



# Youth REACH MD: Youth Count FAQ

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

## 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. To date three Youth Counts have been conducted in 2015, 2017, and 2018, with a fourth planned for 2020. 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 are unaccompanied youth and young adults experiencing homelessness?

Unaccompanied youth and young adults experiencing homelessness 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**. Youth experience homelessness for a variety of reasons, including family dysfunction and abuse; rejection due to sexual orientation, 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 youth experiencing homelessness 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 youth and young adults are experiencing homelessness in Maryland?

Maryland has historically lacked reliable data on the number and characteristics of unaccompanied youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in the state, but data from Youth Counts conducted through Youth REACH MD is helping to change that. In the last Youth Count conducted in **2018, 2,957 youth who were unaccompanied and experiencing homelessness were identified** across 20 jurisdictions in Maryland through either the Youth Count survey or participating jurisdictions' Homeless Management Information System data. This is likely **still a significant undercount**, as many youth do not typically identify as homeless or seek out supportive services, making it more challenging to identify them. Youth REACH strives to continue improving efforts to identify as many youth as possible.

## 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 jurisdiction. 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 next Youth Count take place?

Youth REACH MD is working towards a fully statewide Youth Count in 2020. **Local Youth Counts will take place between March 1, 2020 and April 12, 2020**, and will involve surveying youth who are 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 in some areas to promote survey efforts and provide resources for youth. Local jurisdictions will take this opportunity to connect the youth surveyed with needed resources and supports. Additionally, the University of Maryland School of Social Work will work with Maryland's youth-serving systems to access administrative data and identify unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness within their systems.

*Learn more at [YouthReachMD.com](http://YouthReachMD.com)*