
Houston's High-Tech Solution to Connecting the Homeless With Housing

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Cities decide when and how to conduct the survey, with many opting to do so at night without disturbing or talking to the homeless.

In Houston, where the homeless population has been steadily declining for years, volunteers conducted in-depth surveys with individuals instead, using tablets to log information into an online system that prioritizes the most vulnerable for housing, [Houston Public Media](#) reported.

While in past years the count took place in a single night, this year volunteers spent three days asking homeless individuals about their age, health and housing history. The online system then ranked respondents on a scale of 1 to 10, indicating how vulnerable they are to not surviving if they remain on the street.

Volunteers conducted 40 on-the-spot assessments. All of those respondents are now on a waiting list for housing.

“And with this data, we will know people by name to be able to really check off the list of, yes, these are the people who are considered chronically homeless, and we know where all of them are sleeping,” Marilyn Brown, the president of the Coalition for the Homeless of Houston and Harris County, told [Houston Public Media](#).

HUD mandates that cities report their sheltered homeless population every year, and unsheltered only on odd years, but many choose to count the unsheltered each year anyway. The survey helps cities track how well efforts to alleviate homelessness are working, and determines how much federal funding local programs will receive.

Houston has made [great strides](#) in reducing homelessness in recent years, particularly among [veterans](#). Last year volunteers counted 4,609 sheltered and unsheltered homeless individuals, a drop of more than 700 since 2014.

Houston won't release 2016's numbers until this summer, but many early reports in other cities have shown homeless populations increasing. Seattle's One Night Count tallied a record number of homeless in the city for the

third year in a row. According to [Real Change News](#), volunteers counted 4,505 unsheltered people — a 19 percent increase from last year.
