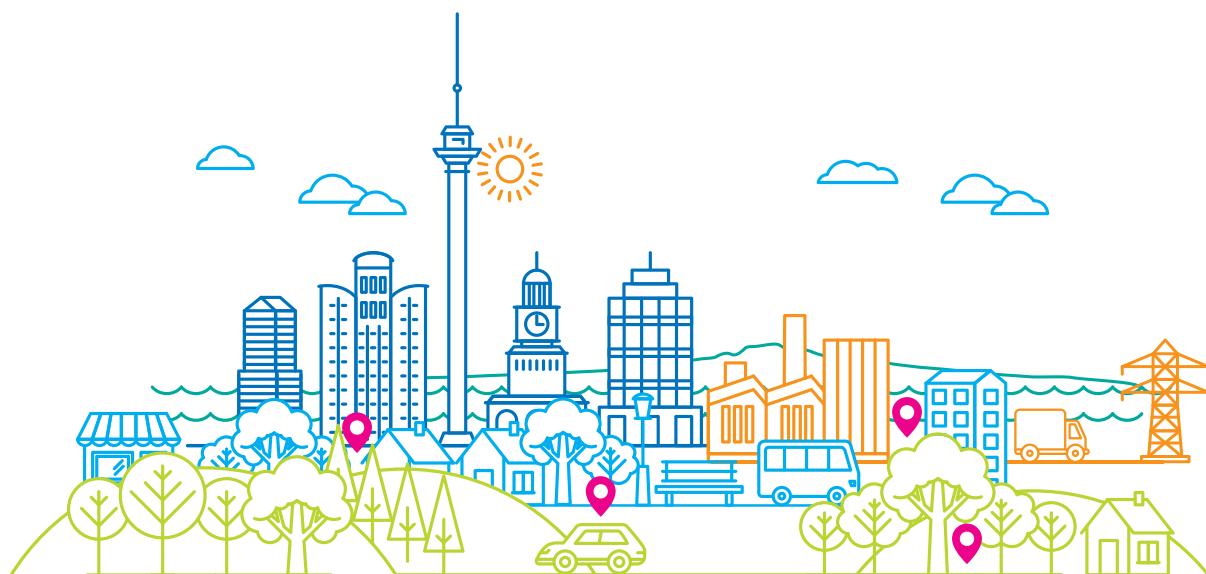# Ira Mata, Ira Tangata

## AUCKLAND'S HOMELESS COUNT



# *Ira Mata, Ira Tangata:* Auckland's Homeless Count Executive Summary

## POINT IN TIME COUNT 2018

HOUSING FIRST
AUCKLAND

Supported by

Auckland Council
Te Kaunihera o Tāmaki Makaurau

# Executive summary

This report presents results from *Ira Mata, Ira Tangata: Auckland's Homeless Count*, the first Point in Time (PiT) Count of people living without shelter and in temporary accommodation, which took place across the Auckland region[1] on 17 September 2018.

In 2017, Auckland Council funded Housing First Auckland to deliver the PiT Count to enhance understanding of the size and nature of homelessness experienced by people living without shelter and in temporary accommodation. With a regional focus, *Ira Mata, Ira Tangata*, built on the PiT Counts conducted in the inner city between 2004 and 2016 by central city agencies, including Auckland City Mission.

## Goals of the count

*Ira Mata, Ira Tangata had several objectives.*

1. Gather information to improve understanding of the demographics and experience of people living without shelter (through the survey) and in temporary accommodation (through service level data.)

2. Provide data to inform Auckland's progress to ending homelessness, specifically in relation to people living without shelter and those living in temporary accommodation.

3. Design and deliver a count methodology for use in the New Zealand context which can contribute to current policy discussions on measuring and understanding homelessness.

## Scope of the count

The 2015 Statistics New Zealand definition of homelessness was the starting point to determine the scope of *Ira Mata, Ira Tangata*. The final scope included people in the categories of 'living without shelter' and 'living in temporary accommodation'. The other two categories, 'sharing accommodation' and 'uninhabitable housing', were deemed outside of scope.

## Methodology for the count

The count collected data using two different methods.

1. Between 9.30pm and 12.30am on Monday, 17 September 2018, 577 volunteer interviewers went out across the Auckland region, an area of nearly 5,000 square kilometres, and gathered data through a street count (tally). A survey was also administered if people were awake, approachable and willing to participate, which collected information on people's demographics, experience and history of service use.

2. Following the street count, service level data, including basic demographic information, was collected from participating government departments and service providers to determine how many people were living in temporary accommodation on the same night as the street count[2].

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1   Excluding the Great Barrier Local Board area.
2   More details about data sources are provided in the data collection section of the methodology section.

Volunteer briefing underway on the night of the count.

## The survey sample size

In addition to quantifying the number of people living without shelter and in temporary accommodation, the street count provided an opportunity for people living without shelter to participate in a short survey about themselves and their experience of homelessness.

However, the small sample size means the survey population does not provide a statistically reliable description of the homeless population and caution is urged in extrapolating the findings of the survey to the wider population of people living without shelter.

The survey data does, however, provide useful insight for consideration.

Additionally, there are lessons relating to delivering the PiT Count methodology (for example, volunteer management) and understanding the reach of the count, that can contribute to policy discussions on quantifying and understanding homelessness across New Zealand.

## Limitations of PiT Counts

PiT Counts are an established research method in North America and can be used by government and local services to identify trends and provide insights that can guide national and local efforts to end homelessness (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2012; Government of Canada, 2017). However, a Point in Time Count does not and cannot count every person living without shelter (Cowan, Breakey & Fischer, 1988; Burt, 1993; Dennis, 1993). Factors for this include volunteers not being able to cover the entire region and people living without shelter inadvertently or actively avoiding being counted. More information about the limitations and considerations of this methodology can be found in the research design and fieldwork section of this report.

## Validating the Auckland PiT Count

A study by Metraux et al. (2001) using administrative data collected from homeless service providers estimated the annual number of homeless individuals is 2.5 to 10.2 times greater than can be obtained using a PiT Count. In response to this limitation, a validation exercise was built into the methodology of *Ira Mata, Ira Tangata* to quantify the number of people missed during the count in order to provide an estimated number of people living without shelter on 17 September 2018. More information about the data validation exercise can be found in the research design and fieldwork section of this report.

## Findings

This section details the headline findings; more detail can be found in the findings section of this report.

On the night of 17 September 2018, a minimum of 3,674 people were living without shelter or in temporary accommodation across the Auckland region (Figure 1). This number includes a minimum of 800 people living without shelter (which is a validation-adjusted number based on a count of 336 people) and 2,874 people who were reported by providers to be in temporary accommodation.

# People living without shelter and in temporary accommodation

**800** people estimated to be living without shelter based on a validation exercise[3]

▼

Based on the actual count of **336** people living without shelter

**179** people living rough

**157** people living in cars

| **335** adults | **1** child |
| --- | --- |

▼

Of which, **59** met the screening criteria and gave consent to begin the survey

**45** people living rough

**13** people living in cars

**1** person didn't confirm

A minimum of **2,874** people in temporary accommodation placements[4]

▼

**1027** people in MSD[5] Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant funded accommodation

| **474** adults | **553** children |
| --- | --- |

➕

**1,768** people in transitional housing and other temporary settings[6]

| **1041** adults | **746** children | **60** age unknown |
| --- | --- | --- |

➕

**79** adults in mental health and addiction services[7]

A minimum of **3,674** people living without shelter and in temporary accommodation across the Auckland region.

*Figure 1:* Minimum number of people living without shelter and in temporary accommodation.

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3   More information on the validation exercise is provided in the methodology section.
4   These 2,874 people are in 1,325 places. A placement may constitute one or more people.
5    Ministry of Social Development.
6   This includes data provided by 12 transitional and other temporary housing providers, and the Department of Corrections on their probation managed transitional housing.
7   This includes data from 12 mental health and addiction services from across Auckland's three district health boards. These 79 adults were homeless upon entering the service and the assumption is that they would have been homeless on night of the count.

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## The street count tally of people living without shelter

A total of 336 people were counted as living without shelter on the night of the count. Of this number:

- The largest concentration across the region was in central Auckland in the Waitematā Local Board area (128 people), the second largest concentration was in the Ōtara-Papatoetoe Local Board area (39 people), followed by the Maungakiekie-Tāmaki Local Board area (18 people).

- 47% (157 people) were in vehicles.

## Data from the street survey of people living without shelter

Of the 336 people counted as living without shelter, 59 (17.6%) met the criteria to participate in the survey and provided consent to start the survey. While the small sample size means the results do not provide a statistically reliable description of the homeless population, it is worth noting that:

- Māori, at 11% of the general Auckland population, were over-represented among those surveyed at 42.7% (53 people).

- People with a Rainbow identity[8] and disabled people were represented in the sample at a disproportionate level when compared to general population data.

- 45.7% (21 people) had spent more than five years living without shelter.

- 41.3% (19 people) had experienced homelessness before the age of 18.

- People reported a high use of public systems, particularly:

  - 44.7% (21 people) had experienced foster care or a group home as a child.

  - 45.7% (21 people) had completed a prison sentence.

- 54.6% (24 people) visited a hospital emergency department in the past 12 months and 18% reported 10 or more visits.

- 41.0% (18 people) were admitted to hospital in the past 12 months.

## Service data on people living in temporary accommodation

Data provided about people in temporary accommodation including Ministry of Social Development Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants (MSD EH SNG) funded accommodation, mental health and addiction services and transitional housing and other temporary settings highlighted:

- At least 46% of people living in temporary accommodation were under 18 years old (1,300 people).

- Māori[9], at 11% of the general Auckland population, were over-represented among people living in temporary accommodation at 39.9%.

- Pasifika people[10], at 15% of the general Auckland population, were over-represented among people living in temporary accommodation at 38. 8%.

- Single-adults with child/ren are 2.5 times more likely than two-adults with child/ren to be experiencing homelessness in temporary accommodation; with 82.6% of single-adults, with child/ren, being female.

## Summary

*Ira Mata, Ira Tangata* was a significant piece of developmental work for Auckland and New Zealand. It is the largest PiT Count conducted in New Zealand to date, both in relation to the geographical coverage area and the number of volunteers involved.

The count found that on 17 September 2018 there was a minimum[11] of 3,674 people living without shelter and in temporary accommodation across the Auckland region. It also highlighted that homelessness disproportionately impacts certain groups and people living without

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8  A 'rainbow identity' is an inclusive term to identify people who have a diverse sex, gender identity or sexual identity.

9  Please refer to the results for information on how ethnicity was categorised.

10  Ibid.

11  A 'minimum' because the number does not include data on people living in boarding houses or campgrounds (as included in the Statistics New Zealand definition of homelessness); data on people in emergency departments, inpatient services or Police cells; or data from all transitional housing providers.

shelter reported high use of public systems.

Homelessness has far-reaching impacts on people, whānau and communities, and there are strong ethical, moral and financial drivers to end it.

Homelessness is a complex issue requiring considerable changes to how the system currently works. *Ira Mata, Ira Tangata* was an important step forward, demonstrating the willingness of people, agencies and organisations to work together to better understand the situation in order to respond more effectively. This collaboration and momentum can continue to be built upon to enhance the way in which we all work together using data to create better outcomes. To be successful, solutions will need to be grounded in partnership to create a joined-up systems approach which improves prevention efforts and services for people experiencing homelessness.

# Recommendations

## a). Policy

It is recommended that:

1. Government ministries, particularly housing, health, education and justice, work collaboratively together and with providers to respond early and promptly to prevent homelessness occurring. This would include measures such as discharge planning to ensure people are not discharged into homelessness.

2. A national homelessness action plan is developed in collaboration with community sector stakeholders to which regions and cities can align their plans and efforts to end homelessness, with a focus on data collection to inform evidence-based responses.

3. The New Zealand definition of homelessness incorporates a cultural dimension including a Māori worldview.

4. A coordinated, joined-up and consistent approach is taken to designing and delivering outreach programmes across the region which connect people to housing and support, involving central and local government and government and non-government services.

5. There is recognition of the high number of children in temporary accommodation and a permanent housing response for people with children is planned and resourced.

## b). Planning, funding and service delivery

It is recommended that:

6. Focus is placed on providing people living without shelter and in temporary accommodation with permanent housing options.

7. Services are responsive to groups who disproportionately experience homelessness including Māori, Pasifika people, rainbow people and disabled people.

8. A targeted response is provided to support local board areas with the highest concentrations of people living without shelter, including the Waitematā, Ōtara-Papatoetoe and Maungakiekie-Tāmaki Local Board areas. This should be supported by a regional approach that responds to the fact that people are living without shelter across the region, including remote rural areas.

9. People with lived experience of homelessness are represented at all levels of planning.



Volunteer resources ready for the count.

## c). Data

Nationally, it is recommended that:

10. A homelessness data expert group is established to support the development of a national approach to data collection. Membership could include Housing First and transitional housing providers, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, Housing New Zealand Corporation and experts on Kaupapa Māori approaches and Māori data sovereignty.

For Auckland it is recommended that:

11. Providers move to delivering a coordinated access and By-Name List approach, which involves working in a more coordinated way to improve access to housing and support services. This approach also provides an understanding of the level of need for housing and support services across Auckland to inform city-wide planning and funding.

    11a. Prioritisation is given to developing an approach appropriate for Auckland's cultural context, affirming the mana of people experiencing homelessness.

12. Data collected by government ministries and departments, including housing, health, education and justice, is strengthened to inform sector-wide responses to end homelessness.

    12a. Funders support enhanced data collection, data sharing and planning across the wider social sector to better inform funding and planning.

For other cities and towns considering data collection approaches, based on learnings from *Ira Mata, Ira Tangata*, it is recommended that:

13. If capacity and collaborative agency relationships exist, consideration is given to developing a By-Name List (which can include delivering a Registry Week). If not, consider proceeding with an anonymous PiT Count and building a post-count validation exercise into the project.

## Further research

It is recommended that more research is required to understand:

1. The number of people in shared accommodation, including couch-surfing and over-crowding, and the nature of people's experiences.

2. Whether the location and availability of transitional housing meets the level and location of demand across the region.

3. The needs of people in temporary accommodation, including people in caravan parks and boarding houses, with a view to creating permanent housing solutions.

4. The situation for women experiencing homelessness.

## Next steps

1. The findings of *Ira Mata, Ira Tangata* will be reviewed by the multi-agency Housing First Auckland Governance Group to identify opportunities for the organisations that are represented to improve collaboration towards preventing and addressing homelessness so that it becomes rare, brief and non-recurring.

2. Work will continue between Housing First Auckland and Auckland's temporary accommodation providers to strengthen and enhance the use of data to improve outcomes, with a focus on consistent data measures and collection.

3. Services within and affiliated to Housing First Auckland will continue to develop a coordinated entry approach, which includes developing By-Name Lists that respond to the Auckland context. This will require services to develop shared data practices that contribute to improving access to services for people experiencing homelessness.

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