

# A STATUS REPORT ON HUNGER AND HOMELESSNESS IN AMERICAN CITIES: 1995

A 29-CITY SURVEY  
DECEMBER, 1995



THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS

## THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS

Norman B. Rice, Mayor of Seattle  
President

Marc Morial, Mayor of New Orleans  
Patricia Ticer, Mayor of Alexandria  
Co-Chairs, Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness

J. Thomas Cochran, Executive Director

This report was prepared by Laura DeKoven Waxman, Kimberly Peterson and Matthew McClure of the staff of The U.S. Conference of Mayors. Additional copies are available for \$15 each (payable in advance) from Kimberly Peterson at The U.S. Conference of Mayors, 1620 Eye Street, NW, Washington, DC 20006 (202) 293-7330.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                                              |           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>SUMMARY</b>                                                               | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>INTRODUCTION</b>                                                          | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>HUNGER</b>                                                                | <b>7</b>  |
| The Problem                                                                  | 7         |
| The Capacity to Meet the Need                                                | 12        |
| The Funding                                                                  | 23        |
| The Unmet Need                                                               | 25        |
| Exemplary Programs                                                           | 28        |
| <b>HOMELESSNESS</b>                                                          | <b>35</b> |
| The Problem                                                                  | 35        |
| Services for Homeless People                                                 | 46        |
| The Funding                                                                  | 51        |
| The Unmet Need                                                               | 58        |
| Exemplary Programs                                                           | 63        |
| <b>HOUSING</b>                                                               | <b>77</b> |
| Assisted Housing Requests                                                    | 77        |
| The Wait for Assisted Housing                                                | 78        |
| People Served by Assisted Housing                                            | 80        |
| Anticipated Effect of Cuts in Assisted Housing                               | 80        |
| <b>THE OUTLOOK</b>                                                           | <b>83</b> |
| Expected Requests for Emergency Food                                         | 83        |
| Expected Requests for Emergency Shelter                                      | 85        |
| Impact of Expected Federal Cuts and Program Changes on Low Income Families   | 87        |
| <b>APPENDIX</b>                                                              |           |
| Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities<br>A Ten-Year Comparison of Data |           |
| Population, Poverty and Unemployment Data<br>for the Task Force Cities       |           |
| Information Questionnaire                                                    |           |
| Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness                                        |           |

## SUMMARY

To assess the status of hunger and homelessness in America's cities during 1995, The U.S. Conference of Mayors surveyed 29 major cities whose mayors are members of its Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness. The survey sought information and estimates from each city on 1) the demand for emergency food assistance and emergency shelter and the capacity of local agencies to meet that demand; 2) the causes of hunger and homelessness and the demographics of the populations experiencing these problems; 3) exemplary programs or efforts in the cities to respond to hunger and homelessness; 4) the availability of affordable housing for low income people; and 5) the outlook for the future.

Among the findings of the 29-city survey:

### HUNGER

- \* Officials in the survey cities estimate that during the past year requests for emergency food assistance increased by an average of nine percent, with 72 percent of the cities registering an increase. Requests for food assistance by families with children increased by an average of 10 percent, with 73 percent of the cities registering an increase. Requests for emergency food assistance by elderly persons increased by an average eight percent during the last year, with 48 percent of the cities reporting an increase.
- \* On average, 18 percent of the requests for emergency food assistance are estimated to have gone unmet during the last year. For families alone, 17 percent of the requests for assistance are estimated to have gone unmet during the last year. In 59 percent of the cities, emergency food assistance facilities may have to turn away people in need due to lack of resources.
- \* Sixty-three percent of the people requesting emergency food assistance were members of families -- children and their parents. One-third of the adults requesting food assistance were employed.
- \* The overall level of resources available to emergency food assistance facilities increased by 1.5 percent during the last year. Fifty-two percent of the survey cities reported that emergency food assistance facilities are unable to provide an adequate quantity of food. The number of bags of food provided and/or the number of times people can receive food are limited in 86 percent of the cities. Eighty-three percent of the survey cities reported that the food provided is nutritionally balanced.
- \* In 93 percent of the cities, emergency food assistance facilities were relied on by families and individuals both in emergencies and as a steady source of food over long periods of time.
- \* Unemployment and other employment-related problems lead the list of causes of hunger identified by the city officials. Other causes frequently cited include poverty or lack of income, the high cost of living and inadequate benefits in public assistance programs.
- \* During the last year, 83 percent of the survey cities supported local emergency food assistance efforts. Forty-eight percent used Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act funds; 38 percent used locally generated revenues; 31 percent used Community Development Block Grant funds; 21 percent used Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program funds; 14 percent used Community Services Block Grant funds; and 10 percent used state grants.

## HOMELESSNESS

- \* During the past year requests for emergency shelter increased in the survey cities by an average of 11 percent, with 63 percent of the cities registering an increase. Requests for shelter by homeless families alone increased by 15 percent, with 71 percent of the cities reporting an increase.
- \* An average of 19 percent of the requests for emergency shelter by homeless people overall and 24 percent of the requests by homeless families alone are estimated to have gone unmet during the last year. In 79 percent of the cities, emergency shelters may have to turn away homeless families due to lack of resources. In 82 percent of the cities they may have to turn away other homeless people due to lack of resources.
- \* People remain homeless an average of six months in the survey cities. Sixty-two percent of the cities said that the length of time people are homeless increased during the last year.
- \* Unemployment and other employment-related problems, the lack of affordable housing, and substance abuse and the lack of needed services lead the list of causes of homelessness identified by the city officials. Other causes frequently cited include mental illness and the lack of needed services, domestic violence, family crises and poverty or insufficient income.
- \* Officials estimate that, on average, single men comprise 46 percent of the homeless population, families with children 36.5 percent, single women 14 percent and unaccompanied minors 3.5 percent. Children account for 25 percent of the homeless population. The homeless population is estimated to be 56 percent African-American, 29 percent white, 12 percent Hispanic, two percent Native American and one percent Asian. An average of 23 percent of homeless people in the cities are considered mentally ill; 46 percent are substance abusers; eight percent have AIDS or HIV-related illness. One in five are employed; 21 percent are veterans.
- \* During the last year the number of emergency shelter beds increased overall in the survey cities by an average of three percent. Transitional housing units increased by an average of six percent. Single Room Occupancy units by five percent.
- \* In 64 percent of the cities, families may have to break up in order to be sheltered. In 54 percent, families may have to leave the shelter in which they are staying during the day.
- \* Every survey city used city government funds during the last year to support shelters or other services for homeless people. Ninety-seven percent used Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act funds; 76 percent used locally generated revenues; 72 percent used Community Development Block Grant funds; 45 percent used state grants; and 38 percent used Community Services Block Grant funds.

## HOUSING

- \* Requests for assisted housing by low income families and individuals increased in 73 percent of the cities during the last year. An average of 28 percent of eligible low income households are currently served by assisted housing programs.
- \* Applicants must wait an average of 17 months for public housing in the survey cities. The wait for Section 8 certificates is 40 months, for Section 8 vouchers 39 months. Seventy-one percent of the cities have stopped accepting applications for at least one assisted housing program due to the excessive length of the waiting list.
- \* The city officials believe that expected cuts in housing assistance will produce a number of negative consequences for low income families, including increased homelessness, longer waits for public housing, an increased gap between income and rent, increased doubling-up, increased incidence of families living in substandard housing, and a reduction in available housing units.

## THE OUTLOOK

- \* Officials in 96 percent of the survey cities expect requests for emergency food assistance to increase during 1996. Every city expects that requests for emergency shelter -- both by all homeless persons and by homeless families in particular -- will increase during the next year.
- \* The officials paint a bleak picture of the cumulative impact of expected cuts in welfare, Medicaid, housing assistance, the Earned Income Tax Credit, and various social services on a typical low income family in their city. That picture includes increased hunger and homelessness, increased stress on families and communities, fewer available housing options, lack of jobs and job readiness, insufficient child care and reduced social services to address the increased problems. In addition, several cities also state that they do not believe the private sector can fill in for reduced government assistance or address the increased need for help.

# INTRODUCTION

In October 1982, The U.S. Conference of Mayors and The U.S. Conference of City Human Services Officials brought the shortage of emergency services -- food, shelter, medical care, income assistance, energy assistance -- to national attention through a 55-city survey. That survey showed that the demand for emergency services had increased in cities across the nation, and that on average only 43 percent of that demand was being met.

Since that time the Conference has done numerous reports on hunger, homelessness and poverty in cities. These reports have documented the causes and the magnitude of the problems, how cities were responding to them and what national responses were required. They include:

- \* Hunger in American Cities, June, 1983
- \* Responses to Urban Hunger, October, 1983
- \* Status Report: Emergency Food, Shelter and Energy Programs in 20 Cities, January, 1984
- \* Homelessness in America's Cities: Ten Case Studies, June, 1984
- \* Housing Needs and Conditions in America's Cities, June 1984
- \* The Urban Poor and the Economic Recovery, September, 1984
- \* The Status of Hunger in Cities, April, 1985
- \* Health Care for the Homeless: A 40-City Review, April, 1985
- \* The Growth of Hunger, Homelessness and Poverty in America's Cities in 1985: A 25-City Survey, January, 1986
- \* Responding to Homelessness in America's Cities, June, 1986
- \* The Continued Growth of Hunger, Homelessness and Poverty in America's Cities in 1986: A 25-City Survey, December, 1986
- \* A Status Report on Homeless Families in America's Cities: A 29-City Survey, May, 1987
- \* Local Responses to the Needs of Homeless Mentally Ill Persons, May, 1987
- \* The Continuing Growth of Hunger, Homelessness and Poverty in America's Cities: 1987, A 26-City Survey, December, 1987
- \* A Status Report on The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, June, 1988
- \* A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: 1988, A 27-City Survey, January, 1989
- \* Partnerships for Affordable Housing, An Annotated Listing of City Programs, September, 1989
- \* A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: 1989, A 27-City Survey, December, 1989
- \* A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: 1990, A 30-City Survey, December, 1990
- \* A City Assessment of the 1990 Shelter and Street Night count, A 21-City Survey, June 1991
- \* Mentally Ill and Homeless, A 22-City Survey, November 1991
- \* A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: 1991, A 28-City Survey, December 1991
- \* A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: 1992, A 29-City Survey, December 1992
- \* Addressing Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities, June 1993
- \* A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: 1993, A 26-City Survey, December 1993

\* A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: 1994, A 30-City Survey.  
December 1994

To spearhead the Conference's efforts to respond to the emergency services crisis in cities, the President of The Conference of Mayors appointed 20 mayors to a Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness in September, 1983. That Task Force was chaired by New Orleans Mayor Ernest "Dutch" Morial. That Task Force is now chaired by New Orleans Mayor Marc Morial and Alexandria Mayor Patricia Tiger, and the number of mayors serving on it has increased to 33. The Task Force meets at least twice each year; many of its members have testified before Congress; and the cities represented on it have provided information to Conference staff on conditions relating to hunger and homelessness for the various reports that have been prepared.

### Methodology

This report provides information on the current status of hunger, homelessness and the conditions which have affected them in 29 of the cities represented on the Task Force. A copy of the survey instrument sent to the cities is contained in the Appendix.

To respond to the survey, the city officials consult with and collect data from community-based provider and government agencies. The data is compiled by the individual or agency in the city government designated to be the Conference of Mayors' contact for the survey and it is reviewed by a senior-level manager before it is submitted to the Conference of Mayors.

The data was collected from the cities for the period of November 1, 1994 to October 31, 1995 during November and December, 1995. It was supplemented with data on population, poverty and unemployment available from the Bureau of the Census and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The reader should note that in no case do the percentages reported for a survey question include a city unable to respond to that question. Tables which provide city-specific data appear at the back of chapters on Hunger, Homelessness and Housing.