

Greater Bangor Area 2019 Point in Week² (PIW²)

Regional III Homeless Council -- Not-in-Shelter Homeless Count

Point in Week 2 (PIW²) was held from July 8 through July 21, 2019, and was designed to count the total number of persons in the Greater Bangor Area experiencing *not-in-shelter* homelessness. The original concept sought to enumerate *unsheltered* homelessness *only* (sleeping outside or in a place not meant for habitation); however, recognizing the fluidity of prospects available to persons networked in the community, and/or the ability to sometimes afford a hotel/motel room, and/or opportunities to find a crisis, shelter or psychiatric bed, a broader framework was created to more accurately account for persons experiencing *not-in-shelter* homelessness. The Council's recommendations and assessment are at the end of this report.

The impetus for this count was a response to observable, early summer increases in homeless encampments and persons sleeping in places not meant for habitation. In general, homeless encampments nationally have grown more than 1,300% in the past 10 years -- 80% of that increase taking place in the last few years (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, Tent City, 2017). The purpose of the count was to better provide an assessment of need so as to enhance homeless services and prioritize resources to improve the lives of those served by the homeless response system. The design and implementation team was comprised of an ad hoc subcommittee of the Region III Homeless Committee, which included agency representatives from Community Care, Community Health & Counseling Services (CHCS), Bangor Area Homeless Shelter, and Hope House Health & Living Center. Other local agencies and MaineHousing representatives attempted to participate and did contribute to design and need discussions during the Region III Homeless Council full meetings; however, due to the need to design a protocol and organize quickly, scheduling barriers were prohibitive for some, which interfered with direct participation in this ad hoc committee.

The count was originally designed to be one week long; however, overwhelming consensus among members of the ad hoc committee and Region III Homeless Council at the end of the first week concluded the week-long effort to have been inadequate. A reasonable number of persons known to be living outside and not captured, coupled with rumors of additional unfound encampments, played a role in convincing the committee to extend the count an additional week.

Persons experiencing homelessness in shelters were not counted unless they were expecting to stay outside the night of the interview, or stayed outside the night before the interview. As outlined below in the *data* section, some people expected to find a couch, hotel/motel, or to be admitted to a crisis or psychiatric facility, or came from those destinations. Only heads of households were interviewed; though, the number in each household was recorded. In addition to agencies collecting data during the normal course of operations, including normal outreach operations, two separate multi-agency coordinated outreach efforts took place. A sample count sheet and list of participating agencies can be found attached to this report.

Strong efforts were made to protect the identity of persons being counted, while balancing efforts to minimize duplication (counting a household more than once). A robust system was developed where gender, the day born (1-31), age as a whole number, 3rd letter of last name, and last letter of first name was used to create a unique string of characters significantly difficult to decipher, if not improbable, while providing enough information to reasonably identify duplicate interviews. For this count, 97 households totaling 157 individuals were recorded. Sixteen (16) head-of-households were determined to be duplicates (16.5%), using 4 conditions as follows: 1) unique string match; 2) working cell phone status match; 3) zip code of last address match; and 4) number of months homeless match. Meeting these 4 standards, 9 people were counted twice, 2 people were counted 3 times, and 1 person was counted 4 times resulting in 16 records being removed from count sheet submissions. After removing duplicates, the final dataset was comprised of 81 households representing 129 individuals (refer to “Lost Data Interpretation” section for additional information).

The count sheets and electronic spreadsheets for this count have been archived securely.

The intent of this count was to inform the council on regional need so as to improve lives, not cause harm or discomfort. If a person did not want to be counted, no pressure was applied. As of this writing, no distress or discomfort resulting from these interviews was reported and only one person was reported to have refused. One person objected to sharing their day born, age as a whole number, last letter of first name, third letter of last name, and zip code of last address; however, they consented to being counted for purposes of quantifying the unsheltered homeless in the area. The letter “n” was recorded for all interview elements objected to.

The target population for this count focused on those who experienced *not-in-shelter* homelessness the night before the interview or were expecting to experience *not-in-shelter* homelessness the night of the interview, with interviews taking place between July 8, 2019 and July 21, 2019. Three (3.7%) households experienced homelessness on one night, but not the other. The remainder (78; 96.3%) experienced homelessness the night before the interview and expected to experience homeless the night of the interview.

Future count methodologies and design should look at language and/or additional questions seeking to determine prior homeless experience, such as:

- Have you experienced unsheltered or in-shelter homelessness the past year;
- Have you ever participated in a program designed for homeless or formerly homeless persons, such as PATH, ESHAP, WISH, etc.; and
- If there was room in a shelter tonight, would you stay in a shelter?

Additionally, future count methodologies should consider changing from creating a unique string including the *age* of a person and, instead, substitute the *year born*. The Region III Homeless Council does not believe this subtle change will negatively influence participation, will continue to adequately protect the identity of those being counted, and benefit future counts as unique identification strings will remain static longitudinally – age changes over time; however, year born is static. By capturing age instead of year born, future counts will be able to assess participation over time, which will enable the Council to better measure year-over-year progress and trends.

Interview Questions

First question

Interviewers first asked if the head of household had been interviewed for PIW². If the answer was “yes,” the interview stopped and information was not collected again.

Working Cell with Minutes

This question, which could only be answered “yes” if the head of household had a cellular telephone with minutes that could make a call without being connected to WiFi (internet), was asked for two purposes: 1) to gather data on access to communication devices; and 2) as a warm-up question to loosen conversation.

From Bangor

This question could be answered “yes” if the head of household worked, lived, went to school, or had/has family in Bangor at any time past or present. Otherwise, the answer was recorded as “no.”

Zip Code of Last Address

The zip code of the place interviewee lived for 6 months or more, most recently. The city and state were to be entered if zip code was unknown. Interviewers were instructed to go as far back in a person’s history as necessary to find a time and place a person lived for 6+ months.

Where Slept/Sleep

Where an interviewee slept or was sleeping was limited to the following responses: Jail, hosp, psych hosp., outside, car, couch, shelter, own place, PNMH, or other (PNMH = other Place Not Meant for Habitation).

Months Homeless Since Last July

Consistent with HMIS reporting, responses were recorded as whole months rounded to the next month. For example, 45 days of homelessness was recorded as 2.

Gender

Gender was recorded as “m,” (male) “f,” (female), or “gnc” (gender non-conforming) as the gender identity self-reported by the interviewee.

Day Born

Recorded as the day (1-31) of the head of household’s date of birth.

Age

Recorded as the whole number of the head of household’s age, rather than date of birth, which is a less ambiguous demographic identifier,

Third Letter of Last Name and Last Letter of First Name

As indicated, the corresponding characters are recorded and like age, are simple identifies used to assist in identifying duplicate records while maintaining a high level of identity concealment.

Number in Household

Recorded as the number of people in the head of household’s household including the head of household.

Greater Bangor Area 2019 Point in Week² (PIW²) Data

Regional III Homeless Council -- Not-in-Shelter Homeless Count

Unique Households:	81	Total Male HH:	54	67%
Unique Individuals:	129	Total Female HH:	81	33%
Average age:	37.9	Average Age Male:	39.33	
		Average Age Female:	35.00	
From Bangor:	47	58%	Zip Code of Last Address 04401/2	46
			Avg. Months	57%
Has working cell:	39	48%	Homeless Past 12 Mo:	7.6 months
Last Night Slept...		Tonight Will Sleep...		
Outside	46	57%	Outside	49
				61%
Car/Camper	7	9%	Car/Camper	7
				9%
Couch	17	21%	Couch	14
				17%
PNMH	7	9%	PNMH	7
				9%
Psych/Crisis	0	0%	Psych/Crisis	2
				3%
Hotel/Motel	1	1%	Hotel/Motel	1
				1%
Place Owned/Rent	3	4%	Place Owned/Rent	0
				0%
Households with 1 Person	54	67%	Households with > 2 Persons	7
				8%
Households with 2 Persons	20	25%		
1 Person Households Female	12	22%	1 Person Households Male	42
				78%

Notable Numbers

Cell Phones. Of significance, **only 48% of head of households interviewed had a working cellular telephone**, with minutes, and able to make or receive a call. Lack of access to a cell phone causes:

- **an inability to provide a contact number for resumes, rental applications, emergency services, or children’s schools;**
- **Significant barriers to communicating with potential employment opportunities, landlord/property managers, children’s schools, care management/housing navigators, and social service programs;** and
- **Decreased safety.** An inability to call 9-1-1 or other emergency services; and

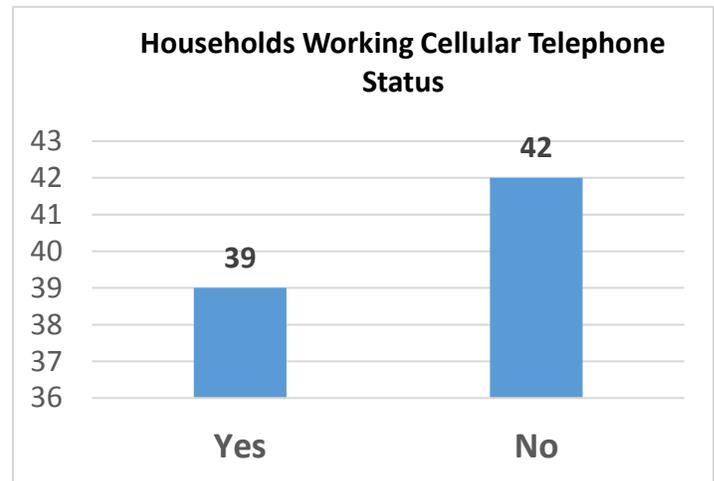


Figure 1. Distribution of head of households with working cellular telephone. This question could only be answered “yes” if the head of household had a cellular telephone with minutes that could make a call without being connected to WiFi (internet).



Figure 2. Average number of months homeless in the past 12 months. Consistent with HMIS reporting, responses were recorded as whole months rounded to the next month. For example, 45 days of homelessness was recorded as 2.

- **an inability to maintain contact with social networks (friends and family), maintain social benefits, connect to the internet, receive push notifications, and benefit from services such as Google Maps and banking apps.**

In addition to serious safety considerations, significant barriers to treatment, housing, and coordination of care result when outreach, housing navigator, peer, recovery coach, and care management workers are unable to connect with clients.

In the Past 12 Months, Average Months Homeless Since Last July. The average number of month’s homeless among the 2019 PIW² population was 7.6 months, representing an average of 228 days for all households. Of note, 51 of 81 (63%) qualify for the full definition of LTS based on the last 12 months of

homelessness alone. While a disturbing number of people without cellphones living in high-risk situations is of immediate safety concern, perhaps the most alarming result from this count is the number of Long-term Stayers (LTS), who are potentially in a place of eligibility for prioritization of resources.

Recent regional Housing First efforts to end homelessness have adhered to the recognized best practice of targeting resources to the most vulnerable, longest-term homeless. As a result, significant recent initiatives have meaningfully reduced Chronic and LTS Homelessness in shelters the past few years. Coordinated outreach efforts and collaborative approaches, coupled with aligning system-wide resources targeting the most vulnerable and longest-term homeless, have made exciting improvements in opening flow through the

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homeless response system ensuring resources are getting to the right people, resulting in a more efficient and just system. While the homeless response system has regionally improved housing outcomes for those experiencing homelessness in shelters, the volume of regional *unsheltered* homelessness is of significant concern as we approach winter.

In addition to the primary concern, which is the safety of those experiencing unsheltered homelessness, there are significant system and program issues. Shelters are expending noteworthy, and largely unfunded, resources triaging needs, mediating conflicts to find temporary or semi-permanent housing opportunities, providing safety gear for survival in the elements, and delivering basic care/case management supports for persons not in shelters. In addition to a host of program redesigns necessary to accommodate the acute needs of persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness, shelters are the *de facto* referral for most persons experiencing homelessness, and rightly so; however, the resources required to coordinate the needs of someone unsheltered are significantly greater than coordinating the needs of someone in shelter. Communitywide participation in Coordinated Entry is of paramount importance to improving and saving lives and maximizing homeless resources.

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Unsheltered homelessness requires different and explicitly coordinated engagement approaches. While our homeless response system is well equipped with best-practice outreach protocols, the region has not experienced a significant volume of unsheltered individuals warranting an intentional coordinate approach.

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For example, unless LAAs accept self-report and professional outreach certification of unsheltered homelessness, housing subsidies will not be an effective intervention in ending homelessness in the region. Previously, the handful of persons sleeping outside have been managed as special cases. Now, however, there are nearly as many,

and possibly more, people sleeping outside than in our shelters. Coordinating outreach interventions with screenings, assessments, and shelter prioritization, with prioritization of housing intervention type and system supports once housed, are necessary elements for the region’s homeless response system flow and essential to maximizing resources to ensure the greatest number and the most vulnerable, with the longest histories of homelessness, are receiving the those resources.

Distribution of where slept last night and where will sleep tonight.

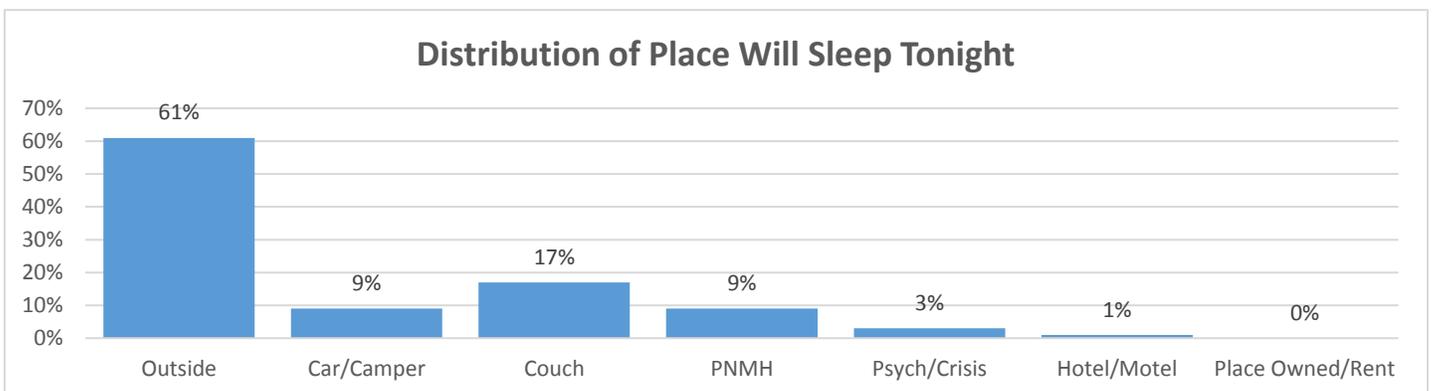


Figure 3. Distribution of Place Will Sleep Tonight. The interview was limited to the following responses: Jail, hosp, psych hosp., outside, car, couch, shelter, own place, PNMH, or other (PNMH = other Place Not Meant for Habitation).

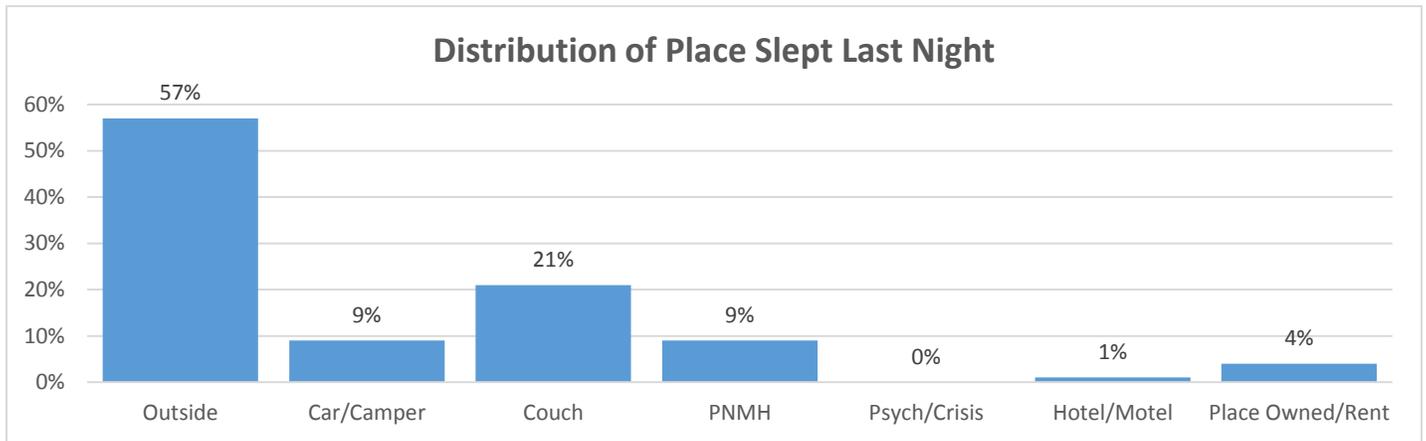


Figure 4. Distribution of Place S. The interview was limited to the following responses: Jail, hosp, psych hosp., outside, car, couch, shelter, own place, PNMH, or other (PNMH = other Place Not Meant for Habitation).

Zip Code of Last Address. Two (2) persons either didn't know or refused to supply their zip code of last address. One numerical sequence (33374) was determined to not be a zip code when checked against the USPS database of current zip codes. 78 of 81 (96.2%) were determined to be valid zip codes.

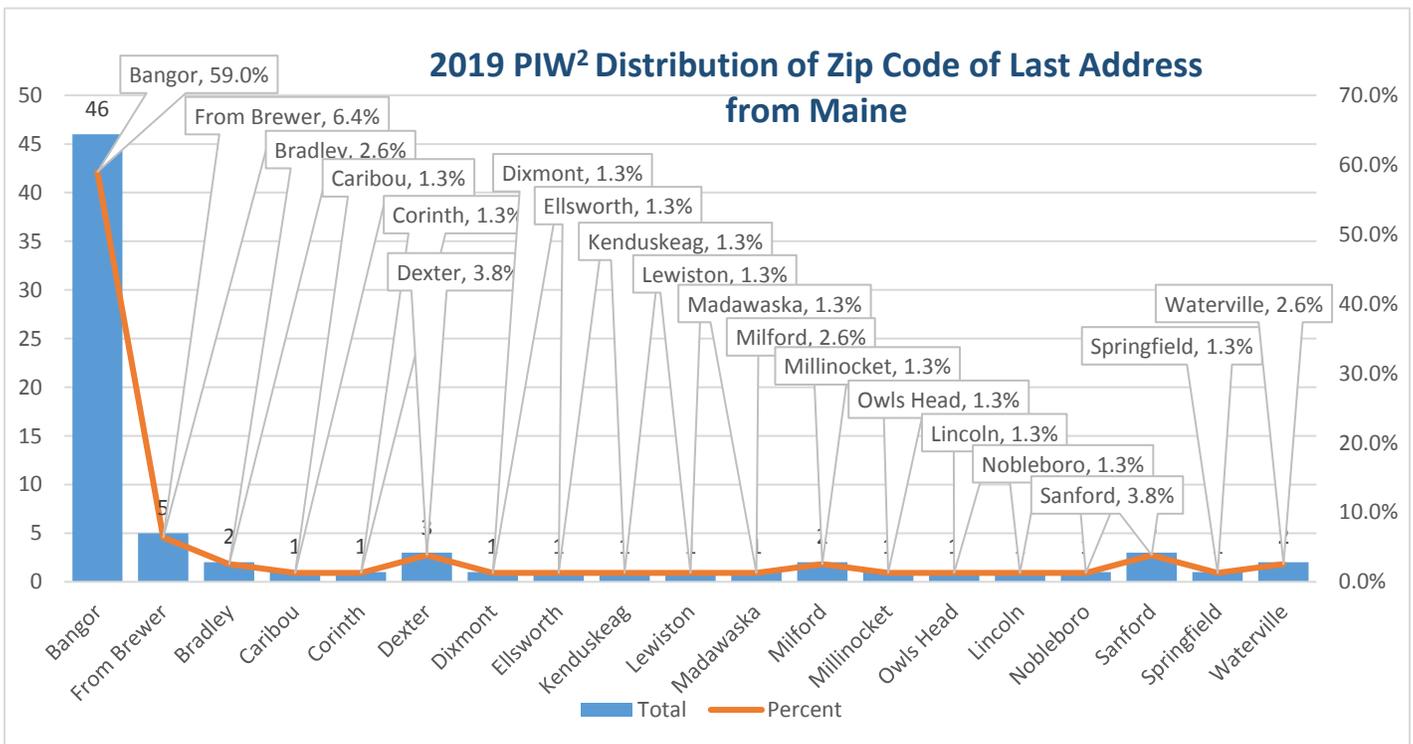
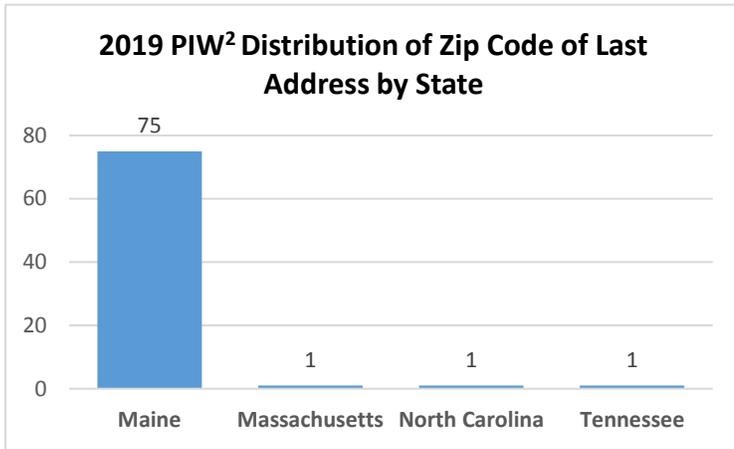


Figure 5. 2019 PIW² Distribution of Zip Code of Last Address from Maine. A distribution of persons identifying zip codes of last address in Maine. The zip code of the place interviewee lived for 6 months or more, most recently. The city and state were to be entered if zip code was unknown. Interviewers were instructed to go as far back in a person's history as necessary to find a time and place a person lived for 6 months or more.



Zip code of last address data is consistent with HMIS data from 2018 for all Bangor shelters (Figure 7). Representing 1,154 shelter project entries, data illustrates 55.12% of individuals had a last address prior to project entry in Penobscot County. While many people experiencing homelessness spend a night in a zip code other than Bangor prior to project entry, upon investigation most are “from Bangor,” when defined as “lived, worked, attended school, or have family in Bangor either past or present.”

Figure 6. 2019 PIW2 Distribution of Zip Code of Last Address by State. A distribution of persons. Where the zip code of the place interviewee lived for 6 months or more, most recently. The city and state were to be entered if zip code was unknown. Interviewers were instructed to go as far back in a person’s history as necessary to find a time and place a person lived for 6 months or more.

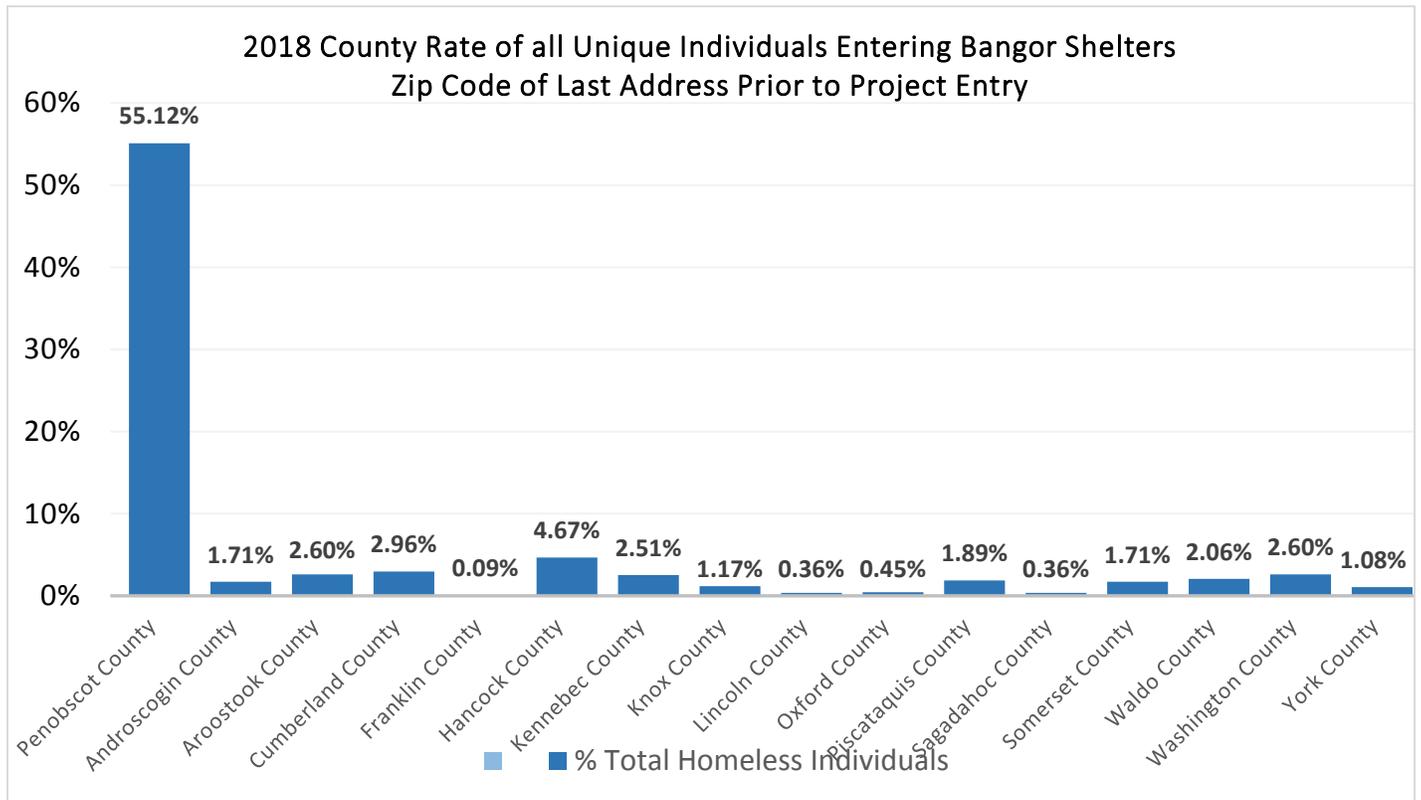


Figure 7. 2018 County Rate of all Unique Individuals Entering Bangor Shelters Zip Code of Last Address Prior to Project Entry. A distribution of all persons from Maine entering Bangor shelters in 2018. 1,154 Shelter project entries in 2018 were distributed as 83.75% from Maine, 16.25% from other states, and 55.12% from Penobscot County. Raw data supplied by MaineHousing.

Lost Data Interpretation

One sheet containing 19 entries was lost by a program after collection, but before faxing to a centralized data center for entry into an Excel Spreadsheet. Using a duplication rate of 16.5% found in the total of all

count sheets, 19 entries represents 16 unique households and 25 individuals. As such, the Region III Homeless Council estimates the number of households in the community living unsheltered to be 97, instead of 81, representing 154, instead of 129, individuals.

Region III Homeless Council Assessment

The Region III Homeless Council unanimously finds the data obtained from the 2019 PIW² count to be consistent with the professional observations reported to this body by WISH, PATH, and Shaw House outreach teams and/or their supervisory representatives; the expert interpretations of assessments and reports by the distinguished members of this Council, and anecdotal reports from other non-member organizations opining on the current state of unsheltered homelessness in the Greater Bangor Area. Further, the Council believes these outcomes to be part of an upward nationwide trend and not a temporary increase in unsheltered homelessness.

Unsheltered homelessness in the Greater Bangor Area has reached unprecedented levels. While this is the first count of its kind in the Greater Bangor Area, at no other time in memory have so many people been living unsheltered. For example: while unsheltered homelessness is nothing new to the staff at the Hope House; typically, persons are known to camp in the woods far back and behind the Hope House. Indicative of significant unsheltered homeless increase, on one day in July, 12 tents were erected on the back lawn of the Hope House – a practice not known to have occurred in the past. According to the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, an exceptionally large study in 2017 indicates homeless encampments are up 1,342% nationally in the past 10 years. Cities across the nation are experiencing similar increases to Bangor. Members of this Council attended the recent United States Interagency Council on Homelessness’ (USICH’s) Convening on Ending Rural Homelessness and the National Alliance to End Homelessness annual conference, where descriptions of communities similar in size to Bangor are all experiencing comparable increases in unsheltered homelessness. At the forefront of cause is a 60% drop nationally in affordable housing to very low income families and stagnant wages (Freddie Mac).

As new guidance and best practices emerge concerning approaches to encampments and their residents, the Council will continue to assess, incorporate into the homeless response system, and make recommendations. For now, what works according to the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty when communities cannot provide enough affordable housing to provide basic needs: "...providing access to sanitation facilities and water, regular trash removal, and safe cooking facilities—all things a city can do to improve the health & safety of its residents" (Tent City, 2017). The current state of homelessness in the Greater Bangor Area is solvable. Listening to the needs of its residents, more than 100,000 of the most service-resistant and chronically homeless were housed by the 100,000 Homes Campaign nationally.

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Region III Homeless Council Recommendations

An adequate supply of affordable and accessible housing is the only solution to end homelessness – housed people are not homeless. Absent an affordable housing solution, the immediate concern as we enter the 2019 / 2020 winter is the safety of those experiencing unsheltered homelessness. The Region III Homeless

Council unanimously recommends adding a low-barrier warming center to the region to protect persons experiencing homelessness from the elements. Cold weather is fast approaching, requiring swift action by agencies and organization able to commit and contribute to solving this dire safety issue. Unlike Portland, Bangor is not a “right to shelter” community and when our shelters are full, lives are jeopardized.

This recommendation is meant to compliment the warming center at the Bangor Area Homeless Shelter. In addition to working with community partners and Region III, the Council further recommends any additional

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warming center to coordinate efforts with MaineHousing, the Statewide Homeless Council, and the Maine Continuum of Care (MCoC) to assess for purposes of implementing the following: 1) data collection (HMIS and PIW² practices); 2) best practices for engaging unsheltered and service-resistant populations; 3) Coordinated Entry

System (CES) participation; and 4) system prioritization. Such coordination is not complex or time consuming, but ensures the system is moving in the same direction, not at cross-purposes, and when properly implemented, provides the greatest good to the greatest number of people.

The Council is aware of efforts by the faith-based community to create space for a warming center and representatives have indicated progress toward that end. Collaborating with in-progress initiatives is also encouraged.

In addition to an increase in unsheltered homelessness in the Greater Bangor Area spurring the need for an additional warming center, reports from members of the Regional III Homeless Council indicate the Bangor Police Department lobby will not be an option, as it has in the past, for persons to stay safe while experiencing unsheltered homelessness. This closure further compounds the need for an additional warming center.

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From a best practice perspective, additional shelter beds are often not a solution for most communities experiencing increases in unsheltered homelessness. The Region III Homeless Council cautions against adding more shelter space at this time, for several reasons:

- while shelters play a critical role in the homeless response system, without additional exit strategies and additional affordable housing units, adding additional shelter beds often result in those beds filling up while unsheltered homelessness continues to grow;
- Communitywide coordinated Rapid Resolution diversion practices can have a greater impact on reducing homelessness than adding shelter beds;
- Improving shelter bed utilization among existing beds through intentional coordination and CES can improve system flow and help more people;
- Other practices, such as navigation, drop-in, and resource centers can improve exits to permanent housing; and

- From financial and exits-to-housing perspectives, adding more shelter beds often results in taking funds out of permanent housing programs and supports resulting in longer stays for existing persons in shelter. Additionally, in Maine, state shelter funds are divided among eligible shelters based on the number of beds and how well they perform. Adding more beds results in less available service and operation dollars for all shelters.

The Region III Homeless Council recommends a PIW² count take place, using the recommended changes in methodology, annually the second and third weeks of July.

The Region III Homeless Council strongly encourages coordination of programs, policy, best-practice approaches, and homeless response system flow to provide the greatest good to the greatest number of people. The best way to learn more and participate in solution-focused initiatives is to join us at our open meetings the second Wednesday of each month in Bangor. Please Contact a Council Co-Chair for up-to-date locations.

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Attachment

Participating Agencies

Bangor Area Homeless Shelter
Shaw House
Community Care
CHCS -- PATH (Community Health and Counseling)
Bangor / Brewer PD?
Preble Street
Hope House
General Assistance / Bangor Public Health
Brick Church
Together Place
Columbia Street Outreach
Emergency Rooms (St. Joe's and Northern Light)
Bangor Public Library
Penquis
Health Equity Alliance
Higher Ground
MAS
Sweeter
Catholic Charities
Clubhouse (Unlimited Solutions)
VA
OHI
Maine Pretrial
Salvation Army
Maine Prison Reentry
Northeast Occupational Exchange (NOE)
Partners for peace
Salvation Army

