

Point-in-Time (PIT) Count of Homeless Persons

Engaging with Domestic Violence Survivors: What CoCs Need to Know

This resource was developed to inform Continuums of Care (CoC) about the changes for the 2018 Point in Time (PIT) Count and the importance of including individuals and families fleeing domestic violence.

The Intersection of Domestic Violence and Homelessness

Domestic violence (DV) is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children, and the need for safe and affordable housing is one of the most pressing concerns for survivors of violence and abuse.

- 80% of women with children experiencing homelessness have also experienced domestic violence (Aratani, Y. (2009). *Homeless Children and Youth, Causes and Consequences*. New York, NY: National Center for Children in Poverty).
- 57% of all women experiencing homelessness report domestic violence as the immediate cause of their homelessness (Women and Children in Chicago Shelters, 3; Nat'l Center for Homelessness & Health Care for the Homeless Clinicians' Network (2003). *Social Supports for Homeless Mothers*, 14, 26).¹

Survivors of violence face complex barriers to shelter and housing that are caused by the power and control dynamics of abuse, which result in financial instability, lasting trauma, and a need for safety and confidentiality. These factors are exacerbated for marginalized and vulnerable communities, such as persons of color and persons living in rural areas. Housing and supportive services are critical interventions that play major roles in trauma recovery and long-term stability. CoCs and DV providers should work together to ensure survivors fleeing DV are accurately reflected in the PIT count. Additionally, effective collaboration in the PIT count will enhance ongoing partnerships between homeless and housing providers and DV providers to ensure survivors can access and maintain safe, stable, affordable housing after fleeing domestic violence.

Collecting PIT Count Data on Survivors of Domestic Violence

The PIT count is an effective way for communities to understand how many people are homeless and about the characteristics of people experiencing homelessness. However, because it is generally conducted very late at night or early in the morning, it is important that communities determine their methodology and survey questions based on their local circumstances.

HUD strongly believes that communities should find ways to improve data collection on persons who are homeless because they are fleeing domestic violence. While HUD has made data collection on survivors of domestic violence optional, HUD strongly encourages communities to work with their domestic violence stakeholders, especially DV providers, to determine the best way to safely and confidentially collect data on survivors of domestic violence.

Communities must evaluate whether they have the capacity to ensure adequate safety and confidentiality for those interviewed *and* those conducting the interview, especially when asking about domestic violence. However, DV providers and other domestic violence stakeholders should be active participants in determining *if* and *how* the PIT count is conducted in a sufficiently safe and confidential manner to collect information about the domestic violence experiences of those being interviewed.

Communities only submit aggregate data to Continuums of Care and HUD, and providers should have policies and procedures established to protect data on persons after it is collected to ensure it is kept safe, secure, and confidential. The guidance below provides tips on how communities can safely and effectively ask about domestic violence experience during the PIT count.

Changes to the PIT Count: Counting Survivors of DV

Beginning in 2018, HUD updated PIT count reporting requirements to only include “those who are currently experiencing homelessness because they are fleeing domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking as opposed to reporting on survivors who have ever experienced those circumstances.”

Why is HUD making this change? With this change, HUD is striving to more accurately capture whether a survivor’s primary cause of current homelessness is due to *fleeing* or *attempting to flee*, one of the four crimes covered under the Violence Against Women Act: domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. In the past, HUD provided suggested language on the [model survey](#) to inquire about any trauma ever experienced by the survey respondent. The change in guidance is intended to lead to improved accuracy in the count of individuals and families currently experiencing domestic violence and who qualify as homeless as a result of:

- 1) Fleeing, or is attempting to flee;
- 2) Having no other residence; and
- 3) Lacking the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing.

According to HUD, what does *fleeing* include? From the [Coordinated Entry and Victim Service Providers FAQ](#) (November 2015), *fleeing* or *attempting to flee* includes: domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous life-threatening conditions (including human trafficking²) that relate to violence against the individual or a family member, including a child, that has either taken place within the individual’s or family’s primary nighttime residence or has made the individual or family afraid to return to their primary nighttime residence.

Maximizing the PIT Count Survey

HUD provides a suggested model survey to help communities know what questions to ask to fulfill HUD’s required data points. This model survey and the suggested language for the survivor-specific language can be found here: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/3322/point-in-time-survey-tools/>.

Communities can also elect to add questions to their local survey tool to enhance the data being collected³ and improve its use at the local level, including questions designed to capture broader data related to DV. When determining whether to add an additional question to the PIT count survey, communities should consider how adding additional questions will impact the willingness of people to respond to surveys and whether they believe they can effectively train and support their counting volunteers to accurately capture this data. In addition to the required question about those currently fleeing due to domestic violence, communities can ask persons identified as homeless whether they have ever experienced domestic violence. In past model HUD surveys, the following question was recommended: “Have you ever been physically, emotionally, or sexually abused by a relative or another person you have stayed with, such as a spouse, partner, brother or sister, or parent?”

Note: CoCs will have the ability to explain to HUD changes in PIT counts that are due to methodology improvements.

Engaging with Survivors: Strategies for a Successful DV Count on the Night of the PIT

Safety, confidentiality and trauma-informed care are essential! To ensure that CoCs have the skills and level of expertise to effectively implement the PIT count, they should invite DV providers to take an active role in the community's planning and preparation efforts, as well as encourage their participation in the PIT.

For Preparation Leading up to the Count:

- **Join Forces with DV Providers** – Include DV providers in the local PIT count planning process, including both sheltered and unsheltered counts. By coordinating with DV providers, the CoC can confirm and determine which DV housing programs should participate in the sheltered count.
- **Utilize a Trauma-Informed Approach** - Partner with DV providers to employ a trauma-informed approach and determine a process for *if* and *how* referrals should be made if a survivor self-identifies during the count.
- **Invite DV Providers to Educate CoC Volunteers on Domestic Violence and Safety Issues** - Approaching and gathering information can be intimidating for CoC volunteers and providers who do not have direct service experience with domestic violence. It is important to ensure volunteers' safety while also being sensitive in engaging individuals, asking questions about trauma, and providing them with appropriate resources.

For the Sheltered Count:

- **Encourage DV Providers to Administer PIT Count Surveys to Sheltered Clients** – DV providers can administer the PIT surveys to their sheltered clients on the day of the count to get information concerning survivors' situations.
- **De-Identify Information** – All survivors' information will need to be de-identified to protect client confidentiality.
- **Report Aggregate Information** - Only aggregated information will be provided (i.e., the total number of persons currently experiencing homelessness because they are fleeing domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking).

For the Unsheltered Count:

- **Work with DV Providers to Train PIT Count Volunteers on How to Approach Individuals** – DV providers can offer training to those implementing the count on how to approach individuals in a non-threatening, non-judgmental way, being especially sensitive to the collection of DV information from respondents and incorporating appropriate interview protocols to protect client privacy and safety, such as: asking survey questions in a private location and not in the presence of a partner or spouse; giving respondents sufficient space and time to answer questions; not making them feel pressured to answer any questions they are not comfortable answering; and helping respondents feel respected and safe to respond to questions however they choose.
- **Educate on Safety Planning and Available Resources** - Additionally, DV providers can offer training to PIT count volunteers on how to conduct brief safety planning and provide needed resources to individuals who indicate feeling unsafe.

Partnering with DV providers and using a trauma-informed approach during the PIT count is the most compassionate and efficient way to get accurate data without re-traumatizing survivors. DV providers and state coalitions are the best resource to help CoCs determine the process for administering the survey and providing the appropriate follow up and referrals for survivors identified as fleeing or attempting to flee during the PIT count.

Resources:

- [2018 HIC and PIT Data Collection Notice](#)
- [HUD PIT and HIC Guides, Tools, and Webinars](#)
- [Safe Housing Partnerships](#)

If you have additional questions about the PIT count or changes for this year's count, please submit them via the [Ask a Question](#) page on the [HUD Exchange](#).

Domestic Violence and Housing Technical Assistance Consortium

The Consortium, launched in 2015, provides training, technical assistance, and resource development at the critical intersection of homelessness and domestic violence and sexual assault. Funded by a partnership between the U.S. Department of Justice, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Consortium supports a TA Team of four national organizations: Collaborative Solutions, the National Alliance for Safe Housing, the National Network to End Domestic Violence, and the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. The Consortium works collaboratively to improve policies and practices that strengthen efforts to build safe and supportive housing options for domestic and sexual violence survivors.

Questions? The Consortium TA Team is available to provide individualized technical assistance and training to communities interested in expanding the array of safe housing options for domestic and sexual violence survivors. We can also provide support to domestic and sexual violence advocates, homelessness and housing providers, and other allied partners interested in building stronger community collaborations.



SAFE HOUSING
PARTNERSHIPS

Visit SafeHousingPartnerships.org to access a comprehensive collection of online resources and to request technical assistance and support.

This project is sponsored under awards from the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Office on Violence Against Women and the Office for Victims of Crime at the U.S. Department of Justice, and the Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The interagency collaboration established this domestic violence and housing technical assistance consortium to provide national domestic violence and housing training and resource development.

End Notes

¹ See also, Inst. for Children & Poverty (2004). *The Hidden Migration: Why New York City Shelters are Overflowing with Families*; Homes for the Homeless and Inst. for Children & Poverty (1998). *Ten Cities 1997-1998: A Snapshot of Family Homelessness Across America*, 3.

² In the 2015 CoC Program NOFA, HUD clarified that persons who are fleeing or attempting to flee human trafficking, including sex trafficking, could be considered homeless under Category 4 of the homeless definition when certain conditions apply.

³ The development of survey tools and inclusion of additional questions should be created using HUD guidance. Communities need to be mindful of excessive data collection that could impact the PIT count data integrity beyond the HUD designated questions. There should be a balance between local needs and capturing the required HUD data when adding any additional questions to the local survey tool.