



Strategic Partnerships Toward Ending Homelessness

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: HOMEWARD ANNOUNCES ANNUAL COUNT OF
PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN POLK COUNTY**

The January Point-in-Time Count revealed 715 individuals in shelters, transitional housing, and living outdoors, an 11% increase from 2023.

May 17, 2024 **DES MOINES, IA-** Today, [Homeward](#) released the results of the [2024 Point-in-Time \(PIT\) Count](#), a survey of individuals experiencing sheltered or unsheltered homelessness in Polk County on a single night. The 2024 count identified 715 people experiencing homelessness on January 25.

“The Count functions as a snapshot of homelessness in our community,” said Angie Arthur, executive director of Homeward, Polk County’s homeless services planning entity. “This data is an important tool to assess how our homeless response system is performing and to identify the needs of our neighbors experiencing homelessness.”

Over the course of 24 hours, homeless outreach staff and volunteers conducted brief, conversational surveys with unsheltered residents in greater Des Moines (those living in a place not meant for human habitation, such as cars, camps, or on the street). Staff offered housing assessment, support services, a bag with supplies, gift cards and snacks to all individuals interviewed. Emergency shelters and transitional housing programs also provided housing inventory counts of their residents experiencing sheltered homelessness on the night of January 24th. Those numbers demonstrated that the homeless system is operating near 100% capacity, with almost all 1394 total units being occupied. These usage rates are the highest on record.

“We’re very thankful to all the homeless service providers who partnered to support the Point-in-Time Count,” Arthur said. “It’s a good representation of how this community comes together to support our residents experiencing homelessness, improve systems, and increase resources.”

The 2024 PIT data was verified, de-duplicated, and analyzed by the [Institute for Community Alliances \(ICA\)](#), Homeward’s partner in maintaining data on homelessness programs in Polk County. ICA also helped document demographic and subpopulation data for residents experiencing homelessness.



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Some highlights from the 2024 Point-in-Time Count include:

- This year's total PIT number of individuals experiencing homelessness was 715, which is up 11% from 2023 (644). The number of unsheltered individuals identified in January 2024 was 147, which is also an increase from 2023 (129) and a record high.
- 84% of unsheltered individuals reported their last permanent address as Polk County. 12% previously lived in another Iowa county. 4.5% of individuals came from out of state.
- Youth homelessness continues to decrease while veteran homelessness remains stable due to coordinated efforts and additional resources to best serve those populations.
- The number of individuals reporting that they were fleeing domestic violence was the highest total in the last 6 years at 89, which is up 37% from 2023 (65). The 2023 number was also the highest number in the past 5 years.
- As is often the case across the nation, Black residents are over-represented in the homelessness population. 22% of the 2024 PIT population identified as Black/African American compared to 8.9% of Polk County residents who are Black/African American.

Results from the January 2024 Count will help Greater Des Moines conduct homeless outreach throughout the year and illuminate demographic, programmatic, and infrastructure gaps.

“As housing vacancy rates hover at 5%, homeless rates in central Iowa will continue to rise. This trend is not unique to Iowa but is being experienced nationally in population hubs where the availability of affordable housing is not keeping up with population increases,” Arthur said.

Data is also reported to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) which requires Point-In-Time numbers to distribute federal homelessness funding. Homeward coordinates the Polk County federal funding each year, distributing \$5.9 million to homeless service partners providing permanent housing, outreach, and supportive services for people experiencing homelessness.

About Homeward

Homeward serves as Polk County's homelessness planning organization, forging strategic partnerships toward ending homelessness. By distributing funding, resources, and data, Homeward seeks to create an efficient, effective homeless response system that meets all residents' strengths and needs. We lead community-wide homelessness planning efforts to ensure that one day, everyone in Polk County will have a safe place to call home. To be part of the solution, visit <https://www.homewardiowa.org/take-action>

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