

Missouri Housing Development Commission Statewide Point-in-Time Count

United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires that each Continuum of Care (CoC) conduct a Point-in-Time Count (PITC) of persons who are homeless every other year in the last seven days of January. However, Missouri Housing Development Commission, in partnership with the Governor's Committee to End Homelessness and Missouri Association of Social Welfare, conduct two counts each year. It is the belief of these agencies that performing a PITC only one time every two years does not garner complete data on homelessness in the state. As such, Missouri is currently the only state to conduct statewide PITC two times each year.

The PITC is a one-night count of both sheltered and unsheltered persons who are experiencing homelessness at that moment. A CoC is defined by HUD as a community plan to organize and deliver housing and services to meet the specific needs of people who are homeless as they move to stable housing and maximum self-sufficiency. It includes action steps to end and prevent a return to homelessness. The CoC process also recently became law through the reauthorization of the McKinney-Vento Act. Additionally, the PITC allows HUD to determine the size and scope of the homelessness problem, plan services and programs appropriately, and measure progress. Further, HUD uses the data to understand the extent and nature of homelessness throughout the country and to provide Congress with information on services provided, gaps in services, and most importantly, making funding decisions.

In addition to providing data to HUD, continua throughout the country use the PITC data to complete their housing inventory charts for funding applications, and this data is used for the Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) for Congress.

Missouri Housing Development Commission (MHDC) serves as the lead agency for the Missouri Balance of State (BoS) CoC, which is made up of the 101 rural counties of the state that are not part of a metropolitan CoC. The most recent counts organized by MHDC and the Governor's Committee to End Homelessness were conducted July 29, 2009, and January 27, 2010, One hundred thirteen of the state's 114 counties, including all metropolitan CoC, participated in these events. One county, St. Louis, conducts their PITC independently of the Missouri continua and their partnering agencies. Conducting counts as Missouri does provides more accurate data, as it diminishes duplication and provides a clearer snapshot of homelessness in our state. According to information from HUD, only 50 percent of CoC nationwide conduct one count per year, and only 4 percent of CoC nationwide conduct two counts per year.

In both July 2009 and January 2010, MHDC provided staffing to conduct the count of unsheltered homeless persons, who are defined as persons living in a place not meant for habitation, including bridges, camp sites and cars. MHDC also produced the Point-in-Time Count Report for both sheltered and unsheltered populations in Missouri during both the January and July counts. Missouri Association for Social Welfare (MASW) provided staffing for the count of sheltered homeless persons, defined as a person living in emergency shelter or transitional housing.

HUD approves several methods of conducting a PITC of unsheltered homeless persons, including a street count, street count with interviews, service-based count, probability sampling, complete coverage of a target area, known location, non-shelter services, or an one-night "blitz." MHDC practices the street-count-with-interview method in conjunction with the service-based count, which allows staff and volunteers to discuss homelessness with persons in that situation.

Approximately 24,000 Missourians are homeless in Missouri every night; 13,000 of those individuals are children. Missouri believes that homelessness is unacceptable. The data gathered from conducting statewide PITCs two times each year greatly assists MHDC and the Missouri metropolitan continua in applying for and managing funding that serves these vulnerable individuals and families.

Conducting two PITCs per year is certainly replicable. It is imperative that an agency with statewide reach and passion for ending homelessness be involved, as conducting counts this way takes detailed organization. MHDC staff is responsible for organizing the Missouri BoS initiative. They attend CoC meetings and ask for provider agencies to lead their individual counties. Each leader is responsible for organizing the efforts of that county, completing surveys, gathering volunteers and sending the data to MHDC staff. In addition, MHDC provides all training for providers of the count. As stated earlier, for those counties without provider coverage, MHDC provides the coverage. Every MHDC staff that provides coverage of a county is trained and provided the necessary tools to interview people who are homeless in their assigned county.