

2013 San Luis Obispo County Homeless Point-in-Time Census and Survey Fact Sheet

The Homeless Services Oversight Council (HSOC) of San Luis Obispo County is a public-private entity that was established to coordinate responses to homelessness in San Luis Obispo County. The HSOC is responsible for implementing the County's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness.

Background

To quantify homelessness and homeless needs in the County, the HSOC relies on data from multiple sources. The most important of these are the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data, data collected from local schools by the County's Office of Education, and the Point-in-Time Count and Survey. While each of these sources provides useful data, they cannot provide a complete picture of the homeless population when examined singly. By analyzing the Point-In-Time data together with other key data, it is possible to get a more complete picture of the homeless population. This fact sheet provides important information about the 2013 Point-in-Time Count and its findings, and analyzes key data in the context of the HMIS and Education data.

1. Point-in-Time Count and Survey

Each year, the County receives approximately \$1.03 million in McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act Continuum of Care funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for transitional and permanent, supportive housing for people who are homeless. The County also receives approximately \$121,000 in Emergency Solutions Grant funding for emergency shelter and services and rapid rehousing for homeless people. HUD McKinney-Vento Continuum of Care or Emergency Solutions Grant funded programs in San Luis Obispo County include the Maxine Lewis Memorial Shelter and Prado Day Center operated by the Community Action Partnership of San Luis Obispo (CAPSLO), the El Camino Homeless Organization shelter, the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program at the LINK, transitional housing operated by Transitions Mental Health Association, a Supportive Services Only (SSO) case management program operated by CAPSLO, and permanent, supportive housing programs operated by the CAPSLO and Transitions Mental Health Association.

To remain eligible for this federal assistance, the HSOC must conduct a Point-in-Time Count and Survey at least biannually. Historically, the HSOC met this requirement by conducted a count and survey every two years, although the HSOC recently voted to conduct an "off year" evaluation in 2014 to increase competitiveness for Continuum of Care bonus funding.

Point-in-Time counts provide a snapshot of the homeless population and includes information on both sheltered and unsheltered homeless people, including those who do not access services at homeless assistance programs in the County that receive HUD McKinney-Vento grant funding. The HSOC sponsored the Count and contracted with nonprofit agencies, with technical assistance from a third party provider, Applied Survey Research, to conduct a count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons living in San Luis Obispo County in a 24 hour period in January 2013. Currently or formerly homeless persons served as guides for teams that counted people sleeping unsheltered.

The HSOC also sponsored a survey of 385 homeless persons from February through March of 2013 to obtain demographic and other key information about homeless persons residing in San Luis Obispo County. The

breadth of the survey ensured a representative sampling from each of the regions of the County. The “peer to peer” survey was conducted by people who were either currently or formerly homeless themselves and all survey information was self-reported by homeless persons being interviewed.

The strength of the Point-in-Time Count and the Survey is that they provide information about people who are unsheltered and not receiving services as well as those who are receiving services.

2. Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)

The County also collects data on homelessness on an ongoing basis through the Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS). HMIS data includes demographics and quantitative information regarding the persons served at emergency shelters, transitional housing, the Prado Day Center, and permanent, supportive housing programs funded by HUD McKinney-Vento grants, including those accessing SSO case management, as well as those served by homeless prevention or rapid re-housing programs.

The strength of HMIS data is that it provides an overview of the population receiving services over time and quantifies the impacts of services on outcome measures such as increases in income. HMIS data also provides information on housing placement and stability. While HMIS data may better capture the flow of persons in and out of homelessness, it does not include any information about those persons who are not accessing services at HUD McKinney-funded programs.

3. Office of Education Data

Data on homeless, school-aged children is collected by local schools and the County Office of Education. The schools use the U.S. Department of Education’s definition of homelessness that includes families who are living doubled up with other families due to a lack of housing or economic hardship, as well as children living in RV and trailer parks. This is a broader definition than that used by HUD to define homelessness. Children who are homeless at any time during the school year are counted as homeless in the annual data.

The strength of the Education data is that it provides information over time. Additionally, it provides quantifiable information about the numbers of children who are not in stable housing and who are at risk of homelessness.

Considering HMIS, Office of Education, and Point-in-Time Count and Survey data together provides a more accurate picture of homelessness in the County.

Key Themes

1. The population in our County of those who are homeless has increased slightly since 2011.
2. School data also suggests there has been a substantial rise in the number of children who are living doubled up with others due to a lack of housing, economic hardship, or other similar reason, or are otherwise unstably housed.
3. The majority of homeless persons are from this area.
4. Overall, the data suggests a relatively large percentage of this population is chronically homeless and/or has significant service needs. 26% were chronically homeless and many more appear to be at risk of becoming chronically homeless (for a definition of chronic homelessness, see Page 11 of the 2013 Homeless Census and Survey report):

- 50% reported this was not their first episode of homelessness.
- 47% of those surveyed reported their current episode of homelessness had lasted a year or more as of the time of the survey.
- 49% reported experiencing a mental illness (e.g. chronic depression, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, etc.)
- More than one in three persons (38%) reported having been injured in a manner that is a possible indicator of traumatic brain injury. Traumatic brain injury can affect cognition and sometimes mimics the symptoms of mental illness.

These statistics demonstrate the need for more permanent, supportive housing for persons with disabilities as well as more treatment services.

5. HUD asked communities to conduct separate, youth-specific counts. In San Luis Obispo County, however, this was not possible this year due to the small number of service programs specifically targeted to homeless youth. Recently, however, HSOC formed a Committee to gain an understanding of the challenges faced by youth who are living unaccompanied, without a parent or guardian, and to recommend services to address the needs of these youth.
6. A relatively small number of people have had frequent or lengthy interactions with the criminal justice system. Data from local law enforcement suggests that a small number of individuals have been arrested a high number of times for crimes related to addiction disorders. Targeting residential treatment and case management services to this limited number of persons could significantly decrease the burden on law enforcement and court resources.

Procedural Differences in 2011 and 2013 Point-in-Time Enumeration

1. Consistent with the HUD definition of homelessness, the 2013 Point-in-Time count excluded families living doubled up with others. The 2011 Count used the broader, Department of Education definition.
2. The 2013 Point-in-Time (PIT) count used only school data for children living unsheltered or in motels. Schools also verified in January that the children were still homeless. In 2011, the PIT count included children who had been identified by the schools as homeless at any time from September 2010-January 2011. The 2011 count also included those who had been identified as living in shelters or in motels, regardless of whether or not they were included in the PIT shelter count as well.
3. All surveys in 2013 were conducted by currently or formerly homeless people trained as "peer to peer" interviewers, whereas surveys in 2011 were conducted primarily by community volunteers and the staff of homeless service providers.
4. In 2011, the survey was conducted at the same time as the Point-in-Time Count. In 2013, the survey was conducted over a period of several weeks following the Count, and there were 385 respondents – a 36% increase over the number of respondents in 2011.
5. In 2013, those conducting the count and survey used a uniform definition of homelessness throughout the County. This differs from 2011, when a different definition was used in the North County to include families living in RV and trailer parks, consistent with the Department of Education definition, whereas those conducting the count and survey in other parts of the county followed the HUD definition.
6. The wording of survey questions differed in several key areas in ways that could explain year by year differences, including:

- Mental illness – The 2013 survey specifically asked about having experienced depression or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), whereas the 2011 survey did not. Some homeless persons may not consider chronic depression or PTSD to be a mental illness and may answer “no” when asked if they have a mental illness, but answer “yes” if asked specifically about depression.
- Where people came from – The 2013 survey asked where people had been residing when they most recently became homeless, whereas the 2011 survey asked how long people had resided in San Luis Obispo County.

Key Findings of PIT Count and Survey and Comparison to HMIS and Other Data

1. A total of 2,186 people were counted as homeless in January 2013. Using a HUD-provided formula, this equates to a total of 3,497 persons estimated to be homeless at some point in time within a one year period. Comparatively, 2,534 unique individuals were served last year according to HMIS data.
2. Compared to 2011 Point-in-Time (PIT) count data, there was a 3% increase in homelessness in 2013 among those who met the HUD definition of homelessness. Annual school data from the Office of Education also suggests there was an increase – the number of homeless children counted by local schools rose substantially from 2011 to 2013.
3. Of those counted by the PIT count on a single night in 2013, approximately 89% of the population was unsheltered. This is consistent with the 89% who were unsheltered on the night of the 2011 count. It should be noted that HMIS data is not used to estimate the percentage of the homeless population that is unsheltered, because it does not include those who are not receiving services,
4. A majority of the homeless population resided in San Luis Obispo County prior to becoming homeless. 71% of persons surveyed during the PIT Survey were living in San Luis Obispo County when they became homeless; and 18% were living in other counties in California when they became homeless. HMIS data from 2012 indicates that 54% of those using McKinney-funded services, shelter or housing reported that their most recent permanent residence was located in San Luis Obispo County. This disparity may be a result of differences in the wording of the question in HMIS versus the PIT Survey.
 - In the 2013 PIT Survey, homeless people were asked where they were living most recently when they became homeless, whereas for HMIS, clients were asked to provide the zip code for their last permanent residence (where they had stayed for 90 days or more).
 - HMIS data is also collected over the course of a year, whereas PIT data is a single point-in-time snapshot.
 - PIT data also includes people not receiving services; these people are not included in HMIS data.
5. 70% responded they would want to move into safe, affordable permanent housing if it were available; 16% indicated they were unsure.
6. 49% reported they were experiencing mental illness. This is a significant increase from 2011, when 31% answered yes. The increase appears to be partly due to the way in which the question was asked (as noted above, chronic depression and PTSD were included in 2013, per HUD’s standards for disabilities). In 2013, 36% of respondents reported they were experiencing chronic depression and 25% reported they were experiencing PTSD, but only 20% answered “yes” when asked if they were currently experiencing a mental illness.
7. Survey respondents were asked about any incarcerations. 62% reported no incarcerations. 4% reported having spent between 21-50 nights in jail or prison in the last 12 months and 8% reported having spent

51 nights or more in jail or prison. 12% reported having spent 1-5 nights and 13% reported having spent 6-20 nights in jail or prison.

8. 8% were unaccompanied minors or Transitional Aged Youth (aged 18-24 years old) in 2013. The 2011 Count and Survey did not distinguish Transitional Aged Youth from other adults, so it was not possible to provide a count of that population, and no unaccompanied minors were counted.
9. 12% of the adult homeless population surveyed in 2013 reported being veterans, compared to 16% of those surveyed in 2011. HMIS data indicates 7% of individuals served at McKinney-funded programs in 2012 reported being veterans.
10. Only 3% of the persons surveyed in 2013 reported they were currently experiencing domestic violence. This is much lower than indicated by HMIS and other data. According to HMIS, 18% of those receiving services in 2012 had experienced domestic violence. Because the 2013 Point-In-Time survey was administered in public places and was administered by other homeless persons who may have known the interviewee, it is possible that persons experiencing domestic violence may not have felt safe in disclosing that information.

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