

EVERYONE COUNTS!



Whatcom County Homeless Count

A POINT-IN-TIME CENSUS OF HOMELESS RESIDENTS

April 2011

Sponsored by:

Whatcom County Health Department

Whatcom County Homeless Coalition

Whatcom Homeless Service Center

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Executive Summary

Homelessness in Whatcom County

At any point in time, at least 1,311 people in Whatcom County are homeless. Throughout the year, hundreds more face the prospect of losing their homes due to precarious financial conditions, domestic violence, health crises, and chronic mental health and chemical dependency conditions. People being released from psychiatric hospitalization and incarceration face challenging community re-entry issues. Furthermore, the rising cost of housing and stagnant wages increases the risk of people losing their housing, and makes it increasingly difficult to find affordable housing.

The 2011 homeless count

This year more than 40 agencies participated in the homeless count, which occurred on January 27. As you read this report, please keep in mind that point-in-time counts generally underestimate the number of those who are homeless because:

- A point-in-time is just a “snapshot” and may not capture all those who are cycling in and out of homelessness over the course of a year.
- It is difficult to find where all the unsheltered people reside. It is impossible to know all the places that might provide unconventional shelter (i.e. tents, abandoned cars) for one night.

How many are homeless?

This year we counted:

- 1,311 homeless persons (a *person* may be part of a family household, or an unaccompanied individual)
- 855 homeless households (a *household* may include one or more persons)

Who are the people experiencing homeless?

The 2011 homeless population is as diverse as the larger community population: they are old and young, male and female, unaccompanied individuals, and families. Of those counted this year:

- 42% of homeless households include only one person
- There were 277 families with children; the median¹ family size is 3 persons

In terms of age and sex:

- 46% of all homeless persons are female
- Ages ranged from less than one year old to 91 years old
- Median age of all homeless persons is 22 years
- Median age of unaccompanied homeless persons is 39 years

¹ The median value is, essentially, the midpoint. Specifically, in a group of measurements (e.g. family size, age) arranged from lowest to highest, the median is the middle value if the number of measurements is odd. If the number of measurements is even, the median is the average of the two middle values.

Homeless youth

Homelessness among youth may result from family problems, economic problems, and residential instability. Some youth become homeless with their families, others leave home after years of physical and sexual abuse, strained relationships, parental neglect, addiction of a family member, or their own chemical addiction.

- 449 persons under 18 years old were counted, or 37% of all homeless persons for whom age is known
- 21% of all homeless persons are less than 10 years old
- 207 persons counted are 16 to 21 years old
- 264 persons are 16 to 24 years old
- At least 57 homeless youth (age 0-17) are unaccompanied

Community re-entry

Homeless Count survey respondents were asked if they had been discharged from an institution within the last six months. Altogether, 148 of household respondents said they had been released from jail or prison, inpatient substance abuse, mental health treatment, or juvenile detention.

- 13% of household respondents had been released from jail or prison (N=107)
- 4% had been released from inpatient substance abuse treatment (N=32)
- 3% had been released from a psychiatric hospital (N=24)
- <1% had been released from juvenile detention (N=4)

Shelter

Homeless survey respondent households told us where they slept the previous night:

- 35% temporarily living with family or friends (N=297)
- 19% in transitional housing (N=159)
- 18% in emergency shelter² (N=152)
- 11% out of doors (N=96)
- 7% in a vehicle (N=61)
- 2% in jail (N=21)
- 1% in an abandoned building (N=12)
- 7% unknown (N=57)

Chronic homelessness

Based on HUD's definition of chronic homelessness, **82 persons, or 10%** of all homeless households are chronically homeless (Table 3). This is certainly an undercount since many survey respondents did not supply enough information to determine whether or not they met all of the HUD chronic homelessness characteristics. Nevertheless, it is a significant decrease from 2008 when 158 chronically homeless persons were counted.³ To be considered chronically homeless based on HUD's definition, a person must be an unaccompanied individual who has been homeless for 12 months or more OR has had more than three episodes of homelessness in the last three years, AND has been sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation OR in emergency shelter, AND has one of the following disabling conditions (mental disorder, substance abuse disorder, permanent physical or developmental disability).

² Emergency shelter includes 42 households who stayed in a motel using an emergency assistance voucher.

³ Due to a counting error in 2008, the published report that year reported that only 113 persons were considered to be chronically homeless by HUD's definition; however, only unsheltered persons were included in that calculation. Instead, we should have also included persons in emergency shelter who also meet the other criteria. The correct number of chronically homeless persons in 2008 is actually 158.

The number (and percent) of counted households with any of the HUD chronic homelessness characteristics include:

- 243 (28%) have been homeless for 12 months or more
- 41 (5%) have had four or more episodes of homelessness in the last three years
- 338 (40%) households have a person with a disabling condition
- 279 (33%) sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation and/or in emergency shelter
- 169 (20%) were unsheltered

Top reasons for homelessness

Homelessness results from a complex set of circumstances that require people to choose between food, shelter and other needs. In fact 21% of respondents to this year's homeless count reported three or more reasons for their homelessness. Household economic factors top the list of reasons for homelessness including job loss (32%) and inability to pay for housing (34%). Also among the top reasons are alcohol or drug abuse (28%) and mental illness (24%).

- 34% Unable to pay rent or mortgage
- 32% Lost job
- 28% Alcohol or drug abuse
- 24% Mental illness
- 20% Family break-up
- 17% Victim of domestic violence
- 16% Medical problems
- 10% Temporary living situation ended
- 10% Convicted of a felony
- 10% Eviction for nonpayment of rent
- 10% Discharged from an institution
- 9% Lack of job skills

Homeless population trends

Using standard methods of defining homelessness, the overall homeless population in Whatcom County declined 18% since 2008, the year our community began implementing the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness. However, the number of people doubled up with another household to prevent becoming homeless increased 24% over that time, possibly in large part, due to marked decrease in employment.

Compared to 2010, the number of homeless households decreased from 905 to 855 this year. However, Homeless Count partners counted a similar total number of homeless persons this year. The number of homeless persons decreased only slightly, from 1,334 to 1,311. It is worth noting here that Count partner agencies exerted a higher level of effort in 2011 as in past years.

Other changes evident in the data compared to 2010 is an increase in the number of people who said they had recently been released from jail or prison, from 81 in 2010 to 107 this year. The apparent trend in the reduction of chronic homelessness – a 48% decrease since 2008 – is possibly associated with the significant investments our community has made in permanent supportive housing, which were greatly increased in 2008 through the creation of the Whatcom Homeless Service Center and City Gate Apartment programs. We also observed a significant reduction in the number of households who have had four or more episodes of homelessness, from 147 in 2010 to 41 this year.

Acknowledgments

Counting people who are experiencing homelessness for the annual Point-in-Time Count is not an easy assignment. Successful PIT Counts in Whatcom County are made possible because of the commitment we receive from the service organizations, community volunteers and members of the Coalition to End Homelessness.

This year was no exception; an overwhelming number of individuals and organizations assisted with the 2011 PIT count.

Thank you to all of you who gave your time and effort.

And to Tutu, Andy and Warren, we miss you and know you would have been there to help.

Finally, we would like to thank the individuals and families who responded to this year's PIT Count survey. We understand that we are asking you some difficult questions and asking you to share a part of your very personal story. Without this information, we would know very little about the complexities of homelessness or how we, as a community, should respond.

Introduction

At any point in time, at least 1,311 people in Whatcom County are homeless. Throughout the year, hundreds more face the prospect of losing their homes due to precarious financial conditions, domestic violence, health crises, and chronic mental health and chemical dependency conditions. People being released from psychiatric hospitalization and incarceration face challenging community re-entry issues. Furthermore, the current recession and associated rise in unemployment increases the risk of people losing their housing, and makes it increasingly difficult for people who become homeless to get back into a stable, permanent housing situation.

The Point-in-Time Homeless Count

The Point-in-Time Count is a census of homeless persons. It is conducted over a very short period of time to reduce the chance of counting people twice. The Count is sponsored by the Whatcom County Homeless Coalition, Whatcom County Health Department, and the Whatcom Homeless Service Center. This year more than 40 agencies participated in the count, which occurred on January 27.

Homeless census data derived from this count is useful for characterizing the homeless population in our community. Knowing approximately how many families with children, unaccompanied youth, and unsheltered veterans – to use just a few subgroup examples – helps Homeless Coalition members plan for homeless services.

With the opening of the County's new Homeless Service Center and the City Gate Apartments re-entry program, the count is also being used as one measure of this program's impact on the community's collaborative efforts as described in the *10-Year Plan to End Homelessness*.

The Count is also required by Washington State and federal laws as a condition of receiving financial assistance to fund homeless services.

Point-in-time count limitations

National research indicates that point-in-time counts generally underestimate the number of those who are homeless because:

- A point-in-time is just a "snapshot" and may not capture all those who are cycling in and out of homelessness over the course of a specific period of time (e.g. annually). Furthermore, an annual "snapshot" may miss any seasonal fluctuations that may occur in our communities.
- It is difficult to find where all the unsheltered people reside. It is impossible to know all the places that might provide unconventional shelter (i.e. tents, abandoned cars) for one night.

Number of homeless individuals and families in Whatcom County

At a single point in time in late January 2011, a total of **1,311 persons** were homeless in Whatcom County. They are members of **855 households**. For the purpose of this homeless count, households are divided into two categories: *homeless individuals* and *homeless families*. Homeless individual households are unaccompanied single persons and homeless families are households that include more than one person (e.g. couples, single-parent or two-parent families with children).

This year, 42% of the homeless households were unaccompanied homeless individuals. Altogether, there were 545 unaccompanied homeless individuals, including 57 youth (age 12 – 17) and 488 adults (Table 1). Persons in homeless families totaled 759, including 447 youth (age 0-17) and 312 adults. Persons in homeless families accounted for 58% of all homeless persons.

Table 1 Homeless count by individual or family status and age group

	Homeless Individuals			Homeless Families			Total
	Single adult	Single youth	Subtotal	Adult in family	Youth in family	Subtotal	
Total	488	57	545	312	447	759	1,304*
% of Total	37%	4%	42%	24%	34%	58%	100%

*Could not categorize seven persons due to missing age data

Characteristics of homeless persons and families

Household size and family status

Of the 855 homeless households counted, 521 included no youth (age 0-17); 277 included families with children; an additional 57 are unaccompanied homeless youth (age 12-17) (Table 2). Among families with children, the household size ranged from two to seven. We counted 689 persons in families with children, which is 53% of the total homeless population, this is higher than HUD reports nationally: 37% of all homeless persons are persons in families with children.

Table 2 Household size and family status

Household size (persons)	Households with no youth	Families with children (0-17)*	Unaccompanied youth (0-17)	Total
1	488	89	57	634
2	31	88		119
3	0	41		41
4	1	34		35
5	0	16		16
6	1	8		9
7	0	1		1
Total	521	277	57	855

*Note that in the table above, 89 families with children are listed as having a household size of only one person. For these families, we had no information on the parents, so only the children were included in the Count.

Age and sex

Just under half (46%) of homeless persons counted are female. Ages ranged from less than one year old to 91 years old. The median age of all homeless persons was 22 years. The median age of unaccompanied homeless persons was 39 years.

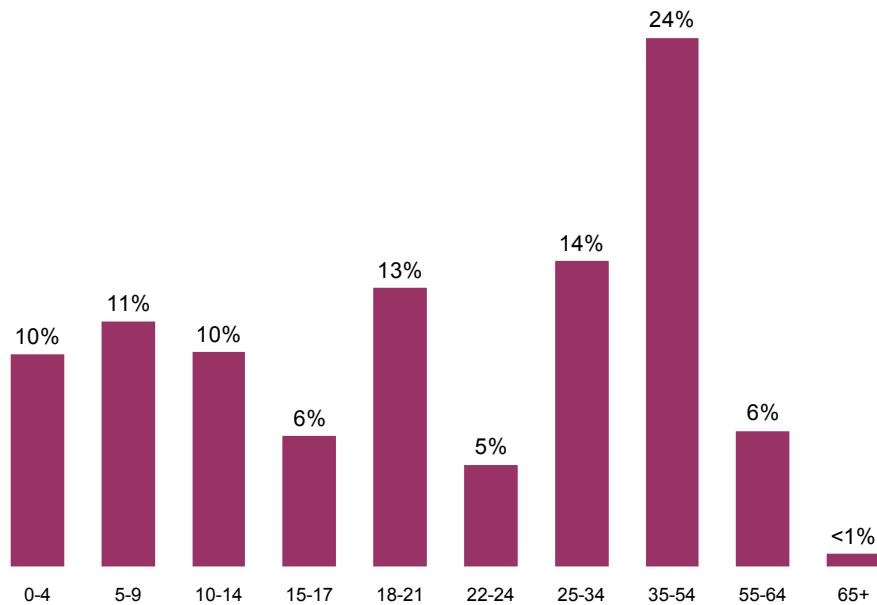


Figure 1 Age distribution of homeless persons

The 449 minors counted this year comprise 37% of the homeless population (of known age), with 256 children under 10 years old accounting for 21% of all homeless persons (Figure 1). Seniors, age 65 and older make up less than 1% of the homeless population.

Disabling conditions

Homeless count survey respondents were asked to list which of ten disabilities applied to each member of their household. The most prevalent disabling conditions were mental illness (24%), permanent physical disabilities (17%), substance abuse disorders (9%), and dental problems (7%) (Figure 2).

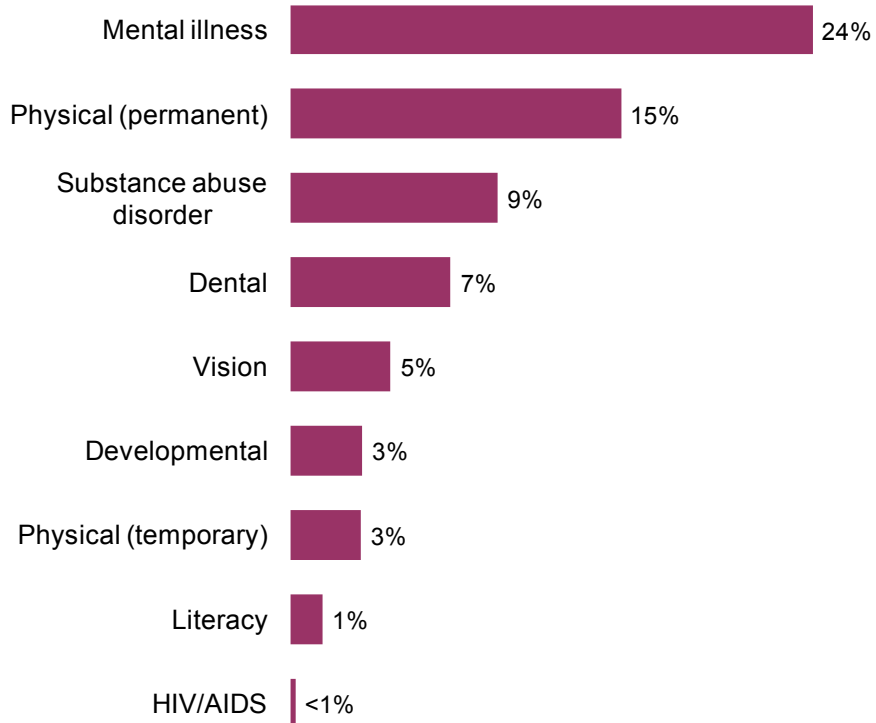


Figure 2 Homeless persons with disabling conditions

Additional analyses show that a substantial number of homeless persons face the challenges of co-occurring disorders. About 1 in 4 (23%) persons who report having a mental illness also report having a substance abuse disorder.

In PIT Counts from previous years, persons who reported having a mental illness were much more likely to also report having a substance abuse disorder when compared to persons who did not report having a mental illness. However, this year, there is not a significant difference (Figure 3).

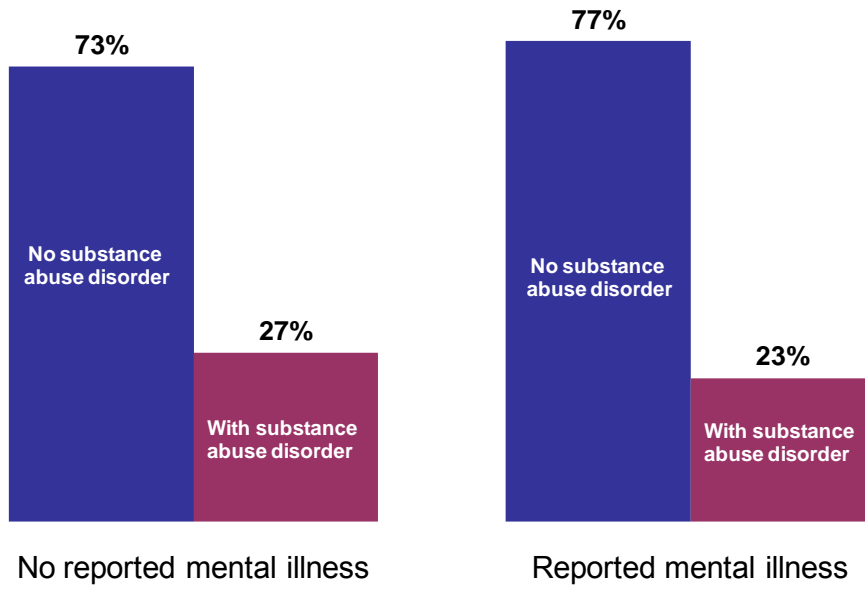


Figure 3 Co-occurring mental illness and substance abuse disorder among homeless persons

Characteristics of homelessness in Whatcom County

63% of the counted homeless households had their last episode of stable housing in Whatcom County.

Geographic distribution: location of previous residence

Respondents were asked to say where they last had stable housing for six months or more. Only 534 of the 855 households answered this question. Of those who answered, 37% listed a location outside Whatcom County. Of the 337 households that listed a Whatcom County location, 233 had last lived in stable housing in Bellingham (Figure 4). Ferndale (28), Blaine (23), and Lynden (23) were the next most frequently cited locations of last stable housing.

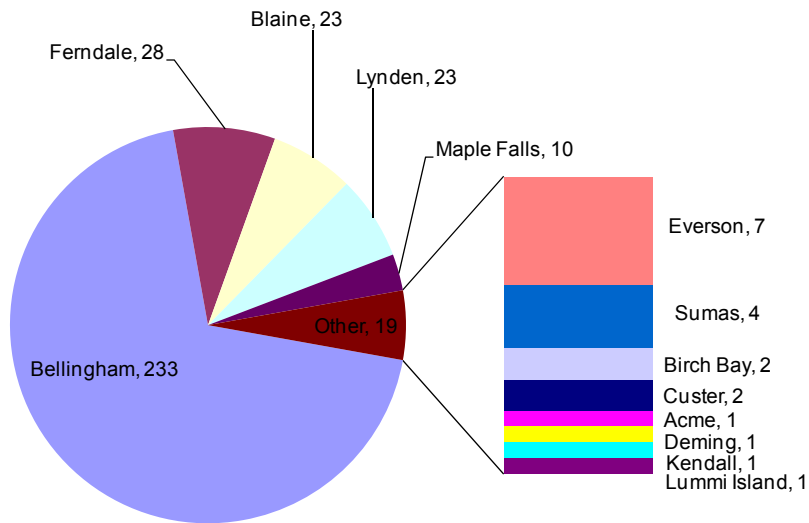


Figure 4 Number of homeless households by location of previous Whatcom County residence

Sources of shelter

In 2011, homeless households found shelter primarily with other households (35%), in a transitional housing facility (19%) or an emergency shelter (13%) (Figure 5). Smaller proportions are housed temporarily in a motel (5%) as a form of emergency shelter. Homeless households are considered unsheltered if they spend their nights out of doors (11%), in a vehicle (7%) or in an abandoned building (1%). A few individuals had just been released for jail, but none had just been released from juvenile detention.

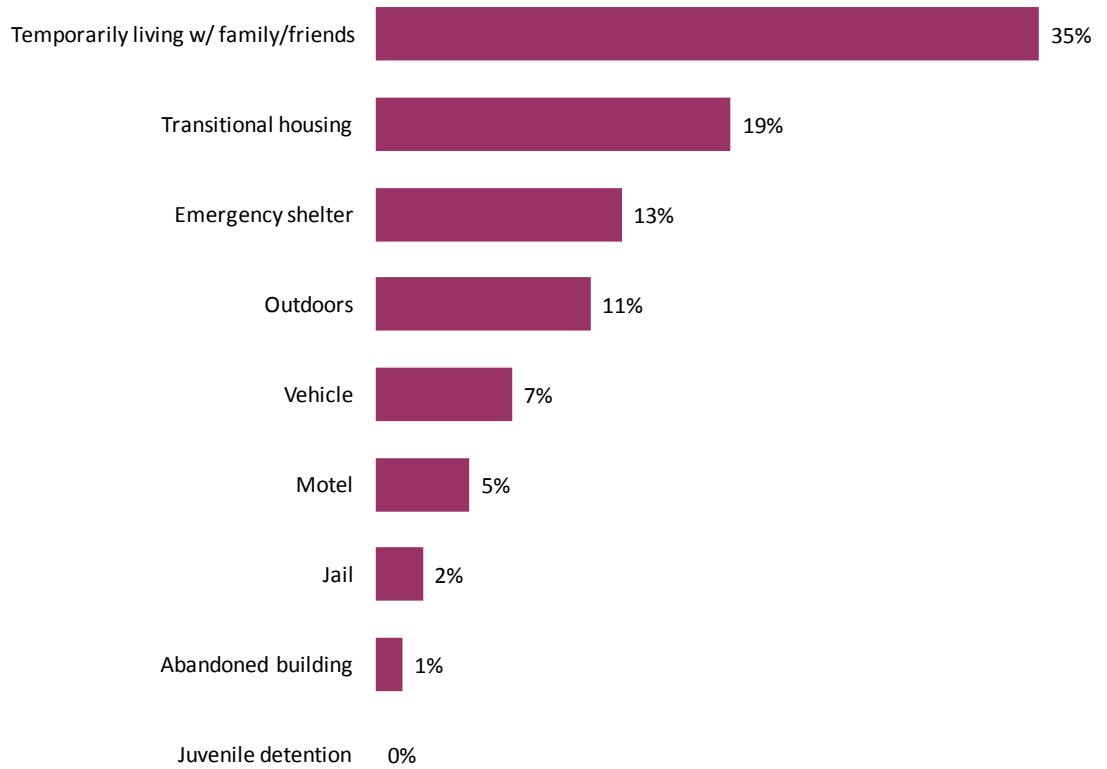


Figure 5 Source of shelter the night before the homeless count

Homeless population trends

Whatcom County’s homeless population trend is measured using the total number of homeless persons for whom their source of shelter is known. Each year the homeless count includes a relatively small number of cases for whom we have no identifying information and for whom we do not know their source of shelter. Some of these cases may be duplicated within the larger population, and because we do not know where they stayed, they cannot be included in the official count that Whatcom County reports to the Washington State Department of Commerce. These data standards are common across local jurisdictions throughout Washington State, so they can be compared across counties. It is also important to draw a distinction between people who are homeless by the standard definition used by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. Using this standard, people who are living with another household to prevent becoming, literally, homeless are not considered to be homeless. People who are homeless are those who are staying in emergency shelter, including motels if they are receiving assistance to obtain the motel stay from a homeless housing program, transitional housing, or they are unsheltered or living in a place not meant for human habitation. In Whatcom County, we choose to also count people who are doubled up with another household. We do this because doubling up with another household is a risk factor for homelessness.

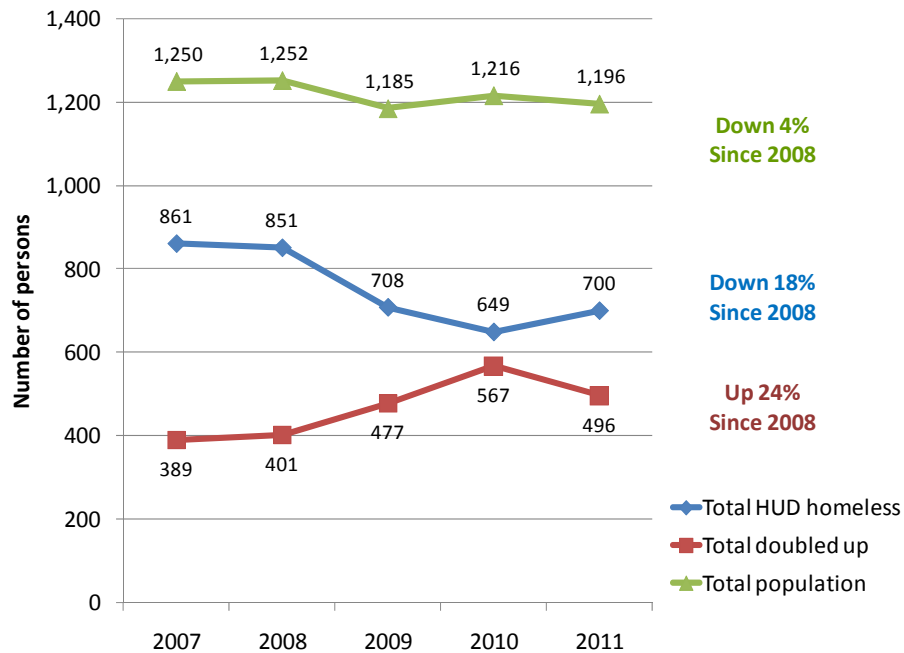


Figure 6 Homeless population trends 2007-2011

We use 2008 as a base year to measure progress toward reducing homelessness. In 2008 our community began implementing the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness. Since that time, the overall homeless population has declined 18%; however the number of people who are living with another household to prevent becoming homeless increased 24%. It is important to note that this time period also saw a doubling in the unemployment rate from 4% to 8%, creating additional challenges for individuals and families, especially for those who already had high housing costs relative to their income.

Reasons for homelessness

Homelessness results from a complex set of circumstances that require people to choose between food, shelter and other needs. In fact 21% of respondents to this year’s homeless count reported three or more reasons for their homelessness. The top three factors people reported this year are inability to pay rent or mortgage (34%), loss of a job (32%), and alcohol or drug use (28%).

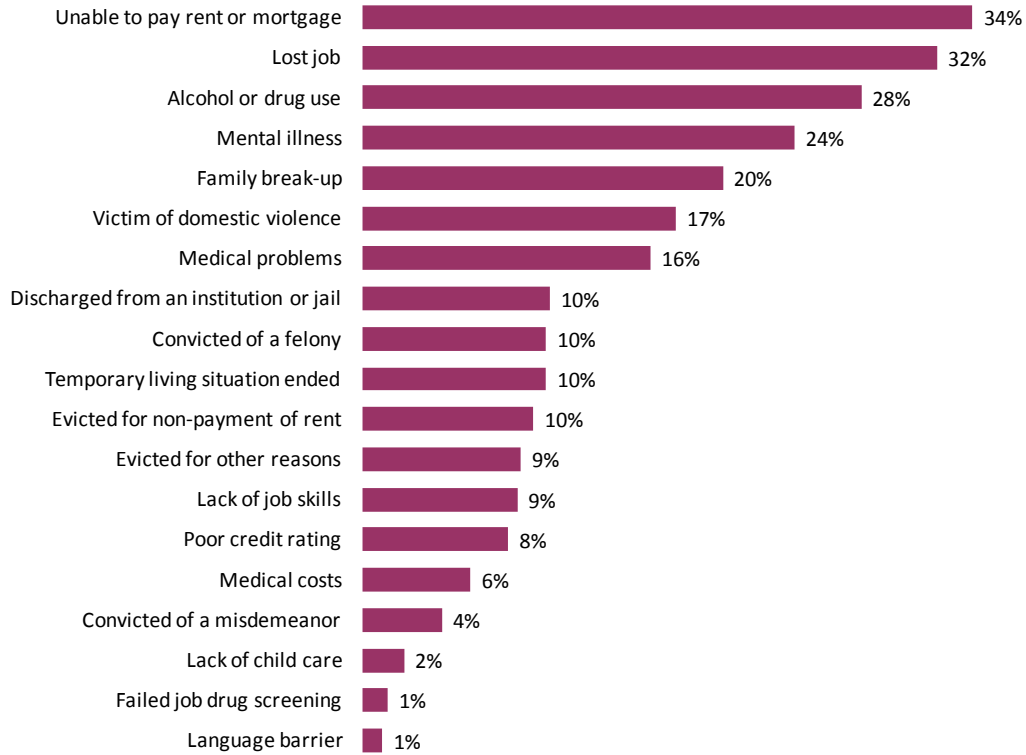


Figure 7 Reasons for homelessness (N=570 households)

When we compare the PIT Count results from the pre-recession Count in January 2008 to this year’s Count in January 2011, you can see that the proportion of homeless households reporting loss of a job and inability to pay rent are significantly higher in 2011 (Figure 8). And there are significant decreases in those who reported the following reasons for their homelessness: alcohol or drug use, mental illness, family breakup, discharge from an institution (jail, prison, psychiatric hospital, or juvenile detention, and felony conviction.

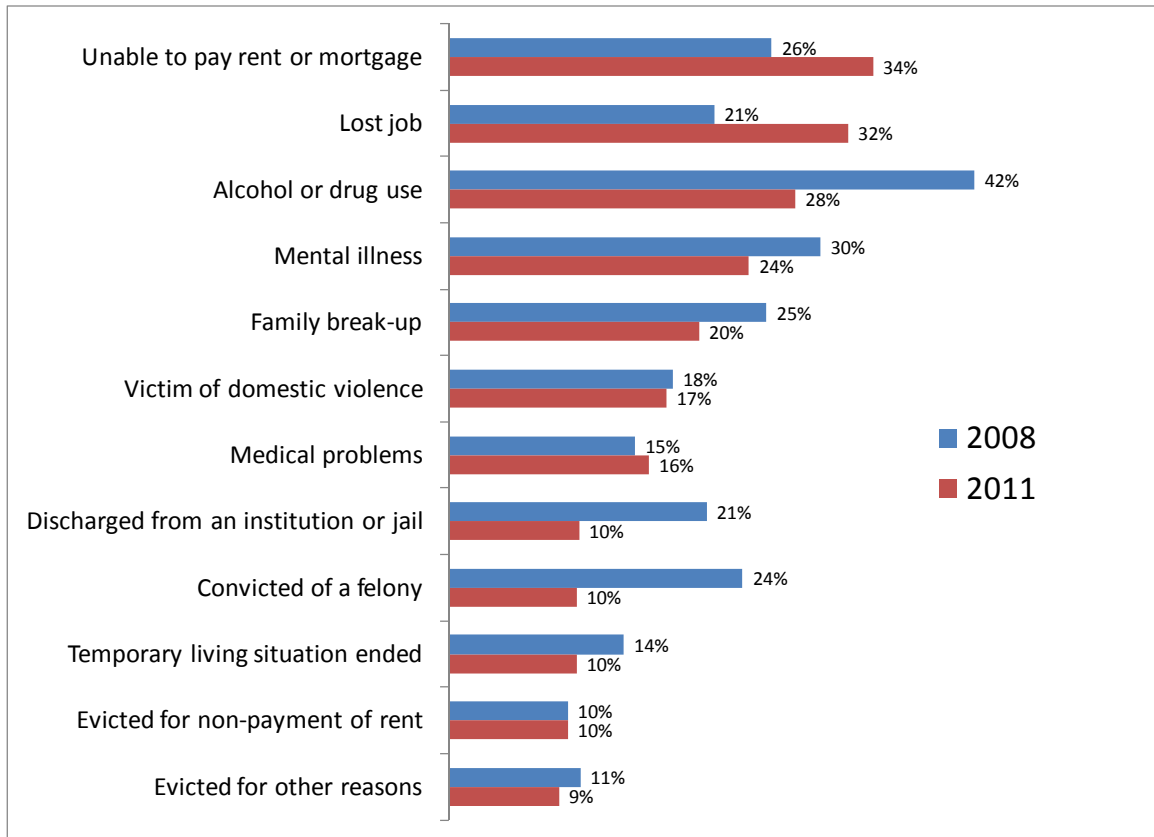


Figure 8 Reasons for homelessness 2011 compared to 2008

Sources of income

The most common income category reported by homeless households in 2011 is “none” (24%) Figure 9. The most common sources of public assistance income for homeless households include: TANF (19%), General Assistance - GAU/GAX (18%), and SSI (14%). Only 15% of households reported income from any type of employment.

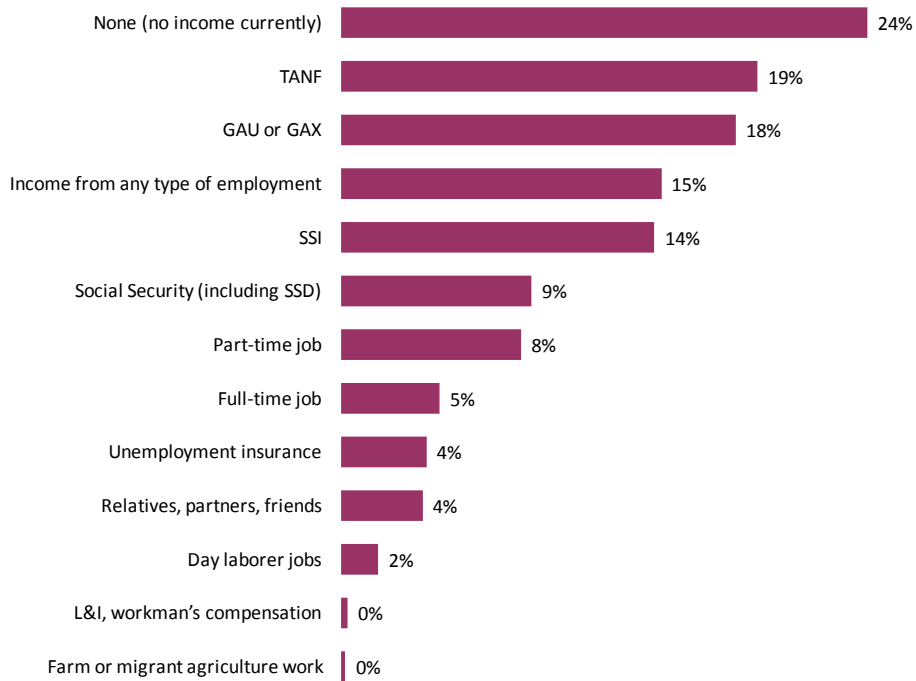


Figure 9 Sources of household income (N=595 households)

The percentage of homeless households who reported income from any type of employment decreased from 25% in 2008 to 15% in 2011 (Figure 10). This decrease occurred in all four categories of wage income: full-time, part-time, day labor, and seasonal agriculture work. The percentage of homeless households reporting TANF or GAU/GAX income increased over that time period.

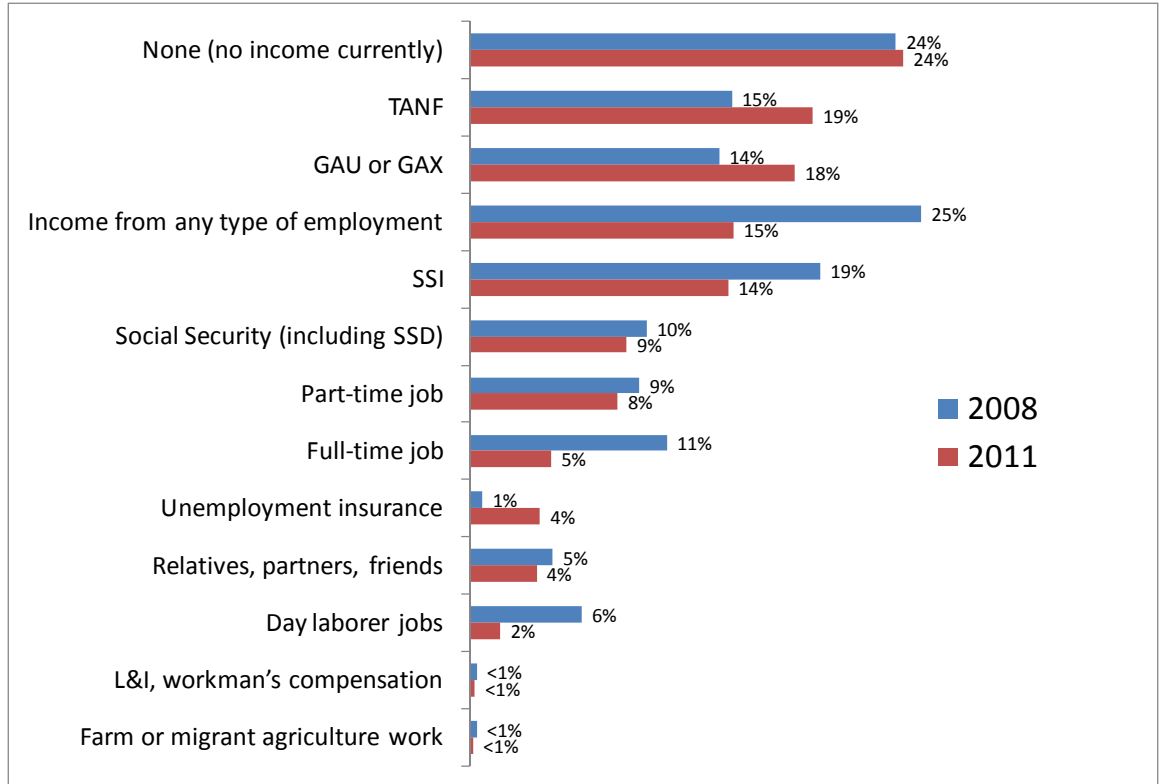


Figure 10 Sources of household income in 2011 compared to 2008

Community re-entry

Homeless Count survey respondents were asked if they had recently re-entered the community after being discharged from a residential institution within the last six months. Altogether, 148 (or 17% of all homeless households) said someone in their household had recently re-entered the community after release from jail, inpatient substance abuse or mental health treatment, or from juvenile detention. Compared to our base year of 2008, this is a 35% decrease in the number of homeless re-entry cases, however, it is a year-over-year increase of 18% compared to the 2010 PIT Count.

Most of that one year increase is driven by an increase in the number of jail/prison releases (Figure 11). It is quite likely that local investments in permanent housing assistance and supportive services to help people obtain and retain housing is partly responsible for these overall positive trends; however, recent statewide budget cuts have resulted in the closure of a prison and an increase in the number of prison releases throughout the Washington State, resulting in more releases into homelessness.

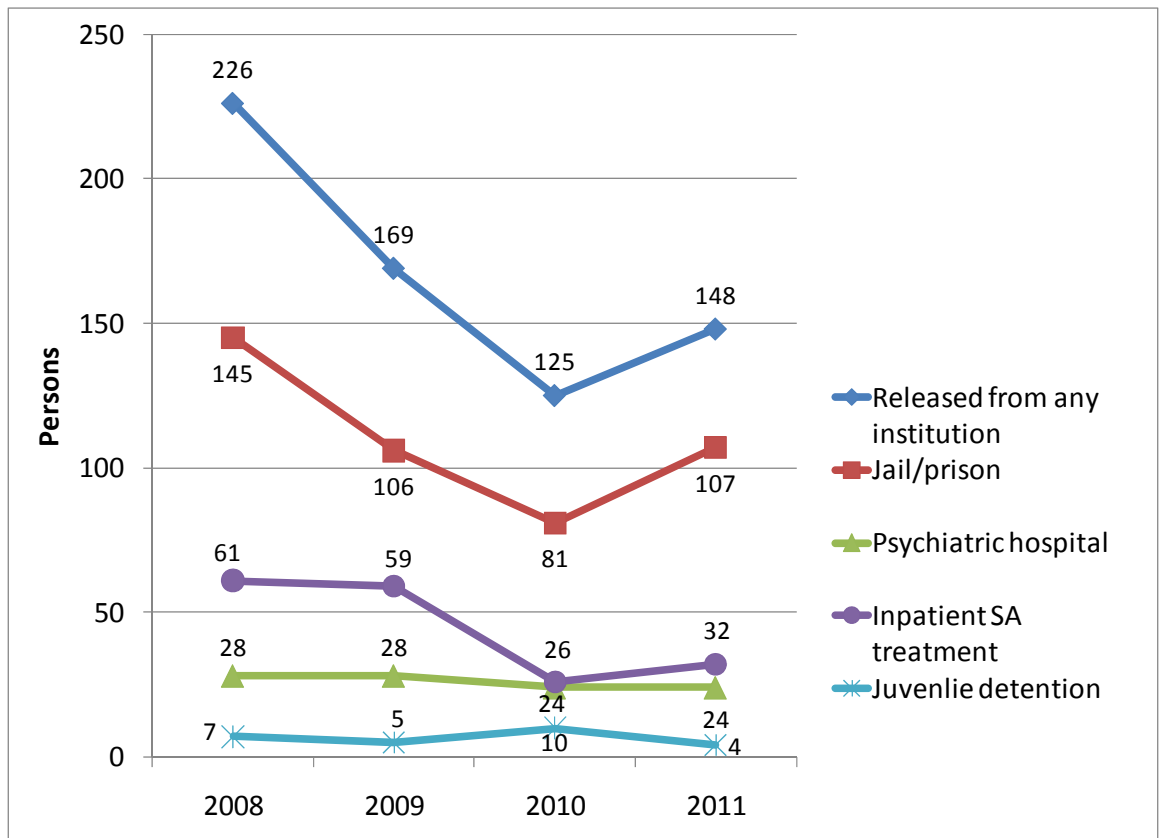


Figure 11 Institutions from which re-entering respondents were discharged. NOTE: Some respondents had been released recently from multiple types of institutions, so simply adding up the number of releases for any given year will not accurately count the number of persons represented. For example, in 2011, 148 persons had a total of 167 releases (107+32+24+4 = 167)

Chronic homelessness

Based on HUD’s definition, **82 single persons, or 9.6%** of all 855 homeless households are chronically homeless (Table 3). This is certainly an undercount since many survey respondents did not supply enough information to determine whether or not they met all of the HUD chronic homelessness characteristics listed as items 1-4 in Table 3. Nevertheless, it is a significant decrease from 2008 when 158 chronically homeless persons were counted. And it continues a trend that we began to observe in 2009 and 2010 when 115 and 85 chronically homeless persons were counted, respectively (Figure 12).

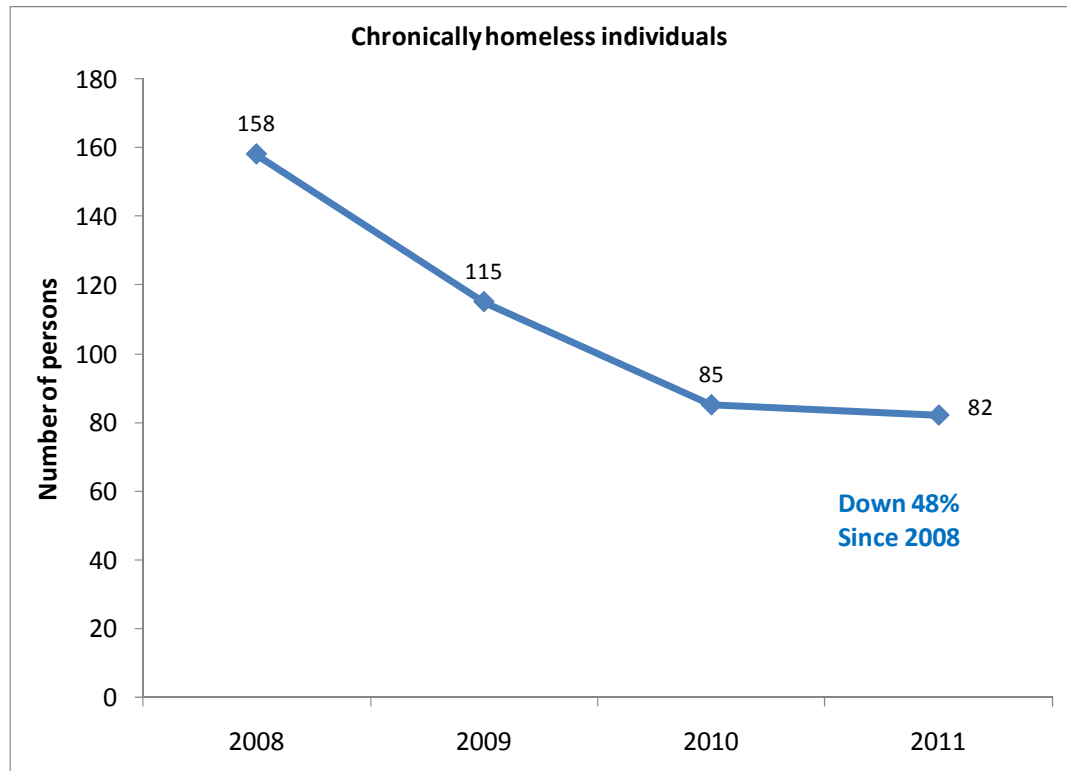


Figure 12 Trend in chronic homeless individuals counted 2008 - 2010

To be considered chronically homeless based on HUD’s definition, a person must be an unaccompanied individual who has been homeless for 12 months or more OR has had more than three episodes of homelessness in the last three years, AND has been sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation or in emergency shelter, AND has one of the following disabling conditions (mental disorder, substance abuse disorder, permanent physical or developmental disability).

Compared to recent national statistics, our current proportion of people who are chronically homeless is significantly lower than the United States, generally, where 18% of the homeless population is chronically homeless. Here, the 82 chronically homeless persons we counted is only 6% of the overall population of 1,311 persons.

As shown in Table 3, long duration homelessness (28%), disabling conditions (40%), and being unsheltered or in emergency shelter (33%) are much more prevalent than would be assumed if one only looked at the number of HUD-defined chronically homeless.

Table 3 Chronic homelessness by HUD criteria

Chronic homelessness criteria	Number	Percent of all homeless households (N=855)
1. Homeless 12 months or more, OR	243	28%
2. Had 4 or more episodes of homelessness in last 3 years	41	5%
3. Has a disabling condition*	338	40%
4. Been sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation (unsheltered) or in emergency shelter	279	33%
Chronically homeless (a homeless individual who meets criteria 1 OR 2, AND 3 AND 4)	82	9.6%

* Mental disorder, substance abuse disorder, permanent physical or developmental disability

Characteristics of homeless subpopulations

The homeless subpopulations described below include households that may have special housing and supportive services needs. As our community looks forward to improving services to end homelessness, it becomes increasingly important to understand the situations and experiences of households within these groups.

Much of the data in the sections below are derived from data in Table 4 through Table 15, which can be found on pages 25-30.

Homeless families with children

About half (53%) of the 277 homeless families counted that include adults and children were doubled-up with another household at the time of the survey. An additional 18% were living in transitional housing, and 8% were in emergency shelter, which includes families who were staying in motels for shelter. The housing situation of 7% of these families is unknown because we did not obtain housing situation data for them.⁴ They are highly likely to report domestic violence (32%), inability to pay rent or mortgage (38%), and loss of a job (26%) as reasons for their homelessness. Very few adults in this subgroup have recently re-entered the community from a residential institution such as jail or treatment facility (4%). Homeless families are more likely than the overall population of households to be earning income from either a full-time (11%) or part-time job (10%), and they also commonly receive TANF (65%).

Domestic violence survivor households

There are 99 households that reported domestic violence as a reason for their homelessness.⁵ Only 12% of this subgroup's adult respondents are male. Less than half of these households (43%) have children. The most frequent source of shelter for DV survivors is transitional housing (40%); 17% are doubled-up with another household and 24% are in emergency shelter or a motel (5%). Their top reasons for becoming homeless are domestic violence (100%), inability pay for housing (34%), family break-up (28%), substance abuse (21%), mental illness (21%), and job loss (19%). The most common income sources for domestic violence survivor households are TANF (34%), General Assistance – GAU or GAX – (20%), Social Security (12%), and SSI (19%). About half (48%) are challenged by a disabling condition, and about one in three (37%) of these household have been homeless for 12 months or more. The proportion of DV survivor households that include someone who was recently released from an institutional setting is 17%.

Unaccompanied youth (under 18 years old)

Most of the data collected about unaccompanied youth come from staff at each school district. Most of the school districts do not collect all of the Point-in-Time Count data elements; therefore, we report here only the data on the ages and shelter status of unaccompanied youth. We counted 57 unaccompanied homeless youth in this

⁴ Most of the missing data on housing situation is attributable to school district data, much of which is limited to very basic demographic data on families and frequently does not include housing situation or other characteristics of homelessness.

⁵ Please note that a survey respondent was considered to be a domestic violence survivor if she/he listed domestic violence as a reason for his/her homelessness. There may have been more survivors in the sample.

year's count. They ranged in age from 12 to 17 years old. Compared to all homeless persons, unaccompanied youth are more likely to seek shelter with another household (91%), meaning they are staying with another family or friends; commonly referred to as "couch surfing". They are less likely than other homeless subpopulations to be unsheltered (2%), or in transitional housing (4%). Two homeless youth (4%) were encountered in a motel unit as emergency shelter.

Chronically homeless persons

Compared to the overall homeless population, the chronically homeless (according to HUD's definition) are older and more likely to be male. Among the 82 individuals who meet HUD's definition of chronically homeless, 84% are males, and their median age is 47 years old. Compared to the overall homeless adult population, the chronically homeless persons we counted this year are more likely to report having a mental health disability (76%, compared to 67% for all adults) and slightly less likely to report a substance abuse disorder (26%, compared to 28% for all adults). The frequency of a reported substance abuse disability is much lower in 2011 compared to 2010 when it was 42%.

Chronically homeless individuals comprise the subgroup most likely to report mental illness (40%) as a reason for their homelessness. However, unlike previous years, they are not the most likely subgroup to report substance abuse (30%) as a reason for homelessness. SSI (19%) and GAU/GAX (35%) are the most common income sources within this homeless subgroup; however, more than one in four (28%) report no income at all.

Two-thirds (67%) of people who are chronically homeless are unsheltered. Of the 27 people who are chronically homeless and living in shelters, 21 were at the Lighthouse Mission, three were at the YWCA, one was at the Sun House, one stayed at the Rescue Mission in Tacoma the night before the Count, and one was in an unknown emergency shelter.

Veterans

This year's point-in-time count located 87 households that include a homeless veteran. The vast majority are unaccompanied individuals (89%) and male (84%). Their median age is 48 years old (ranging from 21 to 81 years old). Mental illness (34%) is common in this homeless subgroup. Homeless veteran households are more likely than the overall homeless adult population to have a permanent physical disability (57%, compared to 45% of all homeless adults); and 61% of homeless veterans report having a mental health disability (a proportion that is slightly lower than the overall homeless adult population – 67%).

Veteran households are highly likely to report being unsheltered (43%). Similar to 2010, they comprise the subgroup most likely to report that they are homeless due to losing a job (50%). They are also the second most likely group to have any disabling condition (66%).⁶ Homeless veterans commonly reported having Social Security (11%), SSI (12%), GAU/GAX (22%), or no source of income (28%). Only 22% of households with a homeless veteran reported receiving veterans benefits, and 13% reported the VA as a source of income.

⁶ For the purpose of this report, we use HUD's definition of "disabling condition" to include mental illness, substance abuse disorder, or permanent physical or developmental disability.

Seniors

One of the changing demographic characteristics of the United States is the rising proportion of our citizens who are elderly. Much of this increase is due to the aging of the baby boomer population. Nationally, the percent of the population 65 and older has increased from 4.1 percent in 1900 to 12.6 percent today. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is forecasting an accompanying rise in the proportion of people who are elderly and homeless. HUD project that the elderly homeless population will increase by 33% over the next 10 years (through 2020) and more than double between now and 2050.

In Whatcom County, since 2007, the proportion of the senior homeless population counted during the Point-in-Time Count has remained stable at about 6% (age 55 and older). However, there is no reason to believe that our communities will be less affected by the trends that HUD predicts will result in a rise in homelessness among seniors. Therefore, beginning with last year's report, we began analyzing seniors as a discrete homeless subpopulation. For these purposes, we choose to report seniors as people who, at the time of the Count, are 60 years old and older.

During this year's Count, we found 26 persons who were homeless and who were at least 60 years old. They ranged in age from 60 to 91 years, with a median age of 63 years old. More than half (58%) are male, and homeless seniors are overwhelmingly single individuals (70%).

One-third of homeless seniors are unsheltered (33%), the rest are staying in transitional housing (17%), emergency shelter (7%), or doubled-up with another household (13%). This year we counted only one homeless senior who had recently re-entered the community from any residential institution (a psychiatric hospital). They are the most likely subpopulation to say that their homelessness is due to a medical problem (40%). About half (54%) of homeless seniors have been homeless for 12 months or more and half (50%) have a disabling condition. Their income sources tend to be Social Security (42%) or SSI (29%).

The disabling conditions seniors report include permanent physical disability (71%), mental illness (22%), substance abuse disorder (5%), and dental problems (22%).

Young adults

Of the 235 young, homeless adults (ages 18-25) counted in this year's survey, most tend to be doubled-up with another household (49%). Other housing situations include transitional (17%), emergency shelter (6%), or unsheltered (10%).

Among the most frequently cited reasons for their homelessness are family breakup (27%), inability to pay for housing (32%), and substance abuse (26%). Relatively few young adults are chronically homeless (3%); however, 20% have been homeless for 12 months or longer, and 32% report a disabling condition. 18% said that they had recently re-entered the community from an institution: jail or prison (13%), psychiatric hospital (2%), inpatient substance abuse treatment (3%), and juvenile detention (2%).

Young adults are highly likely to report having no income at all (33%). The most frequently reported sources of income include TANF (30%), part-time job (16%), and GAU/GAX (9%).

Persons re-entering the community from a residential institution

This year, there were 148 household respondents who had recently been released from one or more of four categories of residential institution: jail or prison (72%), psychiatric hospital (16%), inpatient substance abuse treatment (22%), or juvenile detention (3%).

The housing situation of persons in these households were as follows: unsheltered (22%), doubled-up with another household (19%), transitional housing (28%), emergency shelter (13%), and 10% were in jail but identified as being homeless upon release.

More than half (60%) of the persons in this subgroup attribute their homelessness to substance abuse and 36% say that mental illness is a factor. Other common homelessness factors include felony conviction (22%), inability to pay for housing (28%), and lost job (24%). One in three (33%) attribute their homelessness to their recent release from an institution.

Three out of four persons in this subgroup has a disabling condition (75%), and 40% have been homeless for 12 months or more (though only 17% are considered to be chronically homeless by HUD's definition).

People in households in this subgroup are highly likely to have no income (36%). GAU/GAX (25%) and SSI (16%) are the next most frequent income sources for this re-entry population.

NOTE: much of the data referenced in the section above that describes homeless subpopulations can be found in the following series of tables. Also note that the size of a particular subgroup (indicated by "N=X") changes for different tables because for some survey questions, fewer people within that group provided answers.

Table 4 Source of shelter used by homeless households in selected subgroups

Shelter	Families with children (N=277)		Survivors of domestic violence (N=99)		Unaccompanied youth (N=57)		All homeless households (N=855)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Emergency	21	8	24	24	0	0	110	13
Transitional	49	18	40	40	2	4	159	19
With other household	147	53	17	17	52	91	297	35
Motel	31	11	5	5	2	4	42	5
Unsheltered	10	4	12	12	1	2	169	20
Total known	258	93	98	99	57	100	777	91
Unknown	19	7	1	1	0	0	78	9

Table 5 Reasons for homelessness reported by homeless households in selected subgroups

Reasons for homelessness	Families with children (N=136)		Survivors of domestic violence (N=99)		Unaccompanied youth (N=8)		All homeless households (N=570)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Mental illness	12	9	21	21	0	0	137	24
Alcohol or drug use	21	15	21	21	1	13	158	28
Unable to pay rent/mrtge	52	38	34	34	1	13	193	34
Family break-up	21	15	28	28	8	100	114	20
Domestic violence	43	32	99	100	0	0	99	17
Lost job	36	26	19	19	0	0	182	32
Temp. living sit. ended	9	7	10	10	0	0	58	10
Felony conviction	6	4	5	5	0	0	58	10
Medical problems	10	7	16	16	0	0	91	16
Poor credit	10	7	6	6	0	0	46	8
Lack of job skills	10	7	4	4	0	0	49	9
Discharged from inst.	4	3	4	4	0	0	59	10
Eviction (nonpayment)	21	15	7	7	0	0	54	9

Table 6 Chronic homelessness and re-entry characteristics of households in selected subgroups

Characteristics of homelessness	Families with children (N=277)		Survivors of domestic violence (N=99)		Unaccompanied youth (N=57)		All homeless households (N=855)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
>12 mos. Homeless	49	18	37	37	3	5	243	28
>3 times homeless	7	3	9	9	0	0	41	5
Disabling condition*	21	8	48	48	2	4	338	40
Chronic (HUD)	0	0	10	10	0	0	82	10
Re-entering community								
Any residential facility	11	4	17	17	1	2	148	17
Jail	4	1	11	11	0	0	107	13
Psychiatric hosp.	1	0	7	7	0	0	24	3
Inpatient treatment	6	2	2	2	1	2	32	4
Juvenile detention	2	1	0	0	0	0	4	0

* Someone in household has a mental health disorder, substance abuse disorder, permanent physical or developmental disability

Table 7 Income sources reported by households in selected subgroups

Income sources	Families with children (N=159)		Survivors of domestic violence (N=93)		Unaccompanied youth (N=12)		All homeless households (N=595)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Full-time job	17	11	4	4	0	0	27	5
No income	8	5	7	8	4	33	143	24
Unemployment	8	5	5	5	0	0	23	4
TANF	103	65	32	34	2	17	113	19
Relatives or friends	7	4	1	1	6	50	22	4
L&I	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Social Security	11	7	11	12	0	0	52	9
SSI	14	9	18	19	1	8	85	14
GAU/GAX	3	2	19	20	0	0	107	18
Part-time job	16	10	5	5	1	8	49	8
Day labor	3	2	0	0	0	0	10	2
Agricultural work	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0

Table 8 Source of shelter used by homeless households in selected subgroups

Shelter	Chronically homeless (HUD) (N=82)		Unsheltered (N=169)		Veterans (N=87)		All homeless households (N=855)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Emergency	27	33	0	0	17	19	110	13
Transitional	0	0	0	0	12	13	159	19
With other household	0	0	0	0	13	15	297	35
Motel	0	0	0	0	4	4	42	5
Unsheltered	55	67	169	100	38	43	169	20
Total known	82	100	169	100	84	94	777	91
Unknown	0	0	0	0	3	6	78	9

Table 9 Reasons for homelessness reported by homeless households in selected subgroups

Reasons for homelessness	Chronically homeless (HUD) (N=77)		Unsheltered (N=128)		Veterans (N=80)		All homeless households (N=570)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Mental illness	31	40	50	39	27	34	137	24
Alcohol or drug use	23	30	33	26	18	23	158	28
Unable to pay rent/mrtge	21	27	42	33	37	46	193	34
Family break-up	24	31	30	23	10	13	114	20
Domestic violence	10	13	12	9	6	8	99	17
Lost job	32	42	52	41	40	50	182	32
Temp. living sit. ended	6	8	14	11	5	6	58	10
Felony conviction	6	8	11	9	3	4	58	10
Medical problems	26	34	34	27	18	23	91	16
Poor credit	8	10	14	11	5	6	46	8
Lack of job skills	6	8	10	8	6	8	49	9
Discharged from inst.	10	13	13	10	4	5	59	10
Eviction	8	10	16	13	5	6	54	9

Table 10 Chronic homelessness and re-entry characteristics of households in selected subgroups

Characteristics of homelessness	Chronically homeless (HUD) (N=82)		Unsheltered (N=169)		Veterans (N=87)		All homeless households (N=855)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
>12 mos. Homeless	73	89	79	47	38	44	243	28
>3 times homeless	16	20	13	8	10	11	41	5
Disabling condition*	82	100	104	62	57	66	338	40
Chronic (HUD)	82	100	55	33	21	24	82	10
Re-entering community								
Any residential facility	25	30	32	19	9	10	148	17
Jail	19	23	27	16	6	7	107	13
Psychiatric hosp.	5	6	4	2	3	3	24	3
Inpatient treatment	1	1	2	1	1	1	32	4
Juvenile detention	0	0	1	1	0	0	4	0

* Someone in household has a mental health disorder, substance abuse disorder, permanent physical or developmental disability

Table 11 Income sources reported by households in selected subgroups

Income sources	Chronically homeless (HUD) (N=74)		Unsheltered (N=130)		Veterans (N=83)		All homeless households (N=595)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Full-time job	0	0	3	2	3	4	27	5
No income	21	28	39	30	23	28	143	24
Unemployment	1	1	4	3	6	7	23	4
TANF	0	0	3	2	3	4	113	19
Relatives or friends	0	0	1	1	1	1	22	4
L&I	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	0
Social Security	10	14	16	12	9	11	52	9
SSI	14	19	15	12	10	12	85	14
GAU/GAX	26	35	34	26	18	22	107	18
Part-time job	1	1	8	6	4	5	49	8
Day labor	1	1	3	2	2	2	10	2
Agricultural work	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0

Table 12 Source of shelter used by persons in selected subgroups

Shelter	Seniors – 60+ years (N=26)		Young adults – 18- 25 years (N=235)		Persons re-entering from any institution (N=148)		All homeless persons (N=1,311)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Emergency	2	7	15	6	19	13	156	12
Transitional	5	17	40	17	42	28	240	18
With other household	4	13	115	49	28	19	498	38
Motel	0	0	14	6	3	2	103	8
Unsheltered	10	33	24	10	32	22	202	15
Jail					15	10		
Total known	21	70	208	89	139	94	1,199	91
Unknown	5	30	27	11	9	6	112	9

Table 13 Reasons for homelessness reported for persons in selected subgroups

Reasons for homelessness	Seniors – 60+ years (N=20)		Young adults – 18- 25 years (N=150)		Persons re-entering from any institution (N=138)		All homeless persons (N=861)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Mental illness	5	25	21	14	50	36	162	19
Alcohol or drug use	7	35	39	26	83	60	207	24
Unable to pay rent/mrtge	5	25	48	32	38	28	315	37
Family break-up	3	15	40	27	31	22	154	18
Domestic violence	1	5	26	17	17	12	196	23
Lost job	7	35	30	20	33	24	265	31
Temp. living sit. ended	2	10	20	13	18	13	82	10
Felony conviction	2	10	10	7	31	22	70	8
Medical problems	8	40	7	5	21	15	125	15
Poor credit	3	15	4	3	14	10	75	9
Lack of job skills	0	0	14	9	14	10	67	8
Discharged from inst.	0	0	15	10	45	33	67	8
Eviction	3	15	9	6	12	9	110	13

Table 14 Chronic homelessness and re-entry characteristics of persons in selected subgroups

Characteristics of homelessness	Seniors – 60+ years (N=26)		Young adults – 18-25 years (N=235)		Persons re-entering from any institution (N=148)		All homeless persons (N=1,311)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
>12 mos. Homeless	14	54	46	20	59	40	346	26
>3 times homeless	0	0	11	5	19	13	59	5
Disabling condition*	13	50	76	32	111	75	434	33
Chronic (HUD)	5	19	6	3	25	17	82	6
Re-entering community								
Any residential facility	1	4	42	18	148	100	173	13
Jail	0	0	31	13	107	72	122	9
Psychiatric hosp.	1	4	4	2	24	16	26	2
Inpatient treatment	0	0	8	3	32	22	41	3
Juvenile detention	0	0	4	2	4	3	6	0

* Someone in household has a mental health disorder, substance abuse disorder, permanent physical or developmental disability

Table 15 Income sources reported for persons in selected subgroups

Income sources	Seniors – 60+ years (N=23)		Young adults – 18-25 years (N=183)		Persons re-entering from any institution (N=130)		All homeless persons (N=943)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Full-time job	0	0	10	5	4	3	68	7
No income	0	0	60	33	47	36	166	18
Unemployment	0	0	0	0	3	2	33	3
TANF	0	0	55	30	8	6	332	35
Relatives or friends	0	0	9	5	7	5	36	4
L&I	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	0
Social Security	10	42	3	2	6	5	78	8
SSI	7	29	14	8	21	16	115	12
GAU/GAX	2	8	16	9	32	25	121	13
Part-time job	1	4	30	16	5	4	77	8
Day labor	0	0	3	2	3	2	19	2
Agricultural work	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0

Homeless count methodology

Overview

The Point-in-Time count relies on numerous volunteers and voluntary participation by many agencies countywide. Essentially, the methodology of the count includes three components: (1) coordination and training, (2) data collection, and (3) data processing.

Coordination and training require that all agencies identified as having a role in the County's continuum of care be contacted and recruited to participate in the count. Then participating agencies receive instructions for that year's count and are given data collection tools most appropriate for their situation (e.g. paper survey forms or online database access for direct data entry).

Data collection activities include (1) having clients fill out the survey questionnaires, (2) having volunteer interviewers assist clients complete the survey questionnaires, or (3) having agency staff enter client information directly into the online Point-in-Time Count database. In some cases, agency staff complete paper questionnaires for their clients.

Data processing begins when the paper survey questionnaires are delivered to the County's contracted data analyst or when the data is entered by participating agency staff into the online database. Data from paper forms is added to the online database and then the data is "cleaned." Cleaning includes several processes designed to detect data entry errors and identify and remove duplicated survey respondents⁷. The cleaned data is then imported into special software to facilitate statistical analysis.

⁷ Duplicated survey respondents are identified using automated and non-automated processes that rely on unique identifying data derived by combining fields of data such as sex, date of birth and initials.

Data assumptions and limitations

National research indicates that point-in-time counts generally underestimate the number of those who are homeless because:

- A point-in-time is just a “snapshot” and may not capture all those who are cycling in and out of homelessness over the course of a specific period of time (e.g. annually). Furthermore, an annual “snapshot” may miss any seasonal fluctuations that may occur in our communities.
- It is difficult to find where all the unsheltered people reside. It is impossible to know all the places that might provide unconventional shelter (i.e. tents, abandoned cars) for one night.

Furthermore, due to survey item nonresponse (when a respondent skips one or more of the Point-in-Time Count survey questions), some of the analyses are based on only a subset of all homeless households counted. For example, only 595 of all 855 households responded to the income source question. This large subset may not accurately represent the larger population of homeless households.

**Appendix A: Whatcom County Homeless Count Report to
Washington State Department of Commerce**

April 2011**Whatcom County 2011 Point-in-Time Homeless Count Report to
Washington State Department of Commerce**

Part 1: Homeless Population	Sheltered		Unsheltered	Temporarily Living with Family or Friends
	Emergency	Transitional		
Number of Families with Children (Family Households):	52	49	13	144
Number of Households <u>without</u> Children:	97	108	155	97
Number of Households <u>without</u> Adults (nobody over 17 years old):	2	2	1	55
1. Number of Persons in Families with Children:	155	129	34	323
2. Number of Single Individuals and Persons in Households <u>without</u> Children:	101	109	167	115
3. Number of Persons in Households <u>without</u> Adults (nobody over 17 years old):	2	2	1	58
Total Persons: (Add Lines Numbered 1, 2 & 3)	258	240	202	496
Part 2: Homeless Subpopulations	Sheltered		Unsheltered	Temporarily Living with Family or Friends
	Emergency	Transitional		
a. Chronically Homeless Individuals	27	NA	55	NA
b. Chronically Homeless Families	1	NA	7	NA
c. Persons in Chronically Homeless Families	2	NA	14	NA
d. Mentally Disabled	62	61	87	65
e. Persons with alcohol and/or other drug problems	15	42	27	21
f. Veterans	22	13	41	14
g. Persons with HIV/AIDS	0	1	2	0
h. Victims of Domestic Violence	29	40	12	17
i. Unaccompanied Youth (Under 18)	2	2	1	58
j. Children (Under 18) in Families	91	72	21	209
k. Physically Disabled	41	29	73	36
l. Seasonal Agricultural Workers	0	0	1	0
m. Persons with both substance use and mental health problems	12	17	19	10
n. Senior citizens (aged 65 or older)	0	1	3	0

NOTE: Due to missing data about shelter from some homeless count survey forms, these numbers may not exactly match those reported elsewhere in Whatcom County's 2011 Point-in-Time Count report. For example, we counted 1,311 homeless persons, but the total persons in Part 1 above equals only 1,196 because some survey forms lacked data on where that household was sheltered the night before the count.