

# Connecticut Homeless Response System:

## Understanding 'Who is Homeless Tonight?'

### Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

#### Introduction: Understanding Different Measures of Homelessness

- Different methods of measuring homelessness can yield different numbers, yet all remain accurate within their contexts. Homelessness is complex and dynamic, and datasets reflect different slices of the same population.
- Some measures provide a view of long-term trends while others offer a more real-time picture of those engaged with the Homeless Response System. Understanding which data is used, and why, is critical to understanding homelessness when making operational, policy, or funding decisions.

#### Why is it difficult to determine 'Who is homeless tonight?'

- People experiencing homelessness are a transient population. Not only do people move between shelters, unsheltered locations, and temporary housing, individual circumstances are constantly in flux.
- Some individuals avoid services due to distrust, fear, or other personal reasons.
- Different sectors define homelessness differently, leading to variations in reported numbers.

#### What definitions of homelessness does the Connecticut Homeless Response System use?

For understanding who is homeless, we use two of HUD's four categories of homelessness:

- Literally Homeless – Living in places not meant for habitation, emergency shelters, hotels paid for by government or designated charity, certain institutional stays less than 90 days, or transitional housing.
- Fleeing Domestic Violence – Escaping dangerous living situations with no stable alternative.

*When referring to 'unsheltered homelessness,' we are referring to the subset of literally homeless households who are living outdoors, in vehicles, or other spaces not meant for human habitation.*

#### What data does Connecticut use to track homelessness trends?

- Point-in-Time (PIT) Count – Conducted annually on a single night in January.
  - Provides long-term trend analysis but does not capture real-time fluctuations.
  - Misses those temporarily housed or avoiding services.
- The Annual Homeless Assessment Report – a HUD report compiled from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) from every state that provides data on the number of people experiencing homelessness over the 12 month calendar year.
- By Name List (BNL) – A real-time, dynamic list of individuals identified as literally homeless or fleeing domestic violence within the last 90 days.
  - Used by Coordinated Access Networks (CANs) to track and prioritize households for available housing resources.
  - Updates continuously as individuals engage/disengage with the system.

#### Does the BNL capture everyone who is homeless?

Not entirely. The BNL does not include:

- People with verified homelessness who have not agreed to have their information entered into HMIS.



- People presenting as homeless who have not had their homelessness verified yet due to staffing capacity.
- People who may be experiencing literal homelessness who have not engaged with the system in any way.

### Who is included in the By Name List?

- Every person who is literally homeless or fleeing domestic violence and currently enrolled in an Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, Street Outreach, Safe Haven, Youth Navigator, or Domestic Violence program within HMIS.
- Every person who exited from one of those programs in the last 90 days to a destination other than housing.

### What challenges exist with the current BNL data?

- Data accuracy & timeliness – Some fields referenced when including or excluding individuals from the BNL may be outdated due to the transient nature of homelessness combined with system capacity limitations.
- Standardization issues – Data entry and update processes vary across regions and providers.

### Why does the BNL sometimes differ from other measures of homelessness?

Other sectors use different definitions and tracking methods:

- Department of Education (McKinney-Vento) – Includes doubled-up youth living with family/friends.
- Runaway and Homeless Youth Act – Covers youth unable to live safely with relatives.

Because these definitions differ from HUD's, their homelessness numbers (especially for youth) may not align with Homeless Response System numbers.

### Why has the Homeless Response System chosen to use the BNL to answer 'Who is homeless tonight?'

The BNL provides:

- A consistent metric accessible by providers statewide.
- Real-time updates to track emerging trends in homelessness.
- The ability to create a snapshot of homelessness and standardized reports.
- It references the universe of known literally homeless households that our system is seeking to serve with housing and service resources

### What is being done to improve the BNL?

- Short-term stability – No changes will be made during the legislative session to avoid creating confusion which might jeopardize fiscal and policy requests before the state legislature.
- Post-session improvements – A change management process will be implemented to refine the BNL, focusing on improving data accuracy.
- Long-term standardization – Efforts are underway to enhance statewide data capture and entry consistency.

---

This FAQ provides an overview of how Connecticut tracks homelessness, the challenges in data collection, and ongoing efforts to improve accuracy and consistency. While no data source is perfect, using the BNL as a real-time measure helps inform decisions and coordinate services statewide.

