

An hourglass-shaped graphic with a globe in the top bulb and another globe in the bottom bulb. The hourglass is light blue and has a dark blue top and bottom. The globe in the top bulb is dark blue, and the globe in the bottom bulb is light blue. The text is centered within the hourglass.

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Report RL33956

*Counting Homeless Persons: Homeless Management
Information Systems*

Libby Perl, Domestic Social Policy Division

November 25, 2008

Abstract. This report describes the development of HMIS, reports on the continuing progress of HMIS, summarizes information released in the first, second, and third AHARs, and describes previous attempts to count homeless persons.

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Counting Homeless Persons: Homeless Management Information Systems

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November 25, 2008

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Summary

In 1998, Congress directed the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to develop a process for collecting data about homeless persons. Together with local communities, HUD began in 2001 to implement a series of Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS). Two categories of federal fund recipients are required to participate in HMIS: organizations that receive grants through the Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) program and organizations that receive HUD Homeless Assistance Grants. The HOPWA program provides housing and supportive services for persons living with AIDS, while the Homeless Assistance Grants fund transitional and permanent housing, as well as services, for homeless individuals.

Local jurisdictions called “Continuums of Care” (CoCs)—typically cities, counties, or combinations of both—are the entities that implement HMIS. Homeless service providers in these CoCs collect and store information about homeless individuals they serve, and the information is aggregated in computer systems at the CoC level. HUD anticipates that information about homeless individuals from CoCs across the country will help it to better serve their needs.

HUD released its third analysis of data from a sample of participating HMIS jurisdictions—the third Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR)—in July 2008. The third AHAR was the first occasion on which HUD used data from an entire year to estimate the number of homeless persons (the first and second AHARs used three months and six months, respectively). The third AHAR used HMIS data from a sample of 98 communities to derive a national-level estimate of the number of homeless persons from October 2006 through September 2007. In addition to the AHAR estimates using HMIS data, local CoCs also conduct point-in-time counts of homeless individuals on one day in January at least every two years. HUD has published these results as part of each AHAR.

Congress initially allocated funds for data collection regarding homeless persons in the FY2001 HUD Appropriations Act (P.L. 106-377), and has continued to allocate funds in all HUD spending bills from FY2002 to FY2008. Local communities can then apply to HUD for available funds that they may use to implement HMIS. Community implementation of HMIS increased between 2005 and 2006. According to the most recent HUD progress report to Congress regarding HMIS, 91% of local CoCs were implementing HMIS in 2006, meaning that they had established systems into which data are entered (compared to 72% in 2005). Approximately 9% of CoCs had decided to implement an HMIS, and were in the process of planning the system (compared to 20% in 2005), and 1% of CoCs were not yet planning an HMIS (compared to 7% in 2005).

This report describes the development of HMIS, reports on the continuing progress of HMIS, summarizes information released in the first, second, and third AHARs, and describes previous attempts to count homeless persons. It will be updated as events warrant.

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Introduction

It is difficult to ascertain the number and characteristics of persons experiencing homelessness due to the transient nature of the population, although attempts to count and describe homeless individuals have been made in recent decades.¹ Beginning in the mid-1990s, for example, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) required its grant recipients to provide information about the homeless clients they served. In addition, comprehensive attempts to count homeless individuals were made in both the 1980s and 1990s, first via Census data and then through a national collaborative survey called the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients. However, no systematic method for tracking homeless persons has existed until now. In response to a directive from Congress in 1998, HUD began in 2001 to develop a system to track homeless individuals; the processes of data collection, organization, and storage systems, which take place at the local level, have been termed Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS). In July 2008, HUD released results of its third analysis of HMIS data—the third Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR). This CRS report describes the development of HMIS, the results of the first, second, and third AHARs, and previous attempts to count homeless individuals.

What Are Homeless Management Information Systems?

Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) are databases established at the local level through which homeless service providers collect, organize, and store information about homeless clients who receive services. HUD is implementing the HMIS initiative through local “Continuums of Care” (CoCs), which acquire and process data from all participating local service providers. CoCs are local boards formed by communities—typically cities, counties, or combinations of both—made up of representatives from nonprofit service providers, advocacy groups, local government, and other interested organizations.² Local boards identify the needs of homeless persons in their communities and try to ensure that they receive the appropriate mix of preventative assistance, emergency services, transitional housing, supportive services, and permanent housing. Local homeless services providers submit requests for funding to their local CoC boards, which each in turn submit single consolidated applications to HUD. As of FY2008, there were approximately 468 CoCs, including those in the Territories.³

Two types of organizations are required to participate in HMIS: those that receive funding through the Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) program and those that receive Homeless Assistance Grants. The HOPWA program, enacted in 1990 (P.L. 101-625)

¹ As defined by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (P.L. 100-77), a homeless person is “(1) an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and (2) an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is—(A) a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill); (B) an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or (C) a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.”

² States may also constitute CoCs to coordinate funding in sparsely populated areas.

³ “HUD-Defined CoC Names and Numbers Listed by State,” Revised April 2008, available at <http://www.hud.gov/offices/adm/grants/nofa08/coclisting.pdf>.

provides housing and supportive services for persons living with HIV/AIDS.⁴ The Homeless Assistance Grants, enacted as part of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (P.L. 100-77),⁵ consist of both formula grants, which are distributed through the Emergency Shelter Grants program, and competitive grants, which are available through the Shelter Plus Care program, Supportive Housing Program, and Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation Assistance for Single Room Occupancy Dwellings program.⁶ Other service providers that serve homeless individuals and families but do not receive federal funds from these sources are also encouraged to participate in HMIS.

HUD's Continuing Role in Collecting Information About Homeless Persons

Even prior to the congressional directive to implement HMIS (described in the next section of this report, "Development of the HMIS Network"), HUD began efforts to collect information about homeless clients served in the communities that receive HUD Homeless Assistance Grants. Beginning in the mid-1990s, about the time that the Continuum of Care system developed, HUD required applicants for Homeless Assistance Grants to include in their applications information about the number of persons receiving assistance and the type of assistance they received. Initially this was done in narrative form. However, by 2003, the grant application required CoC applicants to complete a housing activity chart that included a point-in-time count of homeless individuals and families receiving services, though HUD did not specify when this count should take place.⁷ The 2003 application also asked applicants to categorize subpopulations served, including the number of chronically homeless individuals, veterans, those with severe mental illnesses, those with HIV/AIDS, and victims of domestic violence. Some CoCs used database systems similar to HMIS to keep track of homeless individuals who were served; these predecessor systems are sometimes referred to as "legacy systems."⁸

The 2005 HUD point-in-time count of homeless persons marked the first time that HUD required all CoCs to conduct a count of both sheltered and unsheltered homeless individuals, and to do it at a particular time of year. HUD directed CoCs to conduct a one-night count during the last week of January of both clients who used homeless services and those who were on the street.⁹ HUD continues to require CoCs to conduct point-in-time counts every two years, though some CoCs choose to conduct counts every year. For example, in 2006, 61% of CoCs voluntarily conducted counts.¹⁰ The most recent point-in-time count in which all CoCs participated occurred in January

⁴ For more information on the HOPWA program, see CRS Report RL34318, *Housing for Persons Living with HIV/AIDS*, by Libby Perl.

⁵ P.L. 100-77 is codified at 42 U.S.C. §§11301-11435.

⁶ For more information about the Homeless Assistance Grants, see CRS Report RL33764, *The HUD Homeless Assistance Grants: Distribution of Funds*, by Libby Perl.

⁷ The FY2003 application is available on HUD's website, <http://www.hud.gov/library/bookshelf12/supernofa/nofa03/cocapp.doc>.

⁸ See U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *The Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*, February 2007, p. 2, available at <http://www.huduser.org/Publications/pdf/ahar.pdf> (hereafter *First AHAR*).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *The Second Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*, March 2008, p. 12, available at <http://www.hudhre.info/documents/2ndHomelessAssessmentReport.pdf> (hereafter *Second AHAR*).

2007. The results of these counts are described later in this report, in the section “CoC Estimates of Homeless Individuals.”

Development of the HMIS Network

Congressional Direction

HUD’s ongoing attempts to count homeless individuals were given greater direction beginning in 1998, when Congress instructed HUD to count homeless persons and gather data about both their characteristics and use of homeless assistance services. The FY1999 HUD spending bill (P.L. 105-276) set aside up to 1% of the total appropriation for Homeless Assistance Grants for systems to track those persons experiencing homelessness. Specifically, Congress directed HUD to produce an unduplicated count of homeless persons and to collect information about homeless individuals surveyed such as age, race, sex, disability status, health status, and income; the types of services that homeless clients received; and client outcomes such as length of stay in transitional housing, success in acquiring permanent housing, and employment status.¹¹ Congress concluded that this information would allow HUD to better assess the quality of service programs supported with federal funds.¹²

Congress provided further direction to HUD in the HUD Appropriations Act for FY2001 (P.L. 106-377). The law made Supportive Housing Program funds available for local CoCs to implement management information systems.¹³ Congress directed HUD to work with local jurisdictions to develop a system to collect data, and to be ready to analyze the data within three years of passage of the appropriations bill.¹⁴ Congress also requested that HUD provide Congress with a report on its findings containing an unduplicated count of homeless persons and a descriptive profile of the population.¹⁵ The FY2001 Appropriations Act once again allocated funds to pay for data collection, this time setting aside 1.5% of the total appropriation for Homeless Assistance Grants of \$1.02 billion. Congress has continued to allocate funds for homeless data collection in spending bills from FY2002 to FY2008.

¹¹ See House Committee on Appropriations, *Department of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development and Independent Agencies Appropriations Act 1999*, report to accompany H.R. 4194, H.Rept. 105-610, 105th Cong., 2nd sess., July 8, 1998. The FY1999 HUD Appropriations Act referred to the House Committee Report language for specific requirements.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ The provision allowing HMIS funding from the Supportive Housing Program (SHP) is codified at 42 U.S.C. §11383(a)(7). HUD enumerated the ways in which CoCs may use SHP funds for management information systems in *Federal Register*, volume 69, no. 146, July 30, 2005, p. 45890.

¹⁴ See Conference Committee, *Department of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development and Independent Agencies Appropriations Act 2001*, conference report to accompany H.R. 4635, H.Rept. 106-988, 106th Cong., 2nd sess., October 18, 2000.

¹⁵ See Senate Committee on Appropriations, *Department of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies Appropriations Act 2001*, report to accompany H.R. 4635, S.Rept. 106-410, 106th Cong., 2nd sess., September 13, 2000.

HUD Actions

In the time since Congress directed HUD to implement a system to count homeless persons and collect information on their characteristics, HUD has issued six annual reports to Congress updating its progress. In an initial report, dated August 2001, HUD stated that it would help CoCs collect homelessness data through four means:¹⁶

- flexibly implementing the new Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) eligible activity under the Supportive Housing Program in the 2001 McKinney-Vento competition;
- initiating a comprehensive technical assistance program to help local jurisdictions collect unduplicated client-level data by 2004;
- developing an approach to obtaining meaningful data for an Annual Homeless Assessment Report from a nationally representative sample of jurisdictions; and
- analyzing the most viable approaches to obtaining homeless client-level reporting.

Since issuing this 2001 report, HUD has initiated a number of activities to follow through on its pledge to assist CoCs. It specified that CoCs may use Supportive Housing Program funds for computer hardware, software, and personnel to manage and operate information systems, analyze HMIS data, and produce reports. HUD technical assistance teams hold training sessions for CoCs across the country. In each year from 2004 to 2008, HUD sponsored national conferences in which it provided sessions on a wide range of topics, including data entry, strategies for including data on domestic violence clients and chronically homeless individuals, and how to use HMIS to evaluate program performance and improve services to persons experiencing homelessness. HUD established a website—HMIS.Info—where information about HMIS implementation across the country can be disseminated.¹⁷

HMIS Data and Technical Standards

On July 30, 2004, HUD released its final notice on HMIS data and technical standards that local CoCs are expected to follow when they collect information about their homeless clients.¹⁸ The standards describe two levels of data collection—universal data, which homeless service providers must collect from all clients, and program-specific data, which programs that receive certain types of funding must collect, but that other programs are encouraged to collect as well.

All participants must report on universal data elements, which include name, date of birth, race, ethnicity, gender, veteran status, Social Security Number, prior residence, and disabling conditions.¹⁹ In general, all programs that receive funds under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and HOPWA are required to provide program-specific data; this requirement is not

¹⁶ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Report to Congress: HUD's Strategy for Homeless Data Collection, Analysis and Reporting*, August 2001, p. 1, available at <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/hmis/strategy/congressreport.pdf>.

¹⁷ The website is <http://www.hmis.info>.

¹⁸ *Federal Register* vol. 69, no. 146, July 30, 2004, pp. 45888-45934.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 45905.

new, as HUD already requires grantee organizations to provide this information in their Annual Progress Reports.²⁰ Included in program-specific data elements are amount and sources of income, receipt of non-cash benefits, physical and developmental disabilities, HIV status, mental illness, substance abuse status, and domestic violence status.²¹

Confidentiality of Domestic Violence Victims

Due to the sensitive nature of much of the information that homeless service providers must collect, some groups that provide services to domestic violence victims raised privacy concerns to HUD after its release of proposed data and technical standards but prior to release of final standards in 2004. These organizations requested that information about domestic violence victims not be included in HMIS.²² At the time, HUD acknowledged the sensitivity of certain information, but concluded that CoCs could collect the information in such a way that would protect the identity of those in the system. To this end, HUD included privacy and security standards in the data and technical standards that all organizations must follow.

However, on January 5, 2006, President Bush signed the Violence Against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act (P.L. 109-162), which included provisions to (1) amend the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act to prevent victim service providers from disclosing personally identifying information through HMIS, and (2) permit disclosure of non-personally identifying information only after a public notice and comment period. On March 16, 2007, HUD released a notice regarding HMIS and the amendments to McKinney-Vento made by P.L. 109-162.²³ In the notice, HUD confirmed that it would require disclosure of non-personally identifying information only after going through a notice and comment period. Until HUD does so, it has instructed organizations that provide services to domestic violence victims not to input information about their clients into HMIS.

Status of the HMIS Network

Two aspects of HMIS implementation contribute to a CoC's ability to capture data regarding homeless persons. The first aspect is whether a data collection system has been established at the CoC level, and the second is the degree to which homeless service providers within a CoC are participating in the system. Although almost all CoCs have established an HMIS system into which data may be entered, the extent to which data are actually entered into these systems remains incomplete, on average. Once established, a comprehensive HMIS network is meant to improve the ability of communities to provide services to homeless persons as well as to help HUD determine how best to allocate resources.²⁴

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 45913-45914.

²¹ Ibid., p. 45914.

²² Ibid., p. 45891-45892.

²³ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "The Violence Against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act of 2005: Applicability to HUD Programs," *Federal Register*, vol. 72, no. 51, March 16, 2007, pp. 12695-12700.

²⁴ *First AHAR*, p. 1.

HMIS Implementation

HUD's initial goal was that every CoC implement an HMIS by October 2004—meaning establish a system into which communities are entering data. Although this goal was not accomplished by 2004, the number of CoCs participating in HMIS has increased in every year since 2001.²⁵ Between 2005 and 2006, the percentage of CoCs that had implemented an HMIS (meaning they were actually inputting data) increased from 72% to 91%.²⁶ From 2005 to 2006, the percentage of CoCs that had decided to implement an HMIS but were still in the planning stages decreased from 20% to 9%, and the percentage that were not yet planning an HMIS dropped from 7% to 1%.²⁷

At the local level, CoCs have several options for implementing and maintaining their HMIS databases. Not all CoCs are implementing their own HMIS. Some are collaborating to create a multi-jurisdictional HMIS with two or more CoCs. Others are planning to make individual CoC data accessible at the state level, while 19 states have decided to implement a state-level HMIS.²⁸ Local initiatives also differ in their methods of incorporating service providers into HMIS. Local CoCs may use one central HMIS, into which all service providers input client information. Another option is to allow service providers to use different database systems, but to have technical specialists available at the CoC level to merge all data into one unified system. A third option is to use side-by-side systems where individual service providers enter data into their own systems, and also enter data into a CoC-wide HMIS.

Participation of Service Providers in HMIS

Even where CoCs have successfully implemented HMIS, coverage of homeless service providers may be incomplete. HUD uses the term “bed coverage” to describe the rate at which local service providers within a CoC participate in HMIS. The term refers to the percentage of available beds in a CoC that are actually accounted for in HMIS. If not all service providers within a CoC participate in HMIS, then bed coverage may be low. Issues with bed coverage may arise in cases of domestic violence shelters that are reluctant to report data due to confidentiality concerns, or where service providers do not receive HUD funds and are not required to participate in HMIS. In addition, even when service providers report data to HMIS, they might not include all clients served, which could result in another limitation on the usefulness of the data.²⁹

HUD keeps track of bed coverage rates both by the type of shelter provided, such as emergency shelter, transitional housing, and permanent housing, and by household type, such as homeless individuals and homeless families. From 2005 to 2006, the average number of beds across CoCs that were included in HMIS increased in all categories.³⁰ HUD reports bed coverage as an average rate—the average of all CoCs' bed coverage rates.

²⁵ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Report to Congress: Sixth Progress Report on HUD's Strategy for Homeless Data Collection, Reporting and Analysis*, May 2007, p. 4, available at <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/library/improvingDataCollection.pdf> (hereafter *Sixth Progress Report to Congress*).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁹ *First AHAR*, p. 13.

³⁰ *Sixth Progress Report to Congress*, p. 5.

- **Emergency Shelter:** The average bed coverage rate for shelters serving individuals went from 43% in 2005 to 55% in 2006. For shelters serving homeless families, the average bed coverage rate went from 45% in 2005 to 51% in 2006.
- **Transitional Housing:** The average bed coverage rate for transitional housing serving homeless individuals increased from 41% in 2005 to 50% in 2006. Average bed coverage rates for homeless families increased from 51% to 62%.
- **Permanent Housing:** Average bed coverage rates for permanent supportive housing for individuals went from 46% in 2005 to 58% in 2006. Average bed coverage rates for homeless families went from 54% in 2005 to 58% in 2006.

Counts of Homeless Persons

Since the 1980s, a number of attempts have been made to estimate the total number of homeless persons in the country as well as to describe their characteristics. Although the specific methods used in the studies have varied, in most, researchers surveyed a sample of the homeless population and used the sample to estimate the total number of homeless persons in the country. The time periods covered by these counts vary. Some are “point-in-time” counts that estimate the number of homeless people on a single night during the year. Others estimate the number of persons who are homeless during longer periods—a week or span of months. Researchers have also used samples to estimate the total number of persons who are homeless at some point during the year.³¹

The HMIS initiative differs from these previous efforts to count homeless people and gather information. Instead of sampling only certain communities or counting homeless individuals on only a single night, CoCs gather information from all homeless assistance providers regarding all homeless individuals who use their services each day of the year. Eventually, once communities have fully implemented HMIS, the network of systems is expected to provide an annual unduplicated count of homeless persons from each jurisdiction. Counting homeless populations on the street might continue to be important, however, as their use of services is unknown.³² HUD released its first report to Congress using HMIS data, the Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR), in February 2007. In March 2008, HUD released the second AHAR, and in July 2008, HUD released the third AHAR. Because HMIS is not fully implemented in all jurisdictions around the country, the three AHARs, like previous efforts to count homeless persons, rely on a sample of jurisdictions.

This section describes several efforts to estimate the number of homeless individuals over the years. These include CoC point-in-time counts that take place every two years, estimates in the three AHARs using HMIS data, and previous estimates from the 1980s and 1990s. This section

³¹ For an explanation of how annual counts are estimated using data from point-in-time counts, see Martha R. Burt and Carol Wilkens, *Estimating the Need: Projecting from Point-in-Time to Annual Estimates of the Number of Homeless People in a Community and Using this Information to Plan for Permanent Supportive Housing*, Corporation for Supportive Housing, March 2005, available at http://documents.csh.org/documents/pubs/csh_estimatingneed.pdf.

³² U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *HUD's Homeless Assistance Programs: A Guide to Counting Unsheltered Homeless People*, Second Revision, January 15, 2008, p. 14, available at http://www.hudhre.info/documents/counting_unsheltered.pdf (hereinafter *A Guide to Counting Unsheltered Homeless People*).

also includes a description of demographic information regarding homeless persons from various sources.

CoC Counts of Homeless Individuals

As mentioned earlier in this report, in 2005 and 2007, HUD required all CoCs to conduct point-in-time counts of both the sheltered and unsheltered homeless individuals in their jurisdictions. In 2006, 61% of CoCs voluntarily conducted point-in-time counts. Although currently most CoCs conduct counts without using HMIS,³³ eventually HUD expects the HMIS initiative to be part of this point-in-time collection of information about homeless individuals. As HMIS programs develop, CoCs will be able to use the systems as part of the data collection process in estimating the number of sheltered homeless people.³⁴

The reliability of CoC point-in-time data vary by Continuum, particularly in the case of estimates of unsheltered homeless individuals. Unsheltered individuals are those living in places not meant for human habitation, such as cars, abandoned buildings, highway underpasses, and public parks. Although HUD has published guidance on how to conduct street counts³⁵ and provides technical assistance to CoCs, the task is complicated, and not all CoCs are able to conduct statistically reliable surveys of those individuals who are not sheltered.³⁶

During the point-in-time counts, HUD also asks participating CoCs to collect information about homeless individuals, which is referred to as “subpopulation information.” CoCs are to ask homeless individuals whether they are chronically homeless; have severe mental illnesses, substance abuse disorders, or HIV/AIDS; are veterans; have experienced domestic violence; or are unaccompanied youth. CoCs are not always able to gather this information, and even when they do, according to HUD, the subpopulation information is less reliable than the estimates of the number of homeless individuals.³⁷ Further, in the required 2005 CoC count, it was optional for CoCs to provide information regarding unsheltered homeless subpopulations. Information about homeless subpopulations is available on HUD’s website.³⁸

2005 CoC Counts

In 2005, HUD directed all CoCs to conduct counts on one night during the last week of January for the first time.³⁹ The HUD website provides a breakdown of these point-in-time estimates for each CoC from 2005.⁴⁰ The total 2005 count for the states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the territories are as follows:⁴¹

³³ *First AHAR*, p. 17.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *A Guide to Counting Unsheltered Homeless People*.

³⁶ *First AHAR*, p. 18.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ For 2005, see http://www.hudhre.info/CoC_Reports/05_US_HomelessPopSubSmry.pdf; for 2006, see http://www.hudhre.info/CoC_Reports/06_US_HomelessPopSubSmry.pdf; and for 2007, see http://www.hudhre.info/CoC_Reports/07_NatlHomelessPopSub.pdf.

³⁹ Because HUD directed CoCs to conduct a point-in-time count of homeless individuals during the last week of January 2005, not all CoC point-in-time counts took place on the same day in January.

⁴⁰ HUD makes the results of these counts available on its Homelessness Resource Exchange website, available at (continued...)

- the sheltered homeless population consisted of 418,165 persons on a single day during the last week of January 2005;
- the unsheltered homeless population numbered 344,845;
- the total number of homeless individuals counted on one day during the last week of January 2005 was 763,010.

2006 CoC Counts

In 2006, 277 out of 448 CoCs, or just under 62%, voluntarily conducted point-in-time counts. HUD added the 2006 results from these 277 CoCs to the 2005 results of the CoCs that did not conduct counts to arrive at a total number of homeless individuals. HUD refers to this number as the 2006 estimate although some of the results come from 2005 point-in-time counts. The 2006 results for the states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the territories are as follows:⁴²

- the sheltered homeless population consisted of 427,971 persons on a single day during the last week of either January 2005 or January 2006;
- the unsheltered population numbered 331,130; and
- the total number of homeless individuals counted on one day during the last week of either January 2005 or January 2006 was 759,101.

2007 CoC Counts

In 2007, all CoCs were to participate in a count of homeless individuals on one night during the last week of January. The 2007 results for the states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the territories are as follows:⁴³

- the sheltered homeless population consisted of 391,401 persons on a single day during the last week of January 2007;
- the unsheltered homeless population numbered 280,487;
- the total number of homeless individuals counted on one day during the last week of January 2007 was 671,888.

(...continued)

<http://www.hudhre.info/index.cfm?do=viewHomelessRpts>.

⁴¹ The AHAR estimates using HMIS data, described in the next section of this report, do not include data from the territories. For comparability purposes, the CoC point-in-time counts in the states and District of Columbia only were 415,366 sheltered homeless individuals, 338,781 unsheltered individuals, and 754,147 total individuals. See http://www.hudhre.info/CoC_Reports/05_allStsHomelessPopSubSmry.pdf.

⁴² The CoC point-in-time counts of homeless individuals in the states and District of Columbia only were 424,932 sheltered individuals, 323,899 unsheltered individuals, and 748,831 total individuals. See http://www.hudhre.info/CoC_Reports/06_allStsHomelessPopSubSmry.pdf.

⁴³ The results for the states and District of Columbia only were 389,858 sheltered individuals, 276,437 unsheltered individuals, and a total of 666,295 individuals who were homeless on one night during the last week of January, 2007. See http://www.hudhre.info/CoC_Reports/07_StatesHomelessPopSub.pdf.

The Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR)

On February 28, 2007, HUD released the first Annual Homeless Assessment Report, in which HMIS data were analyzed for the first time.⁴⁴ A year later, in March 2008, the second AHAR was released,⁴⁵ and in July 2008, HUD released the third AHAR.⁴⁶ For the three AHARs, researchers relied on HMIS data collected from a sample of communities during a period of time and used these data to derive national-level estimates of the number of homeless persons. The three reports provide point-in-time estimates of the number of homeless individuals, estimates of the number of homeless persons during a longer period (three months during the first AHAR, six months during the second AHAR, and one year during the third AHAR), and a description of characteristics of those persons experiencing homelessness.

The HMIS data in the three AHARs provide estimates only of the *sheltered* homeless population—individuals living in emergency shelter and transitional housing—and do not include estimates of individuals living on the street or other places not meant for human habitation. As a result, the three AHARs also reported data collected from CoCs during their one-night counts of homeless persons in January of 2005, 2006, and 2007, each of which included individuals and families who were on the street or similar location.

In the coming years, the AHAR is expected to include data from a larger number of service providers, cover nonresidential populations, examine longitudinal data, and include more information about the clients served.⁴⁷

Estimates from the First AHAR Using HMIS Data

Initially, data from a nationally representative sample of 80 CoCs were expected to be used in the first AHAR. However, minimum HMIS requirements meant that some sample communities were excluded from the analysis. In order to participate, each jurisdiction was required to have a minimum level of bed coverage—only CoCs in which at least 50% of beds in at least one of four categories (emergency shelter for individuals, emergency shelter for families, transitional housing for individuals, and transitional housing for families) could participate in the AHAR.⁴⁸ As a result, data from 64 rather than 80 sample communities were used to arrive at estimates in the first AHAR.

Using HMIS data, the first AHAR reported two point-in-time estimates of the number of *sheltered* homeless persons, as well as an estimate of the number of persons who were homeless in the three-month period from February 1 to April 30, 2005. (See **Table 1**.) These estimates do not include homeless people who were not residing in emergency shelters or transitional housing during the relevant time periods. Nor do the estimates include the territories. Data from the HMIS sample communities provided that

⁴⁴ The first AHAR is available at <http://www.huduser.org/Publications/pdf/ahar.pdf>.

⁴⁵ The second AHAR is available at <http://www.hudhre.info/documents/2ndHomelessAssessmentReport.pdf>.

⁴⁶ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *The Third Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*, July 2008, available at <http://www.hudhre.info/documents/3rdHomelessAssessmentReport.pdf> (hereafter *Third AHAR*).

⁴⁷ *First AHAR*, p. 53.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

- an estimated 313,722 persons in the country were homeless on April 30, 2005;⁴⁹
- an estimated 334,744 persons were homeless on an average day between February 1 and April 30, 2005;⁵⁰ and
- an estimated 704,146 persons were homeless on at least one day between February 1 and April 30, 2005.⁵¹
- The first AHAR did not attempt to use these numbers to estimate the total number of persons who were homeless at some point during the year.

The HMIS data collected over the three-month period in 2005 also provided information about the characteristics of the homeless persons surveyed. Information from the sampled jurisdictions was used to estimate that 65.7% of homeless persons were individuals or households without children, while 34.4% consisted of households with children. Unaccompanied adult males made up the largest percentage of the population (47.4%). Children made up 21.2% of the population. The majority of homeless individuals in the three-month count were members of minority groups, 58.9%. Of the adult homeless population counted during the three-month period, 18.7% were veterans and 25.0% were disabled. However, 35% of the HMIS records were missing information on veteran status and 55% of records were missing information on disability status.⁵²

Estimates from the Second AHAR Using HMIS Data

The second AHAR relied on data from a total of 74 communities that were collected from January through June 2006. As in the first AHAR, communities were required to meet bed coverage requirements of 50% in at least one of four categories in order to participate.⁵³ Also, like the first AHAR, the second AHAR estimated the number of *sheltered* homeless individuals—those living in transitional housing or emergency shelters—and did not include those living in places not meant for human habitation. Unlike the first AHAR, the sample communities did not include any data from domestic violence shelters.⁵⁴

The second AHAR reported three point-in-time estimates and an estimate of the total number of persons who were homeless during the six-month period from January 2006 through June 2006. The estimates include only the states and the District of Columbia and do not include the territories:⁵⁵

- an estimated 338,000 persons were homeless on January 25, 2006;⁵⁶

⁴⁹ The 95% confidence interval for this estimate is 218,890 to 408,554, meaning that researchers are 95% certain that the actual number of homeless individuals on this date was somewhere in this range. See *First AHAR*, p. 22.

⁵⁰ The 95% confidence interval for this estimate is 235,315 to 434,233. *First AHAR*, p. 22.

⁵¹ The 95% confidence interval for this estimate is 399,244 to 1,009,048. *First AHAR*, p. 28.

⁵² *First AHAR*, p. 31.

⁵³ *Second AHAR*, p. 61.

⁵⁴ *Second AHAR*, pp. 4-5. As explained earlier in this report, the Violence Against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act (P.L. 109-162) prevented domestic violence service providers from participating in HMIS. The first AHAR data collection period occurred prior to enactment of P.L. 109-162, and some of these providers were still participating in HMIS at that time.

⁵⁵ *Second AHAR*, p. 18.

⁵⁶ The 95% confidence interval for this estimate is 248,900 to 426,400. *Second AHAR*, p. 12.

- an estimated 339,000 persons were homeless on April 26, 2006;⁵⁷
- an estimated 337,000 persons were homeless on an average day between January 1, 2006, and June 30, 2006,⁵⁸ and
- an estimated 1,150,866 persons were homeless at some time during the period January 1, 2006, and June 30, 2006.⁵⁹

The second AHAR did not attempt to estimate the total number of people who were homeless in 2006.

The HMIS data for the second AHAR collected over the six-month period in 2006 also provided information about the characteristics of the homeless persons surveyed. Information from the sampled jurisdictions was used to estimate that 72.8% of homeless persons were individuals or households without children, while 27.2% were households with children.⁶⁰ Unaccompanied adult males made up the largest percentage of the population (53%).⁶¹ Children made up 17% of the population, and unaccompanied youth were 3%.⁶² The majority of homeless individuals in the six-month period were members of minority groups, 66.3%.⁶³ Of the adult homeless population counted during the six-month period, 14.3% were veterans and 38.4% were persons with disabilities. However, 20% of the HMIS records were missing information on veteran status and 43% of records were missing information on disability status.⁶⁴

Estimates from the Third AHAR Using HMIS Data

The third AHAR, released in July 2008, marked the first occasion on which HUD analyzed a full year of HMIS data regarding homeless individuals. The HMIS data were collected from 98 communities, which provided information they had collected from October 1, 2006, through September 30, 2007. The requirement for bed coverage rates from participating communities was the same as it had been in the first and second AHARs: bed coverage had to be 50% or higher in at least one of four categories.⁶⁵ The data from the HMIS communities, like the data from the first two AHARs, represented only those homeless individuals living in emergency or transitional housing, not those living on the street or other place not meant for human habitation. In addition, persons staying in domestic violence shelters were not entered into HMIS, so those individuals are not represented in the sample.

The third AHAR used the HMIS data to report an estimate of the number of homeless people in the states and the District of Columbia during the one-year period from October 2006 through September 2007. The third AHAR, unlike the first two, did not use HMIS data to make point-in-

⁵⁷ The 95% confidence interval for this estimate is 249,100 to 428,500. *Second AHAR*, p. 12.

⁵⁸ The 95% confidence interval for this estimate is 249,200 to 424,900. *Second AHAR*, p. 12.

⁵⁹ The 95% confidence interval for this estimate is 691,129 to 1,610,603. *Second AHAR*, p. 20.

⁶⁰ *Second AHAR*, p. 20.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Third AHAR*, p. 6.

time estimates and instead reported CoC counts (discussed earlier). Using HMIS data, the third AHAR reported that

- an estimated 1,588,595 persons stayed in an emergency shelter or transitional housing at some point during the year.⁶⁶

The information collected through HMIS in the 98 sample communities also captured characteristics of the homeless individuals staying in shelters or transitional housing. The third AHAR reported that of this total, an estimated 70.2% were unaccompanied adults, unaccompanied youth, or members of multiple-adult households without children.⁶⁷ Those persons in families (households with children) represented 29.8% of the total. Single adult men represented the largest proportion (48.6%) of the total homeless population, unaccompanied youth were 3.3% of the population, and children were 18.1% of total homeless people.⁶⁸ Racially, approximately 40% of homeless persons were African American, 36% were white, 13% were Hispanic, and 11% represented other races.⁶⁹ Of the adult homeless population, 13% were veterans (compared to 10% of the total adult population) and 37% of adults had a disability.⁷⁰

AHAR Estimates Using CoC Point-in-Time Counts

Because the HMIS data used for the three AHARs did not include information about individuals and families who were unsheltered, the three reports included estimates of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons collected as part of CoCs point-in-time counts. The estimates summarized in the previous section of this report “CoC Estimates of Homeless Individuals” were reported in the first through third AHARs.⁷¹

Table 1. Estimates of Homeless Persons from CoC Counts and the First, Second, and Third AHARs

Time Period	Population Counted or Sampled	Estimate
Data from CoC Counts^a		
One day, January 2005	Sheltered Persons	415,366
One day, January 2005	Unsheltered Persons	338,781
One day, January 2006	Sheltered Persons	424,932
One day, January 2006	Unsheltered Persons	323,899
One day, January 2007	Sheltered Persons	389,858
One day, January 2007	Unsheltered Persons	276,437

⁶⁶ The 95% confidence interval for this estimate is 1,043,775 to 2,133,415. *Third AHAR*, p. 19.

⁶⁷ *Third AHAR*, p. 19.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Appendix D, p. D-2.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26. For persons with disabilities, 32% of HMIS records were missing records on disability status.

⁷¹ See *First AHAR*, pp. 23-24, *Second AHAR*, pp. 11-12, and *Third AHAR*, pp. 9-10.

Time Period	Population Counted or Sampled	Estimate
Data from Annual Homeless Assessment Reports		
Three months, February - April 2005	Sheltered Persons	704,146
Six months, January - June 2006	Sheltered Persons	1,150,866
One year, October 2006 - September 2007	Sheltered Persons	1,588,595

Sources: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *The Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*, February 2007, available at <http://www.huduser.org/Publications/pdf/ahar.pdf>; *The Second Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*, March 2008, available at <http://www.hudhre.info/documents/2ndHomelessAssessmentReport.pdf>; and *The Third Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*, July 2008, available at <http://www.hudhre.info/documents/3rdHomelessAssessmentReport.pdf>.

- a. Although the second AHAR reported the results of CoC point-in-time counts that included counts from Puerto Rico and the territories, for comparability purposes (because HMIS estimates did not include the territories), the numbers in this table are for the states only.

Previous Attempts to Count Homeless Persons

Previous attempts have been made both to arrive at an accurate count of the number of homeless persons in the United States and to describe their characteristics. The first national estimate occurred in 1984, when HUD reported an estimate of homeless individuals using various means to arrive at a result. These included surveying persons knowledgeable about homelessness in randomly selected metropolitan areas, asking service providers to estimate the number of homeless individuals in their area, and assessing the results of various homelessness counts that had been conducted in local areas.⁷² Through this process, HUD estimated that between 250,000 and 350,000 individuals were homeless at a given point in time. Two more recent, comprehensive estimates are described below.

The Urban Institute (1987)

In March 1987, the Urban Institute conducted interviews of a sample of homeless individuals living in 34 different cities with a population of 100,000 or more and who used soup kitchens and shelters.⁷³ The researchers estimated that the number of homeless persons during an average seven-day period in March 1987 ranged from 496,000 to 600,000.⁷⁴ They used this seven-day estimate to project that approximately 1 million individuals were homeless at some time during 1987.⁷⁵

The National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients (1996)

The Urban Institute released a second estimate in 2000 using data collected in 1996 by the Census Bureau as part of the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients (NSHAPC).

⁷² U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *A Report to the Secretary on the Homeless and Emergency Shelters*, May 1984, pp. 8-19.

⁷³ Martha R. Burt and Barbara E. Cohen, *America's Homeless: Numbers, Characteristics, and Programs that Serve Them* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press, July 1989).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29. The range varies based on estimates of homeless individuals who did not use homeless services, and therefore were not counted.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

The NSHAPC surveyed both homeless individuals and service providers. Surveys were conducted in 76 communities of varying size and included clients and staff of numerous organizations such as emergency shelters, transitional and permanent housing facilities, soup kitchens, food pantries, and drop-in centers.⁷⁶ Although the purpose of the NSHAPC was not to arrive at a count of homeless individuals,⁷⁷ researchers used the data to arrive at an estimate of the number of homeless individuals who relied on homeless services during two different seven-day periods in 1996.⁷⁸ During a seven-day period in the fall of 1996, an estimated 444,000 clients used homeless assistance services,⁷⁹ and during a seven-day period in the winter of that year, the number was estimated to be 842,000.⁸⁰ The researchers used these numbers to estimate that during all of 1996, between 2.3 million and 3.5 million individuals were homeless at some time.⁸¹

Table 2. Select Estimates of Homeless Individuals, 1983-1996

Time Period	Source	Population Sampled	Estimate
Average night, December 1983 or January 1984	HUD	Synthesis of Various Estimates ^a	250,000 - 300,000
Average week, March 1987	Urban Institute	Persons Using Shelters and Soup Kitchens	496,000 - 600,000
Full year, 1987	Urban Institute	Persons Using Shelters and Soup Kitchens	1.0 million
Average week, October 1996	NSHAPC	Persons Using Various Services	444,000
Average week, February 1996	NSHAPC	Persons Using Various Services	842,000
Full year, 1996	NSHAPC	Persons Using Various Services	2.3 - 3.5 million

Sources: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *A Report to the Secretary on the Homeless and Emergency Shelters*, May 1984, pp. 8-19; Martha R. Burt and Barbara E. Cohen, *America's Homeless: Numbers, Characteristics, and Programs that Serve Them* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press, July 1989), 32; and Martha Burt and Laudan Y. Aron, *America's Homeless II: Population and Services*, The Urban Institute: February 1, 2000, at http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/900344_AmericasHomelessII.pdf.

- a. In arriving at its estimates for the 1984 *Report to the Secretary on the Homeless and Emergency Shelters*, HUD looked at four different ways of estimating the number of homeless individuals to arrive at its conclusion. These included surveying persons knowledgeable about homelessness in randomly selected metropolitan areas, asking service providers to estimate the number of homeless individuals in their area, and assessing the results of various homelessness counts that had been conducted in local areas.

⁷⁶ Martha R. Burt, Laudan Y. Aron, et al., *Homelessness: Programs and the People They Serve: Findings of the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients, Technical Report*, December 1999, Chapter 2, p. 2-1, available at http://www.huduser.org/publications/homeless/homeless_tech.html.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1-7.

⁷⁸ Martha Burt and Laudan Y. Aron, *America's Homeless II: Population and Services*, The Urban Institute, February 1, 2000, available at http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/900344_AmericasHomelessII.pdf.

⁷⁹ The estimate for one week during the fall of 1996 was based on service usage by homeless individuals.

⁸⁰ The estimate for one week during winter of 1996 was based on service provider estimates.

⁸¹ *America's Homeless II: Population and Services*.

Sources of Demographic Information About Homeless Persons

In addition to efforts to count the number of homeless individuals, attempts have been made to describe the characteristics of the national homeless population. Each of the three Annual Homeless Assessment Reports have collected information regarding age, familial status, race, disability and veteran status. The demographic findings of these reports are described earlier in this report. In addition, earlier efforts as part of the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients and through the Census Bureau provide demographic information regarding homeless persons from the 1990s. Further, ongoing surveys conducted by the U.S. Conference of Mayors annually captures information about homeless individuals, whereas the Department of Veterans Affairs attempts to estimate the number of homeless veterans on an annual basis. These efforts are described below.

National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients

The NSHAPC data resulted in demographic, income, and other information about homeless individuals in 1996.⁸² Among the findings were that homeless clients were predominantly male (68%) and nonwhite (53%); 23% of homeless clients were veterans.⁸³ Large proportions of homeless adults had never married (48%) and had not received a high school diploma (38%).⁸⁴ The NSHAPC also found that although 48% of homeless adults had minor children, only 31% of those with children lived with them.⁸⁵ Thirty-eight percent of homeless clients reported alcohol problems during the past month, and 39% reported mental health problems during that period.⁸⁶ Over one-quarter (27%) of homeless clients had lived in foster care, a group home, or other institutional setting for part of their childhood.⁸⁷ Twenty-five percent reported childhood physical or sexual abuse.⁸⁸

Census Bureau

The Census Bureau released a report using data collected during the 2000 Census of individuals living in emergency and transitional housing. The information was collected on one day in March 2000 and captured information from nearly 171,000 respondents. The report described some basic

⁸² U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *A Report to the Secretary on the Homeless and Emergency Shelters*, May 1984, pp. 8-19.

⁸³ Martha R. Burt and Barbara E. Cohen, *America's Homeless: Numbers, Characteristics, and Programs that Serve Them* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press, July 1989).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29. The range varies based on estimates of homeless individuals who did not use homeless services, and therefore were not counted.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁸⁶ Martha R. Burt, Laudan Y. Aron, et al., *Homelessness: Programs and the People They Serve: Findings of the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients, Technical Report*, December 1999, Chapter 2, p. 2-1, available at http://www.huduser.org/publications/homeless/homeless_tech.html.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1-7.

⁸⁸ Martha Burt and Laudan Y. Aron, *America's Homeless II: Population and Services*, The Urban Institute, February 1, 2000, available at http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/900344_AmericasHomelessII.pdf.

demographic characteristics of those who were included in the survey.⁸⁹ Of those persons who were interviewed, 74% were adults (age 18 and older), and of the entire population (adults and children), 61% were male and 39% were female.⁹⁰ The most respondents were white (41%), slightly fewer were African American (40%), and 20% reported that they were Hispanic.⁹¹

U.S. Conference of Mayors Hunger and Homelessness Survey

The U.S. Conference of Mayors has issued an annual report since 1984, in which between 20 and 30 large cities survey their social service providers' efforts to combat hunger and homelessness and provide housing.⁹² In 2007, the U.S. Conference of Mayors appointed 25 mayors to serve on its Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness. The cities where those 25 mayors serve were surveyed for the organization's annual report on hunger and homelessness between November 1, 2006, and October 31, 2007; 23 cities responded.⁹³

Regarding the demographics of the homeless population, the surveyed cities estimated that 76% of homeless persons were single individuals, 23% were members of a family with children, and 1% were unaccompanied youth. Among single individuals and unaccompanied youth, an estimated 67.5% were men, 22.4% had mental health issues, 37.1% had substance abuse issues, and 16.9% were veterans.⁹⁴ The single homeless population was estimated to be 50.0% white, 45.7% African American, 12.8% Hispanic, 2.5% American Indian, and 1.6% Asian. Among homeless families with children, 60.6% of all members were estimated to be under age 18, 65% of adults were female, and 12.0% of adults were victims of domestic violence. Members of homeless families with children were estimated to be 47.0% white, 47.0% African American, 24.0% Hispanic, 4.0% American Indian, and 2.0% Asian.

Department of Veterans Affairs

In the area of veterans who experience homelessness, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) annually estimates the number of veterans who are homeless through the "Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Groups" (CHALENG) process. The estimates are based on a variety of sources, although the VA is attempting to make its process consistent with HUD's CoC counts of homeless individuals. In its most recent report, the VA estimated that in 2007 approximately 154,000 veterans were homeless on one day during the last week of January.⁹⁵ For more information about the CHALENG process and estimates, see CRS Report RL34024, *Veterans and Homelessness*, by Libby Perl.

⁸⁹ The estimate for one week during the fall of 1996 was based on service usage by homeless individuals.

⁹⁰ The estimate for one week during winter of 1996 was based on service provider estimates.

⁹¹ *America's Homeless II: Population and Services*.

⁹² U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *A Report to the Secretary on the Homeless and Emergency Shelters*, May 1984, pp. 8-19.

⁹³ Martha R. Burt and Barbara E. Cohen, *America's Homeless: Numbers, Characteristics, and Programs that Serve Them* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press, July 1989).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29. The range varies based on estimates of homeless individuals who did not use homeless services, and therefore were not counted.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

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