



**OREGON HOUSING *and*  
COMMUNITY SERVICES**

725 SUMMER STREET NE, SUITE B | SALEM, OR 97301  
503-986-2000 | [www.oregon.gov/OHCS](http://www.oregon.gov/OHCS)

Sept. 29, 2023

Representative Maxine Dexter, Chair  
Representative Mark Gamba, Vice-Chair  
Representative Jeff Helfrich, Vice-Chair  
House Interim Committee on Housing and Homelessness  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, OR 97301-4048

**Re: Oregon’s Emergency Homelessness Response**

Chair Dexter, Vice-Chairs Gamba and Helfrich, and Members of the House Interim Committee on Housing and Homelessness:

We at Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS) are grateful for our continued partnership with the Oregon Legislature. Thank you for your time and thoughtful questions during yesterday’s committee meeting. While we were able to respond to your questions during the hearing, we wanted to provide additional information via written responses:

**What is the plan if a community is not on track to meet their goals?**

Right now, local communities around the state are working hard to reach their goals. OHCS is supporting them and is committed to accountability and transparency in this effort, both for our agency and local partners.

As part of their contracting process with OHCS, local communities were required to list when they anticipated reaching metric milestones in working toward the total shelter bed creation and rehousing goals they committed to. MAC groups were required to outline monthly milestones, and Local Planning Groups will be required to provide quarterly milestones as the contracted period to reach their goals is through June 30, 2025.

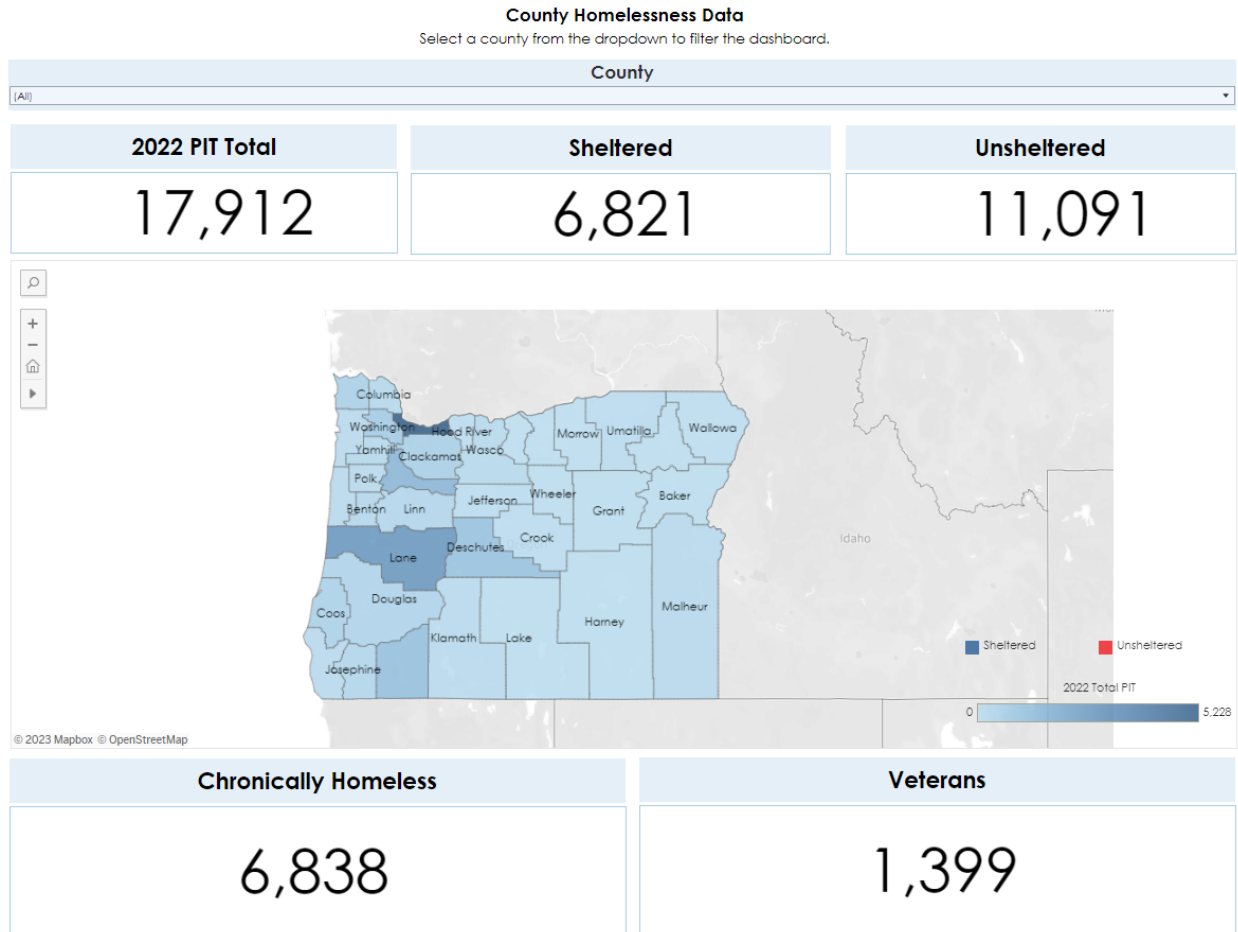
OHCS is regularly monitoring and tracking subgrantee goals and will work to collaborate and support partners to find solutions to reach them wherever possible.

If a community is not meeting a milestone they committed to, we see the first step in that process always being a conversation— there is a lot that a number doesn’t tell us. For example, a local service provider may be experiencing a challenge with data entry and would benefit from additional training and technical assistance, or a group may be about to secure additional units they can utilize to rehouse more households. OHCS is also prepared to make specific recommendations to help keep groups on track. For example, we may suggest that a local group consider bringing on additional service provider subgrantees to increase capacity in order to reach their goals. If it is determined a local group’s goals cannot be met, and as a last resort, OHCS may reduce that group’s funding and redistribute those resources – with a corresponding increase in goals — elsewhere to ensure the overall goals of this response effort are met.



**How many people experiencing homelessness in Oregon are there?**

According to the 2022 Point-In-Time (PIT) Count, there were 17,912 people experiencing homelessness, with 11,091 experiencing unsheltered homelessness in Oregon. This data, along with other key information, is readily available on [OHCS' County Profiles Dashboard](#), a tool that provides data about various housing dynamics across Oregon. (see below)



It is important to note that due to the complexities of capturing this data, the PIT count is considered an undercount. In rural communities, where many service providers have limited capacity and resources, capturing an accurate count of people experiencing homelessness can be very challenging. The PIT count also often less accurately counts families whose experiences of homelessness may be less visible than that of single individuals. Since the PIT count occurs once every other year in January, it doesn't count people who may become homeless episodically for a few days or a few months other times of the year. And finally, the PIT often doesn't reflect people who are experiencing homelessness but may be "doubled-up" with friends or family or moving across temporary living situations.



**There are different reasons why people are homeless. How is Oregon ensuring people get the services and help they need? What major challenges are we seeing?**

Every person experiencing homelessness has their own story and journey. There are many different reasons why they are experiencing homelessness- and that reason often drives the services and support someone needs.

Shelters, street outreach workers and providers are responding to this need by working hard to integrate behavioral health supports, medical services, case management, employment services, linkages to veterans supports, culturally specific services into the services they offer. Similarly, a fundamental element of rehousing is ensuring that the person receiving services that meet their specific needs, whether that be case management, financial assistance, mental health services, substance abuse treatment, housing search support, and more.

Regarding challenges, homeless services providers often face challenges recruiting and retaining skilled staff to provide the types of services and supports that are needed by the people they serve. Due to challenges securing consistent and adequate funding, low wages, and the high demands of the field, staff turnover is often high.

Additionally, one-time investments create challenges for many of the services providers OHCS works with. Rapidly scaling up programs without knowing if additional funding will be available creates challenges in being able to staff up appropriately, operate programs over a period of time that allows for iterative improvements, and build trust with community members. They need to know they can expand and then actually keep their staff and continue providing programs and services. Funding ups and downs also make it more difficult to track progress over time. It's difficult to compare year over year when the level of services increases or decreases rapidly. Stable, ongoing funding will enable providers to focus more on the critical services they provide and less on ensuring they keep their doors open each month.

**How much have homelessness investments shifted between 2021 and 2023?**

The 2021-23 biennium in particular saw significant investments across the state, which depended on a large influx of federal funds, were one-time. In the 2021-23 biennium, OHCS saw investments in shelter and homeless services totaling over \$102 million.

In the 2023 Session, the Oregon Legislature made historic investments in homelessness response. At this point in the 2023-25 biennium, OHCS has received over \$75 million in shelter-related funding *in addition* to the \$256.9 million the Legislature allocated for shelter and rehousing to support Oregon's Emergency Homelessness Response effort via HB 5019 and continuing funds that will allow us to maintain the progress achieved allocated by SB 5511 (2023) and SB 5506 SB 5511 (2023). It is, however, important to note that these are one-time funds.

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I look forward to continuing conversations on our ongoing partnership to address homelessness across the state. On behalf of OHCS and our local partners, thank you for your leadership.

Mike Savara  
Special Initiatives Director  
Oregon Housing and Community Services

