



2011 Santa Cruz County

HOMELESS CENSUS & SURVEY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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INTRODUCTION

Close to two million Americans experience homelessness each year.¹ For most, this is caused by the gap between income and the cost of housing. Yet for many, health conditions, mental health, substance abuse, trauma, and lack of support prevent them from obtaining permanent housing. Biennially, communities across the country conduct comprehensive counts of their homeless population in order to gain a better understanding of the current homelessness in their community, and to apply for federal funding for homeless programs. Santa Cruz County has worked in conjunction with Applied Survey Research (ASR) to conduct the Santa Cruz County Homeless Census and Survey for adults, families and unaccompanied children every two years, since 2001.

This report places special attention on particular homeless subpopulations that have been identified by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). These populations include chronically homeless, veterans, families and unaccompanied youth.²

METHODOLOGY

The 2011 Santa Cruz County Homeless Census and Survey was performed using HUD recommended practices for counting homeless individuals. This study included a comprehensive field enumeration of homeless individuals residing in Santa Cruz County on January 25, 2011. In order to generate detailed profiles of homeless individuals in Santa Cruz County 498 surveys of homeless individuals were administered in the weeks following the census. Data from this representative survey sample revealed detailed information about the overall homeless population. The research design relied on self-described and self-defined responses, which is an approved method in homeless research.

RESULTS OF THE 2011 HOMELESS CENSUS AND SURVEY

More individuals were counted in the 2011 Homeless Census than in 2009.

- 2,771 homeless individuals were counted during the 2011 point-in-time count,³ as compared to 2,265 in 2009.
- It is estimated that 9,041 persons experience homelessness annually in Santa Cruz County.
- Based on the 2009 American Community Survey population profile, this annual estimate of homelessness represented approximately 3.5% of Santa Cruz County's total population of 256,218 people.⁴

The majority of homeless individuals in Santa Cruz County were white, males between the ages of 31 and 60.

- More than two-thirds (67%) homeless survey respondents identified as male, 32% female, and just over 1% identified as “transgender” or “other.”

HOMELESSNESS DEFINITION

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 supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations; or
 - » An institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or
 - » A public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

- 63% of survey respondents identified as White/Caucasian, 23% Hispanic/Latino, 6% Black/African American, and 3% identified as American Indian/Alaskan Native.
- Over half (59%) of all survey respondents were between 31-60 years old.
- A majority (67%) of survey respondents were already living in Santa Cruz County when they most recently became homeless.

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY ENUMERATION FINDINGS

Census Components	2009	2011	2009-2011	
			Net Change	Percent Change
Street Enumeration	1,536	2,125	589	38.3%
Shelter Enumeration	729	646	-83	-11.4%
Emergency shelter enumeration ¹	360	378	18	5.0%
Transitional housing enumeration	369	268	-101	-27.4%
Total Count for HUD	2,265	2,771	506	22.3%
Annualized Estimate	4,624	9,041	4,417	95.5%

Source: Applied Survey Research. (2009). 2009 Santa Cruz County Homeless Census. Watsonville, CA.

Applied Survey Research. (2011). 2011 Santa Cruz County Homeless Census. Watsonville, CA.

¹ This includes those who were using vouchers to stay in motels or hotels.

More individuals were unsheltered than sheltered⁵

- 77% of those counted within the 52 census tracts were unsheltered (2,125 individuals) and 23% (646 individuals) were in shelter facilities such as emergency shelters, transitional housing facilities, and motel voucher programs in Santa Cruz County.
- 24% of survey respondents slept in a shelter (including those living in emergency shelters, transitional housing, and other shelters).
- 36% of survey respondents were sleeping outdoors, on the streets, in parks, or in encampments.
- 22% of survey respondents slept in their vehicles.

52% of respondents indicated this was the first time they had experienced homelessness, compared to 46% in 2009

- Job loss was the highest cited cause of homelessness (124 respondents).
- 54% of respondents had been homeless for a year or more.
 - » 28% indicated that it has been more than three years since their last permanent housing situation.

63% of all survey respondents said they had a disability condition in 2011.

The federal government considers multiple physical and mental conditions disabling to homeless individuals, creating additional obstacles to obtaining work or housing. These conditions include substance abuse disorders, serious mental illness, developmental disabilities, post traumatic stress disorder, cognitive impairments from physical trauma and chronic physical illness or disabilities.

- 23% of respondents indicated that since they most recently became homeless, they had needed medical care but were unable to receive it.
- Just over one-quarter (26%) of all survey respondents indicated they were experiencing chronic health problems.
- 26% of the survey population had a physical disability.
- 18% of survey respondents reported having a serious mental illness.
- 38% of survey respondents reported that they were experiencing a substance abuse problem (alcohol and/or other drugs).
- 11% of women survey respondents were experiencing domestic violence/partner abuse at the time of the survey in 2011. While rates of domestic violence are higher among women, domestic violence does effect the entire community. Among all respondents, 9% indicated they were experiencing domestic/partner violence or abuse at the time of the survey.
- Just over 1 % of survey respondents (7 individuals) had HIV/AIDS.

Many (65%) survey respondents indicated they were receiving some form of government assistance.

- 42% were receiving Food Stamps. 35% reported not receiving any government assistance.

SUBPOPULATION DATA

Chronic

A profile of chronically homeless individuals living in Santa Cruz County was obtained from the homeless survey. In previous years, only unaccompanied individuals were considered chronically homeless by The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This year, HUD extended the definition of chronically homeless to include individuals residing in families.

39% of survey respondents were chronically homeless.

- The percentage of chronically homeless in Santa Cruz County was higher than the national findings reported in the 2009 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. The report found that 27% of all homeless individuals across the nation were chronically homeless.⁶
- It is estimated that on any given night, Santa Cruz County has a chronically homeless population of approximately 988 persons. Of those, 24 were living in families. In 2011 there were 964 chronically homeless single individuals, a 15% increase from 842 chronically homeless individuals enumerated in 2009.
- The percentage of chronically homeless survey respondents decreased from 2009 (42%) to 2011 (39%).

CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS DEFINITION

An individual or family residing in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven or in an emergency shelter that also:

- » Has been continually homeless for one year or more; or
- » Has experienced four or more episodes of homelessness within the past 3 years;
- » Has an adult head of household with diagnosable substance use disorder, serious mental illness, developmental disability, post-traumatic stress disorder, cognitive impairments resulting from trauma, or chronic physical illness or disability, including the co-occurrence of 2 or more of those conditions.

Veterans

The percentage of homeless veterans decreased from 2009 to 2011.

In 2011, HUD and the Department of Veteran's Affairs (VA) agreed to use the HUD Point-in-Time count as the definitive federal estimate of veteran homelessness.

- 11% of survey respondents ages 18 and older indicated that they were veterans of the United States Armed Forces in 2011, down from 13% in 2009.
- The majority (84%) homeless veterans were unsheltered in 2011.

VETERAN DEFINITION

Someone who has served on active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States. This does not include inactive military reserves or the National Guard unless the person was called up to active duty.

FAMILIES DEFINITION

Homeless families are defined as those currently living with at least one child under the age of 18 years.

Families and Children

Despite national data suggesting that the number of homeless families is increasing, however Santa Cruz County saw a decrease in 2011.

115 families with children were counted in the 2011 homeless census

- 17% of the county's homeless population are individuals living in families with at least one child under age 18.
- The percentage of respondents who indicated that they had at least one child (living with them or not) decreased from 20% in 2009 to 15% in 2011.

Unaccompanied Children

Homeless children and youth are an extremely difficult demographic to capture and federal understanding of this population is limited.

143 unaccompanied homeless children and youth were counted during the 2011 point-in-time count.

- 88 unaccompanied children were under the age of 18 were included in the 2011 census.
- 55 unsheltered youth (between the ages of 18 and 25) were unsheltered living on the street, in encampments or make-shift shelters.
- More youth were living on the street than in shelters.
- 37% of homeless youth survey respondents reported having lived on the street for 1-3 months.
 - » 78% reported they wanted to get "off the streets."

UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN DEFINITION

The federal government defines unaccompanied children as any person under age 18 who presents for housing or services alone.

SUMMARY

The 2011 Santa Cruz County Homeless Census identified 2,771 homeless individuals in Santa Cruz County. This count, however, should be considered conservative since it is well known that even with the most thorough methodology, many homeless individuals stay in locations where they cannot be seen or counted by enumeration teams. Further, many women and families try to remain hidden for safety. The majority (77%) of those enumerated during the count were unsheltered. The overall homeless population increased by 22% (representing an increase of 506 persons) compared to the 2009 count.

The 2011 Santa Cruz County Homeless Survey revealed a diverse population with many different needs. However, the survey showed that most homeless persons were 31 to 60 years old, were living in Santa Cruz County at the time they became homeless, had been homeless for more than one year, and were receiving some form of government assistance. Sixty-three percent (63%) of survey respondents were White/Caucasian, 23% Hispanic/Latino, 6% Black/African American, and 3% American Indian/Alaskan Native. Eleven percent (11%) of adult respondents ages 18 and older identified themselves as veterans of the United States Armed Forces. Thirty-nine percent (39%) of survey respondents were chronically homeless.

Key causes of homelessness included economic factors such as job loss or unemployment. One-quarter (25%) of homeless survey respondents reported the loss of a job as the primary reason they became homeless. Seventeen percent (17%) reported that their alcohol or drug issue was the primary cause of their homelessness. Almost three-quarters (72%) of survey respondents stated that they were currently unemployed.

Sixty-three percent (63%) of survey respondents reported that they had one or more disabling conditions. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of survey respondents reported that they were currently experiencing substance abuse issues, highlighting the critical importance of integrated support services. Eleven percent (11%) of homeless women were experiencing domestic violence at the time of the survey.

ENDNOTES

¹ The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. (2010). *Opening Doors: federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness*. Washington, D.C.

² These populations are considered according to the federal definition of the term.

³ This total excludes homeless individuals who were housed in jails, hospitals, or rehabilitation facilities as they do not meet HUD's homeless definition for the point-in-time count.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). *2009 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates*.

⁵ It is important to note that the count is conducted in January when the Winter Shelters are opening and running, which increases the percentage of homeless individuals in shelter facilities.

⁶ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development. (2010). *2009 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*.