



## Ask Me Anything!

Point-in-Time Counts  
February, 1 2018

### ABOUT AMAs

Ask Me Anything (AMA) sessions provide an opportunity for members of the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#) to ask experts questions about homelessness. This AMA, hosted on February 1st, 2018, invited Henry Dagher, Patrick Hunter and Adam Anderson from the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) and Jesse Donaldson from the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH), to help answer questions about Point-in-Time Counts. This document is a transcript of the PiT Counts AMA. You can find the original discussion here: <http://bit.ly/AMAPiT2018>

In February 2017, the Government of Canada announced *Everyone Counts 2018*. This count will continue to help communities measure their progress in reducing homelessness. Participating communities used a common set of survey questions to better understand homelessness at a local level, while also contributing to the understanding of homelessness across Canada.

### THE EXPERTS



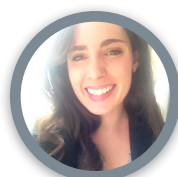
**Adam Anderson** works as a Policy Analyst for the Homelessness Knowledge Development team at HPS. Since starting in February 2015, Adam has had the privilege of participating in PiT Counts in Vancouver, Winnipeg, and Thunder Bay. He has been involved in all aspects of the HPS PiT Count project, from the PiT Count approach to data management. Prior to HPS, Adam worked at the Office for Disability Issues. He holds a Bachelor of Commerce from Carleton



**Henry Dagher** is the manager of the HIFIS Development Team at the Homelessness Partnering Strategy. The team produces both HIFIS 3 and the new web-based HIFIS 4. He has been with HIFIS since 2005.



**Patrick Hunter** has been a Policy Analyst with the HPS on the Knowledge Development team since January 2011. He is the lead analyst on the development of the HPS Point-in-Time Count approach and is the author of the HPS [Guide to Point-in-Time Counts in Canada](#). Before joining the HPS, Patrick completed his PhD in Psychology at the University of Toronto.



**Jesse Donaldson** is the National PiT Count Coordinator at the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, and is available to assist communities that are participating in the 2018 Coordinated Count. Jesse can answer PiT Count questions pertaining to planning, partnerships, implementation and the [COH PiT Count Toolkit](#). Previously, Jesse co-authored the [State of Homelessness 2013](#), [Coming Together: Tackling Unemployment Among Youth Experiencing Homelessness](#) and [Leaving Home: Youth Homelessness in York Region](#).

## QUESTION #1 - CHRISTIE SCOTT

Regarding the HIFIS PiT Count Module. Is there a planned release date for the HIFIS 4 build that will include this Module?

### ■ HENRY DAGHER

Hi Christie Scott, did you know that the HIFIS PiT Count Module in HIFIS 4 is available for trial at [pit.hifs.ca/web](http://pit.hifs.ca/web)? We are actively working on the module and we hope to update that site frequently, so it would be great if you get familiar with it and provide feedback re things not working as expected (or not at all). We hope to have it ready by early March, but we don't have a magic date as yet.

## QUESTION #2 - MARIE MORRISON

Will the PIT Module VI-SPDAT auto-generating data compile the different VI-SPDAT tools separately (single, family, youth)? Or does it really only work with just the VI-SPDAT for single adults?

### ■ HENRY DAGHER

The Community Solutions Overview Excel sheet is geared to ADULTS only. For versions adapted to FAMILIES and YOUTH, Community Solutions have to provide us with modified versions.

## QUESTION #3 - MARIE MORRISON

Will HIFIS 4 PiT Module mirror HIFIS 3 PiT Module (in terms of compiling Registry Week data in graphs and charts)?

### ■ HENRY DAGHER

We aim to match all the features found in HIFIS 3. We are proceeding with the most critical features first and will aim to make successive versions available with more and more features completed.

## QUESTION #4 - MARIE MORRISON

What info if any are the feds getting on hidden homelessness and what are they doing with it?

### ■ PATRICK HUNTER

We collect the survey responses from people experiencing hidden homelessness in communities that choose to include hidden homelessness. The results of their surveys are reported along with the findings from people staying in shelters and who are unsheltered. As an example, you can see how the findings were reported from the 2016 count: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/communities/homelessness/reports/highlights-2016-point-in-time-count.html>

## QUESTION #5 - MARIE MORRISON

Does the data in the PiT Module from the PiT Core Questions and the VI-SPDATs (that gets broken down in charts and graphs immediately) show any breakdown by sheltered, unsheltered and hidden homeless?

### ■ PATRICK HUNTER:

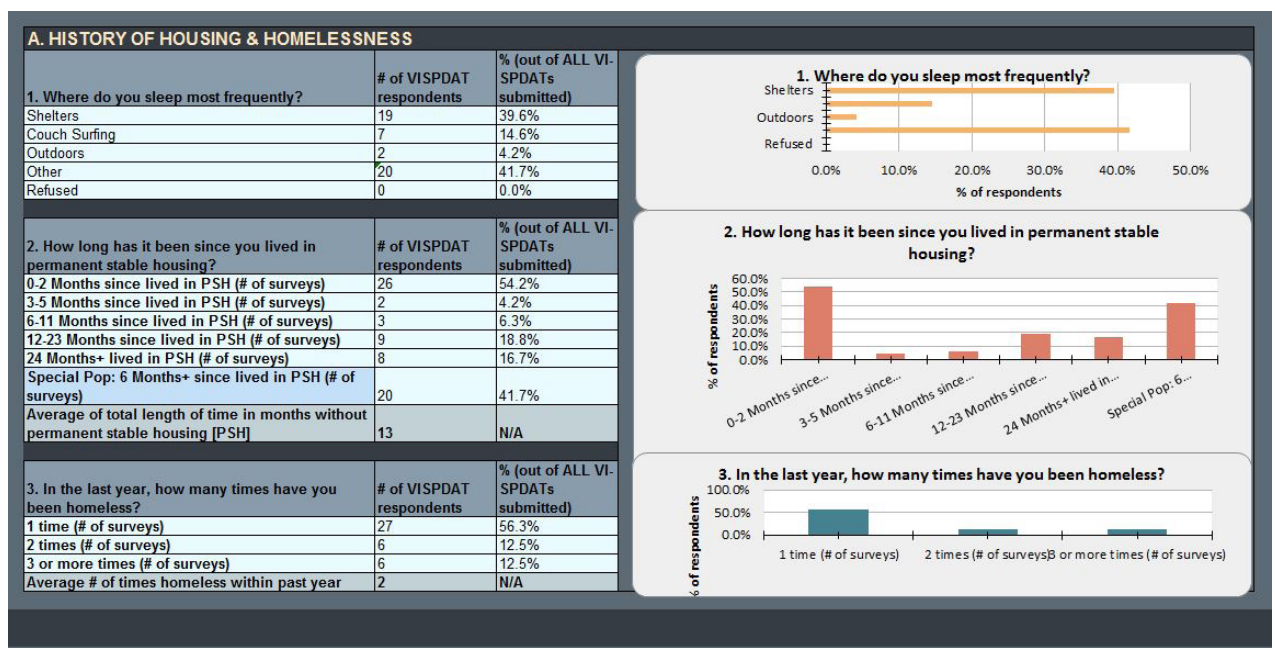
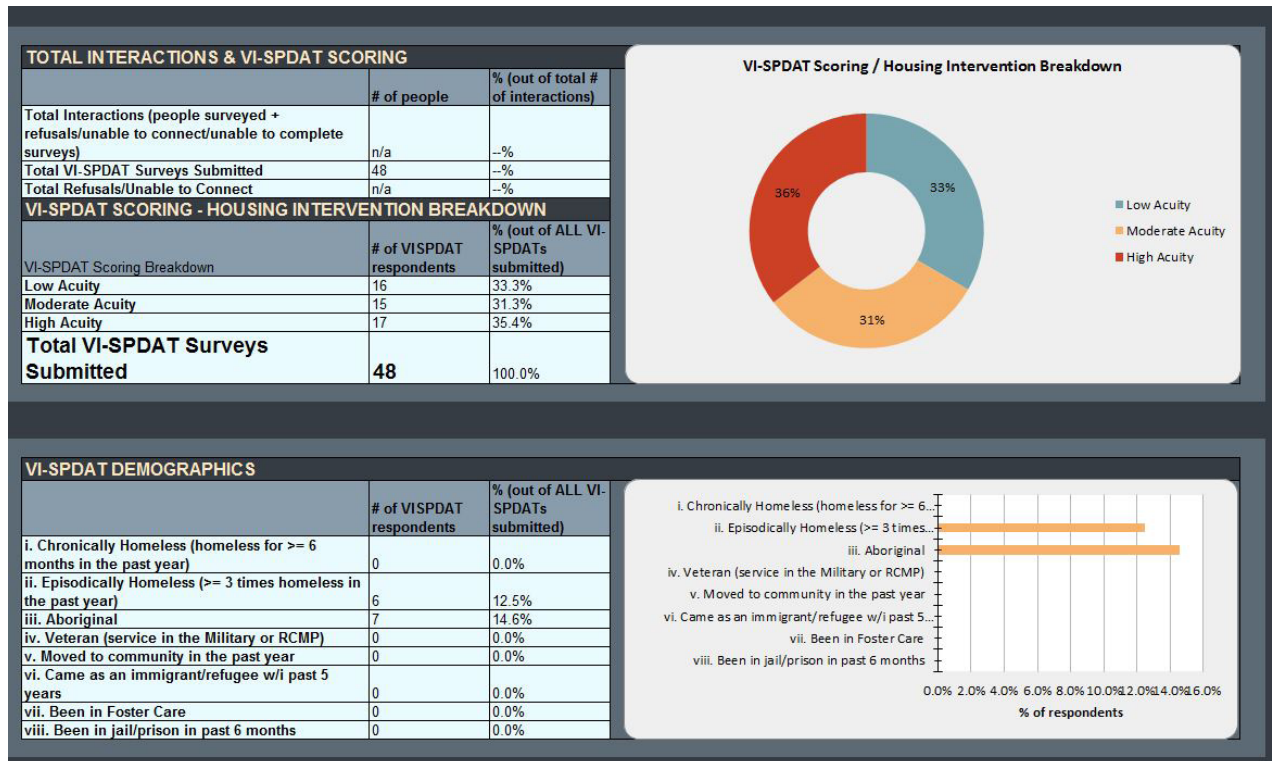
The data includes the response to screening question C (where are you sleeping tonight). The answer to this question can be used to analyze responses by sheltered, unsheltered transitional housing, hidden homelessness and systems homelessness. If anyone is looking for help on how to analyze the results, please contact us at: [hpsr@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca](mailto:hpsr@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca)

# QUESTION #6 - MARIE MORRISON

Sounds like there was some interest for folks in having a really good look at what graphs and charts exist that the HIFIS PiT Module can generate immediately. Is there any way to screenshot and share this so they know what exactly what data they will have access to immediately without further analysis?

## HENRY DAGHER

Please see below



## QUESTION #7 - KELLY CECIL

Hello! We're hoping to include individuals experiencing homelessness within health systems in our count this year, but have had trouble in connecting to the health systems in our community. Do you have any suggestions on how to better engage with them?

### ■ JESSE DONALDSON

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Hi Kelly, thanks for your question.

Engaging with systems can one of the most challenging aspects of the count. It can take time to build relationships and health facilities often have stringent privacy and data policies. If you have any personal or professional connections with anyone working in health, that's often the best place to start. If you don't, it is likely that your PiT Count Committee is connected in some way. Hospital administrators are often a good entry point.

Don't fret if you are unable to connect with health systems in this count. Although it's recommended by HPS (and the Ontario Government) it is not required.

Good luck!

## QUESTION #8 - KELLY CECIL

I also have a question in regards to surveying gender and sexual orientation. I've heard feedback from our volunteers that these questions are a bit too invasive. As this is important information from a data/resource perspective, how can we approach asking for this information in a manner that is respectful and not offensive in any way? Thank you.

### ■ JESSE DONALDSON

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Hi Kelly Cecil,

You can remind volunteers that many questions on the PiT Count Survey, including experiences of homelessness, reason for housing loss, immigration status and income sources, are personal in nature. That is why it's important to ask all questions respectfully and neutrally. For volunteers that are concerned about the questions on gender and sexual orientation, it can be helpful to explain why this data is so important. You can also mention:

The survey was developed in consultation with experts on LGBTQ2S homelessness;

Participants can decline to answer the question if they choose;

Many individuals, especially youth, want the opportunity to self-identify on surveys and forms.

Dr. Alex Abramovich and I are creating a volunteer training resource on this topic. It will be available towards the end of February. In the meantime, feel free to reach out and I'd be happy to discuss it further.

## QUESTION #9 - SABRINA ZOROR

Last year we had trouble recruiting Indigenous volunteers. We wanted our surveyors to reflect the population in our community, as we have a high percentage of Indigenous peoples experiencing homelessness. Do you have any tips or suggestions to make our count more inclusive?

### ■ ADAM ANDERSON

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Thanks for your question Sabrina Zoror. Engage the Indigenous community early in the process. Having Indigenous organizations participate in the PiT Count Planning Committee could provide access to a network of volunteers that can be used. In addition, their involvement in the committee will create an inclusive PiT Count by allowing the organization to provide input on the local approach. Alternatively, reach out to local Friendship Centres, or Indigenous Health Centre and explain the benefits of the PiT Count and see if they would be willing to let you post things on any bulletin boards, send to their own network of partners, or be involved more directly.

## QUESTION #10 - MARY MACKINNON

If we follow the press releases on the workspace do we need approval before sending them out or are they already approved?

### ■ ADAM ANDERSON

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HPS does still require that you send the press release to us for final review. The approval process will not take that long and we usually have a turnaround of a day or two.

## QUESTION #11 - MARY MACKINNON

Where can we find a draft of the screening tool including hidden homeless.

### ■ PATRICK HUNTER

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The recommended screening questions for hidden homelessness are in the HPS Guide, but the response options to question C1 are incorrect (this will be fixed shortly). Here are the correct questions and response options:

Screening C1. Can you stay there as long as you want or is this a temporary situation?

As long as wanted – [thank and end survey]

Temporary situation – [go to C2]

Don't know – [go to C2]

Decline to answer – [thank and end survey]

Screening C2. Do you have a house or apartment that you can safely return to?

Yes – [thank and end survey]

No – [begin survey]

Don't know – [begin survey]

Decline to answer – [thank and end survey]

## QUESTION #12 - MARY MACKINNON

May we have a list of the practice scenarios you used in the training session in Moncton for approaching people in the survey?

### ■ ADAM ANDERSON

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May we have a list of the practice scenarios you used in the training session in Moncton for approaching people in the survey?

Yes, the scenarios are available on the workspace. Here is the link: [https://workspaceonhomelessness.ca/pitcounts/resources/english/volunteer\\_management/activityhowtoapproachpeopleinanunshelteredenvironmentdocx](https://workspaceonhomelessness.ca/pitcounts/resources/english/volunteer_management/activityhowtoapproachpeopleinanunshelteredenvironmentdocx)

## QUESTION #13 - VIOLET STURGEON

Will there be a list made available of every group/organization that will have access to participants' answers, so that participants can provide a more informed consent?

### ■ PATRICK HUNTER

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With respect to who will have access to the responses – because the data belongs to the community, it is up to the community to decide who will have access to the responses (e.g., if they will be shared with a researcher, or other organizations within the community). The responses are shared with ESDC, but they are not shared outside of the organization.

## QUESTION #14 - VIOLET STURGEON

Concern was also raised over Core Question 7 where if the participant answers yes they are asked to specify if they are First Nations, Inuit, Metis, or are Non-Status/have Indigenous ancestry? It was brought up that we are essentially asking people if they are Registered Indian or not and that can be a highly sensitive subject for people. Someone on our PiT Committee has requested further information on why this further clarification has been included in the survey.

### ■ PATRICK HUNTER

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On your second question regarding the Indigenous identity question, this question has recently been updated. The intention is not to ask respondents to specify whether they are with or without status, but rather to ask about their identity. The new wording of the question can be found in the updated survey form: [https://workspaceonhomelessness.ca/pitcounts/resources/english/survey/hps\\_pit\\_count\\_recommended\\_survey\\_forms](https://workspaceonhomelessness.ca/pitcounts/resources/english/survey/hps_pit_count_recommended_survey_forms)

## QUESTION #15 - JORDAN MCKENZIE

Are the survey questions still being modified by HPS? When will the core survey questions be finalized?

### ■ PATRICK HUNTER

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The surveys are now final: [https://workspaceonhomelessness.ca/pitcounts/resources/english/survey/hps\\_pit\\_count\\_recommended\\_survey\\_forms](https://workspaceonhomelessness.ca/pitcounts/resources/english/survey/hps_pit_count_recommended_survey_forms)

An email was sent to the coordinators yesterday to confirm the changes. Please let us know if you did not received this email, or if have any questions or concerns about the changes to the survey.

## QUESTION #16 - MARIE MORRISON

Can you remind me what volunteers can see of VI-SPDAT in HIFIS PiT Module when mobile surveying (e.g., through access rights can you set up just so that they see whether a VI-SPDAT has already been completed and the date?)

### ■ HENRY DAGHER

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Hi Marie Morrison ,HIFIS PiT Volunteers will only be able to see:

- If the interviewee exists in HIFIS 4 as a Client
- If the interviewee has 1 or more VI assessments. User can only see the tool (VI) and the date. No score or acuity are shown.

Hope this helps.



## QUESTION #17 - MARIE MORRISON

Question from the Joint PiT/Registry Webinar - When deciding whether to use tablets and enter Pit/Registry data live, our IT folks are concerned that they would need to set up users who may or may not show. If they don't show, our concern would be having to scramble to set up passwords for folks on the night of. So we may conclude that we'll use paper and have data entry follow. Any suggestions?

### ■ HENRY DAGHER

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Hello again, Marie Morrison! :-)

There will be a way to add users in batch, via importing an Excel sheet with pre-specified column contents.

Users can also be created individually. Essential info for a user consists of:

- UserID
- First Name
- Last Name
- Email address (optional but highly recommended)
- Mobile phone number (optional but highly recommended)
- New user is then attached to a 'PiT' or 'Enumeration' organization
- User is assigned access rights by selecting the pre-established PiT Volunteer rights template

## QUESTION #18 - CASSANDRA VINK

Do you know whether any communities have had any luck engaging high schools to try to reach the hidden youth homeless population. If so, do you know how this was done? Have any communities incorporated the tool that Raising the Roof supports through its Upstream Project?

### ■ JESSE DONALDSON

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Hi Cassandra Vink,

A handful of communities have tried to engage with schools, but as you know it can take a long time to build that relationship. Many schools require a year or more notice for any research activities. To my knowledge, Kamloops has had the most success with schools. In 2016 they conducted a youth count and were able to actually survey students with an online platform. You can read more about their methodology here. To my knowledge, no one has used the RtR tool within the context of a PiT Count.

## QUESTION #19 - SHANNON GANDER

This question came up in our planning committee meeting - is it recommended that magnet events take place during the same timeframe as the PiT Count? We were discussing resourcing and wondering whether it would be better to hold a magnet event for youth a day or two after count (but ask people where they slept on the original PiT night).

### ■ PATRICK HUNTER

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With respect to whether you should hold a magnet event at the same time as the PiT, generally the closer you do the activities the better, but it isn't mandatory. The only concern might be an increased risk of double-counting.

## QUESTION #20 - LISA BAJKOV

Our committee was wondering if it is recommended that some routes, especially areas with high density of homeless, are walked more than once during the street count?

### ■ ADAM ANDERSON

Yes, Lisa Bajkov, if you have the resources, it is recommended that the high density routes are walked more than once. In addition, I would recommend prioritizing your street routes before the night of the count. In some cases, you may have volunteers that don't show up, and knowing which routes can be cut, reduced, or modified will help with last minute adjustments during the night of the count.

### ■ PATRICK HUNTER

The one thing I would add is that if you cover high-density routes more than once, it would be better to have the same team do it. This should help to reduce double-counting.

Another way to increase coverage of high-density areas would be to break them into smaller routes, so more teams cover the area, but don't overlap.

## QUESTION #21 - VIOLET STURGEON

Clarification on the hidden homelessness COH questions. If someone is screened out due to question C because they answered "staying at someone else's place" is there a way they can still answer the COH questions about hidden homelessness?

### ■ JESSE DONALDSON

Hi Violet Sturgeon, could you clarify which COH hidden homelessness question you're referring to? Thanks!

Violet Sturgeon Response -Hi Jesse Donaldson, I think my question has been answered by the changes to the screening questions that Patrick mentioned. I mistakenly confused the COH questions with the VISPDAT questions. I apologize for the confusion.

## QUESTION #22 - LINDSEY GRADEEN

We have a 2 part question around the PiT Survey. We are doing a PiT/PPC method, using HIFIS 3.8, and will be using the same survey throughout the week.a) When it comes to Screening Question C, are we able to change our screening survey questions to reflect our interest in capturing hidden homelessness and at risk of homelessness? For example the survey lists answer (c. someone else's places) as being an answer that would screen you out of the survey. However, this could indicate that someone is couch surfing and we don't want to screen these individuals out, we would like to survey these individuals. Are we able to move some of the responses into the eligible to be surveyed category?

b) If we make changes to the Survey questions based on our paper survey, how will that impact the way that we input data into HIFIS 3.8?

### ■ HENRY DAGHER

Thanks for your questions regarding changing question sequence. I will only attempt a reply based on the known effects on data entry into HIFIS. I hope someone else will address the essence of re-sequencing the questions.

We have witnessed first hand in 2016 the negative effects on data entry (both efficiency and accuracy) brought on by question re-sequencing. As you now, questions in HIFIS are sequenced as per the national guide issued by HPS. If data entry is attempted using an alternate sequence, the net effect will be constant hunting for the next box that matches the answer to be input. Since the survey screen consists of multiple tabs (screening, CORE part 1, CORE part 2, COH and Local), the effort of looking for a question can get very frustrating. We saw this ourselves when we trying the PiT module for the 1st time and the community had already invested in their re-sequenced paper copies before the software was even completed.

I guess the short answer is: not recommended at all! :-)



## ■ PATRICK HUNTER

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If you are including hidden homelessness, you can provide follow up questions when a respondent gives “c. someone else’s places” as an answer. We have recommended follow-up questions, but they aren’t mandatory. They are included in HIFIS 3, however.

The response to your second question is a bit complicated. It would help to know what changes you are considering. Adding response options is possible for some questions, but any more fundamental changes to questions may make the responses not comparable to other communities. If you are an HPS-funded community, it would be important to maintain the core questions. If you would like to follow up with us, please get in touch.

## QUESTION #23 LISA BAJKOV

Another question was raised by our committee in regards to the tally sheet. If we tally individuals that decline to answer the survey during the street count, aren’t we assuming that they are homeless but may not be?

## ■ JESSE DONALDSON

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Individuals who decline to participate should not be included in your count. However, if an individual declines to participate a volunteer can mark them as “observed homeless” should they have reason to believe they are clearly spending the night on the street. Observations of homelessness can be tricky and volunteers can cite a wide range of reasons for believing someone is homeless. While most communities collect this data, many choose not to include these results in their enumeration. You’ll have to make a judgement call, once your count is complete, on how reliable the observations of homelessness seem.

## QUESTION #24 - KYLA FISHER

Could you elaborate on the press release piece? We need HPS approval to send out a press release on the results of the count?

## ■ ADAM ANDERSON

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Hi Kyla Fisher, HPS/ESDC needs to review the press release to ensure it meets federal identity program guidelines. We do not comment on the content of the Press Release other than to possibly include a funding line that states “This project is funded in part by the Government of Canada’s Homelessness Partnering Strategy”.

## QUESTION #25 - CHRISTINA MAES NINO

My question is also for Henry, we used date of birth to help clean the data and would like to do so again. Is there flexibility in the age/birth year question in HIFIS to add that detail?

## ■ HENRY DAGHER

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The easiest way I see is to use the new INTERVIEWEE ID field to store this. This new field can be toggled on or off (event-wide) and opens up an extra field in the screening form where users can enter ‘some kind’ of identifier to help avoid duplicates. If you were to put the DoB there would that work?

## QUESTION #26 - CHRISTINA MAES NINO

Is the requirement same for websites, other communication documents (reports, guides, etc.)? That is, should I be sending HPS/ESDC our public material before printing or posting?

### ■ ADAM ANDERSON

Hi Christina Maes Nino, each funding agreement has language around notifying ESDC of any communications activities (publications, advertising, press releases, reports). The main things we look for are the funding line, and a Canada workmark. Send any documents you have for review to either myself, or the assigned Project Officer and I will make sure they are reviewed quickly.

## QUESTION #27 - LINDSEY GRADEEN

Some of our community partners are concerned that people who are at risk of homelessness are not screened into the survey. For example, someone can be housed this month but were homeless last month and are facing eviction in the near future. There were questions about how these individuals would be screened into the survey. Is at-risk of homelessness addressed through a standard additional question that has been developed? Or are at-risk individuals not usually included?

### ■ PATRICK HUNTER

If you are including hidden homelessness, you can provide follow up questions when a respondent gives “c. someone else’s places” as an answer. We have recommended follow-up questions, but they aren’t mandatory. They are included in HIFIS 3, however.

The response to your second question is a bit complicated. It would help to know what changes you are considering. Adding response options is possible for some questions, but any more fundamental changes to questions may make the responses not comparable to other communities. If you are an HPS-funded community, it would be important to maintain the core questions. If you would like to follow up with us, please get in touch.

## QUESTION #28 - JEN JHINGOOR

Due to the fact that we are doing multiple PiT counts in Nunavut, in multiple communities, do the counts have to be all on the same day?

### ■ PATRICK HUNTER

Generally speaking, it is better to do the counts on the same day, but that can be challenging from a resource perspective. For communities that go second or third (etc.), you may want to include a question in the survey asking the respondent whether they participated in the survey in another community.