

# DATA BRIEF: Allegheny County 2017 Point-in-Time Homelessness Data

Each year, Allegheny County participates in a national effort required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to count the number of homeless people on a single night in January. The Point-in-Time (PIT) homeless count serves to enumerate the sheltered (residing in emergency homeless shelters or transitional housing programs) and unsheltered (residing in places not meant for human habitation) homeless population within the county. The winter count, as mandated by HUD, is conducted during the last 10 days in January and took place on January 25, 2017. Although not required by HUD, Allegheny County also conducted a summer PIT count on July 25, 2017, to better understand warm weather trends. Data were collected utilizing outreach teams, interviews, the County's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and case management records.

This data brief focuses primarily on the January 2017 PIT count, with results of the July 2017 PIT count included at the end for comparison. For an analysis of previous years' PIT data and more information about the annual data collection process, see related reports by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS).<sup>1</sup>

Guidelines for conducting annual PIT counts are issued by HUD each year; variations in count methodologies over the years may contribute to increases or decreases year to year. In addition, fluctuations in the number of volunteer data collectors, weather conditions, and availability and distribution of federal funding may result in variations across time. Certain populations that are in unstable housing situations but not considered literally homeless by HUD's definition<sup>2</sup> are not included in the PIT count; for example, the PIT count does not include those who are in danger of becoming homeless in the near future, living in doubled-up situations, or enrolled in permanent housing programs for the formerly homeless.

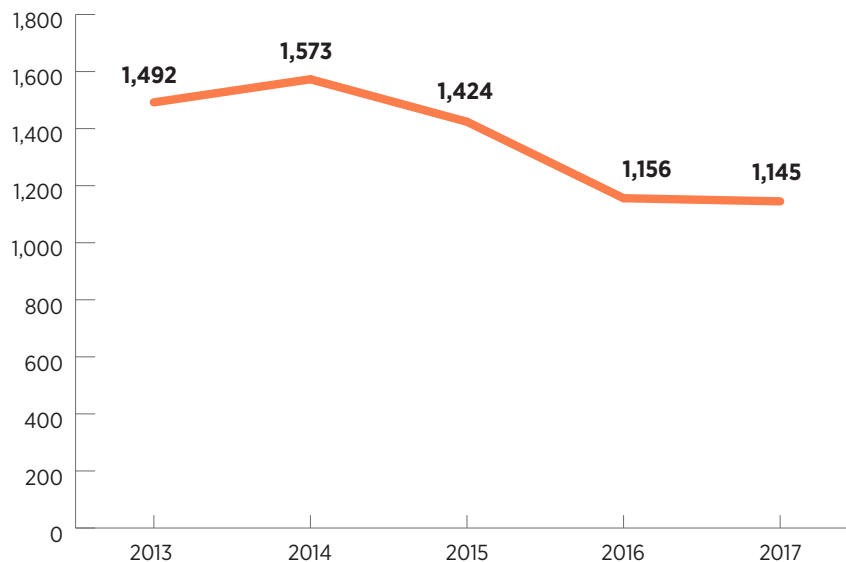
<sup>1</sup> Related reports about past PIT counts include ["Allegheny County 2016 Point-in-Time Homelessness Data,"](#) ["Allegheny County 2015 Point-in-Time Homelessness Data"](#) and ["Allegheny County Point-in-Time Homelessness Data, 2010 through 2014."](#)

<sup>2</sup> HUD's definition of homelessness is available [here](#).

### JANUARY 2017 POINT-IN-TIME COUNT TRENDS

During the January 2017 count, a total of 1,145 homeless people were identified. Compared to the past two PIT counts, this represents a decrease of 11 individuals from 2016 and a decrease of 279 individuals from 2015 (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: Total PIT Count, 2013 through 2017



The total count decrease from 2016 to 2017 can be attributed in part to a smaller number of people residing in transitional housing, where there was a decrease of 146 individuals (a 25% decrease) between 2016 and 2017 (Figure 2, Table 1). The Homeless Advisory Board<sup>3</sup> strategically focused on decreasing the number of transitional housing beds and to instead provide permanent housing through Rapid Re-Housing and Permanent Supportive Housing initiatives. These options enable homeless people to live in a permanent housing setting and therefore decreased the number in transitional housing.

The number of people served by Safe Haven programs has also been steadily decreasing due to the phasing out of this type of housing. Safe Haven housing, which provides shelter for homeless individuals with severe mental illness, is being phased out in favor of long-term Permanent Supportive Housing. Safe Haven facilities began to close in 2014, and all were scheduled to close by the end of 2017. Due to the decrease in Safe Haven beds, only 22 people were counted in Safe Haven facilities in 2017.

Despite the overall decrease in homeless individuals in 2017, there was an increase in the number of people served in emergency shelters. Over the past three years, emergency shelters have seen an increase in both individuals and families. In 2017, 622 people were in emergency shelters, which is 162 more people than were counted in the emergency shelter system in 2016.

<sup>3</sup> The Homeless Advisory Board is a public-private partnership formed to assist Allegheny County in reviewing public policy, programs, activities, data and all other efforts that will eliminate homelessness and improve the well-being of homeless people and families.

The number of parents and children who were in emergency shelters increased by 84 between 2016 and 2017. Some of the increase in emergency shelter use may be due to the decrease in transitional housing capacity; on the other hand, usage of Permanent Supportive Housing and Rapid Re-Housing, while outside the scope of the PIT count, increased during this time.

Included in the emergency shelter count is the Severe Weather Emergency Shelter (SWES), which for the first time was open continuously from November 15, 2016, to March 15, 2017. In previous years, the SWES was open only when conditions included freezing rain, heavy snowfall or severe wind chill, or when the temperature was predicted to fall below 25°F. The number of people served at the SWES in the January 2017 count season was 195 individuals, substantially higher than the 86 served in 2016.

Five percent (53 people) were unsheltered on the night of the count, meaning that they were living in a place not meant for human habitation, such as on the street, in an underpass, in a park or in an abandoned building. This is compared to 48 people living in unsheltered locations in 2016. The slight increase in 2017 is likely due to warmer temperatures and an increase in the areas and number of teams counting street homeless.

**FIGURE 2: PIT Trends by Program Type, 2013 through 2017**

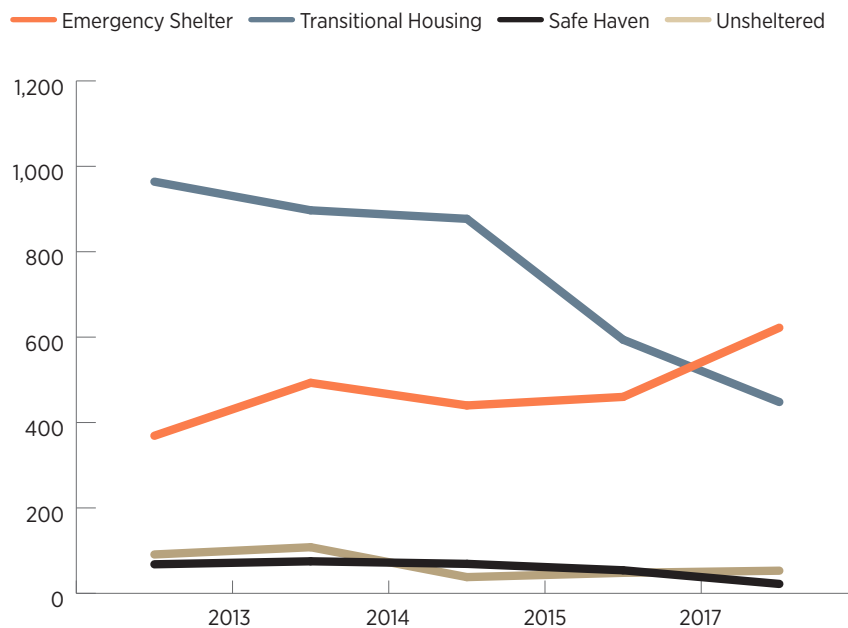


TABLE 1: Point-in-Time Trend by Shelter Type and Household Type, 2015 through 2017

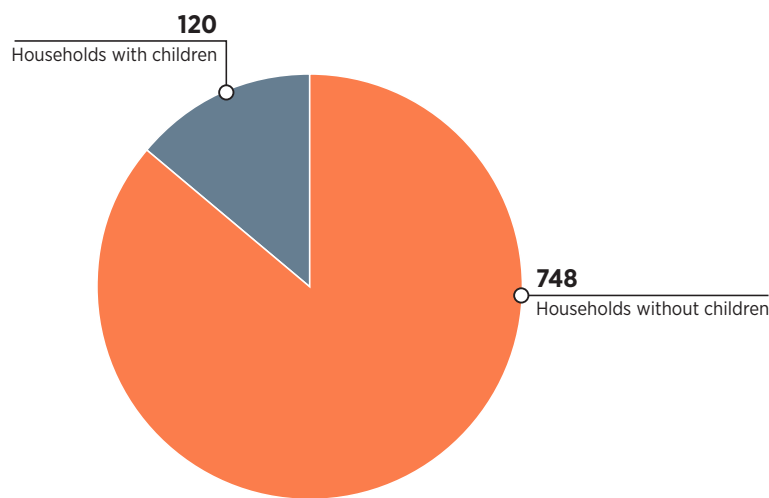
HOMELESS POPULATIONS	EMERGENCY SHELTER	SAFE HAVEN	TRANSITIONAL HOUSING	UNSHELTERED	TOTAL FOR JAN 2015
JANUARY 2015					
People in families with children	132	0	373	0	505
Individuals without children	308	69	504	38	919
Total	440	69	877	38	1,424
JANUARY 2016					
People in families with children	189	0	212	0	401
Individuals without children	271	54	382	48	755
Total	260	54	594	48	1,156
JANUARY 2017					
People in families with children	216	0	173	0	389
Individuals without children	406	22	275	53	756
Total	622	22	448	53	1,145

**DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS**

**Household Composition**

Eighty-six percent (748) of the households counted were adult-only households. These households had 756 adults, including 670 over the age of 25 and 86 youth between the ages of 18 and 24. Fourteen percent (120) of households had at least one child under the age of 18. These households consisted of 140 adults and 249 children.

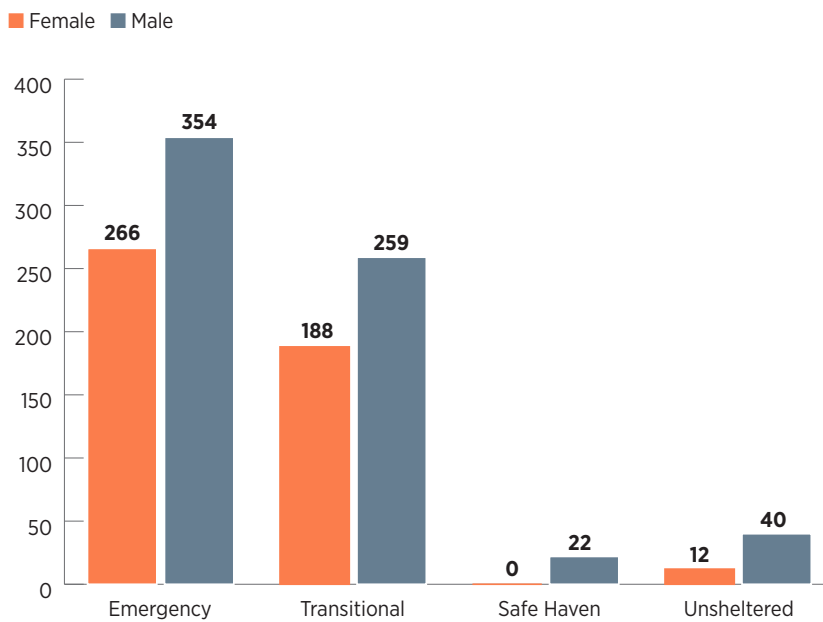
FIGURE 3: Composition of Households Experiencing Homelessness



### Gender

There were 675 males (59% of the homeless population), 466 females, 3 people who identified themselves as transgender, and one person who did not identify a gender during the January count. There was a greater proportion of males than females in all homeless project types in the count. For Safe Havens, only males were identified due to all facilities of this type being available to men only at the time of the count. In unsheltered situations, males accounted for 75 percent of the population.

**FIGURE 4: Gender of People Experiencing Homelessness by Project Type**

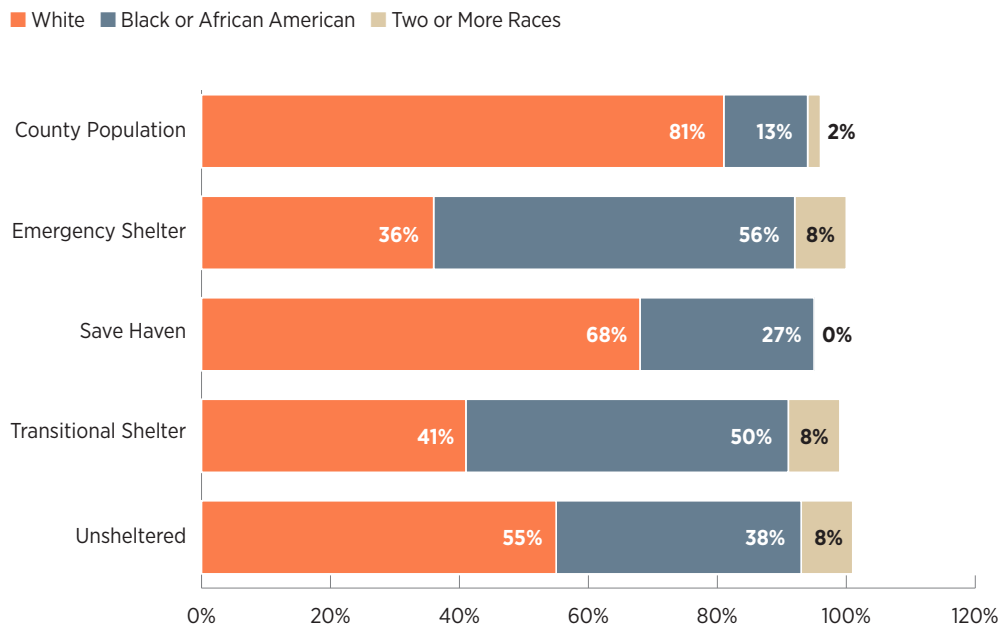


*Note: Figure does not include people who identified as transgender (3) or whose gender was unknown (1).*

### Race

The largest race represented was Black/African American (598), followed by white (419) and mixed race (86). A smaller number identified as Asian (9), American Indian/Alaska Native (1) or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (3). As shown in **Figure 5**, Black/African American people made up a disproportionately large percentage of homeless people in the PIT count (52%) compared to their proportion of the total population of Allegheny County (approximately 13% as of the 2010 U.S. Census).

**FIGURE 5: Racial Demographics of Homeless Population**



Note: Asian, American Indian/Alaskan Native and Pacific Islander percentages are not included in figure due to small counts.

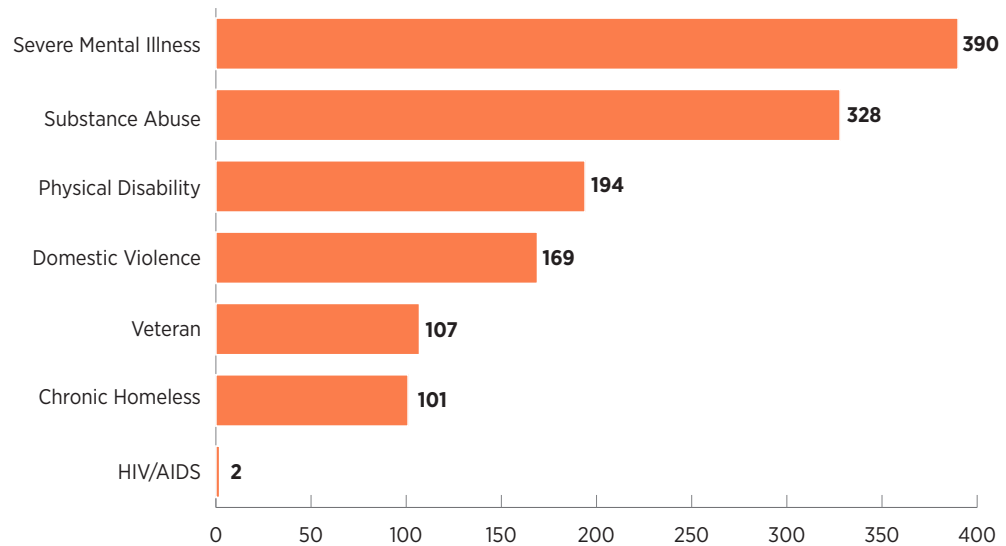
**Homeless Subpopulations**

As shown in **Figure 6**, many people experiencing homelessness were experiencing other challenges simultaneously. Since these categories are self-reported, some of these subpopulations may be undercounted.

The chronically homeless population (101 people) is at times the most difficult to engage and move to a permanent housing solution quickly. HUD defines “chronically homeless” as having a disabling condition and being continuously homeless (sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation or living in an emergency shelter) for four episodes in the last three years where the time spent homeless combined is at least 12 months, or one episode of homelessness that lasts at least 12 consecutive months. Individuals residing in unsheltered locations long-term frequently have multiple disabilities, including chronic mental health problems, drug and alcohol use disorders, and physical health issues.

The largest subpopulation counted during the PIT count was adults with severe mental illness, who made up 44 percent of the total PIT population. Other subpopulations included adults with a substance use disorder (37%), people with physical disabilities (22%), victims of domestic violence (19%), veterans (12%) and individuals with HIV/AIDS (less than one percent).

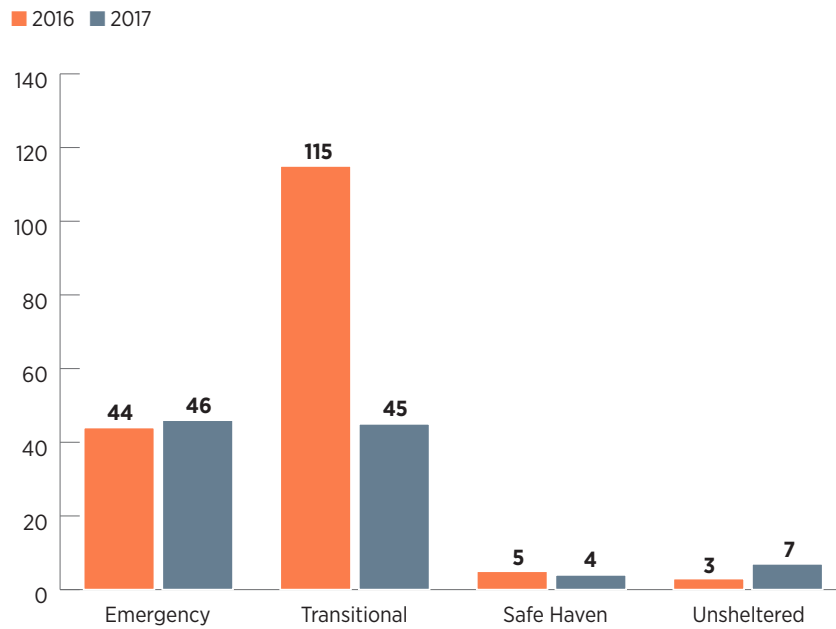
**FIGURE 6: Homeless Subpopulations (Duplicated Counts)**



**HOMELESS VETERANS**

As part of the federal mandate to end veteran homelessness, Allegheny County has been working over the past several years with street outreach workers and veteran groups to address the problem. A veteran is defined as any person who served on active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States. This includes military reserves and National Guard who were called up to active duty.

The number of homeless veterans counted between 2016 and 2017 decreased by 39 percent. The most substantial decrease was in the number of veterans housed in transitional housing (**Figure 7**), since the HUD transitional housing program funded to serve veterans closed and a new Rapid Re-Housing program is beginning to serve veterans. While the number of veterans in transitional housing decreased, there were slight increases in the number of veterans in emergency shelters and in unsheltered locations. Allegheny County continues to work with the Department of Veterans Affairs and local veterans-focused homeless service providers to end veteran homelessness.

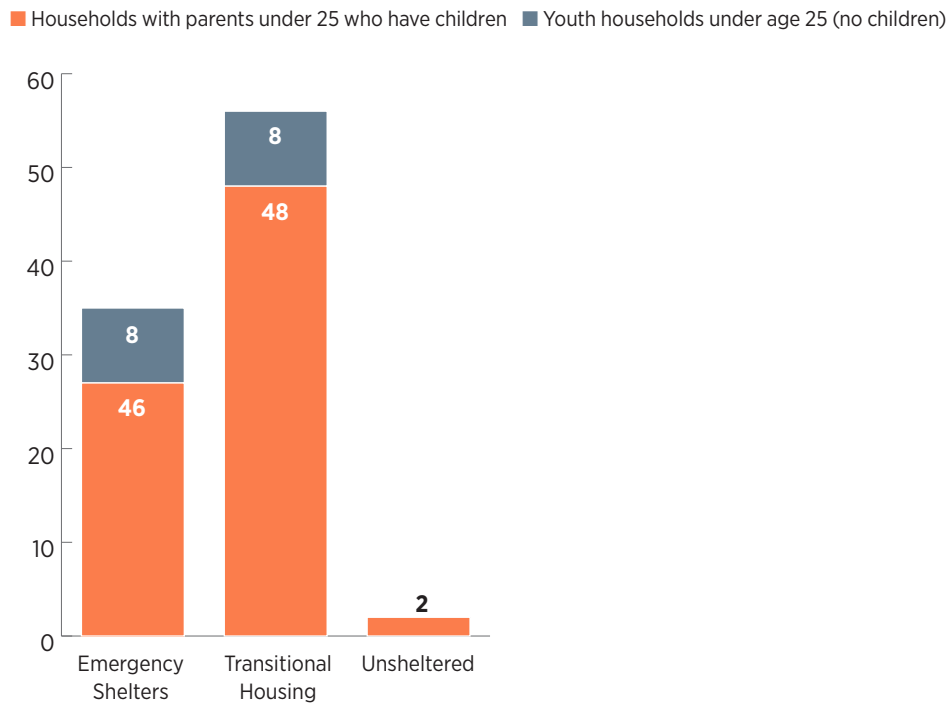
**FIGURE 7: Veteran Households and Types of Housing**

### HOMELESS YOUTH

The number of homeless youth (defined as individuals 24 years or younger not residing with family members older than age 24) can be more difficult to identify than older homeless individuals because youth tend to stay in places like friends' houses or motels, locations not included in HUD's PIT count. In 2017, the total number of youth households counted was 93. This includes 77 single homeless youth and 16 households made up of parents under 25 and their children. There were 30 children residing with parents under age 25. No unaccompanied homeless youth under age 18 were identified, which is consistent with DHS's child welfare practice to provide housing for all under-18 unaccompanied homeless children. The majority (60%) of homeless youth households were in transitional housing.



**FIGURE 8: Youth Households and Types of Housing, 2017**



**JULY 2017 POINT-IN-TIME COUNT**

In 2017, a summer PIT count was conducted to help the County better understand the seasonality of homelessness (Table 2). The results show that there were 19 percent more homeless people (221 more people) in the winter compared to the summer. There were significantly fewer homeless people utilizing emergency shelter and transitional housing in the summer compared to the winter, while there were significantly more people residing in unsheltered locations in the summer (205) than in the winter (53). Between January and July, the overall number of people served by transitional housing continued to decline due to the closing of transitional housing programs. The severe weather emergency shelter was not in use during the summer count. This is the primary reason for the drop in the emergency shelter count from January to July, a decrease of 165 people.

Allegheny County plans to conduct a summer PIT count in all years going forward to help understand the seasonality of homeless trends. Future data briefs will analyze the trends in summer PIT counts as this data becomes available.

TABLE 2: Comparison of January and July 2017 Point-in-Time Counts

HOMELESS POPULATIONS	EMERGENCY SHELTER	SAFE HAVEN	TRANSITIONAL HOUSING	UNSHELTERED	TOTAL
JANUARY 2017 PIT COUNT					
People in families with children	216	0	173	0	389
Individuals without children	406	22	275	53	756
Total	622	22	448	53	1,145
JULY 2017 PIT COUNT					
People in families with children	232	0	57	0	289
Individuals without children	225	23	182	205	635
Total	457	23	239	205	924

### NEXT STEPS

Allegheny County is expanding Rapid Re-Housing programs for those experiencing a temporary housing crisis. Allegheny County's homeless coordinated entry process prioritizes assistance based on vulnerability and severity of needs to ensure that people who need assistance the most can receive it in a timely manner. Through coordinated entry and refinement of the assessment process, homeless individuals are appropriately placed in the least restrictive permanent housing option and provided with appropriate supports over a short-term period.

Since individuals involved with Rapid Re-Housing programs are considered permanently housed, they are not considered homeless by HUD. Therefore, increased capacity in this type of program has led to decreases in the PIT count, specifically in the transitional housing population. Additional Rapid Re-Housing programs opened throughout 2017, and Allegheny County is closely reviewing data related to this type of housing and its overall impact on the homeless system.

Allegheny County has seen a substantial increase in the number of single adults in emergency shelter during the PIT count, from 440 in 2015 to 622 in 2017. We are continually working to increase the capacity of permanent housing to address this need. Additionally, a recently developed strategic plan recommended that a low-barrier emergency shelter be developed to address the need for additional beds for single unsheltered adults, and planning is underway for this shelter to open in 2018.

In addition, the County continues to improve its methods for understanding the volume and needs of homeless youth, both those who fall within HUD's definition of homelessness and those who do not. For the third year, a survey that collects information about homeless youth and youth at risk for homelessness was conducted in July 2017. The County applied for and received technical assistance from HUD to better identify and address the needs of homeless youth in the region.

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