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County Releases 2026 Point-in-Time Count

*Continued Housing Challenges and Growing Need for
Homelessness Prevention Services Highlighted*

The 2026 Santa Cruz County Point-in-Time (PIT) Count identified 1,648 people experiencing homelessness, a 12 percent increase from 2025. While this year's total is up primarily due to improved methodology, it remains below historic levels including the 2022 peak of 2,299.

Overall, more local residents are falling into homelessness for the first time, while those who become chronically homeless continue to face significant barriers to finding permanent housing. And more than ever, homelessness is impacting people with deep ties to Santa Cruz County:

- 50 percent of respondents reported experiencing homelessness for the first time, up from 40 percent in 2025;
- 93 percent said they were living in Santa Cruz County when they lost their housing, up from 78 percent;
- 70 percent had lived in Santa Cruz County for 10 years or more.

Conducted on January 29, the Point-in-Time Count is a federally required census of people experiencing homelessness on a single day. More than 200 volunteers, outreach workers, service providers, and people with lived experience came together to canvas neighborhoods throughout Santa Cruz County, with follow-up surveys providing additional insight.

Additional key findings from the report include:

- 78 percent of people experiencing homelessness were living unsheltered;
- The top self-reported causes of homelessness were substance use disorder (25 percent), followed by job loss (15 percent);
- 71 percent reported at least one disabling condition that interfered with their ability to work or secure housing.

"The federally mandated PIT Count provides one measure of our efforts to reduce the impacts of homelessness on individuals and the community," said Dr. Robert Ratner,

Director of the Santa Cruz County Housing for Health Division. “This year's findings show that more local residents are experiencing homelessness for the first time, and nearly all were living in Santa Cruz County when they lost housing. These results reinforce the need to invest in integrated health and housing services, as well as low-income housing including for seniors and people with disabilities. We also need to redouble our homelessness prevention and housing retention efforts.”

The PIT Count is a snapshot of homelessness at a specific point in time and does not reflect the full breadth of community homelessness over the course of a year. The findings reflect the growing pressures facing many households, including high housing costs, economic uncertainty, and health challenges.

The most reported barriers to obtaining permanent housing were “can’t afford the rent” at 76 percent, “no job/not enough income” at 70 percent, and “no money for moving costs” at 42 percent. These findings reflect the significant challenges many residents face in securing and maintaining housing in the nation’s most expensive housing market.

Communities across the country are facing potential reductions in funding for programs that help prevent and reduce homelessness. Locally, changes to programs such as Emergency Housing Vouchers, permanent supportive housing, and broader safety-net programs could make it more difficult for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness to access housing, health care, and other essential supports.

The increase in the 2026 PIT Count can primarily be attributed to changes in the County’s methodology. For the first time, the 2026 PIT Count included people participating in safe parking and safe sleeping programs throughout the county who had not been included in previous counts. These programs accounted for an additional 126 people in the overall count.

The County also conducted a more robust outreach to identify transition-age youth experiencing homelessness. The number of transition-age youth counted increased from 24 in 2025 to 86 in 2026, an increase of 62 people.

Santa Cruz County remains committed to preventing homelessness, expanding access to affordable housing and supportive services, and strengthening partnerships across the community. Housing projects opening in 2026 and 2027, which include Bridge House, Live Oak Landing, Hope Village, Harvey West, Casa Sankofa, and Veterans Village, will add much needed housing and supportive services for people experiencing homelessness.

The 2026 PIT Count findings will help inform policy decisions, funding priorities, outreach efforts, and service planning throughout Santa Cruz County as local leaders and community partners continue working toward long-term solutions to homelessness.

The full 2026 Santa Cruz County PIT Count and Survey Report is available on the [Housing for Health Partnership website](#).