

## Basic Needs – Food, Clothing, Rent & Utilities



This document provides an update to information in the *Community Action Network Basic Needs Assessment* report released in August of 1999. The data is an update to the Frequently Asked Questions document published in 2002.

### Highlights

**Unemployment Rate Remains High:** Unemployment in Travis County continues to remain high, at 6% in July of 2003, more than three times higher than rates in late 1999 (1.9%).

**Calls for Basic Needs Assistance Continue to Increase:** In a comparison of the year ending June 30, 2003 with the same time period of the previous year, **2-1-1 Texas has experienced an 11% increase in callers in the Austin area (following a 28% increase last year).**

The Capital Area Food Bank serves as a clearinghouse by receiving and storing donated food and other grocery products. They report that local area food banks have experienced a **47% increase in households asking for emergency food assistance** in 2002. In just the first quarter of 2003, they have seen **another 25% increase**. In addition, the cost to transport produce will double when compared to last year.

Caritas of Austin works to prevent homelessness and hunger by assisting low-income community members and refugees with basic needs and promoting self-sufficiency. Caritas is **currently unable to fill an average of 140 requests for rent and utility assistance everyday** - this number has **increased from an average of 120 requests a year ago** that were unable to be filled on a daily basis.

### Top Community Needs

According to 2-1-1 Texas, the top five caller needs from July 1, 2002 through May 31, 2003 were: 1)Utility Bill Assistance; 2)Rent Assistance; 3)Food Pantry; 4)Homeless Shelter; and 5)ID's/ Birth Certificate Assistance.

### Overview

Although layoffs in Travis County have slowed since 2001 (when more than 23,000 people lost their jobs), they are anticipated to climb during the last two quarters of 2003, as budget reductions in the public sector take effect.

The Center for Public Policy Priorities is a non-partisan, non-profit policy research organization committed to improving public policies for Texans. They report that a single adult with no children needs to earn at least \$10/hour (approximately \$20,000 a year) in order to secure basic necessities. However, **a single parent with one child needs to earn a minimum of \$17/hour to support a family (\$33,819/yr)**. For a family of two parents and two children, the Austin-San Marcos MSA is the most expensive metropolitan area in the state in which to live. **Of the top ten occupational categories in the Austin-San Marcos Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), 28.8% of those jobs (186,360) have a median hourly wage of less than \$10/hour.**

Rents appear to have generally decreased as the Austin area experiences a surplus of rental units. However, the most recent fair market rent ranges from \$565 for an efficiency to \$911 for a 2-bedroom apartment (Austin American Statesman 2003; HUD 2003).

## Frequently Asked Questions about Basic Needs

Job loss can create a domino effect for individuals and families who are marginally self-sufficient. It can force choices between necessities such as buying food and paying for other expenses such as rent, utility and medical bills. For families with little or no savings or other financial cushion, a lost job by itself or combined with another emergency, such as a medical need, can have dire consequences such as homelessness. In addition, research shows that economic distress can aggravate situations leading to the perpetration of crimes such as burglary, theft, and domestic violence.

For all of these reasons, Austin area service providers are seeing a tremendous increase in demand for Basic Needs Services.

## Frequently Asked Questions about Basic Needs

### Profile of Typical Travis County Food Pantry Client

- 81% Female
  - Avg. Household Size = 3
  - 67% live at or below the poverty level (\$15,260 for a family of 3)
  - 21% work full or part-time
  - 30% are disabled or retired
- (Capital Area Food Bank)*

### Q. What is the definition of Basic Needs?

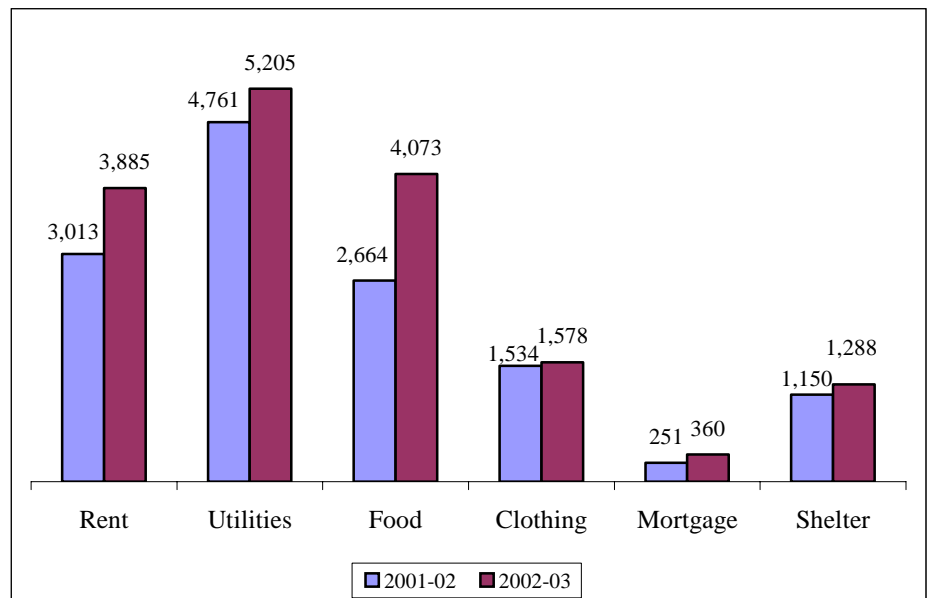
- Basic Needs is defined as **food, clothing and housing** (rent, mortgage, utility) **assistance**. While there are a wide range of other services and supports that may be essential for an individual to reach self-sufficiency (child care, affordable housing, health care, education, transportation, to name a few), this document is focused on assistance to meet immediate crisis situations.

### Q: How large is the demand for Basic Needs services?

- In a comparison of the year ending June 30, 2003 with the same time period of the previous year, **people needing help to pay utility bills increased 9%**. In addition, 2-1-1 Texas saw a **29% increase in calls for rent assistance**, and a **53% increase in calls for assistance with food** (see chart for details on the increased demand for services).

- **At 2-1-1 Texas, the top three caller needs in FY 2002-2003 were: 1)Utility Bill Assistance; 2)Rent Assistance; and 3)Food Pantry.**

- **Local food banks have experienced a 47% increase in the number of households asking for emergency food assistance.** In just the first quarter of 2003, they have seen another 25% increase.



- **Foreclosure postings for Travis and Williamson Counties are three times higher now than they were two years ago.** In 2003, foreclosures are up 55% (to 357) in Travis County and 72% (to 209) in Williamson County compared to the same period in 2002.

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## Frequently Asked Questions about Basic Needs

### Q: Who needs Basic Needs services in the Austin/ Travis County area?

- The current percentage of Travis County residents in poverty is estimated to be 14.8% (Census 2002). In 2002 Travis County's total population was estimated by the Census to be 830,649. There are **approximately 122,607 people living at 100% of poverty in Travis County (defined for a family of four as \$18,400)**. Using the average household size of 2.47, approximately 49,638 households live in poverty.
- The table below demonstrates that **any family must make at least 223% of the federal poverty income guidelines to afford to live in the Austin- San Marcos MSA**. Although rents have decreased slightly, each of the expense estimates below are conservative, and present an accurate picture of the cost of living in Austin.

### Austin-San Marcos MSA—Family Security Index\*

	One Adult No Children	Single Parent One Child	Single Parent Two Children	Single Parent Three Children	Two Parents Two Children	Two Parents Three Children
<b>Typical Monthly Expenses</b>						
Housing	\$533	\$858	\$858	\$1,192	\$858	\$1,192
Food	\$147	\$206	\$295	\$361	\$418	\$484
Child Care		\$366	\$569	\$978	\$569	\$978
Medical	\$281	\$460	\$460	\$460	\$727	\$727
Transportation	\$278	\$278	\$278	\$278	\$391	\$391
Other Necessities	\$177	\$294	\$294	\$351	\$321	\$383
Tax Payments & Credits	\$247	\$356	\$306	\$514	\$386	\$517
<b>Total Income Needed to Survive in Austin</b>						
Monthly	\$1,663	\$2,818	\$3,061	\$4,132	\$3,670	\$4,672
Annual	\$19,953	\$33,819	\$36,729	\$49,590	\$44,044	\$56,058
Hourly	\$10	\$17	\$18	\$25	\$22	\$28
% of Federal Poverty Level	223%	285%	265%	283%	252%	273%

Source: [Making It: What it Really Takes to Live in Texas](#). Center for Public Policy Priorities, November 8, 2001.

\*Estimates for all categories are conservative, and tend to underestimate actual monthly expenses.

- Another indicator of the magnitude of the “working poor” in Travis County is the **number of students who are considered economically disadvantaged**. Students are considered economically disadvantaged when they qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. **In the seven school districts serving Travis County exclusively, 43.3% of all students qualified during the 2001-02 School Year**. Del Valle ISD (70.5%), Manor ISD (59.5%), and Austin ISD (50.1%) exceeded the county-wide rate, and each are up from the previous year.

## Frequently Asked Questions about Basic Needs

### Q: How often can people access Basic Needs Services, and what is the average amount of assistance?

- For the two major Basic Needs Service providers in Travis County (Caritas and Travis County Health & Human Services Department), clients are only eligible for services **once every 12 months**. The average amount of rent and utility assistance provided is approximately **\$150 to \$200 per family**.
- People who qualify for the Travis County program are generally in extreme poverty – making 50% of Federal Poverty Income Guidelines (an annual income of \$9,200 for a family of four). Exceptions are made for the elderly and disabled. Caritas serves those with incomes up to 100% of poverty (\$18,400 for a family of four).

### Q: What can I do to help?

- Contact the United Way Capital Area's Volunteer Center at 512-323-1898 or search for volunteer opportunities on United Way Capital Area's website at [www.unitedwaycapitalarea.org](http://www.unitedwaycapitalarea.org)
- Please see the CAN Urgent Issues Action Plan at [www.caction.org](http://www.caction.org) for additional information about Community-Wide approaches to addressing Basic Needs in our community.
- Providers should contact Dan Pruett at [dpruett@secondharvest.org](mailto:dpruett@secondharvest.org) to ask about membership in the Basic Needs Services Council, a collaboration of basic needs services providers working to reform the basic needs service delivery system in Travis County.
- Through your City of Austin utility bill, pay a small monthly donation to help individuals who cannot afford to pay their utility bills.
- Donate to local helping agencies - money, time, or goods.

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## Additional Information

To access the 1999 CAN Community Basic Needs Assessment refer to: [www.caction.org](http://www.caction.org). To obtain a copy of this or any other CAN report, please visit the CAN offices, email [bahrns@austin.isd.tenet.edu](mailto:bahrns@austin.isd.tenet.edu), call (512) 414-8203, or write to The Community Action Network, 1111 W. 6th Street, Suite B220, Austin, Texas 78703.

For regularly updated current statistics across all issue areas please see *The CAN Community Overview* document at [www.caction.org](http://www.caction.org).

For information on available basic needs services, call 2-1-1 Texas, a service of United Ways in Texas. Also refer to the United Way Capital Area's online database at [www.unitedwaycapitalarea.org](http://www.unitedwaycapitalarea.org).

This FAQ was created by the Travis County Health & Human Services Department, Research & Planning Division in collaboration with members of the Basic Needs Services Council.

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