

# 2023 NSW Statewide Street Count

## Technical Paper

### Executive summary

The 2023 NSW street count, the NSW Government's fourth annual rough sleeping street count, was completed between 2 February and 27 February 2023.

1,623 people were counted sleeping rough during these street counts – a 34 per cent (416 person) increase compared to 2022.

Over 300 local organisations were either consulted and/or partnered with the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) to complete street counts in more than 350 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 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.

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.

Street counts help foster local collaboration and are used to inform locations for assertive outreach patrols and other outreach activities.

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

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimated that in 2016 there were 2,588 people in NSW who were living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out.<sup>1</sup>

In the most recent 2021 Census, the ABS estimates there were 963 people in NSW who were living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping out<sup>2</sup>. The 2021 estimates reflect the unique accommodation circumstances of those experiencing homelessness 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.

<sup>1</sup> [ABS, 2049.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016](#)

<sup>2</sup> [ABS - Census: Estimating Homelessness: Census, 2021](#)

## Summary of results

1,623 people were counted in the 2023 count (see **Appendix A** for full table of results).

In addition, there were 294 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, compared to 212 in 2022, 227 in 2021 and 135 in 2020.<sup>3</sup>

Byron Shire, which accounts for the largest cohort of rough sleepers in the state, recorded 300 people sleeping rough, a 117 per cent increase compared to February 2022. Noting, the 2022 Byron Shire figure was likely an undercount due to extreme weather events in Northern NSW at the time of counting.

The City of Sydney recorded 277 people sleeping rough, a 23 per cent increase compared to 2022. Previously 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 2022:

LGA	2023	2022	Change
MidCoast	15	30	-15
Bega Valley	12	26	-14
Newcastle	6	16	-10
Central Coast	31	40	-9
Lismore	40	48	-8

LGAs with largest total increase in the number of people sleeping rough compared to 2022:

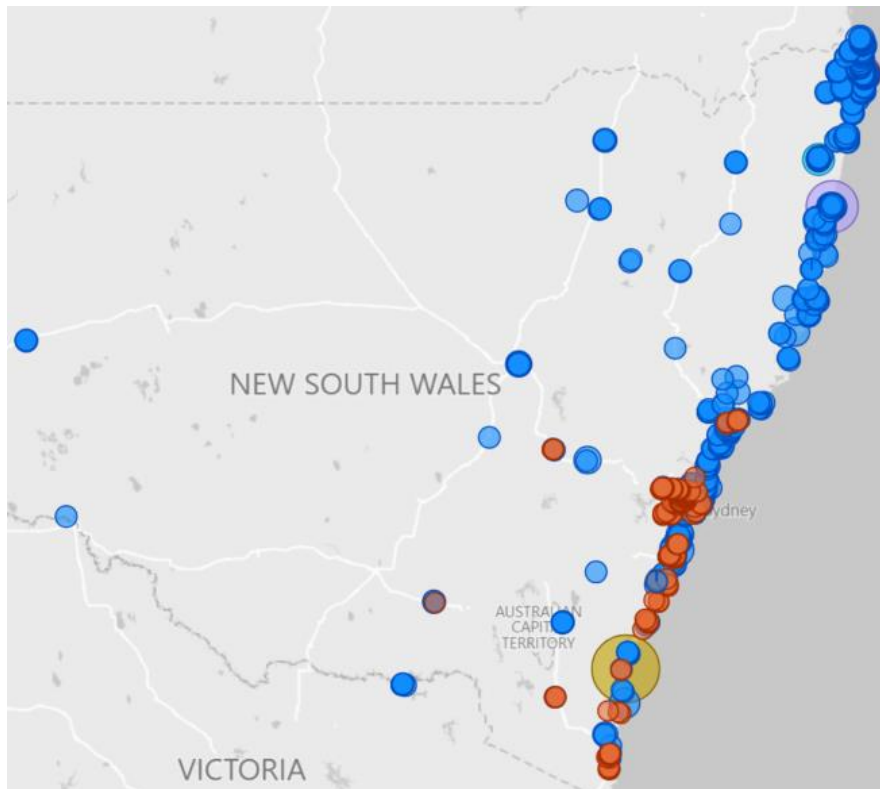
LGA	2023	2022	Change
Byron Shire	300	138*	162
Clarence Valley	69	11	58
City of Sydney	277	225	52
Eurobodalla	59	24	35
Coffs Harbour	82	57	25

\* The 2022 Byron Shire figure was likely an undercount. Due to extreme weather events at the time of counting in Northern NSW in 2022, Brunswick Heads and Mullumbimby were not counted as part of the 2022 Byron Shire street counts.

Approximately 59 per cent of those counted were in vehicles and 24 per cent in open spaces. Another 10 per cent were in public roofed spaces and 7 per cent were in makeshift dwellings. This data is not available for the 277 people experiencing street homelessness in the City of Sydney.

<sup>3</sup> 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 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 approach used in the NSW street count, which is based on approach used in the City of Sydney street count, is to count all people who:

- are carrying substantial belongings and who appear to have no accommodation

- are sleeping, laying 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.<sup>4</sup>

Common sense guidelines were provided to those undertaking the count to assist in differentiating between campers or tourists from those who are 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 2023 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?**

Each DCJ Housing District 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 2022 and was undertaken in partnership with local stakeholders including Specialist Homelessness Services, local councils, Local Health Districts, Aboriginal Organisations and 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 2022 and up from 71 in 2021 and 65 in 2020.

The following LGAs where street counts took place in 2022 were excluded from the 2023 street count:

- Hilltops

No persons were counted in Hilltops LGA in 2022.

The following LGAs were added to the 2023 street count:

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<sup>4</sup> 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.

- Mosman.

### **When did the count take place?**

Street counts were completed between 2 February and 27 February 2023. Most counts took place in the evening, where 51% were scheduled between 10:00pm and 3:00am, with the remaining 49% occurring in the morning between 3:30am and 9am.

### **How was information collected?**

Results were recorded using the Survey123 App. This is the fourth year that DCJ has used the app to support the count with the results now captured entirely 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 conducts its own street count, unlike in other LGAs, where street counts are coordinated by DCJ and partners and, in Social Housing Management Transfer areas, by Community Housing Providers. 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**

During February 2023, some parts of NSW experienced heavy rainfall. Some people sleeping rough may seek shelter off the street during periods of heavy rainfall. This may have impacted the number of people counted. LGAs which were affected by heavy rainfall on their count night were:

- Byron Shire
- Port Stephens
- Maitland.

### **Staffing shortages**

Due to unforeseen resourcing challenges, the street count in Port Stephens LGA was unable to cover all suburbs as planned. The 11 people counted sleeping rough on the 23 February 2023 has been included in the final results however this may be an undercount.

Counts were also cancelled in Tenterfield, Gwydir and Liverpool Plains LGAs, due to staff shortages on the night. Note these LGAs have not been included in previous street counts.

### **Improvements in street count planning, coordination and delivery**

The 2023 NSW Street Count is the NSW Government's fourth 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 2023 street counts. These locations represent additional towns and suburbs within LGAs that had street counts in 2022. These additional locations include:

- Mosman (Mosman LGA)
- Ashbury (Inner West and Canterbury-Bankstown LGAs)
- Ramsgate beach and Rockdale (Bayside LGA)
- Dee Why (Northern Beaches LGA)
- Waverton (North Sydney LGA)
- Austral and Miller (Liverpool LGA)
- Greenacre, Yagoona, Lidcombe and Chester Hill (Canterbury-Bankstown LGA)
- Claymore (Campbelltown LGA)
- Wee Waa (Narrabri LGA)
- Greenwell Point,
- Bomballa, Sanctuary Point and Basin View (Shoalhaven LGA)

### **People sleeping in boats**

DCJ is working with Maritime NSW to better support people sleeping rough in boats, and improve how they are included in street counts.

## Appendix A: 2023 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
<b>Western Sydney &amp; Nepean Blue Mountains</b>	Parramatta	20 February	3	94	32	39	30
	Cumberland	20 February	13	5	7	3	5
	Blacktown	20 February	5	11	8	4	7
	Penrith	20 February	4	13	10	4	5
	<b>Total</b>		<b>25</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Sydney, South Eastern Sydney, Northern Sydney</b>	Mosman	14 February	-	Not counted	Not counted	Not counted	2
	North Sydney	14 February	7	4	7	10	7
	Northern Beaches	20 February	18	71	57	30	45
	Inner West	20 February	2	25	15	11	7
	Burwood	20 February	2	4	3	6	6
	Canada Bay	20 February	1	Not counted	2	3	4
	Canterbury/ Bankstown	20 February	13	9	7	12	7
	Strathfield	20 February	2	3	1	1	1
	Waverley	20 February	2	18	14	13	16
	Woollahra	20 February	3	4	3	3	9
	Randwick	20 February	4	6	11	11	6
	Sutherland Shire	20 February	8	33	19	15	9
	Georges River	20 February	2	Not counted	2	1	1
	Ryde	20 February	4	2	2	2	2
	City of Sydney	20 February	-	334	272	225	277
	Bayside	20 February	7	12	4	0	2

	Willoughby	21 February	1	3	5	6	4
	Hornsby	27 February	3	2	6	1	6
	Ku-ring-gai	27 February	4	Not counted	1	1	0
	<b>Total</b>		<b>102</b>	<b>530</b>	<b>431</b>	<b>351</b>	<b>411</b>
<b>South Western Sydney</b>	Camden	21 February	3	1	0	0	2
	Campbelltown	21 February	10	10	0	8	6
	Fairfield	21 February	6	7	15	13	15
	Liverpool	21 February	7	7	9	8	6
	<b>Total</b>		<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Murrumbidgee, Far West, Western NSW</b>	Broken Hill	21 February	1	3	5	4	7
	Bathurst	21 February	1	4	2	1	7
	Wentworth	21 February	3	Not counted	Not counted	2	1
	Orange	21 February	1	0	1	0	3
	Dubbo	21 February	1	4	8	8	13
	Parkes	21 February	1	1	1	0	1
	Albury	21 February	1	2	7	6	9
	Griffith	21 February	1	4	0	2	0
	Wagga Wagga	21 February	1	1	9	12	7
	Hilltops	-	-	3	1	0	Not counted
	Cootamundra	-	-	1	0	Not counted	Not counted
	Narrandera	-	-	Not counted	0	Not counted	Not counted
	<b>Total</b>		<b>11</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Mid North Coast, New England, Northern NSW</b>	Clarence Valley	14 February	6	7	17	11	69
	MidCoast	15 February	5	2	11	30	15
	Richmond Valley	16 February	5	3	3	5	19



	Kyogle	17 February	2	0	1	1	0
	Lismore	17 February	5	55	48	48	40
	Glen Innes	20 February	1	Not counted	Not counted	1	5
	Moree	20 February	1	Not counted	Not counted	11	5
	Tweed Valley	21 February	15	77	58	127	145
	Tamworth	21 February	3	6	5	4	3
	Inverell	22 February	1	Not Counted	Not Counted	0	0
	Armidale	22 February	2	0	0	1	1
	Bellingen	22 February	2	Not Counted	Not Counted	10	23
	Coffs Harbour	22 February	2	51	43	57	82
	Ballina	22 February	6	21	20	27	30
	Byron Shire	23 February	9	174	198	138*	300
	Gunnedah	23 February	1	Not counted	Not counted	6	2
	Narrabri	24 February	2	3	4	2	5
	Kempsey	27 February	9	3	7	1	11
	Hastings-Port Macquarie	27 February	10	5	10	23	43
	Nambucca	27 February	6	Not counted	0	0	17
	<b>Total</b>		<b>93</b>	<b>407</b>	<b>425</b>	<b>503</b>	<b>815</b>
<b>Hunter, Central Coast</b>	Newcastle	2 February	12	52	19	16	6
	Central Coast	2 February	25	58	27	40	31
	Upper Hunter	2 February	6	2	5	4	1
	Dungog	2 February	3	7	7	12	7
	Muswellbrook	16 February	3	0	0	0	0
	Singleton	16 February	3	3	0	1	0
	Cessnock	16 February	4	7	8	9	11
	Lake Macquarie	23 February	14	33	18	16	31

	Port Stephens	23 February	7	4	12	10	11
	Maitland	23 February	8	12	3	5	2
	<b>Total</b>		<b>85</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Illawarra Shoalhaven, Southern NSW</b>	Eurobodalla	22 February	3	0	3	24	59
	Bega Valley	22 February	4	5	4	26	12
	Goulburn Mulwaree	22 February	1	0	0	2	1
	Queanbeyan Palerang	22 February	1	1	3	2	11
	Yass Valley	22 February	1	Not counted	Not counted	1	0
	Wollongong	23 February	13	10	37	45	59
	Shellharbour	23 February	6	1	2	7	5
	Kiama	23 February	2	4	1	4	6
	Shoalhaven	23 February	9	6	20	11	19
	Snowy Monaro	23 February	3	Not counted	1	4	1
	<b>Total</b>		<b>43</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>173</b>
	<b>NSW</b>	<b>Total</b>		<b>383</b>	<b>1314</b>	<b>1141</b>	<b>1207</b>

\*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.