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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Local Point in Time Count Report on Homelessness Published

**Bellingham, WA** - Opportunity Council, in partnership with Whatcom County Health Department, published the 2021 Point in Time (PIT) Count Report for Whatcom County on July 16, 2021. The report provides a snapshot of persons experiencing homelessness in Whatcom County based on annual surveys conducted each year in late January.

Notable findings this year included:

- 859 individuals from 625 different households were counted in 2021.
  - These are the highest numbers recorded since the annual counts began in 2008.
  - The increase was caused largely by expanded access to motels (225 more individuals in motels than in 2020).
  - Compared to 2020, the total number of individuals counted increased by 152 and number of households increased by 70.
- The number of individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness in tents, vehicles, and other unconventional locations remained unchanged from 2020 at 218.
- Use of shelter (motel rooms, emergency shelters and transitional housing) increased by more than 30% from 489 individuals in 2020 to 641 individuals in 2021.
  - Most of this increase is attributable to the expansion of a motel-based emergency shelter program for families with children that was made possible by new pandemic-related resources. The number of homeless families with children sleeping in shelters increased from 64 in 2020 to 96 in 2021. Motel use increased from 8 households in 2020 to 88 households in 2021.
- Unaccompanied (single) adults remain the majority of individuals experiencing homelessness and made up 82% of all households counted in 2021.
- Individuals ranged from 0-87 years old, with a median age of 36.
- 1,347 households (including 2,267 unique individuals) received some form of housing support through the network of housing providers in Whatcom County in 2020.

The methodological changes that were necessary due to COVID-19 make it challenging to draw any conclusions about the year-over-year trends in homelessness. Additionally, because the pandemic has not yet ended, it is difficult to predict how this health crisis will affect homelessness in the future.

“We’ll need to wait and see how trends change in future counts,” says Chris D’Onofrio, housing specialist with Whatcom County Health Department. “There were too many changes in 2021 to be able to say definitively how COVID-19 has affected people experiencing homelessness in Whatcom County. But what we do know is that despite the high number of people counted in 2021, our community’s effort makes a significant difference. We’re grateful for the hard work of our housing partners that prevent housing loss, create pathways for re-housing, and help to stabilize thousands of Whatcom County residents each year. We’re excited by new local, state, and federal resources that will allow us to strengthen existing programs and pilot new ones in the coming months and years. We expect that additional funding, together with a strong commitment from local leaders to create more affordable housing, will allow our partners to provide more assistance than ever before and will lead to lower numbers of people experiencing homelessness in the future.”

Racial inequities in homelessness rates continue to show disproportional effects on people of color in Whatcom County. Over the last year, system administrators have further explored data related to these disparities, adjusted intake processes, built relationships with local tribal administrators, and begun working towards creating greater access to homeless housing and other services for local tribal members. The extent of progress in reducing the disparities remains unclear due in part to challenges with collecting data during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For those at risk of homelessness, resources are available to help. Households who fell behind in rent during the pandemic are being screened for assistance with rent and utilities by calling the Opportunity Council at 360-746-3826.

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development requires that the nationwide Point in Time Count occur on a specific night every year. In Whatcom County, this effort is the result of coordination between housing service providers, outreach specialists, and administrative staff. This year, surveys were abbreviated and outreach was limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Read more about this year’s findings in the Point in Time Count Report at

<https://www.whatcomcounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/57826/PIT2021>.

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