

## Biennial Point in Time (PIT) Count for SNHCoC Summary of Talking Points

### **Background Information**

Historically, the Southern Nevada PIT Count has been conducted annually. The proposal of an alternative cadence (*biennially per HUD's requirement*) was presented to the SNHCoC Board at the August 12<sup>th</sup> meeting. The following includes researched guidance around the pros and cons as well as concerns raised by the attending Board members.

HUD's PIT Count Minimal Standards (#1) requires that "CoCs are responsible for planning and conducting, at least **biennially** (biannually = twice a year, while biennially = once every two years), a PIT count of homeless persons within the geographic area that meets HUD's requirements."

Additionally, Standard (#2) requires that it be "conducted during the last 10 days in January and represent all homeless persons who were sheltered and unsheltered on a single night during that period."

In Title 24, subtitle B, Chapter V, Subchapter C, Part 578.7 "Responsibilities of the Continuum of Care":

(2) Planning for and conducting, at least biennially, a point-in-time count of homeless persons within the geographic area that meets the following requirements:

(i) Homeless persons who are living in a place not designed or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for humans must be counted as unsheltered homeless persons.

(ii) Persons living in emergency shelters and transitional housing projects must be counted as sheltered homeless persons.

(iii) Other requirements established by HUD by Notice.

HUD PIT Count Minimal Standards documentation: [Point-in-Time Count Methodology Guide](#)

### **Research Summary**

A recurring theme in the following review on transitioning to a biennial Point-in-Time (PIT) Count is the emphasis on leveraging ongoing data collection and reporting to better understand and respond to the needs of our unsheltered population. The consistent, monthly data collection conducted by our street outreach teams and reported monthly by our Regional Outreach Coordinator ensures that we maintain up-to-date insights, which can significantly improve our strategic responses. This approach allows us to supplement the PIT Count with regular data analysis, enhancing our overall understanding and enabling us to adapt more quickly and effectively. Notably, William Snow from HUD supports the use of HMIS data over a PIT Count if the community can validate its accuracy. While we are not at that point today, dedicating resources to monthly outreach—rather than a one-time count—would allow us to demonstrate the accuracy of our data. To illustrate, if we redirected the 3,200 hours (400 volunteers/staff x 8 hours) typically spent on an annual PIT Count to monthly strategic data collection, we could invest 266 hours each month solely on this activity. Imagine how this concentrated effort could vastly improve the quality and accuracy of our data, leading to better outcomes for our community.

A biennial PIT count can be effectively supplemented by other data and outreach efforts to keep homelessness at the forefront of public and funding priorities.

#### **Biennial justification shared at the August Board Meeting:**

1. **Improved data quality** – A two-year cycle provides more time to evaluate the results of PIT and PIT process, to improve plans, train volunteers, and refine methodologies, potentially leading to more accurate and comprehensive results.
2. **Trend analysis** - Homeless populations often change gradually. Biennial unsheltered counts can still effectively capture long-term trends while minimizing short-term fluctuations.
3. **Focus on interventions** – The off-year allows for more time and resources to be directed toward implementing and evaluating homeless intervention strategies.
4. **Alignment with other jurisdictions** – The Northern Nevada CoC is considering a biennial cadence and we could coordinate with them on their cycle.
5. **Reduce disruption** – Less frequent unsheltered counts minimize disturbances to individuals experiencing homelessness, service providers and service delivery.
6. **Cost-effectiveness** – Biennial unsheltered counts reduce financial and resource burdens on local agencies, allowing for more focused allocation of funds to direct homeless services. Over 250 volunteers, primarily made up by homeless service providers, frontline staff, and direct services partners dedicate 8 hours or more on the day of the PIT count (not including preparation and training time). During this period, they are unable to engage in person-centered delivery of homeless response services and the immediate service needs impacts our capacity to address homelessness.

#### **Potential Benefits of Data Review and Tracking in a Biennial PIT Count:**

1. **Trend Analysis:**
  - **Concern:** With a biennial count, there could be gaps in data, potentially missing shorter-term trends or abrupt changes in the homeless population.
  - **Benefit:** Conducting a PIT count every two years allows for more in-depth comprehensive trend analysis, enabling a better understanding of shifts in unsheltered homelessness patterns and subpopulations.
  - **Support for Biennial PIT Count:** While it's true that a biennial PIT count could result in data gaps, we've mitigated this by integrating comprehensive Street Outreach data, which offers a more accurate and continuous representation of the unsheltered population. This approach leverages the robust monthly data collection and reporting conducted by our Regional Outreach Coordinator, ensuring that our understanding of homelessness trends is not solely dependent on a single annual count. Consequently, we are able to capture shorter-term shifts and abrupt changes in the homeless population more effectively than through a PIT count alone.
2. **Resource Allocation:**
  - **Concern:** In fast-growing or economically volatile cities, a biennial count might lead to outdated data, resulting in misallocation of resources during off years.

- **Benefit:** Tracking data over two years could provide a clearer picture of resource needs, allowing jurisdictions to allocate funds and services more effectively based on long-term data rather than year-to-year fluctuations.
  - **Support for Biennial PIT Count:** Although a biennial PIT count might seem to risk outdated data and potential misallocation of resources, this concern is addressed by our integration of Street Outreach data. The ongoing, monthly data collection and reporting conducted by our Regional Outreach Coordinator ensures that we maintain up-to-date insights into the needs of our unsheltered population. This continuous data flow allows us to make more informed decisions and allocate resources effectively, even in fast-growing or economically volatile areas, by providing a real-time understanding that a biennial count alone cannot achieve.
3. **Reduced Costs and Burden:**
- **Concern:** Cost savings might come at the expense of less frequent data, which could impair timely interventions and policy responses.
  - **Benefit:** A biennial count can reduce the logistical burden and costs associated with conducting PIT counts annually, including staff time, volunteer coordination, and financial expenditures.
  - **Support for Biennial PIT Count:** The concern about less frequent data impacting timely interventions is significantly reduced due to our reliance on monthly Street Outreach data. This ongoing data collection provides a continuous stream of information that ensures we maintain up-to-date insights into the unsheltered population, enabling timely interventions and policy responses. Therefore, the cost savings from a biennial PIT count do not come at the expense of data quality or frequency, as our outreach efforts fill in any potential gaps.
4. **Program Evaluation and Adjustment:**
- **Concern:** Delayed feedback on program effectiveness could mean that unsuccessful programs continue longer than they might under an annual review system.
  - **Benefit:** The PIT count does not directly measure program effectiveness; rather, it provides data on trends in unsheltered and sheltered populations in our area. A biennial count allows more time to implement and assess program changes, especially those requiring a phased approach. This extended period makes it easier to correlate changes in homelessness numbers with specific interventions. Additionally, by saving the working hours typically devoted to an annual count, we can redirect efforts toward more in-depth program evaluation, ultimately enhancing our response strategies.
  - **Support for Biennial PIT Count:** While a two-year evaluation period might delay feedback, our CoC's approach to program evaluation and adjustment mitigates this concern. Just as new leadership within our Board brings fresh priorities and driven perspectives, our CoC Core Committees, particularly the Programs Committee, play a crucial role in continuously improving our community's homeless response. We are actively reviewing our monitoring and evaluation processes to align with action-driven and quality improvement standards. Furthermore, we are in the process of bringing on a new Evaluation & Monitoring Consultant, to ensure that we have the appropriate checks and balances in place. This will enable us to promptly identify and address program gaps

and inefficiencies, ensuring that any necessary adjustments are made in a timely manner, even within a biennial PIT count framework.

5. **Focus on Quality Over Quantity:**

- **Concern:** The less frequent data collection could reduce the overall quantity of data, which may limit the granularity of analysis and obscure important demographic or geographic differences.
- **Benefit:** With more time between counts, efforts can be placed on improving the quality and accuracy of data both throughout the year and during the PIT count, leading to more reliable data gathering.
- **Support for Biennial PIT Count:** While less frequent data collection might seem to reduce the overall quantity of data, our ongoing strategies ensure that we maintain a high level of granularity in our analysis. By focusing on quality over quantity during the PIT count, we can gather more accurate and reliable data. Moreover, our continuous data collection through monthly Street Outreach efforts ensures that we still capture critical demographic and geographic differences, providing a comprehensive view of homeless sub-populations. This integrated approach allows us to benefit from the increased accuracy of a biennial count without sacrificing the depth and detail necessary for informed decision-making.

**Concerns shared at the August Board meeting:**

“The Grants Pass v. Johnson decision, which allows for encampment sweeps, adds complexity to the discussion around the frequency of PIT counts.”

- Response: The Grants Pass decision, which allows for encampment sweeps, underscores the importance of a coordinated and responsive outreach strategy, independent of the frequency of PIT counts. While a biennial PIT count provides valuable data for long-term planning, it does not diminish the need for a robust plan to respond to encampment sweeps. Our ongoing efforts to bring together jurisdictional outreach leads and non-CoC outreach teams (brought up during the Board Meeting) are focused on creating an aligned and coordinated approach to encampment response. This proactive strategy ensures that we can effectively address the immediate needs of individuals impacted by sweeps, maintaining a continuous presence and engagement that supports both the collection of real-time data and the provision of timely interventions. Therefore, the Grants Pass decision highlights the importance of our outreach work done on a regular basis by team members who can offer immediate connections to services.

“Do we lose more consistent data and program evaluation opportunities by skipping a year?”

- Response: Although the PIT count may skip a year, we maintain consistent data through our ongoing monthly Street Outreach efforts and regular reporting. This continuous data collection ensures that we have up-to-date insights which can evaluate programs effectively, even in off years, so we don't lose the opportunity to monitor and improve our efforts. It should be noted that the purpose of the PIT is not to evaluate programs. Our program monitoring and evaluator as well as CoC Programs Committee oversees that work which is done at a different time.

“The PIT Count generates public attention and seems to be the only option to highlight the need for homeless response to the community and potential funders.”

- Response: While the PIT Count is indeed a valuable tool for generating public attention, it is not the only way to highlight the need for homeless response. Many communities that have shifted to a biennial count continue to successfully engage the public and potential funders through regular outreach updates, data-driven reports, community events, and strategic communications. By leveraging our ongoing Street Outreach data and collaborating with jurisdictional partners, we can keep homelessness in the spotlight year-round. This ensures that we continue to raise awareness and secure necessary funding, even in years when a PIT count is not conducted. Other communities have demonstrated that with a well-rounded approach, the impact of a biennial count on public attention and funding can be effectively managed.

“Less frequent data might make it harder to advocate for necessary funding or policy changes. Annual counts can be powerful tools for rallying support and keeping homelessness in the public and political spotlight.”

- Response: While annual counts can be effective for rallying support, our CoC’s approach ensures that homelessness remains a priority regardless of the frequency of PIT counts. Additionally, our CoC consists of multiple jurisdictions that actively contribute to and seek out funding for homeless response efforts. This collaborative and continuous approach allows us to keep homelessness in the public and political spotlight, ensuring that we can advocate effectively for policy changes and funding even with a biennial PIT count.

Our requests for new programs and funding are tied to the biennial Consolidated Application NOFO through HUD. Conducting the PIT count biennially offers a unique opportunity to align our efforts with the HUD Local Competition funding cycle. By synchronizing the PIT count with this funding stream, we can better align our programs and resources, ensuring that program monitoring and adjustments are strategically planned and implemented over a two-year period.

This approach allows us to take a more measured and data-driven approach to program adaptation, providing ample time to evaluate outcomes, refine service delivery models, and address emerging needs. Additionally, the extended timeframe facilitates a more comprehensive review of program performance, enabling us to identify and implement improvements that are both sustainable and impactful.

Several cities and Continuums of Care (CoCs) have adopted biennial PIT counts and have successfully maintained public attention and funding for homeless services through alternative strategies. Some examples include:

1. **San Diego, California:** San Diego has conducted biennial PIT counts in the past and uses regular reporting and community engagement strategies to ensure that homelessness remains a priority for both the public and funders. Their CoC has been effective in using various forms of data and storytelling to keep the issue in the spotlight.
2. **Portland, Oregon:** Portland, along with Multnomah County, conducts biennial PIT counts and supplements them with ongoing data collection from outreach programs and service

providers. They engage the community and funders through regular updates, public meetings, and media campaigns, demonstrating that a biennial count doesn't diminish their ability to highlight the need for homeless services.

3. **Phoenix/Maricopa County, Arizona:** This area has also explored biennial counts and uses their HMIS data, along with continuous outreach efforts, to maintain visibility on the issue of homelessness. They emphasize the importance of data-driven decision-making and public communication to ensure ongoing support.
4. **Los Angeles, California:** The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) has explored the idea of conducting the PIT count biennially and relies heavily on a wide range of data sources, including their annual Housing Inventory Count (HIC) and ongoing outreach efforts, to maintain public and political focus on homelessness throughout the year.
5. **Seattle/King County, Washington:** Although they conduct a PIT count annually, Seattle/King County has a strong emphasis on using ongoing data from their Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and other sources to keep the public and funders engaged throughout the year. Their approach demonstrates that continuous data collection and community engagement can supplement the PIT count.

#### **Message from our Social Service Director**

Jamie emphasized the strategic advantage of utilizing the 'off' years between biennial PIT counts to concentrate on enhancing community policies and resource allocation. By dedicating our efforts during these years to strengthening these critical areas, we can achieve more significant benefits for our community. Starting immediately and continuing through 2025, we have an opportunity to focus on refining our methodology and building upon the improvements made this year. With the support of the new CoC Board leadership, this period can become a pivotal 'building' phase, allowing us to advance our strategies and serve our community's needs more effectively.

Investing energy in our services (outreach, prevention/diversion, RRH, PSH), and a person-centered approach is our key to combating homelessness in Southern Nevada. The following link was shared by Donica. It speaks to just that, and how LA is making progress and combating the Grants Pass ruling. <https://endhomelessness.org/blog/las-new-pit-count-numbers-demonstrate-the-flaws-of-the-grants-pass-decision/>