

Data Collection Guide:

New Jersey Statewide

Point in Time Count of the Homeless

January 25, 2012



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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Point in Time survey is to determine answers to some of the biggest questions about homelessness. Who are the homeless? What are the factors that contributed to their homelessness? When did they become homeless? Where are the homeless in New Jersey living? Why do they remain homeless? Answers to these questions will perhaps show the answer to the most critical question of all: How can we prevent homelessness in the State of New Jersey?

To find the answers to these questions, it is necessary to understand both the scope and nature of homelessness in the State of New Jersey. The survey tool captures the nuances of homelessness and assesses not only the number of homeless individuals and families but their respective characteristics the homeless impact as well. The purpose of the survey tool is to gather information that will allow the state and its jurisdictions to gather accurate information that will improve planning processes and help us to better meet the needs of homeless individuals and families in New Jersey.

HOMELESS DEFINITION

A number of definitions for the word "homeless" exist in state and Federal regulations and program planning guides. Most of the funding available to communities to create programs and housing for the homeless is federal funding. Some of this funding may be granted directly to not-for-profit organizations for the purpose of administering a program while other types of funding passes through municipal or state organizations to not-for-profit organizations operating at the community level. In any of these cases, the general rule is this: if the funds originate at the federal level, it is the federal rules and definitions that apply.

According to HUD for the night of the 2012 count, a person should be counted as homeless if that person:

- sleeps somewhere not designed as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, for example -- sleeps in cars, parks, streets/sidewalks, or abandoned buildings;
- lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence, has a supervised emergency shelter or safe haven as a primary nighttime residence (this includes domestic violence and youth shelters);
- resides in transitional housing dedicated solely for the homeless.

Please note that **persons meeting the following criteria may not be counted as homeless** for the 2012 count:

- persons doubled up with other families;
- persons living in illegal dwelling units;
- severely overcrowded units, e.g. those with greater than 1.5 persons per room;
- persons being discharged from health institutions;
- persons being discharged from jail and/or prison;
- persons scheduled for eviction but still in housing;
- persons residing in a motel unit which is being paid for by that person or family.

Chronic Homelessness is defined by HUD as follows:

“... an unaccompanied homeless individual or family where a head of household has a disabling condition who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more OR has had at least four (4) episodes of homelessness in the past three (3) years. A disabling condition is defined as

a diagnosable substance use disorder, serious mental illness, developmental disability, or chronic physical illness or disability, including the co-occurrence of two or more of these conditions. A disabling condition limits an individual's ability to work or perform one or more activities of daily living."

The 2012 Point in Time Survey will continue to collect information on those who meet the HUD definition in order to meet HUD's requirements, but also on those who may be at risk of homelessness or precariously housed, in order to assist in statewide planning to prevent homelessness.

COMPLETING THE SURVEY

Purpose. The purpose of the survey is two-fold: (1) to generate an unduplicated count of homeless households during a specified point-in-time; and (2) to generate an assessment of the housing and service needs of the homeless population within a specific city, town or region.

Who Should Complete the Survey. A survey should be completed on behalf of each household that is homeless during the specified period of the count. A household is generally defined as cluster of related persons who would likely be housed together if permanent housing was obtained. For example, a single mother with three minor children is one household. A single adult who has no spouse and no children is a household. Please complete only one survey for each household. While a married couple with no children is one household, for purposes of this survey, we ask that two surveys be completed – one for each person. When a married couple with children is surveyed, please complete two surveys – one survey for one parent and all children in the household, and one survey for the second parent alone.

How to Complete the Survey. The survey may be completed in one of two ways: (1) staff at agencies serving the homeless who have a fairly stable client base and know the answers to the questions posed by the survey may respond on behalf of their client. In this case, you are requested to complete the survey via the **online survey**; (2) staff or trained volunteers can sit down with the client and interview him/her to obtain answers to the questions posed by the survey. Once surveys administered in person are completed, the information should be uploaded into the online database. The survey should NOT be given to a client to complete themselves; a staff person or survey volunteer should always administer the survey.

All questions in this guide that have an asterisk *next to them are high priority questions and it is important to try are get a response to them.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR RESPONDING TO SURVEY QUESTIONS (BOTH PAPER & ONLINE):

Code: Please enter your five-digit site character code. The code consists of two letters (indicating the site county) and three numbers (may have different configuration due to sub-coding depending on your CoC). Entering this code will allow data to be sorted by site for planning and evaluation purposes.

*This is **A** in the online survey and it must be entered.*

County: Please enter the county in which the survey is being administered. This allows the information to be sorted by County.

*This is **B** in the online survey and the corresponding County must be chosen from a list of all the counties in NJ.*

Agency: If the survey is being completed by an agency, please enter the agency name (optional for paper survey).

This is not part of the online survey.

Program: If the survey is being completed for a client participating in a specific agency program, please enter the program name (optional for paper survey).

This is not part of the online survey.

Question 1: Where will you spend the night of Wednesday, January 25th?*

The night of the count per HUD signifies a single period of time from sunset to sunrise that spans two actual dates. The 'night of the count' begins at sunset on the date of the count (Wednesday, January 25th) and ends at sunrise on the following day (Thursday, January 26th).

Check only ONE response:

- ***On the street, under a bridge, abandoned building, public building, car, traveling on a bus, or camping out.*** If the respondent indicates that they are living somewhere that is not meant for human habitation, select this option.

- ***I don't have a permanent dwelling and I don't know where I'll stay.*** If the respondent indicates that they are homeless and have no permanent dwelling, but have not yet determined where they will spend the night, select this option.
- ***Emergency shelter.*** If the respondent indicates that they are staying in an emergency shelter for the homeless, select this option.
- ***Transitional housing (time-limited).*** If the respondent indicates that they are staying in transitional housing for the homeless, select this option.
- ***Hotel/motel paid for by agency because you don't have housing.*** If the respondent indicates that they are staying in a motel paid for by local board of social services, an agency, United Way, or other community organization because of lack of housing, select this option.
- ***Domestic violence shelter.*** If the respondent indicates that they will stay in a shelter for persons fleeing domestic violence, select this option.
- ***Youth shelter.*** If the respondent indicates that he/she will stay in a shelter for homeless youth, select this option.
- ***Permanent housing.*** If the respondent indicates that they are living in their own permanent housing, select this option. **This information will not be used in the homeless count,** but will be used to collect information on those with precarious housing situations or who are at risk of homelessness and who may have service, housing or other needs.
- ***Temporarily with friends or family.*** If the respondent indicates they are currently staying with friends or family that hold the lease or are the homeowners. **This information will not be used in the homeless count,** but will be used to collect information on those with precarious housing situations or who are at risk of homelessness and who may have service, housing or other needs.
- ***Hotel/motel you paid for while looking for housing.*** If the respondent indicates this answer, select this option. **This information will not be included in the homeless count,** but will be used to collect information on people with precarious housing situations or who are at risk of homelessness and who may have service, housing or other needs.
- ***Psychiatric hospital.*** If the respondent indicates this answer, select this option. **This information will not be included in the homeless count,** but will be used to collect information on people with precarious housing situations or who are at risk of homelessness and who may have service, housing or other needs.

- **Jail.** If the respondent indicates this answer, select this option. **This information will not be included in the homeless count,** but will be used to collect information on people with precarious housing situations or who are at risk of homelessness and who may have service, housing or other needs.
- **Juvenile detention center.** If the respondent indicates this answer, select this option. **This information will not be included in the homeless count,** but will be used to collect information on people with precarious housing situations or who are at risk of homelessness and who may have service, housing or other needs.
- **Farm labor housing.** If the respondent indicates this answer, select this option. **This information will not be included in the homeless count,** but will be used to collect information on people with precarious housing situations or who are at risk of homelessness and who may have service, housing or other needs.
- **Medical hospital.** If the respondent indicates this answer, select this option. **This information will not be included in the homeless count,** but will be used to collect information on people with precarious housing situations or who are at risk of homelessness and who may have service, housing or other needs.
- **Substance abuse treatment facility.** If the respondent indicates this answer, select this option. **This information will not be included in the homeless count,** but will be used to collect information on people with precarious housing situations or who are at risk of homelessness and who may have service, housing or other needs.
- **Other.** Indicate respondent's answer. **Depending on the answer, this information may not be included in the homeless count,** but will be used to collect information on people with precarious housing situations or who are at risk of homelessness and who may have service, housing or other needs.

This question is important to help identify people who are truly homeless, those at risk of homelessness or in precarious housing situations, and to help identify housing gaps within the NJ system. **Please check off only one choice.**

These choices correspond with the choices found on the online survey. If the respondent refuses to answer, on the paper survey please write in "No Response" and on the online survey please select "No Response".

Question 2: In what town will you be spending the night?

This question is important to help identify where needs exist throughout the state. On the paper survey, please fill out the name of the town, the county, and the state.

On the online survey, please select the town, county and state from the drop-down lists (NJ is at the top of the list only). If the town, county or state is not listed, please fill out the box marked "Other." If the respondent does not answer, please enter NR in the box marked "Other."

Question 3: Where was your last permanent address before becoming homeless?

On the paper survey, please fill out the name of the town, the county, the state and the country.

On the online survey, please select the town, county, state and country from the drop-down lists . (NJ is at the top of the list only). If the town, county, state or country is not listed, please fill out the box marked "Other." If the respondent does not answer, please enter NR in the box marked "Other."

Question 4: How many children (under 18) will be with you tonight?*

Please enter the number of children 6 years or under who are currently in the respondents' care on the night of January 25th, and/or the number of children 7 to 17 years old who are currently in the respondents' care on the night of January 25th. If they have no children check off None. **If the respondent is accompanied by a child who is 18 or over, that individual should complete a separate adult survey and should not be included in this question.**

On the online survey, if the respondent has no children currently in their care, select Yes from the dropdown menu under None. For those that have children choose the number from the drop down menu (each age group dropdown has the ability to count up to 10 children in that age group).

If the respondent is part of a two-adult household, please check Yes if their children are counted on another adult survey. Remember, children who are part of two-adult households should ONLY be counted on one adult survey.

Check Yes, No or No Response on the online survey.

Question 5: How long have you been homeless?*

Check only ONE option. This question is important because it will help determine who meets the definition of chronic homelessness, as well as providing information necessary for forecasting and planning.

Check corresponding option on the online survey. Check No Response if the question was not answered.

Question 6: If you have been homeless more than one year, and you have children, have your children been with you the whole time?*

Check only ONE option (Yes or No). **If the respondent has no children leave blank.** This question is important because it will help determine who meets the definition of family chronic homelessness, as well as providing information necessary for forecasting and planning.

Check Yes, No or No Response on the online survey.

Question 7: If you have been homeless less than one year, has there been another time within the past 12 months when you were homeless?*

Check only ONE option (Yes or No). This question is important because it will help provide information necessary estimating a “true” number of homeless and for forecasting planning.

Check Yes, No or No Response on the online survey.

Question 8: Have you been homeless at least 4 times within the last 3 years (since Jan. 25, 2009)?*

Check only ONE option (Yes or No). This question is important because it will help determine who meets the definition of chronic homelessness.

Check Yes, No or No Response on the online survey.

Question 9: If yes and if you have children, were your children with you each time you were homeless?*

Check only ONE option (Yes or No). If the respondent has no children leave blank. This question is important because it will help identify families who meet the chronic homeless definition.

Check Yes, No or No Response on the online survey.

Question 10: Which of the following sources of income do you or anyone in your family receive?

Please check ALL that apply, for the respondent and for any members of their family accompanying them on the night of January 25th. If respondents indicate additional sources of income not listed on the survey, please select OTHER and then write in the income source.

Check corresponding options on the online survey. Check No Response if the question was not answered.

Question 11: What is your income?

On the paper survey, please indicate respondent's actual income reported.

On the online survey, please indicate the range into which the respondent's income falls (for example, \$5,000-\$9,999).

Question 12: In the last 3 years, have you ever received, are you currently receiving or would you like to receive, any of the following services?*

Please check ALL that apply. This question is important because it helps determine disability status, service needs and service gaps. The services above the dark line specifically relate to disability.

Check corresponding options on the online survey. Check No Response if the question was not answered.

Question 13: Have you ever served in the US military?*

Check only ONE option (Yes or No). This question is important because it gives us a count of the homeless veterans in NJ.

Check Yes, No or No Response on the online survey.

Question 14: What is your ethnicity?*

Check only ONE option. This question provides important demographic data.

Check corresponding option on the online survey. Check No Response if the question was not answered.

Question 15: Which category best describes your racial background?*

Check ALL that apply. These have been grouped to match HUD's standard under HMIS data. This question provides important demographic data.

Check corresponding options on the online survey. Check No Response if the question was not answered.

Question 16: What is your sex?*

Check only ONE option. This question provides important demographic data.

Check corresponding option on the online survey. Check No Response if the question was not answered.

Question 17: What is your age?*

On the paper survey, please indicate respondent's actual age (for example, 43). DO NOT PROVIDE A BIRTH DATE. This question provides important demographic data.

On the online survey, please indicate the range into which the respondent's age falls (for example, 40-49).

Question 18: In the past three years, have you ever been discharged into homelessness from any of the following institutions?

Check ALL that apply. This question is important in helping identify how respondents enter homelessness and gaps in discharge planning. Please note that there is a distinction between STATE prison and COUNTY/CITY jails, as well as between STATE and COUNTY/CITY mental health institutions.

Check corresponding options on the online survey. Check No Response if the question was not answered.

Question 19: What happened in your life that caused or contributed to your current living situation?

Please check ALL that apply. This question is important in determining service needs and in homeless prevention planning.

Check corresponding options on the online survey. Check No Response if the question was not answered.

Question 20: Identifier Information*

This section is designed to insure that duplicate surveys are not submitted for the same person. DO NOT PROVIDE THE PERSON'S FULL NAMES. As indicated on the survey form, use just the first 3 initials of the last name, the first initial of the first and middle initial. If the person has no middle initial or does not give you his or her initials, enter an X where appropriate.

TIPS FOR CONDUCTING RESPONDENT INTERVIEWS

1. Introduce yourself to the respondent, offering your first name and a smile. Tell him/her that the information he/she shares will be anonymous and that the information will be used to assess need and get additional funds for housing and support services for the homeless in your community.
2. If you are interviewing respondents with whom you do not normally work, you may want to have an "incentive" gift, such as a cup of coffee, donut, personal care product, toy for a child to give to the respondent.
3. Speak in a soft, but clear voice. Speaking loudly may make the respondent feel as if he/she has no privacy.
4. Try to conduct the interview in a private manner, even if in a public place. For example, sit together in a corner or away from heavy foot traffic. Allow respondent to sit with his/her back to a room or cluster of people.
5. Prior to beginning to administer the survey, ask the respondent if he/she has already completed a survey and if so, where. If you can determine that the respondent has in fact already shared information with us, thank him/her and do not continue with the survey. There is no need to obtain the information a second time.
6. Use simple questions to obtain information. Try to avoid compound questions or direct orders such as tell me your first, middle and last names. Compound questions may be confusing to the respondent and prevent you from obtaining accurate information.
7. Use the survey as a guide for all your questions to ensure that your interview is organized, focused and complete.
8. As much as possible, ***refrain from reading aloud the list of answers***. Read the question and listen to the person's response and select the appropriate response from the list. If necessary, ask questions to clarify. ***Do not pressure any person to answer questions if they do not want to answer.***

9. Personalize your questions from time to time to show respect for the respondent. For example: "John, where are you currently living? In the shelter?" Or, "John, have you been sleeping on the street?"
10. When you have finished the survey, thank your respondent for his/her time. Shake his/her hand. Let him know how his/her time and cooperation will help the community.

TIPS FOR USING THE ONLINE SURVEY

1. It is recommended that one person from each agency enter the survey data, to reduce data entry differences from person to person. If more than one person will enter data, it is suggested that they agree upon a uniform manner of data entry for the text fields. In particular, it is important to agree upon common spellings, punctuation, acronyms and abbreviations for any text that is entered. This will allow for better sorting and analysis of the data.
2. Click the link emailed to you for the survey. Be sure you are following the link for the LIVE survey.
3. The entire survey is displayed on one screen. Every question with an asterisk next to the number **MUST** be answered in order to move on to the next survey. If a question requires an answer but the respondent did not respond or a question was left blank, select No Response.
4. When the survey is completed, click the "Done" button at the bottom of the screen. If the survey is fully completed, you will see a screen that says, "Your survey has been submitted". This confirms that the data you have just entered has been uploaded to the database. If you do not see this screen but instead are returned to the survey, this means that a question that requires an answer has not been answered. The missing question will be marked in red. Page through the survey and find any missing questions and complete them. Then click the "Done" button. ***If you do NOT see a screen that says, "Your survey has been submitted " then your information has NOT been uploaded to the database.***
5. Once the " Your survey has been submitted " screen is displayed, you cannot change the information uploaded. If there is an error that must be corrected at this point, contact CSH with the respondent identifier for the survey containing the error.

6. After you see the " Your survey has been submitted " screen, you may exit the survey by closing your browser window. If you would like to enter another survey, click the "Done" button at the bottom of the screen. This will bring you to another survey where you can begin entering data.

If you have questions about the 2012 Point in Time Count, the survey instrument or the online survey, please contact:

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