KCRHA
King County Regional Homelessness Authority

2024 King County Comprehensive Unsheltered Point-In-Time (PIT) Count

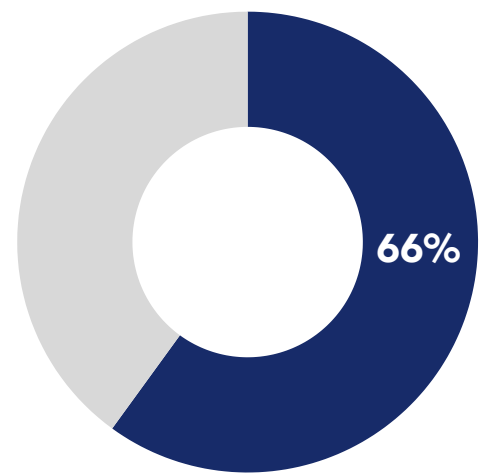## Summary of Key Findings & Frequently Asked Questions

The full comprehensive report provides a data-driven portrait of the regional crisis of homelessness. It is intended as a resource for our communities and their members, including governments, civic leaders, service providers, and community advocates across the region. While specific solutions are beyond the scope of the report, the findings provide a detailed view into how a person's situation, background and resources present a different experience of homelessness that can then be used to shape frameworks in which interventions can be developed.
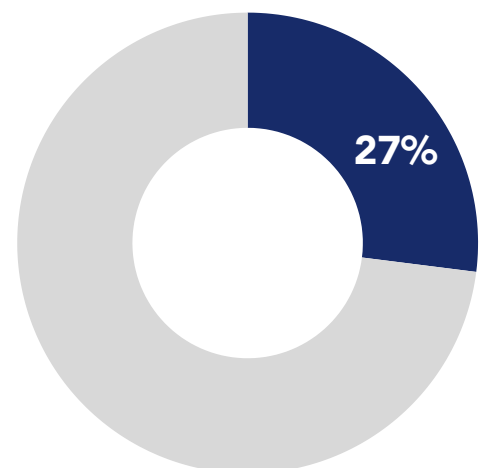
Overall Key Take Aways

- Data on unsheltered homelessness matches what advocates and other service providers are witnessing first-hand.
- There are some regional and population specific trends.
- Homelessness is the most difficult to get out for those facing chronic health and disabling conditions.
- Shelter and service resources continue to fall behind the number of people who need them.
- People identifying as Male make up most of the unsheltered homelessness.
- Total Unsheltered Count: An estimated **9,810** individuals were experiencing *unsheltered* homelessness in King County on the night of the count.

Overall Key Data Points

- **Chronic Homelessness:** 66% of unsheltered individuals met the criteria for chronic homelessness in King County.

- **Vehicle Residency:** 27% of unsheltered individuals live in vehicles

- **Racial Disproportionally Exists:** People who identify as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaskan Native are overrepresented among families with minor children who are experiencing homelessness.

- **Health and Well-Being:** 51% of all people experiencing unsheltered homelessness reported also experiencing a disability. 34% additionally report having a serious mental illness. 47% report substance use disorder, rising to 63% among those who are also chronically homeless.

- **Families & Children:** There was a decline in the proportion of families with children experiencing homelessness.

- **Veterans:** 8% of the unsheltered population are veterans. Over half report a disability, and more than half meet chronic homelessness criteria.

66%

Chronic Homelessness

27%

Vehicle Residents

Frequently Asked Questions

General Methodology

What is Respondent-Driven Sampling (RDS), and why was it used?

RDS is a HUD-approved methodology that uses peer networks to recruit participants. It is designed to better capture hidden and hard-to-reach populations by expanding beyond direct observational counts, which often underrepresent those experiencing invisible homelessness. See the RDS Q&A section below for more detailed information about RDS.

Was the RDS methodology the same as in 2022?

Yes, the same model was used for final estimates. Both years relied on sheltered counts to generate the total estimate.

Was there a change in methodology from the previous count?

Yes, a Family Phone Line was introduced to increase survey access for families with minor children and there were 20 total hubs for survey collection this year.

How confident are we in the accuracy of the estimates?

Confidence is high. The estimates were produced under a partnership with University of Washington (UW) Data Scientists and Faculty, using peer-reviewed and rigorous methods for extrapolation and estimation. The sample sizes exceeded the threshold for accurate estimation and the methodology was approved both by UW's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

During the initial release of PIT count data the total number was 16,365. Now the number is 16,868. Why did the number go up?

Counts increased as non-participating program enrollment data came in later.

Population Insights

What were the major trends in chronic homelessness?

66% of unsheltered individuals meet the chronic homelessness criteria, with a notable 117% increase compared to 2022. This sharp rise may reflect improved sampling techniques and deeper network penetration rather than solely a true increase in chronic homelessness.

How many unsheltered individuals reside in vehicles?

27% of the unsheltered population live in vehicles.

How were tribal affiliations accounted for in the count?

KCRHA collaborated with tribal service providers and placed hub sites near tribal-affiliated locations to improve representation. This effort resulted in over 100 tribal affiliations being represented.

Frequently Asked Questions

Racial & Ethnic Disparities

Why were specific racial and ethnic categories used in the report?
The categories follow HUD-mandated standards, which prescribe the racial and ethnic classifications used in all PIT counts.

What racial disparities were identified?
- Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Island H/PI and American Indian/Alaskan Native or Indigenous groups were overrepresented among families with minor children who are also experiencing homelessness.
- Seattle Metro had the lowest percentage of White individuals in the unsheltered population, when compared to other subregions.
- South King County was the only region where White individuals were proportionately overrepresented (i.e., they appear in higher proportion than their proportion within the population of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness).

Health, Well-Being, and Subpopulations

What were the health-related findings?
- 51% of respondents reported having a disability.
- 34% reported a serious mental illness.
- 47% reported a substance use disorder in 2024 from 37% in 2022, rising to 63% among those who are also experiencing chronic homelessness.

What were the key findings on domestic violence survivors?
- 57% of DV survivors identified as women—the only subpopulation where women out represent men.
- 41% of women experiencing unsheltered homelessness report DV as the primary cause.
- Overall, 17% of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness report DV as the primary cause.

Families and Veterans

How did the count reflect family homelessness?
There was a steep decline in the proportion of families with children, dropping from 20.1% in 2022 to 6.5% in 2024. Comparisons over the years indicate that figures have varied widely, so comparisons and change estimates should be viewed with care.

What insights were gained regarding veterans?
- 8% of the unsheltered population were veterans.
- Over half reported significant disabilities, and more than half met chronic homelessness criteria.
- The Local VA collaborated with KCRHA through a veteran-specific hub to improve representation.

Frequently Asked Questions

Regional Differences

Were there notable regional differences?
- South King County: White individuals were overrepresented, and Hispanic/Latinx people were underrepresented (this is the inverse of what is seen in general and in other subregions).
- North King County: Highest proportion of chronically homeless individuals.
- Seattle Metro: Lowest percentage of White individuals among the unsheltered population, when compared to other subregions.
- East King County: Asian individuals were most disproportionately underrepresented (meaning that they appear in much lower proportion than their proportion in the general population).

Subregion	Shelter Beds Available	Sheltered People	Unsheltered People	Total People	People per Bed
North King County	198	170	1,730	1,900	9.6
South East King County	89	48	155	203	2.3
South King County	1,601	1,123	2,059	3,182	2.0
Seattle Metro	5,003	4,855	4,585	9,440	1.9
East King County	1,018	796	1,114	1,910	1.9
Snoqualmie Valley	38	66	49	115	1.5
Total	8,018	7,058	9,692	16,750	2.1

Frequently Asked Questions

Precipitating Events & Shelter Needs

What were the top causes of homelessness?
Job loss and eviction were the most frequently reported causes of episodes of homelessness.

Leading Causes for Current Homelessness Situations

	Seattle Metro	South King County	North King County	East King County
Job Loss	45%	36%	55%	45%
Eviction	9%	12%	8%	6%
Other	6%	9%	4%	7%
Mental Health Issues	5%	5%	4%	5%
Could not afford rent increases	5%	3%	5%	5%

What shelter priorities were identified?

Service Need	Response of Choices
Easy Enrollment	31%
Personal Space	16%
Clean and Sanitary	15%
In My Community	12%
Secure Storage	7%

Frequently Asked Questions

Respondent Driven Sampling

What is Respondent-Driven Sampling (RDS)?
Respondent-Driven Sampling (RDS) is a peer-to-peer recruitment methodology that uses social networks within hard-to-reach populations to create a statistically valid estimate of homelessness. Unlike traditional PIT counts, which rely on visual surveys or administrative data, RDS incorporates probability-based sampling to better represent unsheltered populations, ensuring more accurate demographic breakdowns and overall estimates.

How Does RDS Meet HUD Standards?
The HUD guidelines emphasize accuracy, representativeness, and consistency in homeless population estimates. The PIT Count Methodology Guide supports innovative approaches like RDS that:
- Improve data representativeness beyond shelter-based counts.
- Increase the reliability of demographic estimates, including race, gender, and age.
- Provide a structured framework for data collection that aligns with HUD's emphasis on valid and repeatable methodologies.
- Allow for statistical weighting to adjust for biases, ensuring a more accurate population estimate.

What Other Methods Have Been Used to Estimate Homelessness?
There are a few other ways communities have tried to count or estimate how many people are experiencing homelessness, especially those who are unsheltered. Some examples include:
- Visual Count: People go out and count anyone they can see in public spaces. This can miss folks who are staying in hidden or less visible areas.
- Using Data from Services (Administrative Data): This method looks at how many people are using homeless services like shelters or outreach programs. But it doesn't count people who aren't connected to those services.
- Counting Near Shelters (Hot Spot Method): Focuses on areas where a lot of people experiencing homelessness tend to gather, usually near shelters. This can miss people who are staying further away or in isolated areas.
- Spatial Sampling: This is a more advanced survey method used in places like Los Angeles County. Researchers choose certain areas and survey people there to estimate larger trends.

Is RDS a Better Approach?
- Higher Accuracy in Demographics: Unlike shelter-based surveys, RDS ensures the demographic breakdown reflects the broader unsheltered population, providing more reliable data on gender, race, and age.
- Improved Estimation Methods: RDS generates high-low estimates, allowing for middle range projections that better capture population fluctuations.
- Mathematically Rigorous Framework: Unlike visual surveys that rely on subjective weighting, RDS provides structured statistical guarantees, making results more predictable and adjustable.
- Built, tested, and improved in practice: At KCRHA, we work closely with researchers from the University of Washington to test and improve our counting method. Every year, we use feedback from volunteers and people we survey to make changes and make it better. This helps us keep improving how we estimate the number of people living unsheltered in our region.

Frequently Asked Questions

Respondent Driven Sampling

What is the supporting evidence for RDS
- Comparisons with visual counts, such as those conducted on Vashon Island, have validated RDS estimates.
- The approach aligns with best practices for robust survey methodologies, minimizing biases inherent in PIT counts.
- A forthcoming research paper by Dr. Almquist at the University of Washington will further validate the advantage of RDS over other methods.

By leveraging RDS, communities can obtain more reliable, accurate, and actionable data to inform homelessness response strategies, making it a strong alternative to traditional PIT methodologies.

How Does RDS Meet HUD Standards?
The HUD guidelines emphasize accuracy, representativeness, and consistency in homeless population estimates. The PIT Count Methodology Guide supports innovative approaches like RDS that:

- Meets Biennial Count Requirements: RDS can be conducted within the HUD-mandated PIT count window (last 10 days in January) and provide a valid estimate for a single night, fulfilling HUD's biennial count requirement (Standard No. 1 & 2).
- Ensures CoC Approval & Coordination: The methodology can be approved within a CoC's governance charter and aligns with HUD's requirements for collaboration with Con Plan jurisdictions (Standard No. 3 & 4).
- Accounts for Sheltered and Unsheltered Populations: RDS ensures complete coverage of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons through statistically sound sampling and extrapolation methods that align with HUD's standards for estimation and reporting (Standard No. 6 & 9).
- Improves Data Quality & Deduplication: The methodology prevents double counting by using network-based recruitment, ensuring each individual is only counted once and improving data quality (Standard No. 10,11,12).
- Protects Participant Privacy and Safety: RDS surveys are conducted in controlled environments, ensuring compliance with HUD privacy and safety standards (Standard No. 13).