

Chapter 10 : People experiencing homelessness and supportive facilities and services

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Different types of Vermonters experiencing homelessness require not just housing but specifically tailored support services to ensure successful housing transitions. These populations include the chronically homeless,¹ families with children, veterans, unaccompanied youth and domestic and sexual violence survivors.

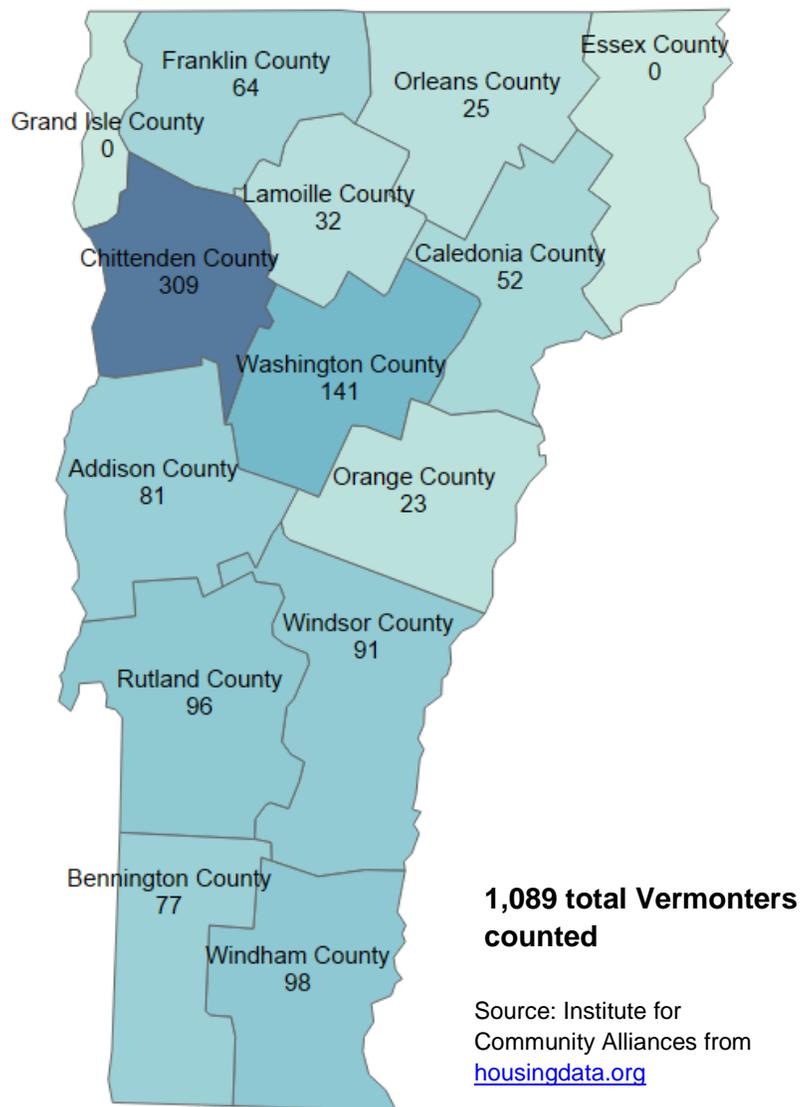
Vermonters experiencing homelessness

During 2019 the average length of stay in Vermont’s publicly funded emergency shelters, domestic violence shelters, and youth shelters was at an 18-year high point of 52 days.² A total of 4,407 homeless persons received services in 2017 (the latest year this data is available) from Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) partner agencies.³ This number would be even higher if it also included those who stayed in domestic violence shelters and those who received services through the Vermont General Assistance program.

The 2019 Point-in-Time (PIT) count found 1,089 Vermonters homeless, a 15.5% decrease from the count in 2018. The PIT count is a statewide count of people experiencing homelessness on one night in January each year. Vermont has two HUD-recognized Continua of Care that lead the count. The Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness is the Balance of State Continuum of Care which includes 11 local Continuums of Care. The Chittenden Homeless Alliance is the Chittenden County Continuum of Care.

PIT counts underrepresent homelessness due to its transitory nature, methodological inconsistencies, the unseen homeless (i.e. sleeping in cars or institutionalized in hospitals and jails) and HUD definitions of homelessness.

Figure 10-1: Vermonters experiencing homelessness during 2019 PIT Count



¹ The 2019 Point-in-Time Count defines “chronically homeless” as persons with a disability who have experienced homelessness for a year or longer, or at least four episodes of homelessness in the last three years (cumulative of at least 12 months).

² Vermont Department for Children & Families, Housing Opportunity Grant Program (HOP) Annual Report-State Fiscal Year 2019

³ Institute for Community Alliances, [The State of Homelessness in Vermont, 2017 Homeless Management Information System \(HMIS\) Report](#), Dec. 2018

Profile of Vermont's homeless population

- **Race:** Persons identified as Black, African American, Hispanic or Latino were disproportionately represented in the overall homeless population (in relation to these groups' representation in the total state population) in the 2019 PIT count. 15% of all people counted in 2019 identified their race as other than white.
- **Chronically Homeless:** The 2019 PIT count identified 190 chronically homeless persons statewide.
- **Families with Children:** The 2019 PIT count found 408 Vermont parents and children living in families.
- **Veterans:** The population of homeless veterans has declined steadily since the 2013 PIT count when it peaked at 128. 2019 saw a continuation of this downward trend; 87 homeless veterans were counted, a 19.5% decrease from 2018. This reflects the coordinated efforts of veterans' service providers to move this number towards "functional zero", according to the Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness and the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance.⁴
- **Unaccompanied Youth:** The 2019 PIT count found 122 youth under the age of 25 who were unaccompanied and homeless. Of these, 27 were parents of young children.⁵
- **Domestic Violence:** The 2019 PIT count found that 133 people experiencing homeless in Vermont were fleeing domestic/sexual violence. In terms gaging the size of this population over a full year, we know that the Vermont-based organization Steps to End Domestic Violence reported providing emergency shelter to 226 adults and 99 children for a total of 14,719 bed nights in 2018.⁶ The size of this population including those with other types of shelter status, besides that provided through Steps, is likely to be even higher.

Rural and urban homelessness

The 2019 PIT count found a disproportionate number of homeless households in Chittenden, Washington, and Windham counties. This occurred to the greatest extent in Chittenden County, where 32% of the state's homeless households were counted, while only 25% of all Vermont households live there.

This distribution may be caused partly by the prevalence of rural Vermonters who are at risk of homelessness rather than literally homeless. For example, when people "double up" or live in substandard housing they are not counted as homeless by the PIT count because they do not meet the HUD definition of homelessness. Another factor is that there are fewer services for the homeless in rural areas and greater transportation challenges to travel the distance to get to the services that are available.

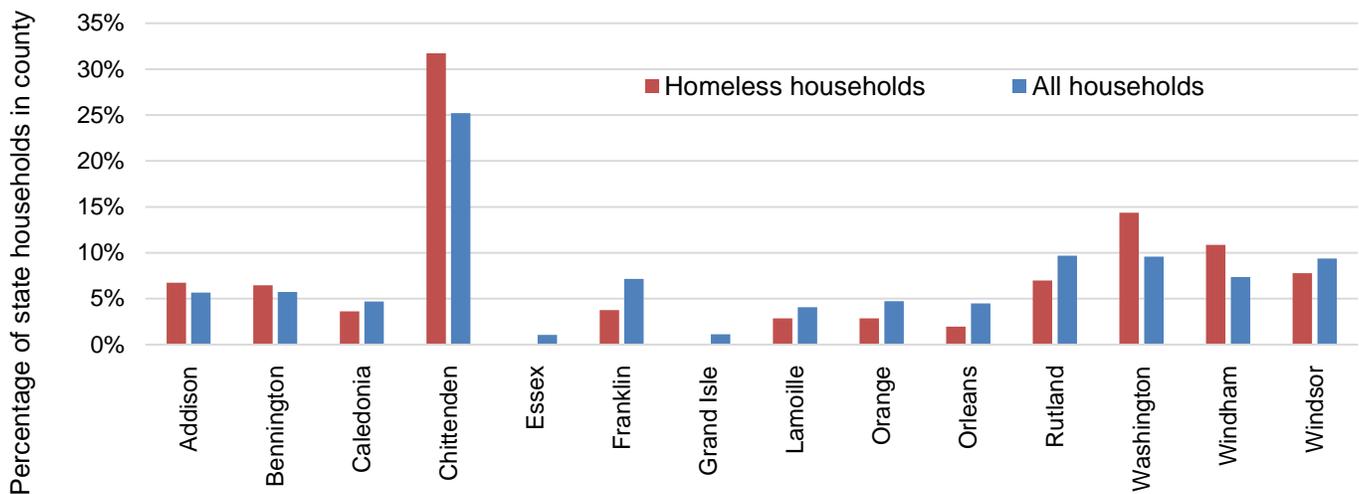
The sheltered homeless are easier to identify, count and provide services based on their location. The PIT count faces challenges in a rural state such as Vermont in which some counties lack an emergency shelter. Both Essex County and Grand Isle County reported zero homeless in the 2019 PIT count.

⁴ [2017 PIT Count Report](#), Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness and the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance. "Functional zero" is defined as the number of veterans who are homeless being no greater than the monthly housing placement rate for veterans.

⁵ [2019 PIT Count Report](#), Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness and the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance

⁶ Steps to End Domestic Violence [2019 Annual Report](#).

Figure 10-2: Distribution of homeless households by county, 2019 PIT Count



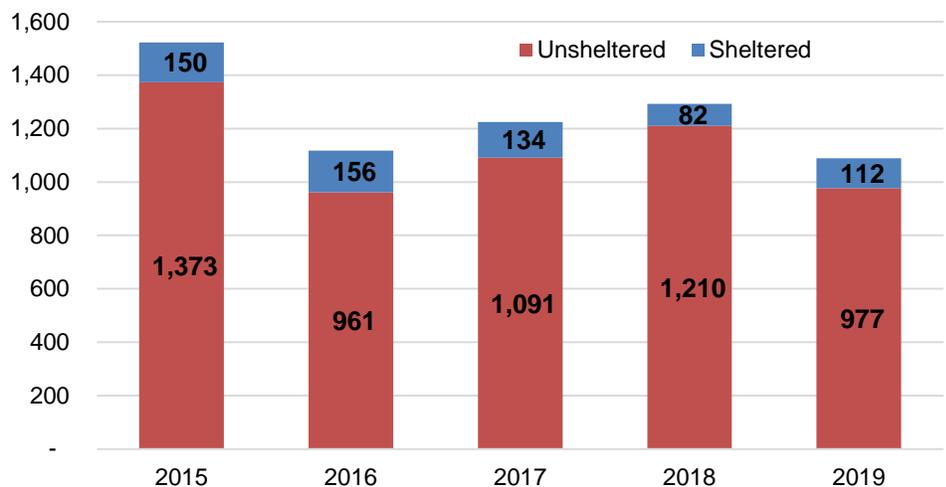
Source: Institute for Community Alliances from housingdata.org

Sheltered and unsheltered homelessness

The number of people staying in Vermont’s publicly funded homeless shelters has decreased slightly each year in 2015-2019. However, the increased average length of stay and virtually unchanged shelter capacity may be the root cause of this decrease.⁷

Similarly, while the 2019 PIT count of all people experiencing homelessness declined, the number of persons staying in unsheltered locations increased by 39% relative to the prior year. This increase may be due to several factors, including the warmer temperatures for the 2019 PIT count as compared to the 2018

Figure 10-3: People experiencing homelessness in Vermont during PIT Count



Source: 2019 Vermont Point In Time Count Report, VT Coalition to End Homelessness & Chittenden County Homeless Alliance

count and reduced use of General Assistance Emergency Housing vouchers (adverse weather conditions, like those experienced on the 2018 PIT Count night, increase eligibility for motel vouchers). General Assistance Emergency Housing vouchers are state-funded motel vouchers for use when the temperature or windchill is less than 20 degrees F or temperatures are less than 32 degrees F with a higher than 50% chance of

⁷ [Vermont Department for Children & Families](http://www.vermont.gov/doc/children-families), Housing Opportunity Grant Program (HOP) Annual Report-State Fiscal Year 2019

precipitation. These vouchers can also be used by vulnerable populations as a last resort housing measure regardless of weather conditions.

The average length of stay in emergency shelters is at an 18-year high, which illustrates the two-fold challenge of transitioning persons to permanent housing and high utilization (occupancy) rates that max out shelter capacity in spite of need.⁸ As a result of shelters remaining full due to the challenge of transitioning occupants to transitional or permanent housing, shelter occupancy remains high, blunting the ability to accept new persons.

Racial characteristics of Vermonters experiencing homelessness

A disproportionate number of people identified as minorities are homeless in Vermont. Black residents in Chittenden County experience homelessness at a rate over five times greater than white residents, according to the Chittenden County Continuum of Care 2019 application to HUD for funding based on Census Bureau estimates and PIT count results. These statistics must be understood with the caveat that minority populations in Chittenden County represent a small sample size and as a result, there is a large margin of error for Census data and a count difference of just a few people can sway the percentages for the Census and PIT data. Nonetheless, black residents experience poverty, homelessness and unsheltered homelessness at a rate disproportionately higher than their share of the overall population. This means that “while 3% of Chittenden County residents are black, and 5% of residents living in poverty are black, 14% of those experiencing homelessness are black.”⁹ The same discrepancies hold true for other minority populations. This may be further compounded by the likelihood of an undercount of those in institutions like jails that are not counted (minority populations being overrepresented in incarcerated populations).

⁸ [Vermont Department for Children & Families](#), Housing Opportunity Grant Program (HOP) Annual Report-State Fiscal Year 2019

⁹ [Chittenden County Homeless Alliance](#), Burlington/Chittenden County CoC Application, 2019

Figure 10-4: Vermont's homeless population counts

		Point-In-Time Count 2019	Annual Count 2017*
Chronically Homeless	Balance of State	116	205
	Chittenden County	74	148
	Vermont	190	353
Families with Children	Balance of State	25	1,851
	Chittenden County	383	
	Vermont	408	
Veterans	Balance of State	70	397
	Chittenden County	17	
	Vermont	87	
Unaccompanied children <12	Vermont	122	Not available
Currently Fleeing Domestic /Sexual Violence	Balance of State	98	Not available
	Chittenden County	35	
	Vermont	133	
Total People	Balance of State	780	3,243
	Chittenden County	309	1,164
	Vermont	1,089	4,407

*Annual counts based on 2017 HMIS data. These data do not include people fleeing domestic/sexual violence or who received services through the Vermont General Assistance (GA) program. Estimates of the homeless fleeing domestic/sexual violence would likely increase the counts shown above by an additional 12% based on the percentage of the PIT count homeless comprised of these Vermonters. Similarly, if HMIS counts included households confronting homelessness who used the GA Emergency Housing program, they would increase further. 2,289 households used the [GA Emergency Housing program](#) in 2017.

Source: VT Coalition to End Homelessness & Chittenden County Homeless Alliance, [2019 Point In Time Count Report](#), Institute for Community Alliances, [The State of Homelessness in Vermont, 2017 Homeless Management Information System \(HMIS\) Report](#), Dec. 2018.

Facilities and services available to the homeless

Across Vermont, there are a variety of facilities and services available to the homeless. Many of these facilities are tailored to certain categories of homeless persons. The data shown in Figure 10-5 was reported to HUD by the Vermont Continuums of Care 2019 application and reflects data from the 2019 PIT count.

Figure 10-5: Vermont's homeless housing inventory, 2019

Project Type	Family Units	Family Beds	Adult-only beds	Child-only beds	Total Year Round Beds	Seasonal	Chronic beds	Veteran beds	Youth beds
Emergency, Safe Haven & Transitional Housing	99	322	500	31	853	209	n/a	81	85
Emergency Shelter	84	283	328	19	600	209	n/a	5	29
Transitional Housing	15	39	172	12	223	n/a	n/a	76	56
Permanent Housing	156	504	594	0	1,098	n/a	n/a	273	0
Permanent Supportive Housing*	37	125	429	0	554	n/a	326	240	0
Rapid Re-Housing	117	371	94	0	465	n/a	n/a	33	0
Other Permanent Housing**	2	8	71	0	79	n/a	n/a	0	0
Grand Total	255	826	1,094	31	1,951	209	326	354	85

*HUD's point-in-time count does not include persons or beds in Permanent Supportive Housing as currently homeless.

**Other Permanent Housing - consists of PH - Housing with Services (no disability required for entry) and PH - Housing Only, as identified in the 2017 HMIS Data Standards.

¹Family Units and Family Beds categories include units and beds for households with one adult and at least one child under age 18.

²Chronic Beds include beds in Permanent Supportive Housing dedicated to serve chronically homeless persons.

³Veteran Beds and Youth Beds, respectively, include beds dedicated to serve homeless veterans and their families, and include beds dedicated to housing homeless youth age 24 and younger.

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, [HUD Vermont Housing Inventory Count Report 2019](#).

A variety of local and statewide organizations make up Vermont's network for providing services to Vermonters experiencing homelessness, some of which are tailored to specific subpopulations. For example, the Family Supportive Housing (FSH) Program is a key player in addressing homelessness among families. The FSH program provides in-depth case management and service coordination to homeless families with children to stem homelessness and facilitate the transition to permanent housing. Funding is administered through the Vermont Department for Children and Families Office of Economic Opportunity. In turn, a network of community-based providers deliver FSH programming in conjunction with affordable housing providers and private landlords.¹⁰

¹⁰ Vermont Department of Children & Families, Family Supportive Housing Program—Annual Report: State Fiscal Year 2019

Gaps between needs and facilities/services available

In response to the challenge of homelessness the Vermont Legislature included \$40,000 for a homeless study and report in its FY17 Appropriations Bill. With additional funding from statewide housing agencies, a Vermont Roadmap Steering Committee hired Corporation for Supportive Housing to develop an actionable Roadmap to End Homelessness in Vermont. This work included an assessment of the homelessness system in Vermont, estimates of cost savings if homelessness is reduced and recommendations on how best to implement system changes to meet this important goal in the next five years.¹¹

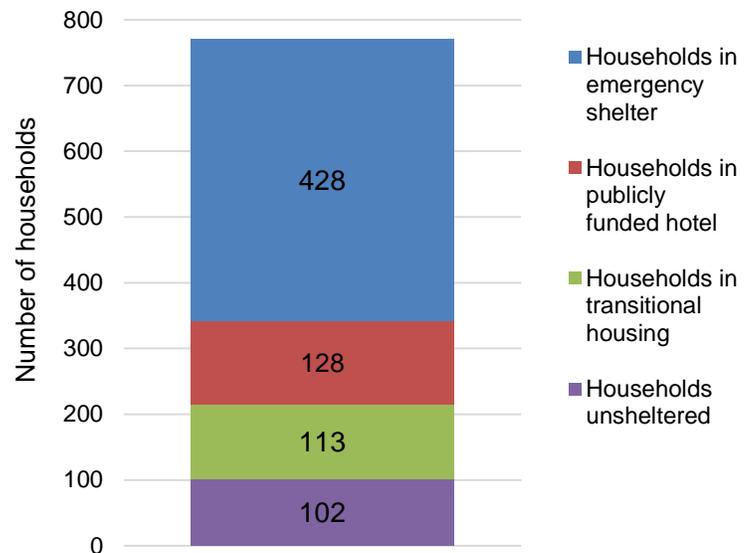
The report identified the following gaps and barriers in Vermont's current system:

- Lack of access to affordable and supportive housing
- Insufficient resources for rental subsidies, capital costs and sustained supportive services
- Coordinated Entry System not yet fully functional
- Reliance on motels
- Access to affordable transportation is limited
- Data availability

A 2019 report to the Vermont State Legislature entitled *Specialized Housing Vouchers Working Group* illustrated the gap between federal subsidies from HUD and their utilization rate. Vermont has returned unused funds (in the form of housing vouchers) to the federal government. The underutilization of funds is not due to a lack of need. Rather, there is a lack of service coordination (case management support), a lack of affordable housing stock and the reluctance of some property owners to rent to the formerly homeless. In addition, the nature of managing the grants due to arduous documentation requirements also contributes to underutilization. This includes the definition of "chronic homelessness" of which there are varying definitions. The continued need for funding for homeless services, combined with HUD's reliance on utilization rates to determine funding levels for state services, points to the importance of addressing this issue to ensure housing to all in need.¹²

Another gap to consider in addressing homelessness is evictions. While there is not a definitive measure of evictions in Vermont, eviction contributes to homelessness and other social maladies such as unemployment, mental health issues and more.¹³

Figure 10-6: Shelter status of Vermonters experiencing homelessness during 2019 PIT count



Source: 2019 Point in Time Count. Institute for Community Alliances from housingdata.org

¹¹ [Vermont Agency of Human Services](#), Homelessness Study: "Vermont Roadmap to End Homelessness", 2017

¹² [Vermont Agency of Human Services](#), Report to the Vermont Legislature: Specialized Housing Vouchers Working Group, 2019

¹³ [Vermont Legal Aid](#), Eviction in Vermont: A Closer Look, 2019

Vermont Roadmap to End Homelessness

The final report of the Vermont Roadmap to End Homelessness proposed five broad action steps:

1. Scale Supportive Housing in Vermont
2. Complete the Design and Roll Out of Vermont's Coordinated Entry System
3. Increase the Supply of Affordable Rental Housing
4. Support What Already Works
5. Design and Test New Innovative Programs

To end homelessness in Vermont, new affordable and supportive housing must be created, according to the Roadmap report. The report concludes that 3,148 new permanent housing interventions will be needed to end homelessness in five years. Beyond newly developed and leased supportive housing and developed affordable housing, rapid rehousing assistance (short-term rental assistance coupled with short-term supportive services) and prevention efforts (services to assist people seeking shelter by helping them stabilize and preserve existing housing, or identify immediate alternate housing arrangements) will need to be provided too.¹⁴

Figure 10-7: Vermont Roadmap to End Homelessness housing units and interventions needed

	Individual households	Family households	Total
Permanent supportive housing units (50% developed, 50% leased in existing units)	304	64	368
Affordable housing units affordable at <=30% AMI (100% developed via new construction or rehabilitation of existing buildings)	1,006	246	1,251
Rapid Rehousing interventions	1,006	246	1,251
Prevention	224	54	278
Total	2,539	609	3,148

The Specialized Housing Vouchers Working Group's identified action steps for improving services funding, services design, delivery and coordination, housing availability and barriers to lease up.

Vermont Legal Aid's eviction report made recommendations in these areas: (1) Direct funding for rental arrearages to prevent eviction, (2) Court-based eviction prevention, (3) Expand and develop programs to help tenants manage their rental payments and (4) Expand rental subsidies and affordable housing programs.

¹⁴ [Vermont Agency of Human Services](#), Homelessness Study: "Vermont Roadmap to End Homelessness", 2017