

2024 NSW Statewide Street Count

Technical Paper

Executive summary

The 2024 NSW street count, the NSW Government's fifth annual rough sleeping street count, was completed between 1 February and 1 March 2024.

2,037 people were counted sleeping rough during these street counts – a 26 per cent (414 person) increase compared to 2023.

Over 300 local organisations were either consulted and/or partnered with the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) to complete street counts in 400 towns and suburbs in 76 local government areas (LGA) across NSW.

These organisations included Specialist Homelessness Services, local councils and Community Housing Providers, as well as Aboriginal organisations, local community groups, and Police.

Annual street counts provide the NSW Government and partners with point-in-time data to track street homelessness and target programs aimed at reducing it.

Purpose

Gathering accurate data about the number of people sleeping rough is essential to informing the best way to target resources to those who need the most support. Street counts also help foster local collaboration.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census is the primary homelessness metric. As Census data is only available every five years, NSW undertakes annual street counts of people sleeping rough to deliver more regular data on numbers of people without safe shelter.

In the most recent 2021 Census, the ABS estimates there were 963 people in NSW who were living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out¹. The 2021 estimates reflect the unique circumstances at the time of the Census. The ABS publication notes the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic public health measures on the 2021 homelessness estimates. As well as international and state border closures, the Census was conducted when parts of NSW were under stay at home orders. Funded initiatives and policy changes for Temporary Accommodation were also in place to support people sleeping rough into accommodation.

DCJ and partners have commenced follow up assertive outreach patrols to locations where people were counted sleeping rough during the street count.

Summary of results

2,037 people were counted in the 2024 count (see **Appendix A** for full table of results).

¹ [ABS - Census: Estimating Homelessness: Census, 2021](#)

In addition, there were 241 locations where there was evidence of street homelessness (such as makeshift camps, sleeping bags or personal belongings) but no people were present to be counted. This is compared to 294 in 2023, 212 in 2022, 227 in 2021 and 135 in 2020.²

Byron Shire accounts for the largest cohort of rough sleepers in the state, recording 348 people sleeping rough, a 16 per cent increase compared to February 2023.

The City of Sydney recorded 280 people sleeping rough, a 1 per cent increase compared to 2023. In the 2020, 2021 and 2022 state-wide street counts, the City of Sydney had recorded the largest number of people sleeping rough in NSW.

LGAs with largest total decrease in the number of people sleeping rough compared to 2023:

LGA	2024	2023	Change
Eurobodalla	29	59	30
Richmond Valley	3	19	16
Clarence Valley	58	69	11
Cessnock	4	11	7
North Sydney	1	7	6

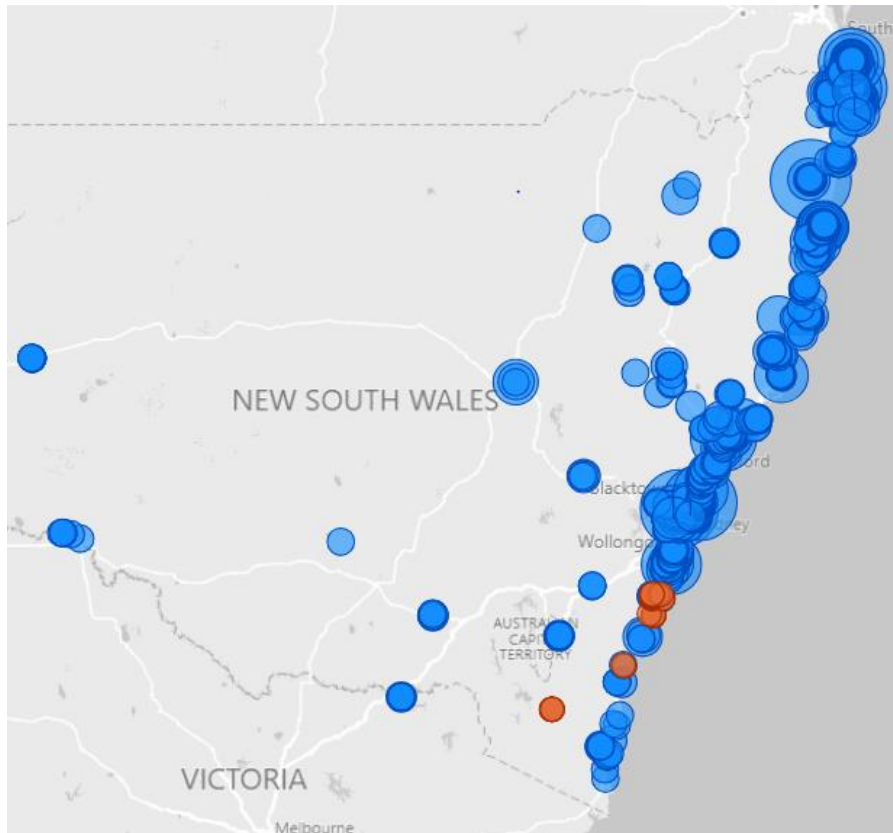
LGAs with largest total increase in the number of people sleeping rough compared to 2023:

LGA	2024	2023	Change
Coffs Harbour	147	82	65
Byron Shire	348	300	48
Newcastle	49	6	43
Northern Beaches	88	45	43
Mid Coast	49	15	34
Liverpool	40	6	34

Approximately 64 per cent of those counted were in vehicles and 18 per cent in open spaces. Another 10 per cent were in makeshift dwellings and 8 per cent were in public roofed spaces. This data is not available for the 280 people experiencing street homelessness in the City of Sydney.

² Note, data on locations where there was evidence of street homelessness but no persons present excludes the City of Sydney LGA.

Locations of people sleeping rough across NSW



Locations of people sleeping rough counted during the NSW 2023 Street Count. The size of the circle corresponds to the number of people counted at that site. Orange circles represent locations where belongings were found but no person was present.

Street count planning and preparation

What is a street count?

Street counts are purely observational and provide a point-in-time count of the number of people in a location observed to be experiencing street homelessness.

The street count involves recording a head count of people sleeping rough in a designated geographic area. No person is engaged with during the count and the only data collected is the number of people counted in each location, their dwelling situation and whether they were accompanied by companion animals.

Who was counted?

Counting the number of people experiencing street homelessness is a challenging task. Counts are generally undertaken in the late evening and early morning while most people are asleep. It is not always accurate to assume from a person's appearance that they are experiencing street homelessness and some level of judgment is required. Advice is provided to people undertaking the street count.

The NSW street count is based on the approach used in the City of Sydney street count, to count all people who:

- are carrying substantial belongings and who appear to have no accommodation
- are sleeping, lying or sitting on the pavement, street, parks, shops/business fronts, parking lots, road or railway underpasses
- are inhabiting a tent or a makeshift structure
- are obviously sleeping in cars - not tourist vans, or
- indicate to those undertaking the count that they are homeless.³

Common sense guidelines were provided to those undertaking the count to assist in differentiating between campers or tourists from those who are experiencing homelessness.

Guidelines were provided on how to identify people sleeping rough in a vehicle from a holiday maker or person travelling who is sleeping in their vehicle temporarily, and not experiencing homelessness.

Those undertaking the count were instructed not to enter any premises, such as squats, or temporary structures to count the number of people living there. They were also instructed to avoid waking or otherwise disturbing people who were sleeping.

Where those undertaking the count could not accurately make out the number of people in a car or a tent, they were advised to count this as a single person.

Locations where there was evidence of street homelessness (such as makeshift camps, sleeping bags or personal belongings) but no people were seen are also recorded. These locations are not included in the 2024 street count number but will allow assertive outreach teams to revisit these locations in case people who require support return at a later date.

How were the locations identified?

DCJ and Community Housing Providers in Social Housing Management Transfer sites were tasked with planning and co-ordinating street counts in their relevant areas. Planning commenced in October 2023 and was undertaken in partnership with local stakeholders including Specialist Homelessness Services, local councils, Local Health Districts, Aboriginal Organisations and NSW Police.

Each year there are some variations in locations where street counts occur. Street count organisers sought information from housing and homelessness services, and worked with local stakeholders, including local councils and people with lived experience of homelessness, to identify known street homelessness hot spots, and prioritise these locations during their counts.

Street counts took place in 76 LGAs, consistent with 2023 and 2022. This is an increase from 71 in 2021 and 65 in 2020.

³ Advice was provided to street count participants on how to identify themselves in the event they were approached during the street count. While the purpose of the street count is not to provide direct housing support to people street sleeping during the count, participants were provided with Link2Home cards that they could provide to people requiring housing assistance if the event they were approached by someone requiring housing assistance.

The following LGAs where street counts took place in 2023 were excluded from the 2024 street count:

- Glen Innes

Due to resourcing issues counts in the Glen Innes LGA were unable to be delivered. There were 5 people counted in Glen Innes in 2023.

The following LGA was added to the 2024 street count:

- Lane Cove

When did the count take place?

Street counts were completed between 1 February and 1 March 2024. Half of the counts took place in the evening, scheduled between 10:00pm and 3:00am, with the remaining half occurring in the morning between 3:30am and 9am.

How was information collected?

Results were recorded using the Survey123 App. This is the fifth year that DCJ has used the app to support the count, with the results captured via the App.

The data validation process involved comparing the results recorded in the app with those recorded on paper by count teams. In some cases there were discrepancies between the two which required a review with participants to determine the correct result. Where count results were recorded manually, these results were later manually added to the app.

The City of Sydney Council conducts its own street count. Results from the February City of Sydney street count are combined with results from other street counts to produce the statewide rough sleeping total.

Factors that may have impacted results

The impact of extreme weather

All the Sydney and South Eastern Sydney street counts are planned to be delivered on the same night to minimise the risk of double counting people sleeping rough. On 19 February 2024, Sydney experienced heavy rainfall which saw the City of Sydney postpone its count to 26 February 2024. People sleeping rough can be transient and move between LGAs and this may have affected the number of people counted in the City of Sydney and surrounding LGAs.

Counts did not take place in Glen Innes

Street counts in the Glenn Innes LGA could not be delivered due to staff resourcing. Local organisations did not see an increase of people sleeping rough in the months leading up to the February 2024 street count.

Improvements in street count planning, coordination and delivery

The 2024 NSW Street Count is the NSW Government's fifth annual street count. DCJ and other participating organisations are now better experienced at undertaking street counts, and have more experience in knowing when and where to conduct counts to improve the likelihood of identifying people sleeping rough.

DCJ and partners now also have more information on where people are sleeping rough, from assertive outreach services and improved coordination with local stakeholders.

In addition to the new LGA that was added to this year's count, several additional towns and suburbs were added to the locations for the 2024 street counts. These locations represent additional towns and suburbs within LGAs that had street counts in 2023. These additional locations include:

- Lane Cove (Lane cove LGA)
- Tingha and Lake Copeton (Inverell LGAs)
- Narwee, Earlwood, Padstow, Hurlstone Park and Yagoona (Canterbury-Bankstown LGA)
- Elderslie and Spring Farm (Camden LGA)
- Macquarie Fields and Woodbine (Campbelltown LGA)
- Wetherill Park and Carramar (Fairfield LGA)
- Hinchinbrook Lurnea (Liverpool LGA)

People sleeping in boats

The 2024 street count results do not include people sleeping rough on boats. DCJ has partnered with Maritime NSW to identify and support people sleeping rough on NSW waterways. This includes considering how to safely assess and include these people in future street counts.

Appendix A: 2024 NSW Street Count results

District Group	LGA	Dates	Scheduled locations	2020 street count results	2021 street count results	2022 street count results	2023 street count results	2024 street count results
Western Sydney & Nepean Blue Mountains	Parramatta	20 February	2	94	32	39	30	26
	Cumberland	20 February	13	5	7	3	5	4
	Blacktown	20 February	5	11	8	4	7	11
	Penrith	20 February	4	13	10	4	5	4
	Total		24	123	57	50	47	45
Sydney, South Eastern Sydney, Northern Sydney	Mosman	6 February	1	Not counted	Not counted	Not counted	2	0
	North Sydney	6 February	7	4	7	10	7	1
	Lane Cove	13 February	-	Not counted	Not counted	Not counted	Not counted	0
	Willoughby	13 February	1	3	5	6	4	4
	Canterbury/ Bankstown	19 February	5	9	7	12	7	4
	Bayside	20 February	8	12	4	0	2	5
	Burwood	20 February	2	4	3	6	6	3
	Canada Bay	20 February	1	Not counted	2	3	4	1
	Georges River	20 February	2	Not counted	2	1	1	0
	Inner West	20 February	8	25	15	11	7	33
	Randwick	20 February	4	6	11	11	6	9
	Strathfield	20 February	2	3	1	1	1	0
	Sutherland Shire	20 February	8	33	19	15	9	8
	Waverley	20 February	2	18	14	13	16	13
	Woollahra	20 February	3	4	3	3	9	8
Hornsby	21 February	3	2	6	1	6	10	

	Ku-ring-gai	21 February	4	Not counted	1	1	0	2
	Ryde	21 February	4	2	2	2	2	1
	City of Sydney	26 February	23	334	272	225	277	280
	Northern Beaches	27 February	18	71	57	30	45	88
	Total		106	530	431	351	411	470
South Western Sydney	Camden	19 February	5	1	0	0	2	0
	Campbelltown	19 February	12	10	0	8	6	6
	Fairfield	19 February	9	7	15	13	15	13
	Liverpool	19 February	9	7	9	8	6	40
	Total		35	25	24	29	29	59
Murrumbidgee, Far West, Western NSW	Wentworth	19 February	1	1	Not counted	2	1	6
	Albury	20 February	1	2	7	6	9	10
	Bathurst	20 February	1	4	2	1	7	6
	Broken Hill	20 February	1	3	5	4	7	12
	Dubbo	20 February	1	4	8	8	13	12
	Griffith	20 February	1	4	0	2	0	1
	Orange	20 February	1	0	1	0	3	0
	Parkes	20 February	1	1	1	0	1	0
	Wagga Wagga	20 February	1	1	9	12	7	6
	Hilltops	20 February	-	3	1	0	Not counted	Not counted
	Cootamundra	20 February	-	1	0	Not counted	Not counted	Not counted
	Narrandera	-	-	Not counted	0	Not counted	Not counted	Not counted
	Total		9	24	34	35	48	53
Mid North Coast, New England, Northern NSW	Inverell	13 February	2	Not counted	Not counted	0	0	5
	Gunnedah	14 February	1	Not counted	Not counted	6	2	8
	Tamworth	15 February	7	6	5	4	3	11

	Narrabri	16 February	2	3	4	2	5	1
	Armidale	19 February	1	0	0	1	1	5
	Moree	19 February	1	Not counted	Not counted	11	5	0
	Clarence Valley	20 February	6	7	17	11	69	58
	Bellingen	21 February	2	Not counted	Not counted	10	23	22
	Coffs Harbour	21 February	2	51	43	57	82	147
	Mid Coast	21 February	5	2	11	30	15	49
	Kempsey	22 February	9	3	7	1	11	15
	Nambucca	22 February	6	0	0	0	17	20
	Port Macquarie-Hastings	22 February	10	5	10	23	43	53
	Richmond Valley	22 February	5	3	3	5	19	3
	Kyogle	23 February	2	0	1	1	0	0
	Lismore	23 February	5	55	48	48	40	64
	Tweed Valley	27 February	15	77	58	127	145	174
	Ballina	28 February	5	21	20	27	30	63
	Byron Shire	29 February	9	174	198	138*	300	348
	Glen Innes	-	-	Not counted	Not counted	1	5	Not counted
	Total		95	407	425	503	815	1046
Hunter, Central Coast	Dungog	1 February	3	7	7	12	7	5
	Muswellbrook	1 February	3	0	0	0	0	5
	Newcastle	1 February	12	52	19	16	6	49
	Upper Hunter	1 February	6	2	5	4	1	9
	Lake Macquarie	6 February	14	33	18	16	31	40

	Central Coast	8 February	25	58	27	40	31	48
	Maitland	13 February	8	12	3	5	2	3
	Port Stephens	13 February	7	4	12	10	11	23
	Cessnock	15 February	4	7	8	9	11	4
	Singleton	15 February	3	3	0	1	0	2
	Total		85	178	99	113	100	188
Illawarra Shoalhaven, Southern NSW	Bega Valley	7 February	6	5	4	26	12	18
	Eurobodalla	7 February	3	0	3	24	59	29
	Goulburn	20 February	1	0	0	2	1	3
	Queanbeyan	20 February	1	1	3	2	11	8
	Yass Valley	20 February	1	Not counted	Not counted	1	0	0
	Kiama	27 February	3	4	1	4	6	4
	Shellharbour	27 February	5	1	2	7	5	11
	Wollongong	27 February	14	10	37	45	59	83
	Shoalhaven	29 February	9	6	20	11	19	20
	Snowy Monaro	29 February	3	Not counted	1	4	1	0
	Total		46	27	71	126	173	176
NSW	Total		400	1314	1141	1207	1623	2037

*Byron Shire result for 2022 excludes Brunswick Heads, Mullumbimby and surrounding areas as counts were unable to be completed in these areas due to extreme weather.