

# **NH Unsheltered Point-in-Time (PIT) Observation Count Guidance**

## ***The Use of Observation Counts***

Observation counts are a standardized methodology specific to the PIT count that is utilized by all three of New Hampshire's Continuums of Care (CoCs) to help ensure the count's accuracy by having a uniform data collection approach.

Due to the way the PIT count functions, there may be situations where an interview is not possible or appropriate. Observation counts allow for the collection of observed data to support the effort of capturing what unsheltered homelessness looks like in New Hampshire as completely as possible.

## ***Informed Consent***

Individuals approached during the PIT count will be informed about the purpose of the survey, and their participation will be voluntary. Individuals approached will have the option to decline to participate or provide only partial information without any consequences.

For individuals that decline to participate, an observation count may be appropriate for the observing staff or volunteer to complete.

## ***Respectful Engagement***

All staff and volunteers participating in the PIT count will be trained to interact with people experiencing homelessness with dignity and respect, recognizing the vulnerability of the population.

## ***Confidentiality of PIT Data***

Personal and sensitive information will be collected during the PIT count and remain confidential. Any identifiable data collected for the purpose of the PIT will not be shared without explicit consent unless required by law.

## ***Observation Count Data Collection***

Observation count data relies on the perception of observing staff or volunteers, which leaves room for bias or assumption. Because of this, extra measures must be taken to ensure that observed data remains factual and, in situations where an interview is not possible, completed only if there is confident reason that the individual is actively experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

Observation counts must take place within the span of **6:00 PM the night of the PIT through 6:00 AM the following morning**. In addition to this, one of the following criteria must be met in order to fulfill observation count eligibility:

- The person was observed sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation, **OR**
- The person was awake and either refused interview at that time or could not be safely engaged with but is also someone the Regional Access Point, observing agency staff, or volunteers know and can confirm as experiencing unsheltered homelessness through previous interactions.

**The key details that should be noted are as follows:**

- The name of the observer (the person completing the form)
- The date, time, and exact location the observation took place (e.g., the sidewalk of 123 Example Avenue in Exampleville, NH)
- A description of the person, which should include:
  - Physical appearance (e.g., long brown hair, grey beard, fair skin, tall stature, large build)
  - Unique identifiers (e.g., visible tattoos or piercings, scars)
  - Clothing (e.g., black puffer jacket, blue and red knit beanie, blue denim pants)
  - Possessions (e.g., green backpack with red carabiner attached, purple blanket, large orange tent, black Toyota Camry)
  - Companion animals (if any)
  - Any other information that may aid in the reengagement of the observed person

Identifiable information and or demographic descriptors such as gender, age, race, or ethnicity should be avoided for the observation count unless the observer has engaged with this client before and can reliably confirm these details from previous interactions.

***Post-Observation Count Next Steps***

The observation count, upon completion, should not be submitted until the observer's agency can verify that the reengagement of the person observed has been attempted in some capacity after the initial observation took place.

***It is advised that the following steps be incorporated in this process:***

- The agency associated with the observation should work with their street outreach staff to determine if this is a client they are familiar or have existing rapport with.
  - If yes and they have not yet been interviewed, staff should strategize on how to successfully reengage this person for the count.
- If the agency is not familiar internally with the person from the observation count, the agency should connect with their Regional Access Point (RAP).
  - If the RAP is familiar with this client based on provided descriptors, they may help support the potential reengagement of the individual as seen fit.
- If the individual remains unfamiliar to both the observer's agency and the RAP, the location of the observation should be revisited at least one more time prior to submittal.

### ***Observation Count Submittals***

If the individual cannot be successfully reengaged for an interview, the completed observation count may be submitted in lieu of a completed survey. From there, observation counts are manually reviewed by each respective CoC to ensure data completeness and that, based on the information included, the individual appears to have been experiencing unsheltered homelessness on the night of the PIT.

Observation count submittal is limited to clients that could not be reengaged. Persons with incomplete data fields on the form will not be included towards the unsheltered count's total and will be discarded.

For individuals that were reengaged and surveyed successfully, please refer to the existing PIT guidance and respective survey forms on ICA's Knowledge Base ([NH PIT/HIC and HMIS - HMIS Knowledge Base](#)).

### ***Additional Resources***

The most up to date contacts for each Regional Access Point may be found on the NH DHHS Bureau of Homeless Service's website ([Regional Access Points](#)).

If you have any questions, please reach out to both the NH HMIS Help Desk ([nhhmis@icalliances.org](mailto:nhhmis@icalliances.org)) and the Bureau of Homeless Services general inbox ([dhhs.bhhs@dhhs.nh.gov](mailto:dhhs.bhhs@dhhs.nh.gov)).