



500 IN 500

Frequently Asked Questions

How many people experience homelessness in Allegheny County?

Allegheny County Department of Human Services produces an annual count in addition to weekly updates. On January 30, 2024, in Allegheny County, 1,026 individuals were staying in emergency shelters or experiencing unsheltered homelessness. For more information please review the **[Point In Time Count Annual Report](#)**.

How many homeless shelters does Allegheny County have?

The Allegheny County homeless shelter system includes 11 shelters for individuals and 10 shelters for families. For information on how to access the shelter system please **[visit Allegheny Connect](#)**.

What is the purpose of the County shelter system?

For individuals and families that find themselves with no place spend the night, the shelters provide a short-term place to sleep and shower. Shelters are meant to be a refuge for people at a moment of crisis. They are not meant to be long-term residences.

How many people use the homeless shelters?

In 2023, approximately 3,300 single individuals and family members used a shelter in Allegheny County. For more information about the characteristics of people using shelters in Allegheny County, please refer to the following reports:

[Families using emergency shelters in Allegheny County](#)

[People using adult-only emergency shelters in Allegheny County](#)

DHS sometimes describes people as low-risk or low-vulnerability? What does this mean? How is it determined?

For a detailed description of the Allegheny Housing Assessment, please review the **[reports and FAQs located here](#)**.

Practically speaking, people who are described as low-risk/vulnerability have few to no interactions with the criminal justice system, homeless system, and emergency and intensive medical or behavioral health services and often have significant employment histories. These are the people we are identifying for 500 in 500. For people with high-risk/vulnerability, the Department of Human Services has extensive programming through Rapid Rehousing and Permanent Supportive Housing programs.

I still see people living in tents, how will 500 in 500 help these people?

Right now, the shelters are crowded, people are staying a long time, and sometimes all we can offer people staying on the street is a mat on the floor. By helping people who have stabilized in shelter exit to housing more quickly, we will create more room in the shelter system for people staying in a tent or on the street.

Who is eligible for housing assistance as part of this initiative?

The 500 in 500 initiative will engage people who have relatively low needs for social services and whose stay in shelter has been lengthened due to barriers in achieving stable housing, such as high rents, employment challenges, etc.

What about the people who have high needs for social services or who are living on the street?

The Department of Human Services has programs to support this group. In fact, the majority of the federal funding DHS receives is used to support the most vulnerable and chronically homeless in programs we refer to as Rapid Rehousing and Permanent Supportive Housing. At any given time, about 1,300 single-adult households are active in one of these housing programs. And each year, about 400 new single adults become enrolled in these programs as other people exit these programs and vacancies are filled. This work will continue. The 500 in 500 initiative is about providing new and needed housing support for lower need people that we didn't have supports for in the past.

How much federal and state funding does the county have to combat homelessness?

The Allegheny County Department of Human Services (ACDHS) receives three annual awards directed at preventing and ending homelessness. From the federal level, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Continuum of Care (CoC) and Emergency Solution Grant (ESG) Programs provided approximately \$23 million and \$1.2 million in funding for homelessness last fiscal year, respectively. At the state level, the PA Department of Human Services' (PA DHS) Homeless Assistance Program (HAP) allocated \$2.6 million to ACDHS for homeless services.

These annual awards are not adequate for supporting homeless-related expenditures. To make up for this shortfall, ACDHS has needed to:

- Supplement its state Homeless Assistance Program (HAP) award with Human Services Block Grant funding initially allocated for other categorical programs (such as mental health, drug and alcohol, and others). In SFY23, ACDHS had more than \$13 million in total HAP expenses –\$10 million more than it was awarded.
- Rely on child welfare system funding to offer services to families with children in need. In SFY23, ACDHS used \$2.5 million of its child welfare funding to offer homelessness services and supports to families with children.
- Leverage smaller, often temporary, grants from sources like the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), PHFA, and foundations.

What is the goal of 500 in 500?

The goal is to make 500 units available to people in Allegheny County's homeless shelters within 500 days of launch on June 6, 2024. With these 500 units, individuals will spend less time in shelter, and shelter beds will be available to those who need them.

Why launch 500 in 500 now?

Since COVID, a growing number of people are becoming stuck in homeless shelters because of a lack of available, affordable rental units. Shelter stays are too long, and shelter beds have become scarce. Increasing the flow out of shelters supports the efforts of those who are in shelter in their move to stability, and makes shelter beds available to those who have nowhere else to turn and who are living on the street.

Who are the main partners in 500 in 500 and what are their roles?

The partners making this possible include those providing the housing (property owners and managers) and those funding efforts to make those units available and support individuals as they move into and live in them. A list of partners is elsewhere on this webpage.

I thought creating affordable housing took years, how will this initiative bring on 500 units of housing so quickly?

It is true that developing new units is a long endeavor. The success of this initiative does not depend on ground up construction of new units. Instead, the focus is on three other avenues:

1. Some prioritization of existing rental units for those exiting shelter as current tenants leave (either with or without a change in ownership).
2. Accelerating efforts to make repairs needed to make empty rental units ready for new tenants.
3. Converting facilities that do not require extensive modification (such as nursing homes or motels) to residential use for those exiting shelter.

I have a unit for rent in a building that I own. Who do I contact to be part of 500 in 500?

Please contact **[Chuck Keenan](#)** at the Allegheny County Department of Human Services.

I am the owner/operator of a building that could be repurposed as housing for people leaving shelter, who do I contact?

Please contact **[Chuck Keenan](#)** at the Allegheny County Department of Human Services.

What supports are available to landlords and property managers?

The Allegheny County Department of Human Services has supports both for tenants and landlords. Landlords housing those exiting shelter have access to caseworkers who can help solve problems before they lead to nonpayment of rent or other disruption.

How will the county track progress on this initiative?

In addition to tracking progress toward the 500 units in this initiative's name, DHS will also be looking at the impact on three other key metrics:

1. Emergency homeless shelters are a key resource for our community. People arrive in those shelters at a moment of crisis. County and shelter staff work with two goals in mind: stabilizing the people involved and then moving them on from shelter to more stable living arrangements. In 2023, an average 22 individuals and 7 families a month left shelter to a rental unit or bridge housing. With the units made available as part of 500 in 500, our goal is to meaningfully increase that number.

2. We have a particular focus on the individuals who find themselves homeless and in need of shelter. We want their shelter stays to be as short as possible while still leading to stability. Half of these individuals already have short stays at our shelters and leave within two weeks. But for the other half, the median shelter stay in 2023 was 64 days. That is too long. Our goal is to meaningfully reduce the length of stay in adult-only shelters.

3. Finally, we don't want anyone to be living in emergency shelter. It's not what emergency shelter is meant for, and it's not the right place for individuals to be over long periods of time. In 2023, on average, 14% of beds in adult-only shelters were filled with people who had been there more than six months. With the additional units available from 500 in 500, our goal is to meaningfully reduce that number.

What else besides the 500 in 500 initiative is Allegheny County doing about homelessness?

To prevent homelessness and assist those experiencing homelessness, Allegheny County is the lead local agency and follows a "continuum of care" approach in partnership with the City of Pittsburgh, surrounding municipalities, healthcare providers, non-profit organizations, the business community, and others.

The County oversees a coordinated entry system that connects people in need to a network of street outreach teams, street medicine teams, emergency shelters, bridge housing, rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing, and the wraparound services to help individuals get the care and assistance they need.

More information about the Allegheny County Continuum of Care can be [**found here.**](#)

How does the County keep track of those living unsheltered?

Each year, Allegheny County participates in a national census of the number of people experiencing homelessness on a single night. The Point-in-Time count enumerates people experiencing homelessness in the County who are sheltered, unsheltered or participating in a short-term, supportive housing program. For more information about this annual count and access to a brief and dashboard, [**click here.**](#)