



This document provides an update to information in the December 2001 Community Action Network Homelessness Assessment Report and the December 2002 Homelessness FAQ. All data included are the most current available.

Overview

Poverty and lack of affordable housing are the two primary reasons that people become and remain homeless. For housing to be considered “affordable” a person/family should spend no more than 30% of his or her gross household income on housing. (U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development - HUD). Stable and affordable housing is the critical first step for individuals and families to gain employment and become self-sufficient.

Highlights

- **Over a 12 month period, there were over 6,200 homeless people in the Austin area.** Between September 12, 2005 and September 12, 2006, 6,242 unique individuals received services from Austin area homeless service providers. (Homeless Management Information System - HMIS)
- **On any given day, there are approximately 4,000 homeless individuals of which 1,900 are downtown.** (Homeless Count 2004)
- **Over 1,500 children are affected by homelessness in the Austin Independent School District. In the 2005-2006 school year, AISD Project Help served 1,556 homeless students.** (AISD Project Help)
- **High Cost of Living Contributes to Homelessness.** Austin has the highest housing costs for an urban area in Texas (Texas A&M Real Estate Center Report 2005)
- **Low Wages Contribute to Homelessness.** Of the top ten occupational categories in the Austin area, nearly 30% of those jobs have a median wage of **less than \$10/hour.** (WorkSource)
- **The Homeless Stay in the Community. 41.2% of the homeless have lived in the Austin area more than 5 years.** (Homeless Task Force, 2004 Survey)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. What is homelessness?

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines a person or family as homeless only when he/she resides in one of the places described below:

- In places not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings, on the street;
- An emergency shelter, transitional housing program, or supportive housing;
- In any of the above places but is spending a short time (up to 30 consecutive days) in a hospital or other institution.

The McKinney-Vento act defines homelessness more broadly and includes those families and individuals living “doubled up” with family or those living in hotels or motels

<http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/rulesandregs/laws/title1/sec11302.cfm>

Q. What is “chronic homelessness”?

HUD defines a chronically homeless person as: “An unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition such as a diagnosable substance use disorder, serious mental illness, developmental disability, or chronic physical illness or disability, who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more, OR has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.”

Facts and Questions About Homelessness

HUD estimates between 10%-15% of homeless persons are “chronically homeless.”. Using the Interagency Council on Homelessness methodology, this translates to approximately 600 chronically homeless people, on any given day in Austin.

Q. Who is homeless in Austin/Travis County?

Approximately 4,000 persons are homeless in Travis County on any given day (Homeless Count 2004)

- A **downtown** homeless count conducted in January 2005 produced a total of 1,924 individuals and 179 families with children
- **Families with children** make up approximately 40% of the homeless population and are the fastest growing homeless population. The majority of these are single parent families. (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty)
- **Women** are a fast growing homeless population. Austin-area homeless providers served 1.6 times more female clients in the first two quarters of 2006 than the same period in 2005, or 916 women in the first two quarters of 2006, compared to a total of 572 in 2005. (Source: Performance Reports of City-funded Homeless Agencies 2005 and 2006)
- 1,556 **students** were identified as homeless during the 2005-2006 school year. However, AISD estimates that between 3 –5,000 of their students are homeless (Austin Independent School District – Homeless Education Learning Program -Project HELP)
- In Austin/Travis County there are approximately 639 homeless **veterans** on any given day. (HMIS 2005)
- Homeless **single adults** are more visible and more likely to live on the streets, experiencing longer and/or more frequent episodes of homelessness

Q. Why do people become homeless?

The two main reasons that people become homeless are lack of income and the lack of affordable housing. Area costs of living coupled with low-wage jobs continue to push the working poor out of housing. Additionally, Austin Area Homeless providers report the following contributing factors:

- Discharged from an institutional setting (hospital, mental health facility, foster care, jail) with no housing resource. 21% of the homeless report that they were released from a public institution within the last 12 months (HMIS May 2005-May 2006)
- **Sudden loss of income** (layoff, loss of spouse, injury, illness, etc...): Prior to becoming homeless most persons were living paycheck to paycheck. An interruption in income jeopardizes household stability, which leads to housing loss.
- **High Cost of Living: HUD** 2006 Austin fair market rents are \$578/month for an efficiency, and \$804/month for a 2 bedroom. (For this housing a single person needs to work 40 hrs. a week and earn at least \$11.12/hr to be self-sufficient. Families needing two bedrooms would need to earn \$15.47/hr. For families additional costs such as child care are not factored into this wage (<http://www.huduser.org/datasets>)
- **Over 30%** of all homeless persons in Travis County are **victims of family violence** (Austin/Travis County Homeless Providers Survey, Feb. 2002)
- 13% of homeless individuals become homeless due to **health problems** (National Health Care for the Homeless)
- **Inability to access resource for mental illness and substance abuse issues:** Approximately 25% of homeless persons (including children) are affected by severe mental illness and nearly 18% have chronic substance abuse issues. (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty)

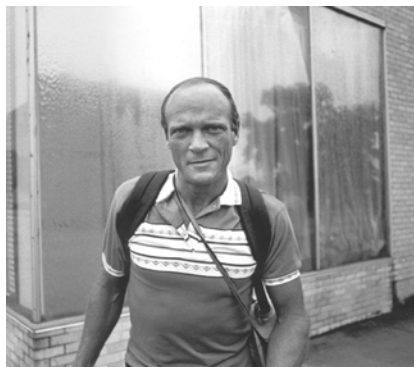
Q. What is the impact of homelessness on children?

Homelessness often precludes good nutrition; homeless children often experience physical and mental development delays:

- Homeless children suffer more health problems than housed children: 38% of children in homeless shelters have asthma, middle ear infection prevalence is 50% higher than the national average, and over 60% of homeless children are under-vaccinated (Redlener & Johnson, 1999)
- Nearly one-fifth of homeless children repeat a grade in school and 16% are enrolled in special education classes – rates 100% and 33% higher than housed children; much of this is due to their high mobility rate (Institute for Children & Poverty, 2001) [Homes for the Homeless :The Institute for Children and Poverty](#) Some AISD grade schools report a transfer rate of 40%. (HousingWorks)

Facts and Questions About Homelessness

- At least 20% of homeless children do not attend school. Within a year, 41% of homeless children will attend two different schools; 28% of homeless children will attend three or more different schools (<http://www.utdanacenter.org/theo/>)



Q. What challenges do people face to resolve homelessness?

- Low wages, high cost of living, scarce resources, and long waiting lists for affordable housing are the major obstacles to those attempting to resolve homelessness. Lack of community health, mental health, and substance abuse resources lead to families' and individuals' inability to address issues contributing to their homeless situation.
- Over 6,000 families are on waiting lists for subsidized housing (H.A.C.A., August 2005)

- Criminal backgrounds, poor credit histories, and unresolved debts can block access to housing.
- Families without access to affordable child care or reliable transportation have greater difficulty moving towards self-sufficiency.
- To find housing they can afford, many households live at great distances from their jobs.
- As a result, the share of their spending that goes to travel costs has increased. Households in the bottom expenditure quartile that devote more than half their outlays to housing and transportation combined had less than \$300 left over each month for other necessities. (The State of the Nation's Housing 2005) [Joint Center for Housing Studies - Research](#)
- Currently Travis County has 633 emergency shelter beds. It is estimated that an additional 322 beds are needed per night to meet the need (The Austin/Travis County 2006 HUD Continuum of Care for Homeless Assistant Grant application)

What are the of Benefits of Addressing Homelessness?

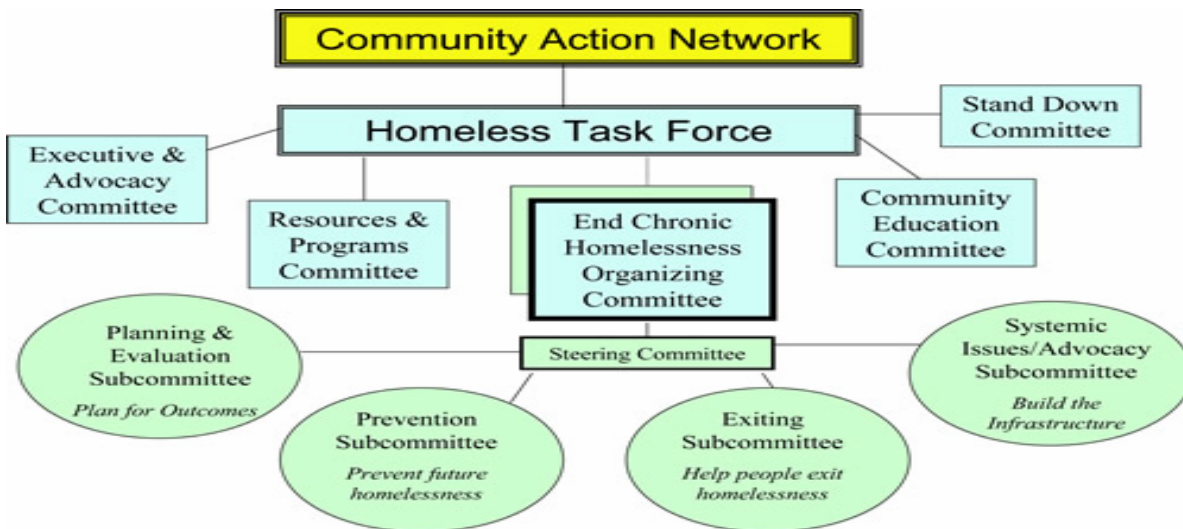
Preventing homelessness is much cheaper than paying for homeless services.

- Homeless persons accounted for 15% of admissions to Austin State Hospital in October 2003. The cost of serving these individuals in the hospital that month was over \$75,000. (ATCMHMR - Austin state hospital admissions, October 2003, Unpublished)
- Every week, the State Jail releases approximately 15 ex-offenders to the Salvation Army. The Travis County District Attorney's office found that altogether, 54 of these offenders had 120 felony and 130 misdemeanor convictions, accounting for approximately \$2.5 million in jail costs alone. (Texas Department of Criminal Justice)
- In a 2004 Austin survey, 26 agencies representing 50 programs responded. Funding devoted to homeless clients totaled more than \$17 million; 32.6% (over \$5.6 million) was used for chronically homeless individuals. Respondents estimated that 78.22 FTEs were devoted to providing services to chronically homeless individuals, accounting for 22% of total homeless staffing reported (Austin Providers Survey on Chronic Homelessness).
- In 2004 it was found that 715 charges were filed against some 200 individuals with repeat convictions for enhanced PI or other alcohol related charges. This accounted for 9,486 days of confinement, with an average length of jail stay of 13 days. The estimated cost per jail stay was \$66 a day, or a total cost of \$626,076 for 2004. (The National Alliance to End Homelessness 2005)

Facts and Questions About Homelessness

Q. What has been done to address homelessness/chronic homelessness in Austin/Travis County?

The Austin community has been actively engaged in a new level of collaboration to work on the systemic problems that lead to and extend homelessness. The Homeless Task Force, the official Community Action Network (CAN) planning body for homeless issues, has been responsible for developing a continuum of care strategy to prevent and reduce homelessness. These collaborations result from communitywide participation among homeless and formerly homeless individuals, faith community, nonprofit organization, business leaders, representatives from state and local government, and community members.



Q. What can I do to help?

- Volunteer
 - United Way Volunteer Center (www.unitedwaycapitalarea.org or 512-323-1898)
 - Contact Agencies Directly (www.AustinHTF.org)
 - Volunteer for the Homeless Count. Go to www.AustinHTF.org
- Contribute
 - Money, Stocks, Planned Giving
 - In-kind donations: Furniture, Office and Household supplies, Clothing, Housing/Real Estate, Employment, Vehicles, Mobile Homeless Trailers
 - Provide a job that pays a living wage (www.universallivingwage.org)
- Support Public Funding
- Advocate/Lobby
 - Support Federal and State legislative efforts
 - Support local ordinances by testifying at public hearings, writing letters to elected officials, and visiting elected officials and their staff
- Serve on community planning groups (www.caction.org)

Additional Information

To access a copy of this document or the 2001 CAN Homelessness Assessment Report, additional Homeless reports, and all other Issue Area reports refer to <http://www.caction.org>. Reports available at CAN office, 1111 W. 6th St, Suite B220, Austin, Tx 78703. 512-414-8203. Please let CAN know if and how you use this document.

This FAQ was created by members of the CAN Homeless Task Force (HTF). For information, please contact Rick Rivera, Chair - Austin Homeless Task Force, at (512) 327-7880 or visit the Austin Homeless Task Force Website at <http://www.AustinHTF.org>.



CAN Partners: Austin Area Human Services Association - Austin Area Interreligious Ministries - Austin Area Research Organization
Austin Independent School District - Austin Travis county MHRM Center - Capital Metro - City of Austin
Community Justice Council - Greater Austin Chamber - HP2010 / Indigent Care Collaboration - Higher Education Coalition
Travis County - Travis County Healthcare District - United Way Capital Area - WorkSource