ALLEGHENY COUNTY
2020 Point-in-Time Homelessness Data

August 2020

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 people experiencing homelessness on a single night in January. The Point-in-Time (PIT) homeless count enumerates 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 count is mandated by HUD to occur during the last 10 days in January every year. In 2020, the count took place on January 29. The low temperature on that night was 25 degrees Fahrenheit, which was much higher than the -7 degrees temperature for the PIT count in 2019.

This data brief focuses on the January 2020 PIT count, with results of the January 2019 PIT count included for comparison. For an analysis of previous years' PIT count data and more information about the annual data collection process, see related reports by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS).[1]

HUD issues guidelines for conducting PIT counts each year; variations in count methodologies over the years may contribute to increases or decreases year to year. In 2020, there were no changes in the HUD guidance in conducting PIT counts from the previous count. However, fluctuations in the number of volunteer data collectors, weather conditions and areas that were canvassed resulted in variations across time.[2] Certain populations that are in unstable housing situations but not considered homeless by HUD's definition are not included in the PIT count; for example, the PIT count does not include people who are in danger of becoming homeless in the near future, people living in doubled-up situations, or people enrolled in permanent housing programs for the formerly homeless.

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[1] Related reports about past PIT counts include "Allegheny County 2019 Point-in-Time Homelessness Data," "Allegheny County 2018 Point-in-Time Homelessness Data," "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."

[2] For historical homelessness data and a view of homelessness over time, see the interactive dashboard.

Bridge Housing: A transitional housing facility funded by the PA Department of Human Services and designed to provide housing and appropriate supportive services to homeless people to facilitate movement to independent living within one year. People utilizing bridge housing are considered to be homeless.

Emergency Shelter: A facility with overnight sleeping accommodations, the primary purpose of which is to provide temporary shelter. People utilizing emergency shelters are considered to be homeless.

Homelessness: According to HUD, a person or family is literally homeless if they fall into one of the following categories: (1) lacking a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence, which includes a place not meant for human habitation or a shelter, (2) will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence within 14 days, (3) is an unaccompanied youth under the age of 25 or a family with children that has experienced persistent instability, or (4) is fleeing domestic violence and has no other residence. A full definition can be found here.

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH): Combines housing with more intensive services for those with one or more chronic disabling conditions. These programs do not have a limit on length of stay as long as the tenant pays their portion of the rent and follows the rules of their lease. People residing in PSH are not considered to be homeless.

Rapid Re-Housing (RRH): Programs that assist individuals or families who are experiencing homelessness to move as quickly as possible into permanent housing and to achieve stability in that housing through a combination of rental assistance, housing search and supportive services. People utilizing RRH programs are not considered to be homeless.

Safe Haven: A form of supportive housing that serves hard-to-reach homeless people with severe mental illness who come primarily from the streets and have been unwilling to participate in housing services. In Allegheny County, these types of shelters currently serve eligible veterans. People utilizing safe havens are considered to be homeless.

Winter Shelter: An emergency shelter that provides sleeping accommodations between 7 pm and 7 am, November 15 through March 15. People utilizing a Winter Shelter are considered to be homeless.

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.

JANUARY 2020 POINT-IN-TIME COUNT TRENDS

During the 2020 PIT count, 887 people were found to be experiencing homelessness, which is 113 more people than in 2019 (**Figure 1**).

FIGURE 1: Total PIT Count, 2016 through 2020

■ All People   ■ Households without Children   ■ Households with Children
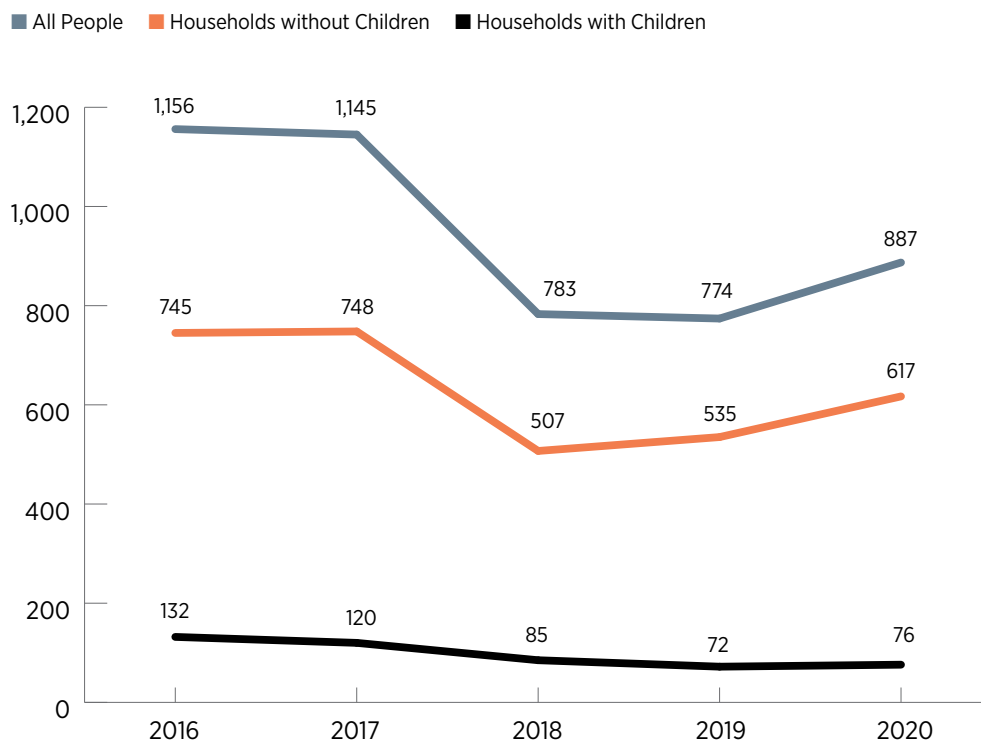
Key findings in 2020:

- There were more families with children served in 2020 than in 2019, and the size of these families was also slightly larger. The average size of families with children in 2020 was 3.5 people per family, compared to 3.3 in 2019.

- There was an increase in the number of households without children (i.e., those not in a family unit), from 535 in 2019 to 617 in 2020.

- More people were residing in locations not meant for habitation (also known as street homeless). The increase in unsheltered homeless was a result of winter weather being mild, people living in abandoned buildings, and more areas of the county being canvassed.

- Additional areas in the county that were believed to have people living in places not meant for human habitation were canvassed for the unsheltered homeless count. This is the second year of significant expansion of the canvassing team that counts people residing on the street. This massive coordinated effort targeted new locations previously not canvassed and partially contributed to the increase in the unsheltered count.

- No households with children were identified as living in places not meant for human habitation.

See below for more detail about fluctuations in the number of people served by different program types.

**Family emergency shelters served more people, while single adult shelters served fewer**
The increase in the total count from 2019 to 2020 can be attributed in part to a slight increase in the number of families with children counted, and with the size of these families being larger on average compared to 2019. There were four more families counted in 2020. The average family size increased from 3.3 people per household in 2019 to 3.5 people per household in 2020, resulting in an increase of 30 more people in families in 2020.

Likely due to the mild weather on the night of January 29, 2020, shelters for single individuals saw a decrease in the number of people served compared to the previous year (32 fewer people served in 2020 compared to 2019). Most of the decline was at the winter shelter, which served 25 fewer people in 2020 (108) compared to 2019 (133).

TABLE 1: PIT Count by Shelter Type and Household Type, Change from 2019 to 2020

	EMERGENCY SHELTER	SAFE HAVEN	TRANSITIONAL/ BRIDGE HOUSING	UNSHELTERED	TOTAL CHANGE IN # OF PERSONS BY HOUSEHOLD TYPE, 2019 TO 2020
People in families with children	+39	0	-9	0	+30
People without children	-32	+1	-1	+115	+83
Total Change 2019 to 2020 by Shelter Type	+7	+1	-10	+115	+113

FIGURE 2: PIT Trends by Shelter Type, 2016 through 2020

■ Emergency Shelter ■ Transitional/Bridge Housing ■ Unsheltered ■ Safe Haven
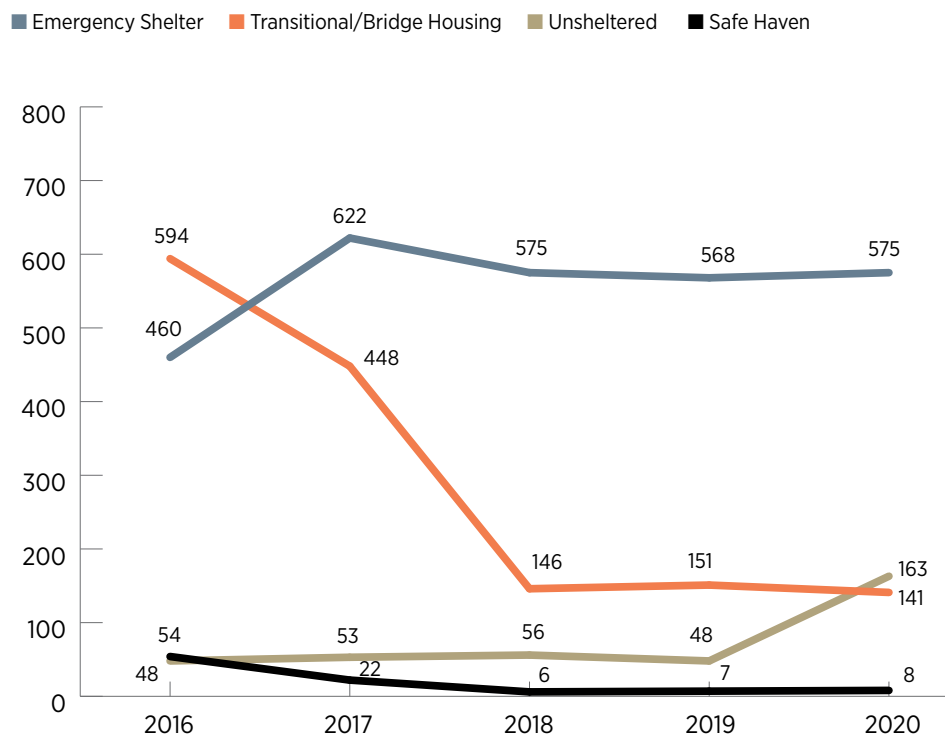
Strategic initiative continues to decrease transitional housing capacity while increasing permanent housing options

The decrease in the transitional housing population is the result of a strategic initiative implemented by the Allegheny County Homeless Advisory Board,[3] which focused on increasing the county's HUD-funded permanent housing capacity over the past five years. To that end, the Board reallocated funding from transitional housing programs to Rapid Re-Housing and Permanent Supportive Housing initiatives, which are both considered to be permanent housing. The remaining transitional housing in the region includes transitional housing funded by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and bridge housing funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. In 2016, there were 769 Transitional Housing beds; by 2020, the number was reduced to 159 beds. The figure below illustrates the shift from Transitional Housing to Permanent Housing.

FIGURE 3: **Housing Capacity (Available Number of Beds) by Project Type, 2016 vs. 2020**

■ 2016 ■ 2020

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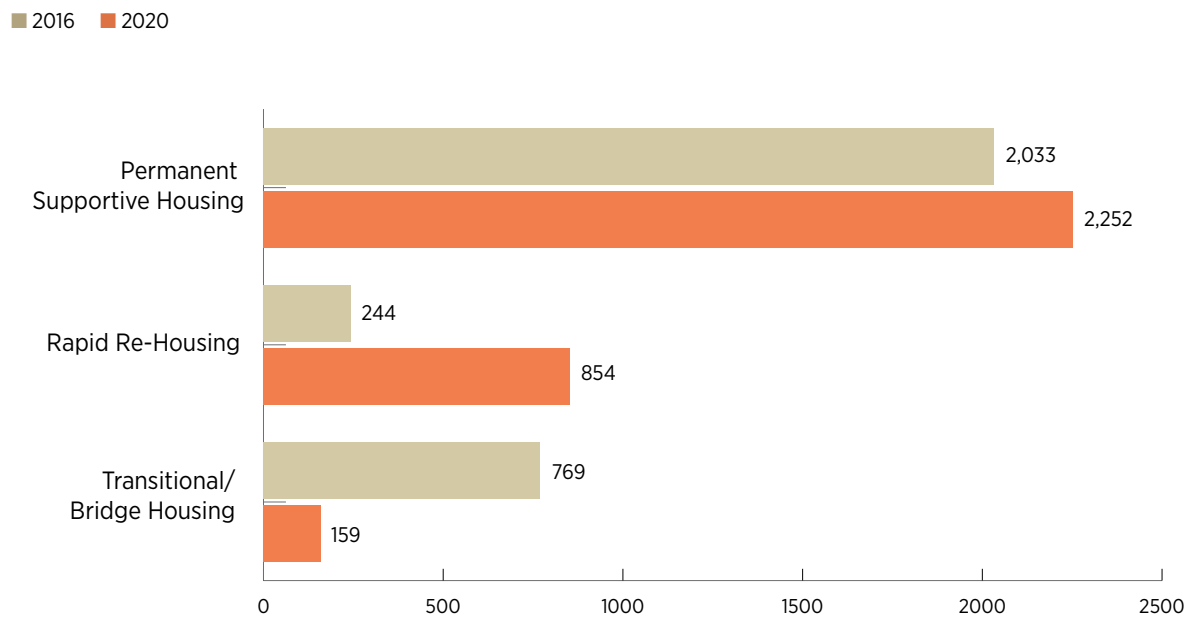
[3] The Homeless Advisory Board is a public–private partnership formed to assist Allegheny County in reviewing public policy, programs, activities, data and all other efforts that will eliminate homelessness and improve the well-being of homeless people and families.

This effort has allowed families to enter Rapid Re-Housing programs directly from an emergency shelter and more quickly exit the homeless system to a permanent housing unit. Families in these types of units are not considered homeless and are therefore not included in the PIT count. In addition, the Continuum of Care (CoC) in 2018 applied for and received 50 units (100 beds) of Rapid Re-Housing under the Domestic Violence Bonus Application submitted to HUD. This collaborative effort by the domestic violence agencies allowed for the expansion of Rapid Re-Housing for people fleeing domestic violence.
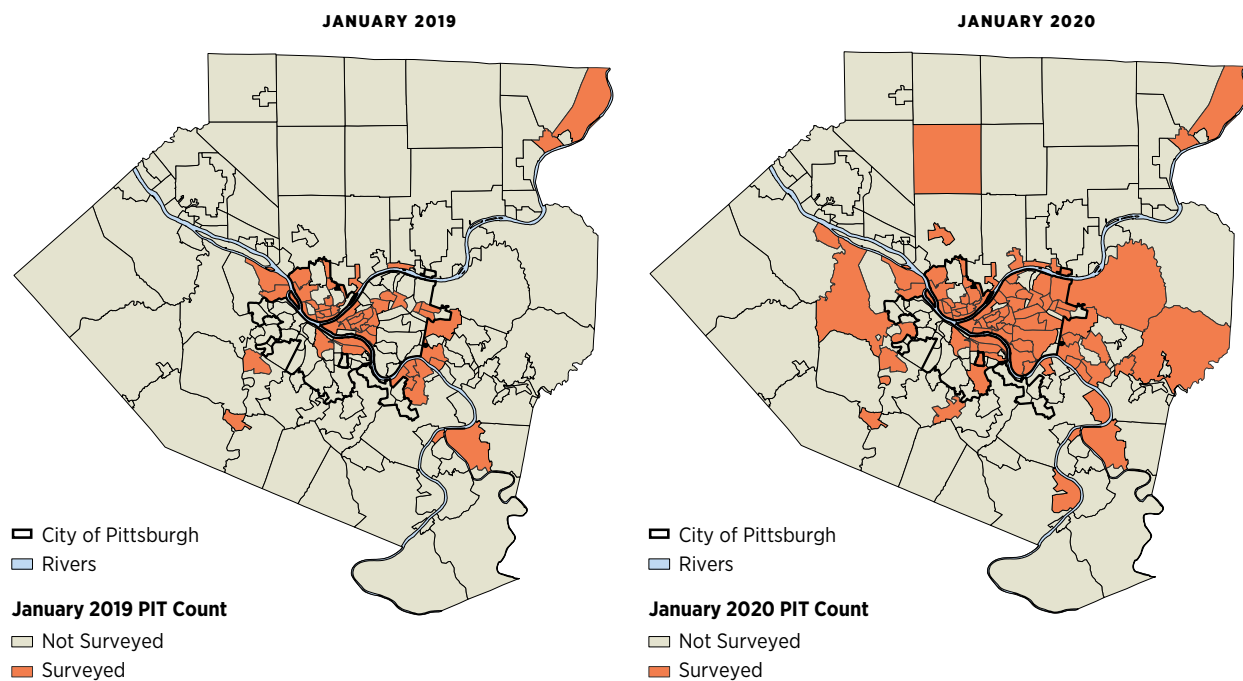
Decrease in Safe Haven capacity

The number of people using Safe Haven programs has been steadily decreasing since 2014 due to the phasing out of this type of housing under HUD funding. All HUD-funded Safe Haven programs in the region ended in 2017. Eight Safe Haven beds were in use on the night of January 29, 2020. These beds are funded by the VA Grant Per Diem Program and are available only to eligible veterans referred by the VA.

Increase in the number of street homeless counted

Since 2019, DHS has utilized a more systematic and coordinated approach to count the size of the street population, those residing in places not meant for human habitation. This approach resulted in 163 unsheltered homeless people being counted during this year's count. Street outreach workers — as well as residential and supportive services staff from DHS, homeless service organizations and community-based organizations — led teams to count the unsheltered population across 60 county municipalities and Pittsburgh neighborhoods, compared to 26 areas in 2019 (see list of locations in **Appendix A**). This expansion in geographic coverage contributed to the increase in counted individuals. In addition, the outreach teams utilized a smartphone app to simplify and improve the efficiency of data collection. Due to coordination with some municipalities and the police, people were found in abandoned buildings not previously identified by unsheltered counts. Abandoned building locations are not traditionally utilized by the PIT count due to safety concerns for volunteers. Those found in abandoned buildings were interviewed by street outreach workers. In addition, people were found at the Pittsburgh International Airport, which previously has not been a location canvassed for the PIT count. DHS intends to include these new areas and residential settings in future years of the PIT. In comparison to the previous winter, the weather was relatively mild and warmer. The milder temperatures caused many people to choose to live outside instead of going to a shelter.

FIGURE 4: **Locations Canvassed for Unsheltered Population, January 2019 vs. January 2020**

JANUARY 2019

City of Pittsburgh
Rivers
January 2019 PIT Count
Not Surveyed
Surveyed

JANUARY 2020

City of Pittsburgh
Rivers
January 2020 PIT Count
Not Surveyed
Surveyed

DEMOGRAPHICS OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Individuals and Families

Eighty-nine percent of the households (617) counted were adult-only households. Eleven percent of households (76) had at least one child under the age of 18. More than half of the children (67% or 118) were school age (5 to 17 years old). The remaining 33% (58 children) were 4 years old or younger.

Gender

There were 540 men (61% of the homeless population) and 341 women counted.[4] There was a greater proportion of men than women in all homeless program types in the count. The number of homeless women in 2020 increased from 287 (2019) to 341 (2020), and the number of men increased from 485 (2019) to 540 (2020). The number of unsheltered homeless women increased from 11 in 2019 to 45 in 2020, while the number of unsheltered men increased from 37 in 2019 to 116 in 2020.

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[4] Count includes only those who identified as male or female.

FIGURE 5: **Gender of Homeless Population by Program Type, 2020**
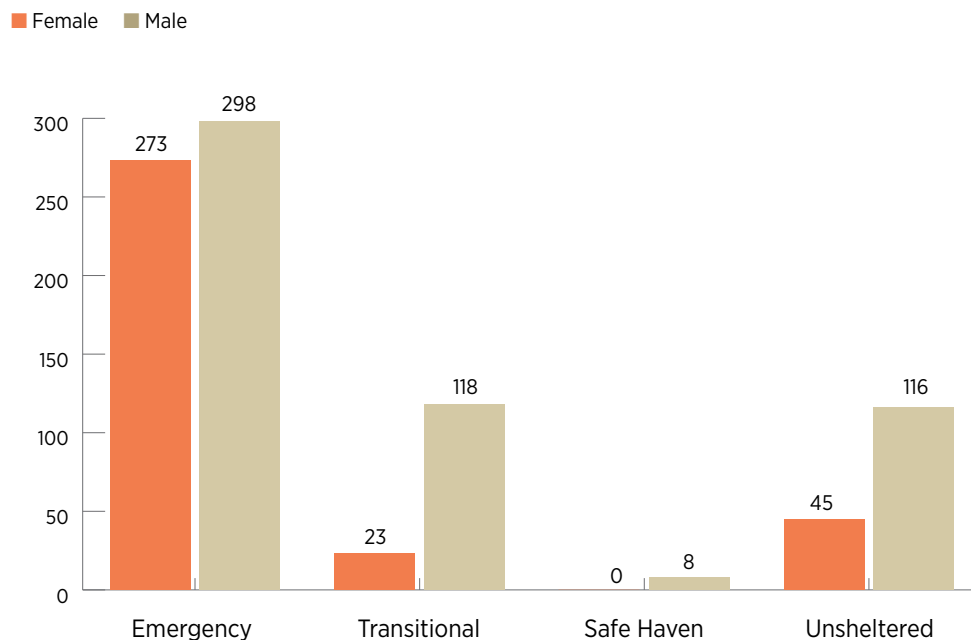

Note: Figure includes only those who identified as male or female.

Race

The majority of those counted were Black (484), followed by White (316), and two or more races (73). Fewer people identified as Asian (7), American Indian/Alaska Native (3), and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (4).

Black people made up a disproportionately large percentage of the homeless population in the PIT count (55%) compared to their proportion of the total population of Allegheny County (approximately 13% as of the 2010 U.S. Census). Racial disproportionality in the homeless system is in some ways the result of systemic racism at large; disparities in generational poverty, education, access to mental health treatment, and contact with the criminal justice system have an effect on who ultimately experiences homelessness. Disparities like these are outside of DHS's control, but for those who are in the homeless system, DHS can monitor available data to work toward fair representation. It is important to note that a fair system may not necessarily mean that each race is represented in services at the same rate that they are represented in the County's population; differences in poverty by race, for example, may mean that racial disproportionality in the homeless system is inherent, but analyzing the data allows us to set a baseline and consider whether people are experiencing a just system once they are in it.

FIGURE 6: **Racial Demographics of Homeless Population, 2020**

■ White ■ Black ■ Other Race ■ Two or More Races
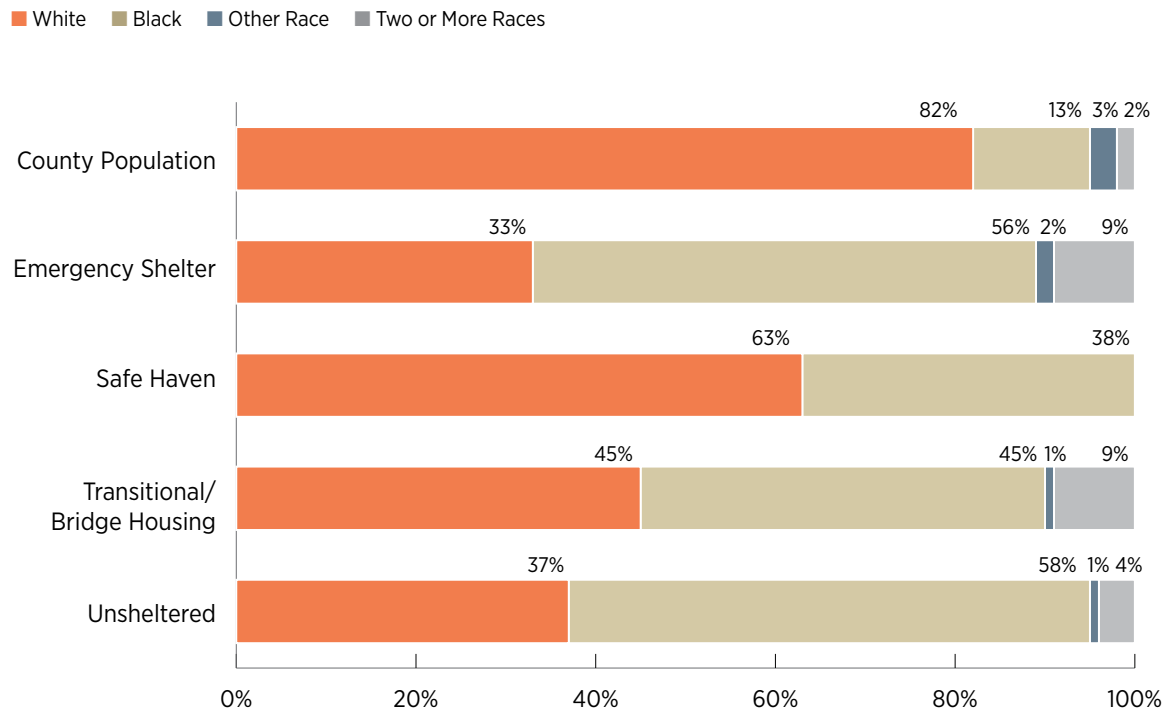
Note: "Other race" category includes Asian, American Indian, Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander percentages.

Homeless Subpopulations

As part of the PIT count, people experiencing homelessness are asked about other challenges they may face such as mental illness and substance use disorder.[5]

Adults with severe mental illness (257 people) comprised the largest subpopulation. Other subpopulations included adults with substance use disorder (209 people), veterans (106 people), victims of domestic violence (73 people) and people with physical disabilities (128 people).

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[5] Since these categories are self-reported and data collection may be inconsistent across providers, these categories may undercount the people in these subpopulations.

The chronically homeless population (183 people) is at times the most difficult to engage and to move to a permanent housing solution quickly. HUD defines the chronically homeless as those with a disabling condition who are 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 homeless combined is at least 12 months, or one episode of homelessness that lasts at least 12 consecutive months.

Comparing subpopulation data between 2019 and 2020, all categories increased in self-reporting as more people answered these questions during the survey. Additionally, the use of the mobile app allowed easier recording of responses.

FIGURE 7: **Homeless Subpopulations (Duplicated Counts), 2019 vs. 2020**
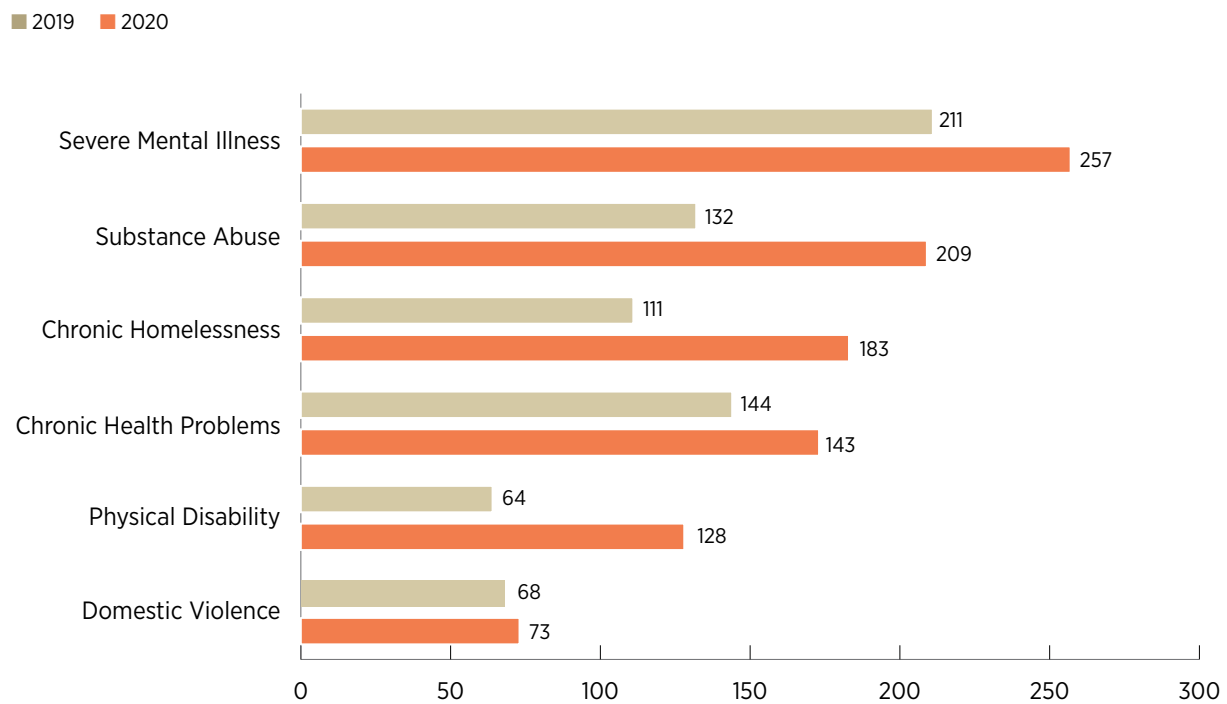
Homeless Veterans

The total number of homeless veterans[6] increased from 100 in 2019 to 106 in 2020. The number of unsheltered veterans counted increased from three people in 2019 to 10 in 2020. In addition, the number of veterans in Safe Havens increased by one person and the number in emergency shelters increased by three in 2020. On the night of the count, the VA Grant Per Diem Safe Haven programs were slightly underutilized.

The VA and veteran service organizations actively participated in the PIT count in 2020 and previous years. Allegheny County continues to partner with the VA and local veterans-focused homeless service providers to prioritize homeless veterans and house them as soon as they are identified and quickly refer veterans to housing options, including referrals to the VA.

FIGURE 8: Veteran Households and Types of Housing, 2019 vs. 2020

■ 2019   ■ 2020

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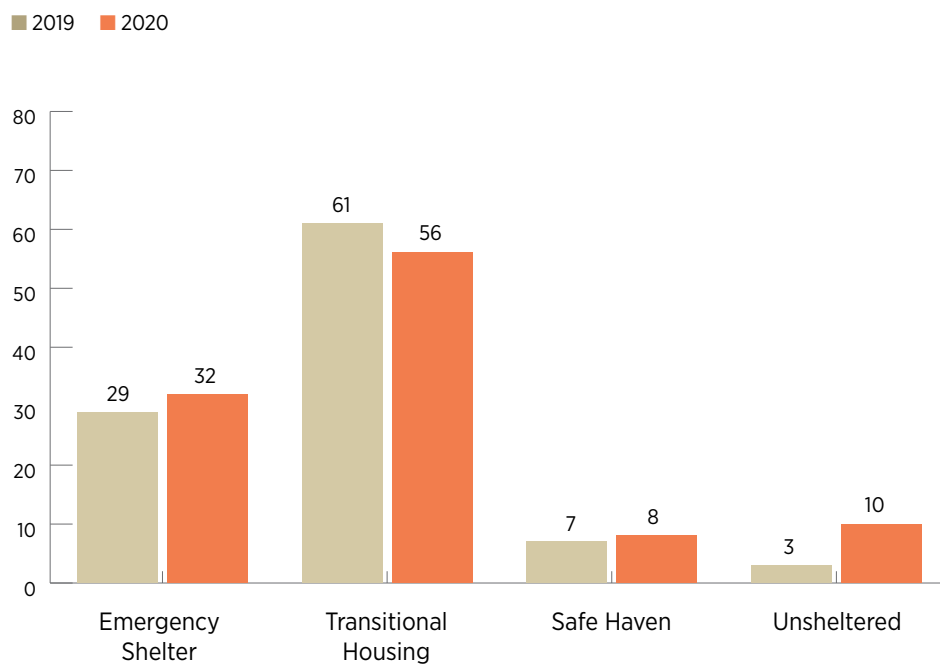
[6] HUD defines a veteran as any person who served on active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States. This includes participants in military reserves and National Guard who were called up to active duty.

Unaccompanied and Parenting Homeless Youth

The number of unaccompanied and parenting youth experiencing homelessness (defined as people 24 years old or younger not residing with family members older than age 24) can be more difficult to identify than older homeless people because youth tend to stay in places like friends' houses or motels, locations not included in HUD's PIT count. As a result, the size of this population fluctuates from day to day and year to year and is difficult to capture in a PIT analysis. In 2020, youth outreach teams actively participated in the count through the Allegheny County Youth Action Board, a group led by youth with lived homeless experience. PIT teams counted 55 unaccompanied youth in 2020, three more than in 2019. Four parenting youth households, which included eight children, were identified in emergency shelters. Most youth households (69%) were staying in emergency shelters. No unaccompanied homeless youth under age 18 were identified, which is consistent with Allegheny County's child welfare practice to provide housing for all under-18 unaccompanied homeless children.

FIGURE 9: Youth Households and Types of Housing, 2019 vs. 2020

■ 2019 Youth Households   ■ 2020 Youth Households
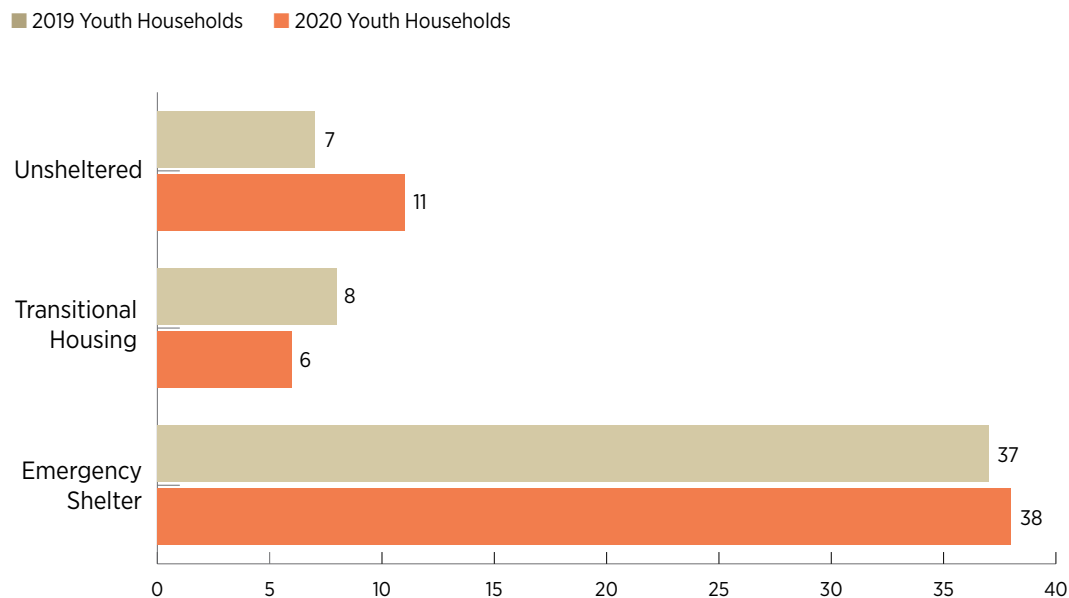
JULY 2019 POINT-IN-TIME COUNT

In 2019, DHS conducted a PIT count in the summer to better understand the seasonality of homelessness (**Figure 10**). The results show that there was a 20% increase in homeless people (149 more people) in the winter of 2020 compared to the summer of 2019. There were significantly fewer homeless people using emergency shelter and transitional housing in the summer compared to the winter, while there were more people residing in places not meant for habitation in the summer (185) than in the winter (163). Winter shelters were not in use during the summer count, which resulted in a drop in the emergency shelter count from January to July.

FIGURE 10: **Comparison of January 2020 and July 2019 Point-in-Time Counts**
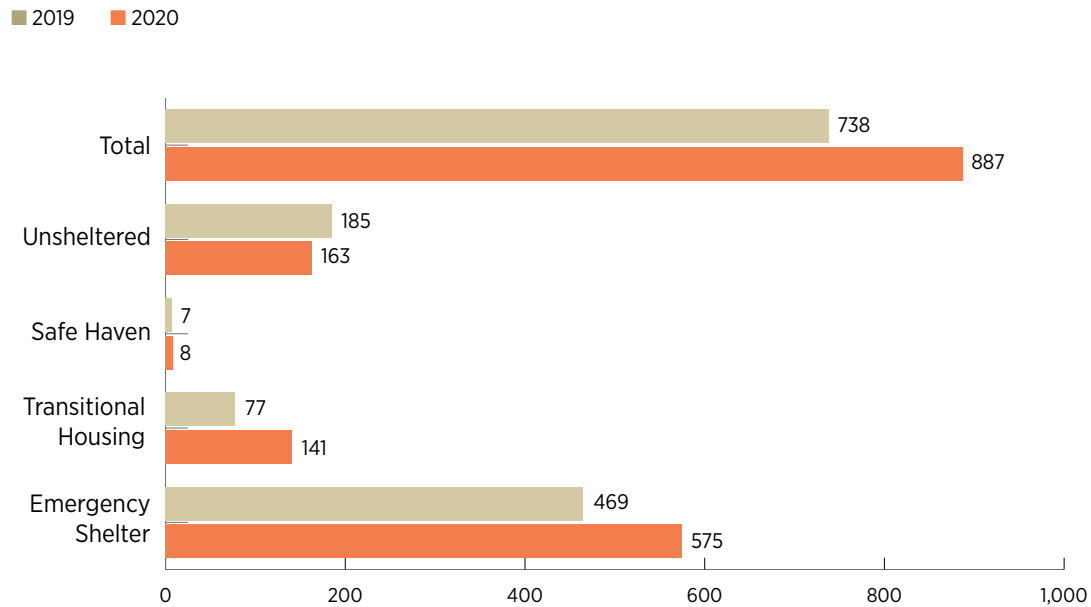
POINT-IN-TIME FIVE-YEAR TREND

A review of the January PIT count over the past five years shows that the CoC has made progress in reducing the number of people who are homeless from 1,156 in 2016 to 887 in 2020. The largest increase has been in the unsheltered count over the past five years. This has been in part due to the more robust effort in the past two years to count more geographic areas in the county. In addition, as noted above, there has been a major shift away from Transitional Housing to Rapid Re-Housing, which is not included in the PIT count. This shift has resulted in the development of more permanent housing options for people experiencing homelessness.

FIGURE 11: **Comparison of Point-in-Time Counts by Project Type, 2016–2020**
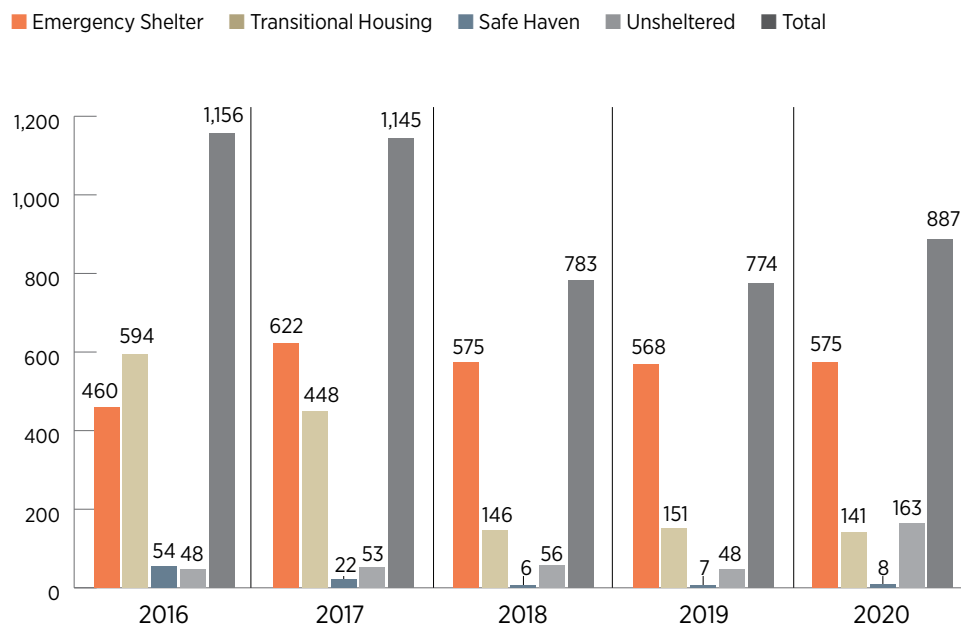
Housing Trends

Adopting HUD's best practice of moving people as quickly as possible to permanent housing, the CoC has embarked on moving from transitional housing for people in crisis to permanent housing. HUD requires the CoC to report the number of people residing in Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) and Rapid Re-Housing (RRH) as a part of the PIT. While the number of people in PSH increased by 11% (217 people) between 2016 and 2020, the population in RRH more than tripled (from 244 to 854) during the same period.

FIGURE 12: **Permanent Supportive Housing and Rapid Re-Housing Populations in Allegheny County, 2016–2020**

■ Permanent Supportive Housing   ■ Rapid Re-Housing
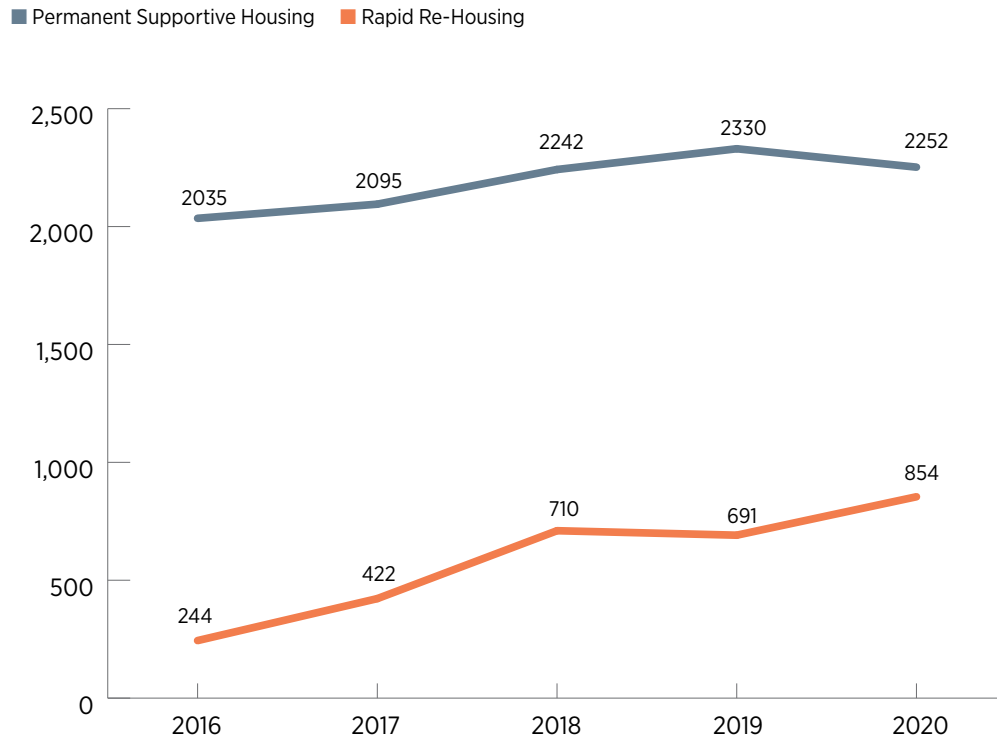
NEXT STEPS

Allegheny County will continue to conduct winter counts as required by HUD, in addition to non-required summer counts when possible. In 2020, Allegheny County will not conduct a summer PIT count due to the COVID-19 pandemic; DHS plans to restart the summer PIT count effort in 2021. DHS will continue working to improve the count of people in unsheltered locations by expanding the use of the mobile app and recruiting teams to canvass additional locations within the CoC's geographic area.

DATA COLLECTION/ANALYSIS
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APPENDIX A: UNSHELTERED COUNT LOCATIONS SURVEYED

MUNICIPALITY/ PITTSBURGH NEIGHBORHOOD	JAN 2020 PIT	JAN 2019 PIT
Allentown	x	
Arlington	x	
Aspinwall	x	
Bloomfield	x	x
Braddock	x	
Bridgeville	x	x
Carnegie	x	x
Carrick	x	
Castle Shannon	x	
Clairton	x	
Coraopolis	x	
Crafton	x	
Downtown/Golden Triangle Pittsburgh	x	x
Duquesne	x	
East Liberty	x	x
Edgewood	x	
Etna	x	
Forest Hills	x	
Garfield	x	x
Glen Hazel/Hazelwood	x	
Greenfield	x	
Harrison	x	
Heidelberg	x	
Highland Park	x	
Hill District	x	x
Homestead	x	x
Homewood	x	x
Lawrenceville	x	
Lincoln-Lemington-Belmar	x	
Larimer	x	
Manchester	x	
McCandless	x	
McKees Rocks	x	x
McKeesport	x	x

[continued]

MUNICIPALITY/ PITTSBURGH NEIGHBORHOOD	JAN 2020 PIT	JAN 2019 PIT
Millvale	x	x
Monroeville	x	
Mt. Oliver	x	
Mt. Washington	x	x
Munhall		x
Natrona Heights	x	x
North Braddock	x	
Northside Pittsburgh	x	x
Oakland	x	x
Penn Hills	x	
Point Breeze	x	
Rankin	x	x
Robinson Township	x	
Shadyside	x	
Sharpsburg	x	x
Southside (Flats & Slopes)	x	x
Spring Hill	x	
Squirrel Hill	x	
Strip District	x	x
Stowe Township	x	x
Swissvale	x	x
Tarentum	x	x
Troy Hill	x	
Turtle Creek	x	
Uptown Pittsburgh	x	
West Homestead		x
West View	x	
Wilkinsburg	x	x