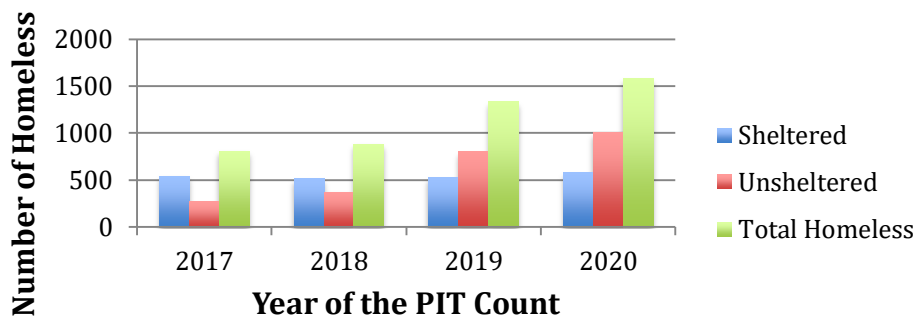# BAKERSFIELD-KERN REGIONAL HOMELESS COLLABORATIVE 2020 PIT COUNT REPORT

2020 Point-in-Time Count Finds Slower Rate of Increase in County's Homeless Population, including a Reduction in Rate of Increase among Families with Children.

The Bakersfield-Kern Regional Homeless Collaborative (BKRHC), also known as the Bakersfield/Kern County Continuum of Care (CA CoC-604), counted 1,580 unduplicated homeless people countywide sleeping in shelters and on the streets in a 12-hour period on January 23rd and 24th, 2020.
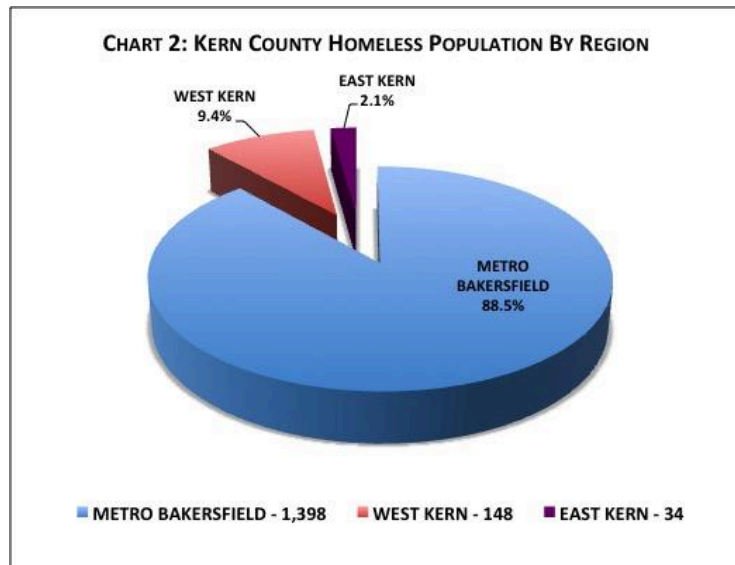
The new count amounts to a 19% increase over the 1,330 homeless people counted the previous January. It also reflects a 25% jump in unsheltered people (from 805 to 1,004)— typically single adults—who were sleeping in parks, empty buildings, cars, and other places not meant for human habitation. By comparison, there was only a 10% rise in the numbers of individuals and families with children sleeping in emergency shelters or transitional housing programs.

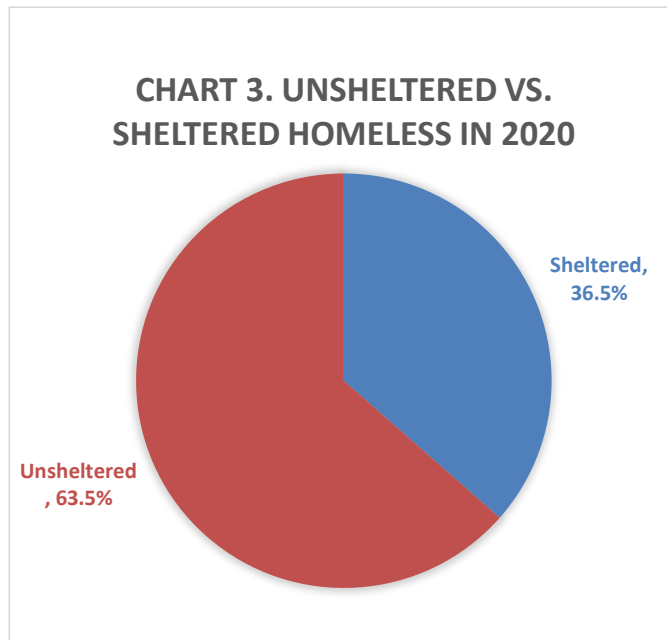**Chart 1. PIT Counts Showing Sheltered, Unsheltered, and Total Homeless Counted, 2017-2020**

Since January 2017, Kern County's homeless population has grown by 95% (from 810 to 1,580 people), largely driven by a dramatic 273% increase in unsheltered people, as illustrated in Chart 1. The BKRHC attributes these successive annual increases in homelessness to rising housing costs that have exceeded growth in wages, and to a critical shortage of affordable housing that reached a tipping point several years ago, both in Kern County and most other areas of California.

Although the homeless population has increased significantly in the past year, the rate at which it increased (19%) is less than one-half of the 50% increase between 2018 and 2019. This slowing in the rate of increase suggests that the recent surge in homelessness may have peaked and is perhaps on the decline. A comparison with statewide findings will not be possible until the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) releases the national PIT Count numbers later this year, but early indications are that several neighboring southern California counties have also experienced decreased growth rates of homelessness.

Other Key Findings:

➤ 88% of Kern County's sheltered and unsheltered homeless population was located in Metro Bakersfield, 12% in rural cities and communities outside of Bakersfield.

➤ Countywide, only 36.5% of homeless people had shelter, 63.5% were unsheltered, as shown in Chart 3.

➤ 40% of Bakersfield's homeless population had shelter on the count night, 60% were unsheltered. Only 11% of rural homeless people had shelter.

➤ Homelessness in Metro Bakersfield rose by 22% over the previous year, fueled by a 31% jump in the number of unsheltered homeless people. Rural homelessness rose by only 1%.

➤ 85% of families with children had shelter; 69% of single adults were unsheltered.

➤ Countywide, families with children accounted for 14% of the homeless population. Children constituted almost 9% of homeless people counted.

CHART 3. UNSHELTERED VS. SHELTERED HOMELESS IN 2020

Sheltered, 36.5%

Unsheltered, 63.5%

PIT Counts. The PIT Count is a one-night count and survey of unduplicated homeless people conducted nationwide in the last ten days of January in communities that receive funding from the HUD. The Count is conducted according to HUD standards, guidelines, and reporting requirements. It is used to track national, state and local homeless population trends for planning and funding purposes, and to inform the public about progress towards ending homelessness. The BKRHC has conducted 11 PIT counts since January 2007. Begun on a biennial basis, these counts have been done annually every January since 2013, as reported in Table 1 and illustrated in Chart 4.

PIT Count Methodology. The 2020 PIT Count was conducted during the night of Thursday, January 23 and early morning of Friday 24th. A total of 342 volunteers participated in the Count, an increase of 42 (or 14%) more volunteers than the previous year. Shelter residents were surveyed on-site from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. on the 23rd. Unsheltered people were surveyed between 3:30 a.m. and 8 a.m. the next morning by 3-member mobile teams operating along pre-determined, assigned routes. The weather was favorable, with clear skies and temperatures in the high 40s.
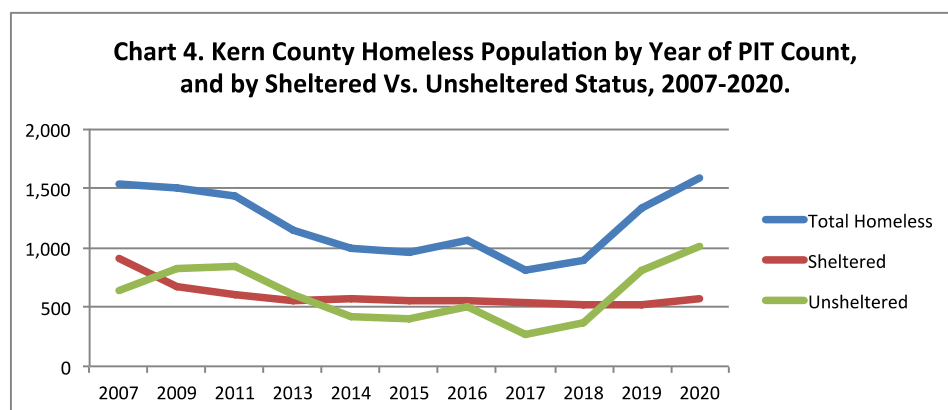
Surveyors used a brief interview tool developed by the BKRHC that was adapted for use on cell phones. The new electronic application, including a Geo-tracking feature, was built and donated by the County for use on its server. Surveys were conducted on a voluntary basis. Subjects who were unwilling or unable to complete an interview were still counted and certain basic visual observations about them were recorded. Information compiled from completed surveys was used to extrapolate data charts for the entire population counted.

Surveyors provided homeless people with resource flyers and incentive packages, including snacks, hygiene items, backpacks, and articles of clothing. These were purchased with

donations from Bakersfield Adventist Health and the County Human Services Department. Home Depot donated supplies including flashlights, batteries, and carrier boxes for surveyors to use during the count.

Table 1. Kern County Homeless Population on January 24, 2020

By Area and Shelter Status	Adults	Adults w/ Children	Children	Total People	% Change Previous Year	Jan. 2019 Count
Metro Bakersfield-Sheltered	366	64	126	556	+10%	507
Regional Sheltered	8	3	9	20	+11%	18
Total County Sheltered	**374**	**67**	**135**	**576**	**+10%**	**525**
Metro Bakersfield Unsheltered	825	11	6	842	+31%	643
Regional Unsheltered	160	1	1	162	0%	162
Total County Unsheltered	**985**	**12**	**7**	**1,004**	**+25%**	**805**
Total Metro Bakersfield	1,191	75	132	1,398	+22%	1,150
Total Regional (Rural)	168	4	10	182	+1%	180
2020 Combined Total	**1,359**	**79**	**142**	**1,580**	**+19%**	**1,330**
2019 Total	1,115	74	141	1,330	+50%	
2018 Total	715	63	107	885	+9%	
2017 Total	633	62	115	810	-24%	
2016 Total	875	71	121	1,067	+12%	
2015 Total	733	71	150	954	-4%	
2014 Total	725	89	178	992	-14%	
2013 Total	924	79	149	1,152	-20%	
2011 Total	1,220	79	140	1,439	-4%	
2009 Total	1,251	88	160	1,499	-2%	
2007 Total	1,248	97	192	1,537		

Chart 4. Kern County Homeless Population by Year of PIT Count, and by Sheltered Vs. Unsheltered Status, 2007-2020.

Where the Homeless Slept

As shown in Chart 4, there is a strong correlation between the numbers of homeless people counted annually since 2007 and the numbers of unsheltered people. Homeless shelter count numbers are primarily affected by the county's shelter bed inventory, including emergency shelters and transitional housing program beds. The City of Bakersfield and Kern County are

supporting the development of several hundred new, low-barrier emergency shelter beds which, when they become available later this year, should significantly reduce the numbers of unsheltered people in the Bakersfield area.

Emergency Shelters. Of the 576 homeless people who had shelter on January 24, 378 (66%) were residing in emergency shelters, 198 (34%) in transitional housing, as shown in Table 2. Although not broken out in the table, the majority (62%) of these people were staying in one or the other of Bakersfield's two largest emergency shelters, which had a combined utilization or occupancy rate of 96% that night.

The remaining emergency shelter residents were housed in either a small veteran's shelter or one of 3 domestic violence programs, two of which are located in rural communities. Except for a small motel voucher program, which was not utilized on the night in question, there are no emergency shelter resources for the general homeless population outside of Bakersfield.

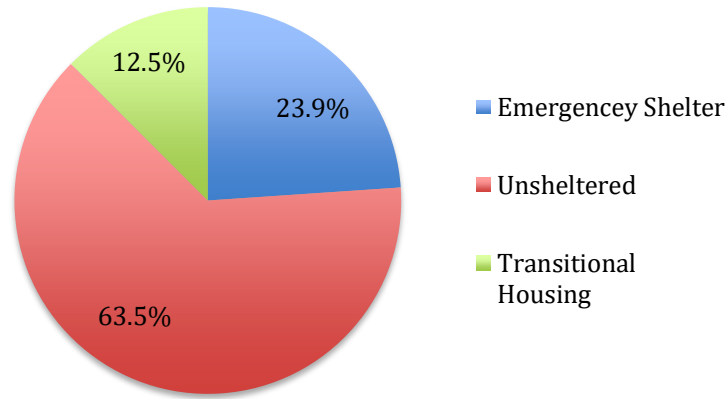**Table 2. Shelter Utilization by Type Program and Region**

Type Shelter Facility	Bakersfield			Rural			Total County		
	IT Count	# Beds	Util. Rate	IT Count	# Beds	Util. Rate	PIT Total	# Beds	Util. Rate
Emergency Shelter	359	373	96%	0	0	0%	359	373	96%
ES – Motel Vouchers	0	0	0%	0	10	0%	0	10	0%
ES –Domestic Violence	13	16	81%	6	41	15%	19	57	33%
Total Emergency	**372**	**389**	**96%**	**6**	**51**	**12%**	**378**	**440**	**86%**
Transitional Housing	115	132	87%	0	0	0%	115	132	87%
TH-Domestic Violence	17	16	106%	14	45	31%	31	61	51%
TH-Bridge Housing	52	71	73%	0	0	0%	52	71	73%
Total Transitional	**184**	**219**	**84%**	**14**	**45**	**31%**	**198**	**264**	**75%**
Total	56	8	_%	20	5	_%	76	)4	2%

Transitional Housing. The 198 individuals and family members residing in transitional housing were distributed between 12 programs, including 3 domestic violence, 6 transitional housing, and 3 bridge housing programs. Bridge housing is a newer type of transitional housing consisting of short-term (up to 90-day) stays for households who have been offered permanent housing vouchers but are not immediately able to secure a suitable unit.

Unsheltered People

Countywide, there were 1,004 people counted who had no shelter, 842 (84%) of who were found in Metro Bakersfield, 162 (16%) in rural areas. Of the unsheltered people counted in Bakersfield, 24% were concentrated in East Bakersfield, 22% in Southwest Bakersfield, and 15% in Central or downtown Bakersfield, as shown in Table 3. Of the 162 unsheltered people counted in rural communities, 137 (85%) were counted in West Kern, only 25 (15%) in East Kern. The largest concentrations of unsheltered homeless people outside Bakersfield were found in Delano, Taft and Arvin. Eighteen percent (18%) fewer homeless people were counted in East Kern than in 2019, due to a less than usual count in the Kern River Valley.

Chart 5. Unsheltered vs. Sheltered Homeless Countywide in 2020

- ■ Emergencey Shelter — 23.9%
- ■ Unsheltered — 63.5%
- ■ Transitional Housing — 12.5%

Table 3. Regional Breakdown of Unsheltered Homeless People in 20202

Region	Adults	People in Households with Children	Total People	% Region
Kern County	**985**	**19**	**1,004**	**100%**
Metro Bakersfield	**825**	**17**	**842**	**84%**
Oildale	47	0	47	6%
River	67	0	67	8%
Rosedale	65	0	65	8%
Central	127	0	127	15%
West	51	1	52	6%
South	40	0	40	5%
Southwest	182	3	185	22%
East	188	13	201	24%
Northeast	32	0	32	4%
Southeast	23	0	23	3%
Unknown	3	0	3	0.4%
Rural Areas	**160**	**2**	**162**	**16%**
West Kern	135	2	137	85%
Delano	66	0	66	41%
McFarland	0	0	0	0
Wasco	7	2	9	6%
Shafter	5	0	5	3%
Taft	31	0	31	19%
Frazier Park	6	0	6	4%
Arvin	15	0	15	9%
Lamont	1	0	1	1%
Lost Hills	4	0	4	2%
East Kern	25	0	25	15%
Tehachapi	4	0	4	2%

Cal City/ Mojave/Rosamond	10	0	10	6%
Ridgecrest	3	0	3	2%
Kern River Valley	8	0	8	5%

Demographic Characteristics of Homeless Population

Household Status. As shown in Table 4, The 1,580 homeless people counted were living in 1,318 separate households, including households with at least "one adult and one child" (i.e., families with children), households with "children only," and "households without children." Households with children accounted for only 5% of all households and averaged 1.9 children. Most of these households were single parent families. Only one unaccompanied minor was found on the streets of Bakersfield. Households without children averaged about 1.03 adults per household.

Table 4. Household Status of Homeless Population in 2020

Type Household	Households		Adults		Children		All People	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
At least one Adult and one Child	73	5%	79	5%	141	99%	220	14%
Children only Households (no adults)	1	0%	n/a	n/a	1	1%	1	0%
Adults without Children	1,318	95%	1,359	95%	n/a	n/a	1,359	86%
Total	1,392	100%	1,438	100%	142	100%	1,580	100%

Gender. The percent of females in the homeless population has risen gradually since the mid-2000s from about 25% to 30% in recent years, as shown in Table 5. The trend of increasing percentage of unsheltered females is continuing, with almost 53% unsheltered in 2020, versus 51% in 2019 and 34% in 2018. Seventy-two (72%) percent of homeless females were in households without children and, of these, 70% were unsheltered.

Table 5. Gender and Sheltered Status of Homeless Population in 2020

Gender	Number	Percent	Percent Unsheltered
Male	1,090	69.0%	68.2%
Female	482	30.5%	52.7%
Transgender	7	0.4%	85.7%
Gender Non-Conforming	1	0.1%	
Total	**1,580**	**100%**	

Age. The percentages of children, youth, and older adults composing the homeless population shown in Table 6 are similar to those found in previous PIT Counts, although the numbers are higher due to the increase in homelessness in 2020. Of the 142 children counted, only 7 children (5%) were unsheltered. One or more adults accompanied all but one of the unsheltered children.

Table 6. Age Breakdown of Homeless Population in 2020

Age Group	Number	Percent	Percent Unsheltered
Children (under 18)	142	9%	5%
Youth (18-24)	89	6%	67%
Older Adults (over 24)	<u>1,349</u>	<u>85%</u>	69%
Total	**1,580**	**100%**	--

Homeless youths (18-24 years) account for about 6% of the homeless population. Many of these youths have experienced traumatic childhoods and/or recently exited the foster care or juvenile justice systems. Sixty-seven percent (67%) were unsheltered during the count. Twenty-four percent (24%) were female. Eight youth were parenting youth, typically single mothers, with combined total of 12 small children.

Ethnicity and Race. Black and American Indian people are both significantly overrepresented in the homeless population (18%, 4%) compared to their proportion (6%, 0.5%) in the Kern County population, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Race and Ethnicity

	Number	Percent
Ethnicity:		
Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino	1,024	64.8%
Hispanic/Latino	556	35.2%
Race:		
White	1,131	71.6%
Black/African American	277	17.5%
Asian	9	0.6%
American Indian/Alaska Native	63	4.0%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	8	0.5%
Multiple Races	<u>92</u>	<u>5.8%</u>
	1,580	**100%**

Subpopulations of Homeless Adults

Priority subpopulations for permanent supportive housing under the Housing First Approach adopted by the BKRHC include chronically homeless peoples and homeless military veterans. Increasing housing placement for both groups is facilitated through the Community Solutions Built for Zero method, using By-Name Lists and lean-6 improvement testing.

Chronically Homeless People. HUD defines chronically homeless people as individuals and families who have been homeless for at least a full year or four times in the last three years, and in which cases the individual or adult family head has a chronic mental or physical disability and/or substance use disorder. Chronically homeless people, especially those who are unsheltered, are extremely needy and vulnerable due to multiple health issues, exposure and length of time homeless.

Of the 1,438 homeless adults counted in 2020, less than 1% (0.3%, or 4 adults) was chronically homeless compared to 15% (or 178 adults) in the previous year, and 17% in

2018, as shown in Table 8 and Chart. This achievement is due to a concerted effort by the BKRHC to outreach, engage, and prioritize this subpopulation for housing vacancies. In January 2020, the BKRHC reached "functional zero" for chronically homeless clients, the point where monthly placements exceeded the inflow of new clients.

Military Veterans. Veterans accounted for 7% (107 people) of all homeless adults in January 2020, down from 10% (123 people) in 2019 and a high of 14% (173 people) in 2011. Although the BKRHC has yet to end veteran's homelessness, it attributes the continuing reduction in the face of increasing homeless numbers to use of the Built For Zero method. Fifty percent (50%) of veterans had shelter, typically in emergency shelter or transitional housing provided by the California Veterans Assistance Foundation. Ninety-three percent (93%) were male, 7% female. Only one veteran headed a household with children. No veterans were chronically homeless.

Other Subpopulations

Other subpopulations of homeless people tracked by the Homeless Collaborative include adults with a serious mental illness, substance use disorder, HIV/AIDS, and survivors of domestic violence, as shown in Table 8 and Chart 6.

Mental Illness. Twenty-nine percent (26%) of homeless adults reported a history of treatment and/or hospitalization for a serious mental illness, 86% of whom were unsheltered. This percentage is similar to that found in previous years, and is consistent with state and national studies showing about one-quarter to one-third of homeless adults experiencing a serious mental illness.

Substance Use Disorders. Thirty-nine percent (39%) of homeless adults reported having experienced and/or been treated for a substance use disorder, 12% fewer than reported this in 2019. This rate is considered to be an underestimate of the extent of substance use disorders in the homeless population because many people are reluctant to reveal this information. A high percentage (86%) of this subpopulation was unsheltered.
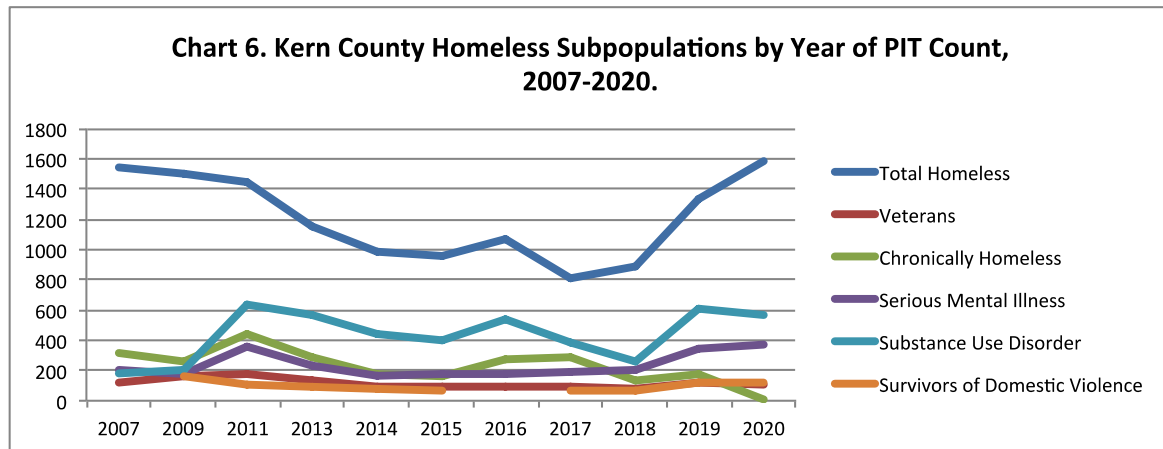
Table 8. Adult Homeless Subpopulations

Adult Subpopulations	Sheltered		Unsheltered		Total Adults	% All Adults
	#	**%**	**#**	**%**	**#**	**%**
All Homeless Adults	**441**	**31%**	**997**	**69%**	**1,438**	**100%**
Veterans	54	50%	53	50%	107	7%
Chronically Homeless	0	0	4	100%	4	0.3%
Serious Mental Illness	53	14%	316	86%	369	26%
Substance Use Disorder	77	14%	485	86%	562	39%
HIV/AIDS	3	37.5%	5	62.5%	8	0.6%
Domestic Violence Survivors	36	30%	84	70%	120	8%

HIV/AIDS. Eight (8) homeless adults reported that they had HIV/AIDS, 5 of whom were unsheltered. This was two more people than were counted in January 2019.

Domestic Violence Survivors. Eight percent (8%) of all homeless adults reported that they were currently homeless as a result of domestic violence, compared to 6% the previous year.

A total of 50 people, including 25 women and 25 children were staying in domestic violence emergency shelters or transitional housing on the night in question (see Table 2).

Chart 6. Kern County Homeless Subpopulations by Year of PIT Count, 2007-2020.

Discussion

The BKRHC Point-In-Time Committee began meeting in May 2019 to plan, coordinate, and implement the annual PIT Count. The PIT Count has become an enormous management challenge, in terms of logistical, technical, volunteer recruitment, training, and public relations aspects. This is even more challenging in an 8,000-square-mile county with a large urban area, 10 small cities, and more than 30 unique rural communities. Some of the major issues involved include:

● From the beginning, the BKRHC has attempted to count and survey every homeless adult in the county, in contrast to many equally or more populous CoCs where random sampling is used to extrapolate subject data. While this has been relatively easy to do in the case of homeless persons residing in shelters, using the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and provider surveys, locating and surveying unsheltered homeless people has been more difficult, particularly in rural areas where there are few service providers. This has resulted in inconsistent counts or undercounts of the homeless populations as happened in Tehachapi and Kern River Valley in 2020. One solution might be to add more locally drawn survey teams and extend the count hours in rural areas, subject to HUD approval.

● In 2020, the BKRHC joined a number of other CoCs in implementing a mobile cell phone application (Survey 123) built into the County's Esri system that incorporated the survey tool and GIS positioning, allowing volunteers to securely input and upload survey answers and locational information in real time from their smart phones to a central server, thus eliminating the paper to computer transfer. Although the app was generally well-received by those who used it, judging from surveyor exit interviews, there were some technical "glitches" and user problems that caused delays, mistakes, or surveyors resorting to written surveys, that should be resolved next year with corrections to the app and additional training.

sponsors, without whom the Point In Time Count could not have taken place – Adventist Health, Kern Behavioral Health and Recovery Services, and The Mission at Kern. Thank you also to the leadership provided by Jan Lemucchi, PIT Committee Chair.