

WHAT IS THE PIT COUNT?

The Point-in-Time Count — and Why It Matters for NORMAN / Cleveland County

Every year, on a single night in late January, communities across America step outside and count. They walk the streets, check the shelters, scan the parks, and document every man, woman, and child they can find who has no place to call home. That night is called the **Point-in-Time Count** — the PIT Count.

What Is the PIT Count?

HUD requires every Continuum of Care in the country to conduct it. For Norman and Cleveland County, that is CoC OK-504. The 2024 PIT Count found 240 individuals — 129 in emergency shelters, 20 in transitional housing, and 91 unsheltered on the streets, in vehicles, or in places not meant for human habitation.

Who Is Counted?

The PIT Count includes anyone meeting HUD's definition of literal homelessness on count night:

- People in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or safe havens
- People sleeping outside — in parks, under bridges, in encampments
- People living in vehicles, abandoned buildings, or other places not meant for habitation
- Veterans, families with children, unaccompanied youth, and chronically homeless individuals

It does not include people who are couch surfing, doubled up with family or friends, or staying in hotels — though those individuals may still qualify for local services and are tracked separately through by-name lists.

How NORMAN / Cleveland County Conducts It

The OK-504 PIT committee — including partners from the City of Norman, Thunderbird Clubhouse, and service providers across Cleveland County — begins planning each fall. On

count night, volunteers canvass from early morning, using digital survey tools to document every unsheltered individual they encounter. Shelters report their totals simultaneously through HMIS. The data is reviewed, audited for quality, and submitted to HUD by late April.

Why January and Not July?

The answer is both practical and strategic. In January, unsheltered individuals tend to congregate in more visible locations — seeking warmth under bridges, in doorways, near heating sources, in vehicles clustered together. In July, people are far more spread out, sleeping in parks, wooded areas, and dispersed locations that are far harder to canvas. A January count simply finds more people.

HUD also requires the same late-January window for every CoC in the country, creating a consistent national baseline. If one city counted in July and another in October, the data would be meaningless for comparison.

There is an important irony, however. Even in January, a single-night count almost certainly understates the true scope of the problem. The people hardest to find on a cold January night — those deep in rural Cleveland County, in remote locations, or deliberately hidden — are often the most vulnerable. The real number is almost certainly higher than any PIT Count captures.

This is precisely why robust by-name list systems like HMIS are so critical. They track individuals year-round — not just on one night in January — ensuring that no one falls through the cracks between counts and that the system's response is continuous, not seasonal.

Why It Matters

The PIT Count is far more than a headcount. It is the foundation upon which everything else is built:

- **It determines federal funding.** HUD allocates hundreds of millions of dollars in CoC grants based in large part on PIT Count data. Communities that count accurately and completely — and demonstrate documented need — receive more.
- **It measures progress.** A declining PIT Count is proof that the system is working. Houston / Harris County's 63% reduction since 2011 is visible in their annual PIT numbers — and that proof attracts more investment.

- **It drives strategy.** By-name, subgroup data tells providers exactly where the gaps are — which populations are growing, which interventions are working, and where to focus resources next.
- **It creates accountability.** When a community commits to Functional Zero, the PIT Count is how it knows whether it is getting there — and how it proves it to the world.

For NORMAN / Cleveland County, the next PIT Count is January 2027. Preparation begins this fall. Every volunteer, every agency, and every partner who participates makes the count more complete — and a more complete count means more resources for the people who need them most.

Get Involved

To learn more or participate in the next PIT Count, contact:

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