

Overview of Homelessness in Columbia/Boone County

January 27, 2022

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Homelessness is viewed to be an issue that falls along a housing continuum from unsheltered individuals and families living on the streets to persons housed in affordable, permanent housing. Homelessness is the result of a convergence of a complex set of issues.

The primary drivers of homelessness are a lack of:

- Affordable housing
- Income
- Access to healthcare (particularly mental healthcare)

Other drivers of homelessness include:

- Domestic violence
- Disability
- Incarceration and institutionalization (e.g. foster care)

Homelessness is generally categorized in three types:

1. Chronic homelessness
2. Transitional homelessness
3. Episodic homelessness

There are three recognized conditions of homeless:

1. Unsheltered: An individual or family with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground.
2. Sheltered: Persons residing in emergency or transitional shelters.
3. Doubled Up: Persons living in a residence that is not their own.

Homelessness is most commonly experienced by the following household types:

- Single adults
- Families with Children
- Unaccompanied youth

The following sub-populations disproportionately experience homelessness:

- Veterans
- LGBTQ+ persons

- People with disabilities
- People of color
- Youth in foster care
- Individuals and children fleeing domestic violence

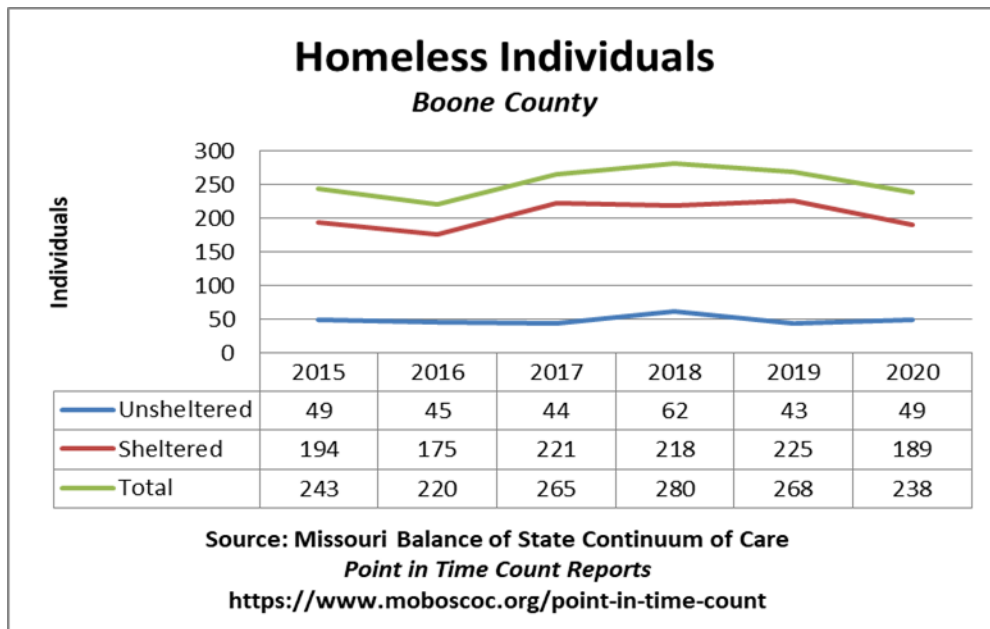
Scope of the Issue

To understand the scope of homelessness, one must first understand the system by which the number of homeless persons is estimated. HUD requires communities receiving Continuum of Care funding to conduct at least semi-annual Point in Time Counts (PITC) of persons experiencing homelessness, on a night in January determined by HUD. The Boone County PITC is conducted as part of the Missouri Balance of State Continuum of Care (MO BoS CoC), PITC. The burden of this unfunded mandate from HUD generally falls on local communities. In Columbia and Boone County, the annual PITC is led by City DHS staff and voluntarily conducted by local continuum provider partners.

PITCs include counts of both unsheltered and sheltered persons. Sheltered counts are conducted using Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) required to be used by shelter providers receiving HUD funds and surveys of non-HMIS shelter providers. The sheltered count is generally considered to be an accurate count of sheltered homeless persons.

Unsheltered persons are counted utilizing two approaches. A “street count” entails community providers literally canvassing the streets, parks, trails, and homeless camps to survey homeless persons. We also utilize “service-based count” in which persons are surveyed as they receive services from health and human services providers, educational institutions, law enforcement, etc.

The following chart indicates the number of sheltered and unsheltered persons experiencing homelessness in Boone County since 2015.



*The PITC was not conducted nationwide in 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is critical note that persons who are doubled-up or living in motels are not included in the official HUD PITC, although this population likely represents the largest number of persons experiencing homelessness and housing instability.

While the PITCs conducted in Boone County are recognized by the MO BoS CoC as among the most comprehensive and accurate, the methodology is inherently flawed and is exacerbated by a total lack of resources provided by HUD to conduct the PITCs.

Strategies to Address the Issue

The simple solution to homelessness is a home. Therefore, our community utilizes a “housing first” approach to address homelessness. In doing so, we follow the *“Home, Together: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness”* which calls on communities to implement a systemic response to ensure homelessness is prevented whenever possible, or if it can’t be prevented, it is a rare, brief, and one-time experience.

This requires that every community must have the capacity to:

- Quickly identify and engage people at risk of and experiencing homelessness.
- Intervene to prevent people from losing their housing and divert people from entering the homelessness services system.
- Provide people with immediate access to shelter and crisis services without barriers to entry if homelessness does occur.
- Quickly connect people experiencing homelessness to housing assistance and services tailored to their unique needs and strengths to help them achieve and maintain stable housing.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires communities to be a part of a continuum of care in order to receive a variety of HUD funding sources. A continuum of care entails a variety of health, human, educational, and housing services which lead to and support a singular goal of permanent, affordable housing.

Our community (defined by HUD as Boone County) is part of the Missouri Balance of State Continuum of Care (MO BoS CoC). At a local level, the Columbia/Boone Functional Zero Task Force (FZTF) serves as our community’s local continuum of care, within the MO BoS CoC. In this role, the FZTF has served as the local coordinating entity for our community’s efforts to address homelessness.

As a CoC, we utilize a systematic approach to ending homelessness called Coordinated Entry. This entails:

- Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)
- By name (prioritization) list
- Common assessment tool to determine risk
- Prioritize resources for the most vulnerable homeless
- Bi-weekly case conferencing
- Continuous Improvement

In order to identify and support people experiencing homelessness in or community, the FZTF partners also provide or support the following collaborative strategies:

- Columbia Homeless Outreach Team
- Project Homeless Connect events (bi-annual)
- Point in Time Count (annual)

- Municipal Court Community Support Docket

Services

Prevention of homelessness is the obvious best and first solution to homelessness. Typical prevention strategies include affordable housing, rent/mortgage assistance, utility assistance, access to affordable healthcare, legal services, and supportive services.

Like most communities, we lack enough affordable housing and housing assistance resources to prevent and end homeless. So, we deploy a wide variety of services to assist the individuals and families that do experience homelessness, including warming/cooling centers, emergency shelters, transitional shelter/housing, street outreach, soup kitchens, and case management.

Funding and Resources

As with most health, human, housing, and education services, funding for programming to address homelessness is provided by a complex combination of local, state, and federal funding sources, private foundations and support organizations (e.g., United Ways), faith-based organizations, and direct support for nonprofit providers. Volunteers are also a key resource.

The state of Missouri provides very limited funding for homeless services and housing through the Missouri Housing Development Trust Fund.

Federal funding for housing and homeless services includes:

- HUD McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act funding (Continuum of Care)
- HUD funding for public housing and Housing Choice Vouchers
- Emergency Solutions Grant Program
- Emergency Food and Shelter Program
- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Funding
- HOME Funding
- Veteran's Administration
- Community Services Block Grant

Our community has done an excellent job of accessing, maximizing, and coordinating these federal resources. For example, Boone County is the largest recipient of Continuum of Care and Emergency Solutions grant funding among counties in the Mo BoS CoC.

In Columbia/Boone County, local funders collaborate as the Boone Impact Group to coordinate and provide funding for health, human, and housing services. This includes the City of Columbia, Boone County, the Heart of Missouri United Way, and the Veterans United Foundation.