



# 2015 SAN MATEO COUNTY HOMELESS CENSUS AND SURVEY

## FINAL REPORT

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2015 San Mateo County Homeless Census And Survey

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## I. PURPOSE

The purpose of the 2015 Homeless Census and Survey (“the Census and Survey”) is to gather and analyze information to help the community understand homelessness in San Mateo County. This data forms the basis for effective planning to solve this complex and long-standing problem. The San Mateo County Human Services Agency’s Center on Homelessness and the San Mateo County Continuum of Care (CoC) Steering Committee were responsible for overseeing this data collection effort, with assistance from a broad group of community partners, including non-profit social service providers, city and town governments, and homeless and formerly homeless individuals.

The Census and Survey was designed to meet two related sets of data needs. The first is the requirement of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that communities applying for McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance funds (also known as Continuum of Care or “CoC” funds) must conduct a point-in-time count of homeless people a minimum of every two years. These counts are required to take place in the last ten days of January. The Census and Survey was conducted in January 2015 to meet this HUD requirement. The previous HUD-mandated count was conducted in January 2013.

The second set of data needs that the Census and Survey is designed to meet are those outlined in “Housing Our People Effectively (HOPE): Ending Homelessness in San Mateo County” (the “HOPE Plan.”) This Plan is the result of a year-long process that began in 2005 and incorporated the experiences and expertise of over 200 stakeholders, including members of the business, nonprofit and government sectors. The HOPE Plan lays out concrete strategies designed to end homelessness in our community within 10 years. Plan implementation is overseen by the HOPE Inter Agency Council (IAC). The bi-annual Census and Survey provides data the IAC and the community needs to guide the implementation of the HOPE Plan, by collecting and analyzing a wealth of additional information beyond what is required by HUD. This data allows for a more complete understanding of who is homeless, why they are homeless, and what they need to end their homelessness, and helps ensure that the interventions undertaken through HOPE are targeted to achieve the best possible results.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The 2015 Census and Survey consisted of two main components:

1. The Homeless Census (“the census”), a point-in-time count of homeless persons living on the streets, in vehicles, homeless shelters, transitional housing and institutional settings (jails, hospitals, substance abuse treatment programs) on the night of January 22, 2015.
2. The Homeless Survey (“the survey”), consisting of interviews with a representative sample of 239 unsheltered homeless people conducted over a two-week period between January 26 and February 9, 2015. Homeless people who were interviewed were asked to respond to a questionnaire designed to elicit demographic information (e.g. age, gender, disabilities, veteran status), as well as information about how long and how many times they have been homeless, and their use of benefits and services.

The Census and Survey used the definition of homelessness established in the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act as the basis for determining who to include and exclude:

1. An individual who lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence, and
2. An individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is:
  - a. A supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill); or
  - b. An institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or
  - c. A public or private place not designated for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

This definition does not include people who are “at-risk” of homelessness (i.e. living in unstable housing situations) or those who are “couch surfing” (i.e. those who “float” from location to location).

Additional details about the methodology used in the Census and Survey may be found in Appendix 1.

### III. FINDINGS

#### A. Homeless Census

The sections below provide a summary of key findings from the 2015 Homeless Census. Complete Census data may be found in Appendix 2.

##### 1. Number of Homeless People

The 2015 Census determined that there were **1,772 homeless people in San Mateo County on the night of January 22, 2015** comprised of:

- 775 unsheltered homeless people (living on streets, in vehicles, in homeless encampments) and,
- 997 sheltered homeless people (in emergency shelters, transitional housing, motel voucher programs, residential treatment, jails, and hospitals).

##### 2. Number of Homeless Households

The 1,772 homeless people counted comprised **1,387 households** as follows:

- 1,240 “adults only” households, i.e. without dependent children (89%);
- 147 family” households, i.e., with dependent children (11%)

The chart below summarizes the types of locations where homeless people were counted, broken down by household types: adult-only households and family households.

<b>Table 1: Homeless Count by Location and Household Type</b>						
<b>Location</b>	<b>Adult Only Households</b>	<b>People in Adult Only Households</b>	<b>Family Households</b>	<b>People in Family Households</b>	<b>Total Households</b>	<b>Total People</b>
<b>Unsheltered Count</b>						
Streets	327	331	0	0	327	331
Cars	92	98	18	59	110	157
RVs	89	95	17	56	106	151
Encampments	136	136	0	0	136	136
<b>Subtotal Unsheltered</b>	<b>644</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>679</b>	<b>775</b>
<b>Shelter Count</b>						
Emergency Shelters	152	152	12	35	164	187
Motel Voucher Programs	0	0	22	67	22	67
Transitional Housing	155	155	78	299	233	454
Institutions	289	289	0	0	289	289
<b>Subtotal Sheltered</b>	<b>596</b>	<b>596</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>401</b>	<b>708</b>	<b>997</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,240</b>	<b>1,256</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>516</b>	<b>1,387</b>	<b>1,772</b>

### 3. Comparison of Year to Year Results

#### a. Summary of Changes

The table below shows the count totals from 2009 through 2015.

<b>Table 2: Homeless Count 2009 Through 2015</b>						
<b>Location</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>Net Change (2013 to 2015)</b>	<b>% Change (2013 to 2015)</b>
<b>Street Count</b>						
People Observed on Streets	422	466	353	331	-22	-6%
People in Cars	96	126	231	157	-74	-32%
People in RVs	170	246	392	151	-241	-61%
People in Encampments	115	324	323	136	-187	-58%
<b>Subtotal Street Count</b>	<b>803</b>	<b>1,162</b>	<b>1,299</b>	<b>775</b>	<b>-524</b>	<b>-40%</b>
<b>Shelter Count</b>						
People in Emergency Shelters	267	215	243	187	-56	-23%
People in Motel Voucher Programs	74	43	29	67	38	131%
People in Transitional Housing	403	441	431	454	23	5%
People in Institutions	249	288	279	289	10	4%
<b>Subtotal Shelter Count</b>	<b>993</b>	<b>987</b>	<b>982</b>	<b>997</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>TOTAL HOMELESS PEOPLE</b>	<b>1,796</b>	<b>2,149</b>	<b>2,281</b>	<b>1,772</b>	<b>-509</b>	<b>-24%</b>

## b. Analysis of Changes

### Unsheltered Homeless People

As illustrated in the chart above, there was a 40% decrease in the number of unsheltered people in 2015 compared to 2013. The number of people observed on the street dropped by 6%, while the number of people in cars, RVs and encampments went down substantially, by 32%, 61% and 58% respectively. This is the first time in the past four counts that the number of unsheltered people has gone down.

There were several factors that contributed to the decrease in the unsheltered count:

- Enumerators observed fewer homeless people on the street compared to 2013, including zero families with children;
- Enumerators counted fewer cars, vans and RVs with sleeping occupants than in 2013;
- Based on responses to interviews with a representative sample of unsheltered homeless people (see Section III.B, Homeless Survey), there were fewer people per vehicle and encampment than in 2013.

It should be noted that counting certain types of vehicles, particularly RVs, is an inexact process. People sleeping in cars can generally be assumed to be homeless, since cars are not designed as living spaces. RVs, however, are designed to be lived in and provide adequate living facilities provided there are electrical and sewer hookups or facilities available nearby. In 2013, enumerators counted a number of RVs that were parked on private property (e.g. in driveways of homes) whose occupants likely were not truly homeless. In 2015, enumerators were instructed to only count RVs parked on public property that had sleeping occupants and did not appear to be connected to services. This tightening of the criteria for counting RVs likely led to some of the reduction in the number that were counted. See Appendix 1, Methodology, for a further discussion of the challenges of counting homeless people living in RVs.

### Sheltered Homeless People

The sheltered count increased in comparison to 2013, though only by a factor of 2%. The total number of sheltered people went up from 982 in 2013 to 997 in 2015. Given that the inventory of available shelter and transitional housing beds has changed relatively little in the past two years, this increase is likely due to fluctuations in bed utilization rate.

### Total Number of Homeless People

Overall, the 2015 homeless count of 1,772 total people represented a 24% decrease compared to 2013. This was largely a result of the decrease in homeless people observed in vehicles and encampments, as discussed above. This decrease reversed a trend of counts that have been going up consistently since 2009.

## Homeless Families With Children

The percentage of households with children versus those without children went up slightly from 2013 to 2015. In 2015, 89% of households were either single individuals or couples without children and 11% were households with children. In 2013, this split was 90% adult households and 10% families with children.

As in prior years, the enumerators counted very few unsheltered homeless families with children. Of the 147 family households counted in 2015, 112 (76%) were living in shelters and 35 (24%) were in cars or RVs. There were no families with children observed on the street. The very low numbers of unsheltered homeless families reflects the County's ongoing commitment to preventing family homelessness and its investment in programs targeting families with children, such as the Motel Voucher Program, Inclement Weather Voucher Program, and homelessness prevention programs operated by the Core Service Agency Network. It is also notable that all the unsheltered families counted were living in vehicles, none were observed living outdoors or in encampments.

The 2015 data on homeless families is consistent with the experience of San Mateo County service providers who observe that homeless families with children rarely live on the streets and are much more likely to reside in shelters or cars. Many families with children also live in places that do not meet the HUD standard of homelessness (i.e. they are living temporarily with friends or families) yet they are very precariously housed. See the section on "Hidden Homelessness," below for more details.

See Appendix 2 for additional data on household composition of sheltered and unsheltered people.



#### 4. Geographic Breakdown

##### a. 2015 Distribution of Homeless People by City

The following table summarizes the geographic distribution of the homeless people who were counted in the 2015 Census. Note that data is collected according to Census Tract, rather than by jurisdiction. Since some Census Tracts span multiple jurisdictions, data for some jurisdictions may include people in neighboring areas. For example, data for Half Moon Bay may include some individuals counted outside the city boundaries.

<b>Table 3: Geographic Distribution of Sheltered and Unsheltered Homeless People</b>			
<b>City</b>	<b>Unsheltered</b>	<b>Sheltered</b>	<b>Total</b>
Airport	1	0	1
Atherton	1	0	1
Belmont	11	0	11
Brisbane	21	0	21
Burlingame	7	24	31
Colma	3	0	3
Daly City	32	11	43
East Palo Alto	95	83	178
Foster City	0	0	0
Half Moon Bay	84	0	84
Hillsborough	0	0	0
Menlo Park	27	146	173
Millbrae	8	0	8
Pacifica	63	0	63
Portola Valley	0	0	0
Redwood City	223	314	537
San Bruno	8	3	11
San Carlos	20	0	20
San Mateo	82	186	268
South San Francisco	55	86	141
Unincorporated	32	0	32
Coastside	22	0	22
Central - Highlands/Baywood	0	0	0
North - Broadmoor	0	0	0
South - N Fair Oaks, Emerald Lk, West MP	10	0	10
Woodside	2	0	2
Scattered Sites	0	95	95
Confidential	0	49	49
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>775</b>	<b>997</b>	<b>1,772</b>

b. Unsheltered Homeless Population By City Compared to General Population

The table below provides an analysis of the total number of unsheltered people<sup>1</sup> counted in each jurisdiction compared to the total population of people in each jurisdiction.

<b>Table 4: Unsheltered Homeless People Compared to Total Population</b>				
<b>City</b>	<b>General Population*</b>	<b>% of General Population</b>	<b>Unsheltered Homeless Population</b>	<b>% of Unsheltered Homeless Population</b>
Airport	NA	NA	1	0.13%
Atherton	7,159	0.96%	1	0.13%
Belmont	26,731	3.58%	11	1.42%
Brisbane	4,443	0.59%	21	2.71%
Burlingame	29,892	4.00%	7	0.90%
Colma	1,492	0.20%	3	0.39%
Daly City	104,739	14.01%	32	4.13%
East Palo Alto	29,143	3.90%	95	12.26%
Foster City	32,377	4.33%	0	0.00%
Half Moon Bay	12,013	1.61%	84	10.84%
Hillsborough	11,273	1.51%	0	0.00%
Menlo Park	33,071	4.42%	27	3.48%
Millbrae	22,424	3.00%	8	1.03%
Pacifica	38,606	5.17%	63	8.13%
Portola Valley	4,518	0.60%	0	0.00%
Redwood City	80,872	10.82%	223	28.77%
San Bruno	42,443	5.68%	8	1.03%
San Carlos	29,387	3.93%	20	2.58%
San Mateo	101,128	13.53%	82	10.58%
South San Francisco	66,174	8.85%	55	7.10%
Unincorporated	64,007	8.56%	32	4.13%
Woodside	5,481	0.73%	2	0.26%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>747,373</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>775</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

As indicated in this chart, several cities have a higher percentage of the unsheltered homeless population than their share of the general population. These include: Brisbane, East Palo Alto, Half Moon Bay, Pacifica and Redwood City. Similar results were found in prior counts. The

<sup>1</sup> Note that this data does not include sheltered homeless people (those living in emergency shelters, transitional housing, etc.). The inclusion of the sheltered homeless people would skew the data towards those jurisdictions with the largest numbers of shelters and transitional housing programs.

higher numbers of homeless people in certain jurisdictions tends to correlate with higher poverty levels in those communities.

c. Comparison of 2009 to 2015 Data By City

The table below shows the unsheltered population in each jurisdiction over the past four counts (2009 through 2015). The final columns show the net and percent change between 2013 and 2015. For most jurisdictions the count went down, which is consistent with the reduction in unsheltered homelessness community-wide.

<b>Table 5: 2009 Through 2015 Counts by Jurisdiction</b>						
City	2009 Count	2011 Count	2013 Count	2015 Count	Net Change (2013-2015)	Percent Change (2013-2015)
Airport	4	9	5	1	-4	-80%
Atherton	0	1	0	1	1	NA
Belmont	5	1	43	11	-32	-74%
Brisbane	1	0	34	21	-13	-38%
Burlingame	8	3	13	7	-6	-46%
Colma	0	1	7	3	-4	-57%
Daly City	49	44	27	32	5	20%
East Palo Alto	204	385	119	95	-24	-20%
Foster City	0	0	7	0	-7	-100%
Half Moon Bay	19	41	114	84	-30	-26%
Hillsborough	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Menlo Park	25	72	16	27	11	71%
Millbrae	1	1	21	8	-13	-61%
Pacifica	16	95	150	63	-87	-58%
Portola Valley	3	16	2	0	-2	-100%
Redwood City	220	233	307	223	-84	-27%
San Bruno	34	14	99	8	-91	-92%
San Carlos	11	9	10	20	10	100%
San Mateo	99	68	103	82	-21	-21%
South San Francisco	7	122	172	55	-117	-68%
Unincorporated	95	47	46	32	-14	-30%
Woodside	2	0	7	2	-5	-69%
Scattered Sites	0	0	0	0	0	NA
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>803</b>	<b>1,162</b>	<b>1,299</b>	<b>775</b>	<b>-524</b>	<b>-40%</b>

As the table illustrates, certain jurisdictions have experienced significant fluctuations in the numbers of homeless people over the past four bi-annual counts. This may reflect the mobility of the homeless population within the County and the limitations of point in time counts.

#### 5. “Hidden” Homelessness

While many of the homeless people in San Mateo County are either residing in shelters or visible on the streets or in vehicles, there are also many homeless people in places that are not easily accessible to enumerators. These “hidden” homeless populations include individuals who live in structures not meant for human habitation, such as storage sheds, unconverted garages, shacks, bus stations, etc. These individuals fall under HUD’s official definition of homelessness, but they typically are not found during homeless counts because they are not visible on the streets.

Additionally, there are substantial numbers of people who stay temporarily in the homes of friends or family but who lack their own permanent housing. People who shelter temporarily with friends or family are not considered officially homeless according to HUD definitions of homelessness, but rather as “unstably housed,” or “at-risk of homelessness.” In the HOPE Plan, people who stay temporarily with family and friends are categorized as “at-risk” of homelessness. However, these individuals often self-identify as homeless and many homeless service providers and advocates believe they should be included in official homeless counts.

In 2009 and 2011 the Center on Homelessness conducted a “Hidden Homeless Study” to attempt to further analyze the number of people who are missed during the one night census. The 2011 study revealed that an estimated 9% of homeless people seeking services from providers during the three days following the count were probably missed because they lived in places that would not be visible (e.g. sheds, garages, on private property, etc.). The study further found a substantial number of people who were living temporarily with family and friends who considered themselves to be homeless even though they would not meet the HUD definition. These households were more likely to be families with children, confirming the anecdotal evidence from service providers that homeless families are more likely than single adults to stay temporarily in the homes of family members or friends.

There was no Hidden Homeless Study conducted in 2015. A description of the methodology for the 2011 Hidden Homeless Study may be found in the 2011 Census and Survey Report.

#### B. Homeless Survey

For the 2015 Homeless Survey, volunteers conducted interviews with a representative sample of 239 unsheltered homeless people using a brief interview questionnaire. Given the difficulty of locating unsheltered homeless families with children during the regular survey time frame (only two households with children were interviewed in the homeless survey), a separate over-sampling survey of homeless families was conducted in the month following the count. The

data gathered during this survey provides some additional demographic information about unsheltered homeless families.

The sections below provide a summary of key findings from the Homeless Survey, as well data on sheltered homeless people from the County's HMIS system where available and relevant. Complete Homeless Survey data may be found in Appendix 3.

### 1. Demographic Data

The results of the 2015 unsheltered homeless survey indicated that the typical unsheltered homeless person in San Mateo County is a single man with at least one disability. The homeless count found that 85% of unsheltered people on the night of the count were single adults. Among the people surveyed, 75% were men, and 43% had at least one disability. The most commonly cited disabilities were alcohol or drug problems (26%), mental illness (24%), chronic health problems (15%), and physical disability (13%).

Rates of disability were lower in the 2015 survey than in the 2013 survey, but this is likely due to significant changes in how questions were asked. The 2015 survey used a set of questions suggested by HUD which asked not only if respondents had a particular health or behavioral health condition but also whether the condition interfered with their ability to be employed or stay in stable housing. This resulted in fewer people indicating they had a disability than in previous surveys, which did not ask about how their condition affected their ability to function.

The population of sheltered homeless people looks somewhat different than the unsheltered population. While this population is still predominantly single and male, there is a greater representation of families. Of the homeless people living in shelters, transitional housing and institutional settings, 40% are in families with children, compared to only 15% of the people who are unsheltered. Sheltered individuals were 56% male and 44% female. Levels of disability are also somewhat lower among the sheltered population compared to the unsheltered population: only 22% reported having a mental illness and 23% chronic substance use.

The Ethnicity of the homeless population (including both sheltered and unsheltered people) was 32% Latino or Hispanic and 68% non-Hispanic. When asked to identify their Race, 53% indicated they were White, 21% Black or African-American, 4% Asian, 11% American Indian/Native American, 9% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 3% were of multiple races.<sup>2</sup> This data reveals that some groups are over- or under-represented among homeless people in San Mateo County. African Americans represent only 3% of the total County population, yet are 21% of the homeless population. Many of the African Americans in San Mateo County live in the south county communities of East Palo Alto and Redwood City, which, as noted earlier,

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<sup>2</sup> In accordance with federal requirements, Ethnicity and Race are considered separate categories for the purpose of the homeless count. People are asked to identify their Ethnicity as either Hispanic or Non-Hispanic, and are given six options to select from for Race (White, Black, Native American, Pacific Islander, Asian, Multiple Races). Some people who indicate their Ethnicity is Hispanic do not feel any of these Race categories are applicable, but since there is no "other" option, they have to be counted under one of these six categories. In the most recent survey, some Latino respondents selected "Native American" as their Race.

have a disproportional number of homeless people. Latinos are only 25% of the County population, but 32% of the homeless population.

Of the unsheltered homeless people counted, 13% were Veterans (having either served in the U.S. Armed Forces and/or in the National Guard or as Reservists). The proportion of unsheltered homeless veterans counted has remained relatively steady over the past two counts (13% in 2011 and 11% in 2013). Among the sheltered people counted in the HMIS system, 19% were veterans. This was a slight decrease from 2013 when 24% of sheltered homeless people were veterans.

Many unsheltered homeless people in San Mateo County have been homeless repeatedly and/or for long periods of time. The survey found that 35% were “chronically” homeless, meaning that they were disabled and had been homeless for longer than 12 months or for 4 times in the past 3 years. This represented a major decrease from 2013, when 65% of those surveyed met the definition of chronic homelessness. This decrease is likely due to the overall reduction in number of disabled people counted, which is discussed above. Since the questions relating to disability changed, fewer people in the survey indicated they had a disabling condition, and therefore fewer people met the definition of chronic homelessness.

The typical homeless person has strong connections to San Mateo County. Of those who responded to the survey, 75% reported that that they were living in San Mateo County at the time they became homeless and 57% indicated that their hometown was in San Mateo County.

## 2. Service Utilization

In addition to providing demographic data, the survey also provided critical data about the services that unsheltered homeless people need. Given their high rates of disability, it was not surprising that the survey found high rates of service use among unsheltered homeless people. Of those surveyed, 79% indicated they had accessed free meals, 40% transportation assistance, 33% health services and 23% mental health services. However, while 43% of people indicated they had some sort of disability, only 29% were receiving SSI or SSDI. Of those who indicated they had a mental illness, only 38% indicated they were receiving mental health services.

The survey also documented that homeless people tend to be frequent users of emergency services, which are not only very expensive but also are not highly effective in helping them become more stable. Of those surveyed, 33% reported that the main place they receive medical care is the emergency room and another 14% indicated they received no medical care at all. Of those who indicated they had a chronic medical condition, only 32% indicated they were accessing health services.

Criminal justice system involvement was prevalent among those surveyed, with 21% indicating they were on probation or parole or both. This was an increase compared to 2013 when 14% indicated reported being on probation or parole, but a decrease compared to the 27% found in 2011. The survey also found that involvement with the foster care system increased slightly

from 10% in 2013 to 11% in 2015. Of those surveyed who had been in foster care, 15% indicated they had been in foster care in San Mateo County.

In the 2015 survey, 28% of respondents indicated they had been a victim of domestic violence, a significant increase from 2013 when only 16% said they had experienced domestic violence.

#### IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR SYSTEMS IMPROVEMENT

Planners, policymakers and service providers have a wealth of data available from the homeless surveys of the past four bi-annual counts (2009 through 2015) as they work to expand and improve the system of housing and services for homeless people. The following are some strategies and approaches that have been and will continue to be included in local efforts to prevent and reduce homelessness.

- Addressing the lack of housing affordability by continuing to create supportive and affordable housing for homeless people;
- Designing and implementing housing retention programs to help those at-risk of homelessness keep their housing with appropriate services and supports;
- Continuing to implement specialized outreach to homeless veterans and linking them to available housing resources, particularly the VASH permanent housing program and SSVF prevention and rapid re-housing programs;
- Working with the systems of care whose clients have very high levels of homelessness, particularly the alcohol and drug treatment, mental health, criminal justice and foster care systems, to develop strategies for meeting the housing and service needs of these populations;
- Coordinating with the health systems to ensure that all homeless single adults are able to access the health care available since the expansion of Medi-Cal through the Affordable Care Act;
- Embracing joint planning between the County and local jurisdictions to meet the housing and service needs of homeless people;
- Exploring non-traditional housing options for utilization or development such as shared housing and residential care facilities for populations with specialized needs, such as older adults;
- Continuing to operate the Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) program. HOT services include intensive outreach to and engagement with chronically homeless people and help connect them to permanent supportive housing. This program helps reduce the incidence of chronic homelessness.

This report may be downloaded at <http://hsa.smcgov.org/center-homelessness>.