

# Homeless Continuum of Care (CoC) of Stark County

## Homeless Services Collaborative

### 2026 Annual Point-In-Time (PIT) Count

#### Methodology

#### Summary

**Background:** Local agencies and organizations conduct a count to determine the extent of homelessness in our community. The information gathered through the PIT Count is a critical component of the Continuum of Care (CoC) grant application submitted to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Each year, Stark County requests funding based on its Annual Renewal Demand (ARD), which totals over \$4 million dollars. These funds support housing and service programs designed to assist people experiencing homelessness and to promote long-term housing stability in our community.

#### Unsheltered Count

**Approach:** To get the best count, Stark County will conduct a Housing Survey. The Housing Survey will include all HUD required PIT data points. The survey will be in paper and electronic format.

**Everyone will be asked where they stayed on January 25, 2026.**

#### **Strategies:**

- **Service-Based Count:** Local agencies who serve people experiencing homelessness will conduct the Housing Survey at their worksites for up to seven (7) days following the Night of the Count, from Monday, January 26, 2026, through Sunday, February 1, 2026. Trained volunteers will also be assigned to assist at some sites such as libraries, hot meal sites, food pantries and bus stations during this same timeframe to survey individuals/families who are experiencing homelessness.
- **Street Count:** Teams of volunteers, led by ICAN Housing's PATH outreach staff and other experienced PIT volunteers will go out onto the streets on Monday, January 26, 2026, from 7:00 am – 10:00 am to cover known locations (where people experiencing homelessness are known to congregate or sleep overnight). This is a time change from the previous years when the street count was conducted from 5:00 am – 7:00 am. The PIT Count Committee recommended this change to a slightly later time based on the Outreach Team's year-round experiences in engaging with those who are unsheltered. The Volunteer Teams will count and survey people experiencing homelessness on the street. Known locations in Stark County are typically found in the cities of Canton, Massillon, and Alliance, which are jurisdictions referenced in local Consolidated Plans. At least one team will also address areas of the county, outside of these cities which will

include, at a minimum, Canal Fulton, East Canton, and Lake / Hartville areas. Information regarding known locations was shared by the Homeless Navigation (Hotline) Coordinated Entry System, local homeless providers, and local street outreach staff. Persons experiencing homelessness will be offered assistance with connecting to needed service providers and will be provided with “Blessing Bags” containing items such as hygiene products, hats, gloves, water, granola bars, fruit cups, Band-Aids, ChapSticks, etc. (donated by Stark Mental Health and Addiction Recovery {Stark County’s Behavioral Health Board}, HCCSC, Faith Family Church, New Vision United Church, Family Empowerment Ministries and St. Thomas Aquinas High School & Middle School).

- **Youth Count:** Previous strategies attempted during the PIT Count to locate youth have provided limited results. Therefore, the Youth Count will incorporate a new approach for 2026 based on feedback from prior years’ counts and the 2025 PIT youth focus groups. The PIT Committee is working with Goodwill Industries of Greater Cleveland and East Central Ohio which runs monthly transitional age youth group sessions with youth that were part of last year and this year’s focus groups. Youth who attended this group were encouraged to participate as volunteers for the 2026 Count, with a focus on engaging with any transitional age youth identified during the count. The 2026 Youth PIT Count will also build upon previous efforts to partner with local schools to conduct the youth count. Homeless youth have often established trusting relationships with school staff who work with them daily and those are the people they are most likely to be honest with concerning their housing situation. The Stark County Vulnerable Student Population Coordinator is working with the local school districts (17 in Stark) and their care teams and/or homeless liaisons to identify any unaccompanied minors experiencing homelessness prior to the count. Those staff will be trained in how to complete PIT surveys and during the week of the count will complete a survey with those youth experiencing homelessness. This strategy is gaining more buy-in from local school districts than previous methods attempted. This more targeted approach will be more efficient and effective than previous attempts at wide scale surveys within the schools.
- **Veteran Count:** While previous counts have sought to identify veterans by partnering with local veteran organizations to provide volunteers, increased partnership with the Veterans Affairs (VA) will allow for greater emphasis and effectiveness in reaching veterans in the 2026 PIT Count. For the street count and the service-based count, the VA is attempting to have a VA representative for each team/shift. For teams/shifts without a VA representative, the PIT Committee is seeking to have volunteers from other veteran-serving agencies in place. If a team/shift is without a veteran representative, the volunteers will be directed to call a dedicated number (“The PIT Count Veterans Command Center”) if they are surveying a veteran. The Command Center will work immediately to dispatch a VA representative to the location where the veteran is located. The purpose of these efforts is to immediately link any veterans identified during the count to more in-depth assistance in addressing their housing crisis and other critical needs.

**Survey:** Questions on the survey determine if the individual is experiencing homelessness (including chronic homelessness) or is at risk of becoming homeless; ask for identifiers to prevent duplicate counts; and request information to indicate veteran status, family composition, and disabling conditions. There will also be an electronic survey available for volunteers to complete with those being surveyed, and homeless navigation specialists will reach out to all households prioritized for housing to determine their location on the night of the count. Survey response fields have been updated to reflect HUD's most recent HMIS data standards.

**Volunteer Training:** Volunteer training will again be mandatory for the 2026 PIT count. Virtual and in-person training will be offered during the month of January 2026. Volunteers will select one training session to attend. Training sessions will be offered at various dates/times to provide more options for volunteers. Training will equip volunteers with knowledge, experience, and confidence regarding conducting the Housing Surveys, how to approach people and safety measures (particularly for the Street Count). A Volunteer Agreement must be completed to ensure volunteers are aware of confidentiality expectations and to eliminate any claims of liability in the event of any emergency situation.

### **Sheltered Count**

**Approach:** Stark County's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) will provide data for the sheltered count. Additionally, social service, faith-based and other organizations within Stark County will be contacted to obtain information about any individuals or families housed by these entities in local hotels or motels on January 26, 2026.

### **De-Duplication Techniques:**

HMIS software is programmed to eliminate duplication by comparison of multiple data points (first name, middle initial, last name, social security number, project entry date, date of birth, etc.), HMIS staff also conduct manual checks of result sets to ensure accuracy. Information obtained from organizations not participating in HMIS is examined using the same criteria, ensuring that each individual only appears once in the final PIT count.

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The methodology was developed with input from the Homeless Continuum of Care (CoC) of Stark County PIT Count Committee, the Homeless Services Collaborative and via outreach to law enforcement and in compliance with:

### **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)**

[Notice CPD-23-11: HIC and PIT Count Data Collection for CoC and ESG Programs - HUD Exchange](#)

### **HUD's PIT Count Methodology Guide**

[Point-in-Time Count and Housing Inventory Count - HUD Exchange](#)