



Youth REACH MD 2020 Youth Count Key Information

WHAT IS YOUTH REACH MD?

- Improving Maryland’s understanding of youth homelessness became a legislative priority in Maryland in 2013. Early efforts to determine the nature and scope of youth homelessness evolved into the initiative known as Youth REACH MD.
- Youth REACH MD is a statewide effort by the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development and coordinated by The Institute for Innovation and Implementation at the University of Maryland School of Social Work.

WHAT IS THE YOUTH COUNT?

- Youth REACH MD conducts an annual Youth Count that helps identify the number, characteristics, and unique needs of youth and young adults who are under 25, on their own, and without a safe, reliable, and adequate nighttime residence.
- The Youth Count acts as an opportunity to connect with these youth to better learn about what we can do to help and connect them to initial supports and services. Survey data is then used to improve the services and resources available to support these youth and young adults in their community.
- The 2020 Youth Count is the fourth Youth Count in Maryland and builds upon the data collected in the first three Youth Counts held in 2015, 2017 and 2018.

WHY IS THE YOUTH COUNT IMPORTANT?

Independent youth and young adults under age 25 who are struggling with housing are often a hidden population. Organizing a separate count for them is vital for these reasons:

- Past agency efforts and state homelessness counts have mainly focused on adults and families (including younger accompanied/dependent children). This has resulted in extremely low numbers reported for unaccompanied/independent youth and young adults who experience housing insecurity.
- Independent youth and young adults who struggle to find or maintain reliable housing have unique characteristics. It is important to understand these characteristics in order to identify and fund the right community services for them.
- These youth and young adults frequently go to school and/or have jobs. Many don’t see themselves as homeless, which creates a cycle that keeps them hidden. By not viewing themselves as homeless, they don’t usually access existing community services. Not accessing the services keeps them uncounted or “invisible,” which results in less resources and support services available to them.
- Since reliable housing is a challenge, they often stay within their personal networks—couch surfing or doubling-up with friends or relatives—and are less likely to seek out support.

The Youth Count helps connect youth experiencing homelessness with local services and supports, and helps state and local agencies better understand how many youth and young adults are experiencing homelessness and how we can best meet their needs.

HOW IS THE 2020 YOUTH COUNT CONDUCTED?

- The 2020 Youth Count targets young people under age 25 who do not reside with their parents or legal guardians (referred to as “unaccompanied”) and do not have access to safe and reliable housing. They are on their own.
- The Youth Count consists of a confidential survey that youth complete in person or online. The survey collects information to better understand the youths’:
 - Demographics and education;

- Housing history and current housing situation;
- Circumstances that influenced their housing instability; and
- Community services they use/need.
- Youth are surveyed at service providers (e.g., shelters, food banks, or libraries), in the community (e.g., in parks, in the streets, or at 24-hour shops), at magnet events (resource fairs designed for youth), and in the schools (typically by pupil personnel workers).
- Those administering the survey are trained on how to protect the privacy of youth completing the survey, and ways in which they can immediately connect surveyed youth with resources or supports they may need.
- All surveys are confidential and results are only reported as aggregated by state and region.
- Survey data is used to assess and improve state and community resources, which are severely limited for these youth and young adults.

WHEN AND WHERE IS THE YOUTH COUNT TAKING PLACE?

The overall Youth Count will be held March 1, 2020 - April 12, 2020. Each region will select its own two-week count dates within this time period to better coordinate with events and agencies their area.

The fifteen regions listed below will be participating, representing 23 of the 24 jurisdictions in Maryland. This is an increase of 3 regions from the 2017 count and 6 regions from the 2015 count.

- Allegany County;
- Anne Arundel County;
- Baltimore City;
- Baltimore County;
- Carroll County;
- Frederick County;
- Garrett County;
- Harford County;
- Howard County;
- Lower Shore: Somerset, Wicomico & Worcester Counties;
- Mid-Shore: Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Talbot & Queen Anne's Counties;
- Montgomery County;
- Prince George's County;
- Southern MD: Charles, Calvert & St. Mary's Counties; and
- Washington County.

WHO IS INVOLVED IN THE YOUTH COUNT?

- At the state level, the Youth Count is led by the Youth REACH MD Steering Committee, which is comprised of state and local stakeholders representing service providers, Continuums of Care, and state agencies.
- At the regional level, Continuums of Care (CoCs) are the local planning and implementation groups for the Youth Count. Dozens of community partners and service providers work together through the CoC to plan and conduct each local Youth Count.
- Youth Ambassadors – youth volunteers recruited by the CoC who help plan and administer the Youth Count surveys at events or through street counts – are key to the success of local youth counts. Often, they have experienced housing instability themselves, making them highly-relatable and trustworthy ambassadors for the count.

WHY DOES THE YOUTH COUNT MATTER?

Too many of Maryland's youth and young adults go it alone to find stable and safe housing. The 2020 Youth Count is an important community effort to create positive change and help eliminate homelessness among youth and young adults under age 25. The Youth Count:

- Helps immediately connect youth and young adults who are housing insecure with local services to improve the support they receive;
- Improves the understanding of what additional services and resources are needed locally to help address youth homelessness;
- Creates awareness of the issue with potential community partners that may provide additional services/resources to this population; and,
- Ultimately helps reduce the overall number of youth experiencing homelessness in the community.

To learn more visit www.YouthReachMD.com, or email the project manager, Carrie Gould-Kabler, at carrie.gould-kabler@ssw.umaryland.edu.