Fresno-Madera Continuum of Care

2022

Point-in-Time Count &

Housing Inventory Count

INTRODUCTION

Homelessness in the Central Valley is a big problem – big enough that it can be difficult to measure. The response to homelessness draws in over a hundred different non-profits and government agencies in the Fresno and Madera region. To coordinate their work, these groups meet together through an umbrella organization called the Fresno-Madera Continuum of Care (FMCoC).

Each year, the FMCoC conducts two annual surveys that help gather information about what people in the Central Valley are doing about homelessness:

1) The Housing Inventory Count (HIC) keeps track of how many **units** of housing assistance are available.

2) The Point-in-Time Count (PIT) keeps track of how many **people** are currently experiencing homelessness.

These surveys are based on what we could find out about homelessness on one particular night of the year – in this case, the night of February 23, 2022. The data presented in this report is only an estimate, but by focusing on what was happening on one particular night, we can at least make sure that the estimate is internally consistent.

The results of these surveys are officially submitted to the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD takes these surveys into account when determining how to distribute grant funding. However, in addition to turning the data over to HUD, the FMCoC has a tradition of publishing the data itself and sharing the data with the community so that people can see what is happening and take the information into account as they plan their own local response to homelessness. Through this report, we hope to share what we have learned about the state of homelessness in Fresno County and Madera County so that you can use that knowledge to take action.

TYPES OF HOMELESSNESS

Any kind of quantitative report about homelessness requires well-defined categories. Before we can say that there are fewer people experiencing homelessness, we first need to have a clear understanding of who counts as homeless. For the sake of consistency, this report will use the definitions adopted by HUD, which has historically provided much of the funding used to respond to homelessness.

According to these definitions, a person is experiencing homelessness if they are sleeping and living in an emergency shelter, in a transitional housing facility, on the street, in a park, in a vehicle, in an abandoned building, or in another place unfit for human habitation, such as a creek bed or an overpass.

HOMELESSNESS VS. HOUSING INSECURITY

HUD's definitions do **not** count people as experiencing homelessness if they still have a house or apartment to live in. This means that people who are doubled or tripled up in an apartment or people who recently received an eviction notice do not fall under HUD's definition of homelessness. Instead, these people are considered "housing insecure" or "at risk of homelessness." Housing insecurity is a very serious problem, but it is not quite the same problem as homelessness. People who are housing insecure may need eviction defense attorneys, credit counseling, and other services that would be of limited use to someone who is already living on the street. Similarly, people who are still housed in an apartment will rarely benefit from moving into an emergency shelter. By tracking these two problems separately, we can get a better sense of how many people need which types of services.

SHELTERED VS. UNSHELTERED HOMELESSNESS

HUD's definitions further distinguish between people who are experiencing **sheltered** homelessness and people who are experiencing **unsheltered** homelessness. Anyone staying at an emergency shelter, in transitional housing, in a motel, or in any other facility that has beds, climate control, electricity, plumbing, and similar "indoor" amenities is considered to be sheltered. Anyone else who is experiencing homelessness is considered to be unsheltered.

TYPES OF HOUSING PROGRAMS

No two housing programs are exactly alike, but many programs are similar enough that they can usefully be grouped together in the same category. Keeping track of how many people are using programs in a given category can give us a more detailed picture of the FMCoC's response to homelessness.

STREET OUTREACH

Street outreach (SO) programs provide basic supplies and initial counseling to people who are living on the streets or in other unsheltered environments. The goal is to build trust and rapport with clients so that they will be able and willing to take advantage of more long-term programs. Street outreach teams often work closely with the Coordinated Entry System ("CES"), which administers assessment questionnaires and gathers supporting documents to figure out which people are eligible for which programs.

EMERGENCY SHELTER

Emergency shelter (ES) programs provide a safe indoor space that people can enter immediately while they are waiting to be connected with a more permanent housing option. Some emergency shelters also offer supportive services such as meals, counseling, and/or assistance with housing searches. Not every "emergency shelter" has its own dedicated building. Some programs operate an emergency shelter simply by distributing vouchers that can be redeemed at privately-owned motels. The same client might use the same emergency shelter for a few months, or they might check out after one night. To fit into the emergency shelter category, a program must provide heating, air conditioning, running water, and electricity – social workers who are caring for people in a collection of tents or garden sheds would be considered street outreach. Residents in an ES program are still considered homeless because the shelter is not intended as a permanent home.

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Transitional housing (TH) programs offer medium-term housing (usually anywhere between 3 and 24 months) that come with intensive supportive services such as therapy, substance abuse treatment, job training, and credit counseling. A TH program usually has semi-private living areas and a relatively structured daily activity schedule. This structure can be useful for youth, people recovering from substance abuse, survivors of domestic violence, and anyone else who wants active support in changing their lifestyle or building life skills. Residents in a transitional

housing program are still considered homeless, because the program is not intended as a permanent home.

RAPID RE-HOUSING

Rapid Re-Housing (RRH) programs provide medium-term rental subsidies that help clients live in private apartments or townhouses. The assistance usually tapers off and ends within 2 years, with the idea that the client will pay for an increasingly large share of their own rent until they are eventually able to stabilize in their new home without ongoing financial support. RRH programs typically provide some type of "housing navigation" that helps clients identify potential landlords, negotiate a lease with those landlords, and manage any conflicts that arise during the tenancy. Due to the ongoing shortage of affordable housing, some RRH programs partner with a specific developer to provide a block of homes that will accept RRH vouchers. RRH program staff will regularly meet with their clients to help them make a budget and take steps toward financial independence, but most RRH programs use a relatively light touch: the clients live their own lives in their own way. This makes RRH ideal for clients who are medically and psychologically stable but who have become homeless after, e.g., falling behind on their rent.

Some people who recently joined an RRH program may still be homeless (because they have not yet found a place to spend their voucher), but once a RRH client moves into their new home, they are no longer considered homeless, even if they are receiving a subsidy.

PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) programs provide long-term rental assistance that will subsidize the rent in private homes for as many years as necessary. PSH programs are intended for people with moderately severe long-term disabilities: people who would struggle to stay housed without some type of formal support, but who are capable of living in the community (rather than in an institution) as long as they get that support. Most PSH programs are also limited to clients who were "chronically homeless," i.e., people who can document that they were experiencing homelessness for at least 12 out of the last 36 months.

PSH case managers help with a wide range of client needs, from bus passes and child care to applying for Medi-Cal and VA benefits. Many PSH clients need a great deal of attention when they first move into a PSH program and then become relatively more self-sufficient as they stabilize in their new homes. Most PSH programs are site-based, meaning that the program operates one or more buildings that are earmarked for the use of PSH clients, but some PSH clients arrange to rent from private landlords. PSH clients generally move into their subsidized units

shortly after they join the PSH program, and after move-in they are not considered to be homeless.

HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHERS

Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) provide long-term rental assistance with few or no services attached. Many of these vouchers (although not all of them) are provided through the Section 8 program. Although they are usually open to anyone with low income, some HCV vouchers are earmarked for people exiting homelessness. A sub-type of HCVs known as HUD-VASH vouchers are reserved for veterans exiting homelessness.

Most HCVs are permanent, meaning that a family can keep their voucher for as long as they continue to qualify for the program by maintaining low income and avoiding involvement with the justice system, but some shorter-term vouchers that will last for only a few years were created during the COVID-19 pandemic. HCV recipients generally move into their subsidized units shortly after they receive their voucher, and after move-in they are not considered to be homeless.

THIS YEAR'S RESULTS

THE POINT-IN-TIME COUNT (PIT)

The 2022 Point-in-Time Count ("PIT") showed that:

- 2,338 people were experiencing unsheltered homelessness,
- 1,524 people were using emergency shelters, and
- 336 people were using transitional housing.

This adds up to 4,216 people experiencing homelessness in Fresno County and Madera County on the night of February 23, 2022.

2022 PIT Count
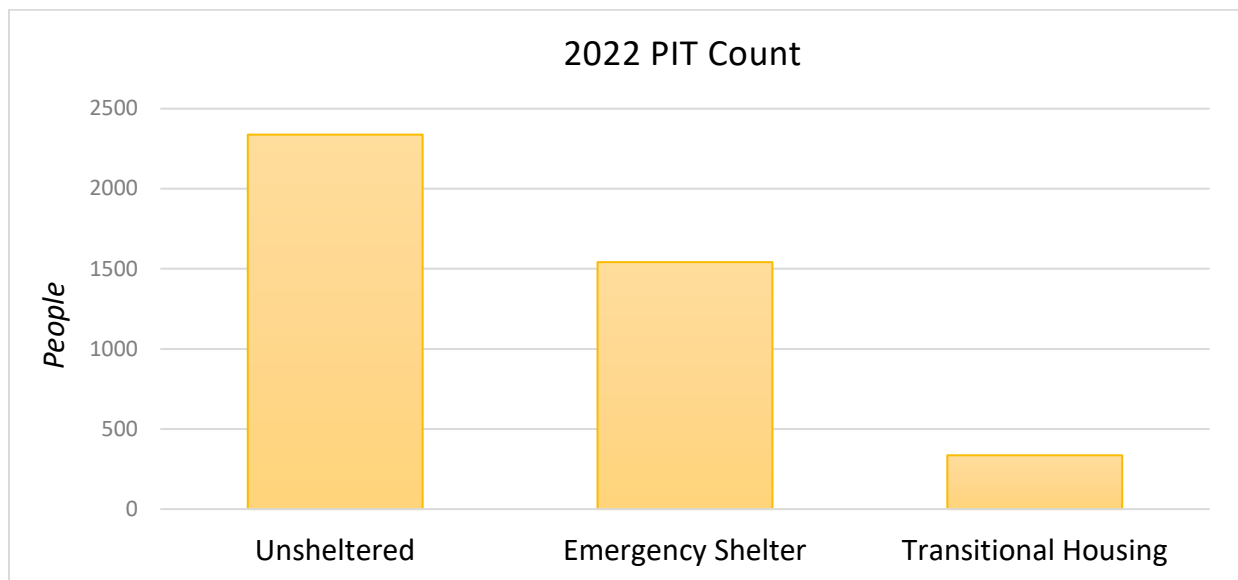
Gender: Demographic surveys indicate that the homeless population was approximately 60% male, 39% female, and 1% transgender or gender-nonconforming.

Age and Family Status: About 6% of the homeless population are parents, and about 11% of the homeless population are their children. Another 4% of the homeless population lived in families that included two or more adults but no children. The vast majority of the remaining 79% of people experiencing homelessness were single adults. There were almost no homeless children under the age of 18 living without adults, but about 2.5% of the homeless population had a head of household who was age 24 or younger.

Chronic Homelessness: About 25% of the homeless population was chronically homeless.

Veterans: About 5% of the homeless population (205 people) were identified as veterans. The true percentage is probably somewhat higher, because some of the people included in the count did not have a chance to say whether they were veterans.

Survivors of Domestic Violence: About 15% of the homeless population identified as survivors of domestic violence. The true percentage may be higher, because some people may not have felt comfortable discussing this topic with the surveyors.

Serious Mental Illness: About 19% of the homeless population identified as having a serious mental illness. The true percentage may be higher, because some people may not have felt comfortable discussing this topic with the surveyors.

Ethnicity: Very nearly 50% of the homeless population identified as Hispanic.

Race: There is a more detailed section on racial equity later in this report. However, in terms of raw totals, the count included:

- 255 people who identified as Native American or Alaskan Native
- 157 people who identified as Asian-American
- 657 people who identified as Black or African-American
- 32 people who identified as Native Hawaiians or Pacific Islanders
- 2,577 people who identified as White, and
- 538 people who identified as multi-racial or belonging to another race

THE HOUSING INVENTORY COUNT (HIC)

The 2022 Housing Inventory Count ("HIC") showed that:

- 1,795 units of emergency shelter were operational,
- 358 units of transitional housing were operational,
- 389 units of rapid re-housing were operational, and
- 2,559 units of permanent supportive housing were operational.

This adds up to 5,101 units of homeless-specific housing in Fresno County and Madera County on the night of February 23, 2022.

2022 Housing Inventory Count
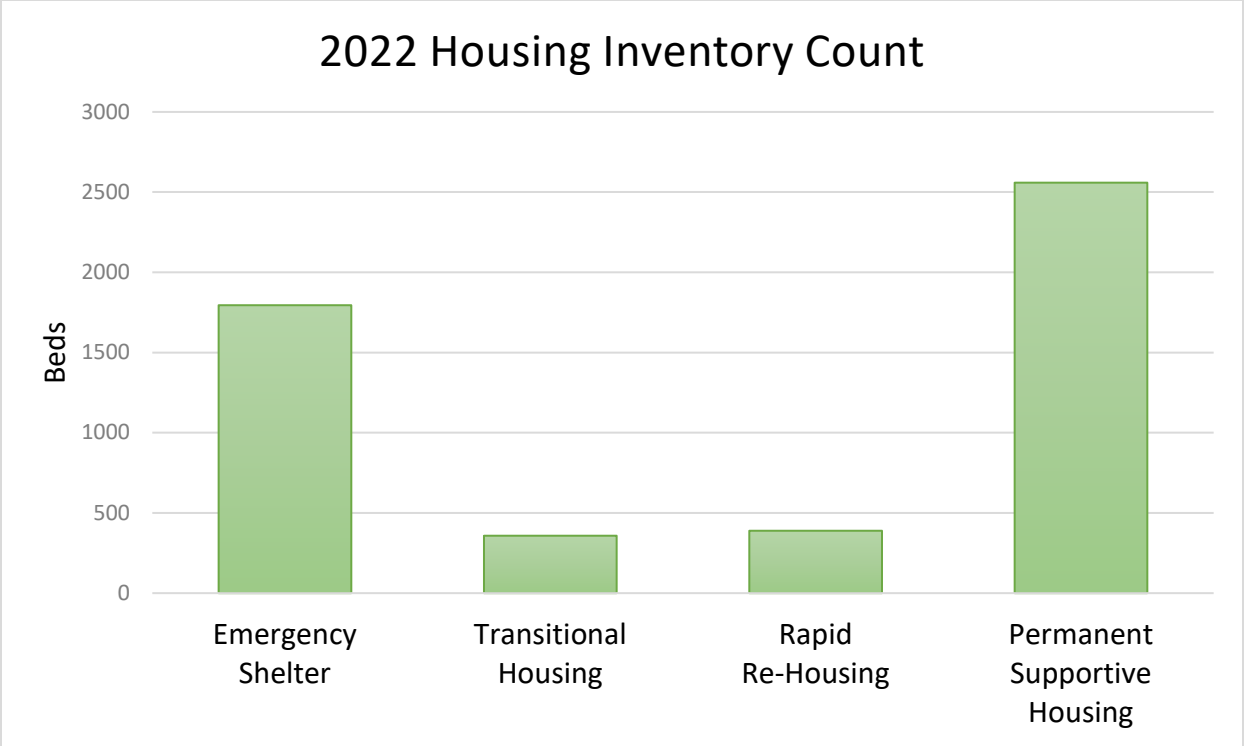
There are 644 Rapid Re-Housing (RRH) vouchers available in the FMCoC system of care. However, in order to be counted as "operational" for the Housing Inventory Count, a RRH bed must be actively occupied by a client who is receiving a rental subsidy and spending that subsidy on an apartment. Clients who are still looking for housing do not count toward the official RRH inventory, even if a voucher is available. Similarly, clients who have achieved financial independence do not count toward the official RRH inventory, even if they are still living in the same home that they moved into using a RRH program. Thus, the official Housing Inventory Count for Rapid Re-Housing is less than 644.

METHODOLOGY

SOURCES OF DATA

There were three main sources of data for the Point-in-Time Count:

- database records from the Homeless Management Information System ("HMIS")
- paper surveys from non-HMIS shelters, and
- electronic surveys from volunteers

Most of the emergency shelters and transitional housing programs in the FMCoC participate in HMIS, so we were able to access their records through that database for the PIT Count. The participating programs were reminded to update and clean their data during the week of the count, and the resulting data was checked for plausibility and to eliminate duplicate records. The HMIS records include detailed information on the demographics of the people participating in these programs. All data was anonymized before being reported to HUD – the only information that becomes part of the public record is the final tally of how many total people are included in various categories.

The emergency shelters and transitional housing programs in the FMCoC who do not participate in HMIS were given paper surveys to fill out on behalf of their clients. The surveys were delivered over the course of a few weeks, but all surveys were filled out based on data from the night of February 23, 2022.

Finally, people experiencing unsheltered homelessness were counted and interviewed by volunteers who canvassed the Fresno and Madera regions. A first group of volunteers went out on the night of February 23 to count heads and identify "hot spots" where there were large concentrations of people experiencing homelessness. Then, on February 24th, a second group of volunteers visited those hot spots to conduct detailed interviews, which included questions designed to make sure that everyone answering the interviews was (a) homeless on the night of February 23rd, and (b) had not yet answered a similar interview for this year's Count. The interviews are not mandatory; if some or all of the questions went un-answered, then the volunteers recorded any information that was visually apparent (e.g. household size) and continued along their designated routes.

EXTRAPOLATION TECHNIQUES

Because of the enormous size of Fresno and Madera Counties, it is not practical to send volunteers to physically survey every acre on the same night. Instead, we send interviewers to all of the "hot spots" where we know or suspect that there are dense

concentrations of people experiencing homelessness, and then we also send interviewers to a handful of zip codes that were selected in order to give a representative cross-section of the region. This cross-section includes samples from low-population-density, medium-population-density, and high-population-density zip codes.

Based on the average number of people experiencing homelessness who are found in each of the zip codes in the sample, we then extrapolate the number of people who are likely to be experiencing homelessness in the remaining zip codes, using their total population size and their population density. For example, zip code 93234, in Huron, had an actual count of 61 people experiencing homelessness, out of a total population of 7,258. Zip code 93625, in Fowler, had a total population of 6,700. Assuming that these two low-density zip codes have a similar rate of homelessness, we can therefore estimate the number of people experiencing homelessness in Fowler as $61 \times 6{,}700 \div 7{,}258 = 56$, for an extrapolated result of 56 people in Fowler experiencing homelessness. Because Fowler has a slightly smaller total population, we estimate that it will have a slightly smaller homelessness count.

The zip codes that are physically surveyed are partly the result of tradition, i.e., they are the zip codes that were canvassed back when the FMCoC first started performing these types of counts. Next year, the PIT Planning Committee will consider what new zip codes should be added to the physical survey to enhance the accuracy and reliability of these extrapolations.

A similar type of extrapolation was used to estimate the demographic breakdown of gender, race, and ethnicity. Some of the people who were included in the count were not directly interviewed, either because they chose not to answer questions, or because the clients could not be reached for a full interview. For example, in zip codes that were not physically surveyed, there was no way to ask the unsheltered people in that zip code about, e.g., their gender. To fill in the missing pieces, we assumed that people who did not complete an interview had the same demographics as the people who did complete an interview. For a few types of information, e.g., veteran status, the number of surveys that were missing a firm answer was large enough that we did not feel comfortable extrapolating, and so we simply stated the number of people who answered "yes" to the question.

Ideally, follow-up research should be done to find out whether people of particular races, genders, etc. are more or less likely to agree to complete an interview. In the meantime, we are grateful to our volunteers for going out and covering an enormous region in a very short period of time in order to get the information used in this report, and we believe it provides the best available snapshot of our community.

RESULTS OVER TIME

WHEN COUNTS ARE PERFORMED

HUD requires that all communities do a sheltered count each year, and an unsheltered count at least once every two years. Because the FMCoC values having accurate information about its homeless populations, the FMCoC has typically done both types of count each year. Since 2009, the FMCoC has done both types of counts every year except for 2012 and 2021. This gives us a relatively clear trend line, so the graphs in this report will assume that the unsheltered count for 2012 was the average of the unsheltered count for 2011 and 2013, and that the unsheltered count for 2021 was the average of the unsheltered count for 2020 and 2022. The averages are marked with an asterisk in the chart below.

PIT COUNTS OVER TIME

	Unsheltered	Emergency Shelter	Transitional Housing	Total Homelessness
2022	2,338	1,542	336	4,216
2021	2,510*	893	106	3,509*
2020	2,681	815	145	3,641
2019	2,069	353	86	2,508
2018	1,681	331	132	2,144
2017	1,529	333	154	2,016
2016	1,431	232	220	1,883
2015	1,183	208	331	1,722
2014	1,883	297	412	2,592
2013	2,537	184	410	3,131
2012	3,180*	141	529	3,850*
2011	3,822	773	540	5,135
2010	3,140	1,060	771	4,971
2009	2,457	1,061	827	4,345

PIT COUNTS OVER TIME
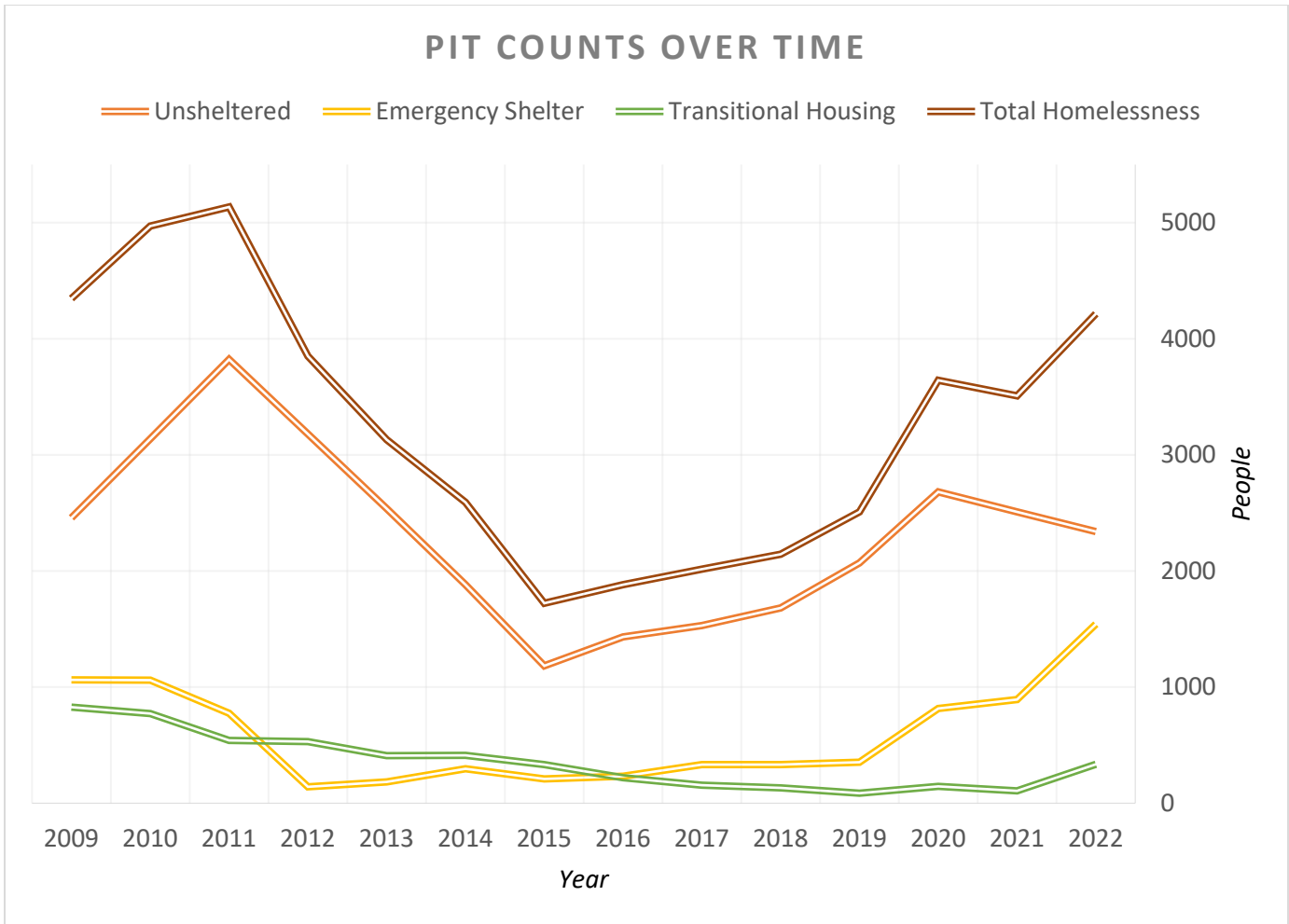
As shown in the table and graph above, the PIT Count over time in the FMCoC region rose to a peak in 2011, then gradually declined for several years, and then began increasing again, with a sharper increase over the last two years. This pattern roughly tracks the progress of the economy: homelessness rose during the last years of the Great Recession in 2009 and 2010, then fell over the next few years as the economy recovered, then began rising again around 2017 as droughts and layoffs reduced job market opportunities in the Central Valley, then further increased in 2019 as the COVID-19 pandemic interfered with service and entertainment jobs. Homelessness is often a lagging indicator of general poverty: when people are laid off from work, they often will be able to remain housed for a year or two using savings, help from family, and so on before running out of options.

Another explanation for some of the trends in the table and graph is that the flexibility and scale of the FMCoC's operations has been increasing since California began providing emergency homelessness funding in 2018. Clients who did not qualify for standard federal housing programs or who did not want to take advantage of those specific programs would likely have gone unserved in, e.g., 2016. As a result, they might have been more likely to lose contact with the system of care

and go uncounted during the PIT Count. By contrast, as new funding came online and offered new options to people experiencing homelessness, those new types of services may have prompted them to make contact with the system of care.

Although we make every effort to find all of the people experiencing homelessness, it is still easier to count people when they are talking to social workers and actively receiving some type of care than when they are out in the wilderness or hidden in an alley. Thus, as funding increases, the official count of people experiencing homelessness will usually also increase, even if the true count remains the same from one year to the next.

Finally, it is worth noting that the last few years have seen a truly impressive increase in the number of emergency shelter beds available in the FMCoC region. This has caused the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in the FMCoC to decrease by about 13%, even as the total number of people experiencing homelessness has been increasing.

HOUSING INVENTORY COUNTS OVER TIME

	Emergency Shelter	Transitional Housing	Rapid Re-Housing	Permanent Supportive Housing	Total Inventory
2022	1,795	358	389	2,559	5,101
2021	863	157	577	1,244	2,841
2020	898	148	767	1,382	3,195
2019	411	114	534	1,397	2,456
2018	425	146	526	1,308	2,405
2017	380	180	238	1,253	2,051
2016	412	265	157	1,114	1,948
2015	372	484	16	1,039	1,911
2014	435	489	53	884	1,861
2013	433	539	30	752	1,754
2012	368	668	0	676	1,712
2011	982	704	0	457	2,143
2010	713	892	0	367	1,972
2009	501	930	0	238	1,669

The Housing Inventory Count has nearly doubled compared to just one year ago. In general, the supply of beds in homeless-specific programs has been steadily expanding since 2009. The growth in emergency shelter beds and permanent supportive housing beds has been particularly dramatic.

One exception to this trend is the decline in rapid re-housing inventory since 2020. Although the size and number of the programs offering rapid re-housing has continued to grow even during the pandemic, it has been somewhat more difficult to actually place clients into apartment buildings. Because of the way HUD counts RRH inventory, a voucher that is currently going unused due to a tight housing market is not included in the Housing Inventory Count. Thus, despite having more RRH vouchers than in the past, the FMCoC's housing inventory count for Rapid Re-Housing is now somewhat lower. There have also been some data quality issues. For example, some of the RRH vouchers counted in 2020 should not have been counted toward the HIC because the vouchers had not yet been matched with a specific client and a specific apartment. We believe that these errors have now been corrected, which should help prevent any further decreases in RRH inventory.

HOUSING INVENTORY COUNT OVER TIME
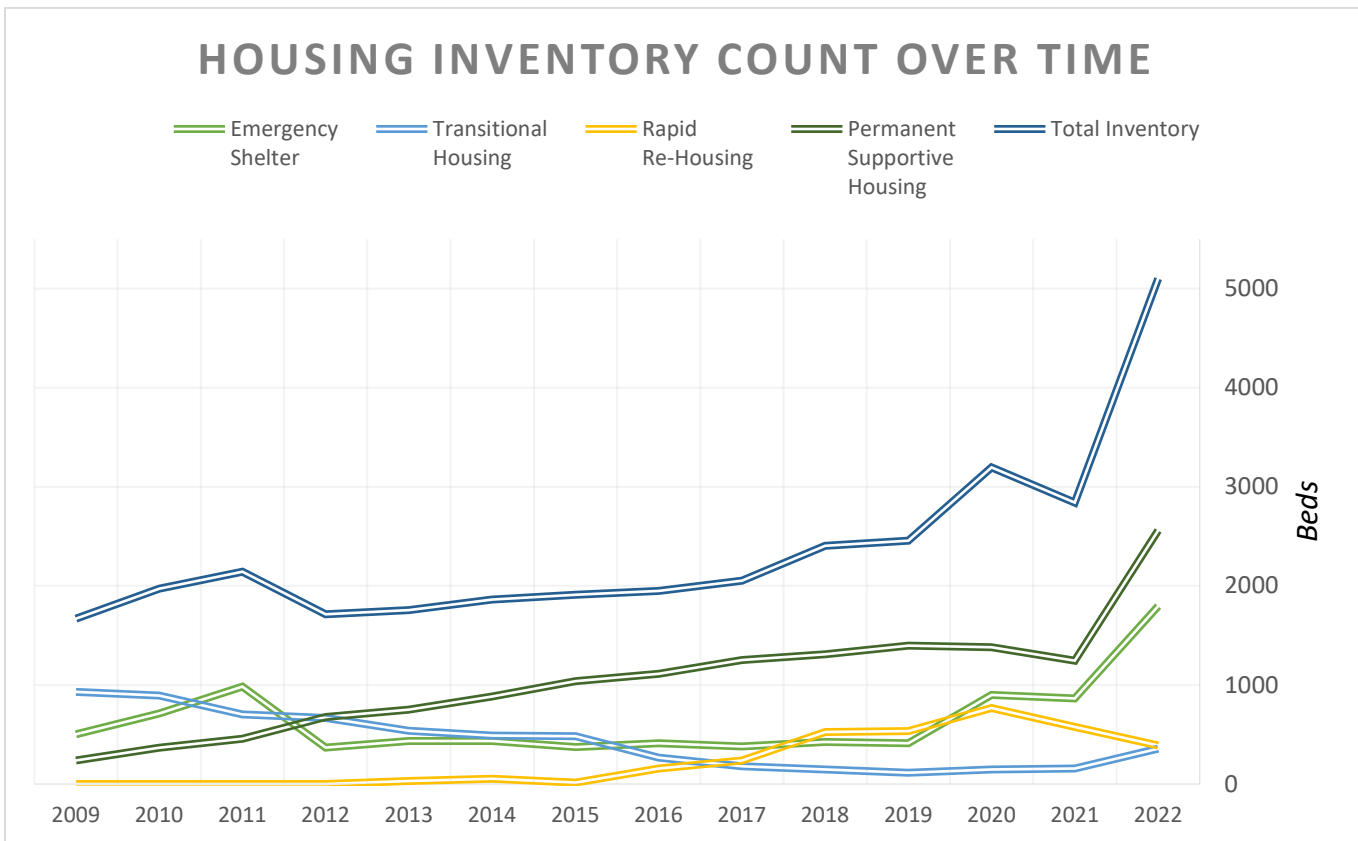
RESULTS BY GEOGRAPHY

Some readers may be interested in how the homeless population is distributed within the Fresno-Madera Continuum of Care's geographic area. For the most part, people experiencing homelessness in the FMCoC were accurately assigned to a particular region. Clients who were staying at an emergency shelter or transitional housing program were connected with that program and thus with that program's location.

Clients who were surveyed by volunteers typically had a geolocator code associated with their electronic survey; when the surveyor entered the client's answers, those answers were paired with the surveyor's current latitude and longitude, which allows us to match the survey with a particular zip code. Some volunteers lost their GPS connections while administering surveys; for these volunteers, we assumed that the volunteers were following their scheduled route and assigned their survey results to the zip code that the volunteer was supposed to be travelling through.

However, some of the clients in the final count were extrapolated based on results in other, similar zip codes. In other words, not every zip code was physically surveyed. Because of this limitation, we cannot offer a precise breakdown of how many people were experiencing homelessness in each zip code. Instead, we report homelessness in four geographic regions: Fresno County, Fresno City, Madera County, and Madera City. The "County" results refer to the entire region of the county, minus the area of the city. For example, anyone living in Selma, Sanger, Clovis, or the rural areas of Fresno County (but not within the city limits of the City of Fresno) would be included in the Fresno County count.

	Unsheltered	Sheltered
Fresno City	1,696	1,701
Fresno County	514	27
Madera City	73	150
Madera County	55	0
TOTAL	2,338	1.878

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was drafted by Jason Green-Lowe, an independent technical assistance provider. Mr. Green-Lowe can be reached at jason@greenloweTA.com.