

**Houston/Harris County/
Fort Bend County
Point-in-Time Count
2015
Executive Summary**



COALITION
FOR THE
HOMELESS
Leading Houston Home

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Houston/Harris County for the Houston/Harris County Continuum of Care

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Overview

A Point-In-Time (PIT) count of sheltered and unsheltered persons experiencing homelessness in the Houston, Harris County, and Ft. Bend County areas was conducted from 3 to 11 pm on 29 January 2015. The purpose of the count was to determine the number of homeless persons [defined by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as those staying in emergency shelter, transitional housing, or safe haven with beds dedicated for homeless persons or those persons who are unsheltered (i.e., staying in a place not meant for human habitation)]. The PIT count is a federal requirement for all communities receiving funding from HUD. Although, due to the size of the geographic area that is covered by the count, we know that not all persons experiencing homelessness and unsheltered can be identified in a single night, the PIT count gives a good assessment of the extent of the problem in the region.

The PIT count was organized and led by the Coalition for the Homeless in consultation with The University of Texas School of Public Health and the City of Houston Department of Health and Human Services. Many homeless services providers participated as well as community volunteers, including homeless and formerly homeless persons.

The 2015 count enumerated individuals staying in a total of 56 shelters including emergency shelters (n=20), transitional housing units (n=36), and no safe havens on the night of 29 January based on reports received from the providers and data entered into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Unsheltered homeless individuals (those sleeping on the streets or in places not meant for habitation) were counted using two methods. Surface teams (one driver, one service provider, one homeless or formerly homeless person, and one community volunteer) drove the streets of the enumeration area observing and counting homeless individuals. Teams left from one of ten staging areas, each of which was divided into smaller sectors. Each team had a map of the area they were to cover, thus minimizing duplicative counting. The number of teams assigned to each sector was based on the prevalence of unsheltered homeless in previous counts. The surface teams counted unsheltered homeless persons found on street corners, parks, parking lots, convenience stores and other areas where they congregate.

Areas where homeless persons were likely to be found but that are not visible from the street were canvassed by Specialized Outreach Teams comprised of homeless outreach service providers familiar with the areas through their professional work. These teams walked under bridges, along the bayous and other areas where encampments of homeless had been identified. They also investigated abandoned buildings where homeless persons may be residing. Care was taken not to double count homeless individuals.

Changes from 2010 to 2015 in PIT Count Methodology

Several significant changes were made in the methodology of the 2011 count to improve the completeness and accuracy of the enumeration and these were implemented and enhanced in subsequent years' counts. The first was the involvement of traditional homeless services providers under the umbrella of the Coalition for the Homeless along with academia (University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston School of Public Health) and a local health department [Houston Department of Health and Human Services (HDHHS)]. This collaboration included the implementation of an Incident Command System (ICS), a standardized management tool used in fire, police, and public health preparedness activities ensuring integration of efforts through its defined organizational structure. ICS has many advantages including an orderly, systematic planning process and clear chains of command and supervision. Command Central was set up at HDHHS.

Other improvements include use of ten staging areas, an increase of four over the six staging areas used in 2010. The additional staging areas reduced travel time needed by teams to get into the field and thus increased their time available to count homeless individuals. In 2011-13, practice counts were held one week before the actual count but by 2014, this was no longer needed as many Captains, Co-Captains and other volunteers had returned year to year. Point-in Time training, however, was held prior to the count to allow Staging Area Captains and Co-Captains as well as the Surface and Outreach Specialist teams to review or, if new, become familiar with their duties and the geographic areas which they were to cover.

Enumeration activity included the Ft. Bend area to better characterize homelessness in that county. Efforts in the past to count Ft. Bend homeless individuals have not been optimized and so the extent of the problem has not been well defined. By increasing the number of teams and adding a staging area in the county, we were able to get a better picture of homelessness in that area.

Improvements were made in the composition and function of teams that counted unsheltered homeless individuals. Volunteer teams included homeless and formerly homeless individuals who could guide teams to locations where homeless individuals are likely to be found. The use of Specialized Outreach Teams to canvass areas not readily seen by teams driving by resulted in fewer unsheltered homeless persons remaining undetected. On the night of the count, "SWAT" teams were formed with HDHHS personnel familiar with working with those experiencing homelessness. These teams were sent out to sectors that needed additional assistance identifying and counting homeless persons, thus increasing coverage of all areas.

The methodology of the sheltered count also was enhanced. This was accomplished in two ways. First, a greater effort was made to identify and inventory all emergency shelters and transitional housing in the area, whether or not they were officially part of the Homeless Management Information System. Secondly, shelter providers were trained on entering data and assessments into HMIS and given the opportunity to confirm the data counted on the night of the Point in Time count. Shelters that do not use HMIS such as domestic violence shelters

were asked to report using the housing inventory chart and were encouraged to return that form for the night of the PIT. Follow-up calls were made to ensure they were received. In 2010, only 75% of the emergency shelter projects and 69% of the transitional housing projects reported the number of persons sheltered on the night of the PIT. For the 2011-2015 counts, due to this increased effort, 100% of entities defined by HUD as housing homeless individuals for the purposes of the Point-in-Time count reported their numbers.

The 2015 PIT count included a modified effort, based on the 2013 YouthCounts! Initiative, to enumerate emancipated youth ages 24 and younger who have not been optimally counted in previous years. This was done by sending volunteer teams to places where youth were known to congregate (such as the downtown library and areas near the University of Houston downtown). Specialized Youth Outreach teams were also deployed during the count.

2015 PIT Count Key Findings

Data collected show a total of 4,609 sheltered and unsheltered homeless individuals (per HUD's definition) in the Houston/Harris County/Ft. Bend County region on the night of 29 January 2015 (Figure 1). Of these, 254 (5.5%) were counted in Ft. Bend county, an increase over last year's finding of 2.9%. Of the total number of homeless persons, 1,950 (42%) were unsheltered. The combined population of Harris and Ft. Bend counties, according to population estimates for 2015, was 5,195,531. This puts the percent of homeless individuals within these two counties at 0.099% or 1 out of every 1,130 residents in 2015 compared to 1 out of every 450 residents in 2011, a significant decrease.

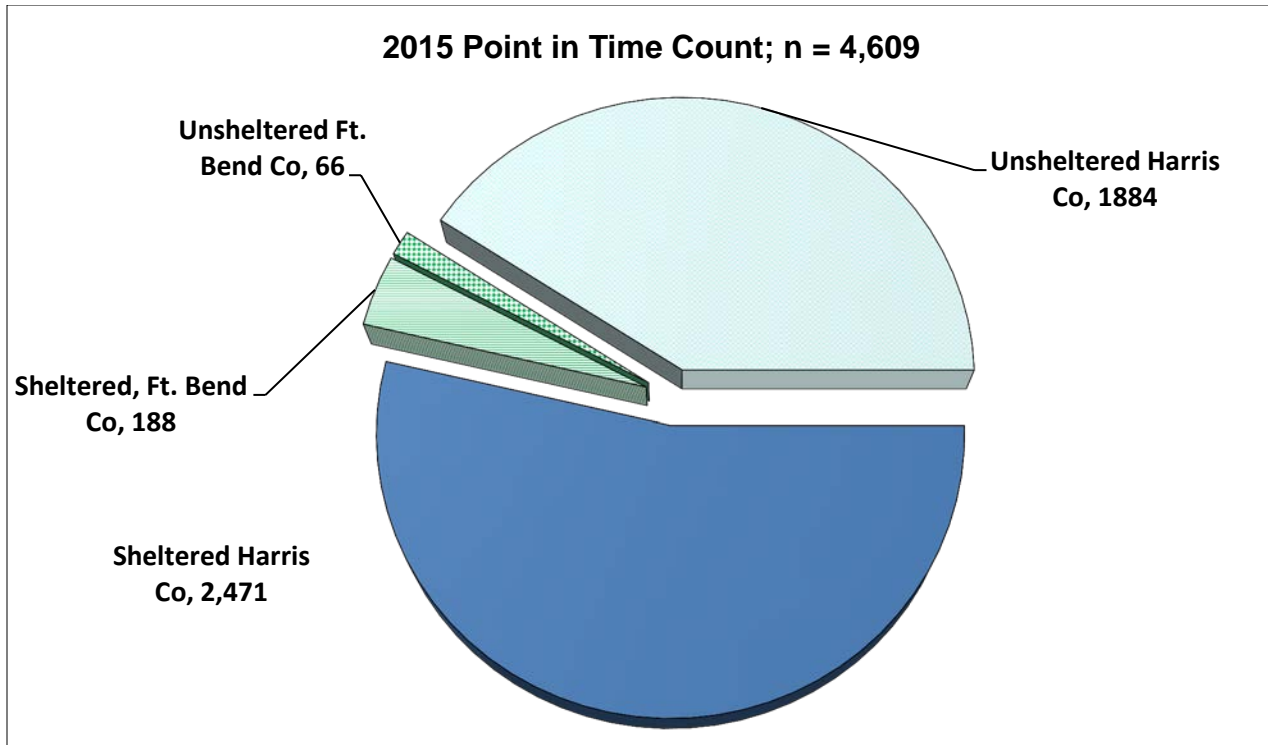


Figure 1

Comparison between 2015 and 2011-2014 PIT Counts

Findings from the last five years' counts are shown in Figure 2. These counts have used a standardized methodology and so valid comparisons can be made between the years. However, it is important to emphasize that limitations of the PIT count make it impossible to count every unsheltered person experiencing homelessness, and factors on the night of the count including weather may affect results.

The 2015 PIT count of 4,609 homeless persons showed a decrease of 3,929 persons from that found in 2011. This corresponds to a 46% decrease compared to the 2011 count and a 14% decrease in homeless individuals counted compared to the 2014 PIT count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless individuals. The decrease seen is encouraging and while the precise magnitude cannot be determined, the level and trend of the decrease does provide solid evidence that there are fewer persons experiencing homelessness in the Houston/Harris County/Ft. Bend County area over the past four years.

In 2015, 1,950 of those experiencing homelessness (42% of the total) were found on the streets or in places not meant for habitation compared to 2,291 (43%) in 2014, 2,978 (47%) in 2013, 3,824 (52%) in 2012 and 4,418 (52%) in 2011. This also is an encouraging trend and may reflect successes of the 100,000 Homes campaign to house chronically homeless individuals

coupled with the implementation of Coordinated Access to create a standardized entry process into housing. .

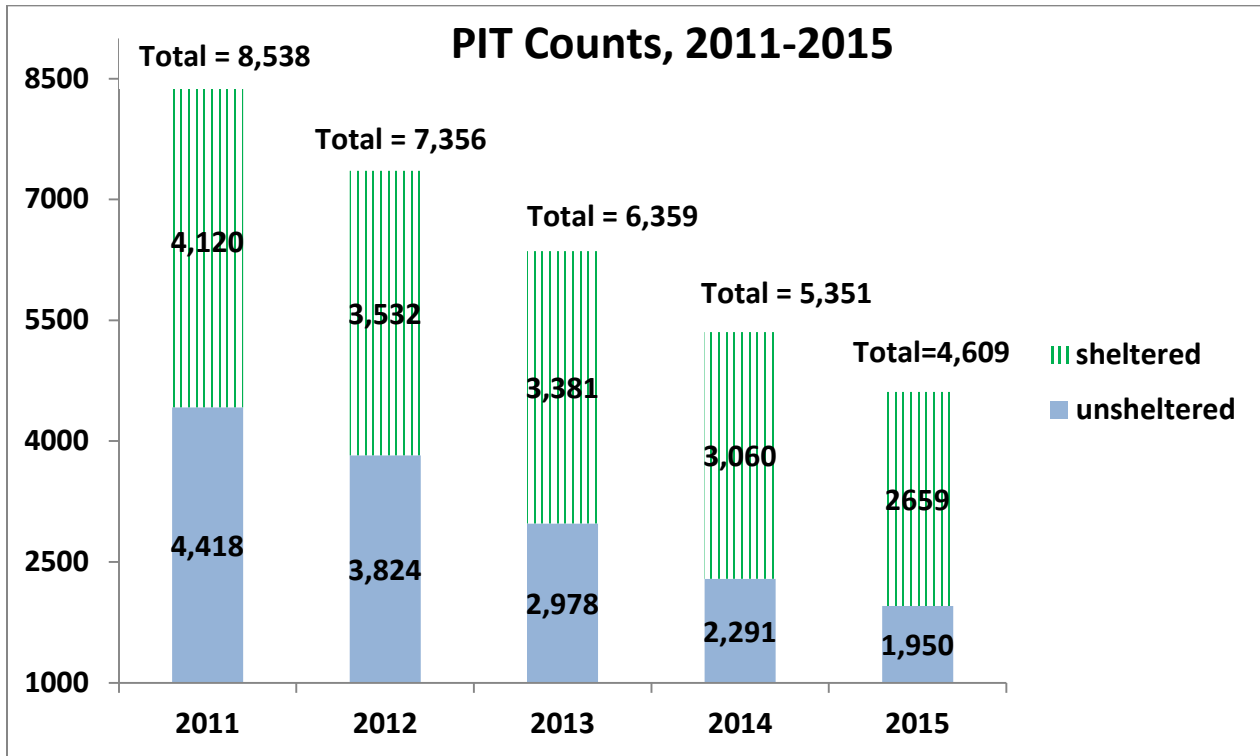


Figure 2

Homelessness in Houston/Harris County/Ft. Bend County using an Expanded Definition

HUD’s rules and regulations dictate the definition of homelessness that was used for the count, and these figures were reported to HUD in the Homeless Data Exchange. However, a more complete picture of homelessness in the region can be obtained by widening the definition of homeless to include individuals in the Harris County Jail the night of the count who indicated that they were homeless before arrest (and therefore likely to be so after release). When these numbers are added to the 2015 PIT Count (Figure 3), the total number of homeless individuals in the region is 6,690 with the largest percentage sheltered (34%). School districts in the area report data for students who are considered homeless although the education definition is broader than the HUD PIT definition. Of the 969,624 students enrolled, 20,613 (2.1%) were considered homeless by the education definition which includes students doubled up or living in unstable housing. Only 425 students in area school districts were determined to be unsheltered homeless. This determination is done at the beginning of the school year and so numbers may have changed by January. Therefore, they are not included in the expanded homelessness numbers.

Expanded Homelessness in Houston/Harris/ Ft. Bend Counties, 2015 (n=6,690)

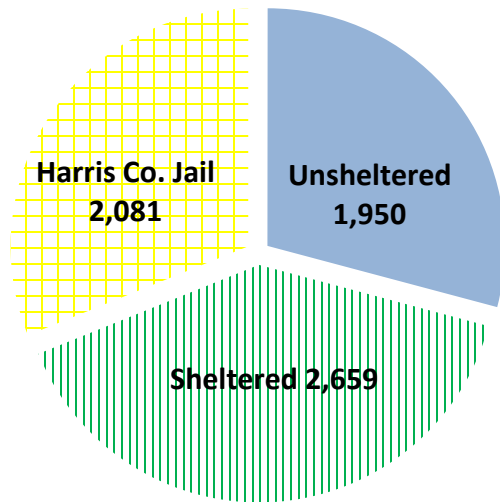


Figure 3

A comparison of data from 2011 and 2015 using this expanded definition of homelessness is shown in Figure 4. In 2011, 11,152 individuals were deemed to be homeless using the expanded definition. The 2015 finding of 6,690 represents a 40% decrease or 4,462 fewer people in the total number of those counted experiencing homelessness since 2011, a similar decrease to that found when assessing using only the HUD definition of homelessness. The decrease seen is encouraging, particularly given the estimated increase of 410,772 in the population of Harris and Ft. Bend Counties over the last four years.

Permanent Housing

Concomitant with the observed decrease in the number of persons counted who were experiencing homelessness is an increase in the number of persons in permanent housing. Permanent housing consists of Rapid Rehousing (RRH) and Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH). On the night of the 2015 PIT count, there were 3,969 persons who were in permanent housing. The majority of clients (86%) were in PSH (Figure 5). Figure 6 shows a comparison of the number of clients in permanent housing from 2011 through 2015. While it appears that the number of permanent housing beds decreased over the past year, this decrease is actually due to the reclassification of Shelter plus Care beds to Housing Choice vouchers, which are not counted as permanent housing within the CoC. The funding from Shelter plus Care beds was reallocated to expand the RRH system with more PH placements in the CoC. The reallocation was in effect at the time of the 2015 count but will be operational for the 2016 count. Therefore, the decrease of 1,278 beds in 2015 was because of this strategic reallocation. Practically, all persons involved remained permanently housed. If this number is added to the 2015

permanent housing number reported, there would be 5,247 permanent housing beds (dashed line in Figure 6) and will reappear in 2016 as additional RRH. This represents an 29% increase of permanent housing from the past year and a 140% increase since 2011.

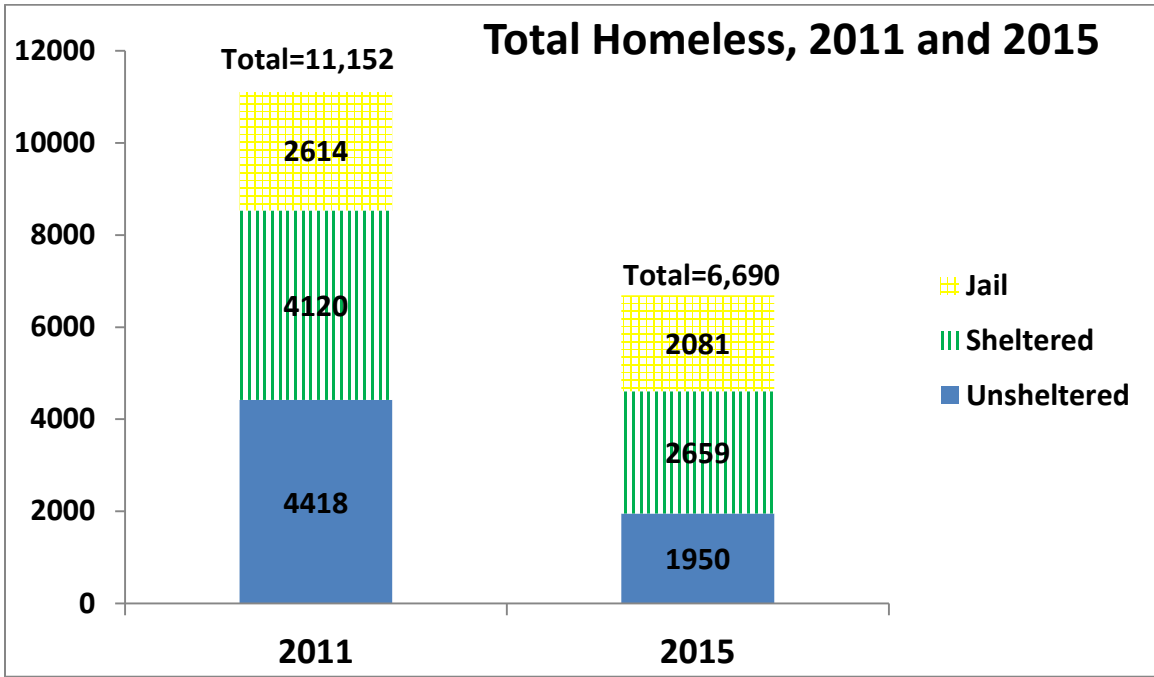


Figure 4

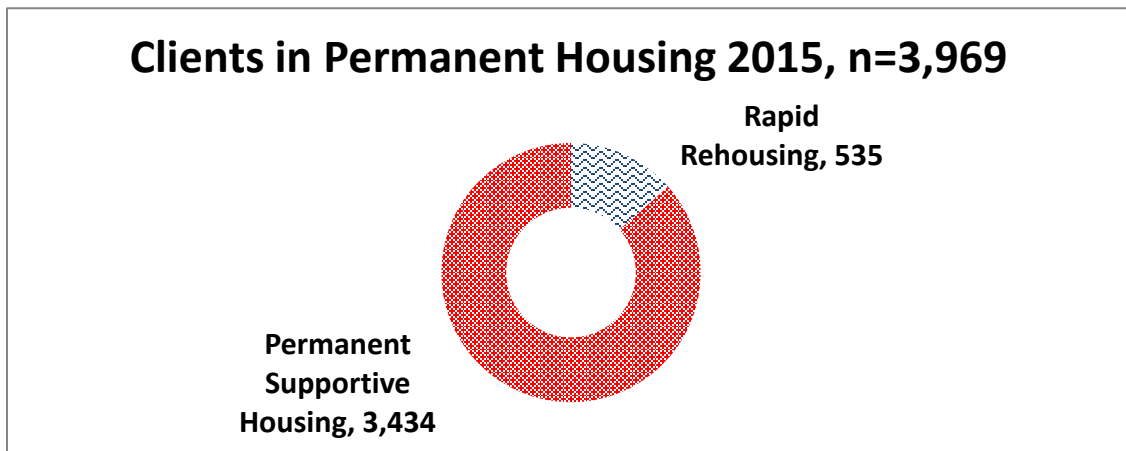


Figure 5

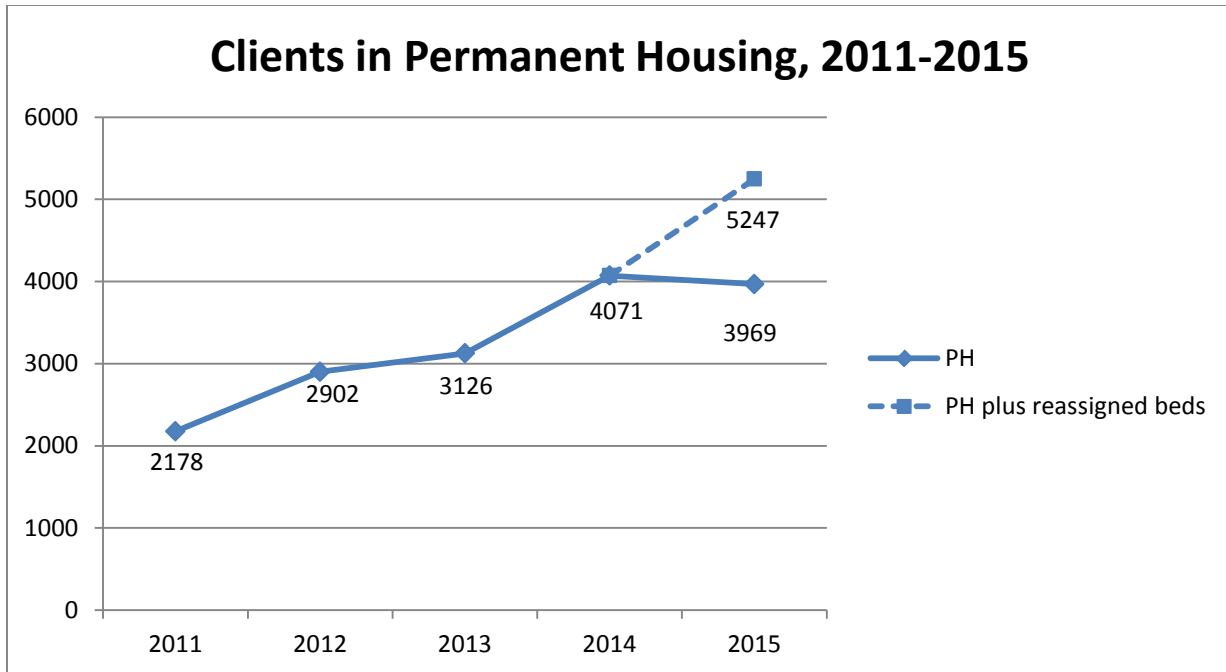


Figure 6

Characteristics of Those Experiencing Homelessness

HUD requires that certain subpopulations of persons experiencing homelessness are enumerated along with the total number of homeless. These subpopulations include veterans, chronically homeless individuals and families¹, victims of domestic violence, persons with HIV/AIDS, and those who are severely mentally ill or experience chronic substance use disorder. This information can be captured by the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) for those in shelters (although only those answering positively to a question are counted and so we can't distinguish between negative responses and missing responses). The total shelter (or total number of adults in the shelter) population was used as the denominator to calculate percentages, but the actual percent may be higher, given that some responses may be missing.

It is more difficult to determine subpopulation demographics on those who are unsheltered the night of the count due to the observational method employed. Therefore, surveys to determine these subpopulations were administered to a total of 475 clients the night of count by the

¹ HUD's definition of chronic homelessness is four or more episodes of homelessness within the past three years or one or more current consecutive years of homelessness. In addition, the individual must have a disabling condition which makes daily activities difficult (e.g., medical, psychological, substance abuse) and prevents them from holding a job. A chronically homeless family meets the above definition with at least one child under the age of 18 years living with his/her parent(s). For sheltered individuals, they must be staying in emergency shelter or safe haven, but not in transitional housing.

Specialized Outreach Teams and those canvassing youth. The following morning, interviewers went out to agencies providing meals or day services to the homeless community to provide an estimation of the percent of these subpopulations. Only those who were unsheltered the previous night were included in the survey. Information was based on self-reporting and so may over or under represent the true percentage in the population. Figures 7 and 8 show results for the total homeless population surveyed as well as a breakdown of sheltered and unsheltered status.

There was an overall 17% reduction of homeless veterans (those who served in the military or activated into the National Guard) from 681 in 2014 to 563 in 2015. Gap analysis and take down targeting has been predicting an annual steady state volume of between 1200 and 1400 homeless veterans based on opposing actions of successful housing efforts versus returning veterans and those falling temporarily back into homelessness. The PIT count finding of only 563, with more than two out of five veterans in transitional housing and another 250 engaged in finding housing using support services for veteran families (SSVF) or HUD VASH (VA Supportive Services) vouchers indicating they are along the road to permanent housing, is therefore quite encouraging.

Among the total homeless population counted, approximately one in five (19.5%) met the HUD definition of a chronically homeless individual with only two chronically homeless families identified. The 2015 count demonstrated a 46% decrease in chronically homeless individuals from 2011 and a 17% decrease from the number identified during the 2014 PIT count.

The age of individuals surveyed the night of and morning after the count was recorded for the unsheltered and the age range documented for the sheltered individuals. Of the unsheltered homeless population, the mean age of those interviewed was 44 years. Of the 275 individuals surveyed, only one unsheltered child under the age of 18 was interviewed (she was age 9 years). During the observational count, 14 males and 14 females judged to be under the age of

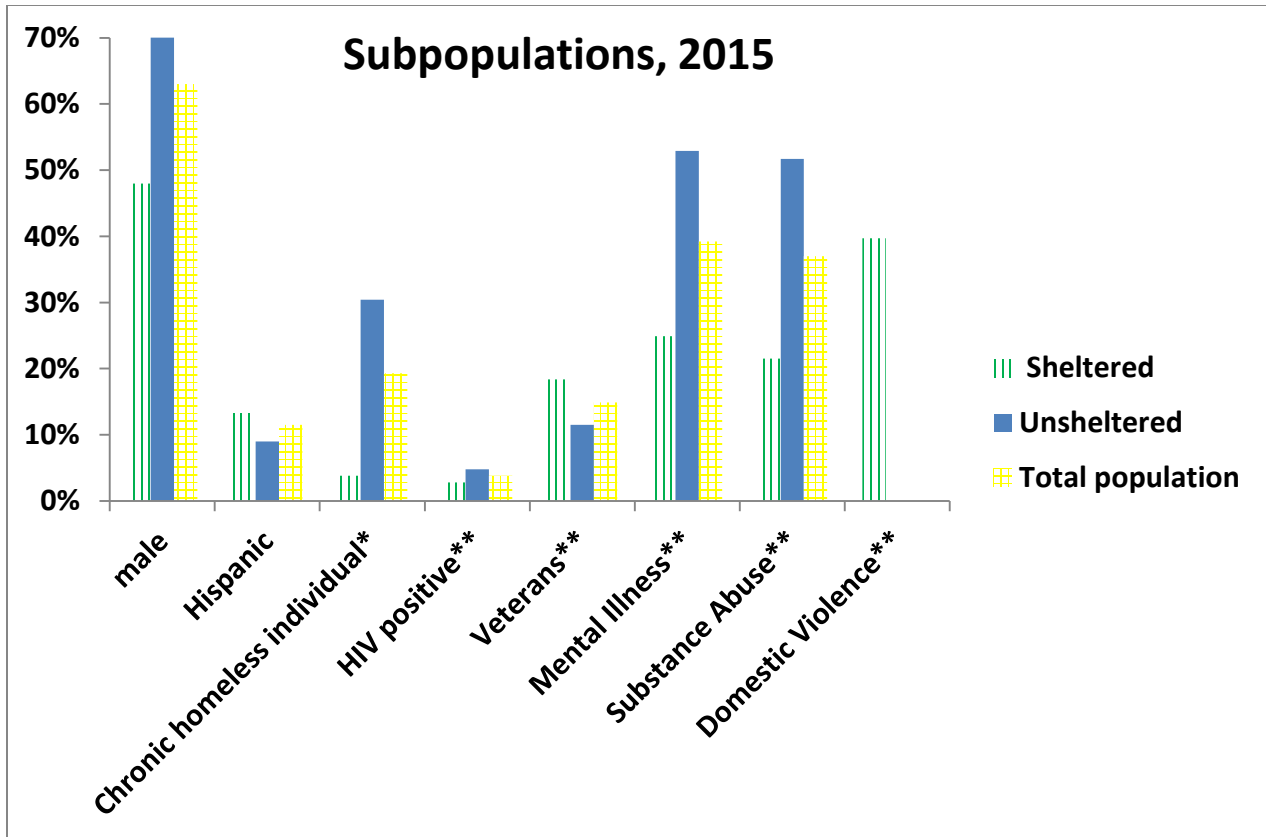


Figure 7

* among sheltered individuals, only those in emergency shelters can be considered chronically homeless

** among adults only

18 and 106 males and 47 females judged to be between the ages of 18 and 24 years were observed. This represents 1.4% and 7.8%, respectively, of the total unsheltered homeless counted that night. Of the 2,659 persons in shelter on 29 January 2015, almost one in three (31%) was below the age of 18 years and one out of 13, ages 18-24. Fifty-seven percent of those under 18 were in transitional housing. Only 19 of the 202 youths ages 18-24 in the shelter that night were not part of a household.

Other subpopulations reported among adults include more than one in three (39%) with severe mental illness or substance abuse disorder (37%). Approximately one in twenty-five (3.8%) reported as HIV positive although the true percentage may be higher since many may not have been tested and therefore don't know that they are positive. Two out of five of those in shelters had experienced domestic violence. Interviews found that over one in five (22%) of those unsheltered the night of the PIT count had experienced some type of abuse, although the questions asked did not distinguish between domestic and other types of abuse.

Among those in emergency shelters on the night of the PIT count, approximately one out of every twenty-six adults (3.8%) was classified as a chronically homeless individual. Only three chronically homeless families consisting of nine family members were identified. Among the

unsheltered population, 30% of adults were chronically homeless and 0% of unsheltered families were chronically homeless. As expected, both the percent with mental illness and those with chronic substance abuse disorder were higher among unsheltered individuals than sheltered individuals (53% vs. 25% and 52% vs. 22%). The percent of individuals who had experienced domestic violence were higher among those who were sheltered.

The racial self-classifications of those experiencing homelessness is shown in Figure 8. The majority of both sheltered and unsheltered homeless were Black/African-American followed by Whites. Asians and Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian each accounted for 1% or less of the total.

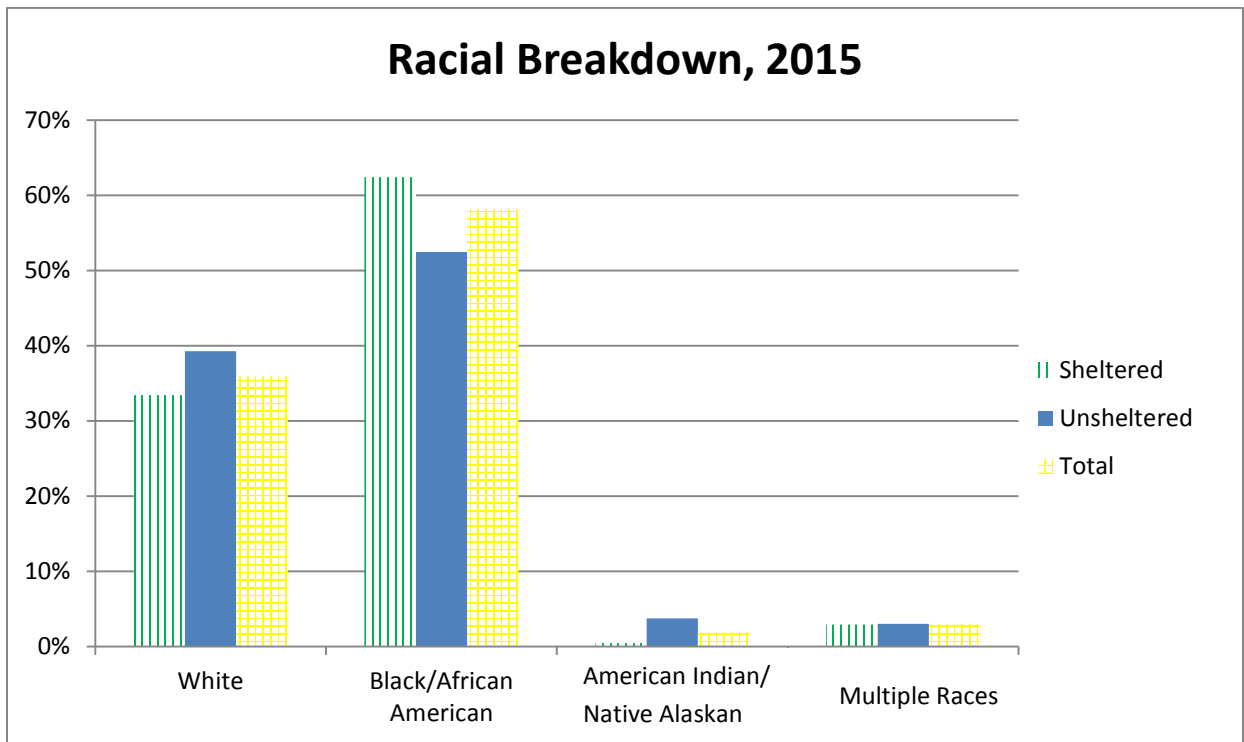


Figure 8

Data from the surveys administered to a representative sample of unsheltered homeless persons could further be analyzed by comparing those who are chronically homeless (per HUD’s definition) and those who are not. This comparison is shown in Figure 9. Not surprisingly, a higher percentage of chronically homeless individuals reported substance abuse and mental illness. Self-reported HIV positivity also was higher among the chronically homeless. A higher percentage of military veterans were classified as chronically homeless than not. Veterans were only slightly more likely to have experienced PTSD and/or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) (38%) than non-veterans (33%). However, among veterans only, those chronically homeless were more likely to have experienced PTSD and/or TBI (46%) than those not chronically homeless (38%).

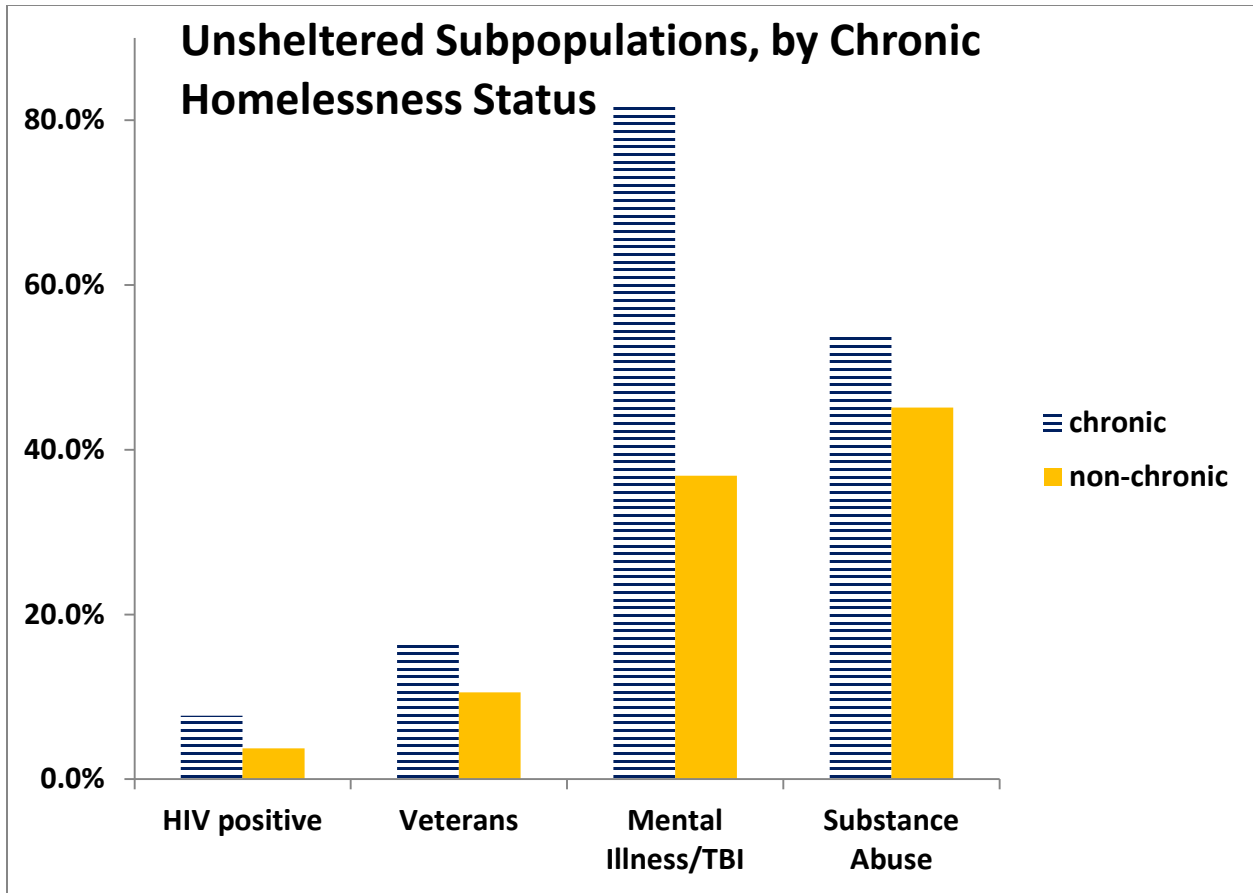


Figure 9

Summary and Conclusions

New methodology designed in 2011 to increase the completeness and accuracy of the Point-In-Time count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless individuals in the Houston/Harris County/Ft. Bend County region was used again in 2015. The enumeration was held on the night of 29 January. A total of 4,609 persons experiencing homelessness were counted with 1,950 (42%) unsheltered homeless individuals (staying in a place not meant for human habitation) and 2,659 (58%) staying in emergency shelters or transitional housing that evening. No persons were staying in safe havens. Most of these individuals were found in Harris County (94.5%), although the percent of homeless individuals located in Ft. Bend County increased over that found in 2014. An expanded definition of homelessness which includes those in jail on the night of the count who indicated that they were homeless before arrest led to a total count of 6,690 individuals.

The 2015 PIT count represents a 14% decrease in the number of homeless individuals counted compared to the number counted in January 2014 and a 46% decrease compared to the number counted in January 2011 (Figure 11). Concomitant with this has been an increase in those in permanent housing. The use of similar methodologies has eliminated artificial variations

due to differences in how we count those experiencing homelessness. These findings provide evidence that the number of those experiencing homelessness is being addressed and reduced and that the focus on housing vulnerable and chronically homeless individuals is helping reduce the number of homeless in Houston/Harris County/Ft. Bend County.

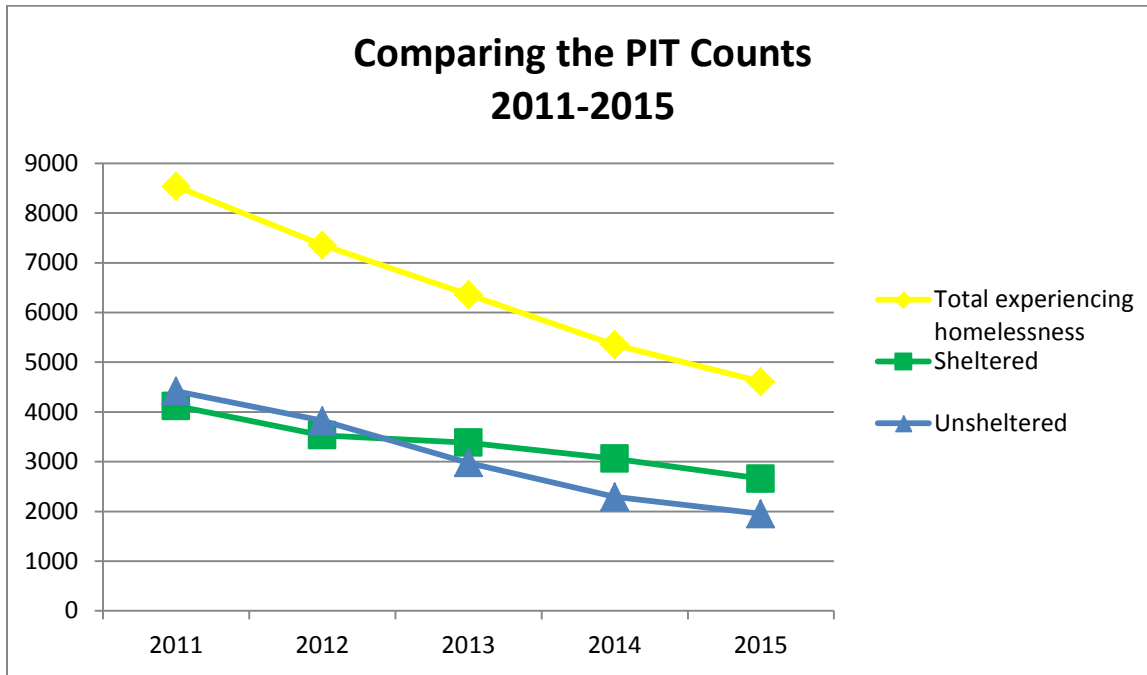


Figure 11