) homelessness data as required by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The PIT count occurs across the country during the last 10 days of January and includes a required annual count of all sheltered homeless as well as a biannual count of unsheltered homeless (with some CoCs such as Allegheny County choosing to collect data more frequently). These data are used to measure homelessness and track progress on a local and national level, thereby helping federal departments, local governments and the general public to understand the extent of homelessness and identify prevention and intervention strategies.

To count the number of sheltered individuals and families, CoCs use data from local Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS), case management records and interviews. CoCs utilize street outreach teams to record the number of unsheltered homeless. Guidelines for conducting annual PIT counts are issued by HUD each year[1]; variations in count methodologies over the years may contribute to artificial increases or decreases during the time period examined. For example, the number of outreach workers counting unsheltered homeless may affect the data collected; Allegheny County's commitment to collecting the most accurate data possible may lead to an expanded outreach effort and (possibly) higher homeless counts in the future. Additionally, fluctuations in weather conditions, shelter vacancies, service funding and resource availability may result in variations across time and CoCs. Certain populations that are

[1] HUD guidelines for PIT data collection can be found at https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/4036/point-in-time-count-methodology-guide
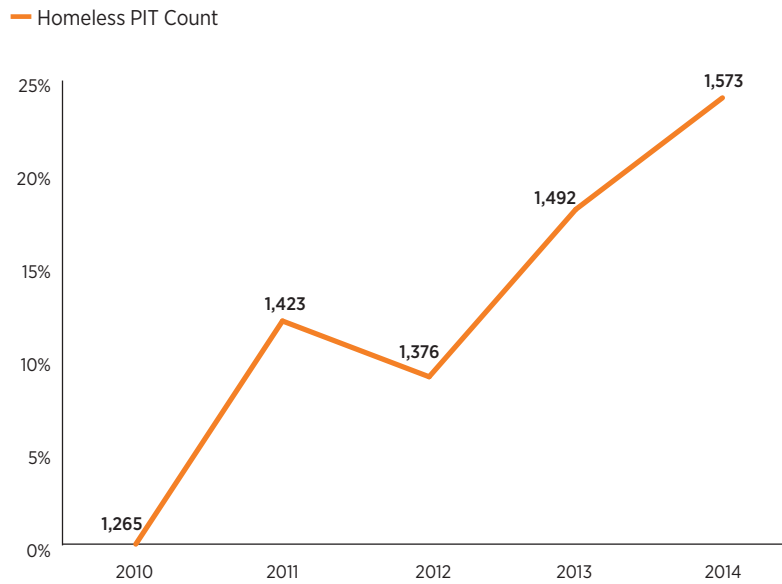
in unstable or supportive housing but not considered literally homeless by HUD's definition are not recorded by the PIT count; it does not include those who are within 14 days of homelessness, living in doubled-up situations or in permanent supportive housing.[2]
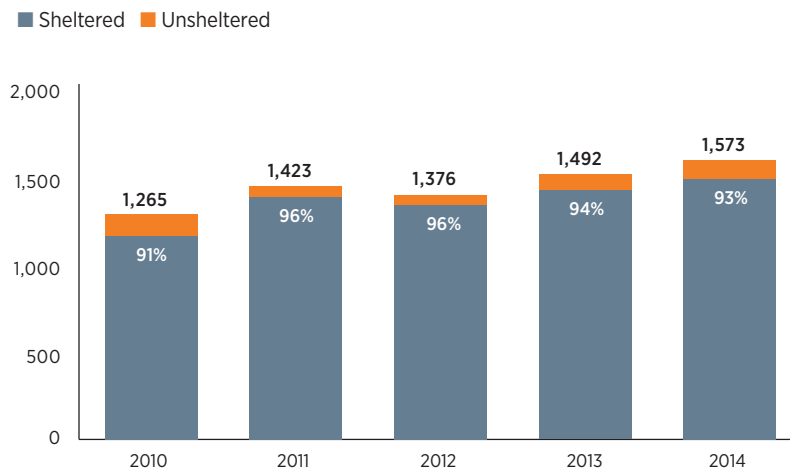
ALLEGHENY COUNTY PIT FINDINGS, 2010 THROUGH 2014

From 2010 through 2014, the total homeless PIT count (a combination of both sheltered and unsheltered) in Allegheny County increased from 1,265 people to 1,573, an increase of 24 percent (shown in **Figure 1**, below). During the same period, the total population of Allegheny County was relatively constant, increasing just 0.29 percent.

FIGURE 1: **Percentage Change of Allegheny County Homeless PIT Population Relative to 2010**
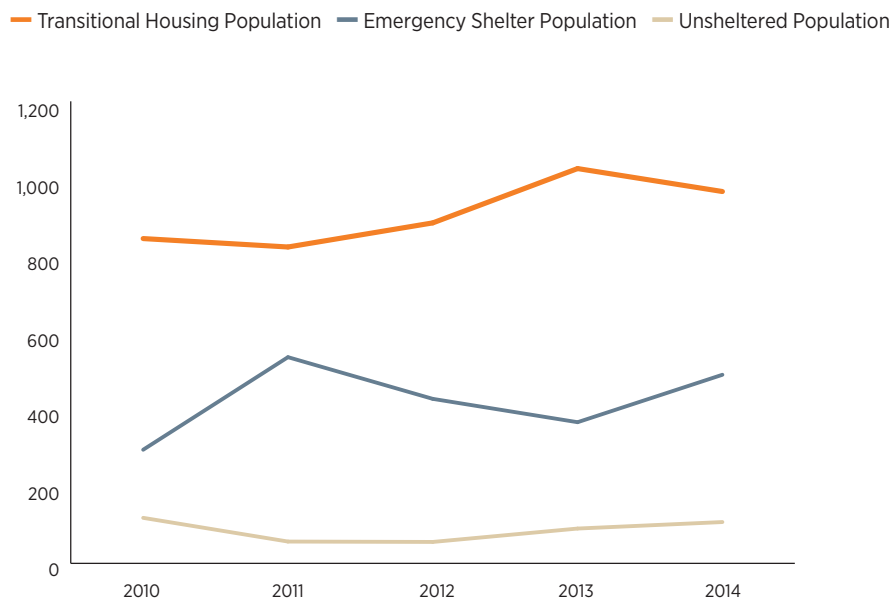
In the last five years, the total homeless count appears to have increased slightly, with the vast majority consisting of individuals in sheltered situations. As shown in **Figure 2**, below, there have been fluctuations over time in both populations, although these may be accounted for by the previously-discussed changes in criteria and count methodologies. One example of this shift in methodology is that people housed in severe weather emergency shelters (SWES) were counted as unsheltered in the past but are now counted as sheltered.

FIGURE 2: **Sheltered and Unsheltered Homeless in Allegheny County (2010 through 2014)**

■ Sheltered ■ Unsheltered

Year	Total	Sheltered %
2010	1,265	91%
2011	1,423	96%
2012	1,376	96%
2013	1,492	94%
2014	1,573	93%

The PIT count of sheltered homeless can be divided into those in emergency shelters and those in transitional housing. As shown in **Figure 3** below, there have been slight fluctuations in the proportions of people in emergency shelters compared to people in transitional housing, with emergency shelter use at a low in 2010 and a high in 2011. In 2014, the transitional housing population was approximately two times the population in emergency shelters. Shifts in the emergency shelter and transitional housing population counts can be attributed in part to changing definitions of these facilities; for example, the Department of Veterans Affairs' Domiciliary Care Program was previously considered transitional housing and has been re-assigned to the emergency shelter category within the past five years. Changes in bed capacity also contribute to changes in population counts; during 2010–2013, Allegheny County added several transitional housing programs, which led to an increase in the numbers served.

FIGURE 3: **Transitional Housing Population, Emergency Shelter Population and Unsheltered Population in Allegheny County, PIT Count by Year (2010 through 2014)**

The number of homeless individuals compared to those living in family units (households made up of at least one adult and one child under the age of 18) is also collected by the PIT count. During 2010–2014, the percentage of homeless people in families has ranged from 37 to 44 percent of the total homeless population, peaking at 44 percent in 2013 and decreasing to 37 percent in 2014.
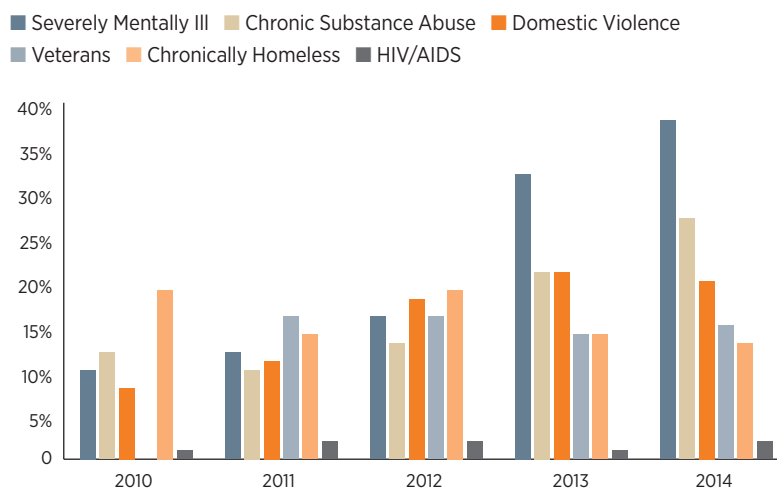
HOMELESS SUBPOPULATIONS IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY

The annual PIT count provides information on subpopulations such as veterans, victims of intimate partner violence (IPV), chronically homeless individuals, individuals with severe mental illness, and those dealing with chronic substance abuse or living with HIV/AIDS. As explained above, changes in count methodologies over time may contribute to population count fluctuations; historically, shelters were hesitant to ask consumers about mental health and IPV issues, but thanks to recent education about why these numbers are important, providers have become more willing to ask the questions necessary to report subpopulations as accurately as possible.

As shown in **Figure 4**, people with severe mental illness represented the largest subpopulation in 2014; 595 homeless individuals were reported to be severely mentally ill, 90 percent of whom were living in sheltered situations. From 2010 through 2014, the severely mentally ill population was also the subpopulation that increased the most, increasing from 125 in 2010 to 595 in 2014.

The subpopulation with the second highest increase was victims of IPV, which increased from 106 people to 315 during 2010–2014. One subpopulation, the chronically homeless, has decreased since 2010 according to the PIT count; in 2010, 235 chronically homeless people were counted and, in 2014, 198 chronically homeless were reported. This decrease may be attributed to Allegheny County's recent efforts to identify and house chronically homeless individuals with mental illness in permanent housing programs.

FIGURE 4: Homeless Subpopulations in Allegheny County as a Percentage of PIT Count, 2010 through 2014 (Duplicated Count)
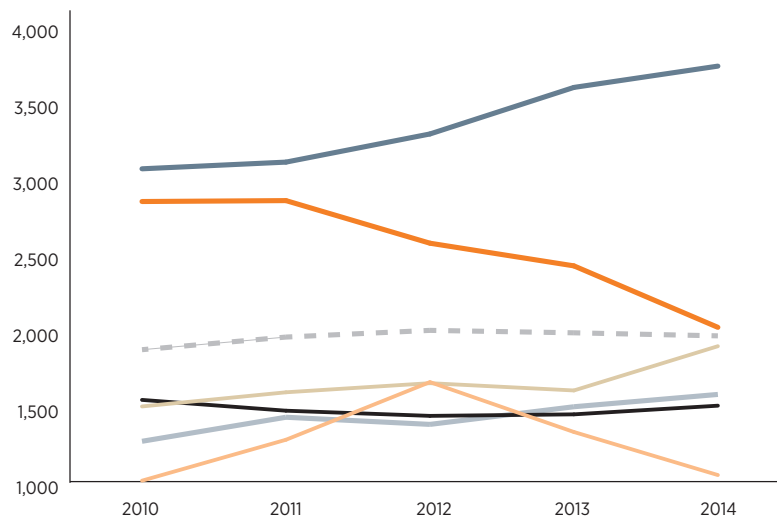

Note: A PIT count of homeless veterans was not reported in 2010.

ALLEGHENY COUNTY COMPARED TO BENCHMARK CONTINUUMS OF CARE

Allegheny County was compared to similar CoCs, chosen because of their comparable populations and their configuration as counties rather than stand-alone cities. When compared to these CoCs, Allegheny County shows similar trends. As shown in **Figure 5** below, most benchmark CoCs exhibited year-to-year fluctuations in the total number of homeless people between 2010 and 2014, with the average count in all benchmark CoCs showing a slight upward trend until 2012 and a small downward trend in the past two years. Within the benchmark group, the Minneapolis/Hennepin CoC reported the largest increase in total homeless population with a 22 percent increase during 2010–2014. The Charlotte/Mecklenburg CoC showed a decrease of 29 percent, the largest total homeless population decrease of the benchmark CoCs considered in this data brief.

FIGURE 5: **Total Homeless Population in Allegheny County and Other Benchmark CoCs (2010 through 2014)**

Legend: Minneapolis/Hennepin County CoC · Charlotte/Mecklenberg CoC · Indianapolis CoC · Cincinnati/Hamilton County CoC · Milwaukee City & County CoC · Pittsburgh/McKeesport/Penn Hills/Allegheny County CoC · Benchmark Average

NEXT STEPS

In addition to assessing the homeless population and evaluating homelessness services on a regular basis, Allegheny County will continue to improve its PIT data collection process to ensure that it is obtaining the most accurate counts possible. As one example of its commitment to more accurate data, this year the county will perform its first-ever Point-in-Time count focused exclusively on homeless youth, in order to get more accurate information about the scope and needs of this population.