

# Point-in-Time (PIT) Count of Homeless Persons

## Partnering with CoCs on the PIT Count: What Domestic Violence Providers Need to Know

*This resource was developed to inform domestic violence (DV) providers about the changes for the 2018 Point in Time (PIT) Count, the importance of including individuals and families fleeing domestic violence in the count, and the need for DV providers to partner with their local Continuums of Care (CoCs).*

### What Is the Point-in-Time Count?

The Point-in-Time (PIT) Count is an annual, census-like count of all people experiencing homelessness within a geographic area. The goal of HUD's PIT count is to gather a "point-in-time" snapshot of a community's current state of homelessness including details about various homeless populations (e.g., unaccompanied youth, survivors of domestic violence). Each year, the PIT count is paired with a Housing Inventory Count (HIC), where communities report on the beds and units dedicated to serving persons experiencing homelessness. Together, the PIT count and HIC provide critical updates on national and local progress towards ending homelessness.

### How is the PIT Count Relevant to Survivors?

Domestic violence (DV) is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children, and the need for safe and affordable housing is one of the most pressing concerns for survivors of violence and abuse.

- 80% of women with children experiencing homelessness have also experienced domestic violence (Aratani, Y. (2009). *Homeless Children and Youth, Causes and Consequences*. New York, NY: National Center for Children in Poverty).
- 57% of all women experiencing homelessness report domestic violence as the immediate cause of their homelessness (Women and Children in Chicago Shelters, 3; Nat'l Center for Homelessness & Health Care for the Homeless Clinicians' Network (2003). *Social Supports for Homeless Mothers*, 14, 26).<sup>1</sup>

Survivors of violence face complex barriers to shelter and housing that are caused by the power and control dynamics of abuse, which result in financial instability, lasting trauma, and a need for safety and confidentiality. These factors are exacerbated for marginalized and vulnerable communities, such as persons of color and persons living in rural areas. Housing and supportive services are critical interventions that play major roles in trauma recovery and long-term stability. DV providers and Continuums of Care (CoCs) should work together to ensure survivors fleeing DV are accurately reflected in the PIT count. This collaboration will improve community planning and increase safe housing options and supportive services for individuals and families impacted by DV.

### The Importance of DV Providers Participating in the PIT Count

PIT count data is used to measure homelessness on a local and national level and is published annually on the [HUD Exchange website](#). The PIT count data is also provided annually to Congress as part of the Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR). The AHAR is used by Congress, HUD, other federal departments, and the public to understand the nature and extent of homelessness.

As a result, it is essential that DV programs participate in the PIT count in conjunction with CoCs, which are the organizing bodies tasked with coordinating the count. Including survivors in the count will enable communities to demonstrate the need for housing for survivors and their families, identify gaps in supports and services, enhance outreach and engagement strategies and justify securing additional resources. It will highlight the importance of developing survivor-specific CoC programs and establish the need for systems that are responsive to survivors' unique housing needs. Finally, effective collaboration with your local CoC in conducting the PIT count will enhance ongoing partnerships between homeless and housing providers and DV providers to ensure that survivors can access and maintain safe, stable, affordable housing after fleeing domestic violence.

HUD strongly believes that communities should find ways to improve data collection on persons who are homeless because they are fleeing domestic violence. While HUD has made data collection on survivors of domestic violence optional, HUD strongly encourages communities to work with their domestic violence stakeholders, especially DV providers, to determine the best way to safely and confidentially collect data on survivors of domestic violence.

Communities must evaluate whether they have the capacity to ensure adequate safety and confidentiality for those interviewed (as well as those conducting surveys), especially when asking about domestic violence. However, DV providers and other domestic violence stakeholders should be active participants in determining *if* and *how* the PIT count is conducted in a sufficiently safe and confidential manner to collect information about the domestic violence experience of those being interviewed.

Communities only submit aggregate data to HUD and should have policies and procedures established to protect data on persons after it is collected to ensure it is kept safe, secure, and confidential. The guidance below provides tips on how communities can safely and effectively ask about domestic violence experience during the PIT count.

### Changes to the PIT Count: Counting Survivors of DV

Beginning in 2018, HUD updated PIT count reporting requirements to only include “those who are currently experiencing homelessness because they are fleeing domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking as opposed to reporting on survivors who have ever experienced those circumstances.”

**Why is HUD making this change?** With this change, HUD is striving to more accurately capture whether a survivor's primary cause of current homelessness is due to *fleeing*, or *attempting to flee*, one of the four crimes covered under the Violence Against Women Act: domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. In the past, HUD provided suggested language on the [model survey](#) to inquire about *any* trauma ever experienced by the survey respondent. The change in guidance is intended to improve accuracy in the count of individuals and families currently experiencing domestic violence and who qualify as homeless as a result of:

- 1) Fleeing, or attempting to flee;
- 2) Having no other residence; and
- 3) Lacking the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing.

**According to HUD, what does *fleeing* include?** From the [Coordinated Entry and Victim Service Providers FAQ](#) (November 2015), *fleeing* or *attempting to flee* includes: domestic violence, dating

violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous life-threatening conditions (including human trafficking<sup>2</sup>) that relate to violence against the individual or a family member, including a child, that has either taken place within the individual's or family's primary nighttime residence or has made the individual or family afraid to return to their primary nighttime residence.

## Maximizing the PIT Count Survey

HUD provides a suggested model survey to help communities know what questions to ask to fulfill HUD's required data points. This model survey and the suggested language for the survivor-specific language can be found here: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/3322/point-in-time-survey-tools/>.

Communities can also elect to add questions to their local survey tool to enhance the data being collected<sup>3</sup> and improve its use at the local level, including questions designed to capture broader data related to DV. When determining whether to add an additional question to the PIT count survey, communities should consider how adding additional questions will impact the willingness of people to respond to surveys and whether they believe they can effectively train their counting volunteers well enough to accurately capture this data. In addition to the required question about those currently fleeing due to domestic violence, communities can ask persons identified as homeless whether they have ever experienced domestic violence. In past model HUD surveys, the following question was recommended: "Have you ever been physically, emotionally, or sexually abused by a relative or another person you have stayed with, such as a spouse, partner, brother or sister, or parent?"

*Note: CoCs will have the ability to explain to HUD changes in PIT counts that are due to methodology improvements.*

### Who Should be Included in the PIT Count?

CoCs are responsible for planning and conducting, at least every other year, a PIT count of homeless persons within the geographic area that meets HUD's requirements; however, many communities conduct sheltered and unsheltered counts every year.

- **Sheltered Count** (HUD definition): A count of people who are homeless and in shelter on the night of the PIT count. This includes individuals and families "living in a supervised publicly- or privately- operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangement (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local government programs for low-income individuals)" on the night designated for the count. This includes individuals residing in Safe Haven projects. These sheltered projects should include projects that are targeted to survivors of domestic violence, like DV shelters. *Note: This does not include people living in Rapid Rehousing Programs or Permanent Supportive Housing Programs – those residents are not considered homeless.*
- **Unsheltered Count** (often referred to as a "street count") (HUD definition): A count of people who are homeless and unsheltered on the night the PIT count, including those who are staying in public or private places not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping.

## Engaging with Survivors: Strategies for a Successful DV Count on the Night of the PIT

*Safety, confidentiality and trauma informed care are essential!* To ensure that CoCs have the skills and level of expertise to effectively implement the PIT count, DV providers should take an active role in the community's planning and preparation efforts, as well as participate in the PIT.

### For Preparation Leading up to the Count:

- **Join Forces with the CoC** - Connect with the CoC regarding the local PIT count planning process, including both sheltered and unsheltered counts. By coordinating with the CoC, DV providers can confirm and determine which DV housing programs should participate in the sheltered count.
- **Utilize a Trauma-Informed Approach** - Partner with CoCs to employ a trauma-informed approach and determine a process for *if* and *how* referrals should be made if a survivor self-identifies during the count.
- **Educate CoC Volunteers on Domestic Violence and Safety Issues** - Approaching and gathering information can be intimidating for CoC volunteers and providers who do not have direct service experience with domestic violence. It is important to ensure volunteers' safety while also being sensitive in engaging individuals, asking questions about trauma, and providing them with appropriate resources.

### For the Sheltered Count:

- **Administer PIT Count Surveys to Sheltered Clients** – DV providers can administer the PIT surveys to their sheltered clients on the day of the count to get information concerning survivors' situations.
- **De-Identify Information** – All survivors' information will need to be de-identified to protect client confidentiality.
- **Report Aggregate Information** – Only aggregated information will be provided (i.e., the total number of persons currently experiencing homelessness because they are fleeing domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking).

### For the Unsheltered Count:

- **Train PIT Volunteers on How to Approach Individuals** – DV providers can offer training to those implementing the count on how to approach individuals in a non-threatening, non-judgmental way, being especially sensitive to the collection of DV information from respondents and incorporating appropriate interview protocols to protect client privacy and safety, such as: asking survey questions in a private location and not in the presence of a partner or spouse; giving respondents sufficient space and time to answer questions; not making them feel pressured to answer any questions they are not comfortable answering; and helping respondents feel respected and safe to respond to questions however they choose.
- **Educate on Safety Planning and Available Resources** – Additionally, DV providers can offer training to PIT count volunteers on how to conduct brief safety planning and provide needed resources to individuals who indicate feeling unsafe.

Partnering with CoCs and using a trauma-informed approach during the PIT count is the most compassionate and efficient way to get accurate data without re-traumatizing survivors. DV providers and state coalitions are the best resource to help CoCs determine the process for administering the survey and providing the appropriate follow up and referrals for survivors identified as fleeing or attempting to flee during the PIT count.

## Resources:

- [2018 HIC and PIT Data Collection Notice](#)
- [HUD PIT and HIC Guides, Tools, and Webinars](#)
- [Safe Housing Partnerships](#)

### Domestic Violence and Housing Technical Assistance Consortium

The Consortium, launched in 2015, provides training, technical assistance, and resource development at the critical intersection of homelessness and domestic violence and sexual assault. Funded by a partnership between the U.S. Department of Justice, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Consortium supports a TA Team of four national organizations: Collaborative Solutions, the National Alliance for Safe Housing, the National Network to End Domestic Violence, and the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. The Consortium works collaboratively to improve policies and practices that strengthen efforts to build safe and supportive housing options for domestic and sexual violence survivors.

**Questions?** The Consortium TA Team is available to provide individualized technical assistance and training to communities interested in expanding the array of safe housing options for domestic and sexual violence survivors. We can also provide support to domestic and sexual violence advocates, homelessness and housing providers, and other allied partners interested in building stronger community collaborations.



SAFE HOUSING  
PARTNERSHIPS

Visit [SafeHousingPartnerships.org](https://SafeHousingPartnerships.org) to access a comprehensive collection of online resources and to request technical assistance and support.

This project is sponsored under awards from the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Office on Violence Against Women and the Office for Victims of Crime at the U.S. Department of Justice, and the Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The interagency collaboration established this domestic violence and housing technical assistance consortium to provide national domestic violence and housing training and resource development.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> See also, Inst. for Children & Poverty (2004). *The Hidden Migration: Why New York City Shelters are Overflowing with Families*; Homes for the Homeless and Inst. for Children & Poverty (1998). *Ten Cities 1997-1998: A Snapshot of Family Homelessness Across America*, 3.

<sup>2</sup> In the 2015 CoC Program NOFA, HUD clarified that persons who are fleeing or attempting to flee human trafficking, including sex trafficking, could be considered homeless under Category 4 of the homeless definition when certain conditions apply.

<sup>3</sup> The development of survey tools and inclusion of additional questions should be created using HUD guidance. Communities need to be mindful of excessive data collection that could impact the PIT count data integrity beyond the HUD designated questions. There should be a balance between local needs and capturing the required HUD data when adding any additional questions to the local survey tool.