Alameda County Point in Time Count Advisory Committee

December 17, 2020
Agenda
1. EveryOne Counts!
2. Concerns and Risks
3. Recommendation for 2021 PIT Count
4. Vote for HUD CoC
What is the EveryOne Counts! Point In Time Count?

- In odd numbered years, Continuums of Care (CoC) across the United States conduct a census of people experiencing homelessness.
- It provides a point in time snapshot of where people slept on a single night. It is a crucial data source that informs many levels of policy, system planning, and funding allocation.
- The count of people in shelters is collected via administrative sources like HMIS.
- The count of people who are unsheltered takes place during overnight hours and involves hundreds of people physically traveling each census tract in Alameda County and counting the number of people sleeping outdoors, in vehicles, tents, or abandoned buildings.
  - Some parts of the county are best covered by car and others on foot. Some areas are hidden and require specialized knowledge to find.
- This presentation focuses on the unsheltered component of the Point In Time Count.
Because of the COVID-19 pandemic the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) issued guidance to CoCs on conducting the PIT Count. This guidance became available on November 13, 2020 and includes:

- Prioritize health and safety of people experiencing homelessness who are more likely to be in poor health.
- Recognize that homeless service providers and other frontline workers have already maximized current staff capacity.
- Minimize reliance on volunteers.
- Minimize face-to-face interactions.

HUD Office Hours have provided further clarification:
- 2021 unsheltered PIT count data will not be comparable with 2019.
- Data collection should give a “general sense” of whether homelessness has gone up or down. If a CoC chooses to submit data, they must be confident that their data is reliable.
I’d hit return on this last sentence and make it a separate bullet. It is distinct from and somewhat contradictory to “general sense”.

Kathie Barkow, 12/17/2020
EveryOne Counts! 2021

- As well, HUD is allowing CoCs to request exceptions to unsheltered PIT Count requirements. Exceptions range from a full waiver of all the unsheltered data elements to providing only a head count (no demographic or subpopulation data), or conducting the PIT Count outside of the usual last 10 days in January (moving the count to February, for example).

- HUD has assured CoCs that requesting exceptions, including a full waiver of the unsheltered PIT Count will not impact funding.

- Some PIT Count requirements stay the same:
  - All CoCs must submit their Housing Inventory Count (HIC)
  - All CoCs must submitted sheltered PIT Count data
  - All data is due on or before April 30, 2021
Many California CoCs have already received or will be requesting full waivers of unsheltered PIT Count requirements as of 12/16/20.

**Waiver Requested And Granted**
- Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA)
- Santa Barbara
- Ventura
- Fresno/Madera
- Los Angeles
- Pasadena
- San Bernardino
- San Joaquin
- Sacramento

**Planning to Request a Full Waiver**
- San Diego
- Orange County
- Riverside County
- Long Beach
- Kern County
- Imperial County
- San Luis Obispo
- Glendale
- Kings/Tulare County CoC
- Merced County
Previous CoC Committee Decision

- At the November 17, 2020 meeting the CoC Committee approved:
  - Requesting from HUD a waiver of the unsheltered demographic and subpopulation data which we obtain by survey and completing a full count only
  - Delaying the count until February 2021
  - Reconsidering a survey in spring or summer if conditions allow

- Due to several emergent factors since then, a new recommendation is being presented to the CoC for consideration and action.
Recommendation

- For myriad reasons, the Research Project Management Team recommends requesting a full waiver of unsheltered point in time count requirements.
  - Research Project Management Team members include Jessica Shimmin (EveryOne Home), Kathie Barkow (Aspire Consulting), Riley Wilkerson (Alameda County Housing and Community Development), Suzanne Warner (Alameda County Office of Homeless Care and Coordination) and research partners Applied Survey Research.

- The rationale for this recommendation follow and are largely in these categories: insufficient person power, unreliable data, non-essential COVID risks, amplified racial inequities, and public health orders.
Point In Time Count Methodology

PIT Count methodology depends on guide and volunteer recruitment. At minimum, the count requires:

- 200 paid Homeless Guides to lead teams with other volunteers in counting areas that are familiar to the guides
- 500 Counters including city and county staff, nonprofit providers, outreach workers, police and sheriff, and volunteers.

Teams of Guides and Counters traverse each census tract working in close proximity to each other.

Some areas of the county are covered in cars, while others are on foot.

Guides help teams identify overlooked places where homeless people may be sleeping, often leading teams on foot into less traveled areas such as under bridges, behind fences, etc. to visually notice and count people who otherwise would have been missed.
Survey found that outreach and other frontline service providers do not have capacity to conduct a count. Providers described teams as “stretched,” “operating at effort level of 10,” and “taking on too much.”

Nonprofits report staff vacancies and/or are using temporary staff, who will leave at the end of the month.

While staff are doing heroic work providing essential services to homeless people, Providers are unwilling to expose staff to additional risk of COVID-19 infection for non-essential PIT Count work: “Put sheltered and unhoused residents first now and count later.”

People experiencing homelessness are high risk for medical complications from COVID-19. Paying homeless persons to lead counters when COVID is widespread is coercive and unnecessary.

Low levels of community/general citizen volunteer engagement is anticipated. SF has only been able to recruit 8 volunteers to date.
Data Accuracy

- Applied Survey Research (ASR) our research partner in producing PIT Count data has seen that without Guides’ expertise, communities grossly undercount the numbers of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.
- Without enough Counters, we cannot accurately cover every census tract.
- Without Guides or enough Counters, ASR expects a significant undercount of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, likely returning lower numbers than 2019.
- Our community will not have accurate data to report to HUD or to use for planning purposes.
What are the COVID-19 Risks?

- Homeless Guides are a highly vulnerable population per CA guidelines.
- Health Care for the Homeless reports increasing rates of COVID-19 infection among homeless persons. First 2 weeks of December saw higher case rates than any other month since the pandemic began.
- Service providers are seeing higher rates of COVID-19 infection among staff. One provider noted more cases in Dec. than in all previous months combined.
- COVID-19 disproportionately impacts Black, Indigenous and Latinx communities, who also make up the majority of our direct service staff and homeless population.
- Methodology of the count will expose Guides and frontline homeless services staff to additional, unnecessary risk of contracting and spreading COVID-19 as they interact, travel, and walk into places where homeless people are sleeping.
- Staff member illness will disrupt—even “decimate”—the delivery of essential homeless services in some programs.
PIT is non-essential

**CA Guidelines**
The unsheltered PIT count is not an essential service in promoting health, well-being and safety of homeless populations.

**HUD**
PIT Count may be waived by request without impact to future funding or standing. Many CoCs have requested and received a waiver from HUD, including the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA).
Alameda County Public Health

Purple Tier and Shelter in Place
- Current order is prohibitive of PIT, which requires non-essential travel and social interaction with some of Alameda County’s most vulnerable residents—people experiencing homelessness.

Increase in COVID-19 Cases
- Earliest vaccinations will not be available until end of February 2021.
Alameda County Health Officer

After review and consideration of the health and safety of all involved, the Alameda County Health Officer, Dr. Moss and the Health Care Services Medical Director, Dr. Clannon do not recommend proceeding with a Point In Time visual count or survey as long as the County remains in the State of California's Coronavirus Purple or Red Tier based on transmission and hospitalization rates.
Other Considerations

**Limited Outreach Capacity**
Do not have adequate outreach staff to cover all census tracts.

**Learnings from Census**
Census staff was not confident in their data collection of unhoused population.

**Leadership Opportunity**
Opportunity for Alameda County to be a leader in the Bay Area.
Recommendation

The CoC Board request a waiver of the unsheltered PIT count requirements for 2021. The community will replicate the survey component of the PIT Count if risk levels allow in the spring or summer of 2020, and the CoC conduct a full count and survey in January 2022.
Vote
KB6: do you want to add a summary of the vote here?

Kathie Barkow, 12/17/2020