



# Youth REACH MD's 2018 Youth Count FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions about Maryland's Effort to Understand and Address Youth Homelessness

## Who are Unaccompanied Homeless Youth and Young Adults?

Unaccompanied Homeless Youth are young people **who are under the age of 25**, who are **not in the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian**, and who **lack a fixed, regular, or adequate nighttime residence**. These youth are often experiencing homelessness due to **family dysfunction and abuse**, including rejection due to sexual orientation or gender identity, pregnancy, or disability; **exiting the foster care or juvenile justice systems** without skills or resources needed to live independently; and/or **economic hardship**. Unaccompanied homeless youth often **'couch surf,'** moving frequently between friends, family, or strangers, or they frequently **live on the streets, in cars or abandoned buildings**. These youth are often going to school or work even while facing the challenge of not having a safe and reliable place to sleep each night. Not having a safe, reliable place to sleep puts these youth at **disproportionately high risk** of mental, physical, and behavioral health problems; school dropout; suicide; crime victimization; sexual exploitation; delinquency; unplanned pregnancy; and, unemployment.

## How many Unaccompanied Homeless Youth and Young Adults are there in Maryland?

Maryland lacks reliable data on the number and characteristics of unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults in our state, but data from Youth Counts conducted through Youth REACH MD is helping to change that. The first Youth Count in 2015 identified 1,715 youth who were unaccompanied and experiencing homelessness across six jurisdictions in Maryland through either the Youth Count survey or participating jurisdictions' Homeless Management Information System data. **In the 2017 Youth Count, 2,332 youth were identified as unaccompanied and homeless across 10 Maryland jurisdictions.** This is still likely a significant undercount, as many youth do not typically identify as homeless or seek out supportive services.

## What is Youth REACH MD?

**Youth REACH MD is a coordinated data collection and analysis effort established by the Maryland General Assembly in 2014 (HB794/SB794) to gather information on the prevalence and characteristics of youth homelessness in Maryland.** The project is modeled on the federal Youth Count! Initiative and implements a 2013 recommendation of Maryland's Task Force to Study Housing and Supportive Services for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, which recognized that reliable data is necessary to develop effective interventions, appropriately allocate resources, and track progress toward reducing and ultimately ending youth homelessness. Youth REACH MD also operates in alignment with the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness' goal and framework to end youth homelessness by 2020. To date two Youth Counts have been conducted, with a third planned for 2018. These regular Youth Counts help track the changes in the prevalence and characteristics of youth homelessness in Maryland over time and inform development of local interventions and allocation of resources.

## Who implements Youth REACH MD?

The Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), The University of Maryland School of Social Work, and the Youth REACH Steering Committee oversee the planning and implementation of Youth REACH MD. They work with local Continuums of Care, including stakeholders, youth, service providers, and schools, to plan and carry out local Youth Counts in each of the participating regions. The University of Maryland School of Social Work analyzes the data from the local Youth Counts and issues an annual report to DHCD and the Maryland General Assembly.

## When, where and how will the 2018 Youth Count take place?

The following **12 regions, representing 20 of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions, are currently participating in the 2018 Youth Count:** Anne Arundel Co., Baltimore Co., Baltimore City, Carroll Co., Frederick Co., Howard Co., Montgomery Co., Prince George's Co., Washington Co., Southern Maryland (Charles, Calvert & St. Mary's Co.), the Mid-Shore (Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Talbot, & Queen Anne's Co.), and the Lower Shore (Somerset, Wicomico, & Worcester Co.). **Local Youth Counts will take place between March 3, 2018 and April 15, 2018,** and will involve surveying youth who are living on the streets, accessing services offered by participating service providers (including schools, libraries, or food banks), or spending the night in shelters and/or transitional housing programs. Special events and resource fairs will be held to promote survey efforts and support unaccompanied homeless youth, and local jurisdictions will take this opportunity to connect surveyed youth with resources and supports. Additionally, the University of Maryland School of Social Work will work with youth-serving systems to access administrative data and identify unaccompanied homeless youth within their systems.