

# THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

## More than 12,700 homeless in O.C., nonprofit's analysis says

By [DAVID MONTERO](#)

2013-09-24 19:52:32



There are more than 12,700 homeless people in Orange County over the course of a year and there remains a dire need to provide emergency shelters for that population, according to a local nonprofit's analysis released Tuesday.

Santa Ana-based OC Partnership culled the data from its July report with the hopes it would be used by nonprofits, politicians and businesses to target the issue of chronic homelessness and help achieve the goals set by a 10-year plan drawn up by the county-based Commission to End Homelessness, composed of public officials,

nonprofits and business leaders.

Scott Larson, executive director of HomeAid Orange County and a member of the commission, said the emergency shelters are critical to reducing the homeless numbers because “we don't have that first doorway to get people off the street.”

Currently, there are only two seasonal emergency shelters that can house about 200 people each in Santa Ana and Fullerton at the California National Guard armories there. There are also a few small ones run by nonprofits that serve a few dozen people in pockets around the county. They are typically open between December and March.

Timothy Huynh, director of grant compliance at Mercy House, which operates the armories, said his group didn't have to turn anyone away last year. But having year-round emergency shelters would help the overall homeless population, he said.

“It's definitely something we need,” Huynh said. “If we can tailor our services to meet the specific needs of each individual, we can move them toward a path that leads to them being in housing.”

Larson said the commission is moving into the third year of the 10-year plan to end homelessness and that the numbers found in the current data will be a new baseline because they used different methods to obtain the information about how many homeless people there were. Before, the data showed 18,325 homeless in 2011 and 21,479 in 2009. But Larson said those numbers were simply extrapolations in some areas, whereas the current data was gathered through an unprecedented push by volunteers to go into areas and to do actual counts.

He said the 12,700 number would be the baseline number as a point of comparison for future reports.

The “2013 Orange County Homeless Count and Survey Report” also found on any given night there were 4,300 homeless people in Orange County – 40 percent of whom are unsheltered. The data also found 20 percent of the homeless population is chronically homeless – meaning they've been homeless four times in the past three years or for 12 months.

Of the homeless population, 480 are living with a severe mental illness. Larson also said the numbers don't include “couch surfers” – young people who sleep on a friend's couch – or those living in motels. He also said some people who live in cars are hard to count – though the 750 volunteers who did the counts were trained to look for vehicles that looked like they may house someone.

Karen Williams, president and chief executive of OC Partnership, said the report is useful for the nonprofits that access the \$16 million in U.S. Housing and Urban Development money that flows to the county to fight

homelessness. That money, she said, will be cut by as much as 10 percent due to sequestration cuts, and she also said if there is a government shutdown next week, it could affect timely disbursements of that money, which goes to assist homeless people.

**Contact the writer:** 714-796-7831 or [dmontero@ocregister.com](mailto:dmontero@ocregister.com)

© Copyright 2013 Freedom Communications. All Rights Reserved.  
[Privacy Policy](#) | [User Agreement](#) | [Site Map](#)