

# County Set to Launch Homeless Count in Santa Monica

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*January 25* -- Volunteers scouring the City Tuesday to tally Santa Monica's homeless population may see up-close what many County officials already sense -- the City's homeless population may be larger than ever.

As part of a massive, \$350,000 effort to pin down how many people are homeless countywide, nearly 30 trained volunteers will do a one night walkthrough of select Santa Monica streets, parks and neighborhoods Tuesday night.

The last time the City conducted a count nearly six years ago, the number of homeless living in Santa Monica on any given night was approximately 2,000 -- a fraction of the currently estimated 84,000 throughout Los Angeles County.

County officials said after tomorrow night they expect that both numbers will climb.

"We believe we'll find more people on the streets of Santa Monica than ever before based on what we've heard from service providers," said Robin Conerly, Deputy Executive Director for Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), which is coordinating the count.

Conerly said local non-profits that serve the homeless have reported an upswing in recent years of people seeking assistance, though she could not provide statistics.

Aside from measuring the extent of homelessness in the Los Angeles area, tomorrow night's count will take on added importance because it is the basis for

distributing nearly \$1.2 billion in federal funding for programs that provide housing, outreach and mental health services.

New U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development regulations call on cities and counties who serve the homeless to provide a statistically valid count when they apply for such grants, which will be even more important for local non-profits predicting significant cuts in federal and state funding in the coming year.

Despite the need for increased accuracy, Santa Monica's count is expected to be less accurate than the 1999 study conducted by the City.

"The 1999 study probably will be slightly better in methodology," said Conerly, noting that the City study was an actual count, as opposed to Tuesday's, which will be a "statistical aggregate."

Sampling 12 census tracts in Santa Monica, Conerly said LAHSA can extrapolate an approximate homeless population for the area. While some of the tracts were chosen as "hot tracts" -- areas known to be frequented by the homeless -- others were chosen at random.

The same methodology will be used for nearly 500 census tracts targeted across Los Angeles County, which will be conducted by almost 1,200 paid and non-paid volunteers over a three day period beginning tomorrow.

For Conerly, the task is immense, but is also immensely important.

"There's never been a count like this before in LA County, but we've got to try and bring some help to those who live out on the streets each night," said Conerly. "We start that by understanding the size of the problem."

The coordinators and volunteers are scheduled to meet at the Ken Edwards Center at 9 p.m.