



2026 Point-in-Time Count FAQs

How many people were housed in 2025?

In 2025, our homelessness response system housed or helped maintain housing for more than 10,000 households. This is the fourth straight year that housing outcomes have increased.

What is the Point-in-Time Count?

The [Point-In-Time](#) (PIT) count is a one-night estimate of both sheltered and unsheltered populations experiencing homelessness. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires the PIT count to be conducted every two years to receive federal funding, with cities and counties nationwide conduct the count during the last week of January. The PIT Count is the single largest and most comprehensive look at unsheltered homelessness in King County, and will be used to inform policy, planning, resource allocation, and further research.

How did KCRHA collect the data for the Point-in-Time and Housing Inventory Count (HIC)?

The KCRHA received approval from HUD to conduct the 2026 unsheltered count using a methodology called Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS). This methodology, consistent with the 2022 and 2024 PIT Count, has a proven track record for reaching people who are not already connected to services. It provides a valuable data point that supplements client data in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and other systems.

The count took place from January 26 to February 6. KCRHA staff and more than 200 volunteers conducted interviews at 25 hub sites in urban and suburban, as well as rural & unincorporated areas of King County through mobile sites. People experiencing homelessness answered questions about their living situation and health and provided demographic information. Each person referred others in their network to a hub site for the same process. KCRHA worked with an expert statistician at the University of Washington to advise on sampling design and statistical

modeling. We pulled the sheltered count from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data on Jan 29, 2026.

What is the Housing Inventory Count?

The Housing Inventory Count (HIC) is a point-in-time inventory of provider programs within a Continuum of Care (CoC) that provide beds and units dedicated to serve people experiencing homelessness, categorized by five Program Types: Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, Rapid Re-Housing, Safe Haven, and Permanent Supportive Housing.

For the 2026 Housing Inventory Count, KCRHA pulled data from the Homeless Management Information System Data on January 29, 2026. Sharing this information alongside the PIT Count data is vital in understanding the homeless response system capacity, what resources exist in our system, and their efficacy.

What is Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS)?

Unlike traditional street counts, RDS reaches people through trusted social networks and can identify individuals who may not be visible during a one-night observational count. RDS relies on peer-to-peer recruitment, using a coupon system to reach the community. KCRHA distributed the initial round of coupons, known as “seeds” to selected organizations that do outreach to people experiencing homelessness. Outreach volunteers and staff distributed the seed coupons to unsheltered community members in encampments around King County.

Once an individual or household has a voucher, they can go to one of many PIT Count Hub Sites, take a survey, receive a gift card for their time, and take three coupons to distribute within their networks. This creates a referral chain, allowing us to reach deeper into the unsheltered community, leading to more accurate, robust, and representative data collection.

RDS is not a census, but a rigorous data sample that, when used in conjunction with data in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), allows us to derive high quality estimates. RDS is a humanizing research process—it invites individual connection and collection of data on lived experiences, while holding to the high standards of academic researchers.

Why does KCRHA use the RDS model, and how does it differ from other PIT Count models?

Prior to 2022, the PIT Count was done on a single night — sometimes referred to as a “one night count” — with volunteers going out to look for people living unsheltered and counting them.



Although this method galvanized community engagement, it produced an undercount and wasn't able to produce the level of detail needed to address the complexities of people's experiences.

When KCRHA took over the administration of the PIT Count in 2022, KCRHA shifted to a different methodology: Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS). RDS has been endorsed by numerous studies by academic researchers, confirming its effectiveness in producing high-quality demographic and population estimates. Having completed PIT Counts in 2022 and 2024, this will be KCRHA's third count using RDS.

What's the difference between sheltered and unsheltered homelessness? Why is it important to differentiate them?

Sheltered homelessness refers to people who are staying in emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, or safe havens. Unsheltered homelessness refers to people whose primary nighttime location is a public or private place not designated for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation such as vehicles, parks, or the street. Because the PIT Count is used to allocate funding to specific programs and services, distinguishing between sheltered and unsheltered is essential.

How did the 2026 numbers change compared to 2024?

The number of people experiencing homelessness overall in King County is 9% higher than our 2024 report. Comparatively, between 2022 and 2024, the overall number of people experiencing homelessness increased by 26%. KCRHA conducts the unsheltered count every two years. Here's a breakdown of the numbers:

Year	Sheltered	Unsheltered	Total
2022	5,683	7,685	13,368
2024	7,058	9,810	16,868
2026	6,536	11,829	18,365



Why is homelessness increasing?

Research consistently shows that homelessness is closely linked to housing affordability and housing availability. Communities with high housing costs and limited affordable housing often experience significantly higher rates of homelessness, regardless of poverty rates alone. As University of Washington researcher Gregg Colburn [has noted](#), Seattle has fewer people living in poverty than Detroit on a per-capita basis, yet significantly higher rates of homelessness because the consequences of poverty are far more severe in housing markets where rents are high and vacancies are scarce.

Homelessness is not a static population. Each year, thousands of people enter homelessness, and thousands of people exit homelessness through shelter, housing, and other interventions. The challenge facing King County is not simply helping people leave homelessness; it is that new inflow into homelessness continues to outpace exits. As a result, homelessness can continue to increase even while many people successfully move toward housing and stability.

Other contributing factors include:

- Shelter capacity remained largely static, with a decline in emergency shelter beds, specifically those serving families. This change in inventory impacted the sheltered count.
- There's one shelter bed for every three individuals that need one in King County, meaning the system is overburdened. The needs of people experiencing homelessness outweigh what's available, and housing resources are insufficient to meet the region's needs.
- KCRHA expanded the number of hub sites and added sites in locations recommended by community feedback, leading to more completed surveys and more accurate number of our homelessness population.

Why did the sheltered count decrease?

Between 2024 and 2026, shelter beds decreased from 5,958 to 5,269, a reduction of 689 resources. This decline was driven in significant part by losses in household and family shelter capacity. Several factors contributed to the reduction in family shelter beds, including loss of shelter buildings and difficulty finding suitable replacement sites that meet the complex needs of families. Families experiencing homelessness have a range of unique supports like childcare, school access, and larger, private space for children, which require a fundamentally different shelter model than the system has historically provided for individuals. The PIT Count highlights



that more emergency shelter is needed in our area that serves families with dignity and care for the whole family unit.

Why did homelessness increase by 9% if we spend so much money on homelessness services?

The PIT Count measures the total number of people experiencing homelessness on a single night. It does not measure how many people received services, entered shelter, moved into housing, or exited homelessness over the course of a year. Thousands of people move through the Homelessness Response System annually, but continued inflow into homelessness remains slightly higher than the number of people exiting. The result is that homelessness can continue to increase even while many people receive assistance and achieve housing stability.

Why are vulnerable communities highlighted?

Different subpopulations experiencing homelessness require different types of support and resources as we seek to connect them with shelter and housing opportunities. By understanding what proportion of the overall population experiencing homelessness are experiencing certain vulnerabilities, it can help us shape the Homelessness Response System (HRS) to respond to those vulnerabilities in the correct proportions.

It is important for service providers, funders, and others in the homelessness response system to understand the breadth of services needed to provide trauma-informed, person-centered care, particularly as it is more difficult for those experiencing homelessness to access services. Because of the historical stigma around these conditions and identities, numbers have historically been underreported, leading to increased potential for underfunding necessary programs and services.

How do we know that homelessness is an outcome of structural racism and inequities?

In the PIT Count, we compare U.S. Census data to compare population estimates in King County and helps us recognize when certain groups are disproportionately impacted. Homelessness is a housing problem, and systemic trends of racial discrimination in areas like housing and economic advancement contribute to the overrepresentation of the following communities: Hispanic/Latina/e/o, Black/African American/African, Multi-Racial, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native/Indigenous.



Were there substantial shifts in the demographics of people experiencing homelessness?

The initial findings show a substantial increase in the share of respondents identifying as White. Additional analysis will be required to determine whether this reflects methodological changes, Census reporting changes, demographic shifts, or other factors.

Our more detailed report, which will be released later this year, will examine whether that change is a result of the following:

- The methodology for conducting the count.
- The impact of a change in how the Census Bureau dictates how we collect (PDF) racial and ethnic identity.
- A fundamental shift in who is experiencing homelessness in King County.
- Or some other factor.

What does the Homelessness Response System Flow graphic tell us about homelessness in King County?

The Homelessness Response System (HRS) Flow graphic is intended to illustrate the movement of people through the Homelessness Response System over time. It is not a precise accounting of every housing outcome or every individual trajectory. Some people successfully exit homelessness and remain stably housed; some require additional assistance later, and some return to homelessness after a period of stability. The broader takeaway is that homelessness is a dynamic system with substantial movement both into and out of services each year.

What is KCRHA's role in addressing homelessness?

KCRHA is an administrative agency that distributes approximately \$205 million annually to more than 60 service providers that provide services such as emergency shelter, day centers, and transitional housing. KCRHA manages a regional data system, operates Coordinated Entry, manages the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), and has an Ombuds Office.

Factors that contribute to why someone becomes homeless are outside the scope of KCRHA. The agency also does not build affordable housing.



What additional information can be expected in the full 2026 Point-in-Time Count findings that is not shown in this initial report?

In the longer, in-depth 2026 PIT Count report, community members can expect to see:

- More in-depth explanation of scope, sources, and methodology,
- Additional analysis of communities impacted by homelessness,
- Break out information on people experiencing homelessness in individual subregions of King County,
- Demographic results by racial/ethnic identities, gender identity, age, and household composition,
- Summary findings,
- And Appendices including documents used during the Count.

