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Snohomish County Releases 2020 Point-in-Time Count of Homelessness

Number of people experiencing chronic homelessness outpaces housing efforts

EVERETT, Wash., July 1, 2020 – Today, the Snohomish County Human Services Department announced the results of their Point-in-Time (PIT) Count of people experiencing homelessness for 2020. The annual PIT Count was held on January 22, 2020. This survey was supported by the efforts of volunteers, county personnel, and partnering agency staff who came together to document 1,132 homeless persons in Snohomish County.

The PIT Count is required by state and federal funders and is used in planning programs. Snohomish County's desire to increase the usability and accuracy of PIT Count data led to a change in the methodology for locating homeless individuals, starting with the 2019 survey, and included a new strategy for finding families experiencing homelessness.

The PIT Count includes people residing in emergency shelters, using transitional housing, and living without shelter. Due to the fact that the unsheltered count relies on volunteer survey takers who visit encampments, food banks, community resources locations, and known areas where people experiencing homelessness congregate, the previous methodology was prone to undercounting families experiencing homelessness. To mitigate that issue, Snohomish County utilized the extensive data in the Coordinated Entry system to locate and actively reach out to people to obtain surveys from households that have been historically undercounted.

The small increase in homelessness seen in this year's PIT Count, up by 16 individuals from 2019, is less than would be anticipated from the 10.5% increase in the number of individuals and families, (2,956 in 2018 compared to 3,267 in 2019) seeking and receiving housing services through the county-wide homelessness response system over the course of the entire year since the prior PIT Count.

The data behind the PIT Count

Despite increased efficiencies and investments across the system which continue to assist more households each year, the PIT Count is the highest it has been since 2012. From its lowest point in 2015, when we identified 829 people, the PIT Count is up 36.6% to 1,132 in 2020. The sheltered count (459), largely a reflection of system capacity, was lower than in prior years due to a decrease in capacity offset

by an 8% increase in permanent housing capacity. There was, however, an increase of 116% in the number of people living without shelter from 2015 to 2020 (312 to 673).

The count varied in important ways from previous years. The number of households with children was down to 284 from 337 and the number of households comprised of children only was down from 35 to 30. The number of households with a veteran was down from 65 to 43. The proportion of people who identified as Black increased from 8.5% in 2019 to 11.2%. In contrast, Latinx people accounted for 10.6% of the 2020 count, a decrease from 2019 (14.6%). Families of color were disproportionately represented in the family count at 38.7%.

A very notable change was the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness which increased dramatically from 476 to 583, now representing more than 50% of all people experiencing homelessness in Snohomish County. The number of chronically homeless people being sheltered increased by 46.6% from 118 to 173 while the number of chronically homeless people who were unsheltered increased by 14.5% from 358 to 410.

While an imperfect measure, the PIT Count is one of the tools used to inform priorities for federal, state, and local funding, and it helps identify trends and craft solutions for addressing the needs of vulnerable individuals and families. The analysis and overall trend data are utilized by the Snohomish County Partnership to End Homelessness as one of many tools to track progress toward goals to prevent, reduce, and end homelessness. Great progress has been made in the collection, analysis, and evaluation of local homeless data. Some of that work is available through public dashboards which may be explored at <https://public.tableau.com/profile/SnoCoHMIS#!/>.

By the end of 2019, 142 additional units of housing specifically dedicated to addressing the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness had become available in Snohomish County. Unfortunately, this increase in housing did not reduce the PIT Count in 2020 as the loss of low-income housing (defined as housing that rents at or below \$800/month) in Snohomish County is among the most rapid in the nation. Coupled with population growth and rapidly rising rents, not enough housing is being built to meet demand at all income levels.

In response to this challenge, Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers and municipal mayors from throughout Snohomish County formed the Housing Affordability Regional Taskforce to launch a community discussion about potential solutions to the housing crisis. The Taskforce examined needs across the housing spectrum: affordable housing, subsidized and special needs housing, and alternative housing models, and created recommendations for increasing the supply of housing across all areas of need to provide more alternatives to those experiencing and at risk of homelessness. Implementation of the first round of recommendations is expected to begin in the fall of 2020 and continue into 2021.

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