



Merced City and County Continuum of Care

2021 Homeless
Count Report

May 2021

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The 2021 Merced County Homeless Count and Survey was a success due to the efforts of the following volunteers:

Kelly Turner
John Ceccoli,
Christy McCammon,
Jeremy Mumford,
Michelle Whitaker,
Matthew Serratto,
Lauren Pope,
Sean Simmons,
Arthur Thompson,
Sherri Conant,
Sonia Suria,
Norma Cardona,
Helidee Millan-Govea,
Sandra Ruiz,
David Serna,
Gary Brizzee,
Cornelia Leyva,
Linda Dash,
Alexandra Pierce,
Lloyd Pareira,
Hector Isas,
Erica Cabrera,
Ken Percival,
Sara Maldonado,
Jennifer Loa,
Leigh Ann Bridgman
Maria Santos
Veronica Suarez,
Marisol Calderon,
Helene Mitchell,
Tanya Ceja,
Maria Santos,
Sandra Salas,
Julie Kellum,
Lisa Jacquez,
John Palm,
Sarrah Wallace,

Candice Adam-Medefind,
Alejandro Araiza,
Amanda Robinson,
Jared Jenson,
Ryan Miller,
Rose Meedina,
Darryl Vitato,
Yvonne Ortega,
Cristina Reyes,
Alejandro Araiza,
Edgar Serrano,
KJ Souza,
Elvira Sanchez,
Kristin Bizzack,
Rafael Radillo,
Ryan Miller,
Jill Badillo,
Sandino Vazquez,
Melinda Xiong,
Noah Venegas,
Gwen Hewitt,
Gwen Hewitt,
Angelina Thompson,
Elena Contreras,
Gwendolyn Hewitt,
Lauren Marks,
Kevin Lewis,
Stephen Hammond,
Sandra Lopez,
Naomi Elliott,
Sheryl Serros,
Yesenia Hernandez,
Barbara Richey,
Crystal Condon,
Mai Moua Thao,
Lucas Brown,
Pablo Perez,

Furthermore, we would like to acknowledge the following agencies:

Behavioral Health and Recovery Services Merced County

Bethel Community Church

Castle HSA

County of Merced

District Attorney/City Council

Healthy House Merced

Livingston Community Health Clinic

Los Banos Police

Merced County Human Services Agency

Merced County Community Action Agency

Merced County Executive Office

Merced Union High School District

Sierra Saving Grace

Symple Equazion

The Salvation Army

Turning Point Community Programs

For more information about this report please contact Joe Colletti,
at joecolletti@urban-initiatives.org.

The report was prepared by the Institute for Urban Initiatives
Joe Colletti, PhD, Chief Executive Officer, Institute for Urban Initiatives
Sofia Herrera, PhD, Executive Director, Office for Urban Initiatives

NOTE: Please contact Phil Schmauss concerning any volunteer or agency that was
mistakenly omitted at phillipschmauss@gmail.com.

A copy of this report is available at www.MercedCoC.com.

Table of Contents

	Page
Total Number of Homeless Persons	5
Total Number of Unsheltered and Sheltered Persons by Location	6
Unsheltered Persons	8
Sheltered Persons	8
Homeless Count Methodology	9
Background Information Concerning the Homeless Count	12
When Was the Count Conducted?	13
Who was Counted?	13
Who Conducted the Count?	14
How Was the Count Conducted?	14

I. Executive Summary

A. Total Number of Homeless Persons

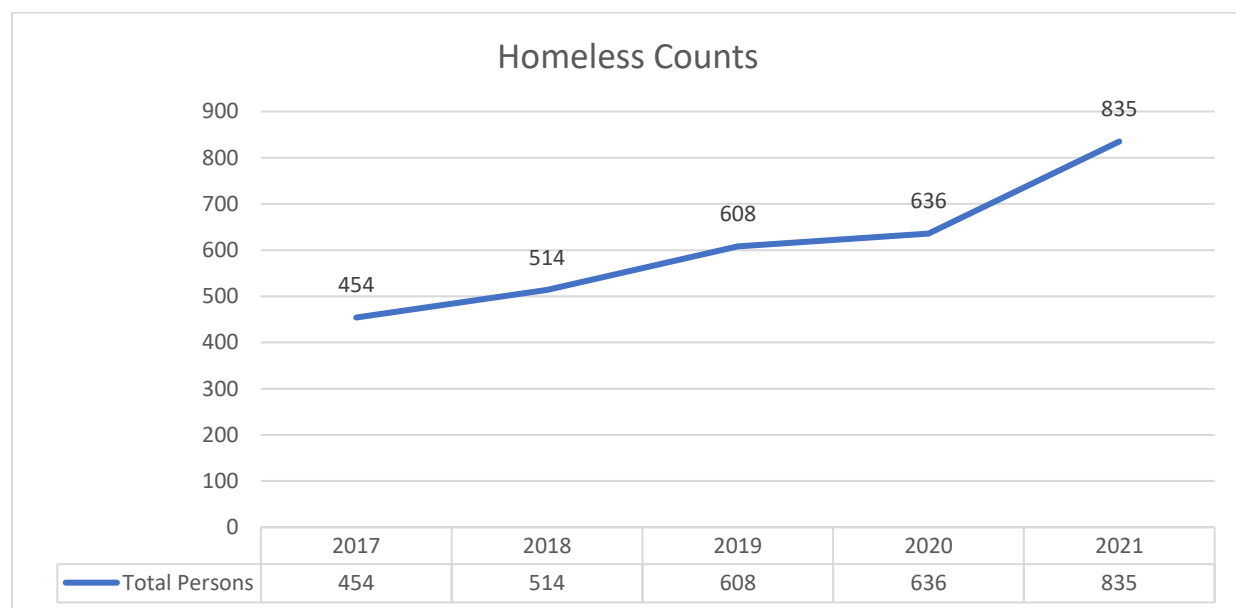
There were 835 adults and children who were counted as homeless on Thursday, January 28, 2021. In 2020, 636 adults and children were counted as homeless. A comparison of the two counts reveals 199 more persons were counted in 2021, which represents an increase of 31% when compared to 2020.

Table 1. Comparison of 2019 and 2020 Homeless Counts

	Sheltered	Unsheltered	Total
2020 Homeless Count	323	313	636
2021 Homeless Count	380	455	835
Difference:	+57 (+18%)	+142 (+45%)	+199 (+31%)

Chart 1 shows that the number of persons counted each year increased during the 5-year period of 2017 – 2021. The number of persons counted in 2017 was 454 and 835 in 2021, which represents an increase of 381 persons or 84%.

Chart 1.



It is important to note that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) limits the count to persons who are defined as

- Homeless persons living in a place not designed or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for humans (these persons must be counted as unsheltered); and
- Persons living in emergency shelters and transitional housing projects (these persons must be counted as sheltered).

A. Total Number of Unsheltered and Sheltered Persons by Location

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the total number of unsheltered and sheltered persons counted in 2021 by jurisdiction.

The City of Merced had the highest total of persons counted. The total count of 482 persons represents 58% of the county-wide total of 835 persons. Nearly half (49%) of the total number of 455 unsheltered persons counted county-wide were in the City of Merced and two-thirds (67%) of the total number of 380 sheltered persons counted county-wide were in the City of Merced.

The City of Los Banos had the second highest total of persons counted. The total count of 169 persons represents 20% of the county-wide total of 835 persons. Nearly one-fourth (24%) of the total number of 455 unsheltered persons counted county-wide were in the City of Los Banos and 16% (60) persons of the total number of 380 sheltered persons counted county-wide were in the City of Los Banos.

More than three-fourths (78%) of the total number of persons counted county-wide were counted in the cities of Merced and Los Banos; 482 persons in Merced and 169 in Los Banos, which totals 651 persons or 78% of the 835 persons counted county-wide.

Table 2. Total Number of Unsheltered and Sheltered Persons Counted in 2021 by Jurisdiction

	Unsheltered Count		Sheltered Count		Total Count	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Atwater	35	8	18	5	53	100
Cressey	0	0	0	0	0	100
Delhi	3	1	0	0	3	100
Dos Palos	19	4	7	2	26	100
El Nido	0	0	0	0	0	100
Gustine	0	0	7	2	7	100
Hilmar	1	0	0	0	1	100
Le Grande	0	0	3	1	3	100
Livingston	19	4	15	4	34	100

Los Banos	109	24	60	16	169	100
Merced	224	49	258	67	482	100
Planada	5	1	0	0	5	100
Santa Nella	22	5	0	0	22	100
Snelling	0	0	2	1	2	100
South Dos Palos	0	0	0	0	0	100
Stevinson	1	0	0	0	1	100
Winton	17	4	0	0	17	100
County-wide (DV programs)	0	0	10	2	10	100
Total:	455	100	380	100	835	100

Table 3 provides a comparison of 2019 count to 2021 count by number of unsheltered, sheltered, and total number of persons by jurisdiction. *(Note: 2020 count was not broken down by area).*

Table 3. 2019 - 2021 Comparison of Unsheltered and Sheltered Persons by Area

Incorporated and Unincorporated Areas	Total Number of Unsheltered Persons				Total Number of Sheltered Persons				Total Number			
	2019	2021	Difference		2019	2021	Difference		2019	2021	Difference	
	#	#	#	%*	#	#	#	%*	#	#	#	%*
Atwater	16	35	+19	118	94**	18	-76	81	146	53	-93	64
Cressey	0	0	0	-	0	0	0	-	0	0	0	-
Delhi	4	3	-1	-	0	0	0	-	4	3	-1	-
Dos Palos	5	19	+14	-	0	7	+7	-	5	26	+21	-
El Nido	0	0	0	-	0	0	0	-	0	0	0	-
Gustine	0	0	0	-	0	7	+7	-	0	7	+7	-
Hilmar	0	1	+1	-	0	0	0	-	0	1	+1	-
Le Grande	0	0	0	-	0	3	3	-	0	3	+3	-
Livingston	6	19	+13	-	0	15	15	-	6	34	+28	-
Los Banos	49	109	+60	122	13**	60	+47	-	62	169	+107	172
Merced	204	224	+20	10	215**	258	+43	20	419	482	+63	15
Planada	0	5	+5	-	0	0	0	-	0	5	+5	-
Santa Nella	0	22	+22	-	0	0	0	-	0	22	+22	-
Snelling	0	0	0	-	0	2	+2	-	0	2	+2	-
South Dos Palos	0	0	0	-	0	0	0	-	0	0	0	-
Stevinson	0	1	+1	-	0	0	0	-	0	1	+1	-
Winton	1	17	+16	-	0	0	0	-	1	17	+16	-
County-wide***	0	0	0	-	0	10	+10	-	0	10	+10	-
Total:	285	455	+170	60	322	380	+58	18	607	835	+228	38

*percentages were only provided for differences that were 200% or less.

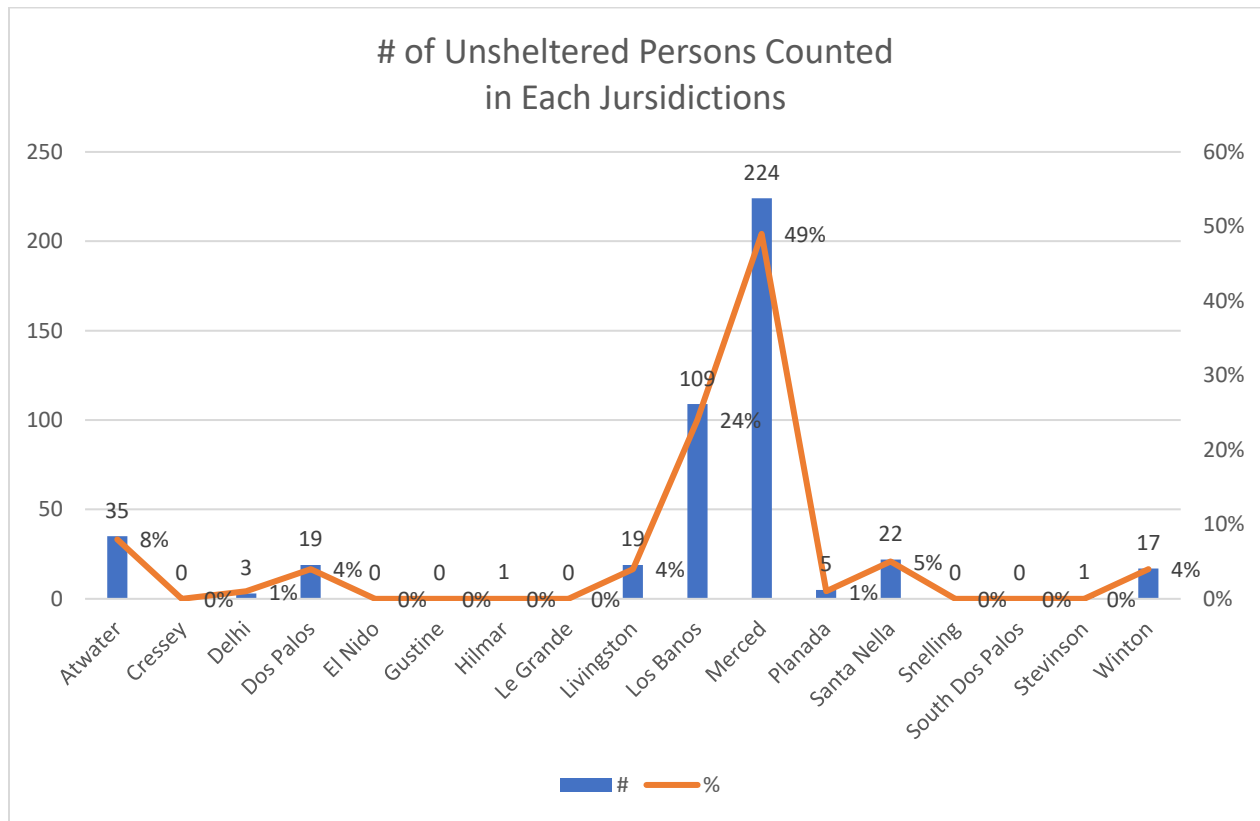
**includes households who received motel vouchers.

***DV programs.

I. Unsheltered Persons

Chart 2 just provides the breakdown of the 2021 unsheltered count by jurisdiction. Nearly half (49%) of unsheltered persons were counted in the City of Merced and nearly one-fourth (24%) in the City of Los Banos.

Chart 2.



II. Sheltered Persons

As required by HUD, the sheltered count included the number of persons and households sleeping in emergency shelters (including seasonal shelters), transitional housing, and Safe Haven programs (of which the County has none) that were listed on the Housing Inventory Chart (HIC). In addition, any persons staying in hotels or motels as a result of receiving a voucher from a social service agency were included in the sheltered count per HUD's instructions if the voucher program was listed on the HIC.

HUD encourages the use of Homeless Management Information Services (HMIS) data to generate sheltered counts and subpopulation data for programs with 100% of beds participating in HMIS. Thus, HMIS was used to gather the total number of occupied beds and the number of persons

that provided a total number of sheltered persons and a breakdown by subpopulation for nearly all sheltered programs as noted in Table 4.

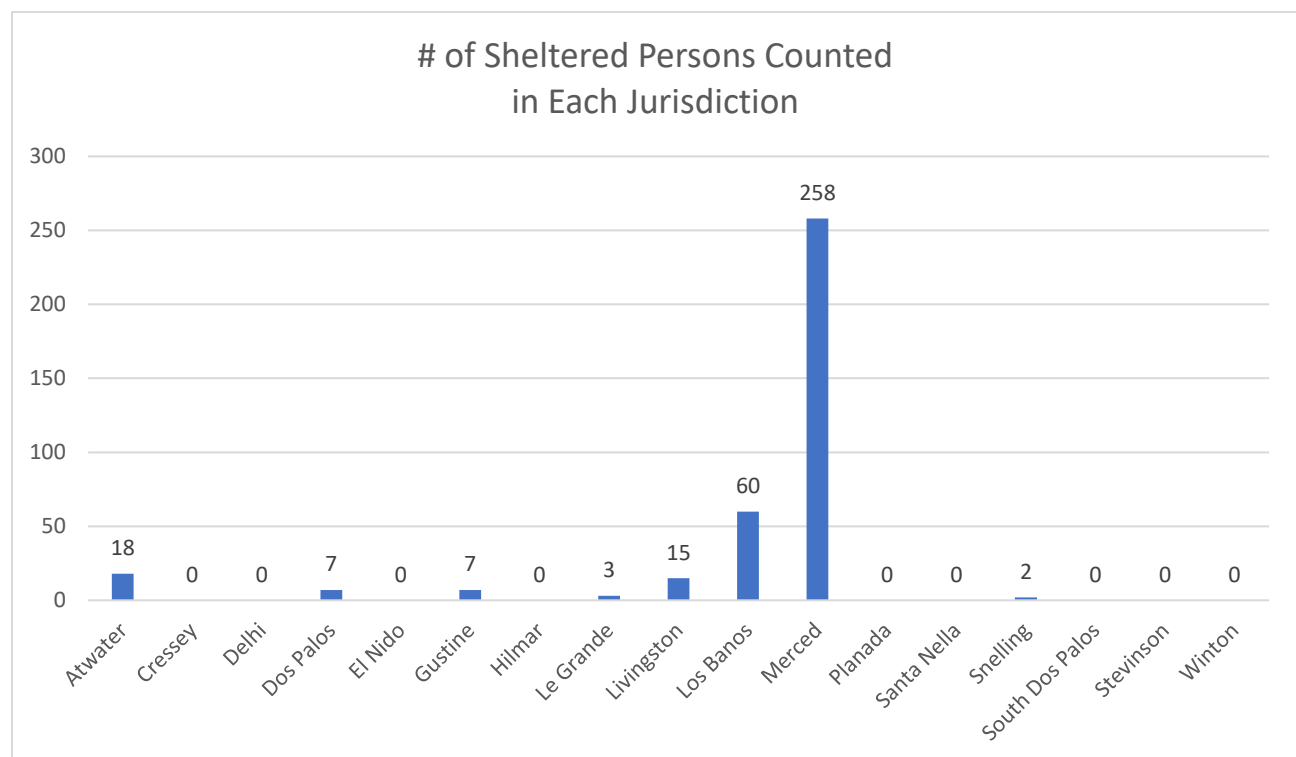
Table 4. Total Shelter Count by Program

Facility	Program:	Total # of Persons
Shelters:		
Community Action Agency	D Street Shelter	25
Merced County Human Services Agency	Motel Vouchers	155
Merced County Rescue Mission	Hope Respite Care Merced	14
Merced County Rescue Mission	Hope Respite Care Los Banos	3
Merced County Rescue Mission	Winter Warming Center	2
Valley Crisis Center	Domestic Violence Shelter	10
Sub-Total:		209
Transitional Housing:		
Merced County Rescue Mission	Bridge to Hope – Los Banos	8
Merced County Rescue Mission	Bridge to Hope – Merced	11
Merced County Rescue Mission	Hope for Men	12
Merced County Rescue Mission	Hope for Women	9
Symple Equazion	Aim High	7
Merced County Human Services Agency	Project Room Key	48
Merced County Rescue Mission	Bridge Housing - Livingston	4
Merced County Rescue Mission	Bridge Housing - Los Banos	2
Merced County Rescue Mission	Bridge Housing - Merced	16
Merced County Rescue Mission	Room at the Inn Shelter to Hope for Families	54
Sub-Total:		171
Total:		380

The table above reveals that more than half —209 persons or 55% of the sheltered population were in shelters and nearly half—171 persons, or 55% were in transitional housing programs.

Chart three notes that the majority of persons were counted in the cities of Merced and Los Banos. Together, 318 persons—258 in Merced and 60 in Los Banos—were counted, which represents 84% of the 380 persons counted as sheltered county-wide.

Chart 3.



III. Homeless Count Methodology

HUD allowed CoCs that felt it was unsafe to conduct an unsheltered count in a similar way during past years to request an exception for the January 2021 unsheltered count, which the Merced CoC did.

What follows is the request to HUD and the response from HUD.

Request to HUD

The Merced County CoC unsheltered count will take place on Thursday, January 28th from 6 am to 10 am. Counting in selected places will take place on an as needed basis for up to one week after the 28th, which is allowed by HUD.

The Merced County CoC is requesting an exception to only conduct a head count of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness (i.e., not data collection on demographics, subpopulation, or household characteristics).

HUD recently announced an exception allowance which allows w CoCs to request an exception to some or all of the unsheltered PIT count requirements (See Conducting the 2021 Unsheltered PIT Count - [Conducted the 2021 Unsheltered PIT Count \(hudexchange.info\)](https://hudexchange.info)).

Implementing a head count will involve:

1. *Counters answering the following question “How certain are you that the person meets HUD’s criteria of staying in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g., tent, vehicle, park bench, etc.)?”*

☐ *Definitely*

☐ *Likely*

☐ *Possibly*

☐ *Not sure*

2. *Only professional volunteers will count (county employees, city, employees, and social service provider staff)*

Note: Per HUD, CoCs conducting counts will need to ensure that all volunteers have some PPE. CoCs should ask all volunteers to bring masks and wear them for the duration of the count and other volunteer efforts. CoCs should be prepared to provide masks to all volunteers as well as hand sanitizer. HUD recommends that all volunteers conducting the count bring masks to provide to those they are interviewing. In areas that have high to moderate COVID-19 cases, HUD recommends that CoCs supply N95 masks to all persons involved in the count. Depending on the level of community transmission of COVID-19, CoCs should consider whether to also provide gloves, face shields, N95 masks, or other PPE. CoCs will have to work with their local public health authority to ensure they provide adequate PPE for conducting a safe count.

3. *Blitz count method will be implemented on January 28th from 6 am to 10 am (i.e., canvassing different areas at same time to avoid double counting)*
4. *Use local knowledge to target known locations (e.g., areas with known concentrations of unsheltered homeless people) within cities and non-incorporated areas*
5. *Implementing a sub-population survey will not occur for safety reasons related to COVID-19.*
6. *Per HUD, CoCs should work closely with public health and health care partners to conduct the PIT count. Partnering with Health Care for the Homeless providers and the public*

health authority will give CoCs needed insight about safely conducting the unsheltered PIT count and may provide additional access to health resources to conduct the count.

Approval from HUD

*Thank you for submitting your request for CA-520 – Merced City & County Continuum of Care (CoC) to be excepted from conducting some of the 2021 unsheltered Point-in-Time (PIT) count. Given the circumstances you described in your CoC, including the current rise in COVID-19 cases and the risk to volunteers and persons experiencing homelessness, **HUD grants you the exception to conduct a partial unsheltered PIT count in 2021.** HUD accepts your proposal to conduct just a head count of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.*

Please note that HUD still expects you to conduct a full sheltered PIT count and Housing Inventory Count (HIC).

HUD encourages you to continue to monitor your unsheltered population and adjust your efforts as needs be based on what you learn.

Thank you for all your hard work and commitment to serve people experiencing homelessness in your community.

Thanks,

William Snow
Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Phone: 202-402-4541
William.Snow@hud.gov

IV. Background Information Concerning the Homeless Count

The Department of Housing and Urban Development HUD), as part of its requirements for local jurisdictions to continue to receive continuum of care funding for homeless persons, asks local jurisdictional applicants to conduct a “one night point-in-time” homeless count every other year during the last 10 days of January.

HUD requires all CoCs that receive CoC Program funding to complete a sheltered count every year and an unsheltered count during the last 10 days of January in odd-number years. The Merced County CoC conducts an unsheltered count every year.

- **When Was the Count Conducted?**

The homeless count was conducted on the streets of Merced County during the hours of 6:00 am-10:00 am on Thursday, January 28, 2021. The count was also conducted overnight on January 27 in shelters and transitional housing programs.

- **Who was Counted?**

A person was considered homeless, and thus counted, only when he/she fell within the following HUD-based definition by residing in one of the places described below:

- a. in places not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, and abandoned buildings;
- b. in an emergency shelter;
- c. in transitional or supportive housing for homeless persons who originally came from the streets or emergency shelter.

HUD does not consider the following persons to be homeless—persons who are “doubled up,” or persons who are “near homelessness”—but considers them to be at-risk of homelessness. Following HUD’s guidelines, such persons were not included in the county’s homeless count.

The County of Merced, like many other counties, has a substantial number of households that are at-risk of becoming homeless. Twenty-three percent (17%) of Merced County residents were living below the poverty level according to the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS). This means that approximately 47,000 of the 277,680 County residents representing around 16,000 households are at risk of becoming homeless on a day like today.

Households living below the poverty level are at risk of becoming homeless. Because of their limited income, they frequently have to choose between paying their rent or mortgage and other daily living costs such as child care, clothing, food, health care, and transportation. The generally accepted standard for housing affordability is that households should not spend more than 30% of their incomes on rent and utilities.

Many households can become homeless because of social structural issues such as increases in rent, loss of job, and rising health care costs. In addition, personal experiences such as domestic violence, physical disabilities, mental illness, and substance abuse can cause members of a low-income household or an entire household to become homeless as well. Often, one or more of these experiences factor into a household’s homelessness experience.

- **Who Conducted the Count?**

Merced County continues to prioritize the health and safety of people experiencing homelessness and those who serve them. Therefore, because of COVID-19 concerns, the implementation of the 2021 count was conducted by Continuum of Care leadership, Homeless service providers, and City/County Essential Workers. In addition, staff from shelters and transitional housing programs counted residents in their respective programs.

- **How Was the Count Conducted?**

The 2021 homeless count was a county-wide effort. Prior to the count, essential workers attended planning meetings and an orientation. During the planning meetings, key locations and mapping of sites were discussed in order to ensure that areas where persons congregate were identified and that efforts were made to minimize duplication. *Observation-only Count:* The Merced CoC choose to conduct a blitz or observation counts in the early morning to identify the number of people sleeping in unsheltered situations. To minimize the potential for duplication this was done in a two hour period.