WILDER

WILDER RESEARCH

2026 Minnesota Homeless Study: Background and Changes

How is the Wilder Research Minnesota Homeless Study different than the January PIT Count?

The Minnesota Homeless Study has been conducted every 3 years since 1991. It uses an expanded definition of homelessness (which includes people who are temporarily doubled up), includes in-depth, comprehensive questions, and offers participants $20 to thank them for their time. We are independent from HUD and other federal mandates. Similar to the PIT, we partner with the Institute for Community Alliances (ICA) to obtain counts of people staying in shelter. Shelter counts are combined with our interview data at non-shelter locations to compile a total count of people experiencing homelessness

Additional details about the study and the information shared above can be found at our website.

https://mnhomeless.org/

Changes this year

We know that it's a difficult time for homeless service providers. We want to make things as easy as possible for providers and people experiencing homelessness to participate in the study. We've made the following changes:

- Shortened and streamlined survey to reduce burden on participants
- Increased support for providers to implement the study, especially in greater Minnesota, including greater availability of Wilder-provided volunteer interviewers
- Utilize HMIS data for shelter counts for most programs
- Disseminate results through shorter, easier to digest reports and issue briefs

Important details about the study

- Interviews are conducted face-to face, by program staff or volunteer interviewers organized by Wilder Research.
- Interviews are conducted with people experiencing homelessness in emergency shelters, transitional housing, domestic violence shelters, and non-shelter locations (e.g. hot food programs, libraries, encampments, etc.).
- Each person who completes the interview gets $20 cash.
- Each interview takes around 30-45 minutes to complete

Minnesota Homeless Study	January Point in Time Count
When:	**When:**
Every three years (next survey: October 22, 2026)	January (every year)
Implemented by:	**Implemented by:**
Independently planned and implemented by Wilder Research, in partnership with hundreds of homeless service providers, local Continuum of Care Coordinators (CoCs), and the Institute for Community Alliances (ICA).	Local Continuum of Care Coordinators (CoCs), mandated by the federal government (HUD)
Funded by:	**Funded by:**
The Minnesota Legislature and other public and private funders.	Federal government (HUD)
Data collected:	**Data collected:**
Highly detailed snapshot of both the prevalence of homelessness in MN and of the circumstances of the people experiencing it. For people experiencing homelessness outside of the shelter system – doubled up or unsheltered - most of this data is not available through other sources. Information collected includes demographic characteristics, location, physical and mental health, childhood and other past experiences, income and benefits, service needs, and children and families experiencing homelessness. Interviews take around 30-45 minutes to complete.	• Sheltered population: HMIS-participating shelters collect large amounts of data for people experiencing homelessness in the shelter system. Not all shelter programs participate in HMIS so the PIT relies on them to fill out shelter surveys. • Unsheltered population: The unsheltered PIT survey asks a limited set of items on HUD-required data and other topics.
Who is eligible:	**Who is eligible:**
• People living in unsheltered situations (outside or in other places not meant for habitation) • People staying in time-limited emergency shelter, transitional housing, domestic violence shelters, and hotel/motel voucher programs • People who are doubled-up or couch surfing who meet the federal definition of homelessness	• People living in unsheltered situations (outside or in other places not meant for habitation) • People staying in emergency shelter, transitional housing, domestic violence shelters, and hotel/motel voucher programs
Administration Method:	
• The Wilder study has extensive volunteer engagement led by full-time, dedicated Wilder staff to help with the survey. • More than 1,000 trained volunteers are mobilized and spread out across 400 locations statewide on the night of the study. • Additional outreach is conducted to coordinate interviewing people experiencing homeless outside of the shelter system with food kitchens, safe waiting areas, schools, street outreach workers, and public safety partners.	The Unsheltered PIT count relies on trained volunteers to administer a common unsheltered survey or unsheltered observation tool. Each CoC Coordinator is responsible for coordinating volunteer recruitment for the PIT count. This includes outreach to food kitchens, safe waiting areas, schools, street outreach, and public safety partners. Counts for people experiencing homelessness in the shelter system are obtained primarily through HMIS with non-HMIS participating programs completing shelter surveys
Participant incentive:	**Participant incentive:**
$20	Varies by county – not all provide an incentive